

SERBIAN LANGUAGE AND CYRILLIC SCRIPT AS A MEANS OF DIPLOMATIC LITERACY IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE IN 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES*

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Abstract: *Cyrillic script was used as the main means of written communication of the South Slavic nations in the Balkans since the 9th Century. From neighbouring Bulgaria and Serbia, Slavic language and Cyrillic alphabet were introduced to the Romanian lands. During the period of Ottoman conquest the use of afore-mentioned language and alphabet was gradually becoming international. After the fall of the Bulgarian Empire, the Serbian (Serbo-Croatian) variant became dominant, especially in diplomacy. Hungarian and Turkish (and sometimes Venetian) authorities wrote to their Slavic and Romanian neighbours or subjects in Serbian vernacular, using diplomatic minuscule (or cursive) Cyrillic script. In late 15th and during the first quarter of the 16th century, Hungary and the Ottoman Empire started to use this language and script for mutual correspondence. This trend influenced Romanian lands too. King Sigismund and John Hunyadi issued charters for Wallachian monasteries in Serbian, the peace treaties of 1503 and 1519 between the Hungarian king and the Ottoman sultan were most probably drafted in “lingua Rasciana” and Stephen Báthory and John Zápolya wrote to Turkish commanders in Serbia in the same vernacular. After the fall of Hungary and the development of written Romanian language, the use of Serbian subsided, but Cyrillic script was used in the Romanian lands up until 19th century.*

Keywords: Serbian language, Cyrillic alphabet, South Eastern Europe, diplomatic literacy, 15th–16th centuries.

Cyrillic script, as the more recent Slavic alphabet, was created in the late ninth century on the territory of the Bulgarian Empire, in the circles of educated men belonging to the church. By the twelfth century it took the precedence from the older Glagolitic alphabet whose use was gradually limited to the south-western border of the area inhabited by the Slavs. The script was most likely disseminated by the Bulgarians during the First Bulgarian Empire, the state which struggled with the Byzantine Empire for the control over the Balkans. Temporary Byzantine reconquest of certain areas which were inhabited or ruled by the Slavs did not jeopardize the dominance of the common Slavic liturgical language (known as Old Church Slavonic) and the Cyrillic alphabet, in which non-liturgical texts came to be written as well. By the aforementioned twelfth century Cyrillic becomes the

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dominant domestic letter of Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Russia, and also of the peoples of their cultural circle (mainly Romanians and Albanians). In Croatia, which became a part of the Arpad Monarchy at the beginning of the twelfth century, Glagolitic script was more prevalent in the northwest areas (present-day Istria, Gorski Kotar and Lika), while Cyrillic was dominant in the southeast (today's Dalmatia)¹.

The area of today's Romania was the place of a collision of multiple impacts, witnessing alternating periods of Bulgarian and Hungarian domination, as well as periods when the vast areas between the Tatra Mountains and the Danube, and between the Black Sea and the Tisza River were flooded by the Eastern peoples (Cumans, Pechenegs and others)². In linguistic terms, in Transylvania, which was directly associated with Hungary, the Latin language and alphabet dominated in written expression, while the territories of Moldavia and Wallachia received Cyrillic alphabet and Slavic language as liturgical and diplomatic means of communication via Bulgaria. Documentary heritage of the latter two Romanian principalities is rather scarce for the period prior to the fourteenth century, so it is difficult to say which means of written communication was dominantly present there³. At a time when the end of the Second Bulgarian Empire was nigh, Cyrillic Slavic literacy began to flourish in the chanceries of the Romanian voivodes of Wallachia and Moldavia. This language and script became dominant around 1370, and persisted over the next centuries. Even some Latin Wallachian documents were supplied with the calligraphic Cyrillic signature. While the Romanian language was gradually gaining ground from Slavic in certain aspects of literacy (from the 16th century on), the Cyrillic alphabet remained official script up until the mid-nineteenth century⁴. Since there is an extensive literature on the Romanian Slavic documents from Wallachia and Moldavia, we will not minutely discuss that particular issue on this occasion⁵.

We must, however, look back on some features of the development of the Slavic language and Cyrillic literacy in the period from 12th to 14th centuries. Old, majuscule script, with some morphological changes, remained widely in use. Yet

¹ Evfimiy Fedorovič Karskiy, *Slavyanskaya kirillovskaya paleografiya*, Moskva, 1928, 1979²; Petar Dordić, *Istorija srpske ćirilice*, Beograd, 1990³, p. 9-59.

² Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor*, vol. II-V, București, 1936-1937; *Istoria românilor*, vol. III-IV, București, 2001; Vásáry István, *Cumans and Tatars. Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185-1365*, Cambridge – New York, 2005; *The History of Transylvania*, vol. I (until 1541), coordinators Ioan-Aurel Pop, Thomas Nágler, Cluj-Napoca, 2005.

