Names in Translation: Multilingual Administration and Name Adaptation in Venetian Dalmatia (Fifteenth-Sixteenth Century)

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This article examines the multilingual dynamics of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Dalmatia, with a focus on the city of Spalato (modern Split). It argues that the region's linguistic landscape was defined not by strict language hierarchies or rigid ethnic divisions but by a pragmatic and adaptive multilingualism. Latin and Italian dominated the spheres of formal administration, law, and commerce, functioning as the official languages of record. However, Slavic – spoken by the majority population – remained the principal medium of everyday communication and played a persistent, though often informal, role in public and administrative life. While Slavic was seldom used in official written documents, Latin and Italian records reflect Slavic input through references to translations, lexical borrowings, and direct quotations. Venetian authorities pragmatically accommodated the linguistic realities of their subjects by relying on translators, accepting bilingual communication, and tolerating unofficial scribes proficient in Slavic.

The article first discusses the social distribution of language skills and multilingual spaces within the city, before giving an overview of the use of Slavic as an administrative language in the communication between town and hinterland. Slavic lexical borrowings and the incorporation of direct quotations into Latin and Italian texts are addressed next. The focus then switches to the flexible use of both Slavic and Romance personal names as well as the challenges involved in recording Slavic place names. All this points to a society in which language use was driven by functionality rather than ethnicity. This »Slavo-Romance symbiosis« challenges binary models of identity and instead suggests a deeply integrated urban culture. Attempts to classify Dalmatian populations strictly by linguistic or onomastic markers are shown to be inadequate in capturing the region's social complexity.

Keywords: Spalato/Split, Venice, multilingualism, urban history, administration, onomastics, Slavic, Croatian, Italian, Latin

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Introduction

The study of multilingual practices in pre-modern Eurasian societies offers critical insights into the development and functionality of administration as well as the interaction between language, power, and identity. One particularly illustrative case is found in the Adriatic region during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, specifically in the Venetian administration of Dalmatia. At the intersection of Latin, Romance, and Slavic linguistic traditions, Dalmatia provides a compelling example of administrative multilingualism that reveals both the possibilities and limitations of communication in a polyglot urban setting.

This article will take the city of Spalato (Split) as an example to explore the coexistence and interaction of Latin, Italian, and Slavic languages in the urban administrative practice of Dalmatia.[1] After an overview of the linguistic environment and multilingual spaces within the city, it will briefly address the use of Slavic as a written administrative language, touching upon the important role of Spalato's contacts with Slavic-speaking (and -writing!) communities in its surrounding areas. It will then discuss Slavic lexical borrowings and direct quotations within Latin and Italian texts, before turning its focus to an aspect that has frequently been linked to discussions of ethnic identity: names. What was the social distribution of Slavic and Romance names and name forms, or can we observe such a distribution at all? How did the Venetians incorporate or adapt Slavic names into their administrative documents? What other direct traces of the Slavic language can we find in these writings? And what does this tell us about the ethnic and linguistic background of the town's inhabitants?

The Linguistic Environment of Dalmatia: Historical Background

In the late medieval and early modern period, the linguistic landscape of Dalmatia was shaped by centuries of layered cultural and political influences. Contrary to the assumption that the Italian or Latin elements were imposed during Venetian domination, the region had long been part of a broader Romance Adriatic space. Italian and Latin did not arrive with the Venetian conquest but had been present for centuries due to Roman heritage and earlier periods of intermittent Venetian control dating back to the year 1000. Indeed, by the time Venice re-established firmer control over Dalmatia between 1409 and 1420,[2] Latin and Italian already played a central role in legal and administrative communication in the region, without any strict distinction being drawn between (relatively) classical Latin and its vernacular Italo-Romance form.[3] Numerous town statutes from the fourteenth century were composed in Latin,

1 Throughout this article, I have chosen to use the Italian place names rather than the contemporary Croatian ones to maintain coherence between the language of the sources and the main text while pre-emptively addressing potential technical problems with search engines that might arise from the use of diacritics or the confusion of the place name »Split« with the English verb »to split«. Personal names are given as in the cited source.

2 On the establishment and functioning of the Venetian *Stato da Mar*, see Schmitt, Die venezianische Herrschaft in Südosteuropa; Arbel, Venice's maritime empire; Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 13-17; Raukar, *Studije o Dalmaciji*; Ortalli, Schmitt and Orlando, *Il Commonwealth veneziano*.

3 Šimunković, La politica linguistica, 95-96; Metzeltin, Venezianisch und Italienisch in Dalmatien, 555; Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 126-128; Novak, *Povijest Splita*, vol. 1, 253; Katičić, *Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte*, 495-501.

attesting to the long-standing prestige and functionality of that language. Moreover, the Venetian dialect of Italian had become a regional lingua franca well before the fifteenth century.[4] In many respects, the Venetian administration simply continued existing practices rather than introducing new linguistic norms.

The Slavic language, by contrast, occupied a different social and functional space. It was the everyday spoken language of much of the population, particularly – but not exclusively – among the non-elite and rural communities. Let us take a look at some sources that illustrate the social distribution of linguistic competence.

Giovanni Battista Giustinian, a Venetian envoy visiting Spalato in 1553, remarked on the linguistic practices of the city's inhabitants. According to his account, all male citizens spoke Venetian Italian and some adopted Italian dress. However, he noted that the women – regardless of social class – exclusively spoke their Slavic mother tongue.[5] This gendered linguistic divide is supported by various legal documents. In one 1491 lawsuit, two brothers contested the validity of their mother's testament, arguing that the chancellor who wrote the document could not have accurately understood her, because he did not know the local Dalmatian (Slavic) speech, and she, in turn, did not know any Italian.[6]

This case is instructive for two reasons. First, it highlights the communication barriers between Italian-speaking notaries and monolingual Slavic speakers. Second, it illustrates that even well-positioned individuals – such as the testator Marica de Augubio, who was married to an Italian and belonged to the elite non-noble class[7] – could remain outside the linguistic reach of the official administration. The conflict over the testament's validity reveals the legal vulnerabilities created by this linguistic gap.

Multiple sources confirm that women, even those of noble birth, were often monolingual in Slavic.[8] One noblewoman is recorded as stating that contracts should be translated into Slavic so that »women and other idiots« – a term referring to the uneducated – »who do

4 On the Venetian dialect, see Baglioni, *Il veneziano 'de là da mar'*; Marcato and Ursini, *Dialetti veneti*; Eufe, *Sta lengua ha un privilegio*; Folena, *Culture e lingue*, 232-233; Vicario, Note sulla diffusione; Dotto, Per il veneziano fuori di Venezia; Dotto and Vuletić, Il veneziano in Dalmazia; Cortelazzo, Il veneziano coloniale; Ferguson, Venetian language; Metzeltin, Venezianisch und Italienisch in Dalmatien. On multilingualism and lingua franca in the Mediterranean, see Dakhlia, *Lingua franca*; Dursteler, Speaking in tongues; Scaglione and Sottile, La lingua franca.

5 *Commissiones et relationes venetae* 2, ed. Ljubić, 215: *È ben vero, che i cittadini tutti parlano lingua franca, et alcuni vestono all'usanza italiana; ma le donne non favellano se non la loro lingua materna, benchè alcune delle nobili vestono secondo l'usanza italiana.*

6 Zadar, Državni Arhiv u Zadru, 16: Općina Split (henceforth DAZD-16): 22/39.7/572v: *Cancelarius est Italicus nec intelligit sermonem dalmaticum immo ipsum penitus ignorat et ipsa dona Mariça fuit dalmata nec intelligebat sed vere ignorabat linguam italicam* […]. Other witnesses testified that she *veramente ignoravit la lingua o vero sermone italico seu latino* (DAZD-16: 22/39.7/580r) and *sempre loquebatur lingua dalmata* (DAZD-16: 22/39.7/587v).

