

Letters from the “Great Jew.” Joseph Nasi’s network and international connections

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ABSTRACT: After examining the social environment and network of Joseph Nasi in sixteen-century Italy, this article will deal with his strategies and contacts from Constantinople with European rulers, diplomats and merchants. Drawing on eleven original letters written by Joseph Nasi (only three of which have been published in previous studies), and four other letters addressed to him by Italian princes, the article analyses Nasi’s relations with the Medici and the Este ruling families, as well as with the Republics of Venice and Ragusa. This correspondence sheds light on Nasi’s business dealings and the measures he took to preserve his family assets. His actual influence on Ottoman affairs, as demonstrated in these letters, will also be evaluated. Together with other previously unknown diplomatic sources, these documents will reveal new information about Nasi’s deeds and strategies for securing his interests. Finally, the article will explore the scope of his environment, his international network and the significance of his role as a public figure.

KEYWORDS: Joseph Nasi; Italian States; trading and information networks.

TÍTULO TRADUCIDO: Cartas del “Gran Judío.” La red y conexiones internacionales de Joseph Nasi.

RESUMEN: Este artículo abarcará, en primer lugar, el entorno social y la red de contactos de Joseph Nasi en la Italia del siglo XVI y, en segundo lugar, sus estrategias y las relaciones que mantuvo desde Constantinopla con los gobernantes europeos, diplomáticos y comerciantes. Once cartas originales escritas por Joseph Nasi (de las cuales solo tres han sido publicadas en estudios previos) y otras cuatro dirigidas a él por príncipes italianos servirán para analizar sus relaciones con las familias gobernantes Medici y Este, así como con las repúblicas de Venecia y Ragusa. Esta correspondencia revela los negocios de Joseph Nasi, su objetivo de preservar los bienes de su familia y su influencia en los asuntos otomanos y, junto con otras fuentes diplomáticas previamente desconocidas, aporta información inédita sobre sus actos y estrategias para asegurar sus intereses. Este trabajo examinará también la amplitud de su entorno, su red internacional y su importancia como figura pública.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Joseph Nasi; Estados italianos; redes comerciales y de información.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Joseph Nasi (born João Micas)¹, was a wealthy and influential New Christian who later openly embraced Judaism after moving to the Ottoman Empire. Born in Portugal, raised in Flanders, he lived in Lisbon, Antwerp, Venice and Ferrara before ultimately settling in Constantinople. His rise to prominence was due in part to his close ties with Prince Selim (Sultan Suleiman's heir and successor) and Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha.

Nasi was the nephew – and later the son-in-law – of the powerful Doña Gracia Nasi, marrying her daughter Reyna in Constantinople. The extraordinary wealth and international network of the Mendes-Nasi *hacienda* enabled Don Joseph to establish direct contact with monarchs and princes across Europe, from the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V to the Ottoman Sultans.

This article draws on newly discovered archival sources, including the entirety of Nasi's surviving correspondence, which is systematically compared and analysed here for the first time.

To write about Joseph Nasi is nothing new, stated Norman Rosenblatt in 1957: "Many documents scattered throughout Europe and Asia Minor have yet to be seen; personal papers and letters remain to be discovered."² Eleven years after these words, Paul Grunebaum-Ballin's biography of the Duke of Naxos partially quoted for the first time the existence of a letter addressed to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francesco de' Medici, and signed in Nasi's own hand.³

This article will focus on Joseph Nasi's social connections and the extension of his contacts and trading networks as they appear in contemporary sources. This framework will be helpful for understanding the relevance of Don Joseph as a public figure: he was first mentioned in the correspondence between Emperor Charles V with his sister Mary, Regent of the Low Countries, already in 1545.⁴ His name also appears in contemporary Italian printed books and *avvisi*⁵ circulating in major Italian cities with news from Constantinople and the Levant.⁶

The letters published and translated in this article will help our understanding of the nature of the direct contacts between Joseph Nasi and several rulers (all Italian heads of state with the exception of the Republic of Ragusa). Of the eleven original letters bearing Don Joseph's own signature, only three have been published in previous studies.⁷ Four draft letters addressed to the 'great Jew' are also published and translated here, in order to integrate these exchanges and to contribute more to our understanding of the role acknowledged by Prince Selim's fa-

¹ "The rich Jew" or "the great Jew" were the nicknames used to refer to Joseph Nasi in Constantinople, as a German diplomat noted in 1577 in his diary: Gerlach 1674, 303. For a general bibliography on Joseph Nasi, in addition to the works mentioned in the course of this contribution, see: Kohn 1879; Kaufmann 1890, 1892; Schorr 1897; Galantè 1912, 1913; Rosenblatt 1965; Rose 1970; Yerasimos 1995; David 1998; Romeu Ferrè 2004; Abravanel 2005; Işıksele 2007; David 2017; Hendrickx and Sansaridou-Hendrickx 2017.

² Rosenblatt 1957, xxiv.

³ Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 163. Rosenblatt mentions the existence of this letter but mistakes the date: November 8 instead of November 7 (Rosenblatt 1957, 48).

⁴ Reznik, 1936, 53 n. 2.

⁵ *Avvisi* were handwritten sheets containing the latest information from major European cities, usually enclosed with diplomatic dispatches.

⁶ For example, the handwritten *avvisi* from Constantinople kept in the State Archives of Genoa, Florence and Modena. One example, which mentions Joseph Nasi, reached as far as Lisbon, see Tavim 2004, 253-282.

⁷ Appendix n. 1, 2, 12.

vorite from Western rulers: Ercole II d’Este duke of Ferrara, Cosimo I de’ Medici and his son Francesco, Grand Dukes of Tuscany.

It is also important to note that other drafts of letters addressed to him by the King of Poland, Sigismund II Augustus, and by the Duke of Savoy, Emanuele Filiberto, were published respectively by Mathias Bersohn and Cecil Roth.⁸

Analysis of these letters, not only help to clarify Don Joseph’s connection with European rulers beyond the myth of him as an influential advisor to sultans, but will also allow a clearer understanding of Joseph Nasi’s aims as implied in his formal correspondence.

In addition to the information contained in the letters published in the appendix, which provide new elements on the biography of Nasi, not forgetting the date of death of Doña Gracia Nasi,⁹ the analysis of this correspondence will help us to discover the real network of Don Joseph. The alleged political relevance of the “great Jew,” will therefore be tested in these newly found sources.

Other contemporary sources help reconstruct Joseph Nasi’s social environment during his years in Italy. Further insights into his life emerge from documents preserved in the state archives of Genoa, Modena and Florence.

In the years of the apogee, from their palace on the hills of the Pera vineyards, the Nasi were the collection point for information (and goods) arriving from India,¹⁰ thanks to their agents working on the trade routes passing through Egypt¹¹ and Syria.¹² In addition, Joseph Nasi’s network of agents and partners were scattered throughout the cities of Europe, extending the family’s connections in the countries of Western, Northern, and Southern Europe, such as England,¹³ France,¹⁴ Portugal,¹⁵ Poland¹⁶ and, of course, Italy, where he also counted on his informers in Venice and Rome¹⁷.

In this article I will use Don Joseph’s Christian name, João Micas, when referring to his Italian years, and I will use his Jewish name from the moment he moved to Constantinople.

⁸ Bersohn 1869, 422-424, see also Reznik 1936, 254-255; Roth 1967a, 460-472. The letter was first published by Cibrario 1839, 25-26.

⁹ Aunt and mother-in-law of Don Joseph Nasi. About this figure see Roth 1947; Brooks 2002; Birnbaum 2003; Adelman 2013; Leoni 1992; Salomon and Leoni 1998.

¹⁰ Tavim 2010, 220; 2013, 466-469.

¹¹ Couto 2005, 350.

¹² Leal 1884, 274, letter dated 11 November 1553. Leoni 2011, 259.

¹³ Leoni 2011, 258, 1028-1029.

¹⁴ See Appendix n. 11.

¹⁵ Roth 1967a, 463.

¹⁶ Schorr 1897, 169-177, 228-237.

¹⁷ Preto 1994, 100-102. See also the trial of Tomé Pegado de Paz published by Valentim 2004, 339-340: “... elle testemunha que há da fé Antonio de Fonseca christaomnovo residente em Corte de Roma mandaua cartas ao Micas a Constantinopla, pellas quaes lhe escreuia muitos auisos do que [se] passaua na Christandade contra o Turco pera que o ditto Micas as dissesse ao dito Turco e he lembrado que se dizia em Constantinopla entre judeus de dentro de casa do Micas, como o ditto Antonio de Fonseca auisara que nom emuistissem os turcos com a armada de dom João d’Austria, por ir muito bem apercebida” (Tavim 2013, 465).

2. THE WORTH OF AN INFORMATION NETWORK. JOÃO'S PROXIMITY TO DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES

The Mendes-Nasi family was a well-known wealthy family, mentioned already in the letters of papal nuncios in Portugal,¹⁸ in letters of Venetian and Florentine envoys in Antwerp.¹⁹

The Florentine Giorgio Dati wrote from Antwerp about the Mendes as “the leaders and most prominent family” among the New Christians. A book printed in Venice in 1552 lists them among the wealthiest people of the “modern” times, alongside major banking dynasties such as the Függer, the Welser, the Strozzi and the Grimaldi.²⁰

In Venice, João Micas, as we will see in the following paragraph, committed a crime that the Most Serene Republic regarded as a direct assault on its sovereignty: the abduction of João's young niece, the wealthy heir of Diogo Mendes' capitals. The news of this event would quickly reach Florence and Ferrara. In those reports, our protagonist appears to be already a known figure, a man who needs no introductions.²¹

The agents of the *hacienda* Mendes often operated in closed proximity the diplomatic representatives of the European sovereigns. João Micas maintained contact with the Portuguese ambassador in Rome, while Duarte Gomes, a trading partner and agent, had close ties to the Spanish ambassador in Venice.²² The Portuguese consul in Venice, Thomas de Cornoça, also supported and protected the Nasi agents in the city.²³ According to a witness who reported these agents to the Venetian Inquisition Office, the Nasi agents appeared to “manage the states, maintaining correspondence and connections in Flanders, Spain, France, Constantinople and in every region of the world, and not only with merchants but also with princes and important people.”²⁴

João's rapprochement with the political protagonists of his time was largely facilitated by his exceptional information network and his willingness to provide substantial loans to sovereigns in need of funds to finance their wars, as evidenced by his stay in Rome between July and November 1553.²⁵

Already in his late twenty's João Micas is remembered in Lucretia Gonzaga's correspondence for having delivered to the noblewoman hot news of Emperor Charles V's victory over the Turks in North Africa (probably the victory at the siege of Mahdia).²⁶

While in Rome seeking papal support for his marriage to his cousin Gracia *la Chica*, João met with the ambassador of the King of Portugal. He informed the Portuguese diplomat of his plans to move to the Levant “for few months,” in order to check on his business in Syria. The Portuguese ambassador, D. Afonso de Lencastre, appointed Micas to inform him of the latest news from the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, particularly the movement of the Ottoman fleet in the Persian Gulf, and entrusted him with a cipher to encrypt his dispatches, which were to be sent

¹⁸ Brooks 2002, 88, 123.

¹⁹ Biblioteca Marciana, Venezia (BMVe), Ms. IT VII, 992 (=9606), cc. 240-241, letter of Bernardo Navagero from Bruxelles, September 5, 1545 in Brooks 2002, 507, nn. 41 and 42; Archivio di Stato di Firenze (ASFi), Mediceo del Principato, f. 1170A fasc. III, c. 171r, letter of Giorgio Dati from Antwerp, October 26, 1545, in Brooks 2002, 197.

²⁰ Lando 1552b, 127. This reference appeared first in Rose 1970, 336-337.

²¹ See the letters mentioned in the notes 35 and 36.

²² Ioly Zorattini 1980, 241.

²³ Tavim 2015, 20-22.

²⁴ Translated by the author: Ioly Zorattini 1982, 71-72. Trial of Duarte Gomes and Augustin Enriques, 1568.

²⁵ See the note 27 and Rosenblatt 1957, 25.

²⁶ Lando 1552a, 264. The victory over the Muslim piracy in North Africa came on September 1550.

from Syria to Rome. The Portuguese diplomat would pass on these messages to his king.²⁷ This is testament to the rapid and trustworthy links that the Mendes heirs established with India during their time in Italy: a few years before João's departure, his aunt Beatriz de Luna (Gracia Nasi's Christian name) sent the physician of the Duke of Ferrara, Antonio Musa Brasavola, some extremely rare leaves of a plant called malabathrum (*Cinnamomum tamala*, also known as Malabar leaf), which grows on the slopes of the Himalayas. *La Señora* not only brought the plant from India to Ferrara, but also wrote to the Duke's physician about the historical use of this plant and its properties.²⁸

During this same stay in Rome, before moving to Levant, João Micas won the confidence of the French ambassador Louis de Lansac. He obtained letters of recommendation in order to be introduced to the French representative in Constantinople.²⁹ How did he gain such easy access? Nasi informed Lansac that he was eager to provide the French monarch with a large sum of money³⁰ at a crucial moment for the French King, Henry II, who was preparing a great military expedition in Italy to save Siena's independence from the Medici and to support the papal anti-Habsburg ambitions.

It is thought to have been during these years that João Micas presented himself at the court of Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence and his wife, the Spanish princess Eleonora de Toledo. A few years later, in a letter from Constantinople, João, now Joseph, recalled the "favors and the appreciated courtesy" he had received during his stay at the Medici court.³¹

It is worth noting the audacity of João Micas, who was able to promise a huge loan to the French King and at the same time revere the daughter of Don Pedro de Toledo, Viceroy of Naples, and one of the most trusted men in Italy of the French monarch's rival, Emperor Charles V.

3. JOÃO MICAS' "VENETIAN" CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

We know from a contemporary witness that "there are few social standing men in Spain, in Italy or in Flanders who do not know him."³² During his years in Antwerp he was both a companion and friend to Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, the future Duke and ruler of Piedmont,³³ as well as to the future Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg.³⁴

²⁷ Leal 1884, 274; Tavim 2004, 253-254.

²⁸ This reference was first mentioned in Segre 1996, 826; Brasavola 1551, fol. 43v-44r: "Brasavola. Folium quod malabathrum antiqui vocarunt non habetur in Italia, nec ad nos ab Indis defertur; tamen Indi folium quoddam habent quod masticant ad halitus suaveolentiam incitandam, et ego folium istud nactus sum ab illustri Beatrice de Luna lusitana: nobilissima virago haec ab Indis Ferrariam illud vehi iussit. [...] Illustris Beatrix de Luna mulier, si quae alia in toto orbe sit solertissima, non tantum me participem fecit malabathri, sed et ipsius historiam ac dotes scriptis tradidit." I am grateful to Gionata Liboni for this reference.

²⁹ Charrière 1850, 403-404 n. 1, quoting Chesneau's *Voyage en Turquie*; Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 68-69.

³⁰ Rosenblatt 1957, 25-26; Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 68-69.

³¹ Appendix n. 6.

³² Andres Laguna, *Viaje de Turquia*, in Serrano y Sanz 1905, 131.

³³ This fact is recorded in a letter written by Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy in 1572 to Joseph Nasi published first by Cibrario 1839, 460-472: "Al sig. Don Giuseppe. Illustrissimo signor, L'amicitia che già di lunga mano si contrasse fra di Noi essendo ne' Paesi Bassi, confermata dalla buona volontà di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima (tutta conforme a quella che le porto) dimostrata verso di me in molte occasioni aggiungendosi a questo l'amorevole natura di lei verso di ognuno come per altrui relatione ne vengo tuttavia reso più certo, mi ha spinto a valermi dell'opera sua come di persona che può assai presso del Gran Signore."

³⁴ Rosenblatt 1957, 113; Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 38.

Yet, it was not only princes and ambassadors who formed João's environment in his late Italian years. This more intimate kind of relationship does not usually survive in archival sources, as it does in correspondence with rulers.

An important event allows us to discover João's entourage and social relations in Venice. After the departure of his aunt, Gracia Nasi for Constantinople, and in order to preserve the future unity of the family fortune, João decided to abduct his cousin, Gracia *la chica*, from her mother's house (I. e. Brianda de Luna, Gracia's sister) with the help of his closest friends.

The ever-informed Ferrarese ambassador reported:

Last Monday (January) 16th around three hours after sunset, Giovan Miches, together with the help of many of his friends, abducted the daughter of *signora* Brianda, who he has had locked up in her house together with her servants. She [*Gracia la chica*] was put on a boat with twelve paddles and was taken away.³⁵

A Florentine informer added further details, reporting that this commando wore masks and entered the palace through the waterside gate, which had been left open by an accomplice within Brianda's retinue.³⁶

The events that followed the kidnapping of her cousin Gracia *la chica* from her mother's house and her escape from the Venetian state have been reconstructed by Ravid³⁷ and by Ioly Zorattini.³⁸ A study of the people involved in this plan allows us a glimpse of the social horizon of João Micas. As the young scion of a very wealthy family, knighted by the Emperor Charles V,³⁹ and serving at his court,⁴⁰ he established relationships with members of the highest ranks of the Italian (not just Venetian) elite. João entrusted this risky operation to a group of experienced men of arms, willing to risk their reputations (perhaps in exchange for a good reward) for an illustrious friend or companion, but at the same time aware of their social recognition. Their fall from grace did not last long.⁴¹

Among the people involved in the kidnapping, two of them belonged to wealthy Bolognese families: First Giovan Francesco dall'Armi (about fifty years old at the time). Two years before the events, he held one of the highest positions in Bologna's political institutions.⁴² About a month after Dall'Armi's arrest, the papal nuncio in Venice exerted pressure to secure his release.⁴³ The

³⁵ Archivio di Stato di Modena (ASMo), ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori Venezia, b 39, Feruffini to duke Ercole II, Venice January 19, 1553, (letter 88-viii-10). "Lunedì passato 16, intorno alle tre di notte da Giovan Miches fuò con interventione de molti suoi amici tolta la figliuola della s.ra Brianda la quale subito da esso serrata predicta essa madre et servitori, in casa, fuo imbarcata sopra barca de xii rhemi et condotta via dove sin mò non se intende, presumessi a Triesto."

³⁶ ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 413, c. 298r: "E' nato lunedì sera un caso in questa città molto brutto in fra queste marane e marani. A do, armato con x compagni in maschera el s.or Gian Mische et con una barca armata, con intendimento di uno di casa che haveva lasatto la riva aperta et robbò la figliola di Brianda, fanciula di xii in xiii anni in sieme con la donna che la governava et un ragazo, et la misse in barca et si andarono con Dio."

³⁷ Ravid 1983, 159-181.

³⁸ Ioly Zorattini 2011, 457-478.

³⁹ This information comes from Andres Laguna's *Viaje de Turquia*, see Serrano y Sanz 1905, 131.

⁴⁰ Dernschwam 2014, 117.

⁴¹ See the case of Alvise Giustinian, Ravid 1983, 171. For the case of Giovan Francesco Dall'Armi see Firpo and Marcatto 1987, 474-475: "Interrogatus an ipse testis unquam fuerit processatus vel inquisitus de aliquo crimine vel delicto, respondit: 'Non io, se non una volta in Venetia, che dicevano che io havea fatto fugire una donna et non fu vero, et mi lassorno stare et andare'."

⁴² Alidosi 1616, 30. Dall'Armi held the office from January to April 1551.

