

## EARLY OTTOMAN EXPANSION TO POLJICA: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POLITICAL DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ELITE

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**Abstract:** The late medieval Croatian community of lesser nobility in Poljica found itself in the middle of a struggle between Mediterranean empires and powers. Changing sides and the recognition of Venetian, Hungarian (latter Hasburg), or Ottoman suzerainty was used to affirm the power and position of the ruling elite within the community and to gain an advantage in disputes with neighbouring urban communes of Split and Omiš. The early composition of the ruling elite within Poljica and the relation between the two complementing legitimization platforms of *didici* and *vlasteličici* nobility is not fully deductible from the existing sources. When Venice became the suzerain of Poljica in 1444 the customary law was recorded in a written statute (*Poljički statut*) but it does not inform us about the legal procedures and hierarchical relations that were undisputed. This debate strives to deduct some of those relations from the specific situation that emerged at the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when the community of Poljica balanced between Venetian and Ottoman rule. When compared with sources of Venetian origin the data about the *nahiye* of Poljica from the *defter* of *vlaachs* in Hercegovina from 1497/8 (TD 987) show many unexpected discrepancies. It is possible to conclude that this *defter* encompassed only a part of the population within Poljica and that there were two parallel hierarchies within the commune, one loyal to the

Ottomans (with Radoš Kostanjić as *veliki knez*) and another loyal to Venice (with Marijan Gregolić as *veliki knez*). Venetian sources confirm this on many occasions in the following two decades. One part of the nobility had maintained good relations with the Ottoman frontier elite within the *Sanjak* of Hercegovina. They were relatives of many high-ranking officials including some *sanjak-beys* and certain nobles from Poljica that converted to Islam and reached the ranks of *vojvodas*. On the other hand, Poljica were essential for the defense and security of the area between Split and Omiš so the Venetians sent repeated gifts and salaries to the elite in Poljica in order to control them. Such attempts had only a temporary effect because the territory of Poljica was very exposed to the Ottoman attacks and harassment. The littoral part of the community of Poljica seems to have been more inclined toward Venice while the hinterland was more inclined towards making arrangements with the Ottomans. Around 1514, Poljica fully accepted Ottoman suzerainty. Subsequently, attempts to change allegiance were repeatedly made but after the Ottoman conquest of Klis in 1537 and the end of hostilities between Venice and the Ottomans in 1540, Poljica remained under the Ottoman rule for a longer period of time. The Ottomans had no (political or religious) interest to interfere in social relations within Poljica and tax exemptions were applied to those members of the elite that performed duties within the hierarchy of the *nahiye* of Poljica. The population, in general, was obliged to pay *resm-i filori*, and in that way, *vlach* status was applied to Poljica in accordance with the Ottoman practice of *istimalet* that allowed flexibility between expansion, defense, and control for the expanding Ottoman Empire.

**Keywords:** Poljica, lesser nobility, elite, suzerainty, Venetian Republic, Ottoman Empire, double allegiance.

**Apstrakt:** Kasnosrednjovjekovna hrvatska sitnoplemićka općina Poljica zatekla se je usred odmjeravanja snaga sredozemnih imperija i sila. Prilikom mijenjanja strana, priznavanje mletačkoga, ugarskog (kasnije habsburškog) ili osmanskog sizerenstva korišteno je za učvršćivanje moći i položaja vladajuće elite unutar te općine, kao i za stjecanje prednosti u sporovima sa susjednim gradskim komunama Splita i Omiša. Postojeći izvori ne omogućavaju nam da u potpunosti dokučimo rani sastav vladajuće elite unutar Poljica i odnose između dviju plemićkih legitimizirajućih platformi “didića” i “vlasteličića”. Prilikom uspostave mletačkog sizerenstva nad Poljicima običajno pravo zabilježeno je u pisanom statutu (Poljički statut

iz 1444. godine), ali nas taj izvor ne informira o pravnim postupcima i hijerarhijskim odnosima oko kojih nije bilo nikakvih prijevora. Ova rasprava nastoji dokučiti te odnose iz specifične situacije koja je nastala na prijelazu s 15. u 16. stoljeće kada je poljička općina balansirala između mletačke i osmanske vladavine. Usporedba podataka o nahiji Poljica iz deftera vlaha Hercegovačkog sandžaka iz 1497/8 (TD 987) s mletačkim izvorima otkriva mnoge neočekivane proturječnosti. Može se zaključiti kako je ovaj defter obuhvatio samo dio stanovništva Poljica te da je u tom trenutku postojala dvostruka hijerarhija unutar općine, jedna lojalna Osmanlijama (s Radošem Kostanjićem kao velikim knezom) te druga lojalna Veneciji (s Marijanom Gregolićem kao velikim knezom). U mnogim situacijama kroz sljedeća dva desetljeća mletački izvori upućuju na takav zaljučak. Jedan dio plemstva održavao je bliske odnose s osmanskim pograničnom elitom iz Hercegovačkog sandžaka. Bili su u rodbinskim odnosima s više visokopozicioniranih dužnosnika uključujući neke sandžakbegove, a određeni plemići iz Poljica preobratali su se na islam i dosegli rang vojvoda u sandžačkoj hijerarhiji. S druge su strane Poljica bila ključna za obranu i sigurnost područja između Splita i Omiša, tako da su Mlečani opetovano slali darove i plaće poljičkoj eliti radi održavanja kontrole nad njima. Takvi su pokušaji imali samo privremen učinak zato što su Poljica bila posve izložena osmanskim napadima i uznemiravanju. Čini se da je primorski dio općine Poljica bio naklonjeniji Veneciji, a da je zaleđe bilo naklonjenije nagodbi s Osmanlijama. Poljica su oko 1514. godine u potpunosti prihvatila osmansko sizerenstvo. Iako su i kasnije postojali čak i donekle uspješni pokušaji promjene pripadnosti konačno je poslije osmanskog osvajanja Klisa 1537. godine i mletačko-osmanskog mirovnog sporazuma iz 1540. godine nastupilo razdoblje dugotrajne osmanske vlasti nad Poljicima. Osmanlije nisu imali (političkog ili vjerskog) interesa da se miješaju u društvene odnose unutar Poljica tako da su pripadnici lokalne elite, koji su obnašali dužnosti u hijerarhiji nahije Poljica, bili izuzeti od plaćanja poreza. Preostalo stanovništvo dobilo je dužnost plaćanja filurije te su time Poljica dobila (poluprivilegirani) vlaški status, u skladu s osmanskim politikom istimaleta, koja je omogućavala fleksibilnost između ekspanzije, obrane i kontrole za rastuće Osmansko Carstvo.

**Ključne riječi:** Poljica, sitno plemstvo, elita, sizerenstvo, Mletačka Republika, Osmansko Carstvo, dvostruka odanost.

Poljica is one of the historical regions in Croatia that has drawn the attention of subsequent historiographical generations. It was located in the southern part of medieval Croatia<sup>1</sup> in the County of Klis.<sup>2</sup> During the early and high Middle Ages, it was attached to various emerging feudal powers with an unknown status but it finally emerged as a separate commune of lesser nobility in the late medieval period. The exact process is not fully documented and is still a matter of debate.<sup>3</sup> Customary law must have had a great role in the process, and the final recording of it in a statute in 1444 is regarded as the peak of indigenous social development.<sup>4</sup> The Statute of Poljica (*Poljički statut*) codified a wide range of relations between individuals and groups, and the way in which regulations should be applied. It was a fusion of two legitimization platforms, one from a group of indigenous noble clans (Croatian term is *rodovsko plemstvo*) called *didići* and another from a group of indigenous lower nobility called *vlasteličići* or *ugričići* descended from Juraj Dražojević<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bear in mind that medieval Croatia had a different geographical position and shape compared to modern Croatia. The fact that the Ottomans conquered the center and the major part of medieval Croatia resulted in the shift of the political center towards the north to Zagreb and the final integration of medieval Croatia and Slavonia into one political unit. This is the most important fact in Croatian history but it is, alas, often neglected or forgotten even in the school curriculum in Croatia. Usage of the stretchable term Croatian lands, which encompasses all the historic regions of Croatia, augments this problem because it generates a false impression of a unified historic development and fate. That is a problem present in many works done from national perspectives in various European countries for their respective narratives.

<sup>2</sup> Lovre Katić, "Veza primorske Dalmacije kroz kliški prolaz od prehistorije do pada Venecije," *Starine*, Zagreb: HAZU, 1962, n. 51, 267-434; Michael Ursinus: "From Pre-Conquest Klis to Post-Conquest Landholding Issues," *Südost-Forschungen*, Regensburg: Leibniz-Institut für ost- und südost- Europaforschung, 2018, no. 77, 236-252.

