

***OBLITI PRIVATORUM PUBLICA CURATE:
A RAGUSAN POLITICAL EPIGRAPH
AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND***

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ABSTRACT: This article examines a Latin inscription *Obliti privatorum publica curate* from the Rector's Palace in Dubrovnik. It affords basic coordinates for its dating, analyzes the message in the context of the Ragusan political epigraphy, and casts light upon an inscription in the Minor Council Hall, unknown until now. The maxim is being discussed as a theme and topos of diverse philosophical works, political speeches and sermons from antiquity (Plato and Cicero) to the Enlightenment, with emphasis on its reception and adaptation in the Ragusan milieu. On the basis of the identical inscriptions from the Basel Town Hall (H. Holbein the Younger, 1521/2) and Italian village of Lustrola (1690), the author concludes that this political adage did not stem from Dubrovnik, but was probably borrowed from a florilegium widely popular in Europe of the day.

By the time the inscription *OBLITI PRIVATORUM PVBLICA CVRATE* (Figure 1 and 2) had been discovered under a thick layer of lime during a reconstruction of the Rector's Palace in 1902,¹ Dubrovnik Republic was a thing of the

¹ Milan Rešetar, *Dubrovačka numizmatika*, I. [Posebna izdanja SKANU, 48]. Sremski Karlovci 1924: p. 525, n. 2. In his work published in 1884, Gelcich cited this inscription, though incorrectly, as his familiarity with it was based on oral tradition only (Giuseppe Gelcich, *Dello sviluppo civile di Ragusa ne' suoi monumenti istorici ed artistici*. Ragusa: C. Pretner, 1884: 43).

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Figure 1. Rector's Palace, former entrance to the Major Council Hall
(photograph: Nenad Gattin)



Figure 2. Rector's Palace, inscription above the entrance

past. In the nineteenth-century, the undertones of this political epigraph must have struck the Austrian governors of Dubrovnik as suspicious and potentially dangerous, for they had it removed. The new government was probably irritated by its air of republicanism, a reminder of the autochthonous statehood—a tradition that was to be extirpated in order to integrate Dubrovnik into a new Habsburg frame.

As a pregnant expression of civic virtue and republican values, this political maxim has been frequently cited ever since. Hardly can a popular text on the heritage of Ragusan statehood or political history of the Republic be found—printed, online or spoken—in which this motto does not appear. It is usually glorified as a home-made distillate of political reality,² a unique example of

² It is quite clear that we are dealing with an idealized self-portrayal of the Ragusan patricians and not reality. A long list of instances concerning neglect of public interests in favour of private benefit and ambition speaks for itself; on the fifteenth century, see Zdenka Janeković Römer, *Okvir slobode: dubrovačka vlastela između srednjovjekovlja i humanizma*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1999: pp. 28-29, 163-176; on political and factional struggle in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries see Stjepan Čosić i Nenad Vekarić, »Raskol dubrovačkog patricijata«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku* 39 (2001): pp. 307-377. In his defence of the hydrotechnical expertise of the River Arno, Ruder Bošković quotes our inscription and adds: "...e la gente dice, che spesso si fa tutto il rovescio, come se vi si dicesse *Obliti publicorum privata curate*." (Ivica Martinović, »Sloboda u promišljanjima Rudera Boškovića«, in: *Synthesis theologica: Zbornik u čast p. Rudolfa Brajičića SJ u povodu 75. obljetnice života*, ed. Marijan Steiner. Zagreb: Filozofsko-teološki institut Družbe Isusove, 1994: p. 490, n. 25; My thanks to Ivica Martinović, friend and colleague, for having drawn my attention to Bošković's citation). The Republic days also witnessed a popular version of the maxim, maliciously reworded into: *òbliti privarom puhajte kurvići* (Luj Vojnović, *Zapisci plemenitog gospara Marina Marojice Kaboga 1706-1707*. Dubrovnik 1900: V, n. 1).

Ragusan political prudence and its republican ideals, still capable of stirring the mind of anyone who dwells on the society he lives in. Widely used but just as equally abused, the inscription has been wedged into the narrow space of the “myth of Dubrovnik”.

Basing this article on the findings of certain authors as well as my own, targeted and random discoveries, I aim to show that the tradition from which this inscription stems is of much earlier date, deeper rooted and of broader significance than local.

Status quaestionis

Although quoted in most diverse contexts over the years, only recently have more serious attempts at highlighting the proverb’s sources and models been made.

In his enquiry on the sources of the two much-cited Ragusan proverbs carved in stone, Neven Jovanović, classical philologist, concludes that the inscription in the Rector’s Palace echoes Cicero’s words from his famous work *On Duties (De officiis)*.³ Referring to Plato, Cicero addresses the statesmen thus: *Omnino qui rei publicae praefuturi sunt, duo Platonis praecepta teneant, unum, ut utilitatem civium sic tueantur, ut, quaecumque agunt, ad eam referant obliti commodorum suorum, alterum, ut totum corpus rei publicae curent, ne, dum partem aliquam tueantur, reliquas deserant. Ut enim tutela, sic procuratio rei publicae ad eorum utilitatem, qui commissi sunt, non ad eorum, quibus commissa est, gerenda est.*⁴

Jovanović has pinpointed three things here. On the one hand, by stripping one of the cornerstones of the “Ragusan myth” and proving it a mere spolium, he has placed this maxim in a more adequate framework: its origins were to be sought elsewhere, as, apparently, it was an outgrowth of a much broader and farther reaching European phenomenon. From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, “recycling” of classical models and reference to the antique tradition of political thought were designed not only to demonstrate the classical knowledge of an author or milieu, but also to link one’s work to the stream of thought on society and its constitution which was rooted in antiquity and stretched to the end of the Ancien Régime. On the other hand, Jovanović has

³ Neven Jovanović, »Ezop u Dubrovniku«. *Zarez V/114* (2003): p. 44, reprinted in Neven Jovanović, *Noga filologa*. Zagreb: Naklada Pelago, 2006: pp. 105-108.

⁴ *De officiis*, I, 85; shorter in: N. Jovanović, *ibidem*.

drawn attention to the intertextual nature of the philosophical source (Cicero quotes Plato, who, again, speaks through Socrates). Lastly, Jovanović stresses that Plato's thought has been sophisticatedly styled into a "carvable form" to be cut in the stone portal but also in the memory of those in power, whom it ultimately concerned.

Jovanović's interpretation on the plausible sources of the Ragusan epigraph was soon challenged by art historian Joško Belamarić, who showed that the Ragusan inscription and Cicero were many more layers apart than suggested. By introducing Cardinal Bessarion into the discourse, a figure to which Belamarić has already devoted fine pages,⁵ the author casts light upon the existence of a more explicit textual model of the Ragusan epigraph in Cardinal Bessarion's well-known letter to the Doge and the Senate of Venice in 1468. In it, Bessarion states his conditions regarding the donation of his personal library to the Church of St Mark in that it was to remain complete and accessible to the public, but also expresses his admiration for the political virtues of the community of his bestowal,⁶ although a modern reader is more inclined to notice a rhetoric of gratitude for the shelter Venice had offered him.⁷

Bessarion's letter, as underlined by Belamarić, contains a phrase almost identical to that of the Ragusan inscription: ... *privatorum commodorum obliti*...⁸ In an attempt to establish a closer link between the Ragusan epigraph and this epistle as its possible model, Belamarić much too boldly declares that "Bessarion's famous letter to the Doge was printed many times and as such circulated widely..."⁹ In true fact, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the letter saw its first publishing.¹⁰ Yet as proof of its circulation and copying in humanistic circles, at least five transcripts of different hand have been preserved.¹¹ Then again, the text may have reached Dubrovnik

⁵ Joško Belamarić, »Cenni per un profilo della storia e dell'arte medioevale e rinascimentale della città di Traù (Trogir)«, in: *Tesori della Croazia restaurati da Venetian Heritage Inc.* Venezia: Multigraf, 2001: p. 23.

