

POISONS AND POISONING IN THE REPUBLIC OF DUBROVNIK

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ABSTRACT: Dubrovnik authorities occasionally resorted to poisoning as a means of resolving state affairs. A number of the Republic's enemies and undesirable prisoners were removed or suspected to have been eliminated by poisoning. Poison was used as a protective measure in times of war, when the Ragusans contaminated the water tanks in the area. Dubrovnik archives reveal a variety of poisoning cases among Ragusan citizens over the centuries, only to prove that, if uncommon, this method was not looked upon as the most popular one. This article discusses the government regulations governing the storage and safe-keeping of poisons in the Dubrovnik Republic, types of poisons and their origin, toxicology from the perspective of contemporary medical practice, and antidotal therapy.

Introduction

It has been established that the ancient Illyrian tribes employed poisonous arrows. In his treatise *De re medica*, Byzantine physician Paul of Aegina described the practice of the Dacians and the Dalmatians smearing arrows with Helenium, also referred to as *ninum*, which is lethal if administered parenterally but completely harmless when swallowed. Therefore, there can

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be no doubt that the ancient Dalmatians were familiar with the poisons effective only in parenteral contact, as they used them for the purpose of hunting.¹

An even older account of the employment of arrows smeared with snake venom can be traced in Ovid's sixth elegy of his *Tristia*, where, depicting Illyrian warriors and their weapons, he comments on their common practice of carrying quiver, bow, and arrows smeared with venom.²

According to Pseudo-Maurikios (6th century) and a number of other writers after him, the Slavs had a good knowledge of poisoned arrows, too.³ These primitive yet deadly arrows shot from wooden bows as well as small spears represented exemplary Slavic weapons.⁴ Arnold of Lübeck recorded that the Serbs used poisoned arrows against the crusaders led by Henry the Lion in 1172. Frederick Barbarossa and his army were to experience a similar unpleasant encounter in 1189: while his troops were marching through the "Bulgarian Wood", their rearguard and the provision unit were attacked with poisoned arrows by Irish, Bulgarian, Serb, and Vlach mercenaries under the command of the duke of Braničevo, as recounted by some prisoners.⁵ Poisoned arrows were also used by the members of the Mrkojevići tribe near Bar in 1559, and Miloš Obilić is said to have stabbed Sultan Murad with a poisoned knife at Kosovo Polje in 1389.⁶

¹ Mirko D. Grmek, "Opojna pića i otrovi antiknih Ilira". *Farmaceutski glasnik* 6/2-3 (1950): p. 37, note 1. Grmek here ascertains that the herb referred to as Helenium cannot in any way be related to the Dacian or Dalmatian poison under the same name, for the former has been identified as the plant *Inula Helenium* J., bearing no poisonous properties. Furthermore, according to the author, there is every ground to believe that the Illyrian poison used for smearing arrows was of animal origin.

² See Ivan Lovrić, *Bilješke o putu po Dalmaciji opata Alberta Fortisa i život Stanislava Sočivice*. Zagreb: JAZU, 1948: p. 99.

³ Francis Dvornik, *Les Slaves, Byzance et Rome*. Paris, 1926: p. 21; Gavro Škrivanić, *Oružje u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji, Bosni i Dubrovniku*. Beograd: SAN (Posebna izdanja, 293), 1957: p.107.

⁴ Škrivanić, *Oružje*: p. 187.

⁵ *Arnoldi chronica Slavorum*. Hannover: Monumenta Germaniae historica (Scriptores rerum Germanicarum), 1868: pp. 118-119; Konstantin Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, I. Beograd: Naučna knjiga, 1952: p. 155; Petar Matković, "Putovanje po Balkanskom poluotoku XVI veka". *Rad JAZU* 124 (1895): pp. 70-114, 115, 123; Škrivanić, *Oružje*: pp. 15, 107.

⁶ Stanoje Stanojević, "Kad je ubijen car Murat". *Glasnik srp. učenog društva* 15-16 (1936): p. 46; Škrivanić, *Oružje*: p. 65.

Apart from the records pertaining to the employment of poisoned arrows, scarce and often inconclusive evidence can be found on the use of poisons in general. One record of poisoning is to be found in the Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea. It concerns Jakvinta, the widow of King Bodin, who intended to enthrone her son Gjuro. She furnished the enemies of Vladimir, king of Zeta, with poison (*potionem mortiferam conficiens...dedit eis*), with which they carried out her intent.⁷

Popular accounts on the subject can be traced in the folklore tradition,⁸ leading us to the following conclusions:

1. Poisonous weapons, such as spears and arrows and even poisonous fire-arms, were employed.

2. The above weapons were generally poisoned with snake venom.

3. Potions were prepared from plant and animal poisons. Anonymous epic authors tell of poisonous herbs and plants, hellebore, and dragon's blood.

4. Poisons were administered in food and drinks, most commonly in wine.

5. Notables and high-ranking individuals had their food and drinks tasted beforehand, so as to avoid the hazard of being poisoned.

6. Popular medicine was acquainted with antidotes.

7. Poisons were sold freely for everyone to purchase.

8. Popular medicine distinguished poisons according to the rapidity with which the effect was produced (instant and delayed effects).

9. Three popular terms have been registered to denote poison: *čemer*, *jed (jid)*, and *naljep (nalip)*.

Epic tradition also records intoxicating drinks whose effect was not fatal, but induced slumber and sleep. The juice was procured from various narcotic plants (*trava afiun*,⁹ *trava od driema*, and *bendjeluk*), and was most frequently mixed with wine or brandy, seldom food.

⁷ Ferdo Šišić, *Letopis popa Dukljanina*. Beograd-Zagreb: SKA, 1928: pp. 366-367.

⁸ See Tihomir R. Gjorgjević, *Naš narodni život*, IV. Beograd: 1931: pp. 104-113.

⁹ We have traced the said *afiun* (opium) in the documents of the Dubrovnik Archives. In the letter of 19 May 1661, a Ragusan correspondent in Novi, Miho Kuljević, complains to Bernard Ricciardi, Ragusan interpreter, about the Novi kadi "of being difficult to awake from stupor and

Croatian history provides scarce evidence on the use of poisons, and what little there is can hardly be compared with the sophisticated art of poisoning encountered in the Western or Eastern royal courts. Croatian poisoners had no knowledge of such artful methods and toxins as *Cantarella* or *Aqua Tofana*,¹⁰ poisoned letters, books, money, toothbrushes, forks, knives, gloves, and rings. They were far below the mastery of the poisoners of ancient Rome, Canidia and Sagana, the Marquis de Brinvilliers and Madame Monvoisin of France, Theophany of Palermo, or the great masters such as Catherine de Médicis and Cesare Borgia.¹¹ There were several reasons why the art of poisoning remained rather underdeveloped in the Croatian lands, one of the most likely being the absence of advanced scientific and technological achievements.

Ottokar, chronicler from Steyr, notes that the Hungaro-Croatian king, Andrew III (1290-1301), fell victim of poisoning while dining. The poison was spread along the blade of his knife. According to the chronicler, the poisoning must have been performed by an expert, for only the piece of food administered to the king was poisoned.¹²

Ladislas of Naples, who claimed the right to the Hungaro-Croatian throne, returned to Naples after his coronation in Zadar in 1403. Since the dynastic dispute was turning in favor of Sigismund of Luxembourg, in 1409 Ladislas sold some Dalmatian lands as well his Dalmatian rights to Venice. As king of Naples he was in constant conflict with his rival, Louis II of Anjou, Popes Innocent VII and John XXIII, the cities of Florence and Bologna, etc. Some chroniclers report that he was poisoned by the Florentines in 1413, during

converse with, since he speaks and sleeps at the same time, overcome so by opium and tobacco...as sleepless nights drive him insane, opium gives him the strenght to endure the day.” (*Diplomata et Acta saec. XVII* (hereafter cited as: *DA XVII*), ser. 76, no.1941/202, State Archives of Dubrovnik [hereafter cited as: *SAD*]).

¹⁰ The Borgias gave preference to Cantarella over other poisons, whereas Aqua Tofana was the celebrated poison of the seventeenth century, named after the woman poisoner, Theophany from Palermo, who was burnt to death in 1633. See L. Lewin, *Die Gifte in der Weltgeschichte*. Berlin, 1920: p. 225; M. Urbani. “Aqua Tofana”. *Vjesnik ljekarnika* 2 (1921): pp. 79-81.

¹¹ Lewin, *Die Gifte*: pp. 3, 99-110, 225, 437-448.

¹² Lewin, *Die Gifte*: p. 112.

one of his campaigns. In order to accomplish their aim, the Florentines involved a physician whose daughter happened to be Ladislas' mistress, promising him a considerable reward. The fact is that Ladislas died in Perugia in 1414 after a short illness. According to general opinion, the cause of his malady and subsequent death was the poison given to him by his mistress. Most fantastic were the speculations on how she had done it, as recorded by the chroniclers and often repeated by numerous older historians. Some claimed that his mistress placed the poison in her genitals. Others, however, were of the opinion that she creamed her genitals with the poisonous substance, killing both herself and the king. According to a more puritan version, however, he was poisoned by having touched the bonnet she wore on her head. Lewin, who discards all the former interpretations as unacceptable, holds that, judging by the symptoms described in the chronicles, Ladislas was actually poisoned with a drink prepared from some poisonous plant, handed to him by his mistress "not as a love—but death—potion".

Piccolomini asserts that Ladislas Posthumus (1444-1457) was poisoned by George of Podebrady, his wife Ivana, and Johan Rocyrán, archbishop of Prague, whom he refers to as *venenorum sator*.¹⁴ Piccolomini's account serves as evidence of the animosity between the Poles and the young Habsburg who was elected king after Wladyslaw III Jagiellon died on battlefield near Varna.

The reign of the Hungaro-Croatian king Matthias Corvinus (1458-1490) is also documented with an episode related to poison and attempted poisoning. According to his biographer Curaeus, while at war with George of Podebrady (1467), Matthias received an offer from one of Podebrady's men to eliminate his lord for a substantial reward. Matthias agreed to the terms in writing, promising to pay for the service after its accomplishment. But things did not turn out as expected, for the killer could not approach George with a sword. The assassin suggested poisoning, but Matthias most decidedly rejected the idea, alluding to the ancient Romans who did not fight with poison but with the sword. Besides, Matthias had already warned Podebrady to have his food tasted beforehand.¹⁵

¹³ Lewin, *Die Gifte*: pp. 320-321.

¹⁴ Lewin, *Die Gifte*: p. 247.

¹⁵ Lewin, *Die Gifte*: p. 186.

On several instances Croatian historiography attributed poisoning to the last count of Krk, Ivan Frankopan. An exhaustive and lengthy account of this event was given by the Venetian secretary Antonio Vinciguerra, according to whom, following the death of the last Bosnian king, Stjepan Tomašević in 1463, his brother Radić, his wife, and his children fled to the Croatian island of Rab, and then to Krk, where Ivan Frankopan robbed and poisoned him.¹⁶ Vinciguerra was obviously misled by Radić's identity, since Tomašević had no brother by that name. This reference, however, was repeated by Š. Ljubić, Antun Knežević, and Vladimir Mažuranić.¹⁷ A certain Radić did exist at the time—Radić Kristić—but he was Stjepan's uncle. Sources reveal that the latter was in Kreševo, Bosnia, on 29 May 1463 when the Ragusan Senate provided him with 200 pounds of gunpowder.¹⁸ Whether he was the victim of the alleged poisoning has yet to be investigated.

The Turks had a particular inclination towards poisoning as a common means of resolving feuds.¹⁹ Ivan Ilić, leader of the first Slavonian uprising against the Turks (1596-1610) was on friendly terms with the pasha of Požega, Mustafa Čunić. Their friendship went a step further when the two declared themselves blood brothers, a relationship generally welcomed by the common people but objected to by the Slavonian Turks. According to Batinić, on 1 April 1607, this friendship was violently terminated when the Turks poisoned both the pasha and Ilić.²⁰

The bloody Thirty Years' War had its poisoning victims, too. The sudden and mysterious death of the young Juraj Zrinski, 28, in Pressburg (Pozsony)

¹⁶ Šime Ljubić, *Commissiones et relationes venetae*, I (1433-1527). Zagreb: JAZU (Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, 6), 1876: pp. 88-90.

¹⁷ Šime Ljubić, *Ogledalo književne poviesti jugoslavjanske na poučavanje mladeži*, I. Rijeka, 1864: p. 250; Antun Knežević, *Kratka povjest kralja bosanskih*, III. Dubrovnik: Naklada knjižare D. Pretnera, 1887: p. 136; Vladimir Mažuranić, "Hrvatski pravno-povjestni izvori i naša književnost". *Ljetopis JAZU* 26 (1912): pp. 123-124; Vjekoslav Klaić, *Krčki knezovi Frankopani*, I. Zagreb: 1901: pp. 274, 284.

¹⁸ *Acta Consilii Rogatorum* (hereafter cited as: *Cons. Rog.*), ser. 3, vol. 17, f. 222 (SAD). See Ćiro Truhelka, "Dubrovačke vijesti o godini 1463.". *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 22 (1910): p. 14

¹⁹ Ernest Bauer, *Hrvati u Tridesetogodišnjem ratu*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1941: p. 54. Michel Baudier, *Histoire générale du serraill et la cour du Grand Seigneur*. Paris, 1674.

²⁰ Mijo Batinić, *Djelovanje franjevaca u Bosni i Hercegovini u prvih šest vjekova njihova boravka*, II. Zagreb, 1883: pp. 72-73.

has yet to be speculated on. He was in command of the Croat regiment that joined Wallenstein's army in 1626. Soon after Juraj's death, Wallenstein was rumored to have poisoned him. This was explicitly stated by a contemporary and fellow-soldier of Juraj's, who claimed that his friend was given a poisonous beet. This account has received historical acknowledgement by Vitezović, Ratkaj, and Vladimir Mažuranić, whereas Bauer, following Šišić's example, dismisses the assertion as insubstantial. Bauer and Šišić alike concentrate on the fact that Wallenstein was in Moravia at the time of Zrinski's death, and could not have poisoned him.²¹ However, there still stands a possibility of Wallenstein's involvement in the poisoning scheme, for he might have committed the crime indirectly, as was common practice. Another fact supports the supposition of Wallenstein's involvement in the crime. From the first day of Zrinski's joining Wallenstein's camp (8 July 1626) until his death on 18 December 1626, the two were involved in a constant and bitter argument over the strategy of war operations, leading Wallenstein even to threaten to hang Zrinski for insubordination. Whether the victim died of poisoning was difficult to assert for the cause of Zrinski's mysterious death gives us a lot of ground for speculation.

Mauro Orbini testifies to rumors that Bosnian landlord Nikola Altomanović, Vojislav Vojinović's nephew, poisoned Vojislav's widow, Gojislava, and her sons, Dobrivoj and Stefan (1368). Contrarily, there was some hearsay that he disposed of them by casting them to the dungeon, where they died seven years later.²²

Serbian despot Lazar († 1458) was said to have poisoned his mother, Jerina, prior to her planned secret visit to the sultan. According to Kritovul's account, Lazar deprived her of all power and influence, whereas Teodor Spandudžin Kantakuzen, who lived in the first half of the sixteenth century, is quite explicit about Lazar giving her poison. The old writers Musachi, Orbini, and Luccari all agree upon the poisoning theory.²³

²¹ Georgius Rattkay, *Memoria regum et banorum regnorum Dalmatiae, Croatiae et Slavoniae*. Vindobonae, 1652: p. 199; Paulus Ritter Vitezović, *Plorantis Croatiae saecula duo carmine descripta*. Graecomonti, 1703: p. 61; Ferdo Šišić, "Posljednji Zrinski i Frankopani na braniku domovine". In: *Posljednji Zrinski i Frankopani*, Zagreb, 1908: p. 9; Mažuranić, "Hrvatski pravno-povjestni izvori": pp. 134-135; Bauer, *Hrvati*: p. 54.

²² Mauro Orbini, *Il regno degli Slavi*. Pesaro, 1601: p. 282.

²³ Jovan Radonić, "Kritovul, Vizantijski istorik XV veka". *Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije* 138 (1930): p. 78; Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, I: p. 385;

Venetian diplomacy was far from modest in its use of poison for political purposes.²⁴ Individuals offering such services were readily recruited by the Inquisitors (*Inquisitori di Stato*).²⁵ The employment of poison in the interests of the state was so common that each newly-accredited bailo (envoy to Constantinople), prior to his taking the post, was presented with a chest of golden coins and a flask of poison to be used as instructed whenever the political interest of the *Serenissima* required.²⁶ The *Inquisitori* claimed political purposes also when attempting to murder a few royal heads.

One of the rulers who greatly troubled Venice was King Sigismund of Luxembourg (*inimicus atrocissimus dominii nostri*), on account of his resistance to Venetian pretensions over Dalmatia. On four occasions between 1415 and 1420 was the Council of Ten to decide on Sigismund's elimination. They were tempted by a certain Muazzo, who had offered his services, and was ready to demonstrate his poisoning skills to the Council.²⁷ When the conflict in Dalmatia was finally resolved to the benefit of Venice those plans became superfluous.

Having scanned through the attempts at poisoning Sultan Mehmed II, whose death was ordered as many as twenty times by the Council of Ten between 20 April 1456 and 28 January 1478,²⁸ the Bosnian pasha, and a cer-

²⁴ See Louis de Mas Latrie, *Projet d'empoisonnement de Mahomet II et du pacha de Bosnie accueillis par la République de Venise (1477-1526)*. Gênes, 1881; Vladimir Lamansky, *Les secrets d'état de Venise, documents ... servants à éclaircir les rapports de la seigneurie avec les Grecs, les Slaves et la Porte ottomane à la fin du XVe et au XVIe siècle*. Saint Petersburg, 1884; Louis de Mas Latrie, *De l'empoisonnement politique dans la République de Venise*. Paris, 1895; G. Rizzi, *Secreti di medicina fra gli atti del Consiglio dei dieci*. Venezia, 1951.

²⁵ Rizzi, *Secreti di medicina*: pp. 10-11. A certain *Joannes de Ragusio ordinis fratrum minorum*, made an offer to the Council of Ten on 14 December 1513 to dispose of awkward persons, demanding for the first successful attempt an amount of 1,500 ducats; were they interested in rendering his services in other instances, he was to be furnished with the annual allowances according to the agreement. On 4 January 1514, the Council agreed fully to the offer, in expectation of the first attempt to be performed on the Emperor Maximilian. See Mas Latrie, *De l'empoisonnement*: pp. 232-234; Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di stato di Venezia*, I. Roma, 1937: table XV.

²⁶ Lewin, *Die Gifte*: p. 322. Ragusan envoys to the Porte, N. Sorgo and D. Menze, were also to learn of one of bailo's poisonings. On 27 July 1629, they informed the Senate of bailo having poisoned his interpreter, Kristo Bratutti, under the suspicion of collaboration with the Spaniards (*DA XVII*, no. 1728/4).

²⁷ Mas Latrie, *De l'empoisonnement*: pp. 209-213.

²⁸ Mas Latrie, *De l'empoisonnement*: p. 225.

tain Ismail, who held Kroja in opposition to Venice in 1477,²⁹ I aim to focus on the Venetian attempt to poison the Montenegrin metropolitan, Vasilije Petrović.

Due to his policy in Montenegro, which proved contradictory to that of Venice, Petrović's name appeared on the list of potential enemies to be liquidated. In his futile attempt to reconcile the Montenegrins and the Turks, the Venetian general provisor, Grimani, tried to force the Montenegrins into paying tribute to the Bosnian vizier. Furthermore, in order to weaken Petrović's detrimental influence on the Venetian subjects, Grimani confidentially suggested poisoning to the Inquisitors. His proposal was accepted, as is proved by the following entry made in the secret index of poisons on 13 January 1756: *Spedito in Dalmazia per avvelenare il vescovo Petrovich Vassilie*. In less than a year, three recurrent warrants for Vasilije's death were issued, but without the expected result. Petrović was a cunning, prudent, and distrustful man who eventually retired to the northern Adriatic port of Rijeka. Reasons for his taking such a step could have been two-fold: political failure in Montenegro, or an awareness of the Venetian conspiracy against him.³⁰

Vladika (prince-bishop) Danilo was another Montenegrin ruler to have perished from the face of earth too early; his independent policy, and relations with Russia and Vienna in particular, also proved contrary to the interests of Venice. On 19 November 1716, in order to stop any further collaboration, the Inquisitors quite unscrupulously signed the order for his poisoning. The act itself was delayed, in hope that Danilo would comply with Venice's terms and subsequently change his attitude. Since the Montenegrin ruler persisted in his policy, on 15 July 1717 the Inquisitors sent a purse of diamond powder to the general provisor, in an ultimate attempt to reach their political goals. It seems that the powder had a magical effect. It could hardly have reached the Montenegrin mountains when Vladika Danilo (21 July) declared war on Turkey, and in August he formally turned to collaborate with Venice. Danilo took active part in the military operations, and fought most bravely. He was almost captured by the Turks near Bar, and in acknowledg-

²⁹ Mas Latrie, *Projet*: p. 5.

