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BETWEEN WEST AND EAST: A PARTICULARITY OF THE CROATIAN ISLAND CULT OF ST MARTIN

Growing out of the traditions of the Antique civilisations, upon which a Slavism whose spirituality was realised on the Christian guidelines of the Western Church was consolidated, Croatia represents a unique civilisational, religious and culturological combination which, in order to survive, was obliged to have its own autochthonic means of expression. At times approved of, more frequently negated, it was, nonetheless, historically confirmed. In the whirlpools of history, the Croatian lands emerged, and prevailed, as the steadfast eastern European border of Roman Catholic Christianity, with the British Isles standing on the western European border. Geographically located at opposite ends of the spectrum, there is much that divides these two cultures, but, still, a number of things that link them.

Keywords: St. Martin, England, Kent, Croatia, Pridraga, Island of Krk, glagolitic

Croatian-Kentish St Martin links

Over many years of research into the cult of St Martin and its viability in the Croatian lands, and into the development of the rich Croatian tradition connected with the saint, we have established that the manifestations of precisely this Early Christian saint have played crucial culturological and religious roles, both in Britain, the extreme European west, and at Europe's extreme eastern border, the Croatian lands. The cult of St Martin, along with Christianity, landed ceremoniously on English territory, in what is now the south-eastern county of Kent, at the very end of the 6th century, with the politically motivated marriage of Kent's pagan king, Ethelbert, and his Christian Frankish bride Bertha, Clodvig's great grand-daughter.¹

¹ The rule of Clodvig (482-511) was marked not only by the creation of the powerful Frankish Empire and its adoption of the leading political and military role among the

Despite the religious and political situation of that time, the developed cult of St Martin, the primary and patron saint of the Frankish Kingdom, also a charismatic Christian, became enrooted in the most secure way possible, that is, through aristocratic, royal authority, both in the western part of the European continent and at its outer western European border, the British Isles. Within this context, the Church of St Martin in Canterbury, the major Christian and cultural Mediaeval focal point in the extreme European west, became the forceful source of the English cult of St Martin and of the entrenchment and dissemination of its tradition, which has remained preserved to the present day.

The tradition of dissemination of the St Martin cult through indirect and *feministically* inclined features represents a unique orientation in spreading the cult of an Early Christian saint, this being confirmed by the twofold royal marital link between the pagan Clodvig and Ethelbert on the one hand and the Frankish Christian princesses Clotilde² and Bertha on the other, who became female promoters of both the cult of St Martin and of Christianity in general.

In 596,³ within only forty years of the arrival of the papal Christian missionaries in England, with Augustine at their head, the Slavic or, more precisely, Croatian coastal region was marked by "renewed" entrenchment of the Christian domination that had been weakened with the arrival of the Avars and of the Slavs (Katačić 1998:163m 256). This was due to the fruitful two-year⁴ missionary work of the pontifical envoy, "the most holy and faithful Abbot Martin",⁵ sent personally by Pope John IV⁶ to Istria and

Germanic tribes, but also by conversion to Christianity, which was to leave its indelible stamp both during the time of Clodvig and on the future of Europe, right up until the present day.

² By her wedding with Clodvig in Soisson in 493, Clotilde, the daughter of the Burgundian king, Kilperik, brought into the marriage her social and political convictions based on Christian precepts that would attain full expression with the baptism of the king himself in the year 496 and the formation of the Frankish Church, with which the Christian Middle Ages really began.

³ The missionary activity of St Augustine of Canterbury (?-604) is the second important factor in the implementation of Christian policies in the British Isles, during which the British Church was founded along with the Canterbury archdiocese, where artistic and scribal activities were intensified. Outstanding in this culturally prosperous period was the prolific literary work of Friar Bede Venerabilis (around 673-735), who gave detailed reports in his chronicle on the religious and educational work of the papal missionaries (Bautz 1990:453-454; Rollason 1996).

