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THE FIRST VENETIAN LOVE LETTER? THE TESTAMENT OF ZORZI CERNOVICH

Diana Gilliland Wright

. . . perché li havemo ben servito et justamente
Zorzi Cernovich, 1499¹

I Latini profondono tutto lo splendore nelle vesti; ma non hanno il maestoso aspetto,
nè gli occhi scintillanti dei valorosi figli di Podgoritza.
“Le Nozze di Massimo Cernojević”²

In December 1496, Sanudo went to Ca' Pasqualin to see the newest celebrity.³ Zorzi Cernovich, “lord of several places and mountains in the vicinity of Kotor,” had escaped from Montenegro just ahead of the Turks and come to Venice with his wife, Isabetha.⁴ The young Cernovich couple were marvelously exotic for a winter's day and Alvise Pasqualin exhibited them as new acquisitions in front of his collection of paintings and tapestries: she

¹ How to write the Cernovich name is a political decision. Sanudo wrote *Zorzi Zernovich* and *Cernovich*. In Montenegro, the name is *Duradj Crnojević*. Because my primary sources – the testament, the *protocollo*, and Sanudo – use *Zorzi Cernovich*, I am following that usage here.

² “Le nozze di Massimo Cernojević” in Bernardino Biondelli.

³ See <http://venicexplorer.net/tradizione/topos/ccc.html> *Toponomastica Veneziana* under “Corner Zaguri.” Alvise Pasqualin, painted by Antonello da Messina: <http://www.galleriaborghese.it/borghese/img/antonel.jpg>. Ca' Pasqualin, now known as Palazzo Zaguri, stands beside the bridge at S. Maurizio leading to S.ta Maria del Giglio. See <http://www.zaguri.net/en/location.htm>.

⁴ Marino Sanudo (1466-1535), *Diarii* (Bologna, reprint 1969) I, 402. Isabetha was the daughter of patrician Antonio Erizzo q. Marco. Sanudo identifies her doubly as Cernovich's wife and Erizzo's daughter, never by name. The marriage of Cernovich and Isabetha is recorded in the ASV *Cronica Matrimonia* as 1497, in C. Hopf, *Chroniques Grèco-Romanes inédits ou peu connues* (Berlin 1873) as 1499. However, ASV Secreta Collegio Commissarii R. 2, f. 140, for 20 July 1490, congratulates Ivan Cernovich on the marriage of his firstborn to Helisabet, “cui fuimus contenti.” Hopf, 534, has Zorzi born in 1467, which may be accurate. Isabetha's parents were married in 1470 and she had two older brothers, so she must have been about sixteen when she married. *Genealogie delle Dinastie Nobili Italiane* at <http://www.sardimpex.com/Erizzo/ERIZZO1.htm>.

wearing jewels and cloth-of-gold, and he, tall and handsome, “dressed in gold like a Greek.”⁵

The Cernovich family had ruled Montenegro with Venice as overlord since 1451/2.⁶ In the Venetian-Ottoman peace agreement of 1478 ending fourteen years of war, Venice surrendered most of Montenegro and the fortress of Scutari, although she retained control over a coastal strip. After failing to obtain Venetian aid in recapturing the whole country, Zorzi’s father, Ivan,⁷ signed an agreement with Bayezid II in early 1482 which recognized him as head of the small principality, owing homage to the Turks, and requiring him to give his son Staniša⁸ as security. After further frustrations, Ivan left his capital of Zabljak on Lake Scutari and led his followers into the barren highlands where he founded a new capital at Cetinje. He then handed over the rule to Zorzi while he went to Italy to look for aid against the Turks. At Ivan’s death in 1490,⁹ Zorzi formally succeeded to the throne.¹⁰ In the mid-90s, Zorzi sought to expand his options by seizing “saline” (salt pans) under Venetian control on the border of the Cataro territory (Kotor), and guaranteeing perpetual confusion as to overlord and loyalties. In late 1496, Ottoman pressure was such that he found it practicable to leave the country; his brother Stefan took over the rule.¹¹

⁵ Sanudo I, 402: “arivò a Santa Maria Zubenigo in cha’ Pasqualin, et la moglie con gran zoje vestita d’oro etc. Et *etiam* lui, che’è un bellissimo homo et gran le vestito d’oro a la grecha.” Sanudo mentions Cernovich’s clothes six or seven times. An expression such as “a la grecha” may speak more of a Venetian’s sense of foreignness than of detail.

⁶ Montenegro translates *Crna Gora*, “Black Mountain” and refers here to the area between the coast, Kotor and the Zeta river.

⁷ Also Jovan, Juvan, Zuan, Zuam, Giovanni; ruled 1461-1490. For a modern faux-naif statue of Ivan, see <http://www.montenegro.org/pictures/ivancrno.gif>.

⁸ Ivan had three sons: Zorzi, Staniša (also known as Skender Beg) and Stephen.

⁹ P. Coquelle, *Histoire du Montenegro et de la Bosnie depuis les origines*, (Paris, 1895) 52-55. Coquelle has made good use of Sanudo. “A picturesque ballad represents Ivan as sleeping in a fairy grotto above his castle . . . like Barbarossa in the German legend, till the hour when the trumpet shall awaken him to lead the Montenegrin nation to the conquest of Albania.” Miller, 374. Otherwise, Miller’s account of the Cernovici should generally be disregarded.

¹⁰ The Cernovich connection with the introduction of the printing press to the Balkans is still repeated, despite Virgil Molin, “Venise, berceau de l’imprimerie glagolitique et cyrillique,” *Studi Veneziani* 8 (1966) 347-446 (esp. 367-368), who has demonstrated that the books traditionally assumed to have been printed in Cetinje in this period were in fact printed in Venice. In a private communication (4 August 2000), John V. F. Fine states that Zorzi established the press in Montenegro which published mostly church books, but also a text of Dušan’s law code.

¹¹ Sanudo I, 402, 421, 454, 643-44, quotes a letter from a Venetian *provveditor* in the vicinity who reported that Stefan had come from Constantinople and told Zorzi that he had 3 days to either give homage to the Porte, or leave the country. Zorzi left and Stefan assumed the rule under the overlordship of Bayezid II. Sanudo seemed to think that Stefan intended to uproot his brother. The Signoria, in an effort to regain control of Montenegro, sent Alvise Sagudino (who spoke Greek and Turkish) to Scutari and then to Constantinople to negotiate with the Ottomans and Stefan, with a present of 250 ducats “acciò ditto Stefano non faci garbajo.” In

If the Cernovici had thought that their introduction to Venice as royalty would help their future, they were over-optimistic, even naive, considering that she was a Venetian and he had lived in Venice for several years. Both should have been aware of Venetian ethos that cultivated an antipathy to personality. Despite their apparent glamour, what happened next was a singular story of frustration, a sequence of political events which demonstrated Venetian rule at its most petty and cynical: ultimately it was a completely insignificant story, except to Zorzi and Isabetha, with perhaps the only tangible result a testament that is, being neither Venetian nor a love-letter, apparently the earliest known dated Venetian love-letter and a remarkable political diary. This paper explores the more personal side of the Cernovich drama, but it was a drama played out against their personal background of constant political haggling, private messages, deals, and betrayals, within a larger context of more important rulers and a major war.

