

Original paper

UDC: 94(497.586Dubrovnik:560)“14/15”

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.21857/9e311hv7gm>

## ***DRAGOMANO NOSTRO DELLA PORTA: DRAGOMANS OF THE PORTE IN THE SERVICE OF DUBROVNIK IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES\****

VESNA MIOVIĆ

**ABSTRACT:** Ragusan tribute ambassadors to the Porte needed the assistance of trained dragomans. Considering that the Ragusans did not have such language intermediaries in their service prior to the mid-sixteenth century, they used the assistance of the dragomans of the Porte, who mastered European languages, contacted and maintained correspondence with European residents, consuls, envoys and rulers, and generally, were an important source of information for the Ottomans and the Europeans alike. Owing to the abundance of sources related to this topic in the State Archives in Dubrovnik, this article aims to illuminate these professionals and their relations with the Ragusans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

**Key words:** dragomans of the Porte, Dubrovnik Republic, Ottoman Empire, 15th century, 16th century

From 1430, Dubrovnik Republic dispatched its envoys to the Porte sporadically. By becoming an Ottoman tributary in 1458, two Ragusan noblemen, the so-called “tribute ambassadors”, delivered annual *haraç* to the sultan. Clearly, at the Porte they needed the assistance of good dragomans. Given that prior to the mid-sixteenth century the Ragusans did not have their own dragomans, they used the services of the official interpreters of the Porte.

\* This research has been supported by the Croatian Science Foundation (HRZZ), under project INTRADA, IP-2018-01-5527.

---

**Vesna Miović, member of the Institute for Historical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Address: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, Lapadska obala 4, 20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia. E-mail: [vesna.miovic@du.t-com.hr](mailto:vesna.miovic@du.t-com.hr)**

---

Dragomans of the Porte were fluent in European languages, they contacted and kept correspondence with European residents, consuls, envoys and rulers, maintained connections with Christian relatives, participated in diplomatic missions to the West, and were omnipresent at the Porte. Therefore, they represented an important, yet not fully reliable source of intelligence for either the Ottomans or the Europeans. Since they were quite familiar with both worlds, their role proved vital in Ottoman diplomacy and the presentation of the Ottoman Empire to the Europeans.<sup>1</sup> Diplomatic and consular representatives of the European states to Istanbul used the translation service of the dragomans of the Porte, but equally so their influence. The Ragusans did the same, and this explains why the State Archives in Dubrovnik abounds in data on the dragomans of the Porte.

*Sultan's chancellors, secretaries, diachi, gramatichi: Đurađ, Toma Katavoljin, Dimitrius, Skender, Ibrahim, Murad Rhim*

Among the holdings of the State Archives in Dubrovnik are 130 fermans dating from the 1430-1520 period, written in the Cyrillic and *Bosančica* (Bosnian Cyrillic script).<sup>2</sup> Some of them, mainly tribute receipts, are the translations of the copies

---

<sup>1</sup> The issues of cultural, religious and other interactions between the Christian and Muslim Mediterranean have attracted historians over the last twenty years. An important role in these relations was played not only by the dragomans, but also by converts, spies and other groups who, in many different ways, were connected to the Ottoman and Christian world. For more details see: E. Natalie Rothman, »Interpreting Dragomans: Boundaries and Crossings in the Early Modern Mediterranean.« *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51/4 (2009): pp. 771-800; eadem, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012; eadem, »Dragomans and "Turkish Literature": The Making of a Field of Inquiry.« *Oriente Moderno* 93 (2013): pp. 390-421; Maartje van Gelder and Tijana Krstić, »Introduction: Cross-Confessional Diplomacy and Diplomatic Intermediaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean.« *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015): pp. 93-105.

<sup>2</sup> Bosko I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire ottoman (1430-1520)*, Paris: Association Pirre Belon, 1998: pp. 195-372. Generally known is a fifteenth-century account by an anonymous Ragusan, according to which the Porte had chanceries for foreign languages, each having its own chancellor. The Greeks and Italians received sultans' documents in the Greek language, while Hungary, Wallachia, Moldavia and the Slavic-speaking territories including Dubrovnik received documents written in the Cyrillic (Nicolas Vatin, »L'emploi du grec comme langue diplomatique par les Ottomans (fin du XVe - début de XVIe siècle).«, in: *Istanbul et les langues orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel. Paris - Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1997: pp. 41-42; Gilles Veinstein, »The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters.«, in: *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*, 3, ed. Kemal Çiçek. Ankara, Yeni Türkiye, 2000: pp. 607, 614). During the reign of Süleyman the Magnificent, until

written in the Ottoman Turkish language.<sup>3</sup> Ottoman historiography holds that Đurađ, a Serb by origin, in 1430 kept the correspondence of Sultan Murad II in Greek and Slavic language.<sup>4</sup> In the Ragusan archival sources dating from August 1430 to the end of 1431, Đurađ is recorded as *canziler grande, diach* and *gramatico*.<sup>5</sup> Ragusan diplomats were well acquainted with him, and were grateful for his services. It appears likely that he drafted one of Murad's three fermans from 1430 and 1431, which were very favourable for the Ragusans. The sultan guaranteed safety to their state, and free passage to Ragusan merchants throughout Ottoman territories. For a tribute of 500 ducats, he was planning to cede to the Ragusans Trebinje, Vrm and Klobuk, yet this plan never came to fruition.<sup>6</sup>

After the first Ottoman occupation of the Serbian despotate in 1439, most important territory for Ragusan trade, Sultan Murad II began to demand tribute from the Dubrovnik Republic. At first, the Ragusans opposed this measure, yet gave in when the Ottomans halted all trade relations between the Republic and the Empire. According to the terms negotiated at the Porte in 1442, Ragusan ambassadors agreed that the Dubrovnik Republic would present the sultan with an annual gift of silverware worth 1,000 gold ducats. In return, he issued a charter by which the Republic and its inhabitants were guaranteed security, and the Ragusan merchants trading on the Ottoman territories were given significant

---

1533 documents in Polish were also issued (G. Veinstein, »The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters«: p. 607).

<sup>3</sup> Gliša Elezović, *Turski spomenici*, vol. I/1. Beograd: SKA, 1940: pp. 24-25, 154-156, 167-168, 173-174, 176, 178-180, 194-203; B. I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire ottoman*: pp. 195, 216, 227, 234, 240, 246, 269-270, 275; Vesna Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*, Dubrovnik: Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku: pp. 137-140.

<sup>4</sup> Ismail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı devletinin merkez ve bahriye teşkilâtı*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1988: p. 226; Bilgin Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.« *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 29 (2007): p. 44; Arzu Meral, »A Survey of Translation Activity in the Ottoman Empire.« *Osmanlı Araştırmaları* 42 (2013): p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Notes et extraits pur servir à l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, vol. II, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1899: pp. 286-287, 302-303. Around this time, that is, in October 1431, the Florentine archival sources mention the sultan's chancellor Dimitrio Yelias (N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits*: p. 1).

<sup>6</sup> The fermans were drafted by various hands, and were issued on 10 June 1430 in Edirne, 6 December 1430 in Edirne, and on 9 June 1430 on Çöke (*Çöke yaylası*). The first ferman is a translation from Greek (State Archives in Dubrovnik /hereafter cited as: SAD/, *Diplomata et Acta, Skupina čirilskih dokumenata*, series 76, Truhelka, XXIII.1, XXIII.2, XXIII.3; Ćiro Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.« *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 23 (1911): pp. 4-7; Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, vol. I/2, Beograd-Sremski Karlovci: Srpska Kraljevska Akademija, 1934: pp. 227-231; Ivan Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*, Beograd: SAN, 1942: p. 55).

privileges. In March 1442, the ambassadors returned to Dubrovnik. Considering that, according to the protocol, the Ragusans were to issue a written oath on the confirmation of the agreement, sultan's envoy Ali Bey and Dimitrus the Greek also arrived with them, the latter being recorded as *cancellarius* and *gramaticus* in archival sources.<sup>7</sup>

In the Dubrovnik collection of fermans written in the Cyrillic and *Bosančica*, explicitly cited is only one translator for the "Slavic language" (*lingua schiava*). Drafted in Skopje, on 23 October 1458, by the sultan's chancellor Toma Katavoljin is a document by which Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror confirms the privileges to Ragusan merchants on the territory of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>8</sup>

After the fall of Istanbul, Mehmed the Conqueror employed Byzantine chancellors to translate the correspondence, to found a library, and translate Western works. It is assumed that Lütfi Bey was the first in a long succession of converts to Islam who translated the documents of the sultan and the Porte, that is, who worked as dragomans. As sultan's envoy, in 1479 he travelled to Venice for the purpose of peace negotiations, most probably via Dubrovnik<sup>9</sup>.

There is no evidence on Lütfi Bey in the archival sources of Dubrovnik. Yet before the time of Lütfi Bey, there is record of the officials Skender and Ibrahim. In June 1463, the Senate ordered the tribute ambassadors to present the dignitaries of the Porte, among whom was chancellor Skender, with the gifts "more valuable than usual".<sup>10</sup> At the very bottom of the ferman in Cyrillic, which Sultan Mehmed

<sup>7</sup> SAD, *Acta Consilii Rogatorum* (hereafter cited as: *Cons. Rog.*), series 3, vol. 8, f. 111; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: p. 92; N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits*: pp. 388-389. Following the restoration of Serbia and its despot in 1444, the Ragusans no longer presented the sultan with a gift (I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: pp. 92-107).

<sup>8</sup> B. I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire ottoman*: pp. 166, 196-198.

<sup>9</sup> B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: p. 45; A. Meral, »A Survey of Translation Activity in the Ottoman Empire.«: p. 108; Maria Pia Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore; Inviati Ottomani a Venezia dalla caduta di Costantinopoli alla guerra di Candia*, Venezia: Deputazione Editrice, 1994: pp. 50, 196; Maria Pia Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente*, Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2010: pp. 132-133.

<sup>10</sup> Archival sources offer no information on the usual gifts to the Porte at the time. In 1463, the Senate decided the following: *Secunda pars est de mittendo ipso imperatori ultra charagium consuetum in argentariis et aliis rebus ducatos trecentos; Prima pars est de mittendo basse ultra consuetos ducatos trecentos; Prima pars est de mittendo Isach basse ultra consuetum ducatos centum quinquaginta (cass.) Secunda pars est de mittendo ultra consuetum duc. centum; Prima pars est de mittendo Iusabech Ysachovich ultra consuetum duc. centum; Prima pars est de mittendo Schender cancellario ultra consuetum duc. viginti; Prima pars est de donando Mustafabegh sclavo imperatoris duc. centum* (Ć. Truhelka, »Dubrovačke vijesti o godini 1463.« *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja Bosne i Hercegovine* 22 (1910): p. 16).

the Conquerer addressed to the Ragusans on 3 August 1466, the name Skender is written down.<sup>11</sup> This could mean that he was the one who drafted this ferman. This may likely be the same Skender also mentioned in 1463.

