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Rediscovery of Illyrians

Illyrian studies

For more than a thousand years before the arrival of the Slavs in the sixth century AD, the lands east of the Adriatic were the home of peoples known to the ancient world as Illyrians. Their territory comprised much of what is now occupied by the Yugoslavs, along with northern and central Albania. They spoke a language of which almost no trace has survived. That it belonged to the 'family' of Indo-European languages has been deduced from the many names of Illyrian peoples and places preserved in Greek and Latin records, both literary and epigraphic. We cannot be sure that any of them actually called themselves Illyrians: in the case of most of them it is near certain that they did not. In general the Illyrians have tended to be recognized from a negative standpoint, in that they were manifestly not Celts, Dacians or Thracians, or Greeks or Macedonians, their neighbours on the north, east and south respectively.[1]

Not merely do all the surviving descriptions of Illyrians and their ways derive from 'external' sources, but what has made matters much worse, for history's verdict upon them, is that many Greek and Roman writers seem to vie with each other in expressing their contempt and detestation for Illyrians. Even though they have escaped the sort of lasting infamy attached

[1] Trbuhović 1971, Stipčević 1986.

to the name of the German Vandali, they have fared little better in the historical record. As 'savages' or 'barbarians' on the northern periphery of the classical world, even today Illyrians barely make the footnotes in most versions of ancient history, and more often than not they are simply ignored. Readers generally familiar with the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome are likely to suspect, and rightly so, an attempt to adjust this balance of the historical record, not least because, as the playwright said, it is the only version they know. There seems little to be gained from seeking to create a picture of Illyrians that does not adopt a perspective of them as peoples on the periphery of the Mediterranean worlds of Greece and Rome. On the other hand, it is now less acceptable to order descriptions of such geographically marginal societies according to such categories as 'Hellenized', 'part-Hellenized' and 'Romanized'. These labels convey simplistic notions of a diffusion of all material innovation and development from an advanced centre to a more primitive periphery, through varieties of direct or indirect contact. Happily, we can now seek an escape from such narrow confines through the increasing archaeological evidence for Illyrians and their way of life. Not that it can be claimed that archaeologists and other students of prehistoric societies are free from a liking for traditional explanations of change and development, among which diffusion and migration continue to enjoy special favour. While we have to accept that an authentic and comprehensive account of Illyrians will remain out of reach for the foreseeable future, the evidence now available justifies an interim statement. We may best begin with a reconnaissance of progress in Illyrian studies.[2]

For all that William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was set in a 'city in Illyria', two centuries were to elapse before that name appeared on the map of Europe. By the Treaty of Schönbrunn on 14 October 1809 a large tract of land east of the Adriatic, including Carinthia, the Istrian peninsula and the Dalmatian coast, was ceded by Austria to the Napoleonic kingdom of Italy to be ruled with the title of the Illyrian Provinces. In the

[2] Salmon 1986 (Roman image of Illyrians), Irmscher 1986 (Illyrians in Classical scholarship).

early nineteenth century the stirrings of Slav national feeling began to be translated into political manifestos more specific to the established order of Europe as constituted by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Among the Slav subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of the Hapsburgs the Illyrian name was invoked by a movement in Croatia, centred on its capital Agram, the Zagreb of today. Here the continued dominance of the Hungarian language set off a movement among the 'Illyrian Slavs', the Slovenes in the northwest around Laibach (Ljubljana), the Croats and the independent Serbs further east. It was from this feeling of cultural oppression that assertions of close links between the ancient Illyrians and the southern ('jugo-') Slavs began to be vigorously promoted, notably by Ljudevit Gaj and the Illyrian Movement. Though their arguments lacked the support of scientific evidence their widespread currency as political slogans awakened the sense of an Illyrian heritage from the remote past. Moreover, it happened that around this period, in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the foundations of the modern historical and archaeological traditions of Illyrian studies were being laid.[3]

In Dalmatia historians and antiquaries of the Renaissance, notably Marko Marulić (1450–1524), had already begun to observe and record the abundant ancient remains. In the seventeenth century Vičko Prodić included an account of the Illyrian burial mounds on Brač in his chronicle of the island's history. In Croatia and Dalmatia, an Austrian territory after the defeat of Napoleon, the collection and study of ancient remains began with the foundation of archaeological museums at Split in 1818–21, at Zadar in 1830 and in the Croatian capital Zagreb in 1846. The first detailed account of the ancient Illyrians appeared in the *Albanesische Studien* of J. G. von Hahn, published at Jena in 1854, in which the author advanced the proposition that modern Albanians were descended from ancient Illyrians. In Austria imperial patronage of archaeology and ancient monuments was formally signalled in 1856 with the establishment in Vienna of the Central Commission for the

[3] Archaeological Museum Pula 1986a (exhibition on the Illyrian Movement).

