

EARLY MEDIEVAL ART AND CRAFT CREATIVITY IN SLOVENIA

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Review

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After the decline of the late antique material culture in the beginning of the 7th century, the first attempts of craft creativity in Slovenia are visible at the end of the 7th century – by introducing western figural style on circular brooches. We can speak about the real medieval art and craft creativity in Slovenia as late as the beginning of the 9th century and it is closely connected with christianisation (supported by the Frankish state). This creativity can be recognized in architecture (among the increasing number of churches mentioned in the 9th and 10th century only 6 of them are excavated), in sculpture with interlaced ornament (among 40 known examples only 3 are from the northeastern part of Slovenia, the others from Koper and its surroundings) and especially in the jewelry of the so called Köttlach culture (enameled semicircular earrings and circular brooches, usually with christian motifs).

The discontinuity in the material findings from the 7th century, the central problem of the early mediaeval archaeology in Slovenia, becomes even more noticeable in studying the creativity of craftsmen during the transition period between the late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Even if this discontinuity period in the field of archaeological material culture is narrowed by the retardation of late antique elements on one side and on the other with early dating of new Slavic cultural elements¹ no new ideas in craft creativity are to be noticed. For example: the “animal style” appearing on Germanic weapons in the early 7th century (representing one of the two components of material culture during the migration period) still belongs to the 6th century. The late antique component of the material culture of the period is over already in the 6th century; nevertheless, some architectural monuments and craft works can be dated in the beginning of the 7th century. The late antique roman component of the material culture that can — in spite of the obviously decreasing power — still express itself even in architecture, literature and plastic art, is without exceptions lost in the 6th century. In the 7th century its remains are only a question of details in dating some special situations and not a question of the evolution in style. It is interesting to notice that this culture is disappearing with various types of artefacts, but very few motifs on them (the cross, the Christogram, the peacock, alpha and omega, and in architecture with a number of churches that belong to the Aquileian type).²

At the end of the 7th century the appearing Old Slavic culture starts to take over the first western art influence — the figural style as expressed on circular brooches of iron core covered with bronze sheet.³ Since the style is limited to only one type of jewellery, since the motifs are unique and exhibit no influence in other objects of material culture we can speak about a short-living importation without any connection with the domestic creativity. Nothing can be said about the architectural and sculptural monuments, which are completely missing. We can speak about the real mediaeval art and craft creativity in Slovenia as late

as at the beginning of the 9th century; besides, it is closely connected with the Christianisation of the territory. Christianity did not only give new values and a new social system but also new ways of intervening — the new contents and its envelope at the same time. The reasons for this lateness are known and we find them in historical events and the political situation of the period. Missionary activity starting after the middle of the 8th century from Salzburg by the duke Hotimir was concentrated especially in large Carantanian and Lower Panonian centres. Irrespective of the three anti-Christian revolts at the time of Hotimir and shortly after his death (763-769) the Christianisation was going on continually from the accession of the duke Valtunk in 772.

In the meantime, more distant Carneola (the historical predecessor of the actual Slovenia) where strong influence of Aquileia should be expected showed no influence either in written historical sources nor in finds. Aquileia became the missionary centre not earlier than it became a part of the Frankish state and after the final victory over the Avars in 796. Not until then were fulfilled some basic conditions such as:

- clearly articulated and stimulated state interest,
- formation of influential territory and unified methods of Christianisation
- abolishment of the Lombardic state law forbidding Aquileia to organise missionary campaigns.

At the same time Aquileia emerged from a 150-year internal crisis resulting from religious disputes (the conflict over the condemnation of the Three Chapters, the monothyletic conflict and the war with the iconoclasts). The revolt of Ljudevit Posavski accompanied by the Carniolans (Slovenes around the upper Sava River) even accelerated the process of feudalisation and Christianisation.