Cernovich arrived in Venice in December 1496. In January he was given a contract to command 200 *stratioti*, which were to include the hundred (“of the best”) he had left behind in Zara who would be shipped over to him, with another hundred he could then enroll, although it was well into March before the ships arrived. He had a *provision* of 40 ducats a month, and assignment to Ravenna.¹² Ravenna was a fortress surrounded by marshes, primarily a holding camp for *stratioti* not in the field – this when Venice was aiding Pisa in its revolt against Florence¹³ – and he was frustrated in the extreme. Such an assignment was calculated policy on the part of Venice to remind him of his dependent position, and warn against independence: the Venetian experience with mercenary commanders had been as Machiavelli described.¹⁴ Two months earlier he had been ruler of a country – admittedly a

fact, Bayezid ignored Stefan and after 1498 administered Montenegro as Ottoman territory. This sequence of exchanges left a hodge-podge of loyalties, with a great many in the Montenegro-Kotor-coastal region all preferring to be ruled by someone else. A wonderful ballad, “Le nozze di Massimo Cernojević,” has another explanation for the Ottoman domination. As quoted by Bernardino Biondelli, in “Raccolta di canzoni serbiche,” *Il Politecnico* xxii (1840) 333, Massimo, who appears to be Stefan, after a ten-year betrothal to the daughter of the Doge and a gift of three bags of gold, kills his father’s prime noble in a quarrel over the bride and flees to the Sultan who divides the country between him and the dead man’s brother. I am indebted to Vittorio Volpi for this ballad. Hopf, 534, gives Maxime as the name of Zorzi’s brother.

¹² Sanudo, I. 402, 485, 534-5. The *provision* was specified “per la sua persona.” In Venetian payrolls, there were 10 months to the year, making this 400 ducats a year, a very decent settlement, but perhaps calculated in this was money owed the Cernovici for Venetian use of Montenegrin territories. In March, Venice sent a ship to collect the 100 horsemen Cernovich had left behind.

¹³ M. E. Mallett & J. R. Hale, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State: Venice c. 1400 to 1617* (Cambridge, 1984) 46-60.

¹⁴ “I capitani mercenari o sono uomini eccellenti o no; se sono, non te ne puoi fidare, perchè sempre aspireranno alla grandezza propria, o con l’opprimere te, che li siei padrone, o con l’opprimere altri fuori della tua intenzione.” Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Book 12.

very small country, leading horsemen against the Turks: now he was isolated from family and friends, under constant observation, and effectively removed from all chance of independent action. Although Cernovich certainly had other sources of information, the Signoria did not discuss with him the letters they were receiving from Venetian officials in Cataro about Turkish claims on the *saline* and peasant taxes in the area Cernovich had improperly taken, claims that were making war more imminent, and for which they had sent their *secretario*, Alvise Sagudino, to talk to Bayezid.¹⁵ Correspondence from the *sandjak-beg*, Feris Beg, in Scutari made it clear he acted on Bayezid's instruction and expressed his own concern about war.¹⁶ Residents of two large villages in the “destreto di Cataro chiamato Montenegro” asked Cataro for assistance, saying it was the Venetian's fault the Turks had taken them over, and wanting to have their own governor. Cataro's response being unsatisfactory or slow, they abruptly gave their allegiance to Turkish rule.¹⁷ Disputes over Cernovich's captured territory continued, with Feris Beg trying to collect from Cataro the taxes to which he believed he was entitled.¹⁸

A year and a half later, in June 1498, Cernovich, still assigned to Ravenna, returned to Venice to talk about his contract. Ravenna had alternated between boring, petty, and wretched. There were frequent nagging border skirmishes with Faenza. In the summer of 1497, the plague that was decimating Italy raged through Ravenna and all travel to Venice was cut off for 40 days. In February, Ravenna's two rivers flooded; the whole city was inundated and the dry moat of the fortress filled with water. In mid-April 1498 there was another episode of plague and another 40-day prohibition on travel to Venice. Just after the quarantine was lifted, a summer flood destroyed the wheat crop and fifty *stratioti* decamped for lack of pay – this was certainly one of the things Cernovich wanted to discuss – and offered their services to Florence.¹⁹

Whatever Cernovich did discuss with the Signoria cannot have been satisfactory because he returned to Ravenna and, almost immediately, exploded with frustration and “parole bestial.”²⁰ This was reported in a letter from the commune of Ravenna dated 15 June, and again in one from the *podestà* dated

¹⁵ Sanudo I, 643-644.

¹⁶ Sanudo I, 679-680. Sanudo notes that this communication was “translatada de schiavo in latin.” (“Latin” conventionally meant Italian.)

¹⁷ Sanudo I, 684-685.

¹⁸ Sanudo I, 696, 702. The *Historia Turchesca*, Donadò da Lezze, ed. L. Ursu (Bucharest 1910) 219-220, endeavors to tell this story, but confusingly, and calls Zorzi by his father's name, as does Priuli.

¹⁹ Sanudo I, 537, 738, 871-2, 884, 943, 989.

²⁰ Sanudo I, 1000 for 25 June 1498; I, 1006 for 9 July 1498: “*etiam*, non hessendo in piacer al Signore turcho che questui da la Signoria nostra, che era suo schiavo e rebelo, fusse tanto honorato e datoli condotta, over per altra causa che fu secreta.”

25 June.²¹ The Dieci met on the 30th to decide how to handle the matter. There were three different votes until one for judgement was reached, probably forced by a Bartolomeo Vitturi.²² The first vote, simply for a hearing before the Dieci, was 6 for, 7 against, 8 not voting. The second vote, for removal from his contract and detainment, was a three-way tie – 7, 7, and 7. The third vote, for Cernovich and another *capo* to be brought before the Dieci, was passed with 1 vote for and 1 not voting.²³ Sanudo thought there were secret reasons for this, but there may have been some justifiable nervousness about what Cernovich might do, as the next day he reappeared in Venice at the Palazzo with a company of soldiers. He was arrested and imprisoned in the armory.²⁴ Three days later, on 4 July, the full Dieci met and ordered him transferred to the Toreselle, which they considered more secure, to be held until four-fifths of them voted otherwise.²⁵

Then, on 12 August, Cernovich escaped.²⁶ He left behind him his two guards, bound with their hands tied behind their backs to their testicles, and at twenty-three hours of the evening, just before sunset, he went out to the piazza and got into a boat. A Greek guard who recognized him told the oarsman to take note of where they went, because it might be important.

It was. When the escape was discovered, the Secretary of the Dieci requisitioned boats and *fanti* to search all the islands and boats between the piazza and Lido, though they were not sure whether he would try to leave Venice by sea, or go by way of Ferrara. Cernovich's oarsman took him to the

²¹ The discrepancy in time is significant, and suggests that the *podestà* may not at first have taken Cernovich's remarks very seriously. They may have been friends, but that is only speculation. What is sure is that had the *podestà* not reported what he said, given the commune's report, and had Cernovich been successfully convicted of treason, the *podestà* would have been, at a minimum, charged with disloyalty. Two years later, after the Captain General of the Fleet died in Corfù after a long illness, his secretary, Zorzi Negro, was brought before a hearing as to his culpability in not informing the Signoria much earlier in the illness. The Captain General's illness may have contributed substantially to the poor showing of the Venetian fleet and the loss of Modon to the Turks. Sanudo III, 549, 583-4, 786, 788.

²² ASV Cons. X Misti R. 27, ff. 173r-v. The resolutions, based on the two letters, describe what Cernovich said as "verbis iniuriosissimis et scandalosis," "verbis gravibus," "rebus scandalosis," and "iniuriosis verbis."

