

# Early Christian reliquaries in the Republic of Macedonia

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The word *relic* comes from the Latin *reliquiae* (Greek *λείψανα*) and refers to any object, part of the body or clothing remaining as a memorial of a saint (Morkot, 2010: 56). The veneration of relics is to some extent a primitive instinct evident in many religions – in Buddhism [1], Christianity, Hinduism, Shamanism, and Judaism. In the Old Testament, God celebrated the holy relics of those who were well-pleasing to Him with miracles. For example, a dead man was resurrected by touching the holy relics of the Prophet Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21). The tomb and bones of this Prophet, who had prophesied to Jeroboam the destruction of idolatrous altars, were greatly revered in Judea. The Patriarch Joseph also left a testament to the sons of Israel during their exodus to preserve his bones in Egypt and to carry them back to Israel (Genesis 50:25).

Relics have had great importance in the Christian world owing to their power to perform miracles. The veneration of holy relics was confirmed by the VII Ecumenical Synod in its decrees: "Our Lord Jesus Christ granted to us the relics of Saints as a salvation-bearing source which pours forth varied benefits on the infirm. Consequently, those who presume to abandon the relics of the Martyrs: if they be hierarchs, let them be deposed; if however monastic or laymen, let them merely be excommunicated" (Relics and Pilgrimages by Jenny Schroede, [www.netplaces.com/saints/a-bone-to-build-a-dream-on/relics-and-pilgrimages.htm](http://www.netplaces.com/saints/a-bone-to-build-a-dream-on/relics-and-pilgrimages.htm))

St. Thomas Aquinas in Summa II: 25:6 regards the word *adorare* as an appropriate, common term *cultu duliae relativae*, a veneration which is not that of *latria* (*λατρεία*, divine worship) directed primarily at material objects of worship, not residing in them but looking beyond to the saints.

In several monasteries, particularly those on Mt. Athos in Greece, all of the relics the monastery possessed were displayed and venerated each evening at Compline. The veneration (Greek *δουλεία, dulia*) of relics in the Orthodox Church is clearly distinguished from adoration, i. e., that worship which is due to God alone. Thus Orthodox teaching warns the faithful against idolatry and at the same time remains true to scriptural teaching (vis. 2 Kings 13:20-21) as understood by Orthodox Sacred Tradition.

It is difficult to determine the period in which it first became common to venerate fragments associated with saints. In the middle of the 3rd century, St. Cyprian of

Carthage, a bishop, said that venerating the instruments used to torture and kill the martyrs was an acceptable practice because their bodies had made those items holy. In the 4th century, St. Basil wrote in detail about the official ceremonies held on the anniversary of saints. The veneration of relics was already widespread early in the 4th century, as is shown by dated inscriptions on blocks of stone (Feissel, 1980). In 415, the disinterred body of St Stephen was reported to have performed miraculous cures, leading numerous pilgrims to visit his shrine in Jerusalem (Oxford Dictionary of World Mythology: Relics [www.answers.com/topic/relic](http://www.answers.com/topic/relic)). Belief in the efficacy of such relics to perform miracles led to the division of remains among many churches and believers. In 401, the Council of Carthage decreed that all churches not honouring the relics of saints should be destroyed.

Miraculous healing seems to be a Christian phenomenon, probably due to the fact that many New Testament episodes describe how Jesus went from town to town healing the sick by His touch alone. Healing involved physical contact with Jesus or an item associated with him. Many miracles were performed as a direct result of the relics of a particular saint. Pilgrimages were a direct result of the cult of saints and the role of relics, all in the hope of miracles. Relics were considered not only the physical remains of the saint — they *were* the saint and had the same attributes and powers that the saints had possessed in life, including the power to heal and perform miracles. The motivation for most pilgrimages was to benefit from being in contact with holiness by seeing and touching the holy. Early relics were often hung around the neck in small containers called reliquaries, showing clearly the person was Christian and hoped to be rewarded by making good things happen. Pilgrims often made their own *brandea* by rubbing a piece of cloth against a holy tomb or filling a small flask (ampulla) with holy water, whereby they could take holiness home with them. *Brandea* were the most common kind of relics in the 1st-2nd century — the equivalent of today's third-class relics. (European Medieval Pilgrimage Project - Relics)

