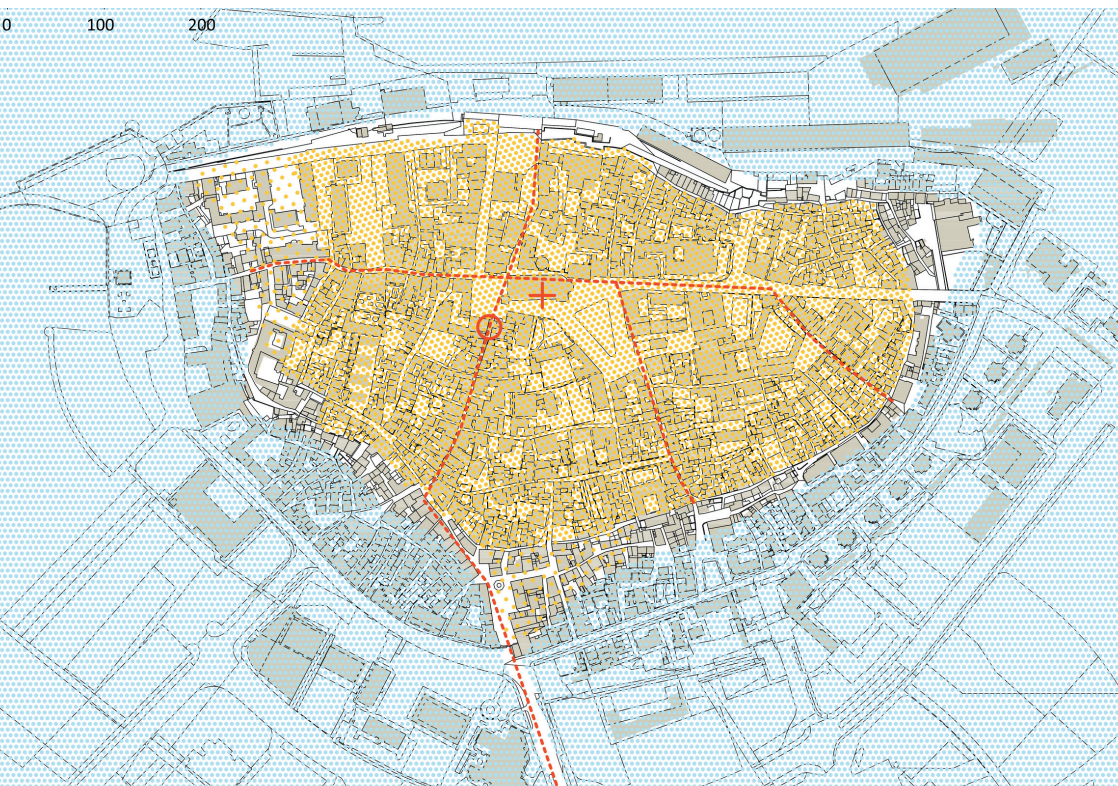


Cities in Between: Urban Dynamics in the Medieval Mediterranean World



KOPER / CAPODISTRIA, 6-8 MAY 2026

Gravisi-Buttorai Palace

Ulica Osvobodilne fronte 10, Koper / Via Fronte di liberazione 10, Capodistria

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Programme and Organising Committee:

Dušan Mlacovič, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts; **Renata Novak Klemenčič**, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts; **Sara Turk Marolt**, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Arts

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INTRODUCTION

In 2017, after decades of limited availability, medieval archival material from Koper once again became accessible to researchers. Three years later, the International Centre for Comparative Historical Studies (ICCHS), Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, launched its first project on medieval Koper. From the outset, it became clear that Koper was one of the largest urban centres in the Adriatic. It was the principal urban centre of the Patriarchate of Aquileia and by far the most significant urban settlement in the territory of present-day Slovenia.

Although its population may not have met the threshold for a medium-sized city in the Middle Ages, its urban dynamics differed from those of neighbouring towns. In the late Middle Ages, Koper functioned as a typical Mediterranean medium-sized city: a hub of vibrant economic activity, a cosmopolitan and multilingual population, pronounced social stratification, a dense network of religious institutions, a rich artistic and architectural production, and strong connections with its hinterland.

With this perspective on medieval Koper in mind—particularly in comparison with better-known urban models such as Dubrovnik—an international symposium was conceived within the framework of the project *Urban Morphology of Koper in the Late Middle Ages* (J6-50188, 2024–2026). Bringing together historians and art historians working on the relationships between medium-sized and large cities in the medieval Mediterranean, the symposium seeks to open new perspectives on urban dynamics across the region.

