

## The Woman in a Medieval Description of a City under Siege

The paper attempts to portray the figure of the medieval woman during a crisis involving a city under siege in Croatia's historical territory, based on a literary analysis of *Obsidio Iadrensis*, a work by an anonymous author which is considered one of the most valuable narrative sources for understanding 14<sup>th</sup>-century Croatian history, as well as two Split chronicles, *Historia Salonitana* (13<sup>th</sup> century) by Thomas the Archdeacon, and *A Cutheis tabula* (14<sup>th</sup> century). A comparison of linguistic and stylistic features in the latter works points to the possibility that parts of the text by Thomas the Archdeacon were copied in the chronicle *A Cutheis tabula*. Several medieval Dalmatian statutes are furthermore consulted, as well as the epic poem *Judita* by Marko Marulić. The aim of this research is to examine unresolved issues that accompany the intriguing and mysterious, yet still insufficiently researched work *Obsidio Iadrensis*.

### 1. Introduction

The topic of this paper is the motif of the woman in medieval descriptions of a city under siege with a focus on a late medieval text by an anonymous author, *Obsidio Iadrensis*, about the Venetian siege of Zadar in 1345/46, which according to historians Nada Klaić (1976: 402) and Neven Budak (1983/84: 353) is considered one of the most valuable narrative sources on 14<sup>th</sup> century Croatian history. Furthermore, according to Budak (1983/84: 353) it is also one of the few, but high quality works dealing with the Renaissance-era Croatia. We have no information on the Croatian redaction of the work, apart from those found in the text itself. We do not know who wrote the text, nor when, where and for whom. All that is known is that the text had been commissioned, as the anonymous writer stated in a letter to the identified client, which was inserted between the prologue and beginning of the description. In the letter, the author stated that two reasons had prompted him to record the event: the first was the repeated request of the distinguished person to whom the letter was directed, while the other was the author's wish to preserve for posterity the Venetian crimes perpetrated during the siege, so that the coming generations would know about them. The original manuscript has not been preserved. The closest to the non-existent and apparent

archetype is the Zagreb manuscript<sup>1</sup> from 1532, which is held in the Archives of the Croatian Academy of Arts and Science, while Croatian historian Ivan Lučić<sup>2</sup> first published the text in Amsterdam in 1666. The latter is based on the Vatican manuscript, which appeared later and is hierarchically at a lower level of authenticity. In 1747, the work was taken and printed by Schwandtner, and in 2007, Branimir Glavičić and Vladimir Vratović, together with their associates Damir Karbić, Miroslav Kurelac and Zoran Ladić, edited the long-anticipated critical edition of the work, based on the manuscript bequest of Veljko Gortan (Glavičić, Vratović, 2007). Apart from the listed manuscripts and editions, one additional copy has been preserved, the one transcribed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Zadar-based librarian and antiquities collector Domenico Ignazio Fraunberger, which is held in the Zadar Research Library.<sup>3</sup>

Previous investigations into the text's authorship did not produce any conclusive results, apart from the refutation of a hypothesis that had been formulated about the author's identity. Franjo Rački (1861: 559) was the first to underscore the work's historical significance, and he cautiously posited that Zadar Archbishop Nikola Matafar may have been the author. Nada Klaić (1976: 217) and Neven Budak (1983/84: 356) concurred with his suggestion, arguing that Matafar was a contemporary, witness, cleric, and a highly educated person of his time. Budak, however, noted that the thesis had to be verified by linguistic analysis and a comparison of the *Siege* to those texts known to have been written by Matafar. Olga Perić (2009:

<sup>1</sup> Franciscus de Chrysogonis was listed as the transcriber of the Zagreb manuscript, but that surname was struck through and Fumatis was written above it. Since the manuscript begins with words, "*Hic nempe liber de quibusdam valde obscuris fragmentis exscriptus et compillatus fuit*" ("Indeed, this book was transcribed and compiled from certain rather unclear fragments"), Veljko Gortan (1970: 104) concluded that the original must not have been a flawlessly compiled in whole. Nikša Lučić (1998: 503) composed an entry for the Croatian Bibliographic Lexicon on Franjo (Frane, Francesco) de Fumatis and his cultural and political activities. He was a solicitor from a Zadar noble family and one of the first collectors of sources for the history of Zadar, who transcribed the text of the *Siege* and edited the Statute of Zadar (*Statut Iadertina cum omnibus reformationibus in hunc usque diem factis*), which was printed in Venice.

<sup>2</sup> Ivan Lučić published the text *Obsidionis Iadrensis libro duo* alongside to his main work, *De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae*, and ten accompanying historical sources. *Obsidio* consists of thirty-six double-column large format pages, and it is divided into two volumes, the first with thirty-five and the second with twenty-three chapters. That the Vatican manuscript is a direct transcript of the Zagreb manuscript is confirmed by the blanks left by the transcriber when he could not read nor decipher an abbreviation, while corrections and deciphered abbreviations in the Vatican manuscript were added by another hand, most likely Lučić (Perić, 2009: 295). In 1673, when together with his *Inscriptiones Dalmaticae* he published corrections to the work *De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae*, Lučić also added twenty-six corrections for *Obsidio*, but even after those corrections, the edition was not sufficiently critical (Gortan, 1970: 105). Miroslav Kurelac wrote a monograph on Lucius (Kurelac, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> Domenico Ignazio Frauenberger. *Rukopis prijepisa djela Obsidio Iadrensis* (18<sup>th</sup> century). Zadar Research Library. Manuscript collection, sign. Ms. 735, pp. 4 – 288.