In 1474, the sultan sent a ferman to the Ragusans demanding that Ahmed Hercegović and his brother, Herceg Vlatko Kosača, be given the property they inherited after the death of their father and mother, which was deposited in Dubrovnik. He added that he was sending to Dubrovnik his logothete Ibrahim to assist in the distribution of property. Accompanied by his father and four servants, by the end of 1474 Ibrahim delivered the ferman to Dubrovnik. Ragusan dragomans, who in the so-called Turkish chancery at the Rector's Palace translated and archived Ottoman documents, on the back of the ferman noted that it was delivered by dragoman Ibrahim.<sup>12</sup> Judging by the handwriting, this annotation dates from the sixteenth century. In 1474, the Ragusans mention Ibrahim as sultan's *sclavo*,<sup>13</sup> *cancellario* and *ambassatore*.<sup>14</sup>

In 1476 Ragusan tribute ambassadors presented Ibrahim, "the sultan's *sclavo* and *diacho*", with 100 ducats and two pieces of cloth.<sup>15</sup>

The function that Ibrahim held is difficult to determine, most probably because it was not clearly defined. The terms logothete, *cancellario*, *diach* conveyed various meanings, from the head of chancery to chancery clerk or ordinary scribe.<sup>16</sup>

The Greek Harmonius Atheniensis was a bibliophile who copied Greek manuscripts.<sup>17</sup> Most likely in the summer of 1482 he adopted Islam. Under the

<sup>11</sup> Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 39-40.

<sup>13</sup> Sultan's envoys from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Ragusan sources are often recorded as *sclavo*, that is, "sultan's servant" (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 20, f. 290; vol. 22, f. 73; vol. 23, f. 277; vol. 25, f. 136v; vol. 39, f. 120v). For more details on the meaning of the term *sclavo*, see: I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: p. 20; B. I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire ottoman*: pp. 382-383).

<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim, his father and four servants received appropriate gifts from the Ragusans. Ibrahim was additionally presented with a copy of the testament of Duke Stjepan Kosača (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 22, f. 153-154v).

<sup>15</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 23, f. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Stanoje Stanojević, »Studije o srpskoj diplomaciji.« *Glas SKA* 61 (1923): pp. 50-96; Miloš Blagojević, *Državna uprava u srpskim srednjovekovnim zemljama*. Beograd: Javno preduzeće Službeni list SRJ, 2001: pp. 167-185.

<sup>17</sup> Maria Papanicolaou, »Harmonios ho Athenaios: bibliofilo e copista, maestro di greco e diplomatico.«, in: *Opora: Studi in onore di Mgr Paul Canart per il LXX compleanno*, vol. 2, ed.

name Murad Rhim, he worked as a secretary to Sultan Bayezid II.<sup>18</sup> Extant among the holdings of the State Archives in Dubrovnik is an original copy of Bayezid's ferman in Italian, drafted by Harmonius and signed *Harmonius Atheniensis qui modo Murad Rhim nuncupatur Turce prefati Divi Baiasit Imperatoris maximi Secretarius*. The ferman is dated 6 August 1482. In short, in the ferman the sultan demands from the Ragusans to find out the secret whereabouts of his brother Cem, who tried to dethrone him.<sup>19</sup>

It may well be assumed that as dragomans, Đurađ, Toma Katavoljin, Skender, Ibrahim and Murad Rhim mediated in the negotiations between the Ragusan ambassadors and the sultan, viziers and other dignitaries of the Porte. The Senate minutes from 1433 already mention a dragoman (*turcimannus*), who for a fee of 50 perpers assisted the ambassadors at the Porte.<sup>20</sup> In 1471, too, the same archival source mentions the sultan's interpreter, who ought to be presented with a silver cup.<sup>21</sup> Sadly, they were not mentioned by name.

Otherwise, on the basis of the data from March 1471, the official list of the persons receiving gifts on the occasion of the Ragusan tribute delivery was the sultan and the viziers of the Porte. Besides tribute, the sultan would receive four silver cups, while the viziers received two cups each and 100 gold ducats.<sup>22</sup> By a special decree, issued seven months later, it was decided that one cup was to be given to the sultan's dragoman.<sup>23</sup> Dragoman of the Porte, therefore, had not yet been included among the recipients of the usual diplomatic gift on the occasion

---

Santo Luca and Lidia Perria [*Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 52 (1998)]: pp. 283-301. For more on the Greeks in the sultan's translation service, and on Greek as a language of Ottoman diplomacy, see: Cengiz Orhonlu, »Tercüman.«, in: *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 12/1. Istanbul: MEB, 1993: p. 176; N. Vatin, »L'emploi du grec comme langue diplomatique par les Ottomans (fin du XVe - début de XVIe siècle).«: pp. 41-48; B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: pp. 44-45; A. Meral, »A Survey of Translation Activity in the Ottoman Empire.«: pp. 107-108.

<sup>18</sup> John Monfasani, »Lauro Quirini and His Greek Manuscripts: Some Notes on His Culture.«, in: *Et Amicorum: essays on Renaissance humanism and philosophy in honour of Jill Krayer*, ed. Antony Ossa-Richardson, Margaret Meserve. Boston: Brill, 2018: p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> SAD, *Diplomata et Acta*, 15th century, Bečki ćirilski spisi, series 76, no. 1169. Among the holdings of the State Archives in Vienna is yet another Murad's translation into Italian of Bayezid's letter on Cem's abortive attempts to dethrone him (Marwan Rashed, *Die Überlieferungsgeschichte der aristotelischen Schrift De generatione et corruptione*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2002: p. 258).

<sup>20</sup> N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits*: 313.

<sup>21</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 21, f. 140v.

<sup>22</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 21, f. 55-55v.

<sup>23</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 21, f. 140v.

of tribute delivery. Dragoman of the Porte found his place on the list at the end of the fifteenth century, at the latest,<sup>24</sup> since when, in addition to the cup, he also received 10 gold ducats.<sup>25</sup> That was a salary for his service as interpreter to the tribute ambassadors at the audience with the sultan, grand vizier and other viziers of the Porte. For all other services rendered to the Ragusans, dragomans of the Porte were rewarded additionally in gold ducats and fine textiles.<sup>26</sup>

### *Kasım*

It appears that dragoman Kasım worked for the Ragusans over a somewhat longer period, as evidenced by only one of his letters to the Dubrovnik authorities, dated 7 March 1481. In it, he emphasises that he has always tried to be of assistance not only to the Ragusan tribute ambassadors to the Porte, but equally so to “the humblest of servants” from Dubrovnik. However, the ambassadors who visited Istanbul recently,<sup>27</sup> thanked him for his assistance with merely one silver cup, which offended him to such an extent “that he could not soothe his heart”. From the ambassadors in 1480, however, he received 16 gold ducats.<sup>28</sup>

In this period, it became quite clear that Mehmed the Conqueror had Dubrovnik Republic in his focus, weighing whether to conquer it or maintain its tributary status. He resorted to various forms of pressure on the Ragusans. He continually increased the tribute amount,<sup>29</sup> and restricted the freedom of trade to Ragusan merchants. In 1480, he tried to force the Ragusans to submit to him voluntarily.<sup>30</sup> In such a dangerous situation for the Republic, Kasım’s help must have been of great value, and that is why he felt offended by the Ragusan modest reward.

---

<sup>24</sup> Archival series *Lettere di Levante* (state letters and instructions to the ambassadors dispatched to the East) is essential for the data related to gift-giving at the Porte. Missing are the documents for the period 1461-1492.

<sup>25</sup> SAD, *Lettere di Levante* (hereafter cited as: *Lett. Lev.*), series 27.1, vol. 17, f. 15v, 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 24, f. 153v; vol. 27, f. 263v, 265; vol. 30, f. 85v; vol. 31, f. 122v, 182.

<sup>27</sup> Kasım speaks of the ambassadors who arrived in Istanbul in February 1481 (G. Elezović, *Turski spomenici*, I/1: pp. 186-187).

<sup>28</sup> These ambassadors arrived in Istanbul in February 1480 (Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: p. 57).

<sup>29</sup> With the accession to throne of Sultan Bayezid II, the amount of Ragusan annual tribute settled at 12,500 gold ducats (V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*: pp. 137-140).

<sup>30</sup> I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: pp. 249-255.

In his letter, Kasım also mentions “the first ambassadors” who gave him a cup and 6 gold ducats. He recorded them as “the first ambassadors, who were to arrive in the first year”,<sup>31</sup> which could mean that he had already worked for the Ragusans in 1459.<sup>32</sup>

On the basis of Kasım’s letter, it may well be assumed, though with some reservation, that he was a dragoman of the Porte.

Sultan’s *sclavo* Kasım came to Dubrovnik in 1478, 1479 and 1486, *sclavo* Kasım Bey arrived most likely in 1483, while *sclavo* and Kapıcı Kasım in 1485.<sup>33</sup> In 1495, a certain Kasım was dispatched by the sultan to Venice.<sup>34</sup> Dragomans, just like the logothetes before them, were often sent on diplomatic missions, and therefore it is possible that at least one of the mentioned Kasıms was Kasım the dragoman.

The expression “our dragoman” used for the dragomans of the Porte in service of the Dubrovnik Republic first appears in 1496. It was then that the Senate allocated 500 akçe to Božo Saraca and Nikulin Gondola, tribute ambassadors in 1493,<sup>35</sup> for a piece of cloth to be given as gift to “our dragoman”.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps, this may have been Kasım.

<sup>31</sup> Č. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 60-61.

<sup>32</sup> The ambassadors who in March 1458 were dispatched to negotiate the payment of tribute, carried gifts to the sultan, viziers, grand chancellor and other dignitaries (I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: p. 151). The Ragusans delivered their first tribute of 1,500 gold ducats in 1458 in Skopje, where, apparently, they did not use the assistance of dragomans (Branislav Nedeljkić, »Dubrovačko-turski ugovor od 23. oktobra 1458. godine.« *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 11/1 (1970): p. 364). In 1459, they delivered the tribute in Istanbul (Č. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 17-18). The Ragusans paid their annual tribute until 1678. From the start of the eighteenth century to the fall of the Republic in 1808, they paid it every third year. For more on this point: Vesna Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istambulu*. Zagreb - Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2003: pp. 178-200.

