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**Aspects related to the beginning of the Christian life in
the Roman province of Pannonia (2nd – 4th centuries)
(summary of the doctoral thesis)**

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2021

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Keywords:

Pannonia, Christianity, Roman Empire, settlers, archeological discoveries, Roman army, Rain Miracle, Orientals, Arianism, cemeteries.

INTRODUCTION

The beginnings and development of Christianity in the context of the Roman world of the first four centuries is still one of the most contested topics for researchers of late Roman antiquity. The Christian religion experienced, in its first centuries of existence, one of the most unexpected developments within this very dynamic organism that was the Roman Empire. Born under some of the most unfavorable auspices from a political point of view, Christianity came, after only three hundred years, to represent not only the most important religious force of the Empire, but the very religion of the rulers of the state. Moreover, through its intimate association with the history of the Roman world, Christianity ended up representing the historical extension of the Roman vision of culture, civilization and the unification of the European space. Long after the Western Roman Empire ceased, at least formally, to exist, Christianity was the force that continued to provide some stability from these points of view in Europe. In a way, it can be said that if there were no Christianity, the Roman world, with all its values, would have been just another forgotten chapter in the history of the European continent. But by the fact that it managed to incorporate and reshape the values of Roman classicism, redistributing them in its own note, Christianity has done it a service that goes back centuries and that are even more, no less, even if they are a continuous guarantee to the Roman world. spiritually.

By organizing from an administrative point of view, by taking over and transforming some traditional secular institutions of the Empire, by incorporating a religious symbolism belonging to the Roman world, the Church (at least the Western one) managed to transform the cultural heritage of Latin classicism into a digestible product. for a Europe at the end of late antiquity in the process of dissolution. Thanks to this fact, the institution of the Church represented not only a much needed pole of stability in the context of the Dark Ages, but also constituted the binder that ensured the cultural reunification of the European world and its reconciliation with its Roman heritage.

Thus, one can postulate the existence of a symbiosis between the Roman mundus and the Christian vision. However, in the early years of the Christian Church's existence, no one could have glimpsed such a report. At a time when Christianity was seen from a political point of view only as a movement founded by a former convict of crucifixion, too few would have expected such a subsequent evolution of events. And yet, the inexplicable occurred, the two worlds, seemingly antagonistic, united in a common effort that aimed to give birth to a new world and lay the foundations of what we now call the European construct.

This rapprochement is the result of a gradual evolution, carried out over three centuries, a period in which the two entities probed each other and influenced each other in ways that today we can hardly imagine. Despite the extensive research that has been done in this direction, a number of questions remain, the answer to which is the understanding of European Christianity. What were

the factors behind this evolution? What historical processes have favored these transformations? In what way did Christianity and the Roman vision intercondition?

This paper seeks to explore possible answers to these questions, applied in the particular case of the Roman province of Pannonia and starting from the realities evoked by archaeological discoveries. Although not a work of archeology, it relies on the clues provided by this discipline, which are likely to shed new light on the evolution of Christianity in an age when alternative sources of information, ie written sources, provide too much. little data on the situation in this province, for various reasons. Therefore, one of the working methods is represented by the continuous comparison of archaeological data with the elements provided by written historical sources and referring to the general situation of Christianity in the Empire, thus trying to determine what was the evolution of Pannonian Christianity in the broad context of Church history of the 2nd to 4th centuries.

Why Pannonia? The answer is very simple. Because Pannonia offers a very rich archaeological repertoire, constantly updated thanks to systematic archaeological research campaigns. Based on these findings, a fairly broad picture of the evolution of Christian society in this area can be outlined. On the other hand, Pannonia is a concrete case of a central European province, whose evolution in terms of the history of Christianity could be symptomatic for other provinces in this part of the Roman Empire, including part of the current territory of our country.

