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# Jerome's relations to the area of the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic in the time of his sojourn in the East (375–420)\*

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In historiography and theology Christian epistolography of the late antiquity is one of the significant sources for researching a comprehensive spectrum of social factors. Since his own time and throughout history Jerome has, with his profound intellect, long been rousing interest. His literary works, not only translations and exegetic treatises, but also theological, biographic and historical compositions, were written in and speak of a turning point in history. The letters are certainly one of the most important witnesses to the social situation in the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic at that time and to his personal relations with the people of the area in question, which are best and most eloquently depicted through his celebration of the ideals of the ascetic life and monasticism, culminating in the very time of Jerome.

**Key words:** Jerome, Western Balkans, Northern Adriatic, letters, monasticism, early Christianity.

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### **Hieronimovi stiki z območjem zahodnega Balkana in severnega Jadrana v času njegovega prebivanja na Vzhodu (375–420)**

Krščanska epistolarna dejavnost pozne antike je v zgodovino pisju in teologiji priznana kot pomemben vir za raziskovanje širokega spektra družbenih dejavnikov. Hieronim je svoj čas in čas skozi zgodovino nenehno buril duhove s svojim pronicljivim intelektom. Njegove literarne stvaritve, ne samo prevajalske in eksegetske, ampak tudi teološke, biografske in zgodovinske, so nastale v in govorijo o prelomnem času. Pisma so zagotovo ena najpomembnejših prič takratnega družbenega stanja na območju zahodnega Balkana in severnega Jadrana in njegovih osebnih relacij z ljudmi z obravnavanega območja, ki se nam najlepše in najbolj povedno naslikajo skozi njegovo slavljenje idealov asketskega življenja in meništva, katerega vrh sega prav v čas Hieronima.

**Ključne besede:** Hieronim, zahodni Balkan, severni Jadrani, pisma, meništvo, zgodnje krščanstvo.

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## Introduction

In the spring of 345, Athanasius,<sup>1</sup> a man whose life mission was a combination of two extremely important topics concerning state (imperial) and church policy of the time, resided in the Western Roman Empire (hereinafter: the Western Empire): on the one hand he appeared in the first line of theologians who advocated the doctrine of the two natures of Christ and, consequently, the Nicæan religion, while on the other hand, he was the main promoter of the idea of a monastic life. From Serdica, where he attended the landmark council in the fall of 342 or 343, he travelled to Aquileia.<sup>2</sup> The closer he got to Aquileia, the closer he was to Stridon,<sup>3</sup> where most likely in 347<sup>4</sup> Jerome<sup>5</sup> was born, who later in his adulthood well assumed the already described dual mission of the older predecessor<sup>6</sup> – defensive pugnacity to preserve theological dogmas and glorifying the ideals of ascetic life.<sup>7</sup>

At this point, let us shed light on the background of events and certain phenomena in the Church at the time, and at the same time outline the very roots and

<sup>1</sup> Alexandrian bishop Athanasius spent his first of five exiles in 335–337 in Gallic city of Trier and during his second exile in the West, which lasted from 339 to 346 and was tied to the city of Rome, he also visited Aquileia. Thus, at least twice, Jerome, sojourns in the area that, a few decades earlier though, was marked by Athanasius. See Marrou, *Od Dioclecijanovega preganjanja*, p. 264 and Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius sojourned in the Western Empire between 343 and 345. After the Council of Serdica, he traveled to the West, staying in Nais for some time in 344 (on Easter on April 15), and after about a one-year stay in the Balkan and Danube provinces, he traveled through Poetovio to Aquileia. See Bratož, *Menišvo v rimskih provincah*, p. 106 and Duval, *Aquilee et Sirmium*, p. 341.

<sup>3</sup> The exact location of Stridon is discussed by several authors – see Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 5; Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis*, p. 21. Cf. Suić, *Hijeronim Stridonjanin*, pp. 213–278.

<sup>4</sup> Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis*, p. 21, cites the year 347, Fürst, *Hieronymus*, p. 145, confirms the same year, Lukman, *Svetega Hijeronima izbrana dela*, p. 1, was cautious in his judgment, as “it can only be said with certainty that he was not born before 340 and not after 350.”

<sup>5</sup> His biography has already been treated extensively in plentiful treatises and books over the years, so no attempt of review is made here. For his vita see Cain, *St. Jerome, Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 3–14; Kelly, *Jerome*; Fürst, *Hieronymus*; Rebenich, *Jerome*, pp. 3–59.

<sup>6</sup> Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, pp. 284–285; Cedilnik, *Ilirik med Konstantinom Velikim*, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> Cain, *Jerome and the Monastic Clergy*, p. 2, makes an interesting remark that “while other contemporary patristic authors such as Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose and John Chrysostom theorized in varying degrees about an ascetic ethical mandate for clerical life, none did so with as much apophthegmatic poignancy and gusto as Jerome did in the letter to Nepotianus.” Perhaps we can apply this notion to most of Jerome’s epistolary legacy.

further development of monasticism, which sprang up in the East and spread to the West through Jerome and other promoters.

