Robbers, Murderers, and Condemned Men in Istria (from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century)

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Introductory remarks

The territory of Venetian Istria, which encompassed about three-quarters of the peninsula, suffered dynamic changes from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. From the 1530s, by transferring navigation to the Atlantic and with the emergence of enemy fleets in the Mediterranean,[1] Istrian towns were affected by a difficult economic crisis which was followed by demographic decline. Illness, lack of provisions, poverty and war resulted in an increase in the mortality of the population.[2] In these turbulent times the land remained devastated and uncultivated, peasants were abandoning their villages and those who stayed behind became cattle-breeders, converting fields into pastures. The Venetian government decided to populate the abandoned land and initiated organised colonisation on a number of occasions during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. In addition, it gave certain privileges in order to stimulate colonisation.[3]

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[1] See Miroslav Bertoša, "L'Adriatico orientale e il Mediterraneo tra il XVI e il XVIII secolo; abbozzo storico-antropologico," *Atti del Centro di richerche storiche di Rovigno* 32 (2002): 183-227.

[2] Idem, "Aspetti demografici della carestia e della pestilenza nell'Istria del primo Ottocento," *Proposte e ricerche: economia e società nella storia dell'Italia centrale* 27 (1991): 226-47; idem, *Istra: Doba Venecije (XVI.-XVIII. stoljeće)* [Istria: the Venetian period. (sixteenth and seventeenth century)] (Pula: Zavičajna naklada "Žakan Juri", 1995), 21-22.

[3] Idem, "Prinos proučavanju etničke structure i kolonizacije Mletačke Istre u XVI. i XVII. stoljeću" (A contribution to the research into the ethnic structure and colonisation of Venetian Istria in the sixteenth and seventeenth century) in *Susreti na dragom kamenu – Zbornik radova posvećen akademiku Miji Mirkoviću* (The meetings on the sacred stone. Festschrift in honour of Mijo Mirković, a member of the Academy), vol. 4 (Pula: Viša ekonomska škola, 1972), 192-206; idem, "Emičke prilike u Istriu XVI. i XVII. stoljeću" (The ethnic conditions in Istria in the sixteenth and seventeenth century), *Istra* 12 (1974) 7-8: 87-91; idem, "Osvrt na etničke i demografske prilike u Istri u XV. i XVI. stoljeću" (A reflection on the ethnic and demographic circumstances in Istria in the fifteenth and sixteenth cen-

Colonisation drastically changed the ethnic structure of Istria. The newcomers originated from different regions: the Apennine Peninsula, Croatian and South Slavic countries, the Albanian coast and Venetian estates in the Levant.[4] The organised arrival of large groups, which were sometimes lured by unattainable promises and settled together in one location where they sometimes outnumbered the natives, however, unavoidably led to confrontations, primarily because of economic interests, but also because of the different mentalities of the native and new populations.[5]

The process of integration of the newly-arrived population was slow and long lasting, followed by many obstacles and dramatic clashes, in the first place with the natives. Official Venetian documents use the terms "old" and "new" inhabitants (*habitanti nuovi* and *habitanti vecchi*) and the relations between them are described as tense, with occasional open confrontations, sometimes even using weapons. The natives needed to take over the payment of taxes and carry out duties from which the "new" population was exempt. The so-called *carratada* was especially difficult, signifying the obligation to transport wood for the Venetian Arsenal from where it was cut to the embarkation point (*carregadora*) on the seaside that – with cow- or ox-drawn wagons – the native population

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tury), *Buletin Razreda za likovne umjetnosti JAZU* 1 (1977) 1: 89-99; idem, "Neki povijesni i statistički podaci o demografskim kretanjima u Istri u XVI. i XVIII stoljeću" (Some historical and statistical data on the demographic trends in Istria in the sixteenth and seventeenth century), *Radovi Instituta za hrvatsku povijest* 11 (1978): 103-29; idem, "Pusta zemlja: kolonizacija mletačkog dijela Istre" (Waste land: the colonisation of the Venetian part of Istria), *Istra* 17 (1979) 3: 67-69; idem, "Migrazioni e mutamenti sociali nell'Istria Veneta (secoli XV-XVII)," in Gauro Coppola and Pierangelo Schiera (eds.), *Lo spazio alpino: area di civiltà, regione cerniera* (Naples: Liguori, 1991), 223-31.

[4] Slaven Bertoša, *Život i smrt u Puli. Starosjeditelji i doseljenici od XVII. do početka XIX. stoljeća* (Life and death in Pula. Natives and newcomers from the seventeenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century) (Pazin: Skupština Udruga Matice hrvatske Istarske županije, 2002); idem, *Levantinci u Puli (XVII.-XIX. stoljeće)* (Levantines in Pula from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century) (Pula: Zavičajna naklada "Žakan Juri," 2003).

[5] The best example of such colonisation is the settlement of *hajduk* families in Istria in the second half of the seventeenth century. See Miroslav Bertoša, "Hajdučka epizoda naseljavanja Puljštine (1671.-1675.): prilog problematici organizirane kolonizacije mletačke Istre" (The Hajduk episode of the settlement of the area of Pula (1671-1675): a contribution to the issue of organised colonisation of Venetian Istria), *Jadranski zbornik* 8 (1973): 105-60. Cf. idem, "I 'travagli' di una convivenza difficile: 'habitanti vecchi' e 'habbitanti nuovi' nell'Istria veneta dal XVI al XVII secolo," in *Popoli e culture in Istria: interazioni e scambi, Atti del Convegno di Muggia, 20-21 novembre 1987*, vol. 5 (Triest: Circolo di Cultura Istro-Veneta "Istria," 1989), 25-36.

was expected to deliver at their own expense.[6] Conflicts often arose among peasant farmers and peasant cattle breeders. The cattle breeders often let their herds get into the farmers' crops in order to force them to abandon their land and leave it to the cattle owners. The slow integration in the Istrian area was also reflected in the existence of numerous outlaw groups, who generated insecurity in the everyday life of Istrian villages.[7]

The processes of acculturation, assimilation and complete integration lasted for around 150 to 200 years, although some "mental" differences, as seen among certain groups of inhabitants of the Istrian peninsula, are present even now.[8] An especially important issue is that of the ethnic changes caused by the colonisation. Over the old layer of the Istrian Croatian population, fifteenth-century migration waves later brought new inhabitants of Croatian ethnos to this region. Although the colonisation had multiethnic characteristics, the vast majority of the newcomers belonged to the Croatian Catholic ethnic group. In that period this ethnos also spread into areas where it had been a minority during the Middle Ages.[9]

Most of the immigrants had difficulty surviving under the new conditions and the discrepancies between the promised Venetian support and the monthly food supplies brought them to the verge of hunger and poverty. The survival of the colonists, dependent on land, was also affected by frequently extreme climatic conditions in Istria; drought and great heat during summer alternating with very cold and sharp winters, the occurrence of flood tides, long-lasting rainy periods and earthquakes.[10]

Under such critical conditions, in the years when hunger prevailed, the newcomers became outlaws. They stole food, cattle, money, and all that was necessary for survival. Violence, theft, kidnapping and assaults on the roads were everyday-life occurrences in Istria for centuries. Numerous archival documents testify to dangerous criminal groups and their criminal endeavours: court records, registers of the deceased, and a

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[6] Danilo Klen, "Mletačka eksploatacija istarskih šuma i obavezan prijevoz drva do luke kao specifičan držani porez u Istri od 15. do kraja 18. stoljeća" (The Venetian exploitation of Istrian forests and the mandatory transportation of wood to the harbour as a specific tax in Istria from the fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century), *Problemi istočnog Jadrana* 1 (1963): 199-280.

[7] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici. Socijalno razbojništvo u Istri u XVII. i XVIII. stoljeću* (Villains and outcasts. Social robbery in Istria in the seventeenth and eighteenth century) (Pula: Čakavski sabor, Istarska književna kolonija Grozd, 1989), *passim*.

[8] Idem, *Etos i etnos zavičaja* (Ethos and ethnos of the homeland) (Pula and Rijeka: Čakavski sabor, 1985), 33-101.

[9] Idem, *Istra: Doba Venecije*, 606-19.

[10] *Ibidem*, 54-55.

lively correspondence between the representatives of the Venetian authorities in Istria and Venice.

During the early modern period, robbery, especially in rural areas, expanded throughout Europe. Each country had its own peculiarities of the development, organisation, and working methods, but there were also common characteristics which defined robbery in general. The criminals' network was well developed in Europe. Their most common gathering places were areas along the borders, forests, and mountains outside of communities, which facilitated individuals hiding and fleeing from the authorities. Outlaws often sought freedom by crossing the border, since they were beyond the reach of the local authorities in the neighbouring country.[11] The political border between the Venetian and Austrian parts of Istria enabled the outlaws from each side to find refuge without fear of being extradited to the authorities that pursued them.

In the sources, a person punished with banishment because of crimes he had committed was called a bandit. Individuals convicted of banditry (*al bando*) were expelled from the environment where they lived and worked and were thus pushed to the social margins. The outcasts became part of the marginalised, although not all the marginalised were outlaws neither by their nature nor by the nature of the crimes for which they were convicted. However, the fact remains that life at the bottom of society, more usually then not, led to crime. The political and legal mechanisms of Istrian society "reproduced" crime and pushed some perpetrators to the social margins. Banishment convictions often turned otherwise peaceful people into criminals dangerous to society. Thus, the Istrian region, as attested by contemporaries, faced an infamous transformation from a "refuge of peace to the crossroads of villains" and some of the inhabitants received the unpleasant appellation of "subjects of vile nature" (*sudditi di natura prava*).[12]

The areas of criminal activity

Pula and its surroundings

Robbery in Istria had a long tradition. According to archival reports, it began to develop as early as the thirteenth and fourteenth century, but only reached drastic proportions in times of great crisis and migration movement.[13]

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[11] For more on the detailed features of robbery in certain parts of Europe cf. idem, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 13-20.

