

# Some Remarks on the Investigation of Traces of Transhumance in the Early Medieval Balkans

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**Abstract.** The study analyses the issue of the archaeological investigation of transhumance on the Balkan Peninsula in the early phase of the Middle Ages. More precisely formulated, our main question is why is this branch of investigation almost totally absent from the archaeology of the given period and geographical region? In the first part of the study, we give a brief overview of the history of prior research, pointing to the fact that although investigations into transhumance were largely carried out in other branches of science (history, linguistics ethnology), they may have potential impacts on the evaluation of archaeological material. In the second part of the study the factors are enumerated which are—in the author’s opinion—responsible for the described situation. At the end of the study, a potential solution is formulated for the described situation. A change is required in the focal areas of the research, with emphasis not only on the problems connected with the issue of transhumance but also on transgressing analyses based on national historical narratives. This change will—hopefully—create positive results through the initiation of research projects focusing on the discovery and excavation of sites in mountainous areas possibly connected with transhumance.

**Keywords:** transhumance, Early Middle Ages, Northern Balkans

## Introduction

There are at least two opposing narratives concerning the early medieval history of agricultural activities in the northern regions of the Balkans. From one point of view, the production of crops on the karstic fields of the lowlands was the main activity;<sup>1</sup> from the other point of view, “grazing and farming were the main activi-

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1 The equivalence of the term ‘agriculture’ with crop production is a characteristic trend—among others—of older Croatian historiography. It is, so to say, symptomatic of how the issue of transhumance is omitted, although Croatian historiography also has to confront the question of the nature of life in the mountainous areas surrounding the Adriatic Sea. I must refer here as a starting point to the overview of Vjekoslav Klaić from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, as this is even today a point of reference. In this work, the question of the agricultural

ties of these people from the Carpathian to the Pindus Mountains since the ancient Thracian–Dacians time until the early twentieth century,”<sup>2</sup> also including the Early Middle Ages. The first approach is often presented as an obvious fact, with no need for further proof. This point of view can be explained by the fact that the term ‘agriculture’ is often identified with crop production—as follows a simple deduction from the original, similar meaning of the Latin term *agricultura*; i.e., without reference to animal husbandry. It is therefore necessary to immediately pin down the fact that crop production and animal husbandry are closely related to each other in food production in the rural context of practically every pre-industrial society in Europe.<sup>3</sup> (As a further premise, it should be also emphasized that according to the latest research transhumance should be analyzed as an integral part of the rural food production activities of mountainous areas.<sup>4</sup>) Differences between various agricultural activities and ways of life arise from the different scales of applying these two branches of food production, as well as from the various technologies and techniques that are used according to differing climatic circumstances. Concerning the second approach, it may be honestly claimed that written sources testify to the presence of transhumance on the Balkan Peninsula only from the High Middle Ages onwards.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, claims of the existence of animal husbandry prior to this epoch

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use of land appears only in the introduction, in the geographical description of areas inhabited by the Croats: Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata od najstarijih*, 29–31. This approach can also be detected in a more recent overview of Croatian history written by Nada Klaić. She also focuses on crop production, in spite of the fact that she emphasizes the importance of animal husbandry: Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata u ranom*, 83–84; Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata u razvijenom*, 98–119; Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata u srednjem*, 35–36. It is also to be remarked that one of the most recent overviews of the early medieval history of Croatia, written by Ivo Goldstein, generally does not count with the possibility of transhumance, in spite of the fact that it not only focuses on crop production but also mentions the importance of animal husbandry: Goldstein, *Hrvatska*, 35–60.

- 2 Micle, “From Carpathian,” 27.
- 3 See two passages from a new handbook on the archaeology of the Middle Ages interpreting food production: Scholkmann, Kenzler, and Schreg, *Archäologie*, 270–73, 281–84. An innovative approach on the issue of food production in a medieval rural environment: Schreg, “Feeding the Village,” 301–20. A new analysis of food production in medieval England also pinned down the reciprocal correlations between grain and meat production, i.e., the correlations between plant cultivation and animal husbandry: Qin, *Food Composition*, 1–15.
- 4 The outlining of the problem of the various methods of pastoralism vs. crop production was formulated by Paul Halstead for the prehistory of Greece: Halstead, “Pastoralism,” 20–42. Concerning the Middle Ages, the examples of the Iberian Peninsula seem to be also instructive. See e.g., Fernández Mier and González, “Medieval Northwest Spain,” 295, 302–04; Fernández Mier and Tente, “Transhumant Herding,” 219–32; López-Sáez et al., “Transhumance Dynamics,” 233–44.
- 5 The written sources on medieval transhumance are mainly connected with a particular social group of the Vlachs, to be treated in detail in another reference of our present study. The written

are usually based on reconstructions and retrospective analyses of descriptions of later written sources, or the interpretations of linguistic analyses.<sup>6</sup> It is sad to say, but one very rarely finds attempts to interpret other types of sources, i.e., archaeological, or archeozoological data.<sup>7</sup>

The outlined controversy associated with the interpretation of the term ‘agriculture’ is also present in the background of many scholarly analyses of the early medieval Balkans. In more precise and sharp words, the issue of transhumance underlies much of the debate connected with the early history of several modern nations connected with the Balkans. It is to be emphasized even at the very beginning that the related controversies may be traced in many analyses of many languages but are nonetheless usually connected with reconstructions of the early history of Romanians and Albanians.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the accuracy of such reviews is a problem in itself, not only because of the multitude of languages used for the publication of the various standpoints, but also, or even more so, because of the emotional background of the questions under analysis.<sup>9</sup> Even so, an attempt to outline the main trends of the research can perhaps give hints for further investigation, especially if the analyses of written sources and linguistic data are not treated as the only way to obtain reliable results.

The main question to be answered in our review is whether there is archaeological research in the states of the Northern Balkans and projects carried out by international teams of scientists that have aimed to identify the material remains of transhumance in the Early Middle Ages. The earliest time limit for our review is the

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sources on transhumance were collected by many scholars in the last 150 years, see e.g., Gyóni, “A Balkán félszigeti,” 337–49; Gyóni, “Les sources,” 225–35. This work was done recently also by: Mirdita, “Balkanski Vlasi,” 25–115.

