

BRIGANDAGE ON THE RAGUSAN FRONTIER DURING THE MOREAN WAR (1684-1699)

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ABSTRACT: The exhausting Ottoman wars waged in the vicinity of the Dubrovnik Republic were marked by disorder and anarchy. The bordering villages of the Republic's counties (Konavle, Župa, and Primorje) became the victims of a mob law that spread from Herzegovina like a disease. The Republic's frontiersmen thus polarized into brigands and non-brigands, their mutual hatred being particularly strong. Life in this area was characterized by constant ravages, plunder, famine, and plague. The population was unable to use the pastures and fields in Herzegovina. Small-scale trade across the border was hampered, contributing further to the unbearable conditions in the area.

A number of wars against the Ottoman Empire, strongly characterized by brigandage, took place in the vicinity of the Dubrovnik Republic. Although the Ragusan government claimed to be neutral in these wars, many Ragusan subjects, mostly inhabitants of the border villages in the regions of Primorje, Župa and Konavle, were involved, either as brigands (Turk. *haydut*) or brigand victims. This phenomenon was most prominent during the second half

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of the seventeenth century as a direct consequence of two wearisome wars (the Cretan War 1645-1669, and the Morean War 1684-1699).

The Republic's economy weakened notably in the period when the Herzegovinian hinterland came under Venetian rule (during the Morean War and the Turco-Venetian War of 1714-1718).¹ Trade with the inland was exacerbated by attacks on caravans and merchants on their way to or from Dubrovnik, the purpose of which was to destroy every commercial link with the Republic and bring it down to its knees. This specific warfare was carried out by Venetian brigands and Ottoman rebels, mostly Vlachs, who succeeded in halting every form of trade with Dubrovnik. As a result, the Republic's ruling class suffered considerable business losses, which was the central goal of the Venetian authorities.

Moreover, Venetians wanted to destroy the authority of the Ragusan patriciate by attempting to win over the Ragusan commoners: In the Republic itself, Venetian agents schemed to recruit Ragusan subjects for the Venetian army,² using force as a common method.³ Furthermore, Ragusan farmers along the frontier, accustomed to taking their herds to pastures in the Herzegovinian hinterland in agreement with the Ottoman landowners, were persistently encouraged by Venice to continue with this practice.⁴

In a number of conflicts, the Republic of Dubrovnik usually declared itself a neutral party, a status which often proved difficult to maintain. Being shuttled about and straining to maintain its position, Dubrovnik nevertheless had a very firm and clear position regarding the Venetians, which could be characterized as that of lasting animosity. Over hundreds of years, the Ragusans devoted much attention to the Ottoman rulers in Herzegovina, since the hinterland was of vital importance to them. The main trade route passed

¹ Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808, II*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod MH, 1980: pp. 183, 191, 197, 206, 209.

² In the first years of the Morean War, the Venetians attempted to recruit as many as eight hundred Ragusan subjects (Gligor Stanojević, *Jugoslovenske zemlje u mletačko-turskim ratovima XVI-XVIII vijeka*. Beograd: Istorijski institut, 1970: p. 354).

³ In the 1690s, one Venetian kidnapped several Ragusan subjects to row on the galleys. The Ragusans subsequently got hold of the aforementioned Venetian in 1701. He was secretly executed in the Ragusan prison (State Archives of Dubrovnik (hereafter cited as: SAD), ser. 76, *Diplomata et acta saec. XVIII* (hereafter cited as: DA 18), vol. 3400, no. 16.

⁴ DA 18, vol. 3185, no. 1; DA 18, vol. 186/3 b, no. 14; SAD, *Diplomata et acta saec. XVII* (hereafter cited as: DA 17), vol. 2125, no. 48, 51.

through Herzegovinian territory, contributing to the strategic significance of this belt of Venetian land bordering the narrow strips of Republic's territory. Dubrovnik had every interest in seeing a friendly state rule over the Herzegovinian hinterland, as its prosperity directly depended upon it. Relations between Dubrovnik and Venice were always hostile; therefore, at the slightest possibility of the hinterland falling into Venetian hands, Dubrovnik's diplomatic activities had no limits. Cornered by the Venetians, the Ottomans, and the Austrians during the Morean War,⁵ Dubrovnik balanced its relations with all sides, although sanctions from one warring party or another were to be expected. It supplied the Ottomans with food, ammunition and information, but also allowed the bands of brigands to travel across the Ragusan territory, since it was unable to stop them anyway. Ragusans issued a clear statement that the bands were only permitted to pass through the territory, without any delay. Unfortunately, this requirement went unheeded, for brigands took their time passing through the Ragusan territory in order to rob Ragusan subjects. Had the authorities confronted them in any way, the conditions would most likely have worsened.

