

Original paper
UDC 81'25=512.161
94(497.5 Dubrovnik)“15/17”

DRAGOMANS OF THE DUBROVNIK REPUBLIC: THEIR TRAINING AND CAREER

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ABSTRACT: An important role in the Turco-Ragusan relations was played by the Dubrovnik consuls and diplomats, together with the dragomans, interpreters for the Turkish language. Ragusan dragomans were professionals, often self-educated merchants who learned Turkish during long business stays in the Empire. Mainly, they operated in Istanbul, in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the Turkish chancellery, situated in the Rector's palace in the City of Dubrovnik.

In the fifteenth century the Ragusans had well-established relations with the Ottoman Empire. An international agreement, the so-called capitulations (Turk. *ahdname*), guaranteed their state security, autonomy, and prosperity.¹ This, of course, was conditioned by an annual tribute (Turk. *haraç*) of 12,500

¹ See Lujo Vojnović, *Dubrovnik i Osmansko Carstvo*. Beograd: SKA, 1908; Grga Novak, »Borba Dubrovnika za slobodu 1683-1699.« *Rad JAZU* 253 (1935): pp. 1-165; Ivan Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*. Beograd: SAN, 1952; Radovan Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak posle velikog zemljotresa 1667. godine. Arhivska građa (1667-1670)*. Beograd: SAN, 1960; Grga Novak, »Borba Dubrovnika za slobodu 1683-1699.« *Rad JAZU* 253 (1935): pp. 1-165; Nikolaas Hendrik Biegan, *The Turco-Ragusan Relationship According to the Firmans of Murad III (1575-1595) Extant in the State Archives of Dubrovnik*. The Hague (etc.): Mouton, 1967; Toma Popović, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XVI veku*. Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1973; Radovan Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*. Beograd: Prosveta, 1983; Vesna Miović-Perić, *Na razmeđu*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 1997.

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golden ducats, Dubrovnik's unique obligation to the Ottomans.² Yet, due to the mounting decentralization and anarchy in the Ottoman Empire, the terms of the Turco-Ragusan capitulations did not have the expected effect in all the Ottoman provinces, the province of Bosnia, in the immediate Dubrovnik vicinity, being one of them. Thus, the Ragusans were forced to maintain relations with all the levels of the Ottoman administration, ensure their commercial privileges, seek the sultan's protection and secure the welfare for the state and people. Governed by the circumstances, they invested great effort in building a special survival strategy based on bribe, gifts, and services, ranging from medical care to providing the Turks with information from the West. An important role in Turco-Ragusan relations was played by Dubrovnik's consuls and diplomats, along with the dragomans, interpreters of the Turkish language.³

Almost all European states that had relations with the Ottoman Empire (France, Austria, Holland, Sweden, Russia, Venice, England) had interpreters of Turkish in their service within the established diplomatic outposts in Istanbul and a number of other Turkish cities. All of them adopted the term *dragoman* (Turk. *terjuman*).

The earliest European diplomatic and consular representatives recruited dragomans from the Ottoman Jews, Greeks, and Armenians. But, the interpreter's commission was far too sophisticated and confidential to be entrusted to an alien. The importance of dragomans and their service was, perhaps, best epitomized in the candid statement of Carlo Ruzzini, Venetian consul to Istanbul in the eighteenth century: "It is enough to say that through a dragoman we speak. His abilities determine the success of every mission. All the money we spend on the Ottomans passes through his hands. They are the ones who carry out all diplomatic assignments. A consul can make a supreme ef-

² The tribute increased from the 1000 golden ducats in silverware in 1442 to 1500 golden ducats in cash in 1458, up to the annual 12,500 golden ducats in 1481. As from 1703, the Ragusans were to pay the tribute every third year, and from 1804 the Ottomans agreed to the term of every five years.

