The Written Communication Between Ragusans and Ottomans Before the Mid-17th Century: Notes on Multilingualism and Language Ideologies

Marijana Mišević*

This paper is an essay on the extant products of pragmatic literacy that testify to centuries-long written communication between Ottomans and Ragusans, emphasizing its multilingualism and multiscripturalism. It rests on the assumption that there is a benefit in studying this corpus by using language and literacy ideologies both as hermeneutical tools and as objects of historical investigation. This rarely, if ever, applied approach entails examining changing patterns in linguistic choices made within the distinct and/or intersecting realms of pragmatic literacy, as well as underlying explicit and implicit ideas about language and literacy use – issues that can be addressed, in the context of Ottoman-Ragusan relations, from at least the late 14th century onward. The main and modest ambition of this paper is to draw attention to the arguably neglected complexity of the history of this communication, and to suggest that its more detailed investigation could offer additional insights into the cultural and power relations between the two polities, the changing ways in which the Ottomans and Ragusans perceived and managed diversity, and the historically shifting relationships among users of multiple languages (Latin, Ragusan Romance, Italian, Slavic, Greek, Turkish, Arabic, Persian) and scripts (Latin, Cyrillic, Arabic, Greek). Although the relationship between the Ottomans and Ragusans – as it pertains to the movement of documents and people across vast geo-linguistic spaces – can be traced up to c. 1808 (the fall of the Dubrovnik Republic), the present discussion is confined to the period between the 1390s and the 1650s. This period may be further subdivided into several phases, each of which will be outlined in broad strokes and illustrated through representative literacy events.

Keywords: late medieval, early modern, multilingualism, pragmatic literacy, Ottomans, Ragusans, South-Slavia.

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* Correspondence details: Marijana Mišević, Postdoctoral Research Fellow of the Cluster of Excellence *EurAsian Transformations* at the Central European University in Vienna, MisevicM@ceu.edu

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The textual corpus attesting to the centuries-long communication between the Ottomans and the Ragusans[1] (hereafter: the *Corpus*) is preserved today in two of the richest extant premodern archives. One is housed in the State Archives in Dubrovnik[2] (hereafter DA), and the other in the Ottoman Archives of the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey's Directorate of State Archives[3] (hereafter OA). Seen as a whole, the *Corpus* encompasses various texts produced using three scripts (Latin, Cyrillic, and Arabic) and five languages (Latin, Italian, Slavic, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian).[4] Its diachronic expansion is traceable from the late 14th century until Dubrovnik lost its independence in 1808.[5]

The texts mainly, though not exclusively, belong to the domain of pragmatic literacy.[6] They can be further categorized based on materiality and form. On the one hand, there are original documents, Cyrillic and Arabographic, that are almost exclusively preserved in the DA. On the other hand, in both the DA and the OA there are handwritten collections of document drafts and various kinds of copies, as well as series of records of official decisions on matters that were regulated through individual documents.[7] In its presently available form, the *Corpus* emerged through the circulation of people and written texts across some of the most intense linguistic and cultural contact zones of the late medieval and early modern periods, including regions often framed in historiography through modern constructs such

1 By both »Ottomans« and »Ragusans«, I simply mean individuals or groups who lived in the various formations of the Ottoman state (c. 1300-1926) and/or in the Dubrovnik commune c.1358-1808, no more and no less.

2 Sl. Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku.

3 Tr. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi

4 The labels for languages and scripts mentioned here do not exhaust all variants that individual producers of texts *could* possibly have used or to which they *could* have been exposed. The idiom known in the literature as Ragusan Romance (originally: *lingua ragusea* or *latina ragusea*), for example, was »one of the traditional official languages of the [Ragusan] patrician administration, besides Latin and Italian«. This note, together with more information on ideas and practices related to this and other Ragusan idioms (Latin, Italian, Slavic) in the 14th and 15th centuries can be found in Kunčević, *Myth of Dubrovnik*, 61 and *passim*. Some illustrations of how Greek mattered can be found later in this article. Note also that I use the label *Slavic* as an abstraction to designate the various mutually understandable idioms constituting the South-Slavic dialect continuum. In late medieval times and afterward, these were attested under the following names: *bosanski* (Bosnian), *bugarski* (Bulgarian), *hrvatski* (Croatian), *slovenski* (Slovene) and *srpski* (Serbian). I use these labels only when they appear in the texts I cite. See also Mišević, How and why, 282. Texts written in Latin using Latin script will be described simply as Latin texts. In all other cases, there is no such overlap.

5 For a general survey of the history of Dubrovnik in English, which, among other things, addresses the period of contact with the Ottomans, see Harris, *Dubrovnik*.

6 The texts that were not pragmatic yet still belong to the *Corpus* are those found in the manuscripts purchased and collected for use by Ragusan *dragomans* (interpreters). It is known that such purchases were approved by the Ragusan government as of 1582, but the surviving manuscripts appear to date mainly from the 18th century. See Miović and Selmani, Turska Kancelarija, 244-248.

7 In the Ragusan context, the core administrative material of this kind was the records (lat. *libri*) of the decisions (lat. *reformationes*) made by the three councils of the Dubrovnik commune, kept as of 1301. Earlier are the records of the Notary Public (kept as of 1278). These were written in Latin, which was gradually replaced by Italian. In the Ottoman context, a comparable type of record is designated by the generic term *defter*, further differentiated by subtype. These were predominantly written in Turkish, unless the drafted or copied documents were in Arabic or Persian. The relevant subtypes will be mentioned in due course. The same applies for the relevant Ragusan compilations of drafts or copies of individual Cyrillic documents.

as the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and even the Middle East. At first glance, therefore, the *Corpus* offers an unusually accessible and compelling case for exploring multilingualism, its late medieval and early modern manifestations and consequences. Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, the *Corpus* as a whole has never been treated as an object of focused research, and one may well wonder whether there are good reasons for this.

From the 19th century onward, Ragusan archival materials have been widely used by modern historians as sources of information on various aspects of the history of Dubrovnik, its neighbors, its political partners, and its adversaries. The scope and variety of research questions pursued have dictated the selection of subcorpuses used not only for narrative construction but also for the preparation of materials published in critical editions. The earliest publications of this kind also date to the 19th century, many remaining authoritative to this day, despite their varying quality. Since then, some collections considered important have been republished more than once, with the aim of both correcting or improving earlier editions and of reformulating the criteria for establishing a meaningful whole.[8] Similar attitudes informed the publication of Cyrillic texts that testify to the early phase of the development of the *Corpus*,[9] whereas the situation is somewhat different when it comes to their Arabographic counterparts.[10] These texts were rarely, if ever, juxtaposed – let alone analyzed together – though it is well known that in some instances (of varied frequency and form),

8 As late as the early 2020s, scholars were concluding that even the most frequently edited texts (an illustrative example being the charters of medieval South Slavic rulers) required further work before their editions could be considered adequate by contemporary standards. See, for example, *Dokumenti*, ed. Porčić, 9-19 and the literature cited therein. This particular collection adopts dynastic affiliation (the Nemanjić dynasty of Serbia, 1166-1371) as the organizing principle for corpus construction and a marker of historical continuity. By contrast, the (Cyrillic) script and (medieval) period served as the defining criteria in *Zbornik*, ed. Ćirković *et.al.*, whereas the notion of (»old«) rulership/statehood provides the framework for the *Codex Diplomaticus*, ed. Kurtović *et.al*.

9 A comprehensive survey of the published editions of these Cyrillic texts – which, among other things, include translations into French published by Boško Bojović – as well as a detailed account of the state of the art, is provided in Filipović, *Ottoman Cyrillic*. Here I will only recall the main editions – outdated but still relevant. In 1858, Miklosich published the results of his work on the DA Cyrillic documents that were then temporarily housed in Vienna, only some of which belong to the *Corpus*. He misleadingly assumed that *Serbian* was an adequate label for all published Cyrillic documents »related to the history of Serbia, Bosnia, and Dubrovnik«. See *Monumenta Serbica*, ed. Miklosich. The next important group of texts from the DA – kept in Dubrovnik at the time of publication in 1911, with a few exceptions that remained in Vienna – includes Cyrillic texts that unequivocally belong to the *Corpus*; see *Tursko-slovjenski spomenici*, ed. Truhelka. With some additions, the same collection was republished as part of an edition that, in principle, follows Miklosich's criteria – that is, it aimed to include all Cyrillic pragmatic texts from the DA, of which some 220 belong to the *Corpus*; see *Stare srpske povelje*, vol. 2, ed. Stojanović, 217-408.

