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MARBLE STATUE OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST FROM THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST ON THE ISLAND OF ŠIPAN

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the marble sculpture of St John the Baptist from the church dedicated to the same saint in the area of Šilovo Selo on the island of Šipán. Although it is an outstanding Renaissance sculptural work, it has only briefly been mentioned in scholarly literature. The sculpture stands out because of the luxurious material from which it was carved and because part of a Romanesque figurative relief was consciously preserved on its back. The intension was to indicate that the statue was created in the first half of the sixteenth century, as well as the fact that a reused marble fragment initially represented an eagle fighting a serpent from the first half of the thirteenth century. Special attention was given to the phenomenon of reused marble fragments and the conscious preservation of older artwork as an attribute of antiquity and prestige, which was also detected on several other examples in the area of Dubrovnik and its surroundings.

Keywords: island of Šipán, Šilovo Selo, Church of St John the Baptist, sculpture, 13th century, 16th century, reused marble fragment

Šipán is the largest island of the Dubrovnik archipelago, belonging to the group of the Elaphite Islands (Elaphites). It is situated between the Pelješac Peninsula in the northwest and the island of Lopud in the southeast. The first mention of Šipán in medieval documents appears in the variant forms *Juppána*, *Jupána*, *Giupána*, *Giuppána*,

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Zuppana, Čupana.¹ It seems that Šipan was geographically divided into two parts: *caput inferius* and *caput superius*, because in the archival sources from 1252 it is mentioned as *in inferiori capite insulae Jupanae* and in 1300 as *in capite superiori in Jupana*.² The name *caput inferius* referred to the northwestern part of Šipan with a deep and well-protected bay where the most important island settlement of Šipanska Luka developed, while *caput superius* referred to the southeastern side with a smaller bay around which the settlement of Suđurađ was formed. The church of St John the Baptist is located south of the latter settlement, and was erected on the island's most arable land, the spacious Šipansko Polje, in the area of Šilovo Selo, where the field has the greatest width. It was first recorded in a historical document from 1312, but the well-preserved medieval edifice was constructed earlier.³ It is a single-nave building rectangular in plan, with a modest dome over its central bay and a prominent square apse at the east end.⁴ According to its architectural features, the Šipan church belongs to the south Dalmatian single nave dome type. This specific type of medieval architecture is characteristic for the Dubrovnik region, and a total of sixteen monuments have been detected. Twelve are on the Elaphite Islands, three in the historic centre of Dubrovnik and one in Ston.⁵ An identical articulation

¹ Josip Lučić, "Prošlost elafitskog otoka Šipana (do 1300. godine)", *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, ser. III, 10 (1968), 96; Josip Lučić, *Iz prošlosti dubrovačkog kraja u doba Republike*, Dubrovnik: Časopis Dubrovnik, 1990, 30.

² J. Lučić, "Prošlost elafitskog otoka Šipana (do 1300. godine)", 96; J. Lučić, *Iz prošlosti dubrovačkog kraja u doba Republike*, 30.

³ Josip Lučić, "Građevinski spomenici XIII stoljeća na Šipanu", *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 14 (1962), 82; J. Lučić, "Prošlost elafitskog otoka Šipana (do 1300. godine)", 100; J. Lučić, *Iz prošlosti dubrovačkog kraja u doba Republike*, 32.

⁴ Archaeological excavations, along with conservation and restoration works were conducted on the church of St John the Baptist in Šilovo Selo on Šipan in 1977. The supervisor of this research was Dubravka Beritić from the Conservation Institute for the Protection of Heritage Monuments in Dubrovnik. Valuable early Romanesque mural paintings were discovered on that occasion and the supervisor of the restoration works on the frescoes was Emil Pohl from the Croatian Conservation Institute (hereafter cited as: CCI). On the archaeological excavations, conservation and restoration works conducted in 1977 see: Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, Conservation Department in Dubrovnik, *Research journal of the church of St John the Baptist in Šilovo Selo on Šipan Island, 1977* (hereafter cited as: *Research journal of Šilovo Selo*). Restoration of mural paintings was also carried out in 1995 (Research director: Emil Pohl, CCI), and archaeological excavations, conservation and restoration works were conducted from 1998 to 2001 (Research directors: Željko Peković, Ivica Žile, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, Conservation Department in Dubrovnik). The restoration of the wall paintings was then headed by Claudia Pezzi from the CCI. In that period, the dome over the central bay was fully restored. On the conservation and restoration works carried out in the period from 1998 to 2001: Željko Peković, *Četiri elafitske crkve / Quattro chiese delle isole Elafite, Studia mediterranea archaeologica 1*, ed. Ante Milošević, Dubrovnik - Split: Omega engineering d.o.o. - Centar Studia mediterranea pri Filozofskom fakultetu u Splitu, 2008, 46-69.

⁵ Twelve monuments are situated on the Elaphite Islands, six of them on the smallest island of Koločep (The church of St Nicholas (St Vitus) and the church of St Michael are located on the most arable land of the island and in the immediate vicinity of the main road that connects the two most important bays, Donje Čelo in the west and Gornje Čelo in the northeast; then the church of St Sergius in the Bige area, the church of St Barbara in the Borje area, the church of St Francis in Jekavac bay, and the church of St Anthony of Padua in Gornje Čelo). Three are on the island of Lopud (the church of St John the Baptist on Ivanje Brdo, the church of St Nicholas on Polačica hill and the church of St Elijah in the Sutiona (Sutionik) area). Three are on the island of Šipan (the church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo

of the exterior wall surfaces, with three semicircle niches on the lateral walls and one on the apse, can be found in a group of typologically related religious buildings. Namely, in the church of St Nicholas on Prijeko in the city of Dubrovnik, from the late eleventh or early twelfth century.⁶ Likewise, the articulated exterior wall surfaces of the church in Šilovo Selo are built in accordance with the interior wall arrangement, which is an architectural trait of early Romanesque monuments.⁷ Valuable medieval mural paintings have been preserved in the church interior, depicting a narrative composition with saints, as well as lavishly painted geometric decoration. In the apse there is a grand figure of Christ on the throne with the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist.⁸ The same wall paintings were created in the typologically similar St Nicholas' (St Vitus') Church on the neighbouring island of Koločep (Kalamota). Both frescoes were executed in the first half or middle of the twelfth century, and it is highly likely that they were conceived by the same painter or the workshop that made frescoes that once embellished the illustrious Dubrovnik cathedral.⁹ The astonishingly high quality of the Elaphite mural paintings, as well as their stylistic proximity to the frescoes from the Dubrovnik cathedral, demonstrate the importance of those two small Elaphite sanctuaries, i.e., their owners (landholders) at the

Selo area, the church of St Michael in Pakljena and the church of St Peter on Velji Vrh). Three monuments have been preserved in the historical centre of Dubrovnik (the church of Sigurata and the church of St Nicholas on Prijeko, and the church of St Luke), while only one building has been preserved in Ston (the church of St Michael on Gradac hill). All monuments are studied in detail in the doctoral dissertation Ivana Tomas, *Srednjovjekovne jednobrodne crkve s kupolom južne Dalmacije i Boke kotorske*, Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet, 2014, 7-235, with previous literature.

