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The Bay of Cattaro (Kotor) School of Icon-Painting 1680–1860

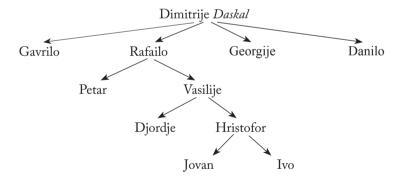
Abstract: Relying on post-Byzantine tradition, eleven painters from five generations of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family, accompanied by Maksim Tujković, painted several thousand icons and several hundred iconostases between the late seventeenth and the second half of the nineteenth century. They worked in major Orthodox Christian monasteries in Montenegro, Kosovo and Metohija, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia, but their works can mostly be found in modest village churches in the Bay of Kotor (Cattaro) and on the South Adriatic coast. The decoration of these churches was financially supported by the local population headed by elders. Along with a reconstruction of their biographies and a chronological overview of their major works, this paper seeks to trace stylistic changes in the Bay of Kotor school of icon-painting. While simply varying a thematic repertory established in earlier periods, the painters from the Bay of Kotor were gradually introducing new details and themes adopted from Western European Baroque art under indirect influences coming from the monastery of Hilandar, Corfu, Venice and Russia. This process makes this indigenous school of icon-painting, which spanned almost two centuries, comparable to the work of Serbian traditional religious painters (zografs) and illuminators active north of the Sava and Danube rivers after the Great Migration of the Serbs (1690). Despite differences between the two, which resulted from different cultural and historical circumstances in which Serbs lived under Ottoman, Venetian and Habsburg rules, similarities in iconography and style, which were inspired by an urge to counteract proselytic pressures, are considerably more important.

Keywords: icon-painting, woodcarving, frescoes, Dimitrijević-Rafailović family, Maksim Tujković, Bay of Cattaro (Kotor), Risan, Morača monastery

Between 1680 and 1860, eleven painters from the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family of Risan, with their founder Dimitrije the *Daskal*, and Maksim Tujković of Grbalj, an area in the Bay of Cattaro as the twelfth member of the group, painted a dozen fresco ensembles, several hundred iconostases and several thousand icons, and they also carved numerous frames for icons and church furnishings throughout Montenegro, Kosovo and Metohija, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Dalmatia. They were successors to the post-Byzantine tradition nurtured at the Patriarchate of Peć and the monastery of Morača in the second half of the seventeenth century and their most intense activity took place in the Bay of Cattaro and its hinterland, including the area delimited by Peć and Bijelo Polje, the Morača and Piva monasteries, Sarajevo and the monastery of Krka. The painters from the Bay of Kotor

¹ The name derives from the Greek word ό διδάσκαλος meaning a teacher or a master.

worked in all major monastic and urban centres in the region, but most of their works were made for modest clients from Luštica, Grbalj, Crmnica and Paštrovići. During almost two centuries of uninterrupted family activity, the work of five generations of painters from the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family inevitably underwent changes, going through several stylistic phases. The first phase, between 1680 and 1760, comprises the works of Dimitrije Daskal, his four sons — Gavrilo, Rafailo, Georgije and Danilo Dimitrijević — and their contemporary, Maksim Tujković, a monk, icon-painter and woodcarver. The second phase covers the period between 1760 and 1820 and the activity of Rafailo's sons Petar and Vasilije, and of Vasilije's descendants, Djordje and Hristofor Rafailović. The third phase, between 1820 and 1860, coincides with Hristofor's second phase, which reveals a Russian influence and includes the works of his sons Jovan and Ivo, which bring the activity of the icon-painting school of the Bay of Kotor to a close. The beginnings and the first century of the workshop's activity were related to Risan, where Dimitrije Daskal signed his earliest works, and where he later settled and started a family. Late in the eighteenth century, when Vasilije was at the head of the icon-painting school, the Rafailovićs moved from Risan to Nalježići in Gornji Grbalj. In 1810, Vasilije's younger son, Hristofor, moved to neighbouring Sutvara. After half a century, the importance of this artistic centre faded.



