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CHRISTIANITY IN ROMAN BRITAIN (I-V CENTURIES)

– PHD THESIS –

(SUMMARY)

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(I-V CENTURIES AD)

(Abstract)

This paper presents the history of an autonomous church (the Church from Roman Britain), whose structure disappeared during the V-VI centuries AD, and it was represented by a certain ecclesiology. We have few information about this in the written documents. This lack of information is to be supplied by archaeological evidence, which in turn has to be interpreted from different points of view and within a specific environment.

The statement we try to illustrate is that of the existence and integrity of the Church in Roman Britain. This Church has three characteristics: it was never inferior to the ecclesiastic structures from the continent, it belongs to the tradition of the first churches and it has been placed for a long time under the controversion affirmation-*negation.*

The requirement of the present paper

The recent research illustrates different point of views about the christianity from Britain, which belong to the Catholics or Protestants interested in this topic. But the present paper illustrates a historical interpretation from the orthodox point of view, following the principle *sine ira et studio*.

The stage of research

There is a major gap between the number of studies related to the topic, published in our country and what was published in western literatures.

The requirement of the present research in the Romanian bibliography is justified by the fact that it is the first paper of this kind, which presents the basic ecclesiastic structure from Britain as the first structure over which the other ecclesiastical structures overlapped: Celtic (for Irish, Scottish and the Picts) and then the Roman (for the Anglo-Saxons).

The stage of research in the Romanian bibliography. Between 2007-2012, the topic was incidentally discussed as the basis for explaining the origin of the Anglo-Saxon christianity in some bachelor's degrees from the Department of the Orthodox Theology of the University of Iasi and Bucharest, under the guidance of His Holiness Varlaam Ploiesteanul. After 2012, the doctoral schools of orthodox Theology from the Universities of Bucharest and Sibiu, show their interest

into the topic. Mr. Petruț Ciprian Terciu , Ph D student, wrote an article entitled "Roman and Celtic christianity within the Anglo-Saxon Territories" (in *Studia doctoralia Andreiana,* 2016). Then, in 2018, he presented the paper entitled "The Anglo-Saxon migration in the Byzantine Empire during the XI century: *political consequences and religious considerations", under the guidance of* Prof. Nicolae Chifăr, and in 2020 the PhD Priest Alexandru Bulgaru presented the paper entitled "The Christening of the Anglo-Saxon Britain". The paper initially began under the guidance of the regretted Prof. Adrian Gabor and was finished under the guidance of Prof. Daniel Benga. I want to mention that all these papers deal with the **period of the Anglo-Saxons' christening, begining with Augustin of Canterbury 597 AD, and not of the Roman-British, even though they mention the existence of the christianity before the Roman archbishop came on the island.**

  The stage of research in foreign bibliography. The foreign bibliography, particularly that written in English, is quite significant in comparison with what was written in Romanian. Up to this point, the following authors are relevant: Charles Thomas, and his work *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500*, *published in* 1981; Dorothy Watts, and her work *Christian and Pagans in Roman Britain*, *published in* 1991 and *Religion in Late Roman Britain*, published in 1998. These are comprehensive papers, which summarize the research that has been made about the period we deal with- the Celtic christianity after the Roman withdrawal(410 AD) . Patrick being the last exponent of the Roman- Britain b*ackground*, as he considers himself.

Chapter I. The argument of a historical hermeneutics in researching the Roman- Britain christianity. The developing of a corresponding method.

  In this chapter it was my initiative to reformulate the theory about the tripartite levels from the integrative linguistics of Eugen Coșeriu's thesis and his theory about the universe of discourse. These two concepts represent the solution for the obstacles positivism vs subjectivism, the Roman-Britain church historiography has to deal with. The method means that we take into consideration the entirely evidence, but beside the historical and archaeological method, we use the method of the integrative linguistics, applied to the history of church. It is a suggestion for a historical hermeneutics, applied to the evidence of this teritory; the evidence is interpreted following the requirements of the Tradition of the church.