[12] *Ibidem*, 28.

[13] Slaven Bertoša, *Život i smrt u Puli*, 209.

One of the crisis periods was that between 1629 and 1632, when the Venetian province of Istria, especially the southern and western parts, became the centre of multiple colonisation processes in addition to a great plague epidemic, general hardship, and an elevated rate of mortality among the population.[14]

Numerous reports by the representatives of the Venetian government in Istria witness the emergence of large numbers of criminals. For instance, the count of Pula, Christoforo Duodo, warns the government in the second half of June 1623 that Pula is "filled with disobedient and brazen people that do not respect the rectors and, by posing as newcomers, commit grave offences and steal from the old subjects (...)." He complains that despite many appeals and reports he can do nothing against them since crimes committed by the "new inhabitants" fall under the jurisdiction of the captain of Rašpor, who presides in distant Buzet. He was thus obliged to forbid the carrying of weapons according to the old regulations of the Council of Ten. Unfortunately, not even this measure was useful because the villains ignored this order and "faced him armed with pistols."[15]

Fig. 1: The port of Pula and the nearby bays and villages on a map made around 1560 by the surveyor Zuan'Antonio dell'Oca[16]

[14] An indication of the conditions in Pula is the large number of deceased, which is confirmed by the data in the parish registers, see idem, "Contributo alla conoscenza della storia sanitaria della città di Pola (1613-1815)," *Atti del Centro di ricerche storiche di Rovigno* 35 (2005): 92.

[15] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 29.

[16] Idem, *Istra: Doba Venecije*, 97.

An interesting example of criminal activity presents news about sheep stealing in Pazin County; the accused were peasants from the Venetian part of Istria. Francis Knežić, the lord of Trsat and Mune, whose cattle were stolen in Žminj, applied to the captain of Rašpor, who then conducted an investigation in southern Istria. At the same time, Knežić also made a complaint to the captain of Pazin, who was also looking for the culprits. However, the pursuit of the criminals in both cases ended unsuccessfully, so Knežić decided to conduct his own investigation. Rather quickly, his men managed to obtain a confession from a thirty-year-old shepherd, who remained anonymous for fear of retaliation. The shepherd claimed that the 232 sheep were stolen on the night of 9 January 1624 from Knežić's house in Žminj. Among the assailants the witness recognised peasants from villages surrounding Pula – Ližnjan, Filipane, Loborike, Muntić, Medulin, and Marčana – led by their count prefect. The sheep were divided at a pond in Marčana. Knežić informed the captain of Rašpor, Antonio Contarini, of these findings, but since eight months had passed from the time of the robbery and evidence of the crime had already been wiped out or concealed and the witnesses' fear was too great, the identity of the robbers could not be proven legally nor could a criminal procedure be initiated.[17]

It often happened that the peasants themselves prevented the arrest of certain criminals, using force to stand against the authorities that hunted them. In the rural area of Venetian Istria one can detect an ambivalent attitude within the peasant population towards outlaws ("public opinion"). The village community (*komun*) in an organised or casual way supported and defended them or left them to their own destiny, not caring about their safety; there are only a few examples in which a village can be seen to have helped the authorities apprehend criminals. This was due to the family connections of the culprits, the interest of the communities, mutual solidarity and, surely, a deeply rooted fear of revenge.

The authorities usually requested that the village gastalds (*merige*) help them with the arrest of villains. They usually responded only formally or, in the worst cases, took a passive stance, so they were of no real use at all. However, sometimes, even with weapons, they prevented the authorities from apprehending criminals. For example, the captain of Rašpor, Anzolo da Mosto, in an urgent reference to the Senate in late 1625, presents the case of Šime Lukačić, who was arrested in Marčana by the village gastald and his entourage of 25 men. However, during the apprehension, a group of armed peasants turned against the authorities and through bodily harm managed to persuade them to release Lukačić. They threatened the officers that they would shoot them with

[17] Idem, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 29-30.

arquebuses[18] if they did not listen to them. In his letter to the Senate, da Mosto writes with bitterness that such "despicable disobedience" of the population had become a reality of everyday life in Istria and as such it must be stopped, for if it were not contained "the Province will become a crossroad of thieves and lowlifes." Thus, at his request, in January 1626, an armed vessel was sent from Koper and immediately started to cruise the shores of southern Istria with the intention of capturing Lukačić's group. The crew was in a bad state, however, with 20 sick and famished sailors who had not been paid for several months, thus failing this endeavour. Exhausted and unpaid soldiers did not have either the will or the strength to capture criminals who hid in the nearby forests. In these unfavourable conditions for repressing crime and due to the small number and lack of organisational skills of the Venetian law-enforcement troops robbery increased, especially among the new population. Between 1630 and 1631, the captain of Rašpor, Giacomo Contarini, came to Pula on business and found numerous complaints, witness statements, and reports of investigation committees about the crimes committed by the "new-comers." He was thus forced to punish ten outlaws with the sentence of rowing in the convicts' galley and one was even sentenced to death by hanging.[19]

Attacks and thefts were not committed only in the rural area, but also in towns, in the course of which sometimes the rural and town villains joined forces. For example, the captain of Rašpor, Polo Michiel, in a letter to the Council of Ten in November 1660, cites a theft at the palace of the count-provisor of Pula, David Trevisan that had occurred in 1650. A long investigation determined that "the well known villain and outcast," Jure Marašević, had been the thief, helped by a citizen of Pula named Constantin Senachi.[20] When they were discovered, Senachi fled Pula and went to the town of Feltre[21] and Marašević boarded a galley from Brač as a mercenary soldier and sailed to Venice. The captain of Rašpor, with the aid of the Council of Ten, managed to apprehend them and bring them to Buzet, where they were chained and imprisoned under strict surveillance in the captain's prison. They managed to escape from the prison, however, and reach Austrian territory. The captain of Rašpor, Michiel, could only try to procure the extradition of the fugitives through the help of the Venetian ambassador at the court of the archduke of Austria. Such requests, however, rarely became fruitful, mostly because the other side asked for a reciprocal concession.[22]

[18] A type of rifle (see fig. 5).
[19] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 31.
[20] Often noted in the towns registers (Slaven Bertoša, *Život i smrt u Puli*, 424).
[21] A locality Northwest from Venice, also under the Venetian Republic.
[22] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 32.

Colonisation by hajduks

Crime in southern Istria took on especially great momentum in the period of the *hajduk* colonisation of the area around Pula, from 1671 until 1675. The Venetian government decided to settle *hajduk*s from Boka (mostly from the area of Risan and its surroundings) in Istria in order to preserve a newly signed peace with the Ottomans (at the end of the War of Candia in 1699) and to resolve the difficult living conditions of the *hajduk*s and their families. After a brief time in Istria the *hajduk* elders wrote a report to the Venetian government in which they requested certain areas where they intended to settle and specified a series of privileges to protect their legal and economic interests in their new homeland. Such a request was exactly the opposite of the privileges that the Venetian Republic usually gave its subjects and the government could and would not confirm them. In fact, in their statement the hajduks requested the best parts of the Istrian land and exemption from duties and other tributes on import and export and also refused to pay taxes. Despite each and every effort of the captains of Rašpor to give the *hajduk* population land for cultivation, thus transforming them into farmers and cattle breeders, they did not manage to dissuade them from their original goals, trade and piracy, nor did they prevent the confrontation with the native population which followed.

In agreement with the Senate and the *hajduk*s, the captain of Rašpor, Lunardo Marcello, managed to settle 630 *hajduk* migrants and their families in Pula. In the beginning they received provisions from Venice, but this was not enough for them to lead a normal life and the problem of food was worsened by the fact that a great number of *hajduk* newcomers from Boka had no intention of working thus providing a way to make a living. Colonisation of southern Istria with a warlike, disobedient, and unproductive *hajduk* element deteriorated the relations between the native population and the newcomers. Conflicts and mutual intolerance started immediately after the *hajduk*s arrived in Pula, and lawsuits for the felonies they committed were still ongoing long after they left Istria.[23]

[23] Cf. Slaven Bertoša, "Nastanjenici i prolaznici iz Dubrovačke Republike, Boke kotorske i Mletačke Albanije u Puli (17.-19. stoljeće)" (Inhabitants and passers-by from the Republic of Dubrovnik, Boka and Venetian Albania in Pula from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century), *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Dubrovniku* 41 (2003): 157-74.

