

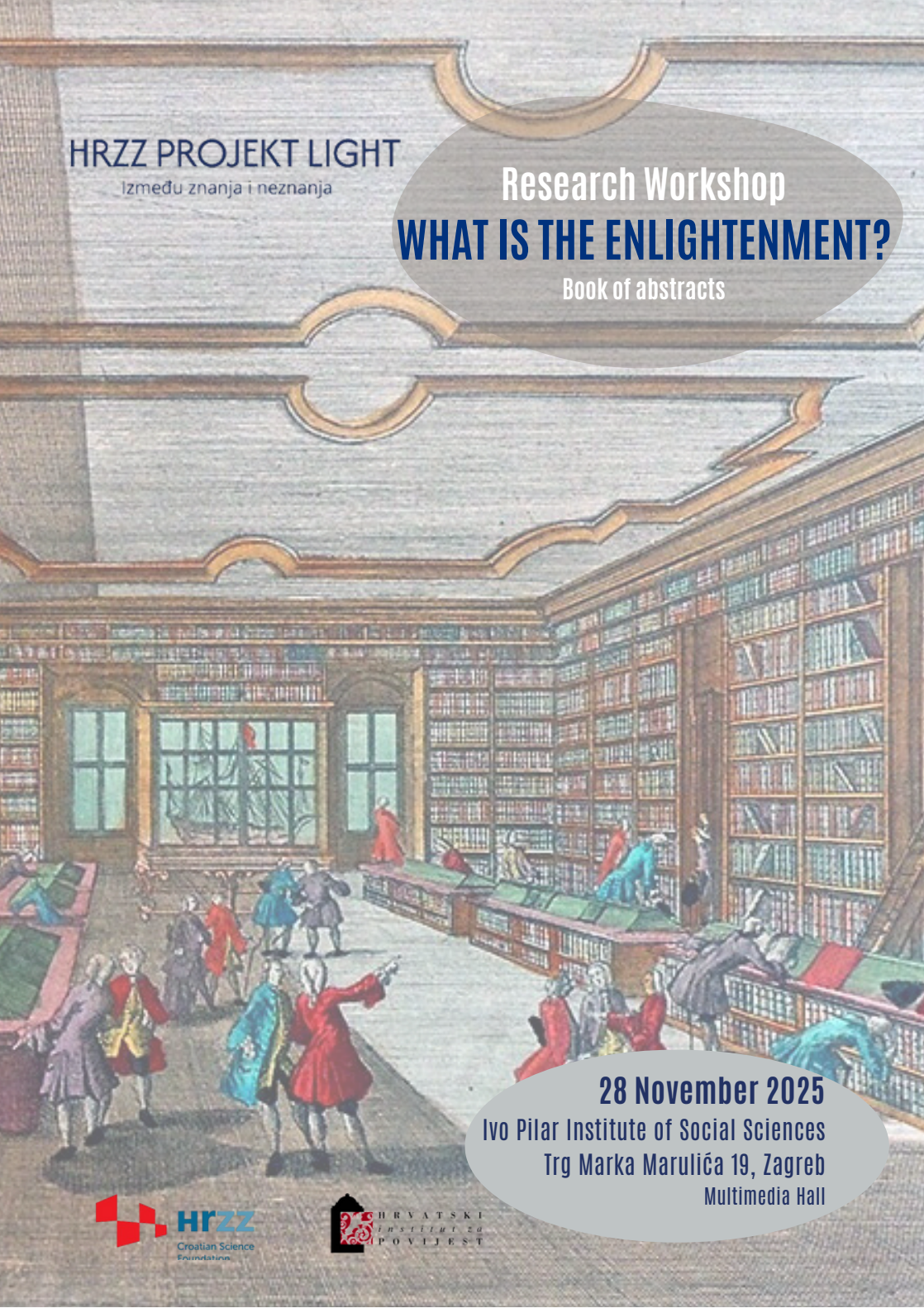
HRZZ PROJEKT LIGHT

Između znanja i neznanja

Research Workshop

WHAT IS THE ENLIGHTENMENT?

Book of abstracts



28 November 2025

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Research Workshop

What is the Enlightenment?

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RESEARCH WORKSHOP

WHAT IS THE
ENLIGHTENMENT?

