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Christianity in the Territory between the Neretva and Cetina Rivers
from the Fifth to the Eleventh Century

MA Thesis in Comparative History, with a specialization
in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies.

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by

Ante Vucic

(Croatia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary
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Chair, Examination Committee

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I, the undersigned, **Ante Vucic**, candidate for the MA degree in Comparative History, with a specialization in Interdisciplinary Medieval Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Christianity in the territory between the Neretva and Cetina rivers from the fifth to the eleventh century with the emphasis on the late antique – early medieval (dis)continuity. The methodological approach is threefold: the *longue durée*, the interdisciplinary and the comparative. The answer to the question whether there was continuity or discontinuity is a complex one. On the one hand, there is obvious discontinuity regarding the Church administration, for contrary to Late Antiquity, there are no bishoprics in the territory during the early Middle Ages. The early medieval ruling elites of Paganía constructed their identity in opposition to Christianity and did not cooperate with the Church. Thus, the surrounding Slavic population labelled them as Pagani. However, the archaeological finds indicate that Christian communities remained in some peripheral areas, especially on the island of Brač.

Acknowledgements

Those who know me understand that I am not a man of many words, hence the acknowledgements section will not be extremely long. Hereby I thank my supervisors, József Laszlovszky and Béla Zsolt Szakács for their guidance, my wife Mihaela, my family, friends and colleagues for their support and generosity, and, finally, St Antony the Great and St Thomas Aquinas, for helping me overcome many obstacles in the thesis-writing process.

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Introduction

Christianity has been one of the most attractive topics to historians. Since Gibbon, they have been attempting to research the topic both as such, and in relation to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, or in relation to the transformation of the Roman world, depending on the viewpoint one assumes. Despite the ongoing changes in the methodological framework, the focus on Christianity has proven stable. My first encounter with Christianity in the academic sense was when I was researching for my MA thesis in history at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. The focus of that thesis was political history, my intention being to examine the relationship between the neighboring early medieval *Sclavinias* on the eastern Adriatic coast: Croatia and Paganía (*Παγανία*).¹ While researching their relationship, I realized that on the territory of Paganía there is a significant lack of evidence for Christianity in comparison with Croatia. However, in my earlier thesis, I pointed to the lack of evidence for Christianity only to emphasize the political differences between the *Sclavinias*.

Nevertheless, the problem of Christianity on the territory of Paganía has continued to occupy me. While thinking about my MA thesis for Central European University, it became clear to me that examining Christianity in the *longue durée* approach, by trying to establish what was the development of the religion like from its beginnings in Late Antiquity until the end of the early Middle Ages, could be fruitful. A research of such a scope of the territory in question has not been conducted yet, moreover there is a lack of similar works for the eastern Adriatic coast in general.² Therefore, my work aims at examining Christianity from the

¹ Ante Vučić, *Odnos Neretvanske kneževine i Hrvatske* [The Relationship between Croatia and the Principality of Narentania] (MA thesis), (University of Zagreb: 2013)

² Recently several articles that investigate the eastern Adriatic coast from the point of transformation and in continuity from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages have been published see: Trpimir Vedriš, “Pokršćavanje i rana kristijanizacija Hrvata [The Conversion and the Early Christianization of the Croats],” in: *Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu*, ed: Zrinka Nikolić-Jakus, (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2015), 173-200.; Ivan Basić, “Sjeverna i srednja Dalmacija u ranom srednjem vijeku [Northern and Central Dalmatia in the Early Middle Ages],” in: *Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu*, ed: Zrinka Nikolić-Jakus, (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2015), 427-462.

viewpoint of the transformation of the Roman world, while trying not to make a sharp separation of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

It seems appropriate to lay out the geographical boundaries of the territory at this point. As stated in the title of this thesis, the territory encompassed in the present work is bounded by two rivers: The Cetina River on the north-west and the Neretva River on the south-east. The narrow coastal line between these two rivers is separated from the hinterland by the mountain of Biokovo, part of the Dinarides mountain chain, stretching from the north-west to the south-east. The only part of the territory that is located inland is the karst-polje around Vrgorac and the delta of the Neretva River. The costal part of the territory ends with the peninsula of Pelješac. Finally, the islands off the coast, Brač, Hvar, Korčula and Mljet, are also included in the territory.

The described region encompasses the early medieval *Sclavinia* of Paganía, as presented to us by the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenite in his work *De administrando imperio*.³ However, in Late Antiquity these geographical boundaries do not present delimitations of any administrative unit or a proto-state. Hence, I will not always strictly adhere to the mentioned territory. On occasion I will take into account the neighboring areas that were either connected with the mentioned geographical territory or with the areas that belonged to the same administrative unit at some point in the period in the scope of this work.

In the present work I will argue that there was a discontinuity of the presence of Christianity in transition from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. However, the entire territory did not undergo an equal development, thus in certain peripheral areas, small pockets of territory were still inhabited by Christians, such as the island of Brač. Furthermore, I will propose that the first trace of Christianity that can be attested dates from as late as the fifth

³ Gyula Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 164-165; Vučić, *Odnos Neretvanske kneževine*, 11-22.

century, while for the earlier period there is nothing that undoubtedly points to the presence of Christians. From that point on, Christianity seems to have spread unequally throughout the Neretva region, leaving some areas more Christianized (e.g. the island of Brač), while other less (e.g. the peninsula of Pelješac).

The seventh and the eighth century, albeit a watershed for the eastern Adriatic, are shrouded with the silence of sources, leaving us in the dark with regards to the development of Christianity. Subsequently, in the ninth century the Neretva region appeared as a territory under the rule of a Slavic tribe called Narrentani or Pagani, and their territory was called Paganía. The ruling elites do not seem to have supported Christianization, rather I will argue that they used their ‘paganism’ as a way of distinguishing themselves from their Slavic neighbors. Only at the end of the eleventh century the elites began cooperating with the Church, and the religious specificity in comparison with the rest of eastern Adriatic coast disappeared.

A long time frame presents a usual problem of terminology, therefore a few remarks on the terms that I will use are indispensable. Repeating the phrase “the territory between the Cetina and Neretva rivers” on numerous occasions in the text is unpractical. Instead, I have opted for the term Neretva region, thus whenever the latter is mentioned it designates the geographical scope of the work as outlined in the title. However, I will use the term Neretva region mostly for the period of Late Antiquity, whereas for the early Middle Ages I will opt for the term attested in a crucial source: Paganía (*Παγανία*).⁴ Regarding the demonyms, for Late Antiquity there is not a specific one, therefore I will use a neutral term, such as ‘population’, while for the early Middle Ages I will adhere to the two terms that are, again, attested in the sources: Pagani and Narrentani.⁵ In the Croatian historiography the latter term is often Croatized to *Neretljani*, however my preference is the Latin original.

⁴ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 164-165.

⁵ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 124-127, 144-145, 150-151, 164-165.; Franjo Rački, *Documenta historiae Chroaticae periodum antiquum*, (Zagreb: Academia scientiarum et artium Slavorum meridionalium 1877), 335, 366, 374-375, 399-400, 425, 427.

My methodological approach is threefold: the *longue durée*, the interdisciplinary and the comparative. Firstly, I will consider the development of Christianity from the fifth to the end of the eleventh century, thus encompassing almost seven centuries and two arbitrary chronological epochs. This is the *longue durée* approach, which I will adopt to overcome the strict division between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Besides the written sources, I will also consider the archaeological finds, and only secondarily the art historical material. By combining all these approaches, my goal is to put forth the most plausible overview of the development of Christianity. However, due to the problematic dating of the archaeological finds, I have resolved to keep the combined analysis of the written sources and the archaeological data only for the conclusion. Frequently the dating of archaeological finds depends on the interpretation of the written sources. However, in the present case, some of the written sources have gone through reinterpretation, thus shaking the traditional dating of the archaeological finds.

I will use two comparative approaches: the asymmetrical and the diachronic. With regards to the former, I will compare the Neretva region with the territory of the bishopric of Salona in Late Antiquity on the one hand, and Paganja with the central part of the early medieval Croatian state, which was between the Zrmanja and Cetina rivers, on the other. I will apply the asymmetrical comparison to both the archaeological and the written sources. The main units of comparison will be the Neretva region and Paganja, while the bishopric of Salona and the center of early medieval Croatian state will represent the ancillary units. With regards to the latter, I will compare the same unit – the Neretva region or Paganja – from the perspective of two different periods, the late antique and the early medieval.

The scarcity of the sources presented the main problem in my research. I have come across certain gaps and, unfortunately, I could not fill all of them, for there is a lack of written sources and archaeological finds with reliable dating. Such an assessment applies first and

foremost to the seventh and eighth centuries. Another problem that I have encountered in my research was an excessively wide dating of some archaeological finds. Furthermore, on several occasions certain symbols or artifacts were interpreted as Christian, in some cases on very thin evidence at best, and in other without any evidence to support it. The lack of secondary literature that is interdisciplinary and that encompasses the entire time frame in the scope of my work has shown to be another problem. Thus, I will use a significant number of studies and articles that deal with particular periods and geographical areas of the territory. I have concluded that presenting all of them in the Introduction would take a significant space, and it would be tiresome to read many titles out of context. Hence, I will present the secondary literature at particular points in the thesis.

Another complex matter relates to how to combine different types of sources, the written and the archaeological. I will take the safest route and separate them, focusing on the written sources in one chapter and on the archaeological finds in the other. Consequently, the thesis will be divided into two main chapters, besides the present one and the Conclusion. In the chapter on the written sources, I will question the hypothesis that insists on that the first attested presence of Christianity in the territory in question dates from the third century. Having thoroughly analyzed and dismissed it, I will proceed to the second hypothesis that states that Christianity can be identified in the region in question in the fourth century. I will dismiss it as well for the lack of the firm evidence. The chapter will continue by examining the sources about Christianity from the fifth and sixth centuries. Later on, there was a hiatus of almost two centuries during which we do not know anything about the history of the eastern Adriatic. The chapter concludes with the analysis of the written sources for the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, examining whether we can establish continuity of Christianity or not, and explaining why certain development occurred.

In the second chapter I will analyze the archaeological finds. Firstly, I will question the interpretation regarding certain archaeological finds, such as the violent destruction of the temple in Naronā. After that I will also challenge the dating of other archaeological finds, thus establishing the beginning of Christianity in the region into the fifth century. The essential element of the second chapter are the maps: one where I have marked all the late antique churches (Map 1) and the other where I have marked all archaeological finds with distinguishing Christian markers (Map 2), thus showing where Christianity spread to during the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries.

Having interpreted the maps, thus outlining the spreading of Christianity in the Neretva region, I will proceed to the early Middle Ages. Once again, I have mapped all pre-Romanesque churches searching for the continuity of the sacred space. The main intention was to verify whether there was continuity of Christianity in the continuity of use of the churches and sacred spaces. The final part of the chapter is dedicated to the island of Brač, which reveals a different development than the rest of the region. Finally, in Conclusion I will merge the conclusions of these two chapters. There, I will offer an overview of the most plausible process of development of Christianity in the territory during the time frame in the scope of the thesis according to written and material sources.

1. Christianity from the fifth to the eleventh century – the written sources

The beginnings of Christianity in the Neretva region are vague. The testimony of the written sources is very scarce; thus, caution is necessary when one interprets the available sources. My aim in this chapter is to offer a historical overview on the emergence of Christianity according to the testimony of written sources in the *longue durée* approach from the fifth century until the middle of the eleventh century.

The sources that I will use are diverse, from epigraphic inscriptions to the synodal letters, medieval chronicle and medieval charter. Even though the list seems to be very wide, thus providing a significant amount of data, the information contained in the source material is brief, condensed and often in need of very cautious interpretation. Thus, there is only one inscription from the fifth century, priest Anastasius' sarcophagus, that turned out to be useful.⁶ For Late Antiquity the Acts of the Synods of Salona are the most valuable source.⁷ These two sources will be the most important in the part on Late Antiquity.

John the Deacon, a Venetian chronicler who lived during the second half of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century, offered the first information about Christianity for the early Middle Ages.⁸ Beside it, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenite's *De Administrando imperio* will be an important source.⁹ Finally, a charter from 1050 will be the last written source I will refer to in this chapter.¹⁰ At first, it seems that the sources cover the

⁶ Ivan Basić, "Postkonzulat i Pars imperii na natpisu svećenika Anastazija iz Slanog (AD CIL III 14623)" [The Postconsulate and Pars Imperii on the Priest Anastasius's Inscription from Slano], *Živa Antika* 66 (2016), 89-107.

⁷ Radoslav Dodig and Ante Škegro, "Akti crkvenih sabora održanih 530. i 533. u Saloni" [The Acts of the councils of Salona held in 530 and 533], *Povijesni Prilozi* 35 (2008): 9-23.

⁸ Franjo Rački, *Documenta*, 335.

⁹ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*.

¹⁰ *Codex Diplomaticus Regni Croatiae. Dalmatiae et Slavoniae vol I*, ed. Marko Kostrenčić, (Zagreb: JAZU, 1967), 78-79.

whole period, however there is a gap for the seventh and eighth centuries, and the mentioned sources offer no more than glimpses of information.

Furthermore, the secondary literature that encompasses the whole territory and the chronological scope that I will research is non-existent, as stated in the introduction of the thesis. For the period of Late Antiquity works of Ante Škegro can be regarded the most useful for he examined thoroughly the most important source for the period –The Acts of the Synods of Salona.¹¹ Together with these studies, Ivan Basić's work on the same subject offered a valuable insight in the problematic of the sources, and his work showed to be important also for the inscription of priest Anastasius.¹² Regarding Late Antiquity and the Synods of Salona, Vadim Prozorov's article helped to establish the authenticity of the source.¹³

For the early Middle Ages there is plenty literature about Paganía from the political point of view. Miho Barada was first Croatian historian who decided to give more attention to this *Sclavinia*.¹⁴ After him, Nada Klaić was the next prolific author who, influenced by the French school of *Annales*, approached the sources from the new perspective, concluding that Paganía had been a separate political unit with its own ethnogenesis on the eastern Adriatic coast.¹⁵ Recently, Mladen Ančić and Vladimir Sokol have also discussed Paganía and its

¹¹ Ante Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija (Ecclesia Naronitana)" [The Diocese of Naronia], *Hercegovina godišnjak za kulturno i povijesno nasljeđe* 23 (2009): 7-34; Ante Škegro, "The Diocese of Naronia (Ecclesia Naronitana)," *Arheološki vestnik* 61 (2010): 229-244; Ante Škegro, "Akti Salonitanskih metropolitanskih sabora održanih 530. i 533. godine – analiza" [The Acts of the Metropolitan Synods of Salona Held in 530 and 533 – the Analysis], *Archeologia Adriatica* 3 (2009): 191-204.; Ante Škegro, "Mukurska biskupija (Ecclesia Muccuritana)" [The Diocese of Muccur], *Povijesni prilozi* 34 (2008): 9-25

¹² Ivan Basić, "Pristupna razmatranja uz popise biskupa Zapadnoga Ilirika u aktima crkvenih koncila u Salonu 530. i 533. godine" [The Initial Observations on the List of Bishops of the West Illyricum in the Acts of the Synods of Salona Held in 530 and 533], *Tusculum* 2 (2009): 59-69.

