

# The Seas of Neglected History: A Muslim-Ottoman Merchant's Ordeal in Trieste

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## Context

Although Trieste functioned as a crucial commercial hub and important port during the eighteenth century, it has so far not garnered sufficient attention from Ottomanists for reasons that warrant further discussion.<sup>1</sup> Since Stoianovich's seminal work, the study of diasporas in Central and Southeastern Europe's early modern history has gained prominence, with much of the resultant literature emphasizing national entities or religious fellowships.<sup>2</sup> The available scholarship focusing on the topic has notably disregarded the Muslim perspective.<sup>3</sup>

This diasporic approach, while emphasizing community bonds, tends to disregard the interactions and interdependence among diverse communities, reflecting political or ideological objectives that accentuate the division of Central Europe's history into numerous distinct and impermeable ethno-religious or national narratives.<sup>4</sup> Braudel (1995) contends that understanding trade in the Mediterranean region is challenging without considering the role of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the limited use of Ottoman archival documents in European historiography poses a significant issue, particularly within the Mediterranean context. Even when exploring the archives of Trieste—a relatively small repository—it is still possible to uncover

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<sup>1</sup> At the outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the editorial board of *Keshif* and the reviewer of my article for providing invaluable insights into the transcription and translation of the document analyzed in this article.

<sup>2</sup> Traian Stoianovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant," *The Journal of Economic History* 20, no. 2 (1960), 234-313.

<sup>3</sup> A recently submitted PhD dissertation endeavored to incorporate the Muslim outlook within the scope. See Zeynep Arslan Çalık, "Crossing Borders and Bridging Differences: An Ottoman Mobility Narrative of Late Eighteenth-Early Nineteenth Century Habsburg-Ottoman Contacts" (PhD diss., Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Among many others, see for example, Nathan Michael Gelber, "The Sephardic community in Vienna," *Jewish Social Studies*, no. 10 (1948): 359-96; Karl Teply, "Die erste armenische Kolonie in Wien," *Wiener Geschichtsblätter*, no. 28 (1973): 105-18; Vasiliki Seirinidou, "Griechen in Wien im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert. Soziale Identitäten im Alltag," *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und Österreich. Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, no. 12 (1997): 7-28; Olga Katsiardi-Hering, "Greek Merchant Colonies in Central and South-Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century," in *Merchant Colonies in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Victor N. Zakharov, Gelina Harlaftis and Olga Katsiardi-Hering (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 127-40.

<sup>5</sup> To better comprehend the Ottoman presence in the Mediterranean region, see Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Ottoman documents, which hold valuable insights into the Muslim perspective within the given historical framework.

In the State Archives of Trieste (*Archivio di Stato di Trieste*), two fonds preserve documents related to Ottoman-Trieste relations. One of these is the fonds named “Cesarea regia Intendenza commerciale per il Litorale in Trieste,” which contains documents from the period between 1731 and 1776. The second fonds, named “Cesareo regio Governo per il Litorale in Trieste,” contains documents dating from the period between 1776 and 1813. While conducting research on the eight folders kept within these holdings at the Trieste archives, I observed the presence of a few documents written in Ottoman Turkish. One of these documents pertains to an attack on an Ottoman merchant from Ulcinj named Derviş Hoca Ömer in Trieste.<sup>6</sup> The document has been transcribed below, along with a tentative translation, for the consideration and assessment of interested researchers.

## Transcription

28A

*hüve*

*Rağbetlü şadâkatlü muhibb-i şadîkım ve âşinâ dostumuz koñ kapudan ve sâyir zâbiñân begleri huñurlarına hutimet ‘avâkıbühu bi’l-ğayrları kalbiyye-i [?] dostânelerine lâ`ik kelâm-i peyâm-ü meserret-i selâmet-encâm iblâğı ve ihdâ kılındığı siyâkına ma`rüz-ı dostâneleri oldur ki ħâliyâ bâ`is-i mektüb-ı meveddetimiz Ülgün tüccârlar[ın]dan Derviş Ĥ`âca ‘Ömer nâm kimesne bundan aqdem sene-i ma`ziyelerde [?] Tırâyâşta kal`a gümrüğü derünında pandur soldat <sup>7</sup> [?] gendüsini katletmekliğına üzerine hücum ve gendüsini aqz ve yanında mevcüd bulunan yüz Venedik altunlarını ma`a [?] bir sîmden [?] sâ`ati*

<sup>6</sup> AST, C.R.S. Intendenza Commerciale per il Litorale in Trieste (1748-1776), 1010/585, 27A-28A.

