

B*eyond the Adriatic Sea: A Plurality of Identities and Floating Borders in Visual Culture* is a collection of papers published with the intention to present the various segments and the intertwined nature of culture and visual culture on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and its hinterland. This collection of papers explores the different sources, functions, presentations and receptions of visual culture on and around the Adriatic. It is grounded on the premise that visual culture is one of the fundamental determinants of this region and an active element in its shaping. This is a determinant that defines the identities of all who were tied to the Adriatic coast as a place of residence or saw it, for one reason or another, as its stronghold. The texts collected in this volume are the result of multidisciplinary research of cross-cultural and transcultural interaction which is the underlying structure of visual identities of this region. Their goal is to shed light on certain strata of these complex identities, unknown to this day or insufficiently present in scholarship dedicated to the Mediterranean and Mediterranean studies.

N. Makuljević

The papers edited and collected in the volume *Beyond the Adriatic Sea* provide very stimulating reading not only for art historians but for all readers interested to learn and reflect various aspects of visual culture in this part of the Mediterranean. As a historian I see the close bonds and the relationship of visual media to the production of historical narratives and cultural memory. To come to terms with all the intersections, syncretisms, and conflicts in this part of Europe, and for a better understanding of representation, meaning and culture on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and its hinterland an interdisciplinary approach seems essential. In this respect this volume is a most welcome contribution. The editor's premise that visual culture is one of the fundamental determinants of this region and an active element in its shaping seems well-founded, and the texts collected in this volume are indeed the result of multidisciplinary research of cross-cultural and transcultural interaction which is the underlying structure of visual identities of this region what definitely enables them to shed light on certain strata of these complex identities, unknown to this day or insufficiently present in scholarship dedicated to the Mediterranean and Mediterranean studies.

Aleksandar Jakir

Beyond the Adriatic Sea

A Plurality of Identities and Floating Borders in Visual Culture

edited by:
Saša Brajović



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MEDI
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PUBLISHING



EDITED BY: SAŠA BRAJOVIĆ BEYOND THE ADRIATIC SEA

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*A Plurality of Identities and
Floating Borders in Visual Culture*

COLLECTION OF PAPERS

Edited by:
Saša Brajović



Novi Sad
2015.

BEYOND THE ADRIATIC SEA

A PLURALITY OF IDENTITIES AND
FLOATING BORDERS IN VISUAL CULTURE

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Marian Piety as Devotional and Integrative System in the Bay of Kotor in the Early Modern Period*

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present the fundamental role of Marian piety in religious, social, gender and everyday life of inhabitants of the Bay of Kotor during the early modern period. Marian piety – shaped by varying historical conditions within certain geographic environments – played a formative role in the creation of verbal and visual culture. It has been a main force which outlined the sacral topography of the Bay and thus one of the most important instruments of the integration of the localities and people in this part of the Adriatic Sea.

Key words: Baroque, the Bay of Kotor, Marian piety, Our Lady of the Reef, perception, social order, gender, sacral topography.

The unique geographic space of the Boka Kotorska (Bay of Kotor) in Montenegro – narrow inlet of the Adriatic Sea, consisting of four interconnected basins, lined by steep mountain slopes – was not a monolithic space in terms of spirituality and culture. It was a place of contact and clashes between different

* This research is part of a project: "Representation of identity in art, verbal and visual culture of early modern period" sponsored by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, № 177001.

faiths and traditions. Boka Kotorska was divided between the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire in the early modern times.¹ This territory thus lived in conflict or on the edge of conflict, which both drained and encouraged its facilities, especially in development of maritime economy. The population of the cities of the south part of the bay (Kotor Bay) was predominantly Catholic although, following the Turkish wars (1683-99) that area was also an intensely populated by the Orthodox from Montenegro and Herzegovina who settled mainly in the north, in Risan Bay. Along with the Orthodox and the Muslims, in Risan Bay there was also a Jewish community. Representatives of different faiths and confessions were active in trading with the hinterland and Mediterranean ports as well as in piracy and brigand's activity.² Even with constant conflict, various forms of differentiation and negative generalizations, in this multireligious and multicultural reality there was interaction and intertwining.³ Documents testify of the circulations of people and objects, texts and artefacts, architectural and urbanistic models, in a manner similar to the entire area of the Mediterranean in the early modern era.

In such a complex system the most powerful pillar of integration, and especially among the Catholics in the south part of the Bay, was Marian piety. It was the axis around which sacral and profane space was shaped, as well as identity, public and private

1 During medieval and early modern times the Bay of Kotor belonged to the Byzantine Empire, medieval states of Duklja (Doclea), Zeta, Raška (Rascia), Hungary, and from 1420 to Venetian Republic, within the boundaries of which it remained until its fall in 1797. The ancient city of Kotor, especially in the days of Serbian Nemanjić's state (1185-1371), became one of the most significant ports and gateways of the Balkans on the Mediterranean, and citizens of Kotor established colonies along caravan routes. During Venetian rule, together with Zadar, Kotor was one of the administrative centers of the *Sereminissima* on the east coast of the Adriatic and a center of anti-Turkish political and military action. The one autonomous rural entity of Grbalj in its immediate vicinity was a part of the Ottoman Empire (1469-1647), as was the northern part of the Bay with the cities of Risan and Herceg Novi (1482-1699). About the history of the Bay: Rastoder 2006: 139-143.

