



This paper intends to present the F. R. Carter's book and the history of the aristocratic republic of Dubrovnik and its relationship with the Turks up to the beginning of the 18th century. The paper consists of three parts. The Introduction provides general information about the Republic of Dubrovnik. The second part provides short overview of its history with an emphasis on the relationship with Ottoman Empire. The second part also discusses the status as a vassal state held by Dubrovnik arguing that the special status they enjoyed during the time interval 1400-1700 had few important causes. The main causes consisted in: the geographical position, the trade interests of both the Ottomans and Christian powers and the wise diplomacy of the Ragusan leadership/government who knew how to obtain a privileged position between the two sides. The last part briefly discusses the main ideas and concepts promoted in Carter's book.¹

Introduction: Dubrovnik a city-state

Dubrovnik is a port city situated on a southern end of the eastern Adriatic coast. Originally the city was built on a small island (Astarea). Later it expanded and annexed the surrounding territory that connected it to the mainland. The origins of the city date from the Antiquity, but it was in the early medieval era, in the times of the Slavic conquest of Balkan Peninsula, when there appeared information about the city. Nevertheless, even if the Romanic population most likely founded the city, by the 12th century the Slavic component was dominant, and the city grew to have a Slavic character.

Throughout the centuries, the city annexed adjacent territories and created a political unit. Thus formed, the City-State of Dubrovnik developed into an aristocratic Republic with internal an organization over the time. It became most similar to those of other Adriatic Republics, such as Venice, etc. Dubrovnik is the Slavic name, and Ragusa its Italian one. Although both forms were used, most of the official documents recorded only Ragusa, or similar names such as Rausa or Raugia. The inhabitants were known as Ragusans,

In spite of being a second rate Adriatic port (in comparison to Venice), Dubrovnik's function as a mediator between large regions of the Balkans and Levant, and regions of western Europe respectively, managed to assure its growth and prosperity.²

The Turkish-Ragusan Relationship Before 1500

In spite of military efforts- engaged by the Christian powers – the Ottomans conquered the Balkan Peninsula in the 14th and 15th century and disrupted Ragusan economic and trade network.³ Moreover, the dissolution of Hungarian Kingdom after the battle of Mohacs, changed the 'external' policy of the city. The Turkish-Ragusan relationship closely followed the rise in Ottoman power. The emergence of this new power in the Balkans hinterland and the inability of Hungarian Kings to secure the further existence of the Republic re-oriented the policy toward the Turks. In order to assure its independent existence and economic interests, Dubrovnik established some relationships with the new Turkish State. The first official contact was in 1392, when the Ottomans conquered the surrounding land. After this, the Ragusan relationships were followed by permission given in 1397 to trade and settle in Ottoman territories freely. Later it was enforced by Sultan Murad's Charter of 1430. Still, this charter did not provide Ragusan merchants with special privileges, nor did it put Dubrovnik

¹ Francis W. Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) a Classic City State* (London and New York: Seminar Press, 1972). The *Introduction* of the book states that SSEES was gathering scholars E, SE, and Central Europe and from different research discipline in order to teach the students history, geography, law, economic and other social sciences. The book was written in this stream. Carter was a professor in the department of geography at UCL and SSEES.

² *Ibid.* pp.548-552.

³ For the scale of Ragusan Balkan trade before Ottoman conquest see Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) a Classic City-State*, pp. 214-284.

in any kind of political dependency toward the Porte. Its contents only regarded the protection of merchants and freedom of trade.⁴

The Turkish invasion of Serbian Despotate in 1439 and the fall of Smederevo, led to further demands by the Sultan regarding Dubrovnik: submission and payment of an annual tribute. After long negotiations, in 1448 the Republic was placed under Ottoman protection, and an annual tribute was negotiated at 1,500 ducats. In return, the Ragusan state received political protection and economic privileges.⁵ Although the Christian counter offensive of 1444 nullified this agreement, in 1458 Dubrovnik was forced to resume its vassal status. This time the tribute was set at 1,500 ducats. Furthermore Christian defeats also brought with them a rise in tribute, 1469 (fall of Bosnia in 1463) to 5,000. The highest tribute (15,000 ducats) registered in 1480.⁶ After the death of Mehmed the Conqueror, and ascendancy of a new Sultan Bayazid, favorable to Ragusans, in 1481 the tribute was finally settled at 12,500 ducats, an amount to be paid by the Republic until 1703.⁷ This increase in tribute can be compared with the tribute paid by the Romanian principalities in the same period that experienced the same demand at the end of the 15th century.

