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Istrian and Dalmatian Towns – Urban Space and the Elites: The Cases of Rovinj and Rab (Middle Ages and Early Modern Period)¹

The authors focus on the issue of urban elites in two Adriatic towns, Rab and Rovinj, which differ in their origins and development alike. Rab is an ancient civitas, while Rovinj was classified as a terra in the Venetian administrative system. The two towns also differ in the amount of their preserved written sources. Whereas the medieval sources for Rovinj are only sporadic, for Rab there are a number of notarial books from the late Middle Ages, which allows for a different approach to the spatial identification of urban elites than in Rovinj's case. Based on the available sources, the paper compares the development, significance, and status of urban elites in both towns.

Keywords: urbane elite, urban history, social stratification, Rab, Rovinj, Middle Ages, early modern period

A comparison between two Eastern Adriatic towns, Rovinj on the Istrian coast and Rab on the Kvarner island of the same name, one of the northernmost towns of Dalmatia, may seem simple, but only at the first glance. Apart from the fact that they are both located on the Adriatic coast, had a long period of strong ties to Venice in the Late Middle Ages, and belonged to the Venetian Republic in the Early

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Modern Period, these two towns could not be more different. First of all, Rovinj and Rab have completely different physical characteristics and vistas: while the former is located on a strip of land that was once an elliptical islet in front of the tame Istrian coast, and was later connected to the mainland by a dike, the latter is located on a peninsula at the western coast of a medium-sized and rather hilly Adriatic island opposite Mount Velebit. Within the northern Adriatic region, the two towns played completely different strategic roles during the given period: while Rovinj, along with Pula and Poreč, was a crucial point when crossing the Adriatic from Venice to the maritime route towards the Mediterranean along the Eastern Adriatic coast, Rab was a minor stop on that route, but therefore an entry point to the important land route towards Hungary through Senj. They also had very different political and economic development at that time. Rab was an ancient *civitas* and during the High Middle Ages one of the great regional centres of political and economic power. Before the Fourth Crusade, Rab was also the outermost Venetian stronghold, and its *comes* was usually a son of the current Venetian Doge. At that time, Rovinj was barely mentioned in the sources. In the Late Middle Ages, however, the situation started to change for both towns – while Rab was economically weakening and turned into a poor area by the end of the 15th century, Rovinj was growing in all respects. By the Early Modern Period, their power relations had completely reversed: whereas there were practically no new buildings in the Romanesque and Gothic Rab from the 17th century onwards, Rovinj was flourishing. Such state of affairs was understandably accompanied by changed demographic dynamics and urban development, and consequently by a completely different character of their elites, with a different situation in the urban area. Rovinj experienced a demographic expansion from the Late Middle Ages until the end of the Early Modern Period. It is believed that there were between 1,100 and 1,400 inhabitants there in the late medieval period, and already in 1554 the Venetian syndics Bragadin, Lando, and Morosin mentioned a population of 1,800.² According to Benussi, there were 562 families living in Rovinj in the late 16th century (1595), which means that there could be between 2250 and 2800 persons living in the town.³ In the mid-17th century, the population of Rovinj may have grown to some 4000.⁴

² Egidio Ivetic, *La popolazione dell'Istria nell'età moderna. Lineamenti evolutivi* (Trieste; Rovinj: Unione italiana – Fiume; Università popolare di Trieste, 1997), 67; Marija Mogorović Crljenko, Danijela Doblanović, “Stanovništvo Rovinja prema najstarijoj matičnoj knjizi vjenčanih (1564.-1640.)” [The population of Rovinj according to the oldest marriage register (1564-1640)], *Povijesni prilozi* 49 (2015): 241.

³ Benussi, *Storia documentata di Rovigno* (Trieste: Tipografia del Lloyd austro-ungarico, 1888), 123; cf. Miroslav Bertoša, “Rovinj: fragmenti za povijesni portret grada” [Rovinj: Fragments for a historical portrait of the town], in: *Rovinj – Rovigno*, ed. Tanja Štambuk (Zagreb: Garmond, 1994), “Rovinj: fragmenti,” 10; Mogorović Crljenko, Doblanović, “Stanovništvo Rovinja,” 242.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

The town and urban space

If we are to trust Bernardo Benussi, Rovinj as an island town was fortified already in the 12th century. From the 12th to 13th centuries, a semi-urban entity evolved outside the walls, towards the canal that separated the town from the mainland, and it was first documented on a map from 1619.⁵ According to the preserved depictions of the town from the period before the 17th century, the central part of the town was less populated than its lower part. *Porton del ponte* was the entrance to the bridge by which one crossed from the mainland to the island of Rovinj, and until the 17th century the town remained an island enclosed within the walls.⁶ Outside the walls, and near the canal that divided the island from the mainland, the so-called *borgo* evolved. Right there, next to the main entrances to the town – *Porton della Pescheria vecchia* and the gate of St Damian, the earliest alterations took place concerning the town walls: incorporations into new structures or demolitions. After the mid-17th century, this happened with the total length of the town walls, which became part of new residential or public buildings.⁷ Thus, a sale contract signed on March 25, 1603 mentions a house leaning against the town walls: *un pie manco una onza di casa posta in Rovigno in contra di piazza grande, in corte cossi nominata di Piero Longo appoggiata alla muraglia di questo castello*.⁸

The development of Rab's urban area was more complex due to its long previous history (from the pre-Roman times). The town is located on a peninsula on the west side of the island of the same name. Its port is an intersection of roads from various island valleys. The main sacral buildings (clearly Romanesque) stood in the High Middle Ages (as well as today) along the summit of a ca. 15 m high and 500 m long steep rocky ridge above the sea, at the south-western edge of the town from which one had an outstanding view to the neighbouring archipelago and

⁵ Marino Budicin, "La topografia della Piazza della riva di Rovigno", *Atti del Centro di ricerche storiche di Rovigno* (hereafter: *ATTI*) 42 (2012): 297-298.

⁶ Marino Budicin, "Lo sviluppo dell'abitato di Rovigno oltre il canale sulla terraferma (secoli XVII e XVIII)", *ATTI* 22 (1992): 108. Cf. bibliography in his note.

⁷ Marino Budicin, *Povijesno-urbanistički aspekti Mletačke Istre* [Historical-urbanist aspects of Venetian Istria] (Pazin: Josip Turčinović, 2019), 91.

