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A French Humanist's First Impressions of Istria and Dalmatia: The Account of a Voyage by Jacob Spon, 1678

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Although primarily focused on the ancient Greek world, Jacob Spon's travel account, published in French in 1678, nevertheless devotes 38 pages to his journey through Istria and Dalmatia. It is not surprising to note that Spon prioritises the monuments of Antiquity, a field in which, at that time, Spon enjoyed a reputation of authority. As a man of his time, he also admires the achievements of the Renaissance and is – with exceptions – rather indifferent to those of the Middle Ages. As for the people living in the countries that he visits, his discourse favours those who are erudite. But he does not fully neglect humble people. Nor is he insensitive to landscapes, and to the resources of agriculture and fisheries. The archaeologist's concerns are thus coupled with a true curiosity for daily life and its setting, which largely explains the success of this account from the time of its publication until the beginning of the 19th century.

Since the “Grand Tour” concept refers to the voyages undertaken in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we have to go back to the past – and a little earlier, even – to acquaint ourselves with the first enterprises of that kind. Indeed, we can argue that the Mediterranean circumnavigation of Jacob Spon, undertaken in 1675-76, inaugurated a series of such travels motivated by authentic cultural interest. In the context of the present volume it is essential to keep in mind that travelling towards Greece, which was his major objective (after which followed Constantinople and Asia Minor), he spent about a full month sailing along the coast of Istria and Dalmatia. He made stops of longer or shorter duration in the major coastal towns, and was also able to visit some islands. The account of his voyage, ^{FIG.13} published in 1678,¹ contains a significant number of pages relating to the regions we are concerned with herein: almost forty,² in the original edition, containing four drawings of monuments and a record of several inscriptions.

Over the past few decades, the personality and work of Jacob Spon have aroused new interest. The first event to generate this newfound interest was an exhibition dedicated to him in his hometown of Lyon, where he developed his abiding interest in the world of Antiquity. It was held at one of the departments of the local University and was coordinated by

1 Spon 1678. The whole original edition of this work is available on the French National Library's website <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/>>.

2 See pp. 78-116.

Roland Étienne and Jean-Claude Mossière.³ These two scholars, together with Hervé Duchêne and several other collaborators, then re-edited Spon's original text, adding an introduction⁴ as well as the appropriate annotations, particularly to establish the connection with the places and monuments as they are named and dated today; concerning Istria and Dalmatia, these annotations were written with the assistance of Noël Duval and Pascale Chevalier.⁵ In this paper I will of course mostly rely on these recent publications (however, certain data have been gathered from some other papers to which I will give precise reference); but, obviously, for the purposes of my own commentary, the data in Spon's account will be the most relevant.

After this preamble, it is important firstly to introduce this man briefly. Jacob Spon^{FIG.14} was born in Lyon in 1647, where his ancestors, who were of German and Swiss origin,⁶ had settled almost one century before. In Strasbourg, Paris, Montpellier, and Lyon he studied medicine and became a doctor in this discipline. While living in Strasbourg, he had the opportunity to get to know the Latinist and historian and above all numismatist, Charles Patin, at that time one of the leading European connoisseurs in the fields of Antiquity Sciences. In addition to practicing medicine Spon became a self-taught and genuine authority on the knowledge of ancient coins and also Greek and Roman epigraphy. His first work on this subject, relating to the "Antiquities" of his own town, Lyon, was published in 1673.⁷ And the very next year, due to his interest in the monuments of Athens, he presented a historic study and a collection of inscriptions collected by other scholars.⁸ It is quite possible that just at that time he decided to undertake a voyage with a view to acquiring a direct experience of Hellenic archaeological heritage, as well as Italian while passing through Italy. This intention brought him to Rome, where he stayed for five months and became acquainted with an Englishman, the botanist George Wheler,

3 Texts gathered under the scholarly guidance of Étienne / Mossière 1993 (book-catalogue of the exhibition organised by the Plaster-Cast Collection of the University of Lumière Lyon 2, October 20-December 8, 1993).

4 Spon 2004, Text presented and edited under the guidance of Roland Étienne, by Hervé Duchêne, Jean-Claude Mossière and Roland Étienne, in collaboration with other authors. For the subject introduction, Fr. Étienne, pp. 7-19.

5 Spon 2004 (cf. above n. 3), p. 93, n. 1.

6 For all the biographic data, cf. Françoise Bayard, "The Life of Jacob Spon (1647-1685)", in: Étienne / Mossière 1993, (cf. above n. 3), pp. 31-36.

