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The article explores the way a noblewoman from fourteenth-century Zadar, along with other women from her circle, faced various crises: the Venetian siege and occupation of Zadar in the 1340s, the outbreaks of plague, and the period of major political crisis and civil war following the death of King Louis of Hungary. The central character, the founder of a Benedictine monastery for women of common status, was chosen for this research due to her long lifespan and widowhood, which made her more prominent in notarial records than most others. However, sources also show that she stood out as a matriarch and a pillar of support within her wider family circle and community in general.

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Throughout history, women have often been expected to take on responsibilities and roles that were traditionally reserved for men, especially during times of permanent or temporary absence of men, or

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when men failed or were unable to fulfil their customary gender roles. During crises, such as wars, women would take over the work usually performed by men. Women would also assume the role of head of the family, stepping into the place of fathers, husbands, and older male relatives, who had died or were temporarily absent because of combat, imprisonment, exile, or other reasons. The same occurred during peaceful times, when men were absent due to business trips or other duties. The Middle Ages were no exception. Aristocratic women were expected to assume leadership roles in peace and war, roles they were otherwise excluded from. Widowed mothers took on the responsibility of being the leading providers and decision-makers for their families. They governed their children and made decisions regarding their adult lives. Even in social circles where women were expected to lead sheltered lives under the protection and supervision of their own or affinal kin, such as in Mediterranean urban elite circles, women sometimes found themselves in situations where they were left in charge of other family members and property. While this was not something they had sought or looked forward to, some women proved to excel in times of trouble, earning recognition and respect within their kin and communities.

I. Zadar in the fourteenth century

Zadar (Lat. *Iadera* or *Iader*, It. *Zara*) was, alongside Dubrovnik (*Ragusa*), the largest commune on the eastern Adriatic coast. It is estimated that in the 14th century Zadar might have had around 8000 inhabitants (7,000 in the city and 1,000 in the suburb), perhaps even more before the Black Death. In addition to the widespread cultivation of vineyards and olives, as well as the husbandry of sheep and goats - especially on the numerous islands across from the city - Zadar had an advantage over other East-Adriatic coastal communes due to its lack of mountains in the hinterland, which allowed for more grain production. Another important asset was its salt-pans, particularly on the island of Pag. These contributed to the city's urban elite having some of the highest incomes on the eastern Adriatic coast, likely only surpassed by those of Dubrovnik. The urban elite closed its circle, holding a monopoly on governance, probably soon after the Venetian *serrata* in 1297. Only nobles had the right to a place in the Great Council and held high elective offices in the town.

However, since the second decade of the 12th century, and especially after the conquest in the Fourth Crusade, the city was under Venetian control. The Venetian representative was the Count, who was Venetian by birth and origin. Venetian rule was challenged by the Hungarian kings, particularly after the Angevins from the Kingdom of Naples took the throne from 1301, and from the turn of the same century, by the ambitious Croatian noble kindred of Šubići. Due to economic interest in expanding into the hinterland, the nobility of Zadar mostly supported these claims and occasionally rebelled against Venetian rule. From 1311 to 1313, the city acknowledged the rule of the Šubići, the bans (viceroys) of Croatia and Dalmatia. Although the Šubići eventually surrendered the city back to the Venetians, they negotiated better terms for the Zadar citizens than those they had before. This encouraged the city to rebel once more when the young king Louis of Anjou launched a campaign in Croatia and Dalmatia in 1345. The city's rebellion led to a prolonged siege of the city by the Venetians and their allies, which lasted for 16 months. The king was forced to withdraw, the Zadar nobility crushed the rebellion of the starving population, who had wanted to surrender. However, the city was eventually compelled to surrender anyway. A contemporary chronicle of the siege mentions that 80 noblemen died during the siege, 20 of them directly in battle. The terms of surrender were much harsher than before: 50 men from noble families were required to remain as permanent hostages in Venice, and up to 100 noblemen and commoners were exiled to the islands and forbidden from entering the city. Should they attempt to escape, their entire property would be confiscated, effectively ruining their families. In early 1348, the Black Death struck the city, causing heavy casualties and leading to the extinction of some families. It was the first of several epidemics to hit Zadar in the 14th century, another devastating outbreak in the 1360s particularly affected the younger generation. Although the rule of Louis of Anjou from 1358 to 1382 brought prosperity and compensation to those who had sacrificed during the previous years, his death without a male heir led to a new period of civil war in the country. Zadar was not spared from this turmoil. In 1384, there were first reports about the rebellion against Louis's daughter, Queen Mary and her mother Elisabeth – the leaders of the rebellion were executed and their property confiscated. Interestingly, they all belonged to the circle of

Zadar commoners. Judging by this, political instability seems to have been compounded by social unrest, possibly stemming from dissatisfaction among the upper layers of society - those non-noble citizens who, despite their wealth, were excluded from political governance.¹

