

Matea Laginja

**NARRATING DEATH:
THE PLAGUE OF 1348 IN DALMATIAN
AND ITALIAN NARRATIVE SOURCES**

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

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Matea Laginja

(Croatia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

Chair, Examination Committee

Thesis Supervisor

Examiner

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Abstract

The Black Death, the fourteenth century plague epidemic, left a strong impact on the people of that period, which was also reflected in the amount of written data preserved from the period. In this thesis I discuss the plague-related motifs present in Dalmatian primary sources, with emphasis on *A Cutheis Tabula*, a contemporary account dealing with the plague in Split. Other Dalmatian sources, both contemporary and later ones, are discussed in relation to the aforementioned narrative and their origins in the city of Dubrovnik; the motifs that can be read from them are compared to a sample of Italian accounts from the same period. The time span of this research focuses on the year 1348, and the comparison stretches up until the eighteenth century, out of which some of the later accounts originate. I opted for this geographic region and this framework due to the fact that it provides me with the possibility of tracking the contemporary image of the Black Death in the Adriatic area and seeing how this image changed in the next four centuries. The focus of the later accounts becomes different, due to the passing of time and the fact that the authors did not have a first-hand experience of the epidemic. The greatest change though is visible in the nearly contemporary account *A Cutheis Tabula*, from Split, because the author's familiarity with other contemporary sources and theories influenced the reasons for writing his narrative, as well as the employed imagery.

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Lidija and Damir Laginja. Their unconditional love and support are what enabled my long-term wish to study at CEU to become possible. Due to that, and other countless reasons, I will be forever grateful to them.

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Table of contents

List of Tables	4
List of Abbreviations	5
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Primary sources	3
1.2. Methodology	10
2. Story of the epidemic and images of nature	12
2.1. Beginning of the epidemic	12
2.2. Changes in the natural world	17
2.3. The peak of the epidemic and its consequences	24
3. Family related motifs	30
3.1. Family and practical issues	30
3.2. Death and burial	32
3.3. Last wills	37
4. Religion and the plague	40
4.1. “Non fu peste ma ira di Dio:” the motif of God’s wrath	40
4.2. Religion, priesthood and last wills	44
5. Conclusion	49
6. Bibliography	52

List of Tables

Table 1: Mortality rates in Dalmatian sources

27

List of Abbreviations

DAD - Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku (Croatian state archive in Dubrovnik)

MSHSM - Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium

RIS – Rerum Italicarum Scriptores

SRH – Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum

TN – Testamenta notariae

1. Introduction

The Black Death, the fourteenth-century outbreak of the plague epidemic which is said to have killed more than fifty percent of Europe's population, created one of the most sudden and all-encompassing changes that struck human kind. Even though there were earlier as well as later outbreaks of the disease, the one that occurred between 1347 and 1352 had unprecedented mortality rates, and it was the only one to affect all of Europe, thus leaving a deep mark on the people of the period. This is the exact motive behind my interest in this topic, since the event proved to cause consequences in all aspects of human actions, from the social and economic ones up to the many changes in everyday lives of ordinary people.

Since several decades before the outbreak, a major climatic change, known as the *little ice age* had commenced, the immune systems of the people were not in a good condition. There was also famine and need to adapt to the requirements exacerbated by this climate change. These factors, alongside the fact that hygiene in the Middle Ages was not as developed as is necessary for human organism, contributed to high susceptibility to the epidemic.¹ Recent research has devoted much attention to the reasons for unprecedented spread and mortality rates of the Black Death, environmental background being among the newest additions to the framework.

Up until this day, it remains questionable which disease the Black Death actually was. Even though the most widespread belief is that it was the bubonic plague, there are several factors that do not fit this framework, like the presence of rats in Europe, the main vectors of transmission. What recent research deduced is that the illness probably originated in modern-

¹ Gordan Ravančić, *Vrijeme umiranja: Crna smrt u Dubrovniku; 1348.-1349* [Time of dying: Black Death in Dubrovnik; 1348-1349], Biblioteka Hrvatska povjesnica 3, Monografije i studije 51 (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011), 21.

day China, in what is known as the Tibetan – Qinghai Plateau.² The reason behind its sudden rapid spread remains unknown, but one of the most famous guesses is that there was an earthquake, or some other natural disaster that spurred the rapid spread of the epidemic.³ Mongol conquests added to this, so it reached the Genoese trading city Kaffa on the Crimean peninsula in 1346, and through the sea routes to Europe by the end of 1347.⁴

Due to the impact the disease had on the people who experienced the terror it brought onto them, the amount of preserved data for the period of the peak of the epidemic is relatively high. There is evidence in the form of laws which were passed, either in order to regulate the people's movements in order to stop the spread of plague, or to influence the economic consequences which were the result of high mortality rates. There are also many visual sources, remnants of the movement in art that was caused by the epidemic, widely known as the *danse macabre*.⁵ The greatest number of preserved sources for the Black Death are narrative ones, providing different accounts and many consequences that the disease caused on all levels of society. These sources have been dealt with in detail, due to the fact that there are so many of them preserved, but the case for medieval Croatia is different, since the number of preserved sources is drastically lower. As a result such sources have not been the primary focus of historiography, and my contribution is to give prominence to some among them.

The geographic scope of my research falls in the regions that were under the first attack of the epidemic, namely, Dalmatia and Italy. I am looking at the preserved primary narrative sources from Split, Dubrovnik, Padua, Piacenza, Florence, Siena and Messina, in order to compare the motifs present in them. In that regards I am comparing the differences and

² This can be deduced from the fact that in this place the diversity of the variants of the plague bacterium are the largest, which implies that the plague had been on that exact spot the longest. Monica H. Green (2014), "Taking 'pandemic' seriously: Making the Black Death global," in Monica H. Green (ed.), *Pandemic disease in the medieval world; Rethinking the Black Death. The Medieval Globe* 1 (2014): 29, 32, 39.

³ Ravančić, *Vrijeme umiranja*, 17.

⁴ Ole J. Benedictow, *The Black Death 1346-1353: The Complete History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 52-4.

⁵ Among the rare and definitely most famous Croatian examples of this movement is the art of Vincent de Kastav. For more information see <http://istra.lzmk.hr/clanak.aspx?id=2958>, last accessed on 19 May, 2015.

similarities between Dalmatian and Italian accounts, to see what makes them different. I believe that the contemporary Dalmatian sources will have certain differences that stem out of specific reasons for their writing, especially in comparison to the Italian narratives. I also compare narratives from different time spans, finishing with those written in the eighteenth century, in order to see in what ways the later accounts differed from the contemporary ones. Since the time that passed provides enough space in human minds for the plague effects to wear off, I believe that the difference over time will be quite drastic. The topic still remains underresearched in Croatian historiography, primarily due to the scarcity of surviving sources. The narrative sources have not been used as the basis for any research conducted so far, and in this way, my comparison of the existing sources will hopefully lead to a fuller picture of the Black Death in medieval Dalmatia, as well as to its accord with wider framework of the Adriatic, to be achieved through comparison with Italian sources. Another point worth mentioning is that data on medieval Dalmatia has not been integrated into the international scholarship, and my wish to conduct in this research also derives from that fact.⁶

1.1. Primary sources

The Black Death has been approached through a wide array of different sources, both primary and secondary, in historiographies of most of the countries that have been affected by this disease. Unfortunately, when it comes to Croatia not many sources from the period survive, which results in the fact that even though scholars of the history of Croatia have also tackled this topic, this has not been done to the same extent as is the case in other countries. Due to the amount of surviving sources, in Croatia there are no surveys of the social, economic or any

⁶ In his attempt at providing a work which will contain information on the plague epidemic in entire Europe, Benedictow devotes less than two pages to the entire kingdom of Hungary, including Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovakia Hungary and Western Romania. Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 75-6.

other aspect of human activity during the epidemic, and most of the works dealing with the topic are based on the analysis of the available source material, focusing only on one type of source at a time.⁷ The only study that, to my knowledge, comprises more than one type of source material and discusses more than one aspect of human endeavors is Gordan Ravančić's doctoral thesis from 2006, later published as a monograph,⁸ which tackles the topic of the plague in the city of Dubrovnik⁹ in 1348.

The available literature on the plague epidemic in Croatia is determined by the state of surviving sources, and these define the structure of my thesis as well. I will focus on the preserved narrative sources that deal with the 1348 plague epidemic in Dalmatia and Italy.¹⁰ As will be explained later, due to the fact that Italian sources are more numerous, I have chosen those that contain motifs similar to the ones in Dalmatia, and as another important factor took into account the geographic location of the cities where the chronicles have been written. It is of crucial importance that there are not many chronicles preserved regarding the territory of today's Croatia, and all of those that mention the plague deal with Dalmatian cities; for this reason, the narrative sources used in this thesis focus mainly on two cities, Split and Dubrovnik. Another important thing is the fact that there is only one surviving contemporary chronicle that discusses the plague, which will serve as the key source for this thesis. Besides sources traditionally considered to be narrative, I used administrative resolutions from Dubrovnik by focusing on their narrative aspects. This is possible because some of the preserved decisions contain more than just pure facts: through them we can also see additional elements, which

⁷ For example, Zoran Ladić based several of his books on the preserved last wills from Dalmatian cities. See for example Zoran Ladić, *Last Will: Passport to Heaven; Urban Last Wills from Late Medieval Dalmatia with Special Attention to the Legacies 'pro Remedio Animae' and 'ad Pias Causas'* (Zagreb: Srednja Europa: 2012).

⁸ Ravančić, *Vrijeme umiranja*.

⁹ In the period under scrutiny here, the name of the city and state was Ragusa, and the citizens Ragusans. In this thesis, the modern name of this town, Dubrovnik will be used.

¹⁰ Dalmatia being the central and southern part of the Croatian coastal area.

reflect the mindset of the people in these turbulent times.¹¹ Some of these share certain traits with the chronicles used in this research, and comprise also more reliable factual evidence than that in the chronicles.¹²

The only surviving close-to-contemporary narrative source is the chronicle of an anonymous writer, who is identified by Croatian historians as a member of the Kutej family from Split.¹³ His last name during this period was Cutheis and his narrative is entitled *Tabula*.¹⁴ It has originally been published by Ivan Lučić and more recently in Hrvoje Morović and Vedran Gligo's collection of primary sources, and by virtue of its unique and sinister depiction of the events of 1348 it represents the central focus of this thesis.¹⁵

Other sources on the plague come from later periods, although this time lag enables an analysis of how the narratives evolved and changed, due to both the passing of time and the change of the purpose of such sources. One of them is Serafino Razzi's *La storia di Ragugia*,¹⁶ a sixteenth-century source on the history of Dubrovnik, which mentions the plague and its effects very briefly, in spite of the fact that the work itself is quite a long and detailed endeavor

¹¹ Among others, in the Great Council decisions we have a specific reference to the plague being the product of God's wrath: "quod cum propter pestilentiam mortalitatis et divini iudicii in civitate Ragusii" (due to the pestilential mortality and divine judgment in the city of Ragusa). *Monumenta Ragusina: Libri Reformationum*, vol. 2, A. 1347-1352, 1356-1360; Additamentum a. 1301-1305, 1318, 1325-1336, *Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium* 13 (Zagreb: JAZU, 1882), 27.

¹² For the organization of the government of medieval Dubrovnik see for example David Rheubottom, *Age, marriage, and politics in fifteenth-century Ragusa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 30-35.

¹³ See for example Nada Klaić, *Izvori za hrvatsku povijest do 1526. godine* [Sources for Croatian history until the year 1526], *Udžbenici Sveučilišta u Zagrebu / Školska knjiga* (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1972), 209.

¹⁴ A *Cutheis Tabula* has been written in the 1370s, but the chronicler remains unknown. Although some argue that the author is Marin de Cutheis, his identity is not convincingly ascertained. See Gordan Ravančić, "Neka razmišljanja o posljedicama epidemije Crne smrti 1348. godine u Dubrovniku [Some reflections upon the impact of the Black Death epidemics in 1348 in Dubrovnik]," *Ekonomika i ekohistorija: Časopis za gospodarsku povijest i povijest okoliša* 2, no. 1 (2006): 5-21, 7. See also <http://www.enciklopedija.hr/Natuknica.aspx?ID=13020> (last accessed on 30 April 2015).

