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## THE FIGURE OF EXECUTIONER IN DUBROVNIK BETWEEN SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND REJECTION (FOURTEENTH TO EIGHTEENTH CENTURY)\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Based on the documents from the State Archives of Dubrovnik, this article examines the office of executioner in the period between the fourteenth and the late eighteenth century. Introduction of professional executioner is being correlated with the process of the expansion of state "services" managed by professionals, with distinctive features of the penal system and the symbolic role of executioner in the rituals of power, while the abolishment of permanent office is accounted by the changing criminality trends in the mid-eighteenth century. Through the elements of execution, the ideal of "good death" is elucidated, along with the executioner's intermediary role between the worlds of the dead and living. Further analysed is the attitude of Ragusan society towards the executioner, attention being drawn to certain ambivalent aspects, with a conclusion that in Dubrovnik, unlike elsewhere in Europe, less stigma was attached to this profession: executioner was generally perceived as an "official" who performed an unattractive though essential service to the benefit of the community.

*Keywords:* Dubrovnik, executioner, punishment rituals, Middle Ages, Early Modern era

### *Introductory notes on semantics*

Modern Croatian term for executioner *krvnik* is derived from the word *krv*, meaning blood. In the same sense it was employed by the seventeenth-century

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Split poet Jerolim Kavanjin, in whose verse an executioner severs the limbs of St James.<sup>1</sup> However, in old Dubrovnik, the Croatian word *krvnik* fell into a different semantic field: it stood for a murderer, a man who owed blood.<sup>2</sup> In the local idiom the executioner was called *manigodo*, certainly imported from Latin or Italian.<sup>3</sup> In Latin written documents of Dubrovnik executioner is referred to as *magister iustitiae*, *carnifex (qui faciat iustitiam)*, *manigoldus*.

As the term *carnifex* in medieval Latin may have denoted both a butcher and executioner, in one of the Ragusan documents a clarification is added: “he who performs justice” (*carnifex qui facit iustitiam*). Given that both the butcher and executioner cut bodies and that both come into contact with blood, terminological congruence mirrors the fluid difference between their occupations:<sup>4</sup> in some parts of Europe of the Late Middle Ages, butcher was known to replace the executioner or even take up his duty permanently, while in Paris in some cases both jobs were known to be performed by the same person.<sup>5</sup>

### *The rise and decline of executioner's profession: Dubrovnik example*

The oldest Ragusan document pertaining to my topic is the decision of the Major Council of 22 February 1333, which concerns the empowerment of the Count and the Minor Council to employ an executioner on regular salary terms (*posse salariare unum carnificum [!], qui faciat iustitiam*). Apparently, this was not the first executioner in communal service. The post was to be offered

<sup>1</sup> Jerolim Kavanjin, *Poviest vandelska*, ed. Josip Aranza. Zagreb: JAZU, 1913: p. 333.

<sup>2</sup> *Lamenta criminalia*, ser. 50.3, vol. 66, f. 268v (State Archives of Dubrovnik, henceforth cited as: SAD); *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, vol. V, ed. Pero Budmani. Zagreb: JAZU, 1898-1903: pp. 706-707.

<sup>3</sup> *Rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, vol. VI, ed. Pero Budmani and Tomo Maretić. Zagreb: JAZU, 1904-1910: p. 444.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Pastoureau, *Couleurs, images, symboles: études d'histoire et d'anthropologie*. Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1989: p. 265; Hannele Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil: representations of executioners in Northern France and the Low Countries in the late Middle Ages*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2005: p. 73. Executioner and butcher are in a certain way connected by Jerolim Kavanjin (J. Kavanjin, *Poviest vandelska*: p. 449). For a discussion on similar tools and procedures see Stefano Boccato, »La pena capitale a Venezia nel primo XVI secolo (1514-1525). Percezione e intrecci culturali dai Diari di Marin Sanudo«. *Acta Histriae* 10/1 (2002): pp. 203-204.

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Delarue, *Le métier de bourreau*. Paris: Fayard, 1979: pp. 38-39; H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 43.

to him for a two-year period under strictly defined terms, surely with a possibility of an extension, as was the case with other offices of state.<sup>6</sup>

It seems, however, that the post was filled intermittently. When in 1359 Ragusan authorities seized three corsairs from Budva who raided Ragusan ships, they had them blinded by “for that purpose elected executioner” (*per manigoldum ad hoc electum*).<sup>7</sup> Given the fact that Ragusan council minutes from that period have only partly been preserved, it is hard to say how regularly the post was filled. In the Ragusan archival material from the second half of the fourteenth century onwards, executioners are present more often, either performing their bloody task, or as offenders or victims awaiting justice at the criminal court.

In the Dalmatian town of Split, the executioner, “master of public justice” (*magister publice iustitie*), is mentioned in the mid-fifteenth century,<sup>8</sup> although the office might have dated from a much earlier period. The development of North-Croatian towns, even the most developed Gradec (one of the two nuclei of today’s Zagreb), went along a somewhat slower pace, and it is not until 1499 that we trace a professional executioner there. Until then, executions were entrusted to the injured parties themselves, accomplices or criminals sentenced to banishment or death, with pardon.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, in some parts of Europe, a professional executioner emerged much earlier: in some French cities and in Augsburg as early as the thirteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

Underlying the establishment of executioner’s post in medieval Dubrovnik—like elsewhere in Europe—a couple of interrelated processes may be discerned.

