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“CONFORME ALLA BUONA ET SINCERA AMICIZIA CHE SI CONSERVA TRA NOI”: VENETIAN–OTTOMAN NEGOTIATIONS CONCERNING TRADE CARAVAN ROBBERY IN 1611

Abstract: In this paper, the issues arising from the robbery of a caravan that departed from Istanbul towards Split in 1611 and passed through the Split transshipment port are analysed. Since a Muslim merchant was killed during this event, and several Venetian merchants suffered financial losses, it left a significant mark in historical records. At the same time, several issues were raised: the restitution of goods, legacy of the deceased merchant, protection of trade routes, and customs duties. Furthermore, there were justified concerns that the event could jeopardise the Split transshipment port. To resolve everything, the Venetian Senate, the count and the captain of Split, bailo and provveditore generale were involved in correspondence, negotiations, and decision-making on the one side, while the Bosnian pasha, the sanjak-bey of Klis, the vojvode of Duvno, the kadi of Sarajevo and the sultan were on the other side. All the letters, decrees, and decisions made in respect of this case represent an important depiction of the Venetian-Ottoman cooperation and efforts to preserve the continuity of trade relations.

Keywords: caravan, merchants, commission trade, zambelotti/mohair, Split transshipment port, Bosnia, Sarajevo, Istanbul, 17th century.

In 1611, a caravan carrying Muslim, Jewish and Christian merchants set out from Istanbul for Split, transporting various goods and money.¹ As the caravan neared Klis, the decision was made to pause so the travellers could rest. Although some warned

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¹ Zambelotti or mohair is a fabric made from Angora goat hair: Suraiya Faroqhi, “Ottoman Textiles in European Markets”, in: *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World*, eds. Anna Contadini & Claire Norton, London & New York 2013. In some explanations, it is stated that zambelotti is a name for a cloth that could also have been made from camel hair, though this is less likely: *Речник српскохрватског књижевног и народног језика*, књ. XIII, Београд 1988, 107. The second part of the paper contains more information about zambelotti.

that the chosen location was unsafe due to the nearby forest, exhaustion led most to dismiss the concerns of the few and stay there to spend the night. In the late hours, while they were gathered around the fire, they suddenly heard arquebus shots – one struck a horse, sending the merchants fleeing. Amid the chaos, a Muslim merchant, haji Ahmed (Agi Amet mercante Turco), who was resting against a bale (It. *balla*, a bundle or package), was also shot. Though wounded, he attempted to escape his attackers, but they overtook him and delivered a fatal shot to his head. After the assailants had left, the other merchants found his lifeless body.² Despite the unfortunate incident, the caravan continued its journey towards its destination. Ottoman sources record that the “man in charge of the caravan” (“kiridžija”, i.e. freight carrier who transported goods, often using animals such as horses) managed to save some of the dead man’s belongings, which were transported to the Split transshipment port.³ However, news of the murder of the Ottoman merchant and the looting of goods brought several problems that first had to be dealt with by the representatives of the Venetian authorities in Split, and later by Ottoman officials.

Caravan movement and bandits’ attacks

Caravans were organised trading convoys, processions of merchants travelling together along the roads. Packhorses for transporting goods were acquired from a man with whom merchants would enter into contracts. The persons leading the caravan – the drivers of animals – were referred to as “kiridžije”⁴ in Ragusan documents, and they were tasked with transporting goods. The caravan waystations were economic hubs, trading and mining places, so the network of stops changed depending on the social and political circumstances of a given period.⁵ Caravans were often specially protected – for instance, Dubrovnik merchants were granted permits to carry arms or wear turbans to avoid potential attacks. Some caravans even had a janissary assigned to guard the entire convoy.⁶ Danger always lurked on the roads, so

² Archivio di Stato di Venezia [=ASVe], Senato, Dispacci, Provveditori da Terra e da Mar, b. 272 (7 November 1611).

³ This is noted by S. Faroqhi in her work on Ottoman textiles – she incidentally mentions the case of a caravan robbery in 1611, based on a copy of the Sultan’s decree issued on that occasion, which is kept in the Ottoman Archives of the Government Presidency (*Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi*) in Istanbul: S. Faroqhi, “Ottoman Textiles in European Markets”, 242. A translation of the Sultan’s order into Italian is preserved in the Venice State Archive. However, it does not include the detail about who was in charge of safeguarding the remaining goods of haji Ahmed, so this may be a dragoman’s omission. It is not unusual that the freight carrier would have done so, as he was responsible for leading the caravan and had the duty to protect its merchandise.

⁴ About the freight carrier known as “kiridžija” see: Сергије Димитријевић, *Дубровачки каравани у јужној Србији у XVIII веку*, Београд 1958, 19–24.

⁵ Гавро Шкриванић, *Путеви у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1974, 24–29.

⁶ С. Димитријевић, *Дубровачки каравани у јужној Србији у XVIII веку*, 83–84.

near risky crossings, special protection in the form of guards was stationed. Some places in the Middle Ages even earned names reflecting their role as “watchposts” – settlements with a guard post for keeping watch over the roads.⁷

Security on the roads of the Ottoman Empire was not left to chance. Due to economic and strategic interests, considerable attention was paid to the roads used by the military, diplomats, travellers, couriers and merchant caravans across the Ottoman Balkans. The Ottoman authorities therefore established the “derbend” organisation. The name derives from the Persian word *darband*, meaning a gorge, ravine or a mountain pass, and came to refer to the derbend guards, i.e. those tasked with safeguarding the road.⁸ Settlements granted the derbend status were entrusted with ensuring security of the road transport. Their inhabitants were responsible for ensuring safe passage for all travellers, merchants and wayfarers through hazardous areas. Most derbend places were Christian settlements, whose residents had to arm themselves with spears, cudgels, arrows and swords, while firearms were permitted only for very dangerous derbends. Some derbend settlements acquired this status due to frequent attacks on caravans in their vicinity, but had to be situated in perilous locations, exposed to banditry.⁹ The 16th-century writer Benedetto Ramberti noted that the derbends had a custom of beating drums to signal to travellers that the route was safe.¹⁰

The caravan carrying the merchant haji Ahmed in 1611 was attacked on Ottoman territory, in the Sanjak of Herzegovina, near what is now Buško Lake (then known as Buško blato, lt. *Buscoblato*). As the provveditore generale emphasised, this occurred when the caravan was just two days’ journey from Klis.¹¹ Further details about the location were provided by the Bosnian pasha, who in his letter to the authorities in Split noted that the incident took place near a fortress, probably Čačvina (*castello Giogiupta* in sources).¹² The more precise site of the ambush was revealed in the Sultan’s decree (firman), where it is recorded as Dobrina or Tabrina (*Tabrina*) – likely modern-day Dobranje, located south of Buško Lake (*Boscoblato* in sources).¹³

⁷ Examples include the toponyms Vardište, Vardištani, Varda, which derive from the word *varda*, meaning *to watch, guard, keep vigil*. Г. Шкриванић, *Путеви у средњовековној Србији*, 37–38.

⁸ Алма Бејдић, “Дербенџијска организација у Босанском санџаку”, *Прилози*. Институт за историју Сарајево XXIII (1988) 61–77; About debend villages in Sanjak of Kruševac, see: Драгана Амедоски, *Сумарни дефтер Крушевачког санџака из 1516. године*, Београд 2023, 118–121.

⁹ Олга Зиројевић, *Турско војно уређење у Србији, 1459–1683*, Београд 1974, 176–183, 221–222.

¹⁰ Г. Шкриванић, *Путеви у средњовековној Србији*, 38–39.

¹¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Provveditori da Terra e Mar, b. 272 (7 November 1611).

