



POLITICAL – DIPLOMATIC MISSION OF ALEKS SPAN

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Abstract:

In the town of Drishtit during the Middle Age, among the noble families, there was also the Spani family, who was very well known. Out of this family emerged important figures whom Aleks Spani was noteworthy. In the field of his activity, Aleks Spani was very well known both for the diplomatic role and for the exercise of other important function's, of which we highlight his position as a mayor of the city of Novobërdë. Although we have not encountered so much information about Aleks Spani as a mayor of the city of Novobërdë, however it was proven that Aleks Spani was the mayor of the city we. After the fall of Novobërdë under the Ottoman dominance, the information we have for Aleks Spani refers to his diplomatic mission. Within this mission, he had served as a mediator between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire. After the fall of Drishti under the Ottoman dominance, Aleks Spani with his family settled in Venice. The Spani family through marriage's had managed to connect with the familiar feudal families, like the Kastrioti one, because Pjetër Spani's wife, was the sister of Vojsava, mother of Scanderbeg, as well as with other familiar families of that time not only from the different parts of Albania but also wider. An example of this case, we got the marriage of Aleks Spani, who was married with Miliza, daughter of a Serbian despot, Gjergj Branković. However, members of the Spani family with their contribution managed to leave trace's not only in Drishtë but also beyond, as we have the case of Aleks Spani, and his descendant's, who although immigrated to Venice, played an important role in social trends or flows of that time.

Keywords: The city of Drishtë, the Spani family, the Republic of Venice, the Ottoman Empire, Novobërdë, Dubrovnik, Aleks Spani, Pjetër Spani

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1. Introduction

In the town of Drisht, during the Middle Age, among the noble familie's there was also the much known Spani family. From this family in documentary source's we have encountered important figures such as: Andrea Spani,ⁱⁱ Nikolla Spani,ⁱⁱⁱ Marin Spani,^{iv} Stefan Spani,^v Pjetër Spani, who was not only seen or noticed as a mayor of the city of Novobërdë, but for his role as a mediator during negotiations between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice.

Before we focus on his activity, we see it as reasonable to stop about some information's, about his family, starting with his father, the relationship with the feudal families of both domestic and foreign time's, to continue with his marriage, information that argue and testify for his position's and factions. Aleks Spani was the son of Pjetër Spani. It is worth mentioning that in the sources and literature we had available for the Spani family we have encountered some members of this family with the name Pjetër Spani. But in this case we are talking about Pjetër Spani, who had three sons: Bozhidar, Aleksin (*Alexius filius Petri Spani*), and Hërvojen.^{vi} Regarding to this in 1458, the testament of Pjetër Spani was confirmed in Dubrovnik, where his sons Aleks and

ⁱⁱ *Monumenta Ragusina: Libri Reformationum*. Tomus I (1306-1347), Zagrabiae: Sumptibus Academiae Scientiarum et Artium, 1879, 120; L. Tholloczy-C.Jericek- E.Sufflay, *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae mediae aetatis illustrantia*, vol. I, Vindobonae 1913-1918, ribotim në Prishtinë nga Ekskluzive 2002, doc. 676; 745; Charles Du Fresne Du Cange, *Historia Byzantina duplici commentario illustrata. Prior, Familias ac stemmata imperatorum Constantinopolitanorum, cum corundem Augustorum Nomismatibus, & aliquot Iconibus: Praeterea Familias Dalmaticas & Turcicas complectitur: Alter, Descriptionem Urbis Constantinopolitanae, qualis extitit sub Imperatoribus Christianis*, Paris: Louis Billaine, 1680, f. 351; Theodor Ippen, *Denkmäler verschiedener Altersstufen in Albanien*, Wiss. Mitt. Bosnien u. Herzegowina. 10, Wien, 1907, 13; Constantin Jireček, *Die Romanen in den städten Dalmatiens während des mittelalters*.III, Wien 1904, 61.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Državni Arhiv u Dubrovniku, Diversa Notariae*, XI/24v; *Acta Alb.*, II/701.

