



Perast

The Outstanding Boka Kotorska





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PERAST ~ THE OUTSTANDING BOKA KOTORSKA

PERAST



LOCATION

The Gulf of Kotor (Boka Kotorska) cuts deeply into the coastline of the southern part of the eastern Adriatic, creating four spectacular bays ringed by mountains, the “fjords” of the Mediterranean. The little town of Perast is situated at the foot of St. Elijah Hill (873 m), opposite the narrow Verige strait, where the innermost bays of Risan and Kotor converge. This easternmost shore was the earliest inhabited area in the Boka. The remains of a Neolithic culture (3500 BC) have been discovered in the caves of Spila above Perast and various archeological finds provide evidence of civilization dating from Illyrian, Roman and early Christian periods.

Highlighted by two jewel-like islands, Perast is focused on the sea. From the interaction between mainland and bay, the inherent contrast of stone and water, the dialogue of island and wave, sometimes in harmony but often in conflict, this sea-faring town has derived its unity, strength and sense of purpose. Despite its size, a sophisticated urban structure has arisen, demonstrated by the proportion, scale, massing and rhythm of the great number of public buildings, especially along the waterfront.



Position of Perast



Winged lion of St. Mark, Museum of Perast

HISTORY

The town acquired its present urban plan and architectural appearance during the prosperous years of the 17th and 18th centuries. Although damaged by a long period of economic stagnation, the construction of a coastal road and various incursions on old towers and palaces, Perast today represents one of the most beautiful examples of baroque architecture on the Adriatic coast.

Two primary factors have influenced the urban character of the place: a historic need for strong defenses and the blending of monumental and minor stone structures with sacral buildings of outstanding beauty.

Under Venice (1482-1684), no continuous defensive barrier was erected around this exposed and fragile settlement on the border of the Ottoman Empire. In 1570, only the fortress, St. Cross, rose above the town. However, within the town a chain of ten watchtowers, called “čardaci”, presented a well-devised system

of checkpoints to protect against attacks. These characteristic towers contributed to the unique appearance of Perast.

Of the more than three hundred (300) houses and palaces crowding the coast and slopes of the hill, two hundred and seven (207) buildings were classified in the 18th-century as being of architectural significance, one hundred and seventeen (117) as ordinary structures and fourteen (14) churches were noted as associated with the patronage of noble families.

Of the churches, the unfinished parish church of St. Nicholas deserves special mention. Its architecture, though incomplete, reveals the monumental design of Giuseppe Beati, who created a Venetian-Romanesque variant of baroque in the 17th century. In 1691, Ivan Scarpe began the construction of an impressive, 55m (179 feet) tall belfry with five stories and a divided series of loges at a cost of 55,000 ducats. An inscription on the belfry proudly

reads that the Turkish threat ended after the Venetians conquered Herceg Novi and Risan. Although left open to the sky, the great apse of the main altar with its two sacristies makes a significant contribution to the coastline of Perast.

Other churches of note include the church of Our Lady of the Rosary with its outstanding octagonal belfry, built in 1687 on the high ground adjoining his palace by Archbishop Andrija Zmajević; the church of St. Mark, dating from 1760, with a richly decorated façade, once the church of the Confraternity; the monastery and church of St. Antony, built near the fortress by the Mazarović family in 1679; the church of St. John the Baptist; and the church of St. Anne.

Outstanding examples of palaces must include the sumptuous Bujović palace, today the Museum of Perast. It was built in 1694 and decorated with five harmonious balconies



Engraving of Perast, Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, Venice 1685

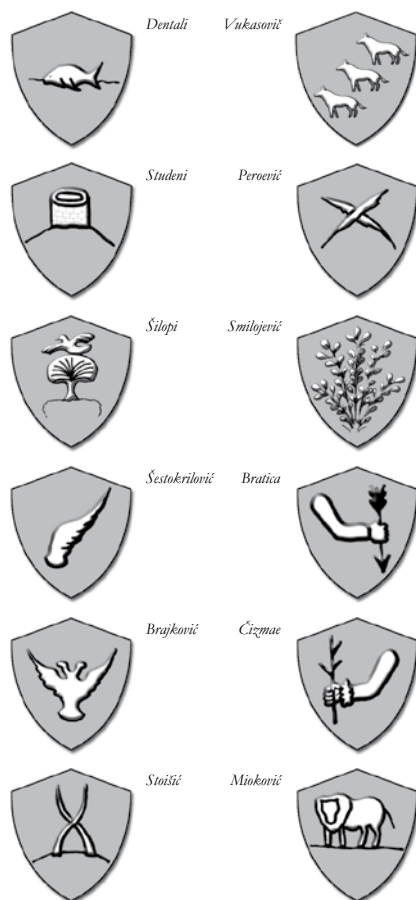


Lion on the Bujović Palace balcony

opening off paired arcades on three sides of the building and fronted by a spacious cross-vaulted porch supported by massive pillars carved in the *bugnatto* technique. Although the newly constructed coastal road gives the palace the impression of being “sunk” and its overall artistic value compromised, the Bujović palace is still one of the most beautiful edifices on the Montenegrin coast.

Besides the Bujović palace, the following palaces also beautify the coastline of Perast: the Smekja palace, with a large terrace projecting towards the sea, balconies ornamented with baroque balustrades and a third floor of narrow proportions which takes the form of an extended belvedere; the Bronza palace decorated with a marble relief depicting the scene of the Annunciation; and the palaces belonging to the Visković, Balović, Mazarović, Šestokrilović and Brajković families

The aesthetic values of baroque Perast have been highly appreciated by modern art historians: “... in Perast, without going into poetical phrases, the Dalmatian baroque achieved its apotheosis in every stone with its coating, every elegantly carved portal, contributing to an eternal atmosphere of province to be lost. Here, the unity of the town, more than individual monuments, creates an atmosphere that connects into one chord church domes and balusters of balconies, as well as gold coating of time... Perast represents a culmination of the Dalmatian baroque.” (Dr Kruno Prijatelj). It was from maritime trade



Coats-of-arms of the Perast casadas

and customs privileges obtained from battles, especially against piracy, that Perast garnered the wealth that financed such beauty.