It is evident that parts of the Ragusan state, borderlands in particular, were plagued with anarchy. Parts of the Venetian, Ottoman, and Ragusan states were all victims of brigand raids. Venetian subjects from Boka and regions west of the Republic, Ottoman outlaws from Herzegovina and Montenegro, and Ragusan outlaws were all recruited into the brigand bands. In opposition to these, the victims of the brigands - i.e., their enemies - can be placed into several categories.

The first of these categories was the Muslims, some of whom belonged to the peasantry, others to the rich and privileged ranks. These were the greatest enemies of the brigands, although they were free to join the brigands whenever they wished, and a great many brigands had accomplices among them.⁶

⁵ V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808, II*: pp. 174-195, 197.

⁶ Dušan J. Popović, *O hajducima I*. Beograd: Narodna štamparija, 1930: p. 98 (author comments on well-known Muslim brigands); Id., *O hajducima II*. Beograd: Narodna štamparija, 1937: p. 38 (author infers that almost every brigand had a Muslim for a blood brother or trustworthy friend); Aleksandar Matkovski, »Mjere turskih vlasti za likvidiranje hajdučije u Makedoniji u prvoj polovini XVII veka.« *Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis* 1-4 (1967): p. 207 (in reference to Ottoman criminal counter-measures against brigands, the author remarks that those undertaken against Muslim brigands were somewhat less severe); Radovan Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak posle velikog zemljotresa 1667. godine*. Beograd: SAN, 1960: pp. 368-370; *DA* 17, vol. 2129, no. 99.

Vlachs who were Ottoman subjects constituted the second category of brigand victims/enemies. Willingly or by force, some Ottoman Vlachs remained loyal to their governors, with whom they retreated before the enemy forces; others remained and collaborated with brigands. These were victimized by their governors and the brigands alike. Everyone related to a brigand was pursued, as well as those suspected of collaboration.⁷ Vlach brigands were equally ruthless toward Muslims and Vlachs, be they their kin or fellow-villagers.⁸ Fleeing this terror, many of these Vlachs sought shelter within the territory of the Republic.⁹ At the same time, some Vlachs who lived and had jobs in the Republic moved out of the state in order to join their cousins and compatriots in the brigand bands. But it were so-called brigand consuls, Vlachs who remained in the Republic with the assignment of recruiting new brigands, that were the greatest trial for Dubrovnik. The results of a thorough investigation carried out in May 1684 indicate that despite being good craftsmen and soldiers in Dubrovnik, some Vlachs were unable to resist the call: »Let's join the brigands; why stay here?« Different opinions, however, were also heard: »I have a job, I work here, I won't go there. I am doing fine here.«¹⁰

Some of the Ottoman Vlachs joined the Ottoman police service »pandours« (Hung. *pandúr*, armed guard), their duty being to maintain order, peace, and security in the Ottoman region. Although smaller in number than the first two categories, pandours represented a specific group, as they were armed and had the least military training. While some remained in the service of the Ottoman state, a number of pandours collaborated with brigands, or even went a step further and resigned from the pandour service so as to join brigands.¹¹

It is evident that all three groups—Muslims, Vlachs, and padours—were tempted at one time or another to join brigand bands, being confronted with the proposition of replacing their former status of victim with the only op-

⁷ DA 18, vol. 3349/2, no. 12; A. Matkovski, »Mjere turskih vlasti«: pp. 187-207.

⁸ Gligor Stanojević, »Crna Gora u doba kandiskog rata (1645-1669).« *Istoriski glasnik* 1-2 (1953): p. 49.

