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## IS MLJET – MELITA IN DALMATIA THE ISLAND OF ST. PAUL'S SHIPWRECK?

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**G**naeus Pompeius' expression *Navigare necesse est*, as well as *mare nostrum*, were created out of a simple necessity. The Romans became seafarers out of necessity, not because they had any inclination to become so, because through gradual spread of their authority and power to the Mediterranean coasts they were forced to learn the shipbuilding technique and seafaring skill from other peoples, particularly from the maritime Etruscans, Greeks and Carthaginians.

The eastern Adriatic coast had been connected from prehistory, antiquity and the Middle Ages with places at the western coast of the Adriatic Sea, but also with certain areas of the Mediterranean Sea. In addition to fishing, exchange of goods and travel, the Adriatic Sea also experienced shipwrecks, as testified by a number of finds.

**Key-words:** Mljet-Melita, Dalmatia, shipwreck, St.Paul

### Is Mljet – Melita in Dalmatia the island of St. Paul's shipwreck?

European scholars were first introduced to the issue of St. Paul's shipwreck in the waters of the Mljet island by Ignjat Đurđević, taking great interest in his work *Divus Paulus Apostolus in mari, quod nunc Venetus sinus dicitur naufragus et Melitae Dalmatensis insulae post naufragium hospes sive de genuino significato duorum locorum in Actibus Apostolicis. Cap. XXVII. 27. Navigantibus nobis in Adria. Cap. XXVIII. 1 Tunc cognovimus, quia Melita*

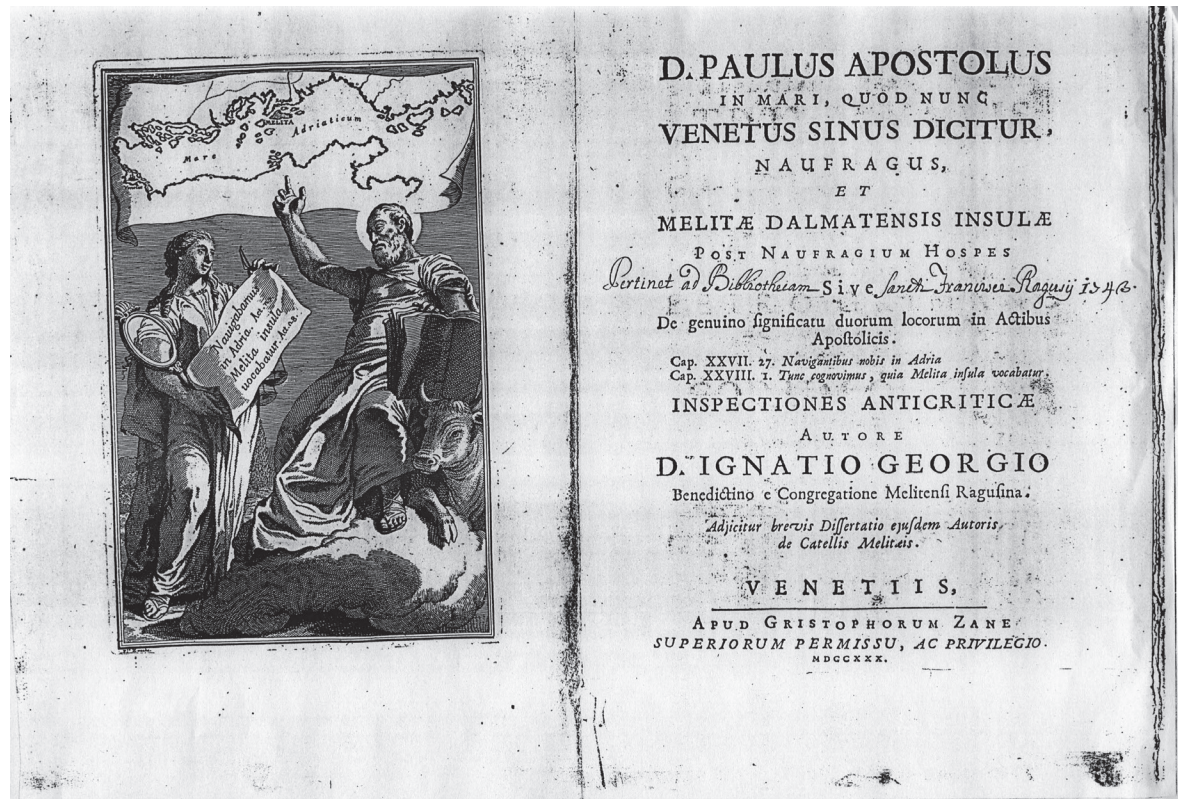
*insula vocabatur. Inspectiones anticriticae autore D. Ignatio Georgio. Benedictino e congregatione Melitensi Ragusina. Adjicitur brevis dissertatio eiusdem de catellis Melitaeis. Venetiis, apud gristophorum Zane Superiorum permissum, ac privilegio MDCCXXX. (Fig. 1).*<sup>1</sup>

However, even before the mentioned work by Ignjat Đurđević, we know of St. Paul's shipwreck in the waters of Mljet owing to the tradition in Dubrovnik, traceable from historical sources from the *Geography* by the 7<sup>th</sup> c. Armenian geographer, mathematician and astronomer Ananias of Shirak (591-636)<sup>2</sup>, through the 10<sup>th</sup> c. histo-

<sup>1</sup> Translation: The castaway St. Paul the Apostle in the sea called the Bay of Venice, and after the shipwreck the Guest or on a dual interpretation of two places from the Acts of the Apostles in chapter XXVII, line 27 since we were chased (by the wind) to and fro around the Adriatic and in chapter XXVIII, line 1. Only once we were safe, we found out that the name of the island was Melite. Critical understanding of the author, Don Ignazio Giorgi, a Benedictine of the Dubrovnik congregation of Mljet with the addition of a discussion on the dogs of Mljet. Printed in Venice in the printing office of Christophor Zana, with the permission and recommendation by the superior in 1730.

<sup>2</sup> THE GEOGRAPHY OF ANANIAS OF SHIRAK 1992, p. 47

Fig. 1 Front page and the Allegory of Truth with the figure of Saint Luke pointing his index finger to the place of the shipwreck on the island of Mljet



rian Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (905-959). In his work *De administrando imperio*, describing the towns of the Dalmatian theme, says about Mljet: "...the second large island is Mljet, mentioned by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles by the name of Melita. On that island St. Paul was bitten on the finger by a viper, which he then burnt in fire..."<sup>3</sup>

After Porphyrogenitus, the same tradition about the shipwreck was passed down in the 16<sup>th</sup> c. by a historian of Dubrovnik, the Italian Serafino Razzi (1531-606). Describing Mljet in his history of Dubrovnik, he says literally: "...At the end of our exposition about Mljet let me also say that many serious writers believe that precisely this Mljet near Dubrovnik is the island where St. Paul the Apostle was saved after the shipwreck, and where he was bitten by a viper, as noted in the 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Acts. The esteemed cardinal Gaetano is one of those writers" (Fig. 2).

