

Clothing in Dubrovnik in the 16th Century – A Reflection of a Multicultural Center

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Abstract

In the 16th century Dubrovnik was a mercantile harbour town that was influenced by the culture of the East and the culture of the West. The multiculturalism was evident in a vast array of different styles of clothing – Florentine, Venetian, Parisian. Through the centuries shapes, colours, and raw materials of the East and of the West were assimilated and the unique fashion of Dubrovnik was created. It is inevitable to mention that the influence of the heritage is evident even today in modern Dubrovnik. There were laws of clothing inside the walls of Dubrovnik that were influenced by both social and religious elements which marked the clothing for both genders. At the same time the clothing was a sign of social status of a noble, a citizen, and a commoner.

This paper will focus on several starting points to achieve a successful reconstruction of particular clothing styles of Renaissance period Dubrovnik. It will discuss trade routes and towns of East and West that had influenced fashion in Dubrovnik. It will present and analyse the archive material as well as rare preserved fragments of textiles, and visual artworks of that time. All the cultures that had influenced fashion in the 16th century Dubrovnik with their economic, social, and religious aspects will be stated.

This paper will try to determine if the fashion influence was one-sided or did certain clothing elements from Dubrovnik establish themselves in European fashion context.

Key Words: Dubrovnik, Mediterranean, 16th century, fashion, trade, textiles

1. Introduction

The analysis of clothing culture in 16th century Dubrovnik is based on "History of Dubrovnik" (*Storia di Ragusa*, 1595) by a Dominican Serafino Razzi from Florence. After ten years of duty as a Head of Dominican monastery (from 1578 to 1588) he wrote this extensive description of Dubrovnik which covers almost all spheres of everyday life including the laws of dressing and interesting insights about the position of women in Dubrovnik society of that time. Razzi's data is supported and supplemented by archival records from 16th century which include

trade and court documents, wills, testaments and dowry documents. Descriptions included in those documents are validated by art works of European artists from Renaissance and Mannerism, such as Dubrovnik painter Nikola Božidarević (1460-1517), and Venetian painter Cesare Vecellio (1530-1601). Furthermore the records and the art works are supported by, small in range but great in value, material artefacts: textiles, laces, various clothing items and jewelry pieces.

On the map of the 16th century Mediterranean Dubrovnik area has occupied an important geographical, political, cultural and economical position on the historical boundary between the East and the West that was created in Roman times, but re-established in 15th century. In the east ruled Islam and in the west Christianity.

As Ottoman Empire conquered Bosnia, it threatened Dubrovnik too. But for reasons of Dubrovnik's strategic position it was left free, transformed into a neutral port for trade with the West. Dubrovnik paid a high price for its independence – harač – a tribute, and in return form Turks got a symbolic testament of receipt of money in form of silk caftans. As silk was exceptionally valuable fabric Dubrovnik government gave the garments to church and there they were re-tailored into mass vestments. That is the reason why along with the Christian symbols there are Arabic letters on a chasuble from 15th century¹.

Free Republic of Dubrovnik, *Republica Ragusina* in Latin, was at its peak in the 16th century. In the city, behind the city walls and beside the sea, people of Dubrovnik lived divided into nobles, citizens and commoners. Dubrovnik's power was based on seafaring, trade and textile manufacture². The merchant fleet ships sailed all over the Mediterranean, on occasion to India, often to England, and once even to Peru³. The merchant fleet made Dubrovnik a ward of Holy See and at the same time a Sultan's vassal.

The western influences were seen in the official trade language of Dubrovnik - Italian⁴. It was prestigious to have Italian blood in one's bloodline so sometimes the origins were invented. But Dubrovnik was also influenced by the East. In his book *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* Braudel states that some women wore the veil and some were even sequestered⁵. That was actually a custom in the whole Mediterranean where a public space, *mediteranski trg* (Mediterranean square) was reserved for men exclusively. A woman's duty was to take care of her home and the sequestering was linked to the code of honour⁶.

Chroniclers of that time state that Dubrovnik was a city where the elements of East and West gave a new cultural blend which was for the most part the result of well established trade.

