

## ON RAGUSAN *LIBERTAS* IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

LOVRO KUNČEVIĆ

**ABSTRACT:** The concept of “liberty” (*libertas*, *libertà*) is one of the key motifs in the political tradition of old Dubrovnik. This article aims to highlight the history of discourse on *libertas* from its advent to the sixteenth century, when “liberty” had become a true commonplace of the Ragusan culture and politics. Apart from illuminating different meanings of this concept in the Ragusan sources, the article traces the shifts in the socio-cultural context of the rhetoric on *libertas*: various situations in which it appears with regard to purpose and addressee, as well as individuals, institutions and groups that spoke about “freedom”.

**Key words:** liberty, identity, Late Middle Ages, Ragusa, history of ideas

In 1547 doctor Lujo Đurašević (Aluigi Giurasio) was despatched to the court of Ferdinand of Habsburg as envoy of the Dubrovnik Republic. Under most delicate circumstances, aware of Ferdinand’s patronage of the plot against the Republic, Đurašević turned to a certain Marko from Risan, captain in the Habsburgs’ service, in an intent to obtain more details. Đurašević approached him with an interesting introduction: “... praising the freedom of our [Ragusan] nation, [I said] that every person of our tongue should desire to see the whole

---

**Lovro Kunčević, member of the Institute for Historical Sciences of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Dubrovnik Address: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, Lapadska obala 6, 20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia. E-mail: lovro.kuncevic@gmail.com**

---

This article has already been published in Croatian under the following title: »O dubrovačkoj *libertas* u kasnom srednjem vijeku.« *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 46 (2008): 9-64. Translated by Vesna Baće.

Dalmatia free at least as much as Dubrovnik, and that every person of our tongue should glory in the liberty of Dubrovnik. With these and similar words I sweetened him into telling me many things”<sup>1</sup>

Đurašević’s worded opening is pregnant with meaning. By positioning the Ragusans in the community “of our tongue” (*del nostro idioma*), he evidently not only counted on a certain feeling of Dalmatian solidarity, but on another, equally important fact. As the Ragusan diplomat put it, Dubrovnik was far more than just a Dalmatian city, and its inhabitants far more than mere people “of our tongue”. Dubrovnik stood in a special relationship to “liberty” (*libertà*), which he mentioned as many as three times in one sentence: Dubrovnik shares little with its neighbours, it is a city in the “liberty” of which other Dalmatians are to take pride, an ideal (even) to be aspired by all. In other words, should Đurašević’s report be trusted, before the captain from Boka he successfully evoked the well-known sixteenth-century image of Dubrovnik as a free republic.

This diplomat was neither the first nor the last to have spoken about Dubrovnik in this manner. His words are but an echo, an epitomised formulation of a powerful tradition. The image of Dubrovnik as a free republic recurs in various documents whenever the ancient Ragusans spoke about themselves and their city. In Dubrovnik *libertà* (*libertas*) had become a commonplace, and speech about it a true cultural “long duration” (*longue durée*). The aim of this article is to write the history of Ragusan discourse on “liberty” in the late Middle Ages, from its first appearance to the time when it permeated the entire culture of the city-state, having become a guiding leitmotif of each Ragusan self-portrayal. In doing so, two objectives lie ahead of me: first, different meanings of the word *libertas* and their changes in time require more comprehensive elucidation; second, attention should be paid to the shifts in the social and cultural context of discourse on *libertas*, i.e. the changing individuals, groups and institutions that spoke about *libertas*, their varying purposes and audiences, as well as the circumstances in which they acted. In sum, the goal of this study is to present the manner in which rhetoric on “liberty” in

---

<sup>1</sup> ...*lodandoli la liberta della natione nostra, e come ogni uno del nostro idioma, doveva desiderare, che tutta la Dalmazia al meno fusse libera si com'e Raugia e ch'ogniuno della lingua nostra doveva gloriarsi della liberta di Raugia, e con simili parola, indolcendolo, mi commincio dapoi molte parolla dire...* Đurašević’s report to the Senate on the mission to Ferdinand’s court is related to the famous affair involving the banished Ragusan patricians Michael and Paulus Bucignolo. *Lamenta Politica*, ser. 11, vol. 6, f. 43rv (State Archives in Dubrovnik, hereafter cited as: SAD).

Dubrovnik had become a series of self-understandings handed down by generations. To put it simply, my objective is to highlight the ancient and powerful tradition behind Đurašević's words.

*The first "liberties" of Dubrovnik (before 1358)*

"Liberty" as a motif emerges in the oldest minutes of the Ragusan councils from the first half of the fourteenth century. Thenceforth one thing was made perfectly clear and apparently persisted throughout the centuries of Dubrovnik's history. Namely, the plural and not the singular was implied—"liberties" and not "liberty". Underlying the words *libertas* or *franchigia* even in the scanty formulations of the oldest state documents are a host of different meanings.

One of these meanings becomes apparent in a seemingly curious context—Ragusan trade and position of the Ragusans in foreign lands. In 1302 the Major Council authorised its representative in Constantinople "to call attention to the liberty of the Ragusans"; in 1325 Ragusan consul to the Serbian court was responsible for the protection of "all the rights, liberties and franchise of the Ragusan commune"; in 1344 the Minor Council learnt that a certain Petrus de Babalio hindered Dubrovnik's sale of salt, claiming that it was "to the great harm of the said city and against its liberty".<sup>2</sup> What *libertas* or *franchigia* in these and similar cases indicate is quite clear: various privileges that Dubrovnik enjoyed in the territories ruled by foreign lords, such as exemption from customs dues or the right to take legal action in lawsuits involving Ragusan merchants.<sup>3</sup> In a succession of charters that the Ragusans had been granted over the centuries, as well as in Dubrovnik's calling upon them, the privileged position of Ragusan merchants was usually defined as *immunitates et libertates, omnia et singula privilegia, libertates et immunitates dicte civitatis* or *omnes*

---

<sup>2</sup> *Libri Reformationum*, vol. V, ed. Josip Gelcich. [Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum Meridionalium (hereafter cited as: MSHSM), XXIX]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1897: pp. 43, 184; *Libri Reformationum*, vol. I, ed. Josip Gelcich. [MSHSM, X] Zagreb: JAZU, 1879: p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Similar examples of rhetoric on "liberty" from the early period are: *Libri Reformationum I*: pp. 248, 250; Jorjo Tadić, *Pisma i uputstva Dubrovačke Republike*. [Zbornik za istoriju, jezik i književnost srpskog naroda, (hereafter cited as: ZIJKS), III, 4]. Beograd: SKA, 1935: pp. 153, 223; *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*, ed. Josip Gelcich and Lajos Thalloszy. Budapest: Kiadja a m. Tud. Akadémia Tört. Bizottsága, 1887: pp. 62, 64, 361, 385, 386, 406, 561, 563.

*libertates et prerogatives*.<sup>4</sup> Equally, though more seldom, *libertas/franchigia* in the documents may also stand for the privileges which Dubrovnik itself granted to its citizens.<sup>5</sup> What is common to all these formulations of liberty, authored either by foreigners or the Ragusans themselves, is that “liberty” essentially stands for privilege. “Liberty” implies freedom from customary obligations—that is, immunity or autonomy granted by a superior authority.

Apart from denoting, in the main, commercial privileges, “liberty” in the minutes of the Ragusan councils frequently stands for yet another similar matter. In the decisions of all the three councils, typical formulas such as *de dando libertatem, comissum fuit et data libertas* or even *cum illa libertate* are often mentioned.<sup>6</sup> These formulations are used when a communal body, mainly the Major Council or the Senate, assigns another body, most commonly the Minor Council or certain officials, to carry out a concrete task, such as correspondence with foreign rulers, organisation of the guards, the city’s supply of grain etc. Basically, underlying all the mentioned decisions is one thing: “liberty” signifies authority to perform a concrete political action, which is communicated or transmitted from the wider to the narrower executive bodies of the commune.

These two meanings of the word “liberty”—*libertas* as a privilege or rather authorisation for a concrete action granted by a higher communal body—feature in the conservative idiom of Ragusan official documents from the early fourteenth century to the fall of the Republic. Both meanings are close to the most common meaning of the term *libertas* in medieval legal theory and

---

<sup>4</sup> Some of the examples from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are: *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. I/1 ed. Jovan Radonić. [ZIJSKN, III. 2]. Beograd: SKA, 1934: pp. 118, 120-122, 178-179, 413; *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. I/2, ed. Jovan Radonić. [ZIJSKN, III.3]. Beograd: SKA, 1934: pp. 569, 602, 711.

<sup>5</sup> In this sense *libertas* appears as early as in the Statute of Dubrovnik, see *Statut grada Dubrovnika*, ed. and trans. Josip Kolanović and Mate Križman. Dubrovnik: Historijski Arhiv Dubrovnik, 1990: pp. 458, 476-477 (hereafter: *Statute*). In addition to commercial privileges, the cases of “liberty” granted to individuals by Ragusan government imply their exemption from civic duties, such as keeping guard, clearly stated in the typical phrase *fuit factus liber et exemptus ab infrascriptis honeribus et factionibus* (*Libri Reformationum*, vol. II, ed. Josip Gelcich. [MSHSM, XIII]. Zagreb: JAZU: pp. 60-61). Indeed, *libertas/franchigia* has yet another much older and more fundamental meaning. For the examples where *franchus* or *liberus homo* mean the opposite of the terms *servus* and *ancilla*, see: *Statute*: pp. 404-407.

<sup>6</sup> The formulation *libertati (!) date comitibus* appears as early as in the *Statute*: p. 481. For but a few of the many examples from the oldest council registers, see: *Libri Reformationum* I: pp. 6, 38, 141, 266, 272, 278; *Libri Reformationum* II: pp. 168, 169, 179, 264, 269, 306, 319.

practice, where “liberty” conveys exemption from customary obligations or right to perform a certain activity—generally, a privilege granted by a superior authority. In other words, official language of the Ragusan documents most often merely mirrors the classical medieval definition of liberty understood as *permissio principis*.<sup>7</sup>

This study deals with those utterances on *libertas* which went beyond such traditional, even routine, meaning. Namely, Ragusan sources—especially those dating from the periods of crisis, when routine vocabulary proved insufficient—contain mentions of *libertas* with a different, far less conventional meaning. Early fourteenth century had already seen cases when the word “liberty”, although still affiliated to its standard meaning of privilege, may have carried a somewhat more general and politically more relevant meaning. An interesting example has been traced in the minutes from 1319 when the Minor Council, replying to the request of the Serbian king for the extradition of a certain debtor, informed the king in “refined, humble and soft words” that “the liberty which the commune of Dubrovnik has ever had and still has should be observed and maintained, for we are obliged neither by law nor custom to the said action [extradition of the debtor] ...”.<sup>8</sup> An equally indicative example from 1326 shows that Dubrovnik’s *libertas* was not only defended from foreign lords, but also from one’s own suzerain—Venice. The government received a letter from the doge ordering that the goods of a certain Florentine merchant, wanted for trial, to the value of 50 libras be confiscated as a warrant of his appearance before the Venetian officials within a certain period. Despite obscure circumstances, it seems that the overly conscientious Venetian *comes*, since the goods of the

---

<sup>7</sup> On liberty as *permissio principis*, see: Philip Jones, *The Italian city-state*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997: p. 353; Alan Harding, »Political liberty in Middle ages«. *Speculum* 55 (1980): pp. 423-443.

<sup>8</sup> *Libri Reformationum* V: p. 157. This case evokes yet another important meaning of the term “liberty” in medieval Dubrovnik: the right of asylum in the city. Despite serious political connotations, this meaning of “liberty”, from the earliest times, saw a relatively independent development, witnessed in the fact that for the “liberty” in the narrowest political sense the term *libertas/libertà* was generally used, while the term *franchigia/franchisia* tended to signify the right of residence and asylum. Regretfully, this article simply leaves no room for the discussion on this aspect of “liberty”, because the topic of Ragusan *franchigia/franchisia* requires an in-depth study of its own. For brief outline and examples, see: Ilija Mitić, *Dubrovačka država u međunarodnoj zajednici*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 2004: pp. 46-51; Ilija Mitić, »Imigracijska politika Dubrovačke Republike s posebnim obzirom na ustanovu svjetovnog azila«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti IC JAZU u Dubrovniku* 17 (1979): pp. 125-163.

mentioned merchant could not be located, demanded that the latter pay a bail of as many as 500 libras. The Ragusan *Consilium Rogatorum* vetoed *comes'* further actions with an explanation that "it would be against the liberty of the city", and that, in case the merchant's goods be found, the Venetian-appointed count was allowed no more than to proceed in accordance with the doge's letter.<sup>9</sup>

Although the cited fragments fail to offer sufficient material for the detailed reconstruction of the meaning of the concept of *libertas*, there still appears to be certain headway in its understanding. Firstly, here "liberty" seems to have clear political connotations, indicating autonomy of Dubrovnik, and no longer any kind of privilege. Secondly, thus politically accentuated "liberty" is not associated with concrete communal bodies or the position of the Ragusans abroad, but, importantly, with the city as a whole.

However, the moment at which the Ragusans definitely began to speak about their "liberty" in a profoundly new way was the pivotal year 1358.<sup>10</sup> Namely, the instructions the Major Council had issued to their ambassadors entrusted to negotiate on the city's status within the Hungaro-Croatian Kingdom with King Louis contained a thought which could hardly be described as harmless. In the negotiations with their new sovereign, Ragusan representatives were instructed to: "defend the liberty of the city (*tera*) and, having defended the liberty of the city, to submit the city to him".<sup>11</sup> What this defence of the *libertade de la tera* actually meant is revealed by the remainder of the brief. The ambassadors were to demand considerable autonomy within the Hungaro-Croatian Kingdom, limited only by the annual payment of tribute,

---

<sup>9</sup> *Libri Reformationum* V: p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> For the context and significance of the year 1358, see: Zdenka Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor: Temelj Dubrovačke republike*. Zagreb: Golden Marketing, 2003; Branislav M. Nedeljković, »Položaj Dubrovnika prema Ugarskoj (1358-1460)«. *Godišnjak Pravnog fakulteta u Sarajevu* 15 (1967): pp. 447-463; Vinko Foretić, »Godina 1358. u povijesti Dubrovnika«, in: idem, *Studije i rasprave iz hrvatske povijesti*. Split: Književni krug Split and Matica Hrvatska Dubrovnik, 2001: pp. 229-254; Dušanka Dinić-Knežević, *Dubrovnik i Ugarska u srednjem veku*. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, 1986: pp. 16-21; Milorad Medini, *Dubrovnik Gučetića*. Beograd: SAN, 1953: pp. 61-78; Bariša Krekić, *Dubrovnik in the 14th and 15th Centuries: A City Between the East and West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972: pp. 40-42; Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik: A History*. London: Saqi, 2003: pp. 62-66. For a comprehensive insight into the international position of Dubrovnik after 1358, see: I. Mitić, *Dubrovačka država u međunarodnoj zajednici*.

