

THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF IVAN VELAT

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It is not surprising that a holograph will can contain much interesting cultural and linguistic information. After all, the testator is generally not mimicking legal formulas but is simply recording his decisions about the division of property and goods upon his death. He tends to write as he speaks though one can assume that on such a serious occasion he would have a tendency to use some stilted phrases.

And thus we can picture Ivan Velat, a *težak* ('peasant'), sitting at a table in his home in Veli varoš ('Big Town'), now a part of the city of Split, on March 18th in the year 1825 and carefully setting down his instructions and admonitions in his last will and testament. The will which rests in the *Historijski arhiv* in Split is a three-page document written in the Croatian language of that time and that area; two notations in Italian on different pages indicate that the will was officially recorded in 1830; one note has June 12, 1830, while the other gives June 14, 1830.¹

What is surprising is that Velat was literate and had good, almost elegant handwriting. Was the will perhaps written by a notary or the parish priest? Velat informs us, however, in two different passages that he wrote the will in his own hand: *ja pišem mojom rukom ovu najzadnju odluku i misal*, ('I am writing with my own hand this last will and thought'), and *Ja Ivan Velat vaš otac pisa s mojo ruko [sic] i da bude svaka moja izvršena usve i posve*, ('I, Ivan Velat, your father wrote this with my own hand and may all my [wishes] be carried out completely.')

It is not condescending on our part to question whether Velat actually penned this will.² He was a peasant and the Croatian language was not taught in Dalmatian schools until the second half of the nineteenth century. Croatian, where it appeared, was written in Italian orthography. But there were Croatian documents, particularly the rule books of the church brotherhoods, and Grga Novak, the great historian of Split, notes that there existed Croatian translations of the epistles and gospels for use by the congregation at the Latin Mass. In addition, the cultural level of Dalmatian cities had been higher than that of the hinterlands.³ And so I take it as a fact that Velat was literate and indeed wrote his own will though his mixed usage reflects an uncertain grasp of the written language.

Here is the first part of Velat's will in the original (i.e. Italian) orthography on the left, accompanied on the right by a version in current Croatian orthography and followed by an English translation.

*U ime Issusovo amen dan -18 Misseca
Marca Goddischia Gospodinoua -1825- u
Splittu uellom Uarrosu Buduchi ia iuan
uelat pokoinoga Tomme od ueloga Uarossa
zdrauu u pameti i u razabranosti u iezika i
znaduchi da iman umriti a neznaduchi
cassa ni ure Kada ima smart priti ia Pisem
moiom rukom ouu naj zadgnu Moiu odluku
i misal i Koja imma bitti izuarsena u sue i
posue po moioi smarti a sadda ga ostauiam
sue i moioi Xeni Dugchi zdusnostiu ouom
da nemoše prodati ni razciniti poniedan.*

*U ime Isusovo amen dan -18 miseca marca
godišća gospodinova -1825- u Splitu Velom
varošu. Budući ja Ivan Velat pokojnoga
Tome od Veloga varoša zdravu [-i?] u
pameti i u razabranosti u jezika i znadući da
iman umriti a ne znadući časa ni smrt priti
ja pišem mojom rukom ovu najzadnju moju
odluku i misal i koja ima biti izvršena u sve
i posve po mojoj smrti. A sada ga ostavjam
sve i mojoj ženi Dujki s dužnošću ovom da
ne može prodati ni razčiniti po nijedan
način nistare, ni drugomen ostaviti, a po*

*nacin nistare ni drugomen ostauiti a po
smarti Moie Xene Dugche onu Polouicu
Choiase pristoi occu dati a ottac ostauia i
Darige sue tancho po tancho stose ocu
pristoi a otac Anti i ossibu darie i ostauia za
ono Uasse Milosge stoste cinili Uasen ocu
i uasoi Matteri.*

*smrti moje žene Dujke onu polovicu koja se
pristoji ocu dati a otac ostavja i darije tanko
po tanko što se ocu pristoji a otac Anti i
Osibu darije i ostavja za ono vaše milosje
što ste činili vašen ocu i vašoj materi.*

(‘In Christ’s name, amen—the 18th of March, the year of our Lord 1825—in Split, Veli varoš. Since I, Ivan Velat, son of the late Tomo from Veli varoš, in my right mind and in control of my language, know that I must die and not knowing the hour or the moment when death will come, I write with my own hand this last decision and thought that must be carried out after my death. Now I leave everything to my wife Dujka under the condition that she cannot sell or distribute anything in any way, or leave to anybody else, and after the death of my wife Dujka that half which it is fitting for the father to give will be left and given exactly as it befits the father. The father gives and leaves this to Ante and Osib for your kindness towards your father and mother.’)

