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EPIDEMICS IN EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN CULTURE: THE CASE OF THE BAY OF KOTOR DURING THE VENETIAN AND AUSTRIAN GOVERNMENT

Abstract: This study discusses structural changes in European societies between the 14th and the 20th century caused by major epidemics of plague and cholera, which had an impact on official institutions, societal norms, segments of public and private life, devotional practices, sacral and urban topography, and other areas of visual culture. This paper is focused on the Bay of Kotor (Montenegro) governed by the Republic of Venice from 1420 to 1797, and the Austrian Empire from 1797 to 1805, and from 1815 to 1918. This study analyzes health institutions, pious manifestations, verbal and visual images created to defend against epidemics or as an expression of gratitude for its passing. Selected representations indicate the similarity of pious practices, forms of behavior and images during crises, over a long period of time. Some of them express a denial of the crisis, in order to create an ideal picture of political stability.

Keywords: epidemics, the Bay of Kotor, the Republic of Venice, Austrian Monarchy, visual culture

The Plague

It is commonly recognized that the history of Europe between the 14th and the 18th century could be portrayed as the history of the plague. The dreaded disease shaped private and public life, attitudes toward notions of the soul, body, and death, religion and devotional practices, economic and political life, literature, music, sacral and urban topography, as well as artistic production.

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Everything Giovanni Boccaccio wrote in his essential sociological, psychological, and cultural analysis of the plague's impact in "The First Day" (Introduction) of *The Decameron* from 1348 was also true of the cities on the Montenegrin coast, and especially of the Bay of Kotor. Boccaccio records that the plague is brought on by the "Wrath of God" (as claimed also many centuries earlier by Homer in the first book of *The Iliad*), and neither reason nor any undertaken measure, nor counsel on health protection and prayer was of any effect. Some retreated into isolation, others relished in debauchery and mocked everything. The plague destroyed families and society, for people ran from one another, even parents from their children. New customs replaced old ones, especially when it came to treating the deceased body: the sick died alone, without mourning and rituals, and their bodies were thrown into hastily dug collective pits (Boccaccio, 1998, pp. 6–23). The repercussions of these attitudes towards death beware far-reaching: it was only at the end of the 18th century that these practices were replaced by establishing new cemeteries and creating the custom of visiting the graves by the relatives of the deceased (Ariés, 1974, pp. 64–68).

Boccaccio writes that there were not enough people left to work the land and take care of the cattle, hence famine ensued. The palaces were deserted, violence was present everywhere, and "the authority of the laws, both human and divine, was all in a manner dissolved and fallen into decay." Numerous sources confirm that the pestilence provoked serious economic crises: maritime economy, trade, agriculture, construction work dwindled. This was followed by an inevitable social transformation: feudalism suffered a great blow in some parts of Europe, which caused the middle class to rise, allowing for greater social mobility of the rich merchants (Herlihy, 1997).

The plague was a constant threat to public health on the territory of present-day Montenegro, from the last decades of the 14th to the first decades of the 19th century. It was recorded in Budva and Ulcinj in 1390. In Kotor, judging by indirectly associated documents, it was already active in the second half of the 14th century. Documents testifying of outbreaks of the plague in that city with a strongly developed maritime economy: 1400, 1422, 1427–1430, 1435, 1457, 1503, and 1572 (Bazala, 1962). The victim of the disease of 1422 was Kotor's bishop Raimund de Viterbo. Bishop Marino Contareno writes that in July of 1435 the city was deserted due to the raging plague, except for only 17 people that stayed inside the city walls. Testimonies of how strong the fear of *morbo grande* was can be found in wills, especially in those bequeathed by women. After losing her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren, Petruša Branković called the

confessor Trifun Bizanti to record her last will since she could not find the public notary. Her will was dictated in a hurry and without signatures of witnesses, who refused to come into the contagious house (Блехова Челебић, 2002, p. 38).

Along with the epidemic in 1503, the Ottoman-Venetian war (1499–1503) raged on, as well as the great famine, all of which resulted in 400 death cases in Kotor only in June. On the heels of the epidemic in 1572 came the consequences of the War of Cyprus (1570–1573). In January that year, the epidemic entered the city together with 500 soldiers from a Venetian warship. It lasted for six months and took more than 3500 lives (Milošević, 2003). Citizens of Kotor complained that they had lost everything “but the bare walls of our bare houses” (Stanojević, 1975, p. 60).

