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Diplomatic gifts as a status symbol. Examples of late medieval Dubrovnik

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ABSTRACT
This paper focuses on the detection of gifts that Ragusan ambassadors presented to their hosts at various places: European courts, private residences and the Sublime Porte, covering the period from the mid-14th to the mid-15th century. The material culture of diplomatic gifts is seen as a determinant of power and a visible sign of the recipient's status. Of particular interest is the comparison of specific gifts presented to various political actors with whom the Dubrovnik authorities conducted diplomatic communication, and who resided within the same courts. This comparison allows for conclusions regarding gift-giving among different genders or age groups, if the recipients are of the same gender. In this sense, diplomatic gifts could be seen as a distinguishing factor of an individual's power within the hierarchical power relations. Finally, such an analysis allows conclusions about how these gifts underwent diachronic alterations, based on the recipient's importance in Dubrovnik's foreign policy, the city's economic power, or the recipient's preferences and cultural background.

KEYWORDS
Dubrovnik; diplomacy; diplomatic gifts; Ottoman Empire; gender diplomacy

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INTRODUCTION

The Dubrovnik State Archive preserves sources that enable the reconstruction of a detailed list of diplomatic gifts sent from Dubrovnik/Ragusa[1] to various recipients during the period of interest. Marcel Mauss was the first to address the issue of reciprocal gifting in premodern societies.[2] Since then, numerous historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists have further developed his theoretical understanding of gifts, often employing an interdisciplinary perspective.[3] In this regard, the exchange of gifts in diplomacy is understood as an integral part of ceremonial practices, as well as a form of 'cultural diplomacy' and late medieval 'material culture'.[4] A particularly important aspect of diplomatic gifts is their use as a means of nonverbal communication. They conveyed layered messages regarding the hierarchical

1 For a detailed explanation regarding the use of both names cf. Kravar 1994, 77–87.
2 Mauss 2002.
3 Zemon Davis 2000; Krausman Ben-Amos 2008; Algazi – Groebner – Jussen eds. 2003; Komter ed. 1996; Osteen ed. 2014; Godelier 1999; Berking 1999.
4 There are different approaches to defining material culture: Tilley 2006, 7–12; Prown 1982, 1–19; Hicks – Beaudry eds. 2010; Miller 2005, 1–50.

relationships between negotiating parties, the identity of the giver, their economic power, trade relations, prevailing tastes, and the artistic achievements of the period. It is important to emphasize that diplomatic gifts were simultaneously used as 'instruments of persuasion', where specific manipulations and strategies can be identified in the selection and presentation of the gift. Finally, there was a heightened awareness among the givers of the potential for the gift to provoke an emotional response from the recipient, as well as from a 'third party' excluded from the gifting process, especially when material benefits were at stake.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that the examples analysed will primarily focus on three case studies within a broader framework of gift exchange: textiles, silverware, and money. Other types of gifts, which are essential for drawing more grounded conclusions, such as status-related benefits, food items, as well as animals and weapons, will be briefly discussed. The analysis of diplomatic gifts in this paper will follow an analytical framework that allows for a nuanced perspective, shedding light on how diplomatic gifts were strategically used. This framework not only underscores their impact on contemporary and future political relations but also highlights their role in fostering symbolic, material, and emotional exchanges across both similar and diverse cultures and religions.

CONTEXT

When Louis I of Anjou defeated the Venetians in 1358 through negotiations in Visegrád Dubrovnik became a part of the *Archiregnum Hungaricum*.[5] The city enjoyed internal autonomy while being under the protection of a powerful yet geographically distant sovereign. This precondition allowed for uninterrupted internal development and marked the beginning of the 'golden period' in its historical development.[6] As the city did not possess significant military power, it preserved its republican status and liberties[7] by relying on the diplomatic skills and strategies of Dubrovnik state officials,[8] with diplomatic gift-giving playing a prominent role. Positioned uniquely on the eastern shores of the Adriatic Sea, Dubrovnik was presented as a hinge between different cultures, and religions benefitting from it greatly.[9] To achieve their vital foreign policy goals, the city councillors established a network of diplomatic contacts with all the significant political entities of the period. They had their representatives throughout Europe, across the Mediterranean region, and even as far as the Sublime Porte.[10] They exchanged gifts with all of

5 Foretić 1960; Janeković-Römer 1998; 2003. For a synthetic overview of Dubrovnik's late medieval history, see: Foretić 1980; Harris 2003.

6 De Diversis 2001, 11–57; Pešorda Vardić 2004, 1–37. More about Dubrovnik's stability and prosperity from the 14th to the 17th century through a geostrategic and economic lens, see: Kunčević 2016.

7 For further insights into the concept of Ragusan liberty, see: Kunčević 2008, 9–64.

8 More about them, such as the use of certain rhetorical strategies and emotional intelligence: Šoštarić 2021, 146–158, 242–245.

9 Detailed study on Ragusan diplomatic relations with the Ottomans is provided in: Božić 1952; Bojović 1998. For Dubrovnik's rhetorical strategy to positioning itself on the frontier with the Orthodox 'schismatics' and Muslim 'infidels', and its significant contributions to Catholic and Christian religion, see: Kunčević 2010, 179–211. For the advantages of Dubrovnik's geo-strategic position in facilitating land and maritime trade, see: Bašić 2006, 139–177; Lučić 1991.

10 Sublime Porte, until 1922, was the diplomatic term for the Ottoman government, derived from the translation of the expression *Bāb-i ʿālī* (High Gate), which primarily referred to the office of the Grand Vizier. For further insights into the diplomatic relations of Dubrovnik in the late medieval period, see: Polić-Bobić ed. 2011; Miović 2003; Šoštarić 2021. General overview of the development of Dubrovnik's diplomacy can be found in: Krizman 1951; 1957; Janeković Römer 1999a, 193–204; Janeković Römer 1999b, 136–141.

them, as these were expected in the sphere of diplomacy and formed an integral part of ceremonial protocols. The rhetoric of gifting was primarily used to promote the achievement of various pragmatic goals, with gifts being valued as a 'desirable tool of persuasion'.[11] J. L. Austin's concept of the 'performative function of language' can be analogously applied to the understanding of diplomatic gifts, with the distinction that gifts possess the power to provoke a reaction in the real world.[12] The absence or inappropriateness of a gift could be interpreted as an insult, which could gradually escalate into a serious incident, or even an open conflict.[13]

In the tumultuous context of the late medieval period, marked by constant conflicts, secret negotiations, and doubtful information, it was crucial to maneuver through the uncertainties of complex international relations with reliance on thoughtful diplomatic decisions. Their integral part was the wise selection of diplomatic gifts. The city authorities demonstrated their expertise in the careful selection, circulation, and production of gifts. They adeptly navigated the demanding balance between fulfilling the personal preferences of the recipient, adhering to dominant styles, and aligning with the economic and aesthetic values of the period. Simultaneously, diplomatic gifts carried carefully wrapped messages, artfully expressing features of a desirable 'collective identity' shaped by the ideological efforts of the city's political authorities. They promoted local craftsmanship, luxury goods, and state symbols, skillfully adapting to prevailing tastes across diverse cultural and religious landscapes.

