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Nationalism and Patriotism in
Serbian Political Discourse:
Medieval, Modern,
Contemporary

Proceedings of the
Conference held on 30–31 May 2024
at the University of Belgrade,
Faculty of Philosophy

Edited by
Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić
Aleksandar Z. Savić

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CONNECTION TO THE ROOTS OR INTEGRATION: THE STATUS OF THE HERZEGOVINIAN MERCHANT MARKO MIRKOVIĆ IN 18TH-CENTURY VENETIAN REPUBLIC

Merchant Marko Mirković came from Herceg Novi to Ancona in September 1761 in order to finish some business and settle his debts. It is unknown where he stayed in Ancona, but by October of the same year he moved to the house of his colleague Jeronim Drašković. He did this because he was feeling unwell, and after just ten days of staying at his colleague's house, Marko passed away. It is likely that his condition worsened significantly on the tenth day, as he received the holy rites in the morning according to Orthodox customs, only to lose his battle with the illness later that afternoon. A priest from the Greek chapel of St. Anna in Ancona took care of him, and he was buried in the Greek church in the same city.

Chances are small that we would know these details about the life of this merchant had certain administrative matters not been initiated in Ancona regarding his death in the same year. First, *the consul of the Levantines* (It. *Console de Levantini*), upon learning of Marko's death, went to make an inventory of the merchant's estate. The body of the deceased and all his possessions were in the house of Jeronim, where an inventory was made, and the chest containing the belongings was sealed in the presence of a notary and other witnesses. The following day, when the consul of the Levantines returned to complete the procedure, he found *the consul of Venice* (It. *Console di Venezia*) Agostino Belarossa there. Declaring that "the deceased should be treated as a Venetian citizen", Belarossa did not approve the involvement of the consul of the Levantines in the administrative matters that, in his view, were under the jurisdiction of the Venetian office. Firm

in his stance, both consuls claimed the right to inventory the deceased's belongings, and they simultaneously began the procedure, which led to a dispute over who was actually authorized to carry out this task.

A formal protocol of a commercial-administrative nature raised a number of questions and uncertainties regarding the identity of the merchant Marko Mirković. Where was he born, and in which territory did he spend his life? How much wealth did he accumulate? With whom did he start a family? Small fragments of his life were gathered in order to form a whole and shed light on a case that in Venetian documents was characterized as a dilemma about which merchant community Mirković belonged to. The problem was that the views of the two consuls differed, and there was no material evidence. Namely, the merchant died in the Ancona without an heir present and without a written will. The lack of written evidence of this kind meant that Mirković had not personally explained his status, so we only learn about his identity through the perceptions of those who knew him.

“Born on Ottoman territory” – implicit connections to the origins

The consul of the Levantines claimed rights over the affairs concerning the estate of the merchant Marko Mirković, highlighting the deceased's religious identity, noting that Mirković was a “schismatic Orthodox” (*greco scismatico*). Undoubtedly, the merchant had respected the traditions of his ancestors during his life and remained faithful to the Orthodox faith, as he received the holy rites from the chaplain of the same church at the time of his death and was buried at the Greek church in Ancona. Since the jurisdiction of the consul of the Levantines applied to “all Orthodox Christians, regardless of where they came from”, his right to conclude the procedure over the deceased merchant's estate was argued. Holding firmly to this right, the consul's office justified such actions by the fact that the duty of this official “implicitly includes any other legal act whenever it concerns an Orthodox, or Levantine”.

It is also necessary to link to the second part of the consul's argument, in which the merchant's identity was defined from the perspective of his geographical origin. Namely, he believed that the deceased should be treated as a “subject of the Ottoman Sultan, because he was originally from Herzegovina”. The fact that Marko Mirković was born in Herzegovina, in the Ottoman Empire, was used as a legal basis to claim that he was a subject of that state.

The legal status of an individual in the Ottoman Empire was conditioned by the fact that they lived in that state and enjoyed certain rights and had specific obligations. Non-Muslims who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire was guaranteed the right to life, liberty, property, and freedom of religion within the borders of the Ottoman state, with the obligation to pay a poll tax and to obey the regulations imposed by Sharia law. For the consul's claim to be convincing, he had to provide evidence that the merchant had lived in the Ottoman state or at least that he was part of a smaller Orthodox community within the Empire. Aside from the fact that this was not demonstrated, it was also not established to what extent the deceased maintained ties with his hometown.

“A Venetian subject in accordance with general legal principles”

It was not disputed by the Venetian consul in Ancona Agostino Belarossa that the deceased merchant was a “Greek Orthodox” and “born in the Ottoman Empire”. However, he believed that the consul of the Levantines’ interference in the case was not justified. In one memorandum, it was emphasized that the consul of the Levantines was intended to represent merchants, specifically “Orthodox Christians, Jews, and Muslims”, and was authorized by the Office of the consul of the Levantines to oversee trade exchanges with the Levant and operate within that domain. However, a significant difference rested on the fact that the consul of the Levantines’ jurisdiction should not affect maintaining relations with individuals from merchant communities that had their own representative in Ancona (*console proprio nazionale in Ancona*).