¹² This is probably a corrupted form of the toponym Čačvina, as interpreted in Ottoman documents. The area also includes Županjac/Županj stream, so there is a possibility that the dragoman rendered this name as *Giogiupta*: ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10, *Instanza del Bassà di Bossina per la consegna delle robbe del Turco morto nel svaleggio della caravana*. For resolving all dilemmas regarding the name of the place in whose vicinity the robbery occurred, I am indebted to Neven Isailović, PhD, and Aleksandar Jakovljević.

¹³ Dobrina is stated in the translation of the Sultan’s firman into Italian, and Tabrina in the same decree in the Ottoman language: ASVe, Documenti Turchi, b. 10, fol. № 1171; I “*Documenti*

The plundered caravan continued its journey towards the Klis Sanjak, carrying the remaining goods, but was intercepted, most likely at the border crossing between the Herzegovina and Klis Sanjaks, by the voivode of Duvno. From the news reaching Split, we learn that the voivode of Duvno, under the pretext that those were goods belonging to the murdered Muslim merchant, kept 43 tavola¹⁴ of zambelotti cloth and four bales (*collo*) of felt (*feltri*).¹⁵ However, the dispatch does not specify the exact location where the caravan was stopped. Still, there is a potential motive for the voivode's intervention. The fact that the robbery occurred in Dobranje – a settlement with a derbend status near the Klis Sanjak border¹⁶ – may have raised the question of poor security in the area. The nahiye of Duvno (Rog was the main fortified town) lay within the Herzegovina Sanjak, its boundaries corresponding to the old Duvno župa.¹⁷ We may assume that news of the caravan's plunder reached the voivode of Duvno immediately, who, as the attack took place in the area under his competence, promptly reacted by confiscating the goods.

This incident gave Venetian merchants, who were awaiting goods from Ottoman territory, legitimate cause for concern. That similar situations were undermining their security on the Ottoman routes was emphasised by the Venetian merchant Bernardo Agazzi, whose goods were supposed to be imported to Venice with this very caravan. In his plea, he demanded a swift resolution to the matter, warning that it could set a bad example and obstruct free trade. He argued that if such attacks continued, if threats to merchants and theft of goods became frequent, no caravan would remain safe.¹⁸

We do not know how the identity of the attackers was uncovered, nor how that part of the investigation unfolded. It is possible that the fact that one of the perpetrators was already known to the authorities made the identification easier. The Ottoman subject Ivan Plostina was accused of attacking the caravan bound for Split in

Turchi" dell'Archivio di Stato di Venezia, pt. 1, eds. Maria Pia Pedani & Alessio Bombaci, Roma 1994, 303; The digitized collection *Documenti Turchi*, as well as the cited document, is available on the archive's website.: <https://asve.arianna4.cloud/patrimonio/666bc029-f04d-4697-aeb3-3939cf3a4d19/1171> (accessed: 17 January 2025).

¹⁴ The tavola is an old unit of area measurement. One tavola equalled 38.1039m²: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tavola_res-aff7f0fd-8bb7-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_\(Enciclopedia-Italiana\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tavola_res-aff7f0fd-8bb7-11dc-8e9d-0016357eee51_(Enciclopedia-Italiana)/) (accessed: 25 March 2025). When the tavola was used for goods such as zambelotti, it likely referred to large bolts containing fabrics of these standard tavola measurements.

¹⁵ Felt is a textile produced by pressing animal hair/fur: *Речник српског језика Матице српске*, Нови Сад 2011, 1408.

¹⁶ We can learn that this was a derbendci place also from the original Sultan's decree in Ottoman, though this detail is absent from its Italian translation. I am grateful to Aleksandar Jakovljević for reading the Ottoman source and bringing this to my attention. The document is filed under the reference: ASVe, Documenti Turchi, b. 10, fol. N° 1170 (27. 12. 1611–4. 1. 1612). A digitised copy of the document can be accessed on the website of the Venice State Archive (ASVe): <https://asve.arianna4.cloud/patrimonio/0bd0b2de-fc19-40a1-8f4f-33108c597f79/1170-27-12-1611-04-01-1612> (accessed: 17 January 2025).

¹⁷ Hazim Šabanović, *Bosanski pašaluk: postanak i upravna podjela*, Beograd 1959, 160–161.

¹⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, Filze, f. 12 (undated)

1611. Records show that he had been travelling regularly to Senj for four years, along with fourteen other brigands. This was the fourth caravan robbery he had organised, suggesting the process of transporting the stolen goods was likely well planned. It is known that the raiders took all the loot to a harbour near Omiš (*nella marina in una spiaggia verso Almissa*), before boarding waiting boats and setting sail for Brač.¹⁹

Likely because the chief organiser of the robbery had been linked to Senj for four years, there was a belief that the caravan had been attacked by uskoks. However, there is no indication that Ivan Plostina was originally from Senj or even resided there. Given that he had by then been implicated in four robberies, he had presumably taken stolen goods there each time, maintaining connections with the town. The Bosnian beylerbey also attributed the 1611 caravan raid to uskoks in one of his letters to the Split count and captain.²⁰ Yet, the provveditore generale dismissed this claim, assuming local bandits were more likely culprits.²¹ Regardless, Ottoman authorities maintained that punishing the criminals was their responsibility. The Bosnian pasha emphasised this in his assurances to the Split count, stating that no one else should concern themselves with the matter, as the attack had occurred on Ottoman soil. On this occasion, he stressed that the Ottoman Sultan had guaranteed protection, with capitulations, to merchants coming from Venetian territory. It was vital, he argued, to reassure them that this pledge was being honoured, so they could travel without doubting their safety.²²

Before entering Venetian territory and approaching the Split transshipment port, caravans arriving from various regions of the Ottoman Empire would pass through the Klis gorge before proceeding to Solin, where they would be met by men from Poljica for protection on the remaining journey. Once the Split count and captain received news from the health guards about a caravan's arrival at the city gates, he would issue authorisation for its passage. All travellers were then required to surrender their weapons before proceeding to the lazaretto for mandatory quarantine.²³ The further procedure concerning merchants and their goods fell mainly under the jurisdiction of the *priore* in the lazaretto – quarantine station manager – who was responsible for compiling an inventory of goods entering quarantine and issuing individual certificates to merchants, with which they would later reclaim their merchandise.²⁴ When the plundered caravan reached Split, the responsibility for its reception fell primarily to the rector holding the title of the count and captain (*conte et capitano*) – the Venetian administrative representative in Split who exercised administrative, judicial and military authority.²⁵

¹⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

²⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 11 (8 April 1612).

²¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Provveditori da Terra e Mar, b. 272 (7 November 1611).

²² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 11 (March 1612).

²³ Grga Novak, *Povijest Splita*, knj. II, Split 1978, 1002.

²⁴ ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, Prima serie, Diversorum, b. 358, *Capitoli da osservarsi nelli lazzaretti stabiliti e decretati Dagl'Illustrissimi et Eccellissimi Signori Sopra Provveditori, aggiunti e proveditori alla Sanità*.