Scholars from Portugal, France, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, and Turkey will examine the interactions, networks, and influences that shaped urban life from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries, with the fifteenth century marking a period of transition to early modern states. Through a wide range of case studies, the symposium addresses themes in social and cultural urban history, as well as the history of art, architecture, and urbanism across the Mediterranean and beyond.

18:00: Event opening and welcome remarks

Aleš Bržan (Mayor of the Municipality of Koper)

Mario Steffè (Italian Community “Santorio Santorio” Koper)

Dušan Mlacović (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana): Medieval Koper / Capodistria and the Mediterranean

18:45 Welcome gathering with refreshments (ground floor)

09:30–11:00 – Session I – Chair: Irena Benyovsky Latin

Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi, Ciutat de Mallorca, a City "In Between": Reflections on the Definition of the Medium-Sized City in the Medieval Mediterranean

Gonçalo Melo da Silva, Towns and Cities Scaling Power: Urban Networks and Municipal Cooperation in the Algarve (1300–1500): Practices, Spaces, and Agents

11:00 Coffee break**11:30–13:00**

Elisabetta Scirocco – Mariano Saggiomo, Una chiesa tutta per sé. Strategie sepolcrali e chiese private a Napoli e in altri centri italiani nel Basso Medioevo

Renata Novak Klemenčič, Scambi artistici tra Dubrovnik e l'Italia meridionale nel tardo medioevo

13:00 Lunch break**15:30–17:45 – Session II – Chair: Dušan Mlacović**

Hasan Sercan Sağlam, From Byzantine Suburb to Genoese Colony: Urban Transformation in Medieval Galata

Dominique Valérian, Ports and Urban Autonomy in the Medieval Maghreb

Irena Benyovsky Latin, The Territoriality of Venice and 'Urban Network' in the Eastern Adriatic (Before the Treaty of Zadar in 1358)

19:30 Conference dinner

10:00–12:15 – Session III – Chair: Renata Novak Klemenčič

Miriam Davide, From Lombardy to North-Eastern Italy: The Different Settlements of Nobles, Merchants, Moneylenders, Craftsmen and Porters Within the Same Urban Contexts

Sara Turk Marolt, Da Padova al Friuli: il primo giottismo nella chiesa di San Francesco a Udine

Dušan Mlacović, The City and Its Neighborhoods: the Case of the Medieval Koper / Capodistria

12:15 Lunch break

14:30 Medieval Koper / Capodistria tour (a walk, Renata Novak Klemenčič)

ABSTRACTS

IRENA BENYOVSKY LATIN

Department of Medieval History, Croatian Institute of History, Zagreb,
Croatia; ibenyovsky@isp.hr

The Territoriality of Venice and 'Urban Network' in the Eastern Adriatic (Before the Treaty of Zadar in 1358)

Between the twelfth and the mid-fourteenth century, Venice gradually acquired a large part of the Eastern Adriatic, bringing individual local communities under its control and incorporating them into its system of rectorates, which formed the basis of the Venetian political organization. The borders of these rectorates were largely inherited from earlier communal divisions, although some were newly established. The new possessions were primarily connected by sea – both with the city of Venice and the Dogado, and among themselves, as well as with other Venetian territories in the Ionian and Aegean seas and beyond. Some rectorates encompassed a single island, others several smaller islands, and others narrow stretches of coastal territory, sometimes including associated archipelagos. Each rectorate had its centre in a selected city, where a Venetian rector (potestas or count) resided either for life (leased countship) or temporarily (ad regimen), acting as a representative of (then polycentric) Venetian government and as an intermediary between the centre and the local community. These centres varied considerably in geographical setting, historical origin, and importance for the metropolis. Some were relatively large urban centres, exercising authority over surrounding settlements and even founding new ones; others were smaller but held strategic or economic significance. Venice also encouraged the establishment of new towns along maritime routes, on the sites of earlier, abandoned settlements. This paper traces the formation and development of the Eastern Adriatic “urban network” under Venetian rule and analyses the key elements of Venetian territoriality that shaped the layout and scale of urban centres. These elements interacted with local traditions and initiatives, and formed part of a broader urban trends, including the development of suburbs, planned towns, and public architecture. The extent of Venetian interventions depended not only on the period in which individual cities came under central authority, but also on shifting traffic routes, influenced by territorial gains and losses as well as by technological innovations

MIRIAM DAVIDE

Department of Humanities, University of Trieste, Italy;
mdavide@units.it

From Lombardy to North-Eastern Italy: The Different Settlements of Nobles, Merchants, Moneylenders, Craftsmen and Porters Within the Same Urban Contexts