Conflicts within the Church from the time of Emperor Constantine, who passed away in May 337 in Nicomedia, took on new and even deeper dimensions after his death. Continuously changing conditions were present in the discussed area as well, but were dependent on the outcome of each Synod of bishops. Throughout the second half of the fourth century and later, the border area of Illyricum<sup>8</sup> and Italy with the city of Aquileia played an important role in the defence of orthodoxy. Over the course of a century, Aquileia developed from a Roman fortress into one of the most strategically significant cities in the Roman Empire, with grave military and economic importance, culminating in its merit in resolving dogmatic disputes - the Council of Aquileia in 381 finally defeated arianism.<sup>9</sup>

Monasticism in the area of the Western Empire developed gradually and approximately synchronously with other parts of the Christian West. In the fourth century in the discussed territory the core of monasticism had not yet been formed, thus the very beginnings of the monastic movement took shape at the hands of influences from elsewhere, transferred to the area of the Western Empire by important protagonists – already mentioned bishop Athanasius of Alexandria (born ca. 295),<sup>10</sup> ascetic Martin (later bishop of Poitiers) and Eusebius of Vercellae. They temporarily stayed in the discussed area and indirectly aided in development of monasticism, although their primary activity was, to be sure, defending orthodoxy, therefore their commitment to spreading monasticism was of less importance. In the mid-60s of the fourth century independently of the religious disputes in the area in question, Hilarion, a Palestinian ascetic, arrived in Dalmatia. He is known as the first ascetic attested in historical records to having contact with the area. However, due to his desire to live in solitude and to the fact that he had no knowledge of the language of the population, he had no contact with the local peoples, so the extent of his influence on the development of monasticism and on the spread of ideals of ascetic life in the area is questionable. Of course, monasticism in its true sense really started evolving only with the appearance of Jerome and his peers (correspondents?) around 370.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The term Illyricum in the general sense consists of the provinces of the Western and Central Balkans, the Eastern Alps and the area of Middle Danube.

<sup>9</sup> Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, pp. 266–277.

<sup>10</sup> Athanasius wrote *Vita Antonii* in 357–8, which was about a decade later available in two Latin translations (the first ca. 365, the second ca. 370). Nothing is known about the scope of this writing in the Western Empire, but it is certain that Antonius' biography had a great influence on some inhabitants of the Empire. See Bratož, *Meništvu v rimskih provincah*, p. 108.

<sup>11</sup> Bratož, *Meništvu v rimskih provincah*, pp. 105–109.

## **The letters of Jerome to the area of the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic**

Out of the entire corpus of Jerome's letters, the author sent to the wider region of the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic only thirteen. It is worth noting that there were probably many more of the letters, yet only a handful have survived throughout history. Letters differ not only in the area to which they were sent, but also in the number of addressees. Some of the letters are personal – the addressee is one person only, others are letters whose addressees are a group of persons.

Considering the area from which Jerome sent the letters, we may notice two spatial and temporal milestones of Jerome's life. Roughly, we can divide the letters into two groups: the first one includes letters that Jerome sent to the discussed area during his stay in the desert around Chalcis near Antiochia. Jerome sent another group of letters from Bethlehem, where he remained for the rest of his life. The letters from the first period were sent to Aquileia, Concordia, Emona and Stridon. The second period is represented by letters to Pannonia and Dalmatia.

Accordingly, we shall first discuss the letters that Jerome sent to Emona and to his native land, then later on the letters sent to Aquileia, Concordia, Altinum and lastly to Pannonia and Dalmatia.

### **Letters to Emona and a letter to Castorina “ad materteram”**

Emona was in the second half of the fourth century already an episcopal see and given its not too large size it was able to pride itself with an enviably large Christian centre, as evidenced by recent archaeological excavations. Although the first known bishop, attested in historical records – bishop Maximus did not stand out at the aforementioned Synod of Aquileia in 381, the minutes of the Synod, citing Maximus, serve as the first mention of the episcopal see in Emona.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of monasticism and ascetic life has at that time already been present in the city as a burning topic. This is also evidenced by the event at the Synod of Mediolanum more than a decade later (393), where bishop Maximus was present and when asked about the Christian ideals, he firmly sided with the Eastern ascetic ideals. The participation of the bishop of Emona at the Synod offers us at least two possible deductions: that the question of the Christian ideals was present in his diocese, or that the question was not as topical for his diocese as such life may had already been present in his diocese to such an extent that Maximus acted at the Synod as one of the greatest supporters of the ascetic ideals. The latter inference is supported by a rather high signature place of Maximus, which is among the nine signatories of the conclusions of the Synod high on the second place.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, p. 274.

<sup>13</sup> Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, pp. 275–276.

Jerome sent two letters to Emona: Ep. 11 – *Ad virgines Haemonenses* and Ep. 12 – *Ad Antonium monachum Haemonaë*. Both were sent to monastic communities. Ep. 11 is written to some virgins of Emona and has as such a group of addressees, whereas Ep. 12 is addressed to the monk Antonius.<sup>14</sup> In both letters the addressees were blamed of silence and negligentia, therefore both have a rather contumelious content.<sup>15</sup> Jerome's letters to Emona mention a handful of earlier letters, all of which remained unanswered, and this primarily is the cause of Jerome's anger and offence.<sup>16</sup>

Silence of the addressees in Ep. 11 and Ep. 12 could come from their pragmatic caution. Namely, Jerome, who had already begun living the ascetic life far in the East, was sending letters to the West that could be rather topical for the local Church.<sup>17</sup> The aforementioned Synod of Mediolanum took place later in time, but it could indicate that the debate on the ascetic ideals and their admissibility was present at the time of Jerome's communication with Emona. The letter to Emona at the same time suggests the possibility of a monastic community in Emona. Namely, addressee of Ep. 11 is a group of virgins from ca. 375 in Emona. Jerome supposedly came into contact with this group while his stay in Aquileia. It is true, however, that small groups of women ascetics in Aquileia were known at the time, who were in fact relatives of the men living the ascetic life there. One example is Chromatius'<sup>18</sup> widowed mother and his sister. Though the record *per se* in Jerome's letter suggests the possibility of a monastic community, it cannot be a proof of the existence of a nunnery in Emona.<sup>19</sup>