7 Spon 1673. Cf. note in Étienne / Mossière 1993 (cf. above n. 3), p. 274.

8 Babin 1674. Cf. note in: Étienne / Mossière 1993 (cf. above n. 3), pp. 284-285.

who, just like him, was a man passionate about antiquities.⁹ Shortly afterwards, they returned to Venice, and on the 20th of June 1675 they embarked on the expedition which is the topic of this paper. Soon after their return Spon published an account of his voyage (four years later, in 1682, Wheler published his own account of their journey, which was different from Spon's in that it had more illustrations and particulars relating to the field of botany).¹⁰ Spon was subsequently engaged in more ambitious work: aiming to complete the collections of previously acquired inscriptions, but also to present different works of figurative art, which was brought to light in 1685.¹¹ This publication, together with some other papers, established his authority in erudite circles, and beyond them as well; consequently, he dedicated the account of his voyage to François La Chaize, confessor to King Louis XIV of France. La Chaize, who was passionate not only about numismatics but about other "curiosities"¹² as well, tried to convert Spon from his Protestant religion, but without success.¹³ And it was the revocation of the edict of tolerance, issued by Louis XIV in 1685 as a consequence of the increasing hostility towards the adherents of that religion in the Kingdom of France, that caused Spon's exile to Switzerland, where he died the very same year.¹⁴

In addition to the description of Spon's itinerary, we have to define his place in the development of the Science of Antiquity. It can be unreservedly said that his studies in the field of Antiquity and his voyage are equally significant. Alain Schnapp in particular set a high value on his contribution and I agree with him.¹⁵ In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that Spon occupies the top position in the long process which led from the curiosity of a mere collector to the brilliant insight of an authentic scientist. Besides the afore mentioned relationship with people such as Charles

9 Concerning that encounter and the general circumstances of the voyage, cf. Jean-Claude Mossière, "Le voyage en Orient et le livre d'Athènes", in: Étienne / Mossière 1993 (cf. above n. 3), pp. 209-228.

10 Raphael 1993 (cf. above n. 3), pp. 256-269 (and for this publication of Wheler's in particular, pp. 258-259).

11 Spon 1685. Cf. note in: Étienne / Mossière 1993 (cf. above n. 3), pp. 292-294 (H. Pommier, J. Guillemain, D. Lardet). The work in question and other data are also available at the following link <<http://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/12776>>

12 Cf. the reproduction of the letter dedicated to Fr. La Chaize (or La Chaise) in: Spon 2004 (cf. above n. 3), pp. 24-26.

13 Cf. the correspondence between the two men on this subject in Étienne / Mossière 1993 (cf. above n. 3), pp. 185-186 (J. Guillemain).

14 On the developments that led to this decision and its consequences for this part of the Kingdom, cf. in particular the synthetic review of several publications by Venard 1986.

15 Cf. Schnapp 1993, pp. 192-185, 350-351; and especially, Schnapp 2014, pp. 216-229.

VOYAGE

D'ITALIE, DE DALMATIE,

DE

GRECE, ET DV LEVANT,

*Fait aux années 1675. & 1676. par IACOB
SPON Docteur Medecin Aggrégé à
Lyon, & GEORGE VVHELER
Gentilhomme Anglois.*

T O M E I.



A LYON,
Chez ANTOINE CELLIER le fils;
rue Merciere, à la Constance.

M. DC. LXXVIII.

AVEC PRIVILEGE DV ROY.

Patin, direct contact with the magnificent monuments of his native town resulted in the significant widening of his interests, beyond the field of coins which, together with inscriptions, usually constituted the domain of the “antiquarians” interests. It is worth noting that in his book about Lyon, besides the epigraphy, which occupies the major part of the book, he dedicated several pages to the buildings – the amphitheatre, aqueducts, and mausoleum¹⁶ – and also to a big silver plate decorated with a figurative scene,¹⁷ trying to explain their function, arrangement, or iconography. He did not fail to mention, though very briefly, several recent buildings, such as the hospital, the city-hall, or different churches. And in the preface to his last work¹⁸ Spon offered a real theoretical definition of what he called – the first person to do so, after the ancient Greeks – *archaeologia* or *archaeographia*. In his opinion the science of past eras included no fewer than eight fields of study: numismatics, epigraphy, but also architecture, iconography, sculpture, engraving, manuscript documents, and various objects. He specified their respective subjects precisely and quoted the names of the main authors who had made the contribution to them (incidentally, it is worth noting that on the list of epigraphists he included two eminent Dalmatian scholars: his contemporary Lucius – Ivan Lučić, to whom I will return later – and *Marullus Spalatenis* – Marko Marulić from Split, who about the year 1500 was one of the pioneers in this discipline). Finally, it should be noted that Spon, having been one among numerous voyagers to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea (where from the sixteenth century onwards the French were famous for their role in diplomatic exchanges with the Sultan) stands out from his predecessors, since he clearly states his intention to provide his testimony of Antiquity by wishing to see it: it is no more a matter of random approach, nor observing Antiquity for the sake of curiosity; instead, it is the subject of scientific research.¹⁹ This point of view is fundamentally innovative and if its results today seem considerably limited, they nevertheless represent a crucial step forward, paving the road for the major undertakings of the following centuries.

