

# Ottoman Cyrillic Documents from the Dubrovnik State Archives: A Contribution to the Study of Early Ottoman Diplomatics

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## **Abstract**

The collections of the Dubrovnik State Archives in Croatia are among the most extensive and informative for the study of the late medieval Mediterranean. Their value has been recognized by generations of researchers who have relied on the detailed archival registers of medieval Dubrovnik in their investigations of political, economic and social relations between various actors, states or communities in the Balkans during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The close relationship that Dubrovnik had with the Ottoman Empire in that time was reflected and manifested in the quite considerable amount of Ottoman correspondence and diplomatic material that was preserved in the archives of this medieval commune. Therefore, the focus of this paper will be a particular collection of sources consisting of documents and letters composed in the Slavic language, written in the Cyrillic script and issued by various Ottoman officials in the Balkan domains of the Ottoman Empire as well as by the Ottoman sultans themselves. In this work I intend to offer a broad survey and a brief analysis of these documents, along with a consideration of the most important issues and questions that researchers of these sources might be faced with. Furthermore, I will also try to examine their diplomatic features in the context of fifteenth-century Ottoman diplomatic practices, thus providing a contribution to the better understanding of the process of document creation and transmission of information in the Ottoman Empire's early relations with Slavic communities in the Balkans.

**Keywords:** Dubrovnik, Ottoman Empire, Bosnia, Archives, Documents, Diplomatics.

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## Dubrovnik Devlet Arşivleri'nden Osmanlılara Ait Kiril Alfabesinde Belgeler: Erken Osmanlı Diplomatikasına Bir Katkı

### Özet

Hırvatistan'daki Dubrovnik Devlet Arşivlerinin koleksiyonları, geç Orta Çağ Akdeniz'inin incelenmesi için en kapsamlı ve bilgilendirici kaynaklar arasındadır. Mevcut koleksiyonların kıymeti, bu arşiv kayıtlarına dayanarak nesillerdir on dördüncü ve on beşinci yüzyılda Balkanlar'da çeşitli aktörler, devletler veya topluluklar arasındaki siyasi, ekonomik ve sosyal ilişkilere yönelik araştırma yürütenler tarafından da kabul edilmiştir. Dubrovnik'in Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile olan yakın ilişkisi bu ortaçağ toplumunun arşivlerinde korunan ve oldukça önemli miktarda bulunan Osmanlı yazışmalarında da kendisini göstermiş ve diplomatik materyallere yansımıştır. Makalenin odak noktası, mezkûr arşivlerde korunan ve Slav dilinde oluşturulup Kiril alfabesi ile yazılmış, Osmanlı padişahlarının bizzat kendileri tarafından veya imparatorluğun Balkan coğrafyasındaki çeşitli devlet adamları tarafından verilen belge ve mektuplardan müteşekkil kaynak koleksiyonudur. Bu çalışmada, mevcut kaynaklarda araştırmacıların karşılaşılabilecekleri en önemli hususları ve soruları ele alarak, belgelerin geniş bir incelemesini ve kısa bir analizini sunuyorum. Ayrıca, on beşinci yüzyıl Osmanlı diplomatik uygulamaları çerçevesinde belgelerin diplomatik özelliklerini inceleyeceğim ve bu şekilde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Balkanlar'daki Slav topluluklarıyla olan erken dönem ilişkilerinde belge oluşturma ve bilgi aktarma sürecinin daha iyi anlaşılmasına katkı sağlamaya çalışacağım.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dubrovnik, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Bosna, Arşivler, Belgeler, Diplomatika.

### Introduction

Historians have long established that the official political and commercial relations between the small Adriatic coastal commune of Ragusa, also known by its Slavic name as Dubrovnik, and the Ottoman rulers and officials in the Balkan hinterland can be dated to the last decades of the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> For the following one hundred and fifty years most of the written correspondence exchanged between the two sides was conducted in the Slavic language and composed in the Cyrillic

<sup>1</sup> On the history of early relations between the Republic of Ragusa and the Ottoman Empire, see: Иван Божић, *Дубровник и Турска у XIV и XV веку*, Српска академија наука, Београд 1952, pp. 1-22.

script.<sup>2</sup> These documents, naturally, attracted a lot of attention very early on and some were published as early as 1840 together with other Cyrillic letters and charters of various Balkan lords from the late Middle Ages that were deposited in the Dubrovnik archives at the time.<sup>3</sup> Considering their language and script, they were then thought of as Serbian texts and would subsequently be treated as such, with very few attempts ever being made to analyse, publish them alongside or compare them to other surviving contemporary Ottoman diplomatic sources.<sup>4</sup>

- 2 The Ottomans did not only rely on this language and script in their written communication with the Ragusans, but also used them throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in their diplomatic dealings with various rulers and officials from the Kingdom of Hungary, Republic of Venice, Holy Roman Empire, Moldavia, Wallachia, the Grand Duchy of Moscow and others. Although these documents have never been gathered together and analysed in one place, many of them have been published in various shorter editions such as: Aleksa Ivić, “Neue cyrillische Urkunden aus den Wiener Archiven”, *Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, Vol. 30, 1909, pp. 205-214; Антонии Романувъ Годинка, “Отвореный листь султана Баязита II. о миръ его съ Владиславомъ корольомъ угорскимъ и чешскимъ р. 1498”, in: *Šišićev zbornik. Zbornik naučnih radova Ferdi Šišiću povodom šezdesetogodišnjice života 1869-1929 posvećuju prijatelji, štovatelji i učenici*, ed. Grga Novak, Tiskara C. Albrecht, Zagreb 1929, pp. 635-639; Никола Радјочић, “Пет писاما с краја 15. века”, *Јужнословенски филолог*, Vol. 20, 1953-1954, pp. 343-367; Б. О. Унбегаун, “Четири писма турског султана Селима I на српском језику”, in: *Xenia Slavica. Papers presented to Gojko Ružičić on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, 2 February 1969*, eds. Rado L. Lencek – Boris O. Unbegaun, De Gruyter Mouton, The Hague – Paris 1975, pp. 221-228; Ivan Biliarsky, “Une page des relations magyaro-ottomanes vers la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Turcica*, Vol. 32, 2000, pp. 291-305; Катарина Митровић, “Пет писамa деспота Вука Гргуревића”, *Браничевски гласник*, vol. 3-4 (2006), pp. 63-83; Lejla Nakaš, “Bosanski pisar sultana Selima”, *Forum Bosnae*, Vol. 77, 2017, pp. 62-113. See also: Neven Isailović – Aleksandar Krstić, “Serbian Language and Cyrillic Script as a Means of Diplomatic Literacy in South Eastern Europe in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries”, in: *Literacy Experiences Concerning Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania*, eds. Susana Andea – Adinel Ciprian Dincă, Academia Română – Filiala Cluj-Napoca, Cluj-Napoca 2015, pp. 185-195.
- 3 These included documents issued by Sultan Murad II in December 1431, as well as those issued by Sultan Mehmed II in July 1453 and May 1480: Павле Карано-Твртковић, *Србскии стоменциъ, или старе рисоуле, дипломе, повеле, и сношенія босански, сербски, херцеговачки, далматински, и дубровачки кралѣва, царева, банова, деспота, кнезова, войвода и властелина*, У Типографіи Княжества Сербіе, У Београду 1840, no. 113, pp. 185-186; no. 143, pp. 265-268; no. 168, pp. 313-314.
- 4 Along with this Cyrillic correspondence, the Dubrovnik State Archives also contain a significant number of documents issued by the Ottoman sultans or officials in the Turkish and Arabic languages. These sources have been transcribed and published during the twentieth century through the efforts of many esteemed scientists such as, for example, Friedrich Kraelitz, Derviš M. Korkut, Friedrich Giese, Riza Muderizović, Fehim Bajraktarević, Sulejman Bajraktarević, Besim Korkut, Hazim Šabanović and Gliša Elezović. In 2002 the Dubrovnik State Archives initiated a new detailed classification of Ottoman documents, specifically those issued by the sultans, arranging them in chronological order. Apart from cataloguing almost 2.000 imperial documents, the project resulted in a representative monograph written by Vesna Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u spisima osmanskih sultana: s analitičkim inventarom sultanskih spisa serije Acta Turcarum Državnog Arhiva*