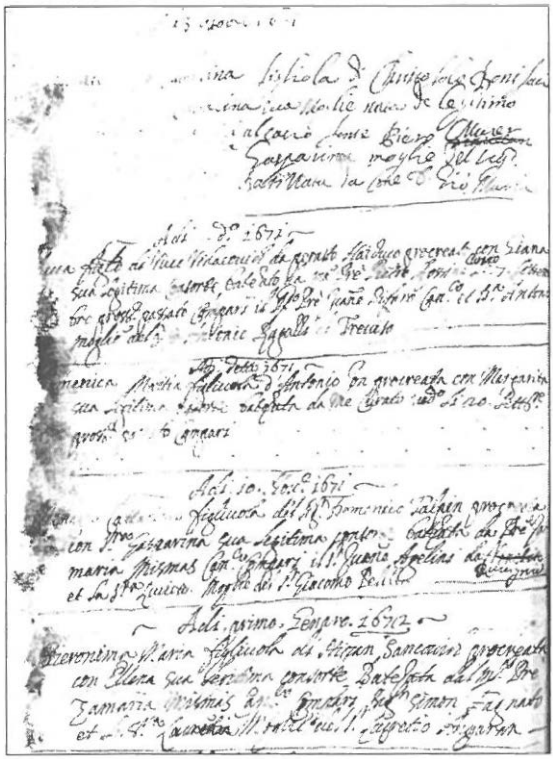

Fig 2: Entry on the baptism of Luke,
son of the *hajduk* Wolf Vidaković from Perast, conducted in Pula[24]

It must be stressed that in the areas where these *hajduk*s came from robbery was considered a usual form of income, thus they behaved the same in Istria, frequently robbing fishermen and boats especially. An extant written account by the Koper rector, Lorenzo Donado, describes a criminal attack on the boat of a captain from Lošinj, Simon Gladulić, who, on his return from Venice had to stop in the bay of Valmiže ja near Premantura because of bad weather. Six armed men attacked the captain of the boat and his passengers on the night of 15 March 1674. The captain repelled them and was killed by a shot from an arquebus, three people were tied up, and the boat was ransacked. The boat's registry log was taken, along with all of the money, 20 pieces of silverware and many other objects. The witnesses claimed that the attack and murder was done

[24] Državni arhiv u Pazinu (State Archive in Pazin), Liber Baptizatorum, 242, 15th of October 1671.

by *hajduk*s, whom they recognised by their "Turkish" outfits and speech. One of them was also seen later in Premantura. Right at that time other armed *hajduk*s were also noticed in Premantura and in April, 1674, the count-provisor of Pula indicted Bajo and Peter Nikolić, John Puhalović, John Mišan, and Matthew Bilan.

There were also lawsuits based upon common reports, for example, against the *hajduk* Vujina, who lived in Pula and stole a number of sheep from the peasants Matthew Statirica and Matthew Šarić and then sold the meat in Pula. When the sheepskin and head were found the owners recognised them as their own by the brand mark; during the search of his house Vujina fled the area.

What all those examples show is that the *hajduk*s were poorly adapted to their new environment. The majority of the agrarian population in the area of Pula stigmatised them as raw and cruel and different in their customs, ways of life, religion, and (social) relations.[25] In addition, they emphasised their alleged superiority and resolved conflicts exclusively by using force. *Hajduk*s were really – particularly the Orthodox ones – a foreign entity in the social and economic organism of Istria at that time.[26]

Some examples from the registers of Pula

Information in the parish registers of the deceased also provides clear insight into the crimes committed in the area of Pula. Killing as an unnatural way of having one's life ended were particularly annotated in the registers. The same goes for the executions that were ordered by the representatives of the authorities. In the period from 1625 until 1815, 30 murders were recorded. Sometimes there is only the general statement that the murder was committed and sometimes a more precise account of how the murder was committed with the description of the place where it took place. They occurred every few years, often more than one in the same year. They usually happened during the night, far from inhabited places, on unsecured roads and fields, and at sea.

In registers of the deceased from Pula one must differentiate four main categories of captured outlaws or other convicted persons:

- murdered in prison,
- executed by order of the higher authorities,
- died in prison,
- died on the convicts' galleys.

[25] Miroslav Bertoša, "Hajdučka epizoda nasceljavanja," 105-160.
[26] Slaven Bertoša, *Život i smrt u Puli*, 321.

In the village of Štinjan near Pula in the summer of 1667 "Turks" appeared that were actually pirates from Ulcinj and wounded *messer*[27] Luke, who died after spending 33 days in a hospital. He was buried in the church of St. Thomas in Pula.

The murder that happened in mid-April 1796, is an interesting example. Sixteen-year-old Jacob, son of Jacob Radolović of Marčana, was found dead. He was killed from ambush and the body was discovered in a deep hollow that the locals' call *fojba*. The body was taken to the cathedral in Pula, where it was buried.

In Pula at the end of August in 1715 it was decreed by the public authorities that Guy Škoravić of Marčana, a known assailant on the roads and murderer, should be executed by musket. At the age of approximately 28 he was sentenced to death by the count-provisor of Pula, Nicolò Zustinian. After receiving the sacraments, he was accompanied to the place of execution by the parish priest and other clerics. They buried him in the cathedral.

On the convicts' galley Dolphin, which was commanded by Andrea Vedova, three convicts died in November of 1783: 35-year-old Lodovico Fanin, 40-year-old Gaetano Ferdinandi, and 45-year-old Antonio Dannoso. According to the findings of the physician Pietro Tomaselli, the cause of death was acute fever.[28]

Poreč and its surroundings

In the area of Poreč, robbery also increased drastically for causes that were similar to those in Pula – a heterogeneous ethnic environment, differing economic interests, and conflicts between the natives and colonists. This is confirmed by different reports of the Venetian rectors, exemplified in the report of Podestà Antonio Barozzi in 1631, who cautioned the Senate about the expansion of criminal activities in Poreč: daily violence, killings, thefts, and burglaries of houses, families, boats and sailing ships harboured in the port of Poreč.

Outlaws were separated into several groups that consisted of locals and "new" residents. They later contributed greatly to the expansion of crime in Istria, as was foreseen by the podestà of Motovun, Piero Loredan, who, in March 1631, notified the government how some colonists turned to a life of crime. He mentions John Kučić, known as *car*

[27] *Messer* or *messere* (the abbreviation *ser* was also often used) is an indication of a gentleman (given out of respect). See Giulio Rezasco, *Dizionario del linguaggio italiano storico e amministrativo* (Bologna: LeMonnier, 1881), 628.

[28] Slaven Bertoša, "Ubojstva i smaknuća u Puli (XVII.-XIX. stoljeće)" (Murders and executions in Pula from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century), *Acta Histriae* 10 (2002) 1: 63-80.

(*emperor*), a famous bandit whose group of villains spread such great fear amongst the population that the podestà had to bribe some peasants in Višnjan to testify against him. Based on those reports, he apprehended two outcasts, John Grubišić from the village Bačve, who, amongst other crimes, had killed the podestà's chancellor, Berto Carraro, and Makač Kosinožić, a thief and fugitive from the army in Dalmatia Palma, and Koper. Loredan thought that by doing this he was greatly diminishing the force of the Kučić group.[29]

The robbery phenomenon was closely related to the social and economic circumstances in Istria, which is visible from the report of the Koper podestà and captain, Marco Michiel Salamon, from July 1698 that describes the unstable and changing conditions in Poreč which had arisen in the devastated and abandoned city and it had been only showing inclinations towards a new fall. The rector of Koper emphasised a number of reasons for the decline of the city: general poverty and scanty community incomes, lack of money to sustain the city physician who managed to protect citizens, and the ruined storage barn, without capital and grain. He mentions outcasts and "South Slavic peasants," descendants of immigrants from Dalmatia and the Levant, as especially dangerous for Poreč, since they stole cattle and property of the residents and brought insecurity to the interior parts of Venetian Istria. South and East of Poreč, Rovinj, Bale, and Vodnjan and other places all the way to Kvarner, the public roads were not secure. Robbery was so widespread that Salamon compared it to an epidemic and calling it a "domestic plague" (*domestica pestilenza*).[30]

Poreč at that time was in a difficult economic situation and many of the inhabitants had to leave their houses; the criminals, who also faced great poverty, robbed and vandalised the territory of the Poreč commune in order to survive. For this reason, in their report the city representatives demanded that the Venetian government publicly grants pardons to the exiled so that they could rejoin their families who had had to leave their lands. The Venetian government at first refused to solve the problem in such manner, but later started to take these suggestions into consideration.[31]

For personal protection, food and preventing death, criminals had to join forces in groups. A criminal, an outcast who worked by himself, could not last long. This is clearly shown by the example of the peasant Matthew Zelenković, a "newcomer" in the village of Vabrige in the Poreč area, which is described in detail in the report of the captain of Rašpor,

[29] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 33-35.
[30] *Ibidem*, 41-42.
[31] *Ibidem*, 42-43.

Zuanne Renier. According to the investigation and the witnesses' accounts, Matthew and his uncle, George Zelenković, were heading home after having dinner at one of their relative's home in late June 1635. On the way, they stopped in the city square to say their farewells, but then Matthew Zelenković took out his dagger and stabbed his uncle twice in the chest. Two days later, George Zelenković died of these wounds and Matthew fled the same night. Several months later he was formally charged and sentenced to exile and a bounty of 600 pounds of his own property was decreed on his head. The indictment also states that Matthew deliberately did the crime due to disguised hatred of his uncle. However, after he was arrested four years later, in October 1639, in the vicinity of the village of Vabrige, he was brought to the prison in Buzet and at a hearing he presented reasons why he had acted the way he did. He stated that his uncle, George Zelenković, had beaten his mother and taken her belongings, which was why he murdered him. Since then he had been hiding in the forest, up until the beginning of October 1639, when he encountered the outcast Bartholomew Justić from the village of Maj in the Poreč area, with whom he devised a plan to go to Dalmatia and join the army. However, they began to quarrel while drinking together. What followed was a sabre duel, after which they parted ways. Matthew, who was wounded in the fight, sought refuge in his native village of Vabriga, in a barn located away from the houses. That is where the search party, which consisted of peasants from Vabriga and Žbandaj commanded by two village gastalds, found him. Afterwards the Rašpor Captain Alvise Tiepolo read the death sentence in the prison in Buzet and on the same day Matthew was handed over to the executioner, Cavalier Felician Arcolini, who hanged him.[32]

