

# Medieval city tower houses as an indication of conflict and struggle for dominance

A comparison of selected European phenomena with examples from Silesia\*

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## Introduction

The subject of the medieval tower houses in Rome has already been discussed by me in the *Quart* quarterly in an article *Wieża mieszkalna – twierdza rodu czy symbol miejskiej komuny? Średniowieczne wieże mieszkalne Rzymu* (The residential tower – a family stronghold or a symbol of urban commune? Medieval Roman tower houses)<sup>1</sup>. In the introduction section of this article, I explained the concept of “*città turrite*”. In the present text, however, allow me to recall some of the most important facts about this subject.

The *città turrite* phenomenon in central and northern Italy resulting from the development of self-government must be considered individually for each city. In general, the occurrence of burghers' tower houses is always linked to a weakening of the influence of central secular and ecclesiastical authorities in favour of local authority. However, towers in cities on the Italian peninsula are not isolated, being elements of family complexes, both in a social and architectural sense. They become a sign of the family's status and, like the castle, enable its economic and political activity.



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<sup>1</sup> R. Eysymontt, *Wieża mieszkalna – twierdza rodu czy symbol miejskiej komuny? Średniowieczne wieże mieszkalne Rzymu*, “*Quart*” 2021, No. 3.



The commonness of the phenomenon is also important:

In Vicenza in the 11th century there were more than 100 towers, in Ferrara in the 14th century 32, in Lucca in 1225 and in 1306 there were 300, in Genoa in 1196 – 80, in Viterbo – 197, in Bologna – 180, in Florence in the 16th century there were 100 large and 120 small towers, in Pavia more than 100, in San Gimignano – the city that became the emblem of the medieval towers there were only 40<sup>2</sup>.

As in the past, our fascination with these buildings today is due to the fact that the medieval tower houses still remain the most important local landmarks.

Such a landmark is the tallest tower house of medieval Europe still preserved in Bologna. It is the Torre degli Asigneli, over 100 m high, located in the centre of the medieval city, at the junction of the main roads leading to the city gates [Fig. 1]. As the literature on the subject mentions, an internal political conflict contributed to its erection. According to Antonio Gozzadini, the reason for the tower's construction even in the pre-communitarian period was the struggles over investiture (the time of the Great Countess Matilda) and the functioning of two bishops in Bologna – one papal, the other imperial. This may, according to Gozzadini, support the hypothesis that this tower was erected by representatives of one of the conflicting sides – papal or imperial – rather than by a particular family. From a strategic point of view, the tower was intended to allow access via a wooden bridge directly to the city walls, from which one could travel towards Rome or Ravenna via the Porta Ravegnana. After the conflict ceased, the previous users of the tower became its owners<sup>3</sup>. The historical atlas of the city of Bologna also indicates a similar function as the reason for the construction of the tallest medieval tower house. According to Francesca Bocchi, hypotheses based on thermoluminescence studies have identified the time of its creation as the last quarter of the 11th c., during a period of great tension between the Papacy and the Empire, which eventually resulted in battles between the participants in the conflict and the use of the strategic function of the towers<sup>4</sup>.

However, without dwelling on the subject of the towers of Bologna, Florence and the obvious topic of the towers of San Gimignano, which requires a separate comprehensive essay, in the following text I would like to focus on selected, perhaps lesser-known examples from the area of the Apennine Peninsula, which were dependent on these renowned phenomena, the tower houses of Dalmatia and Bavarian Regensburg, and finally to reach selected examples from Silesia, which in my opinion are close to the Italian medieval tower house, and which are also worth being considered. I have deliberately omitted the medieval tower houses of Wrocław, which require a separate study<sup>5</sup>.

1. Torre degli Asigneli, Bologna. Photo: R. Eysymontt



<sup>2</sup> A. Katerma-Ottela, *Le Casertorri medievali in Roma*, Helsinki 1981, p. 15, note 13.

<sup>3</sup> See F. Bergonzoni, *L'Asinelli e la Garisenda: Storia di un simbolo*, [in:] *Le Torri de Bologna. Quando e perché sorserto, come vennere costruite, quando furono, che le innalzò, comme scomparvero, quali esistono ancora*, Ed. G. Roversi, Bologna 1989, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> See *Antologia di fonti dalla grande crisi all' "Eta" comunale (secoli IV-XII)*, [in:] *Atlante storico delle città italiane. Emilia-Romagna*. Bologna, Vol. 1: *Da Felsina a Bononia: dalle origini al XII secolo*, Ed. F. Bocchi, Bologna 1995, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> See C. Buško, *Budynki wieżowe w krajobrazie średniowiecznego miasta*, [in:] *Dom w mieście średniowiecznym i nowożytnym*, Ed. B. Gediga, Wrocław 2004. In his analysis, the author looked for examples in Pomerania, Cracow, Prague and Lübeck, Brunswick. Drawing from him, I provided basic information on the Tower of the Dukes of Brzeg in Wrocław in a previous publication – see R. Eysymontt, *op. cit.*, p. 4.



<sup>6</sup> See *Codex Diplomaticus Silesiae*, Vol. 7: *Regesten zur schlesischen Geschichte*, Part 1: *Bis zu Jahre 1250*, Hrsg. C. Grünhagen, Breslau 1884: No. 26, 31 December 1146 (Pope Eugenius III writes that he will receive the envoys of Conrad III); No. 31 (another document issued by Pope Eugenius III in Viterbo on 3 March 1149); Nos. 221–223, of the year 1220 (Pope Honorius III issues three documents on the nuns of Trzebnica); No. 229 (the same pope in Viterbo issues a document addressed to the chapter of Gniezno on the participation of the monastery of St. Vincent and the bishop of Wrocław on the election of a new archbishop); Nos. 490–492, of the year 1236 (three letters of Pope Gregory IX from Viterbo confirming i.a. the delegations of the papal legate William of Modena on a dispute between the bishop of Wrocław and the monastery of Lubiąż and confirming the Lubiąż possessions; moreover, one letter on indulgences to the abbot of the Polish Dominican province); Nos. 502, 504 – of the year 1237 (four documents issued at Viterbo by Gregory IX in cases of dispute between Silesian monasteries, confirming the mission of the papal legate William of Modena).

<sup>7</sup> See N. Kamp, *Istituzioni comunali in Viterbo nel Medioevo*, Viterbo 1963, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 62.

