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Review Article**HISTORICAL GENESIS OF THE BEGINNINGS OF THE CHRISTIANITY - EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN MACEDONIA, WITH A SPECIAL REVIEW OF THE 6TH CENTURY<sup>1</sup>****Suzana KOTOVCHEVSKA**

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*Abstract:* The study "Historical genesis of the beginnings of Christianity – Early Christianity in Macedonia, with a special review of the 6<sup>th</sup> century" in a specific manner would present the most relevant historical and socio-political aspects of the conditions in the late antique province Macedonia Secunda with a capital Stobi, in the function of complete clarification of the genesis of the penetration and gradual establishment of Christianity. The analysis of the historical genesis of these important events begins as early as in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century (the pre-Constantinian period), with a special emphasis on the period of the 6<sup>th</sup> century when many intensive events happened, which were also relevant for the development, and in specific epochs also the stagnation of the development of Christianity in Macedonia. At the same time, the study will clarify the relentless persecutions of Christians which were timely determined by the rule of specific emperors and their attitudes in regard to Christianity and Christians. The study opens new scientific challenges about the research of this insufficiently explored period in the area of late antique Macedonia, the episcopal seats, the vast number of churches in Macedonia from this period (more than three hundred churches from the early Christianity). This study unequivocally confirms the thesis that the territory of Macedonia is a bridge for the future expansion and establishment of Christianity in Europe.

*Keywords:* Christianity, Macedonia Secunda, historical genesis.

The area of present-day Macedonia, in the period of the late antique was divided into at least four, that is, five different provinces – Macedonia Salutaris (Wholesome Macedonia), Macedonia Prima (First) with a capital Thessalonika - Thessaloniki and Macedonia Sekunda (Second) with capital Stobi, the province Dardania with capital Skupi – Skopje, the province New Epirus with capital Dyrrhachion that also included the city of Lychnidos - Ohrid. The small north-eastern part of the present-day territory of Macedonia belonged to the province Mediterranean Dacia<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Jones, A.N.M. (1973). *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602*, II, Oxford, 1456-1457

In the pre-Constantinian period, almost in the entire region of the Southern Balkan in the 2nd and 3rd century there was no separately developed culture (only the Christian community existed in the vicinity of Thessaloniki) with major influence in the immediate surroundings.

In the Macedonian cities that were visited by Paul the Apostle, Philippi, Thessalonika, Beroea, as well as in Stobi, there were Jewish communities that successively worked through their synagogues. Christianity in Macedonia, unlike the other parts of the Empire was slightly familiar although there are specific travelogues in Thessaloniki and Edessa from the 2nd and the 3rd century, as well as some early Christian provinces.

The legend of the martyr-virgins is related to the history of Thessaloniki, which represents one of the assumptions about the beginnings of Christianity in these areas. However, unlike the other provinces (the Danube and Balkan Province), there are no other more relevant information and data that “touch” the antique, in particular, there are no information related to the period of the reign of Diocletian.

Still, for the region of Macedonia we can come to a specific conclusion that during the persecutions by Galerius, and then the emperor Diocletian and the other opponents of Christians and Christianity, the Christians gave many victims.

Another evidence of the persecution and martyrdom of the Christians in our areas is the legend of St. Erasmus of Formia, a martyr from the period of the great persecutions of Christians (there are two Latin and two Greek versions) by Diocletian. St. Erasmus, a bishop of Antioch, was released by the angel before his death sentence was executed and he went to the “large city of Lychnidos” – present-day Ohrid. In Ohrid he started his philanthropic mission whereby in a very strange way he healed many sick people. Also, in these regions (according to the Moscopole anthology) he christened about 40,000 people.<sup>3</sup>

After these miraculous acts, on the order of the Emperor Maximilian, he was imprisoned and taken to the temple of Heracles where he christened another 30,000 people. He died in Formia – Italy, after he was once again, prior to his death, released by the angel Michael.

Despite the several different interpretations, on the basis of the local legends and the archeological findings, we can conclude that there’s quite a big connection between St. Erasmus and the region of Ohrid ever since the ancient times.

