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Venetian-Ottoman Wars

EDITED BY STATHIS BIRTACHAS



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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma
Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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On the cover: lantern of an Ottoman galley captured at Lepanto.
Venice, Armory rooms of the Council of Ten at the Doge's Palace.
Topwar.ru website of Vjačeslav Špakovsky.



Venice and the Ottoman Empire as warriors. Source: [Roger PALMER, Earl of Castlemaine], *Das von den Türcken außs äusserst bedrangte, aber: Durch die christliche Waffen der heroischen Republic Venedig außs tapfferst beschützte Candia* [...], Frankfurt, Wilhelm Serlin, 1669.



“Oltremarini” (Overseas) Regiments in Venetian service, nicknamed ‘Schiavoni’
(Vinkhujzen Collection, NYPL)

The *Scala di Narenta*: A Rural Inland Port between the War of Candia (1645–1669) and the Morean War (1684–1699)

by ERICA MEZZOLI*

ABSTRACT: The article aims to highlight the characteristics of the process concerning the completion of the Bosnian–Venetian commercial project regarding the opening of an inland maritime trade post in the last section of the Neretva river – precisely in the locality of Gabela – between the War of Candia (1645–1699) and the Morean War (1684–1699). The goal of the narrative is to enhance the societal, everyday life and spatial dimensions of an issue that at first glance might seem purely of an economic and territorial conquest nature. The article is based on the sources – thus, also perspective – of the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik).

KEYWORDS: TRADING SEA POST, GABELA, NERETVA, REPUBLIC OF RAGUSA, REPUBLIC OF VENICE, OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 17TH CENTURY.

It is often the case that research interests in the social and economic matter of the Western Balkans in the Early Modern Times focus exclusively on the economic behaviour of the Venetians and the large port cities of the Adriatic basin, primarily, of course, Venice and then – after a certain lead – the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik). The economic and commercial agencies of Ottoman subjects are hardly ever considered, and forms of economic collaboration between Ottoman and non-Ottoman subjects are rarely taken into consideration. However, when research focuses on the Ottoman merchant class, it can provide a lively and exciting image of the Ottoman social and economic realities and its juridical and institutional structures and practices.¹ Similarly, historiography has neglect-

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1 Cf. Erica MEZZOLI, «La guerra degli altri. La (stra)ordinaria vicenda di un gruppo di mercanti ottomani tra politica, diplomazia e commercio al tempo dell'*Armada* spagnola in

ed the essential role of intermediate gateways and of what is known as *poussière portuaire*, both within the framework of the regional economic and social fabric and at a macroeconomic level.² Nonetheless, the observation of the activity of small ports – especially if placed on the border of the State – can offer us an uncommon insight into socioeconomics and institutional dynamics in the Early Modern Age.³

Likewise, also entrepreneurship and trade/business activities are often conceived in mere terms of «personality characteristics» that unveil in an aseptic economic environment, without taking into consideration that «entrepreneurial decisions are made in a socio-cultural and emotional context rather than exclusively via pure economic contracting relations».⁴ In this way, in addition to socially driven features (e.g., social capital), another important aspect is equally discarded from the analysis of entrepreneurship and business: its spatial dimension.⁵

Conversely, Chris Steyaert and Jerome Katz underline how entrepreneurship is a societal rather than an economic fact. From this methodological position, three statements derive: the first informs us that «entrepreneurship takes place

Adriatico (1617–1621)», *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 98, 1 (2014), pp. 57-74. Regarding the Ottoman perspective on the Adriatic, see: Maria Pia PEDANI, «Ottoman Merchants in the Adriatic. Trade and Smuggling», *Acta Histriae*, 16, 1–2 (2008), pp. 155-172.

2 Gilbert BUTI and Gérard LE BOUËDEC, «Présentation», *Rives méditerranéennes*, 35 (2010) [= Gilbert BUTI and Gérard LE BOUËDEC (Ed.), *Les petits ports*], last accessed February 10, 2022, <https://journals.openedition.org/rives/3833>.

3 Cf. Cátia ANTUNES and Louis SICKING, «Ports on the Border of the State, 1200–1800: An Introduction», *International Journal of Maritime History*, 19, 2 (2007), pp. 273-286; Gérard LE BOUËDEC, «Small Ports from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Century and the Local Economy of the French Atlantic Coast», *International Journal of Maritime History*, 21, 2 (2009), pp. 103-126.

4 John P. ULHØI, «The Social Dimension of Entrepreneurship», *Technovation*, 25 (2005), p. 941.

5 In this regard, see Hans WESTLUND and Roger BOLTON, «Local Social Capital and Entrepreneurship», *Small Business Economics*, 21 (2003), pp. 77-113; Giles MOHAN and John MOHAN, «Placing Social Capital», *Progress in Human Geography*, 26, 2 (2002), pp. 191-210; Edward J. MALECKI, «Regional Social Capital: Why it Matters», *Regional Studies*, 46, 8 (2012), pp. 1023-1039. Social capital, human capital and geographical capital can also equally influence work activities and vocational training. In this regard, see Erica MEZZOLI, «Nulle Part. Les sujets ottomans apprentis dans la guilde des orfèvres de Raguse au XVIIIe siècle», in Andrea CARACASI, Nicoletta ROLLA and Marco SCHNYDER (Eds.), *Travail et mobilité en Europe XVIe–XIXe siècles*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2018, pp. 187-207.



1 Territory of the Republic of Ragusa, mouth of the Neretva (in the map *Narenta*) river and Spalato (Split). Source: Nicolas DE FER, *Golfe de Venise*, ca. 1716. Accessible in: David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, last accessed March 6, 2022, <https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/detail/RUMSEY~8~1~279579~90052566:Le-Golfe-De-Venise#>. Public domain.

in multiple sites and spaces»; the second says that those spaces always have a political nature, so «a geography of entrepreneurship is always a geopolitics»; and finally, the third statement tells us that «entrepreneurship is a matter of everyday activities rather than actions of elitist groups of entrepreneurs». Therefore, the geographical, discursive and social dimensions of entrepreneurship are intensely welded to the economic one.⁶ Furthermore, war and all its implications are further able to complicate and enrich variables in the entrepreneurial processes and business activities.⁷

At least partially, the above-mentioned historiographical observations and methodological considerations are valid for the case concerning this article, when

6 Chris STEYAERT and Jerome KATZ, «Reclaiming the Space of Entrepreneurship in Society: Geographical, Discursive, and Social Dimensions», *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, 16 (2004), pp. 179-180.

7 Cf. Jeff FYNN-PAUL (Ed.), *War, Entrepreneurs, and the State in Europe and the Mediterranean, 1300–1800*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2014.