Sources

Despite a few interesting contemporary narrative sources –such as the *Obsidio Iadrensis*, a narrative about the siege of 1345/46 written by an exiled cleric from a Zadar noble family shortly after the siege, and a *Memoriale* (a sort of mixture of personal and public memoirs) written by the Zadar noble Paul de Paulo, covering the turbulent period of late 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries - these sources do not record the experiences and actions of Zadar women. However, such records can be found in notarial registers, abundant in Zadar, which contain business records on sales, leases, creation of companies, marriage/dowry contracts, divisions of family property, testaments, etc.² Another valuable source that traces women's activities during

¹ Nada Klaić and Ivo Petricoli, *Zadar u srednjem vijeku do 1409, Prošlost Zadra II* [Zadar in the Middle Ages until 1409. The history of Zadar. Vol. 2] (Zadar: Filozofski fakultet Zadar, 1979), 291-374; Tomislav Raukar, “Komunalna društva u Dalmaciji u XIV stoljeću” [Communal societies in Dalmatia in the 14th century], *Historijski zbornik* 33-34 (1980-81), 150-56, 160-70; Miroslav Kurelac and Damir Karbić, “The Chronicle *Obsidionis Iadrensis Libri Duo* and its Historiographical and Historical Importance,” in *Opsada Zadra / Obsidio Iadrensis* [The siege of Zadar], trans. and ed. Veljko Gortan, Branimir Glavičić, Vladimir Vratković, Damir Karbić, Miroslav Kurelac and Zoran Ladić, *Monumenta spectantia historiam Slavorum meridionalium* 54, *Scriptores* 6 (Zagreb: Hrvatska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 2007), 53-67; Zrinka Nikolić Jakus, “Vrijeme rata, kuge, zatočeništva. Zadarske plemićke obitelji i posljedice mletačke opsade 1345./46. i Crne smrti” [Times of war, plague, and captivity. The noble families of Zadar and the consequences of the Venetian siege in 1345/46 and Black Death], *Povijesni prilozi* 55 (2016): 9-35.

² The notarial registers are kept in the State Archive of Zadar. Some of the older ones have been published, and those that interest us here are: Jakov Stipišić, and Mirko Zjajić, ed., *Spisi zadarskog bilježnika Franje Manfreda de Surdis iz Piacenze 1349-1350* [The acts of the Zadar notary Francis Manfredus de Surdis from Piacenza, 1349-1350], vol. 3 (Zadar: Historijski arhiv - Zadar, 1977) (hereafter cited as ZN 3); Robert Leljak, and Josip Kolanović, ed., *Andrija pok. Petra iz Cantù. Bilježnički zapisi 1353-1355* [The acts of notary Andrew of the late Peter from Cantù, 1353-1355], vol. 4 (Zadar: Državni arhiv u Zadru, 2001) (hereafter cited as ZN 4); Robert Leljak, and Josip Kolanović, ed., *Andrija pok. Petra iz Cantù. Bilježnički zapisi 1353-1355*. [The acts of notary

times of crises is judicial records. Of particular interest is the oldest civil court register which covers the period from April 1351 until February 1353, and contains procedures for determining the heirs of the deceased, who left no will. Many such cases arouse during the turbulent time of siege, occupation and plague, at the time when many noble men were absent from Zadar.³

II. Pellegrina – filia de Saladinis, vidua de Grisogonis

Pellegrina (or Peregrina) was born into one of the richest noble families of Zadar, the de Saladinis. Her father was Cosa (the Younger), the sole son and heir of Bartholomew. The family was relatively new in Zadar. The founder Cosa (the Elder), was a wealthy immigrant who arrived in Zadar in the 13th century. Little is known about his place of origin, though it seems he was Italian, but not Venetian. This, and his vast wealth, enabled him to marry into the old elite of Zadar and gain acceptance into their circle which was largely hostile to Venetian rule. His testament, the longest and most elaborate will among the Zadar nobility of the time, shows his extreme wealth. The de Saladinis were likely the first family to introduce the strictest patrilineal hereditary custom in Zadar – only legitimate sons inherited estates in equal shares, while daughters received dowries in cash as their share of inheritance. In Cosa the Elder's time, many noble families in Zadar still treated their daughters equal and gave them a full share in all property, in accordance with old Roman law, which treated all heirs – male and

Andrew of the late Peter from Cantù, 1355-1356], vol. 5 (Zadar: Državni arhiv u Zadru, 2003) (hereafter cited as ZN 5). Some of the notarial documents issued by notaries as complete documents to their clients have been preserved and published in the series *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Sclavoniae*, vols. 8-18, ed. Tadija Smičiklas (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti, 1910-1990) (hereafter cited as CD). Some sources of interest from the Venetian archives are published in the special series: Šime Ljubić, ed., *Listine o odnosajih između Južnog Slavenstva i mletačke republike* [The documents about relations between South Slavic peoples and the Republic of Venice], vols. 2-3, Monumenta Spectantia Historiam Slavorum Meridionalium 2-3 (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti, 1870, 1872) (hereafter cited as *Listine*).

