

Bad Byzantines: A Historical Narrative in the Liberal Conception of Vladimir Jovanović*

When, on St Andrew's Day in 1858¹, the people of the semi-autonomous principality of Serbia came together in the national assembly (the *Skupština*), several Western-educated minds formed a united front to encourage liberalism, the protection of civil rights and the elevation of this body to the status of a constitutional parliament. Among this first generation of Serbs to have been educated abroad on scholarships was one exceptional mind who thought that with the introduction of liberalism, which he took to be »the idea of national liberty and independence«², economic and social change in Serbia could be induced to unite the nation and raise it to Western standards of civilization as a purpose to liberate it from foreign – meaning Russian, Ottoman and Hapsburg – influence.

This person was Vladimir Jovanović, born in 1833 in Šabac, educated at both the Agricultural Academy at Altenburg (Mósonmagyaróvár) and the Württemberg Royal Agricultural and Forestry Academy in Hohenheim³ (fig. 1). To implement his liberal conception, he had to prove that Serbia possessed the same or similar structures and institutions as Western countries, which could be cultivated to establish and internalise his liberal ideas. To this end, he tried to legitimize a genuinely Serbian democratic tradition by constructing a historical narrative in which the Byzantines had imposed their monarchical system on Serbian »grassroots democratic forms« like the *Skupština*, *pobratimstvo* (brotherhood)⁴ and the *zadruga* (a form of extended tribal family)⁵.

Interestingly enough, the development of this theory of history was facilitated by the first failure of the liberal movement in Serbia: After Jevrem Grujić and Stevča Mihailović, two other outstanding Serbian liberals, had successfully orchestrated the fall of the Ustavobranitelj and Prince Alexander

Karađorđević in 1858, and established the principle of periodic meetings of the *Skupština* with elected representatives⁶, Miloš Obrenović, who had already ruled between 1815 and 1838, returned to power with quite a different agenda for the future of Serbia. After returning from exile, he used the Assembly's decision to replace councilors and ministers to »cleanse« the country of all people he deemed unfit to serve under his despotic autocracy. Ironically, this hurt the liberals the most, although this act of »wholesale housecleaning«⁷ had been their own idea. Hence, instead of laying the first stepping stone towards a liberal future, they almost dug their own early graves.

Vladimir Jovanović, who had initially gained Miloš's trust to run the influential newspaper *Srpske Novine* – which acted as a political mouthpiece of the prince at the time – was expatriated by his former sponsor due to his connections with »all kinds of troublemakers«⁸. For Jovanović, this was further evidence that it was too soon to implement »liberalism« in Serbia, because in his view, stemming from the nations »Byzantine heritage«, the principality, its institutions and people, lacked the democratic political and social capital to do so.

While other liberals like Milovan Janković fled to Russia, Jovanović moved to England, where he first came into contact with both the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and prominent expatriates from other countries, as well as distinguished English politicians and thinkers of the time⁹. Three years later, after the death of Miloš Obrenović, the political climate changed again with the enthronement of his son Mihailo: Although, contrary to liberal principles, he intended to rule Serbia like a central European autocracy, he was recognized as the »only legitimate source of political authority« by some

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1 For the St Andrew's Day Assembly see Sundhaussen, *Serbien* 129. – Stokes, *Legitimacy* 18-22. – Jelavich/Jelavich, *Establishment* 62. – Pavlowitch, *Serbia* 44. 49. – Bataković, *French influence* 101-102.
2 Jovanović, *Serbian Nation* 1. On Jovanović's »liberalism« see also Milosavljević, *Vladimir and Slobodan* 134-138. Cf. Mishkova, *Balkan Liberalisms* for a more general view of contemporary Balkan liberalism in the 19th century.

3 Stokes, *Legitimacy* 12.

4 Cf. Jovanović, *Serbian Nation* 12: »[...] a sacred union between Serbs of different families, founded upon a resolution of reciprocal self-sacrifice, and sanctioned by an oath [...]«. Cf. Irby, *Putovanje* 483.

5 His interpretation of this patriarchal institution is best explained by himself in Jovanović, »Über Bosnien« (About Bosnia), an unpublished manuscript in the Historical Archive of Belgrade: »Als eine uralte südslawische Sitte hat sich [...] auch die sog. Zadruga, oder die Hauskommunion, noch heutzutage erhalten. Die Zadruga besteht in der Regel aus einer Anzahl von Blutsverwandten, welche mit ihren Nachkommen in Gütergemeinschaft unter einem freigewählten Starešina (Oberhaupt) in einem Hause leben«. Cf. from today's perspective Naimović/Pavković, *Historische Anthropologie* 107-109.