2. At the Crossroads of Trade Routes

The ships of Dubrovnik merchant fleet sailed to the most important Mediterranean ports of the 16th century where they got in contact with many different cultures. At the same time Dubrovnik was a port city where a great

number of merchants from all over Europe came to trade, "... *full of different peoples that would otherwise be enemies, different by language, clothing, religion ...*"⁷. From the Dubrovnik records we know that at one point in time the occupants of Dubrovnik were Catalan, Spanish, Hungarian and Jewish merchants, and also Levantines, Turks, French and English. Besides them the city housed Croatian, German, Hungarian, Italian, and a smaller number of French, Czech, Russian and Polish mercenaries. Many mixed marriages were made. This colourful mix painted a picture of Dubrovnik as a multicultural Mediterranean centre.

The trade of that time was very diverse⁸ but the focus was on the fabrics. Dubrovnik was an intermediary in the Italian fabrics trade with the Ottoman Empire. Because of their good connections Dubrovnik merchants were able to trade in Venetian and Florentine silk velvets, brocades, damasks and English woollen fabrics. To secure Dubrovnik's notable position in English market in the 15th century, Dubrovnik merchants exported finished woollen fabrics to The East not just raw materials as Venetian merchants did. Dubrovnik merchant ships were loaded with wide bales of woollen fabrics and narrow bales of cloth, mostly of thick woven cloth used for making the clothing for rich denizens of Balkan⁹.

From Bosnia to the West, Dubrovnik exported fur and leather, and from the Orient cotton and silk damask. Dubrovnik merchants came from Istanbul with bags (*bisage*) full of oriental clothing: *anterije* (a kind of upper garment), *čakširi* (a kind of tight pants for men), *kaftani* (caftans), *binjiše* (a kind of loose long-sleeved overcoat), even *dimije* (bloomers), and veils, shawls, silk bags, purses, feathered fans and rugs¹⁰. Dubrovnik nobles and citizens ordered scarves woven with gold, Bulgarian purses and platters¹¹.

The trade in Dubrovnik wasn't the domain of the nobles. They left the trade business to the citizens and the commoners while they lived of their shares in ships¹², and silk and wool businesses. The trade was so profitable that the citizens got financially so strong they became the owners of ships and shops in cities of Italy¹³.

3. The Textile Manufacture

The intensive textiles trade in the Mediterranean brought about the strengthening of a new industry – the textile manufacture. In 1490 the Dubrovnik government had invited a foreign expert in woollen fabrics production, a Florentine Pietro del Pantella. That same year he established a craft for weaving and dyeing wool in Dubrovnik. In 1525 Nikola Lukarević from Dubrovnik opened a craft for processing silk. But Dubrovnik fabrics weren't a success in the foreign markets, as they were in the domestic one. A much better success was made in the production and trade of lower grade woollen fabrics (*rasse, sarze, grisi*) that were made in Dalmatia. Another product of that area that had achieved the same success was a specific garment named *schiavonetto*. *Schiafono* is an old Italian name for a Croat

(Slav) from Dalmatia and Istria. *Schiavonetto* made in Dalmatia was a light, airy silk or linen dress¹⁴ with wide neck opening lengthwise decorated with stripes¹⁵. Cesare Vecelio depicted *schiavonetto* as a garment worn by a Venetian woman while sitting on a balcony and highlighting her hair with natural products in the hot sun. A similar garment can be seen on women in the art works of certain Italian and German painters. Toponym *schiavonetto* shows the influence of Croats on the clothing culture of Italian cities¹⁶.

Dubrovnik textile production was marked by lacemaking which developed by the end of the 15th century and reached the peak in the 16th century. The lace was made by air point needle technique and by bobbin technique and was known by the name "*point de Raguse*". There are saved samples of hemming lace from the 16th century, a flat lace with accentuated diagonal linear style that was usual in early Renaissance period.

4. Fashion Culture of the 16th Century Dubrovnik

In the 16th century peoples were directly connected to their religions and since Dubrovnik was a Catholic city, the styles and rules of clothing were influenced by Catholic cities of the West.

Since the 14th century the Europe had established the Laws against luxury that had a significant influence on Dubrovnik fashion of the 16th century. Luxury clothing had an important social role because it reflected a social status of the members of the community. Such a show of luxury of certain individuals and families wasn't always welcomed by the government. In 1515 the government stated that luxury was bringing the city to its doom and made the decrees even more rigorous. Therefore brocade and silk fabrics were forbidden except for the making sleeves and wedding attires. The ornaments made of golden fringes and golden ribbons, long overcoats, long sleeves, scarlet overcoats, pearl embroidered sleeves, and golden belts were completely forbidden. The punishment for wearing fur was up to five years, depending on social status¹⁷.