- 6 It is inevitable to point out the fact that this approach is the characteristic trend of the methodology of the given branch of science from the second half of the nineteenth century until the present research. See e.g., the following studies: Miklosich, *Die slavischen Elemente*; Miklosich, *Über die Wanderungen*; Jireček, *Geschichte der Bulgaren*; Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben*; Jokl, “Katun,” 420–30; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale I,” 223–41; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale II,” 105–25; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale III,” 78–94; Schramm, “Die Katastrophe”; Schramm, *Ein Damm*, 275–343.
- 7 As a positive trend we must refer to two overviews of the archaeological and archeozoological investigations of transhumance, mainly presenting results of the earlier or later epochs: Bartosiewicz and Greenfield, eds, *Transhumant Pastoralism*; Costello and Svensson, eds, *Historical Archaeologies*.
- 8 The studies of Gottfried Schramm form, so to say, an unavoidable point of reference in this respect, regardless of whether one accepts his theses: Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale I,” 223–41; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale II,” 105–25; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale III,” 78–94; Schramm, “Die Katastrophe”; Schramm, *Ein Damm*, 275–343.
- 9 An overview of these questions was compiled by the author of the present study in the thesis for the degree doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Takács, “A középkor,” 233–492.

turn of the sixth–seventh century AD. I chose the time of the turn of the century when the collapse of the lower Danube border defenses began,<sup>10</sup> as this process provoked massive changes in the settlement structure of the Balkan Peninsula that was formed during the centuries of Roman rule.<sup>11</sup> The upper time limit of our review is the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries AD, the time of the so-called Byzantine Reconquista, or—from another point of view—the final collapse of the so-called First Bulgarian State.<sup>12</sup>

### The definition of transhumance and its presence within the geographical setting of the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula

It is useful to start the presentation of the data with basic information, no matter what quantity of literature the given problem is associated with.<sup>13</sup> Concerning the meaning of the term ‘transhumance’, although there are multiple descriptions of the given term, the definition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* seems to fit the standards applied to the investigation of the Early Middle Ages of the Balkan Peninsula. According to this source, “transhumance is a form of pastoralism or nomadism” organized around the migration of “livestock” between mountain pastures in warm seasons and lower “altitudes” the rest of the “year”.<sup>14</sup> It is also worth quoting the third sentence of this definition: “Most peoples who practice transhumance also engaged in some form of crop cultivation, and there is usually some kind of permanent settlement.”<sup>15</sup>

A further well-known and well-elaborated issue in this investigation is the geographical setting of the given type of food production in the northern part of the

10 The chronology of the dissolution of the Danube limes was analyzed by Kovačević, “Arheološki prilog,” 57–83; and also by Nagy, “Az Al-Duna,” 79–87. The results of this process were analyzed by Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale III,” 85–93; Schramm, “Die Katastrophe,” 78–94; Schramm, *Ein Damm*, 275–343.

11 An overview of the historical frame of the Late Roman–Early Byzantine age, as well as the early medieval times, is to be found in: Fine, *The Early*, 9–291; Takács, “A középkor,” 53–61; Curta, *Eastern Europe*, 31–249, 306–24; Takács, *Byzantinische*, 12–20, with the bulk of references based on the analyses of other authors.

12 Takács, “A középkor,” 68–69; Takács, *Byzantinische*, 12–20, with the bulk of references based on the analyses of other authors.

13 We would quote only two overviews of the immense literature on the given issue: Adamar, “Transhumanz,” 686; Takács, “A balkáni vlahok,” 239–89.

14 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transhumance>, accessed: 10 November 2022.

15 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/transhumance>, accessed: 10 November 2022.

Balkan Peninsula. The very first and at some points the most difficult problem is outlining the extent of the Balkan Peninsula. This seems to be a trivial question at first look, but definitions of the borders of the given region are various—it is enough to look at a set of geographical maps with their different alignments.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it must be emphasized even at the beginning that we will follow the outline of the Balkan Peninsula given by scholars who pursue a natural geographical approach.<sup>17</sup> The Balkan Peninsula is in this way closed on its southwestern, southern and southeastern sides by the seas of the Mediterranean, with the line of the rivers of Danube and Sava on its northern side, and with the easternmost mountains of the Alps on its northwestern side. The line of big lakes in Macedonia (Ohrid, Prespa, and Dojran) divides the peninsula into a northern and southern half. Further, it is unquestionable that the whole of the Balkan Peninsula possesses an articulated orography,<sup>18</sup> and this specific physical geography is a very suitable environment for the existence of transhumance. This is not only because there are a lot of mountains with peaks higher than 2000 m (some of them even reaching 2800 m), but also because of the abundance of valleys, usually with watercourses and/or lakes, offering continental but somewhat less harsh climatic circumstances in the colder seasons than the high regions of mountains.<sup>19</sup> The specific trends of the climate of the Balkan Peninsula have been observed and recorded for a long time. Knowledge about specific climatic trends has also found its way into the literature of the social sciences.<sup>20</sup> This occurred at an early stage of the investigations and usually involved romantic descriptions that rely only on a few pieces of data but are written with a great amount of emotion. There is also another branch of literature: geographical analyses of the given peninsula, which often provide and interpret sets of data important for the understanding of climatic circumstances. It is therefore beyond any doubt that—and here, let us repeat ourselves—the natural environment of the Balkan Peninsula is especially suitable for transhumance. As far as we know, this is a fact that has not been disputed, not even by those scholars who are not convinced of the existence of transhumance in the Early Middle Ages at all.

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16 See on this issue the compilation of data of the author of the present study: Takács, “A középkor,” 41–49.

17 Reed, Kryštufek, and Eastwood, “The Physical Geography,” 9–11; in Hungarian: Mendöl, *A Balkán földrajza*. An overview of the various standpoints of the geographical literature: Takács, “A középkor,” 40–49,

18 Reed, Kryštufek, and Eastwood, “The Physical Geography,” 13–20.

19 Reed, Kryštufek, and Eastwood, “The Physical Geography,” 17–20.

20 See the literature collected in Reed, Kryštufek, and Eastwood, “The Physical Geography,” 21–22.

## Some remarks on the history of the investigation

The issue of transhumance in Southeastern Europe is associated with a big literature written in large part in the languages of the region.<sup>21</sup> However, one can also find many important analyses and syntheses written in the German, French, and English languages.<sup>22</sup> A detailed overview of all these works would be beyond the limits of this study. We will therefore refer only to the main analyses and syntheses, with the remark that there is, to our knowledge, a further bulk of studies to be referenced in a more detailed overview. We should also refer to the fact that we have already composed in a previous study a thorough overview of the former, with special emphasis on the beginnings of the investigation of the given problem.<sup>23</sup> This overview, published in 2004, focused on studies based on the analysis of written sources and emphasized the problem of the ethnogenesis of the Romanians. It is honestly admitted that by picking this focus we have to some extent omitted a presentation of the newest results of the archaeology of transhumance from a wider, European perspective.