Zagreb, 28 November 2025

Ivo Pilar Institute of Social Sciences,
Zagreb



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Programme

09:00

Welcome Speech and Participant Introductions

09:15–09:45 KEYNOTE LECTURE

László Kontler (CEU) – *Re-Europeanizing the Enlightenment: A View from the Margins*

09:45–10:15 KEYNOTE LECTURE

John Robertson (University of Cambridge) – *Can We Continue to Work with Franco Venturi's Idea of the Enlightenment as at Once Cosmopolitan and Patriotic?*

10:15–10:30

Discussion

10:30–10:45

Coffee Break

10:45–11:05

Maja Perić (Croatian Institute of History) – *The International Commerce that Connected Antwerp with Rijeka: An Example of Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism Related to Political Economy in Context of the Enlightenment*

11:05–11:25

Discussion

11:25–11:45

Teodora Shek Brnardić (Croatian Institute of History) – *The Venturian Enlightenment in Practice: Examples from Bohemian and Croatian Lands*

11:45–12:05

Discussion

12:05–12:45

Lunch Break

12:45–13:05

Marta Jurković (Croatian Institute of History) – *(Re-)Mapping the Enlightenment in the Eastern Adriatic: Early Reflections and Research Pathways*

13:05–13:25

Discussion

13:25–13:45

Katja Radoš-Perković (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb) – *The Idea of a Dalmatian Enlightenment in the Sources on Giulio Bajamonti*

13:45–14:05

Discussion

14:05–14:25

Zrinko Novosel (Croatian Institute of History) – *Defining the Enlightenment through Local Practices and Modifications of Knowledge*

14:25–14:45

Discussion

14:45–15:00

Coffee Break

15:00–15:20

Stipe Ledić (History Department, Catholic University of Croatia) – *The Croatian Enlightenment: Marginality, Josephinism, and the Estate System*

15:20–15:40

Discussion

15:40–16:00

Goranka Šutalo (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb) – *Variants of Croatian Literary Enlightenment: Croatian Literature in the Habsburg Monarchy in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century*

16:00–16:20

Discussion

16:20

Closing of the Workshop

Marta Jurković

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(Re-)Mapping the Enlightenment in the Eastern Adriatic: Early Reflections and Research Pathways

Although calls have long been made for the sustained study of the Enlightenment in Eastern and Central Europe, research output on the topic remains slim. Croatia is a case in point: the term “Enlightenment” [*prosvjetiteljstvo*] itself remains ill-defined and is often used interchangeably with related but distinct concepts such as “Josephinism” and “physiocracy”. A comprehensive overview of the intellectual landscape has been further hindered by the political and cultural fragmentation of Croatian historical lands, which in the eighteenth century were divided among Habsburg, Venetian, and Ottoman spheres of influence. Existing scholarship reflects this fragmentation, with individual studies addressing specific issues, such as the role of agricultural academies in social reform. Works in English are even fewer, with the notable exception of Larry Wolff’s analysis of Venetian attitudes toward Dalmatia. Nonetheless, even these limited inquiries have demonstrated that local intellectuals were, in Franco Venturi’s terms, both cosmopolitan and patriotic: they engaged in contemporary European-level debates with the aim of improving their own societies. In this paper, I will outline my ongoing doctoral research on private libraries in Venetian Istria and Dalmatia and the Republic of Dubrovnik as sites of knowledge production and circulation, focusing on methodological questions and the challenges posed by the lack of critical editions.

Prof. László Kontler

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Re-Europeanizing the Enlightenment: A View from the Margins

Until recently, the intellectual and cultural history of the “less happy lands of Europe” was studied as successive processes of fertilisation by influences from apparently more advanced regions, in a perspective based on notions of belatedness, incompleteness and lack of originality. Acknowledging the great value of comparative studies by previous generations of scholars, today inquiries informed by this approach seem to be analytically unsatisfactory, and the outcome is unexciting. Even if the historical record of intellectual exertion in “peripheral” lands is meaningful to study largely as a history of receptions, it is reasonable to acknowledge the agency of the recipient side, including its intention and ability to produce not faint replicas of metropolitan ideas, but creative adaptations and original responses reflecting contingent and context-dependent agendas.

The broadening of the scope of Enlightenment studies over the past decades has been a source of inspiration and encouragement for students of the phenomenon in the lands where, according to the earlier research paradigm, it hardly existed at all. Yet, Central Europe, as one of such regions, still features poorly in recent synthetic studies of the Enlightenment. While these—very rightly—discuss extensively the role of Europe’s global entanglement in shaping the Enlightenment (and vice versa), the Central European Enlightenment tends to receive attention in separate volumes dedicated to the “peripheries of the Enlightenment”—in the company of other “peripheries” on Europe’s geographic margins. As in other cases, the globalization of European history in the Age of Enlightenment seems to come at the cost of losing from sight the Europeanization of the history of the Enlightenment. This talk is intended to take stock, and to propose avenues for re-inserting the region in the encompassing exploration of the Enlightenment, which may also hold lessons for our understanding of the mainstream and global Enlightenment.

