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Cyrillic Letters and the *Slavonic* Tongue in the service of the Ottomans (About Attempts at Labelling the Script and the Language in 15th–16th Centuries)¹

Abstract

Despite the fact that three main official languages were used in the Ottoman Empire (Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, Persian), in the 15th–16th centuries, the Ottomans also used *Slavonic* tongue and Cyrillic letters in pragmatic literacy (letters, edicts, charters), diplomacy, and communication with their vassal states and neighbouring countries. However, the language and the script were labelled with different names by 15th–16th-century authors. The main aim of the work is to present, compare, and analyse some terms (used as glossonyms and/or graphonyms) found in medieval and early modern sources created in various European states. Additionally, the article tries to consider why the Ottomans decided to use the language and the script. Moreover, it sheds light on a *Slavonic* and Cyrillic network, formed and developed by the Ottomans in reference to former (Christian and South Slavic) patterns, employed in *Slavonic* chanceries of medieval Balkan states.

Keywords: South Slavs, *Slavonic* language, Cyrillic script, 15th–16th centuries, the Ottoman period in the Balkans

It is generally assumed that three main official languages were used in the Ottoman Empire, i.e. Ottoman Turkish (as the language of the managing, executive and juridical authorities), Arabic (the language of theological and legal manuscripts, used in religious practice of Muslim confessional community), and Persian (the language that dominated over terminology of literary works)². Arabic and Persian were spoken only among native

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² Ch. Woodhead, *Ottoman Languages*, in: *The Ottoman World*, Ch. Woodhead (ed.), London–New York 2012, p. 143.



speakers and the Ottoman intelligentsia. Besides, it is a well-known fact that even Ottoman Turkish (highly influenced by Arabic and Persian) was not close to ordinary people. However, before the reign of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Empire had manifested the tendency to employ particular multilingualism. In the 15th–16th centuries, the Ottomans also made use of the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script in pragmatic literacy (letters, edicts, charters), linked to diplomacy, trade, various financial and military affairs, in general communication with their vassal states and neighbouring countries, a fact confirmed by European travel accounts, treatises, chronicles, or some Ottoman documents.

The paper will primarily refer to the sources that contain different names for the *Slavonic* tongue and/or the Cyrillic script (in the service of the Ottomans). The general term *Slavonic* will be applied to the language to emphasize its universal undertone and avoid references to present-day national languages and ethnic communities (in general, 15th–16th-century lingual terms, used to name the tongue and/or the script, will be written in italics). Lingual terms (used as glossonyms and/or graphonyms) usually had different meanings in the past. Hence, they are often incompatible with contemporary national terminology, as language was not considered the divisive marker of ethnic identities.

The article will try to shed new light on the fact of using the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script by the Ottomans³, presenting it in broader optics, and applying a general interdisciplinary approach by combining historical, linguistic, and literary perspectives, and comparative-historical methods (with references to terms offered by studies on pragmatic literacy and network analysis). Some issues remain to be explored and cleared. Firstly, label names for the language/script should be taken into account. The paper will present, compare, and analyse a few terms found in 15th–16th-century sources created by authors with different cultural, social, and political backgrounds and positionalities. Secondly, the article will try to consider why the Ottomans decided to make use of the language/script at a particular historical time. Thirdly, it will try to determine why they stopped employing those communication “tools” at the central, state level. Additionally, the paper will shed light on a *Slavonic* and Cyrillic network, constructed and developed in reference to former (Christian and South Slavonic) patterns, a fact which benefited from specific pragmatism, the accommodating and syncretic policy of the Ottomans towards the conquered communities at that time.

After the conquest of South Slavonic territories (Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Montenegro, Dalmatia) in a relatively short time, the Ottomans had to integrate a large propor-

³ See M. Kostić, *Srpski jezik kao diplomatski jezik Jugoistočne Evrope od XV.–XVIII. v.*, Skoplje 1924, pp. 8–16; P. Ivić, *Pregled istorije srpskog jezika*, Sremski Karlovci–Novi Sad 1998, pp. 92–95; B. Unbegaun, *Četiri pisma turskoga sultana Selima I na srpskom jeziku*, in: *Xenia Slavica. Papers Presented to Gojko Ružičić on the Occasion of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday, 2 February 1969*, R. Lencek, B. Unbegaun (eds.), Paris–the Hague 1975, pp. 222–228; B. Stolz, *Serbo–Croatian as a Balkan Diplomatic Language during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, “Zbornik Matice srpske za filologiju i lingvistiku” 1984/1985, vol. 27/28, pp. 747–759; V. Polomac, *Srpski kao diplomatski jezik na Porti krajem XV: na primeru pisma sultana Bajazita ugarskom kralju Matiju Karvinu*, “Srpski jezik” 2022, vol. 28, pp. 95–115; N. Isailović, A. Krstić, *Serbian Language and Cyrillic Script as a Means of Diplomatic Literacy in South Eastern Europe in 15th and 16th Centuries*, in: *Literacy Experiences Concerning Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania*, S. Andea, A. C. Dincă (eds.), Cluj-Napoca 2015, pp. 185–195; L. Nakaš, *Portina slavenska kancelarija i njen utjecaj na pisare u prvom stoljeću osmanske uprave u Bosni*, “Forum Bosnae” 2016, vol. 74/75, pp. 269–297.

tion of the population. For that purpose, many South Slavonic Ottoman citizens, both Christians and Muslim converts, were appointed to various Ottoman offices. The most brilliant careers were made by former Christian aristocrats who accepted Islam and Christian boys, recruited and converted to Islam within the *devshirme* system (grand viziers, *beylerbeys*, *sanjakbeys*), which functioned as a specific integrative mechanism in the Empire⁴. The Ottomans needed people who knew local circumstances and languages in the Balkans. South Slavonic Christians were also included in the Ottoman army and administration, especially on territories (e.g. the *sanjak* of Bosnia and the *sanjak* of Smederevo) that were organized as strategic borderlands⁵. Communities of those borderlands could be granted special privileges, tax exemption, or even self-government⁶, and larger masses of the local population were involved in the military forces, serving in various units (e.g. as Christian *sipahis*). Moreover, many Ottoman scribes and interpreters of South Slavonic origin (both Christians and Muslim converts) constituted a crucial cluster of those who “wielded the pen”. All those groups spoke mutually intelligible South Slavonic idioms and could easily communicate with each other and with inhabitants of neighbouring territories (often with large South Slavonic populations or influenced by South Slavonic cultures). That (South Slavonic) ethnolinguistic strata formed a particular connection between the former medieval Christian and the new Ottoman worlds, assuring some kind of continuity in Cyrillic (pragmatic) literacy⁷.

The Ottomans gave the impetus to the development of the *Slavonic*/Cyrillic network, which functioned due to institutions of *Slavonic* chancelleries and actors of different ranks, i.e. senders, addressees, scribes, interpreters, and envoys. The terms such as “*Slavonic*” and “Cyrillic” refer to the lingual and scribal specificity of network links⁸ that mostly had an official (or semi-official), cross-border, and cross-confessional character. Referring to former patterns and traditions of medieval Balkan states, the *Slavonic* and Cyrillic network was developed under the auspices of the Ottomans, who maintained relations and exchanged letters, edicts, or charters with their (Christian) vassal states and neighbouring countries. The *Slavonic* chancelleries existed (and “travelled” with sultans) in Istanbul (the *Slavonic* state chancellery played a central role in the network), at the courts of various Ottoman officials, in the Danubian Principalities (Moldavia and Wallachia), the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), the Adriatic cities under the Venetian rule (e.g. Kotor, Zadar, Šibenik, Split), Hungary, and later (for some time) in the Habsburg Monarchy⁹. The Ottoman *Slavonic*

⁴ L. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, London 2000, p. 105; H. Lowry, *The Nature of the Early Ottoman State*, New York 2003, pp. 120–122.