¹³ Vadim Prozorov, "Salonitanski crkveni sabori iz šestog stoljeća" ["The Sixth-Century Synods of Salona"], *Vjesnik za arheologiju i povijest dalmatinsku*, 104 (2011): 309-337

¹⁴ Miho Barada, "Topografija Porfirogenetove Paganije" [The Topography of Porphyrogenite's Paganía], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta Nova Serija II* 1-2 (1928): 37-54.; Miho Barada, "Dinastičko pitanje u Hrvatskoj XI. Stoljeća" [The Eleventh-Century Dynastic Question in Croatia], *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* 50 (1928-1929):157-199.

¹⁵ Nada Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata u ranom srednjem vijeku* [History of the Croats in the Early Middle Ages], (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1971), 212-221, 474-486.; Nada Klaić, "Historijska uloga Neretvanske kneževine u stoljetnoj borbi za Jadran" [The Historic Role of Paganía in the Centuries-Long Struggle for the Adriatic Sea], in: *Makarski zbornik I*, ed: Jakša Ravlić, (Omiš 1971), 121-168.; Nada Klaić, *Povijest Hrvata u srednjem vijeku* [History of the Croats in the Middle Ages], (Zagreb: Globus, 1990), 326-332; Nada Klaić "Povijest Brača u sklopu Neretvanske kneževine" [History of the Island of Brač as a Part of Paganía], in: *Brač u ranom srednjem vijeku*, ed: Davor

territory.¹⁶ However, in their works, the political history, the borders of Paganía and its relationship with medieval Croatian state were in the focus, while the problem of Christianity was only peripheral.

1.1 The problem of Christianity in the third and the fourth century

The general opinion, starting with Frano Bulić, was that Christianity in Naroná had its beginnings in the fourth century, since the first archaeological finds are believed to have been from that period.¹⁷ However, recently Ante Škegro has concluded that the first traces of Christianity in Naroná can be found in the story about the third-century martyr Venantius.¹⁸ The source that he used is “*Illyricum Sacrum*”, compiled by Daniele Farlati, an eighteenth-century Croatian historian.¹⁹ Farlati based his conclusions on another source published by the seventeenth-century Spanish historian Juan Tamayo de Salazar.²⁰ Škegro was not the first modern Croatian historian to notice the source, for at the beginning of the twentieth century a famous Croatian historian and archaeologist, often considered the father of Croatian archaeology, Frane Bulić read the same passage by Farlati and concluded that Venantius was the first bishop of Salona and a martyr.²¹ For the present work, Škegro’s argument is important,

Domančić (Povlja: Brački muzej, 1984), 5-20.; Nada Klaić, “Problem Slavca i Neretljanske krajine” [The Problem of Slavac and Paganía], *Zgodovinski časopis* 14 (1960): 96-136.

¹⁶ Vladimir Sokol, “Gdje se nalazila Porfirogenetova Paganija i granica sa Zahumljem” [Where was the Porphyrogenite’s Paganía and Its Border with Zahumlje], ed: Ivica Lučić, *Hum i Hercegovina kroz povijest* (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011), 197-216.; Vladimir Sokol, “Južna Hrvatska i Dubrovnik prema ranim povijesnim geografijama” [Southern Croatia and Dubrovnik according to Early Historical Geographies], *Izdanja HAD-a* 26 (2010): 255-269.; Mladen Ančić, “Ranosrednjovjekovni Neretvani ili Humljani” [Early Medieval Narrentani or Humljani], ed.: Ivica Lučić, *Hum i Hercegovina kroz povijest*, (Zagreb: Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2011.), 217-276.

¹⁷ Frane Bulić, “Un frammento di bassorilievo rappresentante il calice eucaristico trovato nella 1904. A Naroná (Vid di Metković)”, *Bullettino di Archeologia e Storia Dalmata* 29 (1906): 39-45.

¹⁸ Škegro, “Naronitanska biskupija,” 11-13.; Škegro, “The Diocese of Naroná,” 234-235

¹⁹ Škegro, “Naronitanska biskupija,” 12.

²⁰ Daniele Farlati, *Illyrici sacri tomus primus. Ecclesia Salonitana ab eius exordio usque ad saeculum quartum aerae Christianae*, (Venetia: 1751), 563.

²¹ Frane Bulić and Josip Bervaldi, “Kronotaksa solinskih biskupa” [The List of the Bishops of Salona], *Bogoslovska smotra* 3 no. 1 (1912): 16-19; Frane Bulić, “Sv. Venancije prvi biskup solinski i mučenik duvanjski [St Venantius, the First Bishop of Salona and the Martyr of Delminium],” *Vjesnik Arheološkog Muzeja u Zagrebu* 15 no. 1 (1928): 59-62. Bulić also accepted Farlati’s conclusion that Salazar had made a mistake in transcription and had written Narbonensis instead of Naronensis.

therefore, I will not deal any longer with the assumption that Venantius was the bishop of Salona, rather, I will examine Škegro's proposal that Venantius was a missionary in Dalmatia who used Naron, and not Salona, as the starting point for Christianization and that he was martyred somewhere between the Krka and Neretva rivers.²²

As I have already stated, the starting point for Škegro is Farlati who transcribed, as he himself confessed, Spanish chronicles: *Cum in Galliam Narbonensem, negotiis inastatibus, Pannoniasque lustratus abiisset, apud Dalmatas martyr effectus, aeternam remunerationem promeruit. Haec illi ad seculum septimum referunt, & ecclesia Toletanae annalibus interferunt; ex quo colligitur Venantium illum D. Gregorio Magno aequalem fuisse.*²³ Here Farlati cited what Juan de Salazar had written, or rather, Farlati condensed several sentences from Salazar's work and showed them as if they were genuinely Salazar's.²⁴ Furthermore, Farlati cited other authors from Salazar's work, however he slightly altered the original text.²⁵

I maintain that this source is unreliable and should be rejected as proof for the existence of Christianity in Naron in the third century for several reasons. Firstly, the sources about Venantius are much later than the supposed period of his missionary work. Namely, the sources that Salazar quoted are from the sixteenth or the seventeenth century.²⁶ Moreover, not only did Salazar use late sources, but also Farlati took over what Salazar had written and created a compilation of his own.²⁷

²² Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija," 11-13.; Bulić and Bernaldi, "Kronotkasa," 18-19: claimed that Venantius was martyred somewhere near Delminium (modern Tomislavgrad), however he offered no explanation as to why he believed this. Furthermore, Bulić connected Venantius with Venantius whose relics were acquired by Rome in 640s when Pope John IV sent Abbot Martin to Dalmatia and Istria to collect relics that were at that time on the territory under the newly-arrived Slavs. See also: *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis)*, ed. and trans. Raymond Davis, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010³), 64-65.

²³ Farlati, *Illyrici sacri*, 563-564.

²⁴ Ioannus Tomayo Salazar, *Anamnesis, sive Commemorationis sanctorum hispanorum, pontificum, martyrum, confessorum, virginum, viduarum, ac sanctarum mulierum; ad ordinem, et methodum martyrologii romani quo utitur ecclesia; tomus secundus*, (Lugduni: Philip. Borde, Laurent. Arnaud, & Cl. Rigaud, 1652) 449-451.

²⁵ Farlati, *Illyrici sacri*, 564.

²⁶ Salazar, *Anamnesis* 449-451: Salazar quotes Ambrosio Morales (1513-1591) and Juan García de Loaysa y Mendoza (1478-1546).

²⁷ Farlati, *Illyrici sacri*, 563-564.

Secondly, Škegro ascribed major significance to Farlati's formulation "apud Dalmatas", which he then interpreted as if Farlati, or his supposed source, had referred to the territory of the Illyrian tribe Dalmatae, and since their territory was between the Krka and Neretva rivers, Venantius must have died somewhere on that territory.²⁸ Since the connection of Venantius and Salona had been rejected, it was reasonable for Škegro to mark Narona as the "headquarters" of Venantius' missionary work.²⁹ However, this seems very improbable, for Narona is not mentioned anywhere in the source.

Thirdly, as one can observe, another issue that stems from the source in question is that the starting point of the missionary work towards Pannonia is not Narona or "Dalmatia Naronensis", but "Gallia Narbonensis". However, Škegro has dealt very easily with this problem, claiming that it is a transcriber's mistake, and that in the original it must have been written as "Dalmatia Naronensis".³⁰ However, except for his firm belief, he offers no evidence for the claim of a transcription mistake. In his defense, I must add that Farlati made the same assumption and claimed that Salazar had seen a document with a transcription error.³¹ Therefore, Škegro seems to accept Farlati's interpretation uncritically.

Another problem emerges in relation with this hypothesis when one takes a look at Salazar's work and finds that the expression "apud Dalmatas" is not there, there is only the expression "ad Dalmatiam", which can then be connected with the territory of the Roman province of Dalmatia, rather than with the mentioned Illyrian tribe.³² Consequently, since the border between the Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia was a long one, Venantius, if he indeed died somewhere near Dalmatia during his missionary work in Pannonia, could have been killed anywhere along that border. Searching for the starting point of his missionary work

²⁸ Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija," 12-13

²⁹ Škegro "Naronitanska biskupija," 12.

³⁰ Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija," 12.

³¹ Farlati, *Illyrici sacri*, 566.

³² Salazar, *Anamnesis*, 449-451.

somewhere near Salona or Naronna has no justification in the source for it clearly states that he came from Gallia Narbonensis, and it is completely unclear how and why we should accept a possible transcription mistake to justify the claim of “Dalmatian headquarters.” Therefore, I maintain that we should completely discard this source as unreliable for we have no contemporary sources from the supposed period of Venantius’ missionary work to compare with Salazar’s writing. Salazar’s work does not allow us to conclude that Venantius had anything to do with Naronna, hence we should abandon the opinion that the source in question is proof of the existence of Christianity in Naronna in the third century.

The fourth century also appears to lack evidence for Christianity. One of the epigraphic texts that has been accepted as proof of the existence of Christianity appears to have no distinguishing markers which could allow us to interpret it as an inscription testifying for the presence of Christianity. The text *Marturius memoriam sibi fecit* is believed to have been done by a Christian, and the argument for the assumption is that his Greek name was a Christian name.³³ However, neither the name of the deceased nor the inscription itself point to his Christianity, for there are no distinguishing religious marks on the tombstone. There is only this plain text from which we can conclude no more than that it was for somebody whose name was *Marturius*, and it is obvious from the inscription that it is a proper name whose religious label is not clear.³⁴

³³ Frane Bulić, “Un frammento,” 45., Jakov Vučić, *Topografija naronitanske biskupije* [The Topography of the Diocese of Naronna] (Ph.D. diss.), (University of Zagreb, 2013), 79-80, 254. The inscription is held in the Museum of Makarska, however it is believed to have been discovered in Vid (Naronna).

³⁴ In the literature it is proposed that Marturius/Martyrius might have been an exclusively Christian name. Dora Ivanišević, *Epitaphic Culture and Social History in Late Antique Salona (ca. 250-600 C.E.)* (Ph.D dissertation), (Budapest: CEU, 2016), 27 footnote 110 seems to accept it as a Christian name concluding: “The cognomen Martyrius seems to have been exclusively a Christian name” and to emphasize she quoted Iiro Kajato, *Onomastic Studies in the Early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage*, (Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1963), 100: who concluded that the name had an obvious Christian flavor, however not offering any evidence that the name was exclusively Christian. Kajato argued that “The name Martyrius is an expression of the veneration of all the martyrs” and then quotes Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Origines du culte des martyrs*, (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1933) 139 who only argued that the name was an expression of the veneration of all martyrs, however, nowhere in the book did he discuss the nature and religious label of the name. Thus, following this logic, it seems that Martyrius is not definitely proved to have been exclusively a Christian name. However, Ivanišević, *Epitaphic culture*, 27 footnote 110 has expressed, in my opinion, a doubt whether an inscription from Salona,

Furthermore, the proposed dating of the inscription is also questionable. Bulić dated it without having enough comparative material. Since there is nothing in the inscription that can help us to date it with certainty, caution is needed in accepting the dating uncritically. Therefore, we should abandon this as firm evidence of the existence of Christianity, for nothing on the inscription points to a certain dating and identifying it as a Christian inscription. This leaves us with no direct sources that testify to the presence of Christianity on the territory between the two rivers in the fourth century.

The fact that we possess no written or archaeological sources that undoubtedly testify to the Christianity in the fourth century leads me to the conclusion that we should abandon the hypothesis of Croatian historians that Naronā was an important Christian missionary center already in the fourth century.³⁵ This is because their conclusion is based, as I have demonstrated, on the sources that were interpreted uncritically. The interpretation of the archaeological finds was closely connected with the assumption that written sources testify to the presence of Christianity in the fourth century, thus they also seem to be unreliable. I will discuss the problem of dating the archaeological finds in the next chapter about archaeology.

Having discarded the two above-mentioned sources, I maintain that, even though it is not possible to claim beyond doubt that a Christian community did not exist in Naronā, for it was an important trade, administrative and transport center, we should admit the lack of written sources that can tell us anything about the history of Christianity in the fourth century. Since the two sources are the only ones that have been used to argue for the presence of Christianity not only in Naronā, but in the whole territory investigated in my work, I must conclude that we have no sources to allow us to claim with certainty that a Christian community existed in the

which she has dealt with, is certainly a Christian one, for she has also pointed to the fact that the inscription from Salona lacks any distinguishing Christian or pagan markings.

³⁵ Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija," 12, and other authors who claim the same are listed in Škegro's article.

territory. Therefore, the history of Christianity in the region begins in the fifth century when we can find the first, although still scarce, sources about its existence.

1.2 Christianity in the fifth century

The fifth century offers us the first archaeological material that can be dated to this century, however the archaeological data will be examined in the chapter on archaeology. For now, there is one epigraphic inscription that can be dated to the exact year when it was produced. The inscription offers some clues about Christianity. It is necessary to point out that the sarcophagus that contains the inscription in question is not from the territory that my thesis encompasses. Nevertheless, Slano, the village where archaeologists discovered the sarcophagus, was part of the bishopric of Naron, therefore it reflects something about Christianity in Naron, and consequently in the territory in question.³⁶

The inscription is the following:³⁷

*D(e)p(ositio) et requies s(an)c(t)i ac venera(ndi) / Anastasi
pr(es)b(ylteri) d(e)positus V Id(us) Mart(ias) / indict(ione) XV post
c(on)s(ulatum) Severini v(iri) c(larissimi)*

According to the indication and the mention of consul Severinus, the inscription is dated to March 11th 462.³⁸ Undoubtedly, the priest Anastasius was a Christian, for apart from the fact that he was called a priest, there are two crosses on the sarcophagus, one on each side of the inscription. Therefore, this is the first “document” that testifies to the existence of Christianity in the territory of Naron. Although Slano, as stated above, is not strictly part of the region that I investigate in my thesis, it is historically connected with the colony of Naron, and as Jakov

³⁶ For the territory of the bishopric of Naron see: Jakov Vučić, “Ecclesia Naronitana/prostor i granice” [Ecclesia Naronitana/ Territory and Borders], *Vjesnik za arheologiju i povijest dalmatinsku* 98 (2005): 159-170.; Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 338-345 (for the territory until AD 533), 345-348 (for the territory after AD 533); Škegro, “Naronitanska biskupija,” 15-18 designates a different territory under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Naron.

