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Forms of Government in the Renaissance: Uniqueness of the Dubrovnik Model

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Summary

The author looks into the forms of political government in the Renaissance, and the typology thereof as provided by Niccolò Machiavelli in *The Prince* and in *Discourses on Livy*. The article aims to examine whether there is a *differentia specifica* distinguishing the Dubrovnik form of political order from similar forms of political government in Renaissance times. Republican forms of political government are analysed here, and the author stresses the existence of forms situated along the transition line from republic to principate, i.e. monarchy, and vice versa. An exposé of presuppositions of Machiavelli's initial analysis of comparative political orders is followed by a comparative analysis of the Florentine republican model of government, the Venetian form of political government, and, finally, the Dubrovnik model of political order. Although each model had distinctive features, they were similar inasmuch as each preserved the common idea of civil republicanism (*repubblicanesimo civile*), and then shaped its political order in accordance with the interests of the main social and political forces in the country, i.e. in its territory. For instance, the Florentine republicanism developed into a so-called “democratic republicanism” (here the term democracy means exclusively that which Machiavelli refers to as *governo dei molti* – the government of many). Although such forms of wider participation of citizens in decision-making satisfied most citizens of Florence, the system was unstable, because it was subject to internal conflicts between factions and parties, and to external pressures. The Venetian system of aristocratic republicanism was much more stable, but its social base was narrower and, ultimately, prior to its downfall, it transformed into a self-contained police system. The Dubrovnik model of political

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order was also a form of aristocratic republicanism, but its uniqueness lies in the fact that, unlike Venice or Genoa, it limited the authority and prerogatives of the head of state, in this case the rector, who guaranteed the stability and non-corruption of the system. The inclusion of commoners through confraternities in the city's public affairs made it possible to expand the social basis of such an order. These two characteristics also make the Dubrovnik political model unique.

Keywords: Machiavelli, civil republicanism, Florentine “democratic” republicanism, Venetian aristocratic republicanism, Dubrovnik Republic, rector

1. Introduction: Forms of Political Government in the Renaissance

It seems that the uniqueness of the Dubrovnik model of government has not caught a great interest of researchers of the republican Renaissance tradition within the context of modern research into the significance of the republican Renaissance legacy to modern politics. Most analyses of the Renaissance government models limit themselves to the Venetian and Florentine models, as paradigmatic samples of the other forms of government on the Apennine peninsula and the Mediterranean area caught up in the Renaissance (cf. Van Gelderen and Skinner, 2006). The model of Genoa is mentioned as the possible third model of republican order which may be a subject of research (Finlay, 1980), but only within the context of the Venetian model, i.e. aristocratic republicanism, as one of the emanations thereof. (The other emanations of such a model are cities-republics which were vassals to the Venetian Republic, and autonomous cities-municipalities which recognised the rule of Venice or Genoa.)

Within this context, one must ask whether the Dubrovnik model of government deserves any special attention, or is it, after all, only a subtype or variation of aristocratic republicanism of the Venetian type. One can definitely say the latter about Genoa: the Genoese political order was very similar to the Venetian one – similar in the aristocratic basis of political government, in the institutions of political power, and in the competences of the head of state, which, in the Genoese republic, is named just like in the Venetian Republic – the *Doge*. He is appointed to his office for life, as guarantee of the order's stability in contrast with instabilities caused by periodical elections of city authorities, whether through random choice of office-holders (be it from a restricted electoral basis), or through the scrutinization method, or else through regular political elections, which are comparable only by name to the elections of political representatives in modern democracies.

But there is a political thinker who, in his time, pointed out the uniqueness of the Dubrovnik example, a thinker who can rightfully be considered the founder of modern political analysis, namely Niccolò Machiavelli. In his principal work, which is considered an analysis of the republican model of government, three models of government paradigmatic of the Antiquity are singled out: Rome, Athens and

Alexandria, while three models of city republican government are held to be typical of the modern times: Florence, Venice and Dubrovnik. Thus in the first chapter of Book I of *Discourses on Livy* entitled “What have generally been the beginnings of some cities, and what was that of Rome”, Machiavelli mentions Dubrovnik as a city created under distinctive circumstances: the original inhabitants of Dubrovnik, who had lived in the area of Epidaurus (today’s Cavtat), fled from the onslaughts of the Avars and the Slavs in the 7th century and moved to an inaccessible fishermen’s settlement on the rocky seashore, and there they raised their city. The new settlement’s inaccessibility and barrenness forced its inhabitants to live in greater harmony than is usual among those who live in a more fertile area (Machiavelli, 1985: 154-55). By the same token, it forced them to cement this harmony with better laws and a better political constitution. The latter was founded upon better laws, because the population of the city was forced to adapt. It had less time for idleness, and consequently less cause for discord, which they had to (and managed to) confirm, inter alia, by good laws. Such a system born of necessity gave rise to special qualities: unlike the cities located in fertile areas, which, when defending themselves, extend and strengthen their rule in their wider *hinterland*, Dubrovnik was inevitably limited to itself. In the struggle for survival, it had to rely on assiduousness, survival and defence instincts, and the good laws which make that possible. In a nutshell, for reasons of defence and security Dubrovnik had to find its own distinctive way of survival, which meant orientation toward seafaring and a particular defensive position with regard to the other forces which threatened it.