⁶ Joško Belamarić, »Još o dva slavna dubrovačka zapisa u kamenu«. *Zarez* V/115 (2003): p. 45.

⁷ Critical edition: Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsman: Funde und Forschungen*, vol. III, *Aus Bessarions Gelhertenkreis*. Paderborn, 1942; reprint Aalen-Paderborn: Scientia Verlag and Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967: pp. 541-543. The relevant fragment is also cited by J. Belamarić »Cenni per un profilo«: p. 23.

⁸ J. Belamarić, »Još o dva slavna dubrovačka zapisa u kamenu«: p. 45; L. Mohler, *Aus Bessarions Gelehrtenkreis*: p. 542.

⁹ J. Belamarić, *ibidem*.

¹⁰ This according to authoritative documentation of Mohler's critical edition (L. Mohler, *Aus Bessarions Gelehrtenkreis*: p. 541, in the note).

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

thanks to Juraj Dragišić, to whom, in his own words, Bessarion was “the father and patron, who encouraged him towards knowledge of human and divine things”.¹² But this assumption, however, is undermined by the fact that the Ragusan inscription is not unique (as will be examined later on in the article): even if Bessarion’s words had been widely disseminated, it is hardly likely that they were rephrased three times in an exactly the same manner.

Notwithstanding, “Bessarion’s hypothesis” continues to intrigue because it calls into question Cicero’s tradition itself. Apparently, Belamarić assumes that in this case Bessarion, zealously devoted to the study of Plato, did not vary Cicero’s words but drew most directly on Plato’s *Republic*. This could be true, for it was thanks to a group of learned emigrants from Byzantium, with Bessarion as member, who revived the interest in Plato. Cicero’s works were translated into Latin, thus being available to humanistic circles to study and promulgate. The first to engage in translating *Politeia* into Latin were Manuel Chrysoloras and Uberto Decembrio, to be completed and revised by Pier Candido Decembrio around 1440.¹³ The second translation by Marsilio Ficino several decades later (first printed in 1484), established itself as a standard: in the sixteenth century alone it saw 24 issues and no doubt became the most popular source for the study of Plato’s philosophy.¹⁴ Thanks to the translations, the latter in particular, Plato’s *Respublica* stepped out of the narrow circle of Neoplatonists versed in Greek and became available to a broader scholarly readership of Europe.¹⁵ The mention of Plato’s book among the will items of Đivo Gozze from 1502¹⁶ as well as Stjepan Gradi from 1507¹⁷ testifies to its

¹² Ivica Martinović, »Humanist, filozof i teolog Juraj Dragišić«, *Dubrovnik* N.S. 6/4 (1995): p. 214; on Dragišić’s activity in Dubrovnik, *ibidem*: 218-226.

¹³ Paolo Viti, »Decembrio, Pier Candido«, *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 33. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1987: p. 495. According to Eugenio Garin, there actually were four versions of the translation completed within a span of several years (*Medioevo e Rinascimento: Studi e ricerche*. Bari: Laterza, 1980: pp. 235-236).

¹⁴ James Hankins, »Some Remarks on the History and Character of Ficino’s Translation of Plato«, in: *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone: Studi e documenti*, vol. I, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki editore, 1986: pp. 287-288.

¹⁵ A. Grafton showed that Plato in Ficino’s translation was a true best-seller (Anthony Grafton, »The Availability of Ancient Works«, in: *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1988: p. 786).

¹⁶ Đivo Gozze demands that Plato’s *De re publica*, borrowed by his uncle Marin, monk on Mljet, be returned to its owners—the sons of the late Lucijan Bona (Bariša Krekić, »*Miscellanea* from the cultural life of Renaissance Dubrovnik«, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 20 (1994): p. 143).

¹⁷ “Platone De Republica, scripto a penna in carta de papiro” (Constantinus Jireček, »Der ragusanische Dichter Šiško Menčetić«, *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 18 (1896): pp. 50-51).

circulation in the Ragusan milieu. A well-preserved *cinquecentina* of the collected works of Plato in Ficino's Latin translation belonged to the private library of the Ragusan patrician family Giorgi-Bona.¹⁸

Clearly, Bessarion had no need for translation and that of Ficino emerged much later than his letter. For the purpose of my topic, here is a quotation from Ficino's long-consulted "standard" translation of Plato: *ibique patet, re vera, legitimum principem non sui ipsius sed eius qui sub ipso est, commoditatem respicere*.¹⁹ It is evident that the "Ragusan" maxim does not lean on the part of Cicero's fragment derived from Plato, but on Cicero's words which introduce it.

A borrowing from Thucydides?

Duško Živanović, historian of architecture, drew my attention to another possible source of the Ragusan maxim. According to him the inscription may have been modelled after a sentence from Pericles' last speech to the Athenians in the second book of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War.²⁰

By the first half of the fifteenth century Italian intellectuals grouped around Greek immigrants had shown great interest in Thucydides' work.²¹ Yet it was thanks to the famous translation of Lorenzo Valla in 1448-1452 that his work became accessible to wider readership. Although greatly criticized for his poetic licence, for over four centuries Valla's translation remained a standard reading on Pericles and the war between Athens and Sparta: 25 manuscripts are known to survive, the first print in 1483 being followed by several editions, nine of which in the sixteenth century.²² Indeed, in terms of popularity

¹⁸ "Platonis Opera Omnia, Marsilio Ficino interprete. Lugduni: apud Antonium Vincentium 1548, in foglio, ben conservato e legato" (Slavica Stojan, *U salonu Marije Giorgi Bona*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 1996: p. 134).

¹⁹ Plato, Politeia I, 347D. *De republica vel de iusto*, in: *Omnia divini Platonis opera translatione Marsilii Ficini...* Basileae: In officina Frobeniana 1532: p. 540.

²⁰ Duško Živanović, *Dubrovačke arhitektonske studije. Oblici i tipologija*. [Posebna izdanja, knj. 659]. Beograd: SANU, 2005: p. 144. I am grateful to the author for having drawn my attention to his assumption and kindly provided me with the relevant lines in Thucydides.

²¹ Stefan Meineke, »Thukydidismus«, in: *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, 15/3. Stuttgart-Weimar: Verlag J.G. Metzler, 2003: p. 484.

²² Marianne Pade, »La fortuna della traduzione di Tucidide di Lorenzo Valla con una edizione delle postille al testo«, in: *Niccolò V nel sesto centenario della nascita*, ed. Franco Bonatti and Antonio Manfredi. [Studi e Testi, 397]. Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2000: pp. 255, 257; S. Meineke, »Thukydidismus«: p. 484.

