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## RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL AND NATIONAL GOALS OF THE ISTRIAN BISHOP JURAJ DOBRILA

### Abstract

The article explores the key influences on the activities of Juraj Dobrila (1812–82), a bishop who played a pivotal role in the national integration of Istrian Croats. Istria, a peninsula situated in the northern Adriatic Sea, had been a meeting point between Croatian, Slovenian, and Italian populations. In the nineteenth century, the Italian bourgeoisie dominated the area. The article highlights Bishop Dobrila's attitudes and efforts, characterised by the convergence of religious, social, and national aspirations. It also examines his achieved results and his complex relationships with both ecclesiastical and secular authorities. Despite enjoying the trust of the Holy See and the Habsburg authorities, Bishop Dobrila was unable to secure their full support for his primary goal – the establishment of a boys' seminary (lat. *seminarium puerorum*) in central Istria. The bishop relied on his own resources and local collaborators to improve the challenging conditions faced by the rural population, predominantly Istrian Croats, in the early stages of national integration. By investing significant efforts and resources, Bishop Dobrila aimed to promote education and literacy. His initiatives laid down a solid foundation for organised political and national mobilisation among Istrian Croats, which continued to grow after his death.

**Keywords:** Juraj Dobrila, Austrian Littoral, Istria, national integration, multinational province

### INTRODUCTION

Istria, a peninsula situated in the northern Adriatic Sea, was divided into Venetian and Habsburg territories from the Middle Ages until 1797. Following the fall of Venice and a period of frequent power shifts during the Napoleonic Wars, the entire peninsula came under Habsburg rule in 1813. It was subsequently incorporated into the Austrian Littoral Province, although a permanent administrative arrangement

was established only in 1825. At that time, the entire geographical territory of Istria, expanded further to include eastern territories around Rijeka and the Kvarner Islands, was incorporated into the Istrian District [Ger. *Istrianer Kreisamt*], with its administrative centre in Pazin. The borders of this territorial unit remained unchanged until 1918.<sup>1</sup>

While statistical and ethnographic data on the ethnic composition of Istria at that time should be approached with caution, informed estimates suggest that approximately one-third of the population was Italian, while the remaining two-thirds were Slavs. The majority of the Slavic population were Croats, with Slovenes residing on the northern edges of the province. Although this division was not rigid, the Italian population undeniably dominated urban areas, particularly along the western coastline, from Trieste to Pula. In contrast, the Slavic population was scattered in the rural hinterland. Historical factors contributed to the dominance of the Italian bourgeoisie and upper classes in the peninsula's public life and economy, with the Italian language prevailing in both public communication and written culture. These circumstances led to different prerequisites and varying development paces in national integration processes among Istrian Croats, Slovenes, and Italians, despite numerous similarities.<sup>2</sup>

When discussing Istrian Croats, historiography consistently highlights the role of Bishop Juraj Dobrila.<sup>3</sup> A biographical account, combined with an emphasis on the key aspects of his work, reveals how much this exceptional figure influenced the national identification and social mobilisation of Istrian Croats during the latter half of the nineteenth century and beyond.

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<sup>1</sup> Egidio Ivetic (ed.), *Istria nel tempo. Manuale di storia regionale dell'Istria con riferimenti alla città di Fiume* (Trst–Rijeka–Rovinj, 2006), 429–36; Marino Manin, 'Istra u 19. stoljeću', in Vlasta Švoger and Jasna Turkalj (eds), *Temelji moderne Hrvatske. Hrvatske zemlje u 'dugom' 19. stoljeću* (Zagreb, 2016), 437–8.

<sup>2</sup> Antoni Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii w latach 1860–1907* (Kraków, 2010), 17–27; Ludwig Steindorff, *Povijest Hrvatske. Od srednjeg vijeka do danas* (Zagreb, 2006), 126–7.

<sup>3</sup> For a critical review of historiographical works on Bishop Dobrila, see Mihovil Dabo, *Sve za Boga, vjeru i puk. Biskup Juraj Dobrila u svom vremenu* (Pazin, 2015), 11–16. A concise yet informative overview of Dobrila's role in the broader Croatian historical context can be found in Mihovil Dabo and Stjepan Matković, 'Juraj Dobrila i njegovo doba', in *Juraj Dobrila, De Confessione sacramentali* (Pazin, 2012), 19–20.

## FORMATIVE YEARS OF THE FUTURE BISHOP

Juraj Dobrila was born in 1812 in central Istria, in the village of Veli Ježenj near Pazin. His biographies, though often romanticised, are based on testimonies and preserved archival records, and emphasise that he came from a modest rural family and could pursue higher education solely through his diligence and personal abilities. He was ordained a priest in 1837, and in the following year completed his theological studies in Gorizia, where a theological seminary, the central institution for clergy education in the Austrian Littoral, had operated since 1818.<sup>4</sup> At that time, the Istrian peninsula was divided between two dioceses. The smaller, southern and southwestern portions fell under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Poreč-Pula, while the larger part, including central Istria, belonged to the Diocese of Trieste-Koper, with its episcopal see in Trieste. Upon completing his studies, the young priest Dobrila, a cleric of the latter diocese, initially served in the rural parishes of northern Istria.<sup>5</sup>

However, Dobrila's educational journey and social ascent did not end there. In 1839, upon the recommendation of the Bishop of Trieste-Koper, he was admitted to the Viennese 'Augustineum' (also known as the 'Frintaneum'), formally the 'Imperial-Royal Higher Scientific Institute for Diocesan Priests at St. Augustine's' [*K. und K. Höhere Weltpriester-Bildung-Institut zum heil. Augustin*]. Biographies have consistently highlighted one pivotal fact: it was there that Dobrila met Josip Juraj Strossmayer, one of the most significant figures in the nineteenth-century Croatian political, cultural, and religious life, with whom he developed a lifelong friendship.<sup>6</sup> More recent scholarly works have noted that during its existence, between 1816 and 1918, the 'Augustineum' provided higher education to a number of prominent

<sup>4</sup> Luigi Tavano, 'Funzione unificante e realtà nazionali nel 'Central Seminar' di Gorizia (1818–1918)', in Mario Brancati et al. (eds), *La scuola la stampa le istituzioni culturali a Gorizia e nel suo territorio della metà del Settecento al 1915* (Gorizia, 1983), 43–54; Luigi Tavano, 'Dalla "Domus presbyteralis" (1757) al seminario centrale di Gorizia (1818). Pastorality e statalismo a confronto', in *Cultura e formazione del clero fra '700 e '800. Gorizia, Lubiana e il Lombardo-Veneto* (Gorizia, 1985), 31–67.