Unfortunately, however, this is the only reference to Dubrovnik in *Discourses on Livy*. Although he intended to discuss republics, as he stressed in the prologue to Book I, which he started to write in 1513, Machiavelli turned, for reasons of conjuncture, to an analysis of monarchies, i.e. principalities. He stopped working on the *Discourses* and wrote *The Prince (De Principatibus)*. He continued to write the *Discourses* sporadically and left them unfinished and unpublished. To the connoisseurs of Machiavelli’s work, in particular of his style and procédé, it is obvious that the caesura in the writing of the *Discourses* occurred precisely at the point when Machiavelli intended to focus on modern republics, i.e. Venice and Dubrovnik, but the subject-matter of *The Prince* took him back to a theoretical analysis of republican government in the early period of Roman history, and to a comparison thereof with the contemporary Florentine republican order. Thus, Venice and Dubrovnik remained *terra incolta*, to the regret – first and foremost – of researchers into the Venetian republicanism, while among researchers into the Dubrovnik political system this indication remained unnoticed.

We are, therefore, forced to acknowledge the fact that, through coincidence and historical circumstances (the coming of Lorenzo de’ Medici junior into power

in Florence and Machiavelli's attempts to enter into his service by writing an advisory manual, namely *The Prince*), we have been deprived of a competent analysis of comparative advantages of the Dubrovnik model of government over the other republican models in the Renaissance. *Per analogiam* we may conclude that such an analysis would surely enrich political thought in general, but also complete Machiavelli's first steps toward articulation of a comparative analysis of models of government or, according to the modern terminology, of forms of political order, i.e. of political systems. Such an initial step was taken in *The Prince*, where Machiavelli elaborated, in the first eleven chapters, on how many kinds of monarchy there are and how they are created. Machiavelli's typology expounded there is already an embryo of comparative-political analysis: monarchies can be hereditary, mixed, new, ecclesiastical and civil. And all states – this is where Machiavelli introduces for the first time the concept of state as *genus proximum*, which encompasses both monarchies and republics – as governments which did have and do have power over people, are either republics or monarchies (Machiavelli, 1999). Here the concept of “government”, *per analogiam* with the state concept, signifies forms of power over people. In Chapter II of *The Prince*, Machiavelli declared that he would not speak of republics because he had already discussed them at length, although Book I of the *Discourses*, which he was obviously referring to, is far from a “lengthy discussion”. It is merely an introduction to the discussion on republics, unfinished because pragmatic interests has once more drawn Machiavelli elsewhere, namely, to proceed immediately and *in medias res* to a political analysis of the Florentine Republic and the republican constitution which might be established again in Florence (Grubiša, 1999). This is precisely why the caesura can be felt between the first book and the other two books of *Discourses on Livy*. The first book was written with the ambition of setting the framework for a systematic discussion on republics, while the second and third books of the *Discourses* lose the consistency of a systematic discussion and turn into a collection of essays, dictated by momentary interest of the participants in the conversation in the Oricellari gardens. During those gatherings, Machiavelli read some chapters to the members of this closed circle inspired with republican ideas. The epilogue to those gatherings was a charge for conspiracy, and two participants in Machiavelli's reading soirées lost their lives for taking part in a republican collusion.

Let us return, however, to the forms of government in the Renaissance, in order to situate the uniqueness of the Dubrovnik example in a wider framework of a typology which Machiavelli only suggested, but never completed. For the purpose of construction of an analytical approach to the subject of study, we might say that the models or forms of government in Renaissance cities-states encompass (1) a set of political institutions which make up the political system in a given territory; (2) processes of political decision-making (election procedures, appointments, reach-

ing of political decisions); (3) a system of political values (political values in the strict sense and the written and unwritten, i.e. common rules of political conduct, legal regulations, and so on) and (4) the actors of said processes (political parties, corporations, interest groups, citizens, etc.).

The models of government depend also on the type of regime: whether it is a monarchy, a state led by an elected or hereditary ruler who rules alone or with the assistance of other institutions, regardless of its designation (empire, kingdom or principality, i.e. principate) or its character (absolute or constitutional), or a republic, where power is exercised by representative bodies (elected, appointed or scrutinized) based on a written or oral constitution. As we mentioned above, Niccolò Machiavelli distinguishes between five kinds of monarchy: (1) newly-established, in which the ruler was elected or seized power himself; (2) hereditary, in which power is handed over to the descendants of the ruling dynasty; (3) absolute, where the ruler governs alone; (4) religious monarchies, where power is based on faith, and, finally, (5) civil monarchy, in which the ruler governs with the citizens' consent. Renaissance political theory, on the other hand, recognizes two kinds of republics: democratic (or popular) republics and aristocratic republics (van Gelderen and Skinner, 2006; Rahe, 2006).