The migration of Lombards from Milan, Bergamo, Como and other cities in Lombardy to north-eastern Italy was driven by economic and political factors. The multifarious rationales for migration are also reflected in the selection of place of residence in the destination cities. The occupations of new arrivals exerted a significant influence on their choice of place of residence, with a clear distinction between those in low-paid jobs and those belonging to the merchant class. An illustrative example of this phenomenon can be observed in the city of Venice, where the distinct occupations of the Lombards resulted in their settlement across different areas of the city. To illustrate this point, one need only consider the different locations within the urban area occupied by porters from Bergamo and merchants of Milanese origin in Rialto, who were engaged in large-scale trade. A distinct scenario is that of immigration driven by political factors, which resulted in integration into local societies facilitated by the institutional context. In such cases, there is a clear tendency to settle in specific locations within the urban setting linked to the role held. A prime example of this phenomenon is provided by the Milanese della Torre family in Padua and in the main cities of the Patriarchate of Aquileia. In this particular instance, as well as in others concerning families associated with the Torriani entourage, the connection with the city of origin remains strong, driven by the aspiration of a return that is frequently never realised.

INGRID HOUSSAYE MICHIEZI

Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS), Orient & Méditerranée
UMR 8167, Paris, France; ingrid.houssaye-michienzi@cnr.fr

Ciutat de Mallorca, a City "In Between": Reflections on the Definition of the Medium- Sized City in the Medieval Mediterranean

What is a medium-sized city in the medieval Mediterranean? Ciutat de Mallorca offers a compelling case to question this definition. Small in demographic terms (fewer than 18,000 inhabitants in the 14th century), it was nonetheless a major commercial hub connecting the Iberian Peninsula, the Maghreb and the great Italian ports. As an island city, it escapes standard categories: neither metropolis nor simple relay, it played a functional role far exceeding its size. Positioned between worlds – between the Christian and Muslim Mediterranean, between Iberian and Italian commercial spheres, between continental powers and African markets – Mallorca embodies precisely the kind of "city in between" this conference seeks to explore.

This paper proposes to use Mallorca as a limit case to reflect on the criteria that define a medium-sized city in the Mediterranean world : is demography sufficient, or should we privilege functional criteria (position within trade networks, social diversity, capacity for attraction and redistribution)? The city's internal social dynamics further complicate the picture: its multiconfessional population of Christians, Jews and converts, and the profound urban reconfigurations triggered by the pogroms of 1391, reveal a city constantly negotiating its identity under pressure from larger political and economic forces.

Drawing on Tuscan merchant archives (Datini records), Aragonese administrative sources and topographical data, it shows how a small city could exert considerable influence on its regional environment and beyond, while remaining structurally dependent on the larger metropolises surrounding it. Mallorca thus emerges as a revealing test case for the limits of classical urban typologies applied to the medieval Mediterranean.

GONALO MELO DA SILVA

School of Social Sciences and Humanities / Institute for Medieval Studies,
NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal; gmsilva@fcsh.unl.pt

Towns and Cities Scaling Power: Urban Networks and Municipal Cooperation in the Algarve (1300–1500): Practices, Spaces, and Agents

Medieval Europe was characterized by towns and cities of diverse origins, scales, and socio-economic and cultural profiles. Medievalists have long maintained a sustained interest in these settlements, making them one of their principal objects of observation and study. Indeed, if we consider only the first decades of the twentieth century, European historiography already displays a substantial body of work on medieval towns, addressing themes such as urban networks and hierarchies, political communication, and the dynamics of cooperation and rivalry between urban centres. However, as with other themes, when so-called “failed” towns, as well as small and medium-sized urban centres, are taken into account, historians have tended to privilege the study of one settlement. Moreover, when incorporated into analyses of urban networks, these towns are often treated as secondary or peripheral elements, interpreted primarily from the perspective of larger cities.

This scenario highlights the need to deepen the study of political communication and cooperation among such European towns and cities, even though this is not always possible due to the scarcity of documentary sources. This is not, however, the case for the Algarve, a maritime region of Portugal composed entirely of urban centres of modest scale within the kingdom. Drawing on both royal and municipal sources, the present study seeks to analyze the forms of cooperation between the towns and cities of the Algarve in the later Middle Ages. To this end, it begins by outlining the region's hierarchy and urban network and the assembled documentary corpus, before proceeding to analyze the factors that fostered cooperation, its various forms, the institutions and spaces of negotiation, the agents involved, and the associated costs. Finally, I hope to contribute to advancing the discussion on cooperation among Mediterranean port towns.