³ *Documenta Romaniae historica (=DRH)*. Seria B. Țara Românească. Vol. 1: 1247-1500, București, 1966; *DRH*. Seria A. Moldova. Vol. 1: 1384-1448, București, 1975; *DRH*. Seria C. Transilvania. Vol. X-XVI, București, 1977-2014; *DRH*. Seria D. Relații între Țările Române. Vol. 1: 1222-1456, București, 1977.

⁴ Nicolae Edroiu, *Scrierea chirilică românească*, Cluj-Napoca, 2013.

⁵ Edroiu, *Scrierea*, p. 27-30, 83-86, 121-122, 179-182, 208-212, 225-226, 261-262.

again, since the last decades of the thirteenth century the diplomatic minuscule (or cursive, in opinion of some paleographical schools), which was, at first, mainly used for writing letters, and later, in some places, for solemn charters, was gradually spreading from Serbia to the neighbouring territories⁶. Due to the small documentary corps, it is not known when and to which extent it “conquered” Bulgaria, while the preserved Romanian Cyrillic charters suggest that in solemn acts majuscule or semi-majuscule script kept the upper hand, although particular minuscule forms of some letters were adopted. Then again, we know that the Bulgarian rulers at the end of the fourteenth century sent letters in Cyrillic minuscule even to the cities in Transylvania, which meant that this form of script was known and used (we can name the example of the letter of Ivan Sratsimir to Braşov)⁷.

As for the nature of the language itself, the former liturgical Church Slavonic began to modify by introduction of the elements of vernacular, spoken language in the texts of non-liturgical content, particularly in the documents issued by the state and its officials. For that reason we talk about the so-called redactions of the Slavic language (Serbian-Slavic, Bulgarian-Slavic, Russian-Slavic), but they were still forming a generally understandable language since the redactions had more similarity between themselves than the individual South Slavic languages today. Local features certainly existed, but they were not a factor sufficient enough to make full differentiation⁸. The use of nasal vowels and morphology of the letters made numerous researchers to conclude that the Slavic language used in Romania and in documents which come from its area should be called Vlach-Bulgarian⁹. That argument is valid to some extent. However, with the expansion of the Serbian

⁶ Ioan Bogdan, *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Braşovul și cu Țara Ungurească în sec. XV și XVI* Vol. 1 (1413-1508), București, 1905, p. XXVI, XXIX; Gregor Čremošnik, *Srpska diplomatska minuskula, njezin postanak i razvoj*, in “Slovo”, 13 (1963), p. 119-136; Vladimir Mošin, *Metodološke bilješke o tipovima pisma u ćirilici*, in “Slovo”, 15-16 (1965), p. 150-180; Vera Jerković, *Poluustav u srpskim poveljama od kraja XIV i tokom XV veka*, in “Zbornik Matice srpske za filologiju i lingvistiku”, 42 (1999), p. 89-111; Đorđić, *Istorija srpske ćirilice*, p. 82-84.

⁷ Serviciul Județean al Arhivelor Naționale Braşov, Primăria Braşov, Colecția de documente “Stenner”, Seria slavo-română (1369-1803), nr. 456; Ioan Bogdan, *Eine bulgarische Urkunde des Caren Joan Sracimir*, in “Archiv für Slavische Philologie”, 17 (1895), p. 544-547; Lybomir Miletič, *Novi vlaho-bâlgarski gramoti ot Braşov*, in “Sbornik za Narodni Umotvoreniya, Nauka i Knjižnina”, XIII, Sofiya, 1896, p. 46. See also internet edition at: http://monasterium.net/mom/MedDocBulgEmp/1396-xx-xx_taq_Ioan_Sracimir/charter?lang=eng

⁸ Mita Kostić, *Srpski jezik kao diplomatski jezik jugoistočne Evrope od XV-XVIII v.*, Skopje, 1924, p. 8; Pavle Ivić, *Pregled istorije srpskog jezika*, Sremski Karlovci – Novi Sad, 1998; Roland Sussex – Paul Cubberley, *The Slavic Languages*, Cambridge, 2006.

⁹ Yuriy Venelin, *Vlaho-bolgarskiya ili dako-slavyanskiya gramoti*, Sankt Peterburg, 1840; Ilija Barbulesku, *Rumuni prema Srbima i Bugarima, naročito s pogledom na pitanje makedonskih Rumuna*, transl. Svetislav Ilić, Beograd, 1908, p. 78-85; Ilie Bărbulescu, *Relations des Roumains avec les Serbes, les Bulgares, les Grecs et la Croatie, en liaison avec la Question Macédo-Roumaine*, Iași, 1912, p. 179-188; Miletič, *Novi vlaho-bâlgarski gramoti ot Braşov*, p. 3-152.

state and its impact on the neighbours, there can be no doubt that the features of the Serbian language found their reflection in the Romanian Slavic literacy, and there is direct evidence for such an assertion. Especially after the fall of the Second Bulgarian Empire (1396), Serbian became the most common name for the Slavic language which was expanding for decades as the diplomatic language of the region¹⁰.