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<sup>3</sup> Сторијата за Еразмо ја наведуваме според Братој, Р. (2000). Ранохристијанската црква во Македонија и нејзините односи со Рим. Скопје: Македонско наследство, 13, 10-20.

It is important to point out that in the vicinity of the medieval church St. Erasmus, a church was discovered, dedicated to St. Erasmus from the period of Early Christianity from the 5th century with nice floor mosaics that are geometrically designed. The cult towards the saints by the population from this region played an important role in the repeated Christianization of the population at the end of the 9th century.

The Eastern Goths led by the Emperor Theodoric (Amal) in 479 after the failed attempts to occupy the city of Lychnidos, devastated its surrounding. The population from this region tried to protect itself in the fortress above the church St. Erasmus<sup>4</sup> whereby the cult towards the saint was strengthened also through this event.

According to some information, the core of the population from this antique settlement existed until the earthquake in 611 and it is considered a mediator in the transfer of the legend of St. Erasmus and in the middle century.

On the basis of the martyria that are assumed to have existed in Lychnidos, Stobi, Demir Kapija, Krnjevo, Karaorman and Mordovis, we can conclude that there were also some other, so far unknown martyrs.

After the withdrawal of the Emperor Diocletian from these areas, Macedonia enters in the whirl of the civil wars. Until the adoption of the Edict of Toleration by Galerius (April 30, 311), Macedonia became an arena for ruthless persecutions of the Christians. This period corresponds with the rule of the Emperor Galerius (until his death in 311), who spent most of his time in Macedonia – in the cities of Serdica and Thessaloniki.

After his death, this region was under the reign of the Emperor Licinius until the first civil war against Constantine (in the autumn of 316), and this is a period for which we do not have any information of some specific more relevant military actions in these areas. Accordingly, we do not dispose of any information about the impact of civil wars and the other military conflicts and events of wider relevance for the development / stagnation of Christianity in the area of Macedonia.

The church council that took place in Nicaea – in 325 is the most certain testimony of the existence of Christianity in the territory of Macedonia. This episcopal gathering, which was attended by 300 bishops, was also attended by three bishops from Macedonia – Thessaloniki, Stobi and Skupi.

This event unequivocally confirms that in Macedonia there was a church organization whose roots we can find in the past period – much earlier than 325.

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfram, H. (1988). *History of the Gots*, Berkeley. Los Angeles: p. 274

In this regard, we can ask the question whether the church centers in the capitals of the provinces (for example Skupi for Dardania), ever since then were seats of the metropolises at the time.<sup>5</sup>

At the Synod of Sardica that was held in 343 in conditions of split of the Christian world (in Orthodox-majority and Aryan-minority camp), there were even seven bishops from the province of Macedonia, with the exception of the bishop from Stobi. The bishops from the Macedonian provinces belonged to the Western Orthodox camp. The bishops from both neighboring northern provinces, Mediterranean Dacia and Moesia Prima were separated according to the religion into Aryans and Orthodox.

Their mutual confrontation at the Synod in Sardica culminated with religious wars between the Aryans and the Orthodox. In this period many other synods took place, which were again attended by bishops from Macedonia, which speaks of the continuity of Christianity in these areas, however beyond as well, in the Balkan region.

In addition, the previous findings are also very indicative, according to which the bishops (with the exception of Thessaloniki) rarely appear in the territory of Macedonia, for an entire century after the Synod in Sardica took place.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that the Macedonian bishops, as representatives of the Pope, played an important role at the Third Ecumenical Council that took place in Ephesus in 431. The issue of discussion at this council was the problem of nestorianism<sup>6</sup>, where Flavian of Philippi had an important role as a great opponent of Nestorius.

At the Council in Ephesus that was held in 449 (so called Latrocinium) between the participants from the neighboring areas of the Macedonian region, was the bishop Anthony of Lychnidos, however many Macedonian bishops that come from Macedonia Prima are signatories.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council that was held in 451 in Chalcedon, where the problem of monophysitism was disputed, was attended by at least eight bishops from Macedonia.