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<sup>6</sup> *Libri reformationum*, vol. V, ed. Josip Gelcich [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. XXIX]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1897: p. 379. As the decisions of the Minor Council are available ending with 16 March, we do not know who was hired.

<sup>7</sup> *Libri reformationum*, vol. II, ed. Ivan Krstitelj Tkalčić [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. XIII]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1882: p. 276; *Libri reformationum*, vol. III, ed. Ivan Krstitelj Tkalčić [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. XXVII]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1895: p. 2. On the background of this case see the letter of the Ragusan authorities to the Doge of Venice (*Libri reformationum*, vol. II: pp. 285-286).

<sup>8</sup> Marko Šunjić, *Dalmacija u XV stoljeću*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967: p. 143, note 231.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Mažuranić, *Prinosi za hrvatski pravno-povjestni rječnik*, vol. I. Zagreb: JAZU, 1908-1922: pp.160, 166, 321, 554; for Europe cf. Paul Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done: The Age of Spectacular Capital Punishment in France*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012: p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> J. Delarue, *Le métier de bourreau*: p. 36; Pieter Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression from a Preindustrial Metropolis to the European Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984: p. 16; P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: p. 73.

On the one hand, although the penal system was still based on monetary fines at that time, for most serious crimes and unpaid fines the sentences imposed corporal punishment, ranging from whipping and branding, blinding, severing of noses and ears, mutilation to capital punishment.<sup>11</sup> For these punishments to be carried out professionally, an expert person was required, who would perform it in a controlled manner to display a triumph of law and order. On the other hand, public authority in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries expanded its responsibilities. A series of new posts of communal officials was created (physicians, notaries, teachers etc.), who acted professionally to the welfare of the community.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, the office of executioner was also understood as a “service” a developed city-state ought to provide. A third, not less important, process concerned the representation of the state. In a society founded on representation, and in which the main communication between the authority and subjects was nonverbal, the executioner not only performed the imposed sentence, but also demonstrated “legitimate violence” as an integral aspect of state power.<sup>13</sup> Had the executioner’s office revolved solely around specific skill and basic knowledge of anatomy, his duties might have fallen within the barber’s domain. However, through the office of executioner the state enacted its punitive authority. In many languages there is a clear semantic connection between execution and “justice”: *faire justice, giustiziare, Hinrichtung*,<sup>14</sup> also found in Ragusan documents in the expressions *magister iustitiae* and *iustitiam facere*. The symbolism of punishment was placed into the hands of executioner: similar to European countries, in Dubrovnik a red-hot seal with

<sup>11</sup> For Dubrovnik see Nella Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde: Kaznenopravni sustav Dubrovačke Republike u XVIII. stoljeću*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 1997: p. 190.

<sup>12</sup> Spierenburg and Klemetilä link the emergence of executioners to the shift of punishment executions from private into state hands (P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 10-12; H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 7). Spierenburg also draws attention to the correlation between the development of executioner’s office and the strengthening of inquisitorial procedure, both related to the development of state authority (ibidem: p. 25). In Dubrovnik of the time inquisitorial procedures were not common (Nella Lonza, »L’accusatoire et l’infrajudiciaire: la «formule mixte» à Raguse (Dubrovnik) au Moyen Âge«, in: *Pratiques sociales et politiques judiciaires dans les villes de l’Occident européen à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. Jacques Chiffolleau, Claude Gauvard and Andrea Zorzi. Roma: École française de Rome, 2007: pp. 649-650), but the state certainly penetrated into many new areas which until then it neither regulated nor institutionally organised.

<sup>13</sup> Esther Cohen, »Symbols of Culpability and the Universal Language of Justice: The Ritual of Public Executions in Late Medieval Europe«. *History of European Ideas* 11 (1993): p. 408; P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> E. Cohen, »Symbols of Culpability«: p. 409.

which the executioner branded the culprit's face resembled that of the official state seal.<sup>15</sup>

According to the evidence, in the Dubrovnik Republic the office of executioner was maintained on professional basis for centuries. On the contrary, by the end of the fourteenth century, Florence adopted the practice by which a person punished to death was chosen as executioner, and who, having completed his four-year service, was granted freedom. In doing so, the Florentine authorities may have been guided by the budget, but it seems that they aimed to avoid "honourable men of other than very low rank" performing this duty.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that among the prisoners who in Florence were "promoted" to the office of executioner, in 1417 was a certain Šimun from Zagreb, seized by the authorities for a series of thefts, of clothes mainly. Even more interesting is the rhetoric of his appeal (probably worded by the clerk), in which he expresses hope that the executioner's performance before the face of God will again place him among the righteous.<sup>17</sup> Can there be a more telling proof of the ambivalence of executioner's office! This criminal-executioner model was also applied in other parts of Europe,<sup>18</sup> though to a much lesser degree from the sixteenth century on.<sup>19</sup> The arrangement with the authorities implied pardon from the sentence in exchange for the execution of punishment on others, which—adopting Miroslav Bertoša's witty remark—may be defined as a "homeopathic approach".<sup>20</sup> Obviously, the criminals were "amateurs" in this trade, but they had some experience in violent dealings, which proved a rather bizarre recommendation for the duty entrusted to them.