³ Fehim Efendić, »Dragomani i turska kancelarija u Dubrovniku.« *Kalendar Gajret* (1940): p. 4; Bogdan Krizman: *O dubrovačkoj diplomaciji*, Zagreb: Naklada Školske knjige, 1951: pp. 120-121; Bogdan Krizman, »Dubrovčani dipomati u stranoj službi: Miho Božović i Damjan Bračević.« *Narodni list*, 18.12.1955; Vesna Miović-Perić, »Pravila kojih se morao pridržavati dubrovački dragoman prilikom poslanstva u Bosnu.« *Hrvatski narodni godišnjak "Napredak" god. 1995* (1994): pp. 354-359; Vesna Miović-Perić, »Dnevnik dubrovačkog dragomana Miha Zarinija.« *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 3 (1995): pp. 93-135.

fort to present impeccable arguments in the negotiations with the Ottomans. But his labor is futile unless a dragoman interprets it convincingly and skillfully. In fact, he performs his interpreter's duties on rare occasions only, such as when he accompanies a consul in an audience with the viziers. As a rule, he acts independently, settles conflicts on his own, has the right to argue as an envoy. In sum, it is difficult to say which of the two is more essential in dealing with the matters of the state—the consul or the dragoman.”⁴

Thus in the sixteenth century, Venice saw the establishment of a school for “student dragomans”, or students of languages, as we would refer to it today.⁵

The earliest evidence of student dragomans in Dubrovnik dates from the same century.⁶ However, besides the professionals, Ragusans were to employ non-experts, such as merchants who had mastered the language during their extended stays in the Ottoman Empire. Training was regulated as rule in the eighteenth century.

Young men in pursuit of a dragoman's career acquired their basic knowledge of Turkish in Dubrovnik, under the tutorship of a *khoja*.⁷ The *khoja* was a Turkish master, selected for the job and brought to Dubrovnik from Bosnia, Istanbul, or elsewhere by the Ragusan tribute envoys. If a young man proved gifted at the elementary stage, the Senate would proclaim him “student of languages”, grant him a scholarship, and send him to the Ottoman Empire for further schooling.

These students would leave Dubrovnik between the ages of 15 and 20. They were to spend their first years of study in Thessaloniki, Edirne, Smyrna, or Plovdiv, and finish up in Istanbul. In the course of their stay abroad, they usually lived alone, boarded with Ragusan consuls and envoys, or enjoyed

⁴ Carla Coco and Flora Manzonetto: *Baili veneziani alla Sublime Porta*, Venezia: Comune di Venezia and Università degli Studi di Venezia, 1985: p. 107.

⁵ Robert Mantran, »L'École des Jeunes de Langues: l'exemple vénitien.« In: *Istanbul et les langues orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997 (hereafter cited as: *ILO*): pp.105-107; Isabella Palumbo Fossati Casa, »L'École vénitienne des "giovani di lingua".« In *ILO*: pp. 110-111; Tommaso Bertelè, *Il Palazzo degli Ambasciatori di Venezia a Costantinopoli e le sue antiche memorie*, Bologna: Apollo 1932: p.123.

⁶ *Lettere di Levante* (hereafter cited as: *Let. Lev.*), ser. 27.1, vol. 27, f. 12 (year 1558), State Archives of Dubrovnik (hereafter cited as: *SAD*).

⁷ *Let. Lev.*, vol. 43, f. 156 (year 1619); vol. 64, ff. 91v-92 (1682); vol. 108, ff. 17v-18 (1796).

the hospitality of monasteries, such as the Capuchin monastery in Istanbul.⁸ They were still taught by carefully chosen khojas. Apart from Turkish, the students also learned Arabic and Persian.⁹ In addition to languages, they were taught Ottoman diplomatics, law, history, and literature. These accomplished students could indulge in conversation with the most learned Turks, a moment particularly important in their training. Mastering the ways of sophisticated conversation was most certainly part of the Ragusan diplomatic strategy.

