

FROM DUBROVNIK (RAGUSA) TO FLORENCE: OBSERVATIONS ON THE RECRUITING OF DOMESTIC SERVANTS IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT: As confirmed by fifteenth-century documentation, Giuliano Marcovaldi, a merchant from Prato established in Ragusa, along with some Florentine merchants, were involved in the trade of slaves, a special segment of the commerce relations between the Italian peninsula, Ragusa and the Balkan hinterland. The persons sold were mostly young women, many of Patarine or Orthodox faith, who were to become domestic servants. They were exported from the Balkans by Ragusan merchants, and sold to Italian traders in exchange for woollen cloth and food stuffs, especially wheat.

In the course of his 1970s studies of medieval slave trade from the Balkans within economic relations between the two Adriatic coasts, Charles Verlinden pointed to the lack of systematic studies on this subject by the Slavs.¹ A few

¹ Charles Verlinden, »L'esclavage sur la côte dalmate au bas moyen âge«. *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 41 (1970): pp. 57-140; idem, »Le relazioni economiche fra le due sponde adriatiche nel basso Medioevo alla luce della tratta degli schiavi«, in: *Recenti e antichi rapporti fra le due sponde dell'Adriatico*. Fasano di Puglia: Arti Grafiche Nunzio Schena, 1972: pp. 23-55, but also see the more general study dedicated to medieval slavery, the second volume in particular (idem, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*, vol. II, *Italie, Colonies italiennes du*

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years later, historians tended to shift the focus of their attention to this theme, especially Bariša Krekić, who published some articles on Ragusa as an intermediary market for this type of trade.² In 1988 Sergio Anselmi promoted a book which contained essays on the migration of Slavs and Albanians to the West from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century³ and, in 1989, the same subject was dealt within a volume with several articles published in Belgrade.⁴ These studies are based on the documents found in the archives of Dubrovnik,⁵

Levant, Levant latin, Empire byzantin. Gent: Faculteit van de Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, 1977: pp. 712-799). For the Slavic studies which Verlinden most frequently refers to, see especially Božidar Petranović, »O robstvu po srbskim spomenicima i statutima primorskih dalmatinskih gradova«. *Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* (hereafter cited as: JAZU) 16 (1871): pp. 59-76; Aleksandar Solovjev, »Trgovanje bosanskim robljem do godine 1661«. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu* 1 (1946): pp. 139-162; Gregor Čremošnik, »Pravni položaj našeg roblja u srednjem veku«. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu* 2 (1947): pp. 69-74; idem, »Izvori za istoriju roblja i servcijalnih odnosa u našim zemljama srednjega veka«. *Istorisko-pravni zbornik* 2 (1949): pp. 148-159; Vuk Vinaver, »Trgovina bosanskim robljem tokom XIV veka u Dubrovniku«. *Anali Historijskog Instituta u Dubrovniku* 2 (1953): pp. 125-149; idem, »Ropstvo u starom Dubrovniku (1250-1650)«. *Istorijski pregled* 1 (1954): pp. 37-43. It should be noted, however, that the studies of Verlinden are based on: *Istorijski spomenici Dubrovačkog arhiva. Kancelarijski i notarski spisi 1278-1301*, ed. Gregor Čremošnik. Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti (hereafter cited as: SANU), 1932; *Spisi dubrovačke kancelarije, I. Zapisi notara Tomazina de Savere 1278-1282*, ed. Gregor Čremošnik. Zagreb: JAZU, 1951; *Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva*, vol. III, ed. Mihailo Dinić. Beograd: SANU, 1967; Antonio Teja, »Aspetti della vita economica di Zara dal 1289 al 1409. II: La schiavitù domestica ed il traffico degli schiavi«. *Rivista dalmatica* 22 (1941): pp. 20-38.

² Bariša Krekić, »Contributo allo studio degli schiavi levantini e balcanici a Venezia (1388-1398)«, in: *Studi in memoria di Federigo Melis*, vol. II. Napoli: Giannini, 1978: pp. 379-394; idem, »L'abolition de l'esclavage à Dubrovnik (Raguse) au XV^e siècle: mythe ou réalité?«. *Byzantinische Forschungen* 12 (1987): pp. 309-317; idem, »Dubrovnik as a pole of attraction and a point of transition for the hinterland population in the late Middle Ages«, in: *Migrations in Balkan history*, ed. Dimitrije Djordjević. Beograd: SANU, 1989: pp. 67-75.

³ *Italia felix. Migrazioni slave e albanesi in Occidente. Romagna, Marche, Abruzzi secoli XIV-XVI*, ed. Sergio Anselmi. [Quaderni di *Proposte e ricerche*, vol. III]. Ancona: Tecnostampa Edizioni, 1988.

⁴ *Migrations in Balkan history*. This volume was preceded by another miscellaneous set of papers, *Migracije Slovanov v Italijo. Le migrazioni degli Slavi in Italia*, ed. Ferdo Gestrin. Ljubljana, 1978 and was accompanied and later followed by numerous Italian and Slavic studies dealing with the migration of these populations to Italy. In this regard, see the extensive bibliography offered by Ferdo Gestrin, »Le migrazioni degli slavi in Italia nella storiografia jugoslava«, in: *Italia felix*: p. 264, note 14, already published with a few changes in *Migracije*, and in *Quaderni storici* 40 (1979): pp. 7-30 - which, however, ends by the end of the 1980s.