Although relics were said to have no material value and the decoration of reliquaries was not supposed to add to their earthly value but only to the power of the saints with which they were associated, the economic value assigned to one celebrated eastern example is described in an Arabic source. This source claims that the Greeks offered 12,000 gold pieces and 200 prisoners of war for the Mandylion lost when the Arabs captured Edessa in the 7th century. According to Anthony Cutler, Christian gifts and collections of relics and sacred objects, decorated or not, go back to the principles of the most archaic societies where the value of an object as a component of a collection is not related to its artistic presentation but is based on the power of its contents. (Cutler, 2002: 252)

Early Christian *memoria* were covered funerary sites that housed the bones of deceased Christians where they were venerated. This tradition continued and the bones of saints came to be considered sacred 'relics' and were housed in special rooms called 'crypts'. Relics and reliquaries were placed in the altar under the altar table or in crypts as part of the ritual called 'catechesis'. Where there was no special room, small crypt reliquaries were constructed in the form of recesses beneath the altar table.

Relics also played a major role in the consecration of church buildings. The consecrating priest (a bishop where possible) placed the relics on a *discos* (paten) in another church near the church that was to be consecrated; from there the relics would be taken in a cross procession to the new church, carried three times around the new structure and then placed in the altar table as part of the consecration service. The relics of saints (traditionally always those of martyrs) were also sewn into the *antemision* given to priests by their bishops as a means of granting them permission to celebrate the Sacred Mysteries. This was kept on a high place of the altar and it was forbidden to celebrate the Eucharist without it.

As for the place where relics were venerated in the early Christian churches, it is important to note the opinion of W. Caraher: 'The transepts at the east end of the aisles must likewise remain a mystery despite the scholarly attention that the tripartite transept has received. It is possible that these spaces facilitated communication between the bema and aisles or that they were reserved for the veneration of relics.' (Caraher, 1997: 176) Snively suggests that the term 'tripartite transepts' should not be used in relation to the early Byzantine Balkans. "The third point of view is that of function, which undoubtedly can affect the overall architectural form as well as the degree of isolation of the wings and their internal divisions, furnishing, and decoration ... Certain functions can be identified, of which burial is the most obvious, but it would be a serious mistake — in the present state of our knowledge — to attempt to correlate this particular architectural arrangement with particular functions in all cases." (Snively, 2008: 73-4)

Elena Gartzonika recently gave the names of the most important Early Christian Balkan martyrs, together with the names of the locations where they suffered martyrdom. She mentions the 4th century date of a stone reliquary with an inscription now kept in the Benaki Museum (Gartzonika, 2009: 129-140).

**Reliquaries** are, in the widest sense, any box, casket, or shrine that serves for the reception of relics. These must have existed in some shape or form almost from the beginning of Christianity. They were named *capsa*, *capsella*, *theca*, *pyxis*, *arca*, etc., which are very general descriptions as the same names describe receptacles for the Blessed Eucharist, the holy oils and other pious objects. Passing over the phials attached to the *loculi* in the catacombs and which were supposed to contain blood, the earliest known reliquaries are probably some 5th century silver boxes from Grado and Numibia. (The **Catholic Encyclopedia**, VIII, 296) Some medieval reliquaries in the form of legs and arms, and particularly heads or busts, were known as 'speaking reliquaries'. Interest in the mysteries and powers of the relics grew continuously and the presentation of reliquaries added a theatrical aspect to worship. Reliquaries of all shapes (house, church, cross, purse, necklace), and *picturae* — altarpieces with painted narrative images that often contained relics — formed a focal point for reflection at the high altar or at smaller subsidiary altars.

Byzantine reliquary crosses were wearable crosses made in two parts and assembled with hinges that allowed them to open lengthwise like a clamshell. They could hold the fragment of a saint's bone or strand of hair and were believed to have the power to heal and protect. Complete and intact specimens with both halves still attached

are extremely rare. Precious decorated crosses were reserved for high priests only and to be used while performing rituals.

