

Tonija Andrić

**Split Notary Office in the 15th Century:
Paleographic and Diplomatic Analysis of Notarial
Documents**

During the Middle Ages, Split was an autonomous commune situated on the central part of the eastern Adriatic coast. Although politically self-contained in terms of governance, it remained highly open to foreign influences, economic factors, and new entrepreneurial initiatives, shaped by the same political and economic currents that characterized Italian city-states. This communal autonomy, however, was abruptly interrupted at the beginning of the fifteenth century with the establishment of Venetian rule, which extended over most of the eastern Adriatic coast until the fall of the Republic at the end of the eighteenth century.

In response to these political changes, the local administration of Split underwent a process of reorganization. While the Venetian authorities preserved much of the existing administrative framework, they installed their own officials in key governing positions to serve their political and economic interests. One municipal institution, however, remained largely unaffected by the establishment of Venetian governance in the fifteenth century: the notarial office.

The history of the Split notarial office dates back to the early eleventh century. The earliest preserved documents, primarily wills and testaments, were drawn up by scribes who were mostly clerics and did not yet perform professional notarial functions. As the most educated individuals of their time, they fulfilled this role out of necessity. With the economic growth and expansion of commercial activity between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, Split increasingly required a well-organized notarial office capable of drafting and authenticating legal and business documents.

From the second half of the twelfth century, the first public notaries appeared in Split, employed and remunerated by the municipal government. Some of them explicitly emphasized their official status in their signatures, using the designation *iuratus communi* and, in certain cases, the title *magister*, indicating formal legal education.

The first fully professional notaries, who operated under imperial authority (*imperiali auctoritate notarii*), emerged in Split at the beginning of the thirteenth century. This development coincided with a period of intensified socio-economic growth, which required a more structured and efficient notarial system. By the second half of the thirteenth century, the

notarial office in Split had evolved into a well-coordinated institutional body operating under the leadership of the city chancellor.

From the early fourteenth century onwards, the number of active notaries increased significantly. By the 1320s, sources mention for the first time three notaries performing their duties simultaneously. In the Late Middle Ages, it became common for several notarial officials to be active concurrently.

All documents produced by the medieval Split notarial office were standardized and composed according to established diplomatic forms and formulas. The foundation of this standardization lies in the work *Summa artis notariae* by the Italian jurist Rolandino De' Passaggeri, originally written in 1255 and reprinted multiple times until the seventeenth century. This treatise provided models for a wide range of notarial acts, including sales contracts, leases, and other types of business agreements or private documents.

Among the primary paleographic characteristics of preserved Split notarial documents, we emphasize their script and language. The documents were written in Gothic cursive script, rich in abbreviations and ligatures, which facilitated rapid writing and was widely used in Western European notarial offices during the High and Late Middle Ages. The texts were composed in Latin and written on paper, often imported from established papermaking centers in Spain from the fourteenth century onwards.

Today, the Split notarial corpus is preserved in the Croatian State Archives. The medieval material spans from the 1340s to the end of the fifteenth century. These documents exhibit a highly standardized diplomatic structure, based on conventional notarial formulas.

Typically, a medieval notarial document begins with the *invocatio* formula, followed by the *datatio* formula, which sometimes appears already at the beginning of the notarial register. If multiple documents were issued on the same date and location, the notary would note "*eisdem die et loco*". If the witnesses and the communal examiner remained unchanged, the phrase "*eisdem testes et examinador*" was used.

The central section (*contextus*) generally begins with the *contrahentes* formula, identifying the contracting parties, their social and legal status, and the type of legal act. This is followed by the *res* formula, which defines the subject of the legal transaction, often supplemented with clauses specifying the nature, location, or quantity of the object. The *pretium* formula states the price, typically in Venetian currency, such as gold ducats, denarii, or solidi. Subsequently, the *poena* formula introduces the contractual penalty, usually defined "*sub pena statutis*". This is followed by the *obligatio bonorum*, which guarantees the

fulfillment of the contract through the property of the contracting party (“*sub pena predicta cum obligatione suorum bonorum*”).

In the final section (*eschatocol*), the document records the place of issuance and the names of the witnesses, unless already stated in previous entries. This section also contains the elements of legal authentication, including the notarial sign and signature. The notary’s name and origin are usually included in the formula “*complevi*”. If this information was already provided in the register heading, the document often concludes solely with the list of witnesses.

Unlike many other medieval legal documents, the Split notarial acts generally do not bear seals, reflecting the strong institutional credibility of the notarial service and the high level of public trust in communal legal structures.

In conclusion, the medieval notarial documents of Split exhibit a standardized diplomatic structure in accordance with the theoretical principles of *ars dictaminis* and represent a valuable source for the study of legal, social, and administrative practices in the eastern Adriatic during the Late Middle Ages.