296) did so and concluded that there is no firm philological evidence of Matafar's authorship. In the preface to the aforementioned critical edition, Miroslav Kurelac and Damir Karbić (Glavičić, Vratović, 2007: 18) cited as possible authors Krševan Cigal, Mihovil Cedulin, and the archbishop's brother Dimitrije Matafar, and pointed out that the list of possible authors has not thus been exhausted.<sup>4</sup> Regarding the time when the work was written, Rački limited it to the period between 1347 and 1356, explaining that the author, being a supporter of Anjou policies, would have certainly mentioned the reactivation of the conflict in Dalmatia had he been alive at the time, or had the work not been completed. Despite the extant scholarly work on the topic,<sup>5</sup> the text is still accompanied by open questions, so that it remains an inexhaustible source for linguistic, historical, literary, and other investigations.

That dramatic siege of Zadar from 12 August 1345 until 21 December 1346 is described in another preserved work, the so-called *Cronica Iadratina*, an anti-Zadar text that celebrates the victory of Venice, written by an anonymous author in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The text is held in the Marciana National Library, and librarian Jacopo Morelli published its Italian translation in 1796. The *Cronica* was the private

<sup>4</sup> The opinion that Nikola Matafar is not the author of the work *Obsidio Iadrensis* was offered by Olga Perić in 2004 at the conference *Sedamnaest stoljeća zadarske Crkve* [Seventeen centuries of the Church in Zadar], on the occasion of the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Anastasia's martyrdom, held in Zadar 16-18 November 2004. In a discussion after her talk, Damir Karbić spoke about possible authors, which was published in 2007 in an introductory study for a critical edition which he co-authored with Miroslav Kurelac. Branimir Glavičić, in his own introductory study, wrote about the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the work, concluding that "*Obsidio Iadrensis* is a work of higher quality from the historiographic and literary, rather than linguistic standpoint" (Glavičić & Vratović 2007: 49).

<sup>5</sup> Franjo Rački (1861) was the first to point to this work's historical significance, he was the first to note Matafar as a possible author, he suggested the time its writing, and compared it to the *Cronica Iadratina*. Veljko Gortan (1969/70) published parts of the text with a parallel translation in a two-volume edition *Hrvatski latinisti* [Croatian Latinists], and in the paper he dedicated to *Siege* (1970) he stated his opinion on the author based on the data from the text, without mentioning his identity, and accentuated the linguistic importance of the work. Nada Klaić (1976) attempted doing the first more detailed historiographic analysis and authentication. Neven Budak (1983/84) considered the work one of the few, but high quality works of the pre-renaissance period in Croatia. Olga Perić (2007) continued and expanded the comparison of the *Siege* and the *Chronicle* initiated by Rački, and after conducting a linguistic analysis and comparison of the *Siege* to the only preserved work by Matafar, *Thesaurus Pontificum*, she abandoned the hypothesis on Matafar's authorship (2009). Branimir Glavičić and Vladimir Vratović, with associates Damir Karbić, Miroslav Kurelac, and Zoran Ladić, published a critical edition of the work based on the manuscript by Veljko Gortan (2007). Zoran Ladić (2009) pointed to various activities undertaken by members of medieval Church with respect to the political and military circumstances during the *Siege*. Emil Hilje (2011) used the *Siege* as the source for investigating the Venetian castle in Zadar, and Sandra Begonja (2014) used it to describe the organization and activities of the Venetian army. I have written about the linguistic and stylistic characteristics of the *Siege* in my master's thesis (2007), the question of authorship in my doctoral dissertation (2020), and the lexis (2012), linguistic and palaeographic properties (2019), supernatural events (2019), Croatian phonemes (2021) and onomastic properties (2021).

property of Girolamo Contarini. It was transcribed by Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski and Šime Ljubić, and the former gave the transcription to Rački. Gherardo Ortalli and Ornella Pittarello published the work in 2014 under the title *Cronica Jadretina. Venezia – Zara, 1345-1346*. The two chronicles, as they were called by Rački (1861), coincide and complement each other in the narration of military and political events, but they differ in the political orientation of their authors.

The importance of that Venetian military success, apart from the aforementioned *Chronicle*, an anti-Zadar text by an unknown author, was also commemorated in a large painting by Tintoretto called *Vittoria dell'esercito veneziano contro gli Ungheresi per la conquista di Zara 1346*, painted from 1582 until 1587 (Perić, 2007: 53).

The aim of this paper is to explore the extent to which the characterization of the medieval woman in situations of crisis during the siege of a city may help confront unresolved issues that complicate an understanding of the *Siege* by contemporary readers, or at least point to a direction for the future search for answers to the questions that accompany this interesting, intriguing, yet insufficiently investigated work. Research into descriptions of city sieges in medieval historiographic works that might be compared to the *Siege* encompassed the work *Historia Salonitana* by Thomas the Archdeacon, while *A Cutheis tabula* has proven to be invaluable among the works beyond the predetermined and established framework of cities under siege. Moreover, medieval Dalmatian statutes have also been consulted, in which the status of women is considered with respect to inheritance bequests, as well as the epic poem *Judith* by Marko Marulić.

## 2. The image of collective suffering

### 2. 1. The motif of the mother and grief

Women and children together with the frail elderly in a besieged city, with their panic-inducing fear of a ruthless enemy, with prayers to the Almighty for salvation from the grave threat to the city, especially the image of women pulling their hair and clawing their chests or on their knees wailing, or the image of the slaughter or capture of innocent children after the city has fallen into the enemy's hands, all have the function of intensifying the drama of the events being recounted and arousing the strongest possible emotions in the reader or listener, in order to solidify the historian's standpoint as accepted historical fact through a persuasive and authentic interpretation – if, to be sure, the event was real, as is the case in the *Siege*. That image of collective suffering in a besieged city as an expression of typical meaning that is called *topos* or *locus communis*<sup>6</sup> has not been confirmed in the *Siege*.

<sup>6</sup> Expressions of typical meaning (*topos* or *locus communis*) may serve various aims and shed light on the diverse qualities of human actions, and investigations of such expressions show that a medieval historian selects, interprets, and presents facts with the help of figures (Ivić, 1992: 57).

