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## Syphilis and Scherlievo in Dalmatia

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**SUMMARY** The authors describe the emergence of syphilis in Dalmatia, the coastal part of Croatia, at the very end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, its presence up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, making reference to the most important physicians that tried to cure the new disease. The archives of Dalmatian towns, their statutes, some literary works, travel writers, physician books, and articles by historians of medicine contain data on syphilis in Dalmatia. Syphilis was first observed in Zadar (1500), Trogir (1501) and Dubrovnik (1502). Among the first physicians who treated patients in Dubrovnik were Mariano Santo and Amatus Lusitanus. The latter was the first to make prosthesis for the palate defect to cure tertiary syphilis lesions. According to the statutes of Dalmatia towns, each had one or more paid physicians and pharmacists. The Ottoman travel writer Evlija Celebi gave an account of syphilis in Dalmatia in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, endemic syphilis known as *morbus de Scherlievo* and *morbus Brenensis* appeared in Dalmatia. Because of the numerous cases observed in the region, new hospitals were opened in Dalmatian towns and the patients were hospitalized. Among the physicians who were engaged in the fight against syphilis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mention should be made of Giovanni Battista Cambieri, Nikola Selak and Božo Peričić. They all treated the affected patients and described syphilis and 'Scherlievo disease' in Croatian as well as in other languages. Syphilis was present in Dalmatia towns during the 15<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century, remaining a challenge and arousing the interest of current dermatovenereologists as well as other specialists.

**KEY WORDS:** syphilis, Scherlievo, Dalmatia

### INTRODUCTION

Today's Dalmatia, rich in natural beauties and history, is part of Croatia on the eastern Adriatic coast. Among the first inhabitants in antique Dalmatia were the Illyrics, then the Greeks, mostly on the islands. The Roman invasion of Dalmatia began in the first centuries BC. After a short presence of the Goths, the Slavs settled in Dalmatia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. At first, they lived in the rural hinterland, then penetrated the coastal towns

of Ragusa (Dubrovnik), Jadera (Zadar), Aspalatos (Split), Tragantium (Trogir), and others. In the Middle Ages, these towns were municipal institutions, had a communal administration and a well documented culture, especially in Dubrovnik. After Charlemagne, the rule was divided between the Venetian Republic, Byzantium, the Croatian-Hungarian government, and Turkey with permanent changes. During the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the towns

gained some autonomy, and Dubrovnik became a maritime Republic; the nobility and the wealthy class riches spoke Latin, Croatian and Italian. These circumstances remained unchanged until the fall of Venice (1797), the occupation of Dalmatia by the French and annexation to Austria-Hungary Monarchy (Kingdom of Dalmatia) at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1,2).

During their long and complex history, the people in Dalmatia had been troubled by various diseases, especially malaria and bubonic plague (3). The subject of this paper is the history of syphilis in Dalmatia from the 15<sup>th</sup> to up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. the authors attempt to outline the first cases observed along the coast, the course of the disease during these centuries, the political, economic and social circumstances during the period, and the achievement of the physicians engaged in the cure.

Syphilis appeared in Europe at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, possibly imported from America by the Columbus's sailors (there also were two Dalmatians among the crew), but some authors believe to be a myth (4). The disease soon expanded to many countries after the French army of Carl VIII, consisting largely of mercenaries of different nations, had conquered Naples, followed by rape and pillages. The first observed cases were among soldiers after the battle of Fornovo (1495), described by the Italian military physicians Marcello Cumano and Alessandro Benedetti (5-7). Some physicians thought the disease had appeared perhaps earlier in Barcelona (8), while others considered it was a punishment sent by God for human sins or due to astrological influences. The disease seemed to be new and had a severe course, but after a few decades its severity waned. The soldiers, prostitutes, merchants, and seamen spread the malady called 'French disease', while the French called it 'Neapolitan disease', throughout Europe, and cases of syphilis were soon reported in Dalmatia, especially along the coast, while it appeared later in other parts of Croatia.

### HISTORY OF SYPHILIS IN DALMATIA UNTIL THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Data on the presence of syphilis in Dalmatia at the very end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and during the 16<sup>th</sup> century can be found in the archives of Dubrovnik, Zadar, Split, but also in the works of some literary men, travel writers, and most of all in the works of the physicians that treated patients with this disease in Dalmatian towns.

