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onstructing identity: church of Saint Blaise in Ragusa (1707-1715) and diplomatic exchange between the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) and *Serenissima*

Costruire l'identità: la chiesa di San Biagio a Ragusa (1707-1715) e lo scambio diplomatico tra la Repubblica di Ragusa (Dubrovnik) e la *Serenissima*

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⁽¹⁾ On history of the Republic of Ragusa see: Francis W. Carter, *Dubrovnik (Ragusa) a Classic City-state* (London, New York, Seminar Press, 1972); Vinko Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, vol. I and II (Zagreb, Matica hrvatska, 1980) and Robin Harris, *Dubrovnik, a history* (London, Saqi Books, 2006).

⁽²⁾ It was in 1958 that Croatian art historian Kruno Prijatelj published *Documents for the construction of the baroque architecture in Dubrovnik*, an article in which he collected the old (Stjepan Skurla, *Sveti Vlaho biskup i mučenik od Sevasta dubrovački obranitelj* (Dubrovnik, Tiscom Dragutina Petnera, 1871); Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika* and new archival evidence on the construction of the new church of Saint Blaise, on its architect Marino GropPELLI, his work and treatment in the Republic of Ragusa. After him, Vladimir Marković was the first who attributed to GropPELLI one part of the architectural and sculptural work on the summer villa of the Ragusan noble family Bozdari (Vladimir Marković, "Ljetnikovac Bozdari u Rijeci Dubrovackoj i Marino GropPELLI", *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 30 (1990), 231-265). In 1990 Radovan Ivančević wrote on GropPELLI's model of the saint placed on the top of the church facade; Ivančević Radovan, "GropPELLIjev model Dubrovnika (1715)", *Radovi IPU*, 23 (1999), 109-116. In 2014 Katarina Horvat-Levaj summed up all in an article on the history of the architecture of the church: Katarina Horvat-Levaj, "Crkve svetog Vlaho u Dubrovniku", in *Sveti Vlaho u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, edited by Pavica Vlačić (Dubrovnik, Knežev dvor, 2014), 246-273. The same author edited a monograph on the church

Rethinking Ragusan identity through its artistic diplomacy and architecture

The article investigates the turning point in the visual identity that the city of Ragusa received after the urban transformations undertaken with the construction of a new church of its protector St Blaise at the beginning of the 18th century. One of the two most important sacred architectural buildings of the Republic of Ragusa (1358-1808)⁽¹⁾ – the other one being the cathedral – introduces us to the new architectural vocabulary adopted directly from Venetian architecture, through the figure of the Venetian sculptor and architect Marino GropPELLI [Fig. 4.1].

The aim is to stress the importance of the diplomatic networks the Republic used in shaping its identity through architecture. The emphasis is put on the architecture of the patron saint church in the city of Ragusa which has been amply studied by some of the most eminent Croatian researchers⁽²⁾. Our intention is to add a new layer to the picture by looking through the prism of artistic diplomacy. Therefore, diplomatic correspondence is used as fundamental evidence for this research. This methodology made us realize the non-deniable importance the diplomatic agents, carefully chosen by Ragusan government, had in the process of choosing the architect. Finally, we can claim without any uncertainty that the architecture of the St Blaise's church is at first place the result of the collaboration between the government of the Republic and its middleman/agent from Venice⁽³⁾.

Over the centuries the Republic of Ragusa [Fig. 4.2] developed a large and well-organized network of consulates based on commercial agreements, most of them established in the second half of the twelfth century⁽⁴⁾. The number of consulates in certain periods depended on the economic and political situation in the state. Ragusa had around 50 consulates in the Mediterranean during the 17th century⁽⁵⁾, but for the purpose of artistic exchange Ragusans always used contacts from developed artistic centres as Venice, Rome, or Naples.

Abstract: In order to shed more light on architectural (ex)changes which reshaped the city of Ragusa (today Dubrovnik in southeastern Croatia) at the beginning of the 18th century, the present paper explores how diplomatic networks influenced the choice of the architect Marino Gropelli (1662-1728) as the designer of St Blaise's church after the fire completely ruined it on May 25, 1706. In the long history of the Republic of Ragusa (1385-1808) this was the first time that a Venetian was given a major public commission in Ragusa. Based on unpublished diplomatic letters (series *Litterae et Commissiones Ponentis*, *Miscelanea* and *Diplomata et Acta*) preserved in the Dubrovnik state archives, the paper focuses on the shaping of identity through architectural and urban change which resulted from the diplomatic exchange. It explores and emphasizes the role and the figure of the diplomatic agent in the process of recruitment of the architect.

Keywords: Diplomatic Exchange, Dubrovnik (Ragusa), Marino Gropelli, St Blaise's Church, Venice (Serenissima)

This article starts from the following questions: What do diplomatic letters on building the new church of St Blaise in Ragusa reveal? What is the key to understanding the choice of a Venetian as an architect of city's patron saint church? How is the presence of government expressed within the construction process? Can the structure and appearance of such government-sponsored architecture tell us anything about the shaping of identity of the Ragusan Republic and if it can-how?

Two rivals in the Adriatic Sea: Venice and Ragusa

Most of the towns along the eastern Adriatic coast have at one point or another been part of the Venetian Republic. The Republic of Ragusa, however, managed to retain its independence, except for the period from 1205 to 1358 when the Venetian count ruled in the city of Ragusa. Once the Venetian count was expelled from the city in 1358, Ragusan patricians formed a city-state based on the Venetian republican political system. The city-state of Ragusa managed to benefit from its geographical position between the East and the West, making trade the base of its wealth. The city's great teacher but also enemy – Venice – caused Ragusa a great number of difficulties⁽⁶⁾. The biggest crises in their relationship happened after the great earthquake in 1667⁽⁷⁾.

