

6 THE REPUBLIC OF RAGUSA

around there was chaos and strife, at Ragusa there was peace. The original inhabitants had fled from the ruins of Epidaurum and Salona, and fortified themselves here; subsequently other refugees from all parts of the country helped to increase the population, for the hospitality of its walls was denied to none. The Ragusans were ever ready, as they proved many a time, to undergo any risk rather than give up those who had placed themselves under the protection of the rock-built city. Even in recent times Ragusa remained true to its past; when in 1876-77 there was revolution in the Herzegovina, and the savage Turkish soldiery were at their accustomed work of massacre and torture, the luckless Christian rayahs found shelter and protection at Ragusa, as their ancestors had done before them.

Ragusa was a small city, and its history is all on a small scale. At best she can only be regarded as a second-class city of the first rank. In size, wealth, and intellectual and artistic development she was far inferior to the city republics of Italy; but her close proximity to a world of barbarism, and the vastly important events in which she played a part, however small, make it loom large. Moreover, while the other republics of Dalmatia, with the exception of the tiny Poljica, were all absorbed by Venice, while those of Italy were a constant prey to civil wars, and lost their freedom and even their independence after a few centuries of chequered existence, Ragusa, after two hundred and fifty years of Venetian tutelage with internal autonomy, remained free, now under the nominal protection of this Power, now of that, for 450 years, actually surviving her mighty rival of the Lagoons.