⁹ DA 17, vol. 2052, no. 71.

¹⁰ DA 17, vol. 16, no. 1666.

¹¹ DA 17, vol. 2053, no. 5; Radovan Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*. Beograd: Prosveta, 1983: p. 375.

tion left to them, that of a villain. With regard to the population, the war against the Ottomans should be viewed as a conflict between brigands and »non-brigands«. »Who isn't with us, is against us« was the ruling brigand motto, which expressed a two-fold benefit. It was the perfect excuse for brigands to rob non-brigands, and at the same time it forced the latter to join the brigand bands and reinforce the outlaw gangs. In addition, other principles changed in accordance with the current war situation. In the periods when the Venetians and the Ottomans were at war, Venetians and brigands had common interests. Brigands thus had free hands to do as they pleased, and enjoyed the support of an official state. However, in cases when Venice did not require brigand services, the brigands' exploits were unstoppable.¹² Venice's relationship with the brigands became particularly onerous after the war, due to the changing course of Venetian policy towards the Ottoman Empire. Brigands were but an unpleasant and bloody episode, which soon had to be forgotten. Thus, in post-war years the Venetians resorted to measures aimed at displacing them. On the other hand, when the activities of the brigands failed to meet their goals, or when aware that the Ottomans might inflict severe punishments on them, or when they estimated Venetian help to be insufficient, the brigands would retreat under the Ottoman wing. With or without Venetian support, they acted in accordance with the prevailing conditions.¹³

The brigands along the three borders were stirred into action by many factors: poverty as the aftermath of long wars, famine, tyrannical masters, general insecurity, a feeling of despair and hopelessness. In these fermenting »high risk« circumstances, joining brigand bands seemed to have been the only solution for a great many who saw it an easier way of earning one's living. These desperadoes found themselves in the company of convicts and dangerous criminals running away from imprisonment or the death penalty. This atmosphere of social erosion and distress opened way to anarchy and moral disorder when plunder was valued as »work«, and work looked upon as fruit-

¹² Bogumil Hrabak, »Trebinje, Popovo i Donja Neretva u hajdučkom vojevanju za vreme morejskog rata.« *Prilozi Instituta za istoriju u Sarajevu* 17 (1980): p. 94; P.D.Š, »Jedna dozvola hajdučkim harambašama da mogu upadati u tursku zemlju.« *Istorijski zapisi* 10 (1954): pp. 214, 215; *DA* 17, vol. 2052, no. 93.

¹³ Radovan Samardžić, »Odnosi Bosne i Dubrovnika od 1656 do 1662.« *Godišnjak Istoriskog društva Bosne i Hercegovine* 8 (1956): p. 111.

less luxury. Generally, it is not possible to draw a clear line between those brigands who under the guise of freedom fighters robbed and plundered,¹⁴ and, those impoverished and miserable individuals who saw joining the bands as their only way to survive. The words of one band leader (Turk. *harami başı*) during the Venetian-Ottoman War of 1714-1718, whose brigands were accused for having stolen wine and fruit in Primorje, are most illustrative: »There are all kinds of people; the commander cannot keep an eye on everyone. Fruit is bare subsistence for one, and delicacy for another.«¹⁵

This was but one in a series of minor thefts experienced by the Ragusan subjects during the Ottoman wars, when brigands frequently invaded Ragusan villages, stealing, killing, and enslaving its inhabitants. Brigands were a peril both to the Republic's frontier lands and to the peninsula of Pelješac, the islands, the coast, and villages unfortunate enough to find themselves on the brigand routes to and from Ottoman Herzegovina. Everything was considered good enough prey: cattle (the most valuable form of property), cereals, farming tools, weapons. They emptied wine cellars, taking not only barrels, but the pots too. They helped themselves to all kinds of food, shoes and clothing, cloths, money, trunks, doors, windows. What they could not load was doomed to destruction. Starving brigands boarded in the houses of already famished Ragusans without any payment. In addition to brigands, the master criminals on the territory of the Republic, Ragusan subjects also fell victim to the plunder of those who held a grudge against the Republic and who were given the chance to revolt against its policies and its actions.

