

THE SECRET LIFE OF SALONA IN 7TH AND 8TH CENTURY*

Danijel Džino

D. Džino
Macquarie University
Department of Ancient History
Balaclava Rd, AU-NSW2109 Sydney
E-mail: danijel.dzino@mq.edu.au

10.1484/M.DEM-EB.5.121625

This paper analyses the available evidence for habitation of the ancient Dalmatian capital Salona during the seventh and eighth centuries. The existing scholarship, with few exceptions, accepts that Salona was taken by the Slavs and Avars before mid-seventh century, probably within the decades of 620s or 630s. However, the lack of archaeological evidence proving the destruction of the city creates space for arguments that the city did not meet a violent end, but rather that it slowly died out, as argued in the works of Rapanić, Goldstein, Budak and the present author. The paper argues that Salona did not meet a violent end in seventh century, but that some kind of habitation existed until eighth century. One plausible possibility could be that some traumatic event happened in eighth century, ending continuity of life within the city-walls.

Key words: Salona, Dalmatia, Late Antiquity, Slavs, the early Middle Ages, urban decay

One of the earliest published works of Nikola Jakšić revisited much discussed parts of *De Administrando Imperio*, which described the capture of Salona.¹ Masterful analysis completed by a youthful Jakšić saw the formulation of a hypothesis regarding the existence of Byzantine military limes in the hinterland of Salona around 600. This idea was later elaborated from archaeological perspective by Ante Milošević, providing persuasive arguments about the existence of a double-walled line of fortifications in the valley of the Cetina river, which in some form survived throughout until 9th century.² Jakšić also elaborated on other important insights, arguing that the Byzantine imperial infrastructure was preserved in the hinterland of Nin and Zadar in the same period.³ This paper will use

* This work has been fully supported by the “Research Cooperability” Program of the Croatian Science Foundation funded by the European Union from the European Social Fund under the Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014-2020, within the project PZS-2019-02-1624 – GLOHUM – Global Humanisms: New Perspectives on the Middle Ages (300-1600). I would like to thank Ivan Basić and Mladen Ančić for commenting the paper, and Caitlin Lawler for editing it.

Abbreviations:

DAI *De Administrando Imperio*, (ed.) Gyula Moravcsik, Washington DC, 1962.

HAM *Hortus Artium Medievalium*.

HS Archdeacon Thomas of Split, *History of the Bishops of Salona and Split*, (ed.) Olga Perić et al., Budapest, 2006.

Salonitansko-splitska crkva Josip Dukić, Slavko Kovačić, Ema Višić-Ljubić (ed.), *Salonitansko-splitska crkva u prvom tisućljeću kršćanske povijesti*, Split, 2008.

SHP *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* ser. 3.

VAHD/VAPD *Vjesnik za arheologiju i historiju/povijest dalmatinsku*.

¹ N. JAKŠIĆ, Constantine Porphyrogenitus as the Source for Destruction of Salona, *VAHD*, 77, Split, 1984, pp. 315-326.

² E.g. A. MILOŠEVIĆ, *Croci sulle lastre di rivestimento delle tombe altomedievali nell'area di Signa*, Dubrovnik - Split, 2008; A. MILOŠEVIĆ, *Arheologija Sinjskoga polja*, Split, 2017, pp. 83-115, cf. Ž. RAPANIĆ, Propast Salone, *SHP*, 43, Split, 2016, pp. 130-133.

³ N. JAKŠIĆ, La survivance des édifices paléochrétiens dans les terres de la principauté Croate, *HAM*, 1, Zagreb - Motovun, 1995, pp. 36-45; N. JAKŠIĆ, Il ruolo delle antiche chiese rurali nella formazione del ducato croato medievale, *HAM*, 14, Zagreb - Motovun, 2008, pp. 103-112.

an occasion of celebrating the immense scholarly contribution of Jakšić, to build upon his interests in the survival of the Byzantine power in the Dalmatian 'Dark Ages', focusing on the city of Salona.

In regard to the question of what happened to Salona (modern Solin in Croatia), the Dalmatian capital and the province's largest city in the 7th and 8th century represents a significant problem. Archaeological research makes clear that the space within the city walls was inhabited at the beginning of the 7th century, but abandoned before 800. Earlier scholarship was clear about what happened to the city. It followed metanarratives of a violent end of antiquity in this part of the world, attested in the written sources such as the *DAI* and *Historia Salonitana* by Thomas the Archdeacon of Split, which described the capture and destruction of this city. The only disputed question remained an exact date when Salona was destroyed. Taking the assumption, made in conjunction with other (un)related sources, that the sack occurred during the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (610-641), the sack of Salona was dated between 614 and 639.⁴ Most scholars still support the idea of a violent capture during Heraclius' reign, but few have been specific about when precisely this happened.⁵ The major issue with that view is that there are no archaeological layers contextualising the destruction, proving a violent end of the city, or at least a simultaneous and measured end of its major public buildings. In the 1980s, a different approach was raised by some scholars who agree that Salona was shrinking and slowly dying out, as was the case with many other late antique Mediterranean cities. As a consequence, it was abandoned after 600 without experiencing a violent sudden end.⁶ While this interpretation explains the absence of the destruction level, it still cannot explain the origins of the story of the fall of Salona, which is preserved in the written sources.

