

# Trade between Kosovo and South Adriatic in the Ottoman period

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## Abstract

Interregional links in their complexity within the human activity have been historically conditioned by economic factors, either in the form of exploitation or the exchange of material goods. Kosovo is among the countries that have provided optimal conditions for the use of natural resources, while with the Adriatic area there has been a certain direction of economic relations since the most ancient periods.

Links between Kosovo and the Adriatic have been of varying intensity through history, but particularly have been pronounced in periods of involvement in political and administrative units, such as the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. Since it was known as a name, in the Middle Ages, Kosovo has not encompassed the same territory that exists today. Kosovo's economic and trade relations with the Adriatic had a specific development during the Ottoman period, which lasted more than five centuries in Europe, from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As a specific mode of commercial activity, the caravans and land routes they followed played an important role until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Kosovo; South Adriatic; Trade; Routes; Caravans; Relations; Ottoman period.

## 1. Introduction

Kosovo's natural resources have long been a prerequisite for encouraging the movement of people with goods inside and outside the country. Trade is an important activity that still characterizes the economic development of this country, and which has been made possible by important factors such as the position of Kosovo and the appropriate interregional communication routes. Kosovo, as well as countries that did not have navigable rivers in terms of traffic development, land roads were a common form of freight transport. Thus, caravans characterized the mode of transportation during the Middle Ages to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The route followed by medieval caravans from Kosovo to the Adriatic and vice versa, crossed almost the same ancient land routes. Thus, perhaps the ancient Lissus - Naissus road of the Roman period (still completely undiscovered) that passed through a part of the territory of today's Kosovo, may have been used approximately during the Ottoman period. As always, large centres or cities were the basis of trade, so road traffic and the way goods were transported and were key to the development of this economic activity. During the Ottoman period, caravan trade took place in different directions, and a specific direction was Kosovo with the South Adriatic through today's Albania and Montenegro.

## 2. Trade in the early Ottoman period of Kosovo

The earliest visible evidence of the Ottoman presence in Kosovo is the 'Bazaar Mosque' in Pristina, founded in 1389, today the oldest architectural structure in the city (Database of Kosovo Cultural Heritage, 2020, nr. 002782). From the late 14<sup>th</sup> century when Ottoman rule began to expand its influence in the form of dual power along with local despots until the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century when the medieval town of Novobrdó came under Ottoman rule (1455), can be represented as a period of a certain developmental and economic features in Kosovo.

A document from Ragusa is an evidence on the coexistence of the two authorities relating to the decision made by the Senate (Concilium Rogatorum) on May 13, 1421 on the objections of its merchants in Pristina who complained to the Sultan, which means that there were Ottoman bodies in the city of the Despot of Raška (Riza, 1984, p.201). From the complaints of traders at the Dubrovnik court, one can also find out the

roads that followed the trade caravans. At the Dubrovnik Consulate in Pristina, it was possible to conduct trials and legal disputes related to the citizens of Dubrovnik, from which one can understand their mining, craft and trade activities in Kosovo. Also, Pristina known for mining and minting, by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century had taken on a larger role in trade relations with the Adriatic coastal centres with which it had ties before. In this city there was also a warehouse of goods through which traders traded in Ragusa, Genoa, Verona, Florence, Mantua, etc (Ibid.).

At the beginning of the Ottoman presence in the territory of Kosovo since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, trade as a civic activity has continued in the same destinations with those centres with which Kosovo had developed relations earlier in the Middle Ages.

Foreign trade and exploitation of ores in this period were managed by foreigners: Saxons, Ragusians, Bokljans, Splichans, Zadrans, Greeks, etc., who had special privileges from local rulers (Drançolli, 1984, p.181).

The presence of Dubrovnik merchants during the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Kosovo is known from two letters from citizens from different parts of the country, who addressed their complaints to the Vicar of Dubrovnik and Pope Gregory XIII for the needs they had in the community (Urošević, 1956, p.241).

From the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and during the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> centuries, 'Albanian' cities revived and continued to grow, especially those that were transit market centres (Pulaha, 2002, p.548-559).

The discovery of new trade routes across the Atlantic to America and Asia, with an emphasis on India, had its impact and should be considered as certain factor on the declining of the importance of the Mediterranean for Western European traders during the 16<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The opening of the Suez Canal in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, for the Empire was another factor that certainly had an impact on the decline of economic benefits from trade and customs.

