What country, friends, is this?¹

“Where there is no illusion there is no Illyria”—thus did Oscar Wilde characterize Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* in a famous theatrical review,² and he probably had no idea how well he grasped the essence of both early modern Illyrian discourse and modern, romantic Illyrism. In step with the gradual advance of the Ottoman power in the Balkans the one-time Illyria becomes in the early modern era the uncertainly defined homeland of national illusions and imperial hopes: it is a land where nothing and no one is what it seems to be, where notions of the glorious past and day-dreams about political utopias partly or entirely overlap, and reality is hardly distinguishable from the colorful weave of imagination. In the following, I will write about the early 18th-century encounter between two scholars who tried to map the dreams and to probe the boundaries in which the long-ago vanished (or perhaps never existing) virtual *patriae* could become inhabitable in reality—real *patriae* for imagined communities. What makes the encounter and the conversation significant is the special nature of the situation. If a patriotic discourse comes into existence and one of its forms solidifies in a legitimized, accepted way, it is usually the result of a collective negotiating process centered around identity, and apart from creating a “language” in a wider sense (national *topoi*, a sense of origin and ancestry, common symbols), it also establishes its own

¹ *Twelfth Night or What You Will*, Act I, Scene 2.
institutions or tailors existing borders to the new ideas. However, in the times following the peace treaty of Karlowitz (1699) which put an end to the Ottoman wars of the 17th century, the southern borderlands of the Habsburg state can be considered as a fascinating laboratory where elite intellectuals tried to come to an agreement about the frames of the would-be collective discourse: what and who should be the communities that would (perhaps) create their own patriotic discourse, where should they live, what language should they speak.

The protagonists of my case study are Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli (1658–1730) and Pavao Ritter Vitezović (1652–1713). Marsigli, who originated from Bologna, served Leopold I with genuine dedication, both as a soldier and a versatile scholar. From the 1680s onwards he traveled repeatedly across the Ottoman-Hungarian theater of war and served as member of a diplomatic mission in Constantinople. With the aim to finalize the country borders that had been only roughly drafted in the treaty of Karlowitz he toured and surveyed the southern borderlands from Dalmatia to Transylvania between 1699 and 1701 as *commissarius plenipotentiarius* of the Habsburg ruler, continuously negotiating with the commissioners of the Ottoman Empire (and for a while, those of the Serenissima). He sent to the Viennese government thirty-six richly illustrated reports of the results of his activities in carrying out diplomatic research—material which he later used for

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