³⁷ See: Frane Bulić, “Necropoli antica cristiana a Slano di Ragusa,” *Bullettino di Archeologia e Storia Dalmata* 24 (1901): 90-98; Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 80.; Basić, “Postkonzulat i Pars imperii,” 89-107.

³⁸ Basić, “Postkonzulat i Pars imperii,” 94.

Vučić demonstrated, it formed part of the bishopric of Naronā, which was probably established in the fifth century, although we do not possess written sources to confirm this assumption with complete confidence.³⁹



Priest Anastasius inscription (drawing: Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 264.)

What we can observe and deduce from the inscription is not much. It seems that Anastasius was a local priest,⁴⁰ for Slano was not a very large settlement. Archaeological finds and church typology in small settlements such as Slano indicate that in the fifth century local churches of this type were usually erected on the territory of Naronā.⁴¹ However, we cannot tell anything about how thorough was Christianization based on the short note from the inscription, nor can we conclude anything about the degree of Christianization. Undoubtedly, we know that there were Christians, and not only in the major urban centers, but also in small settlements, such as Slano. It is also unclear what was the ecclesiastical relationship like between churches in these small settlements and Naronā.

³⁹ The number of archaeological finds that can be dated to the fifth century is significant, which probably points to the greater missionary work in the fifth century, which would be in tune with the desire of emperors to promote Christianity. For the beginning of Naronā's bishopric see: Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija," 9-12.; Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 344-345

⁴⁰ In Croatian historiography the term that is often used is 'parish priest', however, the term parish priest bears a very specific meaning, therefore, I opt for more neutral one which is 'local priest'.

⁴¹ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 306.

1.3 The Acts of the Synods of Salona

The only attestation of bishops in the territory in question comes from the sixth century. The acts of two metropolitan synods under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Salona have survived.⁴² Many historians have been investigating the acts for more than three centuries, from different perspectives, asking diverse questions, and some of them have even questioned the authenticity of the documents that have survived only in a transcription from the sixteenth century as a part of the source known as the *Historia Salonitana Maior*.⁴³

The reasons why the authenticity of the acts has been questioned are: the survival in a late transcription, many mistakes that occurred due to the transcription, and the most recent critique argues that due to the lack of usage of the acts in Archdeacon Thomas's *History of the bishops of Salona and Split*, the work probably was written after Thomas's work, thus it is a forgery.⁴⁴ Ivan Basić and Vadim Prozorov, however, have recently addressed these critiques, and have concluded that the synodal acts are a reliable source, for they are completely in the spirit of their time, i.e. the sixth century.⁴⁵ Thus, even though there have been voices denying the authenticity of the acts, the general opinion of historians is that the acts are authentic. I believe that Basić and Prozorov have been the most successful in confirming authenticity, and

⁴² I have used the most recent publication of the acts in which the authors have compared all other earlier publications: Dodig and Škegro, "Akti sabora," 9-23.

⁴³ For *Historia Salonitana Maior* see: Nada Klaić, *Historia Salonitana Maior*, (Beograd: Naučno delo, 1967) and Stjepan Gunjača, "Historia Salonitana Maior," *Rad JAZU* 283 (1951), 175-243.; For the acts see: Škegro, "Akti sabora – analiza," 191-204.; Prozorov, "Salonitanski crkveni sabori," 309-337.; Basić, "Pristupna razmatranja," 59-69, especially 60 and footnote 4 and 7 for the editions of the acts and for the list of authors who have dealt with the problem of acts so far.

⁴⁴ Ivo Babić, "Splitske uspomene na salonitanske kršćanske starine" [Split's Memories of the Christian Antiquities of Salona], *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju Dalmatinsku* 85 (1992): 33-35.; Archdeacon Thomas, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*, ed. and trans. Damir Karbić and others, (Budapest: CEU press, 2006), 23-25 did not mention the period between the end of the fifth and the end of the sixth century, he just "jumped" from Salona's bishop Glycerius (appointed in 474) to bishop Natalis (582-593).

⁴⁵ Basić, "Pristupna razmatranja," 59-63 having compared the synodal acts with other sources from Dalmatia for Late Antiquity, Basić has demonstrated how the information from the acts is in tune with other sources we have from Dalmatia, therefore he argues that they must have been written in the first half of the sixth century; Prozorov, "Salonitanski crkveni sabori," 315-333 has compared the conclusion, i.e. canons of the acts, with the canons of other synods from the fifth century, thus he has demonstrated that the canons of Salona's synods show the same patterns as others from the sixth century.

following their argumentation I also maintain that the acts were written in the sixth century as the conclusions of the synods.

The acts present the most valuable late antique source for my work. They sketch the state of Christianity in Dalmatia on the eve of the Byzantine-Ostrogothic wars, whose important part was also the struggle for Dalmatia.⁴⁶ Thus, the source can help to situate the position of the two bishoprics of Naronia and Makarska in a broader Dalmatian perspective in the first half of the sixth century. The bishopric of Makarska was established during the second synod.

The first synod was held *sub die XVII Kal. Iuliarum, consulatu vero Lampadii et F. Oresti*, i.e. on the 15th of July 530.⁴⁷ In fourteen canons the synodal fathers issued rules for how priests and bishops should act concerning borrowing money (canons 1-3), what the penalties for promoting or not revealing simony are (canon 4-5), forbidding leaving the province (Dalmatia) or changing the bishopric in which one serves (canon 6-7), forbidding consecrating new deacons or priests improperly (canon 8), keeping the practice of guaranteed income for priests (canon 9), forbidding dealing with lawsuits for priests, unless they are called to testify (canon 10), forbidding priests to take any income which is not according to canonical practice (canon 11), forbidding the consecration of new altars without having money to sustain a new church (canon 12), and finally canon 13 deals with the sacrament of reconciliation, i.e. what priests can do and what they cannot do.⁴⁸ At the end, nine bishops signed the canons, with additional signatures of several presbyters and possibly two monks.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ivo Goldstein, "Funkcija Jadrana u ratu Bizantskog carstva protiv Ostrogota 535-555. Godine" [How did the Byzantines use the Adriatic Sea in their War against the Ostrogoths 535-555], *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 37 (2005): 23-34.; for Ostrogothic rule in Dalmatia see: Hrvoje Gračanin, "Late Antique Dalmatia and Pannonia in Cassiodorus' *Variae*", *Povijesni piloz* 49 (2015): 9-83.

⁴⁷ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 13.

⁴⁸ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 13-16.

⁴⁹ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 16-17.: Škegro, "Akti sabora – analiza," 195.

The list of bishops who signed the canons is revealing. It has been proposed that the order of bishops demonstrates their importance in the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Dalmatia during the first half of the sixth century.⁵⁰ Nine bishops signed the canons and among them *Marcellus episcopus ecclesiae Naronitanae* is in the seventh position.⁵¹ If the proposal of hierarchical order is correct, then Naronna seems to have been at the bottom of the hierarchy. Only two bishoprics, Bestoen (probably in Bosnia around modern Zenica) and Mactaritana (Kotor in Monte Negro), are behind Naronna.⁵² Therefore, Naronna seems to have belonged to the level of less important bishoprics, such as the mentioned above or Skradin which is only one place up. Among the most important there are Salona, Iader (Zadar), Arba (Rab) or Siscia (Sisak). The appearance of Naronna as an unimportant Christian center compared with Salona or Iader will be even more emphasized in the acts of the second synod.

While the first synod dealt with the ecclesiastical discipline, the second synod was about the organization of bishoprics. Bishop of Iader Andrew proposed the reason as establishing new bishoprics for the new synod held on May 4th 533.⁵³ The archbishop Honorius accepted Andrew's proposal and decided to establish three new bishoprics *in Sarsentero* (Mostar or

⁵⁰ Basić, "Pristupna razmatranja," 63.; Škegro, "Akti sabora – analiza," 195.

⁵¹ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 16-17: Naturally, *Honorius archiepiscopus sanctae ecclesiae Salonitanae* is the first on the list, then follows *Andreas episcopus Iadertinae ecclesiae* (bishop of Zadar), *Ticyanus episcopus ecclesiae Arbensis* (bishop of the island of Rab), *Joannes episcopus [ecclesiae] Siscianae* (bishop of Sisak), *Fabricianus episcopus ecclesiae Epitauritanae* (bishop of Cavtat), *Constantinus episcopus ecclesiae Scardotinae* (Skradin), *Marcellus episcopus ecclesiae Naronitanae* (Naronna), *Andreas episcopus Bestoensis ecclesiae* (probably near Zenica) and *Victor episcopus ecclesiae Mactaritanae* (probably Kotor), after bishops there are several priests and monks who also signed the canons. It can be easily noticed that the list was not done according to geographical key, therefore the explanation that behind the list there was a key of significance of every bishopric seems to be the most plausible.

⁵² Ante Škegro, "The Bestoen bishopric in the light of prior research," *Arheološki vestnik* 56 (2005): 385-386 has located Bestoen bishopric on the territory of Rama, upper Vrbas, Lašva valley and around Zenica.; Ante Škegro, "Maktaritanska/Martaritanska biskupija (ecclesia Mactaritana/Martaritana) u svjetlu dosadašnjih istraživanja" [The Diocese of Mactaris/Martaris (Ecclesia Mactaritana / Martaritana) in the Light of Prior Research], *Bosna franciscana* 32 (2010): 136 has identified the modern-day Kotor in Monte Negro with the bishopric of Mactaritana.

⁵³ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 18: *Post iterum atque iterum Lampadii et Oresti sumens [consulatus] sub die IIII nonis Maias, facto sacerdotali concilio, Andreas vir venerabilis Iadertinae ecclesiae episcopus, dixit (...)*

Stolac), *Muccuro* (modern Makarska) *et Ludro* (it cannot be identified).⁵⁴ The major changes in the organization of bishoprics happened in the Neretva region or in the bordering area.

The most important change in the Neretva region is establishing the bishopric in Muccur.⁵⁵ Muccur is not known only from this source: the town is also attested in Procopius's Gothic Wars (from the middle of the sixth century),⁵⁶ and in the Cosmography of Anonymous from Ravenna (written in the eighth or the ninth century, but on the basis of sources from the fifth or the sixth century) where it is called *Aronia id est Muccur*.⁵⁷ Thus, for the town itself acts are not the only source which confirm its existence, however, the acts are the only source that confirms that a bishopric was established there, whose first bishop was Stephen.⁵⁸ The bishopric received areas that had belonged to Naronia and Salona: from the Poljica territory east of the modern-day Split following the coast to the south of Makarska towards the delta of the Neretva, with the islands off the coast: Brač and Hvar.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 19.; Ante Škegro, "The Diocese of Ludrum," *Povijesni prilozi* 32 (2007): 14-18.

⁵⁵ Ante Škegro, "Mukurska biskupija," 15-16: There are two assumed places of the location of Muccur: Makarska and a village above Makarska called Makar. However, the number of archaeological finds support the ubication in Makarska.

⁵⁶ Procopius of Caesarea, *History of the Wars vol. IV*, transl. H.B. Dewing, (London: William Heinemann, 1924). 464-467.: for the year 549 Procopius wrote that Indulf, while leading the Gothic expedition to Dalmatia, sacked Μορίκουρον.; For more information on the Procopius's work see Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the sixth century*, (Barkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 134-151.

⁵⁷ *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia er Gvidonis Geographica*, ed.: M. Pinder and G. Parthey, (Berlin: 1860) IV 16 pp. 209.; Škegro, "Mukurska biskupija," 14 has proposed that the place *Inaronia* on Tabula Peutingeriana is also Makarska basing his conclusion on the similarity of *Inaronia* with *Aronia id est Muccur* from the Cosmography. However, the geographical position of *Inaronia* does not correspond to the position of Makarska, for *Inaronia* is on the Tabula situated in between the rivers Žrnovnica and Cetina close to modern Omiš, while Makarska is to the south of the Cetina river estuary. Thus, the identification of *Inaronia* from Tabula Peutingeriana with Muccur is not acceptable. For the work of Anonymous of Ravenna see: Franz Staab, "Ostrogothic Geographers at the Court of Theodoric the Great a Study of some Sources of the Anonymous Cosmographer of Ravenna," *Viator* 7 (1976): 27-58.

⁵⁸ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 19.; Basić: "Pristupna razmatranja," 60 see especially footnote 9: With Stephen is connected a discovery of an epigraphic inscription thought to have had his name inscribed in it, however the inscription seems to have been a forgery from the eighteenth century that Stephen, who was the bishop of Makarska at that time, made after hearing about the synodal acts.

⁵⁹ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 20: *Muccuritanus autem episcopus se montanorum, delminense Onestinum, Salonitanum quoque dumtaxat quidquid in insulis continentur, vel trans Oneum noscitur esse divisium, quod Continens appellatur.*; Škegro, "Mukurska biskupija," 17-24.; Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 350.

It is telling that the bishopric of Narona was the worst affected by the new organization, for the bishopric of Sarsenterum was mostly in the former territory of the bishopric of Narona.⁶⁰ Thus, Narona seems to have lost the most of its territory, and during the whole process of establishing new bishoprics and giving them their territories, the bishop of Narona was silent according to the acts. Thus, it seems that Narona at that time was very insignificant in the church hierarchy of Dalmatia, so insignificant that its bishop said nothing or at least was not allowed to say anything while his territory was divided.

So far, I have emphasized mostly power relations that can be deduced from the source. To understand better why the new bishoprics were established we have to look closer at the problems addressed in the second synod, for the bishop of Iader explicitly stated that because of the distance of some local churches (*parochias*) some people could not receive confirmation.⁶¹ Thus, it seems that the bishop of Narona was not able to control his own bishopric, and I would go even further and suggest that he was not able to Christianize the whole territory of his bishopric. To speed up the spreading of the religion, the synodal fathers decided to divide Narona's territory into three bishoprics. The fact that the bishop could not control his own territory should not be so surprising, for it was a very diverse territory, stretching from the island of Mljet on the sea, up to the modern-day Mostar.⁶² One bishop could not easily control and lead Christianization of such a large territory. There is also a possibility that the new bishoprics were established because Christianization was intensive by this time,

⁶⁰ The exact location of Sarsenterum is still being debated: Ivica Puljić and Ante Škegro, "Sarsenterska biskupija" [Diocese of Sarsenterum], *Povijesni prilozi* 30 (2006): 39 argue that the location of Sarsenterum was in modern-day Stolac in the eastern Hercegovina. However, Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 255-256, 347 argues for locating Sarsenterum near the modern-day Mostar. Vučić's opinion seems more plausible for on Potok near Mostar, where he locates Sarsenterum, there are traces of several late antique churches, while in Stolac no late antique church has been discovered so far, although the town is archaeologically well researched. Also, the location of the bishopric in modern-day Stolac would be awkward for then it would be on the margin of bishopric's territory according to both Vučić and Škegro which would be very impractical because one of the reasons why new bishoprics were established was the easier control of the territory for every bishop.