7 On this important (and notorious) family, see Sadovski, *Split*, 43-46, 251-261.

8 On the linguistic competences of women in the late medieval and early modern Mediterranean, see Dursteler, Language and gender; Sadovski, Le donne di Spalato, 125-128, including a critical discussion of Dursteler's article.

not know the Latin language would not be misled and betrayed«.[9] In addition to women, the rural poor and those not engaged in maritime trade or political life often lacked knowledge of Italian or Latin.[10]

In response to the widespread presence of monolingual Slavic speakers within the population, the Venetian administration in Spalato developed mechanisms to ensure legal clarity. One key adaptation was the institutionalization of translation practices in both legal and administrative contexts. On the occasion of the election of the communal translator in 1481, the Venetian governor Giovanni Bollani argued that having a competent translator was both necessary and advantageous for a state, ensuring that the intentions of the law were not undermined by misunderstandings or inaccurate wording and that justice was properly served to all:

> *Et mente et animo revolventes quod rei publice conferat sitque necessarium habere interpetrem (sic) idoneum intelligentem et sermone expeditum, sciat quoque ordinate interpretari que sclabonico sermone coram nobis exponi contingit ne ex verborum mutationem seu mala expressione quid fiat contra metas et ordines juris sed quisque justiciam debite consequatur*.[11]

Translators were thus crucial to guarantee legal certainty, thereby ensuring the people's confidence in and acceptance of the state – an aspect that was ever more important in the colonial situation of the Venetian *Stato da Mar*. From the early fifteenth century onward, most communes in Dalmatia employed official translators to bridge the linguistic gap between Latin/Italian-speaking notaries and Slavic-speaking clients. Spalato, however, did not establish such an office until 1472.[12] This relatively late adoption followed repeated complaints by the non-noble population, reflecting a growing demand for accessible and accurate communication in legal matters.[13]

Translators were necessary not only for formal documents but also for the accurate recording of oral testimony in court. In courtroom proceedings, oral statements delivered in Slavic were usually translated on the spot and recorded in Latin, often in the third person. This process was fraught with potential inaccuracies. Several lawsuits contain complaints that the written record did not correspond to what had actually been said.[14] However, such

9 DAZD-16: 48/59/328v: *azio che le donne et altri ydiote che non hanno lingua latina non siano decepte et inganate*. The vernacular Venetian-Italian language was frequently denoted as »Latin« in the sources.

10 The lacking language skills of the poor were addressed in a petition accusing the communal translator of abusing his office: DAZD-16: 58/66.II/236a-r.

11 DAZD-16: 18/35/389r: »And considering in mind and spirit that it benefits the state and is necessary to have an interpreter, suitable, intelligent, and fluent in speech, who also knows how to properly interpret the things which happen to be presented before us in the Slavic language, lest through a change of words or faulty expression anything be done against the goals and rules of law, but that everyone may duly obtain justice« (this and all following translations are my own).

12 *Libro d'Oro*, no. 64, ed. Gligo and Berket, 276; Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 126.

13 Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 165-167; Šimunković, La politica linguistica, 100.

14 For instance: DAZD-16: 22/39.8/646r: *Item sopradetto mathio comparse dauanti la vostra magnificentia ale franche porte interpretando ser marin millossevich vostro interprete publice e che quello che se contien nela scriptura de bernardin petrogar che non era vero ma che le stato interpretado altramente o uero scripto altramente de*

discrepancies were difficult to prove, particularly since no standardized process existed for verifying oral translation.

Next to officially appointed translators, »examinators« fulfilled similar duties. Every notarial act required the presence of such an examinator – a nobleman appointed to verify that all legal requirements were met.[15] Among his duties was the confirmation that every party involved in the contract or legal transaction understood the content of the document, which often necessitated translation.[16] These checks became especially important in lawsuits, where the accuracy of recorded testimony could be decisive.

Despite the statutes forbidding local Dalmatians from acting as official notaries, practical necessity often led to their employment as scribes and interpreters. The use of these local officials – though technically prohibited – was frequently tolerated, as their linguistic abilities were indispensable.[17]

These issues illustrate the vulnerability of Slavic-speaking individuals within a system that privileged Latin and Italian as authoritative written languages. At the same time, they underscore the flexibility and adaptability of the Venetian legal system, which often bent its own rules in response to local needs. This complex relationship between spoken Slavic and written Latin/Italian points to a broader dynamic of multilingual negotiation within the administrative apparatus.

The Space of Slavic within the Venetian Administration

A key observation emerging from the historical record is thus that Dalmatia exhibited a structured form of Italo-Slavic bilingualism: Latin and Italian served as the dominant languages for administration and commerce – the former as the main language of writing, the latter as both a written and a spoken language –, while Slavic functioned as the primary spoken vernacular language among the population. Despite its prevalence in oral communication, Slavic rarely appeared in written administrative documents within the cities.[18] The reasons for this are both ideological and practical. One the one hand, Latin and Italian had been in use as administrative and business languages for centuries, certainly carrying a higher prestige among the Venetians than the local Slavic language. On the other hand, the formal exclusion of local Dalmatians from the notarial profession – enshrined in town statutes[19] – was meant to ensure impartiality but had the unintended consequence of exacerbating linguistic

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quello ho detto mi matheo e cussi fo interpretato a la vostra magnificentia presente ser zuane de acomer e ser piero jacoulich al hora zudese e ser lorraço darnier e molti altri; ibid. 653v: *ipse teste audiente quod non testificatus est prout est scriptum [...] et ha testifica [sic] e non e scripto come la deto*.

15 On the development of the examinator's office, see Šufflay, *Die dalmatinische Privaturkunde*, 106-110.

16 For instance: DAZD-16: 24/40.1/283v-285r: *ut in infrascripta poliza manu eius propria mihi <cancelario infrascripto> tradita sibique de verbo ad verbum per infrascriptum dominum examinatorem de latino in illyricum sermonem interpretate ad eius claram intelligentiam interpretata [sic]*.

17 Sadovski, Litterae in lingua rassiana, 271; Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 171-172.

18 I have expanded elsewhere on Slavic as a written administrative language: Sadovski, Litterae in lingua rassiana scriptae; Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 134-185.

19 *Statut Grada Splita*, book 2, chapter 58, ed. Cvitanić, 434-436: *unus bonus et ydoneus notarius, qui non sit de prouincia Dalmatie*.

barriers. Most notaries operating in Spalato and similar towns were Italians unfamiliar with the local Slavic language. This created a structural imbalance in communication, especially when oral testimony or private agreements had to be integrated into legally binding contracts, leading to difficulties in drafting or interpreting documents involving monolingual Slavic speakers – particularly in legal contexts where misunderstandings could have serious consequences.

In the previous section, we have addressed some strategies to overcome this imbalance. What emerges from this discussion is, moreover, that the chancery was one of the most important places within the urban fabric, where multilingualism was enacted but also problematized. When drawing up notarial acts, commissioning or receiving official documents or licences, or being questioned within court or arbitration proceedings, the people and the Venetian rulers were most directly confronted with multilingualism. Given the growing need to enter into written contracts as part of the increasingly widespread use of »pragmatic literacy« in everyday life, the chancery increasingly became a place where rulers and the ruled, and thus also their different languages, came into contact.[20]

Taking a social-historical perspective on the chancery moreover reveals that, beyond producing certified documents and thereby ensuring legal certainty, it also played another key role within society: it brought together people from all layers of the urban population through legal transactions. Nobles and commoners, women and men, outsiders from Italy, the Slavic hinterlands, or Ottoman territories – they all came to the chancery and encountered one another as well as the Venetian administration. For many, the chancery was probably the most direct point of contact with that administration.

When we speak of »the chancery« here, however, it should also be understood in a metaphorical sense, since not all contracts written and certified by the chancellors were actually produced within the physical rooms of the municipal chancery. The metaphorical chancery was present throughout the city, including in public spaces:

Contracts were issued in, in front of, or at the window of the chancery, but also in or at the *logia Sancti Laurentii*, on the *plathea Sancti Laurentii* – Spalato's main square[21] –, in the square in front of the cathedral, under the bell tower outside the cathedral gates, in the rector's palace, at the city gates (*inter ambas portas* or *ad franchas portas*), at the customs house in the harbour, in the *logia marittima* or more generally at the harbour (*ad marinam*), in the notary's house or on his doorstep, in front of or inside the house or apothecary of someone not involved in the transaction, in monasteries, in front of churches, on the street, in or in front of the fortress, outside the city near the loggia of a city gate, or – especially often in cases involving women – in the home of one of the contracting parties, including

20 Keller, Grubmüller and Staubach, *Pragmatische Schriftlichkeit*. On this concept, see also the homepage of the Special Research Unit (SFB) 231 »Träger, Felder, Formen pragmatischer Schriftlichkeit im Mittelalter« at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster: <https://www.uni-muenster.de/Geschichte/MittelalterSchriftlichkeit/>, 03.07.2025.

21 The square is today called *Narodni trg*, People's Square; however, it is commonly known as *Pjaca*, a Slavicized version of Italian *piazza*, which in itself is a telling example of the town's multilingual history.

that of the archbishop or his vicar, as well as in the city's *burgus*.[22] This incomplete list of locations where notarial instruments were drawn up illustrates how widely chancery activity was spread throughout the city and public spaces – highlighting the presence of the administration and its written practices, and thus also of multilingualism, in the urban landscape.