16 Spon 1673 (cf. above n. 7), pp. 44, 79-80, 119-121, respectively (with drawings).

17 Ibid., pp. 185-187 (also with drawing).

18 Spon 1685 (cf. above n. 11), for the preface in question, on the first, unpaginated leaves.

19 Spon 1678 (cf. above n.1), unpaginated preface.



Portrait of Jacob Spon, engraving by Pierre-Matthieu Ogier, in: Spon, Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie, Lyon 1678.

FIGURE 14

Turning now to the contents of Spon's account, I will examine it according to the different categories into which Spon's interests in the book can be divided. Considering everything stated above, we cannot be surprised that his attention is primarily devoted to the monuments of Classical Antiquity and especially to those with inscriptions. It is already evident in Pula,²⁰ where he, as an insightful reader of classical texts, identifies in the inscription on the pedestal of Severus' statue the correct Roman denomination of the city,²¹ and when he stops in the famous temple, which is well-preserved even today, he indicates that, contrary to the common opinion adopted by the local population, the inscription states that it was not dedicated to Diana, but to Rome and Augustus.²² He also makes a drawing of its façade^{FIG.15} to prove his statement. For a similar reason he draws the no less remarkable "Golden Gates" [Lat. *Porta Aurea*],^{FIG.16} but this time with a commentary that is not, in fact, accurate.²³ On the other hand, his interpretation of the entrance arch to the ancient Roman market, later called "The Gates of St. Krševan" [Lat. *St. Chrysogonus*], in Zadar,^{FIG.17} is more exact.²⁴ In the same town, in the Church of St. Donatus, he also remarks one altar consecrated to Juno (this one, as well as another altar consecrated to the same divinity had been in fact discovered in the foundations of the medieval Christian sanctuary).²⁵ Besides investigating and analysing *in situ*, Spon does not fail to gather information on these things from local scholars: in Zadar, the archdeacon Valerio Ponte shows him a manuscript that gathered together inscriptions of Istria and Dalmatia, which that clergyman collected himself.²⁶ In Split, Spon has the opportunity to enjoy his passion for epigraphy. Thus he mentions certain inscriptions from Salona inside the Romanesque belfry of the cathedral and inside the central fortification wall, on the sea-facing side of Diocletian's Palace.²⁷ Finally, in the third volume of his work, he

20 In Spon's text, "Pola" (and for the Roman denomination, mentioned here after, Respublica a Polensis): in: Spon 1678 (cf. above n.1), p. 80. For all that follows from my own text, I provide the actual toponyms systematically; in the notes if they differ from those used by Spon.

21 Spon 1678 (cf. above n.1), pp. 80-81.

22 Ibid., p. 82.

23 Ibid., pp. 82-83.

24 In Spon's text, "Zara", *Iadera* (ibid., p. 86).

25 Ibid., p. 86.

26 Ibid., p. 87.

27 Ibid., pp. 102, 104.

reproduces *in extenso* the texts of inscriptions from those three towns, as well as from Rovinj, Trogir, and the island of Korčula.²⁸

It is obvious that the ancient buildings do not leave him indifferent. Moreover, the amphitheatre in Pula, whose structure and dimensions were already known to him, due to his reading of Palladio, suggests to him a justified resemblance with the Roman Colosseum, because of its considerable mass and quality of construction.²⁹ It is not surprising that the palace complex in Split makes a profound impression on our voyager.³⁰ He therefore provides a general outline of it comprising drawings of the four gates, the corner towers and the Peristyle, i.e. the central open space of the Palace, with the main buildings close to it.^{FIG.18} He starts with a description of the octagonal plan of the cathedral, which he considered to be an ancient temple, not the mausoleum of Diocletian;³¹ he therefore disagrees that the effigy of that emperor is shown on one of the medallions on the interior frieze (however, that effigy, he notes, “the obstinate people in the country” take for granted). Spon continues with a description of the Peristyle, in his opinion “a long square temple”, the entrance to “another round temple” (today considered to be the vestibule of Diocletian’s Palace).³² Opposite the cathedral, he notices another antique temple turned into the baptistery of the cathedral; he notes that although “the work [has been done] by some good master [...] cornices, foliage and capitals [are not] of the same good quality as in the time of the first emperors”. After that he turns to the quadrangular enclosure, lauding the architectural accomplishment of the three gates and the corridor with openings to the sea-facing façade. In addition, he recalls the figurative relief that in his opinion shows the victory of Constantine over Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge (in fact, it was a sarcophagus depicting the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, which is today kept in the Archaeological Museum).³³ With respect to the town of Salona, he can note nothing else but the ruins of Roman settlements;³⁴ the only thing worth noticing is at Manastirine – “a

28 In Spon’s text, “Rovvigne”, “Traou” (from the Latin *Tragurium*), “Courzola”, respectively; for these denominations, *ibid.*, pp. 80, 93, 112.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

30 In Spon’s text, “Spalatro”, which he considered to be a corruption of the word “Spalato”, of the Latin *Spaletum*, *Spalatum*, or *Aspalatum*: *ibid.*, pp. 98-99. For the different components of the palace, pp. 101-104.

