

## GOLUBARDA PIGEON-HOUSE IN ČELOPECI (DUBROVNIK)

Patricija Veramenta-Paviša

**ABSTRACT:** Golubarda pigeon-house in Župa dubrovačka is a unique example of this type of the Renaissance domestic architecture in the Dubrovnik region, bearing witness to highly developed culture of living in the area. No written evidence on the erection of the columbary or the identity of its owners has been traced. This article examines architectural details and Golubarda's renovation in 2003, its broader historical background, as well as the tradition of pigeon raising and columbary design in the Late Middle Ages. It is suggested that apart from being raised for sport and commercial purposes, pigeons here may have been used for messenger service, the tower itself serving as a useful observation post within the overall defence system of the Republic of Dubrovnik.

The outlying areas of Dubrovnik contain a wealth of architectural heritage, markedly examples of urban building, fortifications and villas. Among them is a unique example of commercial domestic architecture from the Renaissance period—a small pigeon-house in Čelopeci, Župa dubrovačka, known as Golubarda (*golub*=pigeon).

The columbary is located on the southern edge of a small oak and cypress wood in Fratarska Dubrava between Rovanj and Ljuti, north of the Dominican Friary of St Vincent Ferrer. It stands at a strategically important point, overlooking northern Župa dubrovačka and the area bordering Bosnia and

---

**Patricija Veramenta-Paviša, senior adviser - conservator for immovable property at the Board for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, Conservation Department in Dubrovnik. Address: Uz tabor 4, HR-20000 Dubrovnik, Croatia. E-mail: patricija.veramenta-pavisa@du.t-com.hr**

---

This article has already been published in Croatian under the following title: »Golubarda u Čelopecima«. *Anali Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku* 43 (2005): pp. 177-198. Translated by Vesna Baće.



Figure 1. Golubarda in Čelopeci

Herzegovina, and affording a magnificent view from Vlaštica across Drijen and Malaštica to Spijona (Stražišće). It is commonly known as Golubarda, although the cadastral survey from 1837 has the road leading to it marked as *Put za Kolumbardu* (Road to Kolumbarda). The old road used to lead from Dubac to Čelopeci, making a turn at Lepri towards Savinovići and further on to Golubarda. Today the easiest way to reach it is to take the road to Čelopeci, then along the Dominican estate to the north as far as Žujani puč. Turning west, the site is served by 30m of footpath.

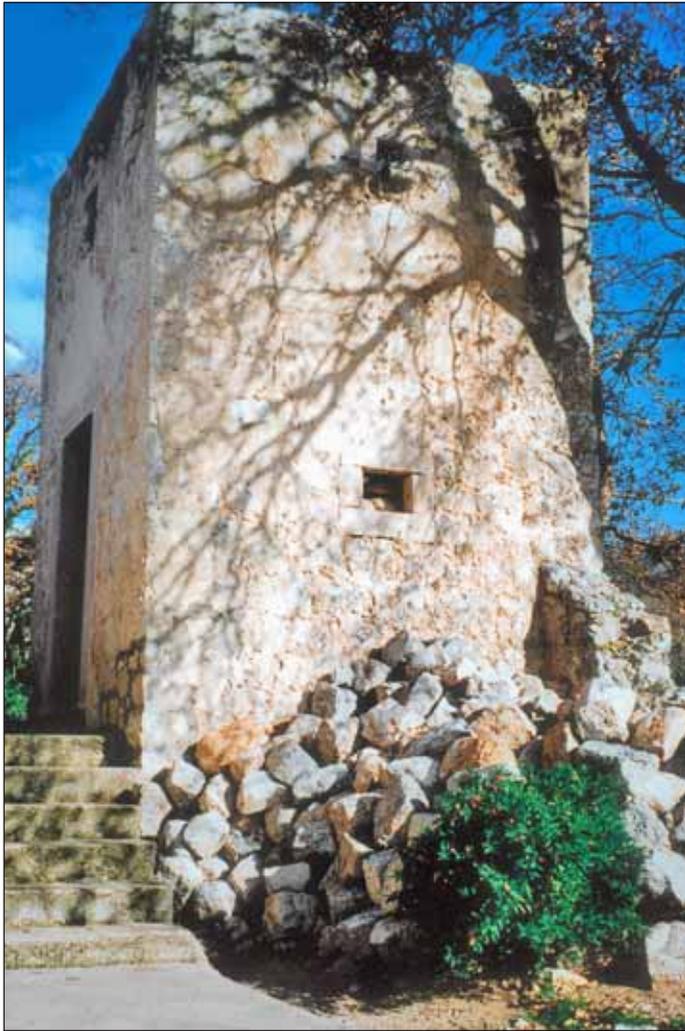


Figure 2. Golubarda before renovation

Golubarda pigeon-house is a small single-storey tower, rectangular in plan (2.20x3.20m). Constructed on terraces, its south, east and part of the west wall rest on the lower, while the northern and rest of the western wall stand on higher ground, height difference being around 1.30m. It was built from evenly cut blocks of somewhat rustic stonework laid in rows and covered from the outside with a layer of lime mortar (3-4mm thick) containing traces of roughly ground tiles. The walls are 0.51m thick, or equivalent to the Ragusan standard length measure of 1 ell.