<sup>5</sup> Cvjetko Rubetić, *Vjekopis Dra Jurja Dobrile, biskupa tršćansko-koparskoga prije porečko-puljskoga* (Zagreb, 1882), 1–10; Antun Kalac (ed.), *Biskup dr. Juraj Dobrila. Spomen-knjiga stogodišnjice njegova rođenja* (pretisak) (Pazin, 2012), 43–66; Božo Milanović, *Hrvatski narodni preporod u Istri. Knjiga prva (1797–1882)* (Pazin, 1967), 211–13.

<sup>6</sup> Milanović, *Hrvatski narodni preporod*, 213.

figures in the religious, social, and political spheres of the Habsburg Monarchy.<sup>7</sup> In short, Dobrila's successful defence of his dissertation in 1842 allowed his entry into the ecclesiastical elite of this multi-national state. As with many other members of this elite, his future work would demonstrate loyalty to both the Church authorities and the Habsburg court.<sup>8</sup>

After a stay in Vienna, Dobrila returned to his home diocese, though not to village parishes. Instead, he moved to Trieste, where he spent the following 16 years. Over time, he was entrusted with various responsible duties and gained increasing recognition. This led to his appointment as a parish priest and canon of the Trieste Cathedral in 1854. Of particular relevance to this study are Dobrila's efforts to support the broader population, not only in the urban centre of Trieste but also in his nearby and native Istria. Notable examples of his dedication include efforts to help the starving population of central Istria in 1850, and those suffering from cholera in Trieste in 1855.<sup>9</sup> However, one of his enduring contributions was the prayer book *Otče, budi volja tvoja!* [*Father, Thy Will Be Done!*], first published in Trieste in 1854. While it may seem unusual to highlight this booklet, mostly a translation of Alois Schlör's *Jesus mein Verlangen*, it is considered one of Dobrila's most significant works. The booklet reflects his worldview and the reasons behind a significant impact of his work on the national integration of Istrian Croats. Primarily a religious publication, the prayer book addressed the spiritual needs of the broader population. Dobrila specifically targeted the community from which he originated and which he understood intimately. Written in Croatian, the prayer book represented a major step in the standardisation of the Croatian language in Istria.<sup>10</sup> Its simplicity made it accessible to the poorly

<sup>7</sup> Karl Heinz Frankl and Peter G. Tropper (eds), *Das 'Frintaneum' in Wien und seine Mitglieder aus den Kirchenprovinzen Wien, Salzburg und Görz (1816–1918). Ein biographisches Lexikon* (Klagenfurt–Ljubljana–Wien, 2006), 18.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Heinz Frankl, 'Das Frintaneum – Konturen einer Institution', in Karl Heinz Frankl and Rupert Klieber (eds), *Das Priesterkolleg St. Augustin 'Frintaneum' in Wien 1816 bis 1918. Kirchliche Elite-Bildung für den Donau-Alpen-Adria-Raum* (Wien–Köln–Weimar, 2008), 36–59.

<sup>9</sup> Elvis Orbančić, 'Un contributo alla conoscenza del periodo triestino di Juraj Dobrila', in Damir Murković (ed.), *I Croati a Trieste* (Trieste, 2007), 157–77.

<sup>10</sup> Teodora Fonović Cvijanović, *Juraj Dobrila i hrvatski jezik u Istri* (Zagreb–Pula, 2022), 51–2.

educated inhabitants of the Istrian rural interior.<sup>11</sup> Until Dobrila's death, the prayer book supported his pastoral and revival efforts. The circumstances that kept Croatian written culture in a subordinate position in Istria well into the mid-twentieth century further underscored its significance, leading to its subsequent reissues and continued distribution long after the bishop's passing.

#### INSIGHTS INTO REALITY – ATTEMPTS TO IMPROVE CIRCUMSTANCES THROUGH RELIANCE ON AUTHORITY

In 1857, following the death of the former bishop of the Diocese of Poreč-Pula, the Governor [Ger. *Statthalter*] of Trieste, the highest-ranking political official in the Austrian Littoral, was tasked with gathering the opinions of the Archbishop of Gorica and all the bishops of this metropolitan area regarding a potential successor. According to the Concordat of 1855,<sup>12</sup> the Governor was then required to submit these opinions, along with his own, to the Ministry for Cultus and Education [Ger. *Ministerium für Cultus und Unterricht*].<sup>13</sup> Dobrila's name appeared frequently in the preserved records, with Church dignitaries highlighting his education at the 'Augustineum', his demonstrated abilities, and proficiency in provincial languages, essential for communication with both the people and higher authorities.<sup>14</sup> In the Governor's report, Dobrila was recognised as the most suitable candidate for the vacant position. He was depicted as a person of "unquestionable legality and strong loyalty to the government. The government could be confident that it would always find in him a zealous and conscientious promoter of aspirations for the welfare of the country".<sup>15</sup> The report

<sup>11</sup> Ivan Vitezić, 'Die römisch-katolische Kirche bei den Kroaten', in Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (eds), *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 4: *Die Konfessionen* (Wien, 1995), 349.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Leisching, 'Die römisch-katolische Kirche in Cisleithanien', in *Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 4, 25–34; Rudolf Leeb et al., *Geschichte des Christentums in Österreich. Von der Spätantike bis zur Gegenwart* (Wien, 2003), 375–9.

<sup>13</sup> Andreas Gottsmann, *Rom und die nationalen Katholizismen in der Donaumonarchie. Römischer Universalismus, habsburgische Reichspolitik und nationale Identitäten 1878–1914* (Wien, 2010), 18; Stipan Trogrlić, 'Neki naglasci u pastoralnom djelovanju biskupa Jurja Dobrile (1858.–1882.)', *Croatia Christiana Periodica*, xxxv, 67 (2011), 155.

<sup>14</sup> Dabo, *Sve za Boga*, 29–31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

convincingly demonstrated that Dobrila had gained the trust of both Church and state authorities. As a result, the agreement on his election was swiftly reached, and Dobrila was appointed bishop by Emperor Franz Joseph I in October 1857. This appointment was subsequently confirmed by Pope Pius IX in late December. In May 1858, he was solemnly enthroned in Poreč, the diocesan see.<sup>16</sup>

The day before, his inaugural epistles were issued in both Croatian and Italian. Although throughout his tenure in Poreč Dobrila continued to publish epistles in both languages, the inaugural ones differed notably in content. The Croatian epistle was tailored to the peasant class, reflecting Dobrila's understanding of local circumstances. This approach was consistent with the one adopted for the release of the aforementioned prayer book and, from 1870 onwards, for the first Croatian-language newspaper in Istria. In the opening sentence, he stressed his own humble origins as an honest but poor peasant.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, the Italian epistle included sections intended for the bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and officials, which were absent in the Croatian text.<sup>18</sup> This approach demonstrated Dobrila's keen awareness of the national and social dynamics in Istria, even before he assumed the episcopal office.