²⁵ The term rector referred to all Venetian governors of important centres and regions. Depending on their responsibilities, rectors held different titles – *count, captain, podestà*,

**Investigation:
damage assessment and inventory of surviving merchandise**

The guard tasked with reporting to the Venetian rector in Split about arriving trade convoys likely brought news of the unfortunate incident involving the Istanbul caravan to count and captain Marin Mudazzo in 1611, prompting his immediate visit to the lazaretto to ascertain the details. Why did this caravan robbery attract such attention from Venetian authorities? The attack occurred on Ottoman territory, and the accused were Ottoman subjects, so this matter could be outside the jurisdiction of Venetian rectors. However, as several merchants, including Venetian subjects, were harmed in the attack, the swift compensation of their losses necessitated the involvement of Venetian officials. However, the primary motivation behind Split's count insisting on rapid resolution of all issues stemming from the caravan robbery lay in the interests of the Split transshipment port. In several reports, count and captain Marin Mudazzo expressed fears that traffic through the Split transshipment port could cease, depriving the entire city of essential supplies unless security along routes to Split could be demonstrably guaranteed.²⁶

His first course of action was to interrogate all the merchants who had arrived with the plundered caravan. They recounted how the attack with firearms had taken them by surprise during the night, causing them to flee in terror. Only when it was safe to return to their resting place did they discover the murdered merchant haji Ahmed, immediately noticing that some goods were missing.²⁷ Having finished with them, he addressed Mehmed, the dead trader's brother. As the count of Split notes in his report, he wished to question him more thoroughly, likely assuming he would be most knowledgeable about his brother's affairs. The opposite proved true – Mehmed's statements were superficial, though whether this was because he refused to disclose details of his brother's business or did not know them remains uncertain. He only knew that during the journey an unspecified sum of money had been entrusted to his late brother, kept in forced-open chests. Furthermore, he stated that his brother had carried no letters with him.²⁸

This aroused the suspicions of the Split count, who resolved to conduct a full inspection of all goods from the caravan, beginning with the remaining merchandise of the late merchant. During this examination, he discovered one intact chest containing a handful of letters and twenty two bundles (*groppi*), which directly contradicted the dead man's brother's testimony. All packages bore seals (*bollo*), i.e. markings.²⁹ These

castellan. About rectoral functions in the Venetian Republic, see: Monique O'Conell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State*, Baltimore 2009.

²⁶ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (14 November 1611; 15 January 1612).

²⁷ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

²⁸ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

²⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

markings on cargo were mandatory for all goods in transit. One of those markings (*senj*, in Ragusan documents) typically consisted of the owner’s initials and would change whenever ownership changed. The other type of markings (*danga*) usually remained intact once placed on the package, and was found on the packages carrying money (*groppi*).³⁰ Only one of haji Ahmed’s bags lacked such markings, prompting the count and captain to open it in the presence of Ottoman customs officials (*emins*) and the city’s Jewish merchant consuls. Inside were Hungarian gold coins (*onagri*) and Turkish coins (*sultanini*)³¹, and – though Mudazzo did not state the exact quantities – he recorded finding 356 sequins in the same package. The bag was then bound again, with an Ottoman official affixing a seal. All money was stored alongside the dead man’s other remaining goods, which the count described as being of poor quality and small value.³²

Further investigation conducted by the Split count and captain revealed that during the attack on the caravan, five *tavola* of zambelotti, fifty fox furs (*vernace de volpe*), and a small sack containing three hundred sequins were stolen, and a larger bag with an unknown quantity of large silver coins (*tolari*) was missing. In accordance with his duty to regularly send reports to Venice, the Split count and captain provided the Senate (*Senato*)³³ with a detailed account of the incident.³⁴ On this occasion, he also wrote to the *provveditore generale* of Venetian Dalmatia and Albania. In several reports, the Split count sought advice on how to proceed, forwarded translations of letters from the Bosnian pasha, conveyed new information, and wrote about the progress of the investigation.

His duty was to compile a complete inventory of the dead merchant’s goods that had safely arrived in Split. Regardless of where the inventory was conducted, this procedure was always carried out in the presence of several witnesses. Among them were usually Ottoman merchants, who would confirm that the goods being recorded belonged to the dead man. In some cases, they could also provide information about any outstanding debts or claims against the merchant. The inventory was always drawn up by a Venetian official responsible for the location where the merchant had died. In Venice, this was done by a notary accountable to the Board of Trade (*Cinque*

³⁰ С. Димитријевић, *Дубровачки каравани у јужној Србији у XVIII веку*, 46–48.

³¹ Вук Винавер, *Преглед историје новца у југословенским земљама (XVI–XVIII век)*, Београд 1970, 6, 49.

³² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

³³ The Senate (*Consiglio dei Pregadi / Senato*) was one of the governing councils in Venice. By the 15th century, it held the highest authority among the magistracies, and at its sessions decisions on military campaigns, peace treaties, alliances, financial matters, and the administration of newly conquered territories were made. Members of the Senate oversaw the work of diplomatic representatives and were responsible for controlling all envoys sent to foreign territory: Gaetano Cozzi & Michael Knapton, *La Repubblica di Venezia nell’età moderna. Dalla guerra di Chioggia al 1517*, Torino 1986, 108; Frederic C. Lane, *Venice. A Maritime Republic*, Baltimore – London 1973, 254.

³⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

Savi alla Mercanzia), while in the Venetian lazaretto, the quarantine station manager (*priore*) was in charge of the procedure. If a merchant died in Split's lazaretto, the duty fell to the count and captain of Split. At the Split transshipment port, the local Ottoman emin and/or another Ottoman official were often present.³⁵

In 1611, the inventory conducted by the count of Split was witnessed by the brother of haji Ahmed, Ottoman customs officials, and the consuls of Jewish merchants. This resulted in a final list of the dead merchant's estate located in Split, which consisted of twelve tavola of zambelotti. Among the merchant's belongings, a small metal box sealed with Spanish wax was discovered. Suspecting that it might contain cotton or other goods subject to sanitary regulations, the count and captain of Split opened it in the presence of these witnesses and found four pearls (*quattro perle*), which he then repackaged in the same manner.³⁶

It is worth to briefly examine the value and characteristics of the fabric that haji Ahmed primarily imported from Istanbul to Venice – zambelotti, also known as mohair. This was a woollen fabric made from the silky white fleece of Angora goats, bred only in the Ankara region. Through a special process of treatment and dyeing, a delicate material with a distinctive “watered effect” on its surface was produced. While Suleiman the Lawgiver (1520–1566) maintained a monopoly over zambelotti, other sultans took little interest in these fabrics. Therefore, after 1566, records show their export from the Ottoman Empire. Demand remained strong, and imports into Venice were intensive until 1645, when a brief export ban was imposed. By the 18th century, the export of raw materials increased slightly, leading to zambelotti production becoming common in Venice and Poland, which is why the export of fabrics produced in Ottoman workshops declined.³⁷

Venetian sources indicate that among the items stolen from haji Ahmed by the bandits were five tavola of zambelotti, while the remaining twelve were brought to Split. The voivode of Duvno retained forty three tavola listed as part of haji Ahmed's cargo. This means the late merchant from Ankara had been transporting a total of sixty tavola of zambelotti. Given that these were precious fabrics, this suggests that haji Ahmed was a prominent merchant in the Ottoman Empire, which is why it would be worthwhile to briefly reconstruct the business dealings he had arranged before the caravan's departure in 1611.

³⁵ In 1614, when the merchant Bayram Cebeci (i. e. the keeper of ammunition; It. Bairam Gebegi d'Angori) from Ankara died after a prolonged illness in the Split lazaretto, the Bosnian beylerbey Mustafa Pasha issued instructions for the inventory of his goods. It was ordered that the inventory be conducted in the presence of the Ottoman nazir, the kadi of Klis, and Rizvan Agga capigi: ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 11 (5 January 1613. m. v.).

³⁶ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

³⁷ S. Faroqhi, “Ottoman Textiles in European Markets”, 237–243.

