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rites of passage: vestition, novitiate and solemn profession in the female convents of eighteenth-century dubrovnik*

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Abstract: This article examines the process young women and novices underwent when entering convent life or preparing to take solemn vows. It is based on eighteenth-century records preserved in the Archives of the Diocese of Dubrovnik, which provide information about the candidates themselves but also shed light on the ceremonies, their location, participants, and the questions asked. Furthermore, it analyses a young woman's entry into a convent as described in the Dubrovnik Book of Ceremonies, offering deeper insights into the transition process and the symbolic elements of the associated liturgical celebrations.

Keywords: nuns, female convents, vestition, novitiate, solemn profession, Dubrovnik, 18th century

Introduction

Occupying an important place in European and world historiography, the study of the history of female monasticism has elucidated an array of relevant issues. One of them concerns the rites through which young women passed in order to become part of the monastic community and take the solemn vows.¹ In a society in which life largely revolved around rituals,² the study of ceremonies related to the life of nuns

¹ Elizabeth A. LeFebvre, "Uneven conversions: how did laywomen become nuns in the Early Modern world?", in: *Conversions. Gender and religious change in early modern Europe*, ed. Simon Ditchfield and Helen Smith, Manchester: Manchester university press, 2017, 127-143; Danielle Rives, "Taking the veil: clothing and transformation of identity", *Journal of the Western society for French history* 33 (2005), 465-486; Eleni Sotiriou, "Monasticizing the monastic: religious clothes, socialization and the transformation of body and self among Greek Orthodox nuns", *Italian journal of sociology of education* 7/3 (2015), 140-166.

² On the meaning of ritual in that period, see: Nella Lonza, *Kazalište vlasti. Ceremonijal i državni blagdani Dubrovačke Republike u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2009, 19-22.

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reveals a myriad of details about the everyday life behind convent walls. What were the steps the girls had to undertake in order to enter convent? How did they express their aspiration for conventual life or taking the solemn vows? Who conducted the examinations and in what manner? When and in what manner did they take the vows? Is there a link between the ritual of entry into convent and secular marriage, as suggested by relevant literature?

These are the questions this article seeks to address on the example of eighteenth-century Dubrovnik, based on the analysis of the preserved archival material housed in the Archives of the Diocese of Dubrovnik and the State Archives in Dubrovnik. Available from this period are the records pertaining to three female convents, which enable the reconstruction of the rite through which the young women passed from the moment they expressed their desire to enter convent to the very act of taking the solemn vows. Noteworthy among the sources is the record from the Dubrovnik Book of Ceremonies regarding the rite of a novice's admission to St. Clare's convent, which casts additional light on the young woman's transition from parental home to the convent.

The research into the earlier period, albeit marked by the presence of as many as eight female convents within the tiny city nucleus,³ is not possible due to the loss of material in a fire that destroyed the archives of the Dubrovnik Diocese in the aftermath of the 1667 earthquake. Despite large-scale destruction of the city, the nunneries⁴ and a high death toll among the nuns,⁵ two convents were restored by the end of the seventeenth century—St. Clare's convent of the Franciscan sisters and the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel of the Benedictines.⁶ The newly-founded Dominican convent of St. Catherine of Siena opened its doors in 1706.⁷ All three convents continued to operate until the fall of the Dubrovnik Republic, when they were dissolved by the new French administration. This article aims to analyse the accessible archival material regarding the mentioned convents and rites that had taken place in them, providing an insight into the everyday monastic life and rituals that shaped the social and religious frames of that time.

³ For a general survey of Ragusan convents before the earthquake of 1667, see: Minela Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, PhD thesis, Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, 2016, 11-20.

⁴ For the destruction of convents, see: Kosta Vojnović, "Crkva i država u dubrovačkoj republici. Prvi dio", *Rad JAZU* 119 (1894), 66; Lukša Beritić, *Urbanistički razvitak Dubrovnika*, Zagreb: Zavod za arhitekturu i urbanizam Instituta za likovne umjetnosti JAZU, 1958, 28; Relja Seferović, "Crkva iza dvora. Kroz povijest Dubrovačke crkve 18. stoljeća uz prateću Serafina Marije Cerve", in: Serafin Marija Cerva, *Prolegomena za Svetu dubrovačku metropoliju*, ed. Relja Seferović, Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2012, 98.

⁵ On the number of nuns among the killed, see: M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 22-23.

⁶ On the restoration of these two convents, see: M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 32-39.

⁷ On the foundation of this convent, see: Minela Fulurija, "Utemeljenje ženskoga samostana Sv. Katarine Sijenske u Dubrovniku", *Povijesni prilozi* 32/45 (2013), 115-134.

Entry into convent

In order to become a nun, a young woman had to undergo a series of rites which symbolised her transition from the secular to spiritual life. The transition from family environment to the convent changed over the centuries. The original, simple vows of dedication to religious life evolved into more complex rituals, which differed depending on the region and the monastic order to which the nun belonged.⁸ Since the earliest of times, there is a clear parallel between the rite of entering convent and secular marriage ceremonies, given that the act of entry into convent may be viewed as the giving away of a girl to Christ, and may thus be interpreted as the giving away of a girl to a groom.⁹ As early as the third century Tertullian used the term "the bride of Christ" for a girl who symbolically married Jesus, while St. Jerome referred to Eustochia as "the bride of my Lord". This term became established in the fourth century, when St. Ambrose in his work *On virginity* recognised consecrated virgins as the brides of Christ. St. Ambrose also emphasised the similarities between wedding ceremonies and the rite of the consecration of virgin.¹⁰ Both secular marriage and entry into convent symbolised a profound change in a girl's life and the beginning of a new period. Required in both cases was the consent of the participants along with the dowry which the girls brought to the new community.¹¹ Given the importance of rites and public rituals in medieval and early modern society, it is understandable why the girls who decided to dedicate their lives to God had to follow very strict rules. In addition, the Church itself with a succession of reforms, notably in the period of Christian revival and the Council of Trent, introduced a series of new rules to be observed.¹²

Becoming a nun could not be achieved through a single instant act nor merely by personal will and decision. It was a complex process which implied strict rules as well as scrutiny of both the Church and secular authorities.¹³ According to the English historian Kate Lowe, that transition may have been traced through four main rites: acceptance

⁸ E. A. Leffeldt, "Uneven conversions", 127-129.

⁹ Kate Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides: wedding ceremonies in Italy during the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation", in: *Marriage in Italy 1300-1650*, ed. Trevor Dean, Kate J. P. Lowe, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 41-46.

¹⁰ K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 41; Rabia Gregory, *Marrying Jesus: Brides and the bridegroom in Medieval women's religious literature*, PhD thesis, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2007, 2-3.

¹¹ K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 43-45. On nuns' dowries in Dubrovnik, see: M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 61-62.

¹² K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 41-42. On its twenty-fifth session, the Council of Trent passed twenty-two decrees related to monks and nuns. *Papal Encyclicals Online. Your guide to online Papal and other official documents of the Catholic Church*. See: <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/trent/twenty-fifth-session.htm> (accessed: 28 December 2024).

¹³ K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 42-43.

of convent life, the rite of vestition (*vestizione*), solemn profession of vows (*professione*) and consecration, that is, the blessing of the nun. However, in practice these formalities were often simplified and, as a result, most frequently performed were two key rites, vestition and profession, which sometimes merged with consecration.¹⁴ Indeed, these two rites also convey a special symbolic meaning. The rite of vestition emphasises the girl's transition from parental household and secular environment into the cloistered world of the convent, while the vow stresses the final renunciation of secular life and full dedication to spiritual vocation.¹⁵ Not only did these rites symbolise a spiritual transition, but they also reflected the social norms and the control of the Church and secular authorities over the status of women in the community.¹⁶

Acceptance of monastic life was the first ceremony which, in the period under consideration, was known to take place on several locations in Dubrovnik. Most commonly it was the girl's family home, convent church or some other city church. An exception to this practice has been recorded on 27 November 1749, when Ana, daughter of Luka Nikolin Gozze, affirmed her aspirations to enter the convent of St. Clare.¹⁷ The ceremony of the examination of aspiration was held at the Rector's Palace, because her father held the office of rector at the time.¹⁸ The ceremony of the examination of aspiration followed a transparently regulated procedure with an aim to examine the sincerity of the girl's decision and to disperse any doubt regarding coercion or manipulation. Archbishop of Dubrovnik or his envoy would ask the girl the usual questions, and based on her responses, he would discern whether she felt genuine vocation. Sadly, only the general descriptions of the procedure have survived, while the concrete questions the girls were asked have not been recorded. The examination of Margarita Proculo of 20 June 1713 may serve as illustration. Margarita was examined by chancellor Bucchia on behalf of Archbishop Roberti at the church of St. Jerome, whereby he discerned that the girl was not seduced nor in any manner whatsoever coerced, deluded or convinced to enter convent but upon her own will decided to dedicate her life to God, accepting

¹⁴ K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 43.

¹⁵ Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the body politic in late Renaissance Venice*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, 137; Elizabeth Kuhns, *The habit. A history of the clothing of Catholic nuns*, New York: Doubleday, 2002, 22; Sharon T. Strocchia, *Nuns and nunneries in renaissance Florence*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, 16.

¹⁶ On the importance of these ceremonies for the nuns' families in Italy, see: K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 50-53.