Figure 3. Stone console of the launch opening

Until recently, the building was in a state requiring immediate renovation: it had no roof, two top rows of stone blocks were missing, with walls partially cracked and uneven in places. The south front has a small window on the mezzanine with a simple stone frame 68x60cm, and a light opening 36x27cm secured by two iron bars cast in lead. Above it, on the first floor, is a loft opening 33x23cm with a simple yet carefully carved stone frame, which, on its right inside, has two iron hinges—supporters of a wooden door, and on the left a bolt hole. At its foot is a stone console—launch platform, beautifully decorated with a double volute motif, twice scrolled. Similar openings have been constructed on each side of the building and on the same level in that those facing the north and west eventually lost the consoles, traces of which could be seen on the wall. On the west front, leveling the upper terrace or about 1,30m above the ground, is a door. The original stone framing has not survived apart from the threshold (147x18x22cm) decorated with a round rod profile, suggesting its former function of a Gothic-Renaissance doorpost or lintel.

Judging by the three rustic stone consoles in the eastern and western wall at 2.10m above the floor originally supporting the beams, the interior of the



Figure 4. The remains of the pigeon holes

pigeon-house was subdivided into two spaces by a wooden beam construction. Besides the already mentioned window facing south, the lower space has no other special features apart from a walled in opening on the east wall, probably a doorway. The walls of the loft contain pigeon holes throughout: at about 0.70m from the floor are two rows of four alternately built pigeon holes, followed by 0.51m of flat surface with a single opening in the middle to be succeeded by the same chequer design as in the lower wall section. Pigeon holes (25x25cm) were built in brick and covered with a smooth layer of lime mortar. The 26cm of the wall surface between them was filled with rubble. The inner wall surface of the loft clearly suggested that the construction must have been roofed over because the existing walls ended with the second row of holes, of which only some remained intact. According to the remains, Golubarda had 64 nests, sufficient for the keeping of about 50 pigeons.

Laid out along the east-west axis, a stone ground-floor cottage adjoined the east front of Golubarda, the former's northern wall leaning on that of the pigeon-house. Part of this wall has survived as well as the remains of the west wall stretching from the east wall of the pigeon-house southwards, both being



Figure 5. Pigeon holes after the reconstruction

0.51m thick (or 1 ell). Traces of gable roof may be seen at about 1.40m below the launch opening on Golubarda's east front. Immediately below the ridge of the gable is a walled up opening—a smaller door which connected the cottage attic with the pigeon-house. The door was 1.80m high with the light opening 1.20x0.55m. It was not framed in stone, but merely shaped with cut blocks, the top being supported by two pointed lintels. A larger heap of carved stones, including beautiful samples of Gothic-Renaissance ornamental work (rod motif, steplike profile, console enriched with the volute motif, etc.), was found in front of the building.

The renovation of Golubarda was undertaken in 2003 with the support of the Ministry of Culture Fund for conservation of immovable cultural properties. Once the outer surface was freed from weeds, and the crumbling mortar and stonework removed, the interstices were filled, two rows of cut stones added to suit the height of the original construction and joints filled with cement mortar. The launch openings were reconstructed, since parts of the stone framing and consoles were missing. Exterior and interior wall surfaces were