¹⁴ Folk songs depict the deeds of the Montenegrin brigand Radulica Knežević (Salko Nazečić, »Hajdučke borbe oko Dubrovnika u drugoj polovini 17 vijeka i naša narodna pjesma.« *Pitanja književnosti i jezika* 1-2 (1955): p. 38). According to Ragusan sources, was a most vicious robber, murderer, and kidnapper on Ragusan territory. Knežević was recorded as a kidnapper prior to the great earthquake of 1667. Accompanied by his brother, he abducted a girl in Konavle and stole her herd. Her father testified on this incident in March 1672, still with no knowledge of the whereabouts of his daughter (*DA* 17, vol. 2051, no. 127). From 1670 to 1676, that is, during the time of peace between the Candian and Morean Wars, Knežević and his band killed eleven men in Konavle, kidnapped eight, and stole about 1,900 head of cattle (*SAD*, ser. 75, *Acta Turcarum* (hereafter cited as: *AT*), no. 4322, 4323, 4395; *AT*, C 7, 1; *AT*, no. 1111, 4110; *DA* 17, vol. 1805 a, no. 4; *DA* 17, vol. 2051, no. 3, 101; *SAD*, ser. 27.1, *Lettere di Levante* (hereafter cited as: *LL*), vol. 62, f. 129, 133; *LL*, vol. 63, f. 109v, 111v. On Knežević's robberies also see Bogumil Hrabak, »Upadi Crnogoraca na dubrovačku teritoriju u XVI i XVII veku.« *Istorijski zapisi* 4 (1978): pp. 33-57.

¹⁵ *DA* 18, vol. 3349/2, no. 83.

Kidnapping and slave trade were the hallmarks of brigand warfare. By day and by night, Ragusan subjects would disappear from their houses, fields, meadows, and roads, wherever they encountered the kidnapers. They were sold for oarsmen on Venetian galleys. They could be traced to Boka, Herzegovina, and even the Apennine peninsula as servants or slaves. Those captives for whom their relatives or they themselves were able to pay ransom could have been considered truly lucky. Ransom was usually paid in cash or cloths.¹⁶ The highest ransom was 150 sequins, which was set for the Ragusan courier Mihajlo Macinjelo. According to Macinjelo's testimony of the event, the brigands let him go in order for him to fetch the money under the threat of death.¹⁷ Such a high price was set for a reason. In the Morean War Macinjelo was of particular importance to Dubrovnik. Between May 1691 and December 1696 this messenger risked his life carrying dispatches to Constantinople and Edirne on four occasions.¹⁸ Besides ransom, the Ragusans would sometimes revert to yet another method of freeing kidnapped people. A Ragusan subject could also be exchanged for a brigand, one who was kidnapped for that particular purpose.¹⁹

Primorje (the westernmost Ragusan region) was largely the victim of brigand bands from the territories west of the Republic (Makarska, Opuzen, Vrgorac, Omiš, etc.). On some occasions they poured into villages on their return from Herzegovina, especially if the prey had been a miserable one. Primorje was also a favorite »hunting ground« of the brigands from the Herzegovinian hinterland (Popovo polje and Zažablje).²⁰

¹⁶ DA 17, vol. 2052, no. 72; DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 56, 85, 94, 95, 186, 188; DA 17, vol. 2131, no. 81, 100. Ragusans contributed to the payment of ransom for 39 Ragusan subjects kidnapped during the years of the Morean War (Hamdija Hajdarhodžić, »Neki podaci o stanju na dubrovačko-hercegovačkoj granici poslije Karlovačkog mira.« *Glasnik arhiva i Društva arhivskih radnika BiH* 7 (1967): p. 275).

¹⁷ DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 49.

¹⁸ Jovan Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*. IV/2 (hereafter cited as: *DAiP*, IV/2). Beograd: SKA, 1942: pp. 107, 114, 141, 155, 202, 212, 270, 357, 407, 422, 430.

¹⁹ DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 203, 307.

²⁰ DA 17, vol. 16, no. 1663, 1676, 1677. DA 17; vol. 1686, no. 4; DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 68; DA 17, vol. 2132; Jovan Radonić, *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*. IV/1 (hereafter cited as: *DAiP*, IV/1). Beograd, SKA, 1941: pp. 153, 155, 156, 166, 388, 389, 739; *DAiP*, IV/2: p. 372.