¹⁵ Ivan Lučić et al., *De regno Dalmatiae et Croatiae, libri sex* (Frankfurt, 1666). References will be made to the *Scriptores rerum Hungaricarum, Dalmaticarum, Croaticarum, et Slavonicarum veteres ac genuini* Valentinelli, ed. J. G. Schwandtner (Vienna, 1748) and the modern edition: Vedran Gligo and Hrvoje Morović, eds., *Legende i kronike* [Legends and chronicles], *Splitski književni krug, Svjedočanstva*, knjiga 2 (Split: Čakavski sabor, 1977).

¹⁶ Serafino Razzi, Ivan Bona-Boliris, and Vincenzo Busdrago, *La storia di Ravgia. Scritta nuouamente in tre libri, da F. Serafino Razzi* (Lucca: Vincentio Busdraghi, 1595). References will be made to the modern edition: Serafino Razzi et al., *Povijest Dubrovnika* [History of Dubrovnik], *Biblioteka Posebna izdanja* 50 (Dubrovnik: Matica hrvatska, Ogranak, 2010).

to record Dubrovnik's history. An account contemporary to Razzi's is Ragnina's¹⁷ chronicle that also quite briefly mentions the epidemic and which will serve as a comparison to the other chronicles mentioned so far.¹⁸

The last two Dalmatian primary sources that will be used in this thesis are the works of Giovanni di Marino Gondola (Ivan Marinov Gundulić) and Giunio Resti (Junije (Džono) Rastić).¹⁹ Since the Gondola family of Dubrovnik was a noble family, with rich archives and members in high governing positions, Francesco di Marino Gondola, a diplomat and ambassador to Rome, made annotations on the archival sources in the sixteenth century, which were then combined into a form of annals by Giovanni, a century later. Resti revised these, and their combination, with some of Giovanni's more elaborate writings became the published edition. They include a description of the Black Death epidemic, which gains prominence in the later part of the narrative. Since these works were written during two centuries it will be interesting to see the changes that become evident through comparing them with earlier accounts.

When it comes to the Italian narratives, I am going to focus mostly on contemporary ones, alongside others from later periods, especially the eighteenth century, so as to provide a framework that corresponds to the Dalmatian chronicles. The main reason for using these is to cover a wider geographic area of today's Italy, in order to see whether there are any differences among the narratives in this matter. The fact that the selected chronicles cover the area from Padua all the way to Messina enables me to look at the narratives as a genre in itself, taking into account the similarities and differences that occur.

¹⁷ The Croatian name of the author is Nikša Ranjina.

¹⁸ Speratus [Natko] Nodilo and Nikola-Nikša Ranjina, ed., *Annales Ragusini Anonymi item Nicolai de Ragnina*, Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium 14, Scriptores vol. 1 (Zagreb: JAZU, 1883).

¹⁹ Speratus Nodilo, ed., *Chronica Ragusina Iunii Restii (Ab origine urbis usque ad annum 1451) item Ioannis Gundulae (1451-1484)*, Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium 25, Scriptores vol. 2 (Zagreb: JAZU, 1893).

The first of these writings is a contemporary account on the plague in Padua, published already in the eighteenth century. This is an important source, because it can serve as a comparative text for the problem of animal behavior and burial provisions described in Dalmatian sources.²⁰ Guglielmo Cortusi wrote the chronicle in Padua, covering the second half of the thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century.

The *Istoria de morbo sive mortalitate que fuit de 1348*, another account written in 1348 in Piacenza by Gabriele de Mussi, is among the most famous ones dealing with the spread of the illness, since the author describes the way in which the Tatars allegedly brought the disease into the Genoese trading city of Kaffa, located in the Crimea.²¹ Historians assumed, due to his very insightful description of events, that he was actually present when this happened, but later research has shown that the account was written in his own city, Piacenza.

Florence is among the richest cities when it comes to surviving sources from the period. The two Villani brothers, Giovanni and Matteo, wrote accounts on the Black Death in Florence successively, since Giovanni himself died of the plague in 1348. The oldest surviving manuscript of his chronicle is a contemporary narrative, and is preserved in the Vatican library. The first ten books were published in Venice in 1537, while the full work was published in Florence in 1559.²² He decided to write this work because during the jubilee of 1300 he realized that in comparison to Rome, a city undergoing decline, nothing on the history of Florence was

²⁰ *Historia de Novitatibus Paduae et Lombardiae ab anno MCCLVI usque ad MCCCLXIV*, ed. Guilelmus Cortusius, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 12.5, (Milan: n.p., 1728). References will be made to the text in English in Horrox, *The Black Death*, 34-5.

²¹ The original manuscript has been preserved and is kept in Poland, references will be made to the text published in English in Horrox, *The Black Death*, 14-26. Gabriele de Mussi wrote that the disease was spread by the Tatars catapulting bodies inside the city walls. W. J. Simpson, *A Treatise on Plague: Dealing with the Historical, Epidemiological, Clinical, Therapeutic and Preventive Aspects of the Disease* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 126.

²² For the purpose of this research I was using Giovanni Villani, Matteo Villani and Filippo Villani, *Croniche storiche*, vol. 4, ed. Francesco Gherardi Dragomanni, *Scelta collezione di opere storiche di tutti i tempi e di tutte le nazioni* 23. (Milano: Borroni e Scotti, 1848).

known, even though the city was gaining more and more prominence.²³ About Matteo Villani we have very little knowledge, apart from the fact that he continued his brother's work until 1363, when he also died of the plague. The first volume starts in the year 1348 with a description of the illness itself.²⁴

The plague in Florence is also dealt with in the introduction to Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, written between 1349 and 1353, a few years after the Black Death struck.²⁵ The *Decameron* is a compilation of 100 stories told by ten people fleeing from the plague epidemic that is raging in the city. The oldest fragment of this work can be found in Florence and dates back to 1360s.²⁶ Although it is a preface to the stories to follow, it is based on Boccaccio's own perception of events during the epidemic in Florence, so it can be taken as a reflection of real-life events. It is quite detailed in describing everything surrounding the plague, from the people's perception of the events around them, through burial problems, business-related issues, all the way to the mortality rates, which makes it one of the most detailed first-hand accounts on the plague in the fourteenth century.

Another account from Florence is the chronicle of Marchionne di Coppo,²⁷ Di Coppo's work was written in the 1370s and has many shared elements with Dalmatian narratives. Di Coppo, whose real name was Baldassarre Buonaiuti, wanted to write a chronicle of Florence exclusively.²⁸ The autograph has not been preserved and the first edition dates from the

²³ Kenneth R. Bartlett, *The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance: A Sourcebook* (University of Toronto Press, 2011), 41.

²⁴ Matteo Villani, *Cronica di Matteo Villani: A miglior lezione ridotta coll'aiuto de'testi a penna*, vol. 1, ed. Filippo Villani and Ignazio Moutler, (Florence: S. Coen, 1825).

²⁵ An introduction to the *Decameron* used for the purpose of this thesis is published in Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, vol. 1 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

²⁶ On the discussion of the development of the *Decameron* manuscripts and critical editions see Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr, *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

²⁷ Marchionne di Coppo Stefani [Baldassarre Bonaiuti], *Cronaca Fiorentina*, ed. Niccolò Rodolico, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 30 (Citta di Castello: S. Lapi, 1903).

²⁸ Lorenzo Tanzini, *Marchionne di Coppo Stefani*, <http://www.storiadifirenze.org/storici/stefani-di-coppo-marchionne>, last accessed on 29 April, 2015.

eighteenth century.²⁹

Agnolo di Tura's account, a contemporary narrative which discusses the plague in Siena, deals with many interesting plague-related issues relevant for my research and quite similar to the Dalmatian accounts.³⁰

The *Cronaca de Michele da Piazza*³¹ is an account which draws information both from the stories surrounding the epidemic, especially related to its spread and the route through which it came to Italy, as well as first-hand experience. It focuses on Messina and the Messinese perception of events, which, apart from the usual description of symptoms and events taking place in the city, also provides information on the measures through which the people tried to prevent the further spread of the illness and restore peace in the community.³² For the purpose of this thesis, I used the account published in Rosemary Horrox's collection of primary sources from the period.³³

The last primary narrative source from Italy is a later one, written by Ludovico Antonio Muratori in the eighteenth century.³⁴ Muratori, a highly educated historian and cleric who published his most important works in the first half of the eighteenth century, discusses the plague in his annals of the Italian history. His expert compilation of Italian narratives and other primary sources provides a comparative framework for my research, with special regards to the time-related change of the narratives themselves.

²⁹ Ildefonso di San Luigi, ed. *Delizie degli eruditi toscani*, vols. 7-17 (Florence: Gaetano Cambiagi, 1776-1783).

³⁰ *Raccolta degli storici Italiani dal cinquecento al millecinquecento*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 15.6 (Bologna, 1931-1939).

³¹ The first edition can be found in Rosario Gregorio, *Bibliotheca scriptorum qui res in Sicilia gestas sub Aragonum imperio retulere. eam uti accessionem ad historicam bibliothecam Carusii instruxit* (Panormi: ex Regio typographeo, 1791).

³² For example, they believed that the relics of St. Agatha of Catania could stop the city's plague epidemic, so they tried to take them to Messina, but the people of Catania thwarted their efforts. Horrox, *The Black Death*, 37.

³³ Horrox, *The Black Death*.

³⁴ Lodovico Antonio Muratori, *Annali d'Italia ed altre opere varie di Lodovico Antonio Muratori*, vol. 3 (Milan: Fratelli Ubicini, 1838).

1.2. Methodology

When it comes to the structure and methodology of this thesis, the main focus will be placed on the Dalmatian narrative sources, which were by and large neglected in Croatian historiography. Although they have been implemented in some of the works dealing with the plague, they are normally used as a reference tool, or as secondary evidence to confirm information found in other source types,³⁵ but to my knowledge they have not been the main source for any of the works written on this or a similar topic. Due to the fact that the longest and most detailed Dalmatian source is *A Cutheis Tabula*, I use this source as the basis of my thesis. Identifying the most prominent motifs of the narrative, I will organize my two research chapters by dividing them into three distinct groups; in the second chapter I am going to discuss the motifs in the description of the disease itself and those related to changes in the natural world that are typical for the plague epidemic, while the third chapter will deal with the questions of family. The final chapter deals with the motifs regarding religion during the plague epidemic.

Throughout this study, the most prominent method used is comparative analysis, which will revolve around the abovementioned contemporary Dalmatian narrative source. It will be discussed in contrast to contemporary Italian and later Dalmatian and Italian sources, which will enable me to keep it as the central focus of my thesis, but at the same time provide the analysis of the motifs therein. Through this approach I want to see the changes that emerged and how consistent they are when it comes to the time when the narrative was written and to the geographic location of writing. I will focus on the motifs that can be found in both groups of sources and I opted for Italian chronicles precisely due to their abundance, as well as to the

³⁵ For example, even though Gordan Ravančić in his doctoral dissertation uses the Cutheis narrative to examine the changes in the natural world during the plague epidemic in the territory of today's Dalmatia, but other types of sources remain his primary focus.

inevitable fact that Croatia, and especially Dalmatia, had strong ties with Italy during the medieval period: fourteenth-century Dalmatia was a contact zone as well as the focus of conflict between Venice and Hungary, and Dubrovnik had strong political and economic ties to Italy all throughout its existence, so I believe that accounts from Italian cities present good material for comparison with the narratives preserved for Dalmatia. I will also use some examples for recurring motifs in descriptions of the plague in other countries, especially from the narratives that have been preserved in large numbers, such as those dealing with France and England. These will serve only as further supporting evidence for the results of the analysis and comparison of the Dalmatian and Italian chronicles and will not be used for seeking patterns beyond the main sources selected for this study.

In the following, second chapter of my research I will discuss the motifs that are related to the origin and transmission of the plague, and the images related to how nature was perceived to be changing during the Black Death epidemic. The third chapter will be devoted to the family-related motifs, and I will finish my research with a discussion on the motif of the origin of the illness, as seen from the eyes of the contemporary chroniclers.

2. Story of the epidemic and images of nature

The motifs that focus on the general description of the plague, as well as those that deal with natural changes described in the narrative sources are many. In this chapter, I focus precisely on them, with emphasis on *A Cutheis Tabula*. In the first part, I will discuss the motifs related to the pre-plague period, namely the origin of the disease as well as the symptoms and transmission.

The second subchapter will deal with the changes in the natural world. I will also present those motifs that are related to plague perception, like the occurrences of events that serve as prophecies of the disaster that is to come. A large part of the chapter will focus on the portrayal of the animal world. I will focus on potentially realistic, as well as metaphoric meaning behind the animal motifs in the sources, especially in *A Cutheis Tabula*. The final subchapter will discuss the peak of the epidemic and its consequences as described in Dalmatian and Italian narrative sources. I will start the subchapter with a description of symptoms and the role of medicine during the epidemic's height, and then proceed to a discussion on mortality rates present in the account. This part of my research will finish with a description of the consequences of the pestilence as shown in the chronicles.

