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**BOOK REVIEW: *DUBROVAČKI PLES S KUGOM: VRIJEME LAZARETA
NA PLOČAMA* [DUBROVNIK'S DANCE WITH THE PLAGUE:
THE TIME OF THE LAZARET ON PLOČE] BY VESNA MIOVIĆ,
ZAGREB-DUBROVNIK: ZAVOD ZA POVIJESNE ZNANOSTI HAZU U
DUBROVNIKU, 2022, 232 P. ISBN 9789533474144**

Among the temptations that often disturbed the daily life of the subjects of the Republic of Ragusa were foreign political pressures, internal discord and occasional epidemics. The fight against that invisible enemy was waged as persistently, organized and consistently as the achievements of Ragusan diplomacy were taken care of, i.e. the best possible organization of all state services. We can find its echo in a series of historiographical works, especially created in the past hundred years. Although deprived of the splendor of diplomatic appearances or the elegance of the halls of the Rector's Palace, which witnessed many heated debates, the past of Ragusan health service had and still has its loyal researchers, who knew how to recognize its importance in a much wider framework than Ragusa's borders.

The rich and exhaustively documented topic offered different approaches: from the description of various profiles of doctors and health institutions (Risto Jeremić and Jorjo Tadić, *Prilozi za istoriju zdravstvene kulture starog Dubrovnika* [Contributions to the history of the health culture of old Dubrovnik]), to a closer investigation of the course of the disease itself, treatment procedures and the role of the so-called great cacciamortos, officials of the Health Office, i.e. special officials of the Republic of Ragusa who enjoyed enormous trust and almost unlimited authority in the fight against a vicious disease (Zlata Blažina Tomić, *Kacamorti i kuga: utemeljenje i razvoj zdravstvene službe u Dubrovniku* [Cacciamortos and plague: establishment and development of the health service in Dubrovnik]). Due attention was also given to episodes related to certain major epidemics that hit Dubrovnik, from the infamous Black Death in the middle of the 14th century (Gordan Ravančić, *Vrijeme umiranja. Crna smrt u Dubrovniku 1348-1349* [Time of Dying. The Black Death in Dubrovnik 1348-1349]) to the so-called plague of maidservants at the end of the 17th century (Rina Kralj-Brasard, *Grad i kuga: Dubrovnik 1691. godine* [City and Plague: Dubrovnik in 1691]). In

this context, Vesna Miović's new book brings a breakthrough by devoting itself to the dual life of the Ploče Lazaret, an institution that from the middle of the 17th century represented a trade door with the Ottoman Empire, and at the same time, as the heir to the medieval Ragusan infirmaries from further surroundings of the city, was the main point of sanitary surveillance for all newcomers.

Through the double game of exchange of trade goods, but also the fragile balance between life and death, Dubrovnik's dance with the plague acquires a new rhythm that marked the city's everyday life in a special way. This complements the approaches of earlier researchers and the history of Ragusan medicine in the fight against infectious diseases finally gets the final part of a kind of trilogy: in addition to the role of the health officials of the Republic through the impact of the epidemic on certain social strata, the position of a key economic branch in the shadow of the constant threat of infectious disease is now thoroughly addressed.

Several research paths led to the creation of this book. The author's story started twenty years ago, dealing with the role of an Ottoman official in charge of collecting taxes during trade with the Ottoman Empire, an *emin*, whose residence was in Lazaret. The next step was a brief treatment of the history of the Lazaret during the time of the Republic of Ragusa, with an emphasis on the urban value of this unique space, thoroughly renovated in 2018, which was documented in an article in a monograph published by the Institute for the Reconstruction of Dubrovnik (*Lazaretto in Dubrovnik: Beginning of the Quarantine Regulation in Europe*). The final impetus was given by the Corona epidemic, a disease of our time which, according to preventive measures, unpleasantly reminded of the long-forgotten experiences of the Black Death. Despite the achievements of modern medicine, fear, isolation and damage to traffic and trade revive the medieval and early modern chronicles and the records of state bodies of the time, so this book, despite its historical foundation, offers a contemporary and timeless lesson.