The preserved records in the Dubrovnik State Archive (hereinafter: SAD) enable us to compile an inventory of diplomatic gifts sent from Dubrovnik to diverse recipients in the late medieval period. The selection of diplomatic gifts expressed multilayered messages. An important function of diplomatic gifts was to differentiate the socio-political positions of individuals across different civilizations and religions, primarily the Ottomans, but also the members of the Bosnian Church from the hinterland of Dubrovnik.

In this context, the main aim of this paper is to interpret the material culture of diplomatic gifts as markers of hierarchical distinctions, emphasizing their role in reflecting the recipient's social status and shaping collective identity. This analysis extends to the careful selection of materials, production techniques, and finishing processes, providing insights into the donor's economic strength, trade connections, current fashion, and artistic achievements of the period. Special attention is given to luxury items, specifically textiles, silverware, and monetary gifts, highlighting their significance within the broader context of political exchanges between Dubrovnik and the Ottomans as well as powerful Bosnian noblemen from the hinterland and prominent European rulers.

THE GIFTS

GIFT TYPOLOGY – DISTINGUISHING FEATURES ACROSS CULTURES

The exchange of gifts in the sphere of diplomacy constitutes a rich semantic field that offers various interpretative possibilities.[14] An anthropological approach, particularly fruitful, fo-

11 For the use of gifts as a rhetorical tool in diplomatic negotiations for acquiring new territories, see: Zovko 2011, 211–224.

12 Austin 1962.

13 Lonza 2009, 188–189, 205.

14 The approach to the analysis of gifts through the lens of symbolic meanings is offered in: Derville 1974, 341–364; Klapisch-Zuber 1990; Groebner 2002.

cuses on studying the value of objects within a relational context.[15] Analysing the diplomatic gifts presented by Ragusan ambassadors to their hosts from that perspective, they can be approached as a form of pragmatic, monetary, social, cultural, and emotional value.[16] In other words, the analysis will not only consider their material value and their power to prompt specific actions but will also regard them as a means of communication that conveyed messages about the power dynamics between negotiating parties, the strengthening of alliances and political friendships, and a form of symbolic exchange. The Dubrovnik authorities constantly sought to tailor the gift not only to the recipient's reputation and honour but also to their taste. A key strategy was to acquire gifts in places where they had a low market value, or to present them to individuals who valued them more than their purchasing price. A particular item could be highly desirable to the recipient because it carried a certain aura due to the uniqueness of the material from which it was made, the complex production techniques involved, or the difficulty in obtaining it. The significance of the gift was determined by the recipient's socio-political position and value system, and over time, its value could increase if it became an object of personal emotional attachment.

Based on their category, these gifts can be categorized as follows: status-related benefits (e.g., Ragusan nobility, citizenship,[17] palaces in the city[18]), luxury items (e.g., silverware,[19] precious fabrics, and furs[20]), food items (e.g., fish,[21] sweets,[22] citrus fruits,[23] sugar,[24] spices[25]), animals (e.g., hunting birds[26]), and monetary gifts.[27]

The Dubrovnik citizenship and city palaces were often granted to the nobility from the hinterland, with a standing invitation for the host to visit Dubrovnik, as it was considered his home, whose interests needed to be cared for.[28] Being a Dubrovnik citizen was legally, morally,

15 Gell 1998. On mutual beneficial use of a gift, see: Fennell 2002, 94.

16 For the emotional engagement of the giver and receiver that could have influenced the creation of the gift's value: Cheal 1988, 131.

17 Grujić 1926, 20.

18 State Archive in Dubrovnik (hereinafter: SAD), *Ref*ormationes (hereinafter: *Ref.*), seria 2, vol. xxxi, f. 121r, (9 Oct 1398); SAD, *Lettere e Commissioni. Lettere di Lev*ante (hereinafter: *Lett. di Lev.*), seria 27/1, vol. iv, f. 71v, (6 Sep 1403).

19 SAD, *Acta Minoris Consilii*, (hereinafter: *Cons. Minus*), seria 5, vol. vi, f. 52r, (12 Jan 1433).

20 SAD, *Acta Consilii Rogatorum*, (hereinafter: *Cons. Rog.*), seria 3, vol. iv, f. 219v, (17 Aug 1430), f. 224v, (25 Aug 1430).

21 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iii, f. 142r, (18 Feb 1423).

22 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, f. 240r, (6 Oct 1430); *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xi, f. 7r, (6 Oct 1430).

23 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. viii, ff. 145rv, (16 Feb 1423); Janeković-Römer 1999a.

24 Janeković-Römer 2003.

25 *Vi mandemo pesçe barile 27 e confetti scatole 48 e lemoni barile 4 e zuccharo e spese e peuerada como in una cedula qui dentro messa se contien el qual pesce e limoni e parte de li confetti presentate a misser lo re per parte del nostro regimento.*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. viii, f. 138v, (13 Dec 1422)...*de mittendo ambassiatoribus nostris qui sunt penes dominum regem Bosne confetiones et pisces in gelatina pro dicto domino rege.*, *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iii, f. 131r, (3 Dec 1422).

26 *Prima pars est de solvendo precium duarum falconum ser Marino de Bona, ut donet illas ex parte sua domino bano de Dalmacia*, (7 Jul 1379), Gelcich ed. 1896, 229; Janeković-Römer 2003, 75.

27 *Ref.*, vol. xxxiv, f. 176v, (22 Nov 1412); SAD, *Acta Consilii Maioris*, (hereinafter: *Cons. Maius*), seria 4, vol. v, f. 107v, (14 Dec 1436).