Muslim merchants from Bosnia – particularly from Sarajevo and Mostar – took part in the Venetian project of “opening” a small land traffic terminal at the mouth of the Neretva river (Fig. 1) in Ottoman territory at the end of the War of Candia (1645–1669).

Although this was not a new matter,⁸ during the 17th century the question of the “opening” of the “new” sea trading post of Gabela, which, along with Spalato (Split), would have operated in direct competition with the Republic of Ragusa, arose officially in autumn 1667. At that time, the Ragusean ambassadors (Fig. 2) Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sargo came to the court of the Sanjak-bey (administrative and military high-ranking officer ruling a province) of Hercegovina and told his *kahya* (butler, personal secretary) to be aware of the «desire of the Venetians to open an *entrepôt* in Narenta for the interest of Bosnian merchants».⁹

At the time of the events narrated, Gabela was a small village along the last section of the Neretva river that was not new to the market and commercial practices despite its size. There, Raguseans had played a role of great importance since the Middle Ages. The Ottoman presence in the valley and in the mountains surrounding the Neretva river dates back to the end of the 16th century when the Ottomans extended their rule over a large part of Herzegovina and Dalmatia. They consolidated the conquest after 1503 when they occupied the whole region, with the exception of the Venetian centre of Almissa (Omiš). Despite the formal adjustments in the conditions of their presence due to the Ottoman conquest, Raguseans maintained a pivotal position in Gabela as they enjoyed a monopoly on the salt trade.¹⁰ Also, the locality played a vital role in the trade of Ottoman

8 The question concerning the absorption into the Venetian orbit of the Ottoman river port on the Neretva, named in literature and documents simply as Narenta or Gabela, was present in the Venetian agenda even before the opening of the port of Split (1590). In 1583, the Captain of Spalato, Nicolò Correr, claimed that, for the successful opening of Spalato, among the various measures, the Ottoman authorities needed to agree to close their port in Narenta. A few years later, in 1589, the *V Savi* also agreed that if they wanted to attract Turkish merchants to Split, it was a priority to allow them to buy salt, rice, and soap at a lower price than that of the Raguseans in Narenta. Renzo PACI, *La 'scala' di Spalato e il commercio veneziano nei Balcani fra Cinque e Seicento*, Venice, Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, 1971, pp. 54–58.

9 Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku (hereafter: DAD), *Acta Sanctae Mariae Maioris – XVII Century* (hereafter: ASMM XVII), Ambassadors Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sargo, Mostar, November 23, 1667, 1868–1.

10 Faruk TASLIDŽA, «Uspon i pad osmanske Gabele», *Hercegovina*, 19 (2020), p. 7; Vesna Mi-

Herzegovina.¹¹ Gabela attracted the merchants of the hinterland who procured their salt from the Raguseans, and they sold wax, wool, leather and other sheep farming products.¹²

As reported by a likely Venetian source, edited by Franjo Rački, in the first half of the 17th century Gabela was a fortified citadel of about 300 inhabitants and a colony of Raguseans who sold salt there.¹³ Also, Evliya Çelebi – who travelled these places in 1665 – described Gabela as a small city that was a maritime trading post (*bender iskeles*) too.¹⁴ In the Ragusean sources, it is almost always called Narenta or, for its trading purposes,

ović, «Beylerbey of Bosnia and Sancakbey of Herzegovina in the Diplomacy of the Dubrovnik Republic», *Dubrovnik Annals*, 9 (2005), pp. 37-69; Vesna Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima namjesnika bosanskog ejaleta i hercegovačkog sandžaka*, Dubrovnik, Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2008, pp. 97-100.

11 Faruk TASLIDŽA, «Trgovina Hercegovačkog sandžaka u prvim decenijama XVII stoljeća», *Prilozi*, 40 (2011), pp. 71-74.

12 Seid TRALJIĆ, «Trgovina Bosne i Hercegovine s lukama Dalmacije i Dubrovnika u XVII i XVIII stoljeću», *Pomorski Zbornik*, 1 (1962), pp. 355-357.

13 Franjo RAČKI, «Prilozi za geografsko-statistički opis bosanskoga pašalika – Opis bosanskoga pašalika iz XVII vieka», *Starine*, 14 (1882), pp. 175-176.

14 TASLIDŽA, «Ušpon i pad», cit., p. 12.



2 Ragusean nobles. The Republic appointed its ambassadors among the representatives of the noble class. Source: Nicolò DE NICOLAI, *Le Navigazioni et Viaggi fatti nella Turchia*, Venice, Francesco Ziletti, 1580.

as *scala di Narenta* (Narenta seaport). Therefore, we are not dealing with an actual opening since the place had already been operating as a trading post for at least a couple of centuries. Instead, we can define the operation as the absorption of Gabela in a sort of Bosnian–Venetian institutional and commercial condominium whose construction, as we will see, did not necessarily require the conquest and the formal Venetian sovereignty over that locality and surrounding areas.

From the point of view of the exposition, it was decided to narrate the story as precisely as possible to enhance the liveliness of the acts and behaviours of the people involved and the strong social dimension in the events of a commercial nature that will be illustrated.

Prior Events. Mostar, spring 1666:

Marino di Nicolò Gozze and Mustafa Effendi have a conversation

In the Ragusean sources, the first mention of the Gabela affair dates back to spring 1666, when the Ragusean ambassador Marino di Nicolò Gozze learnt about the Venetian sights on the commercial outpost during a conversation with a prominent of Mostar, Mustafa Effendi. During an ordinary wartime chat between acquaintances, the Bosnian notable asked his Ragusean companion if he had news of the peace negotiations between the Venetians and the Ottomans. When the Ragusean replied that he knew nothing about it, out of the blue, Mustafa Effendi retorted that the Venetians were lobbying hard to open a trading post in Gabela to sell salt there. This was reliable information obtained from the Herzegovinian merchants who went to Venice for trade. Gozze blurted out that this could not be possible: salt traffic in Gabela had always been a Ragusa prerogative. That was a fact certified by custom, by the *hatt-ı şerif* (sultanic edicts) and, finally, by various *emiri* (orders). Moreover, he added that in his opinion the sultan would never have put his tributaries in such a difficult position. Indeed, he would not have helped the earning possibilities of his arch-enemies, like Venice.¹⁵ To the Ragusean's words, Mustafa Effendi replied adamantly:

That is it. You, the Raguseans, are not strong enough to oppose the sultan's will. The Venetians can negotiate peace right now and start another war in a few years [...]. Perhaps it is true that this undertaking will not be fulfilled, but everyone around here is happy about it, because it would allow a more

¹⁵ DAD, *Miscellanea* – XVII Century, Ambassador Marino di Nicolò Gozze, Mostar, April 26, 1666, XIII–100.

comfortable and more accessible trade.¹⁶

Cozze could not come to terms with that. He decided to console himself with the thought that the sultan would indeed have at heart the fate of the Raguseans by keeping his oaths, and indeed, this operation could not be influenced by the will of a few merchants from Mostar and Sarajevo who wanted to save on transport expenses. Mustafa Effendi nodded without much conviction to the Ragusean ambassador's words and left.¹⁷

Who knows what, and from whom does he get the information?