Despite the clear prevalence of Latin and Italian as written languages, Venetian policy did not completely exclude written Slavic from its administrative practices. Evidence from further north, on the island of Veglia (Krk) in the Kvarner Gulf, reveals that Venetian authorities could accommodate Slavic linguistic practices under certain circumstances. From the fifteenth until the eighteenth century, Slavic notaries on Veglia composed documents in the Glagolitic script alongside Italian- and Latin-writing notaries. These documents – mostly preserved from the later period – were legally valid and issued by notaries who were not merely tolerated but sworn and commissioned by the Venetian Republic itself.[23] This practice underscores a degree of administrative pragmatism and reflects the localized adaptation of Venetian policy in response to regional linguistic realities, in this case the survival of the Glagolitic script in the northern littoral.[24]

However, this flexibility did not extend to the Dalmatian coastal towns, where Latin and Italian remained the exclusive languages of administration. In these settings, Slavic was effectively marginalized in written form, despite its ubiquity in daily life. Nonetheless, the linguistic situation inland was markedly different. In the hinterland surrounding Spalato, Slavic was widely used in both spoken and written communication, including official documentation. This included the use of Cyrillic script in administrative records, particularly in areas under Hungarian or Ottoman rule, but also in Venetian territories. Before addressing how Slavic words and phrases were directly incorporated into Latin and Italian texts of the urban centre, we shall thus briefly discuss the multilingual communication between town and hinterland.

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22 All examples are from sources from the State Archive in Zara (DAZD): *in cancellaria Spalati, Spalati ante cancellariam communis, ad fenestram cancellariae communis, sub logia sancti laurentii, Spalati in plathea sancti Laurentii penes logiam custodie, Spalati ad angulum logie Sancti Laurentii super via tendente post palacium, Spalati in plathea sancti Domnii, Spalati sub campanille ante portas ecclesie cathedralis, Spalati in camera palatii residentie infrascripti magnifici domini constituentis, Spalati ad datium XXXmi, Spalati ad marinam ante trigesimum, Spalati in terra veteri in domo habitationis mei cancellarii, Spalati ad ianuam domus habitationis mei notarii et vice cancellarii, Spalati ante ~~cancel~~ in domo ser Antonii augubio civi Spalati (sic)), Split in plathea magna ante apothecam nobilis ser Joannis q. ser Michaelis de Grisogonis, Spalati in monasterio et reffectorio praedicto, Spalati ante hostium maiorem ecclesie Sancte Marie de Taurello, Spalati in capella Sancti Sebastiani, Spalati in via tendente a plathea ad marinam, Spalati in via publica ante portam pisturii, Spalati in arce dicte civitatis, Spalati in arce Spalati in camera minori domus habitationis magnifici domini Francisci Maurozeno dignissimi castellani et camerarii dicte civitatis, Spalati in arce ante ianuam in introitu illius, Spalati extra civitatem penes logiam pisture, Spalati in terra veteri in domo habitationis infrascripte constituentis, Spalati in sala inferiori archiepiscopatus praedicti, Spalati in camera residentie praefati domini vicarii in archiepiscopatu, Spalati in burgo in domo suprascriptis magistri Radi.*

23 Bošnjak Botica, Botica and Galović, *Hrvatskoglagoljski notarijat otoka Krka*, 44-52.

24 In the early modern period, Venice was also confronted with Glagolitic through the printing of liturgical manuscripts as a means of defending its religious sovereignty against papal policies. The Congregation of *Propaganda Fide*, in turn, saw Venetian Dalmatia and the use of Glagolitic prints in East Slavic Church Slavonic – as opposed to Croatian Church Slavonic – as a way to reach the Slavic Orthodox population in the Balkans and Eastern Europe. On this, see Ivančić, Glagolitic liturgical print.

Town and Hinterland: Communication Across Linguistic Boundaries

The relationship between urban centres like Spalato and their rural hinterlands was shaped by intense social, economic, and political interactions. The city of Spalato served as the economic and administrative nucleus of the region. People from surrounding territories – including areas like the rural polity of Poglizza (Poljica) and the fortress towns Almissa (Omiš) and Clissa (Klis) – routinely travelled to Spalato to conduct business or seek employment. Spalato's status as a fortified urban centre also made it a reliable site for the preservation and registration of legal documents.[25]

The Venetian governor of Spalato functioned as the appellate judge for court cases originating in Poglizza and Almissa, semi-autonomous territories within the Venetian sphere of influence (from 1444 to 1514 and 1797, respectively). This role required regular judicial cooperation between the city and its hinterland. These cross-border interactions necessitated administrative engagement with Slavic-speaking communities, many of which maintained their own legal customs and documentary practices, including the employment of Slavic in Cyrillic script for legal codifications, notarial and judicial documents, and correspondence. Importantly, Slavic legal documents written in Cyrillic were often brought to Spalato for registration, translation, or confirmation.[26]

One particularly illustrative case occurred in 1503 when the chancellor of Poglizza travelled to Spalato to commission the Italian translation of his wife's dowry contract. The original document, written ten years earlier in Slavic by a local priest, was translated and entered into the Venetian notarial record.[27] As explicitly stated in a similar case, Poglizzan contracts were translated and recorded in Spalato »pro maiori securitate et cautione« – for greater security and legal assurance.[28] This reflects the perception of urban chanceries as sites of enhanced legal reliability and shows how the prestige of Venetian administration extended beyond city limits.

These dynamics also reveal that the Venetian administration was not isolated from Slavic legal culture. Rather, it engaged with Slavic documents and practices through translation, adaptation, and selective incorporation. Slavic legal customs, such as the enhanced credibility afforded to the *pristav* – a bailiff who confirmed the legality of contracts and acted as an authenticating witness – were not only tolerated by the Venetians but also directly

25 For more details, see Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*; Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi*; Domljan (ed.), *Omiš i Poljica*; Grekov, *Die altkroatische Republik Poljica*; Laušić, *Postanak i razvitak*; Pfauenthal, Beiträge zur Geschichte; Tolomeo, Chiave di difesa.

26 On the institutional relations, see Sadovski, La città e l'entroterra. The fifteenth-century statute of Poglizza (with later amendments) was written in Slavic and Cyrillic script: *Statut poljički*, ed. Jagić; Matić, Statut der Poljica. The statute of Almissa, in turn, was written in the 1570s in Italian: Cvitanić, Prilog; Cvitanić, *Iz dalmatinske pravne povijesti*, 390-391; Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 67. On Cyrillic in Dalmatia, see Zelić Bučan, *Bosančica ili hrvatska ćirilica*.

27 DAZD-16: 34/46.2/119r-v: *Ibique personaliter constitutus ser Jacobus Dragochnich de policio exhibuit et tradidit mihi Petro cancellario comunis infrascripto scripturam quamdam litteris sclabonicis scriptam sigilloque sancti marci sub ea impresso munitam et cum ea aliam scripturam litteris latinis seu italis notatam quam dixit esse traductionem scripture ipsius sclabonice de sclabonicho in italum translatatam tenoris huiusmodi videlicet*.

28 DAZD-16: 39/51.2-3/25r-v.

encouraged.[29] In one court case, the Venetian patrician Alvise Capello, acting as extraordinary *provisor* of Poglizza and Almissa from 1509 to 1511, ordered the election of a *pristav* to ensure that the case adhered to the legal customs of Poglizza.[30] Upon its incorporation into the Venetian realm in 1444, the new authorities agreed to respect Poglizza's customs, allowing for the continued existence of local assemblies and the use of Slavic in the chancery.[31] Yet, most Slavic-language documents that reached Spalato were recorded only in their Latin or Italian translations. As a result, the survival of original Slavic texts from this period is minimal, making such documents particularly valuable when they do appear.

A rare and significant example of a preserved Slavic document from this period is a letter dated to 1505, located in the archives of Zara (Zadar). This letter, written in Slavic in Cyrillic script and addressed to the judges of Poglizza, is particularly noteworthy because it was issued in the name of Alvise Capello during his tenure as Venetian governor of Spalato. The fact that the letter was authored on behalf of a high-ranking Venetian official strongly implies that it was originally composed in Italian and subsequently translated into Slavic. This might explain why the language of the letter exhibits clear Romance influences, both through the use of Latinisms/Italianisms – *sentencia* from *sentenza*, *apelali* from *appellare*, *konpariti* from *comparire* – and the adoption of Latin and Italian scribal conventions like the vocalic use of the letter ⟨v⟩ as /u/.[32]

Although nothing is known about the scribe's identity beyond his name – Martin Martinčić –, his role in producing a Slavic version of a Venetian administrative letter underscores the extent to which the authorities in Spalato had, by necessity, developed channels of communication in the local language.. This instance is not an anomaly; other sources attest to similar practices, albeit typically only the Latin or Italian versions survive in the archival record.

