

HOW JUSTINIAN BECAME A SLAV: THE STORY OF A FORGERY

"One of the striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives."

Mark Twain

I

Was Justinian a Slav? There is not a wisp of evidence that he was. Yet a great many distinguished scholars, Slavs and non-Slavs alike, have held that the great Byzantine emperor was of Slavic origin. Indeed, this conviction still lingers on in some quarters to this day. How did this claim gain currency?

As far as Western scholarship is concerned, it all began in 1623 when Nicholas Alemannus, curator of the Vatican Library, published his edition of that vicious indictment of Justinian's reign, the *Anecdota* or *Secret History* (*Arcana Historia*) by Procopius of Caesarea. In his otherwise valuable commentaries Alemannus offered some totally new facts about Justinian and his family, for example: that the young Justinian was held as a hostage in Ravenna at the court of Theodoric the Great, and that Justinian's mother was opposed to his marriage with Theodora. Most interesting, for our purposes, was the assertion that Justinian was known among his own people as *Upravda*, which meant *Justice* in his native tongue; also that his father's original name was *Istokus*, and that his mother and sister bore the name *Bigeniza*, for which the Latin equivalent was *Vigilantia*. Alemannus repeatedly cited as his source for all these curious facts a *Life of Justinian* by an Abbot Theophilus, who was allegedly Justinian's tutor.¹ Alemannus did not say

1. *Procopii Caesariensis v. l. Ἀνεκδοτα. Arcana Historia, Qui est liber nonus Historiarum. Ex bibliotheca Vaticana Nicolaus Alemannus protulit, Latine reddidit, Notis illustravit* (Lugduni, MDCXXIII [Lyons, 1923]), see p. 67 for genealogical table and notes 6, 7, 8, and 15, on pp. 67-68; also pp. 9, 21, 22, 23, 34, 65, 66, and 87.

where he found or read this work, nor did he offer any information about it. He did not even mention what was later to become the central issue, that the family names which he ascribed to Justinian and his kin could be nothing else but Slavic.

Either out of indifference or because of their ignorance of the Slavic languages, Western scholars missed this point for nearly two centuries. Most were more concerned with the other biographical facts which Alemannus attributed to Theophilus, and what discussion there was focused on Theophilus's identity and the mysterious Life of Justinian rather than on the linguistic derivation of the names *Upravda*, *Istokus*, and *Bigleniza*. Those scholars who quoted these names in their works did so without ever reaching the inevitable conclusion that the names were Slavic.

For example, in 1731 a German biographer of Justinian and Theodora, J. P. Ludewig, cited both the name *Upravda* and its correct meaning, which he took from Alemannus, and then he concluded rather inconsequentially that Justinian may have been of Illyrian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, or Thracian stock—none of which meant Slavic in Justinian's time.² In his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* Gibbon was guilty of an even more spectacular *non sequitur*. "The emperor Justinian," he wrote with admirable judgment, "was born near the ruins of Sardica (the modern Sophia), of an obscure race of barbarians, the inhabitants of a wild and desolate country, to which the names of Dardania, of Dacia, and of Bulgaria have been successively applied." Then, unwilling to let well enough alone, Gibbon added a footnote which is a linguistic calamity. "The names of these Dardanian peasants," he volunteered, "are Gothic, and almost English: Justinian is a translation of *uprauda* (*upright*); his father Sabatius (in Graeco-barbarous language *stipes*) was styled in his village *Istock* (*Stock*); . . ."³

It is difficult to ascertain who first called attention to the specifically Slavic origin of the names *Upravda*, *Istokus*, and *Bigleniza*. Certainly this fact was known by the beginning of the nineteenth century, for on November 24, 1809, the Slovenian Jernej Kopitar, who was an official Austrian censor for Slavic languages and an avid patron of Slavic culture, wrote from Vienna

2. J. P. Ludewig, *Vita Iustiniani atque Theodorae augustorum nec non Triboniani* (Halle, 1731), pp. 125, 127-129. Since this volume was not available to me I have relied on the following two sources for the above information: James Bryce, "Life of Justinian by Theophilus," *The English Historical Review*, II (1887), 658; and A. A. Vasiliev, *Justin the First* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 45.

3. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. V. (London, 1862), p. 35, see both text and n. 2.

to the famous Czech Slavist Josef Dobrovský that "Emperor Justinian's family was all Slavic."⁴ Encouraged by Gibbon, whose comparison of *Upravda* to *upright* he cited with an exclamation point, Kopitar ventured the opinion that "Belisarius also sounds Slavic."⁵ Kopitar was, by virtue of both his official position and personal contacts, an excellent reflection of learned Slavic opinion of his day.

It is important to note that German scholars were among the first in the nineteenth century to support the claim of Justinian's origin. In 1823 J. S. Vater wrote an article on "The Present State of the Serbian Church" in which he observed, "The interest in the past of the Serbian nation is heightened by the fact that Emperor Justinian the Great . . . undoubtedly belonged to them."⁶ In 1824 the famous Grimm brother Jakob stated in his translation

4. Vatroslav Jagić (Jagich), "Pis'ma Dobrovskogo i Kopitara," *Sbornik ORiA i SLIAN*, XXXIX (1885), 68, cited by N. Radojčić, "O tobožnjem slovenskom poreklu cara Justinijana", *Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije*, CLXXXIV (1940), 199.

5. It must not be supposed that Kopitar was merely trying to outdo Gibbon and that he was indulging in an academic joke. Nor was the claim of Belisarius's Slavic origin a peculiarly Slavic one. As an example, let us cite Lord Mahon's *The Life of Belisarius*, 2d ed. (London 1848). The author (actually Philip Henry Stanhope, 5th Earl of Stanhope) does penance in a special note for an omission for which he was taken to task by no less an authority than the German historian J. von Hammer-Purgstall, author of the first great scholarly history of the Ottoman Empire. Writing in the *Jahrbücher der Literatur* of Vienna in 1832, "M. von Hammer," as Lord Mahon calls him, wrote the following criticism on p. 144, which we quote in Lord Mahon's translation: "The name of Belisarius is Illyrian (or Slavonic), and denotes the *White Prince* (Beli-Tzar). Since Lord Mahon, in a note only a few pages further, rightly explains Belgrade as Beli-grad, the 'White City,' we are surprised that the 'White Prince' should have escaped his notice," Lord Mahon replied, "The justice of this animadversion upon me from this eminent critic, and the fault of the omission which I have here committed, I am bound most fully to acknowledge." (Note to the Second Edition, p. ix.) It should be noted that von Hammer's reference to "Slavonic" here is a parenthetical explanation of the term Illyrian and not an alternate choice to Illyrian. In the period in which he was writing, and for some time before, the terms *Illyrian* and *South Slavic* were synonymous. For example, in the latter half of the eighteenth century the Austrian Government officially used the term *Illyrian* to denote the South Slavic subjects of the Habsburg Empire, especially the Serbs. Napoleon called his conquests in Dalmatia the Illyrian Provinces. The whole Croatian literary and political movement of the first half of the nineteenth century is known as "Illyrianism."

It should also be noted that the Slavs were not alone in trying to appropriate Belisarius. Lord Mahon mentions, on page 2 of his work, "the patriotic ardour of two learned Germans, who labour with more zeal than success . . . to claim the hero as their countryman" and cites both in a footnote.

6. J. S. Vater, "Der jetzige Zustand der Serbischen Kirche," *Kirchenhistorisches Archiv*, III (1823), 307-9, cited by Radojčić. *op. cit.*, p. 22, n. 2.

of Vuk Karadžić's *Short Serbian Grammar*, "Probably Emperor Justinian himself was of this 'South Slavic' origin."⁷ Vater indicated that he knew of Theophilus's Life of Justinian through Alemannus. As for Grimm, it is quite possible that he was influenced directly by his Slavic contacts.