As far as we know, in Dubrovnik it was experimented with the criminal-executioner model only in the eighteenth century. By entrusting the duties of executioner to prisoner Đuro Lazarić in 1734, Ragusan authorities devised an

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<sup>15</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 69-70; E. Cohen, »Symbols of Culpability«: pp. 166-168; for Dubrovnik, see Milan Rešetar, *Dubrovačka numizmatika*, vol. I. Sremski Karlovci: Srpska manastirska štamparija, 1924: p. 563. In certain periods executioner of Paris wore the attire with the city's coat of arms (J. Delarue, *Le métier de bourreau*: 42). We have no similar confirmation for Dubrovnik.

<sup>16</sup> Andrea Zorzi, »Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte a Firenze nel tardo Medioevo tra repressione penale e cerimoniale pubblico«, in: *Simbolo e realtà della vita urbana nel tardo Medioevo*, ed. Massimo Miglio and Giuseppe Lombardi. Roma: Vecchiarelli, 1993: p. 221.

<sup>17</sup> Cesare Paoli, »Manigoldo«. *Archivio storico italiano* 28 (1901): pp. 304-306.

<sup>18</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: p. 21; P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: 73.

<sup>19</sup> H. Klemettilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Miroslav Bertoša, *Doba nasilja, doba straha. Vojnici-pljačkaši, seljaci-razbojnici i doseljenici-nasilnici u Istri XVII. i XVIII. stoljeća*. Zagreb: Durieux, 2011: p. 481.

interesting legal construction: since they were not willing to grant him full pardon on these grounds, the execution of his punishment to forced galley service was suspended “for a hundred years” on condition that he served the state as executioner.<sup>21</sup>

After Lazarić, in 1736, Antonio Bonfigli from Palermo was appointed as the last professional executioner of the Republic of Dubrovnik.<sup>22</sup> In the middle of the eighteenth century, namely, salaried office of executioner was definitely discontinued. Execution of corporal and shame punishments (beating, branding) was entrusted to *zduri* (constables) and soldiers, while for the execution of capital punishments executioners were employed *ad hoc*, always from the territory of the Ottoman Empire in the Ragusan hinterland.<sup>23</sup> Persons suitable for the job were sought through official channels, through the kadi of Stolac and Ljubinje.<sup>24</sup> In the eighteenth century, Ottoman authorities at least on two occasions dispatched gipsy executioners to Dubrovnik,<sup>25</sup> who took to this practice in the Balkan area.<sup>26</sup> A fee of 100-170 ducats for two executioners hired from the outside was not insubstantial,<sup>27</sup> but proved a good bargain considering a cut in the costs of the annual salary budget. It should be noted that the capital punishments became increasingly rare, because from the middle of the eighteenth century Ragusan society witnessed a drop in serious crimes.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, an ever-thrifty Ragusan state calculated that having a salaried executioner was no longer financially justifiable.

However, the transition towards “amateurs” had further impact on the penal system. Namely, with the punishments involving mutilation, the state authorities

<sup>21</sup> *Acta Minoris Consilii*, ser. 5, vol. 93, f. 104r (SAD); *Detta*, ser. 6, vol. 41, f. 6v (SAD).

<sup>22</sup> *Acta Minoris Consilii*, vol. 93, f. 220r.

<sup>23</sup> N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> *Detta*, vol. 77, f. 23r; vol. 84, f. 100r.

<sup>25</sup> *Detta*, vol. 62, *tergo*, f. 1r; vol. 84, ff. 167r-168r.

<sup>26</sup> Tatimir Vukanović, *Romi (Cigani) u Jugoslaviji*. Vranje: Nova Jugoslavija: p. 58. However, gipsies recorded in medieval Dubrovnik were not employed as executioners. Cf. Đurđica Petrović, »Cigani u srednjovekovnom Dubrovniku«. *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta u Beogradu* 13/1 (1976): pp. 123-158.

<sup>27</sup> Calculated from Rina Kralj-Brassard, »*Detta* Presvijetlog i Preuzvišenog Gospodina Kneza: Troškovi Dvora u Dubrovniku od 16. do 19. stoljeća«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 52/1 (2014): p. 137, note. 32; *Detta*, vol. 77, f. 23r. In 1753 a gipsy executioner received no more than 22.5 ducats for two executions (*Detta*, vol. 62, *tergo*, f. 1v).