Dimitrijević-Rafailović family tree

Dimitrije *Daskal* was the most gifted student of the *zograph* Radul, one of the best Serbian painters of the seventeenth century, whom he helped paint frescoes in the Praskvica monastery church of the Holy Trinity of in 1680. Dimitrije moved from the surroundings of the Morača monastery and settled in Risan. During the following years, he painted four large despotic icons for the church of Sts Peter and Paul. Between 1704 and 1718, Dimitrije painted frescoes in at least four Orthodox Christian village



Fig. 1 Dimitrije *Daskal, Holy Virgin and the dove of the Holy Spirit*, detail of the *Annunciation*, 1704, Royal Door, Church of St Paraskeve, Mrkovi





Fig. 3 Dimitrije *Daskal* and Gavrilo Dimitrijević, *Dormition of the Virgin*, 1713, icon in a carved frame, Morača monastery church



Fig. 4 Rafailo Dimitrijević, *St Christopher the Cynocephalus*, detail of the *Deesis with saints*, first half of the 18th century, Art Gallery, Split



Fig. 5 Georgije Dimitrijević, Icon with a carved frame inscribed with the names of the deceased, 1740, Treasury of the Savina monastery



Fig. 6 Petar Rafailović, Triptych, 1776, Banja monastery near Risan







Fig. 7 Vasilije Rafailović (?), *Three-Headed Holy Trinity*, detail of the icon of the *Holy Virgin of the Sign*, *ca* 1800, Church of St George, Sutvara

Fig. 8 Djordje Rafailović, *Jesus Christ*, despotic icon, 1803, Church of St John the Theologian, Zagora

Fig. 9 Hristofor Rafailović, Masonry iconostasis painted with frescoes, 1841, Church of St Nicholas, Očinići

Fig. 10 Ivo Rafailović (?), Polyptych that serves as a home altar, second half of the nineteenth century, National Museum, Cetinje



churches (Šišići, Mrkovi, Pelinovo, Prijeradi) and in one Roman Catholic chapel (Dobrota). Apart from doing commissions for clients from Cattaro, he painted icons and made wood-carved or painted frames for iconostases for the monasteries of Dubočica near Pljevlja, Praskvica, Savina, Krka, Piva and Morača. Dimitrije's style was marked by meticulous drawing, schematic faces with drooping eyelids, conspicuously dark circles under the eyes and a series of short white strokes around them. These features would later evolve into the prevailing painting manner of the icon-painting school of the Bay of Cattaro. Dimitrije Daskal simplified the patterns used by his teacher Radul in terms of form and condensed them in terms of composition. He was not very good at anatomy, proportions and foreshortening. Occasionally, when he was commissioned by prosperous monastic communities, he made lavishly carved and gilt wooden frames. But he usually made iconostases for small village churches, and then he painted the frames in imitation of woodcarving. His approach to wall-painting was the approach of an icon-painter, paying special attention to facial details of the depicted saints, their clumsy movements and stark gestures against a simplified background, repeating the same types and motifs. Apart from the liturgical calendar, Menologion, which was rarely represented in art, in extensively illustrated fresco scenes in Šišići, Mrkovi and Pelinovo, Dimitrije depicted the hagiographical cycles of St George, St Paraskeve and St Nicholas in fourteen, seventeen and eighteen scenes, respectively. Today, it is impossible to observe the purity of his unique and inimitable style in numerous icons which Dimitrije painted jointly with his sons and assistants, as well as in those that were later crudely retouched (Šišići). His work spans thirty-eight years, i.e. the period between 1680 and 1718.

The only artist who belonged to the icon-painting school of the Bay of Kotor though he was not a member of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family was a monk of the Cetinje monastery — Maksim Tujković. He was born about 1680 in Grbalj. Tujković studied icon-painting with Dimitrije Daskal and was also a deft woodcarver. The key years in his career were: 1708 (when he worked in the church of St Luke in Cattaro); 1714 (the Praskvica monastery); 1720 (the church of the Holy Virgin in Njeguši); 1723 (Nikoljac near Bijelo Polje); 1734 (when he painted icons and carved iconostases for the Serbian church in Sarajevo and the monastery of the Holy Trinity in Pljevlja); and 1738 (the Stanjevići monastery). He also worked in the church of the Holy Apostles at the Patriarchate of Peć and the church of the Transfiguration in Budisavci near Peć. Under the immediate influence of the zograph Radul and Dimitrije Daskal, Maksim Tujković imitated the good tradition of old masters. However, the features that distinguished his works from those made by the icon-painters of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family were the sonority of colours and a rustic painterly expression. In

