



# Castle

A Venetian Fortress

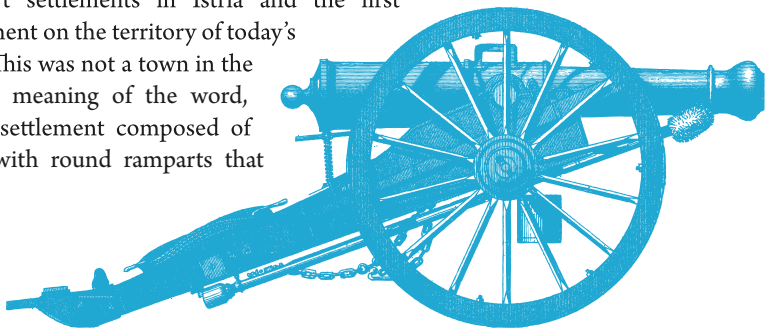
PULA • CROATIA





# The Castle

The Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria – Museo storico e navale dell'Istria, is located on Kaštel, the central Pula hilltop (about 34m above sea level), which has been the focal point of Pula's development since its earliest history. The hilltop is today dominated by a historical baroque fortress from the 17th century. The fortress is erected close to the sea and above the Nimfeia - an abundant freshwater spring which has been used since antiquity. However, the continuity of habitation on this hill dates back to the 1st century BC, when the pre-Roman inhabitants of Istria – the Histri – built a hill-fort on top of the hill. This hill-fort was one of over 400 pre-historic Histrian hill-fort settlements in Istria and the first settlement on the territory of today's Pula. This was not a town in the factual meaning of the word, but a settlement composed of huts, with round ramparts that





served for defence, without streets, squares or houses in the sense we conceive of them today. Outside the dry-wall stone ramparts, on the east and north-east hill slopes, there was a graveyard which is demonstrated by several hundred graves that belonged to the hill-fort settlement and that were found there during the construction of new buildings by the beginning of the 20th century, along today's

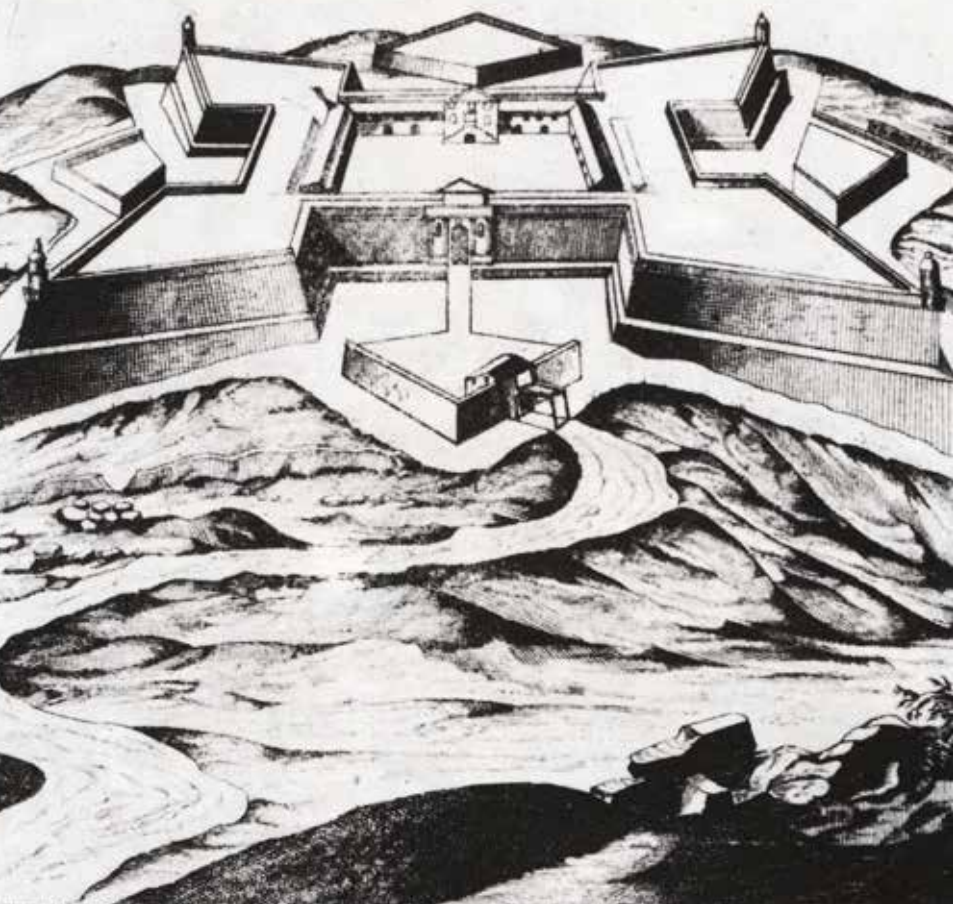
Carrarina Street. At the end of the second Histro-Roman war in 177 B.C., Istria was conquered by the Romans and it is supposed that the Romans erected their military camp – a castrum, in the place of the Histrian hill-fort. The castrum operated as a point of surveillance of the conquered territory and the nearby marine waterway. The first real urban centre on the territory of today's Pula appeared gradually, sometime in the mid-1st century B.C. in the area of the former hill-fort and at the foot of the hill. It was a colony of Roman citizens – Colonia Pietas Iulia Pola.

