

**Ian F. Hathaway - History Project Research Report.**

**Project Title: “Trading Across Boundaries: Sixteenth-century Letters of Safe Passage and the Challenge of Cross-cultural Trade.”**

Thanks to History Project’s generous support, I conducted five weeks of research in Dubrovnik, Venice, and Ancona during the past summer. The purpose of this trip was twofold: to evaluate the possibility of including Dubrovnik and Ancona as case studies in my dissertation, and to further explore the vast collections of the Venetian State archive. My project, “Trading Across Boundaries: Sixteenth-century Letters of Safe Passage and the Challenge of Cross-cultural Trade,” aims at exploring the bureaucratic instruments utilized by early modern states and traders to promote and manage cross-cultural trade in the eastern Mediterranean. My initial hypothesis was that letters of safe passage and other similar documents played an important role in this process, a role which required further analysis and explanation. During my trip, I thus tried to identify which institutions issued letters of safe passage in each of my case studies, what typologies of safe-conduct existed, and what was the relationship between specific strategies of safe-conduct and the political and economic concerns of individuals and states. I also searched for anecdotal examples of the use of safe-conducts in trade-related diplomacy, and in court cases.

In my research and studies, I have often used the terms “letter of safe passage,” or “safe-conduct” as blanket terms which refer to many different types of documents. The common function of these documents was to extend (or reaffirm) a State’s protection to an individual, or to a ship/caravan. The documents that performed these functions were characterized by various levels of formalism and by various functions. Examples of these documents are *salvacondotti*, *litterae passus*, *lettere di commendazione*, *patenti*, *licentie*, *lasciapassare*, *fedi*. At a further stage of my research, I hope to clarify

with more accuracy the differences between each one of these typologies. For now, it may suffice to say that in some cases the same type of bureaucratic instrument could perform different safe-conduct related functions, while in other cases different instruments could perform similar functions. One State might not even need or desire to issue a specific type of safe-conduct at all. A key example of this is Venice itself, where in many cases bureaucratic instruments providing safe-conduct were replaced by state-sponsored armed convoys.<sup>1</sup> Diverging practices seem to have been influenced both by local customs, and by the specific geopolitical positionality of a given State. This conclusion clearly emerges when one considers the evidence comparatively.

Despite the heterogeneity of my sources and the early stages of my research, some general categories through which to theoretically organize safe-conduct in the sixteenth-century eastern Mediterranean have emerged during my research in Dubrovnik, Venice, and Ancona. These categories are based on the motivations that led to the issuing of a safe-conduct related document. Outlining these categories will illustrate how my research this summer contributed to my dissertation project. The first type of safe conduct, which I call “transit safe-conduct,” was issued to protect a traveler and his goods (or a ship) during a specific trip (or series of trips) across a space controlled by the issuing power. A transit safe-conduct could also, it seems, diminish the import tariffs payed by a travel. This category, which was the most common typology in my previous case study, Malta, seems to be relatively rare in both Venice and Dubrovnik (the situation of Ancona is ambiguous because of its inclusion in the Papal State). Venice and Dubrovnik likely needed to issue less of these documents because of the stable commercial agreements, or capitulations, between them and the Ottoman Empire. Ancona also benefitted from Ottoman capitulations until the death of Suleiman the Magnificent in 1566, although

---

<sup>1</sup> The Venetian *mude*, large convoys sent yearly to Alexandria, Beirut, and even Flanders are the most famous example of this practice. But Venice also relied on smaller scale convoys to manage safe-passage in the Adriatic, between Split and Venice itself. See ASVe, Cinque Savi Alla Mercanzia, Prima Serie, Pezzo 26. Capitolazioni dei Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia N. 3, ff. 25v-26r. On Venetian convoy practices, more generally, one can refer to the still relevant works of Frederic C. Lane, particularly: Lane, Frederic Chapin. *Profits from power: readings in protection rent and violence-controlling enterprises*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979.

the agreements were apparently not renewed by the Sultan's successor Selim.<sup>2</sup> Individualized safe-conducts for trade were thus only needed in dangerous or anomalous situations. Venice, for example, issued them to non-Christians (or converts), both to entire "nations" (e.g. "to all the Levantine Jews"),<sup>3</sup> and to individuals. One example of this practice is the case of Rodrigo de Marchiana, whose family was granted safe-conduct to settle in Venice from Portugal and Fez in order to jump start the sugar trade between Morocco and the Most Serene Republic.<sup>4</sup> The transit safe-conduct granted to non-Christians seems to be, indeed, the only case in which Venice issued a *salvacondotto* proper for transit purposes. In the case of Christians, Venice preferred to issue *patenti*, albeit only for specific trade routes to the Duchy of Milan,<sup>5</sup> and in cases related to the trade of dangerous goods (like weapons).<sup>6</sup> The Venetian Senate could also use *patenti* to help maintain the flow of grain supplies during moments of military pressure, such as during the 1570-1573 War of the Holy League.<sup>7</sup> Considering this, it seems clear that *ad hoc* transit safe-conduct was more likely used in the absence of formalized trade and diplomatic agreements, or in the case of specific dangers to a trip.