6 Sundhaussen, *Serbien* 126.

7 MacKenzie, *Ilija Garašanin* 221.

8 Stokes, *Legitimacy* 31.

9 Cf. *Ibidem* 30-31.



Fig. 1 Vladimir Jovanović. – (After Stipčević, Material 121).

liberals, including Jevrem Grujić and Vladimir Jovanović¹⁰. While other liberals, headed by Milovan Janković, went into full opposition to the new prince, Jovanović's group decided to win the ruler for their own purposes by presenting themselves as »dutiful members of the civil service«, although they disagreed with his style of regency¹¹. In that capacity, Vladimir Jovanović was sent to England again, this time as a special envoy to help resolve the diplomatic crisis of 1862.

Mihailo's approach of introducing reforms without the approval of the Sublime Porte had led to the Ottoman bombardment of Belgrade¹², to which the prince reacted by mobilising the newly-formed national militia. It was Jovanović's task to win over the English public and its leading politicians to intervene at the Porte on behalf of the Serbian cause. As a »private propagandist«¹³, he tried various ways to fulfill this task: First he succeeded in obtaining an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury for the new Metropolitan of Belgrade, who was to have promoted the cause of the Balkan Christians if Prince Mihailo had let him go.

Second and more effective, Jovanović, together with Mihailo's wife Julia and Filip Hristić, the former prime minister, who were dispatched by the prince instead of the clergyman, incited a parliamentary debate on the Eastern Question in which at least some better-known politicians spoke in favour of the Serbian cause, which now also included the possibility of full independence. But the English government, even though at that time led by Lord Palmerston as prime minister and William Gladstone, could not be persuaded¹⁴. Although the diplomatic effort went awry, the trip was a great personal success for Jovanović, who established and defended a foreign policy which he would pursue for most of his active political career:

On 14 March 1863, a little pamphlet appeared entitled »The Serbian Nation and the Eastern Question«, consisting of only 46 pages. In it, Jovanović laid out his fundamental outlook on Serbian history and politics to prove that »constitutionalism and representative government were a part of the Serbian past«¹⁵ and to »demonstrate the ability of the Serbian nation for an intimate union with its liberal brethren, by proof drawn from history and from the political life of the Serbian people«¹⁶.

Starting with a concept of history that harked back to the time long ago when the Serbs had moved from »White Serbia« to the Balkans »in the grey dawn of time« before they were converted to Christianity, Jovanović outlines a glorious Serbian past which would become tainted by Byzantine autocracy and would eventually succumb to the allure of its sumptuousness. But first Byzantium is introduced as both benefactor and beneficiary of the Serbian arrival in the Balkans: Emperor Heraclius (610-641) rewarded the newcomers with territory for their help against the Avars, »which [had] devastated these regions of his empire«¹⁷. Thus, the Serbs had settled »on the soil of the Byzantine Empire [and] acknowledged the supremacy of the Emperor of the East«¹⁸. In this narrative they were able to re-establish their independent national government with Heraclius's death in 641, but the »first germs of the monarchical form of government, as it existed at Byzantium«¹⁹ had infested the originally democratic structures of the Serbian nation.

According to Jovanović, the Great Župans – originally elected as a kind of president of a democratic National Assembly, which in turn was formed of freely elected chiefs of the Serbian tribes and leaders in times of war – had accumulated all political power in peacetime. Initially, they used it in accordance with the »general will of the nation«²⁰, but after they accepted the faith of Christ, these Great Župans, in contrast to the lower Župans and *Bans*, yielded to the influence of the neighbouring courts of Greece and Bulgaria.

10 Stokes, Legitimacy 42.

11 Ibidem 44.

12 For a contemporary account see Ubicini, le bombardement 6-19.

13 Stokes, Legitimacy 54.

14 Ibidem 55.

15 Ibidem 52.

16 Jovanović, Serbian Nation 2.

17 Ibidem 3.

18 Ibidem 4.

19 Ibidem.

20 Ibidem 5.

While the latter is mentioned as the first machinator of foreign intrigues that had inspired the Great Župans to »neglect the interest of the people and separate themselves from the national cause«²¹, Byzantium was the final puppeteer, who lurked in the shadows behind both thrones and waited for both to become exhausted. Thus Serbia became, at least from the point of view of Jovanović – who again tried to provide historical legitimisation to the Serbian nation on the cusp of its political maturity and transformation – patient zero of the plague called »Byzantine supremacy«, which became terminal in the early tenth century.