⁵ Much of the medieval and modern documentation from the archives in Dubrovnik has been published by Mihailo Dinić. Concerning the subject of this paper, see especially *Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva* III.

Venice and other cities on the east coast of Italy. Actually, as I have attempted to demonstrate earlier,⁶ the cities of Tuscany were also involved in the trade which, through Ragusa, connected the Slavic hinterland with the Italian peninsula. Copious fifteenth-century documentation of Giuliano Marcovaldi, a merchant from Prato established in Ragusa, confirms this and, among other things, contains much information which questions the assumption that in Tuscany there are only a few minor traces of the recruiting of domestic servants in the Balkans.⁷

Verlinden wrote that, after the northern shores of the Black Sea, the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea was an area which represented the major source of slaves in the Mediterranean world during the late Middle Ages⁸ with the result that, in most European languages, the term *sclavus* was used to indicate the lowest rank of the servant class.⁹

⁶ Paola Pinelli, »L'argento di Ragusa«. *Storia Economica* 3 (2005): pp. 549-574; eadem, *Il carteggio Marcovaldi (1401-1437) nell'Archivio di Stato di Prato. Inventario*. [Quaderni della Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato, vol. CVI]. Roma: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 2006.

⁷ Ch. Verlinden, »Le relazioni economiche«: p. 24; idem, »L'esclavage sur la côte dalmate«: p. 64; idem, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe II*: pp. 719-720. This does not mean that there have not been studies on slaves in medieval Tuscany, but they have concentrated mainly on imports from the coasts of the Black Sea and of Africa: on this subject, again see idem, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe II*: pp. 360-414, but also Agostino Zanelli, *Le schiave orientali a Firenze nei secoli XIV e XV*. Firenze: Ermanno Loescher & Co, 1885 (reprint Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 1976); Iris Origo, »The domestic enemy: the eastern slaves in Tuscany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries«. *Speculum* 30 (1955): pp. 321-366; Geo Pistarino, »Tratta di schiavi da Genova in Toscana nel secolo XV«, in: *Studi di storia economica toscana nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento in memoria di Federigo Melis*. Pisa: Pacini editore, 1987: pp. 285-304; Monica Boni and Robert Delort, »Des esclaves toscans du milieu du XIVe au milieu du XVe siècle«. *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 112 (2000): pp. 1057-1077.

⁸ »Le coste orientali del Mar Adriatico sono quelle che hanno alimentato più considerevolmente la classe schiava del mondo mediterraneo nel basso Medioevo» (Ch. Verlinden, »Le relazioni economiche«: p. 24).

⁹ Ch. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe II*: pp. 797-798, but particularly pp. 999-1010; idem, »L'esclavage sur la côte dalmate«: p. 138. Also see Corrado Marciani, »Il commercio degli schiavi alle fiere di Lanciano nel sec. XVI«. *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 80 (1962): pp. 269-270; Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Âge dans le monde méditerranéen*. Paris: Fayard, 1981: pp. 67, 71. However, according to Teja, Dalmatian documents make a distinction between the terms *sclavus* and *servus*, in that only the latter indicated a condition of slavery (A. Teja, »Aspetti della vita economica« II: pp. 23-24). It should be pointed out that the Balkans also supplied the slave trade headed for the Near East (Bariša Krekić, *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant au Moyen Âge*. Paris-La Haye: Mouton & Co, 1961: p. 109).

Ragusa was the main centre of this trade.¹⁰ Other Dalmatian cities such as Zadar, Split, Trogir and Korčula participated to a lesser degree; Kotor¹¹ and towns at the mouth of the Neretva were also important slave markets.¹²

The trade involved mostly women (men represented less than 10%)¹³ aged between 20 and 30, although there were sometimes young girls between 5 and 13. Many of them came from Hum, Rudinje, Trebinje,¹⁴ and were mainly Patarine or Orthodox—that is, heretics and schismatics, and as such could be legitimately enslaved,¹⁵ as evidenced from a lawsuit initiated with the Rector of Ragusa in 1393. Stojana, Tvrdislava and Grlica begged for mercy because they were baptized Christians born of Christian parents,¹⁶ whereas the Catalan Pietro Doy declared that they had been sold to him as Patarines by a Ragusan merchant and as Patarines he intended to treat them.¹⁷ Having obtained information about the girls and ascertained that they were indeed Catholics, by the laws and customs of Ragusa the Rector had them set free. The Church stood on the position that it was lawful to enslave and forcefully capture those who practised idolatry, because this would allow them to be taken to civilised countries and, through the sacrament of baptism, receive them in the grace of

¹⁰ On the fundamental role of Ragusa see B. Krekić, »Contributo allo studio degli schiavi«; idem, »Dubrovnik as a pole of attraction«; Dušanka Dinić-Knežević, »Prilog proučavanju migracija našeg stanovništva u Italiju tokom XIII i XIV veka«. *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu* 16/1 (1973): pp. 39-62.

¹¹ On this point see: Bartolomeo Cecchetti, »Il commercio degli schiavi a Cattaro nel 1661«. *Archivio Veneto* 30 (1885): pp. 164-166.

¹² A. Solovjev, »Trgovina bosanskim robljem«: pp. 155-156.

¹³ Ch. Verlinden, »Le relazioni economiche«: p. 34; idem, »L'esclavage sur la côte dalmate«: p. 91. The fact that the overwhelming majority of slaves were females in the trade of slaves and servants in medieval Ragusa, is pointed out by Nenad Fejić, »Aspects économiques de la persévérance de la servitude féminine au sein du monde méditerranéen«, in: *La donna nell'economia secc. XIII-XVIII*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi. Firenze: Le Monnier, 1990: p. 580.