Moreover, Transylvania may have owed its knowledge of Slavic language, undoubtedly spread by the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries when the Wallachian and Moldovan rulers wrote to Braşov and Sibiu in Slavic, to its contacts with Serbia whose population very early began to settle on peripheral areas of Romanian territories¹¹. This settlement was intensified in the late Middle Ages (especially during the Turkish invasion), when not only the general population, but also nobility disseminated Serbian and Cyrillic in southern Hungary, Banat, Transylvania etc.¹² Thus, for example, Cyrillic *regesta* can be found on the backsides of Latin charters issued to Serbian nobleman Miloš Belmužević, whose possessions were partly located in the area of today's Romania¹³. Not only *regesta*, but also some full Serbian Cyrillic documents of Serbian nobility from southern Hungary and Banat are preserved in the archives of Vienna, Budapest and Moscow. For instance, charters issued by the Serbian despots of the Branković family to the monasteries of the Holy Mountain Athos and Fruška Gora (late 15th and early 16th centuries), the testament of the afore-mentioned Miloš Belmužević (1500), correspondence of Serbian despots and prelates with Russian court (1509), and correspondence of Serbian commanders with Ferdinand I, his heirs and lieutenants (from the early 16th century on)¹⁴. Also, on some originally Latin documents issued by Pavle Bakić, a

¹⁰ Branislav Nedeljković, *Nekoliko podataka o našem jeziku iz Arhiva Dubrovačke republike*, in "Istorijski časopis", 29-30 (1982-1983), p. 101-115; Bogdan, *Documente privitoare*, p. XII, XXIII-XXIV, XXVI, XXIX-XXXI, XXXIV-XXXVI, XL, XLII-XLIV, XLVIII; Barbulescu, *Rumuni prema Srbima*, p. 113-120; Bărbulescu, *Relations des Roumains avec les Serbes*, p. 225-244; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, passim.

¹¹ Miletić, *Novi vlaho-bálgarski gramoti ot Braşov*, p. 46-81; Barbulescu, *Rumuni prema Srbima*, p. 86-113; Bărbulescu, *Relations des Roumains avec les Serbes*, p. 190-225; DRH. Seria D. Relații între Țările Române. Vol. 1: 1222-1456, București, 1977. See also: Constantin Jireček, *Über Miletić's Kronstädter Urkunden*, in "Archiv für Slavische Philologie", 19 (1897), p. 598-612.

¹² Sima Ćirković, *Seoba srpskog naroda u Kraljevinu Ugarsku u XIV i XV veku*, in: *Seobe srpskog naroda od XIV do XX veka : zbornik radova posvećen tristagodišnjici Velike seobe Srba*, Beograd, 1990, p. 7-35; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. II, Beograd, 1982, p. 314-329 (Sima Ćirković).

¹³ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [Hungarian National Archives = MNL-OL], *Diplomatikai Levéltár 32552*; Adrian Magina, *Un nobil sârb în Banatul secolului al XV-lea: Miloš Belmužević*, in "Analele Banatului. Serie nouă. Arheologie – istorie", 18 (2010), p. 137, 139-142; Aleksandar Krstić, *Novi podaci o vojvodi Milošu Belmuževiću i njegovoj porodici*, in "Initial. A Review of Medieval Studies", 1 (2013), p. 177.

¹⁴ Franz Miklosich, *Monumenta serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae, Bosnae, Ragusii*, Vienna, 1858, p. 539-543, 546-548; Stevan M. Dimitrijević, *Dokumenti koji se tiču odnosa između srpske crkve i Rusije u XVI veku*, in "Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije", 39 (1903), p. 17-19;

Serbian nobleman and the last despot, his signature is in Serbian Cyrillic¹⁵. Some philologists and historians believe that certain Romanian documents have a particularly “Serbian linguistic colour”, and they suggested that they were written by Serbian scribes (*diaks*) or Romanian scribes educated in Serbian schools (e.g. a letter of voivode Alexander Aldea to the Hungarian palatine and to the count of Timiș from 1432)¹⁶. In later centuries (especially in early modern age), despite the long retention of nasal vowels and (semi)majuscule, the Romanians often called their diplomatic language – Serbian¹⁷.