After the 9th century all new cemeteries in Carneola are laid around churches but burials are still continuing in the old pagan cemeteries laid out on the sunward side of the

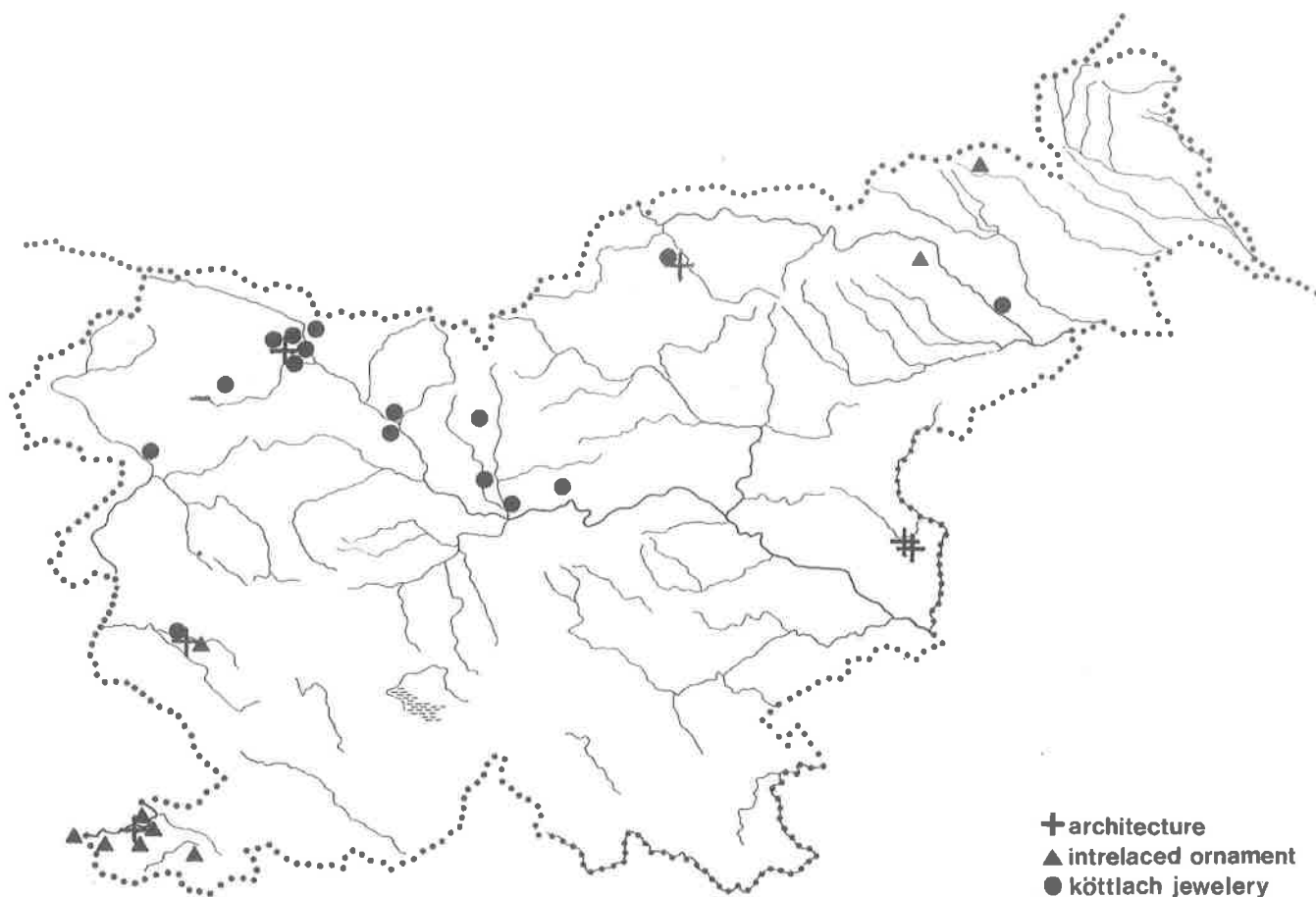


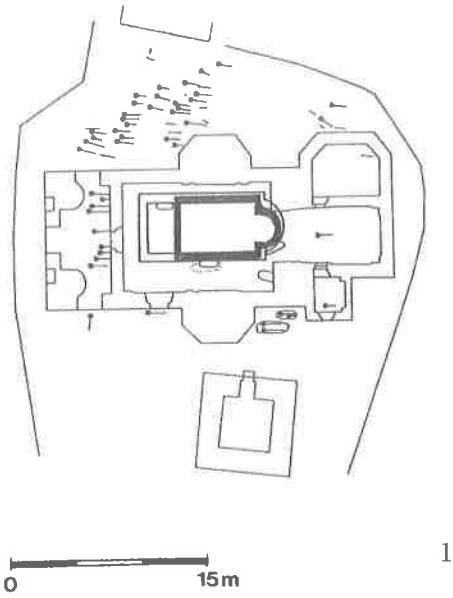
Fig. 1. Early Medieval finds in Slovenia

village edge. But the problem is that the architecture of these early churches has not yet been much investigated.⁴