Asst. Prof. Stipe Ledić

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The Croatian Enlightenment: Marginality, Josephinism, and the Estate System

Contemporary Austrian historiography maintains that Enlightenment ideas and the theory of natural law in the Habsburg Monarchy were realised through the reform processes of the second half of the eighteenth century. This was the period of enlightened absolutism, that is, Josephinism. In addition to the scholarly-legal theorists who advocated for the implementation of Enlightenment ideas, a decisive role in the reform-driven transformation of the administrative system was played by actual political circumstances: economic inefficiency, military threats from the Kingdom of Prussia, and internal political heterogeneity stemming from the position of the Kingdom of Hungary.

In the lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen, the intensive reform processes initiated by the Viennese Court in the 1760s were met with exceptionally strong resistance from the historically deep-rooted and self-sufficient estate-based political system. The marginality of the relatively small territory of Civil and Military Croatia within the Habsburg Monarchy was evident in its centuries-long status as a borderland with the Ottoman Empire. This marginality—and Croatia's role as a frontier against the archetypal enemy of Christian Europe—led over the centuries to the creation of specific estate-based political and social structures.

By the mid-eighteenth century, when European Enlightenment culture was at its zenith, Croatian society remained in the shadow of the Ottoman threat. Ultimately, the promising momentum of Josephinian reforms was “broken” during the Austro-Turkish War of 1787-1791, which produced an exceptionally severe economic crisis and generated social and political instability throughout the Hungarian-Croatian lands.

Given the political self-sufficiency of the Croatian estate system and the lack of an autonomous intellectual sphere, the driving force of Josephinian modernisation reforms came exclusively from the Viennese Court.

Through engagement and growing familiarity with the practices and aims of Josephinian policy toward Croatia, certain public figures came to recognise the importance and necessity of implementing these reforms, whose central purpose was to create an administrative framework that would serve as a precondition for pursuing modern economic policies aimed at improving the general living conditions of the entire population. In this sense, the roles of two public figures—intellectuals who openly advocated the need to implement Josephinian policy in Croatia—will be evaluated. Josip Keresturi was an independent intellectual who rose to prominence in the Habsburg Monarchy through his legal and literary abilities. His legacy offers an exceptional testimony of the state of Hungarian-Croatian society during the Josephinian era. Because he occupied a relatively low position within the political structure of the Viennese Court, and given the widespread anti-Josephinian sentiment among the broader social strata, his Enlightenment thought had limited reach.

By contrast, the Canon and Bishop of Zagreb Maksimilijan Vrhovac, from a position of considerable power, sought to implement Josephinian reforms in the Diocese of Zagreb. Through these two case studies, the scope and impact of Enlightenment thought in Croatia will be assessed.

Dr Zrinko Novosel

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Defining the Enlightenment Through Local Practices and Modifications of Knowledge

Franco Venturi's views on the Enlightenment have mainly focused on progressive ideas and the secular character of Italian intellectuals as cornerstones for defining the movement as a whole. These have provoked vibrant discussions, resulting in new approaches to 1) the phenomena involved in knowledge transfers across political, social and cultural borders; 2) the local manifestations of intellectual production, and 3) the description of related intellectual practices and processes. Such interpretations have been promoted by John Robertson, who emphasized comparative and transnational aspects, and by László Kontler, who focused on the plurality of socio-cultural communicative processes.

The case of local intellectual production in this context proves to be indicative, as these intellectual practices—deemed peripheral in mainstream enlightened production for their negligible impact on the most prominent enlightened ideas—display modifications of knowledge and cultural transfers which defined the enlightened “republic of letters” as a whole. Although marginality may be ascribed to local intellectual communities—such as the group of legal professors and clergymen in late eighteenth-century Zagreb who dealt with the Hungarian legal tradition and canon law during the reformist era of Maria Theresa and Joseph II—their cases speak of intensive intellectual exchange, predominantly in line with the “patriotic” or “reformist” framework of the theoretical enlightened discussions. The concept of marginality should therefore be infused with a sense of importance for processes of knowledge exchange and modification of enlightened ideas in particular intellectual settings.

From this perspective, the case of Zagreb intellectuals proves to be valuable, as their discussions on legal matters reflected official state views, but also showed modifications of knowledge apparent in and specific to the local environment. The investigation of these “local enlightenments” is useful for understanding the intellectual movement as a whole, because it diffuses the monolithic view of the European Enlightenment and supports a multi-layered perspective as a framework for further discussions.