CHAPTER I: The beginning of the Christianization process in Pannonia

I.1 The Roman army - a primary factor in the spread of Christianity

I.2 Material evidence of the presence of early Christianity in the areas occupied by African and Syrian troops

An old tradition places the first testimony of the existence of the Christian religion on the territory of Pannonia on account of a legion that fought on the Marcomanian front at the end of the second century. This is the XII Fulminata Legion, more precisely a vexillation within this unit, which was stationed in the area of the eastern border of the Empire before its arrival in Pannonia. Although this tradition raises a number of issues from the point of view of historical interpretation, some authors believe that the Miracle of Rain, the episode around which this story was built, is nothing more than a Christian interpretation of an older tradition, of pagan origin, the mere existence of such a hypothesis is such as to justify an attempt to explore the possibility that some of the Roman troops acted as Christianizing factors in the Pannonian area. Against the background of the Marcomanni conflict in the eighth decade of the second century, a whole series of military units from the East were brought to the Pannonian area, some of them coming

from fairly heavily Christianized areas at that time, such as Palestine, Syria or, in some cases, North Africa.

Some of these troops, such as the 12th Legion, were only temporarily relocated, while others were stationed for a longer time, especially in the Danube border area. By making an analysis of the origin of these legions and auxiliaries, one can theorize the possibility of the existence in their ranks, including Christian elements, which would have contributed to some extent to the first contact that Pannonia had with Christianity. Based strictly on the area from which the troops were brought from the territory of Pannonia throughout this period, we came to the conclusion that, in addition to the XII Fulminata Legion, there are a number of two other legions, V Macedonica, and I Italica, which in the decades before their settlement on the Pannonian limes, they had been stationed in Judea during the Jewish revolt led by Bar Kochba. It is also possible that a vexation of the XI Legion Claudia, also a participant in the Jewish war, was temporarily stationed at the same border.

In addition to the legions, there are a large number of auxiliary troops, composed mainly of Syrians and Africans, who remained in the Pannonian area for several centuries and may have had an influence on the spread of Christianity in the province.

Given, however, that we are dealing with periodization at the end of the second century, the natural question arises as to whether it was possible that Christian elements really existed among these troops, knowing that the Christian religion was forbidden in Roman society. The answer to this question is definitely difficult to decide. Indeed, Roman anti-Christian laws issued since the time of Trajan were relatively recent, and there is a strong possibility that these laws served as a deterrent to the presence of Christian elements in the Roman army.

Despite this evidence, there is a wealth of recent evidence that allows us to at least hypothetically take into account that things could have been different. The discovery of a third-century Christian basilica just inside the Megiddo camp of a Roman legion, VI Ferrata, may suggest that the Christian religion was tolerated by troops in the eastern provinces. Also, the mere evocation of the possibility of the existence of Christians in the XII Fulminata Legion, a theory clearly elaborated at the end of the second century, could be another point of support for this hypothesis.

The hypothesis seems to be supported by the archaeological discoveries on the territory of Pannonia, especially in the area of the camps where some of the troops brought from the East were stationed. Thus, at Matrica and Intercisa, on the Danube limes, a series of objects clearly of Christian origin were discovered, having specific decorations and which could have been related to the auxiliary troops of Orientals stationed in these camps. However, the relatively small number of such objects, as well as the impossibility of dating them accurately, do not provide sufficient data to convince us that the Christian religion entered Pannonia before the end of the second century or that Roman military units played a role in this possible evolution of the situation.

CHAPTER II: Historical landmarks of the evolution of Christianity in the third century

II.1 The economic revival of Pannonia and the arrival of the first settlers from the East, as a premise for the beginnings of Christianity

II.2 The Influence of Third Century Economic Development on the Strengthening of Pannonian Christianity

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II.4 Christian settlements in the Lake Balaton area, mission centers for neighboring areas

The end of the Marcomanian crisis will bring with it a new era of prosperity for the province of Pannonia. The cessation of hostilities and implicitly the removal of the center of the province from the threat of invasion of the border populations meant from a practical point of view the recovery of Pannonia for its main economic purpose, agriculture. The epoch of the beginning of the third century will witness a significant increase in the share of this field in the economy of the Empire, and Pannonia with its manorial lands could not make a discordant note from this point of view.