¹⁷ Ana took the religious name Marija Ana and was the daughter of Luka Nikolin Gozze and Paula, daughter of Antun Cerva. Born on 13 June 1720, she had three brothers and three sisters. She entered the convent at the age of twenty-nine, and died on 3 January 1814 after the abolition of female convents, in the house of Nikola Buljković. Archives of the Diocese of Dubrovnik (hereafter: ADB), *Regularium et Monialium*, ser. 6, vol. 2, f. 133v; Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, volume 8, Genealogije (M-Z), Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 2017, 159.

¹⁸ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 133v.

the rules of the monastic order she aspired to enter.¹⁹ This example also testifies to the inclusion of secular authorities in religious rites, as the questioning was conducted by the city chancellor.²⁰ On 13 June 1730 Archbishop Franchi visited the home of Frano Marinov Tudisi to examine the aspiration of his daughter Marija to enter the convent of St. Clare.²¹ By using a similar formulation, it was discerned that the girl desired to enter the mentioned convent of her own free will.²² Such an examination procedure of the girls who aspired to enter convent bears witness to the importance of formality in the process of entry into convent, as well as the role of archbishop's authority in securing the legitimacy of the decision. Also traced are the cases of sisters whose aspirations to enter convent were examined on the same day.²³ Thus on 6 May 1746 at the church of St. Mary of Kaštel sisters Glorija and Nika, daughters of Vladislav Gozze,²⁴ affirmed that they felt a genuine calling for entering the convent of St. Mary.²⁵ According to the sources, the rite of the examination of aspiration to enter convent was known to be attended by other secular persons, mainly by distinguished married women. Always entered was the name and surname of one attendee, in addition to the expression *aliis* or *aliis matronis nobilibus*, which referred to the presence of other prominent women.²⁶

Given the importance of the act of examination of the girls' religious vocation, the attendance of other city notables may have been expected, in this case of those of the female sex considering that the persons concerned were their close kin. The presence of distinguished ladies during the examinations may have served as a kind of support

¹⁹ ...*amotis adstantibus, et praemissis debitis interrogationibus ad id necessariis, et opportunis auditisque responsionibus reperit dictam puellam non vi, dolo, malo, metu, aut suasionem aliqua seductam, aut circumuentam fuisse, sed sponte ac deliberata voluntate se Deo dicere velle...* (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 56). I am indebted to Jadranka Bagarić for her assistance with the translations and interpretations of the Latin sources.

²⁰ On the role of notary in secular marriages in Italy, as well as in the girl's entry into convent, see: K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 45-46.

²¹ Marija was born on 15 April 1710 to the family of Frano Marinov Tudisi and Slave, daughter of Marko Bassegli. Besides Marija, they had four daughters and six sons. Marija was twenty when she entered the convent. *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 74-74v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 399.

²² *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 74-74v.

²³ Mexican convents also bear witness to a practice of sisters entering the same or different convents (Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ. Conventual life in colonial Mexico*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008, 29-30).

²⁴ Glorija and Nika were the daughters of Vladislav Pavlov Gozze and Pera, daughter of Orsat Sorgo. They had six brothers and six sisters, two of whom died in childhood, one married, and three were the nuns at St. Clare's convent. Although in his genealogical research N. Vekarić does not cite that Glorija, known by the secular name Slava, was a nun of the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel, it is doubtless the same person as he makes note of Slava who was born on 18 November 1718, whereas nun Glorija took her vows on 14 May 1747, reported to have been twenty-eight at the time (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 126-126v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 162).

²⁵ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 122-122v. They shared their path to monastic life in other rites as well – after the completed novitiate, again on the same day they responded to the questions pertaining to the aspiration for the profession of vows, which they took together (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 126-126v).

²⁶ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 1, f. 41-41v; vol. 2, f. 4v-5v, 7v-8, 12-12v, 13v-14, 14v-15, 15v.

to the girls in this important act, but also as a device of social control in keeping with the marriage politics and family interests of the day.²⁷ Once it was discerned that the girl felt a true vocation, she would proceed to the convent to be accepted by the nuns as well. The first to arrive at the convent church was the convent prioress, who had previously been informed of a girl aspiring to enter convent. Then to the chime of bells all nuns eligible to vote gathered as they were to decide whether they accepted the girl as novice of their convent.²⁸ Not a single case of a girl being denied admission has been preserved for the eighteenth century.²⁹ However, this form of novice acceptance on behalf of the nuns has been traced only at the beginning of the analysed source, whereas later a different form was used in which there is no mention of the nuns gathering for the purpose of the acceptance of the girl who was to enter convent.³⁰ Although the practice of the acceptance of a girl through the nuns' joint decision is not mentioned in the sources of the later period, these rituals probably survived as an important element of monastic life, as was commonly the case elsewhere.³¹

The rite of vestition

Having discerned the girl's genuine religious vocation through examination, it was time for her to enter convent. Dubrovnik Book of Ceremonies³² contains the only extant description of this rite, which details the girl's entry into convent. Hence on 12 June 1740, daughter of Ivan-Toma Markov Bassegli entered the convent of St. Clare, during the

²⁷ On reasons for entering convents and the possible means of control and coercion, see: Zdenka Marković, *Pjesnikinje starog Dubrovnika. Od sredine XVI do svršetka XVIII stoljeća u kulturnoj sredini svoga vremena*, Zagreb: JAZU, 1970, 353-355; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 50-66.

²⁸ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 4-4v.

²⁹ Recorded in the earlier period is a case of Vito Klementov Gozze, who in 1436 complained that he had repeatedly kindly petitioned the prioress of the convent of St. Clare to admit his daughter to the convent, but each time she responded that she would not admit her or any other girl due to overcrowding. Ultimately, the prioress yielded in compliance with the government's decision of 30 October 1415, by which it was decreed that the convent of St. Clare was to admit all patrician daughters, regardless of whether they had one or more sisters there. On this occasion, the nuns were warned not to act in any manner contrary to that decision in future because the convent was not their property but of the Ragusan commune. See Zdenka Janeković Römer, *The Frame of freedom. The nobility of Dubrovnik between the Middle Ages and Humanism*, Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2015, 312; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 16.

³⁰ A total of eight recorded cases testify to the fact that the nuns gathered to accept the girl, while the last case in which this is mentioned concerned the vocational discernment of Mara Getaldić, held on 5 June 1700. *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 4-4v, 4v-5v, 6-7, 7-7v, 7v-8, 12-12v, 13v-14, 14v-15.

³¹ The nuns of Zadar were independent in their decisions to admit novices into the convent. See Zdenko Dundović "Thriller of the Zadar nun Cattarina Marchi: true or false story?", *Historical contributions* 42/64 (2023), 167, n. 104.

³² On ceremony as state medium and the Book of Ceremonies, see: N. Lonza, *Kazalište vlasti*, 19-39.

rectorship of Nikola Nikolin Bona.³³ Curiously, the text of the ceremony fails to mention the girl's name, which, in a specific manner, contributed to her marginalisation. Although this act had a direct impact on her further life and was expected to be the result of her own will, the woman in the sources continued to be primarily identified as someone's daughter, which mirrors the social norms of the day.³⁴ Data related to the girl may still be found in other sources. Marija Rosa, daughter of Ivan Bassegli,³⁵ was questioned by the Ragusan archbishop Franchi in her father's house on 30 May 1740, so as to discern her decision to enter the convent of St. Clare. Archbishop discerned that the girl had made the decision upon her own free will, without any coercion, and that she wished to accept the rules of the Order.³⁶ This information, apart from the girl-related data, also poses the question about the gap between the time when she expressed her desire to enter convent and the act of entrance itself. Namely, Marija Rosa entered the convent of St. Clare thirteen days later, when she commenced the period of novitiate.³⁷

As earlier mentioned, the Book of Ceremonies contains a detailed description of Marija Rosa's rite of vestition into the convent of St. Clare. According to that description, Rector Nikola Bona left the Rector's Palace to join mass at the cathedral, after which, in keeping with custom, honour was paid to Our Lady of Karmen. The rector then returned to the Palace, where, in the Minor Council chamber, he awaited the arrival of the chaplain of the convent in which the novice was about to start her new life.³⁸ At the convent church all the preparations for the rite were made. The attendants sat on the chairs upholstered in red damask, arranged in a circle resembling a crown, which stretched as far as the church doors. Seated first was the rector, followed by the members of the Minor Council, behind them the convent procurators, and finally the girl's parents.³⁹ A short while later, a sonata was played⁴⁰ to mark the start of the ceremony, while the girl, dressed like a bride, entered the church ushered by her cousin, Marin Franov Tudisi.

³³ State Archives in Dubrovnik (hereafter: SAD), HR-DADU-14, *Cerimoniale, Manuali pratici del Cancelliere* (hereafter: *Cerimoniale*), vol. 1, f. 225.

³⁴ Zdenka Janeković Römer, *Rod i grad. Dubrovačka obitelj od XIII do XV stoljeća*, Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1994, 126-127; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of freedom*, 278-279.

³⁵ Marija was born on 9 June 1715 to the family of Ivan-Toma Markov and Deša, daughter of Antun Resti. Besides Marija, they had four daughters and seven sons. One daughter died a few months after birth, while all the others entered one of the city convents. Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika, 7. Genealogije (A-L)*, Zagreb-Dubrovnik, Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2016, 63.

³⁶ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 103.