Study and Preservation of Artistic and Historical Monuments. In Zagreb the Croatian Archaeological Society was re-established in 1878. Around this time also some of the pioneers of Illyrian studies in Croatia began long and industrious careers, Frane Bulić in Split and at Zagreb, Šime Ljubić in the Museum and Josip Brunšmid in the University. In the Austrian port of Trieste the British consul Richard Burton contributed a study of ancient hill settlements (gradina) and other prehistoric remains in the Istrian peninsula (see figure 25), to be followed 30 years later by the major synthesis of Carlo Marchesetti.[4]

At the Congress of Berlin in the summer of 1878 the Great Powers of Europe sought to resolve the Eastern Question, specifically the wretched condition of Christian Slavs in the European territories of Ottoman Turkey. By assigning to Austria the troubled provinces of Bosnia and Hercegovina, the lot of the Slav population may not have been greatly improved but the heartlands of the ancient Illyrians were laid open to historical and archaeological exploration. A vivid account of the archaeology of Austria's new territories, interspersed with comments on the political questions of the time, is provided by the works of the young Arthur Evans, later famous for his excavations at Knossos, centre of the Minoan civilization of Bronze Age Crete. In the late summer of 1875 the 25-year old Evans (see figure 1) made a journey across Bosnia and Hercegovina from Zagreb to Ragusa (Dubrovnik) on the Adriatic. As he and his brother Lewis moved south, news reached them of uprisings by Christian peasants in Hercegovina and of the atrocities committed by the irregular troops sent to quell them. Though on a lesser scale than the Bulgarian atrocities of the following year, the sufferings of the South Slav peasants described in Evans' lurid and frankly sensationalized account produced an outburst of indignation in England. It had been his ambition to discover forgotten and exciting civilizations but his search for Illyrians soon became bound up with the cause of Slav freedom, a movement in which he now began to play a leading part. As a special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* based at Ragusa from 1877 he reported in unflatter-

[4] Burton 1874, Marchesetti 1903.

Figure 1 Arthur Evans in 1878

ing terms the imposition of Austrian rule after the Berlin Congress. His intemperate assertions that the Emperor's regime was no better than that of the Moslem Turk, and in some respects was worse, evoked little response in England. In 1881 he published a sympathetic account of the activities of Slav dissidents in the nearby mountains and, after a spell in prison, he was deported from Austrian territory in April 1882.[5]

Though they ended in ignominy, his years of residence at Ragusa allowed Evans to travel widely throughout the Illyrian lands, to collect and study antiquities. His 'Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum', published in four parts by the Society of Antiquaries of London in its *Archaeologia* (1883–5), still repay study for their wealth of information and observation of detail at first hand. He described a society which had been largely cut off from the rest of Europe during nearly five centuries of Ottoman rule. His discursive and enthusiastic accounts of prehistoric and classical remains and the ancient customs of the contemporary Slavs were not composed in a scholarly seclusion but amid a career of political journalism and agitation. The achievements of Illyrians in the remote past were deployed in order to emphasize to his readers how dark and regressive had been the era of Turkish rule.

Though castigated for its insensitive ways the Austrian regime in Bosnia and Hercegovina transformed the archaeological picture of those areas from one of near total darkness after the centuries of Turkish rule into one of the best observed regions of Europe. The advance began with the foundation of the provincial museum in Sarajevo (Bosnisch-Hercegovinische Landesmuseum). Several major programmes of excavation were soon under way; the Neolithic settlement at Butmir near Sarajevo; the great Bronze and Iron Age burial grounds on the Glasinac plateau in eastern Bosnia; in the west the Iron Age cemetery at Jezerine near Bihać in the Una valley and the pile-dwellings at Donja Dolina on the river Sava. The results and finds were published in the museum Bulletin (*Glasnik*) in Serbian, and in German in the volumes of Scientific Reports (*Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen aus Bosnien und der*

[5] Wilkes 1976.

Herzegovina) which appeared between 1893 and 1916 along with several monographs on major sites. In addition to the archaeological papers these volumes also included many pioneering studies by anthropologists and ethnologists who seized the chance to work in this little known area of Europe.[6]

In Yugoslavia the second half of the twentieth century has seen many important discoveries and numerous publications relating to the Illyrian past. Most of this work has been undertaken by specialists in the universities and in the national museums of Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje, Sarajevo and Ljubljana. In addition much important evidence that might have been lost through new building and other development has been rescued by the hard-pressed antiquities services of the Republics. Several of the long-established periodicals were reconstituted after the Second World War and continue to be published, including the *Starinar* of Belgrade, the *Glasnik* of the Sarajevo museum, and the *Vjesnik* of the Zagreb and Split museums. Some important new periodicals have issued from the new state academies for scientific research at Zagreb, Ljubljana (the Slovenian journal *Arheološki Vestnik*) and more recently Sarajevo. Here the Centre for Balkan Studies (*Centar za balkanološka ispitivanja*) of the Academy of Sciences in Bosnia and Hercegovina, under the inspiration of Alojz Benac, has published an Annual (*Godišnjak*), numerous monographs and a massive synthesis of Yugoslav prehistory in several volumes now nearing completion (*Praehistorija Jugoslavenskih Zemalja*). With the international community in mind, the Archaeological Society of Yugoslavia has since 1954 published *Archaeologica Iugoslavica* containing brief reports on major new finds and important research in English, French or German, followed later by *Arheološki Pregled* (Archaeological Preview) with annual summaries of recent field-work. The same body has also initiated a series of monographs for major excavation reports or archaeological syntheses. At the time of writing political tensions appear to have made concerted publication at the federal level more difficult, but the quality of archaeological publication remains high,

[6] Stipčević 1977a, 3–13; Munro 1900 for a first-hand account of work in progress at these sites and of the Sarajevo congress of 1894.

notably in the flow of volumes from Sarajevo, while the proceedings (*Materijali*) of the annual conference of the Yugoslav Archaeological Society continue to appear.[7]