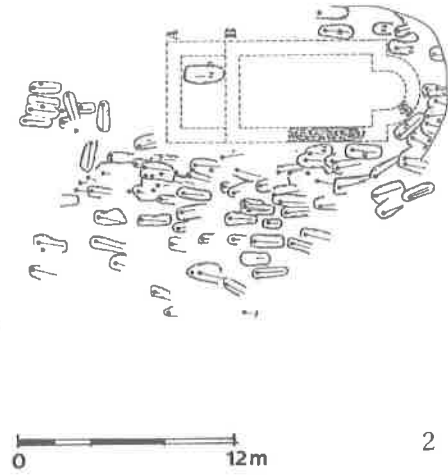
The increasing number of churches in the 9th century in Carneola and formation of the oldest net of pre-parish churches in the 10th century was already noticed and described.⁵ Unfortunately, the hopeful beginning of Christianisation was interrupted by the incursions of the Hungarians in the first half of the 10th century.⁶ That is another reason why we can speak about only five or six church ground-plans from the Carolingian and Ottonian period in Slovenia. These are the rotunda of Sv. Marija in Koper (Pl. 1, 5), the oldest phase of the church of Sv. Marija on the Island of Bled (Pl. 1, 1), remains of the church of Sv. Jurij in Batuje (Pl. 1, 2), the chapel of Sv. Jurij and Sv. Martin on Svete gore above the Sotla River (Pl. 1, 3,4) and the oldest phase of the church of Sv. Jurij on Legen near Slovenj Gradec discovered recently (Pl. 1, 6). The ground plans of churches on the island of lake Bled, in Batuje and on Legen are undoubtedly dated by the early Slavic cemeteries,⁷ while the other three churches belong to the pre-Romanesque period as established on the base of style-analysis.⁸ The rotunda in Koper is therefore the only building of that type. Its function (which supposes a complex church centre) and architectural details present very rich knowledge that can not be found in the continental part of Slovenia. The exception among the modest architectural fund is also the church of Sv. Jurij on Legen near Slovenj Gradec. Namely, it represents the so called "Istrian type" (with inscribed apse). It is quite surprising that of all the churches discovered up till now in Slovenia this one is the most distant from Istria and the nearest to the territory belonging to Salzburg.

And this is not the only example of the Mediterranean influence in the area, considering the basilica at Blatenski kostel and some fragments of sculptures with interlaced ornaments from there. The latter was built by Pribina, the duke of Lower Panonia, and consecrated by the archbishop of Salzburg, Liupram. Therefore we can believe that the masters sent by the archbishop of Salzburg came from the Mediterranean area; this can also be seen in the finds of sculptures with interlaced ornamentation near the Drava River in Carinthia. Four other churches are single-aisled hall churches with semicircular apse on the east. Although some efforts have been made⁹ a pre-Romanesque type of church with a rectangular presbyteryum has not been identified in Slovenia.

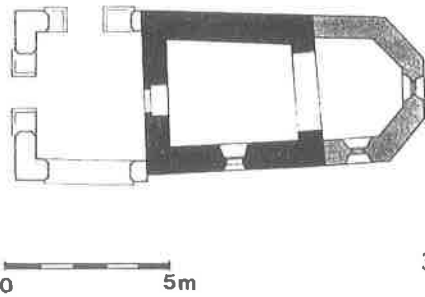
The architecture of the period is also connected with the stone sculptures. We speak about so called sculptures with interlaced ornament placed on furniture in some early mediaeval churches (alter pieces, alter screens, pulpits) or their architectural details (door posts, columns, capitals, consoles).¹⁰ Most of these sculptures are concentrated in littoral Slovenia. Of the about 40 known examples only two are situated in Slivnica near Maribor, one in the castle of Cmurek (a very late one), two in Batuje in Vipava valley, the others are in Koper and its surroundings —Padna, Krkavče, Piran, Hrvatini — the latter being in private property at Milje (Pl. 2, 1,2,3,5). Nevertheless, the complete absence of these elements in central Slovenia is unusual — since some church buildings in this area and this period are quite well-known. We can connect the appearance of two pieces found in Slivnica and those from Blatenski kostel



