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# AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT OF THE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DOGE OF VENICE FRANCESCO DONATO TO THE PODESTÀ OF THE CITY OF BUJE (16TH CENTURY)

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## AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT OF THE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DOGE OF VENICE FRANCESCO DONATO TO THE PODESTÀ OF THE CITY OF BUJE (16TH CENTURY)<sup>3</sup>

*Keywords:*  
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*Abstract.* The 16th-century records produced by the office of the Venetian Doge comprise a rich collection of official documents. They were written according to the rules of *ars dictaminis* and represent important testimonies in the field of history, diplomacy, culture, and other related areas. One example of such documents is the ducal letter from the Venetian Doge Francesco Donato, dated to the 16th century and kept in the State Archives in Pazin. The paleographic characteristics of the manuscript make the text partially legible because it was written on parchment that has a missing part. On the other hand, when it comes to diplomatic features, it can be concluded that it is an official epistle, written in a formal register according to the rules of *ars dictaminis* and *ars notariae*, characteristic of Renaissance Italian documents. It is precisely for that reason that this source represents a valuable testimony within the framework of cultural heritage, history, and diplomacy.

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## Introduction

When it comes to 16th-century Venetian records, which include official reports of Venetian diplomats, dispatches, and relations, official reports encompass bilateral agreements, charters, discussions, wills, censuses, and other documents. They constitute a significant corpus of testimonies arising from diplomatic negotiations, recording data on the politics, economy, society, and culture of the countries where representatives of Italian city-states resided during their missions (Frigo, 2015, p. 229).

Special techniques based on the principles of *ars dictaminis* were commonly used in diplomatic correspondence, involving the skill of writing and rhetoric proficiency, with a particular emphasis on political and economic-administrative terminology in the Italian vernacular (Gambari, 1571, pp. 125–137). Among the rich written production of Venetian administrators from the 16th century, a special place belongs to the sources found in archives in Istria and Dalmatia. Among them, documents related to business and trade-administrative matters certainly represent significant sources (Stulli, 1980, p. 14). Official documents sent from the office of the Venetian doge included ducal letters, or official letters from Doge Francesco Donato (also known in Italian historiography as Francesco Donà). Donato was a Venetian jurist and diplomat who was elected as the Doge of Venice in 1545. Prior to that, he had a successful diplomatic career, having been on missions and residing in Spain, Naples, Vicenza, Florence, Cyprus, Rovigo, and the Vatican. He held various positions, ranging from regent to advisor, served as ambassador, and was also one of the most prominent Venetian senators (Guillino, 1991).

This paper presents a manuscript written in 1550 and addressed to the *podestà*, or governor, of the town of Buje in Istria.<sup>4</sup> It includes the original facsimile, a transcription of the manuscript, and its translation.

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<sup>4</sup> The document is kept at the State Archive in Pazin and is part of the source corpus kept under the designation HR-DAPA, sign. 797–100. Based on our research, it belongs to the collection titled “Franciscus Donato Dei Gratia Dux Venetiarum, soggetto: Commissioni

### Research Objective

To gain a better understanding of the situation referred to in the ducal letter, it is necessary to consider the historical context and circumstances in Venetian Istria during the 15th and 16th centuries. The Republic of Venice established control of the Istrian coast in the Middle Ages. In the 15th century, which was a period of the greatest expansion of Venice in the Mediterranean, the Republic took control of a number of cities in Istria, including Milje, Buje, Oprtalj, Roč, Plomin, and Labin. The cities were administrated by governors or rectors (*rettore*), better known in historiography as podestà, appointed by the Grand Council of Venice (Banić, 2019, pp. 44–50). In this period, these areas were hit by economic and demographic crises, which exacerbated one another and represented the main problem in the transitional period between the Middle Ages and the modern era. This led to a very serious situation characterized by a decrease in the population and a depopulation of certain parts of Istria, especially those under Venetian rule, with phenomena such as abandoned villages and uncultivated land. In addition to these circumstances, during the 15th and 16th centuries the Istrian region was affected by other adversities, including major epidemics such as the plague, typhus, and malaria, which further contributed to lower population density and economic impoverishment (Bertoša, 1977, pp. 141–142).