Thucydides was far from rivalling the foremost writers of the antiquity, and the reception of his work lagged well behind that of Cicero's writings.²³

In his speech to the Athenians, the last to be recorded by Thucydides, Pericles addresses the demoralized and weary men, exhausted by wars and pestilence. He appeals to their strength not to despair over their wretched lives, to resist the trials of war and to set their gaze towards the common good.²⁴ The sentence we should focus on in Valla's translation reads as follows: *Sepositoque priuatarum rerum dolore debemus salutem publicam uindicare, huic belli labori, ne magnus sit, neue aliud contingat, resistentes.*²⁵ Precedence of common over private is also explicitly stated here although not in the form of two juxtaposed benefits likely to tempt an individual but as an articulate ethical demand to accept one's own suffering if it contributes to the common cause. Despite certain analogies with the inscription in the Rector's Palace (*res privatae – salus publica*), the underlying message of Pericles' speech diverges in meaning from that of the Ragusan maxim. It is more than clear that our inscription has not been borrowed from Valla's translation.

Curiously, Thucydides' original words bear closer meaning to the Ragusan maxim than Valla's translation.²⁶ The fact that Renaissance Dubrovnik witnessed several experts in Greek²⁷ leads us to speculate on whether someone among them may have translated Thucydides' words, offering thus an actual model for the inscription *Obliti privatorum*? The answer, however, can only be negative: had there been a local translation of Thucydides, it could not have

²³ S. Meineke, »Thukydidismus«: p. 484.

²⁴ II, 61.

²⁵ *Thucydidis Atheniensis historiographi De bello Peloponnesium Atheniensiumque libri VIII, Laurentio Valla interprete, et nunc a Conrado Heresbachio ad Graecum exemplar diligentissime recogniti.* [Köln]: Eucharius Ceruicornus, 1527: p. 51; *Thucydidis De bello Peloponesiaco libri VIII, ex interpretatione Laurentii Vallae, ab Henrico Stephano iterum recognita.* Francofurti: apud heredes Andreae Wecheli, 1589: p. 119. Both editions interpret this part of the text in the same manner.

²⁶ *Thucydidis Historiae*, vol. I, ed. Carolus Hude. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1915: p. 153. Special thanks to Dr. Neven Jovanović for his generous assistance.

²⁷ In 1549 bookseller Antonio de Odolis had a number of Greek books in stock: Homer, Hesiod, Greek grammar (Constantin Jireček, »Beiträge zur ragusanischen Literaturgeschichte«, *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 21/3-4 (1899): pp. 513-514). John of Ragusa was the owner of Thucydides' History in the original, but acquired it in his late years, when he no longer visited Dubrovnik; the manuscript is currently housed at the University Library of Basle; see André Vernet, »Les manuscrits grecs de Jean de Raguse (†1443)«, *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 61 (1961): pp. 95-96. See also Zdenka Janeković-Römer, »On the influence of Byzantine culture on Renaissance Dubrovnik and Dalmatia«, in this volume.

appeared in Switzerland or Italy in exactly the same wording. I shall refer to this later in the article. Thus one should go back to Cicero's initial "trail".

Obliti privatorum publica curate in the context of Ragusan political epigraphy

Let us first try to determine the time-frame of our inscription. It is certain that the text could not have been inscribed on today's spot before the construction of the Council Hall connected to the Palace through a door on the first floor (1490-1492).²⁸ Cvito Fisković assumed that the epigraph was carved during the reconstruction of the Rector's Palace after the great earthquake of 1667.²⁹ In truth, on that occasion it was only re-carved. Valuable information on the existence of the same inscription before 1667 is provided in a letter of July 1669, written by Stjepan Gradi to his friend Luka Zamagna. In it, Gradi expresses accumulated discontent against Ragusan feebleness and inertia ("with the sails tied and no steering wheel, they merely row as if they did not wish to make a hasty arrival"), and that, according to eyewitnesses, the citizens show little concern for the public good, as best seen on the damaged and shattered (*rovinato and concusso*) state of the wall on which the inscription *Obliti privatorum publica curate* stands.³⁰ Judging by this statement, even if the older portal had been replaced with a new one,³¹ the text is likely to have already stood on the spot before 1667.

Little is yet known with certainty about the person who picked and styled the text for this but also for some other Ragusan political epigraphs (on the Lovrijenac Fortress, on the arch in Divona's atrium and other public spaces). We do know, however, that in 1520 Elias Cerva, *poeta laureatus*, phrased the

²⁸ For a short account of the construction of the Council Hall see Cvito Fisković, »Nekoliko dokumenata o našim starim majstorima«. *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* 52 (1949): pp. 199-200. On the years of the construction of the Rector's Palace after the explosion and fire in 1463 see Bariša Krekić, »Dubrovnik's Struggle Against Fires«, in: idem, *Dubrovnik: a Mediterranean Urban Society, 1300-1600*: VI, pp. 22-23.

²⁹ Cvito Fisković, »Pozornice Držičevih igara«, in: idem, *Baština starih hrvatskih pisaca*, vol. I. Split: Matica hrvatska Split, 1971: p. 313.

³⁰ MS 327, f. 42v (Library of the Franciscan Monastery in Dubrovnik); in almost literal translation this part is provided by Stjepan Kراسић, *Stjepan Gradić (1613-1683) život i djelo*. Zagreb: JAZU, 1987: p. 146.

³¹ On the construction of the portal in the upper atrium see Katarina Horvat-Levaj and Relja Seferović, »Baroque Reconstruction of the Rector's Palace in Dubrovnik«. *Dubrovnik Annals* 10 (2006): p. 108. The fact that the stonemason got carried away and miscarved the first word as OLBITI, later corrected, adds spice to the story.

votive epigraph in Divona,³² while the two fifteenth-century epigraphs in the portico of the Rector's Palace and on Onofrio's Fountain owe their wording to Cyriacus Pizzicolli of Ancona, humanist and classical devotee, during his visit to Dubrovnik.³³ Rather, the selection and adaptation of a particularly apt text was probably assigned to one of the Ragusan schoolmasters or chancellors,³⁴ posts which, in the period between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century, were usually filled by learned foreigners. We also know that it was chancellor Niccolò de la Ciria who suggested the iconographic presentation of Esculap's capital and authored its epigraphic comment in the portico of the Rector's Palace.³⁵ Further, apart from several apt epigraphs phrased for the school building, teacher Lorenzo Guidetti was the author of an epigraph which stood at the foot of the statue of St Blaise in one of the state halls, most likely in the Criminal Court Hall (around 1469).³⁶

³² Igor Fisković, »Kipar Beltrand Gallicus u Dubrovniku – sudionik "Posvećenja grada" oko 1520.«. *Peristil* 37 (1994): p. 52.

³³ Stanko Kokole, »Cyriacus of Ancona and the Revival of Two Forgotten Ancient Personifications in the Rector's Palace of Dubrovnik«. *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996): pp. 237-243; Antun Šoljić has shown that in the official copy of the Dubrovnik Statute from the fifteenth century Cyriacus, in his own hand, entered the draft of these inscriptions (Antun Šoljić, »O ranoj renesansi u Dubrovniku«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku* 40 (2002): pp. 138-142. While describing Ciriaco's character, F. Saxl could not resist to qualify him, and rightly so, as adventurer and political agent (Fritz Saxl, »The Classical Inscription in Renaissance Art and Politics«. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 4 (1941): p. 30).

