

Introduction

The Late Antiquity period, which continues chronologically into the period of the Early Empire, was filled with tumultuous events and turmoils that brought deep political, economic and social changes in the Roman Empire, leading to a gradual feudalisation of society. This period has long been recognised among scholars as a period of large political, religious and cultural changes, which determined the later history of the Mediterranean region and Europe. The Christian religion, which appeared as a bearer of new ideas and a new philosophy, transformed into the bearer of dominant social and cultural life and became a political factor that caused a radical change in the foundations of the social system. By widening and fortifying its political power in the area of the Balkan Peninsula, the Roman Empire created conditions that would allow, somewhat later, the spread of Christianity. The new church adjusted its organisation to the administrative organisation of the state, thus, the main cities of the Roman provinces would become, at the same time, new ecclesiastic seats as well.

At the first half of the 4th century the possibility of free confession of faith, brought prosperity and progress to Christianity, both in terms of the organisation of the Church itself, but also in terms of architectonic and artistic development as well. At that time, larger urban centres got their first basilicas, along with minor cities and fortifications as well. Outside of the city walls (*extra muros*), necropolises were being formed, which churches dedicated to the cult of the dead.

Monuments from the Late Antique period that are determined into the early Christian period indicate its creative force and importance in the religious, social and economic life of that time. In order to create a clearer image of the real importance of Christianity and the role it played in the area of the Danube provinces of *Moesia Prima* and *Dacia Ripensis*, i.e. the north-eastern part of the prefecture of Illyricum (*Praefectura praetorio per Illyricum*), we will provide an overview of archaeological monuments and items known so far that have distinctly Christian attributes. Aside from archaeological findings, historical sources have also contributed to a fuller overview of the Early Christian period, its prevalence and spread, as well as to the attempt to provide an answer to the question as to who its representatives were. The chronological timeframe that encompasses Late Antiquity has not been strictly defined, although the time from the beginning of the 4th century up until the middle of the 7th century is recognised by most scholars as the period in which Late Antiquity traits were most conspicuous and in which the Christian religion acquired its final form, and grew into a strong religious

system that began to increasingly influence the change of the system of the state and the society.

1.1. Research of early Christianity in the area of the central Balkans

Systematic research of the sites in the provinces of *Moesia Prima* and *Dacia Ripensis*, particularly along the Middle Danube Limes, represented by important urban and military centres, enables an insight into the processes of Christianisation through the remains of church architecture, sepulchral monuments, as well as the different objects used in the Christian cult or personal piety. Among the first writers and researchers of Early Christian monuments in the territory of central Balkans (today's Serbia), a special place is held by Arthur Evans, who amassed a vast amount of data on his travels through Serbia at the end of the 19th century.¹ Felix Kanitz focused his interests in the field of archaeology on the Danube Limes and, therefore, he remains, even today, after more than one century and numerous destructions, both natural ones and those caused by human factors, one of the most important sources for studying the cultural heritage of this part of the Balkans.² His extensive research and observations provided a foundation for many later archaeological research activities, especially for the large-scale archaeological excavations within the projects Iron Gates I and Iron Gates II, which lasted from the 1960s up to the beginning of the 1980s. Having examined all the material he left us in this field, we may freely place him among the most important researchers of the cultural heritage of Antiquity in the territory of Serbia.

A figure that also stands out among the prominent researchers in Serbia is Mihailo Valtrović, the founder of Serbian archaeology and the first professor at the then newly founded Department of Archaeology at the Great School in Belgrade, who was also the director of the National Museum in Belgrade (1881). From the 1880s, Mihailo Valtrović started publishing studies about Early Christian churches, tombs, sarcophagi and different early Christian artefacts.³ Further investigations in *Viminacium* were continued by Miloje Vasić, at the beginning of the

¹ A. Evans was one of the first researchers of antiquities in the territory of central Balkans: Evans, A. *Antiquariens Researches in Illyricum* IV. Westminster 1883.

² The book is an important source of data for later researchers: Kanitz, F. *Römische Studien in Serbien. Der Donau-Grenzwahl, das Strassennetz, die Städte, Castelle, Denkmale, Thermen und Bergwerke zur Römerzeit im Königreiche Serbien*. Wien 1892.