The earthquake of 1667 was the most destructive one in the Republic's history and it caused big changes in the urban structure of the city⁽⁸⁾. However, the city managed to keep the medieval street layout in most of its areas⁽⁹⁾. Still, the centre of ecclesiastic power, the cathedral of Assumption of Virgin Mary, as well as the church of St Blaise, the saint protector of the state, changed its orientation and was completely rebuilt. Many churches, monasteries and palaces were ruined⁽¹⁰⁾ and the city state was in peril: Ottomans and Venetians saw in this situation a good chance to conquer the city⁽¹¹⁾. Nevertheless, Ragusa managed to survive thanks to its diplomatic skills, but also Hungarian and Ottoman pro-

of St. Blaise in 2017 published both in Croatian and in English: Katarina Horvat-Levaj (edited by), *Zborna crkva svetog Vlaha* (Dubrovnik, Dubrovačka biskupija, Zborna crkva sv. Vlaha and Zagreb, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, ArTresor naklada, 2017) and Katarina Horvat-Levaj (edited by), *The Collegiate Church of St. Blaise in Dubrovnik* (The Dubrovnik Diocese, The Collegiate Church of St Blaise, Institute of Art History, ArTresor Publishers, 2019).

⁽³⁾ The foreign policy of the Republic of Ragusa reflects in the series XXVII 1-7 of State Archives in Dubrovnik (in further text SAD). More precisely: *Litterae et commissiones: Litterae et commissiones Levantis* (XXVII 1: 1359-1808), *Copia litterarum diversarum* (XXVII 2: 1712-1782), *Minutae litterarum veterum* (XXVII 3: 1565-1762), *Litterae et relationes* (XXVII 4: 1740-1773), *Litterae et relationes comitum et capitaneorum territorii* (XXVII 5: 1705-1799), *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis* (XXVII 6: 1566-1808) et *Minutae litterarum Ponentis* (XXVII 7: 1665-1718). All diplomatic letters are gathered in one series *Litterae et commissiones* which was separated in two parts starting with 1566 when the series *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis* saw the day. In *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis* it is possible to find letters sent from *Rettore e i consiglieri della Repubblica di Ragusa* to their agents, consuls, cardinals, and popes who were the most important Ragusan contacts.

⁽⁴⁾ Bariša Krekić, "La navigation Ragusaine entre Venise et la Méditerranée orientale aux XIV et XVe siècles", in Krekić Bariša, *Dubrovnik: a Mediterranean urban society 1300-1600* (Aldershot-Brookfield, Variorum, 1997).

⁽⁵⁾ Ilija Mitić, *Konzuli i konzularne službe starog Dubrovnika* (Dubrovnik, Historijski institut JAZU u Dubrovniku, 1973), 39.

⁽⁶⁾ Lovro Kunčević, "Dubrovačka slika Venecije i venecijanska slika Dubrovnika u ranom novom vijeku", *Analiz zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku*, 50 (2015), 9-37

⁽⁷⁾ Lovro Kunčević, Domagoj Madunić, "Venice and Dubrovnik during the great earthquake of 1667", *Dubrovnik Annals*, 19 (2015), 7-56.

Dubrovnik, the church of St Blaise and the Cathedral in the city, former Ragusa.

(Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)



⁽⁹⁾ Vlado Kuk, Eduard Prelogović Krešimir Kuk, "Seizmološke i seizmotektonske značajke dubrovačkog područja" in *Obnova Dubrovnika: Katalog radova u spomeničkoj cjelini Dubrovnika od 1979. do 2009.*, edited by Ivanca Jemo, Nada Brigović (Zagreb, Alfa, 2009), 20.

⁽⁹⁾ Milan Prelog, "Dubrovnik: prostor i vrijeme", in *Zlatno doba Dubrovnika XV. i XVI. stoljeća*, edited by Predrag Marković and Jasenka Gudelj (Zagreb, Muzejski prostor Zagreb, 1987), 27-40, 30.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Lukša Beritić, "Ubikacija nestalih građevinskih spomenika Dubrovnika", *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 10 (1956), 15-83, 65-66; Peković Željko, Kristina Babić, "Ubikacija prve crkve sv. Vlaha u Dubrovniku", *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, Vol. III, 44-45 (2018), 237-260.

⁽¹¹⁾ Foretić, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 152-173.



4.2

Guillaume Sanson and Alexis Hubert Jaillot after V. Coronelli, Map of the eastern and western coasts of the Adriatic, with the borders of the Dubrovnik Republic drawn in. (Paris, 1693, copper engraving partially coloured, DUM PM 139, Maritime Museum in Dubrovnik, Collection of Charts, Maps and Atlases)

tection, maintaining its independence until 1808 when it was abolished by Napoleon. In these dangerous times after the earthquake the government insisted on rebuilding the city with the help and connoisseurship of Italian architects. The council of *Regatorum* – the Senate – gave instruction to the rector and his Small Council to write (somewhere) to find an architect to make a certain project or to supervise some construction site. The rector and the Small Council gave the instructions to the agent they were corresponding with. The agent or consul they were writing to was someone who knew well the people in the city he lived in. The agent or consul proposed to the master the terms and conditions himself (based on what had been written) and once he got someone interested, he answered to the rector and his Council that he had someone for them. If the proposal seemed acceptable, the rector and his Council wrote to give orders about the master's trip to Ragusa. The agent had to arrange the passage. Once in Ragusa, the master could discuss with *officials*⁽¹²⁾ about the terms and conditions of his new employment. The supervisors had the task to sign the contracts with architects, to give them salaries, to show them their new home – which was paid for them, but also to control the progress of the construction and the spending of money. They had to make regular reports about the project and present them to the government. This service was a very important one, as confirmed in the Statute of the Republic⁽¹³⁾. The architects had to live in houses *intra muros* like every other employee of the Republic⁽¹⁴⁾. After the earthquake most of the architects came from Rome⁽¹⁵⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ Patricians in the service of the Senate, whose job was to supervise the construction site.

⁽¹³⁾ Chapter 22 of the Statute of Ragusa. See: Ante Šoljić, Zdravko Šundrica, Ivo Veselić (edited by), *Statut grada Dubrovnika* (Dubrovnik, Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2002), 166.

