

ИСТОРИЈСКИ ЗАПИСИ

Година ХСVI

Бр. 3-4/2023.

ЗАПИСИ
ЧАСОПИС ЗА НАУКУ И КЊИЖЕВНОСТ
(1927-1933. године)
Уредник Душан Вуксан

ЗАПИСИ
ГЛАСНИК ЦЕТИЊСКОГ ИСТОРИЈСКОГ ДРУШТВА
(1935-1941. године)
Уредник Душан Вуксан, Одговорни уредник Ристо Драгићевић

ИСТОРИЈСКИ ЗАПИСИ
ОРГАН ИСТОРИЈСКОГ ИНСТИТУТА РЕПУБЛИКЕ
ЦРНЕ ГОРЕ И ДРУШТВА ИСТОРИЧАРА ЦРНЕ ГОРЕ
(од 1948. године)

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ИСТОРИЈСКИ ЗАПИСИ

ОРГАН ИСТОРИЈСКОГ ИНСТИТУТА
И
ДРУШТВА ИСТОРИЧАРА ЦРНЕ ГОРЕ

Година ХСVI

3-4

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ЧЛАНЦИ

Dragana KUNČER*

THE WORLD WITHOUT WOMEN: GENDER ISSUES IN THE *GESTA REGUM SCLAVORUM*¹

ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to explore the role of gender in the Gesta regum Sclavorum (GRS), also known as the Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea. It critically examines the portrayal of women in this historical narrative, noting its reflection of a broader trend in medieval male-authored texts that perpetuate female inferiority and marginalization. In the GRS, women predominantly emerge as anonymous and passive consorts of kings, relegated primarily to the role of progenitors of heirs. Instances of women taking independent action, as exemplified by the widow of Hungarian prince Kys, then Cossara, the daughter of Samuel and wife of St. Vladimir, and Iaquinta, wife of King Bodin, are depicted in a manner that suggests their inclusion in the narrative is due to the benefits these actions provided to their male relatives. The portrayal of female agency in the GRS is thus interpreted as a reflection of the gendered social norms of the era, which were more inclined to resist rather than support the women's empowerment.²*

KEYWORDS: *Gesta regum Sclavorum, Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea, women's history, gender history, Cossara, Iaquinta.*

The Latin chronicle, *Gesta regum Sclavorum (GRS)*, also known as the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea*, narrates the history of the Slavic kings

* Autorka je naučni saradnik na Istorijском institutu u Beogradu.

¹ This paper is a revised version of a presentation that was delivered at the 24th *International Congress of Byzantine Studies* (Venice and Padua, 22-27 August 2022).

² I would like to extend my gratitude to Matthew Kinloch for directing me towards his insightful work on a subject which closely parallels my own. His contribution in the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, particularly M. Kinloch, "In the Name of the Father, the Husband, or Some Other Man", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 74 (2020), 303-328, provided valuable context within the realm of postmodernist discourse. While the foundational argument of this paper was developed independently, the perspectives offered by Kinloch have been instrumental in shaping the analytical framework employed herein.

who resided along the Eastern Adriatic coast and its surrounding regions.³ Its narrative spans from the late fifth century through to the second half of the twelfth century. The Latin text of the chronicle is preserved in two manuscripts from the 17th century (Codex Vat. Lat. 6958, ff. 53r-75r, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, and Codex Belgradensis R-570, ff. 1r-30v, The National Library of Serbia). An Italian version of the same text was edited and published by Mauro Orbini in 1601.⁴ The first 23 chapters of the *GRS* narrative are also found in two shorter versions: one written in vernacular, with the oldest manuscript dating back to 1546, and the other a Latin translation by the humanist Marcus Marulus, penned in 1510.⁵ Since its first edition, published by Ioannes Lucius in 1666, the body of literature on the *GRS* has grown significantly. The bibliographic list of editions and translations of all four versions, up until 2011, contained 37 items alone.⁶

The majority of researchers have examined the text either to clarify general aspects such as the identity of its author and the purpose of its composition, or to unearth specific details that could shed light on the political, economic, and geographical circumstances in the Western Balkans during the relevant period.⁷ Furthermore, scholars including Nikola Banašević have delved into the historiographical and biblical *topoi* of the text, primarily viewing it as a product of medieval Latin historiography, characterized by its unique techniques of compilation and adaptation.⁸ Recently, a controversial line of research has emerged, inspired by Solange Bujan's falsification

³ *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, ed. D. Kunčer, (= *GRS*), vol. 1, in *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, vols. 1-2, T. Živković (ed.), Belgrade/Ostrog, 2009. Selected previous editions: *Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Slavorum*, ed. I. Lucius, in I. Lucius, *De Regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae libri sex*, Amsterdam, 1666, 287-302; *Presbyteri Diocleatis Regnum Slavorum*, ed. I. G. Schwandtner, in *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum, Dalmaticarum, Croaticarum, et Slavonicarum veteres ac genuini*, vol. 3, ed. I. G. Schwandtner, Vienna, 1748, 474-509; *Letopis Popa Dukljanina*, ed. F. Šišić, Belgrade-Zagreb, 1928; *Ljetopis popa Dukljanina*, ed. V. Mošin, Zagreb, 1950.

⁴ *La storia de Rè di Dalmatia*, ed. M. Orbini, in M. Orbini, *Il Regno de gli Slavi*, Pesaro, 1601, 204-241.

⁵ M. Marulus, "Regum Dalmatię et Croatię gesta", ed. N. Jovanović, *Colloquia Maruliana* 18 (2009), 28-61.

⁶ N. Vrsalović, "Bibliografija: Izdanja Ljetopisa popa Dukljanina i odabrana bibliografija radova o Ljetopisu i Imensko kazalo uz Bibliografiju", in I. Mužić, *Hrvatska kronika u Ljetopisu popa Dukljanina*, Split 2011, 301-311.

