One Hundred Croatian Archeological Sites

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- Žirje
One Hundred Croatian Archeological Sites
ONE HUNDRED CROATIAN ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES

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Rijeka

The city of Rijeka is located on the narrow northern shore belt of the Croatian coast, on the bank of the river Rječina. Thanks to its favored position at the intersection of land and sea routes, Rijeka took shape as a settlement with urban features over a period of more than two thousand years. Historical sources, however, record it under this name only from the 13th cent. on, while in earlier periods, especially among Classical writers, it is most often recorded under various forms of the name Tarsatica. This area had been inhabited since the late Paleolithic, the Neolithic and the Chalcolithic, as attested by finds of material culture that come from the cave of Sveta Ana, located east of Trsat, from the site Sabličeva na Pećinama, from Solin hillfort above Martinišćica, from the Kantrida site in the western part of the city, and stray finds from the area of Rijeka.

In the Bronze Age and especially in the Iron Age this area was permanently inhabited and organized in a system of 14 hillfort settlements, which today are within the city limits. The hillfort settlements were regularly encircled by strong ramparts of dry stone, and on account of their outstanding strategic position some of them served as watch posts in Classical and late Classical times. Aside from the hillfort Velj Vrh ['Great Peak'] above Pula, these ramparts can be clearly seen on the hillforts Sveti Križ and Solin above Martinišćica. The beginnings of the formation of the settlement by the sea, on the right bank of the Rječina, can be traced only since the Late Iron Age. Together with the hillforts it formed a strategically important single unit. The pre-Roman Tarsatica took part in the important circulation of cultural goods on the northern Adriatic, as is attested by two hoards of coins found in the center of Rijeka and numerous imported objects collected during investigations of the necropolis that was near today’s movie house Teatro Fenice e Andrešića. The necropolis itself likewise shows the uninterrupted succession of populations, because there were burials there both during Classical Antiquity and in the early medieval period.

In a gradual process of Romanization in the 1st cent. AD Tarsatica grew into a center with true urban features having the status of municipal autonomy. Archeological research conducted on the area of the Rijeka Stari Grad ['Old City'] has shown that it was a spacious city of irregular form, built in two major construction phases. With four main city entrances it was surrounded by mighty walls. They were later buried under late classical and medieval walls, today easily observed in their northern and southern parts. The regular grid of the main city streets – the cardo and decumanus – is also well defined, with the city forum that was on the place of today’s Pul Veic Crikve Square. In its vicinity the foundations of large Roman baths have been investigated as well as of a monumental architectural complex that lies to the west up to Mijekarski Square. All the more important buildings were situated along the decumanus, today’s Užarska Street, and there are notable rich urban houses with atriums, arcades and wells, shops, granaries, but also diverse portable material, especially numismatic finds.

In the insecure periods of late antiquity, in the 4th and 5th cent., life in Tarsatica changed significantly. As the sole naval military fortress it gained additional importance with entry into the so-called Alpine enclosure (Claustra Alpium Iuliamum). At that time in the center of the city a military principia was built with all its more important buildings, a residential section, streets and forum on an area of 2025 m². The old gate (Arco Romano) on the southern part of the principia preserved its original form and grandeur, and served as the main entrance into that military base. The parts of the principia that have been explored can be recognized in the walls reaching under the rear of the Church of St. Fabian and Sebastian, in front of which the original paving of the forum of the principia is preserved. The
remaining walls have been preserved to a significant height in surrounding houses, which were built on them during the Middle Ages.

All the finer Tarsatica buildings during the ancient and late Roman period such as luxurious family houses (villae urbanae), bath buildings, and especially early Christian sacral buildings were decorated with lavish floor mosaics. The wealth, diversity and beauty of these finds is proof of the high standard of living and sophistication of the Tarsatica community, especially in late Roman times. Outside of the Old (ancient) City, at Susak was another necropolis, at Kozala a rural-agricultural building (victa rustica), and from the northern city gates and the Cathedral of St. Vitus stretched the defensive wall, the so-called Tarsatica limes. The fact that Tarsatica was truly an exceptional military stronghold in Late Classical Antiquity is also attested by the name Liburnia Tarsaticensis, from which the wider area along the coast got its name.

In the late 8th cent. Tarsatica was destroyed by the Frankish army, and the population fled to the nearby rise Trsat. Only at the end of the 13th cent. did a new city rise on its abandoned place, Reka or Rika, as a marketplace with towers, a castellum, city gates, streets and squares, inherited in the fabric of today’s city. At that time on the early Christian complex the Romanesque Vela Grkva ('Great Church') was built with its slanting bell tower (Slanting Tower). The church today is a three-naved building done over in Baroque, and the bell tower, built on clearly visible ancient stone blocks, in its upper part shows the features of high Gothic.

At the same time the Frankopan princes reinforced and expanded the complex of the Trsat hillfort. Elements of medieval architecture have been partially preserved: the residential part or »biljet«, the »keep« around which walls and towers enclosed a courtyard, the water reservoir. The complex was bought in 1826 by Count Laval Nugent and rebuilt in the neogothic spirit, according to the plans of the Venetian architect and sculptor Giacomo Paronuzzi (the Ghibelline battlements of the main tower, neoclassical mausoleum »Peace of the Heroes«). He also gathered an impressive collection of archeological objects that today are in the Archeological Museum in Zagreb.

Archeological finds collected during research up to now, aside from the Maritime and Historical Museum of the Croatian Littoral in Rijeka, are kept in the Municipal Museum of History and Art in Trieste, the Natural History Museum in Vienna, the National Museum in Ljubljana and the Historic Museum of Fiume in Rome.