### **State of research and data on relics and reliquaries in the Republic of Macedonia**

The treasures of the Archbishopric of Ohrid are very important to us. The most important liturgical items, the insignia of archbishops, gold woven church textiles given as gifts from Byzantine emperors to the Autocephalous Church in Ohrid, as well as icons from St. Sophia and St. Clement in Ohrid were transferred to Sofia in Bulgaria during the Second World War, while the church of the Holy Virgin in Skopje, where the main Church treasury was, was put to fire. Fortunately, the inventory was published in 1935 (Jergić et al., 1935). They are partly exhibited in the Archaeological and Church Museum in Sofia, *Християнское искусство Болгарии*, (2003: 45-57). In a document dated to 1516, the treasury of the Archbishopric of Ohrid is regarded as one of the first medieval institutions to bear the title of a Museum (Μουσαῖον). Thus, a seal has been discovered in Ohrid with the following inscription: 'The seal of the general museum (ΜΟΥΣΕΙΟΥ) of the Holy and Apostolic See of Justiniana Prima of Ohrid and of all Bulgaria'. The year 1516 is written at the centre in Arabic. It is supposed this was an ecclesiastical institution founded in the Middle Ages to house church inventory after the land become part of the Ottoman Empire and some of the churches in Ohrid were devastated. The typicon of the monastery of St. Naum in Ohrid shows that several reliquaries which were later distributed to other Ohrid churches were originally situated at St. Naum's (Miljković, 1982: 16; Celakoski, 1985: 41; Ćorĳeska, 1983: 221-232, fig. 8-15; Kuzman Počuča, 1988: 133-150, Georgievski, (*Od Ohridskite riznici*, 2001). Some of the gold woven church textiles, given as gifts from Byzantine emperors to the Autocephalous Church in Ohrid were presented and described in the catalogue of an exhibition in Moscow (*Християнское искусство Болгарии*, 2003: 45-57).

Alexandra Walsham highlights an aspect of relic-worship whereby reliquaries themselves could become surrogate foci of devotion and reverence in situations where the relics had been lost, destroyed or confiscated (Walsham, 2010: 12-20).

What has survived from the plundering and removal of relics for safety from early Christian churches in Macedonia are mostly the outer caskets of fragments — parts of Early Christian reliquaries made of marble and ebony, as well as ceramic vessels. Many of the contents of High Medieval and later reliquaries, after having survived so many wars in the region, have been stolen in recent times, though the caskets remain.

There are over four hundred Early Christian churches on the territory of the present-day Republic of Macedonia, mostly of the basilica type. The majority of the Episcopal and urban basilicas have preserved the containers in which relics were kept. Most of these are sarcophagi or caskets from the site of Bargala. Many relics were either plundered by barbarians or removed for security reasons during hard times when bishops and members of their office had to leave the territory. A number of small containers between 10 and 40 cm deep and usually placed under the altar table have been discovered in provincial churches near Prilep, in Ohrid, in the Central Basilica at

Stobi and elsewhere in Macedonia. Some archaeologists have identified these as 'crypt-reliquaries'. Sometimes a marble amphora found under the floor of the diaconicon may indicate its previous function as a vessel-container for holy relics. (Aleksova, 1997; Nacev 2009: 151-156; Filipova, 2010: 127-139) Probably the missing relics were removed when the local bishops were forced to leave their residences at the end of the 6th century.

Very few objects considered to be reliquaries have been reported and none have been scientifically analysed or presented in detail. Bargala has the largest number, with five reliquaries, two of which were found during excavations in the 1970s, perhaps indicating the high status of Bargala as the origin or place of death of martyrs. A number of wooden relief and sculptural fragments have also been found which may have been parts of reliquaries. An amphora with a handle in the middle (l=24 cm, w=15 cm) found under the diaconicon floor of the Episcopal basilica of Bargala may have served as a relic container (Aleksova, 1971: 272, fig 42).

1. The first object that is definitely a reliquary is made of white marble in the form of a sarcophagus with a fragmented inscription: VCPRAETUR B- and PROC.

2. The second one is a casket made of ivory with a Latin inscription: MR. Neither of these have been available for review to me. They belong to the permanent collection of the Museum of Macedonia and might still be stored in its depots as many other temporary exhibitions have been on display in the last few years.

3. The lower part of an andesite box, decorated with a cross on its smaller end and a primitive fish-bone motif on its elongated side, probably served as a container for relics container. This box, missing its lid, has been exhibited in the Museum of Štip and is identified as having come from the site of Kruška, Star Karaorman, near Štip. The legs of an altar table and a column in the Episcopal basilica of Bargala were decorated with a fish bone pattern similar to that on the reliquary casket.

4. The simple reliquary stone casket reported to have been found outside the vaulted room next to the Episcopal residence is not possible to trace. A published picture of the casket shows it was damaged in one corner. The missing lid is presumed to have been thrown away when the tomb was broken into by illegal diggers. The casket has protruding inner edges. Remains of a human scalp and jaw have been found on the floor. (Beldedovski, 2003: fig.3).

