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## RAC/TRAC 2022 in Diocletian's Palace: A Pledge for Theoretical Approaches to Roman Archaeology in Croatia

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The sixth volume of the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal* marks the publication of the first Special Collection and the inaugural TRAJ book reviews, and highlights the hosting of TRAC in South-Eastern Europe for the first time. The guest editors of this volume discuss the significance of TRAC coming to Croatia, the development of Roman archaeology in the region, and the use of a UNESCO World Heritage Site as a conference venue.

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## TRAC in Split

Split, Croatia hosted RAC/TRAC on 4–8 April 2022, after a postponement from 2020 due to the pandemic. Lacking a university campus, the conference was organized in Diocletian's Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site dating to the late third and early fourth century AD. Holding a conference on a historic site, particularly one focused on archaeology, is nothing new. RAC/TRAC 2022 in Croatia was, however, a unique event. Remarkably, TRAC and the modern country of Croatia were both born in 1991, with 2022 marking the first time the conference was held in East-Central or South-Eastern Europe. The five-day event brought fresh ideas and new perspectives to Croatian archaeology, highlighting the importance of theory in a setting which has traditionally been associated with the cultural-historical approach.

Bringing RAC/TRAC to Split therefore marked an important moment in the academic tradition of Roman archaeology in Croatia. The conference organizing committee were conscious of the importance of encouraging theoretical perspectives in the local archaeological environment, just as they were keenly aware of the unique challenges of holding an international conference at a UNESCO World Heritage Site in the wake of a global pandemic. In the editorial that follows, we will discuss the development of Roman archaeology in Croatia, the special challenges and opportunities of hosting RAC/TRAC in Diocletian's Palace, and introduce the papers in the sixth volume of the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal*.

## Roman Archaeology in Croatia

The development of Roman archaeology in Croatia has historically been marked by an emphasis on material culture within a historical context. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, key figures such as Franjo Bulić, Josip Brunšmid and Viktor Hoffiller played a pivotal role in establishing Roman archaeology in the region that would become modern Croatia. After the Springtime of Nations in 1848 led to the raising of national awareness, national institutions, including museums, started to form. Through their association with newly formed museums, the work of these early archaeologists was primarily oriented towards the acquisition of objects and their preservation, involving typological and chronological determination. As the first teachers of archaeology at the University in Zagreb they also played a significant role in the education of the upcoming generations of Croatian archaeologists. Equally (though not exclusively) focused on Roman numismatics, epigraphy and iconography, some of their publications (e.g. Brunšmid 1904–1911; 1914; Hoffiler and Saria 1938) are still important for the study of Roman Dalmatia and Southern Pannonia. Their full bibliographies are published by Ivan Mirnik (1977) and Vera Vejvoda and Ivan Mirnik (1979).

Over time, the number of systematic and salvage excavations increased, providing additional data and new insights into the Roman past in the area. During the twentieth century, Roman archaeology in Croatia does not appear to have been greatly influenced by socio-political turmoil, regime or ideological changes. International cooperation was present throughout the second half of the twentieth century, growing with the dawn of the twenty-first century. The international integration of Croatia offered increasing potential for archaeological cooperation; be it through student exchange, organizing conferences, publishing, multilateral research or joint excavations, today Roman archaeologists in Croatia continuously cooperate with archaeological institutions from across Europe. Nowadays, archaeology can be studied at three Croatian universities in Pula, Zadar and Zagreb. Meanwhile, scholars integrated advanced methodologies and interdisciplinary perspectives, leading to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the Roman period. This evolution facilitated a broader exploration of social, economic, and cultural aspects of the Roman past, transcending a purely historical framework but not entirely relinquishing it.

