

## **EMIN (CUSTOMS OFFICER) AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE IN THE REPUBLIC OF DUBROVNIK**

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**ABSTRACT:** The Osmanlis and the Ragusans alike recognized emin as an unofficial Ottoman consular representative to the Republic of Dubrovnik, authorized to act as a witness, interrogator, and judge. Emin's presence facilitated trade and business arrangements between the Ottoman and the Ragusan subjects, but also contributed to the early settlement of disputes.

The Ottoman customs officers or emins were assigned to two locations in the Republic of Dubrovnik: at Ploče, in the closest vicinity of the city itself, and in the town of Ston (on the Pelješac Peninsula). Both officers were responsible for duty collecting,<sup>1</sup> and the supervision of salt trade between Dubrovnik and the Ottoman subjects, obtaining one-third of the trade income.<sup>2</sup> At Ploče, emin resided within the Lazaretto complex, in a building subsequently called "emin's khan". It stood on the site where the major trade

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<sup>1</sup> The emins collected duty levied on goods exported from the Ottoman Empire by foreigners. Ragusan merchants were not liable to these taxes.

<sup>2</sup> In 1485 the Ragusans resolved the significant issue of salt trade. The Osmanlis allowed its sale on several locations within the Republic (Ston, Dubrovnik) and on the Ottoman territory (Herceg-Novi, Risan, Klek). The income yielded from the salt sold to the Ottoman subjects was divided equally between the two parties, but after 1571 the Osmanlis collected a third.

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route from Bosnia and Herzegovina ended, and in the proximity of the city harbour.

Emin acted as representative of the party for whom the duty tax was currently collected. The revenue was sometimes directed to the Ottoman Treasury,<sup>3</sup> but there is ground to believe that more often it was under concession of various Ottoman administrators, such as the Herzegovinian *sancakbey* or *defterdar*,<sup>4</sup> or even low-ranking state officials as *agha*, for example.<sup>5</sup> The revenue was also distributed to the Herzegovinian military troops for wages, particularly in the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

The appointed emins usually bore the title of *agha*.<sup>7</sup> They remained on the post for a term of six months or a year.<sup>8</sup> The number of emins at Ploče varied from one to four,<sup>9</sup> their representation no doubt depending on the number of concessionaires who took part in the distribution of the revenue. Emins were usually assisted by a recorder<sup>10</sup> and a man-servant or *momak*.<sup>11</sup>

Other than these regular officers, Ploče also witnessed the presence of an

<sup>3</sup> State Archives of Dubrovnik (hereafter cited as: SAD), *Acta Turcarum* (hereafter as: AT), ser. 75, vol. B 19, no. 15 (year 1699), no. 19 (undated), no. 31 (year 1693), no. 43 (undated).

<sup>4</sup> Toma Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik u XVI veku*. Beograd: Srpska književna zadruga, 1973: pp. 199-200; Vesna Miović-Perić, »Dnevnik dubrovačkog dragomana Miha Zarinija«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 33 (1995): p. 116; Hamdija Kapidžić, »Veze Dubrovnika i Hercegovine u XVIII. vijeku.« *Kalendar Gajret za god. 1940.* (1939): p. 91. DAD, *Copia Lettere Diverse Turcarum* (hereafter cited as: CLDT), ser. 27/2, vol. 3, f. 16v; DAD, *Lettere e Relazioni*, ser. 27/4, vol. 1, no. 44; AT, vol. B 131, no. 302.

<sup>5</sup> AT, vol. B 22, no. 6.

<sup>6</sup> The military troops stationed in Trebinje were known to be financed in this way (AT, vol. B 18, no. 57; AT, vol. B 80, no. 55; AT, vol. B 127, no. 86; DAD, *Carte Turche* (hereafter cited as: CT), ser. 75, vol. I, no. 13b and 13d. DAD, *Diplomata et Acta*, 18th c. (hereafter cited as: DA), ser. 76, vol. 3281, no. 21, 22, 34, 36, 37b, 45), as well as those in Ljubuški (AT, vol. B 18, no. 49; AT, vol. B 80, no. 105; AT, vol. C 8, no. 84), Počitelj (DAD, *Traduzioni de Capitulazioni e Firmani* (hereafter cited as: TCF), ser. 20/2, vol. 2, ff. 897-900), Krupa (DA, 18th c., vol. 3281, no. 21, 22, 34, 36, 37b, 45), Ključ (AT, vol. B 80, no. 55; CT, vol. I, no. 13b and 13d), Novi (AT, vol. B 23, no. 7).