2.1. Beginning of the epidemic

The first piece of information present in the central source of this research, *A Cutheis Tabula*, is the date of the beginning of the epidemic in Split: 25 December 1348. This information is quite problematic, for several reasons. Firstly, this date is definitely set too late for the geographic framework of the city of Split, since we know from the preserved Great Council

decisions that the plague was present near Dubrovnik already in January of that same year.³⁶ Secondly, this does not fit a wider, Adriatic framework, since the entire region was struck with the plague quite earlier.³⁷ In the archival series *Opera pia* of Dubrovnik³⁸ a similar issue is present as well, since *Opera* claims that the disease came to the city on 15 December 1348. Gordan Ravančić provided a possible explanation for this,³⁹ but it cannot apply to the source from Split. A potential explanation could be a different system of dating. According to Capelli's edition of medieval chronology, the Christian system of dates could have two different ways for marking the year's beginning, either Christmas, or Annunciation.⁴⁰ If the formula from the source is taken into account, 25 December 1348 is counted as the first day of 1348, and it actually signifies 25 December 1347, which is in agreement with other sources.⁴¹ Some of the later Dalmatian chroniclers also bring forward either the entire date when the plague started in Dubrovnik, or simply mention the year,⁴² but none goes into the question of how long the plague lasted, which is in stark contrast to the Italian chronicles, which do devote some space to this. All the contemporary Italian chroniclers who mention the arrival of the plague state how long the epidemic lasted; for Florence this was approximately five to six months, and in some places even the months that marked the epidemic's height were mentioned.⁴³ Boccaccio, instead of focusing on the plague in Florence itself, decided to provide information on the general duration of the plague, saying that it lasted for six months after the first outbreak.⁴⁴ Da

³⁶ The first mention of the plague on Šipan comes from January 19, 1348. *MSHSM* 13, 11.

³⁷ For the time framework of the spread of the disease see for example Map I in Benedictow, *The Black Death*, after xvi.

³⁸ *Opera pia* 92, vol. 3, DAD.

³⁹ The source has a structure which says "predio millesimo." Ravančić suggested that this might mean *last year*, which sets the dates straight, since the plague indeed started at the end of 1347 and the beginning of the following year. Ravančić, *Vrijeme umiranja*, 72.

⁴⁰ Adriano Cappelli, *Cronologia, Cronografia e Calendario Perpetuo* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1930), 8.

⁴¹ Whenever the date is used in A Cutheis Tabula, the author refers to the Nativity of Christ.

⁴² Razzi only provides the year, 1348, while Gondola's account gives us also an exact date – January 15. Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 58. *MSHSM* 25, 391. Even though we can assume that Gondola used some of the Great Council decisions for his account, the date he provides is not in accordance with the first mention of the plague in the Council, which occurred on January 19. *MSHSM* 13, 11.

⁴³ Villani, *Cronaca*, 7. See also *RIS* 30, 232. Also Horrox, *The Black Death*, 41.

⁴⁴ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 35.

Piazza's account provides information that cannot be correct; namely, his account gives a very early starting date, claiming that the epidemic lasted from September 1347 until April 1348, which is impossible, since he himself claims that it arrived with the Genoese galleys in October of 1347.⁴⁵ The later accounts, on the other hand, mention only the plague's arrival, not its duration, which is not as surprising if the fact that for the contemporaries the end of the epidemic had a greater impact, since it meant their survival.⁴⁶

The question of where the plague was coming from is a motif which, although omitted from the Cutheis source, remains an interesting one, since the Dalmatian and Italian sources differ significantly when it comes to this matter. Namely, the contemporary Great Council decisions from Dubrovnik only mention that the plague started on the island of Šipan,⁴⁷ and Gondola, the seventeenth-century and only other source to address this question elaborates that a natural disaster

bore a ferocious pestilence, which started in Scythia, then around the cities on the Black Sea and having decimated the archipelagos came to Dubrovnik, where the first place where it could be found was the island of Šipan, from where later it came to Dubrovnik and infected the city.⁴⁸

The Italian chroniclers rarely provide information on the route on which the disease came to Europe, but they do emphasize the fact that the plague started among the non-believers or *gl'infedeli*.⁴⁹ When the plague came to Italy, people tried to implement some measures in

⁴⁵ *RIS* 30, 232.

⁴⁶ Di Tura states that the plague arrived in Siena in May 1348, while Muratori just mentions that it arrived in the previous year. See *RIS* 15.6, 555. See also Muratori, *Annali d'Italia* 3, 619.

⁴⁷ The name of the island in medieval sources is Juppana, and its name in Italian remains Giuppana. It is part of the Elaphiti islands and is located approximately 17 km from Dubrovnik. The island became a part of Dubrovnik in 1426. Peter F. Sugar, *Southeastern Europe under Ottoman Rule, 1354-1804* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 170.

⁴⁸ "Partorì una ferissima pestilenza, la quale principiò in Scitia, poi intorno ai luochi del mare Pontico, et havendo danneggiato l'Arcipelago, a Ragusa il primo luoco ove si scoperse fu l'isola di Giuppana, da dove poi venne a Ragusa et infestò la città." *MSHSM* 25, 391. The term Scythia refers to the Asian steppes, where modern science actually places the origin of the disease. For the question of origin see for example Green, "Taking 'pandemic' seriously."

⁴⁹ "The infidels." Villani, *Cronica*, 7. See also Horrox, *The Black Death*, 34. Most of the other chronicles, including Muratori, just state that it came with the Genoese galleys from the East. Muratori, *Annali d'Italia*, 619. In chronicles of other states, like for example England, even if a country of origin is mentioned, emphasis is put

order to stop its further spread: foreigners were banned from entering the city, communication between people was minimized, but it was all in vain. By 1349, Europe was entirely infected.⁵⁰

The cause and transmission of the illness is another important motif from the narrative sources, and remains the topic of many debates even today, since science still has not managed to provide a final answer on this matter.⁵¹ *A Cutheis tabula* provides us with the explanation on how the disease was transmitted by blaming it on the corrupted air: “At that time the air was infected, and became obscure and dark and many parts of the world were infected with the deadly epidemic disease.”⁵² The same motif is present in other accounts as well. Gondola mentions that people were fleeing to change the air and the same can be read in Matteo Villani’s and di Coppo’s accounts.⁵³ This is not surprising, since medical theory in the Middle Ages went in accordance with this; doctors perceived diseases as corruptions of the balance of the four bodily humors through the influence of some outer factor, which could happen through the intake of food and water, as well as air.⁵⁴ The most devastating illnesses were seen as being caused by miasma, vapors that were produced from the rotting in the earth and spreading through the air.⁵⁵ All this shows that Cutheis, as well as other contemporary chroniclers, were familiar with the medical theories regarding the plague.

When it comes to the transmission of the illness, what we know from modern scientific research is that the plague started among rodents, and the most widespread theories claim that

on the fact that it starts among the non-Christians. See Henry Knighton, *Knighton’s Chronicle 1337-1396*, G. H. Martin, ed., Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 95.

⁵⁰ Villani, *Cronica*, 7.

⁵¹ See for example Ole J. Benedictow, *What Disease Was Plague? On the Controversy over the Microbiological Identity of Plague Epidemics of the Past* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁵² “Tunc temporis infectus erat aer, et factus obscurus et caliginosus, et multae partes mundi infectae errant lethifero morbo epidimico.” *SRH*, 654.

⁵³ *MSHSM* 25, 391. See also Villani, *Cronica*, 7. Also *RIS* 30, 232.

⁵⁴ For more on this topic see Joseph Patrick Byrne, *Daily Life during the Black Death* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press: 2006), 16, 17. See also Christiane Nockels Fabbri, “Treating Medieval Plague: The Wonderful Virtues of Theriac,” *Early Science and Medicine* 12, no. 3 (June 1, 2007), 249.

⁵⁵ Rotting of the bodies due to improper burial was also considered one of the causes of miasma; more on this in the third chapter.

the main vectors of transmission are rats and fleas. One of the main questions when it comes to the latter matter is the surprising lack of statements on rodents dying in the medieval chronicles, which furthermore questions this theory.⁵⁶ *A Cutheis Tabula* is quite interesting when it comes to this because even though rodents are not mentioned, the author claims that animals were the first to be attacked by the plague. In the account, the animals (horses, oxen, sheep and goats), had symptoms of *itching and leprosy* and they lost their hair, became thin and weak and died after a few days.⁵⁷ Because animals were the ones that died first, it is possible that this is the reason for the images connected with them, although these motifs do not necessarily involve the same animals.⁵⁸

People of the time were surprised by the rapidness of the spread of the plague and the fact that they did not know how exactly it was transmitted caused them to react in several different ways. Firstly, they tried to move from the contaminated air, by fleeing from the city where the contagion was spreading.⁵⁹ If they were not sure about the contagion via air, they were sure about the fact that touching the possessions of the dead was to be avoided. Several Italian chroniclers mention that people refused to touch items of the deceased and there are descriptions of cases when animals, like pigs in one of the accounts, became ill through contact with clothes of the deceased.⁶⁰ It was understood that man-to-man contact facilitated the spread, so all forms of social contact were decreased. From the Great Council decisions of the time it is obvious that the notion of people being the carriers of illnesses was common. The first plague-related issue the Council discusses is the possibility of forbidding the people of

⁵⁶ For more information on this see Graham Twigg, "The black rat and the plague," in Aleks Pluskowski, ed. *Medieval animals* (Cambridge: Cambridge Department of Archaeology, 2002), 80.

⁵⁷ "Scabies et leprae." *SRH*, 655.

⁵⁸ More on the animal behavior in the next subchapter.

⁵⁹ Alternatively, to a city if it started on the outskirts.

⁶⁰ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 28, 34. After the Great plague of London, in the seventeenth century, people felt uneasy about wearing wigs, because of the questions whether these were previously worn by someone who was infected, as well as wigs in general being the transmitters of the plague. Samuel Pepys, *Memoirs*, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1828).

Šipan to come to the city.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the transmission of the disease in its full sense remains an enigma, which becomes obvious if we look at a motif that is repeated even in the narrative sources that came into being three centuries after the Black Death: The disease spreads so fast that it seems as if it is transmitted through “a simple look.”⁶²

2.2. Changes in the natural world

The notion of many changes in the natural world, for example, animals and movements of celestial bodies, are the most relevant parts of *A Cutheis Tabula*. These descriptions remain unprecedented, compared to other contemporary sources, especially those dealing with animals, since a great deal of space is devoted to them in the chronicle, especially if we take into account its length altogether.⁶³

When it comes to celestial bodies, we have several different motifs in Cutheis’ narrative, the first of them being the mention of changes regarding planets. Cutheis states that “the Sun became dark in the middle of the day, the stars appeared in the sky as if it were night, and the eclipse appeared dark and gloomy.”⁶⁴ The role of astronomy in the Middle Ages cannot be ignored, both for occupying a very important place in the scientific endeavor of the period, as well as people seeing astronomic events as significant for their daily life. When the Black Death spread to France, the king asked the Paris Medical Faculty to provide an explanation for

⁶¹ Since they were too concerned about the damage this could do to business, the decision was vetoed with 30 of them voting for the decision being implemented and 55 councilors voting against it being implemented with immediate effect. *MSHSM* 13, 11. The chronicler from Padua brings forth similar information, stating that cities were banning the entrance to outsiders. See Horrox, *The Black Death*, 35.

⁶² For the Black Death epidemic, see Villani, *Cronica*, 9. For mentions of similar explanations during the Great Plague of London see A. Lloyd Moote and Dorothy C. Moote, *The Great Plague: The Story of London’s Most Deadly Year* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 58.

⁶³ Approximately one fifth of the account focuses on the discussion of extraordinary animal behavior, the mention of their role in the transmission of the plague excluded.