28 *Impreo preghemo el detto Radiz come quello in qui habiamo bona speranza chel se debia adourar come uno de nuy in quello che sia per conservamento de la cita de Ragusa caxa soa et che ge plaça nostro esserne favorevolle a conservamento dela dita casa cum quelle parolle ala discrecion vostra parera aço convignir.*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. IV, f. 20r, (10 Jun 1403); *E Ragusa sempre animo tenuto per special casa sua*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 111r, (30 Apr 1430); *Per le qual cosa Ragusa special casa di la corona vostra et li zentilomeni*

emotionally, and practically binding. Those who held the status of Dubrovnik citizens were expected to offer help, protection, and make sacrifices in order to promote the city's interests. One of those who enjoyed this status was the Bosnian duke Sandalj Hranić Kosača. He was granted the status of a Dubrovnik citizen at the end of the 14th century and was later included in the ranks of the Dubrovnik nobility at the beginning of the 15th century.[29] Along with these honours, he was also awarded a luxurious palace in the city.[30]

Food items were excluded due to the risk of spoilage during long-distance travel, while weapons were mostly reserved as diplomatic gifts among Muslim rulers.[31] Ragusan authorities did not hesitate to establish diplomatic contacts with members of different religious beliefs. For instance, on several occasions, they gifted sweets to distinguished members of the Bosnian church.[32] High-ranking individuals also requested food gifts, but at one point, the Dubrovnik authorities angrily responded to the Bosnian king that it was not customary to present a king with such trivial items and that they were not 'court suppliers who deliver goods upon order'.[33] Specifically, the king had asked for fish, oranges, and other fruits, but the envoys were authorized to refuse not only this request but any future demands from King Tvrtko II.[34] In doing so, they demonstrated sufficient authority to decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether or not to meet the host's gift requests. Some artifacts, such as food and weapons, which were commonly exchanged in diplomatic interactions of the period,[35] were not included in the documented lists of gifts sent to the Ottomans. While some types of food could spoil during long distance travels, certain animals could die for the same reason. For instance, 1514 King Ferdinand I of Aragon reported that he had received seven hawks, although eight had been sent to him.[36] Hunting birds, especially hawks (*astore*) and falcons (*falcone*), were valued gifts in both the East and the West. They were sourced from Dubrovnik's territory or its vicinity, specially trained, and used in hunting among the high-ranking members of society. For instance, in the first half of the 16th century, Ibrahim Pasha expressed a desire for a pair of falcons with a ‚white

dessa seruitori et cordiali suoi., *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 111v, (30 Apr 1430)...*et ad conseruare et defendere Ragusa casa vostra mandare lo subsidio et reparo vostro di gente... lassando di ricordare che sempre cusi caldamente et di bon core aueti offerto et promesso alla conseruacion di Ragusa casa et patria vostra contra zascun chi la volesse offendere*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 115r, (30 Apr 1430).

29 For a broader context, see Kurtović 2009, 100–101, 141, 151, 156.

30 For a detailed study of the Sandalj's palace in Dubrovnik, see: Grujić – Zelić 2010, 47–132.

31 Pedani 2009, 191

32 *Intendessimo lo motiuo vi feci voiuoda per mandar confetti per honorar per suo amor lo died et gosti. Et pero noi voliando far in questo et altro possibile a noi lo suo honor et piacer vi mandemo scatole de confetto le qual per parte nostra vogliamo dobiate donare et presentare alli detti died et gosti come meglio et piu honor nostro vi parera.*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xi, f. 7r, (6 Oct 1430); *Prima pars est de donando died et gosti qui venerunt ad Sandagl.* (*Captum per omnes*). *Prima pars est de donando eisdem in confectionibus yperperos viginti.* (*Captum per xxviiii contra* v), *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, f. 240r, (6 Oct 1430); Dinić 1967, 191, 223.

33 *Voi dite che el re domando pesse e naranze e fructi de piu maniere, e la qual cosa ve diremo che mai non fu costumo nostro di sottomettere la terra e queste cose si minute con algun signore. Et avanti ho voluto questa terra sogiacere e spese di gran doni et di cose di valore degne di se, che volersi mettere con alguno in servitu de queste piccole cose che serto ne pareira gran manchamento de honor tanto per lo re quanto per altri suoi cortigiani e baroni che anche domand di tali cose.*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. viii, ff. 145rv, (16 Feb 1423); Janeković Römer 1999a, 201–202; Janeković Römer 1999b, 138; Jireček 1915, 87.

34 *...el dicto messer lo re vi domandasse tal cose, et voi scusate nostra comunita per quello piu bell modo che vi pare.*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. viii, f. 145v, (16 Feb 1423).

35 For example, weapons were sent as a gift to Ludovic the Great in the second half of the 14th century, Janeković-Römer 2003, 112.

36 Mitić 1978, 118.

mark' (*falconi con lo signal biancho*). However, despite all the efforts made, the authorities were unable to fulfill his request and acquire the requested gift.[37]

Luxurious fabrics were frequently used as diplomatic gifts among the medieval social elite.[38] These high-quality textiles conveyed messages of prestige, reputation, and honour expressed to the recipients. They served as a form of payment for taxes in Islamic societies, further confirming their significant value and esteem.[39] Ragusan authorities gifted luxury textiles to high-ranking individuals, both in the East[40] and the West,[41] a practice that remained consistent throughout the entire period of interest. In addition to textiles, silverware was a highly valued gift at the Sublime Porte, as evidenced by a 1442 agreement in which the Ragusan authorities committed to paying the Ottoman Empire an annual 'gift' of 1,000 ducats in silverware.[42] In the late medieval period Dubrovnik goldsmiths manufactured a large number of silver objects that were sent as diplomatic gifts to foreign rulers and prominent political figures of the time. The Republic did not purchase luxury items made of precious metals from foreigners but rather relied on the services of local craftsmen such as Živko Gojković, Jakov Rusmanović, Antun Branković, and others, who produced diplomatic gifts for the Hungarian-Croatian kings Matthias Corvinus and Władysław II Jagiełło, as well as his son, in their independent production facilities.[43] This indicates that both textiles and luxury items made from precious metals were considered equally valuable gifts in both the East and the West.