³ Gordan Ravančić, ed., “*Curia maior civilium*—najstariji sačuvani registar građanskih parnica srednjovjekovnog Zadra (1351-1353)” [*Curia maior civilium*—the oldest extant register of civil court cases in medieval Zadar, 1351-1353], *Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru* 43 (2001): 85-160 (hereafter cited as CMC).

female – as equal. Cosa the Elder did not have any legitimate sons, only one adoptive daughter, but named his nephew Bartholomew, the father of Cosa the Younger, as his sole heir. Similarly, Cosa the Younger later ignored his daughters in his will and named only his sons as heirs. He had a large family—at least five sons and six, maybe seven, daughters who survived to adulthood. However, in his will, he named only his four sons as heirs, excluding his surviving daughters and one son who became a priest. Nonetheless, all his daughters married men from the most distinguished families in Zadar, bringing exceptional dowries into their marriages. Pellegrina, perhaps among the youngest, married the widower Francis de Grisogonis, a member of an old and large kindred, in 1341.⁴

Although it could be argued that the marriage with a widower was a less distinguished match for a young girl from one of the richest families in town, Pellegrina's dowry of 1600 pounds was the biggest recorded in Dalmatia at the time, reflecting her family's wealth. Cosa the Younger was, as future records will show, a shrewd and calculating man. Although on good terms and related through marriages of his sisters and daughters to most of the old Zadar families, he himself married a lady from one of the most prestigious families of Venice, the Michiel.⁵ A Venetian chronicle mentions that during a Zadar rebellion in 1313, a Venetian count of Zadar fled, dressed as a friar, into the house of his friend (a term often used for affinal kin), Cosa de Saladinis.⁶ Despite this, obviously, the nobility of Zadar did not take this against Cosa, as the marriages of his daughters show. One of them, Honesta, married Vučina (Wolf) de Matafaris, one of the rectors of Zadar in 1346 and thus one of the leaders of the rebellion.⁷

⁴ Cosa the Elder's will from 1296: Mirko Zjačić, ed., *Spisi žadarskih bilježnika Henrika i Creste Tarallo 1279-1308* [The acts of the Zadar notaries Henry and Creste Tarallo, 1279-1308], vol. 1 (Zadar: Državni arhiv u Zadru, 1959), doc. 48, pp. 85-90; Cosa the Younger's will from 1359, CD 12, doc. 491, p. 652; Peregrina's dowry contract from 1341: CD 8, doc. 442, p. 625.

⁵ In my previous article, I wrongly identified the family as the Dolphin: "Vrijeme rata, kuge, zatočeništva," 17, 20.

⁶ Roberto Cessi, and Fanny Bennato, ed., *Venetiarum historia vulgo Petro Iustiniano Iustiniani filio adindicata* (Venice: Deputazione di storia patria per le Venezie, 1964), 210.

⁷ Državni arhiv u Zadru [State Archive of Zadar], Bilježnici Zadra [Notaries of Zadar] (hereafter cited as HR-DAZD-31, ZN) Articutus di Rivignano, b. 1, fasc. 3/2, fol. 33.

Pellegrina was left a widow at a young age – either during the siege or even before. She did not remarry, which allowed her to retain control over her late husband's property on behalf of her underage son. The situation after the siege pushed her even more into independence, especially since her brothers-in-law had also died by that time.⁸ Her own brothers were alive, but the post-siege circumstances positioned her as one of the main actors in family politics.

War, occupation, plague

At the beginning of the war, Pellegrina's eldest brother, Saladin, was outside the city and was therefore taken prisoner by the Venetians, who transferred him to a dungeon in Venice. For the next few years, the de Saladinis desperately sought a way to free him and bring him home. Two months after the imprisonment, he managed to escape from prison with the help of some women and possibly bribed prison-guards. However, he was soon recaptured and returned to prison.⁹ After the siege, despite his mother's Venetian origin, Saladin was included in the number of 50 noble hostages. In July 1348, the Venetian authorities allowed him to go to Corone (Koroni), the Venetian seat in the Peloponese, probably to serve in the military. This was done on the plea of Saladin's uncle, the contemporary Archbishop of Crete, Francis Michiel. However, this plan never materialised, probably because, unfortunately, the uncle who had guaranteed for Saladin, died soon afterwards.¹⁰ Finally, in April 1349, Saladin received a military post in Treviso, since he could not support himself in Venice, and in order "to support his old and fragile father".¹¹ His father had the support of four other sons who survived the Black Death, and was probably among the richest men in Zadar, but, nevertheless, this appeal was successful. It did not, however, helped Saladin to get home and he was still on this post at the end of 1352, and present in Venice in 1355.

⁸ CD 11, doc. 303, p. 398; Serdo Dokoza, Mladen Andreis, *Zadarsko plemstvo u srednjem vijeku (rodoslovlja)* [The nobility of Zadar in the Middle Ages (genealogies)] (Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru, 2020), 314.

⁹ Listine 2, doc. 465, 468, p. 281 (20/10/1345, 3/11/1345).

