

There are no translations available.

A. Tudor

Abstract

The buildings erected previously at the site where now Hvar Observatory is located, their history and fate, are described.

The hill, where Hvar Observatory, is located lies in the centre of a prehistorical settlement zone which spread from the brow of Vela glava in the east to the cove Vira in the west. It is amazing, that this top is the only one in the chain of crests with no prehistorical traces of permanent settling are found there so far. Actually, while the crest Fortica, westward, and the crest Vela glava eastward are extraordinary rich with artifices of ceramics from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages, this very peak has no such findings, which leads to the conclusion that it was not inhabited through the prehistoric period, the Old and Middle Ages (Kirigin, 1996).

At the end of the Middle Ages, the small church of St. Nicolaus was built on this crest. Its title-holder, the protector of passengers and sailors, provided evidence about the votive character of the church. The first direct mentioning of the church originates from the 15th century when the church situated at the place of today's cemetery in Hvar was called the church of St. Nicolaus Inferioris, from which it can be deduced that even then there was already the division to St. Nicolaus Inferioris and Superioris, at Napoljun, which appeared in later centuries. The churches are not mentioned in the reform of the Statue from 1331 so generally speaking we could say that it was built in the second half of the 14th century (Kovačić, 1982).

Unfortunately, neither the remnants of the church nor descriptions or presentations from this time are preserved.

This extraordinary convenient position enabling to watch the ships on their way through the Channels of Koržula, Vis and Hvar was certainly known and used already in ancient times, but the observation post by the church was mentioned for the first time on 9. June 1466. It was mentioned within the frame of the permanent topic associated with the municipal history of Hvar: the conflict between plebeians and nobility. The plebeians requested that professional watchmen should be appointed instead of 40-50 land workers that were on guard fulfilling thus their annual obligation to the municipality, The answer of the Venice authorities was negative with the explicit demand that everything should remain unchanged (Zaninović, 1977).

The church of St. Nicolaus the Superior was shown on the oldest known panorama of Hvar, the one by Conrad Gruenemberg in 1443 (Figure 1). On the hill eastward from Fortica one can see a smaller building having a bell-tower or a round tower, but since the picture is rather unreliable, we cannot be sure about the original appearance. Anyway, this panorama brings the evidence about the existence of the church, as well as the fact that it was recognisable as a church at the end of the 15th century which was not the case later on.



Figure 1: Conrad von Gruenemberg, a view of Hvar with the St. Nikolaus Superior church at the upper right corner (1482).

In the 16th century the status of the church changed dramatically. Almost a century after the request raised by the plebeians, the observation post with permanently watchmen is mentioned in the report made by Gianbattiste Giustiniana in 1553 (Novak, 1972).

The annual salary of the watchman was 372 liras. The time when this new situation actually occurred is not known, however, it appears that the request by the plebeians from 1466 proved as justified. It is interesting to note that Giustinian did not mention the existence of the church.



Figure 2: Camutio: a presentation of the island of Hvar (16th century).

Like Gruenemberg, C.F. Camutio draw a panorama of Hvar (Figure 2), where the church is oriented in the west-east direction, and the bell-tower at the northern side of the façade and a smaller building at the back part of the church are depicted. Certainly, there was in fact no bell-tower by the church. The drawing is accompanied by the text saying: "Guardia de San Nicolo". This panorama summarily presents the most important facts about the church in the 16th century. By putting the non-existent bell-tower with the façade, the author wanted to indicate that it was a sacral building, but he describes it only as the observation post (guardia) in the inscription which brings us to the conclusion that there was a tradition of the existence of the church in the 16th century, but the buildings were used for worldly purposes. The smaller building in rear of the church could also be the observation post attached to the church mentioned in 1466. If we accept this presumption, we can, at least schematically, derive the appearance of the ground-plan for the church and observation post. The church is a smaller building with a rectangular ground plan, oriented in the west-east direction, and the observation post is a building of square ground-plan attached to the southern part of the back wall. A similar presentation from the same period can be found on the general and nave panorama of the Island of G. Rossacio. The fact that the church was not mentioned in the visitation of the apostolic visitor Valiero from 1579 proves that the church was out of usage since the middle of the 16th century.