2 On trade in the Bay of Kotor: Milošević 2003. Notes on life in the Turkish part of the Bay of Kotor were recorded by Elvija Čelebi, an educate efendi, chronicler and writer, in the fifth book of his travelogue: Čelebi 1967: 428-434. On Islamic culture in these parts: Agović 2001: 239-253. Documents about Jews in Risan and Herceg Novi: Ljubić 1876/77: 244.

3 On observing this space through the prism of interaction: Brajović 2013: 225-232; Brajović 2014:.

life of the inhabitants of this area. Concepts of urban, architectural, painted and sculptural ensembles, icons, relics, votive gifts, liturgical and urban rituals and celebrations devoted to the Virgin were all elements of a system which constructed the self-awareness and integrity of the Bay of Kotor. Marian piety as an unite visual, devotional and performative network, thus shaped the Bay of Kotor as an integrated system the unified qualities of which are recognizable even today.

Perception of Mediatrix's mediation

Marian images, material and immaterial (visions, poetical, rhetorical and descriptive images), were invested with great power in the Bay of Kotor: they performed miracles, had corporeal qualities which gave them the ability to swim, move, talk, weep or be injured and be the injurers, and were truly present in the lives of community and the individual.⁴ As fundamental memory of the mystery of Incarnation and testimony that it took place in time and space, images of the Virgin were perceived not only by seeing – although observing the holy image was always a special state of perception – but with other senses as well.⁵ They were experienced by multisensory vision, that is through a gaze which involves all the senses – sight, sound, touch, taste, hearing – simultaneously (Pentcheva 2006: 631; 2013: 121-155). The traditional Byzantine manner of veneration of images was given power after the Council of Trent (1545-63) which signified the beginning of the Catholic reformation.⁶ For this reason, during baroque period, holy images, including those in the Bay of Kotor, were perceived with sensual experience and then contemplated

4 On the characteristics of icons and their presence in the broader context: Freedberg 1989; Maguier 1996; McCracken 2006.

5 About the multiplicity of gaze, discerning forms of the gaze with regard to images and their viewing: Lentes 2006: 363. About phenomenon of 'seeing' in the early modern period: Hahn 2000.

6 About the Twenty-fifth Session of 1563, which defined the status of sacred image on the base of Second Council of Nicaea of 787: Schroeder 1978: 215-27; Scavizzi 1974. About sensual experience in Counter-Reformation: Cooper 2013.

with *oculis pietatis*, the eye of the soul, as essence of the divine.

Baroque sermons from the Bay of Kotor call on the faithful to ask for remission of sin from the „beautiful, good, perfect“ Virgin. She herself invites them to be „at her door“ every day, to greet her „every morning in the church or in front of her image“. Then she will defend them, accept them, forgive them and commend them to God. In the name of every sinner she will show to her Son „the bosom with which she nursed him“, and for its sake, he will then caress him. The Son will then „show to his Father the wounds he suffered on the cross for the sake of the sinners“, and for the sake of those wounds God the Father will forgive them their sins (sermon with quotations from St Bernardino da Siena's *Opera omnia* 2: 158, given on the feast of the Conception of the Virgin on December 8th, year unknown, NAP XII, 5). This sermon testifies of the expressed sensual potential of integrated presentations of the Incarnation and Passion. The image of the Virgin with Child, found on the altars of a great number of churches in the Bay of Kotor, integrates these two themes and thus becomes the most significant devotional medium.

The holy image of the Virgin, especially that crowned by tradition, as is the case with the icon of Gospa od Škrpjela (Our Lady of the Reef, fig. 1) – created around the middle of the 15th century after an older miracle working icon of the Virgin Hodegetria of Byzantine origin ⁷ – was a living image in Baroque Perast, a *tableau vivant*, and not a lifeless imprint of a holy person or a self-consuming artefact. Clad in a luxurious silver frame which reflected sun rays or candlelight, thus achieving an effect of radiance and an impression of malleability of the surface, accompanied by the sounds of sermons, songs, organs, in the service of the Eucharist (which is the essence of a synaesthesia), or in the course of urban festivals (which are the essence of baroque saturation)

⁷ The painting is ascribed to Lovro Dobričević, painter from Kotor: Karaman 1933: 157-158; Ђурић 1967: 83-89. Hesitation towards this attribution is expressed in: Gamulin 1986-87: 376. Contemporary analysis points toward the so-called *Majstor Gospe od Škrpjela* as the author of the painting: Prijatelj Pavičić 2013: 126-137. About all the segments of the making of a cult of this image – the legend of its acheiropoitos origins, arrival by sea from the East, and the choice of the sea in front of Perast as its home: Brajović 2006: 184-211.

