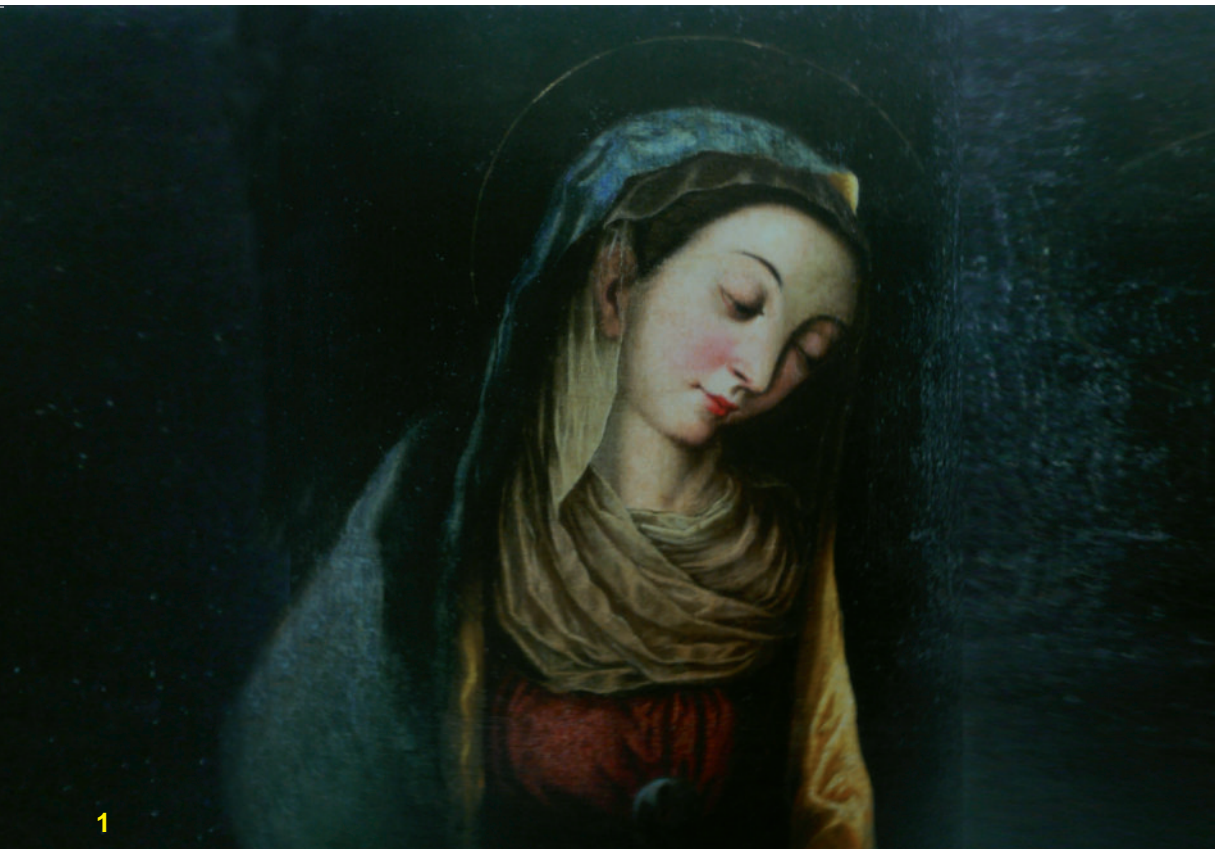


Miraculous
Lady
of Sinj





The Painting of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj

The most valuable ornament of Sinj and the Cetina region is the canvas Painting of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj (58 x 44 cm). The representation of Our Lady on that painting is one of the most beautiful images of Christian art. It is the work of an unknown 16th century Venetian painter.

The Painting of the Mother of Mercy was brought to the church on Šćit near Rama by the friars at the beginning of the 16th century. During the Ottoman occupation, the church, monastery and friars on Šćit were harmed on many different occasions, and on October 15th 1682, the church was set on fire by Orthodox Christians from Vukovsko and Ravno near Kupres. However, the miraculous Painting of the Mother of Mercy remained unscathed every single time.