To sum up, addressing the types of presents, it is noticeable that those sent as diplomatic gifts from Dubrovnik to its neighbouring regions or within broader European countries did not differ significantly. The challenge arose with the initially established diplomatic contacts with the Sublime Porte, where it was necessary to find the ideal calculation – to invest as little as possible in a financial sense while triggering a positive reaction from the recipient. When the Dubrovnik authorities defined their tributary obligations to the Ottoman Empire in the mid-15th century, the city found itself in an uncomfortable position that required an explanation of the promised annual tribute and loyalty to the Sultan to other European Catholic rulers. These new circumstances led to feelings of shame, guilt, and discomfort, as the city was part of the community *res publica christiana*.[44] Christian contact with Muslims was considered undesirable since Pope John VIII formulated the doctrine of 'impious alliance' in the 9th century.[45] While trade contacts were permitted,[46] other forms of cooperation were sanctioned by excommunication. Acknowledging their tributary status, the ruling elite ultimately justified it with two arguments: the necessity of preserving their freedom and the selfless sacrifice for the entire Latin West, whose interests they could better serve with their new status in relation

37 Mitić 1978, 118.

38 For more detailed discussion about textiles and furs, silverware, and monetary gifts cf. the following chapters.

39 Arcak 2012, 251.

40 For some examples see chapter Luxurious fabrics and power hierarchy.

41 Crowned heads, such as Bosnian king Tvrtko II, were gifted with luxurious fabrics…*il dono il qual vi abiamo dato da fare per parte nostra allo re son peze 4 de panno veronese e sette altre peze de l'altra*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xi, f. 66r, (25 Nov 1431).

42 Stojanović 1934, 234.

43 Fisković 1949, 189–190. More recent studies on Dubrovnik's goldsmiths, the sacred artefacts they produced, and their connections can be found in Lupis 2015.

44 For an analysis of Dubrovnik's position towards the Ottoman Empire, see: Kunčević 2013, 91–122.

45 For the idea of *impium foedus*, see: Vismara 1974; Mastnak 2002, 108–113, 149–151.

46 For instance, in the year 1433 the participants of the Church Council in Basel granted Dubrovnik the privilege of trading in the Ottoman Empire: Radonić 1934, 430.

to the Empire.[47] By the mid-15th century, both European rulers and the Ottomans adhered to a similar system of values regarding luxury diplomatic gifts from Dubrovnik, with textiles, silverware, and monetary gifts playing a central role, an aspects explored in greater detail in the following chapters.

LUXURIOUS FABRICS AND POWER HIERARCHY

The role of gifts in shaping social relationships was particularly emphasized in the medieval period.[48] Luxurious fabrics, in particular, served as powerful nonverbal messages, symbolizing the status and rank of the recipient. This use of textiles to signify hierarchical differences is clearly illustrated in 1428, when Bosnian King Tvrtko II was presented with fabrics valued at 400 ducats,[49] while the Bosnian duke Sandalj received a lesser quantity, valued at 240 ducats.[50]

At this place it is worth mentioning that Ragusan authorities did not miss the opportunity to accompany important ceremonial events in the lives of influential women with gifts of textiles, thereby building their political networks and creating conditions for fruitful collaboration in the years that followed. On the occasion of the wedding of Doroteja, the wife of Bosnian king Tvrtko II, they presented her with fabrics worth 300 ducats.[51] However, it is worth noting that sometimes only the groom was honoured with gifts, especially when the bride came from a lower social rank.[52]

The distinction in the recipient's rank was determined by the type of raw materials used, length and width of the fabric, the number of layers, the type of dye used, the dyeing technique, embellishments, the presence of precious metals and furs on the fabric, and the origin of the material. Focusing our further analysis on gifts in textiles sent from Dubrovnik to the Sublime Porte during the first half of the 15th century can lead to interesting conclusions about the correlation between an individual's power status and the received gift.

Discussing the type of raw material, only silk fabric crafted in the technique *zetanin* a *veluta* was reserved for the Sultan.[53] C. C. Frick writes that this was 'one of the most luxurious and expensive materials in history. It is a silk fabric with a single-thread weave, in contrast to velvet, which is visible in certain areas'.[54] Its price was conditioned by a complicated production process that required special techniques and weaving skills. In addition to velvet-woven silk, brocade was also exclusively presented to the Sultan. This refers to a rich and heavy silk fabric with a satin background, featuring an embedded design emphasized by the contrast of colours, in this specific case with golden threads.[55] Grand viziers received fabrics made of scarlet of lower market value compared to fabrics gifted to the Sultan.[56] When individuals were gifted the same type of fabric (e.g., woolen fabric), the difference in their hierarchical position was signalled by the quantity, i.e., the length of the fabric. For instance, Isa-bey[57]

47 For some examples see Kunčević 2010, 190–191.
48 Bijsterveld 2001, 124–156; Cutler 2008, 79–102.
49 Zovko 2012, 166.
50 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 91v, (10 Jun 1428); *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, ff. 57rv, (5 and 9 Jun 1428).
51 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, f. 63r, (23 Jul 1428); *Cons. Maius*, vol. iii, f. 219r, (23 Jul 1428); Anđelić 1972-1973, 381.
52 *Cons. Maius*, vol. x, f. 18v, (29 May 1455).
53 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, f. 224v, (25 Aug 1430).
54 Frick 2002, 98.
55 Gooch ed. 2011, 129.
56 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xi, ff. 50rv, (28 Jul 1431).
57 Isa-bey is the successor of the Sanjak-bey of Skopje, Jigit.

received four pieces of woolen fabric, valued at 70 ducats,[58] while the woolen fabric given to the grand viziers measured one *kavetac*, approximately 1–1.5 meters longer than the fabric received by a lower-ranking Ottoman official.[59] Dubrovnik largely relied on imports for the raw materials necessary for textile production. The city did not produce its own silk or other luxury fabrics; instead, it sourced these from Venice for use in diplomatic gifts.[60] Luxurious merino wool was imported from regions such as Castile and Aragon, England, France, Apulia, Turkey, and northern Africa.[61] At the beginning of the 15th century, Dubrovnik's authorities made considerable efforts to modernize local workshops and improve the techniques for woolen textile production. In the early stages, these initiatives were mainly entrusted to foreign craftsmen, particularly those from the Apennine Peninsula.[62] By the 15th century, there were around 50 weaving shops in the small city. The production of wool was subject to strict state control, ensuring that the manufactured fabrics carried an official quality and authenticity mark. This was verified by a seal featuring the image of St. Blaise along with a size designation on one side and a seal depicting the city of Dubrovnik on the other.[63]

