

Šibenik (Croatia)

No 963

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Cathedral of St. James, Šibenik
<i>Location</i>	Town of Šibenik, County of Šibenik-Knin
<i>State Party</i>	Croatia
<i>Date</i>	10 June 1999

Justification by State Party

The Cathedral of St James is an exceptional artistic achievement which had a tremendous influence on the architecture of the 15th and 16th centuries. It is an exceptionally fine example of its architectural type.

The significance of Šibenik Cathedral lies in the harmony of its form, despite the incorporation of various styles, and in the perfect balance of architectural parts within the whole. The Cathedral has several specific and unique characteristics, not only in the framework of the architecture of its period but also within European architectural heritage as a whole. The Cathedral of St James is an extraordinary example of Gothic-Renaissance construction using only stone. Structural elements simultaneously serve architectural and decorative purposes (eg the apse and the vaulted roofing). A complete unity of interior and exterior is thereby achieved, encompassing architecture, structure and decoration.

[**Note** The State Party does not make any proposals in the nomination dossier concerning the criteria under which it considers this property should be inscribed on the World Heritage List.]

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

History and Description

History

Šibenik is a small town on the Dalmatian coast, opening out on a bay separated from the Adriatic by the Sveti Ante (St Anthony) channel and a multitude of tiny islands.

The town was founded in the 10th century by the Subić family, who were very influential in Croatia at this period. Early in the 12th century it came under the sway of the Kings of Hungary, who granted its independence. In 1116 and 1378 Šibenik suffered at the hands of the Venetians, who were vying with the kingdom of Hungary for control of the Dalmatian coast. In 1298 a papal bull issued by Boniface VIII created the Diocese of Šibenik. The Venetians took the town in 1412, renaming it Sebenico and holding it until the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797.

The cathedral of St James owes its present appearance to three successive periods of construction between 9 April 1431, when the first stone was laid, and 1535. The first phase (1431-41) was carried out under the supervision of master mason Francesco di Giacomo and his journeymen Pincino and Busato, who began raising the west front and the walls of the nave and aisles as far as the first cornice. This first phase of construction in the Gothic style of northern Italy was completed by the west and north doors, the work of Lombard sculptor Bonino da Milano.

In 1441 Dalmatian architect and sculptor Georgius Mathei Dalmaticus (Juraj Matejev Dalmatinac) was charged with the resumption of work, which he continued until just before his death in 1473. In order to transform the simple basilica into a more imposing edifice, he drew up new plans for a more ornate east section (transept, three apses, a baptistery, and a sacristy) and thought of raising a dome over the transept crossing. His projects were only partially executed, however, and came to a halt once the apses were complete. This period also saw the completion of the nave and the vaulting over the aisles. Georgius Mathei Dalmaticus mingled the forms of late Gothic with those of the early Renaissance. Many artists came to join him in working on the Cathedral, the most famous being the architect Andrija Alešić, originally from Durrës (Albania), who worked with the successor to Georgius Mathei Dalmaticus on the third phase of the cathedral's construction.

This final phase was directed between 1475 and 1505 by Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, an Italian architect and sculptor (active from 1467 to 1506) who retained the overall conception of the structure, the use of stone as the only material, and the method of joining the slabs of stone developed by his predecessor. He raised the wall studded with windows and the vaults of the nave, the vaulting over the galleries on the aisles, choir, and transept, the octagonal drum, and the dome in the early Renaissance style. He completed the trefoil of the west front (1475-1505), to which a rose window was added in 1555. The Cathedral was consecrated in 1555.

Description

Šibenik consists of a labyrinth of narrow streets and small squares climbing from the level of the Cathedral to the fortress at the summit of the old town. The Cathedral of St James stands down by the sea, on a small square that was once the ancient heart of the town, with the town hall on the north side of the square and the municipal loggia on the east, both buildings in Renaissance style. The episcopal palace,

built in the 16th century, runs alongside the southern flank of the cathedral.

The Cathedral of St James takes the form of a basilica consisting of three aisles, each ending in an apse, after a non-salient transept surmounted by a dome. A rectangular sacristy raised on pillars under which runs a passage leading to the baptistery stands between the southern apse and the episcopal palace.

The interior of the Cathedral is striking in the height of the nave and the richly decorated stonework. The three aisles are separated by two rows of Gothic columns, the capitals of which are decorated with plant motifs. Above them the fillet decorated with two rows of leafwork motifs and the openings in the galleries, where short fluted pilasters alternate with columns, bear witness to the second phase of construction. This ensemble contrasts with the smooth surface of the walls into which the windows are set and the sharp lines of the barrel vault that forms the convex roof seen from the exterior. The side aisles are surmounted at the level of the galleries by a quartered dome which is echoed on the exterior. There is thus a close correspondence between the interior and exterior forms of the building.