³⁰ Jov. N. Tomić, "Mletački pokušaji trovanja mitropolita Vasilija Petrovića 1756. godine". *Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije* 90 (1912): pp. 114-174.

ment of his help he received a special reward from the Venetian Senate on 7 May 1718. Despite these formal appraisals, Vladika Danilo was still looked upon as an enemy particularly because of his established alliance with Russia, and the prevailing pro-Russian atmosphere in Montenegro. Alvise Mocenigo, the general provisor, could not turn a blind eye to this, and on 7 October 1718 he requested the Inquisitors to deliberate anew on the question of poisoning him. The Inquisitors, however, did not share Mocenigo's feelings, as they considered Danilo's service to the republic in the last war sufficient enough to annul their earlier resolution.³¹

The diamond powder, sent to the general provisor for the purpose of poisoning Vladika Danilo was not the last dispatch of its kind intended for a Montenegrin ruler. The end of November 1767 saw a new delivery of identical contents with the name Šćepan Mali on it. His removal was also plotted because his actions and policies were contrary to those of Venice. Three border communities—Maine, Pobori, and Braiči—were among the first to support Šćepan Mali, and there Venetian rule was abolished overnight. In addition, a possible conflict with Turkey was hovering in the air. Enclosed with the package was a letter addressed to the general provisor, Renier, with the following instructions: "Very grave matters of state require the liquidation of an unknown alien...in Montenegro...Our court considers it appropriate to deliver you the means, and order your excellency to execute the instructed in a most cautious, discreet, cloaked, and safe manner...". Despite his great effort to carry out his orders, Renier's attempts remained futile. The list of candidates he engaged for the job was impressive: a physician who once treated Šćepan Mali, an orthodox priest, and an obscure female. Jorjo Kadić from Makarska was directly appointed by the Inquisitors to poison Šćepan Mali, but with no result. Neither he, nor Staniša Sočivica, an outlaw sentenced to death by the Venetian Republic, nor Staniša's brother Ilija could bring an end to Šćepan's life. Šćepan was more than careful. Aware of the danger, he received no one except his most trusted associates. His house was guarded 24 hours a day. He accepted food from no one other than Vuk Markov and Marko Tanov, sometimes even preparing the meals himself. Venetian inquisitors did

³¹ Gligor Stanojević, *Crna Gora u doba vladike Danila*. Cetinje: Istoriski institut NR Crne Gore, 1955: pp. 120-121, 131-132, 143-144, 149, 166.

not enjoy the pleasure of seeing Šćepan Mali poisoned, but they were firmly to grip the dagger that would stab him to death several years later.³²

The examples recounted above were but a small number of the many attempted poisonings initiated by the Venetian Republic. Proof of this fact is provided by the poison index of the Venetian secret registry. Between the years 1619 and 1768 seven cases of instructed poisoning were recorded in Dalmatia alone.³³ The true number can only be suspected, as much of Venice's long history still remains unknown.³⁴

Poisoning in the interest of the state

Located between the great powers of East and West, the Dubrovnik Republic represented a commercial link between the two civilizations. It was a gathering place of merchants, as many maritime and land routes connected this mart with the rest of the world. Here they traded raw materials from the Balkan lands and products from the West. Dubrovnik was soon to assume a role, first as a middleman and later as a center of intelligence service, that was valuable to both East and West. It is to this fortunate geopolitical position that the Republic of Dubrovnik owed its independence and prosperity over the centuries. Had the small city-state been a serious threat to any of the great powers, it would not have sustained its life as long as it did. This does not go to say, however, that the Republic survived solely on account of its favorable political position. Ragusa's diplomacy, beyond all doubt, contributed remarkably to its prosperity. Guided by the maxim "Seek protection from the powerful, maintain good relations with the weak, attain neutrality in all conflicts," Ragusan diplomacy is generally credited for being the strongest means of the Republic's self-defense.

In order to achieve these goals, Dubrovnik's diplomatic practice resorted to various methods, which I do not intend to dilate upon in this paper. One

³² Gligor Stanojević, *Šćepan Mali*, Beograd: SAN (Posebna izdanja, 273), 1957: pp. 38-40.

³³ Mas Latrie, *De l'empoisonnement*: p. 256.

³⁴ In 1614 an attempt to poison the bishop's vicar at the Trogir Cathedral by pouring poison in the Mass wine has been recorded. See Šime Ljubić, "Prilozi za životopis Markantonija de Dominis Rabljanina spljetskoga nadbiskupa". *Starine* 2 (1870): p. 137; Tomo Matić, "Hrvatski književnici mletačke Dalmacije i život njihova doba". *Rad JAZU* 231 (1925): p. 258, note 6.

such practice was poisoning, a method as old as diplomacy itself. It is therefore only natural that this ancient practice found its place in Ragusan diplomacy which, as far as poisoning is concerned, was patterned after both Byzantine³⁵ and Venetian diplomacy.

Research into this phenomenon, however, is hampered by the fact that the most valuable archives containing evidence on the use of poisons were destroyed by the Dubrovnik Senate. The documents in question belonged to *Secreta Rogatorum*, the secret records of the Senate. This fund is likely to have been disposed of on several occasions, but the bulk of it was destroyed shortly before the French occupation of Dubrovnik at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The remainder of the materials concerned with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries served as the prime source of my research.

The first record of poison used in the interests of the state refers to the Bosnian feudal lord Radoslav Pavlović.³⁶ The actions of this man deeply aggravated the Dubrovnik Senate in the spring of 1430 when he opened hostilities against the Republic with the intent to regain a part of Konavle that the Republic had purchased from him in 1426. The fury and disappointment of the Ragusan authorities was even greater because Radoslav swore to be loyal and to protect Dubrovnik from all intruders. To make matters worse, the government had disbursed no less than 13,000 ducats to him (7,000 in cash while 6,000 were deposited in Dubrovnik). He was accommodated with a beautiful house in Dubrovnik; he and his descendents were promised asylum and protection, as well as an annual life payment of 600 perpers. Radoslav, however, did not turn out to be what the Senate had expected. He ambushed and robbed Ragusan caravans, accused the Senate of protecting his outlaws who retreated to the Republic's territory, while the trench works around Cavtat he interpreted as a provocation which called for offensive intrusion across the Dubrovnik's borders.³⁷ The Senate was profoundly exac-

³⁵ In his work *De ceremoniis aulicis* Constantine Porphyrogenitus quotes that one of the duties of the court attendant was to have an antidote on him at all times, ready to hand it to those in need. See L. Lewin, *Die Gifte*: p. 45.

³⁶ See Risto Jeremić and Jorjo Tadić, *Prilozi za istoriju zdravstvene kulture starog Dubrovnika*, II. Beograd: Biblioteka Centralnog higijenskog zavoda, 1939: p. 151; Ivan Božić, "Ekonomski i društveni razvitak Dubrovnika u XIV-XV veku". *Istorski glasnik* 1 (1949): p. 54.

³⁷ See Ćiro Truhelka, "Konavoski rat (1430-1433)". *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 29 (1918): pp. 145-212.

erated by Radoslav's actions. He was characterized as the worst kind of viper, "poisoning all of Bosnia, biting everyone without exception, loyal to no one, friend to no one, not even himself", someone that ought to be "dethroned and removed".³⁸

These qualifications were soon to stir some action against Radoslav. The Senate launched a campaign against him, engaging all the political and military factors in it.³⁹ They organized an army, supported by mercenaries as well as drafted citizens, to raid Radoslav's estates in Lug and Trebinje.⁴⁰ Having realized that military actions would not break Radoslav, the Senate opted for conspiracy. They were to poison "that venomous snake which was poisoning all Bosnia," "He who poisons should be poisoned" was the idea conceived by the Senate when on 22 May 1430 it issued orders to its pharmacist, Salimbene, for the purchase of poison.⁴¹

Salimbene acted in accordance with the Senate's order and hastened to Venice, where he was to contact Aloysius Gozze, for whom he carried a dispatch from the Senate. As the mission was highly confidential, Gozze had to swear to secrecy prior to Salimbene's elaboration of the mission. In case Salimbene failed to find Gozze, he was to proceed with the assignment on his own. For his expenses and the purchase of "those things" (*quelle tal cose*) he was furnished with the amount of 100 ducats. In order to avoid any possible suspicion while buying only the "instructed items", Salimbene was to get some other drugs, but on his account.⁴² To make certain that the supplies were effective, he was to test them on chicks.⁴³

³⁸ "... Di levar e tuor di mezo di voi, questo pessimo serpente, il qual tuta Bosna auenena, tutti morde, a tutti tra di calzi, a nessun a fede, a nessun e amico, non a se instesso". *Litterae et commissiones* (hereafter cited as: *Litt. Comm.*), ser. 27.1, vol. 10, f. 112 (SAD).

³⁹ Through its envoys assigned to the Bosnian and Hungarian kings, as well as to the Bosnian feudal lord Sandalj Hranić, Dubrovnik invested a lot of diplomatic effort in order to establish an alliance against Radoslav.

⁴⁰ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 154.

⁴¹ *Litt. Comm.*, vol. 10, f. 138v. Due to the confidential character of the document, poison was never explicitly mentioned.

⁴² "...Dobiate insieme comprare alcune speciarie ... per non dar ad algun a vedere, che pur solamente le dite cose vogliate comprare ... et a vostro conto meter ...". *Ibid.*

⁴³ "Et acio che abiate certeza e fermeza dela fineza de le cose che comprarete, uogliame che de esse ne dobiati far proua in polame, zoe galine, o caponi, o altri polli". *Ibid.*

The Senate was eager to see Salimbene accomplish his mission successfully. All the circumstances were taken into consideration, and according to plan B, in case Salimbene did not find Gozze, another contact was at his disposal, this time in the person of the Republic's ex-official, a certain Bertoldo of Piombino, for whom the Senate had also prepared instructions. The nature of Salimbene's mission being highly confidential, he was expected to act accordingly.⁴⁴ We have no doubts that Salimbene kept the secret, but the Senate's poisoning intents still managed to leak out.

While Salimbene was searching for poison throughout Venice, the Senate wasted no time, but busied itself in pursuing other ways and possibilities of how to dispose of its enemy. A more direct step was taken on 26 June 1430, when, by the Senate's approval, the Minor Council passed a resolution regarding the liquidation of Radoslav Pavlović (*ad destructionem persone Radossau Paulouich*), according to which a certain person was to be given armor, a rapier, and some salt, all of which had a value of 36 perpers.⁴⁵ During the same Senate session, the resolution was somewhat altered: instead of a rapier (*pro stoch*), the killer should be armed with a dagger (*una daga*).⁴⁶ Eight days later (4 August), the Minor Council authorized the government clerk to provide the said person with a certain quantity of salt.

In all likelihood the Senate provided this person with poison, too. On the very day when Radoslav Pavlović was doomed to die, the Minor Council appointed three nobles—Marin Resti, Džore Palmotta, and Marin Gondola—to be in charge of all the poisonings carried out in the interest of the state. Their refusal would cost them 100 perpers.⁴⁷ Although the document does not contain the names of the victims, it is more than certain that they belonged to Pavlović's circle. Unfortunately, the careful plotting gave no result. Radoslav Pavlović continued to trouble the Senate, despite the attempts of the latter to poison him.

⁴⁴ "... e questa tal facenda tagniati secretissima e guardate non la manifestassiu e ad algun ...". *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Acta Minoris Consilii* (hereafter cited as: *Cons. Min.*), ser. 5, vol. 5, f. 44 (SAD).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ "Ser Marinus S. de Resti, ser Zore de Palmota et ser Marinus Jacobi de Gondola, electi fuerunt officiales cum pena yperperorum centum pro quolibet eorum si refutauerint ad intendendum et querendum quam melius sciuerint et poterint ad venenandum et venenari faciendum illos ex inimicis nostris de quibus sibi visum fuerit" (*Cons. Min.*, vol. 5, f. 44).

The Senate's disappointment and helplessness was even greater when in 1431 it learned that Radoslav Pavlović made peace with Bosnian king Tvrtko II, whose court was to host Radoslav's son Ivaniš. It was from this time on that the Ragusan envoys to Bosnia had a difficult task thrust upon them—to persuade the king of Radoslav's insincerity and false pretenses, and shatter this alliance. Radoslav, on the other hand, awaited for an opportunity to dissolve the relations between Dubrovnik and the king. The argument that he used to discredit the Republic, and which the Ragusan Senate was informed of by its envoys Đivo Gondola and Nikola Georgio in December 1431, had a most negative effect at home. Namely, Radoslav simply informed the king of the Senate's malevolent intention to poison him and his son Ivaniš, and of the two Ragusan officials assigned to carry it out.

Although Radoslav's message was nothing but a slanderous accusation, it signaled to the Senate that their intentions were known to Radoslav. What other explanation could there be, and how could Radoslav have informed the king with so much precision? Was it perchance Radoslav's intention to warn the king of the ancient practice of the Dubrovnik Senate? For all due reasons, and with the strongest indignation possible, the Senate had to deny all "false" accusations brought against it. In order to do so, the envoys involved received a dispatch dated 19 January 1432 according to which, in connection with other matters, they were to approach the king with the assurance that "the Senate, acting upon the good customs of its forefathers, never attempted nor intended to commit such treason as imputed to it by Radoslav Pavlović, and neglects to consider such unworthy comments uttered by wicked and malignant individuals such as Pavlović and the likes of him...Were the Senate shameless and fearless of God, not only would it have the skill and knowledge to poison Pavlović's son at your court, which was never our slightest intention, but rather to poison the boy at his father's. Our abilities could leave him fatherless, motherless, and without a single kin. But, God forbid that we do none other but observe the custom of our ancestors."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "...Che la nostra signoria segvitando il buon costume de li suoi antichi, che mai uolseno ne presumerno far ne consentir tali tradimenti, quali mo li veneno imputadi per Radossau Paulouich, pocha cura fa di tal sue parole digne de simel de lui per la sua iniqua e maluasia pravita ... che se la nostra signoria non timesse Dio ne la infamia di questo mondo, non solamente aueressimo saputo e possuto mandar a tossicar el dito fiolo in le man de la corona uostra, la qual cosa mai non se inpensassimo ne imaginassimo, ma quando l'era in le man proprie del padre, e non tanto lui, ma ello padre suo propio e la madre e tutti suoi aueressimo possuto e saputo far li tutti atosicar. Ma idio non voglia che far altro uogliamo di quello ano sempre fatto e costumato li antiqui nostri" (*Litt. Comm.*, vol. 11, f. 68rv).

Nevertheless, Ragusan diplomacy managed to accomplish what military operations and poisoning could not. A peace agreement with Radoslav Pavlović was signed on 25 October 1432, and was formally sworn by him on 25 March 1433. This treaty put an end to one of the most exhausting conflicts the Republic had with its neighbors at the cost of great losses, suffering, and diplomatic endeavors.

Although Dubrovnik's walls experienced no hostilities for almost four centuries—from the war with feudal lord Stjepan Vukčić Kosača (1451-1454) until the burst of Napoleon's troops (1806)—the city-state was not immune from various kinds of pressure. Less than a decade after the war with Duke Stjepan, Dubrovnik was threatened by Turkey, which, having invaded Bosnia, was advancing towards Ragusa. Upon the first news of the danger numerous protective measures were taken: houses and churches in the precincts were pulled down, all the trees from St. Jacob to Belveder were cut down, additional fortifications were built, and existing ones were strengthened.⁴⁹

One precautionary step that deserves special attention here is related to the water tanks in Rijeka dubrovačka, Gruž, and the suburban areas. According to a resolution passed by the Senate on 16 June 1463, all the water tanks in these regions were to be polluted with either a particular pigment or mud.⁵⁰

I have singled out this specific resolution because of the parallel which could be drawn with the recorded occurrences of water and spring poisoning as a strategic operation in times of war.⁵¹ It is clear enough that Ragusans had no true poisoning in mind, for they used pigment as a warning to the enemy that water was not drinkable. This decision merely served as a measure to hamper the hostile campaigns, since only a couple of kilometers further, in Šumet and Ombla, the enemy could get hold of fresh water supplies. After all, poisoning was out of the question, for the secrecy of the operation would have been impossible.

⁴⁹ Truhelka, "Dubrovačke vijesti": p. 6.

⁵⁰ "Prima pars est de faciendo corrumpi guado aut implere tereno cisternas, que sunt in Ombla, Grausio et burgis nostris, ne hostes si venirent, possint habere vsum aquarum dictarum cisternarum." (*Cons. Rog.*, vol. 17, f. 236v). Truhelka ("Dubrovačke vijesti": p. 17), misinterpreted this decision by stating that the water tanks were to be destroyed. The decree merely implies that the tanks be put out of use, either by contamination or by filling them with earth, so that they could resume their original purpose as soon as the danger was over.

⁵¹ Lewin, *Die Gifte*: p. 533.

No longer directly imperiled by the Turks, Dubrovnik continued to pay its annual tribute and trade freely across the Balkans. Permission to trade throughout the vast Ottoman Empire and the commercial privileges granted to them by the most powerful Western state of the day—Spain (by Alfonso II 1507 and Charles V in 1518 and 1534)—hastened Ragusan economic and social progress in the course of the sixteenth century.

Dubrovnik's growing prosperity served as an additional reason for the aristocratic government to strain to maintain the social supremacy and the territorial integrity of the state. Having this in mind, one can understand the violent reaction of the Senate to the treasonous actions of the Ragusan subject Ivan Chini de Tanis,⁵² and his intention to cede Ston to the lords of the coastal region north-west of the river Neretva (*Krajina*). The traitor was seized and brought to Dubrovnik in chains.

During a closed session held on 17 June 1525, the Senate decided that the suspect should be interrogated immediately by the Minor Council, and tortured overnight. A proposal brought before the Senate concerning a delay in the procedure until the arrival of Ivan's illegitimate son, Jero, was overruled. The record of the examination and trial, read in the closed session on 10 June, was to remain strictly confidential. That same day an order to continue with the procedure was forwarded to the Minor Council. The examination was over by 28 June, producing no satisfactory results, as the accused may well have refused to confess to anything. Since the guilty plea was not forthcoming voluntarily, a new resolution was passed for the accused to be interrogated under torture before the Senate. When subjected to torture, Ivan de Tanis yielded before this persuasive method, but his testimony remains unknown. One thing we do know for certain is that none of the councillors present, under threat of a 100-ducat penalty or six months' imprisonment, was to reveal in public the words spoken by the offender.⁵³

Meanwhile, the Senate passed a number of restrictive measures in Ston, promulgated by the decrees of 20 June and 1 July.⁵⁴

⁵² We have not been able to establish the very beginnings of this family in Dubrovnik. We have traced it in the early 15th century (*Litt. Comm.*, vol. 10, f. 84). They owned real estate in Ston, Pelješac, and Župa (*Cons. Rog.*, vol. 32, f. 227).

⁵³ *Secreta Rogatorum* (hereafter cited as: *Secr. Rog.*), ser. 4, vol. 1, ff. 16-17 (SAD).

⁵⁴ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 38, ff. 18, 21.

The interrogation may well have resumed, but the Senate was not yet satisfied. On 11 July the Senate decided to resort to torture again, and make the traitor confess his conspiracy and collaboration with men from Krajina. Unfortunately, Ivan was tortured to death. Such an outcome should not have taken place, and the Senate had to act quickly: as he was dead, they decided to bury him outside the city limits as a traitor and unworthy citizen, having denied the proposal to behead him. The Rector and the Minor Council were authorized to confiscate all of his movable property and real estate found in the possession of debtors or other. There no longer existed a ban on talking publicly about this act of treason and the trial, with the exception of the names of the witnesses and informers, alien or domestic, as well as the discussions, which had taken place during secret sessions.⁵⁵

The following day the Senate took immediate steps toward property confiscation, appointing three noblemen for the task. Their job was to take an inventory of all his assets and belongings, money, silver, rings, pawned property, books and documents, of both private or public nature, being at the same time authorized to punish everyone who refused to cooperate.⁵⁶

The trial against Ivan Chini de Tanis gave rise to vigorous protests in the City and Ston, prompting the Senate to issue an order on 12 July, two days after Ivan's death, by which every person—man or woman—heard to criticize the Senate's decision against the traitor Ivan Chini de Tanis, or any of the Senate members, by word or deed, would face a 100-ducat fine, six months' confinement, and be deprived of all offices and privileges for the period of ten years. Had the offender been a commoner, the sentence would have been even worse. The order also included banishment for life of Rusko Chini de Tanis and Jero, Ivan's illegitimate son, from Ston and Pelješac, under the threat of confiscation of their entire property were they ever to return.⁵⁷

On 24 July the Senate put this matter on the agenda again, authorizing the three aforementioned patricians to sell all the boats and vessels in which the late Ivan Chini de Tanis might have had shares, and to use the money to pay

⁵⁵ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 17rv.

