

Original paper  
UDC: 327(497.5 Dubrovnik)“16”  
94(497.5 Dubrovnik)“16”

## VENICE AND DUBROVNIK DURING THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE OF 1667\*

LOVRO KUNČEVIĆ AND DOMAGOJ MADUNIĆ

**ABSTRACT:** The article examines the Venetian-Ragusan relations during one of the most dramatic moments in Dubrovnik's history—the first few weeks after the Great Earthquake of 1667. This large-scale crisis which not only destroyed the city physically, but also its socio-political order, had a profound impact on the relations between the two Adriatic republics. Starting from the assumption that the situations of crisis allow a privileged insight into the nature of historical phenomena, this text centres on the microfactography of this dramatic period. On the one hand, it reconstructs various diplomatic contacts, speculations and plans in Venice itself, among which the most intriguing was the initiative for the union between the two republics and their patriciates. On the other hand, the article traces the situation in the surroundings of Dubrovnik, where general governor Cornaro made recurrent attempts at pressuring the remaining nobility into aggregation with the Most Serene Republic.

*Keywords:* Venice, Ragusa (Dubrovnik), earthquake, 1667, diplomacy, Caterino Cornaro, Miho Sorgo Bobali, Frano Bobali

\* This work has been fully supported by the Croatian Science Foundation, under the project number 5106.

---

**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 u Dubrovniku, Lapadska obala 6, 20 000 Dubrovnik, Croatia*. E-mail: [lovro.kuncevic@gmail.com](mailto:lovro.kuncevic@gmail.com)

**Domagoj Madunić**, historian. Address: *A. Bauera 29, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia*. E-mail: [domagoj.madunic@gmail.com](mailto:domagoj.madunic@gmail.com)

---

This article has already been published in Croatian under the following title »Venecija i Dubrovnik u vrijeme velikog potresa 1667. godine«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 52/1 (2014): pp 173-218.

## Introduction

Crises are invaluable moments for a historian. They strip the phenomena bare, bringing to light relations and structures which remain hidden under normal circumstances. This study addresses one such moment, the greatest crisis that had befallen Dubrovnik in the course of its long history—the immediate aftermath of the disastrous earthquake of 1667. It not only deals with the most dramatic days of the city’s history, but also focuses on probably the most delicate relationship of old Dubrovnik, that with its great rival, the Republic of Venice. The dramatic circumstances of the spring of 1667 disrupted the centuries-long routine of economic competition, espionage and diplomatic manoeuvring between the two Adriatic republics, forcing their elites to articulate their position regarding the fundamental issues of this relationship. An analysis of their intensive communication during the crisis reveals much about the nature of the relations between these two cities, the essential interests of their elites, and the ways in which they perceived one another.<sup>1</sup>

From the perspective of historiographic tradition, this study aims to fill a certain gap in the otherwise vast literature on the Great Earthquake. Namely, although the relations between the two republics in this period have been amply studied—what is more, by some of the most eminent experts—they all tended to reconstruct these events from a single viewpoint, either that of Venice or Dubrovnik.<sup>2</sup> Such biased and one-sided approach was a natural outcome of the fact that the earlier studies were mainly based on the documents from one archive only. Though deeply indebted to this rich tradition, this study will try to view the complex situation of the spring of 1667 in its entirety, that is, from the perspective of *both* protagonists by drawing upon the documents from both the archives of Venice and Dubrovnik.

---

<sup>1</sup> We are deeply indebted to Lovorka Čoralić for her selfless assistance during the work on this text.

<sup>2</sup> Classical examples are the works of Š. Ljubić and G. Novak who examined the situation from the Venetian perspective, and R. Samardžić who addressed it from that of Dubrovnik. See: Grga Novak, »Dubrovački potres 1667. i Mletci.« *Anali Historijskog instituta u Dubrovniku* 12 (1970): pp. 9-26; Šime Ljubić, »O odnošajih medju republikom Mletačkom i Dubrovačkom: od početka XVI. stoljeća do njihove propasti.« *Rad JAZU* 53 (1880): pp. 167-172; Radovan Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*. Beograd: Prosveta, 1962: *passim*, notably pp. 273-274, 279-285; Radovan Samardžić, »Borba Dubrovnika protiv mletačkih pokušaja da unište njegovu nezavisnost u XVII veku«, in: *Dubrovačko pomorstvo: u spomen sto godina Nautičke škole u Dubrovniku MDCCCLII-MCMLII*, ed. Jozo Luetić, Ivo Gluhonja et al., Dubrovnik: Odbor za proslavu sto godina Nautičke škole, 1952: pp. 367-386.

The first part of the study is devoted to the reconstruction of the historical context indispensable for the understanding of the politics of Serenissima towards Dubrovnik in the spring of 1667: it discusses Venetian strategic interests and troops in Dalmatia, alongside their commander, general governor Caterino Cornaro. The second and more extensive part of the study contains a detailed reconstruction of the dramatic developments in the wake of the earthquake. On the one side, it covers the tense negotiations between the general governor Cornaro and the Ragusan nobility whom the Venetian commander repeatedly tried to persuade, even force, to recognize the rule of Venice. On the other side, this part of the text addresses various diplomatic negotiations, speculations and stratagems which proliferated in the extraordinary circumstances, among which the idea of the union between the two Adriatic republics and their nobilities is certainly the most intriguing. Lastly, the third part draws some general conclusions, reconstructing the ways in which the Venetian and Ragusan elites viewed the relationship between their cities, as well as the factions that crystalized within these elites regarding the policy towards the rival Adriatic republic.

### *Military forces and strategic interests of the Republic of Venice in Dalmatia during the earthquake*

At a time when its Dalmatian territories were struck by a disaster, in the spring of 1667, the Serenissima—similarly to its Ottoman enemy—was at the verge of exhaustion. After more than twenty years of war, Venice had suffered massive losses in both troops and money, while the island of Crete, the cause of the conflict, remained in the Ottoman hands, apart from its capital Candia, which was under a prolonged siege. This general exhaustion was strongly felt also at the peripheral Dalmatian battlefield. Deficient in garrisons, with underpaid soldiers, heavily indebted provincial administration, occasional rebellions of the mercenaries and the Vlachs, Dalmatia managed to survive mainly because a similar situation prevailed in the bordering Ottoman territory—the *pashalik* of Bosnia. Corrupt and incompetent Bosnian pashas, population burdened by heavy taxes and exposed to merciless raids by the Venetian Vlachs, dissatisfied and impoverished frontier elites who no longer saw any purpose in the endless bloodshed, were a gloomy picture of this war on the other side of the border.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> On declining interest of the Ottoman frontier elites for participation in the conflict see: Domagoj Madunić, »Frontier Elites of the Ottoman Empire during the War for Crete (1645–1669): The Case of Ali-Pasha Čengić«, in: *Europe and the 'Ottoman World' Exchanges and Conflicts*, ed. Gábor Kármán and Radu G. Paun. Istanbul: Isis Press, 2013: pp. 47-82.

The main strategic interest of Venice in the Adriatic theatre of operations was to secure free communication with the Levant, i.e. defend its shipping from the attacks of the Ottoman corsairs from their strongholds in Herceg Novi, Ulcinj and St. Maura (Lefkada, Leucas). The safety of this vital route was essential for the transport of the reinforcements and military supplies without which the Republic could not conduct military operations in the Aegean Sea and on Crete. This explains why general governor Cornaro had 25 smaller galleys (the so-called *galeotte*) under his command, manned by 800-900 members of the naval infantry and 6 larger warships (*galee sotile*).<sup>4</sup> Besides serving as a key connection with the Aegean front, Dalmatia played yet another strategic role for Venice—it was considered to be an area in which the troops could be prepared for the operations in the Levant. Namely, in the seventeenth century it was generally believed that the army recruits from the northern European areas were not adapted to Mediterranean climate and that, having spent a season in Dalmatia, they would adjust to the new conditions and become fit for service on Crete.<sup>5</sup> This practice prompted Cornaro to complain to the Senate in June 1666 that during his mandate he had dispatched 3,447 veterans from Dalmatia to the Levant, leaving him with inexperienced troops only (*gente di nova leve*).<sup>6</sup>

Following the crisis of 1665—when it seemed for the last time that Dalmatia was to witness large-scale military operations—Venice made no major deployment of troops in the eastern Adriatic. On the basis of documents, it is possible to accurately reconstruct the size of the Venetian forces several months after the earthquake. In September of 1667 Venetian troops stationed in the Dalmatian towns numbered 3,192 members of the Italian and cross-Alpine infantry,<sup>7</sup> while in February 1668, 2,777 soldiers served in the garrisons, and the warships (small galleys and *fustas*) were manned by 733 naval infantrymen.<sup>8</sup> Besides

---

<sup>4</sup> These troops were at Cornaro's disposal in June 1666. See: *Senato, Dispacci, Provveditori da terra e da mar* (hereafter: *PTM*), b. 496, no. 163 (Spalato, 28 Giugno 1666) as well as the undated supplement to that letter, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter: ASVe).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, in July 1666, four hundred selected veterans who served in Dalmatia were dispatched to Zante, to be replaced in Dalmatia by a new regiment of 400 soldiers organized and placed at the Republic's disposal by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. See: *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 496, no. 164 (Spalato, 3 Luglio 1666); no. 165 (Spalato, 5 Luglio 1666); no. 170 (Spalato, 7 Agosto 1666).

<sup>6</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 496, no. 163 (Spalato, 28 Giugno 1666).

<sup>7</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 497, no. 249 (Zara, 26 Settembre 1667), letter supplement: *Ristretto delle militia*, ASVe.

<sup>8</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 498, no. 39 (Zara, 18 Febbraro 1667 m.v.).

these troops, recruited and paid by the Venetian state, from 1647 a papal regiment, with minor interruptions, was also stationed in Dalmatia. Composed of 400 to 500 soldiers, this regiment was provisioned and financed by Rome, but it was placed at the disposal of the Republic for the defence of Dalmatia.<sup>9</sup> All in all, Venetian troops in the province at the time of the earthquake numbered some 3,000-3,500 soldiers in garrisons, aided by around 500 soldiers of the papal regiment, and 700-900 soldiers of the naval infantry, who served as crew aboard warships.

It should be stressed that in case of a serious Ottoman attack, these forces could hardly suffice for the defence of one Dalmatian town. According to the contemporary Venetian calculations, the troops necessary for the defence of the Dalmatian towns (Kotor excluded), i.e. for the defence in case of sudden attack but not a proper siege, were estimated at 3,950 men.<sup>10</sup> The troops necessary for the defence of a Dalmatian city in case of a fully-fledged attack were far greater and varied from town to town, depending primarily on the strength of the town's fortifications. Thus, for example, in 1647 Šibenik was successfully defended by a garrison of 3,300 professional soldiers, 300 Morlach volunteers and 700 inhabitants of the city's district organized into militia (*cernide*)—a total of 4,400 defenders.<sup>11</sup> It was estimated that the defence of Split required a garrison of 5,000 infantry and 400 cavalry,<sup>12</sup> while the defence of Zadar, as the best fortified town in Dalmatia, was thought to require 3,000 infantrymen and 400 cavalrymen.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from a chronic shortage of men, in the spring of 1667 Venetian administration in Dalmatia was faced with a series of additional problems. The news of the earthquake found general governor Cornaro in Zadar, his fleet consisting of only one galley—the rest were either in Venice or pursuing Ottoman corsairs between Kotor and Corfu.<sup>14</sup> Given the circumstances, the general governor could do nothing but dispatch messengers to all the vessels

---

<sup>9</sup> Domagoj Madunić, *Defensiones Dalmatiae: Governance and Logistics of the Venetian Defensive System in Dalmatia during the War of Crete (1645-1669)*. Budapest: CEU, D. Phil. thesis, 2012: pp. 160-163, 252-253.

<sup>10</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 477, no. 23 (Lesina, 29 Marzo 1655), letter supplement: *Nota di soldati che sono necessari per guardar convenientemente le sottoscritte piazze*.

<sup>11</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 471, no. 32 (Zara, 25 Maggio 1651), letter supplement.

<sup>12</sup> *Tvrđavni spisi Onofrija del Campa. Traktati i memorabilije jednog kondotjera u Dalmaciji u doba Kandijskog rata*, ed. Miroslav Bertoša. Rijeka: Državni arhiv u Rijeci, 2003: p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 487, no. 2 (Zara, 18 Marzo 1660).

<sup>14</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 497, no. 209 (Zara, 5 Aprile 1667), no. 210 (Zara, 12 Aprile 1667).

in the Adriatic with the instructions to hasten to Kotor upon receiving his letter.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, Cornaro suffered from a shortage of money, as was usually the case with all the general governors at the end of their mandate, because the state collected and sent fresh funding with the new general governor. Thus it happened that from December 1666 not a single disbursement reached Dalmatia, forcing Cornaro to cancel the regular ten-day advance payments to the soldiers, the so-called *terzo*, in favour of irregular payments designed to pacify the men and prevent them from revolting or plundering the local population.<sup>16</sup>

The shortage of money seriously hampered Cornaro's preparations for sending help to the devastated Kotor. In order to collect the money for irregular salaries for the troops, he resorted to an unpopular practice, i.e. loans from the merchants of Zadar, which caused strong protests among them. Until April 1667 the governor's credit rating was so low that, in order to launch preparations for the relief for Kotor, he had to make a quick loan of 2,000 sequins (ca. 6,000 ducats) as a private person (*sic!*). Doubtful regarding the reliability and discipline of his own troops, unpaid for months, Cornaro originally planned to dispatch to Kotor the papal regiment, which was paid by the Holy See, and reinforce it with an extra 500 selected soldiers from all Dalmatian garrisons. However, this plan failed, because it proved that the papal regiment could not be dislocated from Zadar without an explicit permission from Rome.<sup>17</sup> Luckily for the governor, on 13 April a galley of the governor of the Gulf sailed into the port of Zadar from Venice, carrying the long-awaited 30,000 ducats, which enabled Cornaro's immediate departure for Kotor the next day. On this voyage he set out with hastily gathered and rather modest forces: apart from a squadron of cargo vessels laden with provisions, construction and war supplies, bound south were only two galleys and 500 soldiers.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Grga Novak, *Mletački izvori o potresu u Dubrovniku i Kotoru 6. travnja god. 1667*. Zagreb: JAZU, 1971: p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> This was a common practice during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Probably the best known incident of this kind was the plundering of Antwerpen in 1576 by the foreign mercenaries in the service of the Spanish crown. For an account of a similar incident in Dalmatia during the War of Crete see: Franjo Difnik, *Povijest kandijskog rata u Dalmaciji*. Split: Književni krug, 1986: p. 142.

<sup>17</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b, 497, no. 210 (Zara, 12 Aprile 1667); for a shorter version of this letter see: G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: pp. 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> The soldiers were originally destined for the Levant. *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b, 497, no. 211 (Zara, 13 Aprile 1667), no. 212 (*Di Galea nel canal di Zara, 14 Aprile nell' Alba 1667*); G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: p. 15.

*Caterino Cornaro: a reluctant participant in the Ragusan tragedy*

Much has been written about the arrival of Cornaro in the devastated and burning Dubrovnik, as well as his encounter with the Ragusan envoys—and this study will also address this dramatic episode. But prior to that, one important yet rarely posed question should be answered: who was Caterino Cornaro, commander of the Venetian forces in the critical months of 1667?<sup>19</sup> What kind of a man was he, and what was his attitude towards Dubrovnik? The answers to these questions had serious consequences on the history of Dubrovnik. Namely, as a commander of the only significant armed force in the vicinity of the devastated city—Bosnian pasha arrived much later—Cornaro was one of the main actors in the critical weeks immediately after the earthquake. Beyond any doubt, the fate of Dubrovnik to a considerable extent depended on the character, political estimates, but also moods and whims of this very man.