There are three versions of this story. The earliest two are preserved in the *DAI*, composed in the mid-10th century, and the third one comes from *HS* from ca. mid-13th century. The stories from the *DAI* are similar in content, but placed in different narrative contexts: one within *origo gentis* of early medieval Dalmatian cities (Ch. 29), and the other as a prelude to the Croat *origo gentis* (Ch. 30). With minor differences in detail, they both have the same plot: The Avars/Slavs entered the Salonitan walls through trickery by posing as Romans, taking the city by the sword. They expelled the Romans from Dalmatia, except for the coastal cities, while surviving Salonitans settled in Diocletian's palace after wandering Dalmatian islands for some time. Neither story is dated by any chronological marker, except an impression that the events occurred long after Diocletian.⁷ Thomas admits

⁴ See the overview of historiography in I. BASIĆ, CIL III 9551 i njegovi tumači, *Tusculum*, 1, Solin, 2008, pp. 81-108; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 91-95.

⁵ E.g. I. MAROVIĆ, Reflexions about the Year of the Destruction of Salona, *VAHD*, 77, Split, 1984, pp. 293-314; N. JAKŠIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 1), pp. 325-326, most recently M. KATIĆ, *Castella qui sunt super civitatem Salonitanam*, *VAHD*, 111, Split, 2018, pp. 245-279. Cf. I. BASIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 94, 98 (city captured, without excluding some kind of lingering habitation in the seventh century).

⁶ Željko Rapanić pioneered the idea - see the most complete synthesis of his arguments in Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 98-135. Cf. I. GOLDSTEIN, *Bizant na Jadranu*, Zagreb, 1992, pp. 92-95; D. DZINO, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat. Identity Transformations in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Dalmatia*, Leiden - Boston, 2010, pp. 155-156; N. BUDAK, *Furta sacra et inventio traditionis: Je li doista postojao kontinuitet između Salonitanske i Splitske biskupije*, in: *Munuscula in honorem Željko Rapanić*, (ed.) Miljenko Jurković, Ante Milošević, Zagreb - Motovun - Split, 2012, pp. 169-70, 177; N. BUDAK, *Hrvatska povijest od 550. do 1100.*, Zagreb, 2018, pp. 60-66. Cf. M. PETRINEC, Metal objects of Byzantine origin in medieval graves from Croatia, *Series Byzantina. Studies on Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Art*, 8, Warszawa, 2010, p. 198 (the city was abandoned in the wake of the Avar-Slavene threat in the mid-7th century).

⁷ *DAI*, 29.1-53; 30.1-58. Recently: F. BORRI, Arrivano i barbari a cavallo! Foundation Myths and *Origines gentium* in the Adriatic Arc, in: *Post-Roman Transitions: Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West*, (ed.) Walter Pohl, Gerda Heydemann, Turnhout, 2013, pp. 235-241; D. DZINO, Local knowledge and wider contexts: stories of the arrival of the Croats in *De Administrando Imperio* in the past and present, in: *Byzantium, its neighbors and its cultures*, (ed.) Daniel Dzino, Ken Parry, Brisbane, 2014, pp. 95-100; H. GRAČANIN, J. ŠKRGULJA, Refashioning of Historical Reality: Three Stories by Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus and the Early Medieval History of Croatia, in: *Samuel's State and Byzantium: History, Legend, Tradition, Heritage*, (ed.) Mitko B. Panov, Skopje, 2015, pp. 24-34; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 116-18.

that his account of the fall of Salona in *HS* is composed: “partly from hearsay, partly from writing and partly by relying on conjecture.” The story is a fruit of Thomas’ imagination, a divine punishment for ‘sins’ of the Salonitans, partly using an existing tradition from his context that explained the end of Salona and the rise of a new settlement in Diocletian’s palace. Again, there are no chronological markers and the narrative anachronistically mixes up different historical and non-historical actors.⁸ Thomas proceeds to describe what happened to the Salonitan refugees, who, after ‘epic wanderings’ on Dalmatian islands, settled in Dalmatian cities, specifically in the complex of Diocletian’s palace – the medieval Spalatum.⁹ He could not read *DAI*, or for that part any other work in Greek,¹⁰ so both sources – *DAI* and *HS* – independently prove the existence of the local tradition on the fall of Salona supplemented as an origin story by the medieval elite of Spalatum.¹¹

