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The forum-basilica *complex in Doclea (Montenegro): studies on architecture and architectural decoration*

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Abstract: This paper presents the results of research focused on the architectural decoration and the architecture of the forum-basilica complex of Doclea in Montenegro. The first excavations at the site were carried out during archaeological missions led by P. Rovinsky and J. A. R. Munro in the late 19th c. The monograph published by P. Sticotti in 1913 still represents the main source of information for the early excavations. That research identified the public area, consisting of a quadrangular forum flanked by a basilica on the west side, overlooking the decumanus maximus, a large bath complex, two temples, and a private house. Unfortunately, the basilica and forum were used as sources of materials for nearby buildings, and many architectural pieces have been removed, destroyed, or repurposed. Limited excavation data complicates an understanding of the history of the city, but the analysis of architectural fragments offers valuable insights into the construction phases and use of the main buildings.*

Keywords: Montenegro, Doclea, forum, basilica, architectural decoration, Roman architecture

Introduction

Doclea is the most prominent archaeological site in Montenegro and one of the most important in ancient Dalmatia. Nevertheless, only slightly more than 20 percent of the total area of the city (25 ha) has been brought to light by archaeological explorations, and most of those lacked modern stratigraphic methods or detailed publications (Fig. 1).[1] All the buildings in the city share a similar construction technique, a sort of *opus incertum* with irregular blocks of stone.[2] Bricks are used in only a few cases, either inserted into the stone walls or, more rarely, in curtain walls built entirely of bricks. It is therefore not possible to achieve absolute dating based on the construction techniques, but there is the possibility of recognizing successive building phases by examining the stratigraphical relationships

* This paper is the result of the authors' joint work, thanks to the contributions of all members of the bilateral research projects on Doclea (see "The site and the bilateral research projects" below). Specifically, Lucia Alberti wrote the first section, Tatjana Koprivica the second, Carla Sfameni the third, and Valerio Bruni the fourth, fifth and sixth. The introduction and conclusions were written jointly. We would like to thank our colleagues Elena Scarsella and Stephan N. Hassam for reading this paper and improving the English.

1 The main public monuments of the city were brought to light by P. A. Rovinski between 1890 and 1892 (Rovinski 1909), and the only existing monograph, by P. Sticotti, dates to 1913.

2 On the origin of the building material, see Rovinski's observations: 1909, 32–33: the author believes that they came from a nearby location called Bear's Head or from the area of Spuž.

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Fig 1. *Drone photo of the city of Doclea. (R. Koprivica 2021.)*

between walls. Traces of floors and of wall decorations left on structures are very scarce due to their poor state of conservation. Many structures have also been heavily restored, and the modern elements are not always easily distinguishable from the original ones. Most of the architectural pieces were either removed from their original locations, destroyed, or incorporated into neighboring private residences. The basilica and the forum were used as a quarry for the entire Podgorica region over the centuries, and at the time of the excavations of the late 19th c., many architectural fragments were found piled up in the space of the basilica, probably collected to make mortar.[3] Debris from other buildings (especially the thermae) was deposited in the forum during the first excavation works.[4]

In 2008, a team of conservation specialists from the Atelier for Conservation of Metal, Glass and Ceramics, part of the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Cetinje, together with two conservators from the Museums and Galleries of Podgorica, reorganized the forum and basilica area on behalf of the Municipality of Podgorica.[5] Architectural fragments formerly scattered across the site were arranged around the square, in areas presumed to correspond to the portico, while others were more recently placed in a nearby shed. Although most of these fragments probably derive from the forum buildings, some belong to other monuments of the city, as illustrated by the small pediment with an image usually identified as the goddess Roma (or Minerva) and attributed to the "first temple" or "temple of the goddess Roma."[6] Their displacement makes it difficult to establish their precise provenance and, consequently, to reconstruct the ancient buildings.

3 Rovinski 1909, 22; Sticotti 1913, 110, fig. 58, 114, fig. 114; Korać 2009, 192–93.

4 Sticotti 1913, 111.

5 Jovićević 2010.

6 Sticotti 1913, 65–74. According to Oettel and Živanović (2022), the relief would have belonged to the small temple adjacent to the domus, while Turković 2022 attributes it to the so-called *Capitolium*.

Against this background, this article integrates bibliographic and archival evidence with direct analysis of the surviving structures and architectural fragments to reassess the architecture, decoration, chronology, and wider context of Doclea's forum-basilica complex.

The site and the bilateral research projects

This article is one of the results of a decade-long collaboration between the Institute of Heritage Science of the National Research Council of Italy (ISPC-CNR) and the Historical Institute of the University of Montenegro (HIM-UoM), also with the participation of the University of Naples Federico II and the University of Molise. The collaboration focuses on the site of Doclea and on Montenegrin cultural heritage in general, and it was realized thanks to the CNR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), with the support of the Italian Embassy in Montenegro and the Embassy of Montenegro in Rome.

Doclea was founded in a place of particular significance for intraregional communications between the Adriatic coast and inland territories and along a north–south communication axis whose earlier history is poorly documented. The town, which was the second largest in Roman Dalmatia, is in the northwestern sector of the broad Zeta plain, where modern Podgorica is also located. At the confluence of the Morača and Zeta Rivers and the Širalija stream, marking the end of the Bjelopavlići (or Zeta) valley, this lowland supported important cultural and commercial exchanges linking the northern and western Balkans with Albania and northern Greece. For millennia, the Doclea area was therefore a strategic point for pre-Roman, Roman, and later communities seeking to control the passage from the northern and eastern mountains towards the flatter lands to the west and south, and ultimately to Skadar Lake and the Adriatic coast.[7]

Conquered by Octavian in 35 BCE and subsequently incorporated into the province of Dalmatia, Doclea was named after the Illyrian Docleati and became a *municipium* in the 1st c. CE.[8] The town occupied an area of about 25 ha, forming almost a triangle, with imposing walls that enclosed a large forum, a basilica, various temples, tabernae, domus, and an impressive complex of thermae, along with many other buildings of different sizes, all of which are still visible.[9] Several necropoleis and tombs surrounded the town. Although Doclea was destroyed by the Avars in the 7th c., the site preserves substantial evidence of important Late Antique and medieval phases, including the remains of three early medieval churches (Fig. 2).[10]

After several campaigns of remote sensing, archaeological surveys, and especially geophysical prospection, along with a synthesis of all the data collected from previous research, the urban layout of Doclea slowly emerged, albeit without archaeological excavation. All the results obtained so far, together with 3D reconstructions, are contributing to the architectural plan for a project, brought about thanks to the work of architects from the Department of Architecture of the University of Naples Federico II,

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7 For an overview of pre-Roman Doclea, see Alberti 2019b.

8 For the history of the Roman province of Dalmatia and its cities, see Wilkes 1969.

9 For earlier research in the town, see Sticotti 1913 and Koprivica 2013. For an overview of the history of the town, see the contributions in Alberti 2019a and Colosi 2020. For an overview of the agreements between Italy and Montenegro and the collaborative projects, see Alberti 2020.

10 Munro et al. 1896; Sfameni et al. 2022; Sfameni et al. 2025.

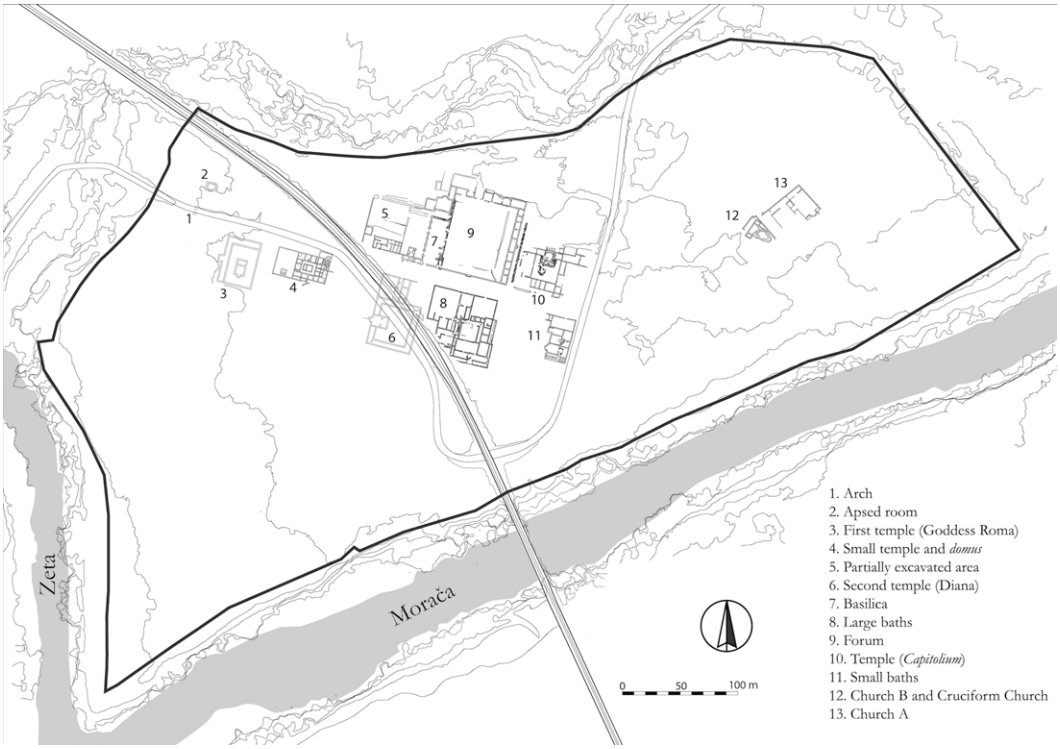


Fig 2. *General plan of the city with the main buildings. (After Sfameni et al. 2022, fig. 1, courtesy A. D'Eredità.)*

which aims to enhance the site and promote its contemporary use.[11] The final goal of our research, in fact, is not only to improve our understanding of Doclea from an archaeological and historical point of view, but also to support the presentation and revitalization of the site as a cultural, social, and economic resource for local communities and the wider public.

History of the research and the archive documentation

The fragmentary state of Doclea's archaeological record is central to the present study. Much of the site was excavated before modern standards of stratigraphic recording, while subsequent neglect, destruction, and restoration have further complicated interpretation (Fig. 3). The analysis therefore draws on published reports, plans, and photographs – including unpublished material located in archives and museums across Europe, in Austria, France, Italy, Great Britain, Russia, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro.[12] These records vary considerably in quality, and several campaigns left no complete photographic or graphic documentation.[13]

The forum of Doclea was first excavated in 1890 under the direction of the Russian ethnologist P. A. Rovinski (Fig. 4). Rovinski focused on this sector because of an apse that

11 Architect Bruna Di Palma is responsible for the enhancement project: Di Palma and Alberti 2022. Di Palma et al. 2026.

12 Koprivica 2013, 1–3.

13 Koprivica 2013, 1–3.



Fig 3. *The basilica at the time of the excavations in 1891. (Photo by J. Wunsch.)*



Fig 4. *Plan of the buildings excavated during Rovinski's time. (After Rovinski 1909.)*

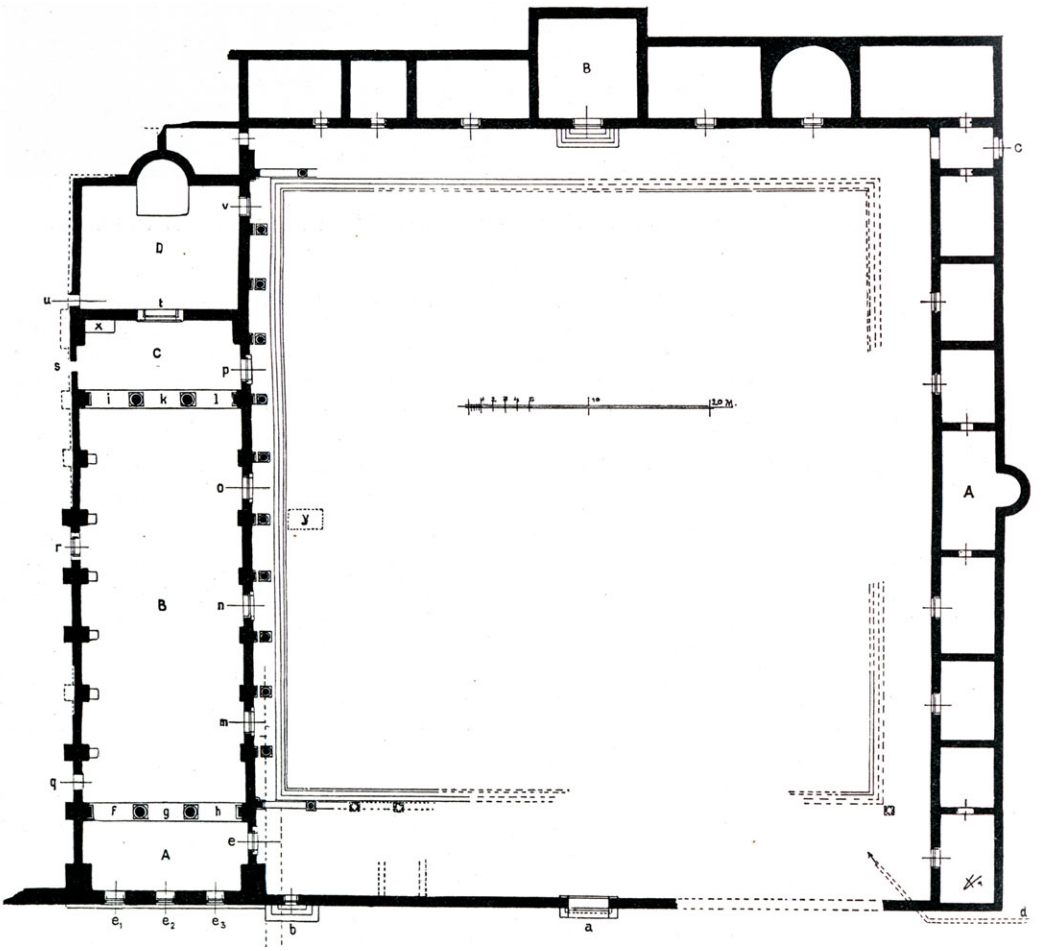


Fig 5. *Plan of the forum published by Sticotti. (After Sticotti 1913, 107–8, fig. 57.)*

may have belonged to a Christian church, perhaps the city's cathedral,[14] and because the area contained the "Carski dvor," or "imperial palace," traditionally associated by the local population with Emperor Diocletian.[15] G. Perrot and C. Buls published the earliest architectural plans of the forum and basilica following Rovinski's campaign.[16] P. Sticotti subsequently emphasized, however, that the limitations of the excavations conducted between 1890 and 1892 prevented firm conclusions about the architecture of this part of the town (Fig. 5).[17]

Further investigation and partial conservation of the forum, basilica, and buildings along the northern, western, and eastern sides took place between 1954 and 1964, under the auspices of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Montenegro, the Homeland Museum in Titograd, and the Archaeological Institute of the Serbian Academy

14 Rovinski 1909, 20.

15 Rovinski 1909, 6 (on Diocletian) and 40 (on the forum). See also Sticotti 1913, 105, and our conclusion.

16 Gérard 1890, 435; Buls 1891, 189–92 (pl. 6).

17 Sticotti 1913, 105.

of Sciences and Arts.[18] A multidisciplinary archaeological project launched in 1997 by the Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts in collaboration with the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts was only partially completed.[19] In 1998, the Center for Archeological Research of Montenegro undertook verification studies and systematic excavations in Sector B, encompassing Blocks I–III to the west, east, and south of the forum.[20] Excavations of the large thermae followed in 1999,[21] while investigations of Structure IX began in 2005 and resumed in 2009–2011, culminating in its identification as the so-called *Capitolium*.[22]

The forum-basilica complex: description of the structures and state of interpretations

The forum

The forum of Doclea is a large rectangular area (66.6 × 55.5 m), oriented north–south, with buildings on three sides; the south side is closed by a continuous wall with two entrances from the decumanus maximus (Fig. 6).[23] The rectangular apsidal building that occupies the entire western side is commonly interpreted as the civil basilica. Numerous rooms open onto the north and east sides. Original decorative elements such as painted walls and mosaic or stone flooring have been completely lost.[24] This makes a reliable reconstruction of how the spaces were used even more complicated.