⁵ Some South Slavonic territories, including northern Serbia, lost their privileged status along with the shift in the Ottoman border towards the north after the final conquest of Hungary (1541).

⁶ L. Stavrianos, *The Balkans...*, p. 101.

⁷ R. Britnell, *Preface*, in: *Pragmatic Literacy: East and West, 1200–1330*, R. Britnell (ed.), Woodbridge 1997, p. VII; Ch. Meier, *Fourteen Years of Research at Münster into Pragmatic Literacy in the Middle Ages*, in: *Transforming the Medieval World. Uses of Pragmatic Literacy in the Middle Ages*, F.J. Arlinghaus, M. Ostermann, O. Plessow, G. Tschepel (eds.), Turnhout 2006, pp. 25–26.

⁸ Ch. Kadushin, *Understanding Social Networks. Theories, Concepts, and Findings*, Oxford 2012, pp. 38–41; Ch. Prell, *Social Network Analysis: History, Theory and Methodology*, Los Angeles 2012, pp. 166–176.

⁹ It is crucial to highlight the fact that Hungarian King Ferdinand I of Habsburg (from 1556 Holy Roman Emperor) had decided to continue his Hungarian predecessors’ tradition of *Slavonic* chancellery, hence, he entrusted the bishop of Eger with the task of finding a secretary for *Rascian* (Serbian) language (at the same time,

sultanic chancellery functioned from ca. the 1430s until the middle of the 16th century. However, the Ottoman low-ranking officials had earlier started to employ the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script, i.e. from the end of the 14th century (e.g. in communication with Dubrovnik¹⁰). After the middle of the 16th century, letter writing in *Slavonic* (in regional varieties) would be continued, but to a limited extent, and on the local, regional level (as a provincial literacy practice) in the Ottoman Balkans.

In general, the Ottoman Empire inherited many practices, patterns, and traditions from the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) and medieval Christian states in South-Eastern Europe. Therefore, the use of the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script should be perceived in terms of that (medieval Christian) heritage. Moreover, it was a reflection of Ottoman multilingualism, which started to subside owing to Sultan Süleyman I's administrative and legal reforms, caused by imperial rivalry, claims to universal legitimacy, a new formalization of Ottoman sovereignty, and centralization of the Empire. From the 1520s onwards, the sultan's court advocated monolingual literacy practice in the Ottoman state chancellery based on Ottoman Turkish (as a dominant medium of communication and a tool of integration), except for Arabic and Persian in some cases¹¹. The reforms contributed to forming distinct confessional barriers between communities¹² and to moving away from the syncretic and accommodating policy towards the conquered communities.

It is possible to find a few different names for the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script (in the service of the Ottomans). The general word ***Slavonic*** was one of the most common terms found in European sources that referred to lingual issues in the Ottoman Empire¹³. The term was widely used in the Dubrovnik chancellery, usually in (Italian, Latin) interlinear glosses added to Ottoman *Slavonic*/Cyrillic letters and documents issued for Dubrovnik, for instance, on Murad II's charter (1430) on freedom of trade (*schrita in schiavo; schrito in schiavonescho*)¹⁴. Moreover, Maciej Strykowski in the *Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia and all of Ruthenia* (1582) states that in Constantinople, everywhere on streets or in caravanserais, he has personally heard beautiful songs, performed to the accompaniment of "Serbian violin" (he meant *gusle*), on heroic deeds of janissaries and great courage of *pashas, sanjakbeys, chaushs, and sipahis*. The songs have been sung in Turkish and *Slavonic* languages¹⁵. In turn, the Polish historian and cleric Jan Andrzej Krasieński in his geographical and political work on 16th-century Poland claims that the "*Slavonic* speech" is not unfamiliar to the "Turkish nation", and it is eagerly heard at

he searched for a secretary for the Hungarian language) and *Rascian* issues in 1528, A. Ivić, *Istrojia Srba u Ugarskoj od pada Smedereva do seobe pod Čarnojevičem (1459–1690)*, Zagreb 1914, pp. 83–84.

¹⁰ Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, vol. 1 (part 2), Beograd–Sremski Karlovci 1934, pp. 217–221 (no. 798, 799, 800, 801, 802).

¹¹ G. Necipoğlu, *The Spatial Organization of Knowledge in the Ottoman Palace Library: An Encyclopedic Collection and Its Inventory*, in: *Treasures of Knowledge. An Inventory of the Ottoman Palace Library (1502/3–1503/4)*, vol. 1: *Essays*, G. Necipoğlu, C. Kafadar, C. H. Fleischer (eds.), Leiden–Boston 2019, p. 32; H. Ferguson, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power, and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourses*, Stanford 2018, pp. 108–109.

¹² H. Lowry, *The Nature...*, p. 101.

¹³ J. V. A. Fine (Jr.), *When Ethnicity did not Matter in the Balkans. A Study of Identity in Pre-Nationalist Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia in the Medieval and Early-Modern Periods*, Ann Arbor 2006, pp. 150–165.

¹⁴ Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje...*, pp. 230–231 (no. 812, 813).

¹⁵ M. Malinowski (ed.), *Kronika polska, litewska, żmudzka i w wszystkiej Rusi Macieja Strykowskiego*, vol. 1, Warszawa 1846, p. XXXIV.

the court in Constantinople, a fact which is related to the Ottoman rule over almost all Slavonic lands, where many Slavs have been converted to the “Mahometan religion” (Islam) and serve in the sultan’s army¹⁶. Describing the languages of the Ottoman Empire, the Italian historian and chronicler Paulus Jovius (Paolo Giovio) maintains that while a sultan speaks Turkish and Arabic, *Slavonic* is the third most popular language, especially among the janissaries (he also mentions Greek)¹⁷. Luigi Bassano da Zara (from Zadar) mentions that the sultan (he means Sultan Süleyman) differs from other rulers (who feel the need to know many languages), as he thinks that it is enough to speak in his own language (Ottoman Turkish) and *Slavonic*. According to Bassano, *Slavonic* is highly valued in the Empire, and considered useful, because it is spoken by many “nations” (*nationi*) and used in various lands. Moreover, many Ottoman officials (*sanjakbeys*, *beylerbeys*, janissaries, *agas*, *chauchs*, *sipahis*) are of Slavonic origin, including the grand vizier Rüstem Pasha, son-in-law of the sultan¹⁸. It is possible to find the same comments on the sultan’s knowledge of *Slavonic* and the popularity of the tongue among the Ottoman officials in Francesco Sansovino’s work¹⁹. The Slovene Protestant grammarian and preacher Adam Bohorič writes in a similar tone in his Latin work on grammar. He states that the *Slavonic* language is extremely widespread, as it is spoken at the court of the “Turkish emperor” (sultan) and among the janissaries²⁰. The aforementioned authors seem to perceive *Slavonic* as one language in various lingual variants.

The *Slavonic* language was often labelled as *Illyrian*. The general term (encompassing South Slavonic idioms) had become popular in the 15th century²¹, probably as a manifestation of humanistic antiquarianism during the Renaissance (the term “Illyrian” referred to the ancient Roman province and the ancient tribe). The aforementioned Luigi Bassano emphasizes in the preface of his work that he is an “uncouth” user of “*Illyrian idiom*”²². Moreover, he mentions that the grand vizier Rüstem Pasha is *Illyrian* as well²³. In another passage of his work, Bassano refers to a 3rd-century historian Herodian, who has allegedly identified Serbs and Croats with Illyrians²⁴. The term *Illyrian* was often employed by those authors who were under the influence of Counter-Reformation propaganda (one of its aims was to convert Orthodox Christian and Muslim South Slavs). It was linked to ideas of South Slavonic common origin and unity, propagated by some 17th-century Dubrovnik and Dalmatian writers and missionaries (often educated in *Collegium Illyricum*). Under the impact

¹⁶ S. Budziński (ed.), *Jana Krasieńskiego Polska, czyli opisanie topograficzno-polityczne Polski w wieku XVI oraz materiały do panowania Henryka Walezyusza*, Warszawa 1852, p. 26.