Today, archaeological publications in Croatia primarily focus on detailed accounts of specific excavations, comprehensive surveys of particular regions or historical periods, and scholarly examinations of material artefacts. Notably absent are works delving into archaeological theory or exploring specific archaeological schools and methodologies; such publications, especially in the Croatian language, are scarce. Only recently has the first book on this subject been published: *Uvod u teorijsku arheologiju – stvaraoци i pravci u 20. stoljeću (Introduction to theoretical archaeology – creators and trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> century)* by Rajna Šošić Klindžić (2016). Though not exclusively oriented towards Roman archaeology, this handbook, written in Croatian, provides a great overview and is indicative of further development of theoretical archaeology in Croatia. Additionally, we would like to emphasize work by Danijel Džino and Alka Domić Kunić (2013), and Vedrana Glavaš (2015). These authors explore modern perceptions of past identities and their cultural intertwining, landscape archaeology and archaeological site formation processes. While it may be said that theoretical discussions are still in their early stages in Croatian archaeology, there is no doubt that they will soon undergo significant development. In the last decade, a slight increase of TRAC attendees affiliated to Croatian institutions is noticeable. Over the past few years, courses presenting theoretical approaches to Roman archaeology have been introduced to all archaeological faculties in Croatia.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, a growing number of students are expressing interest in theoretical subjects, choosing to focus on these aspects when writing their BA or MA thesis.<sup>2</sup>

These students, mostly from the Universities of Pula, Zadar and Zagreb, were vital to the organization of RAC/TRAC 2022. Able to attend all conference events, the student

volunteers were afforded the exceptional opportunity in Croatia to learn from, converse and network with academics specializing in Roman archaeology and theory. We look forward to the directions they will take Croatian Roman archaeology in the future.

### A UNESCO World Heritage Site as a Conference Venue

RAC/TRAC 2022 was organized using Diocletian's Palace as a venue. A pivotal monument of the Late Roman period (Cambi 2002: 80), Diocletian's Palace inspired a new type of architecture — the fortified villa — that was later applied in various geographical and social spheres across the Empire (Cambi 2014: 125). Built as Diocletian's retirement residence, likely from AD 295 to 305, the Palace stands today in modern Split as Croatia's best-preserved ancient complex (**Figure 1**).



**Figure 1:** The Historical Complex of Split with the Palace of Diocletian (Photo: Zoran Alajbeg. Reproduced with permission).

The Palace has a long and tumultuous history, mirroring the history of the later Empire. Shaped as a slightly irregular rectangle, the Palace exemplifies Roman imperial architecture, merging Greek and Roman styles across its 38,000 m<sup>2</sup> layout. It features high walls, towers, columns, arches and intricate carvings. Renowned for his extensive building projects, Diocletian employed a diverse workforce, including local labor and skilled craftsmen from different regions of the Roman Empire (Wilkes 1986: 18). The southern

part of the palace housed the emperor's residential quarters and significant structures, such as temples and the Mausoleum. The northern part of the palace was designated for military use, as well as for service personnel and assistants (Cambi 2020: 140).

It is clear that shortly after his death in AD 311/312, Diocletian's palace transitioned into state ownership, functioning as a residence for rulers and dignitaries. An Imperial decree recorded either in AD 471 or 513 in the *Codex Justinianus* mandated the use of such imperial palaces to house governors, thereby preventing their decay (Karaman 1940: 420). Its transformation from an imperial residence to a city nucleus, particularly influenced by the downfall of Salona, the capitol of Roman Dalmatia, began in Late Antiquity and continued for centuries thereafter (Rapanić 1997: 7; 2007: 139). The fortified features of Diocletian's Palace undoubtedly also made it a strategic location for the commanders of warring factions during Justinian's wars against the Goths in the mid-sixth century AD (Rapanić 2007: 118; cf. Bulić and Karaman 1927: 181). In the mid-seventh century AD, Ivan Ravenjanin, the first Archbishop of Split, converted Diocletian's mausoleum into a cathedral dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, later known as St. Domnius (Basić 2005: 7–28). The walls and towers served defensive purposes until the 1700s (Duplančić 2007: 9–13).

