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RESURRECTION OF BYZANTINE STYLE IN THE 13TH CENTURY CITY OF ZADAR, CROATIA

Abstract: After the first fall of Constantinople in 1204, the city remained under the Crusader occupation until 1261. During that time, the artistic production has not sized but continues to flourish outside the city in its remaining territories of the Empire. In the present-day city of Zadar in Croatia, the Collection of Religious Art in the Church of St. Mary includes several large 13th centuries carved marble icons that only can be recognized as a synthesis of two styles: Italian Romanesque and Byzantine. It is my goal in this paper to discuss these works to expand understanding of the nuances of the Italo-Byzantine style in general.

Keywords: Zadar, Venice, Italo-Byzantine, Iconography, Stone Icons, Ivory Panels

This paper is very much a work in progress, and therefore at the very infancy of reaching definitive conclusions based on presented research. Last year, while in Zadar, I visited the Museum of Religious Art located next to the Church of St. Mary (fig. 1) and was surprised to see in the very basement of the building rather modestly displayed stone icon that is the topic of this paper (I used „modestly“ expression in comparison with the rest of the artifacts displayed on the upper floors). The caption was also rather limited, with no dimensions, medium, or provenance of the work included (fig. 2).

During my inquiry, I came across information that the Nativity Stone Icon originally was found inside the 17th century Baroque Church of St. Simeon in Zadar, according to Ivo Petricioli and his publication from 1976.¹ The author also included dimensions for width and height, and later, I was able to get information about the thickness of the relief (85cm x 145 cm x 15 cm). The exact type of stone is still in the confirmation process, but most likely is a gray marble (fig. 3).

The city of Zadar has a unique, complex, and dynamic history reflected in its artistic production during the 12th and 13th centuries. When the Fourth Crusade arrived in Venice in 1202, they could not raise the 85,000 silver marks

¹ N. Klaić and I. Petricioli, *Zadar u srednjem vijeku do 1409*, Zadar 1976, 263.



Fig. 1 Church of St. Mary with the Museum of Religious Art, Zadar, Croatia, Photo: Author
Сл. 1. Црква Свете Марије, Музеј црквене уметности, Задар, Хрватска, фото: аутор

they initially agreed to pay Venice for provisions and the hire of ships.² The Republic interned them until they discharged debt by conquering Zadar for the Italians. During the next centuries, Zadar functioned as a well-fortified stronghold to secure Venetian trade routes on the Adriatic Sea. Yet, under such trying circumstances, the city became one of the most prominent artistic centers in Dalmatia. It is commonly known as a small Rome, where every simple step takes one on to a diverse chronological and stylistic voyage.

There are three basic elements at work in the cultural consciousness in this part of the world: Franco-Carolingian influences from the northwest, Latin-Benedictine elements from the across the Adriatic, and Byzantine culture from the East.³ All are clearly illustrated in Zadar's artistic production, with a special emphasis on derivative works, commonly labeled as Italo-Byzantine style based on Byzantine models, yet are not purely Byzantine and not purely Western in character. Venice represented geographically and culturally closest source for influences where Byzantine tradition "adopted" other styles of the period. A blend of Byzantine form and Romanesque robustness became the trademark of three - dimensional works, including the so-called stone icons and ivory reliefs. Dalmatian cities, including Zadar, have partially preserved archival records of well- developed workshops and ateliers led by local and Italian masters.⁴

² *Ibid.*, 175-79.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ I. Supićić, Ed. *Croatia in the Early Middle Ages, A Cultural Survey*, London 1999, 415-513.

Fig. 2 Caption for the
Nativity Stone Icon,
Museum of Religious Art,
Zadar, Photo: Author

Сл. 2. Легенда камене
иконе, Музеј црквене
уметности, Задар, фото:
аутор

ROMANIČKO-BIZANTSKO KIPARSTVO:
IKONA KRISTOVA ROĐENJA XIII st.
ROMANESQUE –BYZANTINE SCLUPTURE:
ICON OF THE NATIVITY 13th cent.