<sup>33</sup> Č. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 53-54, 62, 81-82; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: 318, 320; B. I. Bojović, *Raguse et l’Empire ottoman*: pp. 115, 247, 257-258, 288.

<sup>34</sup> M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: p. 197.

<sup>35</sup> Upon return to Dubrovnik, tribute ambassadors were to submit a report on unexpected expenses. Having carefully scrutinised these figures, the Senators would either approve or reject them. Decisions on the ambassadors’ extra expenses were, at times, brought several years after their return from Istanbul. For a more extensive account on unexpected expenses made at the Porte, see: V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istambulu*: pp. 242-245.

<sup>36</sup> Č. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: p. 106; *Cons. Rog.* vol. 27, f. 265.



*Skender Bey*

We know that in 1503 dragoman Skender (Iskender) worked at the Porte.<sup>37</sup> As in Kasim's case, we know about his services to the Ragusans solely from the letters in Cyrillic, which, representing himself as Skender Bey, he sent to the Ragusan authorities between 1506 and 1511. From the letters it is clear that he was always at the service of the ambassadors, and that he promoted Ragusan interests before the Grand Vizier Ali Pasha. Ragusan letters and the news on the developments in the Christendom, conveyed by the ambassadors, he translated into the Ottoman Turkish. He also informed the Ragusans on the rotation of sancakbeys and beylerbeys.<sup>38</sup>

Sultan's *sclavo* Skender travelled to Venice in 1486 and 1487 from Dubrovnik, whereupon Bayezid II demanded that the Ragusans organise his passage, and once in Venice, they were to obtain a document from the Venetians confirming

---

<sup>37</sup> In Skender's day, also mentioned are the dragomans Ibrahim and Alaaddin. They belonged to the imperial army corps, along with subaşı, silâhdars and müteferrikas, in the rank of bey, or sometimes agha. For their translation service they received salaries from a very rich army treasury, therefore, an ideal resource for financing an office which, in formal terms, had not yet existed. This practice came to end in 1527 (Jozef Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.« *Südost-Forschungen* 34 (1975): pp. 33-34; G. Veinstein, »The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters.«: pp. 608, 614; B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: p. 46).

<sup>38</sup> Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 128-134; Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, I/2: pp. 379-384. Ćiro Truhelka published an undated receipt of Ahmed Pasha Hercegović, confirming the payment made by the Ragusan ambassadors Nikulin and Frano to the amount of 47 ducats for the so-called "provision for Konavle" (Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 120-121). Truhelka holds that the receipt was drafted by dragoman Skender Bey, grounding his assumption on the comparison made with the handwriting of Skender Bey's letters to the Ragusans in 1506-11. Hercegović's receipt is no longer extant. The ambassadors Nikulin (Gondola) and Frano (Pozza) were at the Porte in 1488 (G. Elezović, *Turski spomenici*, I/1: p. 227). For more on the origin of the Konavle provision paid to the descendants of Stjepan Vukčić Kosača, see: Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 30-32, 36, 39-40, 92-93; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*: p. 200; G. Elezović, *Turski spomenici*, I/1: pp. 271-279, 599-607, 628; Mihajlo Dinić, »Dubrovački tributi; Mogoriš, Svetodimarski i Konavoski dohodak, Provižun braće Vlatkovića.« *Glas SKA* 168 (1935): p. 742; Niko Kapetanić and Nenad Vekarić, *Stanovništvo Konavala*, vol. I. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1998: pp. 26-33; Niko Kapetanić, *Konavle u XV stoljeću*. Gruda: Matica hrvatska Konavle, 2011: pp. 12-15; Nada Grujić and Danko Zelić, »The Palace of Duke Sandalj Hranić in Dubrovnik.« *Dubrovnik Annals* 15 (2011): pp. 1-66; B. I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire Ottoman (1430-1520)*: pp. 225-226, 237-239, 295, 298-299.

his safe and sound arrival to the lagoon.<sup>39</sup> By the end of 1499 and early 1500, *sclavo* Skender accompanied Duke of Milan, and delivered a ferman to the Ragusans by which they were to make the arrangements for duke's continuation of the journey. Sultan's servant Skender travelled to Venice again in 1512, when the sultan also demanded that the Ragusans organise his passage, and from the Venetians obtain a document confirming his safe arrival.<sup>40</sup> There is reason to assume that at least one of the mentioned Skenders was Skender the dragoman.

On two occasions, in 1505 and 1509, the Senate accepted the ambassadors' expenses for the fees to "our dragoman", who translated a number of Ragusan petitions to the sultan.<sup>41</sup> The mentioned "our dragoman" must have been Skender Bey himself.

### Çoban

The first Ragusan record of dragoman Çoban<sup>42</sup> dates from 1515, when for a reward of 6 gold ducats he obtained for them the transcription of the Florentine *ahdname*,<sup>43</sup> yet the Senate minutes fail to mention whether he was a dragoman of the Porte.

In February 1524, Ragusan authorities ordered the tribute ambassadors to look for "our dragoman" the moment they arrive in Istanbul, as he should have been installed instead of the late dragoman of the Porte.<sup>44</sup> Three months later, Süleyman the Magnificent himself cited Çoban as his own dragoman. Apparently, it was then that Çoban made a payment of the Ragusan tribute of 12,500 gold ducats on their behalf, for which he received the usual sultan's receipt.<sup>45</sup> This action was without precedent, because the tribute was always delivered by the

<sup>39</sup> M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: p. 197; Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 89-90.

<sup>40</sup> Ć. Truhelka, »Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive.«: pp. 137-138; M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: p. 197; B. I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire Ottoman (1430-1520)*: pp. 289-290, 292, 328.

<sup>41</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 30, f. 85v; vol. 31, f. 122v.

<sup>42</sup> There is no doubt that Çoban is a dragoman in literature cited as "Huban" (A. Meral, »A Survey of Translation Activity in the Ottoman Empire.«: p. 47).

<sup>43</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 33, f. 242.

<sup>44</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 19, f. 225, 228v.

<sup>45</sup> *Diplomata et Acta*, 7/2.1, vol. 3, no. 120; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*: p. 153.

Ragusan ambassadors in person.<sup>46</sup> It is not quite clear what exactly happened in 1524. This unusual course of events might only be accounted by the ill health of both Ragusan ambassadors.

The last mention of Çoban in Ragusan documents dates from 1537, when he managed to obtain a ferman for the purchase of Ottoman grain, and when he tried to find out the fate of the crew of a Ragusan ship wrecked in storm en route to Alexandria.<sup>47</sup>

### *Ali Bey*

Ali Bey, who is assumed to have been the first grand dragoman of the Porte (Tur. *baş tercüman*),<sup>48</sup> is recorded from the beginning of the sixteenth century, and he died in 1525.<sup>49</sup> The Ragusans did not mention him explicitly as their dragoman, yet he may have remained “hidden” by the formulation “our dragoman”. They knew him well, as in 1514 and 1517, en route to Venice, he stayed in Dubrovnik. He was hosted in the palace of Sandalj Hranić, in which distinguished Ottoman guests were usually accommodated.<sup>50</sup> On both occasions the Ragusans organised his passage to Venice.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> A similar situation took place somewhat later, in 1628, when the tribute was delivered by the Ragusan dragoman Vicko Bratutti. This action caused quite a stir in Dubrovnik, as the authorities viewed this as an attempt to belittle the act of Dubrovnik’s delivery of tribute. Over the next twenty years, the authorities warned the ambassadors that the sultan’s tribute receipt was to contain their names only (*Diplomata et Acta*, 7/2.1, vol. 17, no. 808; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 45, f. 15; vol. 50, f. 6; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*: p. 246).

<sup>47</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 43, f. 91-91v, 117v, 217; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 81v.

<sup>48</sup> B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> For more on Ali Bey: J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: pp. 27, 33-34, 36, 38-39, 41-42; C. Orhonlu, »Tercüman.«: p. 175; Walter Zele, »Ali Bey, un interprete della Porta nella Venezia del ‘500.« *Studi Veneziani* 19 (1990): pp. 187-224; Jean Louis Bacqué-Grammont, »À propos Yunus Beg, *baş tercümân* de Soliman le Magnifique.«, in: *Istanbul et les langues orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel. Paris - Montréal: L’Harmattan, 1997: pp. 24-25; B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: pp. 46-47; A. Meral, »A Survey of Translation Activity in the Ottoman Empire.«: p. 109; M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: pp. 38, 46, 50-52, 57-58, 62-63, 65, 70-71, 78-82, 86-87, 90, 96, 103, 116-117, 123-125, 131-132, 140-141, 143-146, 180, 187, 190.

<sup>50</sup> N. Grujić and D. Zelić, »The Palace of Duke Sandalj Hranić in Dubrovnik.«: pp. 50, 62.

<sup>51</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 33, f. 102; vol. 34, f. 177; M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: pp. 50-51, 198.

## Mustafa

In the letter to the ambassadors of February 1536, Ragusan authorities mention Mustafa as dragoman of the Porte who was acquainted with the latest developments from 1520, when the sultan imposed a new type of customs to the Ragusans.<sup>52</sup> Mustafa is also recorded in 1523, having notified the Ragusans that the Porte was most dissatisfied, as they had not congratulated the sultan for his invasion of Rodos.<sup>53</sup>

The mentioned letter of February 1536 to the ambassadors is of great relevance because in it the dragomans Ali Çelebi and Yunus Bey are referred to as the members of the family of dragoman Mustafa. As evidenced from this letter, Mustafa was the father of Ali Çelebi and father-in-law of Yunus Bey.<sup>54</sup> There is reason to believe that Mustafa, informally and unofficially, at least, succeeded Ali Bey on the position of the grand dragoman of the Porte, although Çoban may also have been Ali Bey's successor.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 38v-39.

<sup>53</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 19, f. 210.

<sup>54</sup> *Del 1520 in cerca el Gran Signor pose una gabella nominata intervallo, di pagare cinque per cento de tutte le robbe, tanto di quelle che venevano dalle parti di levante, quanto di quelle che andavano, la quale gabella seu intervallo, fu pagata dalli nosti mercatanti alli emini et amaldari, quali in quello tempo scodevano tali denari, si come appare per tre cogiotti scritti dalli cadie di quello tempo, quali Ser Luca Nicolo Seraphino de Bona, andando in Constantinopoli per giustificatione delli nostri mercatanti, mostro alli tre bassalari, cioè Peribassa, Achmatbassa che finise in Cayro et Aiasbassa hora vivo, et questo ancora sano Mostapha dragomano della Porta, e lo figliolo Ali Zelebi, et suo genero Jonusbegh* (*Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 38v-39). Ragusan authorities drafted exactly the same text to the ambassadors in 1539. Evidently, the text of the letter from 1536 was copied word by word, with no alterations made (*Lett. Lev.* vol. 22, f. 89v). In 1540 the ambassadors mentioned three dragomans of the Porte (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 45, f. 185v). Based on the part of the text related to the members of Mustafa's family, one might conclude that Yunus Bey was the son-in-law of Ali Çelebi. However, with regard to the time period in which they are mentioned, it is far more likely that Yunus Bey was Mustafa's son-in-law.