⁶⁴ *SRH*, 654.

the events, and what they stated was that the remote cause of the plague⁶⁵ was the conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars in Aquarius, which had happened three years ago, at 1 PM, on 20 March 1345.⁶⁶ In his account, Boccaccio stated that many believe heavenly bodies influenced the appearance of the plague, while Matteo Villani shows knowledge on the aforementioned Paris Medical Faculty account.⁶⁷

Due to the influence of Plato's writings during the Middle Ages, especially his *Timaeus*, everything, including the human body and soul, was considered to be made out of four elements: air, fire, water and earth. Planetary motion is also important because of the humors theory. The main point was that motions of planets caused imbalance within bodily humors, which caused an immediate reaction inside the human organism in the form of illness.⁶⁸ I believe that it is due to that specific reason that Cutheis discusses this problem in one of the passages of his account. Apart from his narrative, none of the other sources have such descriptions. Cutheis writes about the wind and it blowing very strongly, and also about the sea, where the waves produced very loud sounds while breaking on the shores and "all the elements gave painful and sad signs."⁶⁹

Other important motifs from *A Cutheis Tabula* are those of a comet preceding the epidemic, as well as other similar celestial events that were related to the illness in the minds of the people of that period. Cutheis writes that there was a comet with a large tail on the western skies and the stars were falling on Earth, and along the place where the comet passed

⁶⁵ The plague was seen as having two causes, a remote and an immediate one, the immediate being the effects of miasma vapors.

⁶⁶ Byrne, *Daily life*, 23. See also Horrox, *The Black Death*, 159.

⁶⁷ Villani, mentions the conjunction of the planets, but sets this in the year 1346. Villani, *Cronica*, 5.

⁶⁸ The planets were also considered crucial for deciding the time of bloodletting, probably the most well-known notion of medieval medicine.

⁶⁹ "Et omnia elementa dolorosa et tristia signa dabant." By mentioning the elements in this manner, after describing the wind and sea, I believe here he refers to them being two out of four elements, but does not go into describing the remaining two. *SRH*, 655.

there was an open sky; from here emerged heavenly fire and light.⁷⁰ A similar view is provided in Matteo Villani's account, where he stated that there was "a great fire from the sky, stretching westwards."⁷¹ The motif of the comet was very often preceding catastrophic events in narratives that were older than those used for this thesis, and there are also some that were written in periods of later plague epidemics.⁷² Due to the many mentions of comets and celestial changes in the period preceding the epidemic, this has added to the already existing debates on the nature of the disease. Recently, there have been some researches on the possibility that the comets that are mentioned in the narrative sources were not merely a motif, but a motive and that the occurrence of the plague had something to do with the comets. Namely, some people argue that due to the questionable information on rats being present during the plague epidemic, as well as problems when comparing symptoms from the fourteenth century and modern plague outbreaks, the Black Death could not have been the plague.⁷³ Some researchers, supported with evidence from dendrochronology argue that the comet descriptions in narrative sources were factual, not merely metaphorical and that their debris contained the virus⁷⁴ that caused the disease.⁷⁵

Alongside the occurrences of comets, a very widespread plague-related motif is the one of an earthquake preceding the epidemic. Cutheis' account states that *in the east* in many different places there was a terrible earthquake.⁷⁶ This notion of the earthquake shaking the

⁷⁰ A mistake in translation has been made in the Gligo and Morović Croatian edition, while Nada Klaić's publication provides the readers with the translation closer to the original.

⁷¹ "Cadde da cielo un fuoco grandissimo, il quale stendendosi verso il ponente." Villani, *Cronica*, 9.

⁷² The comet is a recurring motif in most of the primary narrative sources for the Great Plague of London, among others it is mentioned in the diary of Samuel Pepys, probably the most famous narrative from the period. There were even studies on the different qualities of comets as premonitions of different disasters, like the plague or the great fire that struck London in 1666. For example see A. T. Malkin, *Historical parallels*, vol. 2, (London, 1835), 88, 89.

⁷³ See footnote 56.

⁷⁴ It is important that the cause is a virus, since it has a faster spreading rate. The most widespread view today is that the cause is a bacterium, *Yersinia pestis*.

⁷⁵ For this idea see for example M. G. L. Baillie, *New Light on the Black Death: The Cosmic Connection* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006).

⁷⁶ "In parte orientali." *SRH*, 654.

eastern parts of the world is very unusual. What we can ascertain today is the fact that on 25 January 1348 there actually was an earthquake, which inflicted severe damage to the territory of Italy, and this is the main focus of the part of Giovanni Villani's account that I have opted for using in this thesis.⁷⁷ The article's claim is that the motif of the earthquake was preserved in so many narratives specifically due to the fact that it occurred so close to the epidemic's outbreak. The author states that even though it is interrelated with the epidemic, the image of the earthquake that is painted in the sources differs from the image of the illness itself; he argues that the earthquake was perceived as something that is in accordance with the unpredictability of nature, but is not commonly assigned to a supernatural cause, like God's wrath.⁷⁸ However, where Villani's account is concerned, this claim is in stark contrast with what the source actually provides.

When Cutheis discusses that many buildings were ruined in the earthquake, this is quite similar to what Villani claims, so there is a possibility that Cutheis was familiar with Villani's writings. He might have used the motif to add to the gloomy picture of the beginning of the epidemic, especially if we take into account the common and probably correct opinion of the plague originating in the east.⁷⁹ Gondola's account provides another representation of the earthquake, in some ways even more dramatic than the previous ones, claiming that in 1348 there was an earthquake that lasted for fifteen consecutive days and "there was not a pregnant woman that did not have a miscarriage from fear."⁸⁰ This motif is quite unique, compared to the other analyzed chronicles in this research.

Probably the most interesting part of *A Cutheis Tabula*, related to the natural world, is the way in which the animal behavior altered - from what is considered normal - during the

⁷⁷ Regarding the information that we have for this earthquake, as well as the reliability of the sources see Christian Rohr, "Man and Natural Disaster in the Late Middle Ages: The Earthquake in Carinthia and Northern Italy on 25 January 1348 and Its Perception," *Environment and History* 9, no. 2 (May 1, 2003).

⁷⁸ Since God's wrath was seen as the epidemic's cause. Ibid, 128.

⁷⁹ Since Cutheis does not mention the origin of the plague, such an explanation is possible.

⁸⁰ "Non vi fu alcuna dona pregna, la quale non aborti per paura." *MSHSM* 25, 391.

epidemic of 1348. An inevitable question is posed regarding this: should these be taken as a more or less realistic representations of some changes occurring in the behavior of animals during the epidemic, or are these to be taken as accounts that are to add to the very dark portrayal of events in the narratives? As I mentioned in the previous subchapter, Cutheis devotes one fifth of his narrative to the images connected to the behavior of animals, and in my opinion these do not serve the attempt of portraying real-life events; their purpose is rather to enhance the impact of horror that these writings leave upon the reader.⁸¹ Many contemporaries thought that future generations would be spared such a destiny. It was expected that they would have trouble even imagining these events, thus the animal images become more understandable, as well as the intention behind them.⁸²

The first animals mentioned in the account are wolves, which are given almost supernatural traits. The author himself mentions that “they did not look like wolves or beasts, but like demons.”⁸³ They attacked people, even when people were in groups, which is not common, and they entered people’s homes, taking even small children. The image of the wolf is conveniently used here, since wolves in medieval imagery are generally used as the representatives of the devil, and attacks by wolves can be interpreted as the plague attacking men during that year. This fits the contemporary beliefs on the divine origin of the disease.⁸⁴ Also, in the account the wolves are mentioned as eating the corpses, which they were pulling out of their graves, and the same motif is used by Agnolo di Tura.⁸⁵ The motif of stealing children from their mothers could also be related to the fact that women and children were the

⁸¹ Many animal-related motifs were used in the Middle Ages to serve a purpose of teaching humans a moral lesson. For more information see Joyce, E. Salisbury, *The beast within: animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Rutledge, 1994), 110, 116.

⁸² Francesco Petrarca, *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus et variis*, ed. Giuseppe Fracassetti, 3 vols. (Florence: Typis Felicis de Monnier, 1859-63), 1:438-40.

⁸³ “Non lupi, vel ferae, sed daemones videbantur.” SRH, 655.

⁸⁴ This will be the topic of the bigger part of the fourth chapter of my research. <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast180.htm>, last accessed on 10 May 2015.

⁸⁵ SRH, 655. See also RIS, 15.6, 555.

most vulnerable, since their immune systems were not as strong as male ones, metaphorically referring to their deaths by the plague.⁸⁶

Birds and bats are also given a prominent role in Cutheis' account, and these are also mentioned as having changed their behavior in relation to what they usually do. Bats, cuckoos and owls are mentioned in relation to people's homes, either as producing sounds during the night, or as building nests inside the houses. Crows, kites and vultures are mentioned as creating a lot of noise while flying around the city; the animal related part of the account ends with the author's note that many other wild animals were also approaching the city and "giving many unnatural signs."⁸⁷ The animals that were chosen to be used in the account have certain images and meanings ascribed to them, which were well-known during the Middle Ages.

For example, vultures and crows are connected to the image of dead bodies, since they feed on them, and both are infamous for beginning their feeding process on the eyes of the corpse.⁸⁸ Owls are also inevitably related with the image of death, since they are assigned a potential for predicting someone's death, which they marked with their cries, which is also mentioned in *A Cutheis Tabula*⁸⁹. In addition, both owls and bats are nocturnal animals, and nighttime is, as was already mentioned, an image used by Cutheis in the previous parts of his account.⁹⁰ It is important to mention that he also uses two types of birds that are interconnected in many medieval narratives, namely the cuckoo and the kite. Kites represent carnal pleasure and weakness, because they prey on domestic birds, and since cuckoos do not possess enough

⁸⁶ The image of wolves in the Middle Ages also often refers to the motif of retribution imposed by God, not by the devil, which is in accordance with the belief in the plague's origin, topic of the fourth chapter of my research. For this see Aleksander Pluskowski, *Wolves and the wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 96.

⁸⁷ "Plurima signa dabant monstrosa." *SRH*, 655.

⁸⁸ <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast233.htm>. See also <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast252.htm>, last accessed on 10 May 2015.

⁸⁹ <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast245.htm>, last accessed on 10 May 2015.

⁹⁰ <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast245.htm>, last accessed on 10 May 2015.

strength for longer flights, they were depicted as sometimes being carried on kites' backs.⁹¹

Michele da Piazza offers a very interesting and twofold account on dogs during the epidemic in Messina. Firstly, he states that demons were showing themselves in the city in the shape of dogs, and then he retells a story of a dog with a sword in its paw. The dog rushed inside a church and started breaking things on the altar, upon which the people prostrated themselves on the floor, in horror, when the dog finally left.⁹² In the medieval period dogs represented the possibility of repentance for one's sins, through their ability to heal their own wounds by licking them.⁹³ I believe that the representation from Messina could be related to this motif, since people had to bow down in front of the church altar in order to remove the source of their fear. This is again connected to the question of the plague's divine origin, a motif which will be elaborated on in the next chapter. Apart from them being ascribed extraordinary features, animals are mentioned in these accounts as either being the transmitters of the disease or as suffering the same fate as the rest of the household that was infected, where the animals died alongside humans.

When describing nature, *A Cutheis Tabula* has proven to be an unprecedented source, animal imagery especially gaining prominence in this manner. The way in which animals were used to represent the horror of the 1348 events is different from other Dalmatian sources, which do not even elaborate on animal-related events, whether real or metaphorical. Italian sources go along similar lines, since only Michele da Piazza offers a mention of animals in a non-literal sense, while in other cases animals are only mentioned either as carriers of the disease, or as suffering alongside people in households which were infected.

⁹¹ <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast544.htm>. See also <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast4724.htm>, last accessed on 10 May 2015.

⁹² Horrox, *The Black Death*, 38.

⁹³ <http://www.bestiary.ca/beasts/beast181.htm>, last accessed on 10 May 2015.

2.3. The peak of the epidemic and its consequences

Upon the plague bacterium's arrival to Europe, it took the illness several weeks to actually start influencing the people, as well as more time for it to be noticed by the city officials and upper layers of society.⁹⁴ Chroniclers noted the specific symptoms that marked the Black Death, some of which also influenced the name ascribed to the fourteenth-century epidemic.⁹⁵ These symptoms are one of the causes of heated debates on the nature of the illness, because they differ from the symptoms connected to the modern plague outbreaks.⁹⁶ Cutheis left us a brief description of events, but it still relates to other writings we have from the period. After describing how the plague originated among animals, the author goes on and retells that afterwards the plague started "running through the entire world", weakening the people.⁹⁷ Men showed signs of glands or black carbuncles and after the fever of their body rose, death was certain. All the other contemporary accounts also mention the existence of this carbuncle, which we today know under the term *bubo*, which also gave the name to the most well-known type of the disease – the bubonic plague.⁹⁸ In some of the authors that I have chosen, even the sizes of the buboes are mentioned, as well as their specific location, the most common ones on

⁹⁴ For more information see Benedictow, *The Black Death*, 18.