<sup>7</sup> Emins bearing higher titles (*bey*) were also posted in Dubrovnik (AT, vol. B 22, no. 275; AT, vol. E 21, no. 4), as well as those of lower rank whom the Ragusans refused to recognize (AT, no. 4769; *Lettere di Levante* (hereafter cited as: LL), ser. 27/1, vol. 95, f. 24; vol. 105, f. 12).

<sup>8</sup> AT, vol. B 12, no. 22; vol. B 18, no. 2, 5, 10, 12, 16, 31, 41, 51, 84, 88; vol. B 19, no. 33; vol. B 23, no. 7; vol. B 127, no. 86; CT, vol. I, no. 13b and 13d.

<sup>9</sup> LL, vol. 96, f. 39; AT, vol. B 37, no. 6; vol. E 3, no. 15; vol. E 20, no. 17; vol. E 23, no. 8.

<sup>10</sup> AT, vol. B 22, no. 35; AT, vol. B 81, no. 3; AT, vol. C 7, no. 36; LL, vol. 96, f. 39.

<sup>11</sup> AT, vol. B 81, no. 3; LL, vol. 96, f. 39.

emin who collected duty on wax and another fellow-officer who collected only the taxes due on hides and skins. Both of them also acted as representatives of their lords, concessionaires of the mentioned duty of customs.<sup>12</sup> There were times, however, when the post of emin remained vacant, one of the reasons being a sudden drop of trading business because of the Ottoman blockade of the Ragusan border.<sup>13</sup>

Various documents testify to the emins' daily customs routine, mostly receipts of the duty paid on salt, along with records of disputes over the customs duty and tariff rate imposed on the same commodity.

However, there is far more evidence highlighting the emins' consular activity in the Republic of Dubrovnik, which, if unofficial, was equally approved of by the Osmanlis and the Ragusans.<sup>14</sup> As such, the emins negotiated between the representatives of the two states,<sup>15</sup> acted accordingly,<sup>16</sup> and attended to the Ottoman subjects and their property within the Ragusan territory.

The Ottomans, particularly their merchants, were among the regular visitors to Dubrovnik. The reasons which brought them there were myriad. They

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<sup>12</sup> *LL*, vol. 75, f. 179v-181v; *AT*, vol. B 18, no. 35; vol. E 23, no. 19; vol. B 22, no. 46, 77, 83; vol. E 3, no. 4; vol. E 4, no. 5; vol. E 6, no. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Although the Republic of Dubrovnik had an especially favoured position with the Empire, the Osmanlis regularly blocked the Ragusan border during the counter-Ottoman wars in an attempt to prevent an outflow of goods they considered of strategic importance, such as wheat, for instance. Thanks to diplomatic efforts of the Ragusan envoys at the Porte, the boundary was usually re-opened. The Osmanlis often resorted to this measure or the ban of export, using it as a powerful manipulative device. On the reasons underlying the blockade of the Dubrovnik border, see: Vesna Miović-Perić, »Bosanski beglerbeg, hercegovački sandžakbeg i dubrovačka diplomacija.« *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU* 36 (2000): pp. 152-154.

<sup>14</sup> Upon declaring the rights of foreigners in the Republic in 1766, the Ragusans stated that the Ottoman subjects recognized emin as their consular representative who assisted them and protected their interests (Ilija Mitić, »O stjecanju državljanstva u Dubrovačkoj Republici u 18. stoljeću.« *Dubrovnik* 2 (1979): pp. 91-93; idem, »O pravnom položaju stranaca u Dubrovniku tokom druge polovine XVIII. stoljeća.« *Tribunia* 6 (1982): pp. 89-93; DAD, *Lettere di Ponente*, ser. 27/6, vol. 83, f. 94).

<sup>15</sup> For instance, in 1713, it was through emin that the bey of Ulcinj (Dolcigno) informed the Ragusans that the houses of the Ulcinj criminals who had murdered several Ragusan merchants were burned down. One of the villains was seized, and a child abducted from one of the murdered merchants was also found and sent back to Dubrovnik (*AT*, vol. B 61, no. 130). See also: *AT*, vol. B 22, no. 86; vol. B 116, no. 1; vol. B 132, no. 83.