Speaking of epidemics, Istrian cities were particularly affected by the plague in the first half of the 16th century. Consequently, there was a demographic decline, which affected agricultural production and international trade. Extensive data regarding this situation is stated in reports, notifications, and letters sent by Venetian regents in Istria, such as *provveditori* and podestà, and there are also letters and ducal documents sent from the office of the Venetian doge. Almost all reports from Venetian representatives in Istria mention abandoned villages, especially in southern Istria (Bertoša, 1977, pp. 141–142). In order to stop the population from migrating and to promote agricultural production, Venetian regents in Istrian cities and villages introduced special privileges in the 16th century, primarily related to the sale of landholdings. They also sought to improve soil fertility by clearing land and draining excess water. Similarly, efforts were made to preserve forests, and logging and livestock grazing were prohibited in certain areas (Veronese, 1994, pp. 182–186).

By introducing various fiscal measures and privileges, the regents of cities in Istria sought not only to promote population resettlement and agricultural production but also trade (Bertoša, 1985, pp. 50–58). The example of this manuscript shows that the sale of landholdings with privileges was one such measure.

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ducali (Classe III),” a portion of which is kept in the Correr Museum in Venice (Venezia, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Ms, classe III 134. <https://nbn.regione.veneto.it/Generale/ricerca/AnteprimaManoscritto.html?codiceMan=44287&tipoRicerca=AN&urlSearch=pag-Corrente%3D1856.7%26totElementi%3D18714>).

By presenting Doge Donato's ducal document—part of the very rich Venetian *Commissioni Ducali* collection—this study aims to show how these privileges were granted, which is discussed in historical sources and by Italian historians.

### *Introductory Notes on the Manuscript*

In the text of the manuscript, the doge officially addresses Pascualico, the podestà of Buje, notifying him that the Great Council has responded to the requests of the administrative representatives regarding the sale of landholdings (HR-DAPA, s. 797–100). Furthermore, the text instructs that the provisions established by the Great Council in Venice, as well as those recorded in official letters sent immediately before the doge's announcement, must be respected. Additionally, the document highlights that the residents of the city facing any difficulties can address the *signoria* (HR-DAPA, s. 797–100). Given that Venice was a republic and signoria was the highest executive council, the term signoria is notably used in the text of the letter (Maranini, 1927, pp. 10–22). During the 15th century, signorias were abolished and transformed into principalities. However, according to Italian historians, in some cities influenced by Italian city-states—in this case, Venice—this system of administration remained in place. In some cities of Istria, the podestà was the governing body (Cipolla, 1881, pp. 505–536).

The paleographic properties of the manuscript show that it was written on parchment and that a part of it is missing, significantly complicating the interpretation of the text and the transcription of individual words. The text is in brown ink, which has faded over time. There is a blotch at the end of the manuscript, which also hinders the distinction of individual graphemes. In the lower left corner, we can see that the production date was added later, and the ink used for this information is better visible. Analyzing the diplomatic properties of the document, it can be concluded it is written in the form of a letter (*epistola*), executed according to the rules of *ars dictaminis* and *ars notariae*, as was the case with all Italian official documents in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Bartoli Langeli, 1994, pp. 255–258).

At the beginning of the letter is the introductory text (*incipit*), containing basic information about the sender and the recipient of the letter. This is followed by the argument (*argomento*) and the main part (*narratio*). Immediately after the introductory text in Latin, the main part of the text is in the vernacular, and at the end of the manuscript, there is information about the place and date of production in Latin. This confirms that alongside the vernacular, Latin was still used in official Italian documents (Auerbach, 1960, p. 256). Speaking of the stylistic features of the text, the register is mainly formal, which is one of the key characteristics of the diplomatic and chancellery documents of Italian city-states (Lazzerini, 1979, pp. 450–455).