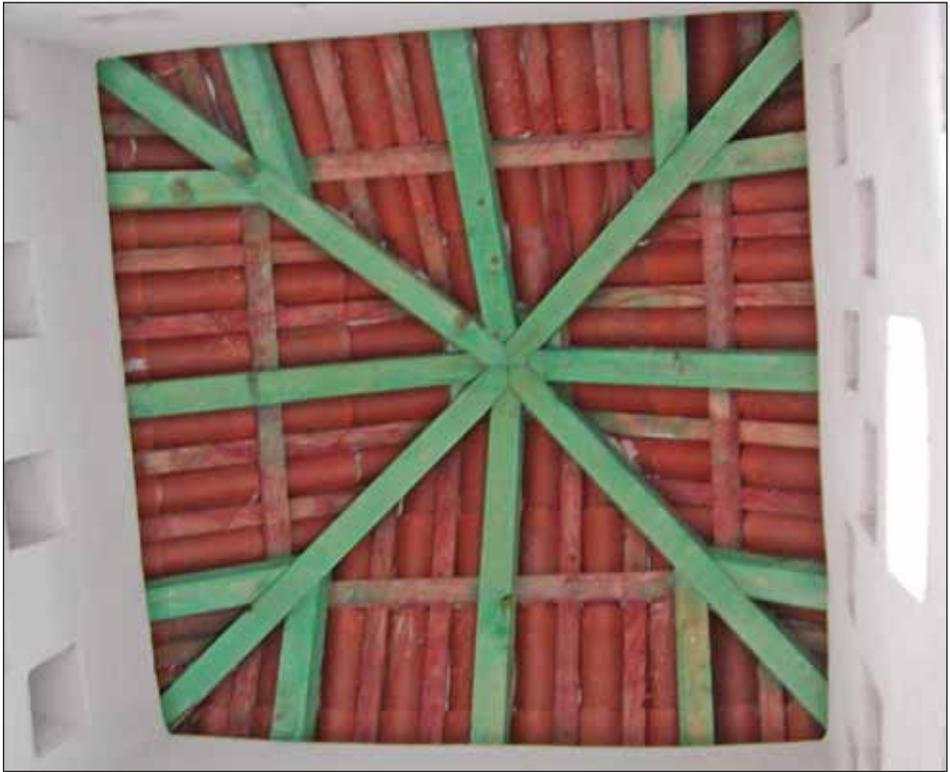


Figure 6. An inside view of the new roof

covered with lime mortar, identical to the original, while the original mortar remained under the new layer. The reconstruction of the roof included the building of a four-sided construction covered with clay tiles (*kanalica*), following the traditional roofing in *Župa dubrovačka*. The door, windows and launch openings were fitted with the traditional wood framing.<sup>1</sup>

### *Gleanings from the past*

The cadastral map from 1837 registers Golubarda as unit 84 of the Cadastral Municipality of Čibača, within a prism-shaped estate probably enclosed with

---

<sup>1</sup> Reconstruction was carried out by “Dubrovnik” contractor and Čikato “Gara” as subcontractor, under the supervision of the Department for Conservation in Dubrovnik – Zvezdana Tolja and myself.

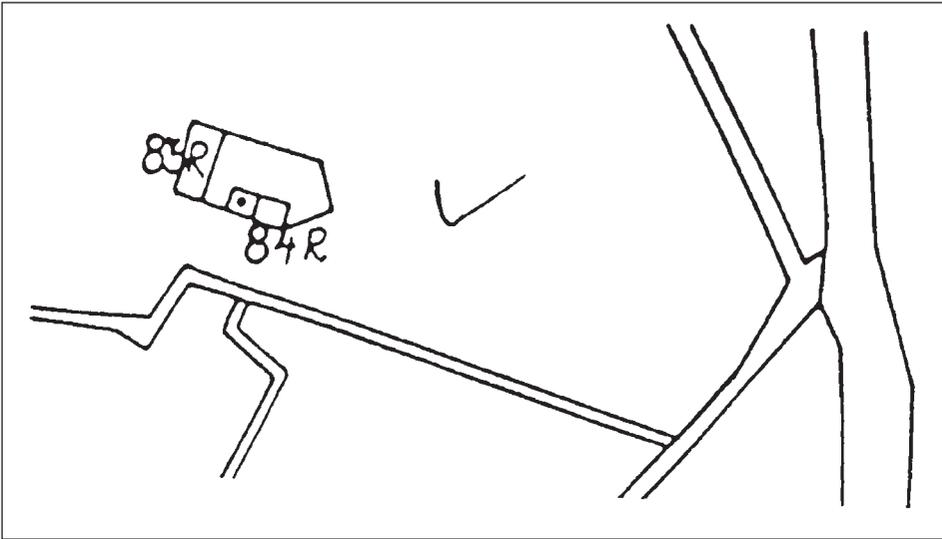


Figure 7. Golubarda as represented on the archival cadastral map from 1837

a wall. This map also shows a building standing longitudinally along a north-south axis west of Golubarda which no longer exists. According to the cadastral survey, integral part of the archival cadastral map, both buildings were in a state of dilapidation and their owners were the Dominican friars. Golubarda is described as a “ruin with tower”, covering an area of 12 fathoms.<sup>2</sup>

One of the landmarks of this area that needs to be considered is the location known as *Žujani puč* or *Puč na Žujani*. Today it borders the access road and the historic wall that enclosed the estate from the east with a large gate opening which, unfortunately, has been stripped of its stone framing. That used to be the entrance to the Golubarda estate, next to which, facing north, a well in stone was designed. Leading from the entrance is a long, wide and wall-defined pathway. A recent construction of a family house in the well’s immediate vicinity has incorporated it in a certain manner. The well’s name “*Žujani*” or “*Žuljani*” might be derived from the name of a church devoted to an old-Christian martyr—St Julian,<sup>3</sup> but conclusive evidence is yet to be found. In

<sup>2</sup> *Arhiv mapa za Dalmaciju, 1837* (Državni arhiv u Splitu - State Archives of Split).

<sup>3</sup> The hamlet of *Žuljana* on the Pelješac Peninsula was named after the church of St Julian. See Nenad Vekarić, *Pelješka naselja u 14. stoljeću*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti JAZU u Dubrovniku, 1989: p. 108.



Figure 8. Žujani puč

favour of this assumption is a sketch of the site from the 1970s, the result of field work of my colleague Lucijana Peko, at the time conservator at the Dubrovnik Institute for the Conservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the pathway which no longer exists, the drawing clearly shows three graves scattered around Golubarda: north and west of the building, and the third farther south. This, no doubt, was a churchyard, leading to a conclusion

---

<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank Lucijana Peko, architect, for the provision of this drawing that helped cast new light on the history of the site.

that the entire estate as entered into the archival cadastral map may have been the grounds of a former religious community, probably a small friary, closed or joined to the Dominican friary. This assumption is further supported by the remains of three stone reliefs (apocalyptic lamb, winged angel, and the relief of a saint) of Gothic origin which, as *spolia*, have been built into the surrounding wall of the Dominican friary, and which had originally belonged to an older Gothic church decorated with fine ornamental stonework.<sup>5</sup> Comprehensive archeological and conservational research of the area pertaining to Golubarda should be able to provide answers to these questions and prevent any future construction at this microlocation, which, unfortunately, tends to fall prey to various construction schemes insensitive to the significance of this historical and cultural site.

