

FLORENTINE MERCHANTS TRAVELING EAST THROUGH  
RAGUSA (DUBROVNIK) AND THE BALKANS AT THE END  
OF THE 15TH CENTURY*Prof. Paola Pinelli*

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**Abstract:** Various unpublished letters and merchants' memoirs dating from the late 15th century Tuscany have enabled us to investigate the reasons for the lack of a network of major European trade companies in the Balkans. Western operators chose to trade with the merchants of Ragusa (Dubrovnik). Consequently, Ragusa assumed a dominant position in both the land trade routes with inland regions and in the land trade routes between East and West.

**Keywords:** Ragusa (Dubrovnik), the Balkans, land trade routes, 15th century.

The discovery of some unpublished letters and memoirs of Florentine merchants who made the long journey to Constantinople through Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and the inland regions of the Balkans at the end of the 15th century, has led us to develop certain theories relating to the role that the city of Ragusa played in trade relations between East and West. This is especially true in terms of the economic relations with the inland regions of the Balkans. These sources have enabled us to approach the subject from a totally new perspective. Historiography has in fact usually been drawn from the reports and testimonies of travellers, pilgrims and diplomats from western Europe that crossed the Slavic countries heading East, especially to the Holy Land, therefore travelling mainly for spiritual or political purposes. The documentation consulted for this essay however, is instead of a mercantile nature. It was produced by traders who engaged in long, dangerous and arduous journeys to reach, through Ragusa and the inland regions of the Balkans, the most important Byzantine markets, primarily Constantinople, bringing goods such as woollen fabrics that were suitable for those markets. On the way back these traders mainly transported silks and a whole range of other luxury products to European cities. Fernand Braudel claimed that cities cannot exist without roads and that they feed on movement<sup>1</sup>. Ragusa was in a fortunate position, squeezed between the sea and the land,

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<sup>1</sup> F. Braudel, *Civiltà e imperi del Mediterraneo nell'età di Filippo II*, Torino 1953, p. 330.

open to the intense movement of people and goods in the Mediterranean. Dubrovnik was also a privileged outlet for a number of land routes that led to the most important regions and towns of Serbia and Bosnia, enabling merchants to reach the rich market of Constantinople (Fig. 1).

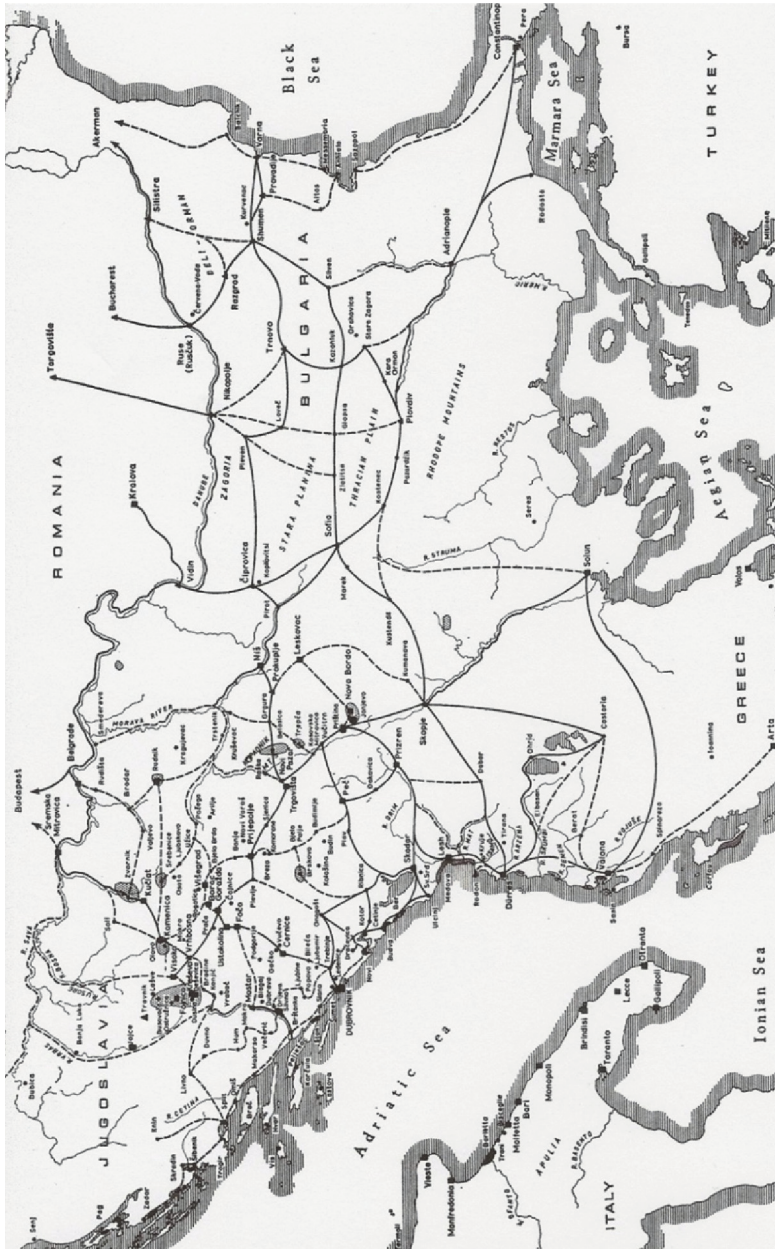


Figure 1.