The spread of Serbian Slavic redaction and Cyrillic from Serbia to the areas of Romania and Albania (from the fourteenth century) was the result of long-term political or neighborly ties between the afore-mentioned lands, but this language and alphabet really began to flourish in the fifteenth century, with the expansion of Ottoman rule in the Balkans¹⁸. Adjustable administration of Turkish state transplanted some administrative and legal practices of the conquered lands, and also the means of diplomatic correspondence. Slavic documents of the previous authorities were considered legitimate and legal proof even on the Ottoman Sharia courts, as early as in the first half of the fifteenth century¹⁹. Early conquered, Bulgaria could not have been the basis for this common diplomatic language. This role was given to the Serbian (i.e. Serbo-Croatian) redaction, along with its

Aleksa Ivić, *Neue cyrillische Urkunden aus den Wiener Archiven*, in “Archiv für Slavische Philologie”, 30 (1909), p. 205-214; Aleksa Ivić, *Spomenici Srba u Ugarskoj, Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji tokom XVI i XVII stoleća (prvi deo)*, Novi Sad, 1910, p. 9, 14, 16, 26, 34-35, 57, 63, 107-108, 133-134; Aleksa Ivić, *Nekoliko čirilskih spomenika iz XVI. i XVII. veka*, in “Vjesnik Kralj. hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinskog zemaljskog arkiva”, 15 (1913), p. 92-94, 98-100; Katarina Mitrović, *Povelja despota Đorđa Brankovića o prihvatanju kćitorstva nad Hilandarom*, in “Stari srpski arhiv”, 5 (2006), p. 229-239; Krstić, *Novi podaci o vojvodi Milošu*, p. 172, 175.

¹⁵ Ivić, *Spomenici Srba u Ugarskoj*, p. 63, 133.

¹⁶ Bogdan, *Documente privitoare*, p. XXVI, XXXI.

¹⁷ Bogdan, *Documente privitoare*, p. XXXIV; Barbulescu, *Rumuni prema Srbima*, p. 78-79, 113-120; Barbulescu, *Relations des Roumains avec les Serbes*, p. 178-180, 225-244; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 15; *DRH. Seria A. Moldova. Vol. 1: 1384-1448*, p. 7, 12, 18, 40, 63, 145, 201, 203, 210, 242, 251-252, 262, 297, 334, 351-352, 355; *DRH. Seria B. Țara Românească. Vol. 1: 1247-1500*, p. XIX, 138, 320, 506, etc.

¹⁸ Rade Mihaljević, *Slovenska kancelarija arbanaške vlastele*, in: *Izborna vrednost stare srpske građe*, Beograd, 2001, p. 9-19; Tasin Gemil, *Romanians and Ottomans in the XIV-XVI Centuries*, Bucharest, 2009; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 2-12; Đorđić, *Istorija srpske ćirilice*, p. 145-177; Edroiu, p. 123-182, 227-231. In 1434, the Albanian noble family of Thopia asked Sigismund of Luxemburg not to send them Latin charters and letters, but only Slavic, since they have only Slavic chancery (Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 15-16).

¹⁹ Aleksandar Fotić, *Ugovori na “drugim jezicima” i osmanski šerijatski sud (XVI-XVIII vek)*, in “Balcanica”, 32-33 (2001-2002), p. 175-182; Aleksandar Fotić, *Srednjovekovne povelje na šerijatskom sudu: primeri iz povesti manastira Hilandara (XV-XVI vek)*, in “Hilandarski zbornik”, 11 (2004), p. 325-336; Ilias Kolovos, *A Biti of 1439 from the Archives of the Monastery of Xeropotamou (Mount Athos)*, in “Hilandarski zbornik” 11 (2004), p. 295-306.

chancery minuscule script, as a specific form of the Cyrillic alphabet. In time, to some extent, a few non-Slavic states like Venice and Hungary also became part of this linguistic circle. While the Venetians sporadically used to issue bilingual documents for Dalmatian cities from the early fourteenth century on, and applied similar practices to their documents issued to the Bosnians in the early fifteenth century²⁰, the Hungarians used Serbian-Slavic from the time of King Sigismund of Luxemburg. Among other examples, we can name the charters which were issued by Sigismund and John Hunyadi (Iancu de Hunedoara) to the monasteries Tismana and Vodița (in 1428 and 1444, respectively), which are preserved as copies, or original charter issued by King Matthias Corvinus to a Ragusan in 1465²¹. There are indications, yet to be verified, that King Sigismund issued more charters in Serbian language addressed to the monasteries in Romania²².