Dr Maja Perić

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The International Commerce that Connected Antwerp with Rijeka: An Example of Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism Related to Political Economy in Context of the Enlightenment

After exposing the pitfalls of a structuralist approach to the Enlightenment as something that can be explained purely philosophically, Franco Venturi (1914–1994) argued for a more contextual approach foregrounding the political and economic ideas of the Enlightenment that shaped society. He emphasises the connection between patriotism and cosmopolitanism, concepts inextricably linked to political economy. The improvement of international commerce and the benefits it brought to the population were central to this, and the intellectual background of actors involved in spreading these ideals played a crucial role.

In my presentation, I will apply these concepts to the case study of Antwerp and Rijeka, where trade was also central and of general benefit to the Austrian Habsburg society to which both cities belonged. This demonstrates that the influence of the Enlightenment was not limited by national borders. Just like Robertson's comparison between Naples and Scotland, by explaining the influence of Antwerp investors in the ports of Rijeka and Trieste, I hope to confirm the importance of cosmopolitanism and patriotism in understanding the Enlightenment in its historical context. The negotiations between Vienna and the investors concerning the establishment of the Privileged Company—which was also considered necessary for the improvement of trade and for the common good—are a clear example of how the arguments put forward by Venturi and Robertson can be understood. These negotiations point to intellectual interaction and exchange, with reform and improvement at their core, which we can deduce from, among other things, the network of correspondence linking Rijeka, Antwerp, and Vienna.

Furthermore, the case study ties in with what Kontler attempts to clarify, namely that the Enlightenment was not simply a core-periphery phenomenon, in which regions such as Southeastern Europe were either belatedly incorporated or entirely excluded. This case study suggests that the economic importance of Rijeka should not be ignored, as it played a significant role in this interregional exchange network of political and economic reforms and objectives.

During the presentation, I will describe the case study in general terms and explain how I think it ties in with new approaches to the Enlightenment. In order to do so, I will give an overview of both the literature I have read over the past few months and the archival sources which already confirm what has been argued above.

Assoc. Prof. Katja Radoš-Perković

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The Idea of a Dalmatian Enlightenment in the Sources on Giulio Bajamonti

The investigation aims to determine whether the various, mostly 20th century papers dedicated to the life and work of Giulio Bajamonti (1744–1800) can provide a picture of a specific, regional Dalmatian Enlightenment within a major Venetian and/or Italian movement. The bibliography used for the research encompasses approximately thirty papers and volumes by Croatian scholars with the exception of Franco Venturi's chapter on Dalmatia in the final volume of his *Settecento riformatore* (1990, pp. 327-424). The objective of the research is to evaluate the data both from the point of view of quantity of useful information on the subject, the epoch and the international networks, as well as of the quality of information. The latter is a delicate task of trying to discover how much is repetitive or stereotypical, and if there is analytical rigor and necessary scientific distance (objectiveness) in the papers, or just proud but unfounded publicity. The depictions of Bajamonti's various lines of work and scientific contributions have been either merely biobibliographical (we have several detailed reports on his life, his works, and his written legacy, such as Milčetić's in 1912, Kečkemet's in 1975 and Duplančić's in 1996, based on the documents stored in the library of the Archeological Museum in Split), or very specifically linked to one particular aspect of his interest such as medicine or chemistry or ethnography etc., which does not take into consideration the wider picture and his influence in the spreading of ideas. His musical endeavors are the only aspect of Bajamonti's creation that has been thoroughly studied and is available to the public. It is thanks to musicologists that we have recently acquired a critical edition of a large portion of Bajamonti's letters, containing the transcription of the Italian original, the Croatian translation, and a rich apparatus which represents a new valuable source (Tomić Ferić 2024).

The main hypothesis of this paper is that Bajamonti has indeed been one of the key figures of what may in the future be called the Dalmatian Enlightenment, but that the movement itself has not yet been clearly defined and described neither from the perspective of single contributions nor through the study of institutions, policies, economic development, culture etc.

Prof. John Robertson (Emeritus)
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Can We Continue to Work with Franco Venturi's Idea of the Enlightenment as at Once Cosmopolitan and Patriotic?