In Albania the first systematic record of ancient sites was made before the First World War by Carl Patsch (1904) and subsequently by Camillo Praschniker and Arnold Schober (1919). Their topographical studies remain the basis of modern studies of Illyrian sites, while between the wars Italian expeditions tended to be focused on classical sites on the coast, notably Apollonia where major excavations were directed by Leon Rey. Since the Second World War archaeological exploration has been impelled by a national policy to establish the link between modern Albanians and ancient Illyrians. The investigation of both prehistoric and classical sites, well underway during the fifties and sixties, gained impetus in the seventies through a heightened political interest in the Albanian Illyrian heritage. Research was centred on the archaeological and ethnographical museum in Tirana from 1948 until 1976 when the Albanian Academy of Sciences created its Centre for Archaeological Research in Tirana with eight regional offices covering the entire country. In addition to the National Museum in Tirana, major museums have been organized at Durrës, Apollonia, Fieri, Saranda and Butrint. Since 1971 all major archaeological research in Albania, including several conferences and colloquia attended by foreign specialists, has been published in the periodical *Iliria*, while the many activities of the Monuments Protection Service are recorded in *Monumentet*.[8]

A welcome development has been the publication of general works on Illyrians, notably that by Aleksandar Stipčević, which first appeared in 1968 in an Italian edition and subsequently in Yugoslav (1974) and American (1977) versions. A more technical study by the Polish scholar W. Pajakowski is more accessible in a German edition published in Sarajevo (1980). Several general works on Illyrians have appeared in Albania,

[7] Now registered in the bibliographies of Stipčević (1967, 1977b, 1978, 1984a) and Škegro 1988.

[8] Bibliography for 1945–71 in Jubani 1972a and survey for 1945–86 in Cabanes 1988c.

among which one may include the proceedings of the 1972 Illyrian congress published in volumes 4–6 of *Iliria*. A major compilation is *Les Illyriens: aperçus historiques* (1985) edited by Selim Islami, with other contributors including S. Anamali, M. Korkuti and the doyen of Albanian archaeology F. Prendi. German technology has now furnished more than one fine visual record of Albanian archaeology: one is the lavishly illustrated catalogue (edited by A. Eggebrecht) produced for an exhibition at Hildesheim during the summer of 1988, while the monuments of Albanian Illyria are well presented in a guidebook by Guntram Koch (1989).[9]

The current version of the Albanian theory of their Illyrian origins is centred on the unbroken descent of modern Albanians from an Illyrian people already formed in Bronze Age times and in a geographical area that coincided with that occupied today by Albanian speakers, the modern state of Albania and the Yugoslav region of Kosovo. The guiding principles of archaeological research are the following: excavation of prehistoric burial tumuli to supplement evidence for prehistoric Illyrians from the Korcë basin and to define more clearly the relations with prehistoric cultures of Greece, Italy and Yugoslavia; the growth of Illyrian urban settlements in the Hellenistic period (fourth to second centuries BC) and their relations with the Greek colonies on the coast; and studies in the late Roman and early medieval periods to demonstrate the links between Illyrians under Roman rule and Albanians, who first appear during the second half of the eleventh century.[10]

The continuing political collisions between Albanians and the Yugoslav Serbs have had a marked impact on Illyrian studies. It is no novelty that debates over the ethnic affinities of ancient peoples in southeast Europe should be bound up with the antipathies of Serbs, Bulgars, Greeks and Albanians but the question of Kosovo has become more serious than at any time since it was first posed at the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. After the First World War the area moved between Albania and Yugoslavia according to the balance of Great-

[9] Also the 1984 Clermont-Ferrand colloquium, Cabanes 1987.
[10] Buda 1984.

Power politics, though for most of the period it has remained under Yugoslav control while the population has become more and more Albanian. For this reason the ethnic affinities of the Dardanians, ancient inhabitants of Kosovo, northern Macedonia and southern Serbia, have attracted attention. Albanians hold them to be Illyrians, ethnically homogeneous with the rest, while a Serbian view argues that Dardanians represent an intermingling of both Illyrian and Thracian elements. There is little danger of lasting damage being caused by arguments being conducted on these lines when the evidence is historical or epigraphic and remains in the public domain, but the damage is done when archaeological evidence is successively deployed to support one hypothesis with another. These reconstructions of prehistory – 'houses of cards' according to one scholar – prove suprisingly difficult to demolish even long after their foundations have been shown not to exist. Similar problems arise regarding the peoples of ancient Epirus, now divided between Albania and Greece. Against a widespread view that they spoke a form of Greek the Albanians argue that the Epirotes were one with the rest of the Illyrians.[11]

If we set aside some of the themes inspired by modern politics we are still left with several worthwhile areas of enquiry for which much new evidence is to hand. Who were the Illyrians and how valid are suggested definitions of Illyrians on the basis of archaeological and linguistic evidence, taken together or separately? How were Illyrians linked with other inhabitants of the Danube lands, Thracians, Daco-Moesians, Italic peoples, Greeks and Celts, in their material culture and language? What happened to the Illyrians under Roman rule and how were they affected by the process known as Romanization? What connection did the 'Illyrian emperors' of the third and fourth centuries AD have with the peoples conquered by the first Roman emperor Augustus? Is there evidence for the survival of an Illyrian native culture during the Roman and early Byzantine periods? What traces of Illyrians can be detected today in the culture of the South Slavs and Albanians? Before we tackle the

[11] For the Albanian view see Hadri 1976 and for the Serbian response M. Garašanin 1980 and the comments of Benac 1987b on Islami et al. 1985.

prehistoric origins of Illyrians and their evolution down to the fifth century BC we must consider the lands in which they lived, since Illyrian landscapes exhibit several distinctive features that imposed a pattern of life on the inhabitants that was very different from even the adjacent parts of Europe.

