

GRADIVO  
Miscellanea

*Laris Borić, Zadar*

**ANOTHER SCULPTURAL WORK BY  
NICCOLÒ DI GIOVANNI FIORENTINO  
IN ZADAR**

The Zadar National Museum (Narodni muzej Zadar) stores a rectangular limestone piece with a high-relief presentation of an angel's bust.<sup>1</sup> The unusual fact that this Renaissance relief has not yet been studied and published can be explained with its considerably damaged surface, particularly the nose and the mouth of the angel, which bear the most of its highly emotional expression. The limestone piece is 173 cm long and 56 cm high. The relief bust of an angel with folded wings is presented within a partly destroyed moulded triangular pediment with two floral ornaments carved in the upper corners. The ornaments consist of the outer rings, made of lattice-like encircled carvings, and of the inner five-petal flower on the left and six-petal flower on the right.<sup>2</sup> There is a considerable difference in the quality of carving of ornament: while the left one is well designed, with fully rounded petals, plastically emphasized by paired drilled perforations, the right one has clumsily curved irregular triangular petals. The angel, whose wings fill the sides of triangular space almost completely, is clothed in a garment knotted on its left elbow. Its face is framed by schematically carved large curls with strong tufts, shadowed by the drilled perforations. The same drilling technique is applied on the tubular folds of the angel's garment, with strings of perforations deepening their shadows. The angel's head is slightly lowered and shifted to the right. This gentle movement is reflected in a wrinkle above the right clavicle. Its wide, boyish face is characterized by small and gentle features, and lowered glance of its half-closed, tenderly incised, almond-shaped eyes with prominent eyeballs. Placid contemplation of the angel's gaze is further defined by its small, partly opened mouth, caught in the moment of uttering or singing. Each feature of the angel's

<sup>1</sup> Since 1980 it has been part of the Museum's permanent exhibition "Renaissance in Zadar".

<sup>2</sup> Right and left as seen by the spectator.

face – the eyelids, the nose, the mouth and the chin – is finely chiselled and superbly articulated with the overall emotion. The linear tubular folds of the garment flow from the right shoulder and end in the left knot visually interweaved with the wing, of which the middle row of feathers appears slightly irregular, implying an almost unnoticeable movement.

Despite considerable surface erosion, the relief is characterized by competent elaboration and skilful concept, visualized in the poetic expression of the slightly lowered head, which, along with some other features discussed below, indicates its original elevated position on a façade. There is another rectangular limestone plate held at the same museum. It is divided into eight coffers decorated by five-petal drilled floral ornaments identical with the left one on the plate with the angel.<sup>3</sup> Since both pieces correspond in length,<sup>4</sup> it is evident that they were originally part of the first or second floor balcony of an unknown palace in Zadar, where the pediment with the angel was probably placed above the balcony portal architrave and the coffered piece probably as balcony flooring, with decorative surface to be seen from below. The corresponding entry of the National Museum catalogue notes that the relief was donated to Zadar Archaeological Museum by the Tamino family, whose house had been situated in the main Zadar *cardo* before the destruction by bombing during the Second World War.<sup>5</sup>

Since there are no known archival data to corroborate the authorship and dating of this work, all conclusions should be based on the typological and morphological analysis, as well as on the comparison with other similar works in Dalmatia dated in the last quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

The figure of the angel is executed with convincing articulation, accomplished through concise and simple concept of gentle and

<sup>3</sup> Those pieces are exhibited separately and have not been recognized as parts of a unit.

<sup>4</sup> 173 cm would equal 5 Venetian feet. Zadar foot was in that time identical to Venetian, app. 0,3477 m.

Triple *balconadae* which Petar Meštričević and Nikola Španić promised to execute for Saladin Soppe were 3 feet wide. Ivo PETRICIOLI, *Renesansni majstori u Zadru, Umjetnička baština Zadra*, Zagreb 2005, p. 174.

<sup>5</sup> Sofija Petricioli, the author of the catalogue entry, noted that the relief has been in possession of the Archaeological Museum up to 1963, when it was given to the National Museum. There is no information about the date of original donation.