Therefore it is invaluable that a description of Cornaro has been preserved, written by a highly perceptive observer who, on top of it all, was a Ragusan. Namely, a few years before the earthquake, in 1665, Nikolica Bona, nobleman and poet, was sent as envoy of the Dubrovnik Republic to Cornaro and made an exhaustive report of his mission. Bona was not particularly impressed by the general governor. Although a Paduan student, Cornaro was of “mediocre education”, but did possess a certain “natural eloquence and brisk tongue, accompanied by plenty of grace”. On the other hand, he displayed “great arrogance and pride” on account of his wealth, education, independent thinking, and above all, his noble origin, because among his kin he had royalty—the famous queen of Cyprus, Caterina Cornaro. Hence he demanded greater honours than his predecessors, and there was no honour which could “be bestowed upon him that he would not consider it below his qualities and merits”. This arrogant man was also very moody and “extremely sensitive to the interests of his ruler [Venice] which he celebrates slightly less than the Almighty”. As for Dubrovnik, although he respected its nobility, Cornaro underestimated and despised the forces of the tiny Republic. Finally, and for the purpose of this study most importantly, Bona emphasized that the general governor “does not comprehend the independence of the [Dubrovnik] Republic from Venice and holds that it

---

<sup>19</sup> Although modern Italian historiography is inclined to the variant Caterino Corner, we have opted for the form Caterino Cornaro, since that was how the general governor signed his own name and this form appears in contemporary documents.

results from the collusion with the Turks<sup>20</sup>. In sum, if Bona's words are to be trusted, in the most dramatic moments of its history the city was faced with a proud and whimsical Venetian patriot whose attitude towards Dubrovnik was not only deprecating but even slightly hostile.<sup>20</sup>

In order to create a more nuanced picture of Cornaro, this subjective, almost literary portrait ought to be supplemented by his fairly impressive biography. Cornaro was born in Venice on 27 October 1624 as a second son to a large family. It is not surprising that he took pride in his origin, since he descended from the same branch of the Cornaro as the famous Caterina Cornaro, queen of Cyprus. More importantly, Cornaro's family belonged to the innermost circle of the Venetian patriciate, virtually an oligarchic group for which the highest offices of the Republic were reserved. Thus the *cursus honorum* of Caterino's father, Andrea Cornaro, among the other included the rector's office of Verona and Brescia, president (*capo*) of the Council of Ten, and a highly esteemed office of the general governor of Terraferma. When the war on Crete broke out, Andrea Cornaro was holding one of the most important offices, that of the general governor of Candia. Caterino, aged twenty-one at the time, accompanied his father on Crete and took active part in the war operations. In the summer of 1645 he was in command of one of the galleys that brought supplies to the besieged Canea (*Canea, Chania, Hania*), where he was lightly wounded. Afterwards as a *sopracomito* of the galley he distinguished himself in a battle off the island of Milos, but upon his father's tragic death in 1646, he returned to Venice in order to attend to the family affairs.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Questo S.re Prov.r General a mio giudizio è un gentilhuomo mediocrementemente erudito, e se bene come ho inteso sia stato nella sua gioventù alli Studij di Padova, non ho potuto scorger in lui lumi di scienza più che ordinaria, però ha una eloquenza naturale e prontezza nel discorso acompagnata con molta gratia. Ha nel animo una gran superbia e concetto della sua persona così nella nobilità la quale vanta dalla Regina di Cipro come nella richiezza e scienza e massime indipendenza dalli consigli d'alcuno, per li quali supposti vol esser stimato ossequiato e riverito sopra tutti li Generali suoi antecessori in riguardo della sua casa, e della sua persona, e stimo, non sarebbe honore che gli fosse fatto che egli non riputasse minore alle sue qualità e merito... dell' interessi della nostra Republica l'ho ritrovato malissimo impressionato e perciò più mal affetto che per propria inclinazione; gelosissimo degl'interessi del suo Prencipe, al quale vanta poco meno che Omnipotente... Fa stima della nostra nobilità ma tiene in pochissimo concetto le forze e molto meno di quel che sono in effetti e non capisce l'indipendenza della Republica di Venetia supponendo questa procedere dall'ardenza al Turco... (Diplomata et acta saec. XVII, series 76, vol. 41, no. 1807/3, State Archives of Dubrovnik, hereafter: SAD). On this description and similar characterization of Cornaro see: R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 283-284.*



Upon his return to Venice, this young patrician of an impeccable career—which included wounding in the service of the homeland—continued his advancement through the state magistracies. Between 1646 and 1664 he performed a number of increasingly important duties, from the patron of the Arsenal and administrator of the Lazzaretto, to the podestat of Verona, and, finally, councillor in the innermost ducal council (*Serenissima signoria*). Although the Senate elected him the general governor of Dalmatia and Albania (*provveditore generale di Dalmazia et Albania*) back in 1661, he assumed this duty only three years later, on 23 December 1664, when after a five-day rough winter voyage he safely arrived in Zadar.<sup>21</sup> Aged forty, Cornaro was highly versed in the administrative affairs, although somewhat less in the military ones, despite his experience in the combat operations in the Aegean in the early days of the conflict. No doubt, the office of the general governor was the highest responsibility that the *Serenissima* had hitherto entrusted him with.

At a moment when Cornaro arrived in Dalmatia, the long-lasting War of Crete was in its nineteenth year and coming to a close. The first two years of Cornaro's mandate in Dalmatia were relatively uneventful, and the departure of the Grand Vizier to Crete at the end of 1666 was a clear sign that, next year too, the Porte would focus its attention to other fronts, and that the campaign would develop without any major operations in Dalmatia.<sup>22</sup> Cornaro's letters to the Senate do not depart from the dispatches written by other general governors who served in Dalmatia during this war. They cover a standard thematic repertoire, mainly complaints about the shortage of money for the army and the related incidents, lack of food, military supplies and equipment, problems concerning the maintenance of galleys and other warships. Probably among the most important events in 1666 for Cornaro were the Senate's decisions by which he was informed of the arrival of his successor, the termination of his office in Dalmatia upon the end of the war season,<sup>23</sup> and the appointment of Antonio Priuli as the new governor general.<sup>24</sup> After the dismissal of the Bosnian

---

<sup>21</sup> Renzo Derosas, »Corner, Caterino«, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 29. Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1983: pp. 169-182; *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 493, no. 2 (Zara, 26 Decembre 1664).

<sup>22</sup> Gligor Stanojević, »Dalmacija u doba kandijskog rata«. *Vesnik vojnog muzeja* 5/2 (1958): pp. 143-144; Caroline Finkel, *Osman's Dream: The Story of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1923*. New York: Basic Books, 2005: pp. 270-271.

<sup>23</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 496, no. 158 (Spalato, 10 Giugno 1666).

<sup>24</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 496, no. 164 (Spalato, 3 Luglio 1666).

spahis in October 1666, Cornaro had only to wait for his newly-appointed successor to return from Crete, and thus peacefully close the term of his office.<sup>25</sup>

But the events did not unfold as Cornaro hoped. Although Priuli had been elected general governor of Dalmatia and Albania already in July 1666, seven months later Cornaro was still at his post in Dalmatia. To his great displeasure, Priuli postponed his departure for Dalmatia with an excuse that he was unable to assume his duty by arriving directly from Crete, but had to go to Venice first to settle family issues.<sup>26</sup> Bad news for Cornaro followed one after the other in the ensuing months. In April 1667 he learnt of the death of his brother, the Venetian ambassador to Vienna. On this occasion Cornaro again complained about the difficult conditions of his service and petitioned for a prompt replacement so that he could go to Venice and devote himself to family affairs.<sup>27</sup> On 5 April 1667, *Marcelo*, a galley intended to carry Antonio Priuli to Dalmatia, was finally equipped, and full of hope Cornaro sent it to Venice to fetch his successor.<sup>28</sup> It was in these circumstances that the news of the disastrous earthquake in Dubrovnik and Kotor had reached the general governor.

### *Governor's first visit*

Those several most dramatic seconds in the history of Dubrovnik—shortly before nine in the morning of 6 April 1667—have been described and analyzed in a myriad of accounts. Although some details are still obscure, the general outlines of the events are clear. In the earthquake and in the following days the city lost almost half of its population, while the rest of the Republic also suffered heavy losses. The earthquake and a persistent fire that followed reduced Dubrovnik to an unrecognizable pile of burning rubble, surrounded by the city walls which almost miraculously remained intact. The city was destroyed not only physically; the Republic's institutional apparatus and the traditional political hierarchy were also in ruins. In the wake of the earthquake there was no public authority, and the inhabitants, including some of the nobles, unscupulously plundered whatever they could find in the ruins. As if that had not been enough,

<sup>25</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 496, no. 191 (Sebenico, 28 Ottobre 1666).

<sup>26</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 497, no. 203 (Zara, 26 Febraro 1666 m.v.).

<sup>27</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 497, no. 208 (Zara, 3 Aprile 1667).

<sup>28</sup> *Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 497, no. 209 (Zara, 5 Aprile 1667).

this desperate situation was taking place in the shadow of a war between two great powers, Venice and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>29</sup>

Upon the first news of the disaster, the representatives of these powers in the region, Bosnian pasha and the general governor, started preparations to march with the troops into the very heart of the crisis—the area of Dubrovnik and Boka. Although primarily concerned that the enemy might use the vulnerability of their own territories, also devastated by the earthquake, their attention must have been captured by the strategically crucial and notoriously rich Dubrovnik. Their objective was not necessarily to conquer and sack the destroyed city, but rather to prevent the enemy from capturing such a precious prey. Both pasha and the general governor found themselves in a peculiar position; it was clear that they should take prompt action—fantastic rumours were circulating and the situation offered endless possibilities—yet they had received no instructions from their sovereigns.

General governor Caterino Cornaro made a quicker start. Upon the first news of the disaster, which he received in Zadar on 12 April, Cornaro immediately began mustering those modest troops and ships which were at his disposal. Doubtlessly, his main preoccupation was the safety of Kotor, Venice's key possession which was also struck by the earthquake, and—a particularly alarming fact—whose city walls were damaged. By 14 April Cornaro was already southbound with the hastily gathered troops consisting of two galleys, several transport ships and 500 soldiers.<sup>30</sup> Although Ragusa was probably not high among his priorities, the very first news which he received about the city must have sounded intriguing. In a couple of the earliest accounts all eyewitnesses agreed that Dubrovnik suffered massive destruction, that the population was fleeing to Ancona, that much of the nobility, including the rector himself, were killed, and even that a part of the city walls had been destroyed (this last information proved wrong). A spy sent to the city by the count of Korčula

---

<sup>29</sup> Basic literature on this period includes: Lujo Vojnović, »Prva smrt Dubrovnika (6. aprila 1667)«. *Letopis Matice srpske* 86/288 (1912): pp. 52-69; R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 241-284; Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika do 1808.*, vol. II. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 1980: pp. 133-146; Stjepan Kراسić, *Stjepan Gradić (1613-1683). Život i djelo*. Zagreb: HAZU, 1987: pp. 106-111. For estimates of the demographic loss, see: Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika*, vol. I - *Korijeni, struktura i razvoj dubrovačkog plemstva*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2011: pp. 270-271.

<sup>30</sup> Documents regarding the governor's first actions are published in: G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: pp. 8-15.

openly reported that the Ragusans said they would “have to submit to whoever arrives here first with an army of whatever size”.<sup>31</sup> The governor must have been aware that he fitted this description perfectly.

Therefore Cornaro might have been surprised by the fact that, while approaching the city, he was intercepted by a boat carrying two Ragusan envoys, Nikolica Bona and Vlaho Bosdari. During this dramatic meeting of the Ragusan diplomats and the general governor—the first in a line of encounters that would strongly mark the weeks to come—both sides were seemingly courteous, yet deeply wary of each other.<sup>32</sup> Ragusan envoys informed the governor of the catastrophe that had befallen them with an intent to stir his feelings and negotiate some relief, but at the same time tried to convey the key message: that in the city there was patrician authority which had the situation under control.<sup>33</sup> Equally so, for the first time in their discourse there appeared an argument which would prove essential in all the later negotiations with Venice—a petition to the Venetians to be considerate in their actions concerning Dubrovnik so as not to provoke Ottoman intervention. For his part, Cornaro was determined to assure the envoys of the Serenissima’s best intentions, but at the same time tried “to discern their thoughts, their needs, as well as their attitudes regarding higher protection (*sic!*)”. The governor was fully aware of the Ragusans’ “enormous suspicions”, as well as their efforts to minimize the number of casualties. Still, he managed to grasp the true scale of the disaster, as evidenced by an accurate report on the Ragusan situation he had sent to the Venetian Senate.<sup>34</sup> Although aware of the true state

---

<sup>31</sup> G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: pp. 11, 15, 17. For the quoted sentence see: G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: p. 17.

<sup>32</sup> This meeting can be reconstructed from two documents, one of the Venetian and the other of the Ragusan provenance. The former is an extensive letter of governor Cornaro to the Senate of Venice of 18 April, and the latter is an excerpt from the diary of the Ragusan envoy, nobleman Nikolica Bona. For Cornaro’s letter see: G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: pp. 17-21; for Bona’s diary: Radovan Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak posle velikog zemljotresa 1667 g. Arhivska građa (1667-1670)*. Beograd: SAN, 1960: p. 27). On the meeting see: G. Novak, »Dubrovački potres 1667. i Mletci«: pp. 16-19; R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 284-285.

<sup>33</sup> This claim was also backed by a letter with the petition for help which they presented to him, and which, interestingly, was signed by the non-existent “rector and the councillors of the Dubrovnik Republic”. It was a copy of the original sent to the governor several days before, which he had not received, as mentioned in his letter of 18 April. See: G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: p. 20 (the text of the letter is published on pp. 21-22); R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 44-45; Šime Ljubić, »Poslanice dubrovačke na mletačku republiku«. *Starine JAZU* 15 (1883): p. 44. Samardžić mistakenly assumes that the governor had received that letter while approaching Dubrovnik (R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: p. 282).

<sup>34</sup> G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: pp. 18-20.

of affairs—and thereby also of the opportunity before him—Cornaro remained passive. It seems that in the negotiations he remained confined to the general phrases about Venice’s benevolence, without any concrete proposal (that would abound later), and was clearly reluctant to take advantage of the military superiority he had.

