

PRE-MEDIEVAL CIVILIZATIONS AND KOSOVO IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

Kosovo and its surrounding regions are a valuable resource for understanding the true identity and culture of the Balkan Peninsula. It offers the backdrop of the historical past for all those who want to know more about the true legacy of the Southeastern Europe. In relation to human events and actions, sources in the form of archeology, philology, culture and fragmentary chronicles, represent forms which on this occasion pretend to offer (at least superficially) additional reflection on the reality of the pre-medieval history of this part of the Western Balkans, which often is surrounded by obscurity, this mainly because of the peripheral role enjoyed by Dardan ethnicity until the period best known as the '*middle-ages of Europe*'.

Keywords: Identity, Pelasgians, Illyrians, Hellenism, Dardania, Antiquity.

Introduction

Social identity is partly a concept of self-identification, the result of self-perception as an integral part of a particular social group¹. In this context, Kosovo with its inhabitants and their deep convictions reflects the millennial tradition and culture, evidence of historical truth within the Balkan Peninsula.

The question is how people subsisted within the region of Kosovo during the pre-medieval period. Within this context, the question arises what can it be understood from prehistorical data in the form of archeology and philology, or from the historical events that followed during the antiquity and pre-antiquity eras, such as during and after the imposition of the Hellenic, Macedonians or Roman hegemonic cultures? In

¹ Henry Tajfel (1978). Differentiation between social groups: studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations.

the midst of this evolution, can we imagine the efforts and forms of survival within the region, life development, or how was history being perceived as being part of it?

Prehistoric Period

Prehistory is most often regarded as the unregistered period of the human evolution, or before the invention of writing systems². Establishment of modern human beings and the evolution of human civilizations vary between different countries and/or regions of the world. In this respect, the prehistory begins and ends at different time periods depending on the area in question³. The pre-history within the southeastern continent of Europe (also defined as the territory of the Balkan Peninsula⁴) is supposed to have begun with the early man (*Homosapien*) coming into the presence of this are apparently 44,000 years ago⁵. This period it has been estimated to have lasted until the so-called '*Iron-Age*', or the emergence of the first written records during an era best known as classical antiquity⁶.

Archaeological Findings

Archeology is considered a fundamental science for exploring and analyzing human traces of prehistoric cultures, specifically (as noted above) in regard to the important past events that are not documented or recorded⁷. In relation to the prehistoric period in the Southeastern Europe, archeology is considered to have also played a very important role. Through this type of research, they were excavated (and/or have been brought again to the light) various stone structures, such as fortifications, settlements, monuments, altars and cemeteries, mosaics, and especially ceramic items. There are also surviving artifacts consisting of stone, bones, horns, copper, bronze, iron, silver and gold. Preval weapons and shields, tools of agriculture, household furniture or ornaments, stamps and coins⁸. All this available archaeological material suggests that the Indo-Europeanization of the Balkan Peninsula cannot be accounted for a single

² Brian Fagan, (2007). World Prehistory: A Brief Introduction.

³ Bo Graslund, (1987). The Birth of Prehistoric Chronology: Dating Methods and Dating Systems in Nineteenth-Century Scandinavian Archaeology.

⁴The territories of modern states of Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova and Turkey.

⁵Albanian Academy of Science. The History of Albanian People (Volume I).

⁶ Pierre Vidal-Naquet. Le monde d'Homère.

⁷Brian Fagan, (2007). World Prehistory: A Brief Introduction.

⁸Albanian Academy of Science. The History of Albanian People (Volume I).

immigrant influx, but as a consequence of a gradual infiltration process or mixing of the native *Pelasgic* culture with the incoming cultures since the Neolithic period⁹.

Bringing the focus to the region of Kosovo and its closely surrounding territories, the basic archaeological excavations have been indicating about closely related culture with other ethnic representatives of the Balkan Peninsula. The current archeological data's offer us an insight that during the prehistoric period within the (so-called then) region of *Dardanes*¹⁰, there was comparative manifestation of the social practices such as¹¹:

- Socio-economic model built on extended families, mostly in the form of a Clan or a Tribe. These tribes/clans usually developed their lives on top of the hills and inside the fortified settlements build from the plain stone;
- Burial rituals which were manifested by placing the cremated deceased body inside a stone ringed cavity (better known as '*tuma*'), generally to expressthe worship over the sun.
- Handicraft ceramics, similar to the other craft formats within the region of Balkan and beyond (mainly eastern Mediterranean).