As previously stated, archaeological excavations could not find any viable evidence to prove that Salona ended in violence. From the available written, epigraphic and archaeological sources it is clear that the city functioned in the year 600. The letters of Pope Gregory I relayed to the Salonitan (arch) bishops from the 590s attest to vibrant city life. The bishops threw lavish parties, ambitious individuals fought for the title of the Salonitan bishop by manipulating the people and local army units.¹² Salona in the second half of the sixth century was an important urban centre, whose inhabitants produced wealth surplus and were capable of maintaining complex social structures.¹³ In ca. 500, the so-called Oratorium A building was repurposed into a banquet hall used by the Salonitan clergy. The water stream was diverted from the aqueduct into a building, where a small fountain was made out of reused sarcophagus. The evidence of calcification and wear implies use of the structure post-600, which is also confirmed with the finds of two newly drilled wells from the late sixth/early seventh century, with direct access to the still working aqueduct.¹⁴ Another chronologically certain information is the attested limited circulation of low-value Heraclian coins in the city, and possibility that the Salonitan mint, the only known mint in the eastern Adriatic, was still functioning in the late 620s.¹⁵ A seminal work of Vinski on late antique personal adornments found in Salona was based on the

⁸ *HS*, 7 (pp. 32-43); R. KATIČIĆ, *Litterarum studia: Književnost i naobrazba ranoga hrvatskog srednjovjekovlja*, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 254-259; N. IVIĆ, Dosezi sjećanja i zaborava: Pad Salone i naseljavanje Splita u Tome Arhiđakona, in: *Toma Arhiđakon i njegovo doba*, (ed.) Mirjana Matijević-Sokol, Olga Perić, Split, 2004, pp. 129-142; M. MATIJEVIĆ-SOKOL, *Toma Arhiđakon i njegovo djelo. Rano doba hrvatske povijesti*, Jastrebarsko, 2002, pp. 233-250.

⁹ *HS*, 8-10 (pp. 42-53).

¹⁰ Cf. M. MATIJEVIĆ-SOKOL, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 335-339 on Thomas’ sources.

¹¹ The tradition is also preserved in four of six *Vitae Sancti Domnii*, D. FARLATI, *Illyricum Sacrum*, vol. I, Venice, 1751, pp. 419-426, all of which were composed in high medieval times or the Renaissance, cf. I. BABIĆ, Splitske uspomene na salonitanske kršćanske starine, *VAHD*, 85/1992, Split, 1993, pp. 16-19; B. LUČIN, Povratak Adama Parižanina, in: *Splitska hagiografska baština: povijest, legenda, tekst*, (ed.) Joško Belamarić, Bratislav Lučin, Marko Trogrlić, Josip Vrandečić, Split, 2014, pp. 85-137.

¹² R. A. MARKUS, *Gregory the Great and His World*, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 156-159; A. ŠKEGRO, Kriza grada Salone i salonitanske crkve u doba nad/biskupâ Natala i Maksima, in: *Salonitansko-splitska crkva*, pp. 299-315. The question whether Salonitan bishops had a title of archbishop in this period is not solved, but it is a very likely possibility.

¹³ T. TURKOVIĆ, N. MARAKOVIĆ, “Velike salonitanske terme” – od antičke kuće do biskupskih kupelji, *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti*, 38, Zagreb, 2014, pp. 25-40; J. JELIČIĆ-RADONIĆ, Salona – Metropolis of the Roman Province of Dalmatia and Its Cultural Environment in the Light of Recent Research, in: *Neue Forschungen zum frühen Christentum in den Balkanländern*, (ed.) Renate J. Pillinger, Vienna, 2015, p. 76, T. 30,8.

¹⁴ P. CHEVALIER, J. MARDEŠIĆ, Le groupe épiscopal de Salone aux VI^e-VII^e siècles: urbanisme et vie quotidienne, *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age*, 120(2), Rome, 2008, pp. 234-237.

¹⁵ I. MAROVIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 5) (the circulation of Heraclian coins); P. SOMOGYI, *Byzantinische Fundmünzen der Awarenzeit in ihrem europäischen Umfeld*, Budapest, 2014, pp. 171-181 (mint located in the eastern Adriatic in the 620s producing counterfeit *solidi* of Heraclius).

assumption that the city was destroyed in 614.¹⁶ Accordingly, he dated the Langobardic fibulae and early Byzantine belt-buckles from Salona before that date, although they were produced and deposited elsewhere for much longer – most stretching to the mid-seventh century, and some even later.¹⁷