10 The two volumes of *Turski Spomenici*, ed. Elezović, from 1940 and 1952, remain the only editions of their kind and the best available for Arabographic pragmatic texts relatable to South Slavia, including translations into Serbian, commentaries and facsimiles. The vast majority of these texts were or have been preserved in the DA and belong to the *Corpus*. An inventory of Arabographic texts from the DA produced on behalf of the Ottoman sultans can be found in Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u Spisima Osmanskih Sultana*, 137-409. A single example of a translation of selected Arabographic texts into English is provided in Biegman, *The Turco-Ragusan Relationship*. For an overview of smaller publications, relevant literature, and the current state of the art, see also Filipović, *Researching*, esp. 270, 272-274.

both Cyrillic and Arabographic texts of the *Corpus* were produced in support of one and the same act of communication involving the same key actors.[11]

Thus, both in principle and in consequence, the scholarship converging around the *Corpus* remains shaped by the monolingual mentalities characteristic of national(ist) historiographies.[12] What also unites current approaches is their reliance on *diplomatics* as the key auxiliary discipline, with its heavy focus on the formal characteristics and genres of (mostly) authentic *diplomas* written in a language (or even dialect) recognized as national from the standpoint of modernity.[13] Significant efforts to analyze such monolingual corpuses have often concentrated on identifying patterns or clusters of formal features within the documents,[14] with only rare excursions into questions of cross-linguistic transfers or interconnections of any kind.[15] These patterns are almost routinely attributed to the »chanceries« of proto-national rulers, aristocrats, or noblemen.[16]

Considering the state of the art outlined above, it may not come as a surprise that no scholarly work to date has focused specifically on the multilingualism of Dubrovnik as reflected

11 Although, before the mid-20th century, both Truhelka and Elezović occasionally pointed to the various kinds of connections between documents in various languages and scripts, no attempts were made to address the broader implications of these connections. The main Slavic publications on Ottoman–Ragusan relations across different centuries do not take Arabographic sources into account. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of incoming Arabographic texts prompted a chain of discussions and decisions traceable in Ragusan non-Arabographic sources is evident in all of these works. See Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska*; Popović, *Turska i Dubrovnik*; Vinaver, *Dubrovnik i Turska*.

12 With rare exceptions, most historians of the Republic of Turkey tended either to ignore sources in languages not considered »properly Ottoman« (that is, languages other than Turkish, and to some extent Arabic and Persian), or to acknowledge them indirectly through selective citation of secondary literature. That the Ragusan archive contains material in various languages (that is, not just in Turkish) which may be relevant to Ottoman history has been recognized, but the existing reviews amounted to little more than calls for further attention. See Şabanoviç, Dubrovnik Devlet Arşivi; Emecen and Bostan, Dubrovnik Arşivi.

13 In the case of the Cyrillic portion of the *Corpus*, these languages could be identified as Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian, or Serbo-Croatian, depending on a scholar's position. Proper historical-linguistic analyses of some of the relevant documents have begun to appear only recently; see, for example, Polomac and Lutovac, *Dva pisma*, and Lutovac-Kaznovac, *Jezik pisama*. The Arabographic portion of the *Corpus* is indeed dominated by Turkish, but documents in Arabic have also survived, indicating a broader usage – mainly in transactions involving individuals rather than groups or collectives. As far as I understand, neither Latin nor Italian has been framed by scholars as a »national language« of the Ragusans.

14 For Arabographic documents belonging to the *Corpus*, an important early publication is Kraelitz, *Osmanische Urkunden*. Examples of general diplomatic surveys are Nedkov, *Osmanoturska diplomatika;* Reychman *et al*., *Handbook*; Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı belgelerinin dili.* Diplomatic features of Cyrillic documents of the *Corpus* have not been analyzed in detail, but see fn.15.

15 As a positive example, see Boškov, Odnos, which also offers a series of general remarks on, and a comparison of, the diplomatic features of relevant Cyrillic and Arabographic documents. See also Filipović, Ottoman Cyrillic, 303-306.

16 In Serbian historiography, for example, it has only recently been emphasized that, for the (late) medieval period, the concept of a chancery – as a stable, organized, and hierarchical institution – should not be taken for granted as the exclusive locus of textual production. See Vujošević, *Srpska vladarska*, 1-28, 284-301. This point is significant, because there is broad consensus that Serbian was among the diplomatic languages of the Ottoman government, a view that assumes certain continuities with the late medieval Serbian chanceries thus conceived. I would suggest that the same analytical reservation is relevant for the Ottoman context as well.

in surviving written texts, whether from a synchronic or a diachronic perspective. The same holds true for other historical polities of the Balkans, including the so-called Ottoman-ruled Europe, or *Rumeli*. Similar observations can be made with regard to broader, and specifically »Ottoman multilingualism«.[17] In much of Ottoman and related historiographies, the link between *a* language, *an* identity, and *a* culture is assumed rather than demonstrated. Although religious confession is usually – and justifiably – treated as the primary marker of difference within Ottoman conceptual frameworks, actors and groups are often profiled according to presumed linguistic competences, which are frequently tied to assumptions about their »origin«. These attributions, however, tell us more about the interpretive frameworks of historians than about self-perceptions of concrete historical actors.[18]

Rather than criticize the existing scholarship, the primary aim of the above considerations has been to suggest that it is precisely based on its achievements that we can conclude that the multilingualism of the *Corpus* is a legitimate theme, fully open to discussion and further research. This basic statement, however, does not resolve the question of how such research is to be conducted – or for what purpose.

As a theme, the multilingualism of written texts and textual traditions has only recently found its place on the agenda of (cultural) historians. Historians, however, rarely – if ever – engage in a critique of the linguistic concepts (of various kinds) they borrow in relation to the material they use. In consequence, similar conceptual problems persist across Eurasian historiographies. One reason for this is that both multilingualism and literacy contain multiple layers of meaning demanding different research strategies. Also, even though written texts constitute the key sources for reconstructing past events and continuities, the two have often been discussed separately. This makes it difficult to apply these notions to past realities as analytical rather than purely descriptive concepts. Moreover, the connotations *multilingualism* and *literacy* carry as concepts depend precisely on the prevailing understanding of the historical contexts in which multilingualism existed as a lived reality and in which *a literacy* or *literacies* were practiced. For example, multilingualism has often been endowed with positive connotations as a supposed indicator of – if not entirely peaceful, then at least less conflictual - coexistence among monolingual (literary) cultures, and by implication, their carriers. Having framed multilingualism as the antipode of situations characterized by strong language politics aimed at the homogenization of speech-communities around languages undergoing standardization or already standardized – and therefore around (national) identities and cultures – historians often find it sufficient merely to demonstrate that such

17 For a discussion of mainstream approaches to Ottoman multilingualism, with citations of relevant literature, see Mišević, Slavic Words, 262-266. For a discussion of my approach to this topic and the literature on which it is based, see Mišević, *Writing Slavic*, esp. 1-36.

18 This tendency is reinforced by the use of »Ottoman« – whether as a noun or an adjective – both as a self-explanatory descriptor and as an analytical vantage point. Consequently, discussions of multilingualism in Ottoman history rarely begin »from below«, where the sheer diversity of languages resists easy classification. Instead, they typically start »from above«, with »Ottoman« placed alongside equally broad extra-linguistic categories such as Muslim/Non-Muslim or Eastern/Western, or alongside glottonyms like (Ottoman) Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Greek, or Slavic – labels that modern readers often populate with meaning (and historical significance) based on their own knowledge and assumptions.

conditions did not exist in the past. When such considerations fail to theorize literacy, or take it for granted, power relations remain blurred – just as the distinction between the written and oral communication does.[19]

To begin with, a broad survey of the relevant material on which this paper relies shows that neither the Dubrovnik nor the Ottoman administrations transparently propagated or explicitly indicated a direct link between *a* language and *an* ethnic community or a (proto-) nation. Nor did the Ragusans and Ottomans who produced the *Corpus* explicitly speak about multilingualism in any sense that corresponds to the meanings we ascribe to it today. Therefore, this paper suggests that the multilingual *Corpus* provides an excellent case for discussing late medieval and early modern multilingualism as reflected in written texts, but sets the term aside in order to avoid circular descriptions and arguments. Instead, it proposes that the analysis of the *Corpus*'s linguistic composition can help us reconstruct the historical ideas about language(s) and literacy that shaped the communicative strategies and linguistic choices of participants in *literacy events*,[20] as well as their persistence, transformations, and analogues. It may be taken as an axiom that familiarity with these ideas – whether explicitly stated in the sources or embodied in practice – contributes to our understanding of the social history of individuals and interpretive communities organized around a single text or a group of texts. In other words, it can help us understand how people of the past – elite and non-elite, literate and illiterate – *coped* with multilingualism. Having in mind this goal, which, of course, can not be achieved immediately, the paper will delineate several patterns which appear significant for reconstructing these ideas in more detail, and, on this basis, outline a periodization of the history of the *Corpus*.

