

## Two Early Croatian Royal Mausolea\*

The monuments of Pre-Romanesque architecture in Croatia constitute a colorful group of some one hundred odd buildings, of greatly varying shapes and sizes, ranging in time from the end of the eighth to the end of the eleventh century.

The small-scale, predominantly vaulted centralized churches, about seventy per cent of the total, have so far attracted most of the scholarly attention. They seem to represent an original version, on a more modest scale, of the local, Dalmatian, architecture of the Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods.<sup>1</sup> Some of these churches are surprisingly well-preserved, having even retained portions of their original sculptural and painted decoration.

The larger longitudinal buildings, both aisled and aisleless, mostly in ruins or known only through excavations, have been rather neglected. This is certainly a pity since these were indeed the representative monuments — cathedrals, important monastic churches or royal foundations — and as such are more likely to reveal possible connections between Croatia, on the very outskirts of the Western World, and the rest of Pre-Romanesque Europe. This brief note on two early Croatian royal mausolea attempts to show the familiarity of Croatian builders with some internationally accepted practices of Pre-Romanesque architecture.

Both of these buildings, the church at Crkvina in Biskupija near Knin in the Dalmatian Highlands, and the church of St. Mary on the Island in Solin (the ancient *Salonae*), a few kilometers to the north of Split, are known only through excavations. Although scanty, the remains allow for reasonably accurate reconstructions.<sup>2</sup>

The church at Crkvina was an aisled building (32,65 meters long, 13,25 side, the thickness of the walls varying from 0.70 to 0.80) with a western annex and a flat chevet (fig. 1). The nave was separated from the aisles by three pairs of rectangular piers. Judging from the quantity of the tufa recovered during the latest re-excavation, the church was vaulted, most likely by a continuous barrel-vault. There was probably a uniform gable roof lying directly on top of the vaults. In front of the body there was a western massif preceded by a transversal porch. Its walls were not in bond with the western facade of the church body but with the walls of a group of buildings to the north of the church forming an irregular quadrangle around a central court and identified as a monastery. There is practically no difference between the masonry of the church body on one hand and of the westwork and the monastery on the other, all construc-

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<sup>1</sup> Lj. Karaman, *Iz kolijevke hrvatske prošlosti*, Zagreb, 1930, 18f. T. Marasović, *Sesterolinski tip u ranosrednjovjekovnoj arhitekturi Dalmacije*, Zagreb, 1958, I, 63f.

<sup>2</sup> On St. Mary: E. Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity*, Oslo, 1951, 130 f. fig. VI, 10. There is no graphic reconstruction of the Crkvina church.

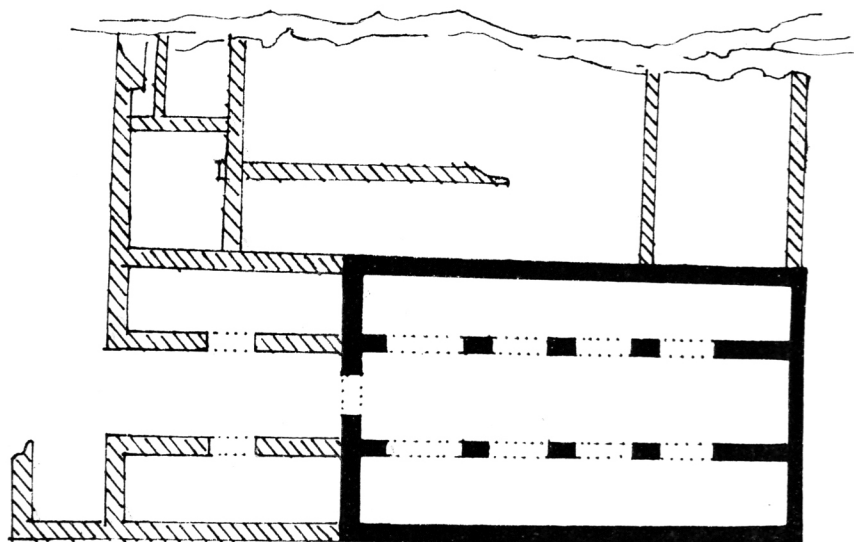


Figure 1

ted from crude rubblework with profuse quantities of mortar, and one can assume that the westwork was built either at the same time or shortly after the construction of the church body.<sup>3</sup>