<sup>3</sup> The best reviews of this problem are in: Ivan Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi Poljičani u XV veku," *Glas SANU*, Beograd: SANU, 1971, vol. CCLXXX, book 15, 67-102; Ante Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi u XIV. i XV. stoljeću*, Split: Književni krug, 2013; and Mihovil Barada, *Starohrvatska seoska zajednica. Rasprava o nekim odredbama Poljičkog statuta*, Zagreb: HAZU, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=49322> last access on 19th March 2021.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.enciklopedija.hr/natuknica.aspx?id=16213> last access on 19th March 2021; Radoslav Tomić, "Baština poljičko omiške obitelji Dražojević Jelić," *Peristil: zbornik radova za povijest umjetnosti*, Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti, 1984, vol. 27-28, no. 1, 185-192; Žarko Domljan, "Plemeniti rod Dražojevića-Jelića poljičkih," *Omiški ljetopis*, Omiš: Župa sv. Mihovila arkanđela u Omišu, 2008, vol. 4, 168-185.

and Juraj Rajčić. The Dražojević kindred is most likely descended from one branch of *didići* nobility that received royal grants while the Rajčić kindred migrated to Poljica after receiving a royal grant.<sup>6</sup> Two groups of nobility jointly performed all the duties in the administration and the judicial system but the leading role of *veliki knez* (i.e. the great count) usually remained in the hands of *vlasteličići*.<sup>7</sup> When in 1444 the community of Poljica accepted Venetian rule the Statute was diplomatically accepted and became the basis of all future arrangements regarding the community's autonomy.<sup>8</sup> Venetian supreme rule seems to have remained stable but it did not sever all the relations between Poljica and the Hungarian crown or the neighbouring Croatian kingdom within it.<sup>9</sup>

The development of society in Poljica was much researched but is still not fully clarified partially due to the fact that the Statute of Poljica was made through a compilation of texts and with subsequent extensions.<sup>10</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> Ante Laušić, *Postanak i razvitak Poljičke kneževine (do kraja XV. stoljeća)*, Split: Književni krug, 1991, 94-99.

<sup>7</sup> I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 77-81; Miroslav Pera, *Poljički statut*, Split: Književni krug, 1988, 185-198; A. Laušić, *Postanak i razvitak*, 141-147.

<sup>8</sup> I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 81-90; A. Laušić, *Postanak i razvitak*, 162-174; A. Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi*, 119-130; Alfons Pavić, *Prinosi povijesti Poljica*, Omiš-Priko: Društvo Poljičana "Sv. Jure", 2003, 9-22 and 37-39.

<sup>9</sup> The Community of Poljica is not mentioned in the Hungarian tax register for the Kingdom of Croatia from around 1500, but various grants have been made to members of nobility from the Community by the Hungarian crown in that period. The family of Žarko Dražojević is a good example for it had several possessions mentioned in that tax register. The royal grant made by king Mathias Corvin in 1480 is a great example of an attempt to attract the nobility of Poljica back to the rule of the Hungarian Crown. Vjekoslav Klaić, "Prilog za povijest Poljica u XV. stoljeću," *Vjesnik kraljevsko hrvatsko-slavonsko-dalmatinskog zemaljskog arhiva*, Zagreb: KHSDZA, 1914, no. XVI, 40-44; Josip Adamček-Ivan Kampuš, *Popisi i obračuni poreza u XV i XVI stoljeću*, Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu – Institut za hrvatsku povijest, 1976, 1-3; I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 67-76 and 87-90.

<sup>10</sup> The bibliography for this question is abundant. Here are some basic titles: M. Pera, *Poljički statut*; Vatroslav Jagić, *Statuta lingua croatica conscripta. Hrvatski pisani zakoni*, in: *Monumenta historico-iuridica Slavorum Meridionalium*, Zagreb: HAZU, 1890, no. 1, vol. IV; A. Laušić, *Postanak i razvitak*; A. Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi*; Stipe Kaštelan, *Povijesni ulomci iz bivše slobodne općine – republike Poljica*, Split: Leonova tiskara, 1940; Boris Dimitrijevič Grekov, *Die Alt-kroatische Republik Poljica. Studien zur Geschichte gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse der Poljica von 15. bis 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961; M. Barada, *Starohrvatska seoska zajednica*; M. P.

paragraphs of the Statute are organized thematically and not chronologically so it is impossible to know how old certain regulations are or whether they were a part of the original text. The analysis done by Ivan Božić shows that there were substantial variations in practice and such variations continued later.<sup>11</sup>

It is essential to analyse the evolution of the social order of the Community of Poljica and to note that the self-government of the Community of Poljica was not unusual within the lands of the Hungarian crown. In a land, without general legislation, closed communities lived according to customary law, acquired privileges, and general legal rules of the kingdom. Communities of lesser nobility had the right to make statutory provisions and exercise administrative authority (*ius statuendi*), to elect judges (*ius eligendi*) for their seats i.e. court (*sedes*). During the Angevin era, they were controlled by local or regional royal representatives (*župan* and *ban*), and when in the 15<sup>th</sup> century that power diminished their autonomy increased. But at the same time dangers increased because they were torn away from the inherited order and they were threatened to become prey to stronger neighbors. It is because of this threat that statutes were formally compiled in order to record potentially dangerous situations while the undisputed procedures, such as the election of village counts, were not formulated at all.<sup>12</sup> Even under Venetian rule, the Statute of Poljica was considered to be a part of Croatian judicial customs (*li observano el zudicar suo secondo Chervacia*).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in the case of Ottoman rule over Poljica, the new suzerains accepted and affirmed the existing medieval order<sup>14</sup> while in other

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Aleksejev, "Thomas More i Poljički statut. Odlomci iz rasprave "Slavenski izvori Utopije Thomasa Morea," *Poljički zbornik*, 1968, no. 1, 165-180; I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi".

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 67-102.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 96-100; Martyn Rady, Nobility, *Land and Service in Medieval Hungary*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 97-98; M. Barada, *Starohrvatska seoska zajednica*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> This was a representation of a general Ottoman policy. See: Mariya Kiprovskva, "Ferocious Invasion or Smooth Incorporation? Integrating the Established Balkan Military System into the Ottoman Army", in: *The Ottoman Conquest of the Balkans* (ed. Oliver Jens Schmidt), Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2016, 79-102. The Ottomans usually accepted the

regions of Croatia it was generally obliterated and it was only by a bizarre fact that the custom was translated to the terminology used by the Vlachs<sup>15</sup> in the medieval and Ottoman era.

### **The origin of noble organization in Poljica and Ottoman adaptation of Vlach status to Poljica**

This article intends to investigate the relation between lesser noble structures and the introduction of the so-called vlach hierarchy that followed the establishment of Ottoman rule over Poljica. Ivan Božić analyzed the question of “noble people” in Poljica and, even today, the composition of the elite remains an important question. The hierarchical structure of Poljica municipality was accepted by the supreme state rule of the Venetian Republic, Hungarian Kingdom, and Ottoman Empire so that through the process of acknowledging suzerainty the elite acquired the recognition of their position by gaining formal privileges. With time the differences between the two noble groups melted and remained clearly visible only in the elections for the *veliki knez* of Poljica who had to belong to the *vlasteličići* group with rare exceptions. The mythic origin of *vlasteličići* and *didići* groups from Hungarian and Bosnian nobility is not attested by the terminology used in the documents from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup>

established prequest legal regulations except in the cases where they were directly interfering with the sharia regulations and Ottoman legal principles. Nenad Moačanin, *Turska Hrvatska, Hrvati pod vlašću Osmanskog Carstva do 1791. Preispitivanja*, Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1999, 23-24; Halil Inalcik, *Osmansko Carstvo. Klasično doba 1300-1600*, Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2002, 87-88.

<sup>15</sup> Compare: Neven Isailović, “Legislation concerning the vlachs of the Balkans before and after Ottoman conquest: an overview”, in: *State and society in the Balkans before and after establishment of Ottoman rule*, Belgrade: The Institute of History Belgrade – Yunus Emre Enstitüsü – Turkish Cultural Centre Belgrade, 2017, 25-42 VS. Vjeron Kursar, “Being an Ottoman Vlach: On Vlach Identity(ies), Role and Status in Western Parts of the Ottoman Balkans (15th-18th Centuries),” *OTAM*, Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi, 2013, no. 34, 137-142 and Dana Caciur, “Considerations Regarding the Status of the Morlachs from the Trogir’s Hinterland at the Middle of the 16th Century: Being Subjects of the Ottoman Empire and Land Tenant of the Venetian Republic,” *Res historica*, Lublin: Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2016, no. 41, 95-110.