The reports of the Koper Podestà and Captain Salamon also give information discovered by Salamon and his predecessor, Zaccaria Bondumier, on the criminal and outcast James Prekalj from the village of Žbandaj in Poreč and the group he belonged to. Bondumier, in an investigation which he started against the Albanian immigrants in Poreč, came to the conclusion that in those areas there was a group of criminals led by Francis Arman one member of which was James Prekalj. It is noted in the investigation that in the night of 4 February 1688, the group took the opportunity of a storm to enter Poreč secretly and break into the praetorian chancellery, where the villains took down the doors by force and removed 50 records about different criminal and civil actions as well as many other documents and money. Afterwards they also attacked the public barn. They opened the door with a drill, smashed the lock, and entered the room, reached the iron chest located in the wall, forced it

[32] *Ibidem*, 43-45.

open, and took one Genoa *zechin*, 68 pounds of gun powder, and 60 lead balls. They dragged all of this outside the town and burned the lawsuit documentation, community books, custom passes, and public records in a vineyard near the church of the Blessed Lady of the Angels. A record on the investigation was compiled by the judges of Poreč, the Praetorian Chancellor Bortolo Scarella, and the guardian of the armoury and public provisions, Antonio Corsini, but the perpetrators could not be apprehended. Although no firm proof was found indicating that immigrants did indeed participate in this theft, they were nevertheless pronounced guilty based on circumstantial evidence and a general conviction that only they could do such a thing. The indictment handed down by the Council of Ten was entered in the convicts' register; they were sentenced to exile and if any of them ever crossed the border and was apprehended then, at the usual time and place in this city, the executioner would hang him by the neck on the high gallows until he expired. To those who managed to catch or kill them, after they presented evidence of the killing, a bounty of 600 pounds was to be paid from the property of the outcasts.

In Prekaljs' criminal record there is also a document about the murder of Andrew Cinić and the investigation conducted afterwards. According to the report, the murders were done by the Grbin brothers from the village of Musalež with the help of the aforementioned James Prekalj, who participated due to the fact that he was related to the Grbins by blood. After the report on the murder in 1695, an investigation was begun. The remains of the small field cabins belonging to the murdered Cinić were searched and the crime was reconstructed. The Grbin brothers were feuding with George Cinić because he had built a small cabin on his own land near Poreč so he and his son could watch the fields and pastures day and night for intruding animals. On several occasions he chased away the cattle of the brothers because they were damaging his property. After long disputes and threats the three brothers and James Prekalj set fire to George Cinić's cabin on 1 January 1695 and they also shot off arquebuses. On that occasion Cinić's son, Andrew was killed, the cabin was burnt down, and George, even though wounded, only managed to escape by some miracle and fled from the attackers. After the group refused to surrender into the hands of justice as requested by the Koper rector an investigation was conducted and the act of exile was pronounced.

However, James Prekalj was involved in another incident of bloodshed the following year. It is noted and described how he participated a revenge killing of a peasant in Fuškulin, a village in the area of Poreč. The crime was committed on 20 July 1696, when Simon Svojković, Prekalj's distant cousin, was killed at the Madonna del Carmine winery during a quarrel over an unpaid debt. The village gastald of Fiškulin

reported the crime to the authorities, but the murderer, George Brajković, and his accomplices had already fled. However, relatives and supporters of the murdered Svojković decided to take vengeance on Matthew Stojmila, a man who had not participated in the killing, but whose bludgeon was used accidentally in committing the crime . James Prekalj stood on their side and together they attacked Stojmila in his field cabin on the night of 25 July, six days after the murder of Simon Svojković, and shot him, immediately after causing his death.[33]

Only two years afterwards Jakov Prekalj found himself in a difficult position and wrote a plea to Captain Salamon of Koper complaining about not being free for many years and saying that he had no way to support his large family. He decided to plea for mercy from the authorities and in exchange for amnesty, he offered to take the position of field guard (*barigello di campagna*), that is, leader of an armed troop that would maintain order in the area of Poreč and catch and apprehend villains. Likewise, he vowed that he would serve for five years with no payment if the authorities supported his request and granted him freedom after these five years. In the archival documentation there is no indication of whether he was appointed as *barigello* or not, but it is known that the authorities usually used criminals and outcasts for such tasks since they were well acquainted with the marginal world of crime and violence, its mode of operation and hideouts, and the nature and character of criminals. However, these outcasts did not agree to this service out of regret for the crimes they had committed, but were forced to associate with the authorities and fight against criminals due to poverty and hard lives as exiles. These "keepers of the peace" were sometimes even successful, but robbery still remained an acute problem during the long eighteenth century and even beyond.[34]

Criminal activities in the eighteenth century

In the eighteenth century Venetian Istria was still burdened with an economic and population crisis, illness, hunger and poverty, conflicts amongst ethnically different inhabitants, general stagnation and crime. The population was unequally distributed into four cities (*città*), ten market towns (*terre*), eleven communes (*castelli*), and 145 villages (*ville*). Every inhabited place had its own villains and criminal groups; they were widespread the most in the area south of the Mirna River.

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[33] Miroslav Bertoša, "Sudditi di natura prava: Banditismo nel Parentino nel Seicento e nei primi decenni del Settecento," *Atti del Centro di richerche storiche di Rovigno* 16 (1985-1986): 294-99.

[34] Idem, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 53-54.

According to the witnessing of the Koper Podestà and Captain Paulo Condulmer, in 1741 there were 72,000 people living in Venetian Istria, among which only a small number was "capable of work and bearing arms." At the same time, there were 348 outcasts in this region, meaning one bandit for approximately every 200 persons. Almost every outcast had his personal group or was involved in some form of organised crime. The frequency of crimes had not diminished nor had the problem of the outcasts and their attacks on the population in the rural region been resolved. The podestà and captain of Koper, Alessandro Basadonna, in his report of May 1700, again stated that the sentences of exile negatively reflected on the colonisation of the province because in those cases entire families left the Venetian part and headed to Austrian territory where they found refuge in Pazin County. That is why there were frequent news in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century sources noting that the Austrian area villages located along the border with Venetian Istria were becoming more populated and that every day the peasants, called the *Benečans* (former subjects of the Venetian State), were usurping more parcels of land on the Venetian side.

The central and local governments were mostly unable to solve the problem of robbery. Istrian rectors did not have enough armed men in their entourages to prevent the trespassing and catch the criminals. By mid-August 1705, in the chancellery of the Podestà and Captain of Koper Tomaso Moresini, 512 outcasts were noted. Most exile convictions were for murder and, in addition, Moresini differentiated so-called "heavy crimes" from "minor wrongdoings." In his report to the Senate, he criticised Istrian investigation offices and even the central court in Koper; while the first were slow to discover criminals and gather evidence against them, the latter pronounced sentences of exile, although according to him it would have been more useful to catch the trespassers and punish them with forced labour in the fields, rowing on galleys, building walls, and so forth.

Simultaneously, Captain Francesco Pasqualigo of Rašpor also acted against the spread of crime; on 19 December 1704 he received orders to take legal measures against villains and tried, using secret arrangements, to promise liberty to outcasts who would apprehend some of the most persistent and dangerous bandits and hand them over to the authorities. By doing this he hoped that the "most ruthless and dangerous leaders of the criminal groups" would hunt down and mutually annihilate one another. However, in reality this could not happen; the universal vow of silence and mutual solidarity (the famous "omertà") was strong in the Istrian criminal world. Thus, this attempt of the captain of Rašpor was unsuccessful and instead of going against the criminals, it turned on their helpers, accomplices, and the village gastalds. The outcasts and villains

were blood relations of the peasant population, among whom there was a persistent fear of vengeance, so no one from the Poreč area wanted to join the rector in his endeavours. Thus, the captain of Rašpor could not execute the order and had to ask the Venetian government again to send funds for "buying bandits."[35]

By the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century there were a number of groups of criminals in southern Istria that robbed and disturbed the population, daringly challenging the authorities. A witness's account is extant from February 1710 noted by count-provisor of Pula, Piero Loredan, about a criminal group from Marčana village that was led by the Dragešić brothers and to which many denizens of Marčana belonged. Many peasants came to his chancellery to complain of the robberies and violence they suffered, never mentioning the names of the criminals, but seeking compensation for the damage. In only a few months of service, the count-provisor received 54 requests to initiate processes for "house robberies, kidnapping in the fields, seizure of belongings and attacks on the roads." Supposedly, the actual damages and violence were far greater, but many kept quiet about the crimes for fear of retaliation.

Crime reached drastic rates, especially in Marčana and the nearby villages of the Proština area.[36] This is evident from the fact that in this area, which might be the only such case in Istria, the villains even managed to build their own fortifications. Piero Loredan states that by the end of 1709 a criminal, Pave Hrvoić, had finished "building a tower with thick walls, open for arquebuses and observation which can offer strong resistance." The tower was located in the midst of fields about a kilometre from the village of Marčana on the border with Prodol. Loredan was rightfully worried that the tower would serve for criminal endeavours and guarding loot.

Besides the criminal groups, some people in the villages confronted the authorities and at the same time enjoyed the general support of the village community that defended the criminals and stood up to the interventions of the authorities attempting to catch the villains. This is confirmed by the example from Muntić when Domenico Trevisan, Loredans' successor as count-provisor of Pula, presented in his report. In the early morning of 22 July 1715, Trevisan's cavalier came with spies and an armed troop from Galižana to the village of Muntić with the intention of capturing a criminal, Stephan Dianović. In the attempt to apprehend him Dianović defended himself with a knife and wounded three spies. Then Dianović's cousins appeared, along with the village gastald, Mike

[35] *Ibidem*, 54-57.

[36] Proština is a name for the territory south of Kmica.

Radešić, and his brother, village judge George Radešić; they demanded that Dianović should be absolved of wrongdoing and set free. They were joined by the parish priest, who, by sounding the bells, alerted the whole village and so the other inhabitants came, armed with knives, sticks, and rocks. Armed troops scattered before the angry crowd and let the criminal lose.

