

Dr. Radoslav Bužančić's London lecture entitled 'Diocletian's Palace in Split: New Discoveries' aroused great interest among experts in archaeology, architecture, history of art, museology and the protection of cultural monuments and heritage.

When Dr. Radoslav Bužančić, Head of the Split Conservation Department, delivered his lecture on Wednesday 19th November 2014, he revealed for the first time the full extent and significance of the findings from excavating Diocletian's Palace in recent times to an English-speaking audience.

The lecture was occasioned by the 250th anniversary of the publication of Robert Adam's exquisite book 'Ruins of the Palace of the Emperor Diocletian at Spalatro in Dalmatia' (1752).

## SPALATRO FROM THE SOUTH-WEST



Collaborating with Dr. Bužančić in preparing the lecture for an English audience is one of the most interesting projects I have ever undertaken. The history of Diocletian's Palace is fascinating. Building work was started in 295 AD, two years after reigning Emperor Diocletian (244 - ?311, 312 or 316 AD) had formed the Tetrarchy, or Rule of Four, in which he and his co-emperor (albeit junior) Maximian were joined by 'junior partners' Galerius and Flavius Constantinus.

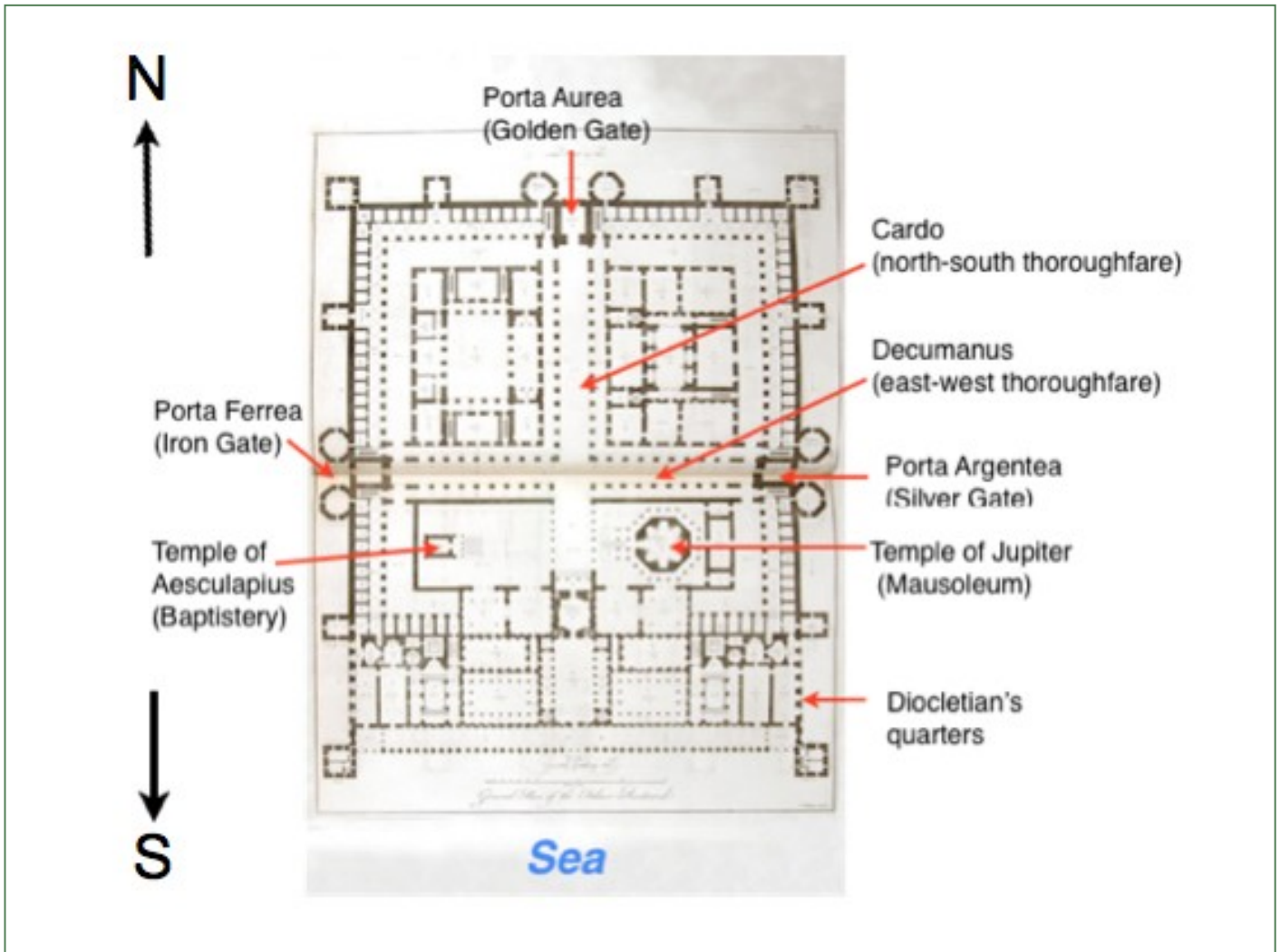
By the time the Palace was finished in 305 AD, Diocletian was ill. He became the first Roman Emperor to abdicate, and retired to the Split Palace, where he was famously proud of growing magnificent cabbages. Diocletian died without heirs. All that remains of his connexion to the Palace is his name, as his dead body was removed from his mausoleum, the Temple of Jupiter (today's Cathedral of St. Domnius) some time after his death. It is historical irony that the two temples left intact from Diocletian's time have become Christian places of worship, as Diocletian persecuted Christians ruthlessly, especially from 303 AD onwards.