Aleksova records the grave (chapel) of a martyr in the location where the first piscine of the Episcopal basilica of Bargala was subsequently built. However, she does not provide material proof of this grave and the low quality photos show only a large hole and no walls or plates of the piscine or grave wall. (Aleksova, 1989: 137-8)

A small marble sarcophagus dated to the 3rd century has been found at Stobi. It is regarded as having belonged to a child and was found in a grave of the necropolis in the vicinity of the early Christian basilica *extra muros* known as the 8th basilica of Stobi. Its very small dimensions 33 x 47 cm (height of the lid of 15, altogether ar. 36) indicate that it could not have been intended for a funeral. It was made from an architrave, Inv. No. A 92-163 (*Municipium Stobensium*, 1994: 68, fig 383)

**Early Christian sarcophagus-shaped reliquaries** are traditionally considered to have originated from Early Antique tombs of the 1-2nd centuries when cremated remains, together with gifts and accessories, were laid in small stone boxes. Such models with angular acroteria were widespread in the Black Sea area and can be found in the south of the Balkans: there are finds in Syria, the Turkey Hermitage Museum, Sofia, Varna, Blagoevgrad and Vratza Museums. Two such reliquaries were discovered in Corinth and Lesbos (previously in the Geneva Museum of Art and History, now in Athens) and one in Thessalonica (*Byzantium 330-1453*, 2008: 330-1453, ill. 181, page 424; ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗ, 1986; Tesori dell'arte Christiana in Bulgaria, 2000, cat. no 3-8, p. 9-10.). One small reliquary sarcophagus made of silver has been found in Niš and has been dated to some time between the 4th and 7th centuries (Ilić, 2008, 130, fig. 3).

Recesses beneath main altars, **square or rectangular, circular and cross shaped**, are to be found under almost every main altar of the excavated churches that have not been demolished or disturbed by illegal digging or land digging prior to archaeological investigation. Only at St. Erasmus and the Polyconch basilica in Ohrid was this space well isolated and decorated with tiles. Yet, anthropological analyses has discovered ashes of human bones only at the site of Zrze in Prilep and St. Erasmus in Ohrid (Malenko, 1989: 6), as well as remains of bones buried later in an older vaulted tomb in Morodvis. None of the other crypts contain ashes. They might have been destroyed out of neglect during the excavations or left unrecorded. Ashes from the bones of birds have been found through analysis of material found under the altar table of newly discovered basilicas in Bargala and Konjuh. [2] The floor of the room that contained the reliquary in Bargala, attached to the Episcopal residence, does contain traces of a human jaw and skull, but these cannot with certainty be identified as having belonged to the stone casket found outside the room, thrown away by illegal diggers who broke into the building. (Beldedovski, 2003: 54). I am not aware of any report or analysis of the traces found in the casket.

The three types of small crypts usually have stone/marble or ceramic supporting walls. There are also cases where the altar table is attached to the rock of the mountain and the relic container (?) was dug into the side of the rock. Relics were also kept in boxes or sarcophagus- like caskets with acroteria, placed in ceramic or alabaster vessels or in boxes in vaulted crypts (Bargala and Stobi).

**Rectangular shaped** recesses under altar tables have been found at the following sites:

1. A second half of the 5th century crypt of the confessio type has been discovered under the altar table in the middle of the presbytery of the Polyconch Basilica in Lychnidos (Bitrakova Grozdanova, 1975: 36). It is made of bricks and has the following dimensions: 0.80 x 0.80 x 0.80.. On the bottom of the eastern wall of the crypt a rectangular treasure container (0.15 x 0.15 x 0.15) tiled with marble was found.

2. In the apse of the 6th century basilica at Kale near Debrešte in Prilep has been found a rectangular section that served as a container for relics (1.37 x 1.00 x 1.78 m.). It was made of bricks, stone and mortar and has two levels, thus forming two chambers one above the other.

3. A basilica in the village of Orman near Skopje, a kind of one nave basilica with three parted transept, and two annexes at the western side comprises rectangular shape recesses too. (Lilčić, 2002: 640-645)

4. Cebren Hill, Mariovo (Mitkoski, 1997: 69, fig. 4.) and 5. Baba, Prilep (Mitkoski, 1997: 73, fig. 6.) show recesses: the first one is a rectangular hole (0.115 x 0.09 x 0.08 cm) dug into the rock of the hill as a monolith foundation of the altar table of an early Christian church and the second is a small rectangular hole (0.17 x 0.13 x 0.10 cm).