As Split evolved into one of the most significant towns in the eastern Adriatic, so did the Palace evolve. Its present appearance mirrors a multilayered process of adaptive reuse (see Mısırlısoy and Günçe 2016; Davies this volume) which repurposed material and converted the physical structure of the complex, adapting it to a completely new function. Starting life as an imperial residence, the Palace later became a fortress, then refuge, before transforming into a place of worship and finally a residential area. Sixteen centuries later, the Palace is the nucleus of the modern city of Split. Despite all these changes, the Palace retains well-preserved traces of the late Roman and medieval periods, to the extent that the historical Complex of Split with the Palace of Diocletian was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

Today, the Palace is best characterized as a cultural landscape (Jalla 2023: 105), forming part of the urban fabric of Split that developed inside and around the Palace. The social importance of archaeological sites integrated with modern urban spaces has been well-established in regard to tourism (Baerenholdt et al. 2017; Griener and Hurley 2023: 424). The former Imperial residence now accommodates residential structures, commercial establishments, and cultural venues, embodying a unique blend of historical significance and modern functionality.

While the Palace often hosts events like archaeological conferences, there are challenges to holding inclusive events, like TRAC aspires to be, at historic sites. Accessibility is of particular concern, as cobbled streets and historic buildings cannot be

considered barrier-free venues. Another challenge was orienting attendees within the Split Historic Complex. First-time visitors often find the buildings similar in appearance, making street names and addresses somewhat confusing. While casual visitors might find this charming, conference delegates rushing to sessions can find it problematic. Ultimately, the success in navigating the challenges of this historic venue was largely due to the benevolence, patience and understanding of the conference attendees.

Upon reflection, the benefits of using a site like Diocletian's Palace as a venue for RAC/TRAC outweighed the challenges. We were glad to have the experience we gained as members of the local organising committee, and we would be happy to share our experiences further and encourage anyone who is willing to host TRAC within an urban historic site in the near future. It was important to host TRAC in South-Eastern Europe. We see the conference as a pledge for further development of theoretical approaches to Roman archaeology in Croatia, development that can be fostered by the next generation of archaeologists, a generation who were hopefully inspired by serving as student volunteers at RAC/TRAC 2022.

### **In this Volume**

The sixth volume of *TRAJ* contains ten papers and five book reviews, of these, the majority of research papers were part of 'Sensory Experiences in the Roman North', a Special Issue edited by Thomas Derrick and Giacomo Savani. Here, we will concentrate on the two that are not: a paper on Romano-British Gorgon sculptures and a paper on adaptive reuse in ancient Rome. In *Wo(man) with the Serpent Hair*, Chelsea Peer considers whether globalization and glocalization can shed new light on art in Roman Britain, showing how the visual language of the Gorgon took on new traits outside of the Mediterranean. Penelope Davies's *Ghosts of Buildings Past* emphasizes the practice of transforming underused or unused buildings into functional spaces, offering a second life to structures. This concept has been well-explored in the post-Roman period; here, Davies focuses on adaptive reuse in ancient Rome, demonstrating that, despite favourable conditions for adaptive reuse, the Romans exhibited little attachment to old buildings and frequently chose to build new structures.

Volume 6 also marks the first publication of book reviews in the *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal*, with subjects including Roman frontier archaeology in Britain, transportation networks in Bronze Age Italy, good practice in presentation on sites associated with the Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site, and urbanization in the north-western provinces.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> BA and MA programmes, including kolegii on theoretical archaeology, are available at: <https://ffpu.unipu.hr/ffpu/predmet/a3>; <https://arheologija.unizd.hr/studij/preddiplomski/silabi>; <https://arheologija.unizd.hr/studij/diplomski/silabusi>; <https://theta.ffzg.hr/ECTS/Studij/Index/927> [Last accessed 8 February 2024].
- <sup>2</sup> All of the recently written theses can be found at: <https://repozitorij.unipu.hr/>; <https://repozitorij.unizd.hr/>; <https://repozitorij.unizg.hr/> [Last accessed 8 February 2024].

## Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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