On either side of the westwork groundfloor passage there was an oblong room. During the excavations in the 1890s a sarcophagus reassembled from roman fragments was found in each of these chambers. A body of a nobleman rested in the northern, that of a lady in the southern one. The upper story of the westwork was accessible only by a staircase approaching from the monastery. On account of the inordinate thickness of the walls between the groundfloor passage and the funerary chambers one is led to assume that these walls were meant to support a kind of a towerlike projection above the westwork roof.<sup>4</sup>

Judging from the quality of the spurs, earrings and the scraps of clothings recovered from the sarcophagi, the noble pair was of a high stature. Two more noble tombs were discovered under the church floor. One was almost exactly underneath the lady's sarcophagus, another at the western end of the southern aisle. Each contained a body of a boy, the one buried in the aisle having taken to his grave a pair of child spurs which rank among the most beautiful objects ever recovered from an early Croatian tomb. The nobleman's sarcophagus also contained a coin of Basil I (867—886), an important guide in establishing the date of the church. Croatian rulers did not mint their own money but used Byzantine coinage. The burial in the westwork could not have occurred before 867. It could hardly have occurred

after the year 900 as the money of Basil I would have been already obsolete by that date. Thus the westwork was probably constructed between 870 and 900, the church body, possibly, a few years earlier.<sup>5</sup>

Another argument for a late ninth century date may be deduced from a study of the fragments of the sculptural decoration. These fragments fall basically into two groups: the first consisting of typical interlace reliefs and the second group characterized by the abandonment of the interlace motifs and the introduction of scrollwork. Even more importantly we find in the second group the appearance of the human figure. The latter group of fragments could hardly be dated before the second half of the eleventh century and it seems reasonable to assume that the more archaic sculptures antedate it by at least a century. That the change of the church decoration signified a complete shift in taste is brought out by the fact that some of the interlace fragments were re-cut and reincorporated into the new decorative program.<sup>6</sup>

A few fragments of the first group may help to establish the dedication of the church and at least the rank of the founder. The fragments of an inscription record the names of St. Mary and St. Stephen and also mention a »dux gloriosus« and »praeclarus«.<sup>7</sup> »Dux« is the Latin translation of the title of Croatian rulers before 925 when they were recognized as »reges«. We know, however, from a statement of an eye-witness, that the Old-Croatian word, unfortunately unknown to us, already

<sup>3</sup> S. Gunjača, »Revizija iskopina u Biskupiji«, *Ljetopis Jugoslavenske Akademije*, LVII, 1953, 9—50. A uniform gable-roof lying directly on top of the vaults seems to have been a fairly popular device in some other Mediterranean lands such as Catalonia, Macedonia and Greece. For Catalonia, see J. Puig i Cadafalch, *Le premier art roman*, Paris, 1928, 67f. For Macedonia and Greece, G. Millet, *L'école grecque dans l'architecture byzantine*, Paris, 1916, 40f.

<sup>4</sup> Gunjača, »Revizija«, 29—30.

<sup>5</sup> L. Marun, »O najznamenitijim starohrvatskim grobovima na groblju otkrivene biskupske bazilike Sv. Marije u Biskupiji kod Knina«, *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, IV, 1898, 113—118. The spurs, of Carolingian type, are datable to the ninth century. See L. Karaman, »O porijeklu starohrvatskih ostruga«, *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, 3rd ser., IV, 1955, 207—208, and Z. Vinski, »Nešto o datiranju starohrvatskih arheoloških nalaza«, *Peristil*, I, 1954, 194—196.

<sup>6</sup> I. Petricioli, *Pojava romaničke skulpture u Dalmaciji*, Zagreb, 1960, 44—47, 50—53. S. Gunjača, *Novi naučni rezultati u hrvatskoj arheologiji*, Zagreb, 1958, 20—24.

<sup>7</sup> Gunjača, »Revizija«, 36.