For example, there are explicit references to Venetian notaries composing correspondence in the Slavic language – referred to in Latin as »lingua rassiana« – for dispatch to courts and officials in Ottoman-controlled territories, including Poglizza after 1514.[33] While the letters themselves have been lost, these references affirm the administrative reality that Slavic was occasionally employed by Venetian officials when addressing external bodies. This usage did not extend to internal administration, but it reveals a functional, if limited, written bilingualism in external affairs.

The archival silences surrounding original Slavic documents are thus a product of translation and archiving practice rather than an absence of Slavic communication. Whenever Slavic-language material entered the Venetian system, it was typically rendered into Latin

29 On the office of *pristav*, see Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 155-159; Cvitanić, *Iz dalmatinske pravne povijesti*, 347-360; Šufflay, *Die dalmatinische Privaturkunde*, 17-19; Laušić, *Postanak i razvitak*, 169-171. For the statutory regulations regarding the *pristav*, see *Statut poljički*, arts. 67a-c, 68a-e, ed. Jagić, 74-77.

30 DAZD-16: 44/55/169r-173v. On Alvise Capello, see Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 120-123.

31 *Libro d'Oro*, no. 30, ed. Gligo and Berket, 168-172.

32 DARD-16: 37/49.1/235b. In the Cyrillic document, the special square-shaped Bosnian Cyrillic character, used to represent /v/ instead of the standard Cyrillic letter ⟨в⟩, is employed to substitute the letter ⟨8⟩ – /u/ – in some instances, such as the spelling of the name »Luka« as »Lvka« (»Л□ка«, »Лвка«), similar to the Latin/Italian spelling of »una« as »vna«. For more details, see Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 140-145.

33 DAZD-16: 57/65.2–VI/113r.

or Italian for official registration. This practice both ensured administrative standardization and minimized the visibility of Slavic in the documentary record. Yet, its underlying presence remains discernible through references to translations, marginal notes, signatures, and scattered bilingual documents that escaped full translation.

There is some evidence that Spalato did maintain an office for a chancellor of Slavic letters during the mid-fifteenth century, particularly in the 1450s and 1460s, when a *cancellarius littere sclave* or *cancellarius de littera sclava* was mentioned.[34] However, this office was not institutionalized to the same degree as in non-Venetian Ragusa (Dubrovnik), where Slavic played a far more central role in diplomacy and external affairs. The Ragusan case provides a useful point of comparison in evaluating the Venetian approach to multilingual administration.

In 1444, the Luccan scholar Philippus de Diversis composed a description of Ragusa in which he detailed the importance of a chancellor or scribe who was proficient in both Slavic and Latin.

> *Sed cum civitas ipsa vicinos Dominos habeat Sclavos, qui sclavis litteris scribunt contractos, privilegia, pacta, et conventiones plurimas cum Dominis Ragusinis, propterea peropus est, ut habeatur et habetur quidam Ragusinus Cancellarius seu Scribanus litteras sclavas pariter et latinas vulgares doctus, cujus officium est eos contractus, privilegia et pacta sclave in Libris communitatis scribere et copiare, illorum litteras legere, et responsivas, juxta Dominij mandatum, diligenter notare*.[35]

As we see from this passage, this official was tasked with writing contracts, privileges, treaties, and correspondence in the Slavic script and language, all of which were recorded in the communal books. The chancellor also read Slavic correspondence received by the city and drafted replies as directed by the governing authorities. This institutionalization of Slavic within the chancery highlights its strategic role in Ragusa's communication with neighbouring Slavic-speaking lords and Ottoman officials.[36] Some notarial acts were also recorded in the Slavic language, in particular testaments, but overall, these documents constitute only a small fraction of the extensive Ragusan archives preserved to this day.[37]

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34 DAZD-16: 11/25.12/8v; DAZD-16: 12/27.5/521r.

35 Philippus de Diversis, *Situs aedificiorum*, book 3, chap. 9, ed. Brunelli, 76: »Since this town has Slavic lords as neighbours, who write contracts, privileges, pacts and many treaties with the Ragusan lords in Slavic letters, it is essential that they have a Ragusan chancellor or scribe who is equally learned in Slavic and Latin vulgar letters, whose office it is to write and copy these contracts, privileges and pacts in Slavic in the books of the commune, to read their letters and diligently record the responses, according to the mandate of the authorities.«

36 Jireček, Die mittelalterliche Kanzlei der Ragusaner. Teil 2, 176; Beldiceanu-Steinherr and Beldiceanu, *Documents Ottomans*, 159; *Raguse (Dubrovnik) et l'Empire Ottoman*, ed. Bojović; *Tursko-slovjenski spomenici*, ed. Truhelka; with a focus on palaeographic aspects of the Cyrillic script in Ragusa: Paskojević, *Srednjovjekovna kancelarija*.

37 Cf. the many studies on the Ragusan chancery by Jireček: Jireček, Die mittelalterliche Kanzlei der Ragusaner. Teil 1, 501-502; Jireček, Beiträge zur ragusanischen Literaturgeschichte; Jireček, Der ragusanische Dichter Šiško Menčetić.

Although Venetian Dalmatia did not replicate Ragusa's model, the underlying need for such linguistic competence was not absent. Spalato, like Ragusa, bordered territories where Slavic was the primary administrative language. The use of Slavic in Venetian Dalmatia's external communication was therefore a practical adaptation to its geopolitical environment. The increasing number of surviving Slavic documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – written in both Cyrillic and Latin script – demonstrate the gradual formalization of bilingual documentation. In many of these cases, the Slavic original and its Italian translation appear on the same page, reflecting a dual-audience strategy.[38]

A notable exception to the general exclusion of Slavic from administrative records within the city lies in the genre of testaments. Testaments were a legal instrument that, unlike many others, did not require the presence of an official notary. As such, they were often written by priests, literate individuals, or the testators themselves. Slavic-language testaments appear in both Cyrillic and Latin scripts, and in some locales, even in Glagolitic. The relative informality of testaments allowed for a greater degree of linguistic diversity, and their survival in the archives – especially from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – suggests an increasing institutional tolerance for Slavic as a written language.[39]

In some cases, bilingual formatting is evident. For example, certain testaments are presented with the original Slavic text followed by an Italian translation, while others feature Cyrillic signatures appended to Latin or Italian texts.[40] These documents often originate from individuals living in the rural territories surrounding Spalato, which reflects the greater use of Slavic in writing outside urban centres. However, this should not obscure the fact that Slavic also played a significant role within urban society itself.

The case of Ragusa demonstrates that Slavic was employed for administrative and diplomatic purposes in fifteenth-century Dalmatia, although its use was more limited in towns under Venetian control (with the exception of Veglia). In these towns, Slavic appeared mainly in communication with nearby regions governed by the Venetians, Hungarians, or Ottomans, as well as in literary and humanist works by intellectuals like Marko Marulić. However, the local population did not use Slavic when producing documents for the Venetian administration.

Slavic Lexical Borrowings and Vernacular Speech in Italian and Latin Legal Records

Despite the official marginalization of Slavic as a written language, its pervasive presence in the spoken realm inevitably influenced the content and form of Latin and Italian administrative texts. One particularly clear example of this influence is the incorporation of Slavic

38 Many such documents are preserved in the collection of Almissa in the archive of Zara: DAZD-26: Providurstvo Omiš, 171/Zbirka Bogišić. Cf. Mošin, Izvještaj; Sadovski, *Venice and the Dalmatian Hinterland*, 177-181.

39 Notable collections of testaments from Spalato and Almissa can be found in DAZD-26: Providurstvo Omiš, 1; Split, Državni Arhiv u Splitu (henceforth DAST), 1 (Splitska općina): 17/ 1; DAST-180 (Zbirka oporuka) (»collection of testaments«).

40 For instance: DAZD-26: 1/1.4/12v, 54r. Cyrillic signatures can also be found in documents from the Venetian archive, for instance: Venice, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth ASVe), Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rectori et altre Cariche, 276: Cattaro (1739-1789), 131v.

lexical items into notarial and court records. These borrowings often referred to specific material or legal concepts for which no adequate Latin or Italian equivalents existed.