³ Valtrović Mihailo recorded the existence of a rich fresco-painted tomb in *Viminacium*, which was destroyed by the locals, see: Valtrović, M.

20th century, who developed the first known typology of burial forms in *Viminacium*.⁴ Vladimir Petković, who continued Vasić's work, even though he was an art historian, had great success in his work dealing with Late Antique and Early Christian archaeology as well. From the very beginning of his work, he displayed an interest in Early Christian archaeology, starting from his PhD thesis, entitled *Ein frühchristliches Elfenbeinrelief im Nationalmuseum zu München* (1905), and also somewhat later, on his return from Munich, when he wrote the article about Early Christian sarcophagus from Belgrade.⁵ Thanks to him, the research of Caričin Grad (*Iustiniana Prima*) began, not long before the Balkan Wars (1912).⁶ Later, in the period between the two World Wars, he was the head of excavations on this site (1937–1939).

The greatest stimulus in discovering the monuments from the early Christian epoch was at the time of extensive archaeological works in the course of the construction of the Djerdap I hydroelectric power plant during the 1960s and 1970s. As part of the research of the forts' interiors and their immediate surroundings, the remains of foundations of several churches, chapels and tombs were also examined. Archaeological material from the Early Christian period was also found, though it was somewhat scarce.⁷

A considerable contribution to the research of Early Christian archaeology and history was also provided by Vladislav Popović, in his numerous articles published in local and foreign journals.⁸ Ivanka Nikolajević showed a special interest in her papers for the topic of Late Antique and Early Christian art, especially relief and decorations,⁹ as well as the issue of burials in this period.¹⁰

Gordana Marjanović-Vujović dedicated several of her papers to the Early Christian period, to crucifixes¹¹

and polycandela¹² from the Collection of the National Museum in Belgrade. Branka Jeličić also published papers of Early Christian items from the Collection of the National Museum in Belgrade.¹³ Mirjana Tatić-Džurić provided a significant contribution to the research of the Early Christian period in the area of the province of *Moesia Prima*, from which a paper on silver vessels from *Viminacium* particularly stands out.¹⁴ In recent years, a series of individual papers, studies, and catalogues of findings were published that complete our knowledge of religious life in the period of Late Antiquity.¹⁵

1.2. The beginning of Christianisation

In the Roman Empire, religion was intricately linked to the state, i.e. the supreme governing power, due to the fact that the emperor, as the highest priest (*pontifex maximus*), was required to take care of the religion of the state. The religious concept of Rome was imposed on conquered peoples as well, who accepted it, along with other forms of Romanisation, adapting local beliefs to the official religion. The cult of Roman gods would soon gain supporters among the urban population, while the local population in the rural and mountainous regions would attribute the functions of their old gods to the Roman deities, through the process of *interpretatio Romana*.

With the ascension of Diocletian to the throne, and the establishment of the Tetrarchy, significant religious and ideological changes occurred in Roman society. Rulers such as Diocletian, Maximian Herculus, Galerius and Constantius Chlorus, became members of the family of Jupiter and Hercules (*Iovii et Herculii*), believing themselves to be the emissaries of gods, being bearers of their name and nature. The period of the First Tetrarchy, most prominently the reign of Diocletian and Galerius, was marked by vicious persecutions of the Christians. The persecutions reached their culmination after the fourth edict against the Christians, issued by Diocletian in 304 AD (Bratož 2003, 42–43, 71–85). Galerius, who became the Augustus after the meeting in *Carnuntum* (308 AD), was in *Serdica*, together with Maxentius, in the spring of 311 AD, and was severely ill (Lact., *Mort. Persc.* XXXIII, 7). Several days before his death, Galerius issued an edict which guaranteed Christians from all over the Empire the freedom to practice their religion. Even though this legal act, because of the death of Galerius and unstable situation in the Empire, had no important direct consequences, it certainly marked an important step towards the enabling

Starohrišćanski sarkofag nađen u Beogradu, *Starinar* III, Beograd 1886, 70–71. Valtrović, M. Dobri pastir, *Starinar* VIII, Beograd 1891, 109–130.