¹⁴ Ch. Verlinden, »Le relazioni economiche«: p. 36, but also *Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva* III: p. 237; Mihailo Dinić, »Trg Drijeva i njegova okolina«. *Godišnjica Nikole Čupića* 47 (1938): pp. 109-147; Momčilo Spremić, *Dubrovnik e gli Aragonesi (1442-1495)*. Palermo: Accademia Nazionale di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1986: pp. 319-320; Krzysztof Olendzki, »Handel niewolnikami bośniackimi w XIII i XIV wieku«. *Kwartalnik historyczny* 2 (1988): p. 339.

¹⁵ Charles Verlinden, »Patarins ou Bogomiles réduits en esclavage«. *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 38 (1967): pp. 683-700; Bariša Krekić, *Dubrovnik in the 14th and 15th centuries: a city between East and West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972: p. 37.

¹⁶ *De intuitu misericordie et ordinis sacre matris ecclesie habeatis misericordiam nostri quia nos sumus Christiane baptizate et nate de Christianis* (*Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva* III: p. 63, doc. 161).

¹⁷ *Ego ipsas emi tamquam patarinas et pro patarinis volo tractare* (ibidem).

God. According to Saint Antonino, Bishop of Florence, baptism as such did not free them from slavery, because slavery, introduced by divine law, was approved by both civil and canon law.¹⁸ This concept also appears in a decree by the Council of Priors of Florence dated 4 July 1366, where it is stated that all those born as heathens must be considered infidels despite their new Christian faith.¹⁹

Recruiting took place in rural communities and involved impoverished individuals with no education or occupation, barely able to provide for themselves. As often mentioned in the bills of sale, slaves had to be healthy, and most importantly not suffering from epilepsy.²⁰ The prices usually varied between 27-28 ducats for women, and 30 ducats for men. The price was in inverse proportion to the slave's age, and could even reach as much as 48 ducats for women and 50 for men. These prices, however, were quite low considering that a Tartar or Circassian maid servant, or even a Bulgarian, Russian or Saracen, cost not less than 42 ducats.²¹ To some extent, this might be accounted by the cost of shipment which was lower with Slavs, but also by the fact that they were not as valued as the Russians or Circassians, for example, whose women were described as more gentle, beautiful and with stronger blood. The Tartar female slaves on the other hand were appreciated for being hardier, stronger and more rustic.²²

¹⁸ *Si autem christianus emerit iudaeum vel paganum, si velit effici christianus, non propterea efficitur liber... quia servitus introducta est de iure divino et per ius gentium et ius canonicum approbata (Sancti Antonini Archiepiscopi Florentini Summa theologica, ed. Innocenzo Colosio. Graz: Akademische Druck u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959: III, 60, De servitute).*

¹⁹ Giuseppe Müller, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città toscane coll'Oriente cristiano e coi Turchi fino all'anno MDXXXI*. Firenze: M. Cellini e C., 1879 (reprint Roma: Società Multigrafica Editrice, 1966): p. 120.

²⁰ *Male maestro* (A. Zanelli, *Le schiave orientali*: p. 48).

²¹ B. Krekić, »Contributo allo studio degli schiavi«: pp. 381-392. For the prices of Balkan slaves in Ragusa at the same time, see also Nenad Fejić, »Notes sur la traite des esclaves de Bosnie à Barcelone au Moyen Age (D'après les documents des Archives de Protocoles)«. *Estudis històrics i documents dels Arxius de Protocols*, 10 (1982): p. 124.

²² *I' m'ho fatto pensiero, togliendo donna, ci sarebbe di bisogno d'una ischiava... e pertanto ti ricordo el bisogno; che avendo attitudine avern'una, se ti pare, tu dia ordine d'averla: qualche tartera di nazione, che sono per durare fatica vantaggiose e rustiche. Le rosse, cioè quelle di Rossia, sono più gentili di compressione e più belle; ma a mio parere sarebbero meglio tartere. Le circasse è forte sangue...* (Alessandra Macinghi negli Strozzi, *Lettere di una gentildonna fiorentina del secolo XVI ai figliuoli esuli*, ed. Cesare Guasti. Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1877 (reprint: Firenze: Licosa, 1972): letter dated 13 September 1465 to Filippo degli Strozzi in Naples, pp. 469-476).

The trade in Balkan slaves, at least according to the sources I had consulted, started to increase at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Some scholars believe that the reasons for this, besides poverty and under-development of the territories they came from²³—which certainly stimulated the phenomenon and made the Balkan hinterland a prolific source of domestic servants—lay in the lack of manpower which came about as a result of the Black Death, which impeded population growth in Western Europe throughout the fifteenth century.²⁴ Among the probable causes, we should also include political reasons which were particularly important in the context of fifteenth-century Slavic migrations closely related to the invasion of the Turks. In my opinion, however, the major cause can certainly be identified in the lively and important trade relations between the Italian peninsula, Ragusa and the Balkan hinterland. Indeed, the development of the mining industry in the Balkans in the fifteenth century gave a new impetus to the trade with the Serbian and Bosnian cities. The ones who benefited most from this situation were the Ragusan merchants who exported various goods to these regions—where a true manufacturing was still lacking—in exchange for silver, but also slaves who were sold by Italian traders in exchange for medium quality woollen cloth and food stuffs, especially wheat, which the limited territory surrounding the city of St Blaise could not produce in sufficient quantities.²⁵

Despite all, in 1416 the city authorities, the Major Council of Ragusa, decided to prohibit the sale of slaves in the city unless they were intended for local employment, considering this trade shameful and abominable because these creatures were made in the image and likeness of the Creator, whereas they were being treated like animals.²⁶ Those who infringed the law were to

²³ Marko Šunjić, »Immigrazione di slavi nel territorio di Ancona nel corso del XV secolo«, in: *Migracije Slovanov*.