According to the caption of the stone Icon, it stylistically belongs to the commonly labeled body of works as the Italo-Byzantine. To be more specific, the typological outline based on selected ivory panels studied by Andrew Keck in 1930 emphasizes some important elements easily recognized in the stone Icon as well:⁵

- Rendering heads in an almost full profile so that the second eye is seldom seen;
- Carving of the features on the concealed side of the head, even though the retreat inward is at a sharp angle;
- The profiles lack the natural indentation between forehead and nose;
- The hair is carved with sharp parallel strokes away from the forehead in pompadour fashion;
- Faces often show a crude hacking of the cheek and jaw (a sign of provincial work);
- The ornament and drapery, although based on the Byzantine prototype, show treatment a falling away from the refinement and technical accomplishment of the East.

In addition to Venice, Ravenna was another city in Italy close to Zadar, a possible source of influence for this hybrid style. Although Ravenna has a wealth of Byzantine monuments, Venice played a much more prominent role in Dalmatia, both historically and culturally. Bluntly speaking, Ravenna was too “Byzantine” for the Zadar population at the time. On the other hand, Venice maintained that fine balance of mixed stylistic references during the 12th and 13th centuries—never purely Byzantine and never purely Western exactly what is seen in the stone Icon (fig. 4).

The most Byzantine of all figures is the Virgin, in a typical relaxing pose, dressed in maphorion ornamented with drilled stars visible on her forehead and left shoulder, while supporting her head with her right arm as seen in numerous Byzantine Nativity scenes. The fine details of drapery folds are predominately refined, while her body’s scale and position follow Byzantine compositional conventions as mentioned: Christ’s head in profile, no natural indentation between forehead and nose in two right-hand figures of the shepherds with their prominent crude facial features. Visual comparison with the 10th century Byzantine ivory plaque from the Baltimore Walters Art Museum reveals several common elements: portraying figures of angels with their stiff poses and treatment of drapery, lacking refinements and technical skills of major artistic workshops

⁵ A. Keck, *A Group of Italo-Byzantine Ivories*, The Art Bulletin, Vol. 12. 2 (June 1930), 147-8.



Fig. 3 See Caption Fig. 2, Photo: Author

Сл. 3. Види легенду уз сл.2, фото: аутор



Fig. 4 Details of the Virgin and Shepherds, Stone Icon, Zadar, Photo: Author

Сл. 4. Детаљи Богородице и пастира, Камена икона, Музеј црквене уметности, Задар, фото: аутор

located in Constantinople or Thessaloniki. Regardless its Byzantine style, the plaque results from the hands of the provincial, local artist and therefore rather crude in its details (fig. 5)⁶. On the other hand, comparison between the stone Icon and the ivory panel of Nativity produced in the 12th century centers such as Venice, reveals obvious superior skill of the Italian master (fig. 6).⁷

Despite the crowded composition with an additional Annunciation scene, the Italian panel shares with Zadar's work numerous figures executed with heads in profile included the wrapped baby Christ with his entire body depicted in profile. Furthermore, the figures' hairstyle is comparable with several stone Icon figures (especially Joseph and midwives). In both works, the baby Christ in the mangers has distinctive soft hair wave line (fig. 7). He looks calm and reminiscent of depictions of mature Christ seen in numerous early Christian examples such as the so-called Dogmatic marble sarcophagus that dates to the early 4th century, held in the Vatican Museums (fig.8).

⁶ *Byzantine Art at the Walters Art Museum*, <https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/walters-ivory> (accessed November 10, 2020).

⁷ *The Victoria and Albert Museum Collection*, <https://www.pinterest.ru/pin/14003448827472397/> (accessed November 10, 2020).

