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The Earliest Representations of St Francis in Southern Croatia

The historical records of Saint Francis from Croatian territory and from the time of his life are still obscure, unlike some representations of the thirteenth and fourteenth-century figure of the saint. The earliest image of the saint can be observed on a monumental painted crucifix in Split, dated in the late thirteenth century. As a rare such an example it deserves a profound analysis and contextualization within history of regional Romanesque painting. Distinguished also by the realistic features in the portraits, this work is chronologically the first to present the figure of the holy hermit in the Western tradition. The two representations of St Francis on a stone sarcophagus in Dubrovnik, reveal typical iconographic forms of the fourteenth century Gothic art. Along with the other reliefs on the tomb of a noble man in the Franciscan cloister, they reveal some features of the dynamics in the development of the local sculpture, manifesting the links, both ideological and morphological, with the culture of early humanism in the mid fourteenth century. These links are undoubtedly due to the movement of members of the Franciscan order, as demonstrated by the two works from their monastery in Zadar. Both the gold-plated silver crucifix, executed around 1380, and the carved choir stalls, executed around 1395, accommodate the scene of *St Francis receiving the stigmata*, following the compositional scheme of Giotto. The second example is even more important as the relief contains the first representation of a picturesque landscape in Dalmatian art. All of these medieval works of high value confirm an early acceptance of themes and motifs related to the cult of St Francis in the visual arts along the Croatian coast, an area that contributes greatly to its dissemination thanks to benefactors and patrons, but also to masters of different origin.