Diocletian only enjoyed residence in his palace for some eleven years at the most. Some old Split families, including Skočibučić-Lukaris, Cipci and my own family have maintained close links with the central part of the Palace over several centuries, far longer than its creator.



There are several exciting discoveries in Diocletian's Palace which have been confirmed in recent months. They have completely changed the historical perspective on Diocletian's building project in the ancient town of Aspalathos. A whole section of that town was destroyed and its people displaced to make way for the Palace.

Diocletian's contemporary Lucius Lactantius (c.250 - c.325 AD) described the Emperor as having an insatiable appetite for building - cupiditas aedificandi - and this is borne out in the lavish structures erected at Aspalathos.



Robert Adam was not the first to visit and study Diocletian's Palace, but he was the first to do detailed measurements and produce an accurate ground plan of what he found.

As Dr. Bužančić highlighted, this was especially important, as there is no written description of what the Palace was like when it was built. In other places, notably Antioch and Palmyra, written descriptions of Diocletian's constructions survived, but not the plans.

Adam's plans allowed insights into the possible functions of the spaces of the Palace, especially the Imperial quarters in the southern part, nearest the sea, and the temples in front of them to the north, or land side, in the Peristyle.



## TEMPLES DISCOVERED

While Robert Adam correctly identified two temples, the octagonal Temple of Jupiter (now Split Cathedral, dedicated to St. Domnius), and the rectangular Temple of Aesculapius, now the Baptistery, he did not know that there were two more smaller temples between the two.

They were sited to the east opposite the Temple of Jupiter, in front of the Protiron, the northern facade of the imperial quarters in the Palace looking on to the Peristyle. This area was therefore totally dedicated to the deities. It would have been known in Roman times as a temenos. One of the temples was in the space later occupied by the Skočibučić-Lukaris family.

The ground floor of the building was converted into an exhibition venue in 2014, leaving a renovated section of the temple wall exposed. The large stones on the floor in the photograph below would have been on top of the temple portico.