Konavle (the easternmost region) and Župa (situated between Primorje and Konavle), however, were tormented by brigands from Herzegovina and Boka, comprising Montenegrins, Vlachs, and Turks. Being located on the route between the brigand headquarters in Boka and the rest of Ottoman Herzegovina, the village of Mrcine (Konavle) was raided repeatedly.²¹

Extensive records concerning these thefts and kidnapping have been preserved. An indictment of December 1693 reports of a total theft of 20,000 head of cattle which the brigands had stolen on the Ragusan territory from the beginning of the Morean War.²²

Faced with anarchy and daily brigand activity in the borderland and the inner territory as well, a number of Ragusan subjects took to brigand ways, too. The former conditions of regular trade, food supply, and cattle freely grazing on home pastures and Herzegovinian commons were now considerably hampered. The irregular supply and flow of goods induced poverty and lack of subsistence. A considerable number of records document the terrible famine of Ragusans and Ottoman subjects who had fled to the Republic. Vlach immigrants, sheltered in a roadside inn at Brgat (Župa), which served as a quarantine station as well, literally starved to death.²³ Some Ragusan subjects were ready to go anywhere in quest of jobs, be that even the Venetian army.²⁴ Others starved when they were left with no animals to pull their carts to the first mill in order to have their wheat ground.²⁵ Famine was joined by plague, the most severe one being in 1691. The epidemics spread to the city of Dubrovnik itself, Primorje (Dubravica), and Konavle (Gruda and Radovčići).²⁶ Two theories about the plague epidemic in the area have been noted.

²¹ DA 17, vol. 16 no. 1676, 1680; DA 17, vol. 1964, no. 2; DA 17, vol. 2052, no. 71, 72; DA 17, vol. 2053, no. 5; DA 17, vol. 2079, no. 8; DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 93-95, 147, 160, 163, 171, 177; DA 17, vol. 2132, no. 49, 218, 221; AT, no. 4785; LL, 64, 333; SAD, ser. 50, *Lamenta del Criminale* (hereafter cited as: LC), vol. 16, f. 15v, 16, 20v-21v; DAiP, IV/1: pp. 216, 465; B. Hrabak, »Trebinje, Popovo i Donja Neretva«: p. 89.

²² DAiP, IV/2: pp. 315, 316.

²³ DA 17, vol. 2132, no. 90.

²⁴ DA 17, vol. 2132, no. 122, 115.

²⁵ DA 17, vol. 2131, no. 70.

²⁶ DA 17, vol. 2132, no. 108, 115, 118; Đuro Orlić, »Dubrovačke vijesti o epidemijama u Bosni i Hercegovini 1463-1800.« *Grada Naučnog društva BiH* 2 (1956): pp. 47-64; Bogumil Hrabak, »Kužne rednje u Bosni i Hercegovini 1463-1800.« *Istorijski zbornik-Banja Luka* 2 (1981): p. 24; DA 17, vol. 2132, no. 108, 118.

According to the first explanation, servant girls on duty at the hospital in Dubrovnik brought some contagious clothes with them from Herzegovina. This epidemic is thus commonly referred to as »La peste delle serve.« The second theory holds brigands responsible for spreading of the plague in the Republic, for they did not respect the quarantine regulations while crossing the border.²⁷ In order to illustrate this, I shall advert to a letter addressed to the Ragusan government by a health officer from Konavle in which he implicitly states that a brigand company passed through Konavle in June 1690, carrying the stolen property of a Turkish functionary who had recently died of the plague.²⁸