The overview of the literature should start with a quotation from the analyses of Konstantin Jireček.<sup>24</sup> Reference to his work should be made even though these pieces were written in the last third of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century. Jireček repeatedly formulated his opinion about the existence of transhumance in the early medieval Balkans. His positive answer<sup>25</sup> was grounded in a reconstruction of the history of the Vlach population<sup>26</sup> and based on the com-

21 An overview of the literature in various south Slavic languages/dialects has been created by the author of the present study: Takács, "A balkáni vlahok," 239–89.

22 See e.g., the following overviews: Dedijer, "La transhumance," 347–65; Gyóni, "Les sources," 225–35; Beuermann, *Fernweidewirtschaft*; Bartosiewicz and Greenfield, eds, *Transhumant Pastoralism*; Biagi and Nisbet, "Archeologia della pastorizia," 581–93.

23 Takács, "A balkáni vlahok," 239–89.

24 A short overview of the first part of the life of this scientist may be found in: Mangold, "Jireček," 924. His work was reviewed with a focus only on the Bulgarian perspective: Sendov, ed., *Bългарска*, 20. Data about his life may be found in various modern encyclopedias: NN<sub>1</sub>; NN<sub>2</sub>. See also: Takács, "A középkor," 474.

25 Jireček, *Geschichte der Bulgaren*; Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben*; Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, 34–35. (The last volume referred to is actually a Serb translation of the volume Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben*, but with many alterations by the translator Jovan Radonić, not marked in the text. It is therefore to be rated as a separate analysis, with results to be compared with the original.) Another approach was formulated by Stojan Novaković: Novaković, *Selo*, 29. The differences between the various approaches are described in Vojvodić, "Transhumance," 71–72. See also: Pejfuss, "Vlachen," 730–32.

26 The meaning of the given term and the history of the given group of people have been analyzed by many scholars with a variety of different approaches. See e.g., Weigand, *Die Aromunen*; Weigand, *Rumänen*; Kadlec, *Valaši*; Peisker, "Die Abkunft," 160–203; Jireček, *Istorija Srba*,

bination of two sets of data. The first starting point was the numerous mentions of transhumant animal husbandry in medieval written sources from the twelfth century onwards. These quotations from the Byzantine or other written sources point to the various activities of transhumant elements, often called—as quoted above—Vlachs. Their mention is usually connected with military activity or the lack of security in the domestic communications of the inner parts of the Balkans.<sup>27</sup> An abundant group of references is to be found in the written sources of various origins. Let mention here, for example, some written sources from the time of the Byzantine Empire,<sup>28</sup> chapters from medieval Serbia,<sup>29</sup> later on some chapters from the medieval city of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik, Croatia) from the thirteenth–fifteenth centuries,<sup>30</sup> and written sources composed as far away as in Venice.<sup>31</sup> The results of linguistic analyses of the languages of the Balkan Peninsula<sup>32</sup> were relied on by Jireček as another data source. It should be emphasized that the linguistic analysis of the Balkans—within this, also Balkan languages—was a branch of science that was very well developed in Vienna at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century; i.e., at the center of the Habsburg Monarchy where Jireček lived.<sup>33</sup> One notices in this Viennese branch of linguistic investigation of transhumance a special interest in the Early Middle Ages, with the aim of reconstructing the ethnogenesis of various modern nations of the region from the results of linguistically analyzed common, personal or place names.<sup>34</sup> As a result of these analyses, the well-known term *Balkansprachbund* was established as an explanation not only for the shared etymology of numerous words but also for some similarities in the grammar, syntax, vocabulary and phonology of various Balkan languages (Albanian, Bulgarian,

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34–35; Gyóni, “A Balkán félszigeti,” 337–49; Gyóni, “Les sources,” 225–35; Dragomir, *Vlahii*; Peyfuss, “Vlachen,” 730–32. The history of the investigation was also reviewed by the author of the present study: Takács, “A balkáni vlahok,” 239–89.

27 Gyóni, “A Balkán félszigeti,” 337–49; Gyóni “Les sources,” 225–35; Mirdita, “Balkanski Vlasi,” 25–115.

28 Gyóni, “Skylitzes,” 155–73; Herrin, *The Social*, 25, 26, 58; Mirdita, “Balkanski Vlasi,” 25–115.

29 Maksimović, “Vlasi u sklopu,” 401–8.

30 Kovačević, “Srednjovekovni katun,” 121–41.

31 Caciur, “The Morlachs,” 149–75.

32 See e.g., the following studies: Miklosich, *Die slavischen*; Miklosich, *Über die Wanderungen*; Tomaschek, “Zur Kunde”; Jokl, “Katun,” 420–30.

33 This is a well-known fact in the historical studies about the given region, often presented with negative connotations, especially concerning the investigations connected with the Albanians: Gostenschknigg, “Die Verflechtung,” 221–45.

34 See e.g., the following studies: Miklosich, *Die slavischen*; Miklosich, *Über die Wanderungen*; Tomaschek, “Zur Kunde”; Jokl, “Katun,” 420–30.



Greek, Macedonian, Romanian) belonging to different language groups.<sup>35</sup> Special emphasis was laid on the common etymologies of many hundred (!) Albanian and Romanian nouns, especially those mainly connected with pastoralism, and associated with this, the grazing of sheep.<sup>36</sup> The name of the Viennese scholar Norbert Jokl<sup>37</sup> deserves special mention because of his work on a special type of settlement named the *katun*.<sup>38</sup> This was work that shaped the approach and scientific view of many later scholars, especially in German-speaking countries,<sup>39</sup> and became an important issue in the social sciences of Romania<sup>40</sup> and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>41</sup> Further on, and adopting a general point of view, one can also say—perhaps with some exaggeration, but not without reason—that the historical and linguistic analyses of the end of the nineteenth and the twentieth century created the framework for the investigation of the issue of transhumance of the Balkans in the Early Middle Ages. This claim stands regardless of whether the scholar who deals with these problems accepts or rejects the postulates of the abovementioned literature.