GRADIVO



1. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *Relief of an angel*, Zadar, Narodni muzej



2. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *Relief of an angel*, detail, Zadar, Narodni muzej



3. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *Coffered balcony flooring, lower face?*, Zadar, Narodni muzej



4. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *Relief of Justice, detail with the angel*, Trogir, town loggia



5. Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, *Archangel Michael*, northern façade of Šibenik cathedral transept

yet enraptured emotion, and the quality which suggests the authorship of a distinguished artist capable of acquiring great artistic expression by using only elementary devices. The analysis of the quality of sculptural performance indicates a work executed by two sculptors, the less skilful one being the author of the clumsy floral ornament in the upper right corner. The significant difference in the quality of carving might even imply the completion of the work without the supervision of the original master. This by no means diminishes the artistic value of the relief as a whole, despite the fact that the image of an angel was evidently executed by an excellent early-Renaissance master.

Close and concentrated observation, which should enable us to ignore the destruction of its epidermis and understand somewhat rough treatment of hair locks and garment folds as deliberate, will find angel's posture and facial features considerably close to some other angel figures in Trogir, undoubtedly assigned to Niccolò di Giovanni Fioren-

tino, such as the angel with the inscription above the image of St. John of Trogir in the relief of Justice in Trogir town loggia,<sup>6</sup> and the left angel from the architrave of the southern portal of the Cipiko Palace,<sup>7</sup> both dated into the beginning of the eighth decade of the Quattrocento. Another two of Niccolò's angel figures, close to the angels from Zadar, are dated after 1499 and were both made for the Šibenik Cathedral: the angel from the tabernacle group<sup>8</sup> and St. Michael above the north transept façade.<sup>9</sup>

The most distinctive element and the strongest emphasis of the Zadar relief is found in the inclination of the angel's head, which can be compared with the almost identical solution in the figure of an angel in Trogir loggia, and with somewhat stronger movement of one on the Cipiko portal. Somewhat more freedom of the same movement is given to many of Niccolò's round figures from both, his early and late, periods of activity, such as St. Stephen from Sumpetar Poljički,<sup>10</sup> both figures of St. Sebastian from the homonymous Trogir church,<sup>11</sup> and St. Nicholas in Tolentino.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, this particular feature can

<sup>6</sup> Alessandro DUDAN, *La Dalmazia nell'arte Italiana*, Milano, 1921, p. 257; Cvito FISKOVIĆ, Firentinčev Sebastijan u Trogiru, *Zbornik za umjetnostno zgodovino*, n.s. V/VI (Steletov zbornik), 1959, p. 380; Radovan IVANČEVIĆ, Trogirska loža: TEMPLUM IURIS ET ARA IUSTITIAE (1471), *Rana renesansa u Trogiru*, Split, 1997, p. 102; Igor FISKOVIĆ, Renesansno kiparstvo u Tisuću godina hrvatske skulpture, Zagreb, 1997, p. 193, Samo ŠTEFANAC, *Kiparstvo Nikole Firentinca i njegovog kruga*, Split 2006, p. 117.

<sup>7</sup> Adolfo VENTURI, La scultura dalmata nel XV secolo, *L'arte*, XI, 1908, p. 119; Adolfo VENTURI, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, VI, Milano 1908, p. 444; Cvito FISKOVIĆ, Tri šibenska reljefa Nikole Firentinca, *Peristil*, 3, 1960, p. 39; Cvito FISKOVIĆ, Duknovičeva vrata Cipikove palače u Trogiru, *Peristil*, 10–11, 1967–68, pp. 51–57; Anne MARKHAM SCHULZ, *Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and Venetian sculpture of the Early Renaissance*, New York 1978, p. 67; FISKOVIĆ, 1997, cit. n. 5, p. 196

<sup>8</sup> Cvito FISKOVIĆ, 1960, cit. n. 6, passim; SCHULZ, 1978, cit. n. 7, p. 59; Radovan IVANČEVIĆ, Nove atribucije Jurju Matejevu Dalmatincu i Nikoli Ivanovu Firentincu, *Peristil*, 23, 1980, pp. 99–106.