^{iv} Marin Barleti, *Historia e jetës dhe e veprave të Skënderbeut*, Prishtinë 1982, 152; Ali Hashorva, *Bashkëlufëtarët e Skënderbeut*, Prishtinë 1967, 121.

^v Giuseppe [Joseph] Valentini, *Acta Albaniae Veneta saeculorum XIV et XV*, 25 vol., Palermo-Napoli-Roma-Venezia-München: Archivio di Stato di Venezia, 1967-1972, p. II, t. 17, nr. 3185, 89; AAV, p. II, t. 13, nr. 3161, 76; *Regjistri i Kadastrës dhe i Koncesioneve për rrethin e Shkodrës, 1416-1417*, bot. I, përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi, Tiranë, 1977, fl.35/a; 37/b.

^{vi} Nicolae Jorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XVe siècle*, Volume III, Paris: Ernest Leroux, Bucurest: l'Academie Roumaine, 1899, 384; Constantin Jireček, "Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter", L. Thalloczy, *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, Band I, München und Leipzig, 1916, 113; Константин Јиречек, *ИСТОРИЈА СРБА, ПРВА КЊИГА ДО 1537. ГОДИНЕ* Културна историја "Научна књига" Космајска 28 БЕОГРАД 1952, 390.

Bozhidar are mentioned as their father's, Pjetër Spani, heir.^{vii} Documentary evidence of that time proves that Aleks Spani was married to (*Milizza*) the daughter of the Serbian despot, Gjergj Branković.^{viii} Referring to the genealogical, respectively the genealogy of the Muzaka family, genealogy of A.Degradit, Du Cange and confronting these informations with documentary sources we understand that Aleks Spani had seven children: Markus (*Markus Spanus*), Vlashi (*Blasius, Biagio*), Aleksandri (*Alexander*), Lucia, Demetra, Angelina and Adriana.

Regarding the activity of Aleks Spani, we are starting with his service as a mayor of the city of Novobërdë.^{ix} Although we did not encounter so much information about Alex Spani at the time, while he was the mayor of Novobërdë, however it was proved that he was indeed the mayor of Novobërdë. From the Information we have, we can see that in the position of the mayor of Novobërdë on the 27th September 1454, Aleks Spani deposits in Dubrovnik, a portion of his money in an amount of 390 ducats,^x apparently at the time the city of Novobërdë was endangered by the attacks of the Ottoman's, who in 1455 took over the town of Novobërdë,^{xi} so the deposits of the 390 ducats was made by Alex Spani for security reasons. In addition to these information, we have encountered that Alex Spain withdraws his ducats in 1474.^{xii}

After the fall of Novobërdë under the Ottoman dominance, the Information we have for Aleks Spani, mainly refers to his role as a mediator between the Republic of

^{vii} Irmgard Mahnken, "Beziehungen zwischen Ragusanern und Albanern während des Mittelalters", *Beiträge zur Südosteuropaforschung anlässlich des I. internationalen balkanologenkongresses in Sofia*. München 1966, 383, shën 112.

^{viii} *Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë vëll.IV (1479-1506)*, pjesa I (1479-1499), Përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi, Tiranë 1967, dok. 94: "... *Milica, femme du despot de Serbie, George Vuković...*"; Du Cange, *Historia*, 351: "Alexius Spanus, ux. Milizza, filia Georgii Brankovitzii Serviaë"; Charles Hopf, *Chroniques gréco-romanes inédites ou peu connues publiées avec notes et tables généalogiques par Charles Hopf*. Berlin: Weidmann, 1877, 535: "*Alessio ("Magnifico") 1442-1495, †1495; ép.: Elisabetta, fille de Georges de Serbie*"; Чедомиљ Мијатовић, *Деспот Ђурађ Бранковић: Господар Србима, Подунавље и зетском Приморје*, Прва књига, Београд 1880, 75: "...*Ђурађ имао две кћери Јелену и Лизабету или Милицу, од којих је по ње у прва пошла за Мурата а друга за кнеза од Дриваста Алексија Ангеловића Шпана...*"; Degrand, *Souvenirs*, : "*Alessio Magnifico. 1442-1495 † 1495. Ép.: Elisabeth, fille de Georges de Serbie*"; Theoharis Stavrides, *The Sultan of vezirs: the life and times of the Ottoman Grand Vezir Mahmud Pasha Angelović (1453-1474)*, Leiden-Boston-Köln 2001, 229.