The second type of safe-conduct is "financial," meaning that it protected its carrier from debts. Debts could be towards the state, or towards individuals both foreign and local. It is unclear at this point what types of debts towards the state could be covered by safe-conduct. In the case of debts towards individuals, a key difference was whether these individuals were foreign or local. In the first case, which I had previously seen in some rare Maltese examples,<sup>8</sup> and which was likely used by Venice as well, the purpose was to attract traders (and corsairs!) by offering them protection against debts (and law suits)

---

<sup>2</sup> ACAN, Antico Regime, Sezione V, Proprieta' e diritti comunali: Pascoli, case e botteghe, navi predate, muline ed annessi delle poiole, Fascicolo 634.

<sup>3</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savi Alla Mercanzia, Prima Serie, Pezzo 26. Capitolazioni de Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia N. 3, ff. 11r-12v.

<sup>4</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savi Alla Mercanzia, Prima Serie, Pezzo 26. Capitolazioni de Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia N. 3, ff. 133r-133v.

<sup>5</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, Prima Serie, Pezzo 135, f. 39r.

<sup>6</sup> ASVe, Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia, Prima Serie, Pezzo 135 f. 144v.

<sup>7</sup> ASVe, Serenissima Signoria, Lettere Sottoscritte, Mar, Filze, Pezzo 174, September 2, 1571.

<sup>8</sup> AOM, Libri Bullarum, 404, f. 230v.

claimed by citizens of other states.<sup>9</sup> In the second case, very common in Dubrovnik, the purpose was also to attract traders and travelers (which of course meant more tariffs for the State), but in this case by shielding them against debts contracted in loco. Dubrovnik issued hundreds of these safe conducts during the early sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The documents were valid for only fifteen days, and came into effect only after the travelers had arrived in port. It therefore seems likely that these safe-conducts protected from local debt, but this claim will require further evidence. If it were substantiated, the dynamics of financial safe-conduct usage in Dubrovnik and Malta would be reversed.

The final typology is the “criminal safe-conduct,” a document which protected individuals against legal penalties, usually anything lesser than the death penalty. These types of safe-conduct were extremely common in early modern Italy, and went hand in hand with the *gratiae* (pardons) granted by rulers. The documents allowed a criminal living in exile to return to his homeland to attend trials, settle debts, or various other issues. The criminal safe-conduct usually addressed different social needs than the mercantile and financial ones, which are the focus of my study. However, the example of Dubrovnik and Venice show that this type of safe-conduct could be granted to secure economic benefits for the State. Occasionally, criminal safe-conducts (not pardons) could grant amnesty to ship captains who were willing to bring grain to Dubrovnik. This practice was particularly important when the availability of ships for provisioning became scares because of war. To cite one example, in 1567 the ruling council of Dubrovnik granted a criminal safe-conduct to all ship captains who were willing to divert their grain-carrying ships to the Croatian port. The decision was directly related to the activities of the Spanish fleet in the eastern Mediterranean, which, as was custom, tried to commandeer foreign ships to support its

---

<sup>9</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Mar. Filze, Pezzo 33, December 5, 1565, Ordini e Provisioni fatte per il Magnifico messer Nicolo Barbarigo sindaco e proveditore in Levante nella Isola di Thime, ff. 9, 19.

<sup>10</sup> DAuD, Acta Minoris Consilii, Fond. 4 Ser. 1 Vol. 34. Almost every page of this volume contains one or more financial safe-conducts. See, for example, f. 40r: “Captum fuit de dando fidam et liberum salvum conductum Marco de Aliyretto de Calamata pro diebus quindecim secuturus a die quia venutus Ragusum.”

own military efforts.<sup>11</sup> I have also found one example in Venice of a French ship captain receiving criminal safe-conduct against fines accrued by not paying custom duties. The document was issued upon arriving in Venice, and suggests that the categories of financial and criminal safe-conduct are closely related to each other.<sup>12</sup>