However, the governor’s passiveness was not the result of Ragusan diplomatic genius, as suggested by Samardžić in his analysis of this pivotal moment. A brilliant historian, but inclined to simplification for the sake of the dramatic effect, Samardžić employs this episode for a true ode to the diplomatic skill of Nikolica Bona, by whose speech “the haughty Venetian” was allegedly “moved to tears”, but also utterly confused by the news of the restored government of the Republic.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Cornaro had a number of more serious reasons for remaining an observer. Namely, at a moment when Kotor had not yet been secured from the Ottoman attack, Dubrovnik was not among the priorities of the governor’s agenda, nor worthy of spending the already modest resources. This is evident from the fact that, upon his arrival in the Gruž port on 17 April, Cornaro wished to immediately continue southwards, but due to bad weather he was forced to delay his voyage, despite several frustrating attempts to make his way further south.<sup>36</sup> The second reason of the governor’s inertness lay in the fact that he lacked the instructions of his government what to do in such a delicate situation, and therefore he refrained from any drastic actions which he could regret later. Lastly, it seems that Cornaro also had a personal reason which accounted for his decision not to intervene. From his correspondence with the Senate, it is clear that he harboured (false) hopes about the forthcoming end of his office term—of whose difficulty he made constant complaints—and was certainly unwilling to launch any operation which could further extend his sojourn in Dalmatia.<sup>37</sup> In any case, as soon as the weather conditions improved, Cornaro had more than one reason to hasten to Kotor on 20 April, leaving the ruins of Dubrovnik behind.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Here Samardžić does not hesitate to use Bona’s tendentious report stating that the general governor *appena si potè aforzare di ritenere le lagrime* (R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: p. 284; R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 27)

<sup>36</sup> G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> Upon his return to Kotor on 9 May, Cornaro found a galley waiting for him, sent by the Senate of Venice. However, instead of meeting his successor, on the galley he was informed that his duty was prolonged until further notice (*Senato, Dispacci, PTM*, b. 497, no. 219, *Galea nel Porto di Cattaro*, 9 Maggio 1667).

<sup>38</sup> Cornaro arrived in Kotor in the evening of 20 April, as mentioned in his letter to the Venetian Senate of 21 April (G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: p. 22).

Regarding the Venetian interests, this failure to act—if strategically understandable—may have been fatal. Namely, the fragile patrician authority over Dubrovnik consolidated from day to day. The first traces of organized authority emerged as early as 11 April, when a provisional administration of the Council of Ten was established, six military captains were elected, the recruitment of militia was initiated, and a ban on the abandonment of the city proclaimed.<sup>39</sup> Yet, the main consolidation took place in the days following Cornaro's departure. On 20 April, in the fortress of Revelin, the assembly of the nobility and several commoners elected a number of the most important officials responsible for the vital communal issues, such as food supplies, reconstruction of the aquaduct or keeping of the state treasury.<sup>40</sup> A few days later, on 23 April, a new assembly in Revelin elected a Council of Twelve with dictatorial authority, while the abandonment of the Republic was banned again on pain of severe punishment, i.e. the confiscation of all goods and the proclamation for a traitor.<sup>41</sup> In this period Revelin acted as a centre in which three major resources, crucial for the restoration of the Republic, were gathered: money, ammunition, and, of no lesser importance, the relics of saints.<sup>42</sup> In short, following the initial shock, beginning from sometime around 11 April, the Republic rapidly consolidated on several fundamental fronts: moral-psychological, since the decision regarding Dubrovnik's restoration was widely accepted and codified by law; institutional, since the first steps were made towards the establishment of effective government and the election of the most important office-holders; military, since the commanding hierarchy was established and several hundred men recruited for the city's defence. All in all, when the general governor returned with a more concrete plan in early May, a very different Dubrovnik awaited him.

---

<sup>39</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 39. Although the first government was formally constituted on 11 April, it appears that by 10 April some patricians had already assumed office, when from Revelin they wrote a letter to the pope and Stijepo Gradi, informing them of the catastrophe (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika*: p. 38).

<sup>40</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 55-57.

<sup>41</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 65-66.

<sup>42</sup> Nikolica Bona gave an extensive account of this in his diary (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika*: pp. 24-27). For the translation of Bona's diary and useful comments on this document, see: Milovan Tatarin, *Feniks. Život i djelo Nikolice Bunića*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice hrvatske, 2004: pp. 13-25.

*First diplomatic actions of Dubrovnik*

Besides internal consolidation, the newly established government immediately launched diplomatic activities. Its first diplomatic actions are deeply symptomatic, clearly revealing the fundamental hopes and fears of this small group of patricians gathered in Revelin. Of course, their first appeal for help was sent to Rome. By 10 April, that is, a day prior to the formal institution of the provisional government, they had written two letters: one addressed to the pope, and the other to Stijepo Gradi, unofficial representative of Dubrovnik at the papal court.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the account of the catastrophe and a desperate appeal for his engagement with the pope for relief, in the letter to Gradi the government insisted on yet another issue which was obviously its chief concern—Gradi was to plead with the pope to have a word with the Venetian ambassador. Holy father was to see to that “the said Republic, compassionate with our ill fate, refrains from any action that could agitate the Ottomans” and provoke their attack on the city. The government asked Gradi to take personal action and use every means to divert the Venetian diplomats from any thought of occupying Dubrovnik “if they harbour any, God forbid, which we do not believe to be the case, since they are prudent and god-fearing lords who will make no attempt to contribute to our misery and ruin, knowing that the Turks would never allow this city to be in anyone else’s hands but ours”.<sup>44</sup> Following this typically Ragusan combination of politeness even humbleness, and veiled threats, in yet another characteristic gesture the government appealed to Gradi to brief the Spanish ambassador in Rome on the whole matter. Finally, it should be noted that this letter marked the beginning of an interesting practice, characteristic of the Potemkin nature of the Ragusan diplomacy in the period after the earthquake. Like all the letters of the provisional government, this one was also signed by the non-extant “rector and the councillors of the Dubrovnik Republic”. As always, words were the first line of Dubrovnik’s defence.

Despite the prompt reaction of the provisional government, in most cases the news of the disaster had reached the Ragusan representatives abroad much earlier than the mentioned official dispatches and instructions. Their first reactions reveal the Ragusan diplomatic horizon—concerns, hopes and fears regarding the foreign policy—very similar to the horizon of their government.

---

<sup>43</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 38-39. For the context of this letter, see: S. Krašić, *Stjepan Gradić*: pp. 110-111.

<sup>44</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 38.

Ragusan envoys to Venice, Marko Bassegli and Luka Gozze, had learnt of the city's fate sometime before 23 April, when they wrote a letter to the government describing their first actions.<sup>45</sup> They had been familiar with the vague rumours circulating the lagoons, yet more exact details about the catastrophe Bassegli and Gozze received from their connections in the Venetian administration. The news could not have been worse: one spoke of a huge number of victims, Venetian ships saw Dubrovnik ablaze, and witnessed a massive exodus of the patricians to Ancona from the Gruž port. After the conversation with the ambassador of Savoy, who contacted him on his own and confirmed the news of the earthquake, Bassegli went to the Spanish ambassador, pleading to be informed if any further news arrived. However, more unsettling news soon reached the Ragusans. On pain of most serious penalties, a proclamation was issued at Saint Mark's Square that not a single ship was allowed to leave Venice without special permission. As to how much this gathering of Venetian forces alarmed the Ragusan diplomats is clear from a brief, but ominous, *avviso* enclosed with their letter to the government. It consists of only few lines:

“We have been told that this government ordered the general governor of Dalmatia to assemble all the ships in the ports of that province and inspect all [*sic!*] places damaged in the earthquake. The goals of this order will be clear to those who hear it. The aforementioned general governor will take the Morlachi militias with him”.<sup>46</sup>

Upon the news that Venice was gathering a fleet to be launched towards Dubrovnik and Boka, the diplomats “deemed it necessary to inform his Excellency the ambassador of Spain on the whole matter”. Don Gaspar de Teves (Tebes) obviously took them very seriously, and stated that due to the uncertain situation he thought it necessary to inform the Royal ministers and especially the vice-king of Naples, whom he asked to have ready “some men, ships and other”. That the purpose of these troops was not humanitarian is revealed by a letter which de Teves sent to the Spanish court several days later, on 30 April. Stressing that the devastated Dubrovnik was “under the protection of His Majesty”, the ambassador wrote that he informed the vice-king of Naples to make all the

<sup>45</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 69-70.

<sup>46</sup> *Ci uiene detto che da questo publico sia stato da' ordine al S. Proveditor Generale di Dalmatia d'unire insieme tutt'i legni, che si trouano ne Porti di quella Prouincia, e portarsi à uedere tutt'i luoghi che sono stati dal terremoto daneggiati. I fini di quest'ordine saranno facili à penetrare da gli intendenti. Il sudetto S. Proveditor Generale dourà pigliar seco le militie Morlache (Diplomata et acta saec. XVII, vol. 61, no. 2039/5). Samardžić did not publish this *avviso*.*



necessary preparations in order to prevent Venice from posting its troops in this city “which it desires so much, under the pretext of preventing the Turks from conquering it”.<sup>47</sup> No doubt, de Teves here repeated Ragusan words and fears. Particularly intriguing in his letter is the distorted geopolitical perspective which, apparently, mirrored the current priorities of the Ragusan envoys to Venice. Namely, the Spanish ambassador justified his alarming of the vice-king of Naples by invoking the Venetian pretensions only—there is not a single word about the Ottomans.<sup>48</sup>

A similar fear of Venice may be observed in the actions of Stijepo Gradi, at that time still the unofficial envoy of the Republic to Rome. Like Bassegli and Gozze, Gradi had learnt about the catastrophe much earlier than the abovementioned letter of 10 April, written by the Ragusan government, reached him.<sup>49</sup> Although without official instructions, Gradi acted completely in accordance with what the government’s letter soon asked of him: apart from informing the Roman dignitaries of the disaster, the first thing he undertook was a diplomatic action aimed at the prevention of the Venetian hostilities against Dubrovnik. Gradi pleaded with Cardinal Barberini, protector of the Republic at the papal court, to speak with the Venetian ambassadors and secure “that these lords act towards us in a good manner and without imposing their own interests (*disinteressamente*)”. Having informed Gradi that all the representatives of the Serenissima were ordered to help Dubrovnik, Barberini suggested that Gradi should have a private meeting with the Venetian ambassador. Without accreditation or instructions, Gradi attended this meeting as a private person, and got an impression that the Venetians had no hostile intentions towards Dubrovnik, but were merely concerned about the possibility that the city might fall into the Ottoman hands. Therefore, Gradi did all in his power to persuade

---

<sup>47</sup> *...quenta por menor al Virrey de Nápoles para que disponga lo que él más conbiniese al servicio de V. Majestad, por no dudar de que no se descuydará esta República [Venecija] en introducir sus armas en aquella plaza que la ha deseado tanto con el pretesto de que no la ocupe el turco, aunque tengo noticia que los pocos nobles que han quedado an introducido dos mil hombres de la misma provincia...* Available on: [http://emidius.mi.ingv.it/RHISE/i\\_6del/i\\_6del.html](http://emidius.mi.ingv.it/RHISE/i_6del/i_6del.html) (accessed on 4 March 2013). Archival classification is: *Sección de Estado. Legajo 3562 (Correspondencia de Venecia, años 1667-68)*, pieza 38, folio 2, Archivo General de Simancas.

<sup>48</sup> On Spanish relief for Dubrovnik, see: S. Krsić, *Stjepan Gradić*: pp. 168-169.

<sup>49</sup> A letter of 7 May, in which Gradi describes his first actions, has been published in the following collections: *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. III/2, ed. Jovan Radonić. Beograd: SKA, 1939: pp. 716-718; *Abatis Stephani Gradii Ragusini ad Consilium Rogatorum rei publicae Ragusinae epistolae scriptae (Ab anno 1667 usque ad mortem Gradii) / Pisma opata Stjepana Gradića Dubrovčanina senatu Republike Dubrovačke: od godine 1667. do 1683.*, ed. Đuro Körbler [*Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium*, vol. 37]. Zagreb: JAZU, 1915: pp. 107-110.

the Venetian ambassador that the Ottomans had no intention whatsoever of occupying Dubrovnik: not only that they showed no hostile intentions, but they had no money for the rebuilding of the city, and, after all, the Ragusans were prepared to defend themselves. Although he shared the fear of Venice with his compatriots, it seems that Gradi was less inclined towards the traditional Ragusan wariness, paranoia even, when it came to the Serenissima.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, his estimates often bordered with naivety; thus in the first weeks after the earthquake, while the general governor circled around the devastated Dubrovnik like a predator, he persistently refused to believe that the Venetian intentions were anything other but humanitarian.

*A view from the lagoons: Venetian strategy towards Dubrovnik and the emergence of the idea of union*

The Venetian intentions, however, often proved very different, that is, far more complex than what most Ragusans imagined and dreaded. The news of the earthquake reached the Venetian authorities around 22 April, when the Senate met and issued an instruction to the general governor.<sup>51</sup> This lengthy document informs Cornaro about the reinforcements in troops, material and money that would be sent to Dalmatia and commends his conduct so far. From the text it is crystal clear that the Senate's exclusive priority was to ensure defence of the Venetian territories in Boka destroyed in the earthquake. Curiously, this detailed document, which clearly prescribed the actions of the general governor, contains not a single reference to Dubrovnik.

Although not being among the first priorities of the Venetian senators, Dubrovnik certainly occupied the high second position. Only several days later, at a session held on 27 April, the Senate turned to the question of Ragusa and issued a detailed instruction to the general governor, most likely prompted by his account of the city's pitiful state in the letter of 18 April.<sup>52</sup> It seems that in the Senate there were serious discussions concerning the policy towards Dubrovnik, since the already written instruction was subsequently altered in one major

---

<sup>50</sup> For the image of Venice in Ragusan tradition see: Lovro Kunčević, »Dubrovačka slika Venecije i venecijanska slika Dubrovnika u ranom novom vijeku«. *Analiza Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 50 (2012): pp. 10-25.

<sup>51</sup> *Senato Rettori*, R-42, (February 1667 – March 1668), ff. 105r-108r, ASVe.

<sup>52</sup> *Senato Rettori*, R-42, ff. 112r-114r.

regard. The senators first opted for a cautious approach: Cornaro was ordered to express deepest sympathy to the Ragusans because of the disaster and to promise whatever help possible, in an attempt to soothe their suspicions (*gelosie*). It seems that this was meant sincerely, because the Senate afterwards really ordered Cornaro and other officials in Dalmatia to help the Ragusans, albeit without thereby harming the interests of that “province”.<sup>53</sup> Of course, altruism was not what guided the Serenissima here, but a most concrete interest, as clearly evidenced by the rest of the text. From the Ragusans Cornaro was to seek firm guarantees that they would not cede their city to the Ottomans, and that was to be his most important objective, because it “not only concerned Ragusan interest, but that of the whole Christendom”.<sup>54</sup> In other words, Venetian authorities dreaded the possibility of Dubrovnik falling into the Ottoman hands to such an extent that they were truly prepared to help the devastated city.

None the less, the temptation obviously proved too great, and this instruction was rephrased that very same day. The reasons for this are obscure, but it could be that the picture of the chaos-ridden Dubrovnik, as described in Cornaro’s letter, swayed the senators. In any case, omitted from the text was the section on helping the Ragusans and replaced by new instructions. The senators opened the brief by commending Cornaro for doing everything in his power to disperse Ragusan suspicion during his first visit to the city in mid-April. Then they expressed satisfaction with the Ragusans’ determination to preserve their independence from the Ottomans. This was followed by a truly novel part, the one about which the senators had obviously changed their mind: “Should [the Ragusans] for reasons of the new state of their government and misfortunes, suffered also by us—for which with many a word you should express our deepest regret—again feel inclined to that good they may receive from the Republic, employ all the means possible to prudently let them know that the Senate will be ready to meet [*corisponderli*] their wishes and merits, in the same manner as it was done with other peoples, cities and particular persons

---

<sup>53</sup> *Senato Rettori*, R-42, f. 113v. This is also confirmed by the report of the French consul to Venice, who on 30 April wrote to the court that the Venetian Senate had decided to help Dubrovnik so as not to become Turkish prey (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, III/2: p. 707).