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<sup>5</sup> Schwarz, E. *Über die Bischofslisten der Synoden von Chalkedon, Hicaea und Konstantinopel*, ABAW, Hr. 13, 76

<sup>6</sup> Ch. J.Hefele. (1908) *Histoire de Conciles*, II, Paris, 360

As an important conclusion of these sources, we can point out that with the very marking of Macedonia Prima in this time period, inevitably (with great probability), Macedonia Secunda also exists.<sup>7</sup>

The Council of Chalcedon was attended by the bishops from Stobi and Bargala as the only representatives from Macedonia Secunda. The church-political activity of most bishops in this period did not exceed the local borders, that is, the limits of the provinces at the time. The Macedonian bishops in this period with no exception were “Western bishops” whose decisions were adopted from Orthodox point of view, despite the parallel existence of the different religious movements in the Eastern Christian world. No center where the literacy of early Christianity was developed, is mentioned in the history of these areas.

### **The role of the vicariate of thessaloniki for the development of christianity in macedonia II**

The image of the development of the church relations in the country can be most precisely formed on the basis of the analysis of the letters of the Pope. They clarify the great interest of the Roman Pope for the conditions in this area. The interest of the Pope arose from the potential danger for the territory of Macedonia and the entire Eastern Illyricum to belong under the rule of the bishop from Constantinople. The danger increased even more after the administrative separation of the prefecture Illyricum for 379 when the dioceses of Macedonia and Dacia will belong to the eastern part of the Empire under the rule of the Emperor Theodosius I.<sup>8</sup> Their fear increased even more after the council in Constantinople was held in 381, when the bishop from Constantinople with the obtained higher rank got closer to the Pope.

Due to the newly created changes in the relations, the Pope Damasus reacted even in 380, however, without any particular result. That encouraged his successor Siricius to undertake one very important and unexpected step by allowing the bishop of Thessaloniki to appoint bishops in the province of Eastern Illyricum. These transferred authorizations were not absolute, because the Pope retained the right to give consent before every new appointment of the bishops.

When after the death of Theodosius, the province Southern Illyricum was transmitted to the Eastern Kingdom, the Pope Innocent made another more radical step, that is, he issued an order wherewith he awarded to the bishop of

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<sup>7</sup> Ch. Pietri. La géographie de l'illiricum ecclésiastique et ses relations avec l'Eglise de Rome (V<sup>e</sup> – VI<sup>e</sup> siècles)

<sup>8</sup> Lippold, A. (1982). Theodosius der Große und seine Zeit. München: 15.

Thessaloniki Rufus the jurisdiction for all provinces of Western Illyricum expanded with the province Praevalitana.

After the strengthening of the Pope's impact in Eastern Illyricum and the disapprovals of specific Illyric, especially some Thessalian bishops, in conditions of complete worsening of the relations between the Eastern and the Western Kingdom, Theodosius II comes to rule. In "the games without frontiers" for conquering the primate in the church relations, Theodosius II – the Emperor of the Eastern Kingdom in 421 adopted a law wherewith it authorized the bishop of Constantinople as the main arbiter-judge in the resolution of church disputes in the area of Illyricum. Its move was interpreted by the opposite side as an attempt to undermine the rule and impact of the Pope in this region, that is, as an act for complete destruction and breakdown of the Vicariate of Thessaloniki.

The west energetically reacted to the procedures undertaken by Theodosius II. In the resolution of the newly created quite serious dispute, Honorius was involved – the ruler of the Western kingdom in the position of an ally of the Pope. Its mediation with the kingdom of the Eastern Kingdom yielded results. That implied resolution of the conflict in Corinth and confirmation of the creation of the Vicariate of Thessaloniki.

The Vicariate of Thessaloniki was preserved despite the numerous threats, however the mutual disagreements continued in the following period with a tendency of the other bishops with their power and authorizations to become equal with the power and the absolute rule of the bishop (bishops) from Thessaloniki.

The retention of the unlimited power of the bishop in Thessaloniki was essential for the elimination of the provisions from the disputed Theodosian Code from 439 according to which in the resolution of the disputable issues in Illyricum, the bishop of Constantinople was authorized.