Curiously, scholarly literature on Župa dubrovačka and its history makes no mention, not even a slightest reference to Golubarda or its location. The same applies to the documents of the Dubrovnik Dominican friary, although it was part of their estate 200 years ago.<sup>6</sup> Only the private archives of Tomislav Macan, chronicler of Župa dubrovačka and its heritage, nature lover and passionate collector of the local tradition, contains two unpublished references to Golubarda.<sup>7</sup> One reads: "...There is such a tower between Rovanj and Juta. It is called Golubarda...Thus the one between Rovanj and Ljuti is said to have nested pigeons, hence its name Golubarda. An interesting example of how wild popular imagination can be".<sup>8</sup> The other quotation concerns an account of a certain Kristo Miloslavić, son of Antun, from Buići: "Between Rovanje and Juti there stands something like a small tower. It is called Golubarda and is said to have been a pigeon house. But it is hardly likely..."<sup>9</sup> These testimonies aside, the remains of Golubarda unquestionably prove that it was a columbary.

---

<sup>5</sup> Vinicije B. Lupis, »Prilozi poznavanju sakralne baštine Župe Dubrovačke«. *Zbornik Župe dubrovačke* 3 (2000): pp. 102-105.

<sup>6</sup> Friar Stjepan Krsić, scientist focusing on the history, culture, scholarship and art of the Dominicans in Croatia, confirms that in the archives and chronicles of the Dominican friary in Dubrovnik he has never come across Golubarda or its locality.

<sup>7</sup> I am most indebted to Trpimir Macan, who generously provided me with the private archives of his father.

<sup>8</sup> *Arhiv Tomislava Macana*, bundle "Svaštice I" (Miscellanea), Old watchtowers in Župa, recorded 16 March 1946.

<sup>9</sup> *Arhiv Tomislava Macana*, bundle "Prošlost" (Past), Towers at Postranje, recorded 27 July 1958.

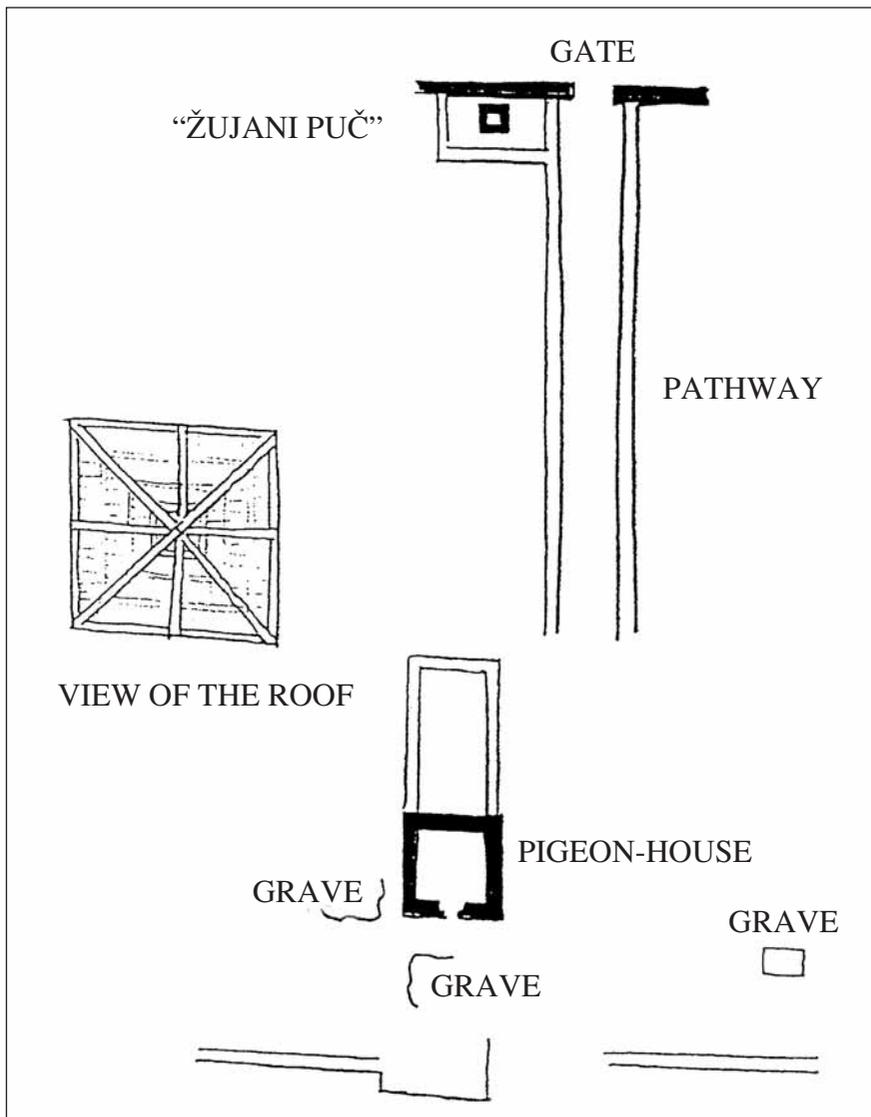


Figure 9. Sketch of the Golubarda site from the 1970s

### *On pigeon-houses and their function*

Pigeon-raising is characterised by centuries of development. First pigeon colonies were farmed in India and central Asia several thousands of years ago, from where they spread to Egypt, Greece and Rome. Pigeon-houses were