³⁷ It was common practice for the girls to enter convent after ten days. M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 51-53.

³⁸ *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 225-225v; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 67.

³⁹ *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 225-225v; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 67.

⁴⁰ On the role of music in the rites of vestition and profession of vows, and the parallels with secular marriage, see: K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 46-47.

She was escorted by distinguished ladies, her cousins, dressed in solemn attire. Upon entering the church, the girl stopped and first bowed to the rector, then to the Minor Council, and all the present, before she proceeded to the benches where she took her seat.⁴¹ The chaplain then held the mass,⁴² while the girl approached the altar to have her veil blessed. The mass was followed by the usual ceremonies and blessings (not specified in the documents), after which the chaplain gave the girl a crucifix in her right hand and a candle in her left. With the crucifix in one and candle in the other hand, the girl made her way towards the convent, escorted by cousins, followed by the chaplain and his assistants. Upon entry into convent, after the chime of bells, the girl showed herself on the choir balcony (*balatur*) behind the screen,⁴³ amidst all nuns, dressed in habit, with a gold crown on her head.⁴⁴ The priest then returned to the altar, started singing *Te Deum* and ended the ceremony of vestition with the usual sermon,⁴⁵ after which the rector returned to the Palace.⁴⁶ Also recorded in the Book of Ceremonies is that Rector Serafin Rafaelov Gozze was present when the daughter of the late Vlaho Junijev Cerva entered the convent of St. Clare, and that the ceremony itself followed an identical pattern as the one previously described.⁴⁷

Although this is the only description of the rite of vestition in Dubrovnik in the period under consideration, there is reason to assume that it followed a common pattern. However, we are unable to ascertain exactly whether the rector attended every rite of vestition. The fact that this ceremony remained recorded testifies to the need of the Ragusan community to stress the importance of the act of convent entry not only for the girl and her family, but for the community as a whole. Official presence of the rector at a personal act such as that testifies to the awareness of the ruling rank of the significance of female convents for the survival of lineage and class.

⁴¹ *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 225v-227; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 67.

⁴² According to the Book of Ceremonies, at least one chaplain was to take part in the rite, who would present the rector and his Minor Council with thyme and peace. An identical act involving the convent procurators and girl's parents followed, whereby the priest's or chaplain's assistant was to conduct that rite in a circular sequence. *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 226v; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 67.

⁴³ *Balatur* was a common architectural feature of the interiors of the Ragusan patrician houses. It was a kind of a mezzanine balcony with a wooden screen, behind which the girls observed the entertainment in the hall below them. *Balatur* was reached by the wooden staircase, while in the fifteenth and sixteenth century it was also equipped with a door, benches and backs (Z. Marković, *Pjesnikinje starog Dubrovnika*, 38).

⁴⁴ *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 226.

⁴⁵ On the role of sermon on the occasion of convent entry in the Habsburg lands, see: Veronika Čapšková, "Framing a young nun's initiation: Early Modern convent entry sermons in the Habsburg lands. Vestiges of a lost oral culture", *Austrian history yearbook* 45 (2014), 33-60.

⁴⁶ *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 225-227; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 67-68.

⁴⁷ *Cerimoniale*, vol. 1, f. 227.

Sadly, the sources fail to provide a clearer insight into the rite of vestition, especially when it concerned the girls from the citizen rank. Whether this rite differed and to what extent if the girl was born to privilege or not is hard to say. Although doubtless there were no differences in the liturgical part of the rite, it is quite inconceivable that the Ragusan rector would attend the rite of vestition of a girl from a non-noble rank. There are no data on how the girls prepared for this act in their own homes, nor how they made their way from parental home to the convent church, nor where they gathered prior to entering the church. The only detail known is that they were accompanied by their cousins, which was a common practice beyond the Ragusan framework as well.⁴⁸ Assumingly, elder cousins had already attended similar rites and their role was to look after the girl and advise her on what steps to take. In Venice it was customary for a girl prior to her entry into convent to recite Psalm 42, which expresses the desire for the meeting with God. After the recitation, the procession would proceed towards the convent. Leading the procession was a priest who carried a cross and led the girl to the convent doors, where she was greeted by the abbess and other nuns. In the late sixteenth century Bishop Grimani expressed his disapproval with the mentioned custom which, as he put it, had lost its spiritual purpose and turned into a performance. He stated that some girls were known to spend months preparing the psalm recitation, by which this holy act was converted into an expression of vanity. As a result, the bishop prohibited the display of pomp that accompanied the girls' entry into convent, demanding that they avoid silk clothes, extravagant jewellery and sizeable escort.⁴⁹ Recitation prior to convent entry has not been traced in Dubrovnik, yet the practice of writing dedicatory poems and verse to mark this occasion has been recorded.⁵⁰

The described rite of vestition and convent entry had a couple of interesting and symbolically important moments. The girl entered the church dressed like a bride—the fact that she wore bridal garments not only allowed a comparison with secular wedding, but at the same time conveyed an important symbolic meaning of the renunciation of these garments by entering convent. Renunciation of secular garments usually took place well beyond the public eye, and the girl's appearance in nun's habit in the presence of other nuns was a clear signal that the girl no longer belonged to the secular, family community but from that moment on she belonged to the monastic community, and that the nuns had accepted a novice. Similar examples of the girl's appearance in the

⁴⁸ M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 68. In Italy during the early modern period a girl entering convent was to leave her parental home in the morning in the company of her closest female kin, without pomp and the presence of other people. See Silvia Evangelisti, "Monastic poverty and material culture in early modern Italian convents", *The Historical journal* 47/1 (2004), 6.

⁴⁹ J. G. Sperling, *Convents and the body politic*, 137-138.

⁵⁰ Z. Marković, *Pjesnikinje starog Dubrovnika*, 356-359.

new habit, along with the various signs of the novice's acceptance on behalf of the prioress and other nuns, may also be traced in relevant literature.⁵¹

Nuns wore the habit of the order to which their convent belonged.⁵² Habit, like the veil, was a symbol of their life in the monastic community and had a disciplinary function—it reminded the nuns of the life they had chosen and accepted. Taking a habit was a public statement of their belonging to a new, spiritual family.⁵³ It also represented their virgin status and that is why it covered the whole body, from head to toe. In the antiquity, the veiling of married women was regulated by law, and in some cultures it was believed that the wearing of black veil helped ward off evil.⁵⁴ In Christianity, in the First Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul had already given instructions on the women's obligation to cover the head with a veil during religious ceremonies, suggesting that behind it was an instruction given by Christ. Until 1983 the veil during mass was obligatory for all women.⁵⁵ The nun's veil symbolically conveys the status of a married woman as well as that of a widow, worn in the memory of the deceased bridegroom. The veiling ceremony probably dates from as early as the second century.⁵⁶ In support of the virgins' veiling, among whom was also his sister, in the fourth century St. Ambrose stated that it was customary for married women of his day to wear a veil. The earliest records cite that the candidates wore a white veil which they renounced by solemn profession, when they took a black veil. First virgins either veiled themselves or were veiled by their parents and wore it at all times, not only during the rite. After some time, the rite of veiling was assumed by the bishops and priests.⁵⁷

⁵¹ S. Evangelisti, "Monastic poverty and material culture in early modern Italian convents"; 6; A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 54; Jo Ann Kay McNamara, *Sisters in arms. Catholic nuns through two millennia*, Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 1998, 537; D. Rives, "Taking the Veil", 470-473; Krsto Stošić, "Benediktinke u Šibeniku", *Croatia Sacra* 4/7 (1934), 26.

⁵² Although the habit was subject to norms, the visitators were known to encounter inappropriately dressed nuns in convents. Thus in 1525 Venetian patriarch Querini encountered a girl wearing plaits, which he personally cut off. In 1578 Patriarch Trevisan, however, encountered nuns with blond and curly hair, as well as those wearing platform shoes or pleated clothes. A year later, he excommunicated the nuns of St. Lucia because they refused to wear black veils (J. G. Sperling, *Convents and the body politic*, 120-124). In the seventeenth century Petar Gaudencije, bishop of Rab, drew the habit rules for the nuns of the convent of St. Andrew the Apostle, stressing that their clothes had to be plain, void of decoration and by no means made of silk. Nuns were forbidden to adorn with gold and silver, wear jewellery and style their hair, while the breach of these rules was punished by excommunication from the convent. The colour of the socks was exclusively specified as either black or white, also forbidden were the shoes with high heels, ribbons or those made of silk (Saša Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura: slušanje, čitanje, prevođenje i pisanje u rapskim ženskim samostanima", *Književna smotra: časopis za svjetsku književnost* 55/210(4) (2023), 23).

⁵³ On habit and its meaning with the Greco-Orthodox nuns, see: E. Sotiriou, "Monasticizing the monastic", 148-150.

⁵⁴ Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns. A history of convent life 1450-1700*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 29; E. Kuhns, *The habit*, 53-54.

⁵⁵ E. Kuhns, *The habit*, 54-55.

⁵⁶ E. Kuhns, *The habit*, 55.

⁵⁷ "Habit", in: *Leksikon ikonografije, liturgike i simboličke zapadnog kršćanstva*, ed. Anđelko Badurina, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1990, 248; E. Kuhns, *The habit*, 55-56.