After Razzi, the prelates of the Korčula bishopric were the first to protest against the appropriation of the Dubrovnik tradition about St. Paul's shipwreck at Mljet. The first to raise his voice was Jakov Salečić (1678-1747). Šime Ljubić referred to him as a very learned canon from Korčula, claiming that he wrote a discussion on St. Paul's shipwreck in 1699<sup>4</sup>, entitled *Dissertazione sul naufragio di S. Paolo* (A discussion on the shipwreck of St. Paul).<sup>5</sup>

D. PAULUS APOSTOLUS  
IN MARI, QUOD NUNC  
VENETUS SINUS DICITUR,  
NAUFRAGUS,  
ET  
MELITÆ DALMATENSIS INSULÆ  
POST NAUFRAGIUM HOSPES  
*Pertinet ad Bibliothecam Sive Sancti Iovannis Ragusij is 4. c.*  
De genuino significato duorum locorum in Actibus  
Apostolicis.  
Cap. XXVII. 27. Navigantibus nobis in Adria  
Cap. XXVIII. 1. Tunc cognovimus, quia Melita insula vocabatur.  
INSPECTIONES ANTICRITICÆ  
A U T O R E  
D. IGNATIO GEORGIO  
Benedictino e Congregatione Melitenfi Ragusina.  
*Adjicitur brevis Dissertatio ejusdem Autoris,  
de Castellis Melitæ.*  
V E N E T I I S.  
APUD GRISTOPHORUM ZANE  
SUPERIORUM PERMISSU, AC PRIVILEGIO.  
MDCCXXX.

In the Introduction of the mentioned work, the Dubrovnik poet and the Mljet abbot, Ignjat Đurđević (1675-1737) wrote: "...I say and claim, in full responsibility, that before the noble Knights Hospitallers settled at Malta, i.e. until 1596, it was generally accepted that the glorious place where St. Paul the Apostle was saved from a shipwreck was the Croatian island of Mljet..."

Daniele Farlati (1690-1773), the author of the work *Illyricum Sacrum*<sup>6</sup>, mentions the shipwreck in the chapter "On the islands of Dalmatia": "...The historian Constantine Porphyrogenitus also mentions that St. Paul was shipwrecked on this Croatian island when he was being taken to Rome in chains, and not, as many believe, on the African island of Melita..."

In his research on the beginnings of Christianity in Illyricum, irrespective of the shipwreck, Farlati thinks that St. Paul spread Christianity in Illyricum either before or after his first Roman captivity. To substantiate his opinion, he cites the words of earlier Christian writers, St. Jerome (345-420), Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390), St. Peter Damian, a cardinal and a Doctor of the Church (1007-1072), as well as later writers, such as Grgur Ratkaj (1612-1666) and Ivan Tonko Mrnarević (1586-1637), the archbishop of Bar, Andrija Zmajević (1624-1694), and the titular archbishop of Ohrid, Rafael Levaković (1590-1649). All those authors explicitly state that St. Paul spread the gospel in Illyricum, so

<sup>3</sup> CONSTANTINE PORPHYROGENITUS 1994, p. 95 (later in the text: DAL)

<sup>4</sup> DEMOVIĆ 2009, p. 124

<sup>5</sup> GLIUBICH 1856, p. 72

<sup>6</sup> FARLATI 1751, p. 199



Fig. 2 The island of Mljet with the peripheral parts of the neighbouring islands Šipan, Lastovo, Korčula and the Pelješac peninsula

this claim was accepted as an undeniable fact based on their writings.<sup>7</sup> Naturally, to this day nobody has tried to show and demonstrate Paul's itinerary in Illyricum, how he sailed there and in which towns he preached. Taking into consideration that sea travel at the time consisted of a series of single-day journeys, because at night the ships did not sail, it could be surmised that St. Paul first arrived in the old Epidaurus, where he preached and founded a diocesan see, and then in Třebinje and in Ston.

The same idea is argued by Francesco Maria Appendini (1768-1837), the author of the 1802 work *Notizie storico critiche sulle antichità, storia e letteratura de Ragusei*, where he wrote: "...I agree with Đurđević that St. Paul was shipwrecked in the Adriatic, on the island of Mljet, where he converted to Christianity the majority of the local population, and from where Christianity soon spread to the neighbouring Epidaurus".<sup>8</sup>

In the introduction of the Chronicle of the Dugo Selo parish<sup>9</sup> near Zagreb, commenced, so it seems, towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> c., the writer tackled the issue of the beginnings of Christianity, claiming that it had spread as early as the Apostolic period from two neighbouring provinces – Slavonia and Dalmatia. In his opinion, Slavonia was introduced to Christianity by St. Jacob, the brother of St. John the Evangelist, who founded a bishopric in Syrmium and appointed St. Andronicus as its first bishop, while in Dalmatia, the same was achieved by St. Paul, following his shipwreck in the waters around Mljet. He also claims that St. Paul appointed his disciple St. Doimus as the

first bishop in Salona. It is not known from where the chronicler learned that St. Doimus was a disciple of St. Paul, instead of St. Peter. This claim nevertheless seems more plausible than the belief of the Salonian Church that Doimus was a disciple of St. Peter, because it is more likely that in Salona the gospel was preached by St. Paul, not by St. Peter. A 4<sup>th</sup> c. bishop from Cyprus, Epiphanius, asserts in his work *Adversus haer.* that St. Luke travelled in Dalmatia to spread the gospel.<sup>10</sup> Another claim in favour of Đurđević's thesis about St. Paul's shipwreck in the waters around Mljet is provided by Vicko Palunko's account in the publication *Melita del naufragio di s. Paolo e isola Meleda in Dalmazia*, published in Split in 1910.<sup>11</sup>

St. Paul's shipwreck also left trace in Croatian literature, because it is mentioned by two Late Baroque poets, Junije Palmotić from Dubrovnik and Jeronim Kavanjin from Split. The poet Junije Palmotić (1607-1657) incorporated the story of St. Paul's shipwreck on Mljet into the historical drama about the founding of Dubrovnik, known by the title *Pavlimir*. The verses on the shipwreck are as follows:

"Zelenoga nadno Mljeta  
Ovo je luka kralju znani,  
Gdje se od mora huda kleta  
Pavo sveti jur sahrani.  
Na ovome on otoku  
U pravedne plame vrže  
Ljutu zmiju i žestoku  
Ka se njemu ruke vrže."

<sup>7</sup> FARLATI 1751, pp. 243-248.

<sup>8</sup> APPENDINI 1802.

