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## **GODPARENTS AND MARRIAGE WITNESSES IN ISTRIA FROM THE FIFTEENTH TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY\***

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**ABSTRACT:** On the basis of baptismal parish registers of Bale, Labin, Rovinj, Savičenta and Umag, this article addresses the topic of godparenthood in Istria from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. The authors elucidate the practice of godparent selection before and after the Council of Trent, as well as the information provided by some parish registers on baptism itself and the persons witnessing the ceremony. Also analysed is the choice of marriage witnesses recorded in the oldest marriage register of the Parish of Rovinj.

*Keywords:* Istria, late Middle Ages, early modern era, baptism parish registers, marriage parish registers, godparents, witnesses

### *Introduction*

Since medieval times, godparents have played a significant role: first, by taking active part in the baptism rite itself (answering the priests's prayers,

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holding the candle, the sign of the cross, anointment with sacred chrism, etc.), but were also expected to provide spiritual care of the baptised child, primarily in terms of his Christian upbringing. Considering that godparents virtually become godchild's spiritual parents, by the early Middle Ages the Church banned parents from acting as godparents to their own children. In case of the parents' death, godparents assumed the spiritual but also material sponsorship of the godchild. Being considered spiritual kinship, godparenthood represented an impediment to marriage.

The Council of Trent limited the number of godparents. That proved of essential importance in smaller communities, in which godparenthood ties radically narrowed the marriage pool. Apart from the mentioned, the Tridentine Council decreed that persons chosen as godparents ought to have received the sacrament of confirmation, and also regulated the earliest age at which one could assume godparenthood, which coincided with the earliest age for marriage, twelve for females and fourteen for males.<sup>1</sup>

Godparenthood at baptism and Holy Confirmation was a significant instrument for creating and reinforcing various types of social alliances: family, professional, political, etc. Many powerful families consolidated their ties through marriage, but also through godparenthood. For example, Pietro II Orseolo, Doge of Venice, established godparenthood ties with the family of the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III, who acted as godfather at the sacrament of Holy Confirmation to Orseolo's younger son (996).<sup>2</sup>

Witnesses at marriage, however, were persons without whose presence the sacrament of marriage would be invalid in the post-Tridentine period. Apparently, in the Middle Ages a vow that the bride and groom gave to each other in the present tense (*per verba de praesenti*) was sufficient for their partnership to be considered valid. Yet, without witnesses to testify to this act, no one could actually confirm the existence of marriage. Therefore, the Tridentine Council regulated the ceremony of marriage, which included a mandatory presence of two witnesses, who, should the circumstances require, would confirm the actual contracting of marriage.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Guido Alfani, Vincent Gourdon and Agnese Vitali, »Social customs and demographic change: The case of godparenthood in Catholic Europe«. *Working Paper* 40 (2011): pp. 5-7. ([www.dondena.unibocconi.it/wp40](http://www.dondena.unibocconi.it/wp40), consulted on 30 September 2016); Ariana Violić-Koprivec and Nenad Vekarić, »Krsni i vjenčani kumovi katolika u Dubrovniku (1870-1871)«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 54/2 (2016): pp. 329-331.

<sup>2</sup> Gherardo Orthali et al., *Povijest Venecije*, vol. 1. Zagreb: Antibarbarus, 2007: p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Marija Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*. Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2012: pp. 75-78.

Based on a select number of parish registers of Istria from the fifteenth, sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this article will examine the choice of godparents, their role at baptism, godparenthood distribution by gender, social status and occupation, along with the phenomenon of repeated godparenthoods. The sources include the oldest baptismal registers of the parishes of Rovinj for the period 1560-1566, Bale 1538-1616, Savičenta 1571-1582, and Umag 1483-1499, written in Latin and Italian, in addition to the baptism register of the Parish of Lindar 1591-1643, recorded in the Glagolitic script. All the mentioned parishes with the exception of Lindar are located in the Istrian territory controlled by Venice, while the Parish of Lindar is located in the Austria-governed part of Istria. These particular parishes have been chosen to allow a comparison between urban and rural communities, but equally so between the circumstances in the Venetian and Austrian parts of Istria.

With regard to the analysis of marriage witnesses, the oldest marriage register of the Parish of Rovinj for the period 1590-1610 has been used. This register abounds in data other than standard, such as the cost of the wedding gift, included in more than 90% of the entries, which may help in ascertaining the social status of the bride and groom, their parents, but also their marriage witnesses.<sup>4</sup>

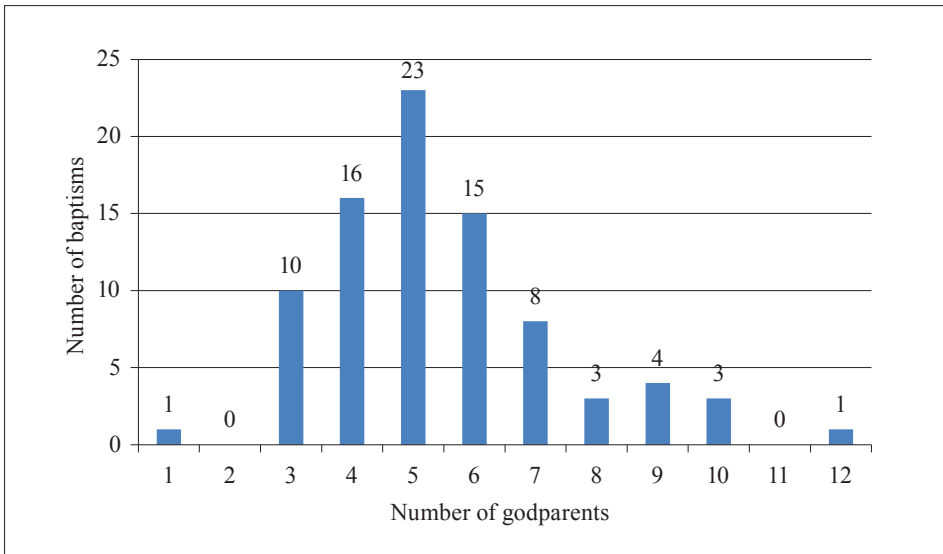
### *The number of godparents before and after the Council of Trent*

The oldest Croatian baptism register (Umag) shows that the children baptised in the fifteenth century had several godfathers and godmothers. The number of godfathers (*compari*) exceeded that of godmothers (*comari*), so that on average there was a surplus godfather at each baptism (3.2 : 2.2). A total of 84 children baptised between 1483 and 1499 had 271 godfathers and 186 godmothers. Most commonly, each godchild had two or three godfathers in addition to two or three godmothers, yet there were many cases of far more numerous godparenthoods (Graph 1 and 2). By far the most multiple godparenthood in the period under study was that at the baptism of *Isabeta Pelegrina Baffo*, daughter of the podesta of Umag, celebrated in Umag in May 1498. She had

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<sup>4</sup> A more detailed account of the wedding gifts and social status of the bride and groom according to the Rovinj marriage register is given in: Marija Mogorović Crljenko and Danijela Doblanović, »Stanovništvo Rovinja prema najstarijoj matičnoj knjizi vjenčanih (1564.-1640.)« *Povijesni prilozi* 49 (2015): pp. 239-274.