In 1496, Giorgio Summaripa, a cultured Venetian poet (known for his verses on the battle of

Fornovo) mentioned that the new disease '*fatto ha in Dalmacia e Grecia gran spavento*', i.e. caused great panic in Dalmatia and Greece (9,10). The disease was first noticed in a soldier in Zadar (1500), as told by the Venetian chronicler Marino Sanuda in his voluminous Diaries from 1496 to 1533 (11); then in Trogir (1501), Dubrovnik (1502) and other parts of Dalmatia (12).

It should be noted that Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in the Middle Ages was already an important maritime republic (from 1358 to 1797), with a flourishing commerce, cultural and scientific influences from the West and East, and with a skilled diplomacy (13). This port-city had a consistent fleet, and their vessels (argosy) are mentioned in Shakespeare's works 'The Merchant of Venice' and 'Taming the Shrew' (14). The communal statute from 1272 (the statute of Korčula is even older, from 1265, and of Split from 1240), written in Latin, did not mention any physicians, but indicated some hygienic measures such as to keep clean the streets and toilets in houses (15), while pharmacists had to use exact balances. Later statutes had additions and improvements. Official scripts from 1302 cite '*medicus physicus*' Ricardus de Cesario, and in 1305 Peter Marangius, both from the Salernitan medical school, who were town physicians (16,17). There were also surgeons, pharmacists and hospitals (18). The physicians engaged by the town by one- or two-year contracts were well paid but had to cure the citizens free of charge. The first pharmacy in Dubrovnik, and it still exists today, was opened in the Franciscan friary in 1317 (19,20), but there is a notice that in Trogir there was a pharmacy as early as in 1271 (21). This indicates that the separation of pharmacy from medicine, according to the Edict of Friedrich II, king of Naples and Sicily (1240), was quickly adopted in Dalmatian towns and this role was included in their Statutes. The first hospital of Dubrovnik was Hospitale Magnum (H. Communale) or Domus Christi (House of Christ) founded in 1347, near the St. Claire nunnery, firstly for the disabled, the old and poor, and later it enlarged to become Civic Hospital in 1540; here the communal physicians had to visit the patients twice a day. From 1540, it also had a pharmacy (22,23).

In 1377, after the plague of 1348, the Great Council of Dubrovnik was the first town in the world that issued a decree to introduce a quarantine (Lazaret) in Cavtat and on the island of Mrkan against plague and other diseases, in shanties for people that came from suspected regions by ships or caravans. Later, the lazarettos were transferred

to Mljet, Danče, Lokrum, and the greatest in Ploče on the eastern border of Dubrovnik (24-26). The oligarchic government of the town was aware that the health of the folk was of paramount importance for flourishing of their prosperity. So, there were not only processions and prayers to the patron saint against contagious diseases, but also wise administrative and health measures and physicians.

The presence of syphilis in Dubrovnik at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is confirmed by the fact that in 1510, the surgeon Antonio Spagnolo (Antonius Hyspanicus), looking for work in this town, as a promotion of his ability said that he could treat the 'male de Franza', i.e. syphilis (15).

From 1527 to 1532, the surgeon Mariano Santo from Barletta, specialist for the extraction of bladder stones, practicing in Dubrovnik reported about patients with the 'French disease'. Critical to the therapy used by local physicians, he used ointments based on mercury, and also made a forceps for cure the stricturae urethrae. Later, he published his 'De ardore urinae et difficultate mendi' (27). Among the most famous physicians that worked in Dubrovnik there was the Portuguese Jew Amatus Lusitanus (Joao Habib Rodriguez) born in 1511 at Castel Branco and died in Thessaloniki in 1568. He graduated from the University of Salamanca in 1530. Later, because of hostility towards the Jews in the Iberian peninsula, he went to Antwerp and then to Ferrara, where he taught medicine at the local university (28,29). He was a known physician, botanist, anatomist and surgeon, and travelled to cure important patients in Rome, Florence, Ancona, and Venice. Because of the spreading of anti-Semitism, he left Italy to be engaged and practicing in Dubrovnik (Ragusa) from 1556 to 1558. He described a dozen of patients affected with the 'French disease' observed in Dubrovnik in his books 5 and 6 of 'Curationum medicinalium centuriam septem', published in 1566 (30). In each book, he described a hundred of patients. His prosthetic treatment of a patient with syphilitic destruction of the palate arch deserves special consideration. He made a 'new palate' of gold alloy that permitted the patient to speak (30). He also cured patients with a diet and introduced the use of *Buxus sempervirens* instead of *guajac* (holy wood) in the treatment of syphilis, and described a Croatian patient with deafness due to labyrinthitis syphilitica (28,31).