DUŠAN MLACOVIĆ

Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia;
dusan.mlacovic@ff.uni-lj.si

The City and Its Neighborhoods: the Case of the Medieval Koper / Capodistria

Late-medieval Koper (Capodistria) is only just beginning to establish itself among the medieval Mediterranean cities: after its historical municipal archives had been inaccessible to researchers for decades, it became clear even from initial research that it was the largest late medieval urban center on the coasts of the eastern Adriatic and that, by Adriatic standards, it could be classified as a medium-sized city. It also soon became clear that it was divided into neighborhoods that played an unusually significant role compared to the quarters in other comparable cities along the Adriatic coast south of Aquileia and north of Durres. In this paper, we will analyze the composition and characteristics of Koper's twelve neighborhoods and identify the sources of influence on this neighborhood structure in the city: despite the city's close ties to Venice, this structure does not originate from there, as in the case with Dubrovnik and its sestieri. Where are the portae of Koper coming from and how far in time can we trace them? What do they tell us about the urban development of the city prior to late Middle Ages?

RENATA NOVAK KLEMENČIČ

Department of Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia;
renata.novakklemencic@ff.uni-lj.si

Scambi artistici tra Dubrovnik e l'Italia meridionale nel tardo medioevo

Dubrovnik fece parte della Repubblica di Venezia fino al 1358, dopodiché divenne ufficialmente parte del Regno d'Ungheria, ma di fatto funzionò come repubblica autonoma. I suoi legami economici e, di conseguenza, anche quelli artistici, dipendevano più dalla vicinanza geografica che dalla politica. In alcuni casi, si è potuto dimostrare che furono proprio i legami commerciali con la remota Repubblica di Ragusa a portare prima i notai e, subito dopo, anche vari maestri.

I collegamenti avvenivano attraverso i porti della costa adriatica: Venezia, Ancona e le varie città del Regno di Napoli, con le quali Dubrovnik aveva stipulato accordi commerciali già molto presto. Non sorprende, quindi, che già intorno al 1200 sia attestato come protomagister della cattedrale di Dubrovnik il figlio di un protomagister di Trani. Nei due secoli successivi, a Dubrovnik si incontrano ancora alcuni maestri provenienti dall'Italia meridionale. I documenti ragusei, ottimamente conservati, ci permettono di seguire, nella prima metà del XV secolo, i mercanti, gli ambasciatori e i rappresentanti della Repubblica presso la corte napoletana, nonché vari maestri che lavoravano a Dubrovnik e a Napoli. I dati sono così precisi che, alle soglie del Rinascimento, è possibile persino risalire agli intermediari delle commissioni artistiche di Alfonso d'Aragona.

HASAN SERCAN SAĞLAM

Sevgi Gönül Center for Byzantine Studies, Koç University, Istanbul, Turkey;
saglam.h.sercan@gmail.com

From Byzantine Suburb to Genoese Colony: Urban Transformation in Medieval Galata

Situated on the northern shore of the Golden Horn, opposite the historical peninsula of Constantinople, Galata occupied a distinctive position within the urban system of the medieval capital. Known in the Byzantine period as Sykai, the settlement formed the 13th region of Constantinople and functioned as a suburban extension of the metropolis. Closely connected to the maritime life of the imperial city, it hosted harbor-related activities and secondary settlement areas associated with the economic infrastructure of the capital.

A decisive transformation occurred in the later 13th century, when privileges granted by the Byzantine Empire enabled the Republic of Genoa to establish its colonial settlement in the area, known as Pera. From this point onward, Galata developed into a distinct urban entity integrated into the commercial and political networks of the Genoese Mediterranean. This process, however, did not unfold on an empty site. The Genoese colony emerged within a landscape already shaped by earlier Byzantine occupation and urban organization.

This paper examines the transformation of Galata between the 13th and 15th centuries by focusing on the relationship between continuity and change in its built environment. While the Genoese administration introduced new institutions, fortifications, and urban expansions reflecting the needs of a colonial trading community, elements of the earlier Byzantine suburb continued to influence the spatial development of the settlement.

Approaching Galata as a layered urban landscape shaped by successive historical phases, the study highlights how the Genoese colony both transformed and incorporated earlier structures and spatial patterns. Through this perspective, Galata can be understood as a “city in between,” where the metropolitan legacy of Byzantine Constantinople intersected with the material and institutional imprint of a Genoese overseas colony.