⁵⁶ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 38, f. 22v.

⁵⁷ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 38, f. 23.

off his creditors. The Senate continued with the investigation against the accomplices in this act of treason, offering a 1,000-ducat reward and provision for life to all those who denounce them. Had the denouncer been one of the two accomplices, or both, he would have been freed of charge and received the reward. So as to commemorate the government's success in putting down high treason, the Senate issued a resolution by which an annual procession would take place on the Day of Saints Peter and Paul and a mass held in St. Blaise's church in Ston following a denied proposal for the building in Ston of a chapel dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul with an expenditure of 100 ducats.⁵⁸

The Senate's attitude in this matter and in the measures undertaken clearly demonstrates the significance of Ivan de Tanis and his actions. The events that followed thereafter account for this statement.

Having sent the right message to its subjects, the Senate then turned against de Tanis' accomplice, Stjepan Milevšević Kačić of Krajina.⁵⁹ This highly confidential mission was to be terminated by "sword, poison, or other means".⁶⁰

During its closed session held on 2 August 1525, the Senate came forward with a scheme. Three senators were to be elected, their identity known only to the secretary of the Republic, with the task of assassinating Kačić one way or another. The election of the three senators, whose identity should have remained unknown, was to be carried out as follows: the 38 senators present at the session were to elect twelve. The elected dozen were not to be called out, but merely listed by the secretary, who later summoned them to the Minor Council, where three of the twelve senators were elected for the job. They were furnished with 500 ducats. Had the senators decided to, they could have opted to use some of the money to hire Stjepan's murderer. If this man had already committed murder or has been expelled from the state and the territory of the Republic, he could have chosen between acquittal and return to the state, and reward, according to the previous agreement with the senators.

⁵⁸ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 38, f. 26rv.

⁵⁹ Dubrovnik's past is strewn with the incidents with Krajina. Since 1499 Krajina was under the Ottoman rule. See Jakša Ravlić, *Makarska i njeno primorje*. Split: Pomorska biblioteka Jadranske straže, 1934: pp. 79-80, 86, 93, 96-98.

⁶⁰ "Gladio aut veneno vel aliter et alio modo" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 17v).

If neither was the case, he could be granted the power to acquit a murderer, lift a banishment, or receive the reward solely on the basis of his ability to prove that he had poisoned or slain Stjepan. On 4 August, the secretary secretly summoned the 12 elected senators to the Minor Council, and after the third round of voting he was presented with three names: Stjepan J. Palmotta, Damjan I. Menze, and Petar J. Sorgo.⁶¹

What actually followed, whether the appointed senators performed their task or had the secretary supplied them with poison, will most likely remain under a veil of mystery, because the whole operation was so well-cloaked that not even the senators were allowed to know the assassins' identity.

Filippo Trivulzio, descendant of one of the most distinguished families in Milan (his brother was a cardinal), was installed as archbishop of Dubrovnik in 1526. He apparently came into conflict with the Ragusan government, which resulted in his resignation three years later. These tense relations persisted until the time of his sudden death in 1544. The fact underlying this evident animosity was Trivulzio's engagement in international politics, endangering thus the jealously guarded Ragusan neutrality. Namely, he sided with the French, who at that time were allies of the Ottoman Empire. He organized his own intelligence network, forwarding the gathered information to the French government or French envoys in Constantinople. Thus he took upon himself the role of the true exponent of the French government in the Balkans, and all the mail from France to Constantinople and back passed through his hands. Fruitless were the Ragusan attempts to persuade him out of this hazardous mission. They reported his activities to his brother, the cardinal, and pope himself, and repeatedly tried to argue him out of these political activities, but with no result. Trivulzio could not be deterred from his political and diplomatic pursuit, often putting Dubrovnik's already vulnerable position at stake. This was particularly the case in 1537, when the West was preparing for an anti-Ottoman campaign. Namely, in June of 1537 a Venetian galley on its way to Kotor was forced to anchor in Slano due to stormy weather. The messenger disembarked and hastened to Kotor with a confidential note from the Venetian government to the count of Kotor. Having soon

⁶¹ "...Dummodo faciat constare, quod ipse privaverit vita dictum Stiepanum gladio aut veneno vel alia morte". *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 18.

learned of the matter, through a person of confidence, the patrician Petar Pozza, Trivulzio sent a man to intercept the messenger and dispatch the letter further to Constantinople. The letter was indeed snatched somewhere in Konavle. The Ragusan government, however, soon discovered the scheme, arrested Pozza, who was sentenced to two years' confinement and deprived of all his privileges, but was pardoned 25 years later, and launched a hunt for the bishop's courier. The Ragusan government succeeded in getting hold of the intercepted letter, and delivered it to Kotor. This incident triggered Venice to accuse Dubrovnik before the allies of violating international law and collaborating with the Ottomans. This seems to have been a strong enough reason for retaliatory measures against Dubrovnik. Thanks to a series of diplomatic negotiations aimed at proving its innocence in the whole affair, Dubrovnik faced no serious consequences.

Nevertheless, Trivulzio persisted with his pro-Ottoman and -French policy. He made his Turkish attitude known in public, and gave rise to general hostility against him in Dubrovnik; as a result, he hardly ever left his residence. The hostile public attitude toward Trivulzio was reinforced after his prompt congratulations to Sultan Süleyman I on the latter's victory over the Christians near Pécs in 1543, an act for which the sultan rewarded him with an annual bonus of 10,000 silver ducats. He did not live to enjoy the award. Several months later, on 11 January 1544, Trivulzio died suddenly.

His unexpected death was attributed to some poisonous powder distributed to him through the government's secret channels. According to Farlati, Trivulzio was buried with highest honors, so that no suspicion of the general relief over his departure would be aroused.⁶²

Some of the resolutions passed by the Senate clearly testify to the government's determination to deal with every individual capable of jeopardizing the well-being of the state and its interests ("steps are to be taken against the life of Jafer, emin of Novi, who is plotting against our Republic; may Radonja Milišević be hanged at Danče or Ledenice for harassing Ragusan

⁶² Seraphinus Maria Cerva, *Sacra Metropolis Ragusina, sive Ragusinae provinciae pontificum series variis ecclesiarum monumentis atque historicis, chronologicis, criticis commentariis illustrata*, 1744: pp. 2180-2311; Jorjo Tadić, "Dubrovački nadbiskup veliki prijatelj i uhoda Francuza". *Novo doba* 314 (1925); Daniele Farlati and Jacobus Coleti. *Ecclesiae Ragusinae historia*. Venetiis: apud Sebastianum Coleti, 1800: p. 225.

merchants in Neretva; may the eleven alien pirates, who were captured aboard an armed frigate and brought to the city port with the slaves, be hanged; may Stipan Radonjić the said Banjanin be decapitated in secrecy for having acted *contra statum et dominium nostrum*).⁶³ But, perhaps, nowhere was the Senate so determined in hunting down one of its enemies as it was in the case of Mahmud emin of Ledenice. They pursued him for six long years, spending thousands of ducats in money and presents for the purpose.⁶⁴ From 13 July 1558, when the Senate decided that “Mahmud emin of Ledenice, a man of ill service to our state, is to be poisoned to death...and two secret officials are being appointed to the task, as his death will be of great relief to our entire city,”⁶⁵ until 7 December 1564, when Sultan Süleyman issued an order relegating Mahmud to Cairo, the Senate searched for a way to liquidate him.⁶⁶

Little do we know of Mahmud’s transgressions and crime against the Republic. In its instructions, dated 9 April 1559, to the Ragusan envoys to Constantinople, Klement N. Gozze and Marin N. Bona, the Senate adverts to a Turkish woman spitefully abducted by Mahmud. We can only assume that this was just one of Mahmud’s actions against the Ragusans upon which the Senate decided to poison this troublemaker. It seems, however, that this particular event with the Turkish woman was the last straw. Mahmud and his men also cite this incident as being the key reason why the Ragusans were after him, even though they had other, more substantial, accusations.⁶⁷

On 23 July 1558, the Senate authorized secret agents to negotiate with any person who would agree to poison Mahmud.⁶⁸ No record of Mahmud can be

⁶³ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, ff. 18v, 20-21v; 105v-106, 122v; *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 42, ff. 100v, 125.

⁶⁴ On 9 June 1559, the Senate held it necessary to provide its envoys to the Porte with special instructions as to what they were to reply, if asked by the Turkish officials, regarding the purpose of the extra expenditures and gifts (*Litt. Comm.*, vol. 27, f. 103v).

⁶⁵ “Captum fuit de procedendo contra Macometum eminum Ledenizarum tanquam hominem male meritum de patria nostra, ita quod medio veneni tollatur e numero viventium... de creando duos de minori consilio secrete, qui teneant specialem curam procurandi medio veneni mortem dicti Macometi, ita quod pereat, quia ipso defuncto civitas nostra quiescet” (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 30v).

⁶⁶ The series *Secreta Rogatorum* contains extensive evidence on the period, whereas *Litt. Comm.*, vols. 27, 28 and 29 provide a lot of information on this particular subject matter.

⁶⁷ *Litt. Comm.*, vol. 27, f. 103v.

⁶⁸ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 31v.

traced in the Senate's secret papers prior to the middle of December 1558, when news arrived of his robbing a Ragusan caravan and stealing five purses with 122,432 aspers. The Senate's patience came to an end when Mahmud touched the most vulnerable spot of the Republic—the safety of trade. Prompt action was taken. The Senate filed complaints with the kadi in Novi, the sancakbey in Herzegovina, and subsequently with the Porte.⁶⁹ However, the lawsuit against Mahmud produced no satisfactory results. A number of Ottoman high officials, notably a certain Ali Pasha at the Porte, took Mahmud's side. The money and presents the Senate spent on the case all proved to be in vain. So as to avoid further expenses and time, the Senate decided to eliminate Mahmud, even if no compensation was to follow. Such a resolution was passed twice—on 29 April and 25 August 1560.⁷⁰ Then Nikola Sorgo received instructions to go to Blagaj and discuss the matter of Mahmud's elimination with his Ragusan friend, Kasum dizdar, providing the latter with poisons and promising him a 300-sequin reward.⁷¹ However, this resolution met with the same destiny as the Senate's resolution to eliminate Mahmud's son Celebi, an official at the Porte, whom the Ragusans held most responsible for delaying the lawsuit.⁷² Neither assassination was ever carried out. The wearisome lawsuit against Mahmud and his son finally ended in 1564 with a verdict: the father was expelled to Cairo.⁷³

Over the course of this long drawn-out procedure, the Senate was equally engaged in a trial against a man named Pavao, who was tried for robbery, assault, and rape and was punished with blinding.⁷⁴ Eyeless, Pavao managed

⁶⁹ *Litt. Comm.*, vol. 27, ff. 60v-61, 78-79v, 99v et passim; vol. 28, ff. 4, 31, 39, 42 et passim; vol. 29, ff. 52v, 80, 86rv, 140, 149 et passim.

⁷⁰ "... De mandando ut interficiatur Machmut eminus quanto fieri comodius poterit" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 52v).

⁷¹ "Havete intesi li ragionamenti... per tentare se pottiamo levare Machmutto emino dal libro delli uiuenti... e li direte li rimedii quali uui havete col mezzo di quali facilmente si potra conseguire l'intento nostro..." (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, tergo, f. 2).

⁷² From the letter addressed to Benessa, envoy accredited to the Porte, on 6 January 1561: "... e ueddendo come questa causa non si estingue punto, ma tutta uia ua crescendo e duplicando. Della qual cosa ueddendo, come lo figliuolo di Machmut emino n'è pattissima causa e fundamento. Percio ... debbiare con quello maggiore studio e vigilantia quale per uui usare si potra attendere che dicto Celebia figliuolo del emino sia in uno o altro extinto e passi dalla presente uita..." (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, tergo, f. 3v).

⁷³ *Litt. Comm.*, vol. 28, f. 126.

⁷⁴ *Litt. Comm.*, vol. 27, ff. 28v-29.

to reach Ottoman territory; he first arrived in Novi and in due course reached Istanbul, where he continued to conspire against Dubrovnik. He claimed that the Dubrovnik authorities had no jurisdiction upon him, since he was a Turkish subject. The Senate's attempts at proving Pavao's guilt and his Ragusan citizenship remained fruitless. Moreover, they claimed that the punishment imposed by the Dubrovnik judges was far too clement for the crimes he had perpetrated. In their opinion he should have been sentenced to decapitation.⁷⁵ The blinded Pavao persisted in his counter-Ragusan activities at the Porte, aggravating the already unstable relations between the two states.

How were they to put an end to this? The whole affair could be most radically resolved by Pavao's sudden death. The Senate had passed such a resolution once before (8 December 1558), during Pavao's temporary stay in Novi.⁷⁶ A new resolution concerning his elimination was passed on 16 October 1560; this time the Senate gave precise details of the execution itself: he was to be poisoned.⁷⁷ The man chosen for the job was a certain Savalai of Verona, whom the Senate provided with poisons and dispatched to Istanbul where he was to meet Benessa, the Ragusan envoy, and await further instructions concerning Pavao's whereabouts.⁷⁸ Savalai received 40 scudi for the mission, the outcome of which we can only speculate. Poison may well have been at work, for no later trace do we find of the eyeless Pavao.

By the close of the sixteenth century, we come across only a single Senate record of poisoning. It concerns Vladislav, a porter, who had committed a theft in the Customhouse and was sentenced to death by the judges of the Criminal Court. On 13 November 1567, in closed session, the Senate debated over whether the punishment should be public or private, deciding on the latter.⁷⁹ The senators also disagreed on the form of punishment. Some recommended that the perpetrator be poisoned as far from the public eye as possible, in some dark dungeon cell (resolution of 22 March 1567). They were outvoted by those who proposed that Vladislav be strangled in the same dungeon cell.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ *Litt. Comm.*, vol. 27, ff. 36v-37.

⁷⁶ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 36.

⁷⁷ "... Quod officiales secreti super venenis debeant illius mortem modo quo supra procurare" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, f. 70).

⁷⁸ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 1, tergo, f. 2.

⁷⁹ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 58, f. 194v.

What calls for our attention here is the air of secrecy with which the Senate decided to deal with a common theft involving an apparently insignificant individual. Why all the mystery if this was a legal execution? Perhaps the very answer lies in its irregularity. It is true that, according to the Ragusan Statutes, the most serious punishments were imposed for property crimes, but only a highway robber was to be sentenced to death (by hanging).⁸¹ Whether Vladislav's crime deserved the capital penalty is yet shrouded in mystery. Perhaps the authorities had another, unknown motive for eliminating Vladislav. In any case, the death sentence imposed upon Vladislav for stealing from the Customhouse speaks clearly of the determination with which the Ragusan government dealt with offences against state and its institutions.

The following case concerns the execution of Mustaj Celebi, a Turkish khoja (Muslim priest), who had been appointed to teach Turkish in Dubrovnik in the spring of 1644.⁸² During its session held on 28 June the Senate decided that the khoja would be slain "for the charges brought against him during the procedure before the Minor Council."⁸³

The nature of Celebi's crime remains a mystery to us, but apparently from the Senate's viewpoint it was an offence that merited death, and the offender being an Ottoman subject, the secrecy of the execution was not to be questioned.⁸⁴ On the same day, it was decided that the rector and the Minor Council were to make all the necessary preparations for poisoning—not strangling—as was Vladislav's fate.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ "Prima pars est, ut dicti iudices per totum diem lune proxime futurum quam secretius fieri poterit faciant ueneno mori in carcere dictum Vuladissauum. Secunda pars est, ut in dicto termino eum strangulari faciant in dicto carcere secreto. Per 26, contra 10" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 2, f. 162).

⁸¹ Statutes of Dubrovnik VI, 4 and 5 (*Liber statutorum Civitatis Ragusii compositus anno 1272*, ed. V. Bogišić and C. Jireček. Zagreb: JAZU (Monumenta historico-juridica Slavorum Meridionalium [hereafter cited as: MHJSM], 9), 1904: pp. 127-128).

⁸² *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 98, f. 67rv.

⁸³ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 142.

⁸⁴ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 143.

⁸⁵ "Prima pars est de committendo magnifico D. Rectori et suo Minori consilio quatenus dictum hoggiam vita privare curent medio veneno componendo per medium medicorum. Per 21, contra 20" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 142). The proposition of strangling was rejected most likely because khoja's body was to be delivered to the Turks, and the signs of his violent death would immediately be observed.

The same case was on the agenda again on 31 May. The records of this closed session provide us with information on the khoja's poisoning, which was already under way. Having recurrently rejected the proposal of strangling in secret, the rector and the Minor Council were allowed to resume with their poisoning activities (*quatenus continuent cum veneno privare dictum hoggiam*), and utilize the formerly prepared substances and poisons or other means at their convenience. For this resolution to be realized, the afternoon session of the Senate was cancelled.⁸⁶

From the marginal notes appearing beside the above-mentioned resolution of 2 June 1644, it can be deduced that, concerning the preparation of poison, the rector and the Council eventually contacted Pavao the surgeon. The marginal entry penned in by the chancellor read as follows: "The said khoja has died this morning, poisoned by the poison prepared by Pavao the surgeon, son of Andrija, distributed to him for the purpose of executing this resolution; the corps has been delivered to emin Šabanović at Ploče."⁸⁷ Pavao the surgeon was awarded 50 perpers by the Senate.⁸⁸

Imbued, at times, with fear and terror, the seventeenth century was a truly eventful one for Dubrovnik. It witnessed numerous Venetian conspiracies and activities that undermined the prosperity and integrity of Ragusan commerce; crisis during the war of the Christian league against the Turks, but also the victory of Ragusan diplomacy at the Karlowitz negotiations; a developed economy and trade industry during the Candian war, along with consternation at Kara Mustafa's demands; the accumulation of gold and wealth in Dubrovnik houses and palaces, as well as the horror of a disastrous earthquake.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 143v.

⁸⁷ "Die 2 junij 1644. Hoc mane contrascriptus hoggia obiit medio veneno composito per Paulum Andree chyrurgicum, ipsi ob id datum in exequutionem contrascripte partis, eiusque cadaver traditum fuit Sciabanovich emino Plocciarum" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 143v). By its decision of 17 June 1644, the Minor Council accepted a considerable amount of 42 ducats and 6 groschen for the covering of the expenses on account of the poisoning, death, and the delivery of the body to Šabanović (*Cons. Min.*, vol. 78, f. 18).

⁸⁸ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 154v.

⁸⁹ See Grga Novak, "Borba Dubrovnika za slobodu 1683-1699". *Rad JAZU* 253 (1935): pp. 1-165; Radovan Samardžić, "Borba Dubrovnika protiv mletačkih pokušaja da unište njegovu nezavisnost u XVII. veku". In: *Dubrovačko pomorstvo: U spomen sto godina Nautičke škole u Dubrovniku*. Dubrovnik, 1952: pp. 367-386.

Let us focus on the period during the Candian war (1645-1669), when Dubrovnik took every opportunity and available means, poisons included, to protect its privileged trade status. During this war between the Ottomans and Venice, Ragusan commerce increasingly developed its network. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Porte suspended trade with all the Adriatic ports, with the exception of Dubrovnik, which enjoyed its earlier privileges. At the same time, Dubrovnik retained its salt monopoly in the Neretva valley. Understandably, this again stirred the centuries-long animosity of the Venetian Republic towards its commercial rival on the eastern Adriatic coast. Venice's commercial prestige in the Mediterranean being at stake, it put up a fierce competition that aimed at eliminating the Dubrovnik Republic from the scene. Companies of brigands (*haiduks*), already fighting for Venice in the war against the Ottomans, were instructed to operate as much as possible out of the Dubrovnik territory. Haiduks from the Venetian lands in Dalmatia and Boka continued with this daily practice because Ragusan territory, with its small ports and inlets, was easy to approach. Venice accomplished its goal, and Dubrovnik was discredited in the eyes of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian Turks, who accused the Ragusans of collaborating with the haiduks.

Dubrovnik thereby found itself in a most delicate position. On the one hand, it had to tolerate the pestilential haiduk activities at sea and on land, and avoid open hostilities with them in order not to harm its relations with the West-European states. On the other hand, the mere fact that haiduks attacked the Turks from Ragusan territory brought its neutrality into question and thus endangered its safety from possible Ottoman reprisals.

Cornered, the Senate could only attempt to improve its position by resorting to diplomatic activities: it filed protests with the Venetian Republic, accusing the haiduks of violating Ragusan neutrality. This was an attempt to prove, in Bosnia and at the Porte, that the raids of Venetian haiduks through Dubrovnik territory and their intrusions into Turkish estates were beyond its power. The voluminous correspondence of the Senate has been preserved, providing evidence of its diplomatic attempts to resolve the matter with the Venetian provisors and with other representatives, the Bosnian pashas, and the Porte.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ *Litt. Comm.*, passim; see Antonije Vučetić, *Dubrovnik za Kandijskog Rata 1645-1669: Dopisivanje Republike sa M. Sorgom-Bobalijem*. Dubrovnik, 1896.