virtually a hallmark of every manorial estate in Europe from the Late Middle Ages until the nineteenth century. Their role was primarily commercial but they were raised for pleasure as well. Centuries of selection and crossbreeding from the common ancestor—rock dove—resulted in a number of most decorative and exotic breeds which were exhibited in gardens from spring to autumn in fairly large cages or voleries. Pigeons were also used for competitions in maximum distance and speed flying. Their role in messenger service was very old, particularly as emergency message carriers. As domestic animals, pigeons were essentially important as food thanks to their digestible and nutritious meat, a gourmet item of all banquets and feasts, but equally so for their guano, highly-valued fertilizer which was collected daily. With the development of agriculture and farming in the Late Middle Ages, pigeon excrement, extremely rich in nitrate, became a most valued fertilizer, and as such was added to manure in order to improve its qualities.<sup>10</sup>

It was as early as the thirteenth century that an Italian, Pietro Crescenzi, pointed to an important commercial role of pigeons in his treatises on farming. Thus five chapters of the ninth book of his work *Gli ordini di tutte le cose che si appartengono a commodi e a gli utili della villa* are devoted to columbaries and their building, establishment of pigeon colonies, care and feeding of pigeons, and their use.<sup>11</sup> In the first book of his treatise on architecture entitled *Le Ville*, Andrea Palladio, renowned Italian architect from the sixteenth century, elaborated on the construction of columbaries, their safety and feeding techniques so as to obtain the best breeding results.<sup>12</sup> In the fifth book of his famous work *Theatre d'Agriculture et Mesnage des Champs*, Olivier de Serres (1589-1619), pioneer of agronomy, describes pigeon-raising in detail, including the construction of columbaries and their capacity.<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of these writings one can deduce that pigeon-houses were generally built on quiet wind-sheltered locations and slopes further apart from the dwellings and other farm buildings; on the positions facing south, with mild climate and plenty of water, protected from intruders and as far away as possible from forests and birds of prey, martens and weasels, and from

<sup>10</sup> Vojislav Drinjevski and Milenko Peruača, *Golubarstvo*. Beograd: Nolit, 1976.

<sup>11</sup> Pietro Crescenzi, *Gli ordini di tutte le cose che si appartengono a commodi e a gli utili della villa*. Venezia: Francesco Sansovino, 1561: L. IX, cc. LXXXVI- XC.

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Palladio, *I Quattro libri dell'architettura*. Venezia: Domenico de' Franceschi, 1570: L. I: *La villa*, cc. XXIII and XXIV.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Saltini, *Storia delle scienze agrarie*, vol. I: *Dalle origini al Rinascimento*. Bologna: Edagricole, 1984: pp.439-441.

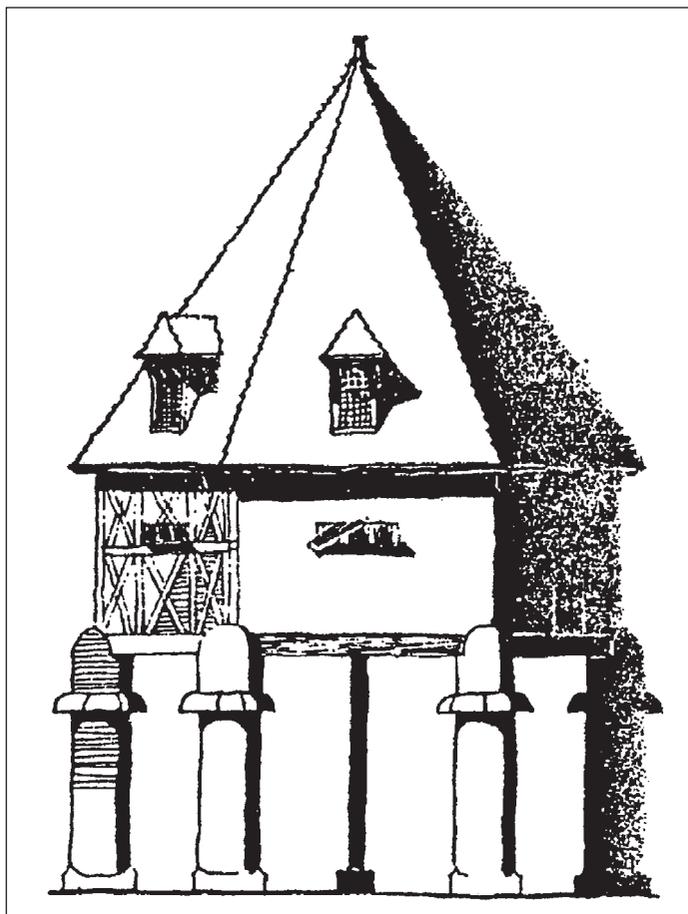


Figure 10: Columbary at Unet (Lot-et-Garonne *département*), France (from: G. Volpe, »Ancora sulle colombaie«: p.181).