²⁴ D. Dinić-Knežević, »Prilog proučavanju migracija«: p. 60; Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau, *La tratta degli schiavi. Saggio di storia globale*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006: p. 39.

²⁵ P. Pinelli, *Il carteggio Marcovaldi*: pp. 19-40.

²⁶ *Quod cum per multos dominos... nobis fuerunt porrecte querele... contra mercatores... eo quia emunt et vendunt ex eorum subditis, considerantes talem mercantiam esse turpem, nefariam et abominabilem et contra omnem humanitatem... videlicet quod humana species facta ad ymaginem et similitudinem Creatoris nostri converti debeat in usus mercimoniales et vendatur tamquam si essent animalia bruta... statuimus et ordinamus quod decetero nullus civis noster... aut forensis... audeat vel presumat emere aut vendere servum aut servam vel esse mediator huiusmodi mercantie (Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva III: pp. 89-90, doc. 200). See also B. Krekić, »L'abolition de l'esclavage«.*

be punished with six months in prison and a fine of twenty-five *perperi* for each slave. In true fact, the trade saw no halt and must have been quite profitable (Mirjana Popović calculates the profit at 150-750% of the capital invested),²⁷ for slave trade companies continued to be founded, like the one established in 1445 between Marino di Bona of Ragusa and Benedetto Magrino for the trade of 12-15 male and female slaves.²⁸ Merely two years later, in 1418, it was declared that on the territory of Ragusa no one could be forced to perform domestic service elsewhere unless willing or authorised by their father or mother. Whatever the case, a permit was required from the Rector.²⁹ Moreover, by the middle of the fifteenth century, numerous Greeks, Tartars, Circassians, Russians, Moslems and blacks arrived in Ragusa where they were sold to foreign merchants, especially Italians and Catalans, but also to Turkish infidels.³⁰ On the other hand, after the Turkish conquest of Serbia and Bosnia (in 1459 and 1463 respectively) men and women who, in order to escape from the Ottomans were willing to sell themselves, poured into Ragusa.³¹ This trade was further prompted by the Republic which, thronged with refugees, was doing everything possible to speed their departure for Italy.³² A similar situation occurred after the fall of Shkodër in 1479, when the inhabitants of northern Albania sought refuge in Dubrovnik.³³ The governing Council of Ragusa was forced to intervene again in 1466 declaring that anyone, native or foreigner,

²⁷ Mirjana Popović-Radenković, »Le relazioni commerciali fra Dubrovnik (Ragusa) e la Puglia nel periodo angioino (1266-1442)«. *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 77 (1959): p. 203.

²⁸ *Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva* III: pp. 112-113, doc. 230. For an example of a company formed in 1320 between a Pugliese from Trani and a Marchigiano from Ancona, see *ibidem*: p. 7, doc. 10.

²⁹ *Ibidem*: pp. 91-92, doc. 203.

³⁰ B. Krekić, »Dubrovnik as a pole of attraction«: pp. 67-69; *idem*, *Dubrovnik (Raguse) et le Levant*: p. 110; Ch. Verlinden, »Patarins ou Bogomiles«: p. 686; Jorio Tadić, »Trgovina robljem u Dubrovniku u XV veku«. *Politika* 8084 (1930); *idem*, »Otkupljivanje roblja u Dubrovniku«. *Politika* 8129 (1930); Vuk Vinaver, »Crno roblje u starom Dubrovniku«. *Istoriski časopis* 5 (1955): pp. 437-444; Momčilo Spremić, »La migrazione degli Slavi nell'Italia meridionale e in Sicilia alla fine del Medioevo«. *Archivio Storico Italiano* 138 (1980): pp. 3-15 (originally in *Migracije Slovanov*).

³¹ M. Spremić, *Dubrovnik e gli Aragonesi*: p. 330; Marko Šunjić, »Pomjeranje mletačkih granica u Dalmaciji i odnosi sa susjedima tokom XV stoljeća«. *Godišnjak društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine* 4 (1966): p. 59; *idem*, *Dalmacija u XV stoljeću*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967: p. 279.

³² B. Krekić, »Dubrovnik as a pole of attraction«: pp. 71-72; M. Spremić, »La migrazione degli Slavi«: p. 12; Dragoljub Dragojlović, »Migrations of the Serbs in the Middle Ages«, in: *Migrations in Balkan*: pp. 63-64.