Illyrian landscapes[12]

The Illyrian lands are dominated by the results of Europe's most recent phase of mountain building. The extensive sedimentary beds of limestone, clay and sandstone created in the Palaeozoic period were raised into a series of complex folds to create the Alpine systems of relief. On the east the main Alpine system divides, the northern to form the Carpathians of Czecho-Slovakia and Romania which then double back as the Stara Planina of Bulgaria. The southern branch continues southeastwards, parallel with the Adriatic, as the Dinaric system of Yugoslavia and then into Albania and Greece as the Pindus range. Between the two Alpine systems lies the great Hungarian or Pannonian plain, divided by the Bakony hills, where the Danube turns south at the great bend north of Budapest, into a smaller northwestern plain (Kiss-Alföld) and the great plain (Nagy-Alföld) to the southeast. Drainage of this area is entirely to the Danube, which exits from the plain by the Iron Gates gorge through the Carpathians east of Belgrade. Europe's greatest river, navigable from Ulm in southern Germany, flows for 1725 miles from its source in the Black Forest to its delta on the Black Sea. Its major tributaries drain most of the Illyrian lands, from the Julian Alps in the northwest to the Alps of northern Albania. From this quarter heavy winter rains contribute to a sustained flow, partly cancelling out the summer maximum from the melting snow of the Alps and the summer rainfall of the plains. Compared with this vast system the rivers which flow into the Mediterranean are insignificant. Along the Adriatic only the Drin and the Neretva are permanent rivers,

[12] Accounts of historical geography are furnished by Pounds 1969 and Turnock 1988.

the rest being little more than seasonal torrents, and even those are navigable for light craft only in their lowest courses. At the same time these lesser Adriatic rivers are important because they offer a means of passage through intractable country, and the most notable in this regard is the Vardar of Macedonia for passage between the Aegean and the Danube basin. The route along the Neretva between the Adriatic and central Bosnia is not easy but was evidently used already in prehistoric times.

In Albania the Mediterranean rivers are altogether more significant. Flowing mainly in a northwesterly direction between parallel ranges, some of the larger streams, including the Drin, Mat and Shkumbin, cut through some hills to reach the sea by meandering courses across the coastal plain. The largest system is that of the Drin, which as the Black Drin (Drin i Zi) flows through a deep valley northwards to Kukës, where it is joined by the White Drin (Beli Drin) from the Metohija basin. The united stream flows west through the mountains for 25 miles in a deep gorge but at the edge of the plain divides between a westward course into the Lake of Shkodër and a tortuous southern course to the sea at the ancient and modern port of Lezha. Within the bend of the Drin the river Mat flows northwestwards through lower hills before turning west to cut through the last range of hills bordering the plain. In central Albania the Shkumbin rises close to Lake Ohrid and then turns west towards the sea, while the Devoll, which once drained Lake Prespa and the Ohrid basin, takes a zig-zag course following and crossing several mountain ranges. In contrast the more southerly Osum and Vijosë flow northwestwards in their main courses parallel with the ranges. Throughout this area there occur abrupt changes in river character at the meeting of mountain and plain. The flows become slower and great quantities of alluvium bring braided streams, flood plains and frequent changes of course among the malarial marshlands that dry out in the hot summers.

The Cretaceous limestones of the Dinaric ranges are not acutely folded and present a uniquely dry surface devoid of vegetation over large areas; they comprise the most extensive and spectacular example of the karst land-formation. Three regions can be distinguished: the Julian Alps and Karawanken in the northwest; the western Dinara 40 to 70 miles broad,

extending from Istria to Greece and falling steeply in many places to the Adriatic where it is screened by long and narrow islands belonging to the fold-lines of the Dinaric system; and the eastern Dinara, lower and dissected by valleys of rivers flowing across it to the Sava and Danube, where the hills fall away gently to the Pannonian plain. South of this plain and to the east of the Dinaric system lies an area dissected by two major rivers and their tributaries, the Morava flowing north to the Danube and the Vardar (Axios) south to the Aegean. This region contains many plains and basins, usually with lacustrine deposits, separated by high but generally isolated mountain masses, notably the great Šar planina (2702 m). Through the valleys and basins of this region pass several major routes between the Danube and the Mediterranean, the so-called Morava-Vardar corridor.

In Albania a coastal plain, north of the Shkumbin the Kavaje, south of it the Myzeqeja, extends north from Cape Linguetta (Kepi Gjuhezés) for more than 100 miles until the border with Montenegro, after which the coastline turns northwestwards and the Dinaric ranges approach the sea. In places the plain is over 30 miles wide but elsewhere is interrupted as the hills come within a few miles of the sea. Flat and only a few metres above sea-level, the surface consists mainly of layers of sand and alluvium deposited by the rivers in the manner described above. As a whole the line of the coast is advancing and has moved more than three miles since classical times. The area has always provided excellent winter grazing but is now extensively exploited for the irrigated cultivation of rice and cotton. Major settlements have developed either as coastal ports (Durrës and Vlora) or important towns on the inland margins (Shkodër, Tirana, Elbasan and Berat) but rarely in between.