In order to solve the problem of the specialists in this field, the Roman authorities will appeal, as indicated by the evidence we have at our disposal, to settlers brought from the Syrian area. The epigraphic elements of the beginning of the third century indicate an abundant increase in the inscriptions attributed to such settlers, a considerable part of which meet two very important conditions: they come from the rural agricultural areas of the eastern province and, from what we can realize, they have a good material condition. These elements may lead us to think that some of the newcomers to the province of Pannonia had sufficient economic power to establish large estates in this area.

A particularly interesting fact is that during the same period a series of large-scale agricultural settlements seem to flourish in some of the most fertile areas from a pedological point of view, especially in the area of Lake Balaton.

Regarding our study, two such settlements hold our attention for this period: Triciana and Valcum. Archaeological campaigns carried out in the perimeter of these settlements have brought to light a series of Christian objects, which could be dated as early as the first part of the third century. According to their specificity, these objects seem to have been part of the inventory of some basilicas, being about objects used in the cult, such as communion teaspoons, vessels for liturgical use, as well as containers for storing relics. In the same locations, the archeological works revealed the presence of the ruins of some possible basilicas. Unfortunately,

the architectural specifics of the time are too ambiguous to be able to firmly conclude that these ruins are undoubtedly places of worship.

However, the presence of such objects of worship, in combination with the possible existence of basilicas, allows us to advance the hypothesis of the existence of Christian communities in these settlements. In the same context, it is surprising that no traces of pagan buildings were found inside the settlements. The hypothesis advanced by the paper is that this is a sign that these two large estates could have been populated exclusively by Christians. There is a possibility that this was the case, given the characteristic of this community, probably consisting only of the family that owns the large estate and their system of clients, respectively slaves and freedoms.

Estimates show that these communities may have had a large enough number of Christians to later become starting points for possible missions to convert the population in the area.

CHAPTER III: The evolution of Christianity in the context of the militarized society from the Danube border to the end of the third century

III.1 Manifestations of Christianity in the military and civilian environment of the border

III.2 Material evidence of the existence of Christianity in civil settlements on the border

III.3 Material evidence of the existence of Christianity in military settlements on the border

III.4 Material evidence of the syncretic Christianity of soldiers

III.5 Conclusions on the evolution of Christianity in Pannonia in the third century and the first part of the fourth century

The third century will bring with it the evolution of the Christian life in the border area of the Danube. The attempts of the Roman Empire to fortify the Danube limes resulted in the creation of an influx of troops brought from all corners of the Roman world for this purpose. From the perspective of our study, we are mainly attracted by the eastern troops, from the area of Syria and Judea, given the fact that among these soldiers we are most likely to find Christians.

An analysis of the archaeological materials discovered in the area of the camps occupied by these troops is likely to convince us that, indeed, after the arrival of the Orientals in the Danube border sector of Pannonia, the Christian life begins to undergo a process of development. The situation is most likely to contribute to the fact that, thanks to the reforms that the emperor Septimius Severus is making in the army, soldiers have, since the third century, the opportunity to marry even during their internship in the legion. This privilege had previously been granted only to officers. Thanks to this situation, to the actual number of soldiers will be added the one

representing their family, and thus the number of Orientals arriving in Pannonia is quite large, thus increasing the possibility that there were civilian Christians among them.

A number of archeological discoveries bear witness to the fact that there were civilians from the East in Pannonia and Christians. As it is known, in the structure of the Roman border, the camp, the military settlement, was doubled by a civilian settlement called *cannabis*. On the Pannonian border of the Danube, most of the *cannabis* inhabited by the Syrian population, such as those from Intercisa or Brigetio, were discovered Christian pieces, as well as places of worship, which indicates the presence of Christians in these civilian settlements.