Dyes were also imported from a wide range of regions.[64] The material value of the finished fabrics depended not only on the type but also on the dye used. The name given to the colour usually indicated the method of dyeing the fabric and served as a direct indicator of the fabric's value and the origin of the dye used. While there were cultural preferences in choosing the colour of the fabric, popularity changed across space and time, consequently shaping fashion. Colour and dye were visual indicators of the worth, social significance, and appropriateness to the recipient's status. For example, in comparison to other Ottoman officials, only the Sultan was gifted with crimson satin velvet.[65] Crimson had different undertones leaning towards purple, which was reserved for rulers in Latin West. Crimson (*cremesi*) was a term designating the colour reserved for silk, indicating the dye used. The term 'Cremesi' is derived from the Balkan Turkish word *grimiz*, more specifically *purpur*, or the Greek word *porfir*, indicating that true crimson was obtained from dye extracted from insects.[66] This dye is typically derived from the insect *Coccus ilicis* (also known as *Kermes vermilio*, *Hermes ilices*, *Lecanium ilicis*), more precisely by drying the females and eggs of these insects under the sun. These insects parasitize the Mediterranean holm oak (*Quercus ilex*).[67]

While grand viziers were also gifted with fabrics dyed in various shades of red, there was a significant difference in the dye used. Typically, *scarlet de grana*[68] or *panno de grana*[69] dye was used for their fabrics. Grana was a red dye derived from the desiccated bodies of the Mediterranean scale insect. In addition to crimson, sky blue[70] and black satin velvet were reserved

58 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. IV, f. 224v, (25 Aug 1430).
59 Miović 2003, 51.
60 Jemo – Parac-Osterman 2016, 37.
61 Belamarić 2020, 304.
62 Dinić-Knežević 1982, 149–152.
63 Jemo – Parac-Osterman 2016, 39.
64 Cochineal or crimson, lapis lazuli, and ultramarine were imported from Bosnia and Serbia: Lučić 1985, 95–114; Kovačević 1961, 166–177. For more information on the dyes used by Ragusan craftsmen, see Roller 1951, 58–59.
65 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. IV, f. 224v, (25 Aug 1430).
66 Monnas 2014, 46.
67 Lorger 2011, 27.
68 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XI, ff. 50rv, (28 Jul 1431).
69 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XI, f. 61v, (2 Dec 1431); vol. XII, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441).
70 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. IV, f. 224v, (25 Aug 1430).

exclusively for the Sultan.[71] This may be surprising as black and blue are often associated with mourning, extreme asceticism, and the humility in medieval Western culture. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 15th century, blue and black became symbols of power and urban aristocracy in the Latin West.[72] Green was also represented among fabric gifts, reserved for socially privileged classes. Even though green was suitable for the Sultan and grand viziers, the distinction in their positions was made by the choice of fabric dyed in this colour.[73]

Fabrics containing gold and silver were quite popular among the Ottoman ruling elite.[74] Typically, golden threads were added around the loom as an additional layer of weaving on the base luxurious fabric.[75] Fabrics with gold and silver were reserved for the Sultan, his brother, and the Pasha of Rumelia.[76] Furs were also represented on the list of diplomatic gifts for the highest Ottoman officials, either independently or as part of tailored garments. On one occasion, the Sultan received *miliaro uno de dossi fini caualareschi* and an equal amount of ermine fur.[77] Even more frequently than ermine, among the gifts dispatched from Dubrovnik, one comes across the esteemed fur of the squirrel. During the Middle Ages, squirrel fur was valued as one of the finest among all furs.[78] A coat presented to the Sultan and grand viziers was crafted from 250 squirrel back furs.[79] Dubrovnik's authorities often gifted the Sultan garments made from a combination of luxurious fabrics and esteemed fur. A vest made of brocade, with woven gold threads, included 300 ermine furs, while two other vests for the Sultan made of satin velvet incorporated 600 squirrel back furs.[80] In addition to the type of gift, the material used, dyeing method, and colour selection, another important parameter, the quantity of the same item, was utilized in signaling differences in the hierarchy of power among gift recipients at the Sublime Porte. Specifically, when it came to identical items, their quantity differentiated the position of the recipient. For instance, the Sultan received three cloaks, while each of the three grand viziers received only one such identical item.[81]

As the examples presented in this chapter have shown, the choice of fabric and colour expressed powerful messages about the political power of the recipient serving as a visual metaphor for personal identity and socio-political status.[82] On the other hand, it reflected the economic power of the donor, their access to specific markets of the Mediterranean and the Balkans through which the city was interconnected with the rest of the world. This is particularly evident in their reliance on imports for fabrics and dyes, rather than local resources and domestic production. By selecting certain other gifts, the city authorities, on the other

71 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XII, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441).

72 Pleij 2004, 6; Piponnier – Mane 1997, 20. This is confirmed by the practice of French kings, who regularly crowned themselves dressed in blue (Scott 2011, 63), while Alfonso of Aragon predominantly wore black garments (Muzzarelli 1999, 252).

73 The garment for the Sultan was crafted from silk fabric using the velvet technique with added fur, while that for viziers was made of wool, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XII, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441).

74 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XII, f. 218r, (without date); vol. XIII, f. 40v, (2 Aug 1441); vol. XIV, f. 52r, (15 Dec 1450).

75 Wardwell 1976-1977, 180.

76 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XII, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441); vol. XIII, f. 40v, (2 Aug 1441); vol. XIV, ff. 52r–53r, (15 Dec 1450).

77 *Cons. Rog.*, vol. IV, f. 219v, (17 Aug 1430).

78 Gage 1993, 82. Fur became highly valued in Islamic societies from the Middle East to Central Asia from the second half of the 8th century until the end of the Middle Ages. Many pelts were obtained from the Middle Volga/Volga Bulgar region, as reported by Marco Polo. For other prized furs from the Middle Volga region according to Marco Polo's writings, see: Kovalev 2001, 58–59.

79 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XI, ff. 50rv, (28 Jul 1431).

80 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XII, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441).

81 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XI, f. 50rv, (28 Jul 1431).

82 Davis 1992, 25.

hand, conveyed specific messages about their 'collective identity', skill, and prosperity, as we will see in the following chapter.