during which she was carried in processions – she was observed, touched, doused with tears and covered with kisses. A multisensory manner of perception enhanced the feeling of belonging of the faithful not only to the metaphysical kingdom but to the community of Perast in the Venetian Republic as well. Our Lady of the Reef, the icon on the altar in the church which was raised for her on an artificial island in the mid-aquatorium of the Bay – the demarcation point between Venetian and Turkish property – had great symbolic power. Within this framework it was an emblem of protective power of the *real* Virgin Mary who by her vigilant eye watched over the Bay of Kotor – a part of the stable and just Venetian state.⁸



Fig. 1

8 On the significance of this image and church in constructing the idea of the Bay of Kotor as the kingdom of the Virgin: Brajović: 2006.

Devotion displayed before Our Lady of the Reef was a system of gaze, gesture, behavior, prayer, devotion, liturgical practice, sacral rites and ceremonies. It united images, texts, music, as well as practices of viewing, reading and listening, and various manifestations of performance.⁹ Source on its presentations and manners of ‘functioning’ during the early modern period testify of its relation with the faithful as very direct, corporeal and spiritual at the same time, thus enhancing its devotional and didactic power.

In a Baroque sermon from Perast, the faithful are called on to uphold the image of the Virgin before their eyes at all times: they should keep it in „their rooms and on themselves“: *E per aiutare la vostra memoria sa dicono averla sempre dinanzi gli occhi adornano le vostre stanze e voi stessi colle Immagini di Lei* (NAP XII, 3). Written and material sources speak also of a great number of medallions with images or relics of the Virgin (fig. 2), which the inhabitants of the Bay of Kotor always held close. Older historiographic works claim that no house in Perast was without a



Fig. 2

9 About these interconnections in broader context: Gertsman 2008; Fisher-Lichte 2008; Bino 2014.

replica of the miracle-working icon. The faithful, as indicated by the quoted sermon, should visit altars dedicated to the Virgin and take part in processions organized in her honor. They should contribute money for the decoration of *la Capella al Santo suo Nome dedicata*, which should thus become a *straoordinarij* home *di Maria Santissima*. This and other sermons made their impression on the audience: the church of Our Lady of the Reef was constantly constructed by each new generation and decorated with luxurious Baroque altars from Genoa and Venice, as well as with painted decoration during the 17th, 18th and 19th century (fig. 1).

As attested by the sermon written immediately after the devastating earthquake of 1667, the veneration of the Virgin's „famous icon“ is equal to the joy of the first Christians who could behold the „heavenly face“ of Mary. That icon had liberated them „from weakness, the plague, the tremors, the destruction and the force of the enemy“. It had also save them from „half-faith“ which had tarnished in all parts of the world „the purity of Catholic faith“. The preacher is inviting the faithful to be decked out, dressed in their best clothes and to „rejoice in front of the church“, because they have their Helper. Enticing the faithful to collectiveness, orthodoxy, hope and joy in that difficult moment, the preacher invites them to enter the church and to observed „those testaments which hang on the holy walls“, which the „Gracious Lady received“ (NAP XII, 5). Thus the Virgin's grace is invested into the votive gifts. In an era in which Perast, like other cities in the Bay of Kotor, thrived on maritime trade, the preacher states that particular attention should be devoted to „that tree which was attacked by winds and the sea waves“, and which would have been preserved through the mediation of the Virgin. By this the preacher showcases one of the votive pictures depicting sail ships in a storm or battle with an image of the the Virgin. In an epoch in which, all over Europe, infant death rate was very high, the

preacher calls on the faithful to contemplate „the child produced in that silver“, i.e. a silver votive plaque donated to the church as a token of gratitude to Our Lady of the Reef for „breathing life“ into a still born child.

These ex-votos were given as gifts to the church of Our Lady of the Reef, itself a votive offering to the Virgin, as the most important pilgrimage goal in the region. This church was visited by inhabitants of Boka and the entire coastal area of present-day Montenegro, citizens of Dubrovnik, Albanians, Venetians. The essence of pilgrimage to Gospa od Škrpjela is visual and tactile veneration of the miracle-working icon, to which pilgrims presented votive offering.¹⁰

A great number of silver votive plaques in Gospa od Škrpjela displays, although schematically, Madonna in the form of the miracle-working icon from Perast (Brajović 2006: 222).¹¹ Drago Martinović, a Baroque captain and chronicler from Perast, wrote: „Countless (victories of the citizens of Perast) are incised in the votives dedicated to the Most Holy Mother Virgin of Škrpjela, and are found with that great Mother, our Protectress There, everyone can see and observe them as signs of great miracles, produced by that most holy protectress, our *Advocata*“ (Милошевић 1996: 297). The rhetorical structure of verbal and visual representation is clear: prayers, as well as gratitude, are addressed not to Mary in general but foremost to Gospa od Škrpjela. Numerous ‘anatomical’ votive plaques are also addressed to her: Our Lady of the Reef was *responsible* for soothing not only spiritual pain and deliverance from great adversity, but also for healing parts of the body.

