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Periferie
Dinamiche economiche territoriali
e produzione artistica

a cura di Giuseppe Capriotti e Francesca Coltrinari

Saggi

Experiment in construction – Innovation in form. The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik and «Freedom of creation in a peripheral milieu»

Predrag Marković*

Abstract

The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik represents the most important architectural achievement of the Renaissance on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea. Its exceptional, in many respects unusual and still enigmatic structure, characterized primarily by the peculiar stone barrel vaults, was designed and for the most part built by Niccolo di Giovanni Fiorentino (1475-1506/1536). If we consider that such unique combination of structural and formal solutions has never reoccurred, not even in smaller-size regional religious or secular architecture, it is obvious that before us stands a great and so far insufficiently researched experiment. Therefore, this article will try to reveal the origin of these specific construction techniques, and will try to answer the question of how such a technological experiment contributed to formal innovations, namely their pure *all'antica* appearance. It

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will also analyse these issues in the context of what has been called “the creative freedom of the peripheral milieu” – a theoretically specified framework defined by the Croatian art historian Lj. Karaman (1963).

Il Duomo di San Giacomo di Sebenico rappresenta la più importante realizzazione architettonica del Rinascimento sulla sponda orientale dell’Adriatico. La sua eccezionale e per molti versi inconsueta ed enigmatica struttura si distingue soprattutto per le particolari volte a botte costruite in pietra, progettate e per la maggior parte costruite da Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino (1475-1506/1536). Alla luce del fatto che questa singolare combinazione di soluzioni costruttive e formali non è stata più riutilizzata, neanche in dimensioni ridotte, risulta chiaro che il Duomo di Sebenico costituisce un eccezionale, creativo ed audace esperimento architettonico. Lo scopo di questo lavoro è quello di indagare l’origine di queste specifiche tecniche costruttive e di offrire una risposta alla domanda sul contributo che questo esperimento tecnologico avrebbe potuto avere alle innovazioni formali, soprattutto al loro carattere all’antica. Infine, questi problemi vengono affrontati pure nel contesto della cosiddetta “libertà di creazione in periferia”, concetto teorico definito dallo storico dell’arte croato Lj. Karaman (1963).

Although the Cathedral of St James in Šibenik is a stylistically complex monument, it is beyond doubt the best known realization of Renaissance architecture on the eastern coast of the Adriatic (fig. 1). It owes its prominent position mainly to its unique stone barrel vaults which, visible on the outside, give shape to the rounded roof. This distinctive structural and engineering approach and the solution of closing off the upper limits of the interior with a single stone cover are unique in European architecture. Since a solution of this kind never reappeared in the regional architecture of Dalmatia, not even in the simplest forms, it is safe to assert that it was a bold but also a successful experiment that led to an entirely new, original and above all innovative solution. The application of the preassembled building technique, invented just for this occasion, the use of large stone blocks, enabled the creation of an almost sculpturally rounded volume that was impressed into the tissue of the medieval city like a great silver reliquary. Although the Cathedral of St James is not an unknown monument in art-historical studies, it must be noted that it has not yet been assigned its proper place in the history of architecture of the 15th century. There are several reasons for this, all related to the main question, still causing divergence of opinion: when did the preliminary plan for these unique rounded roofs/vaults arise? Some researchers still ascribe the preliminary plan for the whole cathedral to Giorgio da Sebenico (c. 1410-1473) and date it to 1441, when he took over the management of the construction of the edifice, while others, perhaps a little less numerous, think that this kind of project with its clear Early Renaissance characteristics could not have possibly been designed before mid-15th century, and attribute it to Niccolò da Giovanni of Florence with proposed datation not before 1475, when the artist took over

the task of master builder, supervising the construction works until his death in 1506¹. Ten years ago in a short review of Renaissance architecture in Croatia, I succinctly put forward my view of this problem, while in the recently published monograph on the Cathedral of St James in Šibenik I attempted to give an answer not only to this but to many other questions raised by this extremely enigmatic monument². Although in this occasion my intent is to discuss only one aspect of the origin of Šibenik Cathedral – the occurrence of such a creative combination of engineering skills and artistic creativity so far away from the main artistic centres, in the Venetian province of Dalmatia, yet entirely in the Renaissance spirit, – it is nevertheless essential to give an overview of previous studies and briefly present the main features of this unique monument of European architecture in the light of recent research.

