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## Information on Travel of Nemanjić Embassies: Content and Context

**Abstract:** The paper offers an overview of available information on travel of medieval Serbian embassies in the Nemanjić dynasty period. This content is contextualized into the wider picture of regional embassy travel, presented by the far better documented embassies of Dubrovnik, Venice and the Byzantine Empire. The information is sorted by the key determining factors of an embassy's journey – diplomatic and auxiliary personnel, representational accessories such as gifts and adornments, transport over land and sea, sustenance, lodging, expenses and obstacles presented by nature and men.

**Keywords:** Serbia, Middle Ages, Nemanjić dynasty, embassy, envoy, travel, Dubrovnik, Byzantium, Venice

During the Middle Ages, before the widespread introduction of permanent embassies, practically every diplomatic mission involved travel. Because of their official nature and political importance, these journeys were often noted in contemporary records and narratives. As a result, they rank among the best documented examples of medieval travel available to modern researchers. In South-eastern Europe, one readily thinks of the wealth of information on this subject provided by the administrative archives of Venice and Dubrovnik or by Byzantine historical narratives, some of which constitute first-hand accounts.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, medieval Serbia does not fit into this pattern. Because of the typological structure and modest overall quantity of the surviving domestic sources, information on the travel of Serbian embassies is both scarce and

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<sup>1</sup> Historiographic results made possible by this wealth of information include J. Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku* (Dubrovnik 1939); L. Bréhier, *Le monde byzantin: Les institutions de l'empire byzantin* (Paris 1949), 281–333; D. Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation on Ambassadors* (Geneva 1966); D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Cambridge 1988); *Viaggiare nel medioevo*, ed. S. Gensini (Pisa 2000), esp. F. Senatore, “I diplomatici e gli ambasciatori”, 267–298; E. Malamut, “Sur la route de Théodore Métochite en Serbie en 1299”, *Actes des Congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur public* (Aubazine 1996), 165–175; *Voyages et voyageurs à Byzance et en Occident du VI<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, eds. A. Dierkens and J.-M. Sansterre (Geneva 2000); *Travel in the Byzantine world*, ed. R. Macrides (Aldershot 2002), esp. K. Belke, “Roads and travel in Macedonia and Thrace in the middle and late Byzantine Period”, 73–90; *Les relations diplomatiques au Moyen Âge. Formes et enjeux* (Paris 2010), esp. N. Fejić, “Les relations diplomatiques au miroir des sources normative: le cas de Dubrovnik (1272–1500)”, 99–110.

widely dispersed, demanding extensive research with little prospect of achieving anything more than a fragmentary picture. It is therefore hardly surprising that this information has never been systematically collected or reviewed.<sup>2</sup> Yet, there may be two ways to provide such an attempt with the necessary degree of coherence to make it worthwhile. Firstly, the information collected can be placed in the comparative context of better documented regional diplomatic practices. Secondly, attention can be focused on one clearly defined segment of the Serbian Middle Ages that can provide a solid backdrop. The best choice in that respect is obviously the two-century period from the late twelfth to the second half of the fourteenth century, during which Serbia was a unified, internationally significant state under the rule of the Nemanjić dynasty.

Available sources contain information on at least some hundred and forty Nemanjić embassies. Their destinations cover a wide area that encompasses Serbia's immediate neighbours, includes Venice and other Italian centres involved in Balkan affairs, and occasionally reaches France, Germany, the Black Sea steppes, Asia Minor and the Levant. However, with any once existing Nemanjić administrative records now completely lost and domestic historical narratives limited to hagiographic accounts of the lives of rulers and leading churchmen, much of this information comes from foreign sources, which are primarily concerned with Nemanjić embassies as negotiators and not as travellers. Also, some embassies cannot be said to have really travelled, as they were dispatched in situations when Nemanjić rulers and their foreign counterparts were already close to each other, usually in the course of preparations for a summit meeting or a military confrontation.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the number of recorded embassies that actually offer information on travel is much smaller than the total, with additional variations concerning specific travel-related issues.

The range of issues related to medieval embassy travel is fundamentally determined by two factors – the general conditions, such as available routes and means of transport, and the specific nature of the embassy as a diplomatic mission. Theoretically, the only person who was absolutely necessary for an embassy to fulfil its purpose, and the only one who had to make the trip, was the ambassador or envoy himself. Yet, since the envoy was a representative of the

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent general overview of travel in medieval Serbia see N. Porčić, "Putovanje – život u pokretu", in *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama srednjega veka*, eds. S. Marjanović-Dušanić and D. Popović (Belgrade 2004), 183–217.

<sup>3</sup> Examples include embassies sent by king Stefan Dečanski to the Bulgarian emperor on the eve of the Battle of Velbužd (*Životi kraljeva i arhiepiskopa srpskih, napisao arhiepiskop Danilo i drugi*, ed. Dj. Daničić (Zagreb 1866), 182) and to the young king Dušan during their standoff at the Bojana River (ibid. 209), as well as embassies sent by Dušan prior to his meetings with the Byzantine emperors Andronicus III and John VI near Thessaloniki in 1334 and 1350 respectively (*Ioannis Cantacuzeni eximperatoris historiarum libri IV*, ed. L. Schopeni, vol. I (Bonnae 1828), 457; vol. III (Bonnae 1832), 137).

authority that sent him, entrusted with speaking and acting in its name, he was by definition a person of importance. As such, he was normally supplied with various accessories intended to produce a representative effect and a number of auxiliary personnel dedicated to various duties. Furthermore, an embassy could, and very often did, include more than one envoy, resulting in additional accessories and more personnel. Also, the ensemble that was thus created had to be provided with the means of sustenance and transport appropriate for the route, the choice of the latter being limited to riding and pack animals, litters, wagons and vessels. Finally, the journey could encounter various natural or man-made obstacles, many of which were capable of preventing the embassy from fulfilling its mission.

Within the available body of information about Nemanjić embassies, the most frequently encountered of these aspects is the number of envoys. That, of course, is a natural consequence of the central role played by the envoy – indeed, many times the term “envoy” serves as a substitute for “embassy”. Taken at face value, this information leads to the conclusion that the number of envoys in Nemanjić embassies was almost always one or two; the only embassies known to have included more are a three-envoy mission sent to the Pope in 1354, and a six-member delegation from the Nemanjić town of Cattaro (Kotor) directed by king Stefan Dragutin to collect a royal family deposit from nearby Dubrovnik in 1281.<sup>4</sup> However, since the sources that transmit this information are not official Nemanjić appointments or records, but descriptions of the embassies’ activities, mostly from the recipient’s point of view, the numbers given by them can seldom be accepted as definite. For example, when these sources mention just one envoy, there is often a good chance that they are referring only to the most prominent member of a multiple-envoy embassy, whose colleagues remain out of sight – thus, on 4 June 1281, records of the Angevin kingdom in Southern Italy mention one Serbian envoy, a *comes Georgius*, but the very next day they speak of “envoys”.<sup>5</sup> Also, a large portion of the recorded cases simply use the numerically

<sup>4</sup> *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia* II, ed. A. Theiner (Romae 1860), no. 16; *Kancelariski i notariski spisi 1278–1301*, ed. G. Čremošnik (Belgrade 1932), no. 94.

