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Traces of the early Slavs in the region of Mostar

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Abstract: The author of this article recently published in the *Godišnjak* a short discussion, which provided chronological and contextual reinterpretation of a stone fragment with human face from the collection of the Franciscan Monastery of St. Anthony of Padua on Humac in Ljubuški (Hercegovina). It was argued that the fragment represents part of an image (idol) originally depicting early medieval old Slavic gods, most likely Veles or Perun. The article also discussed earlier published information and archaeological material from the region of Ljubuški, that further suggests presence of mythology and old Slavic beliefs in Hercegovina. On this occasion, when we celebrate 50th volume of one of the most respected and influential journals in a field in the Bosnia and Herzegovina, the enquiry will focus on neighbouring area of Mostar, where is also possible to find evidence that can be connected with the period of the Slav settlement and its aftermath.

Keywords: Mostar, Herzegovina, early Slavs, early medieval urns, historical topography, Hum, Zahumlje

The author of this article recently published in the *Godišnjak* a short discussion, which provided chronological and contextual reinterpretation of a stone fragment with human face from the collection of the Franciscan Monastery of St. Anthony of Padua on Humac in Ljubuški (Hercegovina). It was argued that the fragment represents part of an image (idol) originally depicting early medieval Slavic pagan divinity, most likely Veles or Perun. The article also discussed earlier published information and archaeological material from the region of Ljubuški, that further suggests presence of early medieval Slavic paganism¹. On this occasion, when we celebrate 50th volume of one of the most respected and influential journals in a field, the enquiry will focus on neighbouring area of Mostar, where is also possible to find evidence that can be connected with the period of the Slav settlement and its aftermath.

The most significant material evidence is spacious and somewhat forgotten cremation cemetery with urns, discovered in 1888. The presence of cemetery was uncovered by the locals, who were planting new vineyard in the area between villages Hodbina and Mukoš in Bišće polje, southeast of Mostar. The find was

recorded by Václav Radimský, and published in *Glasnik Zemaljskog Muzeja* 1891, while the German version of the article was published in *Wissenschaftliche Mitteilungen* three years later². It seems that information provided by Radimský was collected *post festum*, when it was not possible to do any meaningful archaeological work. However, it is likely that earlier mentioned agricultural works did not destroy all the evidence, and as this is potentially the largest Slav cremation cemetery with urns in the western Balkans, any possible future exploration of the site would certainly help to clarify these finds.

At least Radimský left sufficient information about the site: its location and map with recorded finds of prehistoric and ancient graves in surroundings of this cemetery. The author also brought detailed Austro-Hungarian cadastar map, which shows that significant part of the site does not seem to be destroyed with the works in 1888, as large cadastral unit (no. 129) remained intact. It is also significant in context of present discussion to mention a micro-toponym of this site, which is Žarovište (žara – urn) that may indicate local awareness of archaeological finds through generations (fig. 1).

¹ Milošević 2019, 249-266.

² Radimský 1891, 164-166; 1894, 11-12.

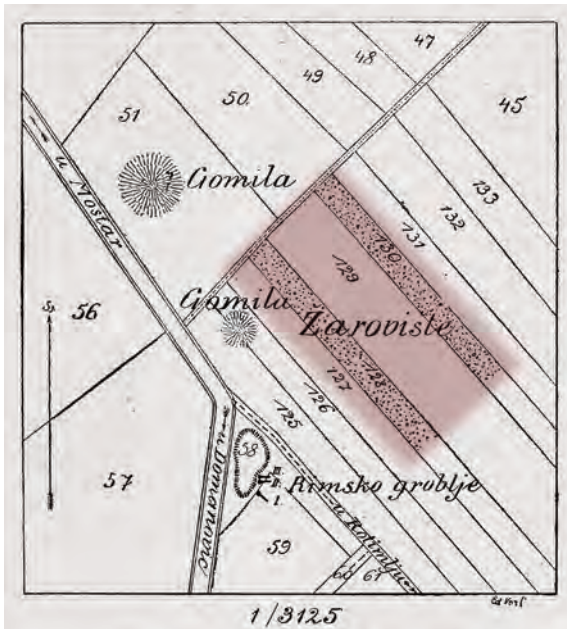


Fig. 1. Archaeological topography in the area between villages of Hodbina and Mukoša south of Mostar (from: V. Radimský).

