

## The abbey of Saint John Evangelist in Biograd na Moru, Croatia

The [abbey of Saint John Evangelist](#) was founded by the Croatian king [Peter Krešimir IV the Great](#) around 1060, who kept his seat in Nin and Biograd na Moru. Some historians even claim that he was crowned in Biograd.

In the aftermath of the Great Schism in 1054, King Krešimir was commanded by pope Nicolas II to reform the Croatian church in accordance with the Roman rite. He founded several Benedictine monasteries (Biograd, Zadar, Skradin, ...) and invited monks from the Veneto area to build them. Analysis of the church remains in the city centre of Biograd shows indeed a very distinct [Italian building style with blind niches](#).

The abbey however was destroyed in 1125 by the Venetians, and the monks built a new abbey on a hill top near Čokovac on Pasma island. Recent excavations (2008 - 2009) and historical research have shown that the church of Saint John Evangelist, which was rededicated to Our Lady, survived until at least the 15th century.

Based upon recently discovered old photographs, showing the church remains at the beginning of the 20th century, excavation and cadastre plans, study of similar churches and abbeys from the 11th century in the Veneto area, building elements in the museum in Biograd and the archaeological remains in the city centre, a 3D reconstruction was made of the church and abbey. You can stand [in front of the church](#) or [in the church](#) and see how it was built [layer by layer](#) or go to the [entrance to the abbey](#) and [walk inside](#) the abbey (put the 3D visualisation in walking mode, upper left button) and discover the [well](#), the [refectory](#), the [kitchen](#), the [chapter room](#) and the [stairs](#) to the monk's dormitory.



*The restored (and partially reconstructed) remains of the Saint John Evangelist church in Biograd*

*[Virtual reconstruction of the abbey before 1125 \(layers 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, roofs, doors & floors\)](#)*

Objects found during three excavations of the site (around 1910, 1930 and 1970) are preserved in the [Homeland museum in Biograd](#). After the 1970 excavations, a physical reconstruction was made of the archaeological remains in the city centre. During the current virtual reconstruction process, hypotheses were made where these objects would fit in the church or abbey building.

The [first capital](#) has a [weathered side](#) and a much [better preserved side](#) with delicate floral motives. It also has a [slit](#) that could hold a transenna, so the best guess is to place it in the middle of the biphora window in the [west facade](#).

The [second capital](#) is slightly assymetrical and carries an [eagle](#), the universal symbol of Saint John Evangelist. The stone still has visible traces of [colour](#). It is made from a soft limestone, and it is designed to be [seen from below](#), so the best guess is to position it in the biphora window of the [singers tribune](#) that is overlooking the main nave of the church.

The [first column](#) has a height of 84 cm and is probably one of the columns of the abbey cloister because it has the right size for that purpose and one side has a [specific cross ornament](#), while the [left](#) and [right side](#) are similar and the [back](#) has only a floral motive. This kind of symmetry is quite common for [cloister columns](#).

The [second column](#) is made of high quality marble and is probably part of the pulpit in the [refectory](#), from where the gospel was read during the meals, as common in all Benedictine abbeys. This column probably goes together with a marble support in the form of an eagle (symbol of Saint John Evangelist) on which the Bible was placed.

The digitisation and virtual reconstruction efforts were partially supported by [HERITECH project](#), with kind permission of the [city of Biograd](#).

*Two capitels of the Saint John church (left: from [west facade](#), right: from [singers tribune](#))*

*Two columns from the Saint John abbey (left: from the [cloister](#), right: from the [refectory pulpit](#))*