1. *An overview of previous studies*

From the moment it was created in mid-16th century, its uncommon appearance attracted the attention of numerous local and foreign historians, travel writers and from mid-19th century, art historians. The first written reports praised the beauty of the Cathedral, some comparing it to the monuments of antiquity; however, even in the earliest studies it was primarily admired as an outstanding work of skilled building. Suggestive in this respect is the fact that the Šibenik-born writer and inventor Faust Vrančić (*Fausto Veranzio*, *Faustus Verantius*), amazed by its inventive structural design and overall appearance, *appropriated* it by including it in his book of inventions *Machinae novae*. Defending himself against any charges of unethical proceedings, alongside the plate with the first known depiction of the building, Faust Vrančić noted:

This church is not my discovery, for it was already built a hundred and fifty years ago. However, because it is outstandingly beautiful and of such uncommon form, I wanted to include it among my new discoveries as an ornament of my homeland. Apart from that, because it is made without any timber material, it is also not, like other churches, vaulted with bricks, but is in its entirety spanned with great stones placed lengthwise, as can be seen from the inside and the outside as well. The other things will be presented by the picture (fig. 2)³.

¹ The first group of researchers includes, among others, Graham Jackson 1887; Frey 1913; Dudan 1922; Ivančević 1998; Pilo 2000; Howard 2003, while the opposite viewpoint is held by Graus 1886; Folnesics 1914; Karaman 1933, p. 51; Angelini 1954; Štefanac 1986; Höfler 1989, pp. 224-228; Heydenreich 1996. There is naturally a third group of authors who have not opted in favour of one version or the other, leaving the issue unsolved: Venturi 1924; Fisković 1976, p. 447; and Olivato, Puppi 1977.

² Marković 2004, pp. 221-223.

³ Veranzio 1615/1616; the translation is mine.

But it should also be pointed out that the Šibenik Cathedral is the only historical building in the area of present-day Croatia in which, apart from building and engineering values, Renaissance stylistic features were also very early on identified⁴. It is the only architectural monument, with the exception perhaps of Diocletian's Palace in Split, discussed in numerous case studies and monograph editions; it is the only work of architecture to which, precisely a century ago, was devoted the first scholarly monograph written by the Austrian art historian Dagobert Frey, immediately upon publication subjected to systematic critical review and confutation of Frey's fellow-countryman Hans Folnesics⁵. Since that time the Šibenik Cathedral has appeared with increasing frequency in reviews of Italian and European architecture of the 15th century; however, only recently has it come to be recognised as a major achievement of early Renaissance architecture. In the introduction to his study on *Quattrocento* architecture, Francesco Paolo Fiore pointed out that Šibenik Cathedral should be considered «[...] come problematica e semplificata alternativa alle facciate veneziane di San Zaccaria» as well as «[...] una monumentale interpretazione del tema all'antica impostato dal Gambello e condotto a termine dal Codussi, e di Santa Maria dei Miracoli»⁶.

2. *The genesis of the Venetian (trefoil) façade in Šibenik – “form follows structure”?*

Clearly, it is this uncommon and in many ways unique vault/roof structure that assigns to St James' Cathedral an exceptional place in the context of 15th century European building practice. It also raises two basic issues related to its creation. Firstly, was the idea of this quintessentially Venetian “trefoil façade” really originate in Šibenik, in a province then belonging to the Venetian Republic, and not in Venice itself, even before the middle of the 15th century as many writers have tried to prove, or was it created under the influence of Codussi's designs, above all for the Church of San Michele in Isola? Precisely the pronounced “organic interaction” between the vault and ceiling structure and the trefoil conclusion of the western façade, as I have stated, has caused

⁴ The first art historical or stylistic definitions related to the explanation of its uncommon transitional phenomenon came in the travelogue of Marko Casotti, who also remarks that the cathedral is «[...] immaginata con felicità di pensiero, ed eseguita con tutta la maestria dell'arte...». Not long after that the first Croatian art historian, Ivan Kukuljević Sakcinski, wrote the first survey on the developmental phases of the cathedral, after which Austrian art historians Eitelberger von Edelberg and Johan Graus devoted separate studies to the Šibenik cathedral. Casotti 1840, pp. 162, 164; Kukuljević Sakcinski 1858; Graus 1886; Eitelberger von Edelberg 1884, pp. 117-120.

⁵ Frey 1913; Folnesics 1914.