Radimský wrote following description of the site: „... wurde 1888 bei der Anlage eines Weingartens auf der Ackerparcelle Nr. 130 (Figur 8) ein Urnenfeld entdeckt und eine grössere Fläche desselben durchgegraben, wobei Hunderte von Thongefässen zum Vorschein kamen. Ein alter Mohammedaner erzählte mir, dass auch bei der Anlage seines nahen Weingartens Parcellen Nr. 128 (Figur 8) eine bedeutende Menge von Thonscherben, Asche und schwarzer Erde gefunden worden sei. Das Urnenfeld von Buna scheint demnach eine grössere Fläche von mindestens 3/4 Hektar eingenommen zu haben.“³

He also said, describing the finds and character of the site: Die grossen Urnen waren unverziert, aus freier Hand gearbeitet, schwach gebrannt und wurden sämtlich zerdrückt aufgefunden. Der untere Theil einer solchen bräunlichen Urne, welchen ich erhielt, war mit Leichenbrand, Asche und Kohlenstückchen angefüllt und an der Oberfläche porös verwittert. Der Boden der Urne hat 10 Cm. Durchmesser; die Bauchwände zeigen keine besonders starke Ausladung. Beigaben wurden, wie es scheint, nicht gefunden. Aus den Scherben eines kleinen röthlichen Thongefässes (fig. 2.1), welches an seinem Halse unter einem aus fünf horizontalen Strichen bestehenden Bande



Fig. 2. Fragments of early Slavic urns from the site of Žarovište (from: V. Radimský).

ein Wellenornament zeigt, kann man schliessen, dass das Alter dieses Brandgrabfeldes kaum über die römische Culturperiode hinaufreicht, vielleicht aber auch erst der slavischen Zeit angehört. Das Randstück eines zweiten, ähnlichen Gefässes, welches mit verticalen, aus je vier Strichen bestehenden Bändern ornamentirt ist, zeigt (fig. 2.2)⁴.

Finishing description of the finds and the site, Radimský concludes that on the site Žarovište in Hodbina near Mostar was discovered and unfortunately mostly destroyed at that time first known early medieval cremation cemetery with urns in Bosnia and Herzegovina. If we accept such opinion, it is possible to add that this is also the largest known such cemetery in the northwestern Balkans, where was subsequently located around 20 other sites which with more or less convincing archaeological data could be connected with this chronological horizon of the graves, regardless whether the ashes of cremated people were deposited in ground or in pottery urns⁵. In Bosnia

⁴Radimský 1894, 12; 1891, 165.

⁵ See the overview of the finds in: Sekelj Ivančan / Tkalčec 2006. On the map showing cremation sites in this article (p. 145) are uncritically included several sites, which only with

³Radimský 1894, 11-12; 1891, 165.