After the Congress of Vienna in 1815 the territory of the old Ragusan Republic was incorporated into the Habsburg Empire and by the mid-nineteenth century most of the valuable archival material, including many of these Ottoman Cyrillic documents, had been transferred from Dubrovnik to the *Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv* in the imperial capital. It was then and there that Franz Miklosich, the renowned professor of Slavic philology at the University of Vienna, had a chance to inspect them closely and publish them, along with many other similar documents, in his influential volume titled *Monumenta Serbica*.<sup>5</sup> For almost fifty years this edition remained the only publication where some preserved fragments of the Ottoman Cyrillic correspondence could be consulted by specialists. The solitary addition to Miklosich's list of such documents in that time was a command of Sultan Mehmed II from 1477 that had been transliterated from Cyrillic into the Latin script and copied into a manuscript which included translations of capitulations and fermans issued to the Republic of Ragusa from the mid-fifteenth century until the reign of Sultan Osman II (d. 1622).<sup>6</sup> The first substantial expansion of this corpus came in the beginning of the twentieth century when historian and publicist Antonije Vučetić transcribed eleven, mostly undated documents issued to Ragusa by sultans Mehmed II, Bayezid II, Selim I and Suleyman I, as well

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*u Dubrovniku*, Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, Dubrovnik 2006. However, the Cyrillic documents issued by the Ottoman sultans were not included in this analytical inventory. See also: Vesna Miović – Nikša Selmani, "Turska kancelarija i Acta Turcarum od vremena Dubrovačke republike do danas", *Analitički Zavod za povijesne znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Dubrovniku*, Vol. 45, 2007, pp. 235-284; Vesna Miović, "History of the Ottoman Documents in the State Archives of Dubrovnik (Ragusa)", in: *Papers from the 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the International Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies*, eds. Ekrem Čaušević – Nenad Moacanin – Vjeran Kursar, Lit Verlag, Berlin 2010, pp. 857-863.

- 5 Miklosich's collection contained 18 documents issued by sultans Murad II, Mehmed II, Bayezid II, Selim and Suleyman, as well as 6 documents issued by other Ottoman officials. Franc Miklošič, *Monumenta serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae, Bosnae, Ragusii*, apud Guilelmum Braumüller, Viennae 1858, no. 308, pp. 362-363; no. 339, pp. 409-411; no. 374, pp. 474-475; no. 375, pp. 475-476; no. 389, p. 484; no. 434, pp. 511-512; no. 435, p. 513; no. 437, p. 514; no. 438, p. 515; no. 439, pp. 515-516; no. 447, pp. 523-524; no. 448, pp. 524-525; no. 449, pp. 526-528; no. 450, pp. 528-529; no. 451, p. 529; no. 452, pp. 529-530; no. 454, pp. 534-535; no. 469, pp. 545-546; no. 472, p. 548; no. 473, pp. 548-549; no. 476, pp. 550-552; no. 477, p. 552; no. 478, pp. 552-553; no. 484, p. 557. Miklosich did not only publish the texts of original documents, but also copies that he found in the contemporary collection of privileges, i.e. *Liber privilegiorum*, which is better known under the title of *Codex Ragusinus*.
- 6 Константин Јиречек, *Споменици српски*, Српска краљевска академија, Београд 1892, no. 95, pp. 89-90.

as several letters from various Ottoman commanders or officials.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the fact that he published them from 1906 to 1908 as a series of separate and disconnected articles in a rather obscure journal which was difficult to get hold of even at the time of its publication ultimately meant that his efforts remained for the most part unrecognized.

Nevertheless, the most significant advance in the discovery and publishing of Ottoman Cyrillic documents was made by Ćiro Truhelka, art historian and curator of Bosnia and Herzegovina's National Museum in Sarajevo, who in 1910, while conducting research in the Dubrovnik archives, came across an impressive number of various diplomatic texts issued by Ottoman rulers and officials in the Slavic language. According to his report, those documents used to be kept in sacks in the former Ragusan customs building, known as Divona or Sponza, and had only recently been transferred to the Rector's palace in Dubrovnik. Looking through these volumes Truhelka encountered around eighty original Ottoman sultanic acts written in Cyrillic, dating from 10 July 1430 to 1 May 1525. Three of these were issued by Sultan Murad II, thirty-two by Sultan Mehmed II, forty-two by Sultan Bayezid II, four by Sultan Selim I and one by Sultan Suleyman I. Apart from that, he also found a significant number of copies or translations of otherwise lost documents that were composed either in Ragusa or in Istanbul, as well as some fifteen documents written in Arabic or Turkish. Truhelka also included in his edition around forty different and previously unknown Cyrillic letters that the Ragusans received from various Ottoman governors and administrators in the Balkans, mostly from the neighbouring sancakbeys of Bosnia and Herzegovina, individual beylerbeys, viziers, dragomans, etc., and he published them all in the year following his discovery, together with some other texts he found elsewhere in the archives, including those already previously issued by Miklosich, Jireček and Vučetić. The edited sources were supplemented with an extensive, perhaps now somewhat outdated commentary on the political relations between Ragusa and the Ottomans, a detailed account of the various prosopographical and archontological issues that stemmed from the published material, brief biographical sketches of Ottoman officials who governed the Balkans in the sultan's name, along with several useful photographic reproductions of the documents themselves.<sup>8</sup>

7 Антоније Вучетић, "Споменици дубровачки", *Српј*, vol. 5 (1906), pp. 151-152; vol. 6 (1907), pp. 334-335, 381-384, 431-432, 479-480, 524-528, 572-576, 621-624, 718-720, 767-768, 814-816, 862-864, 905-912, 958-960, 1008, 1055-1056, 1103-1104; vol. 7 (1908), p. 48, 221.