⁶ Fiore 1998, p. 27.

the still dominant opinion that it was precisely in Šibenik that the idea of the typical Venetian (or as older writers called it, Lombard) façade was created in early 1440s, when Giorgio di Matteo da Sebenico (Cro. *Juraj Matejev Dalmatinac*) took over the supervision of construction. On the other hand, some have suggested the possibility that it was perhaps a later solution, realized after mid-1470s and coinciding with the activity of Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, still a unique design created without reference to Codussi's church façades or to possible indirect influence of Alberti's unfinished façade of Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini⁷. The second and perhaps more difficult question lies in the following *dilemma*. Were indeed aesthetic reasons and the need for material unity of building elements that prevailed in the choice of stone as the sole roofing material of the cathedral? What really prompted the builders to reject tiles or lead as the usual roofing material in favour of the far more expensive, technologically more demanding and until that period entirely unknown and unapplied approach? A decision of this kind is even more curious if we suppose that during the design process it must have been foreseen that this single and relatively thin stone sheathing would not only cause significant difficulties in the execution itself, but would also hardly provide a barrier to rainwater, or that the choice of such a roofing, created not only of stone but also of metal (partially incorporated into the walls), would have enormous implications in the future. In addition, they could easily have imagined that the choice of such a building technique would essentially slow down the completion of the cathedral.

I attempted to give an answer to these and many other questions raised by this enigmatic monument in a book devoted to the problem of the origins of the Cathedral of St James in Šibenik⁸. Many questions were solved by a precise reconstruction of the chronology of construction, and above all, I believe, by clear demarcation of two key building phases – that of Giorgio da Sebenico (1441-1473) and that of Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino (1475-1506/1536)⁹ (figs 3 and 4). Only in the course of that third and final construction phase came

⁷ Karaman 1933, p. 93.

⁸ Marković 2010b.

⁹ An archival note about the stay of Niccolò in Šibenik in 1464 led E. Hilje to conclude that the Florentine master was working on the Cathedral of St James while Giorgio was still alive – on the northern part of the chancel in which there are numbers of Renaissance decorative motifs (this part of the chancel, crowned by a relief of St Jerome in Wilderness, is known in the literature as the 'Malipiero part', for above the relief is the coat of arms of Venetian rector S. Malipiero, who governed Šibenik from 1465 to 1468). See Hilje 2002. A key problem in handling of the authorship of the upper, Renaissance part of the cathedral, the question of attribution of the Malipiero part, was earlier addressed by numerous researchers, but from different points of view: see Karaman 1933, p. 76; Höfler 1989, p. 54; Ivančević 2003/2004. In a separate study I have analysed previous views in detail and concluded that the Malipiero part was created under the immediate direction of Giorgio da Sebenico, making use of the decorative repertoire of painterly origin that was obtained from the circle of Paduan masters gathered around F. Squarcione by his son-in-law the painter Juraj Čulinović. See Marković 2008.

to be designed and in great part executed the unique stone roofing structure. It was realized as a spatial projection of the directly applied idea of the “trefoil façade” which had already been given solid shape in Codussi’s church of San Michele in Isola¹⁰ (figs. 5 and 6). Thus Niccolò’s design for the completion of the cathedral represents a highly individual synthesis of contemporary artistic and “cultural-cum-political” influences and the aged practices of regional architectural heritage. This fruitful encounter of fresh stylistic impulses from Tuscany, manifested in the idea of a barrel-vaulted basilica and in the shape of the dome of the cathedral in Florence, as well as from Venice which provided the idea of the shape of the trefoil ending to the main, western façade, was here skilfully and harmoniously combined with the century-long building tradition in Dalmatia of working in stone and with stone. Precisely these features single out the Cathedral of St James in Šibenik as a unique monument of the “Adriatic artistic synthesis”¹¹.