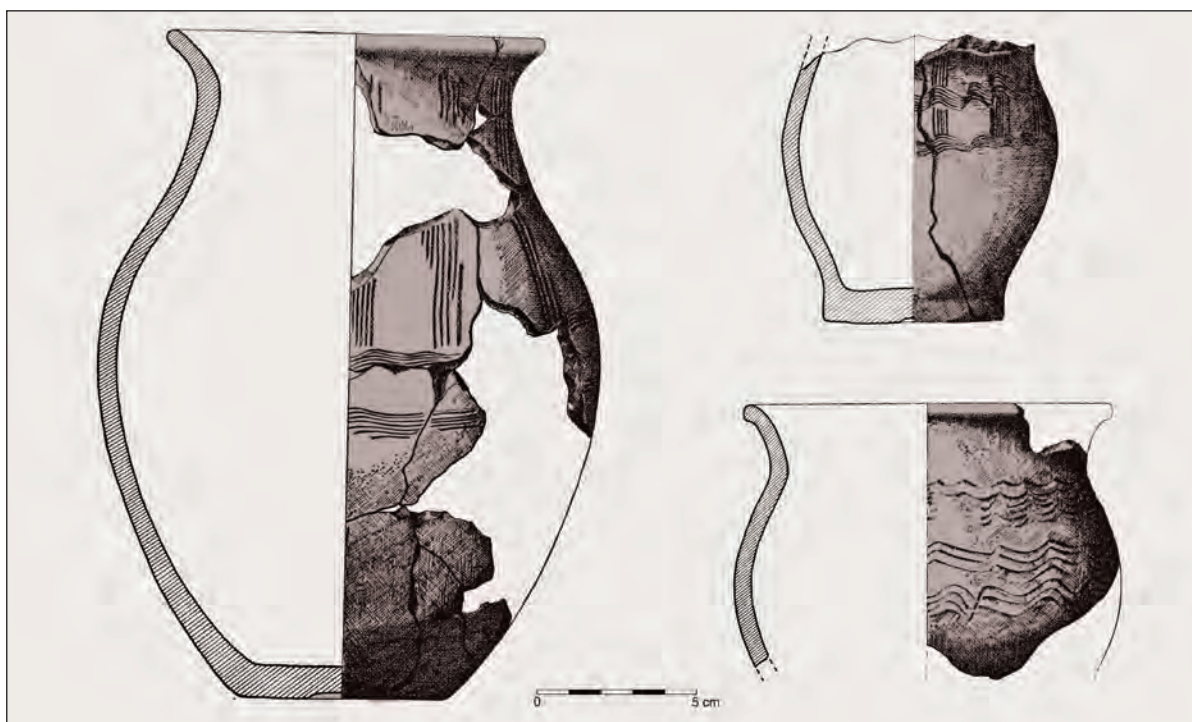


Fig. 3. Early medieval urn and pots from inhumation graves found in cemetery Bagruše in Petoševci near Laktaši (from: Z. Žeravica).

and Herzegovina there are only a few of such sites where early medieval cremations can be conditionally accepted, located mostly near larger rivers. However, majority of currently known cremation sites cannot be certainly connected with the post-Roman period of the seventh and eighth century, or with earliest Slavic cremation graves in urns⁶. In comparative perspective, the site of Bagruša in Petoševci near Laktaši shows the most viable similarities with Hodbina. The excavations of Bagruša cemetery located two or three cremation urns amongst early medieval inhumation graves. These cremations were found very high in stratigraphy in comparison with inhumation graves, which were dug deeper (fig. 3)⁷. The cremation urns were made of clay mixed with sand and calcite on slow-turning pottery wheel (tournette) with visible concave or convex protrusions on the bottom. They are of ovoid shape with neck opening outwards, while the edge of the rim is oval in cross-section. For pres-

ent discussion the most interesting is larger pot found in fragments inside the cremation urn II.⁸ It was decorated with long vertical comb decorations placed above two irregular groups of horizontal wavy lines (fig. 3.3), which is very similar to decorated pottery fragment from Hodbina published by Radimský (fig. 2.2). Archaeological excavations in Bagruša and subsequent analyses of the site, did not reach exact information about dating of the urns. It is assumed that the cemetery was used throughout whole ninth and good part of the tenth century, so that the urns cannot be pre-dating year 800. This conclusion is also based on the fact that small pot, found in inhumation burial Gr99, was decorated with similar ornament made of two irregular horizontal groups of wavy lines and vertical comb-decoration made of parallel lines placed between them (fig. 3.4). This pot contained small burned bones (remains of the food from funeral feast?), and in area of the belt was discovered massive bronze reel⁹. Archaeological context is not sufficient for precise dating of this grave, and no other

significant amount of reader's imagination could be seen as early Slavic cremation cemeteries. See most recently on early medieval cremations in eastern Adriatic hinterland in English, Džino 2021, 92-96, 163.

⁶ Fekeža 1989, 210-211, with the map on p. 212.

⁷ Žeravica 1985/86.

⁸ Žeravica 1985/86, 154-55 with pic. 8

⁹ Ibid., 145-146, with pic. 3; T. 8/4 (pot, wrongly listed as 8/5 in the text), T. 5/34 (reel).



Fig. 4. *Early Slavic pots from Vinkovci* (from: T. Sekelj Ivančan - T. Tkalčec).

analyses of the bones with radioactive carbon or stable isotopes have been made.

It is particularly interesting to notice similarity in the way pots from Bagruša and Hodbina were decorated, which is similar to a small details. There are more superficial similarities, through continuing series of incised vertical comb-decorations above multiple wavy lines, with decorations made on two pots from early medieval grave in Maklinovo brdo cemetery in Kašić near Zadar (Gr5) and the site of Crkvina in Biskupija near Knin, both in modern-day Dalmatia.¹⁰ Similar decorations are also found on a few fragments of the Slavic settlement pottery from southern Alpine regions including only a single fragment from Pannonia, all dated in the seventh and eighth century¹¹. This obvious sim-

ilarity of decorations on urns from Bagruša and Hodbina, which are not appearing elsewhere, provides grounds to hypothesize existence of regional production networks connecting the Pannonian plains and east Adriatic via the valleys of Vrbas and Neretva.

