

VAMPIRES IN DALMATIA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE VILLAGE OF ŽRNOVO ON THE ISLAND OF KORČULA IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY*

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The principal area of interest of this essay is the analysis of a document from the State Archive of Venice (the archival series *Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci: Lettere di Rettori e di altre cariche*) connected to an episode from 1748, when the inhabitants of the village of Žrnovo on the island of Korčula in Croatia (Dalmatia) opened several tombs in the local cemetery, because they feared the malicious activity of vampires. This essay tries to discuss the social circumstances of this event and local ethnographic traditions concerning superstition.

Key words: Dalmatia, Korčula, Žrnovo, Venice, vampires, the eighteenth century

Introduction

It is amazing how some stories are always interesting, how changing times, new tastes and fresh understandings of the world can do nothing to them, as they always attract attention and find those who enjoy reading or listening to

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them. One tradition or genre containing such stories is certainly that of vampires. It did not take long for this to provoke a real sensation, or even a real obsession, after it started its campaign through Europe. It was the period when areas belonging previously to the Ottoman Empire came under the rule of the Habsburgs, who there encountered the strange customs of the population – digging the dead up from their graves and mutilating them, under the pretext that they were vampires,¹ creatures consuming blood, terrifying people, pre-saging death, having sexual intercourse with women, and performing other dark deeds. Naturally, testimonies of such phenomena spread over Europe with lightning speed and created a real craze or even mania.² Even though the authorities tried with radical measures to quell the superstitious habits of local populations, the stories remained and were still appealing. The new genre's popularity did not cease in the following century, either. It was precisely in that century that tales of vampires became a new literary genre, when Lord Byron and John William Polidori managed to pull them into entertaining poems and short stories, not to speak of the later author Bram Stoker, the father of Dracula.³ It was not the end, either, indeed precisely the opposite, because in the twentieth century the story sprang from the printed page and entered the world of film. This combined two fatal attractions: that of moving pictures and that of a vampire, an undead creature, whom the writers of the nineteenth century enabled to cast aside the appearance of a semi-decomposed and swollen human cadaver, hairy and disgusting, the way in which it was perceived by Balkan peasants, and clothed it in the fine black outfit of an aristocratic gentleman, something that was and is also so viciously sexually appealing.⁴ That attractive and sexy vampire still reigns in fiction even today, while new sequels

¹ Most researchers agree that word “vampire” originates from the Old Slavonic word *upir* (in Croatian, according to the Academy's dictionary, the word *upirina* was also used), but there are some who maintain that the word is of Greek, Turkic or Hungarian origin. For more, see Katharina M. Wilson, “The History of the Word Vampire,” in Alan Dundes, ed., *The Vampire* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 3-11. Besides that, in the sources and oral tradition, in Croatian other terms are frequently used for a creature with certain characteristics of a vampire: *vukodlak*, *pomoritad*, *tenac*, *mora*, and so on. The dictionary of the Academy connects to the word *vampir* also the word *vukodlak*, which it defines as “a man who circumambulates after his death.” The same source states that he “comes to his wife, especially if she is pretty and young, and sleeps with her.” From such an act is born a child without bones. For more details, see Stepan Musulin and Slavko Pavešić, eds., *Rječnik hrvatskog ili srpskog jezika* [A Dictionary of the Croatian or Serbian Language] (Zagreb: JAZU, 1973-1974), 622. In this article, the term “vampire” will be used, since the original archival document on which the article is primarily based uses that term.

² For more details, see Klaus Hamberger, *Mortuus non mordet. Dokumente zum Vampirismus 1689-1791*. (Vienna: Turia and Kant, 1992).

³ On that issue, see more in Christopher Freyling, *Vampyres: Lord Byron to Count Dracula* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

⁴ Catherine Deneuve and David Bowie gave such an image its final shape in the movie *The Hunger* in 1983.

of new stories of vampires are incessantly written, filmed and presented to the public.⁵ The present-day infatuation does not concern any authorities, and does not provoke any legal consequences, as was the case in the days when the vampire story started its journey through Europe. Present-day vampires are good for nation states: they earn millions and contribute welcome revenue.

Concerning the first News of the Vampires

Even though the notes of the phenomena connected to vampires appear even earlier, for example in the works of the Slovene polyhistor Janez Vajkard Valvasor (Johann Weichard Walvasor) from the middle of the seventeenth century, who mentioned a note on a certain vampire-like being from the village of Kringa in Istria, the more frequent news of belief in vampires started to pour out from Serbia, Transylvania and Moldavia in the first half of the eighteenth century.⁶ Thus the students of history of this phenomenon list several examples, in the first place the case of Peter Plogojević (1725) from the village of Ksiljevo in Serbia, at the exhumation of whose body there was present also an imperial official who afterwards presented a report, on which more will be said a little later. There is also the case of Paul the Albanian (Arnaut Pavle, Arnont Paule, 1730), a *hajduk* from Serbia who turned vampire, and many others.⁷ Croatian chronicler Balthasar Adam Krčelić, in his *Annuae*, which he started to write in 1748, mentions the case of a vampire from the northern Croatian village of Patak. While other sources of that period emphasise in the first place the horrible, deadly, consequences of vampires' attacks, Krčelić deals with vampire-like sexuality. Thus he stated that vampires *mingle with women and perform sexual acts*. In accordance with that, the vampire of Patak came to his widow and performed sexual acts with her and that he did so, as Krčelić said, *with more strength than he did while he was alive*, which certainly con-