⁷ For an extensive commentary on the *GRS* text, see T. Živković, *Gesta regum Sclavorum: Komentar*, vol. 2, Belgrade/Ostrog, 2009. (For a critique of Živković's views, see A. Radoman, "Gesta Regum Sclavorum – nova istoriografska mistifikacija", *Matica: Časopis za društvena pitanja, nauku i kulturu* 53 (2013), 103-124.) For an extensive introduction to the *GRS* scholarship and its challenges, see W. Kowalski, *The Kings of the Slavs*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021.

⁸ N. Banašević, *Letopis popa Dukljanina i narodna predanja*, Belgrade, 1971.

theory, which suggests that the chronicle is a modern forgery, thus denying its medieval origins.⁹ There also exists a monograph by Wawrzyniec Kowalski, in which the author presents the complex state of research on the *GRS* in a comprehensive and detailed manner. In Kowalski's work, the narrative of the *GRS* is examined from an imagological perspective.¹⁰

Despite the diverse range of research topics and theoretical frameworks in the field, studies on the *GRS* have largely overlooked women's history and gender history.¹¹ Addressing this scholarly oversight, the present exploration—informed on one hand by Joan W. Scott's conception of gender as a “primary way of signifying relationships of power”, and on the other hand by investigation into the connection between power and language—employs critical linguistic analysis to scrutinize the dynamics of empowerment among female characters within the *GRS* narrative.¹² Importantly, drawing upon postmodernist theories of history, the approach here does not view depicted power relationships as direct reflections of historical reality, but rather as narrative constructs, thereby positing an ontological discontinuity between the past and historiography.¹³ Consequently, the focus is not on uncov-

⁹ S. Bujan, “La Chronique du prêtre de Dioclée. Un faux document historique”, *Revue des études byzantine* 66 (2008), 5-38; S. Trajković-Filipović, “Inventing a saint's life: chapter XXXVI of The Annals of a priest of Dioclea”, *Revue des études byzantines* 71 (2013), 259-276; S. Trajković-Filipović, “O, Vladimire, kralju dukljanski, tvrda glavo, srce ponosito! Isaija Berlin i devetnaestovekovne interpretacije Života Svetog Vladimira od Zete”, *Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology* 9/3 (2014), 723-761; P. Komatina, “Quis ergo presbyter Diocleas? Early Ragusan Historiography and the Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea”, *Istorijski časopis* 69 (2020), 189–226.

¹⁰ I. Basić, “Wawrzyniec Kowalski: The Kings of the Slavs. The Image of a Ruler in the Latin Text of The Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja, (East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, vol. 69), Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2021. 368 str.”, *Anali Dubrovnika* 60 (2022), 228.

¹¹ Following Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's standpoint, this paper recognizes that adding women's history is not the same as “adding women to history”. See E. Fox-Genovese, “Placing Women's History in History”, in *History of Women in the United States: Theory and Method in Women's History*, vol. 1/2, N. F. Cott (ed.), Berlin/ Boston: K. G. Saur, 1992, 345. It also acknowledges, in agreement with Michelle Ballif, that this endeavour involves “the production of new narratives, new discourses, new idioms”. See M. Ballif, “Re/dressing histories; or, on re/covering figures who have been laid bare by our gaze”, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 22/1 (1992), 96.

¹² J. W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 1067; T. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. A rare exception in *GRS* scholarship is the approach taken by Svetlana Tomin. In her book *Book-Loving Women of the Serbian Middle Ages*, Tomin adopts a gendered perspective in narrating the story of Cossara, one of the narrative's female characters. See S. Tomin, *Knjigoljubive žene srpskog srednjeg veka*, Novi Sad, 2007, 132-135.

¹³ H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987; H. White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press,

ering what the actual gender relationships between past individuals were, but on understanding the reasons why their gender dynamics are represented as such in this specific historiographical narrative.¹⁴ It is believed that critical linguistic analysis of the *GRS* can potentially provide insights into the gendered social norms of both the era in which the chronicle was written and the periods of its sources.

Thus, this paper endeavours to incorporate two principal theoretical perspectives. The first adopts a postmodernist view of history, as articulated by Jenkins, who sees history as a personal construct, shaped by the historian's narrative choices.¹⁵ The second perspective is grounded in the ideas of critical linguistic paradigms, highlighting how power relations, where gender relations play a significant role, are constructed and perpetuated through language.¹⁶ This dual approach is succinctly encapsulated in the eloquent passage by Michel de Certeau:

“In the past from which it [sc. historiography] is distinguished, it promotes a selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility. But whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant—shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication—comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: ‘resistances’, ‘survivals’, or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of ‘progress’ or a system of interpretation. These are lapses in the syntax constructed by the law of a place. Therein they symbolize a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable.”¹⁷

However, before beginning, it is essential to clarify our understanding of the periodization and authenticity of the *GRS* text. In alignment with the prevailing scholarly opinion, the *GRS* is considered here an authentic medieval composition. Recognizing the need for further substantiation of this view, one aim of this paper is to contribute to the ongoing debate over the chronicle's authenticity from a gendered perspective. Furthermore, considering Susan Mosher Stuard's assertion that “no age is sufficiently understood until the contributions of women are brought to light”—a statement particu-

1978; See also K. Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, London/New York: Routledge, 2003. For a similar approach, see Kinloch, “In the Name”, 306 n. 18.

¹⁴ For further articulation of the questions regarding gender representation in historical narratives, see Ballif, “Re/dressing histories”, 92.

¹⁵ Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 14-15.

¹⁶ van Dijk, *Discourse and Power*, VII.