²³ Vitturi was noted as *capitanus* for the third vote. Sanudo I, 984-5 for 10 June, and 999 for 24, both note that after the meeting of the Dieci, a few stayed on. The position of *capitanus* – there were three at any one time – rotated.

²⁴ Apparently arrested with him was a Giorgio Biffurchi (probably Busichi, a *capo* of *stratioti*). What happened to him is not recorded.

²⁵ ASV Cons. X Misti R. 27, f. 173v. The Dieci record is dated 4 July. Sanudo I, 1006, says the decision was taken 8 days after 1 July. The Torresella was a tower located where the prison reached by the Bridge of Sighs is now. Imprisonment there was apparently for higher-status prisoners and not too severe.

²⁶ This inadequately explained, extensively described, incident and subsequent events are erratically narrated in Sanudo I, 1036-7, and give a remarkable view of relentless Venetian efficiency.

north end of Lido where he acquired as disguise the robe of a Dominican friar of S. Zanipolo, and began looking for a way to go to Trieste or Segna. He was recognized by Nicolò de Vidal, a functionary in the food tax office, who agreed to take him for sixteen ducats and a silver cup, and who persuaded him to hide below deck, whereupon Nicolò took him directly back to the care of the Dieci, and within four hours of his escape, he was in the “camara nuova dil tormento.” This is Sanudo's first narrative of events.

His second narrative becomes more involved: On Lido, Cernovich encountered a band of recently-arrived *stratioti*, two of whom (dressed “a la grecha”²⁷) went off to Castello to get a “peota a cinque remi,” so they could take him where he wanted to go. Meanwhile, Cernovich's oarsman returned to the piazza, encountered Nicolò de Vidal and told him he had just rowed Cernovich to Lido. Nicolò went to Lido, found the *stratioti* with Cernovich, and persuaded him to board his own boat. Whereupon Nicolò then took him back across the lagoon and within four hours of his escape, Cernovich was bound in the *camera*.²⁸ (Sanudo went to the prison at daylight and saw the friar's robe.) It is not clear whether he was tortured during the eight days before the Dieci met to consider his case: Sanudo says “nè le fo fato altra examinatione.”²⁹ He was then moved back to the Toreselle. Sanudo suggested that he was being held “per pocha cosa.”³⁰ although during that period Venice was in tense negotiations with the *sandjak-beg* of Scutari over Montenegrin border incidents.

He was held for several months. In early October, a courier brought the Signoria a letter from Louis XII of France asking for his release.³¹ The Doge,

²⁷ *Stratioti* were the Albanian and Greek soldiers Venice brought in from their overseas possessions. Unless on an Italian battlefield, they were generally isolated in camps, such as that on Lido. Presumably their dress gave Cernovich confidence in their reliability.

²⁸ The “camera nuova dil tormento” was in the suite of rooms used by the Dieci. The Dieci registers make no mention of torture or events subsequent to the 4 July vote.

²⁹ Sanudo I, 1037. Torture was supervised by the Dieci and administered by men who worked as general servants and boatmen for the committee. Cernovich's testament suggests that Isabetha was able to visit him during at least one of his imprisonments.

³⁰ Girolamo Priuli thought: “la cagione se diceva che'l se intendeva cum il Turcho, altri se diceva per traspalar et in fine stette molti mexi in prexone.” Priuli I, 88. Venice was at the time involved in tense negotiations over Montenegrin border raids. ASV Senato Secreta R. 37, f. 46r-v (60r-v).

³¹ Sanudo II.47. This was through the influence of Cernovich's maternal uncle, Constantin Arianiti, regent of Monferrato, a marquisate of the HRE within the territory of the Duchy of Milan. Constantin's problems with the Sforzas and the French need for unhindered passage into Italy had led to close ties with Charles VIII and then Louis XII. Constantin had a sister, Angelina (there were at least thirteen siblings), whose daughter Maria had married the Marchese of Monferrato. Maria and her husband both died by 1495, leaving two minor children. The young Marchese, a boy of beautiful manners, was 14 in 1498 when Urbano da Alba, Constantin's emissary to Venice, reports him ill with quartan fever. It is clear from the number of times Sanudo records Alba bringing the Signoria letters from Constantin with secret information about French plans that Constantin was a Venetian spy. Venice seems to have

relieved that the decision was not under his authority, said that it was a matter for the Dieci to decide. In early November, the Signoria sent Louis information of Cernovich's release, along with a present of furs and falcons. On 16 November, Cernovich came before the Signoria with Urbano da Alba, emissary to Venice from his uncle Constantin, Regent of Monferrato, and asked for an income, as he had lost his *provision*. He was unceremoniously told to forget it: pardon was enough. Cernovich then asked for permission to join his uncle in Monferrato: permission was given, along with a letter of transit.³² Two days later, da Alba came again before the Signoria and spoke on his behalf again, giving them a letter from Constantin about his nephew. Again, the response was that Cernovich had already received his favor and that was enough.

After a brief visit to Monferrato, Cernovich returned to Venice, but it is difficult to get a clear picture of what his circumstances actually were. He may have returned to Monferrato as a place where he was less likely to have his every action watched, and where possibly he was safer. In February 1498/99, da Alba reminded the Signoria that Cernovich "si moriva qui da fame," and again in March asked for consideration.³³ In March the Signoria sent Alvisè Sagudino to talk to the *sandjak-beg* of Scutari and to investigate the local situation generally.³⁴ All summer there were constant negotiations, raids, thefts, killings, changing alliances along the blurred boundaries of Montenegrin territories. In July, Cernovich wrote the Signoria, offering to go to Cataro to "metter fuoco e fiamma su quel dil Turcho," and about the same time, Sagudino wrote from Cataro recommending that Cernovich be helped to regain "la montagna negra, et che fusse presto."³⁵ The *rettor* wrote that Cernovich's brother had showed up in town "under pretext" of needing to rebuild a bath.³⁶ All this attention did Cernovich no good at all: in fact, he was several times refused audience when he tried to discuss Cataro with the Signoria.³⁷ He must finally have been convinced that he could accomplish nothing with Venetian aid and, in August, conspicuously dressed "a la greca," towered over those in the Great Council who had come to hear the *orator* from France. It is entirely possible

gone to a great deal of effort to keep on good terms with Constantin, and Constantin once sent the Doge two Turkish horses as a gift. Sanudo I & II, *q.v.* Monferrato, Arniti, Alba, *passim*.

³² Sanudo II, 151, 125, 132.

³³ Sanudo II, 457, 557. In the testament, where we find that Isabetha is living in the "pala gran," we learn that Cernovich had with him a certain amount of gold, silver, plate, icons, and liturgical vessels, as well as family money. Still, it is clear later on that the family is under real financial pressure.

³⁴ ASV Senato Secreta R. 37 f. 81v (95v).

³⁵ Sanudo II, 876, 900.

³⁶ Sanudo II, 871.

³⁷ Sanudo II, 1017.

that Cernovich joined his uncle Constantin and Louis XII in the attack on Milan.³⁸ He was in Milan when he wrote his testament in October.