⁸ State Archive in Pazin – HR DAPA 532 – Rovinj's notaries – Domenico Moscarda, Protocol 5, fol. 16v. The following section of the contract offers an insight into the situation of the house and its neighbours: *1603. Indicione prima li 25 marzo in di de domenica fatto in Rovigno in casa dela infrascritta compratora presente mistro Zorzi q. mistro Francesco Marangon et mistro Nicolo Moscarda murer da quel medesimo loco, ser Francesco Furlan q. ser Vincenzo pet si et suoi eredi inperpetuo, a dado vendutto et alienado a dona Francesca relita q. ser Francesco Ferarese de ser Luca per si et suoi eredi comprante et acetante un pie manco una onza di casa posta in Rovigno in contra di piazza grande, in corte cossi nominata di Piero Longo appoggiata alla muraglia di questo castello. Confina in levante la preditta corte, in ponente il muro della eredità del q. ser Piero Draghichi in ostro la ditta compratrice, in tramontana dona Meneghina Pessuza fu moglie del q. Nicolo Cozza da Valle cossi stimata per mistro Zorzi Marangon et mistro Nicolo Moscarda ut supra nominatti in ducati dodise a lire 6 soldi 4 per ducato...*

further to the open sea. On the mild, north-eastern slope of the cape, beneath the sacral objects, the town extended all the way to the pebble coast, where the port was located. The oldest part of Rab (the half of the peninsula towards the cape), called Kaldanac, was actually the town within the walls until the 12th century. The tower of the later Count's Palace (probably from the late 13th century) in the port and the fortresses on the upper square of Katurbo marked the approximate end of that first town wall of Rab towards the island's interior. It is only in Kaldanac that the so far discovered and explored Roman and pre-Roman remains prove the continuity of settlement from ancient times. As long as the findings do not prove the opposite, it is only the area of Rab in the High Middle Ages, before spreading to the suburbs, which can be identified with the parameters of Arba in Late Antiquity.⁹

In the form as we know it from the Late Middle Ages to the present, the town was established after the year 1000, largely in the 12th century, when a new part with a regular Romanesque structure was constructed. The urban area was thus more than doubled: by the 13th century at the latest, it was fortified by a new wall: it is more likely, however, that this happened already in the 12th century. The notarial records from the second half of the 14th century show that this part of the town was not entirely built at that time, and that there were many small houses in it.¹⁰

The successful, medieval Romanesque Rab was predominantly built of wood, rather than stone, except for the most important buildings and fortifications. This situation is attested as late as the notarial records from the second half of the 14th century, when wooden houses gradually disappeared. In the 16th century, Kaldanac was largely deserted due to depopulation, and by the end of the 18th century it was lying in ruins. The port, the immediate surroundings of both town squares, the edges of Kaldanac towards the rest of the town, and the modest new suburb (*Borgo*) were quite sufficient to accommodate the entire population.¹¹

Of course, this population was very small in the 18th and 19th centuries, far smaller than in the Late Middle Ages. In 1805, there were only 948 persons living in the town of Rab, and 2778 on the entire island. The Commune of Rab, with Lun and Novalja on the neighbouring island of Pag, totalled 3436 inhabitants living

⁹ Neven Budak, "Urban Development of Rab – a Hypothesis", *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 12 (2006): 123-135.

¹⁰ Ibid., 132; Dušan Mlacović, *Nobility and the Island – The Fall and Rise of the Rab Nobility* (Zagreb: Leykam International, 2012), 118-120, 158-159. More on the urban structure of Rab in the Early Modern Period and a 17th-century panorama of the town as a source, see Dušan Mlacović, "A Painting of a Renaissance Town: How a Source Grew to Be a Prank. The case of seventeenth-century painting from St Anthony's in Rab", in: *Alla ricerca di un passato complesso. Contributi in onore di Gian Pietro Brogiolo per il suo settantesimo compleanno*, ed. Alexandra Chavarria Arnau and Miljenko Jurković (Zagreb; Motovun: University of Zagreb, International Research Center for Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, 2016), 285-304.

¹¹ Mlacović, *Nobility and the Island*, 47, 57.

in some 300 houses.¹² According to the census of 1778, the island of Rab had 3692 inhabitants together with the Pag estates.¹³ Thus, the commune had lost a quarter of its population within 30 years. The census from 1759 indicated 1037 inhabitants living in the town, 10% more than in 1805.¹⁴ The population of Rab's commune had been of a similar size some 200 years before, in 1553, when visited by Giovanni Battista Giustiniani, the Venetian syndic for Dalmatia and Albania. According to him, only 3,500 souls lived in the town and on the island.¹⁵ In the Late Middle Ages, the population of the Commune of Rab was far larger, and the town alone had that many inhabitants. The entire Commune of Rab, which included a part of Pag and the nearby islets, and which had a small colony in Jablanac in the 13th century, may have had around 7000 inhabitants when the Black Death struck the Adriatic.¹⁶

In search of an urban elite

When we talk about the elites of both towns, we must again take into account their diversity. Nevertheless, in both cases we are talking about groups of urban population who dominated the towns' political, economic, and cultural life (as the centres of their own communes), who had either formal or informal power over the majority of the local population, and who extensively identified with their commune as the stage of their exercise of power. As the elites of the pre-modern society in small communities were firmly connected with the possession of real estates and drew their power from them, in both Rovinj and Rab we identify as the town elite all those whose main feature was significant financial power, individual, familial, or collective (the Church), and outspoken exemption from physical work (*labor*). As for Rab, one may positively argue that in the late medieval and early modern periods this elite amounted to 12%-15% of the total population of the commune, or up to a quarter of the town's population.

The answer to the question of who were the elites among the inhabitants of Rovinj in the late medieval and early modern times is somewhat more complex than merely establishing the social structure of the population, and the sources from which we may draw the clues are rather meagre. The classical division of the inhabitants of Rovinj in the Early Modern Period was into nobles (*nobili/notabili*) and commoners (*popolani*). In current scholarly literature, the families

¹² Vladislav Brusić, *Otok Rab* [The island of Rab] (Zagreb: Franjevački samostan sv. Eufemije u Kamporu, 1926), 23-24.

¹³ Alberto Fortis, *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (Venice: Alvise Millocco 1774), 190; Brusić, *Otok Rab*, 23.

¹⁴ Parish office Rab – Archive of the former Rab diocese – vol. XIV: Acta episcopi: Iohannes Luca Garagnin (1756-1765), 552-574.

¹⁵ Šime Ljubić, "Commissiones et relationes Venetae II (1525-1553)", *Monumenta spectantia historia Slavorum Meridiolanum* 8 (1877): 257.