Although the initial steps were directed towards achieving communication in Serbo-Croatian language with Serbia, the Croats, Albania and the Romanian countries, it was the correspondence with the Turks that gave full impetus for the development of the Hungarian and Venetian Slavic chanceries. Those chanceries were, most certainly, originally led by the Slavic scribes, but the staff later expanded out of the circle of the ethnic Slavs. Therefore, in the sixteenth century we can encounter letters in which a Venetian proveditor wrote to the Turkish officials in Cyrillic script lacking diacritical signs²³. On some Venetian documents it was written that the language of the text is “*schiaionesco*”, while on the other it was marked as “*lingua serva*” or “*lingua serviana*”²⁴. Turkish Serbian-Slavic

²⁰ Giovanni Lucio, *Memorie istoriche di Traugurio, ora detto Traù*, Venezia, 1674, p. 203; Sime Ljubić, *Listine o odnošajih između južnoga slavenstva i Mletačke republike*, vol. VIII, Zagreb, 1886, p. 202-205, 215-217, 257-263; Đuro Šurmin, *Hrvatski spomenici*, I, Zagreb, 1898, p. 80; Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma I–I*, Beograd – Sremski Karlovci, 1929, p. 328-331.

²¹ Thallóczy Ludwig, *Studien zur Geschichte Bosniens und Serbiens im Mittelalter*, München – Leipzig, 1914, p. 426-428; *DRH. Seria B*, Vol. 1: 1247-1500, p. 67-68, 118-120, 168-170; Andrija Veselinović, *Tri povelje za manastire Tismana i Vodica*, in “*Stari srpski arhiv*”, 8 (2009), p. 183-203; Đorđić, *Istorija srpske cirilice*, p. 463.

²² We were informed by our colleague Ivan Botica from the Old Church Slavonic Institute in Zagreb that another Czech colleague, Václav Čermák, was studying Sigismund of Luxemburg’s charters issued to the monasteries in the Romanian lands, in Serbian Cyrillic. This information is yet to be verified.

²³ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (=ASV), Lettere e scritture turchesche (1523-1618), vol. 5, nrs. 239-242; Alessio Bombaci – Maria Pia Pedani, *Inventory of the ‘Lettere e Scritture Turchesche’ in the Venetian State Archives*, Leiden, 2009, p. 54-55, 73, 98, 100, 144.

²⁴ ASV, Miscellanea documenti turchi (1454-1813), numero 445, verso; ASV, Miscellanea atti diplomatici e privati, busta 34, numero 1018, verso; Gregor Čremošnik, *Originalni dokumenti južno-slovenskih vladara u Mletačkom arhivu*, in “*Spomenik Srpske Kraljevske akademije*”, 93 (1940), p. 127; Maria Pia Pedani Fabris – Alessio Bombaci, *I “Documenti Turchi” dell’Archivio di Stato di Venezia. Inventario della miscellanea*, Venezia, 1994, p. 117. See also: Alberto Giudici, *Lo schiaionesco a Venezia: tra parodia e realtà linguistica*, in: *Dialetto. Parlato, scritto, trasmesso*, ed. Gianna Marcato, Padova, 2015, p. 141-147.

chanceries existed as early as in the late fourteenth century, although their first preserved products date from the 1430's. The oldest fund of early Turkish-Serbian documents is located in the Archives of Dubrovnik/Ragusa in Croatia, and it is accompanied by the chronologically more recent and numerically smaller funds in Venice and in the Archives of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb²⁵. Some Ottoman charters and letters written in Slavic language have notes on their backsides referring to the language used, which was commonly called Serbian²⁶.

In Transylvania, direct evidence of Serbian diplomatic literacy cannot be found before the late fifteenth century, although it was undoubtedly present earlier. The correspondence between Hungarian rulers and Turkey, not only in the area of Transylvania, was conducted in Serbian language by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, which is evidenced by a number of documents. Cyrillic letters sent from the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen and addressed to Turkish rulers and officials were found among the documents from the Ottoman court in Istanbul in the mid-twentieth century²⁷. For our subject, it is important to mention not only the correspondence of Serbian despot Vuk Grgurević with the Turkish Sultan Bayezid II, but also a letter which Stephen (V) Báthory, royal judge and Transylvanian voivode (in the Serbian original: *Батар Иштван, одвар биров светлости краљевеи и воевода арделски*) sent to Ali-bey Mihaloğlu (in the original: *Алибѣгу Михалѣговикю*), sanjakbey of Smederevo between 1482 and 1489, also in the Serbian vernacular and in chancery minuscule²⁸. That letter came in response to a letter of Ali-bey, which proves that the entire correspondence between Hungarian and Turkish officials was led in Serbian language²⁹. In support

²⁵ Ćiro Truhelka, *Tursko-slovenski spomenici dubrovačke arhive*, in "Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Sarajevu", 23 (1911), p. 1-162, 303-350, 437-484, tables I-XIX; Vladimir Mošin – Seid Traljić, *Ćiriliske isprave i pisma u Arhivu Jugoslavenske akademije*, in "Starine JAZU", 46 (1956), p. 97-144; Vančo Boškov, *Odnos srpske i turske diplomatike*, in "Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis", 3-4 (1980), p. 219-236; Lejla Nakaš, *Bosanska ćirilična pisma*, in "Forum Bosnae", 53-54, Sarajevo, 2011; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 2-12.