On the other hand, in the military settlements on the border, even where most of the troops are composed of Orientals, only a few Christian pieces dating from this period are found, which could indicate a low tolerance for the Christian religion in this period. military environment. However, this does not mean that Christianity did not exist among the troops, especially since one of the discoveries, a tile discovered in such a camp and which has engraved a tribute to Christian martyrs among the troops, martyred, the most probably, in the time of Diocletian, it is a major support for this hypothesis.

Most likely, in the third century, Christians in the army prefer to keep this status secret, for fear of the consequences. It is not excluded the hypothesis that at least some of the soldiers were attracted to some extent by Christianity, especially from its eschatological perspective, but to have practiced this religion along with other faiths, especially Mithraism and Greek cults of mysteries. A series of very interesting pieces, discovered in these settlements, could support this hypothesis of a syncretic vision of these soldiers. Also, in this chapter, we consider the possibility that some of the Christians from the soldiers had the status of catechumens throughout their military service, without being baptized. These last two hypotheses could be valid especially regarding some soldiers coming from the European areas of the Empire and who came in contact with the Christian religion through their Eastern colleagues.

An important question that is being answered is the possibility that Christian soldiers in Pannonia may have also acted as missionaries, spreading Christianity throughout the province. In this case, the conclusion of the research is that it would be hard to believe that these soldiers could carry out preaching activity among the civilian population of the province. This activity, if it existed, must have been aimed exclusively at their military fellows.

CHAPTER IV: The Process of Institutional Organization of the Church of Pannonia in the Fourth Century

IV.1 The beginnings of the organization of church life

IV.2 The first bishoprics attested in Pannonia, before 313

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IV.8 Communities in areas with continuity of life from the third century

Most likely, in its first period, Pannonian Christianity, whether it was the one on the border or the one inside the province, did not benefit from a very strict, hierarchical organization. As the archeological discoveries indicate, we do not have the possibility to consider the existence of some bishoprics in this province before the second half of the third century. Despite this fact, it is not excluded that, as happened in other provinces of the Roman Empire, in Pannonia the institution of the chorepiscopate existed and functioned. Given that, for this period, archaeological evidence speaks of a way of manifestation of Christians in small communities in the province, close to that of Christian communities in more intensely Christianized provinces, it is believed that there was a form of organization on vertical, meant to ensure this unity of faith. Unfortunately, in the absence of concrete evidence, this possibility remains at the hypothetical stage.

The probable cause of this situation seems to be related to the spatial rupture between Christianity in Pannonia and the much more intensely Christianized area of the Empire, on the lower Danube. Only in the second half of the third century, when Christianity completes its penetration into the middle course of the Danube, the first signs of the organization of some dioceses can be observed. Not coincidentally, they appear in important cities in the east of the province, such as Cibalae or Sirmium, and their first attestations appear in the context of the persecutions of Valerian and Decius, therefore before the year 260.

Also in the same period, bishoprics are attested in the western part of the province, as was the case of the diocese of Poetovio or that of Siscia. The appearance of the bishoprics in the west of the province should probably be connected with the extension of Christianity from Rome to Pannonia. Analyzing the evolution of the Pannonian dioceses, one remarkable fact can be discovered: while the dioceses in the eastern part of the province have as holders bishops of Greek origin, those in western Pannonia are led by Latin bishops. This polarization may have been the very reason why the fault that would eventually separate the Eastern Christian world from the Western world passed right through the interior of the province of Pannonia.

The freedom of manifestation for Christianity, which occurred after the year 313, would bring with it the establishment of new dioceses, in the most important cities of the province. One by one, Aquincum, Sopianae or Savaria will also be added to the list of episcopal sees.