Bishop Juraj Dobrila's commitment to his pastoral work is clearly demonstrated by his extensive canonical visitations between June and October 1858. This thorough engagement underscored his deep concern for the religious and spiritual neglect in his diocese – an issue that he would later communicate to both the emperor and the Holy See. While biographical accounts often highlight his national and political achievements, it is crucial to acknowledge that his efforts in these domains were fundamentally intertwined with the mission to address the spiritual shortcomings of his diocese.

One of the primary challenges identified by Dobrila was the acute shortage of priests, an issue not unique to the Diocese of Poreč-Pula but prevalent across the region. This scarcity was partially mitigated

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<sup>16</sup> Rubetić, *Vjekopis Dra Jurja Dobrile*, 18; Kalac (ed.), *Biskup dr. Juraj Dobrila*, 71–3; Milanović, *Hrvatski narodni preporod*, 218.

<sup>17</sup> Porečka i pulska biskupija, Biskupijski arhiv (hereinafter: ABPP), Poslanice i plakati biskupa Dobrile, Inaugural epistle in Croatian, Poreč, 16 May 1858.

<sup>18</sup> ABPP, Poslanice i plakati biskupa Dobrile, Inaugural epistle in Italian, Poreč, 16 May 1858.

in previous decades through the recruitment of seminarians from neighbouring dioceses. However, Dobrila viewed this as an inadequate solution, as reflected in his letter to the Governor of Trieste, where he criticised many priests from neighbouring provinces as being detrimental to the community and burdensome to the bishop.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, the existing clergy were often advanced in age, and there was a shortage of local priests of Slavic origin. Dobrila believed that rural areas, especially central Istria with its Slavic and Croatian population, held the potential to produce more local seminarians under favourable conditions. To address this challenge, he proposed a significant structural change: either a permanent unification of the Diocese of Poreč-Pula with the Diocese of Trieste-Koper, or, at least, its temporary administration by the Bishop of Trieste. He suggested that the revenues of the Diocese of Poreč-Pula be allocated to fund the education of young priests. In his letter to the emperor, Dobrila highlighted the dual benefits of his proposal, stressing that “the execution of this most humble request will also have the most beneficial outcomes for the state, as it will enable the future cultivation of a clergy in this diocese that will be genuinely loyal and devoted to the exalted throne of Your Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty, something that, based on past and present experience, cannot be achieved by any other means”.<sup>20</sup> This alignment between spiritual and state interests was a recurring theme in his communications. Dobrila’s vision and proposals reflect his profound understanding of the intertwined nature of spiritual and national identity and his strategic approach to fostering both of them through the empowerment of local clergy. The following year, Dobrila reiterated this idea in his first triennial report to the Holy See on the state of the diocese.<sup>21</sup>

The preserved archival records from various stages of Dobrila’s activity demonstrate that he enjoyed the trust of both religious and secular authorities. However, their support was confined to the bishop’s

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<sup>19</sup> Archivio di stato di Trieste, Luogotenenza per il Litorale, Atti generali, busta 155, no. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Archivio storico diocesano di Trieste (hereinafter: ASDT), Miscellanea sui vescovi, Carte riguardanti G. Dobrila, The concept of Dobrila’s petition to Emperor Franz Joseph I., August 1861.

<sup>21</sup> Integral transcript of the report to the Holy See: Markus Leideck, *Juraj Dobrila (1812.–1882.): (povodom 200. obljetnice rođenja)* (Pazin, 2012), 78–82.

more modest initiatives. The realisation of Dobrila's ambitious goal of uniting the dioceses required complete commitment and cooperation from both Church and state leadership, which was not forthcoming. Consequently, Dobrila had to rely on his own efforts.<sup>22</sup>

During the early 1860s, Dobrila became increasingly aware of unequal social relations, and actively engaged in the revitalised political life of the province and the state. After the Neoabsolutist period, political reforms impacted the peninsula – designated since 1849 as the Margraviate of Istria, which encompassed the territory described earlier. Still part of the Austrian Littoral, the Margraviate established its own provincial council [Ger. *Landtag*] in 1861, seated in Poreč.<sup>23</sup> The council comprised thirty members, mostly elected, including three virilists – the bishops of the dioceses of Trieste-Koper, Poreč-Pula, and Krk. The restriction of the right to vote to a narrow segment of the population, combined with widespread ignorance and apathy of the broader social classes, and the significant influence of the Italian bourgeoisie and wealthy landlords, affected the first election outcomes and shaped the future political landscape of the Margraviate.<sup>24</sup> As a result, in the spring of 1861, the National Council consisted of twenty-five Italians, one Slovenian, and one Croatian priest from Krk. The presence of three Slav bishops – a Slovenian for Trieste-Koper and Croatians for Poreč-Pula and Krk, respectively, partially offset an uneven national representation.<sup>25</sup>

The Provincial Council's legal duty to elect two representatives of Istria to the Imperial Council in Vienna offers two significant insights. First, a majority of twenty Italian members among the deputies could take coordinated action. Second, their activities did not meet the Habsburgs' expectations. During the vote to elect deputies for Vienna, twenty Council members, acting in prior agreement, wrote 'no one' [Ital. *nessuno*] on their ballots, thereby refusing to send any representatives. While this act is commonly interpreted as linked

<sup>22</sup> Rubetić, *Vjekopis Dra Jurja Dobrile*, 48–9; Leideck, *Juraj Dobrila (1812.–1882.)*, 23–4.