It is noteworthy that in the described rite the girl wore a gold crown on her head. The cases traced in literature usually mention a floral or thorn crown, which the novices could choose and which were directly related to Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ The Book of Ceremonies provides no information on the cutting of the girl's hair prior to entry into convent, which was common practice in other convents.⁵⁹ The rite of public haircut before witnesses may have been interpreted as an act of sacrifice, in which the nuns, renouncing worldly life, voluntarily renounced of their hair as a symbol of beauty and sexuality, which further enhanced the purity of their body. In addition, the Book fails to specify whether it was mandatory for the nuns to treat the attendants with lunch, as it was customary and regulated by law in the fifteenth century.⁶⁰ In Italy of the early modern period there is evidence that the kin of the girl entering convent were forbidden to organise banquets or offer meals at the convent or their own homes, which implies that such practice used to be customary in the earlier times. Records also testify to strong resistance against these decisions although the Church was determined to put an end to this kind of practice, deeming them very dangerous. On the other hand, the families did not wish to miss an opportunity to display their power and prestige by organising banquets for the guests. Food offering after nuns' ceremonies may also be compared to secular marriages where the shared meal had an important role.⁶¹

Nor is there any mention of the girl changing her name upon entry into convent, yet under a new name she was first mentioned when taking her solemn vows. However, it is assumed that by the very act of entering convent the girl changed her secular name and took a new, monastic name, which was a common practice in other convents as well.⁶² In the description of vocational discernment usually entered was the novice's monastic name, her former secular name and the name of her father. Hence, Marija Placida Ragnina, novice of the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel, on 3 November 1736, at the age of twenty-four, responded to the questions on her aspiration to take the solemn

⁵⁸ K. Stošić, "Benediktinke u Šibeniku", 26; D. Rives, "Taking the Veil", 471-472; S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 26.

⁵⁹ In his description of the rite of vesting regarding the Benedictine nuns in Šibenik, Krsto Stošić cites that at the end of the rite the bishop would cut the girl's hair (K. Stošić, "Benediktinke u Šibeniku", 26). The ceremony of the profession of vows of the Rab nuns includes an information that the ceremony master prepared scissors for haircutting (S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 26). For the ritual of head shaving in Venetian convents, see: J. G. Sperling, *Convents and the body politic*, 138-139. On the ceremony and meaning of the ritual of hair shaving with the Greco-Orthodox nuns, see: E. Sotiriou, "Monasticizing the monastic", 150-158.

⁶⁰ In 1426 it was decided that to mark the occasion of convent entry a girl was to treat the sisters with lunch to the value of ten perpers (*Liber viridis*, ed. Branislav Nedeljković, Beograd: SANU, 1984, c. 209, p. 160).

⁶¹ S. Evangelisti, "Monastic poverty and material culture in early modern Italian convents", 6; K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 49-50.

⁶² On symbolism and name changing patterns, see: D. Rives, "Taking the Veil", 473-474; E. Sotiriou, "Monasticizing the monastic", 153-154.

vows.⁶³ It was then that, in addition to her monastic name, her secular name Katarina was entered.⁶⁴ However, during the vocational discernment held on 4 November 1735, only her secular name, Katarina, was entered.⁶⁵ The reason for this probably rests in the fact that the occasion concerned solely the process of vocational discernment, and not the act of convent entry itself. For that reason, as well as for the symbolism behind the taking of a new, monastic name, it may be assumed that the girls changed their names the minute they entered convent. Apparently, name changing marked the end of old and a start of new life, along with the belonging to a new community which the novice joined. There is no record of the girls having to speak their new names aloud so as to inform the witnesses, as it is documented in Italy.⁶⁶

Of the girls' entry into convent we may also learn from the monastic rules. Already in the first known rule written exclusively for women, Caesarius of Arles emphasised the importance of the renunciation of possessions prior to entering the monastic community.⁶⁷ In the Rules established for the good behaviour of the sisters of the Order of St. Dominic⁶⁸ it is also explicitly underlined that all girls prior to entry into convent are to renounce of all private belongings in the name of the community. They should not aspire towards material goods and become arrogant, but ought to "aspire to God heavenwards and refrain from things frivolous and vain; that Monasteries should not be of benefit to the rich, but to the poor".⁶⁹ Renunciation of material possessions had a

⁶³ Marija Placida Ragnina, birth name Katarina, was born on 6 January 1712. Her father was Savin Franov Ragnina, and mother Jelena, daughter of Orsat Sorgo. They had six sons and five daughters, three of whom joined the nunnery of St. Mary of Kaštel, while Marija Placida also acted as the convent abbess from 1783 till her death in 1789. *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 178v-179v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 266.

⁶⁴ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 94v.

⁶⁵ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 90v.

⁶⁶ For instance, on the occasion of changing her name in Rome in 1578, sister Candida informed the witnesses that her secular name used to be Lucija (K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 48).

⁶⁷ *Redovnička pravila*, ed. Hadrijan Borak, Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 2005, 209, 218-219. On canon rules related to the issue of renunciation of possessions, see: Arthur Vermeersch, "Novice", *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (hereafter: CE), vol. 11, ed. Charles G. Hebermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, John J. Wynne, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. Accessible on: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11144a.htm> (accessed: 13 December 2024).

⁶⁸ The source is kept at the State Archives in Dubrovnik and is without dating, but it may well be assumed that it was used by the nuns of the Dominican convent of St. Catherine of Siena. It is written in Croatian. See: SAD, *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje sestara reda svetoga Dominika* (hereafter: *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje*), *Manuali pratici del Cancelliere, Memoriae*, HR-DADU-14, vol. 141. On book culture of the Ragusan nuns, see: M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 90-97.

⁶⁹ *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje*, f. 6. Contrary to the rule prescribing renunciation of property, in some Italian convents there is evidence that the girls had personal belongings, as well as private, luxuriously decorated cells (Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice. Enclosed lives and broken vows in the renaissance convent*, London: Penguin Books, 2003, 2-8). Petar Gaudencije, bishop of Rab in the seventeenth century, however, ordered the abbess of the convent of St. Andrew the Apostle to carry out an inspection every year on the Feast of the Birth of St. John the Evangelist, with an aim to examine the contents of the nuns' chests and whether they had any forbidden items, such as apples, scents and mirrors (S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 23).

twofold purpose—apart from the fact that material goods represented an obstacle to a true spiritual vocation, by renouncing the worldly the difference between rich and poor girls was eliminated.⁷⁰ Renunciation of personal possessions in favour of the community had its roots in the life of Christ, emphasising the person's readiness to abandon old life in exchange for the commitment to serve God. Upon entry into convent, the nuns had to hand over all personal belongings which would become communal. Whatever they may have received after taking the vows, also became the common property of the convent.⁷¹ Due to the requirement regarding full renunciation of any form of possession prior to entry into convent the girls often drafted their wills. Thus, for example, extant is the will of Magda Bosdari, which she drafted before entering the convent of St. Catherine of Siena.⁷² Magda, who later took a monastic name Marija Josipa, in her will of 15 February 1759 renounced of all her goods to the benefit of Marin Martellini, whom she designated as her universal heir.⁷³ Similar examples have been recorded in other cities. Preserved in Zadar is a contract of the nun Marija Elisabetta Carrara, by which she voluntarily renounced the legacy of her father's property. In turn, her father, on his own behalf and that of his heirs, promised to pay her ten ducats per year until the end of life, and secure medical care in case of illness. Should any of his heirs defy this decision, the annual disbursement was to be raised to thirty ducats.⁷⁴

Before the candidates were admitted into convent, it was necessary to examine whether there were any impediments for their entry. According to canon rules, marital status was one of the impediments for a candidate to be rejected.⁷⁵ The only exception to this was when both spouses wished to enter convent or if one of them had already taken the vow of chastity. Also, if one spouse on account of his behaviour had compromised the union, the other could file for divorce and thus become eligible for convent. Parents were not allowed to enter convent unless they had provided for their children, while the children who provided for their parents were not permitted to enter convent if such an act would discontinue the mentioned care. Persons with debt were also forbidden to wear a monastic habit, as well as all those related to criminal deeds.⁷⁶ Secular authorities were in a position to additionally regulate entry into convent and its governance. With time, Dubrovnik witnessed the government's increasing meddling

⁷⁰ *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje*, f. 6.

⁷¹ S. Evangelisti, *Nuns. A history of convent life 1450-1700.*, 28; M. Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, 2-8.

⁷² Magda was the daughter of Frano Vlahov Bosdari and Petra-Amelija, daughter of Andrija Ricciardi. Born on 7 July 1717, and died at the age of eighty on 24 March 1798. She entered convent at the age of forty-one. ADB, *Regularium et Monialium*, ser. 6, vol. 3, f. 18; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 7, 180.

⁷³ SAD, *Testamenta Notariae*, HR-DADU-12, vol. 81, f. 12-13.

⁷⁴ Z. Dundović, "Thriller of the Zadar nun Cattarina Marchi: true or false story?", 164-165, n. 74.

⁷⁵ A. Vermeersch, "Novice".

