

# *Islam in Dalmatia*

JOSIP VRANDEČIĆ

After they had overrun Bosnia (1463) in the mid-15th century the Ottomans began to threaten Venetian sovereignty in neighbouring Dalmatia, moving their border from the Balkan interior to the narrow and shallow Adriatic coastal belt of the Dalmatian districts.<sup>1</sup> The former Croatian hinterland, a thin strip of land sandwiched between Ottoman Bosnia and Venetian Dalmatia experienced a complete breakdown by 1537 and was inserted into the Osmanic administrative-territorial organisation. The Ottoman sweep of the Croatian strip had been so thorough that Turkish land registers (*defters*) recorded no single inhabitant left in the town of Sinj in 1534. In countless raids, the Ottoman horsemen captured cattle and prisoners and forced civilians and Venetian troops to withdraw into Adriatic towns. The Venetian fleet commander Vitturi in 1525 was shocked by the appearance of a “desert” in Zadar’s hinterland. The area had been overcome by Turks and the Vlach population, a large number of which had settled in Dalmatia.

At the time of the conquest there was a large-scale out-migration of Catholics who fled to the still unconquered region of Dalmatia. Whereas the Dalmatian communes and Venice had restrained migration from Bosnia and Croatia into the Dalmatian cities in the Middle Ages, in the 16th century the Republic helped to resettle the population from Croatian counties in urban areas or in Venetian-held parts of Istria. The Turks were particularly eager for the return of order in the strategic areas close to the Venetian frontier. They found their most reliable settler material in the Orthodox Balkan Vlachs, the descendants of hinterland Romanised and Latin-speaking population of this area who survived the sixth – and seventh – century Slavic onslaught by retreating to the high mountain passes. Orthodox Vlachs had started

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the theme see Josip Vrandečić, “Had an Ottoman Combatant any Chance to Win the Love of the Daughter of the Rector of the Dalmatian Town Zadar (Islam in Ottoman Dalmatia in the 16th and 17th century and its coexistence with the Christian world of neighboring Venetian Dalmatia)”, *Radovi Filozofskog fakulteta u Zadru* 34 (21), 1994/1995, 163–184; and “The ‘Military Revolution’ in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Dalmatia”, *Melikov zbornik*, Ljubljana, 2002, pp. 289–310.

fleeing into Bosnia and Dalmatia in the decades of Ottoman pressure on Serbia. The Vlachs were particularly suitable for the Ottoman government's purposes, not only because they were mobile (their typical occupations were shepherding, horse-breeding and organising transport for traders), but also because they had a strong military tradition. They were entitled to carry arms and expected to fulfil a military role; in place of a salary, they were permitted to plunder enemy territory.

In 1551 the Habsburg general Ivan Lenković informed king Ferdinand that the Ottomans had drawn several thousand Vlachs from the inner Empire and settled them in Dalmatia – around the Kosovo valley near Knin. From the very beginning of their settlement in Dalmatia the Ottomans tried to cripple the Vlach privileged *filuri* status according to which each Vlach household was obliged to pay one Ottoman golden ducat yearly and participate in Ottoman military service. The Ottomans tried to bind the Vlachs to the land and make them pay taxes including tithes. According to a *defter* from 1528, the population of Vlachs from *nahiyas* Petrovo polje i gora and Zminje polje were forced to pay personal taxes as well as tithes. However, these efforts spurred Vlach dissatisfaction, causing them to leave Ottoman territory and settle in Habsburg Croatia and Venetian Dalmatia. According to *defters* from 1550 the Vlach population in Dalmatia was granted *filuri* status by the Ottomans again. In spite of Ottoman wishes to attach this population to agriculture, the Vlach population rejected the pressure because *filuri* status allowed them less taxes and more mobility.

In the circumstances of an overwhelming majority of Christians on the neighbouring Bosnian border toward Venice, the Ottomans tried to stir up a process of Islamisation, especially on the fringe of the Empire. Islamisation came mainly from Ottoman soldiers settled in the Dalmatian garrisons, refugees from neighbouring Venetian Dalmatia, Christian slaves granted liberty after conversion to Islam and probably from some of the pre-Ottoman population. The Ottomans apparently did not promote Islam by forcible means. However, economic and political advantages to be gained by joining the state religion were sufficiently compelling. Slowly but steadily the overwhelming part of the Bosnian population accepted Islam, especially the population in the fertile region along the river. This part of the population remained static, pursuing agriculture. Although the Ottomans tried to islamise the part of Dalmatia under their control, encouraging the rebuilding of vacated towns, Ottoman sovereignty held over a tiny core of the population.