Epidemics of the Bubonic plague led to a new attitude towards health, which became a political category. They provoked the establishment of sanitary services, increased control of people and goods, and the establishment of *lazzaretti*, places that served for isolating the sick and those waiting for the biblical 40 days of quarantine to be over. The new health service, *Provveditori della sanità*, was established in 1434, during the regimen of Paolo Contarini, the Venetian governor of Kotor. Not long after that, by the decision of the Small and Secret Council, *Magistrato alla sanità* was also founded, whose members, the city’s noblemen, were in charge of controlling the quarantine, ships, passengers, and goods (Katić, 1958; Милошевић, 1959; Мијушковић, 1963). During the 16th century, one *lazzareto* in Kotor was active outside the city walls, at the mouth of the river Škurda, and another in the neighboring village of Dobrota.

High awareness of natural surroundings as well as the rising need for physical protection, present in Florence and Venice (Benvenuto, 1995; Cohn, 2010), was strong in Kotor as well. In relation to that, the spring of drinking water on Puč (*fons Pucius/Puteus*) was tended to with care, and after its contamination, people used boats to fetch clean water outside the city. *Provveditori della sanità* banned burials within the city walls, which provoked the revolt of wealthy citizens (Čremošnik, 1921–1922, p. 148).

Noble families fled from the dangerous city life and *morte cruda*, finding shelters in the surrounding lands and residences, or isolating themselves on ships or the island of Stradioti (Saint Gabriel) near Tivat (Stjerčević & Kovijanić, 1957, pp. 13–14; Мијушковић & Ковијанић, 1964, pp. 82–83). The island was mentioned in *Bove d’Oro*, a chronicle written by the Benedictine monk and nobleman Timotej Cizila in 1624, as a place where people found safety in times of wars or epidemics, as happened “in the year of our Lord 1623, in times of the plague in Kotor, when people fled from the city infected with this most horrible contagion, with

the help of the more than honorable guards of Kotor nobles, citizens, and the Italian army” (Цизила, 1996, p. 95).

The plague epidemic gave rise to empathy and care for the sick and the poor, which could be understood as an element of the wide-spreading democratic process. On the other hand, archival records indicate that city services identified the poor as carriers of contagion (Pullan, 1992; Henderson, 1992). A similar attitude was recorded in Kotor, especially according to the case presented in front of the Venetian *Signoria*. On August 27, 1454, the citizens of Kotor pleaded to open up the island of Stradioti, which once belonged to the municipality, to the free use of all people fleeing the plague (Ćremošnik, 1921–1922, pp. 172–178).

In each plague epidemic, the “culprits” for its occurrence and effects were identified and castigated. Prostitutes were especially targeted and publicly humiliated. The most severely persecuted were Jewish people, accused of deliberately sowing the plague and poisoning the waters (Cantor, 2001, pp. 147–168). Epidemics accelerated the development of the ghetto (the first was founded in Venice in 1516, soon after the devastating epidemic of 1510). Anti-Semitism “was not created by the plague, but the plague gave anti-Semites a murderous excuse” (Kenny, 2021, p. 87). State authorities, proverbially dedicated to maintaining order, tolerated occasional ghetto raids, murders, and robberies.

The detection of culprits was also present on the Montenegrin coast. Andrija Zmajević, the Archbishop of Bar, writes about the plague outbreak that struck his diocese in 1673 and states that the pestilence was brought upon them by “the new *beg*, the ruler of Albania,” causing the death of 60 persons. That “scourge of God,” according to Zmajević, was sent by the Lord to the cities that “did great evil in Puglia and to the Holy Father Pope on Earth” (referring to the attacks of the Ottoman pirates on the opposite coast of the Adriatic Sea). “Those infidels” (the Muslims) died, while their neighbors (Christians) “escaped the pestilence” (Змајевић, 1996, pp. 514–515).

During the epidemic, women accused of being witches were brought to trials in front of the Venetian *Provveditore* in Kotor. Thus, in 1708, several children fell ill in the town of Risan, apparently from the so-called “Red wind,” once a deadly bacterial infection erysipelas. Accused of causing the disease, Stane Perova, an herbalist from the neighboring village, was punished, and Bojana Sredanova admitted she was a witch (Шеровић, 1958).

During the 17th century, the measures for protection against epidemics in Europe became stricter and more effective (Henderson, 2019). Similar occurrences could be traced in the Bay of Kotor in the 17th and 18th

century. From 1697, when the cities in the north of the Bay were returned to the Venetian Republic, ships and crews had to pass all prescribed medical examinations in the *lazzaretti* of Herceg Novi. All ships that wanted to enter the inner Bay could do so only if accompanied by a state ship and examined by its sanitary team (Zloković, 1982; Lalošević, 2017).