## Italy

One of the more architecturally significant medieval cities in Italian Lazio is Viterbo, the seat of the Papacy since 1257, the city where a conclave was held and Pope Gregory X was elected in 1270. As a temporary residence for those associated with the papal court, the city also became the site of numerous tower house-like residences in the 13th and 14th centuries. It is also interesting to note that the documents that have survived and have been published in part make it possible to characterise the legal conditions for the construction of these buildings. An additional factor that prompted me to take an interest in this city was the fact that many Silesian documents recorded in the 12th and 13th c. were signed at the papal residence in Viterbo<sup>6</sup>.

Viterbo's rise to architectural prominence stemmed from the local law established in the mid-13th century. The *capitaneus populi et comunis* was first elected in July 1254. The first communal chiefs – the *podestàs* were appointed from outside (*forestieri*), but from 1257 onwards it was a local nobleman, and in that very year Rainiero Gatti was elected for the first time for a period of one year. Gatti himself described his duties as follows:

*officium capitanei [...] debet intendere omnia gravamina, que inferuntur per potestas et officiales, qui sunt pro tempore, et corrigere ea et regere et manutenere omnia iura ipsius civitas intus et extra civitatem* [the office of the Captain <...> should have regard to all the complaints which are brought by the authority and office, which is at that time, and must amend and refer to them, and preserve all the laws of that city inside and outside].

From 1265, for the next six years, the office of *capitaneus populi et comunis* was again in the hands of the Gatti family [Fig. 2]. Initially, from 1266, the office was held three times by the aforementioned Rainiero, then by his cousin, and then by two of his sons and two brothers. As can be seen, in spite of the theoretical prohibition against extending the term of tenure, the office of *podestà* of Viterbo was for many years in the hands of a single family, or their affinities<sup>7</sup>. From 1274, the Alessandri family, also related to the Gattis, ruled Viterbo for three years, and then the function of *capitano del popolo* fell to the Orsini family<sup>8</sup>.

The model for the residences of the nobility and burghers that were built not only in Viterbo may have been the papal palace, which was successively extended in the 13th and 14th centuries. The beginning of the construction of the northern side of the palace must be linked to the pontificate of Alexander IV (1254–1261). Alexander IV spent three winters in Viterbo – 1255–1256, 1256–1257 and 1260–1261, the reason being the unfinished repair of the roof of the Roman Lat-



2. Palazzo Gatti, Viterbo. Photo: R. Eysymontt

3. Via Pellerino, in the background, a tower house, Viterbo. Fot. R. Eysymontt



<sup>9</sup> See **G. Radke**, *Viterbo: Profile of a Thirteenth-Century Papal Palace*, Cambridge 1996, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> The rule of Brancaleone degli Andalò is described in the chronicle of the English monk Matthew Paris. See *Matthaei Parisiensis monachi Santi Albani Chronica Majora*, Ed. **H. R. Luard**, Vol. 5: A. D. 1248 – A. D. 1259, London 1880, pp. 699, 709.

<sup>11</sup> See **G. Radke**, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

eran Palace<sup>9</sup>. The Roman revolt in the spring of 1257, in which the Brancaleone family of Bologna, hostile to the Pope and the Roman barons, prevailed, and the unfavourable political conditions in the papal city of Anagni (where the pontificate of Pope Innocent III and Alexander IV began) made the relocation of the papal seat to Viterbo a good alternative<sup>10</sup>. The construction of the papal palace in Viterbo must have already been satisfactory when Pope Alexander, who had also erected another residence in Orvieto in 1260, convened a synod in Viterbo in June 1261. After the Pope's death – even before this event – his successor Pope Urban IV (1261–1264) saw greater advantages in residing in Montefiascone and Orvieto<sup>11</sup>.

After the death of King Manfred at the Battle of Benevento in February 1266 and the accession of Charles I of Anjou to the throne of Sicily and his coronation by the Pope's appointed cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica, the conditions for the Pope's return to Rome were more favourable. Pope Clement IV, however, stayed first in Perugia, then in Viterbo. Despite such propitious circumstances (favour of the Popes, continuity of self-government), however, Viterbo seems never to have fully exploited its opportunities. As Pope Clement IV wrote to Charles I of Anjou in February 1267, Viterbo is simply too

small for the reception of a king. For this reason, the Pope suggested to Charles that he come to the city with a small court and set up camp outside the city, which was also a common practice for emperors visiting Rome<sup>12</sup>.

Towers in Viterbo were being built as early as the 11th c., and are confirmed by numerous 13th c. records such as the one of 1237 and subsequent ones of 1251 and 1252. I give their record and numbering following the codices issued 1872<sup>13</sup>:

No. 35: “*De domibus et turribus minantatibus ruinam* [on houses and towers in danger of collapse]”;

No. 36: “*De pena prohicentium lapides de turri, proferullo et allis* [on penalties for those throwing stones from a tower, a *proferullo* <elevated vestibule> and others]”.

No. 119: “*Quod Nullu possit turrim suam altus elevare quam turris domini Braimandi* [no one can erect a tower higher than that of Lord Braimandi]”.

No. 125. “*De custodia turrium* [on tower guards]”.

No. 184: “*Quod potestas non cogat constringere aliquem, qui habet turrim, prohicere zoccas et scalas* [that the authority does not request to prosecute, <restrict?> anyone who possesses a tower to remove vestibules and stairs]”.

No. 244: “*De illo qui habet criptam sub domo, vel turris alicuis* [on those who have a crypt or some kind of tower by their house]”

No. 24: “*De pena facientis turrim, caligam, vel murum in via publica, seu private* [penalties for those who erect an obstructing tower or wall on a public or private road]”.

As can be seen above, the fact that the construction of the towers in Viterbo and their destruction was a political tool is evidenced by the records, concerning both their height and the practice of destroying them, which, moreover, was not desired except for the exception of the commission of murder or treason by its owner – see No. 165:

*Statuimus quod potestas et sua curia teneatur sacramente et ad penam amissionis salarii sui, aliqua occasione, vel exceptione, vel causa, destruere, vel facere destrui aliquam domum, vel turrim, vel palatium, seu aliquod edificium, nisi ob causam homicidii, vel prodictionis civitas* [we have resolved that the authority and its court shall be solemnly bound, under penalty of loss of remuneration, to find every circumstance, exception or reason not to destroy or cause to be destroyed any house or tower, or palace, or any building except where the reason for such destruction was murder or treason against the city] [Fig. 3].