⁶¹ Škegro and Dodig, "Akti sabora," 18: ... *quia in tanta distensione locorum rarius consignationem chrismatis populus renatus adsequitur.*

⁶² Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 350.

and more bishops were needed to take care of it. However, all these assumptions are not necessarily in conflict, all of them together might have motivated the establishing of the new bishoprics.

1.4 'Dark Ages'

After the synods, the information about the development of Christianity in the Neretva region disappeared. However, some peripheral notes about the territory exist in the sources.⁶³ Something similar happened in the entire eastern Adriatic coast. After the beginning of the seventh century and a short notice in *Liber pontificalis* about Pope John IV sending Abbot Martin to buy off the relics of martyrs from the hands of the pagans, Dalmatia was shrouded in silence.⁶⁴ And the silence was persistent until the end of the eighth century when the Dalmatian bishops partook in the ecumenical council of Nicaea in 787.⁶⁵ However, in both cases nothing can be concluded for certain about the Neretva region from these two sources.

Probably the development in the Neretva region was similar to other parts of Dalmatia, new populations were arriving to Dalmatia, while the late antique governing system of Dalmatia was collapsing.⁶⁶ It is impossible to give an approximation of the number of newcomers, and how many members of late antique local society survived, thus this type of approximation should be avoided. However, the Neretva region probably went through the same process as the rest of Dalmatia. The question is whether the same processes resulted in the same development regarding Christianity.

⁶³ *Ravennatis Anonymi*, 208, 209, 210, 380; Procopisu, *History of the Wars IV*, 464, 465.

⁶⁴ *The Book of Pontiffs*, 64-65; Vedriš, "Pokrštavanje i rana kristijanizacija," 178.; Basić, "Sjeverna i srednja Dalmacija," 434.

⁶⁵ Radoslav Katičić, "Imena dalmatinskih biskupija i njihovih biskupa u aktima ekumenskog koncila u Niceji godine 787." [The Names of Dalmatian Bishops and of Their Bishops in the Acts of the Ecumenical Council in Nicaea of 787], in: *Uz početke hrvatskih početaka* [Roots of Croatian roots], (Split: Književni krug, 1993), 25-35.

⁶⁶ Basić, "Sjeverna i srednja Dalmacija," 430-435; Trpimir Vedriš, "Crkva i vjerski život" [Church and Religious Life], in: *Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu*, ed: Zrinka Nikolić-Jakus, (Zagreb: Matica Hrvatska, 2015), 203-205.; Vedriš, "Pokrštavanje i rana kristijanizacija," 181-185.

1.5 Early Middle Ages

The Neretva region in the ninth century appeared as a territory under the rule of a Slavic tribe known to us mostly from the writing of Venetian chronicler John the Deacon from the end of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century. He consistently addressed the population of the territory as *Sclavi Narrentani* or *Narrentani*,⁶⁷ while on one occasion their ruler was called *Drosaico dux Marianorum*, i.e. Družak duke of the Marians (people of the sea).⁶⁸ Thus, the writer of the chronicle presents us the population of the Neretva region as a separate identity in Dalmatia during the early Middle Ages, who were in constant war with the Venetians because of piracy.

The same author preserved only one short sentence regarding the problem of Christianity/Christianization of the territory. For the year 830 he wrote: *Circa haec tempora missus Sclavorum de insula Narrentis ad domum Johannem ducem veniens, ab eo baptizatus est, pacem cum eo instituens, licet minime perdurasset*.⁶⁹ At the same time this is the first information about the population and the territory for the period of the early Middle Ages. John the Deacon presented the emissary as a non-Christian who had to be baptized. Probably the baptism was connected with the validity of the treaty. And, if the treaty lasted for a short time, probably the baptism had the same effect. After this news, John said nothing more about the religious picture, although he wrote at length about constant fights between the Narrentani and the Venetians.

It is not easy to give a satisfactory interpretation of this short sentence. Nevertheless, the territory seems not to have been Christianized, at least completely, at the beginning of the ninth century, for this seems the most plausible explanation for the doge's act. Therefore, if we give enough relevance to this short sentence, the Neretva region comes out of the "Dark Ages"

⁶⁷ Rački, *Documenta*, 335, 366, 374-375, 399-400, 425, 427.

⁶⁸ Rački, *Documenta*, 335.

⁶⁹ Rački, *Documenta*, 334: "Around that time an emissary from the Narrentani island came to the Doge John, and the emissary was baptized by the doge, he made peace treaty with the doge, however it lasted for a short period."

as a territory where the continuity of Christianity might have been interrupted. However, to judge whether this explanation has enough strength we have to look at other sources from the early Middle Ages and how they described the territory.

*But the Pagani, who are called Arentani in Roman tongue, were left unbaptized, in an inaccessible and precipitous part of the country.*⁷⁰ These words are believed to be written by emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenite, and taken like this they talk obviously in favor of the opinion that the Narrentani were pagans in the early Middle Ages. However, the sentence is part of a larger chapter, and to give a proper interpretation it is necessary to establish a wider context of where it was written, what is behind the work in which this sentence is, and what is a wider political context.

Constantine Porphyrogenite wrote *De administrando imperio* for his son, if we are to believe his own words in the opening lines: *Constantine in the Christ the eternal emperor, emperor of the Romans to his son Romanus the emperor crowned of God and born in purple.*⁷¹ Therefore, the work seems to have been an introduction to his son on how to deal with the Empire's neighbors. To do its task, the work had to be a good diplomatic treatise, thus the emperor seems to have collected data from various sources, and this seems to be the case especially for Dalmatia.⁷² However, it was not simply collecting information, it was also molding it to serve the Constantinople's agenda, to strengthen the claim for Dalmatia as an integral part of the empire, to approve a possible re-conquest of Dalmatia.⁷³ These are the ideological and political circumstances in which the emperor wrote his work. Thus, to interpret

⁷⁰ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 126-127: Οἱ δὲ Παγανοὶ, οἱ καὶ τῇ Ρωμαίῳ διαλέκτῳ Ἀρεντανοὶ καλούμενοι, εἰς δυσβάτους τόπους καὶ χρεμνοδεῖς κατελείφθησαν ἀβάπτιστοι.

⁷¹ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 44, 45.

⁷² Danijel Džino, "Pričam ti priču: ideološko-narativni diskursi o dolasku Hrvata u *De administrando imperio*" [Storytelling: Ideological-narrative discourses on the Croat Migrations in *De administrando imperio*], *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest* 42 (2010): 155.

⁷³ Džino, "Pričam ti priču," 154-155.

what he said about the Neretva region, i.e. Paganía, we have to take in account these circumstances.⁷⁴

For Constantine every *Sclavinia* that existed on the eastern Adriatic coast was inside the territory that used to be part of the Empire, and thus the emperor still had a right to it, and even the Slavs were there only because of the approval of the Roman emperor and the Empire.⁷⁵ However, since he established a direct link with the emperor's approval only with the Serbs (*Σέρβλοι*) and the Croats (*Χροβάτοι*) he had to fit in other Slavic identities in the eastern Adriatic coast. Thus, he labelled all of them as Serbs who accepted the same agreement at the same time as other Serbs did.⁷⁶ Having done this, he managed to encompass every *Sclavinia* in his narrative. Therefore, when reading and interpreting what Constantine said about Paganía, we should always have in mind the broader context. The same applies for when we focus only on what he said about Christianity, i.e. the religious identity of the population.

I began this part of the text, focusing on Constantine's work, with the sentence where the emperor wrote that the population of Paganía did not accept Christianity at the time when the other Slavs did, after they had asked Emperor Basil to send them missionaries. However, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenite continued, later leaders of the Narrentani asked emperor Basil to send them missionaries for Narrentani to accept Christianity, thus they were also baptized.⁷⁷ Although they accepted Christianity soon after other Slavs, during the reign of Emperor Basil, nevertheless they kept the label of being pagans, thus they were called the Pagani by all other Slavs in Dalmatia.⁷⁸ In chapter 36 of his work which is dedicated to Paganía and is entitled *On the Pagani, also called Arentani, and of the country they now dwell in*, he

⁷⁴ Paganía is mentioned in four different chapters in: Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio* 29 (124-127), 30 (144-145), 31 (150-151) and 36 (164-165).

⁷⁵ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*: This is most striking in the stories about the arrival of Croats in the chapter 31 where the Croats asked emperor Heraclius whether they could come and settle down in Dalmatia (146-149); and Serbs who also, according to Constantine in the chapter 32, asked emperor Heraclius if they can settle down around Belgrade (152-153).

⁷⁶ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 152-153.

⁷⁷ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 126-127.

⁷⁸ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 126-127.

repeated that they are called Pagani because they did not accept Christianity at the time when other Serbs did, and that it means ‘pagans’ in the Slavic language, while the Romans from Dalmatia called them Arentani.⁷⁹

However, this story seems to be very unusual on several levels. Firstly, the emphasis on Basil as the one who was responsible for baptizing the Slavs seems to have served as an obvious agenda, showing the emperor as bringing salvation to the ‘savages’, thus keeping the right to the territory for Constantinople, not only because the Slavs had settled in Dalmatia with the emperor’s approval, but they also gained salvation due to the emperor. Secondly, Christianization is shown as a very simple process that could be accomplished quickly. However, if we compare this with the experiences of other early medieval regions and societies the process was usually gradual and faced some resistance.⁸⁰ And thirdly, Constantine stated that the population of Pagania received its name because they were ‘pagans’ longer than other Slavs, however had they accepted Christianity during the reign of Emperor Basil, there would have not been enough time to construct an identity based on their religious affiliation. In order to show that the Empire had the right to its former territory, now in the hands of the Pagani, he had to establish the same narrative of how Basil was responsible for their Christianization.

Constantinople probably encouraged missions to the Slavs on the eastern Adriatic coast, such as sending Constantine and Methodius to Moravia.⁸¹ However, the process probably did not happen the way Constantine described it. For him it was important to show that the Roman

⁷⁹ Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 164-165. Περὶ τῶν Παγανῶν, τῶν καὶ Ἀρεντανῶν καλουμένων, καὶ ἧς νῦν οἰκοῦσι χώρας

⁸⁰ See Nora Berend, “Introduction”, in: ed. Nora Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 23-25.; for Hungary Nora Berend, Jozsef Laszlovszky and Bela Zsolt Szakacs, “The kindom of Hungary,” in: ed. Nora Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 319-368, especially ppg. 339-340 for resistance and conclusion on ppg. 359.; for Moravia: Petr Sommer, Dušan Treštík and Josef Zemlička, “Bohemia and Moravia,” in: ed. Nora Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 214-262, especially conclusion on 251-252.

⁸¹ Francis Dvornik, *Byzantine Missions among the Slavs: SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University press, 1970), 105-130.

Empire and the emperor were still responsible for the good things happening in Dalmatia, like Christianization. Thus, he tried to present the population of Pagania as Christianized already in the ninth century, at the time when other Slavs accepted Christianity. However, his chronology for the whole Dalmatia is false, for the process of Christianization began in Croatia before Basil's reign, as we can observe from the cooperation between rulers of Croatia and the Church. Croatia was situated on the eastern Adriatic coast, from the Cetina river to the peninsula of Istria according to Constantine VII Porphyrogenite, with the center in between the Zrmanja and Cetina rivers, thus it was Pagania's neighbor.⁸² Also, Constantine could have claimed that Basil was responsible for Christianization to 'cover up' the fact that the first successful wave of Christianization was due to the effort of the Franks as early as the first half of the ninth century.⁸³

However, the process, which testifies to Christianization, that can be observed in early medieval Croatia, especially in its center between the Zrmanja and Cetina rivers, is not present in Pagania. While in Croatia the connection between the ruling elites and the Church seems to have been present, thus showing a similar pattern to other East-Central European medieval countries in the tenth or eleventh century,⁸⁴ the same evidence for Pagania does not exist. Namely, in the first half of the ninth century the Croatian Duke Trpimir established connections with the bishop of Split,⁸⁵ in the second half of the same century Duke Branimir helped with financing the construction of churches, and his name has been discovered on five inscriptions all connected with church architecture. Furthermore, a lively correspondence between Branimir

⁸² Moravcsik and Jenkins, *De administrando imperio*, 144-147.

⁸³ Trpimir Vedriš, "Pokršćavanje i rana kristijanizacija," 197-198 states that the first initial Christianization in medieval Dalmatia was at the beginning of the ninth century, and the elites used the process for establishing state.

⁸⁴ Berend, Laszlovszky and Szakacs, "The kindom of Hungary," 359; Sommer, Treštuk and Zemlička, "Bohemia and Moravia," 251-252.; Vedriš, "Pokršćavanje i rana kristijanizacija," 197-198.

⁸⁵ *Codex Diplomaticus I*, 3-8

and Pope John VIII has survived.⁸⁶ The elites (*župani* and others) showed the same attitude towards the Church, building churches etc.⁸⁷

In the tenth century king Tomislav was involved in disputes discussed in church synods held in Split in 925 and 928, together with Michael, duke of Zahumlje, for which reason Pope John X sent a letter addressed to both.⁸⁸ Thus, we have evidence that the same cooperation between the Church and ruling elites happened on the southern border of Paganian in the first half of the tenth century. However, Paganian seems to have been out of all these processes connected with the intertwine of Christianization and state formation. Therefore, all this seems to point to a different development.

What could have been the different development in Paganian? As stated above, the connection of the process of Christianization and of state building in the early Middle Ages has been well researched, even though for the eastern Adriatic coast some further explanations are needed.⁸⁹ Naturally, Christianity, as some other scholars have shown, was not the only religion that could be used to create either an identity or a state.⁹⁰ The case of Polabian Slavs is well known today, and they seem to have used their ‘paganism’ as a strategy of distinction from their neighbors and at the same time to create a medieval state.⁹¹ Therefore, religion, whether Christianity or other, could be used to create a distinction in identity.

⁸⁶ Mirjana Matijević Sokol, *Branimirova Hrvatska u pismima pape Ivana VIII* [Branimir's Croatia in the Letters by pope John VIII], (Split: Književni krug, 1990²), 47-52, 73.-77; For inscriptions see: Vedrana Delonga, *Latinski epigrafički spomenici u ranosrednjovjekovnoj Hrvatskoj* [Latin Epigraphic Inscriptions from Early Medieval Croatia], (Split: MHAS, 1996), 123, 166, 207-208, 217-218, 251-252.