The Slavic scholar whose public support of the theory of Justinian's Slavic origin carried the most weight with Western European scholars was the Czech Pavel Josef Šafařík. It was in 1837 that his monumental work on the early Slavs, *Slovanské starožitnosti*, first appeared. There Šafařík stated that, on the basis of information given by Justinian's tutor Theophilus (who, Šafařík solemnly assures his readers, died in 534 A. D.), he found reason to conclude that Justinian came of a Slavic family.⁸ Being in Czech, this claim did not get much attention from non-Slavic scholars. However, when the second volume of the German translation came out in Leipzig in 1844, under the title *Slawische Alterthümer*, Šafařík's argument broke through the linguistic barrier. Western scholars now learned from a Slavic scholar of unimpeachable reputation that "*Iztok (sol oriens)*" was a Slavic equivalent to the Thracian-Phrygian name *Sabbatios* or *Sabbazios*. Apparently Šafařík did not know what to make of Bigleniza. As for Upravda, Šafařík was not only able to confirm Alemannus's report that the name meant *Justice*, but he identified it as Slavic. The Czech scholar thereupon reached a deduction which went beyond the question of Justinian's ethnic origin, namely: since Justinian was a Slav, and since he was born in Upper Macedonia, *ergo* the Slavs must have settled south of the Danube before the end of the fifth century, that is, much before the date scholars generally assigned to their migration into the Balkans.⁹

Other Slavic scholars joined the chorus. Some were rather restrained and indirect, as, for example, A. Kunik, who wrote about Justinian in a Russian journal in 1854, "Despite his Slavic origin, this Byzantine emperor (565) was so imbued with his dignity as a successor of the Roman caesars that he ordered his code to be compiled in the Latin language and even called this language his father tongue (πάτριος φωνή)." Five pages later Kunik again asserted cautiously, "Though it is now reliably known, on the one hand, that Hellenized

7. Wuk's *Stephanowitsch Kleine Serbische Grammatik*, *verdeutsch* von Jacob Grimm (1824), Preface, p. iv.

8. Pavel Josef Šafařík, *Slovanské starožitnosti* (Prague, 1837), 570-571. Šafařík writes "Wprawda" and "Bigleniza or Wigleniza" in Greek as well, without explaining where he found these Greek forms. They are not to be found in Alemannus, and either Šafařík or someone before him simply guessed at the Greek forms.

9. Paul Joseph Schafarik, *Slawische Alterthümer*, Vol. II (Leipzig, 1844), 160-161.

Slavs sat on the Byzantine throne, and that a part of the Byzantine Empire, especially in Europe, was occupied by Slavic settlements, one must, on the other hand, beware of exaggerating the influence of the Slavic element."¹⁰

Other Slavic scholars were not this circumspect. In 1857 the most distinguished Croatian historian in the nineteenth century, Franjo Rački, lent his authority to Alemannus's Theophilus, adding a few refinements of his own to Šafařík's rendering of the Slavic names. He turned Justinian's birthplace Bederiana into *Vedrijani*, and Bigleniza became *Viljenica*, again without any explanation as to the meaning or root of this name. Rački also took this opportunity to transform Belisarius into the supposedly Slav *Veličar*.¹¹

In 1859 the Russian Slavist Vladimir Lamanskii published two works which touched on this matter. In the first he simply repeated Šafařík.¹² It was in the second he vaunted Slavic influence in the Byzantine Empire with the sweeping assertion, "The nationality which gave Byzantium several emperors—Justinian I (527-565), Justin II (565-578), Basil the Macedonian (867-886), the Patriarch Nicetas (766-780), several generals, among them Belisarius . . . , many officials and men closest to the throne who wielded enormous influence (in the 6th, 9th, 10th and 11th centuries), such a nationality could hardly have played an insignificant role in the Empire."¹³ In 1868 another Russian scholar, Aleksandr Hilferding, published a *History of the Serbs and Bulgars* in which he not only repeated Šafařík's claim concerning Justinian and his family but also Rački's Slavonization of Belisarius (which was now refined into *Velichar*).¹⁴ It is germane to point out that both Lamanskii and Hilferding were not only Slavophiles but organized Pan Slavists.¹⁵

In 1873 the Bulgarian scholar Marin Drinov wrote a Master's essay while at Moscow University in which he took issue with Šafařík on the date

10. A. Kunik, "Po chemu Vizantiia donyne ostaetsia zagadkoi vo vseмирnoi istorii?" *Uchenyia Zapiski of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg*, II (1854), 430, n. 2, and 435.

11. Franjo Rački, "Nacrt jugoslovenskikh povjestij do IX stoljetja," *Arhiv za povjestnicu Jugoslavensku*, IV (1857), 241.

12. Vladimir Lamanskii, *Slaviane v Maloi Azii, Afrike, i Ispanii* (St. Petersburg, 1859), p. 123.

13. Vladimir Lamanskii, "Istoricheskie zamechaniia na delo Slaviane v Maloi Azii, Afrike, i Ispanii," *Uchenyia Zapiski of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg*, V (1859), 2.

14. Aleksandr Hilferding, *Istoria Serbov i Bolgar*, Part I, in *Sobranie sochinenii A. Gil'ferdinga*, Vol. I (St. Petersburg, 1868), 7.

15. Michael B. Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Pan Slavism, 1856-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 63-65 and *passim*.

of the first migration into the Balkans. Not content with pushing the date back a century as Šafařík had done, Drinov placed the beginning of Slavic colonization there in the late second century A. D.¹⁶ Despite this difference of opinion, Drinov was glad to use the Slavic names for Justinian and his family as evidence.

It would be tedious to enlarge on this list of Slavic scholars. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Serbian and Croatian schools, for example, Justinian's Slavic origin became an undisputed part of the curriculum. The Serbian scholar Nikola Radojčić wrote in 1940, "I remember well the pride with which I learned in the sixth grade of high school from the textbook by Vjekoslav Klaić how the Byzantine Emperor Justin was a Slav by origin and how he was succeeded to the throne by his nephew Upravda, who as emperor became known as Justinian."¹⁷ The author of this paper, a native American, heard the same from his father, a Serbian from Croatia. Undoubtedly Justinian's Slavic origin was much more than an academic question with Slavs in the nineteenth century; it was part and parcel of the whole Slavic cultural and political awakening. Here was a way both to dispel one's sense of inferiority and to get back at Westerners who had for so long ignored, belittled, and even suppressed Slavic culture.

Slavic interest in Justinian's Slavic origin is quite understandable. There is considerably less excuse for the fact that some of Western Europe's most renowned historians equally accepted the theory. Some, like Charles Lebeau, who wrote in the first half of the nineteenth century, before it became generally known in the West that the family names cited by Alemannus were Slavic, went on simply repeating these names without realizing their implication.¹⁸ However, after Šafařík's German edition, no Western scholar who treated Justinian could decently ignore the theory of his Slavic birth.

Some, especially the English historians, treated the question gingerly. George Finlay relegated it to a footnote in his *Greece under the Romans*, and even then weasled out of a commitment with the statement, "Justinian appears to have been descended from a Slavonic family." He cited as sources

16. Marin Drinov, "Zaselenie Balkanskogo poluostrova slavianami," *Chteniia Imperatorskogo Obshchestva Istorii i Russkikh Drevnostei*, IV (1872), 1-174; reprinted in 1873 as a separate monograph in Moscow. For a discussion of Drinov's theory see especially A. A. Vasiliev, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 and 305; and Vatroslav Jagić (Iagich), *Istoriia slavianskoj filologii* (St. Petersburg, 1910), p. 578.

17. Radojčić, *op. cit.*, p. 171. See Vjekoslav Klaić, *Povjestnica srednjega vieka za više razrede srednjih učilišta* (Zagreb, 1888), p. 31.

18. Charles Lebeau, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, Vol. VIII (Paris, 1827), p. 9.

not only Theophilus's *Vita Justiniani* but something which he called *Slavonian Antiquities*—apparently Šafařík's work.¹⁹

In 1862 there appeared a new edition of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* "with notes by Dean Milman and M. Guizot. . . with additional notes by William Smith, LL. D." It was Mr. Smith who decided to correct Gibbon's linguistic fantasies concerning Justinian's genealogy. "These names are Slavonic rather than Gothic," Mr. Smith boldly proclaimed, calling attention to Šafařík's second volume in the German edition.²⁰

In 1882, writing an article on Justinian in a *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, edited by the same William Smith (and the Rev. Professor Wace), James Bryce somewhat hesitantly agreed. "The word Uprauda has been supposed to point to a Gothic origin," he wrote, "and we know that there were many Goths scattered over Illyricum. But Upravda is an older form of the Slavonic word Pravda, meaning straight or right; so more probably the name is Slavonic, and Justinian himself the offspring of one of those Slavic families which had settled in Macedonia in the middle of the fifth century. Istok and Bigleniza have also a Slavonic sound."²¹

Two English specialists on Roman law, both of whose works appeared in 1886, apparently felt that the Gothic theory was still worth mentioning. James Muirhead reported that the names in Justinian's family had conjectured to be either Teutonic or Slavonic. "The latter seems the more probable view," Muirhead conceded cautiously, and then added concerning Justinian, "His own name was originally Upravda."²² H. J. Roby's *An Introduction to the Study of Justinian's Digest* began with the words, "When Uprauda the Slave or Goth, reigning under the name of Justinian, essayed the reformation of the laws of Rome . . ."²³

The French historian Alfred Rambaud was neither reserved nor ambiguous. In his *L' Empire grec au sixième siècle*, which appeared in Paris in 1870, he proclaimed, "It seems there is no doubt of the origin of the dynasty

19. George Finlay, *Greece under the Romans*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh and London, 1857), footnote on pp. 235-6.

20. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol. V (London, 1862), p. 35, footnote b.

21. James Bryce, "Justinian," *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Vol. III, ed. William Smith and the Rev. Prof. Wace (London, 1882), offprint, p. 538.