⁵ *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is certainly a series testifying in a drastic manner to the transformation of the attitude towards vampires in modern society, as it affectionately and respectfully parodies vampires and the variants under which they appear in movies, stories, etc.), while, on the other hand, the recent movie saga *Twilight* and the TV series *True Blood*, a serial currently popular in the USA and Europe, both show that fascination with vampires and their sexual attractiveness is still present.

⁶ Different "vampire-like" creatures have been known in European tradition since Antiquity, and different non-European cultures (China, Indonesia, the Philippines, etc.) also have stories of creatures disturbing people and feeding on their blood. For more details, see Dundes, ed., *The Vampire*, and Paul Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁷ Dudley Wright, *Vampires and Vampirism* (London: William Rider and Son, 1924), 95-108. Paul is certainly, besides Plogojević, the most frequently mentioned "historical" vampire. His case is noted also in the second volume of famous history of magic by Joseph Ennemoser of 1854. See Joseph Ennemoser, *History of Magic*, vol. 2 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 480-481.

firms the connection, even now present and inseparable, between vampires and sex.⁸

For the Adriatic area, particularly instructive is the research of Irena Benyovsky into belief in vampires in the villages of the Dubrovnik area in the eighteenth century.⁹ Benyovsky mentions also different examples of vampire-like creatures in Croatian areas from the Middle Ages onwards. The most interesting are cases of the processes from the Dubrovnik villages of 1713, 1722 and 1723, which are kept among the acts and documents of criminal justice of the eighteenth century kept in the State Archive of Dubrovnik. What is common to all cases and connects them to the case of Korčula, which will be discussed in more detail, is the opening of the graves in search of vampires (or werewolves: the concept of the *versipellus* or shape-shifter encompasses both categories and others, especially in the Balkans, as the legend of Prince Bojan of Bulgaria attests). The reason is usually that that villagers were frightened by some phenomenon that they linked to a supernatural being provoking fear, spreading disease (most frequently sudden death or plague), and also forcing victims into sexual acts. After the tomb was opened, the body of the deceased was pierced with a hawthorn stake, and sometimes the tendons under his knee were cut or he was covered with lime.¹⁰

The Empress, the Doge and the Republic of Dubrovnik – all Against the Vampires

In her research into the vampires in the Dubrovnik villages, Benyovsky clearly states that particular villagers were tried by the secular authorities because of sacrilege over graves. The initiative of the peasants, encouraged by the

⁸ Baltazar Adam Krčelić, *Annuae ili historija 1748-1767*. [*Annuae* or History 1748-1767] (Zagreb: JAZU, 1952), 526. For more details, see Mirko Dražen Grmek, “Krčelićevi podaci o bolestima i medicini u Hrvatskoj u XVIII. stoljeću” [Krčelić Data on Illnesses and Medicine in Croatia in the Eighteenth Century], *Liječnički vjesnik* 81 (1959), no. 3-4: 213-219.

⁹ In an article with the title *Vampiri u dubrovačkim selima u 18. stoljeću* [Vampires in the Villages of Dubrovnik in the Eighteenth Century], Irena Benyovsky provides an extensive survey of that phenomenon and with it connected beliefs in *vukodlaci*, *štrige* and *more*, and compares them with particular European examples. See Irena Benyovsky, “Vampiri u dubrovačkim selima 18. stoljeća” [Vampires in the Villages of Dubrovnik in the Eighteenth Century], *Otium* 4 (1996), no. 1-2: 118-130. Benyovsky makes reference to the very interesting (albeit a little Hungarocentric) chapter of Gábor Klaniczay, “The Decline of Witches and the Rise of Vampires under the Eighteenth-Century Habsburg Monarchy,” in which the author links the decrease of belief in witches and the increase of belief in vampires in eighteenth-century Europe. The chapter is published within the book by the same author: Gábor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power. The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 168-238.

