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Christians, Jews and Muslims in the Ottoman Balkans

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In loving memory of Prof. Ivana Burdelez  
a colleague, a friend, a *benadam*

## Between the Ottoman Empire and the Venetian Republic – The Bay of Kotor and the Montenegrin Coast in Early Modern and Modern Times

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The Bay of Kotor (Bocca di Cattaro, Boka Kotorska), a thirty-kilometer-long fjord lined by steep mountain slopes and consisting of four interconnected basins in the Republic of Montenegro, was divided between the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire from 1482 to 1687. The north coast of the Bay, with the cities of Herceg Novi and Risan, was occupied by the Turks, while the southern part remained within the Venetian Republic, which conquered this area in the late fourteenth century. Delineation of Venetian and Turkish property in the Bay has been established along the sea line in mid-aquatorium of the Bay.

This distinction marked both the collective and the individual sense of identity of the inhabitants. That identity is shaped by violence, forms of differentiation, negative generalizations, but also by the integration demanded by the life in a multi-cultural and multi-religious reality. Based on the experiences of actual protagonists, this text represents, in short, the history, perception, and self-perception of inhabitants of the Bay of Kotor and the Montenegrin coast in the early modern period.

The Catholics developed a strong feeling of belonging to the Venetian Republic. Marian piety, which shaped the sacred topography of the terrain, provided the ideal network of protection from conflict of any nature.<sup>1</sup> Orthodox population from the hinterland, who came to escape from the Turks and was drawn by the economic

1 S. Brajović, *U Bogorodičinom vrtu. Bogorodica i Boka Kotorska – barokna pobožnost zapadnog hrišćanstva*, Plato i Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, Beograd 2006, pp. 206-211, 274.

prosperity of coastal towns, strove to maintain its integrity. At first highly reserved toward the “infidels”, in time Venice changed its treatment of the Orthodox population and gradually introduced full freedom to them in the Bay.<sup>2</sup> Christians were partly united by “fear of the Turks”, a phenomenon that spread through a large part of Europe as one of the most significant factors of identity of the Bay of Kotor.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, the presence of the Turks gave rise not only to fear of assault but also to naval competition, especially in pirating, and thus also to the development of maritime economy. Boundaries between Christians and Muslims had an ambiguous character, which under those circumstances promoted social and cultural interaction that is documented in municipal and ecclesiastical archives.<sup>4</sup> Traces of economic, social, and cultural intertwining are found in all the cities of the Bay of Kotor.

Herceg Novi, which was founded by the Bosnian king Tvrtko I Kotromanić in 1382, was an important port situated between the competing Kotor and Dubrovnik. The city was conquered by the Turks in 1482. The Spanish fleet, led by the admiral Andrea Doria, took the city in 1538, but after only nine months the Turkish admiral Hajrudin Barbarossa put an end to Spanish possession of Herceg Novi.<sup>5</sup>

In the time of the Turks, the city was a military base and a nest of Turkish pirates. In 1664, Herceg Novi has visited by Evlija Chelebi, an educated efendi, chronicler, and writer. In the fifth book of his travelogue he writes about his stay in Herceg Novi. He says that most of the inhabitants of the city are the heroes who wear tight clothing like Algerians and walk around bare shinned, and all, both big and small, carry guns and handle weapons. “They board their frigates instantly and charge against the Montenegrins and rob the Apulian coast and Sicily”.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this description of the inhabitants of Herceg Novi as a kind of savages (this type of description is similar to those recorded by Venetians about inhabitants of Catholic Perast, which is a typical form of the image of the Other – even when that other is of the same religion)—documents and material remains testify about huge

2 P. Butorac, *Kulturna povijest grada Perasta*, Perast 1999, pp. 223, 239.

3 V. Gligo, *Govori protiv Turaka*, Split 1983.

4 M. Milošević, *Pomorski trgovci, ratnici i mecene. Studije o Boki Kotorskoj XV-XIX stoljeća*, V. Đokić (ed.), Beograd-Podgorica 2003, pp. 71-94.

5 P. D. Šerović, “Borbe s Turcima oko Hercegnovog do njegovog konačnog oslobođenja g. 1687”, *Godišnjak Pomorskog muzeja u Kotoru* 4 (1956), pp. 8-10.