Merchant haji Ahmed – the raiders’ primary target

Sources reveal little about haji Ahmed, leaving our knowledge of this merchant limited to incidental details written down in records in the aftermath of the robbery. We know that haji Ahmed originated from Ankara and undertook his journey to Venice accompanied by his brother Mehmed.³⁸ It remains unclear whether Mehmed was transporting goods for Venice or was merely assisting his brother. However, reports from the Split count and captain suggest haji Ahmed bore sole responsibility for both the merchandise and money, raising the possibility that the brothers were conducting a commodity exchange as a family enterprise.³⁹ It is known that merchants from the Ottoman Balkans operated family businesses as well, with brothers, relatives, sons and fathers either travelling together to Western trading centres or dividing responsibilities so that each member would carry out a part of the job separately.⁴⁰ We assume that haji Ahmed had a main say in family business, issuing instructions to his brother. As already noted, during his conversation with the Split count, Mehmed disclosed that his brother had taken over a certain cargo and a sum of money during their journey. His inability to provide the count with further details about haji Ahmed’s agreements likely stemmed from the lack of knowledge of someone who was following directions and learning from the older brother. It is less possible that Mehmed did so in order to conceal something since his brother, had he reached the Split transshipment port alive, would have been obliged to declare the goods entering the lazaretto and pay the customs duties.

This raises the question: from whom and why did haji Ahmed receive a sum of money on his way to Split? According to the claims of the Bosnian pasha, the caravan stopped in Sarajevo, where haji Ahmed took on bundles containing 9,000 sultanis and a large quantity of goods received “by order” (*di commissione*).⁴¹ Since the goods were received on order, this undoubtedly indicates commission-based or intermediary trade. The term “commission” referred to an “order given by one merchant to another for a commercial transaction”. The merchant-principal would issue the commission, while the recipient – the commission agent – was obliged to follow the principal’s instructions and complete specific transactions “by order” (*su commissione*). Such arrangements were formalised through a procura, i.e. an agency contract, or

³⁸ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, Filze, f. 12 (21 December 1611).

³⁹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

⁴⁰ A good example of family business is the Brnjaković family from Olovo. After moving to Sarajevo, they developed their family business network and established contacts with numerous Mediterranean commercial centres in the 17th century: Milenko S. Filipović, “Brnjakovići”, *Narodna starina* 13/33(1934) 93–97; Вук Винавер, *Дубровник и Турска у XVIII веку*, Београд 1960, 69–70.

⁴¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10, *Instanza del Bassà di Bossina per la consegna delle robbe del Turco morto nel svaleggio della caravana*.

other documents.⁴² When Venetian records mention Ottoman merchants acting as commission agents, these references serve as the only evidence of such dealings within Venetian administration. Since agency contracts were not translated for the needs of Venetian magistracies, the Bosnian pasha's claim in this case is the only confirmation of haji Ahmed's involvement in this type of trade. Given that he received the money in Sarajevo, the agreements with local merchants were probably concluded and recorded in that city.

Communication, networking and collaboration were crucial for trade, as they enabled merchants to gather information about the situation in the market and current prices necessary for conducting business in unknown cities. Authorised commission agents were usually wealthy individuals with extensive connections across various markets.⁴³ An unambiguous indication that haji Ahmed maintained a broad network of business contacts were the letters he carried with him. While examining his belongings, the count and captain of Split discovered a handful of letters addressed to Christian and Jewish merchants in Split and Venice. It remains unclear why the report described these as "secret letters", as no further details are provided, though we may assume that they contained coded correspondence. Nonetheless, their very existence suggests that haji Ahmed acted as an intermediary in communication between several merchants.⁴⁴

That the late haji Ahmed operated on the order of others was also confirmed by several Venetian merchants who, in December 1611, sent a plea to the Collegio in Venice⁴⁵. From this, we learn that the brothers Ahmed and Mehmed departed Istanbul by caravan in early September, having received several bundles of money from agents of several Christian merchants, which they were to deliver to them in Venice.⁴⁶ However, their plea does not reveal who had commissioned this transaction,

⁴² Fernand Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme XV^e-XVIII^e siècle*, 3, *Le temps du monde*, Paris 1979, 282.

⁴³ F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle*, 3, *Le temps du monde*, 282; Frederic C. Lane, *I mercanti di Venezia*, Torino 1996, 74–75.

⁴⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

⁴⁵ The Collegio was one of Venice's governing magistracies. It was created by the merger of three councils (*Savi del Consiglio*, *Savi di Terraferma*, *Savi agli Ordini*) of wise men (Lat. *sapientes*, It. *savi*), which were established in the 14th and 15th centuries as temporary auxiliary offices (*zonte*, *additiones*) to address different needs. These three offices formed the Full College (*Pien Collegio*). They were unified by the Signoria, comprising the doge, his councillors and three high officials of the Council of Forty (*Quarantia*, appellate court for judicial sentences), which also presided over their sessions. The Collegio's responsibilities were primarily advisory. All proposals submitted to the Senate were first deliberated by the Collegio. It was in charge of public letters, ducal acts and state decrees. Over time, the Collegio gained additional powers, and by the 18th century, it became the supreme arbiter of Venice's political life: A. Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Indice generale storico, descrittivo, ed analitico*, tomo 1, Roma 1937, 23.

⁴⁶ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, Filze, f. 12 (21 December 1611).

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i.e. who entrusted them with the money. However, based on the contents of the above letter from the Bosnian pasha, we may assume that the senders were Christian merchants from Sarajevo.⁴⁷

Based on data on haji Ahmed’s dealings, we can assume that the bandits robbed and killed probably the most prominent merchant of that caravan – the one whose goods held the greatest value in that trading convoy.

**“[...] an unfortunate incident befell poor Ahmed [...]”⁴⁸:
the matter of the murdered merchant’s estate**

After the inventory of the dead merchant’s estate that had arrived in Split by caravan was made, the next step was to settle matters with his heirs. In essence, these procedures differed little between the Venetian and Ottoman administrations. Even when a will existed, Venetian notaries would conduct an inventory of the deceased’s property for verification, while in the Ottoman Empire, such records were kept in special registers (*tereke defterleri*) maintained by the kadi.⁴⁹ In Venice, the claims to the inheritance of deceased Ottoman merchants were processed by means of a will. If no will existed, the heirs would submit a form of surety provided by Ottoman officials, most commonly the kadi. Should someone arrive in Venice with documentation proving their status as the deceased’s legitimate heir, Venetian officials would carry out the restitution of the goods in the presence of several merchants as witnesses, who would then sign a certificate confirming the transfer of the estate to the heirs.⁵⁰

We assume that no will existed, as sources make no mention of such a document being used for the restitution of the merchant’s estate. To comply with standard procedures, haji Ahmed’s brother Mehmed travelled to Istanbul in November to

⁴⁷ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10, *Instanza del Bassà di Bossina per la consegna delle robbe del Turco morto nel svaleggio della caravana*.

⁴⁸ “mal incontro che sucesse al povero Ahmed morto”: ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 11 (14 March 1612).

⁴⁹ Blake De Maria, *Becoming Venetian. Immigrants and the Arts in the Early Modern Venice*, New Haven – London 2010, 124–127; Rossitsa Gradeva, “Towards a portrait of ‘the rich’ in the Ottoman society: Sofia in 1670s”, in: *Provincial Elite in the Ottoman Empire*, Halcyon Days in Crete V. A Symposium Held in Rethymno, 10–12 January 2003, eds. Antonis Anastasopoulos, Rethymno 2005, 149–199.