The same era, after 313, would witness a special context, given that the province of Pannonia became one of the most disputed areas in the confrontation that took place between Orthodoxy and Arianism, after the Synod of Nicaea. During this period, Pannonia manifested itself as a province strongly controlled by the Aryan party. Probably for this situation was responsible, at least in part, the presence of Arius in the area, during his exile from Iliricum. It is certain that a number of Pannonian bishops, such as Germinius of Sirmium, Valens of Mursa, and Ursacius of Singidunum (even though Singidunum was not part of the province of Pannonia on the border with it) were part of Arius' circle of relatives. Participants in various Aryan synods and who tried to impose Arianism not only in the province, but also to influence the imperial perspective on this subject. Arianism was finally liquidated in Pannonia only in the eighth decade of the fourth century, with the involvement of Bishop Ambrosius of Mediolanum in this dispute. Most likely, this episode will also mean the entry of the province of Pannonia, decisively, in the sphere of influence of the Roman Church.

The historical reverberations of the Aryan dispute are reflected in the archaeological material of Pannonia in the form of a series of discoveries that attest to the fact that Arius enjoyed here a broad support from the masses, as evidenced by several terracotta images depicting him as a saint.

The period after 313 also created the framework for the emergence of new Christian communities, while others, older, will only now come to light on the stage of history.

CHAPTER V: Transformations of the mentality of the Christian community in Pannonia

V.1 Changes in the typology of Christian objects of current use in the fourth century

V.2 Transformations of the Christian funeral ritual in Pannonia of the 4th century

The period between the year 313 and the end of the 4th century meant for the province of Pannonia an epoch of transformation from all points of view. As far as the Church is concerned, it must be emphasized that this epoch represents in this province, as in other places in the Empire, the period in which the pagans begin to convert to Christianity. This phenomenon probably brought with it a decrease in the community spirit that characterized the first Christian communities of the previous century.

As all the archaeological data we have indicate, the Church continues its process of development, the ecclesiastical institution becoming from now on an indisputable and very influential presence in the province. At this time there are basilicas with an impressive architecture, there are even more, at the same time, in more important cities. At the same time, Pannonian Christianity is strongly linked to the whole Christian phenomenon in the empire. As a number of archaeological discoveries show, Christians in this province participate in pilgrimages to the holiest places in the Christian world in the fourth century, such as Jerusalem or the source of Abu Menas in Egypt.

Also during this period there is an important influx of Christian goods, especially materials used for liturgical purposes, these goods being imported into Pannonia from various provinces, where they were produced. These pieces, such as lamps and chandeliers, liturgical vessels, decorative objects, especially metal pieces, are part of the category of luxury objects, a sign that the Church in the province had not only a very active liturgical life, but also a flourishing material situation. . No less true is the fact that there are areas in the province where archaeological discoveries are rather poor, a possible sign that, for one reason or another, no such pieces have reached these areas. It is surprising, however, that in the case of these areas, in the absence of the necessary objects for worship, coming from imports, local workshops are organized to provide an inventory of vessels for liturgical purposes to the churches. These are pieces made mostly of ceramic.

Another aspect of the evolution of Christianity in the province is given by the transformations that take place at the level of the funeral ritual. The fourth century is the century in which the funerary cult acquires new connotations, making the transition from the Jewish or Roman vision of death to a new perspective, specifically Christian. In this era are organized the first Christian cemeteries, which have in their center elements related to the cult of martyrs, such as martyrions or mausoleums. The difference between the two categories is given by their regime of use.

The martyrion is the place where the relics of a martyr are laid, often after they have been translated from the place where he was originally buried after his sacrifice. Around this building a burial cemetery is most often organized, with the tombs arranged relatively circularly.

On the other hand, the mausoleum is a construction in which, along with the relics of the martyr, are buried members of a wealthy family or, sometimes, as indicated by archaeological data, members of some confraternities.

This type of constructions, especially the martyrions, will eventually become places of worship and pilgrimage.