**Square Crypts-recesses** have been found at the following sites. The presbytery of Basilica D at Heraclea contains direct indication that relics were placed in the square hole (6x6 cm) of the carved cross (11x11 cm) of an Antique spolia that must have been removed by thieves because the earth layers are mixed, and the stone plate that closed the hole was broken by force. (Maneva, 1989: 53-54). Square crypts-recesses have been discovered in the funerary basilica near Stobi (Mikulčić, 2003,145), in the funeral 5th C. basilica from Morodvis (Trajkovski, 1989, pl.3) and in the recently discovered 6th C. pseudo basilica in Bargala (Nacev, 2009: 151-156).

**Cross shaped recesses** have been found at basilicas in:

1. Makedonska Kamenica (Mikulčić, 1986, fig. 8).

2. Cebren, Manastir Zovik, Mariovo, Prilep (Lilčić, 2002: 961).

3. St. Erasmus, Ohrid (the crypt was covered by marble plate on which traces of burnt human bones have been recorded under the altar table). St. Erasmus worked as a missionary in the Episcopal city of Lychnidos and this resulted in local veneration of this saint and construction of a basilica dedicated to him. Devotion to the saint spread soon after his death and he was venerated at the location where he had preached Christianity with such great success. Rajko Bratož thinks this was soon after the invasion of the Ostrogoths in 479. (Bratož, 2000:20; Malenko, 1977: 136)

4. The Central Basilica of Stobi is made of stone bricks and *spolia* (material re-used from an earlier phase of the building. (Mikulčić, 2003: 135)

5. In a smaller compartment of the upper north-east corner of the 6th century funerary basilica in the village of Suvodol, near Bitola, a cross shaped construction (a depot for relics?) was discovered in its central section containing ashes.

6. Also a part of the table is preserved (6th century.) which might have displayed the sacrifice of Isaac. (Mesesnel, 1932: 202-212)

### **Small pectoral reliquary crosses**

Many types of crosses have been found at Early Christian sites in the Republic of Macedonia. The sites near Demir Kapija, Prilep and Strumica are among the richest. Pectoral reliquary crosses, *encolpia*, are usually of the Greek or Maltese type. Rare examples bearing monograms or accompanying letters include the Early Christian pectoral cross found in Demir Kapija on which there is a small rectangular shallow that might have contained a piece of wood and which has an accompanying Christ monogram dated to the 5th or 6th century, as well as a victorious Constantine cross on a ceramic plate found in Vinica with the inscription 'Crux Christi', dated from the 4th to

6th centuries. (Dimitrova, 1993: 129; *Crosses from the Collections of Macedonian Museums*, 2008: 20, fig. 6)

In an excavation in 2007 at the site of Carevi Kuli near Strumica the archaeologist Z. Rujak found a cross reliquary in the infant grave no. 38 (dimensions of the cross 2.7 x 1.8 cm, 0.5 cm thin; terrain inv. No. 409). It is made of bronze, silver-coated, cast, and is dated to the 4th - 6th centuries. This seems to be the earliest known cross of this kind in Europe. Its front shows an opening for a stone, now missing. (*Crosses from the Collections of Macedonian Museums*, 2008: 20, fig.1.)

In 2000, a catalogue of the private collection of Trifun Kostovski was published. This catalogue included brief descriptions and dates for 2,000 pieces of crosses, in most cases related to the cities or regions where they were found, but not to the sites. There are several from Štip dated to the 5th and 6th centuries (Catalogue No. 4) and from Negotino dated to the 6th century (Catalogue No. 6). It is not clear how this material has been dated, since it is well known this was mostly provided by illegal 'archaeologists'. Both crosses (probably illegally dug and found) have been ascribed to females. One is made of silver and the other of gold. The first is decorated with black stone, as it is described, the other with emerald. The former was made with great skill, with granulation around the stone (2.3 x 1.4 cm). No dimensions are provided for the latter cross, though it is less elongated and similar in shape to the earlier Strumica example of the Maltese type. No. 27 of the catalogue shows a simple undecorated 6th century cross from Strumica, referred to as a reliquary cross cast in bronze (4.5 x 2.2 cm). Yet we see only its back and it is not certain it had a hole to hold relics or a stone to close the opening. Much more ornate is the archpriest pectoral reliquary cross from Štip (Catalogue No. 38). The front side of the cross bears the haloed image of St. John in ceremonial attire with his hands outspread in prayer. On the upper arm of the cross are inscribed the letters HOANHΣ. The back has an engraved cross with enamelled circular medallions. Above the central medallion are inscribed the letters MP ΘΓ (dim: 10.1 x 5 cm). A half preserved cross from Gevgelija from the 6th century is also listed (Catalogue No. 43). This is an archpriest's pectoral reliquary icon cross (74 x 43 cm), cast in bronze and engraved, decorated with a small black stone at the centre of the front side. The upper arm of the cross shows Christ with the inscribed letters HC and XC. The lower arm bears an image of the Virgin. The two saints on the horizontal arm have not been identified (*2000 krstovi od Makedonija*, 2000).