2

The Way of the Cross with 14 Stations / 14 works of art representing the Stations of the Cross are displayed on a winding path towards a small church on the top of a hill called Grad by the people of Sinj – there is a unique cross with two squares which epitomise the Croatian identity (the cross was designed by Boris Ljubičić). **Stations:**

- | | |
|--|---|
| I. <i>Jesus is condemned to death</i> (Stipe Sikirica) | VIII. <i>Jesus consoles the women of Jerusalem</i> (Nikola Vrljić) |
| II. <i>Jesus is laden with the cross</i> (Duje Botteri) | IX. <i>Jesus falls beneath the cross for the third time</i> (Jure Žaja) |
| III. <i>Jesus falls beneath the cross for the first time</i> (Ante Starčević) | X. <i>Jesus is stripped of His garments</i> (Mile Blažević) |
| IV. <i>Jesus meets his Blessed Mother</i> (Kuzma Kovačić) | XI. <i>Jesus is nailed to the cross</i> (Veno Jerković) |
| V. <i>Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry the cross</i> (Stjepan Skoko) | XII. <i>Jesus dies on the cross</i> (Ivan Klapež) |
| VI. <i>Veronica wipes the face of Jesus</i> (Marija Ujević) | XIII. <i>Jesus is taken down from the cross</i> (Miro Vuco) |
| VII. <i>Jesus falls beneath the cross for the second time</i> (Kažimir Hraste) | XIV. <i>Jesus is laid in the Holy Sepulchre</i> (Josip Marinović) |

The safekeeping of the Painting of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj

The Painting was brought to Sinj over the hills and mountains. Fleeing from Rama, the friars remained in Dugopolje, Klis and Split for a certain period; in 1691 they finally brought the Painting to Sinj and remained there to this day, despite all the hardships. After the triumphant victory in 1715, which the congregation attributes to Our Lady's intercession, the officers and soldiers collected 80 golden coins among them and gave them to a forger to make a golden crown, which the Archbishop Stephen Cupilli used to crown Our Lady on the Holy Painting on September 22 nd 1716. Since then, the pious people have been referring to the Painting as the **Miraculous Lady of Sinj**.

3

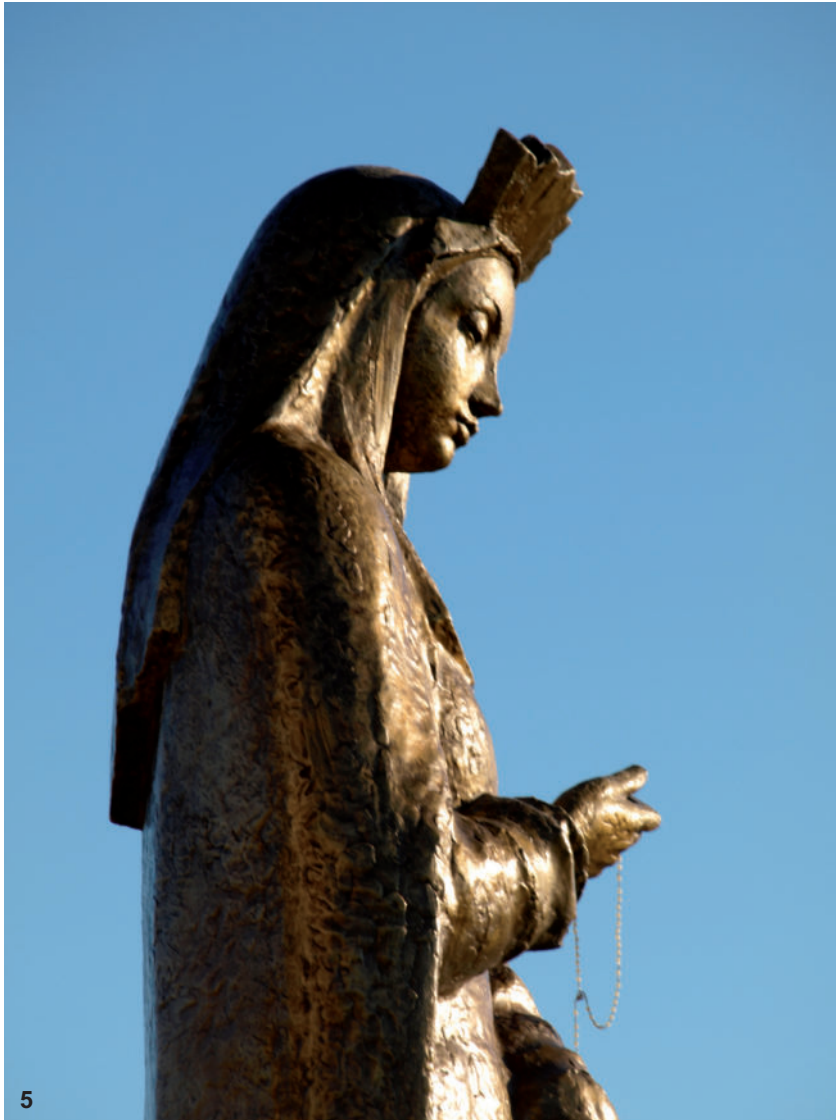
The canvas Painting of the Mother of Mercy, which the Croatian people dotingly carry to this day