22. J. Muirhead, *Historical Introduction to the Private Law of Rome*, 3d ed. revised (London, 1916), p. 364. The first edition appeared in 1886, the second in 1898.

23. Henry John Roby, *An Introduction to the Study of Justinian's Digest* (Cambridge, 1886), p. xvii.

of Justin I. The names of Istok, of Begleniča [sic!], of Upravda . . . provide a rather conclusive proof as to the origin of those peasants of Bederiana." Having thus gotten his feet wet, Rambaud decided to jump in, almost out-doing Drinov, with the statement, "Let us not forget that, since the time of Constantine the Great, Slavonic colonies had been established in Thrace."²⁴

Even the great Leopold von Ranke, a father of the critical school of historiography, fell into the trap. In his *World History* in 1883 he not only accepted Justinian's Slavic genealogy but, probably remembering that he had once written a History of the Serbian Revolution, Ranke made a comparison between Justin's lowly station as a shepherd and the fact that Prince Miloš Obrenović of Serbia had been a pig merchant.²⁵

Even the Greek historian Konstantin Paparrhigopoulos accepted the theory of Justinian's Slavic origin and included the Emperor's Slavic genealogy in the fourth volume of the monumental *History of the Greek People* in 1883.²⁶

Despite the gullibility of these and less distinguished historians, there were doubters from the beginning. What troubled most of them was not the possibility of Justinian's Slavic origin, for many of them did not even know that the names cited by Alemannus were supposed to be Slavic. Rather they were skeptical about Alemannus's source Theophilus. One of these skeptics was the German scholar Reitz who, in 1752, published an edition of the Greek paraphrase of Justinian's Institutes by the sixth century jurist Theophilus. Reitz rejected the possibility that this Theophilus was the one cited by Alemannus since the former died in 537. However, Reitz suggested that Alemannus might have erred in making his Theophilus the tutor of Justinian himself instead of Justinian the son of Germanos and grandson of the great Justinian. Thus Reitz did not doubt the existence of Alemannus's Theophilus even though he complained of not being able to find Theophilus's Life of Justinian in the Vatican Library or anywhere else; he only pushed him up to the reigns of Justin II and Tiberius.²⁷

The learned Philip Invernizi, who published a history of Justinian's

24. A. Rambaud, *L' Empire grec au dixième siècle* (Paris, 1870), p. 535.

25. Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte*, Vol. IV (Leipzig, 1883), p. 8.

26. K. Παπαρρηγόπουλος, *Ιστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἔθνους* Vol. IV (Leipzig, 1883), p. 8.

27. The above information on Reitz comes from James Bryce, "Life of Justinian by Theophilus," *The English Historical Review*, II (1887), p. 659 n., and A. Vasiliev, "Vopros o slavianskom proiskhozhdenii Iustiniana," *Vizantiiskii Vremennik*, I, Books 3-4 (1894), p. 471.

reign in 1783, expressed even greater distrust for Alemannus's source and reported that he and others had diligently searched the Vatican Library for Theophilus's Life of Justinian but without any success.²⁸

To the best of our knowledge, the first categorically to deny Justinian's Slavic origin was the great Czech Slavist Josef Dobrovský. Replying in 1809 to Kopitar's letter, which we have already cited, Dobrovský called all such conjectures "*Spielereyen*" and made sport of the matter by saying that Belisarius sounded more like "carpentarius" to him. More seriously, he suggested that Upravda and Bigleniza were simply fabricated from *Justitia* and *Vigilantia*. Unfortunately, this correspondence between Kopitar and Dobrovský was not published until 1885.²⁹

The first public doubter of the Slavic theory was the Austrian scholar R. Roesler, who, in 1873, wrote an article on the date of the Slavic migration into the Balkans. Resting his case on the traditional view that Justinian was named after his foster father Justin, Roesler asserted on linguistic grounds that "Uprauda" was not a genuine Slavic form at all, but a fabrication. He also pointed out that Justinian's father Sabbatios had an "*echt thrakische*" name, and that Bigleniza (or Vigleniza) was but a corrupt form of the Latin *Vigilantia*.³⁰

The following year, in 1874, another Austrian scholar, W. Tomaschek, really made a breakthrough in an article on the original site of Justiniana Prima. He not only denied the authenticity of Justinian's Slavic genealogy but traced it to the sixteenth-century Ragusan historian Luccari (Lukarević), who in turn, he said, probably got the idea from some old Slavic chronicle. At any rate, said Tomaschek, the tale is no more worthy of belief than, for example, South Slavic folk-tales which connected the Nemanja dynasty with Constantine the Great.³¹ Three years later, in 1877, Tomaschek again took up this question in a very learned review of Konstantin Jireček's *History of the Bulgars*, attacking Šafařík sharply.³²

28. Phil. Invernizi, *De Rebus gestis Justiniani Magni* (Rome, 1783), prefatory note, cited by Bryce, *loc. cit.*, p. 659.

29. Radojčić, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200, citing Vatroslav Jagić (Jagich), "Pis'ma Dobrovskogo i Kopitara," *Sbornik ORIA i SI IAN*, XXXIX (1885), pp. 77 and 101-111.

30. Robert Roesler, "Ueber den Zeitpunkt der slavischen Ansiedlung an der unteren Donau," *Sitzungsberichte der Philosophisch-Historischen Classe der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, LXXIII (Wien, 1873), 115-116.

31. W. Tomaschek, "Miscellen aus der alten Geographie," *Zeitschrift für die österreichischen Gymnasien*, XXV (1874), 658. See Radojčić, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

32. *Zeitschrift für die österreichischen Gymnasien*, XXVIII (1877), 680.

Other German scholars caught the scent and joined the chase, notably Krek and K. Müllenhoff, both of whom wrote in 1887.³³ But by that time James Bryce completely discredited the theory of Justinian's Slavic origin by a truly important discovery.

II

In January 1883, being engaged in studies relating to the history of Justinian and especially to the Ostrogothic war, Bryce visited Rome. At the Vatican Library he asked to see the *Life of Justinian* by Theophilus. The librarians told him that others had searched before him, and in vain. Bryce thereupon looked through the manuscripts of Procopius but could find no clue. Then remembering that Alemannus had been closely associated with the Barberini family, Bryce investigated the library of the Barberini palace and, after a short search, discovered a manuscript entitled *Vita Justiniani*. It was on paper of quarto size and bound up with some other manuscripts in a small book. The manuscript was written in a seventeenth-century handwriting. The *Vita* itself consisted of nine paragraphs. Appended to it was a document entitled *Explicationes*, which contained fifteen notes relating to specific points in the *Vita*. The author of the *Explicationes* identified himself in the first paragraph as Joannes Tomco Marnavich, Canon of Šibenik (Dalmatia).

Bryce did not wish to publish the manuscript until he had investigated several important questions. Was this the *Vita Justiniani* which Alemannus quoted, and was Theophilus its author? To begin with, the *Vita* and the *Explicationes* were written in the same ink and handwriting and on paper of the same size and quality. The *Explicationes* were stated to be by the person who translated what he called not the *Vita* itself but a "*fragmentum*" or abstract. This abstract was written in the third person and in a style which indicated that it was not purported to be a literal translation of the original but a paraphrase. In addition to these problems was the fact that the name of Theophilus was mentioned neither in the *Vita* nor in the *Explicationes*; rather the original was attributed to "Bogomil, priest and abbot of the Monastery of St. Alexander the Martyr in Dardania" whom the Latins and Greeks called Domnius. Marnavich's seventh note explained that *Bogomil* was an "Illyrian" word which meant "dear to God." Apparently Alemannus took the next step himself in translating Bogomil into Theophilus. Despite these

33. See Bryce, *loc. cit.*, p. 474.

problems, Bryce concluded that this must have been the manuscript to which Alemannus referred, for all the facts which Alemannus had attributed to Theophilus were in this manuscript. True, the manuscript had certain facts not found in Alemannus, but they were, Bryce concluded, mostly facts which were in themselves improbable and which Alemannus well might have doubted.

How reliable was Joannes Tomco Marnavich? Because Bryce did not know any Slavic language, he appealed for help to Arthur John Evans, curator of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, to the Czech historian Konstantin Jireček, and to Count Ugo Balzani. Through them Bryce discovered that Marnavich had a penchant for compiling fanciful or fraudulent genealogies and that he was a wholly uncritical person. "Whether he was also untruthful," Bryce wrote, "we have no sufficient materials for judging."³⁴

Another problem was raised by the first paragraph of the *Vita*, which stated that the original "is kept in the library of Illyrian monks of the Order of St. Basil who live on Mount Athos . . ."³⁵ Bryce had friends searching for it on Mount Athos and many other places, including Dubrovnik, Zagreb, Budapest, Tübingen, and Munich, but with no luck. Bryce hoped that perhaps there might be a clue in one of Marnavich's unpublished works entitled *De Caesaribus Illyricis*, but nobody could find that manuscript either.