Dubrovnik's position was further exacerbated by the frequent predatory incursions of the Turkish outlaws, *zlići* (vicious ones) from Novi in particular, led by Omer-aga Begzadić and Alaga Šabanović. They imposed their own provisional taxes on the Ragusan merchandise, raided the Dubrovnik territory, plundered, killed, and burned down villages. The Senate's major concern in this matter was that the outlaws were not being called to account. Fruitless were the sultan's dozens of decrees brought against the Novi bandits which the Bosnian pashas, sometimes even defiantly, did not carry out.⁹¹

How was the Senate to dispose of these dangerous *zlići* from Novi, yet avert the revenge of the unfriendly Ottoman officials, who preferred to side with the outlaws rather than the Ragusans? Placing a reward on some of the outlaws' heads,⁹² the Senate decided on poison as the most suitable means for dealing with the "unbearable violence and cruelty" of the bandits.

The first among the *zlići* to meet death by "poison or other means" were the Ereizović brothers from Novi.⁹³ This was in May 1641, during a controversy between the Ragusans and Šahin pasha of Bosnia over some men from Krajina named Šarić, who were allegedly liquidated in the Dubrovnik dungeons for a murder committed on the Pelješac peninsula. As a result, the pasha had imprisoned Miho Gavde Sorgo, Ragusan who was a salt tradesman in Neretva valley. The pasha was expected to march through Konavle on his return to Novi, accompanied by 1,000 horsemen and 300 infantrymen as an act of retaliation against the Ragusans.⁹⁴ Why the Ereizović brothers were sentenced to death is beyond our knowledge; one likely cause was a robbery on Dubrovnik territory.

During a closed session held in March 1650, the Senate decided to liquidate Murad Omerović, a Turk from Novi *quovis modo*, approving the sum of

⁹¹ *Acta Turcarum*, sez. 75, no. 494, 541, 553, 560, 561, 566, 567, 569, 570, 571, 575, 590, 598, 599 (SAD). See Radovan Samardžić, "Hajdučka pisma". *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu* 3 (1955): pp. 172-195; Radovan Samardžić, "Odnosi Bosne i Dubrovnika od 1656 do 1662." *Godišnjak istorijskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine* 8 (1956): pp. 87-173; Radovan Samardžić, "Jedna seča narodnih prvaka u Hercegovini 1662." *Istoriski glasnik* 2 (1956): pp. 68-77.

⁹² *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 105, f. 203v; *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, ff. 254v and 271.

⁹³ "...Quatenus secreto medio veneno seu aliter ... curent vita privare fratres Ereisovich de Castro Novo" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 127).

⁹⁴ *Littere et commissiones Levantis* (hereafter cited as: *Litt. Comm. Lev.*), ser. 27.1, vol. 48, ff. 25v- 27, 28-30, 41rv, 46 (SAD).

500 ducats for the purpose,⁹⁵ and in November of 1653, the same sentence was intended for Alaga Šabanović (*veneno seu aliter*).⁹⁶

It seems that *zličići* were particularly active at the end of 1654 and the beginning of 1655, prompting the Senate's resolution of 10 November 1654 to poison some of the outlaws who had formerly been sentenced to death, or those who robbed Ragusan caravans. For this purpose the Senate provided the sum of 200 ducats.⁹⁷

The mounting activities of the Turkish outlaws required more efficient defensive measures; again, the Senate had poison in mind. Due to their delayed effects, they considered poisons to be the perfect way to deal with *zličići*. The toxins would take effect between eight and thirty days after administration, thus leaving no ground for suspicion. As such sophisticated poisons could not be obtained nor prepared in Dubrovnik, in December of 1654 the Senate made contact, through the Ragusan consul in Florence, with the grand duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand II de' Medici.

A parcel containing poisons did arrive in Dubrovnik in the first days of April 1655. There are three entries of *aqua nota*, *veneno noto*, which, beyond every doubt, denote the Florentine toxic preparations.⁹⁸ The Senate most likely had this poison in mind when on 6 June 1656 it decided to poison the entire

⁹⁵ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 202v. During the secret session held on 8 June 1651, a certain poison "venenum notum" was discussed (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 219v), most likely intended for the emin at Ploče or his men because of the problems they caused to the merchants. The circumstances were most delicate, and called for certain measures to be taken in the form of a company of mercenaries who were directed to Ploče. They were further instructed to strike on the head, using a steel rod, every person causing any kind of trouble (*Cons. Rog.*, vol. 103, ff. 90v, 91v-92).

⁹⁶ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 241. The wish of the Ragusan authorities to see Šabanović dead came true only in December 1659 when he was strangled by the order of Meleć-Ahmed pasha. See Samardžić, "Odnosi": p. 161.

⁹⁷ "...De committendo... quatenus de Turcis slichis per antea declaratis reis mortis et de iis etiam, qui rapiunt res nostrorum mercatorum curent secrete facere aliquos mori cum veneno seu aliter, expendendo ultra tallia adhuc facta usque ad ducatos ducentum..." (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 247). In February of 1655 the Senate decided to assassinate Izak, son of Muharem Cehajić from Novi, guaranteeing the acquittance of all the death penalties to those inhabitants of Konavle, who would volunteer to murder Izak. The same was promised to the townsmen of Cavtat in case they helped in assassinating any of the formerly convicted Turks (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 251rv).

⁹⁸ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, ff. 255v, 260, 262.

company of Omer-aga Bagzadić.⁹⁹

In the events cited, the Senate's decisions were primarily concerned with the poisoning of Ottoman subjects, but with no references to the actual executions. However, in the case we are about to highlight, we have been provided with that information as well. This was the case of Muho Mirmilović, an outlaw from Novi who was incarcerated in the Ragusan prison. The exact nature of his crime we do not know, but we may suspect it had to do with repeated robberies in the Republic or the harassment of Ragusan caravans.¹⁰⁰ On 22 August 1656 he was found guilty and sentenced to death by poisoning, after which he was to be extradited to one of the representatives of the Turkish state.¹⁰¹ First, it was decided that he would be extradited to the Herzegovinian sancakbey. Subsequently this decision was altered, and in the end the recipients were Ottoman agents and the aga in Novi.¹⁰² As Mirmilović was an Ottoman subject, the Ragusan court had no jurisdiction over his case and was forced to extradite him. However, having decided on capital punishment and not trusting the Ottoman court, the Senate decided to extradite him to the Turks in a poisoned state.

Mirmilović spent two months in the Ragusan prison. On 20 October, the poisoning sentence took effect.¹⁰³ Having administered some poison to him, the Senate closely observed his reactions, for they were determined to see the end of Mirmilović. On the third day upon the toxin's administration, the Senate ordered the rector and the Minor Council to proceed further. Their intent was to extradite the prisoner in relatively good condition, and avoid his death on their territory at every cost. If, according to the physician's opinion, Mirmilović's condition was stable, an additional dose of the poison had

⁹⁹ "...De dando libertatem D. Rectori et minori consilio ut caute possendo, debeant et possint veneno interimere omnes socios Omer aghe Begsadich..." (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 261). Begzadić died in 1658 while struggling against those sent by the Seidi Ahmed pasha to seize him. See Samardžić, "Odnosi": p. 116.

¹⁰⁰ *Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 55, ff. 215-217v.

¹⁰¹ "...De privando veneno noto ei dando quando postea dicitur, et si haec capietur, posmodum dicitur cui nam sic avenenatus erit consignandus. Per 20, contra 18" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 262).

¹⁰² *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, ff. 263v-264.

¹⁰³ "... De committendo D. Rectori et minori consilio quatenus decreta super Muhum seu Mehmed Milmilovich Turcum de Castro Novo... et super veneno eidem dando, exequatur..." (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 264v).

to be administrated. But, if he was feverish, or his state critical, he was to be extradited to the aforementioned agents immediately after the first dose.¹⁰⁴

This concludes our findings on Mirmilović. No side remarks are to be found, yet we may well assume that Mirmilović walked out of the Dubrovnik dungeons with his days numbered.

Thanks to the deaths of the outlaw leaders Omer-aga Begzadić (1658) and Alaga Šabanović (1659), and the arrival of Meleć Mehmed Pasha in Bosnia, some order was established along the major trade routes, making way to prosperous business activities at time of the Candian War. Had Dubrovnik not experienced the disastrous earthquake of 1667, neither the pretentious Kara Mustafa's demands that the Ragusans pay an extra 4,300 purses on account of their 1677 duty fees (the tax they collected from the Bosnian tradesmen during the Candian War) nor Abas Pasha's threat to occupy Dubrovnik (the latter being in charge of tax collecting) would have filled the Ragusans with such consternation as they did.

In resolving this serious conflict between the grand vizier Kara Mustafa and Abas Pasha on one side, and Dubrovnik on the other, the leading role was played by two Ragusan envoys to the Bosnian authorities, Nikolica Bona and Marin Gozze, as well as Marojica Caboga and Đivo Buća, the emissaries to the Porte. All four were cast into prison, the first two in Silistra, and the latter in Istanbul in order to be persuaded to accept the proposed conditions and consent to Kara Mustafa's demands. The determination of the Ragusan envoys contributed to the favorable outcome of this feud, be it at the cost of their suffering and even life, as in Nikolica Bona's case.

Dubrovnik's fierce struggle for life during that period included a poisoning attempt. Its significance is not in the victim, but the identity of the poisoners.

The document, now preserved in the *Miscellanea* series of the Dubrovnik Archives, was written in Italian on a piece of paper, dateless and without sig-

¹⁰⁴ "...De committendo... quatenus inveniedo eum parere phisici nostri in statu sufficienti absque periculo moriendi in carcere suprascriptum Turcam Milmilovich, possendi eidem dari et replicari venenum eisdem bene vedendum, dent et replicent ipsi eumque consignent et tradant oratoribus Castelli Novi, prout terminatum est. Et non inveniendo eum in huiusmodi statu, sed febre gravatum et cum periculo moriendi in carcere, debeant eundem absque replicatione veneni consignare et tradere dictis oratoribus" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 265).

nature, reading in translation as follows: “With that scoundrel Rafo Koronel the Jew we intentionally prolonged our negotiation, hoping for a favorable opportunity to poison him. And although we managed to serve him some kind of potion mixed with malvasia, nothing happened. We are not certain about the freshness of the stuff or its powers, as we were not given a second chance to give it to him. We are trying to persuade him to accompany us as far as Sofia, where he would be humored in every way. If, thanks to God, he does join our company, we shall leave him to the mercy of the vultures after we torture him to elicit a confession of his conspiracy.” With the remark *volta* (turn), the text continues on the reverse: “The above-mentioned Jew, eight days prior to our departure for Istanbul, failed to make his appearance at our house, nor do we know what happened to him during our absence. It is perchance that Master Gozze subsequently wrote to Your Excellencies about the matter. The encoded text enclosed is of the same contents, and decoding is needless, as I deliver it safely to Your Excellencies to see that on my behalf I have acted accordingly.”¹⁰⁵

As we can see, the document has two parts: the first was written when the author was still in Istanbul, and the second on his journey back to Dubrovnik, not far from his destination point. It was written in plural, in the same handwriting and at a single instance, which means that the part referring to Istanbul had not been dispatched to the Senate at the time, but was completed afterwards. Who was the author of this document, when was it penned, who was Rafo Koronel, and what were the reasons for his being poisoned and left to the ravens in the wilderness before Sofia?

Judging by the handwriting, we have established that the document was written by Marojica B. Caboga sometime between 24 April and 2 May 1680,

¹⁰⁵ “Con quel vigliache di Rafael Coronello ebreo habiamo aposta menato in longo il tratato del negotio acenatoli sotto varii pretesti, per haver ocazzione di atosicarlo e benche una volta ci riusci di darli una bevanda conposta con malvasia, non fece verun effetto, non sapiamo o sia stata robba vecchia o che non habbi havuto tale virtu e poi non potemo replicare piu. Hora tratamo con lui che venga con noi sino a Soffia, prometendoli ivi dar ogni sodisfatione che desidera. Ma se vorra Iddio che venga con noi in piena campagna deserta lo lasaremo alli corvi, procurando prima con tormenti cavar da lui la verita di tutta la machina. /volta/ Sudetto ebreo prima otto giorni della nostra partenza di Constantinopoli non comparve piu nella casa nostra ne sepimo cosa si è fatto di lui sino che noi fumo cola. Forsi che dipoi il signor Gozze haveva scritto all’ EE.VV. cosa e segvito. La zifra che si manda e di questo istesso tenore ne ochore interpretarla, ma solamente la mando con sicurezza qui da vicino, accio l’EE.VV. vedino che io non ho mancato per parte mia in cosa veruna” (*Miscellanea saec. XVII, SAD*).

during the journey home of the two Ragusan envoys to Istanbul, Marojica Caboga and Đivo Buća.¹⁰⁶ The conclusion drawn fully corresponds with the document paragraph in which there is mention of Gozze's possible information on Koronel. The Gozze Caboga is referring to, is Rafo Gozze, who was the accredited envoy to Istanbul prior to Caboga and Buća's departure.¹⁰⁷ There is evidence that Rafo Gozze informed the Senate about Rafo Koronel in two of his letters dated somewhat later (17 May and 28 August 1680). "I am convinced—he writes in the first letter—that Masters Gozze [in reference to Secondo Gozze, also in Istanbul at the time], Caboga and Buća have, with due respect, informed you other than in writing of the matters involving the Jew, Rafo Koronel."¹⁰⁸

This letter throws light on Koronel's schemes.¹⁰⁹ He was reputed to have spread rumors of Ragusa's enormous wealth all over Istanbul at the moment when Dubrovnik was exposed to Kara Mustafa's impending pretensions. His maliciousness was not satisfied with that, and he went even further, spreading rumors about Dubrovnik having two extremely rich mines of silver and gold. Shortly after the departure of Caboga and Buća from Istanbul, he made an official statement to *chiaia* (assistant) of the grand vizier, who received him upon the recommendation of the customs officer Husein-aga and his

¹⁰⁶ M. Caboga was appointed envoy to the Porte on 27 January 1677 (*Cons. Rog.*, vol. 122, f. 173v). He was imprisoned, together with Buća who joined him later, in Babagjafer where he was released from in August of 1679. (*Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 63, f. 279). From Istanbul he set on the journey to Dubrovnik in the early days of April 1680. On 20 April the Senate writes to Caboga and Buća, ordering them to stop their travel upon meeting the Ragusan courier so as to provide the Senate with the detailed report on several important issues: the relations between the Porte, Poland, and Russia, the impending war and the conflicting parties, and the oncoming war preparations in Istanbul (*Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 64, f. 14). Our document may well have been enclosed to the reply dispatched to the Senate. There is conclusive evidence relating to the presence of both Caboga and Buća at Ploče on 2 May 1680 (*Cons. Rog.*, vol. 122, f. 173), leading us to deduce that the document must have been written in the period spanning from 24 April to 2 May 1680.

¹⁰⁷ *Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 64, f. 14.

¹⁰⁸ *DA XVII*, no. 1802/4.

¹⁰⁹ The likelihood of Rafo Koronel's remote origin is that of a Spanish Jew. There is a late sixteenth-century record of Abraham Koronel, a co-owner of the cargo carried by a Ragusan ship (Jorjo Tadić, *Jevreji u Dubrovniku do polovine XVII. st.* Sarajevo: La Benevolencia, 1937: p. 237). According to Gozze's statement, Rafo spent some years in the service of a wealthy Ragusan Jew, Rafo Koen. We have traced Koronel twice in the series *Lamenta Criminalia*. On 15 June 1676, he testified in the trial brought up against Marko Markov, a goldsmith. On 14 June 1676, he was reported by Ivan Giorgi's servant (reason unknown), was sent to prison but soon released. Abraham Lucena bailed him out by paying 100 ducats (*Lamenta Criminalia*, ser. 50.3, vol. 11, f. 75 [SAD]).

chiaia, Cupeliogla. The latter was a Jew and, in Gozze's words, a factotum at the customhouse. Koronel came forward with an ambitious business proposal concerning the highly profitable exploitation of the aforementioned mines with the aid of the Turkish military.

Although he considered Koronel's statement to be utterly ridiculous (*ridicolosissima*), and the chiaia's response to Koronel was negative ("Leave the business be for the moment"), the minute Gozze learned of the matter, he took all the precautionary measures in order to obstruct Koronel's activities. Beyond reason, as they seemed, Koronel's actions could still trigger Turkish greed for the alleged Ragusan treasure. Gozze's immediate sources were Baletin, his *dragoman* (interpreter), and the chaplain D. Ante Vučica, who in turn, had come into possession of this information through Markantonio Mamuk, a confidential person present during the conversation between Koronel and the grand vizier's chiaia. Gozze immediately sent both the interpreter and the chaplain to the chiaia's residence in order to vindicate Mamuk's statement. Having done so with the help of a certain Icoylan, whom they bribed with 2 ongars, the two received Gozze's order to watch over the chiaia's door round the clock and follow Koronel's every move. Three days later (15 May), Koronel showed up with another Jew, but taking notice of the Ragusans, he turned around and left.

Gozze continued to keep a sharp eye on Koronel. He informed the Senate that Koronel would most likely end his adventure on the galleys, for the Ottoman court was no place for playing games. No false statements were tolerated.

Therefore, because he had been spreading the above-mentioned rumors about alleged Ragusan riches while the Ragusan envoys languished in the prisons of Babagjafer and Silistra, persistent in their attempts to convince the Porte of Ragusa's lack of wealth encouraged Caboga and Buća, upon their release from prison, to stir a dose of poison into the sweet Ragusan malvasia wine for malicious Koronel to drink.

The second and final news of Koronel has been traced in Gozze's letter to the Senate dated 28 August 1680, in which Gozze informs of not having seen him since (possibly since 15 May), stating his view that Koronel, realizing his position, had either fled to Corfu, or died, the latter being most probable.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ "... È partito per Corfù, o pure è morto, che è la più credibile" (*DA XVII*, no. 1802/8).

The thing that particularly calls for our attention here is Rafo Gozze's opinion about Koronel's fate. Why does he think Koronel is probably dead, rather than in exile? Could this lead us to the conclusion that later poisoning attempts were undertaken against Koronel?

Whatever the actual events, this document provides evidence that the Ragusan diplomats also resorted to poison in their missions.

In the summer of 1671, the Bosnian pasha died suddenly at the reception held in his honor aboard Venetian galleys. This incident was immediately followed by the rumors of his poisoning, reputedly by none other than his hosts, the Venetians. As one of the guests at the party was a Ragusan envoy, the Venetians launched a new rumor, in which the poisoner was the representative of Dubrovnik.

As soon as the Ragusan government learned of the hearsay, it took immediate steps to inform its envoys to the Porte, furnishing them with instructions as to how to react to possible comments. They were instructed to say that Dubrovnik was not involved in the controversy of any kind with the late pasha, the latter being their friend. There had been no reason for disagreement or hostility on their behalf. The Ragusans not only appreciated and respected him, but also loved him as a good neighbor. The envoys were further instructed to point to the shallowness of the Venetian claims. The Ragusans would never have done such a thing: it was not in their interest to see the Bosnian pashas changing post too often, for it imposed a considerable burden upon Ragusan resources whenever they did so!¹¹¹ It seems that the Ragusans experienced no serious consequences on this occasion apart from, whether they liked it or not, having to send an ingratiating ambassadorial party to welcome the newly-appointed pasha.

Hardly had Dubrovnik recovered from the crisis caused by Kara Mustafa's pretensions, when the situation became all the more critical during the Morean War (1683-1699), when its freedom and independence was seriously threatened on a number of occasions.¹¹²

The Ragusan government was suspected of having poisoned a foreign diplomat in Dubrovnik. The man in question was the Austrian Imperial resident,

¹¹¹ *Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 62, ff. 78v-79.

¹¹² Novak, "Borba": p. 106.

Domenico Corradino. We find an account of this in a letter written in April 1690 by the general provisor, Giovanni Calbo, and mailed to his government in Venice. He informed Venice of Corradino's unexpected death in Dubrovnik and that, according to public opinion, the Ragusans had poisoned him in order to prevent him from revealing their conspiracy.