8 Ćiro Truhelka, "Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive", *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Vol. 23, 1911, pp. 1-162; 303-349; 437-484. The study was also published as a separate, standalone volume under the same title and with the same layout, but with different

Not long after this work appeared in print, Karl Kovač, the then director of the Dubrovnik archives, added 15 new acts to Truhelka's list, publishing them in the same manner, with ten imperial documents and a further five issued by various Ottoman representatives, including a couple of letters sent by Mustafa Milivojević, the sancakbey of Herzegovina, and a couple by Hersekzade Ahmed Pasha from the time he was vizier. Kovač also transcribed the brief Cyrillic comments and dates that he found on some of the Turkish language documents, which was certainly a welcome contribution.<sup>9</sup> The next increase of Truhelka's corpus of Ottoman Cyrillic texts came in 1932 when the famed Serbian historian Gliša Elezović published an additional four such documents, as well as four other letters that had been transliterated from the Cyrillic original into the Latin script.<sup>10</sup>

By that time the archival materials which were transferred during the first half of the nineteenth century from Dubrovnik to the *Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv* in Vienna had been returned to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, according to the treaty signed in Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1919. However, instead of being taken back to where they were originally removed from, the documents were kept in the Serbian Royal Academy in Belgrade so that they could be transcribed and published in an edition that would be considered as definitive. This work was conducted by one of the leading Slavic philologists of his time, Ljubomir Stojanović (d. 1930), who unfortunately passed away before he could redact his transcriptions of Ottoman Cyrillic records and prepare them for publication. Nevertheless, four years after his death they appeared within the second volume of Stojanović's major source collection titled "Old Serbian Charters and Letters", with 220 documents pertaining to relations between Ragusa and the Ottomans. Some of these were previously unknown, but the collection mostly consisted of those that had already been published elsewhere and also included copies of letters sent by Ragusans to various Ottoman officials in the Balkans.<sup>11</sup> Considering the fact that it had been the most complete edition

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pagination: Idem, *Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive*, Zemaljska štamparija, Sarajevo 1911. Cf. Idem, "Dubrovnik Arşivinde Türk – İslav Vesikalari", *İstanbul Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol. 1, 1955, pp. 39-65. The documents in Turkish and Arabic were transcribed by Sejfudin Kemura and then checked by Fehim Spaho and Safvet-beg Bašagić-Redžepašić.

9 Karl Kovač, "Nekoliko slavjenskih listina", *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Vol. 24, 1912, pp. 397-412.

10 Gliša Elezović, *Tursko-srpski spomenici dubrovačkog arhiva*, Izdavačka knjižarnica Gece Kona, Beograd 1932, pp. 4-15.

11 Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma. Knjiga I. Dubrovnik i susedi njegovi. Drugi deo*, Srpska kraljevska akademija, Beograd – Sr. Karlovci 1934, nos. 798-1018, pp. 217-408.

until then, notwithstanding the many mistakes in the transcription and dating of different texts, this publication remained as the principal sourcebook of Ottoman Cyrillic documents until the present day. Even the shelfmarks of some of these documents, once they were catalogued upon being returned to the Dubrovnik archives after the Second World War, used to follow the numerical order that was established by Stojanović.

In the second half of the twentieth century the collection was expanded only with the discovery of Sultan Mehmed II's Cyrillic *ahdname* issued to Ragusa in 1458,<sup>12</sup> while the 129 known Ragusan documents of sultans Mehmed II, Bayezid II and Selim I were translated into French with an extensive commentary and numerous useful remarks by Boško I. Bojović, making the materials more accessible to a broader readership.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, due to issues of space and time, this analysis and translation did not include the obviously associated and interconnected documents that were sent to the Republic of Ragusa by many different Ottoman officials or administrators, and considering the advances made in historical knowledge, archival science and applied diplomacy, it would be desirable to have an updated, complete and systematic modern edition of all such texts that have been preserved in the Dubrovnik State Archives.

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Although early modern chroniclers claimed that the Ragusan commune had established diplomatic contacts with Emir Orhan (d. 1362) as early as 1365 [!],<sup>14</sup> these ideas were dispelled in the nineteenth century by Konstantin Jireček who was the first to point out that they were in fact confabulations designed to enhance the image of the Ragusans at the Ottoman court in later times, and that no traces of these relations exist in surviving contemporary sources.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the earliest

12 Бранислав М. Недељковић, “Дубровачко-турски уговор од 23. октобра 1458. године”, *Зборник Филозофског факултета у Београду*, vol. 11 (1970), pp. 363-392.

13 Boško I. Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire Ottoman (1430-1520) de Murad II à Selim I<sup>er</sup>*, Éditions de l'Association “Pierre Belon”, Paris 1998. Cf. Idem, “Dubrovnik et les Ottomans (1430-1472). 20 actes de Murād II et de Mehmed II en médio-serbe”, *Turcica*, Vol. 19, 1987, pp. 119-173.

14 “Ma la repubblica fece un altro bel trattato di prevenzione che poi nei tempi avvenire le servi molto. Già abbiamo detto, del 1365 aver ella fatto un trattato di commercio con Orhane; figliolo d'Ottomano, gran Signore de' Turchi”, *Chronica Ragusina Junii Resti (ab origine urbis usque ad annum 1451) item Joannis Gundulæ (1451-1484)*, ed. Speratus Nodilo, Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zagreb 1893, p. 153.