It was also necessary to ascertain whether an Abbot Theophilus or Bogomil who was Justinian's preceptor ever existed. After a diligent search of the literature of the sixth century and succeeding centuries, Bryce concluded that Theophilus was "a purely legendary personage."

Finally Bryce asked himself what was the relation between the manuscript he had found in the Barberini palace library and the document of which it was purported to be an extract. The external evidence forced him to conclude that there was no such document. However, the internal evidence led him to favor the view that Marnavich really believed "in some sort of an original which he was using, however freely." Bryce could see no reason for Marnavich's forging such a document. "These notices," he wrote, "redound to no one's credit or discredit. They prove nothing of any present interest to any party, sect, or family." Hence he concluded that the writer of the *Explicationes* was "in good faith explaining names and facts which he has read or heard, but has not himself invented."³⁶

On the basis of four years of investigation, therefore, Bryce published

34. Bryce, *loc. cit.*, p. 668.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 661.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 671.

the entire manuscript in 1887 in the second volume of the *English Historical Review* and proclaimed the *Vita Justiniani* of Theophilus a "semi-mythical and romantic" work which "in some points diverges widely from the truth of history." He considered the Slavic names given for Justinian and his family translations from the Latin and Greek, and he regarded the entire work as a reflection of South Slavic legendry.³⁷

III

Bryce had done his task well. It was now for men better equipped than he was in the field of Slavic studies to explain what he could not and to answer some of the new questions which his discovery had raised.

The first such authority to do so was the Czech historian Konstantin Jireček, and on Bryce's invitation. In a letter to Bryce, which is appended in the French original to Bryce's article in the *English Historical Review*. Jireček made the following observations; (1) That the name Upravda for Justinian did not appear in any known work written in Slavic or translated into Slavic in the Middle Ages; (2) That the author of the *Vita Justiniani* evidently obtained the name of Domnius for Theophilus from a Bishop of Sardica called Domnion who is mentioned in the Chronicle of Comes Marcellinus for the year 615 A. D., and that the author took the name of "Selimir, a Slavic prince" who supposedly married Istok's sister, from the name of a mythical king of Dalmatia who is mentioned in the medieval Croatian *Chronicle of the Presbyter of Dioclea*, that is, the *Genealogy of Bar*; (3) That like the author of the *Vita*, two seventeenth-century Ragusan historians, Orbini and Luccari, identify the birthplace of Justinian, Justiniana Prima, with the town of Prizren, though the natives of Prizren believe that Justinian had been born in Ohrid; (4) That the leading authority on Slavic personal names, Miklošič, knew of no Slavic names based on the word *pravda*; (5) That the other names were equally suspect from a linguistic point of view; and (6) That Marnavič (or Mrnavić, as Jireček calls him by his Slavic form) did not merit much confidence as a historian. As for a possible relationship between the *Vita* and the works of Luccari and Orbini, Jireček stated that he could not tell whether Luccari had the *Vita* before writing his own work, except that he did not mention it in his bibliography. However, both Luccari and the *Vita* give the name *Istok*, which may mean that both may have used the same source.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 684.

Orbini, on the other hand, knew nothing of the names *Istok* or *Upravda* but simply stated that Justinian was a Slav.³⁸

The second Slavic scholar to analyze Bryce's discovery was the Croatian philologist Vatroslav Jagić. He branded the Slavic names in Justinian's genealogy as fabrications of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the products of the peculiar brand of cultural Panslavism prevalent at the time in Dalmatia and Dubrovnik. He concurred in Bryce's belief that these Slavic names were simply translations from the Greek and Latin; moreover, he showed how they were faulty from the standpoint of Slavic linguistics. Jagić supported Bryce's contention that Mrnavić's work on the Illyrian caesars, which Jagić identifies as *J. T. M. de Illyrico Caesaribusque Illyricis dialogorum libri VII* (1603), contained clues to the mystery. Jagić reported that he himself had seen the manuscript of this work, and that Mrnavić, in referring to Justinian's boyhood, wrote that his source was a "fragmentum apud nos existens." Apparently, Jagić concluded, this referred to the text found by Bryce, and it must have been in Mrnavić's hands in 1603. Luccari, however, cited a document in Bulgaria that he had seen as his source for Justinian's Slavic genealogy (which Jagić refused to believe). Jagić confirmed Jireček's report that the name Selimir was taken from the Chronicle of the Presbyter of Dioclea, but he added that the same chronicle made no mention of *Istok*, *Upravda*, or the other Slavic names cited by the *Vita*. Jagić discounted completely the claim in the *Vita* that the original was kept on Mount Athos. This story, he wrote, clearly pointed to Mrnavić, who made the same claim concerning a *Vita* of St. Sava that he had written. Two other aspects of the *Vita* seemed to point to the Dalmatian canon, Jagić observed: its pronounced preference for Roman Catholicism, and for the Slavic Mass.³⁹

The third Slavic scholar to write about Bryce's discovery and its meaning was the famed Byzantinologist Alexander Vasiliev.⁴⁰ However, as Vasiliev himself pointed out, it was not his intention to present anything new on the question, but merely to summarize what had been discovered up to that point, that is, up to 1894. Since Vasiliev wrote in Russian and in a Russian historical journal, he actually performed a very useful service to Slavic scholars

38. Constantin Jireček, "Notices concernant la Vita Justiniani avec les explications de Marnavich dans un MS. de la Bibl. Barberini à Rome," *The English Historical Review*, II (1887), 684-685; appended to James Bryce's article as "Letter from M. Constantin Jireček."

39. V. J. Vatroslav Jagić, "Neuentdeckte Quelle der Fabel von Istok, Upravda u. s.," *Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, XI (1888), Bj. 2, 300-304 *passim*.

40. A. Vasiliev, "Vopros o slavianskom proiskhozhdenii Iustiniana," *Vizantiiskii Vremennik*, I, Books 3-4 (1894), 469-492.

throughout Eastern Europe who read neither English or Italian, the two languages in which Bryce's article appeared.

In 1901 the greatest Croatian historian since Jagić Ferdo Šišić, wrote a long and useful summary of the whole affair. He first offered an excellent Croatian translation of both the *Vita* and Mrnavić's *Explicationes* as published by Bryce; he then presented a full biography of Mrnavić, to which we refer later, which documented fully the conclusion that "Ivan Tomko Mrnavić was an educated man and very fertile writer, especially as a historian, and he enjoyed a great fame and reputation for his learning, but his literary work is historically uncritical and marked by a tendency to falsify, especially in matters dealing with family genealogy."⁴¹ Finally, Šišić undertook a critical analysis of the document discovered by Bryce in which he confirmed the points raised by Jireček and Jagić, and added some of his own.

For example, he took issue with the statement in the first paragraph of the *Vita* that the original had been written "in Illyrian words and characters."⁴² Assuming *Illyrian* to mean South Slavic, Šišić concluded that the writer of the *Vita* was thinking of the Glagolitic alphabet, which could not have possibly existed in Justinian's time, since it was first invented by St. Cyril in the ninth century. How could the author of the *Vita* have made such an error? Easily, said Šišić, for one of the favorite legends of Dalmatia was that it was St. Jerome (a native of Dalmatia and therefore, according to popular belief, a Slav) who had invented the Glagolitic alphabet in the fourth or fifth century.

Šišić also presented facts which gave more reason to doubt the claim that the original of the *Vita* was kept "in the library of Illyrian monks of the Order of St. Basil" on Mount Athos. The first monastery on Mount Athos, Šišić reminded his readers, was built by St. Athanasius in 962 A. D. and was Greek. The first Slavic monastery there was founded by the Serbian King Stephen Nemanja in 1198 A. D. If the original manuscript was from the time of Justinian, it must have waited three hundred years to get into any monastery on Mount Athos, and six hundred years to get into a Slavic one. Where was it in the meanwhile? And was it possible that only one copy had been kept all that time?⁴³ Šišić might have added that Western opinion to the contrary, there is no Order of St. Basil or of any other saint in the Eastern Orthodox

41. Ferdo Šišić, "Kako je vizantinski car Justinijan postao Slaven," *Nastavni Vjesnik*, IX (1901), 415.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 563.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 564.

church; as one writer put it, Orthodox monks do not belong to the Order of St. Basil, he belonged to their order.

Another flaw which Šišić observed was the reference to the town of Prizren as Justinian's birthplace. He could see why Mrnavić's *Explicationes* referred to it by this modern name, but how could the author of the *Vita* call the town by a name that was totally unknown in the time of Justinian and for some time to come?⁴⁴

Šišić pointed to another inconsistency. The *Vita* referred to Justinian's father as Istok and identified him as a descendent of Constantine the Great and as a prince of the Dardanians. But several contemporary sources, including Procopius himself, say that Justinian's father was of peasant stock. Besides, how could a Slav be a descendent of Constantine the Great, who, Šišić exclaimed, "was surely not a Slav!"⁴⁵ Yet the Slavic origin of Constantine the Great was another favorite legend of Dalmatian authors.⁴⁶

Šišić brought up several other historical flaws and points of doubt, and also went into a detailed discussion of twelve Slavic names in the *Vita* which confirmed Jagić's suspicion that they were fabrications or translations.

