The Advancement of Literacy in Medieval Croatia/Dalmatia and Slavonia
12th to 14th Century: Examples of Dubrovnik, Split, and Zagreb

Content and Objectives of the Lecture and Group Work on the Lecture Topic:

Before the 12th c., only few texts have been preserved from Croatia, Dalmatia, and Slavonia, some of them of dubious authenticity, showing that communication – including legal acts – was mainly conducted orally. However, several social and cultural changes after the 11th c. led to innovations in legal practice and documents became the main tool of asserting legal acts like donations, contracts or testaments. This process of advancement of “legal literacy” (known in German scholarship as Verschriftlichungsprozess) was accompanied by a more intensive production of liturgical books, thanks to the establishment of new Benedictine monasteries and bishoprics, especially the one in Zagreb. Finally, the emergence of communes stimulated the composition of city statutes and this prevalence of written law as opposed to oral tradition resulted in the writing of the oldest preserved Croatian law, the so called Law of Vinodol. The objective of the lecture is to show how social, demographic, and cultural changes influenced the transformation of early medieval oral culture into the written culture of the High Middle Ages.

Assignment:

A possible essay should be written using secondary literature and published sources. It is suggested that the topic of such an essay would cover a case-study from a town or an ecclesiastical centre.

Readings:

The following literature can serve only as a frame for understanding the period and some social, cultural, and economic processes influencing the advancement of literacy. For more detailed reading regarding the case studies of Dubrovnik, Split, and Zagreb knowledge of Croatian is essential. Further information about primary or secondary sources will be given to students upon request.


*Italy in the Central Middle Ages*, David Abulafia (ed.), *Short Oxford History of Italy*, Oxford University Press 2004, esp. p. 27-57 and 197-211.

