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## Urban Elites of Zadar. Dalmatia and the Venetian Commonwealth (1540–1569), Revised and Expanded 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

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This monograph represents a major contribution to the social, economic, and legal history of the Renaissance Adriatic and firmly establishes Zadar as a key laboratory for studying the functioning of the Venetian Commonwealth. Building on an already impressive first edition, the second edition significantly expands both the empirical base and the analytical reach of the study, most notably through the addition of two entirely new chapters and the systematic use of an extraordinary body of archival material.

Already in the preliminary sections—*Note on Text, Spelling and Translation*—the author demonstrates a high level of methodological and conceptual self-awareness. By carefully delimiting terms such as ‘Venetian Commonwealth’ and by explicitly distancing himself from historically and ideologically charged geographical labels in Southeast Europe, Sander-Faes avoids anachronistic or politicised readings of the past and provides a transparent framework for the reader (p. 9). This sensitivity to language and conceptual precision is one of the book’s consistent strengths.

Both prefaces deserve attention. While the *Preface to the First Edition* situates Zadar as an important but understudied Adriatic centre, the *Preface to the Second Edition* adopts an almost humanistic-pedagogical tone. Beyond reflecting on the evolution of the project, it offers an implicit guide for younger scholars entering the field, thereby adding a warm, reflective note rarely encountered in large-scale archival studies.

The empirical foundation of the book is remarkable: more than 3,500 previously unpublished documents form the backbone of the analysis. In the *Introduction*, one of the author’s most notable achievements

becomes apparent—his skillful integration of existing historiography. Rather than merely citing the literature, Sander-Faes actively works with established concepts from Venetian historiography, using them as analytical categories that function, almost in an Aristotelian sense, as interpretative ‘lighthouses’ guiding the reader through complex historical realities. This approach resonates particularly well with the observation that Venetian self-perception tended toward fixed categories, while social, economic, and geographical realities remained fundamentally fluid.

The study explicitly examines how Zadar’s urban populations interacted internally and externally—across jurisdictional boundaries and political frontiers—with Ottoman subjects, transhumant groups, and Venetians alike (p. 29). This perspective decisively moves beyond a closed, city-bound history and situates Zadar within a pan-Adriatic and cross-border context.

Chapter 1 provides a structural overview of Venetian overseas possessions from the late fourteenth century to the mid-sixteenth century, outlining the specific features of Venetian rule in this part of the Adriatic. Chapter 2 introduces the main actors of Zadar and their pan-Adriatic connections (p. 30), with particular attention to the ‘intellectual elite’, a category supported by the analysis of no fewer than 930 notarial contracts. Chapters 3 and 4 continue this multi-layered approach: the latter, devoted to interwar property markets, is based on 1,772 individual notarial deeds and challenges the long-assumed notion of a uniform economic decline, effectively identifying what the author aptly describes as a ‘black hole’ in Adriatic economic history.

One of the most innovative aspects of the second edition is Chapter 5, entirely new for the second edition. Focusing on social and crime history, it is of particular interest to legal historians. The discussion of extrajudicial settlements (including *stanicum*) invites comparison with broader European and even South Slavic legal traditions and anticipates practices that modern law would classify under arbitration or alternative dispute resolution.

Chapters 6 through 8 shift the focus to social relations at a micro level. Drawing on approximately 650 marriage-related contracts, over 1,000 testaments and codicils, and a wide range of official reports, Sander-Faes reconstructs the everyday topographies of Zadar’s social life. Foreigners, non-noble elites, and ties to the hinterland are analysed not as marginal phenomena but as integral components of urban society. The strong spatial dimension of the study allows the reader, as the author himself puts it, to ‘retrace the steps of individuals and groups through the streets of Zadar and across the salt waters of the Adriatic’.

A particularly compelling conceptual insight appears in the broader interpretation of Venetian rule. As noted by the author, the Republic of St Mark pursued extremely limited territorial ambitions, consistently privileging commerce over expansion. Rather than imposing a rigid imperial structure, Venice exerted cultural, economic, religious, and social pressures that gradually reproduced key elements of its domestic society overseas. This process—often described as ‘Venetianisation’ or ‘symbiosis’—undermines simplistic models of empire and colony and offers a far more nuanced understanding of Venetian power in Dalmatia (p. 43).

Finally, the author’s call for future research deserves emphasis. By advocating comparative approaches that bridge both shores of the Renaissance Adriatic and by criticising artificially separated historiographies, Sander-Faes points toward a research agenda that acknowledges centuries of shared history and interconnected archives (p. 34). In this sense, *Urban Elites of Zadar* is not only a monumental study of one city but also a methodological and conceptual milestone for Adriatic and Venetian studies more broadly.