<sup>23</sup> Ivetic (ed.), *Istria nel tempo*, 461; Manin, 'Istra u 19. stoljeću', 438.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Wiggermann, *K.u.K. Kriegsmarine und Politik. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der italienischen Nationalbewegung in Istrien* (Wien, 2004), 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ivan Beuc, *Istarske studije. Osnovni nacionalni problemi istarskih Hrvata i Slovenaca u drugoj polovini XIX. st. i početkom XX. stoljeća* (Zagreb, 1975), 52; Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii*, 32–4.



to the creation of the Kingdom of Italy and should certainly not be ignored,<sup>26</sup> it is essential to recognise that the Istrian Council was not the only local parliament in the Monarchy to express its dissent with the Habsburg policy through abstention.<sup>27</sup> The court reacted swiftly by dissolving the Council in July and holding new elections in September, with greater involvement from the Trieste Regency. The outcome was a more loyal second convocation of the Provincial Council, which subsequently sent the Trieste Governor and Bishop Dobrila to Vienna as Istrian representatives.<sup>28</sup>

Some works in the Italian scholarly literature assert that during his tenure in the Viennese Parliament (1861–1866), Dobrila built and strengthened connections that he would later use in his anti-Italian activities in Istria.<sup>29</sup> However, an examination of verifiable facts, specifically the written records of his parliamentary interventions clearly shows that Dobrila indeed represented all the Istria in the Imperial Council, rather than just a segment of its population. This was particularly evident in his most famous speech, delivered in May 1862, where he detailed numerous factors contributing to the poverty and backwardness of his province.<sup>30</sup> Dobrila's commitment to representing the interests of the entire peninsula in Vienna is further supported by his correspondence with Giuseppe Parisini,<sup>31</sup> a prominent Italian figure from Pazin, held despite their disagreements on national issues in the Istrian Council.

Within the Provincial Council, Dobrila was the most active of the three episcopal members.<sup>32</sup> His involvement there continued until the mid-1860s, when all three bishops decided to withdraw from active

<sup>26</sup> Giovanni Quarantotti, *Istria del Risorgimento – Storia della Dieta di Nessuno* (Poreč, 1938); Marino Manin and Nevio Šetić, 'Prilike u Istri uoči i tijekom objavljivanja Naše Sloge', *Časopis za suvremenu povijest*, xxxix, 3 (2007), 710.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Beller, *The Habsburg Monarchy 1815–1918* (Cambridge, 2018), 111–12.

<sup>28</sup> Harald Krahwinkler, 'Die Landtage von Görz-Gradisca und Istrien', in Peter Urbanitsch and Helmut Rumpler (eds) *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 7: *Verfassung und Parlamentarismus*, pt. 2: *Die regionalen Repräsentativkörperschaften* (Wien, 2000), 1905; Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii*, 34–7.

<sup>29</sup> Bernardo Benussi, *L'Istria nei suoi due millenni di storia* (Rovinj, 1997), 502–3.

<sup>30</sup> *Stenographische Protokolle des Abgeordnetenhauses des Reichsrates*, I. Legislaturperiode, I. Session, 123. Sitzung, 26 May 1862, 2856–8.

<sup>31</sup> Državni arhiv u Pazinu, Zbirka pisama, Correspondence Juraj Dobrila – Giuseppe Parisini.

<sup>32</sup> Almerigo Apollonio, *Libertà Autonomia Nazionalità. Trieste, l'Istria e il Goriziano nell'impero di Francesco Giuseppe: 1848–1870* (Trieste, 2007), 154.

participation, citing concerns that episcopal honour was incompatible with the contentious rhetoric of parliamentary debates.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, they remained nominal members as virilists. During his tenure in the Poreč Council, Dobrila observed that the Italian representatives regarded the Margraviate as an exclusively Italian province in historical, political, and cultural terms. His opposition to this interpretation, which effectively denied the Slavic population equal representation in public life, was most evident in early 1863. He delivered a speech endorsing the Slavic deputies' second attempt to convince the Italian majority of the necessity to publish parliamentary minutes and laws in both provincial languages. The language question and the intransigence of Italian deputies remained a persistent challenge in the Provincial Council. Notably, even half a century later, during the last sessions held in 1910, speeches delivered in Croatian were excluded from the minutes, and only a brief annotation stating 'speaks Slavic' [Ital. *parla slavo*] was added next to the speaker's name.

Dobrila's speech on that occasion extended beyond the issue of Council's minutes, largely focusing on the need for Istrian Italians to better understand the Slavic population's claims for linguistic equality, especially with regard to education in their native language. However, the most significant aspects of Dobrila's views are encapsulated in his statements at the opening and the conclusion of the speech. In his introductory remarks, the bishop emphasised: "I hold my position as pastor to the Italians, but also to the Slavs. No one can show me an act in which I have wronged the Italian element; on the other hand, I must also care for the well-being of the Slavs." Throughout most of his presentation, Dobrila maintained the composed tone set in these introductory sentences. However, in the concluding section, he delivered lines frequently quoted in both Croatian and Italian historiography, and often subject to varying interpretations:<sup>34</sup> "I ask the Chamber to recognise that we are living in difficult times, and it is a sin to sow discord. Slavic people are now asleep, but those who sleep are not dead; those who sleep can awaken, and when they do, they might do so in a way that could perhaps displease the Italian element".<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii*, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Apollonio, *Libertà Autonomia Nazionalità*, 220–1.

<sup>35</sup> *Atti della prima e seconda Dieta provinciale dell'Istria in Parenzo* (Rovinj, 1863), 85.

Summarising Dobrila's experiences in the decade following his appointment as the bishop of Poreč, it is clear that they deepened his understanding of the circumstances he needed to navigate to achieve his plans and wishes. As a bishop, he met with the comprehension of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, but also their reluctance to fully embrace his ideas. As a protector and representative of Slavic interests, he became acutely aware of the unequal power dynamics in the province. These roles were intertwined with his desire to strengthen, or at least preserve, the influence of the Church and its representatives in rural areas. He regarded Istrian-origin priests, descendants of Slavic families, not only as defenders of the rural population against liberal influences but also as supporters in advancing the position of the Slavic portion of the population. Faced with these limitations, Dobrila recognised that he had to rely on his own strengths and abilities, at least for the time being.

#### RELYING ON OWN STRENGTHS

From Dobrila's perspective, the Diocese of Poreč-Pula under his care was grappling with spiritual and moral decay. He sought to counteract these unfavourable trends by establishing a network of like-minded priests and supportive members of the peasant population, willing to advance his initiatives. He maintained close ties with both groups throughout his life, staying well-informed of local circumstances through episcopal visitations and correspondence. Croatian literature, particularly works authored by Dobrila's contemporaries from the priestly ranks, often portray him in a hagiographic light, which might lead some readers to challenge the reliability of such accounts. However, extant sources reveal that these testimonies are actually an accurate reflection of Dobrila's real character. Several examples serve to substantiate this assumption.