<sup>16</sup> I. Božić: “Plemeniti ljudi”, 67-69.

The first formal appearance of the whole noble structure is detectable in the charter from 1433 that settled the delimitation of the border between the Community of Poljica and the City of Split. It mentions 3 Dražojević brothers and 7 other members of the Tišimirić tribe, 5 members of the Limići tribe including Pavao Novačić from Rajčić<sup>17</sup> kindred, and 11 members of the Kremenićani tribe. The members of *vlastela* nobility were not given any priority or special status in the charter and were simply mentioned as members of 3 tribes.<sup>18</sup> The difference between *vlasteličići* and *didići* nobility came to the fore only in matters of electing representatives to communal functions and bodies. With time the difference between the two groups blended and the whole society became more and more democratic. The descendants of Juraj Rajčić and Juraj Dražojević evolved into several different branches that started using separate surnames. When addressed by the outsiders only members of this group were called nobles but the internal structure of Poljica recorded in the Statute did not include any special rights or status of *vlasteličić* nobility in relation to *didići* nobility. They seem to have had larger estates and were entitled to the right to represent the Poljica community in affairs with the outside world.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pavao Novačić was the son of Novak Rajčić and the founder of Pavići branch of this kindred (Pavić means the descendant of Pavao).

<sup>18</sup> I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 74-5; M. Pera, *Poljički statut*, 255-266 and 422-425.

<sup>19</sup> A. Pavić, *Prinosi*, 1-34; R. Tomić, "Baština", 185-192.



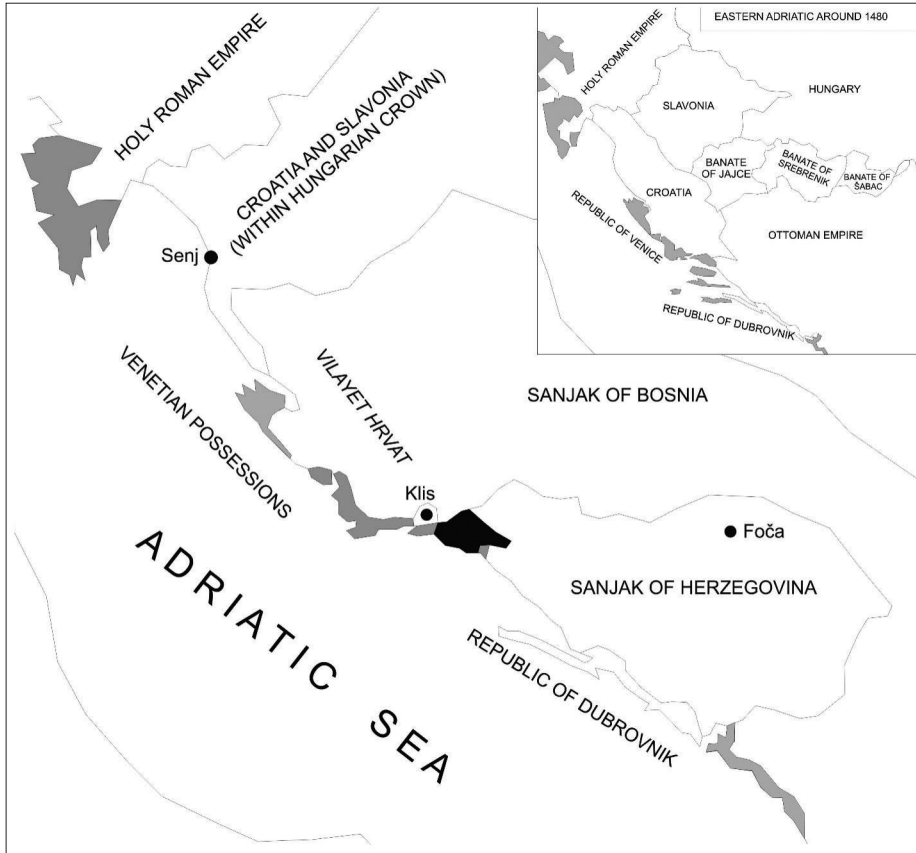


Figure 1 – The *nahiye* of Poljica around 1533 within the Eastern-Adriatic Ottoman possessions

The number of nobles and commoners in Poljica was a matter of debate based on the distribution of wheat sent as help from Venice in 1496 and 1503.<sup>20</sup> There was no doubt that there were 500 houses or families of commoners (*patrimoniali*; regardless of who were those commoners i.e. did this number include only commoners or also the *didići* nobility) but the documents give a different number for nobles. The first document said that there were 200 noble houses and the second, given by the *patrimoniali*, said

<sup>20</sup> I. Božić, “Plemeniti ljudi”, 76; Yves Edouard Boeglin, “Pučki kotarevi u Dalmaciji”, *Istorijski časopis*, Beograd: SANU, 1958, no. VIII, 56 and 60-61.

there were only forty. It is unclear who were the nobles but it was decided to divide the wheat as if there were 200 noble houses. If it was the *vlasteličići* nobility, 200 houses was not a realistic number. It might have been that there were 200 houses of both noble groups, but it also could have been that there were 200 houses of nobles and other dependant (i.e. commoners) houses. In the latter case, the number could have included the whole population of 4 village districts inhabited by commoners that were in large part owned by *vlasteličići* (Podstrana, Jesenice, Srinjine and Duće). Somewhat similar numbers were present in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century with 52 noble houses (*famiglie nobili*), 617 *didići* houses (*famiglie cittadine*), and 427 houses of commoners (*famiglie plebee*).<sup>21</sup> The different proportion of commoners is, most likely, due to the fact that at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century a large portion of the Podstrana village community was under the jurisdiction of the city of Split. It is more plausible to conclude that around the year 1500 there were 40 houses of *vlasteličići* nobility (this number might have included those members of *didići* nobility that served as village chiefs etc. at that time) with 160 or more dependant houses of serfs (*kmetići* and *vlašići*) and that the 500 “*patrimoniali*” were, in fact, the members of *didići* nobility and their dependant serfs. This division was probably connected to the territorial organization so that there were 500 houses in the village districts inhabited and governed by *didići* (i.e. middle and upper Poljica) and 200 houses in the village districts owned or governed by *vlasteličići* group (i.e. lower Poljica). The data from the *defter* TD 174 (1533) confirm the general ratio of nobility (40-50 houses that were exempted from taxation) to *patrimoniali* (400 houses).

A wide portion of the population in Poljica was involved in the election of officials so the local administration and jurisprudence had a democratic note. It seems that just slightly above one third of the population, the group of people called *kmetići* and *vlašići*, did not have electoral right nor the right to be elected to any duty in the Poljica hierarchy. With time the

<sup>21</sup> Danica Božić-Bužančić, “Dvije anagrafske tablice a područje Dalmacije iz druge polovice 18. stoljeća”, *Arhivski vjesnik*, Zagreb: HDA, 1969, vol. 11-12, no. 1, 43-53.

society became more and more democratic so that the commoners were able to participate in the decisions and elections concerning their own village district.<sup>22</sup> It is worth mentioning that the majority of the population of commoner's village districts were legally free men and that many of them owned their land. The differences between village districts were a residue of the process of establishment of borders between the Community of Poljica and the municipalities of Split and Omiš in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The original group of 8 village districts formed the Community of Poljica prior to that process while the latter group only became a part of that community through a series of judiciary disputes with the neighboring municipality of Split. Good relations with the new suzerain were essential for the process and the community managed to get the best deal due to the military and strategic worth they had. The border was finally set in 1433 and 1444 at the location of Mutogras hill and Bila Peć (near Podstrana) but former possessions of the citizens and church institutions from Split were protected even beyond that point.<sup>23</sup> Possessions and claims that the nobility of Poljica had in the area west of that line had to be abandoned and returned to Split municipality as it is seen in the case of the dispute concerning the village of Katići. The whole area of Podstrana, Jesenice, Srinjine and Duće was in permanent dispute and a condominium between Split, Omiš and Poljica. The nobility of Poljica had full jurisdiction to the east of the demarcated line. Village districts with commoner's status were excluded from the electoral process with the argumentation that outsiders from Split and Omiš could influence the process.<sup>24</sup>

Those two aspects, the disputed control over land possessions and the disputed border, must be considered when we interpret the data from the *defters* and the possible influence of Ottoman incursions into Poljica. The first *defter* TD 987 (1497/8) registered only 4 households in the large villages of Podstrana and Jesenice and it registered 14 households in the villages of

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<sup>22</sup> I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 96-100; Y. E. Boeglin, "Pučki kotarevi", 47-68.