It is difficult to comment on the rumors in the Corradino case and how groundless they actually were, but the fact remains that his name did not ring favorably in the ears of the Ragusan government. Corradino took his diplomatic post in Dubrovnik at an extremely critical moment (early 1687). It was then that the Venetians occupied Novi and had penetrated Dubrovnik's hinterland by taking over Trebinje. This practically left Dubrovnik cut off from the hinterland and its major trade routes by land, placing it thus in a most vulnerable position. It should be noted here that by the beginning of this war (1684), Dubrovnik came under the protection of Austria, finding itself in a most undesirable position in reference to the Ottomans, to whom they had been regularly paying tribute. It is true, however, that the Ragusans soon resumed their centuries-long "loyalty" to the Grand Signor, weighing carefully their political and diplomatic steps in the struggle to maintain neutrality. In such circumstances Corradino was promoting the Christian coalition against the Ottomans in his attempts to draw the Ragusans into it as well. He kept a close eye on every activity undertaken by the Dubrovnik government and was constantly prepared to accuse the Ragusans of conspiracy with the Turks. This obviously explains the Ragusan hostile attitude towards Corradino, and how relieved they were to hear of his death. Although they might not have been the ones to raise the cup of poison to his lips, they certainly had venomous thoughts about him.

During this war the Ragusans encountered a forceful captain from Perast, Vicko Bujović, who led his followers in the first unsuccessful Venetian attempt to conquer Trebinje in 1689; afterwards, he merged his ships with Priuli's squadron in order to wage a marine campaign in Albanian waters.

The once good relations between Bujović and the Senate turned into fierce hostility by the end of 1698. Bujović was attacked by Tripo Fiamengo in front of the Orlando's Column in Dubrovnik after having killed Tripo's brother Niko in Cavtat. Although the stab wound did not prove fatal, Bujović demanded that the Senate sentence his assailant to death. The Senate rejected his proposal, and sentenced Tripo to merely "three whippings" (*tre tratti di corda*) and banishment from the Republic. Tripo was subsequently pardoned,

which further turned Bujović against Dubrovnik. From then on, he robbed Ragusan vessels wherever he came across them and ambushed and harassed the patricians through his accomplices. At the end of 1698, aided by Tripo Lale, Bujović managed to kidnap the patrician Vlaho Cerva, take him off shore, give him a proper beating, and leave the poor man on some remote cliff.

This was a heavy blow for the Senate, which took all the possible steps through representatives of the Venetian government and the doge himself to punish the offender most severely, but with no result. Having realized that no justice would be done, the Senate decided to take the matter into its own hands. During a closed session held on 4 October 1699, the Senate sentenced him to death by hanging, after which his body was to be quartered. The Senate simultaneously put a reward of 600 Venetian sequins on his head.¹¹³

The Senate was particularly keen on seeing the execution of this sentence. The memory of Cerva's abduction was still so painful "that we shall never rest unless we make him pay for the crime committed. Ever since we have been doing everything in our power to trap and seize him, but with no luck, for he has never crossed the Republic border nor has he come anywhere near." This is what the Senate wrote to Cremona, its agent to Venice, on 4 December 1699, having learned of Bujović's whereabouts in the said city. The Senate instructed Cremona to find men who would assassinate Bujović. The Ragusans were ready to pay 200 sequins for the elimination, a sum incomparable to the satisfaction the Senate would get from seeing Bujović's impertinence punished by death.¹¹⁴ Cremona, as he reported to the Senate in his coded letter of 12 February 1700, made all the necessary arrangements. The assassins were determined to stab Bujović with a poisoned dagger during the first days of Carnival, but the victim was nowhere to be found.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the Senate refused to give up, and continued to instruct Cremona, but with no success. Bujović was never forgiven nor forgotten, as it seems, for there

¹¹³ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 5, ff. 61-62.

¹¹⁴ *Littere et commissiones Ponentis* (hereafter cited as: *Litt. Comm. Pon.*), ser. 27.6, vol. 42, f. 35 (SAD).

¹¹⁵ "...Che risolutamente pensavano con stili avelenati di sbrigarsi ne primi giorni delle mascare... non si vide e trovai che se ne parti..." (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVIII*, ser. 76, no. 31116/4).

are some indications that the Senate took an active part in his murder in Perast in 1709.¹¹⁶

So far we have seen that the Ragusan Senate employed poisoning whenever it was considered to be the most convenient way to deal with the enemy. A question one cannot but pose here is whether the Ragusans, or Ragusan diplomats who resorted to poisons, ever happened to be the victims themselves.

The Dubrovnik Archives has not provided us with a single document testifying of a Ragusan patrician or plebeian being poisoned outside state borders. The case of the underaged nobleman Miho Đivov Sorgo, who died in Belgrade in the early days of 1640 under the suspicion of having been poisoned, does not belong here, for the investigation was carried out only among the merchants of the Ragusan colony in Belgrade, implying that the possible assassin ought to be looked for among the Ragusan tradesmen rather than aliens.¹¹⁷

As for Ragusan diplomats, we have come across one attempted poisoning which, several years later, was highly publicized. We aim to elaborate the incident, whether it was true or not. It will reflect the atmosphere of fear in which the diplomat lived, gathering from the fact that he was equipped with ready antidotes.

The case we are about to examine occurred in Istanbul on 7 February 1633, and involves the Ragusan dragoman Vicko Bratutti.¹¹⁸ At the time, Bratutti was engaged at the Porte, together with envoys Bobali and Sorgo, in resolv-

¹¹⁶ See Bruno Moravec, "Novi prilozi monografiji o Vicku Bujoviću." *Godišnjak Pomorskog muzeja u Kotoru* 7 (1958): pp. 70-72. This article served as the main source of information on Bujović.

¹¹⁷ *DA XVII*, no. 1913/48; *Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 47, ff. 235v-236.

¹¹⁸ Vicko Bratutti occupied the post of the Ragusan dragoman in Istanbul for a number of years. Being an expert in Turkish and Arab, he acted as an interpreter for the Turkish language with the Austrian emperor Ferdinand III after the year 1636, as well as with the Spanish king Philip IV. Bratutti died in Madrid before 1678. He translated Saidin's chronicle on the Ottoman emperors into Italian. He also produced a Catalan translation of the political moral reflection *Bidpaia Espejo politico y moral, para principes, y ministros, y todo genero de personas*, I-II. Madrid, 1654-1658. See Simeone Gliubich, *Dizionario biografico degli uomini illustri della Dalmazia*. Vienna-Zara: Lechner, Battara and Abelich, 1856: pp. 61-62.

ing a conflict with the Venetians regarding their pretensions over the island of Lokrum, Molunat, and Sušac.¹¹⁹

On this day, the Austrian resident to the Porte, Rudolf Schmid, invited Bratutti to lunch. The luncheon party included the Dominican vicar, another friar, an Armenian (according to Bratutti, a spy), and the resident's dragoman, Michael D'Asquier. "In the middle of the lunch—penned Bratutti to the Senate on 20 February 1633—resident's servant offered me a glass of poisoned wine. The minute I drank down the wine, my stomach turned".¹²⁰ Bratutti further describes his painful vomiting experience and ill state. His calls for help met with no response. Moreover, they kept him there against his will so that the toxin could complete its final effect. Following a struggle with a janissary whom the resident called to hold back the Ragusan, and with the aid of his servant, Bratutti managed to reach his residence, promptly administering *Fariacha di leoncornio* and other antidotes. Convinced of the resident's intention to declare him drunk and not poisoned, Bratutti summoned ten persons as eyewitnesses to his poisoning. He remained in bed for several days due to his feverish state accompanied by loss of consciousness and paroxysms. He was treated by the physician of the French consul.

In Bratutti's opinion the poisoning was initiated by the imperial resident and the bailo (Venetian envoy to Istanbul). Both suspects had their motives. The bailo's motive was to accelerate a resolution of the conflict between Dubrovnik and Venice; the resident's to eliminate the competition of his protégé D'Asquier, supreme dragoman to the Austrian emperor, for Bratutti had previously been selected for the post by the former resident, Lustrier. Bratutti held the friars, along with the Venetians, accomplices in this matter, supporting his claim by the vicar's words to the resident while at the table: "Let our enemies talk; we shall keep to our business". Likewise, Bratutti considered the Armenian to have been equally involved in the attempt on account of his remark during lunch: "Who do you and those gentlemen of yours think you are? You have four villages, and you dare consider worthy potentates and true lords your equals".

¹¹⁹ Samardžić, "Borba": pp. 374-375.

¹²⁰ *DA XVII*, no. 1860/11.

Whatever the case, Bratutti was chilled to the bone, and pleaded the Senate to recall him back to Dubrovnik since his enemies were determined to liquidate him. However, his presence in Istanbul was essential for the Republic, and the Senate not only failed to reconsider his transfer application, but also reprimanded his cowardly behavior. He was to remain at the post and be prepared for the supreme sacrifice, if necessary, for the welfare of the state. As far as his fear of murderers was concerned, he was instructed to avoid the company of suspicious characters and to be on his guard.¹²¹

Prior to the Senate's reply, on 15 March, Bratutti, panic-stricken, repeated his most urgent demand for relinquishing the office in Istanbul and to be allowed to depart the city promptly, swearing by God, and pointing out that he would be of more use alive than dead. He drew particular attention to the threat of the Venetian bailo directed to him at the door of the grand vizier: "...your life is in my hands...".¹²²

Bratutti was soon to receive the Senate's fear-healing letter. Its reassuring tone reminded him of the sense of duty and patriotism he was to guide himself by in order to overcome the terror, convincing him thus to continue his stay in Istanbul for the time being. The Senate greeted his decision to stay in its letter of 15 July, but shortly afterwards (7 August), for reasons unknown, ordered Bratutti to return to Dubrovnik together with the envoys Bobali and Sorgo.¹²³

This, however, did not mean the end of the poisoning incident. Bratutti's unpleasant experience haunted him for years, as he kept retelling the episode in hope of coming across facts which would support his side of the story. In 1638, while acting as dragoman in the service of Ferdinand III, he found himself before Viennese judicial authorities under the charge of slander. The allegation against him was most likely filed by D'Asquier, the resident's dragoman. The court demanded that Bratutti should prove his statements over the attempt of poisoning, which the latter tried by calling witnesses, some of who were in Dubrovnik. He supplied the court with *articuli probatoriales*,

¹²¹ *Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 46, f. 64v-65.

¹²² *DA XVII*, no. 1937/4.

¹²³ *Litt. Comm. Lev.*, vol. 64, ff. 94v, 182.

nine in all, according to which the then envoys, Jakov Bobali and Marin Sorgo, were to be questioned in Dubrovnik, as well as their servants, chaplain, and barber. Having received a copy of these articles, D'Asquier dispatched them to the Senate on 8 January 1639 with a recommendation in support of the resident's case, pointing out that the Senate "had recurrently denied Bratutti's requests in his pursuit of evidence to support these most malicious and chimerical schemes of his."¹²⁴

Understandably, the Senate was faced with a thorny matter. In an aim to retain friendly relations with the imperial resident, who was of both a hindrance and a help in Istanbul, the Senate was soon to interrogate all the listed witnesses (with the exception of Jakov, the barber, who was in Spain at the time) in such a manner as to obtain testimonies in the resident's favor. It then forwarded the evidence first to D'Asquier, sending a copy to the Istanbul resident himself.¹²⁵ D'Asquier's letter of 26 May 1640 serves as the best proof of the Senate's favorable results on his behalf, as it contains the former's apologies for not having expressed gratitude for the service rendered by the Senate to resident Schmid and himself during the questioning of the witnesses quoted by Vicko Bratutti. D'Asquier, however, remarks upon the influence that Bratutti's father left on the testimonies of some witnesses.¹²⁶ Yet, it is quite evident that Bratutti enjoyed no support from the Senate. They also failed to reply to his letter from Vienna dated 23 May 1639, in which he enclosed his *articuli probatoriales* with the request for the Ragusan eyewitnesses to be questioned.¹²⁷

The outcome of the trial before the Viennese War Council is unknown to us, but we do know for certain that the Senate resumed its amicable relations with Resident Schmid. The letter it addressed to the resident on 13 June 1643 upon his leaving the office in Istanbul, contains the Senate's sincere appreciation of his good relations with the Ragusan representatives during his service in Istanbul.¹²⁸ One could, thereby, conclude that the resident was the

¹²⁴ DA XVII, no. 2057/4.

¹²⁵ *Litt. Comm. Pon.*, vol. 17, f. 104; *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 96, f. 75v.

¹²⁶ DA XVII, no. 2057/7.

¹²⁷ DA XVII, no. 2057/6.

¹²⁸ *Litt. Comm. Pon.*, vol. 17, f. 244v.

one to prosper from the whole affair, and not Bratutti, who had subsequently been transferred from the Viennese to the Spanish court, most likely on account of this most unpopular affair.¹²⁹

The use of poisons in everyday life

The use of poisons is explicitly mentioned in the Statutes of Dubrovnik of 1272 (IV, 23), where it is stated that the poisoning of father or mother is a worthy enough argument for the disinheritance of the children.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the punishment of burning is to be imposed upon every person caught in the act of *herbaria*,¹³¹ or *maleficium herbarie* due to which someone could die or lose his senses, under the condition that the victim's death or loss of senses were directly caused by the said deed (VI, 7). If, however, a person performed such an activity but without serious consequences, it was up to the rector to decide whether or not the culprit deserved to be punished. If the act of *herbaria* was only suspected, the rector was authorized to conduct an investigation if he held it necessary.¹³² Other Dalmatian statutes proclaim severe punishments for those who poison with the use of poisonous plants.¹³³

¹²⁹ In *Litt. Comm. Pon.* we find no more than three letters of the Dubrovnik Senate addressed to Bratutti in Madrid. The first is dated 12 February 1659, and the last is of 20 July 1663. When, in the course of 1678, the Senate recurrently contacted the Spanish Royal Court, no mention of Bratutti is to be found, offering ground to believe that he was already dead at the time.

¹³⁰ "...Si vitae ipsius patris vel matris per venenum vel alio modo insidiare temptaverit" (*Liber statutorum Civitatis Ragusii*: p. 91). The same provision can be traced in the article 49 of the Statutes of Poljica (region between Split and Omiš), which states that father can disinherit his son if the latter "conspires to terminate his parents, either by poison, or otherwise" (*Hrvatski pisani zakoni*, ed. Franjo Rački, Vatroslav Jagić, Ivan Črnčić. Zagreb: JAZU (MHJSM, 4), 1890: pp. 57- 58).

¹³¹ The term *herbaria*, as employed in the Dalmatian statutes, refers to venefice, malefaction, or crime of poisoning—*veneficium*, *maleficium*, *crimen veneficium*. See Vladimir Mažuranić, *Prinosi za hrvatski pravno-povjestni rječnik*. Zagreb: JAZU, 1908-1922: pp. 377-378. The original meaning of the word *herbarius* is herbalist, a person skilled in preparing drugs from the medicinal plants and herbs. A good pharmacist—*bonus specarius*, was expected to be *bonus erbarius*. See *Monumenta Ragusina: Libri reformationum*, IV, ed. Josephus Gelcich. Zagreb: JAZU (Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, 28), 1896: p. 83.

¹³² *Liber statutorum Civitatis Ragusii*: p. 129.

¹³³ *Statuta et leges civitatis et insulae Curzulae 1214-1588*, ed. Jaromir Hanel. Zagreb: JAZU (MHJSM, 1), 1877: p. 9; *Statuta et leges civitatis Buduae, civitatis Scardonae, et civitatis et insulae Lesinae*, ed. S. Ljubić. Zagreb: JAZU (MHJSM, 3), 1882-1883: pp. 137 and 193; *Statuta et leges civitatis Spalati*, ed. Jaromir Hanel. Zagreb: JAZU (MHJSM, 2), 1878: p. 174.

All the statutes except that of Hvar, which leaves the punishment to the discretion of the count and his judges, prescribed the penalty of burning for the above crime. The statute of Trogir was quite precise in its description—burning to ashes (*usque ad cinerem*).¹³⁴

The earliest act of poisoning recorded in the Dubrovnik Republic dates from 1373. It took place in Ston; four persons were poisoned, including two children, aged four and five. The only suspect was Radoslava, wife of Miloš. The first investigation was carried out by the count of Ston. As he was not authorized to try serious criminal cases, Radoslava was soon escorted to Dubrovnik together with the investigation report. The inquiry reveals that Radoslava had prepared some sort of an herb tart (*una torta d' erbe*), a piece of which she gave to Marija Miloševa and Miluša Vučić. Vučić's son also tasted the pie, a piece of which he handed to Gozze's four-year-old daughter while playing with her in the street. Shortly after having eaten the pie, all the persons felt sick, with severe abdominal pains and vomiting during the night. Within two days all of them died.

Suspicion fell on Radoslava, for she had quarreled with Marija Miloševa, who had snatched her husband. According to the count of Ston, the poisoned tart was intended for Marija only, but the other persons had eaten some of it by mistake. Radoslava was the first person to be suspected, as there was a hearsay that she had had some previous experience in similar deeds while a domestic in the household of Đivo de Tidinys. Radoslava, who was pregnant at the time, denied before the local count of having given the poisoned tart to the above-mentioned persons. She did prepare the tart, but gave it to other people than the poisoned ones. Marija and Miluša merely inquired about the recipe, and Radoslava provided them with the answer.

We can only speculate as to what took place afterwards. The investigation report written by the count of Ston is all we have.¹³⁵ The onset of symptoms—stomach pain, vomiting, and swelling after death—all indicate death by poisoning.

¹³⁴ *Statuta et Reformationes c. Tragurii*, ed. Ivan Strohal. Zagreb: JAZU (MHJSM, 10), 1915: p. 64.

¹³⁵ The document represents the letter scribed by Giugno de Grede, count of Ston, containing the witnesses' hearing reports related to the poisoning. It is dateless, and stands as an enclosure to the Criminal Court register of 1373-1374 (*Lamenta de intus et de foris*, ser. 53, vol. 1).

The fact that deserves our particular attention in this case is the equivalence drawn between poison and herb. These two terms seem to have been used as synonyms (*venen o erbe*), for according to Vukac's testimony during the hearing, the victims were "herborized" (*aderbadi*). Moreover, the local count of Ston was quite familiar with the statute article dealing with plant poisoning (*herbaria*), and the significance attributed to it. He made it perfectly clear in the closing lines of the document.¹³⁶

A considerable amount of evidence on poisonings in everyday Dubrovnik life we found in the books of the *Lamenta Criminalia* series, covering the period between the years 1667 and 1808, as well as sporadic cases in separate trial reports filed in the *Documenta et Acta* series from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Having taken into consideration all the documented poisonings and attempted poisonings, we arrive at the conclusion that this was not a very popular way of dealing with one's enemies in the Republic of Dubrovnik.

Following the year 1373 and the Ston case which we have already described, we come across another case dated 30 August 1547 (*crimen veneni*). On that day, by the order of the Minor Council, Ivan *zdur* (serjeant-at-arms) made a proclamation concerning a certain Antonius Luce from Urbino, who was accused of poisoning. Should any person be hiding this criminal, he was to hand him over to the rector or the Council on the next day. Had he escaped, his get-away accomplice or anyone else involved in the escape had to report to the authorities under the threat of the punishment prescribed for poisoning.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ "Sapia la vostra signoria che questa femena a nome Radoslaua uxor de Milos mando in bona guardia a la vostra signoria, perche per presuncionj par a mi che ela abia fato morir per venen o erbe Maria... Volchec merido de la dita Milussa dixe... quando vegni a casa io trouie... tuti infermj de una grande angustia e dolor a la parte del stomego con gitar de gola e angustiarse forte, per tal che io incontiente sospetie che sia aderbadi... Io ue scrissi tuto a ponto che uuy e le vostre consciencie soura questo possa esser declarade per lo arbitrio che uuy aue per lo statuto del erbarie assay grando" (*ibid.*). Regarding the semantic relationship between the words "otrovati" and "otraviti", the following verses of Šiško Menčetić may serve as an illustration: "Kriv pravi i togaj sud čeka / Tkogodir otravi jednoga človjeka" (*Pjesme Šiška Menčetića Vlahovića i Gjore Držića i ostale pjesme Ranjinina zbornika*, ed. M. Rešetar. Zagreb: JAZU, 1937: p. 13).

¹³⁷ "...Quod ille qui occultat Antonium Luce de Urbino, accusatum crimine veneni, debeat illum presentare coram magnifico domino rectore et consilio per totam diem crastinam..." (*Cons. Min.*, vol. 41, f. 32).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an increasing number of cases are recorded. Leafing through numerous trial accounts, some of which were quite lengthy and tiresome, we have encountered diverse poisoning methods or attempts: one man attempted to poison his neighbour; one young man his pregnant fiancée so as to avoid marriage; one servant his master (a priest); one domestic his lord; one sister was suspected of attempting to poison her brother, along with similar sibling cases. Neighbors poisoned each other's chickens, pigs, hounds, and watch-dogs. We find one case of a woman who threw a poisoned fig into the neighbors' garden, intending to poison the members of the household next-door. Another woman threatened to poison her neighbor's water. One wife was accused of attempting to poison her husband; one witch-doctor unintentionally poisoned a child with a remedy lotion; one girl was poisoned with a beauty facial cream; another girl was almost poisoned with a drug purchased at the pharmacy.¹³⁸ The articles of food most favored by poisoners were loaves of bread, buns, and biscuits. Poisons were generally ingested with solid food, soup, and wine.