⁹⁵ Due to the internal bleeding, patients often suffered from black spots over their chest, which added to the naming. The other reason for the name is the general panic that the illness caused, as well as from the buboes. See for example <http://www.history.com/topics/black-death>.

⁹⁶ Modern plague spreads significantly more slowly than the Black Death, mortality rates are significantly lower, as well as the virulence of the bacterium. For the debates on this see John Theilmann and Frances Cate, "A Plague of Plagues: The Problem of Plague Diagnosis in Medieval England," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 37, No. 3 (2007).

⁹⁷ "Per universum mundum discurrendo." *SRH*, 655.

⁹⁸ Even though the most widespread belief is that the Black Death was the outbreak of the bubonic plague, nowadays, regarding this, we have two opposing opinions. Among the most prominent plague historians, Ole Benedictow and Samuel Cohn are leading the debate, Benedictow claiming that the disease must have been the bubonic plague, and Cohn disagreeing with such a view. Even though there is still no final answer on this matter, the differences in the fourteenth century and modern symptoms remain, and maybe further comparison of these, together with medical research and archaeology will lead the discussion to a more firm result. Apart from the books by Benedictow, which I have already referred to, see also Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *The Black Death Transformed: Disease and Culture in Early Renaissance Europe* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers, 2002).

the neck, under the armpits or in the groin.⁹⁹ However, some narratives, like Matteo Villani's, Boccaccio's and the one coming from Padua acknowledge that the buboes can appear on all body parts.¹⁰⁰

Part of Cutheis' account on symptoms is peculiar in a way that it does not note the rapidness with which the illness kills, which was one of the most often mentioned motifs by other contemporary authors; five other accounts give the same information, including Gondola, which is a later, sixteenth-century one. It is not surprising that this was preserved in the collective memory of the Black Death, since an illness killing people and animals in only three days was not a common occurrence, not to mention that such a progress did not leave the doctors of the time many options for helping their patients.

The role of medicine during the plague epidemic is not mentioned in *A Cutheis Tabula*, although other authors do devote some space to this issue. Less than a month after the plague was mentioned as being present on Šipan, on 12 February 1348, in the Great Council's decisions we find that the barber surgeon who was active on the island passed away.¹⁰¹ Gondola's account adds to this, saying that during the first onset of the epidemic, the doctors used to visit the patients, but after some time even they started passing away, so many who suffered from the disease died without any medical assistance.¹⁰² Both di Coppo and Boccaccio, in their accounts, ask questions on whether the doctors are simply ignorant, or there is really no cure for the disease, which can tell us that the epidemic also influenced the perception of the medicine and the effect it had on people's lives.¹⁰³ Even though it seems that people were losing faith in medicine of the period, the account from Padua claims something

⁹⁹ Due to the buboes in the groin, the disease in some Italian accounts got the name *anguinaja* (*anguinaia* literally meaning groin in Italian). *MSHSM* 25, 391.

¹⁰⁰ Villani, *Cronica*, 5. See also Horrox, *The Black Death*, 27, 35.

¹⁰¹ Even though the reason is not put in writing, I believe that it is highly likely that he passed away because of the epidemic. *MSHSM* 13, 12.

¹⁰² *MSHSM* 25, 391.

¹⁰³ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 27. *RIS* 30, 230.

different, that even the most accomplished doctors suffer the same fate as all the rest when it comes to the plague.¹⁰⁴ The role of medicine in the period remains an interesting topic even today, because the doctors did not really change the way in which they were treating their patients throughout most of the outbreaks of the disease. Astrology, which was seen as influential on medicine, gained even more prominence, due to the beliefs on the plague's cause. Bloodletting remained the primary attempt at curing the plague, although nowadays it is known that due to lack of disinfection, this actually contributed to the spread of the disease. Some of the most famous doctors from the plague period, like Gui de Chauliac, built their fame on the fact that they were the ones who managed to survive the Black Death, in spite of the fact that they were infected, which implied their success.¹⁰⁵

When the question of mortality rates is concerned, the narrative sources provide us with very interesting and quite unpredictable guesses, and it is quite an endeavor to try to compare them. In *A Cutheis Tabula* unfortunately we do not have any specific numbers of dead citizens of Split, but the author obviously tries to convey the image of the death rates being enormous, asking: “who could name all the nobles and countless numbers of citizens of Split who died in those days?”¹⁰⁶

For later chronicles from Dubrovnik, we have precise numbers that have been written down, although it is impossible to conclude where these numbers are coming from. Table 1 shows the numbers and how they changed in different chronicles.

¹⁰⁴ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ John Aberth, *From the Brick of the Apocalypse: Confronting the Famine, War, Plague, and Death in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Rutledge, 2001), 97-106.

¹⁰⁶ “Quis multitudinem nobilium et popularem numerum infinitum Spalatensium effari posset? vel quis stragem innumerae gentis recensere queat?” *SRH*, 656.

Table 1: Mortality rates in medieval Dalmatian chronicles¹⁰⁷

	noblemen	citizens	commoners
Razzi	173	300	7000
Ragnina	170	300	10000
Gondola	273	300	6000
Resti	273	-	6000

Table 1 Mortality rates in Dalmatian sources

The numbers in the table have been taken from the narrative sources of Dalmatia, none of them contemporary to the plague epidemic. The table is divided between three social strata in medieval Dubrovnik, noblemen meaning the highest class. Citizens indicate those people born in Dubrovnik, with parents being members of the class, or those who gained the status through special merit or marriage. Finally, commoners meant the lowest class of the three, with no political rights.¹⁰⁸

Differences between the number of noblemen in Razzi's and Ragnina's account are strikingly small, which poses a further question – from where were they drawing information on these numbers?¹⁰⁹ It is possible that they used a common source for writing their works, or that they borrowed from each other, since their accounts are written in the same centuries. Since we do not possess any information on this, this question remains unanswered. The number of

¹⁰⁷ I only used numbers from narratives that I focus on in this thesis. For a more elaborated version of the table see Ravančić, "Neka razmišljanja," 8.

¹⁰⁸ Zdenka Janeković Römer, "Građani, stanovnici, podanici, stranci, inovjerci u srednjovjekovnom Dubrovniku [Citizens, Inhabitants, Subjects, Foreigners, Heterodox in Medieval Dubrovnik]," *Raukarov zbornik*, ed. Neven Budak. Zagreb: FF Press (2005). See also Rheubottom, *Age, marriage*, 80.

¹⁰⁹ *MSHSM* 14, 39. See also Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 58.

citizens that died in the epidemic is the same,¹¹⁰ while the number of commoners is very different.¹¹¹ Where this difference comes from is difficult to tell, since to establish even a remote guess on the demographic picture of fourteenth-century Dubrovnik is an impossible endeavor. Some calculations come to the number of 2500 people living in the city, but others, like Gordan Ravančić state that the number must have been higher.¹¹² In any case, the number 7000, as well as 6000 brought by Gondola and Resti¹¹³ are definitely too high, but one cannot guess about exact numbers, nor where these numbers are coming from. Since Resti's account relies largely on Gondola's writings, and these are presented in the same edition, it is not surprising that the numbers they provide are basically the same. Italian chroniclers do mention some estimates as to the number of people that died in certain cities, but these numbers are also too large by far, if taken in accordance with estimates of how many people actually lived there in the fourteenth century.¹¹⁴ Even though medieval chroniclers were prone to exaggerations when it comes to mortality rates, these aimed at describing the horror which people faced. Since modern authors are aware of this fact, they try to lower the numbers, thus some argue that the mortality rates should not be in accordance neither with medieval, nor with modern accounts, but rather somewhere in the middle.¹¹⁵

Finally, I would like to discuss several important issues about the consequences of the Black Death as shown in the narrative sources. When it comes to the Dalmatian territory, these are mentioned in the Great Council decisions, and Gondola confirms the same things, which tells us that he was obviously familiar with them, either directly or by means of some other, unknown source that he used, and which had references to them.¹¹⁶ The number of people of

¹¹⁰ *MSHSM* 14, 39. See also Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 58

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Gordan Ravančić, "Neka razmišljanja," 10.

¹¹³ *MSHSM* 25, 131, 392.

¹¹⁴ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 34. See also *RIS* 30, 232.

¹¹⁵ Aberth *From the Brick of the Apocalypse*, 89-91.

¹¹⁶ Gondola's confirmation of the Great Council decisions can be found in *MSHSM* 25, 391.

Dubrovnik decreased significantly, which influenced the decisions to allow those exiled for some minor criminal deeds to return to Dubrovnik, as well as to lower the age criteria for entering the Council from twenty to eighteen years.¹¹⁷ The latter decision was accepted because the number of people who were supposed to enter the Council was too low. This measure was supposed to enable the Council's proper functioning in these new and extreme conditions. Again, due to the lack of data, we cannot determine the number of people left in the city, but since the discussion on the matter continues in the following period, it is natural to presume that people were reluctant to make such a decision and return to a city decimated by the plague.¹¹⁸ Regarding the consequences of the epidemic, the Italian chroniclers focus on somewhat different motifs; di Coppo's account introduces the fact that gravediggers and doctors gained great amounts of money from the epidemic (if, of course, they managed to survive the disease). This is not surprising due to the risk they were taking by conducting such labor.¹¹⁹ In addition, an interesting motif, not mentioned in Dalmatian chroniclers is that of moral decadence of the survivors. Di Coppo, Boccaccio and Matteo Villani all mention the same occurrence, people starting to show off with the clothes they are wearing, taking a lot of pride in that, as well as general decline of the moral.¹²⁰ People start enjoying their lives, spending much time on drinking, and women are starting to pay less attention to their own reputation. This can be seen in accordance to the fact that people, after being forced to witness terrifying events gained an awareness that death could come at any second, which subsequently changed their behavior. They tried to live every moment to the fullest, enjoying the lives they were leading. Fashion trends started changing, and there were even subsequent changes in law regarding female dressing style in Italian cities.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *MSHSM* 13, 25, 27.

¹¹⁸ Similar calls were made in May and June.

¹¹⁹ *RIS* 30, 231.

¹²⁰ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 29-31. *RIS* 30, 231-232. Villani, *Cronica*, 10-11.

¹²¹ For sumptuary laws in Italy in the years during, and after the Black Death see Maryanne Kowaleski, ed., *Medieval town: A reader* (Pewterborough: Broadview Press, 2006) 219-21.

3. Family related motifs

The sudden death of entire households inevitably brought forth several weighty motifs in connection with the plague epidemic, about which *A Cutheis Tabula*, as well as other sources contain extensive descriptions. The sudden closeness of death led to changes in family relations, since people who feared for their lives acted in an extreme way and abandoned their family members. Often, when members of a household got infected, the rest of the family simply abandoned them, out of fear of getting infected themselves, which is frequently emphasized in the narrative sources. This also affected the last wills from the period. In the following part I will use the wills left from 1348 Dubrovnik, as well as the research conducted on them by Ravančić,¹²² to show what insight these can provide into the mindset of the people in these extraordinary circumstances.¹²³

3.1. Family and practical issues

Even though Cutheis' account does give some description of family-related events during the height of the epidemic, this part of the narrative is much less detailed than the aforementioned passages dealing with the natural world. This is somewhat different from what one can find in other narratives, which tend to focus more on real-life events than on metaphorical elements, for reasons that can only be based on assumptions. One of these speculative explanations may be the previously noted fact that the events were so horrifying that the author wanted to make sure that future generations will understand them and the implications they had on human lives. It is also possible that the author knew that other chroniclers already recorded the actual events,

¹²² Both Ravančić's doctoral thesis, as well as his other articles cited in this thesis, are at least partially based on the last wills from 1348 Dubrovnik. The last wills can be found under *Testamenta notariae*, 10-1, vol. 5, DAD.

¹²³ For the study of last wills in relation to the plague see Aberth *From the Brick of the Apocalypse*, 210-213.

and wanted to add to the impact of these facts through metaphors. Since Cutheis' account was probably written some years after the epidemic itself, the latter seems likely, since this enabled the author to find out about other chronicles. Since his exact identity is unknown it remains speculative, but if the assumption that the author is Marin de Cutheis, a clergyman, is correct, he was an educated nobleman, which makes his knowledge of the other chronicles even more probable. Be that as it may, Cutheis' narrative remains significantly different from the rest of the chronicles, contributing to its relevance in a comparative analysis.