Dobrila's diary entries from 1879, written just two to three years before his death, corroborate his approach. The first two pages catalogue his correspondents for the year, including numerous priests and residents from both Istrian dioceses, proving that the surviving correspondence represents only a fraction of his extensive communication network. Furthermore, notes from his summer visitation to northern Istria within the Diocese of Trieste-Koper, which he headed in his final years, show that even in advanced age, despite illness

and physical frailty, he continued to meticulously document local conditions, the material and spiritual welfare of the population, and the commitment of local clergymen.<sup>36</sup>

His preserved correspondence provides further insight into his methods. For instance, in his letters to Grgur Žmak, the parish priest of Ližnjan in southern Istria, Dobrila advised him to rely on the village headman [Croat. *župan*], who was “smart and experienced”, to build the church.<sup>37</sup> In another instance, Dobrila brought Josip Velikanje, a young Slovenian priest, to the town of Juršići to improve the moral situation in the area notorious for crime and delinquency.<sup>38</sup> This move coincided with Dobrila’s relocation from Poreč-Pula to the Diocese of Trieste-Koper. Despite his transfer, Dobrila continued to support Velikanje’s efforts, financially and otherwise.<sup>39</sup> Velikanje proved to be an exceptional choice, becoming a legend over the next half-century and earning the nickname of ‘hajduk priest’ for his unconventional methods that significantly influenced local behaviours and customs. A frequently cited, albeit unprovable, anecdote from his early ministry involves Velikanje brandishing a crucifix in one hand and a pistol in the other, and telling the crowd: “If you will not listen to this (cross), then you will listen to this (gun)”.<sup>40</sup>

Dobrila’s high expectations of local priests, from whom he demanded the same level of zeal that he applied to his mission, are evident in the letters of Jakov Volčić, a Slovenian priest who served in Zarečje, in Central Istria.<sup>41</sup> A letter from September 1877 underscores Dobrila’s approach to visitations and is particularly noteworthy because it doesn’t solely present positive impressions of the priest in question. Volčić noted Dobrila’s undeniable commitment and effort to visit

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<sup>36</sup> Diary notes were inserted on the blank pages of the official diocesan publication, see Knjižnica Nadbiskupskog bogoslovnog sjemeništa u Zagrebu, sig. 24165, Directorium liturgicum SS. ecclesiarum Tergestinae et Iustinopolitanae ... Ad Annum MDCCCLXXIX.

<sup>37</sup> Ante Jukopila, *Ližnjan u prošlosti* (Rijeka, 1973), 25.

<sup>38</sup> Cvetko Svetlik, *Velikan je pop hajduški* (Ljubljana, 1997); Stipan Trogrlić, ‘Josip Velikanje – hajdučki pop’, *Nova Istra*, xviii, 2–3 (2001), 223–6.

<sup>39</sup> Mihovil Dabo, ‘Stvarni problemi i popularna predodžba: postavljanje Josipa Velikanje za kapelana u Juršićima’, *Histria*, i, 1 (2011), 61–78.

<sup>40</sup> Trogrlić, ‘Josip Velikanje’, 225.

<sup>41</sup> Jurij Fikfak (ed.), *Jakov Volčić in njegovo delo, Zbornik prispevkov in gradiva* (Pazin–Ljubljana, 1988).

even the smallest, often remote places, as well his intimate communication with ordinary people. However, it is clear from Volčič's account that Dobrila did not spare the priests. The bishop's criticism was particularly pointed in a statement made to the faithful in the presence of their priest: "The Church used to have wooden chalices, and golden priests; now it has chalices of gold, and wooden priests". These experiences led Volčič to conclude: "I think that our bishop possesses a lot of absolutist spirit".<sup>42</sup>

As previously mentioned, Dobrila's primary goal was to increase the number of future priests originating from the Slavic rural population. To this end, it was essential to raise the level of education in rural areas. Throughout his visitations and in his correspondence, Dobrila showed particular interest in boys and young men who could become successful thanks to financial support for their education. From the early 1860s until the end of his life, he supported the education of children in both Istrian dioceses. It is difficult to determine the exact number of students supported by the bishop, but numerous testimonies in literature and in archival sources attest to the breadth of his assistance.<sup>43</sup> Dobrila's first biography, although not subjected to rigorous historiographical criticism, but rather based on many often inaccessible sources, explicitly states that he spent between 35,000 and 40,000 forints on the education of youth during his tenure at the episcopal see in Poreč (until 1875). This substantial financial support undeniably shaped the lives of many young men from rural Istria. Still, occasional misjudgements in the bishop's assessment of scholarship applicants were inevitable. Furthermore, harsh living conditions sometimes prevented those boys from completing their schooling. A notable example is definitely the 1873 case of support denied to Matko Laginja, then a student.<sup>44</sup> Whether the withdrawal of support was due to the bishop's limited finances or to differing worldviews is of lesser consequence than the fact that Laginja went on to become a prominent figure in the political and national emancipation of Istrian Croats from the 1880s onward. His lifelong engagement

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<sup>42</sup> Hrvatski državni arhiv, Rukopisna ostavština Vjekoslava Spinčića, 64–62/1877, Jakov Volčič's letter to Vjekoslav Spinčić, 1 Sep. 1877.

<sup>43</sup> Dabo, *Sve za Boga*, 113–6, 124.

<sup>44</sup> Nacionalna i sveučilišna knjižnica (hereinafter: NSK), Rukopisna zbirka, Dobrila, Juraj korespondencija, Letter to Matko Laginja, 30 Sep. 1873.

greatly strengthened the position of Istrian Croats in opposition to the influence of the Italian bourgeoisie.<sup>45</sup>

In line with his consistent work and focus on long-term outcomes, in 1865 Dobrila established a foundation for the promotion of education within the Diocese of Poreč-Pula. The foundation was endowed with a principal sum of 16,000 forints in government bonds, with the accrued interest allocated to fund eight scholarships for students from the diocese. According to the foundation's rules, scholarships were to be awarded posthumously; however, during his lifetime, Dobrila personally managed the interest and granted aid to students at his own discretion. Significant subsequent provisions increased the principal amount, yet the most noteworthy aspect lies in the selection criteria for scholarship recipients, reflecting Dobrila's overarching goals. Dobrila noted that urban Istrian areas, predominantly inhabited by Italians, were already adequately supplied with priests and would continue to be so. Consequently, the scholarships were designated for gymnasium students, "sons of honest, respectable Slavic parents, born in the rural areas of the Diocese of Poreč and Pula, excluding cities and marketplaces". Additionally, if there were insufficient eligible gymnasium candidates, students from lower schools could apply, subject to the same conditions. Scholarship recipients were required to learn Slavic (later specified as Croatian or Slovenian) and German during their secondary education.