Direct analysis of the forum's structures reveals a complex history marked by multiple phases of alteration and reconversion that are particularly evident in the

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18 Bošković 1976. The involvement of multiple institutions in archaeological research at Doclea contributed to inconsistencies and shortcomings in the preservation of documentation related to the 1954–1964 excavations. Part of this documentation is at the Archaeological Institute of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Belgrade, while the materials formerly held by Montenegrin institutions were, following a series of institutional reorganizations, consolidated under the Uprava za zaštitu kulturnih dobara (Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage) in Cetinje.

19 Crnogorska akademija nauka i umjetnosti [Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts], Podgorica, Arhiv [Archive], Dokumentacija *Projekat Duklja - Arheološka istraživanja, konzervacija i prezentacija* **[**Doclea Project Documentation - Archaeological Research, Conservation, and Presentation], Podgorica maj [May] 1997.

20 Uprava za zaštitu kulturnih dobara [Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage] in Cetinje, Dozvola Republičkog zavoda za zaštitu spomenika kulture [Permit from the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments], Cetinje, 31. 08. 1998, Dokumentacija Centra za arheološka istraživanja Crne Gore [Documentation of the Center for Archaeological Research of Montenegro], Duklja [Doclea], 1998, Podgorica.

21 Uprava za zaštitu kulturnih dobara [Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage] in Cetinje, 1999, Duklja, *Knjiga 1, Arheološka istraživanja kompleksa termi i konzervacija otkrivenih zidova, Rezime [Doclea, Book 1, Archaeological Research of the Thermae and Conservation of the Discovered Walls, Summary*], 1–2.

22 Uprava za zaštitu kulturnih dobara [Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage] in Cetinje, P. Lutovac; *Arheološka istraživanja, konzervacija i prezentacija Duklje [Archaeological research, conservation, and presentation of Doclea]*, Podgorica, mart [March] 2005, 2-7; Baković 2010; Baković 2011, 9–24.

23 Rovinski 1909; Sticotti 2013, 105–38; Wilkes 1969, 371; Balty 1991, 382; Rinaldi Tufi 2012, 478–79; Stevović 2014, 120; Sfameni et al. 2019, 87–90; Colosi 2020, 154–55.

24 Sticotti 1913, 106: according to Rovinski (1909, 26), most of these rooms were paved with mosaics or thin stone slabs, and the walls were plastered and painted.

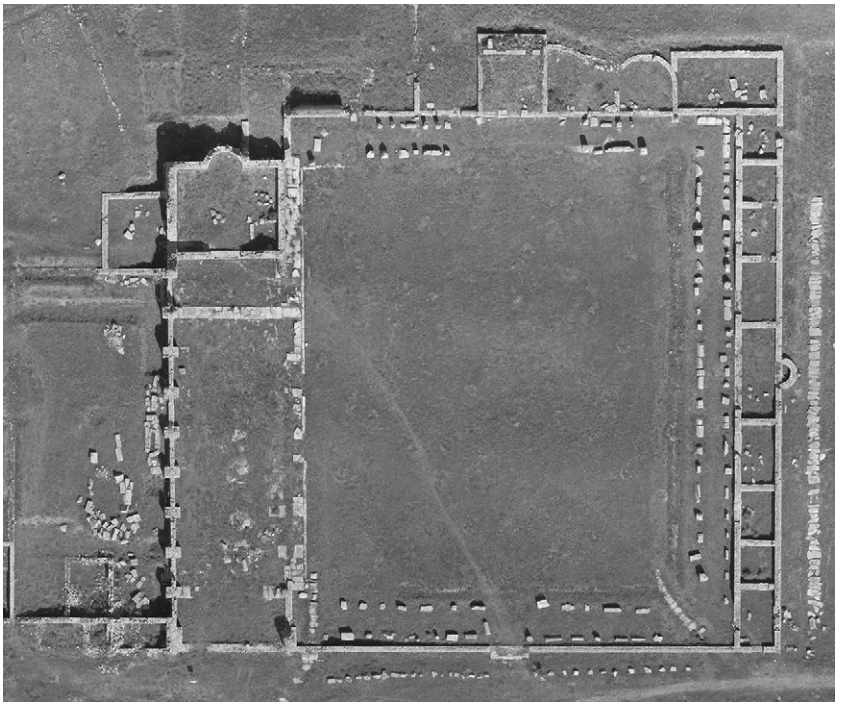


Fig 6. *Drone orthophoto of the forum area. (R. Koprivica 2017.)*

north and east sides. When presenting the remaining structures, we will refer to what is known from bibliographic and archival documentation, as well as to the various interpretative hypotheses formulated so far about the individual buildings and the structures overall (Fig. 7).

It appears the square was originally paved with stone slabs and surrounded by porticos, but no *in situ* elements of the pavement remain, as they were removed at different times;[25] nor does any of the colonnade survive, although Sticotti identified some bases on the south side.[26] The foundations of the portico on the eastern interior side were found during the 1964 excavations.[27] Two large channels for water drainage, covered by stone slabs, are located in the southeastern and southwestern sectors of the open area. The south side of the square is enclosed by a continuous wall, at the center of which is the main entrance, opening onto the decumanus with a stone platform that protrudes from the wall onto the street. Sticotti confirmed that, in his time, traces of the bases of four columns were still visible on the platform, which was thought to have been preceded by three steps. By 1907, however, only the lowest step remained, showing the support for the upper ones.[28]

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25 Rovinski (1909, 28) saw three more slabs, but the landowner told him that many others had been removed because they made excellent building material, a piece of information also mentioned by Sticotti 1913, 105.

26 Sticotti 1913, 107–9.

27 Koprivica 2015, 72 n. 375.

28 Sticotti 2013, 105.

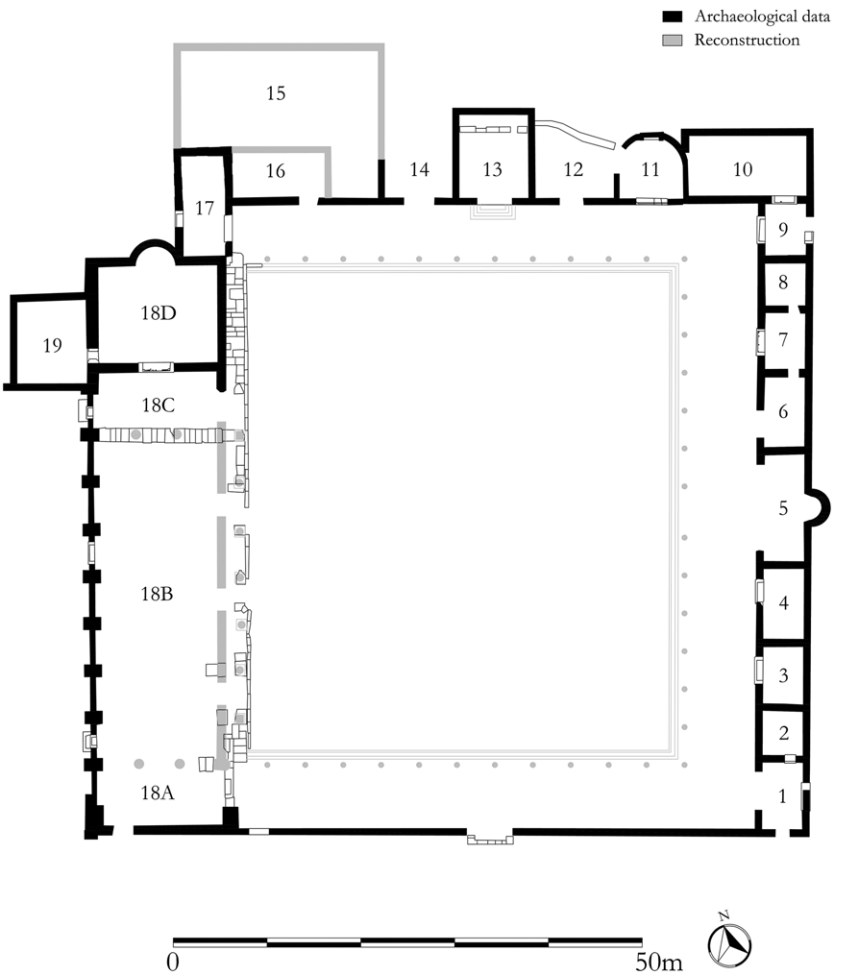


Fig 7. *Plan of the forum with numbered rooms indicated. (Drawing by V. Bruni.)*

The wall is heavily restored but appears to be continuous with the wall that encloses the square on the east side. At the western end, the continuity of the wall structure is interrupted by the presence of a secondary entrance, which, like the previous one, was preceded by three steps – still well preserved at the time of Munro's excavations.[29] This entrance facilitated access to the basilica, which had openings only on the side facing the square and not the decumanus. The section of wall to the west of the secondary entrance seems to be connected to that of the basilica. One of the covered channels was beneath the threshold.

The eastern side of the square features a row of rooms that are situated approximately 50 cm above the current level of the space they overlook. Room 1, located at the southern end of the eastern side, is rectangular in shape and features several openings. On the west wall, there is a 3 m wide opening without a threshold, and another opening onto the decumanus, measuring 1.55 m wide, also without a threshold. On the eastern side of the room, facing the *cardo*, there is an opening with a threshold; part of a wall that blocked the opening is still

[29] Koprivica 2015, IX, 31, fig. 17.



Fig 8. *Room 1 on the southeastern corner of the forum. (Photo by C. Sfameni.)*

preserved on the threshold (Fig. 8). Additionally, there is a threshold on the north side of the room that connects it to room 2, which has no other entrances. Room 3 has a large stone threshold measuring 2.93 m onto the forum, while room 4 has a threshold of about 2.92 m. Rooms 1, 2, 3, and 4 were plastered and painted red, and this decoration was still partially visible in 1961.[30] In room 5, there is a large opening, without a threshold, that faces the forum. This opening is not marked on Sticotti's plan; on the other hand, the two openings to the north and south, towards rooms 4 and 6, that are indicated on the same plan are no longer visible. The apse that characterizes the room is a later addition, built on a scraped wall (Fig. 9). According to Rovinski's report, a burial was found in the niche, containing cremated bones along with fragments of glass and ceramics.[31] Room 6 is accessible from the forum, but it also has an opening onto room 7; in both cases, however, the thresholds are not preserved.[32] Room 7 has a threshold onto the forum (2.94 m), as well as a small opening without a threshold onto room 8. Room 8 has no openings onto the forum, while the opening onto room 9 is blocked. Room 9 is larger than represented in the Sticotti plan, just as room 8 is smaller.[33] It has an opening onto the forum with a threshold on which there are two large blocks. Additionally, half of the threshold of the opening onto the east *cardo* is preserved. Another opening is located to the north onto room 10. The presence of openings on all sides makes this room a passage point, similar to room 1 at the other end of the row.

30 Koprivica 2015, 79 n. 407.

31 Rovinski 1909, 27. A piece of the basilica's cornice had been found in this room, reused "upside down" as a threshold at the entrance; Sticotti 2013, 109.

32 On the threshold of this opening, Rovinski (1909, 27) found two fragments of a relief depicting a chimera.

33 In this room, Rovinski (1909, 26) found a fragment with the inscription SALVE.



Fig 9. *The apse in room 5 at the center of the east side of the forum. (Photo by C. Sfameni.)*

All the rooms on the eastern side of the forum appear to have been built during the same phase and are symmetrically arranged: in the center, room 5, which is larger than all the others, and on either side of it, four rooms with similar characteristics in terms of size, position, and the dimensions of their openings. The construction of the apse in room 5, the burial found inside it, and the closing of some of the passages are attributed to later periods.

On the north side of the forum, room 10 appears to be connected to the structures on the eastern side, but its north walls (with the north/south corner) and south wall rest against the east wall of room 11 (Fig. 10). This room was accessible from room 9 and had an opening onto the square. During the 1962 excavations, several fragments of architectural sculptures were found in this room, as well as a fragment of an inscription.[34]

In the apse of room 11, there is a threshold, later blocked; in addition, the room opened onto the forum square across a large threshold, still in place, that is at a lower level than the rooms on the east side. The walls of room 11 are narrower than those on the east side (about 64/65 cm). In room 12, there is a threshold opening onto the forum, but the northern wall is irregular: a wall partition remains, partially collapsed, with an oblique course leaning against room 13. Rovinski found traces of a mosaic floor in this room.[35] The front of these rooms, facing the forum, appears to be consistent with the wall of the room on the podium (13). This podium, 1.5 m high, is square in shape (8 m per side) and aligned with the main entrance on the southern side of the square.[36] On the podium, there was a small room where only part of a large access threshold is preserved, measuring 2.40 m on the southern side.

