

Reviews

Tajna diplomacija u Dubrovniku XVI. stoljeću / Secret Diplomacy in the 16th Century Dubrovnik, ed. Mirjana Polić Bobić. Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 2011. 212 pages.

This volume gathers the papers from the workshop on secret diplomacy, part of the conference commemorating 500 years of the birth of Marin Držić, which was held in Dubrovnik from the 2nd to the 7th September 2008. The contributors are historians from several Mediterranean countries—Spain, France, Italy, Turkey and Croatia—which is the reason why the volume offers an exceptionally broad and contextualizing view of the secret diplomacy of the Ragusan Republic. The volume consists of eight articles, published both in Croatian and in one of the major European languages (Spanish, Italian, and, most frequently, English). At the end of the publication there are two appendixes which contain documents relevant for some of the articles: the Ottoman documents regarding the influential spy David Passi and several letters of Spanish intelligence concerning Ragusa.

In the first article, entitled »An Influential Jew in the Ottoman Court: David Passi«, Bülent Ari reconstructs the rich and dramatic career of this extremely successful informer. During the last decades of the sixteenth century Passi worked for several states, gathering information for Venice, Spain and Ottomans—frequently, all at the same time. He began his career in Ragusa as one of the Venetian informers during the turbulent period of the so-called war for Cyprus. However, the crucial period of his diplomatic career was the sojourn in Istanbul, where he achieved remarkable influence at the Ottoman court. Ari offers a detailed overview of his career as an expert on Christian Europe and a lobbyist for the Western states, who had significant influence on the crucial events of the late sixteenth century, such as the peace negotiations between the Ottomans and the Poles or the Ottomans and the Spanish.

In the text »Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Budva, Bar and Ulcinj as a Source for the Diplomatic and Political History of Venetian

Albania in the Sixteenth Century« Lovorka Čoralić investigates the espionage activities of the *Serenissima* at the South-Adriatic frontier on the basis of the source material from the State Archive in Venice. More precisely, Čoralić analyses the letters of the Venetian representatives, such as rectors and captains, or the local councils and private persons to the three heads (*capi*) of *Consiglio dei Dieci*, the Venetian magistracy entrusted with the state security. This archival material yields precious insights into the organization and functioning of Venetian espionage in these cities and the region, as well as into various Venetian attempts to gain the allegiance of the populations of the Balkan hinterland.

The third text of the volume is by Bernard Doumerc, entitled »Georges d'Armagnac, ambassadeur français à Venise et ses espions au temps de Marin Držić (1530-1560)«. Doumerc analyses the diplomatic and espionage activity of one of the diplomat-prelates, typical of Renaissance France: Georges d'Armagnac who was a resident ambassador of the French King in Venice for some three years, beginning with 1536. His mission was to report to his court not only on the complex Italian situation, characterized by the fierce Spanish-French conflict, but also to send news regarding the Ottomans with whom his King was just making an alliance that was to scandalize the Christian world. Through a detailed contextualization Doumerc offers a well documented insight into D'Armagnac's methods of collecting information, organizing the network of informers and reporting the news to his sovereign.

Following is an imagological study by Özlem Kumrular with the title »The Creation of the Turkish Image in the 16th-Century Mediterranean: Self-reflection Versus Antipropaganda«. Kumrular's basic thesis is quite intriguing: stressing the well-known, extremely negative image of the Ottomans during the 16th century, the author admits it is largely the product of the Western writers, but warns that it is also a result of Ottoman propaganda. The Ottomans were purposefully supporting such image of themselves as a means of spreading fear and panic among their Christian enemies. According to Kumrular they did it in three main ways: first, through the programmatic violence, premeditated

brutality over their enemies; second, through the arrogance and humiliating of the Westerners, characteristic of Ottoman ceremonies; third, through the extreme and conspicuous luxury of the court and even the military.