<sup>11</sup> Antonije Vučetić, »Spomenici dubrovački«. *Srd* 5 (1906): p. 458. The instruction issued on 11 April 1358.

modest military support, formal reception of the king and a series of symbolic signs of Dubrovnik's allegiance to the Hungarian Crown. However, most interesting is the very formulation of the ambassadors' mission, because it illuminates the way the Ragusan councillors understood the shift from Venetian to Hungarian suzerainty. One should bear in mind that Dubrovnik, unlike other Dalmatian towns, had never been under the control of the Hungaro-Croatian kings and was thus without legal precedent—that is, the old privilege granted by Arpad dynasty, upon which the Ragusans may have called in the negotiations.<sup>12</sup> Yet the position of Dubrovnik in the eyes of its councillors was far from bad. In a seemingly paradoxical formulation of the instruction, the city was to submit itself to the king only after (sic!) its freedom had been “defended”. This thought harbours far-reaching implications of which the councillors must have been aware. If the recognition of the Hungarian king was to succeed the “defence of liberty”, then “liberty” was in essence independent of a superior authority. *Libertas* did not depend on the grace or privilege of the Hungarian king: according to the statement of the Major Council, Dubrovnik had enjoyed “freedom” even before Louis's privilege.

Several other noteworthy details from the instruction of 1358 reveal that its wording was everything but coincidental. Following the sentence on the “defence of liberty”, the Ragusan representatives were instructed to try to submit the city to Louis *only*, and in case this proposition failed, to submit it both to him and his successors.<sup>13</sup> It is hard to say what the Ragusan councillors exactly meant by this, but most likely that Dubrovnik, after Louis's death, could renegotiate its status with his successors, which would *de facto* confirm its right to decide on its own destiny and its independent political subjectivity. Naturally, the victorious king did not accept this: by the Treaty of Visegrád, the city was subjected to both King Louis and his successors. However, even after they had to agree to this, the Ragusans continued to seek an amount of independence unacceptable to the King. From the first draft of the Visegrád privilege it is evident that the ambassadors had sworn an oath of allegiance to King Louis and his successors, yet symptomatically refused to do something

---

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of Dubrovnik's principal position in the negotiations, see: Z. Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor*: p. 70. The very fact that Dubrovnik negotiated with the king distinguishes it from other Dalmatian cities, the status of which was not the result of agreement but Louis's decree (B. M. Nedeljković, »Položaj Dubrovnika prema Ugarskoj (1358-1460)«: p. 459).

<sup>13</sup> A. Vučetić, »Spomenici dubrovački«: p. 458.

else—accept the obligation by which all Ragusans were to pledge allegiance to the king and his successors “forever” (*perpetuo*).<sup>14</sup> Having finally agreed to the latter demand, the Ragusan governors wasted no time, as that same year they made certain moves which, put mildly, did not comply with the freshly drawn charter with the Hungarian Crown. Thus, for example, in October of 1358 the Major Council decided that in all the extant copies of the Statute the phrase *ad honorem domini ducis et communis Veneciarum* should be replaced with *ad honorem et augmentum communis Ragusii*.<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that the Treaty of Visegrád made it perfectly clear that the Ragusans were the subjects of the Hungarian king, his *fideles* who had recently sworn to “perpetual” allegiance, in this provision—although that was absolutely to be expected there— there was no mention at all of the Hungarian king. The formulation *ad honorem et augmentum communis Ragusii* and similar expressions are to be found in the second book of the Dubrovnik Statute, containing mainly the oaths of various Ragusan officials.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the far-reaching consequence of this provision is that by the fundamental legal document of Dubrovnik none of the Ragusan office-holders, from the highest-ranking Rector to the lowest offices of the state, was explicitly bound to pledge allegiance to the Hungarian king but exclusively and solely to the commune of Dubrovnik. Similarly, a very revealing disregard of one’s own “sovereign” is displayed in yet another Ragusan practice. While Zadar and other Dalmatian towns in the entitlement of their acts from 1358 onwards always mention the Hungarian king, Ragusan acts refer only to the city Rectors and never to the Hungarian king.<sup>17</sup> All of the given examples show that, despite pathetic declamations of allegiance in diplomacy and occasional execution of vassal duties, from 1358 Dubrovnik tended to interpret its relationship with Hungary as an agreement on protection or even an alliance of the two, potentially at least, independent states rather than a relationship of “perpetual” vassalage.

All in all, the year 1358 marked the beginning of the creation of an impressive Ragusan self-portrait. The period of Hungarian suzerainty (1358-1526)—the topic of the subsequent chapters—was not only characterised by

<sup>14</sup> Z. Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor*: p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Libri Reformationum* II: pp. 247-248; B. M. Nedeljković, »Položaj Dubrovnika prema Ugarskoj (1358-1460)«: p. 459; Z. Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor*: p. 86.

<sup>16</sup> For similar changes in the second book, see *Statute*: pp. 288, 290, 291, 293, 304, 305, 309.

<sup>17</sup> B. M. Nedeljković, »Položaj Dubrovnika prema Ugarskoj (1358-1460)«: p. 459.

the affirmation of Dubrovnik's *de facto* independence but also by the emergence of its exceptionally rich "mythology". Indeed, the first grand theme of Ragusan politics, and later also of the culture of this epoch, was the nature of the city's relationship with the Hungarian Kingdom. Although the rhetoric of "fidelity" to the Hungarian king and Crown continued until the defeat at Mohács in 1526, the roots, nature and the extent of this "fidelity" were subject to a most interesting new interpretation with which Louis of Anjou would most definitely not have agreed. This redefinition of Dubrovnik's position towards Hungary was, for the most part, founded on a specific historical perspective—that is, on a fairly loose interpretation of what had really taken place in 1358. Ragusan *libertas* began to draw its legitimacy from the past; "liberty" was given a (pseudo) historical foundation. Adoption of a historical approach in interpreting the political status of Dubrovnik has led in due course to more drastic attempts at redefining the whole of Dubrovnik's past in the spirit of "liberty", that is, at creating a new image of the city's history that was to parallel its growing self-consciousness. Yet, in addition to gaining a historical dimension, in this epoch *libertas* acquired distinctive republican and aristocratic contours. "Liberty" did not only entail absence of outside interference on the city's governance, therefore its factual independence, but also life under republican institutions. Genuine "freedom" was attainable only in republican order which, through its institutions, secured peace and welfare for the majority, and for the privileged noble minority far more than that—ability to realise their "liberty" as *cives* by participating in the city's political life. Lastly, in this period Dubrovnik found itself in a situation unknown to other city-states, situation which was probably the greatest challenge to the increasingly articulate ideology of Ragusan "liberty". By the 1440s and particularly in the latter half of the fifteenth century Dubrovnik was expected to explain both to itself and to the whole of Christendom the nature of the relationship—by far more embarrassing than that with Hungary—the status of tributary of the Ottoman Empire.

However, the Hungarian period did not only witness new moments in the meaning of Ragusan *libertas*, but also interesting changes in the social and cultural context of the discourse on liberty. Although in the early fourteenth century rhetoric on "liberty" was an exclusivity of the ruling elite, in the later period *libertas* had become the topic of non-political "speakers", such as Ragusan Humanists, historians or poets. Equally so, the circumstances in which the motif of "liberty" appeared also changed. While in the fourteenth century the subject of "liberty" in its narrow political sense was raised only in

times of crisis, when threatened by the Venetian *comes*, Serbian or Hungarian king, later, however, *libertas* was invoked also when one sought to glorify Ragusa, in ceremonial occasions such as public orations or in the increasingly popular panegyric literature. This also reveals the profound change of purpose of the liberty discourse. While in the earlier period the mention of “liberty” was intended to mobilise—it was a programme and a value, something to be “defended”—with time, discourse on it was applied also to other purposes, emerging as a patriotic topos, a device for legitimising aristocratic rule or part of aristocratic political education. Finally, in the period marked by Hungarian rule the audience had changed, that is, those to whom discourse on *libertas* was addressed. In the fifteenth century, in particular, “liberty”—in full accordance with its new objectives—had become a motif which, through various forms of medieval “public sphere” such as ritual, literature, oratory or even art (e.g. Orlando’s Column), was transmitted to the city masses and the learned European public alike. This series of significant shifts in the content and socio-cultural context of the discourse on “liberty”, shifts that moulded *libertas* into a general theme of Ragusan culture, may be summarised in one sentence which is the best introduction to what is about to follow. In late-medieval Dubrovnik “liberty” had grown into myth.

*“Faithful freedom” and “free faithfulness”: Dubrovnik and Hungary until the mid-fifteenth century*

The rise of “liberty” to the key motif of Ragusan political culture was closely associated with the changes within the city’s political environment. The epoch of Louis of Anjou (1358-1382), although marked by the affirmation of Dubrovnik’s *de facto* independence, contributed little to the actual formulation of the discourse on *libertas*. The circumstances seemed to have offered little opportunity as well as need for the rhetoric on “liberty”. Louis secured prosperity and relative protection to the whole of Dalmatia and Dubrovnik, at the same time granting wide autonomy as regards the city’s newly established self-government.<sup>18</sup> Thus under the powerful king, the suzerainty of whom proved omnipresent in Dalmatia, “liberty” was rarely on

---

<sup>18</sup> Tomislav Raukar, *Hrvatsko srednjovjekovlje. Prostor, ljudi, ideje*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga, Zavod za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskog Fakulteta u Zagrebu, 1997: pp. 80-85; Z. Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor*: pp. 86-116.

the agenda, and if so, it usually appeared in a befitting royalist garb. A good example of the rhetoric of this kind, with the Ragusans as the king's "faithful and subjects" (*fideles et subditi*) is to be found in a letter of the Ragusan government to an unknown addressee from 1371, in which Louis is mentioned as "our natural lord who has granted us the said liberties (*libertates*) and grace".<sup>19</sup> However, the examples in which *libertas* may have indicated more than king's privilege emerge in this period, too, albeit probably not by chance, mainly in communication between the Ragusans themselves. Thus, for example, in 1362 the envoy who was ordered by the king to bring the seal of Dubrovnik to Zadar for the purpose of confirming Louis's treaty with the Austrian duke was instructed to try and read the agreement and unless he found "nothing against our freedom", to proceed according to the instructions of His Lordship's ambassador.<sup>20</sup> After Louis's death, the Ragusans remained loyal subjects of the Hungarian Crown, seeking and being granted confirmation of their privileges—*omnia et singula priuilegia, libertates et immunitates dicte ciuitatis nostre Ragusii*—from his daughter Maria, successor to the throne, and soon afterwards from Charles of Durrës.<sup>21</sup>

The tumultuous reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg (King of Hungary 1387-1437) altered the picture considerably.<sup>22</sup> Apparently, what forced the Ragusans in the early fifteenth century to start speaking about their "freedom" more explicitly was a chain of most dramatic crises that threatened their independence. The episode with Ladislas of Naples, Sigismund's rival and pretender to the Hungarian throne, who, in the early fifteenth century, was recognised by the rest of Dalmatia, forced the Ragusans to reconsider their relations with the Hungarian Crown. Upon Ladislas' request for allegiance, the Ragusan Senate

<sup>19</sup> *Pisma i uputstva Dubrovačke Republike*: p. 223.

<sup>20</sup> *Pisma i uputstva Dubrovačke Republike*: p. 103. A similar example is the instruction to Đivo Gondula from July 1359 prior to his visit to Vojislav Vojnović. Should Vojnović ask about any damage done by the Ragusans, the envoy was instructed to answer *per lo melior modo che tu say et puoy, deffendendo la libertade della terra* (*Pisma i uputstva Dubrovačke Republike*: p. 2).

<sup>21</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje I/1*: p. 121; *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> For a survey of the political circumstances and relations with Hungary during Sigismund's reign, see: Zrinka Pešorda, *Odnos Dubrovnika prema ugarskoj kruni i kralju u vrijeme Sigismunda Luksembušskog* (1387-1438), unpublished Master's thesis at the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb, 2001; Zrinka Pešorda, »The Crown, the King and the City: Dubrovnik, Hungary and the Dynastic Controversy, 1382-1390«. *Dubrovnik Annals* 10 (2006): pp. 7-29; D. Dinić-Knežević, *Dubrovnik i Ugarska*: pp. 72-105; Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I. Zagreb: Nakladni Zavod Matice Hrvatske, 1980: pp. 166-178.

based its defence on strict legality, claiming that they could not choose a king and that they would honour the one wearing the “holy crown” (*sacra corona*).<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, they propagated Sigismund’s cause with a simple and solid argument, so illustrative of Ragusan understanding of the Hungarian patronage. In 1403, during the war with the Bosnian King Ostoja, the captain of Ragusan fleet was in his instruction ordered to try persuading the inhabitants of Kotor into recognizing Sigismund, pointing out that “they will be able to stay free under his name”.<sup>24</sup> However, the episode with Ladislav was merely an introduction to the events that followed. What definitely reshaped Ragusan rhetoric on “liberty” and turned it into an urban “myth” was the greatest crisis of the early fifteenth century: sudden expansion of Venice in the eastern Adriatic. More precisely, the Ragusans feared becoming a commodity in the game of great powers, that is, feared that during a series of largely unsuccessful peace negotiations King Sigismund would cede their city to Venice—the greatest teacher, but also the greatest enemy of the old Dubrovnik.

The brief issued to the envoys to King Sigismund in May 1413 clearly illustrates the atmosphere of the time. With regard to the rumour about the king’s intentions to renounce Dubrovnik in favour of Venice, the envoys were instructed to say: “Our most illustrious Lord... the city of Dubrovnik belongs to God and Your Crown. Your Illustriousness knows that it is free and that the sacred memory of Your Father [King Louis] embraced it under the Crown of Hungary with certain graces, privileges and oath sworn with the whole of Hungary to protect it and defend from all”. Having drawn attention to Ragusan loyalty over the previous period, the envoys were to advance a thought which was far from harmless: “Thus... Your Illustriousness can neither abandon nor renounce it [Dubrovnik], for you are obliged to protect it as part of the Crown”.<sup>25</sup> This statement already hints at a new interpretation of the relationship between Ragusa and Hungarian Kingdom, which was to be fully revealed were the envoys to understand that Sigismund truly intended to cede Ragusa to Venice. In that case they were instructed to say: “Our most Illustrious Lord, we protest before God, the whole world and Your Highness, we protest before the Crown of Hungary, clergy and nobility of whole Hungary, [stating] that we do not

---

<sup>23</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: pp. 119, 136; V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: pp. 169-170.