For instance, the term *rassa*, deriving from *raša*, frequently appears in documents to denote a particular kind of cloth, most likely an atlas or satin fabric.[41] The term *podvorniza* refers to a type of real estate or property holding for which the Venetians did not have an appropriate Latin equivalent.[42] In one document, the tenant of a *podvorniza* was contractually obliged to give the owner, each year at Easter, a chicken and *tortam unam lingua dalmata nuncupatam prisnaz* – a reference to *presnac*, a cake that is still traditionally served at Easter today.[43]

Similarly, a purchase contract from 1525 mentions *unam eorum plemenschinam sive patrimonium* in the region of Poglizza.[44] The term *plemenьština* (*племеньщина*) referred to a family's patrimony or inherited estate, which could only be sold under certain conditions.[45] In this case, the notary wrote down the Slavic legal term alongside its Latin counterpart to ensure both comprehension and precision by including legal concepts that were native to the local legal tradition. However, in the case of the *dvornicus* of the village of Kuk in the district of Spalato, the notary apparently saw no need to offer a Latin equivalent for this steward or village administrator. The Slavic term *дворьникъ* (*dvornik*)[46] was simply given a Latin ending, similar to *celnicus*[47] and *zupanus*[48] (*чельникъ*/*čelnik* and *жупанъ*/*župan*, both denoting a specific type of »leader, chief, headman«). This shows that the exact functions of these offices could not be easily mapped onto Latin administrative vocabulary. Such insertions of Slavic vocabulary into otherwise Latin or Italian texts thus reveal the limitations of those languages in capturing the cultural specificity of Dalmatian life.

41 Kümmeler, *Korčula*, 293, n. 355; Sadovski-Kornprobst, Multilingualism, 222-223; on the etymology of the term, which is probably linked to the toponym *Raš(k)a* of a medieval Serbian state, see Skok, *Etimologijski rječnik,* vol. 3, 111.

42 Mažuranić, *Prinosi*, 969.

43 DAZD-16: 34/46.1/61v-62r.

44 DAZD-16: 60/67/64r: A widow and her son sold *unam eorum plemenschinam sive patrimonium suum videlicet domos, terras, vineas, arbores, aquas, lapides, pascua et alia omnia et quecumque habent predicti mater et filii in Sitno et aliis quibuscumque terras et locis Pollicii*. Although the purchase contract was drawn up at the chancery window in Spalato, it explicitly noted that all applicable taxes were to be paid to the Sultan, as Poglizza was already formally under Ottoman rule by 1525: *et cum obligationibus et oneribus solvendi caragia et alias angaris domino Thurco*.

45 *Statut poljički*, arts. 51[a–e] (78-80), ed. Jagić, 59-60.

46 DAZD-16: 34/46.2/113v-114r: »dvornicus ville Chuch districtus Spalati«; Miklosich, *Lexicon Palaeoslovenico,* 156, gives »*dvorьnikъ*/*дворьникъ*« as »comes palatii«.

47 *Statut Grada Splita*, book 6, chapter 38, ed. Cvitanić, 221: *[…] quod pastores pecudum nequeant dimittere pecudes, antequam celnicus inueniat alios pastores, et celnicus vel pastor teneatur ducere domino pecudum omnes pelles morticinas […].* Miklosich, *Lexicon Palaeoslovenico*, 1112 gives »*чельникъ*« as »praefectus«.

48 ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 18, 7v: *Quod zupano nuncupato de cervical detur prouisio de ducatos 2 in mense in vita, ad cameram Justinopolis*. Ecclesiastical or pious institutions, like monasteries, churches, or confraternities, often had a layman acting on their behalf as *zupanus*: DAZD-16: 60/67/64v: *ser Matheus q. Blasii cerdonis tanquam zupanus […] fratalee [sachratissimi corporis christi istius civitatis spalati]*; DAST-1: 198v-199r: *Damianus Bassetich zupanus earundem monialium*; DAZD-16: 24/40.1/80r-v: *magister Franciscus aurifex zupanus ecclesię [sancti spiritus]*.

Even more telling are instances in which Slavic terms were used despite the availability of equivalent Italian or Latin words. A particularly illustrative example comes from a written court statement that refers to »li altri zoveni vlastelini« – »the other young nobles«.[49] The word *vlastelini*, deriving from the Slavic root *власть*/*vlastь* (»power«), functions here in a context where the Italian term *nobili* would have been entirely appropriate to denote those who were in power. Accordingly, the term is employed side by side with *nobili* and *la nostra nobiltà* in the same text. Its use, without explanation or translation, indicates a level of assumed understanding among the author and the audience. Notably, the statement was made by a prominent citizen whose family background was Italian, suggesting that even elite speakers with full command of Italian might choose to use Slavic terms in formal writing when they felt them to be more expressive or accurate, or at least equivalent to Italian counterparts.

Next to lexical borrowings and direct references to translations of oral or written statements, the documents written in the chanceries throughout the city also reflect the multilingual environment in which they were produced through their multilingual wording itself. Some notarial acts and, more frequently, court files contain entire texts written in the Venetian vernacular, such as accusatory and defensive writings but also testaments or inventories. While personal aspects or explanations of the circumstances were thus often formulated in the vernacular – which was also the spoken language of the ruling authorities –, legal arguments within the same texts were usually written in Latin. One of many examples is the following excerpt from a letter of complaint submitted in a case concerning the alleged unlawful exclusion of a daughter as heir:

> *Si che poi nata el dito testamento per se e nullo & se essendo nata era fato* ***itidem*** *e nullo* ***per modum preteritionis*** *non poteva* ***salva pace ipsius testatoris*** *instituir heredi extranei* ***preteriendo filiam suam ex legitimo matrimonio procreatam*** […].[50]
>
> Thus, since she was born afterwards, the said testament is null in itself, and if it was made with her being born, it is **likewise** null **by way of preterition**, then, **saving the peace of the testator himself**, he could not appoint a stranger as heir **while omitting his own daughter begotten in lawful marriage** […].

By employing Latin phrases and expressions, the author was able to demonstrate legal knowledge and lend credibility to his argumentation. In other cases, direct quotations of oral statements are reproduced in the vernacular within Latin texts, as the following testimony recounting a failed attempt at matchmaking between two youngsters illustrates:

> *Et quod interim Catussa […] dixit ipsi ser Petro Cambio* ***Vui altri non ve save maridar*** *et sic interloquendo dixit* ***Io ve mostreria la piu bella creatura che sia insta terra*** *Et ipse ser Petrus ei respondidit* ***Io la voria veder*** *et tandem posito ordine cum dicta Cathussa ipse*

49 DAZD-16: 43/54/622r.

50 DAZD-16: 45/56.5/213v (my emphasis of Latin insertions).

ser Petrus init in calle seu via [...] et ibi expectavit Et sic praemissa Catussa venit [...] et cum premissa Catussa venit etiam antedicta Margarita [...] Et statim quamprimum ipsa Margarita vidit dictum ser Petrum [...] eam respicientem aufugit [...].[51]

And meanwhile Catussa [...] said to ser Petrus Cambio himself, **You don't know how to get yourself married**, and, speaking thus, she said, **I would show you the most beautiful creature that is in this world**, and ser Petrus himself replied to her, **I would like to see her**, and then, having arranged this with the said Catussa, ser Petrus himself went into a lane or street [...] and there waited. And thus the said Catussa came [...] and with the said Catussa also came the aforesaid Margarita [...]. And immediately, as soon as Margarita saw the said ser Petrus [...] looking at her, she fled [...].

This code-switching between Venetian and Latin in writing alongside the code-switching between spoken Slavic and Venetian characterized the sociolinguistic landscape of the Dalmatian cities. Whether Catussa and Petrus spoke Italian or Slavic with each other cannot be deduced from this source. The records reproduce originally Slavic oral statements either in Latin translations in the third person singular – as numerous witness testimonies included in court records show – or in Venetian translation. The latter preserves the orality of the original statement and was likely the case here, considering the widespread Slavic monolingualism among women.[52] In rare but significant cases, however, Slavic statements were also directly quoted within Latin or Italian documents, in particular when the exact phrasing of the speech was deemed legally or socially important. Following Fabian Kümmeler's interpretation, we find a striking example in a record from the island of Curzola (Korčula) describing a wedding ceremony held in the town's borgo in 1459. The priest, as the record states,

interrogavit ipsum Radovanum et dixit ***tuogistu*** *Marussa per toa muglier legitima [...] deinde petiit Marussam et dixit similia verba videlicet* ***tuogistu*** *Radovan per to marido [...].*[53]

asked Radovan and said: »**Do you want** (**take?**) Marussa as your lawful wife?« [...] Then he asked Marussa and said similar words, namely: »**Do you want** (**take?**) Radovan as your husband?«

Within the Latin text narrating the scene, the phrase *tuogistu* opens two quotations whose second part is given in Italian, before the text once again switches to Latin for the narration. *Tuogistu* could be a form of the Slavic verb *htjeti* (»to want«) – in this case, the second person singular: *tu ogis tu* would then correspond to modern Croatian *ti, hoćeš ti*, »you, do you want«, although this repetition of *ti* would be unusual for Slavic. An explanation for this might be that the writer did not understand the interrogative particle *li* (as in *ti, hoćeš li* or, adapted to the Italian orthography of the source, *tu ogis li*), which would be syntactically expected, and instead interpreted it as a repetition of the personal pronoun. The use of *tu* instead of the

51 DAZD-16: 43/54/631v-632r (my emphasis of Venetian-Italian insertions).

52 See the example in Sadovski-Kornprobst, Multilingualism, 211.

53 Kümmeler, *Korčula*, 260-262 (my emphasis and addition of punctuation).

correct Slavic *ti* would point to an Italo-Romance influence – either on the Slavic-speaking priest or on the scribe, who likely heard *tu*, a form more familiar to him, instead of *ti*.[54]

Given the setting of the wedding in Curzola's suburb, the Slavic origin of the spouses Radovan and Maruša, and the overall prevalence of Slavic as the spoken language in Dalmatia, the original statement was without any doubt uttered in Slavic. Including the Slavic passage in the official documentation would reflect the ceremonial and legal significance of the question and perhaps also a desire to document the precise form of consent given during the marriage rite.