⁴ The significance of this two-year Christian mission is evident firstly in the collection of the reliquaries of the Dalmatian martyrs Venancia, Anastasia and Mavro (Petrović 1998:285-294), whose relics have remained until today stored in the Lateran Basilica, and, secondly, in the payment of ransom for the release of Christian prisoners held by pagans, for which a large sum of money was set aside (Mužić 201:171, cf. Rački 1877:277).

⁵ Some believe that the pre-Romanesque Chapel of St Martin in Split (today the chapel of the Dominican Monastery of St Martin), located in the former guards' corridor above the northern or Golden Gates of Diocletian's palace (Karaman 1931:19), was dedicated to Abbot Martin, the *first* and most deserving promoter of the tradition in the Croatian

Dalmatia in 640, with a great deal of money (*cum multa pecunie quantitate*),⁷ just as had been done not many years previously by Pope Gregory the Great (590-604), sending a Benedictine mission to England.

Based on the foregoing parallels, the question arises as to whether the identical nature of these missions was intentional or came about by chance. Was the missionary activity of John IV simply a continuation of the long-term policy of Gregory the Great,⁸ who had monitored with interest during his papacy the settlement by the Slavs (Šanjek 1999:217) along the Adriatic coast? It remains a question whether he did not venture into missionary activities there for political reasons, or because he was already so enthusiastically engaged with the British mission. Was Gregory the Great the model for John IV, leading him immediately at the outset of his papal mandate to send out the mission of conversion to his "native" Dalmatia, the region he must have known best? Was the St Martin cult the "standard" means of conversion applied by the missions of that time, or did John IV rely on it, following the example of Gregory the Great? Although such conjectures are of little help in arriving at the actual background to these events, it is important to bear in mind the mutual dependence of individual historical occurrences that sometimes suggest possible explanations by their logical sequence, particularly when they are compared with certain similar situations in more recent history.

Compared with the cult in England, the cult of St Martin in the Croatian region was not introduced initially through any royal intermediary links, but directly by the authoritative papal envoys. This represents the first, Benedictine, and oldest wave of dissemination of the cult of St Martin, which was only later accepted and additionally recognised by the Croatian nobility (Zaradija Kiš 2002a:204-212) as an important promotional and patronal factor in the earliest stratum of the Croatian tradition of the St Martin cult. Recognition of the cult by way of

lands and, according to some opinions, the *first* Croatian bishop (Ostojić I 1963:147; Petricioli 1999:484).

⁶ Pope John IV (640-642) was a Dalmatian by birth. His two-year rule by marked by the "Dalmatian" missionary work by which he definitely strengthened Roman Catholicism in the region in which he was born.

⁷ Linked to this event, which had such long-term consequences, is the emergence of the oldest Croatian shines of St Martin in Istria and Dalmatia, among which reference should be made of the small Church of St Martin in Trogir, which is barely noticeable today (dedicated to St Barbara since the 16th century). Its origins are located in the 6th century, and it is mentioned in documents from the 13th century, which are dated as having been executed before the portico and in the Church of St Martin: *sub porticum ecclesiae sancti Martini* (1278) or *in curtile sancti Martini* (1276) (Babić 1985:43).

⁸ The excellent 14th century translation of *Dijalog Grgura pape* [The Dialogue of Gregory the Pope], written in the Glagolitic script, speaks of the importance and repute of Gregory the Great in the Croatian Mediaeval region. In respect of style and linguistic fine shading, the translation represents the foundation of Croatian legendary-hagiographic prose "of which little was written...", but upon which "Croatian Renaissance poetry began to be built" (Hamm 1974:192; Hercigonja 1975:288-289).

the nobility – both in the Europe's island border to the west and in the European Croatian east – represents the concurrence of the action of spiritual and ruling forces. Overall, this shows the identical nature of the stance towards the saint, who was also of noble birth, and who, because of his acts of mercy and pastoral and educational activities, only later crossed over into the category of a popular saint.