<sup>24</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 146.

<sup>25</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje I/1*: pp. 218-219.

liberate your Crown from the obligation to protect us against all, but Your Highness renounces us against our will and against our accord, without our guilt or reason”. Then “at any cost” they were to negotiate a charter from the king, the content of which would read as follows: “We Sigismund King by the Grace of Our Lord, etc. Since the Ragusans, loyal to our Crown, have not agreed to be abandoned or renounced by us in any way, not liberating us from the obligation of our Crown to protect them against all, we here state that against their will we renounce them free and as free men in their full liberty with their city of Dubrovnik and their district”.<sup>26</sup>

In all likelihood Sigismund was never faced with such an incredible proposal. Yet, it does not belittle the significance of this text which, in but a few sentences, recapitulates Dubrovnik’s attitude towards Hungary in the early fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Noteworthy is the vocabulary the Ragusans use to describe the relationship between Dubrovnik and the Hungarian king: they say that he “cannot abandon or renounce” them, that they “do not agree” to be abandoned, that they “do not liberate” him from the obligation to protect them. This text reveals two things of fundamental importance: firstly, the King in fact cannot dispose with Ragusa as he wishes; secondly, he is bound by certain obligation to Dubrovnik, he owes it protection, and only the Ragusans can “free” him from it. In case Sigismund drastically violated his obligation towards the city, that is, decided to hand it over to Venice, an interesting scenario would take place. Prompted by Sigismund’s violation of his sovereign duties, the Ragusans—though “contrary to their will”—would actually *break* their contract with the Hungarian Crown. That is the most radical point of these never-uttered words: If really necessary, the Ragusans were willing to be “in their full liberty”, that is, become a *de iure* independent republic without any, even formal sovereign.

In this text the relationship between Dubrovnik and Hungary is interpreted as an agreement on the protection between two at least potentially “sovereign”

---

<sup>26</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje* I/1: p. 219. For interpretation of this instruction and its historical context, see: V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: p. 318.

<sup>27</sup> The fact that the Ragusans were inclined to repeat this text speaks much of its representativeness. Before long, in very similar circumstances in 1414, the envoys to Sigismund, the latter negotiating a peace treaty in Lodi, were instructed to observe carefully the course of negotiations. In case they heard that anything was being done against *nostrae libertate de gratie et privilegi habudi dai signori nostri per il passato*, they were to say to Sigismund the exact words as in the cited instruction from 1413 (*Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 236).

states. Ragusan submission and fidelity to the Hungarian king may be “perpetual”, but is also conditional—it is effective as long as the king honours his suzerain obligations. Therefore, in Ragusan interpretation the meaning of fidelity to Hungary undergoes a paradoxical turn. Originally a sign of Ragusan subordination and vassalage, it is turned into the complete opposite—an expression of its “liberty”. This is clearly confirmed by one Ragusan letter to Sigismund from 1426. The situation somewhat resembled that from 1413. During the peace negotiations with Venice, the king sent a letter asking the Ragusans whether they wished their city to be included in the peace treaty. Ragusan reply was a fantastic amalgam of vassal pathos and explicit self-determination. This curious combination is visible in the introductory sentence, in which the Ragusans declare that the king’s question is whether they wish to be included in the peace treaty, for he intends us “to remain loyal to your Illustriousness and in our liberty”.<sup>28</sup> They continue by accentuating how moved they are by the fact that the king has remembered them so small and so insignificant in such a paramount matter, mentioning that they are unable to comment the peace treaty as they are not familiar with its content. “One thing, however, we do know: since *upon our own will* we have placed ourselves under the protection of King Louis of joyful memory, we have chosen and established him, and also his successors to the Holy Crown of Hungary as our natural Lords, and have sworn to the same [Louis] undivided fidelity and have preserved it and intend to do so in the future of your Highness and the heirs to the throne”.<sup>29</sup> Following this very peculiar interpretation of 1358, the Ragusans state that “like the body without soul, neither can our small commune ... survive without the support and protection of the Holy Hungarian Crown”.<sup>30</sup> Thus they hope Sigismund will understand that they should not be excluded from the treaty, “but will consider the preservation and expansion of our freedom and fidelity in the lap and at the feet of His Illustriousness”.<sup>31</sup> In conclusion, in a couple of both servile and subversive phrases they epitomise their understanding of the relations with their sovereign lord: “Thus we humbly pray your Lordship to think of us, your loyal servants, in such manner, such judgement and bear in mind, so that faithful freedom as much as free

---

<sup>28</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 314.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>31</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 315.

faithfulness... could be preserved eternally, and at the feet of Your Majesty and the Holy Kingdom of Hungary loyal at heart live and die”.<sup>32</sup>

The statement is explicit: Ragusan faithfulness is not only “eternal”, but is also “free”. Its “freedom” is again founded on a new moment—a very specific interpretation of the Treaty of Visegrád. According to the Ragusan councillors, in 1358 Dubrovnik was not part of the territory conquered by Louis, a city which had no choice but to negotiate with an incomparably superior king, who insisted on claiming Dubrovnik by right of succession. A gap of more than fifty years had very conveniently obscured such historical details. In the interpretation of the ruling patriciate, Dubrovnik is represented as an author and initiator of the shift in allegiance, the shift itself viewed as an affirmation of Dubrovnik’s “liberty”. The Ragusans had submitted themselves “upon their own will” to the king, together with his successors, they had “chosen and instituted” him as their “natural Lord”. A similar thought soon emerged in a speech by Filippo Diversi, Humanist and master at the Dubrovnik school, delivered in honour of the coronation of Albert of Habsburg for king of Hungary in 1438: “Since this city, by agreement and treaty, for the love of peace and serenity, which His Lordship of Venice the Doge, the then Lord of the city, had signed with the most illustrious Lord of Hungary, King Louis, was left without shepherd, security and haven, your ancestors, guided by the best of intentions, had chosen for sovereign Lord this powerful king and had become tributaries of him and his successors”.<sup>33</sup> Hardly was Dubrovnik “left without shepherd” in 1358, as the candidate for this function was more than obvious. Yet, underlying Diversi’s formulation was his aim to represent the Ragusans as the architects of their own fate, as the ones who “chose” the Hungarian rule.

This was to become the commonplace of Ragusan political tradition. Writing in the 1480s, the first true historian of Dubrovnik, the so-called “Ragusan Anonymous”, clearly reveals that this stereotype, stemming from Ragusan diplomacy, had also found its way into historiography. According to his account, defeated, Venice renounced all its Dalmatian territories in favour

<sup>32</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 315.

<sup>33</sup> Filip de Diversis, *Dubrovački govori u slavu ugarskih kraljeva Sigismunda i Alberta*, ed. Zdenka Janeković-Römer. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 2001: pp. 116-117. Diversis in his description of Ragusa repeats a similar thought, albeit somewhat less clearly (see: Filip de Diversis, *Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnika*, ed. and trans. Zdenka Janeković-Römer. Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2004: p. 180).

of King Louis (*Re Lausc*) in 1358, by which the Ragusans upon his “order” were freed from the Venetian counts. And then he really starts to choose the words: “And then Dubrovnik upon its own true will submitted itself to the Crown of King Louis; and from then on [the Ragusans] fly his Hungarian standard. And the Ragusans gave 500 ducats as gift every year” (one version of the Annals from the sixteenth century, the so-called *Anali Storani*, even adds that these ducats were given “without any obligation, out of sheer kindness”).<sup>34</sup> Anonymous annalist went a step further than the Ragusan government, his path being followed by virtually all the later historians of Dubrovnik: not only did the Ragusans willingly submit themselves to Louis, but also the tribute of 500 ducats—an indisputable sign of vassalage to Hungary—had become “a gift”. A few decades later, N. Ragnina in his annals wrote basically the same story. The Ragusans, “in order to better maintain their liberty”, in 1358 despatched their ambassadors to Louis and swore to fealty and tribute of 500 ducats on condition that the king “is to preserve their liberty and defend them from the enemies”.<sup>35</sup> As into what the reinterpretations of the year 1358 eventually evolved shows the example of J. Luccari, who, in the early seventeenth century, wrote about the Hungarian kings as the Ragusan “confederates” (*confederati*), interpreting the events of 1358 as a purely business transaction—apparently the Ragusans offered Louis 500 ducats a year to be exempt from various customs dues and taxes and to be allowed to trade freely throughout Hungary!<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*, ed. Natko Nodilo. [MSHSM, XIV]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1883: p. 41). On incorrect dating of these events in some of the copies of the Annals, see Nodilo’s note on p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: p. 230. Even Ludovicus Cerva Tubero, who had little motive for glorifying his city, proved equally tempted by the generally adopted interpretation of the year 1358. Although he fails to mention that Dubrovnik had come under Hungarian suzerainty upon its own initiative, the result is practically the same, since Louis granted “the Ragusans to live freely and by their own laws, yet in permanent confederation with the Hungarians... He only ordered that they pay 500 ducats in lieu of annual tax” (Ludovik Crijević Tuberon, *Komentari o mojem vremenu*, trans. Vlado Rezar. Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2001: p. 95).

<sup>36</sup> Giacomo Luccari, *Copioso ristretto degli annali di Rausa*. Venezia: Ad instantia di Antonio Leonardi, 1605: p. 137. Discussing Dubrovnik’s refusal to recognise Ladislav of Naples as lord, Luccari writes that the Ragusans ... *per ogni memoria di huomini hanno tenuto la parte de’legitimi Re loro confederati* (G. Luccari, *Copioso ristretto*: p. 79). For Ragusan interpretation of the year 1358, see also: V. Foretić, »Godina 1358. u povijesti Dubrovnika«: pp. 251-253; Z. Janeković-Römer, *Višegradski ugovor*: pp. 127-129.

Yet another detail testifies to how crucial the year 1358 was in the political culture of Dubrovnik. The first provision in the legal collection *Liber Viridis* is a decision of the Major Council of 28 February 1358, by which three city Rectors were to be elected for a two-month term. It does strike as odd that this decision, effective over a fairly short period of a couple of months, was still included in this collection although it had expired some fifty years before *Liber Viridis* was drawn up. The preamble of *Liber Viridis* explains why this expired provision still found its place in the fundamental collection of Dubrovnik's laws. The contents of *Liber* included not only the currently valid laws of the city, but also "issues worthy of memory in this volume" (*note dignas in hoc memorari volumine*). As to what exactly is "memory worthy" in this provision there is no doubt: it was the first constitutional act of the free Dubrovnik.<sup>37</sup>

It is not by chance that Dubrovnik started referring to itself as the "republic" (*respublica*) during this very period marked by the city's expanding autonomy from Hungary. The term was for the first time used internally, in one provision from 1385, and from the 1430s onwards was used regularly in Dubrovnik's official correspondence with foreign states.<sup>38</sup> The word itself was fairly ambiguous, of which the Ragusans must have been aware. Throughout the

---

<sup>37</sup> The contents of the collection were probably decided by a patrician commission headed by the Rector; see *Liber Viridis*, ed. Branislav M. Nedeljković. [ZIJSKN, XXIII]. Beograd: SANU, 1984: pp. XII-XIII. Curiously, the law governing the election of the Rector, passed in December 1358 and effective until the fall of the Republic, was not included in *Liber Viridis*.

<sup>38</sup> The term *res publica* was first mentioned in the decision concerning Blasius Sorgo's exemption from all duties and taxes aimed to help him provide for his large family *ad servitium, augmentum et conservationem nostre rei publicae Ragusi* (*Odluke veća Dubrovačke Republike*, vol. II, ed. Mihajlo Dinić [ZIJKSN, XXI]. Beograd: SANU, 1964: p. 120). For this information on the first mention of the "republic" I am grateful to Dr. Zdenka Janeković-Römer. The term "republic" also appears in a provision from 1388, while Johannes Conversini from Ravenna uses this term when referring to the city in his history of Dubrovnik. Another early example dates from the 1402 inheritance dispute of the Zamagna brothers, conspirators sentenced to death, stating that they acted *contra rem publicam et bonum statum civitatis* (Bariša Krekić, »Prilozi unutrašnjoj istoriji Dubrovnika početkom 15. veka«. *Istorijski glasnik* 2 (1953): 66). On use of the term "republic" in Dubrovnik, see: Ivan Božić, »Ekonomski i društveni razvitak Dubrovnika u XIV.-XV. veku«. *Istorijski glasnik* 1 (1948/1949): pp. 27-28; V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: pp. 318-319; Ilija Mitić, »Kada se Dubrovnik počeo nazivati Republikom«. *Pomorski zbornik* 25 (1987): pp. 488-491; Zdenka Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode: Dubrovačka vlastela između srednjovjekovlja i humanizma*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1999: pp. 88-89.

Middle Ages the term *respublica* tended to indicate any form of government, either monarchical or republican, or even a specific kind of a morally-culturally based community like the well-known *Respublica Christiana* or, later, *Respublica litteraria*.<sup>39</sup> Although the term retained this general meaning, in the Humanistic political discourse, particularly from the fifteenth century onwards, this word adopted yet another, more precise meaning. *Respublica* began to denote a special type of government executed through collective bodies, composed of the members of the community, the citizens (*cives*), this political system often being interpreted as a fundamental alternative or even opposition to the rule of one man, either monarchy or tyranny.<sup>40</sup> Here seems to lie the key to Ragusan understanding of this word. By adopting new Humanistic vocabulary, the term “republic” was to emphasise that the city was governed through councils, composed of its citizens-patricians. Thus, on the one hand, the introduction and use of this term should not be overestimated. More so because the Hungarian kings themselves soon adopted it when referring to Dubrovnik. Had the term in any way undermined their sovereign rule over the city, they certainly would not have used it. The first Hungarian king to call Dubrovnik a “republic”, Ladislav Posthumous in 1454, in the same letter also mentions Ragusan “fidelity under dutiful obedience” (*fidelitati vestre sub debito obediencie mandamus*) and refers to the Ragusans as his “faithful” (*fidelibus*).<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Even for the medieval Italian *dictatores*, teachers and theoreticians of rhetoric, today considered the pioneers of medieval and Renaissance republicanism, this word, as in the classical sources, simply denoted any legally established form of government, and not only its elective forms, as was later the case (Quentin Skinner, »The vocabulary of Renaissance republicanism: a cultural longue-durée?«, in: *Language and images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995: p. 108). It should be noted that from the thirteenth century on the term *res publica* was sometimes used instead of the Kingdom of Hungary, that is, as a synonym of the word *regnum* (Janos M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände in Ungarn im 14.-16. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1973: p. 28). For miscellaneous meanings of this word in the late Middle Ages see: Wolfgang Mager, »Res publica chez les juristes, théologiens et philosophes à la fin du Moyen Âge: sur l'élaboration d'une notion-clé de la théorie politique moderne«, in: *Théologie et droit dans la science politique de l'État moderne*. Roma: Ecole française de Rome, 1991: pp. 229-239.