<sup>7</sup> I propose that this word is a corruption of “pandur soldat/soldatlar”. But it also could be a distortion of the Italian phrase “orza alla banda!,” meaning “Luff alee!,” which seems to be rendered in Turkish as “orsalabanda” (or “orçalabanda”) with the verb form “orsalabanda etmek” signifying “to put the helm down hard alee.” This term may have functioned as a moniker for the

*alub gâşb u gâret eyledikleri [!] mezbûr Dervîş H'âca ol zamânda tarafumuzda geldiği [!] birle devlet-i 'aliyyemüzde varub tesellî-yi hâl eylemek [!] için bu muhibbiñüzden 'arz taleb ve gitmaçlığına hareketde iken bu muhibbüñüz [...] bu bir kalîl şey için üzerine pandur soldat [?] şulh-u şalâha ve 'ahdnâme-i hümâyûna muğâyir hareketleri ve ol mişillü kabâhati devlet-i 'Osmâniyyede ol vaqt eger i'lâm eylemiş idüm biñ Venedik altunlarıyla ol gûne kabâhat kıpatmağa kifâyet olmaz diyü bir ma'nâ idüb hemân zamân-ı mezbûrede siz dostânelerimize i'lâm ve ifâde [!] olunmayınca âhar yerlerde de i'lâm olmağa dostluğa binâ'en cevâz gösterilmeyüb diyü 'arz olunan altunları ve gerek sâ'ir harc [!] ve maşâriflerini siz dostumuza gendüsine virüb icrâ-y-u [!] istirdâd olmağ ümîdiyle memhûrlu kâğıtlarımız ile bi'n-nefs mezbûrı irsâl olunmuş iken siz ise haqqını gereği gibi virüb edâ ol[ın]maçlığına dikkat olmayub ihmâline vaz' eylemeñüz ile mezbûrdan bi'z-zarûret kalkub dođrı Nemçe'ye varub keyfiyyet-i ahvâlini ve gendüsine vâki' olunan zulm u te'addîleri devletli çârsârîçenüñ ceng divânına 'arz-ı hâl ile tesellî-yi hâl eyledikda [!] Nemçe devletinde muķim olan baş vekil ve gerek çârsârîçe ahvâline vuķûf olunduđı birle 'arz olunan altunlar muķâbelesinde ve mâ-'adâ sâ'ati ve sâ'ir şarf-ı harc eylediđi [!] muķâsebe idüb mâ fi setr mine'l-kelâm ve-d-devâm [?] 'alâ meni'tteba 'a'l-hüdâ fi Evâhîri Zî'l-ka'de 1161 el-fakîr [?] mîr-i mîrân-i [...] İskender bin Yûsuf*

28A

Right Side:

*Mezbûr Dervîş H'âca'ya yediyüz yetmiş bir buçuk Nemçe akçelerine göre fi[l]orinleri siz dostumuz Tîrâyâşta'ñüzde virmaçlığına fermân idüb ve fermâna göre principesâ Bürķ Çâhâvuz [?] dađı bir buyruldı taħrîr ve bi'z-zât Dervîş H'âca'nuñ yediyle*

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assailant, potentially uttered before engaging in the attack. See Henry Kahane, Renée Kahane, Andreas Tietze, *The lingua franca in the Levant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 325-326.

*size ırsāl-ü [!] irād itmiş siz ise fermânına ve gerek prencesinüñ [?] buyuruldisında  
alvirüb kaydına göre  
yüz kırk fi[l]orinin tutub virmemişsiñüz diyü ta ‘accüb idüb devletli kraliçenüñ  
fermânına ve gerek principesâ-yi mesfûrenüñ buyuruldisına muhâlefet eylediklariñuzdan  
mâ- ‘adâ  
Ülgünli bir mu ‘annid kavm olduğına bir hoşça ma ‘lūmuñuzdur ifâde olunmaqlığına  
müzâyakası olmayub ihtimâldür ki eger bir def‘a zikr olınan yüz kırk  
fi[l]orin virmişsiñizse re ‘âyalarıñuzdan birisinde otuz kat  
olub gâşb olunmağa bir ma ‘nâdur ba ‘dehü kraliçeye ne gûne cevâb virmağ-  
lığına kâdir olasız zîrâ [?] kraliçe mezbûr Dervîş H‘âca‘ya virmağ-  
lığına emr eyledüğü [!] çünki muhâlefet idüb huşûs-ı mezbûr için  
her ne şâdir olunur ise suçsuz şâdir olunur hemân  
mülâhaza idüb bu bir kalîl şey için gerek başumuzu ve gerek  
başuñuzu ağrıtmâqlığına cevâz ve zikr olınan tuttuğunuz  
yüz kırk fi[l]orinin âhar vechle taleb ve ihrâc olunmağa lâ ‘ık  
göstermeyesiz bâkî siz a ‘lam zîrâ [?] virmek hâcet degildür*

27A

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*Bi-mennihi te ‘âlâ hâliyâ Tîrâyâşta[da] olan rağbetlü muhibb-i şadîkum koñ kapūdân ve  
sâyir zâbiğ begleri huzûrlarına bād*

## Translation

28A

He

To our esteemed and trustworthy friend and acquaintance, the count captain, along with the other respected commanders—may God make their lives end well—, as

follows the pleasures of the Sultanate have been brought forth with heartfelt sincerity.<sup>8</sup> The joyous and sound message delivered to our friend and the friendly submission offered to him [?] are the following:

In the past couple of years, a merchant from Ulcinj, named Derviş Hoca Ömer, was attacked within the customs area of the Trieste fortress by a pandur soldat[?]<sup>9</sup> with the intention to kill him and they captured him and seized a hundred Venetian gold coins together with [?] a silver [?] watch belonging to him [Derviş Hoca Ömer]. The said Derviş Hoca came to our side at that time, and sought comfort in our exalted state.