⁶ I. Tomas, *Srednjovjekovne jednobrodne crkve s kupolom južne Dalmacije i Boke kotorske*, 90, 176.

⁷ Vladimir Gvozdanović, "Značaj starohrvatske arhitekture za opću povijest europske predromanike", in: *Prilozi istraživanju starohrvatske arhitekture*, ed. Andre Mohorovičić, Split: Kabinet za urbanizam i arhitekturu Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti, 1978, 133-135; Vladimir P. Goss, "Is there a Pre-Romanesque Style in Architecture", *Peristil* 25 (1982), 33-51; Igor Fisković, "O freskama 11. i 12. stoljeća u Dubrovniku i okolici", *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 33 (2009), 31; I. Tomas, *Srednjovjekovne jednobrodne crkve s kupolom južne Dalmacije i Boke kotorske*, 7-235; Ivana Tomas (with contribution by Maja Zeman), *Spomenici otoka Lopuda od antike do srednjeg vijeka*, Zagreb-Dubrovnik: Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, FF press - Ogranak Matice hrvatske u Dubrovniku, 2017, 37-58.

⁸ On early Romanesque mural paintings from the church of St John the Baptist in Šilovo Selo on the island of Šipan: Ž. Peković *Četiri elafitske crkve*, 53-69; I. Fisković, "O freskama 11. i 12. stoljeća u Dubrovniku i okolici", 31; Igor Fisković, "Zapažanja o srednjovjekovnim freskama u Dubrovniku i okolici", *Dubrovnik* N.S. 21/2 (2010), 163-200; Igor Fisković, "Likovna oprema i umjetnine starih katedrala", in: *Katedrala Gospe Velike u Dubrovniku*, ed. Katarina Horvat-Levaj, Dubrovnik - Zagreb: Gradska župa Gospe Velike - Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2014, 81-85; Tatjana Mičević-Đurić, *Bizant u srednjovjekovnome zidnom slikarstvu od Budve do Kvarnera*, Zagreb: Sveučilište u Zagrebu, Filozofski fakultet, 2012, 287-303 (Doctoral dissertation); Nikolina Maraković and Tin Turković, "Liturgical Vestments in the Eleventh and Twelfth Century Mural Paintings of Dubrovnik and Elaphiti Islands - a Contribution to the Study of 'Adrio-Byzantinism' on the Eastern Adriatic", *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 40 (2016), 11-15.

⁹ I. Fisković "O freskama 11. i 12. stoljeća u Dubrovniku i okolici", 17-36; I. Fisković, "Zapažanja o srednjovjekovnim freskama u Dubrovniku i okolici", 163-200; I. Fisković, "Likovna oprema i umjetnine starih katedrala", 81-85.

time. This could suggest that it was a related commission, and that the commissioning patrons were most probably the Dubrovnik clerics.¹⁰

More extensive interventions on the medieval building took place during the construction of a larger Renaissance church (Figure 1). As a result, the western façade of the early Romanesque edifice was demolished, and the medieval church became the apse of the Renaissance building.¹¹ Akin interventions are very common in the area of Dubrovnik and its surroundings in the Early Modern times, which points to a meaningful appreciation of the older, more ancient heritage in the spirit of the humanism of that time. Among the numerous examples, one should single out the church of St John the Baptist on Ivanje Brdo on the neighbouring island of Lopud, where a modest early-medieval edifice also became the apse of a larger Renaissance church.¹² However, the Renaissance building in Šilovo Selo surpasses all other churches in terms of size, including those on Lopud, which could imply that the then owner of that Šipan property commissioned a rather ambitious and financially demanding project. This spacious single-nave church is rectangular in plan, 10 metres long and 7.4 metres wide, with an imposing height of 9.5 metres. Its exterior walls on the western and northern sides were well-built with larger ashlar blocks, while the southern wall shows a rough masonry construction due to subsequent alterations. On the north wall, there are two window openings with a rounded ending and a simply moulded frame. They are similar to those found in the Holy Cross Chapel, built in the immediate vicinity of the parish church of Our Lady of Šunj on Lopud in the first half of the sixteenth century.¹³ The design of the main portal on the west façade in Šilovo Selo illustrates the same date of construction (Figure 2). It is a doorway with simply moulded doorposts and a slightly pronounced lintel, surmounted by a semicircular lunette (Figure 3). In the upper section of both doorposts, there is a carved console with a grand and curved foliage, and the lintel is decorated with a central medallion with Christ's monogram. The consoles are similarly executed as those at the window frame on the first floor of the Getaldić summer residence in nearby Suđurađ from 1516.¹⁴ Two coats of arms are carved at the

¹⁰ It is possible that the mural paintings were commissioned by the canons of the Dubrovnik cathedral chapter and that both Elaphite churches—St Nicholas' (St Vitus') on Koločep and St John the Baptist's on Šipan—were in their possession. The creation of these highly valuable frescoes coincides with the Gregorian Reform and the resurgence of the Dubrovnik Church, marked by substantial investments in the construction of religious buildings in Dubrovnik and its surroundings and the reform of the Church itself. At that time the Dubrovnik cathedral chapter was (re)organized, which was reflected in a new church furnishing of the Dubrovnik cathedral and in the formation/foundation of landholdings and properties for the canons of the Dubrovnik cathedral chapter. I. Tomas, *Spomenici otoka Lopuda od antike do srednjeg vijeka*, 55-58.

¹¹ *Research journal of Šilovo Selo*; Ž. Peković *Četiri elafitske crkve / Quattro chiese delle isole Elafite*, 51.

¹² I. Tomas, *Spomenici otoka Lopuda od antike do srednjeg vijeka*, 67-68.

¹³ The Holy Cross Chapel was constructed in the immediate vicinity of the parish church of Our Lady of Šunj on Lopud in 1527. Vicko Lisičar, *Lopud: historički i suvremeni prikaz*, Dubrovnik: Dubrovačka hrvatska tiskara, 1931, 37.

¹⁴ On the Getaldić villa in Suđurađ on the island of Šipan: Nada Grujić, *Dubrovačka ladanjska arhitektura*, Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2021, 150-154.



Figure 1: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area on the island of Šipan (Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

ends of the Šilovo Selo lintel in the older and stylized form of *a testa di cavallo*. On the left coat of arms, a broken curved line in the form of an inverted letter V separates four lilies—three in the upper level and one in the lower. The right coat of arms contains four diagonal lines that are detached in the middle by a horizontal band. The latter coat of arms is close to that of the prominent Dubrovnik noble Sorgo (Sorkočević) family and a similar design of the coat of arms can be seen on the wellhead next to the Dubrovnik chapel of Ivan Marinov Gondola (Gundulić) villa in Gruž from the first half of the sixteenth century.¹⁵ The refined, shallow, almost linear moulding, which in "one stroke" goes from lintel to doorpost appears on the northern doorway in Šilovo Selo.