Somewhere between monarchies and republics we find the *signoriae* (from It. *signori* – gentlemen), in which the external form (designation) of the regime is republican, while the informal process of decision-making is in the hands of the participants of one aristocratic or magnate family, as was the case in the Florentine Republic during the first reign of the Medici family from 1434 to 1494 (Larivaille, 1969).

The designation of *city signoriae* applies also to forms of political government created in the urban communes of northern and central Italy in mid-13th century, as forms of institutional evolution of commune, created as a community of all citizens. Gradually, the most important duties in a commune were confided to representatives of the most influential patrician families of the city, in particular after periods of fierce political and social conflicts which erupted between the commoners, i.e. the citizens that populated the cities as free professionals or as labour force, and the magnates, i.e. the social stratum formed through amalgamation of old patrician families and representatives of the new entrepreneurial strata of citizens of more modest and non-noble origins. The transition of free communes into *city signoriae*, which occurred after the period of social conflicts in the 14th century, marks the citizens' aspiration to establish a stable government capable of putting an end to the endemic institutional instability (von Albertini, 1970). The civil *signoriae* soon developed into aristocratic, dynastic *signoriae*, in which members of the strongest and wealthiest strata managed to impose descendants from their ranks, thus establishing

dynasties of rulers. The *signori* as heads of such dynasties usually sought legitimation of their power either from the emperor or the pope, buying the ruler's title of duke, marquis or prince (rector). Until the 16th century, the classic representative political institutions of the commune coexisted with the rule of the *signori*, although their function was frequently reduced to mere ratification of the ruler's decisions. In the 14th and 15th centuries, such *signorie* (in point of fact monarchies) were established in Milan with the Della Torre, Visconti and Sforza dynasties, in Verona with the Della Scala dynasty, in Ferrara with the Este dynasty, in Bologna with the Bentivoglio dynasty, in Rimini and Cesena with the Malatesta dynasty, in Forlì with the Ordelaffi dynasty, in Faenza with the Manfredi dynasty, in Camerino with the Da Varano dynasty, in Urbino with the Montefeltro dynasty, in Imola with the Alidosi dynasty, in Perugia with the Baglioni dynasty, etc.

In some cities-communes, e.g. Venice and Genoa, an aristocratic republic was established, in which power was held by several powerful families, but the nominal head of state was elected from the aristocracy. In such communes, the government of the aristocracy can degenerate into an oligarchy. In such cases the external form of the republic can also be preserved, but power is in the hands of several individuals or a group which rules either based on customs or the consensus of citizens, or illegitimately, breaking the laws and using power for promotion of particular interests at the expense of the general ones.

In Tuscany the communal government was preserved the longest, until the 15th century: the Tuscan republics held onto the democratic, i.e. popular form of government until mid-15th century. Following the example of Florence, in Tuscan republics such as Pisa, Siena, Pistoia and Arezzo, a republican constitution and an appearance of democratic institutions were preserved, although actual power moved into the hands of the most influential families. The Florentine Republic was a prototype of a "democratic republic"; it was built from a free commune in late 12th century, with republican institutions and electoral legitimacy of the power-exercising bodies (Bruckner, 1980). In 1244, great conflicts between the optimates and the commoners, the new urban strata, brought about a consolidation of the democratic republican regime, also called the "regime of the first people" (*regime del primo popolo*).

2. The Florentine Form of Government: Democratic Republicanism

The distinctive trait of Florentine republicanism was the establishment of the rule of corporations in 1280. They ruled the city via their representatives, the *priori*. Together with the standard-bearers (*gonfalonieri*) of the city's districts, the *priori* of professional corporations, i.e. guilds, made up the "city *signoria*", the government, which ruled through the communal council (later the Major Council) and the people's council (later the Minor Council). The predominance of the commoners