<sup>5</sup> V. Makušev, “Ital’janske arhivy i hranjašiesja v nih materialy dlja slavjanskoj istorii II. Neapol i Palermo”, *Zapiski Imperatorskoj akademii nauk* 19 (1871), Priloženje 3, 31; F. Rački, “Rukopisi tičući se južno-slovinke povjesti u arkivih srednje i dolnje Italije”, *Rad JAZU* 18 (1872), 218–219 (because of errors and inconsistencies in existing editions, Angevin records will be quoted from both Makušev and Rački). In another instance, Venetian authorities note that a Serbian embassy from February 1346 was delivered by “an envoy” (*Listine o odnošajih između južnoga slavenstva i Mletačke Republike* II, ed. S. Ljubić (Zagreb 1870), no. 527), but when passing through Dubrovnik a few weeks earlier, this same embassy had “envoys” (*Monumenta ragusina. Libri reformationum* I (Zagrabiae 1879), 221).

unspecific plural form “envoys”,<sup>6</sup> usually with no way of telling how many individuals are meant by that. In fact, sometimes it is clear that there must have been more than two: as the Byzantine courtier and author Theodore Metochites was leaving Constantinople at the head of an embassy to Serbia in 1299, he was given a send-off by “Serbian envoys who were *all* gathered” at one of the city gates.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the only correct conclusion regarding the number of envoys in Nemanjić embassies would be that it usually was not limited to just one and could reach three or more, just like many foreign embassies that appeared before Nemanjić rulers.<sup>8</sup>

Far less information is available on the representational accessories with which these Nemanjić envoys were supplied. When Vukan, the eldest son of the dynasty’s founder Stefan Nemanja, expresses his desire to send an embassy to the Pope “with great magnificence”, we can only suppose that he had in mind both major types of representative items – gifts for the recipient and accessories intended to enhance the appearance of the embassy itself. For specific gifts, we have an impressive list of items presented by a Serbian envoy to the Mamluk sultan of Egypt in 1344 – five hawks, five falcons, four silver cups and a richly decorated sword<sup>9</sup> – but other than that, there are apparently only the mentions of a precious censer for the Pope and “plenty of gold” for the Bulgarian court in hagiographic narratives about Nemanja’s youngest son and Serbia’s first archbishop, Saint Sava.<sup>10</sup> For representative appearance of the embassy itself, the most relevant illustration available is the description of a diplomatically significant visit made by king Stefan Uroš II Milutin’s consort, queen Simonis, to the court of his brother Dragutin – after Milutin provided “all that was necessary” for her retinue, they “inspired wonder in all who saw them”, travelling along with “royal garment and girdles of gold, pearls and precious stones, royal purple and scarlet, like so many flowers in the field”.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, direct information on representational accessories is supplemented by some testimonies of a more general nature. In fact, a passage men-

<sup>6</sup> An incomplete list of examples just from Venetian records: *Listine* I, no. 254; II, 142, 185, 247, 591; III, 112, 202, 257.

<sup>7</sup> L. Mavromatis, *Fondation de l'empire serbe: le kralj Milutin* (Thessaloniki 1978), 90.

<sup>8</sup> For some three- and four-envoy Dubrovnik embassies to Serbia see *Monumenta ragusina* I, 79–80; II, 293, 365; V, 145, 234–235, 284, 314, 325.

<sup>9</sup> A. Uzelac, “Srbija i mamelučki Egipat tokom XIII i XIV veka”, *Beogradski istorijski glasnik* 4 (2013), 31.

<sup>10</sup> *Život svetoga Simeuna i svetoga Save, napisao Domentijan* (abbr. *Domentijan*), ed. Dj. Daničić (Belgrade 1865), 245–246; *Život Svetoga Save, napisao Domentijan* (abbr. *Teodosije*, who is the actual author), ed. Dj. Daničić (Belgrade 1860), 306.

<sup>11</sup> *Životi kraljeva*, 96.

tioning gifts borne by the embassies of king Dragutin<sup>12</sup> and multiple notes about Saint Sava casually transporting “all his necessities” through the various stages of his “diplomatic pilgrimages” to the Levant,<sup>13</sup> give off an air of routine about these matters that could make them unattractive to the dominant types of sources at our disposal. One possible archival glimpse of this routine is provided by a Dubrovnik record from February 1280 about two Serbian envoys who bought a fur coat, silk and other textiles to the amount of 100 *hyperpyra* – the purpose of this purchase is not stated but it is very likely that they were procuring representational accessories for their mission.<sup>14</sup> Thus, although far inferior in quantity and detail to, for example, records about Dubrovnik embassies,<sup>15</sup> available sources are sufficient to confirm that representational accessories were in fact a common ingredient of an outgoing Nemanjić embassy’s travel package.

It is important to note, however, that items of this sort could also be attached to embassies on their way home. Representation usually worked reciprocally and Serbian diplomatic travellers frequently received gifts from their hosts both for the Nemanjić rulers and for themselves. These gifts, which are specified on several occasions and contain such items as war horses, military equipment, clothes, textiles and money,<sup>16</sup> could obviously become a determining factor of the embassy’s return trip. Also, some embassies were actually tasked with acquiring certain items for their principals. Several embassies to Venice bought and exported home significant quantities of military equipment,<sup>17</sup> while at least two embassies to the Italian Angevins took back home a shipment of wheat.<sup>18</sup> Yet, perhaps the most interesting and most challenging in terms of logistics were

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 39–40.

<sup>13</sup> *Domentijan*, 277, 312, 329; *Teodosije*, 132, 171, 186, 199. Although Sava’s travels to the Levant were not diplomatic missions in the strict sense, their strong political connotations and outward similarities to embassies qualify them as highly relevant comparative material. However, it should be noted that the authors, especially *Teodosije*, tend to supplement facts with their general knowledge and ideas, cf. S. Ćirković, “Problemi biografije Svetoga Save”, in *Sava Nemanjić – Sveti Sava. Istorija i predanje*, ed. V. Djurić (Belgrade 1979, 11–12).

<sup>14</sup> *Kancelariski i notariski spisi*, no. 16.

<sup>15</sup> For types and value of gifts presented by Dubrovnik embassies to the Nemanjić court see *Monumenta ragusina* I, 79–80, 111; II, 293, 360; V, 22, 37, 234–235, 298. Examples of Dubrovnik embassies “dressing up” for occasions like royal weddings or coronations: *ibid.* I, 226; V, 343–344.

<sup>16</sup> *Životi kraljeva*, 44; *Teodosije*, 159; *Monumenta ragusina* II, 298; III, 197, 212; Uzelac, “Srbija i Mamelučki Egipat”, 25. On the special gifts presented to Sava by the Egyptian sultan see A. Z. Savić, “Darovi sa Nila: novi pogled na susret Svetog Save sa egipatskim sultanom”, *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 90 (2014), 7–35.