The first Muslim elements in Dalmatia were soldiers in the Dalmatian garrisons, landlords or administrators. On 1 June 1560 the bey of Bosnian *sancak* sent a letter to the Sublime Porte noting that the

famous officer Ivan from Venetian Šibenik had escaped to the Ottoman side and deliberately accepted Islam. The Sublime Porte granted Ivan a large land estate in Ottoman territory in Dalmatia. According to Venetian accounts there were many Catholics who fled to the Ottoman side. On 8 April 1574 the Venetian rector from Split informed the Venetian government that he had been investigating the case of a Dalmatian girl from Vranjic who fell in love with an Ottoman soldier from Klis. According to his account sent to the Venetian government, there were many precedents, and some Catholic girls had fled to the Ottoman side.

Large numbers of slaves were seized by the Turks in their campaigns against the Habsburg Croats and Venetian Dalmatians. Murat-bej Tardić, the first *sancak-bej* of Klis was a liberated slave of Husrev-bej, the most prominent conqueror of Dalmatia. The Ottomans attracted the settlement of Muslims by granting the population freedom of taxes and by building mosques. This is why the vacated towns of early and mid-16th century such as Obrovac, Skradin, Vrana and Sinj reached the *kasaba* status of a prosperous community. In 1604 entirely Muslim Sinj had 100 households, Vrlika 85, Drniš 200, Knin 300, Skradin 200 and so forth. This development was stirred up by state policy. The Sultan ordered the *sancak-bej* of Klis Ferhadbeg Sokolović to build a mosque, a school and shops. Ferhadbeg on his own granted Zemunik, Hrvace and Sinj Muslim communities many institutions provided by the taxes from his large estates.

Islamisation proceeded at very slow pace, however. Catholics fled to Venetian Dalmatia and the Orthodox population, protected by their large autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, were not prone to convert. According to the estimation of the Venetian proveditor-general Jacopo Foscarini there were 6,860 households in the Klis *sancak* in Dalmatia – not including the Bosnian part of this unit – to 560 Muslim households. Islamisation among the Vlach population had failed. In Petrovo polje i gora nahiya near Drniš in 1528 there were only 5 Islamised Vlach families out of 239 and in 1550 only 20 out of 295 in total.

The new proximity forced both Venetian and Ottoman Dalmatia to build and adapt their mutual relationships. Commercial integration of the 15th-century Venetian Dalmatia was replaced by a war directed economy, thus leading Dalmatia to the limits of economic and demographic endurance. Hunger, plague and climatic disturbances upset the demographic balance of the population, which was reflected in high migrations, and disturbance in the age and sex balance, which was somehow maintained due to the high birth rate. The urban area closure and the militarisation of the province were paid for by economic reorganisation, founded on high rates of profit from salt monopoly and

balanced administrative taxes within which it was not possible to find means for economical development.

Despite five wars in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries – the War of 1499–1502, the Holy League War of 1537–1540, the Cyprus War of 1570–1573, the Candia War of 1645–1669 and the Wiener War of 1683–1699 – there was broad coexistence and cooperation between the “two Dalmatias” which included both trade and personal relationships. Their relationships varied from cruel hostilities during the wars to the outstanding example of mutual cooperation in the Asia-European trade through the Dalmatian town of Split. The spectrum of coexistence included wars, raids and skirmishes, but also everyday communication through trade, visits, personal friendships and love.

Economically dependent on trade with the Ottomans, Venice made efforts to appease the Ottomans. The threat of punishment in galley service or exile for anyone who jeopardized the peace on the border shows the Venetians’ desire to avoid misunderstandings. In addition to the utmost courtesy, the Venetian authorities tried to maintain their relations with Ottomans with gifts. On 18 February 1563 the *sancak-bej* of Klis came to negotiate in Salona and the authorities of Venetian Split welcomed him with vine, lemons, oranges, bread, wax-candle, linen, cakes and sugar. Immediately after the Cyprus war, on 26 May 1573 the *sancak-bey* of Klis and his 30 representatives visited Split. The number of Ottoman visitors to the Dalmatian towns was so large that the rector of Zadar Pisani was warned by the Venetian government on 10 November 1565 to limit gifts to Turks to 100 ducats during the rector’s mandate.