These data and documents of the State archives of Dubrovnik reveal that during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were numerous patients in the town suffering from syphilis (32), and that the physicians

cured them with plants and mercury. In 1591, Nikola Miloš opened a little hospital 'Ospedale degli incurabili', as was the use in some Italian towns.

As in other parts of Europe, promiscuity was present in Dalmatia towns, as evidenced by the founding of an orphanage for illegitimate and unwanted children with *ruota* (a turntable stone in the orphanage window, where unwed mothers could place the unwanted child, ring the bell, and disappear) in Dubrovnik in 1432. This institution was also called Ospedale della Misericordia (33,34). Similar orphanages were also opened in Zadar (1409), later in Split and other towns, but sadly, the mortality of the children was rather high.

One must know that in Dubrovnik as a cosmopolitan town there were many foreign merchants, seamen as well as local prostitutes. The latter had to reside only in a determinate part of the town (35,36). This regulation dated from 1409, while the Statute of Split regulated it even before (37). There were also cases of homosexuality because some decrees issued in Dubrovnik at that time (Liber croceus 1474) make mention of sodomy (38). In 1667, a great part of Dubrovnik was destroyed by earthquake and was reconstructed thereafter.

As mentioned above, the first case of syphilis was seen in Zadar, at the time under Venice because the Neapolitan king Ladislav sold the town to Venice in 1409, and remained so until the fall of Venice in 1797 (1). From Middle Ages, Zadar had been an important port, there was a Forum, the streets were paved, there were aqueducts and many little old hospitals. First was the Xenodochium founded in the year 559, the oldest in Croatia (39,40); another one was founded by the Benedictines in 986, and some by other orders (40). Later, hospitals were founded and held by the rich and nobles (40). During the wars, some of them were transformed into military hospitals. It should be noted that near this Dalmatian town there were also leper hospitals. The Zadar Statute was written in Latin in 1305. Copies of contracts stipulated between patients and local curing physician going back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century can be found in the town archives of Dubrovnik, Zadar and Split (41).

At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the 'French disease' was also observed in Istria, testified by Joseph Grünpeck in an early poem (42). Later, syphilis spread to the inland parts of Croatia. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Paracelsus who erroneously believed syphilis and gonorrhoea to be one and the same disease, called it *Morbus venereus*. During his traveling through Europe, he visited Croatia and Dalmatia (43).

During the 15<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Dalmatia towns had certain autonomy but the coast was under Venice, while the inland was under the rule of Turkey. There are no traces of works on venereal diseases written in Croatian language because the physicians wrote their works in Latin, and according to the old town statutes, the physicians had to be from other regions, as was the rule in Europe. So, the majority of doctors in Dalmatia towns were foreigners, mostly Italians, but there were also Spaniards, Portuguese, and Germans.

At that time, there were no medical schools in Dalmatia and even in Croatia, nor medical books in Croatian language. Dalmatian students had to study mostly in Padua, Bologna, Salerno, and later in Vienna, Graz and Budapest. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that many capable Dalmatian physicians were professors in the leading European medical schools; in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Domenicus de Ragusa was professor of medicine in Bologna and Siena, Frederik Grisogono (1472-1538) from Zadar was appointed professor at the Padua University, and Gjuro Baglivi (1668-1707) born in Dubrovnik was professor of medicine in Rome and member of the Royal Society of London. He described accurately syphilis and contributed to the understanding of the role of the lymphatic system in this disease. Šimun Stratico (1733-1824) from Zadar was professor of medicine in Padua and member of the Royal Society of London. Furthermore, Tomo Natalić Budislavić was physician at the court of the sultan Murat III and at the court of Poland, and Petar Bianchi at the court of the queen Maria Theresa in Vienna. They all wrote some medical books (44,45).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, significant advances were achieved in the science of medicine in Europe with the introduction of new instruments (microscope, thermometer), whereas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century this development was retarded in terms of theoretical and experimental activities and treatment (46). In Dalmatia, the physicians were still mostly foreigners, however, the number of Croatian physicians and surgeons increased with time. The fame of Dubrovnik's physicians was well known, so they were in great demand in neighboring countries and provided consultation in Bosnia, Turkey, Serbia, and Albania, where they brought their medicaments. The various parts of Croatia developed unequally under different governments, or the development was interrupted in a region by wars or other obstacles. As for other parts of Europe, venereal diseases were commonly treated by physicians, or by more or less educated surgeons and barbers