The nave extends into a raised choir reached by means of a circular stairway. The altar stands at the rear of the central apse and there is a quatrefoil baptistery below the southern apse.

The baptistery, designed as a circle within a square, is surrounded by four semi-circular niches topped with a shell design. The circular ceiling is made up of nine slabs of stone whose surface is decorated on the underside and smooth on the upper side, to form the pavement of the south aisle. The decoration of the baptistery, also the work of Georgius Mathei Dalmaticus, combines Gothic forms such as the patterns of interlacing with decorative relief work on the vaulting, which reveals the influence of the very early Renaissance, as do the three cherubim supporting the basin of the font. At the summit of the arch a laurel wreath concealed by an inscription frames the head of God the Father and the dove of the Holy Spirit, flanked by angels and seraphim.

On the exterior, the gable wall that forms the trefoil west front offers a direct projection of the tripartite interior volume of the Cathedral, following the contour of the vaulting to form a remarkable yet functional trefoil front. The west door, which illustrates the theme of the Last Judgement, is flanked by pierced belfries supported by cable columns and framed by two Gothic windows edged with a fine carved cord design. The oculi and rose windows are surrounded by finely worked cornices and arches reflecting the Renaissance style. The Gothic north door is flanked by columns supported by lions and surmounted by Adam and Eve. The north and south fronts of the Cathedral are pierced by broken barrel-arch windows over which run the blind arcades of the cornice.

The chevet consists of a central pentagonal apse and two rectangular side apses. The surfaces of both inside and outside walls of all three apses are decorated with

a row of shallow semi-circular niches carved into monolithic stone slabs. The niches are fluted and surmounted by a shell arch, while their interiors are framed by fluted columns topped with capitals. To accentuate the impression of depth, the base of the niches is raised and the upper section lowered as if converging towards the interior, creating an effect of perspective. Under this short row, at head-height, runs a remarkable frieze decorated with 72 faces of men, women, and children, emphasizing the monumental nature of the Cathedral chevet. The walls of the sacristy are given a simpler treatment with a mid-height row of narrow concave niches. The dome is supported by an octagonal drum pierced by windows divided on the outside by fluted pilasters topped with acanthus-leaf capitals under a cornice ornamented by ovates and stylised palm-leaves. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino himself sculpted the figures of St Michael, St James, St Mark, and the Annunciation group crowning the central apse and the transept.

Although the cathedral was built in three stages, the styles of which can be distinguished in both interior and exterior, the whole partakes of a certain unity. The use of a single material, stone, from the footing of the walls through the vaulting to the dome itself, is no doubt largely responsible.

Georgius Mathei Dalmaticus built the Cathedral, with the exception of the nave and the aisle walls, by assembling slabs of stone and the contiguous sections of pilaster and ribbing using a particular technique for the joints. The roofing of the aisles, as well as that of the apses and the dome, is made from stone "tiles" of between 7 and 12 cm thick. These roofing tiles are laid side by side with their horizontal edges overlapping, and the joints are made by the perfect fit. On the dome the tiles are held in place by stone wedges fitted with great precision and are inserted into the ribs as into a portcullis. This type of construction could well have taken its inspiration from shipbuilding, or from the experience of many artists whose first trade was the working of wood as joiners, cabinet-makers, or model-makers. The solution adopted for the Cathedral at Šibenik was made possible by the outstanding quality of the stone used, which came from the stone quarries of Veselje, on the island of Brac, which are still in operation to this day.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The Cathedral of St James, which is the property of the Diocese of Šibenik, has been classified as a listed monument since the promulgation of Decree No 35/93-1963 by the Dalmatian Institute for Conservation on 14 May 1963. Like the historic centre of Šibenik itself, it is subject to the provisions of several acts of parliament and regulations governing its protection. Certain of these have now been replaced, however, by the new law on the protection and conservation of heritage buildings passed by the Republic of Croatia on 18 June 1999, which includes new measures for the financing of

restoration work and defining the responsibility of owners of heritage buildings.

Management

The property nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List is managed by the Ministry of Culture (Bureau of Heritage Protection) and the Office of Works of the Diocese of Šibenik. Measures for the protection of the Cathedral of St James are implemented by the Šibenik Department of Conservation, the local representative of the Ministry of Culture. The Department is responsible for evaluating and approving projected interventions on the monument. It works in co-ordination with the Croatian Institute of Restoration (Zagreb), a body attached to the Ministry of Culture, which is currently carrying out a series of tests and studies of petrography and micro-climate.

The Cathedral of St James attracts many tourists visiting the region of Šibenik. The church authorities have therefore taken steps to preserve the sacred nature of the monument and the municipal authority applies strict restrictions on parking, which is permitted only on the sea front and prohibited in the historic town centre.