3. *The stone roof covering of the cathedral – both water and fire resistant*

Finally it is worth pointing out that the ever-present fear of fire and of possible destruction of such a majestic structure provided an answer to another essential question: why precisely stone, and only stone, roof instead of the traditional, applied and tested, technique of covering the roof with tiles or perfectly acceptable lead sheeting? As vividly exemplified by the Venetian church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli, lead sheeting is not only appropriate for the curving surfaces of a barrel-vaulted roof, but is also quite close to the white-

¹⁰ All elements point out that Niccolò produced the design for the completion of the cathedral between 1475 and 1477, from the moment in which he took over the construction site as the new master builder, to the moment when he signed the first ten-year contract for the construction. The idea of the “trefoil façade”, realized in the spirit of the *renovatio marciiana*, was borrowed from Codussi’s church of San Michele in Isola (1469-1482), since precisely from 1475 to 1477 the Šibenik patrician Ambroz Mihetić (*artium doctor Ambrosius Michetich*) results present in the Camoldolese monastery on the island as a grammar teacher. Later, because of his remarkable service, he was buried in the chancel of St James’. Close similarity of these two church façades and the testimony that the façade of the church of San Michele was at that very time exciting admiration of the members of the religious order is sufficient to confirm this thesis. In more detail in: Marković 2010b, pp. 433-440. Only Luigi Angelini has argued directly for the primacy of Codussi’s solution in the genesis of this type of façade and its impact on that in Šibenik. See Angelini 1945, pp. 35-38. After him, the problem of genesis of this type of church façade was considered in great detail, if somewhat unclearly, by Lionello Puppi in his monograph about Mauro Codussi: Olivato, Puppi 1977, pp. 29, 31, 32. See also: Howard 2003.

¹¹ An overview of the developmental phases can be seen in: Marković 2004, pp. 221-223. About the problem of demarcation between the two masters, see also Marković 2010a, although the hypothesis has been disputed in some recent articles: Mariano 2012, p. 18.

grey colour of stone¹². However trite this kind of answer might seem, one has to bear in mind that the choice of this roofing technique meant not only to consciously take on a great risk during the construction, but it also essentially slowed down and increased the cost of the whole building. It is in the light of these immediate historical events and the threat to the very existence of this little community that one should observe the decision of the populace of Šibenik to design the main façade of the principal church of the diocese as a Venetian trefoil façade, to embrace in a rather apotropaic act a form so clearly symbolic as the *coronamento alla veneziana*.

And yet, among all these enigmatic issues, there is one question or rather one problem that still needs to be adequately explained. What does the realization of the Cathedral of St James mean in the context of the entirety of artistic creation on the eastern coast of the Adriatic? How can this unexpected and surprising creative synthesis of heterogeneous and diverse formal and structural-cum-engineering impulses and influences be explained, a synthesis of stylistically contemporary elements of Tuscan and Venetian Early Renaissance with elements of local late-Antique heritage (Diocletian's Palace and the Small Temple or the Temple of Jupiter as it is alternatively called); a synthesis that must have in some way reflected the omnipresent roofing of thin slabs or tilestones (Lat. *planchas*, Cro. *škrilje*)¹³. It was in fact the use of local, domestic material that was one of the features Ljubo Karaman drew particular attention to as an essential mark of the provincial milieu¹⁴.

Bearing in mind all these complex and somewhat contradictory requirements, we have to wonder what induced such an outburst of artistic creativity and original inventiveness in a space and a time that had not witnessed anything similar. Was this inventive spark struck by the genius of the artist himself, the bold designer of this audacious idea, of whom we know today only that he was a foreigner, Niccolò the Florentine, or perhaps by divine inspiration, as contemporaries believed looking at Giorgio da Sebenico's baptistry of Šibenik

¹² Such an apparently prosaic answer can perhaps gain in conviction if we take into consideration the fact that precisely in these crucial years of decisions regarding the continuation and conclusion of the cathedral under the guidance of the new master builder Niccolò di Giovanni (1475-1477), Šibenik and the entire Central Dalmatia were being exposed to the attacks and depredations of Ottoman forces. See Marković 2010b, pp. 392-398.

¹³ Today an exception and once a regular phenomenon, a roof of thin stone slabs was used not only on modest rural and city houses and places but also on smaller churches, and often on apses of bigger ecclesiastical buildings (the cathedrals in Trogir and Zadar); this manner of building roofs in earlier period of Dalmatian and in Mediterranean building in general stretches back almost to prehistory and the manner of building with the dry stone wall (the *bunja* and the Istrian *kažun*, the Apulian *trullo*, and so on – dry stone wall buildings with corbelled roofs).

¹⁴ «The Province likes using domestic material that its soil provides in abundance» [...] «The material from which its roof is made has particular importance for the appearance of a church building. Today it is mostly terracotta tiles that prevail, but in older times they often used stone or wood for their roofs»: Karaman 1963, p. 13.