¹⁷ M. de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley, New York, 1988, 4.

larly relevant to the Middle Ages—applying a gendered lens to the *GRS* is expected to enhance both the insight of social norms governing relationships between men and women in medieval Balkans, and to enrich the exploration of the region and period.¹⁸

Identifying Women in the *GRS*

An investigation of gender issues within the *GRS* can fittingly commence with a statistical analysis, specifically examining the frequency and absence of names in relation to gender. The results are revealing: among the individuals mentioned in the text, a total of 134 men are named, in stark contrast to a mere five women.¹⁹ This implies that the presence of women amounts to approximately 3.7% of all named individuals in the text.²⁰ The women who are given this distinction are Prechvalla, Lovizza, Castreca, Cossara, and Iaquinta.²¹ It's important to recognize that this is not a unique trait of the *GRS* text. As Marianne Sághy asserts, the absence of women's names is characteristic of medieval writing in Eastern and Central Europe.²²

This reticence on the part of the author or limitations of the sources in naming female characters is illustrated in a passage where the king is mentioned to have had offspring of both genders, yet only the sons are named.

GRS 160.15-20: *Post haec accepit regnum Radoslavus, frater eius, cui erant octo filii et quatuor filiae. Nomina filiorum eius haec sunt: primus Branislavus, Gradislavus, Chvalimir, Stanihna, Cociapar, Goyslavus, Dobroslavus et Picinech. Fuit autem rex Radoslavus pacificus et mansuetus ac timens Deum in omni vita sua.*

“Following these events, his brother Radoslavus assumed the kingdom. He had eight sons and four daughters. The names of his sons are as

¹⁸ S. Mosher Stuard, “Introduction”, in *Women in Medieval Society*, S. M. Stuard (ed.), Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, 1-12.

¹⁹ The count was conducted on the characters relevant to the historical context of the narrative. Characters employed as biblical exempla, specifically Herod and Herodias, were excluded.

²⁰ In terms of gender representation, the absence of female characters can be regarded as a “foundational characteristic” of most premodern historiography (cf. Kinloch, “In the Name”, 309). However, even by medieval standards, the proportion of named female characters in the *GRS* text appears relatively small. For comparison, Ben Snook notes that in the manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (up to and including AD 800), female characters comprise about ten percent of all named characters. See B. Snook, “Women in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle before AD 800”, in *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*, J. Dresvina and N. Sparks (eds.), Newcastle, 2012, 32.

²¹ *GRS* 116.12, 120.6, 120.18, 128.10, 162.18.

²² M. Sághy, “Eastern Europe”, in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, M. Schaus (ed.), New York/London: Routledge, 2006, 236.

follows: the first is Branislavus, then Gradislavus, Chvalimir, Stanihna, Co-ciapar, Goyslavus, Dobroslavus, and Picinech. King Radoslavus was peaceful and mild, and feared God throughout his life.”

In another revealing instance, the narrative detailing the challenging circumstances of Dragimir’s wife provides a similar pattern. After the death of her husband, she—pregnant and accompanied by her two daughters, and later also by her mother—embarks on a journey to Bosnia. During this journey, she gives birth to a boy. Out of her three children, the narrative chooses to assign a name only to the son.

GRS 140.19-25: Uxor autem Dragimiri defuncto viro suo reversa est ad patriam suam. Filia erat Lutomiri, magni iupani Rassae. Quae, cum reverteretur cum duabus filiabus et ipsa praegnans, patrem suum defunctum invenit. Post haec perexit Bosnam una cum matre ad avunculos suos. Peperit autem filium masculum in itinere in iupania Drinae in loco qui dicitur Brusno vocavitque nomen eius Dobroslavo.

“Following the death of her husband Dragimir, his wife returned to her homeland. She was the daughter of Lutomir, the great iupan of Rassae. Upon her return with her two daughters, and while she was still pregnant, she found her father had passed away. After this, she traveled to Bosnia with her mother to stay with her uncles. She gave birth to a son on her journey in the iupania of Drinae, in a place called Brusno, and she named him Dobroslav.”

Unnamed women mentioned in the text are primarily characterized through their relationships with male family members, specifically as wives of named husbands and daughters of named or titled fathers. This mode of identifying female characters in the *GRS* can be interpreted as a method of marginalizing women within the narrative. For instance, Matthew Kinloch, in his analysis of George Akropolites’ *Chronike syngraphe* (*Χρονική συγγραφή*), observes that “the overwhelmingly relational identification of female characters”—coupled with their general “relative absence”—constitutes the basis of their “systematic subordination” in the chronicle. He also remarks that women in the narrative he studied are not depicted as “autonomous individuals” but as “subordinate characters”, dependent on men. Kinloch states: “their very (textual) existence is outsourced to the male character(s) on which they depend”.²³ It is noteworthy, however, that these observations, while similar and suggesting a comparable notion, are not identical. This distinction particularly prompts the question of whether the subordination and dependence of unnamed women in historiographical nar-

²³ Kinloch, “In the Name”, 310.

ratives, and by extension in the *GRS*, stem solely from their relational identification through men, or more generally, from their identification being exclusively relational (descriptive), regardless of the specific attribute. In the former case, it can be argued that the patrilineal genealogy, on the one hand, and the objectification of women, on the other—wherein women are depicted as objects changing hands “from father to husband”—strongly indicate the social hierarchy represented in the narrative.²⁴ In this hierarchy, men are represented as the dominant group, while women are portrayed as dominated. Consequently, the symbolic subordination of women inferred from the identification of female characters through their male counterparts appears both straightforward and unambiguous.²⁵ In the latter case, however, the perceived inferiority of any character, whether female or male, would primarily arise from their exclusive relational (descriptive) identification—that is, from the absence of a proper name allocated to the character.