Graph 1. Number of godparents in Umag (midwife omitted), 1483-1499



six godfathers and six godmothers, her baptism entry also mentioning a “godmother midwife”.<sup>5</sup>

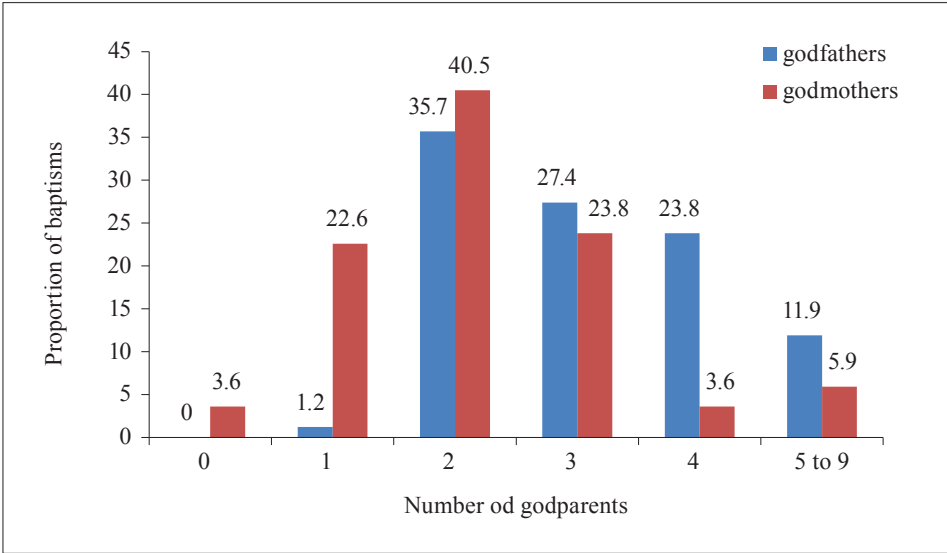
In true fact, the recorded number of godmothers in Umag was even higher. Apparently, the last person recorded in each entry was female and most probably a midwife (more on this issue later in the text). The decrees of the Council of Trent saw their application in Umag as of March 1566, after which only a single godfather was recorded per baptised child.<sup>6</sup>

The Rovinj baptismal register also provides valuable evidence on multi-godparent practice in the pre-Tridentine period. Namely, Rovinj children baptised

<sup>5</sup> *Isabeta Pelegrina filia magnifici domini Mathei Baffo magnifici domini Antonii et domine Mariette eius uxoris. Baptizata fuit a me presbitero Princivali plebano Umagi die 13 Maii 1498. Cuius compadres fuerunt: reverendus dominus magister Stephanus ordinis minorum, venerabilis presbiter Pelegrinus Rotter canonicus Umagi, ser Damianus De Gelpo, ser Batholomeus Princivalis, ser Matheus Vitalis, Pelegrinus quondam ser Marquardi, dona Dominica quondam magistri Mathei sutoris, dona Michaela uxor Bartholomei Crisme, dona Ingaldea uxor ser Ioannis de le Done, dona Francisca uxor ser Antonii quondam Iacobi De Mingo, dona Marieta uxor ser Bartole Dondo, Alexandrina filia ser Ioannis Princivalis et dona Maria uxor magistri Hieronimi barbitonsoris de Iustinopoli.* Baptism register of the Parish of Umag (1483-1642), State Archives in Pazin (henceforth: SAP).

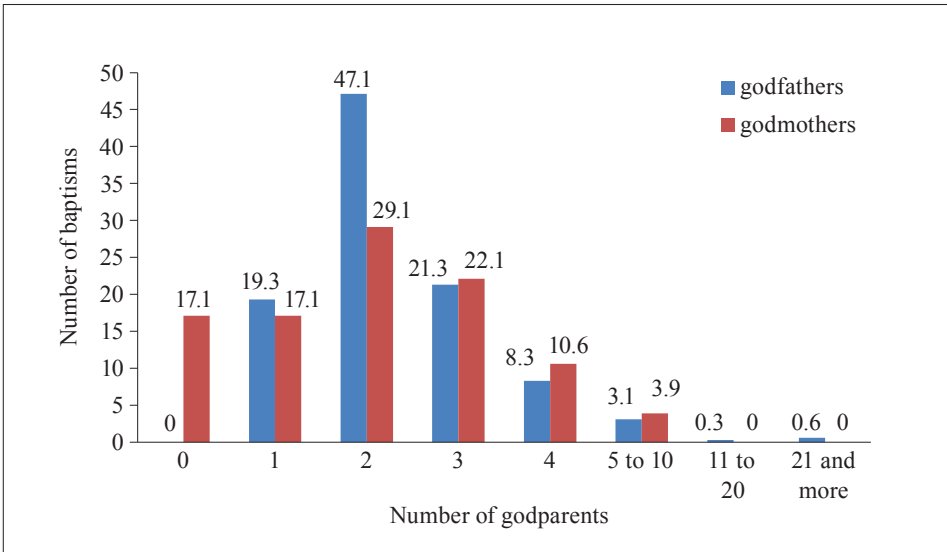
<sup>6</sup> Prior to the baptism entry of 18 March 1566, the priest noted that the registration took place *post publicationem Sacro Santi Concili Tridentini*. Baptism register of the Parish of Umag (1483-1642), f. 32v (SAP).

Graph 2. Godparents in Umag, 1483-1499



by the end of October 1564 had on average more than two godparents (Graph 3). According to most common practice, each godchild had two godfathers and two godmothers, and even one-fifth of all the baptised had three godfathers

Graph 3. Godparents in Rovinj from 1560 to 29 October 1564



and three godmothers each. However, cases of truly multiple godparenthood were not rare. For example, *Veneria Bondumeri*, daughter of the podesta of Rovinj *Aloysius Antonius Bondumeri*, was baptised on 26 April 1564 and had as many as 27 godfathers and 4 godmothers. Among her godfathers were numerous local notables, chancellors and judges.<sup>7</sup> The remaining godfathers, otherwise titled as *ser* or *mistro*, in this entry bear the title of *dominus*, probably because it concerned the baptism of the governor's daughter.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-two godfathers and one godmother witnessed the baptism of *Dominica*, daughter of *Domenego Sponza*, administered on 5 September 1563, whilst *Antonio*, son of *Francesco Zorzi*, who was baptised on 15 December 1560, had twelve godfathers and seven godmothers.<sup>9</sup> These cases concern the baptism of children of the most distinguished citizens, and being chosen as their godparent was a

<sup>7</sup> *Ioannes Lippomanno olim cancelarius, Paulus Puppo olim Valis cancelarius, Dominus Nicolaus Facius eius Magnificencie cancelarius, dominus Antonius Testa iudex, dominus Ioannes Brunensis iudex, dominus Petrus Cadenatius iudex, dominus Hieronimus Burla*. Baptism register of the Parish of Rovinj (1560-1581) (SAP).

