

The Ottoman-Venetian Border (15th-18th Centuries)

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3 Land Borders

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3.1 How a Border is Built

Bounding the ground by mutual consent, marking it, distinguishing what belongs and what does not belong to someone is not a sign of war, but of peace. The frontier vanishes and gives way to the border, i.e. a definite and settled line that, right because it separates in a clear-cut way, somehow draws territories, people, ideologies, religions and laws together, giving their living space to everybody. The border is a shared line, marked with one accord, recognised and recognisable by everybody. If there is no consent, then it is not a real border, but it is a wall, a barrier, an obstacle, a rampart. The border may follow the course of the mountains and the waters of a river, a road that has already been planned by men or it may run among identical fields, pass through an inextricable tangle of a wood or a forest, halve a desert and separate two oases, or run following an imaginary parallel, a meridian or a line marked with a ruler on a map. It may respect ethnic groups or religions, or cut houses and separate families and communities. This is the border and it depends on the way it is marked.

The decision to build a border implies that the preconditions for a peace already exist. This subject, however, is often vaguely broached when an agreement is endorsed. If the frontier is the first element to be violated when the hostilities outbreak, the border is the last element by means of which peace is ratified. Rather, negotiations continue in new meetings, namely other debates among people who are specifically charged with deciding a new line. It is not always easy to agree on a border if the aim is establishing a long-lasting peace: nature and communities should not be violated by irresponsible new divisions. The theory of natural borders that already exist and respect the territory was defined in the nineteenth century (the century of colonialism) even if at the same time the 'Westerns' marked straight lines on a map in order to create new states the Near East or Africa. If we observe an atlas, we soon realise which are the borders that respect geography and which are the borders that were arbitrarily

marked without observing the territory at close quarters and without going there and then decide.¹

The creation of a border represented a further acknowledgment of the right of the other to exist as far as the relations between Christians and Muslims are concerned: if making peace sometimes employed a temporary cessation of the hostilities, marking a border by mutual consent meant corroborating an agreement that had to last for a very long period, without taking into consideration what theories and religions asserted.

The first information regarding the existence of an Ottoman border regards Rumelia's provinces in the second half of the fifteenth century. Before the relentless advance of Osman's successors in the eastern Mediterranean, Venice had to hold out to defend its islands, its harbour towns and coastal strips. The very nature of these properties - i.e. long and narrow areas, constricted between the sea waves and a more and more dangerous enemy - led Venetians to want a border. It was a vital need for the survival of the Venetian *Stato da Mar* (maritime provinces) but not for others. As a matter of fact, it was not equally perceived by Habsburgs who, from the heart of Europe, ruled a wide Empire and could afford the existence of an indefinite area to its ends. The conquest or the loss of some miles was not vitally important for this sovereign, as it was for Venice, for which losing Morea, Dalmatia and the Albanian towns meant to lose all of its maritime provinces.

The first document that concerns agreements for the border between Venice and the Porte was signed in 1479, right after a peace agreement. On this occasion, the sultan sent the *emin* Halil bey in Morea and later in Nafpaktos, Himara, Sopot, Shkodër, Bar, Ulcinj, Budva and Kotor to establish the border. The instructions given by Mehmed II were communicated also to Venetians and were very precise with regard to the lands and the towns he had to get or give. The areas conquered by means of the sword by the sultan's victorious armies had to go to him, even though this implied rejecting a natural border such as the one represented by the waters of the Bojana River near Shkodër. Old borders, such as those who had marked Giovanni Cernovich's lands, were restored. Poljica and other places did not have to offer gifts to the sultan anymore.² In this first border *name-i hümayun* that was written in Greek as it was customary for the correspondence with European states, there are some of the principles that underpinned the drawing up of agreements regarding the borders: the official task given to a diplomatic representative of going there to debate; the existence of possible natural borders other than those of ancient states

1 As for the borders of the Middle East or of North Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Blake, Schofoeld, *Boundaries and State Territory*, *passim*.

2 *Documenti turchi*, no. 4; Bombaci, *Nuovi firmani greci*, 300-305.

that could be restored; finally, the problem represented by the territories conquered with the sword that nobody wanted to yield. In this case, the principle of *'alā ḥalihi* or *uti possidetis ita porro possideatis*, according to which each state had to keep what it possessed when the hostilities ended, was customarily applied. This concept seems to have remained in the agreements with the Porte until the eighteenth century, because it was used with the same procedures also in the Treaties of Karlowitz and Passarowitz. Also in the agreement reached after the war of Cyprus, Venice yielded the island together with Sopot castle, whereas the borders in Albany and Bosnia did not change.³

If the line established for Albany in 1479 satisfied Venetians, Morea one did not; therefore, two official representatives (a Venetian and an Ottoman) were sent there, so that the decision would not be unilateral but made by mutual consent. Sinan bey and the secretary Giovanni Dario, whose palace on the Gran Canal near the Salute is still known by his name, were chosen. They went to Greece and the Venetians superintendents of the most important border fortresses took part in their debates and decisions; other debates took place also in Istanbul between the ambassador Nicolò Cocco and the sultan himself. They reached an agreement that was slightly different from the order given by Mehmed II to Halil; as a matter of fact, Pastrovich and Zupa, which had belonged to Giovanni Cernovich's territories, went to Venice. Venetians were asked to destroy Galata castle (near Nafpaktos) – which was rebuilt after one year – and were prohibited from rebuilding the 'Tzivérin' one in Morea.⁴ Only at the end of the negotiations did the sultan issue a *hududname* (or *sinirname*) and the decisions were confirmed.

It may be observed that the procedure for the institution of the borders was not yet well defined at that time. At the beginning, a single representative was sent there (the Ottoman one), and only later were two representatives designated. Moreover, the discussions continued also in Istanbul with the Venetian ambassador. Finally, the sultan one-sidedly acknowledged the border line by means of a sovereign act. His successor, Bayezid II, renewing the peace, endorsed those borders but, after the arising of some usurpations to his detriment in Morea, he asked for their restorations and confirmed them again.⁵

The *hududnames* were still rather common in the sixteenth century; then, between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, when a real practice for the institution of borders was created, they appeared as a remnant of the past, rejected by Ottomans and obstinately demanded by

3 *Documenti turchi*, no. 818.