Ep. 12 is, in its essence, a short discussion of humility and pride. About Jerome's acquaintance with Antonius it is speculated that perhaps Antonius also belonged to the ascetic circle that once formed in Aquileia and then suddenly broke up. The souring of relations between the monk Antonius and the virgins of Emona on the one hand and Jerome on the other was also probably due to one of Jerome's

<sup>14</sup> Cavallera believes that Ep. 11 is from the first months of Jerome's sojourn in the desert, Lukman, *Svetega Hjeronima izbrana dela*, p. 69, however, because of Jerome's remark that by the time of writing Ep. 11 he had already sent several letters to the virgins of Emona, to which he has not received a reply, sets the date of Ep. 11 somewhat later, specifically in the years 376/377. Fürst, *Hieronimus*, p. 219 as well is of the opinion that Ep. 11 was sent around 376.

<sup>15</sup> Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 213 in his classification labels 8 letters as letters of reproach due to their content - Ep. 6–9, 11–13, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, pp. 500–503 makes an interesting remark, that Kelly in his work *Jerome from 1975* famously labelled the letters that Jerome sent from his monastic retreat in the Syrian desert between 375 and 377 (Ep. 6–9, 11–13, 16) as a corolla of frenzy outbursts by somebody neurotic, insecure, bitter and resentful when snubbed. Other connoisseurs of Jerome's life somewhat took on Kelly's notion of Jerome: cf. Cavallera, *Saint Jerome*; Rebenich, *Hieronimus und sein Kreis*. Shanzer, *Avitus of Vienne*, p. 60, says that, in fact, the content of the letters is not nearly as important as the gesture itself which puts the friendship at equilibrium. He compares the epistulae of antiquity to the Christmas cards in the modern era.

<sup>17</sup> Jerome's treatise *Against Jovinianus*, for example, caused so much indignation and outrage in Senator Pammachius that he strongly endeavoured to withdraw the work from circulating further in Rome in the early 390s. See Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, p. 501.

<sup>18</sup> Chromatius, Jerome's friend from Aquileia, is discussed in the chapter *Letters to Aquileia*.

<sup>19</sup> Bratož, *Meništvò v rimskih provincah*, p. 111. Spinelli, *Ascetismo*, p. 293 agrees with the statement, allowing the possibility of a nunnery hiding behind a collective addressee, while emphasizing that the letter itself does not prove the existence of a common monastic life.

beliefs, namely that the monastic or ascetic life could not be truly fulfilled in the home environment. Jerome, believing that true monasticism is at home only in the desert and that it can only be fully experienced there, may have unsuccessfully presented it to his fellow men, who resisted him and were content with implementing the ascetic and monastic ideals in the West.<sup>20</sup> In Ep. 12, too, there is no mention of any other ascetics from Emona, therefore we emphasize that the insinuations about the existence of the monastic communities in the city are yet hypothetical.<sup>21</sup>

Together with these letters, the modern authors often list the following one as well – Ep. 13 to aunt Castorina (*Ad Castorinam materteram*)<sup>22</sup> The primary theme of the letter is once again reproach, except that this time it is aimed at a close relative who also did not respond to his earlier letters.<sup>23</sup> Kelly understands Ep. 13 as Jerome's final order to aunt Castorina as a result of repeated quarrels. His example of Christ forgiving his disciples<sup>24</sup> is also his request to aunt Castorina to forgive her nephew. If Castorina does not reply to the letter, Jerome, in his own words, will still be washed of guilt, as he has taken the first step towards reconciliation.<sup>25</sup>

If the letters to Emona and Stridon do not directly prove the existence of monastic communities in the area in question, the letters to Aquileia offer us more firmness in speculating about their existence.<sup>26</sup>

### Letters to Aquileia

Jerome sent four letters to Aquileia: Ep. 6 to deacon Iulianus (*Ad Iulianum diaconum Aquileiae*), Ep. 7 to friends from the Aquileian ascetic circle (*Ad Chromatium, Iovinum, Eusebium*), Ep. 8 to Niceas (*Ad Niceam hypodiatonum Aquileiae*) and Ep. 9 to Chrysocomas (*Ad Chrysocomam monacum Aquileiae*).

Let us first outline the background of Jerome's acquaintance with Aquileia. Jerome had undoubtedly become acquainted with Aquileia in his childhood. Aquileia was the exact opposite of his home town of Stridon, which was rather small and rural. After completing his studies in Rome,<sup>27</sup> Jerome, most likely with an aspiration to pursue a career in the imperial service, set out on a longer journey through Gallia. The details are unknown, we can conclude that he became acquainted with various ascetic

<sup>20</sup> Špelič, *The Beginnings of Monasticism*, pp. 294–295.

<sup>21</sup> Bratož, *Meništvó v rimskih provincah*, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Grilli, *San Gerolamo*, p. 310. In the case of the mentioned author and article, it is worth pointing out the mistake: Ep. 63 is listed under the letters most likely because of the misprint which replaced Ep. 13 by Ep. 63.

<sup>23</sup> Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 213; Grilli, *San Gerolamo*, p. 310; Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Jerome constructs intricate plaid of biblical intertext as an instrument of reproach in his letters. Cf. Epp. 6, 8, 11–13 and 16. Epp. 11–13 and 16 contain mostly rather biblical exempla, whereas Epp. 6 and 8 mostly classical ones. Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, p. 508.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> On this see Bratož, *Meništvó v rimskih provincah*, pp. 111–112; Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, p. 291.

