One Hundred Croatian Archeological Sites

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ONE HUNDRED CROATIAN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

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Osor on Cres

Osor is a settlement and harbor on the southwest coast of the island of Cres, located on an artificially dug channel dividing what was once the single island group of the Abysrtides, named for Medea's brother Abyscyrus. According to the same legend the settlement got the name Absorus, which ancient writers recorded, linking it with the legend of the famous Greek sailors, the Argonauts. Continuity of life at Osor can be observed from the Early Paleolithic, most of all in the surrounding caves Jama na Sredi below Vela Straža Mountain and in Vela Jama at Osorčica.

As a dominant settlement it grew toward the end of the Bronze Age and during the Iron Age. It was a settlement of rather large dimensions surrounded by the sea (except on the eastern side) and encircled by strong walls, especially on the eastern side, as well as on the western, more accessible side, where the main city gates were. That is when the channel (the so-called Cavanelle) was probably dug through the narrow western part of the isthmus, on account of which, at the beginning of the growth of seafaring and coastal navigation the settlement gained the main naval strategic position. It thus quickly became the metropolis of the archipelago and an indispensable transit center of the northern Adriatic. Under the influence of Hellenism from the 3rd to the 1st cent. BC Osor developed and was arranged in a proper urban form, with regularly arranged streets and houses. The existing walls were reinforced with large stone blocks in dry masonry, so-called megalithic walls. The standard of living of the inhabitants of that time is attested by the wealth of objects found in the graves right by the city walls, on the site Kavanela, and by today's cemetery, but also in various places within the city limits.

With the change in the political situation on the Adriatic, Osor came under Roman rule in the 1st cent. AD. At that time it gained particular strategic importance, underwent its greatest degree of urban development, and gained the status of a municipium. The shipping channel was significantly refurbished, and the city walls were restored in a new construction technique. In Roman period Osor reached its greatest extent over a large area. Archeological investigations have identified an urban street grid with the main streets – the cardo and crossing it in the south the decumanus with paving slabs and staircases. On the area of today's central square remains of the forum have been explored, and under the cathedral the foundations of a temple were discovered. Remains of the city gates, and of public and private buildings with multicolored floor mosaics, plumbing, etc. have been investigated. Traditional burial was continued in the Kavanela area, on both sides of the channel, in skeletal burials and burials in urns. From that period there are also notable finds of monumental sculptures, especially of emperors and public figures and numerous inscriptions.

In the time of Late Antiquity and the dawn of Christianity a Christian community was organized, and already in the 6th cent. under Byzantine rule the city became the center of a bishopric. Therefore on the extreme eastern part of the city, directly on top of the prehistoric walls, the first Early Christian Osor cathedral was erected. Over a long period it underwent varied and significant alterations; typologically it is ascribed to the classical type of double basilica. Remains of the perimeter wall with an apse on the southwestern side of the complex are visible, as well as a memoria to the northeast.
with an apse and a baptistry with a six-sided font and apse. On the northern part of the complex several remains of mosaics have been studied, which belonged to the northern, narrow church nave of the earlier church. North of the baptistry parts of an apse and of the walls of another three-nave church with one apse were excavated and conserved. Within the main nave of the former basilica the modern-era Church of St. Mary is located, surrounded by a graveyard which is still in use today. For its construction existing architectural elements were used, such as apses and arches, which can be observed on the northeastern side wall of the church, while within the church there can likewise be seen a remnant of the floor mosaic and fragments of interface carving.

The irregular appearance of today's city was formed according to medieval urbanistic concepts, and only the position of the main city street and square were kept. During the 15th cent. the eastern part of Osor was abandoned and a new line of wall was built, which crossed transversally in a north-south direction. At the same time, the square was refurbished with new buildings: a city cistern, the new Osor three-nave Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary, which enclosed the square on the southern side and, a little to the west, the single-nave Gothic chapel of the bishop St. Gaud-