4 *Documenti turchi*, no. 21.

5 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 35, 37/c.

Venetians. The index *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi* mentions only the one issued by the Republic and paid at a high price after the Treaty of Karlowitz.⁶

The *hududnames* concerning international relations are not the only ones. There were other relating to the inner borders of the Empire, for example to administrative areas or properties given by the sultan to eminent characters.⁷

3.2 The Creation of a Practice

At the end of the fifteenth century, another war upset the relations between the Republic and the Porte. Towards its end, new contacts maintained by the Venetian envoy in Istanbul brought peace back. Once again, the issue of the borders was referred to some official representatives. The doge charged the secretary Alvise Sagundino with this task but then, after the latter had given the fortress of Lefkada with arms and munitions to Turks, he substituted him with another secretary, Zaccaria de' Freschi. Ottomans assigned the task to Ali, the sanjakbeg of the area (at least for Morea). Then, another *name-i hümayun* that acknowledged and confirmed what had been decided was issued.⁸

Similar imperial documents, i.e. the international *sınırnames* or the *hududnames*, appeared to have been rather common in this period, much more than in the following years. They were the natural conclusion of the peace agreements and the ensuing debates on the borders. The practice concerning the meeting of two official representatives in the places to be defined is witnessed not only for Venice but also, for example, for Poland: after the Ottoman conquests, around 1542, it was necessary to establish the border line of south Ukraine between Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Yedisan: the diplomats were the sanjakbeg of Silistra (assisted by the qadis of Akkerman and Bender) and the Polish hetman Mikolaj Sieniawski; however, their debates came to nothing since they could not reach a satisfactory agreement and the border remained indefinite. There were other debates a little less than a hundred years later in 1633 for the institution of a line of demarcation with the Polish lands and other discussions followed in 1673, 1680 and 1703, after the Treaty of Karlowitz.⁹

6 *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi Rehberi*, 144.

7 Cf. *Calligraphies ottomanes*, 166, 170-171.

8 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 100, 108, 157.

9 Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 58; Veinstein, *L'occupation ottomane*, 137-146. For a further Frank-Ottoman delimitation happened at the end of the eighteenth century, see Prokosch, *Molla und Diplomat*, *passim*.

Disputes and debates concerning the borders took place in peacetime as well. In the 20s of the sixteenth century, for example, uninterrupted border violation by both parties brought about usurpations, or we might also say that a certain indefiniteness of the border line caused the likelihood of border violation and usurpations. By then, the sanjakbeg of Bosnia, Hüsrev, together with the qadi of Skradin and some representatives of the other state, was charged with restoring the borders between the Most Serene Republic of Venice and the Porte near Šibenik and Trogir. Venetians laid claim to seventy or eighty villages, even though they produced only 'Christian writings' in support of their statements, namely privileges the king of Hungary had granted to them. Local Turks, instead, argued that those lands had been conquered with the sword during the war but had remained deserted; then, they were turned into *mukataa*; men were sent there and registered as tax-payers (i.e. for *öşr*). In 1530 the *emins* of the country recorded the inhabitants paying *haraç* and *cizyes* in a new register (*defter-i cedid*), together with the lands that had been given as *timars* to the *sipahis* and the fortress guards (*hisar eri*) that had already received their *berats*. In the end, these villages were acknowledged as belonging to the Republic, but the fact that they had been already assigned as *timar* made their restitution more difficult. In the following period, in order to avoid such cases, just when problems concerning lands that had already been assigned were in sight, the *sipahi* was immediately sent away and rewarded with another benefit.¹⁰ Putting system like this into practice in the Ottoman Empire was rather easy since the system of *timars* did not bind the recipient and his successors to a specific estate for ever, but the latter could be replaced with a wider or smaller one and, in case of the *sipahi's* death, it came back to the state.

The most ancient Venetian documents, which are kept in Venice and certify the sultan's orders to carry out inquiries (*teftişes*) with regard to borders, date back to this period; they contain also *arzs* of reply by the local authorities and abstracts of *sicil* with authentications of qadis that attest the rights upon the lands given back by Ottoman subjects. Only after having been informed did the sultan issue an order with which lands or villages had to be kept or given back.¹¹ The qadi's key role in the certification of new or re-established borders started in this period, fully developed in the second half of the century and was applied until the eighteenth century.

An order given by Murad III to the sanjakbegs of Bosnia and Klis and to the qadis of Klis and Sarajevo in 1575 explains how a border with the Republic was expected to be re-established after a dispute.¹² The recipients,

10 ASVe, LST, f. I, cc. 10, 28-29, 35; f. II, c. 10; f. VII, c. 49; *Documenti turchi*, nos. 261, 307.

11 ASVe, LST, f. I, cc. 30, 39; *Documenti turchi*, no. 638.

12 *Documenti turchi*, no. 829.

together with the *çavuş* Cafer, had to meet the diplomats appointed by Venice, mark the borders again and place the signals; then, the two parties had to exchange the acts of delimitation. The *hüccet* issued by the qadi had to be transcribed in the *sicils* and a copy had to be sent to the Porte.

