

WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THE 1876 *STEFANO* MANUSCRIPT?

Josko Petkovic

For over one hundred years the *Stefano* manuscript was a private document in the possession of the Baccich family and descendants. It told a story of the 1875 *Stefano* shipwreck as narrated by the shipwreck survivor and the founding family patriarch Miho Baccich. In these circumstances the question of authorship of the manuscript was immaterial and did not arise as an issue. However, with the publication of the manuscript the author's name, or names, need to be formally attributed to it. It turns out that this is not such a clear-cut matter.

As we shall see, all informed sources attributed the authorship, and the ownership, of the manuscript to Miho Baccich. But the manuscript itself was written by Canon Stjepan Skurla – a priest from Miho's hometown of Dubrovnik. The question then arises: should Skurla also be considered as an author of the manuscript, or, even as the sole author (as some would have it)?

Skurla was a historian, teacher, theologian and a minor Croatian author, with several works attributed to him in the Croatian Lexicon of authors.¹ He wrote the Abstract for the manuscript and recorded the details of the shipwreck in an objective third-person narrative while giving it the literary consistency by which we now know it. The Abstract begins as follows:

The sinking of the Austro-Hungarian Barque *Stefano* on the 27th day of October 1875 upon a submerged rock off the North West coast of Australia, the hardship suffered by the survivors of the catastrophe and the tragic end of eight persons who died during the first three months, and finally the struggles of the survivors rescued by the natives, are the subject of this book derived from information given verbally by the shipwrecked *Bačić* and *Jurić*.²

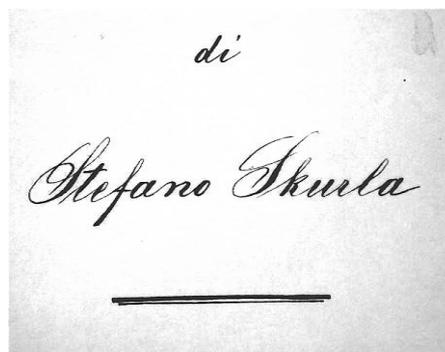
In this translation of the Abstract, Skurla, arguably, has a claim on the authorship of the manuscript as the two survivors can be considered as simple, albeit interesting, informants. However, the actual term that Skurla used to describe how he received the information from Baccich and Jurich is *dettato*, which translated simply means “dictated” – that is to say the book was derived from information dictated to Skurla. In this interpretation of the Abstract, Skurla is a mere scribe taking down all that he is told. Either translation is possible and we may need to look at other contextual information to decide which one is correct.

Skurla himself is self-effacing of his effort and certainly does not attribute the authorship to himself explicitly or implicitly. The contrary is the case. In the second sentence of the Abstract, Skurla tell us to look for nothing more in the book than a simple presentation of facts narrated to him by the two survivors Baccich and Jurich. In his words:

This book does not pretend to be anything more than a simple presentation of all that happened to them, what they saw and experienced in a region until then unexplored, supported by the reassurance that the data related to the natives, their culture, beliefs and nature is accurate, even if virtually unknown by the rest of the world.

In essence Skurla identifies himself here as a mere scribe who bears witness for those who had told him their story. In the semi-illiterate world of the late nineteenth century Europe this arrangement was not all that unusual, especially for those who wished their narratives to be sanctified by the authority of the church and arguably by God as well. This is why Skurla is able to reassure us “that the data related to the natives, their culture, beliefs and nature is accurate, even if virtually unknown by the rest of the world.”

Only a man of God can give us such reassurance with some degree of believability given that belief was his profession. In this context his name and his signature needed to be on the final document to guarantee its veracity in the same way that the signature of a Justice of the Peace is required on our statutory declarations. The original manuscript in Rijeka Maritime Museum, Croatia, indeed has Stjepan (*Stefano*) Skurla's name on it in the official Italian language.



The circumstances that Skurla describes in the Abstract are consistent with the description that Baccich's grandson, Gustave Rathe, sets out in his book *The Wreck Of The Barque Stefano Off The North West Cape Of Australia In 1875* in which he tells how the young seventeen-year-old Miho came to write the story:

My father engaged a Jesuit scholar, Father Skurla, of Dubrovnik, to help me write a record of the shipwreck. Jurich and I met with Father Skurla at the Jesuit rectory several times and told our story in detail.³ It was good to talk to someone who was so sympathetic and understanding. The record he made of our recollection was accurate, and Jurich and I both liked it. The original was for my father and one copy was made for my Uncle Nicholas, owner of the *Stefano*.⁴

In these circumstances the question of authorship is resolved with the ownership of the manuscript. Skurla was commissioned by Miho's parents to record their son's story. We have many such arrangements today with celebrity "autobiographies", which are written by ghost writers who have no legal claim on the book's authorship. Hence, the authorship as well as the ownership of the manuscript belongs to Miho Baccich. The fact that almost every significant detail of the story comes from Miho's own experience gives an ethical imperative to such a claim.

All the available evidence supports this position. The manuscript does not appear in any official references to Skurla prior to the publication of Rathe's book in 1990, nor does anyone knowledgeable of Skurla's work consider him as the author of this manuscript. The half-manuscript copy, which today can be found in Dubrovnik's Library of Knowledge, provides a good case in point. The existence of this half-copy is listed in the Library's foreign manuscripts catalogue published in 1997. What is most illuminating about this catalogue entry is that the author is not given or alluded to – indicating that the author is unknown.⁵ This is in spite of the fact that Stjepan Skurla was a local writer and is referenced as the author of other works in this catalogue. In the very small town of Dubrovnik this omission of Skurla's name is in itself indirect evidence that the manuscript was a private document, unfamiliar to anyone else except the Baccich family which had commissioned it.