However, despite all the measures, the plague persistently penetrated the Venetian towns on the Montenegrin coast in 1613, 1622–1623, 1647–1648, and especially in 1690, the so-called *la peste della serve*, one of the greatest epidemics (Gelicich, 1882, p. 62; Jeremić & Tadić, 1938; Bazala, 1962; Kralj-Brassard, 2016). Its destructive power on the east coast of the Adriatic was particularly felt due to hunger, the fatalities brought on by the Morean War (1684–1699), and the long-lasting effects of the 1667 earthquake. In the autumn of 1690, it was the cause of death of many, especially in the village of Orahovac by Perast, which belonged to the Ottoman part of Boka (Hrabak, 1989).

The plague struck in the 18th as well as in the first decades of the 19th century. In 1818, it attacked the villages above Kotor, in Montenegro. An Austrian military doctor serving in Dubrovnik, Alberto Muzarelli, was sent to the Bay of Kotor and Montenegro to report on health issues due to a planned visit of the Austrian Emperor Franz I. He testified on the difficult situation in impoverished households (Priatelj, 1961).

Infectious disease was not the only problem. Following the fall of the Venetian Republic and the Peace of Campo Formio in 1797, Boka became a part of the Austrian Empire which strove, already during its first administration of 1797–1805, to deconstruct the centuries-long communal organization based on urban statutes and privileges and to create a centralized and bureaucratic state system. Napoleon's wars and taxes imposed by the French administration – contribution, requisition, labor on roads and fortifications, ban on tobacco planting, and by the end of 1810 forced recruitment into the army, brought about a deep economic crisis (Zloković, 1962). As a result of the state bankruptcy of Austria, it escalated in 1815 when the rich inhabitants of Boka, who had purchased state bonds, lost great fortunes. The maritime economy came to a halt.

Still, during the brief interludes between outbreaks of infectious disease and other crises, spirits were revived and creativity inspired. Behind many architectural and artistic undertakings stood business and charity organizations, called *scuole* in the Venetian domain. Their existence in Boka was recorded as early as the 13th century – the oldest being the *fraternitas S. Crucis* founded in Kotor in 1298, and described as *flagellantium*. Church and city authorities encouraged processions of flagellants, who expressed collective penitence by public self-flagellation, together with other

forms of mass religious enthusiasm (Martin, 1988; Henderson, 1978). But, after the first wave of the Black Death, these fraternities dedicated themselves to charitable activities. Members of the *Fraternitas S. Crucis* were both nobles and citizens, as well as women. In 1372, the fraternity also raised the *Hospitale pauperum sancte Crucis* next to its church of the Holy Cross (Stjepčević, 1938, pp. 60–61). Other fraternities in Boka were also devoted to the founding of churches and charitable institutions and, thus, to the collective good and wellbeing.

The reputation of fraternities – acquired, among other means, by the burials they provided for their members and their respective families – grew, riding on the wave of the great Catholic Reform, which began with the Tridentine council (1545–1563). The status of protector against the plague acquired blessed Osanna of Cattaro (Ozana Kotorska, 1493–1565, beatified in 1934), visionary, anchoress, and a Dominican tertiary.

In the Vita of the Beata from Kotor, the Dominican Serafino Razzi points out the significant role she played in the troubling times of pestilence. Although Razzi notes that it was *una certa mortalità infermità* that lasted long and had no cure, one can ascertain that he was referring to the plague, which, as Razzi himself notes, was raging in Dubrovnik in 1533 (Razzi, 1593, pp. 36–37). The Beata Osanna prayed to the Lord and, “to receive a better answer,” to her patron saint, St Vincent Ferrer. One morning, in the first light of day, with devoted prayer and many shed tears, “she rose in ecstasy, out of any sense.” She saw St Vincent and heard him tell her to quiet down, wipe her tears, for her prayers had been answered. Thereby “stopped this vicious ailment and nobody died of it anymore,” while the citizens of Kotor offered praise to the Lord. Osanna’s powerful visions inspired action – prayers, processions, reconciliations, forgiveness, which lifted the spirit and allayed the feeling of helplessness (Brajović, 2013).

The fear of death encouraged the strengthening of *devotio moderna*. It was mostly enacted by the mendicant religious orders, especially the Franciscans, who gained a great reputation during the times of the plague for staying in the cities and treating the sick. Their sermons, church buildings and pertaining decorations, the various forms of devotion, to a large extent determined the spiritual life, culture and mentality of the Bay of Kotor (Brajović, 2006, pp. 133–58; Живковић, 2010, pp. 62–76).