⁴ The first archeological excavations at *Viminacium* was started by Miloje Vasić at the beginning of the 20th century, see: Vasić, M. Nekolike grobne konstrukcije iz Viminacijuma, *Starinar* n.r. II, Beograd 1907, 66–98.

⁵ Petković, V. Jedan rani hrišćanski sarkofag iz Beograda, *Glas SKA LXXII*, 1907, 186–219.

⁶ Excavations at Caričin Grad, begun by Vladislav Petković, meant, at the same time, the beginning of the expansion of archaeology of the paleo-Byzantine period. Numerous architectonic monuments dedicated to the cult, and also the accompanying church inventory, represent, at the same time, important findings of Early Christian archaeology as well.

⁷ The papers were published in the journals *Arheološki pregled* 1964–1970, and *Starinar* 33–34 (1982–1983), 1984.

⁸ Popović, V. Ranohrišćanska bronzana lampa iz okoline Smedereva, *Starinar* XX, 1970, 323–330; V. Popović, Grčki natpis iz Caričinog Grada i pitanje ubikacije Prve Justinijane, *Glas SANU CCCLX*, knj. 7, 1990, 53–108.

⁹ Nikolajević, I. Ranovizantijska arhitektonska dekorativna plastika u Makedoniji, Srbiji i Crnoj Gori, Beograd 1957; *Eadem.*, Les monuments de la décoration architecturale en Serbie d'un atelier local du VI^e siècle, *Actes du Ve Congrès International d'archéologie chrétienne*, Roma-Paris 1957, 567–571. *Eadem.*, Nekoliko ranohrišćanskih reljefa geometrijskog stila iz Dalmacije, *ZRVI* XI, Beograd 1968, 15–27; *Eadem.*, Ranohrišćanske krstionice u Jugoslaviji, *ZRVI* IX, 1966, 223–255.

¹⁰ Nikolajević, I. Sahanjanje u ranohrišćanskim crkvama na području Srbije, *AV* 29, Ljubljana 1978, 678–693.

¹¹ Marjanović-Vujović, G. *Krstovi od VI do XII veka iz zbirke Narodnog muzeja*, Beograd, 1977.

¹² Marjanović-Vujović, G. Dva rana hrišćanska polijejeja iz Narodnog muzeja, *Zbornik NM VII*, 1973, 13–23.

¹³ Jeličić, B. Bronzani žišci u Narodnom muzeju, *Zbornik radova NM II*, 1959, 73–82; Jeličić, B. Bronzani kandelabr u Narodnom muzeju u Beogradu, *Zbornik NM IV*, 1964, 151–155.

¹⁴ Tatić-Džurić, M. Srebrno posude iz Kostolca, *Zbornik NM V*, 1967, 237–246.

¹⁵ Kondić, J. Ranovizantijsko srebro, u: *Antičko srebro u Srbiji*, I. Popović (ur.), Beograd 1994, 65–67; Ilić, O. Early Christian Baptistries in Northern Illyricum, *Starinar* LVI, 2008, 223–244; *Konstantin Veliki i Milanski edikt 313*, katalog izložbe povodom 1700 godina Milanskog edikta, Beograd: Narodni muzej 2013.

Christians to realise the right to their faith, representing a new step in a series of pieces of legislation.

Christianity was not merely a new religious system or a powerful religious passion in a time of crisis, instead, it also appeared as a bearer of new ideas, a new philosophy, and it became a political factor that conditioned a radical change of the system of both the state and society. Having appeared in times of difficult political and economic crises, when old religious and moral principles were in decay and abandoned, Christianity acquired a large number of supporters in the masses, gaining a messianic importance. As a new universal religion, it was proclaimed a *religio illicita* by the Empire and such a position caused a period of persecutions of the Christians, which lasted all the way until Constantine the Great.