I suggested this type of historical hermeneutics, considering on the one hand the relation between the Tradition and the Scripture from the orthodox point of view, reviewed in the last decades, and, on the other hand, the reasessment of the theological disciplines, like the sistematical and biblical ones, from the perspective of this new report. I began with the toponomastic and linguistic interpretation advanced by Charles Thomas and I developed this theory following the methods of the integrative linguistics. The necessity of developing this methodology is the result of the lack of written historical evidence, which is supplied in historiography by the archaeological evidence. This evidence is sometimes interpreted in a manner which is far away from the Tradition of the primary church or is placed in a domestic environment instead of a religious one, or, sometimes it is not considered a christian evidence, even though we deal with symbolic christian objects.

Chapter II. The Structure of the paper.

In order to support my argument, I considered I should gather different cathegories of evidence, together with the preliminary presentations and interpretations, as follows: The historical Geography of Roman Britain.

In Antiquity, Britain stayed betwen the type of commercial Greek colony, a project that did not materialize, and then an administrative- territorial Roman colony. The first explorer of Britain was the Greek Pytheas (around 325 BC), who left Marsilia, a Phoenician- Greek colony, in order to gather information for the settlement of new commercial colonies.

The Roman conquest, not taking Into consideration Iulius Caesar- with any historical considerations, took place in 43AD, under Claudius. We mention several military governors of the region: Aulus Plautius (governor between 43-47 AD), whose wife, Pomponia Graecina was investigated because of her devotion to a strange superstition- in fact, the christianity, and Agricola (governor between 77-84 AD) and father-in-law of the Roman historian Tacitus. In this chapter we tried to estimate the population of the conquered Britain in 60-70 AD in comparison with the population of the Roman province of Judea. The comparison takes into consideration the equal number of Roman military forces on the Britain's territory during the rebellion of Queen Boudica and on the territory of the Roman province of Judea during the rebellion from 69-70 AD. On both territories, the rebellions were defeated by the Roman emperor Vespasian. This is the new method our paper presents in order to discuss the problems about the geography of population.

The contact between the Roman culture and the population on the island, takes into consideration the following aspects of the human Geography: multicultural and multi-ethnic, polyandry, domestic, religious, urbanization of the province.

The multi-ethnic environment. In this subsection we are going to illustate that social differences in Roman Empire were not following the biological criteria, but the social ones: slaves, free men, or, the social status was important: equestrian, senatorial. These social cathegories were replaced after the second century AD with other two social cathegories: humilliores/honestiores. For this reason, to discuss about Romanization, in terms of imperialism, colonialism or racism-from the 19 th century perspective, as presented in some new studies- it involves the territory of politics and can create a false historical debate. We agree to mention and to underline the ethnical, rasial and religious features of different cultures which contributed to the Roman cultural environment in north of Britain.

Poliandry

In order to present the concepts about the British in the Roman society, namely polyandria, we start from the book of Bardaisan de Edesa (christian author from the 3rd century AD), corroborated with the information from Iulius Caesar and Dio Cassius. Thus, we can conclude that at the end of the 2nd century AD , only the British from outside the wall had this type of conjugal life. Possible reasons for the dissapearance of polyandria may be the romanization and the christianity.

Domestic environment

In order to describe the domestic environment, we use the Roman fortress Vindolanda, the place where were found documents of the Roman army, convivial letters, lists of inventory, school exercises. All this epigraphic evidence dates back to the around 100 AD and describes the everyday life in this fort. "Claudia Severa, to her Lepidina, greetings. Three days before the Ides of September, dear sister, for my birthday, please come and make my birthday happier due to your coming. Greetings to your Cerealis, my Aelis and the little boy send him greetings. I am waiting for you, dear sister, my heart, be strong, happy and healthy. To Sulpicia Lepidina of Cerialis from Severa".

The Urbanization

This subchapter includes different urban and rural administrative structure. For small towns, named *oppidum*, it corresponds the Celtic settlement named in English *hillfort,* because they are sourounded settlements, built on a hill. The biggest administrative structure was *civitas*, which was the capital of the province with its' self-government. Another form of organization was colonia, where the Romans located reservists, gave them some land , being useful in case of a rebellion, but in the same time, they were the example of how to organize the domestic life of the locals. They had certain rules - *lex coloniae*, *applied by a council- ordo*, *consisting of one hundred decuriones, elected from the citizens.* The next administrative level was *municipium, including the inhabitants of the local settlements, who were electing their magistrates. They were given the Roman citizenship and they were organizing that municipium after the same regulations as a colonia*, but from the judicial point of view they were allowed to keep some ethnical rules. Around them, there were smaller administrative units, called *vicus*.