15 Konstantin Jireček, “Stojan Novaković, Срби и Турци XIV и XV века. Историјске студије о првим борбама с најездом турском пре и после боја на Косову. Београд 1938, 8°, VII + 397 S. (Издање Чупићеве задужбине №. 33)”, *Archiv für Slavische Philologie*, Vol. 17, 1895, p.

recorded instance in which the Ragusans sent their ambassador to an Ottoman military commander was in August 1388,<sup>16</sup> while the first known official embassy sent to the Ottoman sultan was mentioned in May 1392.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, providing they existed at all, no written texts resulting from these contacts have remained to the present day. The same can be said of the confirmations and charters referenced in some of the contemporary responses that the Ragusan government sent after receiving messages from various Ottoman officials in the Balkan hinterland. Namely, on 28 March 1396 the kadi of Gluhavica in southern Serbia sent a letter to Ragusa, confirming the “word of the great emperor” that the Ragusan merchants could travel across the Ottoman Empire without obstruction, under the condition that they paid the usual tariffs.<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to determine whether this “word” (*сѣра*, lit. faith, meaning promise, guarantee or trust) was presented at the time in written form since its mention survives only in a copy of a Ragusan response, but a couple of years later, on 26 May 1398, the “word” was confirmed once again by Pasha Yiğit Bey, the marcher lord of Skopje.<sup>19</sup> On both of these occasions it is understood that Ottoman officials sent written communications to Ragusa, and they received responses in the Slavic language and Cyrillic script, which they obviously used and understood at the time. Furthermore, this correspondence was continued and maintained in the following years until 1402, when it was abruptly stopped after the Ottoman defeat at Ankara, with many mentions of letters exchanged between the two sides (*књигу твоју примисмо и разумесмо, писање твоје милости примисмо и разумесмо, а саде примисмо писање твоје милости и разумесмо*).<sup>20</sup> However, the first concrete evidence that a sultanic document was issued to the Ragusan commune can be dated to 7 October 1399, when Feriz, the kephale of Zvečan, brought to Ragusa the “charter of great lord emperor

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260; Idem, *Die Bedeutung von Ragusa in der Handelsgeschichte des Mittelalters*, Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien 1899, p. 34, 87.

16 Emir O. Filipović, *Bosansko kraljevstvo i Osmansko carstvo (1386-1463)*, Orijentalni institut u Sarajevu, Sarajevo 2019, pp. 94-95.

17 Ibidem, p. 142.

18 Медо Пуцић, *Споменици Србски од 1395. до 1423 то ест писма писана од Републике дубровачке краљевима, Деспитима, Войводама и Кнезовима Србским, Босанским и Приморским, Књигопечатња Княжества србског, У Београду 1858, no. 7, pp. 4-5.*

19 Ibidem, no. 25, pp. 14-15.

20 Miloš Ivanović, “Cyrillic correspondence between the Commune of Ragusa and Ottomans from 1396 to 1458”, in: *State and Society in the Balkans before and after establishment of Ottoman rule*, eds. Srđan Rudić – Selim Aslantaş, The Institute of History Belgrade – Yunus Emre Enstitüsü, Turkish Cultural Centre Belgrade, Belgrade 2017, pp. 43-63.



Bayezid with the emperor's sign" (*нам донесе лист великаго господара цара Баязита с белегом царевице*).<sup>21</sup> It is unclear whether the Ragusans kept the deed after it was presented to them and whether they deposited it in the Cathedral Church of St. Mary among the other similar charters in their possession, as was customary, and therefore it is also not known how, when and under which circumstances could such an important document later be lost.

Written correspondence with Sultan Bayezid is also frequently referenced in other Ragusan sources from the fifteenth century,<sup>22</sup> but unfortunately, none of these messages have been preserved. In fact, the earliest surviving written Ottoman Cyrillic document in the Dubrovnik archives is a letter from Sultan Murad II that can be dated to 10 July 1430.<sup>23</sup> (*Fig. 1*) Since then, until the reign of Sultan Suleyman I, the Ragusans exchanged literally hundreds of Slavic letters with Ottoman rulers and officials, and the majority of them have been preserved in their original form. This makes the collection completely remarkable, especially considering that late fourteenth and fifteenth century products of the Ottoman chancery in any language or script are still extremely rare. Most of these documents are imperial letters (*hatt-i hümayün*), *fermans*, *buyruktus* or *ahdnames*, i.e. treaties, confirmations of *haraç* payments as well as various privileges (*mülkname*, *temlikname*) and acts concerning different legal matters, but a great deal of them were also remnants of the rich epistolary exchange that the Ragusan government maintained with its immediate neighbours, the governors of Ottoman provinces in the Balkans.<sup>24</sup> (*Fig. 2*) Therefore the corpus of preserved Ottoman Cyrillic documents in Dubrovnik can easily be divided into two recognizable categories; those acts that were issued by the imperial chancery, and those issued by the

21 Пуцић, *Споменици Србски*, no. 47, p. 25.

22 Божић, *Дубровник и Турска у XIV и XV веку*, p. 21.

23 Truhelka, "Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive", no. 1, pp. 4-5; Стојановић, *Старе српске повеље и писма. Књига I. Дубровник и суседи његови. Други део*, no. 811, pp. 227-228.

24 On the characteristics and terminology used to categorize these diplomatic documents, see: Jan Reychman – Ananiasz Zajaczkowski, *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomats*, Mouton, The Hague – Paris 1968, pp. 135-136; Mübahat S. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili (Diplomatik)*, Türk Tarih Kurumu, Ankara 2018, pp. 99-220. Cf. Nejdet Gök – Kürşad U. Akpınar, "An Analysis and Comparison of Berât and Fermân in Ottoman Diplomats", *Bulgarian Historical Review*, Vol. 35, 2007, pp. 38-49. See also: Hazim Šabanović, "Turski diplomatski izvori za istoriju naših naroda", *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju i istoriju jugoslovenskih naroda pod turskom vladavinom*, Vol. 1, 1950, pp. 117-149; Valery Stojanow, *Die Entstehung und Entwicklung der osmanisch-türkischen Paläographie und Diplomatik mit einer Bibliographie*, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, Berlin 1983; M. Tayyib Gökbilgin, *Osmanlı Paleografya ve Diplomatik İlmî*, Enderun Kitabevi, İstanbul 1992.

chanceries of the various Ottoman officials. We now know of 139 documents in total that were sent to Ragusa by a successive line of sultans from Murad II to Suleyman I, and they can further be classified into two groups depending to whom they were addressed; those sent directly to the Rector and nobility of Ragusa, most of which are in fact receipts of the annual *haraç* payments, and those sent to various Ottoman governors and administrators in order to resolve different commercial, political, legal or territorial matters which concerned the Ragusan Republic. As for the acts sent by the Ottoman officials, there are around 65 of them, issued by different pashas, beys, sancakbeys, beylerbeys, viziers, amaldars, dizdars, dragomans or kadis, and they usually pertain to diplomatic and trade relations, judicial settlements of different debts, property disputes and complaints, but sometimes they deal with more mundane issues, such as the exchange of physicians, books, gifts, entertainers, etc. Considering the sheer volume and nature of these documents, their contents serve as an invaluable source for all kinds of research topics on the late medieval and early modern history of the Balkans and the Ottoman Empire. However, the misplaced understanding that knowledge of Slavic languages is not one of the essential requirements for early Ottoman studies has probably contributed most to the fact that these documents have not yet been thoroughly examined or used by historians dealing with the more general aspects of Ottoman history.