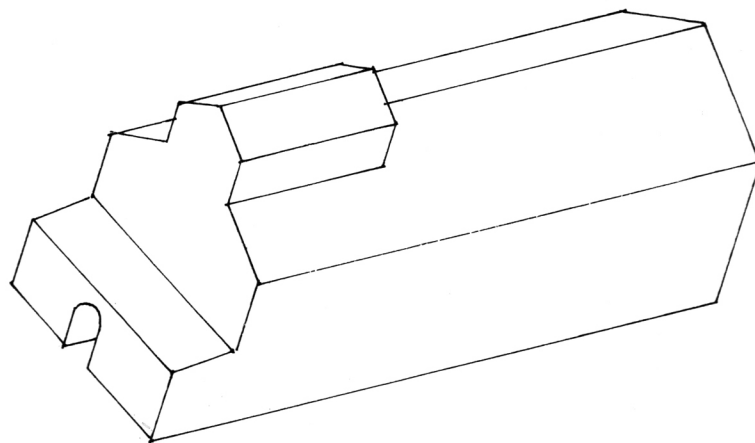


Figure 1/a

signified the royal dignity<sup>8</sup>. One may possibly attribute the church to »Dux« Branimir (879—892), a strong, independent ruler from a collateral branch of the early Croatian dynasty whose possessions seem to have been centered in the Highlands and the Western Lowlands.

The other building, or rather complex, is that of St. Mary and St. Stephen on the Island in Solin (fig. 2). It consists of two more or less parallel churches, the larger northern one dedicated to St. Mary, the smaller southern one to St. Stephen. The complex was investigated by Fran Bulic in 1898 and Ejnar Dyggve in 1930 but the remains were buried again. Of St. Stephen, underneath the present-day parish church, especially little is known. It was a simple rectangular structure (15.10 by 5, thickness of the walls 0.50—0.55) with a square western annex serving as the burial place of Croatian kings. The tombs discovered during the excavations certainly date from the Pre-Romanesque period but the bodies in them were those of seventeenth and eighteenth century peasants.<sup>9</sup>

Architecturally much more interesting is the larger church (21.70 by 9.10, thickness of the walls 0.65—0.70). The nave, separated from the aisles by three pairs of square piers, is terminated by an apse rounded within and rectangular without. The disposition of the second and third pair of piers forming a square bay speaks for the existence of a dome, in early Croatian architecture usually encased within a square turret. The piers and responds probably supported transverse arches underneath the barrel-vaults.

The body of the church was preceded by two western annexes, a vaulted endonarthex serving as the burial

chamber of Queen Jelena (died in 976) the vaults of which presumably supported a gallery on the upper story, and by a two-story exonarthex. The latter consisted of three chambers, the central one serving as the entrance to the church, the southern one housing a stairway, and the northern one providing access to a lateral annex. The exterior walls were decorated by pilaster-strips standing by themselves, or, more probably, in harmony with the local custom, enframing blind arches. The pilaster-strips do not correspond to the interior supports or the internal disposition of the church, which allows for the assumption that, externally, the church appeared as a solid block, only the dome sticking out above the uniform saddleback roof.<sup>10</sup>

Although the above reconstruction may seem fairly reliable there is a detail rather difficult to account for. The western wall of the church body on the side of the endonarthex was decorated by pilaster-strips and provided with a fairly elaborate twice recessed portal quite unique in the early Croatian architecture. This may indicate that the church was already standing when the annexes were added or, at least, that the decision concerning their erection was made when the construction of the church was well under way. The disposition of the pilaster-strips, as has been stated, indicates that, in the exterior, no distinction was made between the church body and the westwork. If a re-excavation is ever undertaken it would be interesting to check on the position of the pilaster-strips at what may have been the corners of the original west facade of the church. At present, the reconstruction of the whole as a single uniform block still seems to reproduce, with a fair degree of accuracy, the final form of the church, regardless the fact that the body and the westwork need not date from the same building campaign.

<sup>8</sup> The eyewitness was the famous Saxon Gottschalk who spent two years (846—848) at »Duke« Trpimir's court. See L. Katić, *Saksonac Gottschalk na dvoru kneza Trpimira*, Zagreb, 1932, 4f.

<sup>9</sup> F. Bulić, »Izveštaj o crkvi Sv. Marije od Otoka i nadgrobnom natpisu kraljice Jelene«, *Vjesnik hrvatskog arheološkog društva*, V, 1901, 201—207. Dyggve, *History* 130f. L. Katić, »Zadužbine hrvatske kraljice Jelene na Otoku u Solinu«, *Rad Jugoslavenske Akademije*, CCCVI, 1955, 187—219.

<sup>10</sup> The westworks of the Savio's Church at Cetina (around 900, the only fully preserved example of an early Croatian westwork), of Sv. Cecilia in Biskupija (around 1050—60) and of the church at Žažvić (eleventh century) were also indistinguishable from the outside.