The question of importing grain from the Balkan hinterland was of life-and-death importance for the Dalmatian towns. Venetians were attracted by prices which did not significantly differ in this period from Western prices, making for a significant discrepancy between Venetian and Ottoman state regulated prices. Trade was stimulated by devaluation of the Ottoman currency, because foreign tradesmen paid with stable currency. One of the main characteristics of the price of Ottoman grain is a stable low price until about 1560, as opposed to prices in Western Europe and Venetian Dalmatia, which were influenced by the price revolution. According to defters the prices in the Ottoman hinterland were: in 1528 – 15 akchas/kejl (1 kejl = 100 pounds), in 1574 and 1604, 25 akchas/kejl. Venetian grain was much more expensive. Around 1565 the price of a kejl in Venetian Dalmatia was 60 akchas. This discrepancy in prices started the struggle for the grain surplus between Ottoman landholders and the mostly Christian peasantry because both of these social and political groups were eager to sell grain on the markets of the Dalmatian towns. Imports commercialised

the Ottoman economy of the hinterland, and attracted the Ottoman non-Muslim subjects toward Venetian Dalmatia. Commercialisation is especially dangerous for the existing political balance, because the numerous non-Muslim population was in opposition to the thin Moslem nucleus which had not succeeded significantly to infiltrate the area demographically.

The agricultural crisis in the Mediterranean, the revolution of prices and above all the cost of endless wars commercialised the Osmanli society. The timar "second feudalism" became socially and economically inappropriate. The need for adaptation imposed a redefinition of the system, because the regular tithes collected from the peasantry became worthless by inflation, which opened the struggle for a direct right of cultivating the land, which started the process of land renting and the struggle for a land market. This increased the pressure on the Christian population in inner Dalmatia. This is why the most effective Venetian weapon in the long-term was the Ottoman economic crisis which burdened the Turkish military efforts.

The Venetians responded with salt. In the relation from 1596 the proveditor-general Cristofor Valiero claimed that Venice had a great profit from salt. Salt attracted Ottoman subjects to come to Dalmatian towns bringing grain, meat, cheese and so forth. In spite of production by the Ottoman salt-pans which covered a third of Bosnian needs, the rest was covered by salt-pans from Ragusa or Venetian Dalmatian territories. There is evidence that Bosnia in 1540 suffered a great scarcity of salt due to war with the Venetians, which stopped the salt trade. The salt trade attracted Ottoman subjects to the markets of the Dalmatian towns. Sharing in the profits stirred the interest of the Ottoman authorities in maintaining good relations between the two states.

Trade links and contacts were convenient for stabilisation and pacification, the establishment of a trading system and networks of ferries and ports attracting mainly foreign trading capital. Venetian Dalmatia represented their door to the outside world. Strategic raw materials, salt and wheat were regulators of political relationships. In 1580, the Venetian office *Magistrato dei Cinque Savii all'Mercanzia* accepted the activity of a Jew from Split, Daniele Rodrigo who tried to make this Venetian town an international port of trade between the Ottoman Empire and Venice. One Venetian account from 1590 pointed out that the amount of trade running through Split attracted tradesmen from India, Persia, and Armenia, and represented the "golden ring" between the Orient and Venice. Moreover, in 1626, the amount of trade in Split reached 25 % of that done in port of Venice due to the fact that two thirds of Balkan trade ran through this port. Venetian salt was the bait, a source of high profits even for the Sultan.

A period of calm in Dalmatia was the result of the wider geopolitical situation, in which Venetian neutrality during 16th century was a precondition for treating with the Turks. At the same time, engaged in the Danube region and Persia, the Turks were not interested in Venetian threats in the Dalmatian region. At the end of the 16th century the stabilization of political relations with the Ottoman Balkans allowed the revival of the Venetian Balkan trade system to a greater extent than in the pre-Ottoman period.

As the 17th century unfolded, Venice strengthened its position in the province. The Balkan-Italian trade route ran through Split, and from 1601 onwards the Venetian governor of Dalmatia, the general-provider, became a symbol of the fiscal and judicial integration of the province. The rector Leonardo Bollani unlike his sixteenth-century counterparts was able to brief the Venetian government on 3 April 1600 on the political conformism of the Dalmatians: “Your town of Split is in very good condition, enjoying under the sovereignty of Venice the two most important things, abundance in living standards and peace on the border.”

