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Law, Power, and Consensus: Institutional Change and the Making of Trogir's Medieval Statutes

This study examines the evolution of the Statute of Trogir within the broader political, social, and documentary culture of late medieval Dalmatia. Moving beyond traditional legal readings, it approaches the statute as a dynamic instrument for articulating power, negotiating consensus, and legitimizing authority under shifting regimes. Drawing on the interpretive frameworks developed by Hagen Keller and Didier Lett, the article situates the Statute of Trogir within the broader Mediterranean phenomenon of pragmatic literacy and legal textualization. It argues that the statute's function evolved from a practical instrument of governance to a symbolic monument of civic identity, revealing the intricate interplay between law, power, and memory. In its final Venetian phase, the Statute of Trogir thus became less a code of law than a performative expression of continuity and collective self-representation, illustrating how medieval legal codes could preserve, in written form, the illusion of consensus and the persistence of political identity across changing regimes.

Keywords: power, consensus, statute, Middle Ages, Trogir, Dalmatia

Introduction

This paper examines the notions of *power* and *consensus* as articulated in the medieval Statute of Trogir, a small commune on the eastern Adriatic coast. Rather than viewing the statute simply as a legal text, the study approaches it as a complex document embedded within the broader social and political dynamics of late medieval Dalmatian communes. In this way, the Statute of Trogir offers a privileged perspective on how urban elites sought to define authority, regulate coexistence, and articulate collective identity. The study is grounded in the interpretive frameworks of the so-called Münster School of Hagen Keller and, more recently, in research coordinated by Didier Lett. Keller's work was instrumental in redefining the discourse on medieval

statutory culture through a series of influential studies on the statutes of northern Italian cities in the first half of the thirteenth century.[1] The Münster School's approach is defined by its departure from traditional legal and philological treatments of medieval statutes, highlighting them as dynamic, multilayered normative texts deeply embedded in the political, social, and communicative practices of urban societies. Within this framework, statutes appear as products of negotiation and contestation among urban groups, as well as responses to pressures and expectations emanating from external centres of power. A further aspect of Keller's approach is its attention to the practical dimension of legal norms, emphasizing the circumstances and actors of their enactment, as well as their subsequent interpretation, adaptation, implementation, or neglect in daily administration. This perspective highlights the performative role of legal norms, which not only governed social relations, but also actively contributed to the construction of political order and the legitimization of authority. On the other hand, Didier Lett's interpretive framework, presented in five volumes arising from collaborative research by French and Italian historians, constitutes one of the most important recent contributions to the study of medieval statutes.[2] By adopting a comparative approach that connects the urban societies of northern and central Italy with those of southern France, thereby underlining regional variations in legal culture and the uses of literacy, the authors examine how statutes were conceived, drafted, read, transmitted, and applied. Their work further demonstrates that statutes were not simply legal texts, but also political instruments and cultural artefacts that embody collective identities, social hierarchies, and power relations.

From this perspective, the statutes of Dalmatian communes, much like their Italian and French counterparts, appear as products of an ongoing interaction between written norms and lived experience, between the expectations of ruling elites and the realities of local societies, and between municipal autonomy and external powers such as royal, Venetian, or that of Croatian magnates from the hinterland. Approached in this way, the Statute of Trogir can also be read as a living text—one that evolved through successive revisions, additions, and reinterpretations, serving at once as a legal instrument, a repository of collective memory, and a vehicle of political positioning. Exploring the interplay of power and consensus within this framework enables us to move beyond a narrowly legalistic view of the statute and to achieve a more nuanced understanding of how authority-making and consensus-building intertwined within a late medieval Dalmatian city, situating it within the broader communicative and political practices of the communal world.

