

**Protecting a Dalmatian Town:  
Security Measures in Venetian Split (1480-1550)**

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## Protecting a Dalmatian Town: Security Measures in Venetian Split (1480-1550)\*

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Following Niall Ferguson's assertion that "a catastrophe lays bare the societies and states that it strikes", this article studies the society of the Dalmatian town of Split through the lens of the various security threats it was exposed to around the year 1500, as well as the precautionary measures taken in their anticipation. Based on broad archival evidence, four areas are studied: the military threat posed chiefly by the Ottomans, emigration and depopulation, epidemics, and civil discontent. The study of these measures, ranging from appeasing Ottoman officials to burning infected people's property, offers new insights into the structures of a border society between Venetian rule and Ottoman menace in the Renaissance period as well as the process of power centralization in the hands of the Venetians.

Seguendo l'affermazione di Niall Ferguson secondo cui "una catastrofe mette a nudo le società e gli stati che colpisce", questo articolo studia la società della città dalmata di Spalato attraverso la lente delle varie minacce alla sicurezza a cui era esposta intorno all'anno 1500, nonché delle misure di precauzione adottate in previsione di esse. Sulla base di un'ampia documentazione archivistica, vengono studiate quattro tematiche: la minaccia militare suscitata principalmente dagli Ottomani, l'emigrazione e lo spopolamento, le epidemie e il malcontento civile. Lo studio delle conseguenti problematiche, che vanno dall'acquiescenza dei funzionari ottomani all'incendio delle proprietà degli infetti, offre nuovi spunti di riflessione sulle strutture di una società di confine tra il dominio veneziano e la minaccia ottomana nel periodo rinascimentale, nonché sul processo di centralizzazione del potere nelle mani dei Veneziani.

Rinascimento, secoli XV-XVI, Dalmazia, Venezia, Spalato, Ottomani, migrazione, peste, conflitti sociali, sicurezza, verticismo.

Renaissance, 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Dalmatia, Venice, Split, Ottomans, migration, epidemics, social conflicts, security, concentration of power.

### Abbreviations

ASVe = Archivio di Stato di Venezia

DAZD-16 = Državni Arhiv u Zadru, Zadar, HR-DAZD-16: Općina/Komuna Split

HHStA = Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv

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## 1. Introduction

Threats, crises, and catastrophes of varying types and scopes challenged the survival of towns throughout history. In his recent book on the “Politics of Catastrophe”, written in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Niall Ferguson rightly points out that the severity of an event, be it natural or man-made, and the watershed at which it becomes a disaster, a catastrophe or even a long-lasting crisis, depend to a large extent on the preconditions of the society hit by that certain event. Both external factors, such as the geographic location or the construction of houses, and internal factors, such as the stability of a society’s administration and the capacities of its leadership, are decisive. Thus, as Ferguson writes, “a catastrophe lays bare the societies and states that it strikes”.<sup>1</sup> In my view, not just the results of and responses to the catastrophe do that but also the measures of precaution taken in anticipation of such critical events tell us a lot about the structures and working of a given society.<sup>2</sup>

Security is a well-studied topic in political,<sup>3</sup> social,<sup>4</sup> and historical science.<sup>5</sup> The historiographical debate on security and protection in the medieval and early modern period has highlighted the importance of studying security as a multi-faceted concept that encompasses various dimensions: in the first place, military security in view of external and internal threats such as wars and rebellions is a classic historiographical theme. Further subtopics are religious, spiritual or moral security, which is closely related to the protection of – or from – (religious) minorities, a topic that became ever more important during the age of confessionalization when a religious and confessional plurality was increasingly considered to be a challenge for security policy.<sup>6</sup> Other aspects concern crime and policing, social security and welfare, a secure economy and employment protection, food security, legal security and the stability of the law, the representation and symbolism of security in architecture and art, and, not least, security in the face of natural threats posed by weather, climate, disease, or fire. Analysing security in all its facets is thus a deeply interdisciplinary task.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, *Doom*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> On different aspects of security in the early modern period, see the comprehensive volume Kampmann and Niggemann, *Sicherheit in der Frühen Neuzeit*.

<sup>3</sup> Especially the *Copenhagen School* of political science has studied ‘security’ as the central topic of their analysis: Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde, *Security*; Buzan and Hansen, *Evolution of International Security Studies*. On the “security dilemma” in international relations, see Herz, “Idealist Internationalism.”

<sup>4</sup> Kaufmann, *Sicherheit*; Lipschutz, *On Security*; Lippert, *Sicherheit*; Foucault, *Security, territory, population*.

<sup>5</sup> Zwierlein, Graf and Ressel, *Production of Human Security*; Reinle, “Überlegungen;” Carrington and Mitterhauser, *Polizeiwesen*.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, the excellent study Rexroth, *Milieu der Nacht* on marginal groups in late medieval London and their instrumentalization to affirm the authorities’ rule.

<sup>7</sup> As expounded by Daase, “Historisierung der Sicherheit;” Daase, “Sicherheitskultur.”

When engaging with this theme, it is important to take into account the diverse and historically changing meanings and concepts of security.<sup>8</sup> Fundamental in this respect is the consideration of security as a concept relevant on both the collective and the individual level. This is often conceptualized by the difference between “State Security” and “Human Security”.<sup>9</sup> While the former primarily addresses the security of states and their borders, the latter is concerned with the security of the individual human being in the face of various threats ranging from poverty and violence to natural catastrophes, taking into account the ubiquity of existential insecurities and risks in the premodern period.<sup>10</sup> A crucial question here is when the personal security needs and their satisfaction of one person affect and possibly endanger the security of others. At this point, the issue of security concerns also the social collective and the equal, or unequal, distribution of security. Given that “[a] government must prioritize between more or less needy people, as well as between more or less pressing security issues [...] the priority given to one security issue will be at the expense of another; relative security of one social group might imply relative insecurity for another”.<sup>11</sup>

This leads back to the collective level of security and the role of the state in protecting both the collective and the individual. Guaranteeing security was the prerequisite for the legitimacy of the state’s sovereign rights and monopoly on violence: as long as the state protected its subjects from different security threats, they would accept his rule.<sup>12</sup> This was also the case with Venice and its Italian and overseas dominions. Concerning this article’s subject, the town of Split (It. Spalato) located in central Dalmatia, the Venetian Senate justified the destruction of a monastery and its replacement with a castle with the words that “after the acquisition of our town of Split, our dominion wanted to provide for the security of this town, which was then found without a castle”.<sup>13</sup> The second part of this sentence, however, indicates what kind of *securitas* the Senate meant, namely military security, which is also suggested by numerous other passages in Venetian documents.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Conze, “Art. Sicherheit, Schutz” analyses the changing meanings of the term security (*Sicherheit*) in a historical perspective; Daase, “Historisierung der Sicherheit,” 396.

<sup>9</sup> Kampmann and Niggemann, “Sicherheit in der Frühen Neuzeit,” 22. On Human Security in a historical perspective, see Zwierlein, Graf and Ressel, *Production of Human Security*.

<sup>10</sup> Kampmann and Niggemann, “Sicherheit in der Frühen Neuzeit,” 22. The ubiquity of insecurity becomes apparent already in Febvre’s famous study of the mental life of the sixteenth century: Febvre, *Problème de l’incroyance*. Compare also Febvre, “Pour l’histoire d’un sentiment.”

<sup>11</sup> Ruby, “Security makes a difference,” 11.

<sup>12</sup> Schorn-Schütte, “Sicherheit,” 43; Stauber, “Politische Sicherheitssysteme,” 90; Kleinschmidt, *Legitimität, Frieden, Völkerrecht*, 19-104.

<sup>13</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASVe), Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 14, fo 27r: “Post acquisitionem civitatis nostre Spaleti volens nostrum dominium providere securitati civitatis illius que sine arce tunc reperiebatur [...]” (1494). All translations are the author’s.

<sup>14</sup> For instance: ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Secreti, Registri, 44, fo. 10r: “It is decided that for the security of Dalmatia *stratioti* shall be sent there as the *Collegio* sees it fit” (“Captum quod pro securitate Dalmatie mittantur illi strathote qui collegio videbuntur”).

This leads us to the relationship between centre and peripheries within the Venetian overseas dominions. A fundamental principle of the Venetian policy of ‘colonial’ rule throughout the republic’s maritime empire was the respect for local autonomy and legal traditions and the inclusion of local elites in the administration.<sup>15</sup> This led many scholars to adopt the concept of a ‘commonwealth’ to the Venetian dominions, although some, like Benjamin Arbel, argue that the terms ‘colony’ and ‘colonial empire’ can still be useful to understand what the Venetians themselves frequently called their *Stato da Mar*.<sup>16</sup> Most places under Venetian rule were administrated by a Venetian patrician who would serve as the republic’s local representative and as the highest local judge for two years before being replaced by a new so-called rector (*rettore*). The Venetians always kept an eye on their rectors to make sure that they respected the local laws and customs of the places they were governing. Ensuring legal security by retaining the respective legal traditions and, at the same time, by offering the subjects the recourse to the elaborated Venetian judicial system and institutions was the key Venetian strategy of securing consensus and thus stabilizing rule. Vis-à-vis its subjects, Venice thus positioned itself as the just arbiter who would mediate both in internal conflicts and in disputes with the current rector, whose wrongdoings were considered as the mistakes of an individual magistrate who did not represent the *Signoria*’s wishes.<sup>17</sup>

Another crucial aspect of the relationship between centre and localities in the Venetian case is the promise of military, but also of subsistence and religious security in the face of the increasing Ottoman threat on the Balkans. Being part of the larger Venetian state should secure military assistance and the provisioning of soldiers and money for fortification work. This should prevent a potential Ottoman conquest which would not only entail huge material losses and danger to life but also the ‘religious danger’ of being subjected to a non-Catholic, Muslim rule.<sup>18</sup> While Venice succeeded in securing its rule over Split and most other Dalmatian possessions between their (re-)acquisition in 1409/1420 and the fall of the republic in 1797, other places in Montenegro, Albania, and Greece were lost to the Ottomans in the course of several wars.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The literature on the structures of Venetian rule in the so-called *Stato da Mar* is vast. The best and most comprehensive overview including both the Dalmatian and the Greek possessions is Arbel, “Venice’s Maritime Empire.” See also the collected essays in Christ and Morche, *Cultures of Empire*.