According to Jovanović, the Serbs thereupon regained national independence under the heroic Voyslav²² in the 11th century, but true unity was only achieved under the rule of Stefan Nemanja, who »relieved the country from the presence of foreign enemies by the capture of several fortresses from the Byzantine empire«²³.

However, Jovanović omitted the fact that these fortresses were regained not much later by Isaac II Angelos and that Nemanja, although under rather fortunate circumstances, had to renew his oath of fealty to the Byzantine emperor²⁴. In the historical construct of the Serbian liberal, who employed a *locus communis* of contemporary national historiography, Nemanja's descendants completed the first independent Serbian empire starting with Stefan the First-Crowned and culminating in Czar Stefan Dušan as the apex predator to the Byzantine rule in a »golden age« of Serbian statehood²⁵. Quoting the English translation of Ranke's *Serbische Revolution*, which had been published in London in 1853²⁶, to show the extent of Dušan's rule, Jovanović agreed with Ranke on the terms of Dušan's crown:

»As a Serbian kralj (king), Dooshan could neither ask nor expect the obedience of the Greeks; therefore he called himself Emperor of the Roumelians – the Macedonian Christ-loving Czar – and began to wear the tiara«²⁷.

He ended this narrative stating that the Serbian Empire had been »reduced to a small despotic state«, because of Byzantium's »thirst of conquest [...] at the expense of the neighbouring countries«²⁸. Ultimately, it had been the revenge of the Byzantines on the Serbs, who had dared to offer resistance, that drove John Cantacuzenos to invite the Ottomans to the Balkans. Analysing his own construct, Jova-

nović ultimately blamed the fall of the Serbian Empire on the »Byzantine System« that had been introduced into Serbian structures. Even Stefan Dušan, the seemingly infallible czar, had erred by imposing »government decentralisation«²⁹.

Both these measures had allowed the now empowered *Vojvodas* and a newly emerged class of nobles to indulge in quarrels among each other rather than protecting the country from foreign influence and direct attacks. Jovanović further argued, following another ideological topos commonly employed by national historiography, that despite the fall of the Serbian state, the national spirit remained unbroken and lived on in two entities: On the one hand the Montenegrins, as »the flower of the Serbian heroes«, had endured Turkish siege like martyrs for over 400 years and therefore could not adopt the results of European progress, but at least preserved »excellent qualities of their national character«³⁰. The other still living part of Serbia was that part of the population which had migrated to Austria in 1690. But their first attempts at national literature and national intentions were hindered by an »anti-liberal« policy of the House of Hapsburg. According to Jovanović, they had it worse than the Montenegrins because the machinations of the »Ballhausplatz« had left them undefended after they fought the Ottomans on the Hapsburg side³¹. The Serbs within the Pašalik survived by dint of their »hope in God«. Again it had been »the Serbian cloisters, isolated in the depths of forests and in the gorges of the mountains, [that] contained both religious and political altars«³².

With their successful rebellion against the Ottomans at the dawn of the 19th century, the Serbs achieved the re-establishment of »their original form of self-government«, meaning the National Assembly, which elected Karageorge as supreme leader as well as further deputies and in short »exercised all the rights of a sovereign nation«³³. But it all went downhill, according to Jovanović, when these »leaders« had to look to Russia for help due to Napoleon's agitation in Europe. With the treaty of Bucharest of 1812, the Russians had imposed an alien kind of government on the Serbs: the *Sovjet*, where only a few *Sovjetniks* started to form parties favouring or disfavouring the role of Karageorge and his actions. Like the *Vojvodas* in the past influenced by the Byzantines, the *Sovjetniks* of his time, swayed by the Russians, quarrelled with each other instead of working together to build a nation³⁴.

21 Ibidem.

22 As to Stephan Vojislav cf. Obolensky, Byzantine Commonwealth 220. – Ćirković, The Serbs 24-25.

23 Jovanović, Serbian Nation 6. – Ostrogorsky, Geschichte 329 shares a similar view.

24 Ćirković, the Serbs 32. – Stephenson, Balkan Borderlands 688. – Obolensky, Byzantine Commonwealth 221-222: Nemanja had been defeated before by Manuel I Komnenos in 1172 who forced him to participate in his triumphant entry into Constantinople after he had to perform an »Unterwerfungsgeste« barefoot and empty-handed, before the emperor. Now, with Isaac II, Nemanja, apart from the fact he had to return the conquered cities, he retained extensive autonomy.