Both Christian missions, although they unfolded at the two opposite points of the old continent, had one and the same symbol, the same saint-horseman, whose earliest iconographic confirmation in the Croatian region is found on an unusual relief of a horseman in Pridraga,⁹ a village north of Zadar (Petricioli 1975:111-117; 1999:476).



St Martin from Pridraga

⁹ Although the small warrior-horseman relief on the façade of the church was first mentioned in literature in 1891, serious conservation work was undertaken only in 1974 when it was established that the image of the ecclesiastical patron-warrior made up part of the pre-Romanesque pluteus, which had borne the image of the ecclesiastical patron as a warrior mounted on a horse as one of its motifs (Petricioli 1975:111). Due to the fact that the human figure was very rarely shown at the time when the relief was made, it is of exceptional importance, both for the history of Croatian Early Mediaeval sculpture, and for European sculpture. If the time of the carving of the relief dated between the 8th and 11th centuries is linked to the highly developed cult of St Martin, which was borne through Dalmatia in its first wave by the Franks, the horseman symbolism, despite its impreciseness, can be interpreted as the image of the most highly revered saint of that time – St Martin.

Inklings exist of the earliest St Martin pilgrimages on the island of Krk, one of the most prosperous islands in the Adriatic during the early Middle Ages, sheltered from the wind by its location in the Quarnero Bay, while at the same time being on the main maritime route linking East and West. Krk was the original home of the most powerful and wealthy Mediaeval noble family, the Frankopans, who supported and promoted the attractive patronal cult of their time, that of St Martin, during their earliest and most poorly argued history. Consequently, bearing in mind all the mentioned social, culturological, geographical, historical and political factors, and many more that are similar, it is obvious that the tradition of St Martin could become deeply embedded only on the island of Krk, of which there still exists visible testimony whose concealed history has, unfortunately, forced them, too, into oblivion.



The Spread of the Cult of St Martin to the West and to the East

The Popular St Martin Pilgrimage Tradition of the Island of Krk

Just as the beginnings of Christianity on British soil were marked by the cult of St Martin and the oldest shrine dedicated to St Martin, in Canterbury, still well-known today, so in the Croatian coastal region, too, a handful of very old shrines survived in Dalmatia (in Trogir, Split, and Podstrana) and in Istria, along with information on a possible Mediaeval St Martin pilgrimage destination. Perception to date on the dissemination of the St Martin cult and the creation of its tradition in the Croatian region, is an indication of what was, perhaps, the existence of the sole St Martin pilgrimage site in this eastern Adriatic part of Europe. Its origins should be sought in the Benedictine transmission of information on the city of Tours, the central Frankish St Martin site, and the reflection of its popularity towards the East. This line of thought is justified by the notion of the heavily travelled Croatian transversal Crusader-pilgrimage route, both along the Adriatic and in Pannonian Croatia (Zaradija Kiš 2003:183-185), which also greatly influenced the worldview of Croatian Mediaeval society (Raukar 1997:352), and, in that way, the prolific dissemination of the saint's cult.

It is not the shrines themselves that particularly interest us in this context, since they were only the meeting-places of the faithful from a particular area, but rather the locality that could have been an important sheltered resting-place and/or wayside stopping place on pilgrimages to the East, or to the West, to Rome. Unfortunately, we have no more definite documentation¹⁰ in domestic Mediaeval manuscript material, since these appeared from the 14th to the 15th century, at the earliest, when the Krk St Martin shelter was already largely losing its former importance.