<sup>16</sup> On the Venetian ‘commonwealth’, see Ortalli, Schmitt and Orlando, *Il “Commonwealth” veneziano*, and therein Arbel, “Una chiave di lettura.”

<sup>17</sup> This topic has been discussed extensively by Schmitt, “Venezianische Horizonte;” Schmitt, “Hommes,” 40; Schmitt, “Altre Venezie”. Focusing on the pluralism of law and jurisdiction: Orlando, “Politica del diritto.”

<sup>18</sup> This concern was voiced frequently, for instance also by the people of Klis when they offered to renounce the Hungarian rule and subject themselves to Venice rather than “going in the hands of the infidels” (Ljubić, *Commissiones et relationes*, vol. 1, 162: “animo suo esser di venir soto l’umbra di quella [Venezia], avanti vadino a le mano de infideli”).

<sup>19</sup> Tables listing the Venetian overseas-territories and the years of Venetian rule in the late medieval and early modern period can be found in Arbel, “Venice’s Maritime Empire,” 132-6, and Schmitt, “Venezianische Herrschaft,” 401-4.

Within the Venetian ‘commonwealth’, a system of burden sharing existed whereby wealthier places, especially on the Italian mainland, provided the poorer overseas territories with money, grain, salt, and other necessary goods. Venice’s Mediterranean subjects could moreover profit from the integration into the Venetian market and trading networks. Although Venice tried to implement monopolies and direct all trading routes straight to Venice, intensive trade relations persisted within different places of the *Stato da Mar* as well as with non-Venetian places in Apulia, the Marches, the Habsburg and also the Ottoman Empire.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, Venice relied on its *Stato da Mar* to secure these trading networks and ensure safe voyages to the Levant.<sup>21</sup> Within the *Stato da Mar*, Split’s role as a stopover port for the Venetian galley convoys, called *mude*, was rather marginal, since the usual route would call at Korčula (It. Curzola), Hvar (It. Lesina) and Zadar (It. Zara).<sup>22</sup> This changed with the establishment of the freeport, the *Scala di Spalato*, in the late sixteenth century, using Split as a gateway to Balkan trade routes.<sup>23</sup> But already before that Split sustained tight relations to its Balkan hinterland and functioned as a regional centre for the administration, jurisdiction, and economy of the surrounding territories of Poljica (It. Poglizza), Omiš (It. Almissa), and Klis (It. Clissa).<sup>24</sup> As the following pages will show, these places played a crucial role for the protection and security of Split and other places in Venetian Dalmatia.

Another concept that is increasingly cited in addressing issues of security and state-building is that of resilience. Resilience can be understood as “as the capacity of a coherent socio-political system [...] to adapt its institutions, social structures, and cultural norms in response to destabilizing threats (political, economic, and ecological).”<sup>25</sup> Resilience thus addresses the different “survival strategies” that were put in place in the face of various threats and challenges. Within the conceptual framework of studying security, or resilience, in a broad sense, the present paper focuses on the collective level, that is, how the authorities of Venice and Split sought to protect and ensure the security of the town of Split and its society in the face of different threats.

Why Split? Within the Venetian Empire, the town occupied a rather peripheral position compared to Zadar, the administrative capital of Dalmatia. Its hinterland, serving not only for agricultural use but also as a military buffer zone, was ten times smaller than Zadar’s, which aggravated the security sit-

<sup>20</sup> On the importance of converted Jews for the supply of Split with grain from Apulia, see Sadovski, “Apulian New Christians.”

<sup>21</sup> The literature on the Venetian trade policy is extensive: Raukar, “Jadranski gospodarski sustavi;” Raukar, “Venecija;” Fabijanec, *Développement commercial*; Orlando, “Spalato, l’Adriatico e i Balcani;” Schmitt, “Venezianische Horizonte,” 98, 102; Schmitt, “Venezianische Südosteuropa,” 83-90; Schmitt, “Contrabannum.” A critical discussion of the existing literature on this topic in light of new sources can be found in Sadovski, *Split*.

<sup>22</sup> Orlando, “Spalato, l’Adriatico e i Balcani,” 222-3.

<sup>23</sup> Paci, *La Scala di Spalato*, 45-70, 93-4; Arbel, “Venice’s Maritime Empire,” 227.

<sup>24</sup> Sadovski, “La città.”

<sup>25</sup> Dumont, “Burgundian-Habsburg monarchic culture,” 30-1 with further literature on the concept.

uation considerably.<sup>26</sup> The approximately five thousand inhabitants living in and around the preserved structure of Diocletian's palace found themselves on the border between the contending Venetian, Hungarian/Habsburg and Ottoman realms at a time of great social and political upheaval. The town is thus exemplary for late medieval and early modern border societies and the challenges they were faced with when navigating political, social, and religious diversity – and antagonism – on a daily basis. Split moreover makes a good case study because of its rich and well-preserved archives that have not been used much by Croatian and international scholars and allow for a micro-historic analysis of the people's daily lives in such challenging times. This will show that the concern for external military threats was an important, but by far not the only dimension of security that the Venetians paid attention to when governing their Dalmatian possessions. The subject of the present article are thus different precautionary measures taken in the Venetian-ruled town Split in the face of four potential, and also very real, threats and crises in the Renaissance period: The first section studies violence and the military threats posed by the Ottomans, the second concerns migration, which was often the result of said violence and could cause the depopulation of swaths of land, the third deals with disease and epidemics, and the final section looks at civil discontent and uprisings, which could also be violent. We will see how different security exigencies called for Venetian interventions on various levels, which led to a slow and steady, yet not centrally orchestrated consolidation and centralization of power in the Venetian capital. In addition to praying that “God may avert”<sup>27</sup> a certain danger, the society and government of Split could enhance their town's resilience to different threats in various ways, as will be shown in the following paragraphs.

## 2. *Military threats*

The biggest military threat for Split and the other Dalmatian towns was certainly the Ottoman advance on the Balkans. The people in the surrounding territory of Split, including Poljica, Omiš, and Klis, were frequently attacked by ‘Turks’ and ‘martolossi’, that is, by Ottoman subjects who were not necessarily ethnic Turks as well as by Christian mercenaries in Ottoman service.<sup>28</sup> These attacks took place not only during the repeated wars between the Venetians and the Ottomans (1463-9, 1499-503, 1537-40, 1570-3, 1645-69, 1684-99, 1714-8) but also in official times of peace.

The obvious preventive measure was the stationing of military garrisons or hiring of mercenary light cavalry, the so-called *stratioti*. This was also the

<sup>26</sup> Raukar, “Društvene strukture,” 106-7; Raukar, “Venecija,” 213.

<sup>27</sup> DAZD-16, 34/46.3/178v: “quod Deus avertat”.

<sup>28</sup> Rossi and Griswold, “Martolos.”

topic that the Venetians were concerned with most when dealing with Dalmatian matters, as the Senate's frequent deliberations on these issues clearly show.<sup>29</sup> Ideally, the *stratioti* were "Greek or Albanian men with good Turkish or Levantine horses and not peasant *stratioti*".<sup>30</sup> The latter part of this phrase points to a constant problem the authorities were confronted with, namely the small number and bad training of many of the available soldiers and mercenaries as well as the lack of adequate equipment.<sup>31</sup> In 1480, the Senate ordered the stationing of 160 foot soldiers in Split so that "our town of Split would not continue to be bereft and empty of foot soldiers as it has been until now with harm and danger to this town of ours".<sup>32</sup>

Another challenge for the sufficient military protection was a decree from 1458 prohibiting the hire of mercenaries of Croatian, Hungarian or German origin. In addition, the soldiers were not allowed to have liaisons with local Dalmatian women.<sup>33</sup> This provision should of course prevent the soldiers from having or developing personal ties that might compromise their morale but at the same time it jeopardized the sufficient manning of the towns and their surroundings. Given the constantly low force level, the military commanders frequently ignored these instructions because they had no choice but to hire local soldiers. In an effort to uphold the provision, Doge Marco Barbarigo ordered the Venetian governor of Split to discharge all Slavic mercenaries in 1485, at the same time conceding, however, that it would not be necessary to dismiss also those with local wives or concubines.<sup>34</sup> Obviously, the Doge was well aware that such a move would have seriously endangered the town's defences. Yet he stood by the Venetian policy aimed at depersonalizing the armed forces in an effort to submit them to a more centralized control and make them more efficient. This can be considered as one of the many steps the Venetians took in the early modern period to centralize power and increasingly overrule local laws and elites. Such a process of consolidation of power (in German *Herrschaftsverdichtung*) can be witnessed throughout early modern Europe, and in both the Venetian and the Habsburg case this

<sup>29</sup> For example: ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 12, fo. 80r: "Last year it was deliberated by this council that, in order to prevent the incursions that were made by morlachs on our Dalmatian territories, *stratioti* shall be sent from the East to Zadar, Šibenik, Trogir, and Split [...]" ("Deliberatum fuit superiori anno per hoc consilium ut obviaretur incursionibus que fiebant per murlachos super territoria nostra dalmatina ut mitterentur ex oriente strathote Jadram, Sibinicum, Tragurium et Spaletum [...]").