¹⁶ Mlacović, *Nobility and the Island*, 159-160.

of councillors are usually referred to as *nobili* or *cittadini*. Benussi, for example, uses both titles and says: "... *che vennero aggregati al Corpo dei cittadini, e quindi anche al Consiglio, i Bichiachi nel 1548... Il loro nome, come pure quello di tutti i Consiglieri, veniva iscritto in apposito libro chiamato Libro dei nobili*".¹⁷ Ivetic calls them *famiglie notabili*,¹⁸ while Bertoša speaks of "nobles" or "aristocrats".¹⁹ A source from the second half of the 16th century mentions ...*una cum aliis civibus ac popularibus Rubini*.²⁰ On the other hand, Bishop Giacomo Filippo Tommasini wrote in the mid-17th century that there were about 4,000 inhabitants in the town, of which 500 were sailors from the ranks of poor commoners. He also stated that there were no noble families (*non vi sono case nobili*),²¹ which may mean that he did not perceive the families involved in the communal council as nobility.

Membership in the council became hereditary, which meant that the council was closed for all those whose ancestors had not been on it. The councillors, those whose ancestors had been members of the council as well, had to be at least 20 years old and could then be appointed to various offices in the commune.²² Miroslav Bertoša indicated that the Venetian rule additionally limited the town's self-government by imposing a *potestà*, that is, the mayor and his administration, and thus a small council of *nobili* was created, which elected three judges from their own ranks.²³ According to Benussi, Rovinj's councillor families were: Basilisco, Bello, Brionese, Burla, Caenazo, Calucci, Giotta, Leonardis, Pesce, Quarantotto, Segala, Sponza, and Vescovi.²⁴ Others could become councillors due to some special merits for the state or the commune: thus, in 1545 it was the Bichiachi family, in 1654 the Costantini, in 1764 the Beloardo, in 1765 the Piccoli, and in 1772 the Biondi family.²⁵ According to Benussi, the Biondi paid 1,000 ducats into the commune treasury on that occasion, as recorded in the *Raccolta di terminazioni*,

¹⁷ Benussi, *Storia documentata di Rovigno*, 84. Unfortunately, the archival material from this period that Benussi used in the municipal archive has meanwhile been lost, including the said *Libro dei nobili*. Jakov Jelinčić has observed that the documents of these institutions have disappeared without a trace; cf. Jakov Jelinčić, "L'archivio capitolare di Rovigno", *ATTI* 22 (1992): 337.

¹⁸ Egidio Ivetic, ed., *L'Istria nel tempo* (Rijeka: Unione Italiana; Rovinj: Centro di ricerche storiche; Trieste: Università popolare di Trieste, 2006), 351.

¹⁹ Bertoša, "Rovinj: fragmenti za povijesni portret grada", 8.

²⁰ Bernardo Benussi, "Abitanti, animali e pascoli in Rovigno e suo territorio nel secolo XVI," *Atti e Memorie della Società Istriana di Archeologia e Storia Patria* (hereafter: *AMSI*) 2 (1886), 1: 128 (n. 31).

²¹ Giacomo Filippo Tommasini, "De' commentarj storici-geografici della Provincia dell'Istria," *Archeografo Triestino* 4 (1837): 424-425.

²² Pietro Kandler, *Statuti municipali di Rovigno* (Trieste: Tipografia del Lloyd Austriaco, 1851), ch. I, 5. Cf. Benussi, *Storia documentata di Rovigno*, 83-84.

²³ Bertoša, "Rovinj: fragmenti za povijesni portret grada", 8.

²⁴ Giovanni Radossi also lists the families Bevilaqua and Tagliapiera, referring to Petronio and Tamaro: Giovanni Radossi, "Stemmi e notizie di famiglie di Rovigno d'Istria", *ATTI* 23 (1993): 189.

²⁵ Benussi, *Storia documentata di Rovigno*, 84.

ducali e lettere written by Antonio Angelini (6 volumes with 1546 pages in total, beginning with the year 1500).²⁶

According to their occupations, the commoners were farmers, fishermen, or various types of craftsmen.²⁷ It is known from the sources that there were 543 families in Rovinj in 1595.²⁸ Biserka Tadić and Miroslav Bertoša, however, using the data of canon Caenazza, concluded that there were 562 households in Rovinj that same year, of which as many as 250 families stemmed from the newcomers who had migrated from Istrian coastal towns, the Kvarner islands of Dalmatia, the Habsburg Croatia, but also from Venice and its hinterland, Carniola and Friuli, as well as from Albania and Greece.²⁹ According to the census of inhabitants and animals published by Benussi, 150 of the said 543 families had grazing animals, in total 4948 of them.³⁰ The source offers interesting information on who owned the animals and thus can also serve, in the absence of other sources, to help determine the property status of councillors' and other families. Namely, Benussi stated that, according to the census of 1595, at least 102 of the 150 families that owned animals had at least a couple of oxen, 9 families had one ox, and 29 of them are listed as extremely wealthy owners. Of these 29, only three (or four)³¹ of the 14 councillor's families of the time were included: Basilisco, Cadenazzo, and Segala.³² The list of wealthy owners further included the following names: Bordacovicchio, Branovicchio, Longo, Pergoli, Zonta, Rotta, Gaiarduzza, Medelin (3), Ferrarese (2), Gambello, Bodi (3), Codmich, da Coslaco, Mismas, da Pedena, da Pinguento, Vendrame, and Zanetta. They differed in the number and type of animals they possessed. Whereas the Bodi, Gambello, Ferrarese (2), Basilisco, Cadenazzo, Gaiarduzza, Rotta, and Pergoli owned primarily cows and steers, the rest were limited to small livestock (*animali minuti*), probably sheep. However, it is interesting that the mentioned difference is not visible when it comes to wedding gifts, i.e. the value of the wedding gift given by young men or received by girls from these families.

²⁶ This information is interesting because of the source that Benussi cites. In his time (19th century), the said source was owned by the Municipality of Rovinj (Municipio di Rovigno), but as far as it is known today, the source never made it to the State Archive in Pazin and it is not known whether it is still sitting in some communal archive. Benussi, *Storia documentata di Rovigno*, 84.

²⁷ Ivetic, ed., *L'Istria nel tempo*, 355; cf. Bertoša, "Rovinj: fragmenti za povijesni portret grada", 9.

²⁸ Bernardo Benussi, "Abitanti, animali e pascoli in Rovigno e suo territorio nel secolo XVI", *AMSI* 2 (1886), no. 1: 121-156, 138.

²⁹ Biserka Tadić, *Rovinj – razvoj naselja* [Rovinj: The town's development] (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 1982), 21; Miroslav Bertoša stated that it was in 1593; cf. Bertoša, "Rovinj: fragmenti za povijesni portret grada", 10.

³⁰ Benussi, "Abitanti, animali e pascoli", 130-131.

³¹ Benussi stated that the two Sotta families had 4 steers, 4 horses, and 630 *animali minuti*. Since this family name is not mentioned in any marriage register for the period from 1564-1599, neither among the wedded couples nor among the witnesses, we believe that the name has been misread: owing to the similarity between the letters "j" and "s", they could be confused in some handwritings. Cf. *ibid.*, 130.