<sup>23</sup> A. Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi*, 90-130.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-87; Y. E. Boeglin, "Pučki kotarevi", 47-68; M. Pera, *Poljički statut*, 133-172.

Žrnovnica, Katići, and Gorica.<sup>25</sup> Both facts are in collision with the demarcation line between Split and Poljica because Podstrana and Jesenice were not under full control of Poljica (i.e. the part that was not controlled by the Community did not accept the Ottoman rule or, according to the indications presented in the following text, because one part of the Community remained fully loyal to Venice) and because the Community of Poljica effectively controlled villages to the west of demarcation line. The village of Katići was returned to the municipality of Split in 1433 only to emerge again as a part of the Community of Poljica under Ottoman rule in 1497/8. Latter *defters* confirmed that the border was shifted at expense of the municipality of Split and that Podstrana and Jesenice gradually came under full control of the Community of Poljica. The number of households in Podstrana and Jesenice increased tenfold in the *defters* MAD 159 and MAD 569 from 1547/8 and 1551/2 and even more up until the *defter* from 1632.<sup>26</sup> That could not have only been a question of demography or devastation done by Ottoman raids<sup>27</sup> but also a question of establishing control, especially when we consider that the same happened with the mentioned village of Katići etc.

Ottoman expansion reached Croatian borders in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and according to the *defter* TD 5 (1475/7), it spread up to the eastern bank of the river Cetina.<sup>28</sup> The area, including Ljubuški, Imotski, Proložac, Gorska župa, and Radobilja, was immediately added to the existing *Sanjak* of Hercegovina and organized according to Ottoman principles into *nahiyes*. The majority of the population in this *Sanjak* obtained the status of *filurîci Eflakân* and in many *nahiyes* there was no other population

<sup>25</sup> TD 987, 52-54.

<sup>26</sup> TD 174, 12, MAD 159, 42r and 43v, MAD 569, 70 and 72, NAST Kaptolski arhiv - fascikl 494.

<sup>27</sup> A. Pavić, *Prinosi*, 45.

<sup>28</sup> Ahmed Aličić, *Poimenični popis sandžaka vilajeta Hercegovina*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut, 1985, 81-95; Jusuf Mulić, *Hercegovina. Drugi dio: Vojna i upravna jedinica Osmanskog Carstva 2.1. (XV i XVI stoljeće)*, Sarajevo: vlastita naklada, 2004, 17; Aleksandar Jakovljević i Neven Isailović, *Petrovo polje u vrelima osmanskog razdoblja (1528.-1604.)*, Šibenik: Državni arhiv u Šibeniku i Javna ustanova nacionalni park Krka, 2019, 124-139.

but vlach.<sup>29</sup> Transhumance gave vlach population the possibility to adapt to any political and economic threat. Although this name was of ethnic origin it was now already transformed into a fiscal, social, economic, and paramilitary category in the wider region of the western Rumelia.<sup>30</sup> The name vlach remained in use for the new, expanded role, sometimes even retaining the old ethnic meaning, but their role was now similar to that of *martolos* and other Ottoman semi-privileged groups.<sup>31</sup> Ottoman authorities broadly gave or confirmed vlach status to inhabitants in *serhat* regions because it allowed them flexibility between expansion, defence, and control.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> J. Mulić, *Hercegovina*, 97-144. Classical historians from the Yugoslav period have looked at the vlachs as a social group and have therefore written them with a small letter in order to differentiate them from the ethnic Vlachs. Some contemporary historians started using the capital letter again as a result of a view that they had been an ethnic group that was gradually assimilated into modern ethnic Croatian or Serbian (etc.) groups. Our debate takes the third direction in which we analyze the sources not to their face value. This has led us to the conclusion that the Ottoman vlachs were indeed a social and fiscal category comprised of former ethnic Vlachs and other ethnic groups that have obtained the fiscal vlach status. Avdo Sućeska: "O položaju Poljica u osmanskoj državi", *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut, 1970, no. 16-17, 80-82; Nada Klaić, "Položaj vlahu u XIV i XV stoljeću u hrvatskim zemljama", *Simpozijum – Vlasi u XV i XVI vijeku* (Sarajevo, 13-16. XI 1973), *Radovi ANUBiH*, Sarajevo: ANUBiH, 1983, no. 73, 107-111; V. Kursar, "Being an Ottoman Vlach", 115-119, 121-127 and 130-133; Zef Mirdita, *Vlasi u historiografiji*, Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2004; Mirdita, Zef, *Vlasi: starobalkanski narod (od povijesne pojave do danas)*, Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2009; Romanian historians sometimes use this homonymy to emphasize the existence of a vast Romanian diaspora in the western Balkans. Such stretched hypotheses can easily be refuted by the mere fact that ethnic Vlachs in Rumelia (present-day Greece, Albania, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, and Bulgaria) did not pay *resm-i filori* at all and were not vlachs in Ottoman eyes. See: Nicoară Boldiceanu, "Sur les Valaques des Balkans Slaves à l'époque Ottomane (1450-1550)," *Revue des études Islamiques*, Paris: Collège de France, 1966, no. XXXIV, 83-132; Dana Caciur, "Considerations regarding the Morlachs migrations from Dalmatia to Istria and the Venetian settlement policy during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century," *Balkanica Posnanensia*, Poznań: Adam Miskiewicz University, 2015, no. XXII/1 *Ius Valachicum* no. I, 58-70; Dana Caciur, "Considerations Regarding the Status"; Cristian Luca, "The Vlachs/Morlaks in the Hinterland of Trau (Trogir) and Sebenico (Šibenik), Towns of the Venetian Dalmatia, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century," (Valeriu Sirbu, Cristian Luca eds.) *Miscellanea Historica et Archaeologica in Honorem Professoris Ionel Cîndea*, Brăila: Muzeul Brăilei and Editura Istros, 2009, 311-332.

<sup>30</sup> N. Isailović, "Legislation", 25-42.

<sup>31</sup> V. Kursar, "Being an Ottoman Vlach", 137-144; N. Isailović, "Legislation", 33-40.

<sup>32</sup> Hazim Šabanović: *Krajište Isa-bega Ishakovića. Zbirni katastarski popis iz 1455. godine*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut u Sarajevu, 1964; Dušanka Bojanić, "Vlasi u severnoj Srbiji i njihovi prvi kanuni",

Vlach population was not unknown to medieval Croatia. Quite contrary it formed a substantial part of the rural population in the late medieval period. Their presence prior to 1322 is not attested in documents and they even seem to suddenly emerge in some sudden unknown migration.<sup>33</sup> An important legal monument from the County of Cetina in 1436 known as *Zakon za cetinske Vlahe* (i.e. The Law for the Vlachs of Cetina)<sup>34</sup> describes their legal status as very similar to the one known for Ottoman vlachs. Each Vlach who had a “village” (i.e. croft or virgate, the equivalent of Ottoman çift) had to pay a gold coin and the ones without a village had to serve the lord as militiamen. They had their own chiefs with judicial, i.e. *knez*, and military power, i.e. *vojvoda*. Their names and surnames were not particularly different than the ones that were usual in medieval Croatia and the process of assimilation was developed enough that we can say that the shift from ethnic to social meaning was at an advanced stage prior to the Ottoman conquest.<sup>35</sup> Taxes and feudal obligations were generally transformed

*Istorijski časopis*, Beograd: Istorijski institut, 1971, no. XVIII, 255-269; Dušanka Bojanić, Šta znače podaci o sjeničkim vlasima u popisu iz 1455. godine, *Istorijski časopis*, Beograd: Istorijski institut, 1987, no. XXXIV, 97-112; Kornelija Jurin-Starčević, *Srednjodalmatinsko zaleđe za vrijeme osmanske vladavine u 16. i 17. stoljeću* (Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu – MA Thesis 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Mladen Ančić, “Gospodarski aspekti stočarstva cetinskog komitata u XIV stoljeću,” *Acta historico-oconomica Iugoslaviae*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1987, no. 14, 69-98; Ante Milošević, *Stećci i vlasii*, Split: Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1991; Ivan Botica, “Vlah i vlah – nekoć i danas”, in: *Jezik i identiteti* (ed. Jagoda Granić), Zagreb – Split: Hrvatsko društvo za primjenjenu lingvistiku, 2007, 61-69; Ivan Mužić, *Vlasii u starijoj hrvatskoj historiografiji*, Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2010; Gordan Ravančić, “Neka razmišljanja o prvom spomenu Vlaha u izvorima hrvatske provenijencije”, in: *Poeta nascitur, historicus fit – ad honorem Zef Mirdita*, St. Gallen – Zagreb: Albanisches Institut & Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2013, 115-124.