The practice of defining a border, which was to be applied in the Venetian-Ottoman relations also after the Treaties of Karlowitz and Passarowitz, was employed as follows. The sultan and the doge designated their own representatives and provided them with credentials that certified them as diplomats charged with marking the new line. The two representatives, together with their retinue that could be composed of hundreds of men in the most important missions, gathered where the works had to begin; they measured the land, placed signals and questioned the local population on the subject, checking the maps and tracing out new ones. At the end of these meetings, they exchanged the documents: Venetians provided the opposite party with an act undersigned by the clerk (*cancelliere*) of the mission with the diplomat's seal and the Republic's seal with Saint Mark's lion. Ottomans handed over the original of a *hüccet* undersigned by the qadi or the qadis that had followed the committee; a copy of this *hüccet*, once copied in the official register, was sent to the sultan together with an *arz* drafted by the diplomat charged with the delimitation and, if necessary, by the qadi too. The transaction was completed and confirmed without any further formalities. To be safer, however, the sultan could issue a *hududname* as a confirmation in which the content of the *hüccet* was quoted.¹³

Beside *hüccets*, however, during the negotiations, other documents were issued by Ottomans: they were *temessüks*, i.e. certificates unilaterally undersigned by the sultan's representative and given to the opposite party. In the Ottoman-Venetian affairs, they were drafted mainly when there had been some objections or uncertainties. According to Kolodziejczyk,¹⁴ these acts were an integral part of the practice used to establish the border between Poland and the Ottoman Empire. They were similar to peace documents, drafted in two languages, undersigned and sealed by a diplomat and exchanged. As for Ottomans, the delimitation document was copied in the official registers (*defter-i mufassals* in the case of the new province of Podolia/Kamenice), but it did not originate a *hududname*. The *temessüks* were drafted after the issue of the *ahdname* (sometimes even after some years) and represented the conclusion of the peace talks.

13 Pedani, *The Ottoman Venetian Frontier*, 172.

14 Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 67.

3.3 Marking the Space

Once the areas where a border line had to run were spotted, the official representatives of both parties had to identify it on the ground so that from then on everybody could recognise where a state ended and another began.

Since the classical antiquity, men used to place signals on the ground to indicate a border. These elements possessed a sacred character; according to Numa Pompilius' law, those who dared to budge a boundary stone, i.e. a boundary mark, had to be sacrificed to gods. Such severe punishments were inflicted by other peoples too. In the Early Middle Ages, however, after the coming of peoples of Germanic origin, fences, hedges, ditches and, most of all, trees on which some marks had been impressed were preferred. This was perhaps the expression of a world that was attached more to nature, woods and forests than to human manufactures. The person to whom a plant, and all the other plants from that spot on, belonged seemed to be more important than talking about ownership. Only Franks resumed the Roman custom of the boundary stones.¹⁵

With regard to the Venetian-Ottoman borders, some information about the way to mark the territory may be found in the documents issued at the end of the delimitation and in the papers that were drafted during the endless discussions between the two representatives. First of all, pyramids of stones (which were called *masiere* in Venetian or *unche* in the Dalmatian dialect) were preferred: they were made of stones collected on the spot and gathered to form a heap that was placed where the border line ran. A cusp-shaped stone was usually placed on the top to make the construction more recognisable.¹⁶ The construction of such a structure could be a hard work and explained the presence of several diggers and labourers in the retinue of the diplomats charged with establishing the border.

The long document concerning the so-called 'Nani border',¹⁷ established in Dalmatia in 1671 by Battista Nani and Hüseyin pasha (the *beylerbeyi* of Bosnia), also describes trees or big stones on which a cross had been carved. This was a very old system of marking the space used not only in Dalmatia but also in other European places; for example, in the Venetian-Imperial borders a cross carved on the stone with the Habsburg coat of arms on one side and Saint Mark's lion on the other was often used. The vertical limb pointed out where the border line ran.¹⁸ Another way to mark the space was driving a boundary stone into the ground – many

15 Werkmüller, *Recinzioni*, 641-659.

16 Sartore, *Termini di confine*, 273-335.

17 *I Libri Commemorativi*, vol. 24, nos. 66-71.

18 Sartore, *Termini di confine*, 295.

examples of which still exist in the Dolomites or on the Venetian lagoon edge; not only coats of arms but also inscriptions, dates, numbers and letters of the alphabet were carved on these structures: sometimes there was the progressive number of the signals, sometimes the first letters of a nearby town's name. The boundary stones could easily be moved by those who wanted the border line to run in a different place. Kolodziejczyk states that along the Polish-Ottoman border a heap crowned by a cross was used by the Christian party and a stack of wood in the form of a turbaned head by the Muslim one.¹⁹

Uprooting and replanting a tree used to mark a border was harder, but nature itself could destroy it or somebody could fell it. Removing the engravings carved on a rocky wall was quite a different thing and, as a matter of fact, this system was employed to mark the Venetian-Ottoman border of Dalmatia-Albany as well. For example, in the winter of 1699, in the mountainous area near Herceg Novi and Risan, there was the meeting between the substitutes of the diplomats Giovanni Grimani and Osman *ağa*, who had preferred not to go in such an inaccessible area that was covered with ice. After their arrival on the spot, these men realised that snow and frost prevented from finding stones or ground to build the heaps and, thus, they decided to carve the side of the mountain. Up until that moment, the cross was the only sign that had been used in the Venetian-Ottoman borders, such as the Nani, the Šibenik (1546) and Zadar (1576) ones.²⁰ By then, however, the cross was not considered to be fit to indicate both states; thus, it was used only with reference to the Republic, whereas the crescent was reserved for the other state.²¹ It was an old Turkish symbol and this was probably the first time Ottomans used it alone, and not together with other symbols, to mean the Ottoman Empire, as Europeans already did. Twenty years later, on the occasion of the new boundary line (the Grimani one), what had been decided was not modified and the cross and the crescent remained to show where the Republic of Venice and the Empire of the sultans met.

3.4 Border Fortresses

Fortresses and strongholds had great importance in the establishment of a border line. Keeping them was a deterrent and ensured greater safety to the inhabitants, both in peacetime and in case of a future war. Leaving them to the enemy meant granting him a place whence he could watch and

19 Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 62.

20 ASVe, *Confini*, b. 243bis, cc. 21-23; *Documenti turchi*, no. 863.

21 *I Libri Commemorativi*, vol. 30, no. 61; ASVe, *Grimani*, b. 8, no. 39 (13 February 1700).

attack their territory. Such a delicate subject could not be extemporised.