¹⁰ For more details, see Benyovsky, “Vampiri.”

benevolence of the local priests, to open graves and mutilate cadavers did not amuse the secular authorities. Benyovsky also states that the attitude of the secular authorities was generally more rational than that of the ecclesiastical ones, and they pleaded for a fight against superstition. In reality, it should be stated that the lesser clergy were more prone to accept popular beliefs, while the higher clergy rejected them as superstitions. In the eighteenth century there were shifts in society whereby superstition was placed in a different context and a more rational stance was taken, one that looked dispassionately at different popular beliefs and customs popular among the people and turned the public's attention towards problems of public health and hygiene. Our example from Korčula concerns a similar problem. However, before we pass to it, we shall briefly return to the aforementioned case of Peter Plogojević from the village of Kisiljevo in Serbia, who entered into all the histories of vampirism in Europe.¹¹

In the colonised areas of the eastern Balkans the Habsburg military and civil authorities met a phenomenon that it, after the manner of good administration, wanted to research and note.¹² Thus an official imperial representative went to the village of Kisiljevo to be present on the occasion of the exhumation of the cadaver (and, consequently, during its "killing"). Concerning the aforementioned vampire, the local villagers claimed that he appeared in the village, among others to his wife, and after his blood-sucking campaign in the village nine people died. After the grave was opened and the cadaver was inspected, it was established that it was fresh, that its hair, beard and nails were growing, that it had fresh new skin, and that in its mouth there was blood, which the vampire, as was believed, sucked from the people. At the same time, fresh blood flowed from its body during the piercing. Furthermore, there were also "wild" signs, evidently a term for the erection of the penis.¹³ The imperial envoy, impressed by what he saw, evidently succumbed to general prejudice, and he mentioned in his official report also phenomena that he could not explain by means of rational thinking. For example, he stated that the hair, beard and nails were growing, even though he did not know what kind of hairstyle Plogojević had before he died. The envoy noted also everything that the cold mind of the Viennese court would later deny. And that cold mind was led by one of the greatest medical minds of that age, Gerard van Swieten.¹⁴ Van Swi-

¹¹ For more details, see Montague Summers, *The Vampire in Europe* (London: Kagan Paul; Trench, Trubner and Co, 1929), 132-156, and Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, 5-9.

¹² For more on the similar customs in the Habsburg territories, see Jutta Nowosadtko, "Der 'Vampyrus Serviensis' und sein Habitat: Impressionen von der österreichischen Militärgrenze," *Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit* 8 (2004), no. 2: 151-167.

¹³ Summers, *The Vampire in Europe*, 132-156; Barber, *Vampires, Burial and Death*, 5-9. For more details, see Hamberger, *Mortuus non mordet*.

¹⁴ Gerard van Swieten (1700-1772) was the physician of Empress Maria Theresa and her advisor. One of the most prominent physicians of the eighteenth century, a disciple of the famous Herman Borhawe, father of clinical medicine, van Swieten was a reformer of health service and medical instruction in the Habsburg Monarchy in general and was one of the promoters of en-

eten engaged himself in the campaign against magic and superstition with his whole mind and force, wanting to contest superstitions by knowledge and logical judgment. He considered that superstition was an enemy not only of philosophers, but also of every intelligent man. Van Swieten explained the clear medical cognition according to which even after death the body, for a certain period of time, frequently for several weeks, contains bodily fluids in liquid form, and equally emphasised the point that scientific settings proved that the cadaver, because of certain chemical reactions and a lack of air, may remain conserved for several months, even years. For him, all the cases of vampirism were the result of pure ignorance and a reflection of primitive thinking inspired by popular stories. Lack of education was a crucial factor in that case, and Van Swieten presented the problem to the empress as a problem that did not belong to the area of supernatural, but to legal norms. It was the age of Voltaire and Rousseau, when the voice of *Ratio* could not be ignored any longer, and the empress issued a special legal decree against belief in vampirism: that is, against the opening of the graves and mutilation of the cadavers of the dead.¹⁵ The stance of the Venetian administrators did not differ in that respect from that of the empress, and, as may be seen also from the examples from Dubrovnik, neither did that of the Republic of Dubrovnik. Exhumation of the cadavers was a punishable deed, and peasants had to answer for and even pay for that. As to what the situation was in reality, in a particular Dalmatian case of the mid-eighteenth century, and what the problem was then, this may be seen in an archival document kept in the State Archive of Venice (*Archivio di Stato di Venezia*), which will be the central object of our research in the following part of the paper.

The Case of Korčula

The State Archive of Venice contains plenty of sources for history of the Croatian Adriatic, from the Middle Ages to the most recent times. The collections and archival series of Venetian state offices, such as the Senate, the Council of Ten and State Inquisitors, offices with specialised jurisdiction and authorities (from seamanship and the army to agriculture, trade, tolls, public health, and frontier questions), of Venetian ecclesiastical institutions (churches, monasteries and convents, confraternities and hospitals) and of Venetian notaries are par-

lightenment in healthcare, who strongly opposed superstition. For more details, see Frank T. Brechka, *Gerard van Swieten and His World 1700-1772* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), and Hamberger, *Mortuus non mordet*. His disciple Jean Baptiste Lalangue became the first physician in Croatia who advocated enlightenment in healthcare there and published educational works intended for the rural population. For more, see Željko Dugac, "Jean Baptiste Lalangue and the Beginnings of the Health Enlightenment in Croatia," in Roland Widder, ed., *Mogersdorf 2006* (Eisenstadt: Amt der Burgenlandschen Landesregierung, 2007), 40-44.