Philological Findings

Philology is considered a science that deals with structure, historical development and relation of a language or languages¹². Language analyzes can trace back a written language from the earliest stages of origin and discover its relationship with other languages until reaching a common lingual parental tree¹³. In this way, when it comes to defining people's identities, philology also offers us irreplaceable information regarding the relevant cultures. The inherited names of ethnicities, tribes, mountains and rivers, legendary heroes, figures and memoirs in coins, or any other kind of similar records provide us with information on the prehistoric identity and culture of the respective peoples and nations.

Facts in the form of philology can also be considered part of the study about the existence of the people known as the predecessors of the present inhabitants in the Kosovo region.

⁹Albanian Academy of Science. The History of Albanian People (Volume I).

¹⁰Latin Dictionary. University of Notre Dame.

¹¹Albanian Academy of Science. The History of Albanian People (Volume I).

¹²Oxford Dictionary. ("philology". oxforddictionaries.com).

¹³ Anna Davies, (1998). History of Linguistics.

According to the hypothesis undertaken by the Austrian Federal Science Fund (FWF), the Albanian language (the official language of Kosovo), has influenced the development of all the languages of the Balkan region¹⁴. The autochthonous form of communication, considered to have evolved from the Paleo-Balkan language, is generally conceived as an abridgement or the trunk for all the early Balkan languages (Illyrian, Thracian, Etruscan, Venetian, Messapian, Vlach ...) as well as all other Indo-European languages¹⁵. The very fact that traces of Albanian language can be found in most European languages and / or in all the languages defined as Indo-European, for most genuine scholars, is sufficient evidence that it is their basic language. Moreover, the Albanian language alone, often takes on the explanatory role of the meanings in the old and the new languages. This is especially when it comes to the names of places, mountains, rivers and/or everything else related to nature¹⁶.

Prehistoric Identity

Similarly as anywhere else round the globe, the rate of ethnic ovulation in the Balkan region cannot be calculated at the same pace throughout the time. In this context, if we choose to refer (at least superficially) to what was emphasized above and to many subsequent historical sources by ancient authors, it can be easily understood that the name *Pelasgian*, generally stands for all native and/or ancestral inhabitants of southeastern Europe¹⁷.

Otherwise, this shall not exclude the well-known fact that Mediterranean part of Balkan region, historically it is considered as a frontrunner to the social and economic developments in comparison with the entities positioned within/inland or/and northwest of the Peninsula, this mainly because of the geographical position, respectively considering the natural contact and direct access by being closer to the more developed world of eastern Mediterranean at those early times of history¹⁸.

¹⁴The Austrian Science Fund (FWF). Considering its funding, FWF is the most important core research organization which supports scientific, engineering and human research. As an independent organization, FWF headquarters are in Vienna and is mainly supported by the Austrian federal government.

¹⁵ John Van Antwerp Fine (1991). *The Early Medieval Balkans*.

¹⁶Kocaqi Elena (2013): Lack of Albanian on the updated map of the Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture– Albanian linguistics continued in the 90s to be isolated.

¹⁷The custom of the fifth century BC, claimed that the Pelasgians were the oldest inhabitants of Greece and among the ancestors of Greek heroes.V. Lynn Snyder Abel (1966). *Fifth Century BC Concepts*.

¹⁸ Within this dispute, we may perhaps refer to developments within the Pelasgian communities of Crete and Peloponnese during the second millennium BC (as it was later the case with the region Attika during the first millennium BC), who are nowadays generally considered as the forerunners of European civilization.

Subsequently this than makes difficult a unified referent to the cultural particularities and the degree of development within the region, mainly also because of the rugged terrain or the changing geography of the Western Balkans. However, since all historical, archaeological, linguistic and anthropological data allude towards the fact that the creation of bronze-age cultures in southeastern Europe has been manifested among the ethnicities identified as *Pelasgians*, considering also the fact that we are dealing with a region (Kosovo) positioned almost at the epicenter of the whole Balkan region, than realistically we can claim that the identity or prehistoric predecessors of the inhabitants of Kosovo and its surrounding regions have belonged to that identity, namely *Pelasgians*.