<sup>30</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 15, fol. 45r-v: "[...] homeni greci over albanexi cum boni cavalli turchi et levantini et non *stratioti* paesani [...]"

<sup>31</sup> Marino Sanuto underlines this in his diaries: Fulin, Barozzi, Berchet, Stefani and Visentini, *I diarii di Marino Sanuto* (hereafter Sanuto, *Diarii*), vol. 2, col. 403; vol. 3, cols. 1504, 1513, 1604-5; vol. 29, cols. 454-5, col. 549: "over there, there are neither soldiers nor money" ("de li non è soldati ni danari").

<sup>32</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 11, fo. 96r: "civitas nostra Spaleti non stet amplius nuda et vacua peditibus sicut hactenus stetit cum incomodo et periculo illius nostre civitatis".

<sup>33</sup> Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 212.

<sup>34</sup> DAZD-16: 19/36.5/18v.



process was accelerated by the Ottoman threat.<sup>35</sup> One feels reminded of the Hobbesian Leviathan demanding that freedom step back to ensure security. However, this was not the product of targeted measures but rather the result of a gradual, often hardly perceptible process of increasing legal standardization and the establishment of more centralized command structures and offices which were initially installed just for one specific purpose but then retained for future exigencies.<sup>36</sup> This did not, however, entail a complete repression or exclusion of local elites or legal traditions such as the statutes, which were also symbolically highly important for the individual communes. Changes followed practical exigencies, which is why resistance against them can hardly be noticed.<sup>37</sup>

Returning to Split's military defence, the sources clearly show that even including the untrained "peasant *stratioti*" as well as foreign soldiers with local ties, the numbers of the defenders were not sufficient to guard the people well. In the case of Split, the authorities resorted to hiring additional mercenaries from the surrounding territories, especially from the semi-autonomous republic of Poljica, which belonged to the Venetian dominions between the years 1444 and 1514, when it was taken by the Ottomans before returning to Venice in 1648. These nobles bearing the title *comes* (count, in Slavic *knez*) and their battle-tested men were even obliged to provide military services to Venice, but they were also coveted by the local forces of the Hungarian king. A letter written by the Venetian governor of Split in May 1482 explicitly addressed this issue: Driven by greed for money and in contempt of their fidelity pledged to Venice, some of these Poljican *comites* had audaciously joined and fought for the Croatian ban, a Hungarian vassal. Given the penitence they now expressed about this, the governor allowed them to return to Venetian service, making them swear to obey only Venice and to keep away from any illicit stipends in the future.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt, "Venezianische Horizonte," 101-2, referring to Winkelbauer, *Ständefreiheit und Fürstenmacht* for the Habsburg case.

<sup>36</sup> The most relevant office for Dalmatia was the *Proveditore generale di Dalmazia e Albania* based in Zadar, see Novak, "Kako i kada."

<sup>37</sup> Schmitt, "Venezianische Horizonte," 101.

<sup>38</sup> DAZD-16: 18/35/479v: "Satisfied by the pleas of many noblemen and 'patrimonials' [commoners disposing of patrimonial inheritance] who, against our mandate, have accepted a stipend from the lord Ban of Croatia in the name of the most serene King of Hungary, contrary to what must be done according to the law since they would rather let themselves be corrupted by money than preserve the immaculate fidelity, we have accepted into our mercy all those <and anyone of them> who, led by penitence, have confided in us, so that they will keep away from any illicit stipends in the future and that they will not desist from obeying our and our successors' mandates in the name of our illustrious ducal dominion of Venice." ("Inclinati precibus multorum de polliza nobilium et patrimonialium qui spreto mandato nostro audacter acceperunt stipendium a domino Bano Croatie nomine serenissimi Regni Ungarie contra id quod de jure facere debebatur quia potius passi sunt se peccunia corumpi quam fidem immaculatam servare, eos omnes <et quemlibet eorum> qui penitentia ducti se nobis recommendarunt ad gratiam acceptavimus, ita tunc quod in futurum ab huiusmodi stipendiis illicitis abstineant et nostris mandatis et successorum nostrorum nomine Illustrissimi ducalis domini nostri Venetiarum etc obedire non desistant").

The support of the Poljican men was crucial for fending off invaders, but the Spalatin hinterland still remained a dangerous territory, as the frequent reports of attacks, plundering, and abductions of people and animals demonstrate. Yet the lines of conflict did not neatly correspond to Venetian subjects on the one and Ottoman subjects on the other side, as the following instance illustrates. After some morlachs, nomadic Christian shepherds who were Ottoman subjects, had come to Split to sell their cheese in 1484, they dreaded returning to their homes on the other side of the border because of the ongoing war between the Ottomans and the Hungarians. The Venetian governor of Split thus raised a hundred men as escort to convoy them through the territory of Split until Poljica since he considered it his duty to ensure the security of everyone on Venetian territory, especially of Ottoman subjects. He furthermore sent a letter to the authorities of Poljica telling them to treat the morlachs well as long as they were on Venetian territory, which Poljica was at the time.<sup>39</sup> This source demonstrates the Venetians' concern for the security not just of their own but also of Ottoman subjects. Moreover, it shows that the Hungarians and their conflicts with the Ottomans must not be neglected as a potential source of danger for the inhabitants of Split and its surroundings. In addition, outlaws and go-betweens used the generally instable situation for their advantage by attacking and robbing anyone they encountered.

To guarantee their own security, some people also took measures into their own hands. For example, in 1515 the commoner Philippus Cuparich asked the governor of Split for permission to build fortified houses on a rock in Otočac in the territory of Split to protect himself, his family, and the people living in the surroundings from the frequent incursions from the “infidels and barbarians”.<sup>40</sup> Other commoners, noblemen, and even monasteries built their own fortifications as well, also in earlier years.<sup>41</sup> Securing the territory with fortresses was thus not just a matter of government investments but also of private initiatives.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from military protection, the most important measure of making the territory more secure was the preservation of peace with the Ottomans. To achieve this on a diplomatic level, the Venetians repeatedly ordered to give gifts to Ottoman officials. Between September and November 1525 alone the Council of Ten allotted more than 1100 ducats to gifts – mostly precious fabrics or money – for Turkish representatives from Bosnia, Castelnuovo

<sup>39</sup> DAZD-16: 19/36.5/11v.

<sup>40</sup> DAZD-16: 39/51.4-III/85r.

<sup>41</sup> DAZD-16: 39/51.2-2/297v-298r; DAZD-16: 39/51.3/67r-v, 68v-69r; DAZD-16: 39/51.4-IV/141v-142r: “given the numerous and continuous incursions by infidels and barbarians in the territory of Split, the mentioned construction will be maximally convenient for the protection and refuge of [Venice’s] subjects” (“attentis crebris et continuis incursionibus infidelium et barbarorum in agrum Spalati fabricam predictam fore ad tutamen et refugium subditorum maxime opportunam”).

<sup>42</sup> On similar fortifications in medieval Italy, see Settia, *Illusione della sicurezza*.

(Herceg Novi), and Mostar.<sup>43</sup> The governor of Split explicitly addressed the strategy behind this in a letter to the senate from March 3, 1517, saying that “it has been a grand remedy to such an incursion to visit these pashas and *sanjak-bey*s with some presents in the name of our *signoria*”.<sup>44</sup> It was not uncommon for Ottoman officeholders or envoys to come directly to Venice to claim the handing-over of the gifts,<sup>45</sup> making them seem to be rather demanded tributes than voluntary presents.<sup>46</sup> In some cases, however, the practice of gift-giving was reciprocal and Ottomans brought gifts for the Venetians with them. Returning the courtesy was then necessary “to keep the sanjak-bey benevolent and friendly so as to ensure the good and amicable treatment of our subjects in the borderlands.”<sup>47</sup>

To prevent retaliation and preserve the “good peace” that the Venetians had with the Porte, they moreover prohibited and threatened to punish violent action of their own subjects against Ottoman subjects.<sup>48</sup> An example of such violence is the kidnapping of a morlach from Ottoman Makarska in 1517 by some Spalatins, among them a nobleman. The kidnappers sold their victim for 40 ducats to a woman who wanted to trade him for her son who, for his part, had been abducted by Turkish subjects. When the governor of Split found out, he confiscated the 40 ducats to prevent others from copying this business model that could harm the “good peace”.<sup>49</sup>

The Venetians expressed great concern for the security of Ottoman subjects after the peace agreement that had brought an end to the war of 1537 to 1540. In these years, the Uskoks of Senj started their piratic attacks on both Venetian and Ottoman ships in the Adriatic.<sup>50</sup> These attacks undermined Venice’s claim to ensure the security of all merchants in the Adriatic sea<sup>51</sup>, thus damaging also “the honour of our state.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, they strained the republic’s relations to Emperor Charles V’s brother Ferdinand, King of Hungary, Croatia and Bohemia, since the Uskoks were based in Senj (It. Segna), in Habsburg Hungarian territory and were thus nominally Habsburg subjects.<sup>53</sup> The senatorial debates of the 1540s address these issues repeatedly, calling

<sup>43</sup> ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Deliberazioni, Comuni, Registri, 1, fos. 110r, 122v, 139r-v.

<sup>44</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Secreti, Registri, 47, fo. 62r: “de grande remedio a tal incursion è stato visitar quelli bassà et sanzachi circumvicini cum qualche presente per nome dela signoria nostra”.

<sup>45</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 21, fos. 91v-92r, 120v, 134v.

<sup>46</sup> Rothman, “Accounting for Gifts,” 416; Schmitt, “Des melons pour la cour du Sancak Beg’.”

<sup>47</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 27, fo. 117r-v: “non si dié mancar di correspondergli di cortesia così per servar il costume ordinario della Republica nostra come per tenir il sanzacco benevolo et amico, sì che a quei confini li sudditi nostri siano trattati bene et amichevolmente”.