¹⁷ P. Giovio, *Comentario de la cose de’ Turchi*, Rome 1535, pp. K3–K3v, http://archive.org/details/bub_gb_rvcZN-dMyHLEc/page/n33/mode/2up (date accessed: 02.06.2024).

¹⁸ L. Bassano da Zara, *I costumi et i modi particolari della vita de’ Turchi*, Rome 1545, p. 51v (Cap. XLVII), https://books.google.pl/books?id=hi-Y2tjSXmgC&printsec=frontcover&hl=pl&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=herodian&f=false (date accessed: 02.06.2024).

¹⁹ F. Sansovino, *Historia universale dell’origine, guerre, et imperio de Turchi*, Venice 1654 [1568], pp. 101–101v, http://archive.org/details/bub_gb_2TS8KgG_IfgC/page/n233/mode/2up (date accessed: 17.04.2024).

²⁰ A. Bohorič, *Arcticae horulae succisivae*, Wittenberg 1584, pp. 11–12 (chapter: *Praefatio*), <http://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:DOC-XJXCBRP9> (date accessed: 22.04.2024).

²¹ J. V. A. Fine (Jr.), *When Ethnicity did not Matter...*, p. 163.

²² L. Bassano da Zara, *I costumi...*, p. A2.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 19 (Cap. XV).

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 43v (Cap. XXXIV).

of some Croatian and Bosnian authors (e.g. Bartol Kašić, Matija Divković, Jakov Mikalja) the 17th-century Bulgarian Catholic intellectuals, such as Petar Bogdan Bakshev, Petar Parchev, or Filip Stanislavov, labelled their language as *Illyrian* (and *Slavonic*)²⁵.

Outside the South Slavonic cultural area, the term *Illyrian* appears in Philip Lonicer's chronicle. The German historian expresses views similar to Jovius', but he has replaced the term *Slavonic* with *Illyrian*. According to Lonicer, the *Illyrian* language takes third place in the lingual hierarchy of the Empire (after Turkish and Arabic; Greek is mentioned as well) due to a large number of janissaries from South Slavonic lands²⁶. In turn, the Italian librarian and bishop Angelo Rocca uses both terms (*Illyrian* and *Slavonic*) in his *Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana*. He maintains that *Illyrian* (*Illyrica lingua*)/*Slavonic* (*Sclavonica lingua*) is very widespread among the "Turks" (in Christian Europe, the word denoted Ottoman Muslims, irrespective of their ethnic origin), especially among soldiers, at the Ottoman court, and generally in the capital (Istanbul), which is no longer called its original name (i.e. Constantinople), but "Caesaris domus Sclavonica vocetur lingua"²⁷. According to Rocca, *Illyrian* is common for many Slavonic "nations" (*gentes*) inhabiting different lands. He also mentions *Dalmatian* language (probably identified with the Chakavian dialect), perceived as a separate "dialect" of *Illyrian*²⁸. In the passage on the popularity of *Illyrian* among the Ottomans, Rocca refers to the Bohemian humanist Sigismund Gelenius and the Ragusan Jesuit merchant Marin Temperica. In his report to the Jesuit general Claudio Acquaviva (1582), Temperica emphasizes that the *Slavonic* language is used in the sultan's palace, is spoken by the Ottoman officials, and enjoys great respect. He mentions four main languages spoken in the Ottoman Balkans (*Slavonic*, Albanian, Greek, and Turkish), although only Turkish and *Slavonic* are widely understood by both Christians and "Turks" (Muslims). The tongue is spoken in Herzegovina (called a "duchy of St. Sava"), Bosnia, Serbia, Rascia, Bulgaria (he adds that the Bulgarians speak in a slightly different way, but their language belongs to *Slavonic* languages), and Macedonia. Furthermore, despite the fact that inhabitants of Wallachia and Moldavia have their own language, he claims that they use the *Slavonic* language and *Serbian* characters (Cyrillic letters). Owing to the popularity and prevalence of *Slavonic*, it can be used for easier conversion of South Slavonic Orthodox Christians and Muslims²⁹. In general, both terms *Slavonic* and *Illyrian* were mainly used as glossonyms, because most of the aforementioned authors referred to everyday spoken language in the Ottoman milieu.

It is worth paying attention to those passages that contain comments on the *Slavonic* two (Glagolitic and Cyrillic) scripts. According to Luigi Bassano, aside from the Arabic alphabet, the "Turks" also use *Slavonic* (=Cyrillic) letters. He adds that the Slavs name their scripts *Buchviza*, devised by St. Jerome, who is believed to have been an "inventor"

²⁵ P. Kolendić, *Sofijski nadbiskup fra Petar Bogdan Bakšić*, "Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva" 1927, vol. 2, (no. 1–2), pp. 79–91.

²⁶ Ph. Lonicer, *Chronicorum Turcicorum*, Frankfurt am Main 1578 [1568], p. 78, http://archive.org/details/bub_gb_3WofaEJSVUMC/page/n3/mode/2up (date accessed: 17.05.2024).

²⁷ A. Rocca, *Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana*, Rome 1591, p. 337, <http://archive.org/details/bibliothecaapo-st00rocc> (date accessed: 03.06.2024).

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 316.

²⁹ J. Jurić, *Pokušaj Zbora za širenje vjere god. 1627 da kod južnih Slavena uvede zajedničko pismo*, "Croatia Sacra" 1934, vol. 4, pp. 155–157.

of the Glagolitic script and *Chiuriliza/Chiriliza*, devised by St. Cyril “the Greek”, as he claims. In fact, the Glagolitic script, was devised by Cyril and Methodius, and the Cyrillic one by their disciples³⁰. It is possible to find the same comments on the usage of the *Slavonic* (Cyrillic) script by the Ottomans in Francesco Sansovino’s work³¹. Adam Bohorič also refers to the *Slavonic* scripts, i.e. the Glagolitic script (credited to St. Jerome, and identified with the *Croatian* language), and the Cyrillic one, used, according to him, at the Ottoman court and among the janissaries³². On the one hand, he employs the term “*Cyrillic* script” in reference to the Cyrillic letters presented in the table³³, on the other, he applies the term “*Cyrillic* language” to the Lord’s Prayer, transcribed in Latin script, and juxtaposed with the texts of the Prayer in other Slavonic languages (Croatian, Polish, Czech, Sorbian, Slovene³⁴). It seems that the term “language” refers to written texts, and the term “script” to characters or signs in that case. Rocca also mentions the *Slavonic* two scripts (Glagolitic and Cyrillic) and presents them in the tables in his *Bibliotheca*. According to him, the *Illyrian* language is common for many “nations”, but the letters differ³⁵. The Glagolitic letters (linked to St. Jerome as usual³⁶), are labelled as *Dalmatian*, *Slavonic*³⁷, *Illyrian*³⁸, and *Croatian*³⁹. Describing the *Dalmatian* language, he adds that the inhabitants of Dalmatia use the *Buchvizza* script, also known as *Croatica*⁴⁰. The Cyrillic letters (again credited to St. Cyril) are labelled both as *Illyrian* and *Serbian*⁴¹. Surprisingly, Rocca connects the term “Cyrillic” not only with the script, but also with the language (“*Huius generis lingua... Chiurilizza, hoc est, Cyrilliana*”⁴²), thus the author identifies the *Serbian* (“Cyrillic”) language with the *Serbian* (Cyrillic) alphabet (“*Alphabeto... Serviano, vel Cyrilliano*”⁴³). Analogous “confusions” can also be found in other works (e.g. of Adam Bohorič, Bartol Kašić), a fact which was typical of that time. According to Rocca, among other “languages” (i.e. communities) that speak *Serbian* (linked to the Cyrillic script), the Bosnians prefer its purer and more elegant form, as he has heard from Marin Temperica⁴⁴. As for the *Slavonic* scripts and their names, it is important to pay attention to Guillaume Postel’s work (written in 1538, i.e. before the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation, which initiated a particular “lingual policy” in the Balkans). Despite the fact that the French linguist does not refer to “*Slavonic* letters” in the Ottoman milieu, it is crucial to emphasize that he associates the *Serbian* alphabet and the *Serbian* language with the term *Bosnian*. He describes both the Glagolitic (title of the chapter: *De lingua Hieronymiana, seu Dalmatarum*

³⁰ L. Bassano da Zara, *I costumi...*, p. 58 (Cap. LIV).