The first Venetian-Ottoman agreement after the fall of Constantinople shows that Venetians were still interested in their trades by sea and were little involved in probable attacks from the land. Their castles in Romania and Albany are mentioned only to state that they could not host enemies or traitors of the sultan. The entire Venetian state was included in the peace because this had been officially reached by the sultan and the *signoria*, its nobles, the subjects, the towns, the lands, the islands and the places that hoisted Saint Mark's flag.²²

The following agreement (1479) reached after a long war (1463-1479) fought not only at sea but also in the open field to the point that the *akıncıs* went beyond the Tagliamento river. This document speaks of fortresses and borders more in detail. Peace was sworn by the sultan by land and sea with all the Venetian lands, castles, islands and places. Venice was obliged to return Shkodër, Lemnos, the «castelli e i luogi... in le parte de la Morea» (castles and places in Morea) conquered during the war, but it was given back «li ocupati destreti neli confini vechi de le terre loro, vicinando cum li luogi de la mia Signoria in ogni luogo» (the regions - placed within the ancient borders of Venetian lands - that the Ottomans had conquered near the sultan's lands).²³ As it was said before, the first known delimitation that was made by two official diplomats (a Venetian and an Ottoman) took place right after this peace.

When a fortress had to be surrendered to the former enemy, all the arms and munitions that were kept there were usually taken away and the fortress was emptied of soldiers and officers. Peace agreements usually provided for this, but this practice was not always observed: in 1503 Lefkada castle was handed over by Venetians to the sultan's representative with what it contained and seven prisoners; on the contrary, in 1540 the *subaşı* Yunus declared to receive the town of Monemvasia together with its stronghold but without armaments.²⁴

An efficient running of the problem constituted by the fortresses placed along the border was important since, if they had remained in a disputed but empty area, the buildings would have represented an easy and handy shelter for criminals. In 1480, for example, the sultan threatened to send his men to destroy Thermis, Vatici and the castle of Aberto in Morea, which had not yet been given to him as it had been established and which had become a den for fugitives.²⁵

22 ASVe, *Comm.*, reg. 14, cc. 136-137v (=143-145v).

23 ASVe, *Comm.*, reg. 16, cc. 136v-137 (=138v-139); in Greek cc. 142-142v (=144-144v).

24 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 106, 440, 435, 436.

25 *Documenti turchi*, no. 13.

If a party could not easily gain such fortresses during the peace talks, it often asked to destroy them. This happened in 1539 when the sultan destroyed the constructions that had been built by Venetians near Herceg Novi in Ottoman territory during the war. The demolished buildings often were not old but new and built during the hostilities. For example, in 1542 the sultan ordered to fell a fortress near Shkodër: already destroyed by mutual consent for safety reasons in the days of İskender bey Mihaloğlu, it was rebuilt by Venetians during the war (1537-1540). One of the reasons that justified the outbreak of the hostilities by Ottomans, stated in the ultimatum of the first part of the moon of *ramazan* of 977/7-16 February 1570, was that, according to the sultan, Venetians were rebuilding castles and villages beyond the borders. The year before, the Porte had complained about the fact that two new fortresses had been built along the borders of Klis and other thirty-four (already demolished on the basis of the peace agreement) had been gradually restored. This behaviour, however, was not only Venetian; also Ottomans, when they could, acted in the same way: in 1586 the sultan was forced to order the demolition of the new fortresses along the border of Bosnia, since Venetians found out suspect traffic of lime and wood.²⁶

Fortresses and castles were built or restored not only during war, but also in peacetime, especially when this lasted for many years and the geo-politics of an area was changing. When we consider the relations between the Porte and the Most Serene Republic, we shall take into consideration the fact that there was not a permanent conflict, but there were long periods of truce, among which the most important one lasted from 1573 to 1645; another one lasted from 1718 until the end of the Republic in 1797 and was characterised by the drawing-up of the 1733 perpetual peace that did not need any further ratifications.²⁷ There are several examples of fortresses built during these long truces: in 1557 the sultan ordered to demolish a castle that troubled the neighbouring salt marshes in the district of Poljica near Klis, together with a fort that had been built nearby by the inhabitants of Split who menaced Ottomans' peaceful exploitation of the salt. In 1577, while the sanjakbeg of Klis, Mustafa, was building a fortress in the district of Kotor, Venetians and Uskoks were building another fortress in Podgorje round an old tower that had remained deserted for more than eighty years. They also tried to seize an old fort placed near Sedd-i Islam that was readily demolished by Ottomans. In 1601 and in 1622 Ottomans erected two fortresses in Novigrad and Split.²⁸

To carry out such projects, however, it was necessary to have much building material and this could not be neglected by the inhabitants of

26 *Documenti turchi*, nos. 410, 488, 802, 808, 958.

27 Bellingeri, *Un frammento*, 247-280; Pedani, *La dimora della pace*, 40-41.

28 ASVe, *LST*, f. II, c. 42; f. III, c. 164; f. V, cc. 204-205; BOA, *MM*, reg. 6004, c. 108.

the neighbourhood. If the other party had been informed, its help could be asked for, but it was difficult to obtain it. In 1531 the sultan ordered Venetians to defend the workers that were building the fortress of Solin in the sanjak of Bosnia: it was placed in a desert and dangerous area, near the Venetian sea harbours, and was easily assailable by the enemies. In 1547, instead, the sultan asked Venetians to give him bricklayers (*bennā*), carpenters (*neġġār*), workers (*erġāt*) and supplies for the construction of the castle of Nadin in the sanjak of Klis.²⁹