In 1911 Jagić re-entered the discussion with an article which denied the authenticity of a Glagolitic psalter supposedly written in 1222 and which was said to be a copy of a Slavic psalter allegedly from the middle of the seventh century, that is, two hundred years before St. Cyril, the founder of the Glagolitic alphabet.⁴⁷ The obvious implication of this was that the Glagolitic alphabet dated from an earlier time, thus lending support to the belief that St. Jerome was its originator. This document had mystified several generations of Slavic scholars, including Dokrovský, Kopitar, and Šafařík. Now Jagić had discovered on further examination that it was "simply a fabrication of Mrnavić's." Why had Mrnavić gone to the trouble? Because of his love for

44. *Ibid.*, p. 565.

45. *Ibid.*

46. See, for example, Andrija Kačić - Miošić's *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga*, "Versi cesara Konstantina Velikoga i njegove majke svete Jeline Križarice." The first six verses tell that Constantine was born in Niš ["in the Slavic realm"] and that his mother Helen was "some say of Bulgarian birth and reared in Sofia, and others say she was a Slavic woman born on Brač." In either case, he says exultantly in the seventh verse, "there can be no doubt that she was of the Slavic people." See Djela Andrije Kačića-Miošića, ed. by T. Matić, Book I. *Razgovor ugodni naroda slovinskoga* (Zagreb: Hrvatska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 1942) in *Stari pisci Hrvatski*, Vol. XXVII.

47. Vatroslav Jagić, "Tomko Mrnavić als Fälscher des angeblich im J. 1222 geschriebenen glagolitischen Psalters," *Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, XXXIII, Books 1-2 (1911), III-34.

the Slavic Mass. He wished to convince the Papal Curia that the Slavic Mass of Croatia was not of Greek (and therefore schismatic) origin, but the work of none other than St. Jerome himself, and that therefore the Roman Catholics of Dalmatia should be permitted to continue using the Slavic tongue for the Roman rite. Jagić's article thus gave additional proof for two previous contentions: that Mrnavić was an accomplished falsifier, and that he had a great love for the Slavic Mass, which is reflected in the *Vita Justiniani*.

This last point requires explanation. The *Vita* stated that Justinian "had a church, which the Oeconomus Marcian of the Church of Constantinople had conceded to the Goths in Constantinople, consecrated by John, bishop of old Rome, according to the Catholic rite, but preserving the usage of the Gothic language in the psalmody and liturgy out of love for his Illyrian people, who have the same language as the Goths."⁴⁸ Remembering that *Illyrian* here means *South Slavic*, we have here an identification of South Slavs with Goths which is a peculiarly Croatian myth and which may be found in the medieval chronicle of the Presbyter of Dioclea.⁴⁹ (Indeed, it may be found in several modern works as well.⁵⁰) Obviously the Roman Catholic Canon of Šibenik Mrnavić was glad to offer the *Vita Justiniani* as additional "historical" support for the Dalmatian campaign to preserve their Slavic Mass.

IV

There, essentially, is where matters stood until 1940, when the Serbian historian Nikola Radojčić made another real advance. Spurred on by Bryce's prediction that Mrnavić's work *Caesaribusque Illyricis* would contain valuable clues to the authorship of the *Vita Justiniana*, Radojčić made a diligent search for the manuscript, which was believed lost. He found it in the Provincial Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to which it had been sold by J. Gelčić.⁵¹ As Mrnavić indicated at the end of the manuscript, he finished it in Šibenik in 1607. The section on Justinian extended from page 225 to page

48. Bryce, *loc. cit.*, pp. 662-663.

49. S. K. Sakać, "Teorije, napose iranske, o postanku Hrvata," *Hrvatska Revija* (Buenos Aires), II (1952), 329.

50. For references to modern theories concerning the Gothic origin of the Croats, see *Historia naroda Jugoslavije*, I (Zagreb, 1953), p. 105.

51. The full title of the manuscript is *Joannis Tomco Marnovich Bosnensis Canonici Sicensis Archidiaconi et Canonici Zagradiensis De Illyrico, Caesaribusque Illyricis Dialogorum Libri Septem*.

229 and presents the first known attempt by any South Slav to write a life of Justinian.

Here one finds that Justinian was born in "Bederina," which Mrnavić identified with present-day Prizren. Mrnavić cited a Bulgarian work, which he did not identify further, to show that Justinian's father was Istok, a man "of our people" and "a nobleman among his own and a prince." However, Mrnavić did not give Slavic names either to Justin I or to his sister, Justinian's mother. Instead, he was content to Slavicize Belisarius into Velizar, which he explained meant "great tsar" in the Slavic tongue ("quae vox vel nomen sermone nostro, Magnum Imperatorem sonat"). He even Slavicized Theodoric or, as he calls the Ostrogothic king of Italy, "Theodatus," into Bogdan—another reflection of the Croatian myth identifying the Goths with the Slavs.⁵²

Radojčić was particularly diligent in analyzing Mrnavić's sources. He began with two that were already identified by previous scholars—the Ragusan historians Mavro Orbini (15?-c. 1614) and Jakob Luccari or Lukarević (1551-1615).

Orbini was the first known historian anywhere to proclaim Justinian a Slav, in his book *Il regno degli Slavi* (The Realm of the Slavs), which was published in Pesaro in 1601.⁵³ His central thesis was that the Slavs were autochthonous in the Balkans and that the Slavic tongue had been spoken in Illyricum since earliest times. On pages 175 and 176 of his book Orbini referred to Justinian as a Slav and said he was either in Prizren or Ohrid, apparently assuming that one of these places was Justiniana Prima. Radojčić probably guessed correctly that Orbini apparently started out with the assumption that Justinian was born in one of those two places, and then concluded that anyone born there must be a Slav.

It was only one step further to claim that Justinian's family was Slavic too. Orbini's contemporary and fellow-Ragusan Luccari took that step in his work *Copioso ristretto degli annali di Rausa, libri XI*, which was published in 1605.⁵⁴ Basing himself on the medieval Croatian *Chronicle of the Presbyter of Dioclea* (*Ljetopsis Popa Dukljanina*), Luccari reported that Selimir (allegedly a Croatian king) married the sister of Istok. "A Slavic baron," whose own wife was Bigleniza, Justin's sister and Justinian's mother. As for Justi-

52. Radojčić, *loc. cit.*, pp. 205-215 *passim*.

53. For a discussion of Orbini and his work, see Michael B. Petrovich, "Dalmatian Historiography in the Age of Humanism," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, XII (1958), Part VI, 93-98.

54. For a brief description of this work, see Petrovich, *ibid.*, Part VII, 98-99.

nian himself, Luccari states that according to a Bulgarian document he had seen, Justinian was called Vprauda in the Slavic tongue, "which means Justinian or Justin." How credible all this is may be judged by the fact that it is followed immediately by the legend of "Lech, Čech, and Rus," the eponymic founders of the Polish, Czech, and Russian nations. Luccari's version is peculiarly Croatian, and he obviously believed every word of it. He called these three the brothers of Selimir and dated their dispersion in 550 A.D. As Radojčić pointed out, no known version of the *Chronicle of the Presbyter of Dioclea* says a word about the marriage of Selimir with the sister of a Slavic baron called Istok. As for the Bulgarian document to which Luccari referred, not only did he fail to identify it any further, so that it remains a mystery to this day, but he referred to it as a "diadario"—which might be taken as a misprint for "diario" except that he used the former form elsewhere as well.⁵⁵

Further investigation convinced Radojčić that, despite these similarities between Orbini and Luccari with Mrnavić, the two Ragusan historians were actually not Mrnavić's chief source; Cesare Baronius was. By a textual comparison, Radojčić discovered that Mrnavić's section on Justin and Justinian followed the seventh volume (published in 1602) and especially the eighth volume (1603) of Baronius's *Annales ecclesiastici* closely, often word for word.⁵⁶ However, it was obviously from Orbini and Luccari that Mrnavić received the inspiration to Slavicize Justinian and his family.⁵⁷

Radojčić's interest in Mrnavić's sources led him to re-examine the *Vita Justiniani* which Bryce had published. He came to the conclusion that Mrnavić was no mere fabricator but a sophisticated forger who was careful to use names which were already known and in existence somewhere. For example, Radojčić surmised, the name Bogomil for the putative author of the *Vita* could have been taken from the well-known medieval heresy among the South Slavs. Mrnavić connected Bogomil with Domnion, Bishop of Sardica, who is a real person and who is mentioned by Baronius (Vol. VI, p. 667) as well as by Marcellinus Comes. Not even the name Upravda was a mere fabrication, because both Orbini and Luccari mention a "Vprauda Catunar di Dabar," and the Ragusan Chronicle mentions a "Radičh Upravda" for the year 1459. Whether this is a genuine Slavic name or simply a translation

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-191.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 209-212.