The Christian church adjusted its organisation to the administrative organisation of the state and, hence, the capitals of the Roman provinces also became episcopal seats at the same time, and the actual organisation of the church was subordinated to the political division of the provinces. The rise and the fall of church life in the territory of the Balkans was directly linked to the changeable political circumstances that the provinces of this area were exposed to. The area of the Diocese of Dacia, i.e. Northern Illyricum, came into contact with the new religion at a later point than the southern part of the Balkans, where Christianity had been present ever since the times of the apostles. According to the scriptures of the New Testament, it was Paul the Apostle and his followers that preached Christianity in these areas, while founding the first church communities.¹⁶ In one of his Epistles to the Romans, Paul the Apostle says that he came as far as the Illyrian lands while preaching; it is assumed that this did not refer to the lands around the Danube, but the Mediterranean lands instead, where communities already existed to which he could preach (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 27–28). The coasts of the Aegean, Ionian and Adriatic Sea, with their cities, became centres from which Christianity spread further on towards the inner regions of the Balkans. Paul the Apostle, in his Epistles, and Luke the Apostle and Evangelist, in the Acts of the Apostles, speak of the first Christian communities in larger urban settlements, from which we can conclude that the beginnings of Christianity should be sought in urban agglomerations of the Balkan Peninsula first. This is the reason why certain scholars call Christianity the “religion of the cities” (Lebreton et Zeiller 1946, 16–17). The Christianisation process was considerably slower in the mountainous hinterland and deeper in the inner parts of the Balkan peninsula, due to the greater isolation of the population from the main communication routes.

¹⁶ The scriptures of the New Testament contain the Epistle of Paul the Apostle directed to Christian communities in cities in the south of the Balkan Peninsula: one to the Philippians, in Macedonia, two to the Christians in Thessaloniki, two to Corinth, in Achaia, and one to Titus the Apostle, on the island of Crete. Cf. Lebreton J. et Zeiller, *J. L'Eglise primitive* I, Paris 1946, 176–188. Acts of the Apostles, 16, 9–12; 17, 1–14; 19, 21–22; 20, 1–2.

In the first centuries of the new era, Roman historians rarely mention Christianity in the northern part of the prefecture of Illyricum. The first reports on the presence of Christians in the Danube Valley come from the times of Marcus Aurelius (161–180) and his war against the Quadi. The war was fought by a legion that was brought in from the East (*Legio XII Fulminata*), in which there was a considerable number of Christians, as noted by Tertullian (Migne, *PL* I, 450) and Eusebius of Caesarea (Migne, *PL* XX, 442). Reliable reports on the first persecutions of Christians in the area of Northern Illyricum come only from the times of Diocletian. Four edicts issued on the topic (303–304 AD) claimed numerous victims from the territory comprehended by the provinces of *Moesia Prima* and, further down the Danube, *Dacia Ripensis*, and *Dacia Mediterranea* in the south-east. Among the persecuted individuals, there were members of the Roman army stationed along the Danube (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 59). These persecutions bear witness on the presence of Christians in the area of the Diocese of Dacia at the beginning of the 4th century. Most Christian martyrs noted by sources or tradition were linked to larger urban centres in these provinces.

Some of the important cities in the provinces of *Moesia Prima* and *Dacia Ripensis* were *Viminacium*, the capital of the province of *Moesia Prima*, *Singidunum* and *Margum*. In the province of *Dacia Ripensis*, *Aquae* and *Romuliana* represented important ecclesiastic seats. Aside from those, traces of the Early Christian period are also present in Roman fortifications along the Danube Limes: church buildings, baptisteries, chapels, and other archaeological finds.¹⁷

Singidunum

One of the important cities in the province of *Moesia Prima* was *Singidunum* (today Belgrade). As a fortification in the border area, it was the seat of the *Legio IV Flavia*, which was stationed in the Danube Valley during the times of Domitian, in 86 AD, but it was moved to *Singidunum* during the reign of Trajan (Mirković 1968, 37–49). Because of its exceptional strategic importance, being located at the confluence of the river Sava and the Danube, the city came into the possession of various tribes and tribal alliances that inhabited these areas, especially during the 5th century. According to sources from that time, we learn that the city was partially restored after the fall of the Hun state in 454 AD, only to be conquered by the Sarmatians later, who would lose it, in turn, to the Goths of Theodoric in 471 AD. The Goths would abandon the city in ca 488 AD, when they headed to the west, to Italy, hence, the city would come under the administrative government of Eastern Rome again (Barišić 1955b, 2–3). Even though Procopius says that *Singidunum* remained