¹⁵ Brechka, *Gerard van Swieten*; Hamberger, *Mortuus non mordet*.

ticularly valuable for Croatian historians for the period when a major part of the eastern Adriatic coast was an integral part of the Venetian Republic.

The archival series in which the tales of vampires that are the subject of this article were hidden is called the *Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci: Lettere di Rettori e di altre cariche* (abbreviated as *Consiglio dei Dieci: Lettere Rettori ai Capi*, henceforth: *Consiglio dei Dieci: Lettere Rettori*) and contains reports, requests, letters and other types of correspondence that were sent to the Venetian administrative body of the *Consiglio dei Dieci*, or, more precisely, to its three-member executive committee (*Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci*), by both the representatives of Venetian rule (rectors, provisors, *podestà*, counts, captains, castellans and treasurers) and the urban communes themselves.¹⁶

Sources regarding the city and the commune of Korčula are kept in the bundle (*busta*) 277 (fol. 222-336) of the said archival series.¹⁷ It contains a little over 50 documents, and covers the period from 1518 to 1795. The majority of the documents are letters and reports sent by the counts of Korčula (*comes*, *conte*) to the Council of Ten and (in a few cases) directly to the doge. Within

¹⁶ The Council of Ten (*Consiglio dei Dieci*) was certainly one of the most important institutions of government in the history of the Republic of St. Mark. It was founded by the decree of the Great Council in 1310 with the aim of punishing participants in the conspiracy of Baiamonte Tiepolo and preventing all similar attempts at changing the system of government by means of violence in future. Within the jurisdiction of the Council of Ten there belonged also the gathering of the reports of representatives of Venetian authorities from all around the area of Venetian dominion, both on *terraferma* and in its transmarine possessions. With time, in accordance with an ever-wider range of authority, the Council of Ten grew to become the central state office, with the aim of limiting authorities and influence of other state magistrates, including the doge himself. For more details on the Council of Ten, see the following: Mauro Macchi, *Storia del Consiglio dei Dieci*, 2 vols. (Genoa: G. Daelli e C., 1864); Andrea Da Mosto, *L'Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, vol. 1 (Rome: Biblioteca dell'Arte, 1937), 52-60.; Lovorka Čoralić, *Venecija: Kraljica mora s lagunarnih sprudova (Povijest Mletačke Republike)* [Venice: the Queen of the Sea from the Sandbars of the Lagoon] (Samobor: Meridijani, 2004), 80-81. For the Croatian littoral area in the archival series of the Council of Ten deeds are kept relating to the towns and cities of Istria (Labin, Dvigrad, Novigrad, Vodnjan, Grožnjan, Sveti Lovreč, Motovun, Poreč, Pazin, Pula, Oprtalj, Rašpor, Rovinj, Umag and Bale), Dalmatia (Cres, Osor, Krk, Rab, Pag, Nin, Zadar, Šibenik, Trogir, Split, Klis, Knin, Makarska, Omiš, Sinj, Brač, Hvar, Korčula, Imotski) and Boka Kotorska, that is, Venetian Albania (Herceg-Novi, Kotor, Budva, Bar and Ulcinj). For the documents regarding a part of the Venetian Dalmatia (the towns of Herceg-Novi, Budva, Bar and Ulcinj), see more in the volume *Pisma i poruke rektora Dalmacije i Mletačke Albanije* [Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Dalmatia and Venetian Albania], vol. 1 (*Pisma i poruke rektora Bara, Ulcinja, Budve i Herceg-Novog* [Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Bar, Ulcinj, Budva and Herceg-Novi]), edited by Lovorka Čoralić and Damir Karbić, *Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium*, vol. 55 (Zagreb: HAZU, 2009).

¹⁷ See *Pisma i poruke rektora Dalmacije i Mletačke Albanije* [Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Dalmatia and Venetian Albania], vol. 2 (*Pisma i poruke rektora Korčule, Brača, Omiša, Makarske i Klisa* [Letters and Communications of the Rectors of Bar, Ulcinj, Budva and Herceg-Novi]), edited by Lovorka Čoralić, Damir Karbić and Maja Katusić, *Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium*, vol. 56 (Zagreb: HAZU, 2012).

particular cases, frequently in the form of attachments to the main document, there are inserted also documents that discuss those problems that form the central theme of the letter in question to the Venetian central organs. The writers of such accompanying letters are often ecclesiastical persons (bishops or local clergy), or representatives of patricians or commoners, as well as private persons. Within such accompanying documentation sometimes transcripts of original documents are also inserted, most often of charters (such as the *ducale* of the doges), describing the main document in additional detail. The contents of the documents regarding the city and the commune of Korčula cover various problems regarding the functioning of the state and city administration, economy and ecclesiastical life. Thus, for example, some of the documents refer to the elections of communal officials (scribe, treasurers, communal chancellors) and irregularities happening in connection with the procedure, some of the documents are responses to the Council of Ten to queries sent already earlier from Venice, while some of the correspondence deals with the state of armament in the city and the commune, public building activity and provision of grain. Furthermore, frequent themes within the correspondence of the counts of Korčula and Venetian central offices in the City on the Lagoon relate to the obligations of the commune of Korčula towards the capital of the *Serenissima*, sending of the envoys (the *oratores*) of the commune to Venice and inspection of the movements of warships passing through the harbour of Korčula. As the Council of Ten was entrusted with solving a full spectrum of issues of internal security all over the territory of Venetian dominion, the counts of Korčula addressed to it letters regarding the initiation of investigation processes for the most diverse cases of criminal actions, as well as, very frequently, letters asking the central authorities instructions regarding the inclusion of ecclesiastical persons (most frequently of local parish priests) in a process (as witnesses, and sometimes also as the accused).¹⁸