As follows from the sentence above, there are basically two approaches concerning the analyses of Konstantin Jireček, Norbert Jokl, and other scholars from German-speaking countries concerning the presence of transhumance in the early Medieval Balkans. The positive approach is one of acceptance. It should be strongly emphasized that the results of Jireček were the starting point for many historians of the given region. A majority of the interesting research was published by Serbian historians, with arguments relying on written sources. Let me refer here only to the name of Dragoslav Antonijević,<sup>42</sup> with the remark that a more detailed overview should contain references to the studies of further scholars.

In the German literature can be identified the historian Gottfried Schramm, who comprehensively summarized the issue of transhumance in a piece of work known as “*Acht Thesen*” or “*Ein Damm bricht*” on the early history of the Romanians,

35 Modern overviews of the given issue: Solta, *Einführung*, 180–231; Fiedler, “Einführung,” 347–64; Feuillet, “Aire linguistique,” 1510–28.

36 Russu, *Elementele*; Solta, *Einführung*, 39–63. These data were reviewed and evaluated by Gottfried Schramm: Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale I,” point 6.5.1.

37 Alibali, “Remembering Norbert Jokl”; Kniefacz, “Norbert Jokl”; NN<sub>3</sub>.

38 Jokl, “Katun,” 420–30.

39 See the bibliographies compiled in the studies of Gottfried Schramm: Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale I,” 223–41; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale II,” 105–25; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale III,” 78–94; Schramm, *Ein Damm*, 275–343.

40 See e.g., the following study: Tanașoca and Tanașoca, “Ancienneté,” 139–44.

41 As shown by a conference organized in 1961 that even in its title explicitly referred to the word *katun*: Filipović, ed., *Simpozijum*.

42 Let us refer here to his main study: Antonijević, *Obredi i običaji*, as well as to an overview of his published in English: Antonijević, “Cattle-breeders,” 147–56.



published in 1985 for the first time.<sup>43</sup> The question of transhumance played a crucial but nonetheless—let us say—lateral role in the argumentation of Schramm. The main focus of the study of Gottfried Schramm was the ethnogenesis of Romanians. His main arguments against the continuous presence of Latin-speaking inhabitants in early medieval Transylvania were based on the linguistical analysis of place names from the central region of the Balkan Peninsula, as well as an emphasis on the importance of transhumance as the way of living of the forefathers of the Romanians and Albanians. The dismissal of Gottfried Schramm of the possibility of the continuous presence of Latin-speaking inhabitants in Early Mediaeval Transylvania should have provoked dispute, but for the most part this did not occur. The debate was, in the opinion of the writer of the present study, only delayed. It should also be emphasized that the stress on the importance of transhumance not only gave impetus to the investigation of the given issue but also influenced the examination of the possibility of the early medieval existence of transhumant pastoralism. Negative opinions about the possibility of the existence of this type of sheep breeding in the Balkan Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages are to a certain extent—but not necessarily—connected with positive appraisals of the continuous presence of a Latin-speaking population in early medieval Transylvania. It should also be noted at this point in the argumentation that there were attempts in Romanian historiography to suggest that transhumance also proves the persistence of groups with vulgar Latin language in the various regions of the Carpathian basin during the Early Middle Ages.<sup>44</sup>

Due to the lack of reliable material remains from archaeological excavations, ethnography began to play an important role as a potential source of further data for the analysis of medieval transhumance. The studies of Arnold Beuermann<sup>45</sup> and Dietmar Lindemann<sup>46</sup> on *Fernweidewirtschaft* in the Carpathians began to play a crucial role in the analysis of the ethnogenesis of the Romanians. The set of data gathered by the ethnographers was evaluated to a great extent by Gottfried Schramm. A similar role was played by the study of I. M. Matley on the issue of transhumance in Bosnia in the social sciences of the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>47</sup> These ethnographers defined ethnography as the third branch of science to be considered in the field—often, unfortunately, the literal battlefield—of debates about the issue of transhumance on the Balkan Peninsula of the Early Middle Ages.

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43 Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale I,” 223–41; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale II,” 105–25; Schramm, “Frühe Schicksale III,” 78–94. A second formulation of the thesis in a form of a separate volume: Schramm, “Die Katastrophe”; a third, and a final version: Schramm, *Ein Damm*, 275–343.

44 See e.g., Draganescu, “Pastoralism,” 16–24.

45 Beuermann, *Fernweidewirtschaft*; and especially the maps compiled by him on pages 22–23.

46 Lindemann, *Fernweidewirtschaft*.

47 Matley, “Transhumance,” 231–61.

It is interesting to see what kind of reception the analyses of transhumance in Albanian or Romanian historiography or other social sciences received, as the predecessors of these two modern nations were quoted most often in debates about the existence and role of transhumance in the early medieval Balkans. One can detect two largely different approaches if the writer of the present study understands the quotations in the literature the right way. In the historiography of Albania the existence of transhumance not only in the Early Middle Ages but also in prehistorical times is widely accepted.<sup>48</sup> Not to mention the fact that Norbert Jokl—the Viennese scholar previously mentioned in this study—counts as one of the ‘fathers of Albanology.’<sup>49</sup>

A different situation can be detected in the social sciences in Romania, as there are in this environment at least two different approaches. It should be emphasized that, even at the beginning of the enumeration of the respective studies, Romanian scientists regularly focused on Transylvania, a region not belonging to the Balkan Peninsula in terms of natural geography.<sup>50</sup> Even so, the results of the above-mentioned work usually impacts the reconstruction of the circumstances of the Balkans. One can find many published analyses in Romania in which transhumance is described as a means of animal husbandry of the Romanians, not only in modern times but also medieval ones.<sup>51</sup> Romanian ethnologists have accepted in large part the so-called historical roots of transhumance of the Romanians—let us refer here to the synthetic work that includes a map of the routes of transhumant shepherds designed in its final form by Anca and Nicolae Șerban-Tanașoca.<sup>52</sup> It is to be stressed that Romanian ethnographers have collected a wealth of especially important data about transhumance in the modern era, and a part of this data is suitable for the analysis of the conditions of earlier, medieval times. At this point we may also refer to many important studies published by the ethnographers of various southern Slavic countries that describe many examples of transhumance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>53</sup>

Returning to the investigations of transhumance in Romania: in contrast to the content of the aforementioned literature there exists another direction of

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48 See e.g., the following overview, written in French: Proko, Marku, and Civici, “Le pastoralisme,” 183–84.