³⁴ This was common practice in Europe of the time. For example, the iconographic programme and the pertaining inscriptions in the antechapel of the *Palazzo Pubblico* in Siena (beginning of the fifteenth century) owe their concept to chancellor Cristiforo di Andrea and messer Pietro de' Pecci, lawyer and teacher (Nicolai Rubinstein, »Political Ideas in Siennese Art: The Frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo di Bartolo in the Palazzo Pubblico.« *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): p. 190).

³⁵ Filip de Diversis, *Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnika*, ed. Zdenka Janeković-Römer. Zagreb: Dom i svijet: p. 149; A. Šoljić, »O ranoj renesansi u Dubrovniku«: p. 134. On his service see Constantinus Jireček, »Die mittelalterliche Kanzlei der Ragusaner«. *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 26 (1905): p. 194; laudation of Diversi was published by Vitaliano Brunelli, »Philippi de Diversis... Situs aedificiorum...«. *Programma dell'I.R. Ginnasio Superiore in Zara* 23 (1879-1880): p. 8.

³⁶ Francesco Caglioti, »Un giovane retore fiorentino a Ragusa e i suoi 'tituli' per immagini: Lorenzo Guidetti«, in: *Quattrocento Adriatico. Fifteenth-Century Art of The Adriatic Rim*. Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1996: pp. 217-218. Caglioti holds that the position described as *in Auditorio et Curia Publica Racuseorum* refers to the Council Hall, although I am inclined to think that it was the hall of the Criminal Court: in the codex in which the epigraph was written down, an entry *et Foro causarum civilium* was subsequently replaced by *et Curia Publica Racuseorum*, suggesting that the author was not quite certain which courtroom was ment. Further, the Criminal Court was established in 1459 (Nella Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde: Kaznenopravni sustav Dubrovačke Republike u XVIII. stoljeću*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 1997: p. 39), its hall most probably being constructed in the 1460s. The text of the epigraph has survived in autograph in one of Guidetti's codices (Biblioteca Corsiniana, fund Niccolò Rossi, n. 230); it was published in Caglioti's cited work.

It should also be mentioned that besides *Obliti privatorum* the Rector's Palace houses yet another inscription most certainly borrowed from the works of the Roman orator. A niche located above the ground-floor passage that once connected the Palace with the Council Hall (until the latter was burnt down in the nineteenth century) contains a stone statue, the work of Master Pietro di Martino of Milan from the mid-fifteenth century.³⁷ An angel-like figure still stands on a semi-capital, with *IEPA BOYAH* carved in it, holding a scroll with a lengthy Latin text on the patrician virtues to be invoked, strewn with a couple of Cicero's syntagms from his work *On Laws (De legibus)*.³⁸ Stanko Kokole has submitted a plausible explanation of its authorship: it was the earlier-mentioned humanist Ciriaco Pizzicolti (Cyriacus Anconitanus) in the 1440s.³⁹ The text from the angel's scroll and that from the Council Hall portal form a pair, not only because they both quote Cicero, but because their addressees are the same: the Senate from Ciriaco's text is actually the Ragusan Major Council.⁴⁰ Ragusan patricians, passing through the Rector's Palace to attend the meetings in the Council Hall, were thus twice greeted by Cicero.

But these were not the only quotations from classical sources adorning the interior of the Ragusan state buildings (Rector's Palace and Council Hall).⁴¹ According to a record from the official manuscript of the Dubrovnik Statute from the fifteenth century, the Hall of the Minor Council contained proverbs ascribed to Solon and Lycurgus: '*Quod tacitum velis nemini dixeris. Si enim tibi silentium non imperasti, quomodo ab aliis speras*' Solon. '*Ad libertatem, et decus nati sumus, qua aut retinenda sunt, aut cum illis simul moriendum.*'

³⁷ Cvito Fisković, »Petar Martinov iz Milana i pojava renesanse u Dubrovniku«, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 27 (1988): pp. 137-138; idem, »Pojava renesanse u Dubrovniku u djelu Petra Martinova iz Milana«, in: *Likovna kultura Dubrovnika 15. i 16. stoljeće*, ed. Igor Fisković. Zagreb: Muzejsko-galerijski centar, 1991: pp. 99-104; Igor Fisković, »Skulptura u urbanističkom usavršavanju renesansnog Dubrovnika«, *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti JAZU u Dubrovniku* 26 (1988): pp. 61-62; S. Kokole, »Cyriacus of Ancona«: pp. 234-237.

³⁸ "PIO, IVSTO, PROVIDOQ(ue) RAG(useorum) SENATVI SACRA MENS:/ IVST(itiam), PIETATEMQ(ue) CIVNTO, VICIO [sic] VACANTO, CAETERIS SPECIMEN (sunto)" (S. Kokole, »Cyriacus of Ancona«: p. 234).

³⁹ S. Kokole, »Cyriacus of Ancona«: pp. 225-269. Cyriacus borrowed the Greek inscription from a statue on Thasos.

⁴⁰ The humanists liked to refer to the Ragusan Major Council as the Senate. For example, Diversi terms it as "Senatus generalis" (*Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnika*: p. 150), but from the description of its function, it is evident that he means the Major Council (erroneously S. Kokole, »Cyriacus of Ancona«: p. 234).

⁴¹ It is still obscure as to which inscription (from the Palace portico?) in the Illyrian/Croatian Ilija Cerva had in mind in one of his letters. See Stanislaus Škunca, *Aelius Lampridius Cervinus poeta Ragusinus (saec. XV)*. Roma: Edizioni Francescane, 1971: pp. 189-191.

Licurgus.⁴² The legendary legislators of Athens and Sparta, however, had nothing to do with these sayings. “Solon’s” proverb on the obligation of secret-keeping in fact derives from a text attributed to Seneca the Younger.⁴³ The proverb “of Lycurgus” on liberty and honour was actually copied from one of Cicero’s philippics.⁴⁴ The names of the ancient legislators were mentioned in the Ragusan epigraphs as symbols of a stern but just legal system of the Greek city-states, to which the Ragusan patricians wanted to refer.⁴⁵ The “authors” were thus linked to the proverbs into fake but semantically pithy messages, blending the Greek and Roman political heritage from a humanistic perspective.

In addition, by 1345 the old Hall of the Major Council had already been decorated with the frescoes rendering political message (*storie et picture*).⁴⁶ They may have depicted a certain iconographic programme of the Good Government, as was the practice in Italian communes.⁴⁷ These illustrations often included sayings addressed to the highest state officials in Latin,⁴⁸ or in vulgar (“Italian”) idiom.⁴⁹

⁴² *Manuali pratici del Cancelliere: Leggi e Istruzioni*, series 21.1, vol. 9a, f. 1v (State Archives of Dubrovnik).

⁴³ The text is identical except for the changed word order in two cases. Cf. Pseudo-Seneca, *De moribus*, www.thelatinlibrary.com/sen/sen.proverbs.html.

⁴⁴ “Ad decus et ad libertatem nati sumus; aut haec teneamus aut cum dignitate moriamur.” (M. Tulli Ciceronis in M. Antonium oratio philippica tertia, XIV.36).