¹⁵ On the Dubrovnik villa of Ivan Marinov Gondola (Gundulić) in Gruž: Nada Grujić, "Dubrovački ljetnikovci", in: *Hrvatska renesansa*, ed. Miljenko Jurković and Alain Erlande-Brandenburg, Zagreb: Galerija Klovičevi dvori, 2004, 125; Nada Grujić, "Ljetnikovac Miha Junijeva Bone u Rijeci dubrovačkoj: problemi datacije, atribucije i prezentacije", *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 38 (2014), 71-74; N. Grujić, *Dubrovačka ladanjska arhitektura*, 175-183. Currently, it is not possible to determine more precisely the origin of the two coats of arms carved on the main portal of the church of St John the Baptist in Šilovo Selo on Šipan. Namely, the coats of arms of noble families often changed, and the fact that some non-noble families also had heraldic insignia, though uncoded, cannot be excluded. Professor Nada Grujić informed us of the latter, for which we sincerely thank her. In this regard, it should be pointed out that a very similar coat of arms with four beams detached in the middle by a horizontal strip is recorded in the book *Sepulcra* in the library of the Dubrovnik Dominican monastery: Đurđica Petrović, "Sepulkralni spomenici u srednjovjekovnom Dubrovniku", in: *Likovna kultura Dubrovnika 15. i 16. stoljeća. Zbornik radova sa Simpozija Likovna kultura Dubrovnika 15. i 16. stoljeća*, ed. Igor Fisković, Zagreb: Muzejsko-galerijski centar, 1991, 129, fig. 5.



Figure 2: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, main portal
(Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).



Figure 3: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, lunette of the main portal
(Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

A similarly executed moulding is perceptible on the window frames of the previously mentioned Suđurađ villa from 1516; on the Dubrovnik portals of Petar Junijev Sorgo villa on Lapad, erected between 1518 and 1521; and on the Paklĵena main doorway of Our Lady of Mercy Parish Church on Šĵipan, which is highly likely from the same period.¹⁶ However, it is necessary to stress that at both portals in Šilovo Selo, one notices certain inconsistencies to the more elaborate and mostly accurately interpreted "Roman" mouldings of *all'antica*, which could point to a misunderstanding of the original design and/or to the poor craftsmanship.¹⁷ For instance, the three shallow hollow mouldings that would be common are not executed on the frames in Šilovo Selo. Instead, there is one, whereby the shallow S strip at the ends of the doorpost is interrupted or, more precisely, there is no characteristic "turn" that is usually found at the corners of a lintel. Therefore, it is made with plain chamfers. Moreover, the usual dentils motif between the lintel and cornice are lacking, and the light opening on the main doorway is slightly larger and is remnant of an older, Gothic style. So, it seems that the (re)interpretation of a "Classic design" of the architrave reveals a stonemason who was familiar with a new Renaissance style, but it was transformed to a more traditional treatment of architectural and decorative elements. A Renaissance marble sculpture was created for the lunette of the main portal in Šilovo Selo, with the figure of the patron saint of the church—St John the Baptist (Figure 4). In the second half of the twentieth century, the statue was displaced to the church interior and is still there today.¹⁸ Although it is one of the most impressive Renaissance sculptural works in the Dubrovnik region, it

¹⁶ On the villa of Petar Junijev Sorgo (Sorkoćević) on Lapad in Dubrovnik: Cvito Fisković, "Sorkoćevićev ljetnikovac na Lapadu", Zagreb: *Rad Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti* 397 (1982); Nada Grujić, "Ljetnikovac Petra Sorkoćevića", in: *Zlatno doba Dubrovnika XV. i XVI. stoljeća*, ed. Vladimir Marković, Zagreb: Muzejsko galerijski centar, 1987, 314-315; Nada Grujić, *Ladanjska arhitektura dubrovačkog područja*, Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 1991; Nada Grujić, *Kuća u gradu. Studije o dubrovačkoj stambenoj arhitekturi 15. i 16. stoljeća*, Dubrovnik: Matica hrvatska - Ogranak Dubrovnik, 2013; N. Grujić, *Dubrovačka ladanjska arhitektura*, 108-119.

¹⁷ In 1486, Radivoj Bogosalić promised Đono Lukin, canon of the Dubrovnik cathedral chapter, that he would create "Roman windows of [quadras] design (...) like those in the Archbishop's Palace", while a document from 1499 states that Marko Kršulović promised Mato Getaldić *fenestras 3 quadras more romano et cum parestatis inferioribus et superioribus dentatis et cum cornisiis*: Cvito Fisković, *Naši graditelji i kipari XV. i XVI. stoljeća u Dubrovniku*, Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1947, 69. Likewise, during the renovation of the Dubrovnik Rector's Palace, the execution of seven new Roman windows is mentioned in 1525. It can be concluded that this Roman design (*more romano*) referred to the square or rectilinear window and to the corresponding smooth, shallow-relief moulding, in contrast to the windows of the *more fiorentino*, which implied a more decorative mouldings with pilasters, foliage capitals and architrave: N. Grujić, *Dubrovačka ladanjska arhitektura*, 148-150. Otherwise, the moulded architrave (based on a tradition that was strongly imbued with classical art like the baptistery of the Florence cathedral) already emerged in the work of Filippo Brunelleschi in Florence in the first half of the fifteenth century, as well as on "Roman" rectilinear portals in Leon Battista Alberti's Palazzo Rucellai from the middle of the same century, after appearing in Rome itself.

¹⁸ The marble sculpture of St John the Baptist was displaced from the lunette of the main portal to the church interior in 1977. *Research journal of Šilovo Selo*.



Figure 4: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, sculpture of St John the Baptist, front side (Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

has only been mentioned briefly in scholarly literature.¹⁹ The sculpture of St John the Baptist also stands out for the luxurious material out of which it is sculpted, marble, which could indeed signify that quite a prominent commissioning patron (or patrons) was behind the project of building and decorating the church in Šilovo Selo. On the back of the Renaissance statue, there is a partially preserved Romanesque figurative relief (Figure 5). Therefore, the sculpture from Šilovo Selo is very interesting to *spolia* studies, particularly due to the phenomenon of reused marble fragments and the conscious preservation of older artwork as a kind of an attribute of antiquity, status and prestige, which can also be detected in several other examples in the Dubrovnik region.

¹⁹ The sculpture of St John the Baptist from Šilovo Selo was first mentioned by Josip Posedel in 1952. He stated that the statue was installed on the lunette of the main portal of the Šipan church: Josip Posedel, "Predromanički spomenici otoka Šipana", *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, ser. III, 2 (1952), 119, note 14. Igor Fisković referred to the Šipan sculpture in 1987, and noted that it was a high-quality sculptural work of the sixteenth century and that on its back there was a part of a Romanesque relief with the image of an eagle: Igor Fisković, "Kiparstvo", in: *Zlatno doba Dubrovnika XV. i XVI. stoljeće*, ed. Vladimir Marković et al., Zagreb: MTM, 1987, 343, K/36. The statue was also briefly mentioned in the scientific paper of Anđelko Badurina and Željka Čorak on the artifacts from churches on the island of Šipan in 1998, and it is dated to the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century: Anđelko Badurina and Željka Čorak, "Inventar šipanskih crkava", *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 22 (1998), 59.



