

Spalatum (Split, Spalato): Diocletian's Palace

IVANCICA SCHRUNK AND MANUELA
STUDER-KARLEN

Spalatum is the traditional name for the location of DIOCLETIAN'S palace, which was transformed into a city in the early Byzantine time and still constitutes the urban core of Split on the coast of central DALMATIA in Croatia. Excavations and restorations of the palace have been carried out since 1947.

The name Spalatum probably derives from Latin *palatium* or Greek *palation*, denoting an imperial residence. In the fourth to fifth century sources it features as Spalato (*Tabula Peutingeriana* V, B1) or Aspalato (*Notitia Dignitatum Occ.* XI). St. Jerome's *Chronicon* (ann. Abraham 2330, Cod. Bern.) records Diocletian's death at *Spalato* in one manuscript version, where another has *palatio*. The listing of Spalathron/Spalatum as a *civitas* in Ravennatis Anonymi *Cosmographia* (IV, 16/ V, 14) may reflect the palace's urbanization in the sixth century. Thomas the Archdeacon of Split (1201–1268) wrote the traditional but historically debatable narrative of how the palace/Spalatum became populated by the refugees from SALONA (SOLIN, CROATIA) and constituted into the Salonitan bishopric in the seventh century.

Any settlement or structure preceding Diocletian's palace on the site cannot be defined historically or archaeologically, although isolated but numerous and significant finds from the Bronze Age to pre-Diocletianic years indicate its existence. Such are the recent finds of the late republican wooden piers and fragments of molded architraves reused as *spolia* in the Diocletianic quay. Remains of the building are likely to be related to the architraves already known in the south-east part of the palace substructures (Delonga 2007: 11–12). Monumental walls under the sixth century Basilica Picta just outside the



Figure 1 Diocletian's Palace, view of the peristyle. Spalatum/Split, Croatia. Reproduced with permission from Michael Bukovich.

palace and finds of amphorae, fine wares, and glass from the first century BCE to the third century CE in the palace excavations may indicate an early imperial maritime villa on the site.

The emperor Diocletian, a native of Dalmatia, built his retirement villa at the turn of the third to fourth century, in the territory of Salona, the capital of Roman Dalmatia, only 6 km south of it. The emperor's motivation to choose this site could be found in its proximity to the familiar provincial city that was centrally positioned in the Empire and well connected by maritime and land communications. Perhaps the protected bay with an excellent harbor and medicinal sulfurous springs were an even higher priority for the aging emperor. Experienced builders and stonemasons from the Greek East were brought in to create

an exclusive retreat equally functional for imperial ceremonies as for imperial cult (McNally 2009).

The ground plan is an irregular rectangle, surrounded by limestone walls and four decorated gates (east and west: 215.5 m, north: 175 m, south: 181 m). Square and octagonal towers project from the western, northern, and eastern façades. The southern, seaside façade, with a full-length arcade on the upper level, was unfortified. The palace was constructed of tufa, brick, and white limestone of high quality from local exploitation from the island Brač (Brattia), while granite columns and sphinxes, mosaic decoration, and fine marble were imported from other areas such as Egypt, the island of Proconnesos, and Syene (Aswan) for its decoration (Wilkes 1993: 15–19).

The palace creatively integrated civil and military forms. Two principal colonnaded streets (*Decumanus* and *Cardo*) divided the complex into four quarters. The northern half of the Palace was designed with buildings for servants, soldiers, and stores. In the southern part of the complex were sacred buildings within two enclosures (*temene*) and the emperor's residence (*palatium*) along the sea front. The southern part of the north–south street after the junction with the east–west street is generally known as the peristyle from its flanking arcades. It gave access to the three principal elements of the southern half of the complex: on the south to the monumental porch leading to the residence of Diocletian, on the east to the temenos with the emperor's mausoleum, and on the west to that with three temples, two round and one rectangular. The main temple, traditionally called the Temple of Jupiter, formed a pendant to the mausoleum. The mausoleum is an octagon with sides each

of 7.60 m and was decorated with statues placed in niches and columns of red Egyptian granite. The location of the mausoleum next to the living quarters is completely new in the residence of Diocletian.

The walls, gates, and towers that enclosed it all were there for the familiar authority and security, but perhaps also to convey an impregnable and enduring *urbs* and *orbis* to the viewers approaching or leaving by land or by sea.

SEE ALSO: Palaces, Roman; Rome, city of: 8. Tetrarchic; Salona (Solín, Croatia).

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- Belamarić, J. (2003) "The date of foundation and original function of Diocletian's Palace at Split." *Hortus Artium Medievalium* 9: 173–85.
- Brenk, B. (1996) "Innovation im Residenzbau der Spätantike." In B. Brenk, ed., *Innovation in der Spätantike*: 67–114. Wiesbaden.
- Delonga, V. (2007) *Archaeological research on Riva in Split in 2006–2007*. Split.
- Marasović, J. et al. (1972–89) *Diocletian's Palace*, 6 vols. Split.
- Marasović, T. (1994) *Diocletian's Palace: the world cultural heritage, Split-Croatia*. Zagreb.
- Marasović, T. (2004) "The transformation of Diocletian's Palace in the city of Split as a chronological question." *Acta ad archaeologiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 18: 115–29.
- McNally, S. (2009) "The Palace of Diocletian at Split." In S. Čosić et al., *Croatia: aspects of art, architecture and cultural heritage*: 48–59. London.
- Rapanić, Z. (2007) *Od carske palače do srednjovjekovne općine* (From imperial palace to medieval commune). Split.
- Wilkes, J. J. (1993) *Diocletian's Palace, Split: residence of a retired Roman emperor*. Sheffield.