⁴³ Firpo and Marcatto 1987, 475; Ravid 1983, 175.

second Bolognese, Bartolomeo Bargellini, brother of the senator Gaspare, who was knighted by Charles V in the year 1530,⁴⁴ was involved in the bloody assassination of a relative. Bartolomeo, aware of his "untouchable" status due to his rank, had organized a kind of crime syndicate together with other powerful scions of the Bolognese aristocracy (Ranuzzi, Berò, Dall'Armi, Guidotti), carrying out contract killings and extortion. His gang was caught together with the hidden graveyard of Bargellini's victims in his own backyard.⁴⁵

Alessandro Rois and Alvise Giustinian (also known in Italian language as Luigi Giustiniani, born in 1521 and died in 1601⁴⁶) were both Venetian captains who served on a papal galley in 1538 during the military campaign against the Ottoman fleet in the Ionian Sea (the Turkish-Venetian war).⁴⁷ The latter, who belonged to an important Venetian patrician family, in spite of the punishment he received, gained an important political career in the following years, being appointed *podestà* of the city of Padua and later *provveditore generale* (governor) of the island of Crete.⁴⁸

Abbot Bibbiena, that is, Bernardo Dovizi, was described as a "very close friend of the aforementioned Miches."⁴⁹ Despite his ecclesiastical title,⁵⁰ Dovizi took part in the same military expedition as Rois and Giustinian, commanding a papal galley from the city of Ancona⁵¹ and fighting off the Greek coast of Prevesa. During this battle, he was enslaved by the Ottoman fleet led by Hayreddin Pasha (Barbarossa) and taken to Constantinople where he was freed "after having paid a huge headmoney."⁵² The abbot was the nephew of the late Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, an influential diplomat and humanist, and was in contact with the most influential and politically connected *letterato* of his times, Pietro Aretino.⁵³

Like the brothers Bernardo and João Micas in the case of Ortensio Lando's *Due Panegirici* (1552), or the single João for Alonso Nunes de Reinoso's novel *Clareo y Florisea*,⁵⁴ a book printed in Venice was also dedicated to Abbot Bibbiena: the Spanish translation of Antonfrancesco Doni's, *La zucca*.⁵⁵

The only woman involved in the kidnapping of João's cousin was Medea Pavoni (referred to as "Paon" in the sources studied by Ravid),⁵⁶ a *cortigiana*.⁵⁷ Born in Bergamo,⁵⁸ she was deeply involved in the Venetian *letterati*'s environment. The musician and writer Girolamo Parabosco dedicated to her a daring letter from his work *Lettere amorose* (1549).⁵⁹ She was the late lover of another member of the Dall'Armi family, Ludovico, former agent of the King of England in

⁴⁴ This information comes from the portrait of Gaspare Bargellini by the Bolognese painter Bartolomeo Passerotti, kept in the Museo Davia Bargellini, Bologna.

⁴⁵ Rinieri 1998, 260-261 n. 71.

⁴⁶ Ioly Zorattini 2011, 463, n. 24.

⁴⁷ Guglielmotti 1887, 25-26.

⁴⁸ Cicogna 1834, 179.

⁴⁹ Ioly Zorattini 2011, 461.

⁵⁰ Bernardo Dovizi must have taken only the minor orders and was appointed as a commendatory abbot.

⁵¹ Guglielmotti 1887, 25, 60.

⁵² Ulloa 1563, 101.

⁵³ Aretino 1609a, 226; 1609b, 28.

⁵⁴ Rose 1970, 336.

⁵⁵ Doni 1551, 2.

⁵⁶ Ravid 1983, 172.

⁵⁷ Salza 1917, 62-63, 65.

⁵⁸ Gussago 1804, 86.

⁵⁹ Parabosco 1547, 13v-24r.

Venice, beheaded in 1547.⁶⁰ Medea was the sister of Ippolita, mistress of the famous archbishop and *letterato* Giovanni della Casa,⁶¹ papal nuncio in Venice between 1544 and 1550 and author of the “best seller” treatise *Galateo overo de’ costumi* (published posthumously in 1558).

In short, João Micas’ Venetian social environment, with local aristocrats as well as natives from other Italian states (Tuscany, Bologna), was a mixture of power, violence, impunity, solid social and political connections and a love of literature. This interest, which must have been shared by João Micas, seems to have continued to be cultivated during his lifetime. Many years later, during Easter 1575, in Constantinople, the play *Reyna Esther*, written in Spanish by Lazaro Levi and Solomon Usque, was performed in the ducal palace of Don Joseph, called the Belvedere, before his guests, the imperial ambassador and his entourage, and some other Venetian guests.⁶² This work was first performed in Venice in 1559, several years after João’s banishment.⁶³

4. SETTLING IN THE OTTOMAN CAPITAL

Whether João left Italy intending to return within a few months as he revealed to the Portuguese ambassador or not, from that moment on, his horizon remained fixed on Constantinople for the rest of his life. He may have given up the idea of having his Christian marriage to his cousin Gracia *la Chica* recognised, or perhaps he could not get the Sultan’s support in this matter, despite the letter of recommendation from ambassador Lansac. He embraced Judaism and married the other cousin, Reyna, the daughter of Gracia Nasi.

João, now Joseph Nasi, certainly found a favorable environment in which links with Europe were highly valued, and where the European know-how in warfare, finance and trade was highly regarded.

Joseph quickly gained influence at the Ottoman court of Prince Selim. He became his *muteferrika* already before 1558.⁶⁴ This title, equal to the rank of gentleman of the household, was usually given to the sons of vassal princes (such as those of Moldova and Vallachia) or to the sons of chancellors and pashas of the Ottoman sultans.⁶⁵ A few years later, after his brother Beyazid fled to the Safavid Empire, Selim became the sole heir to his father’s throne.

It is known that Nasi presented himself as a jeweller at the court of Prince Selim in Magnesia.⁶⁶ Precious stones usually arrived from India, where the Nasi had direct connections. But this skill was probably not the most crucial factor for the influence he gained.

Thanks to a Genoese *avviso*, we know that Joseph, together with his brother Bernardo, served as military advisors to Prince Selim, accompanying him on one of his final campaigns as heir to the throne, carried out to secure the borders of Persia in March 1566.⁶⁷

⁶⁰ Arrighi 1986, 31-34; Salza 1917, 65.

⁶¹ Mazzoni Toselli 1842, 178; Salza 1917, 65; Di Benedetto 1991, 337.

⁶² Gerlach 1674, 48.

⁶³ Roth 1967b; Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 154 n. 1.

⁶⁴ In a letter dated January(?) 2[...] 1557 addressed to the duke of Ferrara, ambassador Codignac already mentioned the title of *muteferrika* obtained by Nasi, ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di Oratori, Rettori, Vescovi, b. 1750/15, fasc. “oratori di Francia in Turchia”.

⁶⁵ Entry “muteferrika” by Erhan Afyoncu in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (online), <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/muteferrika>

⁶⁶ Galantè 1913, 11-12; Tavim 2015, 264.

⁶⁷ Archivio di Stato di Genova (ASGe), Archivio Segreto, b. 2170, *avviso* dated march 8 1566 : “Il signore [sultan Suleiman] avendo considerato eser bene mandarlo ali confini dela Persia con questo campo per sechurità de quele parte,

The sultan considered that was a good thing to send (his son Selim) to the Persian borders with an army for the security of that region. He ordered him to go to the borders and to stay for all the Sultan's campaign in Hungary. People say that next month the prince Selim will move from the city of Kuthaya where he currently rules, and he will go to the place the sultan ordered him to go. Gioan Miches and his brother, both *marrani*, were summoned at the court of prince Selim because they are his men of arms, in order to follow him to the campaign and on the 2nd day of this month they left (Constantinople).

After his arrival in Constantinople, Nasi was able to import "all sorts of equipment such as armor, helmets, guns, long and short lances [...] battle axes and large and small muskets."⁶⁸ Andres Laguna recognized him as "a good soldier, cultivated and loyal."⁶⁹ Don Joseph's military skills were also evident in the lead-up to the Cyprus War. In April 1570, he prepared wooden models of fortresses and drawings of Cyprus, as well as designing a prototype scow suitable for disembarking Ottoman soldiers on the Cypriot coast.⁷⁰

During the same period, a French cargo, driven by the wrong winds, reached the Venetian island of Crete. On board, the Venetian authorities found two hundred New Christians with a cargo of several thousand arquebuses from France, destined for the Ottoman Sultan.⁷¹ Given his undercover trading adventures in France – as we will see, it could be that Joseph Nasi was involved in the arms trade.

Don Joseph's public image was consolidated after Selim's accession and reinforced in the public *avvisi* circulating in the main Italian cities. Shortly after the accession of the new Sultan, during Selim's stay in Constantinople before his departure for Hungary, a crucial moment to secure his power over the Empire, the Sultan received the newly appointed Duke of Naxos in his palace every day.⁷²

[Concerning] Gioan Miches marrano, now called don Josef Nassi, when entering in Constantinople, the sultan Selim appointed him the duchy of Naxos with all its incomes, some say as a gift, others say he [Nasi] will pay him a toll.⁷³ During the three days the Sultan stayed in Constantinople, he summoned [Joseph Nasi] two or three times in his palace in order to talk to him.

However, we should not forget to mention that his title of Duke in the Ottoman context, did not mean the ennoblement of the Nasi family. Despite the use of a Christian noble title (a concept

a comandato se ne vadi a deti confini et li fermarssi fino chel gran signor starà in Hongaria e dichono questa luna nova soltan Selim se levarà dal suo sangiachato de Chutia [Kutahya] et andará al locho hordenato dal gran signor. Gioan Miches et suo fratello marani sono sta chiamati ala corte de soltan Selim per eser suo homeni de arme, aziò vadino con lui in campo e ali 2 del instante [the current month] sono partiti."

⁶⁸ Hans Dernschwam's *Tagebuch* translated by Rosenblatt 1957, 151.

⁶⁹ "... hera gentil hombre y diestro en armas y bien leido y amigo de amigos" see Laguna, *El viaje*, in Serrano y Sanz 1905, 131.

⁷⁰ BMVe, MS IT. VII, 390 (=8872), f. 357r, letter of Marcantonio Barbaro from Pera dated April 3, 1570. MS IT. VII, 391 (=8873), f. 6r, letter of Marcantonio Barbaro from Pera dated April 7, 1570.

⁷¹ ASMo, ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori Venezia, b. 53, Claudio Ariosti to the duke of Ferrara, April 8, 1570 (letter 96-VII-31): "L'altra che in Candia era stata trasportata dal vento una nave francese et ritenuta carica di parecchie mila archibuggi, et ducento marani che conducevano quest'armi al Turco, cosa della quale non ne hanno nova alcuna questi signori francesi nè la credono tampoco."

⁷² ASGe, Archivio segreto, b. 2170 *avviso* from Constantinople dated October 7, 1566: "Gioan Miches marano ora nominato don Josef Nassi, el gran signore soltan Selim nela sua intrata in Costantinopoli gli conzesse el duchato de Nixsia con tute le sue intrate, altri dicono in presente, altri dicono li pagará il tributo. Neli 3 giorni che stete qui el gran signor lo mandò a chiamar 2/3 volte nel suo saralio [serraglio] a parlar con lui."

⁷³ "Tributo" in the original text, meaning the contribution owed to the ruler for being appointed of a fief.

that was extraneous within the Ottoman society) his role was equal to that of a sanjak, or local governor.⁷⁴

The next section explores the main interests shared between Joseph Nasi and the Este and Medici families, ties that continued even after the Nasi family had settled in Constantinople. The surviving letters primarily concern trading activities and financial matters. One of these documents provides evidence of how Don Joseph conducted business by concealing the Nasi family name and operating through intermediaries of other merchants. One such example is the Florentine merchant Pietro del Benino, whom Don Joseph used to gain access to the French market. Similarly, the loan granted to the French monarchy which, when left unpaid, led to the seizure of the French goods in Alexandria, may also have originated from this same practice. According to the French ambassador Pétre mol “Miques had placed around one hundred thousand *scudi* in the *Grand Parti* of Lyon, under the name of Luca Albizi, Florentine banker.”⁷⁵ The French, for their part, later claimed that the debt had been fully repaid.⁷⁶ This method of using aliases or intermediaries had already been employed by Doña Gracia during her years in Venice.⁷⁷ Joseph Nasi may have followed a deliberate strategy of obscuring his identity in order to safeguard his capital from potential seizure.

5. AFFAIRS WITH THE ESTE FAMILY

In his Italian period, João Micas’ first surviving letter, written in July 1552, is addressed to Ercole II d’Este, Duke of Ferrara.⁷⁸ João does not yet offer any possible favor or mediation or exclusive transmission of information, as will be the case in all the later correspondence. The content of the letter reveals only João’s wish to obtain the Duke’s help in a judicial quarrel against his uncle Aires de Luna, who lived in Ferrara.⁷⁹ This demonstrates the extent of his long-standing commitment, dating back to the confrontation with Mary of Habsburg, to supporting Beatriz de Luna (Gracia Nasi) in safeguarding his aunt’s capital.

From Constantinople, Nasi wrote again to the Duke of Ferrara in January 1557, the first surviving letter to use his Jewish name.⁸⁰ The letter shows that, two and a half years after his marriage, he was actively collaborating with Doña Gracia to secure the family’s fortune. Just eight months later, his brother Samuel married the young Gracia *la chica*, who had been left alone in Ferrara after her mother’s death.⁸¹ Joseph Nasi stated with false modesty that “there is no such great prince that at least some time does not need (a service) from a private person, nor a man of humble condition that can’t display any (useful) service.”⁸²

At a moment of great difficulty for his state, the Duke of Ferrara asked the Nasi family for financial help. On December 7, 1557, Ercole II wrote to Joseph Nasi in Constantinople, informing

⁷⁴ Vantin 2004; Kohn 1879, 117: “ut ab eodem ducatu quoque Naxi, quae insula est in Aegaeo mari, zanziacchico jure donatus fuerit.”

⁷⁵ Translated by the author, Grunebaum Ballin 1968, 103. Luca degli Albizi, a Florentine merchant and banker who was living in Venice, appeared to be a solid business partner with the Nasi, see Palladini 2025.

⁷⁶ Rosenblatt 1957, 86-87.

⁷⁷ Brooks 2002, 220.

⁷⁸ Appendix n. 1

⁷⁹ There is no other mention of this family quarrel in this phase of the Mendes history.

⁸⁰ Appendix n. 2.

⁸¹ Brianda de Luna died in July 1556, see Leoni 2011, 357, 1060-1061.

⁸² Appendix n. 2.

him of his request for a loan from Gracia Nasi and asking Nasi to mediate "since I know very well how much you are good and influential towards her."⁸³ This suggests that the true decision-maker behind the family's business operations was Doña Gracia Nasi, a woman whom even her nephew referred to, with evident respect, as "mia Signora."⁸⁴

The Duke of Ferrara, a surprising figure of a duke-merchant, was directly involved in the trade with the Levant. Further evidence of this involvement appears in later correspondence with Nasi, which includes references to the importation of horses from Ottoman lands. The Duke had already agreed to the purchase and obtained the permission, but suddenly the seven horses were detained with no explanation. Duke Ercole sought the support of Joseph Nasi in October 1557,⁸⁵ instructing his secretary to address the letter using the Jewish name instead of his Christian name, João Micas, which continued to be used by the French and Spanish⁸⁶ diplomats and in the *avvisi* sheets until the end of his life. Acceptance of the use of his newly chosen name was acceptance of his new Jewish faith. The Duke of Ferrara appeared to have strikingly different ideas from most of the other European monarchs. For example, the French monarchy used the return to Judaism as a primary pretext to avoid repaying the money it had borrowed.⁸⁷ In dialogue with the tolerant Pope Paul III, Ercole II d'Este declared that he considered the New Christians, despite their baptism, "as Jews and not as Christians, allowing the Portuguese to live in his state freely as Jews, as well as the most excellent Duke of Florence."⁸⁸

Don Joseph's reply, dated 6 January, reached Ferrara at the end of February 1558.⁸⁹ Thanks to this letter, we know that a message from Ercole II to the Gran Vizier Rüstem Pasha⁹⁰ was first addressed to Joseph Nasi. It is evident that the Chancellery of Ferrara, with no direct diplomatic representatives in the Levant, used the extensive commercial network of Nasi's agents, a network very well known to the French ambassador in Constantinople, in order to make the journey of a diplomatic letter quick and safe.⁹¹ On other occasions, the Duke of Ferrara relied on merchants involved in the Levant to deliver his letters to the region.⁹²

Returning to the matter of the horses, Don Joseph was apparently unable to resolve Ercole's issue. He did not fulfill the service "in person" as the Duke had requested, "since the Porte is nowadays in Adrianople." Nasi's request for a copy of the authorization for the export of horses, issued by the French ambassador, may have cast a shadow over his attitude towards the new

⁸³ Appendix n. 4. About the Nasi financing the war of the duke of Ferrara see Palladini 2025.

⁸⁴ Appendix n. 2.

⁸⁵ Appendix n. 3.

⁸⁶ See for instance: ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di Oratori, Rettori, Vescovi, Oratori b. 1760, Guzman de Silva to Alfonso II, Venice, October 31, 1571.

⁸⁷ Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 109-110.

⁸⁸ Ioli Zorattini 1984, 140.

⁸⁹ Appendix n. 5.

⁹⁰ The draft copy of this letter has not been found in the Este archive, but the letter was surely related to the same issue.

⁹¹ Charrière 1850, 416: "[Joseph Nasi] se mesle continuellement de vouloir entendre le secret de vos affaires en ceste Porte pour en faire son profit là où bon luy semble, et ayant le moyen qu'il a par ses ministres juifs qui sont en Italie d'entendre toutes nouvelles de Franquie, les communiquant de jour et jour au bassa, nous tient si subjects par deçà, et bien souvent nous empesche si bien nos desseings, qu'il est nécessaire pour vostre service de luy faire perdre le crédit que, par ce moyen et les présents qu'il faict journellement, il a gaigné."

⁹² See for example the mention of the Florentine merchant Ottaviano Gerini in a letter from the French ambassador in Constantinople to Ercole II d'Este: ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di Oratori, Rettori, Vescovi, b. 1750/15 fasc. "Ambasciatori di Francia in Turchia," letter dated July 28, 1553: "je ne m'estandray monseigneur par la presente que a respondre sur la derniere de voz lettres du xiii juign que m'à baillée M. Ottaviano Gerini marchand florentin."

French ambassador M. De la Vigne, whom he accused of “meddling continuously to know your [the French King’s] affairs in this Porte.”⁹³ In fact, in a letter written just a few months prior to the horse affair, the French ambassador reported that he had been “tyrannized” by him in the recent past.⁹⁴

We have a vivid image of Don Joseph’s presence at Prince Selim’s court. A letter written to Alfonso II, the new Duke of Ferrara, in February 1561 concerning the loans previously granted by his aunt Gracia and the quarrel against Augustin Enriques.⁹⁵ On this latter issue, Joseph had even sought the intervention of Cosimo de’ Medici on his behalf.⁹⁶ Don Joseph persuaded Alfonso by telling him that when he had introduced his brother Samuel at Selim’s court, he had discussed European affairs (“le cose di Franchia”) with other distinguished “princes” forming Selim’s retinue. Among the matters discussed by the group was the Duke of Ferrara himself. Nasi announced the forthcoming arrival in Ferrara of an envoy from Prince Selim, together with a Jewish interpreter and Nasi’s agent, the physician David. In his usual very direct tone, Nasi foreshadowed the future prince’s request addressed to Alfonso II “to recover money from the hands of another,” offering a vague benefit that Prince Selim would grant in the future. It is noteworthy that this letter mentions Don Joseph’s mansion, with the evocative name of Belvedere for the first time, located outside Pera.⁹⁷ In the letter sent ten months earlier to Duke Cosimo de’ Medici, Joseph Nasi used only the name of the area chosen for the establishment of his household, i.e. the Vineyards of Pera, an area facing the Bosphorus outside the northern walls of the city of Pera, where the villas and residences of European ambassadors were usually located.⁹⁸

Don Joseph’s Belvedere included an academy, a private synagogue (his hazan was João Bezerra), a library, a jousting field and a printing press.⁹⁹ The building itself must also have been large, as his retinue grew from twenty members in 1554, when he had just arrived in Costantino-ple, to seventy just before the Cyprus war.¹⁰⁰ The name chosen for the mansion was probably inspired by Duke Ercole II’s villa surrounded by gardens on an almond-shaped island outside the walls of Ferrara.