We can observe something similar in a source from Ragusa, where proving consent was probably the motivation behind preserving the Slavic original in a passage from a dispute revolving around the execution of a will: *dixit quod audivit illam respondentem duabus vicibus* chochio chochio *ut habeas id et quicquid mihi pertineret.*[55] *Chochio* corresponds to modern Croatian *hoću* »I want«, a wording that was attributed with special legal significance.

Similarly, Slavic was occasionally used to record insults or emotionally charged exchanges. One example, though also from Ragusa rather than Spalato, captures the unfiltered nature of a verbal dispute that was the subject of criminal proceedings in 1488:

> *Jacomo de Julian testis: disse Andrea ad Martin:* ***suigno, sto ti snax****, et lo detto Martin li disse:* ***suignia niesam, dobri-sam chlouich chaco Stipcho Rogunouich, a suigna-si ti i-od suigne rogien****, e multe altre brutte parole disse uno ad altro*.[56]
>
> [testimony of the] witness Jacomo de Julian: Andrea said to Martin: **pig, what do you know**, and Martin told him: **I am not a pig, I am a good man, like Stipcho Rogunovich, but you are a pig and born from a pig**, and they told each other many other ugly words.

The preservation of this Slavic-language exchange in a formal Italian record suggests an effort to retain the authentic voice of the disputants, especially in cases where tone and wording could influence legal interpretation. Since most Slavic quotations were recorded in Italian or Latin translation, these quotations are exceptional and illuminating. They serve

54 Whether *tuogistu* is the Venetian-Italian rendering of an originally Slavic phrase asking for consent in marriage is, however, not entirely clear. In a personal letter from 1 October 2025, Franco Benucci (Padua) has suggested another interpretation of this passage: He considers *tuogistu* to be »a regular interrogative form (with ›subject inversion‹) in old Venetian variety (with ll > g' – cf. illi > igi, capilli > cavigi etc. – and still diphthongation and 2nd person *-s*): *Tuogis-tu*? corresponding to Latin *tollis tu*? (modern Paduan *Toi-to*, Venetian *Togi-tu* etc.), as the context also confirms (literally *Take-you Marussa as your wife legitimate*? *Take-you Radovan as your husband*?).« Although, Latin *tollere* and literary Italian *togliere* rather mean »to take away/to get rid off« than »to accept«, the Venetian counterpart tor can also have the meaning of »to take/to accept«, specifically in the context of marriage. Present-day Venetian sources, indeed, exhibit a concurrence between *ciapà(r)* »to take/to get« used in the wedding formula »ciapar par la to mojer« and *tor* in the same sense. This makes the decision between the Slavic and the Venetian interpretation more complicated; both analyses show some open issues.

55 »He said that he heard her responding twice *I want, I want* that you have this and whatever belongs to me«, cited from Dotto, Testi volgari, 115, who cites this passage in Muljačić, Noterelle lessicologiche, 408.

56 Jireček, Der ragusanische Dichter Šiško Menčetić, 55-56 (my emphasis of Slavic insertions).

as a reminder that oral language – particularly Slavic – continued to shape legal proceedings and written records, even when Latin and Italian remained the languages of the formal bureaucratic script.

Naming Practices and the Slavo-Romance Symbiosis

The final section of this article explores multilingual naming conventions documented in administrative records, also addressing the possibility of studying the interplay of language and identity through personal names. The study of names – both given and familial personal names as well as place names – has long been a focus of Croatian historiography. Several detailed studies already exist on the anthroponymy of Spalato, examining the geographical and ethnic origins, the modes of formation (patronymic, matronymic, based on nicknames, etc.), as well as the frequency of surnames and given names occurring in Spalato.[57] Scholars often attempt to determine the ethnicity or linguistic identity of medieval and early modern individuals based on the structure and origin of their names, particularly surnames ending in the Slavic patronymic suffix *-ich* or *-ić*. One study, for example, claims on the basis of such name endings that approximately 90% of the non-noble population of Spalato in the fifteenth century had Slavic or Croatian roots, a proportion that remained the same during Hungarian and Venetian times.[58] However, this study is based on a relatively small corpus of sources from the years 1368-1369 and 1443-1453 and exposes some common methodological difficulties.

Such quantitative approaches often fail to account for what the linguist Radoslav Katičić termed the »Slavo-Romance symbiosis« of Dalmatian towns. Katičić emphasized that, »it is important to note that it is not a question of the cohabitation within the city walls of Spalato of old Romance and new Croatian families, but that it is generally the same families, both among the nobility and the common people, who have become the bearers of both names, both ethnic traditions and probably also both languages«.[59]

In view of the many mixed marriages and the centuries-long merging – already underway at the time of Venetian rule – of the long-established Romance population with Slavic and Romance/Italian immigrants, assigning a clearly Romance or Slavic origin based solely

57 Marasović-Alujević, *Imena Splićana* deals with the pre-Venetian and Venetian city and provides a list of individuals from the eleventh to the eighteenth century, spanning nearly 180 pages. However, the author does so without using the records of the Venetian administration in the Zara archives as sources. Kuzmanić, *Splitski plemići* and Kuzmanić, *Splitski građani* list noble and non-noble families, respectively, in an unsystematic order, indicating the year in which the author came across a family member in the archival records of Zara related to Spalato. Due to the incomplete review of all existing archival material, numerous errors are evident – for example, many individuals appear in the preserved records several years earlier than Kuzmanić states, while certain family members are omitted altogether.

58 Andrić, *Život*, 27-32.

59 Katičić, *Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte*, 501: »Wesentlich ist, daß es sich dabei nicht um das Zusammenleben innerhalb der Stadtmauern von Split von altansässigen romanischen und zugezogenen kroatischen Familien handelt, sondern es in der Regel dieselben Familien sind, sowohl unter den Vornehmen als auch beim gemeinen Volk, die zu Trägern beider Namengebungen, beider ethnischen Traditionen und wohl auch beider Sprachen geworden sind.« See also Krekić, On the Latino-Slavic cultural symbiosis; Steinke, Begegnungen zwischen Slavia und Romania.

on the surname (let alone on the given name) appears unreliable and hardly meaningful. In Dalmatia, we are thus confronted with a blended cultural and linguistic identity shared by individuals and families rather than a clear-cut difference between Slavic and Romance people. Additional problems such as the frequent absence of surnames, differing pronunciations, and spellings that at times appear Romance/Latin, at other times Slavic (*de Bilsa* vs. *Bilsich*[60]), or the Latinization of Slavic names (*Lucia mater q. Martini Duhovinich seu Spiritelli*,[61] since Slavic *duh* means »spirit«) – which, however, could also be a Slavicization of Latin names! – make research endeavours that seek to link names and ethnicity particularly prone to error. This section therefore does not deal with the ethnic origin of the name-bearers but with the notaries' handling of Slavic personal and place names. In doing so, on the one hand, the frequently lacking knowledge of Slavic among the notaries again becomes apparent, while on the other hand, the widespread acceptance of Slavic name forms across all social classes also becomes visible.