31 Cf. Spon 2004 (cf. above n.3), p. 107, n. 43, where N. Duval also rejects the identification of the emperor’s mausoleum.

32 Cf. Spon 2004 (cf. above n.3), p. 108, n. 45.

33 Cf. Spon 2004 (cf. above n.3), p. 110, n. 48.

34 Spon 1678 (cf. above n.1), pp. 107-108.

hole [as he was told by local people] which is considered to be the sepulchre of St. Dujam (Lat. *St. Domnius*), Salona's first bishop and a disciple of St. Peter" and, in another ancient cemetery, the tombs of St. Stošija [Lat. *St. Anastasia*] and one other bishop-saint (Rainer; in fact, an inaccurate identification).³⁵ As noted by Noël Duval, Pascale Chevalier, and Maja Bonačić Mandinić, it is possible that at that time they were probably not visible as they were covered by vegetation (the first accidental discoveries occurred no earlier than the nineteenth century, a few decades before the beginning of systematic exploration).³⁶ Nevertheless, it is surprising that Spon did not take a true interest in those archaeological sites, particularly as the study of Early Christianity had begun to develop at that time,³⁷ and Spon's own voyage partner, George Wheler, would later write a book dealing with that subject after he returned to England.³⁸

While still dealing with the subject of Classical Antiquity, Spon's visit to Zadar afforded him the opportunity to see a numismatic collection belonging to the local Venetian governor, in which one Ottonian copper medallion caught his eye. It was considered to be an exceptional rarity in the learned circles of that epoch.³⁹ But the subject of his most detailed commentary was one manuscript, discovered previously by Ivan Lučić in Trogir. That manuscript was indeed of considerable interest, as it contained the integral text of *The Feast of Trimalchio* [Lat. *Cena Trimalchionis*] by Petronius, since up till then only the first chapters had been available. The authenticity of that manuscript was a subject under discussion in the scholarly world, and Spon belonged to those who argued for its authenticity.⁴⁰

In another part of his report, Spon appears as a man of his time, considering more or less recent defensive structures. Obviously, the fortifications in question were those erected by the Venetians, who at that time controlled the coast but still had to take into account the threat from the Turks (who, notably, had captured Crete from them less than a decade earlier). He therefore takes notice of the relative imperfection of the defensive system of Pula, where

³⁵ Cf. Spon 2004 (cf. above n. 3), p. 112, n. 54.

³⁶ Duval / Chevalier / Bonačić Mandinić 2000, pp. 1-4.

³⁷ Particularly in France; Louis-Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont published a considerable work on this subject: *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique des six premiers siècles*, 1693-1712.

³⁸ Wheler 1689.

³⁹ Spon 1678 (cf. above n.1), p. 88.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 95-97.

a small citadel with four bastions seems sufficient only because of the very vicinity of Venice.⁴¹ On the other hand, he praises Zadar, describing in detail “three bastions with the foundations dug into the ground and covered all with the adequate half-moons and counterscarps”, as well as the structure of the local garrison.⁴² It seems to him that Šibenik is also adequately defended with its four citadels and he qualifies it as “a most strongly fortified place in Dalmatia”.⁴³ His judgment about the fortifications of Split is definitely less positive: at least, he admits that there are three “good bastions made of carved stone [...] on the sea side”; but he regrets the poor geographical features of the location of Split, particularly Marjan Hill on its western side, and the fortress outside Split’s walls on the eastern side with its “four bastions [...] neither completed nor regular”; in short, it seems to him inadequate.⁴⁴ However, this deficiency is compensated by the very favourable position of the fortress of Klis, a real barrier erected between two mountains, like a crest over the town.⁴⁵ In his opinion the modest citadel on the island of Vis looks just the opposite of the one at Klis, “a raven nest”.⁴⁶

The municipal buildings of the Proto-Renaissance period, for him evidently suitable because they could be compared with those of Antiquity, could not leave him indifferent. At least this statement results from his appreciation of the cathedral of Šibenik: “entirely of marble and of beautiful architecture”.⁴⁷ According to him, the lazaretto of the harbour of Split, where he stayed, also deserves to be described as “beautiful and large”.⁴⁸ Further on, he does not consider less attractive “a very beautiful marble pier made of carved stone” in the harbour of the island of Hvar.⁴⁹ In the cathedral of Trogir, in the field of the fine arts, Spon remains true to the spirit of the classical aesthetics evaluation, noting “some statues made by a pretty good hand”.⁵⁰ Undoubtedly these were the work of Nicholas of Florence [Ital.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