<sup>9</sup> DEMOVIĆ 2009, pp. 104-105

<sup>10</sup> Comp. Ignjat Đurđević, *Divus Paulus Apostolus ...*, p. CCLXXXIV.

<sup>11</sup> In the translation by Niko Kličan, *Melita – the island where St. Paul was shipwrecked is the island of Mljet in Dalmatia.*

The Split poet Jeronim Kavanjin (1641-1714) included similar verses in his grand biblical-historical epic poem *Wealth and Poverty*, consisting of 30 books and 32658 verses. The verses are as follows:

*Na istom Mlietnom njeđda otoku  
I svet Pavó na plam varžé  
Ljutu zmiju i žestoku,  
Ká se u ruku njemu taržé,  
Kad ga bieše na ono žalo  
Topno more dotieralo.*

We read about St. Paul's travels and the shipwreck in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>12</sup> Leaving Caesarea after spending two years in prison, Paul must have known that the future is precarious and fraught with danger. He was supposed to appear before the Emperor, but there was a difficult journey ahead of him. It was dangerous to sail the high seas not only because of storms, but also due to problems with orientation in cloudy weather. The remains of shipwrecks bear witness to the dangers involved in the seafaring in the Mediterranean, as well as in the Adriatic Sea. It must be mentioned that ships could not be considered safe even when they were within reach of the harbour: we know from Tacitus<sup>13</sup> that in AD 62, i.e. two years after he arrived in Rome, more than 200 ships sank in a huge storm while sailing into Ostia.

### Journey from Caesarea to Crete

27 ... "And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. (6) And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. (7) And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone. (8) And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

### Stormy voyage between Crete and Malta

(9) Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them (10) And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. (11) Nevertheless the centurion be-

lieved the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. (12) And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. (13) And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. (14) But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. (15) And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. (16) And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: (17) Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. (18) And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; (19) And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. (20) And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. (21) But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. (22) And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. (23) For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, (24) Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee (25) Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me (26) Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

### The last night on the ship

(27) But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; (28) And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. (29) Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. (30) And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the fore-

<sup>12</sup> BIBLE 1968, Acts 27, 28

<sup>13</sup> TAC. Ann. 15, 18.

ship, (31) Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. (32) Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. (33) And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. (34) Therefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. (35) And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. (36) Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. (37) And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. (38) And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

### Shipwreck and salvation

(39) And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. (40) And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. (41) And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. (42) And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. (43) But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: (44) And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

### Three months on Malta

(28) And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. (2) And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. (3) And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. (4) And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among them-

selves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. (5) And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. (6) Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. (7) In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. (8) And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. (9) So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: (10) Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

### From Malta to Rome

(11) And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. (12) And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. (13) And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: (14) Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. (15) And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. (16) And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

As can be seen from the Acts of the Apostles, Luke dedicated an entire chapter to the description of their horrible and traumatic experience. By that time, as we read in a different place (2 Cor 11, 25) Paul had already suffered three shipwrecks, once having spent an entire day and night "in the abyss," that is, floating on the high seas.<sup>14</sup>

It is mentioned in the text that sailing had already become perilous, meaning that the "safe" sailing season lasted from the 27<sup>th</sup> May to the 14<sup>th</sup> September, and that the period between the 11<sup>th</sup> November and the 10<sup>th</sup> March was unfavourable for sailing and above all hazardous. If we consider Luke's remark that when they

<sup>14</sup> BIBLE 1968, 2 Cor 11, 25; HOLZNER 2008, WALKER 2008, p. 175.

Fig. 3 Borders between the Ionian and Adriatic Seas at the Strait of Otranto after the geographer Strabo



arrived in Crete the fast had already passed<sup>15</sup>, it can be computed that the entire Paul's journey toward Rome, including even the departure from Caesarea took place during the risky period for sailing.

Where did St. Paul's shipwreck take place? Certain scholars expressed their positive or negative opinions on Đurđević's assertion that St. Paul was shipwrecked, so it seems, on a part of straight shoreline of the cove near the present-day villages of Saplunara and Korita on the southeast coast of Mljet, not Malta. The main critics of the thesis that the shipwreck occurred on Mljet were Vimer,<sup>16</sup> Bulić,<sup>17</sup> Nikolanci,<sup>18</sup> Tomić, Švab and others, and the Bible and Biblica<sup>19</sup> also mention Malta. Certain

authors mention the shipwreck but do not consider the possibility that it may have happened on the island of Mljet in Dalmatia.<sup>20</sup>

Ignjat Đurđević placed the possible spot of the shipwreck near the village of Maranovići, where still today a rock is visible in the sea that during calm looks like a gemstone, while when the sea is rough it resembles a miraculous monster flaunting like a peacock, scattering its monstrous feathers made of sea spray. The local people call that rock Šepurina Svetog Pavla (*Flaunting of St. Paul*) or St. Paul's rock.

Although Vicko Palunko asserts that the exact spot of the shipwreck on Mljet cannot be determined, he

<sup>15</sup> In AD 59 the Reconciliation Day was on the 5th October.

<sup>16</sup> VIMER 1911.

<sup>17</sup> BULIĆ 1913, pp. 4-49; BULIĆ 1913.

<sup>18</sup> NIKOLANCI 1971.

<sup>19</sup> BIBLIKA 2011, pp. 484-486

<sup>20</sup> WALKER 2008, 175-185



Fig. 4 Adriatic Sea divided into the upper and lower Adriatic after Pliny

believes that, in keeping with the sacred writer's description, this could be the Vrhmljeće harbour, writing: "...When the day dawned, the sailors did not recognize the land, but they noticed a cove with a "straight shoreline", deciding to sail their ship there, if possible." (...) ("peripesontes de eis topon dithalasson). When they entered the harbour, they found themselves in a place open to two seas, and they wrecked their ship on a rock flanked by the sea on either side. The cove of the Vrhmljeće harbour is indeed open to two seas to such an extent that it would be difficult to find a similar place.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the island of the shipwreck is called Melite, but there are three islands of that name in the Mediterranean: Malta, Mljet and Samothrace in the Aegean Sea. The last of these used to be called Melite before it was named Samothrace.<sup>21</sup> Naturally, there are also other similar toponyms that in A. Mayer's opinion have a pre-Indo-Germanic root.<sup>22</sup>

The bulk of the very extensive bibliography on St. Paul's shipwreck supports the Malta tradition, which

is surprising considering that the spot of the shipwreck cannot be ascertained and that a number of clues do not speak in favour of Malta. The series of discussions on the subject were started in the 18<sup>th</sup> c. by Ignacije Đurđević, whose nicely decorated discussion was printed in Venice. It is particularly interesting that the text is decorated with a valuable etching by Francesco Zucchi based on the model of the picture by Giambattista Tiepolo depicting St. Luke and the personification of the truth (*Veritas*), kept in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Zucchi added to Tiepolo's drawing a map of the Adriatic, while Luke's index finger points to the island of Mljet. In addition to Venice, Dubrovnik is also specifically marked on the map. Zucchi thus adjusted Tiepolo's idea with Đurđević's subject, as fully corroborated by the inscription: *Navigabamus/in Adria. Act. 27/Melita insula/vocabatur. Act 28.*<sup>23</sup> A comparison of the two depictions points not only to the originality of the idea but also to G.B. Tiepolo's superior artistic and technical skill.