In the courtyard behind the restored part of the temple wall, excavations are continuing. A water-filled pit has been uncovered, which Dr. Bužančić believes may have been part of the crypt to the temple. It may have been converted in the Middle Ages into a cistern to serve the needs of the Skočibučić-Lukaris family. He believes further excavation will probably uncover an entrance to the pit once it has been emptied of water.



The second temple was located slightly further north, under the present-day Luxor Cafe. Part of the temple floor has been renovated and preserved within the cafe premises.

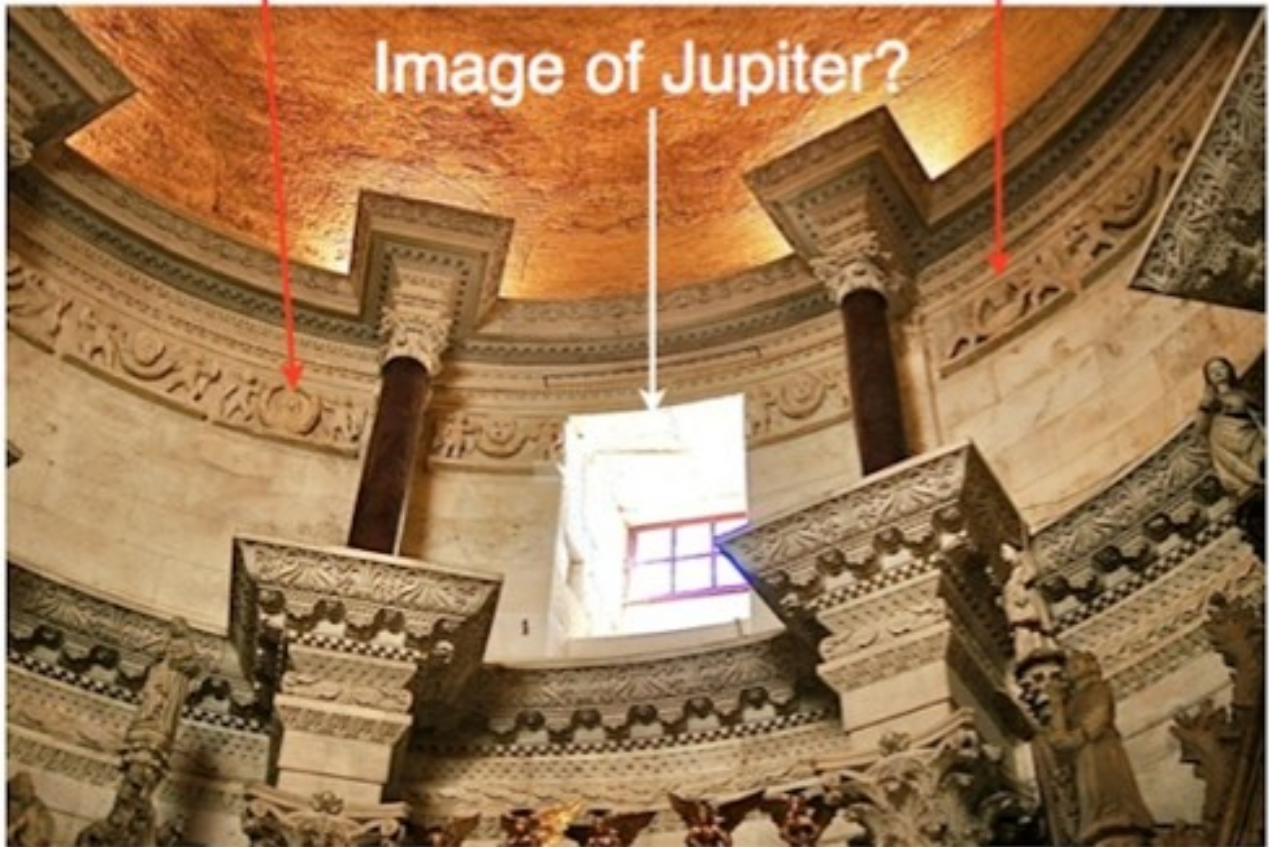


According to Dr. Bužančić, the four temples may have been symbolic of the Tetrarchy.