Their study final years were organized in Istanbul, where they practised the language and other skills. The Ragusan dragoman was instructed to take the students with him whenever he went to the Porte. Thus they could see how the Ottoman Court functioned, get acquainted with the ceremonial, make initial contacts, and establish relations with Ottoman officials.¹⁰

The length of training varied from 5 or 6 to as many as 11 or 12 years, depending primarily on the student's intellectual abilities, but just as equally, or even more, on his adjustability, courage, determination, and strength. Unfortunately, no written evidence concerning the methods of teaching has been preserved. The only data available refer to the Senate's regular financial support for the

⁸ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 92, f. 107 (year 1771); vol. 93, f. 248v (1772); vol. 97, f. 92rv (1778); vol. 110, ff. 17v-18 (1800).

⁹ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 58, ff. 74v-75 (year 1661), f. 135rv (1662); vol. 90, f. 51 (1769); vol. 92, ff. 68-70 (1771); vol. 94, ff. 18-24v (1773); vol. 96, ff. 194v-195 (1777); vol. 101, ff. 39-41v (1783); vol. 103, f. 58v (1786); vol. 107, f. 51rv (1794).

¹⁰ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 79, ff. 224-240v; vol. 84, ff. 209-229v; vol. 101, f. 29rv.

¹¹ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 42, f. 73v (year 1617), ff. 156, 157 (1619); vol. 66, ff. 244v-245 (1702); vol. 71, f. 88 (1722); vol. 72, f. 25v (1726); vol. 78, f. 222 (1753); vol. 80, f. 51 (1769); vol. 92, f. 156 (1771); vol. 94, f. 62 (1773).

¹² I. Palumbo Fossati Casa: »L'École vénitienne des "giovani di lingua"«: p. 111.

acquisition of dictionaries, grammar books, manuals, and textbooks of Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.¹¹ Some other aspects of their life abroad have been noted, as the temptation of the omnipresent vices, the danger of the plague and other diseases, great fires, and finally, Turkish animosity. The metropolis of the Empire was said to charm and chill to the bone at the same time. It was described as a golden bowl of poison where the angels themselves could fall.¹² According to a statement of Đuro Curić, Ragusan dragoman and consul to Istanbul in the first half of the eighteenth century, the most notorious vices were three: wine, cards, and debauchery, or fornication, to be more precise. The following step of a young man's debauched lifestyle was to fall deeper and deeper into debt. To illustrate his statement, Curić provided an account of the misfortunes of Ivo Mitrović, a young man of Dubrovnik. In all likelihood, he once had been a student dragoman whom the Senate had dismissed from service several years before because of his intolerable behaviour and violent nature. Here is what Curić wrote in one of his letters: "Mitrović is deeply addicted to drinking, gambling, and debauchery. Moneyless and in desperate need of some means, he converted to Islam. There are a number of reckless and jobless young men of Dubrovnik here and let us pray they do not become the victims of Mitrović's tragic fate. I am doing everything in my power to send them back home. They, however, invent all kinds of excuses

¹³ *Diplomata et acta saec. XVIII* (hereafter cited as: *DA XVIII*), ser. 76, vol. 3168, no. 31 (year 1775), SAD.

¹⁴ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 77a, ff. 12, 33v, 37, 66-67, 126v-127; vol. 82, ff. 243-245.

¹⁵ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 97, f. 68rv; vol. 98, ff. 79-81v, f. 137rv; vol. 101, f. 29rv.

¹⁶ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 104, f. 166.

to prolong their stay here and continue to fool away their days.”¹³

Similar fates, slightly less tragic, befell several other student dragomans. For instance, Nikola Veseličić got into serious debt in Sofia in 1748. His creditors finally had him imprisoned. He was released and sent to Dubrovnik at the prompting of the Senate, which decided to pay part of the debt. He was not dismissed from service, however, for a decade later his name appears among the Ragusan dragomans. But, his commissions were strictly confined to the Turkish chancellery in Dubrovnik and the Herzegovinian vicinity because the Dubrovnik authorities wished to keep a sharp eye on him.¹⁴ Nikola Radelja and Mato Pušić, long-established students, spent around twelve years in their language pursuits in Edirne, Smyrna, Sofia, Plovdiv, and Istanbul. At the very beginning of their training in 1778, the Senate warned them to keep their minds on their studies and remember the reason for their stay in Turkey. Their conduct was strictly supervised by the contemporary Ragusan consuls, senior students, dragomans, and others whom the Senate considered reliable.¹⁵ Nikola Radelja labored his way to a career as a dragoman in 1789.¹⁶ It was then that Mato Pušić, his colleague, found himself in serious trouble. The Senate paid off his debt, but warned him that he would lose his service if he continued with the same practice.¹⁷ Curiously, this letter is the last piece of evidence on Mato

¹³ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 104, ff. 121-124.