(47). The importance of surgeon in the treatment of syphilis is underlined by the use of cauterization of syphilitic lesions, by the prosthesis made for defective palate in a syphilitic patient introduced by the above mentioned Amatus Lusitanus, and by nose reconstruction by Gaspare Tagliacozzi in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (48).

During his travels through Bosnia and Dalmatia in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Evlija Celebi, a Turkish polyglot and travel writer described in his 'Seyahatname' the lazaretto of Split and Dubrovnik, the presence of *freng* (syphilis) there, reporting that the physicians cured the patients with diet and bath in springs (49). Other famous travel writers were also enchanted visiting Dalmatia, to mention only A. Fortis and Richard Burton (1821-1890), who is known for his translation in English of 'Thousand and one night' and 'Kamasutra'. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, B. A. Krčelić, a historian, reported data on diseases and syphilis in Croatia in his 'Annuae, sive historia'(50).

### **SYPHILIS IN DALMATIA IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

The region was a continuous battlefield, so limiting the development. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, health services were rather poor, with few and little hospitals. Endemic syphilis appeared in some regions. During the first Austrian occupation (1797-1805), health institutions in Split were in pitiful conditions. In 1797, St. Lazarus Hospital was built thanks to the noble Ergovac family, where many women with syphilis were recovered. Unfortunately, soon thereafter the Austrian rule used it as a military hospital (51), then the French did it too. The hospital returned to be civil only in 1817, while military hospital was moved to the nearby St. Arnira convent.

Luka Stulli (1737-1828) was a famous physician from Dubrovnik who not only described *Mal de Meleda (mljetska bolest)*, i.e. keratoderma palmoplantaris hereditaria (52), but introduced Jenner's vaccination in Dubrovnik in 1800. From his reports we also know that at the time, surgeons in Dubrovnik had to control local prostitutes (*donne pubbliche*) for possible infection with some venereal disease (15).

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dubrovnik still had a respectable fleet of about 400 ships, with 5200 seamen mostly engaged in commercial navigation and fishery not only in the Adriatic and Mediterranean Sea, but also in the Atlantic Ocean. The Rector and the Senate paid due attention to seamen

health, issuing decrees for food, hygienic circumstances and drugs on sailing vessels (53). Syphilis was among the diseases that affected seamen. To better comprehend the difficulties encountered by the Dalmatian and Croatian physicians during the past times, we will report briefly some of the most important problems and achievements in venereology (syphilology). During this period, as well as in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of physicians remained under the grip of tradition, the theory of the humors (54), and the belief that gonorrhea and syphilis were the same disease entity. This belief was strengthened after John Hunter's unlucky experiments with the disease inoculation into animals and himself (A Treatise on the Venereal Disease, London, 1786).

Bell and Hernandez demonstrated the contrary and around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after lively debates, Philippe Ricord (1800-1889), a surgeon, definitely separated syphilis from gonorrhea through numerous experimental inoculations in syphilitics (55). Internists treated skin disease, while surgeons commonly treated venereal diseases (47).

At the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an alarming epidemic occurred in the vicinity of Rijeka. In 1800, the protomedicus Leopold Masich first made a detailed report in Latin to local authorities on the disease that he named *Morbus venereoscabiosus* (56). Subsequently, the patients were studied and treated by Giovanni Battista Cambieri (1754-1838), a protomedicus of Rijeka, who believed erroneously that it was a *morbus sui generis* and called it *Morbus Scherlievo*, named after a village near the town. The disease was also called *Morbus Fluminensis* (Mb. of Rijeka), or even *Mb. Croaticum*. It was probably endemic syphilis and was treated with mercury topically, by fumigations, systemically, and with plants. In the region of Rijeka, four hospitals were opened to cure patients suffering from *Morbus Scherlievo*; the greatest hospital was in the Castle of Frankopans in Kraljevica (56). This hospital was visited by Ferdinand von Hebra, by Karl Ludwig Sigmund, and later by Gustav von Pernhoffer, the greatest Vienna specialists for syphilis; from 1818 to 1859, when it was closed, 19,000 patients were treated there (57). Interestingly, a famous Hungarian writer Mor Jokay wrote a novel 'Ein Spieler der gewinnt', based on the Scherlievo disease (58), and more recently a Croatian writer Srećko Cuculić has mentioned Scherlievo disease in one of his books (59). Today, some authors believe the number of cases of Scherlievo disease around Rijeka, as well as the