The Temple of Jupiter is the largest of the temples, which would serve to emphasize Diocletian's seniority in the ruling cadre, as he had taken the title of Jovius, or son of Jove / Jupiter when he became Emperor in 284 AD.

Dr. Bužančić pointed out the images of Diocletian and his wife Prisca in the cornice of the Temple of Jupiter, clearly visible following the recent renovation works. He suggested that it was likely that there had been an image of Jupiter where now there is a window.

Carving of Prisca      Carving of Diocletian



**BASE OF TETRAPHYLON IN FRONT OF  
ST. ROCCO'S CHURCH**





## THE TETRAPYLON

In the centre of the Peristyle where the two main Roman roadways (cardo and decumanus) met, it has now been confirmed that there was a tetrapylon, or four-cornered triumphal arch. Excavations revealed the traces of the foundations, which had been suspected but not proven for many years.

The Danish archaeologist Ejnar Dyggve, who did extensive researches in Dalmatia between the 1920s and 1940s, was the first to suggest that there might have been a tetrapylon in the Peristyle. Such triumphal arches played an important part in ceremonial processions, which in Split would have entered the Palace precincts through the Porta Aurea (Golden Gate).

The tetrapylon marked the transition point into the sacral area or fanum, and the procession would culminate at the entrance to the imperial residence, in front of the Protiron, the elaborate facade facing north in front of the imperial quarters. The Protiron was the grand setting in which Diocletian would appear to be admired and revered by the populace below.



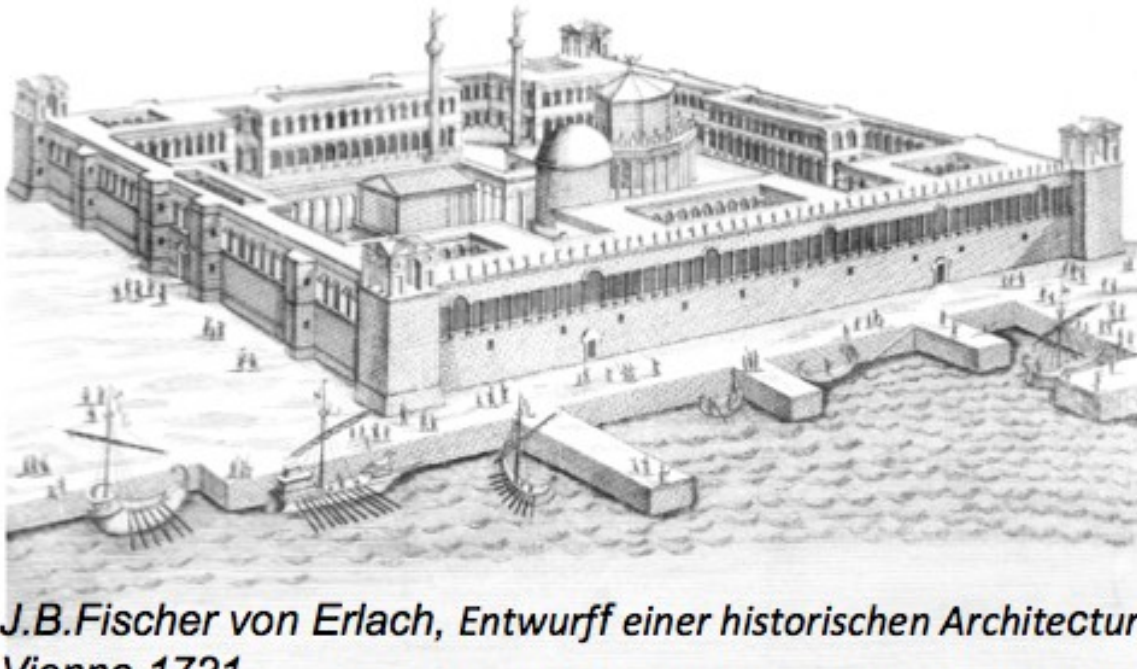
The tetrapylon, according to Dr. Bužančić, may have been similar to Diocletian's famous tetrapylon at Palmyra in Syria.