The methodological approach adopted here traces the evolution of Trogir's political and social structures from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, as reflected in selected statutory provisions. Rather than treating the statute

[1] See, for example: KELLER – BUSCH 1991; KELLER 1998.
[2] LETT 2019; LETT 2020a; LETT 2020b; LETT 2021a; LETT 2021b.

merely as a legal code, the study aims to examine, within the limits of the available evidence, how transformations in political hierarchy, governance, and social organization were articulated in the statutory text, and how the functions of the statute itself adapted to these changing realities. Through a close reading of key provisions, the analysis traces continuities and transformations in the regulation of offices, deliberative procedures, and external relations. By linking textual change to political and social developments, the study explores how the statute simultaneously reflected and shaped the structures of communal governance and social order.

But why focus on the Statute of Trogir? Unlike many Italian communes, whose statutes survive in multiple versions revealing centuries of revision and adaptation, Dalmatian statutes are generally preserved in a single textual form. This restricts our ability to trace the evolution of statutory texts or to discern how legal formulations evolved in response to political and social change. The Statute of Trogir is no exception. Preserved in a single textual version, it prevents a full reconstruction of its textual evolution. Yet Trogir enjoys a unique advantage that partly compensates for this limitation: thanks to the seventeenth-century historian Ivan Lučić Lucius, who transcribed and annotated a wealth of medieval documents concerning the city, much that would otherwise have been lost has survived in his copies. Consequently, the evolution of the Statute of Trogir can be traced within a richer documentary context than in any other Dalmatian commune. Although this cannot fully compensate for the survival of only a single statutory version, it does allow for a more subtle insight into the interplay between text, political order, and the changing social fabric of the commune. Given space limitations, the present study offers only a broad overview of these developments, with a more detailed discussion to appear in the forthcoming monograph.

Textualizing Authority: Forging the First Statute of Trogir

One of the most challenging tasks in this regard lies in attaining a deeper understanding of the origins of the first Statute of Trogir, composed in the mid-thirteenth century. Its creation, however, must be situated within the broader framework of institutional and political changes that transformed the Dalmatian communes over the course of the century. Generally speaking, this was a period marked by the consolidation of internal governance and by the ongoing negotiation of each commune's autonomy in relation to external powers—the Hungarian crown, Croatian nobles and, increasingly, Venice. In Trogir, the thirteenth century also witnessed major transformations in political and social life. Patrician families succeeded in consolidating their dominance over local government, thereby diminishing episcopal authority, while civic offices became increasingly formalized and administrative communication was progressively structured through writing.[3]

[3] Jelaska 2001. p. 11–14, 19–20; Popić 2022. p. 59–61; Popić – Bećir 2022. p. 22–26.

Although the sources from this period are few and largely preserved thanks to Ivan Lučić Lucius, they nonetheless provide valuable insight into this process of transformation. As previously mentioned, the Statute of Trogir was certainly in existence by the 1250s.[4] Its text has not survived, but its use is attested even by a brief examination of Trogir's notarial and court records from the second half of the thirteenth century.[5] Based on its approximate dating, the first statute appears to have been composed at the outset of episcopal decline in municipal governance. Throughout Dalmatia, bishops had long occupied leading civic offices, a situation that gradually changed during the thirteenth century. In Trogir, episcopal influence persisted until the death of Bishop Treguan in 1254, an event that effectively transferred secular authority to the urban nobility.[6] In the earliest surviving decision from 1239, the *Curia* still acted jointly with the bishop, reflecting a form of shared governance.[7] By 1267, however, the bishop no longer appears among the decision-makers, indicating a clear shift toward civic authority.[8] Documents from the following decades further highlight the strengthening of the commune as a corporate entity and the growing influence of its governing bodies.[9] By the 1270s and 1280s, these developments found expression not only in written records, but also in material and symbolic forms, inscribed in urban space and articulated through visual markers of communal identity.[10]

In the early 1260s, the growing consolidation of municipal institutions was reinforced by the professionalization of the communal chancery, as clerical scribes were permanently replaced by trained Italian notaries.[11] Taken together, these developments suggest that the first Statute of Trogir, drafted in the mid-thirteenth century, emerged within the same institutional and documentary paradigm as in the Italian communes. The first book of the 1322 statute, the only redaction to have survived, defines the structure and functions of the municipal governing institutions, revealing a close connection between the earliest codification and the political reconfiguration of communal life. The statute thus emerged both as a product and an instrument of oligarchic consolidation. It enabled the ruling class to define hierarchies, exercise control over governance and its resources, and position the commune within regional and external networks of power. In doing so, the statute codified and legitimized the political order established by the city's dominant families.