Although less elaborate, reports about the plague's influence on family life in Cutheis do exist, and paint a picture of the effect of the disease on everyday life in Dalmatia. There are two prevailing motifs in this section, one related to family matters, and the other concerning the problem of burial during the onset of the illness. One motif in Cutheis is also often mentioned in other narratives: the fact that the plague did not differentiate between people of different social standing, but killed

men and women, old and young, not sparing any age, separated sons and daughters from parents and vice versa, brothers from brothers, and dear ones from each other, and it separated, without showing any mercy, husbands from wives and wives from their lawful husbands.¹²⁴

Among the Dalmatian chronicles, in the seventeenth century, Gondola provides a similar account, saying that neither nobility, nor wealth proved to make a difference when it came to death by the plague, which is a general motif that tends to recur in narratives of other catastrophes as well, and relatives were of no help to each other.¹²⁵ This account shows the main difference between Cutheis and all the other chroniclers, contemporary and later ones, since in his account it is the disease and death which separated family members, unlike others,

¹²⁴ "Mares etiam et feminas senes et paruulos, protinus sacua lues communiter necabat, et nulli aetati hominum parcere volebat, separabat filios et filias a parentibus, et e conuerso germanos et fratres a fratribus, et omnes caros a caris, similiter maritos a consortibus, et vxores a viris legitimis, omnino disgregabat sine aliqua pietate." SRH, 655-56.

¹²⁵ "Non dava soccorso parente al parente." *MSHSM* 25, 391.

claiming that people abandoned each other due to fear of getting infected themselves.¹²⁶ Both Gondola, as well as the contemporary and later Italian chroniclers, present the readers with the latter motif, stressing that it is the fault of humans who abandon their relatives simply due to fear, and although not overtly present in all the chronicles, in many cases it is obvious that the author condemns such behavior.¹²⁷

Marchionne di Coppo takes this account to the extreme, providing detailed descriptions of how family members treated each other. He describes how people lied to their ill family members that they were leaving just to pay a visit to the doctor and then never returned. Even if the patient begged them not to leave, they would wait until he or she fell asleep and then leave.¹²⁸ The difference between the ways in which the motif of abandonment is described may be the result of the intention of the narrative. In this case the author's intention to show the helplessness of people facing the illness, completely beyond their control, is once more successfully established. People trying to flee from the plague was something that occurred regularly,¹²⁹ and even though it was an attempt to avoid contagion, many sources mention that this was unsuccessful. According to da Piazza's account, many people were dying on the roads, in ditches and other places that were not meant to be anyone's dying place, since that was not in accordance with the medieval idea of a proper death and burial.¹³⁰

3.2. Death and burial

Death and burial in the Middle Ages were tightly connected with a number of rituals. Since in the Christian view, death was not the end of life, but just its interruption before the afterlife,

¹²⁶ When talking about this occurring in the eastern countries, when the plague was just starting, Matteo Villani, strongly condemns it and writes that such behavior goes against the human nature. Villani, *Cronica*, 7.

¹²⁷ For examples of this motif see Horrox, *The Black Death*, 34, 36. See also *RIS* 15.6, 555. Also *RIS* 30, 230.

¹²⁸ *RIS* 30, 230-31.

¹²⁹ The same occurred in London in 1665, for example, see Pepys, *Memoirs*, 280.

¹³⁰ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 39.

which depends on the quality of the deceased's life, death was not something to be feared, but rather a stage in human life to be thought through and prepared for.¹³¹ Even though it was clearly not the case, in theory every Christian was supposed to await death with expectations of eternal life,¹³² and when the time for it came, there were three prerogatives that had to be fulfilled: confession, communion and anointment.¹³³ Death was not only a private matter but rather a social event in the Middle Ages, so the spiritual and the social functions intertwined in this regard. It was necessary for a Christian to be buried in consecrated ground, which was commonly done either on church property or very close to it. Graveyards needed to be consecrated by a bishop in order to be suitable for the process of burial, and it was of crucial importance for them to be re-consecrated in the case of sacrilege.¹³⁴ Not being buried in consecrated ground meant 'spiritual death', and those who were denied proper burial were considered to be excommunicated persons, heretics, lepers, the unbaptized, Jews, and people who had committed suicide.¹³⁵

Especially because of this traditional Christian view on death and burial, it becomes understandable why chroniclers devote parts of their narrative to how people died during the Black Death.¹³⁶ People dying on the roads and in ditches, as was previously mentioned, meant not only that they died without all the necessary rituals; they also died while trying to escape death, which is in stark contrast to what was seen as death in a proper Christian manner. The lack of confession meant that they could not get absolution from their sins, which resulted in being denied eternal life in heaven. Burial was yet another issue. Due to the fact that relatives were usually responsible for the burial of the deceased, but people often abandoned their

¹³¹ Steven Bassett, ed. *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead, 100-1600* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), 24.

¹³² Since death was the liberation of the soul of the burden of the body. Horrox, *The Black Death*, 345-6.

¹³³ Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), 52.

¹³⁴ Sacrilege in this scenario meant blood or semen being spilt on the burial ground. Binski, *Medieval Death*, 56.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 56, 57.

¹³⁶ For more information see Aberth *From the Brick of the Apocalypse*, 194-199

families, in combination with very high mortality rates, there were dead bodies that were not properly tended to. Cutheis, the only narrative from Dalmatia that goes into discussing this issue at all, states that people were torn between two options: fleeing in the attempt to save their own lives, or staying and burying their relatives. Since the first option was considered by many to be a better one, people “fled faraway, wandering through many places, leaving bodies of their relatives lying unburied in houses and churches, and there was no one to bury them, because in many houses there was not a single person left alive.”¹³⁷

Among other Dalmatian sources only Gondola mentions this problem indirectly, explaining that the people were dying “falling one over the other.”¹³⁸ When it comes to this motif, Italian sources have proven to be much more descriptive and tend to show these rates in a very imaginative manner. Some descriptions are somewhat similar to what Cutheis writes: due to the people fleeing the cities as the plague advances, patients died alone, without anyone to tend to them. In many cases corpses were discovered by the stench of rotting, and once the corpse was revealed the question of who will bury it was raised.¹³⁹

The contemporary, as well as later narrative sources tend to focus on the negative examples of human behavior, but one account gives an image of pure devotion and parental care, in spite of others which talk about parents leaving their children’s deathbeds: Agnolo di Tura, in his account on the Black Death in Siena, writes that he himself “buried his five children with his own hands.”¹⁴⁰ De Mussi’s account also contains several mentions of families dying and being buried together, which points to the fact that obviously not everyone abandoned the

¹³⁷ “Fugiebant procul et a longe, per diversa loca oberrantes, et dimittebant multa cadauera filiorum propinquorum iacentia in domibus et in templis inhumata, et non erat qui sepeliret, quia in multis aedibus non remanserat mingens ad parietem.” *SRH*, 655. Gligo and Morović’s translation of the text is rendered into Croatian in a very literal manner.

¹³⁸ *MSHSM* 25, 391.

¹³⁹ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 32. *RIS* 30, 231.

¹⁴⁰ “Sotterai 5 miei figliuoli co' le mie mani.” *RIS* 30, 555

ill¹⁴¹ in their family.¹⁴²

Upon death, during the Black Death epidemic as well as later epidemics,¹⁴³ the practice was that the corpses were taken out of the house and transported to the graveyard on biers.¹⁴⁴ Since there was a shortage of biers at the time,¹⁴⁵ plain boards were sometimes used, and the transportation of several bodies at the same time was customary, if the need arose.¹⁴⁶ This was usually done by corpse bearers, people employed for that specific purpose, and it is not surprising that these people were often paid a high amount of money, especially in special and dangerous circumstances as these. The same applies for the gravediggers.¹⁴⁷ Before the epidemic caused such high mortality rates, certain funeral rites were upheld, but during the plague, all the rites were cast aside and the burial was kept extremely simple.¹⁴⁸ The burial itself was not performed as previously, instead the so-called plague pits were used for this purpose, into which more bodies were cast.¹⁴⁹ Di Coppo's account paints quite a descriptive image of a burial in Florence: "In the morning the bodies were cast into the pit, and the earth was thrown over them; afterwards came the others above them and afterwards a bit of earth on them, in layers, like cheese on the lasagna."¹⁵⁰

Since these burials were not done in a proper way, this might have been one of the

¹⁴¹ For this question in the last wills of Dubrovnik see page 39.

¹⁴² The same account contains also negative examples, so obviously both practices were in existence. Horrox, *The Black Death*, 21, 23.

¹⁴³ A surviving account from London states that the number of bodies arriving at the graveyard (during night) was up to seventeen per cart or bier. Malkin, *Historical Parallels*, 92.

¹⁴⁴ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 32.

¹⁴⁵ *RIS* 30, 231.

¹⁴⁶ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 32.

¹⁴⁷ *RIS* 30, 231.

¹⁴⁸ People no longer assembled in the house of the dying person, the body was lowered into the nearest pit without the funeral rites and the body was taken to the closest church, not the one designated in the last will. Horrox, *The Black Death*, 32.

¹⁴⁹ Some sources from London show that there were pits twelve meters long and up to six meters deep for bodies. Malkin, *Historical Parallels*, 92.

¹⁵⁰ "La mattina se ne trovavano assai nella fossa, toglievansi della terra e gittavasi laggiuso loro addosso; e poi veniano gli altri sopr'essi, e poi la terra addosso, a suolo, a suolo, con poca terra, come si minestrasse lasagne a fornire di formaggio." *RIS* 30, 231.

reasons behind the presence of the wolf motifs, discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Di Tura also writes about wolves and other beasts digging up the corpses and feeding on them; one reason for this was possibly due to the fact that the bodies were not buried deep enough, and the animals were attracted by the stench of the remains.¹⁵¹ Another related issue comes from Dubrovnik: a Small Council decision to find a new burial spot for the city's dead due to the fact that stench was spreading through the city.¹⁵² Since there were masses of people dying and being buried each day, an unpleasant stench started to spread, and three men were chosen to find a new, "suitable and distant burial place",¹⁵³ to solve the problem. In addition, by March 1348, there were no more burial places left in the old graveyard, so another one had to be designated, which is again an account that implies a high mortality rate.¹⁵⁴ The attempt at providing better funeral options might also have been promoted by the disease itself. Not only did improper burial cause stench, it might have also contributed to ideas on miasma being created in this manner, which furthermore stimulated the disease, causing an enchanted circle.

However, in Dubrovnik the burial itself could have been an easier endeavor than elsewhere, even in spite of the mentioned shortage of space, since the city had a large number of fraternities, which helped both financially and with regard to organization.¹⁵⁵ The development of such "grave-digging fraternities" is also mentioned in the Florentine account by Boccaccio.¹⁵⁶

What Boccaccio also mentions in his account are the last wills;¹⁵⁷ in many other narratives it is said that the only thing left to do upon getting infected by the plague was to have

¹⁵¹ *RIS* 15.6, 555.

¹⁵² *MSHSM* 13, 18.

¹⁵³ "unum locum aptum et remotum." Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Gordan Ravančić, "Crna smrt 1348.-1349. u Dubrovniku: Sredjovjekovni grad i doživljaj epidemije [The Black Death 1348-1349 in Dubrovnik: Medieval city and the perception of the epidemic]" (PhD Dissertation, Zagreb, 2006), 169.

¹⁵⁶ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 31.

¹⁵⁷ For a discussion on last wills in Italy see Samuel K. Cohn Jr., *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

a confession and write a will, Boccaccio explicitly says that the provisions that were left in the last wills were often disregarded, for practical reasons.¹⁵⁸ In the next subchapter I focus precisely on the question of preserved last wills from 1348 Dubrovnik.

3.3. Last wills

With regard to last wills, relatively many of the Council decisions from 1348 and 1349 are devoted to this topic. This is not surprising if we take into consideration that the number of dying citizens¹⁵⁹ in this period must have been very high; there are actually preserved wills for Dubrovnik¹⁶⁰ from this year that can support the information in the decisions. The custom of writing last wills in the commune of Dubrovnik started to develop quickly in the second half of the thirteenth century and the practice was that they were recorded orally in front of witnesses and then registered upon the testators' death, and the entire process took a maximum of thirty days.¹⁶¹ The registry of 1348 holds a high number of preserved wills, more than 300.¹⁶² One of the will-related council decisions dates to June of 1348 and discusses the necessity of establishing all the relevant information¹⁶³ regarding the wills of people dying of the plague, and stipulates the need for each will to have at least three *pitropi*.¹⁶⁴ The citizens upheld this

¹⁵⁸ See footnote 148.

