

Zum Gedächtnisse
an die Verunglückten der
Bemannung der S. M. Fregatte
Radetzky
20. Februar 1869

Među spomenicima se ističu kapela obitelji Dojmi de Lupis, koja pokazuje vještinu obrade kamena krajem XIX stoljeća i četiri djela kipara Ivana Rendića, koji je podigao mnogo sličnih spomenika na primorskim grobljima s realistički oblikovanim, simboličnim kipovima i u ishitrenim, izvještačenim oblicima, koje je ispreplićao i nagomilavao secesionističkim i folklornim motivima, a ponekad i umrtvjeljem mozaikom. Sve te značajke njegovog kiparstva pokazuju na ovom groblju četiri spomenika; onaj s alegorijskim ženskim likom nad grobom Luke Tramontane iz 1894. godine, grob I. Vojkovića podignut 1899. godine s realistički do sitnica izmučenim kipom žene koja zalijeva ruže pred grobišnim križem i grob obitelji Basileo također iz kraja prošlog stoljeća.⁷³⁹⁾ Tim realističkim djelima strpljivo obrađenih pojedinosti, koje im oduzeše samodjelatnost stvaralačke pobude, ali koje su naručitelji cijevali, onda suvremeno hrvatsko kiparstvo sa svojim najpoznatijim kiparom očitivalo se i na Visu.

⁷³⁹⁾ On je bio izradio i kip austrijskog cara Franje Josipa u Visu. Ibid, str. 26.

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BUILDINGS OF ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AND WORKS
OF ART ON THE ISLAND OF VIS DATING FROM 9TH TO 19TH
CENTURIES

By Cvito Fisković

There has been a continued artistic activity on the Island of Vis since the early Middle Ages (the Croats settled there in the 9th century) until the current century. That activity was generally connected with the artistic trends prevailing on the Dalmatian mainland, but it had closer ties with artistic pursuits taking place on the Island of Hvar whose mediaeval Commune embraced also the Island of Vis.

Although the quality of the island's monuments — works of architecture, sculpture, painting, and various artifacts — is not particularly outstanding which is mostly due to the fact that the island had no mediaeval city, no residence of wealthy bishops or nobility, capable of becoming a cultural centre of any importance, the existing monuments, however, are interesting and notable specimens since, incorporating all the great European styles, they represent their Dalmatian variants and solutions adapted to the circumstances prevailing in the periods of their realization.

The real cultural pioneers in the area were the monks of the Order of St. Benedict who built their small pre-Romanesque churches on the

islands of the Vis area as early as 11th century. Fragments of pre-Romanesque stone-carved interlacing ornament were found on Svetac Island near Vis, while two Benedictine churches at Komiža (St. Nicholas and St. Michael) were built in the 12th—13th cent. Romanesque style. Adjoining the Church of St. Nicholas, the Romanesque Benedictine monastery is fortified by two high towers. While one of the towers has been preserved in its original form the other, transformed into a belfry, shows elements of both the Gothic and Baroque styles. The small Romanesque church, too, undergoing gradual and interesting changes during the Gothic and Baroque periods, finally became a vaulted five-aisle structure — a form rarely occurring in Dalmatia. A new fortification, a bastion, was added to the monastery in the 17th century in order to provide protection from pirates to whose raids the lonely island was exposed from the Middle Ages on. Both the church and the monastery, including the fortifications of the latter, were erected in a well chosen locality, a real point of vantage, representing an ideal place of safety where the islanders were able to take refuge.

In spite of the dangers connected with those raids and to the withdrawal of the Benedictine monks from the Island, the old church, retaining its function of the main place of worship, became the parish church. As such, it gradually enlarged its art treasure, mostly from donations by the inhabitants of Komiža, whose graves lay in its precincts as evident from the armorial bearings, etc., belonging to the old clans (carved by Venetian and Dalmatian sculptors). The mediaeval works of art were replaced by more magnificent ones executed in the Renaissance or Baroque styles (wooden, profusely carved altars, large altar pieces, statues of saints sculptured by native and foreign artists, church plate, and vestments, all executed in the Gothic-Renaissance transition style.