Nadin, together with Buchach, Rasten, Velin, Vrana, Sene and Degirmenler (i.e. Mills) were fortresses placed in the Bosnian borderland, towards Dalmatia, in an area that had been conquered by Ottomans during the war (1537-1540); these place names appear in the ensuing peace agreement. The possession of Nadin and the near Vrana was not questioned by Venetians, even though their name was remembered also in the following capitulations of 1567, 1575 and 1576. Degirmenler, instead, was recognised as Venetian despite the fact that, already in the 20s of the sixteenth century, this place was questioned since it was near Solin where there was no castle but only mills belonging to Šibenik's people. In 1523 the area was probably the vizier Ahmed's property (*mülk*): he proposed an agreement, which was confirmed by the sultan the same year, and Venetians recognised his rights in exchange for money. The other fortresses aroused much controversy. It was necessary to constitute a mixed committee to establish the owners of Buchach (a deserted tower in front of the castle of Klis), Sene (the ruins of a castle built to protect a salt marsh), Rasten (a house placed among the olive trees near Šibenik and the sea), and the tower of Velin, which stands near the castle of Strevice. This committee decided they were all Ottoman; the castle of Rasten, however, was then left to Venetians who, still in 1546, held a garrison in Velin too.³⁰

As regards the fortresses right along the border, Karlowitz border agreement is of special interest. If we read the reports of the time, it is clear that the space around a fortress had to be given to the state that possessed the fortress; then, a series of niches and circular bulges was created in a straight line that usually could be travelled over in some hours. Therefore, not all the forts placed exactly along the border line were demolished, but some of them were given, by mutual consent, to one of the two states.

29 ASVe, *LST*, f. I, c. 25; f. II, c. 18; cf. Bonelli, *Il trattato*, 355.

30 ASVe, *LST*, f. I, cc. 22, 27, 70 (edited in Bonelli, *Il trattato*, 351-352); *Documenti turchi*, nos. 430, 528, 540, 543, 556, 562; Theunissen, *Ottoman-Venetian Diplomats*, 617-639.

3.5 The Disputed Land

Sometimes, after the end of the fighting – in any case before the ratification of a peace or the creation of a border –, one of the two parties could suddenly seize a place, a village or a castle that was considered to be strategically relevant and, thus, attractive and important to go on discussing on favourable terms. Many examples of such a behaviour exist with reference to the Balkan borders. For instance, Habsburgs behaved in this way after the Treaty of Karlowitz, during the talks for the new Venetian-Ottoman-Imperial border: on 10 June 1699, about one thousand knights and five hundred infantrymen went under the walls of the fortress of Zuonigrad and asked to surrender it. After a refusal, they attacked it, whereas only three artillery fires could be shot from the walls; one hundred Habsburg soldiers got into the fortress through a breach and took possession of the building, which they would possess even after the border agreement.³¹

Such usurpations could take place also in peacetime. In 1531, for example, the *bailo* complained to the sultan about the unlawful occupation of places between Split and Omiš. Vice versa, in 1542 the sanjakbeg of Shkodër, Halil, and the qadi of Montenegro told that the people of Kotor had taken possession of many public lands of the ‘salt marsh of the despot’ and had put them to crop, thus damaging the picking of salt, while other lands had been seized near Starigrad and Pastrovich, Bar and Ulcinj. In this case, the sultan ordered to check the border by mutual consent once again and, if Venetians had gone on farming Ottoman lands, to ask them the due taxes. In 1564 the Porte was ordered to demolish three houses built on Venetian lands near Klis and to give them back what had been unduly occupied. In 1590 border violation near Pastrovich by Ottoman subjects was reported, whereas in 1591 Venetians were accused of having plundered, and then occupied with the Uskoks, thirty-four villages, i.e. 360 *bastines* near Split, Šibenik and Trogir, whose inhabitants ‘now pay *haraçs* to the infidels’, and the castle of Vrhpolje that had become, according to the supplicants, a den of pirates. In the near Petrova, two Ottoman fortresses were built by Ottomans to protect their territory from usurpations. Both Ottoman and Venetian local authorities sometimes unduly changed the border line, just like the sanjakbeg of Klis, Ferhad, tried to do in 1559.³²

Lands as well as their inhabitants could not be easily yielded to the neighbouring state. For example, in 1537, on the eve of a war, the sanjakbeg of Bosnia, Hüsrev, prepared a list of 150 people – among which there

31 ASVe, *PTM*, f. 701, no. 14. For the account of these events seen from the imperial point of view, see Holjevac, *The “Triplex Confinium”*, 133-137.

32 ASVe, *LST*, f. IV, c. 159, f. V, cc. 10, 13, 14, 28, 10, 478, 479, 2; *Documenti turchi*, nos. 284, 490, 748, 788.

were also women and children – that had taken refuge in the Venetian land. Not all the inhabitants of a place were happy to live under a certain ruler and, if another state with different customs and faith lay near there, people could turn to the ‘enemies’ in the hope of a better destiny. Before the fall of their city, the Greeks of Constantinople often said that they liked better the turban of a Turk than the tiara of the pope of Rome. Other episodes are less known. For instance, around 1520-1523, the inhabitants of some villages of both Rhodes and Karpathos wrote to the sultan asking for help; the first complained about the oppression exerted by the Christians and asked to send the army to conquer the island.³³

3.6 Rivers and Mountains

When a border was planned, it was important to make it visible. If it ran along a river, the same waters formed a silver dividing line. For many peoples, and also for Turks, before their conversion to Islam, water was a holy element; dirtying it, even just to wash, was a crime; the banks, most of all the nearest to the source, were an area close to god and, therefore, they were a place appointed to oaths, alliances and peace agreements. The very course of the waters was of special value: as a matter of fact, some sovereigns wanted their tombs to be dug right in the riverbed, after having diverted it as long as it was necessary. The same applies to high places, i.e. the mountain or hill tops, which were considered to be suitable for oaths, sovereign graves or else to mark the division of the space. Traces of this ancient belief may still be found in the agreements between Venice and the khans of Crimea: in 1342, for example, peace was sworn next to a river in a place called ‘red bank’.³⁴