disturbing noises. Columbaries were built from the material available (wood, brick, stone), their size varying according to the capacity demands: usually 6 to 8 m in diameter with height exceeding one quarter of its length. The construction sometimes stood on supports with an open lower part which usually served for storing tools or keeping poultry, pigs or sheep. Each side of the pigeon-house had smaller openings for the birds to enter and leave the loft. The roofing resembled that of a tower with steep sides and protruding eaves in order to protect the columbary walls from excessive rain. String course is a common feature of pigeon-houses, aimed to separate the main construction from the upper section. Walls should be clean, smooth and bleached, nests

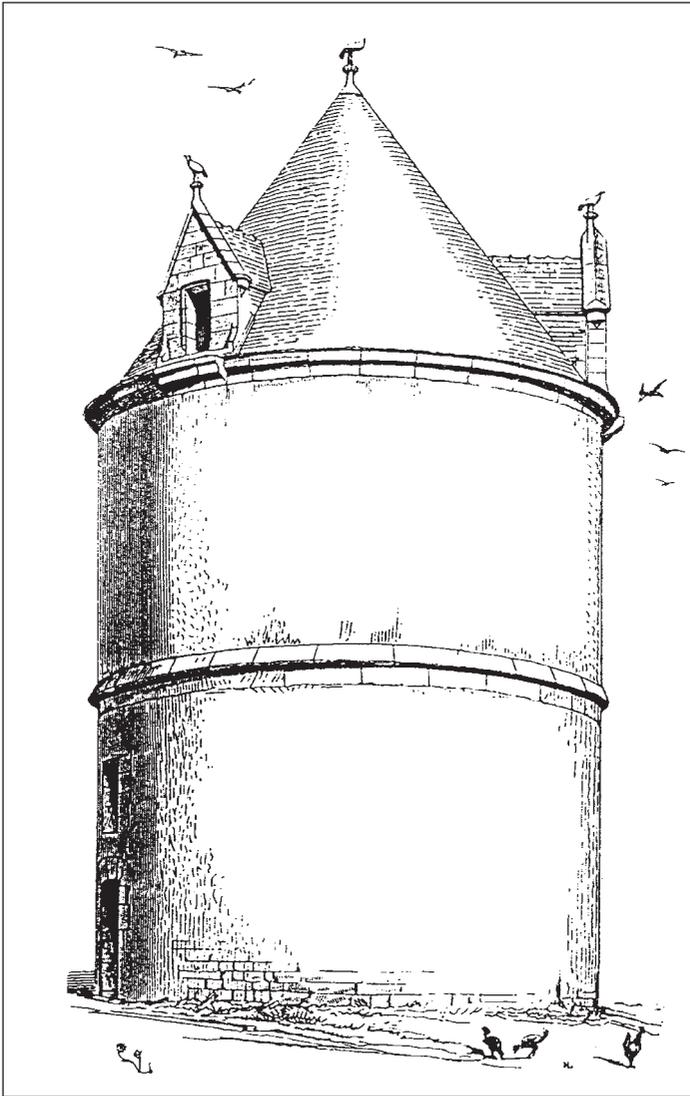


Figure 11: Columbarium at Nesle (Oise *département*),  
France (from: E. E. Viollet-Le-Duc, *Encyclopédie médiévale* I: p. 360).

spacious, warm and made from wood or terracotta, covered with mortar and limed against parasites. Pietro Crescenzi mentions that pigeon holes should be fitted with baskets made from willow canes as nest beds. He also advises how to protect the columbarium from weasels, rats and other animals of prey. Crescenzi emphasizes the importance of regular cleaning and collection of excrements

as prevention against parasites and diseases which could prove fatal for the dovecote population. Wooden crossbars for the birds to stand on were fitted into the construction.

In the medieval period pigeon-raising was an exclusive privilege of a feudal estate or friary and as such was governed by strict regulations defining the number of pigeons (depending on the size of the manor), building material (wood or stone) and the size of the construction itself.<sup>14</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries certain regions kept pigeon inventories, their value being expressed in money. In the seventeenth century the construction of columbaries reached its climax to be followed by years of stagnation when, finally, in the nineteenth century, they fell into disuse.<sup>15</sup>

In the north of France and elsewhere in Europe columbaries were traditionally constructed in the form of round, usually two-storey stone towers with massive walls and a conical roof, the interior of which was covered with holes and designed to suit the birds' comfort to its utmost. Pigeon holes were built from brick so as to provide a warm and damp-free nest, since it was known that damp was a serious health hazard to the pigeons. That is why doves were almost always nested in the upper sections of the building, while the ground floor usually served as a barn. Interesting examples of this type of columbary from the fourteenth century remain in Créteil and Nesle in France, and in St Jacques near Rouen, dating from the sixteenth century.