The religious environment

The Celtic religion was only mentioned in dispersed and lacunar writings, because they did not use the writing in their religious ceremonies, but there are some essential influences of this on its' practicioners. Caius Plinius the Elder and Strabon offer some information about the Druides, the type of sacrifice and the worship.

The Romans promoted here the Roman gods, But with tolerance towards the local gods, they even adopted them. The dedications to the worship of the emperor are more frequent. During the III-IV centuries AD, one can notice the transition from the Roman polytheist religion to the Mithraism and then to the worship of the Sun, Sol Invictus, and finally to the christianity. The important archaeological evidence for the christianity is discovered in the most inhabited and civilized part of the island, namely, the center and the south part of Britain.

The type of governance and the division of the province

Britain was divided by Severus in: Superior, with its' capital in London and Inferior with its' capital in York. Due to the reforms of Diocletian and then of Constantine the Great, these two provinces were divided again: Britannia Superior into Brtitannia Prima and Secunda and Britannia Inferior into Maxima Caesariensis and Flavia Caesariensis. Moreover, the region of Valentia was formed in 369 AD.

ChapterIII. The Roman Empire and the frame for the Britain christianity

Three hypotheses for the Britain christianity. Discussing the main problem we are interested in, we can notice several points of view about the moment when the christianity began to spread into the region. Even though we do not have enough data, we generally have three different historical points of view:

1. The direct preaching of the apostles or the disciples, so during the period of the apostles;

2. The preaching through missionary members from Gallia, after the appearance of the Christanity here;

3. The request made by Lucius, the King of the British, to the Pope Eleuterius in order to be christened in the middle of the 2nd century AD.

The orthodox religious books contain information about the island, namely in the menaion of March, the 15 th, when is commemorated the apostle Aristobul, archbishop of Britain.

The attendance of the Arles and Rimini Synods by the Britain archbishops. Literary refrences about the British archbishops.

In 314 AD at Arles, the mission of the British archbishops was made up of:

"Eborius, archbishop of the city of Eboracum (York), Britain

Restitutus, archbishop of the city of Londinium (Londra), the above mentioned province (*suprascripta*)

Adelfus , archbishop of the Colonia Lindensium (probably Lincoln)

Sacerdos , the priest and Arminius, the deacon."

The second synod where Britain took part, was at **Ariminum**, in **359** AD and three British archbishops were offered the financial support from the state supplies, because they could not cover the expenses. We find out about their presence from the writing of Sulpicius Severus *Historia Sacra,* II, 41. During this synod, were discussed the two terms of *ousia* and *omousios*.

Some researchers claim the presence of the archbishops from Britain at the first Ecumenical Synod (Niceea 325 AD), too and at the Synod of Sardica in 343 AD.

At the latter, Saint Atanasius is nominating them in an enumeration of those who consented to the desisions made by the Synod. Thus, the Alexandrian archbishop, in the "Apology against the Arians," the "History of the Arians to the monks" and in the tome sent to theinhabitants of Antiochia "To the Iovian, the Emperor", mentioned Britain and certain historical events. (325, 343 or 347, 363 AD).

Hilarie of Pictavium established the connection between the name of the island and the approval of the terminology at the Synod of Niceea, in a writing from 358 AD, but hesitating a little about the exact period of time.

The evidence of the patristic literature

In 208 AD, Tertulian in his work *Adversus iudeos,* enumerates in a rhetorical exclamation all the nations who recognized Christ, among them being the British, too. Thus, Britain, at the beginning of the 3rd century AD is mentioned in the existing sources as being christian *Britannorum inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita*. Origen, in a Homily about *Iezechiel* (239 AD) asks a rhetorical question: *"When, before Christ, Britain had only one God?"* Very important information comes from Constantius of Lyon -The life of Saint *Germanos,* Gilda –*De Exciduum Britonum., and* Beda – *Historia Ecclesiastica, where it is mentioned the martyrdom of Saint* Alban at Verulamium, Aaron and Julius at Chester. The Alban's trial is presented in detail, while the other two martyrs are just mentioned. The martyrdom of Saint Alban is mentioned during the persecution of Diocleţian 303-304 AD .