The last two decades of the 15th century brought radical improvements to the Turkish-Ragusan relationships due to Venetian aggressive attitude towards the Ottomans. The Ragusan leadership looked for the protection of the Ottoman Turks in order to avoid Venetian assaults and to benefit from the economic perspectives offered by the Ottoman Empire. The pro-Turkish attitude, dominated, with short interruptions, Dubrovnik's policy until the 18th century. It also seems that in the 14th and in the 15th century the Ottomans preferred to have vassal states, which could be transformed into Turkish provinces. This was the case of the two Romanian Principalities and of Transylvania, too. The anti-Ottoman resistance performed by Moldavia and Wallachia, the threat coming from the Hungarian kingdom and Poland determined the Ottomans to consider this vassalage system applicable to some provinces. There also existed a second interest to shape this policy. The Ottomans who permanently had to face the aggressiveness of the Christians preferred to use the strategic position of Dubrovnik in order to secure the trade outlet on the Adriatic for the Balkans.⁸ The presence of merchants had good contacts both with Christian and Muslim world. The trade became a source of income for the Ottoman State. The trade stimulated production and enabled the population to pay their taxes. Therefore in-between the 15th and the 16th century, following improvements in political relations with Ottoman State, Dubrovnik merchants began rebuilding their lost trade "empire". Furthermore, the Ottoman conquest of Syria (1516) and Egypt (1517) opened these new, rich markets to Ragusan merchants. Consequently, they bound even more the Republic to its new protector.

The Republic of Dubrovnik between 1500-1700

The 16th century was a period in which the Ottomans were expanding in Central Europe on the direction of Istanbul - Adrianopol – Sofia - Belgrade – Buda – Vienna.⁹ The Ottomans managed to conquer a part of Hungary, made Transylvania independent principal vassal to the Turks, and conquered other territories. Despite its being an Ottoman vassal state (from 1458), and since 1526 only nominally under the Habsburg' sovereignty, as Kings of Hungary, Dubrovnik managed to have a distinct position. The city functioned as a quasi-independent, self-governing state, which tried to maintain a 'neutrality' between Christians and Ottomans. This position was strengthened by the 17th century although they had to pay large amounts of money to both parts in order to preserve it.

The neutrality was accepted due to the mediator of the Ragusan merchants played between the West and the East. This was a special case, during a time of major wars (1538-1540 and 1570-1573), when acting as a

⁴ Information provided by Domagoj Mandunic

⁵ Information provided by Domagoj Mandunic: Economic privileges granted to Ragusan merchants by charter of 1442. Included: 2% tax on sold goods, Ragusan subjects were to be tried by their own judges by their own laws and in case of death of Ragusan merchant in sultan lands, his property will be assigned to the Dubrovnik government, and not to the sultan.

⁶ The tribute was raises in 1471 at 10,000; 1477 at 12,500;

⁷ This rises in tribute reflected Dubrovnik involvement in various, anti Turkish activities, like, giving asylum to *Skender-Beg* (1461), crusading plots with Pope Pius II (1463), participation in defense of Venetian *Scutari* (1471) etc.

⁸ Sugar p. 173.

⁹ Murgescu, p. 144.

neutral state, and enjoying a privileged position within the Ottoman Empire. Dubrovnik in the 16th and most part of 17th century enjoyed the times of prosperity and wealth. During those times, Ragusan trade and shipping flourished, mainly at the expense of the Venetian. This constituted one of the main reasons for the constant animosities and competition between them. In spite of this, the Venetians were compelled to accept the raise of the Ragusan trade. In this way, they could also trade despite the interdiction put by the Ottomans to their ships.

Due to the wars between Venice and later the Christian League and the Ottomans, the period 1542-1572 was called the golden age of Dubrovnik. A network of Dubrovnik consular office (50) covered the whole Mediterranean, and its merchant colonies spread all over the Balkan Peninsula. The worth of the Ragusan trade navy, at its height in the 1570's, is estimated at 180 ships, a total of 800,000 ducats. English merchant shipping in 1582 is estimated at 76,000 tons, while that of the Dubrovnik is estimated at 40,000 tons.¹⁰

Dubrovnik's commercial structure changed despite all this prosperity. Both a shift in major trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and also a penetration of new great maritime powers Dutch, England and France in the Mediterranean brought along the changes in global economic trends. Their slow conquest of the Levant trade, compelled both Venice and Dubrovnik to gradually retreat from Mediterranean markets. In an effort to compensate for their losses Ragusan merchants concentrated on their Balkan trade. Then they started to withdraw from trade entirely and invest their wealth in more secure investments such as Italian banks and religious foundations. The Ragusan trade navy mainly engaged in transport activity for other merchants who now faced the ruthless competition of the northern maritime powers.