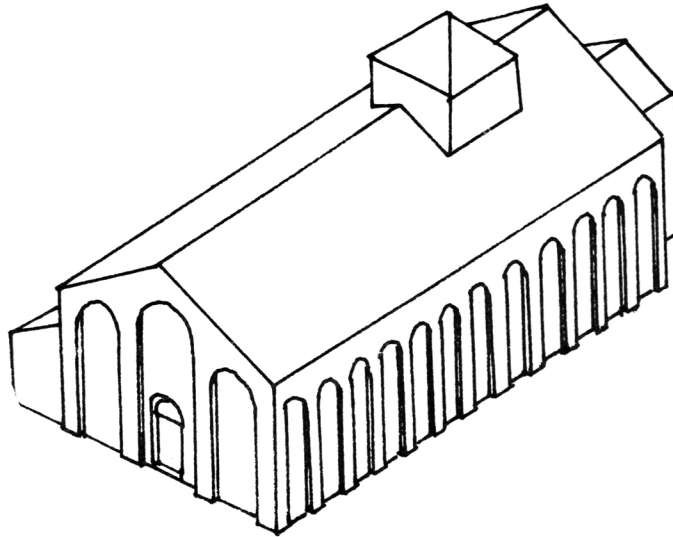


Figure 2

St. Mary was apparently completed by 976. The tradition, still strong in the thirteenth century, attributed the construction of both churches to Queen Jelena.<sup>11</sup> There is, however, a problem as to why the smaller and less sumptuous church was used as the dynastic mausoleum while the larger and richer building was reserved for a single person. Maybe Jelena only restored the southern church, or, if she indeed built it *ab ovo*, its forms and dimensions may have been predetermined by the position of an already existing royal mausoleum. Only further investigations underneath the parish church could shed more light on this problem.

If the Virgin's church had existed prior to the reign of the Queen one may adduce an additional argument for an earlier date of St. Stephen's. Both churches appear as a reflection of the favorite Late Antique Adriatic practice of erecting *basilicae geminae*, the Virgin's church originally serving as the place of the regular cult, St. Stephen as a funerary church, and it would seem logical to assume that they both date from the same period anterior to the reign of Queen Jelena.<sup>12</sup> One may easily imagine Jelena restoring the churches and ordering a funerary chamber for herself to be built in front of St. Mary. One is almost tempted to recall the example of her namesake, St. Helen, buried in a mausoleum attached to the front of the roman church of SS. Pietro and Marcellino.<sup>13</sup>

The dedication of the churches to St. Mary and St. Stephen recalls Crkvina. That the Virgin should be the patron of a royal foundation comes as no surprise. She

had a prominent place in the *laudes regiae* and the Palatine Chapel of Aachen was dedicated to her.<sup>14</sup> It has been also demonstrated that St. Stephen, appearing in several *laudes* could be considered a Saint of the Court. The greatest treasury of the Palatine Chapel of Aachen was a relic of St. Stephen. The Palace and Coronation Church of Byzantine Emperors was dedicated to the same Saint.<sup>15</sup> The popularity of St. Stephen in a country that recognized Frankish overlordship from around 800 to around 870 and had a common border with the Byzantine enclaves of Dalmatia is not at all surprising and is further witnessed by the fact that four early Croatian kings bore the name: Stjepan Miroslav (944—948), Stjepan Drzislav (969—995), Stjepan I (1030—1056), and Stjepan II (1088—89).

Both in the case of Crkvina and in the case of St. Mary of the Island the tombs were located in vaulted chambers close to the entrance to the church. The custom of using the areas in front or at the entrance of a sacred building for burials was known to both Antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>16</sup> In Christian architecture the practice may go back as far as Constantinian and Post-Constantinian times.<sup>17</sup> In the period chronologically closer to our examples one may point out the Asturian *Pantheums* such as Saintianes de Pravia (774—783) and the churches of the Savior and the Virgin at Oviedo (around 800). These royal mausolea have been reconstructed as vaulted chambers at the entrance to the church support-

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Archidiaconus, *Historia Salonitana*, ed. F. Rački, Zagreb, 1894, 55.

<sup>12</sup> The *basilicae geminae* existed in Poreč, Nesactium, Osor and Solona—Solin itself (in the complex of the *Basilica Urbana* and at Marusinac). See J. Zeiller, »Les Basiliques geminées de l'Illyricum«, *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku*, XXXV, 1922, 34—39. Dyggve, *History*, 130f.

<sup>13</sup> For St. Helen's Mausoleum, see R. Krautheimer, »On Constantine's Church of the Apostles«, *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance Art*, 31—32.