³² *Ibid.*, 130-131.

It is difficult to say what share the members of the so-called councillors' families had in the total population. We know that there were 15 different family names in the council, but the previous research does not tell us how many families from certain large kindreds, such as Vescovi or Sponza, which consisted of various families, entered the council.

Judging from the sources, it actually seems more justified to divide the population into those who partook in power (a closed circle of kindreds) and a large circle of those who were excluded from it. Both groups were very heterogeneous in terms of both property and activities. The group of those who were excluded from power often exceeded the council members by far in terms of estates, movable and immovable property, as well as noble titles.³³ Among them, a strong resentment developed towards those who had formal power, i.e. the families who traditionally had local authority through their membership in the council, especially in the 18th century.³⁴ Nevertheless, in the late 17th century they managed to get the permission to have two of their elected representatives participate in all sessions of the council.³⁵

The answer to the question what it meant to be part of the Rab elite in the Late Middle Ages, and what allows us to understand or define it, is simpler than in the Rovinj case. In an old Dalmatian *civitas*, there was no doubt about one thing: the existence and position of the nobility. Fr. Vladislav Brusić, a historian and Franciscan from the monastery of St Euphemia in Kampo on the island of Rab, was quite resolute in this regard back in 1926: according to him, the Rab elite was identical with the Rab nobles or patricians.³⁶ Although at the end of his brochure he added a list of members of the Great Council of the Rab Commune from 1326,³⁷ which shows that certain commoners participated in the constitutive body of the commune, this information seems irrelevant to him. The island memory, transmitted through the work of local (noble) intellectuals from the 18th century, stored in the homes of Rab's nobility, saw in Rab's commoners exclusively the other, antagonistic pole of Rab's population: the discordant, dissatisfied, and diversified mass of commoners, within which the artisans were slightly advantageous.

³³ Ivetic, *L'Istria nel tempo*, 351.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

³⁵ Egidio Ivetic, "Epoca veneta", in: Marino Budicin (ed.), *Rovigno d'Istria* (Trieste: Fama Ruvignisa, 1997), 112.

³⁶ Brusić, *Otok Rab*, 123-124.

³⁷ The list itself and the year of its compilation are both false. A transcription of the list from Rab's diocesan archive, which Brusić consulted, states that it was made in 1336. Moreover, Brusić misread many of the names in it completely, and thus misinterpreted it by omitting a note on the appointed councillors; cf. Mlacović, *The Nobility and the Island*, 112.

Nevertheless, the late medieval reality of Rab was more complex in this respect than what Brusić presented in 1926: and the answer about the small number of Rab's patricians seems insufficient. A research on the commoners included in the list of members of the Great Council of the Rab Commune in 1372 and 1388, and in what relation they were to those listed as noble (*nobiles*), shows that there were certain commoners who were entitled to be councillors.³⁸ No just any commoners were elected to the Great Council. From the late 13th century, besides the noblemen, only members of specific families belonging to Rab's non-noble population (therefore called *populares de consilio* in the Statute) and the descendants of high-ranking officials of the commune, foreigners who had permanently settled in Rab, had the right to participate. From their economic activity, evident from the records of Rab's notaries, it can be inferred that they could also be wealthy landowners, merchants, or ship owners, same as the Rab's nobility. However, none of them was an artisan or lived by the work of his own hands.³⁹

Since it is possible to reconstruct their genealogies based on these sources and older documents from Rab, it is obvious that they also sought to establish family traditions, and by the end of the 14th they had been an integral part of the circle of both formal and informal decision-makers in the commune for at least a century. Same as the nobles, Rab's *populares de consilio* tended to form family-based and clientist associations. Both groups of council members, noble and non-noble, sought to create excellent family ties by means of suitable marriages. Networking in profitable business networks within and outside the commune, and taking care that their members get hold of distinguished ecclesiastical posts, were of primary concern to both groups. And both groups had equally varied success in pursuing their interests.

According to the Statute of Rab, there were to be 100 to 120 councillors from both groups in the Great Council. In 1372, the ratio between the two was 67:52. This discrepancy became greater by 1388, with 59 nobles and only 39 commoners in the Great Council. That year, a problem appeared in connection with the councillors, since it had only 98 members instead of at least 100. Namely, that year there were exactly 68 noblemen (without the clerics) on the island of Rab who were old enough to enter the Great Council, and all of them, with the exception of one, the oldest of all, were his members. They originated from all 17 of the noble

³⁸ On the relationship between the nobles of Rab and the so-called *populares de consilio* in the 14th century, see Mlacović, *The Nobility and the Island*, 110-113, 231-253.

³⁹ Nevertheless, we know of a man from the later noble family of Nimira that he was involved in building business in the first half of the 14th century (at that time one of the *populares de consilio*), but not as a mason; instead, he acted as a person who had the business talent to accept and undertake significant interventions in an important representative building – the Count's Palace of Rab. Cf. Šime Ljubić, *Listine o odnošajih između južnog Slavenstva i Mletačke republike V* [Documents on the relations between Southern Slavs and the Venetian Republic, vol. 5] (Zagreb: JAZU, 1875), 260.

kindreds. The commoner councillors originated from 26 kindreds or families.⁴⁰ The notarial records and other documents from the 14th century indicate frequent family and business connections between both groups of councillors. Only the most exclusive among Rab's nobles and those *populares de consilio* who were unsuccessful in business were not part of such networks, although understandably for completely opposite reasons.

With the process of restructuring the Great Council of Rab from the end of the 14th century until 1411, when the changes were ratified by the Venetian authorities, several of the most successful kindreds of commoner councillors were aggregated among Rab's nobility. By means of aggregation and expulsion of others from the council, the Great Council of Rab eventually became a council of nobles. From that time on, we can identify Rab's noble families with membership in the communal council. In the 1411 list, there were 38 councillors, all of them old and newly created noblemen who were of age. From that point until the mid-15th century, their number varied only slightly (merely as a shift of generations). In a document from 1430 issued to the Bishop of Rab, 31 noblemen of Rab are listed from a total of 17 noble kindreds (Bore, Cernota, *Conziza*, Dominis, Gauzigna, Hermolao, *Lencio*, *Machina*, *Marinellus*, *Nemira*, *Plangosis*, Poruga, Scaffa, Slovi-gna, Spalatin, Zaro, Zudenico).⁴¹ Although one may expect that the aggregations of 1411 would expand the circle of nobility considerably, this did not happen. In fact, their numbers dropped drastically: the most reliable data about the population of Rab's commune in the mid-15th century come from the dissatisfied commoners of Rab in the aforementioned complaint to Doge Francesco Foscari (1451) concerning the division of communal pastures in 1450. According to their testimony, there were about 300 commoners and less than 40 nobles.⁴² On the island of Rab, all emancipated members of the community had the right to share in the communal pastures, that is to say, all emancipated *nobiles* and *populares*, which means that in 1450 there were 300-330 families (or houses) in the Commune of Rab, whose emancipated members were full-fledged members of the community (*cives*, that is, *cives et habitatores* and *habitatores*). The structure of the dissatisfied group, that is, of *cives* who were not *nobiles*, is visible from the authorizations of 109 *populares* that they handed over two years later, in March 1453, to the legates Ivan Belcich and Androsio de Carba, with the intention of settling the matter in

⁴⁰ Mlacović, *The Nobility and the Island*, 240-242.