(*popolani*) resulted in the first Florentine constitution called “Ordinances of Justice” (*Ordinamenti di giustizia*) in 1293. It set down the duties and rights of the citizens and limited the influence of aristocratic families in the city administration in favour of corporation representatives, guild *priori* and the guilds themselves. Social conflicts between the magnates and the commoners erupted throughout the 14th century and culminated in the first uprising of city proletariat in Western history, the 1378 uprising of Ciompi, wool-production workers, which brought to power members of so-called “minor guilds” in opposition to representatives of major guilds. In 1382, after a brief period of minor guilds’ rule, the rule of major guilds was restored with the support of aristocratic families. In this way an oligarchic government was established, which lasted until 1434, when the Medici family came to the fore among the Florentine magnate families, and its head Cosimo became the first informal *signore*. The democratic republican institutions were preserved, but in the final period of the Medici reign they became the ruler’s mere formal façade. During the reign of Cosimo’s grandson Lorenzo the Magnificent (1469-1492), a *principate* or principality was established and the institutions of republican government were thoroughly revised, which enabled Lorenzo to hold not only the informal, but also the actual power. Lorenzo’s death in 1492 was followed by a reestablishment of republican government, and a Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola was appointed the new informal ruler, as tribune of the people who proclaimed Jesus Christ the ruler of Florence. Although Savonarola purposed the setting up of a theocracy, he advocated the “broad government” (*governo largo*) of citizens and introduced the Major Council with 5000 members into the Florentine political system. In the period from 1492 until 1498, when Savonarola was charged for treason and executed, a political system of mature republicanism assumed shape and lasted until 1512. Between 1527 and 1530 it was briefly restored, but after that, the Florentine Republic irrevocably disappeared and was replaced by the Florentine Dukedom.

The democratic republicanism of Florence was based on a pyramid of elected councils. On top of it was the city *signoria* which encompassed eight *priori* elected according to the territorial principle, but always from the corporation ranks, and one elected gonfalonier (standard-bearer) of justice as head of state. The mandate of each city *signoria* (also referred to as republic *signoria*) lasted two months, which means that the government was changed six times per year. Such a system dates back to the communal age, and it lasted until 1502, when the life-long duty of standard-bearer of justice was instituted, following the example of the Venetian doge. In their exercise of power, the nine members of the “government proper” were serviced by two significant bodies: Twelve Good Men (*probi viri*, i.e. *bonomini*) and Sixteen Standard-bearers (*gonfalonieri*), elected in each individual city district, which represented the citizens’ territorial interests. The members of the two bodies had the right to vote and propose measures to the *signoria*, and their

mandate also lasted two months, but it did not overlap with that of the *signoria*. An important role was played by the body called Ten of Warfare, elected among the Major Council members with a six-months or one-year mandate, which was preoccupied with wars and diplomacy. Internal affairs were the domain of the body called The Eight; it was in charge of internal security, city policing and carrying out judicial verdicts. The *signoria* had the right of initiative, but not exclusive, and it proposed laws to the Major Council after extensive consultation with the citizens (Grubiša, 1993). In delicate cases, the *signoria* summoned distinguished citizens for consultation to *ad hoc* boards and commissions, and the citizens had the obligation to heed the summons (non-compliance entailed a fine) and state the requested opinions. All offices were filled by election, which was carried out by drawing the names of eligible citizens (those who had no law-breaking record, who had no ban on political activity due to participation in conspiracies or in conflicts directed against the government, and who regularly paid taxes) out of leather bags. This was the task of special officials who had to check the eligibility of each candidate. The prerequisites for being elected a civil servant included: permanent residence in Florence for the last thirty years, regular paying of taxes, and a history of family loyalty, which meant that in the past the members of the candidate's family had been eligible candidates for public positions in Florence. Since the *signoria* frequently summoned citizens for consultation to special boards, so-called *balia*, giving them an important role in reaching new political measures and laws, this political system was considered a democratic, collegial form of government. In addition to the Major Council with 200-300 members (up to 5000 in Savonarola's time), between 300 and 500 other citizens took part in reaching political decisions. Namely, the *signoria* had the obligation to disclose its standpoint in case of non-acceptance of a required piece of advice or in case an interest of a group of citizens was formulated, be it on a territorial or a guild-related basis. Beside the enumerated bodies, an important role in the Florentine republicanism was played by a very well organized state administration, which consisted of the First Chancellery, led by eminent public persons (humanists such as Collucci Salutati, Leonardo Bruni or Virgilio Adriani), and the Second Chancellery, led by persons less distinguished, but also highly qualified for performing chancellor's duties (for instance, Niccolò Machiavelli from 1498 to 1512). The solidity and strength of the democratic republican system of Florence rested on those pillars, and Marin Držić had in mind precisely the good characteristics of the Florentine republicanism when he prompted Cosimo Medici I, in spite of the fact that the latter was a monarchic ruler, to establish a mixed political system in which aristocrats would share power with the citizens (Držić, 1989).

3. The Venetian Form of Government: Aristocratic Republicanism

The Venetian political system and model of government are classified as aristocratic republicanism. Formally, the sovereign power belonged to the *arengo*, i.e. the assembly of free citizens, which initially elected the head of city as Byzantine commissioner called *dux*. From this appellation was derived the later title of *doge*, which was legitimized by the 1242 Statute (Finlay, 1980; Lane, 2007).

After Venice was liberated from Byzantine rule, the doge became the head of state, as personification of sovereignty of the Venetian Republic. At first, his only competences were to command the army and war fleet in times of war. Moreover, in times of peace he governed together with six counsellors, with whom he constituted the Minor Council (*Minor Consiglio*), also called the *Serenissima Signoria* (Most Serene *Signoria*).

