

The city of Zara in medieval German literature

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to show how Zara was portrayed in late medieval German literature. The capital of Venetian Dalmatia in later Middle Ages occurs several times rather as a city under (nominal) Hungarian rule, unlike the undoubtedly Italian Pola. This is probably due to the bond between Germany and Hungary. In the very end of the Middle Ages, Zara is mostly described as a Venetian stronghold. German pilgrims describe the city in details: a stop at the shrine of St Simeon the Elder had become customary in their travel schedule.

Keywords

Zara, *Dietrichs flucht*, *Rabenschlacht*, Konrad von Grünenberg.

Zara in the Middle Ages

Zara becomes the most important city of Dalmatia in the early Middle Ages, since the former capital of Dalmatia, Salona, had been sacked and destroyed by the Avars in 7th century (Wilkes 1969, p. 437). Dalmatia was then under the Byzantines and fell under Croatian rule in the 10th century.

Already in the 11th century Zara became a Venetian tributary. In the following centuries there were various attempts to escape Venetian influence, even though this implied becoming a

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tributary of the Kings of Hungary who had by then conquered Croatia (Engel 2005, p. 34-35).

In 1202, the Republic of Venice successfully led a fleet of Crusaders for the Fourth Crusade to conquer the city, thus re-establishing its rule over the city.

Since the early 13th century Venice had created a network of emporia on coastal areas and islands, even though it was impossible for such a small state to expand further inland.

In the 14th century, Venice strove to maintain liberty and safety for its fleet at sea, preventing other nations to cross the Adriatic at ease, and especially in Dalmatia, key region for Venetian ships within the Adriatic Sea, that was by then regarded as the Gulf of Venice. At that time Venetian economy depended on sea traffic, as the Republic had little inland to rely on.

In the early 14th century Venice would expand its control as far as Ragusa/Dubrovnik. The republic would follow differing policies for the two main seaports of Zara and Dubrovnik: while Zara, being nearer and easier to control for Venice, was often in turmoil demanding more independence, Dubrovnik had to be bought off with compromise, avoiding armed confrontation. The Anjous on the other side of the Adriatic would gladly offer assistance to Dubrovnik, seizing the opportunity to expand their influence in Dalmatia; a danger that Venice had to avoid at all costs (Arnaldi 1997, pp. 50-53).

The main competitor in the later Middle Ages may have been the huge Kingdom of Hungary (that was then much larger than present-day Hungary), that had its centre far from the coastal areas, thoroughly unfit to compete with the Venetian fleet.

Since 1312, Hungary was ruled by a cadet line of the Anjous in Naples, a connection between competitors that must have caused discomfort in Venice.

In 1344-1358, the Venetian Republic had to endure a bitter fight over Dalmatia with King Louis the Great of Hungary. Fortunately enough for Venice, Louis consumed time and money to conquer Naples, trying to avenge his younger brother Andrew, allegedly murdered by his wife, queen Johan of Naples; Louis was therefore unable to hold his grasp on Dalmatia.

In 1358, the Republic of Venice signed a peace with Hungary at Zara, renouncing to Dalmatia (Arnaldi 1997, pp. 55-64). Later, Venice would carefully balance among the Bosnian king Stephen Tvrtko I, the Roman emperor Sigismund and the candidate to the throne of Hungary and king of Naples Ladislaus, finally obtaining from the latter the opportunity to buy back Zara in 1409 (Arnaldi 68-82, Wakounig 1990, pp. 65-69).

In the 15th century Venice would expand further inland into northern Italy, reaching to the Adda River, but Dalmatia was to remain vital for its economic interests.

Western medieval geographical lore

In Western Europe, Dalmatia seems to have been almost unknown for geographical lore. Few scholars display some knowledge of the Balkan area, as we may infer from the late medieval *mappae mundi* (13th century onwards).

The only exception is the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, based on Roman models, where the city of Zara (called *Iadera*) is placed correctly in front of the Italian coast, almost facing Ancona: but the area is called *Liburnia*, while *Dalmatia* is posited further to the south.

In the so-called *Ebstorf World Map*, Hungary appears to be closer to the Holy Roman Empire than Austria (maybe confused with Istria) and Dalmatia lies further away to the East. The coasts of the area where Dalmatia should have been are filled with Balkan place-names without any apparent order.