25 There is much to be said for this interpretation, see Fine Jr., Late Medieval Balkans 286-344. See also Stephenson, Balkan Frontier 289-270 for the depiction of the Serbian Grand Župan in Byzantine literary works: »The Serbian veliki

župan is portrayed consistently as the emperor's counterpoint: the vanquished to his victor; the shade to his light; the coward to his hero. However, the central motif of all portraits, literary and graphic, is that of the veliki župan as the emperor's doulos, his political subordinate in the hierarchy of rulers«.

26 Ranke, History of Servia.

27 Ibidem 10-11. – Jovanović, Serbian Nation 7.

28 Jovanović, Serbian Nation 7.

29 Ibidem 8.

30 Ibidem 10. Cf. the subsection on »The Violent Balkan Highlands« in Anzulović, Heavenly Serbia 45-50.

31 Jovanović, Serbian Nation 11.

32 Ibidem.

33 Ibidem 14.

34 Ibidem 15.

So while the Serbian people had every disposition to adopt liberalism, it held true that, whether in the glorified past of the medieval state or in the present time of Vladimir Jovanović:

»Whenever [...] they were directed by foreign influence, or when the home government assumed despotic power, this people have remained stationary, and sometimes even retrograded«³⁵.

In historicizing the nation itself, which had preserved its democratic potential into the modern age of his own time, Jovanović could rationalize the liberal option for Serbia, its perception from outside as a »lowermost«³⁶ country in »Turkey-in-Europe«³⁷ notwithstanding. But ultimately, through Bucharest, Serbian autonomy was not achieved by Serbia's own diplomatic efforts or by a free elected National Assembly, but constructed in Constantinople with the aid of the Russians.

Evidently, Jovanović spins a broad narrative connecting »historical« events and processes to argue why the Serbs were, in fact, able to develop and adapt liberal structures but were hampered by external circumstances. In doing so, he twists the role Byzantium played for the Serbian people in the Middle Ages. The other side of the relationship between Stefan Nemanja and Emperor Isaac II Angelos has already been mentioned, but not only in this respect does Jovanović deviate from what we know today from the sources. While Jovanović situates the beginning of Serbian independence in the Middle Ages, culminating in the reign of Stefan Dušan, it rather marked the occasion which initiated the final merging of the Serbian state with the Byzantine political and cultural commonwealth.

The first alliance marriage was already forged after the clash of the aforementioned rulers: Stefan Nemanjić – the son of Stefan Nemanja – was married off to Eudokia Angelina, the niece of Isaac II and daughter of Alexios III Comnenos³⁸. A few years later, the same Stefan, now the »First-Crowned« king, held the title of *Sebastokrator*, which leads to Obolensky's judgement that »this title, no less than the marriage alliance, symbolised Serbia's incorporation [...] into the Byzantine Commonwealth«³⁹. Stefan Radoslav, born of the marriage of Stefan the First-Crowned and Eudokia, married

the daughter of Theodore I Angelos, prince of Epirus⁴⁰, and deepened integration into the Byzantine commonwealth by founding further monasteries⁴¹ and imitating the Byzantine regal style⁴². Stefan Uroš II Milutin married the purple-born daughter of Andronikos II Palaiologos (1282-1328)⁴³. He already had adopted the byzantine system of *pronoia*⁴⁴ and under his rule, the court ceremonial of Constantinople found its way into the regal performance of the Nemanjid dynasty⁴⁵.

It should be noted that such cultural transfer was limited to the »high culture« of the court as well as that of the cities along the most important trade and communication routes⁴⁶. Great parts of the general population remained at first unaffected, but because of the »monastic, hagiolatric, iconodul and canonic aspect of its Christianity«⁴⁷, the cultural substance of Byzantium was able to penetrate and synchronize the every daylife in the Serbian territory to the heartland of the Byzantine Empire. In the words of the late Ihor Ševčenko:

»Thus while the most sophisticated products of Byzantine literature were never translated into medieval Slavic, the Bulgarian words for onions [*kromid*] and cabbage [*lahana*] and the Serbian expression for fried eggs [*tiganisana jaja*] have been taken over from Greek«⁴⁸.