²⁶ Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma I-2*, Beograd – Sremski Karlovci, 1934, p. 256-257, 298-299 (*serviano*); Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 11.

²⁷ Nikola Radojčić, *Pet pisama s kraja 15. veka*, in "Južnoslovenski filolog", 20/1-4 (1953-1954), p. 343-367.

²⁸ Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma I-2*, p. 487-489; Katarina Mitrović, *Pet pisama despota Vuka Grgurevića*, in "Branicevski glasnik", 3-4 (2004-2005), p. 63-83; Radojčić, *Pet pisama*, p. 343-363.

²⁹ Turkish, Austrian and Hungarian border commanders led their correspondence in Slavic in the 17th and even in the 18th century, partly because it was already in widespread use and partly because many Frontier's officials were of Slavic (Serbian or Croatian) origin. See: Rudolf Strohal, *Nekoliko ćirilskih isprava o dopisivanju turskih begova sa hrvatskim komandantima*, in "Vjesnik Kralj. hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinskog zemaljskog arkiva", 16 (1914), p. 45-50; Ivić, *Neue cyrillische Urkunden*, p. 205-211; Nakaš, *Bosanska ćirilična pisma*, passim. There are also some examples that Ottoman sultans Selim I and Suleiman II and Russian rulers Vasili III and Ivan IV kept

of this hypothesis we should mention the letter which King Matthias Corvinus (in original: *Матіеаш милостиом Божию крал угрски и чешики и херцег бечки*) personally sent to Sultan Bayezid II in 1487³⁰. Both letters were issued outside the territory in which Serbo-Croatian language was spoken, which proves that the Serbian-Slavic chanceries existed in the courts and households of the Hungarian central and the local authorities. It is interesting, however, that some Hungarian phrases denoting officials also found their reflection in the mentioned documents.

Despite the scarce specimen (i.e. corps of the documents), which is certainly a consequence of the Turkish occupation of Hungary and the wars that ensued, the continuation of the practice of Serbian-Slavic correspondence is evidenced by the letters of King John Zápolya (*І аношь крааль*) sent to sanjakbey of Smederevo Mehmed-bey Yahyapaşa-oğlu (*І ахїапашию*) and his deputy Ferhat in October 1537. All three letters in Serbian language were sent from Oradea (in original *Велики Варадь*)³¹. In addition, there is also a letter, written in December 1536 in Pest, in which Mustafa, the Ottoman captain of the Danube, wrote to Peter, captain of Esztergom, giving him a “knightly faith” so he could go to Constantinople as an envoy of the Hungarian king Zápolya³². In Vienna there is also a Serbian letter by ban Thomas Nádasdy (1539) written to the Murat-bey, commander of Ottoman Klis. In the court of John Zápolya there was also a logothete named Lacko, who, in the king’s name, wrote to Gavril, *protus* (prefect) of the Holy Mountain of Athos in Slavic language. On the basis of the content of the letter which is dedicated to the issue of Luther’s “heresy”, it is presumed that Lacko was Orthodox³³. There is also a report from Saxon community in Transylvania (1546) about religious books of the Romanian Orthodox population, saying that they are issued in “Die Ratzische Sprach”, which most of the Romanian common folk does not understand, but many Saxons (probably merchants and artisans) do³⁴.

Zápolya’s chaplain and confidant George of Symria (Szerémi György, Đurađ Sremac) also knew the Serbian language, whose words, as well as some traces of

correspondence in Slavic language. See: Dimitrijević, *Dokumenti koji se tiču odnosa*, p. 24-25; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 13.

³⁰ Radojčić, *Pet pisama*, p. 363-366. See also: Ivan Biliarsky, *Un Page des Relations Magyaro-Ottomanes vers la fin du XVe siècle*, in “Turcica”, 32 (2000), p. 291-305.

³¹ Miklosich, *Monumenta serbica*, p. 553-556; Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma I-2*, p. 484-486.

³² Miklosich, *Monumenta serbica*, p. 552-553; Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma I-2*, p. 483-484.

³³ Đorđe Sp. Radojčić, *Tvorci dela stare srpske književnosti*, Titograd, 1963, p. 301-307; Sima Ćirković, *Srbi i rani protestanizam*, in: *Rabotnici, vojnici, duhovnici. Društva srednjovekovnog Balkana*, Beograd, 1997, p. 476-478; Svetozar Matić, *Pismo Gavrilovo o Luteru*, in “Bogoslovlje”, 9 (1934), p. 5-17.

³⁴ Barbulescu, *Rumuni prema Srbima*, p. 114; Barbulescu, *Relations des Roumains avec les Serbes*, p. 234; Ćirković, *Srbi i rani protestanizam*, p. 480.