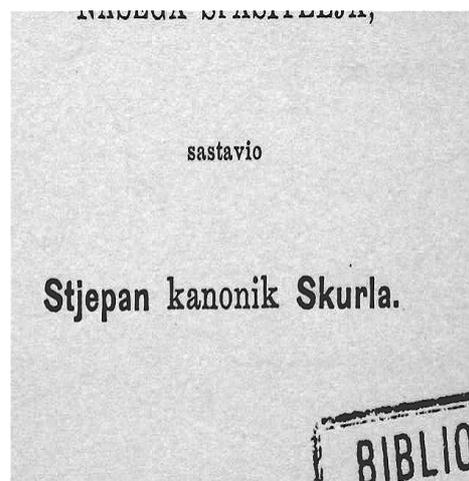


Postcard of Dubrovnik
Jesuit Church (centre) and the old Dubrovnik High School (centre-right)
are the two most prominent buildings.

But whatever Skurla tells us in the Abstract, the image of a young seventeen-year-old Miho Baccich narrating his story, which included an act of cannibalism, to an older historian and a priest is almost cinematic. It is easy to picture the young Baccich and Jurich confessing and reciting from memory details of their plight to a wise and studious Skurla who carefully writes down their verbal presentations while ensuring that all details are in chronological order. In this perspective the presence of Canon Stjepan Skurla grows large in our imagination and, in turn, it is most tempting to ascribe to him more of an authorship role than he himself does. We could take this fictional sketch further and imagine Skurla labouring tirelessly on the manuscript and working from scant information narrated to him by the two youths. Under these circumstances we cannot help but think – on moral and ethical grounds alone – that Skurla made a major contribution to the authorship of the manuscript, no matter what subsequently happened to it and no matter who actually commissioned it or possessed it.

As tempting as this picture is, I would argue that it is broadly in error as there is little evidence to support it. What evidence there is points to the fact that Miho Baccich is the primary author of the manuscript and his youthfulness should not in any way diminish his credentials for such a role.

To begin with, Skurla's own writing was of a theological nature. There is no evidence that he had any detailed knowledge of Australia and there is nothing in his writing that even remotely suggests that he had such knowledge.⁶ In 2000, I examined the Jesuit library in Dubrovnik which Skurla would have frequented and which is attached to the Jesuit rectory. The library is a treasure trove of manuscripts and books but there is no evidence of any books on Australia for the



period in question. The same can be said of other Dubrovnik libraries including the above-mentioned Library of Knowledge. This in itself is not too surprising as there were not many books on Australia in existence at that time.

But problems with Skurla's authorship really come to the fore when we consider the practicalities of writing the manuscript in the time available to do it. The manuscript is not dated but the latest entry is for October 1876. This final sentence tells us that Miho returned to his family in Dubrovnik exactly a year after the shipwreck.⁷ The manuscript has no postscript, or an update of any kind, which suggests that it was indeed completed in 1876 and this is the completion date that is normally attributed to it by most commentators. The implication of this is that the good Canon would have had about two months to pen a 276-page manuscript that is most detailed and knowledgeable of its subject, its geography, its biology, its history and the unknown customs of its indigenous population.

It would greatly stretch our credulity to think that Skurla made anything more than a superficial contribution to these details in the limited time there was in 1876 to write the *Stefano* manuscript. For him, the task in hand would have been as unfamiliar as writing about the dark side of the Moon. Furthermore, there are obvious practicalities to be addressed, namely, how much serious and detailed writing can a priest do in a few months leading up to Christmas.

To write a 276-page manuscript in the last two months of 1876 would have required Skurla to write five pages or around 800 – 1000 words a day for 60 days. Even with this kind of effort, it could only have been accomplished if it was also accompanied by sixty or so (i.e. daily) visits from one or both survivors to provide the content found in the manuscript – content which, as already indicated, is too detailed to be authored without the full knowledge of the Australian terrain, the height of the hills and trees encountered, the size of the caves, the nature of the undergrowth and other innumerable details that make the manuscript what it is. Furthermore, Skurla could not just write down any five pages of dictation a day. To write 5 meaningful pages of dictation a day, these five pages had to be organised, structured, written and edited beforehand.

This is another way of saying that there had to be another “manuscript” used by Baccich and Jurich to dictate quickly and efficiently to Skurla. Skurla, in turn, could have used this un-attributed “manuscript” to complete his own manuscript which he finally produced in 1876. It is only with the existence of such a prior “manuscript” that the conditions outlined in the Abstract are conceivable.

Is there any evidence that Miho Baccich or Ivan Jurich collected relevant information and that either of them had intended to write about their experiences? Indeed there is. Skurla himself alluded to such an activity in the third and the last sentence of his Abstract:

It must be observed that though, at the end of January 1876, the survivors lost track of all days, yet after their rescue, they succeeded in fully re-establishing dates by comparisons with the length and time of the various trips and meetings with the aborigines, as every episode recounted by one of the two survivors corresponds with that narrated by the other.

Even with a good memory for details, the comparison of times and dates described above would have been possible only if someone wrote down the numerous dates, times, topology, biology and related activities for posterity, for reports and for any other official and non-official purposes. We know that Miho started to document his experience as soon as he arrived at Fremantle. There is his substantial signed

statement to the Preliminary Court of Inquiry held at the Customs House, Fremantle, on 8 May 1876 – three days after he arrived at Fremantle.⁸ We also have his letter to the Governor of Western Australia seeking assistance for a return journey home.⁹ We also know that the tale of the *Stefano* shipwreck was narrated at the fundraising events on 8 June 1876 and then again on 16 June. Each one of these instances presents a young man with good literary and presentational skills for all his 17 years of life.¹⁰

The most illuminating evidence of Miho's writing intentions is the substantial letter he wrote home to his parents in Dubrovnik, a mere eleven days after his arrival at Fremantle¹¹ (Appendix 1). A quick glance at this 1200-word letter, which briefly outlines the *Stefano* tragedy and its aftermath, makes it evident that it contains the core of the future manuscript. The letter should also convince us that its author did not need anyone's help to write an account of the shipwreck, as he was evidently quite capable of doing it himself. In this letter Miho also tells his parents that he will write another letter to his uncle Nikola Baccich – the owner of the ill-fated *Stefano*.¹² In time, he repeated the same procedure with the finished manuscript itself. Only two copies were ever made. One remained with Miho and his family and the other was dispatched to his uncle Nikola Baccich.