If we can speak today, after many decades of systematic Byzantine studies, of a genuine Byzantine-Serbian synthesis in the Middle Ages and the incorporation of the latter into the commonwealth of the former, how and where did Vladimir Jovanović obtain the »knowledge« to construct the narrative of the »Bad Byzantines« decades before the first impartial and scientific Byzantine studies in Germany and France?

Gale Stokes has already shown that Jovanović was heavily inspired by John Stuart Mill⁴⁹ when it comes to his liberal body of thought. And in fact, Mill mentions the Byzantine Empire in a less positive way in his 1859 treatise »On Liberty«, when he talks about the possibility that even great ideas and practices might fail, »as in the Byzantine Empire«⁵⁰. But first, this is not enough to inspire or even buttress Jovanović's view, and second, he had not absorbed Mill's liberal ideas directly but through »continental sources«⁵¹, especially Frédéric Bastiat⁵², Wilhem Roscher and Karl Rau. The son of the latter was Jovanović's favourite professor at Hohenheim⁵³, and the most

35 Jovanović, *Serbian Nation* 13.

36 For »lowermost« as a term see Turner, *Dramas, Fields Metaphors* 237.

37 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* 18-19.

38 Ćirković, *the Serbs* 32-33. – Fine Jr., *Late Medieval Balkans* 26.

39 Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth* 222.

40 Ducellier, *Balkan Powers* 785.

41 Stefan Nemanja had already founded Studenica. The Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos was initiated by his son Rastko/Sava. Cf. Podskalsky, *Theologisches Literatur* 87.

42 Kämpfer, *Herrscher, Stifter, Heiliger* 431-433.

43 See Reinert, *Fragmentation* 260 for the context.

44 A *pronoia* was a grant that »temporarily transferred imperial fiscal rights to an individual or institution«. Originally neither transferable nor hereditary, this changed after the reconquest of Constantinople in 1261, which aligned the Byzantine Empire more closely to the western feudal states. Cf. Kazhdan/Podskalsky, *Pronoia*. – Bartusis, *Pronoia*.

45 Ducellier, *Balkan Powers* 801. – Ostrogorsky, *Problèmes*. – Anzulović, *Heavenly Serbia* 21.

46 Above all, the *Via militaris* should be mentioned, which linked Belgrade to Constantinople via Niš and Sofia. Its significance was already emphasised by Constantin Jireček in 1877. Cf. Jireček, *Heerestraße*. Equally important for the Balkans were the *Via Egnatia* and the path along the Danube *limes*. Cf. Lolos, *Via Egnatia*. – Werner, *Via Egnatia*.

47 Vryonis, *Byzantine Legacy* 258.

48 Ševčenko, *Byzantium and the Slavs* 299.

49 Stokes, *Legitimacy* 31.

50 Mill, *On Liberty* 116.

51 Stokes, *Legitimacy* 31.

52 Here we should mention that Bastiat worked with Adam Smith's ideas on »harmony« and that the »idea of social harmony« appealed to Serbs because of the Orthodox church and their kinship loyalty. »One of the underlying concepts of Orthodoxy is harmony and community«. Cf. Stokes, *Legitimacy* 40.

53 Stokes, *Legitimacy* 36.

important political economists in Belgrade in the 1850s, like Milan Janković, had been students of Rau himself⁵⁴. No, for his concept taken as a whole Jovanović transferred a theory of English history onto the local Serbian narrative, a theory which had already been adapted a few years earlier by Alexander Herzen for Russia. In the original Whig interpretation, it had been the »Norman yoke« that stifled English progress, while Herzen blamed a wide range of alien people like »the Mongols, [and] the Polish-Lithuanians« as well as »the imported Byzantine autocracy and a German bureaucracy«⁵⁵.

Also, the negative stereotype of the Byzantine Empire in this concept reverberates too strongly with the »Byzantinism« of that time in Western Europe not to assume an influence of this notion on Jovanović. As Dimitar Angelov defines it, this »essentialist and negative understanding of a medieval civilisation [...]« emanated from a medieval set of negative stereotypes about Byzantium and a reductionist view of the Empire on the part of the Enlightenment⁵⁶. Scholars like Herder, Voltaire and Hegel, following a tidal Enlightenment wave of seeing »Byzantinism« as a negative European other, passed hard judgment on Byzantium as the »crippled other« in the cultural construct of Europe, with no signs of »progress of human spirit«, which permeated even Mill's discourses as shown above⁵⁷. Furthermore, Hegelian philosophy was well-known and discussed in Jovanović's liberal environment before he made contact with the now »popular construct [of Byzantinism] widely used by journalists and politicians« in Germany and England⁵⁸, as shown by articles in the *Srbske Novine* and textbooks, the first of them already published in 1851⁵⁹.