The codification of customary law and the creation of new provisions regulating the commune's evolving institutions thus became a crucial instrument in defining urban autonomy and legitimizing authority. In Trogir,

[4] The earliest reliable reference to the Statute of Trogir appears in a charter from 1257. See: CDCDS V. p. 65–66.
[5] See, for example: MT I/1. p. 48, 104, 128–129; MT I/2. p. 317; MT II/1. p. 16, 18, 49, 118, 156.
[6] POPIĆ 2022. p. 56, 60–61, 64; POPIĆ – BEĆIR 2022. p. 10, 13.
[7] ARCCT p. 91.
[8] ARCCT p. 91–92.
[9] ARCCT p. 92–102.
[10] BENYOVSKY LATIN 2009. p. 49, 54–57; BENYOVSKY LATIN 2019. p. 116–118; BASIĆ 2020. p. 100–119.
[11] POPIĆ 2022. p. 65–66.

as in other communes, the earliest statute likely arose from the need to stabilize the internal hierarchy of emerging municipal offices and assert the commune's claim to legitimate governance. The move toward a unified written code was not simply intended to record existing practices, but to enshrine them within a lasting normative order. In this light, the creation of the first statute represents an attempt to transform the fluid and often contested customs of communal governance into a stable and authoritative text, functioning as a tool of regulation, a channel of communication, and a means of self-representation. While the original statute has been lost, later sources indicate that the codification process was neither comprehensive nor linear. Rather than a single act, it was a gradual, adaptive process responding to shifts in governance and external influence. Its creation marked a decisive stage in the textualization of communal identity, through which governance was articulated, negotiated, legitimized, and codified. By defining procedures of election, deliberation, and jurisdiction, the statute established an implicit balance between coercion and consensus, between the exercise of power and its social legitimization.

Consolidation and Reform: The First Thirteenth-Century Transformations

The available evidence does not permit a full reconstruction of how the commune consolidated as a corporate entity or which mechanisms proved decisive, but the earliest identifiable modifications to the Statute of Trogir provide some valuable insights. According to a note by Lucius, based on now-lost Trogir council records, the Great Council appointed a committee in 1291 to revise the statute.[12] Fragmentary as it is, this record remains the only evidence linking thirteenth-century statutory changes to institutional reorganization, itself part of broader political and social transformations in the 1280s—a decade that marked a decisive stage in the evolution of municipal governance.

In other words, the decision to revise the statute was almost certainly connected to these developments. In 1284, the membership of the Great Council doubled from twenty to forty, and only a few years later it was expanded again to eighty.[13] Such a rapid and substantial increase strongly suggests that tensions over access to political power had reached a critical point. The successive expansions thus appear to have constituted an institutional response to mounting pressures from groups aspiring to enter the ruling class. These pressures were likely fuelled by demographic growth, a phenomenon well attested across late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Europe, before the decline brought about by the Black Death. Within this context, the expanding urban population likely gave rise to a substantial stratum of affluent and socially prominent citizens who regarded participation

[12] Rački 1881. p. 219.
[13] ARCCT p. 96–97; Popić 2022. p. 68; Popić – Bećir 2022. p. 29; Bećir 2022. p. 42–43.

in civic governance as both a right and a marker of status. The quadrupling of the Great Council's membership can thus be interpreted as a negotiated response to these pressures, an attempt to preserve civic cohesion while accommodating an increasingly inclusive political elite. At the same time, the leading urban families sought to preserve their hold on power through decision-making in smaller councils such as the *Curia*, or the Council *pro bono statu civitatis*—a body that, coincidentally or not, appears for the first time in the surviving sources at precisely this juncture.[14]