During the Middle Ages there was a fortress on top of the hill (castrum Polae) granted by the Istrian margraves – the Patriarchs of Aquileia

– as a fief to a family of powerful noblemen and the Patriarchs' allies in Pola – the Sergi, in order to maintain their power over the city. On this occasion the Sergi family received a new nickname – Castropola (from castrum Polae). The Sergi were struggling for power against the Iontasi (Gionatasi) family, who were allies of Venice. An especially bloody conflict broke out in 1271 during the Good Friday night procession, when the champions of Venice murdered the family members and supporters of the Castropola family. However, the Castropola family managed to stay in power until 1331 when the Venetians finally got hold of the city. The Castropola family was then banished from Pula, forced to leave for Treviso in Italy and their fortress on the hill was demolished.

From that point in time the development of the town became linked to the economic and political goals of Venice in the course of its expansion over the east coast of the Adriatic and generally connected with the balance of power on the Adriatic. Pula became a transitional port of call for merchant and navy ships on their way from Venice to Dalmatia and the Levant.

By the end of the 16th century the territory of southern Istria was stricken with the Uskok war. The war was a



consequence of frequent attacks by the Uskoks on the Venetian holdings on the Istrian coast. The attacks were encouraged by Austria that ruled over the Istrian interior. The war escalated into an international conflict and turned into a struggle for power between Austria and Venice. Amid the Thirty Years War (1618 – 1648) Pula became an important strategic defence point of the Venetian Republic, whose Senate decided to build a new defensive fortification in the place of the old one, for the protection of the town and the maritime route along the Istrian coast.

The construction of the fort began in 1630 on the ruins of the former medieval castle and it continued until 1633. At that time it was, architectonically, one of the most important and monumental buildings of the Venetian Republic. The project was designed by a French military engineer originally from Toulouse, Antoine De Ville, a very sought for and respectable architect of the time and one of the most famous builders of fortifications in Europe. De Ville also supervised the construction of the fortress.





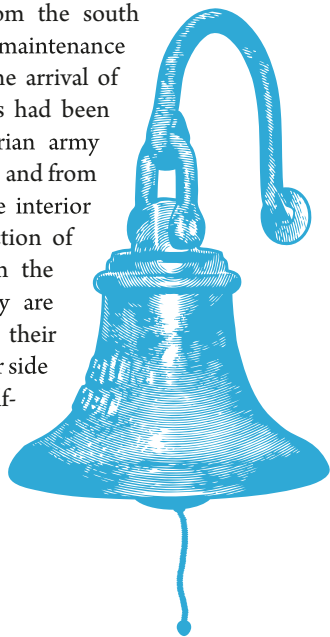
He published a very important work about fortifications - *Les fortifications...*, which, since 1628, saw more than 10 reprintings in Lyon, Paris and Amsterdam. Apart from his work for the Venetian Republic, De Ville also offered his services to the French court, the Duke of Savoy and other European noblemen. Slave oarsmen on Venetian merchant ships, stonecutters and stonemasons from Rovinj and Venice took part in the construction of the fortress and large stone blocks from the ruins of the old Roman theatre on the nearby hill of Monte Zaro and from the local quarries were used, transported to the top of the hill by 20 pairs of oxen.

The fort was constructed in the form of a rectangle, with narrow flanks (cortines) and four bastions on top. Each bastion had its name; the southeast bastion was named Zuliano or bastion Canal, the northeast bastion was named Marcello or bastion Priuli, the southwest bastion was named Pugliana or bastion Pojana and finally the northwest bastion carried the name of its designer - De Ville.





Cannons were mounted on the bastions. There was an open courtyard with a well in the centre of the fort with the armoury and accommodations organized around it. Since the fort had been conceived and constructed during the Thirty Years War, with the conclusion of the war and the signing of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 it fell into oblivion. With the cessation of the Uskok threat all the works on the fortress stopped. At the beginning of the 18th century the principal entrance with the moveable bridge was repositioned from the south flank to the west side and after that the maintenance of the fort ceased completely. Until the arrival of the Austrian army in 1813 the fortress had been abandoned and devastated. The Austrian army had demolished the old, worn structures and from 1840 it started building new ones. The interior of the fort changed with the construction of new casemates. All that remains from the fortification built in the 17th century are the well preserved curtain walls with their bastions and flanks. In 1861, on the outer side of the north wall that is shaped as a half-moon, the Austrians built the fortress' first water cistern while the internal cistern was completed in 1876.