Further details of Cernovich's life are few and vague, and neither Sanudo nor the Senato Secreta nor any other writers put Venetian concern over Cernovich within the context of the 1499-1503 war that consumed the Signoria's attention, money, and anxieties. Spandugnino recorded that Cernovich escaped prison and went to France, then to Rome, then to join Bayezid where he disavowed his Christianity and became a Moslem, but this is gossip.³⁹ Fragments in Sanudo give a somewhat different slant but suggest what Spandugnino may have heard: in November 1499 the *zupani* of Montenegro came to the Signoria and asked that Cernovich be appointed Venetian *provveditor* in the area; nothing was done about this request because of the arrival of some Turks; "el conte Zorzi Zernovich" disappeared and, dressed as a friar, escaped to the Turks in February 1499/1500; he had been living at Casale in Monferrato; he traveled to Ancona dressed as a friar and took a boat which landed between Venetian-held Budva and Kotor; he wrote the Signoria that he had gone "a la montagna negra, fo sua"; he went "dal Turcho" by whom he was well received. (Sanudo speculated, reasonably, that Cernovich had gone over to the Turks because the Signoria had failed to give him some sort of recognition or "provision."⁴⁰)

In April 1500, a letter arrived in Venice from the *podestà* of Venetian Antivari reporting that Cernovich had been taken into Ottoman custody at

³⁸ Sanudo II, 1029: "*etiam vidi framezi i banchi come nostro zentilhomio vestito, tamen a la greca, el conte Zorzi Zernovich.*" The wars and entanglements of the Italian peninsula at this period are overwhelming. Milan had surrendered in September to Louis XII who claimed the Duchy of Milan against Lodovico "il Moro" Sforza based on being the great-grandson of Gian Galeazzo Visconti who had bought the title of Duke of Milan in 1395 from the Holy Roman Emperor. Mallett & Hale, 59-63.

³⁹ "Ma se fuggi di carcere, et andò in Francia, di poi venne a Roma, et non trovando altro recapito, come disperato se ne tornò a Baisit et abnegò la fede christiana et fecesi Turco." Spandugnino in Konstantine N. Sathas, *Mnēmeia Hellēnikēs Istorias: Documents inédites rélatifs à l'histoire de la Grèce au moyen âge* (Paris, 1880-1890) IX, 172.

Coquelle, 64, says he became a Moslem. The claim of apostasy is manifestly untrue, as seen in his testament. His brother, Staniša did necessarily convert while hostage in Constantinople. John V. A. Fine, Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans* (Ann Arbor, 1994) II, 603. D. Zivkovic, in *Istorija Crnogorskog Naroda* (Cetinje, 1989) as translated at <http://www.montenet.org> says: "The historical facts are . . . disputed but it seems the Venetians, frustrated by their own inability to subdue Crnojevicj to their own interests, managed to kill Stefan and deceitfully sent Djuradj to Istanbul. Namely Djuradj visited Venice in order to work on the 'wide anti Turkish campaign' but was kept in captivity for some time while his brother Stefan was defending his country against Turkish forces. It is likely that on his return to Montenegro, Djuradj was kidnapped by the Venetian agents and sent to Istanbul via Skhodr under accusation that he had been organizing a Holly War (sic) against Islam." This passage, riddled with imagination and skimping on brothers, is an excellent example of a willfully nationalistic construction of history.

⁴⁰ Sanudo III, 48-9, 118, 134, 165.

Scutari in February and the *sandjak-beg* was waiting for instructions from the Porte. In May it was learned that Cernovich had arrived at the Porte where he was honored by the Sultan. When Cernovich asked to have his country back, the Sultan said, "Bring your wife and children here," and gave him an Anatolian estate worth 25,000 *aspri* a year.⁴¹ He was also reported to have gone to Rhodes. Meanwhile fighting and negotiations continued along the coasts and borders of Montenegro between Venetians and Turks and Cernovich partisans.⁴²

In May 1501, two envoys from Montenegro arrived to ask for Venetian support against the Turks, 300 *fanti* (foot soldiers) and 100 *stratioti* to protect them after the Turks were expelled, and a Venetian for *provveditore*, Nicolò Memo who was already in Budva. They further asked that Salomon Cernovich, Zorzi's oldest son, be appointed to rule Montenegro with his Venetian mother.⁴³ Presumably he was still underage and she would serve as regent. This is a fascinating detail: Zorzi's testament, written eighteen months earlier but not opened until the 1514 translation says that he desires his son Salomon be sent to his uncle Staniša (now known as Skender Beg) at the Porte.⁴⁴ Presumably, the name of Salomon would be persuasive to those Montenegrans leaning toward the Ottomans, and a calming signal to the Ottomans, while the Venetians would be reassured by a Venetian patrician as regent. The Senate agreed to the military aid, reducing the numbers to 200 and 50, but said that the question of Salomon, his mother, and the *provveditore* would have to wait until they saw how the military part worked out. One can only speculate what part Zorzi Cernovich had in devising this plan, or just what Bayezid's interest might have been.

Isabetha Cernovich remained in Venice with the children. She may have needed money for, in December 1502, the Signoria gave her twenty-four ducats "pro nunc."⁴⁵ A year later, in November 1503, Isabetha petitioned for either an income for herself and her children, or permission to take the children to meet her husband in Budva. She said that he was presently in Anatolia, and

⁴¹ Twenty-five thousand *aspri*, or *akçe*, was not an extremely large gift, being worth approximately 555 gold ducats a year.

⁴² Sanudo III, 189, 335, 413, 491, 1245, 1403, 1568. The Ottomans and Venetians were at war between 1499 and 1502, the Venetians suffering major losses in the *stato da mar*.

⁴³ ASV Senato Secreta Senato, R. 38, f 133v (142 v).

⁴⁴ "At that point, take my son Lodovico Constantin and send him to my uncle Signore Constantin who will present him to Signore King of France. Send Salomon to his uncle Skender Beg at the Porte. I hope to God they will not leave you to die of hunger, these two sons, one being with the Sultan and the other with the King." Here Zorzi is following the model of alliance-building used by his father with him and Staniša.

⁴⁵ Sanudo IV, 494, with no other information. The phrase suggests the possibility of other money in the future. Possibly it was a payment owed Cernovich or his father for Montenegrin land Venice was using.

receiving an allowance from Bayezid.⁴⁶ Government processes moved slowly, the norm in Venice for paying out cash, and it was not until twenty months later, in July 1505, that Isabetha was granted an allowance of sixty ducats a year. One of the sons was promised future benefits worth 200 ducats a year, at which time her provision was to be discontinued.⁴⁷

In June 1510 – they had now been separated for ten years – Isabetha was given the fees from a mooring station at Torre Nuova, worth thirty-six ducats a year. When she protested that it was half what she needed to live on, the Collegio shrugged their collective shoulders and said “*Tamen stante la leze no si pol far altro.*”⁴⁸ This is Sanudo’s last word on either Cernovich and there seems to be no further information until the testament, when the translation was made in mid-April 1514. This is with some reason considered to indicate the date of his death, but the fall of 1517 is a more likely time. A statement from the Signoria included in the probated testament of January 1517/18 suggests that Cernovich had been away from Venice when he died.⁴⁹

Cernovich has been regarded as less than worthy of his valiant father, a political failure who preferred to abandon his power at the first threat from the Sultan, and live quietly with his protectors on the lagoon, with his in-laws, even as a collaborator with the Turks.⁵⁰ Such suggestions derive from the

⁴⁶ Sanudo IV, 388. Budva was a small fortified Venetian port on the coast near Scutari. Apparently Cernovich had reason to think he could safely enter Venetian territory.

⁴⁷ Sanudo VI, 189. Isabetha was presumably living with her children in the “palagan,” the family palazzo or the one where they had been guests. Two hundred ducats would have been a decent, though by no means large, income. The invisibility of family and friends in the record is striking. Isabetha’s father, Antonio Erizzo q. Marco, (d. 1492) had been wealthy enough to provide dowries for five daughters. She had two older brothers, Paolo, and Giovanni Battista who acquired a (tiny) Greek island near Corfù through marriage.