Informed by ideas that society is not directly reflected in language but is mediated through cognition, the study by Sanford, Moar, and Garrod on character salience in narratives becomes particularly relevant.²⁶ Their research concluded that the identification of a character by a proper name, as opposed to relational identification or “role description”, is crucial. Characters with proper names tend to be more easily memorized and, when mentioned anaphorically, are more readily recalled for reference. The use of a proper name gives a character prominence over others identified merely by descriptions, even in the absence of other identifying cues.²⁷ Consequently, it

²⁴ See Ballif, “Re/Dressing Histories”, 91.

²⁵ Deborah Tannen notes that in conversational practices, most linguistic strategies are relative, meaning that in some contexts they could suggest dominance, while in others, they indicate subordination or powerlessness. See D. Tannen, *Gender and Discourse*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 19-52. However, in the fixed context of the historiographical narrative, the linguistic formulation used infers a power hierarchy that is unambiguous.

²⁶ For an understanding of the mediatory role of cognition, see T. van Dijk, *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, VII. Specifically, van Dijk observes that there is “no direct link between situational or social structures and discourse structures”. He argues that this relationship is mediated by “socially based but subjective definitions of the communicative situation”, which he terms “context models”. Conversely, the psychological study by Sanford et al. (A.J. Sanford, K. Moar, and S.C. Garrod, “Proper Names as Controllers of Discourse Focus”, *Language and Speech* 31 (1988), 43–56) focuses on general cognitive processes, such as attention control mechanisms. As the subjective and variable nature of the context models posited by van Dijk suggests the need for universal and invariable mental processes as their foundation, research in psychology, as exemplified by Sanford et al.’s study, is seen as a significant contribution to our analysis of the interrelation between social structures and language in the *GRS* text.

²⁷ For the possible explanation of cognitive mechanisms underlying these findings, see P.C. Gordon, B.J. Grosz, L.A. Gilliom, “Pronouns, Names, and the Centering of Attention in Discourse”, *Cognitive Science* 17 (1993), 311–347.

appears that the subordination of women in historical narratives, and by extension in the *GRS*, may primarily stem from the absence of identification by proper name, rather than from patrilineal relational identification. This observation is, however, hypothetical and warrants further exploration.

Finally, it should be noted that in the *GRS*, some male characters are also left unnamed. These include “four evil kings” (*GRS* 28.10-11: *quatuor iniqui reges*) who succeeded Ratomirus and the seven sons of Leghec, all destined, along with their kin, to perish due to their mischiefs:

GRS 120.23-122.2: *Deus omnipotens... brevi in tempore percussit patrem claudum corpore et anima et filios eius pestilentia et clade quemadmodum percusserunt ipsi fratres et nepotes suos et mortui sunt et non remansit ex eis nec unus.*

“Almighty God... in a short time struck the father with a crippled body and soul, and his sons with pestilence and disaster, just as they themselves had struck their brothers and nephews. And they died, and not one of them remained.”

The depiction of these unnamed men in the *GRS* as inherently “bad” is intriguing. It raises the question: Are all unnamed characters in the *GRS*, including unnamed women, perceived negatively by the author or the readers? In other words, is there a correlation between a character’s anonymity in the *GRS* and the author’s or readers’ perception of their personality? This complex question requires more detailed research and will also, for now, remain unanswered.

Characterizing Women in the *GRS*

Women’s physical characteristics are occasionally mentioned, with two instances in the text. In these cases, we learn that the daughter of the Rascian zupan and the wife of King Proelimirus was considered exceptionally beautiful, with a pleasing figure. Similarly, we discover that Samuel’s niece, who was also the wife of King Dobroslavus, was described as a beautiful girl:

GRS 116.13-15: *Proelimirus autem rex videns filiam eius quod pulchra esset valde et omnibus membris composita vulneratum est cor illius amore eius.*

“King Proelimirus, seeing that **his daughter was exceedingly beautiful and perfectly formed**, found his heart wounded by his love for her.”

GRS 142.1-3: *Acceptit ibi uxorem puellam virginem speciosam, nepotem Samuelis*

imperatoris [...]

“He took a wife there, a **beautiful young maiden**, the niece of Emperor Samuel [...].”

However, the text noticeably lacks descriptions of women’s personality attributes, such as intellect or character. In contrast, when men are described, their personality traits far outnumber their physical attributes. For instance, in the description of King Vladimir, Cossara highlights his handsome appearance, but also his humble, gentle, modest, wise, god-fearing, and eloquent nature:

GRS 128.14-17: *pulcher in aspectu, humilis, mansuetus atque modestus et quod esset repletus sapientia et prudentia Domini [...]* *loquela illius dulcis super mel et favum.*

“He was handsome in appearance, humble, gentle, and modest, and filled with God’s wisdom and prudence [...] His speech was sweeter than honey and honeycomb.”

This adds a significant dimension to the depiction of love and sexuality in the *GRS*, highlighting the influence of prevailing gender norms. While both men and women are depicted as capable of falling in love, they are shown with differing emotional motivations. Women are described as developing emotional attachments to men based on their behavioral traits, whereas men’s love primarily stems from women’s physical appearance. For instance, Proelimirus is moved by love upon seeing the beautiful daughter of the Rascian zupan (*GRS* 116.13-15), and Cossara is drawn to Vladimir “not because of desire” (*non causa libidinis*) “but out of compassion for his youth and beauty” (*sed quia condoluit iuventuti et pulchritudini illius*).²⁸

As evidenced, the narrative explicitly denies sexual agency to Cossara, a key female figure in the *GRS*. This contrasts starkly with the liberty granted to male characters within the narrative, such as Proelimirus. Cossara’s case, however, is unique, given her partnership with a saintly figure and their mutual commitment to a spiritual marriage. Nevertheless, considering that this explicit denial of sexual agency is directed at a female character, unlike her male counterparts, and recognizing that the suppression and abnegation of female sexuality are common in male-dominated cultures, a critical inquiry emerges: Does this portrayal of Cossara primarily stem from her gender and the prevailing gender norms of the time, or is it more influenced

²⁸ *GRS* 128.17-10.

by the specific nature of her partner? Intriguing as it is, this question—along with some others—will remain unresolved in this discussion.