¹⁷ The focus of our research are cities and fortifications located in the territory of today's Serbia. The Early Christian period in the part of the province of *Dacia Ripensis* located in today's Bulgaria, among which is the capital of this province, *Rattaria*, will not be taken into consideration.

in ruins throughout the entire period from Attila to Justinian, events linked to Theodoric's invasion of Srem in 504 AD, and especially the Byzantine–Goth treaty from 510 AD, clearly indicate that the newly created political situation was unfavourable for Byzantium and, in this context, indicate the strategic importance of the city because of the newly created Goth province of *Pannonia Secunda*. Under such circumstances, the conclusion of certain historians that Emperor Anastasius (491–518) restored the fortress at the confluence of the Sava and the Danube just before the year of 510 AD, if not before, seems only logical (Barišić 1955a, 66–67). Justinian I had certainly already started, at the beginning of his reign, works on the restoration of *Singidunum*, as can be clearly seen from *Novella XI* from 535 AD, where *Moesia Prima* is treated as an already organised region. Procopius informs us of this, and continuing the already mentioned report on the devastation of the city by the Huns, says: “Emperor Justinian rebuilt it (*Singidunum*) entirely, surrounded it with a strong wall, and again made it a noble and admirable city” (Procop. *De Aedif.* IV 5, p. 269). The Avar–Slav attacks and the siege of the city, which lasted from 579 to 582 AD, historical sources mention a military commander named Sethos, who, along with the bishop of *Singidunum*, strived to defend not only *Singidunum*, but *Sirmium* as well (Barišić 1955a, 92–93). The city was still under Byzantine government in the time of Phocas (602–610), judging by the fact that there are no reports on Avar–Slav intrusions in this part of the Danube Valley from this period. The report by Porphyrogenitus regarding the time of the reign of Heraclius (610–641), from which it can be seen that the city was still under Byzantine government even in ca 630 AD, represents the final known piece of information on *Singidunum* (Barišić 1955b, 12, note 52).

The oldest information about the presence of Christians in *Singidunum* is related to the tribulation during the time of Diocletian's persecutions. The fact that *Singidunum*, as an important military base in the borderland of *Moesia Prima*, had a deacon who died for the faith as early as the beginning of the 4th century, indicates the existence of an organised Christian community. One of the first Christian martyrs, Donatus, has been reported in the sources as *diaconicus sanctae ecclesiae Singidoniensis*. The death of a group of Christians who were from *Singidunum* and among which there was the priest Montanus and his wife Maxima is also known from sources (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 75–76, 78). Several years later, two more martyrs appear, whose death is also connected with *Singidunum*, the martyrs Hermylus and Stratonicus, who were executed after 313 AD (Popović 1991, 73–80). According to the later, insufficiently reliable, Metaphrast's *Menologium*, their bodies were thrown into the Danube and were believed to have been buried 18 miles downstream of *Singidunum*, possibly in the area of today's village of Brestovik, where the fortified settlement of *Aureus Mons* was located (Mirković 1979, 21). It is possible, however, that the bodies of the martyrs emerged eight miles from *Singidunum* in

Castrum Octavum, in today's Višnjica (Mirković 1976, 27). Hermylus and Stratonicus are unknown in the Latin tradition and they are not mentioned in the early martyrologies. Their hagiography was probably written in Constantinople, no earlier than in the 6th century, but it clearly preserves memories from the hagiography of the Middle Danube (Rizos 2015, 204).

The first known bishop of *Singidunum*, Ursatius, was mentioned in the sources for the first time as a participant of the Council of Tyre, in 335 AD, where he appears as an opponent of Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria, one of the leading representatives of the Nicene doctrine (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 149–150). On the Council of *Serdica* in 343 AD, Ursatius was the leading one on the list of heretics (*nomina haeticorum*) (Mirković 1976, 27). During his long service, until approximately 370 AD, the Episcopacy of *Singidunum* had an important role in the church policy of the Empire and in the spread of Arianism, which was present in the entire Danubian area and Illyricum. During the time of Ursatius, one local Synod of Arian representatives was held in *Singidunum*. The Episcopal See in *Singidunum* after him was also another apostle of Arianism, Bishop Secundianus. As an Arian he would be convicted by the council of the western bishops in Aquileia, in 381 AD (Popović 1995, 195). Written evidence of subsequent bishops of *Singidunum* has not been found to date. The Episcopacy certainly existed in the 6th century, and Justinian's Novel CXXXI testifies to this (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 151). In the second half of the 6th century, in relation to the Avar attacks and the siege of the city by the Khagan Bayan, historical sources mention a bishop of *Singidunum* who, together with the military commander Sethos, strived to defend not only *Singidunum*, but *Sirmium* as well, in 579 AD (Mirković 1976, 27).¹⁸