<sup>54</sup> The formulation in the document is somewhat imprecise, but the meaning is clear: . . . *i quali* [Ragusans] *anzi volemo, si confermino da voi nella costanza dimostrata ad tenersi alieni in ogni modo da Turchi, e cio dovendo essere sopra tutte le cose a cuore alla vostra somma prudenza e vigilanza, siamo sicuri, che con proprij ufficij e conginture saprete ben ponderarlo, e far conoscere, che in questo geloso punto consiste l'interesse loro non, ma della Christianità tutta*. See: *Senato Rettori*, R-42, f. 114r.

who thrive under the happy auspices [*auspicij*] of this Republic. [All this ought to be done] in order to learn whether they are negotiating about the same with others, knowing how important that area, that site is, and how important are the consequences of this affair which concerns the entire Christianity”.<sup>55</sup>

Although confirming Ragusan suspicions about the Venetian pretensions, this instruction does set clear limits. The general governor was not ordered to occupy Dubrovnik with his troops, but only to consensually receive the city under Venetian rule. Moreover, it appears that Cornaro was not to be the first to propose surrender, but he was only to encourage the Ragusans if they themselves felt “inclined towards that good they can receive from the Republic”. In other words, and that will be the leitmotif of the governor’s attempts in the ensuing several weeks, Venice made tremendous efforts to persuade the Ragusans to *voluntarily* submit to its rule.

Another interesting detail in the text is a remark that Cornaro had to find out whether the Ragusans were negotiating the surrender of the city with anyone else. Doubtlessly, this again reveals Venice’s main fear that the demoralized Ragusans would cede their city to the Ottomans. However, the senators were perhaps wary of yet another possibility, and that was the surrender of Dubrovnik to its old protector, Spain. That would have led to the realization of Venice’s geopolitical nightmare, because the entrance into the Adriatic—its “gulf”— would be controlled and sealed from both sides by another power. The atmosphere of profound uncertainty in which the Venetian Senate deliberated, characteristic of the first weeks after the earthquake, is best illustrated by a letter that the French ambassador to Venice addressed to his court in the early May. While writing that Dubrovnik was a much-discussed issue of the current Senate sessions, he explained that it was because “the few surviving patricians of that city were divided: some wished to preserve their independence, other to submit to the Turks, or the Spaniards, or even the Republic [Venice]; we are waiting for the outcome...”<sup>56</sup> In other words, virtually

---

<sup>55</sup> This is a less faithful translation of the flamboyant baroque constructions: *Così quando per la novità del governo, e degli accidenti da Noi compatiti per li quali gl' esprimerete con concetti abbondanti il pubblico vivo dispiacere, risentissero stimoli di quel bene, che possono ricever della Republica; procurerete con li mezzi, che per vostra prudenza [112v] riconoscerete aggiustati; destramente insinuarli, che a misura delle loro disposizioni, e meriti sarà pronto il Senato con li modi proprij corisponderli, come si è praticato con altri Popoli, e Città anco con particolari persone, che godono de felici auspicij della medesima Republica. Avertendo di penetrare se tenessero pratiche con altri allo stesso fine, conoscendo voi quanto rilievi quella parte, quel sito, e le conseguenze dell' affare, che concerne tutta la Christianita...* (*Senato Rettori*, R-42, f. 112r-v).

<sup>56</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 42.

nothing was known, and most bizzare and contradictory rumours circulated. That was the horizon of all the actors in the Adriatic, both great and small, in the dramatic spring of 1667.

Among these rumours there soon emerged one which was to prove extremely persistent and widespread, provoking strong reactions from the contemporaries. Its earliest trace is found in a letter that the Ragusan envoys Marko Bassegli and Luka Gozze wrote to the government on 30 April from Venice. Recounting the latest session of the Venetian Senate—perhaps the session of 27 April mentioned above—the diplomats stated that it was decided to offer Dubrovnik every kind of relief. Afterwards, allegedly, “Jacomo Donà, a highly esteemed senator”, proposed that Venice, in order to prove its good intentions, ought to “work on the union of the two republics, aggregating all that [Ragusan] nobility into the whole of this [Venetian] nobility, to rule both states”. This was thoroughly discussed, but given that it concerned a “delicate issue”, further discussion was postponed for a later date.<sup>57</sup> Intrigued by this unexpected proposal to unite the two Adriatic republics and to aggregate the whole of the Ragusan nobility with that of Venice, Bassegli and Gozze enquired about this idea of several Venetian patricians, who all proved “extremely inclined” (*inclinatissimi*). They even elaborated on the best modes of its realization. Some younger patricians considered that the Ragusans should initiate the whole matter by informing one of the *savi*, highly positioned Venetian officials, of their interest, while others thought that the initiative should come from both sides at the same time. Finally and most interestingly, some patricians informed Bassegli and Gozze that the general governor had already been instructed to enquire into the position of the Ragusan government on this matter.<sup>58</sup>

### *Governor's second visit*

It is hard to say whether the general governor was actually authorized to propose the union to the Ragusans—official documents make no mention of that—yet it is certain that by the beginning of May, Cornaro had set out for the city again. As early as 2 May he wrote to the Senate from Kotor about his

<sup>57</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 83. In the version of the document published by Samardžić it reads, quite surprisingly, “Jacomo Bona”, as if it concerned the nobleman from a prominent Ragusan family. But the original clearly shows that the person in question was a member of the Donà, a distinguished Venetian family.

<sup>58</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 83.

intention to head for Korčula “so that by passing by that city [Ragusa], I could give its rulers another opportunity to submit their supplications, and so that I could try, if possible, to grasp their thoughts and plans, with an intent to keep an eye on that area until I receive the instructions...”.<sup>59</sup> These instructions, that is, the mentioned letter of the Senate of 27 April, arrived soon, on 7 May. Thus the governor, having reached Dubrovnik, could commence the talks with a clear task—to persuade the devastated city to surrender.<sup>60</sup>

Many details of the meeting that followed are unclear. Although it is mentioned in several documents, the identity of the Ragusan envoys is not known, while one can only speculate about its exact place and time. Most probably, it took place sometime on 7 or 8 May aboard Cornaro’s galley.<sup>61</sup> Despite many uncertainties, there is no doubt about the most important issue: from Cornaro’s lengthy report to the government of Venice dated 9 May, the course of the talks can be fairly accurately reconstructed. Immediately revealing his main objective, at the beginning of his report, Cornaro virtually quotes the key part of the aforementioned Senate’s instruction, writing on the possibility that “[the Ragusans] due to the new state of their government and misfortunes again feel inclined to that good they can receive from the Republic and therefore express their public feelings and intentions to me”. He mentions that with all his powers

---

<sup>59</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 84. Also published in: Š. Ljubić, »Poslanice dubrovačke«: pp. 47-48.

<sup>60</sup> In his letter to the Senate of 9 May, Cornaro writes that on 7 May, therefore around the time by which he had reached Dubrovnik, he received their dispatch of 27 April (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 91).

<sup>61</sup> Some details of this meeting may be gleaned from several very different documents: Cornaro’s detailed report to the Venetian government of 9 May, brief account in the history of the War of Crete by Franjo Difnik of Šibenik, a couple of verses from Jaketa Palmotić’s *Dubrovnik ponovljen*, and short comments in the memorandum of Stijepo Gradi (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 91-93; F. Difnik, *Povijest Kandijuskog rata u Dalmaciji*: pp. 284-285; Jaketa Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen i Didone*. Dubrovnik: D. Pretner, 1874-1878: pp. 89-91. Gradi’s memorandum is filed in: *Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 8, after no. 900, f. 145v. The only authoritative source, though biased, is Cornaro’s report, while all other authors (except for Gradi) probably resort to the same thing: combine several meetings of the governor and the Ragusan envoys into one, which makes it very difficult to verify and date certain details from their accounts. But Cornaro himself often omits important details: for example, he fails to mention the time, place or person with whom he talked. However, it seems most likely that, similar to the first occasion, the governor received the Ragusan envoys on his galley (according to the established diplomatic practice). The meeting took place on 7 or, more likely, on 8 May, because in his letter Cornaro mentions that on 7 May he was still heading towards Dubrovnik, and on 9 May he wrote to the Venetian government from Kotor. For this meeting, solely on the basis of Cornaro’s report, see: G. Novak, »Dubrovački potres 1667. i Mletci.«: pp. 20-22.

he engaged himself in “the matter of such paramount importance” and “took urgent actions to see that such a great opportunity led to the achievement of a benefit which would be immense in every sense”.<sup>62</sup>

However, it seems that the general governor was met with the typical Ragusan rhetoric abounding in humble phrases and expressions of loyalty, but void of any concrete commitment. Slightly frustrated, Cornaro wrote that the Ragusans repeatedly expressed their loyalty and respect for the Venetian lords, fervently pleading for help, but “when I recurrently asked them to state their exact demands from the said lords, willing and inclined to grant them without delay, they merely mentioned those related to the needs and facilitation of their reconstruction, always adding [that it ought to be done] without arousing suspicion or anxiety of their Turkish neighbours”.<sup>63</sup> Realizing that tendentious offers of help gave no result, Cornaro, apparently, openly offered the recognition of Venetian sovereignty. However, here he had even worse news to report to the Senate, because the Ragusans clearly “stated their intention not to abandon, as long as possible, that freedom which, though in a limited state, they enjoy”. Of course, this rejection was also formulated with utmost courtesy, since Cornaro cites the arguments with which the Ragusans justified such a decision. They stressed that their fortifications were still intact, claimed to have salvaged a lot of money, mentioned the imminent arrival of Christian relief, and good relations with the Ottomans—in sum, they did their best to convince the general governor that their situation was better than it appeared.<sup>64</sup> That the acknowledgement of Venetian sovereignty was discussed fairly concretely is confirmed by the fact that Cornaro also mentions the reasons which the Ragusans mentioned against such a proposal. Basically, it was about the fear of Ottoman retaliation. The Ragusans feared that their territories in Konavle and Primorje would be occupied and that the Ottomans would confiscate huge amounts of money which the Ragusan merchants invested in business throughout the Empire. These two reasons, Cornaro writes, the Ragusans use as “great pretext for not being able to decide otherwise [*sic*], but ought to do their best in order to survive”.<sup>65</sup> However, while the Ragusans used the fear of the Ottomans as an excuse for not recognizing Venice, Cornaro understood it in quite a different manner. Trying to deepen their anxiety by stressing the unpredictable behaviour

---

<sup>62</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 91.

<sup>63</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 92.

<sup>64</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 92.

<sup>65</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 92.

of the Ottomans, especially of the Bosnian pasha who was marching his troops in the city's vicinity, the governor claimed that the safety of Dubrovnik could only be ensured with Venetian protection. Neither did this have any effect: Ragusan envoys, probably bluffing, assured the governor of having arranged their relations with those "barbarians" in such a way that they feared them far less than of anyone else.<sup>66</sup>

However, from the rest of Cornaro's letter it appears that the Ragusans still left the issue partly unresolved. The general governor writes that these days the Ragusans are expecting the Porte's judgement on two vital issues: their ability to pay the tribute, and the decision regarding the entrepôt. He further underlines that the entrepôt is "the most important of all issues" and that, if a way to close it were devised, the Ragusans would no longer be able to pay the tribute and "would consider a different decision, one to which they could be driven only by necessity". The governor's further comment seems to imply that Dubrovnik's rejection of Venetian sovereignty was not all that straightforward: "they themselves openly state that without these two things [diminution of tribute and preservation of the monopolized entrepôt] neither their restoration nor survival would be possible; and in any case, if they were forced to choose sides, they would always turn to Your Serenity first". Of course, this is not a particularly clear promise, nor is it certain that the envoys were those who said this to the governor and not some other Ragusans in a less formal context. However, it appears that the Ragusan government itself still left the governor with a glimmer of hope. After stressing that, due to all the aforementioned reasons, Venice should keep a keen eye on Dubrovnik, and especially on the troubles which might befall it—a clear allusion to the fact that Ragusan answer to his offer might yet change—Cornaro makes a very interesting addition. Apparently the Ragusans were those who appealed to him to remain in the vicinity until they received the Ottoman reply regarding the entrepôt and tribute "so as to be able to inform me of their final decision". This could mean that the Ragusans, although pretending not to be wary of the Ottomans, still feared the Turkish hostility and that as a final option they left the possibility to rely, unfortunately without clearly specifying in what way, on the protection of Venice.

In its main points Cornaro's report corresponds to the description of the meeting between the Ragusans and the general governor given by Jaketa

---

<sup>66</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 92.



Palmotić in his epic *Dubrovnik ponovljen*.<sup>67</sup> Palmotić also writes that unnamed ambassadors informed the governor that they would not cede the city, and that they would guard their independence “until death brings an end to them all”. The enraged governor allegedly threatened the envoys and uttered “in anger many a rash word”, his main argument being the one constantly repeated in the Venetian documents. Cornaro insisted that the weakened Dubrovnik could not defend itself from the Ottomans and that he had to leave behind the Venetian garrison, “not wishing such a city / to remain in the Turkish hand / and that the vicious emperor from there / plunders and disturbs all Christians”.<sup>68</sup> A long conversation ensued in which the Ragusan envoys did their best to assure the general governor that they would defend the city from a possible Ottoman attack to the last drop of blood. After “many words” they managed to convince Cornaro who, once they pledged to the solemnity of their intentions, agreed to provide any kind of help. According to Palmotić, the meeting ended in an almost cordial tone, with an agreement that clearly corresponds with what Cornaro writes: “then they agreed / that the general for few more days / will not leave with his ships / but will remain in Gruž [port near Dubrovnik] / until they see the pasha of Bosnia / where he will go, to which side / and which cruel thoughts / he nourishes in his proud heart”.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> J. Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen i Didone*: pp. 89-91. It is hard to precisely date the event narrated by Palmotić, because it is difficult to ascertain whether he described Cornaro’s visit of 7-9 May or that of 17-19 May. Namely, the bulk of data provided by Palmotić proves of little use for accurate datation. Thus he mentions that elected at the same time were the envoys to the Porte (himself and Nikolica Bona), envoy to the Bosnian pasha, “diligent Kuničić” (i.e. Marin Gozze), and two unnamed envoys to the general governor. This most certainly had not been the case, since Palmotić and Bona were elected only in July 1667, which was much later than these talks with the governor (R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 340-341). With regard to Marin Gozze, the problem is of similar nature: his instructions were issued on 2 June 1667, therefore, again much later (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 116-118). The only data that fits chronologically is that Palmotić writes about the Ragusans being panic-stricken during that time, as it was rumoured that the Bosnian pasha was descending with his army towards Dubrovnik. This helps date the meeting sometime in May 1667, as similar rumours did circulate at the time. However, that does not resolve the main dilemma whether Palmotić describes the first or second meeting, since both of them took place in the same month. It seems quite probable that Palmotić amalgamates several meetings with the governor into one, although most details—as revealed by the congruence with Cornaro’s report—pertain to the meeting of 7-9 May.

<sup>68</sup> J. Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen*: p. 89.

<sup>69</sup> J. Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen*: pp. 90-91. However, according to Palmotić they petitioned the governor to remain in the vicinity for fear of the Bosnian pasha, while according to Cornaro they required his vicinity until the arrival of the Porte’s decision on the abolishment of tribute and the entrepôt. Basically, it was one and the same thing, i.e. fear of the Ottomans which induced the Ragusans to flirt with the Venetians. In several other places Palmotić repeats that the Ragusans appealed to the Venetians not to leave Gruž until the situation with the Turks was clarified (J. Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen*: pp. 143-144, 391; less explicitly on p. 138).

