

Marco Moroni, *L'impero di San Biagio: Ragusa e i commerci balcanici dopo la conquista turca (1521-1620)* [*The Empire of St Blaise: Dubrovnik and the Balkan trade after the Turkish conquest (1521-1620)*]. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011. Pages 273.

In a paper published in 2005 I defined the overriding historiographic approach as the “conditioning syndrome” (*sindrome del condizionamento*), when the history of Dubrovnik is not studied independently, for the role the city played in the Mediterranean economy in the Early Modern period, but, rather, in function of other needs and realities.

Marco Moroni is not infected by this syndrome. While international historiography has generally paid little attention to Dubrovnik—despite the well-known Braudelian solicitation—Moroni not only wrote a well structured book, but he did it from an original point of view. If it is true that Ragusan success was based on the fact that the city “lay where two movements met: the flow of traffic of the Balkan interior; and the shipping traffic using the unlimited sea routes”—as written by Braudel in his *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*—the choice of Moroni was to study the first one, the less showy, revealing author’s deep insight into the history of Dubrovnik: it is in the Balkan hinterland, in fact, that is rooted its extraordinary economic power in the Early Modern age.

Following this approach, the author decided not to study the much-researched period between the end of thirteenth and the mid-fourteenth century but to start somewhat later, in the 1520s, not only because of the remarkably rich records of the *Debita di Notariae* series, concerning the commercial credit granted by the Republic, but above all because of his understanding of the central role exercised by the Ottoman Empire in this story. The strength of the book is in this awareness, often lacking in the work of other scholars. Moroni studies Ragusan overland trade expansion connecting it to the Ottoman presence in the Balkans, aware of the importance for the small Republic of the privileged relationship with the powerful neighbour. Dubrovnik, indeed, signed an agreement with the Sublime Porte, beneficial to both: peace, security, trade privileges in change for an annual tribute. This agreement allowed Dubrovnik an unthinkable “space for manoeuvre” for that time, taking into account its small territorial dimensions.

Moroni tells us a story of Ragusan achievements, beginning with what he calls—a very successful image indeed—“the peaceful invasion” (*la pacifica invasione*) of the hinterland in the years 1521-1560 (p. 37), being careful not to restrict himself only to data when describing trade growth, but also to follow merchants, families and commercial companies in their daily work. So when he explains the operation of the Ragusan colonies, their autonomy—for example, the right to be judged by their own courts—the author presents the case of Luca di Vincenzo Demetrio, a merchant in Belgrade, who in 1555 prefers to appeal to an Ottoman court, making quite nervous the authorities of the Republic (pp. 41-42). The story of Demetrio also indicates that Moroni in his analysis does not rely on his main bulk of documents, as rich as it may be, but in the series *Lettere di Levante*—the correspondence between the government and the Ragusan envoys in the Ottoman lands—finds additional material with substantial data on loans, credits and economic activities.

Aware that the prosperity of Ragusa was closely connected to the situation in the Ottoman Empire, Moroni introduces time frames that are related to the Ottoman presence in the region. It was not by chance that he situates the “Golden Age” in the last years of the Sultanate of Suleiman II (pp. 69 and seq.) and dedicates important pages to the crisis which succeeded the war of the Second Holy League and the consequent “drop of trade” (pp. 107 and seq.). Everything changes in what Moroni calls “the crucial thirty-year period” (p. 165): after Lepanto, the recomposition of Venetian economic strategies—which, as shown in the case of the opening of the *Scala* of Split in

1591, will be based on the Jewish merchant network—will tackle the Ragusan supremacy in the Balkan trade.

But if in the last decades of the Cinquecento “the total value and volume of business activities tend gradually to downsize”, nevertheless—according to Moroni—the Balkan trade is “still largely under the control of Ragusan families” (p. 166). The key word to understand this supremacy is family: Gozze, Gradi, Cerva, Bobali, Sorgo and Bona are the protagonists of those years and in such an environment the frame most commonly used to carry out economic activities is that of “brotherly companies”, i. e. companies composed of members of the same family (p. 168). Among all, the Gozze family is the one to rise, and Moroni writes interesting pages about its activities and *modus operandi*. In the thirty-year period under consideration, Raffaele of Marino Gozze is the biggest Ragusan investor, with a turnover exceeding 160,000 ducats, and it is no wonder that the Gozze family is the only one that will recover from the crisis from the end of the sixteenth century (p. 174).

In the meantime, however, new players emerge, usually merchants operating in the most important Balkan cities—Belgrade especially, but also Sofia, Buda, Trnovo—that are associated with Ragusan investors. Moroni does not forget to emphasize that, despite the fact that those are “merchants of various geographical, social and cultural background”, we can notice “already uniform behaviour patterns” (p.179): to some of these emerging figures the author dedicates beautiful pages titled “stories of families and merchants” (pp. 190-200).

From the 1620s on, the decline will come, as testified by rich data on the activities of the Ragusan merchants in the Balkans and on the investments of big merchant-bankers of the Republic in Italian *Monti*, two phenomena that show a nearly perfect synchrony. To aggravate the situation, maritime trade faced a crisis, also as a result of the strong expansion of the North European shipping in the Mediterranean. All this within the general context of strong contraction of the Ottoman economy, which drags with it the fortune of the Republic: “Ragusa, too, is now living a crisis which the Turkish Empire has been living.” (p. 229).

And nothing better than this statement can be used to close these short notes. Moroni has written a book that put Ragusa in the centre of the History, the great one. For that, we should be grateful.

Stefano d’Atri

Vjera Katalinić, *Sorkočevići, dubrovački plemići i glazbenici / Sorkočević, Dubrovnik’s noblemen and musicians*. Zagreb: Muzički informativni centar Koncertne direkcije Zagreb, 2014. Pages 165.

This bilingual Croatian-English volume, the latest work of Vjera Katalinić, contains the fruit of the many decades of her research of eighteenth-century Croatian music and is a contribution to the commemoration of the 280th birth anniversary and 225th death anniversary of Luka Sorgo (more commonly referred to as Sorkočević), one of the most prominent members of the Sorgo noble family of Dubrovnik. Besides Bajamonti, Sorkočević is by far the most significant Croatian musician whose work falls within the mainstream of European pre-Classicism and Classicism. By drawing a detailed picture of the atmosphere and the general social landscape of the epoch which glorified the power of the spirit and self-consciousness of human mind, the book provides an abundance of