The late thirteenth-century enlargement of the Great Council not only reshaped the composition of Trogir's political elite but also introduced significant procedural innovations in its internal functioning. Three provisions in the 1322 statute attest to the adoption of new voting procedure that closely mirrored contemporary practices in the Italian communes.[15] This convergence was hardly accidental. During the 1280s, the presence of Italian *podestà* in Trogir served as a conduit for administrative models originating in the communes of northern and central Italy, exposing at the same time underlying tensions among the city's social groups.[16] It is therefore plausible that the subsequent reforms in council proceedings drew on the Italian political and cultural milieu, adapting these models to the needs of a substantially enlarged Great Council. The new norms required individual votes to be formally recorded as either supporting or opposing specific proposals, marking a significant departure from earlier collective decision-making, which conferred legitimacy merely by recording attendance and thus emphasized witness and consent over active participation.[17] This formalization of voting represented a clear step in the bureaucratization of communal governance, reflecting growing concern with accountability and the textual articulation of authority.

These developments indicate profound social transformations that reshaped Trogir's political arena at the turn of the fourteenth century. Comparable patterns are well documented in the northern Italian communes, where the consolidation of the Great Councils typically coincided with periods of political tension and demographic growth. As noted by historians such as Lorenzo Tanzini, increased attention to procedural formalities within councils often arose when membership itself became a contested and politically valuable resource.[18] In this context, the convening of the council and the recording of its proceedings assumed both symbolic and practical importance: they affirmed civic unity while delineating the boundaries of participation and authority. The resulting growth in documentary production mirrored the commune's evolving political landscape and reflected a broader European

[14] For further discussion on the development of these councils and their role within the municipal government, see: POPIĆ – BEĆIR 2022. p. 18–57.
[15] SRCT p. 26–28.
[16] POPIĆ – BEĆIR 2022. p. 13–18; BEĆIR 2022. p. 42–61.
[17] POPIĆ – BEĆIR 2022. p. 39–45, 64–65.
[18] TANZINI 2013. p. 55.

phenomenon—the progressive textualization of urban governance and the codification of political legitimacy in a written, verifiable form.

Codifying Venetian Authority in 1322: Adaptation and Continuity

Leaving aside the fact that the new version of the statute, produced in 1303 as noted by Lucius, arose under circumstances that remain entirely obscure, the next clearly identifiable stage in the evolution of the statutory text is closely linked to the establishment of Venetian authority over Trogir in 1322.[19] This political realignment followed the downfall of Ban Mladen II Šubić and the collapse of his dominion over the Dalmatian cities, Trogir included. From that point onward, the treaty with Venice became the cornerstone of Trogir's political order, confirming also the authority of the newly appointed Venetian count (*comes*).[20] That same year, the commune issued a new statute, replacing the 1303 compilation. The text was reorganized into three books instead of six and incorporated a new set of provisions defining the powers and jurisdiction of the Venetian count.[21] These provisions replaced the earlier regulations governing the office of *podestà*, thereby adapting the communal legal framework to the realities of Venetian rule.

The precise circumstances surrounding the drafting of this new statute remain unclear, though the evidence allows for some contextualization. The citizens of Trogir were not fundamentally opposed to the authority of the Šubić family, which had long shaped the regional balance of power. Increasingly violent and unpredictable actions of Ban Mladen, however, destabilized the existing political order in Dalmatia, and this appears to have been the decisive factor prompting Trogir's submission to Venice in 1322. Contemporary evidence suggests that the commune regarded this new arrangement as provisional, pending the outcome of the conflict between King Charles I and Ban Mladen. Just days after acknowledging Venetian rule, members of the Trogir nobility allied with the city's former count, Paul II Šubić, who was Mladen's brother. The agreement stipulated coordinated action against Mladen, while Paul, in exchange for Trogir's support, promised not to impose additional financial burdens on the city. These developments highlight the fluidity of political alignments in early fourteenth-century Dalmatia and underscore the pragmatic strategies employed by communes such as Trogir to preserve institutional continuity amid shifting centres of power.