Count-provisor Trevisan, after this unsuccessful apprehension of the criminal, was surprised by the attitude of the villagers especially that of the parish priest, who instigated the rebellion instead of calming the stubborn peasants as a proper priest should behave. He even threatened to report him to the ecclesiastical court. The rector of Pula apparently did not know the circumstances in Istria and the centuries-long bond between the village and their priest. A priest in Istria in the early modern period was not, in fact, the humble executor of the orders given by the higher ecclesiastical and lay authorities or their instrument for ruling the population, but he turned to the people and took their side even in extreme cases such as a rebellion against the authorities. The priest usually came from the people and sympathised with them regardless of the norms of life and conduct of the so-called "educated culture" (which also included the doctrine of faith). It appears that Istrian parish priests were usually the ones to stand against criminal groups who abused the villages and sometimes they themselves became victims of the criminals. In the case of Muntić, the parish priest took the side of the village for an additional reason: his *komun* (e.g., community, had the right to elect their parish priest and he depended on the village economically. Whenever possible, such village communities chose local men for their priests, who, due to family ties, upbringing, and origin almost completely equated themselves with the "mental" structure of the village. This case was not unique; there are many such examples and contemporaries thought them typical of the relationship between a village community and the authorities.[37]

Dangerous criminal bands

In almost all of the Istrian villages there were criminal groups that spread fear and anxiety and jeopardised the lives of the population with their hazardous activities. One must especially point out groups whose activities and peculiar characteristics were noted in great detail in the archival sources that provide detailed insight into the world of Istrian robbery.

[37] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 57-64.

Dračevac

In the village of Dračevac, located in western Istria, settled in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century Croatian and Albanian immigrants, there was a criminal group about whose violent behaviour the village parish priest, James Kučipera, wrote a report that he submitted to the Poreč podestà at the end of 1765. This group managed to gain, through intimidation, the reputation of being dangerous criminals that no one dared to stand up to. They were able, almost undisturbed, to kidnap village girls, beat up new settlers, and steal cattle from the barns.

After the parish priest's complaint and the investigation they tried to take revenge. They shot him with an arquebus in order to frighten him and also attempted in various ways to defame his character in order to make him seem like someone who refused to do his duty. For instance, on Christmas Eve, 1756, during a great storm, they tried to force him to serve the midnight mass in the field church located approximately a kilometre and a half from Dračevac, although the weather conditions were unfavourable and made travelling impossible. Since Kučipera declined to travel during the bad weather, the next day the criminals threatened that they would tie him up and take him to the bishop in Poreč as he had refused to perform his duty. Another act of intimidation followed on 9 January 1758: they stabbed the parish priest's horse with a knife, wounding him fatally, and cut off his tail; then they injured the back of the mare, which was thus unable to be ridden. The same night they tried to break into his house, but they did not manage to break the chains with which the oak stanchion was tied to the door.

After hearing the witnesses' accounts, the felons were apprehended on the night of April 1757 Pascal Perkalj, John and Anthony Bestoli were transferred to Koper and placed in separate prison cells. Peter Sambri was the only one who managed to escape since he was the first to find out about the preparations of the chancellery of Koper to arrest the criminals from Dračevac. Unlike the others, Sambri was the only one to take the intentions of the authorities seriously and he fled to Lupoglav, the land of the duke of Brigido in the Austrian area.

After several months spent in the dungeons, by mid-September 1757 a court hearing began and the accused were questioned. On this occasion the scribes entered their descriptions in the records. For example, Pascal Prekalj was described as a tall young man with a round face that exhibited quite a bit of arrogance, with a black moustache, hair tied in a ponytail, with a slight dark beard, dressed in a black linen cloak, pants of white linen, white wool socks, and an old linen shirt; he was approximately 24 years old.

All declared that their profession was working on the land and refused to take the blame for the crimes. However, the testimonies were full of information that confirmed their criminal activity. Their violent behaviour was demonstrated on every occasion; they walked around the village armed with rifles and knives. They broke into houses seeking food and drink, attacked the members of household, beat them, and threatened them with murder, arson, and demolition of their property. They also took their cattle into other people's pastures and crops, thus causing great damage. They usually insulted others, but they did not permit any jokes at their own expense. Uncalled-for violence had one sole purpose: maintaining the authority of the criminals and spreading fear amongst the population. They ventured on every endeavour together, helped by accomplices and criminals from other villages. The peasants complained about the loud and outrageous swearing that followed every appearance of the criminals. This was a part of their custom and everyday speech and it instigated unease and fear. The criminals cursed everywhere, on the road, in houses, taverns, etc.

During the investigation and court procedure the witnesses revealed facts that proved that social tensions in Dračevac had also developed from different mentalities of the immigrant groups of Albanian Catholics and how long they took to fit into their new surroundings. There were tensions between the two worlds, two cultures, and among themselves, and especially between the popular and literate culture. There lay the causes for the conflicts between parish priest James Kučipera and the peasant criminals. Kučipera came to Dračevac from Zadar, an area with a different culture and mentality. Defying the will of the village community to accept as priest Simon Prekalj, a local man from a clan of Albanian immigrants, Jacob Kučipera was elected to the position of curate. Although he was young and inexperienced then, the energetic Kučipera begun to strongly implement church discipline in the village.[38]

South Istria

Unlike the criminal group in Dračevac that limited its ruffian and violent behaviour only to its own village, the criminals in southern Istria were much more mobile; they were not limited to one place but appeared out of nowhere at the moment they were least expected. Information on these villains can be found in the records of the archival series of the Council of Ten of 1777, when an investigation was started by the count-provisor of Pula, Pasqual Cicogna.

[38] *Ibidem*, 73-93.

The record begins with the discovery of the criminal group: a ten-year-old boy, John Biban from Valtura, first brought news about the presence of the outlaws in June 1777. While he was guarding cattle during the night in the forest of Magran in Valtura, he spotted six men and one woman, armed with pistols, sabres, and rifles; they were chasing a bull with white hair. Soon other villagers noticed the criminals.

The sojourn of the criminals in the villages and their tour of public spots and private houses had several ritual aspects. According to the witnesses' descriptions, they came to the village of Krnica and stopped on the square beneath the large tree called *ladonja*. A witness, John Mandušić, observed from his balcony how the villains gathered in circle and conspiratorially spoke among themselves. Such behaviour created an atmosphere of conspiracy, tension and anticipation. Some peasants closed themselves in their houses, prepared their rifles, and monitored the criminals' movements through closed windows while others went out in the village to greet them and exchange a few words with them in order to find out about their intentions and moods. Most of the members of the criminal group were known to the villagers of Krnica and they already had a special way of communicating with them. One of the more traditional ways of contact with the criminals was to host them. From time to time the peasants supplied the criminals with food and drink and in return did not get robbed.

The goal of the criminals was often to create or reinforce their image in the public eye by acting violently in public places to instill fear in everyone's present and thus impose their authority. The peasants usually avoided giving declarations against accomplices coming from the Lilić family of Krnica and other members of the criminal group out of fear of retaliation. The example of young sixteen-year-old shepherd from the Lilić family, John Hodan from Skitača, a village in the area of Labin, is noted in the sources. He repeatedly refused to cooperate and give a statement against the peasant James Lilić, whom he served. He repeated that he did not know anything, negating his own words which had been relayed under oath by other witnesses, denying that he had encounters with the criminals and that they stayed and ate in house and barn of the Lilići. That is why he received a reprimand for dishonesty and covering up the facts during the interrogation and, as he did not want to testify against Lilić even after that, an arrest warrant was issued for him. Hodan was persistent in his statement for fear of his master, who often abused him, even physically. His obstinate negation of the events he had witnessed left the investigators without the crown's evidence of Lilić's ties to the criminals and his role as their accomplice. Therefore, Hodan received a severe penalty as a material witness. The authorities putt him in prison in Pula. Two weeks later the investigators again tried to question

Hodan, but he refused to talk even then, remaining withdrawn although he provided several items of information that completed the picture of the reality surrounding the rural world that was forced to cohabit with the outlaws. Hodan was a young shepherd, an orphan without a father, from the poor village of Skitača above Raša Bay, weak, helpless, and unprotected and totally left at the mercy of the arrogant Lilić family. Even though his master often beat him, he dutifully executed his orders and closed his eyes to Lilić's crimes and associating with criminals. At the end of the hearing, the investigators, the cavalier of the praetorian palace, Pietro Rizzi, the court translator Monsignor don Matteo Grbin, and his Excellency Count-provisor Pasqual Cicogna, were convinced that John Hodan was not a conniving and untoward person who refused to give information about the criminals, but a small, poor, frightened shepherd, and they immediately ordered that he be released. What happened to him next, whether his master punished him for the statement he gave, the sources do not say.

Unlike Dračevac, where the rural world cohabited with the criminals, in Krnica the criminals only came sporadically. However, their accomplices, whom the peasants resented even more than the criminals, were omnipresent. The Lilići family from Krnica, protected by the authority of the outlaws, behaved arrogantly, violently, and tyrannically, causing hatred amongst the population. Likewise, because they accepted criminals, they placed the whole village in danger, since the criminals not only came there to rob, but also because they enjoyed the hospitality and protection of their accomplices. In statements to the investigators the people of Krnica and Proština voiced many more accusations and criticisms against the Lilići than against the criminals.