<sup>40</sup> Q. Skinner, »The vocabulary of Renaissance republicanism«: p. 101; Quentin Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*, vol. I. Cambridge: CUP, 1978: passim, especially pp. 41-48, 53-54, 144-189; Quentin Skinner, »States and the freedom of citizens«, in: *States and Citizens. History. Theory. Prospects*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Bo Stråth. Cambridge CUP, 2003: p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> The letter of King Ladislav of 30 July 1454 (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje* I/2: p. 564). Similarly, before the Hungarian kings the Ragusans, without much reluctance, refer to themselves as the Republic. For example, the instruction to their ambassadorial mission to Sigismund from 1433 already contains the wording *la nostra Republica* (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje* I/1: p. 338).

This fact clearly indicates that the word “republic” did not necessarily have drastic political implications. From the letters of the Hungarian kings from the second half of the fifteenth century, as well as Dubrovnik’s correspondence with the central government, one is able to grasp that a “republic”, without any obstacle, can become part (*membrum*) of the Kingdom of Hungary, and its rulers “subjects” and “loyal” to the Holy Crown of Hungary. On the other hand, the term was not all that harmless. The fact that Rome—archetype of a “sovereign” and institutionally perfect state—had also been a *respublica* could not have escaped a scrutinising Humanistic eye. The fact that Venice, paragon of republicanism, consistently refused to apply this term to Dubrovnik, referring to it as “commune” or “municipality” until its fall, speaks much of the possible connotations of “sovereignty” and prudent “constitution” this term may have had. Thus in Ragusan use, the term *respublica* may have covered all and nothing. It was rather ambiguous; however, that exactly might have been the reason why his Lordship the Rector and the councillors liked it.

However, one’s position may be redefined not only through discourse on oneself, but also through discourse on one’s sovereign. In Sigismund’s epoch—particularly in its last decade—a new rhetoric on Dubrovnik’s relationship with Hungary began to appear. Before Sigismund, the Ragusans referred to themselves as “the natural and most loyal servants of your Crown” or “the last remains of the glory and name of your Crown in these parts”, their ambassadors were despatched to Sigismund “to incline to the Crown of Hungary”, Dubrovnik being “obedient to the Crown of Hungary”.<sup>42</sup> The shift in rhetoric is easily discernible. In the letters from the earlier period, the Ragusans are “most faithful servants” of his Royal Highness who come to bow before Sigismund himself, all in the name of the city that is faithful to the king personally. The new political vocabulary, in which the term “crown” (*corona*) is clearly distinguished from the term “king” and is transformed into an abstract state authority and true bearer of sovereignty to whom the subjects owe loyalty, is not a characteristic exclusive of Dubrovnik. Such an interpretation of state sovereignty prevailed throughout the Hungarian Kingdom in Sigismund’s time, and was used as a key device in the attempts of the estates, especially the highest nobility, at curbing the royal power.<sup>43</sup> Hungarian nobles (*regnicolae*)

<sup>42</sup> Citations from: *Dubrovačka akta i povelje* I/1: pp. 289, 328, 338-339. On this new rhetoric see also: Z. Pešorda, »The Crown, the King and the City«: pp. 12-16.

<sup>43</sup> *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, CD-ROM-Ausgabe, Verlag J. B. Metzler, 2000: s.v. »corona/Ungarn«; J. M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*: pp. 27-30, 32-35.

explicitly formulated this interpretation during the interregnum of 1386, and even managed to impose it on Sigismund, who, in his electoral oath of 1387, was to swear that, among other things, he would use all his power to benefit the “crown”, enhance its honour and cancel all agreements he had signed *contra sacram coronam regni Ungarie*.<sup>44</sup> The fact that this interpretation actually entailed the official doctrine of the rebels against Sigismund in 1401 testifies to its considerable political potential. While the king was being held in prison, the rebel nobles issued documents in the name of the “crown”, carried legal transactions *auctoritate sacre corone*, and even had a seal made with an inscription *Sigillum Sacre Corone Regni Hungarie*.<sup>45</sup> It is clear why this political doctrine became so popular. The point was to establish an authority above the will of the King, authority whose representatives were the nobles. Moreover, once such an entity was established the loyalty was owed—at least on the bottom line—not to the concrete person of the monarch, but to the abstract entity of the crown. And abstractions are far easier to manipulate than sovereigns of flesh and blood. Interestingly, this vocabulary of the fidelity to the “crown” appeared in Dubrovnik, though quite rarely, even before Sigismund’s era. For example, it may already be traced in a letter to Louis from 1359, suggesting that this set of ideas could have reached Hungary via Dubrovnik and other Dalmatian towns which witnessed a stronger Italian influence of the revived Roman Law.<sup>46</sup> Of course, in this period it did not yet have the connotations of limiting the royal power. During Sigismund’s reign, the King himself was forced to adopt the terminology imposed by the increasingly potent barons and there are cases when he also addressed the Ragusans as *fideles corone*. However, in correspondence both Sigismund and the Ragusans tend to use older and less delicate formulations of the fidelity to the king himself, or at least, to the king and his “crown”.<sup>47</sup> More rarely, when

<sup>44</sup> J. M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*: pp. 27-29.

<sup>45</sup> J. M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*: p. 34.

<sup>46</sup> In a letter of 26 August 1359, they declare *fideles et subditi sumus regie corone Hungarie* (*Pisma i uputstva Dubrovačke Republike*: p. 12). Similarly, in a letter the Ragusans sent to King Louis in 1360, they wrote: *quando vestra sacra corona aliquid a nobis, vestris subditis et fidelibus, aliquid sibi placibile fieri requirit* (*Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 16). For the thesis that this understanding of the crown reached Hungary through the Dalmatian towns, see: J. M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*: p. 23, note 88; p. 29, note 14.

<sup>47</sup> Thus, for instance, confirming their privileges in 1387, Sigismund refers to the Ragusans as *sacre nostre corone fideles* (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje I/1*: p. 187). Sigismund probably preferred formulations such as *fidelibus nostris*, and so did the Ragusans. For examples of dominant tone in correspondence, see: *Dubrovačka akta i povelje I/1*: pp. 195, 231, 238, 240, 241, 242, 243, 252, 255, 274, 279.

the rhetoric of loyalty and allegiance to the “crown” appears in Ragusan diplomacy, the logic behind it probably resembled that of the Hungarian barons: it is much more convenient to owe allegiance to a legal fiction than a concrete bearer of a royal title. The room for manoeuvre which this doctrine allowed for Dubrovnik is clearly visible in the earlier mentioned instruction from 1413, in which the Ragusans literally turned the “crown” against the king, denying his claim over Ragusa by stating that their city is *de Dio e dela vostra corona* (!), and especially, emphasising the illegitimacy of his decisions that are against the obligations and duties of the “crown”.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, this is a drastic and uncommon example. In principle there was nothing scandalous in the rhetoric on the fidelity to the “crown”, because it was an accepted “constitutional” doctrine, yet it was one of those tiny and at the same time significant Ragusan advancements in defining their own position. It was a strategy quite typical of the period when the Ragusans had taken a liking to yet another ambivalent term—*respublica*.

However, the Ragusans of Sigismund’s day not only used the “crown” vocabulary, but also developed it in an utterly new direction. In the first decades of the fifteenth century they started employing a specific phrase to describe their position in view of the sovereign, a phrase unique in the whole of the Hungarian Crownland. Dubrovnik began referring to itself as *membrum corone* or *membro di corona*.<sup>49</sup> This specific coinage is a combination of the doctrine of the “crown” and, in the Middle Ages prevalent organicistic understanding of the political community as a *corpus*, or “body”, consisting of the “head” (*caput*), that is, central government and certain parts of the kingdom as “limbs” or even “organs” (*membra*). The metaphors of *corpus* and *membra*, originally applied to the Church and later to the secular communities, by which *regnum* had become *corpus*, emerge sporadically in Hungary from as early as the Anjou period. The phrase used is *membrum regni*, while *membrum corone* first appears in the early sixteenth century in the work of the famous jurist István Werbőczy, who applies it to emphasise the legal equality of the Hungarian nobles.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to say with exactitude what this phrase

<sup>48</sup> In the charter Sigismund was to issue to the Ragusans, he was to state that they did not relinquish him *de quello che la nostra corona e tenuta a quelli de defender de ogni zente* (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje* I/1: p. 219).

<sup>49</sup> J. M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*: p. 77.

<sup>50</sup> J. M. Bak, *Königtum und Stände*: pp. 77-78.

signified in the Ragusan use. Yet, the very fact that the Ragusans defined their position with a unique coinage speaks for itself, especially the context in which it was mainly used. It appeared in the above mentioned instruction from 1413, in which the Ragusans state that Sigismund cannot renounce his claim to Dubrovnik in favour of Venice, calling upon the fact that their city is *membro di corona*.<sup>51</sup> This phrase, along with exhaustive argumentation from 1413, they repeated in 1414, anticipating the king's possible renouncement of Dubrovnik in favour of Venice.<sup>52</sup> The phrase, not by chance, also appears in a letter to Sigismund from December 1427, in which the Ragusans "supplicate that in the dealings with them [Venetian ambassadors (sic!)] Your Majesty remembers this city of ours, part of your crown (*membrum corone vestre*)".<sup>53</sup> Based on speculation, it is plausible to assume that in this phrase the organicistic notion *membrum* was used to stress the inseparability of Dubrovnik from other Hungarian lands, and that the notion *corona* had its established function of the avoidance of immediate sovereign rule. In other words, Dubrovnik is a constituent part, *membrum*, not only of the kingdom (*regnum*), but also of the "crown" (*corona*), that is, of that elusive entity beyond the sovereign's power. Had this been the case, then this phrase, by far more than the term *respublica* or the general rhetoric of the "crown", was used to deny the right of the Hungarian kings to do with Dubrovnik as they pleased.

In sum, the reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg saw significant changes in the Ragusan discourse on freedom. Although the usual loyalty rhetoric still dominated the correspondence with the Hungarian king, on occasion—particularly during crises—its tone took a new angle: the Ragusans spoke explicitly about their liberty and, more importantly, spoke about it in a new way. The formal position of Dubrovnik was fundamentally redefined, or rather translated into something resembling a protection agreement between two essentially "sovereign" states, this redefinition being mainly based on a specific interpretation of the Treaty of Visegrád. Such new understanding of Dubrovnik's

---

<sup>51</sup> This sentence is worthwhile repeating: *Per tanto ... la vostra serenitade non ne po lassar ne allienar, anzi tenuta a defender nui como membro dela corona (Dubrovačka akta i povelje I/1: p. 219).*

<sup>52</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: p. 236.

<sup>53</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje I/1*: p. 281. This phrase, notably in the later period, tends to appear outside the dramatic context. For example, in the instruction to the ambassadors to Vladislav II in 1502 the Ragusans are mentioned as *fideli servitori et membro dela sacra corona*, and Dubrovnik as *digno et honorevol membro dela sacra corona (Dubrovačka akta i povelje II/1: pp. 48-49).*

status was accompanied by the emergence of novel political vocabulary. Different phrases with which Dubrovnik and the Ragusans began to apply to themselves in this period, such as *fideles coronae*, *membro di corona* or *respublica*, are a symptomatic combination of ambiguity and tendentiousness, useful to the city that needed protection of a remote sovereign but, at the same time, was determined to free itself from his concrete claims.

*The city in which “sweet liberty rules”*: *libertas and aristocratic republic*

Despite the Ragusans’ obsession with their *libertas*, a precise and clear-cut definition of it cannot be found in the documents. Moreover, the concept *libertas* contained such a wealth of meanings that quite a surprising thing could occur—it could come to contradict itself. Perhaps the best illustration of such discord between the two fundamental concepts of “liberty” is one of the great myths of ancient Dubrovnik, the story of the tyrant Damjan Juda. Old historians of Dubrovnik write that, back in the thirteenth century, nobleman (Damjan) Juda refused to give up the count’s position despite the end of mandate and, having abolished the noble councils, began his tyranny in the city. With an aim to free Dubrovnik from tyranny, Juda’s son-in-law organised a conspiracy against him with a surprising plan: apparently, the conspirators turned to none other than Venice for help. The conspiracy was accomplished as planned: with Venetian help, Juda was tricked and taken prisoner, after which, demonstrating the forcefulness typical of tyrants, he committed suicide. According to some Ragusan historians, the story thus had a happy ending. The tyranny was over, and the republican government institutions were restored. With a small difference, however: a Venetian *comes* was appointed as the supreme political authority.<sup>54</sup>

No doubt, this account is a moralistic legend about true patriotism, a nobleman who subordinated his family interests to the welfare of the state, and who did everything in his power to free his country from despotism. Equally, it mirrors attempts to relativise the Venetian rule over Dubrovnik in much the

---

<sup>54</sup> *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: pp. 33, 220-221; S. Razzi, *La storia di Raugia*: p. 38; G. Luccari, *Copioso ristretto*: pp. 40-41; L. Crijević Tuberon, *Komentari o mojem vremenu*: pp. 91-93; Mauro Orbini, *Regno degli Sclavi*. München: Verlag Otto Sagner, 1985: pp. 187-189; *Chronica Ragusina Junii Restii (ab origine urbis usque ad annum 1451) item Joannis Gundulae (1451-1484)*, ed. Natko Nodilo. [MSHSM, XXV]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1893: pp. 70-74.

same manner in which the Hungarian sovereignty was relativised. In the same way the Ragusans allegedly “voluntarily” submitted themselves to Louis in 1358, they “invited” the Venetians to their city. Dubrovnik again represented itself as the architect of its own fate.<sup>55</sup>

What is most striking, however, is the manner in which some Ragusan historians comment this legend, particularly the aftermath of the submission to Venice. According to their interpretations, it was not really a matter of losing but regaining freedom. The first to bring the account of Juda, Johannes Conversini, concludes that with the tyrant’s death Dubrovnik “had regained its freedom”, mentioning that henceforth a Venetian-appointed count ruled over the city, his duty being none other than to “protect liberty”.<sup>56</sup> Some hundred years later, anonymous Ragusan annalist followed in the same footsteps. Juda “had usurped liberty” (*havea usurpato la libertà*) and the conspirators decided to turn to Venice, literally, “to send a count to the city from Venice ... so that liberty returns to Dubrovnik.”<sup>57</sup> Seemingly less enthusiastic about the outcome of the story, N. Ragnina in the sixteenth century nevertheless writes that the conspiracy’s goal was “to liberate from the tyrannical slavery”.<sup>58</sup>

Coming from Ragusan historians, these interpretations do strike as odd. Liberty, literally, “returns” to Dubrovnik with the Venetian count. Moreover, Dubrovnik is “liberated” by the establishment of Venetian rule. This story can hardly be reconciled with the usual meaning of liberty in the Ragusan documents, in which it implies the very absence of foreign authority. This legend can scarcely be harmonised with the more or less contemporary account of the adoption of St Blaise, in which the Venetians are presented as the enemies of Ragusan “liberty” par excellence. In a certain way, the story of Juda mirrors that of St Blaise: in one legend “liberty” is being defended from Venice on the city walls, while in the other, “liberty” is gained by ceding the city to the Venetians.