The plague invigorated the Franciscan devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, an emblematic figure of protection and mercy. It inspired the development of Marian teachings, especially the Immaculate Conception. Within the framework of broader theological and social changes, the plague contributed to the transformation of the central image of Christianity – the image of the Virgin and Child.

Although the plague inspired the depictions of decomposed bodies, skeletons, images of *danse macabre* which united people of all ages and social strata, the ghostly emaciation of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, the triumph of death, the art produced in times of epidemics exceeded the grim macabre flavor (Huizinga, 1996, pp. 294–328; Cohn, 1997). The image of Madonna that expresses the dialectic of birth, suffering, death, and eternal life, has been colored with touching tenderness and beauty since the times of the plague.

Although there is no direct proof of the association between the most venerate miraculous image in the Bay o Kotor, *Our Lady of the Reef* (Gospa od Škrpjela), the work of painter Lovro Dobričević from Kotor from the middle of the 15th century (Ђурић, 1967; Brajović, 2000; Prijatelj Pavičić, 2013, pp. 126–137), and the plague, one can ascertain that its creation and veneration were speeded by the outbreaks of pestilence. According to local chronicles and sermons, this disease never attacked Perast, unlike the nearby town of Kotor. Immediately after the devastating earthquake of 1667, a sermon written celebrates the icon for protecting the city from “the plague, earthquakes, and the enemy” (NAP, XII/5; Brajović, 2015).

Based on the inscriptions, we know of ex-vote being laid before the icon. The church in front of Perast, itself a votive offering to the Blessed Virgin Mary, holds one of the most exceptional treasures of votive gifts in the Mediterranean. However, pirate and Turkish raids of the sanctuary in 1624 and 1654, have taken away many of its hundreds of silver plaques. Among the remaining ones, laid out in the manner of a frieze lining the lateral walls of the church and the organs in the choir (Pazzi, 2007), it is difficult to identify those directly testifying of the plague. The so-called “anatomic” votives, displaying human body parts, are fashioned in a schematized manner which further impedes their identification.

The plague encouraged the creation of new iconographic models, such as *Madonna della Misericordia*, *Pietà*, *Sacra conversazione*. The image of the Virgin with the Child is especially effective when saints, the protectors from the plague, appear next to them: the noble Sebastian, St Anthony of Padua, St Bernardino of Siena, St Christopher, St Spyridon (Стошић, 29–50), St Vincent Ferrer and, most frequently, St Rocco.

Built into the passageway of the main city gate of Kotor, the Sea Gate, there is a relief with the figures of the Virgin and Child, St Tryphon with a model of the city and St Bernardino of Siena with the monogram of Jesus Christ, originally planned for the Franciscan monastery (Стојановић-Максимовић, 1956) (Fig. 1). In the context of constant war threats, and particularly those caused by the Turkish siege of Kotor in 1539, the aftermath of which saw the construction of the very *Porta marina* in question,



Fig. 1: Madonna with Child, St Tryphon and St Bernardino of Siena, stone, beginning of the 16th century, Porta marina, Kotor

city authorities decided to place the relief inside this gate. Whatsoever, the figure of St Bernardino, a celebrated Franciscan author and sermon giver, gives the relief a prophylactic role. His monogram is carved, as a symbol of protection, by the entrances to many sacral as well as secular structures in the Bay of Kotor. That is why the great holy patron against the plague is involved in *sacra conversazione* with the Virgin and Christ, as images of *porta paradisi*, as well as with St Tryphon, the protector of Kotor.

St Bernardino is assigned the same role on the marble altar *pala* created in 1654 by fra Desiderio for the church of the Holy Spirit in Kotor (Fig. 2). Together with St Francis, he kneels before Virgin Mary presented in the form of the Immaculate Conception. On the crescent Moon is an inscription *Opus fratris Desiderii a Cattaro Anno Do(mi)ni MDCLIII*, and underneath it says *Regina Sanctissimi stellarii. Ora pro nobis* (Luković, 2000, p. 51; Prijatelj, 1972). Next to the church founded in 1350, the Franciscans raised a *domo hospitalis S. Spiritus*. The Franciscans of the Venetian province of St Anthony of Padua, who inherited this church in 1640, also took care of the poor and the sick by establishing a kitchen. It is for that reason that St Francis and St Bernardino, apart from the fundamental roles they play in strengthening the Franciscan order and Marian



Fig. 2: Desiderie da Cattaro, *The Virgin Mary with Child, St Francis and St Bernardino*, marble, 1654, The Cathedral of St Tryphon, Kotor

theology, take an active part and exercise power in the protection of the faithful against the plague. Thus, this *sacra conversazione* in relief forms a longlasting cult (Брајовић, 2007).