Although it was an ancient settlement, Perast enjoyed greater economic, political and cultural development only from the middle of the 15th century. At that time, the Boka became part of the Venetian Republic (1420). About sixty years later, Ottoman forces advanced on the Gulf of Kotor, determining its fate for the next two centuries. Before these events, Perast was just a small village possessing a shipyard and a number of modest fishing and trading ships. Kotor, the far larger, fortified



Coat-of-arms of Perast with the Perast casadas, Museum of Perast

city at the end of the bay, held jurisdiction over the island and the abbey of St. George (9th century). At that time, St George was the only island off the coast of Perast and the abbey sustained itself from properties it owned there. The overlordship of Kotor became a burden to Perast as the town began to acquire a higher degree of economic independence and power. Following the Turkish conquest of the Boka from Herceg Novi to Risan (1482), Perast attained a strategically and politically significant position as a border town. Because of this new role, important economic and political privileges were bestowed on it which the inhabitants of Perast soon used to their advantage.

Venice encouraged the development of a local fleet for the purposes of trade as well as to do battle with Ottoman pirates. The skilled mariners and traders of Perast gained fame both for their chosen professions and for their prowess as warriors. Due to this reputation, they earned the honour of guarding the Venetian *gonfalon* (standard) of St. Mark in

time of war. Perast held this privilege until the fall of the Republic in 1797.

Despite the dramatic circumstances of constant conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Venice, which were particularly fierce in this area, the town continued to develop culturally and architecturally. The construction of luxurious palaces, chapels and churches, the importation of works of art and the ongoing literary activity give evidence of an intense industry out of proportion to the size of the town and the number of its inhabitants.

NOBLE FAMILIES OF PERAST – CASADAS

According to tradition, Perast had twelve distinguished families. During the Middle Ages and afterwards, these “*casadas*”, patrician clans or brotherhoods, were called by the names of the original families. They were an integral part of the commune of Perast and their chiefs were elected as members of the town council every few years.

The following *casadas* were active in Perast: 1) Studeni, 2) Dentali, 3) Vukasović, 4) Brajković, 5) Šestokrilović, 6) Bratica, 7) Stoišić, 8) Smilojević, 9) Šilopi, 10) Čizmaj, 11) Perojević and 12) Mioković. Each also had a flag bearer. This was in addition to serving as the bearers of the *gonfalon* of St. Mark.



Coat-of-arms of Perast, Our Lady of the Rock

CHURCHES



ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH

It is situated on the main square, a single nave structure, with its apse facing southeast. The present church was built in 1616, although it is said to have replaced an earlier church dating from 1564. Behind the 17th century church of St. Nicholas, on the northeastern side, a new, more ambitious church was begun under the Venetian architect, Giuseppe Beati, but only its apse and sacristies were completed. The



Inscription on St. Nicholas church commemorating the victory over the Turks in 1654

foundation stones were laid beginning in 1740 and construction continued until 1800 when the work was interrupted by the Napoleonic Wars. Today, the two churches of St. Nicholas (the old and unfinished new) combine to form a single entity.

Next to the church, in 1691, as mentioned earlier, a lofty and handsome belfry was constructed by Ivan Skarpa, called “the Baptist”, from the island of Hvar. Although it was built in the baroque period, it had elements of both Romanesque and Renaissance styles. The major bell was given as a present by the archbishops Andrija and Matija Zmajević in 1713. Two smaller bells were added in 1797. The clock on the belfry was brought from Venice and installed in 1730. Inside, the church of St. Nicholas displays a rich collection of paintings by Tripo Kokolja (1661-1713), the famous painter of Perast. The organ is a very old one with no known date of construction but the first mention of repair dates from 1699. Valuable paintings and precious vestments from the 16th and 17th centuries are kept in the treasury.

Interior of St. Nicholas church





St. Nicholas church

OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY

Andrija Zmajević (1624-1694), Archbishop of Bar, built the chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary in 1678 as his mausoleum. The church and its belfry bear stylistic features of both Renaissance and baroque. The slender octagonal belfry is one of the most beautiful on the Adriatic coast. The belfry is supposed to have been designed by Andrija Zmajević.

*Tombstone of archbishop
Andrija Zmajević with
the Zmajević family coat-of-arms*



Our Lady of the Rosary with a belfry



Front of the church of Our Lady of the Rosary



CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

It is located in the western part of Perast, by the side of the old road. It was first mentioned in documents in 1595 and belonged to the medieval "Confraternity of the Wounds of Jesus Christ". Its late Renaissance west façade has a fine portal with a small rose window and a two bell gables above, one on top of the other. One of its bells bears a casting mark from 1596. Some renovation was undertaken in 1703.



Church of St. Anne

ST. ANNE'S CHURCH

It stands about 300 meters away from the Fortress of St. Cross. The exact year of its construction is not known, although Drago Martinović (1697-1781) in his Annals refers to it as "*antichissima*" (very old), further stating that it was surrounded by houses. It was recorded that in 1693 its altar was destroyed in a fire and that a new one was built. Judging from the account books of St. Anne's church and in particular, by one of rare signatures that Tripo



Fresco by Tripo Kokolja in the apse of St. Anne's church



Church of St. John the Baptist