There is no evidence that Ivan (*Giovanni*) Jurich wrote anything during this time. At the Preliminary Court of Inquiry into the shipwreck at the Customs House, Fremantle, on 8 May 1876, Ivan Jurich, through the interpreter, Captain John Vincent, added just one sentence to the signed statement presented by Miho Baccich. This sentence simply stated that he was an AB on board the *Stefano* and had “heard and understood what had been said by Michael Baccich – and cannot give any further or better account of the catastrophe”. This small statement is not signed but has a cross in place of the signature, designated by the Collector of Customs as “His Mark”, suggesting that Jurich was probably unable to read or write or sign his own name.¹³ Neither is there any evidence that Ivan Jurich wrote anything on the shipwreck once he returned to his hometown of Oskorušno. This was confirmed by four of his immediate descendants in the interviews I recorded with them in 2000.¹⁴

1895

Giovanni Jurich. Part I was
 an A.B. on board the "Stefano."
 and I have heard ~~what~~ and
 understood what has been said
 by Michele Baccich. - and cannot
 give any further or better account
 of the catastrophe. -

His
 Giovanni + Jurich
 Mark

The Court do not consider it necessary
 to take any further evidence in this
 matter.

Worley Wilson
 Collector of Customs
 at Fremantle F.T.

Statement by Ivan Jurich
 to the Preliminary Court of Inquiry,
 Customs House, Fremantle, 8 May 18

We also know that, of the two survivors, only Miho Baccich was able to communicate in English. When Charles Tuckey rescued the two castaways in his cutter *Jessie* it was Miho Baccich who was able to communicate with him in broken English.¹⁵ Miho apparently picked up some rudimentary English words through his friendship with the 12-year-old English boy Harry Groiss aboard the *Stefano*. The two would have had around three months for such linguistic exchanges before Harry was taken by the waves on the night of the shipwreck.

More evidence of Miho's writing intentions comes to us from his subsequent correspondence with Captain Tuckey. Baccich first wrote to Tuckey in January 1894 from New Orleans. His letter again indicates good writing skills and an ease of expression.¹⁶ But it is a letter from Charles Tuckey to Miho Baccich on 26 June 1894 which contains the most precise evidence of Miho's writing intentions. In this letter Tuckey indicates in no uncertain terms that publishing of a manuscript on the shipwreck was exactly what young Baccich had in mind as soon as he was rescued. So much so that Tuckey had expected to receive a copy:

When here you spoke of getting a pamphlet printed of your adventures on the N.W. Cape, and although I have not received a copy of that, it was with great surprise and pleasure that I received your letters.¹⁷

If Baccich did intend to write about his “adventures” he would have had access to much local knowledge in Fremantle to help him reconstruct the six months of his life as a castaway. Some of this reconstruction work was already underway in the weeks following his arrival at Fremantle. Each reconstruction becomes more detailed and probably more accurate as new context is included. For example, in the statement made to the Preliminary Court of Inquiry at the Customs House, at Fremantle on 8 May, Miho told the court – bewildered as he must have been after six months in the wilderness – that the castaways walked towards the Gascoyne River for six days.¹⁸ His letter home, a week later, is more detailed and the total time of the journey towards the Gascoyne, with rest-stops, is given as 12 days. Both are different from the final manuscript in which, with all stops and starts, the journey extends to 16 days.¹⁹

Some additional dates and sources of information in Western Australia that Miho would have found potentially useful when recreating the chronology of events include the following:

- The cyclone on Christmas Day was an easy point of reference for Miho. The damage and the loss of life caused by this cyclone was widespread and was well recorded in the local press.²⁰
- The death of his eight companions would have been another measure of time, as were the significant activities involving indigenous Australians. These events are foregrounded in the Abstract as being the primary anchors of the narrative dates.
- Sightings of ships would have been another point of reference on which to anchor his chronology of events. It turned out that these sightings were of Tuckey’s cutter *Jessie*.²¹
- Charles Tuckey was told what had happened by his Aboriginal informant Namman. This information would have been the topic of many conversations following the rescue.²²
- Two members of the Jinigudire tribe, *Tondogoro* and *Cincigo*, came to Fremantle with Tuckey and stayed at his Mandurah property. These indigenous Australians would have been ready-made sources of information to Miho, especially in the context of the indigenous language. For example, we do know that they provided Tuckey with the names of the tribesmen who helped the two castaways. We also learn from Tuckey’s correspondence which one of these tribesmen had had previous contacts with colonial settlements.²³
- Miho made additional trips to the North West Cape with Captain John Vincent (aka *Vicko Vukovic*) who was familiar with the coast and who was able to communicate with the two mariners in their native language.²⁴ The two castaways stayed with Vincent in Western Australia for almost four months. One can only imagine the countless conversations that passed between them.
- There were three official visits to the shipwreck site by Captain Walcott. Miho Baccich was with Walcott on the last journey when they met with their indigenous benefactors. Walcott would have been another rich source of information.²⁵

Altogether Miho would have had six months, between 18 April and October 1876, to recall, collect and record details on his experiences in a notebook of some sort. It is only by his noting, collecting and recording of such details that we can account for the nuanced descriptions that are evident in the final manuscript.

One could also add that writing down details of the shipwreck would have been quite natural for Miho as this form of writing would have been an element of his training as a naval cadet. Some of this training can still be read in the “voice” of the final manuscript, which so often reads like a ship’s log with its specific and precise observational details. This is not in the style of someone aspiring towards a literary status but of someone who most likely would have stopped writing his “log” once the ship was in port.

If we accept this scenario there is still one question which needs to be addressed: If such a prior “manuscript” did exist, why was it not mentioned by Skurla in his Abstract? Why did he stipulate that the information was dictated? The answer to this may be simple. One aim of writing the manuscript would have been to have the story validated by both survivors and in the presence of Skurla himself, so that “every episode recounted by one of the two survivors corresponds with that narrated by the other”.²⁶ Ivan Jurich most likely could not read and write and could not confirm any written evidence unless it was read out to him. That is to say, Skurla could only confirm that both survivors agreed on the sequence of the events if these were presented verbally. One can imagine this dictation being similar to Miho’s presentation at the Customs House in Fremantle described earlier, with Miho narrating the facts – probably from his notes – and with Ivan Jurich confirming this verbal version of the story. In essence the final manuscript would have been heard as a dictation from Miho’s “manuscript” but then re-written by a man of God and with his authority. Skurla would have had around two additional months to edit Miho’s “manuscript”. Most likely this editing would have involved writing a third-person narrative from Miho’s first-person observations and adding any nuances picked up from the oral delivery. Finally, Skurla would have read the manuscript to both men to confirm their approval before he delivered it to those who had commissioned him to write it.