Let us now return to the autumn of 1667, when Caboga and Sorgo had an encounter with the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina. The ambassadors reported that they knew that a certain Hacı Ahmet from Bosnia had gone to Venice to negotiate with the Venetians about opening the new port. The Raguseans added that they also knew that in the port of Venice, three vessels loaded with rice, salt and other merchandise were ready to set sail and then dock at the mouth of the Neretva river. Furthermore, the Venetians were forcing the Turkish merchants present in Venice who wanted to head towards Ragusa, to embark on those three vessels. The Sanjak-bey said that he had not received any communication on the subject from Constantinople and that he would send a man of his trust to Narenta to get a feel for the situation.¹⁸

If the authorities said they knew nothing, there were always those who knew more. In a conversation with a merchant from Mostar, the ambassadors learned that Hacı Ahmet had already been in Venice for four months, negotiating. He had also written to a matchmaker in Herzegovina to agree with the Venetians in Dalmatia to order the *hajduci* (bandits, highwaymen) to disturb and damage all caravan traffic to and from Ragusa. The ambassadors also discussed the matter with the *kahya* of the Herzegovinian Sanjak-bey. Through his connections in Sarajevo, the *kahya* had come to know that the Pasha of Bosnia strongly supported

16 «Così è. Voi non sete forti di levar il capo contro il Gran Sg.re e li Ven.ni faranno la pace adesso e dopo puochi anni un'altra volta e quando gli piacesse possono far guerra seco, [...] è verisimile che non si potrà riuscire ma questa novità applaudono tutti questi louchi per la comodità di più facile trafigo». *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 DAD, ASMM XVII, Ambassadors Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sorgo, Mostar, November 23, 1667, 1868–1.

the opening of this new commercial outpost. The Pasha of Bosnia had sent one of his emissaries to Narenta to establish that all the necessary preparations were in place should a Venetian ship arrive in that locality or Makarska. In this case, the unloading operations would have proceeded smoothly, and the goods sent to Sarajevo. The *kahya* added that the Sanjak-bey was aware of everything and that he had sent his *kapıcı kahya* (chief of the guards) to Narenta to understand under which order the Pasha of Bosnia could make concessions of that kind to the Venetians, since such measures were in direct contrast with the sultan's orders.

However, from other conversations the Ragusean ambassadors had in confidence with other people, they learned – «to be very true» – how the facts unfolded and who was aware of everything. From those confidants, they learned that the Venetians had promised 20,000 sequins to the Pasha of Bosnia and Musli Effendi, his previous *defterdar* (the Ottoman official in charge of finances), to take action at the highest levels.¹⁹ Thus, Musli Effendi had sent one of his envoys to Candia (Crete) to obtain a commandment to fulfil the Venetians' aim from the Grand Vizier through his *kahya*, and now that commandment was already in the hands of the Pasha of Bosnia. The well-informed claimed that everyone knew everything about those facts – including the Henzegovinian Sanjak-bey – although they claimed otherwise.²⁰ At the *kapıcı kahya* return from Narenta, the Sanjak-bey wished to inform the Raguseans about the situation by sending them an *agha* (military official of the Jannisary corps). The *agha* reported that the Bosnian Pasha had given instructions that if ships and a Venetian ambassador arrived in Narenta, the local authorities were to escort the ambassador to Sarajevo to have him confer with him, but were not to unload the goods from the vessels without his express order.²¹ Furthermore, the Sanjak-bey wanted to let them know that he had been joined by a delegate from the Pasha of Bosnia. The man had told him that the Pasha would share with him the money promised by the Venetians, if he gave his support for the realization of the commercial outpost on Narenta.

19 On corruption practices in Ottoman Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Erica MEZZOLI, «Trade, Diplomacy, and Corruption in Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Bosnia: The Ragusan Experience of a Complex Relationship», in Gábor KÁRMÁN (Ed.), *Tributaries and Peripheries of the Ottoman Empire*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2020, pp. 161-187.

20 DAD, ASMM XVII, Ambassadors Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sorgo, Mostar, November 23, 1667, 1868-1.

21 *Ibid.*, Mostar, November 29, 1667, 1868-2.

The Bosnian Pasha believed that this small port would be of great use for the *reaya* (the taxpayers, here used in the sense of “people”, “population”) and the merchants, who did not dare to go to Ragusa for fear of the *hajduci* who attacked the caravans, stole horses and merchandise and enslaved the carters. Indeed, once the new trading post was opened, the Venetians themselves would remedy the problem of the brigands that infested Bosnia and Herzegovina.²² Precisely in this regard, the *agha* told Caboga and Sorgo that once the small port was opened, the Venetians would deal with the *hajduci* problem in seven *kadiluk* (administrative unit which corresponded to the jurisdiction of a judge) – those surrounding the commercial outpost²³ –, promising a sequin as compensation for every robbery or kidnapping committed in those *kadiluk* and, as a further guarantee, they would also “pledge” one of their patricians.²⁴

The encounter with the «little old mother»

On December 1, 1667, the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina left for Duvno, but he did not want to be followed by the Raguseans. Even the ambassadors did not want to stay in Mostar due to the severe plague epidemic in the city. They decided to head first towards Stolac and then continue in the direction of Počitelj. It was precisely in the latter locality that they learned of the presence in the vicinity of a person who could help them a great deal. The ambassadors found out that:

the old little mother of the Grand Vizier’s *kahya* was – by the will of her son – with a certain Mahmut Effendi, who was very solicitous towards her; he wrote the letters to the *kahya* and handled everything related to the woman – so, we felt it was necessary to have a meeting with the woman as soon as possible.²⁵

²² *Ibid.*

²³ It is probable to identify those *kadiluk* in the territorial jurisdictions of Gabela, Duvno, Ljubinje, Stolac, Mostar, Blagaj, Imotski relating to the territory of the Neretva valley or adjacent to it, existing in Herzegovina at the end of the 17th century. Zijad ŠEHIĆ and Ibrahim TEPIĆ, *Povijesni atlas Bosne i Hercegovine. Bosna i Hercegovina na geografskim i historijskim kartama*, Sarajevo, Sejtarija, 2002, pp. 61-62.

²⁴ DAD, ASMM XVII, Ambassadors Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sorgo, Dubrave [near Mostar], December 20, 1667, 1868–3.

