In the previous chapter, we saw that the written sources did not provide reliable accounts of the Slav migrations in post-Roman western Illyricum, in particular Dalmatia. The bulk of activities connected with the migrating and raiding groups labelled Sclavenes (Sklavenoi, Sclaui, Sclauini, Sclavenes, etc.) in our sources were connected with the eastern parts of Illyricum, and only in a very few instances do they appear in Istria and on the Adriatic coast. It is also clear that the sources provided no evidence at all for the appearance and existence of Croat identity in the 7th century, as the accounts from the later period, such as those in the DAI, must be treated with extreme caution as historical evidence for this period. An additional problem with the written sources is that there was almost no mention of the region between the early 7th century and late 8th/early 9th centuries. The scholarship mostly assumed that the settlement of the Slavs in significant numbers took place in this period in Dalmatia and the Dalmatian hinterland, but no valid written evidence exists to confirm this assumption.

Curta, in his *Making of the Slavs*, made an important assumption. His basic idea was that Slavic identity did not have a cultural and historical continuity with antiquity and prehistory. According to him, the ‘Slavs’ did not come to the Balkan Peninsula from some defined ancient homeland, but rather their ‘Slavness’ was developed only in their interaction with the Eastern Roman *limes*, as a consequence of Justinian’s aggressive trans-Danubian policy. The people called ‘Slavs’ became ‘Slavs’ on the Danubian *limes*, not in the Pripet marshes. The elements of cultural *habitus* of the trans-Danubian population were visible inside the *limes*, maybe as early as the 5th century, but that does not mean that these elements reflected a ‘Slavness’, but rather showed cultural interaction and population movements in Late Antiquity. Curta

---

1 Curta 2001a. The Roman/Byzantine *limes* became an interface where new identities were constructed, Curta 2005a; cf. Elton 1996.
2 Trifunović 1997, see also earlier Janković and Janković 1990, or Janković 2004. The idea of a ‘Slav homeland’ in Pannonia and the Danubian plains was popular amongst post-WWII Serbian linguists, e.g. I. Popović 1959, but also in the work of other linguists, such as Trubačev 1985 or Nichols 1993, for example.
explained that the East Roman – Slav conflicts through the economic-social model of competition amongst existing trans-Danubian groups, which were the result of the inflation of the East Roman currency and the temporary interruption in monetary exchange with the Mediterranean world, visible in the archaeological evidence dated between 545 and 565. The social reaction to the change in economic circumstances was reflected through the rise of warrior elites who used war as their only way of gaining prestige objects, which were the basis of their political power and social identity. In short, Curta’s model argued that ‘Slav masses’ became ‘Slav’ only in their contact with the Roman frontier, and that the ‘masses’ was quantitatively much less numerous than previously thought, although the depopulation of some areas might have made their numbers more significant. Archaeological evidence for the demographic decline in 7th century eastern Illyricum confirmed it to be particularly serious, although it is highly unlikely that none of the population survived.

Curta was right when he emphasized that the beginning of the process of ‘becoming Slav’ should be seen in the context of the development of Justinian’s limes and the politisation of the cultural habitus of the trans-Danubian population. However, this process continued and resulted in the multiplicity of ‘Slavnesses’ which were constructed in the interaction with existing regional and political-ideological structures that these groups encountered and remained in contact with, such as the Byzantines, Franks, Bavarians etc. ‘Slavness’ remained a common denominator of these groups, a cultural stereotype which appeared in the perception of existing sources, but in reality, behind its monolithic structure, was hiding a multiplicity of ‘Slav’ identities in the early medieval period, some of which had very little in common with each other, except for sharing a similar language.

This radical reassessment of the nature of ‘Slav’ identity in the early medieval times allows us to approach the problems of identity-transformation in post-Roman Dalmatia from a different angle. The pre-Slavic population was not a factor which has been sufficiently taken into account in earlier research, and their narrative is sorely missing from the picture – “Instead they remained as another group

---

3 Curta 1996.
4 This model is similar to the model of ‘Celtic’ late Iron Age migrations in the 4th century BC, Fitzpatrick 1996; Wells 1999: 99 ff.
5 Curta 2001a: 120 ff. See also Živković 1997a; Liebeschuetz 2003: 71–5; Janković 2004 see pp. 75 and 159.