Although Marian pilgrimage destinations (Lubina 1995), known from as early as the 6th century,¹¹ dominated in what is Croatia today, reverence for St Martin, although very developed from early times, has no memory of prominent pilgrimage destinations; perhaps this is a matter of there being no preserved data, just as there is no convincing evidence of a pious miracle-worker, Martin (Katačić 1999:341), who came among the Croats.¹² Despite centuries of destruction, constant Crusader transits and frequent changes in rulers, historical facts and very modest writings have

¹⁰ In *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Jherusalem*, Raymund d'Aguilers, a traveller on the Crusader-pilgrimage route, first describes journeying through Croatian regions in 1096, which is then followed by other pilgrims' records on the way to the Holy Land: Geoffroy de Villehardouin, Robert de Clari (Raukar 1997:356).

¹¹ Biskupija near Knin was the seat of the Knin bishops and an important cultural centre that emerged and was particularly active in the period from the 9th century to the 11th. Solin, not far from Split, had its pilgrimage history between the 6th to 10th centuries, particularly after the Empress Jelena had the Church of St Mary built there.

¹² This oral legend was mentioned by the Byzantine Emperor himself, Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905-959), in his scientific and literary work, *De administrando imperio*.

remained, which provide an inkling to the existence of St Martin pilgrimage resting places on one of the most important crossroads, not only local but also European, both maritime and culturological routes, located in the sheltered part of the Quarnero Bay near the island of Krk, a hothouse of the Benedictine, popular but also aristocratic-patronal, tradition of the Croatian Middle Ages.

The Krk St Martin pilgrimage resting-place, whose modest confirmations are linked to the developed Mediaeval St. Martin tradition in the Croatian region as a whole (Zaradija Kiš 1997:267-278), and particularly to the island of Krk (Zaradija Kiš: being printed), emphasise the deconstruction of the original St Martin cult of the nobility, and stress the more popular reverence for St Martin on the part of the common man and of travellers. This wayside pilgrimage site could have been created on the model of the highly developed western European, popular St Martin tradition, which was successfully spread through Europe during the Middle Ages by just these Crusader-pilgrims, constant Adriatic travellers. The oldest and probably the sole St Martin pilgrimage destination up until the 15th century would relate in our case to the island of *Almis* (called St Marko since the 15th century), located in the passage between the mainland and the island of Krk. This used to be the site of the Church of St Martin that was under the administration of the exceptionally powerful Mediaeval Abbey of St Nicholas near the town of Omišalj,¹³ one of the richest and most important early Mediaeval *Glagolitic* Benedictine abbeys on the island of Krk as a whole (Ostojić II 1964:188; Šonje 1990:78). Namely, of the island of Krk's four Glagolitic abbeys, it is regarded that it was the Abbey of St Nicholas that played the crucial culturological and literary role in the introduction of the Glagolitic script, later to be the autochthonic Croatian Mediaeval script, the fundamental heritage of the holy brothers, Cyrill and Methodius. Celebration of the liturgy in the Old Church Slavic language from books written in the Glagolitic script was transmitted from this cultural centre to others (Šonje 1990:79).¹⁴ The monumental nature of the remains of the ecclesiastical abbey complex on the shore indicates that the Church of St Martin on *Almis* could have been in the function of a popular pilgrimage destination,¹⁵ which is confirmed

¹³ The Abbey of St Nicholas was located in the bay of Sepen where the ruins of the former monumental Benedictine Abbey complex can still be seen on the very shore, with its elongated cruciform floor-plan representing one of the rare preserved examples of direct Northern Italian architectural influence (Cambi 2002:233). The ruins still remind one of celebrated Early Christian times and the repute of the abbey. All that remains today of that rich tradition is the name itself of the cove of St Mikula for the former Sepen Bay (Šonje 1990:80).

¹⁴ The abbey thrived most during the 15th century when it was under the administration, until his death in 1505, of the famous Glagolitic abbot Stjepan of Zadar (Štefanić 1936:29).

¹⁵ When considering the large number of assumptions and unsolved issues that arise during research into insufficiently reasoned times, one must bear in mind that the initial shine – the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Cassino – was dedicated to St Martin, who founded

by the centuries of prestige, and the wealth and power it enjoyed during the early Middle Ages. Nothing has remained of all this apart from rare historical evocations such as: ... *ipse sive Abbatia, que a populo dicti Castri et Insule in maxima veneratione et devotione continua habetur* (Štefanić 1936:30).