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Providamentum*, May 4th 1508, SAD, Acta Consilii Regatorum 30, f. 294- 295, published in Lukša Beritić, *Dubrovački graditelj Paskoje Miličević* (Split, Novinsko izdavačko poduzeće "Slobodna Dalmacija", 1948).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Just to mention some important names and the period they spent in Ragusa: Pier Andrea Bufalini, 1671 (drafted a project for the cathedral of Ragusa while being in Rome); Francesco Cortese 1668-1670; Paolo Andreotti, 1670-1675; Pier Antonio Bazzi, 1677-1678; Tommaso Maria Napoli, 1689-1700; Pietro Passalacqua (1735).

⁽¹⁶⁾ Cvito Fisković, *Naši graditelji i kipari XV i XVI. stoljeća u Dubrovniku* (Zagreb, Matica Hrvatska, 1947), 22-36.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Nella Lonza, "The statute of Dubrovnik of 1272: between legal code and political symbol", in *The Statute of Dubrovnik of 1272*, edited by Nella Lonza (Dubrovnik, Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku, 2012), 23.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Nada Grujić, "Onofrio di Giordano della Cava i Knežev dvor u Dubrovniku" in *Renesansa i renesanse u umjetnosti Hrvatske*, Predrag Marković and Jasenka Gudelj (Zagreb, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2008), 9-50. See also Adriano Ghisetti Giavarina, "Onofrio di Giordano", in *Gli ultimi indipendenti – architetti del gotico nel Mediterraneo tra XV e XVI secolo*, (a cura di), Emanuela Garofalo, Marco Rosario Nobile (Palermo, Edizioni Caracol, 2008), 45.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Renata Novak Klemenčić, "Dubrovnika velika fontana", *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino*, XXXIX (2003), 57-91

⁽²⁰⁾ Harriet McNeal Caplow, "Michelozzo at Ragusa: new documents and revaluations", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 31, 2 (1972), 108-119; Igor Fisković, "Michelozzo di Bartolomeo a Dubrovnik 1461-1464", in *Atti del convegno internazionale: "Michelozzo – scultore e architetto nel suo tempo (1396 -1472)*, (a cura di) Gabriele Morolli (Firenze, A.D.S.I. Associazione Dimore Storiche Italiane, sez. Toscana, 1998), 275-285; Ana Deanović, "Contributo del Michelozzo Michelozzi alla fortificazione di Ragusa (Dubrovnik)", *Studi Castellani in onore di Piero Gazzola* (Roma, Istituto italiano dei Castelli, 1979), 37-56.

⁽²¹⁾ Janez Höfler, "Florentine masters in early Renaissance Dubrovnik: Maso di Bartolomeo, Michele di Giovanni, Michelozzo and Salvi di Michele" in *Quattrocento adriatico: fifteenth century art of the Adriatic rim*, (a cura di) Charles Dempsey (Bologna, Nuova Alfa, 1996), 91-102.

⁽²²⁾ Lukša Beritić, *Utvrdjenja grada Dubrovnika* (Zagreb, JAZU, 1955), 87.

⁽²³⁾ Ilija Mitić, "Prilozi za poznavanje odnosa između Dubrovnika i Genova u XV i XVI St", *Analiz zavoda za povijesne znanosti JAZU*, 19-20 (1982), 19-75.

⁽²⁴⁾ Nada Grujić, "Klasični rječnik stambene renesansne arhitekture u Dubrovniku", *Peristil*, 35/36 (1992-1993), 141; Nada Grujić, *Kuća u gradu* (Dubrovnik, Matica Hrvatska, 2013), 245.

⁽²⁵⁾ Paolo Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia. Spionaggio e controspionaggio ai tempi della Serenissima* (Milano, Il Saggiatore, 1994), 239-247.

⁽²⁶⁾ Bariša Krekić, "La navigation Ragusaine entre Venise et la Méditerranée orientale aux XIV et XVe siècles", 47.

Foreign architects and the shaping of Ragusan identity through architecture

It is well known that the Republic of Ragusa employed several architects from Italian centres even before the great earthquake⁽¹⁶⁾. This fact is very important for our subject: treating the shaping of identity through architecture. Many areas of Ragusan social life, from ideology and law to art and clothing, were "imbued with strict traditionalism"⁽¹⁷⁾. However, Ragusan government, as a sponsor of public (profane and sacred) architecture was aware of the importance of the skill and prestige the Italian builders could provide.

Onofrio di Giordano (Cava dei Tirreni, Salerno), the author of the project for the Rector's palace, stayed in Ragusa for 7 years (from 1436 to 1446) to supervise all the construction sites in the city⁽¹⁸⁾. He also developed the project for the city's aqueduct and built two fountains with other contractors⁽¹⁹⁾. Michelozzo Michelozzi came from Florence in 1460 to work on the fortification system of the city at a time when the Republic was in great danger of Ottomans coming from the hinterland. He stayed in Ragusa until 1464⁽²⁰⁾. Two other engineers from Florence stayed in Ragusa at the same time as Cosimo da Medici's architect Michelozzo: Tommaso (Maso) di Bartolomeo and Giovanni da Bartolomeo da Fiesole⁽²¹⁾. Bernardino from Parma worked with Michelozzo on fortifications. Afterwards, it was Antonio Ferramolino from Bergamo who made models for the city fortifications⁽²²⁾, again at a time of crisis and Ottoman's approach to the Republic during 1538⁽²³⁾. In the middle of the 16th century Antonio from Padua worked as an architect in the service of the Republic⁽²⁴⁾. Other architects and engineers from Milan, Lucca, Cremona and Mestre were employed in Ragusa and worked under the surveillance of *ufficiali*.

Almost all of them worked on the fortifications of the city, the biggest and longest-lasting construction site in the history of the Republic. Their conditions and treatment varied but the mechanism of their recruitment was always the same. Nevertheless, Venice was never one of the centres chosen for this kind of artistic exchange. As Serenissima's ex subject and all-time rival, the Ragusan government never wanted to take the risk of employing a Venetian architect or engineer who could easily be a Venetian spy⁽²⁵⁾. The concentration of interest on political, naval, and commercial contacts of Ragusa and Venice is not surprising in view of the character of both city-republics, their political relations and their trade and navigation in the Adriatic area⁽²⁶⁾. The tense relation between the two Republics is obvious also from the fact that Venice consistently refused to apply the term republic to Ragusa, referring to it as *commune or municipality* until its fall. Even though they tried to enter-

tain a good diplomatic relationship, the Ragusan Republic was not allowed to have an official consulate in Venice, even though a non-official representative was always in the city.