<sup>17</sup> *Listine* I, no. 254, 566; II, 8, 185, 196, 247, 489, 713; III, 202. See also R. Ćuk, *Srbija i Venecija u 13. i 14. veku* (Belgrade 1986), 129–130.

<sup>18</sup> Makušev, 31–32 ≈ Rački, 219, 221.

sixty-seven bales of cloth, thirty-six silver girdles, thirty-three silver cups and two hundred decorative ribbons, all exported from Venice by an embassy returning in June 1332 and probably intended for use at Dušan's wedding.<sup>19</sup>

Embassies that usually included multiple envoys and valuable accessories obviously could not function without auxiliary personnel. With the right type of sources, this component of embassy travel can be described with great precision. Preserved internal administrative records of Dubrovnik in the first half of the fourteenth century reveal a practice of attaching four to six "servants" per envoy for embassies travelling overland and about three per envoy for those travelling by sea, with possible additions of a common accountant, cook, priest, interpreter and scribe (notary), bringing the usual total to somewhere between ten and twenty persons.<sup>20</sup> "Insider" embassy narratives of Byzantine authors also occasionally reveal exact numbers – Nicephorus Gregoras, who participated in an embassy to Serbia in 1327, suggests a figure of seventy members, including some who knew the local language.<sup>21</sup> Yet, even with a marked deficiency in both of these source types, it is possible to find evidence that sheds some light on this aspect of Nemanjić embassies as well.

Nemanjić embassy auxiliary personnel are generally mentioned on several occasions both in foreign administrative records and in domestic narrative sources.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Angevin records contain two examples that provide exact numbers – a Serbian embassy from 1274 consisting of one named envoy and "eighteen persons returning with him",<sup>23</sup> and another from 1281 comprising an unspecified number of "envoys" with twenty-nine or thirty persons, including, however, the retinue of Maria de Chau, sister of the Serbian queen mother Helen, who was travelling with the diplomats.<sup>24</sup> In addition, information suggestive of the size of some other seaborne embassies is offered by the type of vessel they used for transport – one-envoy embassies dispatched to Croatia in 1304 and 1332 were expected to fit on a simple boat (*barcha*),<sup>25</sup> but Serbian "envoys" going to Venice in January and June 1346, as well as the two-envoy embassy to the same destination in late March 1332, used a galley.<sup>26</sup> The examples do not offer

<sup>19</sup> *Listine* I, no. 556. The shipment also included military equipment worth 900 *hyperpyra*.

<sup>20</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 111, 226; II, 216, 293; V, 236, 270–271, 294–295, 325, 343–344, 360–361.

<sup>21</sup> *Correspondance de Nicéphore Grégoras*, ed. R. Guiland (Paris 1927), 35, 39.

<sup>22</sup> *Domentijan* 218; *Teodosije*, 127, 159, 166; Makušev, 33 ≈ Rački, 224; *Monumenta ragusina* I, 145, II, 365; *Listine* III, no. 439.

<sup>23</sup> Makušev, 30 ≈ Rački, 217.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 31 ≈ 218–219. A joint travel party consisting of an Angevin, Bulgarian and Serbian embassy in 1273 numbered sixty persons (*ibid.* 28 ≈ 217).

<sup>25</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* V, 74, 345.

<sup>26</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 221, 233; V, 344–345.

enough details to enable solid conclusions – for instance, using a galley in 1332 might have had more to do with the extensive shopping list for Dušan's wedding than with the size of the embassy – but they can be taken as an indication that the complement of auxiliary personnel in Nemanjić embassies was comparable to the range defined by Dubrovnik missions, with a potential to reach the numbers recorded by Gregoras if such a need arose.

An attempt can also be made to identify certain specialties among the auxiliaries. The “servant” supposedly sent by Saint Sava to fetch ice during the archbishop's diplomatic mission to the king of Hungary is a literary representation of lowest-ranking embassy personnel,<sup>27</sup> but between him and the envoy there may have been other ranks and duties. This hierarchy is suggested when Dragutin rewards the Hilandar monks belonging to the embassy sent by his brother Milutin “with precious gifts, each according to his title.”<sup>28</sup> It is visible again in a description of Sava's second journey to the East, for which he “chose some of his noblemen.”<sup>29</sup> They were clearly not there to fetch ice – in keeping with the traditional role of the nobility perhaps their duty was to provide security. “Abracito (sic), the king's priest”, who served on the embassy to Venice that arranged the marriage of Dragutin's son in 1293, wrote the Serbian version of the marriage contract, indicating that he was in fact the embassy's scribe.<sup>30</sup> The note about the arrival of the Serbian envoy before the Mamluk sultan's palace in company with a musician playing his instrument adds another, rather curious potential specialty.<sup>31</sup>

An interesting example of auxiliary personnel may also be hidden in Metochites' work. On its journey to Serbia in the late winter of 1299, the Byzantine embassy led by Metochites was accompanied by a member of the Serbian embassy currently staying at the imperial court. This unnamed individual whose attitudes and actions provoke several memorable episodes, providing a sort of comic relief to the narrative of a difficult journey,<sup>32</sup> has been duly noted by historians, who consider him to have been an envoy or ambassador.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, he is

<sup>27</sup> *Domentijan*, 249. A certain Bardus, “servant” to one of the envoys sent to Dubrovnik in October 1321, was evidently also a member of this category, cf. “Spomenici srpski”, ed. K. Jireček, *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije* 11 (1892), no. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Životi kraljeva*, 44. The “titles” mentioned may well refer to positions in the monastic hierarchy of Hilandar, but it is natural to assume that this hierarchy also determined the role and importance of individual members within the embassy.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 250.

<sup>30</sup> F. Nardi, *Tre documenti della famiglia Morosini* (Padua 1840), 15–16.

<sup>31</sup> Uzelac, “Srbija i Mamelučki Egipat”, 31.

<sup>32</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l'empire serbe*, 90–96, 101–102.

<sup>33</sup> Malamut, “Sur la route”, 167; K. Belke, *Roads and travel*, 83; R. Radić, “Theodore Metochites on one Serbian and one Bulgarian envoy”, *Polyhronia: sbornik v čest na prof. Ivan Božilov*, ed. I. Iliev (Sofia 2002), 236.

accompanied by three Serbian servants and boasts of having travelled among the Hungarians, Bulgarians, Tatars and others.<sup>34</sup> Yet, he displays a haughty, tactless, thoroughly undiplomatic character prone to violence, as well as lack of knowledge about diplomatic customs. Metochites himself does not call him an envoy, describing him, in fact, as “not one of their top people”.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the journey, as the embassy approaches Serbia, he goes ahead of the main party to notify king Milutin of Metochites’ arrival. When all this is considered, it seems more probable that he was indeed not an envoy but a senior member of the auxiliary personnel, managing the common servants or performing some more specific tasks for this obviously quite large embassy. In that sense, his apparently routine communication with the king and his claims of earlier missions may indicate that he was a permanent member of the royal household who had become specialized for such a role.<sup>36</sup>

Although many medieval travellers made their way around on foot, a combination of practical needs and the desire to maintain a dignified appearance required that embassies use some means of transport. For overland journeys, Nemanjić embassies are exclusively recorded to have used riding and pack horses. One cannot rule out occasional use of other animals, as well as wagons,<sup>37</sup> but there can be little doubt that horses were predominant, in view of the natural conditions and infrastructure of the region.<sup>38</sup> Comparative information suggests that the ratio of horses to men was often about one to one – Gregoras says of the embassy in which he participated: “The number of horses and us was two

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<sup>34</sup> These claims find support in known diplomatic contacts – see comments by Ivan Djurić accompanying the Serbian translation of Metochites’ work in *Vizantijski izvori za istoriju naroda Jugoslavije* VI, ed. F. Barišić and B. Ferjančić (Belgrade 1986), 92, notes 27 and 28.