While the scholarships were intended to cease upon the completion of the gymnasium education, Dobrila introduced some notable exceptions. Upon the foundation's inception and throughout his life, the Central Seminary in Gorizia offered more guaranteed placements for seminarians from the Diocese of Poreč-Pula than there were interested candidates. Anticipating that this imbalance would be rectified, partly through his initiatives, Dobrila allowed that the foundation prolonged scholarships until the end of theological studies for those pursuing this path, once all guaranteed places had been filled. Moreover, Dobrila extended this support to any gymnasium graduate who excelled academically but did not pursue a clerical vocation, initially specifying medical and law students, and including

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<sup>45</sup> For reliable biography and extensive bibliography, see Mirjana Strčić and Petar Strčić, *Hrvatski istarski trolist. Laginja, Mandić, Spinčić* (Rijeka, 1996).

philosophy students from the 1870s onwards.<sup>46</sup> These guidelines underscore Dobrila's primary aim of enhancing the spiritual conditions in rural areas while recognising the necessity of broader educational influence. The foundation's establishment also demonstrated the alignment of Dobrila's efforts with the Habsburgs' objectives, which earned him the Order of the Iron Crown of the Second Class, in February 1866.<sup>47</sup>

In his pastoral and revival efforts, Dobrila heavily relied on the influence of the press. He aimed to foster written culture among the rural Istrian Croats and Slovenes. At the time, Croatian culture in Istria was almost exclusively oral, with illiteracy rampant among the rural Slavic population.<sup>48</sup> By promoting and distributing publications that he deemed suitable, the bishop sought to strengthen the faithful's attachment to the Catholic Church, enhance literacy, and elevate the significance of written culture in rural areas. This effort also laid the groundwork for the so-called Croatian reading room movement, which, drawing inspiration from the initiatives developed elsewhere in the Habsburg Monarchy, would impact Istria by the late nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> To achieve these objectives, he utilised various publications and distribution methods.

As previously noted, the prayer book *Otče, budi volja tvoja!* held particular significance, with four editions printed during Dobrila's lifetime, the last reaching a circulation of 4,000 copies.<sup>50</sup> It was sold at the lowest possible price, and many copies were distributed during visitations or through local priests. Similar objectives were pursued through the distribution of Dobrila's printed episcopal epistles. The preserved instruction of 1875, from the Ordinariate of Poreč to priests, directed them to "distribute publications as efficiently as possible, so that, if possible, not a single house in which someone

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<sup>46</sup> ABPP, kut. 3Bd, Đačka zaklada bisk. Dobrile, Stiftbrief, 2033/P, 29 July 1865; For the integral transcript with subsequent extensions and the Croatian translation, see Dabo, *Sve za Boga*, 252–61.

<sup>47</sup> Mladen Juvenal Milohanić, *Dr. Juraj Dobrila. Glasnik istine, branitelj naroda i Crkve. Rodoljub, filantrop, homo politicus* (Pazin, 2012), 34.

<sup>48</sup> Wiggermann, *K.u.K. Kriegsmarine und Politik*, 31; Manin and Šetić, 'Prilike u Istri uoči', 712.

<sup>49</sup> F. Sloković, 'Narodne čitaonice u Istri', *Hrvatska čitaonička društva u Istri u 19. i početkom 20. stoljeća* (Pula–Pazin, 1993), 89–97.

<sup>50</sup> *Naša sloga*, xii (1881), 13, 52.

is able to read would be left without a copy”.<sup>51</sup> Dobrila also contemplated publishing booklets with content suitable for the general readership.<sup>52</sup> Recognising his own limitations, he sought a solution that would integrate various elements of his activities, including the cooperation with the Zagreb St. Jerome Society [Croat. *Društvo sv. Jeronima*], founded in 1868.<sup>53</sup> Dobrila regularly supported the Society, was among its founders, and actively recruited members throughout Istria. His efforts were consistently acknowledged in the annual reports published in the calendar *Danica*. By the year of his death, the St. Jerome Society, present in all Habsburg provinces inhabited by Croats, had a substantial number of members in Istria. Reports emphasised Dobrila’s contributions but without naming him directly, and instead used such phrases as “unnamed benefactor” – “ardent friend” – “some bishop”. Given that, from the 1870s onward, Dobrila was increasingly recognised by opponents as an advocate of Slavic emancipation from Italian influence in Istria, this discretion was likely intended to shield him from potential repercussions.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, the publication of Dobrila’s first biography by the St. Jerome Society in the year of his death further attests to his affiliation with this Zagreb-based association.<sup>55</sup>

Of utmost importance to newspapers intended for Croats in Istria was the launch of the newspaper *Naša sloga* [Our unity]. After years of preparation, the journal began to publish in 1870, initially twice a month. Although there is extensive scholarship on this journal,<sup>56</sup> its significance in the context of Dobrila’s efforts can be summarised in a couple of elements. Firstly, from the bishop’s perspective, the

<sup>51</sup> ABPP, XIV/30 – Sede vacante, kut.168J, br. 986, 20 Sep. 1875.

<sup>52</sup> Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, Ljubljana, Rokopisna zbirka in zbirka redkih tiskov, Juraj Dobrila’s letter to dr. Janez Bleiweis, 27 Aug. 1858.

<sup>53</sup> Josip Butorac, ‘Povijest Društva sv. Jeronima ili Društva sv. Ćirila i Metoda 1868–1968’, *Bogoslovska smotra*, xxxviii, 3–4 (1968), 379.

<sup>54</sup> Dabo, *Sve za Boga*, 108–13.

<sup>55</sup> Rubetić, *Vjekopis Dra Jurja Dobrile*.

<sup>56</sup> Nevio Šetić, *O povezanosti Istre s ostalim hrvatskim zemljama – Naša Sloga 1870.–1915.* (Zagreb, 2005); Mihovil Dabo and Nevio Šetić, *Naša sloga 1870.–1915. Novine hrvatskoga preporodnoga i nacionalno-integracijskoga procesa u Istri i na kvarnerskim otocima. Izbor iz građe* (Pula, 2020); Mihovil Dabo, Teodora Fonović Cvijanović, and Vanessa Vitković Marčeta (eds), *Zbornik radova s Međunarodnoga znanstvenog skupa Naša sloga (1870.–2020.)* (Pula, 2022).



newspaper was launched during a period of dual pressures on Istrian Croats – an experience which Dobrila described in one of his letters as being caught in pliers. He referred to the influence of the Italian bourgeoisie and a series of legal measures enacted in the late 1860s that significantly curtailed the Catholic Church's influence on Austro-Hungarian society and its public life.<sup>57</sup> The end of the Concordat period was not perceived as a positive development by the Church's dignitaries, like Dobrila. This circumstance motivated him to gather a core group of trusted associates from the Istrian Croatian clergy, and create a publishing venture. The initial print run was 500 copies, with Dobrila and an unnamed helper – likely his supporter and friend, Bishop Strossmayer – financing 400 copies.<sup>58</sup> Dobrila's hope to secure some modest 100 subscribers across all of Istria provides insight into the levels of literacy, economic challenges, and the nascent national identification among the Croats in the peninsula. Despite these challenges, *Naša sloga* significantly exceeded the bishop's modest expectations. It not only outlived Dobrila but also emerged as the primary tool for political and national agitation among Istrian Croats until the First World War.