Figure 5: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, sculpture of St John the Baptist, back side (Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

Renaissance sculpture of St John the Baptist

The Renaissance sculpture of St John the Baptist is of smaller dimensions (height: 56 centimetres, width: 34 centimetres, depth: 22 centimetres), and is a reused marble piece of an older artifact, whose Romanesque relief of an eagle has partly survived on the back of St John's statue (Figure 6). On the front of the marble block, in high relief, is the traditional prophetic image of St John the Baptist in the desert. In his left hand he initially held a thin stick with a cross on the top, which unfortunately has not been preserved, while with his right hand, bent at the elbow, he points at it with his finger.²⁰ The half-length figure of the saint is adjusted to the format of the stone block and to the setting within the lunette of the main portal, so its height reaches slightly below the hips and is inclined forward (Figure 7). The subtle inclination of his head is accompanied by a turn to the right, which results in a slight torsion of his body. The backside of the

²⁰ The traditional image of Saint John the Baptist, at least in painting, is sometimes shown with a scroll hanging on a staff, on which, according to Isaiah (40:3), his prophetic words are written: *Vox clamantis in deserto parate viam domini*. In another version of that depiction, instead of a cane with the inscription, St John the Baptist holds the Lamb of God in his hands.



Figure 6: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, sculpture of St John the Baptist, left back side
(Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).



Figure 7: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, sculpture of St John the Baptist, right side
(Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

marble block is generally, and in some parts rather roughly executed. Deterioration of the statue is observable on the surface areas directly exposed to weathering, especially on its front side such as chromatic changes, as well as the "sugaring" or granular disaggregation of marble crystals, minor cracks and the loss of material. Apart from the tip of the nose, numerous otherwise very zealously carved anatomical details have been irretrievably lost. This can be clearly seen on the bare and veined forearm of the bent right hand and the outstretched index finger, as well as on the protruding parts of St John's face that are framed on the lower side by the short, now almost trimmed and fused strands of the beard.

In accordance with the usual iconography, the ascetic figure of the last prophet is dressed in a sack made of camel's hair and covered in a cloak. Thrown over the left shoulder and wrapped around the hips, the soft cloth of John's garment descends diagonally on the opposite side in wide, elliptic strokes and cascades in large tubular folds under his bare right arm. The opposite end of the cloak is raised and draped over

the left forearm, revealing the saint's half-closed fist, under which the hem forms a gentle wavy line that blends naturally with the base of the stone block. It is this detail that reveals the masterfulness of the sculptor and his skilful adjustment of the saint, represented in a half-length manner. Otherwise, as a rule, the figure is shown in full-length, in a standing position. A narrow sackcloth robe with wide and regular semicircular openings exposes the lean and bony body of St John the Baptist, on which the lowered right shoulder and the slightly outstretched left shoulder create the impression of a retracted and withered chest, covered with short and densely strung tufts of camel's hair. Deviating from the regular leather belt, the robe in this depiction is attached with a high and relatively thick twisted rope or some kind of fabric. In contrast to the decorative treatment of garment, the unknown sculptor resorted to a more naturalistic approach to the anatomical details of St John's ascetic body. Thus, under the saint's narrow neck, he carefully indicated the upper part of the chest where, under the double wavy folds of dry and thin skin, the rib connection of the sternum and collarbones can be discerned. Zealously sculpted anatomical details adorn the rest of the nude body, markedly a narrow, elbow-bent arm, with spindly and tense muscles that cover the forearm and wrist entirely with veins, while radial ligaments can also be seen on the wrist. The detailed, minute carving of St John's body is specifically manifested in the prominent bone of the forearm where two groups of muscles are fully separated, and the final spherical thickening of the outer ulna bone is also detectable. The face of St John the Baptist is framed by rather lush and long hair resembling serpent-like strands that fall smoothly from the regularly arranged crown of the head to the middle of the high forehead, leaving only the symmetrical side locks visible (Figure 8). Descending along the edge of his face, the strands become livelier and more restless, and completely covering the ears, they pull back falling on the saint's shoulders. Short and neatly arranged strands of the beard fall from the lower side of the face, down the jaw towards the top of the chin. St John's sunken face is dominated by eyes indicated by dimples, located in unequally carved eye sockets. The right eye is more open and more deeply recessed than the left, and the pupils, which are marked by a small hole, are oriented in different directions. Both eyes are framed by prominent cheekbones and overemphasized, unnaturally lowered cheeks, under which nasolabial wrinkles are noticeable. The saint's uniform nose, unfortunately damaged at the top, is also very handily carved, as are his tiny and slightly pressed lips.

It truly is a remarkably valuable sculptural work, as was established earlier. Namely, among the rare observations related to the Šipan artifact, the one by Igor Fisković stands out. He recognized that the marble statue of St John the Baptist from Šilovo Selo, with its highly naturalistic and skilfully sculpted details reveals a strikingly high aesthetic and sculptural value, and that its quality surpasses numerous examples of Dubrovnik sculptural works in mature Renaissance style. Moreover, Igor Fisković properly illustrated that it was executed in the local area because it was made from the older and luxurious



Figure 8: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, sculpture of St John the Baptist, front side, detail (Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

material (marble) that is not common in this region.²¹ Although the Šipan St John stands out from contemporary sculptural pieces in the Dubrovnik region due to its quality as well as its noble material, certain similarities are perceivable with the statue of the same saint on the lunette of the south portal in the Dubrovnik Franciscan monastery church, which was created by the brothers Leonard and Petar Petrović in 1499²² (Figure 9). In this respect, it is necessary to emphasize the almost identical treatment of the folds of their soft and disproportionately large cloak, raised high around the waist, as well as the specific belt, which in both cases is conceived as a thicker twisted rope. Nonetheless,

²¹ I. Fisković, "Kiparstvo", 343, K/36.

²² In contemporary painting from Dubrovnik and its surroundings, the depiction of this widely represented saint differs greatly from the Šipan St John the Baptist and the one on the Dubrovnik portal sculpted by the Petrović brothers. Compare the altarpiece of St Michael in the Franciscan monastery church of Our Lady of Snow in Cavtat, painted by Vicko Lovrin in 1509; the altarpiece of St Nicholas (Triptych of the Lukarević family) in the Dominican monastery church of St Dominic in Dubrovnik, the work of Mihajlo Hamzić and Pietro di Giovanni between 1512 and 1515; the altarpiece of Juraj Božidarević in the Franciscan monastery church of Our Lady of the Cave (known as Gospa od Špilice) on the island of Lopud, which is attributed to Nikola Božidarević and his associates in 1513. Similar features in the depiction of the saint's figure can also be found on Pietro di Giovanni's altarpiece in the Franciscan monastery church on Lopud, created around 1520. More on this: Vladimir Marković, "Slikarstvo", in: *Zlatno doba Dubrovnika XV. i XVI. stoljeće*, ed. Vladimir Marković et al., Zagreb: MTM, 1987, 350, 352-354, SI/10, SI/12, SI/15, SI/18; Igor Fisković, Zoraida Demori Staničić and Radoslav Tomić, "Slikarstvo i kiparstvo", in: *Milost susreta. Umjetnička baština Franjevačke provincije sv. Jeronima*, ed. Igor Fisković, Zagreb: Galerija Klovičevi dvori, 2010, 147-150, S/8-10; Sanja Cvetnić, "Mihajlo Hamzić, Triptih sv. Nikole (Triptih obitelji Lukarevića)", in: *Dominikanci u Hrvatskoj*, ed. Igor Fisković, Zagreb: Galerija Klovičevi dvori - Hrvatska dominikanska provincija, 2011.