<sup>8</sup> *Dominus Ioannes Spongia q. domini Nicolai, dominus Francesco Spongia q. Antonii, dominus Angelus Bichiachi, dominus Natalinus Bichiachi, dominus Blasius Spongia, dominus Antonius Spongia eius filius, dominus Dominicus Cadenatius q. Ioannis, Dominus Michael de Episcopis, dominus Dominicus de Episcopis q. Francisci, dominus Antonius Fachinatus, dominus Antonius de Perinis, dominus Iacobus Quarantotto, dominus Baptista aromatarius, dominus Dominicus Ferariensis barbitonsor, dominus Bernardinus Barzelogna, dominus Ioannes Garzotto, dominus Bartholomeus de Fasana, dominus Paulus Pavanus, dominus Gregorius Longo, dominus Nicolaus Spongia detto Bobaci*. Godmothers were usually the wives of the distinguished locals: *dona Lucretia consorte domini Bartholomei Fanzago cap. Sancti Vincenti, domina Vincentia uxor domini Mathei de Episcopis, dona Helena uxor domini Macharii Marchesini lapicide, Laurentia relita q. Domini Fortunati de Clodia, rev. meser pre Simon Canonico di Valle, meser Antonio Zenovese habitante in Umago, meser Mateo de Vescovi, meser Zuanne Fachineto, meser Anzolo Bichiachi, meser Zuanne Sponza q. ser Nicolo, meser Biasio Sponza, meser Antonio Testa, meser Michalin de Rigo de Vescovi, meser Marcho Moranii da Venezia, meser Domenego Pistoia, meser Antonio Bergamasco nevodo de meser Antonio Stringer da Venezia, meser Anzolo Bichiachi, magnifica Madona Anzola consorte del mag. meser Zuanne Pisano et la sua Canceliera da Vicenza consorte de miser Mattio dei Vescovi, Dona Antonia consorte de meser Hieronimo Burla, Dona Helena consorte de meser Machario, dona Catherina consorte de ser Zuanne Pavan, dona Helena consorte de meser Francesco sartor da Vegia, Dona Fumia consorte de ser Antonio della Braza*. Baptism register of the Parish of Rovinj (1560-1581) (SAP).

<sup>9</sup> *Reverendo meser pre Simon Canonico di Valle, meser Antonio Zenovese habitante in Umago, meser Mateo de Vescovi, meser Zuanne Fachineto, meser Anzolo Bichiachi, meser Zuanne Sponza q. ser Nicolo, meser Biasio Sponza, meser Antonio Testa, meser Michalin de Rigo de Vescovi, meser Marcho Moranii da Venezia, meser Domenego Pistoia, meser Antonio Bergamasco nevodo de meser Antonio Stringer da Venezia, meser Anzolo Bichiachi, magnifica Madona Anzola consorte del mag. meser Zuanne Pisano et la sua canceliera (!) dona Vicenza consorte de miser Mattio Dei Vescovi, dona Antonia consorte de meser Hieronimo Burla, dona Helena consorte de meser Machario, dona Catherina consorte de ser Zuanne Pavan, dona Helena consorte de meser Francesco sartor da Vegia, dona Fumia consorte de ser Antonio della Braza*. Baptism register of the Parish of Rovinj (1560-1581) (SAP).

matter of honour and social prestige, from which no doubt the godparents benefited more than godchild's parents.

Multi-godparenthoods in the pre-Tridentine period were common throughout Europe. In Italy, as emphasised by Guido Alfani, the practice varied from place to place. Thus in Vicenza and Verona, for instance, the number of godparents was smaller (two), yet in Venice it proved quite the opposite. The children of Venetian patricians, according to some vaguely-grounded sources, were known to have as many as one hundred godparents.<sup>10</sup> The results of the Florentine research have shown that multi-godparenthood was common, and usually ranged between ten and twenty-five.<sup>11</sup> According to the most common practice in France and England, boys had two godfathers and one godmother each, while girls had two godmothers and one godfather each, with frequent locally-based discrepancies. Three godparents in various combinations (two godfathers and a godmother or godfather and two godmothers) are traceable in the practice of the Netherlands and Denmark. Generally, in northern Europe and France the three-godparent model was applied, yet in the central and southern Europe a tendency towards multi-godparent model has been detected.<sup>12</sup>

The Council of Trent was a turning-point in terms of regulating the number of godparents: one godfather and one godmother.<sup>13</sup> An entry into the baptism register of Rovinj dated 29 October 1564 best illustrates the application of the Tridentine decrees. It concerns the baptism of Eufemija, daughter of *Petar Squizer*. Her godfather was *magister Georgius Calucii*. The entry clearly states that besides him there were no other godparents, in obedience to the decrees of the Council of Trent: *non fuerunt alii compatres neque commatres ob obedientium synodi sacrae diocesanae quae precipit ut unus compater tantum sit et ad plus unus compater et una commater quae Sacra synodus extracta est ex partibus substantialioribus libri reverendi Concilii Tridentinii sub anno 1563*.<sup>14</sup> Various Church regulations pertaining to godparenthood from the pre-Tridentine period mention the need to reduce the number of godparents, since

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<sup>10</sup> Guido Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni. La parentela spirituale nella storia*. Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2007: p. 56.

<sup>11</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: pp. 58-62.

<sup>13</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: pp. 95-96.; Rina Kralj-Brassard, *Djeca milosrđa. Napuštena djeca u Dubrovniku od 17. do 19. stoljeća*. Zagreb – Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 2013: p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> Baptism register of the Parish of Rovinj (1560-1581), f. 37r.

natural father is one, and the same number or two at the most ought to assume the role of spiritual father.<sup>15</sup>

In Bale the situation was somewhat different. According to the baptismal records from the pre-Tridentine period, baptisms were witnessed by one godfather and two or three godmothers. Post-Tridentine practice indicates the presence of one godfather and one godmother, or on occasion two godfathers, but never two godmothers or a single godmother.