The actual sovereign power, however, was held by the Major Council (*Maggior Consiglio*), the members of which were initially important citizens, but after the “closure of the Major Council” (*Gran Serrata*) in 1297, it consisted of approximately 1000 exclusively male members of noble families. The Major Council exercised its competences through minor councils, the Collegium of Counsellors (so-called “wise men”), i.e. the real government of the Republic, the Senate (*Consiglio dei Pregadi*, Lat. *Consilium Rogatorum*), authorized for foreign affairs, the Council of Ten, authorized for national security, and judicial councils (*Tribunali della Quarantia*). The Council of Ten gradually became increasingly powerful in the role of protector of republican institutions, but also of the oligarchic power of a part of the Venetian patriciate. In the first period, until the closure of the Major Council, the Venetian aristocracy was a relatively open social stratum, for citizens who did special favours to Venice in war and peace could also become noblemen. Later, in the second half of the 15th century, when the “Golden Book” was introduced, i.e. the register in which only members of the “real” aristocracy could be inscribed, wealthy citizens could become noblemen only exceptionally, in time of war, when the government stimulated sale of nobility titles in order to fill the state treasury. The Venetian aristocracy was not only a privileged social class, but also, simultaneously, an estate of professional civil servants. The Venetian noblemen had the obligation to serve in state administration as chancellery secretaries, accountants, port captains and judges, and they had to heed the government’s summons and perform special, *ad hoc* offices of ambassadors, consuls, provveditors, etc. A great part of the Venetian aristocracy was well trained for such offices, most often through university education in Padua, but the government frequently sent gifted young members of noble families to study in other countries at its own expense. In order to prevent concentration of power in the hands of a small group, which was constantly aimed at by the strongest and wealthiest families, the Venetian government limited the

mandate of all offices to the period between two months and two years (for judges). At the same time, public duties were poorly paid, in order to avoid wild competition for them.

The institutions of the Venetian political system were structured in eight basic levels. Thus they formed a governmental pyramid, with the Major Council at its base, and the doge at the top. The first and lowest level was, therefore, the Major Council, which, early in the 16th century, comprised the greatest number of members (1500), and this number later decreased. Approximately three hundred civil servants in state chancelleries, appointed by the Major Council, were also counted among the participants in the first level of government. At the second level was the Senate (*Consiglio dei Pregadi*), which consisted of 120 patricians elected by the Major Council. The second level further included the judicial Council of Forty (*Consiglio dei Quaranta*), called “Quarantia”, also comprised of patricians appointed by the Major Council, governors of Venetian territories and provinces, and commanders of the Venetian army, all elected by the Major Council, as well as commissioners for special affairs and members of *ad hoc* boards. The third level was made up of the Council of Ten with the *Zonta* (dialectal term from It. *aggiunta*, addition), a body of 60 Senate-members which assisted the Council of Ten in decision-making, three head members of Quarantia, ambassadors appointed by the Senate, five members of the body *Savi di Terra Ferma* (Wise Counsellors from the ranks of land aristocracy), and five members of the body *Savi agli Ordini* (Regular Wise Counsellors), all appointed by the Senate. The fourth level consisted of six members of the body *Savi grandi* (Great Wise Counsellors) appointed by the Senate, and six counsellors to the doge appointed by the Major Council. At the fifth level were three head members of the Council of Ten. The sixth level consisted of three “state inquisitors for prevention of the spreading of state secrets”, which, in time, but after 1539 in particular, became the Supreme Tribunal of the Venetian Republic with almost limitless power in comparison with other institutions of the Republic. The seventh level hosted the Council of Procurators of St Mark, which consisted of 9 patricians appointed by the Major Council into a life-long mandate. They were charged with management of the St Mark basilica, charity endowments and foundations, and protection of orphans and the poor. The office of procurator was considered the most prestigious (and the most lucrative) reward for greatly meritorious service to the Republic. At the eighth level of government and the very top of the governmental pyramid of the Venetian Republic was the doge, elected for life by the Major Council in a complex procedure which included several stages: choice of electors, then the first draw, the second round of elections, and finally another draw, so that the outcome was sometimes uncertain until the very end. In routine matters the doge could decide only together with the collegium, and his duties as head of state comprised numerous ceremonial and symbolic functions, but in practice the

doge had largely limited competences in peacetime conditions. An important role in the Venetian Republic was also played by a professional administration presided by a chancellor, which was the highest possible state office to which a candidate from the ranks of the citizens could be appointed. It was also held for life, and, unlike the noblemen, the citizens employed in the administration received substantial wages. The Venetian Republic particularly developed the judicial functions, which earned it the fine reputation of a “well organized state”, as characterized by Machiavelli. The political system was stable and, with the exception of several attempts by doges to seize greater competences than their rightful due, it reacted very well to the changes and the political and social challenges. What applied, however, to the citizens of the Venetian Republic did not apply also to the subjects in territories under Venetian rule. The latter were deprived of the rights and privileges which were enjoyed by the noblemen and citizens of Venice. The appointed proveditors had almost absolutist competences, which frequently caused discontent among the population of territories under Venetian rule and led to uprisings which were brutally crushed.