his paintings, too, the same types recur. His knowledge of anatomy and perspective was poor. Radul's influence is reflected in Tujković's manner of shading and the stylization of facial features, particularly in highlighting the lower edges of the eyes with a radial arrangement of short white strokes. He displayed great craftsmanship in woodcarving and simple shallow relief, distinguished by the interlacing ornament. Lavishly gilded, it adorns the Royal Doors and icons above them. Along with Dimitrije Daskal and Rafail Dimitrijević, Maksim Tujković was one of the best Serbian icon-painters and woodcarvers of the first half of the eighteenth century. His artistic career can be traced over a period of thirty years, between 1708 and 1738.

Gavrilo Dimitrijević, the eldest son of Dimitrije Daskal and brother of Rafailo Dimitrijević, was born in Risan in the last decade of the seventeenth century. It seems that he lived in the area of Kolašin, where he was teaching the Psalter and basic literacy skills. On the lavishly carved wooden frame for the icon of the Dormition of the Holy Virgin in the Morača monastery, believed to have been painted by his father Dimitrije, Gavrilo left an inscription that he did the carving at his own expense. Although he did not sign any other work, it has been assumed that he could have painted two icons at the Morača monastery — the Holy Virgin with Christ and saints (1711/2) and the Vita icon of St John the Baptist (1714). His drawing was skilled and swift and it reveals a particular sense of detail, and a taste for postures and gestures adopted from real life. He had a predilection for a reduced palette and a lavish use of gilding, while his drawings in black on a gold background often appear unfinished. Gavrilo introduced in his compositions a considerable number of women and children, images in semiprofile, as well as figures unexpectedly bent in movement. These features cannot be found in the works of other members of the icon-painting school of the Bay of Cattaro. Gavrilo was perhaps the accomplished woodcarver and one of the best painters of this school. But this remains a hypothesis which cannot be confirmed with certainty. The work of Gavrilo Dimitrijević can only be traced over a period of few years, between 1711 and 1714. The last reference to him dates from 1734, but he was mentioned as a daskal (teacher) and not as a painter.

Rafailo Dimitrijević, Dimitrije Daskal's second and most talented son, and the founder of the Rafailović family, was born about 1700 in Risan. He was engaged both in icon-painting and in woodcarving. He also decorated a linen antimension with a painting in oil. It not been preserved, but it was recorded in a photo. Rafailo painted and signed several large icons in carved wooden frames for the monastery of Piva. Apart from the Dobrićevo monastery in Herzegovina, he worked in Serbian village churches in Luštica, Grbalj and Paštrovići. Numerous icons kept in museums and galleries in Dubrovnik, Belgrade, Split and Sarajevo are attributed to him.

The typical features of his style include elongated figures, an emphatic and stylized drawing, a vibrant and warm colour scheme, as well as the modelling of complexion using several transparent pink layers, which he adopted from his father Dimitrije. His painting skills helped him to create the illusion of the third dimension and well-organized compositions, never to be attained by his successors in the icon-painting school of the Bay of Cattaro. Apart from Dimitrije Daskal and Gavrilo Dimitrijević, Rafailo was the only other member of this school who carved in-the-round, including architectural elements (a base, a colonette with a capital, and an architrave). A curious fact relating to this painter is mentioned in an inscription on a now lost icon painted for the Dobrićevo monastery in 1745. The inscription tells us that the high price of sixteen gold coins paid for the icon was based on the large number of saints depicted — 221. Rafailo's artistic activity can be traced over a period of thirty-three years, from 1723 to 1756.

Of the works of Dimitije's third son, Georgije (Djordje) Dimitrijević, only few have been preserved. The diptych from 1740 with inscribed names of the deceased and a carved wooden frame featuring vegetal ornaments, presently kept in the treasury of the Savina monastery, and the icons showing the *Presentation of the Holy Virgin in the temple with scenes from her life* (1759) and the *Deesis with the apostles* (1748) from the iconostasis in the church of St George in Šišići (Gornji or Upper Grbalj), are believed to be his works. His painting style is marked by schematic forms, *horror vacui*, stocky figures, a dry colour scheme and cool tones with pronounced shadows in complexion. He also made simple wood-carvings, which at that time were more highly valued and more generously paid than the painted elements of an iconostasis. His activity can be traced over a period of nineteen years, from 1740 to 1759.