<sup>27</sup> Booth, *The chronology*, p. 237 says that Jerome most likely completed his studies in Rome in 366.

communities on his trip, and perhaps his desire to participate in such a community led him to visit Aquileia at last, where he stayed for some time, at least so long that he gained acquaintances who accompanied him for the rest of his life.<sup>28</sup>

Jerome left Aquileia suddenly and probably in a great personal disappointment.<sup>29</sup> The community, gathered around bishop Valerianus was where Jerome began to effectuate living the ascetic ideal, but was forced to leave it, either because of disagreements with his home environment or due to conflicts within the community itself.<sup>30</sup> At least at first glance, it seems that the young devotee discovered his life-long vocation, and later remembers the disintegration of the Aquileian community with bitterness.<sup>31</sup>

Ep. 6 was sent to deacon Iulianus, who was most likely an acquaintance of Jerome from his stay in Aquileia. Jerome first apologizes for delaying with writing the letter to the addressee and seeks for the grounds in his illness.<sup>32</sup> He reports about the latter already in Ep. 3.<sup>33</sup>

In the letter, Jerome rejoices to hear the news of his sister, who, after years of "living in error," is said to have begun to follow Christ. Most likely, his otherwise by name unknown sister joined the (female?) ascetic circle, and at this point we can speculate about Jerome's influence on his sister's decision.

Ep. 7<sup>34</sup> travelled to former (co)members of the Aquileian ascetic circle, of which Jerome himself was a member for some time.<sup>35</sup> Among the addressees<sup>36</sup>, the

<sup>28</sup> Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis*, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> About his departure from Aquileia he writes to Rufin in Ep. 3: *Postquam me a tuo latere subitus turbo conuoluit, postquam glutino caritatis haerentem inopia distraxit auulsio, tunc mihi caeruleus supra caput adstitit imber, tunc maria undique et undiquecaelum*. See Hieron. Ep. 3,3 (Labourt 1, 12).

<sup>30</sup> Although Jerome's character traits are not the subject of our disquisition, it is worth mentioning that at least for this situation, we can exclude Jerome's proverbial temperament as a factor that could be the cause of a community breakdown, though the word temperament in this context should be dealt with caution, as Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, pp. 500–525 challenges the personality of Jerome as temperamental and quarrelsome. V. sup. footnote 17.

<sup>31</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 34; Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>32</sup> Up to this point we may gain a perception of Jerome as being hypocritical and beguiling as he has been accusing those, who did not write back to him of negligentia, when he found himself now in the same position. Though he adds: "I shall overwhelm you with so many letters that you will beg me not to write" and thus redeems himself respectively, leaving the question of his personality as hypocritical intact. On this see Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, p. 508.

<sup>33</sup> *Ubi ego quicquid morborum esse poterat expertus e doctus oculis unum perdidit; Innocentium enim, partem animae meae, repentinus febrium ardor abstraxit*. Hieron. Ep. 3,3 (Labourt 1, 12–13).

<sup>34</sup> Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, p. 511: "Ep. 7 to Chromatius, Iovinus and Eusebius is not a reproach letter per se, but it contains distinct elements of the topos", that is why he labels it as the letter of reproach. V. sup. footnote 16.

<sup>35</sup> The acquaintance of Jerome and Chromatius, Iovinus and Eusebius most probably as well, originated from the time when the ascetic circle formed in the vicinity of Aquileia. In his *Chronicon*, Jerome names the mentioned circle with the chosen designation *chorus beatorum* (Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, p. 289, translates it to sl. as "zbor blaženih", in eng. "choir of the blessed"): *Aquileienses clerici quasi chorus beatorum habentur* (Hieron. *Chronicon* (Helm 374f)). Cf. Duval, *Chromace et Jerome*, p. 161.

<sup>36</sup> In addition to Ep. 11, which was sent to some virgins of Emona, Ep. 7 is the only letter where there are more addressees, and peculiarity about the said detail is that the addressees are known figures and historically attested by name.

most famous is Chromatius, then the future bishop of the diocese of Aquileia.<sup>37</sup> Not much information has been preserved about the other two addressees throughout history. While Eusebius, who was in fact Chromatius' brother, became a bishop, not the slightest hint of the place where he performed the episcopal ministry has been preserved. Iovinus served as an archdeacon in the Aquileian church under bishop Valerianus. He was later attested as a bishop of an unknown diocese, most likely in Padua or its environs, as he was visited by Rufinus, one of Jerome's closest friends and later on his nemesis, on his return from Jerusalem to Italy and for Easter 397.<sup>38</sup> We can conclude that the Aquileian ascetic circle was to some extent also a springboard for their subsequent ecclesiastical careers. This gives rise to another thought - namely, that they were as (former) members of the Aquileian ascetic circle positively received by both the clergy and the people.<sup>39</sup>

In both Ep. 6 and Ep. 7 we learn that the addressees have already sent at least one letter to Jerome and it is therefore his turn to reply. In Ep. 7 Jerome complains about the length of the letter received, as he most likely hoped for more detailed news from Aquileia. At the same time, dry news from his hometown make him recall a childhood friend, Bonosus, who is undoubtedly an acquaintance of addressees and who found his ascetic ideal on an unknown Adriatic island. Regarding the native Stridon he complains about its excessive attachment to materiality, and attributes his friends much credit for combating heresy.<sup>40</sup> In the letter, Jerome also asks his friends from Aquileia to intercede with bishop Valerianus to write to his sister, most probably in connection with her's aforementioned decision. Here again we see how strongly Jerome endeavoured to enthuse not only his friends and acquaintances, but also his loved ones with the monastic life.