⁴⁵ Lycurgus and Solon are also praised in the proemium of the Statute of Portoguraro near Venice (see Gherardo Ortalli, «La comunità e la sua norma: Portogruaro e la tradizione statutaria medievale». *Archivio Veneto*, ser. V, 155 (2000): p. 195). Solon is also depicted on one of the capitals of the Ducal Palace in Venice, with an inscription “Sol[one] uno dei sete savi di Grecia che die legge” (Tiziano Rizzo and Claudio Franzini, *I capitelli del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia*. Venezia: Libreria Filippi editrice, 1995: p. 110).

⁴⁶ Master Bernard was commissioned to paint the Council Hall; the work was obviously completed as requested, for he was paid in full. The fact that the Minor Council and the rector were responsible for providing the iconographic programme testifies to the political meaning of the paintings—outspoken or implicit (*Libri reformationum*, vol. I, ed. I.Kr. Tkalčić. [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, X]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1879: pp. 171-172).

⁴⁷ The most celebrated are the frescoes painted by Simone Martini and Ambrogio Lorenzetti in *Palazzo Pubblico* in Siena, and the frescoes of Giotto in *Palazzo della Ragione* in Padua (only partially preserved but documented). Bibliography on the fresco iconography in the halls of state in Italy is most ample. The list of most important works on the eleven preserved cycles from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance may be found in: Randolph Starn and Loren Partridge. *Arts of Power: Three Halls of State in Italy, 1300-1600*. Berkeley etc.: University of California Press, 1992: pp. 310-311.

⁴⁸ For example, the cycle of inscriptions in *Palazzo della Ragione* in Padua from the beginning of the fourteenth century (recorded in the fifteenth century), Eva Frojmovič, «Giotto’s Allegories of Justice and the Commune in the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua: a Reconstruction». *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 59 (1996): pp. 24-47.

⁴⁹ On the latter see Maria Monica Donato, «Immagini e iscrizioni nell’arte ‘politica’ fra Tre e Quattrocento», in: *‘Visibile parlare’: Le scritture esposte nei volgari italiani dal Medioevo al Rinascimento*, ed. Claudio Ciociola. Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1997: pp. 341-396.

Much has been written, analytically and synthetically, about the political iconography of the capitals and reliefs of the Rector's Palace and the Council Hall, which are related to our epigraph both materially and semantically.⁵⁰ For the benefit of my topic, it should be emphasized that many of the iconographic elements employed are genuine *loci communes*: The judgement of Solomon, for instance, was represented on the Ragusan capital but also on the capital of Ducal Palace in Venice,⁵¹ as well as on Giotto's frescoes in the *Palazzo della Ragione* in Padua (early fourteenth century).⁵²

We have thus established that the inscription *Obliti privatorum publica curate* was merely one in a collection of convenient maxims displayed in the "halls of state"—Rector's Palace and the Council Hall. Subsequent reconstructions and adaptations of the space showed little concern for the epigraphs in the interior, whereas, besides this inscription above the doorway, only two longer epigraphs in the Palace's portico and several shorter proverbs on sculptural representations have been preserved. I have not been able to determine as to when exactly our epigraph was installed, but I have reason to assume that it was carved above the door of the Major Council during the construction of the Hall—at the end of the fifteenth century or shortly after, for it was then that the main iconographic program for the state buildings was articulated.

But let us go back to the question of the origin of our text.

Models and tradition: from Plato and Aristotle to Montesquieu

Cicero's, or rather, Plato's thought on the priority of the public (common) before private, expressed in virtually the same manner as in the Ragusan inscription, can be traced in a number of works, from some medieval authors and humanists to the political philosophy of the Enlightenment.

The topos under investigation springs in political philosophy, initially within the idea that a good state rests upon the virtue of those who govern it. Drawing

⁵⁰ See Igor Fisković, »O značenju i porijeklu renesansnih reljefa na portalu Kneževa dvora u Dubrovniku«, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 26 (1987): pp. 195-228; idem, »Skulptura u urbanističkom usavršavanju renesansnog Dubrovnika«: pp. 43-61; idem, »Povijesni biljezi dubrovačkog identiteta«, *Dubrovnik N.S.* 4/4 (1993): pp. 92-98; Z. Janeković Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 383-387, with bibliographic references.

⁵¹ T. Rizzo - C. Franzini, *I capitelli del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia*: p. 112.

⁵² E. Frojmovič, »Giotto's Allegories of Justice and the Commune«: pp. 30-31.

on the antiquity (Plato, Cicero, Seneca), medieval thinkers create a catalogue of political virtues, describe their qualities and mutual relations so that those holding public offices (as well as the ones who entrust them with such responsibility) could know what to aspire to.⁵³ In these treatises, our quotation (ascribed to Plato or Cicero) usually appears in the chapters on Fortitude (*Fortitudo*), or Magnificence (*Magnificentia*) as its component, two virtues orientated towards higher, common goals. It was as early as the first half of the twelfth century that Guillaume de Conches, in his work best known under the title *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, quoted Cicero's exact words: ...*duo precepta Platonis tenenda sunt prelati: unum ut utilitatem civium sic tueantur, ut quecumque agunt ad eam referant, obliti commodorum suorum; alterum ut totum corpus civitatis curent, ne dum partem aliquam tueantur, reliquas deserant.*⁵⁴ Practically the same quotation can be found in *Summa virtutum*, treatise by Guillaume Pérault (Guillelmus Paraldus) from the mid-thirteenth century): ... *Primum est ut sic utilitatem circum [recte: civium] tueantur ut quecumque agunt ad eam [sc. magnificentiam] referant comodorum suorum obliti... Hec duo documenta Platonis recitat Tullius in libro De officiis.*⁵⁵ This, again, was borrowed by Giovanni da Viterbo's *Liber de regimine civitatum* (ca. 1253),⁵⁶ and by Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini in his popular and much-translated "encyclopedia" - *Li livre dou tresor* (the 1260s).⁵⁷

The idea that common welfare should be given priority over private benefit fed on the bitter political experience of factional struggles in the Italian communes, while with the discovery and translation of Aristotle's works it

⁵³ For a synthetic survey see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. I. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1978: pp. 44-48; idem, »The Vocabulary of Renaissance Republicanism: A Cultural longue-durée?«, in: *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995: pp. 87-110. On this specific genre, the treatise on vices and virtues, see Richard Newhauser, *The treatise on Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular*. [Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental, vol. 68]. Turnhout: Brepols, 1993.

⁵⁴ *Das Moraliu dogma philosophorum des Guillaume de Conches*, ed. John Holmberg. Uppsala, 1929: p. 36; on the author and work see ibidem: pp. 5-9.

⁵⁵ Guillelmus Paraldus, *Summa aurea de virtutibus et viciis*. Brixiae: Angelus et Iacobus de Britannicis de Pallazolo fratres, 1494: fol. non num. (I, 7 De fortitudine, Decima pars de fiducia et magnificentia).

⁵⁶ Q. Skinner, »Vocabulary«: p. 97.