Cathedral?¹⁵ Or was there perhaps some input from the actual provincial, peripheral, *milieu* in which such a monument was produced?

4. *The periphery: between constraints of everyday life and artistic freedom of creation*

Casting light upon all possible circumstances that led to such a unique and never to be repeated experiment, like many scholars before me, I took into consideration all possible components – the brilliance of Giorgio da Sebenico and the creativity of his successor Niccolò di Giovanni, the huge aspirations and ambitions of the people of Šibenik, their religious ardour and the particular historical circumstances, the availability of high-quality stone combined with the traditional building practice of Dalmatia, both ancient and medieval, even of everyday vernacular ordinary houses and more modest palaces. But I forgot one essential component – the freedom of artistic creativity that comes from being distant from the big centres of art, discussed by Ljubo Karaman exactly fifty years ago. In what is today recognized as one of the capital works of art history entitled *On the Effect of the Local Setting in the Art of the Regions of Croatia*, a work that via the now well-known article of Jan Białostocki has become familiar to art history scholars in other countries, including in Italy¹⁶, Ljubo Karaman said:

Probably the most interesting and yet little noticed trait of the peripheral setting is the freedom of development that such a setting, uninhibited by the authority and example of the great masters and magnificent monuments gives to the masters who work in it. Art historians gladly explore and ascertain the connections of one region with another, from which the second derives impulses and stimuli for its development. In my opinion they sometimes go too far in their determination of the dependence of one region on another, forgetting two things. Firstly, in different regions, the same preconditions can lead to similar phenomena; secondly, just as much as the existence of influences from one region on another, so the lack of any major influences can have an essential effect on the development and life of art in some region¹⁷.

Not long after this passage, he ended the book with the words:

The freedom of the peripheral setting will occasionally have a beneficial effect on masters who arrive in the setting from outside. A brilliant example of this is Niccolò di Giovanni, who brought with him the first Renaissance forms to central Dalmatia, to Trogir, Šibenik and Split (about 1467 to 1505)... His work is the highly original Šibenik Cathedral with

¹⁵ In the second contract for the overseeing of the construction of 1446, the people of Šibenik expressly sought that Giorgio de Sebenico should further work on the cathedral with his own hands, «[...] pro ut melius poterit et Deus inspirabit eum»: Hrg, Kolanović 1974/1975, p. 18.

¹⁶ Białostocki 1989; Gudelj 2007.

¹⁷ Karaman 1963, p. 89; the translation is mine.

its curving vaulting visible from within and without, built in stone without the slightest addition of timber or tile. Folnesics pointed out that the Florentine even before Bramante and Michelangelo in the same cathedral made use of an octagonal tambour in its true role of mediator of the transition from rectangular ground plan to the circle of the dome. He produced the Chapel of the Blessed John in Trogir Cathedral with the kind of unique feeling of builder and sculptor and achieved in it intimate connection of architectural disposition and copious architectural decoration such that we can hardly find a parallel to even in the Italian Early Renaissance¹⁸.

Clearly, Ljubo Karaman ascribed all the credits for the creation of the renaissance stone vaulting/roofing of St James, or at least the major part, to Niccolò di Giovanni the Florentine, a foreign master who executed another outstanding work of architecture and sculpture that is rather unknown in studies outside the country – the Chapel of the Blessed John of Trogir in the Cathedral of St Lawrence in Trogir (1468-1488)¹⁹. Karaman finds the explanation for this sudden eruption of creativity of a master unknown prior to his arrival in Dalmatia in the uninhibited possibility of creation and freedom of expression provided by the distance from the authority of great monuments and important masters of his native Florence, as well as of the cultural capital of the Adriatic, Venice. Although Karaman omitted a whole series of essential elements, above all the great work of Niccolò's forerunner, Giorgio da Sebenico who had previously developed the method of prefabricated building technique on the walls of the apses of the cathedral, which to the greatest extent preordained the appearance of Šibenik Cathedral, his conclusion was quite accurate²⁰. Although the starting point of the cathedral's construction during the phases of both Giorgio and Niccolò was the idea of a single, integrated and sculpturally rounded image of a cathedral, it was in fact a series of rather bold and audacious experiments in constructive systems that determined the creation of such an inventive and original final appearance. On apse walls Giorgio elaborated the principles of skeletal building into a more complex prefabricated assembly system similar to the principles of building in wood – into corner pillars mortised at the sides, "broken" at the edge of the apse just like the lower ones, where slotted somewhat more slender slabs carved on both sides in shallow fluted niches with shells on top (fig. 7). Niccolò is the one to be credited with creative elaboration of George's technique, adjusting it to the construction system of curved stone vaults and the slender dome on the crossing by fitting the ends of the slabs, with the use of pegs into the mortices of the supporting arches. Like tiles, the

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 91.