The Ottoman *çavuş* and his Jewish interpreter, the physician David, arrived in Ferrara in June 1561.¹⁰¹ The envoy handed over Prince Selim’s letter, in which Don Joseph was bombastically introduced as “highly honored *muteferrika*, European prince among his equals, highly esteemed, famous, honored and loved, our servant, called Joseph,”¹⁰² and asked him to help recover 35,000 gold ducats from Augustin Enriques, “agent of the above-mentioned Joseph [...]. He also stated

⁹³ Charrière 1850, 416.

⁹⁴ The letter to the French ambassador in Venice Lodovico, Adrianople, April 1, 1557, in: Charrière 1850, 389: “Micques, voyant le besoin que j’avois de luy, m’a tyrannizé.”

⁹⁵ Appendix n. 10.

⁹⁶ Appendix n. 9.

⁹⁷ Appendix n. 14 and the document transcribed by Levy 1859, 52 n. 74.

⁹⁸ Bertelè 1932, 232-235; Dusteler 2006, 25-26.

⁹⁹ Rosenblatt 1957, 151-152; Couto 2005, 346.

¹⁰⁰ Dernschwam 2014, 117; Arce 1953, 280, doc. 4.

¹⁰¹ ASMo, ASE, Archivio per materie, Medici e Medicina, b. 5 fasc. “David,” draft letter of Alfonso II to prince Selim dated June 15, 1561. This figure is mentioned also by Roth 1948, 12 and Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 126; for the Ferrarese stay of the Ottoman envoy and his Jewish interpreter see also: Cazzola 2000, 259.

¹⁰² Translated by the author, official Italian translation by the dragoman Ibrahim bey of the letter sent by prince Selim to Alfonso II d’Este, Konya, Novembre 1st, 1560, ASMo, ASE, Archivio per materie, Medici e Medicina, b. 5 fasc. “David”.

that the late Duke of Ferrara, your father, received 43,000 *scudi* from the goods of his brother Ismail's [i. e. Samuel's] wife, who was married there [in Ferrara]"¹⁰³.

Again in 1563, two other letters sent by Prince Selim to Alfonso II through another *çavuş* insisted on the same request "in favor of the honored among the honored ones who serve at my sublime porte, the European lord (translated as 'Italian') Yusuf, who is intended to serve at my sublime porte, he never misses day and night to fulfil his duty."¹⁰⁴

In fact, as recent findings have revealed, a substantial portion of Ercole II's debts – amounting to 43,000 *scudi* – had already been repaid several years earlier.¹⁰⁵

Despite the influence gained in those years, counting on a friendly and supportive Grand Vizier, i.e. Rüstem Pasha, the distant Duchy of Ferrara seems to have been immune to Don Joseph's influence and requests. There was no direct reply from the Duke of Ferrara addressed to Don Joseph.

6. CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE MEDICI

As mentioned above, Joseph Nasi seems to have had a long correspondence with Cosimo de' Medici, Duke of Florence and later Grand Duke of Tuscany. Several letters were exchanged between the Duke of Florence and the future Duke of Naxos between 1558 and 1561. These are the years in which the presence in Florence of a wealthy relative¹⁰⁶ of Don Joseph, Enrique Nunes (also known by his nickname "Righetto"), member of the Enriques/Nunes family is proven.¹⁰⁷ In the Tuscan capital, Righetto lived as a Christian and was involved in some financial and trading operations on behalf of the Duke of Ferrara,¹⁰⁸ but also "attending at the court of the Duke of Florence, banqueting together with *signor* Duke and *signora* Duchess [of Florence] and their children, and their apartment were always open to him," and even gambled enormous sums with Cosimo de' Medici, owing him the sum of 70,000 *scudi* for just one loss.¹⁰⁹

The correspondence with the Duke of Florence shows us that Don Joseph did not do anything for nothing: his first pompous letter showed his eagerness to serve the Duke and the whole Tuscan nation, offering his support to the Florentine ambassador who had arrived in Constantinople.¹¹⁰ A letter from Florence arrived a year later: Cosimo showed himself to be aware of Joseph Nasi's efforts, of "the good deeds you did on favor of me and the Tuscan people"; in fact, there was a colony of Florentine merchants in the Levant. The key role played by important merchants such as Joseph Nasi deserves particular attention. With the ability to transfer large sums of capital between Europe and the Levant, Nasi could convert letters of credits issued in Europe to Con-

¹⁰³ Translated by the author, Italian translation of a letter of prince Selim addressed to Alfonso II d'Este, Konya, November 1560, in ASMo, ASE, Carteggio principi esteri, b. 1612, "Turchia," published by Leoni 1992, 133-134.

¹⁰⁴ Translated by the author, Italian translation by Michele Mambre of Selim's letter to Alfonso II, 27 March 1563, in: ASMo, ASE, Carteggio Principi Esteri, b. 1621, fasc. "Turchia."

¹⁰⁵ Palladini 2025.

¹⁰⁶ The blood ties between Enrique Nunes and Don Joseph will become a problem in Venice, in 1571, for the risk that "for the kinship with Giovanni Michas he can know something about this League" [i.e. the Holy League against the Ottomans], Claudio Ariosti to the Duke of Ferrara published by Ioly Zorattini 1997, 46.

¹⁰⁷ About the Enriques/Nunes family see Leoni 2011, 403-421; Bethencourt 2024, 72-75.

¹⁰⁸ Leoni 2011, 1080, 1082, 1149. See also ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di particolari, b. 477 fasc "Enriquez," Enrique Nunes to Ercole II from Florence dated 1558, January 13 and march 26.

¹⁰⁹ Ioly Zorattini 1984, 42-43. Trial of Enrique Nunes.

¹¹⁰ Appendix 6.

stantinople.¹¹¹ This financial capacity was essential in facilitating the export of substantial quantities of Levantine cloth, spices and wheat. It is likely that the credit gained by Don Joseph among the Florentines is due to this. Moreover, he became an essential broker for the needs of Western diplomats settled in Constantinople, in need of huge cash to carry out their negotiations.

Eventually, the Duke of Florence asked him to advise and guide his new ambassador, Albertaccio Alberti, who had just arrived in Constantinople.¹¹² In these letters there is no clear reference to the “important businesses”¹¹³ that the Florentine diplomat set up in 1560 with Nasi’s support, certainly in favor of Tuscan trading ambitions. All we know is that, in the words of Don Joseph, “now the way is free of important obstacles, since other competitors never lack, but the task can be accomplished quickly, so that they will not give us trouble.” The friendly Rüstem Pasha was still Gran Vizier. Things may have changed quickly after his death and the rise of Sokollu Mehmed, who was more hostile to the “great Jew.”

In the following letters to the Medici, there is no mention of any political action taken by Nasi, he simply introduces himself as an advisor. Don Joseph’s focus turned mainly to his personal affairs. We have already mentioned the request addressed to Cosimo, in April 1560, to provide Duarte Gomes with a recommendation letter, for his task to “recover a sum of money owed us in Ferrara from Portuguese people,” namely the 35,000 golden scudi owed by Augustin Enriques.¹¹⁴

In the last surviving letter addressed to Cosimo,¹¹⁵ written more than a year and a half later, in November 1561, the future Duke of Naxos’ usual direct tone is openly expressed, together with some details of his trading strategies.

The letter was sent after a long silence between the two men, since the duke of Florence no longer included Nasi in his plans. After having labelled the Medici ambassador to Constantinople as a person “more suitable to work as a shopkeeper than to handle such prince’s office,”¹¹⁶ and after having apologized to Cosimo for being too “presumptuous” in this harsh judgment, the future Duke of Naxos made a daring request.

In order to send a ship loaded with alum, cotton and spices to France, Joseph Nasi used the alias of Piero del Benino, a Florentine merchant living in Pera. In case of further need, Don Joseph needed to exempt the Florentine merchant from the payment of taxes and customs due to the Florentine ambassador, and he asked the Medici to grant him a privilege for such operations.

According to Don Joseph’s words, this business between the Levant and France was actually a partnership with the late Gran Vizier, Rüstem Pasha. His joint venture with the former Grand Vizier is an index of his social recognition as a skilled trader. Another Jewish merchant, Hayym Saruq, was involved in a trading operation with the Gran Vizier Sokollu Mehmet some two years later, exporting (or rather smuggling) a huge load of cloth (957 *braccia* long) to Venice.¹¹⁷ Sharing a business with joint trading operation with representatives of the political power was a guarantee of protection from any “international” risk. It seems that the export of Ottoman alums

¹¹¹ See for instance: Orfali 2002, 195. See also the role of Joseph Nasi as “argentier du Roy” in Levant: Rosenblatt 1957, 84 n. 38; Grunebaum Ballin 1968, 100.

¹¹² Appendix 7.

¹¹³ Appendix 8.

¹¹⁴ Appendix n. 9.

¹¹⁵ Appendix 11

¹¹⁶ The Florentine ambassador suffered the wrath of the Grand Vizier Rüstem pasha, who arrested him. Semiz Ali pasha, one of Rüstem’s successors, released him. Albertaccio degli Alberti was expelled from Constantinople in 1565 on the orders of the sultan. See Passerini 1869, 226; Mercan 2020, 172.

¹¹⁷ Arbel 1995, 101-103.

to Europe was a great business for Joseph Nasi as well as for other Levantine Jews.¹¹⁸ Still in 1569 there is evidence of a cargo of 451 pounds of alum from the city of Rocha (in Mesopotamia) belonging to Joseph Nasi and destined as payment of a debt to a merchant living in Genoa.¹¹⁹

The last contacts between the Duke of Naxos and the Medici are dated just nine months before his death in Constantinople in August 1579.

The new Grand Duke, Francesco de' Medici, who had succeeded his father Cosimo, planned to increase trade with Constantinople.¹²⁰ The new Florentine ambassador, Bongianni Gianfigliuzzi, arrived in the Ottoman capital in June 1578. Before his audience with the Grand Vizier, Sokollu Mehmet pasha,¹²¹ the Florentine ambassador had been introduced at Don Joseph's palace with a letter from Grand Duke Francesco.¹²² This was not a good choice. The Grand Vizier seemed irritated by this visit, telling Gianfigliuzzi that "the sultan's businesses should not be discussed in a Jew's house."¹²³ The same response had previously been given by the same Grand Vizier to the Imperial ambassadors of Maximilian of Habsburg who had arrived in Constantinople on the occasion of the peace talks.¹²⁴ However, Mehmet Sokollu's hostility towards the great Jew was surely not due to the difference of religious beliefs. During the same period, Salomon Nathan Ashkenazi gained the Grand Vizier's favor as advisor for European affairs, a broker for European nations (such as Poland, Venice and Ferrara) and a provider of news from Europe.¹²⁵ The Grand Duke also opted to continue his negotiations with Ashkenazi rather than with Nasi.¹²⁶

After ten years of absence from the Levant, Joseph Nasi's support for the financial needs of the newly arrived Florentine representative was an obligation, given the recent absence of Tuscan merchants¹²⁷ and the open hostility of their Venetian and French counterparts.¹²⁸

The Florentine ambassador tried to fix the mistake of having approached the Duke of Naxos by ignoring him from that moment on.¹²⁹ In his bitter message to Grand Duke Francesco, Nasi showed himself to be fully aware of the envoy's behavior, once again demonstrating his deep knowledge of the reasons for the Medici's diplomatic defeat at the Porte:

... since the matter which your ambassador sought to obtain at all costs – namely, that in the service of Your Highness or of the Order [i. e. the military order of Saint Stephen] there remain war galleys bound to serve the enemy in all his needs – appeared to be outside the bounds of propriety, it seems they were unwilling to grant it. [...] this ambassador wanted to act according to his own wish and without the advice of true friends, this was the ultimate cause of mission's failure.¹³⁰

¹¹⁸ Arbel 1995, 105.

¹¹⁹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASVe), not. G. B. Monti, reg. 8257, October 7, 1569, in Leoni 2011, 260.

¹²⁰ Mercan 2016, 20-21.

¹²¹ Mercan 2016, 23.

¹²² The draft copy of this was not found in Grand Duke Francesco's *minutario*. It is mentioned in Don Joseph's reply.

¹²³ Appendix n. 15.

¹²⁴ Grunebaum Ballin 1968, 138-139.

¹²⁵ About this figure see Gerlach 1674, 155; Diena 1897-1898; Zoller 1909; Roth 1960; Arbel 1991, 1995.

¹²⁶ Zoller 1909, 145-151.

¹²⁷ Appendix n. 15.

¹²⁸ Mercan 2016, 23-24, 27; 2020, 175-176.

¹²⁹ Appendix n. 14.

¹³⁰ Appendix n. 14.

This is exactly what happened between Florence and Constantinople that year.¹³¹

7. A MESSAGE TO THE DOGE OF VENICE

The mixing of private favors with supposed future service to the rulers was a common strategy employed by Don Joseph in his correspondence with other Italian princes, such as Cosimo I de' Medici and Alfonso II d'Este, Duke of Ferrara.

Don Joseph's ultimate goal, however, was to thrive and secure his trading network and gain protection for his agents or relatives living outside the Ottoman Empire.

The case of Reyna Benveniste (alias Marquesa Enriques) was another matter in which Joseph Nasi intervened energetically. The Enriques/Benveniste family was not only related to the Nasi by blood, as we have already seen. Their family history mirrored that of the Nasi. After leaving Portugal, they settled first in Antwerp and later in Venice. They abandoned Venice in 1550 and moved to Ferrara. In 1548, João Micas had intervened to free Nuno Enriques, Marquesa's father, from the prison of Marie of Habsburg, Regent of the Low Countries, thanks to a generous gift.¹³²

Reyna, widow of Enrique Nunes *senior* (her and Righetto's uncle), left Ferrara for Venice in 1565 and established her household in the Ghetto Vecchio, living openly as a Jew.¹³³ Reyna remained the victim of a vague attempt at blackmail by a certain *cavalier* Beltrami and a Venetian patrician of the Contarini family, who tried to take advantage of her situation as a wealthy widow who had previously lived formally as a Christian. Beltrami and Contarini were both protected by the French ambassador in Venice, who later tried to defend them before the Doge and his government.¹³⁴ There was evidence that she had lived as a Christian and had "a child baptized here in Venice"; therefore, she was accused of Judaizing. As a consequence, all possessions found in her house were confiscated. The goods were valued at the astonishing sum of 200,000 *scudi*.¹³⁵

Only the intervention of Joseph Nasi from Constantinople spared Marchesa Enriques from a "very bad end." A letter of sultan Sultan Suleiman to the Doge, in which he commended the Marchesa's situation, was obtained "with the means of that Gio Micas, that Your Excellency knows, since she wanted to move to Constantinople."¹³⁶ The solution to the problem was quickly found. As the Ferrarese ambassador reported:

After it [the sultan's letter] was read, in *collegio* before the Doge, he personally issued that all her belonging had to be returned to her, without any loss, they addressed her honorable and good

¹³¹ Arrighi 2000, 349-350. Mercan 2016, 23, 27 n. 63.

¹³² Ioly Zorattini 1984, 28; Couto 2005, 349; Leoni 2011, 405.

¹³³ Leoni 2011, 419.

¹³⁴ ASMo, ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori Venezia, b. 52, Claudio Ariosti to the duke of Ferrara, October 24, 1565.

¹³⁵ ASMo, ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori Venezia, b. 52, Claudio Ariosti to the duke of Ferrara, October 17, 1565: "Fu a questi di dato imputation alla s.ra Marchesa Henriches che si fugì di costà non è molto, che ella in tempo del marito qui et altrove, havea uffitio come christiana, et batigiato anco un suo figliuolo in questa terra, il che comprobatosi per molti testimonii, questi S.ri la fecero metter in distretto, et levargli di casa sua et portar in palazzo quanti beni mobili si trovava apresso, che passavano, dicono, di valsente più di ducento millia scudi."

¹³⁶ ASMo, ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori Venezia, b. 52, Claudio Ariosti to the duke of Ferrara, October 17, 1565: "et se col mezo d'una lettera del gran Turco in raccomandation sua a questi Signori non si fosse aiutata, l'avria come ella ben si puol imaginar, fatta malissimo. La qual lettera ella col mezo di quel Gio Micas ch'ella sa, volendo andar ad habitar in Costantinopoli, havea ottenuta."

words, almost asking for mercy for any trouble she underwent, threatening also the author of this deed (the attempted extortion).¹³⁷

Reyna left Venice with her retinue and her belongings and set off for Constantinople, passing through the Republic of Ragusa. In April 1565, the Minor Council of Ragusa had already granted her and her retinue permission to reside outside the ghetto "because she was blood-related to Gracia Nasi."¹³⁸

In this respect, the political actions undertaken by Don Joseph, like those of his aunt, were aimed at preserving the family and clan heritage. About two years passed after Don Joseph decided to address a formal letter to the Doge thanking him for the quick resolution of impasse. In the meanwhile, his master, Prince Selim, became Sultan and Don Joseph was appointed the title of Duke of the Archipelago. His letter,¹³⁹ delivered to the Doge by his two trusted agents in Venice, offered a vague promise of future service. The aim of the letter was to accommodate "the fair and just requests" of the two Nasi's factors, the Nahamias brothers, "because I will deem this, as it was done to myself." The tone of this letter was that of a person conscious of a newly attained or pretend position of influence, but wisely refusing to sign as "Duque del Archipelago" or "Duque de Naxia" as he would later do. The loss of the fief of Naxos from the pro-Venetian Crispo family was still a very sensitive matter for the authorities of the Most Serene Republic. The banishment of Don Joseph, in force since 1553 and issued after the notorious events of the abduction of Gracia *la chica* was immediately lifted.¹⁴⁰

The brothers Joseph and Ezra Nahamias mentioned in this letter were two experienced traders who were also active in Ferrara, Pesaro and Ancona. From Venice they controlled a trading network extending from England to Aleppo.¹⁴¹

8. A LETTER TO THE REPUBLIC OF RAGUSA. DONA GRACIA'S DEATH.

The Republic of Ragusa was a city-state of 40,000 inhabitants, ruled by a class of Catholic patrician merchants, under the nominal rule of the Ottoman Sultan. Its port developed as one of the main connecting points between the trade routes across the Mediterranean, with a large merchant fleet.¹⁴² Since the time of the passage of Doña Gracia, the city was a main point for the Nasi traders, with two representatives (Isaac Ergas and Abner Alfarin).¹⁴³ The former, together with Aharon Crecente, would continue to look after the interests of the Nasi after the death of the *Señora*.¹⁴⁴ From this hub, the Nasi family's goods were traded to and from the Levant, including wheat, wool, spices, silk, camlets, *mohair* cloth and other textiles.¹⁴⁵ The volume of those goods enabled Doña Gracia to obtain favorable commercial concessions, exclusive reductions in customs

¹³⁷ ASMo, ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori Venezia, b. 52, Claudio Ariosti to the duke of Ferrara, October 17, 1565.

¹³⁸ State Archives of Dubrovnik (DADU), Acta minoris consiliis, series 5, vol 47, f. 200v. Miović and Seferović 2014, 67.

¹³⁹ Appendix n. 12.

¹⁴⁰ Ravid 1983, 179.

¹⁴¹ Leoni 2011, 257-261.

¹⁴² Miović and Seferović 2014, 71 and the mentioned literature.

¹⁴³ Birnbaum 2003, 69-70; Miović and Seferović 2014, 75-76.

¹⁴⁴ Appendix n. 13.