Based on visual comparison, figure of baby Christ in the stone Icon suggests the intention to preserve and transfer elements of early Christian stylistic exploratory iconography of depicting young, beautiful, and mellow Christ (for example the Good Shepherd motif).⁸

One of the issues of the Nativity Icon is its original function. It was Petricioli who, in his article from 1979, suggests several possibilities.⁹ He discusses another author Jovanka Maksimović and her article from 1974, where she made several erroneous conclusions regarding provenances, media, and possible functions of the relevant works from the Cathedral of St. Anastasia in Zadar.¹⁰ Petricioli examined these works that included partially damaged marble panel with the Unknown Female Saint (fig. 9) and the second marble panel with St. Anastasia (fig. 10), both from the 12th century.

He concluded that these panels were parts of the decoration of the lost polygonal baptistery of the Cathedral (fig. 11).

The frontal figures on both panels are executed within a tradition of Italo-Byzantine style with female saints dressed in official Byzantine vestments and with a rather rigid „Romanesque“ expression of face that is serene and lacking refinement typical for numerous Italian 13th-century examples of the gilded wooden statue of Madonna and Child (fig. 12). Therefore, based on the probable functions of two mentioned works, also „modestly“ displayed in the basement of the Museum of Religious Art in Zadar (both with no captions), the Nativity stone Icon was most likely a part of a larger structure comparable to the lost baptistery in the cathedral of St. Anastasia in Zadar, stone altar screen or Nikola Pisano's pulpit of the baptistery of Pisa Cathedral, 1259-1260 (fig. 13).¹¹



Fig. 5 Panel with the Nativity Scene, Byzantine, Ivory, 10th Century, Baltimore Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Photo: <https://www.thebyzantinelegacy.com/walters-ivory>

Сл. 5. Панел са сценом Христовог рођења, Византија, слоновача, 10. век, Балтиморски уметнички музеј Волтер, Балтимор

⁸ For more on early iconography of Christ see R.M. Jensen, *Face to Face, Portrait of the Divine in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 2005, 134-70.

⁹ I. Petricioli, *Dva priloga povjesti zadarske katedrale*, Peristil 22 (1979), 10.

¹⁰ J. Maksimović, *Kamene ikone u Zadru*, Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta, Vol. XII-1 (1974), 385-89.

¹¹ Petricioli, in his work from 1976 mentions several known masters from the beginning of the 12th century. Among them, Andrija and Martin were active at the beginning of the 13th century, and Nazarije and Aluin became prominent later in the century. In addition, there is a record of Italian masters Marin and Stjepan working in Zadar (*Zadar u Srednjem vijeku do 1409*, 275). I intend to examine notary records in Zadar's archives further.



Fig. 6 Panel with Christological Scenes (Detail): The Annunciation with the Nativity, Ivory, North Italian (Venice?), 12th Century, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Photo: <https://www.pinterest.ru/pin/14003448827472397/>

Сл. 6. Панел са христолошким сценама (детали), Благовести са рођењем Христа, слоновача, Северна Италија (Венеција?), 12. век, Музеј Викторије и Алберта, Лондон



Fig. 7 Detail of the Baby in the Manger, Stone Icon, Zadar, Photo: Author

Сл. 7. Детаљ бебе у колевци, Камена икона, Задар, фото: аутор



Fig. 8 Images of Christ, Details, Dogmatic Sarcophagus, Marble, First Half of the 4th Century, Museo Pio Cristiano, The Vatican, Rome, Photo: <https://www.christianiconography.info/sicily/sarc-Dogmatic.loavesLazarus.html>

Сл. 8. Представљање Христа, детаљи, Догматски саркофаг, мермер, прва половина 4. века, Пијев музеј хришћанства, Ватикан, Италија

Fig. 9 The Unknown Saint, Breccia Marble, 13th Century, Museum of Religious Art, Zadar, Photo: Author

Сл. 9. Непознати светитељ, бреџија мермер, 13. век, Музеј црквене уметности, Задар, фото: аутор



Fig. 10 St. Anastasia, Breccia Marble, 13th Century, Museum of Religious Art, Zadar, Photo: Author