Moreover, the dismissive conclusion of Gibbon – apparently the »Karl May« of Byzantine historiography⁶⁰, which became the main historical paradigm on Byzantium in the 18th century and beyond, had already infiltrated the thinking of Serbian intellectuals and nation-builders from the get-go by reading Johann Christian von Engel's *History of Servia and Bosnia* from 1801 onwards. The simplistic portrayal of Byzantium as an outdated ideology of imperialism and expansionism was even used in 1844 by Ilija Garašanin in his *Načertanije* to create a construct of political and imperial weakness

that should have been ousted by the Serbian Empire⁶¹. Thus Jovanović's claim that the ideas of liberalism, national unity and liberty were inherent to the Serbian people fell onto fertile ground⁶². Supported by »historical«, para-scientific arguments he succeeded in instilling the idea that the liberals represented the nation. With it, they managed to legitimise their political position and grew even stronger to the point in 1869 when they, after the assassination of Mihailo Obrenović, were seen as influential enough to be considered for a role in the new regency⁶³.

Meanwhile, Jovanović had to support and steer the movement from abroad, because – after a short stint as a professor at the Velika Škola – he was exiled again in 1864 due to repercussions after a failed assassination attempt on Napoleon III. He settled in Novi Sad, then in Austria, where he followed a Ciceronian path and repeatedly committed his liberal ideology to paper. In 1870 he elaborated and finalised his narrative both in »Osnovi Snage i veličine Srbske« (»The Foundations of Serbian Strength and Greatness«) and »Les Serbes et la mission de la Serbie dans l'Europe d'Orient«:

Pavel Josef Šafárik, a Slovak philologist and historian, replaced Leopold von Ranke as the leading authority on early Serbian history and with him Konstantin VII Porphyrogenetos was exploited for leads on the Serbian antiquity⁶⁴. Jovanović also struck out on a new path in his view on liberalism, now taking a view more Hobbesian than Hegelian⁶⁵. But essentially, the pattern of using Byzantium as an argument for the suffocation of the Serbian liberal and democratic progress remained the same⁶⁶. What was new was the altered self-perception of the Serbs in Jovanović's view. Now, only the inhabitants of Bosnia, Hercegovina and Metohija were still considered the »Serbs of Turkey«, who had to be freed by the Principality of Serbia as the most suited and natural heir, alongside Greece, to the crumbling and collapsing Ottoman Empire⁶⁷. But to achieve that the Serbs had to shake off the Byzantine system that had been imposed upon them, which had divided the Serbs into social classes and estranged them from their fundamentally democratic spirit. Although he again claimed that the Serbian institutions of his day were unfree because they too were in thrall to foreign influences,

54 Ibidem 35. It seems that he even inspired Petar Karadjordjević to translate »On Liberty« into Serbian in 1868. Interestingly, Jovanović himself translated and published Mill's »Considerations on Representative Government« only in 1876. Cf. Pantelić, Mill in Serbia 86; 88.

55 Stokes, Legitimacy through Liberalism 57-58. – Malia, Alexander Herzen 399-400.

56 Angelov, Byzantinism 6.

57 Ibidem 7-8.

58 Ibidem 11.

59 Dimitrije Matić, a relative of Jovanović and later minister of education and justice was a pupil of Karl Ludwig Michelet, see Milosavljević, Vladimir and Slobodan 134 n. 10. In 1851 Kosta Cukić, another influential liberal and pupil of Rau, translated the lessons of his teacher into Serbian. See Stokes, Legitimacy 35 with n. 4.

After the liberals gained control of the »Society of Serbian Letters«, they also used its *Glasnik* as a platform for the distribution of liberal thought. Cf. Stokes, Legitimacy 49-50. Among those was a »short overview on Hegelian philosophy«, published in 1863 by Alimpije Vasiljević. Cf. Vasiljević, Hegelian Philosophy.

60 Like the well-known Germany author of adventure novels, Gibbon has never been to the scenes of his topics he described. Cf. Marciniak, Oriental as Byzantium in this volume.