However, already at the beginning of this work, in the prologue, the anonymous writer employs the motif of the woman in a somewhat different context, but with the same aim of achieving the greatest possible impact in conveying the extreme distress of the besieged citizens, stating that the Venetians tore children away from their mothers' breasts: "How many innocents did they take, still breastfed by their mothers, and, in order to accomplish their intentions, drove them off to live in penury around the world!"<sup>7</sup> Just how sensitive and important this connection between a mother and her nursing infant or her toddlers in their first years of life is may be seen in attempts to protect it legally. Thus, the Statute of Split contains a provision stipulating that in case of a dispute between parents, any children under the age of three must live with their mother at their father's expense, while children over the age of three should live with and be supported by their father.<sup>8</sup>

In Thomas the Archdeacon's work *Historia Salonitana*,<sup>9</sup> children are snatched away from their mother's arms by rabid wolves. In chapter thirty-nine, titled "On Tatar cruelty" (*De seuitia Tatarorum*), one of four chapters in his "History" that contain some of the most beautiful and authentic pages about the affliction that befell Europe (Perić, Matijević Sokol 2003: 217), Thomas stated that after the Tatar devastation of the Hungarian Kingdom, three plagues – sword, hunger, and beast, i.e., is wolves – scourged the sinful Hungarian Kingdom incessantly for three years, thus bringing God's judgment upon it as severe retribution for its sins:

<sup>7</sup> Obsidio, I, 1, 116 (*Quot insontes adhuc ubere alitos ipsorum motionis casu ualuas per orbis girum erumnando direxerunt! Quot egregios, quot alterius conditionis, qui forte adhuc potirentur uita, spiritum naturę ad superiora fecerunt conuolare!* fol. 02v). This quotation was translated from the Croatian version available in *Obsidio Iadrensis/Opsada Zadra*, eds. Branimir Glavičić and Vladimir Vratović, with associates Damir Karbić, Miroslav Kurelac and Zoran Ladić (Zagreb, 2007), and the mark refers to the volume, chapter, and page where the example is located. The Latin text provided in parentheses was taken from the Zagreb manuscript as the oldest confirmation of the work, with the addition of the page number of the facsimile attached to the critical edition.

<sup>8</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 64. Legal provisions were supposed to protect mothers even in other situations, i.e., from violent adult children, husbands, or other men (Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut III, 138; Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut V, 38, Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, KS,19), and from illegal acts by an non-dependent son or husband for which the wife cannot be held responsible or accountable, nor even punished (Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut, II,20). Violence against women is the worst crime after murder (Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, VI,6), and violence against slaves or maids, or disreputable women or prostitutes was prohibited (Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, VI, 62-64). However, mothers could not, like fathers, inherit from their deceased children (Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, V,31, 32; Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, V,27, 28).

<sup>9</sup> On this historical work by Thomas the Archdeacon, Klaić (1976: 216) says that "it is the most valuable contribution of our cultural heritage in the Middle Ages," while Katičić (2003: 330) says that it is "the most significant historiographic achievement of the entire Middle Ages in the Croatian space, and beyond the borders of historiography, it is an expression of an educated and thinking person unrivalled at that time and place." Therefore, it would not have been odd if writers quoted from the *Historia* or used it as a source of solutions for new textual demands.

After that, a multitude of rabid wolves surfaced as if from the devil's grotto, craving only human blood, attacking not from ambush anymore, but openly invading homes and snatching little children from their mothers' arms. They not only attacked children, but also armed men in packs and tore them apart with their sharp fangs. Thus, the three aforementioned afflictions – sword, hunger, and beast – scourged the entire Hungarian Kingdom incessantly for three years, making it pay a great punishment for its sins by God's judgment.<sup>10</sup>

In his chronicle known under the title *A Cutheis tabula*, an anonymous historian from Split's Cutheis family<sup>11</sup> seemed to have copied Thomas' descriptions of the afflictions that befell Split in 1348. The descriptions are identical and emphasize the same motifs:

Countless voracious wolves roamed about the city walls at night, howling and thirsty for human blood, not hidden in ambush anymore, but rather openly invading cottages and snatching children from their mothers' arms, (and) not only children, but also attacking armed men, assembled in packs, tearing them apart with their cruel fangs and devouring many dead bodies taken from their graves. They resembled not wolves nor beasts, but demons.<sup>12</sup>

The author of the *Siege*, unlike the *Cutheis*, does not exhibit linguistic or stylistic congruence with the description by Thomas the Archdeacon; on the contrary, it appears that he sought in the latter's work a way to express and underscore the Venetian crimes perpetrated against Zadar's inhabitants, which he wanted to preserve for posterity. In his work we find the extremely emotional motif of infants snatched from their mothers' arms, while he substituted the real wolves mentioned by Thomas with Venetians, but only after explaining in the preceding sentence that the Venetians had attacked Zadar without cause as the callous wolf seizes a lamb: "Although they had not found in it any evidence, nor anything close to error, they attacked it like a merciless wolf attacks a lamb."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The text was translated into English from the Croatian version available in Perić & Matijević Sokol, *Toma Arhidakon. Historia Salonitana* (Split: Književni krug, 2003), 255 (*Post hec uero rabidorum luporum multitudo, quasi de diaboli cauerna emersit, qui nonnisi humanorum sanguinem sitientes, non iam occultis insidiis, sed palam irrumpebant in domos et de matrum gremiis paruulos rapiebant; nec solum paruulos, sed ipsos etiam armatos uiros facto agmine inuadentes seuis dentibus lacerabant. Tribus ergo cladibus antedictis, uidelicet ferro, fame, fera totum regnum Hungaries continuato triennio flagellatum ex diuino iudicio penam suorum expendit non mediocriter peccatorum.* Ibid. 224).

<sup>11</sup> Klaić (1976: 216) argued that the writer might have been a priest due to the explanations for the causes of all afflictions that had befallen Split as God's punishment in the 1350s.

<sup>12</sup> *Legende i kronike. A Cutheis tabula*, 192.

<sup>13</sup> *Obsidio*, I, 1, 116 (*in praesenti ciuitate illi imponebant nullamque argumentum aut alicuius speciem erroris in ea comperientes, sicuti lupus immesericors rapit agnum.* fol. 02v).