The central theme of this article is the case of a smallish volume, dated 24 June 1748, directed to the Council of Ten by the current count of the commune

¹⁸ All the aforementioned documents are precious sources for all components of the development of the city and the island of Korčula at that time, and thus their analysis and presentation provide important additional knowledge on the history of that region in the period of the Early Modern Age. On the history of Korčula in the Early Modern Age, cf. Marinko Gjiivoje, *Otok Korčula* [The Island of Korčula] (Zagreb: the author, 1969); Vinko Foretić, "Presjeci kroz prošlost Korčule" [Cross-Sections through the History of Korčula], *Zbornik otoka Korčule* 2 (1972): 25-71; Alena Fazanić, "Neki podaci o stanovnicima grada Korčule iz župskih matičnih knjiga od XV. do XIX. stoljeća" [Some Data on the Denizens of the City of Korčula from the Parish Records from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century], *Croatica christiana periodica* 14 (1990), no. 26: 55-61; Božo Banićević, *Korčulanska biskupija (1300.-1830.): prilog poznavanju povijesti Korčulanske biskupije u povodu 700. obljetnice njezina utemeljenja* [The Bishopric of Korčula (1300-1830): a Contribution to the Research of the History of the Bishopric of Korčula on the 700th Anniversary of Its Foundation] (Split: Crkva u svijetu, 2003). See also numerous contributions published in the review *Godišnjak grada Korčule*, vol. 1 (1996)-13 (2010).

of Korčula (with the title of *Conte Proveditor*) Girolamo Bragadin (Bragadeno).¹⁹ The letter of Count Bragadin starts with a note that on 8 June the court of Korčula received news regarding an event in the village of Žrnovo (*Villa di Xernoua*), a settlement belonging to *questa Giurisdizione*. There, on 16 May of the same year, some villagers, “convinced by the illusion of Satanic agency,” went during the night to the village’s cemetery, located in the hamlet of Postrana, near the chapel of St. Guy.²⁰ The villagers, “following false beliefs,” hoped to find there vampires (*falsa credenza si lusingauano di trouar Vampirii*) and wanted to open some of the graves and to stab the “evil spirits” found there with an iron spear or a halberd (*un’asta di ferro, o sia allabarda*), in order to prevent all potential vampires from further disturbance of the inhabitants of that village.

Considering that such an act, which directly offended religious principles, should be quickly and efficiently opposed, Bragadin took an official statement from the village procurator of Žrnovo, Marin Radovanović. The latter confirmed the truth of the event, noting that the halberd (the weapon used in the attempt at violation of the graves) was found in the cemetery and afterwards stored in the house of the current parish priest, Don Anthony Tvrdeić (*Antonio Tuerdeich Curato della Villa*), who, for his part, brought charges against Radovanović against some of his parishioners, emphasising that in these events, scandalous for the church, there participated Anthony Skokandić, son of James, Anthony Laus, son of Mark, Nicholas Didović, son of John, and John Dešević.

Based on this deposition, the count of Korčula ordered that an inspection of desecrated graves and bodies pierced with weapons should be carried out, in the presence of the city surgeon (*Chirurgho*) and a representative of the Office of Public Health (*deputato alla Sanità*). In order to perform the inspection according to all the rules, the surgeon ordered the use of certain preventive means (*presseruatiui e proffumi*). During the inspection on the spot, the investigators found two graves that had been opened, but no other desecration of the dead could be observed, because there were only “skeletons that had turned to bones due to the passage of time.”

The graves were closed, and the count of Korčula decided, considering this to be a serious incident, to start a more detailed investigation. To the start of the investigation there contributed also two depositions of witnesses confirming under oath that on 16 May in the cemetery of Žrnovo, there had been a desecration of graves. Besides the aforementioned four peasants, there were also present the denizens of Žrnovo Dominic Radovanović, John Grbin, Matthias Grbin, James Kuspilić (*Cuspilich*), Christopher Grbin, Nicholas Šegedin (*Segedin*), Anthony Curać (*Zurach*) and Jerome Didović. They, at the moment when they saw the cadavers, gave up “any further experiment” and left the cemetery.

¹⁹ Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio dei Dieci: Lettere Rettori, b. 277., fol. 300, p. 1-4.