<sup>14</sup> For example in the *laudes* sung to Charlemagne at St. Riquier and recorded in the Gallican Psalter from St. Riquier (Paris, Bibl. Nat., Lat. 13159). See C. Heitz, *Les recherches sur les rapports entre l'architecture et la liturgie à l'époque carolingienne*, Paris, 1963, 158f. Also E. Kantorowicz, »Ivories and Litanies« *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, V, 1942, 56—81.

<sup>15</sup> Kantorowicz, »Ivories«, 79—80.

<sup>16</sup> A. Grabar, *Martyrium*, Paris, I, 1942, part five *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> Krautheimer, *Studies*, 27—34. St. Helen's Mausoleum was, as already stated, attached to the front of the basilica of SS. Pietro and Marcellino; Constantine's Mausoleum, built probably by Constantius after 359, may have stood in front of the Constantinopolitan church of the Apostles.

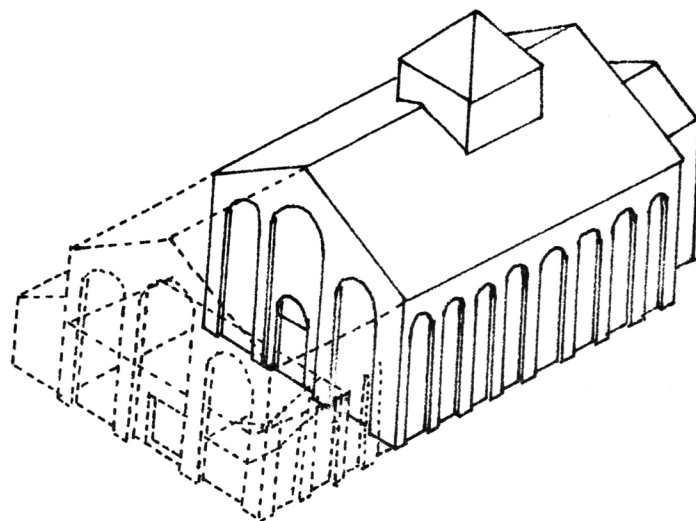


Figure 2/a

ting a gallery. The custom was not unknown to Anglo-Saxon England. Thus Abbot Aestermine had himself buried in the porch in front of the church of Monkwearmouth (after 674). Burials in the area in front of the church were also practised in Grand Moravia where especially noteworthy is the atrium-like western annex with a westernized apse of the church at Sady.<sup>18</sup>

These are all, so to say, marginal countries. Within the lands that were to form the core of the Carolingian Empire one should recall the example of Pepin the Short who ordered himself to be interred in front of the church of St. Denis, the reason being his desire to be trodden upon by the faithful thus expiating himself the harshness his father, Charles Martel, displayed toward the Church. This decision was to some extent reversed by Charlemagne, who constructed a porch to provide for a more monumental setting for his father's tomb.<sup>19</sup> The western apse of the church of St. Cyriakus at Sulzburg served as the burial place of Count Birschtalo of Breisgau, who had the church constructed about 990—993.<sup>20</sup>

No local Antique or Late Antique model of early Croatian mausolea has so far been discovered. Yet one may, at this point, call to mind the Mausoleum of St. Anastasius at Marusinac in Solin (about 300) originally a free-standing building, later on attached to the atrium of a basilica constructed around 425.<sup>21</sup>

The complexity of the westworks of Crkvina and St. Mary on the Island is opposed to the simple funerary

area of St. Stephen's, which seems to follow the tradition of the courtyard or atrium-like burial areas as represented by St. Bernard-de-Comminges, and also reflected by the church at Sady in Grand Moravia.<sup>22</sup> Complex as they are, the two annexes we have been discussing were hardly given any special exterior treatment. The westwork of St. Mary, as already mentioned, was probably completely indistinguishable from the outside while that of the Crkvina church may have been emphasized by a roof projection or a turret. This may again recall the Asturian examples. The wellpreserved church of San Salvador de Valdedios (about 893) is provided by a tripartite two-story western annex, fairly similar to the presumed form of the exonarthex of St. Mary on the Island. Yet viewed from the outside the church appears as a solid block.<sup>23</sup> More generally, one should also note the marked predilection for straight lines, right angles and rectangular projections, by both Spanish builders — Visigothic, Asturian and Mozarabic — and their Croatian colleagues. The same is true of numerous Anglo-Saxon examples and some of Grand Moravian Churches.<sup>24</sup> In early Croatian architecture the apse rounded both inside and out was reserved almost exclusively for central buildings and larger eleventh century basilicas.