³¹ F. Sansovino, *Historia...*, p. 104v.

³² A. Bohorič, *Arctica...*, p. 1 (chapter: *Prima Tabella de Orthographia Cyrillica*).

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 35–39 (chapter: *Orationis Dominicae Synopsis in lingua*).

³⁵ A. Rocca, *Bibliotheca...*, p. 337.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 159–161.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 316.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 337.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 339.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 168–170.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 171.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 337.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

aut Illiriorum) and Cyrillic scripts. The latter one bears not only a *Serbian* name (*Tzeruiana*), but also a *Bosnian* one (Postel presents the Cyrillic alphabet with characters typical of the Bosnian Cyrillic letters⁴⁵) in the title of the chapter: *De Tzeruiana Poznania'ue* (Postel explains: “Bosna em vel Posna vel Bossina”⁴⁶).

Although the term *Bosnian* was not utilized to label the Ottoman *Slavonic* chancellery language/script in 15th–16th-century sources, it is crucial to shed light on a few early modern comments on it, as the chancellery language and the script have been occasionally named as Bosnian in modern scholarship. Considering historical development and continuity of languages, it seems that the term can be applied to particular parts of the *Slavonic*/Cyrillic network (linked to letters and documents issued by some Ottoman officials from Bosnia). Aside from earlier, occasional references to *Bosnian* (for instance, the passage found in Constantin Kostencki's *Treatise on the Letters* from the 15th century⁴⁷), it seems that the awareness of its separateness increased in the age of confessionalization, when, under the influence of new circumstances, the need arose to verify one's confessional identities and define clearer boundaries of confessional communities.

Bosnia has been inhabited by different confessional communities – including the Muslims, the Sephardic Jews, the Orthodox Christians, the Roman Catholic Christians – and due to its particular multi-confessional character and blurred lingual lines between South Slavonic groups, the term *Bosnian* (in reference to the language or the script) could be associated both with the term *Serbian* (e.g. Postel, Rocca) or *Croatian* (e.g. Trubar). Confessional markers started to be more decisive in the post-Trent reality (after the Council of Trent), during the Counter-Reformation and confessionalization in the Balkans. The aforementioned Angelo Rocca probably heard about a Roman Catholic project of standardizing one common South Slavonic (*Illyrian*) language based on a lingual idiom spoken in Bosnia. Roman Catholic reformers sought to find a common, widely understandable, South Slavonic language version intended to be used as a tool in their missionary (proselytic) activities to convert Orthodox Christian and Muslim South Slavs. Those reformers thought that the language version spoken in Bosnia was the purest and most beautiful, hence, it should become the basis for a common South Slavonic literary language. Bartol Kašić, in his *Latin Apology*, maintains that the Bosnians differ little from the Serbs in their vocabulary and way of speaking, and their dialect is the best and the most common among *Illyrian* dialects (Marin Temperica, Jakov Mikalja, and Mavro Orbini express similar opinions on the Bosnian idiom)⁴⁸. Bartol Kašić (influenced by Temperica) also wrote a grammar handbook (Rome, 1604), based on the Shtokavian dialect, and used by Jesuit missionaries in the Balkans. The reformers believed that propaganda texts written in the common language and script would reach more recipients. Hence, they also started to utilize the Cyrillic alphabet, especially the Bosnian Cyrillic, perceived (irrespectively of its regional character) as a “bridge” that connected different South Slavonic confessional communities (bearing

⁴⁵ G. Postel, *Linguarum duodecim characteribus differentium alphabetum introduction*, Paris 1538, p. H II. (chapter: *De Tzeruiana Poznania'ue*), <https://archive.org/details/linguarumduodeci00post/page/n87/mode/2up> (date accessed: 25.04.2024).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. H.

⁴⁷ G. Jovanović (ed.), Konstantin Filozof. *Povest o slovima (Skazanje o pismeneh)*. *Žitije despota Stefana Lazarevića*, Beograd 1989, p. 53.

⁴⁸ V. Horvat, *Apologija Bartola Kašića*, “Filologija” 2011, vol. 57, p. 91, p. 113.

in mind the idea of South Slavonic unity). The Bosnian Cyrillic was sometimes labelled as “Serbian script” not only by foreign authors such as Postel (before the Counter-Reformation), but also by local ones. For instance, the Bosnian Franciscan Matija Divković named his language *Bosnian* (and *Slavonic*), but he referred to the Bosnian Cyrillic as “Serbian letters”⁴⁹. In general, *Bosnian* was transcribed in different scripts, not only Cyrillic, Glagolitic, or Latin letters. Due to the Islamization of Bosnia, the usage of the Arabic script for transcribing *Bosnian* became a particular literacy practice and (*aljamiado*) phenomenon. Despite the fact that *aljamiado* literature (popular in the 17th and 18th centuries) is not directly connected with the subject of the paper, it is noteworthy to mention one of the most popular 17th-century Bosnian *aljamiado* writers, Muhamed Hevaji Uskufi. He labelled his language both as *Bosnian* (in his “dictionary”) and *Serbian* (the *Ilahi lyrics in Serbian*, the *Call to Faith in Serbian*)⁵⁰. The two terms were probably used in a synonymous meaning, with a proselytic and conciliatory undertone to emphasize the common South Slavonic origin and lingual background of different confessional communities in Bosnia, as Uskufi hoped for reconciliation and unity between them. Moreover, he could have counted on the future conversion of Bosnian Christians to Islam. The cultural (and lingual) awareness of the Bosnian Muslims was undoubtedly increased by creating the Bosnian *Eyalet* in 1580 (it raised the significance and prestige of the Ottoman region) and establishing the Sarajevo *madrasa* in 1537 (the educational institution produced more local Muslim intellectuals), and by general circumstances or new challenges in the age of confessionalization. Uskufi’s “proselytic vision” could have been inspired by strategies implemented by Counter-Reformation reformers, who believed that a common South Slavonic language (in combination with the ideas of South Slavonic unity) would encourage “schismatics” to accept the Roman Catholic dogmas and the pope’s primacy.

It is quite interesting that some 15th-century sources employed the term *Bulgarian* to name the language in the service of the Ottomans. For instance, it appears in Jan Długosz’s *Annals or Chronicles of the Famous Kingdom of Poland*, in the passage on the siege of Belgrade (1440). The Polish historian and chronicler claims that during the siege, the Ottoman forces started to send letters to fortress residents, with information on great gifts and various promises. According to Długosz, the letters (transferred using arrows) have been written in the *Bulgarian* language and script⁵¹. In the second half of the 15th century (1485), the term was also mentioned by the Italian humanist Galeotti Martius (Marzio), who managed the royal library of Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus (*Bibliotheca Corviniana*). According to Marzio, the king knows many languages, including *Bulgarian*⁵², in which the “Turks” write their diplomatic acts (in other passages, he enumerates a few

⁴⁹ J. V. A. Fine (Jr.), *When Ethnicity did not Matter...*, pp. 304–305.