The next study »Ragusa: una fuente de informacion entre el Occidente y Oriente« (Ragusa: a Source of Information between the West and East) is also by Özlem Kumrular. The author deals with the crucial role of Renaissance Ragusa as a mediator of information between the two imperial complexes of the Mediterranean—the Spanish and the Ottoman. On the one hand, using the data from Spanish and Italian archives, Kumrular illustrates the work of Habsburg informers in Ragusa. On the other hand, she also reconstructs the intelligence functions of the Adriatic republic from the Ottoman perspective. Thus, she analyses the ways in which the Sublime Porte used Ragusa for its propaganda: namely, the sultans often sent the so-called *zafernâme* to the city, the letters detailing their victories and successes, in that way ensuring that their version of the events reached the West, albeit indirectly. Besides stressing this propaganda function of Ragusa, Kumrular also tackles the more classic theme of Ragusan espionage for the Ottomans.

The well-known expert of Venetian secret services, Paolo Preto, has contributed the article entitled »La diplomazia segreta di Venezia e Ragusa« (The Secret Diplomacy of Venice and Ragusa). Preto addresses a series of espionage operations, sabotages and instances of “dirty war” between the two Adriatic republics in the long period from the 16th to the 18th century. Most space is dedicated to the formation of Venetian espionage network in Ragusa itself, especially during the turbulent Venetian-Ottoman wars. Preto also writes about a series of assassinations—of Ottoman dignitaries, but also Christians perilous for the *Serenissima*—which were in this period ordered by the Venetian government, mostly to be performed with poison. One should stress a remarkable wealth of archival and other data which makes Preto’s text an indispensable reading for anyone interested in the history of Ragusan and Venetian secret diplomacy.

Equally detailed and richly documented is the study »Ragusa y la literatura de avisos« (Ragusa and the Literature of *Avisos*) by Emilio Sola Castaño. Using the rich data from the *Archivo General de Simancas*, Sola follows the formation and work of espionage network of Spanish Habsburgs in Ragusa, from the 1530s to the 1570s. Besides a lot of precious information regarding the Spanish informers and their communication with Habsburg authorities, the text also brings numerous excerpts from the documents (many of which have been published also in the appendix of the volume). From a “ragusanological” perspective especially intriguing are Sola’s references to two important informers in the city: the influential leader of the Spanish faction, the patrician Marin Zamanja, and the trader Lorenzo Miniati, in fact a multiple spy who is mentioned in Držić’s conspiratorial letters.

The last article is »Activities of the Spanish Secret Service in the Republic of Dubrovnik in the 16th Century and the Role of Spanish Confidant Marin Zamanja« by Mirjana Polić Bobić, the editor of the volume. Polić Bobić describes the context of Zamanja’s impressive intelligence career, analysing the political relations between Spain and Ragusa, especially their diplomatic and intelligence communication. The activity of Marin Zamanja is reconstructed on the basis of the Spanish documents, that is, the secret reports (*avisos*) from the *Archivo General de Simancas*. The text not only brings many precious insights regarding Zamanja’s intelligence activities, but also their revalorization. Polić Bobić stresses that Zamanja was far more than an ordinary informer: from his correspondence with the Spanish authorities—including the Emperor Charles V personally—one can discern that he did not only gather information but also interpreted it and offered suggestions, in sum, acted like a political and strategic analyst.

All in all, there is no doubt that this volume is an important contribution to the understanding of diplomacy of early modern Ragusa and, especially, its importance in the fluctuation of information between the Christian and Muslim parts of the Mediterranean. The greatest strength of this volume is the plurality of perspectives which it offers, since Ragusan history is reflected upon by historians

coming from the most diverse backgrounds. On the one hand this resulted with a lot of hitherto unknown data which is always welcome, especially when it concerns an activity as elusive as secret diplomacy. On the other hand, however, this also resulted with some strikingly novel interpretations: namely, the historians of other countries necessarily look at Ragusa from the non-standard and original angles, shaped by their own themes and peculiar historiographical traditions. In sum, one should hope that similar fruitful initiatives—where Ragusan and Croatian history is reflected on by the eminent foreign experts—will become a more regular occurrence in the future.

Lovro Kunčević