The canon from Chioggia, apostolic vicar of the Hvar bishop Cedulina, Petar Morari visited the church of St. Nicolaus on 6th December 1627. He wrote in his visitations: "The Honourable Sir, his Eminency the vicar, climbed up the hill of St. Nicolaus on foot at dawn, here in the city of Hvar. He entered the chapel and prayed, and later on, visiting the rest of the chapel he noticed that there was no altar, that the chapel was empty, without reliquaries and rather uncared-for in all, so that almost no sign of a religious place remained. It was without roof and damaged by thunder at the front side. There was a fire kept up in it and used by watchmen for profane purposes. It had no bell and its rope, no door..." (Mardešić, 1986).

This written evidence provides a significant information that there were no bells or their ropes on the church, which refers to the fact that there was a spindle bell used. Morari calls the whole hill - the hill of St. Nicolaus, which is rather rarely present in written documents, but proves that once the entire hill used to be called after the title holder of the church.

The other description is to be found in the visitation of the bishop Zorzi (de Georgis) from 2 February 1637, the original text is as follows: "Adm R.D. Vica s qui supra ... de mane ascendit equum, et associatus ut supra iter habuit ad ecclesiam S. Nicolai positam supra montem, longe a Ciutete milliaria duo incirca, loco vocato specula, seu guardiola ad quam peruentus eam ingressus fuit, et uidit ipsam dirutum sine altari, et aliuqua imagine sanctor sine porta, et apuimento, attamen consecratam, ut ex signis apparebat, et sic reuersus est domum suam" (Georgis, 1637). This text also confirms a complete devastation of the sacral space.

Juster's panorama of Hvar from 1704 shows, rather vaguely, a ground floor building with a twofold roof oriented in the west-east direction, at the top of Napoljun. This panorama, although presenting the observation post and the church as a small detail, can be regarded as a reliable

picture of the building, because Juster shows other details of the panorama quite faithfully. The panorama of Hvar as seen from St. Nicolaus Superior was drawn by G. Santini in 1668 (Figure 3).

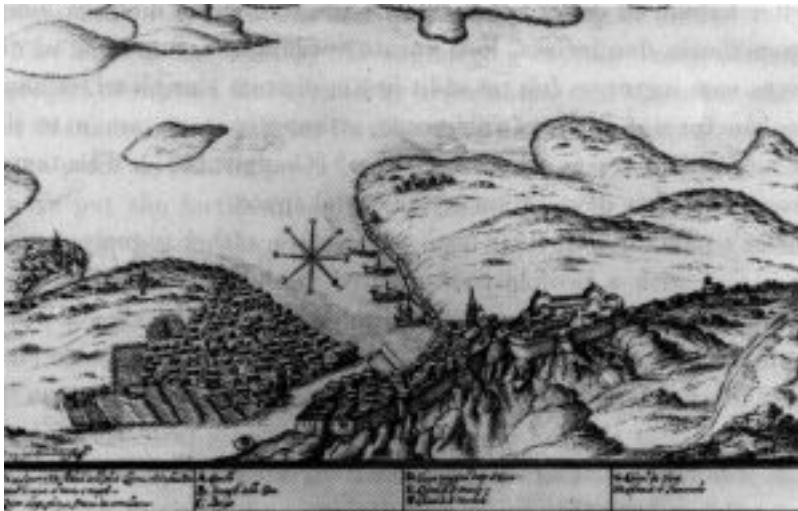


Figure 3: G. Santini: a view of Hvar from the church St. Nicolaus Superior (1668).

During the Napoleonic wars, the interests of great powers were for the first time defended by direct involvement of their armies in the history at this territory. Strong fleets of Great Britain, France and Russia found themselves at the Adriatic Sea, and the conflict areas were the Middle and South Adriatic Sea. The English fleet established itself on Vis, the French fleet on Hvar, and the Russian in Boka Kotorska with occasional departures to Koržula.

