

EXPELLING THE PLAGUE

The Health Office and the Implementation of Quarantine in Dubrovnik, 1377-1533

By Zlata Blažina Tomić and
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*The Health Office and
the Implementation of
Quarantine in Dubrovnik,
1377-1533*

Zlata Blažina Tomić & Vesna Blažina

A ground-breaking study about plague control measures in medieval and early modern Croatia.

A vibrant city-state on the Adriatic sea, Dubrovnik, also known as Ragusa, was a hub for the international trade between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. As a result, the city suffered frequent

outbreaks of plague. Through a comprehensive analysis of these epidemics in Dubrovnik, *Expelling the Plague* explores the increasingly sophisticated plague control regulations that were adopted by the city and implemented by its health officials.

In 1377, Dubrovnik became the first city in the world to develop and implement quarantine legislation, and in 1390 it established the earliest recorded permanent Health Office. The city's preoccupation with plague control and the powers granted to its Health Office led to a rich archival record chronicling the city's experience of plague, its attempts to safeguard public health, and the social effects of its practices of quarantine, prosecution, and punishment. These sources form the foundation of the authors' analysis, in particular the manuscript *Libro deli Signori Chazamorbi, 1500-30*, a rare health record of the 1526-27 calamitous plague epidemic. Teeming with real people across the spectrum, including gravediggers, laundresses, and plague survivors, it contains the testimonies collected during trial proceedings conducted by health officials against violators of public health regulations.

Outlining the contributions of Dubrovnik in conceiving and establishing early public health measures in Europe, *Expelling the Plague* reveals how health concerns of the past greatly resemble contemporary anxieties about battling epidemics such as SARS, avian flu, and the Ebola virus.

"This major study of sixteenth-century responses to plague makes significant use of primary sources not available elsewhere. Outlining the history and development of plague legislation, and looking in detail at its application, it teems with real people: officials desperate to keep plague out of the city, physicians, barbers, priests, and gravediggers coping with the diseased and dying, and humble victims of the disease."

David Gentilcore, University of Leicester

Zlata Blažina Tomić is a medical historian who worked at McGill University's Osler Library.

Vesna Blažina is a translator and librarian who worked at the Université de Montréal.

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