²⁵ «la vecchierella madre del S.r Chiehaia di S.r Supremo Vesire si trovava raccomandata dal medesimo a certo Mahmut effendi, quale era il tutto appresso di ella, e che lui scriveva tutte le lettere al S.r Chiehaia e governava tutte le sue cose onde stimamo necessario prima abbocarsi con la donna». *Ibid.*

In order to get an encounter with the woman (Fig. 3), the Raguseans approached her trusted man, Mahmut Effendi, preparing him lunch in their accommodation and offering him «four weights of sugar» (*quattro capi di zucchero*). Eventually, Mahmut Effendi was willing to organize the meeting. However, «not being usual», the ambassadors could not speak directly with the woman. He said he would introduce the two men to her door, «so that we could hear one another».²⁶

Finally, the day of the meeting with the mother of the *kahya* of the grand vizier Köprülü Fazıl Ahmet Pasha arrived. The ambassadors went to her home with sugar and satin cloths as gifts, begging her to take up their cause by writing a letter to her son, «knowing that the *kahya* would do more for her – whom he loves so much – than for anyone else».²⁷

She appreciated the gifts and was very sorry to learn that the opening of the port of Narenta would put Ragusa in great difficulty. At the end of their private talk, the ambassadors managed to wrest half a promise from the woman. She would write a letter in favor of the Raguseans to her son, *kahya* of Köprülü Fazıl Ahmet Pasha, if, and only if, the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina was the first promoter of the Republic of Ragusa's cause at the Porte. In exchange for the letter, the woman wished to receive a gift from the Republic: «two hounds, a male and a female, and they have to be beautiful and good».²⁸

Thanks to Mahmut Effendi the two Raguseans also gathered new information and clarified the most confusing news. According to Ottoman gentleman, the Bosnia's previous *defterdar* had nothing to do with all those machinations. Defining himself as a trusted man of the current Bosnian *defterdar* – a certain Sciaban Effendi –, Mahmut Effendi was present when:

Sciaban Effendi and the *mola* [juriconsult] of Sarajevo, along with the Pasha of Bosnia, sent the *arz* [order] and the *mahzar* [court decree] to the Grand Vizier to our disadvantage and in order to get the opening of the outpost at Narenta, swearing that Musta Effendi [the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina] was utterly unrelated to the matter.²⁹

26 «ben si ci introdurrebbe avanti la sua porta accio ella puossa sentire il nostro e noi il suo parlare». *Ibid.*

27 «sapendo che il S.r Chiehaia farebbe più per lei che tanto ama che per alcun altro». *Ibid.*

28 «direte ai vostri SS.ri che in ogni modo mi mandino dua Cani brachi un maschio et una femina che siano belli e boni». *Ibid.*

29 «il detto Sciaban effendi et il Mula di Saraio insieme col S.r Passa di Bosna mandarno l'arsi [arz] e masari [mahzar] al S.r Supremo Vesire contro di noi per procurare l'apertura della

At these revelations, the ambassadors asked if the *defterdar*, the Pasha and the *mola* had obtained any commandments in their favor from the grand vizier or the *kaymakampaşa* (lieutenant who replaced the Grand Vizier if he was absent). Mahmut Effendi replied, swearing that he knew nothing «other than what the common people said». However, he did not believe it at all:

because if they had already obtained a commandment, by now they would have registered it in the *sicill* [*kadi*'s register] of the seven *kaza* [equivalent of *kadiluk*] in question; but now certainly the Venetians would have done everything to obtain that commandment, and for that purpose they had offered 12,000 sequins to the Pasha of Bosnia, 8,000 sequins to the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina, 4,000 to the *defterdar* and the *mola* of Sarajevo, in addition to gifts to all the *agha* of Narenta and Mostar, privileges to the merchants and, to the subjects of the seven *kaza*, the promise that they would never be harassed by the *hajduci* again.³⁰

Gentildonna Turca
ouero nel

Stando in casa sua
Serraglio.



scala à Narente, nel quale negotio ci giurò che Musta effendi nulla s'habbi ingerito». *Ibid.*

- 30 «perché se il commandamento havessero ottenuto di quello sin hora haverbbero fatto sigilat [recorded in *sicill*] in tutti i Cadiluchi ma ben si credeva anzi teniva per certo che adesso i Venetiani procurarano più che mai che l'ottenesse detto commandamento per il quale offerivano al S.r Passa di Bosna M/12 [12.000] zechini, a questo di Herzegovi-

3 An Ottoman lady in her home clothing. Source: Nicolò DE NICOLAI, *Le Navigazioni et Viaggi fatti nella Turchia*, Venice, Francesco Ziletti, 1580.

It must be said that Mahmut Effendi, or as the Ragusa ambassadors call him, «farmer of the mother of the *kahya* of the Grand Vizier», was indeed a wealth of information. Also, from him, they learned of the Venetian propaganda – most likely propagated by Hagi Ahmet – aimed at the merchants of Sarajevo, who were strongly advised not to go to Ragusa for security reasons. Concerning the operations in the shadow of Hagi Ahmed in Venice, «the hoi polloi commonly said» that he had already taken the commandment to Venice and that the arrival of Venetian vessels loaded with merchandise and salt in Narenta was about to happen at any moment. Regarding the expected arrival of the Venetian ships *en route* to the mouth of the Neretva, the ambassadors learned from Gio Batista Leporini, the Ragusa salt seller in Narenta, that those vessels had already arrived in Spalato (Split) and were just waiting for suitable meteorological conditions in order to navigate towards their final destination.³¹

What the locals thought

On December 20, 1667, from Sarajevo, the *defterdar* Sciaban Effendi sent a letter to an *agha* (Fig. 4) in Narenta. The Ragusa ambassadors succeeded in detaining the courier carrying the communication and, not without effort, managed to learn the contents of the letter «in which [Sciaban Effendi] writes these precise words»:

The Venetian vessels carrying merchants and merchandise are likely about to arrive at that [Neretva river] mouth. Therefore, be vigilant. As soon as you see them, you will report to me and to the Pasha here in Sarajevo. In addition, you will also notify Ibrahim Agha and Salih Agha, who have already been sent to Mostar. They will wait there for your news on the arrival of the vessels, and then they will move to Narenta to attend the necessary operations – one on my behalf and the other one on Pasha's behalf. If the Pasha hadn't detained me for some important business, I would have come to you personally. Anyway, I'll see you soon. The Pasha and I are very much counting on you and your help regarding the circumstance of the arrival of those vessels.³²

na otto, et al Tefterdaro e Mula di Saraio quatro, oltre li regali à tuti li aghe di Nar.[en]te e Mostaro, privilegii ai Mercanti et à tutti i suditti di sette Cadiluchi che non sarebbero molestati dalli haiduchi». *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