<sup>28</sup> Ivana Mrđen, Ana Prohaska and Nenad Vekarić, »The rhythm of crime: Annual and monthly distribution of crime in the Dubrovnik Republic in the eighteenth century«. *Dubrovnik Annals* 17 (2013): pp. 71-72, 76.

considered it essential to prevent more serious consequences for the culprit's health from those to which he was sentenced, and that could not have been guaranteed if mutilation was carried out by unskilled persons. In 1773 the Senate altered the punishments of Petar Bilan and Ivan Salatić because—on the basis of medical opinion—they could face mortal danger if their arm was amputated ineptly.<sup>29</sup>

### *The scope of executioner's duties*

In Dubrovnik, death punishments were usually carried out by hanging, as in most of Europe since the Late Antiquity.<sup>30</sup> Decapitation by sword was reserved for the elite ranks.<sup>31</sup> On occasion, the executioner was known to strangle the convicted criminal in the prison cell, most commonly brigands who raided the villages along the Ottoman border.<sup>32</sup>

If implied by the sentence, the executioner would further quarter the corpse and take the pieces to the locations specified for this purpose, usually along the land or sea access to the city, where they were exhibited as a warning and reminder of the state's punitive authority.<sup>33</sup> If the criminal's head was exposed, it was executioner's duty to carry it and exhibit it impaled at a specific location.<sup>34</sup> In important cases in which the culprit escaped, executioner would hang an effigy modelled after him instead.<sup>35</sup>

The punishments of mutilation were also among executioner's duties, as for example the digging out of eyes.<sup>36</sup> As mentioned earlier, he branded the culprit's face with a red-hot seal. He also carried out physical and degrading punishments: whipped the convicts,<sup>37</sup> exposed them on the pillory<sup>38</sup> and paraded them on a donkey through the city streets.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, ser. 3, vol. 182, f. 175v (SAD).

<sup>30</sup> For instance, in Paris and Avignon around 70% of death sentences included hanging (H. Klemettilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 32).

<sup>31</sup> N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 142-143.

<sup>32</sup> *Detta*, vol. 19, *tergo*, f. 6v; N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 141-142.

<sup>33</sup> *Detta*, vol. 20, *tergo*, f. 3r; vol. 24, *tergo*, f. 4v; N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 145-146; cf. P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 57-58

<sup>34</sup> *Detta*, vol. 19, ff. 23r, 76v.

<sup>35</sup> N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 150-151.

<sup>36</sup> *Libri reformationum*, vol. II: p. 276.

<sup>37</sup> N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> *Detta*, vol. 16, f. 137v; vol. 17, f. 27r; N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 160-162.

<sup>39</sup> *Detta*, vol. 18, f. 20v; N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 159-160.

Ragusan authorities were also known to engage the executioner as a catcher of stray animals, or he was assigned to test poisons on dogs.<sup>40</sup> Similar tasks were also required from his European counterparts, where the executioners were entrusted with different dirty jobs related to hygiene or policing: cleaning of streets and cesspools, overseeing of prostitutes, etc.<sup>41</sup>

In the heyday of Counter-Reformation, by order of Ragusan authorities the executioner publicly burned the works of the Protestant writer Matija Vlačić.<sup>42</sup> Two centuries later, on 17 February 1724, the Senate almost unanimously decided that the executioner burn in front of the Orlando's Column all the copies of *Talmud* that had been confiscated from the Ragusan Jews.<sup>43</sup> It is clear that in these book fires the executioner's role had a symbolic meaning, for he on behalf of the state was to destroy the prohibited and "infamous" books in a public ritual, on the same site where the corporal punishments were carried out.

Interestingly, judicial torture did not fall within executioner's responsibilities,<sup>44</sup> but within that of *zđur* and soldier. It seems that only one technique of torture was applied in Dubrovnik, that of the strappado. The victim's hands were securely tied behind his back and fastened to a rope with which he was hoisted over a highly mounted pulley. The rope was then allowed to slack suddenly, and the body's rapid descent was brought to an abrupt termination closely above the ground. The advantage of this technique, if any, was that it did inflict pain but rarely led to fatal outcome and its implementation was fairly simple.<sup>45</sup> An executioner rather than soldier might rightly be expected to carry out this mode of torture, all the more because he was not overburdened with duty. I consider this moment very important, because it provides the key to the reading of the executioner's role. Torture was carried out in the Major Council Hall, far from the public eye, and if no public ritual was included, the procedure did not require the presence of executioner. Taking also into account the mentioned burning of books, one may say that the participation in public state rituals itself was typical of his office.

<sup>40</sup> *Detta*, vol. 25, ff. 101v, 108v.

<sup>41</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: p. 21; H. Klemettilä, *Epitomes of evil*: pp. 72-73; P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: p. 76.

<sup>42</sup> Johann Christian von Engel, *Geschichte des Freystaates Ragusa*. Wien: Doll, 1807: p. 225.

<sup>43</sup> Miroslav Pantić, »Izbor dokumenata o dubrovačkim Jevrejima od sredine XVII do kraja XVIII veka«. *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja u Beogradu* (1971): pp. 366-376, 379.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. H. Klemettilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 33.

<sup>45</sup> N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 236-238.