The comparison to sheep, shepherds, and wolves is a device, or *similitudo*, which sheds light on human actions by referring to typical meanings of benign or criminal behaviour (Ivić 1992: 49). Its source is the Bible, and it is rather common in the Archdeacon's work.<sup>14</sup> We can see a contradictory representation of Zadar's inhabitants, which is a consequence of listing, one after another, the two topoi also present in the work of Thomas the Archdeacon. Zadar's residents are compared to the lamb due to their benign character, while the malicious Venetians are wolves. The author may have known that wolves had snatched children from their mothers' arms, so he ascribed that to Venetians. Just as wolves attacked the errant Hungarian Kingdom as divine retribution, so too was wayward Zadar punished by God for the lowly character of its citizens. The inhabitants of Zadar are at simultaneously good and evil, and that dual character of its citizens<sup>15</sup> that became part of the text may have reflected the political divide in the city during the siege, which was not sufficiently elaborated by the author.

That existing narrative procedures and modalities from which medieval historians learned (since the medieval exploration of history was a great narrative abridgment of knowledge<sup>16</sup>) were consciously abandoned by the anonymous author in his interpretation of events, that he intentionally dismantled common topoi when composing select elements into a new portrayal, perhaps for higher credibility, might be demonstrated by the replacement of yet another motif: that of beating one's breast. Women beating their breasts is a common motif in descriptions of collective suffering, as in the work of Thomas the Archdeacon ("Oh, how dolorous was the sight of unfortunate women who pulled their hair, beat their breasts and

<sup>14</sup> Thomas the Archdeacon compares the good to good shepherds, the evil, the profligate, and the licentious to attacking wolves, and the helpless to an untended flock, so that Archbishop Lovro takes care of his believers *sicut bonus pastor super gregis suis*; Thomas speaks identically about himself, while people from Cetinje are *rapaces lupi*. Sheep and wolves were additionally employed to interpret the Tatar invasion and the Hungarian defeat, which may be reduced to meanings based on similarities: the Hungarians behave as cowards when confronted by a brutal threat. Similar acts and similar organization have a similar linguistic expression which points to the real driving force of history: the Creator or the eternal nemesis. By repeating similar comparisons, one expresses the persistence of meaning (Ivić 1992: 37, 48, 49, 50).

<sup>15</sup> The character of medieval personality is constant and represents the sum of good and bad traits that are in conflict, and the trait that wins determines character. An evil man is sinful and commits sinful acts, and sin is followed by punishment. Therefore, for a narrative of a medieval act it is important to determine the character of the actor which explains the outcome of the work (Ivić 1992: 145). Gurević (1983: 306) concluded that in medieval times there was no global personality, but a sum of independent traits that composed character.

<sup>16</sup> The medieval attribute of history is "*Historia est narratio rei gestae*." The act (*res gesta*) is not an unquestionable given, but a construction, the result of cognitive processes and a natural conclusion drawn from the source based on culturally set premises; and the narration (*narratio*) of selected works that compose the history is shaped by generally accepted rhetorical, logical and theological procedures (Ivić, 1992: 12, 15).

struck their cheeks!”<sup>17</sup>), or in *Cutheis* (“Oh, how sorrowful were the days when one would see women pulling their hair and beating their breasts and knees. Oh, how loud were the howls and cries that rose to the sky!!!”<sup>18</sup>). However, in the *Siege*, it is the shocked, bitter, and cowed Zadar troops, betrayed by their own men, who do so: “the distraught began losing their resolve and beat their breasts. They must have been quite bitter knowing that their own men had committed such an imposture, such an atrocity.”<sup>19</sup>

Using the most appropriate literary procedures at his disposal for the description of events of interest, the author seems to have moved from the ordinary and delved more deeply into human spirituality, which also resulted in the focus on emotions or certain human traits in the titles of individual chapters.<sup>20</sup> Aiming to respond to new demands, as shown by the above examples, the text surpasses the boundaries of pre-set interpretative models and – seeking solutions for new situations and events as well as the influx of new notions and the more complex emotions that accompany them – transforms itself on the way to becoming what we today understand under the term “text.”

## 2. 2. *The motif of the widow and happiness*

The motif of the woman mentioned in the prologue has the function of depicting and transmitting to the reader or listener the feeling of turmoil and grief caused by the Venetian crimes committed during the siege. However, the author also used the motif of the woman to display contrasting emotion, an indescribable happiness, a collective joy caused by the arrival of Louis in Zadar. In the seventh chapter of the second volume, “On the King’s benevolence and his descent to the bulwark” (*De benignitate regis et ipsius descensu penes Sticatum*), the joy that overwhelmed the citizens is described quite vividly:

<sup>17</sup> *Historia Salonitana*, 37 (*Heu quam triste erat spectaculum miserabilium mulierum crines lacerantium, pectora genasque tundentium!* Ibid. 36).

<sup>18</sup> *Legende i kronike*, 193.

<sup>19</sup> *Obsidio*, I, 20, 180 (*Innocentes vero oppidi stupefacti ammittunt vires percutiunt pectora. Nimia amaritudine torqueri videntur telem dolum et perditionem a suis factam fore.* fol. 32r).

<sup>20</sup> Emotions and human traits in titles: On the joy that overwhelmed the inhabitants of Zadar because of a battle between two parties (*De gaudio, quod Iadertini conceperunt de quadam pugna habita inter pars* I, 16); On the sorrow of the inhabitants of Zadar over a lost fortress, on one of their misdeeds and on the construction of another bulwark (*De dolore Iadertinorum ammissionis castris et eorum quodam facinore ac confecione alterius sticati* I, 21); On the immense grief of the inhabitants of Zadar upon the receiving of the king’s letter (*De inextimabili consolatione Iadertinorum, de susceptione regalium littararum* II, 2); On the king’s benevolence and his descent to the bulwark (*De benignitate regis et ipsius descensu penes Sticatum* II, 7); On ingratitude (*De ingratitude* II, 8). Although the similarity between the titles in the *Siege* and *Historia* (*De... Qualiter...*) is obvious, in *Historia* only one such title has been confirmed, the title of the thirty-ninth chapter dedicated to the cruelty of the Tatars (*De seuitia Tatarorum*).



