

Dubrovnik in the Work of **Mirko Dražen Grmek** (1924-2000)

The author of this survey has had a demanding task of paying tribute to a man who has been considered one of the ranking authorities in the fields of history of science and medical history, and a major figure of Croatian science. No doubt, his massive scholarly work deserves to be treated respectfully, but for this occasion we are restricting ourselves to a smaller segment of his bibliography that deals with the history of science and medicine in Dubrovnik. It is well to remember that Dubrovnik occupied a prominent and, in a way, symbolic place in the work of Mirko Dražen Grmek. He devoted the early years of his career to Dubrovnik as well as his last. In Grmek's case, "Dubrovnik revisited" was to take place in the early 1990s during the Serbian aggression on Dubrovnik when Grmek, in Paris at the time, engaged himself in the affirmation of the cultural and scientific history of Croatia, especially Dubrovnik. However, the Grmek's views on Dubrovnik as an open city between East and West, whose free, independent, and pragmatic spirit had for centuries spurred the development of science, were, by no means, a novelty. These guidelines can be traced in Grmek's earliest works, but by disseminating them before a wide audience in the 1990s, they conveyed a clear message: Europe must do something to prevent the destruction of this unique city.

Grmek's scholarly career was a most fruitful one, the result of which are dozens of books and more than three hundred papers produced over the period of fifty years (his first work dates from 1946!). The bulk of his contributions were written in Croatian and French, in Italian and German alike, and were published all over the world.

The history of medicine is a vast multidisciplinary field. In his volume *Uvod u medicinu (Introduction to Medicine)* Grmek defined medicine as a science but also as practical application of diverse scientific knowledge. In addition "in medicine, as in certain technical branches, architecture for example, knowledge of the basic scientific facts and practical skill are hardly sufficient. An individual touch of inspiration, intuition, and originality is required. It yearns for a component, the name of which is art".

Medical history is closely intertwined with the history of science in that it examines the effect of the paradigms of natural sciences upon the creation of the systems of medical knowledge; with the history of technology, in its pursuit of the development of the application of scientific knowledge; with social history, investigating the history of medical profession, medical institutions, impact of certain diseases, that is, epidemics on the social and political conditions, etc.; with the history of art and literature by exploring the artistic means and topics involving the experience of human illness and medicine.

It is the practice of medical historians to confine to one of the abovementioned fields, though they occasionally enter in the affiliated disciplines more or less successfully. Rare are the scholars such as Grmek, who by singling out a subject in medical history, were capable of correlating it with the history of science and social history, along with a number of other disciplines. A good example of his interdisciplinary approach is the study on the establishment of the first quarantine in Dubrovnik in 1377 (see bibliographical reference no. 24). Elaborating the problem on 46 pages, Grmek devotes only eight of them to Dubrovnik: he provides a short outline of the history of Dubrovnik,

interpreting the political, economic, and social background underlying the opening of the first quarantine. In addition he introduces the reader to the decisions of the Great Council with respect to the organization of the quarantine by presenting the documents in either the integral or paraphrased form. However, these regulations are but the tail end of the story Grmek dilates upon. Having cited the primary sources—*Corpus Hippocraticus*, Galen, Thucydides, Plutarch, Avicenna, as late as Girolamo Fracastoro—and traced the concept of epidemic disease from the ancient times to the Middle Ages, Grmek sets the scene for the foundation of the Dubrovnik lazaretto thirty years after the Black Death of 1348. In the splendidly documented second part, Grmek offers proof of Dubrovnik's pioneering role in organizing a quarantine, generally falsely attributed to larger centres. Most rigid was the statement of George Sticker, according to whom Venice is to be credited with setting up the first quarantine in 1374. His statement was adopted by a number of authorities on the history of Dubrovnik—Risto Jeremić, Jorjo Tadić, and Bariša Krekić. Having sifted the primary sources at the Venetian Archives and the relevant literature, Grmek carefully deconstructs Sticker's statement by adducing most reliable proof according to which the Venetian regulation forbidding entrance to ships from epidemic-stricken communities could not be compared to that of Dubrovnik. For, while Venice, Milan, and so many other towns simply forbade entry of persons from infected communities, quarantine presupposes a theoretical possibility of a person without discernible illness to be a carrier, harbouring the disease agent which could manifest well after the actual infection. Grmek rightly asserts that between the Venetian and other similar epidemiological

measures resorted to by the city authorities following the plague of 1348 and the quarantine of Dubrovnik, there exists a relevant theoretical shift in the understanding of disease. Researching the history of medicine and science in Croatia, Grmek's scientific interest focused primarily on the phenomena of broader significance in terms of European and world context, to be followed by those of more local character.