¹⁰ Listine 3, doc. 138, p. 91; Konrad Eubel, *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi sive Summorum Pontificum S. R. E. cardinalium, ecclesiarum antistitum series ab anno 1198 usque ad annum 1431 perducta*, 2nd ed. (Münster: n.p., 1913), 215.

¹¹ Listine 3, doc. 185, p. 120.

He was still treated as a hostage, as one of his brothers had to replace him if he wanted to leave the Venetian duchy.¹² Altogether, he spent at least ten years away from Zadar. If he had tried to escape, the property of his family would have been confiscated.

Interestingly, soon after Saladin received permission to move to Treviso to serve in the Venetian cavalry, his father, Cosa, sold Pellegrina his salt-pans in Biograd in the district of Zadar, for the very favourable price of 55 ducats and 8 silver *grossi*. In September of 1352 he also sold Pellegrina two gardens near Zadar for 7 ducats.¹³ In 1364, already under Anjou's rule in Zadar, Pellegrina took her brothers to court because they refused to let her keep these estates, claiming they had been bought for a price twice less than the real value.¹⁴ However, they could not prove the sale was illegal, so Pellegrina won the case and kept the property.

Why would Cosa, who, judging by all, especially his will, was a stingy man and did not mention any of his daughters, whether dead or alive, in his will, nor give alms to the church institutions and the poor as was customary, choose to sell valuable pieces of property to his widowed daughter at such a good price? It seems likely the brothers were correct in claiming these sales were provisional. They were made when Saladin was still under Venetian control in their territory but in military service with a greater chance of escaping if he chose so. Selling to a widowed daughter/sister might have been a way to secure at least part of the family's property from confiscation. Pellegrina did not have a husband who could gain influence over this property. The in-laws of her other sister, Honesta, the de Matafaris, were known as the main enemies of the Venetian regime, and their property could easily be confiscated as well. Perhaps there were other such provisional sales that we are unaware of due to lost sources, perhaps Pellegrina resold the property to her father once the political situation changed. She may have decided, however, that she deserved to keep some of it, given her substantial contributions to the family's benefit in the preceding period. She had proven herself to be the backbone of the family. During Saladin's absence from Zadar, he named her, rather than his father or

¹² Listine 2, doc. 368, p. 249; CD 12, doc. 214, p. 284. About Saladin's fate see also: Nikolić Jakus, "Vrijeme rata, kuge, zatočeništva," 16-17.

¹³ CD 11, doc. 410, pp. 540-41.

¹⁴ CD 13, doc. 284, pp. 387-89.

brothers, as his proxy in legal affairs concerning testaments and inheritance.¹⁵ This was the role she would often assume in the future for various family members.

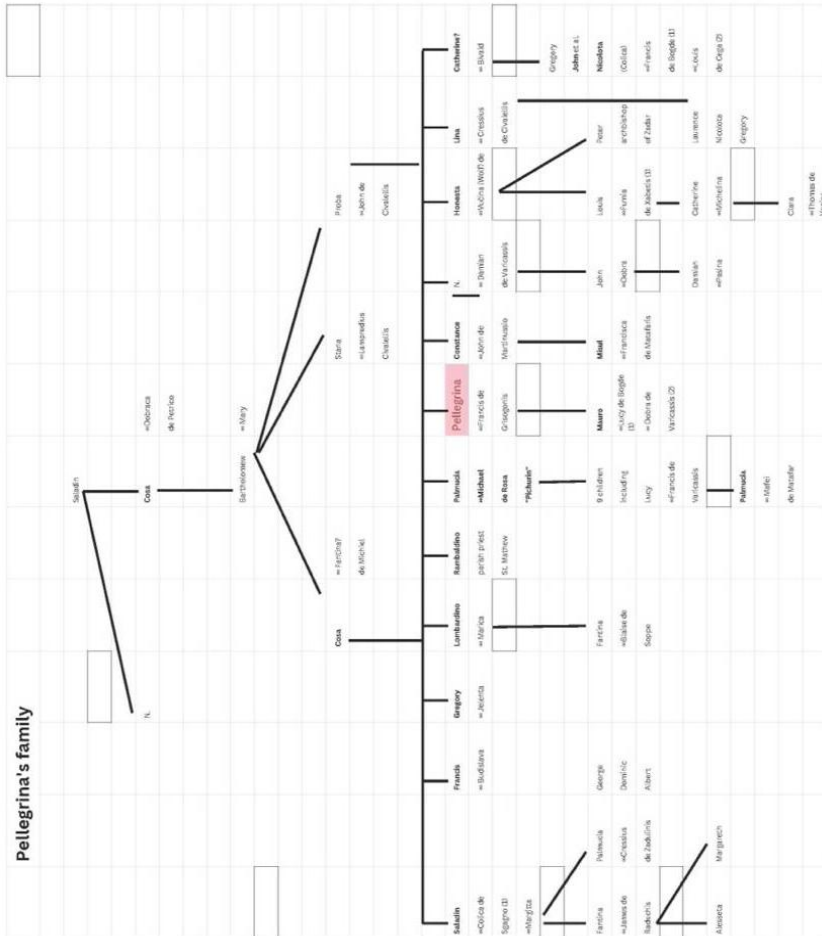


Fig. 1. Pellegrina's Family

¹⁵ ZN 5, doc. 206, pp. 313-316.