<sup>48</sup> Dursteler, “Habsburgs, Ottomans and Venetians,” 73 talks about “the longstanding Veneto-Ottoman policy of working together to preserve the *bona pace* in Dalmatia”.

<sup>49</sup> DAZD-16: 47/58.1/402r-405v.

<sup>50</sup> Rothenberg, “Venice and the Uskoks,” Bracewell, *Uskoks of Senj*.

<sup>51</sup> Faroqhi, “Osmanen.”

<sup>52</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 27, fo. 34r: “honore del stato nostro”.

<sup>53</sup> Wakounig, “Ferdinand.”

for the deployment of armed galleys and negotiations with Ferdinand to contain the Uskoks.<sup>54</sup> The Venetians also actively sought to compensate Ottoman subjects for their losses suffered from Uskok attacks so as to appease them and demonstrate that Venice would always serve up justice.<sup>55</sup> A provision from August 5, 1541 sums up the Venetian assessment of the danger in clear words and merits to be cited:

Having to procure, with every possible measure, the conservation of the peace and good friendship that our Signoria has at the moment with the most serene Turkish Lord, which principally consists in removing any occasion that could cause any, even minimal, disturbance of it [the peace], it is necessary to obviate the insolence and audacity of the Uskoks, people fit solely for robbery, who do not cease to continuously infer new damages to the Turkish subjects and then retreat to our places with their booty, with murmur and resentment of the agents of this most serene lord, from which, if nothing is provided for, could ensue a great inconvenience.<sup>56</sup>

To prevent the “great inconvenience” from happening, the senators instructed the Venetian governors of Dalmatia, including Split, to prohibit their subjects under penalty of death to conduct trade with Uskoks, help or shelter them in any way. Should Uskoks be caught in Venetian places after having done harm in Ottoman territories, the governors were authorized to execute them on the spot. The effect of this provision, however, seems to have been little, given its almost verbatim repromulgation in April 1543, adding the sizeable award of ten ducats for any Uskok handed over to the authorities, who would then immediately be hanged to make an example.<sup>57</sup> The senators justified this harsh course of action with the fact that “on a daily basis the larcenous Uskoks do not cease to infer damages to Turkish subjects and also to ours”, indicating the primary concern for Ottoman retaliation targeted against Venetians.<sup>58</sup>

Another frequent point of contention between the two empires concerned abductions. The archive of Zadar contains a letter written by the Ottoman *sanjak-bey* of Herzegovina to the Venetian governor of Split in 1490 or 1491, saying that the governor had complained about the abduction of some men.

<sup>54</sup> E.g. ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 26, fo. 90r-v, fo. 167v; ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 27, fo. 23v.

<sup>55</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 27, foa. 16r, 58v, 72r (indemnifying Luca and Nadal from Ottoman Shkodra [Scutari]), 77r-v (indemnifying the Turk “Jazia Jagupo”).

<sup>56</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 26, fo. 61r: “Dovendosi con ogni mezzo possibile procurar la conservazione della pace et bona amicitia che tien hora la signoria nostra col serenissimo signor Turco, il che principalmente consiste nel levar qualunque occasione che possi apportar alcun etiam minimo disturbo de quella, è necessario obviare alla insolentia et audacia de eusochi, gente assueta solamente alla preda et rapina, li quali non cessano di continuo di inferir novi danni alli sudditi turcheschi, reducendosi poi con le prede loro nelli loci nostri con mormoratione et risentimento delli agenti de quel serenissimo signor, dal che, non se gli provvedendo, potria seguir qualche grande inconveniente”.

<sup>57</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 27, fos. 24v-25r.

<sup>58</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 27, fo. 24v: “ladri uschochi non cessano per giornata d’inferir danni a subditi turcheschi et etiam alli nostri”.

As soon as the *sanjak-bey* learned, however, that these prisoners were Venetian subjects, he immediately released them to preserve the “peace, faith, and love” between the Sultan and the Venetians.<sup>59</sup> Shortly afterwards, the governor ordered the chief of Poljica<sup>60</sup> to demand the release of the Ottoman tax collector who had been kidnapped by a local *knez* as retaliation for the abduction of some Poljican men by Turks. The governor even received a letter from the Venetian *bailo* (ambassador) in Constantinople saying that the Sultan had ordered the *sanjak-bey* to release the Poljican men in exchange for the tax collector.<sup>61</sup> Venetian and Ottoman officials thus could negotiate the release of each other’s prisoners so as to preserve the peace. Negotiating the release of or even ransoming abducted subjects shows the state’s concern for their individual security as well as the awareness that such acts were necessary to retain the people’s consent and thus uphold the legitimacy of the Venetian rule.

Nonetheless, such negotiations also indicate that the “bona pace” was violated frequently, which made intelligence on the movements of the Turkish army all the more vital. The Venetians hence secretly instructed the governors of Split and other towns to send faithful and prudent “exploratori”, that is, spies, to Bosnia who should gather and report such information.<sup>62</sup>

Secrecy was paramount in other matters as well. As indicated above, the Ottomans repeatedly clashed with Hungarian subjects in the environs of Split, especially because of the fortress Klis, which stood under Hungarian rule and was then passed on to the Habsburgs when they obtained the Hungarian crown in 1526. The Venetians wanted to support their fellow Christians in their fight against the common enemy, but they could only do so secretly because of the fear to strain the “good peace” with the Sultan should he find out that the Venetians were helping those against whom he was fighting, as the *Collegio* wrote in a secret letter in 1493.<sup>63</sup> In the 1520s and 1530s, when the Ottoman attacks on Klis intensified before capturing the fortress in 1537, the Venetians even prohibited helping the people of Klis in any way.<sup>64</sup> To remain neutral, no Venetian subject should help or harm neither the Hungarians nor

<sup>59</sup> DAZD-16: 23/39.33/407r-v.

<sup>60</sup> Under Venetian rule, a nobleman from Split was sent to govern Poljica for one year in the name of Venice. Pfauenthal, “Beiträge,” 200; Laušić, *Postanak*, 163, 165-7; Mimica, *Omiška krajina*, 194-5.

<sup>61</sup> DAZD-16: 23/39.33/409r-410r.

<sup>62</sup> ASVe, Collegio, Secreti, Registri, 7, fo. 144v; Preto, *Servizi segreti*.

<sup>63</sup> ASVe, Collegio, Secreti, Registri, 7, fos. 152r-v, 153r: “that they shall never open their mouth about such a thing to anyone so that it does not come to the ears of the Turks, given the peace we have with the Sultan, that we are helping those with whom they are at war” (“che non habino mai ad aprir la bocha de simel cossa cum alcuno aziò la non venissa ad orecchie de turchi per la pace habiamo cum el signor che nui prestamo aiuto a quelli ali quali loro inferiscono guerra”).

<sup>64</sup> DAZD-16: 59/66.6/77r: “Also, that there may not be anyone [...] who dares or presumes to give any favour to those people of Klis nor to offend any subject of the lord sanjak [...] so as to conserve the peace with the prosperous imperator, the grand Turk” (“Item che non sia alcuno [...] che ardisca ne presuma dar alcun favore alli dicti Clissani né offendere alcuno subdito del signor sanzacho [...] per conservar la pace cum el felice imperator gran Turcho”).

the Ottomans.<sup>65</sup> In May 1532, the Venetians moreover refused to let convoys with food directed to Klis pass through the territory of Split, fearing the Turkish response, as the Habsburg ambassador in Venice, shocked by such cruelty, reported to Archduke Ferdinand in Vienna.<sup>66</sup> Eventually the Venetians gave permission to help Klis with provisions, but, again, only under the condition of utmost secrecy.<sup>67</sup>

These measures were meant to curtail the military threats by political and diplomatic means as well as military armament and responses. On the individual level, however, the people of Split were also advised to have insurances once such attacks happened. Similar to the concept of security as a whole, also insurances could concern both the individual level and the collective or state level. The latter, in the sense of state insurance or social security in the event of a broad range of misfortune, is chronologically a rather late phenomenon; as precursors, however, one might consider religiously motivated collective assistance rendered mostly by monasteries and confraternities.<sup>68</sup>

More individual, ad-hoc-insurances for specific undertakings, especially maritime trade and its related dangers – loss or theft of cargo, damage to the ship, capture and enslavement –, constituted an important element of the Mediterranean economy from the Late Middle Ages onwards.<sup>69</sup> The Spalatin sources, however, do not suggest the existence of an elaborated, let alone institutionalized system of insurances.<sup>70</sup> When concluding individual trading companies for specific voyages, the merchants would only insure one another by agreeing to share the potential damages.<sup>71</sup> Other basic forms of insurance were employed in the economic sector of rental and leasehold transactions. Lease contracts could contain clauses regulating the event of Turkish incursions and other violence or of natural disasters such as hailstorms or epidemics. According to such clauses, the landlord would hold the tenant harmless in these events, meaning that the tenant would not have to pay rent for a plot of land that did not provide any yield or for mills that could not be used

<sup>65</sup> DAZD-16: 59/66.6/79r: “being neutral and not intervening for one or the other side so as to have a good peace both with the most illustrious imperator, the grand Turk, and with the King of Hungary” (“esser neutrali né impazarse per uno né per l’altro per haver bona pace cussi cum lo illustrissimo imperator gran Turcho come con el re de Ungaria”).

<sup>66</sup> HHStA, Italienische Staaten, Venedig, Berichte 1, fasc. 2, fo. 46r: “but negating the passage to those who came from other parts to the rescue of Klis shocked me and seemed to me the harshest [measure] I have ever heard of” (“pero de negar el paso para las que de otras partes se truxiesen para el socorro de Clis mespantaua pareciéndome la mas cruda que jamás hauía oydo”).

<sup>67</sup> HHStA, Italienische Staaten, Venedig, Berichte 1, fasc. 2, fos. 46v-47r, 52r.