<sup>22</sup> For the burials in the atrium of St. Bernard-de-Comminges (before 408), see Heitz, *Les recherches*, p. 163.

<sup>23</sup> Bonet Correa, *Spanish Pre-Romanesque Art*, 176f. V. Lamperez i Romea, *Historia de la Arquitectura Cristiana Española en la Edad Media*, Madrid, 1930, 257—260.

<sup>24</sup> For Visigothic examples (Santa Comba de Bande, San Pedro de Nave) see Lamperez i Romea, *Historia*, 181—189. For Asturian examples (Santianes de Pravia, Santa Cristina de Lena, Santullano, San Miguel de Linio, San Salvador de Valdedios, San Salvador de Priesca), *ibidem*, 331—334, 340—347, 351—362, and Bonet Correa, *Spanish Pre-Romanesque Art*, 86—89, 102—108, 150—193, 202—209. For Mozarabic churches (Santa Maria de Melque, San Miguel de Escalada, Santiago de Penalba, Santa Maria de Lebeña), Lamperez i Romea, *Historia*, 251—259, 263—268, 276—279. For England, Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, I, 49f., 52f., 86f. (Barrow, Barton-on-Humber, Bradfordon-Avon). For Moravia, Cibulka, »L'architecture«, 5—13 (Church at Modra, Churches No. 2a, 2b, 8 and 10 at Mikulcice, Church at Vysoka Zahrada).

<sup>18</sup> For Asturia see J. Puig i Cadafalch, *L'art wisigothique et ses survivances*, Paris, 1961, 92f.; A. Bonet Correa, *Spanish Pre-Romanesque Art*, Barcelona, 1968, 86f. For England, H. M. and J. Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, Cambridge, 1963, I, 443, 442-443. For Moravia, J. Cibulka, »L'architecture de la Grande-Moravie en IXe siècle à la lumière des récents découvertes«, *L'information d'histoire de l'art*, XI, 1962, 1—32.

<sup>19</sup> J. Hubert, *L'art pré-roman*, Paris, 1938, 19—20. S. McK. Crosby, *The Abbey of St. Denis*, New Haven, 1942, I, 118 f.

<sup>20</sup> M. Backes and R. Doelling, *Art of the Dark Ages*, New York, 1969, p. 169.

<sup>21</sup> Dyggve, *History*, 78—79.

The love of western annexes or towers was equally shared by Spain, England, Moravia and Croatia, especially in case of more complex structures.<sup>25</sup>

In emphasizing these analogies we did not intent to imply any direct contact between the groups. Yet, in our opinion, the presence of the analogies cannot but arouse one's curiosity and indicate a need for further, deeper comparative inquiry into the aesthetic principles and artistic background of various Pre-Romanesque manifestations on the outskirts of the Carolingian and Post-Carolingian Empire.

<sup>25</sup> In Spain: Santianes de Pravia, Oviedo, Linio, Valdedios, Priesca. See Lamperez i Romea, *Historia*, 331—334, 335f., 343—347, 357—362. In England: Appelon-le-Street, Little Bardfield, Barnack, Deerhurst and numerous other examples. See Taylor, *Anglo-Saxon Architecture*, I, 28f., 37f., 43f., 193f. In Moravia: Church No. 3 and No. 10 at Mikulcice, Church, »Na Spitalkach« at Stare Mesto, Church at Pohansko and Church at Sady. See Cibulka, »L'architecture«, 12—24.

A possibility of a direct influence of early Croatian monuments on those of Moravia has been suggested by Francis Dvornik (*Byzantine Missions Among the Slavs*, New Brunswick, 1970, 85—89). The dates used by Dvornik have been strongly challenged by recent research projects, the results of which have not yet been fully published. It seems that one has, at present, to refrain from forming any definite opinion about the problem. For a more critical appraisal of some of the monuments quoted by Dvornik one is referred to the recent works by Ivo Petricioli (»Neuere Arbeiten an Denkmälern der vor- und frühromanischen Architektur in Zadar«, *Archeologia Jugoslavica*, VII, 1966, 77—84; »Umjetnost 11 stoljeća u Zadru«, *Zadarska Revija*, XVI, 1967, 159—166.; »Osvrt na ninske građevine«, in *Povijest grada Nina*, Zadar, 1969, 299—356.).