The language of this will is representative of the Split dialect as we know it from earlier and later documents. One surprising feature in this otherwise čakavian text is the use of *što*, ‘what,’ instead of *ča*; also *ništa*, ‘nothing,’ and *zašto*, ‘because.’ The reflex of **ě* is consistently ikavian, e.g. *vrime* (standard Croatian *vrijeme*), ‘time’; *dile* (*dijelove*), ‘parts’; *sriću* (*sreću*), ‘happiness’; *miseca* (*mjeseca*), ‘month’; *nevista* (*nevjesta*), ‘bride’; *odnila* (*odnijela*), ‘took away.’ Final *-l* is retained, e.g. *misal* (*misao*), ‘thought’; *dil* (*dio*), ‘part’; *vrta* (*vrtao*), ‘garden.’ The combination *lj* sometimes appears as such in verbs, and at other times is replaced by *j*, e.g. *ostavljam*, ‘I leave,’ but *ostavja* (*ostavlja*), ‘he leaves’; in nouns only *j* appears, e.g. *zemju* (*zemlju*), ‘land’; *u poju* (*u polju*), ‘in the field.’ Final *-m* alternates with *-n* in no consistent pattern though there are more instances of *-n*, e.g. *govorim*, ‘I say’ but *iman* (*imam*), ‘I have’; *oznanjem* (*odznanjem*), ‘I proclaim’ but also *oznanjen*; *mojom rukom*, ‘by my hand’ but *žalosnin trudon njivoin* (*žalosnim trudom njihovim*), ‘by their backbreaking labor.’ Typically for the Split dialect (and many others), the letter *h* does not appear, e.g. *tija* (*htio*), ‘wanted’; *raniti* (*hraniti*), ‘to feed.’ The added *-n*, characteristic of the Split dialect, appears in a few forms, e.g. *drugomen* (*drugome*), ‘to another’; *komen* (*kome*), ‘to whomever.’

The masculine singular of the past tense relies on the stem vowel for its ending, e.g. *potpisa se* (*potpisao se*), ‘he signed’; *dava* (*davao*), ‘gave.’ Other past tense verbs have the added *ja* for the masculine ending, e.g. *ti nisi tija* (*htio*) ‘you didn’t want’; *odnija je* (*odnio je*), ‘he took away,’ but Velat is capable of using both the bare stem and the *ja* ending in the same sentence: *namiri san je. . . sam je ja otac namirija*, ‘I took care of her. . . I the father took care of her.’ Unlike the modern Split dialect which has infinitives in final *-i*, Velat’s writing employs the full *-ti* forms throughout, e.g. *posaditi*, ‘to plant’; *izvaditi*, ‘to withdraw’; *pitati*, ‘to ask.’ Standard Croatian *može*, ‘is able,’ appears but so also does its Split variant *more*. The plural of the noun *sin*, ‘son,’ is *sini* (*sinovi*). As in the modern Split dialect Italian loans appear in Velat’s text, e.g. *dota* (*miraz*), ‘dowry’; *gustaju* (*koštaju*), ‘cost.’ The instrumental of means is used once without a preposition and once with one, e.g. *mojom rukom*, ‘by my hand,’ but *s mojo ruko* [sic] with the same meaning.

Velat’s speech, as reflected in his will, is štokavian-ikavian with characteristics of the local Split dialect. But why *što* instead of the *ča* which one would expect in a čakavian area? As Vidović points out, there had been extensive immigration into Split from Bosnia and Zagorje, the mountainous region behind Split. In fact, the wide-spread hostility towards *Vlaji* (*Vlah*, *Vlasi*), ‘outsiders,’ which exists in Split to this day: *Pusti zeca, ubij*

Vlaja ('Let the rabbit go, kill the Vlaj') dates to this early influx. The newcomers were štokavian-speakers and, if they came from the upper villages of nearby Poljica, they would be štokavian-ikavian. It is really not surprising, then, that in a peasant community like Veli varoš in the early 1800's the ancestral village dialect would dominate.⁴