<sup>55</sup> Some historians hold that after Ali Bey's death in 1525, his post was immediately filled by Yunus Bey (J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymâns des Prächtigen.«: pp. 42-46), which is certainly not true. Others, however, argue that Yunus Bey was installed as the grand dragoman of the Porte in 1536 (J. L. Bacqué-Grammont, »À propos Yûnus Beg, *baş tercümân* de Soliman le Magnifique.«: p. 25).

*Ali Çelebi*

Judging by the manner in which Ragusan authorities described dragoman Ali Çelebi in 1532, one could say that he was the one who offered his service to them first. Through ambassadors, the authorities expressed their gratitude for the disposition displayed, kindly asked him to keep them updated on all developments of relevance to Dubrovnik and its interests, and instead of the usual gift, sent him 30 gold ducats.<sup>56</sup>

Ali Çelebi worked devotedly for the Dubrovnik Republic, which the Ragusans recurrently mentioned, emphasising his commendable and loyal service. Sadly, similar to the other dragomans of the Porte, details about the actual scope of his work for the Ragusans are not known. Archival sources most frequently mention merely the amount of his reward for “the service rendered”. He received cash, cloth and a piece of fine atlas fabric.<sup>57</sup> The only thing we do know is that in 1540 he mediated in the liberation of two Ragusan ships seized by corsairs, for the purpose of which in 1543 the Ragusans gave him 200 gold ducats and four pieces of cloth.<sup>58</sup> In 1537 they fulfilled his wish, and gave him a clock and sheep fur.<sup>59</sup> One of his clocks they sent to Venice to be adjusted (1543).<sup>60</sup> Given that the 1542 ambassadors highly praised his loyalty and effort, in early 1543 the authorities gave him 50 gold ducats and fine fabrics.<sup>61</sup> The last Ragusan mention of Ali Çelebi dates from November 1543, when they sent him a reward

---

<sup>56</sup> From the briefs addressed to the so-called “gift ambassadors” to Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent upon his return from Hungary, in December 1532: *Appresso dirrette al Halli Celebi dragomano che noi habbiamo havuti una sua lettera dela quale ne siamo restati molto consolati conoscendo il suo buon animo verso di noi, et che li ne restiamo in obliho, et molto lo ringratiarete di parte nostra, advertendo che tale parlare vostro con lui sia secreto, et cauto, et secretamente allhora in segno di gratitudine li darrete li ducati trenta, quali vi habbiamo dati di parte nostra, pregandolo strettissimamente che accadendo cossa alcuna importante per le cosse nostre vogli farcila intendere per quella via che piu al proposito li parera, non sparegnando ne corriero, ne messo, che ci fara cossa gratissima et noi li usaremo ogni possibile dimostratione di gratitudine* (*Lett. Lev.* vol. 20, f. 163v; *Cons. Rog.* vol. 41, f. 135v).

<sup>57</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 42, f. 35; vol. 43, f. 88v, 224; vol. 44, f. 42v, 185; vol. 45, f. 186v; vol. 46, f. 21, 67, 86v, 176v, 184v; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 22, f. 262v.

<sup>58</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 23, f. 25v; *Cons. Rog.* vol. 46, f. 182.

<sup>59</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 43, f. 211v.

<sup>60</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 23, f. 25.

<sup>61</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 23, f. 25.

for the abovementioned liberation of the Ragusan vessels. That year the Ragusans mention Ali Çelebi as the dragoman of the Porte.<sup>62</sup>

### *Yunus Bey*

Yunus Bey, a Greek from Modon, appears to have been imprisoned in 1500, when the Ottomans seized this Venetian city. He is the first dragoman of the Porte whose career is very well known in Ottoman historiography. He assumed the position of grand dragoman of the Porte, on which he remained until death, most probably in 1536. He mastered Greek, Italian and Latin. According to Pierre de Bourdeille, French chronicler and writer (1540-1614), Yunus Bey also had knowledge of the Serbian, “Slavic” and many other languages.<sup>63</sup> Yunus Bey was a most influential and distinguished Ottoman diplomat and dragoman. As sultan’s envoy, he travelled to Transylvania, Vienna and Hungary, as well as to Venice on several occasions. Noteworthy is his intervention during the peace negotiations between the Ottomans and Venetians in 1539-40. For the peace agreement, the sultan demanded 30,000 gold ducats from Venice. Yunus Bey gave the Venetians a loan of 21,000 ducats, in that they were to repay 20,000 ducats within a term of three months.<sup>64</sup> He is also renowned for his short work on the Ottoman administration and the court of Süleyman the Magnificent (*Opera noua la quale dichiara tutto il gouerno del gran Turcho...*), co-authored with Alvise Gritti. The work was published in Venice in 1533 and 1537.<sup>65</sup> He is also famous for founding a mosque, the building of which was completed after his death.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 46, f. 182v, 184v.

<sup>63</sup> Apart from Serbian and “Slavic”, Pierre de Bourdeille also mentions Arabic, Persian Tatar language, Armenian, Hebrew, Hungarian, Spanish, French and German (B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: p. 48).

<sup>64</sup> Snezhana Rakova, »Between the Sultan and the Doge: Diplomats and Spies in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent.« *CAS Working Paper Series* 8 (2016): p. 29.

<sup>65</sup> S. Rakova, »Between the Sultan and the Doge: Diplomats and Spies in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent.«: pp. 29-30.

<sup>66</sup> For more on Yunus Bey: J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: pp. 42-46; J. L. Bacqué-Grammont, »À propos Yûnus Beg, *baş tercümân* de Soliman le Magnifique.«: pp. 23-39; B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: pp. 47-54; Albert Howe Lybyer, *The Government of the Ottoman Empire in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913: pp. 262-275; M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: pp. 8-9, 20, 23, 29-30, 34, 38, 46-48, 56-57, 59,

In 1526 the tribute ambassadors paid 8 gold ducats to Yunus Bey for having replaced the dragoman of the Porte who had fallen ill, as he accompanied them at the audience with the sultan and the viziers.<sup>67</sup>

At the end of 1529,<sup>68</sup> en route to Venice, “sultan’s çavuş” Yunus Bey made a stopover in Dubrovnik. He notified the Ragusans of the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha’s warning concerning the Porte rumours that Dubrovnik was helping Christian rulers with money and ships. The rector and the Minor Council denied this as notorious falsehood and disinformation, assuring him of the Republic’s loyalty to the Empire. They presented him with a gift of 200 gold ducats, and during his stay in Dubrovnik, organised a public feast in honour of the sultan’s safe return from the Vienna battlefield. In early 1530, when Yunus Bey returned from Venice, the rector and the Minor Council took opportunity to reconfirm their loyalty to the sultan by giving him 60 gold ducats. The tribute ambassadors who were on their way to Istanbul at the time, thanked Ibrahim Pasha for the warning sent through Yunus Bey, and for not believing the malicious rumours that circulated at the Porte.<sup>69</sup>

Ragusan authorities also welcomed Yunus Bey, “Turkish envoy”, by the end of 1532, in his next diplomatic mission to Venice. They made all the arrangements for his continuation of the journey, and when he returned in early 1533, they rewarded him with 60 gold ducats.<sup>70</sup> It is possible that on that occasion, too, he warned them about the Porte’s suspicions of their disloyalty to the sultan. Namely, it was common fact that five Ragusan ships had voluntarily joined the fleet of

---

61-62, 65, 70, 73, 75, 81-82, 85-87, 90-91, 96, 128, 133, 143, 145-146, 149, 187-188, 190, 198-199; M. P. Pedani, *Venezia porta d’Oriente*: pp. 103, 140, 143, 145-147, 237; Tijana Krstić, »Of Translation and Empire; Sixteenth-century Ottoman imperial interpreters as Renaissance go-betweens.«, in: *The Ottoman World*, ed. Christine Woodhead. London-New York: Routledge, 2012: pp. 132-134; S. Rakova, »Between the Sultan and the Doge: Diplomats and Spies in the Time of Suleiman the Magnificent.«: pp. 5, 20, 26-31.

<sup>67</sup> Dragoman Yunus Bey then received an extra 4 gold ducats for having obtained the Porte order on the liberation of Ragusan subjects who had been captured by the crew of a Herceg Novi fusta (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 38, f. 170v-171).

<sup>68</sup> That was Yunus Bey’s third voyage to Venice, the first being in late 1518/early 1519, and the second in May/June of 1522 (M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: p. 198). Dubrovnik Archives provides no evidence on these travels.

<sup>69</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 40, f. 15, 15v; SAD, *Secreta Rogatorum* (hereafter cited as: *Secr. Rog.*), series 4, vol. 1, f. 36; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 20, f. 71v-74v; Toma Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*. Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1973: pp. 161-162.

<sup>70</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 41, f. 141v, 166.

