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**Dimensioni istituzionali del Commonwealth veneziano (secoli XIV-XVII)**

*Plurality and Dialectic of the Systems of Justice in Late Medieval Istria (14th-15th Cent.)*

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Abstract

Throughout the medieval period, Venetian Istria was essentially a heterogeneous amalgam of urban and semi-urban communes that recognized the supreme jurisdiction of Venice, subjecting themselves – most of them willingly – to the administration of regularly rotating delegated *podestàs*, elected by the Great Council of Venice from among their own members. These rectors personified Venice in situ as they governed their subjects in tandem with the communal councils and locally elected civic magistrates. However, the key prerogative of Venetian delegated *podestàs* was their right and duty to administer justice, respecting the local customs and promulgated statutes, but primarily maintaining “the honor of Venetian Dominion”. Thus, the rectors were accorded far-reaching discretionary rights (*arbitrium*) in adjudicating both civil as well as criminal cases. As justice administration was one of the seminal, if not the principal aspect of medieval and Early Modern statehood, the *podestàs*’ performances of their *arbitrium* were the main engines that produced and maintained Venetian sovereignty in their subject communities.

The presentation focuses on both the quotidian as well as exceptional cases of justice administration in late medieval Istrian communities subjected to Venice. By analyzing court cases registered by the chancelleries of the rectors of Koper/Capodistria, Piran/Pirano, Buzet/Pinguente, Novigrad/Cittanova, Poreč/Parenzo and Rovinj/Rovigno, the paper aims to untangle the complex interplay between local customs, codified statutes, and discretionary rights wielded by Venetian *podestàs*. Moreover, by presenting several cases that ended up before the appellate courts in Venice – mainly those presented to the *avogadori di comun* –, the presentation illustrates the complex dialectic of the systems of justice operating in late medieval Venetian Istria. Due to the rich and under-researched archival material pertaining to the subject matter, the paper hopes to elevate Istrian case studies to the very center of scholarly debates on justice administration in the Venetian Commonwealth.