^{ix} Constantin Jireček, "Skutari und sein Gebiet im Mittelalter", L. Thalloczy, *Illyrisch-Albanische Forschungen*, Band I, München und Leipzig, 1916, 113 ; Јиречек, *ИСТОРИЈА СРБА, ПРВА КЊИГА*, 327, 354 shën. nr. 78: "*Alessii filii Pethari Span, vaivode Novimontis*"; Gasper Gjini, *Ipeshkvia Shkup-Prizren nër shekuj*, Ferizaj, 1992, 108; Jahja Drançolli, *Raguzanët në Kosovë (prej fundit të shekullit XIII deri në vitin 1455)*, Instituti i Historisë, Prishtinë 1986, 96.

^x Јиречек, *ИСТОРИЈА СРБА, ПРВА КЊИГА*, 354; Drançolli, *Raguzanët*, 96.

^{xi} Constantin Jireček, *Die Handelstrassen und Bergwerke von Serbien und Bosnien. Während des Mittlalters*, Prag 1878, 41.

^{xii} Јиречек, *ИСТОРИЈА СРБА, ПРВА КЊИГА*, 354.

Venice and the Ottoman Empire. Before we approach his role as a mediator, it is interesting to note that Aleks Spani from 1463 was in contact with Venedic. Such a thing is understood by the instructions given to the Venetian, Gabriel *Trivisanos*, a Venedic ruler chosen in Albania on the 17th of October, 1463, whereby, the Venetian Senate, hints that they were being informed by Aleks Spani's letter about the conditions in Albania and Albanian nobility, which were favorable to them.^{xiii}

The documentary sources make us aware that Aleks Spani during the years 1467-1468 had served as a mediator for the peace negotiations between the Ottoman Empire and Venice. In this context, in October 1467, Mehmet the II through Aleks Spani had made an offer for to Venice, which Aleks Spani's had given the offer to the Senate.^{xiv} As well, in May 1468, Aleks Spani had served as a mediator for the peace treaty with Venice.^{xv} Aleks Spani as a mediator for peace between the Ottoman Empire and Venice is also encountered during the year 1470-1473. During 1470 and 1472 the Tenth Council discussed the proposals made by Aleks Spani for peace with the Sultan,^{xvi} and in 1473, Aleks Spani in the capacity of the mediator had convinced the Tenth Council for the sincerity of Mahmud Pasha's.^{xvii} For his role as a mediator, Aleks Spani is rewarded with a yearly pension of 1000 ducats from Venice as well as expensive gifts of fabrics.^{xviii}

After the fall of Drishti under the Ottoman Empire, Aleks Spani with his familu settled in Venice. In 1483, in the testament of Aleks Spani made in *Moncelice*, his wife *Milizza* (Milica) and his daughter *Dorojeta* were mentioned.^{xix} With the placement of Aleks Spain in Venice, he offered a pension, which, with his death in 1495, passed on to his sons.^{xx} In this regard, in 1495, the Tenth Council of Venice, decided to pay the

^{xiii} S. Ljubić, *Listine o odnosajih izmedju juznoga Slavenstva i mletacke republike. Knjiga X: od godine 1453 do 1469* (MSHSM, Zagreb 1891), 279-280 : "...insuper quia illis in partibus sunt nonnulli domini, partim nostro dominio commendati, partim qui erga statum nostrum bonam voluntatem habere videntur, sicut literis comitis et capitanei Scutari de Alexio Spano nuper certiores facti humus..."; Jovan Radonić, *Đuard Kastriot Skenderbeg i Arbanija u XV veku*, Beograd, 1942, dok. 255.