The (Ottoman-) Ragusan Treasury

When the Ottoman soldiers crossed the Dardanelles around 1350, they entered a relatively familiar, predominantly Grecophone continuum, from which they continued their advance into South Slavia, a geolinguistic region divided among independent and semi-independent polities, two of which styled themselves as empires (Serbian: 1346-1371; Bulgarian: 1185-1396).[21] This expansion likely introduced new challenges for the Ottomans, particularly in how they categorized, perceived, and navigated the region's increasingly complex linguistic landscape. Around the same time, in 1358, the commune of Dubrovnik freed itself from Venetian suzerainty and accepted a politically lighter, tributary relationship with the Hungarian crown – a change that enabled it to pursue a somewhat more independent foreign policy. Indirect and later direct contact between the Ragusans and the Ottomans followed

19 I hold here that pre-modern literacy – as a social practice not widely imposed by governmental structures – inherently implies the relative proximity of the literate to the centers of economic and political power, irrespective of the quality of the product of literacy which is observed.

20 My understanding of a literacy event here follows its most broadly accepted definition: »any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants' interactions and their interpretative processes.« Street, Literacy events, esp. 21.

21 As is well known, the Ottoman Empire began as a small principality in western Asia Minor, neighboring the late-13th-century Byzantine Empire. Its Turcophone Muslim governors gained independence from the Ilkhanids and Seljuqs around 1300.

relatively soon thereafter, although the precise initiative behind it remains unclear. The oldest extant document of this direct contact is a 1396 letter written in Slavic using Cyrillic script (see below).

By the mid-15th century, the Ragusans were no longer paying tribute to the Hungarian crown but had instead entered into a new, firmly structured relationship with the Ottomans – one that enabled them to maintain semi-independence by paying an annual tribute directly into the sultan's treasury. Each new sultan, upon his enthronement, would renew the treaty, a document generally referred to in the literature by the technical term *ahdname (ar.tr.)*, issued by his predecessor. These documents regulated the obligations of Dubrovnik's citizens toward the Ottoman central government and set out the privileges they enjoyed while on Ottoman territory or in transactions with third countries of interest to the Ottoman state. As international agreements, they have attracted considerable scholarly attention and are regarded as the principal sources for understanding the political relationship between Ragusans and Ottomans. The standardization of literacy events based on such agreements, however, has its own history, as will be seen later in the paper.

This relationship between Ragusans and Ottomans has typically – and often anachronistically – been framed as one between a mighty »empire« and a tiny, yet brave and cunning, maritime republic. While broadly accurate, this deeply ingrained image obscures the fact that, when the Ragusans first came into contact with the Ottomans, both the central and provincial Ottoman bureaucracies were still in their formative stages.[22] By contrast, the Ragusans could already boast a long tradition of pragmatic literacy, preserved in an archive containing documents in multiple languages. The ideas and practices that shaped the history of the *Corpus*, whose early stages were marked by a pronounced and only seemingly unregulated use of Slavo-Cyrillic texts, can be understood only if this asymmetry is fully acknowledged.

Besides their own administrative records and the Latin and Italian documents exchanged with western and northern ecclesiastical and political authorities, the Ragusans' archival repository – in its 1396 configuration – also held a rich corpus documenting their varied relations with neighboring Slavic-speaking polities. In these states, institutional archiving, if practiced, was largely a Church function. Consequently, the oldest records of these interactions, dating from the late 12th century, along with much of the overall corpus, survived in the DA. Initially, the texts were produced in Latin by the Ragusans as addressees, sometimes accompanied by Slavo-Cyrillic versions supplied by the issuers.[23] The intensification of these relationships paralleled the emancipation of Dubrovnik and its Slavic hinterland

22 A rather small number of documents from this early period, irrespective of the genre, have survived. See, for example, Zachariadou, Records.

23 The earliest preserved example of this kind is a peace treaty signed in 1186 between the Serbian grand *župan* Stefan Nemanja and his two brothers, the *knez*es, on one side, and the Dubrovnik city government (headed by the *knez*) on the other. The text was produced by a Ragusan (ecclesiastical) scribe and written in Latin. The only Slavo-Cyrillic elements are the signatures of the *župan* and a *knez*, see *Dokumenti*, ed. Porčić, 129-131. The oldest surviving Slavo-Cyrillic document from DA (and oldest in the context of South-Slavia in general) is the 1189 charter in which *Ban* Kulin of Bosnia grants privileges to Ragusan merchants. The Slavo-Cyrillic version of the charter was produced by a scribe (sl. *dijak*) in the service of the *ban*, based on the Latin template prepared in Dubrovnik; see *Codex Diplomaticus*, ed. Kurtović et.al., 32-33.

from Byzantine control after 1204.[24] Soon after, Dubrovnik employed its first known Slavic scribe (fl. 1215-1254), an anonymous figure who learned Slavic as a second language and was trained in a neighboring Serbian principality. With his help, the Ragusans produced a series of Slavo-Cyrillic texts addressed both externally and internally (i.e. documents stamped or verified only by the party granting privileges or assuming obligations toward Dubrovnik). Following a roughly thirty-year gap without preserved activity, a long line of Slavo-Cyrillic scribes known by name appears.[25] Their training is less well documented than that of Latin/Italian scribes, but it seems that their Slavic was often self-learned or acquired as a first language. Initially, all scribes and secretaries – regardless of working language – were clerics and/or members of the local aristocracy. The first non-ecclesiastical Latin scribe, brought from Italy (a practice that became customary), was the first notary public (fl. from 1278). With the end of the last aristocrat-scribe's career in 1324, the recruitment of Latin scribes shifted to common citizens, marking a broader transition that concluded in 1347 with the retirement of the last Slavic scribe of noble origin.[26]

Thus, by the mid-14th century, the core structure of the Ragusan linguo-bureaucratic regime – defined by distinct habits, customs, and ideas and, one may cautiously add, relatively conservative in the centuries that followed – was already firmly established. The protohistory of Ottoman bureaucracy and its reliance on pragmatic literacy overlaps with the earliest phase of the *Corpus*'s development. This raises the key question of who the Ottomans involved in producing these documents actually were and what broader implications their linguistic choices carry.

With the exception of Arabic and Persian,[27] non-Turkish languages in Ottoman documents are often described as *diplomatic*, with exchanges framed as dealings between Ottoman officials and independent political entities. The earliest surviving example, a 1397 treaty between Sultan Murad I (r. 1362-1389) and the Commune of Genoa, is described by Fleet as »the only known extant 14th-century treaty between the Ottomans and a western city state«. Preserved in an Italian translation, it was originally drafted in Greek – the common practice at the time – yet, as Fleet notes, it followed »the pattern of Genoese notary deeds rather than that of a document of an Islamic chancery«.[28] Another early case is a 1403 treaty drafted in Greek and translated into Turkish, surviving only in a poor Venetian Italian version that also diverges from Arabographic chancery conventions.[29] In both instances the Turkish

24 Of a few, incoming Greek documents which survived in the DA, three are dated to post-1204 (1206, 1234, 1237) and were produced by the issuers. No trace of Ragusan production of documents in Greek survived. Indirect evidence exists that these were not the first to have been received, but the interesting part about the relevant note (from Giacomo Di Pietro Luccari's annalistic history, published in 1605, in Venice) is that Ragusans were willing, around this time, to send their young men to Byzantium for schooling, provided its government covered the costs. See Tafel and Thomas, Griechische, 510.

25 Čremošnik, Postanak, 75-79. See also, Vrana, Tko je pisao, 314.

26 Čremošnik, Postanak, 79.

27 This remark is meant to draw attention to the fact that Arabic and Persian as Ottoman diplomatic languages – a function they certainly had, among others – have been poorly studied, if at all.

28 Fleet, The treaty, 31-32.

29 Dennis, The Byzantine-Turkish; *Ottoman historical*, ed. Ménage, 162, fn 10.

originals are lost, but later comparable examples suggest that multilingual versions of such treaties were not necessarily verbatim translations of a single »original«.[30] The language of the first draft likely depended on both available expertise and the power dynamics between the parties. Studying Venetian-Ottoman diplomatics, Theunissen argues that Arabographic international agreements (the *ahdnames*) were well-established before 1387, and that Greek or Italian chancery influence was weaker than previously assumed.[31] The Ragusan Slavo-Cyrillic chancery, as far as I know, has not been examined as exerting any direct influence on the Ottoman Arabographic tradition, nor have its documents been studied with an eye to the role of translation in producing such texts.