The Republic's prosperity was mainly during wars (especially 1645-1669 and 1683-1699). One of the most crucial events in the history of Dubrovnik overshadowed this prosperity: "The great earthquake" of 9th April 1667. Not only did it result in the immediate destruction of almost the entire city but also in the death of one third of population. Furthermore it was followed by a political crisis with the Venetians and the Turks that crippled the Republic's economic positions. Although over the next few decades, the city was successfully rebuilt, and its relationship with Ottoman Empire normalized, by 1700 the age of Mediterranean City republics declined.¹¹ Dubrovnik's economic and political decline is revealed by the fluctuations in the number of consuls maintained by the city-state. During the second half of the 16th century, at the peak of its power the Republic maintained more than 60 consuls, at the beginning of 17th century, their number decreased to 30, and in 1660 only eight remained.

Throughout the entire 18th century two major trends are noticed. First, a persistent decline in Dubrovnik Balkan trade began in the first few decades, and secondly, the revival of its merchant navy beginning in the middle of the century. The Reasons for the first was the global decline of the Ottoman economy and the increasing competition of foreign merchants such as the Venetians, Austrians and the French in the Balkan trade.

A revival of Dubrovnik maritime power and accompanying consular offices, was a direct consequence of the positive Mediterranean conjecture. It was produced by frequent European wars in the second half of the century, and the opening of the Black Sea grain market after 1774. Dubrovnik began to capitalize on its independence, and Ottoman protection, in order to take over shipping from the warring parties (France and England). By 1806 Dubrovnik again maintained about 70 consular offices and the size of its merchant fleet reached its highest level ever, 280 long distance ships.¹² During the period of 1793-1806 when all European powers were engaged in a conflict, Dubrovnik's ships completely dominated Mediterranean shipping, producing enormous revenues. All of these, however, were just the consequences of positive trends, on which the Republic had no influence at all. The disappearance of these trends marked Dubrovnik's decline and brought along the loss of its importance as a major Levantine trade center. This repercussion can best be confirmed by the fact that a majority of the Ragusan ships seldom visited their homeport, Livorno, Alexandria and Black Sea being their favored destinations.

The destiny of Dubrovnik – as to the other vassal states – was dependent on the economic interests of the great powers. A slow decline in power of the Ottoman Empire, and its consequent opening to the merchants

¹⁰ Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) a Classic City State*, p. 392.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) a Classic City State*, pp. 421-442.

from other western powers diminished the position of the Ragusan trade. Moreover, the Habsburgs' ambition to incorporate the city (as Hungarian Kings) put an end of the existence of the republic.

The book that was the basis of this presentation reflects the author's geographical specialisation. The geographical determinism and the idea of the economic influence upon the development of a territory can be the main trend. I argue that attention was drawn upon the city of Dubrovnik and to the former importance of the republic. This is due to its unique position, not only as a geographical unit, but also as a political unit. Moreover, the book is built on a concept: the concept of 'city state'¹³ or the sea – state. Carter, sometimes, deals with a second concept (sea-state¹⁴) used as an alternative for the first one. On the first concept, *State* because the Republic was quasi-independent, possessed a small territory and was dependent on commerce. Finally the concept of city–state prevails and the book is entitled *Dubrovnik a Classical City –State*. The entire book is built on the idea of underlining the uniqueness of Dubrovnik, which nowadays is situated on the Croatian's coast, isolated and dependent on tourism. The situation was reversed in Middle Ages. As a republic, it developed mainly due to its function as trade and political mediator between underdeveloped regions of the Balkans and Levant

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¹³ Carter defined the city state such as the city state a state not too large to prevent its government through the assembled body of citizens and is applied not to place but to whole body of republic

¹⁴ He defines the sea-state such as: a state that established trading posts and strategic colonies at convenient points along the shore ... combined the uses of economic and political power, and united its ports another by the strong persuasion of trading facilities. Such as a (sea) state could therefore govern itself without excessive decentralisation. To this extent it was stronger than feudal land-state of the age. The significant examples are Greece, Denmark, Sweden, Anglo-Normand state, Aragon Byzantine Empire etc. Genoa and Venice