49 Kniefacz, “Norbert Jokl”; NN<sub>4</sub>.

50 See e.g., the statements in the following entries: Schaser, “Siebenbürgen,” 617; Hitchins, “Romania.”

51 See e.g., the following studies: Dragomir, *Vlahii*; Draganescu, “Pastoralism,” 16–24.

52 Tanașoca and Tanașoca, *Unitate*.

53 See e.g., Filipović, “Struktura,” 45–112; Trifunovski, “Geografske,” 19–39; Novaković, *Selo*, 29–53; Čubrilović, ed., *Odredbe*; Antonijević, “Glavna obeležja,” 257–68; Antonijević, *Obredi i običaji*.

investigation in the social sciences of Romania that takes for granted the existence of transhumance in the animal husbandry of the Romanians only from the High Middle Ages onwards.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the writer of this study is wrong in his opinion that the questioning of the existence of transhumance of the Romanians prior to the twelfth century is not connected with a ‘puristic’ interpretation of the written sources, with emphasis on strict compliance with the chronological frame they create, but with a general trend to the interpretation of the history of Romanians in the Early as well as High Middle Ages. Even so, it will be revealing at this point in our study to refer to one of the most important Romanian historians, Nicolae Jorga, and his overview: *Histoire des Roumains et de leur civilization*.<sup>55</sup> One finds very few references to transhumance in this work. These mentions are usually not connected with Romanians but with other ethnic groups and their presumed subjugation of the forefathers of the Romanians, and they therefore typically have negative connotations.<sup>56</sup> In line with a way of thinking based on the division of the world into ‘us vs. them,’ transhumance, defined as a means of animal husbandry of supposed oppressors of the Romanian people, gains, perhaps inevitably, a negative connotation. It is perhaps a bit exaggerated but not without reason to claim that at the core of the thinking of those Romanian scholars who denigrated transhumance stands the conviction that this method of sheep breeding was ‘their’ and not ‘our’ method of animal husbandry. One may observe that the critique of the possibility of the existence of transhumance in early medieval Transylvania has become more modest in the Romanian historiography of the last three decades—assuming the judgment of Ionel Calin Micle on this issue is correct.<sup>57</sup>

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54 See e.g., Drăganescu, “Pastoralism,” 16–24.

55 Jorga, *Histoire*.

56 It is worthy to give here a full passage of Jorga’s narrative to have an insight on his opinion, who where the shepherd people of the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, having a need for transhumance. (The phrase ‘besoin de transhumance = need for transhumance’ is underlined by the author of the present study.) “On peut affirmer aujourd’hui que ce peuple, décrit par Hérodote dans son aspect et dans sa légende, n’étaient qu’une confédération éphémère de peuplades, réunies pour la gloire et le butin sous la conduite de quelques familles iraniennes, qui étaient parvenues à fonder des dynasties royales au dire des Grecs. Les guerriers étaient pour la plupart des Touraniens au teint foncé et au corps trapu, pareils aux Turcomans de l’Asie centrale et aux Tartars d’une époque postérieure, qui, après avoir dévoré le fruit de leurs incursions dévastatrices et du tribut fourni par les peuples soumis à leur autorité, se nourrissaient du produit de leurs troupeaux. Leurs déplacements continuels s’expliquent par ce besoin de transhumance, perpétuelle oscillation entre les demeures d’hiver et les champs traversés, toujours sur la même ligne des puits et des citernes pendant l’été, qui forme le caractère distinctif des peuples pasteurs.” Jorga, *Histoire*, 15. [https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Histoire\\_des\\_Roumains\\_et\\_de\\_leur\\_civilisation/02](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Histoire_des_Roumains_et_de_leur_civilisation/02), accessed: 8 October 2022.

57 Micle, “From Carpathian,” 27–32.

Concerning Hungary, only a few scholars who have analyzed written sources and linguistic or ethnographic data have taken part in the debate about the issue of transhumance on the early medieval Balkan Peninsula. As far as we know, all the conclusions are positive—i.e., the analyses of these scholars support the existence of this type of animal husbandry in the given epoch and geographical surroundings.<sup>58</sup>

### **The point of view of an archaeologist regarding the issue of transhumance in the early medieval Balkans, and a potential way of handling the controversy**

From the viewpoint of an archaeologist, the investigation of transhumance in the Balkan Peninsula in the Early Middle Ages has not developed far from point zero. The ground is created by the set of data that emerges from the analysis of the written sources, linguistic research, as well as the interpretation of ethnographic records. The results of these historical and linguistic investigations are promising, but—again from the point of an archaeologist—they need to be verified by sets of contemporary data. As the written sources that date from prior to the twelfth century AD are mute, so to say, a reliable foundation for firm conclusions can be created for the given subject only through the excavation and interpretation of material remains. This is especially true when the issue to be analyzed is of a fundamental character. This means that the mere existence of a special type of animal husbandry in the Early Middle Ages should be determined as the first step, with a definitive ‘yes or no’ response.

Instead of giving a detailed overview of the history of the investigation or the deficiency of interest in the topic, we will try to identify common trends that connect at a given point the archaeologies of the northern part of the Balkan Peninsula (although the major commonality is the lack of research into the latter). As far as we know, there is practically no mention of the term ‘transhumance’ in the archaeological literature that deals with the Early Middle Ages in Bulgaria or the various parts of former Yugoslavia and the successor states after its dissolution (e.g. in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, and Northern Macedonia. We do not mention Slovenia here as we do not treat this country as being located on the Balkan Peninsula). There are—again, as far as we know—references on transhumance<sup>59</sup> only

58 Let me refer at this point in our study only to two analyses of Mátyás Gyóni from the earlier and the large-scale overview of István Schütz in recently published literature: Gyóni, “A Balkán félszigeti,” 337–49; Gyóni, “Les sources,” 225–35; Schütz, *Fehér foltok*. For the evaluation of the work of István Schütz see also: Simon, “Fehér foltok,” 18–28.

59 See e.g., the following studies: Gušić, *Ekološki uslovi*, 143–58; Greenfield, “A Model of Changing,” 45–56; Greenfield, “A Model of Faunal,” 53–55; Porčić, “Nomadic Pastoralism,” 7–31; Kapuran, *Praistorijski*, 31, 35, 62. Aleksandar Kapuran also refers on page sixty-two of his

in the archaeological literature that deals with the prehistorical cultures of the given region. It is worth mentioning that these are typically positive findings that support the existence of this type of animal husbandry even during the Bronze and Iron Age. Thus the real question is not whether the issue of transhumance is present in the analyses of the material culture of the early medieval Balkan Peninsula, but identifying clues that explain its absence. Further on, we will try to outline the factors which—again, in our understanding—have led to this deficiency.