number described in Dalmatia to be too great, due to the problem of recognizing other skin diseases, possible simulation to avoid mobilization in various armies, and sometimes to use a 'fashionable diagnosis' (60).

Cambieri and Facchinetti, surgeons employed in the Hospital of Kraljevica, tried to demonstrate by inoculations whether the disease was contagious only in its early stage or in the later stage as well, and if it was possible, to cure the patients with syphilization (61). This was a terrible mistake and an unethical experiment, but similar experiments were also performed in other European countries (62). Interestingly, in 1843, a Dalmatian doctor J. Dešković published in German in Vienna his dissertation on physician's duties, which was the first manuscript on medical ethics in Croatia and among the oldest in Europe (63). Later, the disease was studied by Dr. Fabris, and Antonio F. Giacich (1813-1887). Giacich was an excellent internist and surgeon employed at the Civic Hospital of Rijeka. He wrote articles about Škrljevo disease in Italian and Hungarian (64), and dealt with venereal diseases in a treatise for seamen entitled 'Medical Lessons for Seamen', used throughout the monarchy. It was believed that 'Scherlievo' disease was transferred to Dalmatia (*Morbus Brenensis*), but it is more probable that the epidemic came from Bosnia (see below).

It is interesting to note that during the short French occupation, there was some progress in Dalmatia: new roads were constructed, marshes drained, and the first journal in Croatian language (Kraglski Dalmatin from 1806 to 1810) was published. Most important, on the basis of a decree of the provider (overseer) for Dalmatia, Vincenzo Dandolo, a medical school was opened in Zadar, the first in Croatia, from 1806 to 1812 (65). The textbooks for students were not written in Croatian but in Italian or German. Another medical school was opened in Trogir (1806-1809), but it was soon abolished (65). Dalmatia had to wait more than 150 years to get a new medical school (1985 in Split).

Doctor Nikola Selak, born in Dubrovnik in 1862, after graduating from Graz University in 1885, worked for a time at Department of Ophthalmology in Graz (Austria), then in Jastrebarsko (Croatia). He became an esteemed physician, was appointed director of the hospital in Koprivnica, and was a very prolific writer. Doctor Selak was a pioneer in Croatian ophthalmology and neurology (66). In 1893, he wrote on *Morbus Brenensis* i.e. 'Škrljevo' around Dubrovnik, a malady that the local folk called 'Turkey disease' (67). Imported from

Bosnia, the disease raged there at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For these patients, a hospital was opened in Gruž (Hospital Sv. Križa) with 160 beds. He visited Dubrovnik hospital 60 years later, and according to hospital data from 1820-1822 (when the hospital was closed and a few patients were transferred to Domus Christi Hospital), he found that 271 patients (125 male and 146 female of all age groups) were cured from syphilis (*Morbus Brenensis*). He believed that among these patients some had probably other skin diseases such as lupus, eczema, psoriasis, and leprosy (67). He also noticed that around 1840, the Dalmatian physician Nikola Pinelli, on the island of Šipan, using the old variolization method from the pustule of a child inoculated syphilis to other children, and from them infected their parents (67). Selak wrote some papers on syphilitic gumma and on a case of tabes dorsalis in 'Liječnički vjesnik'. In 1889, he published the first Croatian manual of forensic medicine. Unfortunately, he died very young (1891), so that some articles were published posthumously (66).