Another fragment of the pot from Hodbina decorated with double wavy line and similar comb decoration on neck of the pot has numerous analogies and it is frequent in all the areas where were discovered pots connected with the early Slavs. One good comparative example represent pots from Vinkovci, dated in c. eighth century (fig. 4)¹².

Several fragments of similar pots dateable to early Middle Ages were discovered during explorations of the church in Cim, western suburb of Mostar¹³. The excavation report states that stratigraphic layers where these fragments were discovered were disturbed by later agricultural

¹⁰ Belošević 1980, T. 61/2, T. 64/29.

¹¹ Tušek 2002, 43, no. 21; Guštin / Tiefengraber 2002, 50, pic. 7.3; Gutjahr 2002, 148, pic. 1; Takács 2002, 174, no. 12; Tica 2008, 44, no. 12, 16 (pottery fragments from rubbish deposit hole dated in the eighth century); Cipot 2008, 61, no. 1 (fragment of the pot from similar rubbish deposit, dated in the seventh-eighth century). The pots with such decorations are not known from other areas inhabited by the

Slavs in that period, especially not in the middle and lower Danube or east Alpine regions.

¹² Sekelj Ivančan / Tkalčec 2006, 198-211.

¹³ Anđelić T., 1974, 206-208, with T. 17-18.

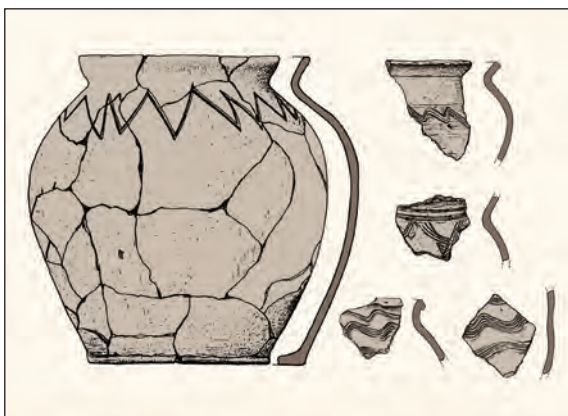


Fig. 5. Early medieval pots from Cim in Mostar
(from: T. Anđelić).

works, so it is not possible to establish whether the fragments belong to settlement pottery, or were deposited in destroyed early medieval graves. This is similar to other examples from similar sites in modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁴. For example, in the ruins of the early Christian church in Nerezi near Tasovčići (Čapljina) were discovered several pottery fragments ascribed to early Slavs¹⁵. Amongst the finds is a pot reconstructed from several fragments, which is in all important elements similar to the larger pot from Cim (fig. 5)¹⁶. Both are handmade with final touches made on a slow-rotating pottery wheel. The pots have a straight cut bottom, protruding body, short neck and oval cross-section of the neck and rim. Both pots are made of poorly baked clay with additions of sand and calcite. Particularly interesting is the almost identical decoration made by a single zig-zag line on both these pots coming from Hercegovina, which is not frequently found in early medieval pottery from the wider region. There are only two known parallels from modern-day Dalmatia¹⁷.

Therefore, currently known early medieval finds from the area of Mostar are not decisively

showing early presence of the Slavs as these are either accidental finds, or they are not supported with sufficient information even when coming from archaeological excavations. Earlier comparative stylistic analysis of this material seems to be the only avenue of exploration, until new material is uncovered in the future. Apart from analysis of archaeological material, it is possible to support the argument of early presence of the Slavs through toponomastics, which might suggest presence of the sites used as pre-Christian sanctuaries of the Slavs. One example is the oronym *Velež* from Mt Velež (ancient *mons Vecenicus*), which can be interpreted as a remainder of Slavic pagan sacral interpretation of the landscape and evidence for presence of the cult of cattle-god Veles, perpetual nemesis and opponent of Perun¹⁸. Worship of this important chthonic divinity from the Slavic pantheon in medieval Land of Hum (that roughly corresponds with modern Herzegovina), can also be assumed through evidence supplied by earlier mentioned fragments from surroundings of Ljubuški that might have been part of his stone image (idol)¹⁹. In a wider hinterland of eastern Adriatic, the presence of the cult of Veles can be assumed on ten different places that have stems *Vol-* or *Vel-* in their names. These toponyms are widely dispersed from Volosko in the Gulf of Kvarner all the way to Velestovo in the hinterland of Sveti Stefan (Montenegro) and Velestovo on the Lake of Ochrid²⁰. The connection between the name of Mt Velež and Slavic mythological system was already noticed in the national-romanticising spirit of the late 19th century²¹.