<sup>55</sup> For this interpretation of the legend, see: Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: pp. 75-76.

<sup>56</sup> Having recounted the details of Juda’s arrest, Conversini writes: *Hoc igitur astu libertate recuperata...* It was then that the Ragusans decided to accept *sub dictione* of Venice, and in her favour and protection *libertate perfruantur*. Venice appointed one of its nobles *qui presideret libertatem populi Ragusini*. A copy of Conversini’s *Hystoria Ragusii* of a later date is filed at the HAZU Archives (Zagreb), reference number II.d.55, the legend of Juda on pages 57-58.

<sup>57</sup> *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: p. 33.

<sup>58</sup> ... *liberar se dalla tirannica servitù...* (*Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: p. 220).

Indeed, the point of this legend seems to have been the cause of slight embarrassment in Ragusan historiography. It was apparently felt already by the Anonymous annalist who hurriedly added that “at that time the Venetians were just, magnanimous, keeping their solemn word; and what they promised, they did not forget to fulfil”.<sup>59</sup> This, apparently, did not suffice, and later historians, despite insisting that the rule of the Venetian count was in full compliance with the city laws and the demands of the patrician councils, showed an even greater awareness of the problematic point of the legend which was gradually turned into a tragic event. Already Ludovicus Cerva Tubero comments that the Ragusans had submitted to Venice “voluntarily, yet beyond any prudence”, confident that “in doing so they would not lose any of their liberty”. In fact, they “had rather gained a new lord than overthrown a tyrant”. According to Tubero, the recognition of Venetian rule upon one’s own initiative is something that would never have occurred to real patriots. Such a demand apparently came from the Venetians, who could not but “abandon the merchant custom to measure everything by profit, and by completely disregarding their honour” they never considered “helping out of kindness, but decided to exchange their favour for the slavery of the other”.<sup>60</sup> Razzi, following in Tubero’s footsteps, tells a similar story, noting that the conspirators agreed to Venetian terms because of the odium incurred by the domestic tyranny (*per l’odio della domestica tirannide*), and thus plunged into the servitude of Venice (*giogo della servitù Veneta*).<sup>61</sup> Other historians, such as Orbini or Resti, go a step further and spice the story with a fabricated dispute between the conspirators about how justified the invitation of Venice may prove.<sup>62</sup> J. Luccari was the only one who avoided controversy, though at the price of changing the story drastically. In principle he recounts the same legend, based evidently on one of the versions of the Annals, but ascribes the fall of tyranny to the conspirators themselves—certain members of the Bobali (Bobaljević) family

---

<sup>59</sup> *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> L. Crijević Tuberon, *Komentari o mojem vremenu*: p. 92.

<sup>61</sup> S. Razzi, *La storia di Raugia*: p. 38.

<sup>62</sup> M. Orbini, *Regno degli Sclavi*: p. 188, Indeed, the Bobalis are the ones who point to the problem, suggesting that the Ragusans themselves kill the tyrant and continue “to live free” (*vivere liberi*), instead of “submitting to the others” (*sottoporsi ad altri*). However, leaning on older interpretations, Orbini refers to the conspirators’ ringleader, Petar Benessa, as *liberatore della patria*. Resti tends to describe Benessa as a demagogue who seeks support from other patricians for the recognition of Venetian rule (*Chronica Ragusina Junii Restii*: p. 71).

and the conspirators' ringleader Petrus Benessa simply murder him *per la bonta divina*. Not a single word about the Venetians.<sup>63</sup>

Notwithstanding, the problem remains. According to earlier historians—Conversini, Anonymous, Ragnina—Venetian rule was understood as restoration of the lost “liberty”. What explanation can there be to the paradoxical conclusion that by losing independence Dubrovnik gains “liberty”? The answer is simple. Here the word *libertà/libertas* does not mean independence, but something quite different. As to what may have been the meaning of *libertà* in this context is best illuminated by J. Luccari’s comment on the story of Juda. He writes that the tyrant had plotted “a deadly conspiracy to destroy the memory, remains and the very name of the Major Council, the foundation and support of our liberty”.<sup>64</sup> In other words, Juda destroyed Ragusan “liberty”, for he abolished the Major Council and other republican institutions of Dubrovnik, which were its “foundations” and prerequisite. In order to be “free” Dubrovnik had to do more than merely deny foreign rule. Equally and by far more important was Dubrovnik’s administration based on a system of collective electoral bodies composed of its *cives*. That is why it appears that “liberty” in the late medieval Dubrovnik had two basic meanings: on the one hand it signified autonomy or even independence, and on the other life under the republican institutions.<sup>65</sup>

Naturally, this understanding of “liberty” as something closely related to the republican government was not distinctively Ragusan. The central figure featuring in the vocabulary of the medieval and Renaissance republicanism on the whole is the man, who, by virtue of his status of a citizen (*civis*), secures his *libertas* by participating in the *res publica*, that is, the electoral system of the republican government. While we today, after centuries of liberalism, perceive liberty as something *par excellence* beyond politics, an essentially private

---

<sup>63</sup> G. Luccari, *Copioso ristretto*: pp. 40-41.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>65</sup> This is its general meaning in the discourse of republicanism from the Middle Ages to Machiavelli and Guiccardini. A good example as to what extent the idea of “liberty” was related to that of the “republic” in the classical tradition of republicanism is Machiavelli’s synonymous use of the phrase “live freely” (*vivere libero*) with “the republic”. See: Q. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*: pp. 6-7; William J. Bouwsma, »Liberty in Renaissance and Reformation«, in: *The origins of modern freedom in the west*, ed. R. Davis Stanford. California: University of Stanford Press, 1995: p. 215; Marcia L. Colish, »The idea of liberty in Machiavelli«. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32 (1971): pp. 323-350; Maurizio Viroli, *Per amore della patria. Patriotismo e nazionalismo nella storia*. Bari: Editori Laterza, 2001: passim, especially pp. XIV-XV.

domain free from outside influence, markedly of the state, in the classical republican tradition liberty was envisaged as something to be realised in no other but the public sphere, implying participation in governmental and public duties as essentially an attribute of a politically active man. Liberty is not only absence of interference—in the modern sense the so-called “negative” liberty—although this is its necessary precondition, but also a kind of activity, public political action which requires “virtue” or even “virtuosity” (*virtù*). Yet, actively understood liberty does not entail continual, let alone unlimited exercise of public power—quite the reverse. According to the classical definition of political freedom from the antiquity, it is a state in which periods in which the individual rules interchange with those when he is ruled over. The only political system that provides a framework and room for the realisation of thus understood “liberty” is the republican one.<sup>66</sup>

While writing on the type of Ragusan government, Diversi, a reliable contemporary observer, clearly confirms: “That is why ... this government ought to be called the government of the citizens, and that, as I have already said, is the government of the free, where those who rule become subjects, and the subjects just as equally turn into governors, where several incumbents hold one office, with limited power regulated by the city laws and regulations, as well as by the patriciate’s decisions. All of the described principles are clearly discernible in the Ragusan political system. Namely, all the Ragusan patricians are equal and free”.<sup>67</sup> As to how typical such an understanding of liberty was of the medieval and Renaissance city-states may be gleaned from a characteristic sentence, even a definition of freedom by one of the leading Humanists, Leonardo Bruni, who speaks much the same as Diversi: “Thus it is genuine freedom, equality of the citizens before the law and participation in public offices...”. Several decades later, a similar view was shared but yet another Florentine, Alamano Rinuccini, as he opens his discourse on liberty as participation in public duties and equality before the law with a rhetorical

---

<sup>66</sup> John Pocock, »Virtues, rights and manners: a model for historians of political thought«, in: *Virtue, commerce, and history*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock. Cambridge: CUP, 1985: passim, especially pp. 39-41; Frederick C. Lane, »At the roots of republicanism«, in idem: *Venice and history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966: p. 529; Q. Skinner, »The vocabulary of Renaissance republicanism«: pp. 87, 101-102; Quentin Skinner, »Classical Liberty and the Coming of the English Civil War«, in: *Republicanism. A shared European Heritage*, vol. II, *The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Martin von Gelderen and Q. Skinner. Cambridge: CUP, 2002: pp. 9-14.

<sup>67</sup> F. de Diversis, *Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnika*: p. 65.

question: “Are we not familiar with the fact that the basic principle of any freedom is the equality of citizens?”<sup>68</sup> Late yet perceptive witness, Ragusan chronicler J. Resti, describes this as Juda’s greatest sin, for the tyrant used power “to oppress the liberty of his fellow citizens with whom he was to live in equality”.<sup>69</sup>

Indeed, despite explicit correlation of the idea of equality with that of freedom, this understanding of *libertas* was quite remote from contemporary “democratic” values. The same was true of Florence with its heritage of somewhat “more democratic” rhetoric, and to an even greater extent of Dubrovnik and Venice.<sup>70</sup> On this Diversi is more than precise. In Dubrovnik only the patricians are mutually equal. More importantly, these patricians are “free”, and their rule is “the government of the free”. “Freedom” was apparently not only a republican issue, but also an aristocratic one. Namely, the right to participate in the city’s government, and thus be in a position to fully realise one’s “freedom”, belonged to a narrow and clearly defined circle of the Ragusan nobles. Here *libertas* tends to lean towards its traditional meaning of privilege, though specific—noble right to enter the Major Council. It seems that in an aristocratic republic truly “free” were only those who governed it.

However, “freedom” was not merely a consequence of the aristocratic-republican constitution. Some seemingly puzzling formulations traced in documents point to yet another shade of its meaning. Thus, for example, in the

---

<sup>68</sup> For the quotation of Bruni, see: W. J. Bouwsma, »Liberty in Renaissance and Reformation«: p. 210. Rinuccini’s text has been published in: *Humanism and liberty: writings on freedom from fifteenth-century Florence*, trans. and ed. Renée Neu Watkins. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1978: p. 204.

<sup>69</sup> *Chronica Ragusina Junii Restii*: p. 70. On the idea of equality among the ruling elite and its significance in Florentine political tradition, see: Nicolai Rubinstein, »Florentina Libertas«, in: idem, *Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance I. Political Thought and the Language of Politics. Art and Politics*, ed. Giovanni Capelli. Rim: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2004: pp. 279-282, 284, 287-290.

<sup>70</sup> For examples of “more democratic” or anti-aristocratic elements in Florentine political tradition which insists on wider eligibility for public office, irrespective of descent, see: Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, David Thompson, *The humanism of Leonardo Bruni: selected texts*. Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1987: pp. 60-61, 105, 117, 119; Q. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*: pp. 78-82. Although in the eligibility for office one’s origin weighed less in Florence than in Dubrovnik or Venice, the pool of those who were allowed access to public offices had, in principle, always been limited in one way or another, primarily by excluding numerous workers of the city industries. On how narrow the social bases of ancient republican systems were, see: F. Lane, »At the roots of Republicanism«: p. 530.

late fifteenth century a Milanese canon, Pietro Casola, who visited Dubrovnik en route to the Holy Land, describing the type of government in the city, remarks: “The government or freedom of these Ragusans governs in the following manner ...”. Similarly, in the seventeenth century, in the opening of his drama *Pavlimir*, Junius Palmota (Palmotić) addresses the Ragusans with the following, seemingly paradoxical, words: “*drazi moji sugrađani, kijeh sloboda slatka vlada*” (my dear fellow citizens, over whom sweet freedom rules).<sup>71</sup> Palmotić’s curious formulation of the “ruling” freedom or Casola’s direct identification of the government with freedom show that this word denoted not only the outcome of the republican institutions, but the institutions themselves. “Freedom” is a specific form of power or, more precisely, the word here stands as an expression of a concept that was in embryo at the time—the idea of state.<sup>72</sup> Not any state, however, but an exclusively republican-based governmental apparatus, a specific materialisation of “freedom”, as it represents an institutionalised expression of the basic republican axiom of the community’s right to self-government.

In short, as much as the understanding of *libertas* in terms of absence of external control oscillated in its meaning between autonomy and absolute independence (sovereignty), so did “freedom” in the republican “constitution”, having at least two basic meanings. On the one hand freedom was the result of life under republican institutions, which were the prerequisite and fundamental sphere of its fulfilment. On the other hand, “freedom” were the institutions themselves, because they were understood as its materialisation in the legal and custom-based system of the aristocratic-republican government. True, in the discourse on *libertas* all of the mentioned meanings rarely feature independently. Moreover, they share a relationship which, at times, is explicitly cited, becoming thus an important figure of the legitimacy of the aristocratic government: while the city’s independence provides the survival of its aristocratic government, the latter is the best warrant of the preservation of its independence.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Junije Palmotić, *Pavlimir*. Zagreb: Zagrebačka stvarnost, 1995: p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Q. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*: pp. IX-X.

<sup>73</sup> For the connection between these two concepts of freedom see also W. J. Bouwsma, »Liberty in Renaissance and Reformation«: pp. 215-216. For a thorough survey of the most distinctive aspects of freedom as a value closely associated with the city’s republican constitution, along with different features of aristocratic rule see: Z. Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode*: passim, especially pp. 13-40.