The only piece of information about Dimitrije's fourth and youngest son is provided by an inscription, according to which he painted, in 1757, the frescoes in the church of St Nicholas at Glavati (Gornji Grbalj), which was pulled down in the late nineteenth century. This shows that he must have been a good and respected painter. The lack of information about his other works indicates that he either died young or that some of his unsigned icons are hiding among the surviving anonymous works of this painting school.

The elder son of Rafailo Dimitrijević, Petar Rafailović, was also an icon-painter and a woodcarver. He was born in Risan and was trained in painting by his father Rafailo. Petar was the head of the family workshop until 1784, when he moved to Corfu due to his trading connections, married a Greek woman, started a family, and, as it has been believed until recently, allegedly gave up icon-painting. After 1784, his younger brother Vasilije became the driving force of the Bay of Cattaro school of icon-painting. A

large number of unsigned icons are with great certainty attributed to Petar based on his distinctive style and brushwork. Two icons showing the Harrowing of Hell and dating from about 1760, one in the National Museum in Belgrade and the other in the Art Gallery in Split, are believed to be his earliest works. Parts of the iconostases in the churches at Djenovići, Vranovići, Mrkovi, Donji Morinj and the monastery of Banja near Risan make the majority of Petar's prolific oeuvre. Several portable triptychs that he painted can be found in Macedonia, and their central panel features the Deesis. Two of them date from his late period (1781/2). Made for Greek clients, these works have inscriptions in Greek, while the years were written in Arabic numerals. Having moved to Corfu, Petar occasionally painted commissions in the style of the Greek painters of the Ionian school, strongly marked by the influence of the Venetian Baroque. The two-part icon with its upper part showing St Matthew and the lower the family house of the Djurković family of Risan (1794) dates from this period; it is presently kept in the Maritime Museum at Kotor. Petar's works reflect all virtues and drawbacks of the icon-painting school of the Bay of Kotor. He tended to use a reduced palette, while his schematic drawing was rather confident and skilled. The period immediately preceding his departure for Corfu was marked by a more frequent use of gilding, which reflects both the spirit of the epoch and the fact that he worked for wealthy clients. Seeking to meet the requirements of his educated and affluent clients, Petar departed from conventional patterns, dealing surprisingly well with less common and more complicated iconographic solutions. He was also an accomplished woodcarver, deftly repeating the repertory of ornaments used by his predecessors from the Dimitrijević family in the works commissioned by large and wealthy monasteries. His activity spans a period of thirty-four years, from 1760 to 1794.

Vasilije Rafailović was the younger son of Rafailo Dimitrijević, a member of the third generation of painters from the Bay of Kotor and, most probably, a woodcarver. He had been an assistant to his brother Petar until 1784, when Petar moved to Corfu and Vasilije became the head of the family workshop. In the late eighteenth century, Vasilije and his sons moved from Risan to Nalježići in Gornji Grbalj. The icon of the *Holy Virgin with Christ*, painted in 1776 and presently kept in the church of St Elias in Petrovac, is Vasilije's only signed work from the period when he was an assistant to Petar. He subsequently worked in the churches of St Luke in Kotor and St John in Gradjani. His best work — the iconostasis for the Gradište monastery church of St Nicholas — was completed in 1795. Vasilije also worked in the churches at Sutvara, Nalježići and Gorovići (Grbalj), where he did not sign his works, and, in 1806, at Donji Seoci (Crmnica), where he made his last known work assisted by his sons. His work greatly varies in quality,

depending on whether he worked alone or was assisted by others, and on the taste, culture and financial power of his clients. Over the years, painterly negligence and a darkened and murky colour scheme began to prevail. The quality and style of the carving in the churches of St Luke in Kotor (1777) and St Nicholas in the monastery of Gradište (1795) shows not only that it could not have been done by Vasilije but also that it could not even date from his times. It must be of a considerably earlier date, when the post-Byzantine spirit prevailed among these artists; accordingly, the carving must have been done either by Dimitrije or by one of his sons, Gavrilo or Rafailo. Vasilije Rafailović was active for thirty years, between 1776 and 1806. He became the head of the family workshop in 1784.