<sup>12</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> I. Ciampi, *Cronache e Statuti della città di Viterbo*, Firenze 1872, pp. 505, 506, 528, 537, 541, 554, 562, 565, 566.



4. Tower house, Tivoli. Photo: R. Eysymontt

On the other hand, however, towers that were built outside the legal system were not protected – see No. 183:

*Quod non debeat custodiri aliqua turris in terra. Statimus firmiter ordinantes quod potestats, vel aliquis de curia non faciat aliquam turrim, seu turres aliquas de civitate Viterbii custodiri, salvo si videbitur balivo Communis, qui ipsas faciat custodire.* [That no tower be guarded in the city. We strongly advocate that no tower or towers of the city of Viterbo be ordered to be guarded by the authorities or anyone of the court, unless it is recognized that the bailiff of the municipality should order them to be guarded].

As can be seen, the city made sure that the towers remained complete, but only those that were approved by the authority, but it also allowed them to be demolished.

According to some historians, there were originally 190 towers in Viterbo, but the 1596 view of the city shows only a quarter of this number, and the 1820 cadastre shows only ten. According to



the catalogue accompanying the most important work on Viterbo, 391 of them were counted<sup>14</sup>. Some of the later ones had an entrance in the lower storey closed with an arch and thinner walls – so they did not serve defensive purposes. However, the defensive structure of the towers was evident from the overhead porches joining the individual towers, the former existence of which is indicated by the narrow vertical openings on the upper floors, which have survived to this day.

The social diversity reflected in the building structure is also evidenced by the houses of the inhabitants of **Tivoli**, among which we can also find many tower houses<sup>15</sup> [Fig. 4]. Source records provide proofs of their military role. The social and city planning role of the tower in Tivoli at the same time is also evidenced by the titlature of its inhabitants. Among the families of *milites* and *iudices* in Tivoli in the 13th c., the families of Toballi, Ilperini, *domini* Mathei, Rainaldi Palloni, Gocoloini, Brunelli and Oddoni are noted. All of them are situated at the highest level of “*de Turre*”<sup>16</sup> [Fig. 5].

A distinctive social feature of Tivoli was the association of its most prominent inhabitants with the Roman families and the Lazio families in general. This led to their control of the highest ecclesiastical offices and effective execution of the jurisdiction of the *castello*. The members of these families led a lifestyle not only completely different from the plebs, but also from the other *nobili*. From the mid-14th c. onwards, their distinguishing feature was their appointment as *milites* those who served on horseback, which was accompanied by the practice of assault and robbery as the main competence of this class. Finally, the last element that distinguished the *milites* from their vassals was their complete separation from the commercial and artisanal professions.

Towers were also an important part of **Genoa**'s architectural and social structure. In the 12th and 13th c. there were 70–80 towers in Genoa well documented in the *Libri Iurium Reipublicae Januensis*. The rich archival resources have not yet been researched, and only La Torre Embriaci, supposedly the foundation of the knight William, a participant in the First Crusade, is widely known<sup>17</sup>. Such little interest in the Genoese towers is perhaps caused by the fact that in the reconstructed history of the city in the 19th and 20th c., in accordance with the historical policy of the time, an undercurrent of urban patriotism was emphasised, eliminating information about the large conflicts between families which were, after all, the reason for the construction of the towers [Fig. 6].

The fact that towers played a fundamental role in the composition of the medieval townscape both in an urban and strategic sense is shown not only by vedutas but also by analyses of city plans. Thus, for example, in Asti, in Italian Piedmont, towers were mostly situated on the corners of the blocks of buildings, especially along the main latitudinal axis<sup>18</sup>. According to Claudia Bonardi, the towers must



<sup>14</sup> See M. R. Giordani, *Ricognizione delle torri medioevali di Viterbo*, [in:] *Case e torri medioevali*, Vol. 2: *Atti del III Convegno di studi La città, le torri e le case. Indagini sui centri dell' Italia comunale (secc. XI-XV), Toscana, Lazio, Umbria, Città della Pieve, 8-9 novembre 1996*, Ed. E. de Minicis, E. Guidoni, Roma 2001.

<sup>15</sup> The most about medieval society of Tivoli – see S. Carocci, *Tivoli nel basso medioevo. Società cittadina et economia agraria*, Roma 1988.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Cagnana, *Le torri di Genova fra XII e XIII secolo*, [in:] *Case e torri medioevali*, Vol. 3: *Atti del IV Convegno di Studi "Case e torri medioevali. Indagini sui centri dell' Italia comunale (sec. XI-XV). Piemonte - Liguria - Lombardia, Viterbo-Vetralla, 29-30 aprile 2004*, Ed. E. de Minicis, E. Guidoni, Roma 2005.

<sup>18</sup> See C. Bonardi, *Le Torri di Asti e altri paesaggi urbani subalpine fra XII e XV secolo*, [in:] *Case e torri...*, Vol. 3, pp. 12-13, Figs. 2-3.


5. Tower house, Tivoli. Photo: R. Eysmontt

have served a strategic “defensive/offensive” function, as evidenced precisely by their location and windowless rooms in the lower floors. These towers were also intended to act as “point” defence elements of the blocks of buildings in the case of a threat to the city centre and, secondly, to distribute defence tasks among the groups of townspeople clustered around them. All four towers mentioned in Asti in the 12th c. were allodial. Their strategic role in the city structure is also evidenced by their location next to the city gates “*solaria et turribus adiacentibus in ad Portam S. Iuliani, ad portam S. Laurenti, in strata apud portam S. Martini* [houses and towers belonging to them at the gate of St. Julian, at the gate of St. Lawrence I by the road by the Gate of St. Martin]”<sup>19</sup>. It was not until the 19th c. that the towers received more ornate finials added to them.

In some cities on the 1574 view from the Teatrum Sabaudie, as in Turin, the former defensive tower houses began at some point to have only communal and symbolic functions, and were transformed into the bases of elevated gazebos<sup>20</sup>. In the cadastres of 1363–1488 they are not mentioned, so they do not have a prestige role, but rather have a “*pauci valoris quia minatur ruina* [those that are less damaged have few values]”<sup>21</sup>. As can be seen, the change in the political situation is reflected in the change in the function of the towers. For example, it is possible to observe the “communalisation” of towers, which no longer functioned, as in Turin or Alba, as defensive structures of individual families, but became communal monuments situated at a *Cardo* and *Decumanus* crossing. When the former municipal palace in Turin was losing its function, first the solarium of Enrico Borghese was taken over as the seat of authority, and in 1375 an old house with a tower by Giovanni do Rivalta. However, all the towers had lost their importance earlier when Charles of Anjou introduced concessions for their construction. For this reason, among others, the defence passed from the hands of the townspeople to royal officials.