In the Parish of Savičenta, godparenthoods registered in the period 1571-1582 have been analysed. As this time frame concerns the post-Tridentine era, the couple-godparent model was common—a single godfather and single godmother per each baptised child. However, an exception or two did take place as, for example, at the baptism of *Livia Nicolosa Allesnio*, daughter of the *magnifico signor Hercule* from Kopar, held on 8 July 1577. The godparenthood entry notes the presence of the captain and many others, followed by a list of three godfathers and two godmothers.<sup>16</sup> Two godmothers also witnessed the baptism of the son of *miser Gabriele Longo*, on 25 June 1580, and the son of *ser Polo Vodopia* on 7 December 1579. The former's godmother was the wife of the podesta of Dvigrad (*la magnifica madona Andriana moglie del magnifico signor Francesco Vida al presente potesta in Dui Castelli*), and the latter's were *Giacomina Summa moglie di miser Zorzi et Anastia figlia del mistro Zuanne Zamperich*. Godparenthood was limited by number, yet the status of the baptised child's family was highlighted, in that the entries insisted on enumerating all the notables present at the baptism.<sup>17</sup>

According to the baptismal practice of Lindar in the period 1591-1596, three godparents were common at baptism in as many as 61.5% of the cases, most frequently a single godfather and two godmothers. Seldom can we find cases of a godchild having two godfathers and one godmother (only 0.03%). From the start of the seventeenth century on, the couple-godparent model was common, a godfather and a godmother.

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<sup>15</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: p. 60.

<sup>16</sup> *Fanzago Bortolo capitano di S. Vincenti et altri furono presenti e fu compar il rev. pre Domenego Vodopia, miser Antonio Pinco et miser Zorzi Summa, Laura moglie di miser Gabriel Longo et Magdalena moglie di miser Domenego Summa ceroico*. Baptism register of the Parish of Savičenta (1568.-1588.) (SAP).

<sup>17</sup> Recorded as witnesses at the baptism of the son of Venetian patrician Alessandro Benzoni in Umag on 1 August 1606 are a godfather and godmother who held the child at the baptismal font (*al sacro fonte*). The entry further reads that among the present at the said baptism were all the persons mentioned thereafter: five men and four women.



Guido Alfani's research of spiritual kinship in the Italian parishes resulted in his own typology of godparenthood models with regard to their number and gender. Therefore, he distinguishes six godparenthood models:

Pure multi-godfather model—unlimited number of spiritual kin of either sex; it was quite widespread in Italy, also traceable in France, and most likely in Spain and Germany.

Asymmetric multi-godfather model—unlimited number of godparents, mainly male; the case of Turin and Firenze.

Limited multi-godfather model—limited number of godparents, of each sex; widespread in Italy, and most likely in France and in northern Europe.

Limited asymmetric multi-godfather model—limited number of godparents, mainly male; traceable in Verona, Vicenza, Treviso.

Pure single-godfather model or the couple model—rarely practiced before the Council of Trent. After the Council, it has become known as a typical godparent model of Catholic Europe.

Asymmetric single-godfather model—only one godparent, male or female; in Italy it is to be found only in the mountainous region of Salerno.<sup>18</sup>

How do the Istrian models fit into this typology? Our research included godparenthoods in four parishes, two from the pre-Tridentine period (Umag and Rovinj) and three from the post-Tridentine period (Lindar, Rovinj and Savičenta).

Umag godparenthoods may be said to fall within the pure multi-godfather model, due to a significant presence of a larger number of godfathers and godmothers. After the Council of Trent, a godchild had one godparent, usually a godfather. Within this model we trace very rare cases of godparents being drawn from the same family (spouses, parents and children, and the like).

Lindar godparents, however, were chosen by combining the pure single-godfather model with that of limited multi-godfather, whereas Rovinj witnessed the pure multi-godfather model in the pre-Tridentine period and that of pure single godfather in the post-Tridentine years.

Savičenta godparenthoods would fall within pure single godfather model, as the baptised child had a godfather and godmother each. In Savičenta, as in Umag, it was most rare for the baptised to have godparents chosen among the members of the same family (merely 8 out of 359 baptisms).

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<sup>18</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: pp. 64-66.

### *Baptismal registration – diversity of customs*

Although the ceremony of baptism was held at church, different customs are attached to this rite. Thus in the mid-seventeenth century, Tommasini, bishop of Novigrad, mentions the presence of godparents at the male child's first haircut (*compare della prima tonsura*), usually held one month upon child's birth (or slightly later). According to his account, the mentioned celebration included friends and relatives, while the godfather himself assisted in the tonsure of the infant's lock of hair.<sup>19</sup> The bishop fails to reveal the godparents' identity. There is reason to believe that the person in question had some previous experience as godparent at the church baptism.

Due to high infant mortality, up to the twentieth century newly-born infants were baptised on the day of birth or a couple of days later. Since the mothers were weak after childbirth, the infant was usually taken to church by some other woman, presumably close to the infant's family. Some parish registers contain entries in support of this practice. For example, an entry dated 1 September 1633 in the Labin baptism register reads that *Bartolomea*, daughter of *Battista Battilana* and his wife Helena, was brought to the church door by *Anzola*, daughter of *ser Jakov Calina*, to be delivered for baptism by *Jakov Dragonja* (*levata al sacro fonte per Giacomo Dragogna*).<sup>20</sup> In all likelihood, *Anzola* was the godmother, and *Jakov* godfather. In the numerous successive entries of the Labin baptism register we find recurrent practice by which a child was brought to the church door and handed over to his godfather. However, there are cases testifying to a different custom as, for instance, the baptism of *Ivan*, son of the spouses *Zaharija* and *Marija*, in September 1633. He was baptised by priest *Michiel Manzoni*, his godfathers being *Marin Višković*, son of *Jakov*, and *Matija Hrvatin*, daughter of *Petar* (*per compare Marin Viscovich de Giacomo, comare fu Mattia Chervatin di Piero*).<sup>21</sup>

Discrepancy in baptismal data provided by the parish registers in a small territory such as Istria owes much to the irregularities in registration. Contrary to that of Labin, the oldest baptism register under analysis (Umag) fails to