Protector of orphans

Pellegrina had the sad duty of being the executor of wills for many family members who died in the Black Death.¹⁶ At least three of her sisters died during this period, some along with their families. Her sister Constance died along with her husband, John de Martinussio, leaving their sole son Misul (“little Michael”) to whom Pellegrina would become guardian and second mother. The boy was entrusted to her care and grew up alongside her own son, Mauro, with whom he remained close all of his life.¹⁷ Misul was, alongside Pellegrina, an executor of Mauro’s will in 1370 and also a benefactor of some of Mauro’s orders in the will. Twenty years later, Misul would appoint Pellegrina as the first executor in his will, before his wife and firstborn son, just a few months before her own testament.¹⁸

A sister of unknown name, married to Damian de Varicassis, had probably already died by the 1350s. There appears to have been another deceased sister who married into the de Botono family, given the close ties with this family. The most tragic fate befell the family of Pellegrina’s eldest sister, Palmucia, who died along with her husband Michael “Pichurin” de Rosa and their nine children. The only surviving descendant was Palmucia’s only granddaughter Palmucia de Varicassis, whose both parents also perished in the plague.¹⁹ The little girl was thus the only surviving descendant of several noble families, or at least branches of them.

¹⁶ Peregrina was an executor of testaments of sister Palmucia and Palmucia’s eldest son: ZN 3, doc. 141, 226, p. 98, 154

¹⁷ ZN 3, doc. 203, 212, p. 140, 145; she soon replaced her father Cosa as one of two legal guardians of the boy, too: ZN 4, doc. 205, pp. 332-333.

¹⁸ CD 15, doc. 78, pp. 101-103; CD 17, doc. 181, pp. 247-23. In her recent article on Pellegrina, Giulia Giamboni suggests that Constance died only in 1388 citing data in Dokoza and Andreis, *Zadarsko plemstvo u srednjem vijeku*, 444: “The Many Lives of Pelegrina de Saladino: Mother, Testamentary Executor, Guardian, and Patroness in Late Medieval Zadar,” in *Medieval Work, Worship, and Power: Persuasive and Silenced Voices*, ed. Abigail P. Dowling, Nancy Ann McLoughlin, and Tanya Stabler Miller (London and New York: Routledge, 2025), 214. However, the document in question, concerning a dispute over property of one of Pellegrina’s brothers in 1388, mentions among the interested parties Misul de Martinussio as the son and heir of the deceased Constance de Saladinis: HR-DAZD-31, ZN, Articutus di Rivignano, b. 1, fasc. 3/3, fol. 20^r. It seems that Pellegrina was appointed as the guardian of Misul by the authorities: ZN 3, doc. 203, p. 140.

¹⁹ CMC, doc. 43, pp. 128-129.

An unusual court case took place over the inheritance of the de Rosa family, more precisely over the inheritance of John, the last of Palmucia and Michael's sons, who died without a will. First, in October 1351 as the claimant appeared Michael "Pichurin"'s first cousin, also named Michael. As the closest surviving agnate and only male relative, he did not anticipate any problems. It was clear he regarded himself as the closest relative in the de Rosa lineage. His five sisters and two female cousins did not apply for the inheritance, nor did he make any claim in their name. However, before the one-month deadline for appeals expired, Cosa de Saladinis appeared at court, claiming the inheritance in his own name and the names of his sons Francis, Gregory, Lumbardin, and Saladin, as well as his daughters Pellegrina and Honesta.²⁰ Cosa argued that, according to the law, which after descendants recognised ascendants as main heirs before collaterals, he is to be regarded as the closest ascendant, and his children as the closest collaterals (uncles and aunts) of the deceased John de Rosa. The following month, witnesses testified about the family's genealogy.²¹

In spring 1352, another claim was brought to court, this time by the tutors of little Palmucia, one of whom was Pellegrina de Grisogonis. In May, she testified before the court about the relationship of Palmucia with the deceased. As a witness, Pellegrina identified herself as a daughter of Cosa de Saladinis, not by her marital status as was common. Cosa brought two more witnesses himself. This time he excluded Pellegrina from the claims he petitioned for. All these

²⁰ It seems one more of his daughters was alive - Lina, married to Cressius de Civaellis. Her testament appears to have been issued only in 1384: Jakov Stipišić, "Inventar dobara zadarskog patricija Grizogona de Civaellis iz 1384. godine" [Inventory of properties of Zadar nobleman Grizogon de Civaellis from 1384], *Zbornik Historijskog zavoda JAZU* 8 (1977), 398. It is not clear why she wasn't mentioned by Cosa in 1351. Her husband was imprisoned in Venice, but so was Honesta's husband. It is possible that Lina's husband was on the run from the Venetian authorities at the time: Cressius was treated as fugitive by the Venetian authorities in 1348 i 1349, although he appeared as a representative of the Council of Zadar in negotiations with the Venetian authorities regarding the sale of Zadar's salt in June 1352. Listine 3, doc. 121, 188, 351-352, pp. 80-81, 121, 235-238. Perhaps Cosa did not want to jeopardize this situation. Did Lina decide to leave the city and take refuge at the Croatian territory under control of the king? Did her father presume she was dead at the time? It is difficult to know.