What is uncertain and leads to doubts, necessitating caution?

<sup>21</sup> STRABO. X, 3, 19

<sup>22</sup> MAYER 1957, p. 224 seq.

<sup>23</sup> PEROVIĆ 2005, p. 210

It is stated in the Acts that wind was throwing the ship around the Adria (*Hadria*). We have to point out here that in the antiquity the name Adriatic was used to denote larger or smaller parts of the Mediterranean. Certain historical sources mention that the term Adria covered the entire area to Malta. However, the name Adria is in fact used for northern Adriatic, while for the Greeks everything else was the Ionian Sea throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, and occasionally also in the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BC. Only later did Adria start to gradually extend and cover increasingly larger areas of the Ionian Sea, but even then Malta stayed outside its limits.<sup>24</sup> However, at the time of Paul's shipwreck, the notion of the Adriatic was already completely clear and defined. It had long been considered that the border between the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea followed the line connecting *Hydruntum* (Otranto) and *Dyrrachium* (Drač) (Fig. 3, 4).

When it comes to the direction of the wind, the ship obviously sailed southwards from Crete. Somewhere north of the Great Sirte, the direction must have changed once again, because only in that case the ship could have been carried due southwest, regardless of whether it eventually wrecked on Malta or Mljet. Three days had passed from the departure from Crete until the arrival near the coast of Africa. In the narrative, there is a feeling that one part of the description ended and another, much longer one started, lasting a fortnight.<sup>25</sup> The northeast wind could not have lasted longer than three or four days. It clears the clouds and allows sight of the moon and stars at night, as well as, obviously, the space around the ship. The wind from the southeast quadrant, however, is prolonged and dark. It should be noted that Paul was familiar with the Adriatic and the surrounding areas.

He had already sent Titus to Dalmatia before (Second Timothy, 4,9). Paul orders Titus to join him in Nicopolis when he sends him Arthemias or Tychicus, because he decided to spend the winter, meaning, a long time there (Titus, 3, 12). Therefore, already prior to the journey to Rome, on which he suffered the shipwreck, Paul had stayed in the neighbourhood of the Adriatic. We cannot know for sure whether he visited and preached in Illyricum at that time. Paul must have known that Nicopolis lay at the southern border of *Ionios kolpos*, and that *Adrias* lay to the northwest, so he would not have used the name Adria for the sea around Malta. The already mentioned information by the 4<sup>th</sup> c. Cyprian bishop Epiphanius is exceptionally important, stating that St. Luke the Evangelist, a faithful friend

of St. Paul, was in Dalmatia (*Adv. haer.* II, 11). When could Luke have spent time in Dalmatia? If he had indeed been in Dalmatia before, he also must have known where *Adrias* was. In Cambi's opinion, this most likely took place precisely at the time of the shipwreck.

Luke mentions that Publius, Paul's host, was the *princeps insulae* (in the Greek text of the Acts that function is called *protos tes nesou*). It should also be pointed out that unlike Dalmatia (Second Timothy, 4,9) and Illyricum (Romans 15, 19), Malta is never mentioned by St. Paul. If the shipwreck had occurred on Malta, Paul would have certainly mentioned at least one or two settlements, for there were settlements on Malta, unlike on Mljet; it is also implausible that he would have referred to the contemporary inhabitants of Malta as barbarians, like he did in the case of the hospitable islanders that wholeheartedly greeted the castaways, because on Malta they also spoke Greek, a language that Paul, as a Hellenized Jew, knew very well.

Another exceptionally important information, from the document *De administrando imperio* by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, from the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> c. states that Paul was bitten on the thumb by a snake. In the words of the Emperor writer this happened on Mljet,<sup>26</sup> not on Malta. The supporters of the Malta thesis downgrade the Emperor's information, taking it for a mistake. However, had there existed any tradition about Paul's shipwreck on Malta, it would have been known in Constantinople, and the Emperor would have written it down. Would Paul's Maltese episode really have been forgotten after the short period that the island was occupied by the Saracens?<sup>27</sup> At that time the tradition that sees Malta as the place of the shipwreck had still not been created. The Maltese tradition will be formed only in the 13<sup>th</sup> c. In 1530, the Knights Hospitaller, today known as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, moved from Rhodes to Malta. On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1530 Emperor Charles V gave Malta with the neighbouring islands of Gozo and Comino as a fief to the Knights Hospitaller, who thereupon fortified the island, transforming it into an invincible fortress of Christianity against Islam.<sup>28</sup> This military order grew into a strong naval force in the Mediterranean that controlled the entire international maritime traffic.<sup>29</sup> Since they needed a patron saint, they found one in the person of St. Paul. That way Malta became and stayed famous mostly by the shipwreck of St. Paul.

Perhaps the only difficulty in this would be the fact that the Alexandrian ship *Castor* diverted from the di-

<sup>24</sup> WALKER 2008, p. 178

<sup>25</sup> CAMBI 2008.

<sup>26</sup> DAI XXXVI.

<sup>27</sup> CAMBI 2008, p. 490

<sup>28</sup> DEMOVIĆ 2009, p. 122

<sup>29</sup> FRANZEN 1963, p. 161





Fig. 5 Possible directions of the route of Paul's ship before the shipwreck and of the route of the Alexandrian ship to Rome (after Cambi 2008)

rect route to Rome into Syracuse, spending three days there. Syracuse lies on the direct route from Malta, although one could also take a route along the western coast of the island, naturally, with a favourable wind. Syracuse may have been the ship's destination out of a number of commercial, technical or weather-related reasons, regardless of the route and the final destination.

In any case, the final say in the determination of the itinerary of St. Paul's ship from Caesarea to Rome, as well as the place of the shipwreck is the prerogative of the maritime science, whose contributions were little known and therefore unused by our biblical scholars in the clarification of the problem.

Antun Ničetić concludes<sup>30</sup> that the writings of St. Luke are of markedly religious nature, and although lacking in navigational, meteorological, oceanographic and other similar arguments, they provide basis for the following conclusions:

1. St. Paul's ship could not sail upwind, with a beam wind and waves hitting the side, so it could not sail westward in the northeast wind and arrive from Crete to the northwest coast of Malta (Fig. 5).