<sup>9</sup> SCHULZ 1978, cit. n. 7, p. 76–77, ŠTEFANAC 1990, cit. n. 6, pp. 138–139, 207.

<sup>10</sup> Igor FISKOVIĆ, Kip sv. Petra u Vrboskoj i početci Nikole Ivanova Firentinca u Dalmaciji, *Peristil*, 45, 2002, pp. 90–92.

<sup>11</sup> Samo ŠTEFANAC, Nikolaj Florentinec in njegova kipa sv. Sebastijana v Trogiru, *Raziskovanje kulturne ustvarjalnosti na Slovenskem (Šumijev zbornik)*, Ljubljana 1999, pp. 519–534.

<sup>12</sup> Samo ŠTEFANAC, Nikola Ivanov Firentinac i raka sv. Nikole u Tolentinu, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 28, 1989, 51–67; Samo ŠTEFANAC, Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino e l'arca di San Nicola a Tolentino, *Quaderni di ricerca storica*, Tolentino 1996, pp. 3–13.

be regarded as another master's original artistic concept.<sup>13</sup> In Zadar, it is accompanied by an emphasizing moment not found in other examples: almost silent indication of fluttering movement in the left wing, felt in the irregular grouping of middle row of feathers. It superbly and yet almost unconsciously accentuates the overall movement of the figure. Combination of the inclined head with lowered gaze is frequent in Niccolò's work and gives the effect of creating a visual relation between the highly-positioned figures and the observer. This sculptural concept may be regarded as another one in Niccolò's Donatellesque heritage.<sup>14</sup> Having that in mind, we might conclude that somewhat rough and summary elaboration of the folds of garment and locks of hair is obviously a result of deliberate simplification and augmentation of features, which should be seen from a greater distance.

The particular details of the countenance of the Zadar angel, such as wide forehead and cheeks, almond-shaped eyes with sharply cut eyelids covering the upper half of the eyeballs, mildly emphasized eyebrow line, parallel to the upper line of the lids, which further continues into the lines of a short nose, are, again, close to the features of the above-mentioned angels from Trogir and Šibenik, but can also be recognized in a large number of Niccolò's angel and female figures.<sup>15</sup> The Zadar angel distinguishes itself with a distinctive beauty in the treatment of small, sensual mouth, half-opened in the melodious rapture, reflected in the lowered gaze.<sup>16</sup> This emotion recalls one of della Robbia's angelic singers from the Florentine *cantoria*, and here it encircles and defines its artistic concept and draws it to a higher level of artistic achievement.

The parallel tubular folds on the angel's garment are simply and summarily treated and their shadows are deepened and emphasized by the arrays of drilled perforations. This particular sculptural feature is yet another of Niccolò's characteristics of Florentine origin<sup>17</sup> – we

<sup>13</sup> E. g. in the figure of St. Lawrence from the triptych in Trogir Dominican church, Madonna from the Trogir Chapel, Deisis and Madonna on the façade of Augustan church in Tremi.

<sup>14</sup> John POPE-HENNESSY, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, London 2000, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> SCHULZ 1978, cit. n. 7, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Similar to the singing angel above Madonna (fourth from the left side) on the Coronation in the Trogir Chapel.

<sup>17</sup> For example, it can be seen in the Florentine works of Arnolfo di Cambio and Tino di Camaino. John POPE-HENNESSY, *Italian Gothic Sculpture*, London 2000, pp. 62–63, 72–74.

can find it on the funeral monument lions from Sobota,<sup>18</sup> statues of St. Paul and St. Jerome's lion in the Trogir Chapel,<sup>19</sup> the furthest left figure of the Cipiko Lamentation,<sup>20</sup> St. Peter's beard on the façade of the homonymous church in Trogir<sup>21</sup> or, with the greatest resemblance, the hair of the Archangel Michael, which is treated in exactly the same way as the hair of the Zadar angel. Furthermore, there is striking similarity with the beautifully elaborated triangular foliate cut of the lower edge of the Archangel's drapery, as well as with the lower part of its disk. They are treated with double drilled perforations exactly like the petals of the left floral ornament above the Zadar angel, or those from the flooring of the balcony.<sup>22</sup>