In the following period (during the Pope Leo - 440 to 461), a crisis of the Vicariate of Thessaloniki emerged, that is, the role of the vicar of Thessaloniki was reduced, and at the same time the impact of the Pope was increased during the determination of the relations in Illyricum. This speaks of the commencement of a new unsynchronized process of management and bad hierarchical functioning.

### **The acacian schism**

Since the middle of the 5th century, the tightness of the relations between Macedonia and Rome weakened, however after the occupation of Odoacer in 476, once again there was cooling of the relations with the East.

In this historical period, the Balkan provinces Thrace, Moesia, Macedonia and Epirus were affected by the relentless Gothic pillages. The greatest impact in the province of Macedonia was felt in the cities of Stobi (474), Heraclea (474 and 479), as well as the city of Lychnidos (479), which was located in the province of New Epirus.

With the occurrence of the Acacian schism in 484, the bishops of Constantinople managed to separate the prefecture Eastern Illyricum from Rome. This act led to complete interruption of the relations between Rome and the Vicariate of Thessaloniki.<sup>9</sup> After all these church combinations, the Macedonian church chose the policy of the patriarch of Constantinople.

The schism from the reign of the Emperor Zeno (476-491) continued during the reign of the Emperor Anastasius (491-518) who was even bigger supporter of monophysitism than his predecessor.

The Vicariate of Thessaloniki no longer existed after the Acacian schism despite the attempts for its renewal, especially by the Pope Felix III. The church in Thessaloniki still condemned the study of Acacius, which was particularly pointed out in a letter written by the Pope Anastasius II to the bishop Laurentius from New Epirus. The Pope asked the Dardanian, that is, the Illyrian bishops to closely observe what is happening in the provinces.

However, under the strong impact of the Eastern propaganda, doubt started to emerge among the bishops, regarding the appropriateness of the decision to convict Acacius. Acacius was not removed from his duty by the Synod, rather by the Apostolic Throne.

The very act of unseating of a capital's bishop is the basic generator of the emerged suspicion about the appropriateness of their decision (to unseat Acacius as a person who was related to the already convicted monophysite patriarch Peter Mongus).

However, despite the complete activity of persuasion and the correspondence between the Pope and the other bishops, the church center of Illyricum – Thessaloniki with the bishop Andrew remained in the schism, related to Constantinople. From them and thereafter the heretical movement continued to spread in the Balkan.

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<sup>9</sup> Duchesue, L. (1982). *L'illiricum ecclesiastique*, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 1. 531-550.

After the Synod that took place in 515, which consisted of 10 bishops from Sirik (Greece), they stopped the relations with their archbishop, the bishop Dorotheus from Thessaloniki.

The bishop Dorotheus, fearing from the threats of the Emperor Anastasius, stood on the side of the monophysite patriarch from Constantinople – Timothy.

The Pope Hormisdas (514-523) in the first years of its reign, started an energetic fight against the promonophysite church policy of the Emperor Anastasius. The Pope Hormisdas was characterized by great persistence and tenacity in the promotion and implementation of his attitudes in all provinces. His energetic promotion of his attitudes and interests brought about significant success during the difficult negotiations. The overall condition at the time was favorable for him, caused by the military defeats of the Emperor by Vitalian. The victory over Vitalian provided the emperor creation of an atmosphere for successful opposition to the Catholic bishops in Illyricum.

The Acacian schism lasted 34 years (484-518) and it ended with the death of the Emperor Anastasius in the summer of 518. As a result, the victory of Orthodoxy occurred in the East, and especially in Constantinople. Then an order was adopted whereby the new Orthodox Emperor Justinian was declared. The Emperor Justinian who came from Illyricum adopted the Code of Orthodoxy (Chalcedonian religion) and laws with severe penalties for the ones who do not adhere to this.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this change in the East, there was no quick normalization of the relations with the Apostolic throne. Intensive and extensive correspondence followed between the Pope Hormisdas, the Emperor Justin, the patriarch of Constantinople John, the inheritor of the throne Justinian, as well as few ladies, that lasted from August 518 to March 519, and final reconciliation was reached on March 28, 519. The expansion was crowned by signing a protocol (libellus). With this act, Acacius and his supporters, the emperors Zeno and Anastasius were condemned and excluded from the church. The patriarch of Constantinople recognized the primacy of the Apostolic throne, while the changes in Macedonia also came to an epilogue. The bishop of Thessaloniki Dorotheus promised that he will sign the protocol and on one occasion he publicly tore the libellus and he proved that in no way he agrees with the reconciliation with the Catholic Church.