Although “liberty” in most Ragusan examples embraces all these meanings, it should be noted that emphasis is laid on one particular aspect—on *libertas* as autonomy/independence. This is worthy of mention, because in the rhetoric of some other city-states—for instance, in this respect highly influential Florence—this was not the case. The reasons underlying this shift in accent are manifold, but one major difference between Dubrovnik and most of the Italian urban republics must have been essential. In Dubrovnik, despite the classical republican myths of *Juda* and the year 1400, the threat from *signoria* was far less felt, and so was the insistence on “freedom” understood as life under the republican institutions. By contrast, Italian cities of the late Middle Ages enjoyed much lesser institutional stability and social peace than Dubrovnik, witnessing at the same time mass transformation of the former republican governments into aggressive and expanding *signorias*. One should bear in mind Florence with its proverbially unstable political institutions, social upheavals, as well as countless wars against “tyrannical” regimes such as that of Visconti’s Milan. This political crisis in Italy gave way to an extremely sophisticated republican discourse, more precisely, to the foundations of modern political philosophy in the West, in which “freedom” viewed as life under the republican institutions was the central value and problem.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, in Dubrovnik it was not its republican system that was in continual crisis but its fragile independence. Although Visconti and the like had never been a threat to Dubrovnik, the city had to cope with various enemies, perhaps even more serious. In the fifteenth century Dubrovnik was to face a challenge unknown to other city-states of the time, which had, more

---

<sup>74</sup> For discourse on “freedom” in the city-states of the late Middle Ages, see the classic works: Nicolai Rubinstein, »Florence and the Despots in the Fourteenth Century«, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Ser. 5, 2 (1952): pp. 21-45; Bueno de Mesquita, »The Place of Despotism in Italian Politics«, in: *Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. John Hale, Roger Highfield and Berryl Smaley. London: Faber, 1965: pp. 303-312; Q. Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*: pp. 3-69, 77-79; Hans Baron, *Crisis of the early Italian Renaissance: civic humanism and republican liberty in an age of classicism and tyranny*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1966. For contemporary assessments of Baron’s capital work, see: *Renaissance civic humanism: reappraisals and reflections*, ed. James Hankins. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. For Florentine republicanism as the foundations of modern political thought, see: John G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975. For the broadest context of early-modern Europe, see: *Kollektive Freiheitsvorstellungen im frühneuzeitlichen Europa (1400 bis 1800)*, ed. Georg Schmidt and Martin van Gelderen. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006.

than ever before, brought the problem of its independence to the fore. Dubrovnik faced a problem of how to survive that “barbarian storm” (*procella barbarorum*) rising on its eastern horizon.

*Antemurale christianitatis and “the most loyal tributaries” of the Ottoman Empire: Ragusan libertas in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century*

Following the lengthy avoidance of direct dealings with the Porte, in the mid-fifteenth century the Ragusans were forced into negotiating a *modus vivendi* with the Ottoman Empire. While the first formal diplomatic contacts with the Sultan in 1430 resulted in obtaining the right to trade freely throughout the Empire without any additional obligations, some ten years later the situation took a fundamentally different course. Having defeated the Serbian despot in 1439/40, the sultan occupied a territory of considerable economic importance to Dubrovnik, and approached the city whose trade was seriously threatened with a proposal that may have been foreseen: the sultan opened the issue of the payment of *haraç*.<sup>75</sup>

Faced with such a demand, the Ragusans went further than ever before in the discourse on their “freedom”. In the brief of December 1440, the envoys to the sultan were instructed to act at the Porte as if it were a “routine” visit aimed at the settlement of certain current issues and renewal of the favourable agreement from 1431. But if the Ottomans should open the question of Ragusan *haraç*, claiming that Dubrovnik paid tribute to the sultan’s predecessors, the envoys were to say something quite surprising: “God from whom nothing can be hidden, knows and is a witness that our city has always lived with franchise and liberty and never will it be found that to the father of your emperor nor any of his predecessors, nor similarly to any other lord has our city ever given any tribute or *haraç*.”<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ivan Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska u XIV i XV veku*. Beograd: SAN, 1952: pp. 77-103; V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: pp. 196-212; Vesna Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istanbulu*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU, 2003: pp. 9-11.

<sup>76</sup> ... *Dio dal qual non si po ascondar alcuna chosa sa et e so testimonio che la nostra zitade sempre ha vivesto con franchizia et libertade, et mai non si trovera che allo padre del vostro imperadore, ne ad alcuni delli suoy antecessori, ne per lo simel ad alcun altro signore la nostra zitade may abia dato tributo, ne carazo alguno. Litterae et commissiones Levantis* (hereafter: LL), ser. 27.1., vol. 12, f. 214r (SAD). For the historical context of this instruction, see: V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: pp. 201-206; I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska*: pp. 82-83.

This incredible statement was not merely a convenient lie. The fruit of necessity, or panic even, it was destined to a brilliant future. The assertion that Dubrovnik from its very beginning had always been “free” is one of the motifs that would become the commonplace of Ragusan diplomacy in the ensuing centuries.<sup>77</sup> The idea that Dubrovnik had virtually always ruled itself equally entails the programme of the bulk of Ragusan historiography from the late fifteenth century to the fall of the Republic.<sup>78</sup> Lastly, the image of the city’s continuous and never violated freedom had become a widely adopted motif of the Ragusan Renaissance culture on the whole. Thus in one of his speeches, Aelias Lampridius Cervinus (Ilija Crijević), calmly ignoring the well-established facts, enthuses about Dubrovnik which “defended itself with divine aid and preserved ancestral liberty throughout an uninterrupted sequence of years”. Similarly, speaking about Dubrovnik in his *The Kingdom of the Slavs*, Orbini remarks that “the Ragusans have always lived in liberty”. This idea gained in significance to such an extent that it became well known even to the Dalmatian *literati* as Hanibal Lucić, whose verse describes Dubrovnik “for

---

<sup>77</sup> This had become the recurring motif of other Ragusan instructions issued in the early 1440s. See: V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, I: pp. 208-209. With time, the examples abound: in the brief to Frano Gundulić, dated 1 May 1570, the Ragusan government instructs him to open his speech before the pope as follows: *Santissimo et beatissimo padre! La città di Ragugia gode da mille anni in quà la sua libertà...* (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, II/2. [ZIJKSN, III.8]. Beograd: SKA, 1938: p. 220).

<sup>78</sup> By the late fifteenth century, the episodes of Venetian and Hungarian rule over the city were interpreted tendentially, as an act of Dubrovnik’s voluntary submission rather than necessity or even result of military conquest (*Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*). The next phase was characterised by interpreting a series of episodes of foreign rule not only as voluntary submission of Dubrovnik, but reducing them to what definitely could not be withheld, e.g. Venetian period 1205-1358, while other episodes were simply ignored (e.g. Orbini). The final stage, discernible in G. Luccari’s history of Dubrovnik, is characterised by the thesis that Dubrovnik was never subjected to foreign rule. Although familiar with at least some of the episodes, Luccari either ignores all the periods of Venetian and Hungarian rule or interprets them as alliance between two sovereign states. As to how programmatic this idea actually was may be gleaned from the treatise, if of a later date, by S. Slade, entitled symptomatically *Ragusinae perpetuae libertatis adversus Venetos vindictiae*. Such attempts at refashioning one’s history are not a Ragusan specificity. Venice, for instance, also insisted on having never acknowledged a foreign lord. (William J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter-Reformation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968: p. 54). For a similar idea in other Italian cities, see: P. Jones, *Italian city-state*: p. 352.

slave it has never been / but always its own master” (*tim jarma nikadar na njemu još ne bi, / vazda gospodar bio je sam sebi*).<sup>79</sup>

The benefit of this image of Dubrovnik’s history is evident. Concretely, in 1440 it served to refute an untrue Ottoman statement that Dubrovnik had, in the past, paid *haraç*. More generally, the function of this image was to anticipate and prevent any possible claims to Dubrovnik based on “historical” right, particularly those coming from its former lords, such as Venice or later the Habsburgs as the bearers of the Hungarian royal title. In order to be solidly grounded, Ragusan *libertas* had to be—as one politically minded Ragusan in the eighteenth century put it—truly “virginal”.<sup>80</sup>

Despite spectacular argumentation, after much diplomatic manoeuvring and negotiations, in 1442 Dubrovnik was forced to yield to the Ottoman demand. Arrests of Ragusan merchants and seizure of their goods prompted Dubrovnik into reaching a new agreement with the Porte, pledging to pay annually 1,000 ducats’ worth of silver dishes. However, the minimum they managed to achieve was that this arrangement was described in carefully chosen words. In the instructions to the envoys despatched to negotiate the terms of the agreement the Ragusans insist that Dubrovnik was prepared for the annual tribute to the Porte, but *per honor et non per harazo*. This was to become the Ragusan maxim in its relations with the Ottoman Empire. In the agreement from 1442, but also in a series of subsequent documents well into the 1460s, this tribute is not referred to as *haraç* but “gift” (*donum*) or “honour”

<sup>79</sup> Crijević writes about Dubrovnik: *...divinitus protegitur et avitam libertatem perpetua serie conservat*. (Darinka Nevenić-Grabovac, »Ilija Lamprice Crijević, Posmrtni govor svome ujaku Juniju Sorkočeviću«. *Živa Antika* 27 (1977): p. 253). Similar are the words of the Greek Humanist Michele Marullo Tarcaniota, who praises *Dubrovnik pulchramque libertatem avorum / perpetua serie retentam* (Albert Haler, »Grk Humanista slavi Dubrovnik.« *Hrvatska revija* 10 (1938): pp. 550-551). Orbini writes: *Rausei sempre vissero liberi* (M. Orbini, *Regno degli Scclau*: p. 185). For Lucić, see: *Pjesme Petra Hektorovića i Hanibala Lucića*. [Stari pisci hrvatski, IV]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1874: p. 263; Jakša Ravlić, »Politički pogledi H. Lučića.« *Historijski pregled* 2 (1954): p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> These were the words Ivan-Luka Volanti addressed to Coleti in 1793, after the censorship of the sixth part of *Illyricum sacrum*, dedicated to Ragusan Church, informing the latter that he no longer ought to send any parts of the text to be reviewed in Dubrovnik: *...fissata una volta nel primo terno la verginità della libertà Ragusea, non vi sarà più pericolo di nulla...* (Šime Ljubić, »Ob odnošajih dubrovačke sa Mletačkom Republikom tja do g. 1358.«. *Rad JAZU* 5 (1868): pp. 104-105). The idea of liberty’s “virginity” has been borrowed from Venice, which had developed a literary and visual topos around the motif of “Virgin Venice” (*Venetia Vergine*), symbolising the fact that the city had never been conquered (David Rosand, *The Myths of Venice. The Figuration of the State*. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001: pp. 36-38).

(*honor*).<sup>81</sup> The tactic is familiar, and often emerges in the tendentious descriptions of the city's relations with Hungary, where the tribute to the Hungarian king is also referred to as *dono*— “gift” not being a sign of vassalage, but an act of good will void of obligation. Apart from avoiding the mention of *haraç*, the Ragusans also succeeded in receiving the Porte's explicit recognition of Dubrovnik's “freedom”. In the agreement from 1442 the sultan orders his subjects not to hinder or harm the Ragusans, but “to respect their city and their laws and freedoms and that people of all languages by land and sea are permitted to come to them and to their free city and its district” (*njih grad i njih vladanje stoji u svojev zakonih i u slobodah i ljudi vsakoga jezika da po moru i suhu da mogu k njimi dohoditi i stojati i pohoditi kako u slobodni grad i u vladanje njegovu*).<sup>82</sup> A similar vocabulary was used in the Turco-Ragusan agreement of October 1458, when, after several futile crusade adventures and an intermission in their relations, Dubrovnik had to renew its arrangement with the Porte. In it, too, the payment, raised to 1,500 ducats, was called “gift”, while the sultan, following the term against harming the Ragusans, orders “that their city and their land and the people are free in their law” (*da je njih grad i njih zemlja i njih ljudi u zakonu njih slobodni*).<sup>83</sup>

The tone, however, tends to change with time. More specifically, the Ottomans started to call the thing by its real name. As early as 1469, in a firman addressed to the Ragusans, Mehmed II states that he has received the envoys who “delivered... dutiful *haraç* of my empire” (*donesoše... zakoni harač carstva mi*). From that moment on the payment was always referred to as *haraç*.<sup>84</sup> Soon the formulations describing the relationship between Dubrovnik and the Ottoman Empire, fairly vague in the documents from the 1440s and 1450s, seem to gain in clarity. While the first contacts were characterised by typical general phrases about “true fidelity and duty to the

<sup>81</sup> I. Božić, *Dubrovnik i Turska*: pp. 91-92. According to the agreement from 1442, the Ragusans were to despatch “to the Porte of my empire every year an envoy bearing a gift of silver dishes worth 1,000 ducats” (*Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, ed. Ljubomir Stojanović, vol. I/2. Beograd-Sremski Karlovci: SKA, 1934: p. 234). For similar examples, see: pp. 239, 240, 242; Branislav M. Nedeljković, »Dubrovačko-turski ugovor od 23. oktobra 1458. godine«. *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 9/1 (1970): pp. 371, 384, 390-393.

<sup>82</sup> *Stare srpske povelje i pisma*, I/2: p. 233.

<sup>83</sup> B. M. Nedeljković, »Dubrovačko-turski ugovor od 23. oktobra 1458. godine«: p. 390.