The smaller churches on the island, most of them dating from the period between the 14th and 17th centuries, have also been re-shaped, consequently losing their original forms. Although simple, their forms vary to a great extent, and their architectural ornaments represent a blend of a variety of styles. A gradual development from the 14th century Romanesque style, through the Neo-Romanesque style, to the present time may be observed in the Church of St. Mary at Velo Selo in the central part of the island. This church boasts a late Gothic relief representing the Madonna and Child which belonged to the original church. This relief, skilfully executed in terra-cotta by a 15th century Italian sculptor, besides being one of the most valuable works of art on the island, belongs to a kind which is very rare in Dalmatia. The parish church of St. Mary »od spilica« at Vis reveals Gothic, Renaissance, and late Baroque elements, its nave having been built in the early 16th century and enlarged at some later time. The unusual proportion of the facade resulting therefrom, has been emphasized by the church-tower. The earlier Renaissance altars were replaced by new ones, but two paintings belonging to a former polyptych by the Venetian master Girolamo Santa Croce, have remained in the church.

The richly, somewhat rustically, decorated 18th century facade and church-tower of the Church of St. Cyprian at Kut reveal provincial characteristics of the modest Dalmatian Baroque art. The church, however, has skilfully been adapted to the picturesque setting. The church ground plan is cross-shaped. The carved ceiling is a late Renaissance work; the carved wooden altars and the pulpit belong to the Baroque period.

The 16th century builders of the Franciscan Monastery, availing themselves of the ruins of the ancient Roman theatre, gave the monastery an unusual semicircular shape. The monastery has no cloister. The 17th century church-tower, with a simple, pyramidal roof, reveals

traces of the Romanesque tradition, which is also evident in the rose window over the church portal. The Dalmatian architects, fond of the mediaeval rose window, remained attached to it through the subsequent periods, and introduced it even in their 17th century Baroque churches. This is why we find one also in the facade of the Church of the Holy Spirit at Vis. That simple church boasts several Baroque paintings. The one executed by the 18th century Venetian master Nicholas Grassi may be included among his best works.

In the heyday of the Dalmatian architectural school (16th century), the Church of St. Mary (»Gusarica«) was erected on the sandy beach of Komiža, not far from a spring. Through subsequent enlargements, the church grew to a three-nave complex with three connected facades and three gables where elements of the Romanesque and Gothic tradition became blended with the modest Renaissance and Baroque styles. The triple nave boasts carved wooden altars executed in the latter two styles. One of the altars contains a series of significant small paintings representing the life of St. Anthony of Padua, bearing the characteristics of the Italo-Cretan mannerism. Although built on the edge of a forest and on a narrow sandy beach, the church and the churchyard with its large, relief-decorated Baroque wellhead, stand out as a harmoniously shaped architectural environment marking the end of the main street of the place meandering along the sea-front.

Two Baroque churches have peculiar forms. One of them, dedicated to the Virgin's visit to Elisabeth, has a circular shape, which fact led to the erroneous conclusion that it was a mediaeval rotunda. The other, dedicated to St. Roch, is a fortified structure having the appearance of a quadrangular tower.

In addition to the two largest places, Vis and Komiža, there are other inhabited places of various sizes on the island with a number of smaller churches, some of which either crown the hills or are located on their slopes near the fields. All the churches, the small and the large ones alike, bear the characteristics of the Dalmatian architecture, from the Romanesque-Gothic transition period to the Baroque style. This is due to the fact that they were erected by experienced Dalmatian architects which is not only evident from the construction method used but also from the documents found in the archives.