Hellenic Period

It is known that History (*Old-Greek* for "inquiry", or knowledge gained through the investigation) represents a study of any peoples past. This means researching, collecting, organizing, bringing forward or presenting the gathered information's¹⁹.

At least since the 6th century BC and until the end of the 4th century CE, scholars who were closely connected to the so-called cosmopolitan centers commonly referred to as Greek and Roman, almost always wrote about important contemporary events, which could then save for latter verification or as valuable information for future generations. Unfortunately the Albanians, or rather their predecessors, until the early 19th century, seem like they never took the needed effort to impose and/or consolidate their autochthonous identity through literacy, documentation or written records. However, the chronicles of the ancient scholars, (suppose as a result of belonging, self-consciousness, guilt or whatever else that could preoccupy them), rarely failed to incorporate information regarding the wisdom of the local people, such as: their myths and legends; customs and connections that relate to family, clan, marriage, birth and death; governance and wars; material goods; folklore and games; medicine or forms of beliefs. Here we can often distinguish sufficient fragmented and/or protohistoric data which can help us rebuild what we want to know about the common past. The rich folklore treasury, that does not recognize typical author or source, but who represents an unwritten body of traditional knowledge approved by the word of mouth, had somehow the permanent attention of these scholars and authors, who fortunately had the knowledge and will record them for future generations.

From the pre-ancient scholars, it is naturally *Homer* who first mentions the population of the region during the so-called Iron-Age, referring to them by the term *Pelasgians* in

¹⁹Brian Joseph & Richard Janda, (2004). Historical Linguistics Handbook.

his epic of *'Iliad'*²⁰. While in *'Odyssey'* (which is considered to have been written afterwards), Pelasgians are also identified as inhabitants of the island of Crete in the Aegean Sea.

Ancient classical writers (*Hesiod, Herodotus, Hekateus, Tuqidi*) and others who followed (*Helanikus, Dionysius of Halikarnas, Straboni, etc.*), offer us other but confused and contradictory notifications on the Pelasgian tribes, placing them sometimes on the Peloponnese island, other times in Asia Minor, or even in Italy. They talk about Pelasgian journeys to Athens, then to Lime and Crete, or in the other side to Sicily, Etruria and other places to the west. They inform us about wall ruins within the different places of Greece which they attribute to Pelasgians. They classify Pelasgian (like the Macedonian centuries after) as a barbarian language (that is non-Greek), which they lost when they were Hellenized. They tell us that the Pelasgians had an established culture, and from them the Helene's inherited the cult of the gods, they even adapted their (Pelasgian) names. There is also mentioning of the names of towns and cities inherited from the Pelasgians, such as *Larissa, Gortyna, Agro, Tirren, etc.*

Within the records of the ancient scholars, we also encounter for the first time the use of the term *'Illyrian'* in conjunction with Pelasgian. This generally to refer to the homogeneous or culturally related groups or ethnicities positioned in the north of the cosmopolitan centers of the Mediterranean (especially state-cities of *Atika, Peloponnese* and latter *Epirus*). This perhaps to refer to the northern neighboring ethnicities, amongst whom (mainly perhaps as the result of a mountainous geography), they had not managed (yet) to establish the so-called colonies, and to 'penetrate them culturally' (a standard or repeated process that by certainty, the very centers of the island of Crete must have been subjected during Bronze-age period)²¹.

Similarly as throughout the ancient period, Illyrian origin still does not reflect well-defined borders within the Balkan Peninsula²². It represents something that is also attributed to certain groups of peoples who once lived within the territory of modern

²⁰Concretely as the residents of Thessaly (present-day northwestern Greece), who during the war of Troy associated with the Trojans.

²¹Paper presented at Sanford Holst - State University of California, Long Beach (June 24, 2006). By: Jerry Bentley & Herbert Ziegler (2000). *Traditions & Clashes*. Physical evidence in archaeological sites shows that the roots of Western civilization were not a European matter, but a union of the east and west - as a normal and natural evolutionary towards something better. So the civilization of Minoans of Crete (2000 BC) accompanies many indications of 'eastern influence'. This at the time when the Phoenicians from the East had long been established as the biggest Mediterranean Sea merchants.

²²Aleksandar Stipčević (1977). *History and Culture*.