⁸⁷ Delonga, *Epigrafički spomenici*, 56, 93, 192-193, 209-210, 219-220, 588-589.

⁸⁸ *Codex Diplomaticus I*, 33-35

⁸⁹ Vedriš, “Pokršćavanje i rana kristijanizacija,” 197-198.

⁹⁰ Christian Luebke, “Christianity and Paganism as Elements of Gentile Identities to the East of the Elbe and Saale Rivers,” in: ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary and Przemysław Urbańczyk, *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 189-203.; Przemysław Urbanczyk and Stanisław Rosik, “The kingdom of Poland, with an Appendix on Polabia and Pomerania between paganism and Christianity,” in: ed. Nora Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c. 900-1200*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 300-308.

⁹¹ Luebke, “Christianity and Paganism,” 189-203.; Urbanczyk and Rosik, “The kingdom of Poland,” 300-308.

I would offer the following narrative regarding the events in Paganía. The reason why they were called Pagani (pagans) and why we have no traces of a similar connection between the ruling elites and the Church is because they used their non-Christianity as a way of distinction, and of creating their identity and the early medieval state. Thus, no one from Paganía took part in the synods of Split in 925 and 928. That is the reason why there is no mention of any bishopric from this territory in the synodal acts or in any other source connected with the synods. It might have been a reason why, although the pope sent the letter to the king of Croatia and to the duke of Zahumlje, he did not send a letter to a member of the ruling elites of Paganía.

It is telling when we compare the synodal acts of Salona from 530 and 533 with the sources of the synods of Split from 925 and 928 that the bishoprics kept their tradition from the sixth to the tenth century. All bishoprics situated on the eastern Adriatic coast, or near it survived, or at least their memory survived, except for two: Naroná and Muccur. Namely, the tradition of Epidaur survived in Ragusa, of Salona in Split, Scardona is mentioned as a bishopric in documents related to the synods of 925 and 928, Iader survived in the same place, Siscia is also mentioned, and Arba is present in the sources.⁹² Additionally, on the territory of Zahumlje, a bishopric was established in Ston in the tenth century.⁹³ Thus, the Church organization on the territory of Paganía seems to have disappeared somewhere between the sixth and the ninth century, and it was not reestablished.

Sources for Christianity in Paganía during the ninth and the tenth century are scarce, nevertheless they depict the territory as if out of the Christendom. The overall picture is even more emphasized when it is compared with bordering territories, i.e. Croatia and Zahumlje. In both of this *Sclavinias* the ruling elites and the Church were intertwined, thus the process of

⁹² *Codex Diplomaticus I*, 37.

⁹³ *Codex Diplomaticus I*, 37.

Christianization and the process of state forming were fused. However, the same development does not seem to have been present in Pagania. I suggest that this is due to the fact that Narrentani used ‘paganism’ as a strategy of distinction from their neighbors, therefore they did not cooperate with the Church and did not encourage the process of Christianization.

This attitude, however, seems to have changed during the eleventh century in favor of Christianity. The last source from the early Middle Ages that we possess is a document from 1050 depicting the ruler of Narrentani, called *iudex* and *rex Marianorum*, when priest John donated his church on the island of Biševo near the island of Lastovo to the monastery of the Virgin Mary on the archipelago of Tremiti.⁹⁴ Together with *iudex/rex* Berigoy there were other members of the ruling elites, i.e. three *župani* *Radabano*, *Bodidrago* and *Sedrago*, and *Tichano settinico* (probably army commander).⁹⁵ Thus, in the eleventh century the ruling elites of Narrentani appear to have cooperated with the Church.

The partakers in the event are from Split (priest John), Tremiti and Pagania, and this might point to the fact that the ruling elites tried to keep their independence by bypassing *Sclavinias* on the eastern Adriatic coast. Even though they might have decided to accept Christianization of the territory, nevertheless they wanted to preserve their identity. On the one hand, by accepting the arrival of Christianity from the territory of neighboring *Sclavinias*, especially Croatia and Zahumlje, they would accept the stronger political influence. On the other hand, accepting Christianization from other centers might have been a reaction to the already strong influence from neighboring *Sclavinias*. Unfortunately, the sources that could help us to decipher what happened have not survived. Thus, except for the fact that the ruling elites began cooperating with the Church in the middle of the eleventh century, we know nothing more. Very soon, by the end of the eleventh century, Pagania would become a part of

⁹⁴ *Codex Diplomaticus I*, 78-79: The writer of the document addressed Berigoy as *rex Marianorum*, while Berigoy subscribed himself as *iudex Maranorum*.

⁹⁵ *Codex Diplomaticus I*, 79.

its neighbor *Sclavinia* Croatia, and subsequently of the Hungary-Croatian Kingdom, while traces of the population's different religious identity were disappearing.

2. Archaeological evidence

Having examined the written sources in the previous chapter, in the present chapter I will classify the archaeological evidence and compare it with the written sources. I will demonstrate that archaeological finds from the region discussed in this thesis can be interpreted so that they correspond to what I have concluded from the written sources. However, in some respects, especially in relation to the case of the island of Brač archaeological finds do not seem to support written sources, and consequently the interpretation of them needs more complex analysis.

At the beginning of the present chapter, I will offer an overview of the state of research, i.e. I will list the most important works about archaeology and church architecture for the territory in question, for both Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Subsequently, I will examine the beginnings of Christianity in the Neretva region according to the dating of archaeological finds that are unquestionably Christian, i.e. churches and their liturgical furniture, stone decoration and sarcophagi with distinguishing Christian markings (sign of the cross, XP sign, inscription with Christian content etc.).

Having established the starting point, or the first unquestionable attestation of Christianity, I will offer archaeological picture of Christianization. Furthermore, I will provide an account of the development of Christianization in the region, beginning with the first unquestionable attestation of the Christian presence there. The next section of the chapter is about the archaeology of the early Middle Ages. I will examine the archaeological finds for every part of the region, thus offering a possible interpretation of the development of Christianity according to archaeological finds. Finally, I will give to the island of Brač a more thorough attention, in both Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, for it appears to offer a different situation than the rest of the region.

As usual with archaeological finds, there is problem of interpretation. The fact that an artefact has a Christian sign on it does not mean that the person who used or produced it was a Christian. This is especially the case with every-day objects that were frequently used, such as olive-lamps. However, certain archeological finds with Christian signs allow us to hypothesize that their users or buyers were Christians. The most important finds in this category are sarcophagi, but caution is necessary in this case because sometimes a Christian symbol might have been added decades or even centuries after the sarcophagus had been made. A similar problem appears with other finds, thus whenever there is an inscription with Christian markings, it is important to confirm that those were an integral part of the inscription, and not a later addition.

I have faced another problem, namely uncritically identifying many finds as Christian. For instance, sometimes a menorah is identified as a Christian symbol, and thus used as a sign of the presence of Christian community.⁹⁶ Hence, my goal was to examine every artefact that seemed to be doubtful. However, my work was much easier due to the healthy skepticism exercised in the works of Branka Migotti, Joško Belamarić and Jakov Vučić, for I have faced the problem of ‘everything is Christian’ only outside their works.

Before analyzing the data, several remarks on the state of the research and literature are indispensable. For Late Antiquity, there are several works that aim at collecting all available data for different parts of the territory. The only exception is the island of Hvar where a thorough research is still needed. I am not familiar with any work that attempts to collect all available data about Late Antiquity, and consequently about the beginnings of Christianity on that island. Hence, I have mostly relied on one monograph and several articles for collecting data about the island.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ For example, see: Škegro, “Naronitanska biskupija,” 31 the comment under the image 7a, showing an olive oil lamp with a menorah, says: “Early Christian olive oil lamp (lucerna) from Mogorjelo (according to Marijanović).”

⁹⁷ Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, *Ranokrscanske dvojne crkve u Starom Gradu na Hvaru* [Early Christian twin churches in Stari Grad on the island of Hvar], (Split: Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika – Split, 1994).; Nikša Perić,

As for the rest of the territory, Jakov Vučić's PhD dissertation covers the major part of the region.⁹⁸ However, since he has excluded the islands of Brač and Hvar, I have consulted Branka Migotti's PhD dissertation, and Joško Belamarić's book to obtain relevant data regarding Brač.⁹⁹ These works combined present almost all available data about Christian archeological finds from Late Antiquity on the island. Also, it is worth noting Emilio Marin's *Forum Naronitanum* which is valuable for Naron, even though the central point of the book is not Christianity in Naron, but the city forum with its pagan temple.¹⁰⁰ The fate of the temple, however, can tell us more about the nature of Christianity, its expression and the beginnings of the Christian religion in this region.

For anybody who wants to deal with pre-Romanesque churches in Dalmatia, the starting point of their research must be Tomislav Marasović's *Dalmatia prearomanica* in four volumes.¹⁰¹ The author has collected all known pre-Romanesque churches in Dalmatia, from Istria in the north to Kotor in the south, categorizing them with short notes on dating, formal features etc. However, work of such a formidable scope inevitably has certain shortcomings. In order to avoid them, I have consulted articles that deal with particular churches on the basis of their typology or geographical position.

2.1 Late Antiquity

From its outset, Christianity was an urban movement, thus it seems appropriate to search for the first traces of Christianity in Neretva region in the most significant Roman urban centers of the Neretva region. Naron stands out as the most important and the largest urban

“Crkve od 5. do 13. stoljeća na području grada Hvara [Churches from the 5th to the 13th centuries in the area of the town of Hvar]” *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 32 (1991): 181-92.

⁹⁸ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*

⁹⁹ Branka Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija na području između Zrmanje i Cetine* [Early Christian Topography between the rivers Zrmanja and Cetina] (Ph.D. diss.), (University of Zagreb, 1991).; Joško Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici otoka Brača* [Early Christian Monuments on the Island of Brač], (Split: Regionalni zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture – Split, 1994).

¹⁰⁰ Emilio Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*, (Vid: Arheološki muzej Naron, 2017).

¹⁰¹ Tomislav Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica 4 vols.*, (Split: Književni krug, 2008-2013).

center, and it seems to have been the only genuine city of the region. The second important urban center was Muccur (modern-day Makarska) where the bishopric was established in the sixth century. The modern-day Stari Grad was also a minor urban center situated on the island of Hvar. These three were the major and the only properly urbanized settlements in the Neretva region in Late Antiquity. Several other urban centers can also be taken into consideration that did not form part of the geographical region in question, but belonged to Naronā: *Sarsenterum* (near modern-day Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina), Ston, Slano and *Novae* (modern-day Runovići near Imotski). As such, they shed light on the development of Christianity in Naronā.

As indicated above, the most important urban center was Naronā. The city seems to have acquired the status of colony during the end of the first century BCE or during the first half of the first century of CE. Its status was connected to the Octavian Augustus family, thus in the first century a temple dedicated to him and his family was erected in the Forum, thus the name of the temple is Augusteum. The temple is thought to have been destroyed around the year 400, after the edict of Theodosius, and that it might have happened due to the zeal of Christians.¹⁰² Starting with Emilio Marin, Croatian archaeologists have suggested that in the same period, the first churches were erected as part of the urban changes.¹⁰³ However, recently Marin has reexamined the archaeological finds and proposed to date churches to the fifth century, which seems to correspond more with the available data, and has thus abandoned the possibility that they were constructed at the end of the fourth century.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Zrinka Buljević, "Njive-Podstrana: groblje iz vremena seobe naroda u Naroni [Njive-Podstrana: The Cemetery dated back to the Migration times in Naronā]", *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju Dalmatinsku* 90-91 (1997-1998): 251-52; Emilio Marin, "Naronitanski Augusteum i arheološka istraživanja u Naroni 1988. – 2001." [Naronā's Augusteum and Archaeological Researches in Naronā 1988-2001], *Arheološka istraživanja u Naroni i dolini Neretve, Izdanja HADA* 22, ed. Emilio Marin, (Zagreb: HAD, 2003), 12, 15. proposes that the destruction of the temple happened due to the political change after the edict of Theodosius, however this explanation appears very similar to Buljević's interpretation, for in both cases the interpretation aims at the religious and political change, thus putting the blame for the destruction on Christian community.

¹⁰³ Marin, "Naronitanski Augusteum," 12.; Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 306.

¹⁰⁴ Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*, 120-121.

Unfortunately, the archaeological finds reveal little or almost nothing about the nature of the Christian community in Naron. However, the proposal that the pagan temple, which was established in the first century CE as a center of the imperial cult, might have been destroyed by Christians seems to suggest that the community was aggressive towards non-Christians. I disagree with such interpretation on two levels, firstly I do not think that the temple was destroyed as violently as it is claimed, and secondly, I do not think that a Christian community destroyed it after the edict of Theodosius.

There are two main reasons to dismiss the violent destruction theory. Firstly, there is no decisive archaeological evidence that the temple was destroyed, the hypothesis relies on the interpretation of the state of the temple during the excavations. The damage that can be seen cannot be dated for certain to the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the fifth, and furthermore it cannot be ascribed to the outburst of religious violence, nor can they be for sure dated to a certain short period, or a single violent event. Rather, the temple seems to have lost its religious importance and the citizens ceased using it. During the fifth century they gradually began using the temple's material as spolia precisely because the religious importance of the building had disappeared.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the temple was slowly dismantled from the middle-fifth century onward. This explanation is strengthened by the fact that in the sixth century the temple and forum were reused as a burial site, which shows again that the original use of the space disappeared.¹⁰⁶

Secondly, the assumption that the temple could be destroyed due to Theodosius's edict does not correspond to the situation in other Dalmatian towns, as Migotti has shown examining traces of possible destruction of temples in the territory between the rivers Zrmanja and Cetina,

¹⁰⁵ Pierfrancesco Porena, "Ipotesi Sulla Fine Dell'Augusteum di Naron," in: *L'Augusteum di Naron*, ed.: Giuseppe Zecchini, (Roma: "L'erma" di Bretschneider, 2013), 209-210; Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*, 120-121 seems to agree with Porena, however Marin leaves the possibility of destruction because of hatred still open even though he has not specified who could express the hatred, mentioning only that it could have happen because of "hate or revenge towards the old idols (...)." ¹⁰⁶ Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*, 98-115.

paying special attention to urban centers such as Zadar or Split.¹⁰⁷ The archaeological evidence is insubstantial to allow the conclusion that in any Dalmatian city a Christian community was violent and that it destroyed pagan cultic buildings. Thus, accepting the proposal that the Christians destroyed the *Augusteum* would mean to accept that the Christian community in Narona, which was smaller than Christian communities in other towns especially in Salona, was an exception in Dalmatia. Furthermore, researches have shown that Theodosius's edict did not have such a decisive impact on the destruction of temples, especially in the western part of the Roman Empire.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, I maintain that there is no reason to accept the interpretation that the temple was destroyed in a single violent act, moreover that it was destroyed by a Christian community. Thus, we should not see the beginning of Christianity in Narona and its region as a violent beginning.