²⁰ The cemetery church of St. Guy is one of the oldest churches in Žrnovo (the thirteenth century). For more details, see Gjivoje, *Otok Korčula*, 338; Božo Baničević, *Imena župa na otoku Korčuli* [Names of the Parishes on the Island of Korčula] (Korčula: Župni ured, 1989), 254-256.

Wanting to bring the investigation to its end by the book, Girolamo Bragadin decided to interrogate, as a very important witness, the parish priest Anthony Tvrdeić, with the “goal of finding out the truth regarding the halberd found there.”

It is not known in what way the investigation regarding the vampires of Žrnovo was terminated. On the back of the document (*a tergo*) there is a brief note (usual for such kinds of documents) on the basis of which it is known that the data on the case were redirected to the provisor-general of Dalmatia. The closing note is dated on 26 September 1749 and in its brief content it is stated that enactment of other regulations and procedures regarding the case was cancelled by the decision of the Venetian authorities (of 19 July 1748). As in the aforementioned notes there is no statement that the Council of Ten or some other Venetian state office approved the interrogation of an ecclesiastical person (because of which the letter was sent to Venice in the first place), it is possible to presume that the representatives of the Venetian government considered this case to be one of lesser importance (as were, at any rate, also many other “cases” on the island of Korčula, marginal, if seen from the point of view of the whole Venetian state) and their resolution was transferred to the level of the provincial or communal authorities.

Living Stories

Belief in vampires and other supernatural beings has not ceased to exist in Žrnovo even today. Conversations with older people show belief in the existence of a series of different beings and phenomena, about whom and which informants narrate stories very vividly. As an informant said, “That was in the old days, I cannot tell you how it was then, because I was born at the turn from the old days to the present day.”²¹ Still, after that introductory disclaimer, she narrated plenty of stories and beliefs. As in other Adriatic regions from Istria, north to south, the informants mostly speak about *štringe*,²² *pomoritad*,²³ *vile*²⁴ and *tenci*.²⁵ Within such acceptance of mythical phenomena as a kind of real-

²¹ Informer: Marija Jeričević Čompo, Žrnovo, the island of Korčula, July 2009.

²² It is interesting that the informers from Korčula, when they were asked who were *štrige*, stated that they were *those with no pubic hair*. So here a certain connection with sexuality is also expressed.

²³ *Pomoritad* – one who is neither alive nor dead. One who harasses the living, spreads fear and pulls hearts from the bodies of the living. It is noteworthy that this motif was not only locally inspirational, but also entered the history of Croatian illustration, through the works of the painter Cvijeta Job.

²⁴ Of fairies is said that *judi virovali i strašili se* [people believed in and feared them]. Thus the fairies also provoke fear.

²⁵ According to the informers from Korčula: *Tenac, to su bili mrtvi koji su hodali* [*Tenac*, these were the dead who walked].

ity, it is not hard to imagine that an enterprising group of serious, mature, men was capable of designing and carrying into effect a venture to which the document found in Venice testifies, and that in the belief that they were in that manner protecting their community this group did not hesitate to use even that which was forbidden to them – weapons. Even though the informers did not directly mention the said event, there is an impression that such a “clash” with the *tenci* was not an isolated case. Present-day denizens of Korčula speak also about the ruse used to find out whether a dead man was rising from the grave. Namely, they would place on the tombstone beads, most frequently little round almonds, and if they did not find them in the morning, it would mean that the dead man was rising from his grave.²⁶

In this area, the stories recur in similar versions all over the Adriatic regarding a dead man walking in the night. Thus the informers narrate: “A dead man walked, and came to a certain man to take a dagger and go with him. And they walked; they came to thirteen or fourteen places. The man would stab people with the dagger through their necks and would pull out their hearts. Thus they collected fourteen hearts, when they came to St. Guy (the cemetery of Žrnovo). Those whose hearts were taken out, naturally, died. It was a *pomoritad*. In St. Guy they counted hearts and one was missing; there were not more than thirteen. The *pomoritad* and the man started to quarrel about how one could be missing. At that moment the rooster crowed. That saved everyone. The man went back with that heart, tore it to pieces and returned one to each victim and they all came to life again. So, that was a *pomoritad*.”²⁷ A version of the story certainly circulated among people in the time when the document preserved in the archive in Venice was written, and what is particularly important is that at that time it was not an empty story, but a real threat.

Horrible or Sexy

The denizens of Korčula were looking for malicious vampires harassing and terrorising the people, and found only bones. However, even that finding was enough to provoke fear and to prevent them from taking any other action. Opening the graves did not solve the problem, as fear only multiplied, and, besides that, the villagers also acquired another, much more realistic fear: that of the secular authorities. The secular Venetian authority, which alluded to insults to the Holy Faith and beliefs, was not in fact so interested in fears and beliefs of some peasants of Korčula; they were much more interested in the weapons with which they were opening graves. For them, tools, not weapons, were what were designed for peasants. They were worried because of their in-

²⁶ Informers: Dinko Jeričević Cive, Marin Šale Bavo, Žrnovo, the island of Korčula, July 2009.