After 300 AD, there are a lot of mentions, among the others, we can indicate writers as: Saint John Chrysostom, Sozomen, Socrates, Eusebius from Cezareea, Lactanţius, Paladius.

Chapter IV. Archaeological sites with traces of ecclesiastical buildings:
Churches *intra-muros* - Silchester

This archaeological site is considered by the majority of the archaeologists as the ruins of a church from the IV century. Among them are: John Hope, Francis Haverfield, R.G. Collingwood, and Jocelyn Toynbee included, who proceed with a certain amount of circumspection about the initial role of the site: the absence of any mixture with a pagan worship, the initial structure of the nave building, the transept and the altar with apse, the side rooms, the baptistery or the outside container with water, the mosaic with cruciform weaving from the apse which was probably the place of the shrine and being damaged only in the East (being oriented East- West), etc. They represent tough arguments in order to consider this site as a christian cultural environment.

Cemetery churches - St. Alban, Canterbury-St. Pancras.

The christian community developed at Verulamium around the martyrdom of Alban in IV-V centuries, separated from the pagan city, outside the walls, on the hill, in the South part of the Roman city Verulamium. The same situation was for other settlements on the continent: Köln, Bonn, Salona. Even though there is less evidence from outside the site, with christian symbols, we have to mention a piece from a pot, with monogram, dating from the IV century. For claiming the existence of this type of ecclesial buildings, it is necessary to consider the existence of martyrs. The evidence we can use is: Gildas, *De excidio Britonum,* Constantius of Lyon, *Vita Sancti Germanus and* Beda *Historia Ecclesiastica.* All these works describe the worship of the Alban martyr, which is the most common on the island, proved by certain archaeological evidence.

In **Canterbury, the old Roman church mentioned by** Beda is part of the lineout of the old Roman road. The church is considered to be the church of Saint Pancras, according to Thomas, and it was initially, according to its' architecture, a christian cemetery church. The Anglo-Saxons transformed it into a temple and after the arrival of the missionaries of queen Bertha and of French archbishop Liudhart (557 AD), it achieved its' old main function. The archaeological evidence proves this fact.

Domus Eclesia- **Lullingstone, Frampton and St. Mary in Dorset**.

This three sites are described from an artistic point of view: fresco paintings and pavements.

"Except the wall paintings from Lullingstone, nothing can describe an interior space used by christians" According to this conclusion of David Petts, one can notice how difficult is to classify the sites, taking into consideration only technical archaeological observation. The christian element of this church-house is represented by the painted walls with fresco paintings, illustrating paleo-christian symbols as: Monogramma Christi framed by the letters alfa and omega, the symbol of the shoal of fish (*pisciculi- in the works of the apologists*), the symbol of the orans (praying) etc.

The **Hinton St. Mary mosaic -** This mosaic is without any doubt a christian one, and it was part of a private *domus-eclesia from the* IV century AD. The defining christian element from here is undoubtedly the central circular panel, depicting a beardless young man, with golden hair, in a hieratic position. He is wearing toga and behind him, around the head, as a halo, we can notice a Monogramma Christi XP. Next to him, on the right and on the left side, there are two red and yellow pomegranates. It is obvious that the young man is Christ.

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This panel is part of a bigger mosaic with the size 8.10 X5.20 m , which was dated back in the same period as the vila, about 350 AD.

The Frampton Mosaic - It depicts different mythological themes with the Monogramma Christi. K.S. Painter mentions that the pagan symbols have lost their meaning in this type of mixture and the mythological characters should not be considered as such, but they embrace obvious religious symbols.

Painter explains his point of view considering the social and political elements, and by analogy with other sites. First, the place of the Monogramma Christi in the most important part of the building, is considered an advantage. The scenes from the next rooms may be considered as symbols of life and death, of death, rebirth and of Paradise.

The same layout is noticeable for the sites of two christian chapels, discovered in Aquileea in 1957-58. Subsequently, we may admit that the two sites from Hinton and Frampton were christian chapels.