⁵⁰ M. Dziekan, *Życie i dzieło bośniackiego pisarza muzułmańskiego Muhameda Hevaiego Uskufiego (XVII w.)*, in: *Estetyczne aspekty literatury polskich, białoruskich i litewskich Tatarów (od XVI do XXI w.)*, G. Czerwiński, A. Konopacki (eds.), Białystok 2015, p. 271, p. 275.

⁵¹ M. Kowalczyk (ed.), *Jana Długosza Roczniki czyli kroniki sławnego Królestwa Polskiego*, vol. 11/12: 1431–1444, transl. J. Mrukówna, Warszawa 2009, p. 278.

⁵² The *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script were used in letter writing conducted between King Matthias Corvinus, Sultan Bayezid II, the *sanjakkbey* of Smederevo Mihaloglu Ali Bey, and the Serbian despot Vuk Grgurević Branković, who played a mediating role between those actors. Despot Vuk’s four letters (1482–1483) to the sultan and one letter to the *sanjakkbey* have survived, Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje...*, pp. 487–489; N. Radojčić, *Pet pisama s kraja XV veka*, “Južnoslovenski filolog” 1953–1954, vol. 20, pp. 353–355.

Slavonic communities, including Bulgarians whose mother tongue is *Slavonic*)⁵³. By referring to letter or document writing, Długosz and Marzio emphasized the close relation between *Bulgarian* and its written forms (texts in Cyrillic letters). However, by labelling the language and the script (used in the Ottoman milieu) as *Bulgarian*, the authors referred to Serbian–Slavonic literacy tradition (in that context, the term cannot be restricted to Orthodox Christian manuscript tradition and the ecclesiastical milieu) rather than Bulgarian–Slavonic, considering places, actors and time, mentioned in their works. The question arises why the authors applied the term *Bulgarian* to Ottoman *Slavonic* pragmatic literacy at that time. Firstly, their works were created relatively soon after the Ottoman conquest of medieval Bulgaria, and they could have identified Cyrillic texts with Bulgarian–Slavonic tradition rather than Serbian–Slavonic one, bearing in mind the leading role of medieval Bulgaria in Cyrillic literacy (and the place of its origin). Secondly, the works were written after the reign of the king Władysław III (Ladislav of Varna) and his famous (unsuccessful) anti-Ottoman Crusade of Varna from 1443 to 1444 (before the Crusade, Bulgaria had played an important role in the king’s plans). It is noteworthy to mention that the king’s royal title consisted of “territorial components”, which referred to (aside from two major states under his rule: Poland and Hungary) a few South Slavonic lands, including Bulgaria (*Dei gratia rex of Poloniae, Hungarie, Dalmacie, Croacie, Rascie, Bulgarie, Sclavonie*). However, it should be emphasized that in contrast to Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, or Serbia, Ottoman officials of Bulgarian origin were rare in the 15th–16th-century Ottoman army and administration. It seems that the Ottomans had lost trust in officials from the Bulgarian lands after the Crusade of Nicopolis and the Crusade of Varna (due to the Bulgarian support for the Christian forces).

Among the terms used to describe the *Slavonic* language in the Ottoman milieu, it is possible to encounter the term *Croatian* as well. During the Reformation, there were some attempts to introduce “printing standards” with regard to various European vernaculars. One of those attempts could be linked to the father of Slovene writings, Primož Trubar, who made use of South Slavonic idioms in his works. The Protestant reformer believed that *Croatian* was very widespread among the South Slavs, and he planned to base his reformatory activity on it. It is possible to find a few traces of his views in his works. According to Trubar, *Croatian* is used not only in Croatia and Dalmatia, but also by many “Turks” who speak that language. Furthermore, he has heard from many people that *Croatian* is employed in speech and writing at the court of a “Turkish emperor” in Constantinople⁵⁴. By labelling the *Slavonic* language (in the service of the Ottomans) as *Croatian*, Trubar probably means (at least in reference to spoken language) various South Slavonic idioms spoken by some Ottoman citizens from Dalmatia or Bosnia (e.g. due to Trubar’s geographical proximity to those lands). Trubar claims that the *Croatian* language can be written in two scripts: Glagolitic and Cyrillic⁵⁵ (Cyrillic literacy was a crucial component not only of Bosnian culture, but of Croatian one as well⁵⁶). Additionally, Trubar emphasizes in

⁵³ G. Martius Narniensis, *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Mathiae ad ducem Iohannem eius filium liber*, L. Juhász (ed.), Leipzig 1934, p. 27.

⁵⁴ E. Vrečko (ed.), Primož Trubar. *Nemški spisi 1550–1581*, Ljubljana 2011, p. 21.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Glagolitic, Cyrillic, and Latin literacies (based on three different scripts and three different languages: Church Slavonic, Latin, and Croatian vernacular) constituted particular phenomena of old Croatian culture and writings (Croatian: *tropismenost* and *trojezičnost*).

the foreword to the New Testament, Tübingen, 1557 that, for his reformatory and printing activities, he needs two “Croats” who can speak in *Dalmatian* and *Bosnian*, and can write in *Croatian* (*Crobatisch*) – i.e. the Glagolitic script – and in *Cyrillic* letters (*Cylurisch*)⁵⁷. He also employs the term “*Syrfischen Sprach*” for *Serbian* when he writes about the liturgy of the “Greek faith” (Christian Orthodoxy)⁵⁸. Furthermore, the Italian traveller Marco Antonio Pigafetta in his travel account also states that the *Croatian* language (identified with *Slavonic*⁵⁹) is widespread among the “Turks”, especially among Ottoman soldiers (Turkish is used for more official conversations)⁶⁰. Surprisingly, in Pigafetta’s work, different South Slavonic groups (Serbs, Rascians, Bosnians, Croats, “Slavs”, and others) are labelled as “Bulgarian peoples”⁶¹.

The language and the script (in the service of the Ottomans) were often labelled as *Serbian* both in Ottoman (works written in *Slavonic* and Ottoman Turkish by Ottoman Muslim officials or writers) and non-Ottoman sources. Of course, the term does not overlap with the present-day notion “Serbian”, and it cannot be restricted to one particular 15th–16th-century ethnic and confessional community (Orthodox Christian Serbs). There is an interesting account found in Grigore Ureche’s *Chronicles of the Land of Moldavia* from the 17th century. According to the chronicler, Elena Ecaterina – the wife of Moldavian *Voivode* (prince) Petru Rareș and daughter of Serbian Despot Jovan Branković – has written a letter in *Serbian* to Sultan Süleyman⁶². Interestingly, the Italian Jesuit diplomat and historian Giovanni Botero mentions both terms, i.e. *Serbian* and *Slavonic*. According to him, inhabitants of the Danubian Principalities employ “*Serbian* speech” in their liturgy (the term refers to Church Slavonic). He adds that the “speech” is among the Slavs as the Tuscan dialect among the Italians⁶³. Moreover, he claims that after conquering Bosnia, the “Turks” took captive many thousands of Bosnians, making them janissaries who speak *Slavonic*⁶⁴. In turn, the Venetian historian Marino Sanudo (the Younger) mentions that in 1499 a Venetian doge could not understand a letter from a *sanjakbey* of Scutari (Shkodër), as it was written in (*schiaivo servo*) the *Serbian Slavonic* language⁶⁵. The prospect of an Ottoman attack on the Adriatic cities under the Venetian rule and the tense situation in the Ottoman–Venetian borderlands (inhabited by South Slavonic populations) required constant communication, often conducted in *Slavonic* and the Cyrillic script. Such actors as *sanjakbeys* of Montenegro, Klis, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and their representatives, governors (*provveditores*) of Dalmatia, dukes (*conti*) of the Adriatic cities and their representatives, or (occa-

⁵⁷ E. Vrečko (ed.), Primož Trubar. *Nemški...*, p. 25.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 432.