Margum

The city of *Margum* on the right bank of the river Velika Morava, in the vicinity of its confluence with the Danube, had an important role in religious life in the Middle Danube Limes area. The existence of a bishop in the town is mentioned by the historian Priscus. The Hun's conquest of *Margum*, *Viminacium* and some other cities in the Danubian area, according to his description, was directly connected with the bishop of this city and his unseemly deeds.¹⁹ The bishop of *Margum*, whose name is unknown, according to Priscus' testimony, went to the Hun territory and robbed the treasury. Being afraid of retaliation, he surrendered to the enemy and promised the capitulation of the city in return (Mirković 1986, 209). This historical data indicates the existence of the Episcopacy in *Margum*, an important Danube fortress. However, archaeological findings have not, thus far, supported this historical fact recorded in a source that is considered reliable.

¹⁸ Menandri excerpta, 471. 34–473. 4, transl. by Barišić 1955a.

¹⁹ Prisk, Frg. 1, 276. 32–277. 5, transl. by Barišić 1955a.

Viminacium

The capital of the province of *Moesia Superior*, *Viminacium* is noted by historical sources as a significant military stronghold and the seat of the VII Claudia Legion. “On the right bank of the river Mlava, not far from the place where it flows into the Danube, an extended plateau rises, which used to be a Roman town”, wrote F. Kanitz, an Austro-Hungarian researcher of antiquities, about the remains of *Viminacium*, when he came across them while travelling through Serbia in the 19th century (Kanitz 1892, 17). When the city gained the status of a *municipium* (117 AD), its territory covered a larger part of the plain in the lower course of the Mlava River, while, after acquiring the status of a colony (239 AD), *Viminacium* expanded to cover the entire Stig plain and Veliko Gradište (*Pincum*) (Popović 1967, 30). The political significance of the city itself, as well as the presence of a large number of soldiers from various parts of the Empire, influenced the spread of different Eastern religious doctrines, together with the official religion of the Empire, among which Mithraism was dominant (Zotović 1973, 31–33). Written data about the existence of an organised Christian community in the city originates from the 4th century. The bishops of *Viminacium* of the 4th and 5th century are known from historical sources. The bishop Amantius, signee of the acts of the Synod of *Serdica* in 343 AD, who was probably represented by one of his priests, presbyterus Maximus, was, together with the majority of the bishops from Illyricum, against the main Arian representatives in the Balkans, the bishops Valens of *Mursa* and Ursacius of *Singidunum* (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 234–235). Bishop Cyriacus, mentioned in 356 AD in *Atanasius Epistola contra Arianos*, was possibly on the Episcopal seat of the Moesian capitol, *Viminacium*, even though in the source this is not precisely stated (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 148–149). An unnamed bishop of *Viminacium* from the first half of the 5th century was mentioned in one letter to Pope Celestine I (424 AD) (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 598).

From the period after the Hun invasion in the middle of the 5th century, there is no data about church organisation in *Viminacium* until the 6th century when, in Justinian’s Novel XI from 535 AD, we find that the city fell under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of *Iustiniana Prima*. At this time, as Procopius informs us, the renewed Episcopate was elevated to the status of Metropolitanate (Popović 1967, 37, note 69). Unfortunately, the renovated settlement did not last long. Located on the main road *Via Militaris*, which led further east from *Singidunum* towards the capital Constantinople, it was among the first destroyed by new barbarian incursions, this time Slavic–Avar at the beginning of the 7th century.

