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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.