While St Sebastian's wounds were a metaphor of the plague, those of St Rocco were rather real, prompting artists to realistically represent an ulcer on his leg. As St Rocco retreated into the woods to spare loved ones from the infection, his self-isolation was highlighted by authorities as a model of quarantine. There was a church of Saints Sebastian and Rocco in Kotor, renovated in 1501 by the efforts of the *provveditore* Sebastiano Contareno, as well as the fraternity of the same name. The archival records of 1574 mention *hospitale s. Rochi* (Stjepčević, 1938, p. 61). In Lastva, on the property of the aristocratic family Bucchia from Kotor in front of which there was a quarantine, a chapel of St Rocco was built in 1551. A church dedicated to the same titular was constructed in its place in 1901. Giorgio Palavičini (Georgius Pallavicinus), a descendant of a respectable family from Perast, naval captain and scrivener of Scuola di San Gior-



Fig. 3: St Rocco, painted wood, 17th century,
The Cathedral of St Tryphon, Kotor

gio e Trifone in Venice, during the *tempore pestilentiae* in 1631 offered a votive gift. It was a picture of Maddona with St Rocco and St Sebastian, with the sea and the view of Perast in the background (Luković, 1957). A marble figure of the saint, a votive gift from the seaman Ivan Marinović, a work of the Venetian sculptor Francesco Gai was placed on the main altar of the church of Our Lady of the Reef in 1783. The picture of St Roco, attributed to Francesco Fontebasso, found its place on the nearby side altar (Prijetelj, 1971). A large polychrome wooden figure of St Roco is preserved in the cathedral of St Tryphon in Kotor (Fig. 3). Apart from the fact that it had previously been kept in Perast, very little is otherwise known about this object. Judging by the robust body and the naturalistically rendered wound on the thigh, this sculpture was produced in the 17th century, most probably in Venice. It can be assumed that it had been commissioned in gratitude to the saint for having stopped the spread of the pestilence.

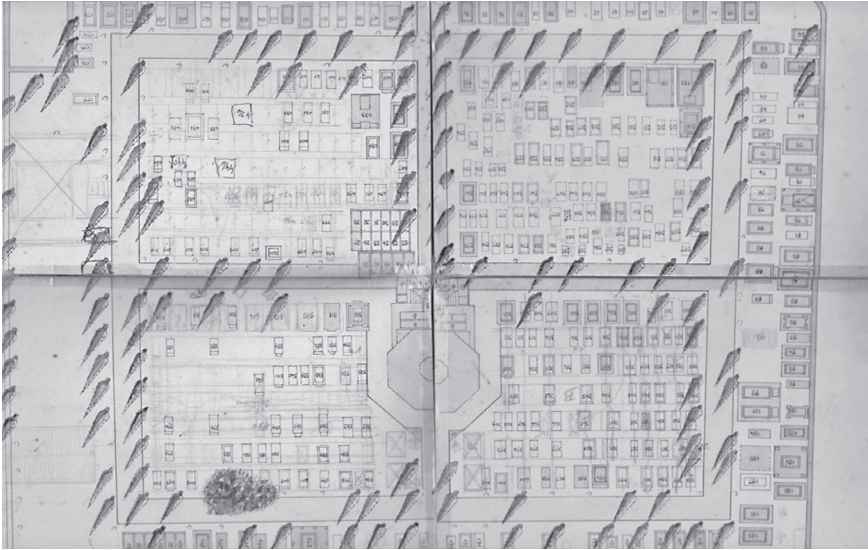


Fig. 4: Plan of cemetery in Škaljari, Episcopal Archives Kotor

The plague influenced the fashioning of the sacral and urban topography of European cities. There is no place in the western and central Mediterranean without churches dedicated to anti-pest protectors, nor one that does not have its Our Lady of Salvation. An unattainable role model was the Venetian Santa Maria della Salute, erected as a sign of gratitude for the end of the plague in 1630 (Mason-Rinaldi, 1979). Gospa od Zdravlja of Kotor, first mentioned in 1518 as *Madonna de riposo*, with a bell tower and open porch, was placed in the middle of the fortresses on the hill of San Giovanni, facing the sea, and watching over the city (Belan, 2017).