The churches of St Vitus and the so-called Popričica in Narona are considered the oldest churches on the territory of the bishopric of Narona. Although for a long time they were dated to the end of the fourth century, recently the dating has been altered due to the lack of finds that could undoubtedly confirm such an early chronology.¹⁰⁹ Thus, according to the archaeology of the churches, the roots of Christianity in this region go back to the fifth century. Furthermore, in Narona we can establish the presence of the Christian community up until the seventh century, when the last late antique church at Erešove Bare was erected.¹¹⁰ Later, the

¹⁰⁷ Branka Migotti, "Antičko-srednjovjekovni sakralni kontinuitet na području Dalmacije" [The continuity of late antique-early medieval sacred space in Dalmatia], *Opuscula archaeologica* 16 (1992): 225-249. The author concludes that mostly there was a peaceful coexistence and there are no traces of any violent destruction of pagan sites.

¹⁰⁸ For the temples in Gaul, see Goodman: "Similarly, despite vivid literary accounts of temple destruction, it would seem that a small minority of sites actually experienced this fate; far more were left to crumble undisturbed, were demolished for practical reasons or were converted to new functions." Penelope C. Goodman, "Temples in Late Antique Gaul," in *The Archaeology of Late Antique Paganism*, ed. Luke Lavan and Michael Murlyan (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 188. A similar picture can be observed in Hispania see: Javier Arce, "Fana, Tempia, Delubra Destruia Praecipimus: The end of the Temples in Roman Spain," in *The Archaeology of Late Antique Paganism*, ed. Luke Lavan and Michael Murlyan (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 195-208, especially the conclusion of the article 205-206.

¹⁰⁹ Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*, 120-121.

¹¹⁰ Emilio Marin, "Erešove Bare. Villa suburbana iz 3. stoljeća i starokršćanska crkva iz 7. stoljeća u Naroni" [Suburban villa from the third century and early christian church from the seventh century], *Vjesnik za*

urban life in Naronia seems to have declined rapidly and together with it the archaeological finds that could be connected to Christianity disappeared.¹¹¹

Archaeologists have proposed an earlier dating of other finds. Among them the most important are the sarcophagi, however, they are usually dated in long-time periods, such as from the fourth to the fifth or even sometimes to the sixth century.¹¹² Thus, it is not possible to rely on such vague dating to establish the time when Christianity took root. Furthermore, the archeologists might have dated the sarcophagi to such an early date due to the impression that something Christian must have existed on the territory already in the fourth century.¹¹³

I propose, however, a more cautious approach, arguing for not taking in account those sarcophagi for which it is impossible to establish the exact date. The only certain date we possess is for only one sarcophagus, i.e. priest Anastasius's sarcophagus from Slano with an inscription dating it as AD 462.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, another five sarcophagi discovered on the territory of the bishopric of Naronia with distinguishing Christian markings are dated to the fifth century or later.¹¹⁵ On the island of Brač there are several sarcophagi or fragments of sarcophagi with distinguishing Christian markings, such as the sarcophagus from Bunje with an XP sign together with A and Ω, or the two sarcophagi from Škrip with crosses.¹¹⁶ In both

arheologiju i historiju Dalmatinsku 94 (2002): 13, 38, 39. For the detailed explanation of archaeological layers and dating, see Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 73-74, 143-45.

¹¹¹ There are traces of the continuity of life from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages, however, they are rare and scarce, and they show that an urban center decreased to a small settlement. Marin has viewed the continuity of life as evidence for the continuity of the presence of Christianity, even though, as I argue, the finds that confirm the presence of a small settlement in the early Middle Ages do not show any connection with Christianity. See in Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*, 116-19, 121, especially footnote 45.

¹¹² Igor Fisković, "Ranokršćanski sarkofazi s otoka Brača" [Early Christian Sarcophagi on the Island of Brač], *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju dalmatinsku* 75 (1981): 105-35.; Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 265-68.

¹¹³ As shown in the analysis of the story of Venantius in the previous chapter, historians and archaeologists often insist on finding a piece of evidence just to prove an earlier date for the start of Christianity.

¹¹⁴ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 264.; Basić, "Postkonzulat i pars imeprii," 94.

¹¹⁵ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 267. Sometimes sarcophagi without Christian marks are labeled as Christian and dated into the fourth century such as Marturius's sarcophagus from Makarska or a sarcophagus from Ubli on the island of Lastovo. However, the dating of these is also very doubtful, for without a certain chronological marker, i.e. year or very certain archaeological layer, no firm date can be established except one very wide (e.g. from the fourth to the sixth century).

¹¹⁶ Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 91-92.

cases, and in others from Brač, Christian markings seem to belong to the original design, and are not a later addition. However, there is no possibility to date any of them beyond doubt since there is no date engraved in them, as is in the case of Anastasius's sarcophagus. Thus, regarding the churches and the sarcophagi, I maintain that we do not possess any traces of Christianity in the Neretva region before the fifth century, at least we do not have decisive evidence for such a conclusion. Therefore, we should accept that even if there were Christian communities we do not know anything about them.

Having established the period when Christianity appeared in the region, now I will offer the archaeological picture of the development of Christianity in Late Antiquity. I have mapped the churches and archaeological finds. In Map 1 I have marked all late antique churches that are undoubtedly attested. In map 2 I have marked all archaeological finds (sarcophagi, inscriptions, church interior, every-day life with Christian signs, etc.) However, I have decided to exclude those for which we cannot know for sure if the symbol belonged to the original design. This is the case of the island of Vrnik between Korčula and Pelješac where a sarcophagus with a cross was discovered, but the cross was added later because it displays different formal characteristics than the inscription.¹¹⁷ Another example is the inscription discovered in Živogošće near Makarska with several crosses, which are also a later addition.¹¹⁸

Finally, I have also excluded an olive-lamp from Mogorjelo near Čapljina, assessed for an unknown reason as 'Christian' even though there is a menorah on it.¹¹⁹ These three examples show what I have not considered Christian, thus not including in my maps. It is worth mentioning that most of the archaeological finds with Christian symbols are connected with either church architecture or church interior. Therefore, in the Neretva region Christianity is mostly attested through churches.

¹¹⁷ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 105-6, 264.

¹¹⁸ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 30-31.

¹¹⁹ Škegro, "Naronitanska biskupija," 31.

The result of mapping the geographical locations of the finds is revealing. In Map 1, we can observe that the churches are situated mostly in or near the urban centers, such as Naron, Makarska or Ston. A similar pattern is visible in map 2, only the latter includes more geographical locations than the former. Nevertheless, this does not change the general picture: once again finds are located either in urban centers or near them. We can also observe that the number of churches and finds diminishes on the islands of Mljet and Korčula, and the peninsula of Pelješac. Interestingly, these parts of the territory did not even have minor urban centers (such as Makarska or Stari Grad on Hvar), thus the impression of a connection between Christian finds and towns is even more pronounced. On Hvar we can observe a similar pattern – less churches and archaeological finds – however, the island has not been well researched, and in its only urban center Stari Grad, there is a twin church from the sixth century, while other possible late antique churches are not surely confirmed.¹²⁰

Regarding islands, there is a peculiar case in the archipelago between Korčula and Pelješac. On four little islands of Lučnjak, Majsan, Sutvara, Gubavac, which cannot sustain a significant population according to their agricultural capacity, there are four churches.¹²¹ On Majsan, Sutvara and Gubavac, there are traces of quarries, therefore the islands appear to have been the center of stone-masonry for that area.¹²² Such intensive trade could have replaced the lack of urban centers on Korčula and the peninsula of Pelješac, thus offering the place for the center of Christianity for this part of the region.

After observing the geographical locations of the late antique Christian finds and churches, Christianity in the region seems to have been a mostly urban phenomenon.¹²³ Certain parts of the region, like the peninsula of Pelješac, or the islands of Korčula and Mljet, seem to have less Christian finds, thus it is possible that they were territories where Christianity did not

¹²⁰ Petrić, “Crkve od 5. do 13. stoljeća,” 181-186.; Jeličić-Radonić, *Dvojne ckrve*, 37-38

¹²¹ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 102-5.

¹²² Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 103-5.

¹²³ Vučić, *Topografija Naronitanske biskupije*, 287-8.

take deep roots during Late Antiquity. Brač shows a different picture, therefore, as I have already stated, it will be examined separately.

When we compare Naronā and its territory with Salona and its territory, the difference in the number of churches and other markers of Christianity are clear. Salona, as the center of late antique Dalmatia and its Christianity shows earlier traces of Christianity, a more developed Christian community, and higher level in the Christianization of its territory.¹²⁴ And, as I will show, Salona's Christianity had its continuation in Split, while Naronā lost its Christian continuity. Thus, the territory of Naronā shows different patterns than Salona's territory. On the territory in question there are less numerous finds which can be labeled as Christian, either regarding the number of churches or any other artefacts which can be identified as Christian.

What is, in conclusion, the archaeological picture of Christianity in Late Antiquity on the territory of Naronā? The first traces appear to be from the fifth century, and we know nothing about Christianity before that date. The first center where it appeared was probably Naronā, the most important city of the region. During the fifth century it seems to have spread to urban centers like Makarska or Ston, or in the archipelago between Korčula and Pelješac, and later in the sixth century to Stari Grad in Hvar. From there Christianity probably continued to spread to settlements that gravitated to urban centers, like Tučepi near Makarska and others. However, certain areas appear to have never been thoroughly Christianized in this period, like Korčula, Pelješac, the most part of Hvar or even Mljet. Also, when the region is compared with Salona and its territory, the Neretva region seems to have been less Christianized according to the number of Christian finds.

¹²⁴ Chevalier lists churches for all late antique bishoprics in Dalmatia, comparing Naronā and Salona in Pascale Chevalier, *Salona II*, vol. 2, (Split – Rim: Arheološki muzej Split, Ecole française de Rome, 1995), 24.; Migotti lists eighty churches for the bishopric of Salona outside of Salona, however, those from Brač must be excluded. Even this way there are around sixty-eight churches, which is much more than on the territory of Naronā including churches in the city. Branka Migotti, "Tragovi starokršćanskih bazilika na salonitanskom području izvan same Salone" [Traces of early Christian basilicas in the territory of Salona outside of Salona itself], *Salonitansko-splitska crkva u prvom tisućljeću kršćanske povijesti*, ed. Josip Đukić, Slavko Kovačić, Ema Višić-Ljubić (Split: Crkva u svijetu: Splitsko-makarska nadbiskupija, 2008), 351-416.

2.2 Early medieval (dis)continuity

Map 3 shows the number and geographical disposition of pre-Romanesque churches, i.e. those which are erected during the early Middle Ages. In purple I marked those which are earlier than the eleventh century, in black those which show signs of continuity, either early medieval adaptations or just the continuity of sacred space. In the end I marked in blue those which are from the eleventh century or later.

The geographical disposition and the dating of churches is revealing. Excluding Brač from the starting examination, I have listed twenty-seven pre-Romanesque churches. However, there is only one that is dated prior to the eleventh century – St George church in Janjina on Pelješac, although its dating is questionable.¹²⁵ Bjelovučić, who discovered the remains, dated it to the ninth or tenth century, but he did not explain why he thought that it should be from that period.¹²⁶

However, churches that show a certain degree of continuity are more numerous, i.e. there are seven of them: two on Hvar (St Stephen and St John),¹²⁷ one on the island of Šćedro (St Mary's),¹²⁸ one on the island of Majsan in between Pelješac and Korčula,¹²⁹ two on Mljet

¹²⁵ Zvonimir Bjelovučić, "Ruševine crkvice Sv. Jurja u Janjini" [Remains of St George's Church in Janjina], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* II no. 1-2 (1928): 118-122.

¹²⁶ Bjelovučić, "Ruševine crkvice," 119; Miljenko Jurković, "Prilog proučavanju pleterne sculpture na području poluotoka Pelješca" [Contribution to the research of sculpture in the area of the Pelješac Peninsula], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* III no. 13 (1983): 178-79 agrees with Bjelovučić's dating, arguing that formal features of the ornament with the inscription point to the ninth or the tenth century, even though he dates all other similar ornaments, which he claims to be from the same fabric, from Pelješac to the eleventh century. See also: Miljenko Jurković, "Prilog određivanju južnodalmatinske grupe predromaničke sculpture" [Contribution to the definition of the South Dalmatian group of pre-Romanesque sculpture], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 3, no. 15 (1985), 184-88.

¹²⁷ Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica I.*, 173.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica III.*, 579-583.; Radoslav Bužančić, "Rađanje srednjovjekovne arhitekture iz antičkih korijena na otocima srednje Dalmacije [The classical Roots of the Medieval Architecture in the Islands of Central Dalmatia]", in: *Starohrvatska spomenička baština*, ed. Miljenko Jurković and Tugomir Lukšić, (Zagreb: 1996), 344-346.

¹²⁸ Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica I.*, 249.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica III.*, 588-590.

¹²⁹ Igor Fisković, "Prilog proučavanju porijekla predromaničke arhitektura na južnom Jadranu [Contribution to the examination of the roots of pre-Romanesque architecture in the South Adriatic], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 3, no. 15 (1985), 135-138.; Igor Fisković, "Srednjovjekovna preuređenja ranokršćanskih svetišta u dubrovačkom kraju [Medieval adaptation of early Christian sacred Places in the Dubrovnik region], *Arheološka istraživanja u Dubrovniku i dubrovačkom području*, (Zagreb: Izdanja HAD-a, 1988), 193; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica I.*, 255, 258-9.

(Polače and St. Andrew),¹³⁰ and only one on the land (St Andrew near Baćina).¹³¹ Thus, on the whole territory there are eight churches that show either a certain degree of continuity or that were erected earlier than the eleventh century.

One would expect that map number 4 would correspond to map 2, i.e. map 4 would offer geographical locations of early medieval finds with Christian markings. However, there is no such map for a very simple reason. The number of finds from the period with Christian markings is insignificant, i.e. there have been only three such discoveries: Bol on Brač, Janjina and one above Makarska.¹³² This is what we can conclude from the current state of research. Future excavation might reveal something new, however I do not expect a discovery which could significantly alter the picture that we can observe in map 3.

The question is how we can interpret this archaeological picture. To offer the interpretation in the context of (dis)continuity, I will divide the territory in several smaller units, mostly determined by geography, i.e. Hvar, Korčula, Mljet, peninsula Pelješac and the land (the Neretva's delta and Makarska Riviera). In Map 1 there are seven churches in the delta (from Mogorjelo to the estuary), however in Map 3 there is no church that is dated prior to the eleventh century, and only one which shows continuity of usage. However, there are finds from the early medieval period, especially in Mogorjelo and Naron which testify that life continued.¹³³ And, for Makarska Riviera there is no church that shows either signs of continuity or which were erected prior to the eleventh century. Thus, the land part of the Neretva region shows signs of discontinuity from the Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages.