<sup>84</sup> *Stare srpske povelje i pisma* I/2: p. 246. Some examples where gift had been referred to as *haraç* during the reign of Mehmed II, are: *Stare srpske povelje i pisma* I/2: pp. 249, 254-256, 260, 264, 267, 269, 271.

lord” (*pravoj veri i ljubavi namesnoj*), and closest to the expression of vassalage was Dubrovnik’s still quite neutral obligation from 1442 to be “true and loyal to the great lord” (*verni i pravi velikom gospodaru*), from the 1470s the sultan introduces more concrete terms and issues direct “orders” to the Ragusans, whom he calls “true and loyal *servants* of my empire” (*prave i verne sluge carstva mi*) or even “my true and loyal servants and tributaries of my empire” (*moi pravi i verni sluge i haračnici carstva mi*).<sup>85</sup> Thenceforth Ragusan “freedom”, if recognised, had a clearly defined price: “as long as the rector and the nobles of Ragusa truly and loyally serve the illustrious throne of my majesty”.<sup>86</sup> In other words, although the sultans’ firmans to the Ragusans in the fifteenth century repeated that “that their city and their land and the people are free in their law” (*da je njih grad i njih zemlja i njih ljudi u njih zakonu slobodno*), in the 1470s the Ottomans started treating them as subjects, who, albeit undeniably enjoying broad privileges, were nevertheless not exempt from *haraç* and a pledge to fealty. Theoretically, from the Ottoman perspective there was a dilemma concerning the precise legal status of Ragusan Republic. Depending on different schools of Islamic law, Dubrovnik may have fallen within the “House of Islam” (*Dār al Islām*), along with the lands under direct authority of the sultan, or within the “House of Treaty” (*Dār al-Şulh*), that is, within the lands which recognised sultan’s authority by paying tribute in order to retain certain amount of autonomy. Practice, however, did not witness any problems of the kind. Ottoman documents without exception refer to the Ragusans not only as *haraçari* (tributaries), but also “*raja*” (*re’āyā*) or sultan’s subjects in the strict sense, while Dubrovnik is mainly described as part of the sultan’s “divinely protected dominions” (*memālik-i mahrūse*), that is, as part of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>87</sup>

If on the Ottoman side there were no serious dilemmas regarding the status of Ragusa vis-à-vis the Empire, the same could not be said when it came to

---

<sup>85</sup> Some examples where the Ragusans as early as in the 1470s were referred to as servants and *haračnici* (tributaries) of the Empire are: *Stare srpske povelje i pisma* 1/2: pp. 251, 255, 268, 265; for cases from the same period in which Dubrovnik “is being ordered”: pp. 251, 252, 254, 255, 257, 258, 267, 274.

<sup>86</sup> *Stare srpske povelje i pisma* 1/2: p. 287. Cited from a charter from 1481 by which Bayezid II confirms Ragusan privileges.

<sup>87</sup> On Turkish view of Dubrovnik’s political and legal status, see: Nicolaas H. Biegan, *The Turco-Ragusan relationship*. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1967: pp. 30-33; Zdenko Zlatar, *Between the double eagle and the crescent*. Boulder, Colo: East European Monographs, 1992: pp. 26-30; V. Miović, *Dubrovačka diplomacija u Istanbulu*: pp. 15-20.

Ragusan understanding of this relationship. Nothing in Dubrovnik's history from the fifteenth century to the fall of the Republic had caused so much embarrassment, tendentiousness, distortion and suppression like its relations with the Ottoman Empire. Despite serious efforts to obfuscate or misrepresent the exact nature of this relationship, the Ragusans were aware that in the negotiations with the Ottomans they were actually discussing subordination, or formal recognition of sultan's rule over the city. If the agreement from 1442 could still have been interpreted only in the light of economic privileges and protection in lieu of an annual "gift" or "honour", that from 1458, in spite of its moderate tone, was something completely different. In November of 1457, still hoping that an embassy to the Porte would not be necessary, the Ragusans pathetically, albeit correctly, describe their situation to the Hungarian king. They write about the sultan's ultimatum, his threats to attack Dubrovnik and its merchants "unless we very shortly despatch our envoys to him, who will bow to him on our behalf and our city submit to annual tribute". Thus they pleaded with the king for help, "so that, not will, but necessity, should force this most loyal city of your Majesty to submit to the cruel yoke".<sup>88</sup> However, that is exactly what they soon did, by signing the agreement of 1458. A decision of the Major Council from 1458 testifies to how hard it was to explain this relationship to the Christian world. Having voted on all the items of the embassy's agenda to the sultan, on the meeting of *Consilium Rogatorum* of 20 March it was also decided to send messengers to Hungary, bearing congratulations on the accession of the new king, Matthias Corvinus, but—without any supplement. The contents of the "supplement" may easily be assumed. It seems that the proposal to inform the Hungarian king of the decision to submit Dubrovnik to the Ottoman Empire was denied.<sup>89</sup> Equally, the first to refer to the payment to the sultan as *haraç*, thus confirming their subordinate position in terms of sovereignty, were not the Turks but the Ragusans themselves. In the council minutes from 1463, during the panicked discussions about the city's security due to the Ottoman operations in Bosnia—that is, in the moment which required precision, not tendentiousness—one finds the first mention of the term *haraç* (*charagium*).<sup>90</sup> With time, the Ragusans tended to grow more

<sup>88</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje* 1/2: p. 604. For the context of this letter, see: B. M. Nedeljković, »Dubrovačko-turski ugovor od 23. oktobra 1458. godine«: p. 367.

<sup>89</sup> B. M. Nedeljković, »Dubrovačko-turski ugovor od 23. oktobra 1458. godine«: p. 372.

<sup>90</sup> Ćiro Truhelka, »Dubrovačke vijesti o godini 1463.«. *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja u Bosni i Hercegovini* 22 (1910): pp. 16.

specific about their position. For example, in the envoys' brief to Suleyman II from 1520, the Ragusans numbered themselves among *tutti altri charazari del Grande Signore*, stating that they are coming to "incline" (*inclinarse*) to the new sultan and pledge "due obedience" (*debita obedientia*).<sup>91</sup> Similar, even more dramatic views of Dubrovnik's position in relation to the Porte may also be found in Ragusan historiography. Thus Ludovicus Cerva Tubero speaks of the "slavery" of Dubrovnik, while one of the unpublished versions of the Ragusan annals, probably dating from the early sixteenth century, mentions the first tribute to the Ottomans, allegedly paid in 1410, with a short and indicative remark: "and that year the Ragusans consider unhappy and wretched, for they yielded to the new (?) *servitude of the infidel*".<sup>92</sup> It seems that even the common Ragusan citizens with a sound grasp of the reality had a clear picture of the city's situation. In 1548, a certain Ivan Matejev, goldsmith, testifying on the pro-Habsburg schemes of the bishop of Ston, stated that he warned the bishop with the following words: "as you know, our lords have two great Lords, one in Constantinople and the other nearby, Lord *sancakbey* [of Herzegovina], and both stand with their eyes open".<sup>93</sup>

Indeed, all of this had to be justified to Christian Europe in some way. The first option was fairly simple—to keep silence on the whole matter. The already mentioned decision of the Major Council from 1458 not to give any supplement to the envoys' instructions to Corvinus is characteristic of the Ragusan diplomacy of the latter half of the fifteenth century. In its approach to Western powers, Dubrovnik continued with its traditional rhetoric of the Christian city menaced by the infidel who persist in schemes and plotting the city's downfall. Further explanation, if any, was to follow only in case the other side posed an explicit question about the city's relationship with the Ottomans. Although one cannot say with exactitude, it seems, at least not before the sixteenth century,

<sup>91</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje* II/1: pp. 197-199.

<sup>92</sup> L. Crijević Tuberon, *Komentari o mojem vremenu*: pp. 96. An unpublished version of the annals quotes: *...et questo anno ebbeno li Ragusei per infelice et sventurato per aversi posto in nova servitù alli infedeli. (Memoriae, ser. 21. 2, vol. 24 Dell'origine della città di Ragusa, f. 20r, SAD)*. Although the text itself is probably a later copy from the sixteenth or even seventeenth century, it mentions that the Ragusans until "today" have been paying 500 ducats to the Hungarian king (f. 16r), which as *terminus post quem non* would date it in 1526. Also, the text closes with the news of the arrival of some ships in the Ragusan port in 1503, sounding like an observer's report (f. 26r).

<sup>93</sup> *... e come sapete li nostri signori hano dua gran signori, uno in Constantinopoli, l'altro questo li juste quale e il signor sangiacco e ciascuno sta con li occhi aperti (Lamenta Politica, vol. 6, f. 33v)*.

the Christian rulers had a fairly obscure idea about the nature of the relationship between Dubrovnik and the Porte. Even the Hungarian kings, far better informed than most of European rulers, continue to speak of Dubrovnik—though perhaps only with rhetorical pathos—as a selfless champion of the Christian cause, as “the harbour of Christian liberty” or the city which, “although in the jaws of the infidels”, has preserved its loyalty to the Hungarian kingdom and its Catholic faith. It seems as if the former ruler of Dubrovnik had not perceived—or, more likely—refused to perceive the new one.<sup>94</sup>

Silence being the first Ragusan line of defence, the second was misinterpretation of their relations with the Turks. The instructions issued to the envoys to the Hungarian king Vladislas from 1443 already contain both strategies. First of all, the envoys were instructed not to mention the recently signed agreement with the Porte. If the king inquired about the reason for their sending ambassadors with tribute to the Porte, they were to respond that the sultan had conquered “Sclavonia” [Serbian despotate] where the Ragusans traded and that the mentioned embassy accomplished to “free” their merchants, which was necessary because “Dubrovnik cannot live without the land of Sclavonia”.<sup>95</sup> This interpretation of the 1442 agreement in strictly economic terms as a business arrangement, though tendentious, may have had some truth in it. But it was definitely untrue when repeated in the 1480s by the anonymous annalist, who, as one single reason for Dubrovnik’s tribute to the sultan, provides the following explanation: “so that the Ragusans could trade in his land”.<sup>96</sup> In confirmation of the fact that *haraç*—a clear indication of political dependence—was interpreted as a price for trade privileges in late fifteenth-century Dubrovnik is a sentence from the travel account of Count Lobkovic, probably a reflection of what he heard from the Ragusans themselves: “I’ve been told

---

<sup>94</sup> For instance, Matthias Corvinus in 1459 confirms privileges to Dubrovnik, mentioning that *civitas ipsa nostra Ragusiensis christiane libertati pro portu habetur*, and continues by praising Dubrovnik because it ransomed the prisoners taken by the Turks and returned them home. Moreover: *Ipsa (civitas), tamquam scutum confinium regni nostri Dalmacie, sacre corone nostre emulorum insultibus est et in illa parte aliis fidelibus nostris pro muro habetur* (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje* I/2: p. 620). A rare and relatively early example of open admission of the Ragusan position is found in a letter from 1514, in which the Ragusans explain to Petar Berislavić, ban of Croatia, why they are unable to pay to him the annual tribute for the defence of Croatia (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje* II/1: p. 115).

<sup>95</sup> *Diplomatarium relationum reipublicae ragusanae cum regno Hungariae*: pp. 442–443.

<sup>96</sup> Although he reports on the subsequent increment of this amount, this is the only explanation of the purpose of the payment provided by anonymous annalist. The same is also repeated by Ragnina (*Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*: pp. 54, 248).

that the Turkish emperor has great benefits from that city; since in advance they give him fifteen thousand ducats of tribute so that all the merchants of the said city are safe to trade and travel throughout his lands”.<sup>97</sup> However, the Ragusans would probably not have argued with Mehmed II, who, at about this time, stated in a letter that he accepted *haraç* “as confirmation of my empire’s recognition of the state you hold and govern, people and things small and big”.<sup>98</sup>

The second and somewhat more sophisticated explanation of the tribute to the sultan was that it did not imply submission to the Porte, but was rather a matter of “the price for peace” or even “freedom”. Apparently this was a typically patriotic interpretation of *haraç*, popular in Dubrovnik itself in the late fifteenth century, as testified by several contemporary travel writers. A good example of the answer a foreigner inquiring about the city’s political status may have got in Dubrovnik is offered by the account of Count Johannes of Solms, who visited Dubrovnik in 1483: “In that city the municipality is for itself and is governed by itself, does not recognise any lord, but pays an annual tribute to the King of Hungary, and does the same with the Turks in order to be at peace with them”.<sup>99</sup> Another traveller, knight Arnold of Harff, speaks of Dubrovnik as “its own master”, independent city which only pays tribute to Hungary and Turkey, while Georges Lengherand (1485) remarks: “The city is not submitted to anyone save that it pays tribute to the Turks and the King of Hungary”.<sup>100</sup> The Ragusans were obviously ready to admit the payment of tribute to the sultan and the Hungarian king, but not as an expression of vassalage. By the latter half of the fifteenth century, though for now only

---

<sup>97</sup> »Iz putovanja Ivana kneza Lobkovic a g. 1493.«. *Slovinac* (1879): p. 74; Petar Matković, *Putovanja po Balkanskom poluotoku za Srednjega vijeka*. Zagreb, 1878: pp. 124-125; Jorjo Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku*. Dubrovnik, 1939: p. 191.

<sup>98</sup> *Stare srpske povelje i pisma* 1/2: pp. 271. The document is dated 30 November 1480.

<sup>99</sup> P. Matković, *Putovanja po Balkanskom poluotoku*: p. 122; J. Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku*: p. 185.

<sup>100</sup> Bohemian knight, Arnold von Harff, who visited the city in 1499, writes: *Regusa... is eyen eygen heirschaff vur sich nyemantz vnderworffen dan sij deme Koenynck van Ungerem trijbuyt geuen moyssen. Ouch moyssen sij nu deme Turcken trijbuyt geuen* (cited from: Matteo Giulio Bartoli, *Il Dalmatico*. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000: p. 138). On Harff, see: J. Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku*: p. 192; P. Matković, *Putovanja po Balkanskom poluotoku*: pp. 125-127. Lengherand’s description has been cited from: J. Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku*: p. 188. For similar descriptions of Dubrovnik as independent state with tribute as the price for peace, see: J. Tadić, *Promet putnika u starom Dubrovniku*: pp. 186, 202; P. Matković, *Putovanja po Balkanskom poluotoku*: pp. 121-123.

within an “informal” context, the statement that Dubrovnik was a fully independent state, a city that “recognises no lord” had become a commonplace. As any other successful tendentiousness, this one also owes its persuasiveness to the fact that it contains a serious element of truth. Indeed, there is no doubt that the city was *de facto* independent. However, it is equally unquestionable that both tributes, to the sultan and that to the Hungarian king, were signs of recognition of the supreme rule. As evidenced from a series of mentioned documents, this was not only the view of the relevant rulers, but of the Ragusans themselves, whenever they deemed it useful.