Djordje Rafailović, Vasilije's elder son, most probably lived with his father and brother at Nalježići in Gornji Grbalj. The large unsigned icon of Sts Sava and Simeon, painted in 1795 for the church of St Nicholas of the Gradište monastery, is believed to be his earliest work. He later made iconostases at Zabrdje (Luštica), Djenovići, Zagora and Vranovići (Donji Grbalj). Together with his brother Hristofor, Djordje made iconostases for the churches of St George (where the Ceklin clan assembled) and St Thecla in Ceklin. The Deesis with the apostles and saints (1822) from the National Museum in Belgrade is his last known surviving work. A number of icons held by museums and galleries in Belgrade, Dubrovnik, Herceg Novi and Split are also attributed to him. Djordje Rafailović's works are recognizable by a stiff drawing style and dark, almost murky shades of ochre. Many of his icons feature red and blue horizontal bands with inscriptions in the upper part of the background. Along with basic colours, he used gilding for the Royal Doors. He adorned frames for iconostases either with painted vegetal ornaments or with carving in shallow, almost rustic relief. His activity can be traced over a period of twenty-six years, from 1796 to 1822.

In 1808, the younger brother of Djordje Rafailović, Hristofor, was awarded a house at Nalježići (Gornji Grbalj) by Prince-Bishop Petar I Petrović for his painting services. Accordingly, his career as an icon-painter must have begun before that year. He moved to nearby Sutvara in 1810, while his brother Djordje remained in Nalježići. Hristofor made iconostases at Kovači, Ceklin, Dupilo, Šišići and Nalježići, either alone or with his brother. In 1820, he adopted a Russian Baroque style of painting, which could be first observed in his works in Krimovice and Krtoli, and was later also apparent in his icons done for the churches at Sutvara, Gorovići, Kovači and Petrovac. During the 1840s, he decorated two masonry iconostases with frescoes, in the villages of Očinići and Vrela near Cetinje, respectively. These artistic ensembles were unique at that time. Although many of his iconostases have not survived, numerous icons painted by Hristofor Rafailović can be seen in museums and churches in the Bay of Cattaro. He painted in the manner

of his father Vasilije and brother Djordje, but his approach to modelling was less restricted, particularly in rendering draperies. The changes in his style under the influence of Russian art were also reflected in the cursive letters in his signature, as well as in the inscriptions, which imitate the type of letters typically found in Russian printed books. In the same iconostasis, he decorated icon frames with simple wood carvings, but he also painted them in imitation of woodcarving. Since the woodcarving technique was time-consuming and expensive, the clients apparently could not afford to have the entire iconostasis adorned with carvings. On the iconostasis for the church of St Nicholas in Krtoli (1820), which has not survived, Hristofor signed himself as "the sinful Hristo daskal Rafailović the people's painter from Risan". This reveals both how others saw him and how he perceived himself. The artistic career of Hristofor Rafailović was longer than that of any other painter from the Bay of Kotor: it lasted for forty-six years, from 1808 to 1854.

Hristofor's elder son, Jovan Rafailović, a member of the fifth and last generation of painters from the Bay of Cattaro, was born on 5 October 1818 in Sutvara. He served as a deacon and then was ordained as a priest in 1839. Jovan served as the parish priest at Orahovac in the Bishopric of the Bay of Cattaro He was trained in painting by his father Hristofor, and was his assistant, just like his brother Ivo. Jovan died on 24 July 1886, and was buried in the churchyard of St Barbara's at Sutvara. An icon of warm colours and modest artistic merit that he painted in the mid-nineteenth century, the Holy Virgin with the Child and Sts Nicholas and Peter, is kept in the National Museum in Belgrade. The artist signed himself as "Jovan Hristofora Rafailović" (Jovan, son of Hristofor, Rafailović). In major museums, galleries and church treasuries, among the unsigned icons attributed to the school of the Bay of Cattaro and dated to the middle and second half of the nineteenth century there are a considerable number of works that may be identified either as painted by Jovan alone or jointly with his father Hristofor (Belgrade, Dubrovnik, Split, Nalježići, Sutvara).