⁴⁸ Sanudo X, 524: “A di 7 zugno vene la mojer dil Zernovich fo fia di sier Antonio Erizao, qual havia per il suo viver la palla di la torre nuova, ducati 36 a’ anno, e si paga a le raxon Nuove, et disse per la parte quelli Signori la tien, la mita e, non pol viver etc.” Sanudo scholar Linda Carroll suggests that Torre Nuova may have been a Cernovich holding, probably on the Adriatic coast (although possibly a Torre near Rialto was intended), from which revenues collected were paid into the Venetian Raxon Nuove, or tax office. The Raxon Nuove withheld half the revenues for the state. Coquelle, 64, refers to this: “Nous voyons, par un document daté su 13 avril, que la République donna à la veuve de Georges IV le domaine de Terranova, en viager (Valentinelli, archives 233).”

⁴⁹ ASV Notarile Testamenti b 1185 Grasolario/15. However, the fact of the translation of the testament is not in itself evidence of his death. Miller, 380: “One account of his death says that it occurred in his Venetian palace; another that it took place in Asiatic Turkey, where he is said to have received large domains from the Turks.” Coquelle, 64: “[II] mourut entre 1510 et 1514, comme le prouve la lettre suivante (juillet 1514): ‘Et arriva un envoyé du sandjack de Monténégro, qui est le frère de celui qui eut une Erizzo pour épouse et *qui est mort.*’” See also n. 42. As the Venetian year began on 1 March, January 1517 in Venetian terms would be 1518 in modern.

⁵⁰ Miller, 380: “George Crnoiević, allied as he was to a noble Venetian lady, and destitute of the martial qualities of his father, soon longed for safety and civilization, neither of which he could find in his mountain home.” Molin, 368: “. . . le dernier des Cernoiević, ne fuerent pas à

intense Balkan nationalism of the late 19th century and assume nation-state values incompatible with the clan loyalties of the early 16th. When reading the testament in combination with Sanudo, a more nuanced impression appears of a determinedly independent man, concerned with honor and family instead of *Realpolitik*, pressed hard between two greater powers, neither of which needed or was even particularly interested in him. Parallels to Cernovici attempts to balance Venice and Bayezid can be seen in other powerful Balkan and Greek families, including the Arianiti, the Bua, the Castrioti, and the Palaiologi, all of whom had some family members allied with the Porte and others with Venice so that there would always be a protector.⁵¹

*The Cernovich Testament of 1499/1514*⁵²

In October 1499, while in Milan with his uncle, Cernovich wrote his testament in “schiava”⁵³ as a letter to his wife, and had it witnessed by his sister’s son and two *servitori*. In April 1514, Stephano di Pasquali of the *sopragastaldi* translated it into Italian.⁵⁴ Di Pasquali wrote small neat letters with tall vertical strokes and large sweeping capital letters, in widely-spaced lines and hanging paragraphs, crossing out a few words. He wrote the notarial codicil hastily with a damaged pen point, swearing that: “Ho trasduta de lingua et lettera Schiava.” The translation required three sheets of paper, which were then folded into a small packet, pierced, a string threaded through the hole and tied, and sealed with red wax. On the outside, di Pasquali wrote: *S[ignora] Isabetha sapi bene chio volio che questa charta conservi non di bolata fin che (se Dio concedesse) Io venga et che io la leza*, which must translate a Cernovich note on the original. Notary Jacopo Grasolario of the Cancelleria Inferior endorsed the translation on the same side: *Test.m .d. Georgii Cernovich manu propria*, and on the reverse wrote: *In prothocoll. ad c.34. [- - -] I.3. mensis January 1517.*

la hauteur, car le faible Georges, à la première summation que lui fit le Suldan, de se soumettre, préféra abandoner le pouvoir, en partant intempéstivement auprès de ses protecteurs sur la lagune, et chez ses beaux parents. Avec cela, se termine en 1496 le court et insignifiant règne du dernier des Cernoëvić.” Because of the overwhelming shortage of reliable material in non-Cyrillic fonts, writers have to read each other. There is an overwhelming assumption that if Montenegro had to be occupied, Venetians were far preferable to Turks. This has not necessarily been supported by contemporary studies concerning taxation.

⁵¹ Cernovich's instruction in the testament to send one son to his uncle and the other to the Sultan is a clear example of this.

⁵² ASV Notarile Testamenti b 1183 Grasolario/208. The testament is mentioned in Coquelle, 63.

⁵³ Sanudo II, 519, written the same year as the testament, refers to a letter from the *sandjak-beg* of the area, Feris Beg, as written in "schiavo servo."

⁵⁴ This brings up the question of how the testament got to Venice, and who wanted it translated.

Grasolario's *protocollo* contains an official action by the Doge and the Great Council which includes an explanation of the testament, its text, and the final resolution of the matter for which Isabetha had petitioned the council a month earlier, in December 1517, "nuper pervenerit ad ipsius supplicatis aures mors prefati q. eius viri."⁵⁵ The office of the *sopragastaldi* recommended approval of the testament which was given by the Doge "cum mei minori et maiori consiliis," on 17 January 1517/18, with a fine of ten gold pounds for anyone who hindered its enforcement. This is a startlingly short period of time for settlement, particularly considering all the other delays set for her over the years. After Grasolario copied the document into the *protocollo*, Doge Leonardo Loredan signed with a distressingly unsteady hand, "Nos Leonardus Loredanus Dei gratia Dux." This was followed by the signatures of two witnesses, Grasolario's signature, and a drawing of his notarial seal.

Quite apart from its value in terms of its political and historical information, the Cernovich testament appears unique in Venetian documents in that it comes very close to being a love letter from Zorzi to Isabetha. While there are collections from later periods, and some love poetry earlier, the identification of Venetian love letters at this period is problematical.⁵⁶ The Cernovich testament, admittedly neither Venetian nor a love letter, is clearly moving in that direction. In an important article on the changing language in wills, Stanley Chojnacki discusses the increase in the number of affectionate terms used by husbands toward their wives as the 15th century advanced, and instances in particular the use of the term *consorte* or "destiny-sharer."⁵⁷ Chojnacki sees this as indicative both of increased affection between husbands and wives, and of increased literary and linguistic facility. Zorzi uses this term at least seventeen times to Isabetha. Zorzi's appointment of Isabetha as sole executor is fully in keeping with the Venetian trend: by this time some 88% of

⁵⁵ ASV Notarile Testamenti b 1185 Grasolario/15. The *protocollo* was a permanent government record. The explanation mentions seven times that the testament had been translated "ex lingua Serva in Latinam linguam" – Latin was commonly used to mean Italian-Venetian. "Nuper . . . viri" : f. 15: "The death of the aforementioned gentleman recently came to the ears of the suppliant herself." This argues against a death in April 1514: it is highly unlikely that Isabetha would have waited three and a half years before petitioning that the provisions of the will be carried out.

⁵⁶ Marino Zorzi, Margaret King, Stanley Chojnacki, and Guido Ruggiero have confirmed to me in private communications that they know of no Venetian love letters of this date, and none in the form of a will. Professor King suggests that the love letter seems to be a phenomenon of the sixteenth century intersection of humanism with the vernacular. However, there is a collection of love letters published by Francesco Sansovino, *Delle lettere amoroze di diversi hvomini illvstri, libri nove* (Venice, 1565). Though none of the letters is dated, a few are from the fourteenth century, and others possibly from just about the same period as the will. If some of them are too literary to be convincing as love letters, others are completely delightful in their intimacy and informal language.