43 In Spon’s text, “Sebenico”: *ibid.*, p. 92.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

45 In Spon’s text, “Clissa”: *ibid.*, pp. 108-109.

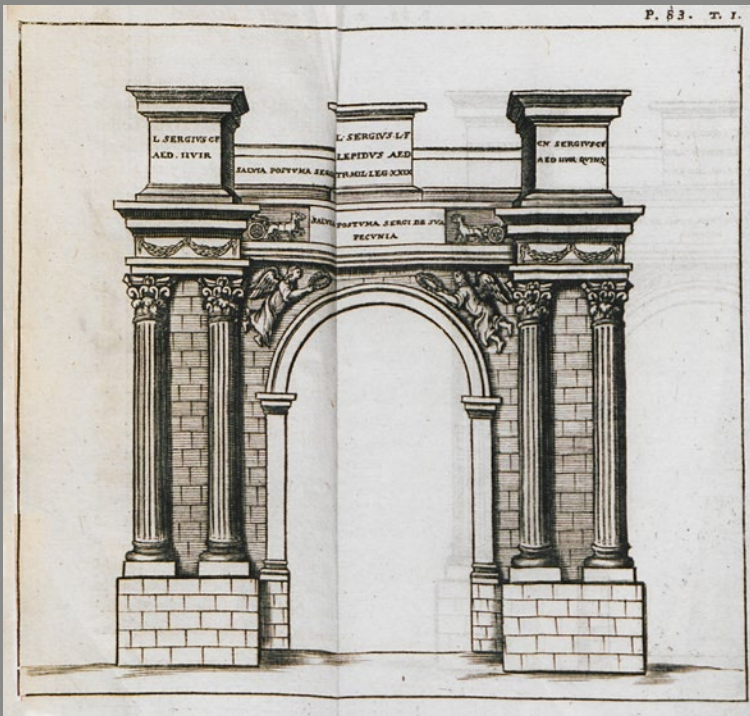
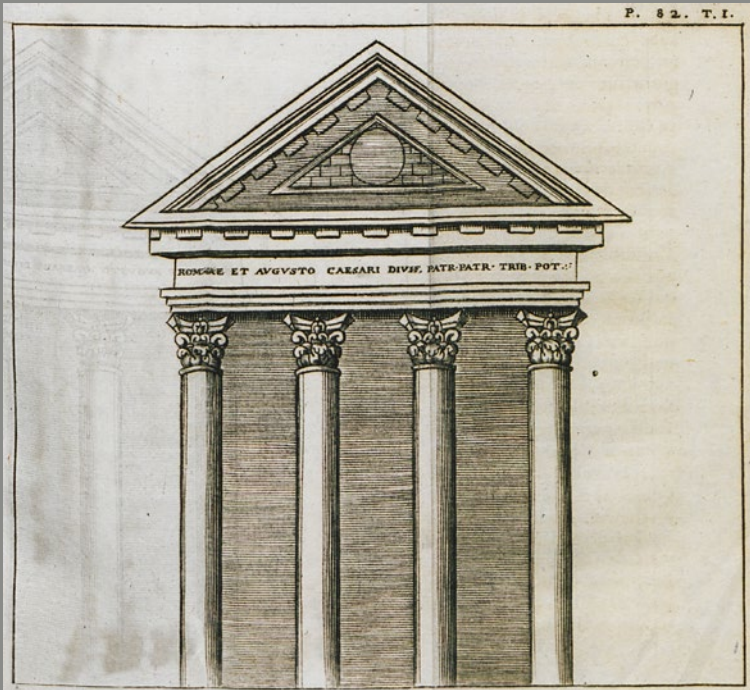
46 In Spon’s text, “Lissa”: *ibid.*, p. 112.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

49 In Spon’s text, “Liesina”: *ibid.*, p. 110.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 95.



The Temple in Pula, in: Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie*, Lyon 1678, p. 82.

FIGURE 15

The "Golden Gates" in Pula, in: Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie*, Lyon 1678, p. 83.

FIGURE 16

Niccolo Fiorentino] in the Orsini Chapel or those of the Baptism of Christ by Andrija Aleši in the neighbouring baptistery. And of course, he does not forget to mention the paintings made by the great Venetian artists which he admired while visiting some churches in Zadar.⁵¹