Andrea Doria, whereas some were seized by Doria himself.<sup>71</sup> This explains why, on the eve of Yunus Bey's return from Venice, Ragusan authorities decided to place the movement of Ragusan ships under strict control. If a fleet of any Christian state seized a Ragusan vessel with an intent to use it in a campaign against the sultan, the captain was instructed to do everything in his power to be released. In case he failed, four mariners were to be left on board, while he and the rest of the crew were instructed to flee, and take with them the flag of St. Blaise. A captain who breached this order was to be fined 50 gold ducats, and the mariners 25 gold ducats each. On pain of the same fine, the captains were forbidden to hire a boat to a foreigner for the purpose of loading grain at the Levant.<sup>72</sup>

Evidently, Yunus Bey notified the Porte ministers of these measures, and thus dispelled all their doubts about the Ragusans. Wishing to remain in the disposition of the sultan and Barbarossa at any cost, whose fleet cruised the Adriatic in 1534, the Ragusans resorted to additional measures. On pain of a 500-gold ducat fine and six months of imprisonment, as of September 1533, Ragusan seamen were not allowed to sail out of the Adriatic without special government permission. When Doria seized another three Ragusan ships that year, the captain of one of them managed to escape. The families who had seamen on board the ships in the Spanish fleet, were instructed by the authorities to write to them to return home immediately, unless they wished to be punished severely. Of this the Ragusans notified the Porte.<sup>73</sup> Their effort did give some fruit in 1535, when the Spanish fleet reclaimed Tunisia, invaded by Hayreddin Barbarossa a year before. Ragusan ships again sailed in this fleet, too. Ministers of the Porte reluctantly accepted Ragusan explanations.<sup>74</sup>

By the end of 1536, Yunus Bey set off for his fifth diplomatic mission to Venice. Ragusan rector and the Minor Council received him on 26 December. Yunus Bey enquired if they were loyal and good servants of the Sublime Porte, to which they, naturally, responded affirmatively. Then, from the chest, underneath his kaftan, he pulled out a ferman of Süleyman the Magnificent, and, bowing low, presented it to the rector. In his ferman, the sultan confirmed his full confidence in Yunus Bey, and the same was recommended to the Ragusan rector and his council. Yunus Bey said that he was not speaking on his own

---

<sup>71</sup> Jorjo Tadić, *Španija i Dubrovnik u XVI. v.* Beograd: SKA, 1932: pp. 44-45.

<sup>72</sup> *Secr. Rog.* vol. 1, f. 7-7v a tergo.

<sup>73</sup> J. Tadić, *Španija i Dubrovnik*: pp. 45-46; T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: pp. 171-175.

<sup>74</sup> T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: pp. 174-176.



behalf, but was translating the words of the sultan. Prior to his departure, the sultan summoned him to his quarters, and without any witnesses, conveyed his message for the Ragusans. The sultan was fully aware that Ragusan ships recurrently sailed in Christian fleets, and that they had participated in the attack on Tunisia, justifying their position by the seizure of Ragusan ships. As he no longer wished to tolerate the excuses of this kind, the sultan made it quite clear that the Ragusans were to take all the necessary measures to prevent any of their ships from sailing again with the Spanish fleet. Ottoman fleet was planning to attack the Spaniards, and the sultan thus needed 50 Ragusan ships, which he was willing to hire. The sultan ordered Yunus Bey to send him most urgently a list of the Ragusan ships anchored in the port of Dubrovnik. The rector and the Minor Council replied that they were doing everything in their power to prevent any Ragusan ship from joining the Spanish fleet. Moreover, almost all ships were at sea, and it would take considerable time to gather some twenty vessels at the most, not more, as that was all they had. Six ships alone were in the territorial waters of Dubrovnik at the time, of which two were decayed and unusable, while the Republic required the two other ones.<sup>75</sup>

Ragusans rewarded Yunus Bey with 300 gold ducats, and organised his voyage to Venice, and upon return, gave him another 100 gold ducats. He notified the Porte of their excuses and responses, and somewhat later, the same was repeated by the tribute ambassadors. Owing to the intervention of Yunus Bey, the sultan and the Porte accepted the argumentation submitted by the Ragusans. Yunus Bey himself informed them of the effort he invested to convince the viziers. Grand Vizier Ayaz Pasha proved the hardest nut, as he yealded to Yunus Bey's arguments only after being promised a gift of 1,000 gold ducats. The Ragusans thanked Yunus Bey heartily, and sent him the money.<sup>76</sup>

After the Ottoman attack of Corfu in 1537, Venice allied with Spain and thus formed an anti-Ottoman league, later joined by the pope and the Austrians. Fully aware that their action would be to the advantage of the Ragusan relations with the Ottomans, the Venetians did their best to obstruct them in any way possible. They insisted that the Ragusans also joined the league. The pope acted in their favour, as he stood by the arguments that Ragusan joining would bring more harm than benefit. Ragusan aid to the league would have been modest,

<sup>75</sup> SAD, *Miscellanea*, 16th century, F II, no. 18; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 76v-78.

<sup>76</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 43, f. 105; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 86, f. 27v, 28 *a tergo*; J. Tadić, *Španija i Dubrovnik*: pp. 57-58; T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: p. 176.

but as such could provoke the Ottomans to attack and invade Dubrovnik. Venetian navy sailed in the Ragusan waters, intercepted Ragusan ships, seized their cargo, and prevented grain and other food produce from being delivered to Dubrovnik. Ragusan ships were joined to the Venetian fleet, with an intention to incite conflict between the Ottomans and Ragusans. With all this aside, the Ottomans had already kept a wary eye on the Republic for quite some time. The sultan issued a ferman by which the Venetians, Ragusans and other “Latins” were forbidden to trade across the Empire, and export cattle and grain. Between two fires, the Ragusans began to gather an army, repair fortifications, and equip the ships with arms. Dubrovnik and Ston on the Pelješac Peninsula were turned into a military camp. The situation deteriorated as the war operations approached Dubrovnik’s borders. In October 1538, the Venetians and Spaniards conquered the Ottoman-held Herceg Novi, while in August 1539 the Ottomans reclaimed it.<sup>77</sup>

Ragusan tribute ambassadors, for several years, fervently advocated for the abolition of the trade ban and purchase of Ottoman grain for the needs of famished Dubrovnik. In these attempts they had Yunus Bey as great support. In 1537, he managed to talk the Grand Vizier Ayaz Pasha into allowing the Ragusans to purchase approximately 1,000 tons of wheat in Farsala. A year later, he persuaded the pasha to abolish the trade ban in the Empire. For this favour, the Ragusans rewarded the grand vizier with 700, and Yunus Bey with 100 gold ducats. For the abolishment of the ban on grain purchase, they offered 500 gold ducats to Yunus Bey in 1538, and 100 in 1539.<sup>78</sup>

In the years to come, like before, the Ragusans and Yunus Bey kept regular correspondence, the details of which are not known, since the letters have not been preserved. Ragusan ambassadors always presented him with various textiles, in 1540 they gave him a clock, whereas he, in turn, provided them with carpets or waistcoats.<sup>79</sup> Yunus Bey’s commercial goods enjoyed special privileges at the Dubrovnik Customs. In 1542 only, the customs officers imposed a fee of 50 gold ducats on his goods. Tribute ambassadors were ordered that Yunus Bey be instantly reimbursed the mentioned sum of money.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: pp. 182-191, 195-198, 202-204.

<sup>78</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 93v; vol. 22, f. 2v-3v; *Cons. Rog.* vol. 44, f. 4v, 24v, 25; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*: p. 156.

<sup>79</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 43, f. 216, 223v; vol. 44, f. 179; vol. 45, f. 155; vol. 46, f. 80v; vol. 47, f. 3v, 20v, 35v, 46v-47; vol. 48, f. 28v-29, 104v; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 21, f. 136v; vol. 22, f. 126, 242; vol. 23, f. 17-18, 152v.

<sup>80</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 46, f. 81, 86; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 23, f. 25.

With regard to his services for the Ragusans after the War of the Holy League against the Ottomans, the only thing known is that he mediated in the long conflict between Dubrovnik and France over the grain purchased for the French in Volos in 1539, which, together with the grain purchased for the Ragusans, was loaded on Ragusan ships, and later transported to Dubrovnik.<sup>81</sup> The sole surviving document drafted by Yunus Bey in the Dubrovnik Archives is his report to the sultan related to this exhausting conflict, written in September 1542.<sup>82</sup>

Yunus Bey also mentioned this problem when in June 1542 he stopped in Dubrovnik en route to Venice. On that occasion, too, the Ragusans arranged his voyage to Venice, and gave him a piece of fabric and 100 gold ducats.<sup>83</sup>

Last record of Yunus Bey has been traced in the government briefs to the tribute ambassadors from April 1551, in a note saying that he ought to be rewarded one piece of crimson atlas.<sup>84</sup> He died in June that year.<sup>85</sup>

### *Mehmed*

In the instructions to the tribute ambassadors from 1552, the authorities cited the complaints they received from the previous ambassadors against Mehmed, dragoman of the Porte.<sup>86</sup> His service was far from commendable, and he made no effort to mediate in favour of the Ragusan interests. Therefore, Ragusan authorities ordered the ambassadors to call upon Grand Vizier Rustem Pasha and inform him that dragoman Mehmed had poor knowledge of the Ragusan language. They were to require a dragoman fluent in the Slavic language spoken by the Ragusans, so that the Porte be better informed of the

---

<sup>81</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 45, f. 249; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 22, f. 272-275v; vol. 23, f. 238-239v. Although Yunus Bey frequently intervened on Ragusan behalf for permission to buy Ottoman grain, in 1540 however, by government order, the ambassadors evaded Yunus Bey, and turned to others for assistance on this matter. Instead, for having obtained the mentioned permission, they distributed 1,800 gold ducats between Grand Vizier Lütüfi Pasha and four viziers, "in such a manner that it does not reach the ears of Yunus Bey" (*Lett. Lev.* vol. 22, f. 140).

<sup>82</sup> SAD, *Acta Turcarum*, series 75, vol. C 1, no. 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 46, f. 5, 6.

<sup>84</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 24, f. 237v.

<sup>85</sup> J. L. Bacqué-Grammont, »À propos Yûnus Beg, *baş tercûmân* de Soliman le Magnifique.«: p. 33.

<sup>86</sup> B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: pp. 53-54; A. Meral, »A Survey of Translation Activity in the Ottoman Empire.«: p. 109.

Ragusan affairs. If Rustem Pasha denied their petition, they were to commission the dragoman of the Porte engaged by the Italians, for a salary usually awarded to Mehmed.<sup>87</sup> This leads us to assume that Mehmed had previously been engaged by the Ragusans a number of times. The services of dragoman Mehmed were also used by the ambassadors who, in late 1539, attended the celebration of the circumcision of the sons of Süleyman the Magnificent. They remained in Istanbul for some time, and left in the latter half of 1541 or first half of 1542.<sup>88</sup>

### *Ibrahim Bey*

After the death of Yunus Bey, installed as grand dragoman of the Porte was Ibrahim Bey. He was a Pole, his original name being Joachim Strasz, who was probably captured by the Tatars and around 1537 sold to the Ottomans. He had a good command of the Latin, Italian, German<sup>89</sup> and Croatian language, that is, he could write in Croatian.<sup>90</sup> As sultan's envoy, he travelled to Venice, Vienna, Frankfurt, Poland and France. He is known for the speech he delivered at the coronation of Maximilian II. Also, he is alleged to have been excessively greedy and bribe prone. Upon the prompting of French envoy Jean de la Vigne in 1558, he was removed from the position of grand dragoman of the Porte. La Vigne accused him of selling copies of French letters to French enemies, and revealing French secrets, and that he was the most influential Austrian ally in Istanbul, and that his translations were maliciously incorrect. He was also accused of revealing Ottoman diplomatic secrets to the Austrians. The representatives of other European states agreed that he was willing to do anything for money.

