

Reviews

Paola Pinelli, *Tra argento grano e panni: Piero Pantella, un operatore italiano nella Ragusa del primo Quattrocento*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2013. Pages LVIII+115.

Croatian scientific public is familiar with the name of Paola Pinelli. In 2006 she published the correspondence of the Marcovaldi brothers, in addition to a number of studies on the economic history of Dubrovnik's Quattrocento. Drawing upon these results, her latest book approaches the same topic yet from a different perspective—the work of Piero Pantella, emblematic of the new economic policy which Dubrovnik adopted in the first half of the fifteenth century.

Chapter One (pp. 1-35) examines the main trade routes of the Balkan silver, grain from Apulia and Italian cloth of modest quality via Dubrovnik as a major trans-shipment port. The export of silver from the mines of Serbia and Bosnia, the production of which reached its peak between the years 1420 and 1455, was entirely in the hands of the Ragusans, possibly approximating to one-fifth of the annual European production of silver. Having established good contacts in the Balkans, the Ragusans reduced the risk of their ventures in this region. The profit in this line of trade ranged between 17 and 18 per cent, which was two to three times the value as compared to other lines of business, with a quick turnover of capital. The Italian merchants described by Pinelli further expanded the silver trade to the markets of Europe and the Levant, mainly through Venice and other Italian ports and emporiums. With the expansion of the Ottoman rule over the territories of Serbia and Bosnia, the production and trade became state-controlled and came to a halt, but managed to survive into the sixteenth century.

A quick turnover of capital also accompanied the trade in cloth, though in an opposite direction. The markets of the Balkan hinterland were supplied with the domestically manufactured cloth of modest quality as well as extravagant and high-quality fabrics intended for the rich, and for this reason the cloth of medium standard manufactured in Venice, Florence and smaller Italian centres filled this quality gap.

In the same space, and with almost the same people, developed the grain trade which was of vital importance for the Dubrovnik Republic, whose own production hardly reached one-third of its needs. Grain was obtained through two channels, both under strict supervision of the state. On the one hand, the state appointed agents to obtain large quantities of grain at public expense outside Dubrovnik, and on the other, it encouraged private enterprise towards grain supply through favourable loans, premiums and tax privileges. This business proved attractive to many merchants from Catalonia and Italy.

In one of the most interesting parts of the book the author shows how important the mediating role of Dubrovnik was to foreign merchants unaccustomed to the hostile hinterland whose language they did not understand. In the Balkan interior the Ragusans had established their social networks, had no difficulty in communication and were acquainted with the mentality of the people they negotiated with. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, the Ragusan agency was favourable for the Italian merchants, as the Republic benefited from the reduced duty rates on the territory of the Ottoman Empire.

In the chapter on the Ragusan textile manufacture (pp. 37-51), the author zooms into the main character of this book, Piero Pantella, illuminating the circumstances in which the foreigners from Prato, Florence and other Italian regions settled in Dubrovnik in order to start the production of textile. Ragusan authorities introduced several incentives to encourage this industry—from favourable loans for setting up the business, subvention for the workshops, and premiums per each

roll of the cloth produced—aimed at large-scale production of this lucrative commodity, at higher and more professional standard of production, as well as the practice and know-how so that the local entrepreneurs could, with time, take over the lead. At the same time, the state made substantial investments into the facilities and equipment necessary for textile industry: dyeshops, washing vats and workshops for stretching the woollen cloth, all located at Pile, but also water supply which was essential for the textile manufactories. The author argues that “the Republic assumed a completely new role of the entrepreneur, not only by financing the project, but by taking upon itself the initiative and the risk, choosing the principal actors and bringing decisions of organisational nature” (p. 44), and thus stepped out of the usual administrative framework of an early fifteenth-century state. In fact, examples of the state playing the leading role in the organisation of textile industry have also been traced in the towns of Italy, though of later date. The author notes that, following the initial oscillations, the cloths manufactured in Dubrovnik improved in quality, particularly with the import of south-Italian wool. With regard to the scale of production, it was significant in comparison to some Italian centres. Ragusan cloth manufacture distinguished itself with the concentration of the production process in bigger workshops, especially in the large factory built for Piero Pantella at Pile.

By the 1430s a shift in the policy of the Ragusan government had taken place, as it was determined to secure more room for the local entrepreneurs, among whom Andrija and Ivan Volčo were the most prominent. This was soon followed by a stagnation of the market in the Balkan hinterland due to frequent Turkish raids, and in 1463, in fear of an attack, the buildings at Pile were pulled down because of the reinforcement of the city walls. At the end of the fifteenth and at the start of the sixteenth century, the government tried to revive the production, this time of high-quality luxury fabrics, which again attracted Italian entrepreneurs, but the results of this project did not meet the expectations, and by the end of the sixteenth century the state finally decided to no longer support this industry.