All typological and morphological similarities with the works that have been indisputably attributed, clearly speak in favour of attributing the Zadar angel to Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino, having in mind that the hand of a much less skilled sculptor finished the upper right floral ornament, probably without the Florentine's supervision.<sup>23</sup>

This work is regarding both, its concept and quality, outstanding in the context of Niccolò's Zadar oeuvre, as well as in the corpus of Zadar Renaissance sculpture as a whole. Most of the Florentine's Zadar works have long ago been confirmed: putti with garlands from the windows of the Ghirardini and Pasini Palaces, portal of da Ponte Palace and the Detrico Chapel coat of arms.<sup>24</sup> Recently, I. Petricioli has

<sup>18</sup> SCHULZ 1978, cit. n. 7, fig. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Igor FISKOVIĆ, Firentinčev kip sv. Jeronima u Trogiru, *Peristil*, 38, 1995, pp. 61, 65.

<sup>20</sup> SCHULZ 1978, cit. n. 7, fig. 78.

<sup>21</sup> *Kulturno blago Trogira*, Zagreb, 1988, p. 115.

<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note the identical use of drill on St. Jerome's beard and his lion's mane on the Šibenik Cathedral "Malipiero partition".

<sup>23</sup> The starting point for the solution of many open questions about the nature of cooperation of Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino and his workshop has been laid by Igor FISKOVIĆ, Kip sv. Petra u Vrboskoj i počeci Nikole Ivanova Firentinca u Dalmaciji», *Peristil*, 45, 2002, p. 95.

<sup>24</sup> Carlo CECHELLI, *Catalogo delle cose d'arte e di Antichità d'Italia: Zara*, Rome 1932, p. 182; Cvito FISKOVIĆ, *Zadarski sredovječni majstori*, Split, 1959, pp. 54–55, 61; Cvito FISKOVIĆ, Radovi Nikole Firentinca u Zadru, *Peristil*, 4, 1961, pp. 61–62; Ivo PETRICIOLI et al., *Prošlost Zadra, III, Zadar pod mletačkom upravom*, Zadar, 1987, p. 152; SCHULZ 1978, cit. n. 7, p. 75; Samo ŠTEFANAC: Le tracce di Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino a Venezia, *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze Lettere ed Arti*, CXLVII, 1988–89, pp. 367ss; ŠTEFANAC 2006, cit. n. 6, pp. 140–143; *Sjaj zadarskih*

added canon Sturičić's tomb slab<sup>25</sup> to Niccolò's oeuvre in Zadar, and it is fairly possible that one of his best works, *Madonna Cernazai*, is of Zadar provenance.<sup>26</sup> Dating of all his Zadar works except for the *Ghirardini putti*,<sup>27</sup> is generally linked to the only known document which directly mentions Niccolò in Zadar, i. e. the contract with the Benedictine abbot Deodat Venier, signed on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1482, in which the sculptor obliges himself to make several decorated windows for the abbot's premises in the Benedictine abbey.<sup>28</sup> Another useful, yet remotely related, information refers to the beginning of works in the Detrico Chapel in the Franciscan church in the year 1480.<sup>29</sup> Both documents place Niccolò's relations with the commissioners in Zadar in the ninth decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The morphological characteristics of the Zadar angel can be related to Niccolò's works dated soon after 1470 (angels from the Trogir loggia and the Cipiko portal), but also to those made at the turn of the centuries (the Šibenik tabernacle angels and the Archangel Michael). This prevents us from any plausible and fixed dating. Nevertheless, the comparison of the floral ornaments with the similar decoration applied on other examples of Zadar sculpture dated into the 1480s, such as Deodato Venier's tomb slab and his coat of arms on the architrave in the belfry of St. Chrysogonus,<sup>30</sup> may indicate

*riznica*, Zagreb 1990, pp. 24, 334, cat. 209; *Tisuću godina hrvatske skulpture*, Zagreb 1991, cat. 18, 19).

