

Valentina Šoštarić, *Dubrovački poklisari: u potrazi za novim teritorijima [Ragusan Envoys: in Search of New Territories]*, Zadar: University of Zadar, 2021, 287 p.

The book *Dubrovački poklisari: u potrazi za novim teritorijima* by Valentina Šoštarić was published in 2021 by the University of Zadar. The author is an associate professor at the Department of History of the University of Zadar. Valentina Šoštarić is the author of a number of scientific papers focused on the history of Dubrovnik's diplomatic practice, and to a lesser extent on certain problems in the field of medieval history of religion. The starting points for the creation of this book are contained in a doctoral dissertation entitled "*Uloga poklisara u širenju teritorija Dubrovačke Republike na zaleđe (krajem 14. i početkom 15. stoljeća)*" defended at the University of Zagreb in 2012. Within the dissertation, the author analyzed the activities of envoys who stood out in the process of acquiring new territories for the Republic of Ragusa. The book covers a wide range of Ragusan diplomatic practice in the last years of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century. The study is chronologically bounded by the negotiations of the Ragusan authorities with the Bosnian king Stjepan Ostoja over the ceding of Primorje in 1399 and it stretches until the end of the war between the Republic of Ragusa and Duke Stjepan Kosača in 1454. It is important to point out that even before this period, during the 14th century, there were ambitions, attempts and successes in expanding the Ragusan state territory inland. The book is based on the sources of the Dubrovnik State Archives, especially on the funds that contain the decisions of the three Ragusan councils, letters and instructions to the Ragusan envoys, and the book of the Ragusan notary. This publication is a refreshment on the regional historiographical scene with regard to the methodological approach to the presentation of the planned thematic framework that follows modern medievalist methodological principles.

The book is divided into eight thematic sections that describe a wide range of activities of envoys such as the selection of an adequate person for a

mission, the selection of diplomats, instructions, reports, scope of authority, costs, entourage, time limits of missions, ceremonies and rituals, receiving gifts, courier services, sending information, moral values, and expressions of emotions. The thematic chapter entitled “Poklisari - Pandan vlasti” (31-77) describes diplomats as authorized representatives of the Ragusan authorities in the negotiations on the acquisition of new territories. In this segment, the author seeks to determine the methodology for selecting envoys for a particular type of diplomatic mission. These decisions were made in the Grand Council, the most prominent nobles were elected for important missions, while commoners could be elected for the less important ones. The councilors proposed nobles who held a considerable social and political reputation at that time. The envoys progressed from less important to more important and complex functions, such as the one of an envoy. It was expected that a potential envoy is a good connoisseur of the circumstances in which he lives, political situation, history, traditions and customs of the state to which he is sent, that he knows human psychology, diplomatic ceremonies, that he has strong oral skills, and that he is adorned with wisdom, prudence, diligence, loyalty, determination, and readiness. The listed elements ultimately make an ideal envoy from the perspective of the Ragusan authorities. The average age of envoys, entrusted with the task of holding missions related to the acquisition of new territories, was 51. For refusing certain diplomatic missions there was a fine higher than the salary for this job, while in certain cases, for refusing to go on a mission, exile from Ragusa to Mljet or Ston was envisaged. The families Gundulić, Rastić, Đorđo, Gučetić, Sorkočević, Bunić were the most represented in the diplomatic missions of the territorial expansion of the city, while the others didn't participate as much. There have been cases in which important missions, such as activities for the purchase of territories in the hinterland, frequently repeat the election of the same persons and their successors, as well as the established practice that only one person leads missions for a certain ruler and noble for many years. All these principles were created gradually and purposefully, so that the diplomatic efficiency of the Republic of Ragusa would be at the highest possible level.

The chapter “Razvoj službe” (79-99) describes the transition of procurators, which clearly defined the framework of action towards orators and ambassadors who had a much greater degree of autonomy in deciding how to achieve results in a given job. The autonomy of the envoys’ activities grew over time. The analysis of decisions on missions related to the expansion of Ragusan territory leads to the conclusion that the initial short-term missions with only one goal became longer, and meant that the envoy stays or accompanies the ruler or noble for a longer period of time and reports to the authorities during the mission while receiving new instructions. This process certainly led to the fact that later envoys became more expensive, sometimes even additional money was sent to the envoys from Ragusa. The number of envoys and entourage in one mission did not change over time, it was defined from case to case, and the parameters that decided on it depended on the importance of the ruler or noble to whom they were sent, the importance of the mission, the distance of the court.

Through the chapter “Ceremonijalni značaj poslanstva” (101-114) the author determines the elements of ceremonial practice which is reflected in the composition and number of members, equipment, clothing of envoys, their farewell and return obligations, culture of behavior at home, gifts sent, the official speech of the envoy, non-verbal communication, and the place of reception of the foreign envoy. Available sources enable monitoring of the process from the preparatory actions for the departure of the mission to the moment of dismissal and gratitude for the duty performed. The chapter “Jezik poklona” (115-137) discusses the gift giving practice that conveyed numerous and multi-layered messages about the relations between the parties in the negotiation, the importance of the goal and diplomatic mission, the relationship between the gift giver and the receiver, it also served as a special means of persuasion, showing special respect and ambition to achieve the planned state and diplomatic results. Gift giving has been established in European diplomatic practice to the extent of obligation. Diplomatic gifts were divided into status benefits such as granting Ragusan aristocratic and civic status, and numerous material items such

as real estate, silverware, expensive fabrics, groceries or money. Gifting in Ragusan diplomatic practice included a wider range of people who could in any way influence the reaching of an agreement that was in their interest.