There is little visible sign of the tetrapylon now, as each section has been covered by other structures. The photograph below shows Dr. Bužančić pointing out where one part lies under the paving by St. Rocco's Chapel (now a tourist office). Two pillars, which are now thought to be the vestiges of the tetrapylon, were still depicted in drawings up to the eighteenth century.

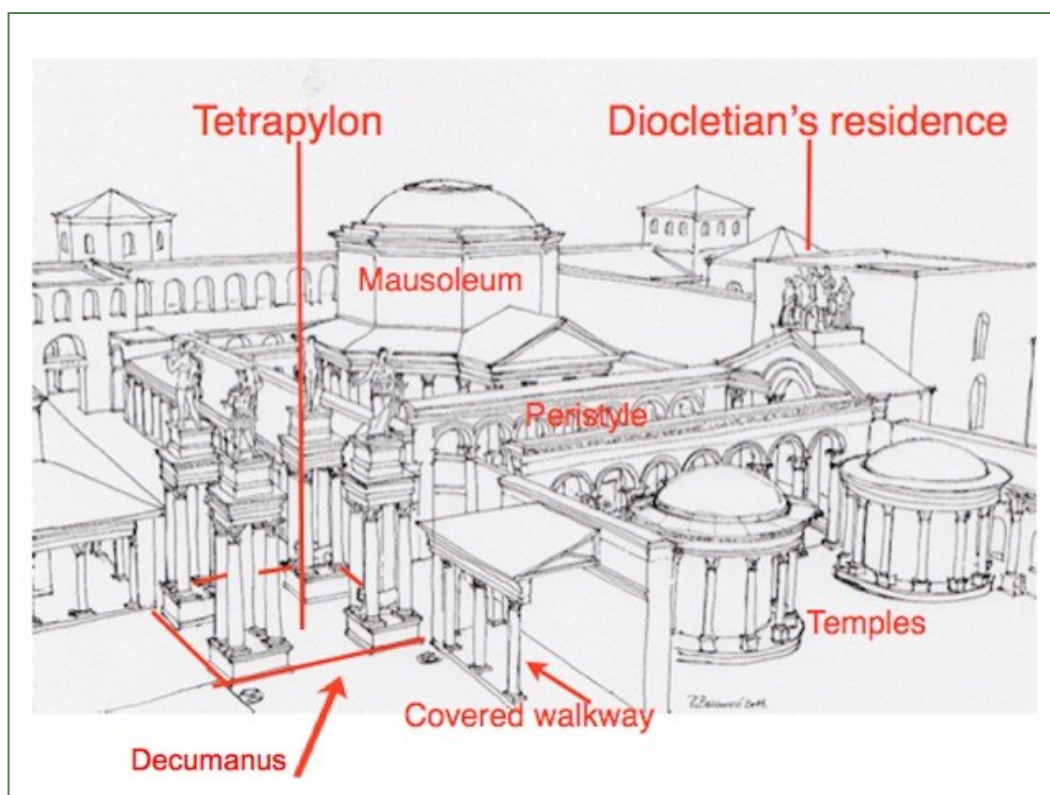


PALATIUM DIOCLETIANI  
EX QUO SPALATUM CIVITAS.



*J.B. Fischer von Erlach, Entwurf einer historischen Architectur, Vienna 1721*

Dr. Bužančić showed his own reconstruction of what the central part of the Palace might have looked like, based on the newly confirmed information.