The last two letters to Aquileia are addressed to Niceas (Ep. 8) and to Chrysocomas (Ep. 9).<sup>41</sup> Both addressees are Jerome's friends, and the sender misses the response on their part and expresses a desire for more intense and frequent communication.

Addressee Niceas could be one of Jerome's traveling companions on the way to the East, and thus also an enthusiast of exploring the ideals of hermitism in the East, whence it also originated. Niceas could also be identical with bishop Niceas of Remesiana, who was, among other things, a great friend of Paulinus of Nola (who was, effectively, one of the more famous correspondents of Jerome) and who

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<sup>37</sup> Regarding the dating of Ep. 7 Lukman, *Svetega Hijeronima izbrana dela*, p. 68, considers that it was sent at about the same time as Ep. 6, that is, in the time before 376, when the Goths ravaged Jerome's home town of Stridon, or at least the news of this did not yet reach Jerome. Chromatius, however, is said to have become bishop a few years later. Fürst, *Hieronymus*, pp. 164–165 places the year 393 as the upper limit of the time when Chromatius became bishop.

<sup>38</sup> Fürst, *Hieronymus*, pp. 172, 187.

<sup>39</sup> In the fourth century, bishops were elected by the people, though the presbyters also had a say in the election. Towards the end of the fourth century, however, the situation changed - the bishops were elected by the clergy, and the people were asked only for their opinion or to confirm their choice only. On this see Merrill, *The Church in the Fourth Century*, p. 114.

<sup>40</sup> Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 213; Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 51.

<sup>41</sup> Both letters are linked into the series of letters of reproach due to both common classification and several other elements. See Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 213.



died after 414. About Chrysocomas we know only that he was a monk in Aquileia and its surroundings respectively.<sup>42</sup>

### Letter to Concordia

Of the letters sent to Concordia, only one letter is preserved,<sup>43</sup> namely Ep. 10, which was written for the old man Paulus (*Ad Paulum senem Concordiae*). Ep. 10 is a supplicatory letter<sup>44</sup>, as Jerome's book *Vita Pauli primi eremitae* was enclosed with it. In the last part of the letter, Jerome asks Paul to borrow or to send him a transcript of the following works: Fortunatianus' commentaries, Novatianus' letters, and some of Aurelius Victor's historical works.

Jerome's acquaintance with the old man Paulus probably dates back to the time of his stay in Aquileia, where he, through Paulus probably, first met the great theologian of the East, Origen. The old man's proverbially high age is said to have aroused admiration and respect in his colleagues.<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that Paulus' compatriot was Rufinus, otherwise translator of Origen later. Since Paulus was an avid bibliophile, it is not impossible that Rufinus borrowed the necessary literature from Paulus as well.

The attached book *Vita Pauli primi eremitae* (talks about the life of Paulus, the first hermit) was most likely a gift from Jerome in exchange for the books he wanted to borrow from Paulus. The choice of the book itself, however, was probably well calculated on the part of Jerome, as it could have served as an indoctrination of monasticism in Concordia, if not in the wider sphere.

### Letters to Altinum

Of the three letters sent to Altinum: Ep. 14 - *Ad Heliodorum monachum*, Ep. 52 - *Ad Nepotianum presbyterum* and Ep. 60 - *Ad Heliodorum epitaphium Nepotiani*, the addressee of two of them (Ep. 14 and Ep. 60) is Jerome's good friend Heliodorus, and the addressee of the third one (Ep. 52) is Heliodorus' nephew Nepotianus.<sup>46</sup>

In the very opening of Ep. 52 Jerome recalls a letter that he had written when he was trying himself at constraining from lustful attacks that had been overwhelm-

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<sup>42</sup> Fürst, *Hieronymus*, pp. 165, 196.

<sup>43</sup> Jerome writes about receiving Paulus' letter in Ep. 5 to Florentine: *Scriptis mihi et quidam de patria supra dicti fratris Rufini Paulus senex Tertulliani suum codicem apud eum esse, quem uehementer reposit. Hieron. Ep. 5,2 (Labourt 1, 18)*. This indicates that the prior correspondence between Jerome and the old man Paulus existed, and that more than one letter was exchanged, but unfortunately Ep. 10 is the only one that preserved throughout history.

<sup>44</sup> Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 213.

<sup>45</sup> Zovatto, *Paolo da Concordia*, p. 170.

<sup>46</sup> Ep. 14 and Ep. 52 belong to a series of letters of exhortation. In this type of letter, the writer endeavours to make a recipient adopt a certain behaviour or lifestyle. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, pp. 214–215.

ing him in his youth. The letter he is referring to is Ep. 14<sup>47</sup> and the circumstances around the letter are rather intriguing: Heliodorus set out on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. On his way back home to Altinum in 374 he stopped in Antiochia to visit his friend Jerome (they had been friends since the early or middle 360s when they were fellow students in Rome<sup>48</sup>). Jerome was at that time already forging a plan to start living the ascetic life in the Syrian desert and asked Heliodorus to join him, but Heliodorus ultimately refused the offer as he had monastic ambitions on his own and could not understand why both the monastic and clergy ambitions could not be aspired simultaneously. Jerome felt offended and wrote Ep. 14 to his old friend to protest and reproach him for not joining him and for thinking that he could assume both the role of a monk as well as a clergyman. It was unimaginable for Jerome at that time to weave these two vocations together.<sup>49</sup>