<sup>16</sup> For instance, in 1768 the emins were particularly instructed by the bey of Bosnia to make sure that the Ragusans did not sell meat or wheat imported from Bosnia to the Ottoman enemies (*AT*, vol. C 3, no. 30). See also: *AT*, no. 4861; vol. B 25, no. 6.

came to trade or were only passing across the Ragusan territory, made business arrangement with the Ragusans, acted as creditors or debtors, sought medical help, repaired ships in the Arsenal, lived and worked there too, etc. Whatever transaction, contract, or arrangement took place it was to be accompanied by an administrative formality of some sort - a certificate, document, receipt, statement, or report written out by the *emin*.<sup>17</sup>

The intensity of the Turco-Ragusan relations and their importance for the welfare of Dubrovnik dictated at the same time the Ragusans' inferior position in case of conflict. If the Ragusans suffered damages, the chances of having them compensated would be far less than vice versa. There were times when the Ragusans were falsely accused of the damages caused to an Ottoman subject and his property. Such allegations were often made by robbery victims, in hope that by accusing the Ragusans they stood better chances of compensating the damages than by stating their claim against the real attackers—brigands, pirates, and the likes. For the Ottoman authorities, the *emin*'s record-keeping of such situations was of unquestionable value, while the Ragusan document was virtually invalid. That is why whenever an Ottoman subject in the Republic took ill, died of natural causes, accident or violent death involving a non-Ragusan culprit, the Ragusans asked the *emin* to carry out an investigation, write a report and file it to them in case the Ottoman authorities should demand it.<sup>18</sup> A sick person who arrived in Dubrovnik for treatment was asked to sign a statement in the presence of the *emin*, according to which his heirs would not sue the Ragusan authorities nor the physician who treated him in case of death.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> In 1750, the *emins* confirmed in writing that an Ottoman merchant chartered a vessel of a Ragusan captain Mato Casilari and paid an advance (*AT*, vol. E 3, no. 5).

<sup>18</sup> In 1754, the *emins* testified that a vessel crewed by the Turks from Bar (Antivari) was attacked by the Venetians in the Dubrovnik waters (*AT*, no. 4312). In 1773, Grgur Kojić, a Vlach, died in an accident which took place in the Republic. He fell onto his own knife. The family brought the injured Grgur to the Dubrovnik hospital. Upon the request of the Ragusan authorities, the *emin* was summoned to witness his statement, according to which his wound was self-inflicted. The Ragusans also summoned the *khadis* of Ljubinje, but by the time he arrived, Grgur was already dead. In this case, the testimony of the *emin* proved invaluable (*CT*, vol. V, no. 18). See also: *AT*, vol. C 7, no. 36; vol. E 3, no. 12, 13, 15; *AT*, no. 4441.

<sup>19</sup> In 1792, a bey from Elbasan came to Dubrovnik to seek medical help. In *emin*'s presence, he signed a statement that the Ragusan authorities could not be held liable for his death, nor could his heirs make any claim against them. (*AT*, vol. E 5, no. 1). Also, the bey signed a statement specifying that in case of his death, his heirs were not to molest the physician who had treated him (*AT*, vol. E 5, no. 2).

For some foreign merchants the Ragusans were an interesting target to be claimed for the damages on their merchandise or property. There seemed to be no limit to the kinds of tactics used to get compensation from the Ragusans. The Albanian seamen could serve as an example of a highly developed strategy. They often sailed into the Dubrovnik territorial waters aboard an old and seaworthy ship which they soon abandoned. The moment it sank, they demanded compensation. In such cases the emins always wrote a report on the damaged ships in the Dubrovnik territorial waters.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, these reports helped the Ragusans when they needed to be favoured by the Ottoman government,<sup>21</sup> or when they needed the latter to intervene in a conflict with a foreign state. For instance, during the Veneto-Ragusan conflict 1751-1754, the emins had written several reports, describing in detail all the atrocities the Venetians committed in the Republic. One of the emins even risked his life while investigating the facts for his report, since the Venetian soldiers fired at him as he was making his way to Lokrum, an island in Dubrovnik's vicinity, which was being invaded by the Venetians. No doubt, the emin's role in the whole affair contributed considerably to the Ottoman decision to intervene in the matter, as was finally done so by the beylerbey of Bosnia in accordance with the Sultan's orders.<sup>22</sup>

The emins also wrote reports which concerned illegal actions of the Ottoman subjects against the Ragusans and their property.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the emins were authorized to apprehend the culprits. The latter could have been arrested