#### THE 1873 ELECTIONS AND THE TRANSITION TO THE TRIESTE-KOPER CHAIR

In the early 1870s, the first signs of emancipation from the influence of the Italian bourgeoisie among the Istrian Slavic population began to manifest, marking the onset of political and national conflicts in the province. While it is difficult to accurately gauge the level of national identification within the entire population, it is evident that over time, an increasing number of individuals responded to the appeals of national leaders. Significant milestones included the launch of *Naša sloga*, which, despite considerable hurdles in its first decade of existence, managed to establish a reliable circle of associates and readers. Equally significant were the opening of the first reading rooms and the first mass gatherings, known as *tabori*. The first Istrian *tabor* was held in the Slovenian part of the Margraviate in 1870, followed by the

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<sup>57</sup> Leeb et al., *Geschichte des Christentums*, 380–91.

<sup>58</sup> ABPP, kut. Dobrila II, fasc. Dobrilina originalna pisma, Juraj Dobrila's letter to Antun Karabaić, 11 Jan. 1870.

successful organisation of the first Croatian *tabor* the following year. Although Italian representatives continued to dominate provincial politics, the proportion of Croatian and Slovenian deputies elected to the Provincial Council began to change noticeably. This shift marked the beginning of greater influence of Croatian and Slovenian deputies on the work of autonomous provincial institutions – a trend that would continue to be apparent in the coming decades. In 1874, the Political Society *Edinost* was founded in Trieste, organising political activities among Istrian Croats and Slovenes until 1902.<sup>59</sup>

In this context, it is necessary to consider how Istria was impacted by changes made in 1873 to the electoral law. Deputies to the Imperial Council were no longer elected by the Provincial Council but through special elections, and their number increased from two to four. Two of these deputies were elected from the rural municipalities of eastern and western Istria. While the influence of the Italian bourgeoisie was widespread throughout the province, it was most prevalent in the western part. In contrast, the eastern part, particularly the hinterland of Rijeka with its centre in Kastav, was more strongly influenced by neighbouring Croatian areas and distanced itself from Italian sway more quickly, although this influence remained significant well into the twentieth century. The ballot in this part of Istria ended with the election of Dinko Vitezić, a Croat who played a prominent role in representing the interests of his compatriots in the Imperial Council. Vitezić was re-elected multiple times, serving until 1891, which was a testament to the growing political engagement and influence of the Croatian population in Istria.<sup>60</sup>

In western Istria, the landscape was considerably more complex, and advocates of the Slavic politics needed to identify a candidate capable of effectively countering the Italian influence while securing broader recognition among both the Croatian and Slovenian populations. The idea of Dobrila standing as a potential candidate emerged among the associates of *Naša sloga*. The newspaper's editor conveyed this proposal to the Bishop of Poreč, who, in his reply, expressed several reasons for his hesitation to accept such a challenging

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<sup>59</sup> Manin and Šetić, 'Prilike u Istri uoči', 713–7; Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii*, 65–89.

<sup>60</sup> Jaroslav Šidak et al., *Povijest hrvatskog naroda g. 1860–1914* (Zagreb, 1968), 113–14.

role. At sixty-one years, Dobrila cited his advanced age, unfavourable provincial conditions, and the dominance of opponents west of the Učka – the mountain symbolising the eastern boundary of the peninsula – referring to the Italian bourgeoisie’s control over autonomous provincial affairs. He also shared his negative views of the Imperial Council, stating that “There is no other assembly in the world where such ugly and derogatory statements about the Catholic faith and the Church are made as those cursed within the Imperial Council”.<sup>61</sup>

Despite these substantial reservations, suggesting that his hesitation was genuine, Dobrila ultimately agreed to stand as a candidate. The election committee, based in Trieste, organised the campaign among the Croatian and Slovenian populations, with *Naša sloga* serving as the primary tool. The pre-election sentiment influenced the newspaper’s tone, which initially adopted a conciliatory stance towards Istrian Italians. This tone gradually gave way to more pointed rhetoric.<sup>62</sup> Articles not only informed rural readers about their electoral rights and opportunities but also highlighted national and class divides between rural voters and the Italian candidate. The Italian side put forward Marquis Gian Paolo Polesini, a nobleman from Poreč and a member of one of the most prominent and affluent Istrian families. *Naša sloga*, along with Dobrila’s associates involved in its publication, emphasised that Polesini was out of touch with the real challenges of the Slavic peasantry and lacked proficiency in German. This criticism underscored that Polesini was unfamiliar with the causes that he was supposed to represent in Vienna on behalf of the peasants of western Istria and unable to effectively communicate in the language required to advocate for them.<sup>63</sup>

The influence of the Italian side in western Istria remained strong, and for nearly two decades, until 1891, it proved too powerful for the loose network of Croatian and Slovenian activists, which ultimately led to Dobrila’s narrow defeat. More troubling than the loss itself was the nature of the campaign waged against him, which included graffiti on the walls of diocesan buildings, mockery, and attacks on his

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<sup>61</sup> NSK, Rukopisna zbirka, Dobrila, Juraj korespondencija, Letter to Antun Karabaić, 1873.

<sup>62</sup> Mirjana Gross, ‘Značaj prvih deset godišta ‘Naše sloge’ kao preporodnog lista’, *Zbornik Pazinski memorijal*, 2 (1970), 45–7.