^{xiv} Ljubić, *Listine X*, 400-401; Radonić, *Đuard Kastriot*, dok.381; Oliver Jenés Schmitt, *Arbëria Venedike 1392-1479*, Tiranë 2007, 597.

^{xv} Ljubić, *Listine X*, 406-407; Radonić, *Đuard Kastriot*, dok.395.

^{xvi} Théoharis, *Stavrides, The Sultan of vezirs*, 220; 222.

^{xvii} Schmitt, *Arbëria*, 601; Théoharis, *The Sultan*, 225.

^{xviii} Schmitt, *Arbëria*, 601; Théoharis, *The Sultan*, 225.

^{xix} *Dokumenta të shekullit XV për historinë e Shqipërisë vëll.IV (1479-1506)*, pjesa I (1479-1499), Përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi, Tiranë 1967, dok.94: "1483 août 14 — Testament d'Alexis Span, rédigé à Moncelice. On y trouve les noms de Dorotheé, fille d'Alexis et femme de Marc Ongaro d'Albanie; Milica, femme du despot de Serbie, George Vuković; Stéphane de Balec l'Albanai".

^{xx} Paolo Petta, *Despotët të Epirit e princër të Maqedonis - Mërgata shqiptare në Italinë e periudhës së Rilindjes* Tiranë: Botimet IDK 2001, 234.

provision to the children of Llesh Spani's.^{xxi} In the following years, members of Aleks Spani's family are mentioned in various parts of Venice. On April 10, in the testament of Vlash Spani, the son of Aleks Spani, some members of this family were mentioned.^{xxii} While in a testimony issued in Padovë on May 2nd, 1542, Luçia is mentioned, Aleks Spani daughter, which was the wife of Pjetër Engjëllit.^{xxiii}

During the 26th century, some of the Spani family members were also seen or found in Novobërdë. In the book of Sanxhakut of Vuçitërrna, at the years 1569-70, interesting information's was provided that Novobërdë after the fall under the Ottoman dominance. In this book, we also come across Novobërdë, which was the sovereign of the Sultan. This city at that time consisted of several communities and neighborhoods.^{xxiv} In the neighborhood of Markus Kërstit, which was quite a large one and contained 32 house's, among the heads of households there is also mentioned *Pejo Spani* (Ispani).^{xxv} Meanwhile in the neighborhood of Koriçkës, which was also in this book, consisted of 15 houses, Luka Spani is mentioned as the head of the household.^{xxvi} However, members of the Spani family with their contribution managed to leave traces not only in Drishtë but also beyond, as we have the case of Aleks Spani who was not only mentioned or seen as the mayor of Novobërdë but also well-known for his diplomatic mission negotiating for peace between the Ottoman Empire and Venice. Alongside Aleks Spani, his descendants were also noteworthy, who, although emigrating to Venice, played an important role in the social trends of that time.

^{xxi} *Dokumenta të shekullit XV, dok 205: "1495 novembre 28 – Délibération du Conseil des Dix de Venise afin que soit payée la provision aux fils d'Alexis Span"*.

^{xxii} *Dokumente të shekujve XVI-XVII për historinë e Shqipërisë, Vëllimi I (1507-1592), përgatitur nga Injac Zamputi, Tiranë 1989, dok. 89.*

^{xxiii} *Dokumente të shekujve XVI-XVII, dok. 149.*

^{xxiv} Skënder Riza, *Novobërda gjatë shekujve XV dhe XVI, Vjetar i Arkivit të Kosovës, Prishtinë, 1985/ XX, 129.*

^{xxv} Riza, *Novobërda, 139.*

^{xxvi} *Ibid., 142.*

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