⁷⁶ A. Vermeersch, "Novice".

into monastic life.⁷⁷ Only noblewomen could hold the rank of prioress, as it was upon the Ragusan government to designate the convents which admitted noble girls as opposed to those admitting non-noble women.⁷⁸ The convents were not allowed to admit novices without the Senate's permission, nor was any novice permitted to take the solemn vows without special permission of the Senate-appointed tutor. Further, the Senate was empowered to confirm the naming of the convent chaplains and confessorers, and also managed the convent revenues, determining the number of novices to be supported from these means. In addition, the Senate regulated the size of monastic dowry and the term of novitiate.⁷⁹ The government was responsible for all female convents, driven not only by an aspiration to preserve Catholicism but also by a belief that men were to be held responsible for women's behaviour, whether they were married or cloistered.⁸⁰ Therefore, they deemed it their duty to watch over the honour and good reputation of the women who had dedicated themselves to the vow of chastity.⁸¹ A similar practice of the meddling role of secular authorities into the regulation of conventual life has been recorded elsewhere in Europe and beyond. For instance, in the colonial Mexico the girls who aspired to become nuns had to fulfil four basic requirements, one of which was the "blood purity", that is, racial status. Although entry into convent was not entirely forbidden to illegitimate daughters, their birth legitimacy was an important factor in the final decision. Moreover, all candidates had to provide a dowry, their age was taken into consideration along with the virgin status.⁸²

Novitiate

The girl's entry into convent marked the beginning of the novitiate, or probation. Novitiate is the initial period of life in a monastic community from entry into the institution to the first vows, aimed at a better introduction of the novices to the God's vocation,

⁷⁷ Z. Marković, *Pjesnikinje starog Dubrovnika*, 365; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 15-20, 52-53, 61-62. On the relations between the church and secular authorities, see: Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*, 306-323.

⁷⁸ Before the disastrous earthquake of 1667, three out of eight female convents in Dubrovnik were reserved exclusively for noblewomen: Franciscan convents of St. Clare and SS. Peter and Paul, along with the Dominican convent of St. Michael. After the earthquake, of the three restored convents only that of St. Clare retained the same purpose, admitting only the female members of the nobility (Z. Marković, *Pjesnikinje starog Dubrovnika*, 348-349; M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 89).

⁷⁹ K. Vojnović, "Crkva i država u dubrovačkoj republici. Prvi dio", 66, 136; Z. Marković, *Pjesnikinje starog Dubrovnika*, 368; Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*, 312-313.

⁸⁰ On the position of women and role of noblewomen in Dubrovnik, see: Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*, 278-306.

⁸¹ Z. Janeković Römer, *The Frame of Freedom*, 314.

⁸² A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 18-25.

in a house especially designated for the purpose, to a term of at least twelve months, or two years at the most. During this period the novices are under the guidance of a novice mistress who is responsible for their spiritual development, and who discerns and examines their vocation.⁸³ Novitiate thus marks a period in which a novice learns the rules of the order and is introduced to the convent's interior discipline, and questions her own vocation through the development of self-discipline so as to achieve the expected monastic virtues: humbleness, modesty, self-constraint and obedience.⁸⁴ Although it was the Council of Trent that regulated the novitiate to a term of at least one year, the practice of the period of probation prior to the profession of solemn vows dates back to the first years of monasticism. Even the earliest communities, such as Coptic in the fifth century, were familiar with the institution of novitiate, for a term of three years.⁸⁵ The Council of Trent decreed the age of sixteen as the earliest age for taking vows that followed the novitiate, which leads to a conclusion that a novice had to be fifteen years of age if the monastic order required a one-year novitiate, or fourteen if a two-year novitiate was required. This opinion related to nuns was also confirmed by a decree of the Holy Congregation of Bishops and Monks of 28 May 1689.⁸⁶

Becoming a nun was a process which required strength, determination, adaptability and utter dedication. Fifteen as the minimum age prescribed for entry into novitiate, symbolised the point at which it was believed that a girl was able to comprehend the weight and significance of her decision. That age also signifies the threshold of puberty and the beginning of sexual maturing, due to which it may be interpreted as the period when girls were to retreat to convent in order to preserve their virgin status and devote their life to God. On the other hand, convent rules sometimes designated the maximum age for profession, which was often placed at the mid-thirties. That upper age limit may be interpreted as a period when the women should opt for either conventual life or marriage, and was often connected to the practice of the girls' education and training in convents, where many of them remained as potential candidates for novitiate. The upper age limit for the profession of vows left enough room for the girls to bring the final decision before their term at convent might have been deemed inappropriate, and were thus able to avoid the stigma of spinsterhood.⁸⁷

⁸³ *Zakonik kanonskog prava (Codex Iuris Canonici) proglašen vlašću pape Ivana Pavla II. (25. siječnja 1983)*, Zagreb: Glas Koncila, 1996, kan. 646.-653. Accessible on: https://hbk.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Zakonik_kanonskoga_prava.pdf (accessed: 18 December 2024).

⁸⁴ A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 48-49.

⁸⁵ A. Vermeersch, "Novice".

⁸⁶ A. Vermeersch, "Novice".

⁸⁷ A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 23. On the practice of admitting girls for the purpose of education in the female convents of eighteenth-century Dubrovnik, see: M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 101-112.

In the eighteenth century, a one-year novitiate was common in Ragusan convents, which was in compliance with the provisions of the Council of Trent. On the occasion of the solemn profession, the novices had to respond to the question as to how much time had passed from their entry into convent and the beginning of the novitiate. Their regular answer was that a year had passed.⁸⁸ However, on occasion examples of longer novitiate periods have been traced. In such cases the novices explained why they had not taken their solemn vows earlier. Hence, for instance, on 7 July 1701 four novices of the convent of St. Clare were questioned about the reasons for their aspiration to take the solemn vows. Novice Frana Saraca was the first to step before Archbishop Scotti, and responded that she had been in the convent for more than three years.⁸⁹ Enquired as to why she had not taken the vows after one year, she explained that it was not possible due to the archbishop's absence. Other three nuns gave similar answers, stressing that they were unable to take the vows earlier due to the archbishop's absence. Two of them had been in the convent for three years, and one for two.⁹⁰ The longest period that a novice spent in the convent without taking the vows was recorded on 4 November 1690. Enquired about her term in the convent, Justina Bona, novice of the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel,⁹¹ responded: "Ten years". The reasons for the delayed vows, as she put it, lay in the archbishop's absence, as well as some other legitimate reasons.⁹² Similar cases were known to appear both earlier and later, most frequently between 1676 and 1709.⁹³ In that period the archbishops were often absent from the city and their duty, the reasons of which should be sought in their discontent with the assigned office. Their absence could account for the delay in vow taking. The archbishops' discontent partly resulted from their inability to become fully integrated with the city and the majority of non-Italian speaking inhabitants.⁹⁴ Also, one should bear in mind that these deviations tended to take place in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophic earthquake that

⁸⁸ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 38-41, 45-45v, 140-140v, 147-147v, 156, 158v-159, 161v-162, 164, 168-168v, 179v-180, 185v-187v, 192-192v, 194v.

⁸⁹ Frana was the daughter of Nikola-Miho Pavlov and Marija, daughter of Frano Bobali. Besides her, they had four sons and six daughters, two of whom were the nuns in the convent of St. Catherine of Siena (N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 300).

⁹⁰ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 16-17.

⁹¹ Prior to entering convent, Justina was known as Deša, and was the daughter of Serafin Ivanov Bona and Paula, daughter of Ivan Gondola. Besides her, they had three sons and six daughters, two of whom were nuns in the convent of St. Clare. Although in his genealogical research N. Vekarić failed to mention that she was a nun of the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel, it is doubtless the same person as Vekarić cites Deša born in 1667, and the novice Justina who was twenty-three at her examination in 1690 (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 1; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 7, 150).

⁹² *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 1.

⁹³ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 1, f. 21-21v; vol. 2, f. 16-17, 19v-20, 37v-38, 46-46v.

⁹⁴ On the service of Ragusan archbishops during the eighteenth century and their relations with the secular authorities, see: R. Seferović, "Crkva iza dvora", 11-77.

hit Dubrovnik in 1667. The convents suffered devastating damage or were completely destroyed, forcing the nuns to abandon their communities.⁹⁵ The prolonged process of restoration, along with the general destabilisation of the city everyday life,⁹⁶ additionally disrupted the regular novitiate period and the taking of the solemn vows within the usual one-year term.

Stated in The Rules established for good behaviour of the Sisters of the Order of St. Dominic (*Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje sestara reda svetoga Dominika*) is a provision by which not a single novice may be admitted into the Order prior to the lapse of a certain period, *vrjeme od Novicata* (period of Novitiate), which was to last one year or longer, as decreed by the head.⁹⁷ In addition, one nun was to be assigned as the novices' assistant, who would draw attention to their possible misconduct. Novices were to be humble, obedient, they were to confess their sins regularly, not aspire for material goods, walk with their eyes downcast and in so doing, avoid haste. From the moment of their entrance into convent they were to be taught not to speak at inappropriate times, to take care of all the convent goods, including books and habits. They also had to be guided into "mastering a manual work of some sort, to keep them busy".⁹⁸ It all leads to a conclusion that a nun who was responsible for the novices had to be a person of utmost confidence and knowledge, because she was entrusted with a duty to help the young girls embrace new life and the rules of conduct. Sadly, in the preserved list of the nuns of St. Catherine of Siena who belonged to the Dominican Order and honoured these Rules, the names of the nuns who performed this duty are not mentioned. Nor is there any mention of the method by which the girls were to adopt the prescribed behaviour patterns. Orsola Formicini, nun of the Roman convent of St. Cosimato, wrote that at the age of eight she learned to pray by observing and imitating one of her five mistresses during her prayer.⁹⁹ It appears likely that all the necessary knowledge and

⁹⁵ On the fate of nuns after the earthquake, see: Minela Fulurija Vučić, "Sudbina samostana i redovnica nakon potresa 1667. godine" in: *Sačuvaj nas Bože rata, kuge, gladi i velike trešnje: Dubrovnik kroz krize, sukobe i solidarnosti. Collected papers from the session "Dubrovnik through crises, conflicts and solidarity" held within the Fifth Congress of Croatian Historians at the University in Zadar from 5 to 8 October 2016*, ed. Gordan Ravančić, Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2018, 91-105.