The defeat of Ban Mladen II in autumn of 1322, which simultaneously marked the collapse of the Šubić family's broader political ambitions, ultimately reinforced Venetian authority in Trogir. In the aftermath, Venice aimed to institutionalize its newly acquired dominance, while the urban nobility sought to retain exclusive political rights within the commune following recent internal unrest. A few years earlier, the city had witnessed the usurpation of power by Captain and *podestà* Matthew de Cega, along with

[19] Rački 1881. p. 221.
[20] Bećir 2022. p. 95–103.
[21] Strohal 1915. p. XV–XVI.

significant efforts by some commoners to assert influence in the political sphere.[22] The interplay of these competing forces—Venetian administrative oversight, noble oligarchic consolidation, and popular ambitions—shaped the dynamics of Trogir's political life in the 1320s, providing also the context for the statutory revisions of 1322. These revisions were not merely administrative adjustments, but deliberate adaptations to new forms of sovereignty and governance.

Notably, some of the provisions regarding the count were drawn directly from instructions issued by the central Venetian authorities upon his assumption of office in 1322, indicating that Venice itself initiated their inclusion.[23] At the same time, the preamble of the 1322 statute explicitly references both King Charles I and the new Venetian regime, while attributing the drafting of the text exclusively to a committee of Trogir nobles appointed by the Great Council.[24] Following Luigi Provero's observations on the role of local actors in statute-making, it is evident that presenting these changes as the work of the local ruling class was politically and symbolically significant, even though they reflected the extensive powers of the Venetian count.[25] For the urban nobility, this approach served to safeguard both their collective identity and their legislative privileges, which could otherwise have been compromised. Viewed in this light, the apparent paradox of the Great Council adopting a statute that incorporated Venetian regulations, while presenting them as their own, becomes intelligible. Through this local adoption and legitimization, Venetian norms gradually lost their foreign character and were integrated into Trogir's legal and political framework. In the process, they structured municipal governance under Venetian rule and became central to the city's own political identity.

Obsolete Norms and Enduring Authority under Angevin Rule

The war between Venice and King Louis I (1356–1358) marked a decisive moment in the political history of Dalmatian communes. The 1358 peace treaty placed the coastal and island cities under Angevin rule, ending Venetian dominion. In Trogir, as elsewhere in Dalmatia, the transfer of power was accompanied by gestures of loyalty toward the new ruler and a reorganization of local authority under royal oversight.[26] Institutionally, however, the impact of this transition was far less radical than it might seem. According to another note by Lucius, based on the proceedings of the Great Council, a new version of the Statute of Trogir was produced in the 1360s, incorporating only minor changes to the provision on the Great Council and introducing adjustments to its hereditary membership.[27]

[22] BEĆIR 2022. p. 62–94; POPIĆ – BEĆIR 2023.
[23] RIZZI 2015. p. 155–159.
[24] SRCT p. 7.
[25] PROVERO 2021.
[26] POPIĆ 2024a.
[27] RAČKI 1881. p. 236.

The closure of the Great Council in Trogir was the outcome of a gradual process initiated under Venetian authority, with key decisions enacted in 1340 and 1342. The first of these abolished the statutory limit of eighty councillors, while subsequent resolutions established hereditary membership, effectively transforming the Council into a patrician body. Admission became an inherited right, transmitted within noble lineages, rather than determined by election or appointment. The result was the formal *serrata* of the Great Council, the institutional closure of membership and its consolidation within a hereditary patriciate, echoing similar developments in Venice half a century earlier, and later in other eastern Adriatic communes.[28]