Shifting the focus away from Marko Mirković’s origin, consul Belarossa emphasized that the deceased merchant, during his life, “became a Venetian subject in accordance with general legal principles”. On the other hand, the consul of the Levantines’ sought to refute any connection of the deceased merchant with the Venetian Republic, emphasizing that he “never presented himself nor identified as a Venetian citizen”, and considered that, he should not be treated as such even after death. Aside from a will, the only documents in which we might find the merchant’s personal stance on this matter are petitions addressed to a state office. Since no petition or other written representation from Marko Mirković was presented, it is not possible to discuss whether and in what way he expressed a sense of belonging to the Venetian society. On the other hand, becoming an equal member of a community required a special procedure and

the fulfillment of certain criteria. From a legal standpoint, personal statements played no role, as the main conditions for that status were dictated by the government, while in some cases, the community itself could also prescribe additional requirements.

Immigrants in Venice could obtain citizenship status. That group of people was divided into two categories: legal citizenship, which was granted to all citizens by birth, and citizenship granted as a type of diploma. The authorities approved the latter upon request, which essentially represented an individual's petition to formalize their integration into Venetian society. Granting a new status brought numerous privileges, and this rank was also classified (*de intus*, *de intus et extra*). A similar model, with minor adjustments likely depending on the local community, their statutes, and city governance, also applied to the status of Venetian subjects, although it was probably more often defined at the *de intus* category level.

From Ottoman Herzegovina to Venetian Herceg Novi

Although born in the Ottoman territory, the merchant Marko Mirković became a Venetian subject because he lived for twenty-nine years in the territory of the Venetian Republic. He was a resident of its holdings on the Adriatic coast, in Herceg Novi, a town in the Boka Kotorska bay, where he founded a family and adhered to the local regulations and laws. How did the Venetian consul prove this? Focusing on the last few decades of the merchant's life, which he spent under Venetian rule, and gathering testimonies from his fellow countrymen, acquaintances and colleagues from that period. Statements were given by people from Boka, and their claims were presented as authoritative statements from representatives of the Boka community, into which the late merchant had integrated over decades, becoming a well-known and respected member.

How did Marko integrate into the Boka community? The issue of immigrants from various regions of the Balkans to the territory of Venetian Republic is a special topic in historiography, with results showing how the process of integration depended on the period and the external political circumstances of that time. Studies addressing the integration of minorities into new environments highlight three key steps in the process: finding accommodation, employment, and forming a family. Especially, marriage was considered the foundation for assimilation into the local society.

We know that both of Marko Mirković's marriages were to women from prominent families of Boka Kotorska. Regarding the first wife, it is only known that she came from one of the noble families of the region, but none of the witnesses knew her name or surname. After her death,

he married the daughter of the esteemed Luka Vučetić from Kotor, which was under the administration of the Venetian Republic. He likely gradually built his economic status in Herceg Novi. Testimonies confirmed that during his life in the city, the merchant amassed wealth, which made him one of the wealthiest in the community. The people of Boka confirmed that he owned several properties, including houses and land in Herceg Novi. Another indicator of the deceased's prosperous status in the Venetian territory was the fact that he owned several ships.

Conclusion

Based on the data we presented, there are several questions that need to be addressed. First and foremost, the dilemma arises: did Marko Mirković maintain connections with his roots? If we judge by the lack of certain information about his life, it is likely that this was not the case. None of the respondents could say anything about his parents, name the exact place of his birth, or testify about his trading life before coming to the Venetian territory. Moreover, no one mentioned whether his family from his hometown had any role as a financial support that helped him create a better life in the Venetian Republic's territory. The only family of Marko Mirković we can speak of is the one he created in Herceg Novi, although it is not known whether he had descendants from the mentioned marriages.

In the final decision that arrived from Rome in December 1761, it was explained that the solution was reached based on information about "Marko's submission" (*la sudditanza del Mircovich*). It was concluded that the late merchant "should be treated as a Venetian subject" because his residence and business had long been tied to Herceg Novi, a city under Venetian rule. It was literally stated that for these reasons, it was necessary to "give preference" to the place of his long-term residence over his homeland, which was under Ottoman rule. In other words, it was concluded that the merchant did not live as an Ottoman subject.

Most likely, the late merchant did not maintain direct contacts with the place where he lived before moving to Herceg Novi, and that within the Venetian society, in Boka Kotorska, he established business, friendly, and family connections. If community is the foundation of every integration, then the testimonies of those who emphasized Marko's professional and social reputation in the Boka community showed that he, at the same time, became its equal member.

Keywords: 18th century, merchant Marko Mirković, Ancona, origin, identity, Venice, Herceg Novi, Boka