⁹⁶ On the earthquake and its scope, see: Jelenko Mihailović, *Seizmički karakter i trusne katastrofe našeg južnog primorja od Stona do Ulcinja*, Beograd: SANU, 1947: 18-32; Radovan Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1962, 241-248; Robin Harris, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, Zagreb: Golden marketing, 2006, 327-345. On earthquake phenomenon in literature, see: Slavica Stojan, "Poetika katastrofe – pjesnici o velikoj trešnji 1667. godine u Dubrovniku i okolici", *Analiz Zavoda za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku* 53/1 (2015), 113-148.

⁹⁷ *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje*, f. 34.

⁹⁸ *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje*, f. 35-36; E. Kuhns, *The habit*, 31.

⁹⁹ Kate J. P. Lowe, *Nuns' chronicles and convent culture in renaissance and counter-reformation Italy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 66-67.

skills were transmitted through the method of imitative learning, and that the novices learnt from the models of the elders.

During novitiate the monastic community was to observe the novice and evaluate her adaptation to new life.¹⁰⁰ On occasion, that task also included the examination of novices so as to discern genuine vocation. According to The Rules established for good behaviour of the Sisters of the Order of Saint Dominic, the novice was examined by the convent prioress and two nuns appointed by the nuns' choir. The candidate was to come to the chapter, prostrate in the middle of it and to the question "What do your desire?" respond "God's mercy, and yours." She was allowed to get up only by permission of the prioress, after which she would place The Rules of the Order before her eyes, seeking her decision. If the candidate agreed to observe all the rules, she was to add "May the God who has begun, finish it", after which they would all together utter "Amen". This rite was followed by the candidate's change of clothes from secular to the habit, by which she was officially admitted into the community of nuns.¹⁰¹ Although this examination procedure is cited in the rules of the Dominican Order observed by the nuns of the convent of St. Catherine of Siena in Dubrovnik, in the period under consideration not a single concrete record on the performance of the examination of this kind has been traced. Nor has the procedure of this sort been recorded in other two Ragusan convents. In the convent of San Paolo in Milan it was common practice that the nuns voted on whether they would accept a particular young woman into their convent, for which a two-thirds majority vote was required.¹⁰² Similar practice has been recorded in the colonial Mexico, where the nuns, having heard the report of the novices' mistress and her recommendation for admission or rejection of a novice, voted for or against admission.¹⁰³

Taking the solemn vows

In Ragusan convents the completion of novitiate was succeeded by a new examination of religious vocation, this time in relation to the solemn vows. The objective was to examine the true vocation of the novice, her familiarity with monastic life and whether there were any impediments to the profession of vows. A question-and-answer session followed virtually the same pattern in all convents—the archbishop would visit the convent church in order to examine the novice's aspiration for profession. The examination may have been carried out by some other church prelate, whereby it

¹⁰⁰ A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 49.

¹⁰¹ *Naredbe postavljene za dobro vladanje*, f. 34.

¹⁰² K. J. P. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 45.

¹⁰³ A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 49-50.

was always noted that he had performed it on behalf of the archbishop.¹⁰⁴ The novices were asked questions pertaining to their desire to take the vows, their basic purpose being to discern whether the novice aspired to take the solemn vows on her own free will and if she understood the meaning of it.¹⁰⁵ The questions were not always asked in the same manner, nor in the same order, nor were they identical. If several novices were questioned on the same day, the questions were written down for the first novice only, while the answers of the rest were recorded in abbreviated form, which suggests that they were all asked the same questions. Besides basic information on the reasons for taking vows, these records contained other data as well: novice's date of entry into convent, her age, since when she had felt the God's calling, whether she was familiar with the rules of the Order which she wished to join and whether she was knowledgeable of performing the necessary services. Novices were also asked about their readiness for the life in community and eternal claustration, whether they would honour their superiors, and whether there was any impediment for taking the vows, such as a marriage promise in the present or future.¹⁰⁶ Also examined was whether the novice was physically and intellectually sound, whether she had any hidden defects, and if more than a year had passed since her entry into convent, why she had not taken her vows earlier. Questions and answers were mainly standardised, with some exceptions, and were most frequently formulated as yes/no questions, requiring a simple response depending on the question. These data point to the assumption that the novices had been acquainted with the prospective questions as well as the answers they were to provide well before the official examination of solemn profession. Given the importance of this act in their personal and religious life, they probably felt certain anxiety and prepared for the examination. That the preparation for vow taking was a usual practice in other female convents is evidenced by the extant Book of Ceremonies of the Rab convent of St. Andrew the Apostle,¹⁰⁷ which contains a description of the solemn profession rite in Italian, although the ceremony itself was performed in Latin. The novices uttered phrases in Latin, which they mostly learnt by heart, considering that prior to entry into convent they may have been illiterate. According to the records, on 28 September 1750 Bishop Calebotta, while preparing for the ceremony, asked the novices if they could read and

¹⁰⁴ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 37v-41, 45-45v, 131v-132, 135v.

¹⁰⁵ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 1, f. 21-21v; vol. 2, f. 65v, 67, 79, 137v, 179v, 185v. On variations of the posed question, see: M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 240, n. 54.

¹⁰⁶ On marriage patterns in Dubrovnik, see: Zdenka Janeković Römer, *Maruša ili suđenje ljubavi. Bračno-ljubavna priča iz srednjovjekovnog Dubrovnika*, Zagreb: Algoritam, 2007, 121-160.

¹⁰⁷ Based on Roman Ritual, the Book of Ceremonies was composed in 1668 by the master of ceremonies don Antonio Dominis, chaplain of the female Benedictine community. The oldest known Rab Book of Ceremonies used in the church of Rab and convent of St. Andrew the Apostle is today housed at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, shelfmark MS. Canon. Misc. 336 and is dated to the fifteenth century (S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 24-27).

write. All three candidates responded that they could not write, but they could read and recite the book of prayers, because that was what they regularly did with the nuns in the choir.¹⁰⁸ According to the Book of Ceremonies, the solemn profession ritual started on the eve of the act itself, when the bishop questioned the candidates and examined whether they fulfilled all the formal requirements—such as whether they were at least twelve years of age, whether they had been forced to enter convent, if they could read and write—but were also enquired about life, death and awareness. It was also stated that the master of ceremony prepared the novice for holy mass, and that each of them was to have a previously prepared habit, white veil and a floral crown. The master of ceremony was responsible for the provision of some other items as well, such as scissors for the haircut, towel, vessel of holy water, crosses, Pontifical for the bishop, Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, along with other necessary objects.¹⁰⁹

In Dubrovnik the first recorded case of a novice being examined took place on 25 April 1676, when Archbishop Petar Torres visited the confraternity of the Rosary¹¹⁰ and asked three novices a series of questions. The novices concerned were Elizabeta, daughter of Martolica Cerva,¹¹¹ and sisters Ana and Marija, daughters of Marin Bona.¹¹² All three were of noble descent and were novices of the convent of St. Clare. The archbishop asked them six questions, to which the novices responded almost identically, which confirmed that the examination was conducted according to the decrees of the Council of Trent for the discernment of vocation. All three emphasised that they had already been three years at the convent and that they had not taken solemn vows earlier due to archbishop's absence. Also, all three stated that during the novitiate they had acquainted themselves with the rules of St. Clare and that they decided to take the vows on their own free will, without any force or persuasion. The answers provide information on their age, and in this regard an interesting answer was given by Elizabeta, who stated that she was twenty-one, of which she was certain because her mother told her so.¹¹³

The questions were asked exclusively in Latin, while the novices' answers were recorded in a combination of Latin and Italian, which leads to an assumption that the

¹⁰⁸ S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 26.

¹⁰⁹ S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 26.

¹¹⁰ Given the fact that female convents had not yet been restored by the time, the nuns found temporary residence in the quarters of the male Dominican convent and in the premises of the confraternity of the Rosary (M. Fulurija Vučić, *Ženski samostani u Dubrovniku u 17. i 18. stoljeću*, 30–32).

¹¹¹ Elizabeta's secular name was Nika, and she was the daughter of Martolica Marinov Cerva and Paula, daughter of Miho Bona. Besides her, they had six sons and four daughters, all of whom were nuns in one of the city convents. The three of them had entered the convents before the 1667 earthquake, while Nika and sister Marija after the earthquake (N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 7, 246).

¹¹² Ana and Marija were the daughters of Marin Đurov Bona and Marija, daughter of Marin Menze. Besides them, they had six daughters and six sons (N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 7, 150).