The third account of this dramatic meeting—that of Franjo Difnik, historian of Šibenik, given in his *Povijest kandijskog rata*—also roughly corresponds with all the abovementioned. However, with the well-informed Difnik another interesting detail emerges. He writes that Cornaro “proposed to the Ragusans to submit to the lordship of the Venetian Republic”, but soon adds, “by offering all the patricians status and honours of the nobility of Venice”. Moreover, Difnik explicitly states that the proposal was made “upon the order of the Senate”. According to Difnik, the Ragusans rejected it unambiguously, and manoeuvred the governor away from the city, wary of his intentions.<sup>70</sup> That Cornaro proposed more than mere recognition of Venetian sovereignty was also confirmed by Stjepan Gradi, who in his memorandum to Pope Clement IX of June 1667 writes that the general governor: “by far exceeded the instructions he received from his sovereign demanding of that [Ragusan] government to permit the entrance of Venetian troops and to formally subjugate to the Most Serene Republic, mentioning the intention that their nobility be aggregated with the nobility of Venice, but was firmly and explicitly rejected”.<sup>71</sup>

It should be noted that, unlike Difnik, Gradi underlines that Cornaro was not authorized by the Senate to propose aggregation to the Ragusan nobility, as is confirmed also by the official documents, in which nothing of the sort is mentioned. Lastly, a somewhat similar information is given in the account of the earthquake by Jacob van Dam, who was the appointed Dutch consul to Smyrna but, given the circumstances, never assumed the post. On his return to Holland via Venice, at the beginning of May van Dam heard that the governor proposed to the Ragusans to acknowledge Venetian rule, to which they allegedly agreed (*sic!*) on condition that the whole of nobility be aggregated with the nobility of Venice. Considering that van Dam had already left Venice by 4 May—that is, prior to Cornaro’s meeting with the Ragusans—this puzzling piece of information should not be given much attention. It is yet another

---

<sup>70</sup> F. Difnik, *Povijest Kandijskog rata*: pp. 284-285. Difnik’s account is confirmed in a way by the already mentioned rumour conveyed to the Ragusan government at the end of April by its envoys to Venice, writing that the general governor was allegedly ordered to enquire into the Ragusan standpoint on the issue of union of the two republics and their patriciates (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 83).

<sup>71</sup> ...s’ auanzò di molto una uolta sopra le commissioni hauute dal Prencipe hauendo pressatamente ricercato quel publico che lasciasse introdur presidio veneto e si soggettasse formalmente la Republica a S. Ser.ta dando intentione che quei nobili sarebbono aggregati alla nobiltà Veneta ma ne ha riportato costante e precisa negativa (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 8, after no. 900, f. 145v). For context see: S. Krasić, *Stjepan Gradić*: pp. 118-119.

symptomatic example of the numerous speculations that circulated regarding Dubrovnik and Venice after the earthquake.<sup>72</sup>

All in all, what remains certain about Cornaro's visit in early May is that the governor openly proposed to the Ragusans to recognize Venetian rule, which they politely, yet firmly rejected. Despite that, it seems that they pleaded with the governor not to leave the vicinity of the city, since they obviously counted on the military aid of Venice, and possibly were even ready to recognize its rule, if the worst scenario of the Ottoman attack should take place. It is not clear whether Cornaro offered the Ragusans also the aggregation into the ranks of the Venetian patriciate, as mentioned in some documents. He probably did, since this proposal is mentioned in a number of different sources, but it is impossible to ascertain during which of his two visits in May, or perhaps both, did it happen. Lastly, it is not clear whether Cornaro was authorized to propose the aggregation to the nobility of Dubrovnik. The Senate's brief issued on 27 April seems to imply the contrary. It states that Venice can receive Dubrovnik under its sovereignty "in the same manner (*sic!*) as it was done with other peoples, cities and particular persons", but the possibility that the governor may have later received some other document or even oral instruction cannot be ruled out. On the bottom line, it is possible, as Gradi puts it, that Cornaro acted on his own, hoping to receive the Senate's approval later, or was even planning to trick the Ragusan patricians once they allowed the Venetian troops into the city.

### *Pro-Venetian sentiments in Dubrovnik*

Although all sources, except van Dam's unreliable account, speak of Ragusan rejection of Venetian sovereignty, that refusal was not as unequivocal as it may appear at first. There are a number of indications that the Venetian proposals deeply appealed to some Ragusan patricians, turning them into fervent advocates of the Most Serene Republic. Already mentioned is the report of the French ambassador to Venice, who at the beginning of May wrote to his government about the dissenting voices among the Ragusan nobility: some were for

---

<sup>72</sup> R. C. Hol, Margot Kooten, Jacob van Dam, *The Ragusa-disaster of 1667: A Dutch Eyewitness account of the Earthquake and Tsunami in Ragusa in April 1667*. Den Haag: Nationaal Archief, 2009: p. 25. For assistance with the Dutch text we are deeply grateful to Nella Lonza.

independence, some wished to surrender to Spain, or even to Venice.<sup>73</sup> That this information was correct is confirmed by a much more reliable witness, Jaketa Palmotić, who, despite his passionate patriotism, testifies to a similar thing in his epic *Dubrovnik ponovljen*. Palmotić describes the dramatic council of the nobility in the Revelin fortress held when “the general came to them... in doge’s name to seize the city”, and when they also received the news of the Turkish threats and demands for “compensation” of 300 bags of ducats. Caught between the “lion” and “dragon”, some councillors proposed military resistance to the enemy, others opted for an exodus to Italy and the establishment of a new town there, while the third suggested that “the city be surrendered to the Venetians / as they are of Christian faith”.<sup>74</sup>

However, the most illuminating proof of the enthusiasm with which some patricians adopted the idea of the recognition of Venetian sovereignty is to be found in the voluminous correspondence of Frano Bobali. One of the most tragic figures of the earthquake, known for his stirring letters in which he describes the loss of almost entire family and his miserable life after the catastrophe, Bobali also wrote about the relations between the two Adriatic republics—and even obsessively so. His addressee was Marko Bassegli, his nephew, the very ambassador of Dubrovnik to Venice who was the first to inform his government about the rumoured “union” of the two republics. Unfortunately, the whereabouts of Bassegli’s letters to Bobali are not known, yet Bobali’s detailed and unusually direct letters make possible the reconstruction of their interesting dialogue.<sup>75</sup>

Thus on 16 May Bobali received a letter in which Bassegli obviously informed him about similar matters as in the abovementioned letter to the government

---

<sup>73</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> J. Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen*: pp. 82-83. It is chronologically impossible that the Ragusans learnt of the Turkish demands for 300 bags of ducats while they were negotiating with the general governor, because Kara-Mustafa made this request much later. However, Palmotić’s account should be taken as a general picture of the circumstances in the earthquake’s aftermath rather than an accurate reference to a specific event. One ought to bear in mind that Palmotić was not only an eyewitness of these events, but also wrote for the Ragusan public, i.e. for the people who participated in them, and therefore this information should be taken seriously. Of course, distancing himself from this idea, Palmotić writes that he who proposed subjugation to the Venetians was “filled with fear beyond any measure” (J. Palmotić, *Dubrovnik ponovljen*: p. 83).

<sup>75</sup> Samardžić published the precious letters of Frano Bobali in his valuable collection with a shelf mark which is not particularly useful—he mentions only “The State Archives of Dubrovnik” (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: passim, e.g. pp. 52, 87, 152). In fact, Bobali’s letters are to be found in: Arhiv Bassegli, C 1/2, SAD.

of 30 April: that the Venetian Senate discussed the union with Dubrovnik and the possible aggregation of the whole nobility with the patriciate of Venice, and that many patricians in Venice were inclined towards that plan.<sup>76</sup> As can be seen from his reply, Bobali was thrilled with the idea, writing that “those most serene lords” were sent no less than by the Lord Himself. However, he soon warned that the Ottomans would not tolerate to see Dubrovnik join their enemies, and that on account of that decision the Ragusans could easily be left with nothing. Thus he suggested that, for the time being, a solid agreement be made with the Venetians, to be realized later, after the peace treaty between Venice and the Ottomans. Bobali then turned to laments about the incompetence of the provisional government, stating that he was surprised that “those lords” did not invite men like him, seniors who had already held office. From this he concluded that they were not even debating these important news from Venice, although they should, since they opened Bassegli’s letter and were familiar with the whole affair.<sup>77</sup> In conclusion he returned to the idea of union between the two republics and patriciates, stating that someone could object that the Venetians might disrespect the agreement, to what his response would be “do you consider them Christians or not”? After all, Bobali writes, the patriciate of Venice could do with an addition of several hundred men, for “those lords” would most surely decline to admit into its ranks “commoners and others” whom the new Ragusan government wishes to aggregate, but only those “born as nobles from the ancient times”.<sup>78</sup>

It was in his next letter to Bassegli, written in Kobaš near Ston on 18 and 19 May, that Bobali returned to this topic.<sup>79</sup> He starts by mentioning that he

<sup>76</sup> The part that follows has been reconstructed from Bobali’s reply to that letter, dated 16 May (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 98-99). Interestingly, the important news on the possible union with Venice Bassegli first dispatched to Bobali, and only then to the Ragusan government. Namely, in a letter of 30 April addressed to the government Bassegli and Luka Gozze mention that Bassegli had already conveyed these news to his uncle (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 83).

<sup>77</sup> In his previous letter to Bassegli, also dated 16 May, Bobali mentions *quelli SS-ri dodici del governo m’aprono le lettere, senza più scrivermi una parola, che m’arabia, ma ho pazienza* (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 96). The opening of private letters by the government may have become a common practice during the crisis. In that letter Bobali also complains of being politically marginalized: *Ma a mio giuditio questo novo governo slo mi se vosse, a od mene malo conta cine, a ia magne od gnih*. This may partly be explained by the fact that he spent most of his time away from the city, in Kobaš near Ston.

<sup>78</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 98. In conclusion, it should be noted that, judging by his tone, Bobali thought it to be an official Venetian offer (*un’offerta stranissima* as he explicitly states). Could it be that Bassegli had told him more than he did to the Ragusan government?

<sup>79</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 101-102.

had received a new letter from Bassegli, sent open to him from Dubrovnik by its governors “who neither informed nor wrote to me regarding any other matter, which makes me suspect they are dissatisfied”. Obviously angry, Bobali wonders “what the devil do they want”, emphasizing that he does not say that the negotiations with Venice should be conducted publicly, but that all documents should be arranged secretly and the nobility entered into the Golden Book of the Venetian patriciate. Here Bobali actually repeats his estimate from his previous letter to Bassegli: union of the two republics and their patriciates is a brilliant thing, but it ought to be arranged secretly for fear of the Ottomans, and published afterwards, at an appropriate moment. It seems that Bobali even went from principal considerations to concrete lobbying, as he writes that a couple of days before at Ploče he spoke to several “most confidential patricians” about the whole matter. He apparently told them: “It would be best to ask the Venetian lords to take us among them, and that they rule us, but so that the Ragusan nobleman is content”. To some, Bobali writes, this idea was “a heresy”, yet others enquired: “Would they [Venetians] agree to this”? His reply was that they had a unique opportunity that should be seized immediately, for it was not certain if it would appear again.

### *Governor’s third visit*

Yet, Bobali soon changed his attitude towards the union with Venice, and the reason for that may largely be ascribed to Caterino Cornaro. While Bobali was writing his letter on 18 May, the general governor visited the city again—this time with a new and far more unpleasant tactic. The course of events may be reconstructed on the basis of two fairly contradictory testimonies: Cornaro’s tendentious report to the Senate and two agitated letters which Bobali addressed to Bassegli. Although he did not take part in the events, Bobali proves a more reliable witness of the two, since he describes the situation with regret and indignation, without any reason to distort. On the other hand, Cornaro’s report should be taken with great reserve, because the governor, as will soon become clear, had a great deal to hide.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Cornaro’s report to the Senate is dated 22 May in Split (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 108; G. Novak, *Mletački izvori*: pp. 28-29). Bobali describes the event in his letter of 19 May and in the following of 29 May (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 102-103, 113-114). In all likelihood, Cornaro had reached Dubrovnik by 18 May, because in the letter of 19 May Bobali evidently recounts the events from the previous day (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 102). For reconstruction of this event see also: V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, vol. II: pp. 138-139.

It seems that Cornaro reached the city with three galleys on 18 May. He immediately took a more aggressive approach than in his previous visits: in every manner possible he tried to enter the city port with these sizeable troops. Bobali heard two versions of the story about the pretext under which the general governor tried to land his troops before the very city gates, and thus also outside the range of most Ragusan cannons. According to some, he justified it with an unfavourable wind, while, according to others, he claimed that he intended to unload the hard tack. Whatever the case, he seemed very determined, which soon gave rise to tensions.<sup>81</sup> Having understood that the Ragusans would not let him enter the port, the governor sailed to his usual anchorage, the nearby bay of Gruž. According to an established diplomatic practice, the Ragusans sent envoys there, Luka Zamagna and Nikolica Bona, two most distinguished noblemen. The governor agreed to speak with them, albeit reluctantly, as Bobali was first informed of his refusal to receive the envoys.<sup>82</sup> Judging by Cornaro's report, which in this respect can be trusted, they proceeded with a conversation which, in terms of content, was similar to that held on 7 or 8 May. The governor did his best to persuade the Ragusans that their devastated city could not survive, due mainly to the Ottoman menace, and that it would be most prudent to recognize the sovereignty of Venice (neither in his report, nor in any other official document does Cornaro mention that he offered the nobility to aggregate with the Venetian patriciate). On the other hand, the Ragusans refused all governor's insinuations with utmost courtesy, relativized Ottoman danger and made it perfectly clear that they were determined to preserve their independence.<sup>83</sup>

While Cornaro probably faithfully recounts the basic content of the negotiations, his version should be supplemented with Bobali's epistolary accounts according to which the governor showed far less courtesy. Consumed with fury, he apparently tried to persuade the envoys of Dubrovnik's poor prospects of survival, insisted that he would station a garrison in it, and that the keys of the city should be surrendered to him. When Nikolica Bona was about to present him with a bowl and cup, he maliciously commented that the Ragusans "salvaged beautiful things" from the earthquake, to which Bona responded "merely one bowl and a cup". Finally, in yet another scandalous diplomatic gesture, Cornaro refused to accept that gift.<sup>84</sup> Then in the company of a hundred armed men he

---

<sup>81</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 103.

<sup>82</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 102, 113.

<sup>83</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 105-108.