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34 Koprivica 2015, 80 n. 417.

35 Rovinski 1909, 26. This is confirmed by a study conducted in 1962: Koprivica 2015, 81 n. 418.

36 Wilkes 1969, 371.



Fig 10. *The walls between rooms 10 and 11 on the northeastern corner of the forum. (Photo by C. Sfameni.)*

According to Sticotti, the floor originally featured "ein prächtiges Mosaik,"[37] but no traces of it remain. Similarly, no traces of wall decorations have been preserved. The external walls were also supposedly painted. The room was likely preceded by a staircase. Rovinski notes that the entrance to the room was flanked by pedestals for columns, which were probably accompanied by columns in front of them.

Rooms 14, 15, and 16 open onto the forum, but only the foundations of the northern walls are preserved. In room 15, a mosaic floor was discovered during the excavations of 1962.[38] On the ground, traces of other rooms are visible to the north and east, some of which were excavated in the 1990s.[39]

The basilica

The western side of the square is dominated by a rectangular building (18) with a large apse at its northern end, commonly interpreted as a basilica.[40] Rovinski reports that he began the excavations at Doclea from this building, which was immediately identified as a civil basilica due to the discovery of some inscription fragments in front of what would turn

37 Sticotti 1913, 111; Rovinski (1909, 26) notes that thin marble slabs had been placed on the mosaic, and the exterior walls were painted with dark red and yellow panels featuring dark veins to imitate marble.

38 Koprivica 2015, 82 n. 425.

39 Koprivica 2015, 82 n. 426: for these studies, only drawings are preserved in the archives.

40 Sticotti 1913, 111–38; Wilkes 1969, 371; Rinaldi Tufi 2012, 479; Stevović 2014, 120; Sfameni et al. 2019, 90–91; Colosi 2020, 155.

out to be the façade opening onto the forum.[41] This structure was accessible from the western side of the square through five openings; on the southern side, three windows overlooked the decumanus. The basilica is situated about 50 cm above the forum square, and Rovinski mentions traces of steps – no longer visible – that led up to it.[42] The building features a single nave supported by buttresses along both long sides and is divided into distinct sections: a central rectangular area constitutes the largest part of the structure at 48 × 13 m. On either side of this central zone, there are rectangular sections with entrances flanked by two columns resting on stone slabs. Access to the first area (A) was from the forum side through a double-leaf door; this space received light from the three windows opening onto the decumanus.[43] In the northeast corner of this space, in 1957, parts of a mosaic floor were discovered *in situ*, along with some fragments.[44] From this area, one could access the central space B through three openings facing the square and two oriented towards the western zone – one centrally located and another adjacent to area A. Space C had an entrance facing the square and a rear access point leading toward the western area.[45] According to Sticotti, the passages between areas A and B and between areas B and C were marked by arches supported on columns.[46] To the north, a large door with a threshold led into the apsidal hall D, measuring 13 × 12 m. Sticotti, referencing Rovinski, states that originally this room had a mosaic floor, which was later covered by marble slabs.[47] Rovinski, on the other hand, distinguishes between the floor of the northern sector, which was paved with a mosaic in white and grey, and the floors of the other sectors of the basilica. The latter were supposedly covered with thin slabs, but almost nothing remains of these coverings today.[48] Inside the apse, there was a raised area, possibly intended for seating, or a bench of sorts.[49] The apsed hall is connected by an opening with threshold to a large rectangular room on the western side, while on the eastern side, there was likely a window.

The western side of the basilica is characterized by the presence of masonry pillars that reinforce the structure on both sides, interspersed with openings onto the western area. This wall has been preserved up to a height of about 1 m in the southern part and 3 m in the northern part. Its state of preservation is due to the debris from the structure that was placed against it. Originally, brick bases were attached to the wall's pillars, intended to support statues. Sticotti suggests that dedications to emperors from Lucius Septimius Severus (226–227 CE) to Gallienus (268 CE) that were later reused in the construction of the western section of the city walls may have originally belonged to these bases.[50]

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41 Rovinski 1909, 21. For the inscriptions, see below.

42 Rovinski 1909, 25.

43 In Munro's times (Koprivica 2015, IX, 29, fig. 13), the cornices could be observed on site. Today, only a fragment remains. For the windows, see Sticotti 1913, 113.

44 Koprivica 2015, 72 n. 380.

45 According to Sticotti (1913, 164 n. 23), in this area, an inscribed slab was found reused as flooring.

46 Sticotti 1913, 117–18, fig. 64, for a reconstruction of the interior of the hall.

47 Sticotti 1913, 128.

48 Rovinski 1909, 24. Although there is some confusion among the documents, even in the 1957 investigations, it is mentioned that there were two layers of flooring in sector B: Sfameni et al. 2019, 94.

49 Sticotti 1913, 128.

50 Sticotti 1913, 123–24.

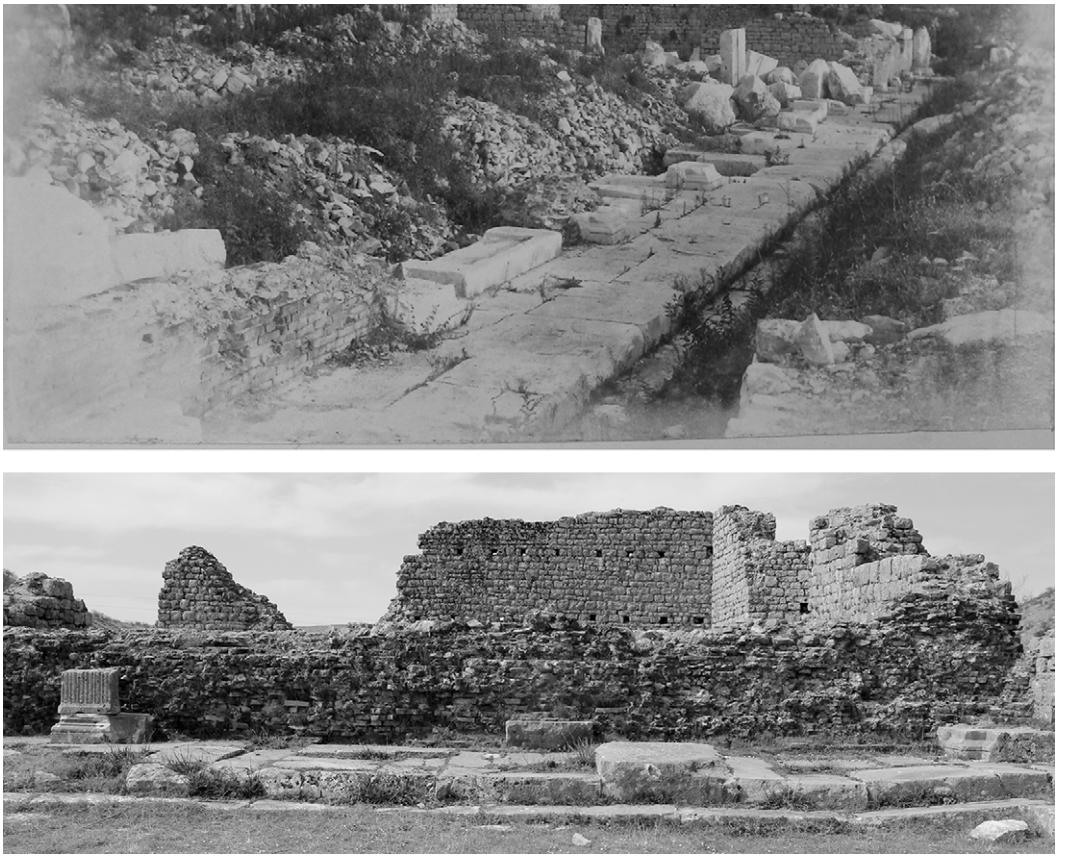


Fig 11. *The brick wall on the façade of the basilica: above, a photo of the southern part taken after the excavations in 1891 (After Koprivica 2015: photo by Munro in 1893); below, a photo of the wall in the apsed area in its current state. (C. Sfameni.)*

On the western side, the wall was decorated with dark vertical bands between the pillars. The eastern wall of the basilica, originally facing the square with five openings, has mostly been destroyed. It was made of bricks, as evidenced by the remaining section in the apsed area,[51] fragments of the structure at the southern end, and historical photographs where brickwork sections are visible (Fig. 11).[52] According to Sticotti, the wall ended in arches and each niche contained a semicircular window covered by a stone lattice, while on the western wall, windows were likely absent.[53] On a platform of squared slabs lay the bases of some pillars, in front of which there must originally have been some columns. The space between the pillar and the column was very narrow, making passage impossible. According to Sticotti, the four inscriptions we will discuss below were likely located on the protruding parts, corresponding to the architraves of the doors.[54]

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51 Describing the remains of the brick wall, Rovinski (1909, 31) recalls the discovery of a yellow brick or tile bearing the stamp OCLABAM, which is the mark of the workshop of *Quintus Clodius Ambrosius*. This workshop was well known and active at the beginning of the 1st c. CE (see Zaccaria and Gomezel 2000). It is not clear whether the brick was found inside or outside the structure.

52 Sticotti 1913, 121–22, fig. 65.

53 Sticotti 1913, 125–26.

54 Sticotti 1913, 133–34.

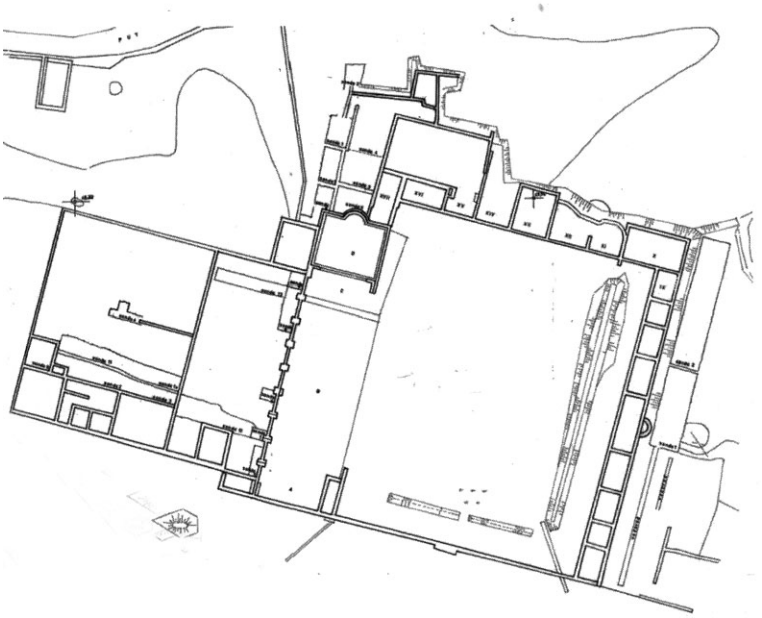


Fig 12. *Doclea: plan of the forum and of the quadrangular building on the west side. (Administration for the Protection of Cultural Properties, Cetinje, Doclea Excavations Documentation, 1998.)*

The area to the west of the basilica

The area onto which the basilica opens to the west was investigated in the years 1961–1962 and then again between 1998 and 1999 (Fig. 12). There are no detailed accounts of the first excavation, and the second remains unpublished.[55] The excavation of 1961, carried out to clarify the relationship between the basilica and the space to the west, revealed on the south side a quadrangular building that was likely inserted into a large courtyard. This courtyard was probably surrounded by a portico of the same length as the rectangular section of the basilica. During the excavations, fragments of Ionic capitals, bases, and inscriptions were found; however, these finds were not documented in any detail.[56] According to D. Srejović, the building was probably a temple set within a temenos, and this interpretation is shared by T. Turković.[57]

The construction of the rectangular structure followed or was accompanied by the closure of an opening on the south side and therefore followed the construction of the south wall, which appears to be in alignment with the wall of the basilica. Beyond this wall, there are two rooms that open onto the decumanus: the first of these was likely built on the foundations of an older structure during Rovinski's excavations and used as a storage space for archaeological tools and a custodian's residence. The structure's original function and that of the adjacent room remains unknown. In the western sector of the area, there are

55 Koprivica 2015, 82–85.

56 Srejović 1960; Srejović 1961a; Srejović 1962.

57 Turković 2021.



Fig 13. *Photomosaic of some preserved fragments of the inscribed architrave. (Drawing by V. Bruni.)*

structures that have been interpreted as part of a residence opening onto a central courtyard;[58] other scholars suggest it might have served as a market space.[59]

Proposed dating and interpretation: the state of the art

The construction of the forum is generally attributed to the Flavian period, based on inscriptions on some architrave fragments discovered by Rovinski in groups in front of the basilica's façade.[60] Therefore, the hypothesis that Doclea became a *municipium* during this period is widely accepted in scholarly studies.[61] Sticotti reports four parts of a first inscription, bearing the dedication of an equestrian statue by the *Ordo Docleatum* in honor of M. Flavius Balbinus, a 15-year-old son of M. Flavius Fronto and his wife Flavia Tertulla who died prematurely.[62] Today, only two pieces survive (Fig. 13, I). A similar inscription is the best preserved of the series (Fig. 13, II).[63] Another inscription features part of the titulature of Flavius Fronto, *praefectus*, *pontifex*, and *flamen Divi (Titi)* (Fig. 13, III);[64] his complete titulature was found on a different inscription.[65]

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58 Turković 2021, 27–28.

59 Rinaldi Tufi 2012, 479.

60 Rovinski 1909, 35. Sticotti 1913, 164–66 n. 22. A fragment had been reported by Munro in the area of the Christian churches, but already by 1907, Sticotti could not find it.

61 Sticotti 1913, 134. Wilkes (1969, 260) suggested that the *municipium* Doclea was established under the Flavian dynasty, based on the dedication to Titus by a magistrate (*CIL* III 12680). See Pelcer-Vujačić 2019 for further information on the inscriptions. Rinaldi Tufi (2012, 479) also dates the forum/basilica complex to the Flavian period, based on the stylistic analysis of architectural decoration fragments, particularly the cornices.