4

The Painting was brought to Sinj in a bag by the friars fleeing from Rama

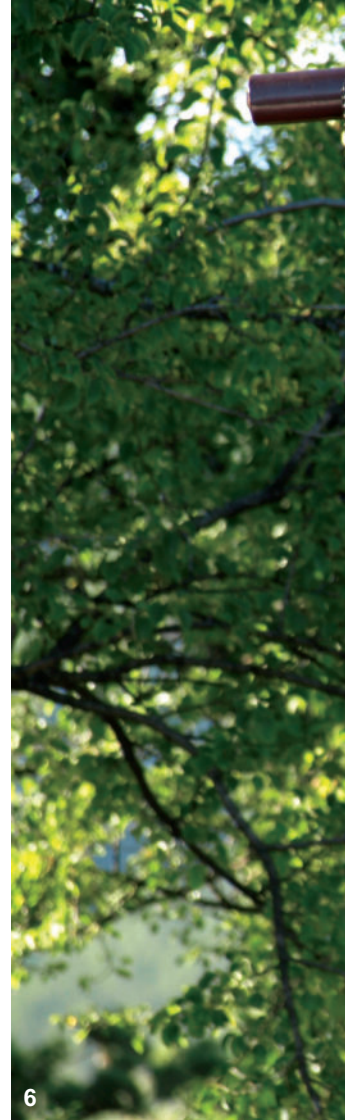






5

5 Our Lady is vigilant over Grad, bronze, a work of art by Josip Marinović



6

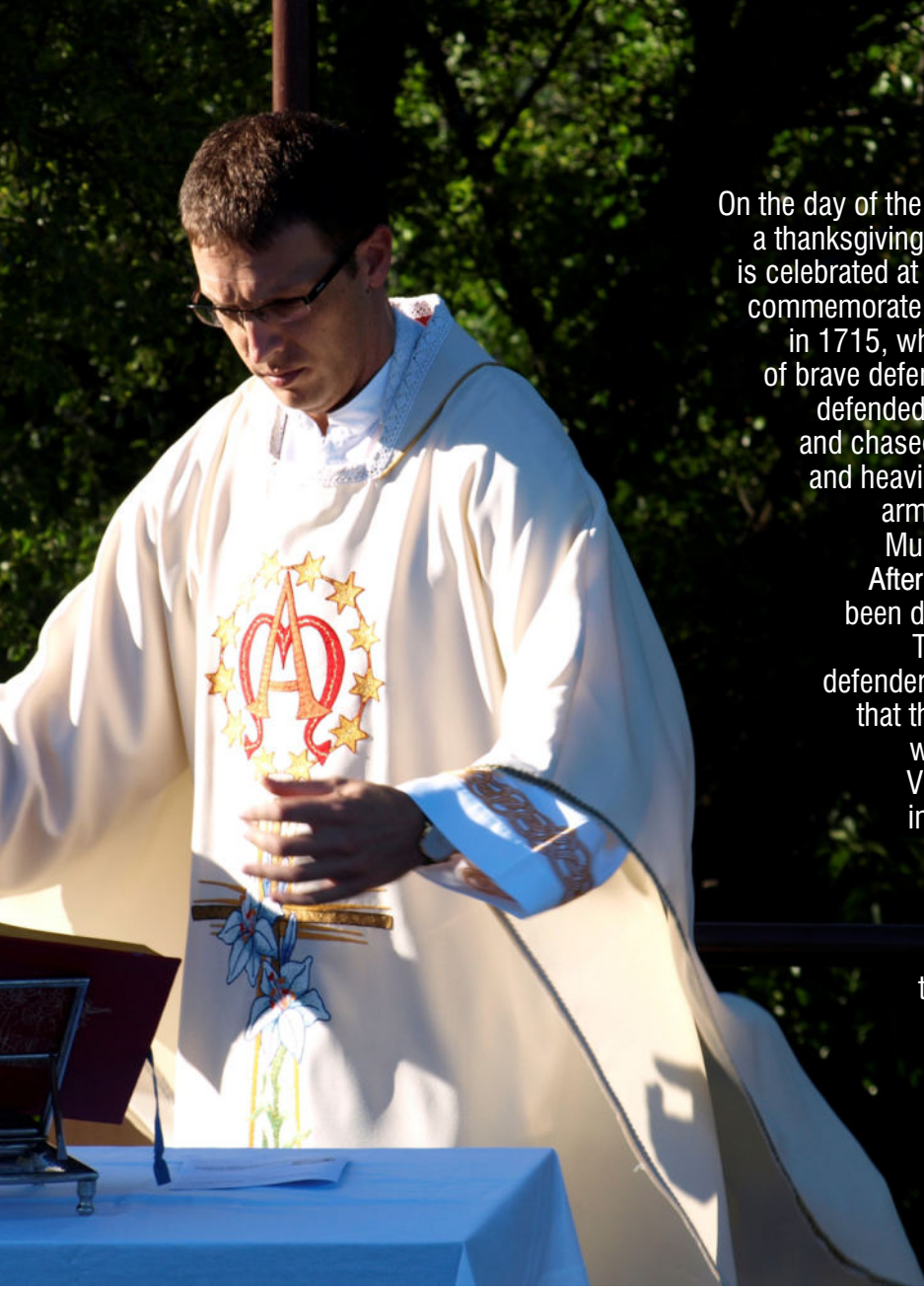


6 Mother of Mercy, replica



7 , 8 Crucifix on Grad /
Holy Mass with the congregation on Grad





On the day of the Alka competition, a thanksgiving "Alka Holy Mass" is celebrated at 7 a.m. on Grad to commemorate a graceful victory in 1715, when a minor group of brave defenders chivalrously defended the fortress Grad and chased away a massive and heavily armed Ottoman army commanded by Mustafa-Pasha Čelić. After the Ottomans had been defeated, they fled. The brave Croatian defenders were convinced that they defeated them with the help of the Virgin Mary, whose image appeared on the walls of the besieged town and discouraged and chased away the massive army, therefore the people of Sinj still praise Her for her intercession.

The position of the town was ideal, as it offered a view of the beautiful Cetina region and made the town strategically important because the vital roads from Bosnia to Split passed through Sinj. The Ottomans conquered Bosnia in 1463 and often invaded the Cetina region, so in 1536 Sinj and the entire Cetina region fell under the Ottoman administration.

The local people and the friars fled, and the church and monastery were destroyed... After several attempts, the Ottoman force was finally shattered, and Sinj and the Cetina region were liberated in 1686. The following year, the friars fled Rama with the exiled inhabitants and moved back to the Cetina region. They brought with them a Painting of the Mother of Mercy and several books (the Rama "Bible" reached Madrid in Spain via Graz, Austria).