<sup>68</sup> On the development of different types of insurance, see Zwierlein, “Sicherheit durch Versicherung,” specifically on the Venetian context: Tenenti, *Naufraiges*, and recently Scheller, “(Un-)sichere Häfen.”

<sup>69</sup> Zwierlein, “Sicherheit durch Versicherung,” 384-5; Clark, “Slave insurance;” Boiteux, *Fortune de mer*; La Torre, *Assicurazione*.

<sup>70</sup> See also Fabijanec, *Développement commercial*, 249, 254. On the institutionalization of insurances in the early modern period, see Zwierlein, “Frühe Formen.”

<sup>71</sup> For instance: DAZD-16: 16/34/285v: A contract “to merchandise and trade for joint profit and loss” (“ad mercandum et traficandum ad comune lucrum et perditum”).

because of sick (or dead) personnel or destructions caused by incursions or hail. Similar clauses freed the tenants from the obligation to work on a piece of land should enemy incursions make this impossible. The tenant was only obliged to investigate and document the damage properly and provide a confirmation about it from the Venetian rector.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the leaseholder of the customs duty was protected against the event of suspended trade because of a plague outbreak in Split, allowing him to renounce the tax farm without any financial harm.<sup>73</sup> However, such clauses can be found relatively rare, which either means that most tenants enjoyed no such protection and insurance, or it means that such clauses were a common practice that did not have to be made explicit in every single contract. Given the frequent complaints from tenants asking for a reduction of their rent because of such events, it is probably more likely that simply not all tenants enjoyed such insurances but instead had to hope that nothing would happen.

### 3. *Depopulation*

Another challenge calling for preventive measures was migration and depopulation. At the turn to the sixteenth century, Split held an ambivalent position regarding migration. The Ottoman expansion and especially the conquest of Bosnia in 1463 entailed the flight and migration of thousands of people from the conquered Balkan inland to the shores, including to Venetian coastal towns such as Split. In this period, the population of the town and the densely inhabited *burgus* adjacent to the town walls grew to nearly ten thousand inhabitants according to estimates by Ermanno Orlando, which would constitute almost a doubling of the usual population figure.<sup>74</sup> This immigration from the Balkan benefitted the labour market, as the high percentage of immigrants among apprentices and servants concluding a training or labour contract demonstrates.<sup>75</sup> The fact that many immigrated parents committed their children at a very young age as apprentices or servants to someone else's household points to the families' plight: Given the daily violence and displacement they considered this to be the best or even the only way to provide for

<sup>72</sup> DAZD-16: 19/36.1/7v; DAZD-16: 24/40.1/123r; DAZD-16: 34/46.1/82r-v; DAZD-16: 34/46.3/178v-179r; DAZD-16: 45/56.1/56v-57r; DAZD-16: 60/67/12r-14r.

<sup>73</sup> DAZD-16: 41/52.1/19r: "Also, if during the time of the said lease of the customs duty a disease came to the town of Split (may God protect us) so that commerce from this place to other places was suspended, it would be at the liberty of the leaseholder to renounce the said customs duty" ("item se in tempo del dicto datio venisse morbo, che Idio [...] guardi, ne la città de Spalato ita che fuisse levado el comertio de questo locho dali altri lochi sia in libertà del conductor renuntiar el dicto datio [...]").

<sup>74</sup> Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 203.

<sup>75</sup> Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 112; Budak, *Na dnu*.

their children. In some cases mothers were forced to take this step following their husband's abduction.<sup>76</sup>

Many of the employers were Italian merchants who came to Split to look for personnel for their ships or their households in Italy, especially in Apulia. This points to the second dimension of migration in Split around the year 1500, namely the emigration of people from Split itself or from the Balkans travelling via Split on to Italy, particularly Venice and Apulia.<sup>77</sup> Given the constant military threats also affecting the coastal town, the Poljican voivode Žarko Dražojević painted a very dire picture of the situation in Split and the neighbouring town Trogir (It. Traù) in a report from 1499, saying that “those from Trogir and Split are in great fear” and that “the majority was preparing to disperse or go to the Marches or the Abruzzi”.<sup>78</sup>

The emigration of a large number of people from the inland could entail a dangerous depopulation of the area, harming both the town's economic worth as well as the ability to defend the territory militarily. To avoid such a depopulation of the area, the Venetians thus tried to prevent these people from leaving for Italy. In October and November 1493, the Venetian *Collegio* instructed the rectors of Split, Trogir, and Šibenik (It. Sebenico) how to treat the people who were fleeing to the coastal towns after the battle of Krbava Field. The rectors should persuade and help the people to move to the Venetian islands close to Zadar or to the islands Hvar, Korčula and Brač (It. Brazza), where they would be safe until they could return to their homes on the mainland. If, however, these people did not want to stay on the Venetian islands but insisted on moving on to Apulia, the rectors should not hinder them, but they also should not help them in any way.<sup>79</sup>

In May 1511, the governor of Split deemed it necessary to penalize the emigration from Split's territory without an explicit license.<sup>80</sup> Many inhabitants of Split and its district had been induced by “devilish persuasions” (“diabolicis persuasionibus”) to move to foreign lands in contempt of the law. If nothing was undertaken against this emigration, the governor argued, “these places could easily become deserted” in the face of the Turkish incursions.<sup>81</sup> The governor furthermore prohibited the selling of one's real estate with the intent of emigrating, as many were doing “out of fear of the Turks” (“ob timorem turchorum”). Both the seller and the buyer would render themselves liable to

<sup>76</sup> For example: DAZD-16: 60/67/162r: Jelina, daughter of Margarita Sestarichia from Klis and “Thomas Sestarich, abducted in Turkish captivity”, becomes a servant in a household in Barletta at the age of seven or eight years; DAZD-16: 24/40.1/465r: The six-year-old John, whose father “had been captured by the Turks”, shall serve the notary of the Apulian town Rodi Gargarnico for fourteen years.

<sup>77</sup> DAZD-16: 44/55/10r-v: A list of licenses from 1512 allowing people to go to Apulia illustrates this type of migration.

<sup>78</sup> Sanuto, *Diarîi*, vol. 2, col. 1144: “queli di Traù et Spalato hanno gran paura [...] la mazor parte si preparavano andar in disperation o in la Marcha o Abruzzo [...]”.

<sup>79</sup> ASVe, Collegio, Secreti, Registri, 7, fos. 152v-153r, 153v, 155v-156r.

<sup>80</sup> DAZD-16: 42/51.1/5v-6r.

<sup>81</sup> DAZD-16: 42/51.1/5v: “faciliter ista loca desertari”.



prosecution. The governor again expressed the concern that “if no opportune remedy was provided for, this diocese could become deserted of inhabitants to the greatest harm, detriment, and ruin of this most faithful town.”<sup>82</sup> This clearly shows that emigration and depopulation were deemed serious threats to the town and its surroundings.

In addition to large-scale emigration to Italy and the influx of refugees from Bosnia or the town’s hinterland, especially Poljica, who were seeking shelter from Turkish attacks<sup>83</sup>, the third dimension of migratory movements that Split was exposed to encompassed the immigration of people from Apulia who were fleeing the wars of the French invasion after 1494. Among these Apulians were strikingly many so-called New Christians, that is, descendants of Jews who had converted to Christianity as early as the thirteenth or fourteenth century.<sup>84</sup> These New Christians were well-connected merchants who, above all, supplied Split with much-needed grain. In addition to that, many of them also settled there becoming inhabitants (*habitatores*) or even citizens of Split after the new Spanish government had expelled them from the Kingdom of Naples.<sup>85</sup> People from the opposite directions thus came to Split to seek security.

Hence, when talking about migration in the terms of crisis in the context of Dalmatia, we must specify that we mean an emigration crisis, not an immigration crisis. The threat of depopulation called for countermeasures coordinated centrally by Venice with the goal of directing migratory movements, avoiding emigration, and repopulating towns. The Venetians thus offered support to Balkan refugees and even tolerated Apulian New Christians, despite having themselves issued orders of expulsion against Jewish converts in 1497 and again in 1550.<sup>86</sup> However, the benefit of wealthy merchants with well-established trading networks taking up residence in the struggling town of Split outweighed the reservations in view of their religious background.

#### 4. Disease and epidemics

The Ottoman attacks were not the only potentially life-threatening danger the inhabitants of Split and its district were exposed to. Regular outbreaks of diseases usually described as “morbo”, “peste”, or simply “epidemia” claimed countless lives, obstructed commercial exchanges, and terrified the population. When studying epidemics and the human responses to them in the

<sup>82</sup> DAZD-16: 42/51.1/8r: “nisi provideretur aliquo opportuno remedio, hec diocesis [de] habitantibus desertari posset cum maximo damno, incommodo [et] ruina huius fidelissime civitatis [...]”

<sup>83</sup> Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 112, 202-9; Nazor, *Splitsko-poljički odnosi*.

<sup>84</sup> Scheller, *Stadt der Neuchristen*; Vitale, “Un particolare ignorato.”

<sup>85</sup> Sadovski, “Apulian New Christians.”