In the same century, the so-called *Psalter Map* (ca. 1265) features *Hungaria* and *Dalmatia* on the way to Rome, with the latter much further north and with the Adriatic Sea much smaller than real. The same map shows the *Sclaveni Occidentales* strangely settled north of the Danube and close to the Black Sea.

Finally, the *Hereford Map* does not depict Dalmatia at all, but only Istria. *Zara* is not mentioned, even though there is a city called *Oara* and we may take this as a misspelling. Both *Pannonia* and *Hungaria* are posited much further to the north-east, close to the lands of Gog and Magog. The name *Slavi* occurs in two different

areas, at the border of North-Eastern Germany and in an area comprised between Russia and Moesia.

Dalmatia is barely portrayed in the 1493 Latin edition of Hartmann Schedel's *Liber Chronicle* (today known as *Liber Chronicarum*) in the World Map (f. 12v-13r).

In the High Middle Ages, the Latin name *Jadera* with initial *j*, still found in Old French as *Jadres* (for instance, in Geoffrey of Villardhoun's *La Conquête de Constantinople* it was described as *Jadres en Esclavonie, qui est une des plus forz citez du monde*) turned to *Zadra* presumably under Venetian Influence, as initial Latin */j/* (as well as palatised */g/*, with which it assimilates in writing) undergoes a somewhat different development in the Venetian dialect than in standard Italian, spelled with */z/* (on these processes, see Rohlfs 1949, § 156, p. 265 as well as § 158, p. 269). The Venetian spelling would later reflect in the Italian name *Zara* as well as in the Hungarian *Zára*.

In late medieval German romances, the city of *Zara* is mentioned as *Saders*, where the first <s> must be pronounced as [z]. The final [s] could indicate that the name of *Zara* was known in German literature through French, where the form with final *-s* appears to be almost consistently employed by historians.

Medieval German epics

The first two texts we must examine here are *Dietrichs Flucht* and *Rabenschlacht*, poems concerning Theodoric of Verona (Dietrich von Bern), based on the legend of Theodoric: his father Theodomer (Dietmar) was king of Verona (Bern), Lombardy, Rome, Istria, Friuli e the Inns valley, and he begged his brother Ermanaric, who owned *Pülle* and *Galaber* (i.e. Continental Southern Italy), to foster his sons Dietrich (Theodoric) and Diether, but the uncle deprived his nephews of their rights.

Dispossessed of his father's inheritance, Theodoric flees to Hungary and will later try and win back his kingdom.

Germanic epos distorts most historical figures: it is well-known from historical sources that Theodoric was a king of the Ostrogoths who conquered Italy in 493, while Ermanaric was a

king of the Goths who died in 376 fighting against the Huns; in Germanic epos becomes typically an ill-advised, malignant figure (Haymes 2006, p. 18, 20-1)¹.

In both poems the Mark of Zara is mentioned in connection with Austria. The Duchy of Austria in the 13th century stretched somewhat longer south than nowadays, including the marks of Krajin (currently Slovenia) and Istria. The most likely explanation for such a connection is that epos does not take into account the possibility to sail; therefore, moving from Italy to Dalmatia requires crossing the Alps and travelling through areas that were predominantly under Austrian control.

a) *Dietrichs Flucht*

Theodoric's Flight (Dietrichs Flucht) is a rhymed poem, describing Theodoric's defeat by his uncle Ermanaric and Theodoric's flight from the kingdom, that he had inherited from his father.

In various battles between Ravenna (*Raben*), Verona, Bologna and Milan, because of Ermanaric's treachery, Dietrich must flee to seek refuge at Attila's court.

The first time, Dietrich goes to Hunland (*Hiunen*) –Hungary, in fact – riding from Italy (vv. 7221-7225, ed. Martin 1866, p. 169) to the Mark of Zara (*ze Saders in die mare*), where he meets Attila's envoys.

The author of *Dietrichs Flucht* knows more of Hungary: for instance, Attila's Queen, Helche, gives to Dietrich on the occasion of his marriage to her niece Herrat the region of *Siebenbürgen* (vv. 7680-2, p. 176), which in the 13th century must have been the part of Hungary most densely populated with German settlers, to the point that German influence stirred bitter anti-German feelings.