9 Doors of the Church of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj, a detail

10 Doors of the Church of Our Miraculous Lady of Sinj, *Cavaliers on Horseback* by Stipe Sikirica



They began with the construction of the church and the monastery. After years of effort and hard work, the buildings were completed in 1712. However, instead of a peaceful life, they faced a horrific adversity. In early 1715, the Ottoman Empire declared war on Venice. On July 23rd 1715, Mustafa-Pasha Čelić set up a camp with his army on the riverbank of Cetina. The siege began on August 8th. The Ottoman army attacked them on daily basis. A fierce attack took place on August 14th when the town walls were almost demolished. The next day, the defenders expected a new attack. Throughout the siege, while the defenders bravely fought, the friars, women, children, and everyone who was capable of fighting, prayed before the Painting of the Mother of Mercy. According to a chroniclers record, Our Lady bestowed so much courage upon the defenders that they "fought back like cavaliers and as such defended the town". The next morning, on the feast of the Assumption of Mary (August 15th), there were no Ottoman soldiers under Sinj. As incredible as it may seem, the invaders gave up the siege and retreated to Livno. The commander Zorzi Balbi wrote in his official report that there were 76,000 Ottoman soldiers, auxiliary troops and artisans, whereas there were only about 700 defenders in Sinj. Such a great number of Ottoman soldiers was required to conquer not only Sinj, but also other cities on the Adriatic coast. In the memory of this graceful defence and victory, a chivalry tournament *Alka* is held in Sinj.

Alka of Sinj

Alka is a Croatian equestrian chivalry competition declared the Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO on November 15th 2010. It is held every year on Sunday, in the first third of the month of August in Sinj, to commemorate the victory over the Ottoman conquerors on August 14th 1715.

Souvenirs

The popular Painting of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj, with a gracious bow and modestly lowered eyelids, is a souvenir frequently bought by domestic and foreign visitors, especially during Alka and the day of the Assumption of Mary on August 15th. In fact, these are celebrated as the days of Alka and Our Lady in the entire Cetina region.

11

Sacred and beloved mementos





12

Alka

The shape of the metal ring *alka* consists of two hoops connected by three joints. The horseman pierces through *alka* with his lance while riding on the back of his horse. Every time the horseman pierces through the central hoop with a lance, which is popularly called "the bull's eye", he is celebrated by shots from the old-fashioned "mačkula" guns, so that the whole Cetina region can hear the shots from the top of the fortress where the votive church was built in 1887 on the 200th anniversary of the arrival from Rama.



13

12 Alka in a scorching August sun

13 Horseman (alkar) in a gallop pierces through the hanging metal ring (alka)

Sinj

The town of Sinj is situated in the hinterland of Split, on the west side of the field where the river Cetina flows, only fifteen kilometres from the A1 highway. The Illyrians, later Romans, had lived in the area for centuries, and the Croats finally settled there in the 7th century.