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<sup>20</sup> For example, in 1743 the emins wrote out a report on a sunk Ulcinj ship from which the crew managed to rescue only bits of property. The owner of the ship had to sign the report (*AT*, vol. C 7, no. 21). See also: *AT*, no. 4572; *AT*, vol. B 37, no. 7; vol. E 21, no. 42; vol. E 23, no. 8; Vesna Miović-Perić, »Ulcinjani i Dubrovačka Republika u prvoj polovici XVIII. stoljeća«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 30 (1992): p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, after the Sultan had allowed export of Turkish goods to the ports in Dubrovnik's vicinity (Makarska, Neretva), in 1793 the emins informed the Porte that this measure caused a drastic fall of traffic in the Dubrovnik harbour (*AT*, vol. E 4, no. 9).

<sup>22</sup> The emins' reports on the Venetian misdeeds: *AT*, no. 4439, 4569, 4887; *AT*, vol. C 7, no. 33, 35, 41; *CT*, vol. VIII, no. 124.

<sup>23</sup> In 1703 the emins testified against Vlachs of Herzegovina who smuggled goods to the Venetian Novi, causing thus direct damage to the Ragusans (*AT*, vol. C 7, no. 83). In 1714, they confirmed that Jusuf Mezzi, a pirate of Skodër, abducted a Ragusan nobleman (*AT*, vol. B 61, no. 134; *AT*, vol. C 7, no. 42). In 1715, the emins testified against the Ottoman soldiers at Carina, in the neighbourhood of the Ragusan border, who harassed, raped, and robbed the Ragusan villagers (*AT*, vol. C 7, no. 79). In 1731/32, the emins testified that Ali-khoja, a pirate of Ulcinj, abducted several Ragusans (*AT*, vol. C 7, no. 43).

by the Ragusans as well, but they could not keep them in the Dubrovnik prison, sentence or punish them, unless the Osmanlis decided otherwise. That is why an Ottoman subject apprehended in Dubrovnik was handed over either to an authorized legal representative of the Porte or emin of Ploče, who was responsible for the extradition of the criminal to the legal authorities of the Ottoman state.<sup>24</sup> The emin was not only authorized to seize but also to question and detain the accused Osmanli within the Lazaretto complex.<sup>25</sup> Also, he was authorized to write an official statement or even a court report. With petty crimes, his authority went as far as bringing of the verdict and punishing the culprit, mostly by flogging or fine.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, the emins issued documents which certified that a Ragusan subject, who committed a crime against an Osmanli, was punished by the Ragusan judicial authorities.<sup>27</sup>

The emin was a conciliator too. The Ragusans and the Osmanlis settled disputes in his presence, putting a stop to greater conflicts or misunderstanding. Both parties were issued a written statement on the settlement, accompanied by a mutual warrant in that neither of the parties would change mind and stir old animosities again.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the emins could witness debt payments between the Ragusans and the Osmanlis.<sup>29</sup>

Merchants, travellers, and visitors arriving from plague-stricken countries were subject to quarantine measures at Ploče, and the emin was responsible for the Osmanlis isolated there.<sup>30</sup> Because of the graveness of the matter, for some Osmanlis refused to follow the quarantine measures, the travellers arriving from provinces suffering from epidemic diseases had to sign a state-

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, in 1788 three Ottoman subjects, robbers, were freed from the Dubrovnik prison and handed over to the emins. The latter had taken upon them the responsibility to extradite the culprits to the Bosnian beylerbey (*AT*, vol. E 3, no. 20). Also see: *DA*, 18th c., vol. 3401, no. 7; *DAD, Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, ser. 3, vol. 199, f. 227.

<sup>25</sup> In 1700 the emin seized and detained a Turk who had robbed a church in a village in Konavle (*AT*, vol. B 132, no. 5). Also see: *AT*, no. 4804; *AT*, vol. B 22, no. 86; vol. B 132, no. 260, 286; vol. C 2, no. 21, 23; vol. E 4, no. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *AT*, vol. B 42, no. 30; vol. B 132, no. 313.

<sup>27</sup> In 1709, the emin testified in writing that the Ragusan authorities sentenced to hanging and quartering a Ragusan who had murdered and robbed an Ottoman subject (*AT*, vol. B 132, no. 79). See also: *AT*, vol. C 6, no. 61, 62; vol. E 3, no. 21.

<sup>28</sup> *AT*, no. 4473, 4661.

<sup>29</sup> *AT*, vol. E 20, no. 15; vol. E 21, no. 11-14, 55.