⁵⁰ Thus, in 1794, Mustafa Aga, known as Sevo Sočivica – the son of a Sarajevo livestock merchant – was required to obtain a document from the kadi proving his status as the legal heir: ASVe, *Provveditori alle beccarie*, b. 43 (9. 12. 1794); Марија Андрић, “Један примерак венецијанских уговора о трговини говедима и трговци из Сарајева (1784–1785)”, *Мешовита грађа XL* (2019) 56; In 1575, an inventory of the estate of Husein Ćelebi, a deceased merchant dealing with zambelotti imports, was drawn up in Venice in the presence of “several Muslims”, probably merchants: Cemal Kafadar, “A Death in Venice (1575): Anatolian Muslim Merchants Trading in the Serenissima”, *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (1986) 213.

obtain the necessary documentation for claiming his late brother's assets. Before his departure, Mehmed requested that the count and captain of Split safeguard his brother's goods, believing this to be the only way of ensuring their security while he was on journey. He expressed his conviction that, should "God decide" that he perish during the voyage, his brother's "modest estate" would remain preserved. Mehmed carried with him a letter of recommendation from the count and captain of Split, addressed to the Venetian bailo in Constantinople, which was to serve to him both as a travel pass and as justification for his journey – in order to present the case before the Ottoman Sultan and secure the required documents.⁵¹

Shortly after Mehmed's departure, Hassan Spai and Mehmet capigi from Sarajevo arrived in Split as envoys of the Bosnian pasha and delivered his letter to the count of Split. In the letter, the governor of the Bosnian eyalet expressed his dissatisfaction with the unfortunate incident involving the murder of the Muslim merchant haji Ahmed. According to his claims, haji Ahmed loaded goods in Sarajevo on the order of other merchants for transport to Venice, but had done so "under unjust terms, to the detriment of the Ottoman Sultan's treasury and in violation of laws of the Ottoman Empire" (*sotto ingiusti colori con fraude del tesoro del Gran Signore et usurpatione del leggi nostre*). By accusing the dead merchant of malversations in Sarajevo, the Bosnian pasha demanded that the count of Split hand over all of haji Ahmed's possessions stored in the Split lazaretto. He further emphasised that only through such action would all laws and their provisions be observed (*che cosi facendo, si osserveranno li canoni e capituli in quelli contenuti*).⁵²

In his response to the Bosnian pasha, the count of Split emphasised that he had carefully approached the entire matter, compiling a meticulous inventory of goods "belonging to the dead man and those entrusted to him by other merchants" (*in potere et custodia*). Although tasked with safeguarding haji Ahmed's merchandise, he clarified that he lacked the authority to influence the case or make decisions, as this fell outside his jurisdiction. Consequently, he could not transfer the dead merchant's assets to anyone without the approval and instructions of the Venetian doge.⁵³ On this matter, the count wrote twice to Venice, expressing concern over the demands from Sarajevo. He assessed them as a potential problem "of great significance for the public interest" that could jeopardise the Split transshipment port. Anticipating that the Bosnian pasha might, "in the customary insolent manner" (*con la solita maniera insolente da Turchi*) characteristic of Ottoman officials, dispatch a capigi to disrupt transshipment port operations, he urgently requested the doge's further guidance.⁵⁴

⁵¹ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (9 November 1611).

⁵² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10, *Instanza del Bassà di Bossina per la consegna delle robbe del Turco morto nel svaleggio della caravana*.

⁵³ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (14 November 1611).

⁵⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (14 November 1611; 15 November 1611).

There is no doubt that the Venetian governor in Split regarded the Bosnian pasha’s claim to the dead merchant’s goods as unfounded. Had haji Ahmed left no heirs, such a demand would have been justified. The Board of Trade (*Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*)⁵⁵ explicitly stated in its 1656 instruction – issued regarding the estate of an Ottoman merchant – that only if a merchant died without heirs would his assets belong to the Ottoman Sultan. To avoid the Porte’s customary claims, it was stipulated that if heirs existed, the estate must be held in Venice’s public treasury.⁵⁶ While no such instruction exists in the Magistracy’s registers prior to the caravan robbery, the resolute refusal of Split’s count and captain to comply with the Bosnian pasha’s demands suggests that this rule probably existed before we find it explicitly stated in later sources.

At the start of the procedure, the count and captain of Split kept the late haji Ahmed’s goods while completing the necessary documentation about the case. In December 1611, the Venetian Senate issued an order that the compiled case file, along with all bundles of money and the dead merchant’s merchandise, be sent from Split to Venice and handed over to the Board of Trade, where they were to be held until their transfer to the heirs.⁵⁷ It is worth noting that this procedure differed markedly from how the goods of deceased Venetian merchants were treated on Ottoman soil. Under the terms of capitulations (*ahdname*), the estates of Venetian traders could not be claimed by the Ottoman treasury official, as they were handed over to the Venetian representative – bailo in Constantinople.⁵⁸

The late haji Ahmed had several heirs: his brothers Mehmed (Mehemet), Abdullà, Abdunnebi, Dervis and mother Ümmü Külsum.⁵⁹ In practice, if a merchant’s heirs were

⁵⁵ The Board of Trade (*Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, literally translated as the “Five Wise Men for Trade”) was established in 1506 and granted a permanent council status in 1517. Created by the Senate from among its own members, it comprised officials with experience in organising trade with foreign countries. In its early years, the Magistracy’s responsibilities were broadly defined, covering maritime and overland trade. Over time, this office acquired greater authority and duties, which were more precisely defined by Senate’s decrees: Maria Borgherini-Scarabellin, *Il magistrato dei Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia dalla istituzione alla caduta della Repubblica: studio storico su documenti d’archivio*, Venezia 1925, 20.

⁵⁶ “Et il Turco non havesse eredi, tutto dovesse esser consegnato in Cassa Publica per cautione delle solite pretensioni che si sogliano havere alla Porta, quando manca alcun Turco, essendo herede de Turchi il Gran Signore”: ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, Prima serie, Risposte, b. 155, c. 73 (7 March 1656).

⁵⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, Filze, f. 12 (29 December 1611); ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 10 (29 January 1612).

⁵⁸ Hans Peter Alexander Theunissen, “Ottoman – Venetian Diplomats: The Ahd-names. The Historical Background and the Development of a Category of Political-Commercial Instruments Together with an Annotated Edition of a Corpus of a Relevant Documents”, *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies (EJOS)* 1/2 (1998) 411.

⁵⁹ ASVe, Documenti Turchi, b. 10, No 1170. Approximate dating of the document, according to Maria Pia Pedani, is 27 December 1611 – 4 January 1612: *I “Documenti Turchi” dell’Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, 303.

unable to travel to Venice, they could authorise someone to reclaim the goods on their behalf. This authorisation procedure took place on Ottoman territory, and the documents used for this purpose were primarily hüccets and sureties. It is not unusual that in this case, haji Ahmed's entire family was unable to travel to Venice, so they appointed his brother Dervis to handle the remaining formalities. In March 1612, four months after his brother's murder, brothers Mehmed and Dervis arrived in Sarajevo before proceeding to Split. They carried with them a letter of recommendation from the Venetian bailo, a hüccet from the kadi of Istanbul, and an imperial order issued in Istanbul by Sultan Ahmed I (1603–1617).⁶⁰

It is not unusual that Dervis departed the Ottoman Empire bearing a supreme decree, given that he belonged to the "sons of sipahis" (*sipahioğlan*) order. These men held the highest rank among the six cavalry divisions of the Porte's forces. Members of this unit were the elite – former *içoğlan* or janissaries – with distinguished careers behind them, often described as the most impeccably attired, befitting their status. This was no coincidence, as the *sipahioğlan* were among those entrusted with guarding the Sultan's tent.⁶¹ Raised in Istanbul in a strict military spirit, they inherited their fathers' timars and represented the future of the sipahi corps.⁶² In his decree, the Sultan referred to Dervis as one of "our sipahioğlan, whose valour shall only grow" (*uno dei nostri ispahi del primo ordine, il cui valor sia in augmento*), probably signalling expectations of his advancement in service.⁶³ This suggests that the father of the murdered haji Ahmed was himself a sipahi or member of another Ottoman military unit. Dervis's good reputation as a sipahioğlan was further underscored by the Sultan's remark that he was "honoured among his peers" (*l'honorato fra pari et simili suoi*).⁶⁴ While we cannot know why Dervis earned such Sultan's description, there is no doubt that he enjoyed a formidable reputation within Ottoman military ranks.