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<sup>19</sup> Giacomo Filippo Tommasini, »De' commentarii storici-geographici della provincia dell'Istria libri otto con appendice di monsign. Giacomo Filippo Tommasini vescovo di Cittanuova«. *L'Archeografo Triestino raccolta di opuscoli e notizie per Trieste e per Istria* 4 (1837): p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> Baptism register of the Parish of Labin (1536-1584), 1 September 1633 (SAP).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

mention the identity of the person who delivered the child to the church door, but makes note of yet another important detail. An entry dated 12 February 1487 is regular of its kind in that parish register: *Dominicus Pelegrinus filius ser Petri Gelfo et done Ursulae eius uxoris. Baptizatus fuit a me ut supra die 12 februaryii 1487. Compatres fuerunt magister Dominicus pictor, Bonushomo de Mugla, Bartholomeus ser Iohannis de Ambrosio, Orio q. ser Baldasaris; Comatres vero Bartolomea filia quondam ser Nicolai Vitalis, Bernardina filia ser Pelegrini Crisme, Micaela filia quondam ser Prinque Crisme, et dona Cattarina Contessa*. Analysis of the entries in the mentioned register has shown that the person recorded as last in a marriage entry was probably a midwife.<sup>22</sup> Namely, over several successive years, the last person recorded in each entry was the same woman: *dona Antonia Siromocha, dona Cattarina Contessa, dona Lucia Slavina, dona Pasqua Cuciana, dona Pelegrina Nanina* or *la Nanina, dona Catarina Cithara*. None of the records explicitly identify her as midwife, but the entries from some other parishes indicate that midwives were recorded as some sort of godmothers of honour. As a rule, the case of Umag testifies to the presence of two godmothers and ultimately the “godmother midwife”. A similar practice has been traced in Bale, where the midwife was referred to as “great godmother” (*comare mazor*). For example, a Bale entry of 3 February 1573 tells of the baptism of Blaž Ivan (*Biasio et Zuanne*), son of Martin Montagna and his wife Agata. According to the entry, the godchild was held by priest *Marin Cozza*, and also mentioned Bartol Žinović, presumably his godfather, together with the *comare mazor*.<sup>23</sup> The earliest entries of the Bale register distinguish the person who held the child by the baptismal font (*lo tene al sacro fonte, lo tene a batesimo*) from those who acted as godparents (*compare, comare*).<sup>24</sup> Many successive entries mention the same person to have held the child at the font (*lo tene al sacro fonte*), who, as a rule, was a cleric.

<sup>22</sup> Midwife is often mentioned in the oldest parish registers. For more on this see: Marija Mogorović Crljenko, Branka Poropat and Tajana Ujčić, »*Suffici tibi scriber: matična knjiga krštenih župe Labin (1536.-1583.)*«, in: *Raukarov zbornik. Zbornik u čast Tomislava Raukara*, ed. Neven Budak. Zagreb: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu – Odsjek za povijest, 2005: pp. 443-453.

<sup>23</sup> *Qual tene al sacro fonte del batesimo il reverendo miser pre Marin Cozza et Bortholo Zinovich, per non vi esser stata comare trane che la comare mazor, qual fu dona Fumia relita quondam Fiorin*. Baptism register of the Parish of Bale (1538-1573), 3 February 1573 (SAP).

<sup>24</sup> *Piero et Zuane fiol de ser Natalin de Orsera fu battezzato da me pre Domenego q. mistro Marin Barbier. Lo tiene a batesimo ser Vinzenzeto da Venetia patron de barcha. Compare Chistophoro Palaziol. Comare Maria muier de Thomasin Vodogaz. Comare mazor dona Oliva muier de ser Antonio q. Sixto*. Baptism register of the Parish of Bale (1538-1573), 8 April 1539 (SAP).

It is quite possible that the midwife was awarded a place of honour at baptism without actually being present at the ceremony itself, yet the above-mentioned entry on the baptism of Martin *Montagna's* son confirms her attendance at the baptism ceremony. Later entries tend to refer to her not only as *comare mazor*, but also as *obstetrix*, at one baptism the same woman is designated as *obstetrix*, yet in the next as *comare mazor*. These records certainly confirm the midwives' great importance and reputation<sup>25</sup> thanks to which they earned the title of godmothers of honour.

### *The social status of godparents*

The analysis of the baptism parish registers shows that some godparents acted in that role more often than others. Notable members of the community (governors, physicians, chancellors and, in a word, well-off members of the society) commonly feature as godparents. A similar practice has been detected in the here studied parishes of Istria.

In the case of Umag 1483-1499, godparents were often chosen among craftsmen (*magister*) of various trades (*sutor*, *textor*, *pictor*), clerics (*venerabilis dominus presbiter*, *venerabilis dominus*), but also notables titled as *ser* or *magnificus dominus*, *spetabilis dominus* and the like. The children of the late *Marquardus de Petronio/de Petrogna* were most frequently selected as godparents: Marija, Franciska, Damjana, Dominika, Katarina, Ivan, Henrik and Pelegrin. They are mentioned on 20 occasions, and they were godparents to one-fifth of the baptised (17 out of 84, or 20.2%). *Ser Damian de Gelpho*, his wife and daughter are mentioned as godparents on 19 occasions, and, like the Petronio, were godparents to one-fifth of the baptised children (17 out of 84, or 20.2%). Among the repeatedly chosen godparents were also *ser Andreas de Valesio (Valesius)* and his children, who witnessed twelve baptisms (14.3%), along with *Ioannes Princivalis* and his daughters Aleksandrina, Beatrica and Lukrecija (12 baptisms). Shoemaker *Ioannes Antonius* was godfather to eight godchildren between 1488 and 1498, as well as the sons and daughters of the late shoemaker Matej in the period 1491-1498.<sup>26</sup> *Magister Thomas Cerdonis/de Cerdo* and his family had eight godchildren (from

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<sup>25</sup> Antonia Siromacha, midwife from Umag, successfully assisted the birth of 52 children in fifteen years, at least according to the contents of the baptismal entry.

<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that shoemakers feature as the only craftsmen commonly chosen as godfathers in Ivrea, Italy. G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, padroni*: p. 194.

1487 to 1498), and so did *ser Matheus de Rimizza* (from 1487 to 1499), and *Ioannes de Ambrosio de Bergamo civis Humagi*, his wife and children (from 1487 to 1499). The members of these nine families acted as godparents at more than 70% of baptisms (61 out of 84). Cases of several habitual godparents from the mentioned families have been traced to attend the same baptism, as in the baptism of *Ioannes Nacifer*, son of Dominik and Antonija Vitalis (baptised on 1 January 1497).<sup>27</sup> The most distinguished members of Umag community (designated as *spetabilis dominus* or even *venerabilis dominus* in the case of clerics) were also chosen as godparents. Their maids (*famule*) were known to assume this role, too. Thus *Cattarina famula magistri Ioannis cirugii* was the godmother at four baptisms in 1487, and *Helena famula ser Alexandri cancelarii domini Francisci Minoto* was in 1492 the godmother to the daughter of the painter Dominik. Also mentioned is the *famula of dominus Ioannes Diedo* as godmother at the baptism of the daughter of weaver *Perinus* from Cyprus (1488), *Achina famula done Ingaldee q. ser Bernardi Rotter* at the baptism of Bernard, son of Jakov Rotter (1498).<sup>28</sup> As it seems, craftsmen were commonly chosen as godparents, but godparents to their children were often sought among habitual godparents, that is, among notable citizens. Equally, the parents' business and professional ties played an important role in the choice of godparents, best exemplified in the baptism of the children of *magister Dominicus pictor* and his wife *Illixia/Lixia*. Between 1483 and 1499 as the godfathers of their three children acted Domenicus' fellow craftsmen: *pictor Bernardinus magister de Iustinopoli*, *magister Hieronimus de Treviso incisor*, but also other Umag craftsmen: *magister Baptista barbitonsor* and *Aloysius aromatarius*.