¹⁹ For more detail about the chapel, Štefanac 1986, 1996, 1998; Ivančević 1997; Belamarić 2012, pp. 247-314.

²⁰ Giorgio da Sebenico first started to build the walls of the apses on the principles of Gothic skeleton building with great stone blocks and in joining them used the principles of wooden structures (tenon and mortice joint), creating thus the basis of the «assembly technique of the Central Dalmatia school of building»: Folnesics 1914, p. 55; Ivančević, 1990.

slabs were arranged to overlap, the edge of the upper partially going over the lower slab (fig. 8). All things considered, although it is possible to discern direct and indirect models for certain elements of stone barrel vaulting of Šibenik Cathedral, in which the vaulting of the Small or Jupiter Temple in Diocletian's Palace was extremely inspiring for Niccolò, there are in fact no direct analogies. We can conclude then that the slabbed stone roofs/vaults of the cathedral in Šibenik are an answer to entirely specific formal requirements, and in the overall context of architectural heritage of Dalmatia they stand out as an entirely new and innovative solution which provided a key technological step forward in handling the problem of how to complete the cathedral²¹.

Apart from the aforementioned engineering aspect and the considerable input of Niccolò's predecessor, Ljubo Karaman perhaps also overlooked the much more important role of the clients themselves – the pro-Venetian Šibenik gentry and the clergy headed by the bishop; nonetheless, his conclusion remains for the most part correct. Like his forerunner Giorgio da Sebenico, he certainly could not have fulfilled his artistic potential in a milieu in which dozens of similar masters were at work and in which commissions of this kind were rather rare. Placed before new tasks, and with a very high personal stake in proving himself and making his name as an artist, Master Niccolò gradually developed and built upon the knowledge and skills acquired in his youth, so it can be argued that his formation as a sculptor and an architect happened only before his arrival to Dalmatia²². He definitely brought a great deal with him from his native (?) Florence, but this second, adoptive homeland provided much more than that: it provided a ground on which his talent could unleash and ultimately create such exceptional architectural and sculptural realizations.

The fact that his earlier sculptural works, realized before his arrival in Dalmatia, have still not been identified, and that the early works in the area evince only faint hints of his rapid personal development²³ shows the importance of freedom of artistic creation in the province, unobstructed by the influence of authority and great tradition²⁴. The possibility of earlier projects is still out of the picture, since it is generally doubtful whether he designed or built anything before his arrival to Dalmatia in 1464, when he is first mentioned in archival sources. The same phenomenon – the non-existence of any ascribable works,

²¹ Since the very form of technological approach suggests the method of building in wood used in shipyards, the vaults having the effect of an upside-down wooden shell of a ship, we have to wonder whether the key stimulus for such a venturesome step came from the skilled shipwrights, and whether the stone vaults of Šibenik Cathedral in fact tell of a happy moment of collaboration between masters of various trades and yet another case of transfer of technology in the Middle Ages.

²² On the problem of the formation of Niccolò's sculptural expression, see: Štefanac 1986, 1996, 1998.

²³ There are numerous studies dedicated to Niccolò da Giovanni as a sculptor, and two monographs with somewhat different views on the presumed early phase of his activity prior to his arrival to Dalmatia. Markham Schulz 1978; Štefanac 2006.

²⁴ Štefanac 1993; 2006, pp. 48-51.

either architectural or sculptural, before the arrival to Dalmatia – can also be referred in relation to Giorgio da Sebenico. For this reason not even such a great and powerful artistic personality as Giorgio da Sebenico can be with certainty connected to Venice, or Niccolò di Giovanni to Florence, although there are strong suggestions of works possibly realized by the two artists²⁵. Both of these master builders became great sculptors and architects only after their arrival in a *milieu* eager to welcome them, which assigned them great tasks, placing great hopes in their skills and in the divine grace, always confident that they were performing a task that could be pleasing in the eyes of God.