¹³⁰ Fisković, "Srednjovjekovna preurđenja," 200-203;

¹³¹ Tomislav Marasović, "Ranosrednjovjekovne crkve pseudobazilikalnoga tipa u Dalmaciji" [Early medieval churches of the pseudo-basilica type in Dalmatia], *Archaeologia Adriatica* 11. (2008): 564-565.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica I*, 165, 207-8, 260.

¹³² Nikša Jakšić, "Predromanički reljef sa spomenom blaženog Teodora u Bolu na Braču" [Pre-Romanesque relief with St Theodor name in Bol on the island of Brač], *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 25 (1985): 49-61; V. Urlić, *Makarsko primorje* 2. (April of 2013), 25.; Bjelovučić, "Ruševine crkvice," 118-9.; Jurković, „Prilog proučavanju," 178-9.

¹³³ Vladimir Sokol, *Medieval Jewelry and Burial Assemblages in Croatia*, (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 91, 94, 96, 114, 126, 133, 185; Marin and others, *Forum Naronitanum*,

Regarding the islands, on Korčula there are no churches that show either continuity (actually, there is no late antique church architecture at all, see Map 1) or the date of constructing earlier than the eleventh century.¹³⁴ It can be said for Korčula that it shows traces of continuity, but not of Christian, rather the continuity of lack of finds which can be identify as Christian (compare Korčula on Map 1 and Map 3). Pelješac shows the same picture of continuity as Korčula, for on the island there are no significant Christian late antique finds, and the lack of finds continues into the early Middle Ages (compare Pelješac in Maps 1 and 2 with Pelješac in Map 3).¹³⁵ In Map 1 there are four churches that I have mapped on the archipelago in between Pelješac and Korčula, however only one of them shows signs of continuity (church on Majsan), and there is no church which was erected at any point in the early Middle Ages.¹³⁶ The reason why this happened on the archipelago might have been the decline of economy in the seventh century due to which these islands lost their main source of income – stone-masonry, and the population which could have kept churches emigrated from the islands.

However, Hvar and Mljet show higher degrees of continuity. On each island there are two churches that show signs of continuity.¹³⁷ The Hvar situation is even more interesting than just the fact that there are churches which show continuity. Late Antique churches are situated in the small geographical area in the western part of the island, and those which are adapted later are also in this area, where in the eleventh century more pre-Romanesque ones were erected (compare Hvar on Map 1 and Map 3).¹³⁸

¹³⁴ For pre-Romanesque churches on Korčula and their dating see: Igor Fisković, “Crkva sv. Kuzme i Damjana u Zablaću na Korčuli” [The Little Church of St Cosmas and St Damian at Zablaće, on the Island of Korčula], *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti za Dalmaciju* 21 (1980): 159-74.

¹³⁵ For pre-Romanesque churches on Pelješac and their dating see: Igor Fisković, “Tri srednjovjekovne crkvice na Pelješcu [Three small medieval churches on the peninsula of Pelješac], *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 19 (1972): 15-40.

¹³⁶ For the complex on Majsan and early medieval adaptations see: Igor Fisković, “Srednjovjekovna preuređenja,” 200-3.

¹³⁷ For churches on Mljet see: Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica I.*, 165., 167., 171., 172.

¹³⁸ For churches on Hvar see: Jeličić-Radonić, *Dvojne crkve*; Bužančić, „Rađanje srednjovjekovne arhitekture,” 344-346; Perić, “Crkve od 5. do 13. stoljeća,” 181-5.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica III.*, 579-83., 588-90.

However, if we observe more closely where we can find at least some traces of continuity, we can easily notice that it is usually on the peripheral parts of the territory. For example, Mljet is the southernmost point of the region, and it is very close to Dubrovnik where continuity of Christianity is very well attested in both written and archaeological sources. On Hvar we can find traces of continuity on the western part of the island, one which is very close to Brač. However, on Korčula, Pelješac and land; traces of continuity are less numerous, and sometimes, especially in the case of Hvar and Pelješac, they correspond with the lack of Christian finds from Late Antiquity.

2.3 Brač

As already stated, I will pay more attention to the island of Brač, for it shows a number of distinguishing patterns. For that reason, I have provided three maps of the island. They are arranged in the same way as those for the whole region. The first map of Brač (Map 4) shows churches dated to Late Antiquity, Map 5 shows archaeological finds with distinguishing Christian markers, also dated to Late Antiquity, whereas the last map (Map 6) shows pre-Romanesque churches, I have also marked differently those that show continuity and those that are dated prior to the eleventh century.

Late antique churches are mostly situated on the northern side of the island facing the mainland. Generally, they are located in the late antique coastal towns/settlements, such as the church in Povlja,¹³⁹ the church in Stipanska Luka near Pučišća,¹⁴⁰ St Lawrence's at Lovrečina

¹³⁹Ivan Ostojić, "Starokršćanska bazilika s krstionicom i rimski spomenicima u Povljima na otoku Braču" [Early Christian basilica with Roman monuments in Povlja on the island of Brač], *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 12 (1960): 5-24; Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 131-2; Joško Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 17-27.

¹⁴⁰Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 133; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 69-72.

bay,¹⁴¹ St John's in Postira,¹⁴² the church in Supetar¹⁴³ and St John's in Sutivan.¹⁴⁴ The churches that are not located on the coast were still connected with the coastal towns. St Andrew's church near Splitska and the church of the Holy Spirit in Škrip belong to this group. Each was located near a quarry, and the town of Splitska served as a port for the transport of stone.¹⁴⁵ Thus, even though these two churches were inland, they were equally connected with the coastal towns.

Those for which it is not possible to establish a link with the towns on the northern coast are St Theodore's near Nerežišća,¹⁴⁶ the church with a questionable dating located between Nerežišće and Donji Humac,¹⁴⁷ and the church near Mirje, which is very close to the northern coast. However the last one seems to have been part of a larger complex, most probably of a monastery.¹⁴⁸ Finally, there are also the remains of a late antique church on the site of the modern-day Dominican monastery in Bol on the southern coast.¹⁴⁹

Therefore, most of the late antique churches on the island are either situated on or somehow connected with the northern coast. This seems logical, for most of the late antique settlements are located there, for having been more fruitful for the economy. On the Map 5, which shows the dispersion of archeological finds with distinguishing Christian markings, the situation looks similar. Many finds are, again, situated on the northern coast or in the settlements connected with the northern coast. In the southern coast a hermit's cave seems to

¹⁴¹ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 130-1.; Jasna Jeličić-Radonić, "Ranokršćanske freske u Lovrečini na Braču [Early Christian frescoes at Lovrečina on the island of Brač]", *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 32 (1992): 133-150.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 28-41.

¹⁴² Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 130.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 42-4.

¹⁴³ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 129.; Belamarić and others *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 57-8.

¹⁴⁴ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 128.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 64-7.

¹⁴⁵ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 129, 134.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 73-5, 78-9.

¹⁴⁶ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 132; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 94-5.

¹⁴⁷ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 134.

¹⁴⁸ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 133.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 52-5.

¹⁴⁹ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 132.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 84-7

have existed,¹⁵⁰ and together with the monastic complex of Mirje, shows that monastic communities participated in the formation of Christianity on the late antique island of Brač.

However, I must closely consider the early Christian finds in the pre-Romanesque churches of St George and St Theodore, both in Nerežišća, and Sts Cosmas and Damian in Smrčevik. In all three cases, the late antique finds were used as *spolia* for building the pre-Romanesque churches anew, or for adapting the earlier ones. In St Theodore's church near Nerežišća three pieces of late antique sarcophagus have been discovered. As they were imbedded in the church pillars, they were not visible before the excavations in 1958.¹⁵¹ We encounter the same situation in Sts Cosmas and Damian's church where a piece of an early Christian sarcophagus became part of the altar.¹⁵² In St George's church near Nerežišća a late antique window impost with an engraved cross was used to construct the altar.¹⁵³

Conclusively, the presence of the early Christian *spolia* in the pre-Romanesque churches on Brač leads to two possible interpretations. One is that under the more recent building, there had been a late antique predecessor to which the imbedded fragments belonged. The other is that the constructors of the pre-Romanesque churches brought them from the late antique locations on the northern coast. The low number of fragments, however, persuaded me to incline towards the latter interpretation, from which then follows that the center of Christianity on Brač in Late Antiquity was its northern coast.

When we observe Map 6, which shows the arrangement of the pre-Romanesque churches, we can easily notice striking differences. Whereas the late antique churches are mostly situated on the northern coast, the pre-Romanesque churches are mostly located in the

¹⁵⁰ Migotti, *Ranokršćanska topografija*, 133.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 97.

¹⁵¹ Fisković, "Ranokršćanski sarkofazi," 121.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 94-5.

¹⁵² Fisković, "Ranokršćanski sarkofazi," 124.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 91.

¹⁵³ Fisković, "Ranokršćanski sarkofazi," 124.; Belamarić and others, *Ranokršćanski spomenici*, 94.

middle of the island or towards its eastern part, which is oriented towards the mainland and the town of Makarska.¹⁵⁴

However, there are four churches on Brač that show signs of continuity. The church of the Holy Spirit in Škrip, St Stephen's church in Pučišća and St Theodore's near Nerežišća all show signs of continual use and architectural adaptations from Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages. St John the Baptist's church in Bol has a continuity of sacred place, but without the continuity of architectural space. The proposal that St Vitus' church on Vidova gora is also an adaptation of a late antique church is questionable.¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, on Brač there is one church dated by archaeologists and art historians prior to the eleventh century, namely, to the ninth or the tenth century: St Clement's church near Praženica.¹⁵⁶

The situation is slightly different on Brač than in the rest of the region. Firstly, there are several churches with continuity of the sacred place on a relatively small area with the late antique churches undergoing adaptation in the early Middle Ages. Secondly, there is one church on Brač that precedes most of the churches in Pagania. Thirdly, the churches on Brač possess similar typological features, consequently Marasović classified them as belonging to one of the regional types of pre-Romanesque architecture in Dalmatia – the longitudinal single-spaced churches.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Domančić collected all pre-Romanesque churches from Brač in: Davor Domančić, "Graditeljstvo ranog srednjeg vijeka na Braču" [Early Middle Ages architecture of the island of Brač], in: *Brač u ranom srednjem vijeku* [Brač in the early Middle Ages], ed: Davor Domančić, (Povlja: Brački muzej, 1984), 31-7.

¹⁵⁵ Radoslav Bužančić, "Dvije crkve na Braču obnovljene u ranom srednjem vijeku [Two churches on the island of Brač renovated in the early Middle Ages], *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 31 (1991): 21-41.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica I*, 245, 248-9.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica III*, 533-4, 537-40, 546-7, 550-4.; Radoslav Bužančić, "Srednjovjekovna pregradnja Crkve sv Stjepana u Pučišćima [The medieval rebuilding of the church of St Stephen in Pučišća]", *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji* 38 (1999.): 107-28.

¹⁵⁶ Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica III*, 545, 556, 561.

¹⁵⁷ Tomislav Marasović, "Regionalizam u ranosrednjovjekovnoj arhitekturi Dalmacije" [Regionalism in early medieval architecture in Dalmatia], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* 3, no. 14 (1985): 137-41.; Marasović, *Dalmatia praeromanica*, 247-50, 254.

Out of six churches that are either adaptations of the late antique ones or were erected anew prior to the eleventh century, four belong to the aforementioned type.¹⁵⁸ Another seven churches erected most probably in the eleventh century continued the tradition of this architectural type.¹⁵⁹ However, there is a lack of finds with distinguishing Christian markings on the island and in the entire region, with the only exception being a ninth-century relief from a pre-Romanesque church discovered in Bol dedicated to St Theodore, most probably St John's church had two patrons in the early Middle Ages, however it is also possible that it belonged to another pre-Romanesque church.¹⁶⁰

How can we interpret these differences? Firstly, I propose that the population of Brač moved from the coast inland at the end of Late Antiquity due to the disintegration of the late antique administration, which caused rising insecurity. Equally, the decline of the local economy at the end of Late Antiquity probably caused the disappearance of the stone-masonry market, the most important branch of economy on the island. Secondly, this population was probably Christianized at the end of Late Antiquity, and they preserved their religious identity after moving inland. For this reason, there are churches that show continuity and a church that was erected prior to the eleventh century. Furthermore, Brač shows its uniqueness in 'inventing' an original type of church architecture, which could indicate the continuity of a Christian community that did not have steady communication with other Christians in the early medieval Dalmatia due to the fact that they lived in a territory where the ruling elites did not accept Christianity.

¹⁵⁸ Due to the fact that several churches on Brač that belong to the Brač type show signs of continuity Radoslav Bužančić concluded that the type itself had its roots in late antique architecture: Bužančić, "Rađanje srednjovjekovne arhitekture," 339-34.

¹⁵⁹ Marasović, "Regionalizam u ranosrednjovjekovnoj arhitekturi", 138-9.

¹⁶⁰ Nikša Jakšić, "Predromanički reljef," 49-61.

Conclusion

In the previous two chapters I have analyzed separately the written sources and the archaeological finds regarding Christianity in the territory of the Neretva region. Here I will offer an overview of the development of Christianity from the combined testimony of the written sources and archaeological finds.

The story of Christianity in the Neretva region begins with the first unquestionable attestation of its presence. In this respect the testimonies of written sources and of the archaeological finds seem to agree. As I have shown in the chapter on the written sources, certain scholars hypothesized that Christianity took root in the said region as early as the third and the fourth century. Nevertheless, I have demonstrated that the evidence is insufficient to date the beginnings of Christianity so early. Firstly, the proposed connection between the story of the third-century martyr Venantius and Naronā cannot withstand a thorough analysis of the source material. Secondly, in the case of the Marturius's inscription from the fourth century, which is believed to have been discovered in Naronā, we do not possess evidence for either that he was a Christian or that the inscription dates from the fourth century. Thus, the written sources equally as the archaeological finds do not enable us to set the beginnings of Christianity into the third or the fourth century.

The first reliable written testimony is the priest Anastasius's sarcophagus, which is dated to 462. The first known churches in the territory date from the fifth century, and the oldest among them are from Naronā, the main center of the region. The sources regarding the first Christian community in Naronā are scarce. Nevertheless, a hypothesis was made that the Christians destroyed the city's main pagan temple, dedicated to the imperial cult, in a violent outburst after the Theodosius' edict. However, having pointed to the lack of the violent destruction in the towns of Roman Dalmatia, and generally in the western part of the Roman

Empire, I have dismissed such an interpretation. Furthermore, the damage discovered during the archaeological excavations cannot be related to a single event, or a violent outburst. Rather the damage seems to have been caused by using the temple's stones as *spolia* after the temple had lost its religious significance during the fifth century. Thus, the hypothesis that the Christian community in Naronā made history as a violent group should be abandoned. Conclusively, the sources reveal that the first traces of Christianity in the territory in question date from the fifth century, but do not allow further conclusions on the nature of Christianity other than that the first Christian community in Naronā did not demolish the main temple in an outburst of religious violence.

