CHAPTER FIVE

STRATEGIES OF DISTINCTION IN THE WORK OF VINKO PRIBOJEVIĆ

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The people who once over the soil crawled, now over the stars tread
Under your guidance, o fluent language of a learned man

In the year 1525 on the island of Hvar, in front of a selected audience who represented the social and intellectual elite of this prosperous Adriatic community, the learned Dominican monk Vinko (or Vicko) Pribojević (Vincentius Priboevius) delivered an oration, “On the origin and the glory of the Slavs” (Oratio de origine successibusque Slavorum). Only a few years later, in 1532, embellished with praises

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1 “Quaeque prius repebat humi, gens sydera calcat / Vindice te, o docti lingua diserta uiri…”. From the poem of Dominic of Rab dedicated to Vinko Pribojević and published in the closing pages of the 1532 edition of the Oratio. See Vinko Pribojević, O podrijetlu i slavi Slavena [Concerning the origin and the glory of the Slavs] (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1997), 104.

2 In spite of the fact that there is an extensive body of literature on the work of Vinko Pribojević, the figure of this Dalmatian scholar remains even today surrounded by a veil of mystery. What we know about him is mainly based on what he himself has told us. Our knowledge about him can be summarized as follows. Pribojević was born on the island of Hvar around 1480. In 1511, we find him in Florence where he was appointed as magister studentium in the Dominican covenant of Sanctae Mariae Novellae. In the Oratio Pribojević styles himself magister of theology, but it is not known where he earned his academic title. The last piece of information known concerning his life is that prior to 1525 he made a prolonged visit to Cracow in Poland, where he familiarized himself with the works of Polish humanists. For more on Vinko Pribojević and his work, see Grga Novak, “Dalmacija i Hvar u prbojevićevu dobu” [Dalmatia and Hvar in the time of Vinko Pribojević], in Grga Novak, ed., O podrijetlu i zgodama Slavena [Concerning the origin and histories of the Slavs] (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1951), 1–21; Joško Kovač, “O podrijetlu Vicka Pribojevića” [Concerning the origin of Vicko Pribojević], Croatica Christitana Periodica 45 (2000): 207–11; Miroslav Kurelac,”Vinko Pribojević i njegovo djelo” [Vinko Pribojević and his work], in Vinko Pribojević, O podrijetlu i slavi Slavena (Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 1997), 9–32; Alois Schmaus, “Vincentius Priboevius, ein Vorläufer des Panslavismus,” Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, 3 (1953): 243–254.
and poems by other Dalmatian humanists, Pribojević’s oration was published for the first time. As such, the *Oratio* was among the earliest of its kind in Dalmatian/Croatian historiography. It abandoned the use of medieval forms of the chronicle or annals, and was instead inspired by the revival of antiquity and the art of rhetoric. Furthermore, it encompassed both a time-span and a territorial scope previously unknown in Dalmatian historiography.

But most important of all, Pribojević’s *Oratio* promoted a new model of Dalmatian patriotism, one that was consciously built on the Slavic character of sixteenth century Dalmatia. In the opening part of his speech Pribojević stated: “But, because I have, as a Dalmatian, and therefore as an Illyrian and finally as a Slav, decided to give a speech about the destiny of the Slavs in front of Slavs, I shall speak in the first place of the origin and the glory of the Slavs (*Slauonici generis*) and their name, and then about the history of Dalmatia, which is an important part of Slavdom…” This simple sentence concisely sums up the new way in which this Dalmatian humanist perceived himself and his community. Differently to the medieval Dalmatian historiographical tradition that associated Slavs with Goths, and promoted the Latin-Roman character of Dalmatian towns, Pribojević strongly emphasized Dalmatian distinctiveness through their Slavic identity.4

3 Pribojević, *O podrijetlu i slavi Slavena*, 56.
4 Two influential works of medieval Dalmatian historiography that made this association between Goths and Slavs were Thomas the Archdeacon’s thirteenth-century *Historia Salonitana*, and an immensely problematic text known in Croatian historiography as the “Chronicle of the Dioclean priest.” This misunderstanding is a product of a fusion of two historical events, the Gothic invasion of the fifth century and the Slavic migration of the sixth and seventh centuries. Indeed, this tradition was not without its advocates among Dalmatian humanists even in Pribojević’s time, as the case of Ragusan humanist Ludovik Crijević Tuberon (Ludovicus de Cierva, Tubero, 1459–1527) shows. Tuberon in his “Comments on my Epoch” (*Comentaria suorum temporum*), which was a history of contemporary events in the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom covering the period from 1490 until 1522, decided to follow this Roman-Latin historiographical tradition and associated the Slavs with the Goths, claiming a Dalmatian-Latin (Roman) heritage both for his home town of Ragusa and for Dalmatia in general. For more on this subject, see Ferdo Šišić, *Letopis popa Dukljana* [Chronicle of the Dioclean priest] (Belgrade: Srpksa Kraljevska Akademija, 1928); Toma Arhidakon, *Kronika: Splitski rukopis* [Chronicle: Split manuscript], trans. Vladimir Rismondo (Split: Čakavski Sabor, 1977), English translation: Thomae archidiaconi Spalatensis…/Archdeacon Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*, ed. Damir Karbic et al., CEMT, 4 (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006); and Eduard Perićić, *Sclavorum regnum Grgura Barskog* [The Sclavorum regnum of Grgrur of Bar] (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1991). A short summary of the problems concerning the Chronicle in English can be found in Zdenko Zlatar, *Our Kingdom Come*:...