Aquae

Among the important cities that were also Episcopal centres in the province of *Dacia Ripensis* was the city of *Aquae*, near today’s Prahovo in eastern Serbia. Historical sources report that the bishop of this city, Vitalis, was one

of the participants of the Synod of *Serdica*, in 343 AD (Athanasius, *Apologia* 48, 2). Only in the 6th century did the activity of the bishop of *Aquae* become known. Justinian I singled out the Episcopate *Aquae* as a distinct church unit, independent of the episcopate of *Meridum* to which it was subordinated until then, including in its episcopate the city of *Aquae*, and its surrounding fortifications (*castella*), churches (*ecclesiae*) and agricultural lands (*territoria*) (Mirković 1995, 207). This measure derived from the intent of suppression of the Bonosus heresy, still present in certain regions in the 6th century. In Justinian’s Novel XI, dated 535 AD, the bishop worked on the suppression of the Photinus heresy, which, at the end of 6th century, was confessed to by Bonosus (Zeiller 1918 (rp. 1967), 350). The bishop of *Naissus* Justinian strived to finally suppress this heresy in the Balkan area and in this endeavour he assigned a special role to the bishop of *Aquae*.

Romuliana

The archaeological site of *Romuliana* near Zaječar in eastern Serbia is famous for the imperial palace complex, built by Emperor Galerius at the beginning of the 4th century (Fig. 1.1).²⁰ The period of Late Antiquity in *Romuliana* is characterised by the first traces of Christianity. Even though it was not a settlement with the status of a city, the fortified memorial palace, named *Felix Romuliana* on the basis of an inscription discovered within the complex (Živić 2003, 23),²¹ provides an interesting instance of the transformation of pagan architecture into Christian, on the example of an imperial palace as a seat of the imperial cult. Church buildings, mostly created through the adaption of chambers of the former imperial palace, bear witness to the religious aspect of the Late Antique settlement in the period from the second half of the 4th century to the 6th century (Čanak-Medić 1978, 134–149; Petković 2010, 167–199). The situation drastically changed in the 6th century: as Christianity had been the official religion of the state for two entire centuries, all the construction undertakings of the emperors Anastasius I and Justinian I regarding the restoration of old or building of new fortifications and urban centres comprehended the building of Christian temples as well.

As we have mentioned before, there is no written data, for the time being, on the basis of which we could conclude that the fortification in *Romuliana* had the status of a city.

²⁰ There are a number of scholar works regarding the Late Antique imperial palace and later buildings built on its ruins: Čanak-Medić, M. *Gamzigrad – kasnoantička palata*, Beograd 1978; Janković, Dj. Carski dvorac, u S. Čelić (ur.), *Gamzigrad kasnoantički carski dvorac*, Beograd 1983, 120–130; Vasić M. ed. *Felix Romuliana 50 years of archaeological excavations*, Belgrade 2006; Petković, S. Romulijana u vreme posle carske palata, u: *Felix Romuliana – Gamzigrad*, (ur.) I. Popović, Beograd 2010, 167–199; Petković, S. Late Roman Romuliana and medieval Gamzigrad from the end of 4th to the 11th centuries AD, in: *Kesythely-Fenékpuszta im Kontext spätantiker Kontinuitätsforschung zwischen Noricum und Moesia*, (hrsg.) O. Heinrich-Tamáska, Budapest... (etc.) 2011, 267–283.

²¹ The inscription was discovered in 1984, in the south-western part of the palace, in the building with mosaic floors. It was carved on an archivolt made of sandstone.



Figure 1.1. Gamzigrad–Romuliana. General view of the palace. (Documentation of the Institute of Archaeology, Belgrade).

However, considering the fact that there was a baptistery with the church, which was erected in the 6th century, some authors believe that *Romuliana* could have been an episcopal see (Janković 1983, 128–129). To date, we have no firm proof that would support this supposition. It should be mentioned, however, that it was not a rare occurrence during Late Antiquity that the act of baptism be performed in smaller rural churches, thus, we could assume that this was also one such church (Ilić 2008, 240). In any case, churches discovered in *Romuliana* so far that have been dated into the period from the 4th to the 6th century – two of them had a baptistery – indicate the intense Christianisation process of the local population of the province of *Dacia Ripensis* in this period.