These measures brought the closure of the Great Council in Trogir to completion well before the 1360s. Subsequently, only a minor revision was made to the statutory provision on the Great Council by lowering the age for full participation to sixteen, evidently in response to demographic losses following the plague of 1348.[29] At the same time, the entire process formed part of a renewed attempt by the urban popular strata to assert political influence—an episode that remains preserved only in a handful of council decisions. In 1365, the Council resolved to abolish all confraternities in the city, except for that of the Holy Spirit, which was explicitly forbidden from issuing any new *statuta et ordinationes* without the approval of the count and the *Curia*. This measure can only be viewed against the backdrop of popular demands for political participation, as confraternities—corporate associations of the commoners with the capacity to launch independent normative initiatives—posed a potential challenge to noble authority.[30] Their dissolution was thus both an act of political control and an assertion of ideological uniformity, achievable only under Angevin rule. Unlike Venice, which typically allowed a limited degree of commoner participation to maintain a balance of power within its urban communities, Angevin authority relied entirely on the support of urban nobilities. It is therefore hardly coincidental that in 1368, the Great Council of Trogir appears for the first time in the extant sources, and from then on consistently, as the Council of the Nobles (*consilium generale nobilium virorum civitatis Tragurii*). The reform of the Great Council's statutory provision should therefore be seen not simply as a procedural adjustment, but as a decisive act of social definition. By transforming the Great Council into an exclusively patrician body and introducing modifications to meet practical and political exigencies, the ruling class in Trogir codified a vision of the commune as the collective domain of its nobility. Civic participation was thus recast as a hereditary privilege rather than a communal right.

Equally revealing as the new provision on the Great Council are the elements of the statute that remained unchanged under Angevin rule. The editors of the 1360s version made no attempt, for example, to revise the

[28] Jelaska 2001. p. 21–24; Popić – Bećir 2022. p. 32–37; Bećir 2022. p. 44–45.
[29] SRCT p. 26–27. On the number of members of the Great Council who took part in its activities throughout the fourteenth century, see: Popić – Bećir 2022. p. 38–39.
[30] Jelaska 2001. p. 24–25; Popić – Bećir 2022. p. 36, 48.

preamble, which continued to refer explicitly to Venetian rule and to the count as its representative. Even more striking is the persistence of the provision concerning the Council of Twenty (*Consilium de viginti*), an institution introduced under Venetian authority, but already obsolete by the late 1320s. The same applies to clauses concerning the office of the Venetian count, whose authority no longer corresponded to the Angevin political order. The result was a statute layered with obsolete norms, preserved due to a deeply ingrained conservatism in the handling of legal texts. Such selective amendment was characteristic of medieval communal legislation throughout the Mediterranean. By the second half of the fourteenth century, statutes were seldom rewritten in full; instead they were expanded and modified to address immediate needs while leaving older layers intact, as illustrated also by the Statute of Dubrovnik following the establishment of Angevin rule in 1358.[31] The coexistence of current and obsolete provisions was not regarded as contradictory, but rather as a testament to the antiquity and continuity of the communal order, reflecting the interplay between law, collective memory, and political identity.

Viewed more broadly, this conservatism highlights the evolving role of the statute itself. By the mid-fourteenth century, the Statute of Trogir had assumed a function as much symbolic as normative. Accumulated over generations, its layers transformed it from a mere code of laws into the textual embodiment of the commune's identity. Each revision or addition, even when motivated by political expediency, reinforced this role. The statute's authority rested less on practical applicability than on its existence as a visible and enduring expression of local autonomy. Obsolete provisions, stripped of legal force, continued to carry political weight, affirming the city's right to self-government and its continuity across successive regimes.

The New Venetian Authority and the Illusion of Continuity

This characteristic of the statute—its rising political significance amid steady, or declining legal authority—became increasingly evident in the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. With the restoration of Venetian rule between 1409 and 1420, which placed Dalmatian cities under the authority of Venetian counts, the statutes' practical function diminished, while their symbolic value intensified even more. They remained tangible relics of a communal order no longer viable, yet whose memory continued to shape the collective identity of the communes. Such dynamics unfolded across most Dalmatian cities, where statutory traditions endured as lasting emblems of civic identity. Gradually transformed from instruments of governance into monuments of memory, the statutes came to enshrine a distinctly aristocratic vision of the commune, preserved more through remembrance than through active legal practice, well into the fifteenth century and beyond.

[31] PROVERO 2021; TANZINI 2021. p. 175–176; LONZA 2012. p. 13.