### **3. Ottoman market (Bazaar) - urban organization and supporting infrastructure**

Urban elements of the Ottoman period can still be seen today in some cities. An interesting source that provides information about the cities of Kosovo and the Southern Adriatic such as Dubrovnik, the cities of today's Albania and Montenegro, roads, political, economic, trade, military and

different relations in this area during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is a unique guide to the medieval period "Seyāhatnāmesi", by the Ottoman author Evliya Chelebi (Čelebi, 1967).

Markets were organized around the most visited places in the city, near mosques. In general, the marketplace was open, organized in the city centre in squares and streets with agricultural, livestock and handicraft products divided according to trades. These were the most common and widespread marketplaces in all the cities that had special market days during the week. The second type of marketplace was closed (Bezisten) in which expensive goods were traded, marketplaces that were popular in Kosovo until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the development and protection of economic interests of merchants in the Ottoman Empire, as well as in the domestic, transit and foreign trade, mainly during the 16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup> century, an important role was played by well-known trade and craft corporations - Guilds (Guilds).

It is understood that for the development of trade, the presence of inns - lodgings and caravans for rest (inns, lodgings, caravanserais - hostels of that time), were important for the development of urban trade. Within the urban complex, the architectural object of the hammam or public bath, which was usually located in the centre of the city, served for the benefit of the health and hygiene of travellers and traders. In the Ottoman urban plan in Kosovo, there was at least one hammam in each city, and in some even more.

In the road infrastructure for easier access to cities, bridges over rivers were built, which are today preserved near some cities, thus developing the level of road and freight traffic.

#### **4. Interregional trade relations**

Kosovo's trade developed in parallel with the economic life of the Ottoman Empire which was manifested by the increase of domestic exchange and strong ties with the international market (Mikić, 1974, p.95).

At the beginning of the Ottoman period, ores extracted from Kosovo mines, mainly gold and silver, were of importance to the foreign market. This activity was carried out mainly by Christian Europeans, including Croats who worked for the interests of the Republic of Dubrovnik, and this activity in Kosovo lasted until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century - the beginning of

the 18th century, when it was interrupted due to Austro-Turkish wars (Rizaj, 1964, p.235).

The basis of export trade was the surplus of agriculture and livestock, raw materials, wheat, handicrafts, jewellery, weapons, processed leather, silk products, wool, etc., while goods imported into the Kosovo market consisted of various items such as coffee, sugar, salt, cotton, rice, fish, soap, cans, etc. (Thëngjilli, 1999, p.338-339). Shkodra was one of the centres connecting not only the Adriatic coast with Kosovo, but also the Western Balkans and beyond, given that in the ports of Shkodra, Ulcinj and Lezha, traders brought goods for the domestic market from Venice, Ancona, Florence and Ragusa, transit trade this that flourished in the 17th and especially in the 18th century even to the westernmost countries of Europe (Ibid., p.240-241). Local traders collected goods (wool, raw hides, wax, etc.) in their warehouses such as in the city of Durrës, and from there it was exported to various centres of the Mediterranean (Ibid.). This activity was carried out with caravans loaded with animals or carriages on old trade roads that connected the shores of the Southern Adriatic with the interior of the Albanian lands mainly through the road line Shkodër - Prizren (Ibid.).

Fairs as a form of interregional trade organization lasted for several days, in special periods, where merchants of cities near the Adriatic coast such as Shkodra came to the cities of Kosovo such as Pristina and thus this activity led to the revival of the monetary and inter-provincial economy (Ibid. p.336).

The rural economy was important in Kosovo's foreign trade with Ragusa, Venice, Ancona and domestic trade, with annual fairs bringing products from the countryside to the cities (Hrabak, 1984, p. 180).

During the last Ottoman period, Dubrovnik merchants traded in various products from Kosovo, including razors and knives (Milojević-Radović, 1959-1960, p.184).

The Ragusa traders from Skopje were the ones who transported wheat from Kosovo villages and kept it in Pristina and Vuçiterna (today Vushtrri) from where the transport continued to the centres of the Adriatic (Hrabak 1970, p.180). This product was transported from Kosovo, Western Macedonia and the countries of the Central Balkans to the city of Dubrovnik via Lezha (Ibid.). A rare product, such as saffron, was produced in Peja "zafrano di Pechio" and from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was export-oriented and was well known in Dubrovnik's archival books (Ibid., p.178).