Numerous health officers gave reports to the Ragusan government about brigand robberies in the border villages.²⁹ Other signs of inefficiency on the part of the authorities include related phenomena that occurred in that period such as collaboration between Ragusan subjects and brigands, kidnappings, and murders. Even some health wardens were alleged to have taken part in these activities.³⁰ No concern was paid to the avoidance of immediate contact. For instance, even at the height of the epidemic, the villagers of Čepikuće (Primorje) traded with Vlachs from the hinterland. The latter had come to the village in order to buy salted sardines. The event was recorded due to an incident concerning the indecent behavior of a Ragusan patrician, the senior health officer to the Čepikuće area, who had been reported to the government. A subordinate health officer had tipped the patrician off: »Sir, Vlachs have loaded seven horses here in the village,« and the nobleman's reply was: »As soon as it dawns, we'll take to our heels before these folk beat us.«³¹

Infernal conditions on Ragusan territory and its vicinity, as well as gloomy prospects for the future, urged Ragusan subjects to resort to all kinds of activities. The government worked on a series of measures and decrees in order to prevent its subjects from collaborating either with the brigands or their

²⁷ *DAiP*, IV/2: pp. 29, 30, 41, 74.

²⁸ *DA* 17, vol. 2132, no. 3.

²⁹ *DA* 17, vol. 2125, no. 68, 186, 188, 209, 233; *DA* 17, vol. 2131, no. 88, 116; *DA* 17, vol. 2132, no. 220.

³⁰ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1675; *DA* 17, vol. 2051, no. 60; *DA* 17, vol. 2052, no. 96; *DA* 17, vol. 2053, no. 8.

³¹ *DA* 17, vol. 2053, no. 23.

enemies. Still, the neutrality of the Ragusan state could hardly be maintained politically, and in practice this goal was almost impossible to achieve. Strict orders, prohibitions and threats of imprisonment, the galley, and hanging were completely ineffective in the years of the Morean War. The brigand / non-brigand stratification of the Ragusan population was sharply accentuated, provoking revengeful reactions by the hostile side from Herzegovina.³² The absurd situation in Herzegovina where brigands plundered and murdered their own countrymen and neighbors, spread throughout the Dubrovnik Republic, too. Ragusan brigands attacked their non-brigand compatriots,³³ and vice versa.³⁴

In the disorder and anarchy in Herzegovina, many saw their chance: »Come on, there is no order, we can grab animals in the Turkish area without punishment« - was a strong argument which circled round the Ragusan region, attracting both »the hungry and the greedy.«³⁵

Despite all the measures and threats taken by the Ragusan authorities, recruiting the Ragusan population into brigand bands was more than common. First in Konavle, then in Župa and Primorje, the authorities launched investigations with the purpose of identifying Ragusan brigands.³⁶ On 2 May 1684, shortly after Venice had joined the anti-Ottoman campaign, the Senate issued death-warrants for all those brigands who would return home within a period of eight days. On 22 May the Senate prolonged this order to 15 June 1684 inclusive, and it concerned all those who had not previously been convicted for any specific crime committed as brigand accomplices. The following day saw an additional decree by which everyone who had not committed any specific crime would receive a reward of 100 sequins for capturing and bringing to justice a compatriot who was guilty of a crime.³⁷ During 1687, an or-

³² R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 385, 386; *DAiP*, IV/2: pp. 218, 229; *DA* 17, vol. 2129, no. 98.

³³ *DA* 17, vol. 2125, no. 55; *DA* 17, vol. 2125, no classification number, dated 11 March 1697. *DA* 17, vol. 2131, no. 84; *DA* 17, vol. 1686, no. 7; *LC*, vol. 32, f. 184, 184v, 217v-219, 231v-233, 240v.

³⁴ *DA* 17, vol. 2131, no. 113, 115.

³⁵ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1675.

³⁶ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1665, 1670, 1671, 1675; *DA* 17, vol. 2052, no. 13, 14, 93; *SAD*, ser. 3, *Acta Consilii Rogatorum* (hereafter cited as: *CR*), vol. 128, f. 222v.

