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Architecture and Urban Planning of the Žagar Brothers

The beginning of the 20th century found the territory of today's Croatia in political and economic turmoil, first under the oppressive reign of the Habsburg dynasty, and then the untrained rule of the nascent Kingdom of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. These were the operating circumstances of the Žagar brothers, a pair of architects whose joint activity in the region would span the years between 1901 and 1943. Such a long continuity of work allowed for a prolific and varied portfolio, comprised of projects in the historicist, secessionist, new classicist, and international styles. For the purposes of this presentation, only examples of the brothers' work in Split will be considered, as this city is home to most of their activity.

A notable characteristic of the brothers' work is contrast with local styles. Split is primarily marked by its affiliation with the Mediterranean cultural circle, reflected in much of its heritage until the late 19th century. Eduard Žagar, the elder of the two brothers, was a practitioner of historicist and secessionist styles – one among few architects that brought a pure continental cultural current to Split, unlike their local contemporaries such as Fabijan Kaliterna or Petar Senjanović, who sought a middle ground between the Viennese and regional currents.

Particularly representative of this uncompromising style are Eduard Žagar's secessionist residential villas – a vivid contrast to what one would expect from an Adriatic city. Their positioning is equally relevant; they are among the first buildings to be constructed in a ring of newly established city districts, created for the occasion of the city's first purposeful expansion beyond its Baroque walls. Eduard's brother Danilo also had pronounced impact on the creation of these districts, as testified by his projects for some of the first modern housing complexes in the area. The brothers' presence in city planning was immense, as Danilo Žagar alone either participated in or presided on commissions for nearly a third of all public construction tenders published between the years 1918 and 1943. The precise extent of the brothers' contribution is yet to be fully determined given the existence of unprocessed archival material concerning their projects;

this problem is compounded by the necessity of re-examining existing attributions of Split's early 20th century architecture considering the growing amount of information about the brothers' vast portfolio.

The dissertation aims to prove the brothers as key figures in early 20th century architecture in Split, and possibly a wider geographical area. They assert themselves as such not only through Eduard's work that establishes a clear cultural axis between Vienna and Split, but also through Danilo's role in shaping the peripheral districts of the rapidly expanding city, which affected not only the districts' own form, but the direction of expansions to come.

After processing the available archival material on the brothers' work, their opus will be subjected to formal architectural analysis, and compared with local architecture of the time. Parallels will also be drawn on the national level, specifically with the city of Zagreb, due to its proximity to Vienna and the brothers' own connections to Zagreb. This ultimately leads to a European and global level, where the brothers' developments will be contextualised within architectural and urbanistic movements on a larger scale. Consideration of prevalent architectural theories through the period of the brothers' activity will also be necessary to determine which schools of thought they subscribed to, and by extent, recognise reflections of these theories in their work.