Hungarian, he wrote in his *Epistola de perditione regni Hungarorum*, a text written in Latin about the collapse of the Kingdom of Hungary. Thus, for example, he wrote that the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, hearing that Belgrade was poorly defended by the Hungarian king and his servants, said: “*Fala Bogu*” (*falabogw*), while in the form of “*grates Deo*” he gave the Latin translation of this Serbian expression meaning “Thank God”³⁵. Only in Latin translation he brought a frequent vulgar phrase of Serbian language, which remained recognizable even translated (*Rex potest reiterare in natica matris sue...extunc potest Rex Ivannes intrare ad wluam matris sue*)³⁶. George of Syrmia himself names Serbian language as Thracian, in the spirit of humanist writers of his age³⁷. In connection with the afore-mentioned, a unique example of Slavic curse was also recorded in a letter of Wallachian voivode Alexander Aldea to the citizens of Sibiu from 1432 in which he says that the one who lies in front of the King should deserve the following fate: a dog should fornicate with his mother and wife (in original: *да кто име слъгати да му ебе пьсь женѣ и матере му*)³⁸.

There is a note dating from 1509 that the Hungarian King Vladislaus II received the peace treaty with Sultan Bayezid II from 1503 in Serbian language, because the Sultan uses it, so he had to translate it into Latin for himself (*ex serviana lingua qua caesar ipse utitur*)³⁹. While this is just a mention, it is particularly interesting that there is a preserved copy of the peace treaty between Turkey and Hungary from 1519, which is kept in the Slovak National Archives in Bratislava⁴⁰. This document was not known to the wider academic and scholarly community, and has, so far, been studied on the basis of its Latin version⁴¹. Bearing in mind that the correspondence between the Ottomans and Hungary was, at the time, led in Serbian language, and also noting the afore-mentioned data from 1509, it is quite possible that drafts of the agreement, as well as the final draft were originally written in Serbian language, which is marked under such name in the document from 1519 (i.e. *paria literararum iuramentalium in lingua Rasciana que date sunt ad magistrum*

³⁵ György Szerémi, *Emlékirata Magyarország romlásáról 1484-1543*, köz. Gusztáv Wenzel, Pest, 1857, p. 89; Đurađ Sremac, *Poslanica o propasti Ugarskog kraljevstva*, Beograd, 1987, p. 53, 264.

³⁶ Szerémi, *Emlékirata*, p. 214-215; Sremac, *Poslanica*, p. 128, 286.

³⁷ Szerémi, *Emlékirata*, p. 214-215; Sremac, *Poslanica*, p. 128.

³⁸ DRH. Seria D. Relații între Țările Române. Vol. 1: 1222-1456, p. 295-296.

³⁹ Gusztáv Wenzel, *Marino Sanuto világkrónikájának Magyar-országot illető tudósításai*, in “Magyar Történelmi Tár”, 24 (1877), p. 81-89; Thallóczy Lajos, *Jajcza (bánság, vár és város) története : 1450-1527*, Budapest, 1915, p. 167-170; Mustafa Tayyib Gökbilgin, *Korvin Mathias (Mátyás) ’in Bayezid II-e Mektupları Tercümeleri ve 1503 (909) Osmanlı-Macar Muahedesinin Türkçe Metni*, in “Belleten”, 22/87 (1958), p. 369-390; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 13. This peace treaty is preserved in its Latin and Turkish versions.

⁴⁰ MNL-OL, Diplomatai Fényképgyűjtemény (=DF) 227344 (original in: Slovenský národný archív, Hodnoverné miesto Bratislavská kapitula 428, caps 28, fasc. 7, nr. 41).

⁴¹ Thallóczy Lajos – Horváth Sándor, *Alsó-Szlavóniai okmánytár (Dubicza, Orbász és Szana vármegyék) : 1244-1710*, Budapest, 1912, p. 279-286.

Kamal)⁴². An interesting example supporting this claim can be found in an answer of vizier Mehmed-paša Sokollu (Sokolović) to a French letter of Andrew Báthory, commander of Timișoara (1551). Sokollu answered in Serbian Cyrillic, asking his addressee not to write him in French again, but only in Serbian (*И што мї послиашь лістова і све мї срьбьськемь езікомь послиаї, а не фруику*)⁴³.

It is also known that the Hungarian King Ferdinand I of Habsburg had a Serbian or Croatian chancellor, not only for his correspondence inside Hungary, but also in Austria. Since his election to the throne of Hungary he had to keep both Hungarian and Serbo-Croatian chancery. In the archive of Vienna several documents mention that the correspondence of Ferdinand's court and War Council with the Serbs was kept in Serbian language (*lingua Rasciana, litteae Rascianae*), though mainly Latin translations or copies are now preserved⁴⁴. The King's diplomatic communication with the Turks was also conducted in Serbian, as in Zápolya's case. Namely, Ferdinand's ambassadors spoke Slavic with the Ottoman court and dignitaries, while there is a case that a Turkish envoy also spoke this vernacular when he was admitted to the Habsburg court in Germany. There are also many reports by the chroniclers (including a prisoner from Transylvania in Constantinople) that Slavic language was "the third language" of the Ottoman empire, after Turkish and Arabic, since not only most of the elite janissary troops spoke it, but also sultan's court. A few anecdotes testify that sultan Suleiman the Magnificent understood some Slavic⁴⁵.