Having this in mind, Grmek's works could roughly be classified into two groups. The first and smaller group includes his works on the "social" aspect of medical history, that is, on the presence, number, and social status of physicians and pharmacists in Dubrovnik's past, on the medical and pharmaceutical practice (e.g. medical treatment contracts), biographical data on the physicians and pharmacists, the development of institutions such as hospitals, leper houses, pharmacies, etc. (see bibliographical references no. 4, 15, 30). Works covering the "social history of medicine" of Dubrovnik before Grmek, were generally descriptive in their presentation of archival documents. Their attempts to analyze are often limited to making analogies with similar examples in other countries. One of the best examples of the kind is the work of Jeremić and Tadić *Prilozi za istoriju zdravstvene kulture Dubrovnika (Contributions to the History of Health Care of Dubrovnik)*. It seems that Grmek found little interest in the aforementioned methodology, for the main focus of his attention are those Ragusan scientists who contributed with their work to the development of the sciences in general. He also highlights the Dubrovnik-born scholars who pursued their scientific career elsewhere. There is no doubt that these works surpass the framework of the history of medicine, and step boldly into the history of natural

sciences, notably physics. Most of the papers from this group are concerned with (in a descending order) Ruđer Bošković and Đuro Baglivi, to be followed by Marin Getaldić, and lastly, Dominko Dubrovčanin, Donato Muzi, Stjepan Gradić, Gin Gazul and others (see bibliographical entries no. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32). As for the history of science, Grmek centred more on the critical evaluation of the texts and the concepts proposed in them, and far less on the study of the historical and individual context of the scientist himself. One of the topics that particularly drew Grmek's attention was the transmission of a scientific text, as Dubrovnik's archives offered excessive material for new discoveries.

No doubt, Grmek deserves great credit for bringing to light some of the foremost scientists of their age. One of them was Gin Gazul, Ragusan astronomer of Albanian origin, who belonged to a philosophical-scientific circle gathered around the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus in the 1460s, but whose life and work is shrouded in obscurity. Another name was also to become the subject of Grmek's inquiry: Donato Muzi (Donatus a Mutiis), Ragusan physician (1526-1536) and scientist who wrote an interesting critical account of Galen's commentary on Hippocrates' aphorisms in 1547, only four years after Vesalius' *De Fabrica Corporis Humani*. Even greater value, particularly in respect of the Croatian history of science, lies in Grmek's numerous works on Baglivi and Bošković, two outstanding scholars who have contributed immensely to the rise and development of modern sciences. Baglivi, physician and medical researcher, seemed to have drawn most of Grmek's attention. In his voluminous research on Baglivi (e.g. bibliographical entries no. 7 and

27), Grmek insisted on validation of Baglivi's work in accordance with his genuine merits within the framework of European medicine and science: experimental proof of spinal transmission, distinction between smooth and striated muscle, logical elaboration of the concept that of all the living organisms originate from an egg.

It is not by chance that in the article written during the war in Croatia (April 1995) and published in France in November the same year under the title "Dubrovnik, l'Athènes Slave", Grmek played on the winning Bošković-Baglivi combination in order to arouse the feeling of cultural solidarity with the victimized city. In the introductory part he discusses the classification made by some historians of science, according to which there exists the "environment which creates scholarship" and the "environment which consumes (imported) scholarship". In Grmek's view a third category ought to be distinguished: the environment which favours the transmission of knowledge. In the part entitled "Medical Vocation of Dubrovnik" he portrays Đuro Baglivi as a natural product of his cultural environment, erudite and pragmatic at the same time, the home of the institution of quarantine. Grmek's intentions become even more explicit in the part devoted to Bošković under the title "Bošković's testimony", in which he presents an extract from Bošković's commentary on his own poem on the eclipse of the Sun and the Moon. Bošković provides an endless list of scientists and artists who were either Dubrovnik-born or its residents, describing his most profound experience of the place in the following words: "Wedged in between barbarism and unspeakable ignorance, it is with the most conceivable passion that we, Ragusans, foster the natural sciences and literature alike, in Latin as well as in the na-

tive language, Illyrian”.

The former sentence may well have been uttered by Grmek himself. He often introduced himself as a citizen of Europe, not a native of Zagreb, nor a Croat. The cosmopolitan character of his life and scientific work, observable from his earliest studies, justifies his statement fully. Perhaps this explains his special interest and appeal for Dubrovnik, a city which managed to maintain its independent spirit and European cultural identity throughout the turbulent years of its centuries-long history.

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¹ Mirko Dražen Grmek and Antun Budak, *Uvod u medicinu*. Third edition, revised and expanded. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus, 1996: p. 15.