Women's Social Role in the *GRS*

When examining the portrayal of women's contributions to society in the narrative of the *GRS*, it becomes evident that women are only granted agency in three instances: the cases of Kys's widow, Cossara, and Iaquina.²⁹ In all other instances, either from the author's perspective or that of his sources, the primary contribution of women to society is through bearing the king's (male) children. Specifically, when referencing women in the context of their marital relationships with kings and their roles as child bearers, the author employs remarkably similar phrases such as: *accepit uxorem alicuius filiam, de qua genuit filios, uxor peperit filios*, and similar.³⁰ These are embedded within broader narrative frameworks where such standardized clauses, devoid of any substantial information, typically serve as the only references to women. Notably, these allusions are confined to a single sentence, and already in the subsequent sentences within the same paragraph, the focus swiftly shifts away from women and lingers on men for a substantial portion of the narrative. The instances illustrating this pattern are as follows:

GRS 70.23-25–72.1-5: Vladimirus autem Surbiam regebat. Qui accepit uxorem, filiam regis Hungarorum genuitque ex ea filios et filias et facta est pax firma inter Hungaros et Sclavos. Post haec Rasbivoy septimo anno regni sui mortuus est.

“On the other hand, Vladimir ruled over Serbia. **He took a wife, the daughter of the Hungarian king, and from her he had sons and daugh-**

²⁹ In the text (*GRS* 114.6-7, 156.2-4), there are two unnamed women who, upon the death of their consort kings, assumed the role of queens (*reginae*) with governing authority. Each had a son who played a significant role in her rule: the son of one queen co-ruled, while the son of the other was expected to ascend to the throne upon reaching maturity. Despite being honoured and obeyed by their subjects, no specific deeds of these queens are mentioned in the narrative. Consequently, due to the presence of co-rulers and the absence of any specific deeds, it can be concluded that these female characters in the *GRS* are also depicted as passive. They appear to have gained and exercised their rule passively.

³⁰ The belief that nature created women primarily for procreation is articulated in Galen of Pergamon's treatise *De usu partium* (*Περὶ χρῆσας μερῶν*), written around 175 AD. Galen (129 – ca. 216 AD), a Greek physician and philosopher, held medical opinions of unquestionable authority during the Middle Ages. Agreeing with Aristotle, he viewed women as less perfect than men (*Galenus De Usu Partium Libri XVII*, vol. 2, ed. G. Helmreich, Leipzig, 1909, 295.27 – 296.1). However, in line with his own and Aristotle's fundamental belief that “nature does nothing in vain” (*οὐδὲν ἢ φύσις ἐργάζεται μάτην*), he attributed this perceived imperfection to the role of women in procreation (*Ibidem*, 299.19 – 300.20).

ters, and a firm peace was established between the Hungarians and the Slavs. After this, Rasbivoy died in the seventh year of his reign.”

GRS 174.14-18: *Igitur Gradichna manens in Rassa accepit ibi uxorem de qua genuit tres filios: primus Radoslavus, Lobasi et Bladimirus. Praeterea Dragilus cum omnibus terrae suae intravit in Podgoream regionem et obtinuit Onogoste et alias plurimas iupanias.*

“During his stay in Rascia, Gradichna **took a wife who bore him three sons**: Radoslav, who was the eldest, then Lobasi, and Vladimir. Meanwhile, Dragilo, along with all his subjects, entered the region of Podgorje, assuming control over Onogost and numerous other zupanias.”

GRS 106.12-16: *Qui coactus eorum praecibus accepit uxorem Romanam, valde nobilem ortam natalibus, de qua genuit filium quem Petrislavum vocavit. Post haec in senectute bona mortuus est et sepultus in ecclesia sancti Ioannis Lateranensis cum magna honorificentia.*

“Compelled by their pleas, **he took a Roman wife**, one of very noble parents, **from whom he had a son** he named Petrislav. After this, he died in good old age and was buried with great honor in the Church of Saint John Lateran.”³¹

If analyzed from a linguistic perspective, it can be argued that the lack of referentiality to unnamed women is another way of inferring their subordination in the narrative. They simply do not appear in the story anymore. Thus, the inferiority of female characters in the *GRS* can be observed on three different syntactic levels: that of the single word, as demonstrated by the absence of proper names; that of the clause, as shown by the insubstantiality and repetitiveness of clauses related to the (unnamed) women; and finally, that of the larger text portion—beyond the sentence boundaries—as demonstrated by the lack of referentiality to the (unnamed) women. The absence of proper names and the insubstantiality of the clauses related to female characters, along with the lack of referentiality, imply that “there is not much to be said about the particular women” except for the completion of their maternal duties. However, the repetitiveness of such statements for almost all unnamed female characters suggests “this is how women should be talked about”, forming a discourse on women by the author or the sources of the *GRS* text.³²

³¹ See also *GRS* 78.8-18; 114.9-13; 168.22-25; 170.3-7; 112.23-25–114.1-2.

³² Refer to the definition of discourse by Gunther Kress: “A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, and organises and gives structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about.” See G. Kress, *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practices*, Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1985, 7.