The construction of votive churches in the Bay of Kotor was marked by complex urban and maritime rituals. The votive procession of Our Lady of Perast was fashioned following examples of Venetian ceremonies and was celebrated on May 15. Even though the primary function of the ritual was the remembrance of the great victory over the Turks in 1654, in this complex and elaborate conglomerate of liturgical and pious practices a prophylactic role was also included (Brajović, 2006, pp. 266–294).

The plague influenced the development of the first arranged city cemeteries. To prevent the spread of epidemics, on November 5, 1818, the Austrian government banned burial in churches. The construction of the Kotor cemetery in Škaljari started in 1820. It was accelerated due to the epidemic in 1824 and was completed according to a design by Marko Benzon (Lupis, 2001). According to his project, the church of St Michael

was built in 1856 on the southern, Catholic part of the cemetery. In the north, Orthodox area, the Church of the Intercession of the Mother of God was built in 1846. A Jewish cemetery was formed on a small plot (5 x 7.5 m) between the Orthodox and the Catholic parcels (Fig. 4). The contract with the *Fabbriceria della Chiesa Cathedrale di Cattaro* on the formal handing over of a part of the Catholic cemetery was signed by prominent Mayer Finci, Maurizio Mandel, and Giacomo Tolentino in June 1858. The funeral area was registered in June 1884 as the property of the Kotor Jewish community (Raičević, 2014; Novaković & Kušević, 2021, pp. 7–25). The Jewish cemetery in Kotor was actively used until 1904.

Cholera

In addition to wars, famines, cold winters, earthquakes, there were diseases like malaria, typhus, syphilis, smallpox, dysentery, besides the plague. On top of that, cholera emerged during the 19th century in Europe. Although it mostly destroyed the poor, at times it entered courts, becoming the undoing of several famous people. It contributed to the emergence of rebellions of the oppressed urban population and the great revolutions. It influenced the development of science and the course of the second industrial revolution (Evans, 1995).

As was the case with outbreaks of all other types of infectious disease in Boka, epidemics of cholera were also accompanied by various other troubles, particularly those related to the economy. The Austrian steamship company Lloyd, founded in 1833, held a privileged position in the business of transporting people and goods and enjoyed significant subventions. The private capital of the citizens of Boka was not sufficient for investments into shipyards and mechanized ports. Many had to leave Boka, moving with them also their ships and their companies (Martinović, 1972). The Bay became a fortified war port of Austria, which only further stifled the maritime economy. Documents from 1847 and 1848 testify of grain shortages (Radulović, 1957). In the mid-19th century, Boka was also affected by the ban of wood export to the rebelling Italian regions.

Known also as “the Asian illness,” cholera sometimes arrived in Dalmatia and the Bay of Kotor by way of passengers and goods from ships from Russia and Istanbul, but mostly from Trieste, the largest harbor in the Austrian Empire. Although strict sanitary measures of the Monarchy were enforced through the local port authority in Rose, and, as of 1850, in Meljine (Herceg Novi), the spread of cholera could not be stopped. Even with all the freight ships subjected to sanitary and tax control, steamships

of the Lloyd company, commuting between Trieste and Kotor had been excluded from any inspection.

Colera asiatico was the most severe in 1855 and 1867. In the epidemic of July and August 1855, patient zero was known – a sailor from Muo, who arrived on the ship of Captain Marko Luković from Trieste, and whose family became ill 12 days later, followed by the infection of the entire village. Despite the quarantine measures, cholera entered Kotor on July 3 through a doctor who traveled to Muo every day to treat patients. The doctor first infected the owner of *Caffe Svizzero* and an officer, but soon over 200 people were sick, 66 of whom died. Cholera was transferred to the village of Špiljari, above Kotor, then Kamenare, and soon, Herceg Novi. The citizens of Kotor collected donations for the victims (Cerineo, 1856, pp. 36–44).

Letters from the priest and catechist of the high school in Kotor, Vuk Popović, addressed to Vuk Karadžić testify that the situation in the Bay of Kotor was challenging. In a letter from October 28, 1855 (according to the Julian calendar), Popović writes that the outbreak of cholera started on August 22 and that 42 people died in Muo, 98 in Kotor, 39 in Risan, and 40 in Herceg Novi and its surroundings. The situation was the worst in mid-September. More than 600 people fled from Kotor. Popović, like Boccaccio once, writes: “Brother fled from brother, husband from wife, and wife from husband, and if it weren’t for the paid army that watched over the sick and carried the dead to the cemetery, they would decompose on their very beds if left to the relatives. The priests did not want to approach their parishioners for anything, let alone manage their bodies and chant over them.” Cholera had brought life to a halt, “nobody was keen neither on thinking nor working on anything, everyone was expecting death, like a lamb taken to slaughter” (Popović, 1999, pp. 275–279).