<sup>35</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 90.

<sup>36</sup> This role seems comparable to that of knights encountered in retinues of contemporary European envoys – see, e.g., G. P. Cuttino, *English Diplomatic Administration 1259–1339* (Oxford University Press, 1940), 88–89, 125 – and reflected by two Frenchmen notable enough to be mentioned by name in the retinue of the envoys sent to Serbia by Charles of Valois in 1308 (A. Ubičini, “Ugovor o savezu i prijateljstvu medju Karlom od Valoa i poslanicima srpskog kralja Uroša”, *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 27 (1870), 328).

<sup>37</sup> In addition to donkeys, mules, and oxen (*Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, eds. S. Ćirković and R. Mihaljčić (Belgrade 1999), 710–714 (M. Blagojević), with reference to earlier works), a more exotic, yet realistic, possibility were camels, recorded in the possession of king Milutin (*Životi kraljeva*, 137; see also A. Uzelać, “Kamile u srpskim srednjovekovnim zemljama”, *Initial. A Review of Medieval Studies* 3 (2015), 23–34). A rare mention of wagons in Balkan embassy travels of this period occurs in Metochites (Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 93).

<sup>38</sup> On horses in medieval Serbia see *Leksikon*, 314–315 (R. Mihaljčić), with reference to earlier works; see also E. Kurtović, *Konj u srednjovekovnoj Bosni* (Sarajevo 2014).

times seven tens.”<sup>39</sup> This does not mean that every embassy member travelled on horseback – among Dubrovnik embassies, only those whose tasks required speed and mobility were fully mounted, while most used about one-third of their horses as pack animals attended by auxiliary personnel on foot.<sup>40</sup> In fact, available information about the number of horses in Nemanjić embassies, which again comes exclusively from Angevin records, contains much lower ratios – the eighteen-person embassy of 1274 had five horses, and a two-envoy embassy with unspecified auxiliary personnel from 1302 had only three.<sup>41</sup> Larger numbers might have been involved in an 1273 embassy, which combined on its journey with an Angevin and Bulgarian embassy for a total of sixty horses, as well as in the embassy of 1281, which counted thirty persons and twenty-five horses, but some, if not the majority, belonged to the retinue of Maria de Chau.<sup>42</sup>

Other information on horses used in Serbian embassies is of a more general and indirect nature. On his travels through the Nicaean and Bulgarian empires, Saint Sava is said to have been provided with horses by their rulers, while Dragutin presented Milutin’s envoy Danilo, *hegoumenos* of the monastery of Hilandar and subsequent archbishop and dynastic historian, with “his own fine horses to take him back to the place of his abode.”<sup>43</sup> Documentary evidence confirms that embassies could be supplied with horses by their hosts,<sup>44</sup> but they also needed to have some to begin their journey from Serbia. A Byzantine embassy to the Nemanjić court around 1270 noted that Serbian horses were inferior to their own,<sup>45</sup> and an early fourteenth-century Western account states that they are for the most part “small like pack horses (*roncini*), but sturdy and good runners.”<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, Serbian narrative sources often speak of horses as a

<sup>39</sup> *Correspondance*, 35. Some numbers involved in Dubrovnik embassies: *Monumenta ragusina* I, 111; V, 333–334, 343–344.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 39 above, as well as *Monumenta ragusina* I, 226, and V, 360–361.

<sup>41</sup> Makušev, 30, 33 ≈ Rački, 217, 224.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 28, 31 ≈ 217, 218–219. Maria’s retinue on a separate trip in 1280 included twenty horses (*ibid.* 31 ≈ 218).

<sup>43</sup> *Domentijan*, 276, 329; *Teodosije*, 171, 199; *Životi kraljeva*, 45.

<sup>44</sup> One form of assistance that was supposed to be given to embassies from Balkan countries expected to arrive in the Angevin kingdom in 1271 was to provide them with horses – Makušev, 29 ≈ Rački, 217.

<sup>45</sup> *Georges Pachymères: Relations historiques* II, ed. A. Failler (Paris 1984), 457.

<sup>46</sup> *Anonymi descriptio Europae orientalis*, eds. T. Živković, V. Petrović and A. Uzelac, trans. D. Kunčer (Belgrade 2013), 123. The difference is reflected by the horses of the 1274 embassy to Angevin Italy, three of which are described as *roncini*, and two as war horses. The latter might have actually been a present for the Serbian ruler.

prized possession of the Nemanjić rulers.<sup>47</sup> It seems natural to suppose that the animals with which embassies set off on their journey came from these royal herds, although it is also possible that, while still on Serbian soil, envoys as royal representatives made use of the obligations of *ponos* and *povoz*, requiring local population to provide transport for the ruler as he passed along.<sup>48</sup>

Available source material on the travels of Nemanjić embassies also contains some information on the means of maritime transport. One aspect of this information concerns the types of vessels and can be indicative of the size of a given embassy. But sources are rarely specific in this respect – in addition to the already mentioned extremes, “boats” and “galleys”,<sup>49</sup> we find only a “small communal vessel” used to transport an embassy to Angevin Italy in 1323,<sup>50</sup> and a *katrga* used by Saint Sava when returning from his first Levantine expedition.<sup>51</sup> More details are provided about the ways in which embassies acquired these means of transportation. Essentially there were three possibilities – own vessels, vessels provided by the host or hired vessels. Throughout its existence, Nemanjić Serbia was a maritime country, encompassing important seafaring communities in the southern part of the eastern Adriatic coast. However, there seems to be no mention of the use of own vessels to transport Nemanjić royal embassies. On the contrary, descriptions of Saint Sava’s maritime voyages explicitly mention “paying the fare”, sailing with a crew of “men of other nations”, and being provided with a vessel by a host ruler – Sava’s *katrga* was furnished by the Nicaean emperor.<sup>52</sup> One could perhaps argue that these voyages took place far from Nemanjić shores, but even when he set out across the Adriatic from the Nemanjić maritime town of Budva, Sava apparently did not use a local vessel, but probably a

<sup>47</sup> *Domentijan*, 83, 92; *Teodosije*, 105, 209; *Životi kraljeva*, 130, 137. Similarly, the precise information on the number of horses in embassies to Angevin Italy results from the efforts of local rulers to prevent unauthorized export of a valuable asset. In fact, harbourmasters were sometimes required to personally oversee the embarkation – Makušev, 40.