The buffer zone for the property nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List corresponds to the entire old town of Šibenik, the historic centre covering some 15ha. Following an historical analysis of urban development carried out in 1990, at the request of the municipality, by the Zagreb Institute of Historical Sciences (Art History Department) in conjunction with the Šibenik Department of Conservation, the same protection measures were extended to the whole historic centre as forming part of a single heritage entity. The town has an overall development plan.

The Cathedral of St James and the historic centre of Šibenik are protected by a specific policy based on four indicators: the significance and authenticity of the heritage property, the effectiveness of the management plan, control over risk factors such as visitor numbers, and compliance with the most stringent international standards of conservation.

Conservation and authenticity

Conservation history

Historical sources refer to periodic restoration work carried out on the Cathedral of St James from 1562 onwards. In many cases, this can be considered as no more than running maintenance, since it consisted of the replacement of damaged stones by others of the same material, design, and dimensions.

In 1846 problems with water run-off from the roof made it necessary to remove the dome and roof vaulting and fill the joints before replacing the same stones. After World War II major work was undertaken (1947-55) to reinforce the roof of the south aisle, which was in poor condition, and replace the stones of the sacristy.

During the hostilities of September 1991 some of the exterior decoration, the vaulting, and one side of the dome were damaged. The safety of the dome's structure giving some cause for concern, it was once again removed and the damaged elements were replaced by others, still of the same design and same material, before reconstruction. This intervention was carried out with the fullest respect for the techniques employed in the past, both at the time of dome's construction and at the time of the 19th century restorations. Work is currently under way to clean the stone cladding of the exterior, a task made necessary by the pollution caused by two major industrial complexes, now closed down. Current restoration work – in common with the dome restoration in 1992 – has played an important role in keeping the Veselje stone quarry in operation and in providing training for young workers on the restoration project. The Croatian Institute of Restoration is carrying out a series of studies, one of which is dedicated to dealing with the humidity that forms on the surface of the intrados of the roof.

Authenticity

In terms of fidelity to the initial model and respect during restoration for the criteria characteristic of the cultural context to which the building belongs, this property satisfies the test of authenticity to a degree rarely attained by constructions in stone.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Šibenik in January 2000.

Qualities

The Cathedral of St James in Šibenik is a monument that documents the transition from Gothic to Renaissance architecture. It is distinctive in the type of construction adopted, in its forms and decorative features, but most of all in the nature of its construction.

Comparative analysis

The Cathedral of St James in Šibenik has no equal in the context of European architecture of the 15th and 16th centuries by virtue of the nature of its construction.

ICOMOS comments

According to the text of the nomination for inscription, the property nominated is the Cathedral of St James and the buffer zone covers the historic centre of Šibenik. On inspection of the site plan, however, it appears that the buffer zone consists solely of those blocks of buildings forming the square on which the Cathedral stands. ICOMOS would therefore appreciate clarification from the State Party that the buffer zone around the property nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List does in fact correspond with the historic centre of Šibenik.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

In order to highlight the importance of the cathedral, for didactic as well as scientific purposes, it would be desirable to establish a Cathedral Museum, or at least a Diocesan Museum, to bring together a significant collection of works of art and the scale model of the dome currently kept in storage. The historic town centre has many unused convent buildings, as well as the church of St Barbara, which could be used to house the museum.

Brief description

The Cathedral of St James in Šibenik (1431-1535) bears witness to the considerable exchanges in the field of monumental arts between Northern Italy, Dalmatia, and Tuscany in the 15th and 16th centuries. The three architects who succeeded one another in the construction of the Cathedral, Francesco di Giacomo, Georgius Mathei Dalmaticus and Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, developed a structure built entirely from stone and using unique construction techniques for the vaulting and the dome of the Cathedral. The form and the decorative elements of the Cathedral also illustrate the successful fusion of Gothic art and that of the Renaissance.

Recommendation

At the meeting of the Bureau in June 2000, this nomination was referred back to the State Party requesting a detailed plan of the perimeter of the buffer zone. This information has been provided and the buffer zone corresponds with the historic centre of Šibenik. ICOMOS therefore recommends that this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, ii, and iv*:

Criterion i The structural characteristics of the Cathedral of St James in Šibenik make it a unique and outstanding building in which Gothic and Renaissance forms have been successfully blended.

Criterion ii The Cathedral of St James is the fruitful outcome of considerable interchanges of influences between the three culturally different regions of Northern Italy, Dalmatia, and Tuscany in the 15th and 16th centuries. These interchanges created the conditions for unique and outstanding solutions to the technical and structural problems of constructing the cathedral vaulting and dome.

Criterion iv The Cathedral of St James in Šibenik is a unique testimony to the transition from the Gothic to the Renaissance period in church architecture.

ICOMOS, October 2000