On the other hand, again as a man of his time, Spon deliberately neglects the achievements of the Middle Ages. Thus, one exceptional building, the rotunda of St. Donatus in Zadar, is noted by him only because it contains the inscription to Juno that I mentioned above.⁵² And in the same town, the no less remarkable chest of St. Simeon is interesting for him only because the saint's body is contained within it.⁵³ Nevertheless, to certain monuments of that period he gives a more refined evaluation, sometimes even a sincerely positive one: he speaks about the "very beautiful belfry" of the cathedral of Split⁵⁴ and the cathedral of Trogir seems to him at least "not ugly".⁵⁵ With respect to the cathedral of Trogir, Spon concludes in his rather indulgent estimation that "the portal [...] had been taken from the ruins of the town of Salona";⁵⁶ we know, of course, that this masterpiece was the work of Radovan, from the middle of the thirteenth century, but it is also true that the astonishing natural appearance of some of the figures could be the reason why our voyager confused them with authentic antique reliefs. In any case, his observations on the cathedrals of Split and Trogir are the reason why we can consider Spon as someone who was not so firmly dismissive of the art that the majority of his contemporaries rejected.⁵⁷

With respect to the population density of the places he visited, Spon tries to provide fairly precise numerical indications. So he calculates that Pula⁵⁸ has about 700–800 inhabitants, Zadar⁵⁹ 5.000–6.000, Šibenik⁶⁰ 7.000–8.000;

51 Ibid., pp. 89–90.

52 Ibid., p. 86.

53 Ibid., p. 90.

54 Ibid., p. 102.

55 Ibid., pp. 94–95.

56 Ibid., p. 95.

57 However, we have to keep in mind that at that time in England and almost at the same time in France, in some erudite circles, the historical interest in medieval Christian monuments was in full swing: cf. the *Monasticum Anglicanum* of William Dugdale (1655–1673), and its counterpart *Monasticum Gallicanum* written by the Benedictines of the congregation of St. Maur from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards. On the importance of these works, cf. particularly the remarks of Louis Grodecki 1979, in the introduction to the book-catalogue, pp. 7–8.

58 Ibid., p. 80.

59 Ibid., pp. 86–87.

60 Ibid., p. 92.

then Trogir⁶¹ 4.000 and Split approximately double (this number he attributes to the role of “the number of caravans from Turkey, which unload their merchandise for Venice there”).⁶² He estimates that Hvar sea port has 3.000–4.000 inhabitants (on an almost unpopulated island)⁶³ and 1.000 inhabitants for the town of Korčula, while the island itself has five other settlements with 1.400–1.500 inhabitants.⁶⁴ Overall, it is evident that these are hasty approximations; but these data are not insignificant for becoming acquainted with the demography of countries in the second half of the seventeenth century. Concerning Spon’s estimation – at least of Pula and Zadar – of the decrease in the number of inhabitants in relation to that number in Antiquity, it obviously resulted from his personal impressions and probably corresponded to the opinion which at that time “the Moderns” had regarding numerous towns of the past. As Jean-Noël Corvisier pointed out, it was not before the 1980s that scholars began a scientific study of ancient demography, which up to that time had existed at the level of simple approximations.⁶⁵

In his account Spon often mentions, very subjectively, the people he had met. Since he embarked on a Venetian ship and since at that time the Serenissima Republic of Venice had agents in all the towns where he stayed, naturally he had numerous contacts with those persons. Thus in Zadar, he and his companions were received by the governor Antonio Soderini, who placed an apartment in his palace at their disposal.⁶⁶ In Split, the governor Francesco Loredano likewise showed him some antiquities that he had brought with him from Cythera, and once he stayed overnight in the gentleman Pietro Alberti’s mansion.⁶⁷ He talked also with the Dalmatian people; in Trogir it was a “doctor Dragatzo” who gave him some information on the town (but “of no importance”, as Spon adds).⁶⁸ But it was Ivan Lučić whom Spon held in very high esteem.⁶⁹ He met him in Rome, during the first five months of

61 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 98.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

65 Corvisier 2001-2002, pp. 101-140.

66 Spon 1678 (cf. above n.1), pp. 87-88.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 106.

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

69 In the Spon’s text, “Jean Lucius”: *ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

his voyage, where the Croatian scientist was staying at that time. And Spon had occasion to pay a visit to his house when passing through Trogir. He gives Lučić credit for publishing the inscriptions on Dalmatia, and above all, “for being the first to draw his native country out of the darkness of Antiquity, by having written the history of his own country”. The paper that he first had written on the distant past of his native town undoubtedly represents the most beautiful eulogy to his country.

