Introduction

In 1839 Matija Mažuranić (1817–1881), a twenty-two-year-old Croat from Novi (Vindolinski), embarked on a journey from his country, which was then a part of the Habsburg Empire, to the Ottoman province of Bosnia. There he stayed less than two months and then proceeded to Serbia. A year later, upon his return home, he told his elder brothers what he has seen and experienced there, and let them read his journal. They persuaded him to shape those records and observations into a coherent text. Published anonymously in 1842, under the title “Pogled u Bosnu ili Kratak put u onu Krajinu učinjen 1839–40. po Jednom Domorodcu” (A look at Bosnia or a short journey to that province undertaken by a native in 1839–40), it became the first integral travelogue in Croatian literature.1 It consists of the Foreword; Part I: “A journey to Bosnia and back”; Part II: “Diverse comments on Bosnia”; and finally, a glossary entitled “A handful of Turkish barbarisms”. The language and literary value of that work, which is a true example of romantic literature, was lauded by many authors from its very publication. Apart from its treatment as a literary text, it was read, and still is, as a reliable historical source giving insight into the situation in Bosnia at that time, and not infrequently as a “mirror”. That later approach to Mažuranić’s travelogue induced us to question some of the author’s observations and to try to determine the factors which operated in the process of shaping his impressions of Bosnian society. In this article, which is a kind of introduction to an investigation of Croatian views of nineteenth-century Bosnia, we will also touch upon some of today’s readings of that travelogue, which clearly

demonstrate the persistence of some stereotypes of Ottoman Bosnia among Croatian intellectuals.

**Background and motivation**

In order to understand what motivated young Mažuranić to embark on his journey, a few words should be said about his background and the political trends in Croatia at the time. Our traveller was a member of a renowned family that produced a number of prominent politicians and intellectuals. One of his elder brothers, Ivan, was a Croatian poet and vice-roy (Ban), and the other, Antun, was a linguist, writer and teacher. Matija Mažuranić himself did not have a solid formal education; he was a blacksmith and a carpenter.

Croatian political life at the time of his journey was strongly marked by the activities of the Illyrian movement of national revival, with Ljudevit Gaj as its leader, and the Mažuranić brothers as its fervent adherents. The movement called for the overcoming of Croatian regional particularities and for the cultural union of all South Slavs (who were considered descendants of the Illyrians, hence the movement’s name). Bosnia was seen as a part of that Illyrian area, and its liberation from Ottoman rule was one of Gaj’s main preoccupations. He warned of the danger that the Hungarians could occupy the province after the Ottoman’s retreat, and asked the Russians for weapons and material support for the rebellion. He organized a network of agents and spies in Bosnia and helped Bosnian refugees in Croatia. The members of the Illyrian movement were intensively discussing the determination of Bosnia’s Catholic and Orthodox inhabitants to rise up in arms.² In the year 1840 Gaj was even accused of sending to Bosnia instigators who roused people to rebellion by means of propaganda and money.³

The importance of the Bosnian issue to the Illyrian movement suggests that Mažuranić did not head for that country as a mere adventurer, even though his travelogue shows that the journey was not lacking in adventures. His aim was to inquire “into the state of that part of our Illyria”,⁴ to estimate what could be done for “the national cause”, and

³ Ibid., pp. 29–30.
⁴ M. Mažuranić, Pogled u Bosnu, Zagreb 1938, p. XIV.