Based on one of the largest editions, some 220 Slavo-Cyrillic documents exchanged between Ottoman officials and the Ragusan commune (1396-1542) have survived. Of these, 119 were sent in the name of five sultans: Murad II (1421-1451): 4; Mehmed II (1451-1481): 42; Bayezid II (1481-1512): 55; Selim I (1512-1520): 9; and Süleyman I (1520-1566): 9. Production gradually increased, peaking under Bayezid II, then declined sharply under Selim I and Süleyman I. The remaining 101 documents were exchanged between Ragusans and about 50 other Ottoman officials.[32] These collections include copies. Applying criteria of originality such as sultanic seals (tr. *tuğra*s) reduces the number of sultanic letters to Dubrovnik to 95.[33] Only around 13 texts, mostly dated 1396-1417 (see below), were written in the name of Ragusans. The Slavic used is vernacular, with some Church Slavic elements in stylistic or formulaic parts. The writers appear fully competent in spoken Slavic.

The Slavic of the *Corpus*, was indeed the language of negotiation and diplomacy, at least initially. For Ragusans, it was also a language actively spoken by Dubrovnik's citizens; for the Ottomans, it, alongside Greek, was also a language used by a significant number of the formerly imperial, and now Ottoman subjects. Yet the limited late 14th-early 15th-century Arabographic material, and later evidence, suggest that Ottoman sultans and officials never intended to officially grant privileges or address their own subjects in any language other than Turkish.[34] Some of the ideas behind this attitude are implicit in the early history of the *Corpus*, where Ragusans were first engaged as »foreign« negotiators and clients through Slavo-Cyrillic – letters. Once their tributary status was established, more formal and well-structured Arabographic genres began to appear, coexisting with Slavo-Cyrillic texts for a time, before eventually replacing them (see the next section).

30 For more on the issue of translation, see, for example, Römer, Contemporary European translations.

31 For illustrations and an example of excellent analysis, see Theunissen, Ottoman-Venetian.

32 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 218-408.

33 Of these, 53 were composed in Istanbul, 18 in Edirne, and 13 in various other places. Lutovac-Kaznovac, *Jezik pisama*, 17-29.

34 The number of extant Arabographic documents increases significantly as of the reign of Sultan Mehmed II, known for strong and clearly visible tendencies towards centralization and bureaucratization of the state apparatus. The earliest known Ottoman document issued on behalf of a Slavic/Serbian landholder dates to 1386 and is written in Turkish. To the best of my knowledge, it appears to be the earliest surviving example of its kind when viewed across the empire's multilingual subjects. See Beldiceanu-Steinherr and Estangüi Gómez, Autour du Document. For examples dated to 1405 and 1439, respectively, see Kotzageorgis, An Ottoman document; Kolovos, A Biti

The phraseology and content of the early letters suggest that from the onset, the participants in these literacy events *perceived* the acts of communication as constituting the broader process of *translatio imperii*. The political imagination of all parties was informed by the notion of empire, yet the process does not unfold linearly in the texts, as a simple and factual replacement of one clearly defined polity by another. The more formal Arabographic genres become dominant when the process of *translatio imperii* was finished – that is, when power relations underlying the Ottoman language and political regime were settled in actuality. It was around the mid-16th century that the Ottoman Slavo-Cyrillic »chancery« was suspended. In the remainder of this paper, I will attempt to illustrate these developments, using the Slavo-Cyrillic letters from 1396 and 1542 as tentative points of orientation.

Direct Ragusan-Ottoman communication began when the Ottomans became neighbors of late medieval Serbia, which had long traded with Dubrovnik. In the beginning of the history of the *Corpus* (1396-1417) that is attested by drafts from Ragusan secretary Rusko Hristiforović, the chief Ottoman provincial representative (*uç beyi*) was based in Skoplje (conquered in late 1391) and was already sponsoring the »Ottomanization« of the town and surrounding border province (tr. *uç*). Stefan Lazarević of Serbia (*knez* 1389-1402, despot 1402-1427) was an Ottoman vassal, likely enabling Ottoman control over urban centers beyond the *uç* and access to strategic roads toward Bosnia and Ragusa.

Of the 13 letters copied by Hristiforović, 11 were sent by Ragusans during Bayezid I's reign (1389-1402), and two under Mehmed I (1413-1421).[35] Most were responses to the Slavo-Cyrillic letters previously received from the Ottoman officials, the contents of which are summarized by Ragusans. These portions show that some incoming letters recorded the results of oral agreements and functioned as legal instruments when sealed by the granting party – here, Ottoman provincial officials using Arabic-script seals and signatures. At first glance, the diplomatic structure of these earliest letters resembles that of other Christian correspondence circulating in South Slavia.

In terms of how the *translatio imperii* was articulated, the letters provide the following evidence. In 1396, the anonymous qadi of Gluhavica granted the Ragusans »v(je/i/e/)ra« (sl./ guarantee, promise) from himself and the »emperor« to trade in the »emperor's land«, requiring merchants to stop at his seat and pay customs there.[36] The Ragusans replied that the emperor's land was large, requesting the qadi's permission to travel freely.[37] »To grant *vjera*« was a standard phrase in earlier Dubrovnik-Slavic contracts; for example, a 1360 charter of Serbian emperor Stefan Uroš V (r. 1355-1371) reads:

> [...] the *empire of mine* (sl. *carstvo mi*) has granted them *this charter* and *my imperial guarantee* (sl. *carsku vjeru*) that both nobles and merchants of Dubrovnik (can) travel freely with (their) goods and with whatever they buy, in the land of *the empire of mine*...without being

35 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 218-227.

36 Gluhavica was the first iron mine in medieval Serbia. It was protected by the nearby Jeleč Fortress.

37 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 217-218.

> disturbed by any *kefalija*, nor *vlastelin* of the empire of mine, nor by any *knez*, nor anyone else be they of minor or high stature ….[38]

The phrase *carstvo mi* (»the empire of mine«) was a Byzantine calque used by Serbian emperors to designate the royal person. Titles such as *kefalija*, *vlastelin*, and *knez* were among the late medieval titles which also feature in Slavo-Cyrillic texts of the *Corpus*.

In 1398, the Ottoman voyvoda Paşayiğit, on behalf of Bayezid I and himself, granted Ragusans *vjera* to trade freely.[39] In spring 1399, he confirmed they could go to the Serbs, offering trusted Serbs to secure the business and promising severe punishment for anyone who interfered – »if he was a Turk – his head should be cut off; if he was a Serb – his head should be cut off«.[40] By fall, customs remained an issue. From the letter the Ragusans sent to Paşayiğit, we read that they had received a letter from Bayezid I carrying his personal seal, together with a letter from Paşayiğit himself in which he authorized the carrier of the two letters, *kefalija* Feriz*,* warden of Zvečan Fortress, as a legitimate envoy and negotiator. Yet, Feriz, the negotiator, did not bring his *dijak* (sl.gr. student, deacon; scribe) with him on his visit to Dubrovnik and had asked Ragusans to write down the results of the negotiations. The Ragusans finally asked Paşayiğit to send them a confirmation of the agreement written up by his *dijak* and sealed by himself.[41] Despite promises, Paşayiğit occasionally overlooked damages caused to Ragusan merchants by »the Turks and, with them, the Vlachs, *Paskac*, *Ninac*, *Dobric*, *Drman*, *Dragovrat* and *Bogavac*«, prompting complaints to the voyvoda »Sarhan«, a high-positioned novice in the region who had previously granted them *vjera* of »the great ruler« (i.e. the sultan), »the master Koca Feriz's« and his own.[42]

After a gap of more than a decade, the provincial correspondence was renewed under Mehmed I, who seems not to have contacted the Ragusans directly. In 1415, they wrote to Balaban Beg, »the honest *subaša* (commander) of Kruje and Raban«. From this we see that the domain of Ragusan movement regulated by exchanges of Slavo-Cyrillic letters, aside from Slavic and Turkish, encompassed the Albanian ethno-linguistic space. The geography changes, but the means of communication, the subject issues and terminology remain similar – Balaban had previously informed the Ragusans that »the noble great sultan« sent him to rule Kruje and the »Albanian land« and that he himself was granting them *vjera* to trade thereabouts. The Ragusans reciprocated, allowing his men, whether Turk or Albanian, to come to Dubrovnik »for whatever reason, be it trade, or else«.[43] Finally, in 1417, Hamza Beg informed the Ragusans that (some) land had been granted to him as *baština* (sl. a free estate inherited from father, or land to be held as heritable, permanent property), so they could

38 *Dokumenti srpskih*, ed. Porčić, 278.