Slavic given names such as *Radoslavus*, *Novacus*, *Biloslavus*, or *Marica* (also *Mariza*/*Mariça*), *Dobra*, *Betiza* can be found across all social classes, among the nobility particularly in the case of women.[62] The notaries typically added the Latin ending *-us* to male names in order to render the cases according to the O-declension in Latin documents, while female names – usually ending in *-a* – were declined according to the A-declension. As outsiders, however, they sometimes misunderstood the names, as shown by the confusion of the female name *Stoja* with the male *Ostoja*: a declaration of renunciation dealing with the administration of the estate of the recently deceased »Stoja, widow of the deceased Nicolaus Cuchlovich« (*Stoyę relictę quondam Nicolai Cuchlovich*) concerns 400 *librae* that Stoja's brothers owed her. In the document, her name (in the genitive) is given both as *Stoyę* and *Ostoyę* (*antedictę quondam Ostoyę*, »of the aforementioned deceased Ostoja).[63] The notary thus equated the male name *Ostoja* with the female *Stoja* and used both for the same person, who was undoubtedly a woman.

The spread and acceptance of Slavic name forms is illustrated not only by such names of Slavic origin, but even more so by the use of Slavic forms of Latin names that were well known to the notaries. Thus, in Latin and Italian documents, the name *Petrus* also appears as *Petar*, *Georgius* as *Jurai*, or *Stephanus* as *Stipan*.[64] Such Slavic forms of Latin-Christian names were in widespread use, with notaries employing them more frequently for individuals from the surrounding area of Spalato than for residents and citizens of the city itself. However,

60 DAZD-16: 24/40.1/128v-129r: *ser Marinus de Bilsa*; DAZD-16: 16/34/258r: *ser Marinus Bilsich*.

61 DAZD-16: 34/46.5/246v.

62 DAZD-16: 16/34/186r-v: *Radoslavus Bilossevich*; DAZD-16: 24/40.1/240r: *Magister Novacus q. Florii*; DAZD-16: 16/34/293v: *Biloslavus Braichovich*; DAZD-16: 24/40.1/266r-v: *Mariza relicta q. Bartholi marinarii de Spalato*; Marica de Augubio, belonging to the highest stratum of the non-noble commoners; DAZD-16: 16/34/261v: *Nobilis dona Dobra relicta q. ser Michaelis Laurentii de Grisogonis*; DAZD-16: 16/34/292v-293r: *Nobilis dona Dobriza relicta q. ser Nicolai Pecinich* (= Picenich or de Marulis); DAZD-16: 24/40.1/74r-v: *Nobilis Dona Betiza relicta q. ser Thomasii de Albertis*.

63 DAZD-16: 24/40.1/280r-v: *quas praedicti fratres dare et solvere tenebantur antedictę quondam Ostoyę*.

64 DAZD-16: 16/34/263r: *Petar Ivanovich*; ibid. 275r: *Jurai Thomasich de Susuraz*; ibid. 287v-288r: *Stipan Veselchovich de Pollicio*.

this does not mean that the use of Slavic name forms was tied to a strict social division. The socially prominent non-noble citizen Antonio de Augubio, whose father had migrated from Umbrian Gubbio to Spalato in the 1430s, referred to himself in an Italian letter written in his own hand and submitted in a court case as *Ante de Ugubio*, thus using the form *Ante* – a version of the given name *Anton*(*-io*/*-ius*) still common in Croatia today.[65]

In some instances, both Slavic and Romance versions of the same name appeared in a single document. In a *compromissum* for the appointment of arbitrators, for example, Johannes Michmirovich is referred to as *Ivan* just one line after his first mention as *Johannes*, when Lucia is introduced as his sister: *Johannes Michmirovich de vila Crisa et Nicolaus Ivanovich nomine Lucię eius uxoris sororis predicti Ivani [...].*[66] In accordance with the usual suffixing of Latin case endings, the name *Ivan*, here in the genitive, is suffixed with an *-i*: *Ivan-i*.

Petar Cranotich is referred to in the nominative form in his daughter Marchesina's marriage contract using the Slavic *Petar*, but in other cases he is designated in Latin as *Petri* and *Petrum*, whereby the similarity of the forms *Petrus* and *Petar* certainly facilitated the transition.[67] By contrast, in the *procura* contract of *Marchus q. Petar cerdonis de banatico*, the notary Antonius de Olzignano refrained from converting the name of the client's deceased father, *Petar*, into the grammatically required genitive form *Petri*, and instead left the Slavic form in the nominative.[68] These examples show that the notaries used both forms side by side and did not insist on a Latinization of the names even in Latin instruments. The Latinization would have enabled the grammatically necessary suffixing of case endings, yet such suffixing was not always carried out, especially since it was difficult to implement with genuinely Slavic names.

Occasionally, Slavic given and family names were translated into Latin or Italian via loan translation (calque). This is demonstrated by the parallel use of the names *Florius*, *Cvitanus* and *Civitanus Megliaevich* to designate a prominent citizen and lawyer who repeatedly represented the commoners in high-profile court cases. The names *Florius*, or *Fiorio* in the Italian version, and *Cvitanus* derive from the Latin *flos*, *floris*, and the Slavic *cvijet*/*cvet* (or *cvit* in the local dialect), respectively, meaning »flower«.[69] The designee likely preferred the Slavic form *Cvitan*(*-us*), as it appears much more frequently in the sources from his hometown Spalato, whereas he is found under the name *Florius*/*Fiorio* in Italian-only Venice.[70] However, *Cvitan*(*-us*) was apparently not understood by all notaries in Spalato, as they often transformed it into the more familiar-sounding *Civitanus*, reminiscent of Latin *civitas* – »the flowery one« thus became »the civic one« in the ears of the Italian notaries.[71]

65 DAZD-16: 42/53/189v. Similarly, in a court case, a woman is called *Antonia seu Antiza*: DAZD-16: 43/54/76v.

66 DAZD-16: 24/40.1/229r-v: »Johannes Michmirovich from the village Crisa and Nicolaus Ivanovich, in the name of Lucia, his wife and sister of the aforementioned Ivan.«

67 DAZD-16: 16/34/313v.

68 DAZD-16: 24/40.1/120v-121r, 16.10.1491. A similar case is Gregorius q. Jurai de Almissio, who is also called Gregorius q. Georgii (DAZD-16: 16/34/225r; DAZD-16: 24/40.1/290r).

69 DAZD-16: 42/53/358v: *Ser Cvitanus seu Florius* [Megliaevich].

70 ASVe, Auditori Nuovi 187/10, 175r.

71 Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 59, 166 uses the form *Civitano*/*-us*.

The case of *Lucia mater q. Martini Duhovinich seu Spiritelli* has already been mentioned.[72] Here, *duh* (»spirit«) was replaced by *spirito*, and the diminutive form present in the Slavic *-ini-* was reflected through the Italian suffix *-elli*. The act of translating the family name – down to the morphological level – suggests a high degree of linguistic fluidity and mutual intelligibility. Since such loan translations were very rare, it was probably not the Venetian-born notary Petrus de Ferrara – whose hand is behind hundreds of preserved pages of records – who was responsible in this instance. Rather, it is likely that the family themselves adopted this second name, although it cannot be ruled out that it was originally a loan translation from Italian into Slavic.

The latter was likely the case in another example of such loan translations: in the will of Magdalena Bonzorno, her uncle Johannes bears the surname *Dobroiutrovich*. While *Bonzorno* is the Venetian form of the Italian *buon giorno* – meaning »good day/morning«– *Dobroiutrovich* derives from *dobro jutro*, also meaning »good morning«.[73] In this case, it is more likely that the Italian surname *Buongiorno* (or Venetian *Bonzorno*) came first and was translated into Slavic, since such delocutive names – those derived from performative expressions – are extremely rare and difficult to form in Slavic, especially with a patronymic suffix.[74] In any case, such parallel usages of Latin or Italian and Slavic given and family name forms – particularly in a personal document such as a will – point to the deep interweaving of the two linguistic cultures. The coexistence of both forms within the same family – and document – defies attempts to categorize individuals as either Slavic or Romance.