Dottor Giovanni Antonio Benevoli, Ragusan agent in Venice

It was not until 1706 that the Ragusan government, after the fire ruined the church of its patron saint, wrote to Venetian *Dottor* Giovanni Antonio Benevoli asking for help. At the beginning of the 18th century, while the construction of the cathedral was still in progress, a fire engulfed the church of Saint Blaise. On the night of May 24, 1706, the Romanesque-gothic church of St Blaise was seriously damaged⁽²⁷⁾. Two city loggias, situated near the church, were spared but they were demolished at the time of the construction of the new church⁽²⁸⁾. The same day the decision was taken to immediately build a new church. To do so, the Senate chose three *officiales pro reaedificatione ecclesiae Sancti Blasii* – supervisors whose job was to control the construction site of the church: Orsatto Sorga, Marino Gradi and Giunio Pozza⁽²⁹⁾.

Letters recently found in the already mentioned *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis*⁽³⁰⁾ illuminate the story of the recruitment of the first Venetian architect and stonemasons in the role of public employees. Besides that, they shed a new light on the figure of the Republic's agent in Venice, Giovanni Antonio Benevoli and his important role as an intermediary in the process of finding the appropriate architect. The decision to "conducendo pro uno anno ab Italia Architectus" was accepted on May 26 of the same year⁽³¹⁾. The very next day a letter from Ragusa signed "Il Rettore et i consiglieri della Republica di Ragusa" was sent to Venice to *Signore Dottor* Gio. Antonio Benevoli, after the decision to write to Ragusan agent in Venice, Ivan Serafino Bona, was rejected. One of the new supervisors of St Blaise's church, Orsatto Sorga, who had also the role of a "tesoriere e procurator della Santa Maria Maggiore"⁽³²⁾, as an employee in the State's treasury, was in contact with Benevoli from 1702 to 1709. Letters by treasurers and procurators of the cathedral were signed generally "Thes. e Pro." or "Thes. di S. Maria"⁽³³⁾. One of these letters, from 1709, was signed: "Orsatto Sorga e compagni [...]"⁽³⁴⁾. It is obvious that the Republic's administrators had multiple tasks given to them, based on their aristocratic roots⁽³⁵⁾.

This fact helped us realize that the choice of the architect was given to someone of confidence, who was already known to the state's employees. Correspondence between him and treasurers reveals that he was their middleman – agent for the ordering of different things the Republic needed from Venice and other cities. He was receiving orders and trying to execute them as we can see in let-

⁽²⁷⁾ Kruno Prijatelj, "Dokumenti za historiju dubrovačke barokne arhitekture", in *Tkalčićev zbornik*, 1 (Zagreb, Muzej za umjetnost i obrt, 1958), 117-155, 150.

⁽²⁸⁾ Peković, Babić, "Ubikacija prve crkve sv. Vlahu u Dubrovniku", 93-95; Cvito Fisković, "Barokni urbanistički zahvat sred Dubrovnika", *Analiz Zavoda za povijesne znanosti JAZU u Dubrovniku*, 19-20 (1982), 91-120.

⁽²⁹⁾ Horvat-Levaj, 2017, 101.

⁽³⁰⁾ Published for the first time in: Anita Ruso, *Les architectes au service de la République de Raguse de 1667 à 1808 et leurs impacts sur l'art de bâtir de la ville de Dubrovnik*, tesi di dottorato (PSL Université Paris, Paris, 2016).

⁽³¹⁾ State Archives in Dubrovnik (SAD by know), Acta Consilii Rogatorum, 140, f. 72, published in: Prijatelj, "Dokumenti za historiju dubrovačke barokne arhitekture", 151.

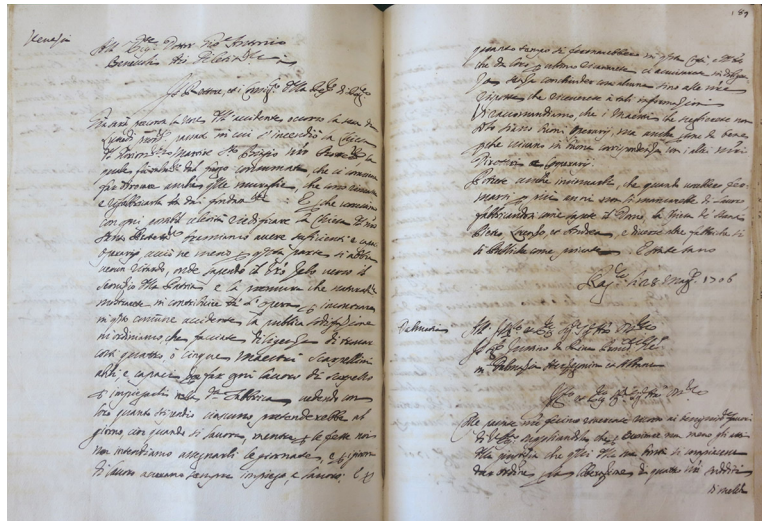
⁽³²⁾ The treasurers of the cathedral were at the same time the treasurers of the State. See: Kosta Vojnović, "Državni rizničari republike Dubrovačke", *Rad JAZU*, 127 (1896), 1-101.

⁽³³⁾ *Tesorieri e Procuri di Santa Maria*: the procurators were responsible for the finances of the construction works conducted on the cathedral and for the regular revenues and costs of the cathedral. In the fifteenth century the treasury began to hold the state money from the mint (zecha) and customs fees.

⁽³⁴⁾ This new evidence is the product of research undertaken in the summer of 2015 in the State Archives in Dubrovnik. SAD, *Opere pie, Coppia di Litterae delli Signori Tesorieri e Procuri di Santa Maria, del 1679 in 1715*, n. 129, 1709. The document was firstly published in: Anita Ruso, 2016, *Les architectes au service de la République de Raguse de 1667 à 1808 et leurs impacts sur l'art de bâtir de la ville de Dubrovnik*, 180.