---

<sup>87</sup> *Dalli nostri Ambasciatori quali per avanti sono iti alla Porta siamo informati come dal dragomano nostro della porta, quale se chiama Mechemet ne siano molto mal serviti, e come non vole adoperarsi per loro servizio in alcuna cossa. Percio vogliamo, che giunti alla corte debbeate senza lo dragomano andare dal Signor Rustambasa e segnificarli attento che Mechmeth, nostro dragomano, non intende bene la nostra lingua, che sua Signoria Illustrissima voglia darce uno dragomano della nostra lingua, accioche la felice porta possi meglio informarsi delli nostri negotii, et accioche noi ancora siamo meglio serviti. E quando sua Signoria non volesse concedervi tale gratia, allhora vogliamo debbeate servirvi dal dragomano della Porta quale serve alli Italiani e per la provisione quale se dole dare a Mechmet dragomano nostro...* (From a letter by Ragusan authorities to the tribute ambassadors, 31 March 1552; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 25, f. 41).

<sup>88</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 46, f. 40.

<sup>89</sup> B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: p. 55.

<sup>90</sup> J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeis Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: p. 32.

After the death of Grand Vizier Rustem Pasha in 1561, Ibrahim Bey resumed his position as grand dragoman of the Porte.<sup>91</sup>

In December 1554, en route to Venice, Ibrahim Bey arrived in Dubrovnik with the document on the sultan's victory (Tur. *fethname*) in Persia. The authorities rewarded him with fabrics and 200 gold ducats, and the members of his entourage also received gifts. They organised his voyage to Venice, where he was also to announce the news of the sultan's victory.<sup>92</sup>

The Ragusans mention Ibrahim Bey again in 1557, when he invited the Ragusan tribute ambassadors Marin Cerva and Pasko Benessa to his wedding.<sup>93</sup>

En route to Venice, he arrived in Dubrovnik again in 1566. On 13 December he presented the rector and the Minor Council with the *fethname* of the new sultan Selim about the Ottoman victory at Gyula and Szigetvár. By attributing the term *musturluchia* to Ibrahim Bey (derived from the Turkish word *muştuluk*, a gift given to a person bringing good and happy news),<sup>94</sup> the Ragusans gave him 200 gold ducats, and distributed 400 scudi between the members of his entourage.

It was then that Ibrahim Bey had confidential talks with Martolica Caboga and Lovrijenac Bobali, Minor Council members. "Secret and important" information heard from him, Caboga and Bobali recounted on the secret session of the Senate. It was decided that, on pain of a 500-gold ducat fine, no one uttered a word on this matter in public.<sup>95</sup>

In true fact, to Caboga and Bobali, Ibrahim Bey conveyed the reproach of the Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, based on serious allegations of Kapudan Pasha. Namely, to the camp at Szitegvár, Kapudan Pasha Piale Pasha sent the news that his campaign to southern Italy did not fully succeed because

---

<sup>91</sup> For more on Ibrahim Bey: J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: pp. 32, 46-48; Michel Lesure, »Michel Černović "explorator secretus" à Constantinople (1556-1563).« *Turcica* 15 (1983): pp. 127-128, 139-140; Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant, (1204-1571)*, vol. 6. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1984: p. 699; M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: pp. 9, 16, 38, 47, 80, 185, 200; G. Veinstein, »The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters.«: pp. 609-611; Thomas Conley, »The Speech of Ibrahim at the Coronation of Maximilian II.« *Rhetorica* 20/3 (2002): pp. 263-273; B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: p. 55; M. P. Pedani, *Venezia porta d'Oriente*: pp. 140-141, 146, 181.

<sup>92</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 52, f. 177; M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: p. 200.

<sup>93</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 54, f. 139v, 146.

<sup>94</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 58, f. 106, 106v.

<sup>95</sup> *Secr. Rog.* vol. 2, f. 143.

of the Ragusan due warning to the Italian cities.<sup>96</sup> The sultan and the viziers were overwhelmed by anger. The authorities wrote to the tribute ambassadors to do their utmost at the Porte to produce as many pretexts as possible, while the gift for Ibrahim Bey should be presented to his family.<sup>97</sup>

Apparently, Ibrahim Bey remained in Dubrovnik for quite some time, almost one month.<sup>98</sup> The authorities instructed the tribute ambassadors to bring to Dubrovnik with them an unnamed Ragusan language youth, who had taken to reckless conduct in Istanbul and neglected studies, because in Dubrovnik at the time there was an experienced Turkish dragoman who could help him advance in his learning. The authorities also attended to the letters of Ibrahim Bey. The letters that he wrote to his family they sent to the tribute ambassadors. On a secret session, the Senate appointed a person who would deliver the letter of Ibrahim Bey to Emperor Maximilian II.<sup>99</sup> The Ragusans also enclosed their own letter to the emperor.<sup>100</sup>

The tensions between the Ragusans and Piale Pasha began in 1565, when in his attack on Malta, he seized one of three Ragusan ships from the Christian enemy fleet. Of this he immediately notified the Porte.<sup>101</sup> He continued to chase

---

<sup>96</sup> On Ragusan spies see: Ivan Dujčev, *Avvisi di Ragusa. Documenti sull'Impero Turco nel sec. XVII e sulla guerra di Candia*. Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1935; Nikolaas Hendrik Biegan, »Ragusan spying for the Ottoman Empire: Some 16th century documents from the State archive at Dubrovnik.« *Beliten* 27 (1963): pp. 237-255; Josip Žontar, *Obveščalna služba in diplomacija avstrijskih Habsburžanov v boju proti Turkom v 16. stoletju*. Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1973: pp. 20-29; Mirjana Polić-Bobić, *Među križom i polumjesecom: Dubrovačke dojave španjolskome dvoru o Turcima u XVI. stoljeću*. Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2000; Nikša Varezić, *Dosta je reči u Rimu da bi se reklo čitavom svijetu: Dubrovačka Republika i Sveta Stolica tijekom 16. i 17. stoljeća*. Zagreb - Dubrovnik: HAZU Zavod za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku, 2018: pp. 140-151.

<sup>97</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 30, f. 147v-148; *Secr. Rog.* vol. 2, f. 140v; T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: pp. 244, 247; Jovan Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. II/2. Beograd: SKA, 1938: p. 138.

<sup>98</sup> M. P. Pedani, *In nome del Gran Signore*: p. 200.

<sup>99</sup> The content of this letter is not known. Yet we do know that from Dubrovnik Ibrahim Bey wrote to a Venetian Michele Membré, presumably a Venetian dragoman. The letter is dated 4 March 1567, and was published by A. Bombaci (Alessio Bombaci, »Una lettera turca in caratteri latini del dragomanno ottomano Ibrahim al Veneziano Michele Membré (1567)« *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 15 (1948): pp. 129-144).

<sup>100</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 30, f. 150-151; *Secr. Rog.* vol. 2, f. 143v-144r.

<sup>101</sup> In August 1566, Ibrahim Bey sent a letter to the Ragusans, the content of which is unknown. It is plausible that, by that time, he had already warned them about Piale Pasha's allegations (*Secr. Rog.* vol. 2, f. 132v-133).

Ragusan ships, sailed into Ragusan waters, and attacked the Island of Mljet.<sup>102</sup> Alarmed by these actions, the Ragusans looked for an ally at the Porte. In early 1566, the tribute ambassadors addressed Sokollu Mehmed Pasha, new grand vizier, with a petition to accept the role of the protector of Dubrovnik.<sup>103</sup> Apparently, they had a feeling that this would not suffice, as Sokollu constantly listened to allegations against the Republic. That is why they also addressed Mihrimah Sultan, with a petition to accept the role of the protector of Dubrovnik, “which the Ragusan government desired most of all”.<sup>104</sup> Her response is not known, but she had already protected Ragusan interests for years.<sup>105</sup>

The Ragusans became increasingly alarmed when, in spring 1566, the Ottomans invaded the Genoese island of Chios, an Ottoman tributary. They instructed the ambassadors to enquire with Mehmed Pasha whether the island was conquered due to the delay in tribute payment (the Ragusans were always late with the payment)<sup>106</sup> or due to some other reason.<sup>107</sup> Alarming rumours began to spread from the Levant that Dubrovnik was next in line to meet the fate of Chios, which sounded quite believable to the Christian states.<sup>108</sup> It was then that Piale Pasha sailed into Ragusan waters again, from where he sent the mentioned news to the Szigetvár camp about his futile attack on southern Italy, for which the Ragusans were to be blamed. He raided several Dubrovnik islands. Dubrovnik was preparing for a siege, Piale Pasha was expected to attack the city, yet it never took place.<sup>109</sup> At the time, the news from Dubrovnik to Naples were carried by the son of Antonio Vives, from Barletta. In 1566 he converted to Islam, and became dragoman of the Porte for the Italian language. At the

<sup>102</sup> T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: pp. 235-236.

<sup>103</sup> Considering the nature of the Ottoman-Ragusan relations, the sultan was a formal protector of the Republic. By the 1520s or 1530s, grand vizier had become the real protector of the Republic. Ibrahim Pasha was the first grand vizier (1523-36) who accepted that role (T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: p. 179).

<sup>104</sup> Vesna Miović, »*Per favore della Soltana*: Powerful Ottoman Women and Ragusan Diplomats.« *Dubrovnik Annals* 22 (2018): p. 104.

<sup>105</sup> The Ragusans and Mihrimah Sultan developed good business relations over the years. They supplied her with large quantities of quality fabrics from Italy, while she, in turn, provided them with grain from her estates (V. Miović, »*Per favore della Soltana*«: pp. 97-110).

<sup>106</sup> *Diplomata et Acta*, 7/2.1, vol. 4, no. 193, 196, 198; vol. 5, no. 213, 223, 231, 233, 235; vol. 6, no. 270.

<sup>107</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 30, f. 114v.

<sup>108</sup> Lovro Kunčević, »“No Harm in Hearing it all”: Medicean Attitude to the Conspiracy of Marin Držić.« *Dubrovnik Annals* 12 (2008): pp. 32-43.

<sup>109</sup> T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: pp. 235-238.