<sup>30</sup> *AT*, no. 4801; *AT*, vol. B 22, no. 67; vol. B 131, no. 30; vol. K 936, 943.

ment witnessed by the emin concerning their full consent to quarantine regulations. The preserved statements pertain mainly to the Bosnian haj pilgrims and merchants who arrived in Dubrovnik from Alexandria.<sup>31</sup> Those Osmanlis who violated the quarantine regulations were reported to the Bosnian beylerbey. As evidenced in emins' reports, some merchants simply disobeyed and walked away, while others escaped at night.<sup>32</sup> There were also cases of violent behaviour and fights with the Ragusan guards.<sup>33</sup> In case of injury of an Ottoman subject in the circumstances, the reports of the emin and other eyewitnesses might prove invaluable for the good relations of the two states.<sup>34</sup>

There were emins, however, who did not wish to cooperate fully with the Ragusan authorities, and who actually worked against the interests of the Ragusan government and its subjects.<sup>35</sup> On several occasions the Ragusans notified the Porte or the Bosnian beylerbey of the emin's misconduct, and managed to have such an unworthy officer replaced.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> The preserved statements date from 1768 (*AT*, vol. E 5, no. 8), 1776 (*AT*, vol. B 35, no. 5), 1780 (*AT*, vol. E 20, no. 62), 1782 (*AT*, vol. B 35, no. 4, 6), 1783 (*AT*, vol. B 35, no. 7; *AT*, vol. B 145, no. 89), 1784 (*AT*, vol. E 5, no. 3), 1790 (*AT*, vol. E 20, no. 35), and 1792 (*AT*, vol. B 35, no. 8).

<sup>32</sup> In 1776, the Bosnian beylerbey was the addressee of a report written out by two emins on a certain Murat, merchant, who had arrived with olive oil from Alexandria. He refused to be isolated at the quarantene, and nothing could prevent him from joining his caravan to Bosnia (*AT*, no. 4436).

<sup>33</sup> In 1763 several Turks came to Lazarettos to pick up a letter. As the letter had not yet been decontaminated, the guards tried to stop them from taking it. The Turks reacted violently and attacked them with knives. A Ragusan guard was killed in the fight (*AT*, vol. B 15, no. 40; *CLDT*, vol. 4, f. 425; *LL*, vol. 85, f. 14). According to an undated document, the violation of quarantine regulations seemed to have been the cause of another fight with the guards also started by a Turk (*AT*, vol. E 22, no. 3).

<sup>34</sup> In 1797, an Ottoman subject, a Vlach from Nikšić, jumped over the barrier installed at the Lazarettos exit and made his way to the city. The captain of Lazarettos kept calling him back. As the Vlach did not react, the captain threw a stone at him. The Vlach received a blow on the head, but not a fatal one as testified by a Ragusan physician. In order to prepare themselves for the eventual allegations, the Ragusans asked the emin to write out a detailed report on the circumstances in which the said Vlach was injured (*AT*, vol. C 4, no. 7; *AT*, vol. C 6, no. 28; *AT*, vol. C 7, no. 38, 39).

<sup>35</sup> E.g., in 1777, the emins bought the commodities from the Ottoman merchants at bargain prices and after a certain period of storage, they sold the same goods at a much higher price. The Ragusans filed a strong protest at the Porte against the emins' intervention in the everyday traffic of goods between the Ragusans and the Osmanlis (*TCF*, vol. 3, ff. 115-120). The Ragusans also complained of the emins' illegal imposition of tax (*AT*, vol. B 148, no. 97, undated).

<sup>36</sup> In 1642, upon the Ragusan request, the Bosnian beylerbey dismissed emin Suleyman from the post (*AT*, vol. B 19, no. 13). In 1754, emin Salih-aga Amičić was dismissed by the firman (*LL*, vol. 78, ff. 258v-259; *TCF*, vol. 2, f. 1006), and two years later Mehmet-aga Čatović (*AT*, vol. C 3, no. 13).

In sum, being primarily concerned with the Ottoman subjects and their affairs in the Republic of Dubrovnik, the *emin* was of equal benefit to the Ragusans. Being empowered to act as a witness, interrogator, and judge, the *emin*'s presence made an early settlement of disputes possible, thus facilitating trade and business arrangements between the two states. Had it not been for him, the Ragusans would have had to call on the *khadis* or some other Ottoman official who would not have been as prompt and efficient as the *emin* positioned in the immediate vicinity of the city itself, amidst the hive-like activity of the harbour.