57. There can be no doubt that Orbini's work, which was published in 1601, was easily accessible to Mrnavić before he finished his own work *Caesaribusque Illyricis* in 1607. Luccari's work was published in 1605, just about the time, Radojčić guessed, that Mrnavić was writing his section on Justinian.

of *Justinian*, Radojčić wrote, is a matter for the linguists. Mrnavić found Istok and Bigleniza in Luccari. He took the name Lada, which he gave to Istok's sister, from Orbini, where she is the mother of Castor and Pollux and is known in Slavic mythology as Lela. He found Selimir in Luccari, who in turn found him in the *Chronicle of the Presbyter of Dioclea*. He found "Rechirad" in Baronius (Vol. VII, p. 636 ff.) as Reccaredus, the famed Visigothic king whom Mrnavić plucked out of Spain to fight a duel with young Justinian on the banks of the Morava River! Similarly Mrnavić's Rastus in Baronius's Aristus (Vol. VI, pp. 535-536). He also found the Caesarides in Baronius and turned them into Slavic zarevichi (Tsar's sons). Indeed, most of the rest of the names in the *Vita Justiniani* are to be found in Baronius.⁵⁸ "I had already become acquainted earlier with Mrnavić's manner of falsifying the past," Radojčić later observed, "but it was only through his original version of the Life of Emperor Justinian . . . that I became fully aware of his boundless audacity in twisting facts and of his singular boldness in finding bases for his wild imaginings."⁵⁹

V

The Englishman Bryce had been prepared to believe that, despite his errors, Mrnavić had been acting in good faith in relying on a source or tradition he believed to be true. Some of Mrnavić's countrymen were much harder on him. Jagić called him "the cunning Tomko Mrnavić" and "this phantasy-ridden man whose lies were artistically tendentious." Šišić compared him to Herostratus; Radojčić called him a "learned deceiver," and "a charlatan on a big scale." Did Mrnavić deserve these epithets? A further look at his career and works should provide the answer.

Ivan Tomko Mrnavić⁶⁰ (1580-1637)⁶¹ was born in Šibenik, Dalmatia. He was the son of a plebeian Bosnian immigrant about whom Mrnavić was strangely silent, probably because the father had served as a hireling of the

58. Radojčić, *loc. cit.*, pp. 219-235.

59. Nikola Radojčić, "Povampireno slovenstvo cara Justinijana," *Istoriski Glasnik*, III (1949), 58.

60. This is the form of his name usually given by Croatian scholars. However, this appears to be only a likely guess since Mrnavić signed himself in Latin as Johannes Tomco Marnavich. However, some scholars use the form Marnavić, and even Mrnjavić has been suggested.

61. These are the dates given by Šišić. Earlier Croatian scholars, such as Ivan Sakcinski and Armin Pavić, give the dates 1579 to 1639.

Turks, if contemporary accounts are to be believed. Mrnavić was trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood in his native city, and then, in his early twenties, he was sent to the Illyrian (or Croatian) Seminary in Rome for further education. He was caught up by the spirit of the anti-Humanistic Counter Reformation which dominated Italian intellectual life at the time. In this retrograde atmosphere of religiosity, miracles, and wonder-working relics a seminary student was not apt to learn much about critical thinking. This is to be seen, in Mrnavić's case, from his first historical work, *De Illyrico caesaribusque dialogorum libri VII*, which he began in Rome and finished in Šibenik in 1607. Here he identified the ancient Illyrians with the Slavs and hence regarded all the Roman emperors of Illyrian birth — Diocletian, Constantine, Justinian, and others — as Slavs. The work is of no scholarly value whatsoever. However, it earned him a reputation for scholarship among his contemporaries and an entrée into a high society of scholars in Rome which included Cardinal Julius Sacchetti, Francesco Barberini, and Cardinal Baronius. Mrnavić later reported how old Baronius wept and embraced him on hearing the section on Constantine the Great.⁶²

Upon receiving a doctorate in theology, the young Mrnavić returned to Šibenik, where he became a professor in the seminary, confessor to the Venetian garrison, and a popular preacher in Italian and Croatian. At the age of twenty-six he was already a canon of Šibenik, an adviser to the bishop, and secretary of the Cathedral Chapter.

In 1609 he finished a work entitled *Discurso dell' priorato della Wrana*, which was a youthful attempt of no critical value and which lay unpublished until 1906.⁶³ In 1612 he also published in Venice, in Croatian, a life of the Blessed Margaret, daughter of the Hungarian King Béla IV, which was a translation of the vita by the Carthusian Lawrence Surio.⁶⁴

Apparently Mrnavić's work in the Croatian language attracted favorable interest in Rome. Pope Paul V wished to counteract the spread of Protestant vernacular literature in Croatia by encouraging the publication of a Roman Catholic missal and breviary in Church Slavonic. Mrnavić was called to Rome, on the suggestion of Faustin Vrančić, the Croatian bishop of Csanad

62. Šišić, *loc. cit.*, p. 399, quoting Mrnavić's *Regiae sanctitatis Illyricanae fecunditas* (Rome, 1630), p. 147.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 401 and Ferdo Šišić, *Priručnik izvora hrvatske historije* (*Enchiridion Fontium Historiae Croatiae*, I (Zagreb, 1914), p. 40.

64. *Zivot blažene divice, kcheri Bele kralja ugarskoga i harvatskoga, sestrenice reda sv. Dominika. Prinessen iz vlasskoga u harvatski jezik. U mletcih Kod Marka albertovicha* 1912.

(Hungary) to supervise this project. What happened is still not clear, but apparently the venture hit a snag and Mrnavić returned to Šibenik. However, in 1619 he was again in Rome to petition Pope Paul V to re-establish a Croatian seminary which had been founded by Pope Gregory XIII but closed by Pope Clement VIII. It was most probably during this trip that Mrnavić wrote the *Vita Justiniani* and presented it to Cardinal Suarez, who then left it to the Barberini Library.⁶⁵ This was precisely the time when Alemannus, with whom Mrnavić was acquainted, was working on the *Secret History*.

Shortly thereafter, in 1620, Mrnavić published, in Venice, "his" *Life of Berislav of Bosnia*, Dalmatian bishop and governor of Croatia. Two scholars, Fortis and Engel, branded this work as a plagiarism stolen from the Croatian scholar Antun Vrančić (Verantius, Veranzio), Archbishop of Esztergom and primate of the Hungarian Church. In 1774 the learned Italian cleric Alberto Fortis accused Mrnavić of rummaging through Archbishop Vrančić's papers and of appropriating "who knows how many things!"⁶⁶ Fortis called the work an "impudentissimo plagio." Johann Christian Engel referred to it as "the biography which Tomko Marnavich ascribed to himself one hundred years later in a shameless manner."⁶⁷ Both accusations were made a century before Bryce's discovery. At least two Croatian scholars, Lucić and Kukuljević, have tried to defend Mrnavić by showing that he used other sources besides the work by Vrančić.⁶⁸ However this might be, of even greater interest here are the fantastic genealogies with which Mrnavić decorated this work. He not only traced Peter Berislav's ancestry to a fictitious Trpimir, but traced the Habsburgs to Constantine the Great and his own family to the Mrnjavčević princes of medieval Serbia, whom he relates in turn to King Matthias of Hungary, John Hunyadi, and even the Albanian hero Skenderbeg. To prove this, Mrnavić forged several documents which he purported

65. Šišić, *Nastavni Vjesnik*, IX, 402. Šišić arrives at this date by noting that in point 2 of the *Explicationes* to the *Vita Justiniani*, Mrnavić identified Prizren as being "now in the territory of Bishop Peter Katić, who was recently assigned by order of our lord and holy father Paul V. . . ." It is known that Katić went to Prizren in 1618 and that Mrnavić was in Rome in 1619 . . . Note that Bryce misread the name "Cathich" and transcribed it as Calitić, without knowing what it meant.

66. (Abate) Alberto Fortis, *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (Venice, 1774), pp. 146-7.