<sup>48</sup> *Leksikon*, 533, 552 (M. Šuica).

<sup>49</sup> See n. 25 and 26 above.

<sup>50</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 81–82.

<sup>51</sup> *Teodosije*, 171–172. The term was obviously loaned from contemporary Byzantine naval terminology, in which it denoted a warship of the galley type – J. H. Pryor and E. M. Jeffreys, *The Age of the Dromon. The Byzantine Navy ca 500–1204* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 418–421.

<sup>52</sup> *Domentijan*, 277, 299, 326–327; *Teodosije*, 171–172, 181–183, 195–196. Return trips on vessels provided by the host find documentary confirmation in Angevin mentions of the Nemanjić embassies of 1274 and 1279 (Makušev, 30–31 ≈ Rački, 217, 218). However, in 1302 (*ibid.* 33 ≈ 224), the Angevin ruler only instructed his port authorities to “allow” the Serbian envoys to board a ship.

hired one.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, for all other outbound Nemanjić embassies whose port of departure is recorded, that port is Dubrovnik,<sup>54</sup> which practically throughout the Nemanjić period recognized the authority of Venice. The validity of this find can be questioned because the records of the Nemanjić maritime towns are almost non-existent, but the fact that the Serbian embassy that was about to set sail for Venice from Dubrovnik in April 1332 consisted of two envoys from the main Nemanjić port of Kotor lends additional credence to the suggestion that Dubrovnik was the main point of departure for Nemanjić embassies travelling overseas.<sup>55</sup>

At least two good reasons can be found for this practice. Since Dubrovnik was part of the Venetian maritime empire, transport on its ships must have been considered safer.<sup>56</sup> Nemanjić awareness of this aspect is attested by king Dušan's request to the Venetian authorities in 1340 that Serbian noblemen, whom he was preparing to send to the Holy Land with rich votive gifts, travel in a convoy of Venetian galleys.<sup>57</sup> The other reason was most probably the availability of a convenient way to cover expenses. Nemanjić rulers enjoyed various revenues from Dubrovnik, including an annual tribute of 2000 *hyperpyra* payable on the feast day of Saint Demetrius.<sup>58</sup> This enabled them to purchase goods and services in the city on credit, by simply deducting the sum from the next annual tribute. The purchase made by two Nemanjić envoys in 1280 was settled in this manner, but there is also direct testimony to its use for hiring vessels – in April 1304, the envoy Matthew procured the boat for his trip to Skradin by presenting to the Dubrovnik authorities a letter from king Milutin with instructions to charge the envoy's expenses to the Serbian ruler's account.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Sava is said to have "stayed there a few days, until his ship came" – *Životi kraljeva*, 251. For a discussion of Sava's maritime route to the Holy Land on his earlier journey, see M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje Svetog Save u Palestinu i njegov značaj za srpsku srednjovekovnu umetnost* (Belgrade 2009), 20–28.

<sup>54</sup> In addition to the five examples referenced in notes 25 and 26, known departures from Dubrovnik include the 1323 embassy to Angevin Italy (the "small communal vessel" belonged, in fact, to the commune of Dubrovnik), a 1319 joint Serbian and Dubrovnik embassy to Croatia (*Monumenta ragusina* V, 145), and probably a 1336 mission tasked with importing military equipment and war horses from Venice (*ibid.* II, 365).

<sup>55</sup> On this embassy see Čuk, *Srbija i Venecija*, 51. Another example of an envoy from Nemanjić maritime regions sailing from Dubrovnik is provided by the 1323 embassy to Angevin Italy. However, this was a two-envoy embassy whose other member was a Dubrovnik nobleman.

<sup>56</sup> The galley provided to the 1332 embassy to Venice was actually a "vessel of the commune of Venice, which is here in Dubrovnik".

<sup>57</sup> *Listine* II, no. 144.

<sup>58</sup> On this tribute see M. Dinić, "Dubrovački tributi. Mogoriš, Svetodimatarski i Konavoski dohodak, Provižun braće Vlatkovića", *Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije* 168 (1932), 224–239.

<sup>59</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* V, 74.

In addition to hiring the boat, Matthew apparently used Milutin's letters to cover other expenses.<sup>60</sup> Although the purpose of these expenses is not stated, it is highly probable that at least some of them concerned the everyday needs of the travellers and their animals, such as food, drink and fodder. One way to address this need was to carry provisions from home – the baggage of Metochites included “foods and drinks”, and a Dubrovnik mission to Bosnia mentions bringing along “victuals”.<sup>61</sup> However, logistical issues seriously limited the effectiveness of such a solution. Therefore, Venetian and Dubrovnik embassies were regularly granted an allowance in money for these purposes, which Venetians sometimes called “expenses of the mouth”.<sup>62</sup> In Byzantine practice, the allowance could also take the form of precious goods.<sup>63</sup> Accounts of Saint Sava's departures from Serbia seem to imply all of these arrangements, when relating how the rulers supplied him with gold, silver and “other necessities”.<sup>64</sup> Awareness of the expenses involved in stately embassy-like travel is also demonstrated by Maria de Chau, who is seen making efforts to collect funds prior to her departure for Angevin Italy in 1281.<sup>65</sup> Yet, leaving aside Sava's travels and the episode with the fish that miraculously leapt on board his ship to feed the saint and his companions,<sup>66</sup> the only explicit testimony to a Nemanjić embassy looking after needs of this sort concerns a Serbian envoy from October 1343, who wished to bring to Dubrovnik “several of his own kegs full of wine, for the use of him and his retinue”.<sup>67</sup>

Fortunately for medieval embassy members, reliance on one's own provisions and funds was not the only way to get food and drink. In keeping with the notion that authority should be expressed through generosity,<sup>68</sup> the power hold-

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<sup>60</sup> In April, when boat hire is mentioned, “all expenses that occurred” totalled twenty *hyperpyra*. Three months later, Matthew is again recorded as using Milutin's letter to obtain another ten *hyperpyra* (ibid. 77). The Dubrovnik archives keeps an original letter of Milutin's authorizing Matthew to withdraw ten *hyperpyra* (*Zbornik srednjovekovnih ćirilčkih povelja i pisama Srbije, Bosne i Dubrovnika* I, ed. V. Mošin, S. Ćirković and D. Sindik (Belgrade 2011), no. 102). The sum is written in the same hand as the rest of the letter, suggesting that the expenses were “preauthorized”.

<sup>61</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l'empire serbe*, 99; *Monumenta ragusina* V, 333–334.

<sup>62</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 111, 226; V, 181, 236, 270–271, 294–295, 343–344, 354, 360–361; *Listine* II, no. 288; III, no. 182. Based on Dubrovnik records, it is even possible to calculate a ratio of roughly one *hyperpyron* daily per four to six embassy members.

<sup>63</sup> L. Bréhier, *Institutions*, 307.