In addition to the three textual layers that suggest women's subordination, reflecting the social norms of the time and place of the text's production (likely the Middle Ages in the Western Balkans), a fourth, metatextual layer pertinent to contemporary times can be discerned. As Kinloch observes, the unnamed female characters in the Byzantine chronicle he analyzed have often been omitted from modern reconstructions based on historiography, indicating a continued marginalization in scholarship.³³ This pattern is similarly evident in the treatment of unnamed female characters in the *GRS* text. For instance, in studies analyzing the deeds of the unnamed widow of the Hungarian prince Kys, there is a notable lack of effort to identify her, despite her deeds having considerable influence on the course of events. This stands in stark contrast to the efforts made to identify her husband in narrative sections detailing his deeds.³⁴

Again, regarding the scholarship of the *GRS*, a similar marginalization is observable not just among unnamed women but also among those with proper names. For example, in a recent depiction of the family trees of *GRS* characters, only two of the five named consorts of kings in the narrative—Cossara and Iaquina—are represented.³⁵

Women's Agency in the *GRS*

The three instances of women actively participating and influencing the course of history mentioned above are intriguing and warrant a detailed examination. The first woman is the unnamed wife of the Hungarian prince Kys, who was killed by the Slavic king Ciaslavus.³⁶ She pleads with the king of Hungary to provide her with an army in order to avenge her husband's death. She succeeds in her quest, leading to the demise of Ciaslavus and his men.

GRS 92.16-24 – 94.18-21: *Uxor autem principis audiens mortem viri sui perrexit ad regem Hungariae, quaesivit ei adiutorium et exercitum quatenus vindicaret mortem viri sui. [...] et captus est rex Ciaslavus et omnes parentes illius, quos iussit uxor Kys ligatis manibus et pedibus proici in flumen Savum.*

“Upon hearing of her husband's death, the prince's wife proceeded to the king of Hungary, seeking his assistance and an army to avenge her hus-

³³ Kinloch, “In the Name”, 326.

³⁴ Živković, *Gesta regum*, 202-211.

³⁵ Kowalski, *The Kings*, 314-315.

³⁶ The Hungarian nobleman named Kys, mentioned in the *GRS* narrative, has not yet been identified with any historical figure. See note 34.

band's death. [...] and King Ciaslavus and all his relatives were captured, whom Kys's wife ordered to be thrown into the Sava river with their hands and feet bound."

The second woman who acts independently and with self-confidence is Cossara, the daughter of the Bulgarian Tsar Samuel.³⁷ Falling in love with the captive King Vladimir, she rescues him from prison by persuading her father to let her marry him.³⁸ Furthermore, she approaches her cousin Vladislav to secure safe visit for her husband. Following the death and martyrdom of Vladimir, she took on the responsibility of his burial. After his interment, she took the vows and became a nun. When she herself passed away, she was laid to rest at the feet of her husband.

GRS 128.20-25: *Volens post haec a vinculis liberare eum accessit ad imperatorem et prostrata pedibus illius taliter locuta est: "Mi pater et domine, scio quia daturus es mihi virum sicuti moris est. Nunc ergo, si tuae placet magnitudini, aut des mihi virum Vladimirim regem quem tenes in vinculis, aut scias me prius morituram, quam alium accipiam virum"*.

"Wanting to free him from his chains afterward, she approached the emperor and prostrating herself at his feet, she spoke thus: 'My father and lord, I know that you are about to give me a husband as is customary. Now, therefore, if it pleases your greatness, either give me Vladimir, the king whom you hold in chains, as my husband, or know that I will die before I accept another man.'"

GRS 132.3-8: *Accepto itaque imperio misit nuncios ad regem Vladimirim ut ad eum veniret. Quo audito Cossara regina tenuit eum dicens: "Mi domine, noli ire ne, quod absit, tibi eveniat sicut fratri meo, sed dimitte me ut eam et videam et audiam quomodo se habet rex. Si me vult perdere, perdat. Tu tantum ne pereas."*

"Upon assuming the throne, he dispatched messengers to King Vladimir, inviting him to visit. On hearing this, Queen Cossara held him back, saying: 'My lord, do not go, lest, God forbid, you meet the same fate as my brother. Allow me to go instead, to assess the king's intentions. If he seeks to kill me, so be it. But you, at all costs, must not perish.'"

³⁷ According to the *GRS* narrative, Cossara is depicted as the daughter of the Bulgarian Tsar Samuel (997-1014) and the wife of John Vladimir, the ruler of Duklja (c.1000-1016). The *GRS* is the primary source detailing her name, father's identity, and life.

³⁸ For an almost identical plot featuring different names for Samuel's daughter and son-in-law, see John Scylitzes' *Synopsis of History* (Σύνοψις Ἱστοριῶν, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*, ed. H. Thurn, Berlin, 1973, 342). For a recent and detailed review of the traditions and scholarship surrounding the story of Vladimir and Cossara, see Kowalski, *The Kings*, 254-266.

GRS 136.14-16: Tulitque denique corpus eius et asportavit in loco, qui Craini dicitur, ubi curia eius fuit, et in ecclesia sanctae Mariae recondidit.

“Eventually, she took his body and transported it to a place called Craini, where his court had been, and laid it to rest in the Church of Saint Mary.”

GRS 136.21-23: Uxor vero beati Vladimiri Cossara sanctimonialis effecta pie et sancte vivendo in eadem ecclesia vitam finivit ibique sepulta est ad pedes viri sui.

“Indeed, the wife of the blessed Vladimir, Cossara, having become a nun, lived piously and sanctly, eventually ending her life in the same church. She was buried there, at the feet of her husband.”

The third dynamic woman characterized in the *GRS* is Iaquina, the wife of King Bodin.³⁹ She persuades her husband to first capture and then kill his cousins. She takes these actions because she perceives Bodin’s cousins and brothers as a threat to her sons, and because they had killed Cosar, a man whom she loved. Following the death of Bodin, she becomes implicated in another crime. Specifically, she prepares a poison that is later administered to King Vladimir. It is, however, suggested that she did so under the influence of some ill-intentioned men.