32 «Non essendo comparsi sin hora più Vaselli Venetiani con mercanti e mercantie a code-

As reported by the Ragusa salt seller Gio Batista Leporini in Narenta, the information about the arrival of the Venetian vessels in Split was confirmed by another source. A man from Vrgorac said he knew that the Venetian ships, besides the merchandise, were also carrying the timber necessary to build the salt deposits (*case del sale*) and the lazaretto to erect right at the mouth of the river.³³

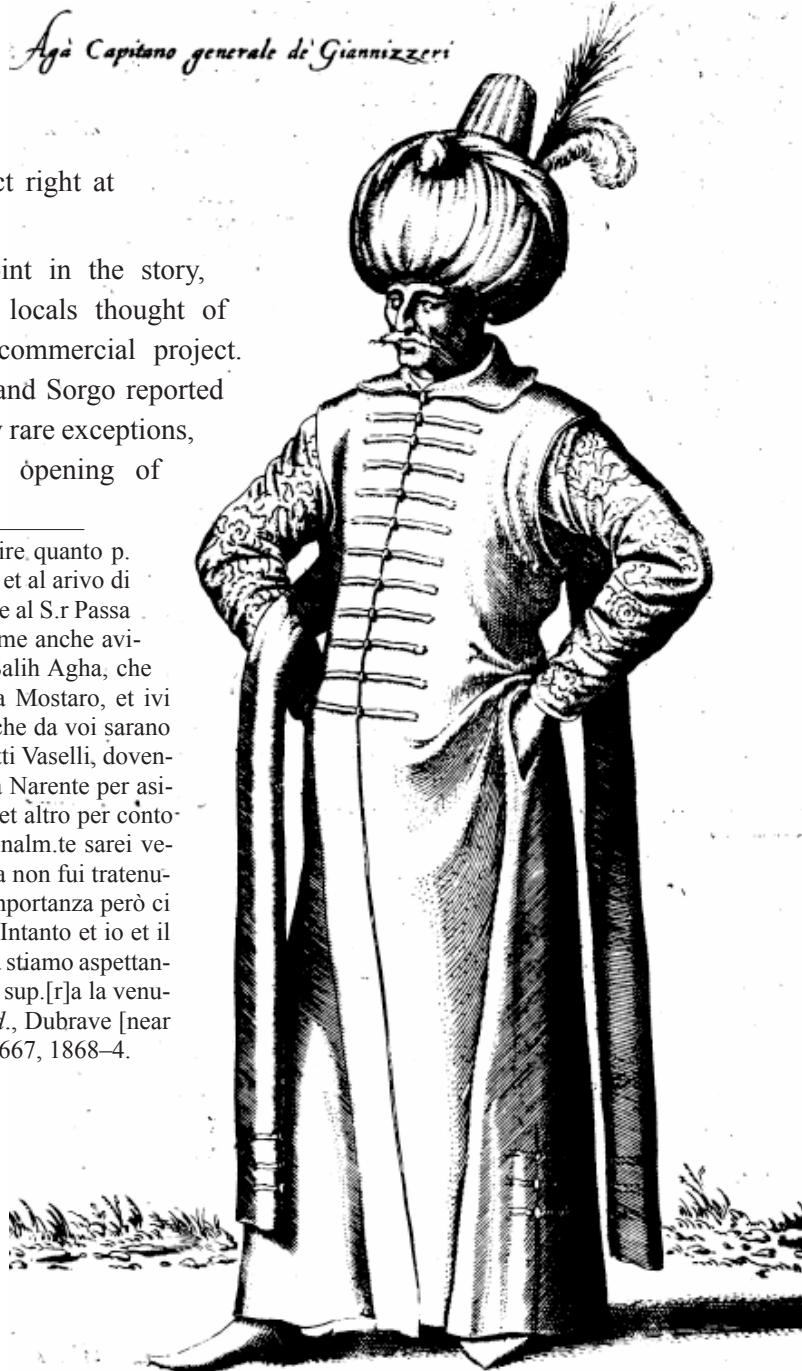
However, at this point in the story, one wonders what the locals thought of this Bosnian–Venetian commercial project. In their letters, Caboga and Sorgo reported that the locals, with a few rare exceptions, were thrilled with the opening of

ste boche dovranno coparire quanto p. ma onde voi invigliarete, et al arivo di quelle subito darete parte al S.r Passa et a me qui in Saraio, come anche avisarete Imbraim Agha e Salih Agha, che gia da qui sono spediti a Mostaro, et ivi doverano aspettare sino che da voi saranno avisati del arivo dei sudetti Vaselli, dovendo ambi doi transferirsi a Narente per assistere uno per conto mio, et altro per conto del S.r Passa, et io personalm.te sarei venuto costi se dal S.r Passa non fui tratenu- to per alcun servitio di importanza però ci vederemo quanto prima. Intanto et io et il S.r Passa con gran ansietà stiamo aspettando da voi particolar aiuto sup.[r]a la venuta di sudetti Vaselli». *Ibid.*, Dubrave [near Mostar], December 21, 1667, 1868–4.

33 *Ibid.*

4 An Ottoman *agha*.
Source: Nicolò DE NICOLAI,
*Le Navigazioni et Viaggi
fatti nella Turchia*, Venice,
Francesco Ziletti, 1580.

Agà Capitano generale de' Giannizzeri



that small port.³⁴ It should be noted that the most significant disadvantage of the Raguseans – a circumstance that strongly compromised the possibility of intercession by the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina in their favor – was represented by the great difficulty, due to the ongoing war, of transporting their salt from Ston to Narenta. The Ottoman official, while reassuring the ambassadors that without the sultan's *hatt-ı şerif* he would never have allowed the disembark of the Venetian salt in Narenta, warned them that if Ragusa had not been able to supply Narenta with salt, he would have been forced to report to the sultan that the opening of that entrepot was absolutely essential.³⁵ The Raguseans indeed had a monopoly on the salt trade in Narenta. However, their market dominance was conditional on whether they could supply Narenta with the goods. Otherwise, others would have been allowed to bring and sell it in their place.³⁶

After a certain period of silence, the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina ordered a trusted *agha* of Narenta, a certain Hussein Agha, that if the Venetian ships were to arrive, the situation should be managed in two ways according to the case. In the first scenario, if the Venetians exhibited the commandment of the sultan authorizing them to moor, the *agha* would first have to demand the customs duties. On the contrary, if the Venetians had neither the sultan's commandment or any other order from the Bosnian Pasha, he would not intervene in any way. In that case, he would have to make a note of the wares and merchants.³⁷

The return to the Sanjak-bey on the scene was probably because the word was spreading that the Venetian ships were already off the Hvar (Lesina) island coast, as Gio Battista Leporini reported to the ambassadors. The salt seller added that the main convoy was delayed, because it was still waiting for a galley from

34 *Ibid.* However, according to the two Raguseans, the most enthusiastic and the real promoter “from the bottom” of the enterprise was a «certain Begho Curt Aghich, propte[r] [causa] of Narenta and the main proponent of the opening of this port». *Ibid.*, Buna [near Blagaj], January 1, 1668, 1868–7.