A number of tombs shaped as vaulted loculi have been identified by some archaeologists as having served as containers for relics, but there are no indications that these were graves of saints. The south nave of the Episcopal Basilica in Stobi contains a vaulted grave variously ascribed to different bishops of the church (Veljanovska, 1987-1989, 233-239) but it is unclear whether the bishop was venerated as a saint or not. His body and the grave were intact at discovery.

We can add to the group of 'unconfirmed' holy places (tombs of holy persons, sometimes with churches attached, where the earthly remains were venerated as relics) the following discoveries:



1. An arched (vaulted) tomb has been found at the site of the church of Holy Transfiguration in the village of Zrze in the remains of an Early Christian three-nave basilica. Risteski regards this as 'a unique manifestation of the construction of an early Christian church complex above the relics of an unknown Christian martyr from some time before 381.' (Risteski, 2011)

2. A special room for keeping relics, as it was described by Beldedovski— a tomb with vaulted construction (2.80 x 1.05 m) containing a casket with bones— was found in the yard between the Episcopal Basilica and the Episcopal residence in Bargala. It was discovered outside, and we cannot claim for certain that it was part of the basilica. It was attached to the southern wall of the room, located in the front of the residence. Its walls are preserved up to 1.40 m. above ground. The upper parts of the southern wall show parts of a vaulted roof made of mortar and bricks. A 3.5 m long stone casket with its lid missing has been found in the vaulted room attached to the southern wall of the Episcopal residence. It contained the remnants of bones. The current whereabouts of this casket are unknown and no data from any analysis of possible relic traces has been reported so far. I am unaware of any dimensions or textual description of the relics. (Beldedovski, 2003: 55, fig. 3)

3. A vaulted reliquary from the mid-5th century has been found under an altar table in the Palicura basilica near Stobi. (Mikulčić, 2003: 144)

4. Along the south wall of the 5th century funeral basilica in the village of Morodviz near Kočani has been found a vaulted tomb originally planned for two persons, male and female. Later in the Middle Ages, the remnants of five or more bodies were added through an opening made in the vaulting and were placed upon two benches. Traces of bones of birds, fish, goats and tortoises have been identified on the floor covered with sand. (Trajkovski, 1989, pl. 3)

In the late middle ages, an important vaulted tomb from the 8th century might have contained the relics of the Fifteen Holy Martyrs of Tiveriopolis, as several researchers speculate (Trajkovski, Aleksova, Pepek). It was built over an Early Christian church of Fifteen Holy Martyrs and was included in the medieval five domed church in Strumica (Tiveriopolis). A fresco representing the Fifteen Holy Martyrs of Tiveriopolis (martyred in the 5th century) was added in the 9th or 10th century. (Miljković-Pepek, 1992-94: 57)

Even if it did not contain the relics of these martyrs, it can be considered a pseudo crypt or a tomb that contained the less important, 2nd or 3rd class relics related to these martyrs.

The south aisle of the Episcopal Basilica of Stobi possesses what Orlandos identified as a rare combination of crypt and confessio. Orlandos's opinion and terminology have since been accepted and repeated by all that have studied the Episcopal Basilica in Bargala. Orlandos made a possible reconstruction of the tomb and the screen of the confessio (Orlandos, 1954: 461, fig. 423). Only a fragment of the bronze needle of the reliquary box (?) has been preserved in the niche in front of the chancel under the floor (Mikulčić, 2003: 128; Wiseman, 2006: 795-803). Mikulčić explains that the corridor was 1 m. wide and that the priests could descend directly into the crypt from the altar space through doors in the façade wall and two stairways. He assumes that that wall 'was

open from above and the curved wall behind it arched above the martyrium in the shape of large shell' (Mikulčić, 2003: 125). As I stated earlier, Veljanovska attributes this tomb to a priest of about 35 years of age around.

Together with the rotunda at Konjuh (where an impost capital has been found with the inscription *domatrirs — (domus martiri)*), these finds are interesting and rare solutions with an ambulatory which allowed the pious to approach the crypt or sanctuary to worship the relics without interrupting liturgical services (Snively, 1979; *Id.*, 2006: 229-244). Mikulčić mentions the existence of *adeambulatorium*, another apse within the larger apse of the cemetery basilica in Stobi, 91.2 m wide. (Mikulčić, 2003:142).