¹¹³ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 1, f. 21–21v.

novices did not have a good command of Latin. Later, this practice changed, in that the questions were mainly asked in the Italian language. First examination in Italian took place on 30 September 1709 at the convent of St. Catherine, when the archbishop examined four novices, Tereza Menze,¹¹⁴ Veronika Zlatarić,¹¹⁵ Agneza-Tereza¹¹⁶ and Justina-Marija Pozza.¹¹⁷ What is striking is that all questions were recorded in the plural, suggesting that the archbishop interrogated all four novices at the same time.¹¹⁸ Hence the question remains as to what extent they were able to provide personal answers in this group examination. On 13 October 1730 the novices of the convent of St. Clare, one after another, arrived before Archbishop Franchi. By order of appearance, they were Marija Gertruda Bassegli (22), Antonija Bassegli (20) and Marija Eugenija Sorgo (16). In their case both the questions and answers were written in the plural, and judging by their answers, all three expressed aspiration for taking solemn vows, stating that they wished to serve God because of which they had retreated to the convent.¹¹⁹ Enquired as to whether they were forced, deceived or advised either by parents, nuns or any other person to enter convent or they spontaneously upon God's calling aspired to make a solemn profession, they responded that it was on their own will to enter convent.¹²⁰ Then the archbishop enquired as to how long they had felt the God's calling, to which all three responded that they felt it since childhood. They also stated that they had not promised marriage to anyone, nor then nor in the future and that they were all in good health, without any defect. Asked as to whether they understood the meaning of the mentioned vows, they responded affirmatively, and also affirmed their determination to live in the community, in eternal claustration, respecting the superiors. With his last question the

¹¹⁴ Tereza, birth name Ana, was the daughter of Jeronim Ivanov Pozza and Nika, daughter of Ivan-Petar Pauli. Born in 1677, entered convent at the age of thirty, and died in 1730. She had two brothers and three sisters (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 15v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 67).

¹¹⁵ Nika was the secular name of Veronika Marija, who was the daughter of Stjepan Mihov Zlatarić and Marija, daughter of Marin Sumičić. Born in 1689, she entered convent one day prior to her eighteenth birthday. She died in 1773, aged eighty-three. She had five brothers and a sister (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 16; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 452).

¹¹⁶ Agneza-Tereza's secular name was Ana, and she was the daughter of Mato Lucijanov Pozza and Marija, daughter of Nikola Bona. Born in 1690, entered convent at the age of seventeen, and died in 1773, one day prior to her eighty-third birthday. The nuns of the convent of St. Catherine of Siena chose her four times as prioress. She had three brothers and three sisters (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 16, 34v-35v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 227).

¹¹⁷ Justina Marija, birth name Ana, was the daughter of Luka Lucijanov Pozza and Ana, daughter of Sebastijan Zamagna. Born in 1691, entered convent at the age of sixteen, and died in 1782. She had two brothers and four sisters, two of whom were the nuns of the convent of St. Clare (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 16; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 228).

¹¹⁸ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 51v-52; vol. 3, f. 15v-16.

¹¹⁹ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 75v-76.

¹²⁰ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 76.

archbishop wished to discern their knowledge of Christian teaching, whether they could read and recite Divine Office, and if they were prepared to bear Lord's cross, renouncing their own selves, following the crucified Christ. They responded shortly with "yes."¹²¹

Equally interesting is an example of the vocational discernment of a novice of the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel, Marija Agneza Saraca of 29 November 1802.¹²² Archbishop Nikola Bani asked her a series of usual questions in order to discern her genuine religious calling and familiarity with the rules of the Order and claustration. An additional question concerned her reading ability, to which she responded that her reading was very good.¹²³ The last recorded vocational discernment was held on 9 April 1805, when a novice of the Benedictine convent of St. Mary of Kaštel, Marija Benedikta Gozze (25), before Archbishop Bani responded to the questions on her calling.¹²⁴ It should be noted that the sources make no mention of the examination of the prioresses about the physical, spiritual, intellectual and voluntary readiness of a particular novice for taking vows, as was the case in Zadar.¹²⁵

Once it was discerned that the novice satisfied the requirements, the ceremony of profession followed, by which the novice affirmed her aspiration for solemn vows. During the ceremony, she made three solemn vows—of chastity, poverty and obedience. Having made the vows, the novice received the habit and thus became a rightful member of the community.¹²⁶ Although one might expect that these important events would be regularly recorded in the sources, it becomes apparent that not all novices are mentioned. For instance, on 17 October 1730 it was recorded that sister Marija Eugenija Sorgo took solemn vows,¹²⁷ yet the sources omit to mention that these same vows were taken by other two novices, Marija Gertruda Bassegli and Antonija Bassegli,¹²⁸ who were

¹²¹ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 76v.

¹²² Marija Agneza was the daughter of Pavao-Vicko Saraca and Paula, daughter of Orsat Cerva. Besides her, they had two sons and a daughter. She entered convent at twenty-three, and died at the age of seventy-three (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 198-198v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 301).

¹²³ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 202-203v.

¹²⁴ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 205-205v.

¹²⁵ Z. Dundović, "Thriller of the Zadar nun Cattarina Marchi: true or false story?", 165.

¹²⁶ Arthur Vermeersch, "Religious life", *CE*, vol. 12., ed. Charles G. Hebermann, Edward A. Pace, Condé B. Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, John J. Wynne, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. Accessible on: <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12748b.htm> (accessed: 20 December 2024).

¹²⁷ Marija Eugenija Sorgo was the daughter of Vladislav Nikolin Sorgo and Marija, daughter of Rado Gozze. Besides her, they had three sons and six daughters, two of whom were also nuns at the convent of St. Clare (N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8,365).

¹²⁸ This concerns the sisters who were the daughters of Ivan-Toma Markov Bassegli and Deša, daughter of Antun Resti. Marija Gertruda's secular name was Marija, and Antonija's Nika. They entered the convent together, a year earlier when Marija Gertruda was twenty-one and Antonija twenty years of age. They had seven brothers and three sisters, one of whom died in infancy, while the other two were also nuns. *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 71-71v; N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 7, 63.

examined that same day.¹²⁹ Nor do other records make any mention of their profession. An entry regarding sister Marija Eugenija states that, after a year of the novitiate, she made the solemn vows according to the rules of the Clares. Attending the ceremony was the current archbishop Franchi, Miho Bošković, confessor of the nunnery of St. Clare, along with Frano Lekić, master of ceremony.¹³⁰

By comparing the dates of the examination with the dates when the novices actually took the vows it is clear that the nuns made profession within a period of several days after examination.¹³¹ Also recorded are the cases of novices who took solemn vows on the same day when they were examined,¹³² while slightly over two months was the longest gap between examination and the profession itself.¹³³ The records make no explicit mention of the presence of other nuns during the rite. However, there is reason to assume that at least the convent prioress must have attended the rite, which is evident from the formula of the solemn vows taken by the novices in the convent of St. Catherine. Also, there is no record of the family members attending the novice's profession, although it was common practice across Europe and in the colonial America.¹³⁴ For example, in 1435 in Florence, sisters Antonia and Camilla Bardi took solemn vows in the presence of Archbishop Corsini, abbess Cecilia Donati, gathered nuns, clerics and a part of kin.¹³⁵ The chronicles of the famous Florentine *Le Murate* convent describe extravagant ceremonies of profession, which were attended by so many family members that the ceremonies had to be held in one of the larger convent halls.¹³⁶ In the colonial Mexico, the family of the prospective nun often expected to attend the ceremony of profession, so as to be given an opportunity to display the family wealth and prestige.¹³⁷ Similar practice has been traced in France in the seventeenth century,¹³⁸ as well as in the convents of Venice.¹³⁹

¹²⁹ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 76v.

¹³⁰ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 76v.

¹³¹ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 76v, 79v, 80v, 85, 86v, 95, 100, 101, 101v, 105, 106, 114, 121v, 123v, 126v, 127v, 128v, 132, 132v, 135v, 141v, 147v-148, 156-156v, 164v, 168v, 177, 180-180v, 186, 186v, 187v, 188v-189, 192v-193, 194v-195, 203v-204, 206.

¹³² *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 96-96v, 146-146v, 162.

¹³³ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 133.

¹³⁴ E. A. Leffeldt, "Uneven conversions", 129; K. Lowe, "Secular brides and convent brides", 45-46.

¹³⁵ S. T. Strocchia, *Nuns and nunneries in renaissance Florence*, 18-19.

¹³⁶ E. A. Leffeldt, "Uneven conversions", 129.

¹³⁷ A. Lavrin, *Brides of Christ*, 53-54, 77.

¹³⁸ Elizabeth Rapley, *A Social history of the cloister. Daily life in the teaching monasteries of the old regime*, Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2001, 181.

¹³⁹ J. G. Sperling, *Convents and the body politic*, 139-140.