⁵⁷ Stanley Chojnacki, "The Power of Love: Wives and Husbands in Late Medieval Venice," *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler & Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA, 1988) 134.

Venetian men did so, this increasing evidence for marital closeness paralleling the increased number of women being assigned responsibility for family financial affairs in preference to male relatives.

Chojnacki instances terms similar to those in Cernovich's testament: "mia molier charissima," "mia chara e dileta chonsorte," "mia dilectissima consorte." Wills in the same Grassoario *busta* with the testament have similar affectionate language: "Cecilia mia dilictissima et honoranda consorte"; "Maria mia moier dilecta che la regna in caxa"; "mia dilectissima consorte"; "Chiara mia dilecta consorte laqual come ho ditto sola sempre." The Cernovich will stands out from these, though, in both the number of affectionate terms and the private references, richly suggestive of the peculiar circumstances of their recent lives. Chojnacki's comments on the flexibility of the personal language he has noted in testaments are supported in the Cernovich testament where his informal language shifts near the end from, "you should," to "let her," confirming to the outside world what he has been saying to her in private. Its legal standing as a testament puts the force of law behind this message to a loved and competent wife.

TESTAMENT OF ZORZI CERNOVICH⁵⁸

22 October 1499/20 April 1514

El tuo Zorzi Cernovich ad ti chara Consorte Isabetha che thabi ad palegran iscrivo: deinde sapi come per la gratia de Dio son sano et alegro in Milano cum el Signore Constantin avunculo mio. Prego Dio che anchora verso de noi sia gratioso. Fin questhora cerca le cose mie altro scriver no ho voluto per bon respecto ma a presente sapi che quando me parti per venir de qui volea far uno testamento: [verum] non te volsi contristar cognescendo l'amor che hai cum mi havuto et sapendo le lachryme tue preparate ad effunderse. Ma hora essenda dati lontanado Dio scia quando et dove piu saremo insieme. E perhò me son aricordato de la mortale hora et ho voluto scriver el presente testamento solo de mia propria mano in remedio dela mia peccatrice anima de mi Zorzi et dela tua cum quelli deli impotenti fioleti. Sol mi accadesse la morte non ritrovandose ne ti ne li filioleti mei apresso de mi volio che ne governiate per questo testamento mio qual scrivo essendo sano del intellecto mio et del corpo mio: Ma se sopravivesse per gratio de Dio non volio che mi possa esser questo testamento contrario al mio volere sio volesse qualcosa azonzere o diminuire or piazandomi cambiar o piazando azonzer or piazando vender: ma volio che sempre in vita mia possa far secundo el mio volere et disponer dele mie cose et sel mi fusse de piacere questo testamento et tuti li altri revocare o vero

⁵⁸ASV Notarile Testamenti b 1183 Grassoario/208. The transcription reproduces the spelling of the original, with separation of words written together, and occasional improvement of punctuation and addition of accents for clarity. Abbreviations are conventional and have not been indicated where expanded. Where the reading was unclear I used the transcription in the *protocollo*.

confirmare. Ma se per li peccati mi prevenisse la morte non possando altro testamento postscripter de mia mano. Allora voglio che faci secondo questo testamento commanda.

Prima: tute le robe de Sancta Maria de Cetina cum le qual fugissemo da i Turchi volio che le restituisci ala Sancta Madona de Cetina sì come beni de sua ragione et secondo me obligai per voto essendo io nel loco qual tu sciai Consorte mia, dove molte lachryme effundesti. Le dicte robe ecclesiastice le darai tute queste o siano de arzento, o de oro, o de rame, o de peltre, o de seda, o anchone, o sancti cum li vasi o tace o cusliere: ogni cosa nominata o non nominata cum le scripture et cum li massari (tue⁵⁹) dà el tuto alla chiesa dela Sancta Madona sopra la Cetina. Ad questo potranno le zente cognoscere il vero amore che verso de mi hai portado quando vederano che tu me ami l'anima dapò la morte.

Item: volio che te appresenti alla Signoria de Venetia se te volesseno alimentar et ti & li filioleti perche ne hano bona cagione. Prima perché li havemo ben servito et justamente. L'altra per lo avanzo che avanza al patre mio Signore Zuanne nela Camera de Sua Signoria per quanto li descripseno perché quando l'imperador teniva Scutari assediato el padre mio per loro honore l'anima sua offendeva, et contra de Signore lo Imperador irritava et li alimenti suoi dissipava. E de questo testifica il loro privilegio facto per Pregadi et de questo danari li fu descritto. Tertio, perché l'è rimasto ne la Camera de Sua Signoria le page de /14/ anni che sono tenuto Pastrovichio, Linstiza, Gerblia fin chel Signore Zuanne retornò de Ancona & da che io son scampato dopo la morte del Signoree Zuanne da Turchi e vivi a Venetia: per questo saria per cadaun anno ducati 600 come se puol veder per el Privilegio che scripseno per Pregadi quando // el padre mio cum loro se pacifico et che le restituirono Pastrovichio et Linstiza. Loro li promisseno a rason de tanto alanno per quanto fu Pastronichio e Linstiza: & Gerblia nele sue mane. La quarta cagion, se è perché mi innocente ligorono et vituperorono senza alcuno mancamento per questo me dieno far del bene. La quinta cagione se è perché quando me casorono via la Compagnia me restò nela Camera dela Signoreeia ducati mille e cento, et etiam ducati cento per el cavallo mio Morelo che mi tolseno quando io era in pregione et quello deteno a Messer Iacomo Venier quando el fu Provededor in Campa quando da Fiorenza deffendeva la Signoria Pisa. Tute le cause soprascripte ricercano et che vi facino del bene et ad ti et alli filioleti. Ma se la sua Signoreeia non nota vi sia fatto qualche bene (el peccato sia sopra le loro anime) non dimorar cum li filioleti per più de doi mesi ne guardar che te dicono Doman Doman. In quella hora tuol mio fiol Lodovico Constantin et consegnado al Avunculo Mio Signore Constantin chel dia al Signore Re de Franza. E Salomon mandato ad suo Barba Schenderbego alla Porta che spero in Dio non ti lassarano perir da fame questi doi filioli essendo uno cum lo Imperador & l'altro cum il Re.

⁵⁹ In margin.

Io te lasso sii procuratrice per questo, et sopra le filiole et sopra li filioli, et sopra la facultade de tuto quello che è stà dicto esser mio per un zorno, et che sia nel mio poder. Cheli mei crediti scuodi etiam se fusseno le dote dele sorelle mie qual sono senza fiolioli et se fusseno di pegni nostra da qualche sia. El tuto et cadauna cosa ti Consorte mia Isabetha el tuto dominarai sola da ti medema cusi qual che qui ho scripto come qual che non ho scripto sì del preterito como sel potesse qualcosa in un longo tempo. Che ti mia Consorte Isabetha faci sì per la mia peccatrice anima e simelmente faci per li mei et toi filioleti et dela facultade et de tuto el mio poco et molto. E per mazor honor tuo Consorte mia io protesto ad cadauno Signore sì spiritual come mundano sia fradello come a cuxino. E simelmente de ogni conditione a persona. Et niun ti possi dar ordene che faci cosa alguna per forza tua, ne che qualuno da ti possa cercar conto de quel che hai facto per mio committo o de quel che non hai: né de qual che hai facto bene overo male ma che tuto qual che tu farai sia facto, et deli arzenti ecclesiastici & de ogni cosa. Et per la mia peccatrice anima de mi Zorzi laqual aricommando in Cielo à Dio et ad lei come alla mia fidel Consorte sopra la terra et come ad colei che verso de mi suo sostegno Honorato amore da sempre portado. Simelmente se qualcosa la scodesse dela Serenissima Signoria de Venesia sì dele dote dele mie sorelle senza filioli come de altri debite che lei toglia in poder suo et che la faci et alle filiole quello la vole et alla anima mia quanto la vole. Similmente che la posseda tuto quel che è soprascritto sì maridandose come non maridandose e del tuto sia Signoria et sopra tuto, sopra quello chio in vita saria Signore. El tuto lei goda in sua vita.