The parties in all of the aforementioned cases were either peasants or commoners. No instances of poisoning among the nobility could be traced in the documents. Had there been any, they might have been noted in some secret records beyond our reach. We have rooted out but one single case—that of the suspected poisoning of the patrician Jero Martolica Ghetaldi. He died on 13 February 1640 at the age of 26. It was suspected that he had been poisoned by Maruša Nikolina of Točionik, a domestic in the household of Andrija Ghetaldi, the younger Ghetaldi's uncle. It seemed that she poisoned Jero in revenge for his alleged mistreatment of her. The wearisome trial failed to prove Maruša's guilt, and she was acquitted.¹³⁹

Only one record of poisoning amongst the numerous Ragusan friars and nuns has been preserved. The trial was held before the Minor Council from

¹³⁸ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 27, f. 203; vol. 28, f. 141; vol. 35, f. 87v; vol. 36, ff. 290v, 295v; vol. 41, f. 50; vol. 43, f. 176v; vol. 56, f. 86v; vol. 66, ff. 107, 145v; vol. 67, f. 220v; vol. 68, f. 4v; vol. 75, f. 125; vol. 86, f. 34; vol. 99, ff. 134v, 240, 360; vol. 119, f. 24; vol. 124, f. 75v; vol. 130, f. 91v; vol. 151, f. 91v; vol. 162, f. 119; vol. 167, f. 51v; vol. 174, ff. 16v, 22v, 35, 143; vol. 175, f. 159; vol. 188, f. 32; vol. 192, f. 107; vol. 197, f. 48; vol. 204, f. 118v; vol. 209, f. 117; vol. 213, f. 154; vol. 218, f. 116v; vol. 221, f. 58.

¹³⁹ *DA XVII*, no. 2238/10; *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 96, f. 200.

6 to 8 February 1661, and it concerned a poisoning attempt against Fra Vicko Komnen of the order of St. Dominic.¹⁴⁰ Even the Senate proved to be interested in this case.¹⁴¹ Rumor had it that the monastery vicar, Fra Augustin Luče, talked Fra Martin, the pharmacist, into poisoning Fra Vicko, for the latter had revealed some of the monastery's private affairs before the Minor Council. This was confirmed by several friars during the hearing, as Fra Martin had confided in them after an argument with Fra Augustin, who had punished him for disobedience. Fra Martin denied the act. He admitted having said something like "he ought to be poisoned," while others had quoted him as saying "he ought to be strangled", or "he ought to be killed".¹⁴² This is where the trial account ends, and no further information is provided. It seems as though the Minor Council was satisfied with Fra Martin's statement. This, however, does not exclude the likelihood of Fra Martin's other statement, uttered in the presence of a number of other friars, being true.

We have traced only one suicide by poisoning, if it was suicide at all.¹⁴³ Sister Jela, a misfortunate nun from the Danče convent, daughter of Petar Kulundija of Podimoć, was constantly tormented by the procurator of the Danče church, Nikola N. Bona, and the priest of the Pile parish, Don Toma Tomičić. She was reprimanded for leading an apparently disgraceful life, making love and even having a baby with Tomo, son of Jakov Tomasov, the dyer. She was asked to leave the convent on several occasions. Bona sent her a message through Don Toma "if she was not willing to leave Danče peacefully, she would be expelled to Puglia, and her sins would be exposed".¹⁴⁴ Unable to cope with the pressure, and in fear of banishment and humiliation, she allegedly took a considerable dosage of arsenic which she had previously purchased at the goldsmith's owned by Pavo Rude, to be used as rat poison. The dose proved fatal. The trial was held before the judges of

¹⁴⁰ He named himself Komnen (Comnenus), pretending to be a member of this Byzantine family. Benedikt Orsini, Komnen's friend, originally from Popovo in Dubrovnik's hinterland, but claiming to be a descendant of the Orsini family of Rome, honoured fra Vincenzo with an elaborate treatise on his Comnenian family background. See Milan Rešetar, "Dva dubrovačka švindlera iz 17-og vijeka". *Dubrovački list* 10 (1925); Gliubich, *Dizionario biografico*: pp. 88-89.

¹⁴¹ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 110, f. 136v.

¹⁴² *DA XVII*, no. 2050/10.

¹⁴³ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 103, f. 136v.

¹⁴⁴ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 103, f. 118.

the Criminal Court on 5 May 1744. From the evidence presented during the trial, we can gather that there was manifest suspicion of whether Jele actually poisoned herself, or it had been the doing of someone else. It does seem odd that from the moment she administered the poison until her death, three priests came to see her, but no physician. Immediately upon Jela's death, the criminal judges appointed the court clerk, the physician Marko Flori, a surgeon named Buzati, and the prosecutor Dominik Padovan to establish the cause of death. When the postmortem examination proved that arsenic was the cause of deadly poisoning, the priests unanimously claimed that on her deathbed Jele admitted to them of having drunk poison. This concluded the case. What is most striking in this episode is the utterly indifferent attitude of the priests towards the life of this nun. They made no attempt to save her: no physician was called, nor did they try to give her an antidote.

We shall bring to light an interesting case of mass cheese poisoning that occurred in the region of Župa dubrovačka in the last days of April 1736. Forty-nine people were poisoned, but only one woman died, thanks to the prompt intervention of Ragusan physicians, notably Marko Flori.¹⁴⁵ All the patients ate cheese bought from Savo Ukropina, and his wife Daina, Vlachs from Ljekova, on Ottoman territory. According to the autopsy results, the Ragusans claimed that the cheese contained arsenic. The Senate then demanded of the pasha in Trebinje to punish Savo and his wife most severely so as to prevent any future incidents. In a letter of 2 May 1736, they wrote to the Turkish official: "It is necessary that your Lordship should arrest the said Vlach villains and seriously interrogate them in order to find the motive of their crime, the nature of the poison used and the possible antidote ... and put an end to their activities by setting an example to anyone who might indulge in the evil ways of poisoning".¹⁴⁶

The pasha proceeded according to the Senate's request, arrested Savo and his wife, and interrogated them. As the couple denied having put any kind of

¹⁴⁵ For the Roncalli's book of European medicine (Franciscus Roncalli, *Europae medicina a sapientibus illustrata*. Brixiae, 1747) Flori was asked to describe the illnesses and medical practice of his region. His contribution deals with the use of mineral water brought to Dubrovnik from Travnik, and herbal therapy against venomous snake bites applied by woodcutters and snake hunters.

¹⁴⁶ *Copiae Litterarum Diversarum* (hereafter cited as: *Cop. Litt.*), ser. 27.2, vol. 2, ff. 79v-80 (SAD).

poison in the cheese, stating, moreover, that they had no knowledge whatsoever about poison, the pasha tried to smooth out the matter. But the Senate had no settlement in mind. It repeated its request for the renewal of the investigation, adverting to the ways of justice and means of eliciting the confession. The Senate specifically pointed to that part of the Vlach's statement in which they alleged that they were not familiar with poisons. This was clearly untrue, for they sold it openly in Mrcine.¹⁴⁷ Determination in seeing justice done in the case of these two Vlachs went as far as the Senate's warning to the pasha that, if necessary, it would seek justice at higher levels in Bosnia and the Porte.¹⁴⁸ Realizing the seriousness of the matter, the pasha decided to hold a trial. A kadi from Nikšić was summoned, as well as eye-witnesses from Župa who were to be prepared and instructed for the procedure by Marin Martellini, who happened to be in Trebinje on business.¹⁴⁹

The records of this procedure, similar to the ones before, fail to provide us with the verdict. We do not know the end of the story about the cheese-sellers, in which, according to the Senate's and medical expert opinion, the cheese sold was poisoned. In any case, it cannot be ascertained whether the cheese was poisoned intentionally or not.

To end this chapter on the use of poisons in the everyday life of ancient Dubrovnik, we should draw attention to a most unusual and uncommon tradition which, unfortunately, cannot be authentically documented. It was described by Le Maire, former French consul to Dubrovnik, in an elaborate report to his government (ca. 1766). Writing about the everyday life of Dubrovnik, particularly on male and female attitudes towards sexual relations, Le Maire observes their rather permissive sexual behavior, and the degree of tolerance with which debauchery was looked upon as long as discretion was maintained: the higher the woman's social status, the greater the discretion. If, however, the affair became a scandal involving family honor, the reaction of society would prove to be less understanding. An immoral act of the kind would disgrace the family to the extent that neither its boys nor its girls would have any marriage prospects. Here, Le Maire describes the aforementioned

¹⁴⁷ *Diplomata et acta saec. XVIII*, no. 3242/28.

¹⁴⁸ *Cop. Litt.*, vol. 2, 81.

¹⁴⁹ *Diplomata et acta saec. XVIII*, no. 3242/27, 3333/124, 125, 126; *Cop. Litt.*, vol. 2, ff. 80-82.

tradition: in order to restore a family's good name and reputation after a flagrant love affair, the ancient Ragusans even resorted to poisoning. Having convinced the young girl of her fall, the parents would give her poison to drink. This cruel death verdict was to restore the family's honor. Le Maire himself did not witness this practice during his consulship in Dubrovnik. He writes that the citizens of Ragusa were much more considerate in the matters at the time, and avoided scandalous interpretations of rumored love affairs.¹⁵⁰

The origin of Le Maire's tragic stories of girls and women who had to sacrifice their lives for the restoration of the family's good name is veiled in obscurity. Whether this information is true or not we shall never know. And if it is true, just how many cups of poison those wretched young women of old Dubrovnik drank will always remain a mystery.

The safe-keeping of poisons

Due to the scantiness of archival evidence, it has been difficult to establish the regulations and means undertaken by the Dubrovnik government for the keeping of poisons. Based on one sole resolution of the Senate, we can conclude that in a certain period during the sixteenth century there was a special office in charge of poisons. Unfortunately, we cannot say exactly when it was established nor how it was organized. The above-mentioned resolution was passed during a closed session of the Senate on 16 December 1561. With 28 votes for and 7 against, it was decided to recall the institution and its officers (*officiales secreti super venenis*) who had been appointed two months earlier.¹⁵¹

The reasons for this action can be only suspected. The resolution was passed while futile attempts were being made to poison blind Pavao and Mahmud, the emin of Ledenice, both of whom we have already mentioned. Was a wrong step taken by one of the secret officers in charge of the poisons, or was it their indiscretion that induced the closing down of the service? The answer to this question we shall never know. Nevertheless, this

¹⁵⁰ Šime Ljubić, "Velevažni izvještaj o Dubrovačkoj republici sastavljen oko 1766 od francuskog konzula u Koronu, a prije vjerovatno u Dubrovniku Monsieur La Maire". *Starine* 13 (1881): p. 107.

¹⁵¹ *Secr. Rog.*, vol. 2, ff. 70, 83v.

does not imply that the Senate had disposed of all its reserves of poisons, rather that it had found a better and safer way of keeping them.

An interesting piece of evidence from the seventeenth century reveals that poisons were kept in a special chest (*cassonetto*) above the notary office and locked with three keys: the rector was the holder of one key, the second was kept by St. Mary's procurator, and the third was in the possession of the state secretary. The chest was sealed with the great seal of the Republic and was not to be opened unless the Senate so decided. It was to be re-sealed after every opening. Although this last entry refers to the safekeeping of special poisons the Senate had purchased earlier from the grand duke of Tuscany, we can suppose that this particular chest or the likes were generally used for keeping poisons.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, this dearth of evidence leads us to conclude that the use of poison in the Dubrovnik Republic was far from accidental and occasional, but organized and legalized.

The types of poison used

Traditionally playing the role of intermediary between East and West, Dubrovnik was undoubtedly acquainted with a diverse range of poisons. Furthermore, the skill of the Ragusan physicians and pharmacists in preparing various poisons has been well-documented.¹⁵³ They were more than familiar with the poisonous plants growing on the territory of the Republic, such as: jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium*), aconite (*Acconitum napellus*), henbane

¹⁵² "Prima pars est, de reponendo capsulam cum venenis nobis missis per serenissimum ducem Haetruriae in uno, ut dicitur, cassonetto sub tribus clavibus reponendo in mansione supra notariam, quarum clavium una stare debeat in posse excellentissimi domini rectoris, altera in capsula sub custodia dominorum thesaurariorum Sanctae Mariae Maioris et tertia penes secretarium nostrum. Cum hac conditione, quod unquam aperiri possit dicta capsula, absque expressa et speciali parte consilii rogatorum et quod quando sic aperietur dicta capsula, quae semper manere et stare debeat in predicto cassonetto, debeat semper eadem sigillari toties quoties cum sigillo magno Reipublicae nostrae" (*Secr. Rog.*, vol. 4, f. 252v). See Risto Jeremić-Tadić, *Prilozi II*: p. 168, note 31 (there is mention of this regulation in line with a number of instances when poison was used in the period between 1641 and 1655).

¹⁵³ See the poisoning of the Turkish khoja in this paper.

(*Hyoscyamus niger et albus*), juniper (*Juniperus sabina*), mandrake, etc.¹⁵⁴

In addition, they were also versed in the employment of snake venoms. An extremely venomous serpent widely distributed throughout the Republic was the viper (*Vipera ammodytes*, *Coluber ammodytes*, or *Vipera illyrica*).¹⁵⁵ Tracking down such a snake represented no great problem, as Dubrovnik had quite a few snake hunters. We have traced two instances of live vipers being sent to Bosnia in the eighteenth century. What might have been the reason for such an unusual order we cannot gather, but we do know that the order in question was made to the Ragusan Senate by the Bosnian pasha, Hećim Oglu, in 1738 for six lively vipers plus some more with eggs. On 10 May 1738, the Senate fulfilled the order by dispatching Matko Čučuk to Travnik in order to deliver six vipers carefully packed in a steel-plated wooden box. The addressee of this unusual package was advised to be extremely cautious while emptying the box, for “the snakes are most irritable and aggressive”. As for the vipers with eggs, the Senate apologized for not having sent any because their snake trackers could find none. Besides, the trackers had never heard of a snake laying eggs.¹⁵⁶ On the second occasion, on 25 September 1747, the Senate dispatched Petar Stulli deliver eight venomous vipers to the chiaia of the Bosnian pasha.¹⁵⁷

Dubrovnik had a long tradition of using snake meat for the preparation of medicines. There is evidence that some sort of viper broth or *viperata* (*brodo*

¹⁵⁴ The 1553 inventory of Frano Britius’s pharmacy included mandragora (*Diversa Cancellariae*, ser. 25, vol. 138, f. 10 [SAD]). See Zdenka Kesterčanek, “Dubrovačke ljekarne i ljekarnici XVI. st.”. *Acta pharmaceutica jugoslavica* 4 (1954): p. 4.

¹⁵⁵ Baldo Kosić, *La vipera ammodytes a Ragusa e dintorni*. Ragusa: Srpska dubrovačka štamparija, 1899; Baldo Kosić, “Dubrovačke zmije”. *Srgj* 3 (1904) 16-17: pp. 782-788 and 18: pp. 990-993; Baldo Kosić, “Crnokrug (vipera ammodites) u dubrovačkom muzeju”. *Glasnik prirodoslovnog društva* 22 (1910).

¹⁵⁶ “Having received an order for about six vipers, very lively ones, we dispatched our men to fetch them across these rocks and cliffs, and they delivered them, the latter being placed in a box made proper, tightly shut and coiled, and brought to you by this man. Take utmost care upon the vipers’ release from the box because they are truly dangerous. Seldom did a person bit by it survive. As for the vipers with eggs, we have made careful inquiries with the experienced snake hunters, who have informed us that no trace of snakes laying eggs was to be found in these parts, nor have they ever seen or heard of snake eggs, the knowledge of which we provide you with” (*Cop. Litt.* 2, ff. 108-109). The expenses for the snakes, box, and packing amounted to 5 perpers (*Detta*, ser. 6, vol. 45, f. 13 [SAD]).

¹⁵⁷ *Cop. Litt.*, vol. 3, f. 56v; *Detta*, vol. 54, f. 19v.

di vipera) was prepared at the old Ragusan pharmacy Domus Christi, established in 1426. It was prescribed for strengthening. The snake was chopped into pieces and boiled in 8 dl of water together with half of a fattened chicken. When the water had been reduced by half, the broth was ready. Until recently, the above-mentioned pharmacy had in its possession a box for keeping snakes, a pair of pincers that were specially designed for handling serpents, and a sword for beheading them. This tradition was described by Baldo Kosić and in his opinion the snakes used for this purpose were vipers.¹⁵⁸

Snake meat was one of the ingredients of theriac—an ancient and commonly used medicament and antidote whose preparation was highly complicated. The pharmacists of Dubrovnik were well-acquainted with the preparation of this antidote, which contained miscellaneous compounds, including plant poisons.¹⁵⁹

In addition to plant and animal (venom) poisons, arsenic was also at the Senate's disposal. This poison was most frequently used in private feuds. It could be obtained from the pharmacy,¹⁶⁰ from some shops which sold it under the counter to goldsmiths, and farther toward the Levant.¹⁶¹ Complaints were even made about it being sold in the street.¹⁶² Arsenic was available from Venice, but could be obtained just as easily in Mrcine, in Konavle, from

¹⁵⁸ Kosić, "Dubrovačke zmije": p. 786.

¹⁵⁹ In May 1699, an expenditure of 4 perpers was made for the procurement of 8 boxes of theriac, and in November of the same year, the amount of 6 perpers for 12 boxes of the aforementioned substance sent to the Turkish commissary (*Detta*, vol. 52, ff. 52 and 60). Due to the demanding preparation procedure of this antidote, it was being supervised. Thus, in 1578, the only pharmacist authorized to prepare it, was Roko Fasano (Zdenka Kesterčanek, "Roko Fasano dubrovački ljekarnik XVI. stoljeća". *Anali Historijskog instituta JAZU u Dubrovniku* 2 (1953): p. 268.).

¹⁶⁰ On 26 November 1689 Rafo Gozze, for the purpose of exterminating rats in his house in Gruž, sent his domestic to Antun Vickov, a pharmacist, "a prendere un poco d'arsenico, o sia siciano per avelenar i detti sorci". The pharmacist refused to sell the poison to the servant upon his word, but demanded a note signed by Gozze (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 27, f. 203v).

¹⁶¹ On 25 January 1691, Salamun David, a Jew, procured 2 pounds of arsenic at the store of Ivan Bonomelli, at 10 groschen a pound "per mandarlo a Levante". During the hearing, Bonomelli denied knowing about the prohibition concerning the keeping of arsenic in the store. He further stated that he had ordered it from Venice, and was to proceed it to Lepanto, having also sold it "agli orefici che serviva per loro arte" (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 28, ff. 224-228). Ivan Petrov, too, kept arsenic and sublimate at his store in 1693. He sold arsenic to the goldsmiths (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 32, f. 119).

¹⁶² On 23 January 1691 a Jew, Salamon Bon, was accused "che vendeva d'arsenico per piazza" (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 28, f. 224).

Vlach women who sold it under the name of “mice salad”.¹⁶³ It was commonly used as rat poison in the Rector’s Palace.¹⁶⁴ Sprinkling a bit of arsenic in neighbor’s yard, so as to poison their chickens and dogs, became a customary way of resolving arguments. According to the existing evidence, the Senate was also to resort to natural arsenic compounds such as orpiment (*orpimento*), mercury, and certain sublimate.¹⁶⁵ It cannot be ascertained with exactitude which of these poisons were actually used, and which were merely stored in sealed and well-locked chests. However, we are certain that the Senate was occasionally dissatisfied with the quality of a poisonous substance at disposal in Dubrovnik; otherwise, it would not have ordered toxins from abroad.

The origin of the poisons

On record we have two instances of poison being acquired from abroad. Both of these cases have already been mentioned in the text. The first was related to the hostilities with Radoslav Pavlović, when the Senate dispatched its pharmacist, Salimbene, to Venice with the mission of purchasing poisons and testing them on the spot. This episode has already been elaborated, and requires no further comment. The second acquisition was made during the Candian War, when the Ragusans had a troublesome problem on their hands—the Turkish outlaws. In their plight, the Senate contacted Ferdinand II de’ Medici, grand duke of Tuscany, for a supply of poison in order to eliminate the brigands from Novi. They required special slow-acting poison¹⁶⁶ so that

¹⁶³ In the procedure which took place on 24 March 1717, Mare Ivana Škife from Lovorno claimed that she had heard “that Mare Kalaš asked for a bit of mice salad... I have heard it before that the Vlachs have a special name for arsenic—mice salad” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 67, f. 232). The Senate’s letter to the pasha of Trebinje contains the reference on the sale of arsenic in Mrcine, related to the case of cheese poisoning in Župa in 1736: “... it is clear that the Vlachs procure arsenic, carry it about in public, and sell it in Mrcine market place” (*Cop. Litt.*, vol. 2, f. 81).