⁴¹ Italics indicate those families who were accepted to the nobility ranks in 1411.

⁴² The document is noted down in the *Red Book* or the *Book of Privileges of the Magnificent Commune of Rab* (*Liber Rubeus Privilegiorum Magnifice Comunitatis Arbensis*), which is now preserved at the archive of Rab's archparochial office. Rab's patrician, notary, and historian Juraj Spalatin transcribed the entire book in the second half of the 18th century and titled his transcription *Libro Rosso*. It is preserved in the library of the Franciscan monastery of St Euphemia in Kampor on the island of Rab, without a call number. Our document is on fol. 26.

relation to the pastures before the Venetian offices in charge.⁴³ Out of the 109 men who delivered their authorization, 24 explicitly identified themselves either by name or by profession, and there were 9 different artisan masters among them: a mason (*murarius*), a tanner (*cerdo*), a comber (*pectinator*), a shipbuilder (*calafatus*), an engineer (*piliparius*), a cooper (*barillarius*), a blacksmith (*faber*), two sailors (*marinarius*), a fisherman (*piscator*), four shepherds (*bravarius*, *pastor*), and eight persons who identified themselves as *soziales* of their masters or a part of the commune they lived in. It is quite certain that they were not descendants of the former *populares de consilio*.

From the 15th until the 19th century, when the noble council of Rab was dissolved together with the other councils in the smaller centres of Istria and Dalmatia, it considered itself very exclusive and only exceptionally admitted new nobility. But unlike the aggregation of 1411, the noble status could now only be acquired if the aspirants had been acknowledged as noblemen in the setting from which they had migrated to Rab.⁴⁴ From the 15th century until the late 18th century, when wealthy bourgeois families came to Rab, there was no one in the town or the commune who could compare with them in terms of economic power. Along with their estates (which in Dalmatia were not exactly huge), they owned a large number of small livestock, which grazed on the public pastures of Rab. The total number of animals in their possession exceeded 30,000, while all the others in the commune owned less than 10,000 heads of small livestock together.⁴⁵

Sources for the ubiety of elites in urban space

An important group of sources for ubication of the elite of Rovinj are certainly the notarial records,⁴⁶ which contain various types of contracts that throw some light on the financial status of the population. There are also registers of births and marriages, as well as deaths, and their analysis can likewise offer answers on the question of property and social status. In addition to these archival resources, important data can be provided by the high and narrow houses of Rovinj. Namely, often one finds an inscription in the stone above the entrance door stating when the house was built and who commissioned it. It is based on examples from these three groups of sources that we will try to demonstrate how late medieval and early modern elites in Rovinj can be researched.

⁴³ State Archive in Zadar – Archive of the old Commune of Rab – Records of Rab's notaries – Marcus de Olivone, 4, 4.1, fol. 29-35.

⁴⁴ Mlacović, *The Nobility and the Island*, 11-41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁶ Benussi wrote on many sources that he had seen and consulted, but they are unavailable today. Thus, he mentioned an archive at the District Court in Rovinj where notarial records from the mid-15th century onwards were preserved (around 250). Today, the State Archive in Pazin only has books of Rovinj's notaries from 1597 onwards.

The notarial records and the contracts preserved therein show that there were wealthy individuals and families in Rovinj who did not belong to the layer of co-councillors, but could nevertheless commission a large (and expensive) house. This is evidenced by a building contract from 1602 signed on October 4 in the shop of Mr Jerolim Spiciaro (*in botegha de meser Gierolimo Spiciaro*) between the master mason Nicolo Moscarda (*mistro Nicolo Moscarda murer*) and Francesco Pergoli from Florence (*de meser Francesco Pergoli Fiorentino depentor*). The foil on which the contract was written is damaged (more precisely consumed), so some data has been lost. However, the greater part of the contract has remained preserved and tells us that Nicolo Moscarda agreed to build a house for Francesco Pergoli in the Montalban quarter (*in contra di Montalban*). The contract specifies the height of the floors (which remains a mystery, as this part is damaged), and that it was to be a two-storey house. The contract also specifies the material used for its individual segments. Namely, it is stated that the balconies and the doors should be built of “living” stone (*piere vive*). The house was to have several balconies (*balconi*): one on the ground floor (*in caneva*), two in the front on the first floor, and another in a room facing the sea, which should be made of *piere cotte*. The exterior façade should be made only in the part facing the street (*la fazzata di fuora solamente che sono in strada commune*).⁴⁷ From the above it is clear that the commissioner was a wealthy citizen who wanted to have a large house (not all houses had balconies). It is also evident that the investor was not a member of a conciliar family, and that he was an artisan himself.

On the island of Rab, there are a considerable number of notarial documents from the Late Middle Ages onwards, so we do not have to resort to the less telling historical sources, such as register, when ubicating the elite in the urban area. Whereas the notarial documents from the 14th century offer an illustrative insight into the situation in the town in terms of real-estate ownership, from the mid-15th century one can have a detailed overview of the properties and distribution of various layers of Rab’s population across the town. Documents from the 14th century also offer a retrograde insight into the housing culture in 13th-century Rab. The main type of noble residence was a building complex with an old family tower, *turris*, as its centre: a fortified Romanesque residential building, which could be as old as 200 years in the late 14th century. In the 13th century, it was surrounded by wooden or partly solid auxiliary facilities for the servants, cattle of burden, and storage, covered with slate or straw. In the late 13th century, these auxiliary buildings were enlarged by adding new floors and connected by means of stone stairs and wooden corridors. As separate buildings, away from the tower, they now had small kitchens and oil presses, sometimes furnaces (although it is not clear whether they were lime or bread ovens). Courtyards were always protected

⁴⁷ State Archive in Pazin – HR DAPA 532 – Rovinj’s notaries – Domenico Moscarda, Protocol 5, fol.8.