The Venetian aristocratic republicanism functioned well in the period of prosperity and expansion. With the trade crisis in the Mediterranean and the loss of its privileged position in relation to the Ottoman Empire, what increasingly came into the foreground were the oligarchic tendencies caused by the reduced numbers of the nobility and the keeping of “closed lists”, as well as the repressive traits of the Venetian government. Consequently, in the 17th century the Venetian Republic had all the characteristics of a police state. The process was already set in motion in Držić’s lifetime, and he perceived in the Venetian model of government all the bad traits of aristocratic decadence and political corruption which started to take root in the hitherto stable and “most finely ordered state” of the time in Europe.

4. The Dubrovnik Form of Government: Arguments in Favour of the Model’s Uniqueness

Unlike the Florentine popular or democratic republicanism and the Venetian aristocratic republicanism, the Dubrovnik model of government is distinguished by the fact that, although it was aristocratic in nature, it relativized the role of head of state, rector of the Dubrovnik Republic, and reduced the institution of rector to a head of state modelled after the traditions of democratic republicanism. This made possible a “democratization” of the institution of rector, as opposed to the life-long mandate of the doge and to the three-month, and later also life-long mandate of the Florentine gonfalonier of justice (Harris, 2003). Although the person who held the office of rector was forbidden to hold it again in the next two years after completion of the one-month mandate, the Dubrovnik noblemen could count on performing the

rectorial duties several times in their lifetime. At the same time, although the Dubrovnik nobility, judging on the external attributes, remained almost as exclusive as the Venetian patriciate, the Dubrovnik model of government was more flexible than the Venetian one, since it found special ways of including the citizens in the affairs of the Republic through confraternities and trade and seafaring associations. But this process reached significant development only later, in the 16th century, after the death of Marin Držić, advocator of the democratic republic in contrast with the aristocratic model of government, and especially after the great earthquake of 1667 (Stulli, 2001).

The sovereignty of the Dubrovnik state belonged to the Major Council. Its members were Dubrovnik noblemen, joining first at the age of 21, and later at the age of 18. In 1358 the Major Council had 130 councillors, but in time the number decreased due to the exclusivity of the nobility estate; in the 1667 earthquake the Major Council was practically decimated and reduced to 37 members. In the first period after gaining independence from Venice, the Major Council operated as a legislative body and central institution of the state's government. Later, in the 15th century, its role was gradually narrowed down to the competence of electing city magistrates, and the focus of government was shifted to the *Consiglio dei Pregadi*, also called the Senate of the Dubrovnik Republic. Senate members are elected by the Major Council every year from the ranks of the wealthiest and most distinguished noblemen, and their number gradually increased from 45 in the second half of the 14th century to 61 in the second half of the 15th century. As opposed to the Venetian Republic, the Dubrovnik Senate fulfilled the factual duties of the government, decided on the most important issues of domestic and foreign policy, and carried out the administrative and judicial tasks. The Senate was also in charge of trade policy, it determined taxes and tariffs, appointed ambassadors and consuls, and gradually took over the legislative activity as well. The frequency of Senate sessions also testifies to its significance – they were held four times a week. Although it had only half as many members as the Major Council, which might lead one to the conclusion that all members of the latter could alternate as Senate members, in practice the choice of senators was limited to members of elite families, thereby creating a narrower, oligarchic stratum, which ruled in Dubrovnik. The rector and the Minor Council, also elected for one year periods, and composed of 5 judges and six members of the Major Council who held the position of Senate members, took care of the administrative, civil and penal tasks confided to them, corresponded with the governments of other states and held audiences for foreign states' ambassadors. The youngest member of the Minor Council performed the duty of state secretary, and later also of secretary for foreign affairs. The Minor Council was the executive body of the Major Council and the Senate, always vigilantly scrutinized by the Senate, which became the central governmental body in Dubrovnik. Next in significance after the enumerated main bodies of government were

the Keepers of Justice, a body which controlled the legality of operation, perused the reports of all other bodies, and supervised the adherence of all bodies to the received instructions and competences. The territorial structure of government throughout the Republic led to the forming of Three Syndics (commissioners) for supervision of state administration in areas outside the city. Their task was to investigate the work of castellans, captains, vice-rectors and other civil servants, and submit reports to the Senate. In the golden age of Dubrovnik the civil services and bodies with special competences expanded and multiplied, but the pragmatic sense and merchant spirit of the Dubrovnik elite kept this expansion within the range of amenable possibilities. A special role was also played by the Dubrovnik clerks led by the secretary of the Dubrovnik Republic, who was, as a rule, a foreigner. Accordingly, in 1515 the office was offered to Niccolò Machiavelli, but he declined, just as he declined the offer of Roman prince and army commander Fabrizio Colonna to enter his service as secretary-counsellor. In both cases, Machiavelli's refusal was motivated by his desire to contribute to changes for the better in Florence, which is why he did not want to live the city. Here we can only state that Machiavelli's naiveté and optimism regarding the possibility of reinstatement of a republican order in Florence deprived us of an interesting and intriguing option, namely that Machiavelli had actually arrived in Dubrovnik, accepted the position of secretary, and expanded his analysis of the republican model to include Dubrovnik, for which he would have had sufficient empirical material on hand.