35 *Ibid.*, Dubrave [near Mostar] 20 December 1667, 1868–3.

36 The privilege granted to the Raguseans to have the monopoly of the salt trade in Narenta, except in cases where they were unable to bring it, was enshrined in many sultan commandments. Some reference to the sultan commandments issued in the 17th century. DAD, *Privilegi* (XX.2): Ahmed I, year 1609 No. 5, c. 324; Ahmed I, year 1617 No. 1, c. 323; Osman II, year 1618 No. 4, c. 374; Osman II, year 1618 No. 19, cc. 395–396; Murad IV, year 1635 No. 14, c. 435; Mehmet IV, year 1649 No. 190, c. 744.

37 DAD, ASMM XVII, Ambassadors Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sorgo, Buna [near Blagaj], January 1, 1668, 1868–5.

Venice with «a public person» on board who, upon arrival in Narenta, would have to go immediately to Sarajevo to the Pasha, while the merchants and merchandise stayed on board.³⁸ The ambassadors decided to reach the Sanjak-bey in Mostar, accompanied by one of his trusted men and, evidently, also belonging to the pro-Ragusa faction of Narenta notables: Hussein Agha. However, the *agha* and the ambassadors preferred not to enter the city due to the fear of contracting the plague that was raging in Mostar. They thought it would be more comfortable and safer to stay overnight in the meadows outside the city to be able to meet the Sanjak-bey when he would leave Mostar to go to Herceg Novi.³⁹

Good news

Despite all the worries, some reassurance began to come from Sarajevo in those days. The Bosnian Pasha had finally decided to free the caravans stationed in Sarajevo, allowing them to head towards Ragusa. The two Raguseans believed that this decision was reached when the Pasha knew for sure that the Venetians did not have any commandment from the sultan allowing them to disembark at Narenta. Since the success of the Narenta enterprise conditioned this block, he no longer considered it appropriate to detain those caravans to divert them towards the new port, whose opening was not complete. In any case, in order to secure further guarantees, the ambassadors returned to see the mother of the *kahya* of the Grand Vizier and to remind her of the letter she was to have written to her son. The woman's position had not changed: before writing her letter, she wanted to be sure that Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina was on the Republic of Ragusa's side. The Raguseans made Hussain Agha swear that the Sanjak-bey was their ally because he, like them, had the sole purpose of serving the sultan. But the woman remained adamant.⁴⁰

In the meantime, however, excellent news was arriving from Ragusa. From the report of the ambassadors, it can be understood that the Republic sent a communication which informed Caboga and Sorgo that the ambassadors who carried the tribute⁴¹ had met the sultan in Plovdiv. On that occasion, they learnt

38 *Ibid.*, Narenta, December 25, 1667, 1868–5.

39 «stare alla travia [on the grass; on the meadows] per poterlo incontrare a quelle strade dove vedaremo che voltarà di certo». *Ibid.*, Buna [near Blagaj], December 29, 1667, 1868–6.

40 *Ibid.*

41 Regarding the Republic of Ragusa as a tributary state of the Ottoman Empire, see Niko-

that the sultan had not granted any commandments in favor of the Venetians to accomplish the enterprise. Of course, this now placed the Ragusa's ambassadors in an advantageous position over the Bosnian Pasha.⁴²

However, good news followed bad news. Notice arrived from Sarajevo about the caravans that had been blocked on their way to Ragusa. Although the Bosnian Pasha had finally made up his mind to allow merchants to travel the Sarajevo-Ragusa route, now it was the merchants themselves who did not want to travel that route. They feared the raids of the *hajduci* during the journey by land to reach the Republic of Saint Blaise and the attacks of the pirates during the following navigation towards Venice. From a merchant, the ambassadors learned that only his caravan and that of a group of Ragusa furriers had left Sarajevo in the direction of Ragusa. The other caravans were still stationary in Sarajevo, because the merchants received constant notices from Venice – news probably spread by Hacı Ahmed, the ambassadors suggested – about the great danger of the Sarajevo–Ragusa–Venice intermodal route.

Although the sultan did not want to endorse the Bosnian–Venetian enterprise of Gabela, the Republic decided to “invest” 500 sequins in the “friendship” with the Sanjak-bey of Herzegovina all the same. This was also so that he would prevent any docking of Venetian ships – this hypothesis was receding further and further – and write a letter to the sultan in favor of the Ragusa's cause. Once both the Sanjak-bey alliance and the sultan's refusal to support the Bosnian–Venetian project were certain, the ambassadors would have greater bargaining power with the Bosnian Pasha. In this way, the Ottoman official would abandon the smear campaign against Ragusa and openly encourage the caravans to head towards the

Iaas H. BIEGMAN, *The Turco–Ragusan Relationship. According to the Firmans of Murad III (1575–1595) extant in the State Archives of Dubrovnik*, The Hague & Paris, Mouton, 1967; Vesna MIOVIĆ, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana*, Dubrovnik, Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2005; Vesna MIOVIĆ, «Diplomatic Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Dubrovnik», in Gábor KÁRMÁN and Lovro KUNČEVIĆ (Eds.), *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, 2013, pp. 187-208; Lovro KUNČEVIĆ, «Janus-faced Sovereignty: The International Status of the Ragusan Republic in the Early Modern Period», in KÁRMÁN and KUNČEVIĆ (Eds.), *The European Tributary States*, cit., pp. 91-121.