<sup>84</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 113-114.

marched to the city gates of Pile—it is not clear what was his goal nor his actions there—only to return to Gruž after the nightfall.<sup>85</sup> It seems that after all of this he still kept insisting, since Bobali writes that the governor remained in Dubrovnik’s vicinity for an additional couple of days, not giving up on the idea to win the city under the pretext “you can neither recover nor survive”.<sup>86</sup>

No doubt, during this visit Cornaro showed more aggression than ever before. It should be noted, however, that he did not go all the way—he never went beyond threats, though the situation escalated to the verge of armed conflict. This indicates that he was not instructed to conquer the city by force nor to act so aggressively. Indeed, on the basis of the Senate’s brief of 27 April, Cornaro was to negotiate with the Ragusans benevolently and in a friendly manner, and try to talk them into voluntary surrender to Venice. The fact that the governor mentions no tensions in his report—it all sounds as if, after having anchored, he negotiated peacefully with the Ragusans—is also a firm indicator that he was not authorized to use force. Appalled at Cornaro’s behaviour, Bobali writes that he cannot believe these news because, judging by what he knew from Bassegli’s letters, “hostilities of this kind are wholly in contradiction with the decisions of those serene lords”.<sup>87</sup> Similar is the reasoning of the well-informed Stijepo Gradi in his memorandum to the Ragusan government from the summer of 1667. Gradi embarks upon a fairly questionable geopolitical analysis, claiming that the Ragusans need not fear Venice, because their independence is an ideal arrangement for the Venetians. However, evidently aware of this embarrassing incident, he writes that occasionally the Venetians tend to act against Dubrovnik, yet always in violation of the Senate’s will, “in a manner, I am certain, in which the general governor had also violated it by trying to station his troops in Dubrovnik”. Gradi continues with an interesting analysis of Cornaro’s conduct, writing that, in order to justify that “ferocity”, the governor misrepresented Dubrovnik’s situation in Venice, claiming that the Ottoman attack was inevitable. His goal was to “gain honour for aggregating our state to the Republic or (as I have heard from the people concerned) to get hold of the state money, which was rumoured to be enormous”.<sup>88</sup> Taking everything into consideration, a most plausible explanation of the governor’s

---

<sup>85</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 102.

<sup>86</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 114.

<sup>87</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 102.

<sup>88</sup> *Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. III/2: p. 721. Indeed, it is not impossible that Conaro’s aggressive behaviour, as Gradi puts it, might also be explained by his desire to get hold of the allegedly huge Ragusan treasure.



intentions is the following: Cornaro realized that the Ragusans had no intention of surrendering and that it was the very last moment to take advantage of the city's vulnerability, so he decided to act outside the given instructions. Had he succeeded, hardly anyone in Venice would have complained.<sup>89</sup>

Governor's aggressive approach had a serious consequence: Cornaro's hostilities largely undermined the pro-Venetian sentiment in the city. A clear example of disappointment and shock with the governor's behaviour may again be seen in the letters of Frano Bobali. In a letter to Bassegli of 29 May, Bobali commented on what would have happened if the Ragusans accepted the governor's demands: "we would have ended up worse than the Dalmatians, or the Turks would have soon occupied the city and the whole of territory, and we would have [remained] the wretched poor". Appalled at Cornaro's approach, he mentions that things may have been quite different: "had he negotiated in a benevolent manner, something would have been arranged, instead of immediately with a club, turning us into traitors towards those who protect and defend us [the Ottomans]".<sup>90</sup> On the governor's violent approach as a crucial mistake Bobali wrote to Bassegli also in March 1668: Cornaro "wished to subjugate the city by force and trickery, but if he had acted by displaying good will... perhaps something may have been negotiated with the help of God" although Bobali was doubtful about it because "the time had not been ripe yet" due to the Ottoman menace. Further on, he calls upon Bassegli to inform the Venetians that it is not true that the Ragusans did not wish to aggregate with their patriciate, but the problem was "in the manner, for in that precious flower was a dragon ready to devour us".<sup>91</sup> From these remarks it is clear that Bobali did not condemn Cornaro only for his aggressive approach. Judging by the remarks that the Ragusans would have "ended up worse than the Dalmatians" or the metaphor

---

<sup>89</sup> As early as 21 May, as if nothing had happened, Cornaro sent from Gruž a brief petition to the Ragusan government to keep him updated on the whereabouts of the Ottoman troops (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 74, no. 2129/22).

<sup>90</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 114.

<sup>91</sup> *...sebene non mi son trouato in questi negotij, nulla di meno mi son informato, che quello S-re Proveditore non esegui come V.S. mi scrisse, perche volse con le battonate e sottometerci col gioco sul esso, che s'hauesse proceduto con qualche dimostrazione di beneficio, dubito che li sarebbe riuscito se bene non era maturo il tempo, ma si poteva accomodare basta Iddio e quello che opera ogni fine.* Later in the same letter: *...se alcun dicali perché non hanno uolsuto esser con loro nobiltà, non dico li si risponda non è uero, perche non è buona creanza, ma assolutamente risponda che questo sii eresia marcia, uero è che si negò il modo, perche dietro di si prezato fiore, staua il drago per ingiotirci...* (Arhiv Bassegli, C 1/2, letter dated 21 March 1668).

about the flower and dragon, Bobali thought that the purpose of Cornaro's visit had nothing to do with the union of the two republics and their patriciates, but it was simply to conquer Dubrovnik.

Apart from the trauma caused by Cornaro's visit, the adherents of the union with Venice must have been additionally discouraged by Venetian policy towards Dubrovnik in the aftermath of the Great Earthquake. Before Venice and the Ottomans signed a peace treaty in the autumn of 1669, Ragusan territory had been exposed to constant *hajduk* raids, while Venetian diplomacy used all its powers to close the Ragusan entrepôt by opening other transit ports in the Adriatic.<sup>92</sup> Again, Frano Bobali is an illustrative example of the Ragusan disappointment with the Most Serene Republic. Upset with the Venetian anti-Ragusan policy, in November 1667 he wrote to Bassegli that the Venetians should fear God, and concluded: "They should leave us in peace, if they do not wish to help us, as would be proper".<sup>93</sup> He was even more explicit in March 1668, when he warned that for the Venetian hostilities "there is no reason, we are Christians like them", and continued "for us too the Lord has suffered", concluding that he did not understand the behaviour of the Venetians, as "our extermination brings them no benefit".<sup>94</sup> The result of all this was that even an

---

<sup>92</sup> During the several critical months after the earthquake, the Venetians were very close to opening an entrepôt with the Ottomans. As early as November 1665, the Senate instructed Cornaro to enquire into the possibility of establishing an entrepôt somewhere in the Adriatic. See: *Senato, Dispacci*, PTM, b. 495, no. 109 (Zara, 26 Novembre 1665). Cornaro devoted himself to this assignment with the usual zeal and through a web of confidants began negotiations with the Ottoman side. Despite Ragusan opposition, by March/April 1667, that is, on the eve of the earthquake, negotiations on two projects—opening of an entrepôt on the Neretva River and in Durrës—were well under way. See: *Senato Rettori*, R-42 (February 1667-March 1668), ff. 87r-v, 97v-98v; *Senato, Dispacci*, PTM, b. 497, no. 207 (Spalato, 27 Marzo 1667). Cornaro continued to work on the project until his departure from Dalmatia in September 1667. In one of his last letters from Dalmatia he informed the Senate in detail about his activities on the opening of an entrepôt on the Neretva. From Cornaro's correspondence with the Ottoman officials it is evident that a network of local Ottoman officials, including the defterdar and *čehaja* of the Bosnian *pasha*, were engaged in the project and that even the *pasha* himself was inclined to this idea, but dared to act without permission from Istanbul. One of the supplements to this letter is a list (*Calcolo*) with the "gift" amounts the Most Serene Republic was to give to the high officials of the Porte, from the *pasha* of Bosnia in Sarajevo to *kaymakam* and his aide in Istanbul. See: *Senato, Dispacci*, PTM, b. 497, no. 248 (Zara, 24 Settembre 1667). On this and later initiatives, see also R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 295-300, 375-395.

<sup>93</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 232.

<sup>94</sup> ...e se noi periremo perciò altri non cresceranno, al fine se in animo non siamo suditi, siamo in effetti costa più uogliono disperarci? Non è ragione, siamo christiani, come loro, riechu ko i gneki i sa nasie G. muku patio, nel saluarci, però mi protesto se con la nostra perdita loro deuon crescere... l'esterminio nostro non portandoli alcun benefitio, ma l'aquisto di non bon nome ne appresso Iddio, ne appresso li Christiani (Arhiv Bassegli, C 1/2, letter dated 21 March 1668).

enthusiast such as Bobali relinquished the idea of the union of two republics. While in the middle of May 1667 he still hoped that in future—despite Cornaro’s display of bellicosity—a union could be negotiated, from the later letters it is clear that Bobali considered this a missed opportunity.<sup>95</sup>

*Speculations on the union with the Venetians and the lobbying of Miho Sorgo Bobali*

As to how plausible the union between Dubrovnik and Venice actually seemed in the spring of 1667 is revealed by the great interest that the diplomatic circles showed for this idea. This interest, anxiety even, is visible in two letters, dated 21 May and 3 June and addressed to the Ragusan government, in which Marko Bassegli recounts his contacts with the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy to Venice. In a series of meetings, the representatives of these powers showed lively interest in the rumours about the union of the two republics, and explicitly stated that their rulers were not inclined towards this solution. Their talks with Bassegli mainly followed the same pattern. The diplomats would enquire about the union with the Ragusan envoy, and the latter would assure them of the poor prospects of this plan and that it was no more than a rumour. The foreign diplomats also insisted on the benevolence of their governments and their determination to help Dubrovnik, especially through the vice-king of Naples, and were surprised as to why the Ragusans appealed to Venice for help in the first place. In order to assure Bassegli of the disinclination of his ruler towards the union of the two republics, the ambassador of Savoy even showed him the official correspondence. He allowed Bassegli to read a letter of the duke himself in which he writes that “he cannot believe that the Ragusan lords on account of the destruction of their city would also destroy their freedom”, as well as a letter of the first minister in which he confirms the regret of his Highness and best intentions towards Dubrovnik, recommending the ambassador to “follow the decisions pertaining to the union so as to be able to hinder it in any manner

---

<sup>95</sup> That immediately upon Cornaro’s visit Bobali was still inclined to the idea of union may be gleaned from his letter of 18-19 May, in which, following a description of Cornaro’s visit, he writes that he hopes that the Holy Spirit will enlighten the general governor *a farci lassare star in pace, che poi [sic] vi sarà tempo d’ogni cosa* (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 103).

available”.<sup>96</sup> Spanish ambassador showed Bassegli the letter of the vice-king of Naples in which he promised every kind of help to Dubrovnik and suggested that the vice-king could dispatch a military commander to the Ragusans “because then no one would even dare to consider disturbing them”.<sup>97</sup> Bassegli understood the message on his part and several times warned the Ragusan government that “those two diplomats seriously enquired about that affair [union] and appear equally disinclined towards it”.<sup>98</sup>

Yet, besides lobbying against the union, in their negotiations with Bassegli these two diplomats did something else: warned about the suspicious affairs and questionable loyalty of another Ragusan diplomat, Miho Sorgo Bobali. Sorgo Bobali was a Ragusan ambassador to Venice for a number of mandates and a highly esteemed diplomat, whose exceptional reputation can be grasped from the fact that by November 1666 he had already been admitted into the Ragusan nobility.<sup>99</sup> A few years before the earthquake, due to a certain political affair and under vague circumstances, Sorgo Bobali was banished from Venice by the state inquisitors. Under equally obscure conditions, shortly after the

---

<sup>96</sup> ...non poter creder che li Signori Ragusei per la rovina della loro Città piegaranno rovinar la libertà loro; and the letter of the first minister attestava il ramarico di S Altezza per coteste rovine, e la buona intenzione verso l'interessi, e conservazione della libertà di V.stre Ecc.ze; amonendolo ad osservare le risoluzioni sopra l'unione per intorbidarla in quelle maniere che potessero presentarlisi. Bassegli's letter to the government of 3 June 1667 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 61, no. 2039/8). Bassegli's previous letter to the government of 21 May is of similar content (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 104; As a shelf mark Samardžić mentions only “The State Archives of Dubrovnik”, while the precise location is: *Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 61, no. 2039/7).

<sup>97</sup> ...qualche officiale militare perché tal volta non audirebbe alcuno pensarsi d'apportarle disturbi. Bassegli vladi 3. lipnja 1667 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 61, no. 2039/8).

<sup>98</sup> In fatti questi due ministri con gran acuratezza vanno indagando sopra tal negotio, e si mostrano altertando di ciò gelosi... Bassegli to the government, 3 June 1667 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 61, no. 2039/8). Bassegli has a similar wording in the letter of 21 May (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 104).

<sup>99</sup> Dragoljub Pavlović, »O krizi vlasteoskog staleža u Dubrovniku XVII veka«. *Zbornik radova SANU* 17 (1952): p. 35. In fact, he descended from a citizen *casata* of the Sorgo lineage, while the addition Bobali, after his mother's surname, he adopted after his admission to the nobility so as to distinguish himself from the rest of Sorgo patricians. On Sorgo Bobali see: Antonije Vučetić, *Dubrovnik za kandijskog rata 1645-1669: iz dopisivanja republike sa M. Sorgom-Bobalijem*. Dubrovnik: D. Pretner, 1896; *Pisma Stjepana Gradića senatu Republike Dubrovačke od 1667.-1683*: p. 221 et passim; R. Samardžić, »Borba Dubrovnika protiv mletačkih pokušaja da unište njegovu nezavisnost u XVII veku«: pp. 379-381. Nenad Vekarić, *Vlastela grada Dubrovnika, 6. Odabrane biografije (Pi-Z)*. Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2016: pp. 233-234.

earthquake he was suddenly pardoned by the Venetian authorities, so that by the beginning of May he returned to Venice.<sup>100</sup> This unexpected pardon at a pivotal moment for the Raguso-Venetian relations gave rise to various rumours and suspicion on behalf of the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy. In the letter to the government of 3 June Bassegli writes that the Spanish ambassador spoke to him about Sorgo Bobali's pardon and asked whether he had heard that "those lords [Venetian government] did so on account of an agreement they had with him", to which Bassegli replied that these were mere rumours.<sup>101</sup> Still, there was ground for suspicion that Sorgo Bobali was pardoned on account of a secret deal with the Venetian authorities, because he was expected to aid Venice in acquiring Dubrovnik. Namely, in his case the Venetian Council of Ten deviated from the usual practice by which pardon was granted by a quorum of seventeen members and the decision was made by smaller attendance. Equally symptomatic is the fact that Sorgo Bobali's petition waited for almost a year until it was granted, curiously, exactly at that critical moment—and, moreover, it was granted unanimously.<sup>102</sup> It seems that certain rumours reached the Ragusan

---

<sup>100</sup> An account of Sorgo Bobali's pardon may be found in a letter of the French consul addressed to his government on 30 April 1667. In a collateral remark, as it was obviously a familiar matter, he mentions that Sorgo Bobali had been banished on account of an affair *de Monsignor Boncio Altouitta e capitano grande in tempo del Sr. ambassador uescouo de Beziers (Dubrovačka akta i povelje, vol. III/2: p. 707)*. Neither the identity of B. Altouitta nor the nature of the affair is clear—which calls for further research in Venice. On the other hand, *vescovo de Beziers* was a French prelate Pierre de Bonzi (1631-1703), ambassador of Louis XIV to Venice in the period 1661-1665. For his biography, see Umberto Coldagelli, »Bonsi, Piero«. *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 12 (1971), on line: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/piero-bonsi\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/piero-bonsi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/), accessed on 18 June 2015. A letter in which the Ragusan government expresses its satisfaction with Sorgo Bobali's pardon and return to Venice is dated 10 May (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 68/4, no. 2095, f. 156r-v).

<sup>101</sup> ... *sopra l'agratiamiento del S. Michiel Sorgo, e dimandandomi se havessi sentito l'havessero fatto questi S-ri per tener seco qualche trattato; io che imaginai voglia inferire dell'unione significatale li risposi crederla opinioni popolari...* Bassegli to the government on 3 June 1667 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 61, no. 2039/8). More thoroughly, though somewhat vaguely, on the talks with the Spanish and Savoy ambassadors on Sorgo Bobali, Bassegli writes in his letter of 21 May (*ibidem*, no. 2039/7). In this letter he also mentions the previous letter to the government, unfortunately lost, in which *raguagliai VV. Ecc. il discorsomi dal S-r Ambs di Savoia sopra li trattati di questi signori con il S-r Michel Sorgo*.