Moveable Treasures:

The liturgical vessels from Water Newton represents a pattern for all the treasures with moveable liturgical vessels. It was discovered in 1975 during the farm working in the field. The researchers have interpreted this discovery in a christian way due to the fact that the objects have christian symbols: Monogramma Christi or dedications, showing their liturgical purpose.

It was dated III-IV century AD and it contains: a chalice with two handles- similar to the Greek cup *Kantaros*, three high bowls for drinking, two of them with dedication for worship and Monogramma Christi, a plate (a liturgical paten) with the same Monogramma Christi, a pitcher with accanthus leaves, a colander with Monogramma Christi on its' handle, a hanging lamp and many votive plates; a golden pan with the same Monogramma Christi, which may be the miniature of a *labarum, a decorative flagship with dedications.*

ChapterV. The big withdrawal

The big Roman withdrawal from Britain is considered a process and not a determined moment. During the IV-V centuries AD political changes that happened support the above mentioned theory- there were rebellions and subsequent regaining of power by the Romans in the island. We may use the terms of conspiracy and dis-Romanization in order to describe the process that took place. "Conspiracy" is a term used by Ammianus Marcelinus to describe the situation of

the island in the second half of the IV century and with reference to the actions of the barbarian populations: the Picts, the Irish and the Anglo-Saxons.

And the dis-Romanization represents the actions of the British or of the Roman stationary army, who were following the politics of separation from Roma or Ravena, since the imperial power has diminished because of the migrant populations.

Another episode about the mission of the church on the island, is the argument of Pelagius. Pelagius, originated from Britain, fought against the work of Saint Augustin- Confessiones. He was skeptical regarding the Augustine`s doctrine of the `total supremacy of Divine grace` and of `those chosen by God` instead of the free will. Because of these, he will be convicted and exiled. For a period of time, he has been supported by powerful people from Rome, but because of his theological ideas, influenced by politics and annoying the emperor, `the chosen one by God`, he was convicted.

As a result, in 429 AD the Pope Celestin sent Saint Germanus to the island in order to fight against the ideas of Pelagius. This episode is narrated by Constanțiu of Lyon in his book *Vita Sancti Germanus*.

Chapter VI. Christian evidence at North border of Britain (IV-V centuries AD)

In this chapter we discuss about the fort of Birdoswald, as supposed to be the place of birth for Saint Patrick. This fort is important for the Romanian bibliography because of the fact that a Dacian cohort- *Cohors Prima Aelia Dacorum has been standing there for three centuries.*

At the end we introduce the representative of the Roman-Britain church who wrote two works "Confessiones" and "Letters to the soldiers of Coroticus".

Saint Patrick illustrates the period of maturity for the church on the island when it was able to send missionaries and apostles. In the second part of the last chapter, we present the life, works and mission of Saint Patrick.

Conclusions and perspectives:

The above mentioned paper tried to find an answer to the problem of gathering all the relevant information in a structured unit- the Church from Roman- Britain and, in the same time, in accordance with the recent discussions about the topic. The method presented at the beginning of the paper was meant to follow the scientific point of view about one ecclesiastic system.

Historical and archaeological evidence was interpreted in accordance with the rules of the system. Subsequently, we can state that the church from the occupied Britain followed the Tradition of church by having a hierarchy, active Eucharistic communities, martyrs and missionaries, authors of papers, but doctrine fighters, too.

By means of conclusion, we can admit that the church from here, with its' hierarchy, had a permanent connection with the Universal Church until the Roman leaving and the abolishment of the administrative Roman structure- Britain Diocese. From now on, the remains of the Roman administrative structure do resist for a while, then they have disappeared, once the territory was divided into small kingdoms and because of the barbarian invasions.

We may say that the same process has happened in case of the administrative structure of the church, but, even though the administrative structure disappeared, the christianity continued to exist in its' Celtic version.

Perspectives for new research:

The Celtic ecclesiology of the V-VI centuries AD may be the topic for new research within the Romanian bibliography, because the period between the V-VI centuries AD, even up to the Synod of Withby (664 AD), where two types of ecclesiologies - that of Rome and the Celtic one met, has not been enough investigated.

Keywords: Britain, Church, Christianity, Roman, fourth century, Romanization, Lulingstone, Patrick.

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