The re-establishment of Venetian rule in 1420 inaugurated a new political order that profoundly reshaped Trogir's institutional framework. Power became entirely concentrated in the hands of the Venetian count, whose authority extended over all aspects of civic administration. This transformation effectively marginalized the local nobility, stripping them of genuine political influence and reducing their role to a largely ceremonial presence within the commune. The Great Council (of Nobles), formerly the principal forum for civic deliberation, was henceforth convened only occasionally, primarily to elect minor officials or ratify decisions of limited significance. Meanwhile, Venetian authorities introduced subtle mechanisms of accommodation to secure their rule. Although deprived of actual power, the nobility retained symbolic prestige, while the commoners, long excluded from political life, gained modest improvements in social standing. By the mid-fifteenth century, Trogir's commoners organized themselves into a corporate body of six confraternities, endowed with limited, but symbolically significant political rights, including the election of envoys to Venice and a formal veto over Council of Nobles decisions affecting their community. These arrangements exemplified Venetian careful balancing act between the semblance of communal liberty and securing unchallenged dominion. Beneath this carefully maintained surface of continuity, preserved through familiar offices, councils, and civic rituals, power had been silently and irreversibly reshaped, turning Trogir from a self-governing commune into a peripheral administrative outpost of the *Stato da Mar*.[32]

Unlike the Venetian rule of 1322, which prompted the creation of an entirely new statute, the restoration of Venetian authority in 1420 involved no comparable redaction, but the act of ratification—a gesture laden with dual meaning.[33] On one hand, it symbolically acknowledged the political and legal identity of the Trogir commune; on the other, it reaffirmed its subordination to Venetian sovereignty, as no statutory amendment could take effect without the central government's approval.[34] The Statute of Trogir thus became the statute of Venetian Trogir, its authority entirely dependent on the metropolis. Within this very framework of subjugation, however, the statute acquired a new, almost memorial function. The retention of obsolete provisions, those referring to former regimes or defunct institutions, served as a deliberate expression of symbolic continuity, preserving the memory of a bygone era of communal autonomy and noble pre-eminence. The Great Council (of Nobles) continued to meet, laws were still drafted, and decisions recorded, maintaining

[32] On all of this, see: Šunjić 1967; Bećir 2024; Popić 2024b; Castelli 2025.

[33] The same phenomenon can be observed in the statutes of other Dalmatian cities as well. See: Ortalli 2015. A particularly instructive example is provided by Zadar's normative collections, which, following the establishment of Venetian rule in 1409, remained unchanged for several decades, even though the *volumen capitularium Iadre* contained explicitly anti-Venetian provisions introduced under Angevin authority. These provisions were only removed in 1456, and the entire collection was subsequently declared null and void in 1458. For a detailed discussion, see: Popić 2012. p. 51–57; Popić 2024b. p. 113–114.

[34] See: Ortalli 1997; Ortalli 2001; Provero 2021. p. 105.

the appearance of an unbroken political tradition. Through this ritualized imitation of self-government, the urban nobility sustained the fiction of autonomy, transforming the statute into a final emblem of their communal identity.

If the statute had thus become, under Venetian rule, a performative instrument of communal memory, by the mid-fifteenth century it assumed an even more explicitly memorial function. For the nobility, its preservation served as a strategy of self-legitimation, a means of safeguarding their corporate identity and symbolic authority within a political order that had long stripped them of actual power. Venice, for its part, not only tolerated, but actively encouraged this process, recognizing that the preservation of traditional forms could function as a subtle instrument of control and stability. The carefully maintained illusion of continuity masked the profound transformation of Trogir's political order.