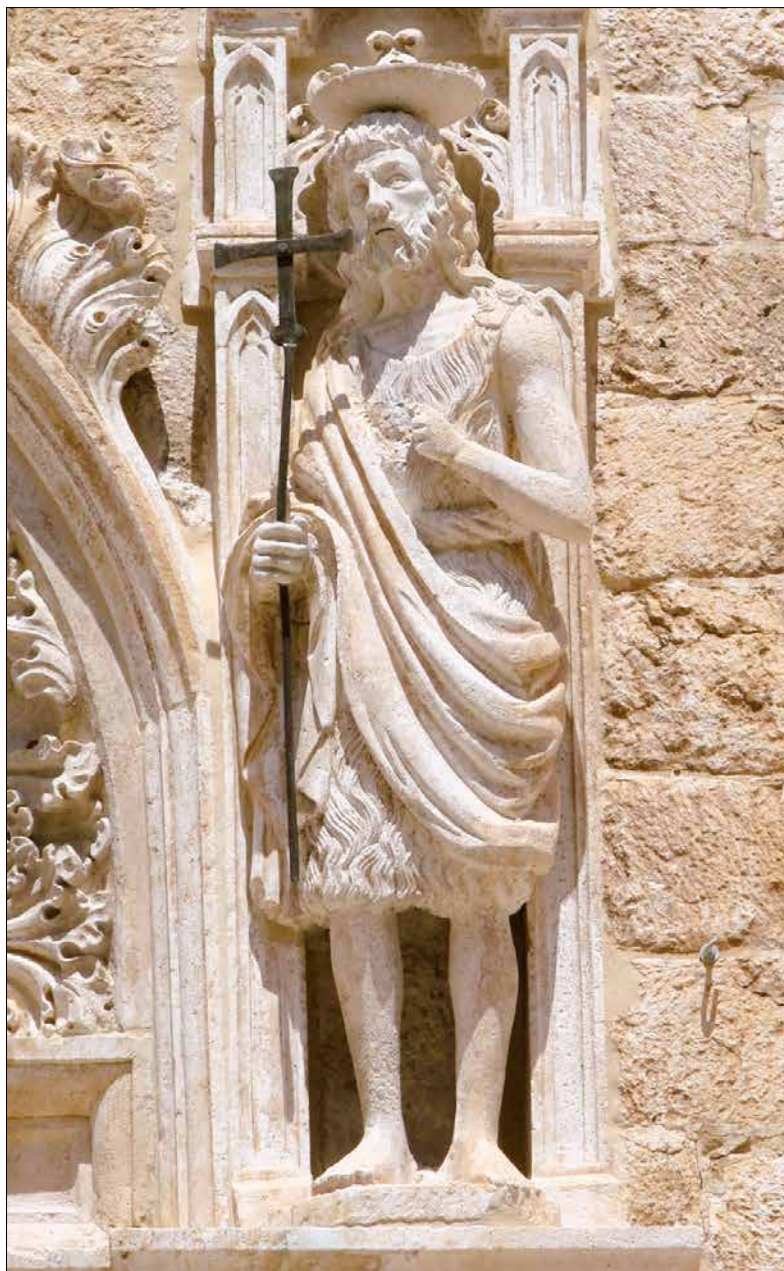


Figure 9: Leonard and Petar Pretović, Statue of St John the Baptist, south portal of the Franciscan monastery church in Dubrovnik (Photo: Predrag Marković, 2011).

apart from that similarity, dissimilarities in the stylistic features of these two artworks, point to the different time of their creation. For instance, the softening of rough lines, deeper shadows, and sharp transitions, can be linked to a greater degree of idealization, that is, to the "silencing" of late Gothic expressiveness that is still perceptible in the work of the Petrović brothers. On the other hand, the statute from Šilovo Selo is generally characterized by a more advanced stage of plastic form, the body proportions are more realistic, while the movement is considerably natural and less stylized, and the anatomical details of the human body are particularly handily sculpted. These stylistic features indicate a certain time distance between these two artifacts, as well as a change in visual culture under the strong influence of Renaissance style that are fully visible on the Šipan sculpture. Likewise, it should be mentioned that the Šipan artwork is made of a more luxurious material, marble, and that an older relief was consciously preserved on the back, which also reveals the spirit of humanism of that time. Therefore, based on the above, it can be concluded that the statue from Šilovo Selo was created by a very talented Renaissance sculptor, and the fact that he was well-trained in marble, might suggest his foreign background. The Šipan sculpture can be dated to the first half of the sixteenth century, that is, to the time when the spacious Renaissance church in Šilovo Selo was constructed. This link is indicated by the stylistic features of the Šipan main portal, for which this valuable sculptural work was commissioned, and which should certainly be dated to the first half of the sixteenth century, i.e., before the clearly defined examples of the high Renaissance style that appeared in the Dubrovnik region during the second half of the same century.

Romanesque eagle relief and the phenomenon of reused marble fragments in the Dubrovnik region

A Romanesque relief of an eagle is partly preserved on the back of the Renaissance sculpture of St John the Baptist (Figure 10). It stretches along its left side at a height of 35 centimetres, width of 20 centimetres and depth of 22 centimetres. The upper portion of the eagle's body is shown on the relief, and its head, beak, neck and raised larger wing are well-preserved. The remains of that medieval figurative relief were incorporated into the back of St John's cloak, while other parts of the older artwork were removed due to the carving of the Renaissance sculpture. The upper part of the wings and a small piece of the eagle's head are lacking, while the lower section of its body is then completely removed. Its head is turned to the left, and on that side, parts of the carved relief are noticeable in the form of a winding longer and thicker band that reaches the upper part of the eagle's beak. In that place, the relief has been re-carved, but the remains of the band are visible under the eagle's head. In that section of the composition, the band is well-kept, and it is conceived as a larger circular loop held by



Figure 10: Church of St John the Baptist in the Šilovo Selo area, relief of an eagle, back side of the sculpture of St John the Baptist (Photo: Predrag Marković, 2021).

the eagle in its beak. It is highly likely that the longer band represented a serpent and that the Šipan relief depicted an eagle with uplifted wings battling a serpent. An eagle that destroys a serpent or a dragon, i.e., evil beings, is the most common representation in Christian iconography and is a symbolic message of the fight of good against evil. The eagle is considered a symbol of the resurrection, and thus of Christ who delivers souls from the shackles of evil.²³ Depictions with the theme of the victory of good over evil, such as the relief from Šilovo Selo, which shows the battle of an eagle with a serpent, are very common in the mature Middle Ages, and especially in Romanesque art, where the aforesaid symbolic subject was mostly placed on the portals or window frames of ecclesiastical buildings. Bearing in mind the dimensions of the Šipan eagle, it is presumable that the marble fragment originally belonged to a larger sculptural unit, and the symbolic depiction of the battle between good and evil could signify that it was created for a portal or window frame.