39 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović,218.

40 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 219.

41 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović,219-220.

42 All of these names sound Slavic, though they might also be of different origin. The Vlachs were nomads and cattle breeders. *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 223.

43 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 225-226.

trade there.[44] The Ragusans' reply was similar to that from 1415, adding that they were glad to be free to trade all over the lands held by Turks (sl. *turska država*).

The primary producers of these and comparable Slavo-Cyrillic letters, aside from the officially employed Ragusan Slavic secretary, were *dijaks* from the Slavic hinterland. Little is known about their education, though it is likely that Slavic was their first language. Ottoman local officials clearly relied on *dijaks* skilled in both Slavic orthography and chancery style. In the local exchanges with Ragusans, it seems, Turkish letters were not necessary at all. It is, however, uncertain whether these *dijaks* were always permanently attached to local Ottoman magnates' chanceries or hired as needed. At the time, the Ottomans could also draw on secretaries of local Slavic officials who generally supported Ottoman policies. Whether provincial *dijak*s knew any other language can only be speculated based on a more in-depth linguistic analyses of individual letters, but Slavo-Greek bilingualism was certainly a possibility inherited from pre-Ottoman times. For the period up to 1542, a handful of provincial *dijak*s who provided service for local Ottoman officials are known by name.[45]

Whether Ottoman provincial *dijak*s acted as interpreters in the 14th and later centuries, we cannot know based on the texts of the *Corpus*, just as we cannot know whether a centrally appointed qadi of Gluhavica, for example, knew Slavic in addition to Turkish and the required Arabic, or whether he relied on the services of a *dijak*. Hristiforović's drafts also do not allow us to conclude whether the qadi's *dijak* and a Ragusan scribe employed a uniform style and language, although the chances that they did are high. The following scenarios illustrate how literacy events involving users of multiple languages (including a qadi) could unfold in ways shaped by ideological considerations.

A *dijak* named Radonja served as secretary to Hamza, the provincial governor (tr. *sancak beyi*) of Herzegovina, who in around 1470 arbitrated disputes arising during the execution of the testament of Stjepan Vukčić Kosača (a politically active Bosnian nobleman, d. 1466). Some of Kosača's property, held in Dubrovnik, was to be distributed between his sons: *herzeg* Vlatko (d. 1489), and *knez* Stjepan (d. 1517), who would later convert to Islam, become known as *Hersekoğlu* (*Hersekzade*, *Hercegović*) Ahmed Pasha, and rise to the post of grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire. For this occasion, Radonja first produced a Slavo-Cyrillic copy of the confirmation signed by Vlatko and Stjepan, in which they stated that they had received everything owed to them by the Ragusans. He notes at the end of the copy that, on the order of his master Hamza Beg, he wrote down everything found in »the *hužet* (tr. *hüccet*, confirmation receipt)« of the two brothers. The style and structure of the document bear no resemblance to the *hüccet* known from Ottoman diplomatics, so Radonja's analogy was clearly drawn from function rather than form.[46]

44 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 227.

45 Đorđić mentions three: one from Bosnia (Šišman Botić) and two from Herzegovina; Radonja and Ćupelija Ajvazović, one Christian and one Muslim. Truhelka provides several more examples »from the first forty years after the conquest of Bosnia«, emphasizing they were all Christians and noting that local officials also employed Christians as representatives in their business with Dubrovnik. Đorđić, *Istorija*, 163 and facsimile no. 226; Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski spomenici*, 177.

46 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 191.

One year later, when Hamza himself got into a territorial dispute with the Ragusans, Radonja produced two Cyrillic copies of a charter issued by the Serbian king Stefan Dušan (king 1331-1346, emperor 1346-1355) in 1333, working from the Slavic original or a copy held by the Ragusans. The charter, originally composed in Latin and Slavic, had granted the disputed land to the Ragusans as *baština* in exchange for an annual tribute. At the end of each copy, Radonja notes that, on the order of his master Hamza Beg, he transcribed everything from »the *knjiga* (sl. document, letter, book) of king Stepan«. Each of the two copies contains two Arabographic notes: one in Turkish by Hamza and one in Arabic by a qadi from Foča named Eminüddin. The qadi's role was to confirm that the copies corresponded exactly to the original.[47] Hamza wrote a note on each copy describing what the document was about. One note reads:

> This is a copy of the confirmation (tr. *ḥüccet*) given to the people of Dubrovnik by the emperor (sl. *car*) Stefan for Ston and Posrednica. It is in no way to be used for anything else. /Written by the poor and humble Hamza./[48]

The other reads:

> This is a copy of the confirmation (tr. *ḥüccet*) for Ston and Posrednica, given by the pride of the infidels, the emperor (sl. *car*) Stefan to people of Dubrovnik. It is authentic. It is in no way to be used for anything else. It is correct. /Written by the poor and humble Hamza./[49]

Many late medieval imperial decrees retained their legal force for long periods, and the incoming Ottomans often recognized them as valid and/or took them into consideration when regulating matters related to the properties mentioned in these decrees. From this perspective, the use of Radonja's copies may be viewed as a fairly typical example. However, citing a fully comparable case would require further research, since the ways in which such documents were handled have not been treated as a topic in their own right. The differences between the two Arabographic notes attributed to Hamza are particularly interesting in that they appear to have been written by two individuals who not only heard and transcribed one of the two Slavic place names differently, but who also had essentially the same, yet subtly divergent, understanding of who the signatory of the original charter was. Both use the word

47 The text of the charter – and these two versions, which are not the only surviving copies – has been known to scholars for most of the 20th century. The Arabographic notes, however, have only recently been correctly deciphered and published in transliteration and Serbian translation. The qadi's notes in the two versions written by the same *dijak*, differ slightly in wording but convey the same amount of information. The first reads (in transliteration slightly modified by myself): *Naḳlu hāẕihi'ṣ-ṣūreti min aṣli'l-ḥujjeti ʿindī wa anā żaʿfu'l-ʿubbād Emīnu'ddīn al-faḳīr al-ḳaẕī fī wilāyati Hersek bi-Drin*. (This is a copy made based on the original confirmation which I have with me, and I am the weakness among the slaves, the poor Emīnu'ddīn, the judge in the province of Hersek, in Drin (probably synonym for Foča)«, *Dokumenti*, ed. Porčić, 212.

48 *Çār İstepān Dubrovniklulere İston içün ve Posırednisa içün virdüği hüccetiñ ṣūretidur. Bir dürlü dāḥi değildür. Ḥurrirehu el-faḳīrü'l ḥaḳīr Hamza*, *Dokumenti*, ed. Porčić, 213.

49 *İfṣithārü'l-küffār çār İstepan Dubrovnıklülere İston içün ve Bosrekniça içün virdüği hüccetiñ ṣūretidur. Ṣarīḥ. Bir dürlü dāḥi değildür. Saḥḥ. Ḥurrirehu el-faḳīrü'l ḥaḳīr Hamza*, *Dokumenti*, ed. Porčić, 213.