Thanks to the merchant and seafaring profile and strength of the ones who pursued those profitable activities, Dubrovnik was an example of a stable aristocratic republic with oligarchic tendencies, which, unlike the Venetian Republic, never managed to prevail. This was partially due to a relatively small number of noblemen in relation to the remaining population of the city. But the governance of the Republic remained in the firm grip of the nobility, which is why Marin Držić – aware of the discrepancy between the various meanings of the concept *libertas*, which became the motto of the Dubrovnik Republic (*libertas* on the outside, *non libertas* on the inside) – perceived the participation of citizens in the government as the only guarantee that the words inscribed above the entrance to the premises of the Major Council (*Obliti privatorum, publica curate*, i.e. “Forget about the private matters, and attend to public matters”) would not remain a mere political platitude.

But a *differentia specifica* of Dubrovnik is also the rector's position in the system of government, his competences and prerogatives, which have different characteristics in comparison with the Venetian and Genoese doges. On the other hand, the rector's position must be viewed within the context of popular tradition, i.e. the tradition of political forms of organizing which precede the state forms and stem from the tribal order. For this reason, we must also mention the distinctive role of the rector in such a system of government.

The designation “rector” (*knez*) is a feudal ruling title, which refers to the position in the feudal social and political structure subordinate to the monarch, king or emperor. In the Byzantine political system, a rector is an appointed governor of a city or area (*dux* or *comes*). In early medieval society, the title of rector was hereditary (*princeps*, i.e. prince), and in medieval communes it designated a city’s head or ruler (*potestas*, *rector*, *comes*), which is initially appointed by a higher (monarchic or ecclesiastical) power, and then the citizens themselves elect him for a specified period (or for life, as in Venice and Genoa, and later in Florence from 1498 to 1512). In southern-Slavonic countries it is also used as appellation for the village chieftain, the head of several villages (*knežina*) and of free tribal municipalities (*obor-knez*, *baš-knez*). In the Croatian constitutional tradition it is mentioned for the first time around the year 1000 on the Baška Stone Tablet as rector Kosmat.

In the Renaissance cities-states, rector is a designation for the head of state: in Venice and Genoa it is the *doge*, i.e. *dux*, in Florence *principe*, which also applies to the elected *gonfalonier*, but also the later ruler which established a hereditary, dynastic government, transforming the republic into a principate, a principality, with the attributes of monarchic government.

During the Byzantine rule over Dubrovnik, the head of the city was *comes* or *rector*; when Venice ruled over the city, he was appointed by the Senate and the Venetian doge. After liberation from Venetian supremacy and acquisition of the attributes of statehood in 1358, the title *rector civitatis Ragusii* (It. *rettore*) was introduced (the people always referred to him as the rector). From mid-15th century, in official documents he was named the rector (*knez*) of the Dubrovnik Republic, while the Venetian authorities avoided mentioning the title even in the official diplomatic correspondence, using the appellation *rettore Ragusino* or *rettore di Ragusa*, i.e. rector of Dubrovnik. After the departure of the Venice-appointed rector, the rectorial duty was initially performed by three members of the Senate elected for a two-month mandate, and they alternated every week in the Rectorial Palace. But their power was limited by a provision stipulating that, in case of absence of only one judge or member of the Minor Council (Senate), no decision could be reached without the ruling of the Major Council. The same provision gave to the Major Council the competence of appointing the Dubrovnik ambassadors. Late in 1358 the rectorial service was simplified, and each of the three rectors performed his duties continually for one month, which turned out to be more practical and made possible a transfer of some competences, inter alia, the appointment of ambassadors and management of Dubrovnik diplomacy through the Minor Council. From that point until the downfall of the Dubrovnik Republic, each elected rector held the office for only one month. The brevity of the mandate was exceptional at the time, for in Venice and Genoa the doges were elected for life, while in Florence, just like in Dubrovnik, a short, one-month-lasting mandate of gonfalonier or head of state

was introduced no sooner than in the late 15th century. The purpose of such a short mandate was to prevent corruption and the concentration of too much power in the hands of one person. Since the rector was, by birth, a member of the Dubrovnik nobility and of the Minor Council, his exercise of executive power, i.e. of the Dubrovnik Chancellery, depended on the collective decisions of the Senate. The rector's competences were predominantly ceremonial and were most prominent during the civil and religious ceremonies, the city's *fiesta* and the processions, and when foreign ambassadors and diplomats were formally received.