In Yugoslavia the karst is everywhere close to the coast, most dramatically in the Velebit range in the north which falls almost sheer into the sea. Except for the central stretch between Zadar and Split there are no significant areas of lowland adjoining the sea north of the plain of the Bojana which drains the Lake of Shkodër. From here to the Neretva some small and isolated areas of flat land have supported the settlements of Dubrovnik, Herceg-Novi, Kotor, Budva and Ulcinj. Behind the last lies the basin of the Lake of Shkodër, into which the Montenegrin

rivers Zeta and Morača flow through an alluvial plain. The coastal ranges are next interrupted by the basin of the Neretva, the only river to cross the karst from a source which lies to the north of it. After flowing through several basins linked by narrows the stream reaches the sea through a small delta. At Makarska south of Split the high ranges retreat inland and the highly indented coast as far as the Zrmanja estuary beyond Zadar has always been intensively settled, notably around the Bay of Castles (Kaštelanski zali) on which lay Salona, the largest ancient settlement of the area and precursor of medieval and modern Split (Spalato). North of the Krka estuary at Šibenik the limestone plateau rises towards the interior but contains several bands of alluvial basins which have long been settled and cultivated. Between the Zrmanja and the head of the Quarnero (Kvarner) gulf the coast is barred by the Velebit range, and even the great port of Rijeka at its northern extremity is confined to a narrow shelf between mountains and sea. The Istrian peninsula is formed of a low limestone platform linked to the higher Julian karst along a line roughly between Trieste and Rijeka. On the west and a part of the east coast areas of lowland border the sea. Though karst features predominate, and there are few rivers, the lower altitude and a higher water-table has inhibited the more severe conditions of the Dinaric region.

Behind the coastal plain of Albania lies a belt of hills formed for the most part by the folding of sedimentary sandstone, shale and limestone. The greater resistance of the last to surface erosion has resulted in steep ridges separated by softer, more eroded hills. In the north this zone confines the river Mat but further south the Shkumbin cuts through several ridges in gorges. Further south again this zone of hills broadens to more than 50 miles to reach the coast and contains up to eight steep-sided ridges running parallel with the coast, most rising to around 1500 metres, although the Nëmërckë range between the Vijosë and the Drino attains 2486 metres. On the north the valleys open to the coastal plain and their courses alternate between narrows and wide basins containing the major settlements such as Gjirokastra, Tepeleni and Berat. These valleys offer several routes to the south, in marked contrast with northern Albania where the mountains rise steeply from the

plain to bar passage to the interior. This distinction has resulted in major differences of historical development between northern and southern Albania, a divide which, as we shall see later, marked also a southern limit of Illyrian peoples.

Behind this intermediate range of mountains, the highlands of eastern Albania are divided by the steep-sided and narrow passages of the Drin, Shkumbin, Devoll and Osum. In the north a great arc of Albanian Alps rises to around 2500 metres, among which are areas of summer pasture and near inaccessible, though inhabited valleys. To the east of the upper Drin the high mass of Korab (2764 m) is no less rugged. Between these masses the alternating gorges and small basins of the Black Drin have never been a route in modern times. South of the Shkumbin the hills are less rugged and there occur several upland plains where cultivation is possible. Here the existence of the transverse valleys has allowed the passage between east and west and for that reason has always been the highly strategic area of the southern Balkans. The lake region which straddles the Albanian–Yugoslav border consists of several alluvial basins formed by north–south faulting, containing Lakes Ohrid, Prespa and Little Prespa, all once much larger than they are today. South of Ohrid the extensive Korcë basin is dotted with marshes and relict lakes, and a similar, smaller basin exists around Bilisht south of Lake Prespa.

East and northeast of the Albanian highlands there lies a maze of river valleys and alluvial basins, drained by rivers flowing in all directions. This region, comprising southern Serbia and Yugoslav Macedonia, includes in the valleys of the Morava, Vardar and Ibar some of the major routes between the Mediterranean and central Europe used since Neolithic times. To the west there is no way across the Dinaric region until the Julian karst plateau at the head of the Adriatic. The area belongs to the Pelagonian massif that remained unaffected by the later Alpine folding which produced the high mountain chains to the east and west, although it is extensively faulted and has been affected by volcanic activity. The lakes which once filled the basins have long since drained away and narrow channels that once joined lake with lake form the modern pattern of drainage.

The Tertiary basins of the Vardar valley around Titov Veles

and Skopje are the largest and most important of the region. The former is more hilly and comprises treeless ridges which rise to around 700 metres, settlements and cultivation being for the most part confined to the river valley. Between the two basins the river flows in a gorge that is followed by the railway but not by the modern road. Above this the triangular Skopje basin is bounded by steep-sided faulted mountains but is accessible by routes from three directions, from the northwest by the Vardar flowing from the Tetovo basin (see below), from the north where a route enters from Kosovo via the Kačanik gorge and the tributary Lepenac between the massifs of the Šar and the Skopska Crna Gora and from the northeast along the river Pčinja and the Kumanovo basin to the Morava system. The upper course of the Vardar forms an arc that encloses the Jakupnica massif (2540 m), from which the ridges of Nidže and Kozuf extend southwards to enclose the Bitola-Prilep basin. This extends from north to south more than 60 miles and is drained by the Crna Reka (Black River) which, after exiting from the southern limit of the plain, doubles back to a northeastward course through an area of mountains to join the Vardar below Titov Veles near the ancient Paeonian capital of Stobi (Gradsko). Though marshy in some areas this plain – the ancient Pelagonia – has supported a large population from prehistoric times and contains two of the major cities of Yugoslav Macedonia, Prilep and Bitola (formerly Monastir).