ELISABETTA SCIROCCO – MARIANO SAGGIOMO

Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History, Rome, Italy;
elisabetta.scirocco@biblhertz.it
mariano.saggiomo@biblhertz.it

A Church for One's Own. Sepulchral Strategies and Private Churches in Naples and Other Italian Centers in the Late Middle Ages

This paper analyzes the role of urban elites in constructing a topography of memory through burials and family foundations in Italian cities between the Late Middle Ages and the early modern period. Starting from Naples, capital of the Kingdom of Sicily from the 13th century, it will examine the strategies of family representation within church spaces, from both a topographic and topological perspective, and phenomena of feudal conservatism such as the reuse of Gothic tombs in the late 15th century and the production of tombs in a medieval style during the height of the Renaissance period.

The paper will then focus on the – less well-known – phenomenon of private churches, a competitive element in the construction of urban and social space, particularly developed in Naples and documented from the Late Middle Ages, with more than forty churches recorded the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. These buildings, although architecturally autonomous, were always created in relation to other significant sacred or civic buildings (palaces, seats of power, major churches), guaranteeing attendance and visibility through indulgences, relics, and miraculous artifacts.

The Neapolitan case, precisely due to its extensive examples, offers insights for revisiting even well-known places of worship in other contexts from a new angle. To this end, Naples will be compared with Genoa, with its system of family parishes, and Padua, with the Scrovegni Chapel and the Lupi Oratory.

The ultimate goal is to draw parallels between these phenomena occurring in the examined centers, stimulating a comparative reflection within the context of the conference, also with other centers in the Mediterranean.

SARA TURK MAROLT

Department of Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia;
sara.turk@ff.uni-lj.si

Da Padova al Friuli: il primo giottismo nella chiesa di San Francesco a Udine

La chiesa di San Francesco a Udine conserva un ciclo pittorico stratificato, risultato di diverse fasi decorative che documentano le dinamiche artistiche del Friuli nel primo Trecento. Le pitture delle cappelle del coro mostrano la circolazione di modelli stilistici tra i principali centri giotteschi del nord-est italiano, offrendo spunti significativi per comprendere le influenze e le interazioni tra artisti locali e altri importanti centri pittorici.

Il contributo si concentra sul secondo strato decorativo, riconducibile alla prima generazione di pittori giotteschi attivi tra Padova, Sesto al Reghena e l'area friulana. L'analisi stilistica e stratigrafica permette di proporre nuove letture di questo strato, considerando i maestri coinvolti, l'estensione dell'intervento e alcuni elementi iconografici, offrendo così spunti per rivedere attribuzioni e cronologia delle opere.

Lo studio mira a fornire una rilettura complessiva del primo giottismo nella chiesa di San Francesco a Udine, evidenziandone al contempo l'importanza nel contesto storico del suo tempo. Negli anni '30 del Trecento, la chiesa acquisisce crescente rilievo nel territorio friulano, anche in relazione alla diffusione del culto di Odorico da Pordenone, configurandosi come un punto di riferimento culturale e religioso locale.

DOMINIQUE VALÉRIAN

École d'histoire de la Sorbonne, University Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France; dominique.valerian@yahoo.fr

Ports and Urban Autonomy in the Medieval Maghreb

The communication will examine how medium-sized Maghrebi ports became centers of autonomous power during periods of political fragmentation, particularly from the 11th to the 15th centuries. During the Zirid era, cities like Tripoli, Tunis, and Ceuta broke free from central control, governed by local dynasties or merchant elites. For example, Tripoli's Banū Ḥazrūn ruled independently from 1000, balancing relations with Fatimids, Zirids, and Normans. Tunis, under the Banū Ḥurāsān (1059-1159), thrived as a commercial hub, even negotiating directly with Pisa. After the Almohads, ports pursued autonomy through three models. The first one is represented by cities ruled by rebellious princes, like Hafsid governors in Bugia, using the city's wealth and strategic location to challenge Tunis. The second concerns cities controlled by a local tribe, as the Ṭa'āliba in Algiers (late 14th c.), who allied with urban elites to resist central authority. The third one sees urban oligarchies governing the cities, like in Ceuta or Gabès, who dominated ports, signing independent treaties and controlling trade routes. Ports' autonomy relied on economic prosperity (customs revenues, maritime trade) and strategic coastal defenses, making sieges difficult. Their hinterlands supplied goods, but their primary focus was north-south trade (Europe/Sahara), reducing dependence on coastal connections. Autonomy was pragmatic, not ideological: ports accepted central rule when it ensured security and economic stability. Institutions like the *ṣūrā* protected merchant interests but lacked the legal frameworks of European city-states. However, this autonomy was fragile and short-lived. Central powers reasserted control when strong enough, and ports' role as economic hubs made them both valuable and vulnerable. Their independence was less about political ideals than securing trade and local interests in a fragmented Maghreb.

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