³³ M. Spremić, *Dubrovnik e gli Aragonesi*: p. 330.

who participated in the shameful trade would be imprisoned and that they had one month to set free anyone that they had enslaved.³⁴

It should be noted, however, that medieval slavery basically involved only domestic servants and was no longer the main generator of agricultural production as it had been in Antiquity. For this reason the slave trade remained of marginal proportions and with a fairly restricted market,³⁵ as illustrated by Krekić: from 1388 until 1398 (the years in which the effects of the mid-century plague should have been felt), 304 slaves, not more than 30 per year, of which only 12 (representing 4,10%) were of Slavic origin, were imported from Ragusa into Venice.³⁶ Between 1367 and 1405, 93 Slavs were sold in Zadar.³⁷ According to Agostino Zanelli, who based his research on the *Registro della vendita degli schiavi*,³⁸ in the period 1366-1397, 339 female slaves were brought to Florence, and of these it would appear that only five came from *Schiavonia* (1,42%).³⁹ Robert Delort and Monica Boni, however, have pointed to the errors and negligence in keeping the register, as well as frequent missing entries.⁴⁰ The *Catasto* of 1427 records 360 female slaves out of a population of about 37,000 inhabitants.⁴¹

Further two characteristics of the medieval slave trade have been derived from the following: the absence of specialised shipping and trade networks and the sporadic arrival of the slaves due to the fact that their importation represented a family transaction and almost always was of confidential nature. As will be discussed below, before leaving the Balkans, the slaves already had

³⁴ *Si quis... vendidit aut in posterum vendere presumpserit aliquem... et tam improbus mercator venerit ad manus iudicum nostrorum, debeat incarcerari et sibi prefigi terminus unius mensis ad restituendum cum effectu in libertatem (Liber Croceus, ed. Branislav M. Nedeljković. Beograd: SANU, 1997: pp. 45-46, Ordo contra vendentes homines).*

³⁵ J. Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques*: p. 15 and more recently O. Pétré-Grenouilleau, *La tratta degli schiavi*: pp. 38-44; Charles Verlinden, »Venezia e il commercio degli schiavi provenienti dalle coste orientali del Mediterraneo«, in: *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*, vol. I, ed. Agostino Pertusi. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1973: p. 927; Susan Mosher Stuard, »Ancillary evidence for the decline of Medieval slavery«. *Past and present* 149 (1995): p. 4.

³⁶ B. Krekić, »Contributo allo studio degli schiavi«: p. 390.

³⁷ Ch. Verlinden, »L'esclavage sur la côte dalmate«: pp. 76-77.

³⁸ The document (*Capitoli*, appendice 26, Archivio di Stato di Firenze, hereafter cited as ASFI) was entirely transcribed by Ridolfo Livi, *La schiavitù domestica nei tempi di mezzo e nei moderni: ricerche storiche di un antropologo*. Padova: CEDAM, 1928.

³⁹ A. Zanelli, *Le schiave orientali*: p. 36.

⁴⁰ M. Boni - R. Delort, »Des esclaves toscans«: p. 70.

⁴¹ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, »Le serve a Firenze nei secoli XIV e XV«, in: eadem, *La famiglia e le donne nel Rinascimento a Firenze*. Bari: Laterza, 1988: p. 273.

an owner and were not objects of anonymous systematic exchange. In fact, demand varied considerably, at least until the sixteenth century when trade acquired the characteristics and features we are well acquainted with.⁴² During the 1470s, the account books of the Florentine company of the Cambini⁴³ still occasionally recorded the purchase of slaves, who arrived in Tuscany on ships that were mainly carrying other types of merchandise. The slaves in question were blacks, Russians or Circassians, usually ordered by a specific buyer who wanted to display them as an exotic acquisition which brought social prestige.⁴⁴ These transactions found their place between the buyer and seller who already had business connections, or contacts through family members or friends.⁴⁵

The changes in the slave trade did not mean that the slaves, even those recruited for domestic service, enjoyed better conditions because, in fact, they could be sold, distrained for the debts of their owner, hired, or given away as part of the bride's dowry. Moreover, the owners had no obligations other than the frequently neglected ones of feeding and clothing them,⁴⁶ as well as giving them a payment of a few ducats, or set aside a dowry for young girls, the value of which depended almost entirely on the generosity of the owner. Also, the payment of remuneration depended on the recognition of the servant's performance.⁴⁷ The situation was even worse for servants imported from remote countries, who were condemned to remain social outcasts for the rest of their lives. The awareness of this often led to the signing of contracts which committed them for life, with the consequence that their status was increasingly

⁴² With reference to Tuscany, see: Franco Angiolini, «Slaves and slavery in Early Modern Tuscany (1500-1700)». *Italian History and Culture* 3 (1997): pp. 67-86.

⁴³ The Cambini company has been studied by Sergio Tognetti, *Il banco Cambini, Affari e mercati di una compagnia mercantile-bancaria nella Firenze del XV secolo*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1999.

⁴⁴ See for example *Estranei*, 223, *Quaderno di Ricordanze*, cc. 13v, 33r and *Estranei*, 226, *Quaderno di Ricordanze*, c. 59r, Archivio dell'Ospedale degli Innocenti di Firenze (hereafter cited as AOIF). Sergio Tognetti shares the same opinion: «The trade in black African slaves in fifteenth-century Florence», in: *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Tom F. Earle and Kate J. P. Lowe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: pp. 219, 223.

⁴⁵ J. Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques* : pp. 185-189. In particular, the slave trade in Venice and in Genoa has been studied by Ch. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe* II; idem, «Le recrutement des esclaves à Venise aux XIV et XVe siècles». *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome* 39 (1968) : pp. 83-202 ; Domenico Gioffrè, *Il mercato degli schiavi a Genova nel secolo XV*. Genova: F.lli Bozzi, 1971 but also Francesco Panero, *Schiavi servi e villani nell'Italia medievale*. Torino: Paravia scriptorium, 1999: pp. 331-370.

