

Požega – From Small Town to Episcopal Center

Around 1225 AD, King Andrew II donated the fort of Požega along with its estates and rights to Ugrin, archbishop of Kalocsa, with the intention to help him combat heresy spreading from Bosnia to Slavonia. This deed of donation, which has not been preserved, made the archdiocese of Kalocsa and its chapter the lords of the town of Požega and the Požega County. Ugrin became the Head of the County, acquiring both spiritual and secular power in Požega. Particularly important was the fact that Pope Honorius III confirmed the Andrew's deed of donation on January 11, 1227 (1-3). It was the first written document where Požega was ever mentioned and described as a church estate, which later became an important ecclesiastical and administrative center of the Požega County.

The chapter (*kaptol* in Croatian) of Požega was established by the bishop of Pečuj in 1221, when Požega became a *locus credibilis*, the place where documents were issued and kept. The present-day village Kaptol, north of Požega, was named after it, and the fort in the center of the village is an important medieval monument. There is no doubt that the chapter of Požega was located in what is today the village of Kaptol. Požega chapter introduced noblemen to their estates, determined the position of boundary stones, drew up reports about their work, and issued charters and transcripts based on the records kept in their archives (1,2). Their jurisdiction covered the vast area between Đakovo and Zagreb – between the rivers Sava and Drava.

In the Middle Ages, there were three churches in Požega: the parish church of St. Paul, the Franciscan church of St. Demetrius, and the Dominican church of St. Lawrence, built in gothic style and adorned with gothic frescos in the 14th century (see cover page) (4). Today, it is a secular church closely linked to the bishop's see.

The parish of Požega was first mentioned as such in documents from the 1232-1337 period, when priest Nikola was Požega's parish priest and the parish church dedicated to St. Paul (1,4,5). The Ottomans destroyed it after they had invaded Požega in 1537. During the Ottoman rule, the Catholics in Požega were free to practice their religion, the merit for which goes chiefly to pastoral work of Franciscans, who were dedicated to the survival of Christian community. The parish of Požega was restored after the end of the Turkish rule and run by Franciscans until secular clergy came in and took over in 1753. Thus

the Franciscan chapel of St. Phillip and James in the Vučjak Street temporarily became the parish church (2,5,6).

The new parish church of St. Therese of Avilla was built between 1756 and 1763 in baroque style (1,4). During the next 250 years it was repeatedly restored and adorned.

The pastoral and other activities of the Franciscans in Požega started in the second half of the 13th century (in 1285). The church and the monastery of St. Demetrius had already been there (7). During the Ottoman rule, their work, though limited, was carried on in a small chapel made of wattle in Vučjak Street, in the part of the town where only Catholics lived (1,6).

Today's church of the Holy Spirit, with its gothic sanctuary and monastery, was built in the 18th century during the intensified activity of the Franciscans. Sometimes, there would be as many as thirty friars living and working there. From 1712 to 1783, philosophy was taught in the monastery and attended by five to seven students (1,7,8). In 1789, during the reign of the emperor Joseph II, the monastery was abolished and Franciscans moved from Požega to the monastery in Velika. In 1797, they returned to Požega, where they have remained until this day. They worked as teachers in elementary schools and were also in charge of the Požega general high school between 1834 and 1864 (7,8). Franciscan monastery was damaged by fire on several occasions, notably in 1842, when a large part of its rich library perished in flames (9). The contemporary Franciscan monastery contains a valuable library, archive, geological collection, collection of fossils from the surrounding area of Požega, and numerous paintings and other works of art (10).

The Franciscans from Požega were well-versed in medical skills, providing medical care to their brethren and other people, especially to the poor, according to the "law on mercy" (*Lex caritatis*) and in cases when there was no physician available. The Cistercites also provided medical care in their abbey in Kutjevo.

The Dominicans had their monastery in Požega and the church of St. Mary as early as the beginning of the 14th century. Faced with the threat of the Ottoman invasion, the Dominicans left Požega in 1533 (1).

The Jesuits were active in Požega from 1698 until 1773, when the Jesuit order was abolished. They established a high school (*gymnasium*) and a college

in 1699. They owned the Kutjevo estate and the income from that estate was used to finance the schools. Along with the full 6-year secondary school education program, they organized a high theological and philosophical school called *Academia Posegana*, which was active from 1761 until 1776 (8,11).

Some rare books in today's high school library and the library of the parish of St. Therese of Avilla formerly belonged to the Jesuits. Numerous documents in the Požega Historical Archive, Požega Municipal Museum, and Archbishopric Archive in Zagreb illustrate their immense cultural and economic influence. Jesuits used and maintained the church of St. Lawrence, which was the pupils' church attended by the College students and children from the Požega orphanage (*orphanotrophium*) (4,8,11). At the beginning of the 18th century there were two physicians among Jesuits in Požega. One was abbot Franjo Rovius (1705-1709), professor at the local gymnasium, who was often called to patients from respectable noble families. He received permission for such activity from Pope Clement IX.

In 1740, Jesuits opened a pharmacy within their College, with a laboratory and a garden where they grew medicinal herbs. Qualified lay Jesuit managed it until 1773, when the order was abolished. Pavao Thaller deserves to be specially mentioned. He had been a lay pharmacist in the Jesuit pharmacy in Vienna before he came to Požega in 1760, where he continued to perform the same duty until 1773. He was often called to the sick, although there were official "*medicus civitatis*" and "*medicus comitatensis*". After the Jesuit order was abolished, Pavao Thaller remained in Požega. Supported by town magistrates and the nobility from the area, and with the permission of the Empress Maria Theresa, he bought the Jesuit pharmacy. It was opened in 1774 as the public pharmacy that covered the needs of local people and regiments stationed in the areas bordering with the Ottoman Empire. Pavao Thaller died in Požega in 1800, and was buried in the parish church of the St. Theresa of Avilla (present cathedral), among other priests and respectable citizens (8).

After 1773, the educational activities of the Jesuits were carried on in turn by Paulists, Franciscans, Jesuits, and secular clergy (3,8).

From the beginning of the 13th century, the town of Požega has been an important religious, administrative, educational, and cultural center of the area. The clergy contributed a great deal to the spiritual, cultural, economic, and general growth of the town (3,12). There were many distinguished monks and secular priests, but the two were especially important. Jesuit Anutun Kanižlić (1699-1777), writer, scholar, and the dean of Požega high school (8), who wrote an epic poem and the ecclesiastic treatise dealing with

Church schism. The other was the Franciscan Luka Ibrašimović (ca. 1620-1698), curate of the chapel of St. Philip and James in Vučjak street, vicar general of the bishops of Zagreb for Slavonia (1675-1698), and the leader of the national uprising against the Ottomans in Slavonia during the Turkish War (1683-1699), which resulted in the liberation of Požega on September 12, 1688 (7,8). Ibrašimović's letters are a valuable historical source for the study of the period (13).

In 1997, Pope John Paul II decided to establish the diocese of Požega with the Bishop's see in the building of former Jesuit College. The first bishop of Požega was Antun Škvorčević, a distinguished scholar. The parish church of St. Therese is now the cathedral and Požega is the episcopal center for central and western Slavonia (14).

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