¹⁴⁵ Orfali 2002, 188, 195; Miović and Seferović 2014, 89.

duties, as well as offers of financial mediation and support to the Republic in the event of famine with the wheat from Volos and from Valona.¹⁴⁶

In March 1568, the Duke of Naxos informed the Republic of Ragusa of Doña Gracia's death.¹⁴⁷ He sent the letter from Adrianople, where he was visiting the court of Sultan Selim in his favorite city. Nasi does not reveal where his aunt died, whether in Belvedere or in the village of Yeniköy, where she probably owned a waterside mansion, or if Gracia Nasi decided to reach Tiberias, as announced by the Portuguese missionary Pantaleão de Aveiro while travelling in the Holy Land around 1565.¹⁴⁸ It was indeed common among wealthy, aging Jews of the time to settle in the Holy Land and spend their final years there.¹⁴⁹

Nasi recalled in his letter that Doña Gracia's agents enjoyed privileges "never acknowledged before to any other Jew." Nasi asked for the renewal of these concessions for five more years. Immediately after the end of the war of Cyprus, the Republic of Ragusa cancelled all the trade privileges previously granted to the Nasi¹⁵⁰ and even sentenced to death a relative of Don Joseph for a crime committed against another Jew.¹⁵¹ The position reached by the duke of Naxos did not favour him even before a vassal state of the Sultan, such as the Republic of Ragusa.

9. WHO WROTE JOSEPH NASI'S LETTERS?

Among the eleven letters mentioned in this article, at least eight were certainly written by the same elegant hand.¹⁵² It is known that Joseph Nasi used the Italian language when communicating with Western diplomats in Constantinople.¹⁵³ Despite this fact, the letters are the product of a fine man of letters (perhaps with the exception of the scathily passages in two of them), more akin to Don Joseph's "inner restlessness" (*inquietudine d'animo*) than a *letterato's* style.¹⁵⁴

Just the Dubrovnik missive contains in the lower margin the acronym of the man who composed and prepared the text of the letter: "secretarius Cohen (St^{ius} Coheⁿ)."¹⁵⁵ It is the abbreviation for the name of the person who wrote the letters of behalf of the sender: Joseph Cohen (Joseph ben Ardu^t?) was Nasi's secretary and scribe (*secretarius et amanuensis*)¹⁵⁵ and wrote all the letters sent from Constantinople, with the exception of the final letter, written a few months before Nasi's death (Appendix 14), and the letter dated November 2, 1561 addressed to Cosimo I de' Medici (Appendix 11). Cohen's mission to Tiberias, in Palestine, on behalf of Joseph Nasi, was "to rebuild the walls of the city":

¹⁴⁶ Birnbaum 2003, 71-73 and n. 192. The wheat trade of Gracia Nasi from Levant to Venice is also mentioned in Ioly Zorattini 1980, 232.

¹⁴⁷ I am deeply thankful to Andree Aelion Brooks for having informed me about the existence of this important letter fully transcribed and translated in the appendix (n. 13).

¹⁴⁸ David 2017, 45.

¹⁴⁹ Dernschwam 2014, 108: "Und wenn die Juden nun alt werden und genügend Mittel haben, dann ziehen sie in das Heilige Land und nach Jerusalem."

¹⁵⁰ Birnbaum 2003, 112 n. 305.

¹⁵¹ Roth 1948, 244 n. 9; Miović and Seferović 2014, 77.

¹⁵² Appendix n. 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13.

¹⁵³ Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 139 n. 2.

¹⁵⁴ Don Joseph's "inner restlessness" was mentioned by the Venetian ambassador Marcantonio Barbaro in 1571. See Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 140.

¹⁵⁵ Roth 1948, 12

And the king sent with him eight men born in his house, and gave him the order written and sealed with the imperial seal, and recommended him to the pasha of Damascus and the pasha of Safut, saying: "All that this man desires of you shall ye do."¹⁵⁶

Cecil Roth suggested that this journey happened in the summer of 1563.¹⁵⁷ Already in 1560 Suleiman the Magnificent had granted the concession of Tiberias and its surroundings and allowed the city to be colonised.¹⁵⁸ Joseph Cohen's absence from Nasi's side may suggest that he travelled to Tiberias at least once more in late 1561. It is likely that Nasi wanted to send his most trusted man, his secretary, the man who guarded his secrets, on such an important mission.

Comparing the handwriting of three of Gracia Nasi's known letters,¹⁵⁹ we can conclude that they were similarly written by Joseph Cohen. Moreover, the words and expressions chosen in some passages of her text reveal the same rhetorical style, mostly in the salutation, but not only.¹⁶⁰ The rhetorical style of Joseph Cohen can also be seen in the alleged letter of Joseph Nasi addressed to the Jewish merchants detained in Venice during the Cyprus war.¹⁶¹ A careful comparison of four passages of this letter with those of Joseph and Gracia reveal similar phrasing and recurring vocabulary.¹⁶²

10. EUROPEAN MERCHANTS AND PRISONERS. JOSEPH NASI'S NETWORK

The man who delivered Nasi's last message to the Grand Duke in Florence was the Tuscan merchant Carlo Samminiati or Saminiati, "young and well off."¹⁶³ He was originally from Lucca, but apparently had a lot of business in Constantinople. At the beginning of 1570, he arrived with a cargo of silk cloth and 6,000 *scudi* in cash. He was in close contact with the Duke of Naxos, and on this occasion he was hosted in Nasi's house.¹⁶⁴ Being received at the Belvedere can also

¹⁵⁶ Joseph ha-Cohen, *'Emek ha-Bakha*, quoted by Roth 1948, 136.

¹⁵⁷ Roth 1948, 112.

¹⁵⁸ David 2017, 44.

¹⁵⁹ See the images in Palladini 2024, 560, 562, 566.

¹⁶⁰ Comparison between some passages of Gracia Nasi's and Joseph Nasi's letters: "Mis flaças fuerças" (Palladini, 2024, 564) = "che le mie poche forze potranno" (Appendix 12), "delle mie poche forze" (Appendix 6); "y con tanto çesso" (Palladini 2024, 564) = "et qui taccio" (Appendix 1); "rogando a N.ro Senor por larga vida" (Palladini, 2024, 564) = "pregnar Iddio per lunga vita" (Appendix 5, 6, 8); "augmento de mayores estados" (Palladini 2024, 564) = "augmento di più grandi stati" (Appendix 2, 5, 6).

¹⁶¹ This letter (preserved in a copy kept in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan) was published by Arbel 1995, 202-203.

¹⁶² The letter published by Arbel begins with the adversative syntactic structure beginning with "Se bene," similar to the letters transcribed in appendix 6, 11, 12, 13. Further examples are the following: "non ho per questo mancato mai di operare" (Arbel 1995) = "io non ho manchato, se con opere non ci è nata l'occasione" (Appendix 6); "quell'illustrissimo Dominio" (Arbel 1995) = "quello illustrissimo dominio" (Appendix 12); "Et io non mancarò mai, né col pensiero né con l'opera" (Arbel 1995) = "desiderar con la mente et con le poche opere" (Appendix 12), "Mi desseo ha seido siempre no con palabras, ma con obras" (Palladini 2024, 559).

¹⁶³ Letter dated April 7, 1570 quoted by Canosa 2000, 107.

¹⁶⁴ Canosa 2000, 107. This information comes from a letter transcribed by Canosa, apparently found in the Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Estado, legajo 1058. This letter was confiscated by an alleged spy working for the Turks, dated April 7, 1570: "Molti mesi sono, sono venuti qui due lucchesi, l'uno dei quali è giovane e di bona facultà et si dimanda Carlo Samminiati; l'altro è il suo pedagogo et si fa chiamare Benedetto Simeoni et è di età de anni '80. Hanno portato con essi loro tanti panni de seta et d'oro la valuta de sei milia scudi. Alloggiorno in casa di Gio Miches marrano, ora Joseph Nasi, dove stanno tutta via. Detto Benedetto tra quattro o cinque giorni sarà espedito per via de Ragusa da detto Gio Miches, de ordine del primo bassà per adar a spiare quello se fa in Venetia o in Puglia e ritornare con diligentia."

be seen as a strategy to gain the trust of enemies or to extend the counter-intelligence network.¹⁶⁵ This happened for example in 1566 when the dispossessed lord of Andros (one of the islands added to the Duchy of Naxos), Giovan Francesco Sommaripa, was first arrested and then held as prisoner in the luxurious environment of Don Joseph's palace. He was later released.¹⁶⁶

Some years after, in March 1569, the Venetian spy (from the city of Vicenza) Giovanni Vancimuglio was also put under arrest in Joseph Nasi's house.¹⁶⁷ He was released thanks to the intervention of Nasi. Don Joseph later used Vancimuglio's skills for a mission in Poland on his behalf. In February 1570, the King of Poland Sigismund II Augustus, wrote a letter to Nasi mentioning the return of the agent Vancimuglio to Constantinople,¹⁶⁸ probably to settle the Polish claims against Moldova and to repay the debt of 150,000 florins owed by the King.¹⁶⁹

While under arrest at the Belvedere, Vancimuglio realized the depth and breadth of Don Joseph's connections with the Western world, receiving fresh news from the *avvisi*, letters from sovereigns, cardinals and other correspondents from Europe.¹⁷⁰

This aspect was also confirmed by two additional witnesses: the Portuguese converso informant Tomé Pegado de Paz, and the physician David, once a close partner and confidant of Nasi, who later turned against him and supported the French maneuvers to discredit Joseph Nasi in the eyes of the Sultan.¹⁷¹ In October 1569, David informed the French ambassador Grandchamp that Nasi:

... writes daily to the Pope, to the King of Spain, to the Duke of Florence, to the Genoese, and to all Sultan's enemies. And he will manage to take from his [don Joseph's] *cabinet* a limitless amount of their letters and requests, this will be the means to cut off his head.¹⁷²

In reporting this news to the French King, Grandchamp used the French word *cabinet* to define a particular room common in the noble residences, corresponding to what in Italian was known as a *studiolo*: a small room where princes of the time kept the most precious objects of their collections and usually conducted their correspondence and political activities, together with their secretaries and the most trusted men of their court. The Mendes-Nasi agent Duarte Gomes also maintained a richly furnished *studiolo* (or *estudo*) in his Portuguese mansion.¹⁷³ A person like Joseph Nasi, so familiar with the European and Italian courts, must have adopted this attitude and brought it with him to the Levant. He wanted a *studiolo* for himself in his house.

Thanks to the letters mentioned in the previous paragraphs, we can confirm the truth of David's accusations against Joseph Nasi of corresponding with the Medici. The correspondence with the Spanish King, through the Viceroy of Sicily was demonstrated in 1953 by Alberto Arce.¹⁷⁴ The links with the Republic of Genoa and the Papacy remain to be discovered.

¹⁶⁵ Rosenblatt 1957, 158-159.

¹⁶⁶ Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 91.

¹⁶⁷ Preto 1994, 101-102.

¹⁶⁸ Bersohn 1869, 423: Sigismundus Augustus Rex Poloniae etc. Judaeo Nasi. Excellens domine s. n. d. Redit ad excel. vestram Joannes Vancimulius Vicentinus pro expeditione negotii per ipsum nobis enarrati, expectabimus vos, ut communis votis felices eventus respondeant. Interimque procurabimus in promptu habere omnem illam summa, quae ad centum quinquaginta millia suis temporibus exbursanda ascendit.

¹⁶⁹ Rosenblatt 1957, 42.

¹⁷⁰ Preto 1994, 101-102.

¹⁷¹ Rosenblatt 1957, 99-102.

¹⁷² Translated by the author; Charrière 1853, 85-86.

¹⁷³ Crespo 2011, 602-603.

¹⁷⁴ Arce 1953, 257-286.

The second witness to the breadth and efficiency of the great Jew's information network was Tomé Pegado de Paz, son of Duarte.¹⁷⁵

Tomé was tried by Portuguese Inquisition in 1578 and testified that, around ten years earlier, a certain Antonio de Fonseca "new Christian resident at the court of Rome, used to send letters to Micas in Constantinople, in which he wrote many *avisos* about what occurred in the Christian world against the Turk, and he remembered what was told among the Jews gathered in Constantinople inside Micas' mansion. Antonio de Fonseca had warned that the Turk should not confront the army of Don John of Austria."¹⁷⁶ Fonseca was a very important New Christian Portuguese merchant and banker. He had connections with members of the *Curia*, such Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and Portuguese ambassador to Rome, thanks to his capacity to transfer large sums of money and ecclesiastical benefices due to the Holy See from Portugal.¹⁷⁷

Later, Pegado de Paz added that "a certain João Ribeiro, Portuguese New Christian resident in Venice, sent many *avisos* to said Micas, for having seen his letters in the *escriptorio* of the said Micas during the time he lived in his house. Similarly, he saw many letters of the aforementioned Antonio de Fonseca."¹⁷⁸ It was indeed already publicly known news that suspicions had arisen about the Levantine merchants living in Venice, for having promptly informed Nasi about the fire in the *arsenale* that occurred in September 1569 and the shortage of food supplies in the city.¹⁷⁹

11. CONCLUSION

Having focused on the only well-documented social environment of João Micas in his Italian years, this article has reconstructed Don Joseph's connections from Constantinople, presenting all his surviving letters addressed to several European rulers. They attest to the extensive contacts witnessed by the Venetian spy Vancimuglio, the physician David and by Tomé Pegado de Paz in Nasi's palace.

The flattering style of Don Joseph's letters is similar to that used in the correspondence of European rulers and aristocrats. Less common is the imperious tone he sometimes adopted, perhaps reflecting his own "inner restlessness."¹⁸⁰ The surviving letters, preserved in the state archives of Florence, Modena, Venice and Dubrovnik, outline Joseph Nasi's trading ambitions and the strategies for the preservation of his family's (rather clan's) assets. The points of contact in his network were not only Jewish trading partners. Nasi carried out his trading schemes in association with Muslims, Jews and Christians. Apparently, the common trading interests allowed him to expand his international networks (see for example the case of Carlo Saminati) and his proximity to political power (see the case of Grand Vizier Rüstem Pasha).

¹⁷⁵ Duarte de Paz was a Portuguese New Christian established in Rome and later in the Levant in 1552, he converted first to Judaism and then to Islam.

¹⁷⁶ Translated by the author, see Valentim 2004, 339.

¹⁷⁷ Novoa 2014, 205-206. About Fonseca see also Bethencourt 2024, 135-137, 152-157.

¹⁷⁸ Translated by the author, see Valentim 2004, 340.

¹⁷⁹ Contarini 1572, 2-3: "Avvenne non molto dopo, che alcuni Levantini Hebrei scrissero a Giovan Miches Marrano a Costantinopoli, che a XIII di Settembre dell'istesso anno MDLXIX l'Arsenal di Venetia dal fuoco acceso nella polvere et in altre monitioni si era tutto abbruciato; et che nella città et in tutto lo stato era grande strettezza di vivere, non si trovando altro che pan di miglio. Co' quali avisi Gio. Miches, familiarissimo et grato al Signore gli si appresentò, [...] lietamente gli ricordò che allhora era il tempo di tentare quella impresa."

¹⁸⁰ See the previous paragraph

Apart from the alleged influence gained by the “great Jew” at the Ottoman court, we can see that in just one surviving letter he openly mentioned his deep knowledge of a diplomatic task.¹⁸¹ The letters exchanged with Cosimo de’ Medici show that until the end of Rüstem pasha’s office, who, as we have said, was also his trading partner, Nasi was truly revered and eventually perceived as a key figure by a well-informed Western monarch such as Duke Cosimo. Nevertheless, even if he counted on the goodwill of a friendly Grand Vizier, he openly admitted in his own correspondence the presence of various conflicting pressure groups. Despite his alleged political marginalization in the last years of his life – a subject that warrants further investigation –, Nasi continued to be perceived by ambitious Italian powers such as the Medici Grand Duchy and the Duke of Savoy as a trustworthy financial intermediary for its diplomats, but nothing more. On the contrary, it is remarkable the influence gained by another Jewish broker of that time, Salomon Ashkenazi.

It is true that Don Joseph’s unique financial weight, reflecting the scale of his trading capabilities, gave him a prominent role before the Western diplomats in the Levant. It was more a financial role rather than political. His house continued to be visited until his last years by Christian diplomats, noblemen and merchants,¹⁸² as well as Turkish,¹⁸³ Christians¹⁸⁴ and not only Jewish members of his retinue. This environment is reflected in the mixture of “European and Turkish furniture,” that decorated his palace, Belvedere.¹⁸⁵

In short, evaluating the whole communication strategy with European powers, it is evident that the main goal was just to preserve his business and the integrity of his family’s heritage above any other political ambition: in 1564, a formal letter from Prince Selim addressed to the French King Charles IX referred to Joseph Nasi as “elected, exalted, esteemed and full of virtues, European nobleman, appointed as *muteferrika* of our house,” a “house” that Selim described in the same letter as “always filled of every virtue coming from the world and refuge of many greats, famous, virtuous princes.”¹⁸⁶ It was extremely unusual for an Ottoman prince to correspond with foreign rulers, a fact that openly contradicted the rules of the so-called cage-system, in which the princes were forced to limit their authority to small provinces far from the capital city.¹⁸⁷ Despite these efforts, Nasi’s initiatives did not have any effect in favor of his requests, even though Ottoman ambassadors reached the courts of France and Ferrara with an open request to honour their debts to the Nasi family.¹⁸⁸

During Nasi’s dangerous secret negotiations with the Spanish King’s representatives to plan his move to Spain together with seventy Jewish and Turkish members of his retinue, he required *inter alia*, that all his goods and possessions be admitted free of taxes, duties and tariffs.¹⁸⁹ Nasi’s “*hazienda*” was described at the time as “very large.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸¹ Appendix n. 14.

¹⁸² See paragraph “Correspondence with the Medici.”

¹⁸³ Arce, 1953, 280 doc. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Joseph Nasi had at his service two German slaves freed to please the Imperial ambassadors in Constantinople, see Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 137.

¹⁸⁵ Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 152.

¹⁸⁶ Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Ms. It. 1423, f. 22r-23v, published by Işıkşel 2007, 247-254.

¹⁸⁷ Işıkşel, 2012, 149-151.

¹⁸⁸ Işıkşel 2007, 247-254. Işıkşel 2012, 164-165, Grunebaum Ballin 1968, 99-117, Vitelli 1994, 341-343, 348.

¹⁸⁹ Arce 1953, 280-291 doc. 4.

¹⁹⁰ Arce 1953, 279 doc. 3.

Again, in September 1574, a few months before the death of Sultan Selim, when Joseph Nasi was apparently already disgraced after the war of Cyprus, he was able to obtain a letter from the Sultan addressed to the Republic of Venice on his behalf, in favor of his relative Righetto Nunes (alias Abram Benvenisti), who was detained by the local Inquisition. Because of the sinister reputation Don Joseph had acquired following the Cyprus War, Righetto refused his help.¹⁹¹ In his last months of life, Nasi continued to meddle with power, successfully securing the appointment of a Venetian renegade (Hasan Venedikli or Hasan "il veneziano") as Bey of Algier.¹⁹²

Furthermore, with the support of the Sultan's mother, Nur Banu, Nasi regained his monopoly of the wine transportation through the Bosphorus in September 1578, a privilege that had previously been suspended.¹⁹³

Reyna Nasi followed in the footsteps of her late husband and continued operating the printing press established in Belvedere.¹⁹⁴

An *avviso* sent to Florence reported that after Don Joseph's death, "the wife remained in the same authority" and expressed a desire to continue fostering trade between the Levant and Florence.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, following the initial seizure of Nasi's property, the Sultan ordered its restitution to the widow.¹⁹⁶

In 1582, Reyna Nasi is reported to have played a prominent role during the circumcision celebrations for the son of Sultan Murad III. A contemporary account notes that the "widow of Gio. Miches, via courier, send every two days into [the Sultan's palace] 25 to 30 men, each carrying a basket of jam, condiments, fruits and other delicacies to eat,"¹⁹⁷ thus continuing Don Joseph's strategy of providing fine food and luxury goods to the late Sultan Selim.¹⁹⁸ Even in 1595, Safiye Sultan, the mother of the new Sultan, Mehmet III, wrote to Reyna Nasi, asking her to continue delivering the "presents" she had formerly sent to her late husband, Sultan Murad III.¹⁹⁹

Based on his correspondence with contemporary rulers, Don Joseph's ultimate goal is clearly articulated in a letter to Cosimo de' Medici: "we live in times where it is compulsory to gain

¹⁹¹ Ioly Zorattini, 1984, 216: letter of the Venetian bailo Antonio Tiepolo from Pera (Constantinople), September 2, 1574: "Voleva questo duca di Nixia, altre volte Gioan Miches, accompagnarlo con una lettera di questo signore ma egli [Abram Benvenisti] non ha voluto, promettendosi d'esser favorito da lei non altrimenti che se avesse la lettera."