⁵⁷ ... *Li uns est k'il gardent le profit as citeins, k'il reportent a çou quanqu'il font, et n'entendent pas a lor propre preu...* (*Li Livres dou Tresor de Brunetto Latini*, ed. Francis J. Carmody. Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948: p. 267).

gained strength from a new source.⁵⁸ Namely, in his discussion of various constitutional forms, Aristotle distinguished them according to the criterion of whether they strived to secure the common good or the ruler's private interests.⁵⁹ In the first Latin translation of *The Politics* (around 1250), this antithetical pair is formulated as *communiter conferens* (= *politia recta*) and *conferens principum solum* (= *politia vitiata, despotica*).⁶⁰ Scholastic thinkers dealt with the topos of the common good before personal considerations within discussion on constitutional organisation and forms of government.⁶¹ The same idea could be traced in the variations of Thomas Aquinas on the theme from Aristotle (before 1274): *bonum commune... est melius et divinius quam bonum unius*,⁶² also, in the treatise *De bono comuni* (c. 1302) by the Florentine preacher and political writer Remigio de' Girolami: *Bonum comune indubitanter preferendum est bono particulari*,⁶³ and quotations made by Giovanni de Cermenate (c. 1315), chronicler and historian: *... ubi sic vivitur, quod vitio civium commune bonum propriae utilitati postponitur, potentiores ... tyrannicum imperium in urbe provocent*.⁶⁴ Among the medieval lawyers devoted to this topic, one should mention the renown Bartolo da Sassoferrato and his *Tractatus de regimine civitatis* (c. 1355/7), in which he writes that the ruler acts properly *quando considerat bonum publicum magis quam proprium*.⁶⁵ Although weakened by deep factional struggles, Italian cities still harboured the image of the "golden age", when the common good was placed before private benefit, a motif often employed in political speeches.⁶⁶ In the Renaissance, our topic remained in the focus of the thinkers concerned with the republican form of government,

⁵⁸ For the framework see Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought I*: pp. 49-60.

⁵⁹ *Politika*, 1279a.

⁶⁰ *Aristotelis Politicorum libri octo cum vetusta translatione Guilelmi de Moerbeka*, ed. Franciscus Susemihl. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1872: p. 177.

⁶¹ Cf. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought I*: p. 60.

⁶² Cited from N. Rubinstein, »Political Ideas in Sieneese Art«: p. 184.

⁶³ *La 'teologia politica comunale' di Remigio de' Girolami*, ed. M. C. de Matteis. Bologna 1977: p. 3; cited from E. Frojmovič, »Giotto's Allegories«: p. 40, n. 65.

⁶⁴ Cited from Nicolai Rubinstein, »Marsilius of Padua and Italian Political Thought of His Time«, in: *Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. J.R. Hale, J.R.L. Highfield and B. Smalley. London: Faber and Faber, 1965: p. 61.

⁶⁵ Bartholus de Saxoferrato, *Tractatus de regimine civitatis*, in: idem, *Commentaria*, IX. Roma: Il Cigno Galileo Galilei - Istituto giuridico Bartolo da Sassoferrato, 1996 [reprint of the edition Venezia 1529]: p. 151.

⁶⁶ For example, in a political speech from 1466. See G. Pampaloni, »Nuovi tentativi di riforme alla Costituzione Fiorentina visti attraverso le consulte«. *Archivio storico italiano* 120/4 (1962): pp. 523-526.

particularly those from Florence and Venice.⁶⁷ The topos on the common before private interest was tackled by Girolamo Savonarola in his *Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze* (1497),⁶⁸ and somewhat later by Niccolò Machiavelli in his *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (1513/9),⁶⁹ and by Francesco Guiccardini in *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze* (1521/4).⁷⁰ The topic showed no signs of losing its appeal, as two centuries later in his treatise *On the Spirit of Laws* (*De l'Esprit des Lois*), published in 1748, Montesquieu writes: *On peut définir cette vertu [politique], l'amour des lois et de la patrie. Cet amour, demandant une préférence continuelle de l'intérêt public au sien propre, donne toutes les vertus particulières; elles ne sont que cette préférence.*⁷¹

Alongside those who had approached the topic of the public and private interests in a broader, "Aristotelian" manner, there were authors who remained faithful to Cicero's syntagm, quoting his exact words or making but minor alterations. After all, Quentin Skinner has clearly shown that, contrary to the trenchant opinion, the Renaissance political theories on civic virtues were far less grounded on Aristotelianism, but drew considerably on the classical tradition of Cicero and Seneca, medieval philosophers (G. de Conches, G. Péroul et al.), and the so-called "pre-humanists" (rhetoricians) from the thirteenth century.⁷² Thus the fact that humanists continue to quote and paraphrase Cicero's warning should not come as a surprise. In this light, Matteo

⁶⁷ See Quentin Skinner, «Political Philosophy», in: *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1988: pp. 416-423.

⁶⁸ ...*Quel governo è buono, il quale con ogni diligenza cerca di mantenere ed accrescere il bene comune... e quel governo è cattivo, che lascia il bene comune, ed attende al suo bene particolare...; ... bisognerà che [li cittadini] amassino il ben comune della città, e che quando sono nelli magistrati, ed altre dignità, lasciassino da canto ogni loro proprietà e le specialità delli parenti ed amici, ed avessino solamente l'occhio al bene comune...* (Girolamo Savonarola, *Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*. Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1963: pp. 8, 44).

⁶⁹ ... *perché non il bene particolare ma il bene comune è quello che fa grandi le città. E senza dubbio, questo bene comune non è osservato se non nelle repubbliche.* (*Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, II, 2, in: Niccolò Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Mario Martelli. Firenze: Sansoni editore, 1971: p. 148).

⁷⁰ Guiccardini, *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, ed. Alison Brown. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1994: p. 48.

⁷¹ Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois*. Paris: Gallimard, 1970: p. 80 (Livre IV, chapitre 5. De l'éducation dans le gouvernement républicain).

⁷² Quentin Skinner, «Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher», in: *Malerei und Stadtkultur in der Dantezeit: Die Argumentation der Bilder*, ed. Hans Belting and Dieter Blume. München: Hirmer Verlag, 1989: pp. 85-86, 98-99.

Palmieri and his work *Vita civile* (first half of the fifteenth century) is a good illustration: *Stando in così fatto proposito, fermi [ogni buono cittadino che è posto in magistrato] nell'animo suo dua singulari amaestramenti di Platone, sommo di tutti i philosophi (!), i quali sono riferiti da Marco Tullio Cicerono in questo modo dicendo: 'Coloro che disiderano fare pro alla republica, sopra ogni altra cosa ritenghino dua singulari precepti di Platone, l'uno che l'utilità de' cittadini in tale modo difendano che ciò che fanno si riferisca a quella, dimenticando ogni proprio commodo....'*⁷³ Following in his footsteps some fifty years later, Venetian humanist Domenico Morosini addresses those holding public offices: *Cura publicas res ad publicam omnium utilitatem non ad privatam tuam....*⁷⁴

In the political thought spanning from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, Cicero's words echoed in numerous works discussing forms of government, political values and civic virtues. Reference to them could be filled with new examples, but here it is far more important to understand that the tradition in which the same ideas and words were being repeated more or less faithfully remained unbroken from the twelfth until the seventeenth century, if not longer. The "common before private" motif features in diverse genres: from philosophical treatises on politics to booklets on virtues, from handbooks for governors and rulers to political speeches but also epigraphs. The topos is quoted and paraphrased by major philosophers and their epigones alike. It is to this *corpus* that the Ragusan epigraph carved in stone owes its identity.

The participation of Dubrovnik in this tradition may be interpreted from two aspects. On the one hand, at least few of the mentioned texts are known to have circulated in Dubrovnik. The fact that in Renaissance Dubrovnik, as elsewhere in Europe, Cicero's *De officiis* was among the best-sellers is evidenced by the purchase orders of Antonius de Odolis from Brescia, Ragusan bookseller, who, in 1549, acquired six copies of the work, their number no doubt being the result of his sound commercial judgement.⁷⁵ Besides Plato's Republic, Ragusan humanistic circles were well acquainted with the works of Aristotle

⁷³ Matteo Palmieri, *Vita civile*, ed. Gino Belloni. Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1982: pp. 149-150.