West and northwest of this area the districts of Ohrid and Tetovo are dominated by the north–south ranges of the Pindus system, notably the Šar planina and its southward continuation formed by the Korab, Bistra (2163 m) and Karaorman (2242 m). Together they form a barrier to east–west movement more than 100 miles long. East of the Šar lies the roughly parallel Suva Gora to the southwest of Skopje which is continued southwards as the ranges of Plakenska and Pelister, between which lie (from south to north) the basins of Prespa, Ohrid, Debar (on the Black Drin between the Jablanica and Stogovo ranges), Kičevo and Gostivar-Tetovo, the last drained to the north by the upper Vardar. Much of the Ohrid and Prespa basins are covered by lakes that still in places reach to the foot of steep mountains. Ohrid, drained northwards by the Drin, has contracted and is now bordered with marshes, notably

around Struga in the north. Prespa is 160 metres higher than Ohrid, from which it is divided by the Galičica range, and was once drained westwards via Little Prespa and the Albanian Devoll, but its level has long since sunk and there is now no discharge to the sea. At the same time its recorded fluctuations in level are caused by drainage into underground passages dissolved in the limestone of the Pindus. Unlike the isolated basins to the north the Ohrid basin has always been an important centre of the southern Balkans. Once the domain of the Enchelei and crossed by the Roman Via Egnatia, it was the site of one of the early Slav settlements and then for a time heartland of the First Bulgarian Empire.

The gently rolling terrain of the linked basins of Kosovo and Metohija is bounded by steep-sided mountains formed along fault-lines. On the southwest lie relatively low ranges (*c.* 1500 m) northeast of the united Drin, on the northwest Koprivnik (2530 m) and Mokra Gora (2155 m), while to the southeast lie the northern heights of the Šar massif. The Metohija basin in the west is drained by the White Drin which exits through a gorge to meet the Black Drin at Kukës in northern Albania. The two hills which define the Metohija on the east, Crnoljeva and Čičevica, are no barrier to communication with the Kosovo basin around Priština, which is smaller and more elongated. This is drained by the northwards-flowing Sitnica which joins the Ibar, itself a tributary to the Morava, at Kosovska Mitrovica at the northern edge of the basin, where the united stream follows a gorge between the massifs of Rogožna (1504 m) and Kopaonik (2017 m). Towards the south of the plain, around the town of Uroševac, there lies an area between the drainage of the Sitnica/Ibar system and that of the Nerodimka, which feeds the Vardar via the Lepenac at Kačanik. This is the crucial area of a major north–south passage between the upper Vardar and the Morava basin around Niš. It was in Kosovo that the advancing Turks destroyed the forces of Serbia in 1389, and in more recent times, as a part of the Sanjak of Novi Pazar, the region was a subject of dispute between Austria and Turkey.

North of the Kumanovo basin rises the Morava, whose northward course links a string of small basins that once contained lakes. As the Southern (Južna) Morava the stream crosses

the Rhodope plateau by a long gorge, linking Vranje and Priboj to the major basin of Leskovac around 25 miles long. From there it passes into a more dramatic gorge to reach the great basin of Niš, cross-roads of the central Balkans. After yet another defile at Stalač comes the meeting with the Western (Zapadna) Morava, which has also flowed through several gorges linking the basins of Požega, Čačak, Kraljevo and Kruševac. The united river then passes through a final defile in the Rhodope system at Bagrdan to the final broad valley where the now puny relic of a great river gently meanders through marshes to the Danube. In spite of the gorges and defiles that had to be by-passed through the surrounding hills, the Morava up to Leskovac has been the favoured route for passage towards the Aegean. The railway and the main modern road now continue along the river via Vranje and Priboj and cross by a dry valley into the Kumanovo basin and from there reach the Vardar. An alternative route, avoiding the detour of the gorge at Grdelica, follows the Jablanica from the Leskovac basin into the Kosovo basin. A longer but easier detour, avoiding the Southern Morava altogether, follows the Western Morava up to Kraljevo and then the Ibar to Kosovo, a line now also taken by railway and modern road. The area east of the Ibar around the massif of Kopaonik is still covered with dense forests of oak and beech. Several of the smaller basins within this area contained cultivable land, including Prokuplje drained by the Toplica into the Southern Morava, Gnjilane, where rises the Southern Morava, and, further north, the Malo (Little) Kosovo basin.

For a distance of around 450 miles an uninterrupted system of mountains, high plateaus, deep valleys and gorges extends from northern Albania to the head of the Adriatic. Becoming steadily broader towards the south, this Dinaric system constitutes a near-impassable barrier between the Adriatic and the Pannonian plain. Most of the rock is limestone of the Trias and Cretaceous ages and has no surface drainage except for the streams that cross the clay floor of a basin (polje) before vanishing underground. The surface of the limestone plateau in the karst is quite dry and there is no accumulation of red soil to sustain even a cover of scrub vegetation. Cultivation is impossible, while travel in the region is made difficult by ser-

rated ridges caused by uneven erosion. The most conspicuous surface formations are the depressions (dolina), where a heavy residual clay can retard the drainage of rainwater. These depressions can unite to form dry valleys, but the most significant formations are the karst basins or polje, a level area of alluvium between ridges on which rainwater can seasonally accumulate to form a lake. Some of the higher polje remain dry but those nearer the coast at a lower level usually have lakes for some months of the year, while the Lake of Shkodër is in fact a polje whose surface lies below sea-level and is permanently inundated. These areas afford the only place for permanent settlement in the karst, with most of the villages being spread around the margins. Towards the northeast of the Dinaric system the karst becomes discontinuous, interrupted by beds of sandstone and shale. While the lines of relief follow the same northwest to southeast axis, the ridges are broader and less rugged and the surface greener with more extensive forests. There is also more surface drainage to the few major rivers which cut across the lines of relief through deep valleys and gorges to link narrow basins of cultivated land. The Dinaric region of Yugoslavia comprises some of the most impenetrable country anywhere in Europe. Its inhabitants have never submitted to a central authority, as local loyalties prevail and the fragmented terrain hinders contact even between adjacent communities. By the same token, resistance to the would-be conqueror has always been determined; the struggles of the Pannonian Illyrians against the Romans and those of the Montenegrins against the Turks were emulated by Yugoslavs during the Second World War.