¹⁴ Marie de Testa and Antoine Gautier, »Drogmans de France à Istanbul«. In *ILO*: p. 537.

¹⁵ *DA XVIII*, vol. 3168, no. 53-60, 64, 67, 71, 116.

¹⁶ *Acta Consilii Rogatorum* (hereafter cited as: *Cons. Rog.*), ser. 3, vol. 100, f. 83; vol. 101, f. 123; vol. 103, f. 20; vol. 106, f. 216v (SAD).

¹⁷ Paolo Preto: *Venezia e i Turchi*, Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1975: pp. 102-103.

Pušić at the State Archives of Dubrovnik. It is interesting to note, however, that a certain Mathieu Pousitch appears among the French dragomans seven years later, which leads us to conclude that Mato was not such a failure after all.¹⁸

Epidemics of plague and other diseases, as well as great fires, were common features of the day. Judging by the letters of the dragoman Curić, the aforementioned two students, Pušić and Radelja, had an exciting medical history which could account for their excessively long training. In short, in July of 1778, while the two students were attending courses in Edirne, the city was terribly struck by the plague. With the pestilence at its peak, they dismissed their tutor and fled from the city temporarily. Istanbul was experiencing even worse days, with 200,000 people dying in a matter of five months. Miraculously, Curić and his family escaped infection, although a Ragusan lodging with them died. In September of the same year, Radelja suffered again from a fever known as “febbre maligna.” Two months later, a great fire hit Edirne, and the house in which the two students lived burned down, together with all their belongings. Soon after, the plague spread again. They left for Istanbul, spending their days under the care and guidance of Curić. In the course of his study, Radelja was exposed to a series of exhausting fevers, referred to as “febbre maligna” and “febbre terzana”.¹⁹

Ragusan envoys and members of their staff (dragomans, chaplains, physicians, messengers, servants)

²² *Diplomata et acta saec. XVII* (hereafter cited as: *DA XVII*), ser. 76, vol. 1849, no. 4; vol. 2052, no. 45 (SAD).

²³ Zdravko Šundrica, »Poisons and Poisoning in the Republic of Dubrovnik.« *Dubrovnik Annals* 4 (2000): pp. 44-48; *DA XVII*, vol. 1860, no. 11.

²⁴ *Miscellanea saec. XVIII*, vol. 5, no. 18 (SAD).

were not spared a number of diseases, including the plague. The seventeenth century saw the death of at least 60 of them, among whom were the dragomans Luka Marinov Mercator (1621/22), Andrija Rosa (1638), Marin Giuliani (1649), and Mileta (1652).²⁰

Thanks to the nature of Turco-Ragusan relations, the Ragusan students and dragomans were not in a position to experience Turkish animosity to the extent their colleagues from other lands did. For example, strangling awaited several Venetian dragomans in Istanbul.²¹ On the basis of the available records, the dragoman Pero Baletin could be singled out for having had the most unpleasant experiences. The Ottoman Turks had him arrested and imprisoned in the so-called *lelek šator* (tent of lament), a place reserved for those sentenced to death. This incident took place in 1678, in an Ottoman camp near Edirne during a serious crisis in the Turco-Ragusan relations. In all likelihood, that same year, or a year later, the notorious grand vizier Kara Mustafa had the said Baletin flogged. Though innocent, the wretched man was subjected to 160 lashes during the divan session and before all the Sultan's ministers.²²

Dragomans were not only the victims of the Turks, but of foreigners as well, as in the case of Vicko Bratutti. In 1633 Bratutti was invited to a luncheon party by the Austrian resident in Istanbul,

²⁵ P. Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi*: pp. 101, 509.