SHAPING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY: A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO GIFT SELECTION AND PRODUCTION

The messages embedded in gifts could carry an ideological component in terms of presenting the collective identity of the community that the ambassadors were authorized to represent. In this context, 'collective identity' refers to the patriciate, the group that held the right to rule and, through their choice of gifts, communicated messages about the city's self-portrait, thus shaping a shared understanding of the community's self-recognizable identity. For example, luxury objects made of silver transmitted messages of the city's prosperity.[83] C. Fisković demonstrated that the golden age of Dubrovnik goldsmithing was the 14th and 15th centuries. The number of goldsmiths in the city was significant, and their organization into a guild was not only logical but necessary. They obtained materials from nearby mines in Serbia and Bosnia.[84] Consequently, there was no need for importing foreign masters or obtaining raw materials from distant regions.[85] According to the calculations of J. Tadić, during the first half of the 14th century, approximately 25 tons of silver, valued at over 500,000 ducats annually, were exported from mines in the Balkans to the West via Dubrovnik.[86] City authorities paid considerable attention to the appearance and quality of finished products made from precious metals. A special mixture of silver, incorporating legally regulated substance ratios, was prescribed, and violators faced penalties.[87] Starting from 1277, goldsmiths were required to use a precisely determined mixture of silver that could not be of lower quality than that known as sterling.[88]

Notably, local goldsmiths produced silver items for the Croatian and Hungarian King Sigismund of Luxembourg on multiple occasions during the 15th century.[89] In 1436, the government placed a substantial order of silverware from the skilled goldsmiths of Dubrovnik as a gift for Alfonso I, the King of Aragon, Sicily, and Sardinia.[90] The order included gilt bowls for sweetmeats, silver jugs featuring the image of St. Blaise in enamel, silver plates, and goblets with handles, decorated with enamel and gilt both on the inside and outside.[91] Similar to luxury textiles, distinguished women were gifted valuable silver objects on the occasion of their wedding. This is confirmed by the decision to present Beatrice of Aragon with silverware on the occasion of her upcoming marriage to Matthias Corvinus. These gifts included a gilded jug and washing basin, silver plates, goblets with stems and lids, all decorated and gilded. To carry out this task, six skilled goldsmiths were selected, who successfully completed their work.[92] On January 15, 1477, King Matthias Corvinus expressed his gratitude for the gifts he had received.[93] The success of this gesture led to a repetition of the practice during the wedding of Hungarian

83 Damen 2007, 239.
84 *Cons. Minus*, vol. IX, f. 142v, (28 Dec 1442). In one occassion, Ragusan ambassadors apologize for not bringing gifts earlier. The reason was a shortage of silver, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XIII, f. 100r, (12 Jan 1443).
85 Fisković 1949, 150.
86 Tadić 1968, 527.
87 For example, one of the punishments was the amputation of the hand, Fisković 1949, 158.
88 Lučić 1979, 65.
89 *Cons. Minus*, vol. VI, f. 52r, (19 Jun 1433); Gelcich – Thallóczy 1887, 759, 763, 781, 794, 892.
90 SAD, *Diversa Notariae*, (hereinafter: *Div. Not.*), seria XXVI, vol. XXI, f. 72r, (22 Dec 1436).
91 Fisković 1949, 189.
92 Fisković 1949, 189–190.
93 Gelcich – Thallóczy 1887, 635.

and Croatian king Władysław II Jagiełło to Anna of Cilli, where the previous tradition was followed, and identical silver gifts were sent as those for King Matthias's wedding. However, at the last moment, the authorities decided to make a modification. Instead of sending four goblets with lids and stems, they chose to send four plates, as the previously selected gifts had fallen out of use and become undesirable due to changing tastes and fashion trends.[94]

The quantity of silver items dispatched as diplomatic gifts to the Sublime Porte in the 15th century was considerable.[95] However, what remains uncertain is the further fate of those Dubrovnik's gifts in the Ottoman capital. C. Swan highlights that in the 17th century gifts made of precious metals from different countries at the Sublime Porte were regularly melted down and converted into money.[96] In this sense, diplomatic gifts could have acquired a new meaning in a different socio-cultural and religious context. This is further supported by an example from the opposite direction, albeit from a later period, when Dubrovnik's envoys at the Sublime Porte were presented with caftans as gifts by their hosts.[97] However, they were not permitted to keep them and were instead required to hand them over to the authorities upon their return. Ultimately, these gifts were given to churches, where they were repurposed into functional items such as liturgical vestments.[98] In this way, the Ragusan authorities took advantage of the luxurious materials from which the caftans were made, and through their transformation, they integrated them into a context that was foreign to their original purpose, granting them a new function. This process allowed a piece of material culture from one community to live on within a completely different one, in a new form, while adhering to established norms.

The state seal, bearing the image of the city's patron saint, St. Blaise, was impressed onto silver items as both a guarantee of authenticity and a visible mark of quality.[99] In modern terms, this means that the city authorities protected the origin, originality, and quality of silver items.[100] Preserved examples, including those of a secular nature, indicate that these 'logos' were typically placed in a prominent position for the recipient to see immediately. In other words, they were not concealed but rather engraved on the bottom of the silver objects.[101] The depiction of the city patron St. Blaise, proved to be an excellent choice for several reasons: it expressed messages about the identity features and values of the community the ambassadors were authorized to represent and served as a reminder to the recipient of the donor. Dubrovnik's patron saint, St. Blaise, is symbolically associated with the city's freedom, as he is regarded as its protector from external enemies through divine intervention. According to legend, in the 10th century, when the Venetians attempted to deceitfully seize the city, St.

94 Gelcich – Thallóczy 1887, 824–825.

95 For example, just in one occasion ambassadors brought as a diplomatic gift to the Sublime Porte 32 silver plates, *Lett. di Lev*., vol. xii, f. 218r, (without date), and in another 45 silver plates, *Lett. di Lev*., vol. xiv, f. 190v, (without date). Besides plates, jugs, washing bowls, and platters, were included in the lists of diplomatic presents approved for dispatch to the Sublime Porte, *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, f. 219v, (17 Aug1430); *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xi, ff. 50rv, (28 Jul 1431); *Cons. Minus*, vol. ix, f. 135v, (22 Nov 1442).