Beyond the high karst plateaus and the adjacent high mountains lies a mountainous region where heights rise to between 1300 and 1600 metres. Here the valleys are broader and offer easier passage, while there are long-established major centres in Sarajevo, Višegrad and Novi Pazar. East of the Drina an area of broad valleys and rounded hills ends at the Golija planina (1833 m) and the Ibar valley. On the west lie several plateaus, including the great prehistoric centre of Glasinac, that reach to the basin of Sarajevo, once a great lake and bordered on the southwest by the fault-line of the Vranica (2112 m) and Bjelašnica (2067 m) ranges. This area is the physical centre of

Bosnia and the source of the river Bosna which forms the axis of the basin as far as Zenica, where the river enters a tortuous defile between the volcanic massifs of northern Bosnia. The next river to the west is the Vrbas, which rises on the west slopes of Vranica. After the broad high basin of Bugojno the river enters a gorge, with dramatic falls at Jajce, until Banjaluka. This densely forested area in the Middle Ages formed a nucleus of the short-lived independent state of Bosnia and later of Serbia. In addition to the timber that away from the gorges can be floated down the major rivers, the area has rich mineral deposits, including lead, silver and iron ore, most of which have been worked since Roman times.

The main eastward continuation of the Alpine system is the Karawanken, a steep-sided ridge that reaches over 2000 metres and separates the upper Drau (Drava) basin around Klagenfurt from that of the upper Sava around Ljubljana. This range, which is crossed by several passes, notably the Wurzen and Lubelj (Loibl), terminates in the high Savinski mountains, but the line of relief is continued into the Pannonian plain with some lower hills above Maribor on the Drava. The upper course of the Sava follows a valley that has continued eastward from Friuli, where it is drained by the Tagliamento, and then turns southeastwards into the Ljubljana basin, around 30 miles long. Several small but steep-sided hills rise from this plain, around one of which is situated the city of Ljubljana, founded as the Roman colony Emona although an inhabited area from at least the Late Bronze Age. On the east a limestone plateau rises in places to above 1000 metres but has been dissected by the Sava, Krka and their tributaries. Only in modern times has the gorge of the Sava across this area become a route, for all of its length by the railway and in part by a modern road. North of the Karawanken the river Drau rises in the High Tauern of Austria and at Maribor emerges from a gorge through the Pohorje plateau into the broad basin around Ptuj, site of a Roman fortress and veteran colony. Later it is joined by the Mur, flowing from the area of Prekomurje, some way below Varaždin. With its gentle relief and broad alluvial valleys this region marks the transition from the high Alpine mountains to the flat Pannonian plain, which lies mostly below the 150 metre contour and is drained by the Danube and its two

principal tributaries Tisa (Tisza) and Sava. The part of the plain which lies south of the Drava is the historic region Slavonia, through which a double line of hills passes from northwest to southeast. The southern range commences with the hills north of Zagreb which rise here and there above 1000 metres, while further east the line is continued by the slightly lower Moslavačka and Psunj hills. The northern range commences with the Kalnik hills (643 m) and broadens eastwards to form the Papuk and Ravna Gora which partly enclose the basin of Slavonska Požega. Around 70 miles east of this area the narrow range of the Fruška Gora (539 m) is forested on the north face and falls steeply to the Danube, but the gentler southern slopes have long been cultivated and support large villages with vineyards.

The loess plateaus which rise from the plains between the major rivers to heights of more than 60 metres appear to be formed of wind-blown deposits from the northeast. There is little surface drainage and wells must be dug deep. Although now fertile and intensively cultivated in some areas, for example around Vukovar, in the Bačka and Banat plains the settlements tend to be located around the margins. The old Tertiary basins around the Drava and Sava have been overlaid with masses of sediment borne down from the Alps. Now both rivers meander sluggishly, with many cut-offs and occasional changes of course. Both have flood-plains up to five miles across, bordered by rising terraces to the respective plains of Podravina and Posavina. Here settlements were set well back from the river with meadows reaching to the bank and fields extending across the valley floor.

The Illyrian lands experience a wide range of climate. The northern plains and the mountains have the cold winters and short hot summers of the continental climate, while the coast enjoys the more amenable regime of hot summers and mild wet winters. During winter much of the plain and mountains have freezing temperatures, although snowfall is comparatively light, except towards the Adriatic. Snow is rarely seen on the coast except on high ground. Summer temperatures are everywhere high, especially in the karst hollows near the Adriatic and in the alluvial basins of Macedonia, though even here night-time cooling is significant. Rain is borne to the area on

westerly winds and is consequently higher in the mountainous west and southwest, with from around 1200 to 2000 mm, than areas further east such as the Morava-Vardar corridor with around 750 mm. The Mediterranean receives the bulk of its rainfall during autumn and early spring, the plains in late spring and early autumn. In the matter of winds the Illyrian lands experience the consequences of lying astride the boundary between the Mediterranean and continental systems. High pressure in central Europe and lower pressure in the Mediterranean produces the notorious winter bura (bora), a cold dry wind which sears down the Adriatic from Istria to Albania. Locally it can become a great danger to shipping at anchor and is totally destructive of any tree- or vegetation-growth, especially in the northern Adriatic. Similar conditions produce the Vardarac which blows down the Vardar during winter, cold and dry like the bura but much less violent.