An important event dateable in 641/642 is the mission of Abbot Martin, sent by the Pope John IV the Dalmatian to bring holy relics of the Dalmatian and Istrian saints to Rome and buy prisoners from unnamed *gentes*.¹⁸ Previous historiography interpreted it as an attempt of the pope to save holy relics from his homeland overrun by the Slavs and bring them to safety.¹⁹ The mention of relics of local Salonitan saints implies that Martin visited Salona, but it is difficult to imagine that he was collecting the relics on his own in a destroyed city. Two traditions of transfer of relics from Salona to Rome and Split indicate that the papal emissary encountered relevant Salonitan ecclesiastic authorities who provided him with access to *brandea* - contact-relics or small parts of saints' bodies.²⁰

Another indication of Salona's habitation is a recent absolute dating of the timber parts of harbour structures in Vranjic, a small peninsula located some 500m from the city walls. The latest phase of development of this facility was built with spolia and dated to 595-775 with C¹⁴ – most likely to the 7th century.²¹ This is important evidence indicating that Salonitans were able to mobilize a workforce and the resources to build and maintain this kind of structure in 7th or even early 8th century. The so-called extramural cemeterial 'emergency churches' on Manastirine and Kapljuč, next to the Salonitan city walls, should also be dated to this period. The term refers to improvised buildings which utilized small parts of earlier built, late antique basilicas that had been cleared and used after they collapsed at some point after the end of the sixth century, due to the lack of maintenance or an earthquake.²² The recent revision excavations of the Manastirine cemetery very clearly dated the period of use for the oil/wine press found next to the basilica to the last chronological phase of the complex, which is contemporary with the existence of the 'emergency church'.²³ There is only one, albeit very general reference of Zonaras, who mentions the earthquakes in "*many districts of the Roman Empire*" at the times of Emperor Constans II (641-668).²⁴ The dating could indeed fit an initial destruction of the churches on Manastirine and Kapljuč, but unfortunately there is nothing much else to get from this very general and late information.

¹⁶ Z. VINSKI, Kasnoantički starosjedioci u salonitanskoj regiji prema arheološkoj ostavštini predslavenskog supstrata, *VAHD*, 69/1967, Split, 1974, p. 5.

¹⁷ Z. VINSKI, *op. cit.* (n. 16), pp. 16-21, 24-29, 32, 35-36.

¹⁸ *HS*, 8 (pp. 44-47); *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, 3rd ed., (ed.) Raymond Davis, Liverpool, 2010, 74.1-2 (pp. 64-65).

¹⁹ Justified reservations towards current interpretations were recently expressed in I. BASIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 90; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 118-120.

²⁰ G. MACKIE, *Early Christian Funerary Chapels in the West: Decoration, Function and Patronage*, Toronto, 2003, pp. 216, 225-227; E. MARIN, Mosaik im Oratorium des Hl. Venantius im lateranischen Baptisterium, *Prilozi Instituta za arheologiju u Zagrebu*, 24, Zagreb, 2007, p. 254; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), p. 122. Cf. F. VERAJA, Kapela Sv. Venancija u Rimu i kult solinskih mučenika, in: *Salonitansko-splitska crkva*, pp. 81-106; S. DETONI, *Giovanni IV – Papa Dalmata*, Vatican City, 2006, p. 28. This mission should be explained in a very different light as argued in a forthcoming publication: D. DŽINO, The Mission of Abbot Martin in Dalmatia and Istria 641: A new interpretation, in: *Dissidence and Persecution in Byzantium*, (ed.) Daniel Džino, Ryan W. Strickler, Leiden - Boston (forthcoming).

²¹ K. VODIČKA MIHOLJEC, Vranjic – južna obala, *Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak*, 4, Zagreb, 2007, pp. 542-543; cf. I. RADIĆ ROSSI, Vranjic – zapadna i južna obala, *Hrvatski arheološki godišnjak*, 3, Zagreb, 2006, p. 452; I. RADIĆ ROSSI, Zaštitno arheološko istraživanje u vranjičkome podmorju 2005/2006, *Tusculum*, 1, Solin, 2008, pp. 25, 28.

²² E. DYGGVE, *History of Salonitan Christianity*, Oslo, 1951, p. 83; cf. I. NIKOLAJEVIĆ, Salona Christiana aux VI^e et VII^e siècles, in: *Disputationes Salonitanae 1970*, (ed.) Željko Rapanić, Split, 1975, pp. 91-95; N. DUVAL, E. MARIN, C. METZGER (ed.), *Salona III. Manastirine. Établissement préromain, nécropole et basilique paléochrétienne*, Split - Rome, 2000, pp. 653-656.

²³ N. DUVAL, E. MARIN, C. METZGER, *op. cit.* (n. 22).

²⁴ N. AMBRASEYS, *Earthquakes in the Mediterranean and Middle East: A Multidisciplinary Study of Seismicity up to 1900*, Cambridge, 2009, p. 221.