62 *CIL* III 12692, Sticotti 1913, 165–66, I: *M(arco) Fl(avio) M(arci) f(ilio) Quir(ina) Balbino. [huic defun] c(to) ordo Docl(eatium) honores omnes et statuam / equestr(em) decr(evit); [Fl(avius) Fronto et] Fl(avia) Tertulla parentes inauraverunt.*

63 Sticotti 1913, 165–66, II.

64 Sticotti 1913, 165–66, III.

65 *CIL* III 12695; Sticotti 1913, 170 n. 26: *M(arco) Fl(avio) T(iti) f(ilio) Quir(ina) / Frontoni, sacerd(oti)/ in coloniis Naron[a] et Epidauro, duum(viro) i(ure) d(icundo) /Iulio Risinio, (duum)viro/ quinq(uennali), pontif(ici) in col(onia) / Scodra/ (duum)viro i(ure) d(icundo)quinq(ennali), / flam(ini) [divi Titi]praef(ecto) fabr(um), / pleps/ex aere conlato.*

The last inscription of the series was similar to the first two: Sticotti saw two pieces, but the current authors could not locate them.[66] The architrave bearing the inscriptions, based on Sticotti's reconstruction of the façade, would have been positioned above the four entrance doors to the basilica.[67] An inscription, now lost, was likely associated with the statue of the young Balbinus, which, according to Sticotti, could have been placed in front of the basilica's façade on a pedestal.[68]

Among the buildings of the forum, the basilica, dated by Sticotti to the first half of the 2nd c., has sparked academic debate regarding architectural models and chronology.[69] Sticotti drew comparisons with the Basilica Ulpia in Trajan's Forum in Rome and the Palace of Diocletian in Split, suggesting that the basilica of Doclea could represent a precursor to the palace.[70] However, due to the significant chronological gap between these structures, his position regarding the dating of the basilica remains unclear. J.-C. Balty dates the basilica to the time of Trajan[71] and believes that the apsidal hall should be identified with the *curia*.[72] According to I. Stevović, the building underwent a renovation between the end of the 3rd c. and the beginning of the 4th c., along with the city's main baths.[73]

T. Turković does not accept the association of the basilica with examples from the Julio-Claudian and Trajanic periods, instead proposing comparisons with the forum of Cyrene and other sites dedicated to the imperial cult.[74] According to Turković, the architecture of the basilica in particular exhibits distinctive features of the Tetrarchic period. It would be a unique complex "which in every way reflects Diocletian's taste and character."[75] The forum and its structures are based on "a strict geometrical logic" that is found in other Diocletianic constructions, such as the palaces of Spalato, Antiochia, or Luxor.[76] The complex, to be interpreted as a *Kaisarion*, functioned as an "imperial court," with the basilica understood as a *Kaisersaal* (imperial hall).[77] It would have been conceived

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66 Sticotti 1913, 165–66, IV.

67 Sticotti 1913, 137–38, fig. 75.

68 Sticotti 1913, 165–69, n. 23.

69 See Walthew 2002, 142–45 for a metrological study: "the extent to which Doclea conforms to the principles of basilica planning established in Italy is most striking" (145). In Walthew's opinion, a convincing comparison can be established, even from a metrological perspective, with the basilica of Veleia (146–49).

70 Sticotti 1913, 122.

71 Balty 1991, 382.

72 Balty 1991, 381–82.

73 Stevović 2014, 120. For the phases of the large baths, see Sfameni et al. 2019.

74 Turković 2021. Already Srejović, in 1967 (Srejović 1967) and 1968 proposed the hypothesis that this complex was dedicated to the imperial cult, also based on the discovery of a statue head in part A of the basilica, which he attributed to Septimius Severus (Rinaldi Tufi 2010 believes it to be the portrait of Marcus Aurelius). Stevović 2014, 61–64 and 118–20, develops the interpretation of the complex as a *Caesareum* by considering complexes dedicated to imperial cults such as Cyrene, Pergamon, Miletus, and Ephesus, and noting an Eastern influence in the architecture of the structures.

75 Turković 2021, 15.

76 Turković 2021,17.

77 According to Turković (2021, 23), the structure has its closest parallels in the Basilica of Maxentius in Rome and the *Caesareum* of Antioch. The presence of statue bases, which could be

as a unified whole, based on "a precise and unified plan," attributed to the intervention that Diocletian would have planned for his hometown.[78]

The spaces along the eastern and northern sides of the square have generally been identified as *tabernae* or *scholae*.[79] The burial found in room 5 has been interpreted as the internment of an illustrious figure, possibly even the same Balbinus,[80] but, as already observed by Sticotti, it might rather represent a subsequent insertion.[81] In the same section, the closure of numerous thresholds indicates modifications to the original layout and the transitions between adjacent rooms. Regarding the structure with a podium, prominently positioned at the center of the northern side and aligned with the main entrance, Wilkes suggests that it could have been the "senate house,"[82]but it would be too small for that purpose, as already noted by Sticotti.[83] Other scholars hypothesize that it may have served as a small temple, or, according to Turković, "a profane shrine to the imperial builder and the town's biggest benefactor."[84]

The architectural decoration of the Doclea forum

The fragments from the forum area

Approximately 230 fragments pertaining to various architectural members now lie in the forum area of Doclea.[85] Among these, five Attic bases with double *torus* moldings can be identified, all with a diameter of 60 cm but with slightly differing heights, averaging around 30 cm. They are composed of a plinth, not always preserved (h. 10 cm), a lower *torus* (h. 8 cm), a *scotia* (h. 10 cm), and an upper *torus* (h. 6 cm). Several pillar bases come from the same area: one base still *in situ* is located roughly in the northeastern corner of the square, and another corresponds to the northern section of the basilica façade. Both are composed of a plinth (h. 8 cm), a lower *torus* (h. 8 cm), and a *scotia* (h. 10 cm). The pillar base located in the northwestern corner is slightly different, presenting a plinth (h. 10 cm), a fillet (h. 4 cm), an oblique *torus* (h. 7 cm), and a smooth *scotia* (h. 9 cm).

Also different is a large base with pedestal (h. 73 cm), difficult to place within the forum space, composed of a tall plinth (h. 11 cm) and an Attic base with lower *torus* (h. 8 cm), *scotia*

linked to the inscriptions published by Sticotti and datable to the period between Trajan and Gallienus, would serve as evidence of the imperial use of the hall.

78 Turković identifies Doclea as the birthplace of the emperor and recognizes Diocletian's other interventions in some of the city's temples: Turković and Maraković 2021; Turković 2022.

79 Sticotti 1913, 110. Rovinski (1909, 27) believed that the fragments of reliefs depicting a chimera or a horse could have been parts of signage for the shops and taverns located on the east side of the forum, while the side rooms without external doors would have been the residences of the shop owners. According to Turković 2021, these rooms were *scholae* for local *collegia*. For more information on *tabernae* in forums, see Baratto 2003.

80 Rovinski 1909.

81 Sticotti 1913, 109. According to Turković (2021, 17), "it was obviously a tomb of someone important who was awarded *funus publicum*."

82 Wilkes 1969, 371.

83 Sticotti 1913, 109.

84 Turković 2021, 16.

85 A complete catalogue of the architectural decoration belonging to the city of Doclea was published in Koprivica 2015, although not all items listed in the dissertation were traced during the most recent inspections (2024).

(h. 11 cm), and upper *torus* (h. 7 cm), from which the column shaft (*imoscapo*), carved with cabled flutes, begins. Two further bases, certainly belonging to the basilica, are positioned near the second pillar from the northwest corner and the second pillar from the southeast corner; they feature a plinth (h. 13 cm), a lower *torus* (h. 8 cm), a *scotia* (h. 13 cm), and an upper *torus* (h. 8 cm).

Five large pedestals with plain leaves (h. 130 cm, w. 92 cm), supporting both columns and pillars, consist of a plinth (h. 22 cm), a block decorated with plain leaves (h. 67 cm), a fillet (h. 8 cm), another plinth (h. 12 cm) and, only in some preserved examples, a lower *torus* (h. 8 cm), a *scotia* (h. 11 cm), and an upper *torus* (h. 6 cm).

In the forum area, there are also about 70 column shafts, smooth, fluted, and cabled, with diameters ranging from 27 to 70 cm. Five fluted pilaster shafts are also present, along with one cabled example, with depths ranging between 43 and 27 cm and widths between 84 and 34 cm.

At least three so-called Doricizing capitals survive (h. 30 cm, d. 51 cm), featuring a *cavetto* (h. 5 cm), a tall *cyma recta* (h. 11 cm), and an *abacus* (h. 6 cm), carved in one block with the upper part of the shaft. The remaining capitals are Asiatic-type Corinthian capitals with *acanthus spinosus* leaves. At least six column capitals are preserved: the largest two measure 73 cm in diameter and 88 cm in height; two slightly smaller ones are 60/58 cm in height and 54 cm in diameter; while two others are highly damaged and smaller, approx. 45 cm in diameter with a maximum height of 78 cm. In addition, nine pilaster capitals are known: four large examples (h. 86 cm; capital width 101 cm), four identical but smaller ones (h. 53 cm, w. 96 cm), and one Corinthisant capital, lower and wider (h. 50 cm, w. 63 cm).

Regarding the entablature elements, several architrave blocks and molded cornice fragments survive. From the forum square, the largest group consists of 11 frieze-architraves (seven of which preserve parts of the inscription of *Flavius Balbinus*) molded on both the opposite long sides; at least two others display molding only on one face. The frieze-architraves (h. 55 cm, max. w. 70 cm, d. 47 cm) are molded from bottom to top with two plain *fasciae* (h. 11 cm), two astragals or a *cyma recta* (h. 5 cm), a *cyma* (h. 6 cm), and the frieze (h. 30 cm).

Three larger slab-carved frieze-architraves differ slightly (h. 100 cm, max. w. 122 cm, d. 45 cm) and consist of three plain *fasciae* (from bottom: h. 12, 15 and 21 cm), an astragal (h. 4 cm), a *cyma* (h. 8 cm), a fillet (h. 6 cm), and the beginning of the frieze (h. 34 cm). Another smaller slab (h. 86 cm, w. 72 cm, max. d. 31 cm) is composed of three *fasciae* (h. 7, 12, 13 cm), an astragal (3 cm), a *cyma recta* (h. 7.5 cm), a fillet (h. 7 cm), a convex frieze with *acanthus* scrolls (h. 22 cm), and a closing fillet (h. 13 cm).

Another homogeneous group includes at least 10 archivolt blocks (d. 79 cm), also featuring three plain *fasciae* (from bottom, h. 7, 11, 15 cm), a *cyma recta* (h. 7 cm), and a fillet (h. 7 cm). Four blocks preserve the double springer on both sides of the arch, four correspond to the segment of the top part of the haunches, and one bears a single springer on one side only.

Regarding the cornices, seven examples (including one corner cornice) can be identified as belonging to a homogeneous decorative group composed, from bottom to top, of a leaf-and-dart *kyma* (h. 10 cm), dentils (h. 2 cm), a soffit with consoles framed by an egg-and-dart *kyma* (h. 15 cm), followed by a fillet (h. 3 cm) and a *cymatium* decorated with *anthemion* (h. 16 cm). Other cornices present plain moldings: also belonging to this group is the well-known

pediment featuring the image of Roma/Minerva (h. 107 cm, w. 106 cm), ending with a cornice consisting of a *kyma recta* (h. 7 cm), a fillet (h. 2 cm), an astragal (h. 5 cm), and a *cymatium* (h. 10 cm).

A large number of cornices again present plain moldings, all identical, composed of a *cyma reversa* (h. 7 cm), a continuous dentil (h. 3 cm), an ovolo (h. 4 cm), a soffit with *taenia* (h. 6 cm), another *cyma reversa* (h. 7 cm), a plain *fascia* (h. 8 cm), and the *cymatium* (h. 8 cm). In the forum and west of the basilica, at least three blocks can be attributed to a portico, with both long faces decorated, five lack their rear face, three form an angle, and five are projecting corner pieces. At least three blocks preserve double-angled moldings, presumably belonging to projecting architectural elements.

Other fragments once belonged to the forum's architectural ornamentation: these include three large identical modillions (h. 133 cm, w. 51 cm, d. 65 cm), one block with a central *clipeus* (h. 80 cm, w. 114 cm), and another block bearing what appears to be a greave and possibly a *carnyx* ending in an animal protome (h. 43 cm, w. 80 cm).

We conclude this analysis of the fragments with a number of slabs that should be identified as ceiling decorations. In one case, an entire coffer is preserved (h. 96 cm, d. 16 cm), whereas in the others, a row of small square coffers with vegetal elements inside them can be recognized (max. w. 79 cm, d. 23 cm), or alternatively, hexagons alternating with meanders (max w. 100 cm, d. 8 cm).

The architectural decoration in its historical dimension

The origin of the archaeological deposit, which had resulted from the chaotic dismantling of the city's structures, cast doubt on any attempt to attribute the pieces to their original locations. To try to spatially reassemble the structural elements, the methodological approach involved linking architectural fragments with the few pieces still *in situ*, and, in turn, relating all those elements to the recognizable building phases that could be reconstructed for the structures. Another essential step in this process was to compare these fragments with other ancient monumental buildings, especially within the proximal geographical area.

The first step was to group fragments with similar characteristics, proposing their association based on the architectural system they belonged to and the dating suggested by stylistic analysis. This approach led to a division into two main groups: one including fragments generally datable to the Julio-Claudian or Flavian periods (1st c. CE), and another consisting of later fragments, likely dating to the Diocletian era or shortly before (around the 3rd c. CE).

1ST-C. CE DECORATION (JULIO-CLAUDIAN OR FLAVIAN PERIOD) – Among the stylistically earliest elements is the group of seven cornices with consoles, apparently found inside the apse of the basilica (Fig. 14a).[86] These cornices are composed, from bottom to top, of a leaf-and-dart *kyma*, a row of dentils, and a soffit with consoles, masked by an acanthus leaf, that frames a coffer adorned with individually varied floral motifs. In one coffer, a reworked female head is also included. At the top, the cornice terminates in a *cymatium* decorated with an *anthemion* composed of upward-facing calyces and palmettes.

[86] Rovinski (1909, 27) reports the discovery of various fragments, including one with a female head.