67. Quoted by Ivan Kukuljević-Sakcinski, "Ivan Tomko Marnavić," *Arhiv za Povjestnicu Jugoslavensku*, IX (1868), 256.

68. *Ibid.* The Lucić referred to here is not the famous Dalmatian historian Ivan Lucius (1604-1679) but a late 18th-century kinsman of Mrnavić's, Ivan Josip Pavlović Lucić. See Armin Pavić, Ivan Tomko Mrnavić, *Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije Znanosti i Umjetnosti*, XXXIII (1875), 76.

to be from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, had them notarized by the Cathedral Chapter in Split as true translations from Slavic to Latin, and had them printed.⁶⁹

In 1621 Pope Paul V was succeeded by Gregory XV, in whose two-year reign the famous Congregation for the Propagation of the Catholic Faith was established, in 1622. Again Mrnavić was called to Rome because of his past dealings with church books in Slavonic. His fortunes rose even higher when, in 1623, Maffeo Barberini, the uncle of his patron, Cardinal Francesco Barberini, became pope. In 1624 Mrnavić was appointed Apostolic Protanotary and assigned to tour Croatia with the Archbishop of Zara to report on the state of the Church. During his visit to Zagreb he was appointed canon and archdeacon of the Zagreb Cathedral. In 1626 he returned to Rome and wrote a Latin work which again reveals his mania for fanciful genealogy. In 1628, shortly after Pope Gaius's remains had been discovered in the catacombs, Mrnavić wrote a work of seventy-nine pages attempting to connect the Pope with the family of Gaius Aurelius Valerius.⁷⁰

In 1630 Mrnavić published, in Rome, a major work of 296 pages entitled *Regiae Sanctitatis Illyricanae foecunditas*. It was printed by the Vatican press at the expense of Cardinal Barberini and, at his behest, dedicated to Emperor Ferdinand II. This work consisted of twenty-two biographies of saints of "Illyrian" extraction and royal blood; actually only two of the saints were Slavs, Ivan Gostumil and the Serbian Sava, who is not even recognized as a saint by the Church of Rome. Apparently the author had an interest in advertising himself, for the book began with thirteen odes of praise in his honor.

Both the work on Pope Gaius's genealogy and on the Illyrian saints of royal lineage brought Mrnavić more honors. On February 21, 1631, he was made an honorary citizen of Rome; on November 11, 1631, Emperor Ferdinand II named him Bishop of Bosnia (an empty title in view of the Turkish occupation of that province), which nomination Pope Urban VIII confirmed.

Judging by the two Slavic biographies, in which Mrnavić might have made a real contribution to Western scholarship, Mrnavić's work on the "Illyrian" saints was worse than useless. Like all previous biographers of St. Gostumil, Mrnavić also erred in making his father the king of Croatia and Dalmatia and called him the son of Branimir, about whom history knows

69. Šišić, *Priručnik*, p. 41.

70. Pavić, *op. cit.*, 92. The work was entitled *Unica gentis Aureliae Valerial Salonitanae Dalmaticae nobilitas auctore Joanne Tomco Marnavitio Bosnensi Archid. Zagradiensi, Canonico Zagreb. Sicensiq. Romae*, 1628.

nothing. Moreover, Ivan Gostumil was not even a South Slav but belonged to another group of Slavs to the north of the Danube who were also called Croats. As for the life of the thirteenth-century Serbian Saint Sava, a prince of the House of Nemanja and first Serbian primate, Mrnavić's biography was a leaning tower of lies.⁷¹ Again the author's penchant for fabricated genealogy was exhibited, not only in his tracing the lineage of the Nemanja dynasty but in connecting with that dynasty the family of Batošić, to whom he dedicated the section on St. Sava. His disregard for historical fact was shown, for example, by his claim that Saint Sava had been received in Constantinople by a Latin emperor and consecrated bishop by a Latin patriarch when, in fact, he was received in Nicaea by the exiled Orthodox emperor and consecrated by the Orthodox patriarch. Unfortunately Mrnavić's *Life of St. Sava* misled as many historians as his *Life of Justinian* had done, beginning with Bollandus and the first volume of his famous *Acta Sanctorum*, and including Charles Du Cange, Farlati, Assemani, Martinov, and others. Not until Johann Christian Engel's *Geschichte von Serbien und Bosnien* appeared in 1801 were Western scholars in a position to compare Mrnavić's fantasies with the Slavic sources which Engel used.⁷² As the Serbian historian Radojčić concluded, "The influence of Mrnavić's *Life of St. Sava*, a wretched compilation, lasted for centuries, and was deep and widespread. His fabrications about Saint Sava confused far better and more able scholars than he was, mostly those who had the same confessional tendencies as he."⁷³

Mrnavić's lust for glory led him on to even bolder ventures. Now that he was titular Bishop of Bosnia, he felt the need to make up for his plebeian background by assuming a distinguished genealogy for himself, just as he had fabricated for others. He prepared his ground in 1631 in a preface to his five-act Croatian drama in verse *Osmanščica*, which he published in Rome. He dedicated the play to Vuk Mrnavić of Croatia with the explanation that they were kin and both descendents of the Nemanja kings of Serbia through "King Vukašin, Lord Uglješa and Gojko, elder and Grand Duke of Serbia and Rascia," that is, the Mrnjavčević family. But this was not all. Mrnavić further claimed that this made him and his Croatian "cousin" the

71. The best discussions of the *Vita S. Sabbae* are by Nikola Radojčić, "O životu Svetoga Save od Ivana Tomka Mrnavića," *Svetosavski Zbornik*, I, *Rasprave* (Belgrade: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1936), Posebna, Izdanja, Vol. CXIV, Društveni i istorijski spisi, Book 47, pp. 319-382; and by Momir Veljković, "Vita S. Sabbae Abbatis od Ivana Tomka Mrnavića (1580-1637)," *Srpski Književni Glasnik*, new series, Vol. XLIV, No 3 (1935), 201-207.

72. Radojčić, *loc. cit.*, pp. 372-3; see especially pp. 362-377, where Radojčić lists the historians who have been infected by Mrnavić's *Life of St. Sava*.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 377.

descendents of the Hungarian hero John Hunyadi and the Albanian hero George Skenderbeg. This was plain lunacy. First, the Mrnavić family of Bosnia and the Mrnavić family of Croatia were not at all related. Second, neither family was connected with the Serbian Mrnjavčević line of princes. Third, the Mrnjavčević princes did not come from the Nemanja dynasty anyway. Fourth, nor were they connected with the Albanian hero Skenderbeg, though Skenderbeg did have Serbian blood. Finally, there was no reason at all to bring in John Hunyadi, the illegitimate son of the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus.

Recognizing that his flimsy claims could not stand up by themselves, Mrnavić cited six documents in the preface to *Osmanščica* to buttress his claims. They are all fourteenth and fifteenth century charters—by the Bosnian kings Dabiša and Tvrtko, and by the Hungarian King Matthias Corvin and Hunyadi—to various alleged forebears of Mrnavić. These charters were meant to show that the Mrnavić family was an ancient and noble one whom even kings wished to honor. One even purports to show that a Mrnavić rescued Hunyadi from a dungeon after the second battle of Kosovo in 1448 and received lands in Serbia as a reward. All of these charters, from first to last, were the figments of Mrnavić's fertile imagination.⁷⁴ Though critical historians have since exposed their flaws, these documents were put together skillfully enough to deceive several generations of historians.⁷⁵

In 1632, after laying his groundwork, Mrnavić published, in Rome, a detailed genealogy of his family—*Indicia vetustatis et nobilitatis familiae Martiae, vulgo Marnavitiæ*, etc. The book included a picture of the author, with the legend "Johannes Marnavitius of the Princes of Niš, Count of Zvornik . . . Bishop of the Kingdom of Bosnia." Mrnavić even claimed descent from the ancient Roman clan of the Marciae. The whole affair was so ridiculous that his namesakes and alleged kin in Croatia never accepted him or the titles he dangled before them, despite the peculiar charm noble titles exerted in the seventeenth century.⁷⁶

For the next five years of his life, his last, Mrnavić enjoyed his glory. In 1632 the Propaganda sent him to inspect Paulician monasteries in Poland and Hungary; however, he could go only to Hungary since Poland was at

74. Šišić, *Nastavni Vjesnik*, pp. 412-413.

75. Šišić cites Krčelić, Švear, and Boročki as examples of the deceived historians. Nikola Radošević's "O dva rukopisa Ivana Tomka Marnavića," *Zbornik Matice Srpske za Književnost i Jezik*, I (1935), p. 35.

76. Kukuljević, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

war with Russia. He attended a church council in Hungary as papal legate. Then he proceeded to Zagreb, where he was received with full honors, to reconsecrate the rebuilt cathedral. In March 1633 he consecrated an altar to St. Elizabeth in the same church. The Bishop of Zagreb named him his vicar, and the Emperor appointed him royal privy councillor. Mrnavić returned to Rome in 1634 to consecrate the church of the renewed Croatian Institute of St. Jerome. When he returned to Zagreb the following year, he brought with him a gift of Cardinal Francesco Barberini to the Cathedral—a gold and silver bust of St. Stephen of Hungary which contained the sainted king's skull. For unknown reasons Mrnavić then relinquished his title of Bishop of Bosnia in favor of his nephew and returned to Rome, where he died in 1639. Though popes and emperors gave him honors in his lifetime, his last resting-place remains unmarked and unknown.