There were no completely walled places on the island. The protection was provided by separated towers, forts, and even fortified dwelling-houses. There is a notable 16th century castle in the bay of Komiža, built from income derived from fishery. Farming, particularly viticulture, and fishery have for centuries been the most important occupations of the islanders. There are also some fortified dwelling-houses and churches which, in addition to the castle, made up the system of defence for the whole place, its port, and farms. Modest-sized towers were also built by wealthy families at Vis, too, the 17th century one standing at the head of the bay being the most conspicuous. It belonged to the Perasti family. The port of Vis was systematically fortified by the British who occupied the island in the course of Napoleonic wars using it as their naval station while blockading the Adriatic. Of the three forts built by the British, the strongest was named after King George III. New forts were built at Vis by the Austrians, who came into possession of Dalmatia and all its islands after the downfall of Napoleon I. The one located in the middle of the port of Vis is the most outstanding. The forts played an important part in the defence of the island against the French, as also against the Italian naval forces when, in 1866, the Austrian navy defeated the latter, preventing thereby Dalmatia from being conquered by Italy. Those early 19th and mid-19th century events are symbolized by a number and of soldiers and sailors of graves of British sailors of various nationalities included in the former

Austrian Empire. The island's strategic importance became evident during the Second World War, too.

The situation with regard to dwelling-houses underwent considerable changes on the island, particularly in the 19th century, when a number of stone-built houses, erected in earlier centuries in the Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles, lost their modest, but tasteful original appearance and general arrangement, their old courtyards, gardens, etc. At Vis and Komiža, however, amid their dense but stirring urban structure, some of the old houses have survived, boasting windows built in the Gothic style and other ornaments carved in stone. A few Renaissance summer-houses with courtyards, balconies, and terraces adorn the water-front of the Bay of Vis where some skilfully planned old streets are still in use. Some such summer-houses at Vis display armorial bearings belonging to patrician families from Hvar who had their landed property on the Island of Vis. Most of them have attractive wellheads, etc. Their ground floor had a wide use as a wine cellar, as storage of farm implements, fishing gear, etc. There are also 17th and 18th century summer-houses at Komiža, some of them displaying stone-carved coat of arms, others bearing inscriptions, mottoes, etc., of their original owners who came from the old and wealthy clans. Wherever the circumstances made it imperative, the summer-houses were fortified to some extent.

All these summer-houses tell us a lot about the people who owned them and about the conditions of life at the time of their erection. They also reveal a skilful combination of several practical uses (residence, summer resort, farm-house) which gives us a good idea of the ability of the Renaissance man, even at Vis, to combine the useful with the agreeable. These houses, like those in other Dalmatian places, were built by native architects about whose activity tell us numerous contracts and other documents found in the archives. The 18th century native architects had embarked on creating a dwelling-house that eventually became a typical Dalmatian house incorporating one or the other of the European styles, but having particular proportions well adapted to squares and streets of minor urban agglomerations — both townlets and villages — that developed in the course of centuries without a formulated plan according to actual needs and in harmony with the ground outline.

The cultural life at Vis developed within the comfortable sphere of those Renaissance houses. A number of writers and learned men, who were active at Vis between the 16th and 18th centuries, published their works either in Latin or Croatian. One of them was Marin Gazarović whose 16th century description of the scenic beauty of the island is worth mentioning.

Facts culled from the old archives at Vis, last wills, inventories of furniture, etc., and lists referring to dowries, give a wealth of information about the tasteful way in which the old houses were furnished and adorned with paintings and products of applied art, which either came from Venice or were made by native artists. We learn from those sources that the ladies belonging to the well-to-do families at Vis often wore sumptuous clothes and jewelry and that their garments usually revealed a blend of the prevailing European fashion and the style of dress worn by the people on the Island.

Everything then, the churches and towers, the summer-houses and simple dwelling-houses, as well as the works of art and the documents illustrating the past, give us a clear idea how this eminently Dalmatian community consisting of Croats completely adopted the Mediterranean way of life, a community with roots in the ancient Greek and Roman heritage and remaining in touch with the Western civilization for centuries.