- Concerning the archaeology of the Early Middle Ages, the nature of the collection of archaeological artifacts and data in the countries of the Balkan Peninsula should be first place on the list of obstacles. The process of obtaining archaeologically relevant items and data has taken a long time, with a lot of local variability, not only in the different countries but also within different regions of the same countries. The common trend was a first stage of collection lasting until the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. During this long period only ‘valuable’ artifacts were gathered and regularly taken from the Balkans as treasure finds either to Istanbul, or—more rarely—to Vienna, or the museums of Western Europe or America.<sup>60</sup>

The first ‘domestic’ museums were not regularly established in the northern part of the Balkans not earlier than the middle third of the nineteenth century. There are at least three models of the formation of central museums in the northern part of the Balkans. The first one, regularly treated as the ‘classical’ approach, involves the establishment of ‘national’ museums in the capitals of the newly formed countries after their liberation from Ottoman rule. Examples include the National Museum in Belgrade, established in 1844, and the National Archaeological Museum<sup>61</sup> in Sofia, established in 1892. Another process of the establishment of central museums can be identified on the north-western edge of the examined region, in Croatia. This country was during the given period located within the Habsburg Empire, but also an adjacent part of the Hungarian Monarchy. Here the formation of the central museum also began in the middle third of the nineteenth century, in Zagreb, the capital. The establishment of the museum was closely related to the national movement of the Croats, the so-called Illyrian movement.<sup>62</sup> A special type of case is Bosnia-Herzegovina, as this country after 1878 shifted from under Ottoman rule to

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study to the dynamic relations between communities dealing with plant growing and transhumant pastoralism.

60 The finding history of the treasure of Vrap is edifying in this respect: Werner, “Aspekte,” 181–201; Werner, *Der Schatzfund*, 10. See also: Takács, “A középkor,” 256–58.

61 A recent overview of the data: Takács, “A bulgáriai,” 334.

62 Blažević, “Indetermi-Nation,” 203–24.

under the occupation of the Austrian–Hungarian Monarchy.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, the Monarchy established the first museum of a central character in Sarajevo,<sup>64</sup> with an interest in archaeology. Finally, Montenegro should be mentioned, but as a negative example, as in this case the gaining of independence was not followed by the foundation of an archaeological museum.<sup>65</sup>

Common to the newly founded museums was their aim of collecting the ‘important’ archaeological artifacts of their countries. These were antiquities, with potential value on the art market, or archaeological objects that could be interpreted within the framework of the national historical narrative. This narrative was in the majority of the countries of the region formed before the time of the foundation of the respective central museums.<sup>66</sup> The museums of the countries of the Northern Balkans made an effort to build up a network of collaborators, to collect archaeological discoveries, or at least information about them.<sup>67</sup> The flow of artifacts or information was in principle intense only around the capital or other bigger cities of the given country. The variable tendency to collect and identify archaeological heritage is also important concerning the discovery of the possible traces of transhumance. Recent excavations of sites that may be associated with transhumance in the countries of southern and southwestern Europe (Italy, Spain, and Portugal) highlighted their typical location in high mountains, far away from urban centers.<sup>68</sup> Moreover—and also of crucial importance—is the fact that at these sites no artifacts of value to the art market are usually found.

- Another important trend with negative consequences for the issue of transhumance is the usual ‘national’ approach to interpreting medieval archaeological heritage<sup>69</sup> (also a vivid tendency today in many areas). Early medieval archaeological heritage was interpreted in the context of the narrative of the given national historiography that was typically outlined in the first half of

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63 Concerning the events of the end of the nineteenth century see the innovative standpoint of Srećko M. Džaja: Džaja, *Bosnien-Herzegowina*.

64 Dautbegović, ed., *Spomenica*; Imamović, “A Bosznia-hercegovinai,” 50–52; Takács, “A középkor,” 270.

65 Takács, “A középkor,” 191–94. With an explanation of the roots of the given situation.

66 An overview of these questions was compiled by the author of the present study in his thesis for the award of Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: Takács, “A középkor,” 113–232.

67 We presented in our doctoral thesis the construction of a system of ‘museums assignnes’ using the example of the Croatian central museum in Zagreb: Takács, “A középkor,” 437.

68 Stagno, “Short- and Long-distance,” 171–86; Vanni and Cristoferi, “The role,” 197–218; Fernández Mier and Tente, “Transhumant,” 219–32; López-Sáez et al., “Transhumance dynamics,” 233–44.

69 Takács, “A középkor,” 233–492.

the nineteenth century,<sup>70</sup> prior to the formation of the first institutions that collected archaeological items or data. Although there are many differences between them, the histories of early medieval archaeology in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia involved negotiation between ‘archaeology vs. the national historical narrative’ and may be considered classical examples of this, as detailed in various overviews.

There was considerable interest in medieval archaeological heritage in Bulgaria even before 1878, prior to when the country was liberated from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>71</sup> One of the focal areas of this interest was the period of the so-called I. Bulgarian State; i.e., the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the power centers of this entity were for the most part located on the northeastern edge of the country, far from the high mountains. There has been practically no archaeological activity on sites with possible connections to the issue of transhumance.

Concerning Serbia, the time before the end of the twelfth century—i.e., the time of the formation of the medieval state of Serbia<sup>73</sup>—has not been the focus of either historiographical or archaeological research.<sup>74</sup>

The situation contrasts with that in Croatia, where the excavation of early medieval churches and cemeteries was the main point of archaeological interest.<sup>75</sup> Both churches and cemeteries were in focus in Dalmatia, but mainly only the cemeteries of the eleventh century in the northern parts of the country. Investigations were carried out both in Dalmatia and continental Croatia, mainly with the purpose of reinforcing the argumentation of national historiography.<sup>76</sup> Sites excavated at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in Dalmatia were usually located in valleys near the Adriatic Sea, or—in continental Croatia—on the southern fringes of the Carpathian Basin.<sup>77</sup> As far as we know, the possibility of transhumance in Croatia was also never included in the interpretation of the excavated sites.

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70 Takács, “A középkor,” 113–232.

71 Takács, “A bulgáriai,” 332–35.

72 Takács, “A bulgáriai,” 334.

73 Jireček, *Geschichte der Serben*; Jireček, *Istorija Srba*; Ćirković, *Srbi u srednjem*. The same study in Italian: Ćirković, *I Serbi*.