My contribution will be in three parts. First, I shall outline the genesis and character of Venturi's understanding of the Enlightenment. This will include the formation and early expression of his interest in Enlightenment thinkers before and immediately after World War II, and the decisive turn his understanding took in his 1953 paper to a conference of Italian historians, "La circolazione delle idee". I will then examine how his understanding of the Enlightenment as combining cosmopolitanism with patriotism was worked out, both on an international scale in his 1960 conference address on "The European Enlightenment", and in particular detail in *Settecento riformatore* (from Volume 5:2 of which he derived the article on "The Agrarian Academies of Dalmatia"). By the end, Venturi may have been close to identifying Enlightenment with modernisation; but he always retained his eye for what was intellectually distinctive. Second, I will briefly summarise how I myself framed the comparison of Enlightenment in Scotland and Naples to exemplify and develop Venturi's. To be underlined will be the importance of the political framework in defining the possibilities of economic and social reform in the two countries—but also the scope for a common intellectual history of the Enlightenment. My work, however, had its own contexts, in political and social developments in Scotland and (to a lesser extent) Naples between 1980 and 2005. Consequently, the third and final part of my paper will ask whether the Venturian approach can be sustained in our present contexts. Given the ever-present normativity of the concept of Enlightenment, should historians be more careful what they wish for when they reconstruct Enlightenments in the eighteenth century? Since 1989, historians have been particularly keen to identify Enlightenment with "modernity" (itself a value-laden concept). But is it so clear now what "modernity" stands for?

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The Venturian Enlightenment in Practice: Examples from Bohemian and Croatian Lands

Ever since the defence of my PhD thesis entitled “The Enlightened Officer at Work: the Educational Projects of the Bohemian Count Franz Joseph Kinsky (1739-1805)” (2004) at Central European University in Budapest, I have been trying to make a case for the Enlightenment in Bohemian and Croatian lands, which were historically part of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Republic of Venice, and the Republic of Ragusa. My contributions to Enlightenment scholarship have included both historical case studies and theoretical and methodological reflections on the possibility of researching the Enlightenment in regions other than Western Europe. From the beginning, I have emphasised the usefulness of the concept of the Enlightenment as conceived by the late Italian scholar Franco Venturi (1914–1994), which combines patriotism and universal cosmopolitanism as conceptual tools for examining local contexts. In this paper, I will first present existing approaches to Enlightenment research in Czech and Croatian studies, which remain rooted in national contexts. I will then argue for the usefulness of the Venturian approach—which relates ideas to reforms—in charting a European Enlightenment in which there is no gradation of the relevance of local actors and their contributions. Finally, I will outline some of the criteria by which historical actors can be assessed for inclusion within the Enlightenment canon in the LIGHT project.

Asst. Prof. Goranka Šutalo

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Variants of Croatian Literary Enlightenment: Croatian Literature in the Habsburg Monarchy in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century

Croatian literary Enlightenment has been described in Croatist literary historiography mostly imprecisely. It is reduced to popular didacticism and defined primarily by its “shortcomings” in comparison with French Enlightenment, from which it differs greatly in being neither atheistic nor anti-feudal. Scholars have therefore questioned the concept as such, which is sometimes, in the absence of more precise definitions, reduced merely to “prosvjeta” [education] (Matić 1945).

In the eighteenth century, Croatian literature in the Habsburg Monarchy encompassed two literary regions, that is, two distinct literatures—the Slavonian Shtokavian literature and the Kajkavian literature of Banal Croatia—whose principal representatives worked and created within the context of enlightened absolutism, specifically the reforms of Maria Theresa and Joseph II. The selection of representative authors thus extends beyond the strict chronological boundaries, reaching into the early nineteenth century, as illustrated by examples such as the comedies of the Zagreb Pauline Tituš Brezovački and anonymous works of Kajkavian drama.

As representative figures of Slavonian Enlightenment-era literature, I take into consideration Matija Antun Relković (1732–1798), Adam Tadija Blagojević (1745/1746?–after 1797), and Josip Krmpotić (c. 1750/1755–after 1797). The focus on writers active within the Habsburg Monarchy in the eighteenth century and at the turn of the nineteenth is therefore not accidental; their work will serve to clarify the Enlightenment ideologemes abundantly present in their literary texts, with the aim of describing more precisely this particular variant of Croatian literary Enlightenment, temporarily setting aside writers from Dubrovnik and Dalmatia.

Taking into account the importance of the “national turn” (Robertson 2005: 27) in the study of the Enlightenment as a phenomenon—a turn to which John Robertson draws attention, observing as its consequence a kind of “decentralization” of the French Enlightenment—the term “Enlightenment” is considered and reflected upon in the plural (in different European national contexts). At the same time, one must also consider the shortcomings of such an approach, which Robertson explains in terms of the potential loss of coherence of the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement, resulting in the “fragmentation” of its ideas into various discursive practices and separate national units (*ibid.*: 28). Ultimately, this also leads to considering the Enlightenment along the lines suggested by Franco Venturi, in terms of the importance of cosmopolitanism and patriotism as its constituent elements (Venturi 1972: 18–19), which will also be examined and questioned using examples from literary texts of Slavonian and Kajkavian writers.

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