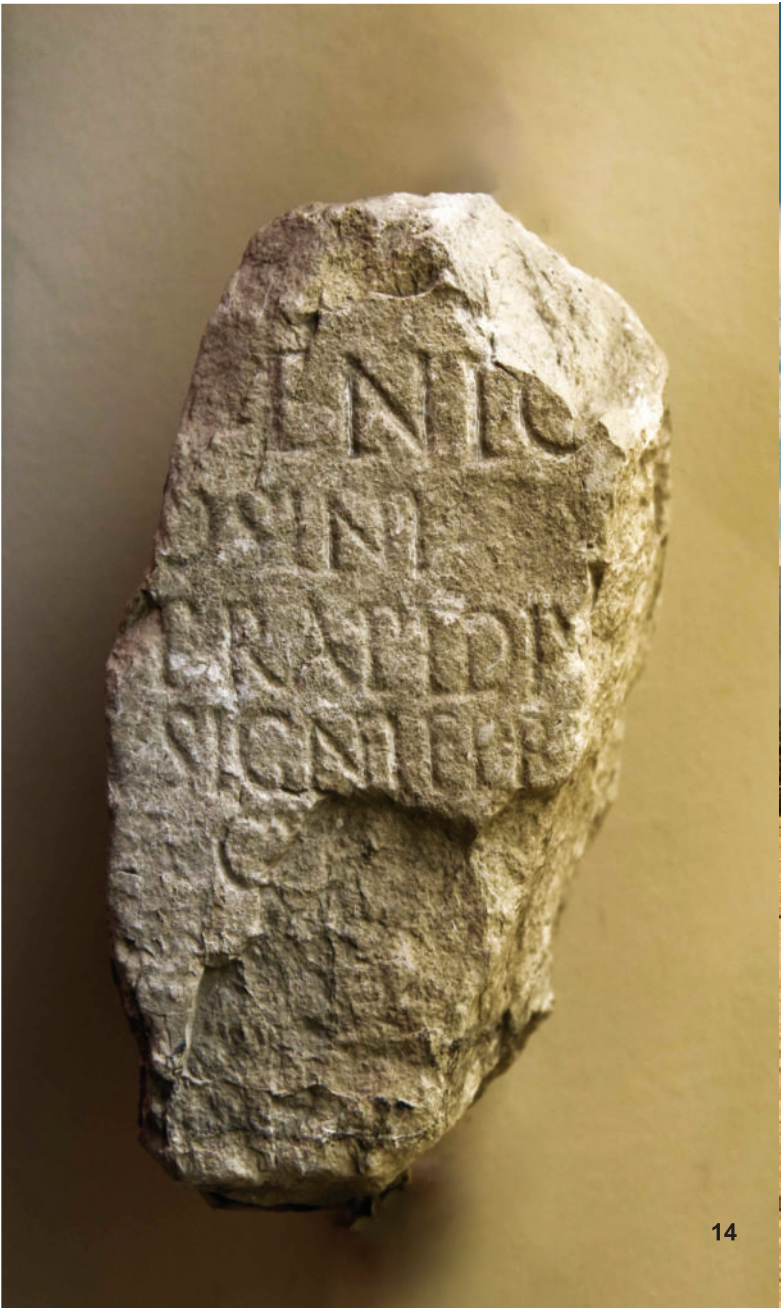
OSINIUM, the name of an Illyrian settlement, was carved by the Romans on a stone altar (1st- 2nd century), which is kept in the monasterial museum in Sinj. The name of the town of Sinj was first recorded on November 21st 1345. It referred to a fortress on a hill (438 meters a.s.l.), and later a settlement developed on the foot of that hill. On April 30th 1357, the Pope Innocent VI allowed the Prince Ivan Nelipić to build a church and a monastery and hand them over to the Franciscans. That marked the development of the spiritual and cultural centre of the entire Cetina County.

14

The name OSINIUM carved in stone

15

View from the fortress Kami ak







The Sanctuary of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj

In 1715, the Ottomans set fire to the newly built Church of Our Lady, but the friars and the local people rebuilt it. The church was destroyed several times afterwards by several earthquakes (1769), fires and a bombing of Allied aircrafts (1944). A small bell tower made of local stone was built next to the church in 1775, and the cornerstone of the new bell tower, which was completed in 1927 (43.5 m high), was consecrated in 1896. Four massive bells were procured from Venice. There were people who demolished it, yet there were also those who always rebuilt and refurnished it. To this day, it has largely retained its original appearance.

16 /impressive two-colour stone bell tower dominating the vista of the town of Sinj



17
The image of Our Lady on a massive bell



18



19

The image of Our Lady of Sinj appears on all buildings and facilities because She is a symbol of faith and the protector of all believers in the Cetina region and beyond. The artistic renderings of Her image on the church bells, the church entrance doors and the priestly attire constitute the visual identity of the Sinj Sanctuary.