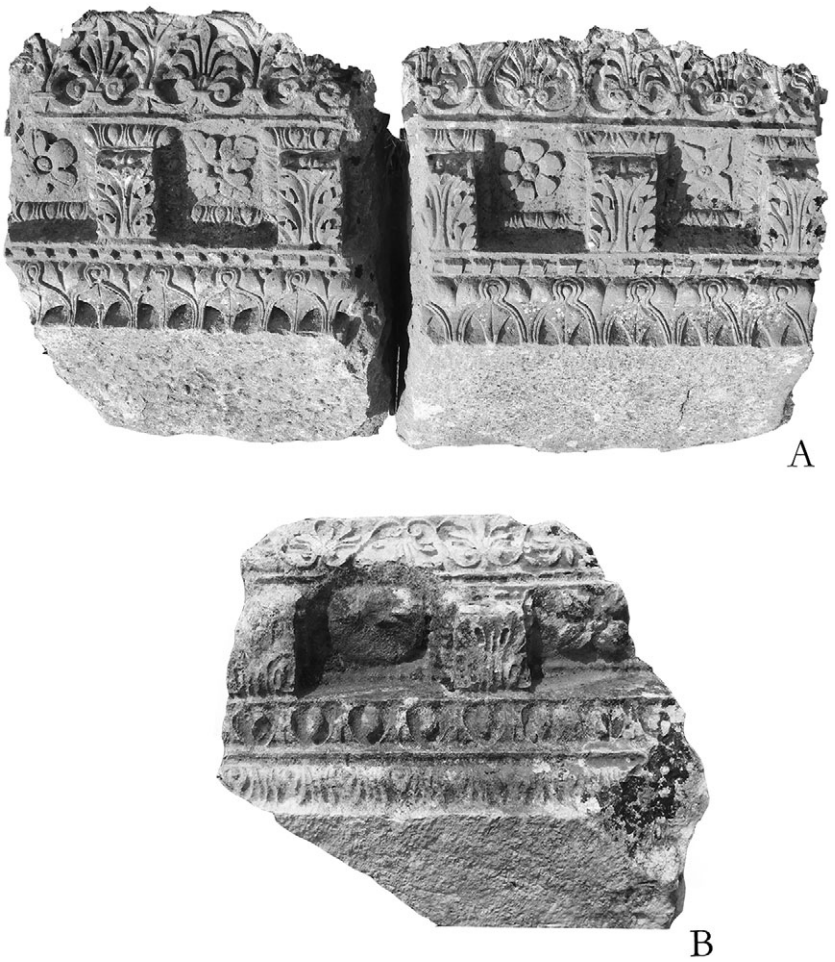


Fig 14. *Cornices from the 1st-c. CE phase: A. Cornice from the forum; B. Cornice from the so-called Temple of Diana. (Photos by V. Bruni.)*

Stylistic characteristics clearly place these cornices in the Augustan period or shortly thereafter, indicating strong connections between local craftsmen and Eastern artistic traditions. The sharply defined planes of the *cymatium* – almost resembling openwork – and the "metallic" treatment of the leaf-and-dart *kyma* suggest the influence of imperial architectural decoration in Asia Minor. Comparisons can be drawn with some cornices of Asia Minor; for example, similar console arrangements with an egg-and-dart *kyma* are found in Miletus,[87] which also echoes the two-dimensional central motif of the leaf-and-dart *kyma*, typical of Augustan-era cornices.[88] Further parallels include cornices from the Temple of Roma and Augustus in Ancyra,[89] and especially a doorway cornice from the *temenos* of

87 Ungaro 2017, 54.

88 Vandeput 1998, 151. On the particular motif of the stirrup-framed leaf-and-dart *kyma* in Asia Minor, see most recently Ismaelli 2017, 372–75.

89 Rumscheid 1994, 6, pl. 4, 4.

the Temple of Apollo Klarios in Sagalassos, dated to the Augustan–Tiberian period.[90] Comparable leaf-and-dart *kymatia* also appear in Rome, in workshops of the Augustan age, as seen in the inner order cornice of the *Basilica Aemilia*.[91]

A geographically closer comparison is offered by the *abacus* decoration from Basilica B in Byllis, likely part of an as-yet unidentified monumental structure.[92] Also noteworthy are the cornices from the forum in Zadar, which feature an Ionic *kyma* comparable to that of Doclea and *acanthus* leaves rendered identically on the undersides of the consoles. These cornices may date to the early 1st c. CE,[93] consistent with the forum's timeline and similar examples from Asseria.[94]

Within the forum area, a pediment also survives, bearing a central *clipeus* containing the bust of a helmeted female figure, possibly Minerva or the goddess Roma (Fig. 15).[95] However, it did not originate from the forum square, and its exact findspot – the bust was discovered during the city's earliest excavations – was not recorded.[96] Dating the piece is challenging: the plain moldings of the raking cornice suggest a 1st-c. CE origin, while the roughly carved facial features of the goddess's head – particularly the oversized eyes – indicate local craftsmanship distinct from official artistic norms, complicating stylistic comparisons.[97] As scholars often note, any identification of the bust as Roma is uncertain, even though the cult is attested at Doclea.[98] The goatskin draped over the upper torso more strongly suggests the *Aegis*, an attribute of Minerva rather than Roma, for whom such iconography is currently unattested.[99] We must therefore consider either a complete adoption of Minerva's imagery by the figure of Roma or that the image indeed represents Minerva herself.[100] The figure reflects a classicizing depiction of Minerva, with a shaggy rather than scaly *Aegis* draped over the peplos – an iconographic feature rare in large statuary but not absent in small bronzes, especially from northern Italy, possibly inspired by the statue of Minerva from the Aventine temple.[101]

A more substantial and coherent group of architectural elements – consisting of at least three Doricizing capitals, several fluted column shafts, and the five Attic bases – can be attributed to a single structure (Fig. 16). The capitals are characterized by a *cavetto*

90 Vandeput 1998, 51, 54.

91 Leon 1971, pl. 78 n. 1; Lipps 2011a, 55–60.

92 Lipps 2011b, 155–57.

93 Cambi 2003, 62–63; Starac 2020, 467–69. However, it has been suggested based on stylistic comparisons that these cornices should be dated to the Flavian period (Maršić and Dubolnić Glavan 2015, 55–59).

94 Liebl and Wilberg 1908, 52.

95 Sticotti 1913, 71–72. On the cult of the goddess Roma and other cults attested at Doclea, see Koprivica 2019.

96 Sticotti 1913, 64–74.

97 On the chronological issue for provincial architectural environments, see Ertel 1997. Despite the classical appearance of the goddess's face, the depiction of some facial features is comparable to productions from the nearby Dalmatian area (Rendić-Miočević 2009).

98 Jadrić-Kučan 2011, 105–6.

99 See Vermeulen 1959.

100 Turković 2022, 99–100.

101 Bolla 2012, 5–7.



Fig 15. *Small pediment with image of the goddess Roma. (Photo by V. Bruni.)*

supporting a tall *cyma recta,* topped by a short *abacus*.[102] The corresponding bases are double-*torus* Attic types with *tori* slightly disproportionate to the tall *scotia*. Some of the fluted shafts from the square match the capitals and bases in scale, ranging from 57 cm at the base to 51 cm at the top. The capitals suggest an early date, consistent with types that were prevalent in central Italy from the early 1st c. BCE through the Augustan period.[103] A variant with *cyma recta* appears episodically during the Flavian and Trajanic periods before disappearing, replaced by capitals with decorated *echinus*. Unlike the Doclean examples, Flavian capitals feature a high *hypotrachelion* marked by small astragals.[104] The closest parallels for the Doclean capitals are the original Pergamene types, which served as models for the Italic ones.[105]

These columns likely relate – both structurally and chronologically – to numerous cornice and frieze-architrave fragments, some inscribed, discovered in the forum. The architraves feature two plain *fasciae* framed by a *cyma reversa* (in portico fragments, two astragals appear on one side and a *cyma reversa* on the other), topped by a *cyma* adjacent to a plain frieze. Above the frieze, the cornice typically consists, from bottom to top, of a *cyma reversa*, a continuous dentil, an ovolo, a soffit, another *cymatium* with *cyma reversa*, and

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102 A similar capital is also preserved in front of the so-called *Capitolium* and could hypothetically be attributed to the porticos lining the main street; however, this does not exclude that the same forms were used for the forum porticos.

103 Kosmopoulos 2022, 193–200.

104 Kosmopoulos 2022, 233–42.

105 Laufer 2017.



Fig 16. *Fragments from the decoration of the forum portico: A.* Cyma recta *capital; B. Shaft; C. Attic base. (Photos by V. Bruni.)*

a broad *cyma recta*. As already mentioned, some architraves and cornices are molded on both sides – likely from a portico – while others are single-faced, possibly from a rear ambulatory. The plain-molded cornice tradition, a hallmark of Roman Republican architecture, was standardized in the Augustan era. These cornices closely echo the reinterpretation of plain Ionic cornices in the Forum of Augustus, as seen in the nearly identical molding sequence.[106] However, the tradition extended through the Flavian and Trajanic periods.[107] Notably, the Doclean cornices lack the small separating fillets characteristic of Flavian and later styles.[108] A Flavian-type cornice from Doclea lies south of the basilica near a former metal-grated window, identified by Sticotti, distinguished by mounting holes.[109] In this case, the moldings are separated by narrow fillets, comprising (from bottom to top) a *cyma recta*, ovolo, and *cymatium* with *cyma reversa*. Similar to the portico cornices are the cornices – without a rear face – stacked on the western side of the basilica, corresponding in measurements to the buttresses structuring this side of the hall.

Based on stylistic analysis, all these elements broadly date to the 1st c. CE, with no definitive attribution to either the Julio-Claudian or the Flavian periods. The artistic environment reflected here appears to be later than that of Narona, where the *Augusteum* displays early Second Triumvirate models,[110] or Pola, where the Arch of the Sergii[111] shows already mature Augustan forms that likely influenced Illyrian urban architecture.[112] Some features considered Augustan or Julio-Claudian may, in fact, belong to the Flavian period. This is evident in the aforementioned Zadar cornices – likely from the forum and basilica – which exhibit clear Augustan traits: dentils with rear fillet, egg-and-dart *kyma* with narrow shells around the eggs, and the use of a leaf-and-dart *kyma* in place of an *anthemion* for the *cymatium*. The only potentially Flavian element may be the vegetized *scherenkymation* (leaf-and-dart shear-shaped) of the *cymatium*, although this aligns more closely with the naturalistic tendencies introduced during the Julio-Claudian period than with the mechanical stylization typical of Flavian design.[113] A similar temporal shift must be assumed for the *Capitolium* of Aenona (modern Nin), which M. Cagiano de Azevedo dates to the Vespasian era.[114] Its interior order shows clearer Flavian features, such as wide shells around the eggs of the *kyma* and the absence of a rear fillet between the dentils.[115] At Doclea, a more definitively Flavian example is the cornice from the so-called Temple of Diana (h. 60 cm). It features a *blattkymation*, an egg-and-arrow *kyma*, a soffit with consoles covered by *acanthus* leaves and large floral rosettes in the coffers, surrounded by a bead-and-reel astragal, and an oblique *anthemion* with alternating open and closed palmettes (Fig. 14b). The most direct comparisons for the oblique *anthemion* come from the area of

106 Del Monte 2020–2021, 101–4.

107 Coletta and Pergola 2017, esp. 211–12 for further comparisons.

108 See especially the Ostian examples from Porta Romana (Pensabene 2007, 184–91), of the basilica (Pensabene 2007, 212–17) and, reused, in the Forum of the Heroic Statue (Pensabene 2007, 471–77).

109 Sticotti 1913, 113–14.

110 Marin 2021, 316–17.

111 Traversari 1971.

112 Marin 2021, 316–17.

113 Maršić and Dubolnić Glavan 2015.

114 Cagiano de Azevedo 1946.

115 Maršić and Sekso 2012.

Rome, such as a cornice from the Domitian Palace or the Tomb of the Haterii.[116] The inward-facing palmette flames suggest an early Flavian date, comparable to the Temple of Vespasian.[117]

Few examples of later-period architectural decoration from Dalmatia are published. Some cornice blocks near Dyrrachium have been attributed to a Trajan–Hadrian building,[118] and Trajan's gate remains preserved at Asseria.[119] Compared to earlier cornices, these later examples appear more hastily executed, with disproportionate moldings.

2ND-C. CE DECORATION (HADRIANIC OR ANTONINE PERIOD) – Not all fragments conform to the two primary groups discussed above (Julio-Claudian/Flavian and Severian/Diocletian periods). Some pieces are clearly post Early Imperial yet predate 3rd-c. elements. Among these are the three large modillions from an Ionic doorway, featuring double volutes surmounted by an egg-and-dart *kyma* and vegetal motifs in the corners. The upper surface is concealed by a large *acanthus* leaf with a midvein decorated with small U-shaped elements and deeply serrated lobes with triangular holes between them (Fig. 17a). The style of the vegetal elements is comparable to an example from the Asklepieion at Pergamon, where plant motifs are similarly carved into a plain background.[120] The Doclean example, however, was executed more swiftly, with flatter scroll surfaces. While the Pergamene modillion dates to the Hadrianic period, the Doclean example likely dates slightly later. The *kyma*'s flat form, with softly shaded shells and sharply cusped dart dividers, reflects late 2nd-c. style, as seen in a Sagalassos cornice.[121] The *acanthus* leaf masking the volutes also recalls mid-2nd-c. capitals.[122] Also attributable to the late 2nd c. is a large ceiling coffer formed by a square with oblique sides delineated by a guilloche, with each remaining space filled by a different floral motif (Fig. 17b). While stone ceilings are rarely preserved or published, this coffer is comparable to the ceiling of the Nymphaeum at the Sanctuary of Hierapolis, dated to the late 2nd–early 3rd c. CE.[123] Similar guilloche motifs appear in ceilings of the Hadrianic and Antonine periods, such as in the Temple of Hadrian in Rome.[124]

3RD–4TH C. CE DECORATION (SEVERAN OR DIOCLETIAN PERIOD) – A group of architectural elements can clearly be assigned to a much later period, including at least two sets of Corinthian capitals, which are identical except for their size (a diameter of 73 cm in one case and 54 cm in the other), pilaster capitals, large archivolts, and column pedestals decorated with plain leaves. These Corinthian capitals, both large and small, feature two rows of *acanthus spinosus* leaves that wrap around the *kalathos*, with veins carved with a drill and ogival voids between the lobes. Above the central leaf of the second row, a flower stem

116 Mattern 2001, 157, 199.

117 Mattern 2001, 150–51.

118 Forsén et al. 2018, 309–10.

119 Liebl and Wilberg 1908, 35–36.

120 Hoffmann 2011, 195–97, cat. no. 120.

121 Vandeput 1998, 98–99. A relevant example from a closer area is a frame from *Ulpia Ratiaria* in Dacia: Dimitrov 2015, 572, cat. no. 31.