//

Quelli che sono stati cortesani apresso de lei et apresso de mi che la li aiuti secondo le forze et mandine via de loro non volendo star con lei overo andar mesene cum li filioli da qualchuno deli soprascritti Signori.

E cusi tuto quello che qui ho scripto et quello che non ho scripto sia del passato o sia che con il tempo potria accadere tuto lasso in poder et confermo sia nele man de madona Isabetha Consorte mia. Et soprattutto dapo la morte mia l'honor mio, el qual la lo potrà tamen mantenere se la vorà aricordandose de l'amore che la havuto cum mi et la conservation del suo honore sì essendo in viaggio como apresso de lei ritrovandomi.

Aloro non scrivo se non che Dio te conserva cum li filioleti chara Consorte. Ad ti Isabetha alla qual replicando renuntio plenariamente ogni mio poder dapo la mia morte: Ad niuno altro non permettendo adimandar contra de ti conto né darte ordene ma solamente alo unico Dio. Al qual ricomando la mia peccatrice anima de mi Zorzi et ad ti Consorte mia cum li filioleti mei. Nel millesimo quandrigentesimo nonagesimo nono dela natività de Christo Et de Adamo sette mille & octo nel mese de Octobrio adi .22. In Milano.

Io Zorzi Cernovich ho scripto de mia mano presente li testimonii infrascritti. Et sigillai cum lo mio sigillo grande per mazor fede.

Io Triphon Bucsia da Catharo nepote da parte di sorella del Signore Zorzi Cernovich son testimonio del soprascritto.

Io Frans Mednich son testimonio del soprascritto essendo servidor del Signore Zorzi Cernovich.

Io Laico Stanissalich servidor del Signore Zorzi Cernovich son testimonio del soprascritto.

1514 adi 20 April

Io Stephano di Pasquali q Messer Nicolò costituito nel officio di Magnifici Signori Sopragastaldi fazo fide qualiter el suprascritto testamento over cedula scripta de mia man propria ho trasducta de lingua et lettera Schiava de man del. q. Illustre Signore Zorzi Cernovich q. del Illustrissime Signore Zuanne. E questo fidelissi mandato de verbo ad verbum come in quello se contien senza mudar o alterar el sentimo de cosa alguna cum le sua sottoscription de testimonii come in esso. Et in fidem me sottoscripsi de propria manu.⁶⁰ Iuravit.

[*scr. al. imo man.*] Alexander ant[- -] .6. Octobris soprascritti supragastaldi.

Verso:

[*scr. Grasolario*] Testamento de Georgii Cernovich manu propria.

In prothocoll ad c .54. [- -]I 3. mensis Ianuarii 1517

[*scr. di Pasquali*] S.a Isabetha sapi bene chio volio che questa charta conservi non dibolata fin che (se Dio concedesse) Io venga et che io la leza.

TRANSLATION

Your Zorzi Cernovich writes to you, dear consort Isabetha, who live at the palazzo:

Know then that by the grace of God I am well and happy in Milan with Signore Constantin, my uncle. I pray God that Christ will again be gracious to us. I have not wanted to write anything about my affairs thus far for good reason. But know now that when I left to come here, I wanted to make a testament. I really did not want to make you sad, knowing the love you have had for me, and knowing how your tears will surely flow at our separation. But being so far away from you at present, God knows when and where we will be together again. For this reason, I have thought of mortality and have wanted to write the present testament myself, in my own hand, to put right my sinful soul, of me Zorzi, and for you with those helpless children.

⁶⁰ Following this text *in protocollo*: “Hic finis. Volentes et firmiter statuentes quella soprascritta Helisabet relicta soprascritto q. dom. Georgii Cernovich ut sua beneficitata cum hac nostra subventionis carta iuxtem cum ipsius testamentarie.”

If death should come to me and neither you nor the children are with me, I want you to be governed by this my testament which I write, being sound in my intellect and body. But should I survive by the grace of God, I do not want this testament to be contrary to my will, if I should want to add something, or take away, or am pleased to change, or pleased to add, or pleased to sell, but I want to be able to act in my life according to my desire and to make disposal of my affairs, and if this testament pleases me, to revoke or confirm all the others. But if for my sins death should come and I am not able to write another testament later in my own hand, I want you to act as this testament directs.

First: all the possessions of Santa Maria of Cetinje⁶¹ with which we escaped from the Turks, I want you to restore to the Santa Madonna of Cetinje as possessions in its own right, as I obligated myself by vow being in that place (which you know, my consort) where you wept many tears. You will give them the said ecclesiastical vestments and objects in entirety, whether they are silver, or gold, or copper, or pewter, or silk, or icons, or images of saints, with the vases, cups, or liturgical spoons: everything named and not named, with the documents and the furnishings: give [them] in entirety to the church of the Santa Madonna above Cetinje. By this the people can know the true love you have borne towards me when they see that you love my soul after death.

Item: I want you to present yourself to the Signoria of Venice so that they will maintain you and the children, because they have good cause for it.

- First, because we have served them well and justly.
- Next, because of the surplus that is owing my father, Signore Zuanne,⁶² in the *camera* of the Signoria, about which they wrote him, because when the Sultan besieged Scutari, my father offended him for the Signoria's honor and challenged the Sultan and he destroyed his own food supplies. The Privilege granted by the Pregadi testifies to this [*page 2 of ms.*] and for this money was assigned him.
- Third, because there remain in the *camera* of the Signoria payments for 14 years that I held Pastrovichio, Linstiza, and Gerblia⁶³ since Signore Zuanne returned from Ancona.⁶⁴ And because I escaped from the Turks after the death of Signore Zuanne and lived in Venice, there should be 600 ducats every year for this, as one can see by the Privilege that was issued by the Pregadi when my father made peace with them and they restored to him Pastrovichio and Linstiza. They promised him the same amount as long as he held Pastrovichio, Linstiza, and Gerblia.

⁶¹ The Monastery of S.ta Madonna of Cetinje was founded by Zorzi's father, Ivan Cernovich, in 1484/5. Burned by the Ottomans in 1679, the present structure is an 18th-century rebuilding.

⁶² Zuanne (Ivan, Jovan) Cernovich died in 1490.

⁶³ Pastrovichio is the modern Petrovići; Gerblia is Grbalj.

⁶⁴ In 1485.

- The fourth reason: because they bound me when I was innocent and dishonored me without any fault, for this they are obligated to make good to me.
- The fifth reason: because when they discharged me from the company, there remained to me in the *camera* of the Signoria 1100 ducats, and also 100 ducats for my horse, Morello,⁶⁵ which they took from me when I was in prison and gave to Messer Iacomo Venier when he was *provveditor* at Campo⁶⁶ when the Signoria defended Pisa from Florence.