Thessaloniki, as the center of Illyricum further remained in the center of attention as a motive for disputes between Rome and Constantinople, between

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<sup>10</sup> De Labriolle, Bardy, Brechier, de Plinual vo: A.Fliche i V.Martin (1972). Storia della, IV, Dalla morte di Teddoso A11, AVV ento di S.Regorio Masno, Turin: 223-235



the church and the secular authority (the bishop of Thessaloniki Dorotheus was placed under protection by the emperor).

The Orthodoxy won in the other provinces / episcopal seats (in 519 the bishop of Lychnidos Theodoret signed the libellus). There was a similar resolution in Scampe, before Lychnidos, as well as in Praevalitana. Everywhere (with a small exception of Avalon), the bishops expressed their unlimited loyalty and complete admiration for the victory of Catholicism and the end of the schism.

### **The time of the emperor Justinian I - historical and administrative-church occasions –**

The victory of the Pope as well as the rebirth of the Roman influence in Illyricum were short. The results of this plan started to become pale after only 15 years, which was the beginning of a trend of significant fall of the Roman impact in Illyricum. The emperor Justinian in his Code (529, that is, the second edition was in 534), undertook the then forgotten law of the emperor Theodosius from 421. According to this code, competent for the resolution of the disputes between the bishops of Illyricum was *Antistes urbis Constantinopolitanae, quae Romae veteris praerogativa laetatur*.<sup>11</sup>

On April 14, 535, Justinian established by law the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima with elements of an autocephalous church. Its formation was a replacement of the former archbishopric of Sirmium, which suddenly became popular once again IN the middle of the 5th century.<sup>12</sup>

The new act of Justinian was a strong impact for the bishop of Thessaloniki, that is, it caused drastic reduction of its impact.

After the conquering of the six “Latin” and one “Greek” province in north, the territory of the bishop of Thessaloniki was divided in half and only six provinces remained within it, where the Greek language prevailed (Crete, Achaia, Thessaly, Old Epirus, New Epirus and Macedonia Prima).

From church-organizational point of view, the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima had all subordinate Moesian and Dacian areas (Coastal Dacia, Mediterranean Dacia, the rest of Panonnica Secunda, Moesia Prima, Praevalitana,

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<sup>11</sup> Cod. Ilis. 1, 2, 6 (421); Cod. Theod. 16, 2, 45 (421); Streichhan (note 68), 359

<sup>12</sup> Grani, B. (1925). Gründung des autokephalen Erybistums von Justinijana Prima durch Kaiser Justinian I, im Jahre 535n. Chr. Byzantion 2, 123-140.

Dardania and Macedonia Secunda). Of all areas, the Greek language prevailed only in Macedonia Secunda.

In his code, the emperor Justinianus also indicated his arguments for the establishment of the new administration and the new church-organizational structure.

During the attacks and the devastations by the Huns, the prefecture was displaced from Sirmium to Thessaloniki, whereby the church impact of the new center was increased. Its impact was primarily conditioned by the rank of the city in the civil administrative hierarchy, rather than because of the dignity and the authority of the bishop of Thessaloniki. Justinianus completely ignored the creation of the Vicariate of Thessaloniki as an institution of the Pope formed during the collapse of Sirmium. The new archbishopric of Justiniana Prima was erected at the highest pedestal of the church hierarchy thanks to the highest rank that was assigned to it by the Emperor Justinianus.

The initial foundation for the new form of the church organization was the decision of the emperor to expand the state to the coast of Danube and further on. In the newly created situation, it was necessary to establish a center in the returned territory, considering the fact that Pannonia Secunda was not very far from Mediterranean Dacia (Justiniana Prima), however, it was very far from Macedonia Prima, that is, the city of Thessaloniki.