### *Salary and other income*

Until the eighteenth century, Ragusan executioners received regular salary (*salarium, stipendium*), and thus belonged to the circle of office-holders known as *salariati*.<sup>46</sup>

In 1333, executioner earned an annual salary of not more than 37 perpers,<sup>47</sup> which probably covered all his services. At the same time, annual salary of the city musician was 35 perpers, and that of chancellor 50 perpers.<sup>48</sup> A century and a half later, in 1480, the salary of Šišat the executioner consisted of a somewhat lower fixed pay (2 perpers per month) and a variable pay which he received for each execution. A fee for the execution of death punishment amounted to as many as 20 perpers, for mutilation 10, and for whipping 2 perpers.<sup>49</sup>

By the early sixteenth century, executioner Baptista was constantly penniless and in debts, and quite a number of documents testify to his unstable financial and property status. Thanks to the loans he had to pay back to the state, we know that he received a salary of 4 ducats per month.<sup>50</sup> Several decades later, executioner Nikola Ivanović received the same sum.<sup>51</sup>

A parallel with other salaried positions of the same period shows that this rise of executioner's salary cannot be accounted by the increasing need for his services, but was caused by inflation, which tormented Europe after the discovery of Americas. Namely, at the time when Baptista's salary was 48 ducats per year, in Florence Ragusan authorities were looking for a new state secretary, the highest ranking office of the state chancellery, at a salary of 84 ducats, in addition to extra rewards estimated to around 50 ducats.<sup>52</sup> This clearly indicates that the basic ratio between the salaries of the *salariati* had not fundamentally changed during the previous two centuries.

<sup>46</sup> *Miscellanea saec. XVI*, box 7, vol. 10, no. 18; *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 35, f. 179.

<sup>47</sup> *Libri reformationum*, vol. V, ed. Josip Gelcich [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium, vol. XXIX]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1897: p. 379.

<sup>48</sup> *Libri reformationum*, vol.V: pp. 380, 382.

<sup>49</sup> *Acta Minoris Consilii*, vol. 21, f. 156r.

<sup>50</sup> *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 35, f. 305r; *Acta Minoris Consilii*, vol. 34, ff. 18v, 28r, 39v; vol. 35, ff. 74r, 97v, 140v.

<sup>51</sup> *Detta*, vol. 2, f. 16r.

<sup>52</sup> Lujo Vojnović, »Nikola Machiavelli, nesugjeni sekretar dubrovački (1521.)«. *Glasnik Dubrovačkog učenog društva 'Sveti Vlaho' 1* (1929): pp. 36-37.

In the Republic's final century, the executioner's salary again increased to reach a daily pay of 12 grossi,<sup>53</sup> or 109 ducats per year. The nominal duplication of executioner's salary follows, in global terms, the growth of daily wages and may be accounted by the inflationary processes with which the Ragusan society coped.<sup>54</sup>

### *Executioner, his audience and the ideal of "good death"*

By mid-fourteenth century the rituals of public punishment had become so common in Dubrovnik that they had their "usual site" (*in loco solito*) and a massive audience (*multitudo hominum copiosa*).<sup>55</sup> Although of all the death sentences imposed, only a few were executed, most Ragusans had at least once in their lifetime witnessed a spectacle of hanging or other capital punishments.<sup>56</sup> The authorities themselves were known to invite village heads from the surrounding areas and even paid their trip to the city in order to witness hanging, so as to be able to pass on their impressions "back home" on the efficient suppression of crime and the state's unwavering hand of justice.<sup>57</sup>

Executioner was expected to provide a clean and swift execution. In some parts of Europe we know of cases when the crowd was prepared to lynch the executioner for not carrying out the punishment to their expectations and whose botchy performance led to further suffering of the condemned criminal.<sup>58</sup> One should know that the reaction of the disappointed audience was not the sole issue here, but in the first place the failure to witness the ideal of "good death" that permeated the executions of death punishments as well.<sup>59</sup> This ideal conveyed man's aspiration to meet his hour of death prepared, at peace with God and his fellow men. If every man is given

<sup>53</sup> *Acta Minoris Consilii*, vol. 94, f. 220r; *Detta*, vol. 41, f. 8v; vol. 43, f. 7r.

<sup>54</sup> Vuk Vinaver, »Cene i nadnice u Dubrovniku XVIII veka«. *Istoriski časopis* 9-10 (1959): p. 122.

<sup>55</sup> *Libri reformationum*, vol. II: p. 276.

<sup>56</sup> In the eighteenth century even, when executions became infrequent, at least 20 death sentences were carried out (N. Lonza *Pod plaštem pravde*: pp. 141, 203).

<sup>57</sup> For example, *Detta*, vol. 16, *tergo*, f. 3v.

<sup>58</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 13-15; A. Zorzi, »Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte a Firenze«: pp. 222-223.