The clothes were retailored and shortened but soon that became too expensive, because of the large quantities of clothing items. That led to a new law that prohibited wearing the new fashion, especially Florentine fashion. If one brought such an item, it had to be turned over in fifteen days time. There is no mention of social status differences regarding this law but some other sources reveal that that was regulated by the common law. In the eyes of legislators public disorder was connected with luxury and proclaimed a danger for the city's wellbeing. They wanted to inspire residents to be economical, moderate and humble and at the same time root out avidity and extravagance with the help of these laws and regulations. They saw the moderate and old fashioned. *Dubrovnik style*¹⁸ way of dressing as reflection of order and virtue while the new fashion was seen as the reflection of wanton and decadence.

The main element of Dubrovnik fashion style is hiding the women's body with clothes. According to Serafin Razzi, Dubrovnik women were restrained in dressing and everything else. They couldn't even be seen prior to their marriage. Noble women dressed in black and wore a white veil which reached to half a *Dubrovnik elbow*^{2,19} starting from the forehead which effectively covered their faces. They were also unable to see anyone else's face unless they lifted their heads²⁰. For that reason whenever they went out for a walk a serving woman would walk in front to avert accidental contacts with other people.

The style of dressing reflected the marriage status of woman, and was different for members of nobility and citizens. Married noble women wore earrings²¹ (the earrings were called *obozi* and weren't worn directly on the earlap, they were worn on a thin silver chain called *kličak*). Citizen women wore only wedding rings. Both noble and citizen women wore headgears. Edmon Cleary describes headgear shaped as a pyramid, a foot and a half high²² which is a part of today's traditional clothing of Dubrovnik area²³.

Citizen women clothing featured high buttoned dresses made of red plain fabrics that were made in Dubrovnik. French diplomat wrote in 1573 that silk was reserved for weddings²⁴. Common women wore red or yellow dresses, and didn't wear veils to church as citizen and noble women did. The dresses without the corset had a lower neckline²⁵.

That the laws and regulations against luxury didn't completely take hold can be seen in lists of contents of dowry chests. The chests contained intensively coloured clothing items and brocade, velvet and cotton fabrics. The influence of Venetian rich style of clothing can be seen in the drawing *Giovanetta Ragusea* (young Dubrovnik woman) by Cesare Vecellio from 1590. A depicted woman is wearing a velvet or damask richly ornamented dress with a short pearl decorated corset. Over that she's wearing a loose black silk overcoat with arm openings. The clothing composition is completed with lavish gold and pearl jewellery. A dress is shorter and elevated to reveal footwear *pianelle*. The fashion of wearing short dresses in time became known as *alla schiavonesca*²⁶.

The noble men wore Florentine style coats and round Venetian style caps. Until the were five the boys wore short dresses, like girls, as was the custom in many towns. When they were around fifteen they wore a long toga and a coat²⁷.

The 16th century Dubrovnik was a trade center on the trade routes towards the East and the West. The trade brought Dubrovnik under the influence of many Mediterranean cultures that helped form indigenous Dubrovnik fashion style. The multiculturalism in 16th century was reflected in many languages that could be heard and in various dressing styles that could be seen on the streets of that important port city in the Adriatic.

Dubrovnik and Dalmatia also had an influence on a fashion of the 16th century. They produced lower grade wool, gave the Mediterranean a clothing item *schiavonetto*, a new kind of lace "*point de Raguse*", and a style of wearing a short dress *alla schiavonetto*.

The rich historical trace of the 16th century fashion is preserved in partly modified forms that make the today's traditional clothing of Dubrovnik area (the headgear – *hondelj*, pleated fabrics, a vest and jewellery).