The main route was the one that passed from Ragusa to the Serbian city of Niš, crossing one of the most important business routes that descended from Hungary<sup>2</sup>. Exiting east through the Ploče gateway, the road climbed from Mount Sergio to Bergatto, the frontier of Dubrovnik that was located on a ridge between the valleys of Breno and Gionchetto. A few minutes further on there was the Slavic customs station of Ledenica: then, after a downhill march of five to six hours, the road led to the fertile valley of Trebinjčica reaching Trebinje. The journey continued until Ljubomir and Bileća; then, through dense forests, the road headed to Crnica, where since 1380 the trading colony of Ragusa had been, and went beyond the castle of Ključ. Later, passing through the gorge of Sutjeska, where in the 15th century there was an important customs office and the road was so narrow that even a handful of men could hold off an entire army, the road reached the river Drina, where there were many castles and commercial stations including Foča. In a day's walk the road met Goražde; heading southeast through the forested mountain pass of Metalka, the road reached Pljevlja and then Prijepolje, the Dubrovnik merchants' favourite resting place. After another day's walk, the road reached Sjenica, meeting another road coming from the northeast of Bosnia. The joint road split at Raška, just beyond Novi Pazar, home to another important Ragusa colony. From here, the road to the valley of the Ibar proceeded through the mining district of mount Kopaonik, often referred to as *Argentario* in the documents of the period; after passing through Toplica and Prokuplje, the road finally arrived in Niš. With favourable weather, up to this point the trip normally required about fifteen days. From Niš, via Sofia, caravans reached Constantinople in another fifteen days.

Another route that was frequently used started at the mouth of the river Neretva. The merchants of Ragusa came here from the sea through the Pelješac peninsula (Sabbioncello) or via Ston (Stagno). A customs office was located here and there were many commercial warehouses, of which the most important was the „*Forum Narenti*”, also called Drijeva, later replaced by another one named Gabela. Following the course of the river, the caravans came from Neretva to Blagaj, near Mostar, then to Konijc, then headed to Visoko and Vrhbosna, present day Sarajevo, where the road forked towards Olovo or Borać. In Olovo the road divided into three more branches: one went northward reaching Tuzla; the second one reached Zvornik and finally Belgrade; and the third went east arriving at Srebrenica and

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<sup>2</sup> L. Villari, *The Republic of Ragusa. An Episode of the Turkish Conquest*, London 1904, pp. 130–141.

Rudnik. From Niš it was possible to reach Constantinople by passing through both Borać and the mining district.

In the documents the two roads are referred to as „*via de Bossina*”. The roads that departed from the coast south of Ragusa were instead called *via de Zenta*. With the latter route, ships from Dubrovnik had to unload their cargo in Bar (Antivari) or Ulcinj (Dulcigno) reaching Sveti Srgj (now Obotti) via a river route. After a very difficult route through the Albanian mountains, the caravan headed to Scutari and Prizren, which was Dubrovnik’s main business post in Albania. The whole journey took more than thirty hours on foot. After Prizren the road met the fertile plain of Kosovo until Janjevo, from where it reached Novo Brdo and then, via Skopje, Constantinople. A second „*via de Zenta*” that started from Antivari and passed through the mule track that went to Cetinje via Kotor, led to Budva, Podgorica and lake Plav, where the mining centre of Brskovo was located. The road then reached Peć, where another important Ragusa colony was located, and from Peć, via Novoselo, the road led to Priština, Skopje and Plovdiv (Filippoli) and reached the Bosphorus in eighteen days.

The merchants of Ragusa ruled these routes. Italian merchant Piero Pantella, stationed in Dubrovnik, wrote in 1433 to his agent Giuliano Marcovaldi that he had the feeling that Ragusa was like a maze („*me pare essere in uno lanbarinto e parme essere legato a non me sapere voltare a nulla banda e però non ti so dare consiglio nè prendere per me e basta*”)<sup>3</sup>. Using this image of a maze, he described the city as a place where even the most experienced traders and entrepreneurs felt disorientated.