<sup>64</sup> *Domentijan*, 262; *Teodosije*, 116–117, 166, 181; *Životi kraljeva*, 250–251.

<sup>65</sup> *Kancelariski i notariski spisi*, no. 64, 68.

<sup>66</sup> *Domentijan*, 327; *Teodosije*, 196.

<sup>67</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 145.

<sup>68</sup> On royal generosity, or *largitas*, see G. Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers. Political Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*, trans. C. Carroll (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106–107.

ers of the time devoted special attention to providing for the sustenance of their diplomatic visitors. An early fourteenth century source states that the king of Hungary spends “everything that he has” on his magnates and envoys, while the Byzantine emperor is so open-handed in cash and kind that envoys try to extend their stay at his court “so that they can become rich”.<sup>69</sup> Communal governments such as Venice and Dubrovnik also honoured their diplomatic visitors in this manner, even if the expenses were not always viewed favourably by the ruling oligarchies.<sup>70</sup> Finally, in Serbia itself, the *Law Code* of emperor Dušan expressly extended the long-standing obligation of *obrok*, which required every village to provide the passing ruler, his retainers and officials with free meals, to inbound and outbound foreign envoys.<sup>71</sup>

Information on Nemanjić embassies indicates that they benefitted significantly from these opportunities. While in Serbia, they could use both the *obrok* and a similar obligation concerning fodder (*pozob*).<sup>72</sup> The treats they received abroad are recorded on numerous occasions. These again include the travels of Saint Sava – Nicaean, Epirote, Bulgarian, and even Muslim rulers are said to have supplied him with “gold” and/or “necessities”, the latter sometimes being additionally described as coming from their own households.<sup>73</sup> But there is no small amount of evidence related to regular embassies. Serbian and other Balkan envoys whose arrival was expected in Angevin Italy in 1271 were to be given not only horses but also money for travel expenses,<sup>74</sup> while returning embassies in 1279 and 1281 received an eight-day supply of fodder “and other necessities” for their sea crossing.<sup>75</sup> In Dubrovnik, several records note grants of money or “comestibles” of a certain value – usually two *hyperpyra* per day with a maximum of ten *hyperpyra* – to Serbian envoys,<sup>76</sup> and in 1323 the city council voted

<sup>69</sup> *Anonymi descriptio*, 113, 141.

<sup>70</sup> Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation*, 54.

<sup>71</sup> *Dušanov zakonik*, ed. Dj. Bubalo (Belgrade 2010), 101 (Article 133).

<sup>72</sup> On these obligations see *Leksikon*, 458, 535, both entries by M. Blagojević, with reference to earlier works, and esp. his “Obrok i priselica”, *Istorijski časopis* 18 (1971), 166–188. The obligation to provide the emperor’s envoys with three meals is expressly mentioned in Article 1 of the Statute of Budva – *Statuta et leges civitatis Buduae, civitatis Scardonae, et civitatis et insulae Lesinae*, ed. S. Ljubić (Zagreb 1882), 3, and service to envoys in general is encountered in Nemanjić charters – e.g. *Zbornik srednjovekovnih ćirilčkih povelja i pisama*, no. 92, l. 33a, 255–258; no. 98, l. 26.

<sup>73</sup> *Domentijan*, 277, 280, 312, 329; *Teodosije*, 132, 171, 191–192, 199–200.

<sup>74</sup> Makušev, 29 ≈ Rački, 217. An allowance was also granted to Bulgarian envoys arriving in 1281 (*ibid.* 28–29 ≈ 219).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 30–31 ≈ 218–219.

<sup>76</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 66; II, 365; V, 126, 278, 299. The comestibles provided by Dubrovnik authorities on such occasions included bread, meat (especially lamb), cheese, and wine (*ibid.* I, 280, 285).

overwhelmingly to cover the expenses for the first twenty days of the embassy sent to negotiate a marriage alliance between Serbia and the Italian Angevins.<sup>77</sup> Venetians also liberally covered the expenses of Nemanjić envoys whose tasks were of special importance to them.<sup>78</sup> Finally, Metochites reassures his Serbian companion that his needs during the journey through Byzantine territory shall be satisfied through “imperial kindness and generosity” expressed in the form of daily allowances.<sup>79</sup>

The combination of distances involved and modes of travel available, coupled with the duration of embassy business itself, meant that envoys and their retinues also regularly needed lodgings to rest and sleep in. These could again be self-provided by using tents – Saint Sava is said to have stayed in one during his mission to the Bulgarian regional lord Strez.<sup>80</sup> Lodging of this sort, however, raised various concerns – both Metochites and Gregoras felt uneasy at the prospect of spending the night in the open.<sup>81</sup> It is, therefore, no surprise to find Dušan’s *Law Code* prescribing that travellers caught by nightfall on the road must be accepted for overnight stay at the nearest village.<sup>82</sup> This was probably an expansion or reiteration of earlier obligations towards important travellers and, although there is no direct evidence, Nemanjić embassies must have relied on them while on Serbian soil.<sup>83</sup> Evidence concerning Nemanjić embassy lodging abroad is also very limited. Most of it deals with Saint Sava’s travels to Hungary, Nicaea, Bulgaria, and Muslim courts.<sup>84</sup> Apart from that, there is only Metochites, who leads his Serbian companion through the Byzantine system of lodging along the route and also mentions that Serbian envoys in Constantinople had “usual” residences.<sup>85</sup> It was indeed customary for the host to assign appropriate lodgings to visiting envoys,<sup>86</sup> but Metochites’ words allow for the possibility that Serbian embassies made use of various establishments created or supported

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. I, 81–82; see also n. 55 above.

<sup>78</sup> *Listine* II, no. 591; III, no. 439. Grants of such larger sums are sometimes difficult to distinguish from outright bribery, exemplified in Dubrovnik negotiations with Serbian envoys in 1362 – *Monumenta ragusina* III, 197, 212.

<sup>79</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 91.

<sup>80</sup> *Teodosije*, 111.

<sup>81</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 102; *Correspondance*, 35–39.

<sup>82</sup> *Dušanov zakonik*, 109 (Article 159).

<sup>83</sup> See n. 71 and 72 above.

<sup>84</sup> These include unspecified “lodgings” in Hungary, “a quiet place to stay” in Nicaea, “a home to lodge in” in Babylon, accommodation with the local Christian metropolitan in Cairo, and the emperor’s own warm palaces in Bulgaria – *Domentijan*, 250, 277, 312, 329; *Teodosije*, 154, 190, 191, 198.

<sup>85</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 90.