The political role of towers can also be seen in **southern Italy**. Here, the structure of the tower house is still a sign of Norman times. In Bari, for example, during the Byzantine era (894–1071), the *casa a corte* – a house with a large garden – prevailed, and one- or two-storey *casaterrinee* and *solariate* houses formed separate *insulae* surrounded by streets<sup>22</sup>. The *casa-torre* appearing only in the next phase (1071–1194) – is generally square in plan with an area of 45 m<sup>2</sup><sup>23</sup>. It was not until the next period, during the Andegavian era (from 1194 to the 14th c.), that the *casa palaziata* – the result of building transformations, or a re-built residence that was horizontal in its architectural composition – appeared in Bari<sup>24</sup>.

As the literature indicates, the towers in the area were related to the dispute between those in favour of the Normans and those of the Byzantines, and were therefore defensive in nature. Anonymous of Bari describes numerous towers situated next to each other accessible by long wooden stairs. There is also a note from 1131, where

 <sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> C. Bonardi, *L'Uso sociale dello spazio urbano*, [in:] *Torino fra medioevo e Rinascimento*, Ed. R. Comba, E. Rocca, Torino 1993, pp. 152–156.

<sup>22</sup> R. Palombella, *Modelli abitativi e trasformazioni del tessuto urbano a Bari tra XI e XIV secolo: una ricerca multidisciplinare*, [in:] *Case e torri...*, Vol. 4: *Atti del V Convegno Nazionale di Studi "Indagini sui centri dell'Italia meridionale w insulare (sec. XI–XV). Campania, Basilicata, Puglia, Calabria, Sicilia e Sardegna"*, (Orte, 15–16 marzo 2013), Ed. E. de Minicis, Roma 2014, pp. 146–148.

<sup>23</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibidem*, pp. 159–160.



6. Tower house in the port of Genoa.  
Photo: R. Eysymontt



<sup>25</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 154.

<sup>26</sup> M. Cadinu, *Documenti e testimonianze materiali do case a torre medievali in Sardegna*, [in:] *Case e torri...*, Vol. 4.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 273.

reference is made to towers in houses that threaten the integrity of the city and which are said to be a source of revolt. This may indicate a connection between these towers and the defensive ring of this city. In 1107, reference is made to a *camenata turris e mulinom*, a tower house and mill with two entrances – one on the harbour side and one on the city side<sup>25</sup>.

That towers also occurred in the Italian provinces is reported by Marco Cadinu<sup>26</sup>. Towers were erected in **Sardinia** in the 13th and 14th centuries. The author recognises two types of tower houses [Fig. 7]. The first – the tall ones – were built in an urban environment and belonged to the political and military elite of the time. Documents confirm single towers, or properties consisting of two towers with surrounding houses. The latter belonged to manor houses of the rural type. They were generally lower, but were no less important as a symbol of social and public representation. The towers referred to in Pisa documents as *turri*, and so called in Sardinian, may have belonged to an older type associated with the urban reality of the region. Towers in Sardinia were also partly direct cultural imports. Il Giudice, a magistrate in Arborea, had *ballatoriata* towers in Pisa in 1303, and another tower house in his home town of Oristano [Fig. 8]. As can be seen from this, Sardinian towers may also be the result of extensive merchant contacts<sup>27</sup>.

The towers were also a sign of the military and political dominance of the newcomers arriving from outside and colonising the city. The presence in Cagliari of eminent Genoese and Pisan families in the area of Il Castello – erected in 1216 – (26 Pisans are recorded



7. Aragonian tower house, Ghiralza, Sardinia. Photo: R. Eysymontt



8. Tower house in Oristano, Sardinia.  
Photo: R. Eysymontt

here in 1302) led to the establishment of new municipal statutes and the will to preserve, for defensive reasons, the towers both in the city and in *il contado*<sup>28</sup>.

## Dalmatia

The towers in Dalmatia are also interesting from the point of view of their political role<sup>29</sup>. Sources indicate that towers here had two functions – a defensive one, which was used during internal city conflicts, as was the case during the civil war in Split described in the 13th c. *Historia Salonitana* by Thomas the Archdeacon, and a residential one, prevalent in the 14th c., when there was already communal control of the city. Among the architectural phenomena confirming the role of towers during internal urban conflicts, examples from the island of Brač and from Zadar can be mentioned<sup>30</sup>.

On the island of **Brač**, the tower was located on the old square, at the corner of the upper street and the new square by the harbour. The tower, which belonged to the most prominent Galzignas family, was connected to the old ring of town walls. In 1213, the family received permission from the bishop to build St Stephen's Chapel on top of the tower. It was one of the first masonry buildings in the town. All the other towers of the island in the 15th c. were associated with communal fortifications, and the Galzignas tower was the only one comprising part of the hereditary family estate<sup>31</sup>.

In **Zadar**, a tower belonged to the House of Dominic Morosini Maurocensus, Count of Zadar during the Venetian rule. It was sold by his son, Count Roger in 1193, when Zadar was ruled by the Hungarian King Bela III. It has been identified that the tower was located opposite the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary and may also have been part of the fortifications. It is significant that in the 12th c., when Zadar was mostly Venetian, the only house with a tower belonged to a Venetian count, which may indicate that the Venetians feared the possibility of resistance from the local people<sup>32</sup>.

According to the research of Irena Benyovsky Latin, of the seven documented towers of Trogir, built on a near-square plan (five were connected to the system of 13th c. fortifications to the south (from the sea) (the Lucić tower, the Sv. Nikole tower, which belonged for a long time to the Cega family and bears its name today, the Vitturi tower [Fig. 9], the Bishop's tower, the Sv. Ivan's tower), and two (the Andres tower and the Malipiera tower) were only slightly distant from them<sup>33</sup>. As can be seen, private towers were also intended to play a role in the defence of the city, as evidenced by the 1267 record: "*Hi sunt quibus baliste comunis in domus date sunt* [these are the houses in which there are common ballistae]". A document of 1279 mentions a "*domus cum curte et turre* [house with a rampart and tower]" situated next to Sv. Nikole's monastery. A new ring of fortifications was also

<sup>28</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 260.