In the Mediterranean area the origin and design of pigeon-houses was related essentially to military architecture—that is, watchtowers which, in the Middle Ages, were part of a settlement's defence system, scattered along the borders between arable fields and the natural surroundings. With the maintenance of peace and order they tend to lose their original function and become suitable for raising pigeons but also habitation (dwelling-tower).<sup>16</sup> From the Late Middle Ages on, Mediterranean columbaries acquired the shape of a

<sup>14</sup> Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc, *Encyclopédie médiévale*, vol. I. [Paris]: Inter-Livres, 1988: pp. 357-361, s.v. *Colombier*.

<sup>15</sup> Marco Moroni, »Le palombare nei beni fondiari della Santa Casa di Loreto«. *Proposte e ricerche* 7 (1982): p. 51; Marco Moroni, »Case e palombare nel territorio recanatese del 1530«. *Proposte e ricerche* 5 (1980): pp. 37, 41.

<sup>16</sup> Gianni Volpe, »Ancora sulle colombaie. Confronto fra esempi marchigiani e quelli del sud-ovest della Francia«. *Proposte e ricerche* 8 (1982): pp. 180-181; M. Moroni, »Case e palombare nel territorio recanatese del 1530«, *ibidem*: pp. 34, 44; Laura Quagliano Palmucci, »Il rapporto tra ambiente urbano e rurale nella lettura del tipo edilizio a 'palombara'«. *Atti e memorie della Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Marche*, s. VIII, 10 (1976): pp. 341-342.

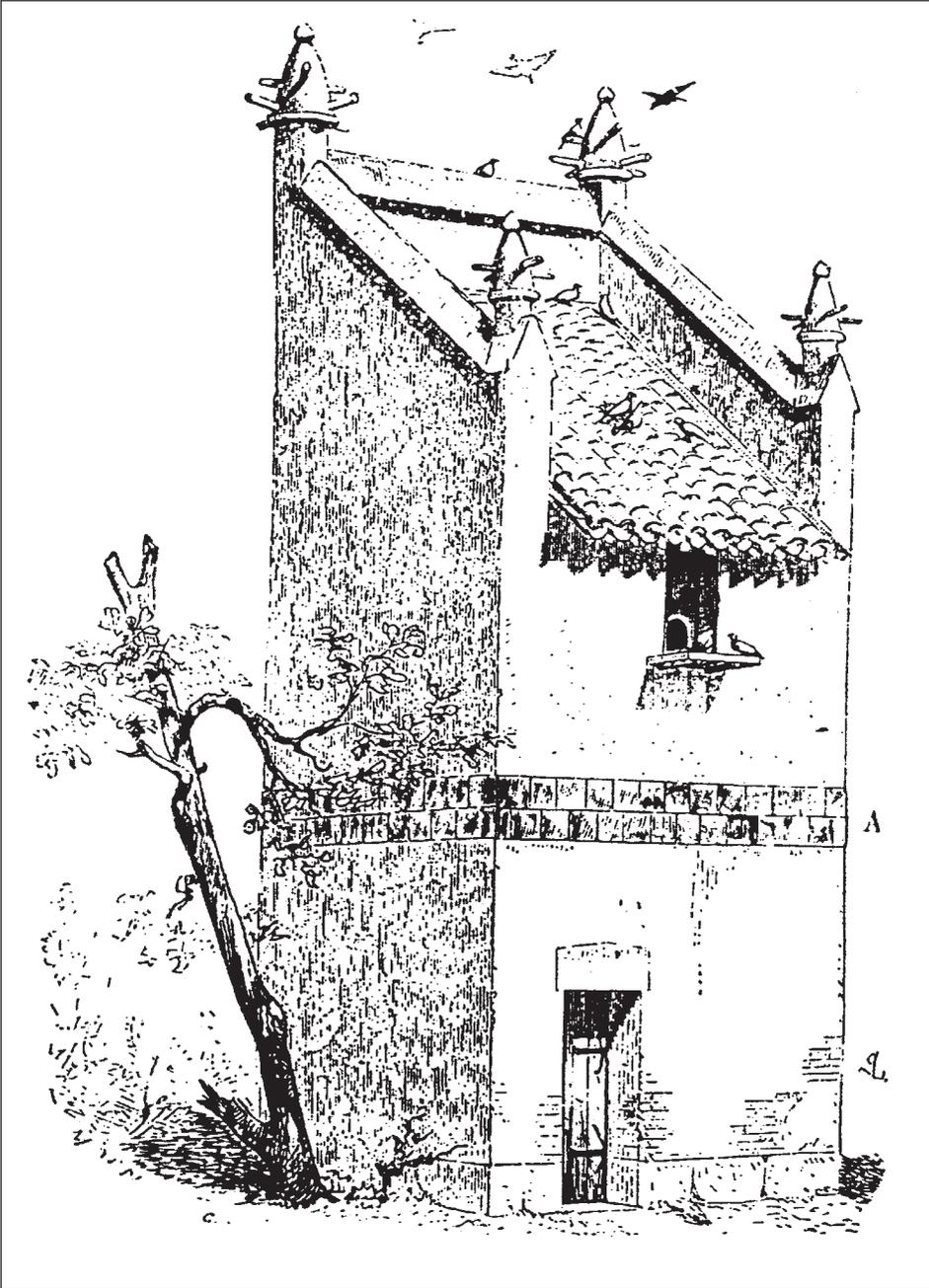


Figure 12. Columbarium at Montauban, France  
(from: E. E. Viollet-Le-Duc, *Encyclopédie médiévale* I: p. 361).