Just like the rivers, mountain ranges often used to mark a border; also in this case, however, it was difficult, if not impossible and often useless, to leave marks to find the exact border dividing the two states. Sometimes, the marks were left at steep faces’ feet and in the written agreements it was specified that they had to be interpreted as if they had been placed on the tops. This is what happened in 1778 to Venetians and Habsburgs near the Marmolada glacier; then, ignoring the written text, someone wanted to make reference to that old agreement to mark the border between Veneto and Trentino taking into consideration only the signs left on the mountain and not the maps of the time. Therefore, we may infer that studying old agreements is not only a display of culture, but it can have an effect on the present as well. From the point of view of the current geopolitics, the

33 ASVe, CXM, reg. 46, c. 22v; *Documenti turchi*, nos. 400, 1102.

34 *Diplomatarium*, vol. 1, no. 135.

border, or borders, that once divided the Venetian Dalmatia from the Ottoman Empire are likewise important: for many tracts the ancient maps were used to divide the present-day territory of Croatia from that of Bosnia.³⁵

During the nineteenth century, seas and mountains were defined as 'natural borders'; as a matter of fact, it was believed that the very nature had divided men and cultures; physical barriers were thought to be a god-send, an element that always existed, just like peoples living on the two sides of a border were destined to stay separate. The line of the Pyrenees was considered as the best example of that concept for a long time, just like the Urals were believed to be the separating element between Asia and Europe, and the Mediterranean Sea was believed to be a belt between Christianity and Islam.

The border between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice was marked not only by the man's hand but, wherever possible, by nature. In 1720 the stream Tiskovac, which is a tributary of the Cetina near Strmica, for example, was recognised as the limit of a zone that could be crossed in five hours. Thus, if a 'dry border' (*suha meda*) existed between Habsburgs and Ottomans after 1699 in the area near the left bank of the Una River, this means that in other areas of the valley, where the limit really ran together with the river waters, the border was necessarily 'wet'. Still in 1542 Polishes and Ottomans contended about a common tract: the first argued that it had to run along the Kodyma, which was a right tributary of the Boh; the other maintained that it had to run along the Savran (or Savranka) placed more northward.³⁶

3.7 Measuring Space and Time

We are used to the decimal measuring system that is world-wide spread. Therefore, it is not easy to understand the difficulties peoples once had to agree on the way to measure the space. During the discussions held to mark a border, the diplomats had to agree on the distance between a fortress and the border line or between a sign on the ground and the next one. These were important issues, since giving a certain quantity of land to a stronghold meant making it more or less dangerous, while giving a land to a state meant to reduce the other's territory.

The Venetian unit of length was the *piede veneto*, that is to say 0,347 m; five *piedes* were equivalent to a *passo veneto* (1,738 m), whereas six

35 *I libri Commemorativi*, vol. 33, no. 13 all. (register); cf. also the original text in ASVe, *Comm.*, reg. 33, c. 57; Mustać, *The Borders*, 63-71. With regard to the mountains in the previous 1750 border, see Zoccolotto, *Il congresso di Mauthen*, 140.

36 *Documenti turchi*, no. 1851; Roksandić, *Stojan Jankovic*, 240; Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations*, 58-59.

piesdes were equivalent to a *pertica grande* or *cavezzo* (2,086 m) and one thousand *passos* were equivalent to the *miglio veneto* (1.738,674 m). As regards Ottomans, measures of length proper and 'of walk' existed. The basis of the first was the *arşın*, which may be translated with 'peak' or 'cubit', but it took on different values according to the person who used it. There was the *mi'mar arşını* used by architects for walls or building lands that was equivalent to 0,758 m and had a multiple, the *kulaç* (1,89 m) and some submultiples: the *kadem*, i.e. the foot (0,379 m); the *parmak*, i.e. the inch (0,03159 m); the *hat*, i.e. the line (0,0026 m); and the *notka*, i.e. the point (0,0002 m). Then, there was the *çuhaci arşını*, that is the draper's *arşın*, used for clothes, which was equivalent to 0,68 m and could be divided into *rubs* (0,085 m); for more valuable fabrics, they used the *enzade* that was slightly shorter (0,65 m). Among the geographical measures, there were the *mil* (mile) that was equivalent to 1,895 m, the *fersah* (5,685 m), the *berid* (22,740 m), conceptually equal to the distance between two post houses (*berid*), and the *merhale* (45,480), namely a day journey, whereas the *imili bahri* (sea mile) was equivalent to 1,667 m.³⁷

There were several units of length and, thus, it was often difficult to entirely agree on a distance. Sometimes the measures used in different states had to be compared but also the space that could be travelled over in a certain period of time, usually on the basis of the hour, could be considered. After the invention of mechanical clocks, measuring time became easier, even though the length of day and night officially continued to vary according to the season and, as a consequence, according to the measure of the hours. In midsummer, the day, from dawn to dusk, was much longer than the night and, thus, the hours (always twelve) into which it was divided drew out in direct proportion, whereas night hours consequently drew in. On the contrary, in winter, the relation was reversed while day and night hours were of the same length only in the period of the equinoxes. That system clearly belonged to peoples who still lived in close contact with nature.

Once the two diplomats established to agree on a walk of a certain length, they had to choose whether it was a man's or an animal's walk and which kind of animal; the steps of a camel are different from those of a horse, a mule or a donkey, and these ones are different from those of a man.