Except on the dry karst towards the Adriatic and the loess platforms around the Danube the Illyrian lands tend to be tree-covered, though a good deal of this has been removed through human activity since prehistoric times. Towards the Mediterranean the characteristic cover is the maquis, a combination of drought-resistant shrubs which is widespread between the mountains and the coast. At higher levels this can turn into light deciduous woodland. Where some soil is retained in the limestone karst an open woodland of broad-leaved trees, including hornbeam and varieties of oak, can develop, and towards the north the karst areas tend to be more densely wooded with oak and beech. The interior mountains of Bosnia and Old Serbia are densely forested with oak and beech, a huge natural resource for long barely exploited. In Macedonia woodland is now confined to the higher ridges and plateaus but evidently never extended to the alluvial plains. Towards the north, areas such as Šumadija, whose name means 'woodland', have now largely been cleared for cultivation. In the plains few trees are to be seen, except for the stands of willow and poplar which cover the wetlands near the rivers. On the whole the Illyrian lands are among the least favoured areas of Mediterranean Europe in the matter of soils. These, when present, originate from the rock and are generally shallow with little formation of humus. The karst limestone is bare save for

a few pockets of clay, but alluvium, albeit badly drained, covers the basins. In the plains of Albania the cultivation of alluvial deposits requires irrigation during the hot summers. Some valleys contain cultivable soils but many are narrow and the soils have been covered with stony deposition. In some upland basins of the mountainous and lake region the alluvial and other deposits of dried-out lakes have produced soils of a high quality, though often amounting to only a small proportion of the Ohrid, Korcë, Debar and Kukës basins. The forest soils of the belt of lower hills to the north of the high mountains offer a better reward for cultivation, while the most recent loess and alluvial deposits of the plains are now fully cultivated.

The united state of the South Slavs proclaimed on 1 December 1918 comprised all the Illyrian lands except for Albania, where a boundary line defined with Montenegro in 1913 was retained. The predominantly Albanian Kosovo region was also assigned to Yugoslavia. At the time Albania was in no position to press her claim, while the Yugoslavs were eager to gain northern Albania itself for its easier passage to the Adriatic. In the northwest the border with Italy was no less a problem, in a manner which mirrored the conflicting needs of those who inhabited the Illyrian karst plateaus and the population of the plains in northeast Italy in ancient times. The east coast of the Adriatic had for centuries been under Italian influence. Until Napoleon most of it had belonged to the Republic of Venice and in 1815 it passed under Austrian rule. An undisclosed pact in 1915 promised most of the coast and islands to Italy but in the final treaty Italy was confined to the Istrian peninsula, including the ports of Trieste and Pula, and further south Zadar and some minor islands. The Italian grievance focused on Fiume (Rijeka), an Italian port in a Croatian hinterland, which in 1919 was siezed by an expedition of Italian patriots. After the Treaty of Rapallo (1920) had proclaimed it a free city Fiume was eventually annexed to Italy under Mussolini (1924), leaving merely the eastern suburb of Susak as the wholely inadequate Adriatic harbour for northwest Yugoslavia. After the Second World War the Yugoslav need for an adequate Adriatic port was acknowledged with the award of almost all Istria, along with the Julian Alps. Unfortunately, Trieste was denied and a wholely artificial frontier line from Gorizia on

the Isonzo to Koper (Capodistria) ten miles behind the coast left the once-great port of Trieste bereft of its natural hinterland. Along the Dalmatian coast all Italian possessions were assigned to Yugoslavia, the first occasion since the end of the Roman Empire when the entire area was politically integrated with the interior.

The stirring of Albanian nationalism in the late nineteenth century was prompted less by a desire for freedom than by the fear of being partitioned between an enlarged Greece and Serbia. They resisted the encroachments of the Montenegrins sanctioned by the Congress of Berlin in 1878, while their hostility to an increasingly oppressive Turkish regime culminated in the rebellion of 1912 which brought a declaration of Albanian independence before the end of the year. The Greeks and Slavs objected to the new state, the latter eager to join Serbia with the Adriatic via the route from Ohrid. The Montenegrins had designs on the north, while the Greeks were more than willing to take over southern Albania with its large Orthodox population. Across the Adriatic, Italy was a supporter of the new state, confidently anticipating the prospect of increased influence across the strait. Though the Great Powers consented, Albanian independence remained precarious until 1920 when it was formally accepted by Italy, which retained possession of the small island Sazani (Saseno) in the Bay of Vlora (Valona). Kosovo and the Metohija, which in 1912 the Turks had been prepared to include with their offer of an autonomous Albanian province, was in 1920 finally ceded to Yugoslavia. During the Second World War the Albanians gained temporary control of the area while under Italian rule but gave it up in 1945 without protest, in spite of its Albanian majority. The rupture of relations between Yugoslavia and the rest of the communist bloc in 1948 was marked by a renewed hostility towards the Yugoslavs, a change which, in the eyes of most Albanians, was a satisfactory return to the natural state of affairs. At the time of writing the old dispute has once more reached a state of crisis. Federal Yugoslavia faces disintegration while a bid for autonomy, or even independence, by Kosovo has been suppressed by an increasingly nationalistic Serbian Republic. The battleground of this conflict has now been extended to the area of prehistory. The

long-standing Albanian claim for a continuity of descent from the ancient Illyrians is now accompanied by arguments that Kosovo and Metohija form parts of an ancient Illyrian homeland that should naturally be joined with the rest of modern Albania.