2. The floating anchor is an irrefutable proof that St. Paul's ship sailed before the wind, i.e. downwind. That way one could not sail from Crete to Malta in the northeast wind, whereas one could reach Mljet in the southeast wind.

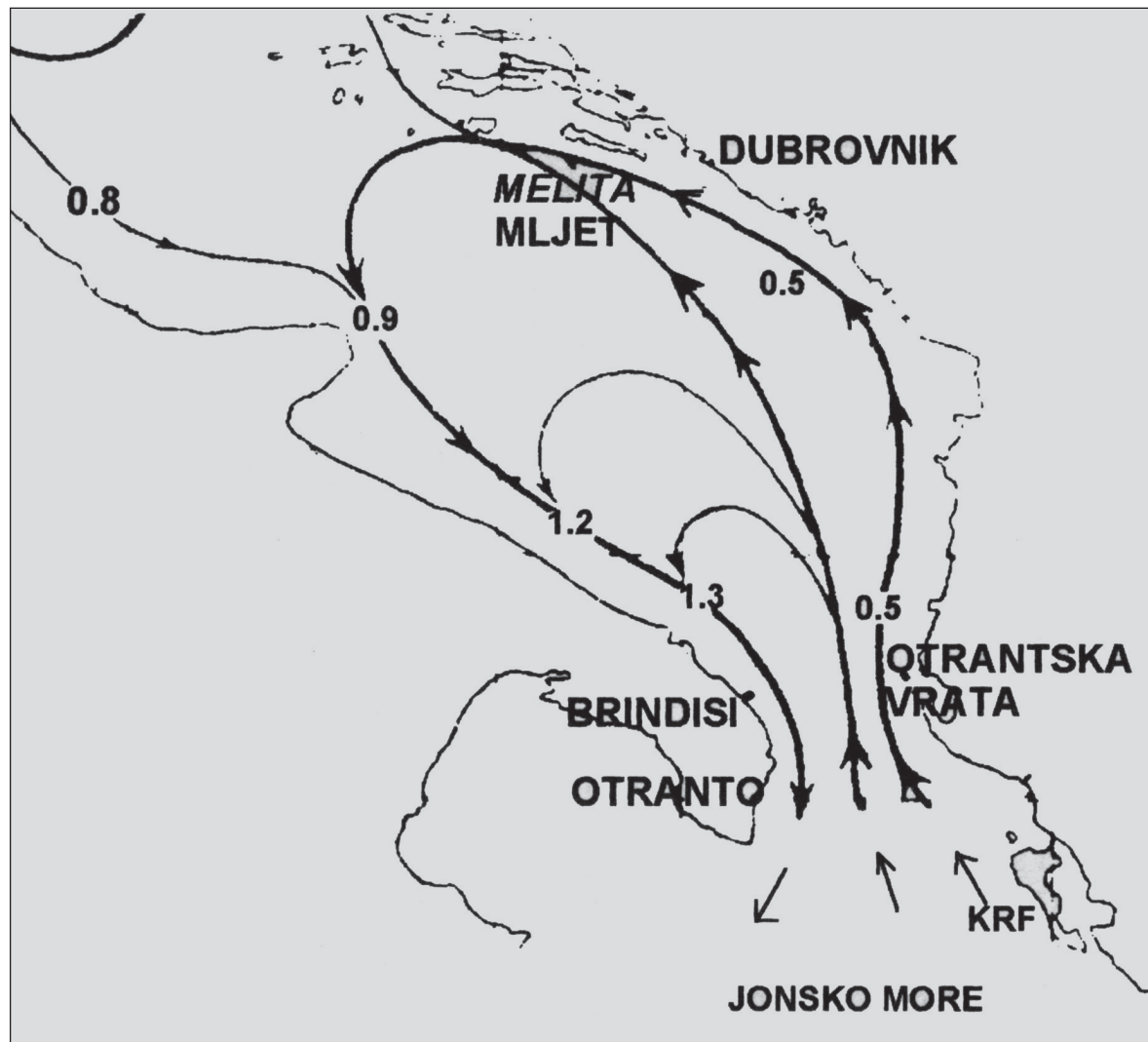
3. The mention of "sailing to and fro across Adria" clearly points to the change of the direction of the wind. It is very likely that the wind did change and northeast wind did not blow throughout the fortnight, as usually asserted in literature. Had the northeast wind blown the entire time, the ship would have wrecked on the coast of northern Africa. Ničetić argues that southern wind blew, most probably sirocco (southeast wind), the predominant wind in that part of the Ionian and Adriatic Sea during the season St. Paul's voyage took place, and that this was the reason the ship did not wreck on the shores of Great Sirte but was carried towards Mljet. The southern wind could not have pushed the ship towards the northwest coast of Malta.

4. The currents of the eastern Mediterranean, Ionian and Adriatic Sea flow counter-clockwise, pushing the ship towards Mljet, in the opposite direction of Malta (Fig. 6).

5. The navigation route for wheat-carrying ships from Alexandria to Puteoli ran east along the coasts and islands of the eastern Mediterranean and the Ionian Sea, the Strait of Otranto and further along the shores of southern Italy and the Strait of Messina towards Puteoli and Rome. It can therefore be assumed that a ship from Alexandria could find itself on Mljet, and not on Malta, and pick up Paul and the marooned castaways.

<sup>30</sup> NIČETIĆ 2009, pp. 183-184

Fig.6 Currents in the Adriatic Sea



6. It is clear from St. Luke's writings that St. Paul's ship visited the Adriatic, and not only the Ionian Sea, because Paul arrived on an unknown island after a fortnight's voyage, only later learning that its name was Melita.

7. There are harbours and coves on Mljet that are well protected from all the winds and waves, used in the antiquity and in later periods (Fig. 7).

8. Recent research by Maltese scholars, published toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> c., reveals that there is no archaeological evidence on the wreck of St. Paul's ship on Malta, and that the tradition of worship was created there as much as twelve centuries after the shipwreck, as late as 1299.

Based on the analysis of hydrometeorological elements of the southeast coast of the island of Mljet and the maritime features of ancient ships, the records from the Acts of the Apostles as well as considerations and interpretations of various authors, Miloš Brajević and Stjepo Đurđević-Tomaš put forward the idea that St.