⁴⁶ See for example *Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva* III: p. 15, doc. 30.

⁴⁷ C. Marciani, «Il commercio degli schiavi»: pp. 274-275.

confused with that of the slaves. Although the relations with their master were governed by a contract, they found themselves living at the limits of social tolerance. For example, in 1352 Bjeloslava pledged in front of two witnesses and a notary that she would become a domestic of the Ragusan Vito de Resti, who had bought her for 23 *perperi*, and promised that she would submit to the will of her owner.⁴⁸ The Slav Hvalica (*Qualica*) made the same pledge to a Venetian merchant.⁴⁹ In a contract governing the status of Stanka, a Bosnian woman, it was also stated that if she attempted to escape, she could be captured and held wherever the owner saw fit.⁵⁰ Female domestics were often forced to become their masters' concubines,⁵¹ and we know that many of the servants died young on account of the hardships they suffered.⁵² Moreover, documentary sources clearly demonstrate the hereditary nature of the servile condition: in 1405, a Bosnian slave by the name of Monna was contested in front of the Rector of Ragusa, and one of the contending parties claimed ownership on the basis that both her mother and grandmother had been his servants.⁵³ In 1430 a Ragusan citizen claimed a child because he was the son of one of his slaves.⁵⁴

The legal status of these servants, therefore, cannot be considered as indicative of a condition that is very different from that of slavery.⁵⁵ Also,

⁴⁸ *Ego quidem Bieloslava... confiteor quod sum ancilla diffinite usque ad mortem Vite de Resti, eo quod me emit pro yperperis XXIII. Et ideo promitto ei servire tamquam ancilla ut de me faciat perpetuo omne velle suum tamquam de ancilla et serva sua* (Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva III: p. 12, doc. 23).

⁴⁹ Ibidem: pp. 12-13, doc. 24.

⁵⁰ "Et si aufugerem facere me capi possit et detinere ad suam voluntatem ubi sibi placuerit" (ibidem: p. 14, doc. 28).

⁵¹ V. Vinaver, »Ropstvo u starom Dubrovniku«: p. 39; Ch. Klapisch-Zuber, »Le serve a Firenze«: pp. 275-276. It should also be noted that many children born to slaves were brought up in Florentine foundling hospitals like the Ospedale degli Innocenti (Richard C. Trexler, »The foundlings of Florence 1395-1455«, *History of Childhood Quarterly* 2 (1973): pp. 259-289).

⁵² M. Spremić, *Dubrovnik e gli Aragonesi*: p. 326.

⁵³ *Tua* (sc. Monna's) *avia et tua mater fuerunt serve mee empticie et similiter tu es serva mea et recessisti a nobis, petimus quod tu debeas reverti ad nos et nobis servire ut serva nostra* (Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva III: pp. 84-85, doc. 194).

⁵⁴ Ibidem: p. 99, doc. 211.

⁵⁵ Also according to Marc Bloch, who maintained that slavery disappeared in the West in the Middle Ages, a profound essence of the phenomenon persisted (Marc Bloch, »Personal liberty and servitude«, in: *Slavery and serfdom in the Middle Ages. From slavery to feudalism in South-Western Europe*, ed. Pierre Bonnassie. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991: pp. 33-92).

according to Susan Mosher Stuard, different terms used to indicate domestic servants in medieval Ragusa (*famuli, famulae, homines, servientes, pueri, puellae, ancillae*) “obscure rather than reveal legal status” despite suggesting a new and freer condition.⁵⁶ This scholar also observes that in the Balkans and the Adriatic regions there had always been an organization able to satisfy the demand for slaves, continuing the practice since Antiquity.⁵⁷

As already mentioned, Tuscany was also involved in the trade which, through Ragusa, linked the Slavic hinterland with the Italian peninsula,⁵⁸ even though most merchants came from Venice and Puglia, the closest regions, and especially from Barletta and Trani.⁵⁹ One should also consider the close connections between the city of St Blaise and Venice, the financial capital of the Ragusan trade, and the persistent shortage of grain which affected Ragusa and which, in various ways, made the city dependent on the cities of Southern Italy. As far as slave trade was concerned, the books of the Ragusan Chancellery have annual records of the sale and purchase of slaves, even though some authors speak of a stagnation in the Venetian trade in the fifteenth century, which became even more evident after the Turkish conquest of the Serbian and Bosnian territories.⁶⁰

From the documents published by Mihailo Dinić we know that by the fourteenth century Florentine merchants were already buying slaves, especially female ones, through Ragusan intermediaries— especially from Marino Gondola, Raffaello Gozze, Michele Luccari—whom they resold in their own cities as well as other Italian cities including Venice. For example, in 1374 a Ragusan named Giorgio sold to Giovanni of Florence a young Bosnian woman, and in 1376 Bartolomeo di Betto of Florence bought a servant named Ljubislava from a Ragusan for 15 gold ducats and 12 *grossi*.⁶¹ In May of 1377, at the market of Neretva Taddeo di Iacopo of Florence bought two male servants and ten female servants of Bosnian origin ranging in age between 10 and 30,

⁵⁶ Susan Mosher Stuard, »Urban domestic slavery in Medieval Ragusa«. *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983): p. 162; in the same sense, Ch. Klapisch-Zuber, »Le serve a Firenze«: pp. 278-279.

⁵⁷ S. Mosher Stuard, »Urban domestic slavery«: p. 157.