<sup>29</sup> See Z. Nikolić Jakus, *Privately owned towers in Dalmatian towns during the high and central Middle Ages* [in:] *Towns and Cities of the Croatian Middle Ages: Authority und Property*, Ed. I. Benyovsky Latin, Z. Pešorda Vardić, Zagreb 2014.

<sup>30</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 293.

<sup>31</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 287.

<sup>32</sup> See *ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> In 13th c. documents (1267), information appears about tower taxes paid by the citizens Andrea, Vitturi, Lucio, Cega, Orso. Due to scarce data on the towers on the southern rampart, it is not possible to trace the change of ownership of these towers with any accuracy. These towers are partially preserved today. See I. Benyovsky, *Srednjovjekovni Trogir. Prostor i društvo*, Zagreb 2009, p. 165.

added to the towers between 1380 and 1400<sup>34</sup>. Often the city towers were not independent structures, but were part of the line of walls. In the case of internal or external danger, they could be protected by members of a particular clan for the benefit of the whole commune. City towers were also a reflection of the true power of the family in a society based on property ownership. The era of building the towers coincides with the development of municipal institutions<sup>35</sup>. They all had a square plan and were linked to the city walls.

Tower houses also became important elements of the structure of neighbouring sacred buildings in 15th c. Trogir, as was the case with the Vitturi tower, which was linked to the structure of the palace and functional courtyard belonging to the St. Nicholas Monastery.

Despite their defensive function, the towers of Trogir were also residential, as evidenced by the 1450 record of the sale of the “*turrim cum suis curia et coquina sive domo [the tower with its court and kitchen or house]*”<sup>36</sup>. It is known that after 1420, when the power in the city was taken over by the Venetians, some of the towers and large houses of Trogir, as well as Split and Šibenik, were appropriated by them<sup>37</sup>. This also applied to the tower of St. Nicholas in Trogir, which, however, was not taken over by the Venetians due to its deplorable condition<sup>38</sup>. Trogir’s towers also gave their name to the town’s streets<sup>39</sup>.

Dalmatian tower houses were also situated outside the walls. It cannot be ruled out that having towers outside the ring of fortifications gave the cities’ elite a better chance of defending themselves against attack from the side of a city, something that had already happened before the 13th century<sup>40</sup>.

In conclusion, it should be stated that the mighty families, the cities’ elite, had the privilege and duty to defend the city walls, and most of the examples from Trogir, Split and Dubrovnik testify to the connection between private towers and the city walls. Thus, one can speak of a private-public partnership from which both sides, the city’s commune and the city’s elites, could benefit. The elites invested in the construction of the city walls getting in return a prestigious location in the city. In the 14th and 15th c. on the Gradec (the Kaptol) in Zagreb, most of the towers at the city walls were privately owned. In Zadar, the Venetian authorities restricted such a situation fearing the military power of the mighty.

## Regensburg

In the case of the northern Bavarian **Regensburg**, we can speak of both the internal and external defensive role of the tower houses<sup>41</sup>. These towers were presumably built earlier than many of the Italian towers. In the north-east corner of the Salzburg Bishop’s Regensburg court there was a tower identified during the demolition of the



<sup>34</sup> See *ibidem*, pp. 67, 72, 139.

<sup>35</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>36</sup> *ibidem*, p. 187. See also plan on pp. 44–45.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> See Z. Nikolić Jakus, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

<sup>41</sup> The most information on this topic – see R. Strobel, *Forschungsprobleme des mittelalterlichen Wohnhaus in Regensburg*, “Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Oberpfalz und Regensburg” Vol. 103 (1963); *idem*, *Das Bürgerhaus in Regensburg, Mittelalter*, “Das Deutsche Bürgerhaus” Vol. 23 (1976); U. Osterhaus, *Beobachtungen zum mittelalterlichen Regensburg*, “Verhandlungen des Historischen Vereins für Oberpfalz und Regensburg” Vol. 112 (1972).



9. Vitturi tower, Trogir. Photo: R. Eysymontt



court in 1895–1896. On the first floor there was a St Rupert’s chapel, dated to a time shortly after 976. The portal of this building can be dated to the 12th c. at the latest. Similarly old must have been the tower of the Bishops of Bamberg, demolished as early as 1441<sup>42</sup>. They wrote in 1551 that the city was renowned for its towers, of which it had more than any other city on the Danube, the Saale and the Elbe; it was also then called a city with a tower law<sup>43</sup> [Fig. 10]. In the 15th c., 91 towers were counted in Regensburg including the church towers. At the end of the 15th c., the Raselius Chronicle had described the situation as follows:

*von der Thurm Menge In dieser Stadt [...]soviel gewesen, als Tag im Jahr. Wurden ihrer viele Baufalls halber abgetragen [as for the number of towers there were as many in the city as there were days in the year. However, due to decline of their construction, half of them were demolished]*<sup>44</sup>.

The defensive function of the towers in Regensburg is indicated by defensive slits arranged not on the street side and the main façade, but on the side façade, close to the front, which proves their real defensive function and not merely symbolic one, especially as they were sometimes placed in three levels, one archery window in each. As this suggests, the slits served the purpose of firing along the street, not the houses opposite. The real defensive function is further evidenced by the internal glyphs (Gesandenstrasse 2). Even more developed is the form of the slits in the Goldenes Kreuz house from ca. 1250 with a slightly widened hourglass-shaped lower part of the slit. Another type of embrasure from around 1270 with a semi-circular arrowslit at the bottom can be seen in the town hall, and around in the Neues Waag tower built in 1300. The latest type of slits also with a semi-circular closing at the bottom has a tower house called Goldenes Turm erected between 1270 and 1290 [Fig. 11]. Most of the defensive slits in the tower houses were located on the main thoroughfare – the Gesandenstrasse – which was an extension of the ancient *via principalis* leading from the legionary camp to the *canabe*, as well as on the line of Goliatstrasse, Neue Waaggasse, Haidplatz on the former connection between the suburban *canabe* via the later market square and along the northern walls to the *porta pretoria*, where the Goldenes Kreuz tower, Neue Waag, town hall and Posthorngäschen 6 tower are situated. The limited number of defensive slits and the generally openness of the façades of the tower houses in Regensburg indicate that they were not used for self-defence but were a type of system to reinforce the external defences of the city [Fig. 12]. Archaeological research has confirmed that at the time they were built there were no defensive walls and the towers were situated outside the defensive line of the former Roman camp. However, the “internal” defensive role of the Regensburg towers cannot be ruled out either. It can be assumed that also during internal conflicts the



<sup>42</sup> See R. Strobel, *Das Bürgerhaus...*, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 32.