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Nothing more is heard of the *Stefano* manuscript in the press for over sixty years until 1937, when Father Niko Stuk again recalled the *Stefano* shipwreck in an issue of the journal *Adriatic Sentry (Jadranska Straza)*.²⁷ He did this while reflecting on the votive paintings in Dubrovnik’s Our Lady of Mercy Church. Among these paintings was one by a noted votive artist, Ivankovic, depicting the two *Stefano* castaways and the cutter *Jessie* on the North West Cape.²⁸



It seems that this painting caught Stuk's eye – enough for him to write about it. The story that he subsequently wrote was speculative and based on memories of some Dubrovnik elders.²⁹ These memories could best be described as wild exaggerations with little connection to reality or the truth of the shipwreck. From these exaggerations alone it is possible to conclude that Miho's manuscript was indeed a very private document commissioned by his parents and that the details of the shipwreck as narrated by Baccich and Jurich to Skurla had not reached the wider public some 60 years after the event, even in such a small place as Dubrovnik. What is also interesting about Stuk's story is that, whatever rumours he was able to pick up about the manuscript in Dubrovnik, these presented Miho as the author:

According to reports from some of our Dubrovnik elders, he (Miho Baccich) wrote in great detail of his unfortunate experience and the privation he suffered, but in spite of the urging from all his friends, he refused to have his manuscript published.³⁰

Stuk returns to the *Stefano* story in a 1938 issue of *Adriatic Sentry*. This time he brings to his readers additional information which indicates that he had now read the manuscript.³¹ This 1938 publication was in fact the very first public occasion that an account of the *Stefano* manuscript was presented by someone who had actually read it. This first public reference to the manuscript is also illuminating as it again attributes the authorship and ownership of the manuscript to Miho Baccich. More importantly, Stuk's narrative implies that Miho kept a notebook of his experiences and that it was from the content of this notebook that Skurla arranged (*sastavio*) the manuscript as we know it. Stuk writes under the title: "A Few More Details on the Shipwreck of Our Mariners in 1875 On the Desolate Coast of Australia":

Regarding the article in *Adriatic Sentry*, issue no 4, 1937, I am now able to bring you additional details and corrections about the demise of our tall ship barque *Stefano* which ran aground and was wrecked on the North West coast of Australia on 27 October 1875.

I have extracted these details from the handwritten book by the surviving naval cadet, now qualified mariner, Miho Baccich from Dubrovnik, who at that time recorded (*pobiljezio*) these details, from which a description of this event was arranged (*sastavio*) by now deceased Dubrovnik priest (*kanonik*), high school theologian and our own historical author Stjepan Skurla.³² This manuscript is to be found with the sister of the shipwrecked Baccich, married to the Susak attorney-in-law, Mr Rikard Lenac, to whom I here extend my sincere thanks for making this article possible. I can also add that, from this manuscript, I am now in total possession of all detailed facts, and to that

extent corrections, regarding this tragic event, described in the fore-mentioned issue of *Adriatic Sentry*.³³

Stuk indicates his nuanced knowledge of the manuscript by noting that the Aboriginal benefactors had some difficulties with Croatian first names – they addressed Miho as *Mir* and Ivan(e) Jurich as *Tigone*.

The image shows a close-up of a handwritten manuscript page. The text is written in a cursive script. The word 'Tigone' is clearly visible and underlined. Other words are partially obscured or less legible due to the handwriting and the angle of the photograph.

Page 204 of Rijeka Manuscript

The person who provided Stuk with a copy of Miho's manuscript was Miho's sister Ina (Baccich) Lenac. Ina and Rikard Lenac had three daughters: Nela, Divka and Danica.³⁴ In his book *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, Gustave Rathe tells us that Ina's copy of the manuscript was subsequently given to the Rijeka Maritime Museum, Croatia, a gift from Danica Lenac Presic – Baccich's niece.

In the mid 1970s, the *Stefano* story was serialised in the weekly Yugoslav magazine *Arena* by Aleksander Veljic, who used the Rijeka manuscript as his primary narrative frame. Veljic made the story more accessible to his readers by writing in Dalmatian vernacular and by using information from a variety of sources including the already mentioned Father Niko Stuk, Josip Luetich, Director of Dubrovnik Maritime Museum, as well as a well-known writer, Ivan Lukich-Lupis.³⁵ To give his story an additional human touch Veljic managed to find and interview Nela and Danica Lenac, two of Baccich's nieces still living in Rijeka. The *Arena* serialization in turn gave rise to an English translation in Western Australia by Julia Leahy in 1977. Both *Arena's* translation and Leahy's English translation attribute the ownership and the authorship of the manuscript to Miho Baccich. The words are very similar to those used by Niko Stuk:

This story ... was taken from a handwritten book by Miho Baccich, a cadet from the barque *Stefano*. Baccich was one of the seamen who managed to swim ashore at Point Cloates, Western Australia, after *Stefano* was wrecked in October 1875. On returning to his homeland, he told his story to historian Stefan [sic] Skurla. Shortly after Baccich's return to his homeland he left for New Orleans, but prior to his departure he gave his original copy to his sister, Ines Lenac. Baccich's nieces today live in Zagreb.³⁶ They remember very well the story told them by their mother, Ines Lenac.³⁷



Ina (Baccich) Lenac
Miho's sister and the keeper of the second
copy of the *Stefano* manuscript



Ina's daughters Danica (left) and Nela (right).
Danica subsequently gave the second copy of Miho's manuscript to the Rijeka Maritime Museum

Around this time, Miho Baccich (*Bacic*) had a substantial entry in the *Croatian Biographical Lexicon*.³⁸ This Lexicon entry reiterates the same authorship arrangement as outlined by all previous researchers and commentators:

On the basis of Baccich's notes (*biljezaka*), historian and Dubrovnik's Canon, Stjepan Skurla arranged (*sastavio*) a manuscript of their experiences.³⁹

The manuscript details also came to Western Australia through Neven Smoje – one of the foremost researchers on the *Stefano* shipwreck in Australia. Gustave Rathe acknowledged his substantial, generous and selfless contribution to his book.⁴⁰ Around 1977 Smoje arranged for a translation of the Rijeka manuscript from a copy sent to him by Nenad Gol – a journalist from Zagreb. Smoje then used this translation as the basis for his paper *Shipwrecked on the North-West Coast: The Ordeal of the Survivors of the Stefano*, which was presented to the Royal Western Australian Historical Society in 1978. On this occasion the paper was read by John Honniball, the great-grand son of Charles Tuckey, and himself a useful primary source of information on the *Stefano* story.