42 DAD, ASMM XVII, Ambassadors Marino di Caboga and Orsato de Sorgo, Buna [near Blagaj], January 1, 1668, 1868–7.

Republic of Saint Blaise.⁴³

Finally, on January 1, 1668, the ambassadors managed to have a meeting with the Sanjak-bey near Mostar. The ambassadors asked to speak only with the officer and his closest collaborators. The Sanjak-bey replied that the meeting could be held only after dinner. So, the Raguseans went to his rooms at two in the morning. As “encouragement”, they offered him 400 sequins, 60 to his *kahya*, 20 to the *divan effendi* (secretary, scribe) and other 20 to the other dignitaries of his court. Despite many reassurances about his hostility towards the Bosnian–Venetian commercial enterprise, the Ottoman official was very afraid to write those letters. The official told them that, although the Bosnian Pasha and six hundred great Bosnian merchants were against Ragusa, he was sure the sultan would trust his words. However, the real problem was represented by the Pasha of Bosnia, who would be very offended by this. Furthermore, the Pasha was also the brother-in-law of the sultan and, therefore, possessed a significant influence over him. Finally, – of course – he also wanted economic encouragement from the Ragusa to be more conspicuous.⁴⁴ Caboga and Sorgo replied that they only asked him to inform the sultan as precisely as possible about all the possible and dangerous consequences that the realization of Gabela’s project could present. The scenario envisaged by the Ragusa ambassadors was the following: at first, the Venetians would build the lazaretto, closing the mouth of the Neretva; later, they would build houses and other buildings and, finally, they would undoubtedly also erect a fortress which, in order to be demolished, would certainly require the sultan’s armed intervention. Nevertheless, despite that picture the official remained unmoved, but he did agree to the ambassadors’ request to think about it a little longer and invited them to follow him on the journey to Stolac the next day. In Stolac, the Raguseans tried to have a further encounter with the Sanjak-bey but were unsuccessful.⁴⁵

A few days later, Caboga and Sorgo met the Sanjak-bey and his court again on the road to Nikšić. This time, the Ottoman officer approached them and asked to discuss the price for his help: to write those letters supporting Ragusa to the sultan, the officer wanted 1,000 sequins for him and 300 for his *kahya*. However,

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*, Stolac, January 4, 1668, 1868–8.

45 *Ibid.*

this time the Raguseans were inflexible: 400 sequins was their offer, take it or leave it. The officer tried again to negotiate his price, but the two ambassadors were ordered to return to Ragusa and there, in all probability, they went after this last meeting.⁴⁶

Anyway, it is possible to affirm that, after the reassurances received by the sultan through the ambassadors of the tribute and the non-mooring of the Venetian ships at the mouth of the Neretva, for Ragusa the tension and the concern subsided.

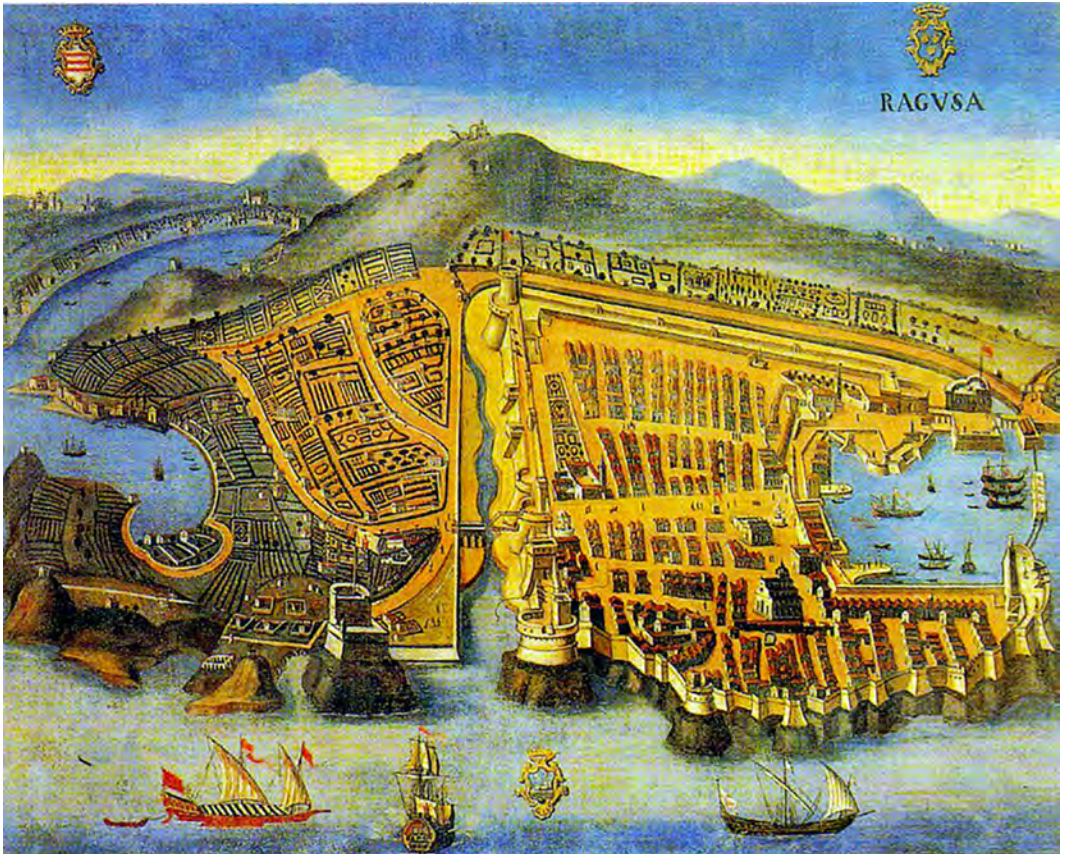
Finally, the project is completed

The Bosnian–Venetian trading post project on the Narenta was born and died down during the War of Candia and was reawakened during another war, that of Morea.

In a communication dated May 26, 1693, a Venetian *capo di piazza* (a prominent merchant) reported to the *V Savi* that normally Bosnia's commercial traffic went to Split, where the goods were loaded on galleys and thus arrived in Venice. On the contrary, in times of war the local merchants regularly went to Ragusa (Fig. 5), which was becoming rich, not so much by the duties it imposed on goods, but especially by the prices imposed on the sale of salt. The merchants were looking for another trading post, a convenient and safe place to carry goods. The *bosnesi* (or *bossinesi*) merchants did not consider Split a suitable place to carry their goods, because it was too far inside the Venetian territory. However, not even Risan or the Herceg Novi area (both in Montenegro now) were considered suitable options due to the inland populations, who continually plundered the caravans in transit. The merchants proposed the Neretva valley – where they had already begun to route trade with goods from Mostar – naming the locality of Gabela as the hub of commercial traffic. However, at that time the goods remained stationary in Gabela and could not reach the coast, because the fortress called Forte Opus, located on a tiny island at the mouth of the Neretva river, prevented communication with the sea. Thus, Forte Opus could have served as an intermediate trading outpost for the commercial traffic between Ottoman Bosnia and Venice, so that:

the goods – either they will be brought to Forte Opus or unloaded from the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Gliubigne [Ljubinj], January 5, 1668, 1868–9.