⁽³⁵⁾ Zdenka Janeković Römer, *Okvir slobode: dubrovačka vlastela između srednjovjekovlja i humanizma* (Dubrovnik-Zagreb, Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1999), 92.

The letter sent from *Il Rettore et i consiglieri della Republica di Ragusa* to Giovanni Antonio Benevoli in Venice SAD, *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis*, 1703-1706, ff. 188v-189. (photo by the author)



ters. Gio. Antonio Benevoli was one of the commercial agents, a sort of extended arm of the state's treasurers, but the details of his life remain unknown⁽³⁶⁾. In the above-mentioned letter, we can read about the horrible tragedy that happened in the church of St Blaise which had to be completely rebuilt, including the walls that had been reinforced after the earthquake of 1667.

Già sarà precorsa la noce dell'accidente occorso la sera di Lunedì prossimo passato in cui s'incendiò la Chiesa del Gloriosissimo Martire S. Biagio nostro Protettore, la quale fu talmente dal fuoco consumata, che ci conviene far dirocare anche quelle muraglie che sono rimaste e rifabbricarle fin dai fondamenti.⁽³⁷⁾ [Fig. 4.3]

To rebuild the church Ragusans needed very skilled stone masons, capable of performing any masonry work. Furthermore, it had been suggested to propose them salaries but to communicate everything to the government of the Republic before concluding final deals. *Il Rettore et i consiglieri della Republica di Ragusa* stressed that it was very important to employ workers who were, among other things, good persons, so they could be in good terms with other workers: "Vi raccomandiamo, che i maestri che sceglierete non solo siano buoni operarij, ma anche persone di bene perche vivano in buona corrispondenza con i altri nostri direttori e cooperarij"⁽³⁸⁾. Finally, it was explained that the workers wouldn't be paid on holidays when they would not work. In the end of the letter Ragusans explained that many construction sites were active in the city so there was a possibility for workers to stay even after the completion of the church.

Potrete anche insinuarli, che quando vorrebbero fermarsi per più anni non li mancherebbe di lavoro; fabbricandosi come sapete il

⁽³⁶⁾ While consuls were citizens who worked for the Republic of Ragusa (in some city mostly as judges for the Ragusans living elsewhere) agents were sent occasionally from Ragusa to Italian cities when consuls didn't have time to execute important tasks. They could also be citizens who were some kind of relation between the government and some important institutions, for example banks. They were not paid by the Republic; they mostly earned an income from different fees.

⁽³⁷⁾ SAD, *Litterae et commissiones Ponentis*, 1703-1706, ff. 188v-189.

⁽³⁸⁾ *Ivi*, f. 189.

Domo, la chiesa di Santi Pietro, Lorenzo et Andrea, e diverse altre fabbriche si Pubbliche come private.⁽³⁹⁾

Dottor Antonio Gio. Benevoli responded on the 11th of June 1706 expressing his grief and promising to send masons. On July 4 he received a letter, this time signed by the supervisor of the construction site: *Orsatto Sorga e suoi compagni sopra la Fabricha di chiesa di San Biagio*. They were mentioning the architect who should know that, if his project was not accepted, he would be paid the cost of the travel back to his hometown.

In proposito dell'Architetto, e quattro maestri scarpellini, sopra i quali si scrisse ultimamente a voi dai nostri Eccellentissimi Signori, dai medesimi è stata data incombenza à noi e consegnataci la lettera da lei loro scritta. Onde in risposta siamo à significarle la nostra intenzione, et è, che ci mandi con prossima occasione l'architetto con prometterli le spese del viaggio, che gli occorreranno in qui, e quelle di ritorno, quando non potesse accordarsi con noi.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Groppelli's church of St Blaise in Ragusa: architecture and ceremony

The Altarista Marino Groppelli (28 July 1662 - 10 June 1728) came to Ragusa from Venice in November 1706. His name was not mentioned in the letters, but it is safe to claim that it was Antonio Benevoli from Venice who sent him to Ragusans with their authorization. Venetian Groppelli was active in his hometown from 1691 until 1706. In 1692 he made sculptures for the main altar of the church of Santa Croce alla Giudecca, sponsored by Cecilia Correr. His *bas-relief* of the veduta of Grado and the island of Barbana della Laguna was dated 1704. During 1704 and 1705 Marino sculpted an angel for the main altar of the archpriest's church of St Peter and Paul in Fratta Pollestine. In 1706 he made a relief representing an allegory of the victory of Dardanelles for the monument Valier in the church SS John and Paul under the direction of the architect Andrea Tirali⁽⁴¹⁾.

As a member of a Venetian sculptor family, had never drafted an architectural project. It was not until his arrival in Ragusa, at the end of November 1706, that he started to work on architectural projects⁽⁴²⁾. He made two designs for the project of the church which were on the agenda of the Senate⁽⁴³⁾. On November 29, the Senate chose to make the church *ex novo* and to give the architect a salary of 10 sequins⁽⁴⁴⁾. The construction of a new loggia was also entrusted to Groppelli, of which the construction started at the beginning of 1707 between the city tower and the Council Chamber⁽⁴⁵⁾.

⁽³⁹⁾ *Ivi*, f. 183.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ *Ivi*, f. 206-206v.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Maria Elena Massimi, "Marino, Groppelli", *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani*, vol. 59 (2002). See also: Katarina Horvat-Levaj (edited by), *Zborna crkva svetog Vlaha (Dubrovnik, Dubrovačka biskupija, Zborna crkva sv. Vlaha and Zagreb, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, ArTresor naklada, 2017)*, 137-159.

⁽⁴²⁾ Besides the church of St Blaise, he finished the construction of the summer villa of family Bozdari. See: Marković, "Ljetnikovac Bozdari u Rijeci Dubrovačkoj i Marino Groppelli", 231-264.