Late antique churches from the territory in the question are mostly dated to the fifth and sixth centuries. However, the scarcity of the church remains and archaeological finds with Christian markings in some parts of the territory indicates that every part of the Neretva region had not been thoroughly Christianized before the end of the sixth century. This seems to be the case especially with the islands of Mljet and Korčula, the eastern part of the island of Hvar and the peninsula of Pelješac. The delta of the Neretva River and the Riviera of Makarska were more thoroughly Christianized, while Brač shows the highest number of late antique churches and archaeological finds with Christian markings.

The geographical arrangement of the churches and the archaeological finds reveal that Christianity was typically situated in or around urban centers. The most important urban center, which contains the highest number of archaeological finds, is Naronā, followed by Muccur (Makarska) and the four islands between the peninsula of Pelješac and the island of Korčula. On Brač, most of the Christian finds are situated on the northern coast, which was the center of the late antique economy of the island.

In the Neretva region, Muccur and Naronā were the most important urban centers, for in the sixth century each had a bishopric. The bishopric of Naronā was older, for in the Acts of

the synods of Salona where both are mentioned, Naronā appears as an already existing bishopric, whereas Makarska was established during the second synod in 533. These two bishoprics, as established after these synods, encompassed the entire territory of the Neretva region. Their territory, compared to the neighboring territory of the bishopric of Salona, was less Christianized judging from the archaeological finds. Furthermore, the position that the bishop of Naronā occupied on the list of bishops written down in the synodal acts indicates that he was not important in the hierarchy of bishops in Dalmatia. Furthermore, his silence during the second synod when he lost the major part of his bishopric to the two newly established, Muccur (Makarska) and Sarsenterum (Mostar), supports that conclusion. I propose that the bishop of Naronā lost his territory for not being able to control it or Christianize it, which can be deduced from the lack of archaeological finds with Christian markings on the island of Korčula and the peninsula of Pelješac.

Thus, in the sixth century, the territory seems to have been unimportant in the Church hierarchy of Dalmatia. Even though Christianity had been present there from the fifth century, in the following century the territory was not yet Christianized as much as the neighboring areas, such as the bishopric of Salona. Brač displays a different development, which was probably because, before becoming a part of the bishopric of Muccur, it had formed part of the bishopric of Salona, a territory more thoroughly Christianized than the bishopric of Naronā. Such had been the condition of Christianity before the seventh and the eighth century, when Dalmatia, and consequently the Neretva region, underwent the process of social, demographical and administrative changes. Unfortunately, the sources for the Neretva region during the period of the seventh and the eighth century are nonexistent, hence the chronological leap to the ninth century.

The Neretva region in the ninth century, when the silence of the sources finally ended, appeared as the territory under the rule of a Slavic tribe called Narrentani by the population of

Dalmatian towns, the Romans by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenite, and Pagani by other Slavs. The emperor attempted to present the population of Pagania as Christian thanks to the efforts of his predecessor Emperor Basil. However, his story seems to have served as a political agenda of Constantinople. Constantine VII wanted to present the entire territory of the eastern Adriatic coast, including several *Sclavinias*, as Christianized because of the efforts from Constantinople. In that way, he wished to demonstrate that the emperor still controlled the events in the territory that used to be part of the Roman Empire.

However, the development of Christianity in Pagania does not reflect Constantine VII's description. Firstly, it is telling that other Slavs called the population of the Neretva region Pagani. Furthermore, there is a lack of early medieval finds with Christian markings on the territory of Pagania, especially when compared with the neighboring territory between the Zrmanja and Cetina rivers, which was the center of the early medieval Croatia. Additionally, the connection between the Church and the ruling elites can be observed in the early medieval Croatia, whereas it is absent in the territory of Pagania.

The traces of church administration in the Neretva region had disappeared before the early Middle Ages. The documents related to the synods of Split in 925 and 928 showed that almost all bishoprics mentioned in the Acts of the synods of Salona from 530 and 533 survived, either in the same town where they had been during Late Antiquity (Iader, Scardona, Arba), or by moving to a new one (Salona to Split, Epidaurus to Ragusa). However, both bishoprics from the Neretva region, Naron and Makarska, completely disappeared.

Finally, there is a lack of pre-Romanesque churches on the territory of Pagania. Firstly, the number of the churches erected during the ninth and the tenth century is insignificant. Secondly, the number of the churches with the continuity of use, or at least of the sacred space, is also insignificant. Thus, this indicates that there was a break in Christianization during the early Middle Ages. Strikingly, there are no traces of Christianity in Naron or Mogorjelo, for

which there is archaeological evidence of the continuity of the settlements, although not in the same degree as in Late Antiquity. The peninsula of Pelješac, similarly as the island of Korčula, shows the continuity of the lack of Christian finds.

However, this interruption is not present in the entire territory. The most notable example is Brač, where, I have argued, we can trace the continuity of the use of the churches and sacred spaces. Furthermore, the development of an original type of church architecture might point to the presence of a Christian community that was not in contact with other Christian communities on the eastern Adriatic coast. Similar patterns, however less pronounced, can be observed in the western part of the island of Hvar, and on the island of Mljet.

Conclusively, the answer about the continuity/discontinuity cannot be simple. On the one hand, the territory shows signs of discontinuity regarding the presence of Christianity. The church administration that had been there during Late Antiquity seems to have disappeared during the early Middle Ages. Furthermore, there is no evidence for the re-Christianization as in the case of the territory between the Zrmanja and Cetina rivers, nor is there a cooperation between the ruling elites of Paganian and the Church. Therefore, I suggest that the ruling elites of Paganian used their non-Christian label as a mean of creating an identity, similarly as it can be observed among the Polabian Slavs.

On the other hand, there are traces of continuity in some peripheral areas of the territory. As stated above, Brač was the most thoroughly Christianized during Late Antiquity, and the population of the island kept their religious identity during the early Middle Ages, even though they were part of the territory where the ruling elites did not support Christianization. If the assumption that they managed to survive, although under the rule of ‘pagans’, is correct, then the relationship between the ruling elites of Paganian and the Christians seems not to have been antagonistic. Unfortunately, there are no sources that could tell us more about this issue.

In the mid-eleventh century, the ruling elites of Pagania, i.e. *iudex Maranormu* with his *župani*, changed their attitude and began cooperating with the Church. Interestingly, the early medieval churches from the territory are mostly dated to the second half of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century. Conclusively, I maintain that the territory of Naronia began losing its specific religious identity in the eleventh century. However, the scope of the present work does not allow for an elaboration on the matter and requires further research.

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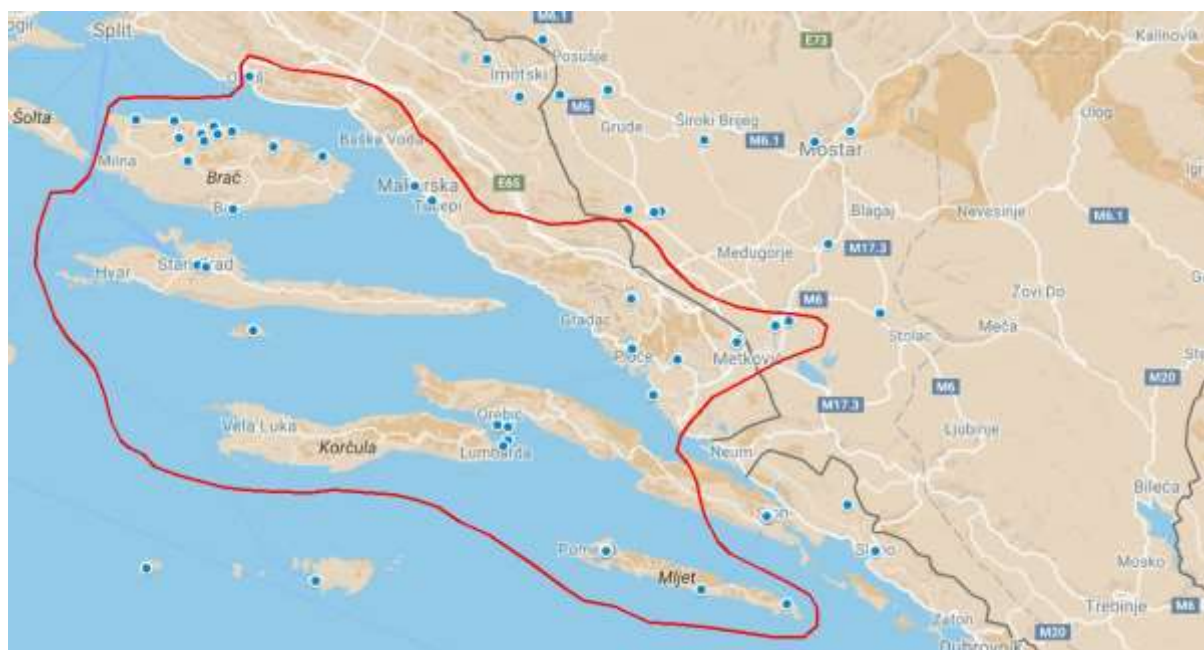
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Glossary

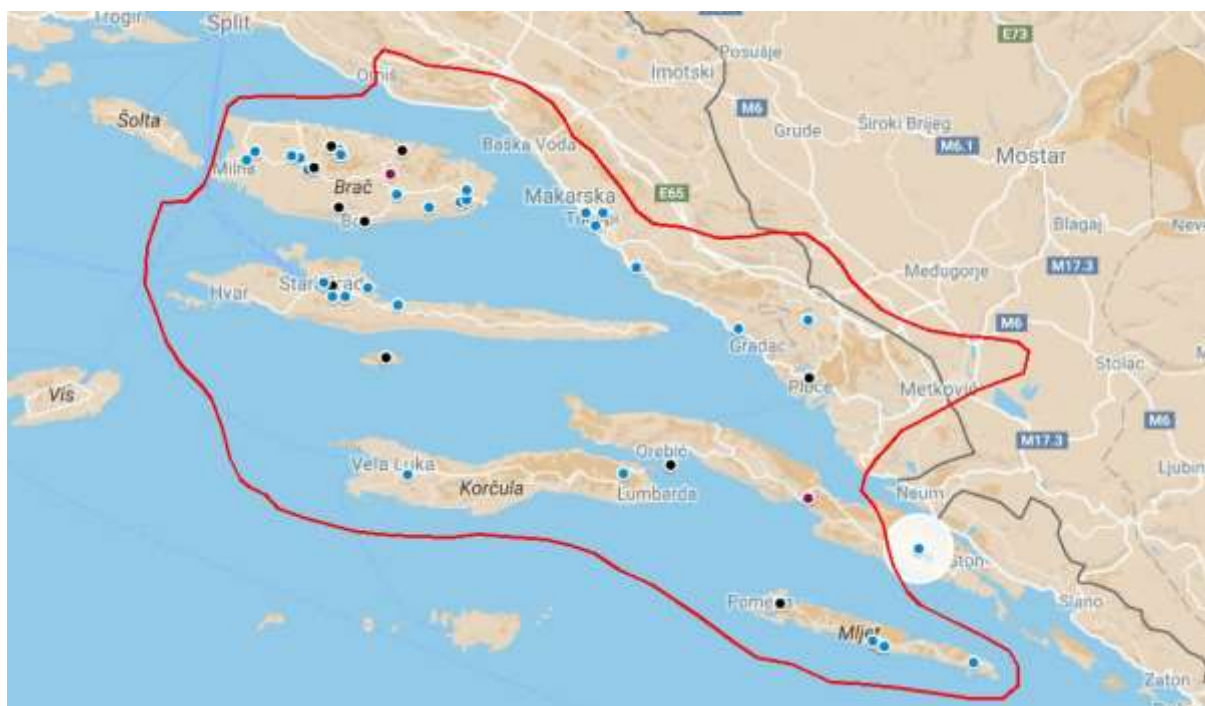
Appendices



Map 1: Late antique churches



Map 2: Late antique archaeological finds with Christian markings



Map 3: pre-Romanesque churches.

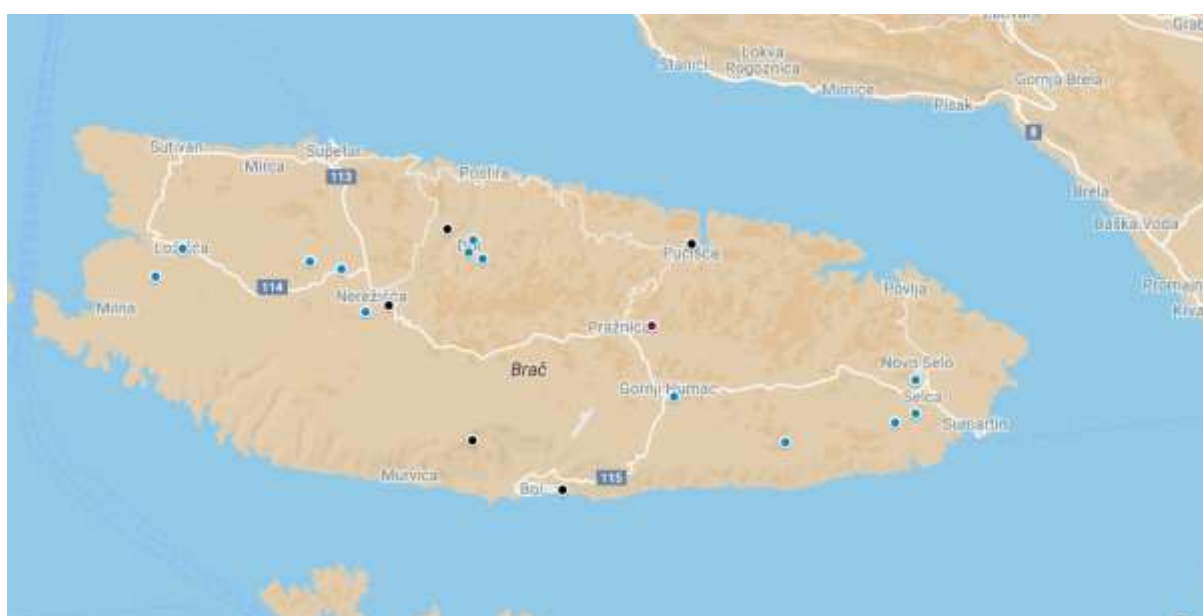
Legend: blue – churches from the eleventh century or later; Black – churches with continuity from Late Antiquity; Purple – churches built prior to the eleventh century.



Map 4: Brač – late antique churches



Map 5: Brač – late antique archaeological finds with Christian markings



Map 6: pre-Romanesque churches on Brač

Legend: blue – churches from the eleventh century or later; black – churches with continuity from Late Antiquity; purple – church erected prior to the eleventh century