During the excavation of the early Christian basilica (Šuplja Crkva) some 500m east of the Salonitan city walls, several gold coins, including *tremissis* of Heraclius from the early 610s, were discovered in 2000. The earliest information laconically implied that the coins were discovered in the foundations of the northern side-wall (probably an atrium) of the 6th century basilica, which was renovated at some point.²⁵ To be precise, the coins were found built into the bench, which was made of stones connected with mortar, beside the northern wall, approximately one metre from the ground.²⁶ The find implies that the coins were deliberately placed and built into the wall during the renovation works. This custom of enclosing coins and other artefacts during building activities was discovered on several late antique and medieval sites in Dalmatia. These depositions in Dalmatia reflect an active and continuing hybridisation between Christianity and elements of 'folk magic', which were used as a tool to re-inforce the apotropaic power of ritual acts.²⁷ The find of these coins provides excellent evidence that the Salonitans were still able to maintain their churches in the 620s/630s, so the appearance of 'emergency churches' cannot be dated before the 640s/650s.

Archaeological evidence for habitation in the 8th century is modest and less certain than for the 7th century. Early medieval 'Slavic' pottery or graves with grave goods dateable to this century were not found. There is only a pot from an unknown location, few unpublished sherds found near the Roman theatre in the city, and the sherds found in the Roman/late antique/early medieval cemetery just outside the western city walls.²⁸ At the western cemetery a decorated deer antler was discovered, while one more is known from an unknown locality in Solin. These artefacts in Dalmatia are usually dated to ca. 8th century, but recent research suggests that they could be dated to the early eighth century.²⁹ There are no graves securely dateable to the mid/late seventh or eighth century, but the graves from this period might be very difficult to date if there are no grave goods, and it would not be surprising if the graves postdating the year 650 were dated to the 6th or early 7th century.³⁰ The

²⁵ H. GJURAŠIN, Šuplja Crkva u Solinu. Arheološka istraživanja 1998. i 2001. godine, *SHP*, 27, Split, 2000, p. 86; T. ŠEPAROVIĆ, Notes on Byzantine coins from the 7th to 9th century found in Croatia, in: *XV International Numismatic Congress Taormina 2015*, vol. 2, Rome - Messina, 2017, pp. 1008-1009, Figs. 1-5.

²⁶ A. MILOŠEVIĆ, *Campanili preromanici della Dalmazia e della Croazia altomedievale*, Split - Dubrovnik, 2011, pp. 116-117 n. 175. M. KATIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 5), pp. 273-274 n. 84 recently argued that the coins were found as a hoard in a fissure between the bench and the wall. Unfortunately, the article did not address the earlier publication of Milošević, which contained more accurate information on the find.

²⁷ Ž. RAPANIĆ, *Od carske palače do srednjovjekovne općine*, Split, 2007, p. 141 n. 224; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 100-101; cf. A. MILOŠEVIĆ, Primjer ritualne žrtve pri gradnji kuće na srednjovjekovnom Bribiru, *SHP*, 42, Split, 2015, pp. 51-52; K. REED, Ritual household deposits and the religious imaginaries of early medieval Dalmatia (Croatia), *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, 56, New York, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2019.101084>

²⁸ A. PITEŠA, *Catalogue of finds from the Migration Period, Middle Ages and Early Modern Period in the Archaeological Museum of Split*, Split, 2009, p. 78 (no. 112); L. KATIĆ, Solin od VII. do XX. stoljeća, *Prilozi povijesti umjetnosti u Dalmaciji*, 9, Split, 1956, p. 19; B. KIRIGIN, I. LOKOŠEK, J. MARDEŠIĆ, S. BILIĆ, Salona 86/87: Preliminarni izvještaj sa zaštitnih arheoloških istraživanja na trasi zaobilaznice u Solinu, *VAHD*, 80, Split, 1987, p. 53. The western cemetery also contained undated early medieval graves, A. ŠARIĆ, Zapadna salonitanska nekropola – ranosrednjovjekovni grobovi, in: *Starohrvatski Solin*, (ed.) E. Marin, Split, 1992, pp. 113-114.

²⁹ B. KIRIGIN *et al.*, *op. cit.* (n. 28), p. 15; (Western cemetery); A. ŠARIĆ, Ranosrednjovjekovni i srednjovjekovni nalazi s područja Solina u Arheološkom muzeju u Splitu, *VAHD*, 85/1992, Split, 1993, pp. 163-64; M. PETRINEC, *Gräberfelder aus dem 8. bis 11. Jahrhundert im Gebiet des frühmittelalterlichen kroatischen Staates*, Split, 2009, pp. 300-301, T. 301,7 (unknown locality). See the criticism of current dating in V. GHICA, A. MILOŠEVIĆ, N. URODA, D. DZINO, Varvaria/Breberium/Bribir Archaeological Project. The 2015 Excavation Season, *HAM*, 23(2), Zagreb - Motovun, 2017, p. 790 n. 25.