Insecurity arose mainly from the fact that Ragusa had the inland regions of the Balkans as the main business partners; Serbia and Bosnia appeared in the eyes of European merchants as still unexplored places, wild, sparsely populated and urbanized, dangerous from every point of view. In addition the overland route connecting Ragusa to Constantinople through the inland regions ran along a rugged terrain, characterized by poor roads and impervious mountains where, as reported in a letter by the Dubrovnik merchant Pietro di Bogdano, one could have unpleasant encounters and be victims of frequent robberies<sup>4</sup>. In reality the most significant difficulty was the western traders’ ignorance of the Slavic language.

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<sup>3</sup> Archivio di Stato di Prato (hereafter ASPO), *Ospedale*, 7028, 566, Ragusa-Fortore, Piero Pantella e compagni a Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi, 28 gennaio 1433.

<sup>4</sup> J. Gelcich (ed.), *Monumenta Ragusina. Libri Reformationum 1301–1336*, V, Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, XXIX, Zagreb 1897, p. 90.

Instead, Dubrovnik merchants knew that world intimately and partly shared the customs and lifestyle of the inland regions of the Balkans. In a Venetian report of 1555 it was stated that in the city of San Biagio the inhabitants spoke Slavic fluently („*la lingua loro natia è schiava, con la quale parlano li altri Dalmatini*”)<sup>5</sup>. The Florentine Serafino Razzi, while describing the language used in the churches of Ragusa, noticed how the women that were attending Mass in St. Dominic and St. Francis, spoke Slavic<sup>6</sup>. In Dubrovnik people wrote and spoke in Slavic and Vulgar Italian in addition to Latin<sup>7</sup> and the local Romance language. And if Italian was the language of commerce<sup>8</sup>, in the second half of the 15th century, Slavic became the language in common use at every level<sup>9</sup>.

In addition it should be noted that the merchants of Ragusa had large economic power in those regions, especially by controlling the production and trade of silver from Serbia and Bosnia<sup>10</sup>. In the inland regions of the Balkans, Ragusa as we have seen, could also count on many trading posts, where its merchants enjoyed a special tax regime, judicial autonomy. They were also able to use their own money and to exercise Catholic worship<sup>11</sup>. When the Balkan regions fell under Turkish domination, Dubrovnik, which realized the extent of the danger early and tried to establish contact with the Turkish authorities, obtained extensive guarantees for its merchants. Even in the 17th century, Matteo Gondola, a member of one of the most important families of the Republic of Ragusa and ambassador to Constantinople, wrote that the citizens of Dubrovnik enjoyed fiscal exemption in the Ottoman

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<sup>5</sup> S. Ljubić (ed.), *Commissiones et relationes venetae* III, Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, XI, Zagreb 1880, p. 74.

<sup>6</sup> S. Razzi, *La storia di Ragusa*, Bologna 1980 (anastatic reprint of the 1595 Lucca edition), pp. 193–194.

<sup>7</sup> Latin was used above all in the justice courts and official correspondence.

<sup>8</sup> J. Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku*, Dubrovnik 1939, pp. 205–208; I. VOJE, *L'attività dei commercianti italiani a Ragusa nel Medioevo (secc. XIV-XV) e il loro adattamento alle nuove condizioni di vita*, in P. F. Palumbo (ed.), *I rapporti demografici e popolativi*, Congressi sulle relazioni tra le due sponde adriatiche 2, Roma 1981, pp. 111–127. In the 15th century Italian increasingly became the language of law and diplomacy, surviving the fall of the Republic in 1808.

<sup>9</sup> B. Krekić, *On the Latino-Slavic Cultural Symbiosis in Late Medieval and Renaissance Dalmatia and Dubrovnik*, *Viator* 26, 1995, pp. 321–332, pp. 323–324.

<sup>10</sup> P. Pinelli, *Tra argento grano e panni. Piero Pantella, un operatore italiano nella Ragusa del primo Quattrocento*, Firenze 2013, pp. 1–15.

<sup>11</sup> D. Kovačević Kojić, *Trgovina u srednjovjekovnoj Bosni*, Sarajevo 1961, pp. 22–23. Regarding the privileges given to merchants from Dubrovnik in Serbia and Bosnia in the late 1300, see F. MIKLOSICH (ed.), *Monumenta Serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae, Bosnae, Ragusii*, Wien 1858, *passim*.

lands, with the exception of Constantinople, Adrianople and Bursa where they had to pay a small 2% tax („sono esenti da gabelle e da dogane ed altri pesi già imposti, e da imporsi in futuro, le robe e i beni stabili e le persone loro in qualsivoglia parte dell’Imperio; eccettuate le città regie di Costantinopoli, Adrianopoli e Prussa, ove pagano solamente due per cento delle robe, colle quali trafficano”)<sup>12</sup>.