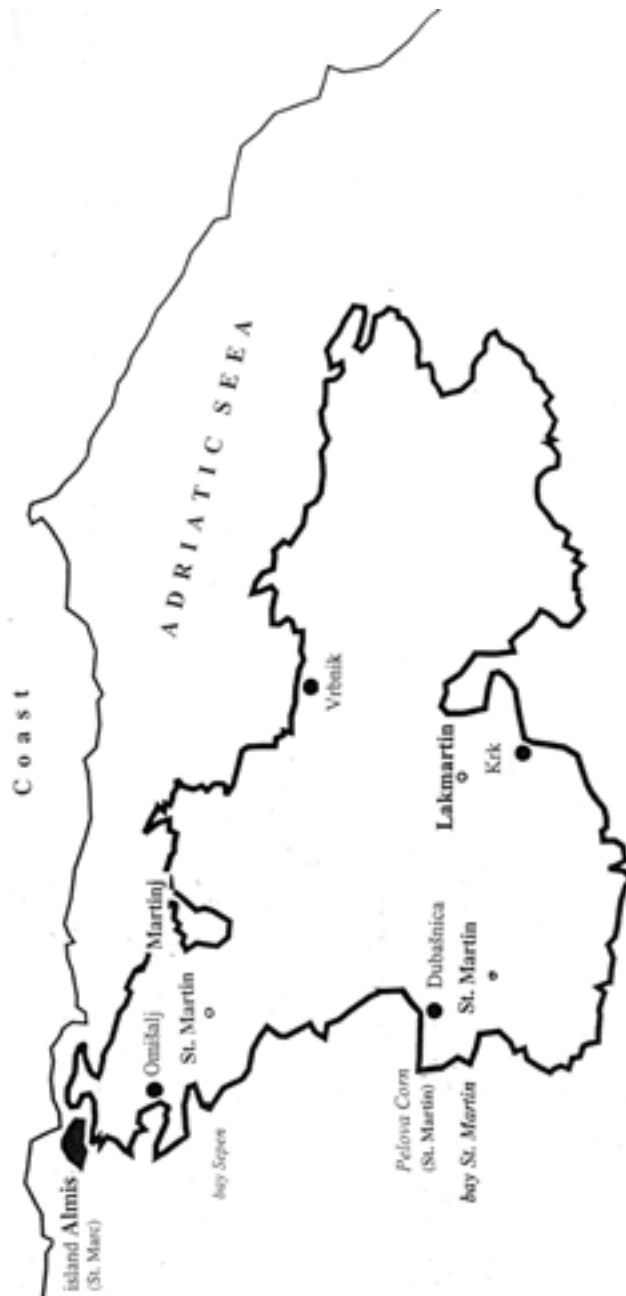
Written testimony of what is almost an accumulation of St Martin centres, of which none remain, speaks of the fact that the cult of St Martin was particularly developed in early history on just the western part of the island. First of all, there were two settlements that bore the name of *Saint Martin*. One, not far from the town of Omišalj, had two churches dedicated to the saint (Bolonić, Žic Rokov 2002:435). Services were held in the settlement church until the beginning of the 16th century, while the settlement was no longer mentioned by the end of that century, and no sign of the church remains (Ljubić 1876:96); there are still barely visible remains of the other small church.