The description of the decision of a short tract near the Triplex Confinium in 1699 is very useful to show how such a border was physically marked. On 20 June 1699 the Venetian, the Imperial, and the two Ottoman diplomats started their work debating on the kind of steps they had to employ, i.e. those of a man, a horse or a camel; they did some tests with their

37 Martini, *Manuale di metrologia*, 817; *Système des mesures*, 3-9; İnalçık, *Weights and Measures*, 987-994; *Introduction to Ottoman Metrology*, 311-348.

clocks and they soon realised that each of them differently measured the space covered in an hour. Reasoning on the basis of the linear measures appeared to be easier: for the time being, a Turkish ell corresponded to half a Venetian step minus a quarter, so that 1330 Turkish ells were equivalent to 598 geometrical Venetian steps. On August 30th, after having marked the point where the three states would meet, they started to debate on the space to be assigned to the strongholds and they decided to establish the equivalence between a ride of a quarter of an hour and the geometrical steps. They did some tests: in the presence of the two delegations, the cartographer Giust'Emilio Alberghetti started to ride and a Turk set out «with a ridiculous step» while the imperial diplomat, count Marsili, calculated the duration of a quarter of an hour with his clock «plus some minutes out of politeness»; in the meantime, his colleague Giovanni Grimani measured the ground with a pole sealed with the state seal and representing the official measure of a Venetian step. At the end of the test, a quarter of an hour was equivalent to 1.057 steps and this would be the measure used to establish the semicircular line that ran around the strongholds.³⁸

3.8 Meetings of Diplomats

The papers of Giovanni Grimani and Alvise III Mocenigo – the Venetian diplomats charged with establishing the borders after the Treaties of Karlowitz and Passarowitz – provide some information on their life during the months spent side by side with the Ottoman delegations to establish the border line between Saint Mark's land and the sultan's one. Besides the diplomatic meetings and the land measurements, building boundary stones and distributing guard posts or farmed lands to the parties, there were also pleasant and relaxing moments with courtesy visits or the exchange of gifts and favours. Working together for many months, meeting almost every day and also quarrelling could make people know each other and sometimes even become friends.³⁹

The Venetian gifts were: olive oil and cinnamon water (perhaps just arrived from Venice), oranges and lemons, fabrics, sugar loafs, jams, *grana* cheese (i.e. parmesan by then called *piacentino*), clocks, fish and even wine, which request really amazed Venetians. Ottomans gave enamel and locally made stirrups, boots, handkerchiefs or muskets (such as the ones given by the pasha of Herzegovina to Mocenigo), or fans, clothes, perfume

38 ASVe, *PTM*, f. 701, nos. 19, 38.

39 ASVe, *Grimani*, b. 8, no. 39 (Giovanni Grimani's diary); *Documenti turchi*, nos. 1651-1862; Pedani, *The Ottoman-Venetian Frontier*, 175. As for an Iberian case, see Szászdi León-Borja, *La demarcación*, 194-196, 199-201.

burners, tobacco and pipes, rose jam, sorbet glasses, combs, amber and aloe. Becoming friends also meant to invite the other to family events, such as the wedding of the diplomat Mehmed *efendi*. He invited his Venetian counterpart who did not go in person but sent a representative with a mirror and some jams for the married couple. Sometimes, this familiarity was used to obtain the treatments of a physician who had joined the other state's expedition and who was probably more experienced than their own, or the release of a slave, as did Mocenigo for a certain Pellegrini in return of some Ottoman slaves. On the contrary, at the beginning of their acquaintance, Osman *ağa* tried to obtain the release of some prisoners from Giovanni Grimani who, however, managed to give a vague answer about it. Having a physician available for any contingency was often very important since several accidents could happen: on 8 July 1699, for example, Grimani was hit by a horse's kick and stayed aching in his tent for a few days, while on August 15th people coming from the town of Zuonigrad, which Ottomans disputed with Venetians, attacked one of the two Ottoman camps, stole some horses and injured some men. Colds and fluxions too were on the agenda.⁴⁰

The diplomats in charge with the borders – Venetians, Imperials or Ottomans – did not do their job on their own. Their retinue was often very large. For example, in 1699 Osman *ağa*, an old *ağa* of the sultan's *silih-dars*, carried 100 infantrymen, 100 knights, 180 slaves, 70 diggers and 100 members of the retinue destined to his person; among the latter there were a *kadı*, a *defterdar*, a *miralem*, an *alaybeyi*, five old experts from the village and an interpreter. Giovanni Grimani, instead, had a retinue of more than five hundred men, i.e. 100 knights, 100 infantrymen, 250 people that had to look after the horses and the luggage, and 100 members of the most closed retinue of which also a secretary, two or three interpreters (depending on the moment), a cartographer, six trumpeters and two physicians were part. According to rumours of the time, the imperial diplomat, count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili, reached the place of the meeting with four hundred people.⁴¹

40 ASVe, *PTM*, f. 701, nos. 8all., 11-12, 28; *Documenti turchi*, nos. 1662, 1669, 1723, 1725-1726, 1731, 1736-1737, 1739-1742, 1744, 1754-1757, 1762, 1766-1769, 1771, 1773, 1776-1777, 1780, 1784-1785, 1788, 1800, 1821, 1831, 1838-1839, 1853.

41 ASVe, *PTM*, f. 701, no. 12.

3.9 The Triplex Confinium

When we think about a border, we usually imagine a long line that divides two states. Sometimes, however, there are places where three states meet, if not four. If some problems may arise when only two state entities are interested in the delimitation of a border, the decision of a Triplex Confinium is even more difficult. The way the Venetian-Imperial-Ottoman border was established in 1699, and was later questioned, is a model. In the last few years, several historians have dealt with this issue. The break up of Yugoslavia, with the consequent birth of new state entities in need of historical references for a more correct identification, gave rise to a widespread interest (with different political implications) in the subject of borders and, especially, in the Triplex Confinium, i.e. the border where the Empire, Venice and the Porte met. In this recent historiographical production, it is interesting to observe that the documentary sources used by scholars, however concerning the same subject, are different and complementary. Some historians use only the documents kept in the State Archives of Zadar even if they present a point of view that is essentially Ragusean;⁴² others tackle the problem from a purely cartographic point of view on the basis of the maps kept mainly in Zagreb;⁴³ others study the papers of the Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv of Graz and mainly recall the imperials' remarks,⁴⁴ just like those who focus on the count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili's Italian papers;⁴⁵ others analyse the Venetian sources and what the representatives of the Republic thought;⁴⁶ and, finally, other scholars use only Ottoman documents.⁴⁷