All the above-written reasons demand that they do well by you and the children. But if the Signoria does not take note nor do well (the sin be upon their souls), do not delay with the children for more than two months, and watch out when they say, “Tomorrow, tomorrow.” At that point, take my son Lodovico Constantin and send him to my uncle Signore Constantin who will present him to Signore King of France.⁶⁷ Send Salomon to his uncle Skender Beg at the Porte.⁶⁸ I hope to God they will not leave you to die of hunger, these two sons, one being with the Sultan and the other with the King.

I leave you to be *procuratrice*⁶⁹ for this, and over the daughters and over the sons,⁷⁰ and over the management of everything that has been said to have been mine for one day, and that is in my power. The money for the debts

⁶⁵ Morello: “mulberry,” a dark reddish color. A hundred-ducat horse was a valuable animal.

⁶⁶ Campo: a town near Florence.

⁶⁷ Constantin had worked on creating an anti-Turkish league with Charles VIII and then Louis XII of France, and planned on launching an Albanian uprising. French aid never arrived. Zorzi's involvement with this led to his having to leave Montenegro in 1496.

⁶⁸ Zorzi's youngest brother Staniša (d. 1528+) had been given to Bayezid as hostage. He was appointed governor of Montenegro in 1513.

⁶⁹ Wills more often use the term *procurator*, even for a wife.

⁷⁰ It is not clear how many children Cernovich and Isabetha had. The testament suggest they did though it is not specific, and the phrasing suggests that the boys were his sons, not hers. Cernovich was earlier married to Yela, daughter of Carlo Thopia, an Albanian prince, and a relative of Zorzi's mother. The Thopia had been Venetian vassals for some generations. Hopf has to be regarded with a certain degree of scepticism: e.g., Hopf dates the marriage to Isabetha to 1499, but at this time there were at least four children, according to the testament. In the “Breve memmoria de li discendenti de nostra casa Musachi,” (Hopf 284), written while Staniša was governor of Montenegro, Zorzi and his first wife are said to have had two sons – Salomon and Constantine, mentioned in the testament – and three daughters, two of whom married in Hungary, and one in Venice. Of the sons, Salomon died in battle in Hungary (1521), and Constantine returned to Venice and married into the Contarini family. Constantine had a son, Giovanni (who held a long series of Venetian administrative positions in Friuli and the *terraferma*), and two grandsons, Vettore and Constantine. Hopf, 534. In 1548 it was reported that a Constantine Cernovici, captured at Nauplion during the 1538-39 Ottoman assault on the city and still held as a slave, was to have for his lifetime, in the holding of his wife, Eugenia Simena, and son, Nicolò, the salary and benefits of a position of the *Sarasinesca del portello de Padoa*, a house, and a one-time payment of 15 ducats. Sathas, VIII, 5-6.

should be the dowries of my sisters who are without children, and that should be for our pledges, however much there is. Each and every thing, you alone, my dear consort Isabetha, will manage, by yourself alone, the same over that which I have written, like that which I have not written, whether in the past or that might happen in the distant future.

Do this, my consort Isabetha, for my sinful soul, and similarly, for my and your children with authority and with all that is mine, little and much. And for your greater honor, my consort, I declare be to each lord, whether spiritual or lay, as to a brother or a cousin, and similarly, to each person of any condition. And no one can give you an order you to do anything with your authority or question what you have done on my account, or what you have not done, nor what you have so done well or badly, but that all you will do, let it be done. And in the matter of the ecclesiastical silver and for each thing, and for the sinful soul of me, Zorzi, which I commend to God in Heaven and to you as my faithful consort on earth, to her who has ever given to me sustained and honorable love. Likewise, should you collect anything from the Most Serene Signoria of Venice, whether from the dowry of my sisters without sons,⁷¹ or from other debts they hold in their power, and you should do for the daughters what you wish and for my soul what you wish. Similarly, you should possess everything that is written above, whether you marry or whether you do not marry,⁷² and you should be Signora in all and over all, over what I in life would be Signore. And let her have the enjoyment of the whole in her life.

[page 3 of ms.] Those who have been attendants with her and with me, let her aid them according to her possibilities. Let her send away those not wanting to stay with her or go with the boys to one of the above-mentioned lords.

And so, all this that I have written and that I have not written, be it in the past, or be it in time to come, I leave all in the power and confirm that it should be in the hand of my lady Isabetha, my consort, above all, my honor after my death, which she will maintain if she wishes, remembering the love she had with me and for the preservation of her honor, whether I am traveling or find myself in her presence. Thus, I do not write anything except that God preserve you and the children, dear consort. To you, Isabetha, to whom, I repeat, I consign all my power entire after my death, to no one do I permit to demand an account for your judgment or to give orders, but to God alone to whom I commend the sinful soul of me, Zorzi, and to you my consort with my children.

⁷¹ The son of one sister, Triphon Buscia, is witness to the testament. Coquelle (57) gives Cernovich a sister, Antonia who married a Montenegrin named Hyeronimus who ruled Zenta, the area where Cetinje developed. Her marriage to cement a political alliance locally parallels his marriage to a Venetian. However, the testament refers to "sisters without sons" which suggests least three sisters, considering that one had Triphon: the matter of sisters is not clear.

⁷² Bequests to wives are normally conditional on their not remarrying, especially where children are concerned, to protect family resources from new alliances.

In the 1499th year from the birth of Christ, and from Adam the 7008th year,⁷³ in the month of October, the 22nd day. In Milan.

I, Zorzi Cernovich, have written with my own hand the present above-written testament, and sign with my own great seal for greater assurance.⁷⁴

I, Triphon Buscia of Kotor, nephew of Signore Zorzi Cernovich by his sister, am witness to the above.

I, Frans Mednich, am witness to the above, being servant of Signore Zorzi Cernovich.

I, Laico Stanissalich, servant of Signore Zorzi Cernovich, am witness to the above.

1514, 20 April

I, Stephano de Pasquali, son of the late Messer Nicolò, official in the office of the Magnificent Lords Sopragastaldi, do here affirm the above-written testament or document that I have translated in my own hand from the Slavic language and script from the hand of the late most illustrious Signore Zorzi Cernovich, son of the late most illustrious Signore Zuanne. This is most faithfully translated, word by word as it is contained, without changing or altering the meaning of anything, with the undersigned signatures of witnesses as are in it. And in faith, I sign in my own name. Sworn.

[*in another hand*] Alexander ant[----] 6 October, of the above-mentioned Sopragastaldi

The document was folded in half lengthwise. On the top of one side of the reverse, Stephano de Pasquali wrote:

Signora Isabetha knows well that I want this document preserved and not unsealed until (God willing) I come and read it to her.

The document was again folded in half length lengthwise and then in half again. The notary Grasolario noted:

Will of Zorzi Cernovich, in his own hand.

Registered in volume 34 [--] I. 3 January 1517.

⁷³ Cernovich uses the Byzantine/Orthodox calendar which calculates the birth of Christ to 5508 years after the creation of Adam on September 6, the first month of the first year.

⁷⁴ The seal would have been like that of Ivan Cernovich with the crowned double-headed eagle which can be seen at <http://www.montenegro.org/crnojev.html>. The inscription transliterated reads IVAN / TSRNOEVICH / GOSPOD / ARV ZETCVI.