It should not be forgotten that in the Balkans, competition between local traders was virtually non-existent and that the merchants of the mining centres struggled to reach the cities of the Adriatic coast and would not have dared to venture beyond the sea<sup>13</sup>. Unlike the coastal zone, the inland regions of the Balkans were less developed and urbanized<sup>14</sup>. Only in the 16th century did merchants from these areas, particularly Bosnians and above all those from Olovo and Goražde, emancipate themselves and begin to trade outside the Balkan peninsula, especially with Venice<sup>15</sup>. Ragusa merchants were instead long time world-class traders, with contacts with the most important trading powers of the time and with the main Italian trading centres, from which they assimilated both commercial and financial tools and techniques, such as the accounting system. As we have attempted to demonstrate in our recent work, Ragusa operators gained an absolute mastery of the double-entry method<sup>16</sup>. In describing the merchants of Ragusa the afore mentioned Piero Pantella used, in a letter of 1432, a rather colourful expression that is very indicative of the unbridled competition and the qualities that distinguished the operators of the market, calling Ragusa merchants very diplo-

<sup>12</sup> F. M. Appendini, *Notizie storico-critiche sulle antichità storia e letteratura de’ ragusei* I, Ragusa 1802, p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> S. Cirković, *Ragusa e il suo retroterra nel Medioevo*, in A. Di Vittorio (ed.), *Ragusa e il Mediterraneo. Ruolo e funzioni di una Repubblica marinara tra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Bari 21–22 ottobre 1988, Bari 1990, pp. 15–26, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Idem, *Sviluppo e arretratezza nella penisola balcanica fra il XIII e il XVI secolo*, in A. Guarducci (ed.), *Sviluppo e sottosviluppo in Europa e fuori d’Europa dal secolo XIII alla Rivoluzione Industriale*, Atti della X Settimana di Studi dell’Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica „F. Datini”, Prato 7–12 aprile 1978, Firenze 1983, pp. 291–314, pp. 299–300.

<sup>15</sup> M. Popović Radenković, *O trgovačkim odnosima Dubrovnika i Bosne i Hercegovine (1480.–1500.)*, Istorijski glasnik 1–4, 1952, pp. 3–20.

<sup>16</sup> P. Pinelli, *Between Two Shores: the Accounts of the Merchant Companies in Ragusa (Dubrovnik) in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century*, Conference Proceedings III Balkans and Middle East Countries Conference on Accounting and Accounting History, Istanbul 19–22 giugno 2013, Istanbul 2013, pp. 866–877. See also D. Kovačević Kojić, *Poslovne knjige Dubrovačkih trgovaca (XV vijek)*, in S. JERŠE (ed.), *Med Srednjo Evropo in Sredozemljem: Vojetov zbornik*, Ljubljana 2006, pp. 451–461.

matic, but at the same time fierce („à lo mele in bocha e rasoio a cintola”)<sup>17</sup>. This description matches that of the Venetian diplomat Benedetto Ramberti who stayed in Ragusa in 1533 during a trip from Venice to Constantinople. Ramberti depicted the merchants of Ragusa as rich and mean, devoted only to profit, but worthy of praise because they had made a fortune and developed large commercial opportunities despite the wild and rugged land that surrounded them („Gli raghusei universalmente sono ricchi e avari. Come il più delli mercanti [...] attendono solamente a far denari contanti. Sono superbissimi di modo, che non credono che altro sapere o nobiltà sta al mondo che la loro; [...] ma meritano invero grandissima laude che, essendo posti in uno sito aspero et stretto sopramodo, si habbiano aperta la via di ogni comoditate con la sola virtù et industria loro, si può dire al dispetto di natura”)<sup>18</sup>. Benedetto Cotrugli also defined Ragusa merchants as very capable, also because they were trading goods with a high velocity of circulation such as silver, lead, copper, wax, skins and crimson („molto acti [...] sì perché loro mercantie che usano sono leste, come argento, oro, pionbo, rami, cere, chermisi, chuori et simili, et sì etiamdio per la dextrezza dello ingegno che hanno”)<sup>19</sup>. The skill and cunning that drove the action of the merchants of Ragusa and the limits that they were able to impose on foreign traders are once again very clear, although inexasperated tones, in the words of Prato merchant Michele di Giovannino in 1421, when he described the conduct of Dubrovnik merchants as extremely dishonest („non potrò sostenere a tanti manchamenti e veghomi disfatto in tutto. [...] Essi fanno beffe di paghare se noe chon bugie e tenghonsi gentili huomeni e buoni e grandi”)<sup>20</sup>; „Sono tanti

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<sup>17</sup> ASPo, *Ospedale*, 7028, 552, Ragusa-Fortore, Piero Pantella a Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi, 26 aprile 1432.