<sup>86</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Terra, Registri, 13, fos. 22r-v; Kaufmann, “Vertreibung.”

premodern period, it is crucial to take into consideration the contemporary understanding and perception of such misfortune. During the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the perspective increasingly changed from seeing diseases, and natural catastrophes in general, as a punishment from God to focusing on ways to prevent or alleviate them. This allowed for more concern for human agency directed at inner-worldly preventive measures.<sup>87</sup> Apart from practical measures aimed at technological improvement and innovation, this entailed a better political organization, leading ultimately to the establishment of specific offices or even institutions tasked with coordinating measures of precaution or support.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, symbolic measures aimed at imagining security remained vital, both religious acts such as supplicatory processions or pilgrimage, as well as political measures such as an embargo on export, which similarly could be more symbolic than practically helpful.<sup>89</sup> Guaranteeing security, both practically and symbolically, legitimized a government's rule, thus a government could also use the construction of security to affirm, strengthen, and intensify its rule. Especially in towns, the construction of security led to the concentration of power and administrative practices from the fifteenth century onwards.<sup>90</sup> With this in mind, we can now ask if and how the Venetian dominion used diseases and other catastrophes to affirm, strengthen, and intensify its rule in Dalmatia, both materially, since such catastrophes allowed increasing statal intervention, and symbolically, since Venice became present in the inhabitants' daily lives through these interventions and could depict itself as the people's saviour. To attempt an answer to this question, let us first take a look at the extent to which Split suffered from diseases at the turn of the sixteenth century.

Particularly severe was the plague epidemic that spread from Italy to Dalmatia in the years 1526 and 1527.<sup>91</sup> The envoys of Split reported to Venice that out of a population of eight thousand only one thousand remained alive – exaggerated numbers, but the loss of two-thirds of the population is still probable –, and they pleaded for the dispatch of at least fifty soldiers to contain the looting that was rife.<sup>92</sup> The disease did not only kill a majority of the population, it also suspended the societal order and led to robbery and plundering, houses were burnt down, and even the gates of the churches where people tried to safeguard their possessions were demolished. To prevent this chaos from prompting even more of the survivors to leave Split and “wander around

<sup>87</sup> Kampmann and Niggeman, “Sicherheit in der Frühen Neuzeit,” 20: “Handlungsimperative im Hinblick auf innerweltlich-vorbeugende Maßnahmen”.

<sup>88</sup> Jakubowski-Tiessen, “Zum Umgang,” 330.

<sup>89</sup> Jakubowski-Tiessen, “Zum Umgang,” 330-1.

<sup>90</sup> Rüther, “Zwischen göttlicher Fügung,” 335-6: “Eine besondere Rolle in diesem Prozess kam dabei den Städten zu, in denen die Konstruktion von Sicherheit im 15. Jahrhundert zu einer Verdichtung der Herrschafts- und Verwaltungspraktiken führte”.

<sup>91</sup> Raukar, “Komunalna društva,” 158f; Kunčić, *Od pošasti sačuvaj nas*, 68-9.

<sup>92</sup> ASVe, *Provveditori alla Sanità, Registri*, 12, fo. 50r (5.10.1527); Palmer, “The Control of Plague,” 163.

desperately in the world”, the envoys asked Venice to order all the Spalatins who were staying outside the town – especially those who were currently in Apulia or other “hostile places” – to come back. Given that “the land is empty of people” even the temporary exiles should be allowed to return to Split.<sup>93</sup>

Again, depopulation emerges as a pressing problem in the wake of military threats and epidemics. The fatal interplay of these two crises is explicitly addressed in a lawsuit conducted following an earlier outbreak of the plague in Split which questions whether the precautionary measures taken against the proliferation of the disease were commensurate and appropriate.<sup>94</sup> The story goes as follows:

In 1513, the young Spalatin nobleman Gianfrancesco Bubanich decided to flee to the nearby island of Šolta after his neighbour had fallen ill with the plague. While he was loading his clothes, shoes, and bed linen on a boat in the harbour of Split, the health officer Gregorio Agostini commanded him to stop, then put all his belongings on a pile and set them on fire in the marina. The fleeing Gianfrancesco was baffled and later sued the health officer, saying that he had no right to burn his property. In general, burning the things belonging to an infected person or to someone who had contact with an infected person made sense in the case of a disease like the plague that was transmitted by fleas which thereby could be eliminated. But Gianfrancesco considered the burning to have been illegal because he had not had any contact with his infected neighbour given that their houses were not connected. Furthermore, he claimed it to be common in Venice and throughout the rest of the world that even sick people would always be allowed to leave their homes for other places. He concluded that the health officer Gregorio Agostini just acted out of viciousness and resentment against him.<sup>95</sup>

To defend himself, Gregorio Agostini said that the burning was legitimate because as a neighbour of an infected person, Gianfrancesco was a contact person, who, moreover, ignored the mandated quarantine. Gregorio furthermore stressed that quick action was necessary because the current plague epidemic was devastating and spreading quickly. The people of Split were “all terrified and frightened”, even more so since they could not flee the city for the hinterlands because of the “horrible and continued incursions by the Turks”.<sup>96</sup> Many people thus tried to flee to the island of Šolta – especially the wealthier noblemen, which points to the existence of class conflicts (see below) mani-

<sup>93</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Mar, Registri, 21, fos. 82r-83r: “che non vadino i vostri fidelissimi subditi desperati per el mondo”, “attento che ne è gran numero in Puglia et altri loci nemici a questo stato” (“given that a great number of them is in Apulia or other places hostile to this state”), “attento che la terra è vachua de le persone”.

<sup>94</sup> DAZD-16: 43/54/105r-111r.

<sup>95</sup> DAZD-16: 43/54/108r-109r: Gianfrancesco talks about Gregorio’s “cativo animo”, “pessimo voler” and his will for “potencia assoluta”.

<sup>96</sup> DAZD-16: 43/54/106v: “all terrified and frightened, lacking the remedy to flee landwards because of the horrible and continued incursions by the Turks” (“tuti territi et spaventati deficiente del remedio fuzir infraterra per le orribil et continue incursion di Turchi”).

festing themselves also in the wake of an epidemic<sup>97</sup> –, but as a potential contact person Gianfrancesco should have stayed at home in quarantine.

Interestingly, Gianfrancesco described the extent and severity of the epidemic radically different. He said that the plague was not that disastrous since only twenty people had died in three months. Furthermore, the Turks were not even attacking the territory of Split at that time and the people were not as scared as the health officer claimed. Hence, burning his personal belongings was an exaggerated and not necessary measure.<sup>98</sup> Why he still wanted to flee if the plague was not that bad, he did not say. It becomes evident, however, how different the perceptions of one and the same event, of one and the same outbreak of a disease could be, seeing it as disastrous or not. Whoever was not telling the truth probably was well aware of his dishonesty, but he still insisted on his view to promote his own interests.

Unfortunately, we do not know how the lawsuit ended or how the court tried to determine the real extent of the plague epidemic of 1513. The potentially fatal combination of Ottoman attacks and deadly diseases, however, underlines the need for preventive measures. Moreover, a disease posed not only a threat to the lives of the people but also disrupted trade relations. Given the disastrous epidemic of 1527, ravaging not only in Dalmatia but also in Venice, Milan, and Florence, Venice suspended the yearly trade fair around Ascension Day (called in Venetian “Sensa”).<sup>99</sup> In March of the same year, a merchant complained to the rector of Split that he could not continue his journey and thus was suffering great losses because of a wrongful detention in disease-ridden Split. He had travelled from Apulia via Venice to the safe island of Šolta off the coast of Split where a former business partner had him detained and brought to Split because of alleged debts.<sup>100</sup> Conversely, Spalatin merchants needed licenses from the town’s health officers to travel to the infected town Makarska in 1524. Upon their return, they were obliged to stay in quarantine for forty days outside the district of Split, just as travellers from Venice had to do in 1512.<sup>101</sup> To prevent the proliferation of a disease, afflicted towns were thus isolated, the commerce with infected places was interdicted, and merchants coming from such places had to stay in mandatory quarantine. Additionally, the Spalatins were prohibited to house any foreigner without the permission

<sup>97</sup> DAZD-16: 43/54/106v: “many and especially the more powerful ones, or rather those who could afford it, fled with their boats to an island named Šolta” (“molti et assai di più potenti over quali spender potevano fuzorono cum le loro brigade ad una isula chiamata Solta”).

<sup>98</sup> DAZD-16: 43/54/108r-109r.

<sup>99</sup> ASV, Provveditori alla sanità, Registri, 12, 47r-v.

<sup>100</sup> DAZD-16: 60/67/75r-v: “not being able to navigate or conduct trade in sane places for having been in Split” (“non poter navigare et pratichar in lochi sani per esser stato a Spalato”).

<sup>101</sup> DAZD-16: 59/66.6/79v, 83r; DAZD-16: 39/51.3/44r.

of the governor and the health officers.<sup>102</sup> Because of the “risk of infecting the whole town” measures were also taken to prevent the pollution of water.<sup>103</sup>

Different protective measures were thus employed in Split during an outbreak of a disease: infected people, suspected or proven contact persons, and travellers from afflicted regions had to be quarantined; the previous contacts and visited places of an infected person were retraced diligently; trade relations with affected places were suspended; (possibly) infected personal belongings were burned; and many people fled to the rural hinterlands or nearby islands.

These measures aimed at containing a disease undoubtedly constituted intense and direct interventions into people’s everyday life. However, the examples discussed above show that the measures themselves were not challenged. The merchant did not complain about having to be in quarantine because of his stay in Split, but rather resented his business partner for forcing him to go to Split. Likewise, the purpose of burning infected goods was not questioned, but only the necessity and legitimacy of doing so in this specific case. This shows that the legitimate extent of a public officer’s power in the face of a potentially catastrophic disease could still be discussed vividly. Interestingly, neither the plaintiff nor the defendant referred to instructions issued by the authorities regarding the burning of suspected goods. Rather, the nobleman considered it to be the personal fault of a vengeful man who happened to be one of the town’s public health officers. The defendant, in turn, rather stressed the overall dangerous situation in view of the interplay of Ottoman attacks and an epidemic, legitimizing his acts with his concern for the common good. The existence of a public health office points to the concern for sanitary preventive measures as well as the will to apply and control these measures from a centralized position. This centralization, however, took place within the commune and not as a result of decisions mandated from the central authorities in Venice.<sup>104</sup> This is why the Venetians remain strikingly absent from the discussion about the burnt goods, apart from the rector’s mandatory role as judge. In contrast, after the fatal plague of 1527, the Spalatins turned directly to Venice for aid in their desperate situation. Such an occasion could thus help Venice to affirm and legitimize its rule by showing that it supported its subjects in their time of need. In general, however, Venetian efforts to centralize control of health-related measures can be observed in a heightened intensity only in a later period than the one under consideration here. In the metropolis itself, the *Provveditori alla Sanità* were

<sup>102</sup> DAZD-16: 36/48.1/34v: “that no person, whoever it may be, shall decide, dare or presume to welcome any foreign person in their houses from abroad without a license from the magnificent count and the lords deputies of the health office” (“quod nulla persona sit qui esset velit audeat vel praesumat recipere aliquam personam forensam in eorum domibus ab extra sine licentia magnifici comitis et dominorum deputorum officii sanitatis”).