³⁰ E.g. a destroyed cemetery in Crikvine, close to Vranjic, where E. DYGGVE, *op. cit.* (n. 22), pp. 66-67 n. 34, 102 found a 7th-century Langobardic fibula in the grave, the graves from the western cemetery (above n. 25), or intramural (mostly sub-adult) graves in amphorae found inside eastern portion of the walls, J. MARDEŠIĆ, Istočni trakt gradskih zidina Salone, *Opuscula archaeologica*, 23-24, Zagreb, 1999-2000, pp. 147-149.

seal of the Ravennate Exarch Paul (723-726), accidentally found in Salona or Diocletian's Palace, is unfortunately lost today.³¹ Despite the lack of information about the circumstances of this find and its exact location, the seal confirms the existence of the officials who corresponded with the Ravennate Exarch. Whether they were based in Salona, or at some point of time moved from Salona to Diocletian's palace, is impossible to establish without more information.³²

Another information comes from a written note of the great-uncle and the namesake of historian Johannes Lucius from 1511, published by Farlati, which Lucius Senior apparently found in "some old chronicle". The text briefly mentions the repair of the church Sta Maria di Platea in Trogir (some 20km from Salona) by unknown *comes*, the son of Constantius and the grandson of Severus Magnus. This happened at the times of Peter, the bishop of Trogir, and Emperor Theodosius, identified as Theodosius III (715-717). The repairs were conducted by three builders mentioned by names, coming from "salina" – the saltworks.³³ Another version of the note, preserved in the *Codex Lucianus* in Zadar, instead of *salinas* brings *Salona*.³⁴ The document is problematic, especially for mentioning the bishop of Trogir who did not exist at the time, but its authenticity is generally accepted.³⁵ Recent underwater archaeological research in the area of the Kaštela Bay between Salona and Trogir uncovered wooden pylons from the basins used for fish farms or salt collecting, dated by C14 to the seventh/eighth century.³⁶ This adds relevance to the note, but also shows that complex social structures were maintained very close to Salona at that time – hardly evidence of a violent Slav invasion. Also, the continuity of habitation in Trogir under the Byzantine power throughout the Dalmatian 'Dark Ages' was recently strengthened by the pertinent analysis of Basić.³⁷ The fact that a much smaller Trogir survived the alleged Slav sack of its well-defended neighbour Salona represents another problem in providing coherent argument defending the thesis that the Slavs sacked Salona in the mid-7th century.

While archaeology cannot help us to establish *terminus ante quem* for the abandonment of Salona, perhaps some information could be deduced from *HS*. Thomas reports that an unnamed pope sent John of Ravenna after the sack of Salona to re-establish the Salonitan archbishopric in Diocletian's palace. The refugees from the destroyed Salona, led by Severus Magnus, settled earlier in the palace after wandering central Dalmatian islands, and Severus donated his quarters to the new archbishop. John soon transferred holy relics from the destroyed 'bishop's church' in Salona to Split, symbolically moving the ancient seat of Salonitan church to Spalatum.³⁸ After a long debate whether to date John of Ravenna to the mid-seventh or the late eighth century, he was finally identified as the Salonitan

³¹ F. BULIĆ, Iscrizioni e rappresentazioni su oggetti di metallo acquistati dall i.r. Museo di Spalato negli anni 1895-1901, *Bullettino di archeologia e storia dalmata*, 24, Split, 1901, pp. 139-141; I. NIKOLAJEVIĆ-STOJKOVIĆ, Солински печат егзарха Павла (723-726), *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta*, 7, Belgrade, 1961, pp. 61-66.

³² A. DUPLANČIĆ, Two Early Christian reliquaries from Split, *VAPD*, 106, Split, 2013, pp. 220-221; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 2), pp. 132-135.

³³ D. FARLATI, *op. cit.* (n. 11), vol. IV, Venice, 1769, pp. 306-307.

³⁴ *Codex Lucianus* MS 617 f. 122v; Ž. RAPANIĆ, Sancta Maria de Platea u Trogiru. *De ecclesiis datandis - dissertatio* (1), *SHP*, 25, Split, 1998, p. 50.

³⁵ R. KATIČIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 259-261; Ž. RAPANIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 34), pp. 43-59; N. BUDAK, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 171-172.

³⁶ I. RADIĆ ROSSI, Arheološka baština u podmorju Kaštelanskog zaljeva, *Archaeologia Adriatica*, 2, Zadar, 2008, pp. 492-498.