6 E. Čelebi, *Putopis. Odlomci o jugoslavenskim zemljama*, H. Šabanović ed., Sarajevo 1967, 428-434

cultural and, especially, architectural activities of the Turks from Herceg Novi. The most impressive among the buildings is Spanjola fortress, on the extremely important strategic position covering the entrance to the Bay. It was built by the Spaniards and hence its popular name (in the documents it appears as *fortezza superiore* as we can see it on the Coronelli and Mortier maps). But, it was expanded by the Turks, as its inscription testifies—the fortress was built by the sultan's orders by Suleiman, the son of the great emir Sulejman Han.<sup>7</sup>

In scholarship, until recently, there was almost a kind of amnesia about the mosques of Herceg Novi and Risan. But in the territory of the northern part of the Bay there were nine mosques. We do not know the exact locations of most of them as well as those of medressas, tekis, bezistans, and shedrvans which, according to the documents, existed.<sup>8</sup>

Muslim Herceg Novi experienced a kind of urbicide in the Morean war at the end of the seventeenth century. Girolamo Corner, admiral of the Venetian republic, took the city after weeks of siege and battle. The siege of the city is partly visible as part of the votive image of Girolamo Corner and on old maps.<sup>9</sup> The Venetian Republic organized a kind of *damnatio memoriae* of the Turks in the city. The archbishop of Bar, Andrija Zmajević, as the spiritual leader of Boka's warriors served Mass and gave a sermon in the largest mosque of Herceg Novi. So, the mosque became the church of Saint Jerome.<sup>10</sup> Later, because of landslides the church had to be demolished, and a new church was built in 1856. The foundation of the mosque can be seen only as a ground plan between the tower and the present church. Other mosques were destroyed or rearranged on the same occasion. The Turks were expelled, and their land was occupied by citizens of Perast and hajduks, as irregular Venetian troops.

7 On Spanjola, see T. Поповић, *Херцег Нови*, Дубровник 1924, pp. 29-31. Coronelli and Mortier's maps can be seen in *12 vjekova Bokeljske mornarice*, Beograd 1972, pp. 40, 117, 124, 133, 150-151.

8 B. Agović, *Džamije u Crnoj Gori*, Podgorica 2001, 239-253.

9 On the votive image, see N. Luković, *Zvijezda mora. Štovanje Majke Božje u kotorskoj biskupiji sa historijskim podacima*, Perast 2000 (Kotor 1931), p.17.

10 P. Butorac, *Zmajevići*, Zagreb 1928, pp. 3-4; M. Пантић, *Књижевност на тлу Црне Горе у Боке Которске од XVI до XVIII века*, Београд 1990, p. 141; S. Brajović, "Andrija Zmajević, barski nadbiskup i pokrovitelj umjetnosti", in *Umjetnost i naručitelji*, J. Gudelj ed., Institut za povijest umjetnosti i odsjek za povijest umjetnosti Filozofskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, Zagreb 2010, pp. 127-148; B. Agović, *Džamije u Crnoj Gori*, 244.



It was the same in the city of Risan. The traces of Turkish culture remained, but there are no signs of the mosques, gunpowder storage, and han. Risan, as a border location, flourished during Ottoman rule. According to the documents, Orthodox people freely traded in the city.<sup>11</sup>

Documents record that the most active traders in Risan and Herceg Novi were Jews.<sup>12</sup> Grain trade was almost entirely in their hands. It is known that only during the time of Dželal Hasan pasha in 1602 did they suffer, because the ruler of Herceg Novi was prone to violence. Soon the Porta reacted and condemned the offender to death after his negotiations with Venice on the sale of Herceg Novi.

That the Sephardic community was significant and substantial is attested to by the fact that in the city of Herceg Novi was a Jewish cemetery.<sup>13</sup> The cemetery was marked on the map as *Sepoltura de Ebrei*, near the sea coast. The cemetery sank into the sea during the big earthquake in 1667. The available documents do not mention the existence of a synagogue, but it can be assumed that it existed.

In 1599, buried in that cemetery was Isaiah Cohen, a Sephardi from Portugal, physician, doctor and poet, known as Flavius Eborensis (Didacus Pirus). He wrote a book of poems *De exilio suo* on his exile from Portugal, Constantinople, Italy, Dubrovnik, and Herceg Novi.<sup>14</sup>

Documents verifying the existence of Jews in the medieval city of Kotor are known,<sup>15</sup> but their fate from the Renaissance and Baroque periods remains unknown. We can assume that they did participate in the rich commercial and cultural life of the ancient city. We can also conclude that, like their compatriots in other areas of the

11 On trade in Turkish Herceg Novi, see M. Milošević, *Pomorski trgovci, ratnici i mecene*, pp. 71-95.

12 S. Ljubić, "Commissiones et relationes Venetae II", *JAZU MSHSM* 6, 8, Zagreb 1876/77, p. 244; P. Butorac, *Kulturna povijest grada Perasta*, p. 29.

13 Т. Поповић, *Херцег Нови*, pp. 43-44.

14 Đ. Körbler, "Život i rad humanista Didaka Pira Portugalca, napose u Dubrovniku", *Rad JAZU*, Zagreb 1917, pp. 1-169; B. Vodnik, *Povijest hrvatske književnosti* I, Zagreb 1913, p. 181; D. Novaković, "Didacus Pyrrhus as *lusor amorum*: unpublished love-elegies from the manuscript *D. a. 29* in the Historical Institute of Croatian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Dubrovnik", *Euphrosyne* XXVI (1998), pp. 399-408.