10. Romanesque tower at Kapellen-gasse 2, Regensburg. Photo: R. Eysymontt

11. Goldener Turm, Regensburg. Photo: R. Eysymontt

tower houses served the commune to guard the main communication routes. The defensive function of the Regensburg towers was not the only one, however. Their characteristic features is loggias, Italian in origin, located on the second or third storey, often bricked up later. However, it is not easy to determine their function. According to the iconography, they were wide apertures (balconies) with a wall behind them, but research shows that the spaces behind the loggia were full width open to the street [Fig. 13]. This structure, which was undoubtedly inspired by Italian examples, may have been intended to display goods on a shopping day, or to present sacred symbolism in the space above the chapel located in the tower's ground floor. A manifestation of a political nature is not ruled out here either, especially since above the entrance to the Regensburg Town Hall, figures of defenders of municipal freedoms are depicted in a wide-open arcade. Schutz und Trutz – “defence and attack” – as Regensburgers call this representation – is a depiction of soldiers defending the city walls<sup>45</sup>.

Thus, for Regensburg, it can be concluded that, in addition to their role in the defence of the city, the underlying reason for the construction of the towers was ambition for power and prestige, as well



<sup>45</sup> K. O. Ambronn, *Der Kampf um die Macht 1180–1245 oder das Werden der Kommune*, [in:] *Regensburg im Mittelalter*, Vol. 1: *Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte vom frühen Mittelalter bis zum Beginn der Neuzeit*, Regensburg 1995, pp. 64–65.



as the self-consciousness of the patricians associated with the trade largely linked in Regensburg to the Italian peninsula. The city's nobility sought to use the towers to create an external image of their seat as a knight's castle, thus emphasising their political ambitions and at the same time communicating their excellent economic situation resulting from their trade. The example of Regensburg is also the most illustrative example of the intertwining of both external and internal functions performed by the defence towers.

— 12. Finial of the patrician tower in Scheugäßchen, Regensburg. Photo: R. Eysymontt

### **Tower houses and Vogt's Houses of Silesian towns (selected examples)**

In Silesian conditions, medieval tower houses are usually hidden in the structure of *kamienice* (tenement houses) rebuilt in the early modern period and in the 19th c., sometimes even situated with their ridge to the street. The *kamienica* located in **Brzeg** (former Brieg) at the corner of Długa St. and Jabłkowa St. 6 is currently the most recognised, best preserved and one of the oldest town houses in Brzeg



13. Baumburger Turm, tower with loggia, Regensburg. Photo: R. Eysymontt

[Fig. 14]. Constructed with a Vendian brickwork and carefully faced, it had at least three brick storeys as early as the 13th century. Analysing the findings, Małgorzata Chorowska writes about it:

From Jabłkowa Street it was possible to get to the first floor through an entrance placed in the axis of the slit window of the ground floor. This indicates that the façade of the *kamienica* fronted onto Jabłkowa St. and yet another building with a Vendian brickwork, situated *vis-à-vis*, on the eastern frontage of this street (Jabłkowa St. 5). The ground floor entrance and the second floor entrance of building No. 6 were located in the courtyard façade of the

building. As for the side of the later Długa St., a canal for the discharge of waste from the residential floors of the house opened directly onto it. This fact indicates, according to the author, the location of this tower house at the inner (older) ring of town walls. Thus, this tower house was linked to the external defence system of the town<sup>46</sup>.

The closest to the social but also urban function of the Peninsular towers seem to be the Silesian residences and **vogt's towers**. Although not all of them have a tower form, they probably had a political and defensive function similar to city tower houses. Vogt's buildings were also probably the first brick buildings in smaller urban centres. Sometimes they were located in the market frontage. Their architectural character and the fact that they were the first residential brick buildings make them similar to a tower house. This was the case in Duszniki with the vogt's house referred to in a document of 1361 as "a brick manor house"<sup>47</sup>. Erected probably by Tamme von Panewicz, the lord of Homola, the building replaced the Vogt's House mentioned as early as 1324 (probably wooden) and bought in the same year by a burgher from Kłodzko<sup>48</sup> [Fig. 15]. Today, the house at 2 Słowackiego Street has cross vaults with prominent vault seams in the hallway and part of the ground floor rooms, and a typical early Renaissance façade portal in the entrance to the staircase. We can date these elements to the 16th century. This dating cannot be changed by the stone barrel vault of the cellar with its axis parallel to the market frontage. According to the description from the end of the 18th c., there were four rooms in the ground floor of the Homol house, being used as shops, and there was an adjoining courtyard with a garden. In 1585 the building was bought by the town, later converted into the inn "Zum Hummelfürsten", and before 1838, due to the town's debt, sold to a private user<sup>49</sup>. Today the building is within a compact frontage, but it is very likely that originally, as the only brick building, it formed an individual architectural complex independent of the neighbouring buildings. Regrettably, we have no means of ascertaining to what extent such a building situated inside an urban structure had the potential to protect its inhabitants during a possible conflict.

However, in the case of the vogt's seat in **Głuchołazy** (former Ziegenhals), situated, as in the described examples of Dalmatian towers, right next to the town walls, we should speak about the form of the tower. In 1268 the vogt Reymbold appears in Głuchołazy documents<sup>50</sup>. The first confirmed reference to the village, dating to 1249, mentions the village of *Cygnhals*<sup>51</sup>. The location must have been done before 1263 – for in that year the *civitas Cigenals* appears<sup>52</sup>. The location was connected with a planned colonisation campaign initiated by Bishop Wawrzyniec consisting in the settlement of border areas with Moravia around the later town of Głuchołazy with the help of the lokators Wittich and Sifrid<sup>53</sup>.



14. Former medieval tower house in the corner of Jabłkowa and Długa Street, Brzeg. Photo: R. Eysymontt



<sup>46</sup> M. Chorowska, *Rekonstrukcja pierwotnego rozplanowania Brzegu. Przestrzeń i architektura w średniowieczu oraz wczesnej nowożytności (komentarz do planszy)*, [in:] *Atlas historyczny miast polskich*, Vol. 4: Śląsk, Brzeg, Ed. R. Eysymontt, M. Goliński, in preparation.