³⁷ I. BASIĆ, The sarcophagus with sanction formula from Trogir (Aspects of the Byzantine diplomatics tradition in early medieval epigraphy of the Adriatic), *VAHD*, 111, Split, 2018, pp. 281-330.

³⁸ *HS*, 8-12 (pp. 44-57). The whole episode with the transfer might be invented, N. BUDAK, *op. cit.* (n. 6), pp. 160-164, while Thomas' depiction of the settlement of the Salonitan refugees was also validated by the recent archaeological excavations, K. MARASOVIĆ, T. MARASOVIĆ, Naseljavanje Dioklecijanove palače, in: *Munuscula in honorem Željko Rapanić*, (ed.) Miljenko Jurković, Ante Milošević, Zagreb - Motovun - Split, 2012, pp. 99-106; V. DELONGA, Faza II. Podzemni urbanizam, in: *Prije sjećanja. Arheološka istraživanja u jugoistočnom dijelu Dioklecijanove palače u Splitu 1992. godine*, (ed.) Vedrana Delonga, Split, 2014, vol. 1, pp. 157-161.

bishop John who attended the Nicaean council in 787, and the archbishop John whose funerary inscription is preserved on a sarcophagus from Split.³⁹ Thus, it is undeniable that there was a break in the leadership of the Salonitan church, ending with the arrival of John of Ravenna. Recent arguments indicate that there was no continuity between the Salonitan and Spalatan church, strengthening the idea that the Salonitan ecclesiastic authorities did not move from Salona to Diocletian's palace.⁴⁰ Rather, their existence ceased at some moment after very late into the 7th century as the earliest time when the 'emergency churches' in Kapljuč and Manastirine basilicas could be abandoned.

HS directly connects John of Ravenna with Severus Magnus and the oral tradition relating to the sack of Salona. The problem arises from the fact that Severus Magnus is also mentioned in the note of Lucius' great-uncle. One person clearly could not live in the mid/late 7th century and be contemporary of John of Ravenna in the late 8th century. It is not impossible that Lucius Senior or the author of the unknown chronicle he used, found actual information that the unknown *comes* was "the son of Constantius and grandson of Severus", subsequently identifying this Severus with Severus Magnus whom tradition placed in these times. A recent paper convincingly argued the existence of the cult of St Severus in late antique Spalatum,⁴¹ so it is likely that this name could have belonged to a number of prominent individuals living in the mid/late 7th and later 8th centuries. This provides ground to cautiously hypothesize about the existence of a single event, which caused sudden abandonment of Salona and the end of the Salonitan church, occurring no more than 10-20 years before the arrival of John of Ravenna. The settlement of Salonitan refugees in Diocletian's palace was approved by 'emperors in Constantinople'⁴², but this could relate to both 7th and 8th century because most of the emperors from that time co-ruled at some point.

This does not provide an answer as to when the Salonitan (arch)bishopric ceased to exist, as there is nothing to confirm (or deny) its functioning in the late 7th and early 8th centuries.⁴³ The only evidence are the local lists of Salonitan bishops, which were composed in much later times and could be generally considered as unreliable. Amongst these catalogues, there are five lists that may present more coherence than the others. Four of these list more or less the same 35-38 names, from the death of the last historically known bishop Maximus (d. after 602) to John of Ravenna, while the so-called Roman catalogue has only four names between Maximus and John.⁴⁴ The shortest of four longer lists, composed by the archbishop Sforza Ponzoni of Split in the 17th century, contains 35 names providing an average of 4.85 years for a bishop, if we take the year 775 as the latest date for abandonment of Salona and the end of the Salonitan church. This is not so different from the average length of pontificate at that time, as there were 20 popes in the 7th, and 14 in 8th centuries (average 5 and 7.14 years/pope). The positions of church dignitaries were elective, and always reserved for the people of advanced age, so this short

³⁹ I. BASIĆ, New evidence for the re-establishment of the Adriatic dioceses in the late eighth century, in: *Imperial spheres and the Adriatic: Byzantium, the Carolingians and the Treaty of Aachen (812)*, (ed.) Mladen Ančić, Jonathan Shepard, Trpimir Vedriš, London - New York, 2018, pp. 261-287, cf. I. BASIĆ, M. JURKOVIĆ, Prilog opusu *Splitske klesarske radionice kasnog VIII. stoljeća*, SHP, 38, Split, 2011, pp. 149-185; I. BASIĆ, Prilozi proučavanju crkve Svetog Mateja u Splitu, *Ars Adriatica*, 1, Zadar, 2011, pp. 67-96.

⁴⁰ N. BUDAK, *op. cit.* (n. 6), cf. I. BASIĆ, Sjeverna i srednja Dalmacija u ranome srednjem vijeku, in: *Nova zraka u europskom svjetlu: Hrvatske zemlje u ranom srednjem vijeku (oko 550 – oko 1150)*, (ed.) Zrinka Nikolić Jakus, Zagreb, 2015, pp. 432-435.