As he prepared to depart, Derviş Hoca, approached me, your sincere friend, after which I informed the Ottoman state of the pandur soldat's actions that contradicted the established peace and imperial treaties. However, at that time, a decision was made out of friendship not to widely publicize the matter before informing you, our friend, about it. It was believed that even a thousand Venetian gold coins were insufficient to conceal this offense. Furthermore, the issue was not openly discussed later on, also out of friendship.

The aforementioned gold coins, along with other expenses and costs, were sent to you, our friend, accompanied by our signed documents, for the purpose of implementing the reimbursement [to Derviş Hoca Ömer]. However, you did not fulfill your duty properly and neglected it. Due to your negligence, you went willy-nilly to Austria. When state officials observed the circumstances and the oppression faced by our friend, they reported the situation to the Austrian Aulic War Council. Subsequently, both the chancellor in Austria and the empress discerned the situation and calculated the reported gold coins and other expenses.

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<sup>8</sup> The aim of the translation here is not to offer a sentence-by-sentence rendition but rather to provide the most comprehensive translation possible, particularly when encountering illegible words. Translations are not strictly literal; when words were illegible or unclear, meanings were inferred from context, and when needed, they are marked with "[...]". Still, efforts were made to maintain fidelity to the original text and sentence structures as closely as possible.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 7. When reading "pandur soldat," both "pandur" and "soldat" would be translated as "soldier," with "pandur" historically referring to a light infantry unit of the Habsburg army.

In conclusion, peace (interpreted here as “long life” or “eternity”) be upon those who follow the right guidance.

Written in the last third of *Zil-ka‘de 1161* (November 11-21, 1748), by İskender bin Yūsuf, the beylerbeyi of [...].

## 28A

Right side

You, our friend, ordered that seven hundred and seventy-one and a half florins should be delivered to Derviş Hoca in your Trieste. According to [this] order, an order was written by the Princess of [...] burg [...] and made delivered to you by Derviş Hoca’s own hand. You, however, did not give back the firman nor the order of the princess and acted against the order of the princess. Moreover, there is no shortage [of money], so that you would have to [resort to] saying that the people of Ulcinj are a notoriously rebellious group.<sup>10</sup> Upon delivering the specified one hundred and forty florins, each of your subjects will probably receive thirty times [that amount].

In that case, you may find it challenging to address the empress’s subsequent reaction, as she had explicitly instructed them to be delivered to the aforementioned Derviş Hoca, and failing to do so goes against her orders. Whatever happens in this matter, it is not [anyone’s] fault. Be careful, do not make your and my head ache for such a small thing. Any effort or plea on your part to demand and collect the aforementioned

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<sup>10</sup> The portrayal of the people of Ulcinj as rebellious was influenced by multiple factors: the strategic importance of Ulcinj on the Adriatic coast for Habsburg maritime trade, insights from Habsburg intelligence or diplomatic channels indicating local resistance, and the fluctuating territorial dynamics in border regions like Ulcinj. Among the extensive literature available, for a cohesive and multi-layered analysis of the issue, see Maria Pia Pedani, “Beyond the Frontier: the Ottoman-Venetian Border in the Adriatic Context from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Zones of Fracture in Modern Europe: Baltic Countries, Balkans and Northern Italy | Zone di frattura in epoca moderna: il Baltico, i Balcani e l’Italia settentrionale*, ed. Almut Bues (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005); Bernd J. Fischer, Oliver Jens Schmitt, *A Concise History of Albania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 23-64; Abidin Temizer, Marijan Premović, “Montenegro under Ottoman Rule (1497-1697),” *Hiperboreea* 8, no.1 (2021): 1-15.

amount of one hundred and forty florins in any other way will not be acceptable, but you know best, as there is no need to give anything at all.<sup>11</sup>

27A

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By the grace of the almighty, [this letter shall be sent] to our esteemed and beloved loyal friend in Trieste, the captain, and other distinguished commanders.

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<sup>11</sup> This sentence warrants consideration, albeit with reservations. It may hint that the author is disinclined to address the matter or facilitate an informal reimbursement of Derviş Hoca's loss by his acquaintance, the count captain, particularly given the apparent failure of official channels.



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Facsimile