A very spectacular transformation from the perspective of the funeral ritual is also related to the positioning of the burial tombs, which, from this period, begin to be oriented in the east-west direction. The objective causes of this transformation are difficult to determine, but they could be related to the vision of solar symbolism. Christianity integrated elements of solar symbolism into

its vision during the fourth century, perhaps even at the end of the third century. This attitude was probably the result of attempts to find a common language with the cults of mysteries, in order to facilitate the conversion of their members to Christianity.

The final part of this work deals precisely with the presentation and interpretation of situations of this type, as they are transparent in the funeral rite. A series of tombs discovered on the territory of the province present heterogeneous characteristics, both Christian and pagan, a probable sign of the fact that the Christian world offered, from this point of view, serious concessions for the converted pagans.

CONCLUSIONS

The Christianity of the first four centuries in Pannonia experienced a spectacular, even unexpected, evolution, if we refer to what historiography generally knows about the emergence and development of Christianity in the Danube provinces of the Roman Empire. Developing at the intersection of the two civilizations that shaped the historical character of the Empire, Pannonian Christianity benefited from a double ancestry, oriental in its first phase and then Roman.

The beginning of the Christian life in the province benefits from the transformations produced on the occasion of the Marcomanni conflict and especially of the peace that was established after it, at the end of the second century.

In the first phase, troops from the eastern and northern provinces of Africa who are being brought in to counter the threat on the Danube border seem to carry with them the first germs of Christianity, in the form of Christian soldiers arriving with legions from the East, but especially cohorts. auxiliaries formed or stationed in areas with an intense Christian life.

The peace that temporarily settled in the province made it possible for it to be restored to the empire's agricultural system, which in turn led to the arrival in the area of settlers specializing in agricultural production in the Syrian area. Some of them brought Christianity with them, founding not only prosperous large estates on the shores of Lake Balaton, but also the first Christian centers in the province. They were also the first missionary nuclei in the area, contributing decisively to the evolution of Christianity throughout the province. The Christian life in Pannonia in the first half of the third century benefited from the policy of religious tolerance that manifested itself under the Severan dynasty.

At the same time, the phenomenon of the massive arrival of Syrian Orientals in the province will manifest itself in the area of the militarized border of the Danube. Here, in addition to the soldiers from the legions and auxiliaries on the limes, a large number of civilians arrive, who

found the first articulated Christian communities in the settlements near the military camps. Christianity is manifested during this period in both the civil and military communities of Limes.

The beginning of the fourth century brings with it the connection of Pannonian Christianity, now more than half a century old, with the great mass of the Christian world, through the land lines of communication established along the Danube and the Drava River. Until then, Christian communities in Pannonia, due to their sudden emergence through Syrian colonization, were physically disconnected from the rest of the Christian world, which led to the development of their own administrative organization, an organization centered on the institution of the chorepiscopate. This relative independence of the Pannonian communities, although it did not effectively break with the Church's doctrinal body, subsequently had the effect of the province's massive adherence to Arianism and the removal of Orthodoxy, until almost the end of the fourth century. In the context of the conflict between Arianism and Orthodoxy, there are a number of archaeological discoveries in Pannonia that speak of the extent of Arianism and the cult of Arius in the province.

Throughout the period after the enactment of Christianity by the Edict of Mediolanum, the province of Pannonia is noted for a steady increase in church organization. This is the period in which a series of new bishops appear and the existence of several parishes is documented archaeologically. We know this due to the increase in the volume of archaeological materials in the category of cultic goods. The fact that most of these goods come from other provinces of the Roman Empire attests to Pannonia's connection to the global Christian phenomenon.

Despite its early onset and the many syntheses that brought it an indisputable refinement, Christianity in Pannonia will not withstand contact with the migrant populations that will invade the province, beginning in the late fourth century. The few communities that will continue to exist, such as the community in the Fenekpusta-Keszthely area, will not have the strength to spiritually influence the barbarians who will succeed one another in the fast-paced area of this province.

However, Pannonia's Christian heritage will last long after this date, being carried into the Western world thanks to the diaspora in this province, profoundly influencing European cultural evolution.

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