

The town is situated on the site of a pre-historic fortress. It was settled in ancient times, and in the Middle Ages it was the property of various feudal lords. In 1209 it was ruled by the Patriarchs of Aquileia and in 1490 it was taken over by Venice. The medieval walls which surround the town are well preserved because houses built much later use them for support. In front of the entrance to the town there is the town loggia which dates from the 17th century.

It now contains a collection of stone monuments. The medieval arrangement of narrow winding streets, small squares and covered alleys has remained more or less the same right up to the present day. The entrance to the town is through the old town gates. Most of the houses are on two floors. In the centre of the town there is a square with the Church of St. George (Sveti Juraj), with a separate four-sided bell tower. A presbytery with a polygonal end wall was built in the 15th century inside the old church which is divided into three parts by columns with pointed arches. At that time a Gothic net vaulted ceiling was added to the original building. In the 17th

century the church was extended and given a new stone facade. It has a valuable altar and paintings from the 16th

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and 18th

centuries. It also possesses a valuable painting of the Carpaccio school. The painting The Madonna of the Rosary is the work of the Italian 18th

century master M. Furlanetto. Some beautiful medieval frescoes have been preserved in churches outside the town. In the fraternity Church of St. Mary (Sveta Marija) below Oprtalj, which was built in the 15th

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century and extended in the 17

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centuries, the master Clerigin from Koper painted scenes from Mary's life on the triumphal arches and on the south wall in Renaissance style in 1471. Three other Istrian early Gothic masters painted similar scenes. In the Church of St. Leonard (Sveti Leonardo) there is a 17

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century altarpiece by Zorzo Ventura from Zadar. In the Church of St. Rochus (Sveti Rok) there is a fresco by the prominent Istrian master Anton of Padova (an Istrian village) from 1535 with a series of pictures of saints. In the single-naved Romanesque Church of St. Helen (Sveta Jelena) which is about 1 km to the south of Oprtalj, on the road for Motovun, there is a fresco by the Istrian master Clerigin of Koper. About 4.5 km from Oprtalj is the village of Zrenj which some think was the ancient town Stridon where St. Jerome (Sveti Jeronim, Hieronymus Sophronius Eusebius, c. 340-420) was born. He was an author of sacred writings and the first translator of the Old Testament from the original into Latin. Some writers believe that Stridon lay 12 km to the south of Postojna, somewhere near Pivka, where as earlier tradition places St. Jerome's Stridon in Strigova near Cakovec or even in Dalmatia.