The new church political reform of the emperor Justinianus was an attempt to regulate the chaotic conditions in the border provinces, an expression of the caesaropapism that created a difficult impact on politics and the influence of the Pope in these important provinces.

The papal administration in the halved Vicariate of Thessaloniki was fully ignored by the emperor Justinian.

The Macedonian area that was united a century before this, with the papal organization – the Vicariate of Thessaloniki, with the decision of the emperor was divided between the two centers: Thessaloniki (the southern and the western part) and Justiniana Prima (the central and the northern part).

Justinian's novel from 545, does not mention Macedonia Secunda as one of the subordinate provinces of Justiniana Prima. According to R. Bratoz,<sup>13</sup> it would be logical for Macedonia Secunda to be connected with the archbishopric of Justiniana Prima, whereby the territory of Justiniana Prima remained only in its northern, Dardanian part of present-day Macedonia.

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<sup>13</sup> Братој, Р. (2000). Ранохристијанската црква во Македонија и нејзините односи со Рим. Скопје: Македонско наследство, 13, 66.

Granic confirms the opinion that the province Macedonia Secunda was disbanded and attached to Dardania, as Zeiller claims<sup>14</sup>.

If this is the time when Macedonia Secunda was disbanded, which is no longer mentioned since 545 (Justinian's novel), there is increased probability that it was attached to Macedonia Prima that to Dardania.

Zeiller's thesis rests on the argument that the bishop of the city of Stobi, Focus, acted on behalf of the absent bishop of Justiniana Prima, at the council in Constantinople in 553.<sup>15</sup>

The decision of the Novel from 545, for Justiniana Prima to enjoy the greatest reputation, caused some misunderstanding, which was confirmed by the Pope Vigilius. These misunderstandings were overcome after ten years when these decisions of Justinian were confirmed by the Pope. However, the church-legal status of Justiniana Prima further remained insufficiently clarified – whether it was an independent archbishopric or papal vicariate. After the death of Justinianus, the last interpretation was not approved by the Apostolic throne, however in essence, his church policy caused some fierce disputes in Illyricum.

In this regard, it is important to point out that many bishops from the Macedonian areas participated at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553. The bishop Benignus from Heraclea – Pelagonia in the document (the formula of religion - *Theophaniorum dei*) is mentioned couple of times as a mediator between the emperor, that is, the council and the Pope.<sup>16</sup>

Since Benenat, the archbishop of Justiniana Prima, same as the archbishop from Thessaloniki did not participate at the council, the bishop Focus from Stobi acted on his behalf, who according to the detailed list of names, was a member of the synod of the Pope Vigilius.

The events from the Fifth Ecumenical Council that caused resistance in Illyricum are the last for which there are certain historical literary data.

The development of Christianity in the areas of ancient Macedonia in the period from the 4th to the end of the 6th century has been documented with numerous material proofs. Also the early Christian churches – episcopal seats are

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<sup>14</sup> Zeiller, J. (1918). *Les origines chrétiennes dans les provinces danubiennes de l'empire romain*. Paris: 365

<sup>15</sup> Grani, B. (1925). *Die Gründung des autokephalen Erzbistums von Justiniana Prima durch Kaiser Justinian I im Jahre 535 n. Chr.*, Byzantion 2, 123-140

<sup>16</sup> Coll. Avell., epist. 83, 24, 28, 203 (CSEL 35, 1, 235 Z. 14; 236 Z. 22; 286 Z. 22), според Братој, Р. (2000). *Ранохристијанската црква во Македонија и нејзините односи со Рим*. Скопје: Македонско наследство, 13, 66-67.

very relevant, however, also the numerous settlements that originate from this period. In the area of present-day Macedonia there are about 300 early Christian churches whereby archeological research has been conducted in 60 of these churches.

In the area of late antiquity Macedonia, together with the territories of Mediterranean Dacia, New Epirus and Dardania, the early Christian archeology has realized some of the most important researches in the region of Stobi, Heraclea, Lychidus and Bargala. The city of Skupi was least researched in this field.