“Indeed, flutes and trumpets blare, bells resound, and various musical instruments can be heard. Dances and cavalry games with lances are performed throughout the city and all of the common people, unfortunate widows and parents who lost their children, removed their mourning clothes and donned their festive attire for great consolation.”<sup>21</sup>

On one side there are Venetians and grief, on the other Louis and joy; on both sides there is the woman, as the mother who loses her child due to the Venetians and a widow who feels joy again because King Louis is coming to liberate the city. The status of medieval widows was not favourable, which can be seen from the statutory provisions according to which they inherited only what their husband left them in his will. Without a will, the wife was not included in the inheritance, but she could dispose of her husband’s belongings unless she remarried or fornicated.<sup>22</sup> A remarried woman could not be the executor of a will or children’s tutor, nor could she marry off her sons or daughters.<sup>23</sup> She was not allowed to sell or alienate property, unless her husband consented to this in his will.<sup>24</sup> The deceased’s belongings and jewellery were inherited by the children,<sup>25</sup> and everything a wife possessed during the marriage was considered her husband’s property.<sup>26</sup> Kept women and mistresses could inherit only a limited sum of money.<sup>27</sup> However, a wife retained her dowry even if she remarried, although she could not freely dispose of it because “it is generally beneficial that women do not lose their dowry because, should they become poor, they could easily find themselves in danger of carnal or spiritual transgression.”<sup>28</sup> The dowry was supposed to ensure financial security and could be used only for food, for payment of ransoms for her husband or sons held in captivity, or for her daughter’s dowry, and could be assigned to someone as an inheritance, in which the husband had the right of precedence.<sup>29</sup> A

<sup>21</sup> *Obsidio*, II, 7, 230 (*Certe clangunt tybicines et tubę, et nolę ad stornium pulsant plurimaeque musicorum instrumentorum genera citarizant. Coreę astilidiaque equestria per vrbem uagant discurrendo et uniuersus mediocris populus, miserabiles uiduateque femine ac orbatu parentes elegicas exuunt vestes nuptialesque nimio assumunt solatio.* fol. 55r).

<sup>22</sup> Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut, III, 37, 122, 141; Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 24, 29, 35, 36; Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, V,16, 17; Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, V, 14, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut, III, 93; Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 28; Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, V,49; Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, V,13, 42.

<sup>24</sup> Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut, 2, 119; Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, III, 59.

<sup>25</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 51.

<sup>27</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 32.

<sup>28</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, LXXII.

<sup>29</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, III, 24; Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, IV, 26; V,12, 51; Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, IV, 18; V, 9.

wife could use her husband's property under the condition of merging her dowry into it.<sup>30</sup> From the list of reasons why a wife could not be her husband's guarantor one can identify the medieval attitude toward women and their qualities, "for due to the weakness of woman's nature, those women might end up in misery or poverty at the fault of others,"<sup>31</sup> and so there were provisions "wishing to help the fragility and ineptitude of women,"<sup>32</sup> "wishing to take care of women who, upon seduction of men, often entranced with excessive love, deprive themselves of their own property and sadly renounce it,"<sup>33</sup> and "wishing to protect women for their instability and ignorance."<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, in statutes we do find provisions stipulating that a wife is entitled to a half of the marital estate, though in most cases those provisions were added later.<sup>35</sup>

Interestingly, the only non-fictional character in the work – Vladislava, who owned the castle of Knin and who attempted to resist Louis' ambitions – is mentioned as the mother of Ivan or the widow of Nelipac.<sup>36</sup> She appears at the beginning of the description of the event in which the author states that King Louis, after his father Charles died, sent a great army commanded by *Ban* Nikola to the Croatian territories, intending to recoup the losses of his predecessors. Although in this campaign the *ban* was not able to capture the Knin castle, held by Vladislava and her son Ivan, after a bold offensive by Louis' army on neighbouring Spas Hill, the apprehensive Vladislava nonetheless sued for peace with the *ban* and signed a treaty. However, when the king wanted to take possession of the surrendered castles, Vladislava changed her mind. The infuriated king arrived in the territory of Bihać with a large army and received the frightened Croats, granting pardons to Ivan and his mother, although they, as the author states, had already deceived him twice.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Vladislava is deceitful, untrustworthy, and unreliable, because she had violated the agreement concluded with *Ban* Nikola. In his work *De planctu ecclesiae*, written around 1330, Spanish Franciscan Alvaro Pelayo

<sup>30</sup> Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut III,141; Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, V,41; Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, V, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, IV, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Grubišić 1982, Šibenski statut, IV, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Kolanović & Križman 1997, Zadarski statut, III, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, IV,16.

<sup>35</sup> Frangeš 1998, Splitski statut, R,101; Čepulo 2011, Paški statut, V,44.

<sup>36</sup> "[The castle of Knin] was then held by Vladislava, the widow of Nelipac of the Svačić clan, and her son Ivan," *Obsidio*, I, 3, 121 (*tunc possidebet Vladislava relicta Neliptii generationis Sवादचिह, cum Iohanne, eius filio*, fol. 04v), "Vladislava, on her own behalf and on behalf of her son," I, 3, 123 (*ipsa Vladisava pro se et pro sui nati*, fol. 05v), "Vladislava and her son," I, 3, 125 (*Vladislava et genitus eius Iohannes*, fol. 06r), "that Ivan with his mother," I, 4, 127 (*illumque Iohannem cum sua genitrice*, fol. 07v).