⁶⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 11 (14 March 1612).

⁶¹ *Историја Османског царства*, ed. Робер Мантран, Београд 2002², 221–222.

⁶² Ćiro Truhelka, "Historička podloga agrarnog pitanja u Bosni", *Гласник Земаљског музеја у Босни и Херцеговини* XXVII (1915) 35–36; О. Зиројевић, *Турско војно уређење у Србији, 1459–1683*, 158–162.

⁶³ In the regesta of Ottoman documents (*Documenti Turchi*) from the Venetian State Archive, edited by Alessio Bombaci and completed by Maria Pia Pedani, there is a brief description of an Ottoman-language document (No 1170) in which Dervis is stated as a sipahioğlan. In the Italian translation of this document (No 1171), found in the same fund, Dervis is designated as *ispahi del primo ordine* – literally, "a sipahi of the first order". This conveys the main meaning of his rank, indicating that he belonged to the first division of the six cavalry units: *I "Documenti Turchi"*, pt. 1, 303; ASVe, Documenti Turchi, b. 10, N° 1171 (approximate dating according to M. P. Pedani: 27 December 1611 – 4 January 1612). The Sultan's decree is also preserved in the Ottoman Archives of the Government Presidency in Istanbul: Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi [=BOA], Bab-ı Asafi Divan-ı Hümayun Sicilleri, Düveli Ecnebiye Defterleri 13/1, 86, N° 420. This archival reference appears in S. Faroqhi, "Ottoman Textiles in European Markets", 242.

⁶⁴ ASVe, Documenti Turchi, b. 10, No 1171 (approximate dating, according to M. P. Pedani: 27 December 1611 – 4 January 1612).

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In his decree, Sultan Ahmed I named as the deceased’s sole heirs his four brothers and mother, confirming that they had all appointed Dervis as their legitimate representative in Venice. Dervis was tasked with reclaiming, on their behalf, the portion of the estate to which they were legally entitled, which was confirmed by the hüccet issued by the kadi of Istanbul. Dervis himself submitted a formal request to be granted not only a hüccet, but also a firman (*imperial lettera*), to secure the restitution of the twelve tavola of zambelotti entrusted to the count and captain of Split. The Ottoman Sultan demanded that the Venetian authorities restore the money and all the goods remaining behind haji Ahmed, stressing that this would demonstrate the “good and sincere friendship maintained between them” (*conforme alla buona et sincera amicitia che si conserva tra noi*), thereby reaffirming the good relations cherished by the two states.⁶⁵

**“[...] ensure that the Venetians receive what is theirs”⁶⁶:
the restitution of goods and money to Venetian merchants**

The murder of the Muslim merchant haji Ahmed seems to have caused significant indignation not only on the Ottoman side but also among the Venetians. Beyond the question of inheritance, his death created complications for other merchants whose interests the late haji Ahmed had represented. In December 1611, several Venetian merchants petitioned the doge, seeking assistance in recovering twenty two bundles of money that haji Ahmed was to transport to Venice. They requested that the count and captain of Split be informed thereof, so that he should forward these funds to the Board of Trade in Venice. To prove the money was theirs, they offered to present the documents they had – delivery receipts (*polizza di consegna*) and receipts (*riceputa*). They further argued that the seals on the bundles should serve as a certain proof of who the money was intended for.⁶⁷

As a damaged party, the Venetian merchant Bernardo Agazzi separately addressed the doge⁶⁸. He claimed to have demanded from haji Ahmed to transport fine zambelotti of “great value” to Venice, and that two tavola of the fabric belonging to him had been lost in the attack on the caravan. Agazzi demanded either the

⁶⁵ ASVe, Documenti Turchi, b. 10, fol. N° 1171, 1172. Both documents, though differently numbered, contain entirely identical information. The difference lies in the fact that one (1172) appears somewhat disorderly, with several crossed-out words and corrections. We presume this to be the initial working version of the translation from Ottoman to Italian, drafted by the dragoman, who made amendments during the process. The other is likely a copy produced after the interpretation was finalised.

⁶⁶ “farete così che i Venetiani habbino il suo”: ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Provveditori da Terra e da Mar, b. 272 (8 March 1612).

⁶⁷ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, Filze, f. 12 (21 December 1611).

⁶⁸ In the Sultan’s decree of March 1612, the merchant’s name was probably wrongly stated as “Agostino”: ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Costantinopoli, f. 73 (c. 8 March 1612).

restitution of his goods, or compensation equivalent to their value if the goods were not found. He described the incident as a bad example that threatened “the freedom of mutual trade”, expressing concern that such events might become more frequent, rendering “no caravan safe” and reducing traffic to the Split transshipment port.⁶⁹

The Venetian authorities could not easily secure the restitution of this portion of goods and thereby satisfy their subjects, as part of the capital for which haji Ahmed had been responsible never even reached Split. As already stated, the voivode of Duvno had retained a portion of the cargo under the pretext that it belonged to a Muslim merchant. The count and captain of Split already highlighted this issue in his first report in November 1611, though he lacked further details about the event. In an attempt to resolve the matter swiftly, the count sent a messenger (*messo*) to the voivode of Duvno, aiming to find out if it was possible to persuade him, with gifts, to send to Split the capital he had confiscated from the caravan. When this failed, he sought, likely through the same intermediary, to ask for the help of the nazir of Sarajevo, planning to negotiate directly with the Bosnian pasha if necessary.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the count did not specify whom he had appointed as his envoy to Duvno. Also, the outcome of these visits and the course of negotiations remain unknown.

The very next month, the count and captain of Split received instructions from the Senate to take all necessary measures to ensure the restitution of the zambelotti and other goods to the Venetian merchants.⁷¹ Simultaneously, Senate members dispatched a letter to the bailo in Constantinople, expressing their concerns. They ordered the bailo to secure an effective order for the voivode of Duvno, the Bosnian pasha and all others, to prevent anyone from having access to Venetian merchants’ capital under any excuse. This reveals Venice’s apprehension about potential obstructions from Sarajevo, likely viewing the keeping of goods as contrary to established practices that characterised Venetian-Ottoman cooperation in similar situations. They argued it was justified to expect from Ottoman officials to treat merchants and commodity exchange with Venetian subjects as it was done in Venice, in line with the capitulations.⁷²

We can only assume that the above envoy reached Sarajevo and brought news to the count of Split that the goods held by the voivode of Duvno had been transferred to Sarajevo. The Bosnian pasha ordered their confiscation from the voivode, likely following reports of the caravan robbery and the discovery that this portion of the capital belonged to Venetian subjects. However, there is little indication that the pasha was willing to proceed with restitution, as the Ottoman officials acted in an unexpected manner. Once the goods arrived in Sarajevo, all bales were unpacked, the merchandise was promptly sold off, and an undisclosed sum was obtained in return. This information was conveyed by Venetian merchants then present in

⁶⁹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, Filze, f. 12 (undated)

⁷⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia. f. 10 (9 November 1611).

⁷¹ ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, f. 12 (29 December 1611).

⁷² ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Costantinopoli, f. 12 (29 December 1611).