by walls, especially guarding access to the tower. When such a building complex was divided between family members, the buildings were restructured, the yards divided and separated by partition walls. In the 14th century, the wealthier noblemen replaced the wooden auxiliary objects with solid stones, and instead of slate, they covered them with tiles as a safer, although more expensive roofing material. The area used for the kindred's housing gradually expanded beyond the tower, to other buildings, and the windows of the residential part grew larger. Considerable attention was paid to the harmoniousness and firmness of the portal at the entrance to the complex, and those who could afford it established a chapel within their building complex. Two such chapels are known in Rab: St Stephen's within the tower complex of the Galzigna kindred in Katurbo, established in the first half of the 13th century, and a somewhat younger chapel of Our Lady of Mercy within the building complex of the richest non-noble person during the second half of the 14th century, *popularis* Creste de Bubogna. The set of stone buildings around the tower almost reached its height by the 14th century, and the word *turris* started to be used as a generic name for the complex as a whole (*turris Bubogna, turris Badoarii*).⁴⁸ What *turris* meant on the island of Rab during the second half of the 15th century is evident from a notarial document on renting some rooms in the *turris illorum de Gauzigna*. The tenant was allowed to build a drywall house within.⁴⁹ Such a tower, *turris*, and a house, *domus*, next to it as a smaller, yet likewise solid building made of stone, were a typical home of Rab's nobility in the Middle Ages. But when the houses of the most powerful kindreds on the island came into the hands of master Andrea Alessi and the later masons and stone-carvers, the residential areas of the ancestors of their wealthy clients from the 13th and 14th centuries remained present only as fragments or disappeared completely. The oldest preserved noble houses in Rab, today designated as noble palaces, are not from those times, but from the 15th and 16th centuries, the time of flourishing maritime trade before the island fell into poverty. Despite their late Gothic portals, these building complexes, in their shape, their functional characteristics, and their position in the town, reflect the spirit of Rab's Renaissance, not the Middle Ages. Unlike Rovinj, these buildings had no more than three stories and were only much later and exceptionally adorned by balconies. The exclusivity of noble life still dictated detachment from public urban space and enclosure in one's own courtyards and gardens. Nevertheless, ancient family coats-of-arms remained present on portals and other prominent segments of the front façade.

⁴⁸ Mlacović, *The Nobility and the Island*, 118-119.

⁴⁹ ... *Nobilis vir Arbensis ser Gauzigna dedit tradidit concessit et affitavit Tomasio genero domine Marine de Poruga hinc ad annos quinque proximos futuros unum petium casalis positum in turrim illorum de Gauzigna super Caturbum ad faciendum unam domunculam de maceria et non de muro...*; State Archive in Zadar – Archive of the old municipality of Rab – Records of Rab's notaries – Marinus Maromanus, 4, 5.2, 96.

The elite and urban space

Some contracts recorded with the same notary, Domenico Moscarda, confirm the hypothesis that in Rovinj there were no elite and less elite areas in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Namely, the contract clearly states who are the neighbours of the contract parties, and the additional descriptions show that not all were of the same social status, but they lived next to one another. The very position of a house within a certain urban area actually does not say much about the status of the owner. Rovinj does not seem to have been a town where some neighbourhoods were more elite than others.⁵⁰ Due to its island situation (up to 1763) and a limited area, the town grew upwards. Bishop Tommasini described his stay in a town situated on an island and connected to the mainland by a bridge, where the neighbourhoods and streets were narrow, and the houses were high and extremely crowded, so that, as a rule, a family resided in a single room.⁵¹ Miroslav Bertoša described vividly how the newcomers were literally sitting on the natives' heads. Due to the lack of space, the residential areas were rising in height. Because of this, Rovinj became a town of chimneys, since each newcomer family was building one of their own: on the one hand, it was to have a hearth as a life necessity, but on the other hand, as Bertoša observed, it was to show their social status, for having a hearth was necessary to acquire citizenship, as a legal requirement.⁵² This expansion of the town upwards was also emphasized by Biserka Tadić in her study from the early 1980s, where she showed that four-storey houses dominated Rovinj.⁵³

Using the example of *meser Astolfo Mismas*, we have sought to relate several sources in order to place him and his family in the context of Rovinj's society. We know that the Mismas family was not part of the Rovinj Council. Radossi listed several members (probably brothers) of the Mismas in the 16th century, indicating that it was probably a native family: Tomas (1505-1540), Zuanne (1510-1575), and Zorzi (1515-1550), who was a cobbler.⁵⁴ Astolfo appears several times in the

⁵⁰ A part of the contract offers an insight into the position of the house and the neighbours (State Archive in Pazin – HR DAPA 532 – Rovinj's notaries – Domenico Moscarda, Protocol 5, fol.16v): 1603. *Indicione prima li 25 marzo in di de domenica fatto in Rovigno in casa dela infrascritta compratora presente mistro Zorzi q. mistro Francesco Marangon et mistro Nicolo Moscarda murer da quel medesimo loco, ser Francesco Furlan q. ser Vincenzo pet si et suoi eredi inperpetuo, a dado vendutto et alienado a dona Francesca relita q. ser Francesco Ferarese de ser Luca per si et suoi eredi comprante et acetante un pie manco una onza di casa posta in Rovigno in contra di piazza grande, in corte cossi nominata di Piero Longo appoggiata alla muraglia di questo castello. Confina in levante la preditta corte, in ponente il muro della eredità del q. ser Piero Draghichi in ostro la ditta compratrice, in tramontana dona Meneghina Pessuza fu moglie del q. Nicolo Cozza da Valle cossi stimata per mistro Zorzi Marangon et mistro Nicolo Moscarda ut supra nominatti in ducati dodise a lire 6 soldi 4 per ducato...*

⁵¹ Tommasini, "De' Comentarj", 424.

⁵² Bertoša, *Rovinj: fragmenti za povijesni portret grada*, 10.

⁵³ Tadić, *Rovinj – razvoj grada*, 53-54.