²¹ CMC, doc. 11, 23, 40, 43, 45, pp. 102, 112-13, 125, 128-29, 132-34; Nikolić Jakus, "Vrijeme rata, kuge, zatočeništva," 20.

witnesses testified about the family relations and basically all said the same, but depending on which side they were brought, they emphasized different aspects of the family tree. The witnesses whom Cosa called to testify about the descendants of Michael “Pichurin” avoided mentioning any of John’s sisters – one of whom was little Palmucia’s mother, in an obvious attempt to ignore female descendants. Whether they deliberately ignored them as possible heirs or, more likely, tried to hide the fact that they might still be considered heirs, cannot be determined.

Finally, in August 1352, the court, consisting of Venetian count and captain of Zadar and his two counsellors, ruled in favour of little Palmucia. Judging by law, either Venetian or Zadar, the girl had the least right as the law gave priority to descendants, then ascendants, and finally collaterals. Moreover, as other court cases show, the priority was given to the agnatic family, and the males in the agnatic family.²² Great-grandfather Cosa was the closest ascendant, albeit by both female sides, and Michael de Rosa was the closest agnate and the only surviving male of the de Rosa. The girl was collateral through the female line, therefore would not count by any legal principle. The only explanation for the court’s decision might be pity for the little orphan who had suffered so many heavy losses. The judges might also have been disgusted by the attempt of the old and very rich great-grandfather to get hold of the inheritance of his deceased grandchildren. This was not the only Cosa’s attempt to claim inheritance of some of the unfortunate young relatives.²³ Cosa presented his appeal as a joint act of himself and his children, but failed in the end to produce any document of their consent with his actions, so he was forced to act alone, which suggests their general disagreement with his actions. Still, since the relations between Cosa and Pellegrina were not strained, as shown by the aforementioned provisional sales that took place at the same time, it cannot be excluded that Cosa’s claim was intended as a distraction for the court, drawing attention away from the original claim of Michael de Rosa, who would ordinarily be considered legally entitled to the

²² Nikolić Jakus, “Vrijeme rata, kuge, zatočeništva.”

²³ The same day that he petitioned for John de Rosa’s inheritance, Cosa claimed the inheritance of John de Soppe on the basis that John’s maternal grandfather was also Cosa’s maternal uncle. The claim seems to have been ignored by the court, which did not mention it in later proceedings: CMC, doc. 15, p. 106.

property as the only surviving agnate of his de Rosa kinsman. Perhaps it was a calculated family strategy to secure the inheritance for little Palmucia de Varicassis, for whom Pellegrina became a legal guardian, along with another widow, Selcha de Bogde. It is probable that the girl was also living with Pellegrina.²⁴ Both orphans, Palmucia de Varicassis and Misul de Martinussio were later married to the members of the de Matafaris clan. Misul married Francisca, daughter of John de Matafaris who was brother of Vučina, Honesta's husband. Palmucia married Mafei de Matafaris, Francisca's second cousin, who was a royal knight and the sole heir of his parents, with splendid political career in prospect.²⁵ It seems that their great aunt/aunt Honesta, who was also married to the de Matafaris, likely the most important family in Anjou Zadar, may have played the part of match-maker. Pellegrina also kept close ties to the de Matafaris family.

At that time, there were also some young members of the de Botono family in Pellegrina's circle. It is possible they were the children of one of her sisters, or they might have been related to her in some other way. Bivald de Botono was a nobleman but led a riot of Zadar's desperate *populus* during the siege, when they tried to force Zadar noble government to surrender the city. He was executed as a traitor, along with his eldest son. Despite this reputation, the family maintained close relations with the de Saladinis. Therefore, it is possible that Bivald's wife, Catherine, was Pellegrina's sister,²⁶ although some other familial relation cannot be excluded. Bivald's brother Zoilo/Zuve was a legal guardian of Misul de Martinussio, Pellegrina's adopted nephew, and as such paid support to Pellegrina for the boy's upbringing from Misul's estates.²⁷

It also seems that Bivald's daughter, Nicolota (Kolica), was temporarily living in Pellegrina's house, seemingly in desperate search of a husband. In November 1349, in Pellegrina's house, she made a marriage contract with Francis de Bogde, a twice-widowed man who

²⁴ ZN 4, doc. 399, pp. 614-615,

²⁵ HR-DAZD-31, ZN, Petrus Serčana, b.1, fasc. 1/4, fol. 111^v-112^r.

²⁶ Robert Leljak, ed., *Inventari fonda Veličajne općine žadarske Državnog arhiva u Zadru godine 1325.-1385*. [Inventories of the fund of the Grand Municipality of Zadar of the State Archives in Zadar, 1325-1385], vol. 1 (Zadar: Državni arhiv u Zadru, 2006), doc. 10, pp. 85-105.