<sup>34</sup> N. Klaić, “Položaj vlaha”, 107-111; I. Botica, “Vlah i vlah”, 61-69; N. Isailović, “Legislation”, 32-34.

<sup>35</sup> N. Isailović, “Legislation”, 32-34 and 39-40. “Despite some regional and local differences and specificities, it is, therefore, quite possible to assume that Ottoman legislation concerning the vlachs was adapted and revised legislation of previous periods. It was a well-exploited institution of conquered states, put to purpose of the Ottoman Empire, although, in the past, it may have been directed against its expansion. Trends which were already ongoing, such as turning an ethnic, social or professional category into a category of status measured by taxation and military obligation, were only brought to perfection by the new rulers.” quoted from N. Isailović, “Legislation”, 39-40. Concerning the Vlach community in Cetina at 1436 one must note that the law differentiates Vlachs, Croats, and Serbs as legal categories. In the context of Vlachs and Serbs, one might say

to pecuniary equivalents in late medieval Croatia (and Hungary for that matter) even in the areas where the Vlach population was not present as can be easily seen from e.g. *Urbar modruški* (i.e. Manorial roll for the County of Modruš) from 1486.<sup>36</sup> So *resm-i filori* was a tax that could have seemed almost natural to people or individuals changing allegiance from Hungarian to Ottoman suzerainty.

It is best to say that Ottoman rule was established gradually so that the exact dates of Ottoman conquest for many areas are not only unknown but also unimportant for the understanding of the process. When the Kingdom of Bosnia fell in 1463 the Ottomans were temporarily pushed back and king Matthias Corvinus established fortified areas south of Sava in order to defend the core of his Hungarian Kingdom.<sup>37</sup> The Kingdom of Croatia and the remains of the Duchy of Saint Sava were shambly encompassed by

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that it is a transfer of legal practice introduced by emperor Dušan's law Code. The legal distinction between Vlachs and Serbs, taken as social groups, spread to medieval Hum undoubtedly due to migrations of Vlachs to this western neighboring country. There it managed to survive even under the Ottomans and it was recorded in the *defter* TD 174 from 1533. Such usage in the *defter* and the attached *kanunnama* is the best evidence that ethnic names were used to represent legal status by the Ottoman administration and that their ethnic meaning was irrelevant in the new context. Compare: Mladen Ančić, "Registar Splitskog kaptola," *Fontes*, Zagreb: HDA, 2014, no. 20, 40-41; Neven Isailović, "Pomeni srpskog imena u srednjovekovnim bosanskim ispravama", in: *Srpsko pisano nasljeđe i istorija srednjovekovne Bosne i Huma*, Banja Luka – Istočno Sarajevo: Filološki fakultet Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci – Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Istočnom Sarajevu – Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Banjoj Luci, 2018, 261-282; and Neven Isailović, "Trgovinski ugovori između Bosne i Dubrovnika u srednjem veku: diplomatički osvrt", in: *Zbornik radova u čast akademiku Desanki Kovačević Kojić*, Banja Luka: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Republike Srpske, 2015, 235-258; and V. Kursar, "Being an Ottoman Vlach," for a different opinion.

<sup>36</sup> Josip Adamček, *Agrarni odnosi u Hrvatskoj od sredine XV do kraja XVIII stoljeća*, Zagreb: Sveučilišna naklada Liber, 1980; Radoslav Lopašić, *Urbar modruški od godine 1486.*, Ogulin: Ogranak Matice hrvatske, 1997; Neven Isailović even calls the pre-Ottoman pecuniary obligations of the Vlachs of Cetina *filuria* see: N. Isailović, "Legislation", 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Borislav Grgin, *Počeci rasapa. Kralj Matijaš i srednjovekovna Hrvatska*, Zagreb: Ibis grafika, 2002; Davor Salihović, "For a different catastrophe: A fruitful frontier on the southern edges of the Kingdom of Hungary after 1463. An initial inquiry," *Inicijal. Časopis za srednjovekovne studije*, Beograd: Istorijski institut, 2017, no. 5, 73-107; Davor Salihović, "The process of Bordering at the Late Fifteenth-Century Hungarian-Ottoman Frontier", *History in Flux*, Pula: Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, 2019, no. 1, 93-120.



this system and had to be defended separately. Since it was impossible to fortify such a long border, the resistance was focused on strongpoints. One of them was Počitelj on the lower Neretva<sup>38</sup> and after it fell in 1471 Knin and Klis became the centers of resistance until they fell in 1522 and 1537, respectively (there were other smaller forts important to mention such as Koš in the delta of the river Neretva which fell in 1490/1, and Sinj and Čačvina, north of Klis and Poljica, which fell in 1513 with great impact on the position of Poljica towards the Ottomans). It proved almost impossible to defend and control the area between the stronger forts for a longer period. We could probably assume that the rural population was even sometimes forced to pay taxes to both belligerent sides in order to stay alive and keep the property.<sup>39</sup> Pretensions to unconquered areas were a part of *akıncı* tactics and were supported by the search for *mülk çiftlik*s. Outlying taxation units deep inside the Croatian kingdom were recorded in the vlach *defter* for the part of the *Sanjak* of Hercegovina TD 987 (1497/8). In that year the ban of Croatia and Slavonia controlled the forts of Knin, Vrlika, Sinj, Nutjak, and Klis but villages of Maovice, Otišić, and Suhovare were recorded in that *defter* regardless of them being 10-30 km behind enemy controlled forts.<sup>40</sup> This *defter* was traditionally dated to around 1516 but

<sup>38</sup> King Matthias writes to the council of Dubrovnik: "...ad conservacionem castris nostris Pochitel vocati in regno nostro Croacie predicto..." see: *Diplomatarium relationum republicae Ragusanae cum regno Hungariae* (Budapest 1887) from <https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/title/BV013827095> last access on 25th March 2021.

<sup>39</sup> One such example was detected by Michael Ursinus in the area of Klis. Inhabitants of the *varoš* (i.e. suburb) of Klis became Ottoman subjects before the fort above it. How did this work and with what problems one can only imagine, compare: Michael Ursinus, "From Pre-conquest Klis"; Michael Ursinus, "From *defter* entries to landmarks on the ground: cooperative research in Cleune (Gorica, Livno, Bosna Hercegovina) on Ottoman perambulations from the 16<sup>th</sup> century," *Osmali Üzerine Konuşmalar* (Fuat Aydan ed.), Istanbul: OSAMER, 2016, 103-123; Michael Ursinus, "Ottoman Çiftlik / Zemin Holdings in the Grounds of Ancient Salona and the Ager Salonicus before the fall of Klis (1537)," *Tusculum*, Solin: Javna ustanova u kulturi Zvonimir, 2020, no. 13, 83-89; Fahd Kasumović, "Osmanska agrarna politika i nadmetanje za zemlju u jugoistočnoj Europi", *Anali Gazi Husrev-begove biblioteke*, Sarajevo: Gazi Husrev-begova biblioteka, 2014, no. 36, 93-150; H. Šabanović, *Krajište*.