Besides scholars, our voyager did not fail to pay attention to the types of people he met. Sometimes his comments are very insulting, as when he mentions the women of Rovinj, whose dresses “make them look horrible”.⁷⁰ However, Spon’s remarks can be more benevolent, too; such is the case when talking about those whom he names the “Morlachs”, the mountain inhabitants (he believes them to be “fugitives from Albania”). In spite of their “terrible looks”, he points out their resistance to fatigue, their courage in fighting against the Turks, and then, as he was convinced when they offered their services during the expedition from Split to Salona, their perfect “honesty”.⁷¹ Moreover, he does not fail to mention that they are mostly Christians, although of the Orthodox religion. But with respect to that, Spon, a fervent Protestant, perhaps felt less hostility towards them than many Catholics of his time. However, we have to note that these “Morlachs” (“Morlacchi” for the Venetians who at that time had already lived in the coastal towns and on the main islands) in fact constituted only a part of the autochthonous population. As Larry Wolff states, it is a question of generic designation of that epoch of the Slavic ethnic groups of distant exogenous origin – that name originates from a phonetic deformation of the Greek *Mavro Vlasi*, or “Black Vlachs”, referring to their primary region of origin.⁷² A century after Spon, Alberto Fortis, mentioning the Morlachs in his account of his own voyage, caused a debate on them in the *Serenissima*.⁷³ This shows the fundamental dichotomy of that period, between the urban milieu belonging to the Venetian culture and the hinterland population that was considered to be barbarians; a dichotomy which in Spon’s time evidently prevailed, as has recently been pointed out by Wojcieh Sajkowski.⁷⁴ The echo of this same dichotomy, though the intention of our

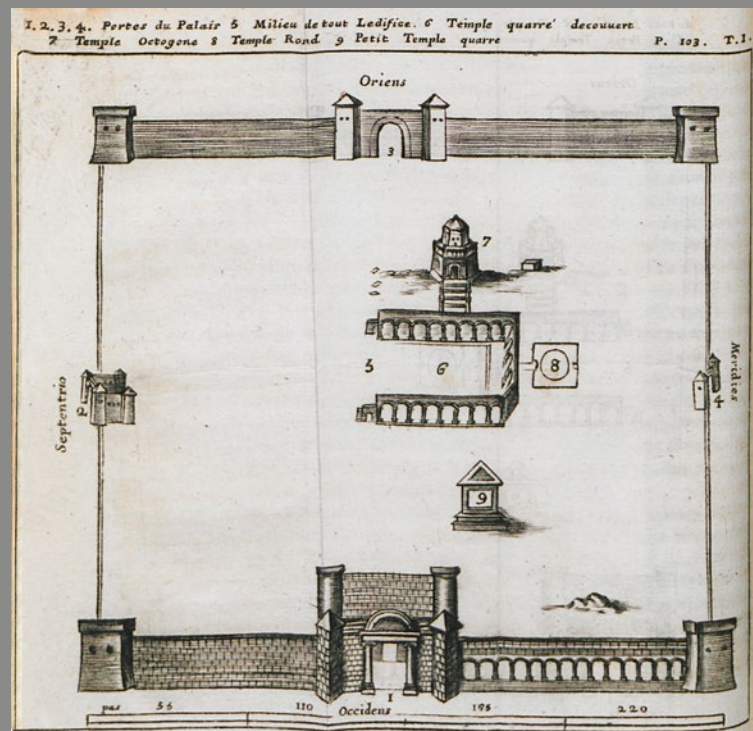
70 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

71 *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 107.

72 Wolff 2001, particularly pp. 127-129, and pp. 228-318 regarding the debate mentioned above.

73 Fortis 1774.

74 Sajkowski 2015, pp. 83-93 (pp. 86-89 expressly concerned with Spon).



The Gates of St. Chrysogonus in Zadar, in: Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie*, Lyon 1678, p. 86.

FIGURE 17

Diocletian's Palace in Split, in: Spon, *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie*, Lyon 1678, p. 102.

FIGURE 18

author was to alleviate it, is undoubtedly perceptible. On the other hand, it must be said, Spon rarely mentions, with the exception of those whom I have already mentioned – the women from Rovinj with derision, the doctor Dragatzo from Trogir more benevolently, and above all Ivan Lučić in a highly laudable way – the rest of the authentic Croatian local population, of the Catholic faith and more or less Italianized, which represented the majority of the inhabitants of the territory he visited.

Finally, descriptions of the landscape are not lacking in Spon's text. Sometimes these are observations expressing pure pleasure in the appearance of a particular place, for example Silba⁷⁵ [Lat. *Silva*] on the islands of the Kvarner, "a small lovely place inhabited by rich mariners"; or Trogir, "fairly beautiful appearance of town, specially the suburbs [...] on the island of [Čiovo]";⁷⁶ or again Split, whose "appearance from the sea is very delightful". In addition, Spon is attracted to the rows of rural agricultural or horticultural areas to which he refers as "a rich soil with vineyards and olive-groves" around Rovinj;⁷⁷ "neatly cultivated fields" (although "deprived of trees after skirmishing with the Turks") near Zadar;⁷⁸ or "the beautiful gardens" of the inhabitants of Dubrovnik, along the coast with a view of the small island of Lokrum.⁷⁹ On the other hand, our author despises the island of Hvar, where he sees only "the rocks and barren soil where only hares and rabbits could live";⁸⁰ Korčula, no less savage (according to Spon, it is even the burrow of jackals) could at least, in his opinion, provide the Venetians with wood from its forests for the construction and repair of ships.⁸¹ Thus, through his records, we have the perfect testimony of conceptions of the classical period, according to which only domesticated nature could be positively appraised. Undoubtedly it could be said that his opinion of the landscape was mirroring the conceptions developed in 1600 by the agronomist Olivier de Serres (a Protestant like our author, from Vivarais, the region near Lyon).⁸²