³⁷ *CR*, vol. 127, f. 2, 19rv.

der to capture all the Ragusan brigands hiding on Ragusan soil was issued twice. In June 1692 the Senate repeated its appeal that the Ragusan brigands who had committed no offence return freely to their homes. In April 1693, the Senate came forward with a proposal concerning the Ragusan brigands who wished to join the Napolitan Navy; the proposal guaranteed them safe passage through Ragusan territory prior to their departure for Naples.³⁸ Occasionally, the Ragusan authorities would act against Herzegovinian brigands who had committed offences within the former's jurisdiction; several of these were thus executed during the Morean War.³⁹

The authorities' appeals and threats, however, did not remain fruitless, as some of the Ragusan brigands returned to their villages but not for long. In 1687, several men from Konavle returned home but were practically ready to join brigands again, even if perchance it meant going at once.⁴⁰ In fact, some of them did join the bands again several months later.⁴¹

A number of Ragusan subjects joined brigands not more than once or twice, only to return home soon after, hoping that their errands would pass undetected by the Ragusan authorities. Some proved to have been true amateurs in brigand activities: while their professional comrades were robbing a caravan on its way from Dubrovnik in 1687, one group of Ragusan brigands did not seem fit for the role. Their share of the prey was equal to their engagement in the robbery: »this is for the wine, since you did not join us, bigger share you cannot get, and this we give you as incentive to come with us next time« explained one band leader to Ragusan brigands as he handed out a sequin or two, or as little as few groshets.

Ragusan authorities launched a thorough investigation concerning this robbery and established that thirty men from Župa took part in it. Being provided with the names of the man who joined the brigands in their attack on the caravan carrying wax to Dubrovnik, as well as of those who took part in other robberies and attacks, the government appealed to all people involved

³⁸ *CR*, vol. 128, f. 214, 222v, 225v; *CR*, vol. 132, f. 102v, 217.

³⁹ S. Nazečić, »Hajdučke borbe«: pp. 35, 36; B. Hrabak, »Trebinje, Popovo i Donja Neretva«: pp. 73, 74, 91.

⁴⁰ *DA* 17, vol. 2052, no. 93.

⁴¹ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1670.

in the matter to report freely to the investigator and give their statement of the events, after which they could retire without any restriction. Only a third of the men were to report to the authorities.⁴²

Contrary to those who were inexperienced in the job, the hardened criminals stayed away from their villages and were visited in secret. Some of those who topped the list of wanted men are described in the following paragraphs:

A warrant for the arrest of Đuro Vragolov from Konavle was issued twice. He joined the brigands at the very beginning of the Morean War and took part in a number of robberies. He was arrested and questioned in May 1689. In the course of the investigation, he gave a brief account of all his actions after having fled the Republic: »The first two years I spent with the brigands. After being wounded in the leg while with the brigands, I remained in Perast the next two years. The first year I was on a ship, and the second I earned my salary with harambasha Miladin in Carina.« Vragolov was strangled in the dungeon on the night of 28 May.⁴³

Konavle was to breed three more outlaws—Pero Bronzan, Ivan Kovačić Škadrica, and Đuro Alaga. All three were known for their criminal activities during the Morean War, while the first two had started during the Cretan War. »I have heard, gentlemen, that those three are the leaders of all the brigands from Konavle«, reported one witness.⁴⁴

In addition, the documents contain more names of Ragusan brigands, many of which were recorded in complaints filed against them by Ottoman authorities and subjects.⁴⁵

Directly taking part in brigand activities was not the only crime a Ragusan subject might have resorted to. Some collaborated with the outlaws by buying up goods stolen in Herzegovina or even on the Ragusan territory.⁴⁶

⁴² *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1675 (investigation carried out in 1687).

⁴³ B. Hrabak, »Trebinje, Popovo i Donja Neretva«: pp. 72, 74; *DA* 17, vol. 2052, no. 13, 14; *CR*, vol. 130, f. 70.

⁴⁴ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1665.

⁴⁵ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1671, 1680; *DA* 17, vol. 2052, no. 93, 94; *DA* 17, vol. 2152, no. 95, 164, 243, 247; *DA* 17, vol. 2132, no. 106; *AT*, vol. B 52, no. 33, 39; *AT*, vol. B 53, no. 38, 44; *DAiP*, IV/1: p. 310.

⁴⁶ *DA* 17, vol. 16, no. 1664, 1674.