### Relics as a means of reconciliation

Relics have served as important political tools and means of preserving power. They are instruments of legitimacy and embodiments of authority. The use of relics in political discourse continued in the era of the Counter-Reformation. The history of Venice shows how important a tool the possession of relics could be. Their priceless nature and the restricted access allowed to them made relics a particularly powerful gift for Byzantine diplomatic missions to the rulers in the West. Relics were transported throughout Christendom, especially during the Crusades. They were given as gifts to various cities. The possession of holy relics secured power and authority for the ruler and his kingdom by allying him with a holy object. Leaders vied to possess important relics as symbols of divinity and believed that their presence brought holiness to their city. Relics also played a role as political tools in other cultures. Muslim rulers claimed to possess the Prophet Mohammed's mantle and staff, employing these objects in investiture ceremonies and carrying them into battle as powerful totems. In early medieval Japan, Buddhist relics were instruments of political power brokerage and charisma exploited by imperial families and shoguns (Walsham, 2010: 12). Rome played an important role in the production and dissemination of holy relics across the newly Christianized areas of Northern Europe. One expression of the Popes' monarchical pretensions and their assertion of Rome's autonomy and sovereignty in relation to Constantinople was the translation of relics of early martyrs from catacombs. The attempt of the Pope to claim ecclesiastical rights to some parts of the province of Macedonia resulted in the founding of the Justiniana Prima archbishopric by Justinian I. The role of the bishop of Thessalonica in this dispute between the churches was crucial: he inveigled some of the bishops from the north to join the Pope's alliance but had to capitulate in the end. Sending relics as gifts was one way of acquiring support from other bishops in province Macedonia, which may be one reason why Latin inscriptions appear on the reliquary of Bargala. Aleksova suggests that the ivory reliquary with the monogram of the Holy Virgin found in Bargala could have been received as a gift during the tenure of Pope Innocent I (401-417), when the whole Eastern Illyricum was under the jurisdiction of Rome, or in the period of Justinian I.

To study the journey of the important relics is actually **to follow the way of the cross** in Europe as a universal way of interaction and connection. In our case, the preserved relic containers that have been discovered come from bishoprics that were under the

rule of or on good terms with the Pope in the early 6th century, unlike the Bishop of Thessalonica who was publicly excommunicated with a *libellus* sent by the Pope in 511 and was subsequently protected by the Emperor. Was this the reason why these churches were respected and not subjected to plundering — or is this a mere coincidence? The 'must-see' places for pilgrims certainly included the Episcopal church of Stobi with the crypt and Lychnidos whose bishop Theodoritos signed the *libellus*. This is the reason Bratož thinks the cult of St. Erasmus from Lychnidos must have rapidly spread to Rome. (Bratož, 2000: 62) I would propose that Bargala was a very important pilgrimage station, possessing several relics as well as local ceramic and metal productions for producing encolpia and vessels at the same place. The early medieval cult of the holy warrior St. George to whom the nearby domed church in Bargala is dedicated may be related to a popular local cult. Another saint warrior, St. Theodor, is represented several times on early Christian ceramic plates from Vinica (Dimitrova, 1993: 151-161; Balabanov, 2006: 30-31). Recent findings of two plates from Vinica depicting a warrior on a horse were exhibited in the Museum of Macedonia at a temporary exhibition in 2009/10. Continuing to the south, the pilgrim would certainly visit the tomb of St. Demetrius in Thessalonica (Bakirtzis, 2003: 175-192).

There are ongoing attempts at reconciliation between the Orthodox and Catholic Church through the return of important relic once taken by crusaders, initiated by the Pope (such as restoring the head of St Andrew to Constantinople). Thus the Papacy employs relics as a powerful tool in church politics. At the end of 2008, the Macedonian Orthodox Church presented small parts of the relics of St. Clement to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church.

In spite of many thefts, some remarkable silver-coated wooden caskets containing precious relics have been preserved and kept in some of the medieval churches in Ohrid, at the Ohrid Museum and Gallery and the Museum of Macedonia (Krikhaar, 2011: 118-119, 123).