122 Pensabene 2016, 912–16, part. cat. 501–512.

123 Campagna 2018, 563, 587–88.

124 Lipps 2012, 110.

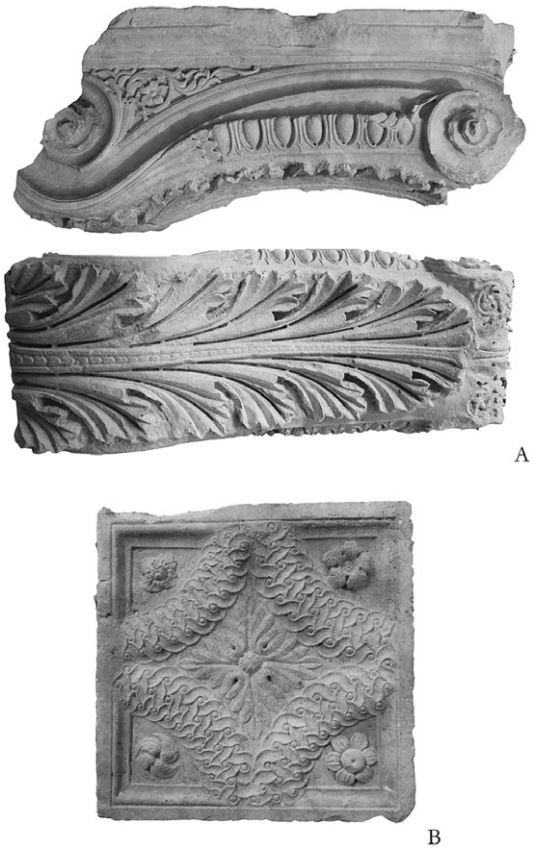


Fig 17. *Fragments from the 2nd-c. CE phase: A. Modillion; B. Ceiling. (Photo by V. Bruni.)*

rises with a subtle curve, culminating in a large, lobed blossom. On either side, flat helices emerge from calyxes, giving rise to the volutes (Fig. 18a). Some pilaster capitals share the same type and display the same decorative scheme, differing only in relation to the presence of a ribbon tying the helices and a smaller abacus flower (Fig. 18b). A second pilaster capital belongs to a different Corinthianizing type, in which the helices are replaced by floral scrolls; nevertheless, the treatment of the surfaces and the morphology of the decorative motifs remain consistent with those of the former examples (Fig. 18c). All these capitals, with their *acanthus spinosus* and distinct style, align with early 3rd-c. Corinthian Asian types.[125] They are clearly distinct from later, flatter, more schematic capitals with geometric contact zones and oblique voids between lobes. While the voids in these examples are slightly oblique, this feature is absent in some Severan versions.[126] Although this type was formalized in the early 3rd c., it may have persisted into the late 3rd c., as attested by comparisons with Butrint and the Palace of Split.[127] A similar timeframe likely applies to the archivolts, which are probably associated with a trapezoidal block bearing

125 Pensabene 1993, 406–7, cat. no. 436; Pensabene 2016, 926, cat. no. 658, fig. 629; Campagna 2018, 129–34.

126 Gliwitzky 2010, 44–45.

127 Butrint: Podini 2014, 163–64, cat. no. 58. Split: McNally 1996, 51, fig. 97; Matetić Poljak 2009, 205–8, 209–10.

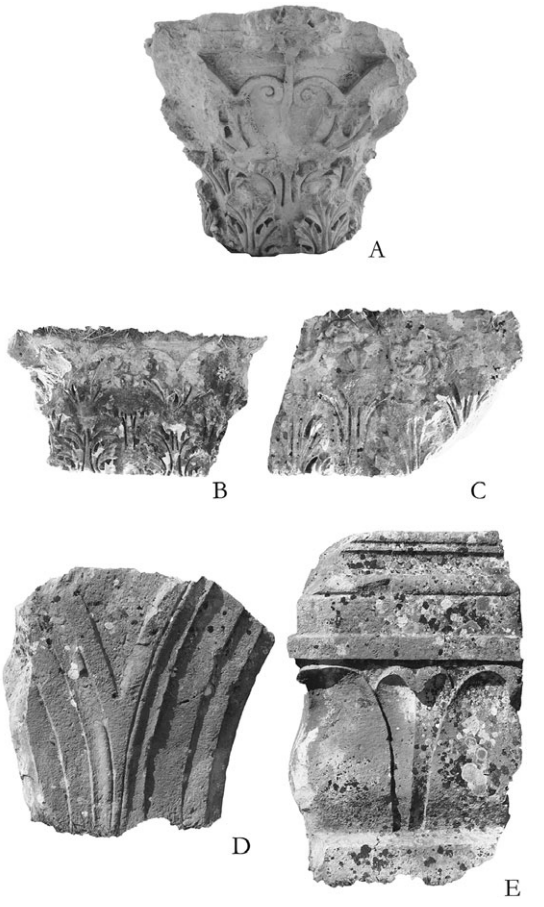


Fig 18. *Fragments from the 3rd–4th-c. CE phase: A. Asiatic-Corinthian column capital; B. Asiatic-Corinthian pilaster capital; C. Corinthisant pilaster capital; D. Archivolt; E. Pedestal with plain leaves. (Photos by V. Bruni.)*

a central *clipeus*, likely placed above the arch's extrados (h. 83 cm, w. 60 cm) (Fig. 18d). These closely resemble the architectural solutions found in the peristyle of Diocletian's Palace at Split. The plain-leaf pedestals (h. 130 cm, d. 60 cm) are harder to compare, as no other examples are known (Fig. 18e). Their design likely originates from pedestal bases common not only in triumphal arches but also in Eastern buildings, influenced by Hellenistic traditions.[128] Particularly close parallels, especially in their proportions and the practice of carving the pedestal, lower *torus*, and half of the *scotia* from a single block, can again be found in the pedestals of the Palace of Split.[129]

Construction phases and interpretative reconstruction proposals

The following analysis, which proposes a distinction between two main construction phases in the development of the forum and basilica, is based on wall stratigraphy and stylistic data from the architectural decoration. Due to the lack of stratigraphical excavations and the reliance on limited, often ambiguous information from early

[128] For decorated pedestals, but without plain leaves, see Hellenistic examples from the Temple of Artemis at Apollonia: Follain 2015, 128–29.

[129] Matetić Poljak 2024, 289.

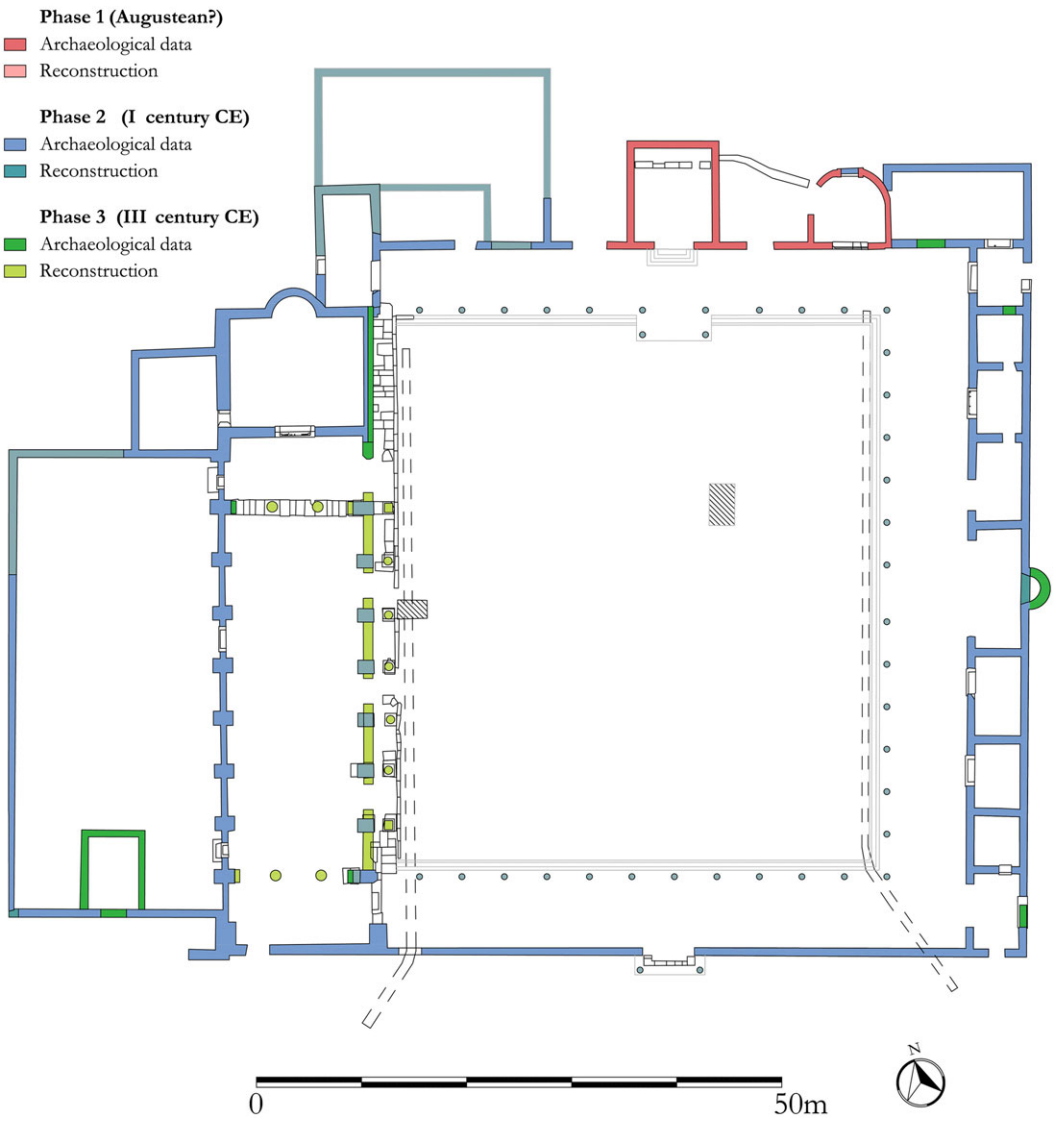


Fig 19. *Plan of the forum showing the construction phases. (Drawing by V. Bruni.)*

investigations, it is evident that any proposed reconstructions, though well founded, are subject to a certain degree of uncertainty and open to critique (Fig. 19).

Although there are reports of earlier occupation in the area,[130] analysis of the wall structures reveals notably consistent construction techniques and a strong connection between different parts of the forum and basilica structures.[131] Only on the northern side,

[130] Koprivica (2015, 71 n. 367) reports news of the discovery of structures dating to earlier phases inside the basilica, in the area around the apse and near the section that was added to the western wall, which could be linked to the earlier settlement in the area, possibly an Augustan-era *castrum*.

[131] See the previous description of the structures.

the other structures seem to lean on a central core, composed of the podium chamber and the nearby rooms to the west. In particular, we observed that the walls of room 10 visibly rest against the structures of room 11 (see Fig. 10). Nevertheless, the relationship between the walls of the forum rooms and the basilica structures in the northwestern corner remains unclear. For this reason, it can be only cautiously hypothesized that these spaces (the podium chamber and the rooms to the west) were the first to be constructed.

Based on the observations made on the masonry, a simultaneous construction phase for the basilica's southern wall and the southern side of the square appears plausible. The analysis of the masonry also revealed a connection with the entire western side of the square, to which the southern wall seems to be closely linked. This complex of structures likely corresponds to the principal construction phase, to which the majority of the architectural decoration can be attributed. In light of the stylistic characteristics of this decorative repertoire, the main building phase of both the forum and the basilica can therefore be placed in the 1st c. CE.

Some architectural elements dating to the Hadrianic–Antonine period do not appear to belong to any specific location within the forum area.

A significant later building phase is suggested by the construction of the brick wall of the basilica (see Fig. 11), possibly associated with the architectural materials dating to the second half of the 3rd c. It is also plausible that the building on the southern side of the rectangular space to the west of the basilica and the apse in Room 5 were constructed during this phase.

The blocking of doorways in the eastern rooms may relate to the repurposing of furnishings and the reuse of structures in even later periods.

Phase 1: Julio-Claudian or Flavian Period (1st c. CE)

The group of materials we propose were associated – columns with Attic bases and Doricizing capitals, as well as architraves and cornices with plain moldings – likely correspond to the decoration of the forum square. Given their similarity to elements definitively linked to the western side of the basilica and the structural relationships observed, it seems that the basilica hall was constructed alongside the colonnades of the forum square, sharing part of their architectural decoration.[132]

As noted previously, the construction of the forum complex is almost unanimously attributed to the Flavian or Trajanic period, based primarily on inscriptions carved on some of the frieze-architrave blocks. These refer to honors bestowed upon M. Flavius Balbinus by the municipal order and his parents M. Flavius Fronto and Flavia Tertulla (*CIL* III 12692). The inscription is dated to the Flavian era based on the onomastics of the individuals. It is also suggested that the family of the honored youth, who died at the age of 15, sponsored the very construction of the basilica and the forum square.[133] However, this interpretation remains tentative, as the inscription does not explicitly refer to the construction of the

[132] Sticotti 1913, 135–36.

[133] Pelcer-Vujačić 2019, 104–6. A slightly later chronology, dating to the Trajanic period, has also been proposed, suggesting that the father, M. Flavius Fronto, belonged to the second generation of Roman citizens (Balty 1991, 382 and n. 592).

portico or basilica, but rather focuses on the erection of an equestrian statue, which does not necessarily imply simultaneous building activity.[134]

If the involvement of the local Flavii does indeed date to the Flavian period, it could provide a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the forum, where the statue was likely placed. This hypothesis aligns with the systematic reworking of the frieze-architraves on the side of the inscription, where the *cyma* molding of the architrave was replaced by two astragals.[135] The block-joining system suggests that not all blocks belonged to the same architrave running above the portico. At least four blocks have a recess formed by an oblique face and a rectangular appendage, designed to connect with a rear block via a clamp on the sloped edge.[136] For inscriptions I–II (see Fig. 13), the moldings continue on the side of the blocks, suggesting that different segments of the architrave may have rested on projecting structures that are now lost. It is plausible that such projections emphasized important spaces, such as the podium room on the northern side of the forum or the southern entrance, and that inscriptions were placed on these structures (Fig. 20). It is unlikely, as Sticotti previously suggested,[137] that these architraves with inscriptions belonged to the basilica façade, as their reconstructed length (7 m) exceeds the clear width of the openings.