An example of the violence of the Lilići towards the villagers was stated by John Hrastić, a witness from Krnica. James Lilić wanted to graze his cattle on Hrastić's cornfield at the beginning of August 1776. Hrastić did not allow this and started to chase the cattle away with a stick, but Lilić pointed a rifle at him and chased him away and threatened that he would regret that he ever dared to touch his cattle. Lilić actually carried out his threat two days later by killing two donkeys that belonged to Hrastić's brother. After that, Hrastić, as he stated himself, did not engage in any conflicts with Lilić.

In his investigation of this group, Chancellor Zuanne della Zuanna tried to question all the people mentioned in the witnesses' accounts and validate the information about the villains which came from Proština, Barbat and Rakalj, going even further south to the village of Valtura and estates between Pula and Medulin. Based on this information, it was possible to determine the movements of the criminals. The chancellor

called the witnesses to Krnica from the area around Proština and he went to remote villages himself, which is well documented in the records.

In Proština, in the forest around the village of Kavran, the peasants encountered outlaws whose dress was similar to that worn by the peasants in Kanfanar and Savičenta. An especially interesting account is that given by John Poštić from Kavran, who claimed that he saw the criminals gathered in the forest not far from James Lilić's estate and that with them there was also a "woman wearing a hat." This is the only archival account of the existence of a female criminal, which was a rare occurrence at that time. The criminals encountered Poštić and took his rifle, pistol, knife, and powder horn and emptied his tobacco box.

Afterwards, the questioning was done in Rakalj, where the witness, Paul Mandušić, confirmed that the permanent residents of that village were criminals, Guy Percan and Caspar Grubić, and that from time to time the old outcast, Mike Lilić, who resided in the house of his brother-in-law Roko Vale, also went there. He also claimed that in Percans' and Grubićs' housees armed men from nearby areas gathered and Guy Marić from Kanfanar also went there often. Mandušić as well as other witnesses stated that these were the worst people in the village, who had been sentenced to prison many times for their criminal activities and some had even been banished, but despite that they still lived in Rakalj. James Lilić was also connected to the group of criminals from Rakalj, since he visited the communities and informed the villains about the movements of the "black army."[39] The investigation in Rakalj did not discover any particularly new facts about crimes and accomplices, but it was determined that the criminals from Rakalj also had boats harboured in the bay under their surveillance and that they used every opportunity to attack them and rob them although they were more oriented to endeavours on land. The most important data that the chancellor obtained from this investigation confirmed the connection of small groups of criminals that had their own "bases" in villages, but were constantly on the move, circulating through inhabited and unpopulated places all over southern Istria.

The chancellor then moved the investigation to Valtura, where a fourteen-year-old girl named Lucy Perić was questioned; she declared

[39] "The black army" (Ital. *cernide*) was a common name for the territorial forces of the local militia, which drafted able-bodied men from 18 to 35 years of age. According to the regulations, a unit consisted of a captain, lieutenant, infantry – a flag bearer, a batman, a discharged soldier, two under-officers, and two drummers. In 1700 a special decree prescribed a proper uniform for them that at the beginning differed from the uniform of the regular army but afterwards, probably to save money both dressed the same. See Miroslav Bertoša, "Črna vojska" (The Black Army), in idem and Robert Matijašić (eds.), *Istarska enciklopedija* (Istrian encyclopedia) (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2005), 134.

that she saw the outlaws in the Magran forest while she was herding swine. She fled afterwards and hid until they passed her. Another witness, fifty-year-old Luke Biban from Valtura, related information to the chancellor about movements of the bandits from the Magran forest, where they were hiding, to the village of Šišan and the estates of Šikići and Škatari, where they operated.

After that, witness hearings were organised in Pula, where a twenty-year-old peasant, Martin Škataro, presented many details, interesting with regards to robbery, but also for social history. His encounter with the villains happened at the meadow in Jadreški where Škataro brought his bulls for pasture. He was then approached by three men, armed with rifles and sabres, who asked him for directions. They forced him to accompany them to Šišan to get wine, which he then had to carry on the way back.

The witnesses' statements unequivocally proved that within the jurisdiction of the count-provisor of Pula, Pasqual Cicogna, a group of united villains and outcasts was present that had its own accomplices. The exact number was not really determined nor was their identity, except for eight criminals who belonged to different groups. It was confirmed that they committed violence, theft, threats, and revenge. In his report, Count-provisor Cicogna asked for authorisation from the Council of Ten to continue with the investigation, that is, to arrest the outlaws. The end of the investigation is not known and no further archival records refer to it, but based on other indications it seems likely that nothing was done to prevent crime and apprehend criminals.[40]

Plomin and surroundings

The criminal group that plagued Plomin and the nearby area was formed by five brothers from the Filipaš family (Mile, Matthew, Caspar, Barnabas and Joseph). They all lived in the same house and formed a large household in the village of Zagorje, within the jurisdiction of the commune of Plomin. Their crimes are listed in the report written by the judges of the commune of Plomin, which was then, in September 1769, handed over to the Podestà of Labin Santo Muazzo, whose jurisdiction also included Plomin castle. Two amongst them were sentenced to exile. After the conviction, the brothers returned to their native house in Zagorje, but the authorities did not intervene. Only after ten years of criminal activities by the brothers Filipaš did the communal judges request their prosecution because, due to their crimes and violence, the lives and property of the inhabitants were in danger.

[40] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 94-133.

During the investigation, a nobleman, Peter Kreševanić, a member of the Council of Nobles of Pula and a former resident of Plomin, was questioned. At the beginning his relationship with the Filipaš brothers had been good. Kreševanić lent them money and rented them his field cottage close to their family house. The brothers, however, soon took down the windowpanes and the iron construction of the balcony and afterwards converted the cottage into a bam for large and small cattle. They started to chop down Kreševanić's forest, take the cattle to pasture on his meadows, steal grapes, and run sheep through the crops. This was the source of the conflict between them and the nobleman that culminated with the brothers Filipaš invading Kreševanić's house when his servants were not present, frightening him and beating him up. He declared that he had believed they would probably have killed him if several residents of Plomin who had noticed the criminals enter his house had not run to his aid. After this unfortunate event the nobleman left his estate and house in Plomin and moved to Pula.[41] The Filipaš brothers took over his lands, harvested his crops, and disposed of his forests, vineyards, and meadows while Kreševanić was barely able to feed his own family in Pula.

The criminals usually fought with the village gastalds, village judges, and parish priests because they were the only ones able to stand up to their arrogant behaviour and violence. Such was the case in Plomin, where, in the 1660s the Filipaš brothers regularly insulted and threatened the parish priest John Bančić on a regular basis. Even their arrival at Sunday mass was a real spectacle.

In the sources, an additional issue is mentioned of which the Filipaš brothers were also accused: usurpation of Plomin communal land. They had taken possession of the communal land that was intended by old investitures for everyone to use. The witnesses explained how the Filipaši came to appropriate by force the land of Plomin community that was located below Zagorje, near the shore, on the hillside that descended towards the sea. This area, called Pod Puškovo, was pasturage that was rented to cattle owners from the area of Plomin. In 1767, communal judges rented the pastures to the Filipaš family, but they refused to sign the contract that would legally regulate the rental. Immediately they began to clear land and transform it into a vineyard and olive grove.

The Filipaš brothers were accused of robbing the boat of the *patron*,[42] Anthony Kučić from Cres, in July 1762. The robbery occurred

[41] Petar Kerševanić and the members of his immediate and extended family were often noted in the town registers (Slaven Bertoša, *Život i smrt u Puli*, passim).

[42] *Patron* was the title of the owner or the captain of a ship (Rezasco, *Dizzionario*, 776).

during the night, when his *bracera*[43] was harboured in the bay beneath Brseč village and the patron and the passengers were sleeping in a private house. Unknown thieves broke into a chest and took articles valued at approximately 80 sequins. A month after the theft some of the belongings from the robbed ship were exhibited in Kršan and suspicion fell on the Filipaš family. Their acquaintance with the *patron* was revealed even though their involvement in the theft could not be proven.

In cases of robbery in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Istria, the Filipaš brothers were a unique case. They were peasants as much as they were criminals; they were permanently tied to the land and to their criminal calling, as apt in farming as in handling weapons. The Filipaš brothers were undoubtedly a rare blend of criminal inclination and diligence and enterprise, and unlike most other criminals they were actually quite productive. They came to possess, albeit by fraud and theft, much land, but they invested great personal effort and energy in caring for and cultivating of these lands. For instance, they cleared the weeds and stones from the abandoned parcels on the communal land and planted a vineyard and olive grove and witnesses testified that they saw them carrying large stones and building a dry wall on the less accessible part of the usurped land.

After consulting the investigation records and correspondence with the heads of the Council of Ten in Venice, the new Podestà of Koper, Captain Niccolò Donado, issued a public proclamation summoning the Filipaš brothers before the justice in order to be arrested and taken to prison. The proclamation was read in Koper on the 7 August 1770 and copies of it were sent to Labin and Plomin, also in order to be announced publicly. However, in the archival series of the criminal processes of the Council of Ten of the State Archive in Venice there is no information on the further destiny of the violent Filipaš brothers. It can only be assumed that they probably did not surrender to the authorities and that they rather chose exile then imprisonment. Conditions in Istria were favourable to criminals since the chances of getting arrested where slim and the people had a deeply rooted fear which enabled the villains, even after an official sentence of banishment was pronounced, to reside undisturbed in their villages without facing any problems.[44]

A criminal venture of the peasants from Medulin

In Istrian villages there were individuals who constantly or occasionally fell into stealing and crime, but there were also those who

[43] A *bracera* is a small rowboat. Cf. Radovan Vidović, *Pomorski rječnik* (Maritime dictionary) (Split: Logos, 1984), 54-60.
[44] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 134-54.

entered a life of crime accidentally. The chances for theft were numerous and the persuasion of criminals was sometimes suggestive and tempting, so that many, despite their convictions and good family reputation, ventured on occasional risky and dangerous adventures. This generally happened when the cattle were driven up to summer pasture on the slopes of Učka and Ćićarija, when there were favourable conditions for stealing others' property with a sense of ease that many felt because they were away from their native environment and had the illusive hope that they would be able to avoid arrest and punishment.