Captains from Perast, in their hour of peril, required that replicas of the image of Our Lady of the Reef be hung on the front mast, or held high in the hands of sailors, while the crew offers her their devotion – as visualized by one of the votive plaques in the church (Brajković 1987-88, 61). Every sailor would pray to her

10 About sight and touch as a definition of pilgrimage experience: Vikan 2007: 5, 25.

11 On the precise number of votive gifts (1 427), the manner of their production, workshops engaged in their making in the Bay and Venice, iconographic and stylistic analysis of individual examples: Pazzi 2007; Pazzi 2010. On votive gifts in Gospa od Škrpjela in the context of Marian piety in the Bay of Kotor: Brajović 2006: 218-227.

prior to setting off to sea and offer his gratitude, barefoot, upon returning home. The icon offered deliverance from slavery. During the attack of pirates from Tunisia on the city of Perast in 1624, many of its citizens were taken into slavery. Our Lady of the Reef was hurt 'personally': the church was robbed and the icon struck by a bullet.¹² The wounded Gospa inspired the citizens of Perast do collect ransom money. One of the slaves in Algeria, Nikola Buća, a patrician from Kotor, offers his gratitude to the icon by the means of a silver votive plaque (fig. 3).



Fig. 3

The icon was carried from the island to the main altar of the parish church of St Nicolas whenever there was the danger of a possible Turkish attack. During the great attack of the Turkish army in 1654 it was place in the fortress of the Holy Cross. Women, children and old men knelt before it in „fervent prayer“ (Брајковић, Милошевић, 304-316). At this turning point in the process of formation of self-awareness of the city of Perast the

¹² About the damage in the church we learn from *Libro dela Fraternita della Madonna d'Scarpello da Perasto*, 57 (NAP). On the event: Milošević1977.

icon of the Virgin turned its „pupils full of grace“ to the citizens of Perast and guided the bullet into the body of the Turkish leader which resulted in the withdrawal of his forces. The vision of the Virgin at this crucial moment, a topos in the mythologies of urban centers of the Mediterranean world, was noted also in Venetian sources: „The Great Lady“ above the walls repelled enemy fire with her shroud (Corner 1760: 427-428). The Perast legend stresses that the Virgin had thrown ashes into the eyes of the Turks who were thus blinded and had to run away.

The icon of the Our Lady of the Reef is the heart of the ephemeral spectacle which was established in the aftermath of this defense of the city and is celebrated each May 15th as the feast of Virgin of Perast. In this complex and elaborate conglomerate of maritime and urban rituals, liturgical and pious practices, the icon was an intercessor between humans and the divine which had power to transform the viewer from observer to participant. During the course of translation of the icon the peal of bells from the city churches was incessant, shots were fired from fortresses and docked ships and there was singing. At certain points the procession would halt in order for the faithful to pass under the holy image to kiss or touch it. At those moments her divine presence, which provoked tears, became fully visible and tangible and almost auditory accessible. This dynamic relationship annulled the tension between worldly and the transcendent. In this multi-sensory theatrical performance, at once religious and profane, the Virgin's icon integrated urban spaces, as well as the whole of Boka Kotorska, and turned it into an image of the Kingdom of the Virgin.

Participation in this procession, as well as in the festive activities celebrating the Assumption of the Virgin Mary – the feast to which the church Our Lady of the Reef is dedicated – brought everyone, especially those in most direct contact with the icon, a great relief: in 1723 pope Benedict XIII, as well as and pope Pius VI at the end of 18th century, granted them indulgencies and absolution from sin (Vulović 1887: 153-154).

Marian piety as defender of order

The Virgin's material and immaterial images in the Bay of Kotor performed many tasks, doctrinary-dogmatic, sociological and cultural, which the Godmother which were elaborated over the course of development of Catholic Mariology. Marian piety can be observed as an instrument of a dynamic argument from the Catholic church about the structure of society, presented as a God-given code (Warner 2013: 344).

The vision of the Virgin who appeared to one of the most famous and most influential women in the history of the Bay of Kotor – Blessed Ozana of Kotor (1493-1565), saved that old town from civil strife between the nobles and the citizens.¹³ At the moment they made a decision to „cut each other to the death“, Ozana appeased them by her mystical ecstasy. She had a vision of the Virgin spreading her shroud over the holy protectors and patrons of the city of Kotor: St Tryphon, the personification of the ancient patrician city, „quieted with his right hand the agitated spirits of the nobles, who gathered up in arms on the Piazza of St. Tryphon to protect their rights“, and St. Vincent Ferrer, the protector of the *popolano*, who was calming down „the citizens who often came to the nearby Piazza of the Sea“, in his desire to „defend them from the coming evil“. The visualization of the emblematic conciliatory figure of *Mater misericordiae* under whose shroud kneels the unified city commune was salvific in cases of social tensions in the Bay and the Mediterranean world. Within the boundaries of the Venetian Republic, who was skillful at protecting social peace and resisting democratic processes, the image of the Virgin was a sort of social stabilizer and channel of preservation of order.