The same pagan religious-cultic context probably includes the toponym *Svetigora*, which are located in several places in Hercegovina, including one recorded in Podveležje, east of Mostar. It is possible that these toponyms bear memory on sanctuaries of Svantevit, who is assumed to be the hypostasis of Perun²². To the group of

¹⁴ Fekeža 1989; Milošević, 1990.

¹⁵ Anđelić P., 1959, 175-178, with T. 1-2.

¹⁶ Anđelić P., 1959, T. 2,1 (Nerezi); Anđelić, T., 1974, 223 with T. 17.7 (Cim). As an analogy to the pot from Cim is listed one pot from the Mogorjelo castrum near Čapljina (Čremošnik 1952, 264, T. 7.1). This pot, although of similar shape and clay composition, has a single wavy line instead of a zig-zag line.

¹⁷ Belošević 1980, T. 53/8 (pot from unknown site around Zadar), T. 60/9 (grave 13 from cemetery Klarića kuće in Stankovci).

¹⁸ Milošević 2011, 17-72.

¹⁹ Milošević 2019, 249-266.

²⁰ Petrović 2014, 298-300.

²¹ Gržetić Gašpićev 1900, 161.

²² Vego 1978, 96; Dodig 2014, 300. It was suggested that the name of the Tara tower might be of Slavic origins (goddess Tara, the sister of sun-god Dazhbog and daughter of Perun, patroness of oak forests, roads and travellers) - see Puljić 2020, 39 with n.180. This is difficult to accept because of several centuries of discontinuity, as this name for the tower

toponymes with similar origins might be added the name of the village Mukoše or Mukoša south of Mostar and close to Neretva.²³ This toponyme should be connected with the goddess Mokosh²⁴, the wife of Perun and a lover of Veles, whose cultic places are located close to water or springs or, generally speaking, near muddy and marshy areas. This connection with water hides etymology of Mokosh's name, which is connected with something that is generally wet²⁵. Similar toponymes deriving from Mokosh's 'watery name' can be found elsewhere in the Slavic world and on wider area of east Adriatic such as for example the Mokašnica creek that springs in the village of Mokro (Široki Brijeg) and follows through Mostarsko blato west of Mostar, the village of Makoše in Župa dubrovačka, Mokošica in Rijeka dubrovačka (both near Dubrovnik), Mukoš in the plains around Rama, Mukošina in Popovo polje, Mukoš in Tihaljina south of Grude, Moščica in Poljica above Duće, Mukoše near Konjeverate in the hinterland of Šibenik, Mošćenice in Mošćenička draga near Lovran, etc.²⁶.

Furthermore, from northern slopes of Mt Velež extends mountain chain with highest peak named Porim some 1100m above the sea level. This can also indicate traces of the Perun's cult, as his sanctuaries were usually placed on mountain peaks²⁷. Earlier scholarship tried to connect

origins of the name Porim, as well as neighbouring Mt Prenj²⁸ with Perun²⁹. The author of this article provided arguments in earlier study that name of the Croat archont from the 30th chapter of the mid-tenth century Byzantine treaty *De Administrando Imperio* (DAI), can be identified with this Slav divinity³⁰. The main thesis presented there was that behind name of the Croat leader (archont) Porin really hides Slavic Perun, who in the early medieval Croat ethnogenetic tradition transformed into celestial ruler of the Croats. Such an identification of divinity and a ruler is well known from other early medieval narratives of the *origo gentis* genre.³¹ Therefore, the evidence from close surroundings of Mostar suggests the existence of sacred sites dedicated to trinity of the most significant Slavic divinities – Perun, Mokosh and Veles. It also can be interpreted as an evidence for settlement extent and strategies in which Slavs, and later Croats, claimed landscape of their new homeland and sacralised it with their mythological system (so-called "sacred triangles") (fig. 6)³².