As mentioned above, the use of Slavic names did not correspond to a strict social division. Thus, no few noblewomen bore Slavic names, and even noblemen of the city were occasionally, though rarely, referred to using Slavic name forms. This is shown, for example, in the case of *Petrus quondam Georgii Bubanich*, who also appears in the sources under the name *Petrus Jurasich*. *Jurasich* is the Slavic equivalent of *quondam Georgii*, i.e., »(son) of the (deceased) George«.[75] The name *Jurasich* remained in use for this branch of the Bubanich family at least in everyday language: more than three decades later, in the years 1512 and 1515, Petrus' son Johannes Franciscus Bubanich is referred to in Italian-language documents submitted to the court as *Zanfrancesco Jurassich* or *Gurasich*, while in the Latin entries of the notary, the name *Bubanich* continues to be used.[76]

This practice of name-based differentiation within large noble families was also known among the de Grisogonis families present in Spalato and Zara. Probably in order to distinguish them from their relatives of the line of Arnerius de Grisogonis, the children of Michael Laurentii de Grisogonis were at times referred to solely by the name of their grandfather,

72 DAZD-16: 34/46.5/246v.

73 DAZD-16: 60/67/94r-v.

74 I would like to thank Univ.-Doz. Dr. Velizar Sadovski for referring me to Benveniste, Les verbes délocutifs.

75 E.g. DAZD-16: 16/34/177r-v.

76 DAZD-16: 42/53/187r; DAZD-16: 43/54/105r: *ad instantiam nobilis ser Joannis Arnerii de Grisogonis uti tutoris Joannisfrancisci filii & heredis q. ser Joannisfrancisci Bubanich*, followed by *Comparo Io Zuan de Arnier come tutor et eo nomine di Zuanfrancesco mio nepote zoe fiol de q. ser Zanfrancesco Jurassich mio zenero*.

either as *Laurentii* or, in the Slavic form, *Lovretich*, both forms meaning »son of Lawrence«.[77] The noble Natalis likewise acquired a Slavic name form through the addition of the suffix *-ić*: *Nadalichii*.[78] These parallel forms often appear in different contexts: the Slavic form in local or informal usage, the Romance/Latin form in official Venetian documents.

The choice of name was thus strategic and situational, and this practice of switching between name forms, even within the same document, illustrates the practical multilingualism of the society. It also undermines attempts to draw neat ethnic or linguistic divisions based solely on onomastics. The frequent and casual use of both Slavic and Romance names among all social classes reflects a deeply integrated linguistic environment, which again points to the Slavo-Romance symbiosis we have discussed above.

The occasional lack of understanding of Slavic names by some notaries did not only affect personal names – as shown by the adaptation of the name *Cvitan* as *Civitanus* or the confusion between male and female names described above – but also place names.[79] This relates not only to the undoubtedly difficult written rendering of Slavic names using Latin letters without diacritics and before orthographic standardization, which applied to both personal and place names. There is also an additional detail that sometimes appears in the naming of places: they are frequently preceded by the prefix *a-* as though it were part of the name itself – for example, *Asmocovich* instead of *Smocovich* (*Smokovik*).[80]

In a list of eight properties that arbitrators were to divide between the aforementioned nobleman Petrus q. Georgii Bubanich and his cousins Catharina, Franceschina, and Nicolina q. Simeonis Bubanich, no fewer than four place names are mistakenly given with the prefix *a-*: *Agripe* (*Gripe*), *Aloque* (*Lokve*), *Acociunar* (*Kocunar*), and *Agustirna* (*Gustirna*, from *cisterna*).[81] When the contracting parties told the notary in Italian that the properties were located »a Gripe«, etc., he evidently mistook the Italian preposition *a* for part of the unfamiliar and unintelligible place names and attached it to the names in his Latin document.[82]

77 DAZD-16: 34/46.6/289v: While the text of the notarial act itself speaks of *nobili ser Antonio q. ser Michaellis de Grisogonis*, the marginal note records *pro ser Antonio Lovretich quietatio*.

78 DAZD-16: 53/62.1/215r.

79 On the toponymy of Spalato and its surroundings, see Petrić, Splitski toponimi; Marasović-Alujević and Vuković, Zaboravljeni toponimi; Šimunović, *Istočnojadranska toponimija*; Šimunović, Ranosrednjovjekovna toponimija; Skok, *Slavenstvo i romanstvo*.

80 DAZD-16: 24/40.1/55v-56r: *in loco vocato asmocovich*, ibid., 164r-v: *in contrata asmocovich districtus Spalati*, ibid., 200v. Other cases are *Acman* instead of *a C(h)man* (Kman) (ibid., 142v: *super terreno eclesię sancti Johannis in loco vocato acman*; ibid. 153r), *Acopilize* instead of *a Copolize* (Kopilica) (ibid., 115v-116r: *in loco nominato acoplize*), *Arogac* instead of *a Rogac* (Rogač) (ibid., 139v-40r: *posito arogac*), as well as *Alusaç* instead of *a Lusaç* (Lučac) (ibid., 235v-236) and *Achrisic* instead of *a Chrisic* (Križice) (ibid., 154v-155r, 20.1.1492). Lasić, Onomastički opis, 57 gives a list of places where the confraternity of the Holy Spirit owned land in 1525. Several of the mentioned place names were written with the incorrect suffix *a-*, for which Lasić, however, provides no explanation.

81 DAZD-16: 24/40.1/107r-v, 27.8.1491: *Terrenum in mergnano agripe vretenorum quatuordecim. Terrenum positum in Trestenicho vretenorum quatuordecim. Terrenum positum aloque vretenorum octo. Terrenum positum acociunar vretenorum octo. Terrenum positum agustirna vretenorum quatuor.* Similarly: *Aloque* instead of *a Loque* (Lokve): ibid. 253v-254r: *in loco nominato aloque*; ibid. 92v-93v.

82 This is also nicely illustrated by the phrasing *in contrata ubi dicitur agrippe in districtu Spalati*: DAZD-16: 20/37.3/27v.

The phrasing also shows that this is not merely a graphic phenomenon in which two separate words are joined and written as one. Although this does often occur, it cannot, on the one hand, involve the Latin preposition *a, ab*, since that means »from, from…toward, from… out of« and not »in« (locative). On the other hand, in the Latin phrases *in loco vocato acman*, *in contrata asmocovich districtus Spalati*, or *positum agripe* (place name in the ablative), no preposition is needed. The agglutination of local prepositions or articles is a well-known phenomenon in toponomastics and also occurs in reverse, as deglutination. Thus, the Latin *Ariminum* became Italian *Rimini*, when – due to the increasing use of prepositions in place of Latin cases like the accusative, locative, and ablative – the initial *a* was taken for the corresponding preposition and separated from the city's name.[83]

This treatment of Slavic place names is, on the one hand, yet another expression of orality within written sources, and on the other hand, it once again reveals the challenges posed by notaries and scribes unfamiliar with the local language and geography.

Conclusion

The linguistic landscape of Dalmatia in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as reflected in the Venetian administration of Spalato, reveals a sophisticated and adaptive multilingualism. Latin and Italian functioned as the primary languages of formal administration, legal documentation, and commercial exchange. Slavic, by contrast, remained the dominant spoken language of the majority population and served as the principal means of communication in both domestic and public life.

Slavic was not entirely absent from administrative practices, but its presence was generally confined to oral interpretation, translated documents, and a limited number of exceptional cases of preserved Slavic writings and original quotations. Venetian authorities adapted to the linguistic needs of their subjects by employing translators, tolerating unofficial scribes, and maintaining bilingual communication with Slavic-speaking regions. Although official records typically rendered Slavic-language materials into Latin or Italian, the underlying Slavic content often shaped the structure and vocabulary of those records. Lexical borrowings, direct quotations, and bilingual formatting all point to the persistence of Slavic as a crucial component of administrative life, albeit one that remained largely invisible in official policy.

The role of Slavic in testamentary practices, the use of both Slavic and Romance names across all social strata, and the casual switching between name forms, as well as the general interplay of oral and written communication, demonstrate that language in Dalmatian society was both fluid and functional. Rather than reflecting rigid ethnic boundaries, the multilingual practices of the period illustrate a flexible and pragmatic approach to identity and communication. The concept of a »Slavo-Romance symbiosis« is therefore essential to understanding Dalmatia's urban culture, one in which linguistic plurality was not merely tolerated but deeply embedded in everyday life.

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83 *Ire Ariminum* (Acc.) did not become *andare a(d) Ariminum*, but *andare a Rimini*, moreover maintaining the locative ending of *Arimini* in all cases. On this phenomenon, also with other prepositions, articles or remnants of Latin case endings, see Pellegrini, *Toponomastica italiana*, 20-21.

Efforts to quantify or categorize populations as »Slavic« or »Romance« based on naming patterns or language use alone fail to capture the complexity of this environment. Instead, the evidence points to a society characterized by overlapping identities, strategic code-switching, and a practical engagement with multiple linguistic traditions. In this sense, Dalmatia under Venetian rule offers a compelling model of early modern multilingualism, in which language served not as a marker of exclusion but as a bridge between communities, legal systems, and cultural traditions.

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Abbreviations

ASVe = Archivio di Stato di Venezia
DAST = Državni Arhiv u Splitu
DAZD = Državni Arhiv u Zadru

Unpublished sources

Split, Državni Arhiv u Splitu
1: Splitska općina
180: Zbirka oporuka
Venice, Archivio di Stato di Venezia
Auditori Nuovi 187/10.
Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rectori et altre Cariche, 276: Cattaro (1739-1789).
Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 18.
Zadar, Državni Arhiv u Zadru
16: Općina Split
26: Providurstvo Omiš

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