Figure 13. *Repčar* of Hektorović's Tvrđalj in Stari Grad, island of Hvar

small, usually one-storey rectangular tower with a roof covered with clay tiles and crenelation. They sheltered pigeons from strong winds and offered them a place to flock. The crenelation corners were decorated with acroteria so that the birds could recognise their home loft from afar. They were built of stone or brick, and regularly covered with smooth layers of mortar to prevent rats, weasels and snakes, their most common enemies, from entering. Such columbaries have survived in the environs of Toulouse and in Montauban in France,<sup>17</sup> and a unique known example in Croatia within Hektorović's Tvrđalj (fortified villa) in Stari Grad, on the island of Hvar.<sup>18</sup> Overlooking the fishpond, the pigeon-house occupies a square tower decorated with small arcades and colourful ceramic plates at the top. Pigeons were kept in the lower space, while the upper level or *repčar*, as referred to by Hektorović, accommodated sparrows and birds. The constructors paid special attention to the shape of the pigeon holes and their openings—that is, their doors and coverings.<sup>19</sup> No doubt the columbary was Hektorović's pride and joy, as proven by the verses describing it in his *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje*: "Nad ribnjakom odzgar golubinjak oni, više njega rebčar hvalom više poni".<sup>20</sup> His friend Mavro Vetranović also mentions it in an epigram dedicated to Hektorović.<sup>21</sup>

### *Župa's valuable historical site*

A parallel drawn between the remains of Golubarda and the evidence provided by old treatises and the writings of scholars on the architecture of European pigeon-houses indicates that Golubarda faithfully patterned after the contemporary architectural design of columbary constructions of the Mediterranean. Its location, shape and levels, the mezzanine, trap openings and launch platforms, mortar layers, the fact that pigeon holes were built on

<sup>17</sup> E.E. Viollet-Le-Duc, *Encyclopédie médiévale* I: pp. 357-361.

<sup>18</sup> Cvito Fisković, »Hektorovićev Tvrđalj«. *Bulletin Instituta za likovne umjetnosti JAZU* 5/2 (1957): pp. 93-107; Miče Gamulin, *Tvrđalj Petra Hektorovića u Starom Gradu na Hvaru*. Zagreb: Društvo povjesničara umjetnosti Hrvatske, 1988: pp. 16, 44, 46, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Goran Nikšić, »Nove spoznaje o Hektorovićevom Tvrđalju«. *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 27 (1988): pp. 195-211.

<sup>20</sup> Petar Hektorović, *Ribanje i ribarsko prigovaranje*, ed. Marin Franičević. [*Pet stoljeća hrvatske književnosti*, vol. VII]. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1968: p. 206, verse 1180.

<sup>21</sup> Hektorović and Mavro Vetranović exchanged epistles and epigrams, the latter's verse referring to Hektorović's columbary ("...i tvoj golubinjak..."); C. Fisković, »Hektorovićev Tvrđalj«: p. 101.

the upper floor and the ground level was used for keeping poultry, pigs or sheep add to Golubarda's striking resemblance to some of the surviving columbaries of Italy and France. Although on the basis of its shape Golubarda might be datable to the Late Middle Ages, the dimensions of the cut blocks, quality of the facade mortar as well as the preserved decorative element of the launch console point to a somewhat later date—High Renaissance or the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is upon future archeological and archival research to establish whether Golubarda was part of an ecclesiastical or patrician estate. Ragusan nobility owned large country estates—places of retirement and leisure but also farms on which pigeons were raised for food and fertilizer. Or the building may have been awarded a special function unknown to date. Golubarda was erected at a strategic point which commanded the vulnerable borderland with the Ottoman Empire and Brgat as its centre with the localities of Tumba, Carina and Željezna ploča. In the period between the sixteenth and nineteenth century this area of the Dubrovnik Republic was commonly raided by the Turks and their soldiers. As the main caravan route to the interior and beyond passed here, this access point was equally vulnerable to diseases, plague in particular.<sup>22</sup> The fact that a small cottage adjoined the pigeon-house in which guards may have been stationed, but also that from Golubarda visual communication was possible with the towers established at convenient intervals along the so-called “sanitary belt” in Martinovići, Bijelići and with Pavijun above Mandaljena may lead to an assumption that the Golubarda complex functioned as a border defence post, security being one of the Republic's prime considerations. Pigeons were thus used to carry important messages on the state and actions along the border. It is not rare that from as early as the late antiquity onward religious or secular buildings were used as surveillance posts (St Mauro on the island of Lopud or SS Peter and Paul on Mljet, and the monastery of Our Lady above Orebić).

The significance and value of the Golubarda pigeon-house lies in the fact that in broader Croatian terms it represents a rare preserved example of this type of architectural heritage—the landmark of Župa dubrovačka, bearing testimony to a developed lifestyle of the Dubrovnik region of the Renaissance.

---

<sup>22</sup> Vesna Miović-Perić, *Na razmeđu*. Dubrovnik: Zavod za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Dubrovniku, 1997: pp. 28-30, 72, 119-120, 242.