In a search for earliest presence of Slavs, written sources offer even less information than earlier discussed archaeological and toponomastic evidence. Only chapter 33 of the DAI provides grounds for at least some possible speculations³³. The topic of this chapter are the group named the Zahumljani (*Zachlumoi*) and territory where they lived in the first half of the tenth century when this treaty was composed. The chapter says that the Zahumljani are Slavs, that their ruler was Michael, the son of Bouseboutzis, and that they originate from unbaptised Slavic group of Litzikes who inhabited upper flow of the river Visla in modern Poland. From there the Zahumljani migrated and settled along the river

appears only in second half of the 15th century, while its earlier medieval name was - Nebojša. On location of the Nebojša tower see: Anđelić, P., 1999, 171; Milošević / Peković 2006, 14-15.

²³ On this location (Han Mukoš, Mukošan) are noticed visible remains of monumental building from the Roman period with the fragments of columns and Corinthian capitals, so it was assumed that these represent remains of larger Roman temple, Radimský 1891, 163-164, 190; Radimský 1894, 9-10, 32.

²⁴ Vego 1978, 97.

²⁵ Katičić 2011, 214-217; Katičić 2012, 11-12: ... *Nature of the goddess Mokosh is signified by her own name. Its etymology is very simple, so the original meaning looks very clear. The name Mokoš is difficult to separate from proto-Slavic moknŭti (to get wet), močiti (to make something wet), to which we can also add an adjectiv mokrŭ. All these proto-Slavic words exist in the Croatian language: moknuti (only in a dictionary of Belostenac), močiti and mokar. Similar meanings are also present in other Slavic languages. Mokoš is therefore by testimony of its name mokra (ie. wet)...* (transl. from Croatian, D. Džino).

²⁶ Katičić 2011, 211; Katičić 2012, 9-19.

²⁷ Katičić 2008, 111-116.

²⁸ Dodig 2010, 337.

²⁹ Gržetić Gašpićev 1900, 32, 193.

³⁰ Milošević 2013, 127-134. Analogous to Porim near Mostar, the toponymes Pirin (or Perin) in Bulgaria and North Macedonia as well as the place near Stolac in Herzegovina, could be connected with the cult of Perun (Katičić 2008, 109-111).

³¹ Алимов 2015, 21-64; Alimov 2016, 141-164.

³² The theory of "sacred Slavic triangles" was defined by A. Pleterski, who showed it convincingly on several examples from modern day Slovenia (Pleterski 1996, 163-185, more developed in Pleterski 2014.). This idea got support in some Croatian scholarship (Belaj, V. / Belaj J., 2014, 110-120).

³³ DAI, ch. 33; Moravschik / Jenkins 1967, 160-161; Konstantin Porfirogenet 2003, 63-89.