⁵⁹ M.A. Pigafetta, *Intinerario di Marc Antonio Pigafetta gentil' huomo Vicentino*, London 1585, p. 65, http://archive.org/details/bim_early-english-books-1475-1640_itinerario-di-marcantoni_pigafetta-marco-antonio_1585/mode/2up (date accessed: 05.05.2024).

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁶² Đ. Radojičić, *Srpsko–rumunjski odnosi XIV–XVII veka*, “Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu” 1956, vol. 1, p. 22.

⁶³ G. Botero, *Relatiae powszechne. Abo nowiny pospolite*, transl. P. Łęczycki, Kraków 1613 [1589], p. 132, <http://polona.pl/item-view/9dbefd43-8a10-429f-aa23-a7cf7857d6e4?page=0> (date accessed: 15.04.2024).

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ I. Kukuljević-Sakcinski, *Odnosaji skupovlade mletačke naprema južnim Slavenom. Izvadjeni iz ljetopisah Marina Sanuda*, “Arhiv za povjesnicu jugoslavensku” 1859, vol. 5, p. 28.

sionally) Venetian doges⁶⁶, usually participated in the *Slavonic* and Cyrillic network in the 15th–16th centuries⁶⁷. It is possible to find the term *Serbian* even in Russian (Muscovite) diplomatic codices (*posol'skie knigi*), informing that Ottoman sultans' letters to grand princes of Moscow are written in the *Serbian* script (used here as an evident graphonym)⁶⁸. There is also an interesting *Serbian* copy of the Polish–Ottoman–Crimean agreement signed at Moldavian Țuțora (Cecora) in 1595⁶⁹. It concerns taking the Moldavian throne by Ieremia Movilă, and was drafted in two versions, one in Polish and one in *Serbian* (surely for the Moldavian authorities). There is the note “copy of the agreement in *Serbian*” (“Przepis rozejmu po serbsku”) located over the text of the document, written in broken *Serbian*, transcribed (probably for easier reading and pronunciation) into Latin and Polish characters. Despite the fact that the text was written in non-Cyrillic letters, it was labelled as *Serbian*. However, an original Cyrillic text had probably existed. Hence, the term *Serbian* could have been used as a glossonym, but in close connection with its graphonym equivalent. Using the Cyrillic script and the *Slavonic* language seemed to be quite natural for Moldavia and Wallachia (the vassal states of the Empire) in their communication with the Ottomans, as the Danubian Principalities were influenced by the Cyrillic and Church Slavonic literacy tradition to a large extent. Some documents (pragmatic literacy) of Moldavian and Wallachian *voivodes* (princes) were created in the (vernacularized) Church Slavonic language (*limba slavonă*), including Serbian–Slavonic orthographies⁷⁰, as Moldavian and Wallachian chancelleries hired scribes from the Serbian lands, among places. In general, the chancellery language of the Danubian Principalities presents an interesting variability of orthographies.

The term *Serbian* (replaced sometimes by the alternative words such as *schivo*, *slavo*, *illirico*, *rasciano*)⁷¹ was occasionally inserted into documents linked to communication between the Ottomans and the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), a vassal city-state⁷². For

⁶⁶ For example, *Sanjakeby* of Montenegro Skender Bey Crnojević's letter to the doge of Venice (1523), B. Šekularac, *Dukljansko-crnogorski istorijski obzori*, Cetinje 2000, pp. 54–55.

⁶⁷ There was a wide variety of topics found in Ottoman–Venetian letter writing. They usually referred to such subjects as incidents caused by the uskoks (irregular military troops, responsible for the acts of piracy on the coast of the Adriatic Sea), trade issues, confirmation of payment, exchange of envoys, thanks for gifts, etc., see S. Ljubić, *Tursko–mletačke listine*, “Starine jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti” 1878, vol. 10, p. 7 (no. 5), pp. 13–14 (no. 18), pp. 16 (no. 21, 22); J. Tomić, *Sedam srpskih pisama ćirilicom pisanih iz mletačkog arhiva*, “Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije” 1898, vol. 31, pp. 70–75; M. P. Pedani Fabris, A. Bombaci, I “*Documenti turchi*” dell' *Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, Venezia 1994, p. 157 (no. 611), p. 175 (no. 693).

⁶⁸ G. Karpov, G. Štendman (eds.), *Pamjatniki diplomatičeskix snošenij moskovskogo gosudarstva s Krymom, Nagajami i Turcieju*, vol. 2: 1508–1521 gg., in: *Sbornik imperatorskago russkago istoričeskago obščestva*, vol. 95, G. Karpov, G. Štendman (eds.), Sankt–Peterburg 1895, p. 236; B. Unbegaun, *Četiri pisma turskoga sultana Selima I...*, pp. 222–228.

⁶⁹ The Library of Polish Academy of Sciences (PAN) in Kórnik, the Polish–Ottoman–Crimean agreement (1595), BK01874, *Turcica* (Turkish and Tatar documents and correspondence); D. Kołodziejczyk, *Ottoman–Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th–18th Centuries). An Annotated Edition of 'Ahdnames' and Other Documents*, Leiden–Boston 2000, pp. 298–299 (no 25).

⁷⁰ For example, Sultan Mehmed II's letter to the Moldavian *voivode* (prince) Peter III Aaron. The sultan states that he has heard *voivode*'s envoy Mihul Logothete and agrees to a peace on condition that the prince will pay an annual tribute, the Central Archives of Historical Records (AGAD) in Warsaw, the Crown Archives, the Turkish Section, 1455, box 66, folder 1, no. 1.

⁷¹ B. Nedeljković, *Nekoliko podataka o našem jeziku iz Arhiva Dubrovačke republike*, “Istorijski časopis” 1982/1983, vol. 29/30, pp. 102–104, p. 110.

⁷² Documents of such sultans as Murad II, Mehmed II, Bayazid II, Selim I, and Süleyman I have survived. They usually referred to the sultans' privileges for the Republic, trade matters, annual tribute, and other issues,

example, the word *Serbian* (*serviano*) appears as an interlinear gloss in the letter of Sultan Mehmed II to Dubrovnik (1476), confirming the receipt of a tribute⁷³. The phrase “written in *Serbian*” (*scritto in serviano*) was also added to Süleyman’s *firman* (1518), sent to the *kadi* of Avlona due to the Dubrovnik authorities’ complaint⁷⁴. Despite the fact that the cultural identity of Dubrovnik was strongly based on the Latin tradition, and Latin and Italian languages functioned as its main official languages, the city-state had its *Slavonic* chancellery (*cancellaria sclavica*) as well. The *Slavonic* language has been often labelled as *Serbian* in the chancellery; however, it should be emphasized that the term was used in a universal meaning, as a conventional term for texts written in the Cyrillic script (hence, as a graphonym), encompassing various South Slavonic idioms⁷⁵.