In particular Our Lady of the Reef was an indicator of social tensions: she had the ability to recognize them and to control them. In 1766 the Minor Council of Perast raised the case against

13 The most comprehensive biography of the Blessed Ozana was written by the Dominican Serafino Razzi in 1589 and published in Florence in 1592 as *Vita della reverenda serva di Dio la madre suor Ossanna da Cattaro, dell'ordina di San Domenico*. It is presented in: Милошевић1996: 102-129. On the reconstruction of identity of Blessed Ozana: Brajović 2013.

those who „incited the people out of pure ambition, promising thus to the innocent citizens that they would introduce them to all the services and flattering them that they would bring them to the highest honors in the fatherland”. Kotor’ *provveditore* Emo ordered that the leader of the movement against the *ancient régime* of sorts, Antun Maticola, his followers and „anyone who shows no respect to representatives of power”, be fined with 25 pieces of gold „in favor of the holy temple of Our Lady of the Reef” (Butorac 1999: 129). Our Lady of the Reef equally merciful to the rich and the poor, while being at the same time integrated into the system of far reaching social control organized by both the Republic and the church.

The church and the icon of Our Lady were a symbolic presentation of structural relations inside the city and an emblem of its spiritual and political unity. The church served as the city *loggia* with an organized communal legal service. In this sanctuary sessions were held at which respectable city dignitaries were elected to office, disputes resolved, reconciliations as well as decisions on the purchase those taken into slavery made. The sanctuary offered a safe haven for fugitives from the law – brigands (*hajduks*), whom the Venetian Republic deftly instrumentalized in its conflicts with the Turks, still occasionally requiring they be delivered to the authorities.¹⁴ The Virgin was an emblem to all strata of society: one popular lyrical song celebrates the „all-pure lady“ who holds the keys to „celestial heights and the deepest of the deep”, and is thus able not only to „free the sailors at sea“, but also „the tired plough man in the fields, the weary traveler on the road, the poor herdsman in the mountain, the pleasant in the village“.¹⁵

The icon of Gospa od Škrpjela offered a sense of security after the fall of the Venetian Republic. Citizens of Perast, proud bearers of the state flag for almost four centuries, buried the flag under the altar of the parish church as a sign of devotion to the dying fatherland. Over three days the icon was the catalyst of grieving and apprehension over the loss of the state: it was kissed inces-

14 About sessions and brigands in the church of Our Lady of the Reef: Butorac 1928, 78, 93.

15 The song is recorded in: Злоковић1962: 297.

santly and born in processions. In the changing of power between the Austrians, the French, the Russians, and the Austrian again (1797-1814), social peace was preserved in processions with her image always at their center. At the moment the Bay finally came under Austrian control, representatives of the authorities expressed their gratitude to Our Lady „for so many special acts of mercy that she had offered them in those tumultuous times“.

The integration of Gospa od Škrpjela and state authorities was verbalized and visualized a number of times: in city statutes, travel documents, flags, pictures, parts of ships which all bring together the coat of arms of Perast and the Venetian Republic and the image of the Virgin. Peasants from the environs, who came bearing gifts on the occasion of the feast of the Virgin of Perast, swore their obedience to „saint Mark and the blessed Virgin“.

The Virgin was considered the one most responsible for economic prosperity of the cities in the Bay of Kotor. The preacher Andrija Balović wrote that it was by her merit that ships from Perast reached „all corners of the earth“ and „were the first to sail the distant seas“ and could thus open „new sources of riches“. It is to her that gratitude should be expressed for the fact that Perast has „more ships than any other place on the sea in our State“. Because it was for those ships, i.e. the employment opportunities they offered, that there were many new arrivals to the city, the Virgin was also credited with „populating our land with multitudes despite so many hardships“ (Брајковић, Милошевић 1978: 304-316).

Gospa od Škrpjela, who integrated popular piety and civic patriotism, expressed spiritual and political, but also an ethnic integrity, which was very important in times of settlement of Orthodox population from the hinterland. In a report written by the abbot Antun Zambela and addressed to Marin Drago, the bishop of Kotor, dating from 1708, the author describes how high morale was restored to a certain Orthodox village when some of its village people came into service of ships from Perast where they were introduced to the cult and veneration of Our Lady of the Reef. Local legend points out that the Orthodox were often seen as visitors to the church, especially on occasion of the great

feasts, to which they brought offerings. As proof, an ex-voto from the 18th century with representation of a double cross is mentioned, the only such example among votive gifts in the whole Bay of Kotor (Pazzi 2010: 244). Although it is possible that this so-called *croce doppia* was actually a gift from some pilgrim from central Europe – where this form of the cross did exist in Catholic parts of the region – in the context of the Bay of Kotor is more probable that it was bestowed by an Orthodox. A pilgrim from Agisto in Greece, Nikola Teodori, a sailor or merchant, presented to the church a votive plaque in 1703 (Pazzi 2010: 36), which goes to prove that Gospa od Škrpjela was held in high esteem among the Orthodox in the eastern Mediterranean.