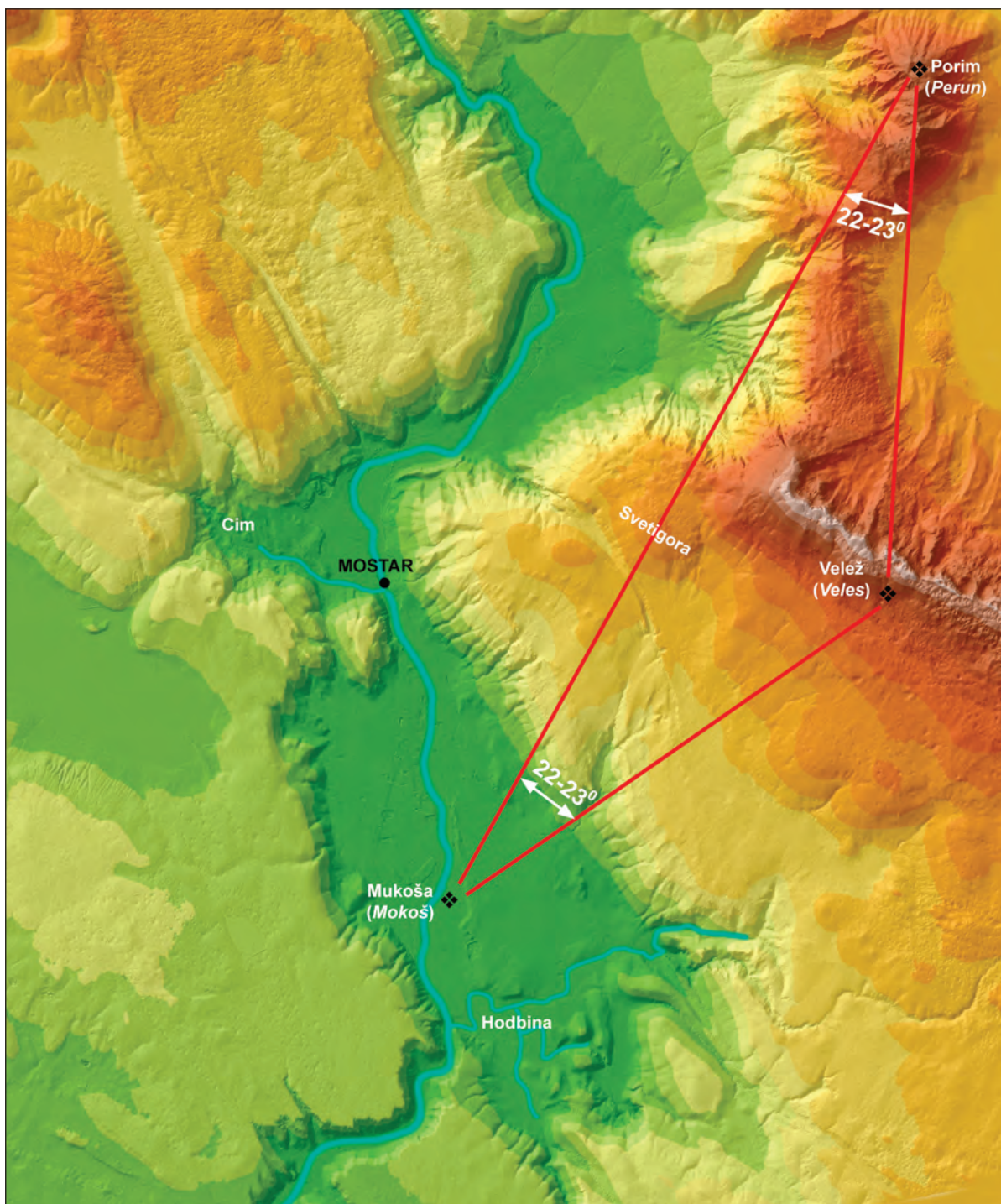


Fig. 6. Schematic interpretation of the early Slavic mythological system (so-called 'sacred triangles') in the vicinity of Mostar.

Zachluma. It is also said that the Zahumljani got their name after the mountain Hum (*Chlumos* – likely a steep hill of Hum, above Mostar), as they lived behind Hum (Zahumljani – the people behind Hum) where are located two of their important fortified settlements (*kastra*) Bona and Hum (*Chloun*). Behind Hum is the river *Bona* (Buna),

its name meaning good or beautiful (*kalon*). The *DAI* also names a few more settlements in land of the Zahumljani such as: *Stagnon* (Ston), *Mokriskik* (Mukoša near Mostar?), *Iosli* (Ošlje), *Galoumainik* (Glumine?), *Dobriskik* (Dabar?).

The toponymes recorded in the chapter 33 of the *DAI* is possible to conclude with confidence



Fig. 7. Fort Blagaj (early medieval Bona) in Bišće polje south of Mostar: 1. A view on the fort from east (photo: Ž. Peković); 7.2. Early medieval capitels from the fort (author).

that the territory of Zahumlje (or Hum) in the first half of tenth century also encompassed wider area of Mostar, as well as wider area of modern central Herzegovina. The chapter 30 defines the territory of Zahumlje as stretching from Ragusa (Dubrovnik) all the way to river Neretva. On the sea side it borders the Pagani (Narentani), and in the hinterland borders Croats at the north and Serbia 'at the front' (north?)³⁴. The main centres should have been the fortified settlements of *Bona*, modern Blagaj on the springs of Buna, and *Hum*³⁵, which in opinion of the present author was placed on western periphery of modern Mostar. Bona got name after the homonymous

river, also mentioned in the *DAI*, on which it was placed. This name of the river and the settlement above it is preserved in the name of the river Buna, and modern Blagaj (or Stjepan-grad). The research shows that some of medieval walls of Blagaj are placed on remains of late antique walls, and likely early medieval era and that current fortified area significantly reduced in comparison with previous periods (fig. 7)³⁶. The location of *Hum* is much more complex topographical question that was addressed differently in earlier scholarship³⁷. P. Anđelić thought that

³⁴ DAI, ch. 30.100-104, Rački 1877, 405-406; Vego 1937, 41; Moravschik / Jenkins 1967, 144-145; Konstantin Porfirogenet 2003, 79.