²⁷ ZN 3, doc. 212, pp. 145-146.

had lost all three of his children. He was seeking to remarry and have heirs to his family name and fortune. Why was young Nicolota interested in marrying a much older widower might be speculated. Perhaps the family could not have been very selective due to their status as the children of a traitor, perhaps there was a shortage of younger men because of the war, occupation, and plague. Since Francis was a hostage in Venice at the time, the marriage was contracted through proxies. Nicolota authorised Deacon Nicholas de Soppe to sail to Venice and express her acceptance. If the marriage proxy reached Venice and repeated her acceptance to Francis, the marriage would have been valid. However, the marriage never took place. Francis must have already died of the plague at the time when Nicolota gave her acceptance, and the marriage proxy never reached Venice, as he perished at sea. Less than three months after Nicolota accepted marriage to Francis, she married Louis de Cega, a young nobleman from Trogir - obviously a much better match than the previous one. This marriage took place in the home of Nicholas de Civalelis, who was the uncle of the husband of Pellegrina's sister Lina, suggesting a possible family connection to the de Botono. Nicolota received a dowry of 1000 pounds, but her brother, who gave her away in the place of their deceased father, also immediately borrowed 70 ducats from his new brother-in-law.²⁸ Nicolota's marriage may have marked the first step towards economic and social recovery of the de Botono family.

Life beyond

Pellegrina continued her life as an independent widow afterwards. In the prosperous decades of the Anjou period in Zadar, she established herself as a capable businesswoman and a matriarch within her large extended family. Apart from her female kin, who are usually only mentioned as testators, she appears in the sources managing her vast estates on the mainland and the islands, as well as selling salt from her salt-pans in Pag. She was also buying additional estates, which was not a typical activity for a widow.²⁹

²⁸ ZN 3, doc. 13, p. 10; CMC, doc. 42, p. 128; CMC 9, 13, 15, pp. 99-100, 104, 105-106; Nikolić Jakus, "Vrijeme rata, kuge, zatočeništva," 22.

²⁹ Branka Grbavac, "Patrizierinnen in Zadar und Split. Ihr rechtlicher Status und ihr wirtschaftliches und religiöses Leben," in *Besitz, Geschäft und Frauenrechte. Jüdische und*

However, her independence and activity were also partly the result of family tragedies - her only son Mauro died childless in 1370. Since there were no heirs, Pellegrina was the beneficiary of these estates as long as she remained unmarried. Pellegrina also buried her daughter-in-law Lucy, great-niece Palmucia, her brothers, sisters-in-law, a couple of nieces, and finally her nephew Misul, who had been like a son to her. She acted as a trustworthy procurator for her male relatives, who were absent from Zadar for various political or business reasons, and was often appointed as the executor of wills for a wide circle of family members.³⁰ These were not easy tasks, as the obligations regarding the provisions of the testaments could last for years. The individuals chosen as executors of testaments were those whom the testators trusted most.³¹ After her son's death, she slowly began to devise a new plan for the family property.

The foundation

Approaching the end of her, for the 14th century, relatively long life, Pellegrina decided to leave the bulk of her estates to the local church institutions, likely to appease both her native and late husband's families. Already in 1382, she purchased estates for 670 ducats to support the hospital for the poor that she had founded.³² In her 1390 will she left bequests to all the nuns and monks in Zadar's monasteries, as well as a wish to bring Bosnian Franciscans to the church of St. Duimus on the nearby island, which she had already founded in memory of her deceased son. This Franciscan monastery would later become very popular among the citizens of Zadar, especially favoured by the de Grisogonis, the family of Pellegrina's husband and son.³³ But from her will it can also be seen that for some years she had already

christliche Frauen in Dalmatien und Prag 1300-1600, ed. Martha Keil (Kiehl: Solivagus Verlag, 2011), 33-35.

³⁰ Regarding these matters as well as the guardianship of some other children see: Giamboni, "The Many Lives of Pelegrina de Saladino," 206, 208.

³¹ CD 15, doc. 78, pp. 101-103; CD 16, doc. 118, pp. 128-129; CD 17, doc. 181, pp. 247-23; HR-DAZD-31, ZN, Iohannes Casulis, b. 1, fasc. 3/1, pp. 52-53; HR-DAZD-31, ZN, Articutus di Rivignano, b. 5, fasc. 3, fols. 57-58.

³² CD 16, doc. 227, pp. 274-276.

³³ CD 17, doc. 204, p. 289. See also Giamboni, "The Many Lives of Pelegrina de Saladino," 211.

been working on the foundation of her own of a very particular institution.