The figure of the eagle is rendered in higher relief of *more mature realistic modelling* and plastic form, with clearly differentiated parts of the body and carved details of its feathers on the neck, trunk and raised wing, which additionally contributes to the tactility and realism of the entire surface.²⁴ The quality of this sculptural work is

²³ Ante Crnčević, "O simbolizmu ptica u kršćanskoj tradiciji", *Živo vrelo* 9 (2014), 8-10; Robert Smajlagić, "Zoomorfni, teriomorfni i tetramorfni simboli na kovanom novcu 2. dio", *Numizmatičke vijesti* 61/72 (2019), 72.

²⁴ The term *more mature realistic modelling* [zrelije realističke modelacije] is a quote from: Igor Fisković, "Još o romaničkoj skulpturi s dubrovačke katedrale", *Ars Adriatica. Časopis Odjela za povijest umjetnosti Sveučilišta u Zadru* 5 (2015), 48.

particularly evident in the skilfully carved eagle's head with a large almond-shaped eye and rounded beak, which reveals the hand of a well-trained Romanesque carver. The stylistic and morphological characteristics of the Šipan relief, as well as the quality of its execution, show affinity with a group of Romanesque figurative reliefs from Dubrovnik. This refers to several pieces of sculptural decoration, from the remains of portals and windows frames to various cornices, as well as parts of the ciborium and pulpit, which are considered to have belonged to the opulent Romanesque furnishing of the Dubrovnik cathedral and to have been executed during the thirteenth century.²⁵ All these sculptural pieces are made of luxurious marble, more precisely from reused marble fragments, which were most likely taken from the ecclesiastical complex that preceded the construction of the Dubrovnik Romanesque cathedral.²⁶ Among these Dubrovnik fragments, three carved reliefs with zoomorphic depictions of the victory of good over evil deserve special attention, because there are major similarities between them and the Šipan eagle in terms of execution and iconography. It is presumed that all three Dubrovnik reliefs initially belonged to the same sculptural unit—a larger and more lavishly decorated window frame on the cathedral apse and are dated to the first half of the thirteenth century.²⁷ The Dubrovnik artifacts depict a griffin's head with prey in its beak, a console with a human figure fighting serpents, and a part of a beam ornamented on two sides. One side shows the lower part of a horse's body, while the other side most plausibly represented a centaur in a fight with a serpent or a dragon.²⁸ All of them are distinguished by high quality execution and *more mature realistic modelling*, like the Šipan eagle, and a significant link with the beam is noticeable, where a more advanced stage of three-dimensional form is achieved in the carved figures. This mainly refers to the side on which the centaur is depicted, as there one also finds an identically executed serpent in a highly plastic form of a thicker winding band with

²⁵ I. Fisković, "Likovna oprema i umjetnine starih katedrala", 87-107; I. Fisković, "Još o romaničkoj skulpturi s dubrovačke katedrale", 39-66. The research and educational project Uncovering Old Dubrovnik Cathedrals [Otkrivanje starih dubrovačkih katedrala] was launched in 2015, and its activities were primarily focused on the study of finds originating from the site under the Baroque cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and in the neighbouring Bunićeva Poljana in Dubrovnik. See: Maja Zeman, Ana Marinković, Ivana Ožanić Roguljić, Marina Šiša Vivek and Suzana Damiani, "Preliminarna analiza rezultata aktivnosti istraživačko-edukacijskoga projekta Otkrivanje starih dubrovačkih katedrala (2018.-2020.) / Preliminary analysis of activity results for the research and educational project Discovering the Old Dubrovnik Cathedrals (2018-2020)", *Annales Instituti Archaeologici / Godišnjak Instituta za arheologiju* 16 (2020), 269-282.

²⁶ I. Fisković, "Likovna oprema i umjetnine starih katedrala", 88; I. Fisković, "Još o romaničkoj skulpturi s dubrovačke katedrale", 58, note 22.

²⁷ I. Fisković, "Još o romaničkoj skulpturi s dubrovačke katedrale", 48-49.

²⁸ Cvito Fisković, "Fragments du style roman à Dubrovnik", *Archaeologica Iugoslavica* 1 (1954), 122-123. The marble beam is now kept in the Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik (DUM AM 3347). The height of the beam is 65 cm, width 31 cm, and depth 33 cm.

a circular loop, as on the relief from Šilovo Selo (Figure 11). Although it is reasonable to believe that all three Dubrovnik artworks belonged to the same sculptural decoration that once embellished the most illustrious religious monument in Dubrovnik, it should be highlighted that none of them were discovered in the cathedral but were found at other locations. The remains of the beam and the head of the griffin were discovered in the nearby Rector's Palace in the 1950s, while the console was found in the garden



Figure 11: Beam from the Dubrovnik cathedral, now in the Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik, DUM AM 3347 (Source: Igor Fisković, "Još o romaničkoj skulpturi s dubrovačke katedrale", *Ars Adriatica, Časopis Odjela za povijest umjetnosti Sveučilišta u Zadru* 5 (2015), 47, fig. 9a).

of a residential building on Lapad.²⁹ Considering the striking similarity between the Dubrovnik "zoomorphic" reliefs and the Šipan eagle, from the dating, the quality of execution, iconography, and the (re)use of noble marble as a medium, as well as the fact that the three Dubrovnik artifacts were transferred from their original placement, it seems proper to question the provenance of the marble fragment from Šilovo Selo. In this regard, it should be emphasized that this is a unique example from that time, both on the island of Šipan and on the entire Elaphite Islands. Therefore, the possibility that the Šipan eagle was initially a part of the Romanesque sculptural decoration from the Dubrovnik cathedral should not be ruled out.

The sculpture from Šilovo Selo is also interesting to *spolia* studies, particularly due to the phenomenon of reused marble fragments and the conscious preservation of older artwork, because the preserved part of the Šipan relief with the eagle was very intentionally incorporated into the back of St John's cloak.³⁰ Preservation of the most notable part of the figurative relief, which is also handily integrated into the new sculptural work, while the rest of the Romanesque relief was removed due to the carving of the Renaissance statue, points to a meaningful appreciation of that marble fragment which had the purpose of expedient material and obviously a greater, symbolic or "iconic" meaning. It seems that the intention was to emphasize its significance or (age) value, and it also appears to be a kind of an embodiment of history or antiquity, because otherwise the older relief on the back of the later artwork would not have been maintained. The phenomenon of reused marble fragments and the conscious preservation of older sculptural work can be found in several other examples in Dubrovnik and its surroundings. Among them, a chronologically close example from the sixteenth century should be mentioned, as a medieval relief has also been preserved (Figure 12). It is a part of a marble slab today kept in the Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik, but unfortunately the findspot is unknown.³¹ In the Renaissance period, the head of a winged angel was carved on the front side of the slab, while on its back, an older ornamented relief of a complex geometric scheme containing knotted three-way circles interlaced with triple diagonal bands has been maintained. The geometric composition is very skilfully carved, which reveals the hand of a well-trained pre-Romanesque carver, and the relief can be

²⁹ C. Fisković, "Fragments du style roman à Dubrovnik", 120, 123.

³⁰ On the phenomenon of reused marble fragments: Dale Kinney, "The Concept of Spolia", in: *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 233-252, with previous literature; Patrizio Pensabene, "Architectural Spolia and Urban Transformation in Rome from Fourth to the Thirteenth Century", in: *Perspektiven der Spolien-forschung 2. Zentren und Konjunkturen der Spolierung. Studies of the Ancient World*, ed. Stefan Altekamp, Carmen Marcks-Jacobs and Peter Seiler, Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2017, 177-234, with literature.