Who was Ivan Velat? Though we cannot be positive about his identification, we do know that the name Velat appears on the listing of members in more than one *bratovština*; the *bratovštine* or 'brotherhoods' were associated with particular churches and have existed in Dalmatia for centuries and exist to this day.⁵ In the membership list for the brotherhood Sveta Manda po Ubogih (Saint Manda of the Poor), in Veli varoš, an Ivan Velat is listed as the *župan* or chief administrator for the year 1794, some 31 years before the time of the will we are considering.⁶ That this Ivan Velat is the author of the will seems quite likely since the *župan* in 1782, twelve years before Ivan's tenure, was Bartul Vrdoljak; in his will Ivan identifies his father-in-law as Bartul Vrdujak; with his mixed usage of *lj/j* and the possible raising of the vowel before *j*, Ivan's Bartul Vrdujak is most probably his fellow lodge member Bartul Vrdoljak.

In the year 1825 Split was a small Dalmatian city with a population in the city proper (*grad*, which also included the site of the Roman Emperor Diocletian's palace) of about 2,500; the city was ringed by *zagradska/predgradja*, 'suburbs,' though a more precise rendition would be 'adjacent settlements.' These settlements, called at that time *varoši*, 'towns,' were actually more like *sela*, 'villages,' both in appearance and in the peasant makeup of their populations. A *varošanin*, 'town dweller,' was distinctly different, sociologically and economically, from a *Splićanin*, 'resident of Split,' and these differences lasted until the beginning of this century. Split was the cultural center, the cathedral seat and the residence of the upper classes, nobles and functionaries. The language of Split or Spalato was Italian, that of the *varoši* (Veli varoš, Lučac, Dobri, Manuš) was čakavian-ikavian Croatian for the most part but also štokavian-ikavian in particular family clusters. At the time Ivan Velat wrote his will, the population of his town, Veli varoš, was at least 2,000.⁷

In his study of English medieval wills Sheehan (1963: 56) writes: "Sometimes the document may begin with a bald statement: 'This is the will of X,' then proceed to describe the donor's gift in the third person. At other times the donor is made to speak in the first person, so that the *will* reads like a report of his actual words." Velat's will does both: sometimes he speaks directly to one of his children, other times he refers to himself in the third person but at all times it is clear that it is Velat speaking. Thus, *a otac Anti i Osibu darije i ostavja za ono vaše milosje što ste činili vašen ocu i vašoj materi* ('and the father gives and bequeaths [this] to Ante and Osib for your kindness towards your father and mother'); but *I ti Kate odnila si što te moglo doći, i ja sam te i tebe Kate namirija* ('And you Kate took that which was coming to you and so I provided for you Kate.') A mixture of references can be seen in that portion of the will quoted above: 'Now I leave everything to my wife Dujka . . . and after the death of Dujka that half which is fitting for the *father* to give will be left and given exactly as it befits the *father*.'

The family Velat, as recorded in the will, consisted of Ivan (whose father was Tomo); Ivan's wife Dujka (whose father was Bartul Vrdujak); three sons: Ante and Mikula, both married, and Osib who is to be married; and three daughters: Kate and Dvaka/Dujka, both married, and Marija. Dvaka's husband, Pero Kostre, is mentioned. Other names in the will are those of Velat's tenant farmers: Menij/Menije Faraćin in Kopilica, Pjero Slavić in Gripe, and Pjero Alberti in Pojud (Poljud). There is a puzzle about the name of one daughter which first appears as *Dvaka* (original orthography *Duaka*) but thereafter as

Dujka, the same name as that of the mother. The mother is consistently referred to as *moja žena Dujka* and so it is clear that the daughter is meant in other uses of *Dujka* because her name is associated with the names of the other daughters; undoubtedly *Dvaka* ('the second') was a nickname for the daughter *Dujka*.⁸

Dujka, Ivan's wife, brought to their marriage a *dota*, 'dowry,' of 150 *tolors* and 5 *libras*. It is interesting that Ivan specifies that this dowry will be kept separate from the general property and will be disposed of as *Dujka* wishes. Some problem, not clear from this will, is associated with the dowry of daughter-in-law *Ivanica*: *Ja opet otac izgovaram i govorim što je moja nevista Ivanica donila dote da nima pitati da joj se namisti a ja otac nisam se potpisa pod nje dote. Ko se potpisa neka i odgovara. Ante koji se potpisa neka i odgovara* ('I the father again declare and state that whatever my daughter-in-law brought in her dowry she should not ask that it be placed at her disposal as I, the father, didn't sign for her dowry. Whoever signed for it, let him be responsible. Ante who signed for it, let him be responsible.')