The presentation is roughly divided into twelve chapters. In addition to the necessary overview of certain health measures with the procedures for the screening of goods and the isolation of comers during the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the chronological focus is on the period from the construction of the Lazaret in Ploče by the decision of the Senate in the first phase in 1627 and then in the second phase in 1642, until the twilight of the Republic at the end of the 18th century, when new construction works were carried out to renovate the space. Introductory part devoted to the construction and maintenance of the Lazaret, with an interpretation of the organization of the entire space, naturally transition into consideration of all the characteristics of commercial activity seen from this special perspective, through customs and quarantine regulations.

The attention is captured by the detailed descriptions of the trade goods (whereby lovers of the history of everyday life will come to their own, learning everything about clothing items, various types of fabrics, dishes and food that were regularly delivered to the Lazarets), but with material reviews the reader begins to understand the role of time in the business of merchants, artisans and other travelers and the damage they suffered by staying in the Lazarets, their restlessness and anxiety living in iso-

lation for forty days at a time. Given these circumstances, it is surprising that there were not more incidents and the need for the intervention of the ever-vigilant authorities and special guards, the so-called medical service soldiers, especially since there were also women among the passengers, although they did not trade often and traveled mostly for religious or family reasons.

On the other hand, the prolonged stay of numerous foreigners in a specific environment close to the city walls favored the easy exchange of various information and real espionage activities. Hundreds of recorded reports to the authorities in the Rector's Palace, which sometimes resorted to expelling undesirables from the Ragusan territory (even at the cost of breaking the quarantine rules), just to avoid bigger riots, speak of this. These difficulties, characteristic of the stay of numerous foreigners in a small space, did not hinder the other form of fight against the epidemic, which the authorities of the Republic conducted throughout the Ragusan territory with the organization of the so-called sanitary cordon. The specific Ragusan sanitary cordon was created very early, at the beginning of the 1570s, and it was made up of nobles and commoners who stood guard in the border villages during the danger of the plague. Such a system was expensive, but extremely effective. The sanitary cordon, the isolated Brgat-Ploče corridor and the Lazarets in Ploče protected the population of the Republic in the best possible way and, at the same time, guaranteed the safety of trading. Not only was the local population not prone to major riots due to the imposed strict disciplinary measures and numerous restrictions, but it only encouraged them after the establishment of the transitional French and then Austrian administration, when the Western European authorities also recognized the expediency of Ragusa's health and especially epidemiological protection measures for the sake of well-being the whole community.

The lists of noblemen who, between the ages of 20 and 50, performed the difficult and thankless duty of *cacciamortos* during the 18th century, people who, according to the Dominican Serafin Marije Crijević, literally had power over life and death in the most difficult circumstances, speak of their own understanding of responsibility: while individuals regularly retreated from the assigned task and found replacements (like the musician Luka Antunova Sorgo who intensively wrote new compositions during the time of the epidemic), most of them served the state several times in circumstances that did not offer an opportunity for personal enrichment or for significant progress in public service, and at the same time they exposed themselves to the risk of infection, which, as a rule, penetrated from the border. On land and at sea, the watchful eyes of not only health officials, but also of the local population, who, for their own protection, reported any suspicious case to the authorities.

Recognized common interests in the fight against an invisible enemy strengthened cohesion within the Republic of Ragusa, and in the foreign policy field, they ranged from cooperation and exchange of valuable information, to false accusations that harmed Ragusa's political and economic interests the most. The defense of the state's reputation and trust in the institutions of the Republic in the always sensitive international relations was as important a task for the authorities as the protection of public health.

Created on the basis of many archival documents and rich secondary literature, this beautifully illustrated book offers a completely new insight into the problems of border relations, into the psychology of a detained individual and the responsibility of many civil servants faced with one of the greatest trials that has been faced since the founding of the City until today (in the form of Corona) other threats to its existence. That's why its messages should not be ignored, even by readers outside professional circles.