Not counting certain Serbian elements in numerous Wallachian and Moldovan documents, Moldovan Duke Alexander (*Алексендарь воевода, господарь земли молдовской*) wrote a completely Serbian letter from Suceava in 1566, in which he recommended the descendants of Bosnian noble Vladislav Hercegović to the Ragusans. Hercegović's descendants moved from Slavonia to Transylvania, entering the service of John Zápolya. It should be noted that the letter was actually written by a clerk (scribe) called Dragomir the Serb, but nevertheless it remains a fact that the Serbian Cyrillic minuscule was recognized even in Moldavia⁴⁶. Even somewhat earlier a chronicler reports that Jelena, wife of

⁴² MNL-OL, DF 227344.

⁴³ Ivić, *Neue cyrillische Urkunden*, p. 210-211; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 6. In original its is written "fruški jezik", which should denote French, but may also mean Latin language.

⁴⁴ Ivić, *Neue cyrillische Urkunden*, p. 206; Ivić, *Spomenici Srba u Ugarskoj*, p. 9. 14, 16, 26; Ivić, *Nekoliko ćirilskih spomenika*, p. 94-95; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 12-14; Ćirković, *Srbi i rani protestanzizam*, p. 481.

⁴⁵ Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 7, 9-10, 12-13. It is also said that king Matthias Corvinus had a knowledge of "Bulgarian" language in which the Ottomans wrote their charters. However, only Serbo-Croatian Turkish charters are preserved, so it may mean that Matthias understood some Serbo-Croatian instead (Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 14).

⁴⁶ Miklosich, *Monumenta serbica*, p. 556-557; Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma I-2*, p. 411-412.

Moldovan voivode Peter Rareș, sent a Serbian letter to sultan Suleiman⁴⁷. Although the Slavic language commonly used in Moldavia cannot be called Serbian-Slavic redaction, it should be said that on some later copies of the Slavic documents issued by Moldovan rulers it is written that they are “documents in Serbian” (*sârbescă*)⁴⁸.

To conclude, although the Slavic language indisputably dominated the literacy of Wallachia, Moldavia and Albania for a long time, and was also present in Transylvania and Hungary, it was the Ottoman Empire that was the main factor or, at least, the catalyst of the introduction of Serbian-Slavic redaction and its chancery minuscule as a diplomatic language and script of Southeast Europe, particularly in the period of transition from 15th to 16th century. A rather quick collapse of the Hungarian state prevented us from knowing how wide area would have been affected by this regional *lingua franca*. It seems that in the late 16th century other languages started to be used in diplomatic correspondence, along with Serbian – namely Turkish and Hungarian, and sometimes Latin. For instance, if the preserved documents are not later translations, Ottoman officials grand-vizier Sinan-paşa and Hassan-paşa of Timișoara wrote to Sigismund Báthory and received his answers in Hungarian (1594). Also, since the late 16th and early 17th century there is a number of preserved letters in Turkish language and Arabic script, exchanged by Transylvanian rulers and Turkish officials⁴⁹. Although its use in widespread diplomatic literacy gradually subsided, the Serbian language was still important for much longer period of time, since it remained the official language of South-Slavic lands of the Ottoman Balkans and some parts of present day Romania.

⁴⁷ Barbulesku, *Rumuni prema Srbima*, p. 78, 97; Bărbulescu, *Relations des Roumains avec les Serbes*, p. 179-180, 207; Kostić, *Srpski jezik*, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Bogdan, *Documente privitoare*, p. XXX-XXXI, XXXIV, XXXVI; *DRH*. Seria A. Moldova. Vol. 1: 1384-1448, p. 7, 12, 18, 40, 63, 145, 201, 203, 210, 242, 251-252, 262, 297, 334, 351-352, 355.

⁴⁹ Aleksa Ivić, *Istorija Srba u Vojvodini od najstarijih vremena do osnivanja Potisko-pomoriške granice (1703)*, Novi Sad, 1929, p. 443-450; Tasin Gemil, *Documente turcești inedite (sfârșitul sec. XVI și XVII)*, in “Revista arhivelor”, 3 (1981), p. 351-361; Tasin Gemil, *Relațiile Țărilor Române cu Poarta otomană în documente turcești (1601-1712)*, București, 1984.

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