⁷⁴ Domenico Morosini, *De bene instituta re publica* (end of fifteenth-early sixteenth century), cited from Margaret L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986: p. 144, n. 160.

⁷⁵ C. Jireček, »Beiträge zur ragusanischen Literaturgeschichte«: pp. 513-514.

as well.⁷⁶ The will of the Ragusan Dominik from 1430, archdeacon and canon of the Split Church, apparently itemizes the earlier-mentioned work by Guillaume de Conches (*liber de vita et moribus filosoforum*), who quotes Cicero's words from *De officiis*.⁷⁷ A *Summa de viciis et virtutibus*, a work of the genre in which the theme of the common before individual is often discussed, was sent from Dubrovnik to Venice in 1376,⁷⁸ while a century later Nikola Gondola bequeathed several manuscripts pertaining to the same subject to the Lokrum Abbey.⁷⁹ An incunabulum with the earlier mentioned Pérault's treatise *Summa aurea de virtutibus et viciis*, in which Cicero's words were quoted literally, is still kept at Dubrovnik's Scientific Library.⁸⁰ Finally, Montesquieu's work *On the Spirit of Laws*, among the last in this unbroken line, had its readership in Dubrovnik at the sunset of the Republic.⁸¹

Yet, there was more to it than mere reception. The motif was quoted, inserted and paraphrased. The topos on the priority of the public over private concerns reflected in the works of the local authors, finding roots in the Ragusan political discourse, variations on it being recurrently inserted into texts, speeches, sermons and correspondence. Stating that public office should be filled by a competent person, with or without his consent, in his treatise Nikola Gozze quotes Aristotle's thought that common interest should come before personal considerations.⁸² In his first letter after the earthquake, Stjepan Gradi expresses

⁷⁶ Among the bequests of Đivo Gozze from 1502 was "Ethica de Aristotele" that was to be returned to its owner (Bariša Krekić, »On the Latino-Slavic cultural symbiosis in late medieval and renaissance Dalmatia and Dubrovnik«. *Viator* 26 (1995): p. 330); as early as 1418 the personal library of Pietro de Camurata, physician in the service of the Dubrovnik state, included Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* (Dušanka Dinić-Knežević, »Biblioteka Petra, dubrovačkog lekara s početka XV veka«. *Godišnjak Filozofskog fakulteta u Novom Sadu* 17 (1974): pp. 45-46).

⁷⁷ D. Dinić-Knežević, »Biblioteka Petra«: pp. 41-42.

⁷⁸ B. Krekić, »On the Latino-Slavic cultural symbiosis«: p. 329.

⁷⁹ "... liber intitulatus de vitiis, liber intitulatus de virtutibus ... tractatus de speciebus virtutum ..." (*Diversa notariae*, series 25, vol. 53, ff. 148v-149r, State Archives of Dubrovnik).

⁸⁰ Guilielmus Paraldus, *Summa aurea de virtutibus et viciis* (see note 47), Scientific Library in Dubrovnik, Inc. 68. A single ex libris points to the Ragusan Residence of the Jesuit Society as its owner. The incunabulum entered the library in the course of the seventeenth century, most definitely before 1684, when the Residence advanced into Collegium.

⁸¹ S. Stojan, *U salonu Marije Giorgi Bona*: pp. 144, 146, 151; N. Lonza, *Pod plaštem pravde*: p. 303.

⁸² ... *Nam communis utilitas propriae uoluntati praeferenda est...* (Nicolò Vito di Gozzi, *Dello Stato delle Repubbliche secondo la mente di Aristotele con essempli moderni*. In Venetia: Presso Aldo, 1591: p. 110).

hope that something good must come out of such massive destruction, that being the concern for the common good (*ben comune*), as individual interest is closely connected to it.⁸³ In his master reconstruction plan of Dubrovnik, Gradi is even more explicit in his emphasis of the “necessity... to concern ourselves more with the common than the private” (*la necessità, che hora habbiamo di pensare al comone più che al proprio*).⁸⁴ The inscription *Obliti privatorum* was mentioned in a sermon by a Jesuit Bernard Zuzzeri (Zuzerić) in the first half of the eighteenth century,⁸⁵ but also by the scientist Ruder Bošković in 1783, who described it as “the most beautiful inscription imaginable” (*la più bella iscrizione immaginabile*).⁸⁶

The maxim *Obliti privatorum publica curate* is thus derived from the ancient and rich heritage of European political thought that found fertile ground in Dubrovnik to root and to grow. But does its fruit have an authentic Ragusan flavour? Should Dubrovnik be credited for the copyright of this aphorism?

Dubrovnik inscription and its two European counterparts

In my search for the iconographic context of the elements of the Ragusan state ritual, I came across a reproduction of an identical pair of the Ragusan epigraph (see Figure 3):⁸⁷ above the head of Justice (*Iustitia*), depicted with its traditional attribute—sword, stands a plaque which reads: O VOS REGENTES / OBLITI PRIVATORVM / PVBLICA CURATE.⁸⁸ The presentation comes from Basel and was part of a larger iconographic cycle painted by Hans Holbein the Younger in 1521/2 in the Great Council Hall (*Grossratssaal*) of the new

⁸³ *Pisma opata Stjepana Gradića Dubrovčanina Senatu Republike Dubrovačke*, ed. [B. Bogišić and] Đuro Körbler. [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium, vol. 37]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1915: p. 104.

⁸⁴ *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. III.2, ed. Jovan Radonić. [Zbornik za istoriju, jezik i književnost srpskog naroda, vol. III.10]. Beograd: Srpska kraljevska akademija, 1939: p. 734.

⁸⁵ *Besjedde duhovne oza Bernarda Zuzzeri Dubrovčanina Drusche Jesussove recene prid Skupstcinom Dobre Smaerti u Zaerkvi S. Ignazia u Dubrovniku*. Dubrovnik: Andria Trevisan, 1793: p. 97. Zuzzeri was mentioned already by J. Belamarić, »Još o dva slavna dubrovačka zapisa u kamenu«: p. 45.

⁸⁶ I. Martinović, »Sloboda u promišljanjima Rudera Boškovića«: p. 490 and n. 25.

⁸⁷ Otto Rudolf Kissel, *Die Justitia: Reflexionen über ein Symbol und seine Darstellung in der bildenden Kunst*. München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 1984: p. 105.

⁸⁸ After the second E in the word REGENTES, as if there stood an I (REIGENTES), perhaps as a reflex of the long ‘e’ in metric reading.



Figure 3. Drawing of the fresco depicting Justice from the Basel Town Hall in: Otto Rudolf Kissel, *Die Justitia: Reflexionen über ein Symbol und seine Darstellung in der bildenden Kunst*. München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1984: p. 105.