5 The evolution of the city of Ragusa. On the left the ancient settlement, on the right the old city before the 1667 earthquake. DRŽAVNI ARHIV U DUBROVNIKU, Unknown author, via Wikimedia Commons.

caravans further inland, in Mostar and Gabela – will not be able to pass the river mouth in order to enter the sea without its [Venice’s] permission, and [the merchants] will also have to recognize the Rule of the August Republic through the payment of the duties that will be established.⁴⁷

The communication of the following day, May 27, 1693, in which Nicolo Cottoni pointed out that the war had seriously compromised the trade of Bosnia,

47 «le merci, o saranno adiritura portate al detto Forte Opus, o scaricate dalle caravane nelli luoghi superiori di Mostar e Gabella, non potranno passare le Bocche della Fiumana per entrar sul mare senza la sua permissione, e doveranno egalmente risconosser l’Imperio della Repubblica Augusta col pagamento di quei dazi che saranno decretati». Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *V Savi*, Ia serie, *Diversiorum*, 350, c. 212.

is also of the same tenor. He reiterated that the traffic that once was directed only towards Ragusa now sought other channels of outlet. Meanwhile, rather than going to Ragusa, the local merchants preferred to go to Shkodër, but the journey was long, expensive, and very dangerous due to the *hajduci*. Cottoni also confirmed that Risan and the Herceg Novi areas were not good alternatives to Split due to the bands of brigands that infested the surroundings of the two localities. He too believed that Gabela and Forte Opus were comfortable and safe, both for the Venetians and the Bosnian merchants.⁴⁸

Between 1693 and 1694, the Bosnian–Venetian project had greater success. With the title of France consul of navigation (*console della navigazione*), the Greek Giovanni Milio obtained permission from the sultan to open a trading outpost in the same places, taken into consideration in 1666–1668. In 1693, once Milio made the necessary agreements with Venice and obtained the authorization from the Porta, the Provveditore Generale of Dalmatia and Albania Daniele Dolfin began to prepare the conquest of Gabela.⁴⁹ Without dwelling on the military actions in the area, suffice to say that Gabela, and the terminal part of the Neretva valley, ended up in Venetian hands at the end of 1694.⁵⁰ There, the Venetians established an active commercial terminal until 1718, when the Ottoman re-earned the locality.

A fluid and oblique space

The case study of the Bosnian–Venetian joint venture offers much food for thought. The first consideration that can be made is that it is a story literally crossed by forces that go well beyond the economic, commercial and *raison d'état* dimensions. In our case, the societal, of everyday life, and spatial aspects seem to be pivotal indeed. Precisely for this reason, here we have chosen to value a non-economic facet of this trade and business-related story, namely the one that refers to the question of the control of the territory in relation to trade and the problem

48 *Ibid.*, c. 213.

49 Marko JAČOV, *Le guerre Veneto-Turche del XVII secolo in Dalmazia*, Venice, Atti e memorie della Società dalmata di storia patria, 1991, p. 206-207; Giacomo DIEDO, *Storia della Repubblica di Venezia dalla sua fondazione sino l'anno MDCCXLVII*, Vol. III, Venice, Andrea Poletti, 1751, p. 466.

50 JAČOV, *Le guerre Veneto-Turche*, cit., pp. 206-213.

represented by the *hajduci*. The first aspect to underline and that emerges from the Venetian documents dating back to the Morean War is absolutely obvious: is the confirmation of the directional alternation from the inland cities towards Split and Ragusa, a rotation dictated by the conjunctural conditions of the war. The second is that which has to do with the main trade routes of the region. In fact, alongside the segments Sarajevo–Mostar–Ragusa, Sarajevo–Split, Mostar–Split and Banja Luka–Split, there were other commercial corridors in which the goods concentrated in the city markets sought an outlet. Some of these had a sporadic and temporary character in wartime, such as those leading from the inside to Herceg Novi, Risan and Shkodër. On the other hand, others were consolidating precisely because of the ongoing war, such as the Sarajevo–Mostar–Gabela/Narenta–Forte Opus one taken into consideration.

Furthermore, in this case, it should be emphasized that trade also contributes to redefining the physiognomy and perception of territorial control, making the territory something dynamic and “liquid” among the warring sides. In this way, the two modes of trade in Ottoman Bosnia during the 17th century take shape. The first is “central”, structured and of a purely city nature, in which the representatives of power and the stakeholders operate. The second is “peripheral” and occurs in a rural environment; it is fluid and almost impossible given that the Bosnian–Venetian affair is located in an exceptional regulatory and institutional horizon, where there is sufficient flexibility and ambiguity to create new commercial possibilities, even during a conflict that sees the subjects involved on antagonistic positions. This “peripheral” mode of commerce is affected and conditioned by the decisions of the “city-centre”, but it is made possible precisely because it is far from the centre.⁵¹

Also, the *hajduci* move in this politically, institutionally and commercially fluid space; it seems they can also manipulate the perception of it and the way to exploit it. Banditry was a problem not only for the safety of the merchants and the goods transported, but also because it damaged and weakened the communication and information systems, two fundamental components of the connective tissue that supported and nourished the Western Balkan region in the Early Modern Age.⁵²

51 Biagio SALVEMINI, *Il territorio sghembo. Forme e dinamiche degli spazi umani in età moderna*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2006, p. 580.

52 In this regard, see Erica MEZZOLI, «Information Networks between the Republic of Ragusa

Banditry is a complex social and economic phenomenon – not to be confused with common crime or with forms of social revolt⁵³ –, whose analysis for the region and the period in question is far beyond the scope of this article. What is worth mentioning here is that during the War of Candia, banditry intensified for social and economic conjunctural reasons and because the Venetians organized and coordinated military actions by brigands in Ottoman territory. In this way, they could count on small guerrilla brigades behind the enemy lines.⁵⁴ On the other hand, and as demonstrated by Vesna Miović, not even the Raguseans were innocent of collaborations and connivance with acts of banditry in the border areas between the Republic of Ragusa and the Ottoman Empire, in particular during the years of the Morean War.⁵⁵

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53 It can be understood as a social phenomenon strictly connected to the characteristics of the Mediterranean pastoral world. Given that banditry finds its peak in moments of crisis represented by war and/or political upheavals in territories, any other increase in the phenomenon is connected to the internal changes to the pastoral economy and to a surplus of young males in the communities that found their livelihood in activities related to sheep farming. Yves-Marie BERCÉ, *Revolt and Revolution in Early Modern Europe: An Essay on the History of Political Violence*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1987, pp. 144-148.

54 JAČOV, *Le guerre Veneto-Turche*, cit., p. 153.

55 Vesna Miović, «Svakodnevnica dubrovačkih pograničnih sela u doba hajdučije (Morejski rat 1684. – 1699.)», *Anali Zavoda povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku*, 35 (1997), pp. 19-36.

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Icon of the naval Battle of Curzolari (Echinades in Greek) islands, by the Cretan painter Georgios Klontzas, last decades of the 16th century; one of the most famous depictions of the naval Battle of Lepanto in post-Byzantine art. Courtesy of the National Historical Museum, Athens (cat. n. 3578).

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