Paul's shipwreck took place on the southeastern coast of Mljet in a bay with a straight shoreline (Fig. 8). The authors' interpretation of the term "bay with a straight shoreline" from the Acts of the Apostles denotes a bay offering the possibility of a safe disembarkment or where the castaways could safely land ashore.<sup>31</sup> However, while approaching the "bay with a straight shoreline" the ship hit an underwater rock. Nevertheless, even though there must have also been nonswimmers among the castaways, everyone was saved, indicating that the shore was near and most likely sheltered from the rough seas. The "Uvala Nad Garma" and "Uvala Podškolj" bays, with the islets of Veliki Školj and Mali Školj offer excellent shelter from the southeastern wind and waves, allowing safe landing to the castaways. In the opinion of Brajević and Đurđević-Tomaš,<sup>32</sup> the bay of Veliki Školj and Mali Školj matches the description of *Dithalassos* by St. Luke, i.e. a place open to two seas (Fig. 9). From the sailing experience of the authors, when a sailor looks from a ship a cable's length from Veliki Školj

<sup>31</sup> BRAJEVIĆ, ĐURĐEVIĆ-TOMAŠ 2009, p. 203

<sup>32</sup> Miloš Brajević and Stjepo Đurđević-Tomaš are ship captains and professors of maritime sciences at the Dubrovnik University.

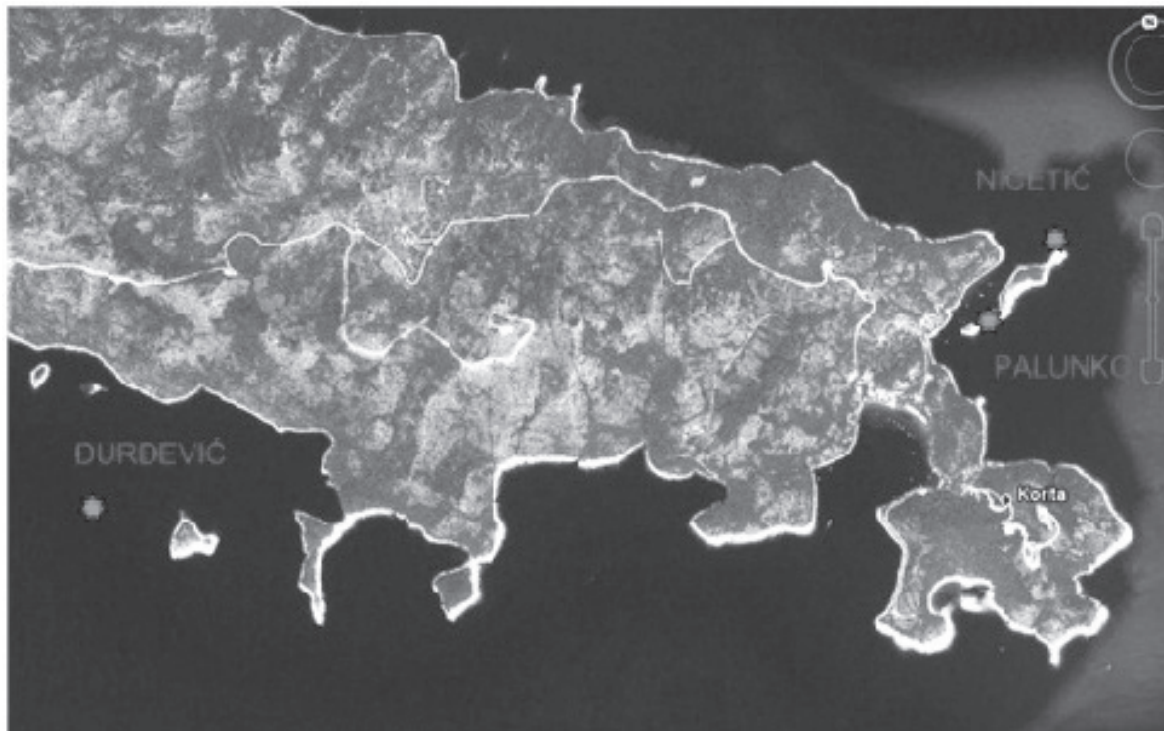


Fig. 7 Possible positions of the shipwreck



Fig. 8 Horizon of the “bay with a straight shoreline” on the southeast part of the island of Mljet

Fig. 9 Strait on the eastern coast of the Mljet island between the islets of Veliki Školj and Mali Školj, giving the illusion of a place where two seas meet (*dithalasson*)

during the southeastern wind, he has the illusion that there are indeed two seas; a stormy sea hitting the rock on the southeastern side, and a quiet sea on the north-west side, providing safe shelter.<sup>33</sup>

The described locations according to Đurđević, Palunko and Ničetić match all maritime descriptions, and especially the visual descriptions from the Acts of the Apostles, proving it possible that St. Paul may have been shipwrecked on the southeast coast of Mljet, in a “bay with a straight shoreline.”<sup>34</sup> The authors consider the opinion of Palunko and Ničetić plausible, based on the depth and position of Veliki Školj and Mali Školj, which form a natural breakwater, that is, “a double sea.”

Two sites of early Christian sacral monuments have been discovered on the island of Mljet, the first on a coastal elevation near the villages of Saplunare and Korita, and the other in the village of Polače, in the heart

of the ancient Palatium<sup>35</sup> (Fig. 10, 11). They were constructed as double churches, but their patron saint is unknown.

Recent archaeological investigations on Mljet yielded the remains of another early Christian basilica, which—according to the tradition—might belong to a church of St. Paul<sup>36</sup> (Fig. 12), as well as yet another one that could be dated to the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> c. The basilica occupies the southeast part of the island, near the Veli Školj islet, the place where we believe St. Paul’s ship ran aground, as documented by Vicko Palunko. The former church can be dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> c.

The remains of the churches confirm the existence of a significant Christian community on Mljet.

The continuity of the Pauline tradition in Dubrovnik can be substantiated by the monuments of visual arts, for instance, by the oldest figure of St. Paul,

<sup>33</sup> BRAJEVIĆ, ĐURĐEVIĆ-TOMAŠ 2009, p. 203

<sup>34</sup> BRAJEVIĆ, ĐURĐEVIĆ-TOMAŠ 2009, p. 204 seq.

<sup>35</sup> ŽERAVICA 2009, p. 385

<sup>36</sup> ŽILE 2009, p. 267

Fig. 10 Polače, 5<sup>th</sup> c.