²⁶ Bratutti also produced a Catalan translation of the political moral reflection *Bidpaia Espejo politico y moral, para principes, y ministros, y todo genero de personas*. See Zdravko Šundrica, »Poisons and Poisoning in the Republic of Dubrovnik.« *Dubrovnik Annals* 4 (2000): pp. 44-48.

²⁷ V. Vinaver, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XVIII veku*: pp. 11-13; *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 74, ff. 45, 47-48, 93-94, 114-126, 131v-133v.

²⁸ B. Krizman, »Dubrovčani dipomati u stranoj službi: Miho Božović i Damjan Bračević.«; Vesna Čučić, »Misija Damjana Bračevića u Parizu za Dubrovačku Republiku početkom 19. stoljeća.« *Dubrovački horizonti* 40 (2000): pp. 122-131.

during which he was served a poisoned glass of wine. He fell sick shortly afterwards, but the host and other guests prevented him from leaving. On the pretence that they were enjoying his company, they tried to keep him as long as possible in order to make sure that the poison would take effect. Yet Bratutti managed to escape and spent the following days in severe pain and serious fever. Once recuperated, he wrote an exhaustive report to the Dubrovnik government, accusing the Austrian resident and the Venetian bailo of poisoning him. As he still was in great fear for his life, he asked the government to grant his immediate return to Dubrovnik.²³

The student dragomans' training ended with an exam taken before experienced Ragusan dragomans. The candidate who passed successfully was officially proclaimed a dragoman of the Republic of Dubrovnik.

One should point out that the cases of Mitrović, Veseličić, Pušić, and Radelja were not the rule. The quality of the students varied. In 1792 Curić spoke highly of the students Karaman and Bračević for having absorbed the entire program in nine

²⁹ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 107, ff. 1v, 27rv, 40v.

³⁰ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 107, ff. 25-26; vol. 109, ff. 40, 134.

³¹ Part of Zarini's estate was a collection of 25 books which the Senate had estimated and bought up from his family. Dragomans generally acquired professional literature through the state fund, making it thus the property of the Republic. The fact that Zarini had made acquisitions of books with his own means speaks of his indulgence and highly professional attitude towards his work. Ten books from his collection are reference books—dictionaries, grammar books and manuals of the Turkish, Arabic, and Persian languages. The rest are books of poetry, astronomy, geography, and history of the Turks, Arabs, and Persians (*Lett. Lev.*, vol. 71, f. 88v; *DA XVIII*, vol. 3190, no. 276: the list of books owned by the Ragusan dragoman Miho Zarini).

³² *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 102, ff. 92-93 (year 1784).

³³ The Diary of Miho Zarini comprises 70 folios written in Italian. It contains detailed descriptions of his visit to the Bosnian pasha in 1737/38, and all of his activities in Istanbul in the course of 1744, while acting as dragoman to the tribute envoys (*Diarrii, Memorie*, ser. 20.2, vol. 145, SAD; V. Miović-Perić, »Dnevnik dubrovačkog dragomana Miha Zarinija«: pp. 93-135).

months, he himself having completed it in two years.²⁴

Thanks to the extremely lively relations between the Republic of Dubrovnik and the Ottoman Empire, Dubrovnik's dragomans had the opportunity to practise their skills daily and thus acquire valuable experience. There is no doubt that the Ragusans provided their student dragomans with the best possible comprehensive training, the result of which were expert interpreters, capable diplomats and fluent collocutors in both official and unofficial talks. The fact that European states—though generally distrustful of foreigners—recruited Ragusan dragomans speaks of their reputation and abilities. Surprisingly, they were even engaged by Venice, despite the long-drawn-out animosity and rivalry between the two states. In their own words, they accepted the job with utmost caution and when they had no alternative.²⁵