## ADAM'S DEPICTION OF THE SOUTH WALL



*View of the Crystal Staircase or Street towards the S. Harbour*

## **SOUTH OF THE PALACE: THE STADIUM?**

The south wall of the Palace facing the sea is commonly depicted in historical drawings as being right on the sea. Robert Adam showed it with a thin strip of land between the wall and the water.

Excavations in 2006 uncovered Roman remains showing that there were substantial constructions in front of the Palace wall. There was a building in front of it, containing a wall linking two towers, south-west and south-east. A thick layer of concrete stretched along the waterfront, to a length of about 180 metres.

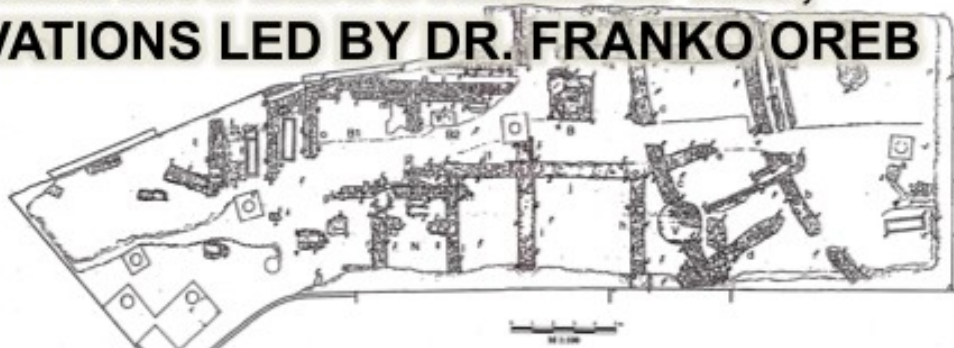


Dr. Bužančić identified these findings as likely to be the remnants of a stadium, which was an important part of any major Roman city in Diocletian's time. He reasoned that the ceremonial arches in the south wall, which were not filled in in Diocletian's day, were much more likely to have served as an imposing framework for Diocletian to show himself to the people and participants on the ground below than as 'picture windows' from which he could admire the sea view, fine though it is.

The findings have shown beyond doubt that Diocletian's Palace was not a Villa Marittima built directly on the waterfront.



**REMNANTS DISCOVERED IN 1997,  
EXCAVATIONS LED BY DR. FRANKO OREB**



## THE AMPHITHEATRE

Traces of the Amphitheatre were discovered in excavations during the 1950s and in 1997, but the findings were considered at the time to be a theatre or odeon. It was only when work was being done digging foundations for a shopping mall in 2013 that it became clear that the remains were far more significant than that.