Notes

- ¹ In the 16th century the tribute was usually two to four caftans, and later five to ten caftans. They were green or red, made of velour, heavy or light silk interwoven with gold or silver threads. They were made in the well-known textile centre Brusa (Vesna, Miović, *Mudrost na razmeđu, zgone iz vremena Dubrovačke republike i Osmanskog carstva* (Dubrovnik : Udruga za promicanje multikulturalnih vrijednosti „Kartolina“, 2011), 110.)
- ² There was a measure for the length of fabrics named *dubrovački lakat* (*Dubrovnik elbow* – 51.2 cm) close to palace Sponza (the palace was built in the first half of the 16th century and housed the mint, the merchant goods warehouse and the customs office named "Divona"). It still exists and can be seen cut into the pedestal of the Orlando's pillar (it was erected in 1419 and is one of symbols of Republic of Dubrovnik).
- ³ Fernand, Braudel, *Sredozemlje sredozemni svijet u doba Filipa II* (Zagreb: Antibarbarus, 1997), 343.
- ⁴ An official order had been issued that Italian had to be used even in the protocols of the prince assembly (Fernand, Braudel, *Sredozemlje sredozemni svijet u doba Filipa II*, 138.)
- ⁵ A man wasn't permitted to see his betrothed until the actual wedding (Fernand, Braudel, *Sredozemlje sredozemni svijet u doba Filipa II*, 138.)
- ⁶ Zdenka, Römer Janković, *Maruša ili suđenje ljubavi* (Zagreb: Algoritam, 2007), 46.
- ⁷ Serafino, Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika* (Dubrovnik: Matica hrvatske – Ogranak, 2011), 139.
- ⁸ Salt, spices, precious and other metals, beeswax (From Bosnia and Serbia), leather, wine from Crete, soap used in textile production, olive oil, raisins, oriental carpets, furniture ... slaves until 1416 (from Bosnia, Greece – African slaves) Robin, Harris, *Povijest Dubrovnika* (Zagreb: Golden Marketing – tehnička knjiga, 2006), 156.
- ⁹ Robin, Harris, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 169.
- ¹⁰ Many of those items are a part of traditional clothing of Dubrovnik area.
- ¹¹ Vesna, Miović, *Mudrost na razmeđu, zgone iz vremena Dubrovačke republike i Osmanskog carstva*, 109.
- ¹² They ship the goods from the East to Italy and from there to Constantinople, Alexandria, Bosnia, Greece and other free trading countries.
- ¹³ Serafino, Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 152.
- ¹⁴ Lynne, Lawner, *Lives of the Courtesans* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 67.
- ¹⁵ In her book "Dressing Renaissance Florence" (2002) Carole Collier Frick describes *schiavonetto* (from *schiaive*, slovin) as a light, airy silk or linen women's dress. It was worn during the hair highlighting in *Loggia*. Jill Condra in "Clothing through World History" (2008) describes *schiavonetto* as a thin, richly embroidered, colourful linen tunic (Jill, Condra, *The Greenwood encyclopedia of clothing through world history* (Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press, 2008), 36.)
- ¹⁶ At first *Schiavina* was a Venetian name for Croatian soldiers, Ultramarines, members of the Venetian army. In time, *schiaquina* became a name for cloth overcoats and rough woollen cloaks which were cheap and accessible for the wide range of people. *Schiaquina* was also the name used for pilgrim's overcoats, short red coats worn by fishermen and sailors, and short tunics worn by the wards of the almshouses. *Schiavonetto* (derived from *schiaquina*) was a name used for an additional item of women's clothing, most commonly worn in the time of Renaissance. A small street in S. Marco area where above mentioned overcoats and dresses were manufactured still holds a memento of these garment.
- ¹⁷ Zdenka, Janeković-Römer, "Nasilje zakona: gradska vlast i privatni život u kasnosrednjovjekovnom i ranonovovjekovnom Dubrovniku", *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti Hrvatske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti u Dubrovniku* 41, (2003): 9-44.
- ¹⁸ Women's "Dubrovnik style" of dressing included scarlet or red rough fabric with dense folds bound at the chest with silk sleeves and gold buttons.
- ¹⁹ See²
- ²⁰ Serafino, Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 157.
- ²¹ The jewellery was a filigree, sturdy and durable. It was passed in the family from mother to daughter. In case that a family died out, the jewellery was willed to Dubrovnik churches and monasteries for preservation.
- ²² Zdenka, Römer Janković, *Maruša ili suđenje ljubavi*, 150.
- ²³ A traditional clothing from Konavle with a high headgear (*Hondelj*).
- ²⁴ Robin, Harris, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 207.
- ²⁵ Serafino, Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 157.
- ²⁶ At the turn of the 16th century, and especially in the 17th century the term *alla schiaionesca* is replaced with *croavota*.
- ²⁷ Serafino, Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 154.

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