Further investigation has produced the following information on the career of several dragomans of Dubrovnik: Vicko Bratutti occupied the post of the Ragusan dragoman for a number of years. After the year 1636 he acted as a dragoman with the Austrian emperor Ferdinand III, as well as with the Spanish king Philip IV. Bratutti died in Madrid before 1678. He translated Saidin's chronicle on the Ottoman emperors into Italian.²⁶ Luka Chirico, Ragusan consul to Istanbul and dragoman during the first half of the eighteenth century, also performed the duties of an English dragoman. Having found political interest in the idea, the Senate never opposed it. On the other hand, dragoman Andrija Magrini's request to join the service of the Austrian resident to Istanbul in 1724 was denied, and Magrini acted accordingly. However, in 1736 his services were recurrently required by the Dutch consul. De-

spite the Senate's denial, Magrini joined the foreign service, and was immediately relieved of his Ragusan office.²⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, dragoman Miho Božović joined the Prussian service, most likely being encouraged to take such a step because of the constant conflicts with the Dubrovnik consul regarding the income distribution of the consular office. In 1807 Božović was highly positioned as the Prussian chargé d'affaires to the Porte. Damjan Bračević shared a similar reputation. He became the second interpreter of General Bonaparte in Egypt.²⁸ Another two gifted student dragomans were to join the services of others states: Pasarević and Karaman. The latter was recruited by the Prussian government.²⁹ In order to prevent the students from leaving the Republic, in 1794 the Senate decided that all the Ragusan dragomans and students alike who joined foreign service without the permission of the Senate were to be punished; in addition, they were to reimburse all the money the Republic of Dubrovnik had invested in their education. Students and dragomans reluctantly abided by this decision, trying to postpone the oath as long as possible.³⁰ Judging by their letters from this period and earlier, they led a very modest and simple life. Therefore, the Senate might have

³⁴ Aleksandar Maurocordato, dragoman of the Porte, was one of them. The Ragusan government kept regular correspondence with him. For instance, in 1709 they wrote to him on three occasions (*Lett. Lev.*, vol. 68, ff. 80rv, 85v-96, 103). Their friendly relations can be confirmed by the fact that the Ragusans made two acquisitions of books for him in Venice (*Lett. Lev.*, vol. 67, f. 50v-51v, year 1703; vol. 68, ff. 42-43v, year 1708).

³⁵ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 69, ff. 28-39v.

³⁶ Livio Missir de Lusignan, »Une aristocratie 'inclassable': les drogmans.« In *ILO*: pp.153-159.

³⁷ I. Palumbo Fossati Casa: »L'École vénitienne des "giovani di lingua"«: p. 113.

³⁸ Nora Šeni, »Dynasties de drogmans et levantinisme à Istanbul.« In *ILO*: pp. 161-174. Marie de Testa and Antoine Gautier, »Deux grandes dynasties de drogmans: les Fontons et les Testa.« In *ILO*: pp. 175-196.

accomplished far better results by raising the dragoman's salaries and daily allowance than by introducing such rigorous and unpopular measures.

By no means were the dragoman's abilities to be judged by the standards of foreign governments only. Many of them, equally competent, spent their entire careers as dragomans of Dubrovnik. One of them was Miho Zarini. He seems to have been among the ablest, if not the best, dragoman the Republic ever had. He was entrusted with the most demanding and most delicate tasks. His pleasant and trustworthy nature, eloquence, and erudice³¹ made him popular in Bosnia and Istanbul alike. Even the customarily stern Ragusan Senate happened to qualify him as "famous," an attribute bestowed upon him posthumously.³² Apart from the reports, his diary has also been preserved, the only of its kind at the archive of Dubrovnik.³³

The Senate records indicate that there was a constant need for a dragoman's services in Dubrovnik itself. He was to make regular contact with the local Ottoman authorities from the Ragusan hinterland in order to resolve conflicts and misunderstandings that occurred almost daily along the border. His services were also required in the Republic's relations with the highest Bosnian and Herzegovinian dignitaries, the beylerbeys and sancakbeys, whose favor Dubrovnik desperately sought. For example, the sudden whim of a beylerbey could halt the traffic of goods across the border or de-

³⁹ *DA XVIII*, vol. 3168, no. 43 (year 1777).

⁴⁰ *DA XVII*, vol. 3168, no. 109 (year 1782).