¹⁵⁹ Due to the lack of data necessary establishing the exact number of citizens of medieval east Adriatic communes, this is a difficult question. Some attempts have been made by Croatian scholars, but the question remains open for discussion. For example see Ravančić, *Neka razmišljanja*.

¹⁶⁰ TN 10-1, vol. 5, DAD.

¹⁶¹ Gordan Ravančić, "Preparation for a Good Death in the Last Wills of Dubrovnik Citizens from the Late 13th and Mid-14th Century and the Influence of the Black Death to the Perception of Afterlife," *Петербургские Славянские И Балканские Исследования*, 2, no. 16 (2014): 148–74, 149-50.

¹⁶² Namely, the numbers are drastically lower. For example, the number of last wills for Zadar for a period of almost 30 years (1376-1404) is 324, and the numbers of wills from other cities do not exceed 150 even for longer periods of time. Zoran Ladić, "O razlozima sastavljanja kasnosrednjovjekovnih dalmatinskih oporuka [The reasons for compiling late medieval Dalmatian wills], *Raukarov zbornik: zbornik u čast Tomislava Raukara*, ed. Neven Budak (Zagreb: FF Press, 2005).

¹⁶³ These had to be properly registered and all the witnesses to the will had to be established. *MSHSM*, 13, 29.

¹⁶⁴ *Pitropi* or *epitropi* were the executors of the testament. Their duty was to secure that the process of the execution and legal registration of the will was completed. Ravančić, "Preparation for a good death," 150.

provision and there are many examples of several *pitropi*, as well as their different obligations.¹⁶⁵ There is also an important provision dealing with the authenticity and validity of the wills, from 1349, which is a telling piece of evidence for the administrative chaos in the city due to the epidemic.¹⁶⁶

In accordance with the question of proper death, the last wills of the citizens of Dubrovnik are similar to the last wills from other areas, devoting space to two different issues: distribution of property, and care for one's soul.¹⁶⁷ The property was usually left either to family members or monastic orders, and it was the duty of the *pitropi* to carry out the will. A large part of the wills is devoted to solving the question of the testators' salvation, which was conducted through different pious donations.¹⁶⁸ These were aimed at various types of recipient, ranging from monasteries, churches, individuals, to those who were in greatest need of help, from the lowest social strata.

The last wills from 1348 Dubrovnik rarely have provisions regarding burials, which could be attributed to the haste in which the wills were made and the high mortality rates.¹⁶⁹ The Dominicans were the most valued religious order during the epidemic, which is not surprising, because the preaching brothers, or *fratres praedicatores*, were seen as most influential in helping souls reach the afterlife.¹⁷⁰ For that reason, it is surprising that they were not as frequently mentioned as the Franciscans, in questions of burial in the last wills.

¹⁶⁵ Testators often relied on the *pitropi* to make decisions in their name upon their death, like deciding on the monastery to receive money, or deciding which poor orphans were to be married. TN 10-1, vol. 5.

¹⁶⁶ All the wills from 1348 which are missing some relevant piece of information, like the date or year, have to be checked. *MSHSM*, 13, 71.

¹⁶⁷ Binski, *Medieval Death*, 33.

¹⁶⁸ Pious donations from the period depend largely also on the perception of the origin of the Black Death, so certain parts of this aspect of last wills is to be mentioned in the next chapter, when this question is dealt with in more detail.

¹⁶⁹ Only 21% of the wills have the burial provisions. Ravančić, "Crna smrt," 160.

¹⁷⁰ For the development and organization of the Dominican order see for example Georgina R. Galbraith, *The Constitution of the Dominican Order, 1216-1360* (Manchester: University Press, 1925).

In general, the number of last wills grows after 6 January 1348, and the numbers are highest in March and April.¹⁷¹ Since the issue of burial in the chronicles is mostly related to the question of family relations and abandoning family members, it is important to mention that this is not visible in the last wills from Dubrovnik. There are several occurrences where servants are mentioned as inheritors in the last wills of Dubrovnik, which indicates that the household obviously stayed together, even when the testators were on their deathbed. It is hard to speculate on this matter, since none of the wills explicitly mention the plague. The number of those that provide information on any sort of illness is very small, so it is hard to tell whether the testators were infected; nevertheless, it is quite probable that some of them actually suffered and died from the plague, and their servants remained by their side. There are nineteen wills with provisions to leave money for servants, and the servants are either given the money, or it is specified that the money is meant for marrying them. Out of these, only three testators mention writing the will while in good health,¹⁷² two while they are ill,¹⁷³ and the other fourteen do not mention the state of their body, just that they are writing the will in sound mind.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Number of wills is usually in accordance with peaks of epidemics. John Aberth presents some interesting graphs on how the number of testaments changes with epidemic outbreaks. Aberth *From the Brick of the Apocalypse*, 95. See also Ravančić, “Crna smrt,” 115, 117.

¹⁷² Two are explicitly mentioned as being healthy, while the third one claims that the will is written by the hand of the testator. Fols. 28', 44', 67 in TN 10-1, vol. 5, DAD.

¹⁷³ Fols. 99', 100' in TN 10-1, vol. 5, DAD.

¹⁷⁴ Fols. 10, 14, 17, 48', 49, 67', 68, 86, 89, 91', 94', 95', 111, 121' in TN 10-1, vol. 5, DAD.

4. Religion and the plague

In this, final part of my research, I will discuss the further religious aspects concerning the perception of the outbreak of the disease in Dalmatian and Italian primary sources. The main focus of the chapter remains *A Cutheis Tabula*, but I will also discuss the last wills from Dubrovnik, since these have many provisions that stem out of the religiosity of the people of those times. The first section will deal with the beliefs on the origin of the disease, proceeding to the last wills, as well as the role of priests and how this was altered due to the highly infectious and deadly illness.

4.1. “Non fu peste ma ira di Dio:” the motif of God’s wrath¹⁷⁵

The title of this subchapter comes from one of the later Dalmatian narratives, namely from Ragnina’s account on the plague in medieval Dubrovnik. It perfectly sums up the beliefs of the people who lived through the epidemic, and since his account comes from the sixteenth century it shows that this did not really change in the centuries to follow: what the people saw was that the plague was not a natural event, but rather the onset of God’s wrath. From the Old Testament believers of the time could see that God is capable of not only anger, but also vengeance if the humans deserved it, whereas in the New Testament, he is presented as being more prone to peacefulness and reconcilability. Whenever the people suffered an inexplicable occurrence, when an event happened which was out of their control and understanding, it was convenient to connect it to the sign of God’s wrath for their misdeeds. The medieval Church also propagated the fact that people brought God’s punishment onto themselves, due to their improper way of living, which added to the frequent use of this image. According to Thomas

¹⁷⁵ *MSHSM* 25, 39.

Aquinas, God's wrath must not be understood as the excitement of God¹⁷⁶ or as the disturbance of his inner peace. Rather, his wrath¹⁷⁷ was understood as his efficacy in making sinners feel that they had become separated from his will and were therefore to be punished.¹⁷⁸

In any case, chroniclers of the fourteenth century took the belief in God's wrath and used it as fact, so in the narratives, which I chose for this research, this motif becomes obvious. *A Cutheis Tabula* has a very strong narrative which discusses this issue, claiming that the plague attacked people "because of many different sins of men, which they had committed against God."¹⁷⁹ The aforementioned statement of Ragnina that the pestilence in Dubrovnik was not a pestilence but rather God's wrath is strong, depicting this belief, but it is even more significant that this has been preserved in the decisions of the Great and Small Councils of Dubrovnik. As I have stated in the introductory chapter, mentioning the pestilence as "the divine judgment in the city of Dubrovnik,"¹⁸⁰ adds to the narrative style of the Councils' writings.¹⁸¹ It also shows that such a view of the plague was widespread and often perceived by the people as being inflicted upon them by God himself. This is a common motif in these narratives, and that belief is not only obvious from the chronicles, but it also shaped some parts of human behavior and the ways in which people tried to stop the disease.

Even though it is mentioned in the Dalmatian narrative sources, this "justification" of the plague is even more straightforward in the Italian chronicles, which often focus precisely on this motif. Matteo Villani dedicated the longest plague-related part of his narrative to this,

¹⁷⁶ For a discussion on whether God is capable of experiencing emotions see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the scientific imagination from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 43.

¹⁷⁷ Some debates focus on the fact that since God cares about humans, when his vision of justice is not respected his wrath strikes the Earth that much stronger. See for example Robert Oakes, "The wrath of God," *International journal for philosophy of religion*, vol. 27, no. 3 (June, 1990), 130-134.

¹⁷⁸ See F.J.A. de Grijns, "Thomas Aquinas on ira as a Divine Metaphor," in 'Tibi soli peccavi.' Thomas Aquinas on Guilt and Forgiveness, ed. Henk J. M. Schoot (Utrecht and Leuven: Thomas Instituut, 1996).

¹⁷⁹ "Propter multa et varia delicta hominum, quae commiserunt contra Deum." *SRH*, 654.

¹⁸⁰ See footnote 11.

¹⁸¹ See pages 4-5.

describing that each time people's lack of moral became too excessive, God decided to punish them. Due to this, he sent the flood and different pestilences on humankind, but none of them was as terrifying and all-encompassing as was what happened in 1348, with the Black Death epidemic.¹⁸² Giovanni, his brother, connects this motif already in the beginning of 1348 with the earthquakes that occurred in Italy. He argues that this was a result of people's lack of morality, and claims that the earthquake could not have been an accident, but was rather a sign for people, to act and change their behavior, because God gave the permission for this event to influence their lives.¹⁸³ The same motif can also be found in Boccaccio's narrative, and he also provides an account of the people's action, in which they took part in order to return to God's grace.¹⁸⁴ Already from Cutheis one can see that the author writes that the people who were not ill at the moment "humbly gave thanks to God" and went to church to pray.¹⁸⁵ In the Great Council decisions it is written that the first reaction to the plague on Šipan was that the Council allowed every measure that could possibly help to be implemented on the island. Among other things, the Council encouraged "processions and litanies, as well as merciful acts and praising directed towards God, Virgin Mary and other male and female saints and do everything necessary to ensure that God be worshipped in order to invoke his mercy."¹⁸⁶

It is unknown what exactly these processions looked like, but since Dubrovnik did have a flagellant brotherhood, there is a possibility that among these there were also their performances.¹⁸⁷ It is difficult to discuss this question, since sources that are preserved do not provide any information on this matter, but speculations do exist. Since the flagellant

¹⁸² Villani, *Cronica*, 3-4.

¹⁸³ Villani, *Croniche storiche*, 185.

¹⁸⁴ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 26, *RIS* 15.6, 555.

¹⁸⁵ "Supplicantesque Deo gratias agebant." *SRH*, 655.

¹⁸⁶ "Faciendo fieri processiones et letanias opere misericordie et laudis supplicando Domino Deo et Virgini Marie et aliis sanctis et sanctabus et omne aliud opus ad cultum et reverentiam omnipotentis Dei pro impetrando misericordiam suam." *MSHSM* 13, 11.

¹⁸⁷ Ravančić, "Crna smrt," 173.

movement had a very vivid period of popularity during the plague, especially in Germany, it would not be a surprising occurrence if it also had spread on the Adriatic coast.¹⁸⁸

Later Dalmatian accounts, like Ragnina's, focus on the fact that the church of Saint Blaise was built¹⁸⁹ for the sake of showing devotion to the patron saint of the city,¹⁹⁰ and the same motif can be found in the account written by Razzi, in the same century.¹⁹¹ Since similarities in the accounts are many, it is probable that here too the two authors borrowed from one another. It is a question of why the church was being built in that precise time period, since the decision was brought in February, 1348, during the onset of the epidemic, but since the direct connection with the plague came from later periods, it is hard to draw firm conclusions on this matter.¹⁹² Since the plague gave momentum to church building both in previous epidemics, as well as the ones after the onset of Black Death, it is possible that the church of Saint Blaise was indeed somewhat related to the epidemic in the city.¹⁹³

When it comes to Italian narratives, this motif of increased religious activity is also present, and Boccaccio mentions the ineffectiveness of prayers, which is a measure to which people turned after the first onset of the illness.¹⁹⁴ The most elaborated narrative comes from Da Piazza's account from Messina, which definitely has some metaphoric meaning behind it, but also some parts of the account can be treated as though these are facts. Namely, the people

¹⁸⁸ For more information on the flagellant movement see for example Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (London : Penguin Books, 1982), 85-111.