⁴¹ A. DUPLANČIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 32), pp. 213-214.

⁴² *HS* 10 (pp. 52-53).

⁴³ I. BASIĆ, Dalmatinski biskupi na crkvenom saboru u Hijereji 754. godine, in: *Spalatumque dedit ortum*, (ed.) Ivan Basić, Marko Rimac, Split, 2014, pp. 149-196 provides persuasive argument that 'Dalmatian bishops' in the Hieria council from 754 might have been coming from southern Adriatic. This still does not exclude the possibility that the bishops from other parts of Dalmatia attended the council.

⁴⁴ D. FARLATI, *op. cit.* (n. 11), vol. I, pp. 320, 324, 327, 332, 347; cf. R. KATIČIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 250-254, who sees them as containing some facts, and I. BABIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 11), pp. 16, 26-33 who is more suspicious about their historicity.

span of rule is not surprising. While this in no way confirms the authenticity of Ponzoni's list, at least it shows that it was theoretically possible to have this number of (arch)bishops for 170 years after Maximus, including a decade or two of discontinuity between the Salonitan bishops and John of Ravenna.⁴⁵

There are a few conclusions that could be drawn from the discussion above. First, it looks very clear that within the city walls Salona was inhabited throughout the 7th century, if not longer, so traditional dating of the sack of Salona should not be accepted. The existence of port facility in Vranjic, the finds of artefacts that could have been deposited in the mid-7th century or after, and the visit of Abbot Martin in 641 which implies the presence of ecclesiastic authorities all point to these conclusions. The collapse of cemeterial churches on Manastirine and Kapljuč, and the building of 'emergency churches' was a sign of inability of the local community to maintain these structures, which could not happen before the mid-7th century, and 'emergency churches' were undeniably used for a few generations after that. Salona certainly experienced rapid decline after c. 650 and there is less archaeological evidence for habitation in the 8th century. This could be explained by surviving late antique cultural traditions that made the 8th-century finds undistinguishable from those from the 7th century. The evidence about the existence of ecclesiastic authorities in Salona after ca. 650 century is by no means certain, although possible, so this matter should be separated from the question whether Salona was still inhabited at that time. It is, however, certain that Salona was abandoned and its church lost leadership before the mid-780s when John of Ravenna became archbishop. If the stories of the sack of Salona indeed reflect the memory of the real events, such a hypothetical event could not be dated before the 8th century. The sack of a half-abandoned city would have left much less trace in archaeological records and would have been more difficult to detect. The connection between the sack of the city and the historically attested John of Ravenna implies that the date of this hypothetical sack might have occurred later in the 8th century. The question of who could have sacked Salona and penetrated the limes on the Cetina, cannot be answered at this moment without speculation, and only new archaeological research could provide us with more information.

Tajni život Salone u 7. i 8. stoljeću

U radu se analiziraju dostupna materijalna i pisana vrela koja svjedoče o životu Salone, antičke prijestolnice Dalmacije, u 7. i 8. stoljeću. Postojeće mišljenje znanstvenika koji se bave ovom tematikom, s nekoliko izuzetaka, prihvaća da su Salonu zauzeli Slaveni i Avari prije sredine 7. stoljeća, vjerojatno tijekom 620.-ih ili 630.-ih. Nedostatak dokaza o nasilnom kraju grada omogućio je drugačije pristupe u radovima Rapanića, Goldsteina, Budaka i autora ovoga rada koji se slažu da Salona nije završila nasilno, već da je grad vremenom napušten. Ovaj rad potkrepljuje stav da Salona nije zauzeta u 7. stoljeću, i da je postojala neka vrsta nastanjenosti do 8. stoljeća, otvarajući mogućnost da se u 8. stoljeću doista dogodilo nešto što je prekinulo kontinuitet života unutar gradskih zidina.

Ključne riječi: *Salona, Dalmacija, kasna antika, Slaveni, rani srednji vijek, propadanje grada*

⁴⁵ R. KATIČIĆ, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 252-254; N. BUDAK, *op. cit.* (n. 6), p. 172 suggest that archbishop Martinus dated by *HS* 13 (pp. 60-61) in 970 at the times of emperor Theodosius and Croat king Stephen Držislav, holds information about two persons with the same name. One contemporary with Držislav, and another from 8th century as Theodosius III was the last emperor with that name. In all five catalogues of Salonitan bishops, the names Marinus, Martinus and Marinus came immediately after Peter. The note of Lucius Sr. placed Peter as 'bishop of Trogir' at the times of Theodosius (III). This, at least on speculative grounds, could be an indication that Peter and Marinus/Martinus were bishops in 715-717, and the only place where they could reside at that time was - Salona.