<sup>103</sup> DAZD-16: 39/51.4-III/70v: “periculo infestandi totam civitatem”.

<sup>104</sup> O’Connell, *Men of Empire*, 110; Arbel, “Venice’s Maritime Empire,” 188.

established as a constant institution only in 1490, and it was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that their ability to enforce norms in the overseas territories increased notably.<sup>105</sup>

### 5. *Civil discontent*

Finally, civil discontent and uprisings called for preventive measures to avoid the disruption of the social order and any threat to the Venetian rule. The biggest uprising Dalmatia saw in the early modern period was undoubtedly the rebellion on the island of Hvar between 1510 and 1514. Led by Matija Ivanić, the commoners of Hvar rebelled against the supremacy of the nobility, attacking, killing, and plundering noblemen in the island's urban centres. While the insurgency was not directed against the Venetian dominion itself, the patricians considered it a threat to the republic's overseas possessions and the established order. They thus sent troops under the command of Sebastiano Giustinian to the island to put down the rebellion, if need be, militarily.<sup>106</sup> While Hvar was the centre, the commoners' uprising against the nobles spread also to other Dalmatian towns.<sup>107</sup> Revolts broke out particularly early and violently in Šibenik. Murders, mutilations, and plundering of local noblemen even gave cause to speak of a civil war in Šibenik.<sup>108</sup> Nonetheless, the uprising could be put down by internal conflict settlement.<sup>109</sup>

The situation in Split was less violent, but the activities of some seditious commoners still called for measures to prevent a similar escalation of the conflict. The basic measure of preventing the *popolani* from planning any agitation was the surveillance of their congregations and of the embassies they sent to Venice. Hence, they were only allowed to assemble in the presence of the Venetian rector, who also had to agree to their embassies before they could leave for Venice.<sup>110</sup> During the revolt in Hvar, the rector of Split thus

<sup>105</sup> Konstantinidou, Mantadakis, Falagas, Sardi and Samonis, "Venetian Rule;" Vanzan Marchini, *Rotte mediterranee*.

<sup>106</sup> Gabelić, *Ustanak*; Bracanović and Zaninović-Rumora, "Novi izvori." Giustinian's letters concerning the rebellion are recorded in Sanuto, *Diarii*, vol. 14, col. 599; vol. 15, cols. 151-7, 220-4, 348, 372.

<sup>107</sup> ASVe, Senato, Deliberazioni, Secreti, Registri, 44, fos. 14v-15r (March 1511).

<sup>108</sup> ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Deliberazioni, Misti, Registri, 35, fo. 201r: "murders, mutilations and plundering of numerous houses of noble citizens" ("homicidium debilitationes membrorum et expoliationes plurium domorum civium nobilium"), "civile bellum"; Registri, 33, fo. 179r; Registri, 34, fos. 109r-v.

<sup>109</sup> ASVe, Consiglio dei Dieci, Deliberazioni, Misti, Registri, 35, fos. 200v-202. More research is still needed on the events in Šibenik, see Gabelić, *Ustanak*, 433-4 and 435, note 17.

<sup>110</sup> DAZD-16: 39/51.4-II/62v; Gligo and Berket, *Zlatna knjiga grada Splita* (hereafter *Libro d'Oro*), vol. 1, 164 (no. 28: "That congregations, councils and negotiations of the citizens without license and knowledge of the count shall not take place" ["Quod adunationes, consilia et parlamenta civium absque licentia ac scientia comitis non fiant"]); Lonza, "Il ruolo catalizzatore," 104-5.

announced that he would not allow any congregations to assemble.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, we have records of popular assemblies from the following year 1512, which were held with the approval and in the presence of the rector.<sup>112</sup> This was probably a concession made to appease the Spalatin *popolani*, given that the threat of a popular uprising also in Split was by no means over at that time, as a letter from the Venetian governor of Split from December 1513 “concerning these seditious commoners” shows, in which he talks about the “infection from Hvar having stained Dalmatia a lot”.<sup>113</sup> To punish insurgent behaviour, the Venetians detained five of these troublemakers in Venice.<sup>114</sup>

To maintain control and social stability the Venetians thus were determined to curtail civil discontent by both punishing individual seditionists and by making concessions to the *popolani* to appease them. Above all, they granted them the right to send their own embassies to Venice and to convoke popular assemblies to coordinate political action and elect representatives. Fearing to lose their monopoly on the political representation of the commune, Split’s noblemen, however, continued to protest any independent political coordination on the part of the commoners. The latter’s congregations could thus not take place on a regular basis and depended to a large extent on the willingness of the current Venetian rector to tolerate or even promote them. During his term of office from 1481 to 1484, Giovanni Bollani curtailed several of the noblemen’s rights and privileges as representatives of the commune, thereby increasing not only his own powers but also the possibilities of the commoners to take part in the administration of the commune and voice their concerns and demands. Amongst other things, Bollani appointed commoners to public offices without consulting the noble council and he allowed the *popolani* to congregate and elect procurators.<sup>115</sup> Bollani’s unauthorized actions were, however, not only fiercely criticized by Split’s nobility but also frowned upon by the Venetian central government that did not want to risk political instability by disrespecting the nobility’s traditional rights to local self-government, as conceded in the convention of the town’s submission to Venice from 1420 (called *deditio/dedizione*). Hence, several of Bollani’s orders were revoked during and after his term of office, culminating in the prohibition of popular assemblies in June 1484.<sup>116</sup> In the 1490s, however, such

<sup>111</sup> ASVe, Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rettori ed altre Cariche, 281, Spalato, no 12 (December 1511).

<sup>112</sup> DAZD-16: 39/51.3/46v; DAZD-16: 39/51.4-II/65v; Novak, *Povijest Splita*, 234; Novak, *Autonomija*, 103.

<sup>113</sup> ASVe, Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rettori ed altre Cariche, 281, Spalato, no 23: “Spalletum, circa illos cives seditiosos”, “la infectione de Lesina haver maculato multo questa Dalmatia”.

<sup>114</sup> *Libro d’Oro*, no 97, 370.

<sup>115</sup> DAZD-16: 18/35/153v-164v; 389r; 400v; 414rv; 505r; 521r; 523v; *Libro d’Oro*, no. 72, no. 74, no. 75, no. 76, no. 78, no. 80, 296, 300-16, 320, 322-4 (no. 78 and no. 80 can also be found in DAZD-16: 19/36.5/9v resp. 12v); Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 347-51; Novak, *Povijest Splita*, 229-33; Lonza, “Il ruolo catalizzatore,” 105-6.

<sup>116</sup> DAZD-16: 18/35/400v; DAZD-16: 18/35/163v-164r; *Libro d’Oro*, no. 88, 318.

assemblies seem to have been generally tolerated again, given that the nobles in 1499 only complained about the popular assembly being convoked by the chimes of a bell, which was a symbolic privilege granted only to the noble council.<sup>117</sup> The commoners furthermore successfully demanded the possibility to monitor the nobility's handling of the city's finances as well as the right to appoint a communal translator who would enable the poorer and more often monolingually Slavic strata of society to interact with the Italian-speaking Venetian administration independently of bilingual noblemen who otherwise used to act as intermediaries.<sup>118</sup>

The nobility continued to oppose the concessions granted to the commoners, making it necessary for them to fight for their rights anew. In 1525, the representative of the people asked the rector to allow them to congregate to elect a translator, ambassadors, and procurators who would control the town's finances and the night watch together with the noble officers. All these rights had already been granted to the commoners previously but apparently they could not exercise them freely.<sup>119</sup> The representative of the nobility even tried to deny them the right to any procurator of their own, pretending that only the government of Split could be responsible for them.<sup>120</sup> Other sources, however, clearly show that the Venetians did not budge to the nobility's pretences but instead upheld the commoners' right to their own procurators, ambassadors, and financial officers.<sup>121</sup>

At times, Venice was even interested in strengthening the commoners to the detriment of the nobility in order to curtail the latter's political power and use the internal social conflicts to stabilize its own rule.<sup>122</sup> Giving the commoners more but not too much power was, however, a balancing act during which it was paramount to prevent any discontent from becoming directed towards the Venetian rule. While the commoners had to be appeased by conceding them more political rights to participate in the administration of the commune, the nobility had to be kept content by respecting its right to communal self-government as formulated in the *deditio*.<sup>123</sup> As the highest representative of Venetian rule on the ground, the rector not only had to mediate between the local society and the central administration but also between the social strata in their respective striving for more political and social power, while at the same time affirming the legitimacy of the Venetian rule.<sup>124</sup>

The main competence of the popular assembly was the election of legitimate procurators who would represent the *popolani* in front of the nobility,

<sup>117</sup> *Libro d'Oro*, no. 92, p. 360; Novak, *Povijest Splita*, 233; Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 173.

<sup>118</sup> Sadovski-Kornprobst, "Multilingualism," 223-6; Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 171-2; Andrić, *Povijest Splita*, 124.