On the ground of the data on recruitment for public works in 1477 the number of inhabitants of the area of Umag may have ranged between 700 and 900 (with household size coefficients of 4 and 5).<sup>29</sup> Given the number of godchildren (98), nine most habitual godparent families were related by spiritual kin with some

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<sup>27</sup> *Magister Tomaso Cerdo, magister Ioanes Antonius sutor, magister Perinus textor preco communitatis, Lucia uxor ser Bernardini de Moncelese, Maria filia ser Andree de Valesio, Damiana filia q. ser Marquardi de Petrogna, Helena filia ser Petri de Tridento de Parenzo*. Baptism register of the Parish of Umag (1483-1643) (SAP).

<sup>28</sup> Baptism register of the Parish of Umag (1483-1643). Baptisms of 19 and 21 February, as well as 14 October 1487, 2 December 1492, 9 October 1488, along with 21 July 1498.

<sup>29</sup> Egidio Ivetic, *La popolazione dell'Istria nell'età moderna. Lineamenti evolutivi*. Trieste-Rovigno: Unione italiana - Fiume and Università popolare di Trieste, 1997: p. 67. This population estimate suggests that not all baptisms were recorded in the parish register of Umag for the period analysed. An average number of baptisms at the time, according to the parish register, was around 5, which would correspond to a community of approximately 150 inhabitants (at birth rate of 35‰).

50 families, if we assume that within the time frame under analysis at least two children from the same family were baptised.

Table 1. Habitual godparents in Umag, 1483-1499

Godparents	Number of godparent entries			Number of godchildren
	M	F	Total	
Children of the late Marquardus de Petronio		20	20	17
Damian de Gelpho, wife and daughter	8	11	19	17
Andreas de Valesio and his children	5	8	13	12
Ioannes Princivalis and daughter	4	8	12	12
Daughters and daughter-in-law of the late magister Matheus sutor		8	8	8
Ioannes de Ambrosio de Bergamo civis Humagi, wife and children	2	6	8	8
Tomas Cerdo and daughters	6	2	8	8
Matheus de Rimiza	8	0	8	8
Ioannes Antonius sutor	8	0	8	8

In the Parish of Savičenta 359 children were baptised between 1571 and 1582. This was a small parish with approximately 750 to 1000 inhabitants.<sup>30</sup> Over 90% of the baptised had a godfather or godmother from one of fifteen families whose members were most frequently chosen as godparents (Table 2), such as the families of the craftsmen, chancellors, captains and other local notables. The density of godparenthood network, was typical of small communities (e.g. Azeglio in Piemonte), and grew common in the post-Tridentine period. Thus a relatively limited number of “habitual godparents” supported the dense network of social solidarity that renewed constantly.<sup>31</sup> In Umag of the pre-Tridentine period the network of the baptised and their godfathers was also fairly dense, though not to the same degree as in Savičenta in 1571-1582.

An interesting phenomenon has been observed with the godparenthoods in Savičenta. Women from the mentioned 15 families were more active in that role than the male members of the same families (their husbands and fathers), some of whom being wives and daughters of the highest-ranking community

<sup>30</sup> No sources are available on the population size of the time, yet a population estimate may be calculated on the basis of the number of baptisms and a presumed birth rate of 35 and 40 ‰ (specific to the pre-transitional period).

<sup>31</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: pp. 190-191.

Table 2. Habitual godparents in the Parish of Savičenta, 1571-1582

Godparents	M	F	Total	Proportion (%)
Pietro Selaro (mistro), his wife and daughter: Lucia and Zuana	47	21	68	18.9
Zener de Manzoni q. Franceschin and his wife Domenica	32	7	39	10.9
Bortolo Quinzano (miser), his wife and daughters: Maria, Franceschina, Orsina, Quinzanella, Lugretia	1	27	28	7.8
Ricardo Vodopia (ser/miser), his wife and daughter: Menegha, Franina	10	13	23	6.4
Zorzi Summa (miser), his son Zuan Maria, wife Giacomina and Lucrezia (wife of Zuan Mariae)	11	11	22	6.1
Zanut Cargnel (mistro) and his wife Meneghina	12	9	21	5.8
Constantin di Fioli (miser), his son Francesco, wife Andriana and daughters: Cattarina, Chiara, Fumia, Pelegrina	7	12	19	5.3
Francesco taiapiera (mistro) and his wife Francesca	7	12	19	5.3
Marco Zamperic (mistro) and his wives Biasia and Matiuza	5	13	18	5
Hieronimo Salgaredo (ser), his wife and daughters: Cattarina, Cattarina and Uliana	10	6	16	4.5
Zuanmaria Pulisan (mistro) and his wife Gasperina	8	7	15	4.2
Jacomo Calimeni (ser) and his wife Mare	1	13	14	3.9
Isepo de Manzoni (ser), his widow Mare	1	13	14	3.9
Andrea Vodopia (ser), his widow Giulia	0	9	9	2.5
Thoma Quelli (ser) and his wife Fumia	6	1	7	1.9
<i>Total</i>	158	174	332	92.4

members. Thus, for example, *miser Bortolo Quinzano* (of the Quinzano family of the Savičenta notaries, and in the early seventeenth century even a captain) was the godfather at only one baptism (son of *mistro Bortolo Gersino*), while his wife and daughter on as many as 27 occasions. The captain of Savičenta castle was present at one baptism, though not as godparent. Neither his wife nor children, if any, have been recorded as godparents, contrary to his maidservants (*massare*): *dona Giustina masara del magnifico capitano di San Vincenti* and *dona Agustina, massara del magnifico capitano* (on 3 occasions). The cited domestics were the godmothers to the son of *mistro Marcuzio Zampericho* (1 August 1575), to the daughter of *mistro Giacomo Preno* (1 September 1575), to the son of *ser Simon Budach* (15 July 1576), as well as to the son of *ser Matia Salgaredo* (12 November 1576).

Similar to what has been observed for the parish of Azeglio (Piedmont),<sup>32</sup> various clerics have been found to act as godfathers at the Savičenta baptisms of this period (19 out of 359; 5.3%): *pre Giacomo Zamperich, pre Pasqualin Sellaro, reverendo miser pre canonico Batista Vodopia*.

Baptismal parish register of Lindar provides insufficient data to allow an analysis of the parents' and godparents' social status. Yet, a tendency to choose same persons as godparents has been established, and if the members of their families are added, it becomes clear that certain families acted as habitual godparent families, which may suggest their high reputation and status in society.