<sup>59</sup> Andrea Zorzi, »Rituali di violenza, cerimoniali penali, rappresentazioni della giustizia nelle città italiane centro-settentrionali (secoli XIII-XV)«, in: *Le forme della propaganda politica nel Due e nel Trecento*, ed. Paolo Cammarosano. Roma: École française de Rome, 1994: pp. 414-415; Mitchel B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*. Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press and Redaktion Books: pp. 144-145.

this chance, even the worst of criminals, true Christian values are fulfilled throughout the community.<sup>60</sup> This explains why the clerics and confraternities of Dubrovnik tried to give the criminal a chance to show repentance and approach the gallows at peace.<sup>61</sup> Particularly keen in accompanying the criminal to the execution site were the Jesuits, whose presence in the Ragusan public life was increasing from the sixteenth century onwards.<sup>62</sup> The annals of this Order record a Ragusan case from 1585, when a criminal sentenced to death attacked the executioner by surprise, bit him, and most certainly would have pulled him down from the ladder had it not been for the guards. The attending Jesuit negotiated a short delay of the execution until the criminal composed himself, heard his confession and prepared him for the final hour.<sup>63</sup> This probably concerned an execution of 14 February 1581, the only one carried out that year, when shoemaker Zorzi de Gioan, a Greek from Nafplio who settled in Dubrovnik, was executed by reason of a series of burglaries he had committed.<sup>64</sup> In conformity with the same ideal of “good death”, the criminal’s body was buried and commemoration service held at the cost of the state.<sup>65</sup>

Unsuccessful performance of justice brought shame on the executioner, and proved just as embarrassing for the state authorities. From the expenditure records of the Rector’s Palace (the so-called *Detta*) we can learn that, for the reasons mentioned, the wooden construction of the gallows was additionally checked and repaired, if necessary, before the hanging to avoid its collapsing under the body’s weight.<sup>66</sup>

### *Ragusan executioner between social inclusion and exclusion*

From the practice of other European states, we know that this profession was universally unpopular and that executioners were forced to live at the

<sup>60</sup> M. B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*: pp. 145-150.

<sup>61</sup> N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: p. 144; Nella Lonza, *Kazalište vlasti: Ceremonijal i državni blagdani Dubrovačke Republike u 17. i 18. stoljeću*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2009: pp. 127-128.

<sup>62</sup> N. Lonza, *Kazalište vlasti*: pp. 314-317, 323-325.

<sup>63</sup> *Annuae litterae Societatis Iesu anni M.D.LXXXV. ad patres, et fratres eiusdem Societatis*, Romae: In Collegio eiusdem Societatis, 1587: p. 48 ([http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fsl/object/display/bsb10183358\\_00052.html](http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fsl/object/display/bsb10183358_00052.html); accessed on 10 April 2015); Miroslav Vanino, *Isusovci i hrvatski narod*, vol. I. Zagreb: Filozofsko-teološki institut Družbe Isusove u Zagrebu, 1969: p. 28.

<sup>64</sup> *Criminalia*, ser. 16, vol. 20, ff. 18r-20r.

<sup>65</sup> *Detta*, vol. 77, f. 17r.

<sup>66</sup> *Detta*, vol. 77, ff. 17r, 22r; vol. 84, f. 99v.

margins of society. In sixteenth-century Italy there was even an expression “lonely as an executioner”, which best epitomises his status,<sup>67</sup> while in the Dutch cities any physical contact with him was avoided.<sup>68</sup> In many parts of Europe, the executioner’s profession was handed down from father to son together with its outcast status.<sup>69</sup>

It is impossible to establish whether the Ragusan executioners of the early period—Stojko, Utješeni, Stojša—were born in Dubrovnik or settled in the city from the hinterland. Florence of the *Trecento* preferred outsiders for this job, usually from the Italian South, most likely because for the ritual punishment—which may be read in the key of the ritual of expulsion—it was inappropriate to choose a member of one’s own community.<sup>70</sup> However, archival data from Dubrovnik provide no evidence on any form of heavy stigmatisation of neither the executioner nor his family.

Apparently, in medieval Dubrovnik executioners remained in service for a number of years. Some of them not only grew accustomed to the city, but also settled in it for good. For example, Stojko’s descendants may be traced in Dubrovnik for at least two generations thanks to being designated with his name, too.<sup>71</sup> Besides his wife, executors of the will were two goldsmiths, and according to the property inventory cited in the testament, one may deduce that he was in cloth manufacture.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Stojko the executioner was literate, as his son Mihoč mentions a ledger that his father kept (*quaderno de mio pare*).<sup>73</sup> Most likely, Stojko kept business accounts because he, like many Ragusan officials, also ran a private trade on the side in order to add some extra income to his state salary.<sup>74</sup>

Executioner was a symbolic intermediary between the living and the dead, between this and the other world.<sup>75</sup> In some parts of Europe, special beliefs and powers were attributed to the execution of death punishment, culprit’s body

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<sup>67</sup> Peter Burke, »Insult and blasphemy in early modern Italy«, in: idem, *The historical anthropology of early modern Italy. Essays on perception and communication*. Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1987: p. 106.

<sup>68</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 17-20; for France see also P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: pp. 71-88.

<sup>69</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: p. 41; H. Klemettilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 44.

<sup>70</sup> A. Zorzi, »Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte«: pp. 220-221.

<sup>71</sup> *Testamenta notariae*, ser. 10.1, vol. 8, f. 158v (SAD); *Distributiones testamentorum*, ser. 10.2, vol. 8, f. 260r (SAD).