From their texts we learn that these documents are usually referred to as “letter” (*књига*, lit. book), “hüküm” (*хукум*), “hüccet” (*хожат, хужет*), and “order” or “command” (*зановѣд*). For the most part they are written on very high-quality paper, probably produced in Italy, of oblong shape with their length far exceeding their width, as was the case with other Ottoman acts from that time.<sup>25</sup> In this they completely differed from contemporary letters and charters created in the chanceries of Serbia or Bosnia, many of which were written on parchment and with a more rectangular form. The writing is executed in a black ink of an extremely good organic composition, meaning that all of the documents remain clearly legible today as they were at the time they were written. Only the *tughra* and sometimes the initial letter or certain special words that needed to be emphasized were written in gold or different colour inks. In some cases, either the

25 Reychman – Zajączkowski, *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomats*, p. 138; Küttükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili*, pp. 15-36. On the paper of Ottoman documents, albeit based on examples from later times, see: Franz Babinger, “Appunti sulle cartiere e sull’importanza di carta nell’impero Ottomano specialmente da Venezia”, *Oriente Moderno*, Vol. 11/8, 1931, pp. 406-415.

whole document or just the *tughra* were sprinkled with gold sand which still glitters today.<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 3) As for the language and script, the documents were written in the vernacular Štokavian dialect of the Central South Slavic area and the Cyrillic diplomatic cursive which was commonly applied in diplomatic correspondence between the Balkan Slavic states at the time.<sup>27</sup> Both the language and script were then called Serbian,<sup>28</sup> meaning that the whole correspondence is still more often considered as belonging to the Serbian diplomatic and literary tradition rather than to the Ottoman one. This is perhaps justified from a linguistic point of view,<sup>29</sup> but these documents must not be observed in isolation from general diplomatic practices of the Ottoman chancery. Namely, it has already been well established that the Ottomans also composed documents in other “western languages”, such as Greek, Latin, Italian and perhaps even German, and that some of them were created as translations from the Turkish originals. Sometimes the chancery would produce copies in two languages at the same time and most of the receipts for the payment of *haraç* that have been preserved in the Dubrovnik archives have in fact been translated from Turkish.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, these Ottoman Cyrillic

- 26 Reychman – Zajączkowski, *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomatics*, p. 139. For the *tughra*, see: Paul Wittek, “Notes sur la Tughra Ottomane”, *Byzantion*, vol. 20 (1950), pp. 267-293; Ernst Kühnel, “Die osmanische Tughra”, *Kunst des Orients*, Vol. 2, 1955, pp. 69-82; Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili*, pp. 71-76.
- 27 Kristian Paskojević, *Razvojni procesi diplomatske ćirilice minuskule u dokumentima srednjovjekovne dubrovačke kancelarije*, Unpublished PhD, University of Zagreb, Zagreb 2018, pp. 252-253, 358.
- 28 Стојановић, *Старе српске повеље и писма. Књига I. Дубровник и суседи његови. Други део*, no. 952, p. 351.
- 29 See especially the works of Vladimir Polomac who has analysed the linguistic, orthographic and dialectological aspects of some of these Ottoman Cyrillic documents: Владимир Р. Поломац – Тамара Н. Лутовац, “Два писма турског султана Мурата II Дубровнику (текстолошка и језичка анализа)”, *Наслеђе. Часопис за књижевност, језик, уметност и културу*, vol. 28 (2014), pp. 9-24; Владимир Р. Поломац, “Српски као дипломатски језик Југоисточне Европе XVI века (на примеру писма Мехмед-паше Соколовића Андрашу Баторију)”, in: *Српски језик: статус, систем, употреба. Зборник у част проф. Милошу Ковачевићу*, eds. Јелена Петковић – Владимир Поломац, Филолошко-уметнички факултет, Крагујевац 2018, pp. 639-652; Idem, “О графици и правопису у писмима Ахмет-паше Херцеговића”, *Philologia Mediana*, Vol. 11, 2019, pp. 35-47; Idem, “Српски као дипломатски језик на утарском двору XV века (на примеру писма Стефана Баторија Али-бегу Михалоглу)”, *Studia Slavica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 66, 2021, pp. 159–171.
- 30 Nicolas Vatin, “L’emploi du grec comme langue diplomatique par les Ottomans (fin du XV<sup>e</sup>-début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle)”, in: *Istanbul et les langues orientales. Actes du colloque organisé par l’IFÉA et l’INALCO à l’occasion du bicentenaire de l’Ecole des Langues Orientales*, ed. Frédéric Hitzel, L’Harmattan, Paris – Montréal 1997, pp. 41-47; Gilles Veinstein, “The Ottoman Administration and the Problem

documents contain certain traces borrowed from Byzantine diplomatic traditions and the Greek language, such as the solemn word of salutation – “херетисање” (Gr. *χαρῆτισμος*), among other things, or the fact that they sometimes date their texts according to the Byzantine calendar from the date of creation.<sup>31</sup> It is quite possible that these were taken directly from Byzantine documents instead of from Slavic ones and that the Ottoman texts composed in the Cyrillic script contain a greater number of distinctive Turkish diplomatic features than has generally been assumed. Of course, they combine and merge various sets of diplomatic practices and were to the greatest extent influenced by the late medieval Slavic chanceries of the Balkans, but the fact that these documents were predominantly thought of as Serbian, in terms of language, script and diplomatic tradition, rather than Ottoman – as is evidenced by the titles of the publications in which they were edited and the subsequent approaches of later researchers – has to an extent distorted the fact that this documentary corpus was and is primarily Ottoman and that it needed to be considered in its own right.

As was the case with other Ottoman documents of the time which were composed in different languages, the Cyrillic acts also had several clearly distinguishable and recognizable internal segments that were arranged in the usual order, but not many proper attempts have been made to compare and contrast them to documents issued by the rulers and nobles of the late medieval Balkans, or to highlight the similarities and differences that existed between the two groups of sources. Thus far, only Vančo Boškov formulated and attempted to answer the question whether these Ottoman Cyrillic documents belonged to the Serbian or the Ottoman diplomatic system, and whether there was a direct correlation between the two.<sup>32</sup> He was right to point out that they share certain distinctive characteristics of deeds created in the late medieval Slavic chanceries of the Balkans, but that they also have unmistakable features of standard Ottoman

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of Interpreters”, in: *The Great Ottoman Turkish Civilisation*, vol. 3, ed. Kemal Çiçek, Yeni Türkiye, Ankara 2000, pp. 607-615; Vesna Miović, “Dragomano nostro della Porta: Dragomans of the Porte in the Service of Dubrovnik in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries”, *Dubrovnik Annals*, Vol. 24, 2020, pp. 65-95.