³¹ The marble slab (DUM AM 3769) is 38 cm wide, 33 cm high and 7.5 to 9.5 cm deep. The find was first published in: Romana Menalo, *Ranosrednjovjekovna skulptura / Early Medieval Sculpture*, Dubrovnik: Dubrovački muzeji - Arheološki muzej, 2006, 70, fig. 74.

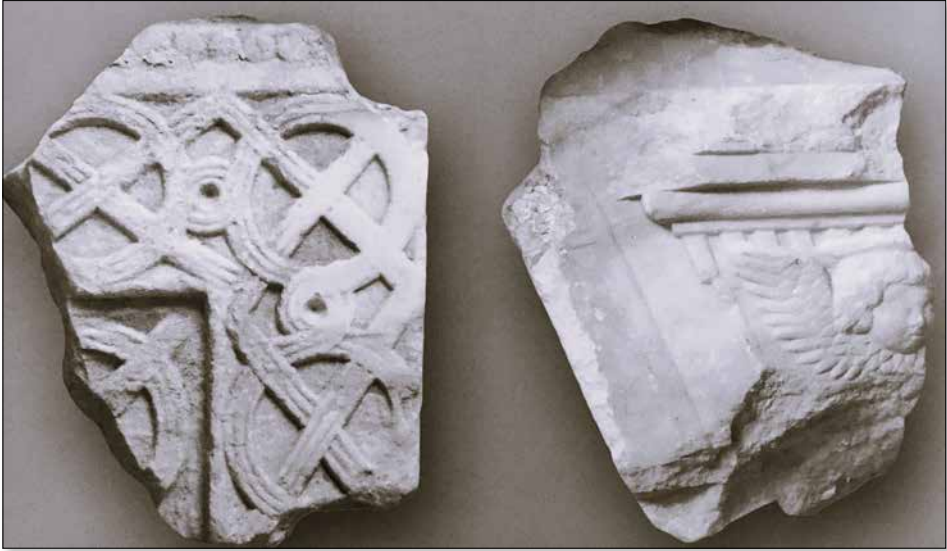


Figure 12: Slab from the Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik, DUM AM 3769, back and front side (Source: Romana Menalo, *Ranosrednjovjekovna skulptura / Early Medieval Sculpture*, ed. Mišo Đuraš, Dubrovnik: Dubrovački muzeji - Arheološki muzej, 2006, 70, fig. 74).

dated to the first half or the middle of the tenth century.³² The early medieval artifact is quite well-preserved, without marks of re-carving, and it is assumed that it was initially a chancel screen slab or a ciborium arcade.³³ Undoubtedly, the pre-Romanesque marble fragment once adorned a more prestigious ecclesiastical building in Dubrovnik—most likely the cathedral or the church of St Peter the Great.³⁴ An even clearer example of

³² A similar geometric composition from the same period can be found on chancel screen slabs from the church of St John the Baptist on Ivanje Brdo on Lopud (the slabs are stored in the Lopud parish collection), as well as in Dubrovnik: a fragment of a chancel screen pilaster from the church of St Peter the Great in the historical centre (the pilaster is now kept in the Collection of the Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik: DUM AM 2205) and a slab installed into the Baroque chapel of St Ilar at the Three Churches site in the Boninovo area.

³³ R. Menalo, *Ranosrednjovjekovna skulptura / Early Medieval Sculpture*, 70, fig. 74; Željko Peković, *Crkva Sv. Petra Velikoga. Dubrovačka predromanička katedrala i njezina skulptura / La chiesa di S. Pietro Maggiore. La cattedrale preromanica di Ragusa e il suo arredo scultoreo* [Studia mediterranea archaeologica, 4], Dubrovnik - Split: Omega engineering d.o.o. - Centar Studia mediterranea pri Filozofskom fakultetu u Splitu, 2010, 149-150, fig. 133-134; Romana Menalo, *Ranosrednjovjekovna skulptura iz fundusa Arheološkog muzeja u Dubrovniku / Early Medieval Sculpture from the collection of the Archaeological Museum in Dubrovnik*, Dubrovnik: Dubrovački muzeji - Arheološki muzej, 2018, 98, fig. 66.

³⁴ Željko Peković presumed that the marble slab was originally from the early medieval church of St Peter the Great in Dubrovnik, and that it was a ciborium arcade: Ž. Peković, *Crkva Sv. Petra Velikoga*, 149-150, fig. 133-134. The possibility that this slab was initially from the Dubrovnik cathedral should not be excluded because it was executed from the luxurious marble. Markedly, the largest number of Dubrovnik pre-Romanesque reliefs from the first half

reused marble fragments and the conscious preservation of older artwork may be found on the nearby island of Koločep. It is the medieval church of St Michael, situated on the most arable land of the island and in the immediate vicinity of the main road that connects the two most important bays, Donje Čelo in the west and Gornje Čelo in the northeast. According to its architectural features, St Michael's Church belongs to the south Dalmatian single nave dome type, like the early Romanesque church of St John the Baptist in Šilovo Selo, and was constructed in the first half or middle of the twelfth century.³⁵ At the same time, its sculptural decoration was entirely executed of luxurious marble, more precisely of reused marble fragments from Classical Antiquity, and these are the remains of sarcophagi and columns that once adorned the Roman complex in Donje Čelo bay.³⁶ An ornamented window frame was made from these older Roman artifacts, as well as a lavishly decorated chancel screen.³⁷ In addition to the characteristic early Romanesque floral and foliage motifs carved on these reliefs, figurative representations are also executed on the gable and the panels of the chancel screen. A hunting scene is

or the middle of the tenth century were discovered in the church of St Peter the Great in Dubrovnik, but none of these findings are made from marble. Cf. Ž. Peković *Crkva Sv. Petra Velikoga*, 95-173. On the other hand, the use of this noble material during the early Middle Ages was detected in the Dubrovnik cathedral. Cf. Ivica Žile, "Kameni namještaj i arhitektonska plastika prve dubrovačke katedrale", in: *Tisuću godina Dubrovačke (nad)biskupije. Zbornik radova znanstvenog skupa u povodu tisuću godina uspostave dubrovačke (nad)biskupije / metropolije (998.-1998.)*, ed. Želimir Puljić and Nediljko A. Ančić, Dubrovnik: Biskupski ordinarijat Dubrovnik - Crkva u svijetu Split, 2001, 462, 469.

³⁵ I. Tomas, *Spomenici otoka Lopuda od antike do srednjeg vijeka*, 47, 51-54. On St Michael's Church on the island of Koločep: Vicko Lisičar, *Koločep nekoć i sada*, Dubrovnik: Dubrovačka hrvatska tiskara, 1932, 86-89, 96, 108, 120-121; Ivica Žile, *Predromaničko crkveno graditeljstvo otoka Koločepa*, ed. Vlaho Benković, Dubrovnik: Matica hrvatska - Ogranak Dubrovnik, 2003, 105-114; Ž. Peković, *Četiri elafitske crkve*, 84-105; I. Tomas, *Srednjovjekovne jednobrodne crkve s kupolom južne Dalmacije i Boke kotorske*, 131-143 with literature

³⁶ In the southern part of the deep and well-protected bay in Donje Čelo, the remains of Roman buildings were discovered in 1969, which most likely functioned as part of a larger complex. It is assumed that it was a significant estate which generated higher income, with additional edifices for its administration, housing units for the workforce, a pier, and a more opulently decorated residential building. Based on the fragments of three marble sarcophagi, it can be concluded that the Koločep property was in the possession of a prominent landholder(s).