⁴¹ *Catalogo dei libri stampati e manoscritti in lingue orientali esistenti nell'antico Archivio Politico (SAD)*; Hazim Šabanović, »Turski dokumenti državnog arhiva u Dubrovniku.« *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju* 12-13 (1962-63): p. 129; Gustav Flügel, *Die arabischen, persischen und türkischen Handschriften der kaiserlich-königlichen Hofbibliothek zu Wien*, vol. I. Wien, 1865, no. 265, 308, 311, 329.

ter merchants by charging extra taxes. Fitting perfectly into the prevailing atmosphere of anarchy and corruption of the local officials, a beylerbey was able to decide on most vital issues relating to Dubrovnik and completely disregard the general policy and instructions of the Porte. The Ragusans worked out a means by which they settled problems such as these. It was either through gifts, a smooth-tongued envoy, or an able dragoman.

Although a number of Bosnian officials were natives, there were still two reasons why a dragoman's service still proved indispensable. The majority of contacts were rounded off with an official Turkish document, the contents of which could be examined by a dragoman only. Besides, his knowledge of the Ottoman character and ceremonial customs, as well as the fact that he had acquaintances among the dignitary's closest associates, contributed to the immense importance of his commission.

In sum, Ragusan envoys and dragomans paid frequent annual visits to the neighboring authorities in order to settle the current problems, but also to honor them on particular occasions, such as marriages or births of their family members or the installation of a new official. Zarini and some other dragomans alike were sometimes required to act independently, being entrusted with the role of an important and confidential envoy.

Besides Bosnia, Ragusan dragomans also operated in Istanbul, carrying out their regular and, at times, extra duties. They announced the arrival of the tribute envoys, took part in formal audiences with the sultan when tribute was disbursed or in the audiences with the grand vizier, demanded the issuing of various documents, and supervised the

writing in terms of clarity and unambiguity. Thanks to the nature of their commission, they built a more or less successful social network with the Ottomans. The greater favor they enjoyed, the easier it was to deal with a particular problem and gather valuable information for the Republic. For example, the head dragoman of the Porte was a person of the utmost influence, being in a position to influence the sultan's decisions and those of his ministers. Naturally, all Ragusan dragomans managed to maintain very good relations with the aforementioned most distinguished colleague of theirs, all in the interest of the profession. Moreover, most of the dragomans at the Porte looked upon the Republic of Dubrovnik with great sympathy. The Ragusan authorities kept regular correspondence with them, in pursuit of their occasional counsel regarding actions to be taken and ministers to be contacted.³⁴ Ragusan envoys to Istanbul often presented the dragomans of the Porte with extra contributions of cash as a sign of their government's gratitude. Gifts were always given in secrecy, so as to avoid envious reactions for other ministers. A dragoman was to receive a locked box containing aromatic oils and an extra key. His prudence would tell him to open the box in private, and find its hidden contents—60 sequins—a noteworthy sum.³⁵

Dragomans who were frequently or permanently posted in the Ottoman Empire, notably in its capital, represented an exceptional and distinctive group.³⁶ This was both logical and expected, bearing in mind their non-Moslem origin. The Europeans, however, considered them too well-established in the public and political life of the Empire, and deeply accustomed to the Turkish way of life and manners. This, most likely, inspired one author to satirize them in a poem that circulated in the Mediterranean at the time: "A Pera ci sono tre malanni: peste, fuoco e dragomanni" (In Pera we have three miseries: pestilence, fire, and dragomans).³⁷

Istanbul was the home of the distinguished foreign families in which the dragoman's profession

³⁴ For example, *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 168, f. 136; *DA XVII*, vol. 1805a, no. 11.
³⁵ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 96, f. 50; vol. 97, f. 13; *Acta Turcarum*, ser. 75, vol. B 132, no. 181 (SAD).
³⁶ *DA XVIII*, vol. 2246, no. 58; *Acta Turcarum*, vol. B 131, no. 82; vol. C 3, no. 8.
³⁷ *Acta Turcarum*, no. 4806; vol. B 80, no. 66.
³⁸ *Lett. Lev.*, vol. 76, f. 251.