As for the universal dimension of *Slavonic* in Ottoman pragmatic literacy, it is valuable to mention Sultan Selim I’s peace treaty (1519) to Louis II of Hungary⁷⁶. Owing to a swearing formulae, the document was called a “swearing book” (*kletovna kniga*). The treaty was supposed to regulate political and diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian powers and to settle the armed conflict. Due to the fact that both sides of the Ottoman–Hungarian border⁷⁷ were inhabited by a South Slavonic population, diplomacy and letter writing could be conducted in the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script⁷⁸. Despite the fact that Selim I’s document does not refer to any lingual terms, it contains an interesting (“territorial”) hint that reveals a universal dimension of the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script. The document was created as an “open letter”, and its content was intended to be read aloud by Ottoman and Hungarian local authorities in territories (mentioned in the document) on both sides of the border. As for the Ottoman borderlands, the document mentions various towns, castles or fortresses in Herzegovina, Bosnia, the Serbian lands with Smederevo, Braničevo with its lands, the town of Vidin with its lands, the “land of Tsar Shishman” (it refers to the lands under the former rule of the Bulgarian tsar Ivan Shishman) and other Bulgarian lands. The territories were mainly inhabited by the sultan’s South Slavonic subjects, hence, the document, read aloud, was comprehensible for them.

Despite the fact that the Ottomans rarely named the language of their *Slavonic* documents, it seems that they eagerly employed the term *Serbian* in the 15th–16th centuries. For

see Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje*..., pp. 229–234 (no. 812, 813, 816), pp. 237–253 (no. 821, 822, 823, 840), pp. 284–341 (no. 879, 881, 918, 919, 936, 939), pp. 386–394 (no. 993, 994, 1000), pp. 397–405 (no. 1005–1015).

⁷³ A. Vučetić, *Spomenici dubrovački*, “Srđ: list za književnost i nauku” 1907, vol. 9, p. 432.

⁷⁴ G. Elezović, *Turski spomenici*, vol. 1 (no. 1), Beograd 1940, p. 981.

⁷⁵ M. Grčević, *Povijesni glotonim “srpski” u starijoj hrvatskoj književnojezičnoj tradiciji*, in: *Dubrovnik u hrvatskoj povijesti. Zbornik radova u čast akademiku Nenadu Vekariću*, M. Grčević, N. Vekarić (eds.), Zagreb 2019, p. 136.

⁷⁶ The British Library in London (BL), “Firman of Selim Khan” (1519), Add. MS 8160.

⁷⁷ After the conquest of Hungary, the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script were still used (for some time) in letter writing conducted between Habsburg provincial commanders, *bans* of Croatia, and the Ottoman officials from Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, or Klis, see A. Ivić, *Neue cyrillische Urkunden aus den Wiener Archiven*, “Archiv für slavische Philologie” 1909, vol. 30, pp. 207–208 (no. 3, 4, 5, 6).

⁷⁸ Ottoman–Hungarian letters and documents usually referred to military actions, exchange of envoys, and peace negotiations, see N. Radojčić, *Pet pisama*..., pp. 343–367; Lj. Stojanović, *Stare srpske povelje*..., pp. 483–487; A. Ivić, *Šest srpskih pisama iz šesnaestog stoleća*, “Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor” 1925, vol. 5, pp. 136–137.

instance, a letter from *beylerbey* of Rumelia Mehmed Pasha Sokollou's (Sokolović's) to the captain of the Hungarian fortress in Temesvár (Timișoara) Andreas Báthory (1551), should be mentioned. The *beylerbey* asks his addressee to send him letters in the *Serbian* language, not in Latin⁷⁹. It is worth paying attention to another example of letter writing linked (indirectly) to Mehmed Pasha, who, as a grand vizier, had encouraged Pavle Bridović (from Dubrovnik) to spy on the Habsburg authorities. The *sanjakkbey* of Herzegovina, Hasan Pasha Prodović, wrote a few letters to Bridović. In one of them (1573), he claims that Bridović can feel free to write to him in Latin, *Serbian*, German, or Hungarian, because he has people who read the languages⁸⁰. It is important to mention another example of the Ottoman *Slavonic* document (issued between 1478 and 1483), which refers to letter writing in *Serbian*. The Ottoman border official (probably Ayas Bey from Herzegovina) and the *kadi* of Stepan claim in their document (concerning a financial dispute between Dubrovnik and the Ottoman customs officer Ali) that they have sent a letter to the Dubrovnik authorities, and it has been written in *Serbian*⁸¹. The aforementioned Ottoman *Slavonic* sources show that Muslim converts of South Slavonic origin, who were at least bilingual, labelled the language as *Serbian*. Referring to *Serbian*, they probably meant both spoken and written language, because letters were often read aloud by envoys. Thus, the term could have been perceived as both a glossonym and/or graphonym. As for Ottoman sources in Ottoman Turkish (the late 15th – early 16th centuries), it is valuable to refer to the poet and prose writer Mesihî (born in Prishtina), who writes a letter to his friend Suzeni in Istanbul and claims that he has had to stay another year in Bosnia, where Turkish is practically unknown and all sultan's subjects speak only *Serbian*⁸². Additionally, Ottoman 15th-century multilingual handbooks⁸³ also employ the term *Serbian*. The works contain texts in Arabic, Persian, Greek (called *Rūmī*), and *Serbian* languages, written in the Arabic script (*Serbian* was rather perceived there as a glossonym, because it was written in non-Cyrillic letters). The handbooks were designed to learn the languages and to prepare Muslim students of various ethnic origins to communicate in other (non-Arabic) languages around the sultans' court⁸⁴.

After the Ottoman conquest of medieval Bulgaria at the end of the 14th century, the Serbian–Slavonic literacy tradition (as an incarnation of universal Cyrillic and Church Slavonic literacy tradition) and its carriers (scribes) dominated Cyrillic literacy in the Balkans. It took over a main communicative function in inter-cultural relations of the Orthodox Christian South Slavs from the second quarter of the 15th century. The term

⁷⁹ A. Ivić, *Neue cyrillische Urkunden...*, p. 211 (no. 9).

⁸⁰ A. Ivić, *Pisma Hasan-paše Hercegovackog iz god. 1573*, "Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije" 1923, vol. 49, p. 22.

⁸¹ K. Kovač, *Nekoliko slavjenskih listina*, "Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini" 1912, vol. 24, p. 404.

⁸² V.L. Ménage, *The Gül-i sad-berg of Mesihî*, "Osmanlı Araştırmaları – the Journal of Ottoman Studies" 1988, vol. 7–8, pp. 29–30.

⁸³ The handbooks from Süleymaniye Ayasofya Library in Istanbul (MS Süleymaniye *Ayasofya* 4749, MS *Ayasofya* 4750), and from the Berlin State Library (MS SB Berlin Or. oct. 33), G. Necipoğlu, *The Spatial Organization of Knowledge...*, p. 54; M. Mišević, *How and Why was Slavic Learned at the Ottoman Court? Insight from the Fifteenth-Century Projects Dedicated to Learning Languages of the World*, "Istorijski časopis" 2023, vol. 72, pp. 283–284.

⁸⁴ M. Mišević, *How and Why was Slavic Learned...*, p. 292, 304, 306.

Serbian for the script and the language had become popular in *Slavonic* chancelleries of Balkan medieval states before the Ottoman conquest. Hence, the Ottomans inherited and adopted the already existing circumstances in Cyrillic (pragmatic) literacy. The term *Serbian* cannot be directly connected with the 15th–16th-century Serbian (Orthodox Christian) ethnic community and its identity, despite the fact that some Ottoman scribes and interpreters, both Muslim converts and Christians, were probably ethnic Serbs among others.

The *Slavonic* language of Ottoman pragmatic literacy (based on the Shtokavian dialect) was vernacular, infiltrated with formulas and phrases rooted in Church Slavonic⁸⁵. It is possible to find different orthographies in Ottoman *Slavonic*/Cyrillic letters and documents, i.e. Rascian, Resavian, and Bosnian–Hum (there are texts with mixed orthographies)⁸⁶. The Ottomans tried to base *Slavonic* on a certain “standard” (at least in their state, sultanic chancellery) found in *Slavonic* chancelleries of former Balkan states. Despite this fact, especially the Serbian despotate, the language was quite changeable and elastic, a fact which seemed to depend on skills, competences, and cultural (regional) background of hired scribes and interpreters.