⁵⁴ Radossi, "Stemmi e notizie", 231.

registers of baptisms and marriages: we find him as a father of the baptized, as a father of the married, and also as a godfather at a baptism or a witness at a wedding. He chose godfathers for his daughters from different social groups, and he was himself a godfather to children whose parents were differently titled (*dominus, mistro*) and apparently belonged to different social groups. As the choice of godfathers indicated the family's status, because, as a rule, godfathers were chosen from a group above one's own, it seems that Astolfo Mismas belonged to a wealthy family of Rovinj. He himself chose godfathers from the councillors' families, and he was also interesting to artisan (*mistro*) families as a means of climbing the social ladder. Thus, he was chosen as a godfather by *dominus* Marchesini, which may suggest that they were business partners or friends. We also know about Astolfo Mismas that in 1615 he donated a half of the income from renting his house to hospital paupers.⁵⁵ In the town, in Grisia Street (today no. 2), there is a house with a carved inscription stating that it was commissioned by Astolfo Mismas in 1585.⁵⁶

On the island of Rab, the elite functioned completely differently inside urban town space. The late Gothic and Renaissance palaces of Rab's nobility are located along the main town streets (Spalatin, Marinellis), at their beginnings (the Cernotta and Benedetti palaces), or at their end, next to the main town gate (the Dominis and Nimira palaces), in the harbour (the Zaro and Spalatin palaces), or in the upper square (the Galzigna and Cernotta palaces). Their position mirrors the arrangement of economic functions in the town during the 15th and 16th centuries, and the way of using the urban area within the town walls. Both of the main town areas, Old Square or Katurbo, and *Platea Gospi* were the only contact points between the Renaissance and medieval habitations of Rab's nobility. In the 14th century and before, Middle Street was not the main communication line in the town; more important was the street that led from the pier over the loggia at the Count's Palace to the Old Square and area, with the seemingly lowly name of *Contrata macelli*. Named after the butcher's shop, it connected the harbour and the central part of Kaldanac below the Rab cathedral. At least three towers (*turris*) are known in *Contrata macelli* during the 14th century: the prominent men living in this street included Creste de Bubogna, the richest and most reputable among Rab's *populares de consilio*, the Cernotta, Citadella, and Zudenico kindreds, and the most distinguished of all, the Venetian nobleman Marino Badoaer, a great-grandson of Marco Badoaer, the Count of Rab in the mid-13th century, and a great-great-grandson of Doge Pietro Ziani (r. 1205-1229) and his wife Constance, daughter of the Sicilian king Tancred (r. 1190-1194).

⁵⁵ Giovanni Radossi, "La confraternita dei poveri infermi di Rovigno e i suoi benefattori", *ATTI* 40 (2010), 168; Radossi, "Stemmi e notizie", 231.

⁵⁶ Several inscriptions carved on lintels have been published in: Tadić, *Rovinj – razvoj grada*, 109-111.

It was only at that time that someone from the ranks of the *populares de consilio* could be equally prominent as someone from the top ranks of Rab's nobility. A good example is the Bubogna family, which died out at the end of the 14th century, and whose wealth and influence were the basis of the power and reputation of the kindreds that inherited them. The notarial records inform us about their last generation, *heredes quondam ser Andree de Bubogna*.⁵⁷ The brothers Marinus, Andreas, Creste (Christopher) and Dominicus de Bubogna owned (altogether) at least 7 houses, 3 other buildings, 2 large estates within the walls, a landed estate in the district, and with it at least 27 vineyards, 59 other arable lands, 20 *cavedini* of salt plants, and small livestock grazing on their own pasture in Frkanj as well as the communal pastures on the island of Pag. The family estate in the town stretched from the edge of the cathedral along the church of St Anthony on the town's cape to the *Contrata macelli* in the direction of the port. Alongside the family tower, there were at least two more houses on that estate, and the aforementioned chapel of Our Lady of Mercy (*ecclesia sive capella Marie de Misericordia*), over which the family had patronage rights. The most distinguished among the four brothers was Creste, whom the notaries regularly referred to as *ser* as the only one among the commoner councillors, except in the official documents concerning the commune, because out of courtesy they could only write this title before a nobleman's name. It was an exception that validated the rule. Only two people were richer in the commune: *ser Stephanus de Domine* and *ser Petrogna de Phillipio*, both of them noblemen.⁵⁸ Creste de Bubogna was a councillor at least from 1346, when he was one of the Count's electors.⁵⁹ He lived in the family tower. He was a brother-in-law of the patrician Christofer de Zudenico, with whom he had a joint property and several other common affairs. In addition to the patronage right over the church on his own estate, he was the procurator of the Minorite church of St John the Evangelist, which was the second eminent sanctuary of Rab after the cathedral.⁶⁰ On November 10, 1378, as one of the most distinguished men in the commune, he was elected to a committee for the surrender of the town of the Venetians, who had docked in front of the town port with 10 galleys. He died in 1387, so in 1388 he was no longer among the councillors. Fragments of his last will have remained preserved in three different places. As the founder (*fundator*) of the chapel of Our Lady of Mercy, he left a considerable legation to it. The memory of the Bubogna kindred was preserved for a long time on the island of Rab precisely due to this

⁵⁷ Franciscan monastery of St Euphemia in Kampo on the island of Rab – Records of Rab's notaries – Acta notarii Nicolai quondam Zanmathei de Curtarodulo, 94.

⁵⁸ Mlacović, *The Nobility and the Island*, 232-235.

⁵⁹ Šime Ljubić, *Listine o odnošajih između južnog Slavenstva i Mletačke republike II* [Documents on the relations between Southern Slavs and the Venetian Republic, vol. 2] (Zagreb: JAZU, 1870), 390.

⁶⁰ Franciscan monastery of St Euphemia in Kampo on the island of Rab – Records of Rab's notaries – Acta notarii Nicolai quondam Zanmathei de Curtarodulo, 123.

legation: well into the 17th century, as its chaplains were still appointed according to the provisions of his last will.

Conclusion

A comparison between two Eastern Adriatic towns that are as different as Rovinj and Rab in the pre-modern era points to the great variety of possible manifestations of urban environments on the same coast of this relatively small and enclosed sea. These two examples are sufficient to observe the presence of many factors that affected the urban structure of the town and the distribution of the elite in the urban area. Their variety does not necessarily result from the regional differences between Istria and Dalmatia: if Rovinj were compared with any other town in Dalmatia whose tradition of urban socio-political structures does not originate from Antiquity and that arose after the Middle Ages (such as Šibenik), some of the patterns by which the elite functioned in the town would be closer to each other than in comparison with Rab. On the other hand, comparing Rab with Poreč, which was also an old *civitas*, or with Kotor in the very south of the Eastern Adriatic, may reveal some similarities and contact points in terms of the way in which the elites of these towns functioned within the long-formed (and transformed) urban grid. The message of the comparison between Rovinj and Rab is unambiguous: when studying the relationship between the town, urban space, and the elite, one should always give a chance to kaleidoscopy. On the other hand, analogy as a preferred method of studying towns should be applied with an appropriate dose of scepticism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Oddi, Drawing of Rovinj 1584

Source: Giuseppe Caprin, *L'Istria Nobilissima, Parte I*. Trst, 1905, 112. Originally published in: Angela degli Oddi, *Viaggio de la provincie di mare della Signoria di Venetia*. Venezia, 1584.