<sup>18</sup> B. Ramberti. *Delle cose de' Turchi. Libri tre. Delle quali si describe nel primo il viaggio da Venetia a Costantinopoli, con gli nomi de' luoghi antichi et moderni. Nel secondo la Porta, cioè la corte de soltan Soleymano signor de' Turchi. Nel terzo et ultimo il modo del reggere il stato et imperio suo*, Venezia 1541, pp. 4–5.

<sup>19</sup> U. Tucci (ed.), *Benedetto Cotrugli raguseo. Il libro dell'arte di mercatura*, Venezia 1990, p. 160. We have dedicated specific studies to these goods, as well as some in depth comments in the cited volume, P. PINELLI, *Tra argento grano e panni*, cit.). In particular see Eadem, *L'argento di Ragusa, Storia Economica*, 3, 2005, pp. 549–573; Eadem, *The Florentine Company of Francesco Neroni and Trade with Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in the First Half of the 15th Century*, in S. Rudić (ed.), *Spomenica Akademika Sime Ćirković/Homage to Akademician Sima Ćirković*, Beograd 2011, pp. 159–175; Eadem, „E s'egli regha arienti o cera ...”: *prime indagini sul commercio della cera a Ragusa (Dubrovnik) fra XV e XVI secolo*, in the soon to be published in „Mélanges de l'École française de Rome”.

<sup>20</sup> ASPO, *Ospedale*, 7028, 483, Prato-Ragusa, Michele di Giovannino e compagni a Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi, 17 giugno 1421.

*chativi che m'àno diserto cho gl'inghanni e tradimenti che m'ànno fatto; e se v'àe de' buoni, sono pochi*"<sup>21</sup>.

Foreign merchants found significant obstacles in trading with the inland regions of the Balkans. Insecurity is evident, for example, in the recommendation made to Antonio dei Medici, heading East by land, not to venture into those areas without having found someone from Ragusa to act as a guide (*„una persona pratica [...] secondo il consiglio et parere del quale possi dirizare il proprio viaggio*"<sup>22</sup>). In his tax cadastral, Prato woollen cloth merchant Michele di Giovannino expressed, once again a little overly dramatically, the fears and anxieties related to trade in those countries. He drew up a long list of money believed to have been lost because the debtors had gone to the wild and the impenetrable lands of Serbia and Bosnia, and lost their way<sup>23</sup>. Aware of that, Ragusa merchants themselves often pretended to be employed in those areas in order to settle their debts (*„io son impaçado in Sclavonia e non poso eser a lo chomandamento de la vostra Signoria*"<sup>24</sup>).

All the insecurity, fear and the inability of the western merchants inventuring into the Balkan regions is also reflected in some letters and a book of memoirs by Bonsignore Bonsignori, which are kept at the Florence National Library.

Bonsignore left Florence for the East on 3 August 1497, along with Bernardo Michelozzi, a humanist and son of the sculptor and architect Michelozzo, and the merchant Giovanni Maringhi<sup>25</sup>.

Because of the spread of a plague, Bonsignore and his traveling companions were forced to reach Pesaro through Rimini. They stayed in Pesaro a month, waiting for a ride to Ragusa. It was not until 5 September that he was given the opportunity to board a caravel bound for Dubrovnik. Due to bad weather, they were forced to stay at sea for eight days. Once landed, they decided to stay in Ragusa for more than a week, in order to stock up on

<sup>21</sup> ASPO, *Ospedale*, 7028, 487, Prato-Ragusa, Michele di Giovannino e compagni a Giuliano di Marco Marcovaldi, 20 agosto 1421.

<sup>22</sup> F. Naitana, *I beni dei Pazzi all'indomani della congiura. Un „passaporto” per la storia delle relazioni fra Firenze e Dubrovnik nel tardo Medioevo*, «Quaderni medievali», 47, 1999, pp. 41–75, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF1), *Catasto*, 134, c. 769 r.

<sup>24</sup> Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku (hereafter DAD) II, *Reformationes* 9, Marino Luccari al conte e giudici di Ragusa, 8 febbraio 1330.

<sup>25</sup> Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze (hereafter BNC1), *Mss. Magliabechiani*, XIII, 93; *Mss. Ginori-Conti*, 29, 99, cc. 2-5. The documentation is mentioned in the studies of art history by E. BORSOOK, *The Travels of Bernardo Michelozzi and Bonsignore Bonsignori in the Levant (1497–98)*, „Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes” 36, 1973, pp. 145–197, with reference above all to Bernardo Michelozzi.



all that was needed for the trip, including 114 working animals. Other merchants, mainly from Tuscany, soon joined the company. Altogether they transported 120 „some” of woollen cloth to Constantinople<sup>26</sup>.