<sup>37</sup> *Obsidio*, I, 3, 121-124; fol. 04r-07r.

listed the aforementioned characteristics among the roughly two hundred vices of women, and that main document of clerical animosity toward women was further deepened by German Dominicans Henrik Insitoris and Jakob Sprenger in their work *Malleus maleficarum*, published in 1486. The *Malleus* instilled in the minds of the faithful a belief in the existence of witches as a real and major peril to the Christian world. The dishonest, irredeemable, and malicious woman is included among Satan's allies during the demonic assault just before the final apocalypse, recognized in the plague, starvation, rebellions, Ottoman invasions, and the Great Schism, which Christian culture has seen as a threat from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onward. By transforming spontaneous into planned fear, the political-religious authorities aggrandized danger and the number of internal and external enemies, including the woman among them (Delimo 1982: 287). Vladislava also fits into that image of the woman, being the only historical female character mentioned in the Siege.

### 3. *The woman as deus ex machina*

Apart from fulfilling the function of expressing basic contrasting emotions, such as sorrow and joy, the woman also fulfils the function of expressing contrasting human traits, which especially come to the fore in wartime situations, such as cowardice and courage. In chapter seventeen of volume two, entitled "On a conviction and battle against their enemies in which the inhabitants of Zadar were more dominant" (*De quadam iustitia et agone hostium, in quo Iadertini preualuerunt*), the Venetian captain, having seen that Zadar's forces had launched a small pirate ship which had been built for food shipments, fiercely pursued them with eight galleys, but eventually gave up without showing any courage, like a woman:

"The naval commander equipped eight galleys covered with linen so that they cannot be endangered by ballista arrows. With them, he set off after that pirate ship with all due haste, but he fled without showing any courage, like a woman. When he had approached it at almost three paces, he halted and hesitated to approach any closer."<sup>38</sup>

In the final, twenty-fourth chapter of volume 1, entitled "On a victory won by Zadar's forces over a tower built atop of two wide Mantuan ships" (*De quodam triumpho, quem Iadertini obtinuerunt de quadam turri laborata in duobus plathis Mantuanis*), during an attack by Zadar's forces against a Venetian ship, a woman appeared in the sea, with a weapon at her thigh, who wrested an oar from the

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<sup>38</sup> *Obsidio*, II, 17, 274 (*Ornant octo galleas capitaneus maris tectas lanei armis lausis ne of-fensionem balistę spiculorum paterentur, cum quibus audacter se mouit festinanter erga illum paronem, sed more femineo abscessit nihil probitatis ostensus et cum penes ipsum accessisset indistans ab eo fere trium passuum se stabiliuit propius mutauit accedere. fol. 70v*).

Venetian helmsman. The panic-stricken oarsmen leapt into the sea, and the Venetian fast ships in the vicinity did not come to its aid due to fear. The Venetians who remained on board were taken by the sea and the Zadar forces took control of the vessel and towed it to the city walls. The woman who appeared as *deus ex machina* decided on the winner:

“As the two sides fought each other, a woman appeared in the sea with a weapon at her thigh, who wrested the helmsman’s oar with her bare hands. At that moment it was apparent that the oarsmen, having seen that, began to gasp. The best they could do was to begin leaping into the sea. Five of them swam to other, smaller ships which were farther away. A handsome young man, who was found on that wide-deck ship, begged for his life, but the Zadar soldiers slew him without mercy. However, while the adversaries fought, none of the Venetian fast ships, perhaps because they were frightened, offered any assistance, so that all remaining hands on the ship were devoured by the sea. There were eighteen of them, all from Venice. The men from Zadar towed the ship with tower to the city, next to its walls.”<sup>39</sup>

The description of the maritime battle ends after this scene, and an unrelated description of rather unclear content follows, which leads to the middle of a conflict between Zadar forces and the Venetians on the city walls.<sup>40</sup> There is no mention of the woman who had helped the Zadar forces anywhere in the rest of the work, nor can we find a reaction by the author or the participants in the event. Commentary is absent because according to Andrea Zlatar, *visio* in the medieval system was subject to the method of allegorical interpretation; therefore, one

<sup>39</sup> *Obsidio*, I, 24, 200 (...*et quamdiu sic mutuo partes certantes visa est quedam mulier armata vsque ad femora, in mari sita et in in potentia duorum lacertorum remum gubernatoris violenter eripuisse. Deinde remigatores videntes spiritu deficere videbantur. Siquis melius poterat in magna pressura in mare saliebat. Quinque ex ipsis transnatarunt ad reliquas cymbas que aliquantulum longius distabant. Vnusquisque formosi aspectus iuuenis qui ibi in dicto platho repertus extitit qui postulans ne interimeretur sed laderitini nulla versi compassione letaliter fuit interfectus. Sed dum hic agone inter inimicos altercabatur nullus angromagus Venetorum forsane pauore perterriti presidium aliquod prebere curabatur sic quod omnes reliqui in dicto carabo existentes mari sunt conglutinati qui erant numero vltra duouiceni viri omnes natione Venetiarum. Ipsumque carabum cum dicta turri ipsi ciuitatem et iuxta menia vrbis deduxerunt...* fol. 43v).

<sup>40</sup> Such unrelated events within a chapter are quite idiosyncratic for the *Siege*. Occasionally the description is interrupted with an unrelated and often incomprehensible event, or a description is identified which extends over several chapters in broken form, or a description that occurs twice in a sequence, as if it was about two different events, with different dates. That points to the possibility that the *Siege of Zadar*, as received it in the form of the Zagreb manuscript, is not an integral work by a single author (Butić, 2020). Furthermore, Olga Perić also contended that it is difficult to say whether the transcriber of the Zagreb manuscript had a complete text in front of him, or he compiled it himself, as mentioned, from “certain ambiguous fragments” (Perić 2009: 296).

must reach the inner sense and meaning, or the truth accessible in a story, through interpretation (Zlatar 1989: 50). Philosophical writer Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius explained the use of myth in a matter under discussion by means of the gnosiological hypothesis – what cannot be understood by individual human senses (otherworldliness or transcendence first and foremost) may be presented through a story (myth or vision) and the neoplatonic understanding of the principle of analogy whereby the invisible structure of the cosmos is depicted with the help of symbols and images that correspond with the entire universe on the basis of analogical principles (Zlatar 1989: 49). The representation of the woman who helped the Zadar forces take a Venetian ship is a *visio* that is used to provide evidence of God's presence in the worldly events being described and his help to the people of Zadar.<sup>41</sup>