Understanding the exact value of the various currencies mentioned in the will is difficult and perhaps impossible at this late date; generally, the more valuable currency is mentioned first, e.g. *tolors*, then *libras*. The word *tolor* comes ultimately from German *Thaler* (English *dollar*), while *libar/libra* stems from Latin *libra*, 'pound,' which also yields Italian *lira*. The currencies mentioned more often are the *fijorin*, 'florin,' originally a gold ducat and later silver named for the city of Florence (in Italian *Firenze* but earlier *Fiorenza*), and the *karantan*, 'copper (coin)' from Italian *carantino*; there were 60 *karantans* to 1 florin. Daughter *Dvaka/Dujka* received 61 florins and 40 *karantans* for her dowry, daughter *Kate* took clothing and other things worth 57 florins and 26 *karantans*. Son *Mikula* took 40 florins and 8 *karantans*, the reason not specified. And when the third daughter *Marija* finds 'her happiness or marriage,' she is to be given the same amount as *Kate* received: 57 florins and 26 *karantans*. In addition, *Velat* instructs *Ante* and *Osib* to give *Marija* 6 florins: *da vi dva brata date sestri Mariji fijorini -6- od onoga što ste vi dva posadili što je s van radila u poju* ('you two brothers give to your sister *Marija* 6 florins from that which you two had planted and for her work in the field with you.')

Son *Mikula* does not fare well in his father's will and the reason is: *za ono tvoje nepoštenje u vrime tvoga matrimonija i tvoje žene kako trataš svoga oca i svoju mater* ('for your dishonesty at the time of your wedding and for your wife because you didn't treat your father and mother well.'). But *Ante* and *Osib* are instructed to compensate *Mikula* with 6 florins for the 'little work' he did in planting on the land at *Firule*.

Velat's property consisted of his 'land on *Gripe*, *Kopilica*, and *Poljud*, the house, the yard and the garden, nothing more.' *Ante* and *Osib* were the diligent sons who worked the land and evidently supported their parents: 'I, the father, again declare that the property could not feed me or your mother but that *Ante* and *Osib* did it with their work because the work of your father and his property could not feed us.'

Velat's last sentence is the one mentioned above: *Ja Ivan Velat vaš otac pisa s mojo ruko* [sic]. . . Towards the end of the will *Velat* makes a request of his favorite sons: *A sada sini moji Ante i Osibe ja van ne ostavjan da mi date nego samo očenaš i zdravu Mariju za dušu vašega oca da se spomenete* ('And now my sons, *Ante* and *Osib*, I don't want you to do anything but give me an "Our Father" and a "Hail Mary" in memory of your father's soul.'). This would seem to be a fitting sentiment with which to terminate the will but *Velat* remembers another detail and so returns to property concerns: *Ante otac govori da daš od komuna Osibu kano i tebi dva prstena i jednu veru i osan srebreni botuni što si da tvojoj ženi zlato i srebro i ostale stvari koje gustaju fijorini 23 tako i bratu Osibu* ('*Ante*, father

is telling you to give Osib from the property the same as was given you, two rings and a wedding ring, eight silver buttons that you gave to your wife, gold and silver and other things that are worth 23 florins; so do the same for your brother Osib.')

In the last will and testament of Ivan Velat we have a unique record of a peasant patriarch talking to members of his large family in the year 1825. He reminds the family of the dowries paid out for two of the daughters and enjoins his heirs to provide an equal dowry for Marija, the as yet unmarried daughter; he rewards his faithful sons, Ante and Osib, and punishes Mikula who committed some reprehensible act at the time of his wedding. He is as scrupulous as an accountant in calculating sums of money, even rings and buttons, given to or owed to members of the family. As a good husband, he provides for his wife, even separating out her dowry for her own disposal. Except for a few stilted phrases (e.g. 'Now I again say and declare. . .'), Velat's text is almost an exact transcription of his everyday speech with its repetitions, mixed syntax and, above all, its directness (e.g. 'And you Kate took that which was coming to you and so I provided for you Kate.')