61 Stokes, Legitimacy 50.

62 Even the curriculum of the reformed Velika Škola in Belgrade shows that in 1867, not the »history of Byzantium« but »Byzantinism« was taught: Alongside such topics as the »change of the imperial position towards the Serbs and the South Slavs« or the »shift in the condition of the state after the iconoclasm« there were lectures on »corruption, absence of patriotism and the political fate of the Byzantine empire« or »adventurous trades and skullduggery« (AS, VŠ 1867, 10). It was composed by Panta S. Srećković.

63 Cf. Sundhaussen, Serbien 130.

64 Jovanović, Les Serbes 8-10.

65 Milosavljević, Vladimir and Slobodan 135 n. 11.

66 Jovanović, Osnove Snage 26. – Jovanović, Les Serbes 11-12. 22.

67 Jovanović, Les Serbes 263.

Jovanović had become more positive. He now believed that the same institutions – the constitutional monarchy with its centralized bodies – had the power »to achieve the goal which the general progress of civilisation and humanity tells them to achieve«⁶⁸.

Hence, two decades before Panta Srećković appeared to have launched the Serbo-Byzantine-historiographical Discourse, which gave a positive assessment of medieval Serbia as »the heir to the then culturally decayed and politically deteriorated Byzantium«⁶⁹ that had preserved its cultural, political and material accomplishments, Vladimir Jovanović already employed a diverging topos with a slightly different assessment of the distribution of power between Serbia and Byzantium.

While the subsequent historians of the late 19th and early 20th century considered the whole political entity of Serbia as the vivid and strong parvenu that would sooner rather than later have succeeded the Byzantine Empire but for the Ottomans, Jovanović declared the Serbs of the Middle Ages to have been »weaker than the Turks« – a result of the introduction of the Byzantine System into Serbia⁷⁰. Whereas Garašanin utilised the competition between a strong Serbia and a deteriorating Byzantium to legitimise his imperialist concept of irredentist expansionism against the Ottomans, Jovanović acknowledged that there was a weak part of a strong Serbia, which had, in fact, all assets for liberal nation-building had not the Byzantines grafted their monarchic system onto Serbian institutions by manipulating the emergent political elite. From Jovanović's point of view, their modern equivalent, the first generation of Serbian politicians and nation-builders (to which Garašanin belonged), perpetuated this deficiency by submitting to Ottoman, Russian or Hapsburg dominance⁷¹. The weakness thus persisted into modern times. The alien oppressors had changed, but not the problem of atrophied natural liberal structures. To combat this debility, Jovanović advocated the education and intellectual elevation of the people, so they could liberate themselves from foreign influence. He concentrated on the domestic political sphere to alter the attitudes and mentality of the Serbian people in order to achieve »a powerful, independent, and liberal Christian state« within »an active fraternal co-operation with other nations« of the West⁷². Ultimately, however, it could be said

that Jovanović employed »Byzantium« and his historical narrative as an argument to secure the position of a new political party, and as such it has to be considered a success. Serbian liberals continuously grew in political power, founding the Association of Serbian Youth (Omladina)⁷³, participating in the regency of Prince Milan, providing members of the constitutional *Skupština* – Jovanović even became finance minister in 1876 – till they registered as one of the first official political parties in 1881, preceded only by the People's Radical Party at the beginning of that year⁷⁴.

Intriguingly, as a political retiree, Jovanović returned to the topic of Byzantine history. In a manuscript on the »Istorija privrednog i kulturnog života u Srednem Veku« (»history of the economic and cultural life in the Middle Ages«) he took a vastly different approach: After consulting Bryce's »Holy Roman Empire«⁷⁵, Hertzberg's »History of the Byzantines and the Ottoman Empire«⁷⁶ and Oman's »Byzantine Empire« – whose opinions can be summarised in the statement of the latter: »[The sweeping condemnation of Byzantine history] sounds like a cheap echo of the second-hand historians of fifty years ago, whose staple commodity was Gibbon-and-water«⁷⁷ – Jovanović re-evaluated the significance of Byzantium: »In the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire, ruled a feudal system, as well as in the other Europe in the Middle Ages«⁷⁸.