<sup>72</sup> *Testamenta notariae*, vol. 8, ff. 158v-159r.

<sup>73</sup> *Testamenta notariae*, vol. 8, f. 159r.

<sup>74</sup> Ignacij Voje, »O trgovačkoj djelatnosti dubrovačkih nastavnika u srednjem vijeku«. *Dubrovnik* 6 (1980): pp. 59-69.

<sup>75</sup> A. Zorzi, »Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte a Firenze«: p. 219.

and the image of executioner, such as magical powers of the execution sword.<sup>76</sup> Only a century ago, in a small Croatian town of Gospić it was believed that an amulet from the clothes of the hanged criminal protected from witches and helped disrupt the opponent at the court of law.<sup>77</sup> In some parts of Europe, folk tradition tended to attribute special magical and healing powers to the executioner himself,<sup>78</sup> yet we do not know whether that was the case in Dubrovnik.

In many European parts, executioner's liminal position may have been grasped from the location of his residence, e.g. outside the city walls or in an ill-reputed quarter, where the brothel-houses stood.<sup>79</sup> According to Ragusan tradition, the house once occupied by the executioner is the building adjoining the Dominican Monastery,<sup>80</sup> the first on the right as you enter the city through the Ploče Gate (today St Dominic's Street 7). This oral tradition is still unconfirmed by the archival sources. In Venice, Genoa, Ferrara, Lucca and other Italian cities stand buildings popularly believed to have been the house of the executioner (*casa del boia*), but these claims generally fall within the realm of "urban legends",<sup>81</sup> fed with morbid fascination with the executioner's work, that same fascination which in the nineteenth century produced the fake "medieval" torture instruments, today often exhibited as authentic.<sup>82</sup> As for Dubrovnik, we know for certain that in the middle of the fifteenth century executioner Stojša had a right to a rent-free accommodation (*sine solutione afflictus*) in a communal house next to the Church of St Thomas in Pile.<sup>83</sup> The mentioned church was located on the site of today's Hotel Imperial,<sup>84</sup> which means that

<sup>76</sup> H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p.166, note 928.

<sup>77</sup> Mijo Biljan, »Snaga nekih stvari (Gospić u Hrvatskoj)«. *Zbornik za narodni život i običaje Južnih Slavena* 13 (1908): p. 308. On similar beliefs in magical properties of the body remains, clothes and rope of the person executed to death in France see J. Delarue, *Le métier de bourreau*: p. 34.

<sup>78</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 30-32; P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: p. 72.

<sup>79</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: p. 20; H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 74.

<sup>80</sup> Antonije Vučetić, »Kriminalitet u Dubrovniku od pola XIV. v. do velike trešnje 1667. g.«. *Dubrovački list* 2/16 (1925): p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> For Genoa: [http://www.balestrieridelmandraccio.it/bdm/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=55](http://www.balestrieridelmandraccio.it/bdm/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=47&Itemid=55); for Ferrara: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porta\\_degli\\_Angeli](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porta_degli_Angeli); for Lucca: <http://www.fondazioneCARILUCCA.it/media-immagine/casa-del-boia-facciata-laterale-2518>; for Venice: <http://www.visitmuve.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Dalla-Casa-di-Carlo-Goldoni-a-Ca-Rezzonico.pdf>.

<sup>82</sup> A. R. E. North, »Instruments of torture«, in: *Why Fakes Matter: Essays on Problems of Authenticity*, ed. Mark Jones. London: British Museum Press, 1992: pp. 93-99.

<sup>83</sup> *Acta Minoris Consilii*, vol. 12, f. 189v.

<sup>84</sup> Lukša Beritić, »Ubikacija nestalih građevinskih spomenika u Dubrovniku«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 12 (1960): pp. 81-82.

the executioner's residence should be located in this extramural area, too. His home was en route to the main place of execution at Danče,<sup>85</sup> however, I do not think that the reason for this was practical, as the majority of the penalties performed by the executioner took place in the city, mostly next to the Orlando's Column. I find it reasonable to believe that the executioner was simply offered a communal property that was vacant at that moment and suited his needs. Nor did the executioners always live outside the city. For example, at the start of the sixteenth century executioner Baptista, apparently, leased a communal house within the walls, in Kovačka ulica (*dei fabri*).<sup>86</sup> In other words, the archive documents do not confirm that in Dubrovnik the executioner was surrounded with social unease due to which his place of residence would be restricted to a specific area outside the city or at least on its outskirts. Perhaps, the strange location of the house between the two curtains of the city walls initiated a story about it being the executioner's home, maybe also by association to the nearby location of the slaughterhouse (*komarda*).<sup>87</sup> Anyhow, the oral tradition is recorded in the twentieth century only.