In 19th century Dalmatia where most records were in Italian, Velat's will stands out as a personal document written in the Croatian of his time and place. Short as it is, the will tells us much about life in Veli varoš in the early 1800's, about the concerns of a typical (i.e. peasant) family and about the local version of the Croatian language.

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REFERENCES

1. 1830 is most likely the year of Ivan Velat's death when his heirs submitted his will for official action. Each page of the 3-page text is 5.25 inches/13.3 cm wide and 8.25 inches/21 cm long but Ivan occasionally begins a sentence in the margin. I am grateful to my colleague, Prof. Dr. Dunja Jutronic-Tihomirović of the University of Split, for her help in elucidating some obscure passages.
2. Appropriately, Velat's name is probably derived from the adjective *veli-i*, 'big' (as in Veli varoš)+ *ūt*; compare the surname Milat (from *mil-i*, 'nice,' + *ūt*). There is a handful of Velat families in Split today with one family living in Veli varoš. All the place names mentioned in the will (Veli varoš, Gripe, Poljud, Kopilica, Firule) designated in 1825 settlements and fields outside of Split but are today sections of Split.
3. Novak (1964) is the prime source of information about Split and environs in the 19th century but Vidović (1973: 16-48) has a good summary of the language situation during that century.
4. Vidović (1973: 59-60) writes: ". . . up to the end of the 18th century. . . the main immigrants into Split were people from Poljica and their descendants gave an ethnic and linguistic stamp to the settlements around Split. Accordingly one can assume that this population group spoke a dialect which was, in the case of the first immigrants, more čakavian (in the 16th century) but later showed ever more štokavian characteristics, and that difference depended on the time, the century in which they settled and also on the part of Poljica from which they came: Upper, Middle or Lower. . . . Already in the 17th century immigration from štokavian regions (Bosnia) was greatly increased and in succeeding centuries was even greater and more extensive. . . . in the period 1611-1644 about 70% of the new immigrants were from čakavian areas, 23% from hybrid štokavian-čakavian areas (Poljica and Žrnovica) and only 7% from štokavian areas (Bosnia, Imotski, Sinj) [but] in the period 1645-1700 the percentage of immigrants from čakavian areas falls 52%, from hybrid areas it rises 17.7% and from štokavian areas it rises 39%." It seems, then, that the Velat family in Veli varoš or their ancestors came from a štokavian-ikavian area, most likely one of the villages of (Upper) Poljica, a former 'peasant republic' southeast of Split.
5. I have written a popular article about brotherhoods in Korčula, "Easter in Korchula." Since the magazine in which it appeared (*The Penn Stater*) is unlikely to be in many libraries, I shall be

- happy to send a copy upon request.
6. This brotherhood was associated with the church of Sveta Manda i Sveti Lazar in Veli varoš. A *župan* was elected each year. For a listing of members and officers see Bezić-Božanić (1984: 121-2).
 7. My population figures are extrapolated from those given by Novak (1965: 400) for the year 1817: 2263 for the *grad* (i.e. Split) and 3887 for Veli varoš and Dobri combined.
 8. Another puzzle seems to involve a place name *u opinju* (original orthography *u oppignu*) in the sentence: *moja žena Dujka ka je nosila od svoga oca u opinju u moju kuću od svoga oca Bartula Vrdujaka dote. . .* ('my wife Dujka who brought from here father in Opinje/Opinja(?) from her father Bartul Vrdujak a dowry. . .'). The only possibility I have come across, and it seems remote, is *Opine* (fem.pl.) which the Yugoslav Academy Dictionary identifies as a village in Hercegovina.

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POVZETEK

POSLEDNJA VOLJA IVANA VELATA

Leta 1825 je Ivan Velat, kmet v kraju Veli varoš (sedaj del Splita v Jugoslaviji) napisal tri strani dolgo oporoko v hrvaščini. V tej oporoki Velat nakaže denar in posestvo svoji ženi in svojim šestim otrokom. Avtor analizira jezik oporoke, ikavsko štokavščino, in obravnava kulturne vidike Velatovega okolja.