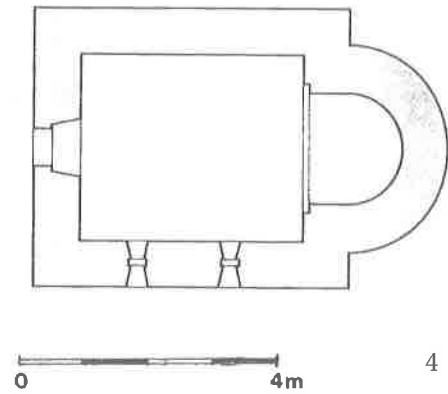
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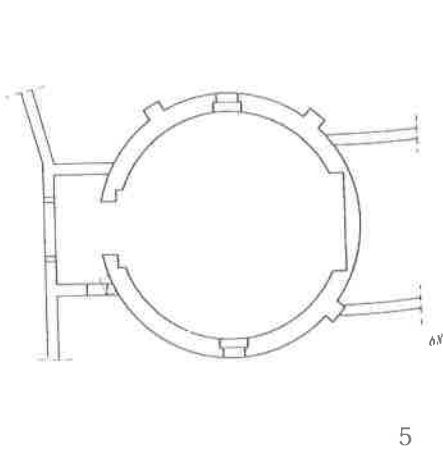
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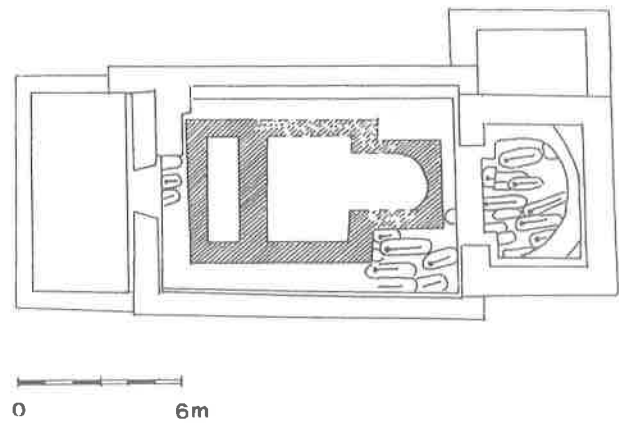
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Plate 1.

1 - Island of Bled, sv. Marija (after V.Šribar, 1968/69); 2 - Batuje, sv. Jurij (after T.Knific and D.Svoljšak 1976); 3 - Sv.gore above Sotla, (after M.Zadnikar 1982); 4 - Sv.gore above Sotla, sv. Jurij (after I.Stopar 1977); 5 - Koper, sv. Marija (after M.Zadnikar 1982); 6 - Legen, sv. Jurij (after M.Strmčnik 1994).

with similar pieces containing interlaced ornament from Carinthia and all of them with the well organised missionary activity from one centre (ie. Salzburg). I believe we can connect the absence of the interlaced ornament in central Slovenia with the very poorly organised Aquileian missionary activity in the 9th century, in contrast with the situation in Salzburg missionary area.

The analyses of the recurring motifs and their combinations of interlaced ornament in Slovenia as presented in my article of 1981 shows that the Slovene finds are closely linked with the Istrian and North Adriatic finds (coming from the antique tradition), whereas the Austrian (Carinthian) motifs are more simple and less rich. Strong connections between the North Adriatic finds are confirmed by the latest stone analyses. And this confirms the old Karaman's finding that when discussing the interlaced ornament we can not speak about the national but territorial specialities.

The only stonework in Slovenia that does not belong to interlaced ornament and is dated in the period we speak about, is a slab built in the chapel of Sv. Jurij on Svete gore above the Sotla River (Pl. 2, 6). The motif has not been cleared up yet; it can present either an Orant or a donator or, in my opinion, Noah leaving the Arch after the flood (there are some similarities with the paintings in catacombs). Recently, another explanation has been provided — it could be St. John the Baptist.¹¹