Ep. 52 is one of the more extensive letters Jerome sent to the wider region of the Northern Adriatic. The discussed letter is addressed to Nepotianus, who was a young priest in Altinum and a practicing monk and had requested Jerome for guidance and to shed some light onto how he is supposed to handle and integrate the two vocations.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, by the time Jerome wrote Ep. 52 to Nepotianus, his view on the matter of the two vocations and the necessity of their absolute separability has radically changed – he now celebrated the very notion of integrating the vocation of a monk, living the ascetic life, with the vocation of a clergyman.<sup>51</sup> In reference to the style of the letter we conclude that Jerome's purpose was to publicly announce Ep. 52 and hand it over to the wider Christian clergy in the Northern Italy and in the West. The length of the letter could also support this hypothesis, since a detailed treatise on the clergy and the ecclesiastical hierarchy would receive a debate in the Christian community.<sup>52</sup>

Ep. 60 is the only letter among the letters to Altinum that has a very consoling content.<sup>53</sup> It was intended to comfort Heliodorus, who suffered the untimely death of his nephew Nepotianus. Jerome wrote Ep. 60 shortly after the news of

<sup>47</sup> Jerome's remarks on the previous letters are rare, so the letter in question (Ep. 14) probably meant a lot to him. To be exact, Jerome recollects Ep. 14 in two letters, written later: Ep. 52: *Dum essem adulescens, immo paene puer; et primos impetus lasciuientis aetatis heremi durtitia refrenarem, scripsi ad anuunculum tuum sanctum Heliodorum exhortatoriam epistulam plenam lacrimis querimoniisque, et quae deseri sodalis monstraret affectum. Sed in illo opere pro aetate tunc lusimus, et calentibus adhuc rhetorum studiis atque doctrinis, quaedam scolastico flore depinximus.* Hieron. Ep. 52,1 (Labourt 2, 172) and Ep. 77: *Librum, quo Heliodorum quondam iuuenis ad heremum cohortatus sum, tenebat memoriter; et Romana cernens moenia, inclusam se esse plangebat.* Hieron. Ep. 77,9 (Labourt 4, 49).

<sup>48</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, pp. 31–32.

<sup>49</sup> Cain, *Jerome and the monastic clergy*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>50</sup> As a letter of exhortation it is written in the paraenetic style. The very nature of such a letter presupposes that the author – no matter the relationship he is in with the addressee – is morally superior. This puts the author to a unique position of being able to guide his addressee as he pleases or as he thinks is right, respectively. Jerome in this letter well assumed such a role as he presented himself as a wise and experienced senior. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, pp. 214–215.

<sup>51</sup> Cain, *Jerome and the monastic clergy*, pp. 2, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, p. 146.

<sup>53</sup> Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, pp. 209–210 classifies the letter under consolatory letters.

Nepotianus' death reached him. He expertly incorporates also the report<sup>54</sup> on the highly unenviable position of the area from Constantinople to the Julian Alps into the consolation of Heliodorus.<sup>55</sup>

In Heliodorus' consolation, Jerome points out that Nepotianus wanted to visit Egyptian monasteries or to visit monastic communities in Mesopotamia, or to at least settle on lonely Dalmatian islands. Attention is drawn, in this respect, to the fact that Jerome, not Nepotianus himself, speaks of Nepotianus' desire. The letter excellently illustrates how Jerome did not miss a single opportunity where he could express the manifesto for monasticism.

### Letters to Pannonia and Dalmatia

To the area of the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic Jerome wrote two more letters,<sup>56</sup> namely Ep. 68 to Castritianus in Pannonia (*Ad Castricianum*)<sup>57</sup> and Ep. 118 to Iulianus in Dalmatia (*Ad Iulianum*).<sup>58</sup>

The letter gives information about the person who carried the letter to Castritianus, namely, the deacon Heracles, who was probably just like Castritianus from Pannonia, but was most likely brought to the East by a pilgrimage. Castritianus himself was deciding about setting out on a pilgrimage just like the one Heracles went to, but was detained by friends on his way to the East in Dalmatia, more specifically on the island of Cissa. The letter itself is very likely a proof of the existence of a monastic colony on the island of Cissa, the exact location of which still has several assumptions.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> From the premise that Jerome wrote Ep. 60 in 396 and from the temporal indication from the text that the barbarian peoples have been plundering the said territory for more than twenty years, we obtain a period of time, which includes both the Battle of Adrianople and the Battle of the Frigidus. The distress throughout the better part of the Western Empire at that time was undoubtedly substantial, but we have to take into account the distance between Jerome and these events, and so Jerome's descriptions of distress appear to be exaggerated. This was undoubtedly aided by the fact that Jerome was likely to receive news from the West both first-hand and second-hand, and when describing the news, his description of the situation was thus greatly intensified. On this see Lotter, *Premiki ljudstev*, p. 129.

<sup>55</sup> *Non calamitates miserorum, sed fragilem humanae condicionis narro statum – horret animus temporum nostrorum ruinas prosequi – : uiginti et eo amplius anni sunt, quod inter Constantinopolim et Alpes Iulias cotidie Romanus sanguis effunditur. Scythiam, Thraciam, Macedoniam, Thessaliam, Dardaniam, Daciam, Epiros, Dalmatiam cunctasque Pannonias Gothus, Sarmata, Quadus, Alanus, Huni, Vandali, Marcomanni uastant, trahunt, rapiunt. Quot matronae, quot uirgines Dei et ingenua nobiliaque corpora his beluis fuere ludibrio ! capti episcopi, interfecti presbyteri et diuersorum officia clericorum, subuersae ecclesiae, ad altaria Christi stabulati equi, martyrum effossae reliquiae: "ubique luctus, ubique" gemitus "et plurima mortis imago.* Hieron. Ep. 60,16–17 (Labourt 3, 106–108).