¹⁹² ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 727, c. 44v, letter of Abram Barocas from Constantinople, September 9, 1579: "Disendogli ancora che se el re de Arziere qual è un venetiano renegato de pochi giorni se lui entra nel tradimento, potrebe essere per che è pocho che è re, e lo fese far el duca de Nochesia." About Hasan Venedikli see Fabris 1997, 51-66.

¹⁹³ Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 163-164.

¹⁹⁴ Roth 1948, 217-219.

¹⁹⁵ ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 727, c. 42r, avviso from Constantinople by Abraham Barocas, september 9, 1579: "et che il Duca di Nicosia è morto, è rimasta la moglie nella medesima autorithà, et afferma che quei paesi hanno bisogno di questo commertio."

¹⁹⁶ See *avviso* from Venezia dated december 12 1579 in ASMo, Avvisi e notizie dall'estero b. 110: "Dicano li hebrei haver nuova che tutto quello ch'era stato inventariato et sigillato a nome del Turco, sopra Gian Miches morto, sia stato rilasciato alla moglie sua, con speranza che sia per haver anco il Ducato de Nixia il quale per le precedente lettere fu detto che era stato dato in governo a un chiaus, che n'havea offerto 3 mila soltanini de più di rendita."

¹⁹⁷ ASMo, ASE, Documenti di Stati e Città, b. 192, fasc. 9, c. 2v, Aviso related to the feasts for the circumcision of Sultan Murad III's son, July 21, 1582 from the Vineyards of Pera: "La sig.ra relitta di Gio. Miches per ordinario, ogni dui giorni ha mandato dentro 25 e 30 huomini con una cesta per uno di confetture, condimenti, frutti, et altre delicatezze da mangiare."

¹⁹⁸ Rosenblatt 1957, 29, Grunebaum-Ballin 1968, 73.

¹⁹⁹ Tavim 2004, 264.

someone's favor in order to obtain justice.”²⁰⁰ This was supposedly the real aim of the “great Jew”'s proximity to power.

APPENDIX 1²⁰¹

Letter of João Micas to Ercole II d'Este, Venice, July 13, 1552

ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di Referendari, b. 170

Published in Leoni 2011, 903-904.

Ill.^{mo} et Eccell.^{mo} S.^{or} mio

Anchora che la mia humil servitù non habbia mai fatto per V. Ecc.^a quanto sarebbe stato il mio desiderio di fare, nondimeno confidandomi nella volutà mia, et nella bontà et giustitia sua, vengo al cospetto di quella, pieno di confidenza che quella giustitia che trova ogn'uno sì pronta et spedita, debba anche esser pronta et ispedita a beneficio mio, et a perpetua gloria del suo tribunale dal quale niuno mai si parte mal contento. Occorremi alcuna contraversia con Aries di Luna, nè ella m'occorrebbe, s'egli astutamentj non si fusse armato d'un surrettitio salvo condotto sì come V. Ecc.^a del mio procuratore sarà pienamente informata, ma spero nell'integrità del giuditio di V. Ecc.^a che tosto veduta la mia ragione, et considerato il suo torto m'habbia d'esser fatta summaria giustitia, et qui taccio, humilmente raccomandandomi alla buona gratia di V. Ecc.^a di cui sono et sarò sempre in ogni tempo, luogo et fortuna humile et perpetuo servidore. In Venetia adi XIII di jullio del 1552

humilissimo s.^{or} de V. ex.^{ia}

J. Micas

²⁰⁰ Appendix n. 9.

²⁰¹ The titles and formal expressions used to address the recipients have been left in their abbreviated forms.

Venezia

1552.
13. Luglio.Ill^{mo} & Eccell^{mo} S.^{or} mio

Anchora che la mia humil scrutu non habbia mai fatto p^a V. Ecc^a quanto sarebbe stato il mio desiderio di fare; non dimeno confidandomi nella volunta mia, et nella bonta et giustitia sua; uengo al cospetto di quella; pieno di confidenza che q^{lla} giustitia che troua ogn'uno si pronta et spedita; debba anche esser pronta; et spedita a beneficio mio, et a perpetua gloria del suo Tribunale dal quale niuno mai si parte mal contento. Occorremi alcuna contrauersia con Artes di Luna; ne ella m'occorrerebbe; se gli aditamenti non si fusse armato d'un surretito saluo condotto si come V. Ecc^a del mio Procuratore sara pienamente informata, ma spero nell'integrita del giudicio di V. Ecc^a che tosto ueduta la mia ragione, et considerato il suo torto m'habbia d'esser fatta summaria giustitia, et qui taccio, humilmente raccomandandomi alla buona gratia di V. Ecc^a di cui sono et sarò sempre in ogni tempo lugo, et fortuna humile et ppetuo seruidore. In Ven^a a di xij di luglio del 1552

Humilissimi S.^{or} de v^{or} &
J. mica

Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

Although my condition as a servant did not accomplish for Your Excellency what my desire was to do for you, nonetheless, counting on my will and in your goodness and justice, I come to you full of trust, certain that the justice that anyone receives from you so fast and fair, must be fast and fair for me as well, and in perpetual glory of your court, from which no one departs unsatisfied. A controversy with Aires the Luna occurred to me, and I would not need this if he would not have obtained an immunity guarantee as Your Excellency will be fully informed by my agent. I hope in the integrity of Your Excellency's decision, that soon after hearing my reasons, and considering his wrong deed, I will get quick justice, and from this point on I keep silent, humbly recommending myself to Your Excellency's grace, of whom I am and always be, at any time and place and fortune, your humble and perpetual servant. Venice, July, 13 1552

most humble servant of Your Excellency

J. Micas

APPENDIX 2

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Ercole II d'Este, Vineyards of Pera (Constantinople), January 27, 1557
ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di Particolari, b.979 fasc "Naz"

Published by Leoni, *La nazione ebraica*, 1100.

Ill.^{mo} et Ex.^{mo} Sig.^{or}

Dubitando non fastidir l'Ex.^{tia} vostra con mie lettere non gli ho scritto inssino adesso. Ho[r] essendo questa ochasione, mi è parssso travagliarla et supplicarla quanto mi è possibile si contenti sopra il chaso di Gratia Benveniste prestar orecchie a quello che di parte de mia signora gli diranno Augustino Anrriquez et Duarte Gomez o ciaschun di essi. Perchè oltra che l'Ex.^a vostra in farlo userà della sua solita giustizia et bontà, a noi ci terrà obblighatissimi con opere presenti, et animo di seguitar in futuro. Del che l'Ex.^{tia} vostra debbe tener conto, perchè non è Prencipe sì grande che qualche volta non habbia bisogno d'un particholar, nè homo de sì pocho stato che non possi far servizio. L' Ex.^{tia} vostra è sapientissima, et cognosce quanto più naturale è a Dio et al mondo, et più honorevol a lui, il achordarssi in questo caso con li agenti di mia signora che con altri. Et però io non dirò altro aspettando in questo che l'Ex.^a vostra sia contenta farci favor et haverci per suoi obblighatissimi servitori. Iddio la vita di vostra Ex.^{tia} felicità con aumento di maggiori stati. Delle Vigne di Pera il dì XXVII di Genaio MDLVII

basia le mani di V. ex.^{ia} il suo humilisimo servitor

Josef Nacy

1557
17. genn.

Ilmo et Ex^{mo} sig^o
Anriquez Agostino e
Gomez Duarte

Dubitando nò fastidir l'Ex^{ta} via conmielre' nò gli ho scritto insino adesso. Ho
essendo questa ocbasione mi è parso trauagliarla et supplicarla quanto mi è
possibile si contenti sopra il chaso di Gratia Benueniste prestar' orecchie a quello che
di parte de mia sig^a gli dirano Agostino Anriquez et Duarte Gomez, o ciaschun
di essi. Perche oltra che l'Ex^a via In farlo userà della sua solita giustitia
et bontà, a noi ci terrà obligatissimi con opere presenti et animo di seguirlo
In futuro. Del che l'Ex^a via debbe tener conto, perche nò è Prenape si grande
che qualche volta nò habbia bisogno d'un particholar' ne homo de' si pocho Stato
che nò possi far' seruizio: L'Ex^a via è sapientissima, et cognosce quanto
pia naturale è a Dio et al mondo, et pia honoreuol' a lui il achordarsi In questo
caso con li agenti di mia sig^a che con altri. Et pero Io nò dirò altro aspettando In questo
che l'Ex^a via sia contenta farci fauer' et hauerci per suoi obligatissimi Seruitore.
Addio la vita di vra Ex^{ta} felicità con augmento di maggiori Stati.
Delle vigne di Pera Il di xxvii di Genajo M. D. L. vij

basia le mani di v^{ra} Ex^{ta} Il suo humilissimo seruitore
Jof naz

Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

Fearing to annoy Your Excellency with my letters, I did not write until this moment. Now, since this fact occurs, I urge to bother and beg you, as much as I can, upon the case of Gratia Benveniste, to listen to what Augustin Henriques and Duarte Gomes, or one of them, will tell you on behalf of my *signora* [Gracia Nasi]. Beside the fact that Your Excellency in doing so will use your usual justice and clemency, we will feel obliged to show you the deeds we have done and we will be willing to do so also in the future. For this reason, Your Excellency should take this into account, because there is no such great prince that doesn't need (a service) from a private person at least some of the time, nor a man of humble condition that can't perform any service. Your Excellency is extremely wise, and knows how natural it is to God and to the world, and how honorable it is to him, to come to terms in this case with the agents of my *signora* rather than with other people. And for this reason I will not speak any longer, awaiting that Your Excellency will be pleased to favour us and to have among his most obliged servants. May God please Your Excellency's life with an increase of larger states.

From the Vineyards of Pera, January 27, 1557

his most humble kisses Your Excellency's hands

Josef Nacy

APPENDIX 3

Draft letter of Ercole II d'Este to Joseph Nasi, October 6, 1557

ASMo, ASE, *Carteggio di Particolari*, b. 893 fasc. "Miches"

a Don Gio Miches alli 6 8bre 1557

ditto Gioseppe Nassi et per tal si nom[ini]

Magnifice Amice Carissime. Vederete per la qui inclusa nota che vi rimetto ~~mo~~ per information vostra come sono stati tolti cinque cavalli turchi et una cavalla a Leon di Bondi hebreo mio suddito ferrarese quali esso havea compri a mio nome et imbarcare per condurmele con la licenza et patente che havea ottenuta dal gran signore il signor ambasciatore di sua maestà christianissima costì, et perche non posso credere che ciò sia di mente de predicto gran signor nè che l'eccellentissimo signor Rustam bassà sia per comportarlo, ho voluto dar a voi avviso di questo tanto et pregarvi sì come fo ben instantemente ~~assai~~ che vogliate pigliare la pronuncia per amor mio di far ogni caldo ufficio a nome mio con predicto eccellentissimo signor Rustam et col gran signore istesso se così sarà bisogno perchè ditti cavalli mi siano restituiti et lasciati venir al suo viaggio senza impedimento che ricevero il tutto per piacere gratissimo da voi a cui mi offero et priego ogni contento.

To Don Gio Miches October 6, 1557

now called Gioseppe Nassi and in that way shall he be addressed

Magnificent most beloved friend. You will see from the enclosed letter, which we send to you for your information, that the Jew Leon di Bondi, my Ferrarese subject, has been deprived of

five Turkish horses and one female horse which he had bought on my behalf. The ambassador of the Most Christian King²⁰² obtained from the Great Lord²⁰³ the license and permission to export them, and since I can't believe that this was the Great Lord's will, nor that it was caused by the most excellent Rüstem pasha, I wanted to inform you of this and ask you, as I do now, for the love you have for me, to energetically undertake the task on my behalf to return my horses and let them leave without hindrance. I will receive all this as a beloved favor from you, to whom I offer myself and I wish every happiness

APPENDIX 4

Draft letter of Ercole II d'Este to Joseph Nasi, December 7, 1557

ASMo, ASE, Carteggio di Particolari, b.747 fasc. "Luna"

Published by Leoni 2011, 1148.

al S.r Gio. Miches vii xmbre 1557

Magnifico signor amico carissimo. Io scrivo alla signora Beatrice mosso dalle promesse altre volte fattemi da lei pregandola di ~~havermi~~ a prestarmi bona somma de denari in caso di mio bisogno, et perchè hora ~~mi~~ son gravato di molta spesa per la guerra che m'è stata rotta, la priego, o accomodarmene lei, o mandar ordine a chi le pare in Vinegia che mi faccia credito che l'assicurerò sopra ~~le in~~ qualsivoglia delle mie intrade a sua eletione, acciò sia certa di non dover sentir danno alcuno della commoditate che mi sarà fatta da lei, presso la quale sapen(d)' io quanto voi siate ~~atto~~ buono et di autorità, ho anco voluto farvi saper che riceverò a molto grato piacer ogni uffitio che vi contentarete far, perch'io sii compiaciuto da detta signora di ciò et ne teniro viva memoria con desiderio di rendervene il cambio in qualche occasione, et con questo me ne offero et priegovi contento.

To (signor) Gio. Miches, December 7, 1557

Magnificent lord most beloved friend. I write to *signora* Beatrice, urged by the promises I have received from her other times, asking her to land me a good sum of money in case of my need, and since now I am now burdened by a huge expenditure for the war addressed against me, I beg, whether she provides or she sends an order to whomever she wants in Venice who will give me credit, and I will ensure it over any one of my incomes at her choice, in order to make her certain that she will not suffer any damage from the good deed she will do to me. Since I know very well how much you are good and influential towards her, I also want to let you know that I will receive with great pleasure any initiative you will undertake, in order to be satisfied by the aforementioned *signora*, and I will keep alive the memory of this, desiring to repay you on some occasion, and with this I offer myself and I pray that you will be satisfied.

²⁰² The King of France.

²⁰³ The Sultan.

APPENDIX 5

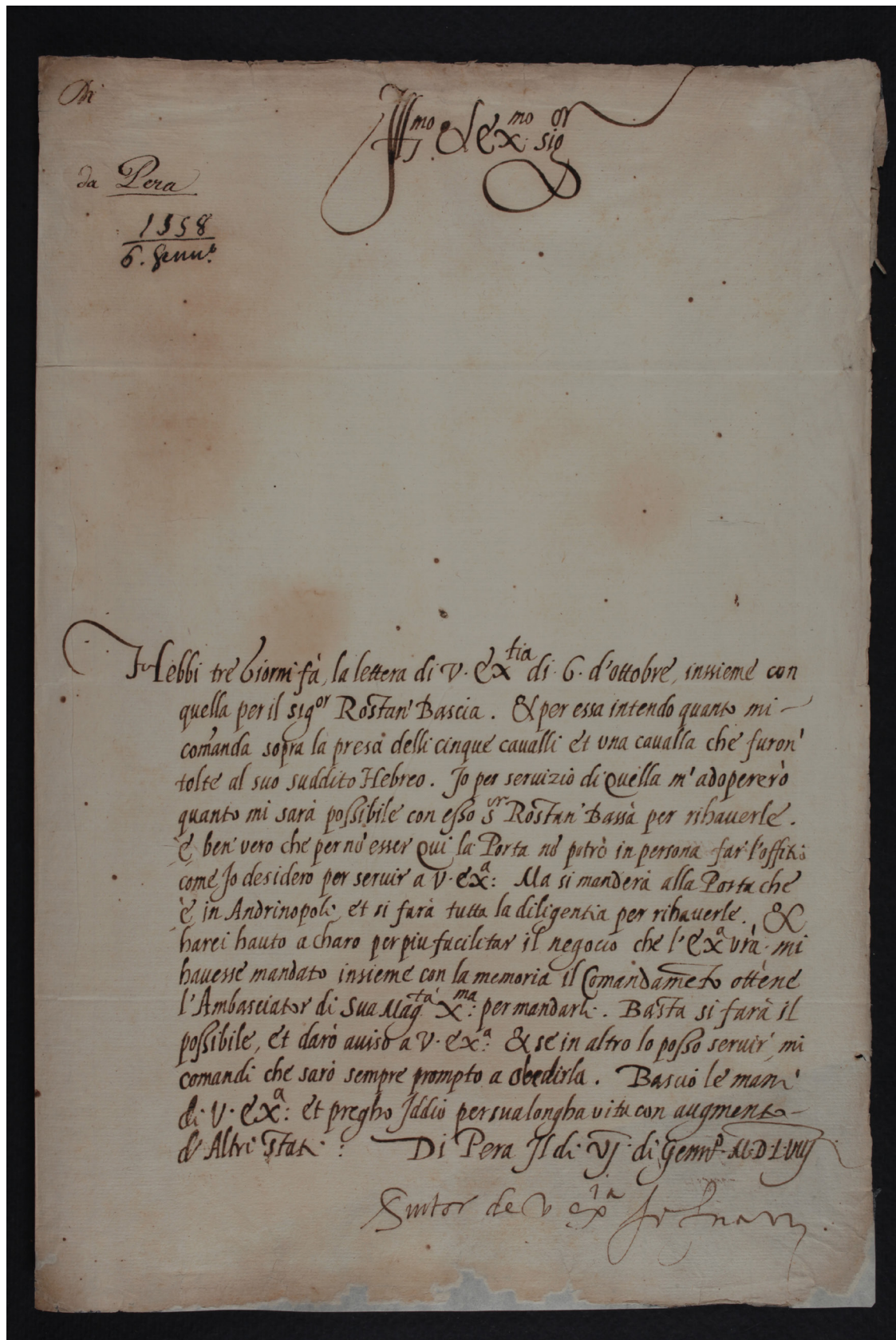
Letter of Joseph Nasi to Ercole II d'Este, Pera (Constantinople), January 6, 1558

ASMo, ASE, Carteggio ambasciatori, Levante b. unica

Ill.^{mo} et Ecc.^{mo} Sig.^{or}

Hebbi tre giorni fa la lettera di V. Ex.^{tia} di 6 d'ottobre inssieme con quella per il signor Rostan Bascia. Et per essa intendo quanto mi commanda sopra la presa delli cinque cavalli et una cavalla che furon tolte al suo suddito hebreo. Io per servizio di quella m'adopererò quanto mi sarà possibile con esso signor Rostan Bassà per rihaverle. E' ben vero che per non esser qui la Porta non potrò in persona far l'offitio come io desidero per servir a V. ex.^a, ma si manderà alla Porta che è in Andrinopoli, et si farà tutta la diligentia per rihaverle. Et harei hauto a charo per più facilitar il negocio che l'Ex.^a vostra mi havesse mandato insieme con la memoria il comandamento ottenne l'ambasciator di Sua Magiestà Cristianissima per mandarli. Basta, si farà il possibile, et darò aviso a V. Ex.^a et se in altro lo posso servir, mi comandi che sarò sempre prompto a obedirla. Bascio le mani di V. Ex.^a et pregho Iddio per sua longha vita con augmento di altri stati. Di Pera il dì VI di gennaio MDLVIII