Sarajevo, who heard that 4,000 thalers had been gained from the sale. They also revealed that this had been done under the pretext of preventing the goods from deteriorating.⁷³

In January of the following year, the count of Split reported to the Senate that there was nothing more he could do regarding the matter, other than follow instructions and dispatch an envoy to the new Bosnian pasha. However, the count of Split was pessimistic, believing it unrealistic to expect the restitution of the zambelotti, given that the previous Bosnian pasha had already sold them off before departing for Istanbul. His only hope was that the bailo could help and expedite a resolution.⁷⁴

The change of two Ottoman officials in the position of the administrator of the Bosnian eyalet further complicated the situation. By the time Dervis, the murdered merchant's brother, arrived in Sarajevo with the necessary documents to claim the inheritance, Mustafa Pasha was appointed the new beylerbey of Bosnia. He informed the count of Split via a letter about the heir's arrival and the transfer of the late haji Ahmed's estate. Likely unaware of the details preceding his appointment, he included in this transfer two tavola of zambelotti belonging to Bernardo Agazzi, which had initially been sold in Sarajevo to Haggi Ali Carabalizade and then resold to another merchant, also named haji Ahmed (Haggi Ahmet). After purchasing the goods, haji Ahmed departed for Split. Believing these were the goods belonging to the heirs of the slain merchant, the Bosnian pasha urged the count to detain the Muslim trader so the goods could be repurchased and returned to the heirs.⁷⁵

To clarify the situation, the count of Split wrote a letter assuring him that the heirs of the murdered merchant from Ankara would receive their due inheritance once they arrived in Venice with documentation. He also explained the misunderstanding regarding the goods sold in Sarajevo, emphasising that the two tavola were not the personal property of the murdered merchant, but part of the consignment he was transporting to Venetian subjects on order. Realising everything, the Bosnian pasha hastily defended himself in his reply to the count of Split, reiterating the already known fact that it was not him who had ordered the sale, but the former beylerbey. He then assured the count of his readiness to act, “as justice commanded by Prophet Muhammad dictates” (*come la giustizia del nostro Profetta me li comette*), in accordance with the provisions of the peace treaty between Venice and the Ottoman Empire (*son prontissimo di far sempre giustizia conforme alli Capitoli della nostra buona pace*).⁷⁶

In all likelihood, it was the intervention of the bailo that ultimately bore fruit and led to a resolution. Around 8 March 1612, the Sultan issued a firman (decree) to rectify the losses suffered by Venetian merchants in the caravan raid. At the start of the decree, he noted that he had only subsequently learned of the incident, after the bailo's plea (*arz*) was received at the Porte. Referring to an earlier decree from late 1611, he highlighted that the Venetians had followed due procedure and preserved

⁷³ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia. f. 10 (29 December 1611).

⁷⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia. f. 10 (15 January 1612).

⁷⁵ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 11 (14 March 1612).

⁷⁶ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, b. 11 (8 April 1612).

the estate of the Muslim merchant. Now, it was necessary to redress the injustice inflicted upon the Venetian merchant Bernardo Agazzi and other subjects of the Republic. The Sultan thus ordered that the goods belonging to them be seized from those withholding them and, in keeping with the goodwill established by the peace treaty, restituted accordingly. The restitution was to be carried out through the count and captain of Split, who would then forward the goods to their owners.⁷⁷

The decree was addressed to the beylerbey of Bosnia, the sanjak-bey of Klis, and all kadis in those provincial territories of the Ottoman Empire, explicitly instructing each to ensure the restitution was carried out with due care. It particularly emphasised that this must be done “in accordance with the excellent capitulations and the good peace that has been established” (*conforme all’Eccelente Capitulationi et alla Buona Pace*). The capitulations were issued following the conclusion of armed conflicts, with each new sultan reaffirming them.⁷⁸ By invoking them, the decree underscored the necessity of continuing good relations between the two states, with the restitution of goods serving as tangible proof of such cooperation. Moreover, since the capitulations stipulated the protection of Venetian merchants on Ottoman soil, it was logical that in case of violation of their commercial rights, this error should be rectified. In case that a part of the goods disappeared or was concealed, the Sultan ordered that merchants be compensated at all cost, ensuring everything was settled so that “the Venetians receive what is rightfully theirs”, without the need for another Sultan’s decree.⁷⁹

No further reports exist in the preserved Venetian dispatches of Split’s rectors and provveditori generali, nor in the registers of Senate decisions, to suggest that additional interventions were required following the Sultan’s decree. Unfortunately, in such cases, there was rarely a document confirming the matter was fully resolved. Thus, the absence of new complaints likely served as the best indication that the issue was settled to mutual satisfaction.

Demands of Ottoman customs officials: payment of duties

In January 1612, while the matter of the late haji Ahmed’s estate was still unresolved, customs officials (Tur. *gümrük emînleri*) at the Split transshipment port hastily asserted their rights. Unmoved by the upheaval caused by the caravan raid, they insisted on the payment of customs duties for the transferred goods. This was not surprising, as the caravan crossed the border from Ottoman to Venetian territory carrying merchandise in respect to which merchants were in any case obliged to pay customs. As the count of Split noted in his report, the emins were “deeply aggrieved and highly dissatisfied”. Such reaction was caused by the shipment of the

⁷⁷ ASVe, Dispacci, Provveditori di Terra e Mar, b. 272 (approximate date: 8 March 1612).

⁷⁸ About Venetian-Ottoman capitulations see: H. P. A. Theunissen, “Ottoman – Venetian Diplomats: The Ahd-names”, 104–636.

⁷⁹ ASVe, Dispacci, Provveditori di Terra e Mar, b. 272 (approximate date: 8 March 1612).

dead merchant's goods to Venice, where they were to be safeguarded until the heirs' arrival. Though this was an important procedure that was being carried out, the officials viewed it as a breach of another procedure – the payment of the 3% customs.⁸⁰

In any transshipment port, the payment of customs duties was a customary formality. Ottoman customs commissioners (*gümrük emînleri*) were stationed in many coastal towns along the Adriatic and smaller surrounding settlements, where they served as authorised officials (customs tax farmers) responsible for collecting duties on goods exported from Ottoman to Venetian territory. They had to maintain records of goods exported from the Ottoman Empire and imported from Venice, assist merchants and advocate for their rights before Venetian authorities.⁸¹

The complaints lodged by them in January 1612 threatened to cause far greater damage than what could arise from individual merchant complaints. Ottoman customs officers warned of potential disruptions, intending to request that the Bosnian pasha send a man to Split to commit “various acts of insolence” against merchants and their goods. This is why the count of Split feared that the customs officers might detain all goods shipped from Split to Solin or Klis. His concerns were undoubtedly rooted in prior experience, as he noted the possibility of customs officials opening packages and handling merchandise as they pleased. He believed it necessary to exercise considerable patience with them and to find a solution aligned with state interests. His apprehension ran deeper still as he suspected that even if the Bosnian pasha refused to support their demands, the customs officers would present their complaints directly with the Porte in Istanbul. He therefore believed that the only solution was to be granted what they demanded.⁸²

How did the count and captain of Split envision this? As the importer of goods, the late haji Ahmed was the party responsible for settling the customs duties, but, after his death, this obligation fell solely to his heirs. However, when this was taking place, they had not yet arrived with the documentation required to claim the inheritance. We can assume that the count of Split suspected that the heirs might never appear or be willing to pay the duties to the customs officers. The count Marin Mudazzo therefore devised a solution to pay to and calm the Ottoman customs officials without damaging the Venetian state treasury. Among the money bundles transported by the caravan was one without any identifying mark or seal. Goods lacking such markings were not formally considered to be ownership of any merchant, making it impossible to determine the owner of the funds. In his report, the count of Split proposed deducting the relevant sum from this unmarked bundle to pay the customs officers. Though he believed this was the only way to appease them, he stressed that it would be his last resort.⁸³

⁸⁰ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 10 (15 January 1612).