<sup>56</sup> These are two more of the consolatory letters. See Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, pp. 211–212.

<sup>57</sup> It is worth mentioning that the addressee was indeed from Pannonia, but at the time when the letter was sent to him by Jerome, he was staying in Dalmatia.

<sup>58</sup> Approximate dating of Ep. 68 to Castritianus is varying around the year of 397, possibly early in the next year. Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 213; Fürst, *Hieronymus*, p. 164.

<sup>59</sup> Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, pp. 554–556. The location is discussed in more detail by Suić, *Cissa Pullaria*, pp. 185–219.

Jerome objects Castritianus that his blindness is God's punishment, and comforts the addressee by enviable comparison to Antonius the Great.<sup>60</sup> We do not learn much from the letter about Castritianus' life path, where Jerome first encountered him and whether they actually ever met in person, but we can deduce that Castritianus was also a monk or at least a friend of the nearby ascetic community.

Ep. 118 to Iulianus of Dalmatia is the youngest by creation of the letters sent to the Western Balkans or the Northern Adriatic – it dates from 407 to 409.<sup>61</sup> As we learn from the content, Iulianus was a rather wealthy man. Because he suddenly lost both his daughters and his wife, Jerome recommends that he also devotes himself to monastic life and becomes one of those he supports – Iulianus supported the monks who lived in the nearby Dalmatian islands, perhaps even financed the construction of monasteries. According to chronology, the letter to Iulianus is the youngest of Jerome's letters that mentions the existence of monasticism and monasteries in the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic.<sup>62</sup>

In the letter Jerome puts his and obviously also Iulianus' acquaintances Pammachius and Paulinus of Nola on a pedestal and uses them as an example. Pammachius was Jerome's acquaintance and classmate from Rome, and at the time of writing the letter he had already entered the path of consecrated life, and did so after the death of his wife Paulina in 396, while Paulinus of Nola was not yet a bishop at that time, as he was consecrated in 409. At the same time Jerome claims that he cannot be held up as such an example. By the word of God, he only reserves the right to exhort if he cannot already exhort by his example.<sup>63</sup>

It is obvious that Jerome in this case acted not only as a comforter to Iulianus, but also as a promoter of the ascetic life. The very length of the letter is telling, as Jerome is strongly committed to convincing Iulianus to join his ranks. We cannot exclude that Jerome did not act completely pragmatically in this case, since they could have benefited materially from the rich Dalmatian – namely, the monks and after all the monasticism in Dalmatia, if not Jerome himself, though far in the East.

## Conclusion

Jerome's letters and his connection with the area of the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic are witnesses to an important and diverse period of late antiquity, primarily because they draw from the life spectrum of one of the most important figures of late antiquity.

The letters in question testify to a turning point for the discussed area, both in the political and ecclesiastical spheres. In addition to his endeavours to eradicate

<sup>60</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 213; Bratož, *Meništvu v rimskih provincah*, p. 112, Fürst, *Hieronimus*, p. 164.

<sup>61</sup> Kelly, *Jerome*, p. 296.

<sup>62</sup> The two letters, written around and soon after 400, are the last witnesses to the existence of monasticism in the area of the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic. On this see Bratož, *Meništvu v rimskih provincah*, pp. 111–112; Bratož, *Med Italijo in Ilirikom*, p. 291.

<sup>63</sup> Lukman, *Svetega Hieronima izbrana dela*, p. 41; Fürst, *Hieronimus*, p. 188.

heresies and his zeal for orthodoxy, Jerome is one of the important figures in the development of monasticism in the Western Roman Empire. In the last quarter of the fourth century, the first groups of ascetics were formed, and, due to the influence of the Egyptian examples, true hermitism took shape. From the circle of Jerome's friends, many chose the path of living the ascetic life. Concrete witnesses to the existence of monastic communities are mentioned in the letters. After all, the letters are an inexhaustible link between two different cultures, East and West, which Jerome both experienced and valued and because of his assessment of both, his person marks the very era of late antiquity.

If we take in consideration Jerome's addressees of the letters in question, we notice that with all but aunt Castorina, the common denominator is monasticism or better even propagation of monasticism. This is not surprising, since Jerome accepted the ascetic life as his vocation and tried to inspire others to do the same. It is worth mentioning that his defense of orthodoxy, which is otherwise a distinctive and common theme of his letters, is almost completely excluded, with the exception of Ep. 7. The silence on the part of the addressees can be noticed from the letters several times, in these cases the cause could be of an otherwise theological nature. The silence of the virgins from Emona may be one of the examples, namely the community of virgins may have pragmatically kept silence as they, given the situation in the Church at the time (the question of Arianism), did not want to take sides.

Jerome was, as evidenced, a rather polemical and contentious person, and through his letters he often gives the impression that he is the centre of the Church in late antiquity.<sup>64</sup> This was perhaps also one of the techniques that helped him to propagate monasticism in the Western Balkans and the Northern Adriatic.

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<sup>64</sup> Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, pp. 524–525, argues that with a careful selection of the letters that went later in Rome in circulation, Cain, *Vox clamantis in deserto*, pp. 524–525, Jerome shapes the perception of his personality in the then present and future. We know that Jerome chose a selection of letters for his propaganda, thus aiming at his own wider recognisability with the aim of "transforming himself textually into something of a Latinized Antonius." Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority*, p. 172 makes an interesting remark about Jerome writing his *Vita Pauli* as an attempt to possibly rival the achievement of Athanasius, whose work was well known to some inhabitants of the Empire. V. sup. footnote 10.