çār, but they display different degrees of concern with intitulation. The phrase »pride of the infidels« in the quoted notes is reminiscent of expressions found in 15th-century sultanic orders (tr. *fermān*) as part of their formula of intitulatio – for example, *ifitħārü'l-ümerā'* (»the pride of the commanders«), applied to *sancak beyi*s. The Turkish term for »infidels«, *küffār* (sg. *kāfir*), was used in orders and letters (such as letters of recommendation) to refer to Christians who were not subjects of the Ottoman state.[50] Thus, instead of two authors, we may in fact speak of three (Hamza, the qadi, and someone else), and it is even possible to question whether Hamza wrote anything himself. Finally, designating the *knjiga* (issued by a king perceived as an emperor) as a *hüccet* can be understood as an act of translation that effectively reduced the kingly/imperial authority to that of a judge – an official normally appointed by the emperor.[51]

A glimpse of how the Ragusans gradually learned about the nuances of Ottoman political realities can be seen in the summarized letters to Balaban and Hamza – Balaban was sent to govern, while Hamza received the land as *baština*, though both were centrally appointed local officials. A question that emerges from this corpus is whether the Ragusans themselves formulated new expressions based on their understanding of the new socio-political reality or whether they tended to adopt ready-made solutions from the Ottoman side. In any case, the exchange of knowledge in these earliest provincial letters was certainly not based on the translation of written documents. The written traces of cross-linguistic contact were initially limited mainly to the adoption of titles and a few crucial institutions. In some letters, we also see instances of the Ragusan practice of adopting Ottoman titles directly (e.g. *subaša* for Turkish *subaşı*), rather than searching for Slavic functional cognates. Foreign phonetics were, unsurprisingly, initially recorded by transcription based on hearing. The integration of Turkish terms into Slavic texts gradually expanded to encompass more titles and the names of institutions established in the region. It is also worth noting that as early as the 1390s, the ethno-linguistic space reflected in these letters was already legally divided: on the one hand, the Ragusans (Dubrovčani), and on the other, the allied Turks, Serbs, and/or Albanians holding various social positions. Based on a brief survey of Arabographic cases of a later date, I concluded that Slavic texts were generally more permeable to Turkish terms than vice versa. In the long run, *voyvoda* is one of the rare Slavic titles that crossed the linguistic barrier to become an Ottoman term par excellence. The same is true for *vjera*, which even transcended documentary literacy to enter Ottoman narrative discourse in the form of *vire*.[52]

50 One such example is from 1464: an Arabographic-Turkish letter in which Isa Beg issues a letter of recommendation »to infidel Latin merchant by the name Franko« (tr. *Frānḳo adlu Lātin bāzergān kāfirine*)., *Turski Spomenici*, vol 2, ed. Elezović, 7.

51 In Ottoman diplomatics, *hüccet*s are described as documents issued by qadis; see Boškov, Die hüccet.

52 For a broader contextualization of these observations, see Mišević, *Writing Slavic*, esp. 309-310.

The Ottoman Slavic Dragoman Interrupted

What all the literacy events discussed in some detail so far have in common is that they took place in Ragusa and/or Ottoman-ruled South Slavia. Those events that have actually led scholars to describe Slavic as a diplomatic language of the Ottoman government, however, were based on texts produced by scribes employed in the chanceries of Ottoman sultans or by highly placed government officials, most notably grand viziers.[53] That these scribes possessed skills in Slavic orthography and chancery style is beyond doubt. What remains less clear is how they acquired these skills, as is also the case with the role of translation in the production of Slavo-Cyrillic documents sent on behalf of the parties mentioned. Since these patterns have not been studied systematically, what we currently know is limited to insights drawn from a select number of specific literacy events. Finally, a very small number of Slavo-Cyrillic texts issued by the sultanic chancery or by other Ottoman officials have been preserved in the OA. Most of these, however, belong to the *Corpus* and have survived in the DA. Summarily speaking, the history of Slavic as a diplomatic language of the Ottoman governors effectively begins (c. 1430; see below) and, in a sense, ends (c. 1542; see above, p. 11) with the documents contained in the *Corpus*.

The literacy events based on Slavo-Cyrillic texts produced in the sultanic chancery that led to the consolidation of Ragusan tributary status (before and shortly after 1458) constitute one of the crucial segments of the history of the *Corpus*. The year 1458 is significant, because it marks the date of its oldest Arabographic text: a *hüccet* (19 November) issued in Istanbul by Mehmed II, confirming that the Ragusan envoys had duly submitted the tribute – twenty plus days earlier in Skopje. For, prior to this, on 23 October, the same transaction had been confirmed by a receipt written in Slavo-Cyrillic. On that same day, in Skopje, a general Slavo-Cyrillic treaty was drafted by the sultan's scribe, Toma Gramatik, and verified by sultanic seal.[54] After this point, we can observe an increasing influx into the DA not only of Arabographic-Turkish documents from the Ottoman central government but also of Arabographic (Turkish and Arabic) records of local communication between Ragusans and Ottoman officials (qadis, customs officials, provincial governors, and others).[55] Some of these incoming Arabographic texts from the central government were accompanied by Slavo-Cyrillic counterparts which, although never verbatim translations, regulated the same transactions and carried the same legal force. Once this practice ceased, sometime in the 16th century, the Ragusans began to educate their own interpreters – *dragoman*s – at least for Turkish.[56] As noted earlier, Slavo-Cyrillic documents addressing various matters continued to arrive in the DA until c. 1542. Most, if not all Arabographic documents issued by the central Ottoman authorities and preserved in the DA have not survived as part of the OA. This is certainly the case for the period before c. 1542, and although further research is needed, the informed impression is that the same holds for later periods as well. This does not imply that

53 Polomac, *Srpski*.

54 *Turski Spomenici*, vol 2, ed. Elezović, 3: Nedeljković, Dubrovačko-Turski.

55 Besides Miović cited in fn.10, see also Miović, *Dubrovačka Republika u Spisima Namjesnika*.

56 Miović-Perić, Dragomans, 81-94.

the Ottoman central government failed to keep records of the relevant literacy events; rather, as I will suggest, the beginning of a particular form of record keeping around1544 represents a new phase in the history of the *Corpus*. Before addressing that, let me unpack some of the claims made here by means of concrete examples.

The oldest extant Slavo-Cyrillic letter issued directly in the name of an Ottoman sultan is dated 10 July 1430. Sent from Edirne to Dubrovnik and sealed with the *tuğra* of Murad II, it is one of three such surviving letters. Together with two additional samples – an official translation from a Greek original and a Ragusan copy –, some scholars interpret these as evidence of a Slavo-Cyrillic sultanic chancery during Murad II's reign.[57]

The 1430 letter is stylistically Slavic. The sultan first reprimands the Ragusans for failing to send envoys despite trading »throughout his lands«, and then, acting upon the complaint of »his man« and tribute (sl. *danak*)-payer, Radoslav Pavlović, orders them to return the land they took away from him. The sultan dispatches the letter with his nobleman (sl. *vlastelin*) Karač, authorizing him to speak on his behalf, and uses the phrase »the lordship of mine« (sl. *gospodstvo mi*) instead of the sultanic »I«.[58] Whether a Slavic scribe was employed or the services of Karač's or someone else's scribe were used remains unclear. Notably, this is the only Slavic letter to employ the Slavic term *danak* for »tribute«; later scribes prefer the Arabic loanword *harač*.

The next Slavo-Cyrillic document, from December 1430, is a treaty guaranteeing Ragusan commercial freedom. More formal than the previous letter, it reflects mixed chancery influences. Its intitulation mirrors that of contemporary Arabographic documents. The opening reads as follows:

> I, the great master and the great commander (*amiru*), Amurat Beg, the son of the great master and the great commander (*amire*) Sultan *Mehemet* Beg; wills and commands the lordship of mine the following [...]

Its geographic scope is described is some detail:

> [...] wherever they choose to go, in the western and the eastern sides, across the land and over the sea, in Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and all lands and towns and counties (sl. *župa*s) of the lordship of mine, (and all) those (lands) which are under my protection [...][59]

This treaty was produced in Slavic, Greek, and apparently also Turkish.[60] Based solely on the Slavic version, I cannot draw any conclusions regarding how the two texts, Slavic and Greek, are related. The use of the Italo-Romance *porta* for the Ottoman court and the absence of

57 Nakaš, Portina, 288; Polomac described the chancery producing Slavo-Cyrillic documents in Murad II's time as »Turkish«; Polomac and Lutovac, Dva pisma,10.

58 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 227-228.

59 *Stare srpske povelje*, ed. Stojanović, 229-231.

60 Božić wrote about the Turkish version of this document citing the DA collection titled *Lettere di Levante*. Božić's remark appears in various later publications, but as far as I can determine so far, this version is not preserved. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska*, 54; see also, Groot, Historical development, 580.

the Slavic *vjera* are striking, but no particular evidence clarifies the authority of the Greek version. Two sealed versions in different languages may have been necessary simply because the sultan's domains were vast, inhabited by speakers and readers of both Slavic and Greek, and the know-how for their production in different languages was obviously available.

Several other examples illustrate how the Ottoman-Slavic chancery related to Greek and other chancery traditions. A clear example of translation surpassing the level of words and phrases is that of »the extended oath« used in treaties. The documents quoted below are also illustrative of the change in the Ottoman perception of the space in which the Slavic documents were in force.

Theunissen notes that the extended oath's origins and original language are unknown; its earliest version appears in the 1403 peace treaty. He notes that for a Muslim to guarantee his word, a rather short formula was needed, but despite this, criticizes an earlier opinion that extensive Islamic, and therefore, Ottoman oaths were developed »under pressure from Christian, probably Venetian negotiators«.[61] Over time, these formulas became increasingly elaborate and were translated into all languages used in the 15th-century sultanic chancery – Italian, Greek, Turkish, and, very early on, Slavic. The oldest surviving Slavic version, however, is not in a sultanic document.