31 Стојановић, *Старе српске повеље и писма. Књига I. Дубровник и суседи његови. Други део*, no. 812, pp. 229-231; no. 822, p. 238; no. 824, pp. 240-241; no. 861, pp. 267-268; no. 954, p. 352. On the influence of Byzantine documents on the Ottomans, see: Franz Babinger, “Byzantinisch-osmanische Grenzstudien”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, Vol. 30, 1929, p. 415.

32 Vančo Boškov, “Odnos srpske i turske diplomatike”, *Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis*, Vol. 19, 1980, pp. 219-236.

diplomatic documents composed in Turkish. He concluded his brief analysis by stating that the documents belong to a particular system which contains elements of both diplomatic practices.<sup>33</sup>

Although the collection is extremely diverse in terms of the kind of texts it contains and the matter which they treat, and that certain documents, depending on their purpose and character, understandably differ in their composition, some distinctive characteristics of the Cyrillic acts preserved in the Dubrovnik archives can be discerned regardless of their category, type or form. This can most easily be done by relying on the established general arrangement of the internal structure of Ottoman documents.<sup>34</sup>

### I. *INTRODUCTORY PROTOCOL*

#### 1. *Invocatio (Invocation)*

The invocation that is usually present in other Ottoman documents is conspicuously lacking from those composed in the Slavic language.

#### 2. *Tughra (Imperial cipher)*

The *tughra*, referred to as the “exalted” or “powerful sign” (*узвишени билъез; узможни билъез*), is usually well executed, relatively large and appears regularly on the top part of all imperial documents. It is sometimes inserted after several written sentences of text, meaning that scribes wanted to make better use of the available space. In certain cases, the ink of the *tughra* was dried by a scattering of gold dust which has still retained its sparkling character. The acts issued by Ottoman officials usually carry a *tughra*form *pençe* that is sometimes located above the text, but more often placed in the side margins or at the very end of the document. (*Figs. 4 and 5*)

#### 3. *Intitulatio (Intitulation)*

The imperial documents all begin with the signature which indicates the title and name of the sultan issuing the act, along with the name of his father and predecessor. From the time of Sultan Mehmed II, the name and title (“great lord, great Amir Sultan”) are sometimes preceded by a devotional formula: “by the

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 234.

<sup>34</sup> Reychman – Zajączkowski, *Handbook of Ottoman-Turkish Diplomats*, p. 140; Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili*, pp. 100-113. Cf. Gökbilgin, *Osmanlı Paleografya ve Diplomatik İlmî*, pp. 53-79; Boškov, “Odnos srpske i turske diplomatike”, pp. 222-229; Bojović, *Raguse et l'Empire Ottoman (1430-1520)*, pp. 173-178.

grace of God” (*милостију Божијом*), and various extravagant epithets (“most brave”, “most wise”, “most commendable”, “most famous”, “most honourable”, etc.). The imperial title evolved parallel to Ottoman territorial expansion, so it takes different shape as time progressed, from the fairly uniform and simple “great lord and to all Eastern and Western lands emperor”, which was the most common expression in documents issued by Mehmed II, to more elaborate enumerations of the lands over which the sultans ruled from the time of Bayezid II, Selim I and Suleyman I (including the Coast, Rum, Karaman, Anatolia, Romania, Persia, Egypt, Arabia, etc.). The documents issued by the Ottoman governors or administrators also give the name and title at the beginning, sometimes with the devotional formula that also indicates they held their office through the mercy and will of the ruler. In the imperial *ahdnames* which regulated the status and relationship of the Ragusan commune, the title would be followed by a long oath filled with numerous religious references (“I swear by God, who has created the sky and land, and I swear by the great prophet Muhammed, and seven books that we Muslims believe in, and 124,000 prophets of God, and by my father’s soul and my grandfather’s and my own soul, and by the sabre with which I gird myself, and by my head”).

#### 4. *Inscriptio* (*Inscription*)

The name and title of the recipient were given in the inscription which remained rather brief, fairly uniform and changed very little over time, which is understandable considering that the majority of the documents from the corpus were addressed to the rector and nobility of the Ragusan commune. Depending on the occasion and the person who was sending the act, the inscription could also occasionally contain a number of epithets designed to flatter the recipient and highlight the close relationship between the two sides (for example: “most honourable, most wise and most decorated rector and nobility of Ragusa”).

#### 5. *Salutatio* (*Salutation*)

The inscription would immediately be followed by a formal greeting and wishes of well-being, the kind of which appear in other Slavic documents from the same time. In lengthier and more elaborate letters, the salutation would usually have a little more substance, but otherwise would remain very short and simple, delivered in only a few words (for instance: “kind salutations and rejoicing”; “we send you our joyous greeting”; “accept the grace and health from God”; or even just: “love and friendship”, etc.).

## *II. Context*

### *6. Narratio et dispositio (Narration and disposition)*

After the introductory protocol, the majority of the Ottoman Cyrillic documents would move directly onto stating the reasons why the act was issued, sometimes describing the particular case in great detail. These elements are most interesting and useful for the better understanding of various political events or commercial transactions as they usually give a lot of valuable information about the individuals who were involved in the matter that the document aimed to settle. The narrative explanation would then be followed by a decision and order or command.

### *7. Sanctio et corroboratio (Sanction and corroboration)*

The texts of the documents would usually end with a short reiteration in imperative form which stated that the command was to be obeyed along with a stern warning that the recipient was not to do otherwise. Corroborative elements were not particularly announced and seldom given, most probably as the *tughra* or *pençe* were considered sufficient enough for the validation of authenticity.

## *III. Eschatocol*

### *8. Datatio (Tarih, Date)*

Many acts from the collection remain dated very loosely or even completely undated due to the Ottoman custom of regularly dating documents by only indicating the month and the day when the text was composed, which often makes it necessary to consult other available elements or sources in order to determine the exact time when the act was issued. Moreover, there are various inconsistencies in the writing of the date which mostly follows the Julian calendar and calculates years from the birth of Christ (*в лето рождства Христова*), but dates are also sometimes given according to the Byzantine (“beginning of the World”, *почелѣ свата*) or Islamic calendars (“in the year of Muhammed”, *в лето Мехметово, лета Мехмета*). Occasionally, the scribes in the Ragusan chancery would write a brief note in Italian on the back of the document indicating the date and year when the letter was received, which makes it possible to date the document with more certainty or precision. Otherwise, some acts can be dated according to the arrival of Ottoman messengers or couriers who brought them to Ragusa, providing that their arrival was recorded in the minute books of the Ragusan councils. It is important to note that the chronology still remains a problematic issue since many of these documents are incorrectly dated in older publications.