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Božo Peričić (1865-1947), a distinguished Dalmatian internist, surgeon and polyglot, wrote interesting and critical papers about Scherlievo in Dalmatia. He was born in Sukošan near Zadar, studied in Vienna, and then practiced in Šibenik, Zadar and Split (68). He took interest in dermatovenereology and went to Paris to improve his knowledge. He studied about 6000 cases of *syphilis tertiaria*, and found that many cases of *Morbus Scherlievo* in Dalmatia actually were venereal syphilis, as in case of young soldiers or seamen, or other skin diseases. Comparing data on syphilis from Šibenik Hospital (1.9%) with data from Vienna Hospital (5%) and Trieste (4.7%), he found that the number of cases was relatively lower in Dalmatia to speak of an epidemic (69). Peričić wrote numerous papers on syphilis in German, Italian and Croatian languages, and clarified the issue of Scherlievo in Dalmatia (70-72). He published a Croatian-German medical dictionary, and translated Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' to Croatian. It is worth noting that he was member of the German Society of Dermatovenereology and was nominated member of the Supreme Health Council in Vienna (73).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were few cases of syphilis on the Pelješac peninsula, and the people called it 'zla od žena' (women's evil), and a few cases were recorded in the Neretva region (74). According to Jelić, on the island of Iž syphilis was called 'francoz' (75).

Dermatovenereology as a specialty developed in Dalmatia and Croatia later than in other European countries such as France, Germany, Austria, Italy, and England. Apart from the deficiency of physicians, in particular dermatovenereologists in Croatia during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a major problem was illiteracy of the majority of the rural population, the presence of charlatans, quacks and superstitions connected with venereal diseases. The credulous folk (76) made use of extravagant treatments to cure venereal diseases, e.g., washing the chancre with the patient's urine and then powder it with the ash of a burning cigar. Some used to push the penis into a hole in a pumpkin for gonorrhea or employed some kind of coprotherapy (drink beer lain in cow dung) (77). The folk also supposed that coitus with a virgin could cure gonorrhea (78). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Croatian hospitals, these patients were commonly cured in surgery division, but in Dalmatia there was no division between medical and surgical departments, except for Šibenik thanks to Dr. N. Lalić and B. Peričić (68).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, movements of national self-determination started, especially in Eastern Europe, in countries under the Ottoman Empire. This first happened in Greece, then in Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Montenegro (79).

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dalmatia was under the rule of Habsburg Monarchy, underdeveloped and without communication of the coast with the inland. Slowly, the representatives of the people became aware of the censorial and absolutist politics of C. Metternich and A. Bach, and of the need to integrate with other parts of Croatia and to open schools in Croatian language (1). In 1861, Dalmatia constituted its parliament (*Sabor*), and took care for the health of its citizens. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, new hospitals were founded in larger towns: Šibenik in 1883, Zadar in 1887, Dubrovnik in 1888, while the old Civil Hospital in Split, built in 1797 thanks to the Ergovac brothers, was enlarged in 1892 (80). The Dalmatian Society of Physicians was founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1903) (81). Dalmatia became part of Croatia only after World War I.

The first Department of Skin and Venereal Diseases was opened at Split Hospital in 1918, and the first head was Ivo Stalio (82). In Zadar, which remained under the rule of Italy, a Dispensary was opened in 1920 by Dr. Ivan Smirkinić at St. Nicholas Monastery. At Šibenik Hospital, Department of Dermatology was opened in 1921, and the first head was Vjekoslav Rismondi (83). Here the patients received free treatment. Later on, in

Zadar, Head Doctor Vladimir Matanić, who graduated from the Zagreb School of Medicine in 1941, headed Division of Dermatovenereology from 1952 to 1982 (84). He wrote numerous papers on syphilis, especially on its treatment with rolitetracyclin (Reverin) (85-87).

## CONCLUSION

Syphilis emerged in Dalmatia towns at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and has remained a challenge and a focus of interest to the present. The Republic of Dubrovnik was highly developed at that time and had organized legal system and wise health measures. The physicians, surgeons and pharmacists came from the best foreign medical schools. Among the most important physicians that treated and wrote about syphilis and later *M. Scherlievo* were Amatus Lusitanus, Giovanni Battista Cambieri, Nikola Selak and Božo Peričić. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Dalmatia was under the rule of Venice, Napoleon and Habsburg Monarchy, whose political interest was against the union with Croatia (*divide et impera*). So, the unfavorable social, economic and political conditions retarded the construction of new hospitals and the introduction of a new specialty like dermatovenereology.

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