<sup>102</sup> On deviation from usual procedure and information about the unanimous vote see the aforementioned report of the French consul (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje, vol. III/2: p. 707*). A copy of the Ducale dated 28 April 1667 on his pardon Sorgo Bobali enclosed to one of the letters to the Ragusan government (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 26, no. 1724/4). It shows that Sorgo Bobali's petition had waited for the grant to be passed since May 1666, although it was submitted in the name of Louis XIV, which, indeed, is an equally intriguing detail.

government too, which in a letter of 28 May reproached Sorgo Bobali for a grave diplomatic offence: meeting with the Venetian officials without informing the government about it.<sup>103</sup> Defending himself from this accusation, an obvious sign that there were suspicions about his relationship with the Venetians, in his reply Sorgo Bobali revealed how strong his connections really were. Uncertain of how much the government actually knew, he was forced to admit that he did visit the doge in his private quarters to thank him for the pardon, and even did it alone, and that he also talked to various senators who acted on his behalf.<sup>104</sup> Since “there are rumours which are far from the truth” about his pardon, in the same letter to the government Sorgo Bobali sent a copy of the pardon grant, emphasizing that anyone could see that he was acquitted “upon supplication of the most Christian [French] king”. An unspoken implication, naturally, was that he had not been acquitted on account of the secret scheme with the Venetian authorities.<sup>105</sup>

During the next few months, Sorgo Bobali did nothing to arouse the government’s suspicions regarding his loyalty. From May 1667 on, the government sought his services continually; moreover, thanks to his experience and connections in Venice, he was appointed chief of the three Ragusan envoys.<sup>106</sup> The only occasion when Sorgo Bobali mentioned the union of the two republics—an affair of which the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy suspected him—was a letter addressed to the government of 11 June. In it he mentioned, as a side remark, that there are rumours in Venice about the aggregation of Ragusan nobility with that of Venice, and that even the senate supposedly discussed this issue. He soon added that until that moment no one from the Venetian government had approached him on the matter, but, revealing the seriousness of these

---

<sup>103</sup> *Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 68/4, no. 2095, f. 158r, a letter of the Ragusan government to M. Sorgo Bobali of 28 May 1667. Bassegli may have been the source of these news, that is, his talks with the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy.

<sup>104</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 125. Sorgo Bobali’s letter to the government is dated 11 June.

<sup>105</sup> This part of the letter has not been published by Samardžić (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 26, no. 1724/1).

<sup>106</sup> Ragusan government on several occasions stated that Sorgo Bobali was its main representative. See the letter of 10 May 1667 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 68/4, no. 2095, f. 156v), letter of 30 May 1667 (f. 160r-v); letter of 20 June 1667 (f. 164r); also R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 149-150.

rumours, added that he would inform the government immediately if approached with an official proposal.<sup>107</sup>

Later developments reveal that there indeed were reasons to doubt the loyalty of this able diplomat. Namely, in yet another critical moment which ensued soon, Sorgo Bobali proved a fervent advocate of the Most Serene Republic. It took place in the last months of 1669, during the peace negotiations between the Ottomans and Venice. This was a deeply anxious period for Dubrovnik: it was clear that significant geopolitical changes would follow, and yet they were almost completely beyond Ragusan control. An atmosphere of profound insecurity, typical of the period of October-December 1669, can be glimpsed from the panicky reactions of the Ragusan government, which every now and then learnt of a new rumour of the Venetian pretensions. Thus in late October the city was alarmed by the news that the Venetians were planning to launch a sudden attack and invade Pelješac, Lastovo and Mljet, and have these territories inhabited by *hajduks*.<sup>108</sup> An even greater anxiety was stirred by the rumours of the Venetian-Ottoman negotiations in which Dubrovnik did not take part, but where its fate may have been decided. The scenario which the government dreaded most was that the Ottomans would cede the Republic to Venice in exchange for the Aegean territories.<sup>109</sup>

In these moments of deep insecurity Sorgo Bobali openly and vigorously supported the union of the two republics. It appears that he first tried to feel the pulse of the Ragusan elite through private channels. His correspondent was no other but a highly prominent senator, Luka Zamagna. Undoubtedly, one of

---

<sup>107</sup> *Si è parlato dà qualche particolare [added above: e credo ancor in Publico] di agregare à questa nobiltà li Nobili di cotesta Rep.ca ma in tal proposito sin à questa hora a me non è stato parlato cosa alcuna da verun soggetto che ha parte nel governo. Se mi sarà parlato in appresso lo comunicaro imediate all Ecc. SS. Illm con ogni fedeltà.* See the letter of Miho Sorgo Bobali of 11 June 1667 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 26, no. 1724/1). Some parts of the letter, not including the cited fragment, have been published in Samardžić's collection (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 125-126).

<sup>108</sup> On 20 October 1669, Ragusan government wrote to Sorgo Bobali in Venice and instructed him to check the credibility of this information (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 492). Stjepan Gradi was instructed to do the same in Rome (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. III/2: pp. 837-838).

<sup>109</sup> The government wrote about this in two letters: one addressed to the envoys to the Porte on 19 November 1669 (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 495-496), and the other to Miho Sorgo Bobali to Venice on 24 November (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 499).

the most influential figures of contemporary Dubrovnik, Zamagna was a genuine leader, a man who was perhaps the most meritorious for the restoration of the patrician government after the earthquake. Obviously continuing their private correspondence, otherwise unfortunately lost, in a letter to Zamagna from early December 1669, Sorgo Bobali put forth some interesting geopolitical considerations.<sup>110</sup> Stating that the Venetian-Ottoman peace treaty was finally signed, Sorgo Bobali warned that “if a union with those [Venetian] lords were agreed now”, Dubrovnik would no longer have to pay the tribute. He also emphasized that this peace treaty would remove the reasons to fear Ottoman retaliation if Dubrovnik were to unite with Venice, and thereby also the reasons “which deterred our [rulers] from the idea of union”. Having stressed these favourable circumstances, Sorgo Bobali wrote that the matter required thorough consideration and that he awaited official instructions. Then he even more openly advocated the union with Venice, warning that one should not waste time waiting for the moment when the Venetians will cede their remaining possessions in the Levant to the Ottomans in exchange for Ragusa, “whereby we would end up like the rest of Dalmatia”. After tendentiously invoking this rumour—which haunted Ragusan government in that very period—Sorgo Bobali mentioned his “good friends” in Venice, suggesting that he could negotiate a favourable agreement. He even outlined its main contours: Ragusan patricians would become Venetian patricians in addition to gaining some other privileges, such as exemptions from taxes or grants of land. At the end of his exposition he again strongly advocated the union—Ragusan governors should consider what was good for their homeland so as to avoid regretting, together with their posterity, when it was too late.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Not only that the contents of this letter clearly reveal that Sorgo Bobali continues previous communication, but there is yet another private letter which Sorgo Bobali had written to Zamagna in 1664. In it he speaks very openly, even sarcastically, about the admission of new families into the nobility—himself being a prospective candidate—revealing a sincere and close relationship with Zamagna. See a letter of 15 April 1664 (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 68/2, no. 2094, f. 134r). Samardžić writes in a panegyric tone about the role of Luka Zamagna in the post-earthquake period (R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: p. 275).

<sup>111</sup> *V.S. haverà inteso la pace agiustata da questi SS-ri con il Turco la resa di Candia et in riguardo di quella che resti alla Republica tutto l'occupato in Dalmatia e assai che questo intrigo si sia agiustato senza sborso di dinari ...Se con questi SS-ri si faceva unione adesso li nostri sarian restati esenti del tributo mal fatto non c'è rimedio. Con questa pace come mancano li sospetti che li Turchi possino trauagliare li nostri teritorij in caso di unione cosi mancano li motivi che tenevano li nostri lontani di far questa unione con questi Ss-ri. Quando paresse bene far adesso tal unione po V. S. meter in consideratione dove occorre e se li pare bene per la Patria si potria fare... Non*



Probably not even waiting for Zamagna's reply, on 15 December Sorgo Bobali addressed a letter to the Ragusan government in which he supported the same cause.<sup>112</sup> However, his argumentation was somewhat different: as a pretext to mention the union, Sorgo Bobali used a diplomatic mission the government had recently assigned to him. It was quite an unrealistic attempt to persuade the Venetians not to open their entrepôts in the Adriatic, particularly not in Split, after the conclusion of the peace treaty, which would ruin the monopolistic position of the Ragusan port. Sorgo Bobali wrote that he had spoken with many friends in Venice and that they were all inclined to the idea of opening Dalmatian ports and there was no chance whatsoever of talking them out of it. Except, he stated, if "Your Excellencies were willing to make a union of your territories with those of the Most Serene Republic, in such a manner that these [Venetian] patricians aggregate the whole of that [Ragusan] nobility to its nobility under the terms and details which would be agreed". As in his letter to Zamagna, Sorgo Bobali again insisted on prompt action, this time stating that the negotiations should be started before the opening of the other entrepôts in Dalmatia, because their closing would be difficult at a later point. Maintaining the facade of a professional diplomat, he wrote that he had not undertaken anything regarding the whole matter because he was not familiar with the position of the Ragusan authorities, yet from his tone it was clear that he approved of the idea. At length and tendentiously Sorgo Bobali insisted that the Ragusan councillors ought to consider prudently what was best for their homeland, and that they could be certain that he would serve them just as loyally and ably as ever. Obviously wishing to further encourage the councillors, he added that his two "patrons", a certain Contarini and Sagredo, would in

---

*bisogna ridarsi mai a 24 ore ne e prudenza aspetar l'ultimi periodi ovvero sino che questi SS-ri quelli logi che li son rimasti in Levante diano ai Turchi accio che egli in cambio li assegna cotesto Paese come ho penetrato che si ha hauto qualche discorso perche in tal caso ci tocara restare come il resto della Dalmatia. Se a me sarà ordinato di trattar qualche cosa spero nei boni amici che si ridurrebano far Gentilhomeni la nobilta nostra e farli acora qualche altro beneficio di esentioni o assegnar terreni. Però considerino bene quello po essere ben della Patria per non haver poi da penitenza con li posteri quando non sarà piu tempo. (Diplomata et acta saec. XVII, vol. 68/2, no. 2094, f. 231r-v).* The letter is not dated, but considering that it is succeeded by a letter of 12 December, it was probably written sometime at the beginning of the same month. For a short account of this letter see also: V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, vol. II: pp. 145-146.

<sup>112</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 503-504. Samardžić made a minor mistake in dating the letter: it is dated 15 and not 16 December, as he states (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 68/2, no. 2094, f. 235r).

January assume the high office of the great *savi* in the Venetian government, which guaranteed “certain smoothness and benevolence” to the negotiations.<sup>113</sup>

However, Sorgo Bobali made a serious error of judgement, which is more than evident from the government’s reply of 22 January 1670.<sup>114</sup> As the councillors could not have been more explicit, it suffices to simply quote them: “A union that you mention has never struck our mind, as it is entirely contradictory to that freedom which God has bestowed upon us and which has been preserved over the centuries. Thus with utter astonishment we have read your letters, from which we understand that you consider this agreement an easy task, without giving any thought to the fact how remote the Senate is from such ideas”.<sup>115</sup>

Softening their tone somewhat, the councillors then commended Sorgo Bobali, emphasizing that they were satisfied with his work and were convinced of his loyalty to the homeland. But then they again clearly stated that the negotiations were out of the question: “You are directly ordered not to undertake any actions regarding this matter”. Not only was Sorgo Bobali himself forbidden to open this issue, but if any of his Venetian friends were to do so, he was to “shrug his shoulders” without any comment. If any of his collocutors insisted, which the Senate deemed improbable, Sorgo Bobali was merely to state that he was not authorized on the matter and therefore he could not speak about it. The Senate again reprimanded its diplomat for his excessive initiative. Had Sorgo Bobali at the very start rejected Venetian proposals and not engaged in the negotiations, he would have acted in the spirit of the Senate “with which you must always assume an extremely strong will to maintain possession of

---

<sup>113</sup> For a succinct account of this letter: V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, vol. II: p. 145; A. Vučetić, *Dubrovnik za kandijskog rata*: pp. 81-82; R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 441-442. Vučetić comments that the Venetians obviously wished to use Dubrovnik as compensation for the loss of Crete, and were able to “seduce naive Bobali” with the idea of the union of two republics. However, Bobali was all but naive; in fact, it is not clear how Vučetić, having studied the voluminous correspondence of this able diplomat, could have reached such a conclusion. Samardžić argues more realistically that, though “loyal to his homeland”, after living twenty years in Venice, Sorgo Bobali “had already been stripped of the close affection that allows no temptation” (R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: p. 442).

<sup>114</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 504-505.

<sup>115</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 504-505. Somewhat puzzling in the cited fragment is the mention of “the letters” in plural. However, it is possible that Sorgo Bobali submitted this proposal to the government in a sequence of letters that have not been preserved. In support of the assumption that he had previously addressed the Senate regarding similar delicate issues is a provision of 10 December which prescribes draconian punishment for anyone revealing the content of his letter (R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 502).

its liberty”, for whose preservation Dubrovnik would endure the greatest sacrifices. The Senate continued by warning Sorgo Bobali that neither regarding this, nor any other public affair, was he to write to private persons, probably alluding to his correspondence with Luka Zamagna.<sup>116</sup> For his part, Sorgo Bobali quickly realized the mistake. This topic was closed in a single sentence. In his reply to the Senate at the beginning of March, Sorgo Bobali shortly wrote: “I will strictly abide by all the orders Your Excellencies issued in the letter of 22 January”. This marked an end to the speculations on the union in the period after the Great Earthquake.<sup>117</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Hopefully, this study has confirmed the fundamental thesis stated in its introduction: crises are epistemologically privileged moments which often reveal far more than normal situations. The critical circumstances of the Great Earthquake have allowed a fresh insight into the Venetian-Ragusan relationship, a perspective beyond the usual disputes over the customs tax, entrepôts, ships or diplomatic manoeuvres at European courts. Extremely unusual negotiations, rumours and schemes that marked the Venetian-Ragusan relations in the spring of 1667 open a series of questions to which this conclusion aims to outline the answer or, in some cases, admit that there is none.

The first key question concerns the protagonists and their intentions. More accurately, in what way did the elites of these two cities act towards each other

<sup>116</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 504-505.