³⁷ The remains of a Roman sarcophagus made of Carrara marble were used to execute a medieval chancel screen. Parts of the medieval window frame were made from the same sarcophagus, but also from columns that once adorned the Roman complex in Donje Čelo bay. The medieval chancel screen and the window frame were restored in 2000 and are kept in the Koločep parish collection in Donje Čelo. On the early Romanesque chancel screen and the window frame from St Michael's Church on Koločep: Nenad Cambi, "Ulomci antičkih sarkofaga s Koločepa", in: *Oltarna ograda s Koločepa*, ed. Ante Milošević, Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2000, 5-8; Vedrana Delonga, "Pisana uspomena na jednu 'sestru i kraljicu'", in: *Oltarna ograda s Koločepa*, 23-28; Željko Peković, "Oltarna ograda crkve sv. Mihajla s otoka Koločepa", in: *Oltarna ograda s Koločepa*, 9-17; Ivo Petricioli, "Razmišljanja o ulomcima s Koločepa", in: *Oltarna ograda s Koločepa*, 18-22; Ivica Žile, "Novi nalazi predromaničke skulpture s otoka Koločepa", in: *Zbornik Tomislava Marasovića*, ed. Ivo Babić, Ante Milošević and Željko Rapanić, Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2002, 254-267; I. Žile, "Kameni namještaj i arhitektonska plastika prve dubrovačke katedrale", 81-86, 101, 110; Željko Peković, Duško Violić and Doroti Brajnov, "Oltarna ograda crkve sv. Mihovila s otoka Koločepa", *Prostor* 13/29 (2005), 1-10; Vedrana Delonga, "Pisana uspomena na jednu 'sestru i kraljicu' s Koločepa", *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, ser. III, 34 (2007), 199-211; Ž. Peković *Četiri elafitske crkve*, 84-105; Ž. Peković, *Crkva Sv. Petra Velikoga*, 199-203; I. Tomas, *Spomenici otoka Lopuda od antike do srednjeg vijeka*, 51-54.

depicted on the left slab with four small figures inspired by the Classical artworks—two young male figures blowing a horn, a dog hunting wild animal and a winged horse or griffon. On the front side of the gable is a central half-length figure of the Archangel Michael with magnificent wings and a sceptre in his left hand (Figure 13). It should be stressed that on the gable, the most essential part of the chancel screen, on which the patron saint of the Koločep church is presented and a dedicatory inscription is written, a piece of a figurative relief from Classical Antiquity has been maintained on its back³⁸ (Figure 14). That side of the chancel screen was facing the altar, so it seems highly likely that the older, Roman relief with the pagan image was therefore "converted", i.e., placed upside down. There is a partly preserved narrative scene with a male figure sitting on a chair and holding a scroll in his hand, and a female figure standing next to him with her legs crossed. It was a "reading scene" that was originally carved on the Roman sarcophagus, and which is considered to have been created in Rome in the second half of the third century.³⁹ Although the chancel screen from Koločep and the sculpture of St John the Baptist from Šilovo Selo are chronologically divided by as many as four centuries regarding their origin, both sculptural works have retained a momentous part of the ancient figurative relief. On Koločep the "reading scene" from Classical Antiquity has been preserved and on Šipan the eagle from the Middle Ages. Moreover, it is indicative that in both cases the older artwork was consciously kept on the back of St Michael and St John the Baptist—the patron saints of the churches on Koločep and Šipan. Such intended and obviously meaningful display of these ancient elements may only have emanated from their commissioning patrons, i.e., the then owners of these Elaphite ecclesiastic buildings. The early Romanesque gable from Koločep is the earliest observed case of this phenomenon in the Dubrovnik region. The time of the construction and decoration of St Michael's Church on Koločep corresponds to stronger reflections of the Gregorian Reform in these areas and the resurgence of the Dubrovnik church, the time of substantial building investments in religious edifices in Dubrovnik and its surroundings in the form of their renovation or construction. In that period, the Dubrovnik cathedral was also rebuilt, and a considerable number of churches were constructed on the Elaphite Islands, markedly on the three largest islands of the Dubrovnik archipelago—Šipan, Lopud and Koločep. As many as nine were the churches of the south Dalmatian single nave dome type, while the older Elaphite edifices were

³⁸ More attention to the preservation of the Roman figurative relief on the back of the medieval gable of the chancel screen from St Michael's Church on Koločep has hitherto been given by Ivo Babić only: Ivo Babić, "Spolije na tlu ranosrednjovjekovne Hrvatske", in: *Starohrvatska prosvjeta*, ser. III, 33 (2006), 107-108.

³⁹ N. Cambi, "Ulomci antičkih sarkofaga s Koločepa", 5-8; Nenad Cambi, *Antika*, Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2002, 165.



Figure 13: Gable of the chancel screen from the church of St Michael on the island of Koločep, front side (Photo: Ivana Tomas, 2019).

mostly renovated.⁴⁰ St Michael's Church on Koločep and St John the Baptist's Church on Šipan stand out among the newly built sanctuaries on the Elaphite Islands. The former because of the expensive marble furnishing and the latter for its lavish decoration, specifically the mural paintings that were conceived by the painter or the workshop that also decorated the Dubrovnik cathedral at that time. Therefore, it is highly likely that in both cases a very prominent commissioning patron(s) was behind the construction and decoration of these Elaphite churches. The link between the early Romanesque wall paintings from Šilovo Selo and the frescoes from the Dubrovnik cathedral would suggest that it may have been a related commission, that is, those who commissioned them were most presumably the Dubrovnik clerics who might have owned the Šipan church of St John the Baptist at that time. It is precisely this possible earlier relationship between the Dubrovnik cathedral and the Šipan edifice that seems interesting in terms

⁴⁰ On the extensive (re)building interventions during the Gregorian Reform in the Dubrovnik region: I. Tomas, *Srednjovjekovne jednobrodne crkve s kupolom južne Dalmacije i Boke kotorske*, 49-60, with previous literature.



Figure 14: Gable of the chancel screen from the church of St Michael on the island of Koločep, back side (Photo: Ivana Tomas, 2019).

of the provenance of the marble fragment used to create the Renaissance sculpture of St John the Baptist, on the back of which the Romanesque relief of an eagle has been deliberately maintained as a kind of attribute of antiquity, prestige or even origin. In this regard, the observed similarity between the Šipan eagle and the Romanesque "zoomorphic" reliefs from the Dubrovnik cathedral could indeed mean that this valuable sculptural work made of luxurious marble was originally from the illustrious cathedral in Dubrovnik and that it was subsequently transferred to Šipan for the main portal of the Renaissance church of St John the Baptist in Šilovo Selo.