Italy, as it is the case with the tribes such as *Lapyges*, *Dauni* and *Messapi*²³. Otherwise, speaking about the first millennium BC, it is worth mentioning that; considering a (long) period of time and constant change of the socio-political conditions within the region, the referral 'Illyrian', is considered to have shifted continuously northward, this as the result of a 'cultural invasion', which today is generally referred to as the 'Hellenistic Influence'²⁴.

Hellenic identity influence

The so-called 'Hellenistic' culture and/or identity, from the perspective of which most of the scholars wrote throughout the ancient period, it is considered at the center of the Balkan developments for at least a thousand years²⁵. Otherwise, considering all of what's been emphasized above, this referral (Helen), represents cultural identity conglomerate, which could only evolve by the long-term contact/frictions between regional ethnic Pelasgians and the incoming trading nations representatives from the Mediterranean basin over millennia. This virtually as something in permanent advancement, infiltrating naturally from the southeast towards the northwest of Peninsula and beyond. This 'cultural amalgamation' seems to have manifested itself at least through three closely interrelated subsequent forms.

(1) *The creation of new markets*, the so-called commercial colonies, within the secluded islands or coastal controlled centers. The cultural infiltration of this form, with undetermined origin but through a universal rhythm moving from the southeast towards the northwest (a natural conveyance from the Aegean Islands in the direction of Ionian and eventually Adriatic basin), must have enabled over time the eventual integration between the people and cultures, thus creating special identity with common Mediterranean and Balkan characteristics²⁶. From this point of view, it is difficult to claim that the region of Dardania or the regions beyond the Alpine Massifs (Dinaric and Sharr mountains) in the north, have ever been touched by the direct cultural influence of this form. This mainly because:

²³Stipčević (1977).

²⁴Charles Frazee, (1997). World history: antique and medieval times. Publisher: Barron's Educational Series... '2000 years BC, the Balkan Peninsula consisted of three Indo-European groups: to the West were Illyrians; to east were the Thracians; while Greeks progressed to the southern part of the Balkans'

²⁵Hellenic culture, toward whom adhered the majority of the Aegean Mediterranean urban centers throughout the ancient period, comes to terms as a concept for the first time in the mid-19th century. Period of Helene-Definitions

<http://dictionnaire.sensagent.leparisien.fr/Hellenistic%20period/en-en>

²⁶Albanian Academy of Science. The History of Albanian People (Volume I).

- These so-called colonies or markets centers established by those south-eastern newcomers, never reached or attempted to establish their presence within/inland of the Balkans Peninsula, and/or;
- The extremely mountainous geography along the Adriatic coast line should have played the role of a natural barricade in regard to the cultural penetration from coastal centers.

(2) Subsequently, the radical cultural strata on the initial so-called Hellenistic identity culture can also be considered the sporadic impositions of indigenous population from the interior of the Balkan Peninsula by force. Such an occurrence is alleged to have occurred also by the end of the Bronze-Age through the so-called 'Dorian invasion' (from the northeastern part of the peninsula), which is considered to have radically affected the influence from the Mediterranean-Orient during subsequent Iron-Age period (11th-5th centuries BC)²⁷.

Similar intervention on the evolutionary cultural cycle can be considered also the upcoming Macedonian hegemony almost a thousand years later²⁸. Indeed, this kind of 'reverse cultural influence', through the imposition of native population from the interior, must have had its impact more than any other process on the evolution and consolidation of the cultural identity that today is generally referred to as *Hellenism*.

(3) From a similar perspective, speaking about tribal ethnicities who lived further inland to the north of the Balkan Peninsula, they certainly did not lack also the ambition to least 'become the part of the bigger picture', and/or somehow integrate with the more 'advanced' Mediterranean cultures of the southern Balkan. In other words, the need to identify or somehow feel part of a more developed space and society, should have influenced at least the instinct to the claims for giving direction to the socio-cultural developments. Permanent movements of the populations from peninsula's interior toward commercial colonies for benefits, emancipation, easier life or depending how we decide to make the interpretation, should also be considered as a cultural influence on local identities. Dardanian ethnicity permanent ambition on the neighboring territories of the Kingdom of *Paeonia* (or northern Macedonia), it coincides (at least part of it) somehow with such a reality²⁹.

