

The Church of St. Martin in Sveti Lovreč Pazenatički – a private church of Bishops of Poreč or Istrian counts/margraves?

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Summary

The article deals with the church of St. Martin in Sveti Lovreč Pazenatički, questioning in the first place the historical context of its foundation, presenting some new assumptions about its original dedication and function, and consequently, questioning the accepted ideas about the history of the town.

The large three aisled basilica of St. Martin belongs to the most significant and intriguing Istrian medieval monuments and is one of the most exceptional early Romanesque buildings in Croatia. According to the typological and morphological features of the architecture, as well as the stylistic traits of rather well preserved original mural paintings, the church has been dated to the second third of the eleventh century. Its monumentality tells us that it must have been built by one of the most important members of Istrian feudal society of the time. The placement of the church by the (no more existent) town palace and the direct communication which existed between the two buildings lead to the conclusion that the church must have been built by the chief administrative officer of the medieval *castrum* Sveti Lovreč.

The questions about the possible patron of the church require, in the first place, reexamination of the existing ideas considering the history of the town. The formerly accepted thesis that, at the time of the building of the church and in the following periods, the *castrum* belonged to the bishop of Poreč, is put into question by reexamination, and a somewhat changed interpretation, of some of the well-known historical documents – the mentioned documents, in fact, provide no direct confirmation for such a thesis. Finally, some of the previously neglected but, in our opinion, relevant historical data are referred to, as they provide ground for a reconsideration of the former hypotheses. They can be used to support an assumption that the church was built by some other member of local feudal elite, possibly the Istrian count or margrave himself, in the period when Istria, as it is supposed, was elevated to the status of an autonomous march.