Stylistic models for several decorative elements in Doclea trace back to the Augustan or Julio-Claudian period – reflecting the chronology attested at other fora in the Dalmatian region, such as at Zadar, Asseria, and Aequum.[138] It is likely, however, that the layout of the forum of Doclea was realized during the Flavian period, a pivotal moment for Dalmatia's Romanization,[139] and that the decorative motifs rooted in the Augustan tradition were borrowed from the architectural decoration of nearby cities. The use of *cyma recta* capitals, while less common and without immediate regional parallels, is not surprising given the choice of Tuscan (i.e., Doricizing) forms for older structures in remote provinces like Pannonia.[140]

The architectural design of the forum-basilica complex corresponds to a well-defined type of small fora with a long basilica on one side. The strongest parallel, already proposed by Sticotti, is with the basilica at Veleia, dated to around 15 CE.[141] Similar complexes include Iulium Carnicum, Ruscino, Clunia, Martigny, and Aequum (Fig. 21).[142] This type

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134 Inscriptions on architraves usually name only the dedicator, or the building constructed, or both the building and its statue decoration but never just the latter (*CIL* III 9987 is a nearby example). A key comparison is with Asseria, where architraves similar to those from Doclea, some smaller in size, have been found on which the construction of the porticos they belonged to is explicitly mentioned (Kurilić 2004).

135 However, the hypothesis remains uncertain because the inscription appears very regular in its execution, something that would be very difficult to achieve on blocks already in place.

136 A similar anchoring system is found on some cornices from Tusculum: Rodríguez Gutierrez 2021, 296.

137 Sticotti 1913, 105–6.

138 Wilkes 1969, 368–71.

139 Musielak 2012.

140 Dimitrov 2012, 123–28.

141 Nünnerich-Asmus 1994, 213–15; Cavalieri 2022, 398–99.

142 Nünnerich-Asmus 1994, 226–29; Balty 1991, 135, 330–34, 339–50; Mainardis 2008, 39–40; Alarcão et al. 2017.

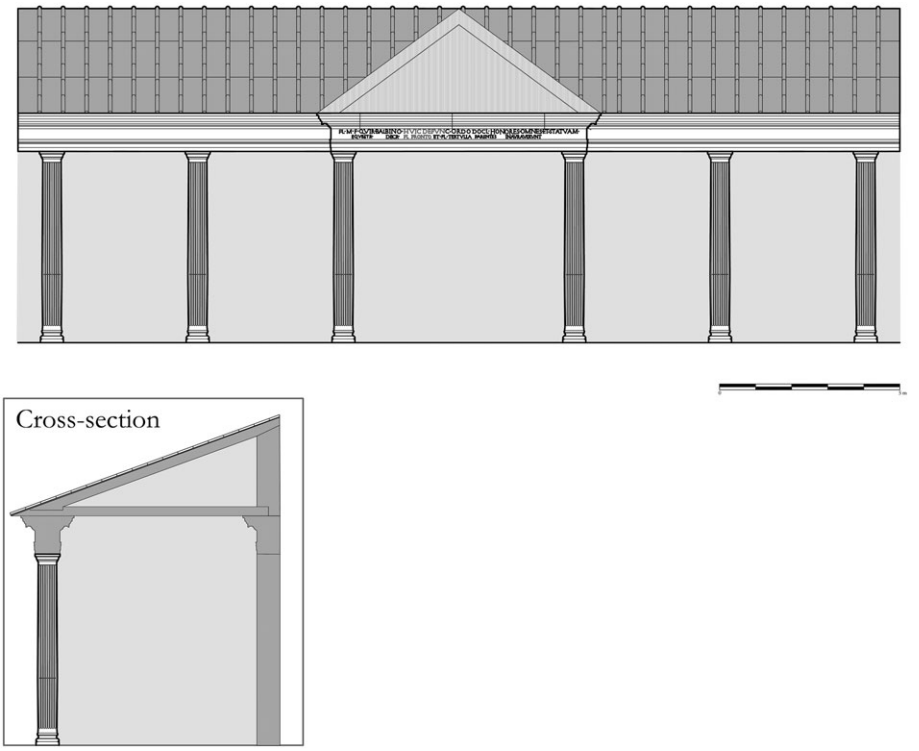


Fig 20. *Reconstruction of the forum portico based on the architectural elements attributed to it. (Drawing by V. Bruni.)*

extended beyond the Early Imperial period into the Trajanic–Hadrianic period (e.g., British "Principia-type" fora like Caerwent, Wroxeter, and Silchester)[143] and post-Antonine examples like Sufetula.[144] In these cases, the portico colonnades end at the basilica, which is separated from the forum square by a column or pier façade. The basilica of Doclea is comparable with other basilicas supported by massive perimeter buttresses, with or without interior supports (as seen in Ampurias).[145]

Recently, T. Turković proposed a later, Diocletian, dating for the forum-basilica complex. His critique focuses on the dual-axis layout (north–south and east–west), which he links to the Basilica of Maxentius.[146] However, this dual-axis theory is flawed: what is interpreted as a southern entrance in the basilica of Doclea is actually a window. Turković's chronology is further based on architectural fragments compared to the Split Palace and the dating of a statue of Emperor Gallienus. However, since the statue pediments attributed to the basilica were reused in city walls and only hypothetically belong to this building – in which case, they could still have been added over time – they cannot reliably indicate the building's construction date. Interpreting the original layout and reconstructing the forum remains a

143 Balty 1991, 256–64; Creighton and Fry 2016, 106–8; Guest 2022. In the case of Silchester, it has been suggested that the forum of the Hadrian period was a reconstruction of a wooden forum from the Flavian period.

144 Barresi 2008, 263.

145 Nünnerich-Asmus 1994, 219–21. For other columned examples, see Liverani 2019, 146–48.

146 Turković 2021, 19–21.

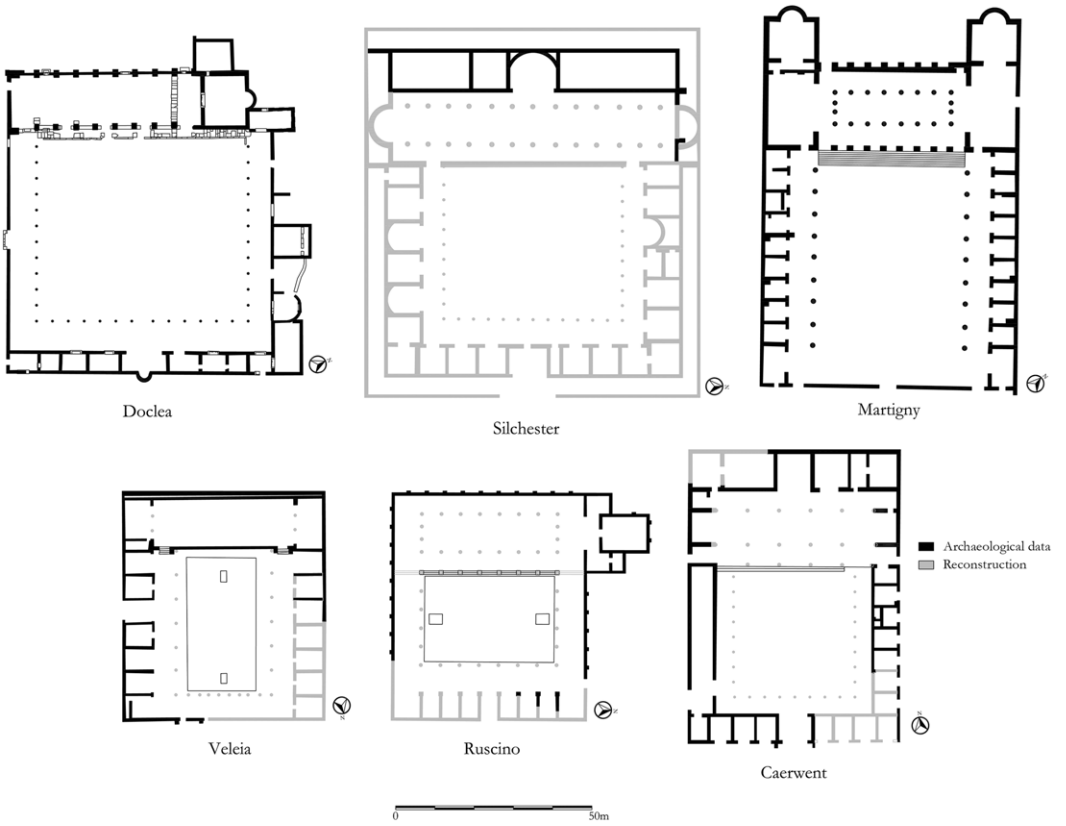


Fig 21. *Plans of forums comparable to the Doclea complex. (Drawing by V. Bruni.)*

complex task. While many structural elements survive, it cannot be assumed that all architectural components belonged to the original complex or were later brought in for reuse or dismantling. In conclusion, an earlier phase is suggested by certain architectural elements (particularly cornices), though their exact placement is uncertain. Based on wall stratigraphy, it is possible that they were originally located in the elevated northern chamber of the forum square. A nearly contemporary or slightly later architectural phase (still within the late 1st c. CE) may correspond to the construction of the forum complex, with its square and western basilica. Planimetric parallels span the Julio-Claudian to Antonine periods, although the strongest matches are with the older ones. The same chronology is supported by the architectural decoration, assuming the proposed repositioning of fragments is accurate.

Phase 2: Diocletian period (late 3rd – early 4th c. CE)

The subsequent phase is marked by minor modifications to the existing structural layout. Some decorative fragments from the late 2nd or 3rd c. CE, likely part of the basilica, indicate that the city retained some vitality during the mid-Imperial period. The basilica's role in imperial commemoration is highlighted by the discovery of a portrait head of Marcus Aurelius (initially interpreted as Septimius Severus) in the apse.[147]

147 Koprivica 2019, 120–21.

More substantial modifications seem to have occurred after the second half of the 3rd c., possibly during Diocletian's reign. Some fragments may be attributed to the basilica, based on their size and *in situ* traces. The dimensions of the plain-leaf pedestal plinths (93 cm wide) match the impressions found on the façade (96 cm), suggesting they stood at the front of the building.[148] These impressions cover only the width of sector B; the presence of a pedestal supporting a pier, rather than a column, may indicate the end of the row on one side.

The diameter of the pedestal base aligns with the larger Corinthian capitals, and its load-bearing part matches the measurements of the blocks of archivolts (*scamillus* 82 cm; arch impost 79 cm). Photogrammetry has shown that the arch width matches the intercolumniation on the façade. Two other impressions on a block stylobate closing Room C on the basilica's north side may mark the location of two columns with larger bases (140 × 126 cm), suggesting support for larger columns, perhaps corresponding to a dispersed capital from the forum (diam. 96 cm).[149] The placement of the pilasters is easier to determine due to surviving bases along the brick wall, some still visible *in situ* from the excavation. These larger but shallower pilasters, with scrolls instead of volutes, belong to the façade; those from inside the basilica match bases found near the northwest and southeastern corners of area B.

As indicated by the architectural decoration, the basilica structure remained largely unchanged during this phase. The façade facing the forum was rebuilt in bricks, fronted by a colonnade just a few centimeters away, following an architectural style fully expressed in the Palace of Diocletian at Split (Fig. 22). Colonnades with piers and archivolts, and attached architectural elements, suggest characteristics shared between Doclea and Split. The rest of the façade likely featured pilasters, and the interior was decorated with two pairs of columns (south and north ends), placed on a block stylobate that still shows their base marks. The west wall decoration likely retained earlier cornices with plain moldings. A repaving of the basilica floor probably occurred during this phase, likely reusing inscribed slabs from the forum.[150]

Other Diocletian-era architectural decoration is well represented in the city. Cornices found in the nearby temple, the so-called *Capitolium*, feature a *blattkymation*, a coffered soffit with ovolo-molded edges and four-petal rosettes, and a *cymatium* decorated by an *anthemion* with alternating upwards and downwards facing palmettes (h. 30 cm) (Fig. 23a). Notably, the plain-leaf *kyma* with a strong central vein, arranged in two rows, mirrors those in the frigidarium of the Diocletian Thermae[151] and the Palace of Split's mausoleum door.[152] The consoles, though simplified, share characteristics within the same chronological context: shaped shafts with deep central bands and schematic covering leaves. The uniform coffer flowers align with 4th-c. CE solutions, such as those in the Basilica of Maxentius.[153]

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148 Despite the fact that the pedestals were found along the northern side of the portico of the forum (Rovinski 1909, 26).

149 Koprivica 2015, X, 48, cat. no. I-VI/2.

150 This is the case of the inscription listing the full honors bestowed upon the young M. Flavius Balbinus, which probably adorned the base of the equestrian statue placed directly in front of the basilica and found by Sticotti inside the hall, reused as flooring: Sticotti 1913, 164.