²⁷ *Idem*.

surge and their decision to unite and undertake common actions with weapons, even though these weapons were directed towards a dead man.

The whole story belongs, as the informant from Korčula said, to “the old days,” but our modern age has not remained without stories regarding vampires. Our vampires are no longer terrifying, and they do not push men to arm themselves and answer for that to the authorities: they have become simple, sensual and attractive, just as our popular culture prefers.

Appendix: A Transcript of the Document Regarding Appearance of the Vampires on Korčula (Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio dei Dieci: Lettere Rettori, b. 277, fol. 300, pp. 1-4, 24 June 1748)²⁸

Illustrissimi, et Eccellentissimi Signori Signori Colendissimi²⁹

Sopra le notizie portate à questa Giustissima dall'Officiale di Corte nel di 8 corrente, che nella vicina Villa di Xernoua di questa Giurisdizione alcuni di què Villici indicati, e persuasi da diabolica illusione, partiti si fossero di notte tempo nel cimiterio della Cappelletta di San Vitto, situato nel luoco di Postrana in pocco distanza dell'accenata Villa di Xernoua ad'aprire alcune sepulture, doue per concepita falsa credenza si lusingauano di trouar Vampirii, ed iui ne'sepolcri traffigerli con un'asta di ferro, o sia allabarda, e concio leuar l'arte à medessimi di più apportar mollestie, e mortallità à Villici, ò creduto fene d'interuenirui nel fatto, ne' perder di uista un caso, che direttiuamente offende la Santa Fede, e Credenza.

Assunto perciò il costituito di Martin Raddouanouich Procuratore di detta Villa, uenne egli di confermare per uenissimo il graue attentato, significando anzi d'esser stata trouata la suriferita alabarda fra l'erbe del cimiterio, e conseruata nella casa del Sacerdote Don Antonio Tuerdeich Curato della Villa, quale suestato (!) accuse à lui Procuratore d'esser interuenuti uarii Villici in si dannata funtione, contrassegnando in speccie li Antonio Scocandich di Giacomo, Antonio Laus di Marco, Nicolò Didouich di Zuanne, e Zuane Deseuich.

Sù tale fondamento, ordinaì per capo del buon ordine, la visione delle violate sepulture, e de' traffitti caddaueri coll'interuento del Ministro Cancelliere Chirurgho, ed'vn deputato alla Sanità, destinato del Collegio per la uerità di

²⁸ The letter was written on the sheet of paper. The text is on the first three pages, and the fourth is used as an envelope. In the transcription of the document, we were helped by Dr. phil. Nedjeljka Balić Nižić from the Department of Italian Language and Literature of the University of Zadar, for which we take this opportunity to thank her.

²⁹ On the left side of the page is added: 1748, 19 Luglio. *Un Ducale del Tribunale. Lettera citata del Vescouo nel proposito*. Added in pencil: 1748 *Curzola*. The note on the bottom of the page: *Illustrissimi, ed Eccellentissimi Signori Capi dell'Eccelso Consiglio di Dieci*.

Salute in quest'occlusioni, e perchè ancora sien posti in uso que' presseruatiui, e proffumi suggeriti in Colleggetto della cognizione di questo Medico Fisico nell'incontro, che si doueano aprire le sepolture. Incontrato questo caso furono uedute due di dette sepolture uiollate, e meltate di fresco, quali fatte aprire, non si è posuto rilleuare alcuna offesa ne' caddaueri, perchè inscheletriti, e riddoti in semplici ossa.

Fatte di del nuouo rinserare, e ridotto il ministero in Città, ordinai la formazione di processo, ond'accertarmi maggiore del fatto, e rilleuare gli intrauenti autori. Non fù difficile di conseguire anco l'intento col mezzo di due giurate deposizioni, che comprouarono le violenze delle due sepolture concessa nella notte di 16 Maggio decorso delli quatro precitati Villici, e colla società di Domenico Radouanouich, Zuanne Gherbin, Mattio Gherbin, Giacomo Cuspilich, Cristoforo Gherbin, Nicolò Seghedin, Antonio Zurach, e Jerco Diddouich tutti dalla detta Villa di Xernoua, ma che po' trouati li cadaueri putreffatti, e fettenti in allora, non ebbero coraggio di proseguire à maggiore enormità ma' sospesera ogni altro esperimento, che del denuncio era stato loro seguito.

Per proseguire alla compilazione del Procuratore medesimo ui si rende necessaria l'apartiene dell'esame del predetto Curato, effine di rischiarare la verità sopra l'alabarda ritrouata, e che ueniua da lui contenucata, quale uiene supposta trafigurata dalla di lui casa, perchè non resti riconosciuta di raggione di chi ella si sia, non temendo la facoltà di questo Reggimento d'assumerlo, ma risseruata unicamente questa à cotesto Eccelso Sacratio, insegno le presenti alle Eccellenze Vostre per uenerare l'infalibili prescrizioni loro nel proposito, di che si tratta, e le baccio riueramente le mani.