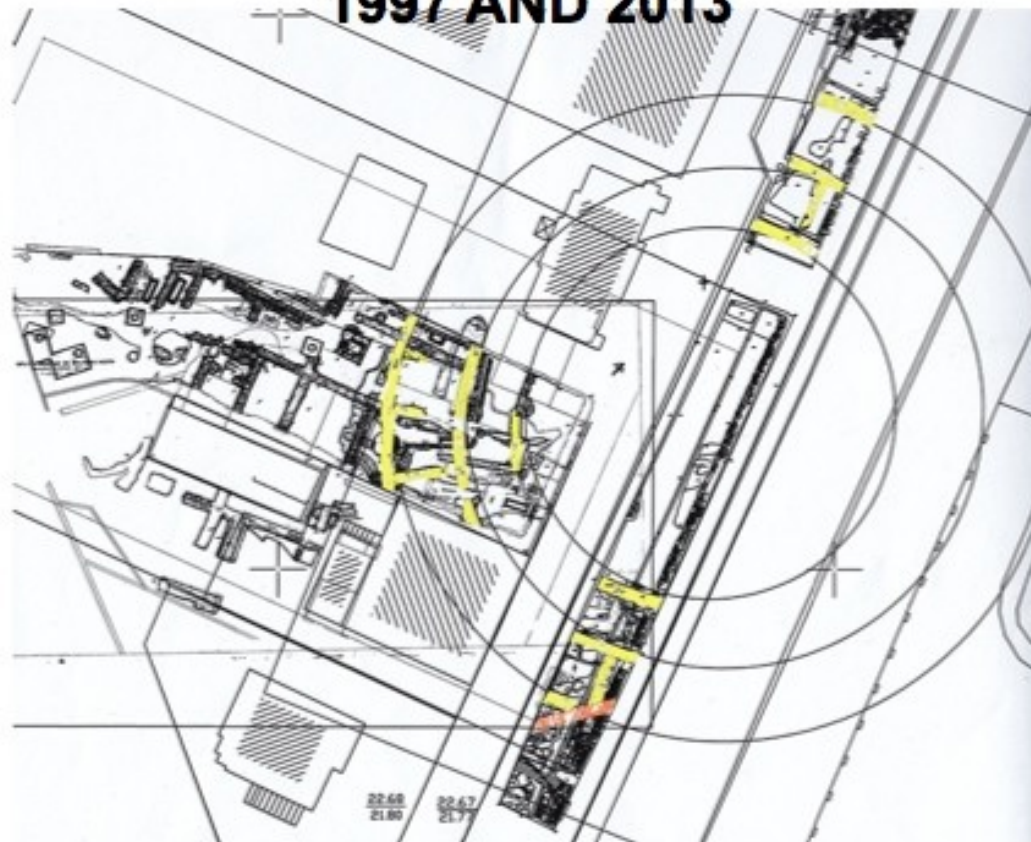


The excavations revealed clear evidence of an amphitheatre.



The overall conclusion from the previous and recent researches was that the amphitheatre had a span of some 50 metres.

## RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCHES IN 1997 AND 2013





Finds of coins, together with fragments of glass, ceramics and amphorae, confirmed that the site dated to the early 4th century.

Further proof was provided by the discovery that part of the aqueduct built by Diocletian, which stretched nearly ten kilometres from its source at the Jadro river, was built under the amphitheatre, as shown in the right side of the picture below.



Two later Christian churches, dedicated to St. Andrew and St. John the Evangelist, covered part of the western area of the amphitheatre. It only took a few months following the excavations for the site to become heavily overgrown around the temporarily protected chapel structure.



Dr. Bužančić is of the opinion that the churches may have been so-called 'martyrs' churches', raised in honour of those who died in the Roman arena. Excavations in the adjoining area have uncovered sarcophagi. Two are seen covered in white cloth to the right in the photograph below.

## October 2014



The land under excavation is being developed for the shopping mall by a private owner.

Of course the period of excavations has halted the development plans, which inevitably creates financial consequences for a landowner in this situation.

Dr. Bužančić highlighted how difficult it can be to reconcile the needs and interests of individuals and groups, be they residents, property developers or visitors, with the renovations and explorations which are the conservator's duties when entrusted with such an important heritage site as Diocletian's Palace.



## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RECENT FINDINGS**

Dr. Bužančić demonstrated that these major findings all serve to confirm that Diocletian's Palace was not simply a luxurious retirement home, built in splendid isolation in some backwater settlement of the Empire. It was part of a functioning Roman urban environment. Diocletian had planned it to be an imperial residence like his other major centres at Antioch and Palmyra, a place where his grandeur and links to divinity would be on display. The Split Palace has now revealed several of its secrets. Dr. Bužančić believes that there is one more major discovery to be made: every major Roman centre had a hippodrome, and he is confident that one will be found in Split in the foreseeable future.

## **THE LECTURE ORGANIZATION**

The British Croatian Society in London and the Hrvatsko-britansko društvo in Split organized the lecture jointly. The two organizations have collaborated for many years in creating successful links between British and Croatian experts from diverse fields. The lecture venue was particularly appropriate, a building on a square constructed according to the design of Scots architect Robert Adam. The building is the headquarters of the Georgian Group, an influential association of experts.