Porte, before the Ragusan ambassadors he explained how the Ragusans delivered the news about the Ottomans to the vice-king of Naples. The ambassadors denied everything, whereupon the authorities decided to halt any news to Naples. When the vice-king objected to this, they sent an ambassador to relate the Vives case, and the great danger that threatened the Republic.<sup>110</sup>

It appears likely that the allegations made by Vives, new dragoman of the Porte, were but the last straw that prompted the senators at the secret session to pass the decision on the prohibition on informing the Christian states. The wariness of the Ragusans was such that even a year later, in October 1567, they brought secret decisions on the same matter.<sup>111</sup>

However, by the first months of 1567, Ragusan spying for the Christians was no longer mentioned at the Porte. Tribute ambassadors talked with the Ragusan friend Behram *Chehaia*, kethüda of Mihrimah Sultan. He informed them that he had heard no one utter a single word against the Dubrovnik Republic.<sup>112</sup>

Ibrahim Bey returned to Dubrovnik from Venice on 3 March 1567. The Ragusans gave him 50 gold ducats, that is, 30 ducats with which they always rewarded sultan's envoys upon return from Venice, in addition to 20 extra ducats "for having indebted us and for being our dragoman".<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> *Siamo stati soliti per l'adietro d'investigare i progressi del Gran' Signore turco et le nove del' paese di Levante et di quelle per barche a posta darne avviso a sua Eccellenza. Hora per il gran' pericolo che habbiamo passato quest'anno della armata turchesca, la quale ad altro effetto non venne in questo Golfo che per doglierci questa città, il che cossi Dio volesse che non fosse, et non per altra cagione se non per imputatione et infamation' dataci alla corte del Gran' Signore che noi diamo tutti gli avvisi de' progressi di sua Altezza ai principi christiani et che le nostre bavi servono nelle loro armate, perciò siamo risoluti per l'avvenire d' haver' riguardo a una tale cosa. Et perchè ancora ci è stato proibito dalla Porta che a modo alcuno non escano avvisi della città nostra, si che contra il desiderio nostro siamo astretti soprastare alquanto in continuare con sua Eccellenza il nostro solito ufficio in darle gli avvisi per fin tanto che vediamo et conosciamo l'animo et il procedere che farà verso di noi questo nuovo signore... Un' figliuolo di Antonio Vives, già castellano di Barletta, per mano di ciu s'espeditano gli avvisi a sua Eccellenza, siandosi fatto Turcco et ascaso al grado d'interprete della lingua italiana, il qual grado è assai reputato fra' i Turchi, in presenza di nostri Ragugei ci ha dato imputatione et calunnia de' detti avvisi alla corte del Gran Signore et detto il modo del' nostro espedir' le barche et dello scrivere delle lettere, et il tutto puntualmente come è passato, la qual' cosa, quantunque fosse da essi nostri Ragugei negata, nondimeno egli s'è sforzato di far' credere la sua mala intentione* (from the instructions to the ambassador dispatched to the vice-king of Naples, dated 4 October 1566, J. Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, II.2: pp. 138-139).

<sup>111</sup> *Secr. Rog.* vol. 2, f. 136-136v, 157-158; T. Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*: p. 238.

<sup>112</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 30, f. 165-165v.

<sup>113</sup> *Secr. Rog.* vol. 2, f. 145.



Ibrahim Bey had already left Dubrovnik when a Jew, most probably from Venice, brought four pieces of headgear (Tur. *üsküf*) for him, usually worn by the Janissaries. The authorities sent them to the ambassadors to Istanbul.<sup>114</sup> Upon the prompting of Ibrahim Bey, in 1567 the Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha arranged that the Ragusans be issued permission to purchase Ottoman grain.<sup>115</sup>

Till his death in 1571, Ibrahim Bey received annual gifts of damast and atlas textiles from Ragusan tribute ambassadors.<sup>116</sup>

### *Ferhad, Murad, Hüseyin, Hasan*

The Ragusans continued to mention the services of the dragomans of the Porte over the next fifteen years, although they sought their assistance less frequently than before. In 1563, the ambassadors to Edirne were assisted by Ferhad<sup>117</sup> and Murad, “dragoman of the sultan and the Porte”.<sup>118</sup> Murad, a very famous dragoman of the Porte, his real name being Balász Somlyai, was born in Nagybányi (Baia Mare, Romania), and most probably was captured in the Battle of Mohacs. He was fluent in the Arabic, Persian, Latin<sup>119</sup> and Croatian language.<sup>120</sup>

<sup>114</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 30, f. 173v, 182v.

<sup>115</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 30, f. 167v, 168.

<sup>116</sup> SAD, *Lettere di Ponente* (hereafter cited as: *Lett. Pon.*), series 27.6, vol. 1, f. 89; vol. 2, f. 88v, 165.

<sup>117</sup> Ferhad, a Hungarian by birth, worked as dragoman of the Porte from 1554. Upon his death in 1576, he was succeeded by his son Mehmed (J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: p. 55; C. Orhonlu, »Tercüman«: p. 177; G. Veinstein, »The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters.«: p. 608). Mehmed has not been traced in Dubrovnik archival sources.

<sup>118</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 58, f. 126.

<sup>119</sup> For more details on dragoman Murad: J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: pp. 53-54; Pál Ásc, »Tarjumans Mahmud and Murad, Austrian and Hungarian Renegades as Sultan’s Interpreters.«, in: *Europa und die Türken in der Renaissance*, ed. Bodo Guthmüller and Wilhelm Kühlmann. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000: pp. 307-316; T. Krstić, »Of Translation and Empire«: pp. 136-139; Tijana Krstić, »Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate: Self-Narratives of Conversion to Islam in the Age of Confessionalization.« *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51/1 (2009): pp. 35-63.

<sup>120</sup> J. Matuz, »Die Pfortendolmetscher zur Herrschaftszeit Süleymāns des Prächtigen.«: pp. 38, 53; P. Ásc, »Tarjumans Mahmud and Murad, Austrian and Hungarian Renegades as Sultan’s Interpreters.«: p. 313.

In 1574, the ambassadors were accompanied by dragoman Hüseyin on one occasion,<sup>121</sup> though it is not quite certain whether he was a dragoman of the Porte. From 1576/7 to 1587, the tribute ambassadors were assisted by the second dragoman of the Porte, Hasan.<sup>122</sup> In 1579, the ambassadors rewarded the third dragoman of the Porte with 6 gold ducats, and demanded his full attention regarding the Ragusan affairs.<sup>123</sup>

### *Ragusan dragomans at the Porte*

European states which had good relations with the Ottomans, as well as the Ottoman enemies, offered regular salaries to the dragomans of the Porte and presented them with expensive gifts in order to win them on their side, or at least avoid their hostility. The sultan and the viziers were generally familiar with the fact that their dragomans had some arrangements with the Christian world. Through information (and disinformation) that the dragomans conveyed to the Europeans, the sultan and the viziers had an opportunity to send messages and warnings to friends and enemies. Clearly, dragomans of the Porte were frowned upon by the Europeans and the Ottomans alike. The Ottomans harboured doubts about their loyalty. On the other hand, however, La Vigne claimed that the dragomans of the Porte, before the sultan and the viziers, feared of translating anything that would aggravate them.<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 63, f. 62.

<sup>122</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 64, f. 220; vol. 65, f. 263; vol. 66, f. 20, 168v; vol. 67, f. 129; vol. 68, f. 132v, 172v, 297v; vol. 69, f. 234v. A few years before Hasan, as in the 1550s, Murad was the second dragoman of the Porte (T. Krstić, »Illuminated by the Light of Islam and the Glory of the Ottoman Sultanate«: p. 47).

<sup>123</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 33, f. 216.

<sup>124</sup> J. L. Bacqué-Grammont, »À propos Yûnus Beg, *baş tercümân* de Soliman le Magnifique.«: pp. 30-31, 86; G. Veinstein, »The Ottoman Administration and the Problem of Interpreters.«: pp. 609-611; Gábor Ágoston, »Information, ideology, and limits of imperial policy: Ottoman grand strategy in the context of Ottoman-Habsburg rivalry.«, in: *The Early Modern Ottomans: Remapping the Empire*, ed. Virginia Aksan and Daniel Goffman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: p. 86; Emrah Safa Gürkan, *Espionage in the 16th Century Mediterranean: Secret Diplomacy, Mediterranean go-betweenes and the Ottoman Habsburg Rivalry*, PhD Thesis, Georgetown University, 2012: pp. 79, 121-123; Emrah Safa Gürkan, »Mediating Boundaries: Mediterranean Go-Betweenes and Cross-Confessional Diplomacy in Constantinople, 1560-1660.« *Journal of Early Modern History* 19 (2015): pp. 112-114; Pál Ásc, »The Changing Image of Ottoman Turks in East-Central European Renaissance Literature.«, in: *The Ottoman Orient in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Robert Born and Michał Dziewulski. Kraków: The National Museum in Kraków, 2015: p. 170; Alain Servantie,

For the reasons mentioned, the Ragusans, like the other Christian states, tried to reduce their need for translation services of the dragomans of the Porte, and use their own dragomans instead. Already in 1520-1, the Senate appointed Benedikt Crispi to accompany the tribute ambassadors, but as a secret dragoman.<sup>125</sup> Evidently, his duty had to be kept secret so as not to arouse the hostility of the dragomans of the Porte, who counted on collaboration with the Ragusans, and the occasion to appear before the sultan as their honour.

From the mid-sixteenth century, Ragusan dragomans Petar, son of Božo, from Ston, his son Frano, Marin Rajković, Radoje Bisodre, Stjepan Saluković, Frano Milli, Matko Stay, Ivan, son of Marko, and Mato, son of Pavao, had a good command of the Ottoman Turkish language, while from 1558, Dubrovnik state began with the training of young men interested in the career of dragoman.<sup>126</sup> When a local dragoman was not available, yet they wished to avoid the dragomans of the Porte, Ragusan authorities would instruct the ambassadors to find in Istanbul a person who was fluent in the Ottoman Turkish and Slavic language (1543, 1564-5).<sup>127</sup>

---

»Clocks and Baksheesh: Art Presents Between Foreign Princes and the Ottoman Court (15th - 17th Centuries).«, in: *15th International Congress of Turkish Art*, ed. Michele Bernardini and Alessandro Taddei. Ankara: Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Turkey; Università di Napoli "L'Orientale", Istituto per l'Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino, 2018: pp. 538, 542, 545.