¹⁸⁹ The first stone was laid in 1349 and the church finished within three years. Stjepan Skurla, *Sveti Vlaho: biskup i mučenik od Sevasta, dubrovački obranitelj* [Saint Blaise: bishop and martyr of Sevastopol] (Dubrovnik: Tiskom Dragutina Pretnera, 1871), 111.

¹⁹⁰ The same account mentions that the church was visited by the Bosnian king after the epidemic had passed, and he and his wife showed devotion by visiting this, and other bigger churches and monasteries in the city. *MSHSM* 14, 39.

¹⁹¹ Razzi, *Povijest Dubrovnika*, 58.

¹⁹² Gordan Ravančić, in his doctoral thesis, argues against the decision being connected with the plague. Ravančić, "Crna smrt," 115.

¹⁹³ A similar argument from the period of the Justinian's plague can be found in Hugh N. Kennedy, "Justinianic Plague in Syria and the Archaeological Evidence," in *Plague and the end of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541-750*, ed. Lester K. Little, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007). A similar argument, but for a later epidemic, can be found in Christine M. Boeckl, "Giorgio Vasari's "San Rocco Altarpiece:" Tradition and Innovation in Plague Iconography," *Artibus et Historiae* 22, no. 43 (2001).

¹⁹⁴ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 27.

of Messina were trying to come into possession of the relics of St. Agatha of Catania, through the alleged belief that these would help stop the plague from killing the Messinese. Da Piazza writes how they were doing that due to their long-term wish to possess the relics and goes into detail to discuss how the people of Catania prevented this, as well as to how the statue of the Virgin Mary played a role during the unsuccessful attempt to bring it to Messina. Namely, after seeing the state in which the city was, the statue itself refused to enter it.¹⁹⁵

4.2. Religion, priesthood and last wills

The motif of God's wrath left an impact which can be seen in more than just immediate actions undertaken by people in order to try and influence the onset of God's wrath. The demand for an increased participation of the Church in general, especially the priests, was enormous, and from *A Cutheis Tabula* it becomes obvious that they were the ones to whom people turned to during the epidemic's peak. The author states that after seeing the first symptoms on his body a man "had no hope for living on this world, and with a contrite heart made confession to the priest, recommending his soul to God."¹⁹⁶ This is the only mention of priests in this narrative, which discusses their role as we knew it was during the plague period.

From later Croatian narratives, only Gondola's contains the mention of priests and their role during the epidemic, and it is different from Cutheis, in that he claims that people died without the help of priests, due to the fact that the disease killed people in a very fast manner.¹⁹⁷ The main difference between these two accounts and the Italian ones lies in the fact that the judgmental tone is completely lacking in these narratives, while Italian ones blame it on the

¹⁹⁵ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 38-9.

¹⁹⁶ "Et ille nullam spem habebat amplius in hoc mundo viuendi (...) et contrito corde faciens confessionem Sacerdoti, et recommendans animam suam Deo." *SRH*, 655.

¹⁹⁷ *MSHSM* 25, 391.

priests. The reason for this may have been that the priests in these two areas behaved differently, but I think that this was not the case. The reason could be that even though Cutheis wrote his narrative very close to the epidemic, he was not doing it during the events themselves, and the passing of time might have influenced his judgement, as well as his style of writing.

From the contemporary Italian accounts, Michele da Piazza's was the one to focus on this question directly, claiming that the priests¹⁹⁸ refused to have anything to do with other people, due to their fear of getting infected themselves. Because of this confessions and last wills became almost an impossibility, and the author states that the Franciscans and Benedictines were the only ones that did not leave people unattended, which resulted in their high mortality rates.¹⁹⁹ In order for the safe passage of people from this life to afterlife to be ensured, all priests received the right for absolution, but once more, da Piazza states that it was difficult to find a priest willing to get involved with the ill.²⁰⁰ Agnolo di Tura's only mention of friars and nuns is at the end of his plague-related account, where he states that everyone, including them, wanted to enjoy life after the epidemic had ceased, implying the lack of morality inside the church.²⁰¹ The Italian account by di Coppo is very similar to later Croatian narratives, meaning that it lacks the moral aspect in the writing, mentioning only that many people died without a confession, with no remark on whether it was due to the priests ignoring their duties, or simply because the demand for priests was too high, due to the mortality rates.²⁰²

In spite of the claims that last wills were almost impossible to write, the high number of preserved ones for 1348 Dubrovnik leads to a different conclusion, at least for this city. In the last wills it becomes quite obvious to see that these were also a way for the people to seek reconciliation with God, and this can be read in the pious bequests made by the people who

¹⁹⁸ The same applied also to judges and notaries, which becomes relevant in the context of the last wills.

¹⁹⁹ Horrox, *The Black Death*, 36.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 40.

²⁰¹ *RIS* 15.6, 556.

²⁰² *RIS* 30, 230.

experienced the plague. In fourteenth-century Dubrovnik, during the plague epidemic, people tried to help those who are most in need. Even though this was also common in other periods, previous research showed growth in this manner.²⁰³ When it comes to the poor, what the people usually suggest as the best way of helping them was through providing money for preparing meals for them, buying grain and clothing, as well as giving money for marrying poor orphans.

These donation types were quite common during the period. Arranging meals for the poor in the monastic orders is one of the ways the testators tried to provide for them, and usually this practice was given to the Dominicans and Franciscans. One of the specific will-related features from this area was also aimed at redeeming not only those misdeeds done on purpose, but also those committed accidentally, and this was done through the *malcollecto* provision.²⁰⁴ *Malcollecto*, or *male ablatis*, is a bequest that was implemented in the wills even before the plague, but gained prominence during this period, when it also stopped being only business related, but rather became another form of expressing piety.²⁰⁵ An example of how *malcollecto* changed focus to pious donations can be found among the 1348 wills, where one man decides to devote money from *malcollecto*, alongside some extra money to buying grain and flour for the poor.²⁰⁶

Apart from this, many bequests were directed towards providing the poor with clothes, the money for which was derived from selling the testators' own clothes or a piece of property, and also towards providing the necessary grains for their nutrition. Beside the city's poor in

²⁰³ A rise of 20 percent in the 20 years prior to the epidemic.

²⁰⁴ Ravančić, "Preparation for a good death", 167-8..

²⁰⁵ From 1295 until 1326 the *malcollecto* could be found in 30% of last wills. In 1348 this decreases to 21%, and Ravančić argues that this is due to the fact that the donations to the poor are rising, so the need to express piety is satisfied in spite of the decrease in this specific provision. Ravančić, "Preparation for a good death," 158, 168.

²⁰⁶ Fol. 9', TN 10-1, vol. 5, DAD.

general, the donations were often given to unmarried orphan girls. It is not surprising that orphan girls were receiving donations, since the testators tried to contribute to their own salvation by helping them with their dowries. Apart from the aforementioned types of bequest it is important also to mention donations aimed at visiting different pilgrimage sites, from which pilgrimage to Rome's great pardon, which occurred that year, gains prominence.²⁰⁷

From all these sources it becomes obvious that the concept of God's wrath causing the illness was all-encompassing, implemented in many different types of sources and visible in many different instances. Not only did it find its way into the minds of ordinary people, which we know from their wills, it is also apparent from the official decisions, made by the Great and Small Council decisions. At the onset of the plague, people were mostly ignorant of this matter, but after seeing the amount of dead among the clergy, the people's opinion on this could have gone into two different directions, because of which religion seems to have been undergoing changes. Generally, it often led people to look at the clergy as being more similar to them, or to question the meaning behind so many deaths that occurred among them. This could lead to the answer that, if they were also dying in such large numbers, and in many cases even during the epidemic while they were neglecting their duties; this might point to the fact that, since God punishes those who do not obey his laws — he punished them as well, meaning that their behavior was also inappropriate.²⁰⁸

In any case, the plague brought forward a type of obsession, related to the mortality of the human body, with direct and obvious changes, like the *danse macabre* in art. Some scholars even argue that this fact influenced something bigger and more permanent, namely that even though the people of the period had no notion of division of history as we know it, the many

²⁰⁷ Rome mentioned 80 times, out 192 pilgrimage provisions from this year. Ravančić, "Crna smrt," 174.

²⁰⁸ Faye Marie Getz, "Black Death and the Silver Lining: Meaning, Continuity and Revolutionary Change in Histories of Medieval Plague," *Journal of the History of Biology* 24, no. 2 (1991): 265-89, 273.

changes that accompanied the plague left such a great impact on humanity that it inevitably led to the end of the Middle Ages and caused the Renaissance to be born.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Getz, "Black Death and the Silver Lining," 265. See also Christine M. Boeckl, *Images of Plague and Pestilence, Iconography and Iconology* (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2000), 75.

5. Conclusion

The Black Death's influence had a large impact on the source material from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. The later narratives were not influenced by the disease itself, but their form rather stems out of other purposes and the strong impact that the disease had on folk memory. In this thesis I focused on the medieval and later Dalmatian narrative sources that contain data related to the plague epidemic, and after analyzing them I compared them to the Italian contemporary and later sources revolving around the same epidemic. The motifs on which I focused are natural events and occurrences of unusual animal behavior mentioned in these narratives, with special emphasis on *A Cutheis Tabula*, the source from medieval Split which goes into the most detail on this matter. I proceeded to the family related motifs, in particular those related to abandoning of the family members, which led to the question of improper burial as narrated in the chronicles. The final chapter of my research dealt with motifs related to religion, and showed that the somewhat traditional roles of the clergy, as well as the people's view on them changed during the epidemic. The motif of God's wrath, as a constant in these narratives is the one on which I put an emphasis, and the thesis ended with the last wills of Dubrovnik, providing an insight into how individuals coped with such a view on the origin of the epidemic.

The basic questions which I began with were how can all these narratives be compared, and what can such a comparison show? Most of the Italian contemporary narratives that I used paint a picture of events which were, in my opinion, quite realistic, aiming at preserving the events of the plague year for future generations. Contemporary Italian chronicles also give some estimates of the mortality rates of the period, while in Dalmatia only later sources venture in such guesses. The numbers present in the latter accounts often exceed the number of citizens

of the time, and the same type of bold guessing occurs in Italian sources, but there in the contemporary ones.

Later chronicles tend to have a more factual approach, which, after the interesting speculations and contemporary stories have been cut out leave a very short and somewhat dry account. The only exception to that is the Dalmatian account written by Gondola, which offers much more descriptive motifs, but also some relatively factual data, since from his account it is obvious that he used some of the contemporary sources.

A Cutheis Tabula, the narrative in the form of a chronicle of the year 1348, and the closest to a contemporary narrative that was preserved for medieval Dalmatia, has provided the most interesting source for this approach. Through partial depictions of contemporary events in a similar manner to other chroniclers, the author shows that the time-span of thirty years which had passed between the time when the plague was ravaging Split and him writing the account, allowed him to get familiar with the existing contemporary chronicles. However, the author moves beyond this, showing that he is also familiar with medical theories of the period, through his descriptions of the humors and elements.

The main difference between Cutheis and other chroniclers remains the aim of his account, which, in my opinion, differs from all the rest. The proximity to the epidemic itself, alongside the fact that the narrative was not written during the time when the epidemic reached its peak, allowed Cutheis to change the perception of the epidemic, focusing not on facts, but rather on imagery. Since other (Italian) chroniclers seem to have noted the events which actually happened, I believe that the author's aim was to familiarize his readers with the epidemic through carefully chosen motifs, contributing to the dark vision of the period when the plague was raging through Europe. The animal-related motifs, with carefully chosen metaphorical

meanings add to this author's approach, making the chronicle one the most interesting plague related accounts in Dalmatia, as well as Italy.

Apart from the narrative sources, in this research I also used the 1348 last wills that were preserved in Dubrovnik, which can give a small insight into the beliefs of people of the period, and the donation patterns common for that year. Even though these sources were used for some of the research conducted for Dalmatia, 1348 narrative sources have not been the primary focus of attention of Croatian scholarship. I believe that the greatest contribution of this thesis is contextualization, since even when sources that are derived from the territory of modern-day Croatia are used in a research, precisely this area remains the focal point. In my thesis I have provided a comparison of the narratives preserved in Dalmatia with the Italian ones. This is a relatively narrow comparison, if the amount of preserved data from the period is taken into account, so future research might endeavour to check how Dalmatian sources fit a wider, Adriatic framework, which would encompass all the materials from the region. Such a research might enable a look into how this fits the European framework, from which the territory of Dalmatia has, so far, been omitted.

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