In eighteenth-century Dubrovnik it is noticeable that several nuns from the same convent took solemn vows on the same day. Thus, for instance, on 15 June 1732 five nuns of the convent of St. Clare took solemn vows. According to the source, they approached the collocutorium fence¹⁴⁰ in the church of St. Clare, where they took vows in the presence of Archbishop Franchi, Frano Lekić, master of ceremony, and their confessor Miho Bošković.¹⁴¹ Some ten years later, on 30 July 1752, solemn vows were taken by two nuns of the same convent.¹⁴² They were Marija Domenika Sorgo¹⁴³ and Marija Angelica Gozze, who were not examined on the same day.¹⁴⁴ The rite of solemn vows was held after the holy mass at the convent church, celebrated by Archbishop Milković, wearing his pontifical vestments and in accordance with the current rules.¹⁴⁵ On 31 December 1786 Marija Tereza Gozze, novice of the convent of St. Mary of Kaštel, took her vows during the solemn mass before Archbishop Lazzari at the convent church, in accordance with the book of rituals, rules and constitution of the Order. The rite was attended by the canon and deputy of archbishop Ivan Matov Ghetaldi, canon Luka Nikolin Sorgo and many other clerics, including the chancellor who recorded this event.¹⁴⁶ This example draws attention to the fact that the rite was attended by as many clerics as possible,¹⁴⁷ which was an established practice. Although the sources mention that the rite was attended by a multitude of people,¹⁴⁸ rarely is it explicitly cited that they were clergymen, and not other individuals.¹⁴⁹

Preserved for the convent of St. Catherine is the formula of the solemn vows which the novices placed in archbishop's hands, in the presence of the convent prioress. According to that formula, the novices vowed to "All Mighty God, Blessed Virgin Mary, Blessed Dominic, Blessed Catherine of Siena and All Saints, as well as to the Revered

¹⁴⁰ Collocutorium was a visiting room used for conversation with persons outside the convent. See Vanja Kovačić, "Simboličko značenje prostora u ženskim benediktinskim samostanima dalmatinskih gradova", *Crkva u svijetu* 58/1 (2023), 144.

¹⁴¹ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 80v.

¹⁴² *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 138v.

¹⁴³ Marija Domenika, by secular name Petrunjela, was the daughter of Vladislav Nikolin Sorgo and Marija, daughter of Rado Gozze. Cloistered at St. Clare's were also her other two sisters. They had three brothers and four sisters. On one of her sisters as nun, see note 128 (N. Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, 8, 365).

¹⁴⁴ Marija Angelica Gozze was examined on 26 July 1752, and Marija Domenika Sorgo two days later, 28 July (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 137v-138).

¹⁴⁵ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 138v.

¹⁴⁶ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 186.

¹⁴⁷ In the source cited as *alisque quam plurimis clericis* (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 186).

¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere cited only as *alisque quam plurimis* (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 76v, 80v, 85-85v, 96-96v, 100, 101, 101v, 105, 106, 114, 121v, 123v, 126v, 127v, 128v, 132, 132v, 133, 135v, 138v, 141v, 144v-145, 146-146v, 147v-148, 159-159v, 162, 164v, 168v, 177, 186v, 187v, 192v-193, 194v-195, 203v-204, 206).

¹⁴⁹ Apart from this, I have traced only two more examples where it is explicitly stated that the gathering involved as many clerics as possible (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 2, f. 180-180v, 188v-189).

Lord Archbishop, his successors and the convent prioress, to live in obedience, poverty, chastity and claustration their entire life, observing the rule of St. Augustin, apostolic constitutions and Dominican orders".¹⁵⁰ The third volume of the *Regularium et Monialium* fond includes a catalogue of entries for each novice of the convent of St. Catherine of Siena respectively, with the date of the solemn vows, name of archbishop to whom the girl vowed, along with the name of the prioress who attended the solemn act. It becomes apparent that the novices always took the solemn vows on Sunday, and in most cases also entered is the name of the saint whose feast was celebrated on that day.¹⁵¹ Thus, for instance, on 6 October 1709, when eight nuns took their vows, that day was noted as the Feast of Our Lady of Rosary. On 23 April 1719, on the second Sunday after Easter, the Feast of St. George, two girls took solemn vows.¹⁵²

Considering that it was an act by which the girls vowed to eternal chastity and dedicated their life to God, it is understandable that the ceremony was held on Sunday, on the holiest day of the week, with additional emphasis on the church feast celebrated on that day. However, a detailed description of the ceremony itself has not survived, that is, there is no mention as to when and how the novice was to utter the profession formula, as is the case in some other European convents. Thus, for instance, preserved from fifteenth-century England is an interesting example of the profession ceremony of the Benedictine sisters, from which it is evident that the ceremony was performed at the altar of the convent church in the presence of other nuns. The novice uttered her profession in the presence of a priest, after which she made a sign of the cross in the book of profession. She then approached the altar, kissed it and bowed, chanted specific verses and prostrated herself. This was accompanied by the priest's and nuns' chant of various verses. The novice would then stand up, whereupon her veil was consecrated and placed on her head. She again uttered the wording of the profession before the convent prioress, prostrated herself again, and after the chants she would join the rest of the nuns in the choir. In the end, she was to receive the eucharist.¹⁵³ A similar accent on the solemn and symbolic character may also be traced in the preserved Book of Ceremonies of the Rab convent of St. Andrew the Apostle from the seventeenth century. On the day of the profession of vows the bishop, accompanied by the clerics, would make a solemn entrance into the church to the sound of organs, while the nuns stood in the choir. The novices wore a black habit, and above it the solemn wedding attire with ornaments, white veil and floral crown. They approached

¹⁵⁰ *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 55v.

¹⁵¹ Out of the thirty-eight recorded cases of the profession of solemn vows, only six did not have a comment on the religious feast celebrated that day (*Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 56-61v).

¹⁵² *Regularium et Monialium*, vol. 3, f. 57-58.

¹⁵³ E. A. Lehfelddt, "Uneven conversions", 128.

in twos, with a burning candle in hand, while the children dressed in angels walked before them. Having laid the crowns and veils on a prepared cabinet, the bishop called them out and examined in Latin. The congregation would then sing and pray, while the act of profession included a series of symbolic gestures—renunciation of secular life was symbolised by the casting of the floral crown on the floor and a haircut in the form of a cross, which the bishop performed by using special scissors, assisted by the matrons who collected the hair into previously prepared handkerchiefs.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

The study of rites through which the girls passed in order to become nuns provides an insight into a myriad of questions on female monasticism in the past. The rites of passage from the secular to the spiritual life, novitiate and the profession of vows reveal the complexity of the process, as well as the social, family and religious context that shaped it. During the eighteenth century, Dubrovnik witnessed the usual form of the girls' admission into convents, regardless of the religious order and the rules that followed. Archbishop or any other prelate examined the girls about their true aspiration to enter convent, but neither the questions nor the answers were consistently recorded. Solely recorded was the usual form from which it may be learnt that the girl felt a religious vocation after which she could enter the convent.

Scarce data have survived regarding the manner of the girl's transition from parental home to the convent, yet the description of the ceremony provides an insight into the manner of convent entry. It is evident that the members of the family participated in the transition, along with other influential persons of the time. Also, the transition contained the usual symbolic elements, which was in keeping with the rules and practice elsewhere in Europe. Thus, a girl, after the liturgical celebration, upon entering the convent discarded her secular clothes and appeared dressed in the habit, surrounded by other nuns. That act symbolised her belonging to a new community, that of the spirit. The change of secular name also symbolised the spiritual "rebirth", which additionally confirmed the separation from secular life.

The period of novitiate was a key phase in which the novices adapted and prepared for monastic life, observing the rules of the order they had joined, in which the mistresses were responsible for their training. In all Dubrovnik convents, the novitiate, as regulated by canon law, was designated for a minimum of one year. If the novitiate lasted longer, the reasons for it were stated, and in most cases it was because of the archbishop's absence. The completion of the novitiate was followed by the profession of solemn vows, that is, vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, from which it is

¹⁵⁴ S. Potočnjak, "Redovnice i rukopisna kultura", 26.

evident that the rite, regardless of the convent, was the same. First, the novice was to be examined again, and the archbishop would arrive at the convent church where he questioned the novices. The questions were not always identical, on occasion they were recorded in abbreviated form, notably in cases when several novices were examined and took the solemn vows on the same day. The main purpose of the questions was to discern whether the novice concerned aspired to take the solemn vows on her own will and whether she understood its meaning. Also examined was the existence of any impediment for the profession of vows, such as marriage promise or any physical disability. The questions and answers were generally uniform, though not entirely. That leads to an assumption that the novices prior to official examination had already been acquainted with the questions they would be asked, as well as the answers they were to give. Once the genuine vocation was discerned, the novice took the solemn vows, most frequently a couple of days after the examination. That act was attended by the archbishop and other members of the church, while there is no mention of the presence of the kin or other secular persons.

Further, also apparent on the Dubrovnik example is a specific resemblance between the rite of marriage and the monastic rites, such as the wearing of wedding gown or crown, which points to the influence of secular authorities on the shaping of these ceremonies. Given that secular authorities had a certain impact on church issues as well, the nuns' families shared a different view of the ceremonies their daughters passed through from that of the Church. They insisted on the preservation of the rites' similarity with an aim to emphasise family values, especially in the cases when their daughters entered the most elite city convents, and it is likely that by telling stories about the rites they tried to bring cloister life closer to their daughters. Considering that from the earliest childhood the girl was determined either for marriage or convent, and that by telling stories about virginity as a sublime lifestyle little girls were introduced to that choice, the stories about ceremonies were probably assigned the same role. Apparently, the families were aware of the impression such a ceremony could have on the frail girls' hearts in which they played the central role. The fact that the archbishop also participated in the ceremonies added even greater significance to the entry into convent. Ceremonial rites were not only important for the novices, but they also had an important role for other nuns by breaking the monotony of everyday convent life and reminding the community of the purpose and missions of the monastic vocation.