<sup>125</sup> *Cons. Rog.* vol. 36, f. 85; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 19, f. 163v, 172v-173, 178, 184v, 186. In 1512 the Senate mentions dragoman Ivan, but he did not work for the tribute ambassadors (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 32, f. 166). Traced in the Dubrovnik archival sources from the end of fifteenth century are the so-called "Florentine dragomans". They were Ragusans who carried the goods of Florentine merchants to the Ottoman Empire. In the first half of the sixteenth century, there were at least twenty of them (*Deb. Not.* vol. 2, f. 110, 115, 120v, 162v, 164-165, 167, 174-174v, 179, 184v, 186v, 189, 196, 197, 198v; vol. 4, f. 6v, 9, 13, 17, 19v, 25v, 27, 28, 30-30v, 32v, 34-35v, 37v, 39v, 43v, 52v). Their proficiency in the Ottoman Turkish language must have been very modest, reduced to elementary commercial communication. This explains why from the end of fifteenth century to the 1540s the tribute ambassadors turned to them for assistance on no more than a couple of occasions (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 27, f. 263v, 263bis; vol. 30, f. 85; vol. 47, f. 3v). Petar Zuppana was the only among them whose level of the Ottoman Turkish may have been of assistance to the ambassadors at times (*SAD, Pacta Matrimonialia*, series 33, vol. 4, f. 33; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 19, f. 188-188v; vol. 20, f. 75v-78, 245-245v; vol. 21, f. 20, 48, 49-50, 64v; vol. 23, f. 17-18, 51v-52v, 153, 164v-165).

<sup>126</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 29, f. 279; vol. 30, f. 81-81v, 150, 218v; vol. 31, f. 122; vol. 37, f. 212; vol. 39, f. 104v; Vesna Miović-Perić, »Dragomans of the Dubrovnik Republic: their Training and Career.« *Dubrovnik Annals* 5 (2001): pp. 81-94; Vesna Miović, »Dubrovački mladići jezika: studenti osmansko-turskoga u vrijeme Dubrovačke Republike.« *Književna smotra* 173 (2014): pp. 138-140.

<sup>127</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 23, f. 52v; vol. 29, f. 163, 279.

Government briefs to the tribute ambassadors long contained a formulation “the moment you arrive to the Porte, look for our dragoman with whom you will visit all pashas at their homes, starting from the grand vizier”.<sup>128</sup> Although not explicitly stated, it is clear that the dragomans of the Porte also accompanied the ambassadors at the reception with the sultan. Audiences with the sultan and the viziers were formal, therefore, followed the same protocol.<sup>129</sup> Concrete talks about current issues the ambassadors had during the so-called “second secret audience with the viziers”, without the presence of the dragoman of the Porte.<sup>130</sup> Many viziers of this era came from Slavic-speaking territories,<sup>131</sup> so that the ambassadors could speak with them in their mother tongue.<sup>132</sup> In addition, some ambassadors who visited Istanbul on several occasions, particularly in the sixteenth century, were probably able to communicate in the Ottoman Turkish language.<sup>133</sup>

The abovementioned formulation, instructing the ambassadors to look for “our dragoman” the moment they arrive to the Porte, disappeared from the state briefs by the beginning of the 1570s, which may indicate that from then

---

<sup>128</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 17, f. 91; vol. 19, f. 225; vol. 23, f. 146v; vol. 24, f. 1v; vol. 25, f. 36v; vol. 27, f. 1v; vol. 30, f. 117v, 214v; *Lett. Pon.* vol. 1, f. 81v.

<sup>129</sup> For more on the Ragusan ambassadors at the audience with the sultan and the viziers: V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istambulu*: pp. 53, 66-76.

<sup>130</sup> *Lett. Lev.* vol. 19, f. 172v.

<sup>131</sup> Marc'Antonio Pigafetta, member of the mission of Antun Vrančić, Habsburg envoy to Istanbul in 1567-8, wrote that almost all Ottomans at the Porte could speak Croatian (Maria Pia Pedani, «Il silenzio del sultano.», in: *Il potere della parola, la parola del potere tra Europa e Mondo arabo-ottomano tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, ed. Antonella Ghersetti. Venezia: Filippi Editore, 2010: pp. 64-65).

<sup>132</sup> Marc'Antonio Pigafetta claims that the viziers, during official and important meetings with European envoys, insisted on communication in the Ottoman Turkish, assisted by a dragoman. Only minor issues, details, and particulars they would agree to communicate in some other language. Ragusan experience, however, proved otherwise. With the viziers of Slavic origin, the Ragusans discussed fairly important issues in their mother tongue. For example, when the Ottomans banned the Ragusans to purchase grain in 1570, the authorities instructed the ambassadors to negotiate the lift of ban in the mother tongue, because in so doing they could express themselves more precisely, and would thus avoid the spreading of this undesirable news by the dragomans (M. P. Pedani, «Il silenzio del sultano.», pp. 64-65; *Lett. Pon.* vol. 1, f. 144-144v. See also: *Lett. Lev.* vol. 27, f. 105).

<sup>133</sup> Stjepan Ivan Sorgo, for instance, in the period 1504-1521, went to Istanbul nine times, at least (*Cons. Rog.* vol. 29, f. 173v; vol. 30, f. 100, 188; vol. 31, f. 57, 268v; vol. 32, f. 66; vol. 34, f. 66; *Lett. Lev.* vol. 17, f. 135v-139; vol. 19, f. 95-98, 147-154v, 182v-187v; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istambulu*: p. 25).

on, Ragusan dragomans accompanied the ambassadors during the audiences with the sultan and the viziers.<sup>134</sup>

Indeed, tribute ambassadors continued to present the dragomans of the Porte with the usual diplomatic gift. Considering that they always mention only one dragoman, this probably refers to the grand dragoman of the Porte.<sup>135</sup>

Up to the 1670s, dragomans of the Porte were recorded merely as recipients of the usual Ragusan gift. However, the situation changed somewhat when the post of the dragoman of the Porte became occupied by the Fanariots, members of Greek families settled in the Fener quarter of Istanbul.<sup>136</sup> Many of them studied in Italy, had knowledge of foreign languages, and had good connections with the European states. In early 1667, Ragusan ambassador Jaketa Palmotić wrote an extensive report about the chief dignitaries at the Porte. Among others, he singled out Panayoti Nicoussios Mamonas, citing that he was titled as sultan's dragoman, and that he enjoyed great confidence of the grand vizier. Almost all European envoys presented him with gifts, whereas he complained that from the Ragusans, whose interests he promoted, he never received a thing. Palmotić, thus, gave him a gift, and informed the government that such practice ought to be continued. Physician Panayoti Nicoussios Mamonas was the first in the long succession of the Fanariots to hold the position of the grand dragoman of the Porte.<sup>137</sup>

In 1673, Panayoti was succeeded by Alexander Maurocordato, also physician, who devotedly and successfully worked for the Ragusan benefit, which ultimately altered Ragusan opinion on the imperial dragomans. This probably helped him squeeze out Ragusan dragomans from the audience with the sultan. The Ragusans kept mentioning him well after his death in 1709. With Fanariot dragomans they maintained close and fruitful relations until the fall of the Dubrovnik Republic in 1808.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup> For more on Ragusan dragomans before the sultan: V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istanbulu*: pp. 73, 77.

<sup>135</sup> V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istanbulu*: pp. 73-74.

<sup>136</sup> For more on the Fanariots on the position of grand dragomans of the Porte: C. Orhonlu, »Tercüman«: p. 177; B. Aydın, »Divan-i Hümayun tercümanları ve Osmanlı kültür ve diplomasisindeki yerleri.«: pp. 57-60; Alexander H. Groot, »Die levantinischen Dragomanen: Einheimische und Fremde im eigenen Land; Kultur- und Sprachgrenzen zwischen Ost und West (1453-1914).«, in: *Verstehen und Verständigung: Ethnologie - Xenologie - interkulturelle Philosophie*, ed. Wolfdietch Schmied-Kowarzik. Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann GmbH, 2002: pp. 110-128.

<sup>137</sup> Jovan Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. III.2. Beograd: SKA, 1939: pp. 685-686.

<sup>138</sup> V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istanbulu*: pp. 60, 73, 90, 190, 192-193, 195-196.

### *Conclusion*

Having no dragomans of their own, the Ragusans used the translation service of the dragomans of the Porte only when the circumstances required so. Dragomans translated their letters, reports, petitions and complaints to the sultan and the Porte. In addition, they accompanied the tribute ambassadors at formal audiences with the sultan and the viziers. Yet, the ambassadors did not require their presence during concrete and confidential talks with the viziers, as many viziers of this era originated from the Slavic-speaking territories. Further, certain ambassadors who frequently travelled to Istanbul, must have picked up at least the basics of the Ottoman Turkish language.

While dispatching their confidants in search for interpreters in Istanbul, Ragusan authorities always emphasised that these persons ought to have perfect command of both the language of the Ragusans and the Ottoman Turkish. Dragomans Kasım, Skender Bey, Murad, and apparently also Yunus Bey and Ibrahim Bey, could understand the Slavic language spoken by the Ragusans. There is reason to assume that other dragomans of the Porte also had knowledge of it, those referred to as “our dragomans” by the Ragusans, such as Çoban and Ali Çelebi. The knowledge of this language was probably the key by which the Ragusans selected “their dragomans” at the Porte. The case of Mehmed is illustrative, with whose services the Ragusans were not satisfied, and hence the ambassadors asked the grand vizier to find them a dragoman who had greater knowledge of their language “so that the Porte be better informed of the Ragusan affairs”.

From the middle of the sixteenth century, the Ragusans had their own trained dragomans. From the end of 1560s to early 1570s, they replaced the dragomans of the Porte at the audiences with the sultan and the viziers. True, this did not terminate the contacts between the Dubrovnik Republic and the dragomans of the Porte, because the Republic needed their connections, power and influence at the Porte. Yunus Bey and Ibrahim Bey, the most famous grand dragomans of the Porte and Ottoman diplomats in the sixteenth century, contributed to Ragusan interests, for which they were rewarded. As sultan’s envoys, they travelled to Venice on a number of occasions. This they did via Dubrovnik, which gave the Ragusans an opportunity to win them to their side on their home territory. Yunus Bey travelled to Venice six times, of which at least four times via Dubrovnik. The relations between the Ragusans and Ibrahim Bey

were so close that during one of his visits to Dubrovnik, he agreed to tutor an unnamed Ragusan language youth.

From the end of 1580s on, the dragomans of the Porte are mentioned in Dubrovnik archival sources merely as recipients of the usual gift given on the occasion of tribute delivery. This changed with the emergence of the Fanariots to hold the post of the grand dragoman of the Porte. Ragusan interests at the Porte were protected by Panayoti Nicoussios Mamonas, the first Fanariot on the position of the grand dragoman of the Porte, his successor Alexander Maurocordato, along with all the others, without exception.

Translated by Vesna Baće