Corzola, li 24 Giugno 1748

Girolamo Bragadin Conte Proueditore

a tergo: Curzola, 24 Giugno 1748

Circa sepolture aperte da sudditi di Zernoua

Notte (? *hardly legible*) li commissioni rilasciate nel proposito al Proueditor General in Dalmazia con Ducali del Tribunale 19 Luglio 1748 fù sosspesa ogni altra deliberazione.

Vedi Ducal del Tribunale 26 Settembre 1749 alli Sindici in Dalmazia.

Translation:

Most illustrious and respected lords;

In connection with the news that was brought to this Court by a court clerk on the eighth of this month, that in the nearby village of Žrnovo, which belongs to the jurisdiction of this court, some of the peasants indicated, convinced by the illusion of Satanic agency, went in the night to the cemetery of the chapel of St. Guy, located in the place of Podstrana near the said village of Žrnovo, in order to open some graves, where they, following false beliefs,

hoped to find vampires, and wanted to pierce them there in their graves with an iron spear, or a halberd, and in that way take from them the power of further harassing and murdering peasants, I believed that there one should immediately intervene and not lose from sight any case directly offending the Holy Faith and belief.

Therefore the deposition was taken from Martin Radovanović, the procurator of the said village, who confirmed the truth of the serious damage, mentioning moreover that the aforementioned halberd was found in the grass in the graveyard and that it was stored in the house of the priest, Don Anthony Tvrdeić, a parish priest of the village, who, for his part, presented to the procurator accusations that in that troublesome operation various villagers participated, naming in the first place Anthony Skokandić, son of James, Anthony Laus, son of Mark, Nicholas Didović, son of John, and John Dešević.

Based on that, I ordered that an inspection be made of the desecrated tombs and the pierced cadavers, with the intervention of an officially authorised physician and a representative of the Office of Public Health, whom the Council obligated to check sanitary conditions in these circumstances. In order to increase the preservation of such conditions, taking it into account that the tombs should be opened, in the Small Council, according to the cognisance of the physician, preventive means and odours were recommended. Confronted with that case, the inspection noted two desecrated tombs, freshly cemented, which were opened, but it was impossible to discover any desecration of the cadavers, because there were only skeletons transformed into bones alone.

After the tombs were closed again and the representatives of the public authorities returned to the city, I ordered the opening of the process, in order to get better acquainted with the case and discover the instigators and perpetrators. It was not difficult to carry out that purpose, with the help of two sworn depositions confirming the desecration of two tombs, which took place on 16 May and was perpetrated by the four aforementioned peasants, who were accompanied by Dominic Radovanović, John Grbin, Matthias Grbin, James Kuspilić (Cuspilich), Christopher Grbin, Nicholas Šegedin, Anthony Curać and Jerome Didović, all from the said village of Žrnovo, but who, seeing that the cadavers were already rotten, did not have the courage to continue, but stopped any other experiment that was attributed to them in the denunciation.

In order to continue with the collection of the data, the procurator is of the opinion that it is necessary to examine the aforementioned parish priest, with the goal of clarifying the truth regarding the halberd found there, which he kept, about which it is supposed that it was taken from his house to prevent anyone from finding out to whom it belongs, without fear of the public authority to whom belongs the right of keeping it, which is reserved only to that Elevated Holiness [?], I send these reports to Your Lordships and with reverence expect your infallible decisions regarding the matter in question, kissing Your hands with reverence.

Korčula, 24 June 1748.

Girolamo Bragadin, provisor

a tergo: Korčula, 24 June 1748.

On the tombs opened by the subjects of Žrnovo

Notes (? *hardly legible*) of the commission connected to the case directed to the Provisor-General of Dalmatia with a *ducale* of the court of 19 July 1748, by which any other deliberation was suspended.

See the decision of the court of 26 September 1749 directed to the *Sindici* of Dalmatia.

Vampire in Dalmatien: Beispiel des Dorfes Žrnovo auf der Insel Korčula im 18. Jahrhundert

Zusammenfassung

Im einführenden Teil des Textes wurde die Problematik der Geschichte des "Auftauchens" von Vampiren auf dem weiteren Gebiet des europäischen Südostens kurz gefasst und historiographische Arbeiten, in denen dieses Thema im Fokus des Forschungsinteresses war, analysiert. Im zentralen Teil des Beitrags wurde der im Staatarchiv in Venedig bewahrte Text analysiert (Fond: Capi del Consiglio der Dieci: Lettere di Rettori e di altre cariche), der sich auf Geschehnisse aus dem Jahre 1748 im Dorfe Žrnovo auf der Insel Korčula bezieht, als die Bewohner des Dorfes – glaubend, dass Vampire aufgetaucht waren - einige Gräber im Dorfe entweiht haben. In diesem Beitrag werden die wichtigsten Daten aus dem genannten Text angeführt und die erwähnten Geschehnisse werden in einem breiteren damaligen gesellschaftlichen Kontext analysiert. Als Beilage werden am Ende die Abschrift des Originaldokumentes (in italienischer Sprache) und die englische Übersetzung gebracht.