<sup>47</sup> In 1361 Tamme von Panewicz bequeathed to his wife Elisabeth Voloks of farmland land and a brick manor house in Reinherz (Duszniki) with a folwark and half a mill belonging to it. See F. Volkmer, W. Hohaus, *Geschichtsquellen der Grafschaft Glatz*, Vol. 5: *Ältestes Glatzer Amtsbuch oder Mannrechtsverhandlungen von 1346-1390*, Habelschwerdt 1891, p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> See F. Volkmer, W. Hohaus, *Geschichtsquellen...*, Vol. 4: *Das älteste Glatzer Stadtbuch 1324-1412*, Habelschwerdt 1889, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> See R. Eysymontt, *Kilka epizodów z dziejów rozwoju przestrzennego i architektury Dusznik*, [in:] *Zdroje Ziemi Kłodzkiej. Historia, przyroda, kultura przeszłość*, Ed. W. Ciężkowski, J. Dębicki, R. Gładkiewicz, Wrocław-Kłodzko 2000, pp. 64-65.

<sup>50</sup> See *Schlesisches Urkundenbuch*, Vol. 1, Ed. H. Appelt, Vol. 2-6, Ed. W. Irgang, Köln-Wien 1963-1998 (hereinafter: SU); here: SU, Vol 4, No. 57, p. 52.

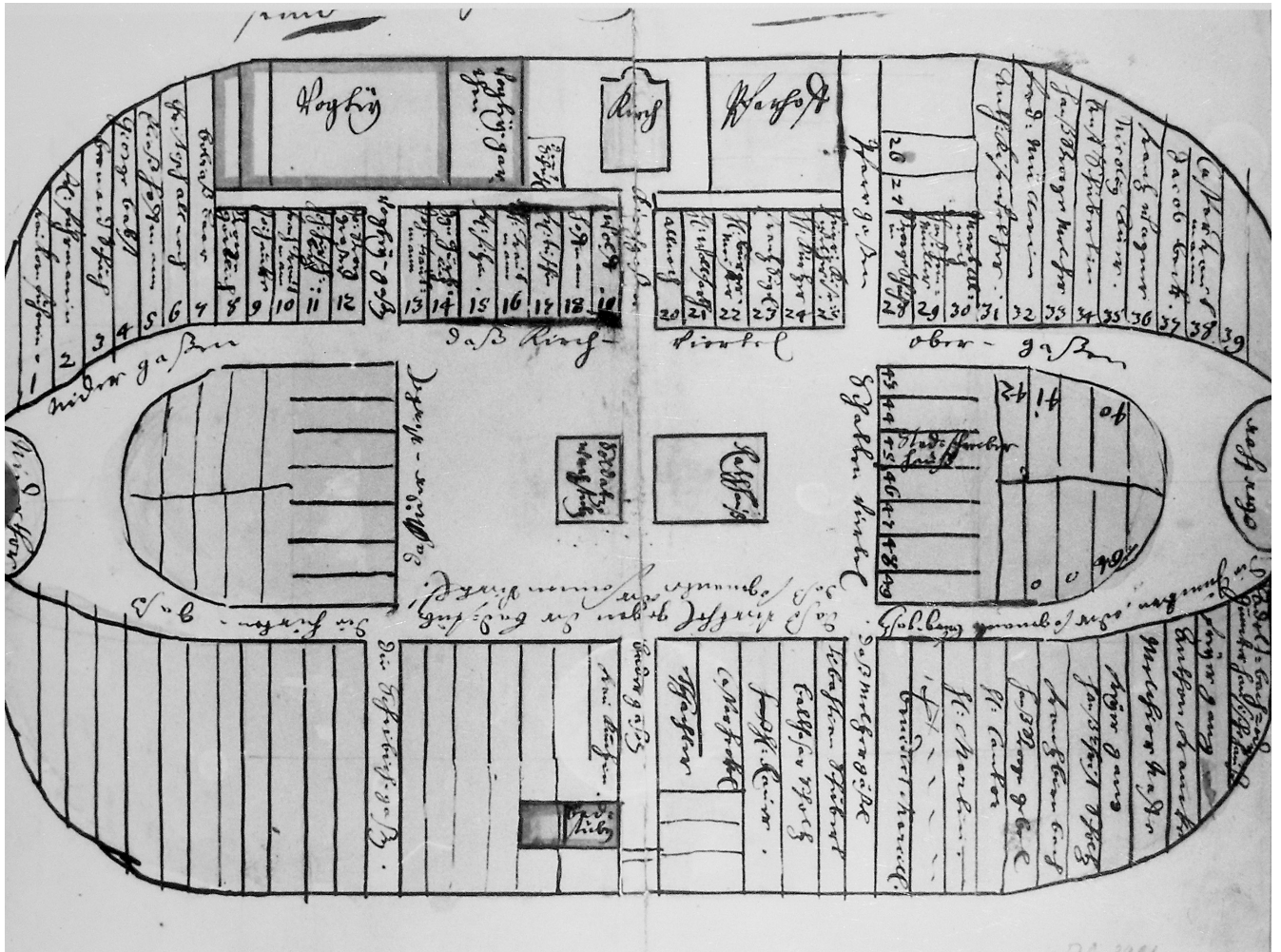
<sup>51</sup> See SU, Vol. 2, No. 380, p. 240.

<sup>52</sup> See SU, Vol. 3, No. 449, p. 296.

<sup>53</sup> See W. Kuhn, *Siedlungsgeschichte Oberschlesiens*, Würzburg 1954, p. 52.