Mrnavić was one of the most prolific Croatian authors in the first half of the seventeenth century. He wrote about twenty works, most of which are not mentioned here because they were literary or theological. As for his historical works, the only ones that modern historians have found at all useful are two of his last works, both pamphlets dealing with the diocese of Zagreb. The first was published in 1635 on the occasion of Cardinal Francesco Barberini's gift, and gives useful information about the Cathedral of Zagreb.⁷⁷ The other work, which was published in 1637 in Vienna, was a biography of Blessed Augustine of Trogir, a thirteenth century Dominican who founded many monasteries in Croatia, fought the Bogumil heresy in Bosnia, and, in 1303, became Bishop of Zagreb.⁷⁸ This work was later translated into Croatian by Krčelić and published in 1747. The rest of Mrnavić's historical works are either useless or worse, forgeries and plagiarisms. Modern Croatian and Serbian historians know this better than James Bryce. "He was a charlatan on a big scale," Radojčić write of Mrnavić, "and all the lies which he sowed in world historiography have not yet been uprooted, and some, perhaps, have still not been detected or at least not proven to the extent that they deserve."⁷⁹ As for his ability as a historian, Radojčić concluded, "There is not any category of gross methodological errors in historical work which Mrnavić did not commit . . ."⁸⁰ These errors all sprang from three of Mrnavić's ruling

77. *Pro Sacris Ecclesiarum Ornamentis et Donariis contra eorum Detractores*. Romae apud Franciscum Caballum, 1635. 76 pp.

78. *Vita Beati Augustini ordinis Praedicatorum ex Zagrabiensi Lucerini Episcopi*, 44 pp. First published in work by Sigismund Ferario, *De rebus Hungariae Provinciae Ordinis Praedicatorum Commentarii* (Vienna, 1637).

79. Radojčić, *Zbornik Matice Srpske*, p. 35. 80. Radojčić, *Svetosavski Zbornik*, p. 327.

passions — his religious zeal, his Panslavic feeling, and his mania for giving himself and others distinguished ancestors. The *Vita Justiniani* which Alemannus used and Bryce discovered is infected by all three passions.

VI

The historians who were led astray by Mrnavić via Alemannus regarding Justinian's origins were all guilty of simple credulity. But what is one to say about those who continued to perpetuate his legends even after Bryce's discovery, and down to the present day?

In some cases plain ignorance or carelessness appears to be the only explanation, as in the case of the famous world history of Lavissee and Rambaud. The first volume of that monumental work, which was published in 1893, that is six years after Bryce published his exposé of the *Vita Justiniani* in English and in Italian, still contained Justinian's genealogy as found in Alemannus, and specifically identified the family names as Slavic.⁸¹ Another even more widespread work which continued to spread the legend of Justinian's Slavic origin is the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. As late as in 1947 Volume XIII proclaimed Justinian to be "probably of Slavonic parentage" and added, without any additional comment or reservation that "his own name was originally Uprauda."

In several important instances, however, the legend is being perpetuated by people who still believe or would like to believe, that Justinian was actually a Slav. For some of those there is no explanation. Why, for example, would a German scholar who published a book on Justinian's religious policy in 1896, nine years after Bryce's study, still insist on using the names "Istok" and "Biglenitza" even though his footnote shows that he knows of both Bryce's and Vasiliev's articles?⁸²

There is no mystery about Lujo Vojnović's acceptance of the legend.⁸³ Vojnović was a fiery Dalmatian patriot and a prejudiced publicist. Yet, because it was written in French, his two-volume work continues to claim the attention of Western scholars.

Two famous Russian Byzantinologists, Uspenskii and Vasiliev, adopted a point of view that seems noncommittal and neutral. In the edition of his *History of the Byzantine Empire*, published in St. Petersburg in 1913, Uspenskii wrote, "There are no sufficient grounds for either affirming or denying

81. Ernest Lavissee and Alfred Rambaud, *Histoire générale du IV^e siècle à nos jours*, Vol. I. *Les Origines* (Paris, 1893), p. 175.

82. August Knecht, *Die Religionspolitik Kaiser Justinians I* (Würzburg, 1896), p. 6.

83. L. de Voinovitch, *Histoire de Dalmatie*, Vol. I, (Paris, 1934), p. 220.

their [Justin's and Justinian's] Slavic origin . . ."⁸⁴ In his *Justin the First*, appeared in 1950, Vasiliev wrote, "a certain admixture of Slavonic blood in the veins of Justin and Justinian's family is very possible. If this is so, the famous *Vita Justiniani* of Theophilus-Bogomil, though devoid of historical value in itself, may be regarded as something more than a mere late fabrication of the Canon of Sebenico, Joannes Tomco Marnavich (+1639), with no historical background; it may vaguely reflect the old and popular local tradition which attributed Slavonic origin to Justinian, for Justin and Justinian's family may well have been of Thraco-Slavonic extraction."⁸⁵

The case of the Soviet historian N. S. Derzhavin and his *History of Bulgaria*, published in 1945 by the Soviet Academy of Sciences, presents a problem. Did he really believe in Justinian's Slavic origin, even after Bryce, Jireček, Vasiliev, Jagić, Šišić, and Radojčić, or did he not know about these works? It is difficult to say. Derzhavin simply repeated the genealogy found in Alemannus, and then did not quote Alemannus's commentaries to Procopius but a secondary source, the Bulgarian Drinov, whose controversial work was written a decade and a half before Bryce's article.⁸⁶ The Soviet historian gave no indication whatever that he even knew of the critical analyses of the *Vita Justiniani*, much less as to why he adhered to the facts in the *Vita* despite these works.

At least one Slavic scholar has defended the authenticity of the *Vita Justiniani* as an excerpt from a real Bulgarian original, though he was acquainted with the arguments against this supposition. P. Syrku, who was a specialist in Bulgarian literary history, expressed the belief, in 1887, that Mrnavić's contemporary and compatriot Luccari actually did see the "Diadario in Bulgaria, in lingua slava," the Bulgarian document which he said called Justinian Upravda and identified him as a Slav.⁸⁷ Three years later Syrku again defended the same thesis in a volume on Bulgarian literature in the fourteenth century.⁸⁸ He connected the document with the Bogumil heretics who, to save themselves from expulsion from their homeland, tried to connect themselves with Justinian by asserting that he was a Slav and a native of Prizren. However, he offered only two arguments in support of his theory; first, that the letters

84. F. I. Uspenskii, *Istoriia Vizantiiskoi imperii* (St. Petersburg: n. d.), p. 410.

85. Vasiliev, *Justin the First*, 1950, p. 50.

86. N. S. Derzhavin, *Istoriia Bolgarii*, Vol. I. (Moscow: 1945), p. 61.

87. P. Syrku, "Sluzhba sviatiteliu Mefodiiu, uchiteliu slavianskomu," *Russkii Filologicheskii Vestnik*, XVII (1887), 91-92.

88. P. Syrku, *K istorii ispravlennia knig v Bolgarii v XIV veke*, Vol. I. *Vremia i zhizn patriarkha Evfimiia Ternovskogo* (St. Petersburg, 1890).

DD in the *Vita* did not refer to Domnio but *ded*, the Bogumil title "elder;" and second, that the existence of a South Slavic tradition concerning the Slavic origin of Alexander the Great and Constantine the Great encouraged the Bogumil claim. As Radojčić has pointed out, the first contention is utterly arbitrary, and the second is weakened by the total lack of evidence that any such tradition existed before modern times.⁸⁹

The Polish scholar Eduard Boguslawski has defended the authenticity of the *Vita Justiniani* to the hilt, on the assumption that behind Mrnavić's Latin version there actually was a Slavic original, which Boguslawski inferred was written in the Čakavian dialect of Dalmatia and in the Glagolitic script. He also believed that the document out of Bulgaria to which Luccari referred really existed and must have been a version of the original Mrnavić reported had been preserved on Mount Athos. Boguslawski's whole case rested on his conviction that Mrnavić deserved to be believed because nothing in the *Vita Justiniani* could be proven as being contrary to fact or possibility.⁹⁰

No one furthered that "tradition" more assiduously than the eighteenth-century Dalmatian poet, Friar Andrija Kačić-Miošić. In his popular work *A Pleasing Discourse of the Slavic People*, where he speaks of the Slavic origin of Constantine the Great, the good friar refers specifically to Tomko [Mrnavić], Baron[ius], and Ferario, and says of them:

These are men to whom you owe
Trust in what they testify,
For as everyone must know,
These are men who do not lie.⁹¹

It is incredible that anyone should ever again put his trust in Ivan Tomko Mrnavić, even if someone should one day prove beyond any doubt that Justinian was a Slav.

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89. Radojčić, *Glas Srpske Kraljevske Akademije*, pp. 245-6.

90. Eduard Boguslawski, *Einführung in die Geschichte der Slaven*. Translated from the Polish by Waldemar Osterloff. (Jena, 1904), n. 145, pp. 55-57.

91. Kačić-Miošić, *op. cit.*, verse 9.