A second time Zara is mentioned, when Dietrich must come back to Italy to counteract Ermanaric's moves (*Dietrichs Flucht*, 8110 – 8121, p. 183) and he travels through *Saders* to Istria (*Isterrîch*: here the confusion with Austria is evident); eventually he meets the people from Pola, led by his faithful Berhtram. The city's inhabitants repeatedly assist Dietrich (8200, 3609-3617), and their lord even dies fighting for his king (9708).

b) Rabenschlacht

The Battle at Ravenna (Rabenschlacht) is a sort of continuation to *Dietrichs Flucht*, sharing with the former poem part of the manuscript transmission as well as the plot (Lienert –Wolter 2005, p. ix-xx)

Dietrich attempts again to win back his kingdom from Ermanaric, but he loses Attila's two children and his younger brother Diether in battle. Upon his return to Attila's court, the king is strongly moved by his sons' fate, but he is eventually reconciled with Dietrich.

Zara is mentioned in connection with Dietrich's departure to Italy: Attila comes with Dietrich all the way to Zara, whence Dietrich continues with his troops over Istria to Italy (str. 202, v. 4: *durch Saders uf gein Isterrich*, ed. Martin 1866, p. 238).

c) Jüngerer Titarel

Two further mentions of Zara occur in *Jüngerer Titarel* (that must have been composed about 1260 to 1275). The first one concerns a maiden of exceptional beauty, such that it remains unrivalled all the way from Zara to *Hoie*, probably the city of Hoya in Niedersachsen – that is, the entire area of influence for German culture (st. 2294, 2, ed. Wolf 1964).

Zara appears again in a travel starting in Cappadocia through Anatolia (the so-called “deserted *Romania*”) and “wild Greece” to Zara (*Saders*), hence to Aquileia and *Parlit* – that may be tentatively identified with the Apulian port currently known as Barletta (st. 5761, 1-4, ed. Nyholm 1992).

Zara in historiography: The *Styrian Chronicle*

Saders is mentioned several times in the *Steirische Reimchronik* (ed. Seemüller 1890) a rhymed chronicle dating back to the early 14th century, written by Ottokar aus der Gaal (born in 1265; dead in 1318-1322). The author was a nobleman that still longed for anti-papal policies that had become impossible in his day, but also a

well-read historian, especially for the relatively ill-documented interregnum in the late 13th century.

If we compare Ottokar's work with the older *Kaiserchronik*, Eastern Europe plays a more important role. The anonymous author of *Kaiserchronik* would just dismiss Magyars and Bohemians as heathens that received Christianity and civilization from benign German emperors, but Ottokar needed to create a more realistic and detailed picture.

The first mention concerning Zara is related to Beatrice of Este, Queen of Hungary, Andrew II's third wife. After her husband's death, Beatrice must leave Hungary, as there is this custom among the Hungarians – so Ottokar says – that a childless widow cannot inherit from her husband. Therefore her brother, Adso margrave of Este, conjures her to *Saders bî dem mer*, in order for her not to be dishonoured (11611-5, p. 153).

Before leaving, though, Beatrice declares to be pregnant with a child, Andrew's son. Then she leaves with her following, crossing the sea (11642-3: *si kêrt mit iren geverten hin / ûf daz mer*)

Ottokar appears to know Zara to be an important seaport of the Kingdom of Hungary for traffic with Italy. The story is again referred to later in the text, discussing of Andrew III (1290-301), who is erroneously considered Beatrice's son (in fact, Beatrice's son is Andrew's father, Stephan, duke of Slavonia). Here the author stresses that the exiled Queen showed her pregnancy in Zara, before being driven from her Kingdom (39910-9, p. 519).

Zara is again mentioned as the entrance to Hungary from Italy in the account concerning the arrival of the pontifical legate, Philip of Formia, sailing to Zara in order to inform King Ladislaus IV (1272-1290) about the offers from the Pope (24442-57).

A third time Zara is quoted in connection with the arrival into Hungary of Albertino Morosini, Stephan's brother-in-law and Andrew III's uncle, that arrived to Zara crossing the sea (40035-48, p. 520-1).