<sup>40</sup> A. Jakovljević and N. Isailović, *Petrovo polje*, 123-124 and 141.



the latest research has pointed out that it should be dated to 1497/8.<sup>41</sup> This is important for our topic because this *defter* includes the *nahiye* of Poljica. The fact that Poljica was now an Ottoman *nahiye* did not change the local perception that it was still the Community of Poljica governed by its own *veliki knez* (all the documents written in Croatian language used the term *Poljička knežija* i.e. area governed by the *veliki knez* of Poljica or sometimes just *Poljička daržava* i.e. the Territory of Poljica).<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, recent research has revealed some new evidence of Ottoman rule in Poljica before 1514. Michael Ursinus has identified an inscription from Sita in Poljica dated 1508 which mentions an *emin* for the salt pans in that place.<sup>43</sup>

### **Poljica between danger and opportunity**

According to the treaty by which the Community of Poljica accepted the Venetian suzerainty a nobleman from Split was to be elected as the *veliki knez*. He had to be accepted by the Venetian count of Split. This ensured that the community would remain loyal to the Venetian state but had a negative effect on the autonomy of Poljica.<sup>44</sup> According to some opinions, the office of *vojvoda* became a permanent part of the Poljica's hierarchy in order to compensate for the loss inflicted by the foreign *veliki knez*.<sup>45</sup> At

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 123-124, 141, 165-166, 217-229, 351-357, 407-410; Neven Isailović and Aleksandar Jakovljević, "Neka razmatranja o Vlatkovićima, Krajini i Zaostrugu," (Manuscript 2022) and Neven Isailović and Aleksandar Jakovljević, "Nahija Posušje – primjer povijesnog diskontinuiteta," (Manuscript 2022); Dating of the *defter* TD 987 to 1497/8 is further augmented by the amount of *cizye* in that *defter*. The *cizye* was 52 *akçe* which corresponds perfectly with the exchange rate of Venetian ducato to *akçe* in 1490-ies.

<sup>42</sup> Marko Mišerda, *Spomenici Gornjih Poljica*, Omiš-Priko: Udruga Poljičana "Sveti Jure" – Priko, 2003, passim; Jusuf Mulić has a similar view towards the question of vlach nahiyes which he sees as vlach knežinas, see: J. Mulić, *Hercegovina*, 100-101.

<sup>43</sup> Based on the public lectures by Michael Ursinus. Compare: <http://poljica.hr/prof-dr-michael-ursinus-islamist-i-orijentalist-svjetskog-glasa-istrazuje-poljicke-dokumente-iz-osmanskog-razdoblja/> last accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021 and <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/split/jeste-li-culiza-nbsp-rustem-pasu-velikog-vezira-koji-je-upravljao-cak-i-podrucjima-kile-i-visoke-ali-se-nije-spustio-u-split-537126> last accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

<sup>44</sup> A. Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi*, 119-130.

<sup>45</sup> I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 77-81.

the same time when the Ottoman expansion began to threaten Poljica and Split, there was a shift in the practice of electing the *veliki knez* occurred. The lack of data does not allow us to know how they elected them, but the first known *veliki knez* indigenous to Poljica was Ivan Petrović in 1499 followed by Marijan Gregolić in 1500.<sup>46</sup> They broke the tradition, established in 1444, that the *veliki knez* had to be a nobleman from Split. We have to note that the *defter* TD 987 (1497/8) states *knez* Radoš son of Kostanjic as the head of the *cema'at* of Poljica which probably implies that he was the *veliki knez* under Ottoman suzerainty.<sup>47</sup> That could lead us to the conclusion that the shift of allegiance from the Venetian Republic to the Ottoman Empire was used by the Community of Poljica to get rid of the *veliki knez* from Split. From 1502 till 1509 the *veliki knez* was again a nobleman from Split (Augustin Maričić) and after 1511 all the known office holders were noblemen from Poljica. The traditional date of the first acceptance of Ottoman suzerainty by Poljica was, according to Marino Sanudo, 1514.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Jozo Novaković Bepo, "Knezovi u poljičkoj povijesti", *Poljica*, Gata: Poljički dekanat, 2017, no. 32, 322-323.

<sup>47</sup> TD 987, 51; Mate Gojsalić, "Isprave o Gojsalićima iz Kostanja," *Poljica*, Gata: Poljički dekanat, 2007, no. 32, 14-18; In a report by Marino Mussura, the Venetian castellan of Omiš, from 10<sup>th</sup> December 1512, Rados Costagnich is mentioned as one of the nobles in Poljica who were principal seducers of his people to accept the Ottoman rule. *Pisma i poruke rektora Korčule, Brača, Omiša, Makarske i Klisa. Epistolae et communicationes rectorum Corzulensium, Brachiensium, Almissensium, Macarensium et Clissiensium* (prepared by: Lovorka Čoralić, Damir Karbić i Maja Katušić) part of: *Pisma i poruke rektora Dalmacije i Mletačke Albanije. Epistolae et communicationes rectorum Dalmatiae et Albaniae Venetae*, sv. 2, *Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium*, vol. 56, Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2012, 240-241.

<sup>48</sup> S. Kaštelan, *Povjesni ulomci*, 63-65; Ivan Pivčević, *Sabrani radovi o Poljicima*, Omiš-Priko: Društvo Poljičana "Sv. Jure", 2008, 121-122; Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, "Marina Sanuda odnošaj i skupnovlade mletačke prema južnim Slavenom. Rapporti della republica veneta coi Slavi Meridionali. Brani tratti dei diarj manoscritti di Marino Sanudo," *Arkiv za povjestnicu jugoslavensku* vol. VI, Venice: Društvo za jugoslavensku povjesticu i starine, 1863, 344-345; Jusuf Mulić believes that the first Ottoman rule over Poljica was established between 1477 and 1502 and that it lasted until 1530 or 1531 when Poljica were temporarily returned to the Venetian Republic only to be reincorporated in 1541, see: J. Mulić, *Hercegovina*, 68-69. The first contact with the Ottomans was actually made in 1479 when the Community of Poljica paid a tribute to the *sanjak-bey* of Hercegovina. Sultanic charter from 1481 explicitly forbade this practice and guaranteed territorial integrity of Venetian possession over Poljica. A. Pavić, *Prinosi*, 40-42, and I. Pivčević, *Sabrani*

That obviously was not a coincidence and although we do not know all the details we can assume that the Ottoman suzerainty helped, intentionally or coincidentally, in the process of affirming the autonomous position of the community towards the Venetian Republic and the municipality of Split.

This issue is, so far, only superficially researched as can be seen from the following examples<sup>49</sup> unknown to present historiography. On 5<sup>th</sup> January 1498, the Venetian Senate reinstated the privileges of the Community of Poljica. According to the document the Community received a sword for each house, 200 measures of wheat, and one standard of Saint Mark. The leaders of the Community received salaries, primarily *knez* Marijan (together with his 3 brothers), son of late *knez* Stipan Gregolić, who maintained his father's salary of 125 *liras*. *Knez* Ivan Ivanišević received 5 ducats per year just as he has received before. Three envoys, two of which represented the nobles and one which represented the *patrimoniales*, received 12 ducats each.<sup>50</sup> This document is a strong indication that the Community of Poljica was either in a double allegiance with the Ottomans and Venice or, more probable, one part of the Community was under Venetian rule and the other under Ottoman rule. According to that Senate decision from early 1498 Marijan Gregolić was *veliki knez* of Poljica and according to the *defter* TD 987 from 1497/8 the leader of Poljica hierarchy and therefore *veliki knez* was Radoš son of Kostanjić. From that, we must conclude that there were two persons serving as *veliki knez* at the same time, one governing the

*radovi*, 207-208. It becomes more and more obvious that scarce historic data collide and that an alternative interpretation is necessary. This text brings a hypothesis that this was actually due to the fact that only one part of the Community accepted the Ottoman rule while the other part remained loyal to Christian suzerains. The charter given by king Mathias Corvinus in 1480 to one part of the nobility from Poljica confirms that such a split in loyalty actually happened in a different context. I. Božić, "Plemeniti ljudi", 87-95; V. Klaić, "Prilog", 40-44.

<sup>49</sup> The material is located in the National library of Serbia in Belgrade. Late historian Jorjo Tadić has left his archive to this institution. In his notes made in the State archive in Venice one can find many useful information about early modern history of the eastern Adriatic region. Since the history of Poljica was not his main topic we presume that many other valuable information could still be found in Venice.

<sup>50</sup> IT ASVe Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, reg. 14, f. 142r (according to note in: National library of Serbia – The legacy of Jorjo Tadić, notebook 8).

part of the community loyal to Venice and the other loyal to the Ottomans. Presently we do not have an explicit confirmation of this conclusion<sup>51</sup> but there are several similar incidents of the disloyalty of people from Poljica towards Venice.