Interestingly Bonsignori, in describing Dubrovnik, laid particular stress on the fact that the inhabitants spoke the „stiacona” language, the same used in the inland regions of the Balkans, implying that language was a crucial element to deal with this kind of travel, and that it was therefore necessary to collaborate with the inhabitants of Ragusa („*La lingua loro naturale è stiacona [...]. Son tutti gran merchanti et ricchi et passa la lingua stiacona per tutta la Grecia et la Turchia largamente*)<sup>27</sup>.

Departing from Ragusa on 20 September, Bonsignori began to write a travel diary. He and his companions stayed in the open countryside as far as Sofia, which means for the most of the route. In those areas there were no refreshment places or taverns. At most they found shelter in caravanserais, which were very primitive poor and dirty hotels. On the way he saw nothing but mountains and silver mines, no towns, and only gypsies and peasants. The landscape and population only changed once they reached Thrace („*sempre allogamo alla campagna et maxime che, per insino in Andrinopoli, non si trovano mai hosterie nè alloggiamenti, altro che casali tutti di capanne. Per otto o dieci giornate sempre andamo per montagne et non vi si trova chosa notabile salvo che vi si trovano fodine d'argento le quali fa exercitare el turcho et talvolta le vende o alloca. Et questa parte hoggi la chiamano Murlachia, dove sono homini che tutti paiono zinghani et villani. Da poi dicono che si entra nella Bossina, che a me par tutto sia una, cioè che la Murlachia sia parte delle Bossina. [...]. All'ultimo si trova una terra che si domanda Nissa, assai bona, et dicono lì s'entra in Servia, a me par se ne escha. Di lì dopo certe giornate si trova un'altra terra detta Sophia, dove si comincia a tohare la Tracia et trovansi belli paesi et da man dextra è il monte Olimpo di Tessalia*”)<sup>28</sup>.

The group reached Constantinople on 16 November, after spending nearly a month in Adrianople. As explained in the letters of Bonsignori, the route that the Florentines faced was the first of the two we have mentioned, the most frequented by western merchants. This route, as we have seen, offered many stopping places where Ragusa had its own trading colonies. Nevertheless, the words of Bonsignori reveal the fear of facing this type of journey, because of the roughness of the landscape, with its tones and patt-

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<sup>26</sup> BNCFl, *Mss. Magliabechiani* XIII, 93, c. 9v.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>28</sup> BNCFl, *Mss. Magliabechiani* XIII, 93, c. 10v.

erns that were very different from those of the peaceful and rolling hills and plains of Tuscany. In the eyes of Bonsignori, the inhabitants of those places appeared barbaric, savage and uncouth as well as possessing unknown tastes, customs and habits.

Bonsignori had been forced to give up everything he was used to, and that distinguished the western way of life: he could only drink water because he could not find any wine; he could not eat normal bread, only coarse and unleavened flatbread; he was not able to attend Mass („ò *beuto aqua per non havere trovato onde havere vino; et messer Bernardo dua sere se ne andò a llecto senza cena per non bere aqua [...]. E manchatoci el pane che togliamo a Raugia, habiamo mangiato stiacciate non lievite cotte sotto la brace, che così usano questi huomini, se si possono chiamare huomini, che a me pare sia conveniente chiamargli bruti, senza religione alchuna, né sanno se si sono di Dio o del diavolo [...]. Messa non ci s'ode perché non ci si dice; a chiese non si va perché non s'odono le chanpane che ci chiamano*”)<sup>29</sup>.

In our opinion, Bonsignori's words should not be interpreted as being derogatory. They are rather indicative of a deep fear and strong disorientation that westerners felt when they ventured into the inland regions of the Balkans, an almost totally unknown environment, which was, and still is, wild, untamed, with the typical features of a poorly urbanized area of which the habits and language were unknown.

The same kind of feelings are evident in the accounts book of another Florentine merchant, Daniele Strozzi, who travelled to Constantinople through Ragusa and the Balkans in 1523, taking woollen cloth for eastern markets<sup>30</sup>. Despite being extremely concise and dry, the accounts book with the records of expenses incurred during the different stages of the trip, shows the length and effort of the journey, which lasted, stops included, more than four months. Daniele Strozzi left Florence in early December of 1523 for Ancona, where he stayed until the 27th of the month; on 29 December he was in Ragusa, where he remained until February 22. He also took the busiest route. In fact, he was in Trebinje on 25 February and in Tjentište on 4 March; on 5 March he crossed the river Drina heading towards Foča. On 17 March he dismissed the caravan and, between 1 and 4 April, he arrived in Adrianople. He finally arrived in Constantinople on 14 April 1524.

The records also show how perilous and insidious Strozzi's journey was, since the merchant demanded the traders who had entrusted him the

<sup>29</sup> BNCFl, *MSS. Ginori-Conti*, 29, 99, c. 5.