Zara is mentioned one last time in a list of bishops and noblemen conjured by Andrew III to a royal council: the list begins with the unnamed archbishops of Esztergom and Kalocsa, the bishop of *Rab* (Arbe), Matthias bishop of Siebenbürgen (a mistake, probably for Peter, bishop 1270-1307),

Peter of Veszprém (1275-1288), unnamed bishops of *Agrim* (Eger) and Pecs, Andrew of Segna (Senj) – not otherwise known – and Philip of Zara, one of the kings' relatives (43752-4, p. 566-7, with comment).

We may well assume that in this context the chronicler must have confused Philip bishop of Segna (1247- before 1280) with Andrew of Zara (Andrea Ganzoni, 1241- before 1291). It is a fitting list, containing most prelates of the Kingdom but the bishops of Vác and Zagreb (Sibenik was not a diocese until 1298).

Pilgrimage accounts of the outgoing Middle Ages

Venice was a major European seaport to the Holy Land, especially for German pilgrims (Denke 2001, Graciotti 2007, Lozzi Gallo 2012), and was to become even more in later Middle Ages. In the fourteenth century, Zara had become one of the most common stops on the itinerary from Venice to the Levant.

The Irish pilgrim Symon Semeonis, travelling in 1322, mentions his stop in *Iataram, civitatem opulentissimam et bene munitam ... in provincia Dalmathie, in qua etiam Veneti dominantur* (Golubovich 1919, p. 252).

The Austrian Anonymous, travelling surely before 1426, (possibly at the turn of the century) informs that he departed from Venice and travelled along the Adriatic, between *Pullenland* – i.e. Southern Italy – and *Krawaten*, but does not mention Zara (ed. Szeny 1998, p. 14). In 1418-9, another German pilgrim, Hans Porner, mentions Zara, informing on its distance from Pola and the presence of St Simeon's body; he also adds that the city belonged to the Venetians (ed. Hänselmann 1874/5).

Jörg Pfinzing (1436) completely ignores Zara; the pilgrims travelled from Pola directly to Lesina and then proceeded to Ragusa (ed. Kamann 1880, p. 125-6).

Girnard von Schwalbach (1440), on the other hand, did stop in Zara (which he calls *Gerra oder Zerra*, see ed. Huschenbett 1998, p. 115), and he dedicates more space to the city than to any other between Venice and Rhodes.

The Rhenan Franconian Anonymous (1441) calls the city *Sara*, noting that it is a large city (*eyn groÿße stad*; ed. Herz 1998, p. 173); the Anonymous from Augusta (1444) states flatly that he visited the city (ed. Birlinger 1867, p. 302). Stephan von Gumpfenberg, in mid-15th century (1449), mentions a brief visit to *Saders* on his way back:

“We arrived there before Vesper and entered the town and we would have gladly seen St Simeon, but the one that held the key had just left on horse. Then came a German monk, that was the prior of the Benedictine Order, he led us to his place with him and gave us good wine and good fish that he let us cook, then he let us visit the monastery”² (ed. Feyerabend 1584, f. 246v).

It seems that the visit was very short, but the presence of a German monk in Zara appears remarkable, as he must have had few (if any) companions to speak his language with, but for the occasional pilgrims.

Another illustrious traveller to Zara was Duke Wilhelm III of Sachsen and Thüringen (1461). We possess three different accounts on his travel, currently named A, B, C (Herz 1998, p. 175-6). Account A records that Zara had seven monasteries and 20 churches – and yet it was a small town, of the same size as Arnstadt in present-day Thuringia (ed. Kohl 1868, p. 84).

Two pilgrims travelling in 1472, the Rhenan Anonymous from Cologne and the Swiss Ulrich Leman, do not describe Zara on the occasion of their travel to the Holy Land. The former one did stop in the city on his way back, though. He calls it *Jare*, trying to create an equivalent of French *Jadres* and Venetian *Za(de)ra*. He describes the city as “fairly big” (*redeliken groet*) and informs again on St Simeon and the other twenty saints that allegedly rest with him in the city.