Secondly, another settlement, which was probably older, was also called *Saint Martin*; it existed prior to the 12th century, located somewhat to the south in Dubaonica, and two charters dating from 1153 speak of its church, estate, connections and deed of gift (Kukuljević 1886:7; Štefanić 1936:14-16; Ostojić II 1964:148, 190). All that is left today is a pale memory in the form of a particular hagiohydronym – the bay of St Martin. Generally speaking, the St Martin shrines on the seacoast, or in the high ground that provides a view of the sea (the islands of Pag, Brač, Mljet), are the result of information on St Martin's popular miracles related to events that took place at sea. This is one such legend:

A voyager was travelling across the Tyrrhenian Sea towards Rome. All at once, a powerful storm arose whose hurricane-strength winds started to place in peril the lives of all on board. Suddenly, an Egyptian trader, who was not even a Christian, called out in a loud voice: "Lord Martin, save us if you can!" At that moment, the storm abated, and the voyager, astonished at the event, calmly, without any fear, continued his journey towards his destination. (Monceaux 1927:244).

A total of five early Mediaeval St Martin landmarks on the western part of the island clearly indicate the strength of the cult and its particularly developed *popular* tradition. While the St Martin tradition in that part of the island had already faded away with the departure of the last ruler, Ivan Frankopan, who was imprisoned in Venice in 1480, it did not disappear from the island. Reflections of the cult from the western part of the island could be seen prior to the 16th century on the southeastern part of Krk. This was not only visible in the form of shrines in the towns of Krk and Vrbnik and the toponyms (Martin, Lakmartin), but also through specially prominent popular religious features that grew out of the older Krk pilgrimage tradition. Particularly worthy of attention was the existence of

monastic life in the West, was a Christian teacher, a tireless pastoral activist and the precursor of the Benedictine Order's organisation.



St Martin on the Island of Krk until the 16th century

two St Martin confraternities (Bolonić 1975:26-50) and their social and cultural activities, which continued until the confraternities were banned by the decree of 1807, with the establishment of the Napoleonic administration.

Conclusion

All the foregoing shows an almost imperceptible but, nevertheless, firm link between the European St Martin tradition and its developing continuity from the British Isles to the Croatian islands, to which should be added the rich literary hagiographic St Martin heritage that represents an inalienable link between the literary heritage of Antiquity and developed Western European Christian spirituality (Petrović 1998:285). This is particularly evident in the lengthy Breviary lessons (Zaradija Kiš 2002:299-307), read on November 11, St. Martin's Day, which have been preserved in the Krk Glagolitic coda from Vrbnik, the most powerful Glagolitic scribal centre.

The presence of St Martin, both in social and in cultural Mediaeval events on the island of Krk, highlights the importance and strength of the cult of a markedly Western European saint in a Croatian, markedly Glagolitic, region.

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IZMEĐU ZAPADA I ISTOKA: POŠEBNOST HRVATSKOGA MARTINSKOGA OTOČNOGA KULTA

SAŽETAK

Na temelju provedenih istraživanja glede kulta i tradicije sv. Martina, najpopularnijega ranokršćanskog sveca na zapadu europskoga kontinenta, razvidno je da je hrvatski prostor odigrao ulogu istočnoga graničnog teritorija. Uvijek na vjetrometini vjerskih, političkih i kulturnih sukoba Istoka i Zapada, hrvatski je priobalni prostor, premda malen, od najranijih vremena uspio odrediti, učvrstiti i obraniti svoje interese koji su bili i interesi kršćanskoga Zapada.

Kao što i britanski otok, krajnji europski Zapad, utemeljuje kršćanstvo na kultu sv. Martina, koji se nakon 6. stoljeća širi cijelim otokom, tako i hrvatski prostor dolaskom prvih benediktinaca prihvaća kult sv. Martina otprilike u isto vrijeme. Iako je veći dio hrvatske kršćanske povijesti utemeljen na latinskom jeziku i slavensko glagoljaško ozračje na specifičan je način obilježilo kult sv. Martina, posebice na hrvatskom primorskom prostoru, kult se ogleda u hodočasničkoj, spomeničkoj i književnoj tradiciji od koje se mnogo sačuvalo i do naših dana.

Ključne riječi: sv. Martin, Engleska, Kent, Hrvatska, Pridraga, otok Krk, glagoljski