⁽⁴³⁾ The first project was planned on the old foundations with the main facade oriented towards East while the second one was planned *ex novo*, with new foundations and the main facade oriented towards North (opening to the main street called Pjaca or Stradun). The archival document: SAD, *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, 140, fol. 98r, was published by Prijatelj, 1958, "Dokumenti za historiju dubrovačke barokne arhitekture", 150.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ *Ibidem*.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ *Ibidem*. Vinko Foretić, "Zgrada glavne straže u Dubrovniku", *Vijesnik za arheologiju i historiju Dalmacije*, 52 (1950), 5.



4.4

Dubrovnik, the church of St Blaise in by Marino Gropelli, (1707-1715), external view. (Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)

The construction site of St Blaise was active from June 4, 1707, when the foundation stone was laid with the name of Gropelli on it⁽⁴⁶⁾. It took 8 years to finish the church [Fig. 4.4]. At the end of his work, in October 1715, Gropelli wrote a letter to the Senate asking the government to show him acknowledgement, putting Ragusa in his debt for other important “assignments with which I was honored”⁽⁴⁷⁾ and not only for the church and loggia; he was rewarded with a golden medal with an engraved figure of Saint Blaise and the bonus of 200 ducats⁽⁴⁸⁾.

The whole new Gropelli’s building with an entry facade turned northwards onto the main street *Stradun* also called *Placa*, has a traditional Venetian ground plan: a Greek cross inscribed in a square, with five domes (quincunx), connected onto a rounded chancel flanked with two sacristies [Fig. 4.5]. This type of ground plan was used in Venice by Mauro Codussi (around 1440-1504) in his churches of San Giovanni Crisostomo (1497-1504) [Fig. 4.6] and Santa Maria Formosa (started in 1492) as well as in and many other churches⁽⁴⁹⁾. On the other hand, the Byzantine influence in the same ground plan inspired the project of the churches of Santa Fosca in Torcello, San Giacometto and Saint Mark⁽⁵⁰⁾.

In the interior, Gropelli decided to follow Venetian tradition by using the dichromatic pattern. This kind of practice was not characteristic for the interiors of churches in Ragusa. Its purpose was to put on evidence the elements belonging to the structure of the building [Fig. 4.7].

The spatial organization based on quincunx is reflected in the composition of volumes and in the tripartite main facade articulated with four Corinthian half columns. As an experienced sculptor, Gropelli sculpted on the main facade the motives that were in fashion in Venice at the beginning of the 18th century. The palm tree branches symbolizing Victory are the same ones he

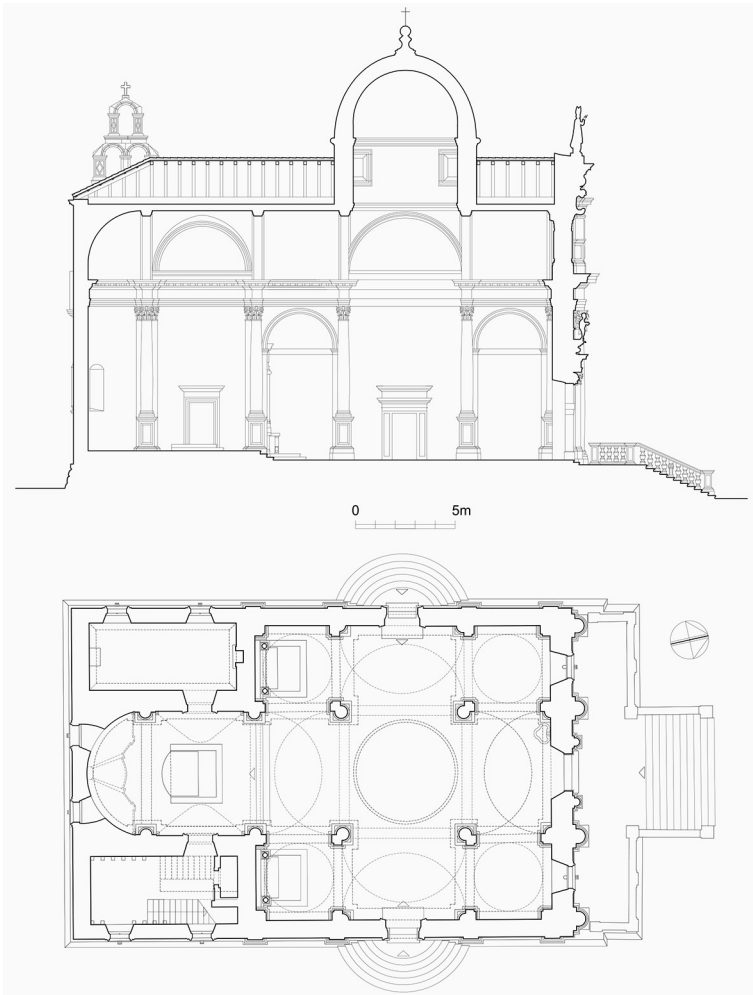
⁽⁴⁶⁾ Prijatelj, “Dokumenti za historiju dubrovačke barokne arhitekture”, 150.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ The letter was published Ivi, 151: SAD, *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, 140, fol. 70r-v.

⁽⁴⁸⁾ After the earthquake this was usual early salary for architects. Also, this was a kind of a diplomatic gift that was given only to him and the engineer Cerruti. Cerutti was sent to Ragusa by Pope Clement IX in June 1667 to make a project for a house on the main road of the city: Katarina Horvat-Levaj, “Strani projektanti i domaća tradicija u dubrovačkoj baroknoj arhitekturi”, in *Zbornik I. kongresa hrvatskih povjesničara umjetnosti*, edited by Milan Pelc (Zagreb, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2001), 75-84, 75.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Loredana Olivato, Lionello Puppi, *Mauro Codussi* (Milano, Electa, 1981).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Katarina Horvat-Levaj (edited by), *Zborna crkva svetog Vlaho* (Dubrovnik, Dubrovačka biskupija, Zborna crkva sv. Vlaho and Zagreb, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, ArTresor naklada, 2017), 141.