¹⁶⁴ *Detta*, vol. 18, f. 18; vol. 52, f. 3.

¹⁶⁵ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 56, ff. 93, 119, 131; vol. 162, f. 197v.

¹⁶⁶ These specific poisons were referred to as: *venena ad tempus*, *venena lenta in certum tempus definita*, *venena terminata*, *venena moratoria* (Lewin, *Die Gifte*: pp. 30-31). The former occupied the Senate for quite some time. The renowned physician Amatus Lusitanus in his medical treatise answers the question, most probably posed by the Senate, as to whether there exists a poison with a delayed effect. It seems as though the Senate refused to believe Amatus, who denied the poisons of the sort. See Lavoslav Glesinger, *Amatus Lusitanus i njegov liječnički rad u Dubrovniku (1556-1558.)*. Zagreb-Beograd, 1940: p. 71.

the Turkish outlaws would not suspect anything. The main reason why the Senate decided to order this kind of poison abroad lay in the fact that the Ragusan physicians and pharmacists were not familiar with the preparation of this kind of toxin. Why they chose to contact a Medici can be explained by their belief that he had to be the person with a considerable collection of various toxic substances.

On 10 December 1654, the Senate decided to inform the grand duke of Tuscany on the matter through the Ragusan consul in Florence, Scipione Capponi. The consul was also to receive detailed instructions on the subject. Consequently, two letters were approved on 15 December.¹⁶⁷

In the letter addressed to the grand duke there is no reference to poison. The Senate kindly requested an audition for Capponi, who would come on a matter of grave importance. The Senate recommended Capponi to the grand duke in hope that the latter would grant their request “not only as an act of mercy upon the Republic, but also as an act to please God, too.” In its letter to Capponi, the Senate presented an elaborate analysis of its request, confiding in his efforts and determination to persuade the grand duke to help them. On the other hand, the Republic would find the means to recompense him for his services. As this letter is an interesting piece of correspondence, notably in terms of the methods of Ragusan diplomacy, we shall quote it in full¹⁶⁸:

15 December 1654

To Marquis Capponi, Florence

Most honored Sir,

As our state, as well as the merchant venturers in the Levant, are currently victims of unspeakable terror at the hands of our pagan neighbors and are not in a position to confront them due to a number of reasons, nor punish their intolerable yet customary violence and atrocities, and in order to put an end to this unbearable situation, we have decided to execute these heathen creatures by using poison whose effect would have to be slow yet deadly so

¹⁶⁷ *Cons. Rog.*, vol. 105, ff. 218 and 220.

¹⁶⁸ *Miscellanea saec. XVII.*

that no suspicion would arise. Since poisons of this kind are not in our possession, and since no skilled person can be found in this state to prepare them, we deem that Your Most Honored Lordship would act on our behalf and present the enclosed letter to His Grace the Grand Duke, as it has come to our knowledge that he has a diversity of such substances at his disposal. We have entrusted this matter to Your Lordship in the utmost secrecy and confidence, as important and delicate matters such as this require. We urge Your Lordship to forward our letter with the same affection and consideration with which you treasure the prosperity and peace of this Republic, so endearing to You, and to present His Grace with our intent and reason. Approach him with the deepest sincerity, all in the name of the Republic, which is most devoted to his house and person, to help us free our Republic from the swelling terror, and do us the grace of providing us with the poison His Grace most likely possesses, one with a delayed effect. Use our reputation and oath of state to persuade His Grace that the poison will not be given to anyone but the pagan villains, and that this Republic would remain ever grateful for such an act on his part. If it be so that His Grace is willing to gratify us, which should be considered an act of the greatest generosity, please request that he mark the instructions for use and dosage, along with antidotes for those handling it to know. We entrust Your Lordship to keep this matter in strict confidence and fail not to devote yourself with all the diligence and prudence Your Lordship would deem most suited for the cause. The moment you acquire it, you will send it to us well-packed and sealed via Ancona, informing us of every detail for our further action. No one must suspect or know of the contents. At all costs, burn this letter. This Republic will cherish the memory of your loyal service and the actions Your Lordship would take in this urgent matter, and award you worthily at all times and occasions.”

This letter, along with the one addressed to the grand duke arrived in Florence on 16 January 1655. This we gather from Marquis Capponi’s letter dated 30 January of the same year, informing the Ragusan government of the grand duke’s prompt willingness to comply with the request. Capponi had hoped that he could dispatch the parcel as well, but due to the grand duke’s numerous responsibilities, he failed to do so. He assured them of a satisfactory result. As for the confidentiality of the matter, the letter had already been destroyed according to the instructions.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

In his letter of 13 March, Capponi states several reasons—the vacant papal seat, the duchess of Parma paying a visit to the grand duke, etc.—which delayed the departure of the package from Florence on that very day. Capponi sent the carefully packed parcel with poisons to Orsat Giorgi in Ancona for the latter to proceed with it to Dubrovnik. “‘Tis tonight I am sending”—pens Capponi to the government—“a parcel wrapped in paper and sealed with five seals on one side and four on the other, all seals of His Highness, and an enclosed letter to master Orsat Giorgi (the seals bear the inscription: *Ferdinandus II Magnus Dux Hetruriae*). The parcel also contains a leaf with detailed instructions concerning the dosage and application. I have placed the said box into a wooden one, wrapped it in cloth and waterproof fabric, and addressed it to Your Excellency.”¹⁷⁰

The box containing the poisons arrived in Dubrovnik on 11 April (this date was marked by the secretary on the back of Capponi’s enclosed letter), and on 13 April a secret resolution was passed in the Senate to store the newly-arrived parcel in a chest above the notary, as was mentioned above. In two letters of 7 May sent to the grand duke and Capponi, the Ragusan government expresses its appreciation and gratitude for the service rendered.¹⁷¹

The Ragusan government thus complemented its poison supplies with special samples of Medicean poisons and was ready to employ them. Unfortunately, the paper containing instructions on exact dosage, application, and antidotes, which could have helped us determine the types of the toxic substances, disappeared along with the box they were stored in. Nevertheless, we have ascertained that the Ragusan government did not receive the poisons as ordered, that is, the poisons producing a delayed effect, killing victims 5, 8, 15, or 30 days following the taking of the poison, for such toxins, according to experts, did not exist. It seems that the Senate itself showed little faith in the substances obtained because, as in the poisoning of Muho Mirmilović, it sent physicians to observe the onset of symptoms and to act accordingly.

Regardless of the type of poison involved, the very fact that the Republic of Dubrovnik obtained a delicate substance such as this from the grand duke

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

of Tuscany speaks of their close and deeply confidential relationship. At the same time, it illustrates the Republic's determination to keep pace with the mainstream even when toxicology was concerned.

The medical experts of Dubrovnik and their practice of forensic toxicology

As we have already seen, Ragusan physicians were sometimes given the opportunity to display their forensic skill. By the long-established practice of the Ragusan court, in cases of sudden death or suspected poisoning, apart from sending clerks of the court to the scene of death, the judges also sent one of the medical experts: a physician, a surgeon, or a barber, or, in some instances, one of each, depending on the investigation. In cases of death, if it was not possible to establish the cause of death by other means, an autopsy was performed. If there were any indications of death by food or drink poisoning, the suspected specimen had to be brought to court. This was followed by an examination, the purpose of which was to identify whether or not the substance was toxic. The most common method by which the experts determined the nature of the suspected substance was experiment. Tests were usually performed upon dogs, sometimes on roosters. The substance was declared poisonous or not by the effect it produced on the animals. Furthermore, an analysis of the incriminated specimens was invariably conducted. In order to establish whether the patient was the victim of attempted poisoning, the victim's vomit would be analyzed.¹⁷²

As we are dealing with some of the most recently discovered data of value to the history of Dubrovnik medicine, we aim to present several cases of poisoning, or suspected poisoning, in which Ragusan physicians, surgeons,

¹⁷² As an illustration, I aim to produce some evidence on the expenditures on account of poison testing on animals as well as the costs resulting from the services rendered by the barber in investigating the cases of poisoning. In June 1701, five perpers and seven groschen were spent "per far la prova dei veleni et altro necessario per detto officio" (*Detta*, vol. 22, f. 89v). In April 1717, a payment of 10 perpers was made "a Matteo barbiere stato a Canali d'ordine delli signori giudici del criminale per riconoscere li amalati supposti avelenati", while six groschen were paid "al maestro di giustizia per un cane per far l'esperienza dei veleni". (*Detta*, vol. 25, f. 100v). In September of 1717, barber Damjan received 5 groschen for having gone to Osojnik on account of a woman who died of poisoning, and a man "che porto il ragazzo avelenato per ordine delli signori giudici del criminale" the sum of 8 groschen. In the same occasion one perper was disbursed "al maestro di giustizia per due cani per far esperienza dei veleni" (*Detta*, vol. 25, f. 108v).

or barbers provided the Criminal Court with expert medical evidence. This particular evidence will help us reconstruct the toxicological practices of the time in Dubrovnik. On the occasion of the sudden and early death of the patrician Jero Martolica Ghetaldi, who died on 13 February 1640 at the age of 26, an investigation was first carried out before the Criminal Court, then before the Minor Council, and finally, before the Senate, on account of the strong belief that he had been poisoned. There was one suspect, Maruša Nikolina, a domestic of Ghetaldi's, who was supposedly beaten by him. Having heard the rumors of her master being poisoned, she took refuge in the church of St. Lazarus. Ivan Arneri of Korčula immediately suspected poisoning, as he noticed black nails on Jero's corpse. A carpenter by the name of Ilija gave the same statement during the investigation, quoting that he had heard in Italy that a poisoned man could be recognized by black nails, like the ones he had seen on Jero. He further added that he had furtively pulled Jero's hair, after which a few hairs remained in his hand. In addition, it was said that Jero's uncle, a friar of the Friars Minor, had the corpse exhumed for an autopsy which established poisoning as the definite cause of death.

The crucial and most decisive part in this long trial was played by the physicians who had treated Jero. Thanks to them, Maruša was subsequently acquitted.¹⁷³ During the procedure, Božo Mihajlov, a barber who had also treated Jero, testified that he could not conclude poisoning, as he had failed to pay enough attention to the external signs. After him, Lorenzo Agnelo, a physician, took the stand. First, he furnished the court with his account of Jero's illness. "On Saturday," he said, "I found him vomiting food and some bile. He was suffering from nausea, abdominal pain, slight fever, and general weakness. On Sunday he did not vomit food but merely bile, the doctors referred to as "colera". He also suffered from diarrhea, with a similar substance, and on Monday he vomited some kind of substance similar to wine sediment, which also appeared in his feces. He died that evening". Asked by the judges whether he suspected a particular poison, he categorically denied. In Agnelo's opinion, a poison-like matter developed internally due to a dis-

¹⁷³ Almost three months having elapsed from the beginning of the procedure, Maruša was acquitted on the Senate session held on 10 May 1640, such an outcome being the result of a slight outvote (*Cons. Rog.*, vol. 96, f. 200v).

ease, the examples of which could be found in all the medical books.¹⁷⁴ Giovanni Martino, a physician, agreed with Agnelo's statement, holding that Jero suffered from a disease common to man.¹⁷⁵ The third doctor to testify twice was Tomaso di Puca. Of his repeated testimony we learn from the trial report dated 11 April 1640, in which he ascertained that poisons produced different effects, as he had elaborated at great length during the previous hearing. Asked whether Jero's symptoms could have been caused by an edible poison, Tomaso responded with an almost identical testimony as doctor Agnelo. His observations of Jero's symptoms made it clear that no deliberate poison was involved, as death was caused by natural causes.¹⁷⁶

In July of 1693, the judges of the Criminal Court investigated the case of an alleged suicide by poisoning of a Vlach woman Vesela, Don Petar Antonini's servant. The news was spread around by Don Petar's mother, for Vesela was found vomiting violently one day.

She was examined by a barber, Petar Tromba, whom Don Petar had asked to see into the matter. Tromba testified before the court that he had observed the vomit, as much as two pots of it, which he described as glasslike (*color di vetro*). This led him to deduce that the vomiting was not of a natural cause, but induced by some vomiting agent, not poison, for if it were poison, the characteristic signs (*segni evidenti*) of poisoning would have appeared. Tromba continued that Vesela told him of having bought figs and cherries at the market place. When she had eaten some, she got severe stomach pains accompanied by vomiting, but felt slightly relieved after doing so.¹⁷⁷ Vesela denied having purchased poison at the store of Ivan Petrov, contrary to the latter's statement.¹⁷⁸

When Petar Milković, a goldsmith, was found dead in his flat in Između Polača street on 15 January 1694, the judges of the Criminal Court immedi-

¹⁷⁴ "Disse di non, ma che ben si habbia generato di dentro qualche materia simil al veleno generata di malatia e di questo habbiamo pieni libri di simil esempi et infermita" (*DA XVII*, no. 2238/10).

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ "...Non ho cognosciuto altro in quanto gli fosse dato per bocca, ben ho cognosciuto come dissi in detto mio primo costituito, che si fece il veleno di humori naturali" (*ibid.*).

¹⁷⁷ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 32, f. 102v.

¹⁷⁸ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 32, f. 108.

ately sent a team consisting of two judges accompanied by a clerk to the scene of death. They found Petar lying quite dead in bed with traces of froth in his nostrils. According to the customary legal practice, he was asked three times whether he held someone responsible for his death and whether he accused someone, but he “failed to answer, as he was dead.”¹⁷⁹

Due to the sudden nature of his death, the physician Tomo Bogašinović was summoned to assist the court. Having examined the body, he testified that the goldsmith had died of a stroke induced by mercury vapors, which sometimes develop in the process of gold melting with the use of mercury. These vapors, in Bogašinović’s opinion, provoked a stroke, which caused suffocation.¹⁸⁰

Barber Andrija Utija was sent to Osojnik in November of 1695 by order of the judges of the Criminal Court to examine the body of Kate Nazlobrzova, once domestic of Don Dominko, former priest at Osojnik. She died a sudden death; it was suspected that she had been poisoned by her parents.

Upon his return from Osojnik, the barber provided the judges with a report, in which, under solemn oath, he stated that he had examined the body of the late Kate; during the examination he observed blue and black spots across her back, and also around the neck. Her hair was easy to pull out, and her fingernails had turned black. The autopsy showed a bluish lesion surrounded by shades of yellow in her stomach, which led him to the conclusion that it had been caused by some sort of poison.¹⁸¹

Marin Zamagna, the count of Konavle, filed a report to the judges of the Criminal Court on 12 January 1699, concerning the death of Ivo Kralj of Radovčići, who was poisoned by having eaten some bread his sister had brought from Perast. The count also enclosed a piece of this bread as *corpus delicti*.

¹⁷⁹ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 33, f. 87.

¹⁸⁰ “...Rifferii, che detto quondam Petar morii d’apoplezia, causatali dagli aliti mercuriali dependenti dalla materia, nel mentre squagliava l’oro e da questo effetto è concorso il sangue, che l’ha affogato” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 33, f. 86).

¹⁸¹ “...Rifferii con giuramento haver oservato tutto il suo corpo e ho visto per la schiena lividure e negrure et in torno al collo, e lo tirata per i capelli i quali tirati subito cascavano. Le unghie delle mani divenute negre, anzi da un altro barbiere ho fatto aprir il suo corpo et ho visto nel stomaco una piaga livida con intorno colori gialli et arguisco tutto cio provenire dal veleno” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 36, f. 14v). Barber Andrija received 10 perpers for his services (*Detta*, vol. 20, f. 161v).

The bread was subjected to expert analysis, carried out by doctor, Klaudije, who was to establish whether this bread contained any kind of toxin. Following the tests, Klaudije testified before the judges that he had identified arsenic in the form of tiny white grains.¹⁸²

In the course of examining some crime-related substance, a liquid or white powder which Antun Krivonosović had brought from Šipan upon the court's request in June of 1701 for the case of Marin Polonić, two physicians were authorized, the above-mentioned Klaudije and Toma Bogašinović. After careful examination, they both stated that the jar contained some sort of plant juice, but they were unable to establish whether it was toxic without testing it on an animal. Furthermore, they were unable to identify the powder, but supposed that it was neither a mineral, nor sublimate or arsenic.¹⁸³

The following day an experiment was performed upon a dog and a rooster at the Rector's palace. First, the rooster was given some of the powder mixed in pastry, and the dog tasted soup to which the unusual liquid had been added. This resulted in a rapid and intense effect in both animals, but they recovered after a few minutes. Afterwards, they were kept under observation for five hours, but no symptoms developed. At nine in the evening the dog was given a spoonful of powder mixed with the liquid, after which he immediately died. So as to ascertain the toxic effect, dissection was performed. The dog's stomach supposedly contained the poison he had drunk. This led to the conclusion that the toxin contained alcohol compounds, reached the heart, provoked the clotting of blood, and eventually death. On the other hand, the rooster, which ingested the same substance, survived.¹⁸⁴

In November of 1710, two physicians, Simit and Bogašinović, carried out separate tests on a powder forwarded to the Criminal Court by the count of Konavle, Frano M. Tudisi, which had been applied by the local sorceress and

¹⁸² *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 41, f. 51v.

¹⁸³ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 43, f. 221v.

¹⁸⁴ "...Mischiando la polvere con il liquore e datosi al detto cane sopra un chuchiaro imediate tramortii con affanni e creppo quasi di subito et aperto li fu trovato il detto veneno nel stomaco tal quale lo bevette, con che si suppone, che il veleno sia composto di parti spiritose e che sia penetrato al cuore e congelato il sangue e per conseguenza causatoli la morte..." (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 43, ff. 228v-229). During the hearing held on 14 December 1701, Crivonossi stated that he had been in the dungeon at the time of the experiment, and heard the tobacco poison being mentioned (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 43, f. 263v).

healer, a certain Anica Nikolina from Gabrile, as a remedy in treating the four-year-old daughter of Petar Zlovečera. The child was said to have suffered from some kind of mange. The said Anica powdered the child's head with it. Several hours later, the girl died.

Analyzing the powder, Sismit established that it was realgar (arsenic sulfide), which had initially appeared in the form of powder, but subsequently combined into a compact substance, losing thus its natural appearance. In order to make sure that the matter was toxic, he suggested an animal experiment. As for the child, he assumed that she had probably died due to the penetration of poison into her blood system.

Sismit had the substance ground, and then mixed into a paste. The experiment was carried out on a rooster which was kept locked and under observation. The animal lived to see the following day, when it was decided to release it. Curiously, though, the rooster died two days later. Sismit was called again to establish the death cause. The dissection proved that the rooster had died of the poison it had eaten two days before, and that death had occurred when it did due to the low dosage. He found some of the paste in the stomach, partially ingested, as well as several grains of barley which it had swallowed afterwards.¹⁸⁵

In Bogašinić's opinion, the white granules in the powder were actually quicklime, and the yellow powder, orpiment (*arsenic sulfide*), which he claimed was toxic but not very harmful. It may cause death if taken in very large doses. When, however, it is mixed with lime it becomes caustic, and if applied to the skin with no wounds, it could not be lethal, for that was its common use. In the case of the mangy child, it could have been deadly had the child had a bruise through which the toxin could penetrate into her bloodstream.¹⁸⁶

On 6 April 1717, Mato, a barber, reported having examined Petar Kalaš, his wife Stana, and his daughter Mara in Konavle, all of whom had been poisoned by eating a loaf of bread. They complained of swelling, stomach pains, and vomiting.

¹⁸⁵ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 56, ff. 93v, 119.

¹⁸⁶ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 56, f. 131.

According to his report, Mato found Petar and Mara in bed. He made a complete check-up of Petar, and found nothing unusual, except that both his legs below the knees were swollen, and the skin of his left palm was slightly peeling. The swelling might have been caused by a fever or poison of any kind. In addition, Petar complained of a burning sensation in his mouth, but the barber found his mouth perfectly sound. He pulled Petar's hair, but it held firmly. He no longer had a fever, and his condition was beyond critical. As for Stana, she was up and about. Mara's fever had dropped too, her hair being in normal condition, except for some spots on her left thigh, the size of a palm and a half, resembling fish scales, for which he said could have been produced by some kind of poison.¹⁸⁷

To be sure, a test was made on a dog. From the leftovers of the loaf, handed to the Criminal Court in a bag sealed with the Republic seal, "a lump of paste" was made with the assistance of a barber named Cvijeto, and given to a dog that morning. The following day they found the dog well and lively. Despite these first results, the experiment was continued. A small bun was baked from the same flour and given to the animal again. Nothing occurred then nor did it some time afterwards when the dog ate dry flour.¹⁸⁸

In September of the same year Jele Burinova was found dead in her house in Osojnik. Poisoning was suspected. Damjan, a barber, and one assistant of the court were authorized to carry out the inquest. In his report dated 24 September 1717, the barber stated that he had found the woman, in her early 40s, lying in bed dressed, with some froth around her mouth. Both her cheeks were blue. He undressed her in order to examine other parts, but noticed nothing unusual. He pulled her hair, and some of it came out quite easily. In order to make his report complete, the barber intended to open up the body, but the parish priest, Don Stjepan Šuljaga, managed to talk him out of it. The priest persisted in his belief that Jele had poisoned herself with rye bread. To support his claim, Šuljaga produced a piece of the bread, tucked away in a stone wall, with which Jele had supposedly poisoned herself. Šuljaga also confirmed that he had checked the bread by giving it to a cat, which died immediately thereafter. A piece of the bread was delivered to the court as evidence.