The veneration of the Madonna icons was especially prominent during the epidemic of 1855. Thus, Our Lady of the Reef was once more considered responsible for freeing the city from the “heavy whip of God’s wrath, the plague of cholera” which raged throughout Boka, while only three deaths were recorded in Perast (Vulović, 1887, p. 52). The citizens of Kotor organized processions with the image of Our Lady of Salvation, moving through the entire city, symbolically chasing away the pestilence.

The epidemic of 1867 was even worse. This is attested by Mr. Senković, the Kotor correspondent of *Napredak*, a political paper published by Serbs from southern Hungary, who sent “a letter from hell,” and admitted to his editor, Đorđe Popović Daničar, that he “was very scared of cholera” and that it seems to him “most horrible to die of cholera” (*Napredak*, No 53, 1867, p. 1).

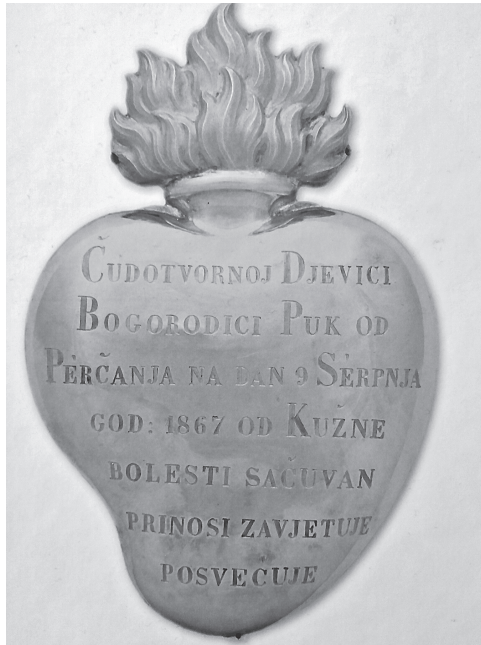


Fig. 5: Ex-voto, gilt 1867, The church of the Nativity of the B. V. Mary, Prčanj

During this time, there was a strong surge in the cult of the miraculous icon Madonna di Perzagno. The icon, the origins of which remain wrapped in legend, was painted most probably in the second half of the 14th century. It was a constant source of miracle-making and healing, it protected from the plague and provided rain, and was a particularly successful defender from cholera. In 1867, inspired by the parrish priest Niko Lazzari, the citizens decided on making a feast on July 9 in memory of the beneficial agencies of the icon and offered it a golden heart (Luković, 1937, p. 150). This heart was inscribed with the following words: “To the Miraculous Virgin from the People of Prčanj on the day of July 9, 1867, protected from the plague disease” (Fig. 5).

At the time of cholera, the fraternity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was founded in the church of the Holy Spirit in Kotor. The cholera of 1867 left a specific mark on the relief altarpiece in the church, already mentioned. Beneath the Virgin’s right hand is a ring from which a chain is hung with a large silver gilded heart bearing the inscription: *Catharenses liberati morbo asiatico Deiparae A. D. 1867*. In the context of the above-described, one can understand the relief “of the citizens of Kotor saved from cholera through the intervention of the Virgin in the year of the



Fig. 6: Rudolph von Alt, View from Dobrota toward Muo, water colour 1841, from: *Jakob and Rudolf von Alt. At His Majesty's Service*, Eds. Schröder, A. K., Sternath, M. L. Albertina, Vienna, 2010.

Lord 1867." They offered their votive gift to the holy image around which a cult had formed two centuries earlier, during the outbreak of the plague.

There are no direct visual testimonies of the cholera epidemic in the Bay of Kotor. Neither are there any of the economic crisis, the resistance against Austrian law on obligatory military service, and the popular uprisings of 1848, 1869, and 1882 in Grbalj and Krivošije. In the pictorial "cosmos" of landscape sceneries and depictions of architectural ensembles commissioned by Emperor Ferdinand – an album envisaged to express the plurality of various nationalities and cultures harmoniously united under one well-ordered empire (Telesko, 2010) – there are watercolors painted by Rudolf von Alt in 1841, representing the Bay of Kotor as an ideal corner of the Empire (Brajović, 2014). The watercolors are faithful topographical presentations, but it is through their Biedermeier *stimmung* – the magnificent scenic beauties of the Bay, blissful landscapes, calm stability of nature, unadulterated by the weight of urbanization and industrialization of nature, far away from economic crisis and revolutions – that the attitude of the Habsburg monarchy towards the Mediterranean and the Orient shines through (Fig. 6). The same visual strategies of self-re-