In 1387, she obtained a special permission from the secret council of Zadar, in which some of her relatives held positions, to bequeath most of her land in the district of Zadar, and all her possessions in the city to the newly-founded Benedictine monastery of St. Catherine. It was perhaps unusual to found a Benedictine monastery at the end of the 14th century, at a time when Franciscan and Dominican orders were much more popular. What was special about Peregrina's foundation was that, although she came from the most distinguished nobility, it was intended for *femines populares*, commoner women who could not enter the Benedictine monastery of St. Mary, which was reserved for nobility.³⁴ Like Cicca, the foundress of St. Mary in the 11th century,³⁵ Pellegrina received support from the city's governing elite, as the nunnery addressed a significant problem in the city. This was a turbulent period, the time of civil war over the succession in the Kingdom of Hungary after the death of King Louis the Great. As stated before, in 1384, a few years before Pellegrina's foundation, there was a crushed rebellion in Zadar which involved some of the commoners.³⁶ Perhaps the foundation of a Benedictine house for non-noble women could also be welcomed by the governing city elite as an attempt to balance the spiritual needs of its population and establish a new mark of communal identity for a previously neglected segment of the population, thus contributing to unity and cooperation within the city. The monastery of St. Catherine was located in a prestigious position on the main street of Zadar (*Calle larga*), close to the main square, and was to be under the protection of the commune of Zadar. The income Pellegrina provided was sufficient to support 12 to 16 nuns, but by the beginning of the 15th century, the number at St.

³⁴ CD 17, doc. 204, pp. 287-291.

³⁵ About Cicca and her foundation see: *ABBATISSA INGENUITATE PRECIPUA - zbornik radova sa znanstvenog kolokvija "950. obljetnica Samostana benediktinki Sv. Marije u Zadru (1066.-2016.)"* [ABBATISSA INGENUITATE PRECIPUA - The Proceedings of Scientific Colloquium The 950 anniversary of the Benedictine Monastery of St. Mary in Zadar (1066-2016)], ed. Pavuša Vežić and Ivan Josipović (Zadar: Sveučilište u Zadru; Benediktinski samostan sv. Marije u Zadru, 2020).

³⁶ The main source – a *memoriale* of the Zadar nobleman Paul de Paulo – is very vague on the matter, but the social elements involved in the rebellion are quite plausible, as we find similar movements in other Dalmatian cities at the time, such as Split.

Catherine had grown to 35, nearing the 40 nuns at St. Mary's at the time. This growth suggests that the monastery was much needed in the city. The same as St. Mary in the 11th century, St. Catherine was carefully planned and executed foundation by a distinguished female individual,³⁷ but also welcomed by the governing elites of the city. Both monasteries became valuable institutions of the common good and the marks of identity of their social groups. St. Catherine was abolished in 1802, but perhaps ironically its remaining nuns helped to maintain the St. Mary monastery, which is one of the few surviving Benedictine monasteries surviving to this day.

III. Conclusion

Was Pellegrina de Saladinis, married to de Grisogonis, an exceptional woman in her time, or was she an ordinary woman in unexceptional circumstances? In her behaviour she did not transgress any norms. The life she led was probably not the one she had wished for herself. Her early widowhood, along with the lack of immediate male in-laws due to circumstances, led to her taking control and responsibility for the immense property in the name of her son and heir. The premature death of that son, without issue, made her position permanent. It also made her presence in the historical record far more prominent than that of her other kinswomen. However, Pellegrina's active participation in events surpassed the expected role for a woman of her time: it was she who got involved in the affairs of her kin and community – caring for orphans, engagement in court and legal machinations, in order to help her family members survive and thrive in times of peril. Her abilities were recognised by her environment because she would not have been chosen by so many of her relatives to act as procurator or executor, even later, when there were plenty of men to fulfil that role. Her life's work and the culmination of her efforts was the endowment

³⁷ In 1392, Pellegrina was buying some estates for her St. Catherine foundation: CD 17, doc. 317, pp. 431-432. See more data about the endowment of the monastery in Giamboni, "The Many Lives of Pellegrina de Saladino," 210. Pellegrina was still alive in 1394 when she was mentioned as an executor of testament of her niece Fantina, daughter of Lombardin and wife of Blaise de Soppe, who was an executor of Pellegrina's will: HR-DAZD-31, ZN, Articutus di Rivignano, b. 5, fasc. 2, nr. 27. Fantina has made her testament out of fear of dying in childbirth, but, fortunately, survived. Dokoza and Andreis, *Zadarsko plemstvo u srednjem vijeku*, 518.

of the Benedictine monastery for common women, which lasted more than 400 years and had significant socio-political meaning as a permanent symbol of the meaning of the upper citizen class in the commune of Zadar. Still, we can recognise the subtle actions of other women in Pellegrina's circle - her sisters and kinswomen – who were less visible, either because they were married and overshadowed by male relatives, or less rich and therefore not in a position to participate in notarial acts involving business and property. They, too appeared in court when necessary, acting as guardians or witnesses. Marriage relations among their younger relatives show their role in the arrangement of marriages. The invisible care they provided in the crisis can only be imagined. We may conclude that Pellegrina's life circumstances enabled her to show her exceptional talents for organization and management. The choices she made left a lasting impact on the community. It was not the life she anticipated or hoped for, but it made her memorable.

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