<sup>119</sup> *Libro d'Oro*, no. 102, 386-8.

<sup>120</sup> *Libro d'Oro*, no. 104, 390-4.

<sup>121</sup> *Libro d'Oro*, no. 105, no. 106, no. 107, no. 108, 394-402.

<sup>122</sup> Schmitt, "Addressing community."

<sup>123</sup> On the importance of the *deditiones*, see Orlando, "Politica del diritto," 15-9.

<sup>124</sup> Schmitt, "Storie d'amore;" Lonza, "Il ruolo catalizzatore."



the Venetian governor, and the authorities in Venice. Since tensions between the commoners and the nobles existed also before and after the Hvar rebellion,<sup>125</sup> the Venetians and the Spalatins themselves were always careful to differentiate between a legitimate “procurator populi” (procurator of the people) and an illegitimate “capo del popolo” (head/leader of the people). The procurators had to be elected by the popular assembly and then also be approved by the rectors, making them official representatives who could be controlled more easily. A *capo*, on the contrary, acted outside the system and thus posed a potential threat to social stability.

A lawsuit from 1526 illustrates the importance ascribed to this differentiation between procurator and *capo*: Simone de Augubio, who was the son of the well-known Italian merchant and Spalatin citizen Giovanni Battista de Augubio,<sup>126</sup> one day went to the chancery and demanded the copy of a bill, saying that he was the “procurador del populo”. The chancellor, however, refused to give him the copy because he did not know Simone to be the legitimate procurator of the commoners. A heated argument with mutual insults ensued, ending with Simone’s arrest by the authorities. The following lawsuit about Simone’s insolent behaviour concerned above all the question whether he had made himself an illegitimate *capo del popolo* by claiming to be the procurator. To prevent punitive measures against the commoners as a whole, one of them positioned himself against Simone de Augubio and even asked the rector to punish Simone because he was a frequent troublemaker who insulted everyone, including Venice, with this “bad tongue” and thus did not represent the will of the people.<sup>127</sup> The testimonies recorded in the lawsuit suggest that Simone indeed had no mandate to act as the commoners’ procurator.<sup>128</sup> Because of this dispute, doge Andrea Gritti wrote a letter to the rector of Split telling him to seek to maintain peace between the nobles and the *popolani* and to severely punish anyone who tried to become a *capo*.<sup>129</sup>

An important factor aggravating these internal social tensions was the constant military threat outlined above. In 1502, the governor of Split Gian Antonio Dandolo informed the *Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci* about the bad mood and anxious atmosphere in Split caused by the “Turkish issues” (“cose

<sup>125</sup> Novak, *Povijest Splita*, 217-55; Orlando, *Strutture e pratiche*, 165-84; Andrić, *Život*, 123-6; Šunjić, *Dalmacija*, 202-19; more generally about Venice: Ventura, *Nobiltà*.

<sup>126</sup> Raukar, “Ser Baptista de Augubio.”

<sup>127</sup> DAZD-16: 60/67/93r-v. It shall be noted that Simone’s brother Antonio was among those agitators detained in Venice in 1512.

<sup>128</sup> DAZD-16: 60/67/88r-91r.

<sup>129</sup> DAZD-16: 60/67/88v-89r: “you have to monitor and watch out that both the nobles and the commoners live in love and peace amongst them [...] to all troublemakers and especially to those who shall try to become *capi* we will give such a harsh and severe punishment that they will repent their error and give an example to the others of living together well and peacefully” (“debiare procurar et invigilar che cusi li nobeli come li popolari viviano in amor et pace fra loro [...] a tuti scandalosi maxime a quelli che se volesseno far capi li daremo una cusi aspra et severa punition che se pentiranno del suo error et daranno exemplo ad altri di ben et pacificamente viver insieme”).

turchesche”) that were heating up the discussions and conflicts.<sup>130</sup> He thus asked Venice to write a “sweet and humane letter” (“dulce et humana littera”) to the whole society of Split, reassuring them that Venice believed in their fidelity.<sup>131</sup> That way, he hoped to calm the noblemen and the *popolani* down and secure social stability. This instance points to the importance of the psychological strains of warfare, military threats, and any crisis for social peace. Moreover, we see how Venice positioned itself as the neutral third party to whom everyone could turn and who promised to guarantee safety and security. This position stabilized the Venetian rule because it made both parties try to gain Venice’s favour against the other one.

## 6. Conclusions

As this broad range of evidence makes clear, life in a small Dalmatian town in the border zone between Venetian, Ottoman, and Hungarian/Habsburg territories was full of threats and dangers calling for precautionary measures to mitigate their consequences. Apart from insights into the daily lives and sufferings of the people living in Renaissance Split and its environs, the study of these threats and the security measures taken in their anticipation also allows for conclusions regarding the town’s government and society as a whole. While no masterplan of concentrating Venetian rule at the cost of local elites existed, the sources show that local security exigencies called for Venetian interventions on various levels, which slowly consolidated power in the centre.

The appeasement of the Ottomans adopted by the Venetians as the main strategy against the military threat points to the military weakness of Venice despite the hiring of foreign and local mercenaries. The Venetians were interested in preserving their rule in Dalmatia for commercial interests at all costs, and to achieve this they had to live with and appease the Turks, also at the expense of their relations to the Hungarians and Habsburgs, and even if this meant giving the Ottomans gifts as quasi-tributes. At the same time, the Venetian goal of preserving peace with the Ottomans by not harming their subjects was repeatedly the occasion for centralized orders directed to Split and other Dalmatian towns. In general, the Ottoman threat called for more centralized command structures which slowly led to the increasing overruling of local elites. Yet the inhabitants of towns like Split also profited from the Venetian concern for the military security of its overseas territories, the money and soldiers they were hence provided with, and the republic’s diplomatic

<sup>130</sup> ASVe, Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rettori ed altre Cariche, 281, Spalato, no. 6: “in effect, it seems to me that they all talk with some passion, it is true that these Turkish issues do not let the people be as calm as we would want them to be” (“in effecto me par parlano tuti cum qualche passion, vero è che questi cose turchesche non lasa star li homini cusi quieti come i voriamo”).

<sup>131</sup> ASVe, Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, Lettere di Rettori ed altre Cariche, 281, Spalato, no. 6.

weight in negotiations with the Ottomans. To ensure their own security, the people of Split additionally resorted to taking measures into their own hands by fortifying their properties, procuring insurance, or attacking and kidnapping Ottoman subjects as retaliation or lever to free their abducted relatives.

Prohibiting the emigration from Split on the one hand and accommodating refugees from both the hinterland and from Apulia – even New Christians – on the other hand points to the threat of depopulation in the wake of constant Ottoman incursions and devastating epidemics. This threat of depopulation also called for countermeasures coordinated by Venice to direct migratory movements, avoid emigration and repopulate towns. The value of a place was determined by its geostrategic position and by the number and qualifications of its inhabitants, hence both the Venetians and the Spalatins were interested in keeping and attracting people, especially well-connected merchants, to the town. That way they hoped to keep Split's economy going despite the constant reduction and devastation of the territory suitable for agriculture, and despite the difficult trade relations often hampered by war and disease.

The measures taken against epidemics show a remarkably good understanding of contagion and the nature of diseases as well as efficient institutions able to enforce these provisions. In addition to the medical dangers posed by such diseases they could moreover cause internal social conflicts between those who had to stay and those who could afford to flee, or between those who accepted the countermeasures and those who deemed them unjust and exaggerated. While the measures to prevent the proliferation of diseases would become more centralized only in the following centuries, the sources show that the political will and the ability to implement a number of such measures existed already at the turn of the sixteenth century.

The psychological strain of the military menace exacerbated social conflicts as well, showing how external threats could amplify internal ones and thus increase the social instability even more. This aspect very likely affected many border societies and calls for more detailed comparative research. Preventing popular uprisings and thus ensuring internal security by making concessions to the commoners shows the growing strength of this increasingly self-confident social group as well as the interest of Venice to act as a broker in internal social conflicts and thereby establish a social balance. An additional goal of this arbitration policy was the legitimation of the Venetian rulers as just mediators. Yet the surveillance of the commoners' assemblies and embassies as well as the decisive punishment of individual *capi* show that Venice still wanted to control the *popolani* and their collective action. Similarly, also the noblemen's council and embassies were subject to the Venetian rector's surveillance and approval.

All these measures of precaution did not prevent Split and its society from suffering a lot from numerous threats and crises. They do show, however, the level of resilience the Spalatins and Venetians could exhibit under these circumstances to achieve security, peace, social stability, and a working econo-

my as good as possible. At the same time, these measures entailed the gradual centralization of power, which accelerated the integration of the Venetian *Stato da Mar* and turned it into a more uniform political and administrative entity. Such a consolidation of political power can be witnessed throughout Europe in the later Middle Ages. Yet, as John Watts stresses, “political integration or coordination arises from below, as well as from above: [...] it is always the product of some kind of negotiation between interest groups [...]” The various subject groups living in a given polity “have a certain interest in working with one another and with those that claim to rule them, even if they also have an interest in maintaining media of resistance, advice and consent.”<sup>132</sup> The consolidation of central power can thus be considered as the product of complex processes of negotiation between the ruler and the ruled, a frequent background of these negotiations being the preparation for or response to more or less imminent threats. To further ascertain the role of security and measures of precaution in the process of power consolidation in late medieval and early modern states in the Mediterranean, the present article seeks to stimulate more comparative studies within Dalmatia, Venice’s Greek possessions, and non-Venetian territories.

<sup>132</sup> Watts, *The Making of Polities*, 424-5.



Fig. 1. Venetian Dalmatia in the fifteenth century. Source: Orlando, “Mercanti ‘italiani’ a Spalato nel XV secolo,” 223.



Fig. 2. Split and its surroundings.

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