As for the Cyrillic script used in the *Slavonic* chancelleries (the Cyrillic diplomatic minuscule had become popular in the 13th–14th centuries, spreading through medieval Balkan states)⁸⁷, it is hard to discern one general graphic pattern of the Cyrillic letters in 15th–16th-century Ottoman *Slavonic* documents. Subtle differences (influenced by regional scribal traditions⁸⁸) in the graphics of the Cyrillic letters in the handwriting of 15th–16th-century documents depended on hired scribes, who came from various South Slavonic areas. Thus, the Cyrillic script of the *Slavonic* chancelleries had a universal and cross-regional dimension, rooted in the common Cyrillic (pragmatic) literacy tradition.

The Ottomans tried to assure some kind of continuity between their own Empire, the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium), and medieval Christian states in the Balkans, and they were motivated by imperial awareness and succession. The imperial discourse (of Byzantine origin) had been adopted by the South Slavs (the Bulgarians, the Serbs). Hence, South Slavonic idioms became languages of imperial court, state policy, diplomacy, trade, etc. before the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans. On the eve of the Ottoman conquest, the imperial discourse was well developed in the Serbian despotate. The Ottomans could adopt it in the Serbian variant rather than the Bulgarian one, despite the fact that Bulgaria had an older and longer imperial history. In general, the 15th-century Serbian despotate, ruled by the Lazarević dynasty and then by the Branković dynasty, was perceived as a successor of the Serbian Empire, established by Tsar Dušan, and enjoyed a relative independence longer than Bulgaria (until 1459). After the conquest, the Ottoman sultans tried to emphasize that they were the legitimate successors of (Eastern) Roman emperors and South Slavonic rulers, especially the Serbian despots, i.a., through the marriages between Prince Lazar

⁸⁵ V. Boškov, *Odnos srpske i turske diplomatike*, “Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis” 1980, vol. 19 (no. 3–4), pp. 219–234.

⁸⁶ P. Ivić, *Pregled istorije...*, p. 92; V. Polomac, *Srpski kao diplomatski jezik...*, p. 95.

⁸⁷ See T. Raukar, *O nekim problemima razvitka ćirilske minuskule (“bosančice”)*, “Historijski zbornik” 1968, vol. 1 (no. 7), pp. 485–499; G. Čremošnik, *Srpska diplomatska minuskula*, “Slovo” 1963, vol. 13, pp. 119–136.

⁸⁸ Some of the Bosnian Cyrillic (*bosančica*) features can be discerned in documents of Ottoman officials from Bosnia, Ć. Truhelka, *Isprava Skender-baše od godine 1486*, “Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni I Hercegovini” 1894, vol. 4, pp. 608–610.

Hrebeljanović's daughter, Olivera, and Sultan Bayezid I, and Despot Đurađ Branković's daughter Mara and Sultan Murat II. It is possible that by labelling the language and the script as *Serbian*, the Ottomans were motivated by ideological impulses. The Ottoman authorities perceived the term *Serbian* as one component of (written) literacy heritage, which consisted of two main parts: Greek and South Slavonic⁸⁹, inherited in Rumelia. Thus, for the Ottomans, the term *Serbian* symbolized South Slavonic (written) literacy heritage based on the universal, common Church Slavonic and Cyrillic tradition.

The paper has presented an overview of lingual terms (applied to the *Slavonic* tongue and the Cyrillic script in the service of the Ottomans) in chosen medieval and early modern sources. The subject is very extensive and multifaceted; thus, it is impossible to describe a wide variety of topics found in Ottoman *Slavonic*/Cyrillic correspondence, its functions, types (genres), or the actors who participated in the network. The paper focuses on the perspective of 15th–16th-century intellectuals and their perception of lingual issues in the Ottoman Empire, rather than on Ottoman *Slavonic* documents and their authors (only a few are mentioned here), because they rarely named the language or script of their own texts. It is noticeable that only a few medieval and early modern intellectuals were able to notice differences between South Slavonic idioms. Most authors thought that those idioms belonged to one language, with different scripts. In general, the word “Cyrillic” in reference to the script (in the service of the Ottomans) does not raise serious dilemmas from the contemporary perspective due to its universal meaning (in spite of regional scribal traditions). However, the terms such as *Serbian*, *Bulgarian*, *Croatian*, or *Bosnian* (as glossonyms) can lead to confusion. Thus, it should be emphasized that 15th–16th-century terms do not overlap with their modern equivalents. Nevertheless, the language used by the Ottomans has usually been identified with Serbian, Bosnian, or Serbo-Croatian in modern scholarship. Considering historical development and continuity of languages, the terms could be applied to particular parts of the *Slavonic*/Cyrillic network that were linked to particular territories, senders, or scribes. From the contemporary point of view, it is not easy to name the language employed in the whole *Slavonic*/Cyrillic network. Rather, it should be perceived as variety or lect encompassing various South Slavonic idioms based on the Shtokavian dialect. The reasons for this include: defective linguistic terminology, incompatibility between medieval or early modern and contemporary glossonyms, and national particular (political) tendencies in the former Yugoslavian states (the division of Serbo-Croatian language into Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin languages). Due to the ambiguity of the terms, which inevitably evoke associations with present-day national languages and ethnic communities, this paper uses the more neutral term *Slavonic* in a conventional and universal meaning, bearing in mind that there was no (spoken) common South Slavonic language at that time. However, throughout history, there were various attempts (projects) to introduce common written lingual “standards” based on chosen South Slavonic idioms (e.g. Trubar, Bartol Kašić), aimed at overcoming diglossia and dialectical variation among the South Slavs. Despite the fact that the Ottomans generally enabled writing in South Slavonic idioms without clear regulations, they tried to employ a certain lingual “standard” found in former

⁸⁹ Other components of the (written) literacy heritage of the Balkans were relatively late. The first written texts in the Albanian language came from the 15th century, and in the Romanian language from the 16th century.

Christian medieval chancelleries, applicable in pragmatic literacy of their chancelleries (at least in the central, sultanic *Slavonic* chancellery).

The language names were a question of positionality and the cultural background of 15th–16th-century authors. The Ottomans (usually Muslim converts of South Slavonic origin) preferred to use the term *Serbian* to denote both the *Slavonic* language and the Cyrillic script, and it did not have any ethnic affiliations for them. It had a much more universal and common meaning at that time. For the Ottomans, the term *Serbian* was the label word that symbolized South Slavonic literacy heritage (based on the common Cyrillic and Church Slavonic tradition, which did not have, of course, any confessional affiliations for the Ottomans, as the tongue and the script were applied to pragmatic literacy) and was adopted (along with the Greek one) by them in Rumelia. Moreover, the term also alluded to the imperial legacy, as the Ottomans emphasized the fact that they were the successors of both Byzantium and medieval Balkan states, including the Serbian state. Ottoman *Slavonic*/Cyrillic pragmatic literacy can be perceived as an example of continuity between pre-Ottoman and Ottoman realities in the Balkans, and as the common written heritage of all South Slavonic and some non-Slavonic (partially Romanian and Albanian) communities that had a common experience of the Ottoman domination, and participated in the *Slavonic* and Cyrillic network. Moreover, it was a particular manifestation of the phenomenon, which can be labelled as “Ottoman Slavicism”, connected with an extensive presence of officials of South Slavonic origin (who had a great influence on Ottoman *Slavonic*/Cyrillic pragmatic literacy) in the Ottoman state apparatus, army, and administration during the 15th–16th centuries.

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