²⁷George Grote, (1846). History of Greece (Part I, Chapter XVIII, Section I: 'Return of Heracles in the Peloponnese')...Ancient Greek historians consider the Dorians those who through migration and / or invasion substituted the dialects of pre-classical traditions in southern Greece with that which prevailed in classical Greece.

²⁸This refers to the ancient period from the death of Alexander the Great (in 323 BC) and the emergence of the Roman Empire (as implied by the Battle of *Actium* in 31 BC, and / or the invasion of Egypt under the Ptolemy).

²⁹Albanian Academy of Science. The History of Albanian People (Volume I, Chapter VI).

Antiquity social identity

The fact that the ancient scholars were aware-of and always wrote about the special cultural and social characteristics of autochthonous ethnicities, is enough evidence to presume the ever-present Hellenistic culture throughout the Balkan Peninsula during the period of classic antiquity. Otherwise, since the autochthonous population should be considered at the center of any long-term regional evolution, it is really difficult to claim any irreversible cultural impact from abroad, especially if we consider the (least) five century' time interval of this era. Within this context, focusing to the region of Kosovo (or the whole territory of the *Dardanian* province during this period), respective to what's been elaborated above, we come to the natural conclusion that; irrespective to the natural evolution, we are to deal with the same peoples identity as during the prehistoric-era of the region. Otherwise, the sole difference seems to be that during this (antiquity) period, they were more often referred to as '*Illyrians*' instead of '*Pelasgians*'. This is because both of these nominations (*Pelasgian* and/or *Illyrian*) are attributed to the same regional population by others, or those who should have perceived themselves at least superficially different, and that we cannot really claim anything more, as there is no concrete information on the presence of any other population within the region throughout the first millennium BC.

Roman period

Forcefully imposed in the midst of the Balkan millennial evolution (after the second century BC), intervening or as a natural continuum within the process commonly defined as Macedonian and/or Hellenic influence, the Roman obtrusion, is generally thought to have exerted a special impact on people's cultures within and beyond the Balkan Peninsula for the up-coming half millennia³⁰. The root of Latin hegemony, similarly to Hellenism within the Balkan Peninsula, should be probably deemed as the next variation of the cultural Mediterranean influence gradually (over millennia) domesticated amongst people/nations within the Italian Peninsula (Etruscan, Samnite, Umbrian, Oscan etc.)³¹. From this outlook, similar to Hellenism, the Roman hegemony cannot be realistically distinguished from a common origin of the nation's dwelling around the Adriatic basin. However, the ever-present influence from the

³⁰Edward Gibbon (1776–1789). *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Separated into three parts, Gibbon's story unfolds the height of the Roman Empire until the Byzantine fall.

³¹Michael Grant (1978). *The History of Rome*. Publisher: Prentice Hall (USA). Grant recreates the evolution of Rome, describing the events that made it a political and cultural conquistador. Among other things, here is also portrayed the character of Roman society and the development of the Empire, such as the relations between Rome and the people of other provinces throughout the Italian peninsula.

Mediterranean, as well as the successes in the form of inter-ethnic wars inside and outside the peninsula of modern Italy throughout the first millennium BC, are alleged to have shaped a distinct imposing mentality³². For the very fact that we are dealing with a more modern period of history than the classical antiquity, the records from the authors throughout this period dictated by the cosmopolitan center of Rome are considered as more factual. So whereas *Pelasgian* pronunciations is coming much less across in the records, the denominations like Illyria and the other ones (as in relation to the common names for clans and nations that were used throughout the classical antique period) are considered now as more factual.

Roman identity influence

The Romans were known as the true master of the war and over time they also became familiar with the art of governing over the others. It is a well-known fact that throughout the centuries they have been borrowing from the artistic, social and literature practices of Oskanes, Etruscans and Helene's, but over the time (after embracing those practices), they learned how to adopt, transform and disperse/impose them on the submissive populations³³. In this form, principally the aim must have been to protect personal interests through the control of political and military affairs, but on the other hand, this should have had also influence over the culture and authenticity of subject identities. Concretely to what stage should have affected the Roman impact inter-ethnic cultural identities within the Balkans Peninsula during that period, it requires a more focused interpretation as we pretend as follows.