<sup>117</sup> For the correspondence from 1669 see also: R. Samardžić, *Veliki vek Dubrovnika*: pp. 442-443; V. Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, vol. II: p. 146. It is worth noting that the idea of union re-emerged some ten years later, and was initiated from the Venetian side. Namely, in February 1677, in a letter to Sebastian Zamagna, envoy to Venice, Ragusan government again rejected the idea of union by using the same arguments as after the earthquake, i.e. the fear of the Ottoman reaction (*Dubrovačka akta i povelje*, vol. III/2: pp. 869-870; similarly in the other instruction to Zamagna: *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis*, ser. 27.1, vol. 27, f. 20r, SAD). This idea reverberated some twenty years later, and, what is more, among the Ottomans, because in 1686 de Girardin, French ambassador to the Porte, in a dispatch to the navy minister mentions how the Grand Vizier is inclined to Dubrovnik, as he remembers that it had refused Venetian offers for union several times and remained loyal to the Porte (Lujó Vojnović, *La Monarchie française dans l'Adriatique: histoire des relations de la France avec la République de Raguse (1667-1789)*. Paris-Barcelone: Bloud et Gay, 1917: pp. 80-81). The emergence of this idea in the later periods is beyond the scope of this study, but it ought to be mentioned because it points to the lasting appeal of this plan, at least from the perspective of Venice.

during the crisis? What were their main strategies and objectives? What were the factions that emerged among them as regards these strategies and objectives? With respect to Dubrovnik, there is no doubt that the dominant group consisted of the patricians who advocated the preservation of independence. This is evident from the Ragusan envoys' insistence on the preservation of "freedom" in negotiations with the general governor Cornaro, as well as from the categorical rejection of the idea of union in the letter addressed to Sorgo Bobali in 1670. However, this attitude was not as uncompromising as it may seem at first glance, and for two reasons. Firstly, at a moment when the Ragusans were categorically declaring the intention to preserve their independence to the general governor, as their ultimate solution in case of the Ottoman attack they still counted on the possibility of allowing the Venetian garrison into the city. That is the only plausible interpretation of the information, traceable in reliable sources, that the Ragusans asked Cornaro not to leave the city environs until the situation with the Ottomans had been resolved. Secondly, it is hard to say to what extent the constantly repeated argument against the union with Venice (possible Ottoman retaliation) was a mere diplomatic excuse, and how much it actually deterred the otherwise interested councillors. That it was not just a diplomatic manoeuvre is visible from Sorgo Bobali's letter to Zamagna in 1669—therefore, from private communication of two "insiders"—in which Sorgo Bobali underlines that with the Ottoman-Venetian peace treaty perished the reason which prevented "our [rulers]" to enter the union. This clearly shows that the Ragusan estimates of the situation did not involve only the relations between the two Adriatic republics, but that their key concern was the behaviour of the neighbouring Ottoman power. On the one hand, the Ragusans were apparently ready to give up their independence if the Ottomans attacked the city, and on the other, the fear of Ottoman retaliation was an important reason for the rejection of the union with Venice.

Although the majority of patricians felt that Dubrovnik should preserve its independence—though not necessarily out of patriotism, but guided by purely pragmatic concerns about the Ottomans—by no means did this view enjoy unanimous patrician support. Doubtlessly, there existed a significant group of patricians inclined, in some cases even enthusiastic, about the union with Venice (that is, not unconditional surrender but a specific agreement which would include the aggregation of the Ragusan nobility with that of Venice). It appears that this enthusiasm—which might have endured and borne fruit even—was most thoroughly cooled down by Cornaro's hostilities in May 1667, and finally

destroyed by the anti-Ragusan policy of Venice during the last two years of the War of Crete.

Regrettably, documents allow but a fragmentary and obscure picture of the pro-Venetian faction among the patriciate. Obviously, most prominent among them was Frano Bobali, whose position on this issue has been sufficiently dealt with. Still, it should be stressed that Bobali, despite the complaints about his marginalization, belonged to the inner circle of the ruling elite. It is not certain whether it was due to the small number of surviving patricians or to his genuine political reputation, but Bobali had already been elected in the first provisional government of the Council of Ten, while in June he entered the Minor Council and also held the position of vice-rector, replacing the still not elected rector of the Republic<sup>118</sup> A crucial though less obvious fact concerning Bobali's correspondence is that it not only reveals the attitude of its author, but also that of his correspondent, Marko Bassegli, whose replies have been lost. From the manner in which Bobali writes to him about the union with Venice— with enthusiasm, without any need to either defend or justify the cause—it is clear that Bassegli also considered the union of the two republics and their patriciates a desirable goal. It should be kept in mind that it was Bassegli himself who first communicated this idea to the Ragusan government, and, symptomatically, did it in a very neutral and cautious tone (only later, probably having understood the dislike of the government for this project, he spoke of it dismissively to the ambassadors of Savoy and Spain). Apart from these two patricians, another influential Ragusan who was known for his pro-Venetian disposition was Miho Sorgo Bobali. In Sorgo Bobali's case it is even possible that he had some sort of a secret agreement with the Venetian authorities: his sudden pardon indicates that he may have been sent back to Venice at such a critical moment so as to persuade the Ragusan authorities to agree to the union with Venice. Judging by the two letters in which he speaks bluntly about the key political issues of contemporary Dubrovnik, Sorgo Bobali for years corresponded privately with

---

<sup>118</sup> R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: pp. 39, 122, 151-152. It is certain, however, that Bobali did not participate continually in the work of the provisional administration, since much of the time during the first weeks after the earthquake he spent in Kobaš near Ston (in a letter of early May he mentions being summoned to the city, but refused to leave his family; R. Samardžić, *Borba Dubrovnika za opstanak*: p. 85). His absence from Dubrovnik probably explains his not sitting in the provisional government of the Council of Twelve, established on 23 April. It was not until the second half of May that Bobali returned to the city on more permanent basis, when we find him holding the mentioned high offices.

Luka Zamagna, probably the most venerable patrician of the post-earthquake period.<sup>119</sup> Considering that in the abovementioned letter Sorgo Bobali mentions the union without any introduction or justification—simply stating “if we made the union now”—it is evident that this was not the first time that this project was mentioned in the correspondence of the two patricians. Equally so, it appears that in their former correspondence Zamagna had not explicitly rejected the idea. Namely Sorgo Bobali, who was everything but a political dilettante, would certainly not have advocated the union so openly had he not believed that there might have been a real chance of Zamagna agreeing with his plan. All this shows that Zamagna was prepared to consider the possibility of union, at least in principle if not even more than that, and that his position was more inclined to it than the official position of the government.

All indications considered, the list of the pro-Venetian patricians is far from negligible: Bobali, Bassegli, Sorgo Bobali, and possibly even Zamagna—in sum, two esteemed diplomats and two members of the Republic’s innermost government circle. In all likelihood, the list did not end here. The aforementioned documents clearly indicate the existence of a pro-Venetian patrician group in the city. Thus the French consul writes about a part of the patriciate wishing to surrender to Venice, the same is confirmed by the patriotic Palmotić, while Bobali mentions that some patricians with whom he talked about the union enquired “Would they [Venetians] agree to this”? Therefore, although it is risky to talk about a pro-Venetian faction—that is, an organized interest group—Bobali was certainly not alone in his attitude.

As for the position of the Venetian elite towards Dubrovnik, the documents clearly reveal that the majority of the senators agreed about the main strategic interest of the Serenissima: Venice could not allow Dubrovnik to fall into the Ottoman hands. According to the instruction of 27 April to the general governor, Venetian authorities were prepared to offer help to the devastated city. However, on the basis of the alterations made in this instruction it appears that the Venetian elite was also tempted to take advantage of the crisis in order to gain control over Dubrovnik. None the less, the senators were not prepared to go all the

---

<sup>119</sup> From this evidently voluminous correspondence only two letters have survived, both of which have already been mentioned: one from December 1669, in which Sorgo Bobali writes about the union with Venice, the other from April 1664, in which he comments on the idea of aggregation of the new families into the nobility (*Diplomata et acta saec. XVII*, vol. 68/2, no. 2094, ff. 134r, 231r-v).

way, since the general governor was not instructed to launch an attack on the city, but merely to resort to all means in order to talk the Ragusans into voluntary surrender. It is not quite clear what exactly Cornaro was authorized to propose, and what he actually offered. In the instruction issued to him it clearly reads that Dubrovnik can be admitted under the rule of Venice “in the same manner as was done” with the other cities, which would imply that it was only offered a status similar to that of the rest of Dalmatia. On the other hand, several relevant documents, such as Difnik’s chronicle or Gradi’s memorandum, mention that the general governor was prepared to offer much more. Cornaro apparently proposed the admission of Dubrovnik’s entire nobility into the ranks of the Venetian patriciate.

All this information, which certainly contains some truth, opens a puzzling question regarding the origin, seriousness and the purpose of the idea of the union of two republics and their patriciates, an idea that kept recurring in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. It obviously originated in Venice; moreover, if Bassegli’s and Gozze’s letter of 30 April is to be trusted, the idea had been discussed by the Venetian Senate itself, though, without final decision. One could speculate that the idea of the union had been formulated because its authors (who will be discussed soon) anticipated that the Ragusans would not agree to surrender under the usual conditions, as was once done by the Dalmatian cities. That is why the Ragusans were to be additionally motivated with an attractive offer of the admission into the Venetian nobility, and perhaps, if one is to believe Sorgo Bobali’s letter of December 1669, other privileges, even grants of estates. In short, Venice tried to “bribe” the surviving rulers of Dubrovnik.

However, the question remains as to who exactly among the Venetian elite supported this project? Bassegli’s and Sorgo Bobali’s letters provide but a fragmentary response. In a letter in which the idea is mentioned for the first time, Bassegli and Gozze write that in the Senate it was advocated by the venerable Giacomo Donà, adding that many patricians were also most inclined (*inclinatissimi*) towards it. Sorgo Bobali openly states that in the realization of the union he can count on the assistance of two high ranking officials, a certain Contarini and Sagredo, who were to assume the post of *savii grandi*, and thus become the members of the influential Venetian *collegio*. If Sorgo Bobali’s apparently consensual (!) pardon by the Council of Ten is understood as a gesture aimed at securing a man of confidence who could persuade the Ragusans to accept the union—as was suspected by the ambassadors of Spain and Savoy—then the support of the union in Venice was even more significant. Although

a shadow of its former power, the Council of Ten still represented an influential oligarchic body which also included the doge, who, a detail worthy of note, even received Sorgo Bobali in a private audience. Sorgo Bobali's energetic advocacy of this idea among the Ragusans at the end of 1669 also confirms that the project enjoyed serious support of the Venetian administration. Sorgo Bobali was much too experienced a politician to expose himself in such manner without having a serious backing in Venice. All in all, taking into account Bassegli's and especially Sorgo Bobali's contacts, the list of the Venetians who were probably inclined towards the union was all but negligible. In addition to many patricians who were *inclinatissimi*, there were a few high officials, senator Donà and *savi* Contarini and Sagredo, and perhaps even some members of the Council of Ten, including the doge himself.

Such a significant political backing of this idea raises even more acutely the question of its exact nature: was it an official proposal of the Republic of Venice, a widespread yet ungrounded rumour, or something else? Ragusan ambassadors to Venice certainly had never received an official proposal, for they all write about the idea of union as a rumour, while Sorgo Bobali in a letter of 11 June explicitly states that no one has approached him officially on this matter. Similarly, the union is neither mentioned in the Senate minutes nor in the correspondence of the general governor with the Senate—therefore, in the two series in which it would be expected to appear if it were an official position. All this speaks in favour of the fact that this unusual political project had never been confirmed by the Venetian councils nor officially proposed to Dubrovnik. This comes as no surprise, because the proposed union with Dubrovnik was quite atypical of Venice—what is more, a hazard to its hegemony. Admission of the entire nobility of one city into the ranks of the Venetian patriciate would have represented an enormous precedent which could open the Pandora's box. Following the Ragusan example, the elites of a number of provincial centres—from the powerful Padua, Vicenza or Verona to the towns of Dalmatia—may have submitted a similar request. In other words, the union with Dubrovnik would have implied a risky departure from a centuries-old Venetian model of a city-empire, in which Venice was the only centre (*dominante*) of its territories, and its hegemony was maintained largely through the very monopoly of its patriciate in governing the state.

On the other hand, the observers in the lagoons must have realized that the union was an extremely elegant way to gain control over Dubrovnik. For Venice, it was of crucial importance to have Dubrovnik surrender voluntarily, that is,



to gain control of the city with the consent of the local elite. The Most Serene Republic was seriously tempted to establish control over Dubrovnik in 1667, yet everything except peaceful and consensual union could have led to scandal with other Christian states, whose alliance Venice desperately needed in the war against the Ottomans. Yet another serious reason in favour of the union was that the arrangement was extremely convenient for Venice (assuming, of course, that the issue of precedent before other subject cities was somehow resolved). Venice would admit several dozen men into its patriciate—at that point the noble status was anyhow sold by the government in order to cover the costs of war—and in return gain the whole Dubrovnik Republic. Of course, as always the great question was how the Ottomans would react, but war seemed as a good moment for such a geopolitical change. The usual peacetime considerations of Venice towards the Sublime Porte did not exist, and the future peace treaty provided an ideal opportunity for the legalization of the newly-established condition.

From these fairly speculative considerations the following can be deduced: from Venetian perspective, there were strong reasons both for and against the union, and although there are no clear signs that such an idea had ever been accepted by the Venetian institutions and officially proposed to Dubrovnik, it doubtlessly enjoyed the support of a part of the Venetian establishment. A configuration such as this may explain the numerous rumours, a series of encouraging unofficial conversations which Bassegli and Sorgo Bobali had with Venetian patricians, as well as Sorgo Bobali's open lobbying in 1669. Namely, it is possible that through such semi-private consultations and initiatives the pro-union part of the Venetian elite tried to encourage the Ragusan government to do something which was of essential importance to Venice—that the Ragusans make the first move. If Difnik's account is to be believed, the Venetians were even prepared to go so far as to authorize general governor Cornaro to offer the Ragusan envoys aggregation of the Ragusan nobility. However, neither this can be considered an official proposal but merely another step in the "encouragement" of the Ragusans, for it was delivered orally during a private audience attended only by several men. Such reluctance is quite understandable having in mind the Venetian position. For Venice it was risky to openly offer such an arrangement to Dubrovnik—if it were rejected, it would be a significant blow to the prestige of the Republic. Instead of making the offer themselves, it is likely that the Venetians expected the traditional scenario to unfold, typical of the other Dalmatian cities: that Dubrovnik recognizes the sovereignty of the Most Serene Republic on its own, and is thereafter granted privileges, in this case perhaps

quite unique ones. This could perhaps explain why the pro-union group in Venice did not put this issue on the councils' agenda, but instead, persuading the Ragusans informally, waited for them to make the first move (in that case the approval of the Venetian councils would be much easier to gain). The problem with this plan lay in a wrong estimate; whether for fear of the Ottomans, due to patriotism or because of Cornaro's violent approach, the Ragusans never made that first move.

In conclusion, one point should be stressed. The relationship between the two Adriatic republics has often been misinterpreted, even caricaturized; by inheriting a centuries-long tradition of Venetian-Ragusan vilification, the historians tended to represent this relationship in the worst possible light.<sup>120</sup> Yet, the critical period of the earthquake reveals that this relationship was far more complex and intricate than it may appear at first. Despite constant suspicion, Dubrovnik saw Venice also as support, even an ally. Apart from the obvious example of the pro-union patricians of the two republics, it should be stressed again that in the most critical of moments after the earthquake the Ragusan authorities petitioned the general governor not to leave the city environs, obviously prepared to rely on Venice for the defence against the Ottomans. On the Venetian side, although an intention to subjugate Dubrovnik was present, yet the key line had never been crossed: despite their overwhelming military superiority, the Venetians never resorted to force, but did their best to negotiate the Ragusans into *voluntary* surrender. One should also bear in mind that underlying these attempts to win Dubrovnik was not (only) expansionism and elimination of trade competition, but most of all a fear that Dubrovnik would fall to the Ottomans, which would prove a strategic disaster for Venice. Therefore, although the traditional animosity was doubtlessly present—the Ragusans were wary of the Venetians, while the latter plotted how to submit them—what strikes most in this situation of crisis is the amount of good will, or at least consideration, on both sides.

Translated by Vesna Baće

---

<sup>120</sup> For more on this vilification see: L. Kunčević, »Dubrovačka slika Venecije«: pp. 9-37.