Although there is no apparent Christian intonation, the *mulier armata vsque ad femora* who appeared to the Zadar forces during the naval battle against the Venetians is reminiscent of apparitions of Christian female saints. The weapon resting against her thigh associate her with St Catherine, who lived in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Maximinus II, whom she boldly opposed, defending the Christian truth with knowledge, wisdom, and rhetorical skill and thus converting fifty emperor's learned men, who were put to death as a result, while she was beheaded. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, she was one of the most popular saints in Western Europe, and the *Life of St Catherine* was in fact written/transcribed at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the Gothic script in the Zadar area. Intended for the religious services of nuns in the Benedictine Convent of St Mary, it is one of the most beautiful works of Croatian medieval prose. Marko Marulić mentioned this saint and martyr of Alexandria in *De institutione bene vivendi per exempla sanctorum* ("Instructions on How to Lead a Virtuous Life Based on the Examples of Saints"), and she also appeared in Gasparotti's work *Cvet sveteh* (Lives of the Saints), in Part 4, under the title *Sitek Sv. Katarine Devicze, y Muchenicze* (Life of St Catherine, Virgin and Martyr). Gasparotti drew a comparison between Catherine and Judith (Fališevac 1970).

Judith served as a metaphorical reflection of Marulić's awareness of the danger posed to Dalmatia and other Croatian territories after the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia (1463), Herzegovina (1482), and the tragedy of the Croatian army in the Battle of Krbava Field (1493). By associating the actual circumstances surround-

<sup>41</sup> For more information about two supernatural events in the work *Obsidio Iadrensis*, which testify to the move from an allegorical description with ancient and Christian elements to a clear and unquestionable divine miracle, and the changes that the text underwent over the course of the Middle Ages on the way to the present-day understanding of the text, see D. Butić, "Natprirodno u djelu *Obsidio Iadrensis*", *Zbornik zadarski filološki dani 8* (Zadar; Sveučilište u Zadru, 2019), pp. 155-173.

ing the Ottoman conquest of Christian territories with the Old Testament story about the Bethulian widow Judith, who had killed Holofernes and thus saved the Israeli lands, Marulić conveyed the message that conquerors could be defeated by personal courage and confidence in God's aid (Marulić 2021: 207, 208). Even in Marulić's work the enemy is compared to a wolf.<sup>42</sup> Having taken the city, the enemy humiliated everyone, even women, who are publicly debased in front of their husbands and treated with derision and disgrace.<sup>43</sup> The people pray for mothers not to be left without their beloved sons and not to take their own lives because they cannot watch their sons being beaten and taken to slavery at some far-off place. Women cry because they will be enslaved with their children, who die from thirst during the siege.<sup>44</sup> Judith says that God struck down the soldiers who came to burn their villages and seize the women and children in their territories.<sup>45</sup>

The briefly described scene in the Siege of Zadar in which the *quedam mulier* appears above the sea's surface as a *deus ex machina* and wrests weapons from the arms of Venetian soldiers, who fearfully leap into the sea and lose that naval battle, but not the war, is transformed in Marulić's work into an elaborate story about the Bethulian widow who brings victory to her people through her belief in God, courage, and beauty. The supercilious Holofernes, who wanted to conquer the entire world believing that not even God could halt his might, was in the end overcome by a woman's strength.<sup>46</sup> God enhanced the strength of the woman's right arm with his own and beheaded his enemies.<sup>47</sup> The woman is no longer Satan's ally, but rather God's. The woman is not just a mother who laments her fate and fears for her sons due to the enemy, an ancillary character with the function of

<sup>42</sup> *Ti ne daj da ovuj pogibil prime puk,  
puk ovi tvoj, kojuz dat misli ljuti vuk.* (Marulić 2021: 60)

<sup>43</sup> *Ne daj da se izbavi milih sinak mati  
· ter se ne zadavi ne moguć gledati  
· gdino ih vezati svih budu žestoko  
· i bijući peljati u ropstvo daleko.  
· [...]   
· Nemilostiv toko on jest da, grad vazam,  
svih ključi nizoko, ne prašća ni ženam,  
da svakim vašćinam za rugo prida jih,  
gdino gleda sajam, gdi vide muži njih.* (Ibid. 60)

<sup>44</sup> *Plače brižna žena i jure rada je  
da je povedena z ditcom mruč od žaje.* (ibid. 90)

<sup>45</sup> *žene z ditcom htili vest u svoje strane* (Ibid. 191)

<sup>46</sup> *ubi ga ženska sarv, ki biše prostro dim  
da zajme svitom svim, ki mnjaše da ni Bog  
silam njegovim tim jest protiviti mog.* (Ibid. 157)

<sup>47</sup> *ki milo k nam ustav i moć ženske desnice  
moćju svojom nadav, protivnim glavu sne.* (Ibid. 163)

triggering the most powerful effect in the description of wartime atrocities. She becomes the main protagonist of the crisis, and she decides on the winner with God's help, which she had earned with her belief, goodness, and purity of spirit. In Marulić's work, the woman is an exemplar, role model, and the embodiment of true virtue – an elaborate symbol of victory.<sup>48</sup>

Due to the weapon resting against her thigh, the woman who helped the inhabitants of Zadar is also reminiscent of Joan of Arc, God's chosen one who saved France from its enemies in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Whether there is a connection between these themes should be explored in a study that would encompass a broader body of works than those containing a description of a city under siege. I believe that this mysterious woman, who brings and symbolizes wartime victory, could tell us much more about the *Siege of Zadar*, and about the time and manner in which the Zagreb manuscript was written. The woman, who may have reached us as a *locus communis* precisely through St Catherine, the first learned woman depicted in Croatian culture with the sword as her tool of martyrdom, truly resembles the woman holding a sword in her hand that is depicted on the Homeland War Memorial Medal, awarded to the defenders of Zadar, which was attacked and besieged more than half a millennium later.