In 1441 (Vučitrn, 13 July), independently of Murat II, Şehabeddin Pasha, »the master of all western sides« (i.e. *beylerbeyi* of Rumelia) entrusts his message to the Ragusans to *sklav* Yakub. The letter grants the Ragusans *vjera* for their safety and promises mediation:

> [...] if there appears some business to be done with the great emperor, we will send them (the merchants) to the great emperor with our man, and return them to you safe and sound.

The oath, placed at the end, reads:

> And for this, we give our solemn oath unto God, creator of the earth and the heavens, and upon the great prophet of ours Muhamed and upon the Seven *Mushaf* which we believe in and (which we) respect and upon my soul and the head of mine, so it never happens the other way.[62]

In 1442, two Cyrillic contracts were drafted, one by Ragusans and one by Murad II, each containing oaths referring to the parties' religiosity. The sultanic version includes an expanded oath formula echoing the one quoted above in the letter of *beylerbeyi*, but more elaborate:

> I, the great master and the great commander (*amira*), Sultan Murat Beg, the son of the exceptional and great lord commander (*amir*) Sultan Mehemet Beg, give my solemn oath, upon God I swear, who created the heavens and the earth, and upon the great prophet Mahmet, and upon the seven Mushaf in which we *Musromans* believe, and upon 124000 prophets of God, and upon the soul of my father, and my grandfather, and upon my soul,

61 Theunissen, Ottoman-Venetian, 288-295, esp. 295.

62 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 7-8. Seven *mushaf* is written as seven *musafeh*.

> and upon the sabre I am girding myself with, and upon my head, that since this day and in the time after, I gave my solemn oath to the honourable *knez* and *vlastela dubrovčanom*, since the *knez* and … had sent to the porte of the lordship of mine the honest gifts and their emissaries […][63]

Here, third parties are no longer defined ethnically or geographically but in socio-political terms. No harm is to be done to Ragusans by the sultan, his viziers, *subaša*s, or any of his men, including tribute-payers (»those who give me *harač*«), and Dubrovnik is acknowledged as a free city governed by its own laws.[64]

In 1453, after conquering Istanbul, Mehmed II issued an *ahdname* to the inhabitants of Galata with a similar opening – the intitulation and oath are structurally identical, though with minor differences in wording. İnalcık notes that it was first drafted in Greek and later translated into Turkish, at an unknown point.[65] The same oath appears in a treaty of 7 March 1459 addressed to Dubrovnik (preserved in an official Italian translation from Turkish).[66] In 1478, Mehmed II wrote to Venice and explicitly mentioned his »Latin« scribes. This is the third known document he issued in Italian; the first is from 1466, the second from 1471.[67] The oath from the 1478 document is placed towards the end, but has a similar wording to that mentioned in previous examples.

All of the above suggests, that, from the very foundation of the sultanic Slavic chancery, if it existed as a permanent structure, its scribes were very well acquainted with corresponding activities in *at least* the Greek chancery. Until further research is conducted, however, it can only be concluded that within the Ottoman chancery as a whole, translation remained limited to particular phrases or formulaic elements (like oaths, salutations) used in documents intended for communication with individuals/corporations beyond the confines of the Ottoman polity.

If we are to judge by the Slavo-Cyrillic part of the *Corpus*, the structure of documents composed – conditionally speaking – according to Slavic diplomatic principles remained remarkably stable for a very long period of time, all the way until the reign of Süleyman I, irrespective of the sender. In other words, Arabographic-Turkish chancery rules based on the Persian model never interfered with the structure of Slavo-Cyrillic documents to the point of disturbing continuity with pre-Ottoman practices. This implies that several generations of scribes employed at the Ottoman court were acquainted with the diplomatic principles of the Slavic and Greek chanceries established in pre-Ottoman times and perpetuated during the process of the gradual imposition of direct Ottoman rule in the Balkans.

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63 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 9-10. The only earlier example Theunissen provides for an oath of almost identical wording is an Ottoman Venetian treaty issued by Murad II, in 1430 and extant in an Italian (Greek) version: Teunissen, Ottoman-Venetian, 271.

64 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 9-10.

65 İnalcık, Ottoman Galata.

66 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 16-17

67 *Seven Ottoman Documents*, ed. Menage.

Whether – and, if so, when exactly – the Ottoman court began educating its own scribal staff responsible for Slavic correspondence, rather than outsourcing from the pool of Slavic or Greek allies and officials, is not known. The same uncertainty applies to the question of when – and whether at all – this specialization became unrelated to the ethnic origin of the students. What is certain is that, from its initial phases, training guided by the Ottoman educational cadre at court was conducted by employing all available resources, and the known methods of language instruction were based on the historical experiences and grammatical traditions of Islamicate societies. This can be inferred from the three surviving handbooks for learning multiple languages at the court of Mehmed II – one of which was Slavic/Serbian. Discussing handbooks, I concluded that the idea of educating scribes at the court existed, but it never materialized in a way which provided full competence reflected in the outgoing Slavic documents.[68] The Slavo-Cyrillic letters of the *Corpus*, however, do offer some information about Slavic *dragoman*s, most of whom can be assumed to have been trained in Slavic literacy before entering court service.

As early as 1431, Murad II's slave (sl. *sklav*) Ali Beg, the *defterdar* (head of the finance administration), traveled from Istanbul with a *tuğra*-sealed Slavo-Cyrillic letter authorizing him to negotiate with Dubrovnik. Ali Beg appears to have traveled alone. The letter contained some Greek phrases.[69] His ethnic origin is unknown, but his possible knowledge of Slavic or Greek is noteworthy given his position: interpreters and scribes involved in diplomatic work rarely held financial offices in the central Ottoman chancery. Although individuals holding multiple offices was not unusual in Ottoman history, the combination of two scribal roles in one person, as in Ali's case, is striking. But, was Ali Beg a *dragoman* as well?

Discussing the 16th-century period, Matuz notes that the office of *dragoman* was normally combined with non-scribal, middle-ranking posts.[70] Observing the reign of Süleyman I, he observes that the first person (ever?) to hold the *dragoman*ate as a full-time court position was Atik Ali, first mentioned in 1502. Matuz also notes that all *dragoman*s employed by the Ottoman court arrived already literate in a »foreign« language.[71] The question of whether Slavic can be considered a language »foreign« to the Ottomans has already been raised indirectly here, but based on the ways it was used by the Ottoman governing elite, it appears to have been fashioned as one. That said, it may be important for future investigations of the *Corpus* to note that Ragusan *dragoman*s, mentioned in the DA as of 1558[72], belong to the rare but highly mobile group of South Slavs whom we can confidently identify as having studied and used at least Turkish – though the exact written record of their translating skills has been poorly studied.[73]

68 On these, see Mišević, How and why.

69 Like *heretisanije* instead of sl. *pozdrav*.

70 Like *ṣubāşı*, *müteferriḳa*, and *silāḥdār*. Matuz also writes that Turks working in the central chancellery never learned a language other than Turkish. Matuz, Die Pfortendolmetscher, 34.

71 Matuz, Die Pfortendolmetscher, 41.

72 Miović-Perić, Dragomans, 83, fn. 6.

73 The one publication dealing with Ragusan translations from Turkish that I am currently aware of is from 1932: Elezović, Tursko-Srpski.

Some further depth on the issue of translations and the production of both Slavo-Cyrillic and Arabographic texts in the *Corpus* can be gained by examining the few known court scribes who wrote Cyrillic letters to Dubrovnik on behalf of the Ottoman sultans toward the end of the 15th century. One such figure is Ibrahim, active around 1474 and a native speaker of Slavic. A letter dated 8 July 1474, written in Istanbul and sealed with Mehmed II's *tuğra*, was sent with him to Ragusa to collect money owed to the sultan.[74] The letter identifies him as »*sklav* Ibrahim« and »the servant and the slave of the empire of mine« (sl. *sluga i sklav carstva mi Ibrahim*). A second letter, dated 24 September of the same year and likewise issued in the name of Mehmed II, calls him »*logofet* Ibrahim«, in addition to servant and slave. The Ragusan recipients refer to him as a *dragoman*, confirming that he acted as an interpreter and probably as the writer of the letters he carried. This time he was assigned to help resolve an inheritance dispute between Ahmed (Stjepan) and Vlatko by examining the documents held by the Ragusans in the DA.[75] In early 1486, Ibrahim traveled to Ragusa again, now identified in the letter he carried as »*spahioglan* Ibreim« (*sipahi*-oğlan, the son of a *sipahi*).[76]

Ibrahim the *dragoman* was of Herzegovinian origin. His father held a land estate there – granted by the Ottoman government until 1477 – as the leader (*knez*) of a local Vlach (pastoralist) community. Hence the *sipahi* – landowner obliged to military duty.[77] Ibrahim is also known as the *dijak* of Isa Beg Isaković (of Skoplje and later Bosnia). Scholars maintain that Ibrahim entered Ottoman service through a political alliance between his father and the Ottomans rather than through the *kul*/*devşirme* system.[78] His Slavic origin likely recommended him for *dragoman* service, but whether he received his first education at the palace remains uncertain; his father, after all, was literate. As a Muslim, Ibrahim likely studied at least some Arabic in addition to Turkish. Several corrupted, Slavicized Turkish words appear untranslated in the letters he carried – and likely wrote – such as *hazna*, a Slavic form of Turkish *hazine* (»treasury«). This may reflect either Ibrahim's interpretation or the fact that the term had by then become embedded in Slavic vocabulary.