Both of them were undoubtedly endowed with talent, but the naïve and brilliant giftedness and technical virtuosity of the first master builder and the systematic and extremely rational approach of the second could not have sufficed to breathe the spark of life into the dull material of stone and transfigure it into a monument of unimagined potentials of human capacity. Because of these circumstances the Cathedral of St James, which enthral us like any truly great achievement, shows that at a given moment it was possible to realize something perceived as almost impossible.

5. Conclusion. Artistic freedom creates a space without either centre or periphery

From this point of view, the vaults/roofs of the Cathedral of St James in Šibenik and their designer, Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, confirm not only Karaman's proposition, but also the idea of Jan Białostocki from it derived, that artists in the periphery and in the province can much more freely combine the influences and *stimuli* originating from different artistic centres, and that on such a foundation they can create entirely new and original works of art²⁶.

By accepting the earlier stated remark of F. Paolo Fiore that the Cathedral of St James is «[...] una monumentale interpretazione del tema all'antica [...]», we can agree with his observation that both artistic centres and peripheral *milieus* can be equally creative yet at different levels and from differing aspects.²⁷ The Cathedral of St James in Šibenik also shows that in his shadowy zone (*zona d'ombra*) and in belated area (*luogo di ritardo*) of peripheral regions and/or provinces far removed from centres of political, religious and artistic power as well as from their control, genuine artistic phenomena can, from time to time, appear bold and rich in invention²⁸.

²⁵ Fisković 1982; Kokole 1993; 1996.

²⁶ Białostocki 1989, pp. 50-53.

²⁷ Ivi, p. 53.

²⁸ Castelnovo, Ginzburg 1979, pp. 306-308; 320-322; 342-344.

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Appendix

Fig. 1. Šibenik, Cathedral of St. James (Foto Ž. Bačić)



Fig. 2. *The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik*, drawing by Fausto Veranzio, *Machinae novae*, Venetiis, 1615/1616

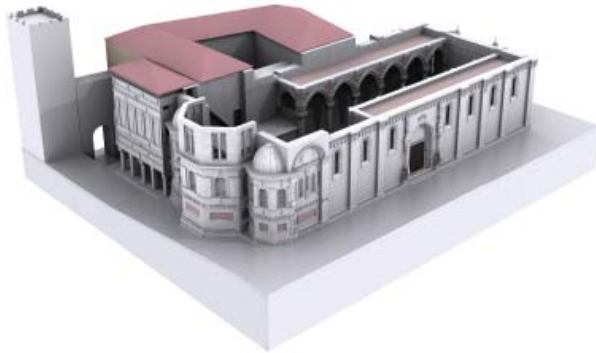


Fig. 3. The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik, ideal reconstruction after the second building campaign (1441-1473), (Foto Marković 2010, p. 332, 3D model by S. Pul)



Fig. 4. The Cathedral of St. James in Šibenik, ideal reconstruction after the third building campaign (1475-1536), (3D model by S. Pul)



Fig. 5. Venezia, Church of San Michele in Isola, detail of the façade (Foto Marković 2010, p. 437)



Fig. 6. Šibenik, Cathedral of St. James, detail of the façade (Foto Marković 2010, p. 437)



Fig. 7. Šibenik, Cathedral of St. James, detail of the north apse (Foto D. Šarić)

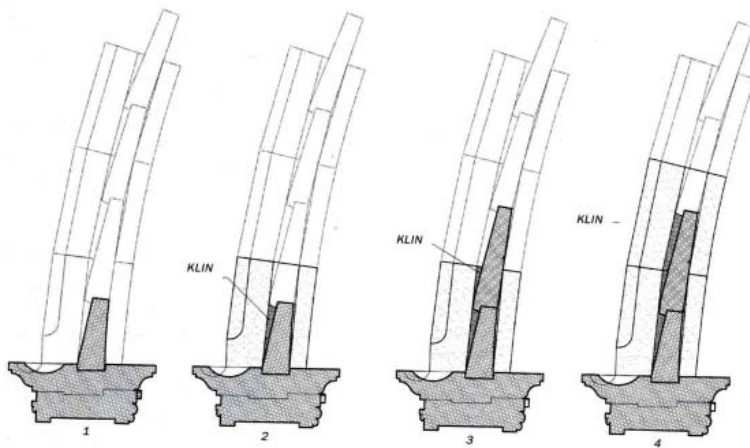


Fig. 8. Assembly system of the curving stone vaults and the slender dome (after Škugor 1997)

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