Servitor de V. ex.^{ia} Josef Nacy



Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

Three days ago I received Your Excellency's letter dated october 6, together with the the message addressed to Rüstem pasha. With that, I understand what you command me to do regarding the five male horses and the female horse taken away from your Jewish subject. For your service, I will do the best I can with Rüstem pasha to get them back. It is true that since the Porte is not here I won't be able to do this service personally, as I would like to do since I desire to serve Your Excellency, but I will send someone to the Porte, which is in Adrianople, and we will make every effort possible to get them back. I would have appreciated to have received from Your Excellency, together with your letter, the privilege obtained by the French ambassador in order to facilitate the task. That is all, I will do everything possible and I will inform Your Excellency, and if I can serve you for other things, please order me and I will always be ready to obey you. I kiss Your Excellency's hands and I pray to God for a long life with the increase of other states. From Pera, January 6, 1558

servant of Your Excellency *Joseph Nacy*

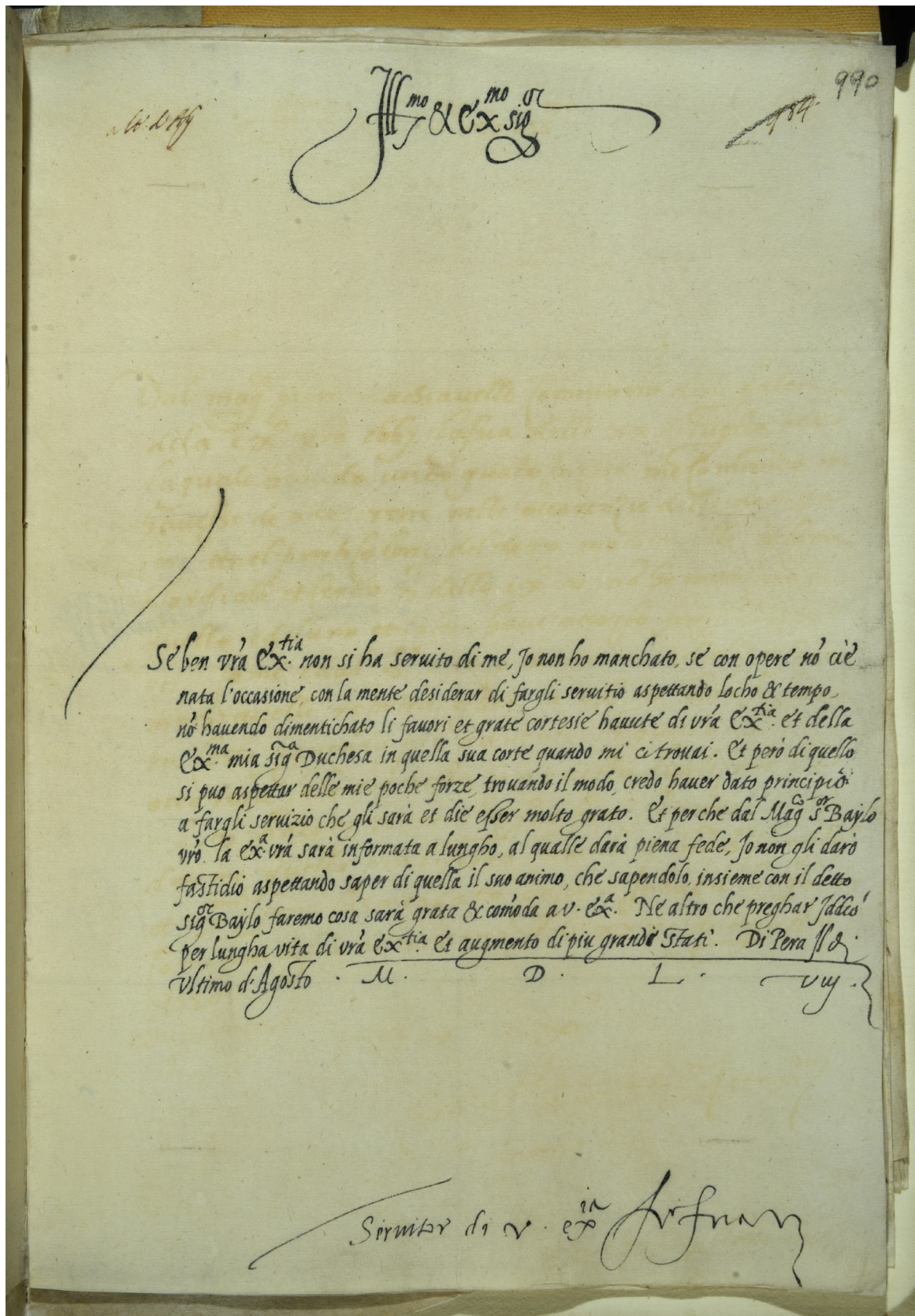
APPENDIX 6

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Cosimo de' Medici, Pera (Constantinople), August 31, 1558
ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 470A, c. 990

Ill.^{mo} & Ex.^{mo} sig.^{or}

Se ben vostra Ex.^{tia} non si ha servito di me, io non ho manchato, se con opere non ci è nata l'occasione, con la mente desiderar di fargli servitio aspettando locho et tempo non havendo dimentichato li favori et grate cortesie havute di vostra Ex.^{tia} et della Ex.^{ma} mia signora Duchesa in quella sua corte quando mi ci trovai. Et però di quello si può aspettar delle mie poche forze trovando il modo, credo haver dato principio a fargli servizio che gli sarà et die esser molto grato. Et perchè dal magnifico signor baylo vostro la Ex.^a vostra sarà informata a lungho al quale darà piena fede, io non gli darò fastidio aspettando saper di quella il suo animo, che sapendolo insieme con il detto signor baylo faremo cosa sarà grata et commoda a v. ex.^a. Nè altro che preghar Iddio per lungha vita di vostra Ex.^{tia} et aumento di più grandi stati. Di Pera il dì ultimo d'agosto MDLVIII

Servitor di v. ex.^{ia} Josef Nacy



Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

although Your Excellency didn't take advantage of me, I never missed the desire to serve you with my mind, since there was no occasion to serve you with deeds, waiting the right time and place, since I never forgot the favors and the appreciated courtesy I had from Your Excellency and from the most excellent signora duchess in your court when I passed by there. For this reason, for what you can expect from my weak forces, I believe that I have begun serve you, and this will be and shall be very much appreciated. And since by the magnificent (Florentine) ambassador Your Excellency will be informed in detail, whose words you will fully trust, I will not annoy you by wanting to know your opinion, and by knowing it, together with the above-mentioned ambassador, we will accomplish a favorable and appreciated service to Your Excellency. I have nothing more to add, other than I pray God for Your Excellency's long life and increase of greater states. From Pera, the last day of August 1558

servant of Your Excellency *Josef Nacy*

APPENDIX 7

Draft letter of Cosimo de' Medici to Joseph Nasi, Florence, October 1, 1559
ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 51 (Minutario di Cosimo de' Medici), c.128r

A Don Josef Nazi hebreo in Constantinopoli
il primo di ottobre 1559

Il presentator di questa sarà Alberto delli Alberti gentilhomio della mia città di Fiorenza, il quale io mando per nuovo balio da riseder in Costantinopoli, et però, et sapendo io quanto V. S. mi ama et quanto ella ha sempre cercato di honorar et autorizar le cose mie in cotesta parte, li ho commesso venga a visitarla per parte mia et farle testimonio dello obbligo ch'io riconosco seco di tanti buoni uffitii ch'ella ha fatti per me et per questa natione, et inoltr che in tute le occorrenze di suo uffitio, debba far recapiti confidentemente de la opera et consiglio suo. Pregola li (?) voglia prestar fede et credenza come a me medesimo et dove ella potrà, li piacerà avisarlo et indirizarlo sempre ne suoi negotii conforme a la molta fede ch'io tengo in lei che tosto sarà in aumento del obbligo nostro per riconoscerla forse un dì la S. V. di tante sue cortesie et amorevoleze usate verso di me et verso questa nation, le quali ben mi stanno et staranno in memoria sinchè mi si porga qualche occasione di potergliere render il cambio come molto desidero. Et non occorrendo altro prego Nostro Signore Dio che la molto magnifica persona di V. S. conservi et prosperi sempre. Da Firenze

To Don Josef Nazi Jew in Constantinople
October 1st 1559

The bearer of this letter will be Alberto delli Alberti, a gentleman from my city Florence. I send him as the new ambassador resident in Constantinople, and for this reason, since I know how much Your Lordship loves me and how much you have always tried to honor and fulfil my requests in that city, I ordered him to come to visit you on my behalf, to testify to you my debt

towards you for so many good services you have provided for me and for my subjects, and furthermore that in all his [the ambassador's] duties he shall rely confidentially on your deeds and your advice. I beg you to believe and trust [him] as if he were me in person, and since you are able to do so, please give him advice and orient him in his tasks according to the great trust I have for you, that soon will increase our obligation to repay you, Your Lordship, maybe one day for the many courtesies and loving deeds you have shown me and my subjects. Those deeds are and will be kept in my memory, until I will have occasion to repay you as I desire. And since nothing more is needed, I pray God, our Lord, to always keep Your Lordship in good health and prosperity. From Florence

APPENDIX 8

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Cosimo de' Medici, Vineyards of Pera (Constantinople), February 30, 1560

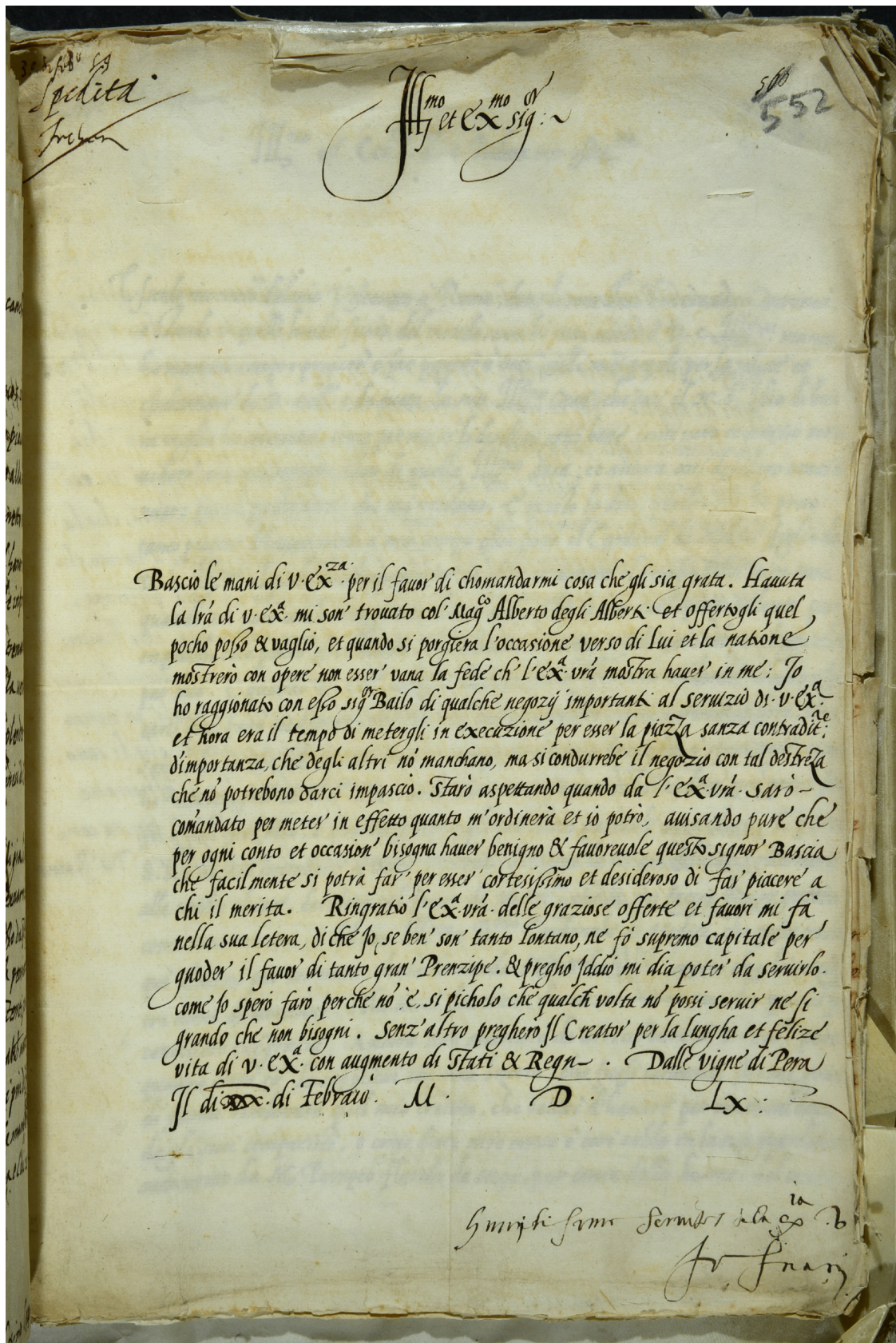
ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 483, c. 552

Ill.^{mo} et ex.^{mo} sig.^{or}

Bascio le mani di v. ex.^{za} per il favor di chomandarmi cosa che gli sia grata. Havuta la lettera di v. ex.^a mi son trovato col magnifico Alberto degli Alberti et offertogli quel pocho posso e vaglio, et quando si porgierà l'occasione verso di lui et la natione mostrerò con opere non esser vana la fede che l'ex.^a vostra mostra haver in me. Io ho ragionato con esso signor bailo di qualche negozii importanti al servizio di v. ex.^a et hora era il tempo di metergli in executione per esser la piazza senza contraditore d'importanza, che degli altri non manchano ma si condurrebbe il negozio con tal destreza che non potrebono darci impascio. Starò aspettando quando da l'ex.^a vostra sarò commandato per meter in effetto quanto m'ordinerà et io potrò, avisando pure che per ogni conto et occasion bisogna haver benigno et favorevole questo signor bascià che facilmente si potrà far, per esser cortesissimo et desideroso di far piacere a chi li merita. Ringratio l'Ex.^a vostra delle graziose offerte et favori mi fa nella sua letera, di che io, se ben son tanto lontano, ne fò supremo capitale per guoder il favor di tanto gran Prenzipe. Et pregho Iddio mi dia poter da servirlo come io spero farò perchè non è sì picholo che qualche volta non possi servir ne sì grandando che non bisogni. Senz'altro pregherò il Creator per la lunga et felice vita di v. ex.^a con aumento di stati et regni. Dalle Vigne di Pera il di xxx di Febraio MDLX

humilisimo servitor de la ex.^{ia} v

Josef Naçy



Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

I kiss Your Excellency's hands for the privilege of asking me something beneficial to you. After I received Your Excellency's letter, I met the magnificent Alberto degli Alberti and offered him what few I can and I value, and when the occasion will come to him and to the Tuscan nation, I will show with deeds that the trust Your Excellency's showed to me will not be vain. I have discussed with the ambassador some important business to serve Your Excellency's service, and now the time has come to put it into practice since the way is free of opponents, which from others never lack, but it would be possible to handle the task with such skill that they would not put any obstacle. I will keep waiting, when from Your Excellency's I will be ordered to put into effect what you will desire and what I will be able to do, I inform you that in every situation and on every occasion it is compulsory to gain the grand vizier's favor, which can be easily obtained since he is very friendly and desirous to those who deserve it. I thank Your Excellency for the gracious offers and favors mentioned in your letter, which, despite being far, I consider them as supreme worth for enjoying the favor of such a great prince. I pray that God will give me the strength to serve you as I hope to do, because there is no little man who cannot serve well in some occasion nor such a great man who does not need [help]. I will certainly pray to the Creator for a long and happy life for Your Excellency, with an increase of states and kingdoms. From the Vineyards of Pera, February 30, 1560

most humble servant of Your Excellency

Josef Naçy

APPENDIX 9

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Cosimo de' Medici, Vineyards of Pera (Constantinople), April 24, 1560
ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 484, c.569

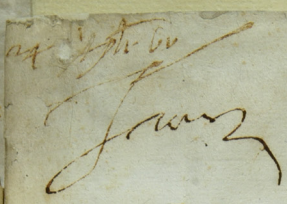
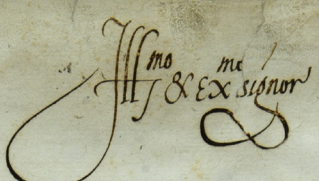
Ill.^{mo} & Ex.^{mo} signor

La infinita bontà di V. Ex.^{tia} et l'offerte che a me suo fidelissimo servitore ha fatto per una sua letera hauta per mano del magnifico bailo, alla qualle ho fatto risposta, mi dà animo, se ben io con servitij non l'habbi meritato, a domandar gratia da v. ex.^a. Et però supplico quella m'habbi per scusato se io il facio.

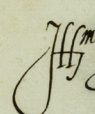
Ill.^{mo} signor mio, havendo noi d'haver qualche somma di danari in Ferrara da persone Portoghese abitanti in quella cità, dalle qualle non ne possian cavar construtto, saren forzati stringerli per giustizia. Et perchè li tempi son tali ch'hoggi mai bisogna favor per ottenerla, essendo vostra ill.^{ma} sig.^{ria} quel Prenzipe che tanto l'ama et fa osservar, son forzato ricorer da lei et supplicar l'ex.^a vostra ch'essendo richiesto da Duarte Gomez nostro agente d'una lettera di raccomandatione per l'ill.^{mo} signor Ducha di Ferrara suo genero gliela conciedi, acio gli sia fatta breve et bona giustizia. Dil che io n'harò obligatione infinita, restando sempre al servitio di vostra ex.^a, et desiderando occasione di meter in effetto questa mia volontà. Preglio il Signor Iddio che l'ill.^{ma} et ex.^{ma} presona di vostra ex.^a prosperi con augmento di stati et regni. Dalle Vigne di Pera el di xxxiii d'Aprille MDLX

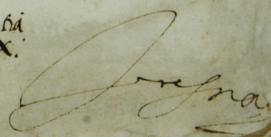
Humil serv.^{tor} di vostra ex.^{tia}

Josef Naçy



569

La infinita bontà di V.^{ra} E.^x et l'offerte che a me suo fidelissimo seruitore ha fatto per vna sua
 lettera hanta per mano del Mag.^o Bailo, alla quale ho fatto risposta, mi dà animo, se ben
 io con seruitù no l'habbi meritato, a domandar gratia da V.^{ra} E.^x. Et però supp quella
 m'habbi per scusato se io il faccio: ~


 signor mio: Hauerò noi d'hauer qualche soma di danari in Ferrara da persone Portoghese
 habbitanti in quella città, dalle qualle no ne possian' cauar constructo, saren' forzato
 stringerli per giustizia; Et perche li tempi son' tali ch' hoggi mai bisogna fauor per
 ottenerla, essendo v^{ra} Iffma sig. quel Prencipe che tanto l'ama & fa obseruar, son'
 forzato ricorer da lei et Supplicar l'E.^x v^{ra}. ch' essendo richiesto da Duarte Gomez
 nro agente d'una l^{ra} di raccomandatione per l'Iffmo I^{ro} Duca di Ferrara suo genero
 gli ela concedi, acio gli sia fatta breue & bona giustizia. Dilche io n' habo obligat^{ne}
 infinita, restando sempre al seruizio di v^{ra} E.^x: & desiderando occasione d'i
 meter in effetto questa mia voluntà. Pregho il sig. Iddio che l'Iffma & E.^x ma
 Persona di v^{ra} E.^x prosperi con aumento di Stat. & Regni: Dalle vigne
 di Pera el di xxij d'Aprille. M. D. Lx. ~

Humil. Seru. di v^{ra} E.^x.


Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

Your Excellency's limitless kindness and the offers you made to me, your humble servant, in your letter that I received from the hands of your magnificent ambassador and to which I answered, gives me courage to ask a favor, despite the fact that I have not deserved it by any deed. So I beg you to forgive me if I do so.

Most illustrious Lord, since some Portuguese living in Ferrara owes us a sum of money, and since we cannot get out of this situation, we are obliged to take legal action. And since we live in times where it is compulsory to gain someone's favor in order to obtain justice, and since Your Most Excellent Lordship loves justice as a prince and ensures that it is applied, I am forced to ask you, on behalf of Duarte Gomes, our agent, a recommendation letter to be presented to the duke of Ferrara, your son-in-law, so that justice may be quickly obtained. For this favor I will be indebted without obligation, remaining always at Your Most Excellent Lordship service and desiring occasion to put into action my will. I pray the Lord to make the most illustrious person of Your Excellency prosper with the increase of states and kingdoms. From the Vineyards of Pera, April 24, 1560

humble servant of Your Excellency

Josef Naçy

APPENDIX 10

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Alfonso II d'Este, Belvedere (Constantinople), February 11, 1561
ASMo, ASE, Carteggi di oratori, rettori vescovi, b. 1782/1

[...]

Essendo andato alla Porta del potentissimo Principe Soltan Selim a presentargli mio fratello per schiavo, essendol'anch'io, ragionando delle cose di Franchia, fra gli altri Principi si ragionò della Ex.^{tia} vostra, do[ve(?)]... feci quel'offito che si richiede alla servitù che gliene porto, trovandomi obligatissi[m]o alle [...]e cortesie et favori havuto da v. Ex.^a quando mi trovava in cotesta sua città. Et intendendo sua Magestà alcune particolarità de i miei negotii, et anchor del successo nel matrimonio di mio fratello, di sua gratia et per farci favor, et veder l'experientia di quello, haveamo referto di V. Ex.^a mio fratello et io, volsse mandar il primo chiaus di sua Porta, con altro schiavo suo hebreo, con lettere di prieghi a v. ex.^a come per esse et per la comission che il detto porta, si vederà. Hor mi resta dir che se ben l'Ex.^a vostra farà quello che da esso signor gli vien preghato, anchor che sia cavar danari di mano, lui è tal prencipe, che con la minor occasion che da V. Ex.^{tia} sarà richiesto, importerà infinito più, sì per tener la brida a qualch'uni, come anchor per altre necessità occorrenti al suo stato. Et se non fosse che forse si dirà parlo per mio benefittio, darei tale et tanto sufficiente ragione a V. Ex.^a, che credesse haverli fatto un gran servizio [...] [qu]esto negotio. Et [...] pad[re] di [vostra ex]^a fu [...]n tanto honor. Abracci adunque l'Ex.^a vostra questa [...] et compiaccia a[...] signor et visitilo con quello gli parerà, che io sarò il mezo, et farò tali offitii che v. ex.^{tia} s'habbia per contento. Et a me in particolar l'Ex.^a vostra mi può commandar come a suo fidelissimo servitor che haverò a gran favor servirsi di me. Preghe Iddio per longha vita di V. Ex.^{tia} con felice et prospero successo del suo stato. Di Belveder appresso a Costantinopoli el dì XI di Febraio 1561

afectionatissimo et humile s.^{or} dela ex.^{ia} v.

Josef Nacy

Turchia
1561
11. Feb.

Essendo andato alla Porta del potentissimo Principe Solim Selim a presentargli mio fratello
per schiavo, essendol' anch' io, ragionando delle cose di Franchia, fra gli altri Principi si
raggiò della V. M. e feci quel' offero che si richiede alla Seruitù che gl'iene porto,
frouandomi obligato alle cortesie & fauori hauuti da V. M. quando mi trouaua in cortezza
sua città. Et intendendo sua Magesta alcune particolarità de' i miei negotij, & anchor del successo
nel matrimonio di mio fratello, di sua gratia & per farci fauor, et veder l'esperienza di quello
hauemo referto di V. M. mio fratello & io, volse mandar' il primo Chiaus di sua Porta con altro
schiavo suo Hebreo, con lettere di prieghi a V. M. come per esse et per la comission' che il detto port a
si vederà. Hor mi resta dir che se ben l' V. M. v'ra farà quello che da esso signor' gli vien' preghato,
anchor che sia cauar' danari di mano, lui è tal' principe, che an la minor' occasione che da V. M.
sarà richiesta, importerà infinito più; si per tener la brida a qualch' vni, come anchor per altre
necessità occorrenti al suo Stato. Et se non fosse che forse si altrà parlo per mio benefitto,
darei tale & tanto sufficiente ragione a V. M. che credesse hauergli fatto un' gran' seruizio
in tal' negotio.

Con tanto honor. honorati anni. 1561. 11. Feb. Compiacca a V. M.
signor' & visitilo con quello gli parerà, che io sarò il mezo, & farò tali offerij che V. M. s' habbia
per contento. & a me in particolar' l' V. M. v'ra mi può comandar' come a suo fidelissimo Seruitor
che hauero a gran' fauor' seruirsi di me. Pregho Iddio per longha vita di V. M. con
felice & prospero successo del suo Stato: Di Belueder' appresso al detto 11. Feb. 1561

affectionatissimo et humile s^{to} deli sp. n.
Solim

[...]

I went to the Porte of the most powerful Prince Selim in order to introduce to him my brother as his servant, and since I am also his servant, we discussed the events happening in Europe. Among the other princes there, we spoke about Your Excellency, and where (...) I did that task which my duty to you obliges me to do, since I feel obliged for (...) courtesies and favors that I received from Your Excellency when I lived in your city. And since his majesty heard some details of my affairs, and also heard about my brother's successful marriage, and of your favor in satisfying us, and after having seen the proof of what I and my brother told Prince Selim, he wanted to send the first messenger of his Porte with his Jewish servant²⁰⁴, with letters of request to Your Excellency, as you will see from the bearer of the mission. I add that although Your Excellency will do what the lord²⁰⁵ requires, namely to recover money from the hands of another, he is a prince of such stature that, at even the most minimal request from Your Excellency, you will obtain innumerable things more, whether to stop someone's action or to meet other needs of your state. Were it not for the suspicion that I speak for my own benefit, I would give Your Excellency the right to believe that you have done a great service (...) in this business. And (...) fat[her] of [your excellenc]y was (...) such honor. May Your Excellency embrace this (...) and please (...) lord and visit him in the form you want, and I will be the means, and I will do these tasks in order to satisfy Your Excellency. And to me in particular, Your Excellency can commend as to your most trusted servant, so that I will receive great pleasure to serve you. I pray God for the long life of Your Excellency with the happy and prosperous success of your state. From Belveder, near Constantinople February, 9, 1561

fond and humble servant of Your Excellency

Josef Nacy

APPENDIX 11

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Cosimo I de' Medici, Belvedere (Constantinople), November 2, 1561

ASF, Mediceo del Principato, f. 490 A, c.1059

Ill.^{mo} et ex.^{mo} sig.^{or}

Se ben la ex.^a vostra non mi comanda cosa in che servirla (che io molto desidero per mostrar l'animo che ho di farlo) non lascio in tutte le occasioni che in queste bande succedeno, far opera da leal et fedel servitor come ho fatto. Et la ex.^a vostra mi perdoni se in questo sarò prosuntuoso, ma per la servitù che gli porto sono obligato a dirgli che questo signor bailo mandato qui da v. ex.^a è più atto a star in botegha che a ministrar officio di tal Principe, perchè con le sue operationi ha messo li giorni passati l'honor di v. ex.^a et il ben della natione in punto differente del servitio di tal Principe et beneficio di detta natione.

Dio n'ha provisto et io suo servitor non ho manchato di far quanto si conveniva. A me come tale toca avisar a v. ex.^a et lui con la sua sapientia provvederà.

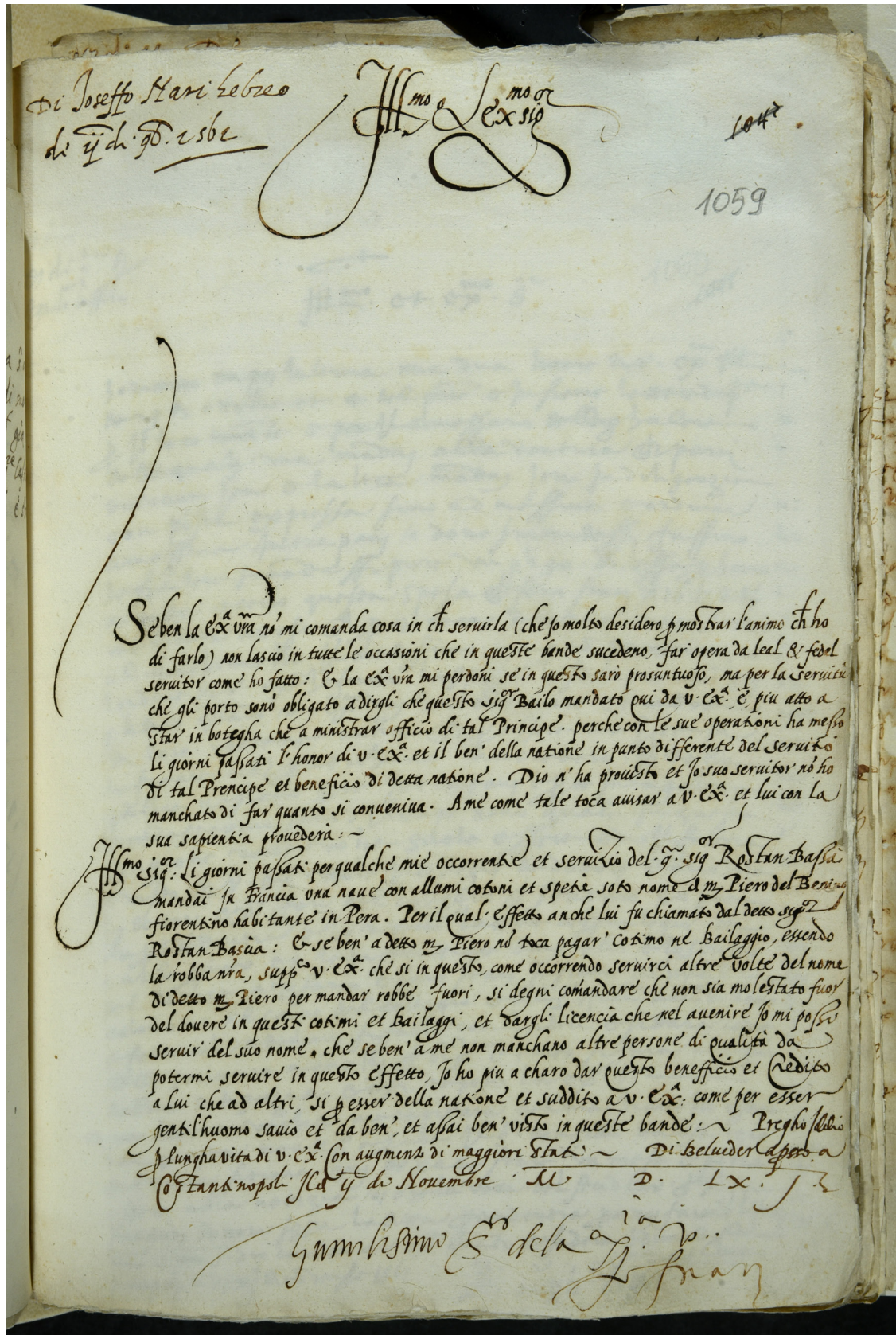
Ill.^{mo} sig.^{or}, li giorni passati per qualche mie occorrentie et servizio del quondam signor Rostan bassà mandai in Francia una nave con allumi cotoni et spetie soto nome di messer Piero del Benino fiorentino habitante in Pera. Per il qual effetto anche lui fu chiamato dal detto signor Rostan bascia. Et se ben a detto messer Piero non toca pagar cotimo nè bailaggio, essendo la robba

²⁰⁴ It is the Jewish physician named David with the role of translator.

²⁰⁵ Prince Selim.

nostra, supplico v. ex.^a che sì in questo come occorrendo servirci altre volte del nome di detto messer Piero per mandar robbe fuori, si degni commandare che non sia molestato fuor del dovere in questi cotimi et bailaggi, et dargli licencia che nel avenire io mi possi servir del suo nome, che se ben' a me non manchano altre persone di qualità da potermi servire in questo effetto, io ho più a charo dar questo beneffficio et credito a lui che ad altri, sì per esser della natione et suddito a v. ex.^a come per esser gentilhuomo savio et da ben, et assai ben visto in queste bande. Pregho Iddio per lungha vita di v. ex.^a con augmento di maggiori stati. Di Belveder apresso a Costantinopoli il ii di Novembre MDLXI

*humilisimo s.^{or} dela ex.^{ia} v.
Josef Nacy*



Most illustrious and most excellent Lord

Although Your Excellency does not command any task in which I can serve you (that I really desire to do, so that I can show the will I have in doing it) in all the events happening here I continue my effort as loyal and faithful servant as I have done. May Your Excellency forgive me if on this point I will be presumptuous, but because of my eagerness to serve you, I feel obliged to tell you that your ambassador is more suited to work as a shopkeeper than to handle such a prince's office, because with his deeds in the last few days he has compromised Your Excellency's name [literally: honor] and the well-being of the (Tuscan) nation. God ensured this situation and I, your servant, have not failed to do what was convenient. I have to inform Your Excellency; and you, assisted by your wisdom, will take action.

Most illustrious lord, in recent days, for some of my needs and at the service of the late Rüstem pasha, I sent a shipment to France, a ship full of alum, cotton and spices, under the the name of *messer* Piero del Benino, a Florentine living in Pera. He was also summoned by Rüstem pasha for this purpose. Although *messer* Piero does not have to pay the taxes and fees due to the Florentine ambassador, since the goods belong to us, and since we will need to require *messer* Piero's name in order to export (our) goods, I beg Your Excellency to issue an order that he will not be harassed for the payment of these duties and fees, and to give him a license so that I can use his name in the future. Despite the fact that I do not lack other people of condition whom I can use for this task, nonetheless I am more pleased to offer this benefit and credit to him rather than to others, firstly because he belongs to the Tuscan nation and he belongs to Your Excellency's subjects, and also because he is a wise gentleman and honest, and very respected here. I pray god for the long life of Your Excellency's with the increase of greater states. From Belvedere close to Constantinople, November 2, 1561

most humble servant of Your Excellency's

Josef Nacy

APPENDIX 12

Letter of Joseph Nasi to the Doge of Venice, Belvedere (Constantinople), March 7, 1567

ASVe, Lettere e scritture turchesche, filza 2, n. 277

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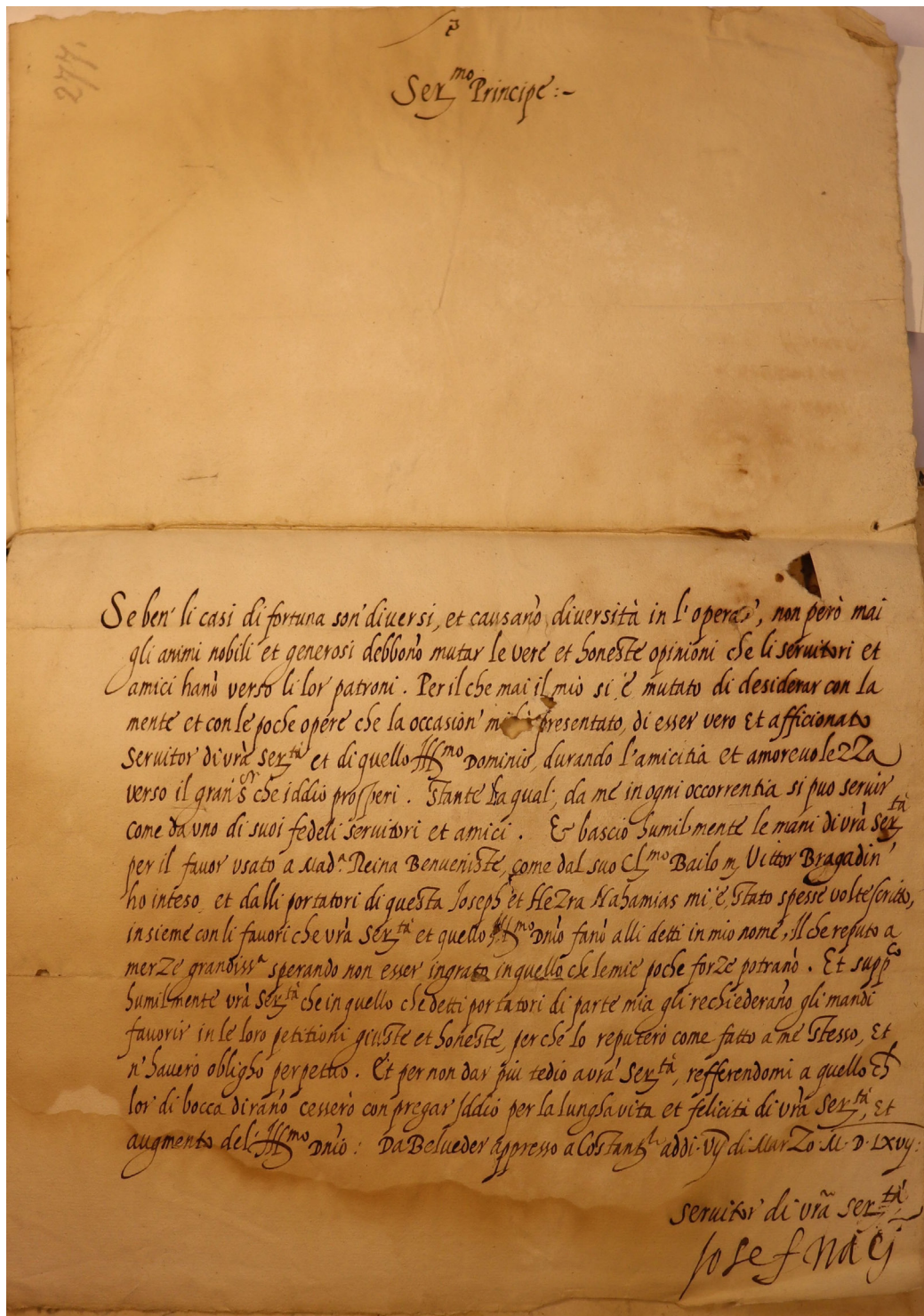
Ser.^{mo} Principe

Se ben li casi di fortuna son diversi, et causano diversità in l'opera, non però mai gli animi nobili et generosi debbono mutar le vere et honeste opinioni che li servitori et amici hanno verso li lor patroni. Per il che mai il mio si è mutato di desiderar con la mente et con le poche opere che la occasion m'[ha] presentato di esser vero et afficionado servitor di vostra Ser.^{tà} et di quello Illustrissimo Dominio, durando l'amicitia et amorevolezza verso il gran signor che Iddio prosperi. Stante la qual, da me in ogni occorrentia si può servir come di uno di suoi fedeli servitori et amici. Et bascio humilmente le mani di vostra Ser.^{tà} per il favor usato a madonna Reina Benveniste, come dal suo clarissimo Bailo messer Vittor Bragadin ho inteso et dalli portatori di questa Joseph et Hezra Nahamias mi è stato spesse volte scritto, insieme con li favori che vostra Ser.^{tà} et quello Illustrissimo Dominio fanno alli detti in mio nome. Il che reputo a merzè grandissima sperando non esser ingrato in quello che le mie poche forze potranno. Et supplico humilmente vostra Ser.^{tà} che in quello che detti portatori di parte mia gli rechiederanno, gli mandi favorir in le loro

petitioni giuste et honeste, perchè lo reputerò come fatto a me stesso, et m'haverò obbligo perpetuo. Et per non dar più tedio a vostra Ser.^{ta} refferendomi a quello che lor di bocca diranno, cesserò con pregar Iddio per la lungha vita et felicità di vostra Ser.^{ta}, et aumento dell' Illustrissimo Dominio. Da Belveder appresso a Costantinopoli addì vii di Marzo MDLXVII

servitor di vostra Ser.^{ta}

Josef Naci



Most serene Prince

Although the cases of fate are various, and cause a variety of events in actions, this is not the reason why nobles and generous souls change the true and honest opinion that servants and friends have towards their masters. For this reason, my soul has never diverted from desiring with the mind and the few deeds that fate has presented me, to be true and fond servant of Your Serenity and of your most illustrious dominion as long as friendship and love that will last towards the sultan, may God prosper him.