Fig. 11 Small churches in the Polače bay (after I. Fisković)

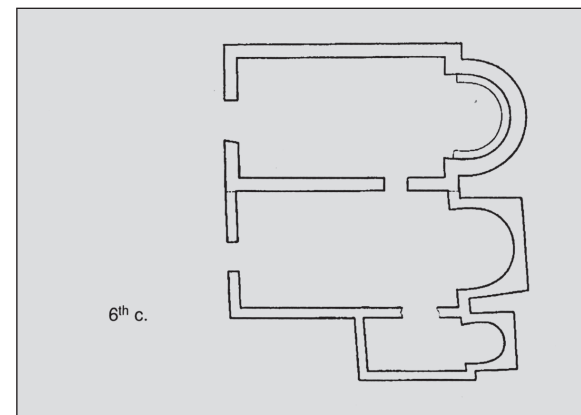
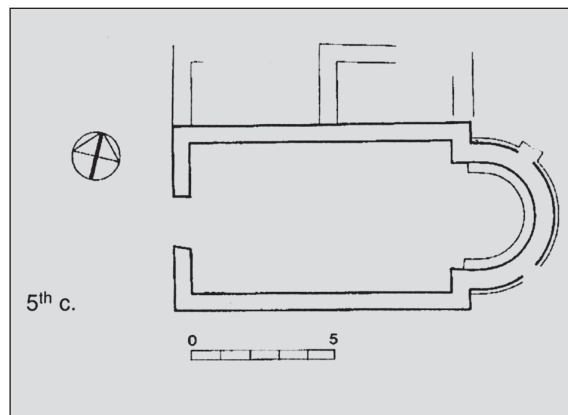
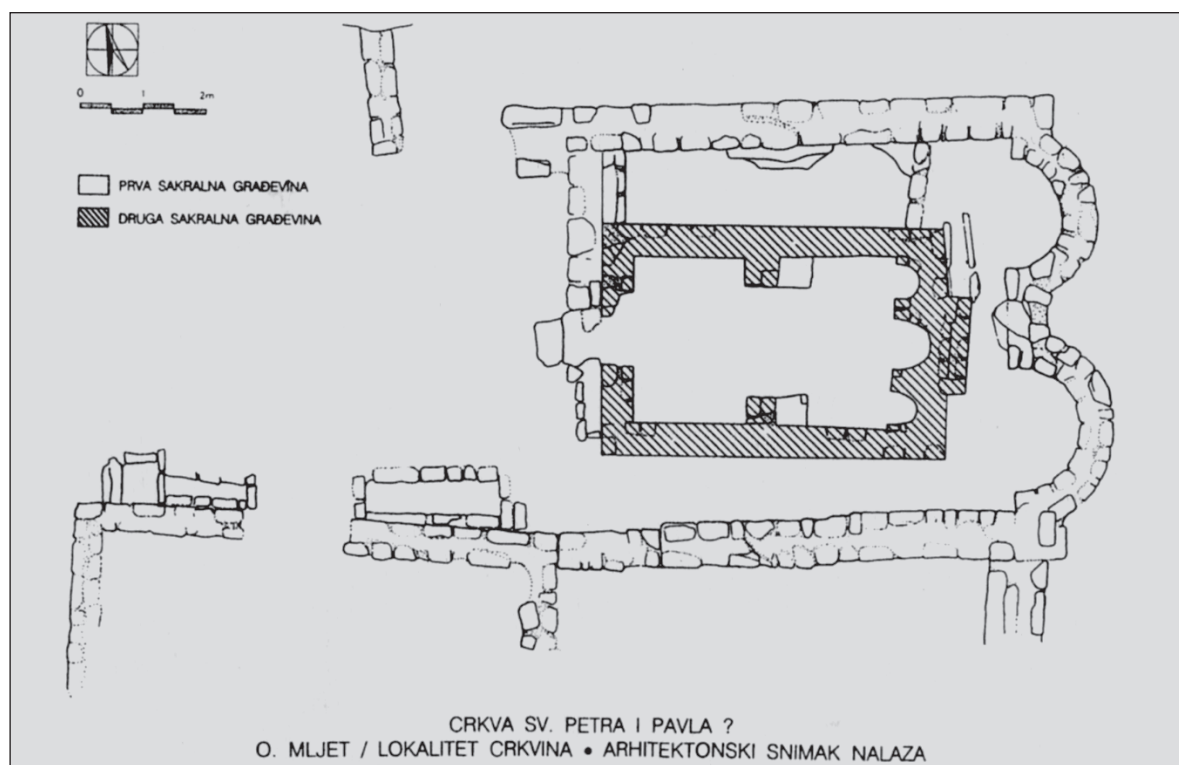


Fig. 12 Plan of the mediaeval church of St. Paul east of Korita (after I. Žile)



executed in enamel on a 11<sup>th</sup> c. reliquary of the Right arm of St. Blaise in Dubrovnik, a figure of St. Paul on a 15<sup>th</sup> c. triptych of Mother of God from St. Blaise's Church, a decorative image with St. Paul's figure on a dalmatica on St. Blaise's altarpiece from the 15<sup>th</sup> c., as well as by several Renaissance works of the Dubrovnik school of painting, particularly the figure of St. Paul in the company of St. Blaise on the polyptych of the Croatian painter Nikola Božidarević in the Dominican Church etc. It should be pointed out that there used to be 6 churches erected in the honour of St. Paul in the Dubrovnik bishopric, but that only the church in Palje Brdo in Konavli has remained standing. Its early Christian origin is indicated by a rosette. The remains of St. Paul's church were discovered in the village of Korita on Mljet, in the vicinity of the spot of the shipwreck. Pauline churches were erected also in Ston, where there

is a toponym SuPavo, in Šipan, where there is a hill of St. Paul, as well as in Župa Dubrovačka, where, as archival documents reveal, a church of St. Paul once existed next to the Pijavičino brook. The fact that more than three hundred different surnames developed from the name of St. Paul is another indication that his cult must have been very strong.

At the end let us point out that the dilemma left by the author of the Acts is not easily solved, but that there are numerous indications in favour of the thesis that Pauline shipwreck took place on the Adriatic Melita.

Based on the ancient sources about the seafaring in the Adriatic, Croatian Latin heritage and archaeological finds, we tried to concisely answer the question whether Mljet – *Melita* in Dalmatia was the island of the shipwreck of St. Paul.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

BAStorDalm                      Bulletino di archeologia e storia dalmata (Split)  
 Bogoslovska smotra            Bogoslovska smotra (Zagreb)

**SOURCES**

ANANIAS OF SHIRAK            The Geography of Ananias of Shirak, Wiesbaden 1992.  
 CONSTANTINI PORPHYROGENITI De administrando imperio (later in the text:DAI) O Upravljanju carstvom, Zagreb 1994.  
 STRABO                            Geographica, Lipsiae 1903.  
 STRABON                         *Γεωγραφικά* (Geographica)[*The Geography of Strabo. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge – London 1969*]  
 TACIT                              *Anali, Zagreb 1970 (trans. J. KOSTOVIĆ)*  
 TACIT, KORNELIJE              *Annales sive Ab excessu divi Augusti [P. Cornelii Taciti Ab excessu divi Augusti. Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge – London 1969]*

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## SAŽETAK

### JE LI OTOK MLJET – MELITA U DALMACIJI OTOK BRODOLOMA SV. PAVLA?

**Marija BUZOV**

Istočna obala Jadrana od prapovijesti, antike i ranog srednjeg vijeka bila je povezana s mjestima zapadne obale Jadrana, ali i s nekim krajevima Sredozemlja. Pored ribarstva, razmjene dobara, putovanja, na Jadranu su se dogodili i brodolomi o čemu svjedoče brojni nalazi.