A report about relations of some people from Poljica and Turks sent from Split on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1500, in the time of war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, confirms this doubt.<sup>52</sup> Historiography knew that the *sanjak-bey* of Hercegovina, Mehmed Bey (Obrinović according to other sources), who according to Sanudo was by origin from Poljica,<sup>53</sup> wrote at the end of 1500 to his countrymen that they must remain loyal to the Ottomans under the threat of imposing them a fine for disobeying mobilization orders. He has written to the *conte Marian Gregolich* and *conte Jvanis Nenadich* to come to him, under *salvus conductus*, in order to make a deal about things of mutual interest. The count of Split found out about this development and called upon *veliki knez* Marijan Gregolić to justify himself. Gregolić and the advisers finally decided not to go to Mehmed Bey and the count of Split ended the investigation but the next report from 28<sup>th</sup> December 1500 reported that Gregolić and Nenadić, together with *uno patrimonial Iurai Sotoriza*,<sup>54</sup> did go to see Mehmed Bey so that they had

<sup>51</sup> Unfortunately, Kukuljević's excerpt from Sanudo's diaries does not cover the first half of 1498. Ivan Kukuljević, "Odnosaji skupnovlade mletačke prema južnim Slovenom priobčeni u izvadcih iz rukopisnih ljetopisih Marina Sanuda. Od godina 1496. do 1533.", *Arhiv za povjestnicu jugoslavensku*, vol. V, Zagreb: Društvo za jugoslavensku povjesticu i starine, 1859, 1-159.

<sup>52</sup> IT ASVe Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci. Lettere di Rettori ed altre Cariche, Busta 281; according to Tadić's note.

<sup>53</sup> Modern historiography has discarded news about his origin from Poljica as false. His origin was from the nahiye of Neretva where he had possessions inherited from his father Petar Obrinović. He probably originated from Poljica by his maternal ancestry. See: Behija Zlatar, "Neki podaci o sandžak-begu Mehmed-begu Obrinoviću", *Prilozi instituta za istoriju u Sarajevu*, Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 1974, vol. 10, no. 2, 341-346; Toma Popović, Spisak hercegovačkih namjesnika u XVI vijeku, *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut, 1970, vol. XVI-XVII, 93-99; Hazim Šabanović, *Bosanski pašaluk: postanak i upravna podjela*, Sarajevo: Oslobođenje 1973, 191 after I. Pivčević, *Sabrani radovi*, 112.

<sup>54</sup> Juraj Sotoriza is indeed mentioned in TD 987 from 1497/8 in the village of Srinjine.

to justify themselves again.<sup>55</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1502 certain member of *didići* nobility Matij Desić (*Matija Desich patrimonialis Police*) was brought to Venice under the accusation of treason and sent to jail in Toricella.<sup>56</sup> The removal of a pro-Ottoman agitator must have been an important stimulus for the election of Augustin Maričić, a nobleman from Split, to the position of *veliki knez* of Poljica and, hitherto, the affirmation of Venetian suzerainty over the Community.<sup>57</sup>

In September 1508 the count and captain of Split reported that the Community of Poljica had decided to abandon the loyalty to Venice and that, even after his request, they had refused to come to justify themselves in his presence.<sup>58</sup> The leader of this disloyalty was the aforementioned *knez* Ivaniš Nenadić who has escaped from Verona and became the main pro-Ottoman protagonist in Poljica.<sup>59</sup> During 1508 and 1509 he changed allegiance and became an Ottoman plunderer. He has even raided two villages in Poljica. But in September 1510 he became a *condottiere* for Venice with a company of 500 Turkish light horsemen. His services were so effective that on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1510 he was in Venice where he was made a cavalier and was given a golden vest worth 70 ducats.<sup>60</sup> His services were now essential to Venice because of the raging war in Italy. His previous actions have made some Venetian officials wary of him. On 4<sup>th</sup> December 1510, the new castellan of Omiš Marino Mussuro sent a letter to Venice in which he stressed his opinion that a Venetian professional soldier i.e. *vojvoda* Ivaniš (Nenadić), who was to lodge during the winter in the area near to Poljica and Omiš, was a threat to the security and stability of the area. His cousin was the *sanjak-bey* of Hercegovina (obviously the already mentioned Mehmed Bey Obrinović)<sup>61</sup> and two of his brothers were in *sanjak-bey's* service, one of which was the

<sup>55</sup> A. Pavić, *Prinosi*, 40-41; I. Pivčević, *Sabrani radovi*, 112-113.

<sup>56</sup> IT ASVe Consiglio di dieci; Misti; reg. 29 (1501-1503) f. 135 v; according to Tadić's note.

<sup>57</sup> I. Kukuljević, *Odnosaji*, 237; I. Pivčević, *Sabrani radovi*, 114.

<sup>58</sup> I. Kukuljević, *Odnosaji*, 310; I. Pivčević, *Sabrani radovi*, 116.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-120.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 118; I. Kukuljević, *Odnosaji*, 317-318 and 321.

<sup>61</sup> J. Mulić, *Hercegovina*, 10-11.

*vojvoda* of Mostar i.e. one of the most important people in the whole *sanjak*. *Vojvoda* Ivaniš has only recently returned from the Ottoman territory where he was the leader of incursions to the territory of Poljica. He had another brother living in Poljica along with many relatives and friends and placing him near them was, in castellan's opinion, like placing fire near hay.<sup>62</sup> The castellan of Omiš had reported on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1512 that he received news from Poljica about their decision to agree to pay the tribute to the Ottomans through direct contact with the Ottoman *vojvoda* of Imotski.<sup>63</sup> Another report written on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1512 clarifies that this was not the first time that the Community of Poljica made an agreement with the Ottomans and that the defense of the area was weakened due to this action.<sup>64</sup>

The count and captain of Split sent an order on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1512 to the castellan of Omiš to invite or bring certain people from Poljica to his presence in Split concerning a rebellion in the Community. Their names can all be found in the *defter* TD 987 from 1497/8 (*Conte Andrea Nouacouich* was Andrija son of Novak from Dolac, *Petris Nouacich* was Petrič son of Novak who was at the head of a *cema'at* in 1497/8, *Hieronimus Gojacouich* was Jeronac, son of Gojak from Kostanje, while *Rados Costagnich* was *knez* Radoš son of Kostanjić who was at the head of the whole *nahiye* in 1497/8)<sup>65</sup> and their rebellion was indeed linked with the plan to pay the tribute to the Ottomans for that year.<sup>66</sup> The principal causes of this rebellion were the mentioned *Hieronimus Goiacouich* as well as *Rados Costagnich* and it is obvious that they were the leaders of the pro-Ottoman party in Poljica for longer than a decade. It is obvious that, at that period, Ottoman rule over Poljica was very loose and depended on the ability of the *serhat* elite to enforce the payment of tribute.

<sup>62</sup> L. Čoralić- D. Karbić-M. Katušić, *Pisma i poruke*, 199-200 and 237-239.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-240.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-242.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-241.

<sup>66</sup> That letter was written the next day after the castellan of Omiš informed the count and captain of Split that the assembly of the Community of Poljica decided to pay the tribute to the Ottomans, *Ibid.*, 239-240.

Marino Sanudo reported that Poljica accepted Ottoman suzerainty in 1514<sup>67</sup> and on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1519 the Senate instructed the Bailo of Constantinople to see if it would be possible to accept the offer of the Community of Poljica who wanted to become Venetian subjects again. The argument was that they would continue to pay annual tribute to the Sultan and that they were always under the jurisdiction and within the territory of Split.<sup>68</sup> That property and jurisdiction disputes with owners from Split were a burning issue we can see from the complaint from 1<sup>st</sup> May 1513 about a youngster from Poljica who was, together with his 2-3 companions, a cause of much distress for Split. He was blamed for a past incursion of a larger group of people from Poljica, whom he persuaded to plunder the villages belonging to Split (*le ville di questa comunita*), and for the destruction of a vineyard in Mirča belonging to Papali family from Split.<sup>69</sup> Two other unnamed people from Poljica were blamed in a letter from 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1514 for the occupation of villages belonging to the Community of Split during the government of count Andrea Basegio.<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Venetians managed to keep Poljica in control with repeated gifts and salaries to the elite. It was essential for the defense and security of the area between Split and Omiš. But the results were always temporary because the threat of Ottoman attack forced the Community of Poljica to get to terms with *serhat* elite of the *Sanjak* of Hercegovina. Such arrangements

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<sup>67</sup> I. Pivčević, *Sabrani radovi*, 121-122; I. Kukuljević, *Odnosaji*, 409. A more recent article about the status of Poljica within the Ottoman state was published by Michael Ursinus dealing mainly with the situation after the final establishment of Ottoman rule after 1540; compare: Michael Ursinus, *Christian rule under the Ottoman Sultans: The Nahiye of Poljica, Living in the Ottoman Lands: Identities, Administration and Warfare* (ed. Burhan Çağlar, Ömer Faruk Can, Hacer Kılıçarslan), Istanbul: Kronik Books 2021, 66-75.

<sup>68</sup> IT ASVe Consiglio di dieci, Misti, reg. 43 (1519), fols. 48 v-49r; according to Tadić's note.