The third and probably the most typical approach in interpreting the payment of *haraç* to the Ottoman Empire is an odd combination of the rhetoric on Dubrovnik as defender of the Christian cause “in the jaws of the infidels” and an open recognition of the tribute to the Porte. Once the Ottoman-Ragusan relationship became common knowledge in the West, events took an incredible turn: *haraç*, a sign of submission to “the worst of infidels”, was turned into an epic sacrifice for the Christian cause. A Ragusan letter to the Doge of Venice in 1540 is a good illustration of the new rhetoric. Complaining about the seizure of their ships, the Ragusan government pathetically describes the sterile site on which their city “is situated”, also accentuating that Ragusans are “burdened” with tribute “paid annually to the Great Turkish Lord in order to preserve this city and its inhabitants *under the banner of Christ, and to the service and benefit of your dominion and the whole Christian Republic*”.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, in the well-known instruction from 1535, in which the Ragusans finally informed Ferdinand of Habsburg of their intention not to pay the tribute of 500 ducats, it is emphasised that the Ragusans were already paying a heavy tribute to the sultan, by reason: “not so much of the preservation of our private goods, but *in the name of the whole Christian Republic* which can stand in better spirits beholding [Dubrovnik] under the banner of Christ”.<sup>102</sup> This was to become the general leitmotif of Ragusan diplomacy, primarily from the sixteenth century on. In the specific local version of myth of the “defender of Christianity” (*antemurale christianitatis*), Dubrovnik is represented as an

---

<sup>101</sup> *Qualmente trovandosi quella città situata in uno sterilissimo luogo, dal quale non se può cavare tanta vitovaglia che basti per uno mese del anno, e sendo angaridiati dal tributo, qual annualmente pagamo al Gran Signore Turcho per conservare quella citta et abitanti sotto lo vexillo de Christo, et al servizio e commodita di questo Dominio e tutta la Republica Christiana...* (LL, vol. 22, f. 108).

<sup>102</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje* II/1: pp. 374-375.

altruistic guardian of Christian faith, who pays *haraç* “in order to keep alive the religion of Jesus Christ in these parts”.<sup>103</sup> Certainly, like most stereotypes of Ragusan diplomacy this one, too, has its reverse, a reflection intended for that other world. Proverbially hypocritical or rather politically prudent, the Ragusans instructed their envoys to Istanbul in 1571 to say that the Uskok raids “threaten us with losing this city which, as long as we live, we wish to preserve for serving the Great Lord”. Moreover, denying the accusations of aiding Christians in the ongoing Holy League, the ambassadors were to say: “we care more for the lowest of the servants and slaves of your Highness than for all the Christians with whom we have nothing to do, unless necessity forces us because of the traffic of trade, and truly wish to live and enjoy our freedom under the protection and favour of your Highness...”.<sup>104</sup>

Although Ragusan diplomacy of the sixteenth century tended to maintain this distinctive approach characterised by a dramatic-pleading tone and expressions of “affection” and willingness to serve, in the communication with the Christian states occasionally a profoundly different rhetoric emerged. The period after the battle of Mohács marked the final affirmation of the ideology of Ragusan *libertas* in the most delicate of all spheres of Dubrovnik’s discourse on itself—in diplomacy.<sup>105</sup> Quite openly, almost defiantly, Dubrovnik began to speak about its independence. Probably the best example of this rhetoric may be traced in the brief to the ambassadors to Ferdinand of Habsburg from 1539, pertaining to the well-known case of the banished Ragusan nobles of the Bucignolo family, who, with the aid of the king, plotted against Dubrovnik. Should Ferdinand offer to arbitrate between Dubrovnik and these “traitors of

---

<sup>103</sup> On 30 May 1570 Franciscus Gondola writes from Rome about his audition with Pope Pius V: *Dissi poi che, sebene li Ragusei pagano il tributo al Turco, lo fanno per mera forza, nè li pare inconveniente pagar quella somma de danari per mantenere in quelli paesi viva la religione di Gesù Christo et quella città con il suo popolo a gloria sua et essaltatione di questa Santa Sede (Dubrovačka akta i povelje II/2: p. 205)*. A similar role of the defender of Christianity was also claimed by Venice (W. J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*: pp. 72-73).

<sup>104</sup> *...et metterci a volontario risico di perdere la città la quale fin che habbemo vita desideriamo conservare per servitio del Gran Signore... Further: ...perche noi più conto facciamo d'un minimo servitore et schiavo di sua Altezza che di tutti gli christiani, con i quali non habbiamo che fare, senza se non in quanto la necessità ci astringe per il traffico della mercatia, ma si bene conosciamo di vivere et godere la nostra libertà sotto lo protettione et il favore di sua Altezza...* (LL, vol. 31, f. 94v).

<sup>105</sup> On the significance of the year 1526 in Ragusan history, see: Vinko Foretić, »Dubrovnik u doba Marina Držića«, in idem: *Studije i rasprave iz hrvatske povijesti*. Split: Književni krug Split, Matica Hrvatska Dubrovnik, 2001: pp. 301-321.

the state”, the envoys were instructed to give the following response to this man who bore the title of the Hungarian King: “Our intention is not to litigate over this matter, for we have the highest jurisdiction bestowed upon us by God, to remunerate our good vassals and castigate the evil who are among our subjects”.<sup>106</sup> The letter to the Doge of Venice from 1542, in which the Ragusans justify the launching of a warship in the Adriatic, epitomises the same self-understanding into a short yet powerful phrase: this we have done, explains the Ragusan government, “in virtue of that liberty in which God placed us on this spot”.<sup>107</sup> This is an explicit statement of what had been merely anticipated in the course of the previous two centuries, from as early as 1358: above the Ragusan government stood neither the Hungarian king, nor the Ottoman sultan, but only the Lord Himself. This is a classical, almost Bodinian formulation of sovereignty. Clearer than this it cannot be.

However, such an understanding of Ragusan freedom did not remain only within the narrow scope of political rhetoric. In the Renaissance, the motif of “liberty” had definitely become a true topos of Ragusan culture, the basic element of virtually all Ragusan self-portrayals. In the late fifteenth century, the poet Đzore Darsa (Držić) enthused about Dubrovnik, writing “many are envious of it who are not free / when they see its pleasant peace”. Mavra Vetranović in his poem *Galijun* follows in the same footsteps: “That is the glory, that is the pride, / of worthy Dubrovnik, / from east to west, / in freedom governed”. At the end of the sixteenth century Orbini would open his description of Dubrovnik with the following sentence: “The city of Dubrovnik, of the Slavic name and language, is the sole free and most serene city, not only in Dalmatia but in the whole of Illyric”.<sup>108</sup> In this period Ragusan *libertas* managed even to accomplish a notable regional career, having become a general theme not only of Ragusan literature but of Dalmatian as well. Praising

<sup>106</sup> *Per non essere nostra intentione de litigare sopraccio per avere amplissima giurisdizione a noi da dio data, de remunerare le nostri vassali buoni e castigare le tristi quali se ritrovano fra li subditi nostri* (LL, vol. 22, f. 39v).

<sup>107</sup> ... in virtù di quella libertà nella quale Dio ce ha posti in questo luogo (LL, vol. 23, f. 11r).

<sup>108</sup> Držić’s verse cited from: Rafo Bogišić, »Dubrovačka književnost. U znaku hrvatskog književnog trolista«. *Dubrovački horizonti* 32 (1992): p. 40. For Vetranović, see: *Pjesme Mavra Vetranovića Čavčića*. [Stari pisci hrvatski, III-IV]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1871-1872: pp. 225-226; Vinko Foretić, »Politički pogledi Mavra Vetranovića«, in: idem, *Studije i rasprave iz hrvatske povijesti*. Split: Književni krug Split, Matica Hrvatska Dubrovnik, 2001: pp. 321-333. For Orbini, see: Orbini, *Regno degli Sclavi*: p. 180.

Dubrovnik, Hanibal Lucić addresses the city in the following words: “You are free and rich [in justice and prudence], know it well / and different from all those that surround you”, while Vinko Pribojević in his famous speech, in the couple of lines dedicated to Dubrovnik, places emphasis on its “obsession” with liberty.<sup>109</sup>

Many of the above-mentioned examples share a specific figure of speech—contrast. Ragusan *libertas* is often spoken about through comparison with those “who are not free” (*ki nijesu slobodni*, Držić), those who are “different” from Dubrovnik in its neighbourhood (*različitim koji su tebe kraj*, Lucić)—that is, by comparing it with the “unfree” cities of Dalmatia and Illyric (Orbini). This was as typical of the literature and historiography as it was of diplomacy. Here we should recall Đurašević’s sentence cited at the beginning of this study, in which he accentuated that the whole of Dalmatia ought to be free like Dubrovnik, and that all Dalmatians, that is, all “of our tongue”, should pride in the liberty of Dubrovnik. In other words, this period bears witness to a unique rhetoric on *libertas* with a promising future. Until the fall of the Republic, Ragusan *libertas* tended to feature in contrast to the inhabitants of Dalmatia and its hinterland, the subjects of Venice, Habsburgs or the Porte. Juxtaposed with this dark background, Ragusan “liberty” emerged in yet more magnificent light. This patriotically coloured antithesis between Dubrovnik and its neighbours occasionally verged on contempt. Targeting his caustic satire on the natives of Kotor and Korčula, at the start of the seventeenth century Paskoje Primo (Primojević), a Ragusan, literally declared them slaves: “Envy is maliciously killing you / Malice chokes you even worse / For free we are better off / Than you who are slaves”.<sup>110</sup>

As to what extent the motif of “liberty” had imbued the culture of the city-state and its everyday life is best illustrated by the fact that eventually *libertas* was identified with Dubrovnik itself and became one of its most distinctive symbols. Thus, the Renaissance saw a new unofficial version of the Ragusan banner bearing the word *Libertas*, which, apparently, seriously challenged the older one with the image of St Blaise. Similarly, a version of an unofficial Republic coat of arms also existed. The title page of Razzi’s history of

<sup>109</sup> For Lucić see: *Pjesme Petra Hektorovića i Hanibala Lucića*: p. 261. J. Ravlić, »Politički pogledi H. Lucića«: p. 29. For Pribojević’s text: Vincentius Priboevius, *De origine succesibusque Slavorum*, ed. Grga Novak, trans. Veljko Gortan. Zagreb: JAZU, 1951: p. 91.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Rafo Bogišić, »Hrvatski barokni slavizam«, in: idem, *Zrcalo duhovno: književne studije*. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 1997: pp. 158-159.

Dubrovnik, published in 1595, contains a coat of arms whose shield bears nothing but the motto *libertas* written on it.<sup>111</sup>

*Conclusion: all Ragusan liberties*

Apparently the only precise answer to the question as to what the word “liberty” (*libertas*, *libertà*) actually conveyed in Dubrovnik of the late Middle Ages is that there is no answer. Abundance and not scarcity of meanings hinders us from singling out a clear-cut definition or a fixed meaning. The reason is simple: discourse on the city’s liberty was subject to dramatic changes of meaning and form depending on the context in which it emerged. *Libertas* tended to take on a different meaning with respect to the speaker and his intent, historical circumstances, genre in which it appeared and the audience to which it was directed. In other words, as any other form of “identity”, Ragusan *libertas*, too, was a situational construct. Given the circumstances and needs, Ragusan “liberty” denoted autonomy and full independence, a specific way of life under republican institutions or the institutions themselves; finally, it even denoted Dubrovnik itself. “Liberty” was, at the same time, a value, an inalienable right, recapitulation of a political programme, a call for action, a focus of patriotic feelings, a category in terms of political philosophy, diplomatic *terminus technicus*, patriciate’s ideological tool, literary and historiographic topos.

However, the variety of meanings does not dilute the significance and power of this great Ragusan myth. Even today, two centuries since the Republic’s fall, the topic of *libertas* is more than a mere historical curiosity or yet another in a series of academic considerations. Namely, discourse on its “liberty” has outlived the Republic itself. It continues to thrive posthumously, having profound impact on the current views of Dubrovnik. The media, politicians, cultural circles, tourist guides and many others insist on quoting old Ragusans and the miraculous survival of the tiny republic and its “freedom”. In addition, the magic word *libertas* seems to reappear at the most curious of

---

<sup>111</sup> Igor Fisković, »Historical monuments of the city-state of Dubrovnik«, in: *Diplomacy of the Republic of Dubrovnik*. ed. Svjetlan Berković. Zagreb: Diplomatska akademija, 1998: p. 195. The word *libertas* emerges much earlier as a symbol of other republican regimes. Cola di Rienzo in Rome, as well as Florence in the fourteenth century, place it on their flags and coats of arms (P. Jones, *The Italian city-state*: p. 333). One of the commonest symbols of the Republic of Siena was no other but the word *libertas* “written in classical capitals on a blue ground” (Fabrizio J. P. Nevola, »Revival or renewal: defining civic identity in fifteenth century Siena«, in: *Shaping urban identity in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Marc Boone and Peter Stabel. Leuven-Apeldoorn: Garant, 2000: p. 125).

places in Dubrovnik, from the flag of its Summer Festival to the public transport logo. What strikes most is that posthumous influence of the discourse on freedom can even be traced in the so-called professional historiography. The motif of liberty is one of the fundamental axes in the interpretation of Dubrovnik's history. The city's history is interpreted and conceptualised through a series of focal events or, in the words of the writer Miroslav Krleža, through a specific "mystical lottery of numbers", the meaning of which is known only to those who are versed in it: 1000, 1205, 1358, 1526, 1806. These are the years that marked the history of "liberty", that is, the succession of Dubrovnik's supreme rulers and the changes it witnessed in terms of sovereignty. Still more important, they are being taken for granted; these landmarks in time traditionally open and conclude all the books about Dubrovnik, or their chapters at least. In other words, in current modern historiography "liberty" is no doubt one of the key organisational principles of the history of Dubrovnik.

And more than that. *Libertas* not only provides a form for this history through periodisation, but also constitutes much of its very content. If one should pinpoint the dominant "grand narrative" of modern historiography of Dubrovnik, notably that of its "Golden Age", then it is the idea of fundamental development of Ragusan history being a gradual process of the city's increasing emancipation—that is, the expansion of its *libertas*. More precisely, viewed from the standpoint of classical historiography, if not from its early beginnings then at least from the period between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Dubrovnik's history actually evokes the development of two basic kinds of Ragusan freedom. It entailed a gradual accomplishment of Dubrovnik's independence and parallel establishment of a republican type of government. The history of the city's self-representation is still the background for the rich literature on the development of its republican institutions, and more so, a fundamental topic in the voluminous writings on its international sovereignty. Overall, even two hundred years after the fall of the Republic, historians still echo the very words of ancient Ragusans. There probably is no greater testament to the power of their political tradition.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup> For a more general discussion of the images of Dubrovnik in modern historical scholarship, see: Ivica Prlander, »Povijesni identitet Dubrovnika«. *Dubrovnik* 3/2-3 (1992): pp. 286-295. On different strategies for the liberation of Venetian historiography from impact of the so-called "myth of Venice", see: James S. Grubb, »When myths lose power: four decades of Venetian historiography«. *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986): pp. 43-94.