Na problematiku brodoloma Sv. Pavla u vodama Mljeta upozorio je europsku znanstvenu javnost, Ignjat Đurđević, koja je njegovo djelo *Divus Paulus Apostolus in mari, quod nunc Venetus sinus dicitur naufragus et Melitae Dalmatensis insulae post naufragium hospes sive de genuino significato duorum locorum in Actibus Apostolicis. Venetiis, apud gristophorum Zane Superiorum permissum, ac privilegio MDCCXXX*. primila s velikim zanimanjem.

No, i prije navedenog djela Ignjata Đurđevića o brodolomu Sv. Pavla u vodama otoka Mljeta znamo zahvaljujući dubrovačkoj tradiciji koja se može pratiti na temelju pisanih izvora od *Geografije* Ananije Širaka, armenskog geografa, matematičara i astronoma iz 7. st. (591. –636.) preko cara i povjesničara Konstantina Porfirogeneta iz 10. st.

Gdje se dogodio brodolom Sv. Pavla? Pojedini su znanstvenici iskazali svoje slaganje ili neslaganje s Đurđevićevom tvrdnjom da je Sv. Pavao doživio brodolom, kako se čini, u mljetskom zaljevu ravne obale u blizini današnjih naselja Saplnare i Korita na jugoistočnoj strani otoka Mljeta, a ne Malte. Glavni kritičari teze da se brodolom dogodio na Mljetu bili su Vimer, Bulić, Nikolanci, Tomić, Švab i drugi, a da se brodolom dogodio na Malti donosi i Biblija i Biblika. Pojedini autori spominju brodolom no ne uzimaju u obzir da se brodolom mogao desiti kod otoka Mljeta u Dalmaciji.

Na temelju analize hidrometeoroloških elemenata jugoistočne obale otoka Mljeta i maritimnih svojstava antičkog broda, zapisa iz Djela Apostolskih te promišljanjima i tumačenjima različitih autora, Miloš Brajević i Stjepo Đurđević-Tomaš upućuju na mogućnost pozicioniranja brodoloma Sv. Pavla na jugoistočnoj obali otoka Mljeta u zaljevu ravne obale. Autori definiraju da pojam “zaljev ravne obale” prema Djelima apostolskim označava uvalu u kojoj je moguć pouzdan i siguran iskrcaj, izlazak na kopno brodolomaca. No, pri prilasku “zaljevu ravne obale” brod se nasukao na hrid. No, iako je bilo zacijelo među brodolomcima i neplivača, svi su spašeni što govori o blizini obale i najvjerojatnije mirno more u zaštićenom dijelu. Zaljevi “Uvala Nad Garma” i “Uvala Podškolj” s otocima Veliki i Mali školj pružaju odličan zaklon od utjecaja jugoistočnog vjetra i valova te omogućuju siguran iskrcaj brodolomaca. Po mišljenju Brajevića i Đurđevića-Tomaša zaljev Velikog i Malog školja odgovara opisu *Ditalasa* prema svetom Luki, tj. dvomorskog mjesta ili dvomorja. Iz pomorske prakse autora, kad se pomorac nalazi na brodu na udaljenosti jednog kabala od Velikog školja za vrijeme jugoistočnog vjetra, ima privid da su stvarno dva mora; olujno koje udara o greben, s jugoistočne strane i mirno sa sjeverozapadne strane koje pouzdano osigurava zaklonište.

Spomenute pozicije prema Đurđeviću, Palunku i Ničetiću udovoljavaju svim maritimnim, a posebice vizualnim opisima u Djelima apostolskim te dokazuju mogućnost brodoloma sv. Pavla na jugoistočnoj obali otoka Mljeta u “zaljevu ravne obale”. Autori drže vjerodostojnima stavove Palunka i Ničetića s obzirom na dubinu i položaj Velikog i Malog školja, koji prave prirodni valobran, odnosno dvomorje.

Na otoku Mljetu otkrivena su dva nalazišta ranokršćanskih sakralnih spomenika od kojih se prvo nalazi na visoravni uz more kod naselja Saplunare i Korita a drugo u naselju Polače u samom starom Palatiumu. Građene su kao dvojne crkve, no ne znamo tko im je bio titular.

Novija arheološka istraživanja na Mljetu potvrdila su ostatke još jedne ranokršćanske bazilike, koja bi možda prema predaji mogla pripadati crkvi sv. Pavla, te druge koju možemo datirati u kraj 11. st. Bazilika se nalazi na jugoistočnom dijelu otoka u blizini otočića Veli školj, mjesta gdje se držimo nasukao brod sv. Pavla, koju je zabilježio Vicko Palunko. Prvu crkvu možemo datirati u 5/6. st.

Nalazi crkava potvrđuju da je na Mljetu postojala značajna kršćanska zajednica.

Kontinuitet dubrovačke svetopavlovske tradicije možemo potvrditi spomenicima likovne umjetnosti primjerice najstarijim likom sv. Pavla izrađenim u emajlu na relikvijaru desne ruke sv. Vlaha iz 11. st. u Dubrovniku, lik svetog Pavla na triptihu Majke Božje iz 15. st. iz crkve sv. Vlaha, ukrasna sličica s likom sv. Pavla na dalmatici sv. Vlaha oltarne pale iz 15. st., potom s više renesansnih ostvarenja slikarske škole Dubrovnika posebice likom sv. Pavla u društvu sv. Vlaha na poliptihu istaknutog hrvatskog slikara Nikole Božidarevića u Dominikanskoj crkvi itd. Treba istaknuti da je na području dubrovačke biskupije postojalo 6 crkava podignutih u čast sv. Pavla od kojih je jedino danas sačuvana u Paljem Brdu u Konavlima, a na njezinu ranokršćansko podrijetlo upućuje rozeta. Na otoku Mljetu u selu Korita nedaleko mjesta brodoloma otkriveni su temelji crkve sv. Pavla. Crkve sv. Pavla bile su sagrađene i u Stonu gdje postoji toponim SuPavo, Šipanu gdje postoji brdo sv. Pavla, u Župi Dubrovačkoj gdje je kako svjedoče arhivski dokumenti uz potok Pijavičino bila crkva sv. Pavla. Da je kult sv. Pavla bio snažno razvijen ukazuje činjenica da je po imenu svetog Pavla nastalo preko tri stotine različitih prezimena.

Na kraju bismo mogli istaknuti da dvojbu koju nam je ostavio pisac Djela, nije lako razriješiti, no brojne indicije govore u prilog tezi da se Pavlov brodolom dogodio na jadranskoj Meliti.

Na temelju antičkih izvora o plovidbi Jadranom, hrvatske latinske baštine i arheoloških nalaza pokušali smo sažeto odgovoriti je li Mljet – *Melita* u Dalmaciji otok brodoloma sv. Pavla.