³⁹ According to the *Lupi Protospatarii annales*, a daughter of Archirici, who was the son of Ioannaci, was married to Constantine Bodin (1081- c. 1101), the ruler of Duklja. Cf. *Lupi Protospatarii annales*, ed. G.H. Pertz, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores, vol. 5, Hanover, 1844, 60: *Et in mense Aprilis Archirici perrexit ad Michalam regem Sclavorum, deditque eius filio suam filiam uxorem.* / “And in the month of April, Archirici went to Michael, king of the Slavs, and gave his daughter to his son in marriage.” Her name, Iaquina, and her personality and life are primarily known from the *GRS* narrative. The name Iaquina represents the feminine form of Hyacinth (Gr. Ὑάκινθος). This, along with the likely derivation of her father’s name from Argyros (Gr. Ἀργυρός), points to the Byzantine influence in Bari. When Iaquina was born, probably around 1060, the city of Bari had been under Byzantine rule for almost two centuries (since 876). Interestingly, the names of Iaquina’s father and her grandfather both feature phonetically similar suffixes. However, her grandfather’s name includes the Greek diminutive suffix -άκης (Gr. Ἰωαννάκης), potentially indicating Greek origins for the family. In contrast, the name of Iaquina’s father evidenced as Argirichi, Arzerizi, Argirigi, Archirici (cf. *Lupi Protospatarii annales*, 60.10, 60.40), and Argirizi, Archirizi (cf. *Annales Lupi Protospatarii*, ed. W. J. Churchill, PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1979, 147, 150) likely incorporates an Italian suffix (e.g. -iccio/-izzo) which suggests that vernacular Italian dialect might have been the family’s primary language. For this Italian nominal suffix, see G. Rohlfs, *Grammatica storica della lingua italiana e dei suoi dialetti: Sintassi e formazione delle parole*, vol. 3, Torino, 1969, 367-369. This analysis aligns with Chris Wickham’s assertions that “The Byzantines never achieved a total hegemony over Apulia” and “Greek influence was never dominant in most of Apulia”. See C. Wickham, *Early Medieval Italy: Central Power and Local Society, 400-1000*, London/ Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1981, 156-157.

GRS 164.5-6, 13.17 – 166.7-10: *Timebat enim ne viro eius moriente Branislavus seu filii eius acciperent regnum. [...] Dicebat illi: “Scio quia moriturus es et isti regnum accipient. Filii autem tui ad mensam eorum manducabunt.” Quid multum? Victus Bodinus rex ab uxore, ut Herodes ab Herodiana, dum sederent ad prandium et epularentur, iussu regis capti sunt et positi sunt in custodia [...] “Numquid non cernis quod fecit Cociaparus? Quare sinis vivere fratres eorum, quos tenes in vinculis?” Tunc rex iratus manu sua porrigens gladium iussit decollari Knesum Branislavum cum fratre et filio [...]*

“She was indeed fearful that upon his death, the kingdom would be taken over by Branislav or his sons. [...] She would tell her husband, ‘I know that you’re going to die and they will take over the kingdom. Your children will be reduced to eating at their table. What more can be said? While King Bodin and his wife were seated at lunch and eating, he, swayed by his wife just like Herod was by Herodias, seized his cousins and put them into custody [...] Don’t you see what Cociaparus has done? Why do you allow their brothers, whom you hold in chains, to live?’ Enraged, the king grabbed his sword and ordered the beheading of Knez Branislav, along with his brother and son [...]

GRS 170.10-15: *Itaque XXII anno regni Bladimiri regis Iaquina, consiliata a quibusdam pessimis hominibus qui inimici erant iupani Belceni potionem mortiferam conficiens in Cattaro, quo manebat, dedit eis. Hii vero venientes in Scodarim propinaverunt regi per manus ministrorum eius, qui ab eis deceptus tunc cecidit in lectulo.*

“In the twenty-second year of King Vladimir’s reign, Iaquina, counseled by some malevolent men who were enemies of župan Vukan, concocted a deadly potion in Kotor, where she resided, and handed it to them. These men, upon arriving in Skadar, tricked the king, via his servants, into consuming the poison. Consequently, the king fell ill in his bed.”

Upon analyzing these narratives of three women who act independently in the *GRS*, glaring similarities become evident when viewed from a gendered perspective. Each of the women depicted is strong-willed, resolute, and exhibit swift action. Once they assess their circumstances, they make decisions quickly and waste no time in executing their established aims. For instance, upon the death of her husband, Kys’s widow not only realizes she wants vengeance for the prince, but also promptly proceeds with executing her decision. A similar efficiency characterizes the other two women. Cosara, after realizing her love for Vladimir, promptly takes action to save him. Iaquina, perceiving a potential threat to her and her sons upon King Bodin’s

death, also demonstrates quick decision-making. She accomplishes her goals with just a few words spoken at the right moment. Both Cossara and Iaquinta, two of the self-determined women depicted in the *GRS*, demonstrate exceptional eloquence, effectively persuading their male relatives with whom they interact. Given that their persuasive speeches are explicitly documented in the text, it can be confidently asserted that Cossara and Iaquinta possess extraordinary rhetorical skills. Their eloquence, owing to its performative function and the immediate impact it has on the addressees, appears to surpass the speeches delivered by male characters in the *GRS*.⁴⁰ Furthermore, although the talk of Kys's widow is not directly reported in the text, from the efficacy of her approach to the king of Hungary, we might infer that she, too, was highly articulate.