Besides the architectural and stonework creations belonging to the Mediterranean influence there is another component in the creativity of Carolingian and Ottonian period in Slovenia. This is the so called Köttlach culture of the Carantanian Slavs expressed in the jewellery.¹² Its extension and the comparison performed suggest this is a typically Middle European or Western European phenomenon. It appears on semilunate earrings and especially on circular decorative brooches from the 9th to 11th century. In addition to the cross, the interlaced ornament is also often used on early examples (Pl. 2, 4). Even figures shaped on this kind of jewellery are often part of various compositions with interlaced ornaments. With the appearance of jewellery decorated with enamel the motifs become richer — beside the brooches with the cross (Pl. 3, 1) and the eagle (Pl. 3, 2,3) some new motifs with Christian connotation also appear. What we would like to stress is that at this time the eagle is Christian motif, in spite of the fact that it is older than Christianity. Its Christian connotation is drawn from the vision of Ezekiel in the Old Testament and from the Apocalypse. It can also represent one of the four stages in Christ's life: he was born as a man, sacrificed like an ox, rose like a lion and ascended into heaven like an eagle.¹³

Another motif with a Christian meaning at the time is the Tree of Life (*Arbor vitae*) although in itself it was much older. The motif has Christian connotations linked to the description of the garden of Eden in the *Genesis* where it was understood as a positive contrast to the tree of recognition and was the subject of much mediaeval scholastic speculations (the legend of the cross). While the oldest jewellery shows the tree with the birds feeding on it (Pl. 3, 4) the later motifs (10th century) normally present only a symmetrically composed palmette (Pl. 3, 5,6).

The Fountain of Life (*Fons vitae*) draws its Christian meaning from the Psalms (36), the Song of Solomon (4 and 15),

the Gospel of John (7,37) and the Apocalypse (22,1). It was not known in the repertoire of motifs on Early Slavic personal jewellery until 1984 when a grave with four semilunate earrings was found at Kranj Parish Church. One of them is so well preserved that two very detailed enamelled birds drinking from a spring can be clearly seen (Pl. 3, 7). The same motif on other three earrings was degenerated owing to a damaged mould and was hardly recognised (Pl. 3, 8).

Another Christian symbol appearing on Early Slavic jewellery is the Lamb of God (Pl. 3, 9). This is the image of Christ as the New Testament sacrificial Lamb that was foretold in the Old Testament. One of the most famous brooches is that from the Bled Castle, announcing the romanesque sculpture with its decoration (Pl. 3, 10).¹⁴

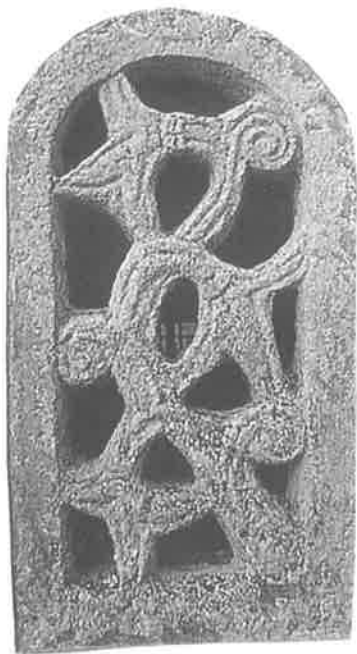
The next example is the decorative brooch from the cemetery at Bled Castle probably representing Ss. Peter and Paul, the two apostles (Pl. 3, 11). The appearance of both figures in stance and vigour, the fine and soft golds and the shallowness of the reliefs indicate a relationship with examples from Zauschwitz Weiderod and Trier and is dated in the beginning of the 11th century.¹⁵

At the end of the 10th century and beginning of the 11th the appearance of cast earrings with a panther motif is quite frequent (Pl. 3, 13,14). The panther motif itself is older, but when the two animals on the two earrings assume the role of two lions in the scene with prophet Daniel, then the wearer can represent the prophet himself.

The excavations carried out in the church of Sv. Jurij at Legen near Slovenj Gradec revealed the Istrian type of architecture and a new motif in the early mediaeval sculpture — a circular enamelled brooch with a motif of a peacock (Pl. 3, 12), a very well-known early Christian motif.¹⁶

The only craft product from the early mediaeval period without any certain Christian association is the circular brooch from the Bled Castle (Pl. 3, 15). The motif represents a face with a triangular headgear. The shape of the headgear strongly recalls the contemporary crown of Otto II or Otto III that can be seen on the miniature from the Mainz Breviary, the *Registrum Gregori* in the Gospel book of Otto III.¹⁷