The discovered icons with biblical content in Vinicko Kale (former Macedonia Secunda) represent an enormous success of the early Christian archeology. Despite the numerous bishops in the 5th and the 6th century in the Macedonian region, the number of known episcopal seats remains relatively small. The provisions of the constitution of the Emperor Zenon (48) pointed out that every city should have its bishop. What is typical is that with the Synekdemos of Hierocles from 527, there is a relevant difference between the real and the hypothetical state of the number of episcopal seats in the area of Macedonia Prima (32) and Macedonia Secunda (8).

The episcopal seats in at least five cities that are indicated by Hierocles, are not mentioned at all in the territory of Macedonia Secunda. These are the cities Argos (Vodovrati), Eustraion (Sopur), Pelagonia (Prilep), Kelainidion and Armonia (Lukovica, Vinica) which is a sufficient challenge for new future scientific breakthroughs in this insufficiently explored field that is relevant for the history of our country.<sup>17</sup>

### **The disappearance of the early Christian church in Macedonia**

The Huns and the Germans during the period of the 5th century with their barbarian incursions in the Balkan, became the main threat for the existence of the early Christian church in the Balkan. The Western Goths endangered the territory of Macedonia with their incursions in the period from 395-401, and particularly with the agreement (foedus) from 397.<sup>18</sup>

Macedonia was once again endangered after half a century during the second war of Atilla against the Eastern Kingdom in 447 when the Huns penetrated to the Thermopylae. The same happened once again during the

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<sup>17</sup> Hierokl. Synekd. 638-641 (4-6 Burckhardt). според Братож, Р. (2000). Ранохристијанската црква во Македонија и нејзините односи со Рим. Скопје: Македонско наследство, 13, 73.

<sup>18</sup> Wolfram, H. (1988). *History of the Goths*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: 274

migrations of the Eastern Goths in the period from 472-479. After 518 when Skupi was struck by a strong earthquake, there was no other serious security threat for the state.

The breakthroughs of the Slavs and the Avars in the 6th century were intensified whereby once again this caused serious threat for the security and the overall progress of the Macedonian territory.

The period of the reign of Justinian at the end of the 6th century was the period when the last blossom and development of construction in Macedonia happened. A testimony of this construction period in Macedonia and Illyricum are the numerous built churches, fortresses, cities and villages.

The level of impact of all previously presented historical events on the development of church life inevitably would have to be explored in the following period.

In this regard, necessarily we have to point out the fact that in the transition from the 6th to the 7th century, surprisingly the Macedonian bishops are rarely mentioned. In this historical period, during the breakdown of the antique world, the only exception is the city of Thessaloniki – the last unconquered goal by the Avars. On the basis of the content of the letters by the Pope Gregory the Great, we can follow the breakdown of the church life caused by the intensive attacks of the Avars. The church of the prefecture of Eastern Illyricum after the serious internal turmoil, fell apart in the year of 600.

In 602 Justiniana Prima also fell – the episcopal center for the northern parts of the present-day Macedonian regions. This important episcopal center loses the role it had during the reign of the emperor Justinian. Justiniana Prima, in the last period of its existence as a Papal Vicariate, had the same status as Thessalonika, observed under the watchful eye of the Pope, who had worsened relations with the emperor and the patriarch from Constantinople during this period. The Pope fully protected the archbishop John from Justiniana Prima in the attempt to unseat the emperor, emphasizing in the letters that he appoints him for his vicar (deputy).

The Pope Gregory condemned and strictly punished the bishop of Justiniana Prima in his attempt to interfere in the relations of the Greek countries that were managed by another bishop. At the same time, the Pope protects the bishop of Justiniana Prima in his disagreements with the archbishop of Mediterranean Dacia, as well as in the arrangement of the relations in Praevalitana (Skodra).

The events in old Epirus in 603 provide even more accurate representation of the state with the breakthrough of Slavs deeply in Greek territory.