Сл. 10. Света Анастасија, бреџија мермер, 13. век, Музеј црквене уметности, Задар, фото: аутор

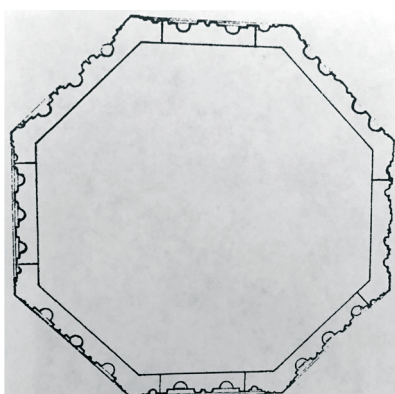


Fig. 11 Lost Baptistry, Cathedral of St. Anastasia, Zadar, Photo: After I. Petricoli (Peristil, 8); Possible Reconstruction, Photo: Author

Сл. 11. Уништена крстионица, Катедрала Св. Анастасије, Задар, према И. Петриџију (Перистил 8); могућа реконструкција, фото: аутор



Fig. 12 Romanesque Madonna and Child, Detail, Gilded Wood, 13th Century, Italy and the Marble Panels, Photo: Author

Сл. 12. Романичка Богородица са Христом, детаљ, дрво са позлатом, 13. век, Италија; мермерни панели, фото: аутор



Fig. 13 Nicola Pisano, Detail from the Pulpit for the Pisa Baptistery, Marble, 1259-1261, Pisa, Panel with the Nativity Scene, Photo: <http://www.italianrenaissance.org/nicola-pisano-baptistery-pulpit-pisa/>

Сл.13. Никола Пизано, детаљ приповедаонице крстионице, мермер 1259-1261., Пиза, Панел са сценом Христовог рођења



Fig. 14 Possible Functions of the Nativity Stone Icon, Photo: Author
Сл. 14. Могуће функције камене иконе Христовог рођења. фото: аутор

In conclusion, and as I mentioned at the very begging of the paper, this is still a work in progress. Additional data on the workshops and the local masters who produced the hybrid works in Zadar, with our knowledge of specific patrons who were behind these commissions, will significantly improve understanding of the nuances of the Italo-Byzantine style in general.

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ВАСКРСЕЊЕ ВИЗАНТИЈСКОГ СТИЛА У 13. ВЕКУ У ГРАДУ ЗАДРУ (ХРВАТСКА)

После првог пада Константинопоља 1204. године, град је био под контролом крсташа до 1261. године. Током тог времена, уметничко стваралаштво није прекинуто, већ је настављено у територијама византијског царства. У неким географским областима које нису типичне за византијско стваралаштво и које су привремено и недобровољно припадале Византији, постоје дела која су произведена у хибридном стилском маниру и која је веома тешко класификовати по стандардно утврђеним категоријама. На пример, град Задар (Хрватска) у својој колекцији религиозне уметности, у цркви Свете Марије, има неколико великих мраморних икона из 13. века које изгледају као да су израђене у синтези два стила: романичко-италијански и византијски. Важно је напоменути да је Задар био почетна станица четвртог крсташког похода на путу до Свете земље, преко Константинопоља. Моје мишљење је да је „васкрсење“ или обнова византијског стила у овој провинцији потекло из неке локалне радионице, са мајстором или мајсторима који су живели у Задру и који су дошли у додир са дериватима венецијанске културне баштине, у време када је република пљачкала град да би наплатила трошкове бродова које је изнајмила крсташима, а који их нису платили, већ су понудили град Задар уместо новца. Мој циљ је да анализирам поменуте примере из Задра који су резултат јединствене израде и који, истовремено, поседују и западњачке романичке елементе и византијску иконографију. Надам се да ћу у блиској будућности, моћи да откријем ко су били ктитори, као и могуће тржиште за ове радове, у време вишедеценијске окупације византијске престонице од стране Латина.