*Franciscus Donato Dei Gratia Dux Venet[i]a[ru]m<sup>5</sup> et cab.<sup>6</sup> Nobili, et Sapienti Viro Hectori Pasqualigo de suo mandati Potestati Bulearum, fideli dilecto salutem et dilectionis affectum. Perché li agenti<sup>7</sup> di quella fidel.<sup>ma8</sup> comunita nostra si hanno grauato<sup>9</sup> delle lettere nostre scritte per il passato in materia di far nota[r] nella cancellaria<sup>10</sup> del rezimento<sup>11</sup> nostro tutte le condiconi esprese nella parte circa il uender li fondi<sup>12</sup> [due], et più uolte presa nel nostro mazzor consiglio à 29 di Marzo 1535. Pero ui co[m]mettemo, ché per quello apartiene al notar in quella cancellaria debbiate tener in suspeso le p[re]dette lettere nostre fino ché per noi altro ui sarà imposto, perché ritesi li grauami, et raggion di cadauno devennerro a quello ché né parera esser giusto, et co[n]ueniente, se di quanto poi havete ad eseguir ue ne daremo particolar ordine, et notitia, ma se alcuno diria si sente grauato, compare auanti la signo[ria] N[ost]ra<sup>13</sup> ché non se li mancara di giustitia.*

*[Datum in N]ostro Ducali Palatio Die' XXiiij Aprilis Indictione Octava M. D. L.  
[Deposited signature]*

*[Francesco Donato, by the grace of God, Doge of Venice and cavalier noble, to the noble and wise Hectore Pasqualico, in his capacity as podestà of Buje, I extend sincere greetings and respect. As representatives of our loyal community have encountered difficulties due to our previous letters, concerning the issue of asserting all stated conditions in the office of our administration, regarding the sale of land estates ..., which were repeatedly taken into consideration by our Great Council on March 29, 1535. But I instruct you to keep our incoming letters on standby in your office, until we request otherwise. Because upon reviewing the difficulties and their causes, it was deemed inappropriate and impractical. If you are compelled to proceed, we will provide you with detailed instructions and information. However, if anyone claims to have difficulties, let them come forth before our signoria, and let justice not be denied to them.*

*The date at our Doge's Palace, on the 23rd of April, in the eighth month of the indiction, 1550]*

*[Deposited signature]*

<sup>5</sup> Syncope, from *Venetiarum*.

<sup>6</sup> Abbreviated from *Cabaliere* (in some sources *Cavaliere*) > *caballierus* (lat.); *caballus* (lat.) = *cheval* (gal.) > *caballieri* = *cabaliere, cavaliere* (it.) = 1) Nel medioevo e nel principio dell'età moderna, guerriero a cavallo; 2) Di qui il sign. più generico di guerriero, eroe; 3) Nobile in genere, contrapposto a plebeo = in this case, *cavaliere* is used as an honorary title.

<sup>7</sup> Rappresentante dell' amministrazione.

<sup>8</sup> Abbreviated from *Fidelissima*.

<sup>9</sup> *Gravato* > *gravare* (prov.) > *aggravare* (it.).

<sup>10</sup> *Cancellaria* (lat. mediev.) = *ufficio* (it.).

<sup>11</sup> *Rezimento* > *reggimento* (prov.) > *regimentum* (lat.) = *governo* (it.).

<sup>12</sup> Terra, suolo dove nascono le piante.

<sup>13</sup> Abbreviated from *Nostra*.

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### Необјављени рукопис преписке венецијанског дужда Франческа Доната подестаду града Бује (XVI век)

#### Резиме

У оквиру писане продукције канцеларије венецијанског дужда из XVI века можемо издвојити богати опус званичних докумената. Она су написана по правилима *ars dictaminis* и представљају значајна сведочанства на пољу историје, дипломатије, културе и других сродних области. Један од примера таквих докумената представља дукал венецијанског дужда Франческа Доната који потиче из XVI века. У питању је рукопис који се чува у Државном архиву у Пазину. На основу палеографских карактеристика поменутог рукописа, можемо рећи да је сам текст делимично читљив, јер је написан на пергаменту коме недостаје део. С друге стране, када је реч о дипломатичким својствима, долазимо до закључка да је реч о званичној епистоли, написаној узвишеним регистром по правилима *ars dictaminis* и *ars notariae*, што је одлика ренесансних италијанских текстова. Управо из тог разлога овај извор представља вредно сведочанство у оквиру културне баштине, историје и дипломатике.

*Кључне речи:* Венеција; Истра; дужд; дукал; рукопис; епистола; епистографија; књижевна историја; дипломатика; палеографија.



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