Local tradition claims that Our Lady of Škrpjela was also respected by the Muslims. Among the testimonies and proofs there are silver votive plaques with presentations of the Virgin Mary in Turkish cross-legged seating on pillows, *alla sultana*. The idea of Virgin Mary as Sultana has a complex history which goes as far back as the first centuries of Christianity. It was instrumentalized in particular by the Jesuit in their missions in Mount Lebanon during the 18th century as a sort of 'enlightenment' among 'natural Christians' (Khater 2011: 89). One particular silver plaque shows a sailor offering thank to the Virgin *alla sultana* for delivering him from shipwreck by praying the rosary (Pazzi: 62), which goes to prove that he was a Catholic (fig. 4). Still, it is possible, as stated by local tradition, that silver plaques with this particular iconographic formula, popular in the Levant during the late 17th and 18th century, were produced by Turkish craftsmen of the Turkish part of the Bay of Kotor. The orientalist Madonnas in the church of Gospa od Škrpjela are among those presentations which cannot be categorized as belonging to just one single culture.¹⁶ They are a hybrid blend of two traditions and an expression of mutual living and coexistence of the Christians and Muslims who, although in different modes, were in agreement over the question of veneration of the Virgin Mary.¹⁷

16 On such images as examples of Jesuit art produced in the Far East: Bailey 2001:3-16.

17 On venerating the Virgin Mary as mother of the Prophet, untouched by sin, in the Islamic world: Seumoiss 1957: 212; Pelikan 1996: 67-80.

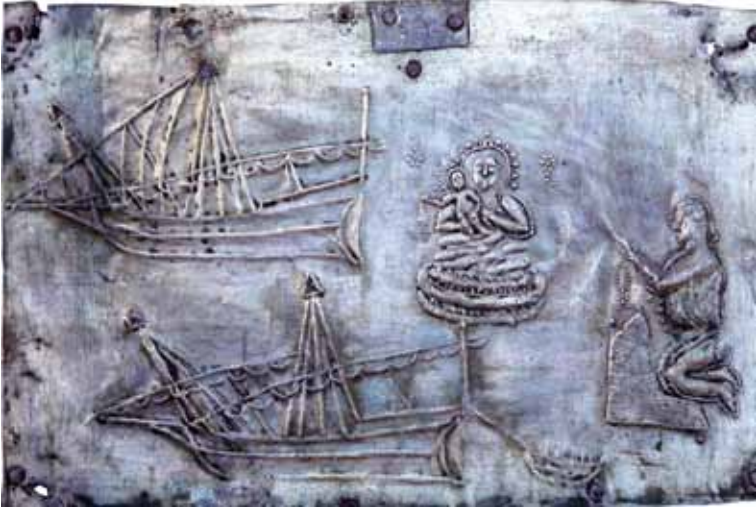


Fig. 4

Marian devotion and (female) gender

The Virgin Mary has always been the most important female figure with whom Christians could relate. In contemporary historiography, Mary's role is interpreted in various ways: some feminist historians have seen Her as an instrument in creation of male society which reinforce misogynist values; some see Her as the historical embodiment of fully realized womanhood. Everyone agrees that the Catholic ideal of the Virgin Mary encompasses an essential and ambiguous notion of gender roles, and that, thus, the cult of the Virgin cannot be properly analyzed without taking into account early modern notions of womanhood (Carroll 1986; Levine 2005: 1-14; Tavad 2005: 107-120; Van den Hengel 2005: 130-146; Heal 2007: 262).

Although Marian piety shaped both men's and women's devotion, it was a devotion which influenced the women first and foremost. In the early modern period – a time of continual reinforce-

ment of gender hierarchies and patriarchal structure (Wiesner 2000: 311), she was the principal role model for women. For lay women she was a symbol through her motherhood, for celibate female through her virginity. Verbal and visual culture in the Bay of Kotor attests to that.

The text of the sermon delivered on the occasion of the feast of Conception of Mary in 1702 in Dobrota, the Virgin is invested with her traditional attributes the visual power of which was highly efficient. She is represented as „the Star of the Morning, the star which is not diminished, nor does it withdraw the light of its sustenance“. Because she was conceived without sin, she is represented as „dressed in the Sun and standing on the Moon, surrounded by a wreath of 12 stars“. Images of the Virgin as the immaculately conceived, preserved in the churches of the Bay of Kotor, served as visual aids to the sermons, in accordance with the concept *Ut pictorae sermones*. Because she „united in a miraculous way within herself fertility and virginity“ she should be the object of devotion of virgins, pregnant women, mothers and barren women in particular, who are called upon to relinquish „sinful medicine“ (NAP XII, 6). They should learn from the Virgin Mary to preserve their purity while women should learn from her the rules of conduct – especially „not to talk in the church“. The text of a sermon delivered on the same feast in 1796 points out that the Virgin, „the fort of virginity“, has promoted the perception of virginity as virtue. Still, „vicious people“ often claim that „virginity is infertile and useless“, so that „the fathers of the Holy Council of Trent gathered and united in the Holy Spirit“ proclaimed that „a Virginal being is much better and more perfect than that of Marriage“. For that reason the preacher reminds the faithful of the obligation that „the virgins of God“ be presented with gifts and preserved. He admonishes the „sad parents“ not to promise „their children in marriage before their time“, but to wait until their children reach „an age of reason and choose their being according to inspiration and the calling of God“ (NAP XII, 6). Sermons testify that the Virgin Mary was the preachers' model for both virgins and wives, an image of the ideal female,