The last offspring of the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family of painters was Ivo, Hristofor's younger son. Ivo was born in Sutvara on 28 August 1829. He was appointed a deacon and ordained as a priest in 1855. Just like his brother Jovan, he primarily was a churchman, and he served as a priest in Uble in the Bishopric of the Bay of Cattaro Ivo was trained in icon-painting by his father Hristofor. He and his brother kept on assisting their father until the end of his life in 1854. In 1869, Ivo and Jovan Rafailović led the Grbalj uprising against Austria. Their house collapsed the same year and the icons in it were destroyed. Ivo died on 12 March 1900, and was buried next to his brother in the churchyard of St Barbara's at Sutvara. His artistic skills were rather modest and he did not sign a single icon. Accordingly, various

icons are more or less reliably attributed to him, e.g. the icon of the *Fountain of Life* from the treasury of the Serbian Orthodox church in Dubrovnik. The icons attributed to Ivo, with their naive, caricature-like, childish drawing incised into the surface, are dominated by stout figures with dark, almond-shaped bulging eyes and disproportionately large hands combined with dry colours on a gilded background. He was most probably skilled enough to carve icon frames with various simple ornaments. A large number of such unattributed pieces, usually dated to the middle or second half of the nine-teenth century, can be found in museum and gallery collections (National Museum in Belgrade, Cultural History Museum in Dubrovnik, Art Gallery in Split, National Museum at Cetinje, National Museum in Zadar, Museum of Herceg Novi, private collections).

The works of painters from the Bay of Kotor show peculiar iconographic features in the scenes such as the Annunciation featuring the dove of the Holy Spirit, the Black-Faced Virgin Mary, Virgin Skopiotissa, Virgin Mary the Unwithering Rose, Coronation of the Holy Virgin, Holy Virgin the Fountain of Life, three-headed Holy Trinity, Divine Fatherhood and St Christopher the Cynocephalus, which make them unique and distinctive in the Orthodox Balkan world under Ottoman rule. The introduction of new themes and variations of the traditional thematic repertoire make this school of painting a distinctive phenomenon. A specific manner of painting devised by its members distinguishes this school from other contemporary phenomena in art. The organization of work of these painters of frescoes, icons and church furnishings, and masters of woodcarving, conformed to the principles of a guild. The workshop was headed by a *daskal* (teacher, master), a role that was passed down through generations, from father to son or to the most experienced icon-painter, so as to remain within the Dimitrijević-Rafailović family. Occasionally, young men who were not close relatives of the family (e.g. Maksim Tujković) were also trained at the workshop. Over time, they either became the most distinguished painters of their epoch, or remained anonymous, never signing even the works that they painted by themselves.

Despite the large number of surviving icons, it is difficult to systematize, date and attribute them reliably not only because they often lack a signature but also because several artists from various generations were involved in their production. However, a considerable number of signed works that have survived, apart from allowing attribution, reveal important information about the social structure of those who commissioned them. Numerous donor inscriptions on the icons from the Bay of Cattaro show that along with clerics, clan leaders — princes, wealthy merchants and artisans, and almost all local inhabitants, who jointly funded the decoration of a village church, were increasingly involved in the patronage of art. Try-

ing to satisfy the taste of their clients, the painters from the Bay of Kotor sometimes tended to lower the quality of their painting and woodcarving to the level of traditional patterns, but they would also enrich them with elements adopted from the art of Mount Athos, the Ionian Islands, Venice and Russia.

This indigenous regional school of painting, which spanned almost two centuries, is an extraordinarily valuable cultural and historical phenomenon in the artistic heritage of the Balkans. It bridged the gap between the waning late Byzantine tradition and the rise of Western European Baroque. The icon-painting school of the Bay of Cattaro, which preserved the features that made it unique, can be compared to the emergence, transformation and waning of the art of Serbian *zographs* and illuminators north of the Sava and Danube rivers, i.e. in the territory of the Metropolitanate of Sremski Karlovci (Karlowitz), after the Great Migration of the Serbs (1690). The differences between these phenomena resulted from the different circumstances in which the Serbs lived under Ottoman, Venetian and Habsburg rule. However, similarities in iconography and style, which were inspired by an urge to defend their own faith against proselytic pressures, considerably outweigh them in importance.

UDC 75.034(497.16 Kotor) 75.051/052].04"16/18" 75.071.1 Dimitrijević/Rafajlović

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