These women also demonstrate exceptional bravery as their actions involve considerable risks. These risks vary, ranging from potential injury or death in battle, to the threat of a malevolent cousin, or the anger of a father or husband. All these dangers the women in question confront head-on, with no hesitation. All three women also exhibit remarkable determination in carrying out their intentions to the end: until the destruction of the perceived enemy, in the case of Kys's widow and Iaquinta, or even to the point of potential self-destruction, in the case of Cossara. Thus, the widow of the Hungarian prince isn't satisfied merely with capturing her husband's killers, but also subjects them to a brutal death; Iaquinta is not at ease merely with the imprisonment of her rivaling cousins, but only after they are slain. Cossara, on the other hand, threatens her father that if her wish to marry Vladimir is not fulfilled and another husband is imposed upon her, she would choose death instead. Lastly, it is noteworthy that, as evidenced by their successful attainment of objectives despite limited power at their disposal, all three women—Kys's widow, Cossara, and Iaquinta—are portrayed in the narrative as characters of remarkable creativity and intelligence, capable of finding solutions to challenging problems.⁴¹

Moreover, our analysis reveals that, beyond their common behavioral traits, these women also exhibit similarities with regard to the beneficiaries of their endeavors. Simply put, they undertake these daring tasks primarily to serve, benefit, or care for their male relatives. Specifically, Kys's widow acts to restore the honor of her late husband, Cossara intervenes to res-

⁴⁰ Among the speeches of male characters in the *GRS*, only Dobroslav's speech (*GRS* 142.15-19) demonstrates a similar intention to persuade. However, although Dobroslav successfully uses his eloquence to sway his addressees, the fruition of his efforts is not immediate but unfolds at a slower, more gradual pace.

⁴¹ In this respect, only Dobroslav, among the male characters, can be compared to the aforementioned women. He won a battle over a significantly more powerful enemy by using a creatively devised military tactic (*GRS* 146.18-148.6).

cue and protect her beloved, and to fulfill the final honors for him, while Iaquinta acts decisively to safeguard her sons' wealth and position. This condition can be compared to the two modes of women's behavior identified by Leonora Neville, which allowed women to exercise self-determination and take independent action in Byzantine society, or what she refers to as Medieval Roman society. The first mode involves women adjusting their behavior to closely resemble that of men, while the second mode refers to women achieving their goals by, conversely, exaggerating typically feminine traits, such as perceived weakness and emotional expressiveness.⁴² Taking into account the evidence presented by Neville, which shows that these modes of autonomous agency improved the well-being of the historical women concerned, it seems that the portrayal of female characters in the *GRS*, and thus the historical gendered norms underpinning them, presents a different picture. Specifically, apart from moments of independence, women in the *GRS* are not portrayed as enjoying any material or emotional benefits as a result of their actions. Consequently, when compared with the aforementioned modes of women's behavior in Byzantium, the societal condition depicted in the *GRS* text appears to be the least beneficial for women.

The question of whether this distinct feature of gender relations reflects the origins of the text or its sources, unaffected by Byzantine gendered social structures, remains one of several in this discussion left open and unresolved. However, it is posited—and this assumption should serve as the conclusion—that resolving this question, along with others, could significantly contribute to the debate surrounding the text's origins and authenticity.

Summary

To summarize, the narratives in the *GRS* depict some women as dynamic, eloquent, independent, resolute, and even as leaders. However, this portrayal comes with a caveat: their remarkable abilities are primarily shown in contexts that benefit men. These women, while depicted as capable, are not celebrated or socially recognized for their unique traits, nor do they receive wealth or affection. Consequently, their portrayal stops short of true empowerment, reflecting the male-dominated societal norms of the time.

Further illustrating these gender dynamics, the narrative never shows men expressing care or admiration for women's personalities, a stark contrast to how women are depicted in their attitudes towards men. Women's expressions of love, profound care, and concern for men's wellbeing and security are prominent, whereas male interactions with women primarily focus on admiration of their physical beauty.

⁴² L. Neville, *Byzantine Gender*, Leeds, 2019, 59-78.

Compounding this portrayal, a significant portion of the women and girls mentioned in the chronicle remain unnamed, a trend that aligns with what Marianne Sághy notes as a common pattern in Eastern and Central European medieval texts. Consequently, further research on gender roles and societal norms in the *GRS* narrative, conducted through comparative analysis with texts from diverse chronological, geographical, and linguistic backgrounds, could potentially elucidate the text's positioning within the broader spectrum of various European historiographies. Such an approach may unveil insights into whether the *GRS* more closely aligns with specific regional traditions, thereby enriching our understanding of its historical and cultural context.

Драгана КУНЧЕР

СВЕТ БЕЗ ЖЕНА: ПИТАЊА О ПОЛОЖАЈУ ЖЕНА У GESTA REGUM SCLAVORUM

Резиме

У раду се анализира латинска хроника *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, у науци позната као *Летопис пона Дукљанина*. Напомиње се да питања о положају жена нису била у жижи интересовања у студијама посвећеним *Gesta regum Sclavorum*. Пажњу су превасходно заузимала питања ауторства, односа различитих верзија, намена дела, време настанка, веродостојност садржаних података, језик којим је написана и слично. Осим тога, у последње време, значајно занимање истраживача заокупља питање аутентичности хронике. Рад је настао у намери да се овај пропуст надокнади.

Након детаљне анализе утврђено је да, у вези са схватањем и представом жена у *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, могу да се изнесу одређени закључци. Примећено је наиме да већина жена поменутих у делу није именована. Једино одређење ових жена је њихова родбинска веза са мушким чланом породице. Истакнуто је да је такав приступ одређењу жена особина средњовековних дела насталих у источној и централној Европи. Даље, примећено је да се у хроници жене помињу понајпре због своје улоге у рађању потомства. Најзад, истакнути су карактери три жене, Кишове удовице, Косаре и Јаквинте. Запажено је да оне делују самостално и одлучно, да поседују изузетну речитост и способност убеђивања, као и решеност да постигну задати циљ. Међутим, такође је запажено да ове три жене, које делују самостално, своје изузетне особине и енергију усмеравају како би допринеле својим мушким сродницима, мужевима или синовима. Напомиње се да је слична представа жена присутна у другим средњовековним делима, те се предлаже да се резултати радова који се баве историјом жена и рода уврсте у расправу о аутентичности *Gesta regum Sclavorum*.

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