### 9. *Locus (Place of writing)*

The place in which the document was issued was regularly indicated and would usually come immediately after the date. Naturally, since 1453 most of them were composed in the imperial capital whose name is frequently given in its Slavic variant as *Tsarigrad*, meaning the city of the emperor. On a few occasions the city was also named Constantinople, New Rome (*у Новем Риму*), and a couple of times it was also called Istanbul (*Станбол*). The documents were also written in Bursa and Edirne, but the range of places where the sultans issued some of these acts is varied and includes, among others, Gebze, Karahisar, Yeni Pazar, Trikala, Sazlıdere, Vize, Skopje, Yambol, Sivas, etc. Unfortunately, the documents issued by the Ottoman officials do not always specify the location.

### 10. *Mühür (Seal)*

The imprinted wax seal as an element of validation is very obviously absent from the Ottoman Cyrillic documents and appears only on a couple of them. These examples may be considered as exceptions which confirm the rule. Unfortunately, both seals are in a very bad condition and no inscriptions or images on them can be distinguished with any amount of certainty.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The collection of Ottoman Cyrillic documents from the Dubrovnik State Archives represents an outstanding resource for the investigation of early Ottoman history, but it has not yet been afforded appropriate attention in the more general works from the field of Ottoman studies. In fact, it can even be said that historians of the Ottoman Empire remained disinterested in these documents, despite the fact that they were made available for consultation in an adequate critical edition more than a hundred years ago. This is primarily due to the obvious linguistic barrier that exists in the field since they were composed in a language and script which were not traditionally considered as essential for students of Ottoman history, but also because they have seldom been presented as Ottoman documents in their own right. Previous research attempts have mostly focused on their specific language and script, and even though traces of Slavic diplomatic practices can clearly be recognized within them, the majority of these acts undoubtedly contain distinct elements of Ottoman diplomatic traditions stemming from the Islamic worldview. From the writing materials and the very shape of the paper, along with other immediately recognizable outward signs such as the *tughra* and *pençe*, to the



internal structure and composition of the document, which includes the specific dating formula and lack of wax seals, these diplomatic materials need not only to be considered from a comparative, but also from a distinctly Ottoman perspective. Furthermore, as they contain an abundance of information on language and communication, the political and economic circumstances of their time, the itinerary, commercial or legal activities of the sultans and various officials, as well as providing key evidence for the development of state institutions, offices and ceremonies, these documents certainly deserve to be taken into account and inspected in greater detail by historians of the early Ottoman Empire.

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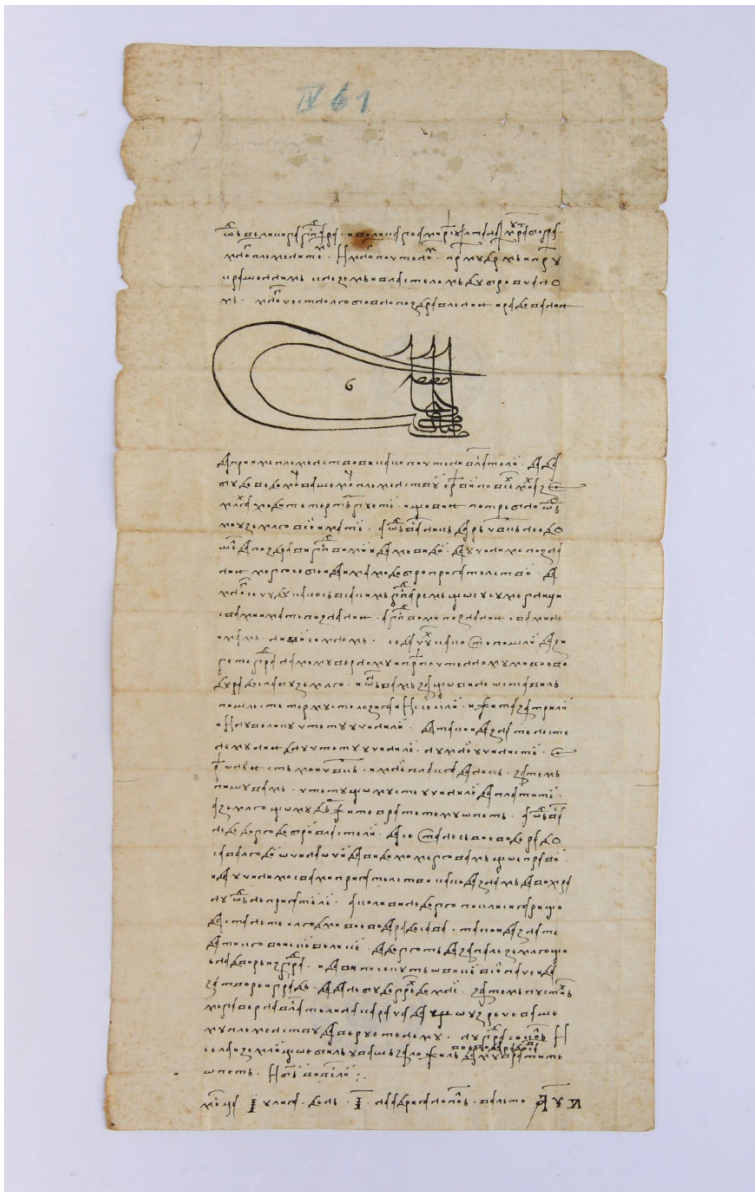
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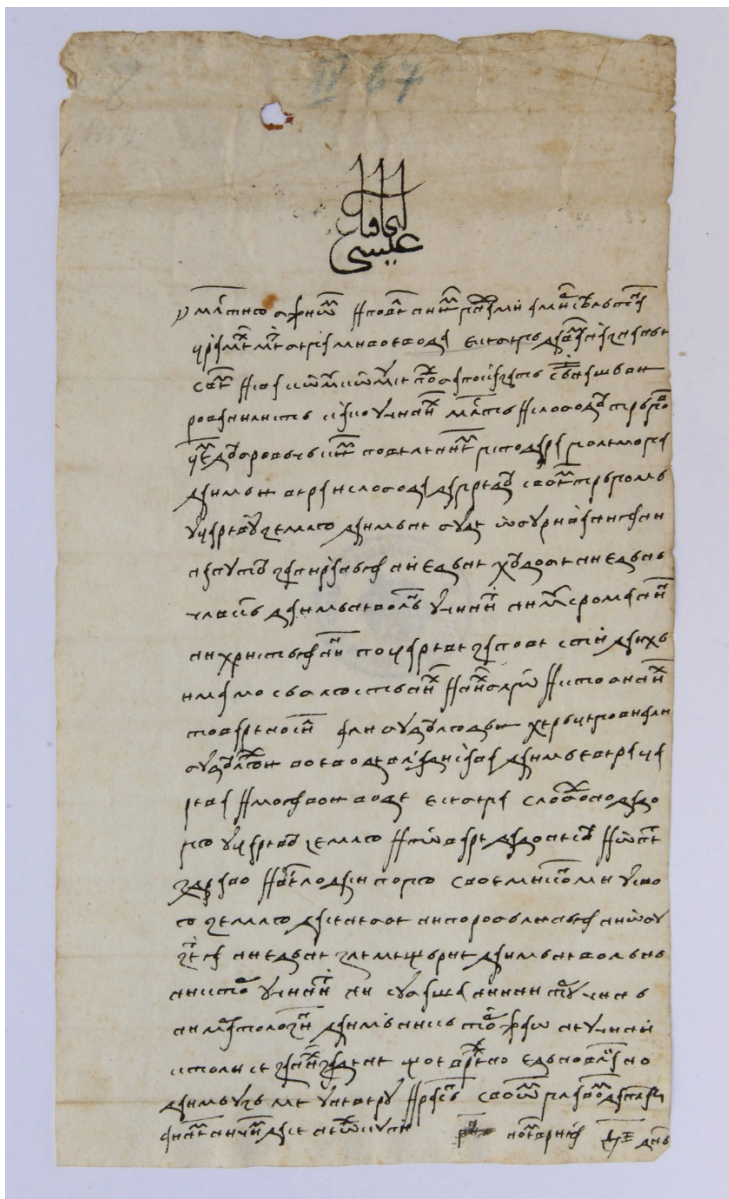
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Appendices