In this paper Smoje also surmises that there must have been an earlier Baccich “manuscript”:

Although Baccich himself must have drafted or dictated the story, it was actually recorded or edited by a prominent Dubrovnik author, Stefano Skurla.⁴¹

He further suggests – probably for reasons similar to those outlined above – that the writing of the manuscript took longer than the few months of 1876 and he suggests that the completion date may have been in 1877.⁴² In this context he gives us another interpretation of how Baccich and Skurla collaborated on the writing of the manuscript and in this interpretation Baccich, once again, is given an active role:

He must have spent many hours either in writing or in talking with the editor of his story, and for Stefano Skurla it was a decided change of subject matter after his other works concerning Dubrovnik’s religious and architectural heritage.

At first glance this seems like a most reasonable proposition as it resolves many issues to do with the time needed to complete the writing process. The only problem with this proposition is that there is no evidence to support it. In fact there are quite a few factors that work against a 1877 completion, including the following:

- If the manuscript was finished in 1877 one would expect some kind of 1877 postscript as indicated earlier. There is no such postscript, which suggests that it was completed shortly after the 1876 date given in the manuscript.
- One can imagine many reasons for an early completion of the manuscript, including reports on the shipwreck for general insurance and other official purposes that would have been required by Miho’s uncle Nikola Baccich, the owner of the *Stefano*.⁴³ Although we have no direct evidence, one would have expected Miho’s uncle to have cabled Miho in Fremantle requesting a detailed account on the shipwreck as soon as he came to know that he was alive and well.
- The most pressing reason for an early completion would have been for the purpose of notifying the parents of 15 deceased sailors. Miho’s uncle would have wanted this information within days of his return if not earlier.⁴⁴ The need for this information would have been outstandingly obvious to both survivors as well. Along the rather thinly populated coast of Dalmatia everyone knew one another and the two castaways would have been inundated by the relatives of the deceased sailors wanting to know what had happened to

their loved ones and what had caused their misfortune. One can imagine Miho writing an account of the shipwreck prior to his return home for this reason alone.

- Soon after his return from Australia, Miho Baccich left his hometown Dubrovnik for distant Rijeka to complete his maritime studies. He completed his lieutenant (*porucnik*) course in 1877 and his captaincy in 1879.⁴⁵ It is questionable if he would have had much time to spend on the writing of the manuscript in 1877.
- Skurla died in Dubrovnik on 30 November 1877 of pulmonary pneumonia at the young age of 45.⁴⁶ At the time of his death he was preparing three more religious manuscripts for publication.⁴⁷ With Miho some distance away in Rijeka, at this time it seems unlikely that their collaboration went on in 1877. The other alternative is that Miho kept editing the manuscript after Skurla's death in 1877. Although this too is possible there is no evidence for it.
- Miho Baccich was alive and well in 1920 when his wife, Angelina translated his story. In her translation she gives no indication that this process went on beyond 1876. In her translation, Angelina also confirms that her husband Miho was the primary informant – she did this presumably with her husband's approval:

Michael Baccich and Ivan Jurich were the sole survivors of the ill-fated barque, and immediately after their rescue, while the facts were fresh in his mind, Baccich narrated to a priest of *Ragusa* (Dubrovnik) (the late Father Skurla) all of the events set forth in the story – the kindly priest making a faithful record of the same.⁴⁸

If the manuscript was completed in 1876, as all the available evidence suggests, then the contribution made by Miho Baccich would have been proportionally greater and that of Canon Skurla proportionally smaller.

One scenario that fits all the above facts is as follows: Miho Baccich had intended to write his own shipwreck story. We know this from his correspondence with Charles Tuckey. From the letter he wrote to his parents a mere 11 days after he was brought to Fremantle we know that he was capable of writing such a story. We also know that this 1200-word letter already contained the core content for a subsequent manuscript. We also know that Baccich wrote a similar letter to his uncle and the owner of the *Stefano*. Baccich would have been hard pressed to provide a more detailed report on the shipwreck to his uncle quickly – if only because 15 other mariners perished and their families needed to be informed. Miho's own "manuscript" report may well have been in place when he landed back home in October 1876, some six months after his rescue by Charles Tuckey. A report from just one survivor would not have been enough for an official report. Such a report required verification by both survivors, which is probably one reason why Skurla was invited to write it. With his own "manuscript" in hand Miho would have been able to "dictate" its content efficiently to Skurla with Ivan Jurich also present. It had to be this way as Ivan Jurich most likely could not read or write and thus could not confirm any written evidence

unless it was read out to him. We can also surmise that a “manuscript” of this kind was necessary for Skurla to complete his own 276-page manuscript in 1876.

In these circumstances what answer can be given to the question: “Who wrote the *Stefano* manuscript?”

Formally the authorship and ownership of the manuscript belong to Miho Baccich. But morally and ethically the answer is not so clear cut. In all likelihood the authors were most probably both Miho Baccich and Stjepan Skurla, and in that order of priority. This is the authorship I have attributed to the present publication.

NOTES AND REFERENCES – WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THE 1876 *STEFANO* MANUSCRIPT?

