There is no uniform or standard type of Old Croatian grave or grave architecture. However, the links to the late antique burial rites and grave architecture are at best tenuous. A number of authors have claimed that the supposed adoption of the late antique burial practices took place in the late 8th or early 9th century, an opinion rejected by others who insisted on cultural discontinuity. Janko Belošević, on the other hand, believed that the burial customs documented in 8th- and 9th-century cemeteries in Croatia were no different from those in the rest of the “Slavic world.” To be sure, Belošević’s plain inhumations, some in stone-lined pits, have many analogies dated no later than the mid-9th century in the cemeteries of the Sopronkőhida-Pitten-Pottenbrunn group in northwestern Hungary and in Austria. Stone cists appear only occasionally at Kašić-Razbojine, Smičič-Kulica, Medvída, Stankovci, Velim, in the hinterland of Zadar, and at Dubravice. Such cists appear in relatively larger numbers in valley of the Cetina river, but also at Mogorjelo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) along the eastern rampart of the fort. The inspiration for such cists may have derived from graves with timber coffins, such as found in southwestern Slovakia during the Late Avar period.

Stone cists are common during the second (or middle) horizon, especially in cemeteries between the Zrmanja and the Trebišnjica. The younger part of the Strančče-Gorica cemetery near Crikvenica includes plain inhumation pits, but blocks of roughly hewn stone have also been found in some graves, often around the pit. No true cist is known, however, from that cemetery. Plain inhumation pits are also known from Lika, Gomjenica near Prijedor, Junuzovci, Mahovljani, Petoševci, and Mihaljevići. Stone-lined graves of rectangular (and not oval) shape appear in Istria, for example at Žminj. To date, the area between the Zrmanja and the Trebišnjica has the majority of available on stone cists. In his study of the Mravince cemetery, Ljubo Karaman believed that plain inhumation pits were the earliest form of grave employed by the early medieval Croats, who then adopted stone cists only after their conversion to Christianity around AD 800. Karaman believed that only analogies from within the Slavic world were relevant for understanding early medieval forms of graves in Croatia.

Š. Batović and O. Oštrić treated such forms of graves as an Illyrian (prehistoric) legacy. They pointed to Mihaljevići and Nin–Ždrijac as examples of continuity from the ancient times. However, judging from the available publication, in Mihaljevići there are clearly two distinct phases, with several grave superpositions, and very different grave goods. Those were in fact two different cemeteries dated at a great distance in time from each other. The only thing they have in common is the location. In Nin–Ždrijac, there are Liburnian graves in square stone cists underneath the westernmost section of the early medieval cemetery. They have been dated between the 9th and the 3rd century BC. The chronological gap between the first and the second cemetery is therefore considerable—more than a millennium. Continuity can hardly be assumed under such circumstances. Nor can the
western orientation of graves be taken as an indication of continuity from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, since such an orientation appears in many areas of early medieval Europe with no funerary traditions going back to late antique practices.

The survival of a native population in Dalmatia and the pre-Alpine region during between the late fifth and the early seventh century has been postulated by Zdenko Vinski. Vinski believed that the chronology of such typical artifacts as bow fibulae, fibulae with bent stem, disc-shaped fibulae, various types of buckles and beads, and bracelets with animal-shaped heads strongly supported the idea of a contact between the native population and the early Slavs. He was convinced therefore that early medieval cemeteries in Croatia reflected "the late antique tradition, especially in view of jewelry and grave architecture." But Janko Belošević's dissertation (of which Zdenko Vinski was the supervisor) later showed that Vinski's native material of late antique date is absent from sites with early medieval cemeteries. The latter represent something completely new, linked to the Frankish world to the north, and not to the late antique traditions of the Mediterranean south.

Branko Marušić has drawn the scholarly attention to stone-lined inhumation pits in "barbarized cemeteries" in Istria, which are dated to the 7th and 8th century. He has also pointed to the existence of stone cists in the 9th- and 10th-century cemeteries of Buzet and Rijča. He believed that that grave architecture originated in the "Bronze Age and the hill-fort cultures." However, if rectangular stone cists were the predominant type of grave architecture among Croats in Istria, and illustrated in such cemeteries as Žminj and Buje, then that cannot be a legacy of the "Bronze Age culture," because in the latter, grave pits are fashioned out of "stones." It is important to note that rectangular stone cists co-existed with timber coffins, the latter being completely absent from any earlier cemeteries. In his book on the early medieval cemeteries between the Zrmanja and the Cetina rivers, Dušan Jelovina similarly believed that the grave architecture in the region pointed to a "a semi-Romanized local Illyrian population." His claims of continuity from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages are primarily based on the evidence from three cemeteries, two of which have remained unpublished to this day—Bijaći-St Martha, Danilo-Šematorij, and Bribir-Vratnice. According to Jelovina, in Danilo-Šematorij, 32 out of 403 excavated graves are of a late antique date, while only 5 out of 128 graves in Bribir-Vratnice cemetery have been dated to Late Antiquity. Only in Bijaći-St. Martha is the percentage higher, namely 15 out of 28 newly discovered graves. Needless to say, that late antique and medieval graves are found within one and the same cemetery site is no indication of continuity. Such a situation may be easily be explained in terms of two burial phases (i.e., two separate cemetery, unless the archaeological material bespeaks a gradual transition from the earliest to the latest burial assemblages. Out of the five late antique graves in Bribir-Vratnice, one was a plain inhumation pit, while the others were pits lined with bricks or regularly hewn stones bonded with mortar. From the evidence published so far, it appears that some of the early medieval graves lie on top of the late antique ones burials. Nor is there any indication of an early medieval grave in a plain inhumation pit or in a pit lined with brick or stones bonded with mortar (such as typical for the late antique burials).

Moreover, according to Dušan Jelovina, the late antique graves in Danilo and Bijaći have been found underneath the early medieval ones, much like in Mihaljevići. In Bijaći-St. Martha, the late antique graves are over 1 m underneath the early medieval graves (which have, therefore, not disturbed them). Despite claims to the contrary, the architecture of the late antique graves is different from that of the early medieval graves.

A considerable chronological gap has also been initially advanced for the late antique and early medieval burial phases in Lučane near Sinj, even though the excavator of that site has meanwhile changed his opinion on matters of continuity. According to Jelovina, despite assumed continuity between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, no graves of the pagan (or first) horizon have been

---

23 Vinski 1971.
25 Marušić 1987a, 100.
26 Marušić 1987a, 98.
27 It has become fashionable with many authors to limit their research to the area between those two rivers, although no archaeological, historical, or geographical justification exists for such an approach. This choice may have more to do with the location of the authors' hometowns than with the "Kingdom of Croatia."
31 Vrsalović 1968a, tab. 1, lower picture.
32 Jelovina 1976, 32 and 43.
33 Jelovina 1976, 33, t. x, pic. 1–4.
34 Milošević 1984, 288.
35 Milošević 2001, 44.