Town Hall.⁸⁹ The wall paintings soon fell into decay due mainly to dampness, and apart from several preserved and restored fragments, their original state is known to us on the basis of a few of the author's original sketches but also copies made by other painters.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Rudolf Riggenschach, »Der Grossratssaal und die Wandbilder Hans Holbeins d. J.«, in: *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Schweiz. Die Kunstdenkmäler des Kantons Basel-Stadt*, I, ed. C.H. Baer. Birkhäuser Verlag Basel, 1932 [reprint 1971]: p. 538; John Rowlands, *Holbein. The Paintings of Hans Holbein the Younger: Complete Edition*. Oxford: Phaidon, 1985: p. 55.

⁹⁰ J. Rowlands, *Holbein*: p. 56.

The Basel fresco programme was conceived so as to introduce the councillors to the ideals of good government, as traditionally presented in iconographic cycles decorating the central halls of state. It included the personifications of political virtues (*Iusticia, Sapientia, Temperantia*), as well as the scenes from the Old Testament and antique history as reminders of good governing and a warning against the age-old lusts for political power.⁹¹ Many of the depicted figures (*virii illustres*) are named to help decode the message, while some of the scenes are accompanied by proverbs on government, masterly incorporated into the artistic presentation.⁹² It was assumed that it was Bilde von Rheinau (Beatus Rhenanus), a celebrated figure of German Renaissance and European humanism, who actually suggested and elaborated the themes and textual additions to Holbein's frescoes.⁹³ Practically each of the maxims can be traced to its model as, for instance, Vulgate, Etymology of Isidore of Seville, *Ars dictaminis* by Thomas of Capua (early thirteenth century), Lactantius;⁹⁴ in most cases the text is almost identical to the original, the likelihood thus being that neither *Obliti privatorum...* does owe its phrasing to Beatus Rhenanus. This brings us back to the Ragusan part of the story. If Beatus Rhenanus were the "author", this would imply that the Ragusans "had copied" the Basel inscription from the (short-lived) original or had heard about it indirectly. The truth, however, should be sought elsewhere: the epigraph on Holbein's fresco and that on the Ragusan portal were derived from the same source.

Curious, yet solid proof of this assumption is also the existence of a virtually identical epigraph carved in one of the stone beams of a house in Lùstrola, a

⁹¹ R. Riggenbach, »Der Grossratssaal«: pp. 530-540; J. Rowlands, *Holbein*: p. 55.

⁹² By the choice of the cycle motif (*virii illustres*) with Latin titles, the Basel fresco fully shares the tradition of images and inscriptions of 'political art' of the Italian communes and republics. Cf. N. Rubinstein, »Political ideas in Sieneese art«: pp. 194-196; M.M. Donato, »Immagini e iscrizione nell'arte 'politica'«: pp. 341-396, especially pp. 349 and 379. It is worth noting that Holbein's Justice addresses those who rule (*O vos regentes...*) in exactly the same manner as Iustitia on the frescoes of Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo de Bartolo in *Palazzo Pubblico* in Siena: ... *vo' che reggiete...* (Furio Brugnolo, »'Voi che guardate...': Divagazioni sulla poesia per pittura del Trecento«, in: *Visibile parlare*: p. 320; M.M. Donato, *ibidem*: p. 369).

⁹³ R. Riggenbach, »Der Grossratssaal«: p. 533. There is no solid evidence for this. Rhenanus collaborated with Holbein on the preparation of the title pages of editions illustrated by the famous painter.

⁹⁴ Since I tried to trace the quotation sources by means of Internet search tools, they ought to be taken with reserve. Some sources, related to ancient authors only, have been established by Solomon Vögelin (see R. Riggenbach, »Der Grossratssaal«: p. 533, n. 1), while the citations from the Old Testament have been mentioned by R. Riggenbach (*ibidem*, pp. 581-582).

small village near Bologne. It reads *Obliti privatarum publica curate*, dated 1690.⁹⁵ It is uncertain as to how the inscription found its place in this house, the likelihood being that the beam was taken from a public building and incorporated into the present construction. Whatever the case, it is quite clear that the epigraph could not have been borrowed from Dubrovnik nor Basel.

Conclusion

In an attempt to establish the common source of the epigraph within the vast geographical triangle Basel-Dubrovnik-Lustrola and the time-frame: possibly the end of the fifteenth century and certainly before 1667 (Dubrovnik)-1521/2 (Basel) – 1690 (Lustrola), the only logical assumption is that this “aphorism” had already appeared in this form in a work available throughout Europe, and from which it must have been copied at different points in time and space. Although I have not been able to trace the exact source, I have reason to believe that the epigraphs were borrowed from a *florilegium*, widely popular collections of proverbs, classical as well as contemporary quotations.⁹⁶

The fact that the actual phrasing of the aphorism *Obliti privatarum publica curate* is not to be attributed to the Ragusans should in no way belittle its significance or affect its appeal. Stanko Kokole has pointed to most explicit borrowings on the iconographic presentations on the façade of the Council Hall. The relief of Fortitude (*Fortitudo*, c. 1491), for instance, was carved after *Forteza*, engraving on the Italian playing cards which came into use around 1465 (the so-called *Tarocchi del Mantegna*). The local artist must have been supplied with this model by a learned person familiar with the drawings and their meaning. It may have been a Ragusan educated in Italy, but more likely, a foreigner in public service, officially assigned to outline and prepare the allegorical programme of the state palace, the construction of which was well

⁹⁵ This inscription I found on the Web site of the local history enthusiasts (www.lustrola.it). I am grateful to Mr. Bruno Agosti from Lustrola for providing me with additional information on the epigraph.

⁹⁶ In 1549 Antonio de Odolis, Ragusan bookseller, had in stock four copies of *Dicta notabilia* and 7 copies of *Fior di virtù* (C. Jireček, »Beiträge«: p. 514). *Dicta notabilia* was a most popular florilegium containing citations of Plato, Aristotle, Terence, Seneca, Apuleius, Boethius and other famous authors (according to the catalogue on <http://www.iccu.sbn.it>).

under way.⁹⁷ The same formula, “imported source—local realisation”, could also have worked with the relief of the embraced Venus and Mars from the portal of the Rector’s Palace (c. 1464).⁹⁸ This is probably how our epigraph found its place in the Palace portal, its source circulating in one of the popular books citing Cicero’s paraphrase.

In any event, the Ragusan patricians who commissioned *Obliti privatorum publica curate* to be inscribed above the Hall entrance hardly concerned themselves with the idea of an original thought. Claims to “authorship” and “originality” characterize our rather than their sensibility. By choosing this particular maxim, as well as those on Lovrijenac and in Divona, the Ragusans witnessed knowledge and taste. Fostering the ancient and glorious traditions, they have displayed the ability to recognise and single out an elegant maxim conveying their own political ideals.

⁹⁷ Stanko Kokole, »A Relief of Fortitude and the ‘Tarocchi of Mantegna’ in Dubrovnik«, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 22 (1992) [= Prijatelj zbornik, vol. II]: pp. 21-30. The relief is housed within the lapidary collection of the Dubrovnik Museums.

⁹⁸ Stanko Kokole, »Venera i Mars na portalu Kneževog dvora: O porijeklu prvog mitološkog prizora ‘all’antica’ u kiparstvu ranorenesansnog Dubrovnika«, in: *Likovna kultura Dubrovnika 15. i 16. stoljeće*: pp. 122-123. The author’s conclusion that the motif was literally copied after the model is based on an apparent discrepancy between masterly conception and composition on the one hand and quite a modest realization on the other. See also I. Fisković, »O značenju i porijeklu renesansnih reljefa«: pp. 210-212.