Such is the example of the endeavour of the Medulin peasant and innkeeper Matt Lorencin, called Oštarić, who participated in a robbery in the house-inn on Pehlin on the main road from Rijeka to Kastav. Together with two other criminals, he robbed Anthony Juričić, the owner of the inn. Based on the depositions of the household members, the investtigation committee made a list of stolen items and estimated their value in Venetian pounds in order to demand retribution for the damage from the rector of Pula. On the list, there were several objects made of gold and silver, medallions and rings, pieces of garment (aprons, two linen aprons, a silk scarf, a pair of socks), a mirror, a linen cover, a towel, tablecloths, tin spoons, forks and knives, gunpowder, etc. After the thieves had left, the household members discovered that the robbers had entered the closed house through a small kitchen window. All three of the household were illiterate so they signed their joint statement with the sign of the cross.

In this venture, Lorencin was the one to be arrested and taken the next morning under guard to Rijeka, where he was imprisoned, chained, and his identity was determined. During the two depositions he gave, the first one before the captain of Kastav and the judges on October 1782 and the second during the trial in January and February of 1783, his sincere remorse for having committed the crime is clearly visible. After the arrest he promised the authorities that he would give the whole truth and thus help the investigation and the apprehension of other criminals in the hope that he would thus be able to save his life. He claimed that he tried to distract the robbers during the theft by deliberately putting out the candle he was holding to light the place so that the thieves would leave the house as soon as possible.

After a long hearing the "Independent criminal court of the town of Kastav" withdrew for consultation and, in April of 1783, passed a verdict that was read to Matt Lorencin before the court. Because of the burglary and robbery, he was sentenced to the death penalty, according to which he was to be taken to the scaffold and there hung. This was the court's usual sentence for such a crime. However, in this case a rare concession was made: the court council and president sought pardon from higher

authorities and after the answer the Kastav criminal court delivered another verdict in May: Matt Lorencin, called Oštarić, held in prison in Kastav for robbery, was given a new penalty instead of the death penalty that he was sentenced to: he was to receive 50 strong lashes publicly and afterwards be taken to the penitentiary in Ljubljana where he would spend the next 15 years chained and working at the most difficult jobs.

Lorencin was saved from the death penalty by his sincere and remorseful countenance and his cooperation with the authorities in discovering the participants in this crime. This, however, was also supported by the testimony of the robbed innkeeper Anthony Juričić, who stated to the court authorities in Kastav that among all of the three villains who entered his house, the most merciful was the one who was holding the light. After the sentence Lorencin was taken to the penitentiary in Ljubljana and his further destiny remains unknown.[45]

Preventing robbery. Inefficiency in preventive measures and punishments

Venetian rectors of early modern Istria were constantly faced with chronic and acute problems of maintaining the peace and suppressing criminal activities. The representatives of the Republic of Saint Mark were troubled for a long time with unsolvable issues: how to stand up to the rise of crime, how to restrict criminal groups from roaming the province, how to diminish the number of the outcasts who formed the core of organised crime? As the Venetian rectors changed, each started over with the issue of criminals.

In 1635, the Captain of Rašpor Giovanni Battista Basadonna considered it more useful to hold the convicts captive in some place in Istria rather than banish them over the border since in this way they would stay in the province even after the end of their sentence and no subjects would be lost. One of his successors, Zuanne Corner, dedicated part of his report in 1679 to the problem of bandits and the consequences that banishment caused Istrian society. He argued that the simple fact of providing basic living requirements for the Istrian peasants in the light of rigid and essentially harmful Venetian regulations and laws converted common folk into outcasts and subsequently criminals. He did not condemn trespassers to banishment, but during his service he sentenced 22 perpetrators to rowing on galleys so that they could be useful.

[45] *Ibidem*, 155-76.

Fig 3: A convicted galley slave (*schiavo sforzato della Galera Veneta*) was usually a person convicted for murder[46]

In 1704, Captain of Rašpor Francesco Pasqualigo entered information in his report to the government about numerous groups of armed criminals that wandered Istria robbing travellers and merchants on the roads and also peasants and citizens, and he was forced to admit that it was impossible to get rid of them. He proposed, however, that the armed troop under the authority of the rector in Buzet needed to be strengthened instead of having inefficient and unreliable land militia that was connected with the criminals by blood relations and friendship. Likewise, he stated that during their banishment criminals should serve in the army, especially in Dalmatia.

However, even when the authorities had the opportunity to strike the criminals harder, especially outcasts, they stayed torn between the alternatives of what to do. Harsh punishments might provoke the loss of too many subjects and at the same time they needed to protect trade and remove the causes of a general lack of security and the domination of criminals in the rural areas of certain parts of Istria. This problem dominated the whole eighteenth century and all solutions seemed to be inadequate. Most rectors suggested repressive measures against the villains. For example, the Podestà of Koper Marco Michiel Salamon be-

[46] *Ibidem*, 136.

lieved in 1698 that the government should capture all of the most ruthless criminals and members of their groups and sentence them to rowing on the galleys. He advocated the establishment of the institution of field guard (*barigella*), which was a paid official in certain communities who would deal with the criminal world. Two well-known bandits who consented to do this service in exchange for pardons were Jacob Prekalj and Francis Arnan, villains from the area of Poreč.

However, after the post of field guard was established it was not successful. Archival data mention the paid army as being the most reliable in campaigns against villains. However, they usually failed due to accomplices who stalked the soldiers, disclosed their plans, monitored their movements and regularly supplied the criminals with this information. For instance, in a campaign in Dračevac in 1757, the army was supposed to surround the village, especially the houses of criminals, arrest them, and ensure their delivery to the galley waiting in Lim Bay and afterwards to the prison in Koper, but it did not quite succeed because one of the criminals fled. In the 1770s such attempts in the area of Plomin and Krnica ended similarly.

The legal procedure of an investigation prior to an arrest was slow and allowed the criminals to escape, work on their defence or hide their tracks. In short, repressive measures by the Venetian government were ineffective and rarely resulted in a successful capture of the criminals.[47]

The Captain and Podestà of Koper Giorgio Bembo, in his report in 1738, made a correct observation that delinquency was strongly rooted in Istrian society although he simplified some complex causes of the Istrian early modern crisis. He believed that the province was not unproductive because of the unfortunate circumstances in which it found itself, but because the inhabitants were neglected and that is why they were all poor in general. He presented different customs of the people who lived in the territory and characterised the population as lazy, emphasising that they led an inappropriate and sinful life and did not like to work diligently. Bembo did not explain the core social causes for the emergence of robbery, which could not be related to the "lazy population which finds it difficult to abide labour" since the outcast immigrants in Istria received barren and rocky land which they were supposed to ameliorate and use to provide goods for their own subsistence. Small and irregular aid from Venice often left them hungry and unfit for labour and many had to seek help from the local authorities.

The usual punishment for robbery was the verdict of banishment sentenced in absence. After they committed a crime most criminals fled over the border outside the reach of the Venetian government and such a

[47] *Ibidem*, 179-97.

verdict was the only possible solution. Not only capital crime offenders, murderers and ruffians were charged, but even those who committed lesser criminal offences that could be settled by paying a fine. In exile they continued with crime since this was the only way to survive, but that only made crime more widespread and stronger.

If the Venetian government was lucky and managed to catch the criminals, the punishment was decided according to the nature of the crime. By some calculations Venetian Istria had a high proportion of the most major crimes in all rural Europe. The Podestà and Captain of Koper Pietro Antonio Magno remarked in 1740 that one should differentiate between those who committed a crime "due to their perverse and criminal soul" and those whose trespass was the "consequence of human imperfection." Although both were in the category of fugitives or the banished, one fled because of the severities of his crime, while the others fled for fear of facing justice.

The statutes of the Istrian communes specify harsh penalties for murder. For instance, the statutes of Bale state that anyone who murders someone and gets caught should be decapitated so that his head is completely removed from his shoulders, and if the murderer is a woman then she should be burnt to death. If the perpetrator is not caught, he should be banished forever. The fulfilment of the punishment was usually preceded by a "ritual of purification," that is, the chopping off of the "violent hand" (usually the right hand) with which the crime was committed, which was meant to symbolically "undo" the crime. In the archives, however, there was no record of the exact number of such executions, decapitations, dismemberment or hanging of criminals and outcasts on the so-called "Hanging Hill" (*Monte delle Forche*) not far from Bale nor on any other scaffold in Istria.[48]

It is clear, however, that such repressive measures did not contribute to the decrease of crime and that the most distinguished representatives of the Venetian government usually tried to avoid them. The cruellest criminals could not avoid the death penalty by hanging, though, which in most places served as a warning to other criminals and citizens in general. Many were taken to Venice, where the executions were carried out in the so-called Camerotto dello Giardin Scuro located inside the prison building on Ponte della Paglia near the Riva of Hrvatov (Riva degli Schiavoni). The decisions on executions were handed down by the Council of Ten. The lives of many people from Dalmatia and Croatia ended in this room. For example, a note is preserved on the punishment of Andrew Neretić by hanging, convicted and executed in 1761. He was a captain from Veli Lošinj who, together with guardian of ammunition in

[48] *Ibidem*, 198-213.

the Venetian fortress of Corfu, secretly sold a certain quantity of ammunition and weapons to an Ottoman.[49]