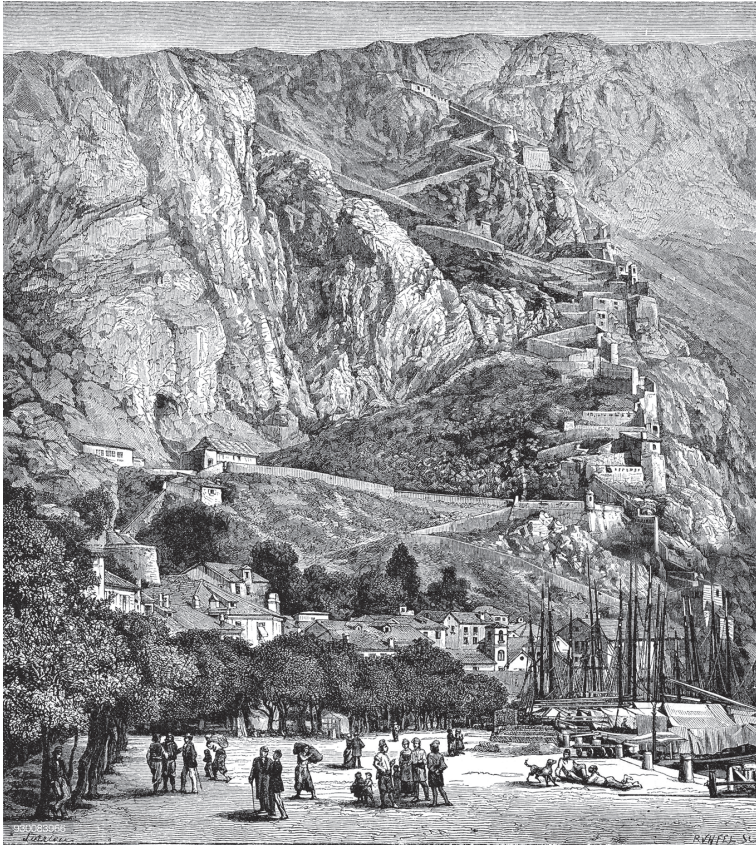


Fig. 7: Frédéric Sorrieu, View of the city of Kotor (from a photograph by Charles Yriarte), *Il Giro del mondo* Volume VI, Issue 15, September 13, 1877

flection can also be seen on illustrations published in the Trieste *Illustriertes Familienbuch des Osterreichischen Lloyds*, a highly upheld magazine first published in 1850, which promoted coexistence between the different ethnic groups. The vedutas showing Kotor display its fortification and its waterfront, as, for example, on the lithograph by the French artist Frédéric Sorrieu, made after the sketches of Charles Yriarte dating from 1874. It was published on September 13, 1877, in the illustrated journal *Il Giro del mondo* vol. VI/15 (Fig. 7).

These examples show that the mechanisms of institutional and individual actions and reaction, acceptance as well as rejection, despite a major change in context, were similar to those today amid the Coronavirus epidemic. The new epidemic has made us, perhaps for the first time, truly aware and compassionate towards them.

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ЕПИДЕМИЈЕ У НОВОВЕКОВНОЈ ЕВРОПСКОЈ КУЛТУРИ: СЛУЧАЈ БОКЕ КОТОРСКЕ ЗА ВРЕМЕ МЛЕТАЧКЕ И АУСТРИЈСКЕ УПРАВЕ

Апстракт: У раду се разматрају структуралне промене у институцијама, манифестацијама побожности, сегментима јавног и приватног живота, сакралној и урбаној топографији и другим видовима визуелне културе, које су у европском друштву од 14. до 20. века изазвале епидемије, нарочито куге и колере. Рад је усредсређен на област Боке Которске у саставу Млетачке републике од 1420. до 1797. и Аустријске монархије од 1797. до 1805. и од 1815. до 1918. године. Пажња је усмерена на здравствене институције, побожне манифестације, вербалне и визуелне слике стваране ради одбране од заразе и захвалности што су прошле. Изабране визуелне представе указују на сродност побожних пракси и облика понашања током криза, у дугом временском периоду. Многе од њих изражавају и порицање кризе, ради креирања идеалне слике политичке стабилности.

Кључне речи: епидемије, Бока Которска, Млетачка република, Аустријска монархија, визуелна култура

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