An interesting activity in Kosovo during the Ottoman rule was jewellery. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Kosovo goldsmiths were known for their foreign trade, and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, works of art aroused the interest of large Parisian trading houses (Marković 1962-1963, p.403-404).

## 5. Organization of trade caravans

The word “caravan” is of Persian origin (kārwan “protection of merchants”) and comes from the joint journey of merchants during the transportation of goods (Ndreca, 1986, p.377).

Albanians are mentioned as caravan guides in Pristina in the third decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (per unam bisachiarum unis Arbanenisis qui vehebat salmam in dictam), and in the acts of the Small Council (Com. Min.) of the Republic of Dubrovnik from 23.VI.1439. (p. 8), a person with a characteristic Albanian name and surname, Gjukë Kastrati, is mentioned among Ragusa’s in Novobrdo (Riza, 1979, p.157).

According to one study, data on the trade routes of Dubrovnik caravans moving in Kosovo during the Ottoman period are described as follows: caravan transport was performed with the use of horses, carriers, dealers and loaders. Pristina, Peja, Prizren and Vushtrri were among the places used to provide these services. In this type of trade, a number of security measures related to the transport of goods were provided, ensuring adequate traffic time, quantity of goods, caravan size, handover of goods of the same placement and quarantines near Dubrovnik (to prevent possible transmission of infectious diseases), various insurance of caravans under arms (cavalry, road guards, regular janissaries, regular soldiers, military escort and field gendarmerie). Direction, roads and places through which caravans passed were Dubrovnik - Bosnia: Stara Vlahia - Novi Pazar - Kosovo: Mitrovica - Vushtrri - Pristina - Kacanik - Skopje (one direction) - Upper Morava- Kumanovo and places of today's Bulgaria (other direction). Local roads from Kosovo followed the lines: Pristina - Lipjan - Novobrdo; Janjevo - Prizren, Prizren - Ferizaj -Skopje and Novobrdo - Lezha. In western Kosovo, traffic flowed in the following directions: Prizren - Gjakova, Decani - Peja - Pristina. The following lines were important: Novobrdo-Prokuplje; Novi Pazar - Trepça - Vushtrri - Svetlja in Lab - Kursumlija - Prokuplje / Prokuplje - Kursumlija - Podujevo - Pristina. Caravanserais and inns were used for travellers and merchants (Vukanović, 1961, p.216-217).

## **6. Rail transport in Kosovo**

The traditional form of caravan transport will quickly lose its role due to technical and industrial advances in the field of transport in the 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> centuries that influenced the new dynamics of trade.

Kosovo's trade relations with the southern Adriatic will change significantly after 1873, when the Thessaloniki-Skopje-Mitrovica railway was built. Commercial activity shifted towards Skopje and Thessaloniki, while Shkodra passed to the secondary level (Pllana, 1984, p.268-269).

This change of the commercial priority direction will be a factor in weakening Kosovo's exchange relations with the West. Four decades later, with the annexation of Kosovo to Serbia, its cities will lose the traditional role of relations with the centres of the southern Adriatic coast, not only in economic terms, but also socially and culturally.

## **7. Conclusion**

During the Ottoman period, trade developed in three directions: local or internal (rural), transit and interregional or foreign trade. Between Kosovo and the southern Adriatic in the form of imports and exports, certain goods were traded. Foreign and transit trade in Kosovo took place in two main phases during the Ottoman period. The first phase is the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century - the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when self-governing towns or colonies near mines in Kosovo coexisted with Ottoman rule. The second phase is the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Ottomans had complete political and territorial power. The main economic relations of the cities of Kosovo with the centres of the Southern Adriatic were Shkodra and Lezha on the Albanian coast and in the north the Republic of Dubrovnik.

During this period, the role of transit and foreign trade was mainly concentrated in the main cities of Kosovo which has been based on agricultural, livestock and handicraft products within the socio-economic development system of the Ottoman Empire. After the secession of Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire in 1912, Kosovo's trade relations with the southern Adriatic were seriously deteriorated.

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