APPENDIX 2

Unknown author, A depiction of Rab from the end of the 16th or beginning of the 17th century, The Museum of sacred Art in Rab, painting on canvas, detail

Source: Dušan Mlacović, "A Painting of a Renaissance Town: How a Source Grew to Be a Prank. The case of seventeenth-century painting from St Anthony's in Rab", in: *Alla ricerca di un passato complesso. Contributi in onore di Gian Pietro Brogiolo per il suo settantesimo compleanno*, ed. Alexandra Chavarría Arnau and Miljenko Jurković, Zagreb; Motovun: University of Zagreb, International Research Center for Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, 2016.



APPENDIX 3

Map of Rovinj with marked heights of the buildings

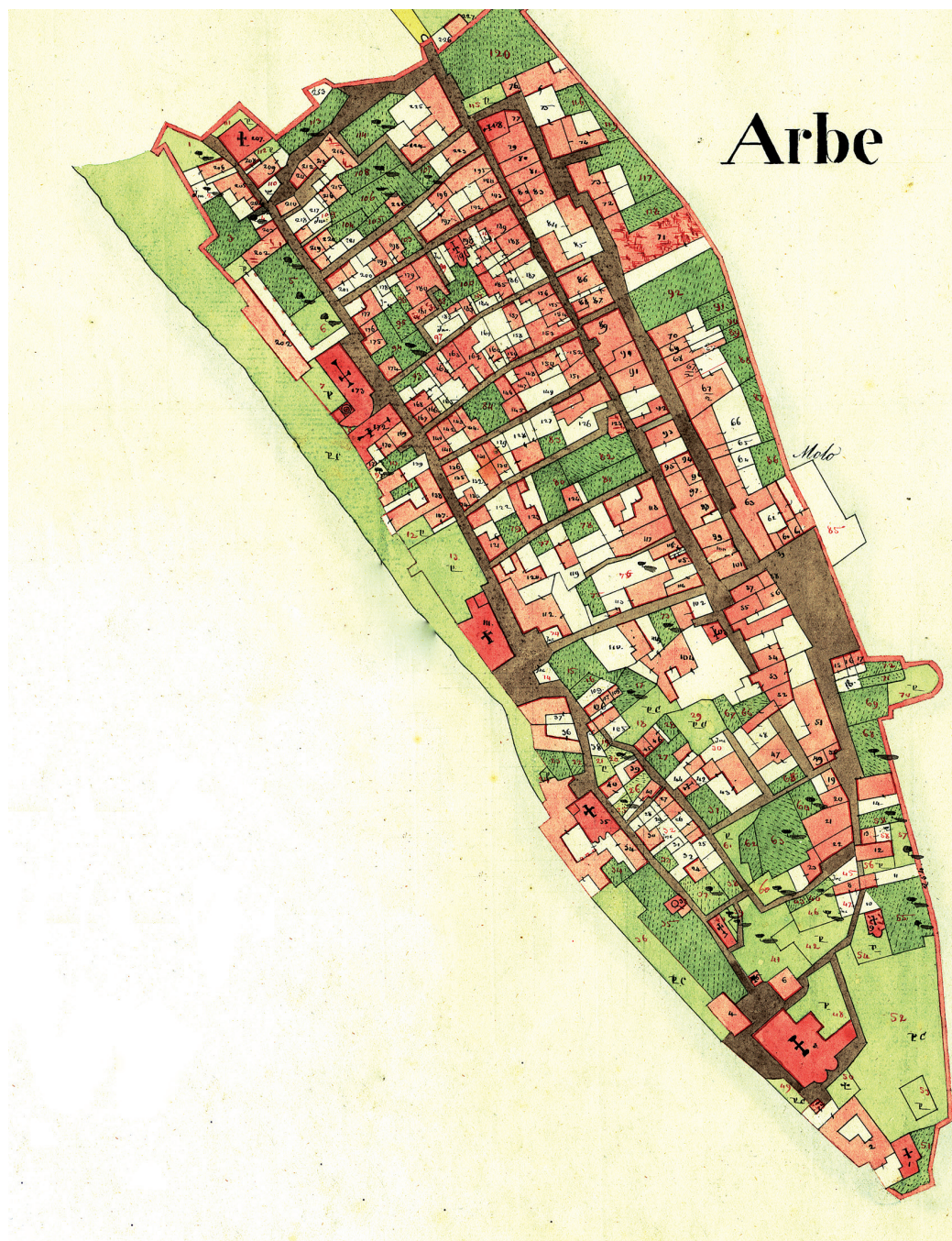
Collection of plans, Institute of Art History, Zagreb, P 03354, the object height analysis, 1:2000, author Biserka Tadić, architectural documentation prepared by Marie Stepinac



APPENDIX 4

Rab in the Austrian cadastre in 1828

Source: Dušan Mlacović, *Nobility and the Island – The Fall and Rise of the Rab Nobility*, Zagreb: Leykam International, 2012.



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Istarski i dalmatinski gradovi – urbani prostor i elita, primjer Rovinja i Raba (srednji i rani novi vijek)

Sažetak

U središtu je ovoga rada propitkivanje položaja, značaja i uopće određivanje gradskih elita u gradovima Rabu i Rovinju. Dva se grada međusobno razlikuju, napose u antičkom i srednjovjekovnom razdoblju, što je vezano i uz njihov nastanak i kasniji položaj, a samim time i definiranje gradskih elita u gradskome prostoru. Dok je Rab bio *civitas*, Rovinju je u mletačkom upravnom sustavu dodijeljen naslov *terra*. U geografskom smislu također postoje broje razlike koje određuju prostore stanovanja elita, a i sačuvani izvori na temelju kojih se elite mogu smjestiti u gradski prostor fizički, ali i statusno. Za Rovinj primjerice nema sačuvanih bilježničkih knjiga sve do kraja 16. stoljeća, dok za Rab one postoje i za razdoblje kasnoga srednjeg vijeka. Bilježničke knjige rječito progovaraju o ulozi, položaju i statusu gradskih elita. U njihovu nedostatku u slučaju Rovinja, poslužili smo se matičnim knjigama, popisima stanovnika i njihovih dobara, ali i preživjelim ostacima kuća koje nedvosmisleno govore o njihovu nastanku, gradnji i vlasnicima.

Usporedba Raba i Rovinja u predmodernu dobu ukazuje na niz mogućih manifestacija urbanih sredina na istočnojadranskoj obali. Rovinj je po svom razvoju kad je riječ o funkcioniranju gradskih elita unutar gradskoga prostora moguće usporediti sa Šibenikom, dok je Rabu primjerice bliži istarski Poreč ili Kotor na samome jugu Jadrana.

Cljučne riječi: Rab, Rovinj, srednji vijek, rani novi vijek, urbana povijest, gradske elite

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