The final chapter focuses on the work of Piero Pantella in Dubrovnik (pp. 53-80), primarily his woollen cloth manufactory, along with his other business pursuits during the fifty years of his life in the city (1415-1464). Most attention has been given to the large three-floor factory at Pile, built by the Ragusan government to accommodate Pantella’s manufacture. This building was specifically designed to suit the innovations in the organisation of the production process, in that the essential stages in the production were concentrated under the same roof, and the entrepreneur managed the entire process. Another novelty here, as opposed to Tuscany, were the longer-term employer contracts which enabled a continuity of the work rhythm and stricter discipline. Ragusan textile industry developed later than in most of the leading Italian centres, but without strong guilds which could hinder free entrepreneurship, with many investments and state incentives, and with a manufacture-specific building, it was able to act more freely and even experiment with the new organisation of the production. The author discerns Pantella as an *all-round* businessman, who built his career in Dubrovnik as an agent to other merchants, who also traded in grain and silver, and invested in shipping.

A short conclusion is followed by the transcription of a lengthy contract between the government of Dubrovnik and Paulo Cornello, Pantella’s half-brother, whose terms defined the beginnings of the Ragusan cloth industry, a list of archival sources and literature, as well as the indexes. The book is supplemented with tables and geographical charts.

The story of Dubrovnik’s textile industry is woven into its magnificent fifteenth century. It may also be read as a moral about the courage of those who arrived from the Italian towns in search of potential markets and who created new work environments, but equally so about the business-minded Ragusan government which clearly understood that ventures rested upon people and their knowledge, and not on pure natural resources (the manufacture project was launched when Dubrovnik abounded in neither resources nor water). This does not imply that every measure of Dubrovnik’s economic

policy was equally successful. However, it is evident that the Ragusan governmental institutions planned on long-term basis and were committed to a rational development strategy of the Republic.

A methodological novelty in the research of Paola Pinelli is her leaning on the potential of the private correspondence of the Italian merchants in Dubrovnik. Namely, only a part of their business dealings they registered at the state notary office, while the rest they entered into private documents and ledgers, acting upon trust and avoiding the expensive and sluggish official registration. This explains, as the author stresses, why an important portion of the business dealings simply cannot be gleaned from the contracts registered in the chancery and notary books of the State Archives in Dubrovnik. By comparing the data from the private correspondence with the official documents, the author was able to weave a realistic canvas of the trade across the Adriatic: the latter do not provide information that can be found in the former, while the indignant overtone of the private letters is discarded by the reliable information from the official sources, which shows that the periods of crisis and prosperity interchanged. The author argues that the Tuscan entrepreneurs were not so much driven away from home by the crisis, but were rather attracted by the opportunities that the stimulating Ragusan policy had to offer.

Until a couple of years ago, the beginnings of textile industry in Dubrovnik in the early fifteenth century seemed like one of the more densely-written pages of Dubrovnik's history book, a topic hardly to be found among the research priorities, as it has already been thoroughly sifted. Most recent publications of our Italian colleagues (Pinelli, Bettarini, D'Atri) provide a host of unexpected data and an insight into the broader context of the trade routes and ventures that attracted merchants from both coasts of the Adriatic. Their sound discussions represent an outstanding step forward, and a most commendable contribution to the historiography of Dubrovnik.

Some thirty years after the establishment of the factory at Pile, Filippo Diversi remarked that Piero Pantella was not only worthy of having his name stamped in gold in the book of merchants, but was to have a marble statue erected in his honour in the centre of the city. With her book, Paola Pinelli has symbolically fulfilled the long-ago uttered words of her compatriot, and has erected a monument to Pantella "more lasting than bronze".

Nella Lonza

Katedrala Gospe Velike u Dubrovniku, ed. Katarina Horvat-Levaj [Studije i monografije Instituta za povijest umjetnosti, book 46]. Dubrovnik - Zagreb: Gradska župa Gospe Velike, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2014. Pages 592.

The celebration of the 300th anniversary of the completion and consecration of the Baroque Cathedral of Our Lady (1713-2013) has been crowned with a monumental edition on the history and artistic heritage of Dubrovnik's head church, its present-day building and decoration, as well as the vanished 'old cathedrals'. Lavishly illustrated, co-produced by the City parish of *Gospa Velika* and the Institute of Art History in Zagreb under the editorial supervision of Katarina Horvat-Levaj, the volume comprises the texts of thirteen authors, exceptional photographs contributed by Paolo Mofardin and architectural drawings by Ivan Tenšek and Ivana Valjato-Vrus.

Arranged chronologically, the first thematic section on the history of Dubrovnik's Cathedral opens with a series of contributions by Danko Zelić on the architecture of the old cathedrals in which, on the basis of the findings of the archaeological excavations on the site started in 1981 as well as the written sources, he summarises the until now known data on the buildings which