Stones of Zadar

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STONES OF ZADAR

The Capital of Venetian Dalmatia

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FOREWORD

Jasenka Gudelj

This volume presents the findings of the European Research Council-funded project *Architectural Culture of the Early Modern Eastern Adriatic (AdriArchCult)*, which I had the privilege of leading at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. The project set out to explore the architectural culture of the eastern Adriatic between the 15th and 18th centuries, a period of profound political transformation. During these centuries, the region was divided among several powers: the Venetian Republic, the Republic of Dubrovnik, the Habsburg Monarchy, which incorporated the Hungarian-Croatian Crown in 1526, and the Ottoman Empire. This political fragmentation created a complex archipelago where even coastal towns on the mainland could be isolated from their hinterlands. As a result, a fluctuating and dynamic architectural market emerged, shaped by diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious influences.

Despite the richness of its architectural heritage, scholarship on the region has remained fragmented, with historiographies in different languages largely separate and often shaped by national or Centre-periphery perspectives. To overcome these shortcomings, the *AdriArchCult* project brought together an international team of scholars to examine the region's architectural culture from multiple, interconnected angles. Their research focused on four key themes: architecture as a tool of territorialisation, investigating how built environments shaped and reflected political and cultural identities; the impact of religious change, exploring how the spread of Islam and the Catholic revival influenced architectural developments in this multiconfessional setting; the circulation of architectural knowledge, examining the eastern Adriatic's role in broader European intellectual exchanges, particularly through the dissemination of knowledge on the revival of antiquity; and finally, architectural practice itself, mapping the networks of builders, patrons, and craftsmen who drove architectural innovation across the region. By integrating these perspectives, *AdriArchCult* sheds new light on the architectural culture of the early modern eastern Adriatic, revealing its dynamism and deep connections to wider European artistic and intellectual currents.

The study of architectural culture in the early modern eastern Adriatic gains particular depth at the intersections of different research domains. One such focal point is Zadar (Zara), the provincial capital of Venetian Dalmatia and the subject of Laris Borić's book. The transformation of this once-flourishing medieval city—an important hub for Central European and Balkan trade—into a strategic administrative and military stronghold at the heart of the Venetian trade route to the East (*Rotta di Levante*) is a compelling story, written quite literally in the stone that shapes the city itself. The carved lions marking Venetian rule, the stone churches reflecting civic devotions and traditions, the repurposed remains of the Roman *Iader*, and the *lapicidae* (stonemasons) whose workshops and skills were passed down through generations—all form the intricate relief of a city that once was, now reconstructed by Borić. This reconstruction is particularly poignant, as the image of Renaissance Zadar has been obscured by the division of historiographies along national lines and the destruction wrought by WWII bombings, which reduced much of the city's core to rubble. Thus, untangling these narratives—sorting through countless stone fragments and connecting them with the artists named in archival documents—demanded patience, expertise, and passion, qualities that define the work of this book's author.

The territories marked by stone buildings described in this book emerged from strategic commissions by various agents, including local nobles, confraternities, and officials from both the state and church apparatus, the latter firmly under Venetian control. During this period of political and cultural transformation, traditional Zadar symbols and rituals were appropriated and recontextualised, becoming instruments of political influence through their fusion with Venetian symbols and Donatellesque forms introduced via drawings. The construction of vast 16th-century military structures, carried out by Venetian mercenaries and engineers, altered the cityscape dramatically, often at the expense of important churches, palaces, and entire districts (*Borgo*), fundamentally reshaping early modern Zadar. This process extended to religious architecture, as the city

served as a metropolitan see on the edge of Catholic territories. Zadar's patron saints and relics—symbols of its civic identity and religious significance—were relocated, refashioned, and reinterpreted, adding new layers of meaning within the context of Venetian domination and the Ottoman threat. Interestingly, the reinforcement of Tridentine rules not only reshaped church interiors but also contributed to the flourishing of Croatian-language writings by Zadar authors. This language transcended class and gender barriers, facilitating communication among Orthodox and Muslim populations in the city's hinterland and beyond. Zadar's responses to these challenges played a pivotal regional role, influencing interactions between the Split archdiocese, Venetian patriarchs, and the papacy in particularly dynamic ways.

Zadar's elites actively participated in the revival of antiquity as part of the southernmost branch of the Republic of Letters, incorporating a distinct local character. For instance, the relocation of the Roman arch of Melia Anniana to a public street—an initiative led by Petar Kršava, a learned abbot of St Grisogono Monastery—was marked by an inscription dating the intervention to the second year of the 553rd Olympiad, symbolising continuity with the past. This event, documented in the writings of Ciriaco d'Ancona, provides vivid testimony to the Renaissance *fortuna critica* surrounding the city's Roman heritage. In the 15th century, Dalmatian cities with ancient roots, such as Zadar and Split, both literally and figuratively used their past to shape their present, seamlessly blending historical grandeur with contemporary identity.

Finally, with the growing demand for architectural expertise, Zadar's architectural market in the 15th and 16th centuries became particularly dynamic. During the Quattrocento, Zadar's master builders and sculptors became renowned across the Adriatic, leaving traces of their work even in Rome. With the consolidation of Venetian rule, increased maritime mobility between Dalmatian cities and easy access to high-quality stone commonly known as *pietra d'Istria* opened the local architectural scene to prominent regional figures. Among them were Juraj Dalmatinac (Giorgio Dalmata, c. 1410–1473), *protomagister* of Šibenik Cathedral; Andrija Aleši (Andrea Alessi, 1425–c. 1505), an Albanian-born sculptor; Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino (d.1506), a Tuscan sculptor and architect; and Marko Andrijić (c.1470- after 1507), a master builder from Korčula (Curzola). At the same time, Zadar attracted notable painters, including Carlo Crivelli (1430?–1495), a fugitive from Venice, and later his brother Vittore, both of whom contributed to public architectural commissions, further enriching the artistic dialogue between painting and architecture. The investment in military structures during the 16th century absorbed much of Zadar's resources, while classicising tendencies were influenced by both Venice (Sanmicheli circle) and the Marche, with Dalmatian workshops increasingly concentrated in Korčula.

Thus, Borić's research presents a pioneering and methodologically innovative case study, offering broad applicability to historical contexts where traditional historiography falls short. Moreover, the book addresses historiographical challenges arising from contemporary linguistic and cultural divisions, providing a valuable framework for future research in the eastern Adriatic and beyond.