The rector's prerogatives included the important role of proposing the agenda and convoking the Senate and the Major Council. Thus, the priority of execution of state affairs depended on him during his short period in office. During his mandate, the rector resided in the Rectorial Court, separated from his family, which was considered a good custom that prevented the influence of family interests on public affairs, in accordance with the maxim carved into the doorpost of the entrance portal – *Obliti privatorum, publica curate* (“Forget about the private matters, and attend to public matters”). The Minor Council maintained strict control over a possible conflict of interest, so that the rector had to be excluded from consultation on every issue under discussion which could be connected with some rector's private interest, and the oldest Senate member would preside over the Council instead. The rector was elected by secret vote with a complex procedure, like in Venice, and after the one-month mandate he could not be re-elected for the next two years. Gradually, the judicial competences were transferred from the rector to specially founded judicial bodies (in 1448 to the civil tribunal and in 1459 to the penal tribunal). In addition to several secretaries, the rector was assisted in his work by a vicar chosen among the Senate members for a one-year period, but with limited competences. The rector was also the keeper of the state seal, and he had the right to keep personal guards (called *sduri*) and eight servants, which were called *knežaci* or *chene-saghi*. Although the rector's role, as mentioned above, was ceremonial, it also had a great symbolic significance, and the common people perceived the rector as guarantee of the institutions' stability. The very fact that there was no attempt to usurp power through the centuries testifies to the stability of the system, but Marin Držić objected nonetheless to its closed character and conformism which prevented any true democratic innovation and political dynamics. In later centuries, in the times of crisis of the 16th and 17th centuries, this was proven to be true.

Naturally, no government can be analysed without its basic social substrate: in this case, the Dubrovnik aristocracy, which is also distinctive in comparison with other aristocracies of similar cities-republics.

We already mentioned that in the Middle Ages, a patrician aristocratic republic was established in Dubrovnik, at first called “*Communitas Ragusina*”, and then, from mid-15th century, the Dubrovnik Republic, in which the Dubrovnik nobility

held all the power. The population of the city-republic was divided into the nobility (*patrizi*) and the commoners or citizens (*cittadini*), which included craftsmen, seafarers and other free professionals. In order to preserve the exclusivity of participation in the nobility, the city authorities proclaimed in 1332 the “closure of the Major Council”, whereby commoners were excluded from governance of the city. Public offices in the Republic could be held only by noblemen, and they elected the rector among themselves for a mandate of only one month, which, as mentioned above, should prevent corruption and nepotism.

The nobility was divided into *casatas* according to the clan principle, and one *casata* encompassed several families. But the pressure of the wealthy citizens on the nobility was resolved in a distinctive way already in the Middle Ages by the creation of confraternities. The most prominent among them was the confraternity of St Anthony, which brought together the wealthiest commoners, merchants, seafarers and foreigners in the service of the Dubrovnik Republic – chancellors, notaries, doctors and teachers, as well as the aristocrats’ illegitimate children – thus creating a secondary elite of the Dubrovnik society. In his *Conspiratorial Letters*, Marin Držić criticised the political exclusivity of the nobility, which resulted in early 16th century in political immobility and stagnation, stifling all progress and further prosperity of the Republic. Accordingly, Držić advocated the creation of a mixed government of nobility and commoners, and the abandonment of the patrician aristocratic model of government. Therefore, in contrast with the Venetian aristocracy, which had to resort to the citizens’ purchase of aristocratic status, as touched upon, inter alia, in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*, in Dubrovnik a special hybrid status of nobility and commoners was created through the institution of confraternities as a transitional stratum between the aristocracy and wealthy commoners. Although this experiment could have resulted in gradual prevalence of the commoners and the realization of Držić’s dream, this unfortunately did not happen due to the general economic depression and the crisis which befell Dubrovnik in the 17th century.

The distinctiveness of the described type of political constitution in Dubrovnik truly justifies the estimation that the Dubrovnik republican model or form of government was unique. In connection with the factors enumerated by Machiavelli in the first chapter of his *Discourses on Livy* – namely the inaccessibility of the city’s territory and the difficult life conditions which necessitated greater harmony and industriousness of its inhabitants, as well as the forming of an emergency mentality caused by permanent outside danger that resulted not in an aggressive, but in a peaceful policy in which diplomatic methods replaced violence – Dubrovnik truly becomes a unique model of political government. This model is characterized by internal stability, but with time it becomes static and ossified, which is why stagnation ensued in the post-Renaissance period. The political constitution was petrified

by social immovability, and the aristocracy in Dubrovnik, just like in all other post-Renaissance cities-states, turned into a rent-collecting, parasitic class which was no longer able to adapt to new times and the changes they bring. In Machiavelli's time, however, Dubrovnik was at the pinnacle of its glory, and then it truly deserved the attribute of uniqueness.

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