18 The walls of the Old Town with a church built in 1887

19 Central detail on the entrance doors, bronze, a work of art by Stipe Sikirica



20

The statue of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj
 A bronze statue of Our Lady of Sinj was installed on the very top of the fortress Grad, with a view of the entire town, the field of Sinj and the surrounding mountains. From this protruding stone, Our Lady seems to be watching over the entire landscape: the plain and the fertile field of Sinj surrounded by mountains. The Cetina region was named after the river Cetina which flows along the borderline of the land.

20
 Mother guarding
 her children

21, 22
 Cross on Visoka
 and at the top of
 the bell tower

23
 Cover page
 of the 1922
 Gospa Sinjska
 newsletter



23



21 22



Publishing activities / In addition to their pastoral and educational work, the Franciscans attributed special attention to writing books, not only on philosophical and theological subjects, but also on subjects from other scientific disciplines, especially history. *Vjesnik Gospe Sinjske* newspaper appeared in 1914, and in 1922 the *Gospa Sinjska* newsletter was launched. After the Second World War, the communist authorities abolished the Catholic press, so the newsletter was relaunched only in 1974, and is still published today. They have published numerous books, monographs, prayer books and

23

calendars. The friars organise scientific conferences, forums and concerts. The monastery houses the editorial board of the *Kačić* Book of Proceedings, which was started by the Franciscan Province in 1967. Fifty volumes of the Book of Proceedings and over eighty books have been published. Numerous scholars and writers, particularly Friar Ivan Markovi (+1910) and Friar Josip Soldo (+2005), have written about Sinj, Our Lady of Sinj and Alka.



24 Mother in her children's yard, work of art by Josip Marinovi





25, 26
Dalmatian
stone laid
with love

Croatian sculptors,
painters and architects
artistically shaped
sacral subjects
on regular basis.



27

Mary's figure
in solid material,
work of art
by Kuzma Kovačić



28



The people of Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived in Sinj fleeing from the Ottomans in 1687 under the leadership of Friar Pavao Vučković. While fleeing from the Rama Monastery, which was previously set on fire so that the Ottomans would not violate it, Friar Pavao brought along the Painting of the Mother of Mercy, which the people of Sinj celebrate as their protector Our Lady of Sinj in the memory of the graceful defence from the Ottoman army on the eve of the feast of the Assumption of Mary on August 15th 1715. Friar Pavao Vučković built the church and the monastery in Sinj, and he has immensely contributed to the foundation of the town of Sinj.

28, 29

Friar Pavao carries Our Lady of Rama to Sinj, bronze, work of art by Kuzma Kovačića (2005)

30
Adorned with a golden
crown and decorated
with flowers



Pilgrims

Although pilgrims come to Our Lady any time of the year, tens of thousands of pilgrims set off on a pilgrimage in August, especially on Novena and on the feast of the Assumption of Mary. Holy Masses are celebrated, sermons are held, and many priests are available to the believers for the sacraments of Holy Confession and Communion.

31

A foreboding on the eve of the holiday / The final destination of the pilgrims - Mother's Home, church in Sinj





32 An extremely beautiful Painting of the Mother of Mercy adorned with a golden crown and decorated with flowers.



33 Grand procession on the day of the Assumption of Mary in Sinj on August 15th.
Pilgrims and locals shower the Painting of Our Lady with flower petals.



34 Procession on the Assumption of Mary



35 Relief on the entrance doors of the Church of Our Lady of Sinj

Grand procession is held on the day of the Assumption of Mary in Sinj on August 15th. The painting of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj is carried by Sinj alkars and numerous members of the military, civic and priestly groups with a large entourage of believers not only from Croatia but from other countries as well.

The doors of the Church of Our Lady of Sinj were made by Stipe Sikirica. The relief depicts, in great detail, the struggle and the triumph over the Ottomans in 1715.



36, 37 The marble altar of Our Lady was donated by the parishioners to Our Lady (1795); there are also altars of St. Joseph, St. Francis, St. Anthony, St. Nikola Tavelić and St. Paulinus in the church.