74 An overview of the data to prove this statement: Takács, “A középkor,” 391–429.

75 An overview of these pieces of work was compiled by the author of the present study: Takács, “A középkor,” 333–62.

76 For the issue of the expectations of medieval archaeology *in statu nascendi* see Takács, “A középkor,” 160–75.

77 Takács, “A középkor,” 333–40.



Concerning Bosnia Herzegovina, the upper chronological limit of the interest in the archaeology of the National Museum (*Zemaljski Muzej*) was late antiquity, with a few exceptions like the peculiar late medieval tombstones.<sup>78</sup> There were a considerable amount of settlement excavations in this country even at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, focusing on prehistoric hillforts.<sup>79</sup> As far as we know from the literature, there is no mention of medieval findings in their reports. If there have been findings of this type, they were dug out without documentation—no matter how important they may have been in the analysis of the potential existence of early medieval transhumance.

We must return at this point to an issue already mentioned in the context of the analysis of the argumentation of Nicolae Iorga.<sup>80</sup> The lack of interest in the early medieval transhumance of practically all the archaeologies *in statu nascendi* of the countries of the Northern Balkans was—most likely—connected with the approach<sup>81</sup> that transhumance should not be identified as the national type of animal husbandry. Moreover—let us repeat this here—through building a position regarding the ‘us vs. them’ duality and designating transhumance as ‘their’ presumed way of life,<sup>82</sup> a barrier was constructed to the investigation of the given issue. In the reasoning of Nicolae Iorga, it is very peculiar that transhumance gained a negative connotation in the archaeologies of the Northern Balkans as being the animal husbandry of the Vlachs in the Middle Ages.

- There is also a third negative trend concerning the investigation of the possibility of the existence of transhumance on the Balkan Peninsula of the Early Middle Ages. This is the fact that the focus of investigations has not changed in the last hundred years either in a geographical sense or in the outlining of the main fields of research. The question is thus why.

78 An overview of this work was compiled by the author of the present study: Takács, “A középkor,” 269–88.

79 The investigation of hillforts was the focus of the scientific career of Václav Radimský: Filip, “Radimský,” 1114. For other data on the investigation of prehistory see: Takács, “A középkor,” 273.

80 Iorga, *Histoire*, 15.

81 For an analysis of how the national narratives in the northern half of the Balkans were usually built up: Takács, “A középkor,” 233–492.

82 Let us remind the reader here of one very characteristic example, in the words of the Croatian historian Ferdo Šišić from 1925: “Vlasi živeći po gorama i držeći se jedino stočarstva, odvikli su od poljodjstva i s vremenom postadoše nomadski pastiri.” [The Vlachs, living in the mountains and sticking only to animal husbandry, weaned themselves from agriculture and over time became nomadic shepherds]. Šišić, *Povijest*, 276.

Finances must be mentioned as the first issue. The limited financial resources dedicated to the protection and investigation of archeological heritage is a fact that may be observed in practically all the countries of the given region, and at all times during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Having this negative trend in mind, the growth in the number of museums and other institutions dealing with the investigation of early medieval archaeological heritage (universities, archaeological institutes, and offices for monument protection) is impressive. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that the growth in the scope of these institutions was not typically associated with archaeological coverage of those mountainous areas of the given countries where traces of transhumance could be expected.

There are of course exceptions to this negative trend, both in the western as well in the eastern part of the Northern Balkans from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. As previously mentioned, in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina are located historical hillforts that were traditionally investigated from the end of the nineteenth century onwards,<sup>83</sup> and this branch of science in Serbia and Bulgaria is associated with a research history of considerable length.<sup>84</sup> This fact should be treated as important, although we know that this research was usually carried out without reference to the possibility of the presence of early medieval settlement remains.

Another branch of investigation, established only recently (e.g., in Serbia<sup>85</sup> and Kosovo<sup>86</sup>) focuses on the early Byzantine hillforts that also served also as refuges, typically dated to the sixth–seventh century. The excavation of sites of this type in Serbia and Kosovo gave significant impetus to the analysis of settlement patterns in the given period, but still without reference to transhumance—as far as we see from the literature that was reviewed.

- It is necessary for understanding the outlined situation to make a short digression about the survival of national narratives in the interpretation of the early medieval material remains in the countries of the Northern Balkans after World Wars I and II.

After 1918, the investigation of the issue of transhumance—as far as we know—did not appear among the tasks of archaeology. The reason for this was

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83 For data about the investigation of prehistory in Bosnia-Herzegovina see: Takács, “A középkor,” 270, 273.

84 For data about the investigation of prehistory in Serbia see: Takács, “A középkor,” 302, 368.

85 We refer to the one and only example of the excavations of the site Jelica-Gradina: Milinković, *Gradina*.

86 We refer to the one and only example of the excavations of the fort of Harilaq (with the Serb name *Ariljača*): Berisha, *Archaeological Guide*, 81; Peja, Rraci, and Hajdari, *The Castle*.

not only the low level of financial support for archaeological research both in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria in the period between the two World Wars, nor the fact that the end of antiquity was often treated as the upper chronological limit of ‘real archaeology,’ but the fact that transhumance was usually treated as a specific ‘Vlach issue.’<sup>87</sup>

After the spring of 1945 and the final collapse of Nazi Germany, the countries of the Northern Balkans came not only under the rule of their communist parties but also under the massive influence of the Soviet Union. This influence can be detected in the field of medieval archaeology.<sup>88</sup> Concerning the archaeology of the early medieval times, this meant the massive spread of so-called Slavic archaeology, as promoted by the Soviet archaeologists of the era of I.V. Stalin.<sup>89</sup> In the former Yugoslavia, this approach lasted only until 1948, and in Bulgaria until the transition at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s.

The situation in relation to the early medieval archaeology of Bulgaria is easier to describe. The acceptance of the Soviet type of Slav archaeology meant acceptance of the thesis of quick Slavicization after the arrival of the Slavs in the Northeastern Balkans in the seventh century. Any issue that did not fit with this concept was neglected. The problem of the early medieval population of the Northeastern Balkan speaking a Vulgar Latin idiom belonged in this category. Moreover, as the problem of transhumance was traditionally connected with the Vlachs, the investigation of the possibility of early medieval transhumance was put aside. There were other, let us say, more ‘national’ approaches in the analysis of the early medieval archaeological heritage of the country. Their commonality was a focus on the material culture of the I. Bulgarian State. The problem of transhumance was—as far as we know—also not raised in these analyses.