On the other hand, executioner's profession doubtless was perceived as opprobrious, as it appears in abusive vocabulary.<sup>88</sup> Thus in a sixteenth-century comedy *Dundo Maroje* by Marin Držić, various characters at least five times "honour" someone as *manigodo* in their temperamental dialogues or use this term to defame a third person.<sup>89</sup> The same insult is mentioned in an anonymous poem from the close of the eighteenth century.<sup>90</sup> A bizarre case has been recorded in which the executioner's wife insults her husband with the words "manigodo jedan" (you executioner).<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Nella Lonza, »La giustizia in scena: punizione e spazio pubblico nella Repubblica di Ragusa«. *Acta Histriae* 10/1 (2002): pp. 178-182.

<sup>86</sup> The lease entry is incomplete (*Baptista maistro di...*), while the dating has been obtained indirectly (c. 1506), but the name is rare, and these two indicators fit into the biography of Baptista the executioner (*Knjiga nekretnina Dubrovačke općine (13.-18.st.)*, vol. II, ed. Irena Benyovsky Latin and Danko Zelić. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2007: p. 236). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the authorities recurrently allowed an expenditure for the reparation of executioner's home, yet it may not necessarily concern the same building (*Detta*, vol. 16, f. 112v; vol. 20, f. 143v; vol. 41, f. 10r).

<sup>87</sup> Lukša Beritić, *Utvrđenja grada Dubrovnika*. Zagreb: JAZU, 195: pp. 29, 36, 49

<sup>88</sup> P. Burke, »Insult and blasphemy«. pp. 95, 105.

<sup>89</sup> Marin Držić, *Djela*, ed. M. Rešetar. Zagreb: JAZU, 1930: *passim*.

<sup>90</sup> Slavica Stojan, »Mizoginija i hrvatski pisci 18. stoljeća u Dubrovniku«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 39 (2001): p. 449.

<sup>91</sup> *Lamenta Criminalia*, vol. 29, ff. 57v, 80v-81v, 94v, 249v. I am grateful to Nenad Vekarić for these transcripts.

It does strike that the executioners were often inclined towards violence outside their profession.<sup>92</sup> For example, Stjepan Šupurda had a quarrel with his wife Anica while on their way from Prapatno to Ston. To his wife's insults the executioner reacted by throwing a stone at her, which injured her temple. Stjepan buried her body secretly, and returned to the city a few days later. His wife's disappearance gave rise to suspicion, and he was arrested. In prison he confessed to the crime, and in 1692 the Senate sentenced him to death by hanging.<sup>93</sup> In 1737 executioner Antonio Bonfigli sought sanctuary in a church after having committed a crime unknown to us, on account of which the secular authorities petitioned with the archbishop to deprive him of the right of asylum.<sup>94</sup>

Given that by order of state authorities he performed the punishment according to the contemporary understanding of justice, the executioner served "good justice"<sup>95</sup> as well as "good death". Execution was not merely a way for a society to get rid of a notorious criminal, appease the victim's community, and deter others from the ways of crime, but also a public ritual, carefully choreographed as a triumph of power and a drama of repentance with a cathartic effect.<sup>96</sup> From this multiperspective, the social role of executioner may be read as positive. On the other hand, corporal punishments and executions cause suffering and bleeding of a person that is unable to defend himself, all this being done for money, which mars the perception of executioner's profession as "honourable".<sup>97</sup> A clear indicator of the negative social attitude are the examples of men being slandered as "executioners".

The authors who tackled the figure of executioner in European history have observed the ambivalence (or paradox) of his social position.<sup>98</sup> Although the

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<sup>92</sup> For example, *Lamenta de foris*, ser. 52, vol. 1, f. 78v, 200r (SAD); *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 35, f. 179 (SAD). For France, cf. P. Friedland, *Seeing Justice Done*: pp. 73-74.

<sup>93</sup> *Lamenta Criminalia*, ser. 50.3, vol. 29, ff. 57v, 80v-81v, 94v, 249v; *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 132, f. 3v.

<sup>94</sup> *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, vol. 157, f. 215v; vol. 158, f. 10v. Archival sources provide no evidence on his offence nor his punishment, we only know that he was to be tried by the Minor Council, but no sentence concerning the case has been found.

<sup>95</sup> H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: pp. 46-47.

<sup>96</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: pp. 58-59, 83-83; E. Cohen, »Symbols of Culpability«: pp. 408-409; A. Zorzi, »Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte a Firenze«: pp. 224-227; M. B. Merback, *The Thief, the Cross and the Wheel*: pp. 144-146, 150-157; H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: pp. 39, 49-50.

<sup>97</sup> H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: p. 47.

<sup>98</sup> P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*: p. 42 et passim; H. Klemetilä, *Epitomes of evil*: passim.

attitude towards the executioner in Dubrovnik was not devoid of contradiction, social inclusion was dominant. I believe that the main reason for it lies in the fact that the Ragusan urban community showed an exceptionally high degree of identification with the state and its institutions, which may be ascribed to a tangled web of geopolitical and social factors.<sup>99</sup> Because of that, the executioner was perceived primarily as an “official” who performed one of the least attractive yet essential duties to the benefit of the community.

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<sup>99</sup> See the analysis of Lovro Kunčević, »O stabilnosti Dubrovačke Republike (14.-17. stoljeće): geopolitički i ekonomski faktori«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 54/1 (2016): 1-38.