## Notes

- [1] The story of the distribution of the relics of Buddha, which is believed to have taken place immediately after his death, seems to have found remarkable confirmation in certain modern archaeological discoveries. According to the Theravada Tipitaka, sacred relics appeared after the cremation of the body of Buddha, the Enlightened One: *Facts on sacred relics of the Buddha*, The Dhamma Times, 5 August 2002.)
- [2] As Dr. Trajče Nacev from the Museum of Štip informed me in the autumn 2011. Prof. Caroline Snively says the same applies to the new basilica in Konjuh. Analysis of the bones found under the altar table indicates they belonged to birds. The vaulted tomb of Morodvis, with traces of four kinds of animals, may indicate that these were animals usually represented in art as inhabitants of Paradise.

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### Abbreviations

BCH = Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique

CORSO = Corso di cultura sull' arte ravennate e bizantina

**DOP** = Dumbarton Oaks Papers  
**MN** = Makedonsko Nasledstvo  
**MAA** = Macedoniae Acta Archaeologica  
**GSND** = *Glasnik Skopskog Naučnog Društva*  
**NB** = Niš and Byzantium  
**ZSU** = Zbornik na Srednovekovna umetnost, Skopje  
**Zbornik** = Zbornik na Muzej i Nacionalna Galerija, Štip

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# Ранохристијански реликвијари пронајдени во Република Македонија

## РЕЗИМЕ

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*Клучни зборови: реликвии, реликвијари, ранохристијанство, Македонија, цркви, крипти, крстови*

Ранохристијанските реликвии пронајдени во Република Македонија може да се поделат на неколку вида, од кои најзначајни се ковчежиња за чување реликвии, како и амфора, пронајдени единствено во Бургала и во нејзината околина и реликвијарни крстови, од кои најстариот потекнува од Струмица (4/5 в.). Нивниот број се зголемува во 6 и 7 век, при што се појавуваат и луксузни архиерејски крстови, а се зголемува и бројот на претставените светци (доминира Св. Јован Крстител), покрај Исус и Богородица. Во поедноставните и посиромашни цркви, сместени во планински амбиент или далеку од населени места, наместо видана крипта (Плаошник, „Св. Еразмо“, Охрид), под олтарската трпеза во која се сместувани мошти, со што се осветувал објектот, се издлабува во карпа или земја четириаголен, кружен или крстовиден простор. Потоа во него се сместувале моштите, во сад со различен облик. Такви примери доминираат во Прилеп, но присутни се и гробници во состав на црковни (манастирски) објекти во кои е сместено тело на мартини (Зрзе) или многу почитувани свештеници, епископи (Стоби, епископска базилика). Дел од црквите кои поседуваат деамбулаториум или влез од страна на апсидата за директен пристап и оддавање почит на мартирот, немаат зачувана крипта (ротонда во Конјух), но поседуваат пластика во која се спомнуваат мартини (domatirns).

Натписите кои се зачувани на најстариот дрвен ранохристијански релјеф со претстава на Аврамовата жртва од Македонија (Бургала, терми, секундарен наод, 4 век?) на латински и грчки, кога ќе бидат прочитани би можеле да дадат одговор дали овој предмет бил реликвијар или дрвена облога. Еден од зборовите можеби може да се врзе со второто Христово доаѓање (ADVENTUS). Така, реликвијарот можеби содржел мошти на неколку светци или на светиот Крст, каде Исак би бил праслика на Исус. Останатите реликвијари од Бургала (капак од мермерен ковчег во облик на саркофаг и делови од слонова коска со зачувани монограми (според Блага Алексова на Богородица), заедно со долен дел од ковчеже од андезит, украсено со мотив на крст и слонова коска (дивокопачите го оставиле зад себеси упаѓајќи во објект 3). Белдедовски го смета за просторија за реликвии. Овие

реликвији можеби укажуваат дека Бургала (како и Стоби) била мошне значаен центар во ходочастието спроведувано во првите векови во Македонија.

Дел од метална облога на реликвијар(?), како што Иван Микулчиќ го толкува предметот најден во подот на Епископската базилика во Стоби, кој содржи натпис, прочитан од него како "На дојденецот од Африка" е уште еден предмет кој засега буди интерес, но не може со сигурност да му се одреди функцијата.

Иако многу подоцна датираната отонска ставротка од Охридскиот Музеј и неколку од моштите на многу значајни светци (кои, покрај сите ограбувања, се дел од ризниците на МПЦ или се чуваат во Музеј на Македонија), сепак, заедно со претставените светци на реликвијарните скапоцени крстови и инвентарните книги на манастирот „Св. Наум“ во Охрид, може да ни допуштат претпоставка колку била богата ранохристијанската колекција.