But in the same manuscript he also talked about the Byzantinism of the Byzantine Empire: »The Eastern Roman Empire, has for long not ceased to suffer from barbaric attacks. Outwardly, it remained unchanged, but despite the pressure of the Tatar and Semitic invasions it was celebrated outside as to be able to live the spirit and light of general awareness. Thus isolated, Hellenism was transformed into »Byzantinism«. This change shifted the performance of Byzantine history in a different direction than it did in the West«⁷⁹.

So after successfully merging an imagined patriarchal democracy with European liberalism by using the trope of »Bad Byzantines« and through it becoming the main ideologue of his party, Jovanović even contributed to the wide currency of the notion which characterizes the umbrella term of Byzantinism.

68 Jovanović, *Les Serbes* 277.

69 Ignjatović, *Byzantium Evolutionized* 259. – Ignjatović, *Inheritors*.

70 Jovanović, *Serbian Nation* 9.

71 A similiar view had already shared a report from Belgrade to Vienna, 14 March 1850 (Franz, *südslawische Bewegung* 4): »Während die stürmischen Leiden-schaften der Jugend, diese überall in Europa in die ersten Reihen der Revolutionärs führen und oft die junge Nation mit sich reißen, finden wir im Oriente, und dahin ist die europäische Türkei zu rechnen, immer den älteren Theil der Bevölkerung an der Spitze der Bewegung; so bringt es der noch allgemein herrschende patriarchalische Sinn seiner Völker mit sich. Daher kommt es, dass all die jungen Serben, welche in Wien, Berlin, Paris und London studiert, noch nichts im Volk vermögen, und auch bei der letzten Škuptina (Nationalversammlung) zu Kragujevac 1848 mit ihrer Agitation gänzlich durchgefallen sind. [...] Darum sind bis heute noch Männer wie Wučić, Garašanin und Knićanin

die populärsten in Serbien. Und gerade daher vermag keine westeuropäische Neuerungswuth in Serbien und der Türkei Wurzel zu fassen«.

72 Jovanović, *Serbian Nation* 1, 46.

73 Cf. Stokes, *Legitimacy* 69-95.

74 Sundhaussen, *Serbien* 124. – Stoianovich, *Social Foundations* 318-320. – Stokes, *Politics* 196-197, 217.

75 Bryce's book was first published in 1873. The preface to the edition of 1904 reads: »An entirely new chapter has been inserted dealing with the East Roman or Byzantine Empire, a topic inadequately handled in previous editions«. Cf. for this chapter Bryce, *Holy Roman Empire* 167-181.

76 Hertzberg, *Geschichte der Byzantiner*. It was falsely quoted by Jovanović as »Herzling (S. J.), *Geschichte der Byzantiner*«. Cf. Jovanović, *Istorija* 4.

77 Oman, *Byzantine Empire* 153.

78 Jovanović, *Istorija* 6.

79 *Ibidem* 1.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Bad Byzantines: A Historical Narrative in the Liberal Conception of Vladimir Jovanović

With the fall of the »Ustavobranitelj« in 1858, Serbia entered a new era of party politics. Several Western-educated minds formed the first political party to promote the idea of liberalism. While unauthorized as a political party by the new prince Mihailo Obrenović, Serbian »liberals« relied on a specific narrative to convince their countrymen that liberalism had always been an innate part of Serbian history. In this article I will shed light on the construction of this narrative and its creator Vladimir Jovanović, who used the Influence of »Bad Byzantines« to explain why Serbia had not already adopted liberalism in the past, although it had had all the necessary means and institutions.

Böse Byzantiner: ein historisches Narrativ im liberalen Konzept Vladimir Jovanovićs

Mit dem Fall der »Ustavobranitelji« trat Serbien 1858 in eine neue Ära der Parteipolitik ein. Verschiedene Denker mit westlicher Ausbildung formten eine erste politische Gruppierung, um für die Idee des Liberalismus zu werben. Diese serbischen »Liberale«, die vom neuen Fürst Mihailo Obrenović nicht als legitime politische Partei anerkannt wurden, beriefen sich dabei auf ein spezifisches Narrativ, um ihre Landsleute davon zu überzeugen, dass der Liberalismus schon immer ein immanenter Teil serbischer Geschichte war. Dieser Aufsatz soll die Konstruktion dieses Narrativs und seinen Autor Vladimir Jovanović näher beleuchten. Dieser benutzte den Einfluss von »Bösen Byzantinern«, um zu erklären, warum Serbien nicht bereits in der Vergangenheit den Liberalismus angenommen hatte, obwohl es doch über alle dafür notwendigen Mittel und Institutionen verfügte.