These conclusions and the categories I have sketched derive from a still scant sampling of the archival series produced by the main administrative institutions of Dubrovnik (*Acta Consilia Rogatorum*, Vol. 36, 59; *Acta Minoris Consilii*, Vol. 34, 49; *Lamenti Politici*, Vol 4, 7; *Diversa Concelleriae*, Vol 148, 150; *Secreta Rogatorum*, Vol. 2; *Diversa Notariae*, Vol 117), and Venice (*Senato, Mare*, Filze N: 18, 25, 33; *Senato, Deliberazioni Costantinopoli*, N: 1; *Collegio, Notatorio*, N: 55; *Collegio, Secreti, Registri*, N: 25; *Consiglio dei Dieci, Deliberazioni, Secreti*, N: 10; *Avogaria del Comun* N: 622, 670/6, 3638, 3676; *Serenissima Signoria*, N: 164, 166, 169, 172, 174, 180, 182; *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, N: 26, 56, 135, 181; *Collegio, Suppliche di Fuori*, N: 322; *Podesta di Chioggia*, N: 30; *Cariche Mare, Processi*, N: 10; *Secreta, Miscellanea Materie Miste e Notabili*, N: 26, 27, 41, 42, 44, 122). This source base provides a wide range of data, but is in no way comprehensive. The next step of my project will thus entail selecting the series to delve into systematically in order to confirm or alter my current interpretations.

During my weeks of research, I was also able to identify useful series containing evidence regarding the use of safe-conducts at sea, or in court. The latter has proven a complex issue, and I was only able to recover vague references to safe-conduct violations in the *Cariche Mare*, and in the *Avogaria del Comun* series from Venice.<sup>13</sup> This may be because safe-conduct violation, particularly that of transit safe-conducts, was addressed as a diplomatic issue, and hence left traces in different archival series than those produced by tribunals. Therefore, the correspondence of the Bailo's office, or the

---

<sup>11</sup> DAuD, *Secreta Rogatorum*, Fond. 3, Ser. 2, Vol. 2, ff. 112r-114r.

<sup>12</sup> ASVe, *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*, Seconda Serie, Pezzo 129, January 20, 1668.

<sup>13</sup> ASVe, *Cariche da Mar, Processi*, Pezzo 10, case number 6 against Mathio Messali; *Avogaria del Comun*, Pezzo 3676, f. 116v.

Senato series seems to be the most likely places to find references to them. One interesting example of safe-conduct violation comes unexpectedly from a brief survey trip I took to Ancona: traces of a diplomatic exchange between Ancona, Rome, Venice, Istanbul, Dubrovnik and France discussing the case of a trading vessel captured by the Ottoman Kapudan Pasha in full violation of Sultan Suleiman's safe-conduct. The case also contains a second safe-conduct sent to the ambassador of Ancona to aid him in his travels.<sup>14</sup> This episode may provide a fundamental case study for my dissertation, as it will help illustrate how the diplomatic apparatus of many different States dealt with issues of safe-conduct violation. My hope is to trace this case in the archives of the other powers involved, and to provide a comprehensive and multi-perspective description of it.

As for the use of safe-conduct on the sea, the *Dispacci* from Venetian official in the Levant are a key candidate for future data mining. These famous series are not complete, but I plan to integrate them with material extracted from Marino Sanudo's *Diarii*, a hugely useful source for Venetian maritime history up to 1536. The archive of Dubrovnik also offered a truly fascinating find. A series called *Lettere da Levante* contains the correspondence between the city's ruling council and its diplomats, sea captains, and officials stationed in the eastern Mediterranean. It is for the most part uninterrupted for the entire sixteenth century. Even a minor sampling of the series points to its importance: I discovered, for example, that sea captains who provisioned the city were provided with two safe-conducts (*patenti*, in this case), one Venetian, and one Ottoman. The captains were instructed to show the documents, together with other Ottoman imperial orders (*hukm*) to the naval officers they encountered.<sup>15</sup> This information hints strongly to the possibility that Dubrovnik did not generally issue its own transit safe-conducts because it relied on those granted by its powerful neighbors. The transit safe-conduct, thus,

---

<sup>14</sup> ACAN, Antico Regime, Sezione V, Proprieta' e diritti comunali: Pascoli, case e botteghe, navi predate, muline ed annessi delle poiole, Fascicolo 634/4.

<sup>15</sup> DAuD, Lettere e Commissioni, Lettere da Levante, Fon. 8, Ser. 1, Vol. 28, ff. 24v-25r.

was directly linked to the capacity of a State to provide military protection in a specific region; Dubrovnik was not capable of doing so (or chose not to) and left the job to Venice and Istanbul.

The sum of my five-week research trip is quite positive. In both previously explored and in new archives, I found substantial material which allowed me to formulate more detailed work criteria with which to advance my dissertation research. Future steps will involve systematic data collection and analysis from the most relevant series I have identified, and expansion of the qualitative aspect of the work using diplomatic and *Dispacci*-like materials. I thank History Project for the support provided this past summer, which allowed me to move on to the next step of my project.