<sup>86</sup> In Venice, innkeepers were required to have rooms ready for the accommodation of foreign envoys – Queller, *Early Venetian Legislation*, 56.

by the Nemanjićs in foreign lands. The travels of Saint Sava again offer specific examples, as he regularly took up residence in monasteries to which he and his kin had made rich endowments – in Constantinople this was the Evergetis, in Thessaloniki the Filokalou, and in Jerusalem the monastery of Saint John the Divine.<sup>87</sup> Thus, when sources tell us that king Milutin built “palaces” and “royal residences” in Constantinople and Thessaloniki,<sup>88</sup> and that Kotor noblemen with close ties to the Nemanjić court had houses in Dubrovnik,<sup>89</sup> the possibility that these were used for the lodging of embassies, much like the Dubrovnik tribute was used for financing them, does not seem too remote.<sup>90</sup>

Even if transport, sustenance and lodging issues were successfully sorted out, there were still other, less foreseeable factors that could complicate or even prematurely terminate an embassy’s journey. Some of these were natural – the biographies of Saint Sava offer some descriptions of stormy maritime voyages and general allusions to the treachery of the sea,<sup>91</sup> while Metochites details the difficulties of a journey in severe winter.<sup>92</sup> In fact, both sides in the 1299 negotiations used the weather as a convincing excuse for delays,<sup>93</sup> and one of Sava’s reasons for demanding an autocephalous Serbian archbishopric was avoiding the “long and troublesome journey” at each subsequent succession.<sup>94</sup> However, although these hardships could result in accidents and disease, apart from Sava’s own illness and death on the return trip from the Levant and the severe cold caught by Metochites’ Serbian companion who insisted on braving the winter winds without headgear, there is no other direct information about these factors interfering with the travels of Nemanjić diplomats.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, Milutin’s envoys

<sup>87</sup> *Domentijan*, 179, 227; *Teodosije*, 52, 77, 135, 186, 198. On Sava’s endowments to these and other monastic institutions see M. Živojinović, “Ktitorska delatnost Svetoga Save”, in *Sava Nemanjić – Sveti Sava. Istorija i predanje*, ed. V. Djurić (Belgrade 1979), 15–25.

<sup>88</sup> *Životi kraljeva*, 134. See also M. Živojinović, “Bolnica kralja Milutina u Carigradu”, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 16 (1975), 105–115.

<sup>89</sup> E.g., the Thoma family – M. Malović-Djukić, “Kotorski vlastelin Toma Pavla Toma”, *Istorijski časopis* 48 (2001) 69.

<sup>90</sup> However, the proposition that Serbian envoys mentioned by Metochites might have been based in one of these establishments (*Vizantijski izvori* VI, 83, n. 9) is unlikely, because it is hardly imaginable that Milutin would have started his projects in Byzantine cities before the 1299 peace treaty between Serbia and the Empire (Živojinović, “Bolnica”, 108).

<sup>91</sup> *Domentijan*, 277, 299, 300; *Teodosije*, 183. The sea is called the “briny grave”.

<sup>92</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 92–94.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 98, 109, 115.

<sup>94</sup> *Domentijan*, 220; *Teodosije*, 130.

<sup>95</sup> Letters by Dušan and one of his nobles from 1352 mention a trusted servant who had fallen ill and probably died on a trip to Venice, but there is no indication that he belonged to an embassy – *Spomenici srpski* II, ed. M. Pucić (Belgrade 1862), no. 25.

who concluded the treaty with Charles of Valois at the abbey of Lys near Paris on 27 March 1308, as well as his envoy who “very quickly” made two successive journeys to Constantinople for secret negotiations with the internal opposition to emperor Andronikos II in 1320/21, made their journeys in wintertime.<sup>96</sup>

Much more traces are found of various man-made difficulties. There is no evidence of these being caused by the host – medieval diplomacy embraced the ancient concept of inviolability of the envoy as an essential precondition for negotiations,<sup>97</sup> and the known Nemanjić embassies seem to have been treated appropriately.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, problems could arise from lack of information. Even in Serbia itself, envoys could get in trouble for requesting the usual dues when a given community had been exempted from them – Milutin’s charter for the monastery of Saint George near Skoplje not only releases the monastic estate from providing food and lodging for envoys, but even threatens offenders with an elaborate curse and a beating while being thrown out.<sup>99</sup> Two cases of such misunderstandings are recorded abroad – the wish of the Serbian envoy from 1343 to bring his wine to Dubrovnik went against city regulations, but was nevertheless granted, while vigorous insistence of Metochites’ Serbian companion to receive from the Byzantine population the type of service accorded to embassies in Serbia led to a brawl with the locals that was stopped by Metochites’ intervention before serious injuries occurred.<sup>100</sup>

The fact that both of these situations were promptly resolved by the host emphasizes the key importance of establishing direct contact. This could be achieved by sending prior notification of the embassy’s arrival or by simply travelling together with the host’s own envoys returning from the Nemanjić court, who then communicated the news to their principals. The host usually responded by providing escorts, as well as guarantees of safe conduct. Reflections of all these procedures, which are amply attested in comparative sources, can also be

<sup>96</sup> Ubićini, “Ugovor o savezu” 324; *Cantacuzenus* I, 35–37 (see also *Vizantijski izvori* VI, 307–309).

<sup>97</sup> On this concept in medieval times see L. Frey and M. Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity* (Ohio State University Press, 1999), 75–118.

<sup>98</sup> Still, Saint Sava is described as doubting his safety when he set out for the Hungarian court (*Teodosije*, 153), and there must have been a real sense of danger in Milutin’s embassy to the Tatar khan Nogai which found him on his way to attack Serbia with a large army – *Životi kraljeva*, 120–121. For some comparative regional examples of mistreatment of envoys by the host see R. Radić, *Strah u poznoj Vizantiji* I (Belgrade 2000), 236–243.

<sup>99</sup> *Zbornik srednjovekovnih ćirilčkih povelja pisama* I, no. 92, lines 255–258. Since it is difficult to imagine such treatment of foreign envoys, this must have applied primarily to the Nemanjić’s own embassies.

<sup>100</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l’empire serbe*, 91–92. Perhaps it was this kind of attitude on the part of embassy members that provoked the sharp tone in the charter for the monastery of Saint George.

found in information on Nemanjić embassies. Saint Sava is often shown sending prior notifications and receiving escorts and, on one occasion, letters of safe conduct.<sup>101</sup> Actually, his mission to Hungary is a textbook example – he arrives in company with returning Hungarian envoys, who notify their king that the Serbian archbishop is coming with them, and on his departure he is given an escort of Hungarian nobles to the Serbian border.<sup>102</sup> Metochites also mentions a Serbian envoy travelling with a returning Byzantine messenger,<sup>103</sup> while his own Serbian companion reflects the case when part of a Nemanjić embassy returns home together with the envoys dispatched by the other side. Documentary sources are not that explicit. There are no preserved safe conducts for Nemanjić envoys and when the coastal authorities of Angevin Italy were ordered to provide the embassies expected to arrive from Serbia and other Balkan lands with safe conduct to the king's presence, it is not clear whether that means letters, escorts or both.<sup>104</sup> However, this and at least three Dubrovnik examples indicate the use of prior notification,<sup>105</sup> while joint travel is mentioned or suggested on several occasions, albeit usually with homeward-bound Nemanjić embassies accompanying foreign envoys.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to guaranteeing safety and ensuring that, as Metochites put it, “we are not denied what is due to us, as sometimes occurs”,<sup>107</sup> joint travel and early contacts with hosts also assisted embassies in finding the way to their destination. This could prove to be quite a problem given the medieval phenomenon of itinerant rulers. There are several examples of incoming embassies making efforts to locate Nemanjić rulers, most strikingly a Dubrovnik embassy from August 1345 which expected to meet king Dušan in Prizren, but found him several weeks later in Serres.<sup>108</sup> However, other than the fact that some of Saint

<sup>101</sup> *Domentijan*, 66, 99–100, 310–312, 329; *Teodosije*, 139, 174 (safe conduct), 188, 190–192, 199.