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## POVZETEK

## Hieronimovi stiki z območjem zahodnega Balkana in severnega Jadrana v času njegovega prebivanja na Vzhodu (375–420)

Gregor Sraka

Krščanska epistolarna dejavnost pozne antike je v zgodovino pisju in teologiji priznana kot pomemben vir za raziskovanje širokega spektra družbenih dejavnikov. Hieronim je svoj čas in čas skozi zgodovino nenehno buril duhove s svojim pronicljivim intelektom. Njegove literarne stvaritve, ne samo prevajalske in eksegetske, ampak tudi teološke, biografske in zgodovinske, so nastale v in govorijo o prelomnem času. Pisma so zagotovo ena najpomembnejših prič družbenega stanja na obravnavanem območju in Hieronimovih osebnih relacij z ljudmi s tega območja. Iz ohranjenih pisem, poslanih na območje zahodnega Balkana in severnega Jadrana, lahko iz drobcov rekonstruiramo zgodbo duhovnega in zgodovinskega dogajanja na področju, ki razmeroma predstavlja širši prostor današnjega slovenskega ozemlja.

Hieronim je kasneje v svoji zreli dobi in dobršni meri tako rekoč prevzel dvojno poslanstvo starejšega predhodnika – Atanzija, ki je bil pomembna osebnost pri zagovarjanju pravoverstva in slavljenju idealov asketskega življenja.

Meništvo se je na tem ozemlju razvijalo postopoma in približno sinhrono z drugimi deli krščanskega Zahoda. Na obravnavanem območju v 4. stoletju še ni bilo izoblikovanega jedra meništva, zato so k začetkom meniškega gibanja pomembno prispevali vplivi od drugod, ki so jih na območje zahodnega Balkana in severnega Jadrana prenesli pomembni protagonisti – škof Atanzij iz Aleksandrije (rojen ok. 295), asket Martin (kasnejši škof v Poitiersu) in Evzebij iz Verceilov. Njihova prisotnost v širšem zaledju obravnavanega področja je pripomogla k začetkom meništva, čeprav je bila njihova primarna dejavnost teološke narave. Približno v drugi polovici 4. stoletja je na obravnavano območje, natančneje v Dalmacijo, pripotoval Hilarion, asket iz Palestine. Njegova navzočnost pomeni prvi pisno dokumentirani vir v povezavi z asketizmom na tem območju. Nepoznavanje jezika in uresničevanje ideala asketskega življenja – bivanje v samotni – nista pripomogli k širjenju same ideje, zato je razsežnost njegovega vpliva na razvoj meništva in širjene idealov asketskega življenja na tem območju vprašljiva. Seveda je meništvo v pravem pomenu besede nastopilo šele z nastopom Hieronima in njegovih vrstnikov ok. 370. Skozi pisma je moč zaslediti Hieronimovo zavzeto in skrbno premišljeno propagacijo meništva, ki je nedvomno posredno in neposredno vplivala na razvoj tega v Zahodnem cesarstvu. Izmed celotnega korpusa pisem jih je Hieronim namreč na območje zahodnega Balkana in severnega Jadrana poslal trinajst – dve v Emono in Stridon, štiri v Akvilejo, eno v Konkordijo, tri v Altinum ter po eno na območje Panonije in Dalmacije. Če se ozremo na Hieronimove naslovnike obravnavanih pisem, opazimo, da ima z vsemi, z izjemo tete Kastorine, skupno točko meništvo oz. propagacijo meništva. To niti ni presenetljivo, namreč Hieronim je asketsko življenje vzel za svoje poslanstvo in skušal nad tem navdušiti tudi druge. Pisma v Emono, Stridon, Akvilejo, Konkordijo in Altinum, ki so tudi starejšega nastanka, nam pričajo o obstoju meništva že v drugi polovici četrtega stoletja, medtem ko mlajši pismi v Panonijo in Dalmacijo veljata za dokaz o obstoju meništva v začetku 5. stoletja.

Omeniti velja, da je njegovo zagovarjanje pravoverstva, ki je sicer tudi značilna tematika njegovih pisem, z izjemo v Ep. 7 diakonu Julijanu, skoraj povsem izključeno. Večkrat je iz pisma razbrati molk naslovnikov, v teh primerih bi lahko bil vzrok sicer teološke narave. Molk devic iz Emone je lahko eden od teh, namreč skupnost devic je morda pragmatično molčala, ker se glede na takratne razmere (vprašanje arijanstva) ni želela opredeljevati na eno ali drugo stran.

Hieronimova pisma v zahodni Balkan in severni Jadrna so tako torej priče pomembnega, predvsem pa raznoterega dogajanja pozne antike, predvsem zato, ker ta dela niso le zgodovinski vir *per se*, ampak ponujajo veliko vedenja o takratnem času na obravnavanem območju, ker črpajo

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iz življenjskega fokusa v globalnem smislu ene najvidnejših osebnosti poznega 4. in zgodnjega 5. stoletja. Hieronim je bil očitno polemična osebnost, skozi svoja pisma pa daje dostikrat vtis, da je center poznoantične Cerkve. Verjetno je to tudi ena od tehnik, ki so mu pripomogle k propagaciji meništva na območju Zahodnega Balkana in Severnega Jadrana.