<sup>63</sup> *Naša sloga*, iv (1873), 19, 75.

property. After the elections, Dobrila addressed these issues in both public and private letters to the editor of *Naša sloga*.<sup>64</sup>

Even more concerning was the pre-election atmosphere, marked by the persistence of inter-ethnic tensions. Although everyday life in Istria was not dominated by such frictions, as sometimes portrayed in the opposing national newspapers and suggested by earlier historiography, arguments and clashes from this period exerted a lasting influence. These national conflicts, shaped largely during this election period, continued to affect the population and their views in the following decades. Dobrila's difficult position in Poreč is illustrated by his letter from March 1875 to the Viennese Cardinal Joseph Rauscher, in which he lamented that the existing situation was intolerable. Prompted by the death of the former Bishop of Trieste-Koper, Dobrila expressed his desire to return to his native diocese and take over the vacant position.<sup>65</sup>

The process of gathering opinions on the most suitable candidate for the Bishopric of Trieste coincided with Dobrila's wishes. Surviving correspondence between Church dignitaries and state representatives offers useful information about Dobrila's reputation in high circles. The Trieste Governor's characterisation of him as a 'good Austrian Slav' is illustrative of this perception. Supported by the argumentation framed in pastoral, educational, political, and national terms, Dobrila was appointed Bishop of Trieste-Koper in May 1875.

Dobrila used his move to Trieste as an opportunity to revive an initiative that he had proposed in the early 1860s, namely the idea that the permanent or temporary unification of the administration of both Istrian dioceses would help increase the number of future priests. Central to this plan was the allocation of funds for the establishment of a boys' seminary affiliated with the German gymnasium in Pazin.<sup>66</sup> Dobrila's letter to the Viennese Apostolic Nuncio Lodovico Jacobini, dated September 1875, highlights this ultimate goal. Reflecting on the failure of his initial efforts to convince ecclesiastical and secular authorities of the necessity of unifying the dioceses, he concluded:

<sup>64</sup> 'Otvoreno pismo častnomu gospodinu Antonu Karabaiću, vlasniku 'Naše Sloge' u Trstu', *Naša sloga*, iv (1873), 21, 83–4; NSK, Rukopisna zbirka, Dobrila, Juraj korespondencija, Letter to Antun Karabaić, 29 Oct. 1873.

<sup>65</sup> Makso Pelozo, 'Dobriliino pismo kardinalu Rauscheru od 10 III 1875', *Zvona*, xx, 4 (1981), 4.

<sup>66</sup> Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii* 93–5; Dabo, *Sve za Boga*, 172–81.

After that time, I spared neither concern nor effort in this regard; however, without money, seminaries are not built, and without an institute for boys from the age of nine or ten onwards, there can be no seminarians. Among the three options, a choice needs to be made: either the unification of the dioceses, or, alternatively, at least the administration of Poreč should be entrusted to the Bishop of Trieste for fifteen years, or failing either, the irreparable ruin of both dioceses.<sup>67</sup>

The extensive preserved correspondence between Dobrila and representatives of both secular and ecclesiastical authorities, particularly the Governor of Trieste and the Apostolic Nuncio in Vienna, reveals several key points. Firstly, by the mid-1870s, Dobrila's initiative was taken more seriously than it had been fifteen years earlier. Responses from the Nuncio and the Governor suggest that neither Rome nor Vienna explicitly dismissed his proposals. This is further reflected in the fact that the episcopal see of Poreč remained vacant for three years following Dobrila's move to Trieste, with a new bishop appointed only in 1878.<sup>68</sup> Dobrila's detailed argumentation in support of his proposal demonstrates his circumspection; he was able to frame his idea in both religious and moral terms, and propose a financial plan to enable its implementation. Surviving letters also reveal that the ultimate stance of ecclesiastical and secular authorities remained unchanged. Both offered limited support: Austrian authorities endorsed the reduction of the number of dioceses but ignored the financial involvement suggested by Dobrila, while the Holy See pointed to the secular authorities' stance as a reason for deferring its definite position.<sup>69</sup>

It is challenging to precisely assess the role of the opposition in Istria regarding Dobrila's proposal. However, it is clear that an organised opposition existed and emerged relatively quickly. In August 1876, letters were sent to the emperor and the pope, requesting the prompt appointment of a new bishop of Poreč, and arguing that the prolonged vacancy was creating uncertainty among the faithful and fears that the diocese's income and assets might be misused. These letters were spearheaded by the Provincial Committee of the

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<sup>67</sup> ASDT, Atti di gestione particolare, b. 11, 93/Pr, Letter to Viennese Apostolic Nuncio Lodovico Jacobini, 4 Nov. 1875.

<sup>68</sup> Giampaolo Valdevit, *Chiesa e lotte nazionali: il caso di Trieste (1850–1919)* (Udine, 1979), 110–12; Gottsmann, *Rom und die nationalen Katholizismen*, 312–3.

<sup>69</sup> Cetnarowicz, *Odrodzenie narodowe w Istrii*, 94.

Margraviate of Istria, the highest provincial executive body, and were endorsed by prominent cities within the Diocese of Poreč-Pula as well as by segments of the clergy, including the Poreč Cathedral Chapter.<sup>70</sup> It is notable that both Dobrila's arguments and the opposition's requests were primarily framed in terms of the concern for the spiritual condition of the diocese. However, the opposition was largely composed of representatives of the Italian social and political elite, who advocated for preserving the exclusively Italian character of the province. This group increasingly viewed the Slavic clergy as proponents of the political and national emancipation of Istrian Croats and Slovenes. Conversely, Dobrila envisioned an expansion in the number of seminarians from Slavic rural backgrounds. In summary, while religious reasons featured prominently in both the advocacy for and criticism of the boys' seminary initiative, the underlying political and national context cannot be overlooked.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, Dobrila's idea did not take root, and the ecclesiastical boundaries remained unchanged. Nonetheless, until his death, the bishop remained committed to improving clerical recruitment and expanding educational opportunities in the Istrian interior. For example, the funds that he had saved, apart from the money already allocated for the foundation of the Diocese of Poreč-Pula, were intended to support scholarships within the Diocese of Trieste-Koper, with a particular focus on four districts in central and northern Istria.<sup>71</sup> Scholarships awarded both during his lifetime and after his death in 1882 enabled dozens of young Croatian and Slovenian men from Istria to pursue education, thereby contributing to the emergence of an educated class among the non-Italian population.

The impact of Dobrila's efforts is most clearly reflected in the political and national emancipation of Istrian Croats, even though, despite his aspirations, the peninsula's religious situation did not undergo a radical transformation. This discrepancy explains why Dobrila has been primarily remembered as a central figure in the national integration process of the Croatian element among the Istrian population,

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<sup>70</sup> Dabo, *Sve za Boga*, 181–9.

<sup>71</sup> Milohanić, *Dr. Juraj Dobrila*, 38–40.

while his religious significance is often regarded as secondary. A more balanced perspective should more explicitly connect Dobrila's ecclesiastical role and his genuine concern for religious circumstances with the broader social and national context in which he operated.

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