(1) To what's been alluded earlier, respectively: considering the idea that the Roman authority in essence should have presented cultural conglomerate comprising from the mixture of closely related neighboring identities that lived just beyond the Adriatic and Ionian water basins; considering also the fact that the Empire of Rome, in one form or another was itself the product or continuation of a very long evolutionary process transmitted preliminary from the Balkan region itself, than; seems like we simply are to deal with natural cross-regional cultural development and emancipation beside the imposition of the new inter-regional authority.

(2) Depending on the time and space circumstances, the approach and ambitions of the Roman authorities must have been different in relation to the submitted subjects and locations. However, given the fact that essentially imperial ideologies are created/intended for material benefits (or expansion beyond natural boundaries relays basically on such an ambition), the initial imposition from Rome within the

³² Grant (1978).

³³ Grant (1978).

Balkan peninsula must be perceived within this light, hereupon to protect and advance its economic benefits. Otherwise, despite the brutality often exercised against those who resisted, they did not always claim the destruction of cultural identities apart from acting on the imperialist perspective.

(3) Unlike the cultural advancement on which the philosophy of Helene's was lenient, the discipline and the 'iron' resilience of the Romans, through a very long and violent history, eventually could exercise the total control within the entire Balkan Peninsula³⁴.

Nonetheless, the result of a different Balkan cultural legacy and geography, the approach over the cultural identities within the region, had also to adapt to the social and natural surroundings considering the earlier historical periods.

- i. Thus, if we are to refer to the trading city-states perceived as the cradle of the *Hellenistic* culture along the Aegean part of the Balkan Peninsula, subsequently also to these northwestern neighboring state-communities who had been influenced closely by them (along the Ionian sea and later to the north along the eastern Adriatic coast), even though most of them lost the commercial and economic power they possessed before subjugation, they, however, possessed more than sufficient accumulated civic and cultural baggage to naturally resist any kind of cultural submission during the new-era;
- ii. Perhaps as the result of close geographic proximity to the north of the Apennine peninsula (or the *Azurcoast* across the northern Adriatic waters), the Roman influence was more pronounced to the ethnicities of the northern Illyria along Adriatic coastline. This mainly because the initial claims must have been also less ambitious for the inland territories, especially considering the rugged highland geography of the Dinaric mountains. In fact, trying to understand this whole reality, here is the opportunity to also create a parallel and/or make a comparison with the similar phenomenon regarding the advancement of Hellenistic culture along the eastern Adriatic coast in earlier historical phases.
- iii. The other Illyrian ethnicities that were present in the north and east of the Dinaric Mountains, finally also recognized a different reality after the Roman conquest. This mainly because of the lower social development, different geography in comparison to mountainous or coastal regions, and giving to the fact that the Roman Empire was built on the slave-owner socio-economic model³⁵.

³⁴The History of Albanian People (2002).

³⁵ The History of Albanian People (2002).

Roman social identity

In relation to the Roman administrative provinces of Illyria, the simple question arises; how did the cultural identity of the Balkan region have escaped full Romanization? This matter becomes even vaguer when making an parallel or if we refer to the influence exerted on populations physically more distant/peripheral and given the shorter time of their domination by Rome (as we have the case for example with the *Dacia* or the *Gaul*).

Some of the issues targeted above claimed to provide a superficial reality in relation to the general circumstances that helped the survival of *Pelasgic-Illyrian* culture. Within this framework and trying to focus further on inter-regional specificities, as it is the case with the former *Dardanian* province of Illyria, what we consider relevant is that:

(1) Regarding the relation between the Roman Empire and the Dardanian *semi-kingdom* ethnicity, considering the non-central role enjoyed by the latter (Dardanes) during the ancient *Hellenistic* period, it is unreasonable to assume that there has ever been a consideration of any kind from the conquering party. This seems even truer considering the mentality of the invader at the period of the events and the spatial distance between the parties. However, on the other hand, the very geographical distance and being that much different must have created a natural blockade to the long-term cultural penetrations.

(2) From a different viewpoint, one must not forget that the ethnic Dardanian ethnicity was not completely without epitome during the ancient Hellenic era. Thus, if they were not considered as a civic society by ancient Mediterranean contemporaries, they at least enjoyed a unique sense of organization, attributes and ambitions, often imposing at the center of historical events as a respected opponent or ally³⁶. This then can be considered as sufficient evidence in regard to a society that had managed to create a genuine sense of uniqueness and belonging, pride and perspective, somewhat different in comparison to other communities and / or ethnicities within the region. These facts should then also be considered as an additional barrier along the processes of *Latinization*.