- 1 Stjepan Skurla was born in Dubrovnik on 4 March 1832 and died in Dubrovnik on 30 November 1877. He studied philosophy in Dubrovnik, theology in Zadar and Croatian literature in Graz. He became a priest in 1853. His works include *Sveti Vlaho, Biskup I Dubrovacki Obranitelj (St Blaise, Bishop and Defender of Dubrovnik)* (1871), *Mocnik Stolne Crkve Dubrovacke (Treasury of Dubrovnik Cathedral)* (1868), *Zemljopis Palestine (Geography of Palestine)*, *Bogoljubna Zabava (Blessed Play)* (1872), *Cenni Storice su Ragusa (History of Dubrovnik)* (1876), *Svibanj Posvecana bl. Dr. Mariji (January Dedications to Blessed Mary)* (1876). See Zuzul, Ante; *Hrvatski Leksikon*, II L–Z (Zagreb, Naklada Leksikona, 1997), p. 430.
- 2 All references to the original *Stefano* manuscript in this text are references to the manuscript *The Wreck Of The Austro-Hungarian Barque Stefano On The North West Coast Of Australia*, translated into English by Angelina Baccich in 1920, edited with analysis by Josko Petkovic and cross-referenced with pages of the Rijeka manuscript.
- 3 From 1868 till his death in 1877 Skurla taught religious studies at Dubrovnik High School (*gimnazija*) which in his time was within the walled city itself and next to the prominent Jesuit Church. The first floor of the school had a passageway to the Jesuit library and to the Jesuit rectory attached to the Church. Around 1876 this passageway was accessible to both staff and students of the High School. It is highly likely that Skurla, as a scholar and an author, would have used the Jesuit library. As a teacher and a priest he may well have consulted with his students in this library and possibly in the Jesuit rectory itself. This is one possible explanation why Rathe in his book *The Wreck Of The Barque Stefano Off The North West Cape Of Australia In 1875* identifies Skurla as a Jesuit priest when, in fact, he was not a Jesuit but belonged to the conventional Canonical order.
- 4 Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck Of The Barque Stefano Off The North West Cape Of Australia In 1875* (Calisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. 97.
- 5 Urban, Mirjana; *Rukopisi Znanstvene Knjiznice Dubrovnik: Knjiga II Rukopisi Na Stranim Jezicima* (Dubrovnik 1997), Manuscript 352 designated [Brod *Stefano*” – 1876], p. 154.
- 6 See note (i) above and Zuzul, Ante; *Hrvatski Leksikon*, II L-Z (Zagreb, Naklada Leksikona, 1997), p. 430.
- 7 The original manuscript in this publication, p. 262.

- 8 State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA). Evidence given by Michael Baccich (J. Vincent translator) at the Preliminary Court of Inquiry into the wreck of the *Stefano*, at the Custom House, Fremantle, 8 May 1876, C.S.R. 844, fol. 78. First quoted in Smoje, Neven; “Shipwrecked on the North-West Coast: The Ordeal of the Survivors of the *Stefano*”, in *Early Days*, Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Volume 8, Part 2, 1978, p. 44.
- 9 SROWA. Letter from Michael Baccich to Governor of WA, CSR 844/133-4.
- 10 For details see Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck Of The Barque Stefano Off The North West Cape Of Australia In 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), pp. 94-5.
- 11 First published by Luetic, Josip; “Katastrofa barka *Stefano*” (“The Barque *Stefano* Catastrophe”), *Pomorstvo*, 10 (1955), No. 1&2, pp. 31-32. The original letter was held in Dubrovnik Maritime Museum but is now apparently lost. The English translation of the letter is given in Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck Of The Barque Stefano Off The North West Cape Of Australia In 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), pp. 86-91.
- 12 According to R.F. Barbalic, these two letters had a very similar content. See Barbalic, Radoica F.; “Nasi Slavni Jedrenjaci: Bark *Stefano*” (“Our Glorious Sailing ships: Barque *Stefano*”), *Pomorstvo*, 1958, p. 246.
- 13 SROWA. Statement from evidence given at the Court of Preliminary Inquiry into the wreck of the *Stefano* (J. Vincent translator), Fremantle 8 May 1876, C.S.R. 844, folio 80 of 75-80.
- 14 These interviews are with the author and will be published in time.
- 15 Honniball, J.H.M., “The Tuckeys of Mandurah”, in *Early Days*, Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Volume 5, Part 8. 1961, p. 22-23.
- 16 Baccich, Miho, Letter to Charles Tuckey, 9 January 1894, WA State Archives, Battye Library microfilm, Acc. 554A.
- 17 First quoted by Honniball, J.H.M.; “The Tuckeys of Mandurah”, in *Early Days*, Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Volume 5, Part 8. 1961, p. 24. This was followed by Smoje, Neven; “Shipwrecked on the North-West Coast: The Ordeal of the Survivors of the *Stefano*”, in *Early Days*, Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Volume 8, Part 2. 1978, p. 46. Also quoted in Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australian in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. 108.
- 18 SROWA – Reference No: 36 C.S.R. 844 Folios 75-80, Colonial Secretary’s Office, Correspondence Received.
The main castaways group did walk for approximately six days until they reached Points E and F on the manuscript map. Because these two localities were close to one another and both had water, they became the new base for the castaways. They stayed here for the next three months and during this time they ventured further south as well as north and east.
- 19 The final manuscript brings up many interesting questions regarding the castaways’ journey south. Some of these issues are addressed in Cramer, Max; “Tracking the