⁸¹ Seid Traljić, “Trgovina Bosne i Hercegovine s lukama Dalmacije i Dubrovnika u XVII i XVIII stoljeću” in: *Pomorski zbornik: povodom 20-godišnjice dana mornarice i pomorstva Jugoslavije 1942–1962*, tom I, Zagreb 1962, 342–343.

⁸² ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 10 (15 January 1612).

⁸³ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 10 (15 January 1612).

It turned out that, even after haji Ahmed's goods were sent to Venice, the customs officials refused to give up. In February 1612, they revisited the count of Split to ask for payment, this time expressing frustration at being placed in such a position. To placate the customs officers, the count told them that the Venetian authorities were prepared to compensate them, but only after the procedure was followed. The bundles had to be opened in Venice for the purpose of verification, in the presence of the merchants awaiting the restitution of their capital. There was also a proposal that the customs officials authorise someone in Venice to collect the payment on their behalf though whether this suggestion came from the customs officials themselves or from Venetian officials is uncertain.⁸⁴

In any case, Marin Mudazzo judged their resolve as firm and concluded that Venice's interests lay in a swift resolution. As the customs officials invoked the Sultan's decrees during their meeting with the count of Split, it was hardly surprising that he feared that their complaints might reach Bosnia or even Istanbul. As Mudazzo noted in his report, the officials demanded what was determined for them and "written in the ruler's books" (*quello che li veniva et ch'era scritto nelli libri del Re*). He therefore put forward the possibility that their dissatisfaction could delay the restitution of the remaining goods of Venetian merchants, which were held by the Bosnian pasha. Likely for this reason, he argued that the customs officials should be paid without further delay, in accordance with customs. The negotiations proved successful: they agreed to accept forty gold coins out of the requested one hundred and twenty. This sum was deducted from the unmarked money bundle, after which they issued to the count of Split a receipt of settlement (*cautione*), which was forwarded to the Board of Trade.⁸⁵

Conclusion

While a single caravan robbery might not have been enough to destabilise Venetian-Ottoman trade relations, the consequences of other events caused by the robbery certainly could. As Venetian merchants emphasised in their written petitions, there was a risk of losing trust in the safety of routes leading to Split. On the one hand, Ottoman representatives in Bosnia who got involved in claiming the murdered merchant's goods could disrupt operations of the Split transshipment port through various actions. On the other, customs officers, who demanded their due payments were prepared to slow down the imports and exports of goods out of retaliation, which could have long-term consequences for the transport of goods via Split. Therefore, in this context, it is clear why this robbery left a lasting mark in Venetian records. All efforts of the Venetian representatives to rectify the damage were driven by fears that far greater losses could otherwise be incurred, draining the Venetian state treasury.

⁸⁴ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 10 (1 February 1612).

⁸⁵ ASVe, Senato, Dispacci, Rettori, Dalmazia, f. 10 (1 February 1612).

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It should not be disregarded that the correspondence between Venetian and Ottoman officials regarding the restitution of zabelotti highlights the significance of trade in these textiles at the time. Earlier research on mohair exports in Ottoman sources has shown that broader conclusions are difficult to draw because the Ottoman term *sof* for zabelotti was used both for the fabric and raw material.⁸⁶ For this reason, the documentation collected during the procedure on the occasion of the robbery of the caravan which in 1611 carried a substantial quantity of zabelotti, the Angora goat hair fabric, enriches our knowledge about trade in Ottoman mohair, showing that this trade was well-established at the time and that such goods were in demand among Venetian merchants.

⁸⁶ S. Faruqi, “Ottoman Textiles in European Markets”, 240.

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Марија Андрић

„У СКЛАДУ С ДОБРИМ И ИСКРЕНИМ ПРИЈАТЕЉСТВОМ КОЈЕ НЕГУЈЕМО“: ВЕНЕЦИЈАНСКО-ОСМАНСКИ ПРЕГОВОРИ ПОВОДОМ ПЉАЧКЕ КАРАВАНА ИЗ 1611. ГОДИНЕ

Резиме

Један караван којим су путовали муслимански, јеврејски и хришћански трговци пошао је 1611. године из Истанбула за Сплит, носећи разноврсну робу и новац. Када је караван био надомак Клиса, донета је одлука да се направи пауза како би се путници одморили. Иако су неки упозоравали да одабрана локација није безбедна, пошто је у близини била шума, умор је натерао већину да занемаре забринутост неколицине и остану како би преспавали. У ноћним часовима, док су били окупљени око ватре, изненада су чули пуцње аркебуза, а један хитац је погодио коња и натерао трговце да се дају у бег. У том метежу, устрељен је био и муслимански трговац хаџи Ахмед (Agi Amet mercante Turco), који се у том тренутку одмарао наслоњен на једну балу (ит. *balla*, паковање, свежањ). Премда рањен, покушао је да умакне нападачима, који су га, пак, сустигли и усмртили једним хицем у главу, а остали трговци пронашли су његово тело након одласка агресора.

Упркос несрећном догађају, караван је наставио свој пут ка одредишту. Османски извори бележе да је „човек задужен за караван“ успео да спасе неколико покојникових ствари, које су превезене до сплитске скеле. Ипак, вест о убиству османског трговца и пљачки робе донела је неколико проблема с којима су се морали суочити најпре представници венецијанске власти у Сплиту, а затим и османски функционери.

Муслимански трговац хаџи Ахмед, који је убијен, дошао је из Анкаре и кренуо је ка Венецији 1611. године са својим братом Мехмедом. Носио је своју робу, коју је вероватно намеравао да прода на тржишту у Венецији, али и капитал других трговаца. Осим тога што је преносио тканине и новац за поједине млетачке трговце, важно је напоменути да је то чинио као посредник у име хришћанских трговаца из Сарајева. Будући да је био укључен у комисиону трговину, није изненађујуће што је међу његовим стварима пронађен и свежањ писама за неколико трговаца.

Сву робу, имовину трговца и преостали новац након пљачке, који су стигли у Сплит, забележио је Марин Мудацо, венецијански ректор у Сплиту (ит. *conte e capitano*), који је био одговоран за њихово чување док се не добију даље упутства из Венеције. Оно што је остало од имовине трговца и капитала представљало је његову заоставштину. Да би преузео братовљеву имовину, Мехмед је отишао у Истанбул да прибави потребне документе. У османској престоници, породица убијеног трговца пријавила је случај властима, које су

издале неколико потврда како би се, у складу са устаљеним обичајима, могла извршити реституција наследства.

Још један проблем настао је у вези са робом млетачких трговаца, чији је део био украден, док је други део запленио локални званичник – војвода Дувна. У оба случаја био је укључен беглербег Босне. О томе сведочи преписка коју је венецијански ректор у Сплиту водио са њим у циљу решавања случаја на корист обе стране. Различите надлежности, интереси и нејасне намере појединих званичника утицали су на одлагање читаве процедуре. Сложеност ситуације довела је до укључивања султана, који је издао два указа о том питању. Последњи проблем, настао услед пљачке, самостално је решио венецијански ректор у Сплиту, а тицао се царинских дажбина.

У сваком случају, сви аспекти пљачке каравана из 1611. године могли су значајно да одложе или потпуно обуставе рад сплитске скеле. Стога су дипломатски напори обе стране показали једнозначну тежњу за очувањем добрих млетачко–османских односа и трговачких веза.