⁵⁸ P. Pinelli, »L'argento di Ragusa«; eadem, *Il carteggio Marcovaldi*.

⁵⁹ M. Spremić, »La migrazione degli Slavi«.

⁶⁰ Pavo Živković, »Mletačka trgovina bosanskim robljem u srednjem vijeku«. *Godišnjak društva istoričara Bosne i Hercegovine* 21-27 (1976): pp. 51-58.

⁶¹ *Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva* III: p. 33, docc. 77, 82.

whom he sold along with a large quantity of lead from Bosnia to Laurello di Francesco, Petrello di Masello and Francesco di Giovanni of Ancona,⁶² Taddeo seems to have been regularly engaged in this kind of trade because in 1381 for 35 gold ducats he sold to Petrello of Ancona a Bosnian servant named Gojslava, also acquired at Neretva.⁶³ In 1382 we again find word of a Bosnian woman sold by Marino di Gondola to a Florentine, *ser* Pietro Nardi, for 12 gold ducats.⁶⁴ In 1396 Bernardino and Francesco of Florence appeared before the Ragusan Rector with the judges from Neretva, declaring that the latter had unduly requisitioned from them ten female servants whom they had purchased at that marketplace, as well as the ship on which the servants had been transported to Italy.⁶⁵ The notarial documents analysed by Dušanka Dinić also demonstrate that Florence was one of the main destinations for slaves from the Balkan hinterland, starting at least in 1324.⁶⁶ In the fourteenth century, in fact, the Florentines participated actively in this trade at Zadar, in competition with Ragusans and Venetians. Among the merchants directly engaged in the slave trade were again Taddeo di Iacopo and Domenico di Francesco, who traded even ten or more female slaves at a time.⁶⁷

Fifteenth-century sources confirm the interest of Tuscan merchants in this type of trade. In 1421 Benedetto di Matteo Schieri from Prato, who had become chancellor of Ragusa, sold for 10 gold ducats a ten-year-old slave named Milica (*Milliza*), a girl from Priština, acquired by the Ragusan Nikola Glavić, to a Florentine, Giorgio di Giorgio Gucci, who could do anything he pleased with her, as if she were an object that belonged to him.⁶⁸ In 1442 Martino Ricci of Florence instructed Brajan of Ragusa to purchase a seven-year-old female slave in Bosnia,⁶⁹ while his father, Francesco, complained to the Rector about the escape of a slave of Slavic origin, Elena.⁷⁰ Among the letters of the Marcovaldi we read that from 1420 to 1428 Giuliano imported into Tuscany,

⁶² Ibidem: pp. 34-35, doc. 85.

⁶³ Ibidem: p. 40, doc. 100.

⁶⁴ Ibidem: p. 43, doc. 107.

⁶⁵ Ibidem: pp. 67-69, doc. 169.

⁶⁶ D. Dinić-Knežević, »Prilog proučavanju migracija«: pp. 51-57.

⁶⁷ Ch. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe II*: pp. 731-733.

⁶⁸ *Ser Georgius illa uti possit pro libito et de ea omnem suam facere voluntatem tamquam de re propria et ut dominus de mancipio* (Iz Dubrovačkog arhiva III: pp. 97-98, doc. 208).

⁶⁹ Ibidem: pp. 109-110, doc. 224.

⁷⁰ Ibidem: p. 110, doc. 225.

and into Prato and Florence in particular, seven female slaves from the Balkans, the price of whom was not more than 30 ducats.

Apparently, the Tuscan merchants were not heavily involved in the slave trade and it would appear that individual cases occurred in response to the requests of friends, relatives and acquaintances. Female slaves arrived in Florence sporadically and in small numbers, on ships which were loaded with various goods. These women slaves were usually employed as domestics and were given the heaviest household tasks: laundering, house cleaning, hauling water, building fire, cooking and taking care of the children.⁷¹ In May of 1421 Antonio di Iacopo di Meo of Prato asked Giuliano, who was in Ragusa, for one of these servants adding, however, that she should be neither too old nor too young.⁷² In July of the same year, Iacopo Ricciardi, a Florentine merchant at Fermo, asked for a servant girl of about 10 to 12 years of age, pointing out that her appearance mattered little as long as she was gentle.⁷³ The slave was paid for with a bill of exchange, like any other merchandise. In July of 1423, Giovanni Buonagiunta—whose company in Pesaro was often involved in the deals of the Marcovaldi—wrote to Giuliano asking for a young girl of 7 or 8 years of age, ugly even, and promised that in due time he would marry her off.⁷⁴ A few years later, in 1428, Bartolomeo di Filippo of Prato, who worked in the Venetian branch of the Florentine company, asked for a young girl, ugly or not, but honest, good, healthy and vigorous,⁷⁵ again demonstrating that beauty was of little importance as it was essential to have girls that were young and healthy. Another Pratese, Francesco Vinaccesi, decided to take a Slavic servant into his service to help maintain the household. In this case, however, his wife did not want a girl that was too young.⁷⁶ There is a well-documented

⁷¹ On this, see Ch. Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe II*: pp. 360-414.

⁷² *No la vorrei grande et non vorrei avere a dirizzare fanculline picchole* (*Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 392, letter dated 5 May 1421 of Antonio di Iacopo di Meo in Prato to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, Archivio di Stato di Prato, hereafter cited as ASPO).

⁷³ *Ospedale*, 2467, 111, letter dated 5 July 1421 of Giovanni di Feo Nerli in Fermo to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO.