Thus, this is a short survey of the art and craft creativity in Slovenija in the Carolingian and Ottonian period. Deliberately I was avoiding the expression "artistic creation" because in view of quality these are only crafts products. Obviously, we are dealing with the creativeness in a province without large cultural centres assuming the influence of the milieu that itself presented the province of the Frankish state. The various influences are the consequence of the specific geographical position of the area in contact with both the Mediterranean and Middle European world. Owing to only modest creative achievements seen in the preserved monuments we can not speak about a significant type of Carolingian or Ottonian art. Nevertheless, it is a fact that on the other hand the Carolingian state became the initiator of the cultural life in the area. The only contribution of the Slovenian area to the craft creativity of the period can be seen in the jewellery of Köttlach culture. The richness of forms and motifs, the number of unique pieces and the popularity of this kind of jewellery allow us to assume the existence of local workshops. And if we search for the influence of the Carolingian and Ottonian periods we can see it in the appearance of the human figure and in iconography typically strongly bound to early Christian art.



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Plate 2.

1 - Piran; 2,3,5 - Koper; 4 - Bled Castle (after A. Valič 1964); 6 - Sv. gore above Sotla, sv. Jurij.



Plate 3.

1,2,4,13,14 - Kranj, Parish Church (A.Valič); 3 - Ptuj Castle (J.Korošec); 5,6 - Kranj, Iskra Crossroads (M.Sagadin); 7,8 - Kranj, Parish Church (M.Sagadin); 9 - Batuje, sv. Jurij (T.Knific, D.Svoljšak); 10,11,15 - Bled Castle (A.Valič); 12 - Legen, sv. Jurij (M.Strmčnik).

- ¹ T. KNIFIC, *Carniola, Sclavorum patria*, 24. seminar slovenskega jezika, literature in kulture, Ljubljana 1988, p. 201-207.
- ² T. KNIFIC — M. SAGADIN, *Pismo brez pisave*, katalog razstave Narodnega muzeja, Ljubljana 1991.
- ³ H. ROTH, *Kunst der Völkerwanderungszeit*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte, Supplementband IV, München 1979, p. 75ss.
- ⁴ T. KNIFIC — M. SAGADIN, o.c.
- ⁵ A. PLETERSKI — M. BELAK, ZBIVA. *Cerkve v Vzhodnih Alpah od 8. do 10. stoletja*, in: *Zgodovinski časopis* 49, 1995, 1, p. 19-43.
- ⁶ P. ŠTIH, *Madžari in slovenska zgodovina v zadnji četrtini 9. in prvi polovici 10. stoletja*, in: *Zgodovinski časopis* 37, 1983, 3, p. 188-193.
- ⁷ V. ŠRIBAR, *Tisoč let slovenske arhitekture na blejskem otoku*, Sinteza 1967/68, p. 60-64; T. KNIFIC — D. SVOLJŠAK, *Vipavska dolina*, in: *Situla* 17, 1976, p. 71ss; M. STRMČNIK, *Sveti Jurij*, Slovenj Gradec 1994.
- ⁸ M. ZADNIKAR, *Romanika v Sloveniji*, Ljubljana 1982, p. 441-448; I. STOPAR, *Kapela sv. Jurija na Svetih gorah*, in: *Varstvo spomenikov* 21, 1977, p. 23-35.
- ⁹ P. KOROŠEC, *Zgodnjerednjeveška arheološka slika karantanskih Slovanov*, in: *Dela 1. razreda SAZU* 22/1, Ljubljana 1979, p. 278; I. STOPAR, *Župnijska cerkev Marijinega vnebovzeta v Braslovčah in problem karolinške sakralne arhitekture na Slovenskem*, Razprave Filozofske fakultete v Ljubljani, 1987; J. HÖFLER, in: *Arheološki vestnik* 39-40, 1988/89, p. 650-652.
- ¹⁰ M. SAGADIN, *Plastika s pleteninasto ornamentiko v Sloveniji*, in: *Zbornik za umetnostno zgodovino* n.v. 17, 1981, p. 33ss.
- ¹¹ E. CEVC, *Dvoje zgodnjerednjeveških figurálnih upodobitev na slovenskih tleh*, in: *Arheološki vestnik* 3, 1952, p. 214-249; T. KNIFIC — M. SAGADIN, o.c., p. 42s; Z. TUNER, *Relief na kapeli sv. Jurija na Svetih gorah*, in: *Varstvo spomenikov* 35, 1993 (1995), p. 77s.
- ¹² T. KNIFIC — M. SAGADIN, o.c., p. 42-46.
- ¹³ D. KRAMER, *Imago Aquilae (Bemerkungen zu einer Emailscheibenfibel aus Krungl)*, in: *Da Schau Her* 4, 1983, p. 11-14.
- ¹⁴ A. VALIČ, *Staroslovansko grobišče na blejskem gradu*, in: *Situla* 7, 1964, T. XLVI.
- ¹⁵ *Das Reich der Salier 1024-1125*, Mainz 1992, p. 136, 24, 25.
- ¹⁶ M. STRMČNIK, o.c., p. 16s.
- ¹⁷ M. SCHULZE-DÖRRLAMM, *Juwelen der Kaiserin Theophanu*, in: *Archeologisches Korrespondenzblatt* 19, 1989, p. 415-422; M. BACKERS — R. DÖLLING, *Nastajanje Evrope*, in: *Umetnost v slikah* 3, Ljubljana 1987, p. 161, 164, 165.