wife, and mother. Through verbal-visual presentation of „humble, obedient, timid“, „untiring in action“ and „God loving in prayer“ Mary, women were encouraged to follow her exemplary humility and domesticity. Sermons indicate that celibacy and virginity remained the ideal for Catholic women in the 18th century in the Bay of Kotor.

But, the sermon of the late 18th century reveals something more. Sending girls off to the convent was a traditional solution for families from the Bay of Kotor who could not secure the precondition necessary for their marriage – the dowry. However, the statute foresaw the obligation of the family to offer material support to daughters who made monastic vows because monasteries were sustained by those means.¹⁸ At this moment we have no relevant data regarding the possible decrease in the number of nuns in the Bay of Kotor in the late 18th century. Judging by the sermon, it does seem to have dwindled and that the preacher indeed had a reason to remind his flock of the tradition of taking the habit as well as of the obligatory sustenance of this manner of feminine existence. It may well have been that constant economic progress of the 18th century encouraged a growing number of families to include their daughters in marriage-finance related transactions, instead of fostering obligations of supporting them in nunneries. A very small part in this may also be assigned to ideas of enlightenment which were slow to penetrate the area of the Bay. In those days, and in that semi archaic and semi modern space, the verbal-visual image of the Virgin admonished of the right of women from the Bay of Kotor to choose „their being“ in God, a traditional path of articulation of the female identity.

It was that being that the shepherd girl from an Orthodox village in Montenegro, Jovana Djujović (as she was probably called), had chosen with the help of a vision of the Virgin with Child, thus becoming the Blessed Ozana of Kotor. This Dominican nun, who spent her life in strict anachoresis – as a recluse (‘walled up’ in her cell), with the help of visions of the Virgin exerted consider-

18 On women and marriage in medieval Kotor: Blehova-Čelebić 2002; Mitrović 2013, 2015; Благојевић 2015.

able influence on life in general in the city of Kotor. Ozana's ecstatic visions displayed their particular strength in the summer of 1539 when the Turkish fleet of Khayr ad-Dīn Barbarossa held the city under siege. Great fear set upon the old medieval city closed within its fortress walls. Blessed Ozana implored the Virgin Mary as the ultimate source of connection with the divinity: with her visions, prayers and calls to the public to apply themselves to the Rosary devotion, she encouraged them and they succeeded in repelling the attack.

The Virgin's name is invoked in songs sung at weddings. In a sort of poetic drama of profane-sacral nature from 1757, composed by a passionate Baroque preacher and writer, Ivan Antun Nenadić, there is a description of the departure of Tonina Barižoni, a girl from Kotor, leaving the world of urban life for the nunnery of St Joseph in Kotor. The nun to be bids farewell to her relatives, earlier habits and the worldly existence, puts on the habit and becomes a bride of Christ, taking on Mary's name.¹⁹ On the occasion of great church feasts and urban festivals girls and women would decorate the icon of Our Lady of the Reef with white roses, and that traditions has been preserved to this day. The Virgin Mary was invoked at all major life events: childbirths, weddings, baptisms, diseases, funerals... Women looked to the Virgin Mary to be their role model and serve as their advocate in heaven. The extent of their devotion and what they looked like giving themselves to the Virgin, is attested by some silver votive plaques in the church of Our Lady of the Reef (fig. 5), which reveal a complex relationship between visual imagery and contemporary attitudes toward gender.²⁰

19 The appropriate song by the vicar from Dobrota, Luka Burović, on the occasion of a wedding dating from the mid-18th century, as well as the song on the occasion of taking the monastic vows of T. Barižoni by Nenadić are both published in: Милошевић, Брајковић 1976: 347-349, 183-187.

20 More on this subject in the paper: Brajović, Ulčar, *Female devotion and presentation on silver votive plaques in the church of Our Lady of the Reef*, forthcoming.



Fig. 5

*Marian piety as integration power
of the Bay of Kotor*

In times of constant danger from the Turks, pirates, plagues, earthquakes, floods during the 17th century, perseverance was designated as the most important characteristic of the Virgin Mary, chosen for its power to strengthen the characters of both genders. In the sermon delivered in 1685 on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, written by the very young Vicko Zmajević, the future archbishop of Zadar, with the help of his uncle, Andrija, the archbishop of Bar, the Virgin is compared to a palm tree, one of the traditional attributes of the Godmother (Canticles 7, 6), because both are „upright and tall and do not bend under burden“, and bear all „hardships, sorrows, troubles in this world“.