From 1591 to 1600, Lindar witnessed 206 baptisms and 491 godparenthoods. Some individuals, or rather families,<sup>33</sup> proved more desirable for the role of godparent. More popular families in terms of godparent recruitment gave in total 159 godparents, or 32.38%, and the number of families reached 10 or more godparenthoods (see Table 3).

In the following 1601-1610 decade, Lindar saw a mild decline in baptisms (194), and similarly that of godparenthoods (349). The rate of the most popular stayed on virtually the same percentage as in the previous decade. A group of families gave up to 8 godparents (see Table 4), and concerned 113 godparenthoods, or 32.37%.

Analysis has shown that in both decades under study godchildren and godparents were not kin related.<sup>34</sup>

In the period under analysis, the Parish of Lindar was a small rural community of some 500 to 600 inhabitants.<sup>35</sup> Vertical differentiation among the parishers was insignificant, since the majority more or less belonged to the farmers. Rare craftsmen among them must have enjoyed a somewhat higher reputation. This social equality mirrors in the baptism records, in which neither the children's parents nor godparents bear any title. Yet, some godparents have an entry on the place of origin and their current occupation. These were not habitual godparents, as they appear in individual cases. The register mentions *mišer*

<sup>32</sup> G. Alfani, *Padri, padrini, patroni*: p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> Our analysis is based on the most common nuclear family type consisting of husband, wife, children, usually daughters.

<sup>34</sup> In both time frames a markedly higher number of people bearing the same surname has been detected, but if they were not designated by any family relationship (wife, daughter, husband, son etc.), we have not treated them as members of the same family, considering that there were several families of the same surname.

<sup>35</sup> For more on this: Danijela Doblanović, »Crtice o stanovništvu Lindara na kraju 16. i u prvoj polovici 17. stoljeća«. *Vjesnik istarskog arhiva* 20 (2013): pp. 24-26.



Table 3. Habitual godparents in the Parish of Lindar, 1591-1600

Godparents	M	F	Total	Proportion (%)
Kata Lukežić, wife of Mate	0	29	29	5.9
Mihel Rabar and wife Lucija	10	6	16	3.25
Mihel Bolunac and wife Katarina	14	2	16	3.25
Marko Marinčić and wife Katarina	8	8	16	3.25
Gabriel Klenovar and wife Lucija	8	6	14	2.85
Grigor Cacrman and wife Elena	5	8	13	2.64
Baštijan Andreičić and wife Orsa	5	7	12	2.44
Jerolim Frle and wife Fumija	7	5	12	2.44
Jakov Bolčić and wife Polka	5	6	11	2.24
Kirin Štihović and wife Elena	4	6	10	2.03
Ivan Lovrečić and wife Katarina	2	8	10	2.03
<i>Total</i>	68	91	159	32.38

*Andrea Rapiciš*, patrician of Trieste, who in 1598 acted as godfather to Ivan Skubić, son of Martin and Elena. In 1591 Ivan Bazgalić, son of Frančina had as godfather *pre* Mate Lovrečić, future parish priest, and Marko Malinar, and godmother Orsa, daughter of *župan* Juraj Lovrečić.<sup>36</sup>

Within the two-decade time frame, four cases of twin baptisms (eight children in all) have been traced among 400 baptism entries. In three cases, different godparents were chosen, while in the case of the last twins, neither the name of one child nor those of his godparents were recorded which may imply that the child died prior to baptism or that it had the same godparents as its twin sister, the former assumption being more plausible.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Baptism register of the Parish of Lindar (1591-1648).

<sup>37</sup> In some cases, brothers had same godparents, and in others not. In the sources which made note of the person who delivered the child to the church door, apart from different godfathers, different women who delivered them have also been recorded. In this respect, an entry from the Labin register is enlightening, hereafter cited in full: *Adi 23. dicembre 1670. Zaccaria Zuanne, et Adraria Ellisabeta gemelli figliuoli del signor Giovanni Maria Dragogna del q. signor Gasparo et della dona Zannetta sua consorte furono cioè il maschio presentato alla porta della chiesa dalla signora Laura consorte del signor Zan Marco Zann cancelier et dal medesimo fu levato al sacro fonte et da me don Gio Battista Toscani piovano fu battezzato et la puttella fù presentata alla porta della chiesa dalla signora Agnesina moglie del signor Gierolamo Ferri, fù levata al sacro fonte dal signor Mattio Coppe, et dal signor don Tomaso Battiala archidiacono fu battezzata.* Baptism register of the Parish of Labin (1662-1682) (SAP).

Table 4. Habitual godparents in the Parish of Lindar, 1601-1610

Godparent	M	F	Total	Proportion (%)
Jerolim Frle, wife Fuma and daughters Dorka, Luca and Matija	4	23	27	7.73
Martin Andreičić, wife Ulika and daughter Fuma	2	16	18	5.15
Kirin Klenovar, wife Katarina and daughter Kristina	6	9	15	4.29
Grgur Šoštar, daughter Dorka	1	9	10	2.86
Gabriel Semić, wife Matija	3	6	9	2.57
Gabriel Klenovar, wife Lucija	3	6	9	2.57
Mihel Bolunac	9	0	9	2.57
Anton Butegar	8	0	8	2.29
Mihel Češić, wife Maruša	7	1	8	2.29
<i>Total</i>	43	70	113	32.37

The Lindar godparenthood analysis has shown no name-sharing pattern between godparents and godchildren.

The cases of repeated godparenthoods are also traceable in the Rovinj baptism register, though not as habitual as in some other parishes. Namely, by the late medieval times, and notably in early modern age, when most Istrian towns were sparsely populated, Rovinj had a sizeable population, as its location and economic opportunities attracted hosts of new settlers from Istria and the broader Mediterranean area alike.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, in establishing repeated godparenthoods in Rovinj we encountered two problems. The first is homonymy, which clouds the identity of the godparent. The second is related to the earlier mentioned number of inhabitants. In Rovinj, too, we find persons that might qualify as repeated godparents, yet due to Rovinj's larger population size, their percentage figures are very low.

### *Marriage witnesses – the case of Rovinj*

The Council of Trent, among others, decreed that the marriage ceremony ought to be administered by a priest, in the presence of two or three witnesses who would subsequently confirm the contracting of marriage, marriage had to be registered, that is, the contract of marriage had to be recorded in the parish

<sup>38</sup> See: Marija Mogorović Crljenko and Danijela Dobljanović, »Stanovništvo Rovinja prema najstarijoj matičnoj knjizi vjenčanih (1564.-1640.)«. *Povijesni prilozi* 49 (2015): pp. 241-245.

marriage register.<sup>39</sup> Although witnesses at marriage played a different role from that of the godparents, in everyday Croatian speech they are still referred to as *kumovi* throughout Istria and the rest of Croatia.<sup>40</sup> In the Istrian territory the keeping of marriage registers was introduced immediately after the Council of Trent, and in some places even before the Council's conclusion.