RANOSREDNJOVJEKOVNO LIKOVNO STVARALAŠTVO U SLOVENIJI

SAŽETAK

Poslije zalaska kasnoantičke kulture početkom VII. stoljeća, koja u svim komponentama zapravo još pripada VI. stoljeću, o ponovnom buđenju zanatsko-umjetničkog stvaralaštva u Sloveniji možemo govoriti tek krajem VII. stoljeća, poslije dolaska Slavena. Prvi počeci toga manifestiraju se u iskucanom ukrasu kružnih fibula izrađenih pod snažnim utjecajem zapadnog figuralnog stila. No pravo stvaralaštvo u više grana likovnog izražavanja počinje tek početkom IX. stoljeća i ide rame uz rame s procesom pokrštavanja. S obzirom da je veći dio sadašnje Slovenije pripadao akvilejskoj jurisdikciji, pokrštavanje je (iz više poznatih razloga) kasnilo u usporedbi s područjima koja su pripadala Salzburgu.

Premda se u IX. i X. stoljeću na teritoriju Carniole već spominje više crkava, do danas je istražen tek mali broj njih (rotunda Sv. Marije u Koprju, najstarija faza crkve na bledskom otoku, ostaci crkve Sv. Jurja u Batujama, kapele Sv. Jurja i Martina na Svetim gorama i novootkrivena najstarija faza crkve Sv. Jurja u Legnu kod Slovenj Gradeca). Zanimljivo je da upravo crkva u Legnu, premda najudaljenija od jadranske obale, pripada tzv. "istarskom tipu" s upisanom apsidom, a time se nadovezuje i na ostatke Pribinove bazilike iz Blatenskog Kostela. Uzimajući u obzir i činjenicu da se od svih 40 fragmenata pleterne ornamentike u Sloveniji, tek tri nalaze u njezinom sjeveroistočnom dijelu, a

svi ostali u Primorskoj, možemo pretpostaviti da taj dio sadašnje Slovenije očito nije pripadao istom kulturnom krugu kao njezin centralni dio.

Inače, pleterna ornamentika, koja se pojavljuje ponajviše u zaleđu Kopra, sasvim se uklapa među istarske i sjevernojadranske primjerke, a nedostatak fragmenata u kontinentalnoj Sloveniji može se objasniti vrlo slabom misionarskom aktivnošću Aquileie i najездом Mađara tijekom X. stoljeća. Jedina skulptura tog vremena u Sloveniji, koja ne pripada pleternoj ornamentici, je reljef ugrađen u kapelu Sv. Jurja na Svetim Gorama. On predstavlja ili oranta ili donatora, a možda i Nou nakon izlaska iz lađe ili pak Ivana Krstitelja.

Pored mediteranske komponente u likovnom stvaralaštvu karolinškog i otonskog doba u Sloveniji, očit je i utjecaj Zapada. On se izražava u nakitu alpskih Slavena koji pripada tzv. ketlaškoj kulturi. Na emajliranim polumjesečastim naušnicama i okruglim fibulama predstavljeni su brojni kršćanski motivi (križ, orao, drvo života, zdenac života, janje božje, lik prvaka apostola Petra i Pavla, proroka Daniela, pauna), a u jednom primjerku i lik vladara.

Sagledavši sav taj materijal očividno je da se u Sloveniji tog vremena radi o stvaralaštvu provincije bez većih kulturnih centara, a njezin jedini doprinos po našem mišljenju možemo vidjeti u nakitu ketlaške kulture za kojeg se mogu dokazati i domaće radionice.