(3) Taking into account the high concentration of inhabitants, geographical position and social development, the Roman politics in relation to the Illyrian inland occupied territories, from the beginning were mainly oriented to agricultural utilization and military recruiting. Thus, the genuine assimilation policies, which promoted trading relations between the ruling classes to make a way for the formation of the genuine colonies and the subsequent manifestation of advanced Roman culture (infrastructure

³⁶The History of Albanian People (2002).

public buildings, schools, amphitheaters, public baths ... inspiration model for many subdued nations), were never accordingly manifested within the Dardanian occupied province. This should normally also have reflected on the permanent cultural divisions between colonizers and largely rural native populations of Dardanes throughout that period.

(4) As the result of cultural features, geographic distance, geopolitical priorities and all-around mountainous terrain, comes to the fore also the 'time factor'. Randomly or by the simple chance, Dardanian identity have been spared somehow completely from the direct impact of Latinization during the B.C. era. This initially when they were not invaded during the second-century Roman campaigns against the Macedonians (the result of the limited Roman ambitions; that the Dardanian kingdom was known as the ally of Rome against the Macedonian rivals; or whatever interpretations there may be), then also during the campaigns that followed throughout the first century B.C. (for the fact that they were initiated and developed mainly along the northwestern part of the Adriatic coast and Balkan Peninsula)³⁷.

(5) The fact that the Illyrian provinces never enjoyed the status of a so-called 'senatorial provinces' (not even those along the western Adriatic which were influenced more strongly by the Roman culture), but were always distinguished as Imperial Provinces (a status which was mainly enjoyed by the inland provinces and those located along the military bordered frontiers³⁸), reports of their inferior status, respectively unlike most coastal regions where Roman culture could mainly consolidate over the time.

(6) Considering the extreme mountainous relief of the Balkan Peninsula, it must have come as a natural shield for the ethnicities during the whole period before and after the Roman hegemony. This initially during the stage when eastern Adriatic communities were invaded and which coincides with the III century B.C., then also after the final subjection of the Macedonian rival in 168 B.C. In this way, naturally isolated by Alpine mountains of the Balkan, Dardan ethnic identity, can also be

³⁷ John Drogo Montagu, (2000). The battles of the Greek and Roman worlds: A Chronological Roundup of 667 wars up to 31 BC by Historians of the Ancient World. In this case, it is considered the time period which is related to the two main developments: the final subjection of the Macedonian rival in 168 BC, and the campaigns that were subsequently initiated from the northwestern part of the Dinaric Range, to be consumed only two centuries after, before the eventual arrival and fully subjecting the Dardanes to the east of mountainous range.

³⁸ Inscriptions from the time of the Roman Republic, translated by Eric Herbert Warmington (1940). From the inscriptions apparently, 'Low Illyria' (or inferior), differently from 'High Illyria' (or superior), officially was to refer to the regions beyond the massif of the Dinaric mountains. Low Illyria was commonly known as a military zone with a single military leader (as a governor) and the legions positioned mainly across areas facing nations across the Danube River. Marjeta Šašel-Kos, (2010). Pannonia or Lower Illyria? Tycha's Contributions to Ancient History, Pilarology and Epigraphy.

considered to have enjoyed (at least partly) the privileges of cultural autonomy during the whole of the Roman-era.

Conclusion

The issue of cultural identity always has the capacity to provoke argument and debate. In addition to the needs (or at least curiosity) for each and every person to be properly informed and reflect on personal inheritance and background, the disclosure of the past generally has to do with the emancipation through recalling and reflection on the experiences of the past in form of the culture, society, politics and economy, otherwise; through the history of ordinary people, their strategies and institutions in dealing with life³⁹. The population of Kosovo is simply another group understandably obsessed with issues relating to their ethnic cultural identity, whose history is understandably intertwined with those from its neighboring societies. The purpose of this research was to understand (as much as possible) about the cultural evolution and preservation of the autochthonous cultural identity within this region before the medieval historical age. In closer focus, the analysis aimed to represent the regional cultural heritage of the ancient Kosovo as a central component of the wider territory of the Balkan Peninsula or Southeastern part of Europe that we can also experience today.

³⁹ Peter Stearns, (1994). *The Encyclopedia of Social History*.

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