<sup>30</sup> ASFl, *IV Serie Strozziiane*, 82, cc. 1–7.

cargo – to be precise, 50 bales for a total of 200 pieces – pay a refund of 8,083 „*aspri*” on a total value of the goods estimated at 32,960 „*aspri*”. Transport costs through the Balkan peninsula were thus equal to 24.52% of the value of the goods themselves, very high compared to the most popular routes frequented by western merchants<sup>31</sup>. To give just one example, in his studies on documentation regarding Francesco Datini, Federico Melis shows that at the end of the 14th century, the cost for the transportation of woollen cloth from Prato to Mallorca, was just over 3% of the final revenue<sup>32</sup>. Luciana Frangioni, again with reference to the business of Datini, estimated an average incidence of transport costs from Milan to Avignon at around 10%<sup>33</sup>.

All this shows, in our opinion, the reason for the lack of a network of large trade companies in the Balkans, especially Italian ones<sup>34</sup>, and the need for western operators to lean on the merchants of Ragusa<sup>35</sup>. In our studies on the economic and commercial relations between Ragusa and Florence, the sources that we used have not revealed, at least with respect to the first half of the 15th century, cases of Italian companies formed with the intention of trading directly with the inland regions of the Balkan Peninsula. We were only able to find that in 1429 Benedetto Schieri, a merchant from Prato, took shares in a company from Dubrovnik for importing Bosnian silver, investing 1,000 ducats<sup>36</sup>.

Venice itself did not consider it essential, as part of its commercial design, to have a constant and official presence in those regions and did not invest resources and expertise for stable diplomatic consulates, but used to

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<sup>31</sup> ASFI, *IV Serie Stroziane* 82, c. 4r.

<sup>32</sup> F. Melis, *La formazione dei costi nell'industria laniera alla fine del Trecento*, in F. MELIS, *Industria e commercio nella Toscana medievale*, Firenze 1989, pp. 212–307, p. 262.

<sup>33</sup> L. Frangioni, *Milano e le sue strade: costi di trasporto e vie di commercio dei prodotti milanesi alla fine del Trecento*, Bologna 1983, pp. 182–184.

<sup>34</sup> See also D. Kovačević Kojić, *La Serbie dans l'économie de Venise au XV<sup>me</sup> siècle*, in G. Ortalli, O. Jens Schmitt (ed.), *Balceni occidentali, Adriatico e Venezia fra XIII e XVIII secolo/Der Westliche Balkan, der Adriaum und Venedig (13.-18. Jahrhundert)*, Venezia–Wien, 2009, pp. 39–52, p. 42; in addition A. Ducellier, *La place des Toscans et des Italiens du Nord dans le commerce balkanique au XV<sup>me</sup> siècle: l'apport des sources ragusaines, Byzantinische Forschungen*, 11, 1987, pp. 299–314, p. 303.

<sup>35</sup> See also R. Čuk, *Delatnost dubrovačkog trgovca Luke Milanovića dvadesetih godina XV veka*, *Istorijski časopis* 38, (1991), pp. 19–30; A. Ducellier, *La penisola balcanica vista dall'osservatorio veneziano nei sec. XIV e XV*, in S. Gensini (ed.), *Europa e Mediterraneo tra Medioevo e prima Età Moderna: l'osservatorio italiano*, Pisa 1992, pp. 297–314.

<sup>36</sup> DAD, XXXVI, *Debita Notariae*, 14, c. 353v. The company was made up of Luca Radossaglich, Nicola di Marino Nale e Nicola Radulinovich.

send its delegates only when necessary. In 1626, when the Senate asked the *Cinque Savi* if there were Venetian trade posts in the Balkans like those from Ragusa, they responded negatively<sup>37</sup>.

The search for a strategy aimed at enhancing trade with the inland regions became a major concern for Ragusa. Many of its merchants chose to limit their reach to controlling land trade in the inland regions of the Balkans and to Constantinople: therefore, they were not widespread in the European markets following the Florentine or Catalan model. By doing so, they forced foreign operators interested in earning opportunities related to goods that passed from Dubrovnik to rely on them, even informally, limiting their action in the area by binding them to their own interests. The contractual instrument which foreigners had to resort to more frequently in order to do business with Ragusa was the *colleganza* or *commenda* which, the fruit of a legal tradition linked to maritime trade, was common in trading cities such as Dubrovnik and Venice, but alien to the Italian inland regions.