- Crew of The Barque *Stefano* Wrecked At Ningaloo”, in *Treasures, Tragedies and Triumphs on the Batavia Coast*, (Perth, Scott Four Colour Prints, 2001), pp. 263-274.
- 20 The damage caused by the cyclone on December 24 and 25, 1875 was reported by the *West Australian Times* on 14 January, 1876. Four ships and fifty-nine lives were lost in the Exmouth Gulf area. Quoted in Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. 38.
- 21 Page 242 of the original manuscript in this publication.
- 22 SROWA No: 36 C.S.R. 844 Folio 81.
- 23 SROWA No: 36 C.S.R. 844 Folios 81-82.
- 24 See the original manuscript in this publication, pp.253-261 and Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. 84ff.
- 25 Details of these searchers are well documented in Henderson, G. and K. J.; *Unfinished Voyages: Western Australian Shipwrecks 1851-1880*, (Perth, UWA Press, 1988), pp.175-183. Also in SROWA: *Stefano – police file on the wreck of the vessel in 1875*, SROWA, Cons 129 (AN5/6), File 23/412, 19/5/76.
- 26 Abstract of the original manuscript in this publication.
- 27 Stuk, Niko; “Brodolom Nasih Pomoraca iz 1876” (“The Shipwreck of our Mariners in 1876”), *Jadranska Straza*, 1937, No.4, pp.144-145
- 28 Gustave Rathe in his book *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. 98, tells us that the painting was also commissioned by Miho’s father in thanksgiving for his son’s survival. For more details see Kisic, Anica; “Zavjetne slike 19 i 20. stoljeca u crkvi Gospe od milosrdja u Dubrovniku” (“Votive Paintings from 19th and 20th Century in Dubrovnik’s Church of Our Lady of Mercy”), *Pomorski zbornik*, (1974), 12, pp. 538-539.
- 29 Stuk seems unaware that Miho Baccich was interviewed in New Orleans by a journalist from Zagreb, Croatia. In this interview Baccich talked extensively about the *Stefano* shipwreck. He died a week after this interview on 12 December 1935 at the age of 76. See Pejovic, L.M.; *Yugoslavs in the South U.S.A.* (New Orleans, Damerson-Pierson, 1935). Quoted in Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. 112.
- 30 Stuk, Niko; “Brodolom Nasih Pomoraca iz 1876” (“The Shipwreck of Our Mariners in 1876”), *Jadranska Straza*, 1937, No. 4, p. 145.
- 31 Stuk, Niko; “Jos nekoji Podaci o Brodolom Nasih Pomoraca iz 1875 na pustosnoj obali Australije” (“A Few Additional Details on The Shipwreck of Our Mariner in 1875 On the Desolate Coast of Australia”), *Jadranska Straza*, 1938, No.11, pp. 465-468.
- 32 This sentence in Croatian runs as follows:

Ove podatke sam crpao is rukopisne knjige spasenog brodskog kadeta svrsenog nauticara Miha Bacica, Dubrovcanina, koje je podatke on u svoje doba pobiljezio, a opis dogadaja sastavio pokojni dubrovacki kanonik i kateketa gimnazije, domaci historicki pisac Stjepan Skurla.

- 33 Stuk, Niko; “Jos nekoji Podaci o Brodolom Nasih Pomoraca iz 1875 na pustosnoj obali Australije” (“A Few Additional Details on The Shipwreck of Our Mariner in 1875 On the Desolate Coast of Australia”), *Jadranska Straza*, 1938, No.11, p. 467.
- 34 Danica subsequently gave the second copy of Miho’s manuscript to Rijeka Museum. See Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), footnote p. 97.
- 35 After Niko Stuk, Leutic is the next significant author to write on the *Stefano* manuscript. See Leutic, J., “Katastrofa Barka *Stefano*”, in *Pomorstvo* (Rijeka), Vol.10, No. 1-2, 1955, p.32
- 36 There are a number of errors here. Only one of Miho’s nieces, Divka Sirola, lived in Zagreb in the mid 1970s. Nela and Danica lived in Rijeka. Also, the Rijeka manuscript is the copy made for Nikola Baccich, the owner of the *Stefano* and Miho’s uncle.
- 37 Julia Leahy’s translation is held in the Battye Library, catalogued under Baccich’s name, see Baccich, Miho; *The Wreck of the Stefano, April 1875 [i.e. October 1875] as related by Miho Baccich, a survivor of the ordeal*, (Perth, 1977), PR8818/STE/1 – 0/77
- 38 *Hrvatski Biografski Leksikon (Croatian Biographical Lexicon)*, No. 1, 1996.
This biographical entry lists some interesting cosmopolitan sources for Baccich and the *Stefano* shipwreck, including:
- A short notice on the *Stefano* shipwreck in the official *Annuario marittimo per l’anno 1877*, (Trieste), p. CXXVI.
 - Marchetti, Hermann; *Die Erdumseglung S.M. Schiffes “Saida” in den Jahren 1890, 1891, 1892*. Wien 1894, pp. 78-29.
 - Foretic, Vinko; “Udio nasih ljudi u stranim mornaricama I opcim pomorskim sbivanjima”, *Pomorski Zbornik*, 1, Zagreb, 1962, p. 328
 - Vujnovic, Milos M.; *Yugoslavs in Louisiana*, (Gretna, 1974), pp. 96-98.

All these references would have been available to Veljic when writing his *Arena* serialisation on the *Stefano* shipwreck.

- 39 *Hrvatski Biografski Leksikon (Croatian Biographical Lexicon)*, No. 1, 1996.
This sentence in Croatian reads as follows:
- Na temelju Bacicevih biljezaka, povjesnicar I dubrovacki kanonik Stijepo Skurla nastavio je opis njihovih doživljaja.*
- 40 Rathe, Gustave; *The Wreck of the Barque Stefano Off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875*, (Carlisle, WA, Hesperian Press, 1990), p. xi-xii.

- 41 Smoje, Neven; “Shipwrecked on the North-West Coast: The Ordeal of the Survivors of the *Stefano*”, in *Early Days*, Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Volume 8, Part 2. 1978, p. 35.
- 42 Smoje, Neven; “Shipwrecked on the North-West Coast: The Ordeal of the Survivors of the *Stefano*”, in *Early Days*, Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society, Volume 8, Part 2. 1978, p 46. In note 2 on page 47 he gives the publishing details of the manuscript with a question mark: (Dubrovnik, 1877?)
- 43 These official reports on the shipwreck may well have been the primary reason why Skurla recorded this manuscript in Italian, which was the language of trade and commerce at that time as well as the official language for the Dalmatian region, as mandated by the Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian government – even though 95% of the population of a city like Dubrovnik were Croats and Croatian speakers. Writing in Italian was somewhat unusual for Skurla as all but one of his many publications were in Croatian. The one exception is *Cenni Storice su Ragusa (History of Dubrovnik)*, which was another “official” publication.
- 44 The manuscript copy which was sent to Miho’s uncle, Nikola Baccich, in Rijeka had crew names underlined in pencil, suggesting that these personal details were of importance to someone – most likely to the person who was responsible for informing the families of the deceased men as to what happened to them.
- 45 Barbalic, Radoica F., “Nasi Slavni Jedrenjaci: Bark *Stefano*” (“Our Glorious Sailing Ships: Barque *Stefano*”), *Pomorstvo*, 1958, p. 246.
- 46 Zuzul, Ante; *Hrvatski Leksikon*, II. Svezak L-Z, (Zagreb, Naklada Leksikona 1996-7), p. 430.
- 47 The Croatian Lexicon of authors give these as: *Ostan Bozje Ljubavi, Korizmene propovijedi, Dubrovnik Ponovljen*, see Zuzul, Ante; *Hrvatski Leksikon*, II. Svezak L-Z, (Zagreb, Naklada Leksikona 1996-7), p. 430.
- 48 Abstract in this publication.