4.5
Dubrovnik, section and the ground plan of the church of St. Blaise.
(Architectural Plans, Drawings and Records Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)



4.6
Venice, Mauro Codussi's church of San Giovanni Crisostomo (1497-1504), view of the interior.
(Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)



4.7
Dubrovnik, church of St Blaise, view of the restored interior.
(Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)



4.8

Venice, church of St Stae, details of the main portal (façade finished in 1709).
(Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)

had sculpted for the monument to Victory of Dardanelle. Gropelli put palm tree branches in the arms of putti sitting on the sides of the broken pediment of the main portal. This element crowns the entablature that is carried by two half Corinthian columns flanking the entrance of the church. Furthermore, when it comes to the baroque vocabulary and the syntax of the decorations of Saint Blaise's church it is obvious that they were inspired by various projects Gropelli had the opportunity to see in his hometown⁽⁵¹⁾, especially in works of Longhena's successors Giuseppe Sardi (1621-1699) and Antonio Gaspari (1656-1723). At the beginning of the new century, architects such as Domenico Rossi (1657-1737), Andrea Tirali (1657-1737) and Giorgio Massari (1687-1766)⁽⁵²⁾ reintroduced the classical Palladian vocabulary in their works filled with high baroque characteristics. One of the venetian facades which reflects both Palladian revival and baroque style is San Stae's (Saint Eustachius) facade, a project by Domenico Rossi finished in 1709 [Fig. 4.8]. Gropelli's brothers Giuseppe and Paolo were active as stone masons on the project of Rossi's façade, so it is possible that Gropelli was familiar with the project of the façade even though he was in Ragusa from 1706: its main portal with the indented pediment leaning on the Corinthian order is the same one we can observe in Ragusa [Fig. 4.9]. Also, the facade of the Church of San Lorenzo dei Mendicanti (1673) by Giuseppe Sardi has elements in common with Gropelli's facade: the same type of portal and the thermal window on the second floor. Another commonality is the highly accentuated dentil element on the cornices of both mentioned facades. Finally, the tripartite division of the facade into two floors with a thermal window on the second floor is used on the side facades of Santa Maria della Salute as well as on the main facade of the Santa Giustina. Accordingly, in the Church of St Blaise, the Venetian variant of the Baroque style was brought into a milieu which, after 1667, was completely influenced by Roman baroque forms.

⁽⁵¹⁾ The association of an art form with a specific location is related to theories of *Kulturlandschaft* or *Kunstlandschaft*: Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (London, Chicago Press, 2004), 154. Moreover, artistic production in the province tends to be directly influenced by one distant centres from where it receives information, art objects, and even masters and the peripheral one is influenced by multiple cultural and political centres, offering local artists access to these centres while at the same time offering them the ability to synthesize influences and produce unique and independent artistic approaches" Ljubo Karaman, *Problemi periferijske umjetnosti* (Zagreb, Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 2001); Jasenka Gudelj, "Ljubo Karaman e i problemi dell'arte periferica" in *Arte e architettura. Le cornici della storia*, Flaminia Bardati, Anna Rosellini (Milano, Bruno Mondadori Editori, 2007), 260 -272.

⁽⁵²⁾ Deborah Howard, *The Architectural History of Venice* (London, Yale University Press, 1980), 55. See also Horvat-Levaj, *Zborna crkva svetog Vlaha*, 137.





4.10

Dubrovnik, church of St Blaise, view of the high slanting-bugnato base.

(Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)

Groppelli's project in relation to traditional procession of St. Blaise

The main façade of new St Blaise church rises on the high slanting- bugnato base and on the terrace with its broad staircase in front of it [Fig. 4.10]. Marković explained that this kind of staircase served to connect auditorium (public space) with the stage belonging to church. It was an optimal solution to interlace the body of the church with the urban tissue of the city⁽⁵³⁾. The staircase Groppelli put in front of the Ragusan church bears witness to his awareness of the importance the theme of the "procession" had in the city, as it is below deepened. In addition to that, we would like to recall the fact that the Ragusan cathedral also has a staircase in front of the body of the church⁽⁵⁴⁾. In view of some past inundations that happened in the city it seems like a pragmatic and smart decision to raise the architecture on the stylobate that separate the most precious and valuable treasures from possible destruction.

As Nella Lonza stated, "the knowledge of state ceremony is an essential prerequisite for a successful understanding of a society and its political structure"⁽⁵⁵⁾. All state rituals were performed out-of-doors, intended for the subjects to witness. The celebration of the holy days often involved performances with most complex messages of power, order, and social paradigm, of the wrath of saints and their protection⁽⁵⁶⁾. As in Venice, civic and religious elements in Ragusa were so inextricably intertwined that it was impossible to separate them during the Feast. The urban landscape was a powerful tool the city-state used in its demonstration of power. As in Venice, Ragusan most important churches served as a *mis en scène* for the state's ceremonies⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The Feast of St Blaise was the central point in the calendar of state celebrations in Ragusa because the figure of the saint personified the collective identity and political independence of the Republic⁽⁵⁸⁾. In addition to that, it is very important to stress that, during the Feast of Saint Blaise the procession started every year, on February 3rd, the day of his martyr's death⁽⁵⁹⁾, from the cathedral where

⁽⁵³⁾ Marković, "Ljetnikovac Bozdari u Rijeci Dubrovackoj i Marino Groppelli", 262.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ The staircase was realized during the renewal of the cathedral after the great earthquake (1667) following the architectural plan by Pier Andrea Buffalini from 1670. It was finished until 1674. See: Katarina Horvat-Levaj, "Arhitektura barokne katedrale", in Katarina Horvat-Levaj, *Katedrala Gospe Velike u Dubrovniku* (Zagreb, Dubrovnik, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, Župa Velike Gospe, 2014), 125.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Nella Lonza, "Festa svetoga Vlaha u starom Dubrovniku", in *Sveti Vlaho u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, edited by Pavica Vlačić (Dubrovnik, Knežev dvor, 2014), 45.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Nella Lonza, *The theatre of power: State ceremony and feasts of the Dubrovnik Republic in the seventeenth and eighteenth century* (Zagreb-Dubrovnik, Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, Zavod za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku, 2009), 357-383.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Janeković-Römer, *Okvir slobode: dubrovačka vlastela između srednjovjekovlja i humanizma*, 302.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Since the city was saved by the intervention of St Blaise. It was described for the first time by Filip De Diversis, *Opis slavnoga grada Dubrovnik*, Zdenka Janeković-Römer (Zagreb, Dom i svijet, 2004), 93-95; 175-177; Nella Lonza, "Festa svetoga Vlaha u starom Dubrovniku", 79.