96 Swan 2013, 56–57.

97 The caftan is a ceremonial robe, a long upper tunic, which is a sign of honour, made from luxurious fabrics mostly in the workshops of Anatolia.

98 Miović 2003, 239–240.

99 Fisković 1949, 158–159. The same practice was applied to the production of textiles with the stamp 'panni ragusei', Belamarić 2020, 303. Some craftsmen placed their own seal on textiles originating from their workshops, Roller 1951, 35.

100 Fisković 1949, 150.

101 The same is true for religious objects, such as the reliquaries of arms from the second half of the 15th century, which are kept in the treasury of the Dubrovnik Franciscans (Fisković 1949, 194–195).

Blaise revealed their intentions and thus preserved the city's liberty.[102] Assuming that silver items presented as diplomatic gifts to high-ranking Ottoman officials, had this Christian state symbol engraved, it is possible that it was controversial for recipients of the Islamic faith.

Luxury items made of silver were also used to differentiate an individual's hierarchical position. For instance, in the 15th century, a variety of silver items such as trays, chalices, containers, lids, plates, jugs, and pitchers were sent to the Sublime Porte, some of which may have been gilded.[103] In addition to the differences in type, there were also variations in the number of gifted items depending on the individual's power. Regarding the type of items, only the Sultan received silver boxes for storing sweets and a silver container with a lid.[104] When it comes to distinguishing in the quantity of the same item, for example, plates, the Sultan received twice as many as the grand viziers, and sometimes this ratio was even 3.5 times in his favour.[105]

IS MONEY AN APPROPRIATE GIFT? A WHIRLWIND OF EMOTIONS

In scholarly discourse on the theory of gift-giving theses have been made that money is not a suitable gift for everyone and is universally not well-received.[106] Gifts in money could serve as markers of the socio-political status of the recipients,[107] but they are never presented to the Sultan,[108] while lower-ranking officials, especially grand viziers, are usually gifted money,[109] that served as a bribery. It was evident that the Ragusan government used money as a tool of persuasion. This had the potential to create favour and influence the recipient's willingness to act in accordance with their needs. Although the authorities in the instructions, that ambassadors were obligated to follow, emphasized that money and other material gifts were merely *signs of affection and respect*,[110] the Dubrovnik scale, which measured expenses for diplomatic gifts, was calibrated according to different parameters. At the moment when Lovro Nikolin de Ragnina and Vuko Vlahov de Babalio had the freedom to decide whether to gift Duke Vukac Vardić 100 ducats or not, they first had to consider the strength of his influence on the successful completion of the tasks entrusted to them.[111]

Beside satisfaction, money could trigger a whirlwind of emotions. In the court of Bosnian king Tvrtko II in 1428, there were complaints that the Ragusan authorities hosted the ambassadors of Radoslav Pavlović more generously than the king's own.[112] The value of gifts was often a subject of envy among recipients. E. Kurtović argues that the money received by Sandalj Hranić for his part of Konavle triggered anger and envy of his neighbour Radoslav Pavlović,

102 Further insights into the metaphorical association of the city's patron saint with its liberty can be found in Lovro Kunčević 2008, 36–40. Some studies on the cult of St. Blaise include Prlender 1994, 9–22; Belamarić 2001, 703–731; Cvjetković 1916.

103 *...grandi, belli, mazori bochali, piu belle e piu grande taçe*, *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv. f. 224v (25 Aug 1430); *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 215v, (13 Sep 1430).

104 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xi, f. 50r, (28 Jul 1431), vol. xii, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441).

105 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xii, f. 213r, (15 Jun 1441), f. 218r, (without date).

106 Webley – Lea – Portalska 1983, 223–238.

107 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 215v, (13 Sep 1430).

108 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xiii, f. 98r, (2 Jan 1443); *Cons. Rog.*, vol. xi, f. 266r, (21 Nov 1450).

109 *Cons. Maius*, vol. vi, f. 135v, (29 Sep 1441); vol. xii, f. 218r, (without date).

110 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xiv, f. 119r, (20 Jun 1453). For similar examples of proving that a gift was valuable and given without any hidden motives at the papal court, see: Fletcher 2011, 8.

111 *Se a vuy par per meglio di far la dicta proferta fatela, se ve par di non farla, non le fate*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. xiv, f. 130r, (4 Sep 1453).

112 Babić 1960, 19.

influencing his decision to start an armed conflict against Dubrovnik.[113] The territory of Konavle, which the Dubrovnik authorities had attempted to acquire on several occasions over the decades, was finally meant to bring peace between the hostile Pavlović and Kosača families. Since Sandalj and Radoslav shared ownership of this territory, its joint sale was supposed to signify the normalization of relations between them. However, the subsequent secret gifting to Sandalj and his wife could not remain hidden and triggered a wave of dissatisfaction from his rival.

Although it may seem that women were excluded from 'high politics', their role in the creation of personal networks, lobbying, and influencing the decisions of their influential husbands, fathers, and sons was significant. City counselors believed those women held sufficient power to influence the decision-makers with whom they were related by blood or marital ties. Their attitude is confirmed in the period preceding the outbreak of the conflict over the strategically important territory of Konavle in Dubrovnik's hinterland.[114] During this time, the wives of Bosnian dukes Sandalj Hranić and Radoslav Pavlović, namely Jelena and Teodora, held significant positions. Krekić argues that these two women held a high influence in shaping plans for the future actions of their husbands.[115] Therefore, it is unsurprising that the city government gifted them money on multiple occasions, *not out of any debt*, but *out of love*, even though they did not personally participate directly in the negotiations.[116]

Overall, women played an important role in shaping events with political implications, and their gift-giving could support their actions in the desired direction. The documented gifts presented to these prominent women, often very generous, confirm this thesis. In 1410, the people of Dubrovnik gifted 500 ducats to the Bosnian queen.[117] In 1449, they gifted Katarina and Jelena, the mother and wife of Herzog Stjepan Vukčić, with 200 perpers.[118] This example of ritual gift-giving to women residing at the same court demonstrates that the political authorities of Dubrovnik did not distinguish between women's positions, age, or marital status. They regarded them equally important for reaching desired diplomatic goals. Comparing the gifts presented to the spouses together it is visible that there was usually a difference in the value of the gift, expressed in a ratio of 1 to 2 in favour of the man. For example, in 1435, authorities made a decision to gift the Serbian despot with 1000 and his wife with 500 perpers in fabrics.[119] Ragusan authorities gifted the Hungarian and Croatian king Sigismund of Luxembourg and his wife with silverware, with the difference in their positions reflected in the number of similar items given, favouring the king.[120]

113 Kurtović 2000, 114, 119.

114 This war is known in the literature as the First Konavle War (1430–1433). For a broader context of its course, see: Truhelka 1917, 145–211.