The province-building process did not, however, stay within the city walls. Besides the impact of capitalist economy on Ottoman society, the military revolution decisively tipped the balance in favour of Venice. The reconstruction of old fortifications took place throughout all of the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth centuries. New-style fortresses with uneven lines, like the teeth of saw, and angled bastions, built lower and thicker behind wide, deep ditches, created an unpleasant feeling of insularity but also provided security. Unlike the bastions around the Zadar city centre, which were finally reshaped *alla moderna* during the early 1590s, the designs of the other Dalmatian cities show that the rapid evolution of fortifications occurred during the Candian War. In Split the fortifications *alla moderna* built during Candian war included the bastions around the urban core and both fortresses, Gripe and Botticelle near the city. The vulnerability of the old-fashioned walls of Šibenik, open to an Ottoman assault from the hinterland, compelled citizens to build the fortresses of St. John and of Baron in 1646.

In contrast to its defensive posture in the 16th century, Venice took the initiative on the battlefield and in finances during the protracted seventeenth-century wars – the Candian War of 1645–1669 and the Viennese (Morean) War of 1683–1699. The regular 16th-century wars in Dalmatia were limited to raids by Ottoman cavalry, to the passive posture of Venetian infantry behind walls, and to listening to news from distant eastern Mediterranean battlefields. Innovations in star-shaped fortifications, gunpowder weaponry and trained troops

had all occurred in Dalmatia, mostly during the 16th century. During the Candian war these elements were successfully coordinated for the first time to produce offensive capacity. The Venetian assault on the Ottoman fortress of Klis in 1648 scored the biggest victory of the Republic's arms in the province yet. Thanks to the massive amphibious landing of troops, bombards and horses, and the coordination of artillery bombardment with the charges of the handgun-armed mercenaries and militia, the Venetians stormed the Ottoman stronghold, which had dangerously hindered neighbouring Split. In contrast to the increasingly impregnable Venetian towns along the coast, each Ottoman stronghold succumbed at least once during the Candian War. The use of gunpowder artillery, defended in siege camp by pike and musket, enabled the Venetians to advance out of their own towns for the first time, and to seize Ottoman strongholds. The best Ottoman men, large bombers, and supplies were deployed in the Pannonian basin and were bogged down in a centuries-long, static and bloody confrontation with the Habsburgs. The Ottomans' overwhelming superiority in horsemen was no longer sufficient in the Candian War.

The crucial reason for maintaining the momentum of complex and numerous Venetian siege operations was the increasing defection of the Ottoman auxiliaries. Thousands of militia and Ottoman irregulars tipped the balance in favour of the Adriatic towns. The social, religious and political factors which by that time had become the basis of Venetian agitation, Venice would fully use them during the War of Vienna, when it would definitely unite the area politically. The massive appearance of powerful siege and field artillery, lethal shoulder gun volleys and trained troops on the eastern Adriatic shores encouraged steady defection by the Ottoman Christians to the Venetian side during the Candian War. Their short, massive assault on the Ottoman strongholds in the first months of the next Vienna War would finally enable the Venetian conquest of the entire province by 1688.

## POVZETEK

### **Islam v Dalmaciji**

Po zavzetju Bosne (1463) in ozkega pasu Hrvaške kraljevine (1537) so Osmani na Jadranu postali edini sosede dalmatinskih mest pod beneško upravo. Ker je hrvaško katoliško prebivalstvo iz zaledja prebegnilo v dalmatinska mesta, v Italijo ali v Panonijo pod habsburško upravo, so si Osmani prizadevali organizirati mejni prostor proti dalmatinskim mestom. Pri tem so

poskušali naseliti pravoslavne Vlahe, predslovansko balkansko prebivalstvo. Poleg tega so spodbujali islamizacijo. Čeprav se je islam razširil med delom prebivalstva v mestih Sinj, Klis, Knin, Obrovac in drugih, pa ga vlaški prebivalci večinoma niso sprejeli, zato so ti ostali za Osmane nevarni.

V 16. in 17. stoletju so dalmatinska mesta razvila močne trgovske vezi z osmanskimi mesti v zaledju. Ti gospodarski odnosi so slabili timarsko osmansko ureditev, ker si je osmansko prebivalstvo prizadevalo prodajati žito v dalmatinskih mestih po tržni ceni. Obdobje umirjanja so Benetke izkoristile za vlaganja v utrdbe, strelno orožje, artilerijo in plačance. Zaradi teh inovacij v okviru širše evropske vojaške revolucije in zaradi upora osmanskega obmejnega krščanskega prebivalstva so Benetke ob koncu 17. stoletja lahko začele ofenzivo in razširile meje Dalmacije vse do gorske verige Dinare, ki je še danes meja med Hrvaško ter Bosno in Hercegovino.