In April 1479, the sultan sent his *sklav* Kasum to Dubrovnik with another Cyrillic letter, to collect money. On 7 March 1481, Kasum wrote to the Ragusan Municipality on his own behalf, identifying himself as »*dragoman* Kasum«. He emphasizes the assistance he offered Ragusan envoys at court, notes that he received a small goblet as a gift from their representatives and five ducats for each *hüccet* he issued, and remarks that earlier gifts had been more generous. Kasum apparently remained in the service of Bayezid II: in 1485 he held the

74 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 38-39.

75 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 38-40.

76 Truhelka, *Tursko slavjenski*, 85.

77 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 177. A recent summary of available data is available in Konjević, Herak Vraneš.

78 One anonymous scribe, perhaps Ibrahim, wrote a Cyrillic letter (dated to 1472, and written in Tirhala/Greece) in which Mehmed II informs the Ragusans that he ordered Hamza Beg of Herzegovina to collect *Vlahe i Vlašiće* (Vlachs/ and plural of diminutive of Vlach, maybe a child Vlach, but could also be something else) for *acemi-oğlans* (i.e. *devşirme*). This letter contains a proverb (meant as a threat) which perhaps betrays a native speaker: every man will reap what he sows (sl. *što poseje vsaki človek, toi ke požeti*); Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 37-38.

post of gatekeeper (tr. *kapıcı*), and he is attested again in 1486.[79] His tenure overlapped with Ibrahim's, and he was almost certainly a native speaker of Slavic.

The next scribe-interpreter known by name is Skender. In 1486 he appears as the Ottoman ambassador to Venice; on his way he was supposed to pass through Dubrovnik, where he would receive a ship and safe conduct. This order was issued in the Slavo-Cyrillic letter he carried, though it is unclear whether he wrote it himself, since Kasum still seems to have been active as a Slavic scribe, and Skender's main duties in Venice were to be conducted in Italian. It is noteworthy that, despite Skender's knowledge of Italian, the instruction for the Ragusans was written in Slavic. Skender appears as the writer of a Slavic letter only in 1506 – a personal letter written on his own behalf, lively in tone and rich in detail. Scholars described him as a non-native or second-language speaker of Slavic.[80] This may explain why he explicitly mentions translation in the letter, saying:

> [...] the news from the seas, which you wrote and sent by your servants, they came and brought the letters, one for the honourable emperor, and one for Mustafa Pasha. And I turned (them into) Turkish, and all of it was retold and explained to the emperor in detail. And having formulated his response, that (response) was sent to the nobility of yours.[81]

The letter also reports news from court: the appointment of the new grand vizier Ali Pasha, who then reassigned various *sancak beyi*s.[82] When referring to Ottoman pashas of Slavic origin or appointed to Ragusa's Slavic hinterland, Skender uses Slavic surnames ending in *-ić* rather than *-oğlu* or *-zade*. From this letter we also learn two additional facts about *dragoman* Kasum: before 1506 he traveled as an envoy to Hungary, and in 1506 he was appointed *sancak beyi* of Kruševac (Akhisar, in present-day Serbia).

After Skender, no other Slavic *dragoman* employed at the court is known by name. Slavo-Cyrillic documents continued to be issued in the sultan's name for a time, but from the later part of Bayezid II's reign, a clear trend emerges: both the number and the variety of subjects addressed in these documents decline, while the production of Turkish documents increases – addressed to the Ragusans and even more frequently to both Ragusans and provincial officials, including qadis handling disputes. It was also Bayezid II who, in 1485, issued an order recognizing Ragusan receipts of commercial transactions at the court and instructing local qadis to consult local priests for interpretation when necessary. Later he decreed that entries from qadi court records (sl. *kadino libro*), together with *hüccets* issued by qadis, were the only valid proofs at court. During the reign of Selim I, confirmations of tribute payments and treaty renewals became the sole subjects of sultanic Cyrillic documents, which had been

79 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 81-82, and 88-89.

80 This is noted by Nakaš, who adds that he does not seem like a Greek who learned Slavic, illustrating the conclusion with linguistic evidence; Nakaš, Portina, 276.

81 Truhelka, *Turskoslavjenski*, 131-133. Mustafa Pasha could be Çoban (tr./shepherd) Mustafa Pasha (d.1529), conscripted through devshirme.

82 This is Bosnian-born Hadım (tr./eunuch) Ali Pasha (d. 1511). This was his second tenure as a grand vizier.

issued in two versions since at least 1458. During the reign of Süleyman I, the sultanic Slavic chancery ceased to produce documents.

Besides the Slavo-Cyrillic documents issued in the sultans' names, the *Corpus* also contains dozens of letters issued on behalf of grand viziers of Slavic aristocratic origin between the mid-15th and early 16th centuries. Hersekoğlu Ahmed Pasha who died in 1517, was one of them. So, once figures of this kind disappeared from the scene, Slavo-Cyrillic letters ceased to be produced by centrally based Ottoman officials. As already noted, only a negligible number of these documents were preserved in the OA. Nevertheless, the province remained a realm in which Slavo-Cyrillic literacy – together with Slavo-Latin – continued to flourish throughout the 17th century, now exclusively in the form of semi-formal letters addressed to non-Ottoman subjects.

The Early Modern Ottoman Libri Reformationes: *A Conclusion*

The history of the *Corpus* begins with Slavo-Cyrillic documents from around 1396, followed by a brief period – starting circa 1458 – during which documents were issued in both Slavic and Turkish. Around 1542 the *Corpus* entered its longest phase, characterized by the exclusive use of Turkish documents. From roughly the same period dates (1544-1545) the oldest surviving volume from the long series of *mühimme defter*s – registers of important affairs.[83] These were bound compilations of Imperial Council decisions and deliberations, most of which involved issuing written orders. Entries concerning Ragusa appear interspersed among a wide array of other matters until the turn of the 17th century.

In 1604, Ottoman administrators in Istanbul created a dedicated register compiling copies of documents that trace the history, purpose, rhythm, and quality of communication between the imperial government and the Republic of Dubrovnik, alongside decisions of the Imperial Council prompted by Ragusan petitions. This register covers the years up to 1618 and was followed in the 17th century by two further examples, for 1628-1646 and 1647-1665. These collections were produced by scribes attached to the Imperial Council (*Divan-ı Hümayun*). Portions of the registers also include entries concerning relations with Venice.[84]

The introduction of the two types of *defter*s complicates the task of identifying individual literacy events, their participants, and broader patterns – far more than was the case with stand-alone documents. Yet even a cursory examination reveals a remarkable expansion in the social range of individuals who indirectly participated in, or were affected by, literacy events prompted by Ragusan initiatives or by their Ottoman counterparts. Many of these were Slavs of the Ragusan hinterland, some of whom were Christians who, based on everything we know, did not learn Turkish (Arabic, Persian) at school, and of whom we know very little.

This paper has not attempted to exhaust any of the topics it touches upon. Rather, by sketching a periodization of the *Corpus* and examining a select set of literacy events, it has

83 Sahillioğlu, Topkapı.

84 All three *defter*s have been transliterated in three MA thesis: Kara, *13/1 Nolu*; Köker, *XVII. Yüzyılda*; Diraga Canbaz, *15/3 No'lu*. See also Bojanić, *Sultanska akta*.

aimed to suggest that the *Corpus* itself has a history – one best understood through close attention to its multilingualism in all its complexity, rather than by relying on categories anachronistically derived from modern notions of »diplomatic language«, »foreign language«, »imperial/administrative language«, and the like.

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