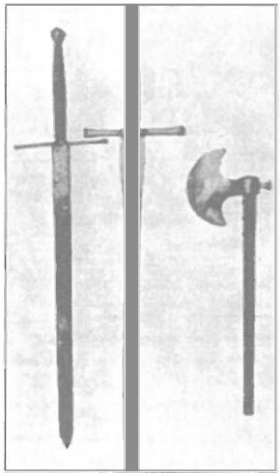

Fig. 4: Large sabres and the axe with which the executioners did their work: examples from the sixteenth century[50]

In contrast, in the area of Pula in the seventeenth century executions were mostly carried out by shooting with fire arms, usually with a musket.[51]

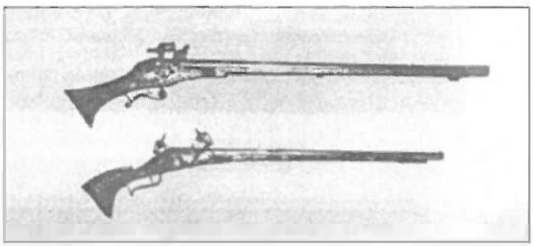

Fig. 5: Musket and arquebus with which executions were carried out[52]

Another type of punishment was placing the perpetrator in stocks. The sources have only a few entries about this since it was usually ordered by the representatives of the so-called "judicial bank" (meaning

[49] *Ibidem*, 171.
[50] *Ibidem*, 212.
[51] Slaven Bertoša, *Život i smrt u Puli*, 215.
[52] Miroslav Bertoša, *Jedna zemlja, jedan rat: Istra 1615.-1618.* (One country, one war: Istria from 1615 to 1618) (Pula: Istarska naklada, 1986), 57.

ten village judges), that is, the owners of private estates. Only small offenders such as petty thieves and people who swore in public were sent to the stocks.[53]

Furthermore, in many parts of old Europe, as in Istria, captured robbers and criminals of all types were tied to the so-called "pillars of shame" (*berline*) where they were subjected to public mocking and even attacks by wild dogs. Sometimes, for example, in Sutlovreč, cattle which were caught doing damage or on the meadows of another village community were also tied to the *berline* until the owners settled the fine.[54]

In the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries there was an increase in sentencing the convicted to galleys, mostly because the number of men who would "volunteer" as galley rowers for a salary was diminishing. Instead of being sentenced to prison, hanged, shot or decapitated, both minor criminals and serious offenders were more often sentenced to the galleys, that is, they were chained to the bench and oar, usually for fifteen, twenty or more years.[55]

The Venetian authorities also issued verdicts of long-term imprisonment in dungeons. However, the great difference was that the establishments in Venice had dungeons which were famous since no one could escape from them (for instance, the one called *Prigioni Nuove*), while the prisons in Istria were usually inadequate for keeping accused delinquents who waited for the end of the investigation process or for those who were awaiting execution. Except for the dungeon in Koper, other Istrian jails are described in the sources as shabby places, sometimes even as wooden huts without strong doors, windows or reliable guards. Although the accused and convicts were regularly chained, the Istrian rectors often lamented their escape and evasion of the hand of justice.[56]

Conclusion

The history of the early modern age in Istria is filled with shocking revelations of deeply rooted hunger, poverty, depopulation, general insecurity, danger, and robbery. The number of thieves, extortionists, lawbreakers and murderers sometimes reached serious numbers. Robbery was a side-effect accompanying the rapid deterioration of Istria from the beginning of the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, archival data about the growth of crime from that time are scarce, sporadic and inconsistent. There is mentioning of different criminal

[53] Miroslav Bertoša, *Zlikovci i prognanici*, 81.
[54] *Ibidem*, 209.
[55] *Ibidem*, 51.
[56] *Ibidem*, 172.

groups, damage being done, numerous complaints by subjects and Venetian rectors, but there are no investigation files, court records or descriptions of crimes for constructing a more detailed picture of robbery in Venetian Istria in the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

Even the general archival data, however, show that crime in Istria became widespread and omnipresent. The number of convicted criminals in Istrian settlements does not portray the precise spread of the banditry there. Although the local criminals were banished by the city podestà, those who committed capital crimes were under the court jurisdiction of the podestà and captain of Koper or the captain of Rašpor in Buzet. That is why these two places had so many convicts who originated from all over Istria, not only from Koper and Buzet.

The entire criminal world gathered around bandits in groups of five to ten and more people, including those who joined the criminals only occasionally for thieving or to take revenge on someone. In this category one must also include the accomplices who protected criminals and were also criminals themselves. Witnesses' accounts directed to the Venetian rectors demonstrate that the solution for the problem of crime was not found and that it did not move from a standstill for almost a century and a half.

Although Istria up to the fall of the Venetian Republic was a land where crime prospered, by the end of the 1740s the number of outcasts was starting to decline. The population was still poor and there were still thefts by individuals and groups, but there were fewer cases than in the two previous centuries, when the fight to sustain bare life instigated crime. Village communities began to organise in their fight against criminals and introduced patrols and monitoring the approach of known criminal groups and tried to apprehend them with the help of the army and the peasants, even though the fear of retribution often deterred such attempts. However, it must be stressed that in Istria the measures for the maintenance of public security were modest, so was their success in the fight against crime too. Therefore, crime managed to survive the transition from an agrarian to industrial society and was transferred to the nineteenth century and modern age. Criminals and outcasts lived for centuries in Istrian society and represented a sinister and deadly symptom of the society's disorder and also the great crisis that the Venetian Republic was experiencing.

(Translated by Kosana Jovanović)

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AT THE EDGE OF THE LAW

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Socially Unacceptable and Illegal Behaviour in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period

Edited by

Suzana Miljan

and

Gerhard Jaritz

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Preface

This publication contains selected papers from a conference held in Zagreb (Centre for Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb) in 2009, dealing with the medieval and early modern period, and translated into English for this purpose.* The main goal was to gather papers on a topic that has not been researched enough amongst Croatian historians, that is, the socially unacceptable and illegal behaviour of individuals who were "walking at the edge of the law." The general idea was also to present various research questions at the intersection of social and legal history, from the problem of feuding in medieval society to the various types of delinquency by pilgrims. The emphasis was put on the Croatian territory in the Middle Ages (from Slavonia to Istria and Dalmatia) and set in a broader (East) Central European context. The articles follow a chronological sequence, starting from the High Middle Ages, with a particular focus on the late medieval and early modern period.

The first paper is by Damir Karbić, who deals with the use of violence as a means of obtaining justice and re-establishing order, which was one of the peculiarities of the medieval legal system when compared with Roman law. After presenting different cases of feuds in Croatian sources, he discusses, how medieval communal legislation treated feuds as a separate legal institute, using the example of the city statutes of Split.

Marija Karbić concentrates on the ways in which women from the medieval urban settlements of the Sava and Drava *interamnium* came into conflict with the law by various criminal actions, from insults or brawls to abortion and murder. She connects those problems with the economic situation of these women, basing the analysis mainly on theft and prostitution cases. The women were sometimes punished severely, but sometimes pardoned or punished minimally.

The problem of gambling along the eastern Adriatic coast is the research subject of Sabine Florence Fabijanec. She analyses the urban statutory regulations stretching from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. She deals with the adoption of legal provisions against gambling and shows the diversity of approach to gambling from city to city.

Gerhard Jaritz analyses the interdependence between late medieval material culture, human behaviour, religious discourse, and legal culture using the example of actions connected with *superbia* that played a role in public

* The Croation version of the conference proceedings is published as Suzana Miljan (ed.), *Na rubu zakona: društveno i pravno neprihvatljiva ponašanja kroz povijest*, Biblioteka *Dies historiae*, vol. 3 (Zagreb: Hrvatski studiji, 2009).

urban arguments. The secular authorities emphasized moral, national, and religious components, highlighting the necessity of averting God's wrath.

The perception of the behaviour of pilgrims is the topic of Zoran Ladić's contribution. He shows, in contrast to the idealized vision of pilgrimages and pilgrims, that pilgrimages made by average medieval or early modern believers were also considered superstition and that the pilgrims often engaged in fights, robberies, prostitution, and other forms of delinquent behaviour.

Paul Freedman offers an article on late medieval and early modern public acts of torture and execution, which were carefully choreographed events whose solemnity and meticulous preparation made the infliction of mutilation and death horrifyingly impressive. He also concentrates on the various *topoi* of peasant rebellion as described by literate contemporaries, such as rape, murder, cannibalism, the roasting of victims, and so on.

Lovorka Čoralić deals with Croats accused in the records of the Venetian Inquisition. Four types of accusation can be recognized: conversion to Islam, Protestantism, the use of magic, and conduct considered improper for clergymen (priests and other members of religious orders).

The last article is by Slaven Bertoša, dealing with poor social conditions in Istria in the early modern period that led to hunger, poverty, depopulation, and general insecurity, which in turn provoked dangerous behaviour, robbery, and murder. Capital crimes were under the jurisdiction of the *Potestà* and Captain of Koper or, respectively, the Captain of Rašpor with his seat in Buzet. The village communities were also starting to organize themselves by introducing patrols, although in a modest way.

The collection of articles tries to popularise the topics for one plain purpose, that is, to erase the border between history and legal studies, since until now one cannot actually speak of "interdisciplinarity," but only of looking at many research problems from various reference points. Hopefully, this volume will be useful not only for historians dealing with this poorly researched topic of (Croatian) historiography, but also for a wider public generally interested in the functioning of the legal and social system in the past.

Finally, my special gratitude goes to Judith Rasson for copy editing the volume and to Gerhard Jaritz for offering the opportunity to publish it as a special issue of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*, thus promoting this research on an international level.

Suzana Miljan