From an organizational point of view, most of the foreign companies did not constitute subsidiaries in Ragusa. It would have been too risky to invest permanently in commercial activities which were beyond their control and whose flows were determined by the merchants of that city. The solution was to use *fattori*, a sort of agent who, without the support of a corporate structure and without exclusivity, looked after and administered - continuously and with full power - commercial relationships on behalf and in the name of a company. These agents had a wage determined on an annual basis and the reimbursement of expenses incurred. The *fattori* that operated in Ragusa were never shareholders of the companies they were representing, nor was their role similar to that of the commissionaire, the operator who, with reference to a specific deal, acted on behalf of the client but using his own name, on payment of a commission determined by the size of the transaction. These agents were usually people sent from the motherland or, as in the case of the afore mentioned Giuliano Marcovaldi, were people who had emigrated a long time before and had built up extensive experience and expertise in the affairs of Ragusa. In some cases local operators were chosen whose skills and reliability were acknowledged through the testimonies of other compatriots.

The position of foreigners was very different when, in the first half of the 15th century, attracted by the favourable economic regime of the Repub-

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<sup>37</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* II serie, *Ragusi*, busta 141, 2 dicembre 1626.

lic of Ragusa, they were involved in the creation of the textile district<sup>38</sup>. The wool merchants, mainly Italians, who migrated to Dubrovnik, found themselves operating in an environment that only had experience of the domestic production of low quality woollen cloth, and in which the skills and capabilities necessary to start production aimed at a broader market than the local one, had not yet been developed.

Therefore, unlike the commercial sector, in the productive sector foreigners enjoyed a position of superiority and did not suffer major limitations or constraints. The first wool companies that set up in the area of Ragusa were handled exclusively by foreigners, who sometimes even invested permanently in the activity, keenly aware of the control they exerted on the industry. When local operators entered the market, they were limited to providing warehouses and capital, while companies were managed and guided by foreigners.

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## ФИРЕНТИНСКИ ТРГОВЦИ НА ПУТУ ПРЕМА ИСТОКУ ПРЕКО ДУБРОВНИКА И БАЛКАНА КРАЈЕМ 15. ВИЈЕКА

### Резиме

Откриће неких необјављених писама и мемоара фирентинских трговаца довело нас је до различитих теорија о улози коју је град Дубровник (Рагуза) имао у трговинским односима између Истока и Запада. Ово је нарочито случај кад су у питању економски односи са унутрашњим дијеловима Балкана. Тим путевима су владали дубровачки трговци. У очима европских трговаца Србија и Босна изгледале су као још неистражена мјеста, дивља, ријетко насељена и слабо урбанизована, опасна у сваком погледу. Насупрот томе, дубровачки трговци добро су познавали тај свијет и дјелимично су имали исте обичаје и начин живота као становништво у унутрашњости Балкана. Осим тога, они су имали велику економску моћ у тим подручјима, нарочито зато што су контролисали производњу и трговину сребра, а конкуренција локалних трговаца практично није ни постојала. За разлику од приобалних подручја, унутрашњост Балкана била је неразвијенија и мање урбанизована. Тек су се у 16. вијеку трговци из ових подручја, нарочито Босанци и они из Олова и Горажда, еманциповали и почели да тргују и изван Балканског полуострва, нарочито са Венецијом.

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<sup>38</sup> P. Pinelli, *Tra argento grano e panni*, cit., pp. 37–51.

Све ово, по нашем мишљењу, представља разлог недостатка мреже великих трговачких компанија на Балкану, нарочито италијанских, и потребу западних пословних људи да се ослањају на дубровачке трговце. У нашем проучавању економских и комерцијалних односа између Дубровника и Фиренце, извори које смо користили нису открили, бар кад је у питању прва половина 15. вијека, случајеве да су италијанске компаније биле формиране са намјером да директно тргују са унутрашњим дијеловима Балканског полуострва.

Тражење стратегије чији је циљ проширење трговине са унутрашњим дијеловима, постало је главни интерес Дубровника. Многи његови трговци одлучили су да ограниче своје снаге на контролисање копнене трговине у унутрашњим дијеловима Балкана и на Константинопољ: они стога нису били широко раширени на европским тржиштима по узору на фирентински или каталонски модел. Тиме су присилили стране оператере, који су били заинтересовани за добијање прилика у погледу робе која је долазила из Дубровника, да се ослањају на њих, чак неформално, ограничавајући њихово дејство у региону, тако што су их везивали за своје властите интересе. Положај странаца увелико се разликовао када су, у првој половини 15. вијека, привучени повољним економским режимом Дубровачке Републике, били укључени у стварање текстилне области. Трговци вуном, углавном Италијани, који су одселили у Дубровник, нашли су се у окружењу које је имало искуство само у домаћој производњи нискоквалитетне вунене одјеће, и у којем се вјештине и умијећа потребна за почетак производње за једно шире тржиште, а не за локално, нису још биле развиле. У производним секторима странци су имали надмоћнији положај, те нису имали нека већа ограничења ни сметње.