Others, however, were holding Vlach property for safekeeping which further attracted brigands to Ragusan territory. When in 1687 the Ragusan government launched an investigation against those holding Vlach property, it was established that the Vlachs from the Herzegovinian hinterland had 840 head of cattle in Konavle. Brigands, mostly their kin and fellow-villagers, managed to steal 730 head.⁴⁷

Victimized and terrorized during the Morean War, Ragusan subjects reacted vengefully at times, only to suffer further losses. These conflicts took place between 1689 and 1699. During this period Ragusans killed ten Venetian and Ottoman outlaws. The majority of the counterkillings were committed in self-defence,⁴⁸ blood feuds,⁴⁹ and fights generally started by the other party.

With regard to the Ragusan subjects the institution of the feud often surpassed the original meaning of the phenomenon, serving thus as a pretext for merciless and highly cruel robberies, homicides, and kidnappings. This vindictive urge was omnipresent and a single misdeed was often revenged several times over. Offenders who were related neither by kinship or by other means to the killed—nor to anyone suffering a loss of any kind—were the perpetrators of most brutal thefts and murders under the pretext of revenge.

In all their vengeful activities (1689-1699), the Vlachs avenged the killing of ten of their fellow-robbers with the murder of thirteen Ragusan subjects, six of them were kidnapped, one of those was killed immediately, while the fate of the other five remained unknown. They also stole around 1,400 head of cattle in addition to the prey of many more robberies which cannot be supported by conclusive numerical data.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ DA 17, vol. 16, no. 1674; DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 289; B. Hrabak, »Trebinje, Popovo i Donja Neretva«: p. 78.

⁴⁸ LC, vol. 37, f. 117-120; LC, vol. 40, f. 6rv. DA 17, vol. 1686, no. 7, 9, 10; DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 118, 126, 142, 182, 203, 220, 215, 240, 242, 248, 251, 258, 264, 307; DA 17, vol. 3346, no. 5, as well as documents bearing no classification number dated 25 and 26 July 1700; DA 18, vol. 181/5, no. 250; H. Hajdarhodžić, »Neki podaci o stanju na dubrovačko-hercegovačkoj granici poslije Karlovačkog mira.«: p. 279.

⁴⁹ DA 17, vol. 2052, no. 67, 80; DA 17, vol. 2132, no. 171; DAiP, IV/2: p. 322; S. M, »Saslušanje jednog hajdučkog harambaše.« *Istoriski zapisi* 1 (1953): pp. 256-259.

⁵⁰ DA 17, vol. 16, no. 1682; DA 17, vol. 2052, no. 18, 93; DA 17, vol. 2053, no. 5; DA 17, vol. 2125, no. 81, 111, 112, 114, 119, 123, 238.

Conclusion

The subjects of the Dubrovnik Republic, especially those residing along its inland, experienced tormenting moments during the wars waged in the region. Freely and without any restraint, bands of brigands roamed the borderland and the rest of the Republic. The majority of these armed bands attacked Ragusan villages, kidnapped people, and stole everything they could. Such circumstances led to an irregular food supply and the disturbance of trade relations with neighboring Herzegovina.

The terror and disorder of the Morean War followed shortly after the exhausting Cretan War (1645-1669) and the great earthquake of 1667. The poverty-stricken borderland of the Dubrovnik Republic also suffered from famine and plague. Although the Ragusan government masterfully struggled for the well-being and interests of its state, the absence of organized armed forces made it absolutely helpless and incapable of protecting its subjects. As a result, its subjects, particularly the frontiersmen, took part in military operations. By passing various acts, the authorities tried to keep them from collaborating with brigands or the likes. But the neutrality of the Ragusan state was difficult to attain, both politically and in practice. The population along the border abode by the mob law of Herzegovina: they polarized into brigands and their victims. Deep poverty and growing crime outlawed Ragusans into brigand bands and, together with Herzegovinians, they attacked their fellow-countrymen. The Ragusan non-brigand population pursued all brigands—both compatriots and those from across the border—and at the same time offered shelter to non-brigands in flight from the hinterland and held their property in safekeeping.

Although Ragusan subjects were constantly victimized by the brigands, the very fact that some Ragusans were joining these bands served as a perfect excuse for Herzegovinian Turks and pandours to plunder the villages of the Republic. Anarchy and violence from Herzegovina spread throughout the Ragusan borderland like a disease.