According to the data from the Rovinj marriage register, in the period under analysis the bride and groom commonly had two witnesses at marriage, or three in 11% of the cases, or four or more in merely six cases (0.025%).

The number of witnesses shows no variation in terms of social rank of the bride and groom. Unlike in Dubrovnik, the nobility of Rovinj, i. e. the families represented in the city Council did not form a sealed off rank and inter-marriage between them and wealthy commoners was no exception. Within the time frame under study fifteen families entered the city council. According to Bernardo Benussi, they were the following families: Basilisco, Bello, Brionese, Burla, Caenazzo, Calucci, Giotta, Leonardis, Pesce, Quarantotto, Segala, Sponza, Vescovi, in the middle of the sixteenth century the Bichiachi were admitted, and in the mid-seventeenth century the Constantini.<sup>41</sup> During these twenty years, 38 noblemen and 57 noble women were married. Of this number, only eleven married their equals, while the others married outside the noble circle. Only ten marriages of 57 noble brides were witnessed by three witnesses, and one marriage by four witnesses. Only four marriages of 38 noblemen are recorded to have been witnessed by more than two witnesses: in two cases there were three witnesses, in one case four, and five witnesses in the last. In none of the marriages witnessed by multiple witnesses do we have both the bride and groom from the noble rank.

Marriage register of Rovinj indicates that the witnesses at marriage were always male. It was not until the end of the nineteenth or early twentieth century that women were allowed to assume the role of witnesses at marriage in some Croatian regions.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> M. Mogorović Crljenko, *Druga strana braka*: pp. 75-78.

<sup>40</sup> A. Viočić-Koprivec and N. Vekarić, »Krsni i vjenčani kumovi katolika u Dubrovniku (1870-1871)«: p. 355.

<sup>41</sup> Bernardo Benussi, *Storia documentata di Rovigno*. Trieste: Unione degli Italiani dell'Istria e di Fiume, Università popolare di Trieste, 1977: pp. 78-80. Cf. Marino Budicin, »Lo sviluppo dell'abitato di Rovigno oltre il canale sulla terraferma (secoli XVII e XVIII)«. *Atti del Centro di ricerche storiche - Rovigno*, 22 (1992): pp.128-129.

<sup>42</sup> See: A. Viočić-Koprivec and N. Vekarić, »Krsni i vjenčani kumovi katolika u Dubrovniku (1870-1871)«: p. 355.

Rovinj of this period saw a considerable number of the clergy as marriage witnesses (38%), designated in the records as ostiary (*ostiario/ostiario*), canon (*canonico*), cleric (*chierico*), dean (*diacono*), subdean (*subdiacono*), chaplain (*capelano*), priest (*pre, don*).<sup>43</sup> On occasion, both witnesses were of clerical status, or only one. The bulk of the clergy that feature as witnesses was related to the Rovinj church, though sporadic cases of the clergy from the neighbouring parishes are found (e.g. from Dvigrad – *canonico di Doi Castelli*). However, it is not always clear whether a cleric was intentionally chosen as marriage witness or simply happened to be in the church at the time. Persons of other occupations appear in the records as witnesses, though more rarely, such as apothecary, and doctor (*medico*).

Marriage registers show that the choice of witnesses was not a personal matter after all. It seems that the role of witnesses was professionalised to a certain extent, that is, same witnesses tend to appear at many different marriages, with certain ecclesiastics as a constant. Some individuals acted as recurrent witnesses at marriage, as, for instance, Domenego ostiary (*ser Domenego da San Vincenti nostro ostiario*), who was witness on 25 occasions, cleric (*chierico*) Gabriel Bodi on 20 occasions, *pre Francesco Buseti (canonico et cleric)* on 14 occasions, cleric (*chierico*) *Alvise Quarantotto de ser Francesco* on 11 occasions, etc.

The phenomenon of professional witnesses in France, though in the nineteenth century, has been discussed by Vincent Goudron, as he mentions that their percentage in a specific period (1830-1840) was very high, only to drop by 1860.<sup>44</sup> In the period 1734-1813, Savičenta also saw 'professional witnesses', usually recruited among bell ringers or sacristans.<sup>45</sup> The mentioned phenomenon has also been traced in Rovinj in the latter half of the sixteenth century, and future research ought to shed more light on their role and status, and needs to draw a parallel with other Istrian places.

<sup>43</sup> Marriage register of the Parish of Rovinj (1564-1642) (SAP).

<sup>44</sup> Vincent Goudron, »Les témoins de mariage civil dans les villes européennes du XIX siècle: quel intérêt pour l'analyse des réseaux familiaux et sociaux?«. *Histoire, économie & société* 2 (2008): p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> Danijela Doblanović, *Demografska slika župe Svetvinčenat od početka 17. do početka 19. stoljeća*, PhD dissertation, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, 2013: pp. 122-124.

*Some conclusions*

Spiritual kinship established between families represented an important cohesive fabric of a community. The sources show that godparenthood networks between families were very dense and almost indissolubly linked. In this respect, baptisms played a significant part. Having a 'good' godparent implied better prospects in many ways and reliable sponsorship in case of necessity. Godparenthood was a means of linking one family with another, according to one's own choice.

In terms of godparenthood number, the sources clearly indicate the application of Tridentine regulations aimed at the limitation of their number. In Istria, as elsewhere (on the Apennine Peninsula, for example), the single godparenthood model with its variants was common. In Umag of the post-Tridentine period, a godchild had a single godfather, in Savičenta and Rovinj two (one of each sex). Lindar would fall within the limited multi-godparent model (godfather and two godmothers). Research has yet to show what influenced these varying practices. Further, a discrepancy in the selection of godparents has also been established. According to the sources, the choice usually fell on a particular group of persons, that is, the families who had earned a status of the most desired godparents. In smaller places/parishes (e.g. Savičenta) the number of habitual godparents was smaller, yet their proportion in godparenthoods is significantly higher than in larger parishes (e.g. Rovinj).

The marriage register of the Parish of Rovinj shows that some witnesses at marriage performed this role more frequently, either by virtue of their profession or place of residence. Apparently, clerics commonly acted as witnesses, or rather persons connected to the church in one way or another. As for the other witnesses, their frequent appearance at marriages might be accounted by the fact that they lived in the proximity of the church, and were simply 'available' at all times.

Godparenthood ties in the Istrian parishes have not been examined to date, which makes this research and the selected samples a pioneering contribution to the study of the institution of godparenthood in Istria from the late medieval times onwards.

Translated by Vesna Baće