4.11
 Venice, church of the Redentore, (1575-1592) by Andrea
 Palladio, external view.
 (Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)

all the relics were kept in a magnificent treasury⁽⁶⁰⁾. Throughout history the procession didn't always have the same path. Before 1667 it only went from the cathedral to the church of the patron saint which was in the same place as the new one. When the new church of St Blaise was finished, the procession was given the direction used until today. It started from the cathedral then continued down the street *Od Puča* until its crossing with the street *Široka*, the largest street linking street *Od Puča* with the main street *Stradun* leading to the church of the saint located at the crossing of two of the most important city streets *Stradun* and *Pred Dvorom*. After the solemn mass was served in St Blaise's church, the procession continued back to cathedral to put the saint's relics back to the treasury of the cathedral. This procession is like the Italian practice, to different processions with relics followed by mass organized by procurators in Venice⁽⁶¹⁾. In the design of his masterpiece, the church of Redentore (1575-1592), Andrea Palladio (1508-1580) used the base with a terrace and a staircase to accentuate the body of the building [Fig. 4.11]. For Santa Maria della Salute (1631-1687) Baldassare Longhena (1596-1682) also used the *bugnato* base and a large staircase [Fig. 4.12]. As Palladio's Redentore, that was also a church for ceremonial processions⁽⁶²⁾, Longhena's design for Santa Maria della Salute is completely dependent on its function. The plan and the details he chose were suitable for the ceremonial functions: the tripartite arrangement of the plan corresponded to a neat division of the church into a retrochoir for the conventuals, the space in front of the high altar for the government and the rotunda for the people⁽⁶³⁾. We would like to emphasize that our objective is not to compare the very complex and elaborated processions of Venice, including low mass in Santa Maria della Salute or Redentore and the high mass in San Marco⁽⁶⁴⁾ with the one in Ragusa, but to rather highlight the fact that Gropelli was surely familiar with them and used some ceremonial motifs, as the staircase, in his design in Ragusa.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ St Blaise from ancient Sebastea (today's Sivas, in Turkey) in Lesser Armenia has the most important role in Ragusan state theology. He died in 316, in the persecutions of Emperor Licinius: Joško Belamarić, "Životopis, legende, povijesni motivi izbora dubrovačkog zaštitnika" in *Sveti Vlaho u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, edited by Pavica Vilać (Dubrovnik, Knežev dvor, 2014), 28-41. The miracle of St Blaise occurred in 971, when it was revealed to the vicar of the Church of St Stephen in Ragusa during a night-time vision that the Venetians had come to take the city.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Daniel Premerl, "Stoljeće opremanje barokne katedrale" in *Katedrale Gospe Velike u Dubrovniku*, edited by Katarina Horvat-Levaj (Dubrovnik-Zagreb, Katedralna župa Gospe Velike, Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2014), 215-271.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Iain Fenlon, *The ceremonial city* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007), 320-322.

⁽⁶²⁾ Tracy E. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice: Architecture and Society in a Renaissance Republic* (Yale, Yale University Press, 2006).

⁽⁶³⁾ Andrew Hopkins, *Santa Maria della Salute, architecture and ceremony in Baroque Venice* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), 144-153.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ *Ivi*, 146-147.

4.12

Venice, Santa Maria della Salute (1631-1687) by Baldassare Longhena, external view.

(Photographic Collection of the Institute of Art History, Zagreb)



Conclusion

For the residents of Ragusa, the patron saint of the city was more than just a religious figure. He was a political symbol, representing the identity of the Ragusan community. Saint Blaise *is caput, dux et protector* of the city of Ragusa and of the State. His figures carved from stone can be found all around the city, on every entrance and looking from every important building. Around 20 figures make a unique gallery of representations of the same content, of the kind that exists nowhere else⁽⁶⁵⁾. Their role was to convey the essential beliefs and messages of both a religious and political nature. Also, his figure was displayed on the Ragusa's banner, on its stamps and coins and on every state document of any importance.

In the long history of construction in the city of Ragusa the role of agents and diplomats was a crucial one, for there were no competitions as in Italian centres, where princes or governments could choose between various projects and architects. Diplomatic letters exchanged between the Senate of Ragusa and its agents, and sometimes architects and engineers, are not only a testimony to efficient diplomatic policies but also an incredible source of information on construction sites, architects, and their projects, as well as the government's priorities and preferences. Venetian forms speak the language of its origins keeping distinguishable in the Ragusan region. In this way, the Ragusan government used the optimal way to express their power, paying attention to the church's significance in the state's ceremonials. The fact that Venice was not at the peak of its power anymore at the end of the Seventeenth century, and that they had agents of confidence in Venice, made Ragusans opt for a Venetian architect and a new sort of architectural style in order to demonstrate their capacity to follow the newest architectural trends in architectural vocabulary and to prove they are still wealthy enough to compete with venetian sacral projects. In this way the state conveyed messages, values, and policies through architecture by means of symbolic language.

Through its long history, the Republic of Ragusa developed a set of recognizable discourses of identity to describe itself⁽⁶⁶⁾. One of the most powerful self-narration practices of Ragusans was performed in the visual arts, especially architecture. Finally, the urban tissue of the medieval city and the new church by Gropelli are a perfect reflection of that narration. They form a unique whole, a product of diplomatic correspondence and the government's ideas and discourses on power. We hope that this new approach enriched the understanding of the new church of St Blaise – as a product of a social need, fashioned in a way that it expresses a new and unique visual moment in the shaping of Ragusa's identity.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Igor Fisković, "Skulpturalno predstavljanje dubrovačkog Parca" in *Sveti Vlaho u prošlosti i sadašnjosti*, edited by Pavica Vilać (Dubrovnik, Knežev dvor 2014), 154-200.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Lovro Kunčević, *Mit o Dubrovniku, diskursi o identitetu renesansnog grada* (Dubrovnik, HAZU zavod za povijesne znanosti u Dubrovniku, 2014).

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