Hans Tucher (1479-1480) recounts his rather unfortunate experience with the city:

“A wind ... led us quickly for over 60 miles, to a city called Zara that is 200 miles from Parenzo in the Wends’ land, and they did not want to let us in on account of the plague that raged in

Venice, and they closed the door before us; and yet with much effort our patron obtained that some of us be allowed into the city to see the crypt of St Simeon, where he lies in his earthly remains. Besides is found the skull of prophet Joel, and soon we had to exit the city again [...] In Zara there is an archbishopric, and in front of it lies an island, that is called ‘the island of Zara’ and is 50 miles long and therein stands a castle, called St Michael’s Castle” (ed. Herz 2002, p. 352-3).

The Swiss monk Felix Fabri (1480), writing in Latin, treats *Slavia* or *Slavonia* as the name for the whole of Eastern Europe, comprising both Hungary and Dalmatia; for Felix, its capital is Ragusa.

Bernhard von Breydenbach (1483-1484) does not write much about Zara. He relates directly his arrival from Parenzo to Corfu, then lists the most important cities of *Slavonia*: Zara, Rovigno, Polmedore, Porto San Pietro, Lesina, Ragusa. Zara is mentioned as an archbishopric and resting place of St Simeon the Elder and Joel the prophet.

Bernhard’s account was almost immediately translated into German, since we possess a printed edition from 1488, so he had larger influence even on the vulgar literature.

Konrad von Grünemberg (1486), on the other hand, inserts a lengthy description of Zara (called *Sara*), stating that it is the capital of Slavonia (Sibenik being the capital of Dalmatia):

“It lies two hundred miles from Parenzo and three hundred from Venice, and is the capital of Slavonia, and is a large, pleasant city and well disposed to its defence; and in the city are abbeys and many monasteries: and there is an archbishopric and Venice has acquired it with its countryside from King Wenceslaus of Hungary”

Then he recounts in details the four saints that rest there, mentioning first St Simeon, then Donata, Anastasia and *Chrysogonia* [i.e. Chrysogonos], enumerating additional important relics, followed by the story of a peculiar monument:

“in Sara, in a place, a tall, mighty stone column stands, sculpted from a single stone; on top a griffin lies. The griffin has been their idol over many years and has worked many wonders, and spoke to them. Then the country and the city converted to Christianity, and posed an epigraph on the said column, with many crosses. As soon as the cross touched it, the column broke in two over all its length, even though it did not crumble, and the evil spirit exhaled hence” After a rich description of a Slavonic wedding, complete with an account of the mass, where he participated for his “desire to see strange, peculiar things” (*frömde selzame ding*), he mentions the fort of St Michael and then moves on (Denke 2010, p. 320-3). Grünemberg has some data wrong: for instance, the king was surely Ladislaus of Naples, not Wenceslaus; and yet Grünemberg’s account is important, since both main manuscripts bear accurate reproductions of the town, albeit far from identical.

A few years later, Arnold von Harff (1496-1499) was much less impressed: to him, Zara is a small, fortified town (*keleyne starcke stat*); he barely mentions the relics of St Simeon and the prophet Joel (ed. Groote 1860, p. 63).

With the end of Middle Ages, the discovery of America would have a devastating impact on the *traffigo* – by then, Venice would eventually be crushed between the competing superpowers, Habsburgs and Ottomans, struggling in the Balkan for the supremacy over the old world. By then, the German-speaking Habsburgs would establish a new regional hegemony over the Adriatic; Dalmatia was to become a part of it.

¹ Recently, professor Max Siller (University of Innsbruck) has suggested a new, brilliant theory: Ermanaric and Theodoric might be reconducted to kings in the 5-century Iberian Peninsula.

This assumption is based on material drawn from historians: Hidatius tells of the conflict between Swabians and Visigoths, ending with Theodoric II, king of the Visigoths, defeating Ermanaric’s grandson Rechiarus, king of the Swabians (*Continuatio chronicorum hieronymianorum*, 168 [175], ed. Burgess 1993, p. 196); Rechiarus had married a daughter of Theodoric’s, therefore they were related (cit. 132 [140] p. 98). The two characters are also named in Jordanes’ *De origine*

actibusque Getarum XLIV, 229-231 (ed. MGH, pp. 116-117), who calls the Visigothic king *Theoderidus* and introduces *Riciarius* as his *cognatus*.

² This and the following translations are my own.

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