The situation in the archaeologies of the various republics of former Yugoslavia was a bit more complicated, but even so perspicuous. The main accent of the investigations of the Early Middle Ages led to the denotation of the archaeology of Croatia, and partly Serbia, with the terms of the epoch: the Zagreb- and Belgrade schools. In both cases, the traditional approach at the end of the nineteenth century was reestablished or—better to say—reinforced. Moreover, as all these traditional approaches assumed the quick Slavicization of the northwestern part of the Balkan Peninsula, there was no room for the investigation of the ‘Vlach’ issue of transhumance. These approaches underwent

87 See again the lines written by Ferdo in an overview written for a broader audience: Šišić, *Povijest*, 276.

88 Takács, “A középkor,” 105–6.

89 A recent overview of the trends associated with the reception of the Soviet model: Takács, “A középkor,” 200–2, 397–98.

gradual transformation in the second half of the 1980s as the idea of rapid Slavicization was abandoned by some archaeologists of the so-called Zagreb- and Belgrade schools.<sup>90</sup> However, the formulation of questions connected with the archaeological investigation of transhumance only began with delay, as the turbulent epoch around the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (interethnic wars) significantly reduced the opportunity for archaeological investigations, especially concerning fieldwork. It is, let us say, symptomatic that the first attempts were made—as already mentioned—by archaeologists working in the republics of former Yugoslavia who dealt with prehistory.<sup>91</sup> It is also symptomatic that the identification of transhumant sheep breeding through a reinterpretation of already excavated sites did not lead to firm conclusions.

- It must be stressed that international projects on transhumance were carried out even in the 1960s and at the end of the 1980s in the central and southern parts of former Yugoslavia (in Bosnia-Herzegovina and also Macedonia, currently called Northern Macedonia). In both cases, the sampling of ethnographic data was the focus of research. One of the results of these projects were references to the historical roots of this type of sheep breeding in the given regions.<sup>92</sup> But the question remained: can these roots be traced back to the Early Middle Ages? We should also refer at this point in the investigation into transhumance in the southern parts of the Balkans. Important archaeological research into transhumance was carried out in Greece, focusing not on early medieval times but on the different epochs of Prehistory.<sup>93</sup> The importance of these investigations is amended by the fact that their results were already evaluated concerning the Middle Ages.<sup>94</sup> Another branch of science that has led to relevant and important results is archaeozoology,<sup>95</sup> which has produced preliminary findings and a debate about their interpretations.<sup>96</sup>
- Coming to the last point in the enumeration of the facts that influence the investigation, we must refer to one overview of the investigations into transhumance

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90 For a short overview of the main trends postulated by these two schools in the field of early medieval archaeology: Takács, "A középkor," 239–40.

91 See e.g., the following studies: Gušić, *Ekološki uslovi*, 143–58; Greenfield, "A Model of Changing Animal Exploitation," 45–56; Greenfield, "A Model of Faunal Exploitation," 53–55; Porčić, "Nomadic Pastoralism," 7–31; Kapuran, *Praistorijski*, 31, 35, 62.

92 See e.g., Matley "Transhumance," 231–61; Rasson, "Mountains," 138–41.

93 Biagi and Nisbet, "Archeologia della pastorizia," 586.

94 Biagi and Nisbet, "Archeologia della pastorizia," 581–93.

95 Greenfield, "The origins," 573–93; Greenfield, "The advent," 15–36.

96 Greenfield, "Reply," 635–37.

in Serbia presented by Uglješa Vojvodić at the *Ruralia XIII* conference.<sup>97</sup> This is, so to say, a ‘state of the art’ archaeological investigation of the given subject applicable to the first decades of the third millennium. The overview of Uglješa Vojvodić can be evaluated at least from two perspectives. From an optimistic point of view, we may rejoice when realizing the magnitude of data that is available on the issue of transhumance in the case of the territory of Serbia. From the more pessimistic perspective, it is clear that these data do not refer to the Early Middle Ages. This period is apparently not on the agenda of the archaeological investigations into the issue of transhumance in the given geographical surrounding. At the present moment, we may only hope for this...

## Conclusions

A general conclusion may be formulated regarding the lack of interest in the issue of transhumance in the archaeological research of the Early Middle Ages in the second half of the twentieth and the first two decades of the twenty-first century, not only in Serbia, but also in the other countries of the Northern Balkans. The situation can be described in the very figurative and instructive words of Florin Curta:

“Transhumant pastoralism was an economic strategy associated with mountains, and old preconceptions about »primitive« or »backward« mountain communities of shepherds may be responsible for the current lack of archaeological studies of medieval pastoralists.”<sup>98</sup>

According to the present analysis, the last sentence should be amended a little bit. The perception of ‘primitive’ or ‘backward’ mountain communities was not the only reason for the lack of archaeological studies. The other reason for the lack of interest was—most likely—connected with the desire<sup>99</sup> that transhumance not be associated with the animal husbandry techniques of individual nations. Let us again emphasize that, according to the process of opinion formation that relies on an ‘us vs. them’ duality, transhumance has been disfavored as ‘their’ presumed way of life, thus a barrier was constructed to investigations of the given issue. This is the starting point that must be always taken into consideration during the outlining of further research steps. A change is required in the focus of the research, with an emphasis on problems connected with the issue of transhumance. This change can—hopefully—lead to positive results through the initiation of research projects that focus

97 Vojvodić, “Transhumance,” 69–79.

98 Curta, “Introduction,” 12.

99 For an analysis of how the national narratives in the northern half of the Balkan were usually built up: Takács, “A középkor,” 233–492.

on the discovery and excavation of sites in mountainous areas possibly connected with transhumance. One should not forget that targeted projects focusing on the discovery and excavation of the summer camps of transhumant shepherds in the mountains led to positive results in Italy, Southern France, and Spain.<sup>100</sup> It is also to be mentioned that these projects were carried out with international cooperation. Again, in our opinion it would be very useful to create projects of a larger scale in the various countries of the Northern Balkans, if possible, with an international background, but without reflection on the issue ‘whose heritage’ is the history of transhumance on the Balkan Peninsula. This remains a crucial concern even today, regardless of whether it is a legacy of the times of national romanticism (and in most cases from the second half of the nineteenth century, onwards when the narratives of the different historiographies of the given regions were formulated). Analysis should be continued to identify whether there is reliable material proof of the existence of transhumance in the northern part of the early medieval Balkans.

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