¹⁸⁷ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 67, ff. 238v, 240.

¹⁸⁸ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 67, ff. 246v-247.

The six-year-old son of the late Jele was brought to hospital on the following day. He was examined by Serafin, a physician, who established that the child's pulse and complexion were normal, but was unable to determine the type of poison which had caused the poisoning. In his expert opinion, the toxin in question was not a proper one (*veneno propinato*), for it would have killed the child within three days, as it did his mother. As for the bread, he declared that no poison could be identified in it unless an animal experiment was carried out. Even if the poison proved deadly, it would be impossible to determine the exact type of toxic substance.

Several days later, the bread was given to the dog, which soon vomited four times, the matter exceeding the amount that he had eaten. Serafin, who monitored the dog and later analyzed the vomit, stated that it must have been a poisoned substance, but was unable to determine of what kind. He further explained that the survival of the dog did not necessarily imply the absence of toxin, because dogs could remain alive even after swallowing arsenic under the condition that they vomited it. According to him, the dog would have undoubtedly died if he had not vomited. To be perfectly sure, the animal was kept under additional observation for it continued to vomit a soap-like mucus (*flemme come di sapone*). Nothing dramatic followed. As reported by serjeant Braco, the dog was soon released and was later seen running down the main street.¹⁸⁹

An inquiry undertaken in June 1739 and occasioned by the death of Marica Kolendić, a young girl from Vrbica, deserves particular attention. She was a servant in the household of a merchant, Antun Vitković, and she was suspected of having died of poisoning. Medical assistance in this case was provided by the distinguished Ragusan physician Marko Flori, whose very extensive report contributed to the belief that she had been poisoned. The complete forensic team agreed with him on the matter, as we shall learn later.

The said Marica was a healthy, "fleshy and red-in-the-cheeks girl, although, at times had suffered from minor illnesses". True, she was "of delicate complexion", and furthermore "a pretty maid in appearance". But a month prior to her death, "a change in Marica's complexion" caught her master's eye. She complained and searched for a remedy "at women's healers". Eventually, she

¹⁸⁹ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 68, ff. 107-110.

was bedridden with extreme stomach pain. Among the “specialized women’s healers” that called on her was Anica Markovčičeva from Trsteno, “skilled in treating women’s problems”, as she herself stated before the court. Anica put “a *ventusa* on Marica’s navel” according to the latter’s request, but no improvement occurred.¹⁹⁰ She was excessively thirsty, and vomited the egg Anica gave her to eat.

Fifteen days before she died, Marko Flori examined her, diagnosing the common *asthma isterico*. Four or five days prior to her death, the doctor was called again. This time he examined her most thoroughly, but was unable to determine the nature of her disease, the course of which, judging by her symptoms, foretold a tragic ending. During this visit, Marica’s lord informed Flori that she had started fading away from the moment she began to apply some sort of facial beauty cream—*qualche sbelletto*.¹⁹¹

This detail encouraged Flori to conclude that the beauty cream, if poisonous, could well be the cause of her ill state. Therefore, he revisited Marica the following day, and resumed his research in that direction. Marica admitted to having used a lotion five or six times. She had even poured some into her mouth, but spat it out soon after. Flori was becoming increasingly convinced that poisoning was the cause of her poor condition, and applied antidotes. Unfortunately, Marica died soon afterwards.

While responding to the judge’s direct question as to whether Marica died of poisoning, Flori avoided an apodictic answer. “I cannot determine the real

¹⁹⁰ A glass cup frequently used for stimulating bleeding in certain parts of the body. In Stulli’s dictionary it is entered as *ventuza*.

¹⁹¹ Namely, Marica had some beauty spots on her face which she aimed to get rid off. She consulted the Jew Filip, a newly converted Christian, as to what “the Jewish women wash the face with and use to keep their complexion fair”. Filip told her about fra Ignacije, pharmacist from the Friars Minor, “who was skilled in preparing certain cleansing lotions which help remove spots from the cheeks”. Filip was the one who supplied Marica with the lotion. The substance proved to be egg-oil, with which she was to moisture her face in the evening and wash the following morning “with water from the fountain”. Fra Ignacije stated before the judges of the Criminal Court that the aforementioned oil was “so harmless, but yet not intended to be swallowed. It is made from the yolks, and could be eaten without causing sickness”. However, Ivo Pepov, a painter, provided Marica with another beauty lotion, the so-called “voda of bjake”, which he purchased from Pero Budmani’s sister at Pile. The plain “voda od bjake”(lime water), according to the expert opinion of Đuro Altapena, consisted of “lime, sulphur and brandy” and was not poisonous unless drunk. The lotion Marica administered, as testified by Ivan the tailor who licked some of it, caused a burning sensation of the tongue “like a green serviceberry”.

cause of her death with absolute certainty,” he stated before the court on 8 June 1739, “but the circumstances and the symptoms observed during the course of her illness force me to believe that the said Marica did die of poisoning”. The clinical observations and the progression of symptoms which led Flori to this conclusion were the following: (1) loss of weight and spirits (*un mancamento e di forze e di spirito*) due to no apparent or discernible external cause; (2) paleness (*un tetro pallore*) of the entire body, typical of poisoning; (3) complete lack of appetite (*disapetenza totale*); (4) heavy respiration (*strettezza di respiro*), which could mislead to a diagnosis of asthma; (5) emaciation and dehydration (*una emaciazione et una essicazione*). Flori further supported his statement with Marica’s confession that she had put *sbillette* into her mouth. Flori was certain that she must have swallowed some of it. The fact that she lived as long as a month after having administered the toxic substance can be attributed to the small dose. Finally, another symptom that spoke in favor of Flori’s poisoning theory was that Marica vomited in the first days of her illness, as was confirmed by her lord. As for the origin of the poison in the aforementioned beauty cream, Flori thought that it could have been some sort of corrosive agent, for otherwise, it would have taken effect more rapidly. In all likelihood, it was a certain kind of lead compound (*cavato dal piombo*).

The court continued the investigation after Flori’s statement. Between 8 and 27 June quite a number of witnesses passed through the court chambers. Among the witnesses, we could find one who testified against poisoning—Anica Ivanova Gabrijina, who bathed and dressed the deceased Marica. Anica was determined in her statement that the deceased’s hair showed no signs of loosening, one of the generally accepted symptoms of poisoning. Yet the court was not satisfied with just one forensic opinion, so on 27 June it called two more medical experts: Tomo Bogašinović, a physician, and Venceslav Busati, a surgeon. Having acquainted them with all the testimonies, the presiding judge approached them with the following words: “Mark carefully so as to tell the truth, judging by the aforementioned signs and symptoms, what might have caused the death of the abovestated Marica Kolendić of Vrbica?” Their answer was unanimous. After a brief exchange of views, “all three categorically agreed that the said Marica did not die of natural causes, but due to poisoning (*ma assolutamente...dagli effetti venefichi*)”.

Based upon this statement, the court directed the investigation towards *sbelleto*. Some of Marica's beauty cream was delivered to the physicians for testing. As their immediate answer was unsatisfactory to the court (they were unable to identify the substance but would most certainly reach an answer after a series of experiments), they were dismissed, having sworn to silence. Further inquiry uncovered certain details on the origin of *sbelleto* and its contents, but having no material evidence to go by, the court released the beauty cream suppliers from prison.¹⁹²

On 3 July 1741, an investigation was carried out pertaining to Antonija, daughter of Ivan Stella, who was believed to have been poisoned by a drug prepared at the pharmacy of Petar Remedelli.

The medicament had been prescribed by the physician Marko Flori, and according to the account of Antun Marković, a barber, it produced the following symptoms: swelling of the tongue, frequent and painful diarrhea 10 to 12 times, vomiting, bleeding, anuria, inflammation and swelling of the anus. She was pale, she had a very low pulse, and her tongue was numb and dry.

Flori, who prescribed a common purgative consisting of 4 to 5 ounces of the syrup *fior di persico* with 2 ounces of *decotto solutivo*, was taken aback by such a reaction. Upon analyzing the vomit brought to him by Marković, and judging by other accompanying symptoms, Flori suspected poisoning. The medicament must have contained some sort of corrosive compound, a toxin, because the preparation itself could not have produced such drastic effects. Flori was soon to apply antidotes, prompted by the information that the girl was losing hair.

Elaborating the possible causes of the poisoning before the court, Flori stated that such an incident might have occurred due to an alteration of the medicament by the infusion of one of the natural purgatives, or due to the preparation being carried out in improperly tinned pots. Flori further suggested that cassia, one of the compounds, had not been properly peeled from the stems, and that these very parts caused severe pain. Finally, Flori pointed to the possibility that the patient might already have been suffering from a slight *influenza diareja terminoza* at the moment of the administration of the purgative, which merely accelerated the whole process.

¹⁹² *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 95, ff. 56v-128.

Luckily, though, the girl soon recovered. During the second hearing, Flori pursued ways to convince the court that poisoning was not at work. His attempts were undoubtedly guided by the noble gesture of protecting Remedelli and Kristo Buća, the latter having personally prepared the incriminated medicament. Flori's statement of 4 July is most illustrative of his attempt to shield Remedelli. He pulled the girl by the hair, and as no hairs remained between his fingers, having put aside the antidotes he had previously prescribed her, he cried in a suggestive manner: "A most evident sign, gentlemen, for had she been poisoned, it would have been conclusive proof of poison, and a permanent one, not temporary".¹⁹³

We have already called to attention the practice of autopsy in Ragusan forensic medicine in the event that poisoning was suspected. We will describe an autopsy performed on a poisoned person, and the finding of arsenic in the victim's stomach, done in order to substitute facts for speculation in the courtroom.

It occurred in the case of the nun from Danče, which we have presented earlier, and who had supposedly committed suicide by poisoning herself. The coroner's report compiled a list of pathological findings on the stomach tissue due to the toxic effect of arsenic. The physicians asserted that arsenic adhered to the ventricle tissues, causing inflammation and damage (*sfacello*), which, in their opinion, occurred most commonly with this type of poison. In this case, just as in many others, the physicians did not fail to quote the results of their exemplary pulling-the-hair experiment, which proved that she had been poisoned, for her hair "extracted easily in patches".¹⁹⁴

Made, the four-year-old daughter of Mato Andrijašević, who had been found dead, was examined by Ivan Pagani, a physician, and a surgeon named Cattaffio on 3 April 1755. They established that the girl's body was livid, which led them to the conclusion that death occurred due to severe hemorrhaging (*stravasamento di sangue*). This could have been caused by a narcotic of some sort, or excessive drinking of wine or brandy. This diagnosis was most likely brought under the influence of rumors, for it was said that little Made had drunk half a pot of brandy (4 dl).¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 99, ff. 134-139v.

¹⁹⁴ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 103, f. 115rv.

¹⁹⁵ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 124, ff. 64, 68.

Lastly, we shall quote the original statement of barber Ivan Bunić, who testified in the case of attempted poisoning of Don Dominko Natoli, a priest in Luka Šipanska. The accused was Vicko Glavić, his domestic, who confessed of “having poured some arsenic into the boiling pasta”. The testimony, written in the local dialect of Dubrovnik and dated 16 March 1795, is a vivid illustration of the atmosphere during the proceedings as well as the poisoning itself.

Asked by the presiding judge as to whether he suspected or knew why the court had summoned him, Bunić replied:

“I gather I have been called here to tell of the event which took place last Monday, when I was invited by don Dominko Natoli, priest of the Luka parish, to call upon him, as he was ailing with colic. I set off for the said Don Dominko’s house in Luka Šipanska, and found him in bed, feverish, with convulsions and stomach pains. Then I questioned the said Don Dominko about the first signs of his illness. His mother and sister then told me that they had given him only pasta for dinner. With the first spoonful, he noticed a bad taste about it. The priest told me the same story, but he thought that the bitterness in his mouth was from his not yet having recovered from a previous malady. He took another spoonful of pasta, and it seemed even more bitter than before. Thereafter, the said don Dominko uttered to the said sister, I deem that the meal was terrible and his throat was very sore. Then she tasted the said pasta and found it bitter, too. What followed was that the here said sister started bickering with the mother over the badly cooked pasta. Then the mother tried some of the pasta, and thought it bitter as well. The young manservant was also given some to taste, but he vomited it. Moreover, all the aforesaid told me that they vomited, had severe pains in the stomach, and suffered from diarrhea. I suspected that the pasta they had eaten might have been the cause of the weakness, for my experience tells me that the said pasta was poisoned. I gave them the antidote for the said poison. The following day both the mother and sister had improved in health, but the said parish priest was still vomiting and had a fever for several days, after which he too recuperated, save his throat. He complained of feeling sore and having a burning sensation throughout his body, but he had no convulsions and did not vomit. After that, I was told by the aforementioned parish priest’s sister, their mother, and the priest himself that they would find out who had put poison into the pasta before my leave. They also told me what they had heard from Marija Luke Helbe, who had been told by Điva Mandofina that she had wit-

nessed Jele Petrova shouting at the priest's manservant for coming to fetch the poison. He replied that he had needed it because mice had been eating the mattress. Jele asked him why he had lied about his master having sent him for the poison. In addition, Pavla, wife of Baldo Jozović and Jele's daughter-in-law, said to the said priest's sister that the boy had taken some poison from the said Jele Petrova. Furthermore, the said servant met a little boy who attended Don Dominko's classes, and who inquired about Don Dominko's health. The servant responded that the master's condition would not improve but worsen. I heard all this from the said priest's sister, the priest himself, and his mother. I will tell you further that I have heard from the said priest's sister and their mother, whose name I do not know, that the said servant took some of the aforesaid pasta to his lips, saying 'by devil, I almost poisoned myself'. This is all I have to say at the moment. Et tantum dixit...".¹⁹⁶

Bearing in mind all the above cases which involved the medical skill of the Ragusan experts, we cannot but observe the highly serious attitude of the Dubrovnik court of law in undertaking exhaustive procedures in order to establish the facts in crimes of poisoning. As we have seen, the authoritative, most competent, and at times decisive role was played by the physicians.

As for the methods the Ragusan physicians applied in determining whether someone had been poisoned, or died of poisoning, they resorted to clinical observation as well as examination methods which are still applied today, although in a somewhat more sophisticated way.

The medical experts of Dubrovnik used the following methods: (1) organoleptic and analytical examination, that is, analysis of the incriminated substance, vomit, or stomach contents; (2) biological experiments on animals (most commonly dogs and roosters); (3) clinical observation—i.e., comparison of the observed symptoms with ones suspected in a death by poisoning; and (4) pathological findings established after a post-mortem examination of the body.

¹⁹⁶ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 204, ff. 118v-121.

Antidotal treatment

The earliest recorded use of an antidote by the name of *lincorno* (*lioncorno*, *leoncorno*)¹⁹⁷ can be cited back to 1578 in the Dubrovnik chancellery records, when such an antidote, prepared by a pharmacist named Frano Testa, was presented to his fellow colleague Roko Fasano for expert testing. As the latter proved unable to determine the exact nature of the substance, he suggested an animal experiment on either pigeons or poultry. The animal was to be poisoned first, and then treated with *lincorno*, the antidote.¹⁹⁸

This very antidote was used by the Ragusan dragoman Vicko Bratutti, about whom we have already heard, while he was in Istanbul. In his probative articles filed at the Viennese court of law with the aim of proving that he had been a victim of attempted poisoning in 1633, under number 3, he asserts that immediately upon his arrival home after the lunch during which he had supposedly been poisoned, his barber and chaplain gave him *una rasura di leoncorno*. Bratutti lists other antidote preparations used during the therapy: milk and sugar purgatives, orvietan, alchermes, and intense sweating.¹⁹⁹

Although the above-mentioned antidotes had not been resorted to in the earlier studied cases of poisoning, the Ragusan physicians must have been quite familiar with them, as we see that a non-medical expert most certainly was. The substances having anti-toxic effect recorded in our documents are: oil, oil froth (virgin oil), milk, milk fresh from the cow, milk thinned with cold or warm water, various purgatives, and theriac.

Here are a few illustrations. In an attempt to save Kate Nazlobrzova from poisoning, Mare Đurova from Osojnik gave her a mixture of honey and oil,

¹⁹⁷ *Lincorno* or *unicorno*, a drug long believed to have originated from the horn of some uncommon animal. See Kesterčanek, "Roko Fazano": 269.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ "...Chrisieri di latte di zucchero, di leoncorno, d'Orvietano, d'Alchermes, sudori et altri rimedij che sogliono applicare agl'attosicati" (*DA XVII*, no. 2057/4). *Orvietano*, a kind of electuary composed of numerous mixed substances. It was considered a good antidote. It was named after its inventor, a man from Orvieto in Italy. *Alchermes*, or *kermes* from the Arab *qirmiz*. The latter denotes a kind of a scale insect, but also some mineral compounds.

which induced vomiting. The attempt proved futile.²⁰⁰ Having noticed that his hunting dog had been poisoned, Đuro Ilin Bošnjak tried to help him with oil and other antidotes.²⁰¹ In the case of cheese poisoning in Župa, the Senate informed the pasha in Trebinje of the doctors administering “olive oil and other antidotes” to the patients.²⁰² Guljelmo of Cavtat, who complained to Božo Franović that his wife was poisoning him, was advised to “drink oil.”²⁰³ Ivan Kokot of Lastovo, who was supposedly poisoned by his brother Ivan, was advised by his physician Ivan Costo to drink oil froth for three days, and take his medicine on the forth.²⁰⁴

Milk was a very common antidote, especially milk fresh from the cow, and was recorded on a number of occasions. Suspecting that Marica, a domestic in the household of Antun Vitković, suffered from poisoning, Marko Flori prescribed her as much fresh milk as she could drink, thinned with two-thirds of water.²⁰⁵ In the case of the supposed poisoning of Antonija, daughter of Ivan Stella, Flori prescribed the drinking of milk thinned with cold, and subsequently warm, water.²⁰⁶

In the treatment of Antonija Stella, Flori resorted to theriac as well. She was to drink a solution of theriac and wine.²⁰⁷ Theriac was also referred to in the case of the poisoning of Guljelmo of Cavtat. In pursuit of theriac, he set off to the guardian of the Cavtat monastery. “I asked for theriac, and he took

²⁰⁰ “...Allora li diedi del detto miele e di oglio, che li provocarono maggior vomito...” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 36, f. 37).

²⁰¹ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 75, f. 125.

²⁰² *Cop. Litt.*, vol. 2, f. 80v.

²⁰³ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 99, f. 260v.

²⁰⁴ The physician testified as follows: “...gli ho ordinato che prenda dell’oglio vergine per tre volte, l’indomani poi venne di nuovo da me e mi disse d’aver preso dell’oglio e di sentir meno dolori... doppo due giorni gli diedi un aqua angelica e con questo rimase sano...” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 221, ff. 59v, 61v-62).

²⁰⁵ “...Gli mi ordino che se li dasse *mglika jemusce*, meschiato con due terzi d’aqua, e che cio li si dasse a bere quanto volesse” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 95, f. 64v).

²⁰⁶ “... Et indi li si dasse pur da bere quanto ne voleva del latte strempato nel aqua... prescrissi che si valesse delle bibite copiose di latte fresco co dell’aqua tepida...” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 99, ff. 135, 137).

²⁰⁷ “...Che li fusse subito strempata nel vino della teriaka e data li a bere” (*Lam. Crim.*, vol. 99, f. 135).

some out of a tiny box, handing it to me thrice on a blade's edge after which I had some meat soup, and a drink of plain old wine".²⁰⁸ The said Guljelmo was later admitted to the Dubrovnik hospital for treatment, and in addition to the purgative, Doctor Flori administered him *una dramma di teriaka*.²⁰⁹

We also traced two more cases in which antidotes are referred to generally,²¹⁰ and that would conclude our knowledge on antidotal treatment in Dubrovnik, judging by the documents available to date.

With regard to antidotal treatment, the aforementioned cases lead us to two conclusions. First, measures were taken to prevent further absorption of the toxin in the body, and second, to block the toxic effect by using antidotes. Emergency measures were accomplished by administering large quantities of oil froth and fresh milk, which have been proved to be highly absorbent, followed by the actual taking of the antidote—theriac.

²⁰⁸ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 99, f. 259.

²⁰⁹ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 99, f. 336.

²¹⁰ *Lam. Crim.*, vol. 107, f. 125; vol. 204, f. 120.