15 D. Sindik, "Jevreji u srednjovekovnom Kotoru", *Zbornik JIM*, knj. 7, Beograd 1997.

Venice commonwealth, they lived according to prescribed rules, which were often violated in practice.<sup>16</sup>

The city of Kotor lay deep in Turkish territory—the area between Kotor and Venetian city of Budva, called Grbalj, was the part of the Ottoman Empire—in the “jaws of the lion” as old documents say. Both Venice and Turkey were well aware of the fact that whoever controlled the Bay also had possession of a safe haven for his fleet, bountiful food, and human resources for the army. So, the Turks orchestrated occasional assaults on the city, and Venice occasionally invested into building city walls. Kotor was populated by people of various religious confessions: Catholics were the majority, then the Orthodox, while a number of Protestants were to be found among the guardians of its walls.<sup>17</sup>

The city of Perast has enjoyed the status of heroic guardian of the Venetian part of the Bay of Kotor. Baroque historiographers celebrated this area as the crucial segment of the circle of European civilization where Christianity was defended from Islam, a veritable *regnum Mariae*. Perast was a center for the gathering of hajduks, piracy, and the selling of slaves.<sup>18</sup> The city benefited from grain trade with Albania. Many documents prove intensive communication between Perast and both Risan and Herceg Novi, not only conflicts. They exchanged goods as well as mutual bribes in order not to attack ships. Relations between the Turkish cities and Perast varied, depending upon the political and economic situation. Sometimes they relied on personal relationships.

Municipal documents testify to one affair that largely determined the destiny of Perast. Vicko Bujović, who in the name merits earned in war won the title of *conte* and a palace from Venice, kidnapped a Turkish girl from Captain Krsto Zmajević. Zmajević had bought the girl as a slave, baptized her, and named her Jelena (from the documents we know that Turkish girls commanded a high price on the market). There are documents, however, that testify that Jelena had fled willingly with Vicko Bujović to Dubrovnik. They married in Bujović’s house in Perast 1703, before witnesses (one

16 My research into Jewish culture in modern times in the Bay of Kotor has recently begun. I shall devote more attention to this subject in the future, so I hope that I shall be able to write more about Jewish life and culture in this area.

17 About Kotor in early modern times, see M. Milošević, *Pomorski trgovci, ratnici i mecene*, pp. 135-291.

18 Г. Станојевић, “Грађа за историју Пераста”, *Споменик САН СХ*, Београд 1956, pp. 53-66.

of them was Tripo Kokolja, the painter of the church of Our Lady of the Reef).<sup>19</sup> There is a legend that Jelena's face was the model for Shulamite from Song of songs. Seemingly because of the "abduction", but actually because of the Bujović's economic power, he was killed. The leader of the conspiracy against Bujović was the brother of the Archbishop of Bar, Matija Zmajević, later a famous admiral in the Russian fleet, and the direct trigger was the judge Štukanović. Representatives of these noble and rich families had to leave the town, sparking a major crisis in the city.

The economic crisis deepened extensively in mid-eighteenth century, again because of a 'personal' affair. The wife of a certain captain from Perast was hijacked by pirates from the city of Ulcinj. Despite the ban of Venice, which did not want the affair to become a *casus belli* with Turkey, Perast attacked Ulcinj to free the woman from the harem. As a punishment, the Republic took away its privileges from Perast.<sup>20</sup> The rise of economic growth of Prčanj and Dobrota occurred because trade concessions with the Albanian coast moved from Perast into their hands.

The most intense intertwining of cultures, but also a tragic erasing of the memory of the Other, is found in the city of Bar, on the south of the Montenegrin coast. Bar, the center of the bishopric from the eighth and the archbishopric from the eleventh century, was a strong economic and cultural center of the medieval state of Zeta and the Serbian Nemanjić's state, a link between the hinterland and overseas elements. In 1443 Bar was conquered by the Venetians and in 1571 by the Turks.<sup>21</sup> After the Congress of Berlin in 1878, at which time it attained the status of a state, Montenegro won the city. Then the city was nearly destroyed in an explosion of gunpowder caused by the Montenegrin army (see below).