The Virgin has „born the glorious fruit of life, the only cure for deadly and poisonous sin of Eve our first mother“. Because she was the reason that sinners were restored and „the gates of eternal glory to open“, the preacher calls for her celebration as „that ship which leads us to the harbor of eternal salvation“ and the one who is „God lovingly honored and celebrated among all nations, all tongues, all peoples, all kingdoms, all states, all cities, all places, all the lands across the entire world“.²¹ This sermon expresses the ideas of Baroque Catholic universalism which Andrija Zmajević presented in his written work *Annales Ecclesiastici*, and in the *con-cetto* of painted decoration in the church of Our Lady of the Reef, created 1684-94. The climax of this program and visualization of this sermon is the *Coronation of the Virgin*. Apart from expressing doctrinaire and moralizing stands of the Catholic church, this painting also celebrated the liberation of the north shores of the Bay of Kotor from the Turks and the integration of the population within the frameworks of one church and state.²²

Priests, religious orders – especially the Franciscans and the Dominicans, confraternities, humanists, poets, the wealthy and educated individuals strove to homogenize this region. Totality of space, creation of a unique spiritual-political entity, was carried out by its sacralisation, i.e. through its sacral topography. United, the Catholic church and Venice, strove to make the Bay of Kotor into a Garden of the Virgin Mary on earth, by relying to a great measure on morphological concordance of the bay and the garden, both closed forms and landscapes of beauty. Churches, chapels and altars dedicated to the Virgin were raised on those locations in the bay which were of prime strategic standing – on cliffs overlooking the sea or by its waters, on its shore, on river banks, leaning against city walls, on the crossroads of significant thoroughfares. From the very point of entry and throughout Boka there are churches dedicated to the Virgin, and in them her cultic icons, figures and relics. Such a careful disposition of objects of

21 *Propovjed na dan Uzvišenja Blažene Djevice Marije. Razgovor duhovni godišta MD-CLXXXV*, is published in: Брајковић, Милошевић 1978: 301-303.

22 About Zmajević's conceptual programme of the painted decoration in the church: Brajović 2000; Tomić. About Zmajević as a patron of art: Brajović 2010.

her cult, as well as the many different manifestations of Marian piety, in particular the urban celebrations, are all the result of a well thought out strategy rooted in the vision of the Bay of Kotor as a well-organized and arranged entity. The heart of this artistic landscape was the church raised for the icon of Our Lady of the Reef (fig. 1). Other churches dedicated to the Virgin also lay at the core of shaping the identity and integrity of cities in the Bay of Kotor: for example the church in the city of Prčanj, rising above the shore, the most luxurious and most representative sacral structure in Boka. A special place in this entire corpus belongs to the copy of the icon of the Virgin with Child from the papal endowment of *Santa Maria Maggiore*, which the archbishop of Bar Andrija Zmajević brought and placed on the altar of his funerary chapel dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. This image became the palladium of Zmajević's efforts in the task of *dissemination of true faith*, i. e. that of strengthening of Catholicism (Brajović 2006: 97-98).

Buildings and objects dedicated to the Virgin Mary determined the urban space, and thus also urban behavior and activities of its citizens. They were an integral part of everyday life, reasoning, perception and emotional status of individuals and the community as a whole. Marian piety was a form of the culture of living and one of the most significant means for the development and vitality of this region of Mediterranean through the centuries.

Resume

In the unique geographic space of Boka Kotorska, divided between the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire in the early modern times, the most powerful axis of integration, especially in the southern part of the Bay, among Catholics, was Marian piety. The first part of this paper discusses ways of perception of Marian images, verbal and visual, in particular of the icon of Our Lady of the Reef. This icon was observed, touched, doused with tears, presented with *ex-voti*, transferred to city walls to provide protec-

tion and carried in urban processions. The second part of the text considers Marian piety as an instrument of protection of order. Documents and legends testify that in times of Turkish and pirate attacks, plagues, earthquakes, floods, social tensions and changes, Marian piety functioned as an instrument of preservation of social and economic order. Marian piety, especially in the form of devotion to Our Lady of the Reef as the central Marian church and icon in the Bay, expressed also confessional and ethnical integrity, which was of utmost importance in times of Turkish presence and arrival of Orthodox population from the hinterland. The third part of this paper discusses the manner in which Marian piety shaped women's devotion, and thus also the way of life of both virgins and wives. Finally, it describes the mode in which the Catholic church and Venice, united, used Marian piety to make the Bay of Kotor into a Garden of the Virgin Mary on earth, i. e. a well organized and arranged entity. Marian piety was a form of culture of living and one of the most significant means of providing development and vitality to this region of Mediterranean through the centuries.

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