In the chapter “Komunikacija” (139-169), the author states that various forms of communication have become the most important activity in the process of diplomatic negotiations on the expansion of Ragusan borders. The most important information in the process of communication was transmitted verbally and those for historical science represent lost sources. The letters and instructions of the authorities to the envoys are the basis for studying their communication, but also diplomatic activities in general. Written reports of the authorities to the envoys have not been preserved, their reflection has been preserved through the authorities’ response, so in this case we are talking about one-way communication. The instructions were written in vernacular Italian, while the decisions on compiling the instructions were recorded in Latin. In this chapter, the author discusses the issues of the courier service established for the needs of diplomatic missions, couriers were the basic chain in communication and timely supply of authorities and missions with new information and instructions. Their journeys were demanding, difficult, time consuming and dangerous. Sometimes, due to various reasons, there was a delay in providing information, sometimes the chain was forcibly interrupted by foreigners, and sometimes the Ragusan authorities themselves delayed providing instructions to resolve the current confusing situation on the ground.

The chapter “Vrijednost informacija” (171-181) tells us that the value of information was extremely high for adequate instructions to the envoys who were negotiating the expansion of the territory. The authorities often stressed to the elected envoys the importance of as comprehensive reports as possible. In this regard, they advised the envoys to stay close to the ruler or noble at whose court they were staying, and to attend all the meetings and talks that would take place there. The frequently collected information was shared by the Ragusan authorities with their allies, creating a kind of

communication network. Envoys had to have a pronounced sense of lying and hiding information in the courts to which they were referred. The great importance of information is also indicated by the examples when the most important information was encrypted, stolen from envoys, bought and sold.

The chapter “Društvene mreže” (183-211) gives us information about social networks. In the context of this study, the author views social networks as complex, single or multiple connections among members of a defined group whose connection differs in the degree of formality. The Ragusan diplomatic network developed at the beginning of the 15th century, with the aim of expanding state territories, it included their suzerain King Sigismund, Bosnian kings Ostoja and Tvrtko II, and nobles Radič Sanković, Hrvoje Vukčić, Sandalj Hranić and Radoslav Pavlović. These were people who, with their position and strength on the ground, could be adequate factors for the realization of the Ragusan expansion plans. The author analyzes the diplomatic approach of the Ragusan authorities towards these political figures, which they try to present as friendly connections, and often in their statements they point out to one of them that they are doing business with him out of love, and with others for their own survival. Especially good places for building a communication network were the centers where the largest amount of information was accumulated, such as the courts of the Bosnian and Hungarian kings and the Ottoman sultan. Participation in the wider communication network sometimes led the Ragusan nobles and envoys to enter the service of certain hosts after learning about the opportunities there. The authorities viewed such nobles as a valuable source of information from a particular territory. It was also not uncommon for envoys of a ruler and noble to be engaged in a mission together with the Ragusan envoys to help them understand the customs, traditions and current political situation of the ruler to whom they were addressed.

The chapter “Emocije u diplomatiji” (223-243) tells about emotions in diplomacy. The author sees emotions in diplomacy through various factors such as who, when, where, to whom and why expresses feelings, and how

these expressions of emotions influenced the behavior of the parties involved in the negotiations. These are so-called diplomatic emotions that did not have much contact with the real human feelings of the party that expresses them, but the goal was to somehow soften the other side in the negotiations. This practice was often used by the Ragusan authorities in their instructions to their envoys, but there is a lack of knowledge about the effect of these expressions of emotions. Some of the basic emotions expressed in the instructions to the Ragusan envoys are: hope and faith in a certain person, gratitude, love, contentment, happiness, joy, jealousy, dissatisfaction, anger, fear, shame, pain, hopelessness, sadness, compassion, envy and anxiety.

Professor Valentina Šoštarić's book is not only a study of envoys who were engaged in diplomatic missions related to the territorial expansion of the Republic, but this is an approach that offers a large amount of hitherto unknown and scattered information about the diplomatic practice of the Republic of Ragusa. It is a book that was missing and for which every medievalist in this part of Europe had a blank space on its shelf. The author tries to compare the Ragusan model of envoy missions with those principles witnessed in Venice and Florence, she uses extensive literature to follow the established principles of European diplomatic practice at the time and thus brings readers closer to the basic lines from the research of many scholars. For the purposes of this study, a large number of archival documents were used, which required special effort, commitment and skills inherent in working on medieval sources. The successfully processed thematic framework of data processing on Ragusan envoys who aimed to negotiate the expansion of Ragusan territories became the basic starting point for a comprehensive study of Ragusan diplomacy in the Middle Ages.

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