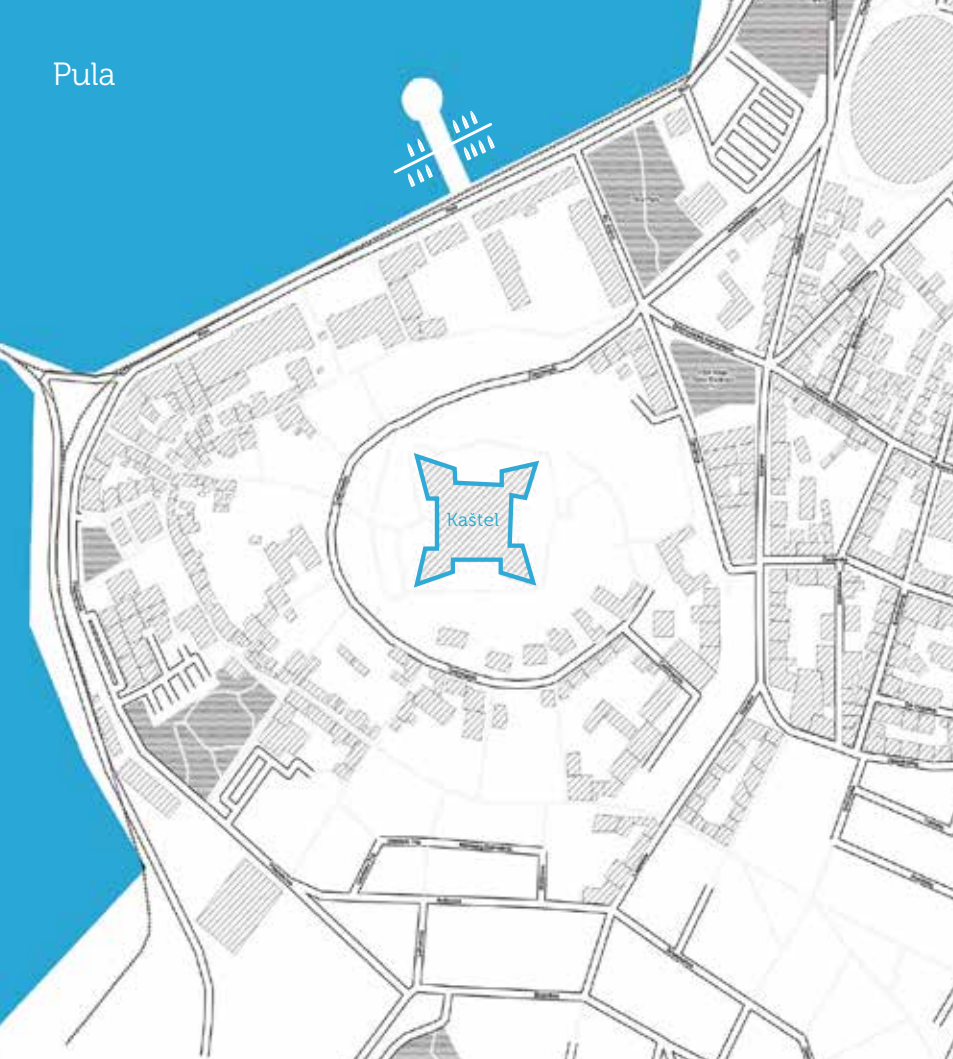


The cisterns were built as part of the first modern water supply system of the city of Pula, and so the fortress also became an important municipal building. Under the Austrian rule it was called the Hafenkastell and its function had predominantly become that of an army barracks for the accommodation of the military, rather than that of a fortified structure whose purpose was the defence of the city and the port.

After the end of the Great War and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the fort lost its defensive function. The new Italian authorities retained the military-strategic purpose of the building and used it as a point of observation and communication. After the Second World War it housed the Yugoslav Army forces and by the beginning of the 1960ies it was repurposed as a museum. Today it is the home of the Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria – Museo storico e navale dell'Istria that displays permanent and occasional exhibitions. A unique view of the city, its bay and suburbs can be enjoyed from the walls and the top of the tower rising above the fortress.



Pula



# IMPRESSUM

Editor:

*Historical and Maritime Museum of Istria*

*Povijesni i pomorski muzej Istre*

*Museo storico e navale dell'Istria*

For the editor:

*Gracijano Kešac*

English translation:

*Franka Strmotić-Ivančić*

Design:

*Erwin Rotta*



Grand Pula Club of Pula

ISTARSKA



REGIONE  
ISTRIANA



Upravni odjel za kulturu  
Assessorato alla cultura