Old Bar, surrounded by walls, had a vast number of churches. Most prominent among them was the cathedral of St. George, a thirteenth-century three-aisled basilica,

19 M. Milošević, *Pomorski trgovci, ratnici i mecene*, pp. 313-346.

20 P. Butorac, "Grilova afera 1747", u: *Kotor i Boka Kotorska*, prelistak iz *Nove Evrope*, Zagreb 1934.

21 M. Šufflay, *Städte und Burgen Albaniens hauptsächlich während des Mittelalters*, Wien und Leipzig 1924; Г. Станојевић, "Услови примања млетачке власти града Бара 1443", *Историјски часопис* 76 (1956), pp. 207-213; И. Божић, *Немирно Поморје XV века*, Београд 1979; S. Ćirković, B. Hrabak, N. Damjanović, Đ. Vujović, L. Živković, *Bar: Grad pod Rumijom*, Bar 1984; T. Bošković, *Bar pod mletačkom vlašću (1443-1571)*, Bijelo Polje 2004.

built on the foundations of a ninth-century church.<sup>22</sup> Holy places attract population with their energy and memory. So, the Turks converted that church into Ahmed beg's mosque (called Londža). The Montenegrin army turned the mosque into a gunpowder storage site, which was completely destroyed in the explosion of 1881. It was the same with the church of St. Nicholas, which was raised in 1288 by Queen Jelena, wife of the Serbian king Uroš I. The church, which belonged to the Franciscan order, was converted into a mosque. The mosque was demolished in an explosion of gunpowder. The same fate befell the church of Saint Mark, adapted into the mosque of Sultan Murat III, which was destroyed in an explosion. The war of liberation ruined many mosques in Bar: Sultan Selim's (built in 1571-74), Derviš Hasan (built in 1714), Škanjevića mosque (built in mid-eighteenth century) with its minaret restored in 2006, Pazarska mosque, and more. The only one preserved is Omer-bašića mosque, with a fountain and the turbe of the Šejh Hasa, built in 1612, on site of the grave of one of the most famous Muslim missionaries in the area, which was a sacred place of great power.<sup>23</sup>

In Bar we can see how the Turks were great builders and city planners. In the seventeenth century they built a large bath (*amam*) using water coming from the Rumija Mountain through a viaduct on the north side of town. The aqueduct, a great architectural undertaking, was destroyed by an earthquake in 1979, but has been renovated and continues to serve its primary purpose. The Turks built the tower clock, gunpowder storage, and the bazar—the trade zone and cross-cultural heart of the city, with its ambient physiognomy shaped by centuries.

Very intense intertwining of cultures is also found in the port of Ulcinj, which was part of the Ottoman Empire from 1571 until the 1878. The most famous resident of the city was Sabbatai Zevi, Sephardi rabbi and kabbalist, who claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Historians seem to agree that in 1673 he was exiled by the Turkish sultan from Constantinople to Ulcinj, where he died, according to some accounts, on September 17, 1676. The tomb of Sabbatai Zevi may be there, although another theory that claims that he died in Berat, Albania.<sup>24</sup>

22 Ђ. Бошковић, *Стари Бар*, Београд 1962; П. Мијовић, *Вирпазар – Бар – Улицњ, Цетиње – Београд* 1979, pp. 11-57.

23 About mosques in Bar, see B. Agović, *Džamije u Crnoj Gori*, pp. 191-224.

24 Gershom Gerhard Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626-1676*, Princeton 1973, p. 921; Paul Fenton, "The tomb of the Messiah of Ishmael" [in Hebrew], *Pe'atim* 25 (1985), pp. 13-39.

In Ulcinj, a living legend relates that Miguel Cervantes lived there as a prisoner for five years. Apparently, the name of Don Quixote's love, Dulcinea, is inspired by the name of the city, Dulcinjo. According to legend, after the Battle of Lepanto in 1571, the famous writer had somehow passed into the hands of an Ulcinj pirate, Unuč Halija. Scholars claim that Cervantes served in the Spanish fleet, was wounded at the Battle of Lepanto, and captured by Algerian pirates. However, Ulcinj's legend was created as the manifestation of a cross spinning of stories about Ulcinj and Algerian pirates, often allies in fighting and looting. Its construction is common and attests to the interfusion of the Mediterranean world, regardless of religion.

Over centuries, popular piety united people of different religions. Orthodox, Catholics and Muslims from that region, where olives are grown, made a pilgrimage to the Church of Saint Nicholas in the nearby village of Zupci, because of the miracle-working figure of St. Nicholas, made out of olive wood, which probably dates to the sixteenth century. The neighboring monastery of Ratac, built in the eleventh century by the Benedictines, became the most prominent focus of pilgrimage in the wider area thanks to its miracle-working icon of the Virgin and its famous fair which united Catholics, Orthodox, and Muslims.<sup>25</sup>

In this paper I wanted to point out one possible way of studying, understanding, and arranging the problems related to different cultures, confessions, faith, and their intertwining on the Montenegrin Adriatic coast. The great effort needed to uncover and determine the facts about the life, identity, culture, and visual culture of non-Christians awaits the historians, art historians, and archaeologists.

25 M. Šufflay, *Srbi i Arbanasi. Njihova simbioza u srednjem vijeku*, Sarajevo 1990 (Beograd 1925), p. 103.