The Russian fleet attacked Hvar in 1806 when the French barely succeeded to defend their base. After the combat it was concluded that the town Hvar was poorly fortified and that new fortifications have to be built. It was decided that two fortifications should be built at the entrance of the harbour, and a new large fortification above the town. This fortification had originally been planned to be situated at the top of the hill Vela glava and was erected to the height of 1 meter, when the idea was given up. This fortification was supposed to be remarkably smaller, with a rectangular ground-plan oriented in the north-south direction and with a bastion in the north-west corner. A macadam road, the remains of which are visible still today, was partially built up to the fortification.

Finally the new fortification was built at the place of the observation post and the church of St. Nicolaus Superior, probably because it was more close to the town. It was named after the emperor Napoleon, from which the local name Napoljun was derived later on (Kovačić, 1982). The fortress was built by the engineering captain Tracy, according to the project of captain

Rubby, and by order of marshal Marmont who wrote in his Memoirs: "...je mis les fortifications de l'île de Lesinaen bon état-c'est un point de relache précieux a conserver e bon a enlever a l'ennemi..." ("I have put the fortifications of the island Hvar in a good state - it is a precious and stop place where one can have an eye on and defeat the enemy") (Duboković, 1958).

It was built under coercion of the French army. The entire population of the island was forced to build the fortification with minimum wages. The famous altar builders of Bertapella from Vrboska worked on the fortification as excellent stone-cutters. They were brought to the building site under threat that the army would inhabit their homes in Vrboska until they responded to the command. The inhabitants of Vrboska worked on the fortification for 25 centimes a day till 1812 (Duboković, 1958).

The perimeter of the fortification had a square ground-plan with the size 30x27 meters. The northern wall was fortified with a small bastion in the middle, and all four corners were fortified with smaller towers. In the middle there is a tower of square ground-plan, 10x11 meters in size. It is the two floor tower with a terrace and the observation post at the top. Similarly, the northern wall of the tower is also fortified with a smaller embossment in the middle. In the northern part of the fortification there is a spacious camp surrounded by a wall (Figure 4).

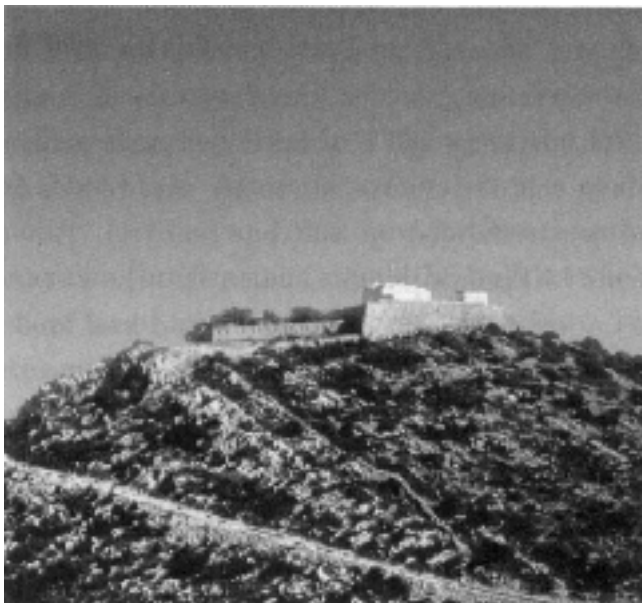


Figure 4: The fortres "Napoleon".

After the fall of Napoleon in 1815, the Croatian fortifications were taken over by Austria, which reconstructed and fortified the fortifications on Hvar in the 19th century as a part of the measures to be taken for the defence of the eastern Adriatic coast from the threats of Italy. The

importance of the fortifications on Hvar declined in 1866 after the defeat of the Italian fleet in the sea battle of Vis, and also along with the rapid development of arms in the second half of the 19th century. At the end of the century, the fortification became the property of the family Machiedo, which sold it to the Department of Navy in 1929. From 1941 to 1945 the fortress was under the authority of the Army of the Independent State of Croatia. After the World War II the fortification was used also for military purposes, as an observation post, until the year 1964. From 1972 the fortress is the seat of the Hvar Observatory which was erected and equipped in collaboration between the Faculty of Geodesy, University of Zagreb and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.