36



37

Five settlements belonging to the Parish of Our Lady of Sinj have their own respective churches in which worship is regularly celebrated.



38

The Church of the Miraculous Lady of Sinj

When the Croatian worshippers of Our Lady in Chicago heard that the church had been bombed and that a valuable organ had been destroyed, they donated a new one, made by Franc Jenko from Ljubljana, which was consecrated in 1958. The comprehensive renovation of the church was orchestrated by B. Bernardi (1974 – 1975). The bronze main doors were made by the sculptor Stipe Sikirica (1987), and the new stone altar was made by the sculptor Kuzma Kovačić. Artists Josip Botteri Dini, Ivan Grgat and Antun Vrlić made several stained-glass windows: *Assumption of the Virgin Mary*, *St. Nikola Tavelić*, *Blessed Alojzije Stepinac*, *Friar Ante Antić*, *Friar Pavao Vučković* and others.

38 Interior of the Church of Our Lady of Sinj

Bruno Bulić and Mila Wod made the works of art *St. Nikola Tavelić*, *The Way of the Cross* and others. On the occasion of the grand jubilee (1715 – 2016), a gold memorial rosary was made and donated by Our Lady's worshippers. A bronze relief with the image of Our Lady of Sinj, a detail from the church in Rama (K. Kovačić, 2007), was installed in the confessional, while the stained-glass windows were made by Duje Botteri (2016). Copper reliefs of twenty friars who were violently annihilated by totalitarian regimes were installed in the same area.

The archaeological collection of the Franciscan Monastery in Sinj is one of the oldest and most valuable collections in Croatia.



39

Founded in 1860 as the Gymnasium Collection, it contains exceptionally valuable exhibits, particularly the head of Heracles and the statue of the goddess Diana (39, 40).

The Monastery and the Gymnasium

The Monastery of Our Lady of Sinj has been nurturing and educating young generations of Franciscans (primary, secondary and higher education) since the ancient times. Finally, in 1838, the Franciscan Classical Gymnasium was founded as the first gymnasium in southern Croatia with Croatian as the primary language of instruction. The gymnasium building was built on the main square in 1854, and the new seminary was built on the Alkar Racecourse in 1907. The communist authorities confiscated both buildings, which were returned after the establishment of a democratic government in Croatia. The gymnasium with public status accepts the interested young men and women.



40

The Monastery has a rich library and archive, and, in addition to valuable archaeological exhibits, the Museum has a paleontological, numismatic, philatelic and ethnological collection as well. After many relocations, a building was built in 1972 where they stored all of these collections.

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41

Sinj is a proud city of Our Lady and Alka. Both Alka and the Assumption of Mary represent highly anticipated folk and popular events. The very view of Grad and the small church fills you with pride and faith. Alka and the Assumption of Mary are held in the scorching hot month of August. This is no obstacle for the eagerly awaited events attended by tens of thousands of believers and admirers. The management of the Chivalry Alkar Society was located next to the Monastery and the Church of Our Lady of Sinj, with a view of the historical church on the Old Town. That is why the people of Sinj and the Cetina region run Alka peacefully and with dignity and carry

the Painting of Our Lady in a procession, as their grandfathers and great-grandfathers did, and as their sons and grandsons will likely do, with a minor but vital prerequisite – that they are born in Sinj or the Cetina region. This detail gives Alka a touch of autochthony and prestige in the long continuity of Croatian and European tradition, which Sinj has carefully and wholeheartedly preserved and nurtured to this day.

41 Neither the hills nor the forests between Sinj and Rama can prevent the genuine love of the pious believers for their Mother Mary

If we did a contemporary analysis that would turn Alka into an ordinary competition without the glitz and glamour of the past, without the victorious memories and political quotes, without the marketing and tourist aspirations and other epithets, we would still get its core meaning. Shooting a wooden lance through two concentric circles, connected by three bars that divide it into equal segments, carries within it a primordial and contemporary, and perhaps a lasting definition of faith and hope.

42 View of the votive church on Grad from the town window

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