⁷⁴ *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 329, letter dated 31 July 1423 of Giovanni di Feo Nerli in Pesaro to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO.

⁷⁵ *Honesta e buona... sana e ghaliarda* (*Ospedale*, 2467 ter, 797, letter dated 19 April 1428 of Francesco di Ridolfo Vinaccesi in Venice to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO).

⁷⁶ *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 496, letter dated 6 May 1428 of Francesco di Ridolfo Vinaccesi in Prato to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO.

case of a request made in 1420 by *ser* Bartolomeo di Piero, priest of Casale, a village near Prato, for a Slavic servant. In order to avoid gossip, an elderly maid servant was expected. Giuliano declared that he was willing to procure the servant on the condition that, in conformity with the contractual laws effective in Ragusa, the priest promised to pay all of the expenses from the time of purchase up to the arrival at destination and, if the servant was unhappy in her new position, he would set her free. In satisfying this request, Giuliano had certain difficulties. Even though in his letter he stated that he had tried very hard, he admitted that he had not been able to find anyone who was 35 or 40 years of age, but only a woman of about 28 or 30 years old, good natured and well kept: if *ser* Bartolomeo thought she was too immature, Giuliano suggested that his brother Sandro should keep her until he returned to Prato and could place her with another buyer.⁷⁷ At the time of purchase at the Ragusan market, Vukosava Dobrićeva (*Boccasavia Dobrichio*)—this was the woman's name—was to be dressed in a shift and a pair of new shoes. Giuliano paid the Rector for the export license and the rental of the boat which was to take the slave to Pesaro, where Giovanni Buonagiunta would make arrangements to have her transported to Prato.⁷⁸ The expenses amounted to a total of a ducat and a half. Vukosava did not travel alone, but with another slave of the same name, sent to a purchaser from Prato, Luca di Cecco. The woman intended for *ser* Bartolomeo, however, could easily be distinguished by her age, but also bigger and plumper appearance.⁷⁹ Notwithstanding all these efforts, *ser* Bartolomeo was not happy with the purchase and Giuliano's brother, Sandro, was forced to keep Vukosava for a month in his own household to train and teach her the language.⁸⁰ In the end, the servant was sold to Andrea Nardi of Florence. Sandro himself asked his brother for a young slave because he was

⁷⁷ *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 661, letter dated 1 August 1423 of Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa to Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Prato, ASPO.

⁷⁸ *Ospedale*, 2467, 80 and 81, letters dated May 1421 of Bartolomeo di Piero in Casale to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO; *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 531, letter dated 21 December 1421 of Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa to Bartolomeo di Piero in Casale, ASPO.

⁷⁹ *Quella di Luccha à nome chome questa: la nostra è magore e piùe grassa, piùe piena di charni* (*Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 646 and 654, letters dated 4 November 1420 and 12 December 1421 of Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa to Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Prato, ASPO).

⁸⁰ *E io per bene servillo l'ò tenuta in chasa uno messe apresso per dimesstichalgliele e metere ne' suoi verssi* (*Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 407, letter dated 22 February 1422 of Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Prato to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO).

alone in the house and had to take care of Giuliano's two children.⁸¹ The maid servant employed to take care of the children was not supposed to be a mother, because this would have compromised the family's honour.⁸² During his stay in Ragusa, Giuliano had employed a Slav, Stanisava, to do domestic tasks. As it turned out, the woman had soon become his lover and the mother of his two children, Adriano and Giovanni. The two young boys, while in Ragusa, were taken care of by another slave, a Bosnian named Vukava (*Ulcava*), who was also their wet nurse.⁸³

From the documents published by Mihailo Dinić we know that in the fourteenth century Florentine merchants were already buying Balkan slaves but the trade, at least according to the sources I have consulted, started to increase at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Some scholars believe that the reasons for this lay in the lack of manpower which came about as a result of the Black Death or in the invasion of the Turks, although, in my opinion, the major cause can certainly be identified in the increasingly frequent and important trade relations between the Italian peninsula, Ragusa and the Balkan hinterland. In particular, the development of the mining industry increased the importance of the trade system of the Serbian and Bosnian cities. The people who benefited most from this situation were the Ragusan merchants who were exporting various types of goods towards these regions in exchange for silver, but also slaves who were sold by Italian traders in exchange for medium quality woollen cloth and food stuffs, especially wheat. The slaves arrived in Florence and in the other cities of Tuscany in small numbers and sporadically, on ships which were loaded mostly with other kinds of goods, and they were usually used as domestics and given the heaviest household tasks. The trade involved mostly women aged between 20 and 30 years. Many of them came from Hum, Rudinje, Trebinje and were therefore Patarine or Orthodox. The price of these slaves was usually around 27-28 ducats, low if one considers that a Tartar or Circassian maid servant cost not less than 42 ducats.

⁸¹ *Ospedale*, 2467, 197, letter dated 29 March 1430 of Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Florence to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO; *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 440, letter dated 20 February 1431 of Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Prato to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO.

⁸² *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 433, letter dated 29 April 1428 of Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Prato to Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi in Ragusa, ASPO.

⁸³ *Ospedale*, 805, *Libro di dare e avere di Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi*, c. 2r, ASPO; *Ospedale*, 2467 bis, 702, letter dated 11 May 1426 of Francesco di Ridolfo Vinaccesi in Ragusa to Sandro di Marco Marcovaldi in Prato, ASPO.