— 15. Former Homole manor house at the current 2 Juliusza Słowackiego Street, Duszniki. Photo: C. Wandrychowski



16. Schematic city plan from 1731, Głucholazy. Photo from: P. Kutzer, *Aus Kleinen Fürstenstadt. Historischer Rückblick auf die Vergangenheit von Ziegenhals. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Neisser Landes*, Ziegenhals 1928

The role of the Vogt's Residence in the town's spatial and functional layout is evident from historical cartography [Fig. 16]. The old plans show more intensive urban development at the back of the eastern frontage of the market square than in other areas of the town. On this side, the town could develop more easily (there were no riverside floodplains). The plan reproduced in the municipal chronicle of 1737 shows not only the church, but also the Pfarr Hof at the back of market's buildings, which extended all the way to the town walls, and *Die Vogtei* (Vogt's Residence) to the south of the church. *Die Vogtei* occupied 1/3 of the inner perimeter of the walls and also served as part of the defensive structure of the town [Fig. 17]. Food and ammunition were stored in its warehouses. As the local chronicler writes, everything possible was being done to turn this building



17. The site of the former Vogt's residence, Głuchołazy. Fot. R. Eysymontt

into a castle<sup>54</sup>. *Die Vogtei's* layout was formed at the beginning of the 17th century. At that time, it was a massive building with a tower, a garden and a barn. There was a servants' room, chambers, kitchens, vaulted stables, a great hall with a concrete screed floor (*Estrich*), a winding staircase led to the upper storeys, and under the roof there were grain stores. On both sides there were archery openings in the wall the width of an entire brick. These probably served not only for external defence, but also to conduct defence during an attack from inside the town. The tower, or *Das Wighaus*, was used by the burghers also as a furnace<sup>55</sup>. The tower of the Vogt House in Głuchołazy, however, had its competitor. According to old chronicles, in 1600 the Vogt of Głuchołazy, Adelsbach, was to build the stone tower of the Upper Gate<sup>56</sup>, which is now one of the important vertical accents of the town, visible even from the market square.

In a document of 4 July 1319, King John of Luxembourg granted Jakub Rucker the hereditary title of der Vogt in Bystrzyca<sup>57</sup>, attesting the erection of the town walls together with the fortified Vogt House<sup>58</sup>. According to the description from 1416 and 1417, it was said to be surrounded by a moat (indicating the defensive nature of the



<sup>54</sup> See P. Kutzer, *Aus Kleinen Fürstentadt. Historischer Rückblick auf die Vergangenheit von Ziegenhals. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Neisser Landes*, Ziegenhals 1928, p. 87.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>56</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 86.

<sup>57</sup> K. Bartnik, *Bystrzyca Kłodzka*, Wrocław 1992, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> P. Wiszewski, *Średniowieczna community (1319-1520)*, [in:] M. Ruchniewicz, S. Rosik, P. Wiszewski, *Bystrzyca Kłodzka. Zarys rozwoju na przestrzeni wieków*, Wrocław-Bystrzyca 2007, p. 28.





— 18. Vogt's tower, view from the town hall tower, Bystrzyca Kłodzka. Photo: R. Eysymontt



<sup>59</sup> The description is given by **M. Chorońska** (*Rezydencje średniowieczne na Śląsku. Zamki, pałace, wieże mieszkalne*, Wrocław 2003, p. 135), following an unpublished work by A. Kwaśniewski.

<sup>60</sup> See **W. Dziejulski**, *Bystrzyca. Studium historyczno-urbanistyczne do planu zagospodarowania przestrzennego miasta, Wrocław 1957* (typescript from the archives of the Wrocław branch of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage), p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> See **F. Volkmer**, *Geschichte der Stadt Habelschwerdt*, Habelschwerdt 1897, p. 58.

<sup>62</sup> See **R. Eysymontt**, *Wieża mieszkalna...*

seat), and its building complex also included a summer house (*das Sommerhaus*), situated in front of the main tower, and a garden behind it, as well as stables<sup>59</sup> [Fig. 18]. The 90-foot-tall Vogt's tower, located at the southern corner of the square at the end of a diagonal compositional axis running from this corner, was part of the town's functional layout, and its separation by a moat from the town emphasised its independent character. The tower was in constant intensive use in the 15th and 16th c., as its planned repairs were mentioned as early as 1481<sup>60</sup>. On 3 August 1537 at Prague Castle, Ferdinand II, King of Bohemia, confirms the donation made by Hans von Hardegk of Kłodzko on 22 December 1533 to Wolfgang Geysler, *Vogt* of Bystrzyca, including, among others, this tower<sup>61</sup>.

## Conclusion

City tower houses in the medieval period were one of the best emanations of family prestige. Because of the universal nature of this phenomenon, the concept of *città turrite* with its social conditions is transferable beyond the Apennine peninsula to countries situated north of the Alps.

The towers combined both representative and defensive functions, clearly being a focus of some conflict within the urban community, but also one of the essential elements of its external and internal defence. This is evidenced not only by historical records, but also by the form of these buildings. As their original defensive function weakened, however, they took on an increasingly representative and residential character, and the protection they provided functioned more strongly in the realm of symbolism. This phenomenon appears both in the area of the Apennine Peninsula and north of the Alps, in Regensburg or Prague, but also, what is still less well recognised, in Silesia. In the latter area, the symbolic form of defence was associated not, as in Italy or Dalmatia, with the dominant knightly families, but more with the Vogtian elite of the municipal government.

The model for tower-like urban buildings may have arrived in Silesia, as in other European areas, from Italy. A good pretext for this were the diplomatic expeditions to Viterbo, a city marked by towers along the roads leading to the papal residence. A possible role here could also be that of Rome, a city essentially filled with medieval towers shaping its silhouette visible to visitors<sup>62</sup>.

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### Słowa kluczowe

wieża mieszkalna, architektura obronna, symbolika architektury średniowiecznej, funkcje społeczne architektury, urbanistyka średniowieczna

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### Keywords

residential tower, tower house, defensive architecture, symbolism of medieval architecture, social functions of architecture, medieval urban planning

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**Summary**

**RAFAŁ EYSYMONTT (University of Wrocław) / Medieval city tower houses as an indication of conflict and struggle for dominance. A comparison of selected European phenomena with examples from Silesia**

The article is a continuation of the theme addressed in the text *Wieża mieszkalna – twierdza rodu czy symbol miejskiej komuny?* (The residential house – a family stronghold or a symbol of urban commune?, “Quart” 2021, No. 3). In the first publication, the author focused on little-known examples of medieval Roman tower houses. In the text presented here, the analysis concerns the issue of social and military conditions of residential towers in relatively rarely analysed selected areas of the Apennine Peninsula, medieval tower houses in Dalmatia, the towers of Regensburg and also some examples of residential towers in smaller towns of Lower Silesia. For the Silesian examples, the phenomenon of Vogt Houses sometimes taking the form of towers was also important. The examples of architectural solutions discussed were chosen due to the possibility of determining their precise function, as well as their importance in the urban landscape of the selected cities. The examples selected illustrate well the phenomenon of medieval tower houses combining both representative and defensive functions. These buildings were focuses of some conflict within the urban community, but they were also one of the essential elements of its external defence.