On one side there is courage, determination, and the strength of Zadar's inhabitants; on both sides there is again the woman who embodies and resurrects the aforementioned traits.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the medieval description of a city under siege, as noted in the *Historia Salonitana* by Thomas the Archdeacon, the motif of woman is a *topos* or *locus communis* which functions as an intensifier of the drama of the events in question and generator of the strongest possible emotions with the reader. Woman is

<sup>48</sup> We do not know whether Marulić may have been familiar with the *Siege* and the concrete description that might have influenced his choice of motif, which he elaborated to send a message in the Ottoman threat confronting Split. In that context, when comparing these two works several coincidences are quite intriguing. The sun is named Titan: “*S istočnih postelja Titan je dignuo glavu*” [“From his eastern bed, Titan raised his head”] (Marulić, 87); *dum Titan tertium horam præsignabat* [“(…) when the sun announced the fourth hour,” *Obsidio*, 165]; *et quanto altius Titan polum circuibat* [“(…) and Titan circled the sky at a higher altitude,” *Obsidio*, 221; *vsque ad Tytanis*, *Obsidio*, 277]. Demonstrating a lack of courage with the question, “Who is so brave as to await them or unafraid when he sees them from afar” (Marulić, 47); *Quis ergo tanta esset fundatus audacia, quis tanto esset humano precinctus uigore, qui contemneret tam discriminosa indicia* [“Who was armed with such audacity, or with such human vigour, to despise such malignant signs”, *Obsidio*, 215]. The idea that God demonstrates his power: “And then God displayed his power to those who ran” (Marulić, 69); *ad illum qui contra folium arboris suam inhaustibilem ostendit potentiam* [“(…) to the one who demonstrates his endless power to a tree leaf”, *Obsidio*, 115].

the mother in a besieged city who fears for her sons or who, wailing, pulls her hair and claws her chest and knees while the enemy kills or captures innocent children after the city's fall. She is a symbol of grief, and an aggrieved mother can best convey the image of a devastated city. The anonymous author of the *Siege*, wishing to further strengthen the drama contained in that *topos*, substituted innocent children with babies, snatched by the enemy from their mothers' arms. That relationship was also protected by law, and in case of dispute between the parents, a mother could not legally be separated from children under three years of age. The author of the *Siege* could have found the image of seizing infants in another context in the works *Historia Salonitana* and *A Cutheis tabula*, although there rabid wolves snatched babes from their mothers' arms, which was God's punishment for the low character of its citizens. Also, the distraught mother beating her breast was replaced by the author with soldiers who had been betrayed by their own men. And while the *Siege* abandons the pre-set narrative framework in order to make room for an influx of complex emotions and thus meet the new demands of the text, the linguistic and stylistic congruence of the description of rabid wolves snatching infants points to the possibility that parts of Thomas' text had been copied into *A Cutheis tabula*.

And while the woman portrayed as a frightened and harmed mother is a *locus communis* that demonstrates grief in the besieged and conquered city, in the *Siege* she was used in the form of a widow to demonstrate contrasting emotions, unspeakable happiness and collective joy due to the arrival of Louis in Zadar. The anonymous author goes a step further and resorts to the woman when he demonstrates contrasting human traits that come to the fore in wartime situations, such as cowardice and courage. Through the character of Vladislava, who had on several occasions broken her agreement with the Croatian-Hungarian King Louis, the author discreetly projects medieval misogyny, and through the contrast between Vladislava and Louis, the king's nobility and benevolence are underscored.

Exploration of the motif of the woman in medieval descriptions of a city under siege has highlighted a detail in the *Siege of Zadar* that requires further investigation to foster a better understanding this mysterious work, and that is the apparition of a woman above the sea's surface who helped Zadar's forces secure a victory over the Venetians. Although there are no apparent Christian aspects, the mulier armata vsque ad femora is reminiscent of apparitions of Christian female saints, while the weapon resting against her thigh links her to St Catherine, Judith, and Joan of Arc. This is the woman who as a *locus communis* and symbol of victory may have still be with us today, as the description resembles the woman with a sword on the Homeland War Memorial Medal, awarded to the defenders of Zadar, which was again attacked and besieged more than half a millennium later.



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## Žena u srednjovjekovnom opisu opsade grada

U radu se pokušava ocrtati lik srednjovjekovne žene u kriznim situacijama opsade grada na našem prostoru, na temelju književne analize djela anonimnog autora *Obsidio Iadrensis* koje se smatra jednim od najvrjednijih pripovjednih izvora za poznavanje hrvatske povijesti 14. stoljeća te splitskih kronika *Historia Salonitana* (13. stoljeće) Tome Arhiđakona i *A Cutheis tabula* (14. stoljeće). Usporedbom jezičnih i stilskih osobitosti, iznose se tvrdnje o mogućem prepisivanju dijela teksta Tome Arhiđakona u kronici *A Chuteis tabula*. Također se konzultiraju srednjovjekovni dalmatinski statuti i Judita Marka Marulića. Dobivenim se rezultatima nastoji usmjeriti istraživanje otvorenih pitanja koja prate zanimljivo i zagonetno, ali još uvijek nedovoljno istraženo djelo *Obsidio Iadrensis*.

*Ključne riječi:* *A Cutheis tabula*, *Historia Salonitana*, *Obsidio Iadrensis*, opsada grada, žena  
*Keywords:* *A Cutheis tabula*, *Historia Salonitana*, *Obsidio Iadrensis*, city siege, woman

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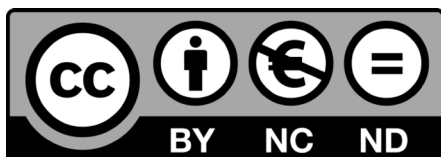
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