115 Krekić 1986.

116 *E siando Sandal cum la dona insembre… presentati al dono al voyuoda et ala dona per parte nostra… el dono e scrito in questa cedula introclusa*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. vii, ff. 28rv, (15 Dec 1411); *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iii, f. 127r, (14 Oct 1425); *Et perche vedemo el vostro desiderio et la vostra vogla vi dicemo che non per algun debito ma per amor non vogliando niente taglar delli IIM ducati a voi offerti volemo che alla vostra donna sia donati altri ducati mille d'oro…che altre gente non sia et a lei et lui pregaste che questa cosa romagna credença et che scriptura ne altro non bisogna far di çio*, *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. x, f. 65v, (5 Jun 1429)…*ducatos duos mille pro dicto voiuoda et ducati mille pro euis uxore*, *Cons. Rog.*, vol. iv, f. 112r, (9 Jul 1429).

117 *Ref.*, vol. xxxiii, f. 284v, (22 Oct 1410).

118 *Cons. Maius*, vol. ix, f. 13r, (8 Mar 1449). The name of this monetary value comes from the shortened form of the Latin *perperum-perperus* and the Italian *perpero*, and since 1272 it has had a fixed value of 12 dinars., Rešetar 1924, 49, 69.

119 *Cons. Maius*, vol. v, f. 38v, (30 May 1435).

120 *…avanti che ve sia data audiencia apparechiative a presentar li doni. Et primo appresentati al nostro signore per parte de a misser lo rector et nobeli homeni de la sua cita de Ragusa, fedelli de la sua maiesta:*

Secret gift-giving usually used as a form of bribery was strategically implemented to prevent undesirable emotional reactions from excluded parties. When the Ragusan government presented grand vizier Mahmud Pasha-Angelović, along with fellow viziers, with four silver platters, envoys secretly gifted Mahmud with an additional six, reflecting the authorities' assessment of his importance in comparison to others.[121] It is not surprising that at times, secret gift-giving was impossible to conceal. In 1399, when the government secretly gifted an additional 150 perpers to Bosnian duke Rauf, compared to others in his group, the Ragusan authorities sent a clear message about his socio-political position.[122] However, this hidden activity did not go unnoticed and provoked discontent among the other recipients, leading to an adjustment in the value of the gift for all involved, raising it from 300 to 500 perpers.[123]

Gifts in money not only confirm their primary use in facilitating Dubrovnik's interests but also in differentiating individuals' positions. Equally significant, monetary gifts, much like the previously analysed diplomatic presents, have the potential to provoke a range of emotions: from satisfaction and happiness, ensuring the successful realization of desired goals, to discontent, anger, and jealousy, which could lead to secret gift-giving, to avoid unwanted consequences.

CONCLUSION

This article aimed to analyse the correlation between the type and value of gifts sent from Dubrovnik in relation to the recipient's socio-political status during the first half of the 15th century. Analysing the multi-layered facets of late medieval Ragusan diplomatic gift-giving practices, this paper synthesized aspects of diplomatic gifts, power relations, gender, and collective identity. The city councilors proved their competencies through strategically selected gifts, carefully navigating the diverse geopolitical and cultural landscapes of diplomatic interactions. Diplomatic gifts, ranging from prominent titles, city palaces, food items, birds, luxurious silverware to carefully selected textiles and money, expressed complex messages regarding the receiver's position in the power hierarchy, cultural and fashion preferences, and distinctive features attributed to collective identity.

The decision-making process behind choosing gifts was highly complex. When determining the type, quantity, origin, method of processing, production, and material value of the gifts, it was essential to assess the recipient's position in the current power hierarchy, the significance of the tasks entrusted to the envoys, and to anticipate how the gifts might influence the future development of relations between the parties involved in the ceremonial exchange of diplomatic gifts. Diplomatic gifts played a key role in tracking Dubrovnik's trade relations and promoting the use of local resources, craftsmanship, and production techniques. This strategy fostered the growth of domestic luxury goods and strengthened the branding of local products. The selection of gifts required a deep understanding of the recipient's preferences, as these shaped the cultural and stylistic trends of the period. The lists of approved gifts for their political interlocutors suggest that the Dubrovnik authorities were not only aware of but also largely aligned with the value systems of the hosts they engaged with. Textile gifts

scudelle XII, bacili II et bocali 2, et a la raina scudelle 4, bacili 2, et bocali 2, Lett. di Lev., vol. VII, f. 59v, (without date).

121 *Lett. di Lev.*, vol. XIV, f. 190v, (without date).

122 *Ref.*, vol. XXXI, f. 129r, (20 Feb 1399); Lučić 1968-1969, 125–126.

123 Lučić 1968-1969, 126.

proved to be an important non-verbal medium for expressing individual power status through the choice of fabric, dye colours, embellishments, and ornaments. Precious silver objects transmitted messages of Dubrovnik's collective identity and religious symbolism. Money, as a controversial gift, often served as bribery and was a source of a wide range of emotions that could influence the decision-making process and have important socio-political consequences.

Despite the perception that women were excluded from diplomacy, their role in shaping personal networks of acquaintances, lobbying, and influencing the decision-making of their powerful husbands was significant. In this context, presenting these women with valuable material goods served as a strategic instrument through which Ragusan authorities sought to achieve desired political goals. Simultaneously, diplomatic gifts were used to convey messages about the hierarchical status of women at the courts, which was consistently lower compared to that of the men with whom they shared blood or marital ties. Gifts intended for women were valued at half the amount of those sent to their male relatives, while among women, no distinction was made in the selection of the type and value of the gifts.

In a broader context, the material culture of diplomatic gifts in late medieval Dubrovnik does not only function as a strategic tool but also proves the expertise of the city's councillors to navigate through different geopolitical, gender, emotional, cultural, and religious boundaries. This paper is merely a small step in that direction, as the rich sources of the Dubrovnik archives offer many more examples that allow for a more detailed discussion and comprehensive conclusions.

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