On the basis of numerous written sources, in about 600, we can conclude that the church life in Macedonia temporarily extinguished, while in its south it was seriously threatened. This conclusion is also supported by the claim that the European seats that were occupied by the Slavs (with the exception of Stobi), were no longer mentioned. The bishop of Stobi most probably defected to some of the places at the coast of the Byzantine Istra.

Similar defections in this period are typical of the numerous bishops in the Balkan countries, in areas that were not inhabited by the Slavs.

Furthermore, on the basis of the church-historical sources we can conclude that the church organization was not completely destroyed in the areas inhabited by Slavs, especially not in the lower structures. These structures in the antique / relics, helped in the attempts to expand Christianity between the Slavic population inhabited from both sides of Vardar during 658. For this reason, we should not be surprised by the fact that the names of the two bishops from Stobi in 681 and 692 are mentioned, despite the fact that many scientists claim that the occurrence / existence of the bishoprics of Stobi in this period was unreal.

With conclusions from the church council (Quinisextum) in 692, the situation of the emigrated bishops was once again regulated by applying solutions that were identical to the recommendations of the Pope Gregory the Great for South Illyricum, since 99 years ago.

The bishops that emigrated from their territory, had the right to live as they would find it appropriate and as such they were respected by their fellows although they were not able to visit their bishopry.

Finally, realistically assessing the indicated historical concepts about the development of early Christianity and the early Christian church in the area of Macedonia, we can conclude that exactly Macedonia Secunda, the subject matter of our research, was in the center of all events with the development of church life in the wider region of the Balkan Peninsula.

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## ИСТОРИСКА ГЕНЕЗА НА ПОЧЕТОЦИТЕ НА ХРИСТИЈАНСТВОТО – РАНО ХРИСТИЈАНСТВО ВО МАКЕДОНИЈА, СО ПОСЕБЕН ОСВРТ НА ШЕСТИОТ ВЕК

Сузана КОТОВЧЕВСКА

*Апстракт:* Студијата „Историска генеза на почетоците на христијанството – рано христијанство во Македонија, со посебен осврт на шестиот век“ на специфичен начин ќе ги претстави најрелевантните историски и општествено-политички аспекти на условите во доцната античка провинција Македонија Втора со главен град Стоби, во функција на целосно појаснување на генезата на пробивањето и постепено востановување на христијанството. Анализата на историската генеза на овие важни настани почнува уште во 2. и 3. век (периодот пред Константин), со посебен фокус на периодот од шестиот век кога се случува многу интензивни настани коишто беа и релевантни за развојот, а во специфични епохи и за стагнацијата на развојот на христијанството во Македонија. Истовремено, студијата ќе ги разјасни постојаните прогони на христијаните кои во свое време беа определени од владеењето на одредени императори и нивните ставови во однос на христијанството и христијаните. Развојот и воспоставувањето на христијаните во Македонија, а во оваа смисла, и во Европа, ќе се истражува низ анализа на Првиот вселенски собор во Никеја (во 325), Синодот на Сардика, соборот во Ефес (во 449), четвртиот Четвртиот вселенски собор во Халкидон (во 451). Освен тоа, важна позиција и фокус во оваа студија ќе се стави врз улогата на Солунскиот викаријат за развојот на христијанството во Македонија Втора. Заради целосно комплетирање на научното знаење за анализираниот период, ќе се претстават и условите што се однесуваат на тој период, како и Акакијевиот раскол и улогата на бискупите во овој регион до крајот на расколот. Историските и административно-црковните прилики за време на владеењето на императорот Јустинијан Први целосно ќе ги одрази вкупните историски, општествено-политички и општествено-економски прилики што се однесуваат на христијанството во тој период, но и историјата и судбината на Македонија Втора во овој историски контекст. Студијата отвора нови научни предизвици за истражувањето на овој недоволно истражуван период од областа на доцноантичката Македонија, епископските позиции, огромниот број цркви во Македонија од овој период (повеќе од триста цркви од раното христијанство). Оваа студија недвосмислено ја потврдува тезата дека територијата на Македонија е мост за идното проширување и воспоставување на христијанството во Европа.

*Клучни зборови:* христијанство, Македонија Втора, историска генеза