<sup>102</sup> *Teodosije*, 153, 159.

<sup>103</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l'empire serbe*, 100.

<sup>104</sup> Makušev, 29 ≈ Rački, 217. A safe conduct for a 1361 mission to Dubrovnik and Croatia is also mentioned (*Monumenta ragusina* III, 102).

<sup>105</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* II, 215; III, 196; V, 299.

<sup>106</sup> Makušev, 28, 30–31, ≈ Rački, 217. *Listine* III, no. 439; *Monumenta ragusina* II, 365; Ubičini, “Ugovor o savezu” 310, 328.

<sup>107</sup> Mavromatis, *Fondation de l'empire serbe*, 90.

<sup>108</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* I, 184; N. Porčić, “Povelja kralja Stefana Dušana Dubrovčanima o carini sluge Dabiživa”, *Stari srpski arhiv* 5 (2006), 86–87. For other examples from Dubrovnik see *Monumenta ragusina* I, 79, 105, 110; II, 365; V, 314. Metochites also made enquiries about Milutin's movements (Mavromatis, *Fondation de l'empire serbe*, 101), and a Venetian envoy from November 1346 reported that he “found” Dušan “several days inland” in Byzantine territory (*Listine* II, no. 657)

Sava's escorts in the Levant obviously also acted as travel guides,<sup>109</sup> there are no testimonies about Nemanjić envoys having problems with finding their way or taking measures not to get lost.<sup>110</sup>

As much as close cooperation with the hosts was helpful, there were still factors outside their control that could threaten the success of an embassy's journey. A major one was thieves, brigands and pirates. Theft and brigandage were a problem in Serbia itself, where legislation attempted to counter them by enforcing common responsibility on the locals and instituting a system of armed escorts working in relays.<sup>111</sup> Gregoras, on the other hand, tells us that some Byzantine areas he passed through on his way to Serbia had been practically depopulated by brigand activity.<sup>112</sup> Yet, although we have recorded instances of foreign embassies targeted by brigands in Serbia – most notably the theft of “excellent” horses from the Byzantine embassy of about 1270, when brigands also attacked the chief Nemanjić negotiator<sup>113</sup> – there seem to be no such cases involving Nemanjić embassies. Saint Sava is said to have miraculously avoided Adriatic pirates waiting to ambush him, while later on the fear of his companions that they will be murdered and robbed by the foreign crew transporting them proved unfounded.<sup>114</sup> The closest comparable incident involves a party of Serbian travellers on the way from Milutin's court to Hilandar at the time when Catalan mercenaries ravaged the area. This party, which successfully posed as an “embassy heading for Constantine's holy city”, managed to defeat an attack led by a local “potentate” with brigand-like intentions, proving that an embassy-sized company had some capability of defending itself.<sup>115</sup>

Nemanjić embassies are more explicitly linked to another security challenge – interference of third political powers. In 1199, Nemanja's son Vukan was hesitant to send his “magnificent” embassy to the Pope, “having heard that

<sup>109</sup> See n. 101 above.

<sup>110</sup> However, Bulgarian envoys to Angevin Italy in 1281 were given “a horseman” to take them to the royal court “because they do not know the roads” – Makušev, 29.

<sup>111</sup> *Dušanov zakonik*, 100, 108–109 (Articles 125, 155–157, 160). The mainstay of these measures was apparently the *priselica*, which demanded compensation from the local community for damage incurred by travellers in their area (*Leksikon*, 586 (M. Blagojević), with reference to earlier works). In fact, the abovementioned obligation to provide shelter to travellers after nightfall (n. 82) was essentially an extension of this principle, as it required in compliant land-owners to compensate any resulting loss.

<sup>112</sup> *Correspondance*, 35.

<sup>113</sup> *Pachymeres* II, 457. A Dubrovnik embassy from 1318 also suffered a stolen horse and, quite curiously, a burned document belonging to one of the envoys (*Monumenta ragusina* V, 114–115, 118).

<sup>114</sup> *Domentijan*, 299–300, 326–327; *Teodosije*, 181–182, 195–196.

<sup>115</sup> *Životi kraljeva*, 345–346.

the land [Italy] is in turmoil",<sup>116</sup> but there are also two examples of actual interference with apparent political background. The first used nonviolent means – when a Serbian envoy requested a boat to take him to Zadar in April 1332, the authorities of Dubrovnik turned him down.<sup>117</sup> Although there are no details, the fact that the galley given to Serbian envoys bound for Venice just ten days before was provided only under the express condition that they not stop anywhere along the way to negotiate with somebody else, seems to indicate that Dubrovnik and its Venetian masters were actually sabotaging a Serbian diplomatic contact that was not to their liking. Far more sinister are the events recounted by Gregoras, concerning Nemanjić envoys to the Ottoman leader Orhan around 1351 – on their return trip together with a Ottoman embassy to the Serbian court, they were ambushed near Rodosto by an ally of the Byzantine emperor who had an interest in preventing these contacts. As a result, some of the envoys were murdered, others captured, and the rich gifts they carried were looted.<sup>118</sup>

Nevertheless, such setbacks seem to have been very rare and it may be concluded that, regardless of their diplomatic achievements, Nemanjić embassies were successful travellers – the vast majority of them managed to arrive at their destination and then to make it home safely. Many of these journeys and their protagonists have left no trace in the sources available today and are thus consigned to the role of historical stowaways in the story of Nemanjić diplomatic travel. Yet, the information that has been preserved can be put to good use. Since it hardly ever offers more than a handful of glimpses at any of the aspects of embassy travel over a period of almost two centuries, there is obviously no potential for diachronic analysis. But if this fragmentary content is placed into the context of much richer comparative information it becomes possible to attain something of a comprehensive, albeit static, picture. That picture is sufficiently clear to show that the experience of Nemanjić embassy travel essentially conforms to comparative models. In fact, it offers some interesting contributions to the general model, such as the use of Dubrovnik tributes as an expedient source of on-the-road funding, the tendency for satisfying the needs of travellers in kind, as opposed to the more money-oriented solutions of others, as well as a range of interesting individual cases. In that sense, it presents itself as a research field worthy of attention, where a comparative approach can yield valuable results furthering our knowledge of diplomacy, travel and state administration in medieval Serbia and its regional contemporaries.

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<sup>116</sup> *Register Papst Innozenz*, no. 167 (176).

<sup>117</sup> *Monumenta ragusina* V, 345.

<sup>118</sup> *Gregoras* III, 100.

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