75 In Spon's text, "Selva": *Voyage d'Italie, de Dalmatie...* (cf. above n.1), p. 84.

76 In Spon's text, "Bua": *ibid.*, p. 94.

77 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

78 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

79 In Spon's text, "L'écueil de Saint-Marc": *ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 110.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

82 Serres 1600. About the work of this person, cf. particularly Boulaine / Moreau 2002, also Margnat 2004.

Next, Spon extends his remarks to praising the fruits of the soil and in a more general manner, the food of the country. He finds pleasure in remembering the good wines of Rovinj;⁸³ he also mentions “the very good food” which he enjoyed in Split, where partridges, hares, and other meat and even turtles are offered at a very low price,⁸⁴ again for Split, he praises the trout of Salona, which Diocletian had enjoyed so much; this time Hvar gets more credit for its wine, bread, and sardines (but the latter, as he was told, near the island of Vis are much better).⁸⁵ The man of science and literature, Spon appears here as a genuine *bon vivant*, fully open towards the gastronomic specialties of the regions that he travels through.

What can we conclude now, from these different types of observations? Certainly, many of the facts he mentioned were indirectly related to the circumstances of his voyage and the hazards inherent in it, as for example the period of ten (or twelve?) days of his stop in Split caused only by the obligations of the Venetian bailee, the owner of the galley our voyager embarked on, and the different stages of the voyage were then decided by that very same person.⁸⁶ From this point of view, therefore, we cannot expect Spon to have made the records of his voyages in the methodical manner in which it is done today. The more so, because a great number of recordings contained in his account are extremely subjective. Nevertheless, this confers on the whole of his report a vivid character, which is one of its undeniable attractions. But if we try to evaluate his account, namely a testimony, according to the prevailing trends of the scholars of his century, its value has considerable significance. Indeed, as I have already mentioned in my introduction, in the field of his archaeological specialty, Spon’s remarks had a genuine impact that was widely recognized in the scientific circles of that era. Therefore, if here and there we come across certain failures in the interpretation of some inscription or in the identification of some figurative work, posterity really has no reason to reject the majority of his statements. The richness of Spon’s report is also due to the fact he refers not only to the field of a pure Classical Antiquity; thus, when it comes to artistic achievements, we have seen that, although preferring the achievements of the Renaissance and modern periods, he does not always follow his contemporaries in their misunderstanding of the Middle Ages. And

83 *Voyage d’Italie, de Dalmatie...* (cf. above n.1), p. 80.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 105.

85 *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

86 Spon himself is fairly inaccurate about the duration of his stay: cf. Spon 2004 (cf. above n. 3), p. 106.

concerning the autochthonous people, their environment and some of their manners and habits, we can note that he does not miss the opportunity to show a certain curiosity for them and under some circumstances, also some good intentions. Namely, in spite of very incomplete information in his record, it is a proof of everyday reality, a product of first-hand observations, often without prejudices. On the whole, as Spon normally could not be qualified as a geographer and an ethnologist in terms of the present meaning of these words, it does not mean that his records are lacking in interest, and as such, they contribute equally to give his text a very appreciable balance of perspectives.⁸⁷ Therefore, it is easy to understand the success which it had in Western Europe, even up to the first decades of the nineteenth century with the republication of his work – in French in Amsterdam as early as 1679 and then in the Hague in 1724, also in Italian (1688), in Dutch (1689), and in German (1690). And in 1802 again, in the *Voyage pittoresque et historique de l'Istrie et de la Dalmatie* illustrated by Louis-François Cassas, Joseph Lavallée wrote his own text drawing data from Spon's original account,⁸⁸ (and of course of the later voyagers, the Scottish Robert Adam and the Venetian Alberto Fortis).⁸⁹ Then, in 1826, in the preface of the third edition of his *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, Chateaubriand mentioned again the high quality of Spon's report.⁹⁰ Certainly, as I have stated in the introduction, it was primarily an account of the position of Greece and the Levant what Spon had in mind, and which is the main reason for the fame of his work. But this does not exclude the part played in his text by other regions, notably Istria and Dalmatia, and therefore, we must fully recognise that our author made a major contribution in order to draw attention to the genuine heritage that these two regions also possess.

87 It is to be noted that the term ethnologia – and the correlatives of the same notion – did not appear until the end of the eighteenth century by František Kollár 1783.

88 Cf. particularly Caillet 2009/2011, pp. 919-927.

89 Adam 1764; for Fortis, cf. above n. 73.

90 Chateaubriand 1826, p. XXV.

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