APPENDIX 1

Miho Baccich's letter to his parents from Fremantle

Fremantle, Western Australia
16 May 1876

Dear Parents

I'm sure that you as well as the others that know me, think of me as a dead man and believe me, I wasn't too far from that. Now I'll tell you about the terrible tragedy which occurred from 27 October 1875 until 15 April 1876.

Last year on the 27th October at 2 a.m., the bark *Stefano* under the command of Captain Vlaho *Miloslavić* wrecked on a reef near the North West Cape of Australia. As soon as the bark struck, it heeled over to the right side and in less than three hours the ship broke up completely into large and small wreckage. We did everything possible to launch the lifeboats, but it was all in vain because the sea was so rough. At the captain's order, a small dinghy was lowered over the stern and the captain, lieutenant, one seaman and I got aboard. But what happened then? The moment the boat touched the sea, it overturned. I was lucky to grab the keel; the others I never saw again. Thus frightened, in the dark night, I floated for ten hours. Finally I succeeded in getting ashore where, almost half dead, I threw myself on the bare, hot sand, hoping to see some of my companions. Soon I was able to see Karlo *Costa* floating on the ship's ladder, then the boatswain and other sailors came floating on various parts of the wrecked ship. Ten of us were saved. All half-dead, stretched out near me; we stayed there, naked, all the day, unable to walk because our feet were becoming swollen. The next day we decided to search for food and drink and we found various kinds of it floating up to us from the ship. We decided to build a hut out of the pieces broken off from the shipwreck. Next morning we saw some naked savages, men and women. At first we were frightened that they were cannibals but they didn't do us any harm.

Finally we went in search of a river which was only a few miles ahead as the officer had told us. We walked for six days and if we hadn't met some savages who helped us by showing us a water well, we would all have died of thirst in the middle of all that sand. We stayed by the water for three days and then we moved on because we were told we were only two miles distant from the river. We went on foot for three days but we didn't find any water so we turned back. We lived for three months eating only raw shellfish and having no fire to cook with. We drank plain water. You should know that we lost all our strength during that period and looked like skeletons; we were dying quickly. It stormed on Christmas and it lasted for three days. During that time we didn't have any food, as we couldn't find anything to eat.

Two men died at that time and after a few days six more also died. My companion and I survived probably because we had more strength. But later we, too, nearly died of hunger. When the black savages came again, we clasped our hands, begging them to give us something to eat. They were deeply concerned and took us with them and gave us some fish to eat and some water to drink. We stayed with them for three months, totally naked, looking for food almost all the time. We saw several ships passing by but they couldn't see us.

At last, on the 18th of April, 1876, an English cutter came near the coast. The photo, enclosed in this letter, shows the captain of this ship, Captain Charles Tuckey, who saved our lives. We sailed for seventeen days with them until we came to the port of Fremantle which has about six hundred inhabitants.

The English, hearing about our terrible accident, took us ashore and gave us food and money. In this small port, we found a rich gentleman from the Island of Sipan, who has been here for seventeen years. He is married and has five children. His present name is Mr. Vincent but his real name is Vicko Vukovic. He gave us some clothes and some money too. We are staying at his place now. His wife is treating us like her own children. He owns several ships. Soon we will embark on a schooner under his command for five liras per month.

He is sending two letters to his relatives because he hasn't heard anything about them and I beg you to inquire and let me know whether there are some of his relatives still alive so that he could help them.

The Englishman, the master of the cutter, after having questioned me about navigation, praised me in front of many fine gentlemen and asked if I would join his ship as an officer. I thanked him and told him I had already been assigned to a ship owned by my family, but I promised to visit him on my way back to Fremantle (which will be exactly in two months' time). He agreed and stated in front of all those gentlemen that he himself will pay for my officer's exam. Noticing his kindness, I asked him teasingly why did he favour me so. He replied: 'First of all, you're very professional and you're not like the local seamen who are always drunk which I really don't like.'

I now speak English very well. It was said here that the natives had been nourishing us so that they could eat us. All the citizens here are anxious to meet us, so they keep on inviting us for lunch or dinner. They have taken a lot of photos of us and everyone wants one. I'm sending you one which is not the best of my photos because my eyes are still hurting me. I'll also send you the photo of our countryman and his wife as well as the photo of all the survived crew of the *Stefano*, which is me and my friend Jurich from Pelješac.

I hope you're happy to know your son loves you and will never forget you.

You'll get my letters every four weeks because I can mail them only once a month. People here collected twenty liras (pounds) to help us. On the 21st of this month there will be a drama performed showing the terrible tragedy which occurred on the night of the 27th October 1875. The money collected from selling the tickets will also be given to us. As soon as we get it I'll let you know the exact sum. I'll write to my

Uncle Nikola today so that he too gets some news of me. Write to me whether the number of my brothers and sisters has increased.

We are immensely happy and very grateful for being saved, especially since the natives have previously eaten several persons. We could have died as well. The two of us were the first ones that have escaped from the natives' hands. I have so many things to write to you but it's enough for today. I'll write to you more about me in my next letter.

Give my regards to Uncle Ivan and his family as well as to all the others who thought me dead. Give my regards to Kate; has she gone to the nunnery yet? I've no space to write you more. Good bye,

Yours faithfully,
Miho Baccich

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