As for the concept of the triplex confinium, its meaning may vary according to the perspective: it may be a point – more precisely, for the Venetian-Habsburg-Ottoman border of 1699, the peak of Debelo Brdo, or Veliko Brdo on the Medveda Glavica mountain –, but it may also be, in the broadest sense, a whole area that shares the same problems, for example the one that extends among Zadar, Senj, Knin and Bihac, i.e. the most important towns between the bordering states. As for the Eurasian area,

42 Tolomeo, *La repubblica di Ragusa*, 305-323.

43 Slukan, *Cartographic Sources*. Cf. also the catalogue of the exhibition on the Treaty of Karlowitz, *Like Mira*.

44 Holjevac, *The "Triplex Confinium"*, 117-140.

45 Marsili, *Relazioni dei confini*; Nouzille, *Histoire de frontières*, 98-105.

46 Pedani, *The Ottoman-Venetian Frontier*, 171-177.

47 Abou-El-Haj, *Ottoman Diplomacy*, 498-512; *Ottoman Attitudes*, 131-137; *The Formal Closure*, 467-475.

there were, according to Alfred J. Rieber,⁴⁸ at least five other similar areas: Transylvania where Habsburgs, Hungarians and Ottomans met; the Pontic steppe next to the Polish-Russian-Ottoman border; the 'Caucasian knot' as a point of contact among Russia, the Porte and Persia; and finally, the Russian-Chinese-Mongolian border in the innermost Asia. The same author finds many similarities mainly between the first border, the Pontic steppe and the Caucasian part rather than with the other two areas, and draws a parallel between the Cossack and the Uskok societies. Peace agreements and diplomatic meetings were necessary to establish these borders; for example, in 1724 the Ottoman Empire and Russia agreed upon the place of the Caucasian triplex confinium: it was near the Caspian Sea, not far from Baku, but not on the mountain peak as in the Balkans but at the confluence of two rivers, the Kura and the Aras.⁴⁹ The situation remained very uncertain because of the Persian army that moved forwards and retired, and the Russian army that sometimes was called, such as in 1770, in defence of Christian peoples. Moreover, there were local rebellions, such as the one guided by Mansur Uşurma, i.e. Giovanni Battista Boetti, an Italian friar converted to Islam and founder of a new universalist and mystic creed, based more on the Koran than the Gospel.⁵⁰

In the Balkans, i.e. the area where the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Venice met, local people, subject to one of these states, did not find, at least until the late eighteenth century, a blockade in the state border. Shepherds used to go downhill to reach the coast each year in autumn; in spring, instead, they followed the opposite path to go to the green summer pastures in the mountains. Here, i.e. an area that was always disputed, this transhumance influenced also the real border line among the states. To explain this we should start from August 1699 and the meeting between Giovanni Grimani, Osman *ağa*, İbrahim *efendi* and Luigi Ferdinando Marsili in Otton. The latter, after a five-hour discussion, suddenly «spiccata una corsa» (running), headed for three little hillocks that Osman *ağa* had just pointed out stating that they were the perfect place for the Triplex Confinium; then, «col geto de sassi e col sbaro della gente di Cesare s'alzò masiera gettando tutti un sasso» (stones were thrown and Habsburgs were shooting and the heap of stones was built because everybody threw stones), while the four diplomats hugged one another. The presence of a wide – Venetian, Ottoman and Habsburg – documentation allows to reconstruct also the most hidden manoeuvres that led to that run. A secret meeting had taken place the night before

48 Rieber, *Triplex Confinium in Comparative Context*, 17-18, 23-27.

49 ASVe, *SDC*, f. 177, cc. 550-553, with a drawing (a Venetian copy of an Ottoman original used for the definition of the border).

50 Sambonet, *Il profeta armato*, 76, 78, 154-175.

between Marsili and the representatives of the Porte who had decided to place the Triplex Confinium there; in this way the Empire would widen its territory at the expense of Venice, preserving (in addition to Zuonigrad, which had been unduly torn from Venice after the signing of the peace) also the territory as far as the fortress of Otton, whereas Ottomans would conquer the fertile plain of Plavno and Strmca.⁵¹

Caught off balance, Giovanni Grimani yielded to the psychological pressure of the moment but soon after, realising that he had been compelled, refused to undersign anything. A verbal decision was not enough if it was not confirmed by a written, signed and sealed text. After a few days, while the Venetian diplomat was not taking any decision stating he had to wait orders from Venice, there was a small clash between the diplomats' men and some Vlachs. According to Grimani, it was a skirmish done on purpose to make him decide and, thus, to close the meeting. As a matter of fact, they soon had to leave since the situation was tenuous and tense. Therefore, he left Popine and set off with Osman *ağa* to go on with the delimitation along the entire Dalmatia. The problem of where the Triplex Confinium had to stand remained unsolved. For Venetians, Debelo Brdo was unacceptable, which is why they did not ratify the agreement; on the contrary, for the Imperials and Ottomans, recognising it meant seizing a strategically important tract. In this way, since everybody kept their positions, the problems remained unsolved: Zuonigrad went to the Imperials, the town of Plavno to Ottomans and the fortress of Otton, together with its territory including the Debelo Brdo peak, to Venetians. That situation remained unchanged also after the Treaty of Passarowitz. In the meantime, since a delimitation was necessary for practical necessities, even though there was not a political border, they continued to use, until the end of the Republic of Venice (1797), the line that the local people called 'the shepherds' border' because it was used for the transfers of herds from the summer pastures to the winter ones and vice versa.⁵²

51 ASVe, *Grimani*, b. 8, no. 39 (12 August 1699); *PTM*, f. 701, no. 34; Marsili, *Relazioni di confini*, 146, 149.

52 ASVe, *SDC*, reg. 35, cc. 144-145; Netto, *I confini*, 137-153.