The introduction to the lecture was given by Nicholas Jarrold, former British Ambassador to Croatia and current Chairman of the British Croatian Society. Aida Batarelo, Deputy Mayor of Split, spoke on behalf of the delegation from Split, which included Nikola Horvat, Head of International Affairs at the Mayor's Office, and Vjenceslav Pejša, Chairman of the Hrvatsko-britansko društvo.

## **THE AUDIENCE**

The audience, which numbered over 70, consisted of members of the British Croatian Society, representatives of AMAC UK from Oxford, members of the Decorative Arts Society and curators from several important museums, and experts from several fields. The lecture-theatre was packed. Flora Turner-Vučetić, formerly Cultural Counsellor to the Croatian Embassy in London and previous Chairman of the British-Croatian Society and author of the delightful book 'The Sweet Taste of a Dalmatian Love Affair', did her best to conjure up more chairs, but some people still had to stand in the doorway. Afterwards, people wondered at how rapt the audience had been, despite the overcrowding. Even some young children present were quiet for the whole duration of the talk.



The distinguished guests included His Excellency Dr. Ivan Grdešić, the Croatian Ambassador in London, accompanied by Mrs. Grdešić; Lady Jadranka Beresford-Peirse, founder and Chairman of the International Trust for Croatian Monuments; Rosemary Baird FSA of the Georgian Group, Curator Emeritus of the Goodwood Collection; Dr. Marjorie Trusted, Head of Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum; Dr Frances Sands, Catalogue Editor (Robert Adam Drawings Project) at Sir John Soane's Museum; Margaret Baird, Chairman of the Events Sub-Committee at the Decorative Arts Society; Silvia Mazzola, Italian art historian; Anne Ceresole, historian of architecture and design; Andrew Selkirk, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, former Vice-President of the Royal Archaeological Institute, founder and editor-in-chief of 'Current Publishing', editor-in-chief of 'Current World Archaeology'; Caitlin McCall, editor of 'Current World Archaeology'; Richard Hughes, Engineer and Building Conservator with Ove Arup and ICOMOS among other influential organizations; Martin Drury CBE, Chairman of the Landmark Trust, Vice-Chairman of the Attingham Trust, Vice-President of the Heritage of London Trust, and Vice-President of the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts; Dr. Nigel Ramsay, historian, of University College London; Colin Thom, senior historian, Survey of London, UCL Bartlett School of Architecture; Tom Nancullas of English Heritage's Planning and Conservation Office, London; John Harris, architect, editor of 'Fort' journal; Dr. David Davison of Archaeopress, Oxford, the specialist publishing house for academic books on archaeology; Tony Suchy, Chairman of the British Croatian Chamber of Commerce; and Malcolm Billings, broadcaster and writer.



The lecture was greeted with unprecedented warmth. Immediately afterwards, some experts were suggesting that Dr. Bužančić should publish the lecture material and give talks presenting it to a wider public. Many in the audience described the lecture as “absolutely wonderful” and commented on what a perfect setting the Robert Adam building was, especially because there was a cornice around the room which was reminiscent of some of the decorative elements in Diocletian’s Palace. Several people wrote to the organisers afterwards with fulsome praise, for instance “last night was a magnificent event. .. [a] perfectly timed and very interesting lecture”; “Very many thanks for ... the wonderful lecture on Diocletian's palace. We thought it was a splendid event and so popular. For [us] it was the perfect introduction to Croatian hospitality and Bon homie.”; “Thank you very much at the Croatian Embassy and the Anglo-Croatian Society for an excellent lecture. it was so clear and concise, as well as being really fascinating.”; “thank you for ... the fabulous lecture last night. I enjoyed it enormously and am all the more excited about visiting Split for the conference next week.”

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<http://www.eco-hvar.com/en/about-us/94-london-lecture-on-diocletian-s-palace>