<sup>69</sup> IT ASVe Capi de Consiglio di Dieci, Lettere di Rettori ed altre cariche, busta 281. According to Tadić's note.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



were facilitated by the fact that part of that *serhat* elite were members of nobility from Poljica that went into Ottoman service and became Muslims. Their contacts with their relatives in Poljica remained strong and presented a nuisance to Venetian plans on the role of Poljica in their domain. From the aforementioned examples of pro-Ottoman agitation in Poljica we can see that the villages closer to the Ottoman border were more open to such influences while the villages closer to the sea were more inclined to remain loyal to Venice.

Ottoman rule was used to establish and expand the outer borders of the Community of Poljica and to affirm the privileged position of *vlasteličići* nobility in relation to the Ottoman authorities through tax exemptions. The whole community was incorporated into the Ottoman administrative system as a *nahiye* and village districts as *cema'ats*. The inner structure of the community remained the same. The population remained the same but it received the status of vlachs visible in their obligation to pay *resm-i filori*. In the *defter* TD 987 (1497/8) it is even formulated with such a meaning “*nahiye* Poljica, belongs to the fortress of Nutjak, in the *Sanjak* of Hercegovina; *Cema'at* of *knez Radoš veled-i Kostanik*; the afore-mentioned vlachs appeared /in front of the Ottoman authorities and the surveyor/ from the mentioned *nahiye* through *istimalet* so that they were given a sultanic charter and they have to pay one Frankish *filori* each year.” It is important to notice that it is not the Vlach population but the vlach status that moved to Poljica as Sućeska has stressed in his work half a century ago.<sup>71</sup> The titles of

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<sup>71</sup> M. Gojsalić, “Isprave o Gojsalićima”, 14; TD 987, 51-56; A. Sućeska, “O položaju Poljica”, 77-91. “Iako u osnovi sličan, specifičan status imali su carski hasovi u našim zemljama koji su obuhvatati skupine stanovništva koje je imalo status vlaha (filurdžija), koji su, umjesto raznih feudalnih i državnih dadžbina, plaćali određeni novčani iznos (filuriju) odsjekom. Obično su filurdžije bili obavezni da daju izvjesnu količinu novca (aqče, aspre) sultanu na ime harača (ğizye = glavarina) i izvjesnu količinu novca svome neposrednom gospodaru na ime feudalne rente. Ukoliko je takvo stanovništvo obavljalo izvjesne radove (npr. rad u solanama) ili obavljalo određene službe (npr. knezovi) za tursku državu, ono je još bilo oslobođeno od posebnih nameta u korist države avâriz-i divâniye i tekâlîf-i örfiye, to jest uživalo je tzv. mu’afiyet i bilo mu’af i müselleme. Pošto su takvi posjedi (kao hasovi) bili serbest, a njihovo stanovništvo mu’af, oni su imali specifičan položaj u sistemu organizacije turske vlasti. Obično je tu turska vlast bila zastupljena samo posredstvom



the nobility were transformed to those used by the Ottoman administration for vlach population. Croatian documents used the term *knez* for every village headman and the title of *katunar* obviously did not exist in Poljica prior to the Ottoman rule. It appears relatively late e.g. in the documents from Poljica as in 1699,<sup>72</sup> and for all we know, it was first introduced in article number 91 of the Statute of Poljica from 1623.<sup>73</sup> Chiefs (*knez*, *vojvoda*, *katunar*, *primičur* etc.) were responsible for administration, first-degree judiciary trials, collecting taxes, mobilization, police duties etc.<sup>74</sup> It was a joint function of representing internal self-government to imperial authority and performing duties for the Ottoman Empire in order to exercise the power of the state. Soon after vlach groups changed allegiance they became active protagonists of Ottoman expansion and not only subjugated “victims of the Ottoman yoke”.<sup>75</sup> Such complex phenomena must be interpreted from an evolutive view as has been shown by this debate.

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određenih funkcionera (vojvoda, subaša, emin) koji su bili ovlašteni da posredstvom organa domaće samouprave (knezova) ubiru dadžbine od stanovništva (filurija) ili da od njega traže radne usluge. Na toj osnovi je u nekim našim zemljama pod turskom vlašću postojala samouprava čitavih oblasti (Crna Gora npr.), čije je stanovništvo imalo status filurdžija.” Quoted after Sućeska, *ibid.*, 79.

<sup>72</sup> M. Mišerda, *Spomenici*, 77.

<sup>73</sup> M. Pera, *Poljički statut*, 494-495.

<sup>74</sup> N. Isailović, “Legislation,” 29-39; V. Kursar, “Being an Ottoman Vlach,” 137-142.

<sup>75</sup> Halil Inaldžik, “Od Stefan Dušana do Osmanskog Carstva. Hrišćanske spahije u Rumeliji u XV vijeku i njihovo porijeklo,” *Prilozi za orijentalnu filologiju*, Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut, 1953, no. 3-4, 23-54.

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## RANA OSMANSKA EKSPANZIJA U POLJICIMA: RAZMATRANJA O DRUŠTVENOJ STRUKTURI I POLITIČKOJ DIVERZIFIKACIJI ELITE

### Sažetak

Hrvatska kasnosrednjovjekovna plemićka općina Poljica zatekla se usred borbe sredozemnih imperija i sila. Promjena strana i priznavanje mletačkog, ugarskog (kasnije habsburškog) ili osmanskog vrhovništva koristilo se za učvršćenje položaja vladajuće elite unutar općine te kako bi se odnijela prevaga u sporovima sa susjednim gradskim komunama Splita i Omiša. Rani sastav vladajuće elite u Poljicima, kao i odnos dviju legitimizacijskih platformi didičkog i vlastelićičkog plemstva, nije do kraja dokučiv iz postojećih izvora. Kada je Venecija 1444. godine postala sizeren Poljica običajno je pravo zapisano u pisanom statutu (Poljički statut), ali nas on ne obavještava o pravnim procedurama i hijerarhijskim odnosima koji nisu bili sporni. Ova rasprava nastoji rasvijetliti te odnose iz specifične situacije koja je nastala na prijelomu 15. i 16. stoljeća kada su Poljica balansirala između mletačke i osmanske vlasti. Nakon usporedbe s izvorima mletačke provenijencije podaci o nahiji Poljica iz deftera vlaha u Hercegovini iz 1497/8. godine (TD 987) pokazuju mnoge neočekivane nepodudarnosti. Može se zaključiti da je taj defter obuhvatio samo dio stanovništva Poljica te da su postojale dvije paralelne hijerarhije unutar općine, jedna lojalna Osmanlijama (s Radošem Kostanjićem kao knezom) te druga lojalna Veneciji (s Marijanom Gregolićem kao knezom). Mletački izvori to potvrđuju i u sljedeća dva desetljeća. Jedan dio plemstva održavao je dobre odnose s osmanskim pograničnom elitom u sandžaku Hercegovina. Bili su u rodu s više visoko pozicioniranih dužnosnika uključujući neke sandžakbegove, a određeni poljički plemići preobratili su se na islam i dosegli položaje vojvoda. S druge strane, Poljica su bila ključna za obranu i sigurnost područja između Splita i Omiša tako da su Mlečani uzastopno

slali darove i plaće poljičkoj eliti nastojeći ih tako kontrolirati. To je imalo privremen učinak jer su Poljica bila izrazito izložena osmanskim napadima i uznemiravanju. Čini se da je priobalni dio poljičke općine bio naklonjeniji Veneciji dok je zaleđe bilo sklonije nagodbi s Osmanlijama. Poljica su u potpunosti priznala osmansku vlast oko 1514. godine. Nakon toga bilo je više opetovanih pokušaja da se ponovno promjeni strana, ali nakon osmanskog osvajanja Klisa 1537. godine i prekida neprijateljstava između Venecije i Osmanlija 1540. godine Poljica ostaju pod osmanskom vlasti na duže razbolje. Osmanlije nisu imali nikakav interes u mijenjanju društvenih odnosa unutar Poljica tako da su pripadnici elite, koji su obnašali dužnosti unutar hijerarhije u nahiji Poljica, bili oslobođeni plaćanja poreza i time očuvali svoju privilegiranost. Ostatak stanovništva je bio dužan plaćati filuriju te je na taj način vlaški status primijenjen i na Poljica u skladu s osmanskom praksom istimaleta koji je omogućavao fleksibilnost između ekspanzije, obrane i kontrole za rastuće Osmansko Carstvo.