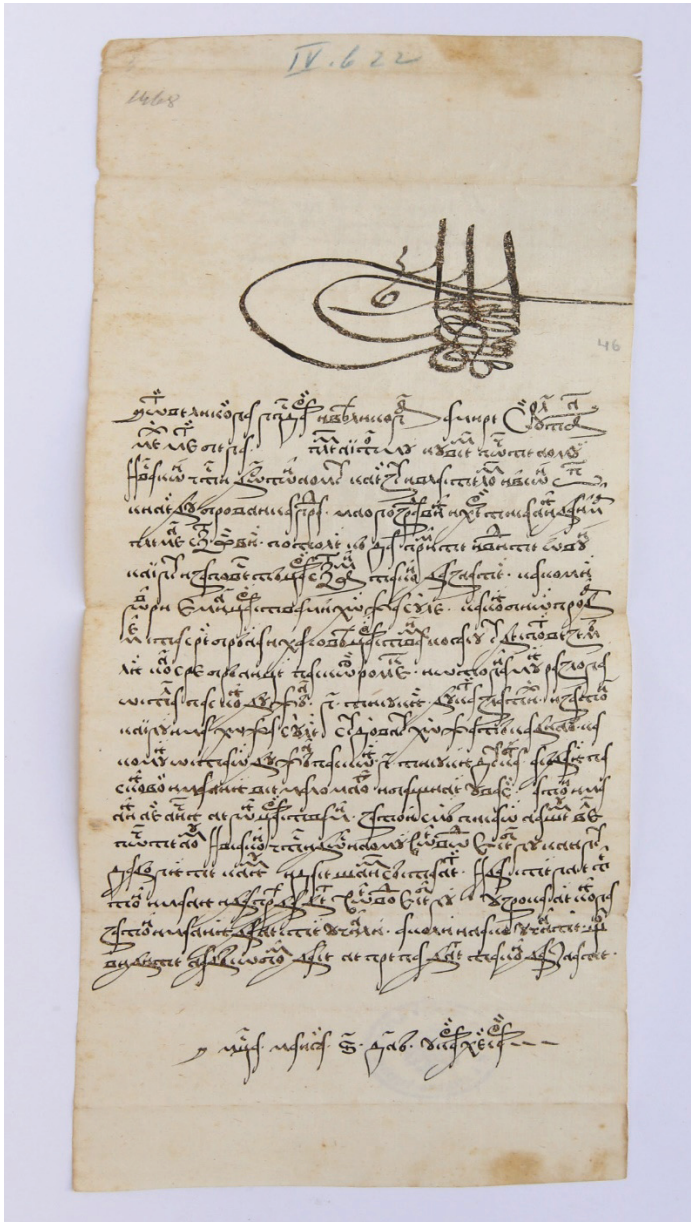


**Fig 1:** Letter of Sultan Murad II to the rector and nobles of Ragusa, 10 July 1430  
(Dubrovnik State Archives, *Prilozi arhivskim serijama* IV b, no. 1)

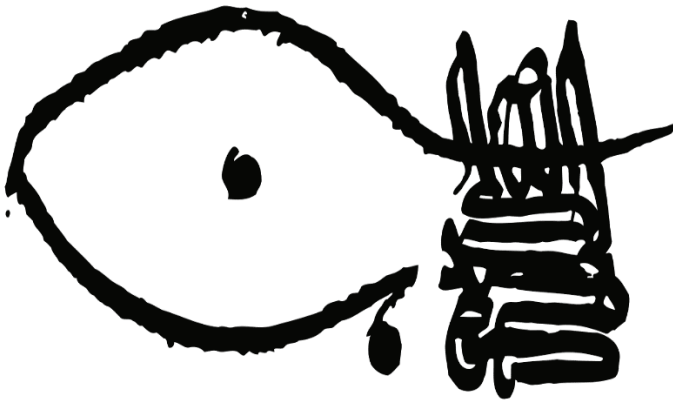


**Fig 2:** The grant of trade freedoms for Ragusan merchants from Voivode Isa Bey Isaković, 14 November 1464 (?)  
(Dubrovnik State Archives, *Prilozi arhivskim serijama* IV b, no. 7)





**Fig 3:** Letter of Sultan Mehmed II to the rector and nobles of Ragusa, 6 May 1468  
(Dubrovnik State Archives, *Prilozi arhivskim serijama* IV b, no. 22)



**Fig. 4:** Pence of Grand Vizier Mahmud Pasha Angelović from a document issued on 19 July 1463  
(Dubrovnik State Archives, *Prilozi arhivskim serijama* IV b, no. 15)



**Fig. 5:** Pence of Mustafa Milivojević, sancakbey of Hercegovina, from a document issued in March 1490  
(Dubrovnik State Archives, *Prilozi arhivskim serijama* IV b, no. 91)