Yet despite its enduring symbolic prestige and formal authority, the official copy of the Trogir Statute appears to have undergone significant physical deterioration after the restoration of Venetian rule. The evidence for this is manifold: none of the manuscripts or transcripts known to Ivan Lučić, which he consulted in preparing the printed edition of the statute, contained any provisions enacted by the Trogir Council of Nobles after 1428. The same applies to all manuscripts and copies known today, the earliest of which dates only to the last quarter of the fifteenth century. The absence of these later additions underscores the fragility of even the most venerated legal texts and reveals the practical limits of continuity in a statute increasingly valued for its ceremonial rather than functional role. The extent of the statute's deterioration is most clearly revealed in Lucius's own account: he observed that the official copy, written on parchment and preserved in the communal chancery, was so severely damaged that it could not serve as the basis for the printed edition. According to his description, the surviving material contained only the core of the statute, organized into three books, together with five later ordinances, two of them incomplete.[35]

The reasons for this neglect remain unclear, especially given the statute's enduring symbolic value and continued use in judicial practice. It was likely the very combination of frequent consultation and the absence of new official copies that hastened its physical deterioration. Viewed in this way, Lucius's decision to publish the statute appears even more comprehensible. His aim was more practical than scholarly: to produce a working edition of the statute, incorporating all subsequent ordinances for convenient reference by judges and officials. His editorial method—retaining only the substance of each law while omitting what he regarded as "superfluous for judicial use", such as records of council convocations, proposals, and voting outcomes—makes this purpose evident.[36] This approach also explains the striking differences between Lucius's version of the statute, published posthumously in 1708, and

[35] LUCIO 1673. p. 498, 504.
[36] LUCIO 1673. p. 499, 504.

all other surviving manuscripts: it was not conceived as a faithful textual reconstruction, but as a functional codification, intended to restore the statute's authority and usability within a civic sphere where both its material form and, to some extent, its institutional setting had long since decayed.[37]

Conclusions

The history of Trogir's Statute offers a compelling window into the interplay of law, power, and identity in the late medieval Adriatic. Emerging from the political transformations of the thirteenth century, the statute initially functioned as a tool for civic consolidation and oligarchic governance. Over time, its role evolved in response to shifting sovereignties—from Venetian dominion to Angevin rule and back again—with each iteration reflecting not only practical adaptation, but also the local nobility's efforts to reaffirm its authority and preserve the semblance of continuity. By the fifteenth century, the statute had largely ceased to function as a means of political authority, even as it remained in legal use. However, its symbolic and memorial significance endured. The persistence of obsolete clauses, together with the continued ceremonial invocation of statutory authority, demonstrates how legal texts could transcend their normative function to serve as repositories of civic memory and instruments of ideological survival. Through the statute, the urban nobility maintained a vision of communal autonomy within the new Venetian framework that had long since undermined it.

The evolution of Trogir's Statute thus demonstrates, as do other medieval statutes, that such texts were far more than mere compilations of rules. They were powerful instruments of political negotiation and struggle, arenas in which competing authorities and dominant groups contended over both the formulation of norms and the values they were meant to embody. Their apparent contradictions or inconsistencies stem from the fact that statutes were seldom rewritten from scratch; instead, new norms were layered atop older ones. For modern scholars, these are not defects, but invaluable evidence of the political dynamics that shaped them. Embedded within their textual fabric are traces of negotiation, factional rivalry, and ongoing adaptation to shifting hierarchies of power.

Viewed in this light, each variant of a statute embodies a moment of tension—a moment in which authority, privilege, and legitimacy were actively contested within the community. Studying these texts means looking beyond the words themselves to the processes that produced their successive versions. This is where the true political life of statutes resides. In Trogir, uniquely illuminated by the survival of both statutory and documentary evidence, these processes can be traced in far greater detail than for any other Dalmatian city. Through them, we can see that the statute functioned not only as a legal code, but also as a practical and symbolic instrument of governance. The evolution of Trogir's Statute thus exemplifies a broader Mediterranean

[37] For a detailed discussion, see: Popić 2024b.

phenomenon: the transformation of law from a tool of administration into a monument of municipal identity. It demonstrates how the written word could preserve, even in decay, the illusion of consensus and the semblance of self-government, serving both as witness to and participant in the long, uneven redefinition of communal authority under shifting dominions in the late medieval Adriatic.

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