For this reason, you can count on me as one of your faithful servants and friends. I humbly kiss Your Serenity's hands for the favor you granted to *madonna* Reyna Benveniste, as I heard from your most distinguished ambassador *messer* Vittor Bragadin, and from the bearers of this letter, Joseph and Hezra Hahamias, who have many times written to me, together with Your Serenity's and your most illustrious dominion's favors granted to them on my behalf. This thing I estimate as an enormous reward, hoping not to seem ungrateful in what my weak forces are able to achieve. I humbly beg Your Serenities to satisfy the fair and honest requests of my letter's bearers, as I will consider this as favor done to me and I will feel perpetual debt. And so as not to bother you longer, referring to what they will say to you in person, I add nothing further. I pray to God for long life and happiness of Your Serenity and increase of the most illustrious dominion. From Belveder near Constantinople, March 7, 1567

servant of Your Excellency

Josef Nacy



Seal of Joseph Nasi, letter dated March 7, 1567 (Appendix 12)

APPENDIX 13

Letter of Joseph Nasi to the Council and Rector of the Republic of Ragusa, Adrianople, March, 21, 1568.

State Archive of Dubrovnik (DADU), 61, Miscellanea 16. sec., Box n. 6, F. II/1, c.46r.

Ill.^{mi} signori

Se ben' per il pas[sat]o non sia occorso scrivergli, non però per la affitione che porto a quella [...] sig.^{ria}, in le occasioni ho mancato di essergli buono e vero amico come forse alcuni signori delli vostri in queste bande hanno visto. Il che col'aggiuto d'Iddio continuerò sempre che occorrerà.

Hor'essendo passata a miglior vita la buona memoria della signora Gratia Naci, et havendo le Ill.^{me} s.v. a sua instantia fatto parte ai suoi huomini per li commercii di cotesta inclita città, come per detta parte si potrà vedere, non concedendo a nessun'altro hebreo simili conditioni e vantaggio, il che è stato mantenuto de tutte le bande sì dal canto delle I. S. V. come da detti agenti con assai vantaggio del promesso. Però di novo gli supplico che per amor mio et per il desiderio che ho di compiacerli in cose di maggior qualità, al huomo di detta signora nominato Isac Ergas Abenazo, et Aharon Crecente insieme concedano di novo detta parte per cinque anni, non la concedendo ad alcun altro hebreo. Dil che oltra che sarà beneficio della sua scala, io gliene restarò obbligatissimo a rendergli il contracambio in ogni cosa che da loro sarò richiesto, et perchè son certo che questa lettera sarà dalle ill.^{me} S.V. per la sua humanità accettata essequendo quanto in essa si contiene, aspetando la sua gratiosa risposta, non dirò altro salvo suplicargli che detti miei huomini siano ben visti et favoriti dalle I. S. V. di sorte che loro mi scrivano quanto la presente gli habbia giovato per la quale me gli offero di buon cuore ad ogni suoi piaceri che il Signor Iddio gli mantenga felicissimi. Dato in Andrinopoli 21 di Marzo 1568

Alli piaceri di vostre Ill.^{me} S.

*Josef Naci duque del
arcipelagho*

Secretarius Cohen

13
 Ill^{me} Signori ~

Se ben' ~~per il~~ ^{non} sia occorso scrivervgli; nò pò per la affittione che porto a quella ^{di} Sig; in le occasioni, ho mancato di enervgli buono e vero amico. come forse alcuni S. delli vñi in ^{quante} bande hanò visto. Il che col' aggiunto d'Addio continuerò sempre che occorrerà.

Hov' Essendo passata a miglior vita la buona mem^a della Sig Gratia Nac., & hauendolo Ill^{me} S. V. a sua Instantia fatto parte a i suoi huomini p^{er} li Comercij di coteda inclita cita, come p^{er} detta parte si potrà vedere, nò concedendo a nessun' altro Sebreo simili conditioni e vantaggio, il che è stato mantenuto de tutte le bande si dal canto delle S. S. V. come da detti agenti con assai vantaggio del promesso. Però di nouo gli supp^{lico} che p^{er} amor mio et p^{er} il desio che ho di compiacervi in cose di maggior qualità, al huomo di detta S. nominato Isaac Ergas Alenazò, et Abaron ercentè insieme concedano di nouo detta parte p^{er} cinq^{ue} ani, nò la concedendo ad alcun' altro Sebreo; di che olera che sarà benefo della sua scala, so gliene restarò obligatissimo a rendergli il contra cambio in ogni cosa che da loro sarà richies^{ta}, et p^{er} che son certo che questa lra sarà dalle Ill^{me} S. V. per la sua humanità accettata. Essequendo quanto in essa si contiene; aspettando la sua lgratiosa risposta, nò dirò altro, salvo supplicargli che detti miei huomini siano ben visti et favoriti dalle S. S. V. di sorte che loro mi scrivano quanto la parte gli habbia giouato, p^{er} laquale megli offero di buon cuore ad ogni suoi piaceri che d'Addio gli mantenga felicitissimi. Dat. In Andrinop^{oli} 21 di Marzo 1568.

Alli piaceri di vñe Ill^{me} S. ~

Isaac Ergas
 Arcipalaga
 Sig. Ergas

Most illustrious Lords

Although in past times I did not have occasion to address you, notwithstanding the affection I owe to Your (...) Lordship, in any occasion have I failed to act as good and true friend, as maybe some of the gentlemen your subjects have experienced here. With God's help I will continue in doing so when it will be necessary.

Now, since the good memory of *signora* Gracia Nasi passed away, and having your most illustrious Lords, at her request, given trading privileges to her agents in that illustrious city, as you can see, without granting to any other Jew such conditions and advantages, and this thing has been preserved everywhere from your side as well as her agent's side with reciprocal satisfaction. Therefore, I plead again for the love I owe you, and for the desire I have to please you in greater matters, to grant [the same privilege] to the agents of the aforementioned *signora*, Isac Ergas Abenazo and Aharon Crecente, for five more years, without consenting [the same privileges] to any other Jew. This will bring benefit to your harbor, I will feel obliged to repay you in any duty you will require of me, and since I am sure that this request will be accepted by Your Lordships for your kindness and for doing what my plea contains, waiting for your gracious answer, I will not say anything more, except that those agents of mine shall be favored by Your Lordships, awaiting from you an answer, offering with good heart to any of your requests. May God preserve you happy. Given in Adrianople, March 21, 1568

to the service of your most illustrious lordships

Josef Naci duke of Archipelago

secretary Cohen

APPENDIX 14

Letter of Joseph Nasi to Francesco I de' Medici, Belvedere (Constantinople), November 7, 1578
ASF, Mediceo del Principato, f. 4279, cc.15r-v

Ser.^{mo} Principe

Per mano del signor Mongrani Gianfigliazzi ambasciatore di V. Altezza hebbi la sua lettera. Et conferendo insieme le cose della sua ambasciata, io per l'amor et affettione che sempre ho portato e porto a V.A. (mentre che con buona gratia et in servitio del mio Principe lo potrò fare) non ho mancato in quelli principii che lui venne, di farli fare tutti gli favori possibili come fu notorio dandoli ancora il mio parer e consiglio col quale forse le cose sarebono venute al desiato fine. Egli poi (non so la caggion per che) se rimosse dalla mia pratica, non dandomi ne mandandomi dar conto delli suoi negotii, anzi quelli signori con chi negoziava, erano da lui pregati che non mi dicessino niente, havendolo io indrizato in tali luoghi, e loro mel dicevano. Io dunque vedendo questo suo animo lo lasciai far e non me n'impaciai, solo qualche volta li mandai a dire che vedesse come parlava perchè intendevo che parlasse fuor del dover, e di quello si conveniva, del signor capitan bassà²⁰⁶ e di me. Sì che havendosi lui governato a modo suo se ben s'affaticò assai per haver il suo intento, essendosi desviato dalla vera stra, le cose non sono riuscite come li amici di V.A. volevano, del che io in particolar per suo rispetto ne ho sentito dispiacer, sapendo

²⁰⁶ Kapudan Pasha, the title of commander in chief of the ottoman fleet.

massime che l'animo reale del potentissimo Gran Signore, che Dio exalti, è di abbracciar amorevolmente tutti quelli che alla sua felice Porta se raccomandano, richiedendo però cose giuste e ragionevoli. Ma sendo per il contrario questa che lui ad ogni modo voleva conseguir di far che appresso V.A. o la sua religione vi restassero galere con patto di servir l'inimico in ogni suo bisogno, par che come cosa fuor del dover non habino voluto concederla. Perchè se ben li signori venetiani per li patti della lor pace hanno galere per la sua diffensione, non possono prestarle ad altri per offender il Gran Signore tal che l'haver questo signor ambasciatore voluto governarsi a modo suo e senza il consiglio de' veri amici, è stato causa che non habbi otenuto il desiato effetto della sua venuta. Pur quando a V.A. Paresse tratar questo negocio con li debiti modi e mezzi, credo che non mancherebbe di esser ben spedito per che l'invictissimo Gran Signore come Principe giusto et amorevole si rende facile à conceder quelle cose che son giuste et honeste. Et similmente l' Illustrissimo signor Mehmet bassà suo supremo vezir, et io in questo et in ogni altra occasione che senza pregiudizio del servitio di Sua Magestà lo potrò fare, non mancarò mostrar l'animo che ho di far cosa grata a V. Altezza, la cui vita con felicità e prosperità de suoi stati, Dio per molti anni augmenti. Basciando la mano di V.A., sarà portator di questa messer Carlo Saminiati gentil'huomo luchese. Da Belveder appresso Pera di Costantinopoli alli 7 novembre 1578

*al servitio de v.a
el duque de naxia*

17 febre 1520

Ser^{mo} Principe.

Per mano del S. Mongrami fianziglia L. Amb. di V. Alteza Sebbi la sua lra. conferendo insieme le cose della sua Ambasciata, io p'l'amor et affectione che sempre ho portato & porto a V. A. mentre che con buona gratia et in seruicio del mio Principe lo potrò fare) nò ho mancato in quelli principij che lui vede, di farli fare tutti gli fauori possibili come fu notor. dandoli ancora il mio parer & consiglio col quale forse le cose sarebbono venute al desiato fine. E gli poi nò so la cagion per che se rimosse dalla mia gratia, nò dandosi mi ne mandandomi dar conto dell' suoi negotij, anzi quelli s. con chi negotiaua erano dalui pregati che nò m' dicessero niente. Sauendolo io indirizzato in tali luoghi; Eloro m'el diceuano. Io dunque vedendo questo suo animo, lo lasciai far & nò me ne impacciai, solo qualche volta m'andaua a dire che vedesse come parlaua & che intendeuo che parlasse fuor del douer, & di glio conueniua, del S. Capitan Bassa, & di mè. Si che sauendoli lui gouernato a modo suo, se ben s'affaticò assai per sauere il suo intento, essendoli desiato della Vera Stra, le cose nò sono riusate come li amici di V. A. voleuano. del che io in particolare per suo rispetto me ho sentito di spiacer, Sapendo massi che l'animo Reale del ptebini gran s. che Dio Exalti & di abbracciar' amoreuolm^e tutti quelli che alla sua felicità se raccomandano, richiedendo però cose giuste & ragionevoli. ma sendo per il contrario questa che lui ad ogni modo voleua conseguir di far che appresso V. A. o la sua religione vi restassero galere con patto di seruir l'inimico in ogni suo bisogno, par che come era fuor del douer nò habino voluto concederla. per che se ben li s. venetiani per li patti della lor pace sanò galere p'la sua diffensione, nò possono prestarle ad altri per offender il gran s. Tal che l'auer questo S. Amb. voluto gouernare a modo suo. E senza el consiglio de' veri amici, è stato causa che nò habbi otenuto l' desiato effetto della sua Venuta. pur quando a V. A. parese tratar questo negotio con li debiti modi & mezzi, credo che nò mancherebbe di esser ben spedito p'el finitimo

Gran S. come Principe giusto et amovole si rende facile a conceder quelle cose che
 sono giuste et honeste; E similmente il M. S. Mehemet Bassa suo supremo Vezir.
 E po in questo et in ogni altra occasione che senza pregiudicio del servizio di
 Sua Maestà lo potro fare, no mancarò mostrar l'animo che ho di far cosa grata a
 V. Altezza. La cui vita con felicità & prosperità de suoi Stati Dio per molti
 anni augmenti. basciandola mano di V.A. Sarà portator di questa m. Carlo
 Samiriani gentil'huomo Lucese. Da Beluder appresso Perad. Cost. dli. 7 non. 1578.

Al M. S. Mehemet Bassa

Elong Tenaxi

Most serene Prince

I received your letter through the hand of *signor* Mongrani Gianfigliuzzi, Your Highness's ambassador. And as we conferred on the aims of his mission, I – out of the love and affection which I have always borne, and continue to bear, toward Your Highness (insofar as I may do so with due grace and in the service of my own Prince) – did not fail, from the very beginning of his [the Florentine ambassador] arrival, to extend to him every possible favour, as is well known, offering him also my opinion and counsel, with which matters might perhaps have reached the desired conclusion. He, however – for reasons unknown to me – withdrew from dealings with me, neither informing me nor having anyone inform me of his affairs. Indeed, he even requested those gentlemen with whom he was negotiating not to tell me anything, although I had directed him to those very persons, and they in turn reported his requests to me. Thus, seeing his disposition, I let him proceed as he wished and did not involve myself further, although I sometimes sent word advising him to moderate his words, for I heard that he spoke ill of *capitan bassà*²⁰⁷ and of me.

Therefore, since he acted in the way he wanted and despite his efforts to reach his goal – having deviated from the proper course, things did not succeed as the friends of Your Highness had hoped. On this account, and particularly out of regard for Your Highness, I was saddened, knowing especially that the noble heart of the most powerful Great Lord (may God exalt him) is inclined to embrace with benevolence all those who commend themselves to his Porte, provided that they request what is just and reasonable. But since, on the contrary, the matter which he sought to obtain at all costs – namely, that in the service of Your Highness or of the Order²⁰⁸ there remain war galleys bound to serve the enemy in all his needs – appeared to be outside the bounds of propriety, it seems they were unwilling to grant it. For although Venetian lords, by the terms of their peace, maintain galleys for their own defence, they cannot lend them to others for the purpose of attacking the Great Lord; thus, since this ambassador chose to act according to his own views and without the counsel of true friends, it was the reason he did not obtain the desired outcome of his mission. Yet should Your Highness wish to treat this matter with the appropriate means and methods, I believe that it would not fail to be well concluded, for the most invincible Great Lord, as a just and benevolent Prince, is inclined to grant what is just and honourable. Likewise, the most illustrious Mehmet pasha, his Grand Vizier, and I myself – whenever, without harming the loyalty I owe to His Majesty, – shall not fail to demonstrate my disposition to do what may please Your Highness. May God for many years increase the life, happiness, and prosperity of Your Highness and of your states. Kissing Your Highness' hands, *messer* Carlo Saminati, gentleman from Lucca, will carry this letter. From Belveder near Pera of Constantinople, November 7, 1578

At the service of Your Highness,
The Duke of Naxia

APPENDIX 15

Draft letter of Francesco de' Medici to Joseph Nasi
ASFi, Mediceo del Principato, f. 4279 c.16

Quando da messer Carlo Sanminiati mi fu presentata la vostra lettera di già ero stato ragguagliato dal cavaliere Gianfigliuzzi mio ambasciadore di quanto avesse trattato a cotesta Porta, dal quale

²⁰⁷ The Kapudan Pasha.

²⁰⁸ The Tuscan Military Order of Saint Stephen.

intesi che egli non si era prevalso dell'opera vostra in cosa nessuna, poichè Mehmet bascià insospettito per essere egli stato una sol volta da voi, gl'haveva detto, che i negotii di sua maestà non si trattavano in casa giudei. La qual cosa ancor io sapendo non gli detti commissione che in questo ricorresse per aiuto, et per consiglio a voi. Ma solo per la mia ve lo raccomandai acciocchè occorrendogli cosa alcuna per essere in paese così lontano dove non sono nostri mercanti, potesse far capitale di voi come di persona della quale io mi promettevo. Et se egli di poi ha sparlato di voi et del capitan bascià come dite, mi assicurarò conoscendolo per cavaliere honorato et mio fedel servitore che ciò non harà fatto senza giusta cagione, sì come ancora so che l'essersi egli governato a modo suo come vi è parso, è stato conforme alla volontà mia et alla promessa fattaci per lettera di sua maestà, alla quale venendogli mancato forse per l'avaritia de ministri di cotesta Porta non poteva fare di non governarsi in quella maniera. Nè dovevano parere le sue domande non ragionevoli essendo state da sua maestà promesse et non contenendo altro se non che io non fussi costretto ad obligar cose che fussero obligate ad altri.

Et poichè per questa via che era la diritta non si è potuto questo trattato condurre a fine io non ci penso più bastandomi una volta haver conosciuto quanta fede si debba prestare alle lettere del Gran Signore nè voglio usare altri mezzi per ottenere cosa che non è meno utile à sudditi di sua maestà che à miei come potrebbe dimostrare il tempo. Ma quanto appartiene al buon animo che dite di avere verso di me et alle offerte che mi fate, all'occasione vi faremo conoscere quanto conto noi ne facciamo.

When *messer* Carlo Sanminiati gave me your letter, I had already been informed by *cavaliere* Gianfigliazzi, my ambassador, about what he had negotiated at the Porte. He told me that he didn't count on your mediation at all, because Mehmet pasha, suspicious of the fact that he [the ambassador] visited you once, told him that "His Majesty's business can't be handled in a Jews' house. Upon hearing this, I ordered him not to seek your help or counsel. I commended him to you so that he would not lack for anything, since he had come to a distant country devoid of merchants of our nation, he could rely on you. And if he spoke ill about you and about the kapudan pasha as you said, I will make sure that he did not do so without a good reason, since I know him as an honorable *cavaliere* and my faithful servant, and moreover, I know that he managed [the mission] in his own way, as it appeared to you, this was according to my will and to the promise that His Majesty²⁰⁹ made to us. This promise was not kept, probably because of his ministries' greed, he²¹⁰ acted in the only way possible. His requests shouldn't have sounded unreasonable, since his majesty had promised this, [the agreement] required me to assume certain obligations similarly to which other [nations] were bound. But since from this path, which was the proper one, we couldn't achieve the treaty, in the end I don't think about it anymore, it is enough to have learned once how much faith should be given to the Great Lord's letters, nor do I wish to use other means to obtain something less useful for my subjects than for those of His Majesty, as time would have shown. But about the goodwill you say you have towards me, and about the offers you make to me, on the right occasion we will let you know how valuable they are to us.

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²⁰⁹ The Sultan.

²¹⁰ The Florentine envoy.

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Alberto Palladini: conceptualization, investigation, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

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