151 Beste et al. 2014, 194.

152 McNally 1996, 46.

153 Carè 2005, 97–98, cat. nos. 38–39.

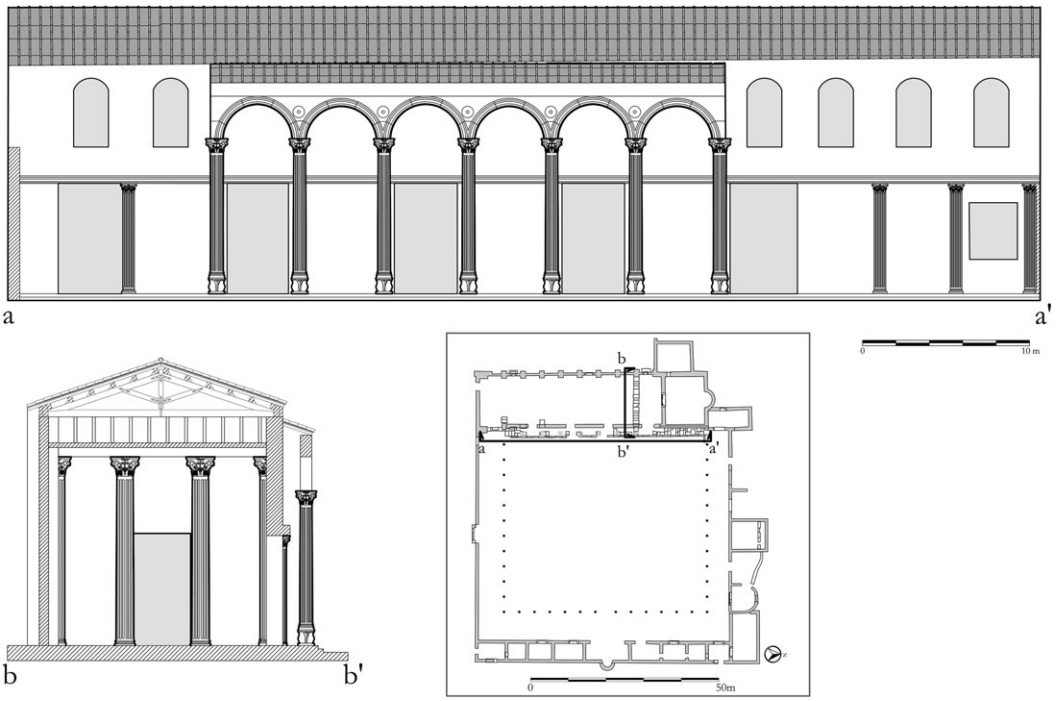


Fig 22. *Reconstruction of the basilica in its final phase based on the architectural elements attributed to it. (Drawing by V. Bruni.)*

The acroteria (h. 70 cm), also part of the same temple's decoration, are harder to date due to the scarcity of Late Imperial examples (Fig. 23b). Nonetheless, their design – with large multi-petal flowers wrapped in acanthus scrolls – continues a tradition from the Antonine *ustrina* of the Campus Martius, though in a later stylistic stage.[154] This dating is supported by excavations in the temple area that identified an abandonment layer starting in the second half of the 4th c. CE, with the complex having been constructed probably at most a century before.[155]

Phase 3: Transformations and abandonment

The later stages of the buildings' life are characterized by the closing of numerous thresholds and the reuse of building materials, decorative elements, and inscriptions. J. A. R. Munro already observed that the rooms on the eastern side of the forum were constructed with "fragments from the ruins of the basilica, and it is not difficult to identify pieces of the cornice and architrave converted into door-posts and thresholds."[156] However, these could be later modifications made after the initial construction phase, involving the sealing of openings and changes in the rooms' functions. In the absence of excavation data, we cannot determine how long the area was used in antiquity or what functions it served, nor can we specify the periods to which the closures of access points – typical of abandonment and reuse phases during Late Antique to early medieval times – may be

154 Friedl 2012, 384–86.

155 Živanović 2011.

156 Munro et al. 1896, 7.



Fig 23. *Architectural elements of the* Capitolium*: A. Cornice; B. Acroterion. (Photo by V. Bruni.)*

attributed. The fact that, at the time of excavations, the surface of the basilica was covered with numerous architectural fragments, along with the presence of circular pits identifiable in archival photographs, suggests the possibility of lime kilns used for calcining architectural pieces (Fig. 24). However, it is not possible to establish the chronological horizon of these activities, which may have been carried out until relatively recent times.[157]

Architecture of the forum-basilica complex, Doclea and Dalmatia: models and influences

As already noted, the architectural decoration of the square – based on the limited surviving elements – suggests constant contact with the eastern Mediterranean, particularly

[157] Rovinski (1909) recalls how, even in his times, building materials were still being taken from the structures in the forum area. Additionally, the zone was used for cultivation or was abandoned and covered with vegetation (23).



Fig 24. *Photo of the basilica at the time of the excavations in 1960s. (Agency for the protection of cultural heritage of Montenegro, Archive, Doclea 1973, photo by Č. Marković.)*

the Asia Minor region.[158] Although the overall layout of the architectural fragments is perfectly consistent with the contemporary experimentation documented in the Western provinces, some specific decorative features – such as the stylistic execution of the leaf-and-dart *kymatia* on the cornices and the form of the Doricizing capitals – point to a direct relationship with major architectural productions in Asia Minor. A Greek-derived architectural model in the Illyrian area is already attested during the Hellenistic period.[159] However, the limited contexts preserving architectural decoration from such an early phase seem to draw primarily from mainland Greek and Magna Graecia prototypes.[160] The Augustan age represents a second, distinct phase of intense experimentation, initially characterized by what appears to have been a compulsory adherence to central Roman authority. This is exemplified by the *Augusteum* of Narona, which meticulously replicates the formal language defined under the name of "Second Triumvirate" decoration.[161] The creation of new architectural forms in the late Augustan period, including the formalization

158 For a recent discussion of the geographical extent and cultural characteristics of Asia Minor in the Roman period, see Hallmannsecker 2022.

159 Obviously excluding the Greek colonies, in which the attestations date back to the Archaic era: von Hesberg et al. 2018.

160 This is also the case of the capitals from Illyria, recently reassessed, which reproduce Tarentine exemplars that are themselves indebted to decorative patterns originating in the Peloponnese (Toçi 2017). For Greek models that influenced the architecture of southern Italy and again the oriental Adriatic coast, see also Ferrarini and Santoro 2009; Ismaelli 2020; and Bruni 2024.

161 Pensabene 2025.

of the "standardized" Corinthian capital developed as part of the experimental architectural solutions adopted in the Forum of Augustus,[162] opened the possibility for neighboring provinces to regain a certain degree of autonomy in architectural choices. However, such autonomy remained ultimately dependent on the architectural language re-elaborated in Rome, in a more or less liberal manner.[163] From this point onwards, the architectural trajectory of Illyricum becomes regionally differentiated: the northern sector aligns predominantly with Roman formal models, while the southern sector exhibits influences more clearly deriving from Asia Minor, with Doclea functioning as an intermediate hinge between these two cultural and stylistic spheres. In Pula, Zadar, Enona, and Risan, public architecture shows a more explicit reference to Roman prototypes,[164] whereas in Durrës and Apollonia, a continued adherence to fashions of Asia Minor is recognizable, even into slightly later periods – evidenced, for instance, by the use of stirrup-framed *cymatia* and Hellenistic-style "open-work" *anthemia*.[165] This can be explained by the fact that the northernmost part of the province had not yet developed its own architectural autonomy and, lacking buildings of significant structural complexity, had not been influenced by Greek architectural models. Conversely, the southern part of the province, due to the influence of the Greek colonies, had evidently already developed its own local style, derived from Asia Minor architecture, which survives in Imperial-period decoration. The fact that, even in the northern part of the province, the decoration appears to derive from that developed in the mid-Augustan period may suggest that, with the exception of the aforementioned case of Narona, Second-Triumviral architecture in Illyria was not particularly widespread,[166] and that the main architectural development should instead be attributed to the late Augustan, if not Julio-Claudian, period. Later Late Imperial Corinthian capitals, although generically recalling an eastern horizon, cannot be regarded as direct borrowings from Asia Minor models; instead, they reflect a Mediterranean-wide phenomenon.[167] Numerous examples are known in Dalmatian territory, particularly in Split and the nearby sites of Kaštel Sućurac, Manastrine, and Sustipan.[168] The standardization of formal types has led scholars to propose that such capitals were, at least in some cases, commercialized as finished products.[169] This hypothesis implies that the workshops must have been located in proximity to the Proconnesian marble quarries, since almost all examples are carved in that material.[170]

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162 On the capitals from the Forum of Augustus, see Ganzert 1996, 191–92. For the reception of Augustan stylistic models in public buildings in Italy and the provinces, see most recently Pensabene and Bruni 2023, 180–82, with further bibliography.

163 Conversely, the architecture of Asia Minor itself – partly serving as a model for Augustan architecture – appears to undergo hybridization through the coexistence of Hellenistic traditions and new "Italic" forms: Ungaro 2020.

164 Fischer 1996, 79–92 (Pola); Maršić and Sekso 2012; Kovačić 2011 (Enona and Zader).

165 Follain 2015, 97 and figs. 91–92.

166 Unlike what appears to have happened in the Western provinces, where an early use of Triumviral decoration can be identified: Trunk 2020.

167 Bianchi et al. 2023.

168 Matetić Poljak and Brajnov Botić 2018, 196–200.

169 Plattner 2014, 60–63.

170 Pensabene in press, 83–84.

The layout of the complex, in contrast to the decorative language, seems to derive more clearly from the Roman architectural tradition, shaped by the development of standardized building types for major public structures. The forum-basilica complex appears to have been conceived in an Italic context; indeed, earlier examples are known, such as that of Veleia, and were subsequently re-applied – with only minor regional variations – in provincial settings, particularly in Britannia and Gaul. In Dalmatia, a consistent pattern appears to be favored: a rectangular square with the basilica along one of the long sides and a *Capitolium* on one of the short sides, as documented in Zadar, Aequum, and Asseria. The Doclea example partially diverges from this standardized typology, presenting a square-shaped forum and lacking an identifiable *Capitolium*, unless that function is to be associated with the elevated structure located at the center of the northern side (room 13 in Fig. 7). The genesis – and especially the set of influences shaping both structure and decoration – appears to indicate centralized planning, while the execution was entrusted to local workmanship. The monumentalization of the civic center forms part of the broader historical trajectory leading to the creation of the province of *Dalmatia et Histria*. The need to monumentalize the principal urban centers of the new province stimulated, in the same chronological horizon, the construction of the fora at Salona, Zadar, Aenona, Aequum, Asseria, Delminium, and Domavia.[171] The employment of local craftsmen is indicated by the use of local limestone instead of more expensive white marble, and by the quality of the workmanship, which, although technically competent, appears less refined than what would be expected from highly specialized workshops. Furthermore, the presence of the name *Flavii Frontones* on the frieze blocks suggests local patronage. Nevertheless, uncertainty remains as to whether the family financed the entire complex or only the honorific statues dedicated to the young *Flavius Balbinus*.

More difficult to reconstruct are the patrons responsible for the later restorations. The surgical precision of the interventions – concentrated on the façade of the basilica while leaving the remainder of the structure substantially unaltered – implies a considerable financial investment, at least for the consolidation. The objective seems to have been to enhance the monumental appearance without altering the architectural identity, preserving substantial historical stratification, as evidenced by the imperial statues within the basilica and the continued display of the celebratory inscriptions of the *Flavii Frontones*. Even in this later phase, where architectural articulation clearly evokes monumental features typical of Late Imperial constructions (particularly those in Split), the decorative elements were again entrusted to local workshops, as indicated by the continued use of limestone, albeit updated through the adoption of models emulating, for instance, the Corinthian capitals with *acanthus spinosus* typical of Proconnesian workshops.[172]

Conclusions

Taken together, architectural evidence, wall stratigraphy, and analysis of the architectural decoration point to a multi-phase history for Doclea's forum-basilica complex. The largest and most coherent group of fragments – especially the inscribed entablatures – belongs to the Early Imperial period and corresponds to the city's initial monumentalization. This chronology

171 Most recently, Demicheli 2023, 306.

172 The same phenomenon occurs in other Balkan contexts, such as the quarries of Sivec (Niewöhner et al. 2013).

accords with the broader pattern in Dalmatia, where many cities underwent their principal phase of urban planning during the 1st c. CE. Architecturally, the complex draws heavily on Roman models, while aspects of its decoration reflect contacts with Asia Minor, probably mediated through the Greek cities of Epirus. Some elements that cannot be dated precisely may belong to the Hadrianic–Antonine period, while another significant phase occurred around the end of the 3rd or beginning of the 4th c. CE, during the reign of Diocletian.

This later phase should be understood within the broader development of the city. The large baths underwent at least four construction phases, the latest dating to the 4th c. CE,[173] while the small baths – probably part of the same complex – remained in use until the 5th c. CE.[174] The city walls have likewise been dated to the late 3rd or early 4th c. CE.[175] The architectural decoration of the so-called *Capitolium* also exhibits features characteristic of the Diocletianic period, although the excavators have shown that the temple's overall layout is earlier.[176] Collectively, this evidence demonstrates substantial building and restoration activity at Doclea during the Tetrarchic period, even if the precise character and extent of the interventions in the forum-basilica complex remain uncertain.

Sticotti records that local inhabitants referred to the ruins of the forum as the *Carski dvor*, or "imperial palace," a name associated with Car Dukljanin – the emperor of Doclea – who was identified with Diocletian.[177] Turković regards this tradition, together with several other elements, as evidence of direct imperial intervention in the complex.[178] Although such intervention cannot be documented securely, major building projects at Doclea during the Tetrarchic period are well attested and correspond to the wider pattern of renovation and new construction in Dalmatia and across the Roman Empire. The interpretation, advanced by several scholars and recently reaffirmed by Turković, that the forum-basilica complex served as a setting for imperial-cult practices is supported by the possible presence in the basiica of dedications to emperors, the display of statues – probably representing members of the imperial family. If the complex did serve functions related to the imperial cult, however, this association may have originated well before the Diocletianic period, as might be indicated by the role of Flavius Fronto as *flamen* of an emperor. Moreover, there is no epigraphic evidence linking the complex specifically to Diocletian or the Tetrarchs.

The available evidence therefore supports a longer and more stratified history than a single Diocletianic building phase, while the fragmentary state of the documentation necessarily leaves aspects of the reconstruction open to further discussion. Beyond Doclea, the study demonstrates the value of combining archival documentation, wall stratigraphy, architectural analysis, and the examination of displaced decorative fragments in reconstructing poorly preserved provincial civic centers. The forum-basilica complex illuminates both the shared architectural language of Roman fora in Dalmatia and the regional interaction of Roman, Adriatic, and eastern Mediterranean traditions. It thus

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173 Administration for the Protection of Cultural Properties, Cetinje, Doclea Excavations Documentation 1999 (Sfameni et al. 2019, 96).

174 Srejović 1968, 93; Marković 2006, 355.

175 Živanović and Stamenković 2012.

176 Baković 2011.

177 Sticotti 1913, 105.

178 Turković 2021.

provides a methodological and historical point of comparison for understanding how public monuments in the Balkans were constructed, adapted, and reinterpreted over time.

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