<sup>25</sup> Ivo PETRICIOLI, *Ruke kanonika Sturariususa – Prilog Nikoli Fiorentincu, Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 39, 2002, passim; Ivo PETRICIOLI, *Umjetnička baština Zadra*, Zagreb 2005, p. 181.

<sup>26</sup> Stanko KOKOLE, *Zu Madonnenreliefs des Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, XXXVII, 1993, p. 226. This work is currently owned by Foundation Lázaro Galdiano in Madrid: cf. Johannes RÖLL, *Un relieve de la Virgen con el Niño, de Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino*, en el Museo Lázaro Galdiano, *Goya: revista de arte*, 1999, pp. 203–204.

<sup>27</sup> FISKOVIĆ 1961, cit. n. 22, p. 67.

<sup>28</sup> KRUNO PRIJATELJ, *Bořavak Nikole Fiorentinca u Zadru*, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 13, 1961, pp. 227–232.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> I. Petricioli has suggested that this tomb might be by Petar Meštričević, particularly important sculptor of the last decade of Zadar Quattrocento, whose concept of the destroyed tomb of Archbishop Maffeo Vallaresso has been recognized by Petricoli as the ideas derived from Niccolò di Giovanni Fiorentino. Ivo PETRICIOLI, *Renesansni kipar Petar Meštričević, Ivan Duknović i njegovo doba*, Trogir 1996, pp. 189–194, also in *idem*, *Umjetnička baština Zadra*, Zagreb 2005, pp. 171–180.



the dating of Niccolò's Zadar angel into the ninth decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. around the time of his contacts with Abbot Venier, which may have attracted other commissioners from Zadar.

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Emil Hilje (1, 2, 3), D. Šarić (5), Samo Štefanac (4)

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izvirni znanstveni članek – original scientific paper

## ŠE ENO KIPARSKO DELO NIKOLAJA FLORENTINCA V ZADRU

V članku je predstavljen doslej neobjavljen relief angela v Narodnem muzeju v Zadru. Doprna podoba krilatega angela se nahaja v trikotnem timpanonu s profiliranim okvirjem, medtem ko sta nad poševninama rozeti. Relief je bil prvotno verjetno nad balkonskim portalom, medtem ko je bila druga plošča v omenjenem muzeju, okrašena s kasetami in enakimi rozetami, morda talna površina istega balkona palače, ki je stala na glavnem zadarskem cardu. Ob primerjavi morfoloških in tipoloških značilnosti dela z angelskimi figurami v Trogiru in Šibeniku, pa tudi nekaterih drugih del, pripisanih Nikolaju Florentincu, v katerih lahko prepoznamo podobno kiparsko tehniko in koncept, lahko tudi ta relief pripišemo roki ključne umetniške osebnosti s konca dalmatinskega quattrocenta. Glede na to, da za zdaj poznamo samo en dokument, ki potrjuje delo Nikolaja Florentinca za zadarskega naročnika, opata benediktinskega samostana sv. Krševana Deodata Veniera leta 1485, tega dela – tako kot tudi drugih Florentinčevih zadarskih del – ni mogoče natančno datirati, vendar lahko vsa okvirno postavimo v osemdeseta leta 15. stoletja, v čas domnevnega porasta interesa zadarskih naročnikov za našega mojstra, vendar po opatovemu naročilu.

**Slikovno gradivo:**

1. Nikolaj Florentinec, *Relief angela*, Zadar, Narodni muzej
2. Nikolaj Florentinec, *Relief angela*, detajl, Zadar, Narodni muzej
3. Nikolaj Florentinec, *Kasetirano podnožje balkona, spodnja stran?*, Zadar, Narodni muzej
4. Nikolaj Florentinec, *Alegorija Justicije, detajl*, Trogir, mestna loža
5. Nikolaj Florentinec, *Nadangel Michael*, severna fasada transepta katedrale v Šibeniku