³⁵ Klaić 1990, 42-55; Šišić 1925, 452-454; Vego 1937, 43-44; Anđelić P., 1981, 41-72.

³⁶ Vego 1957, 14-16; Basler 1993, 30-31; Anđelić P., 1999, 232-235; Imamović 2005, 9-17. For early medieval impost capitel see: Patsch 1904, 273-274; Ribarević Nikolić 2019, 37, sl. 10a-b, and for early medieval capitel: Patsch 1904, 273-274; Nikolajević Stojković 1958, 121, sl. 12; Mulović 2018, 177.

³⁷ See the overview of different opinions in Vego 1957, 14-16, 47; Anđelić P., 1999, 235-240.

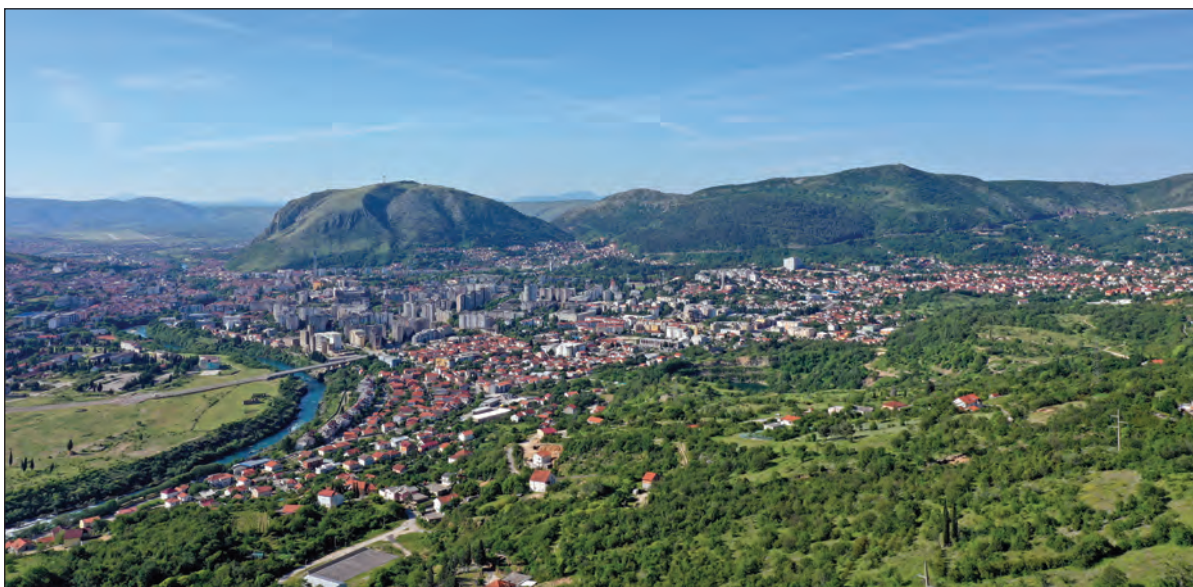


Fig. 8. Hum Hill overlooking Mostar (photo: Ž. Peković).

both settlements, Bona and Hum, were located on the same hill as it was literally said in the *DAI*. He assumed that dispersed early medieval settlement in Mostar separated into two different urban foci, which continued development as two separate settlements and forts³⁸. The reasons for this separation Anđelić sees in possible ethnic division, so that Bona in his opinion remained to be settled by the descendants of local Romans, while newly settled Slavs took over the position of Mala gradina on the same hill and gave it Slav name Hum³⁹. Similar proposition was earlier argued by K. Jireček, who hypothesized that Bona and Hum are names for the same town, but with chronological gap; Bona as old Roman/Late antique name, and Hum, as frequent and widely spread early medieval Slavic name⁴⁰.

All earlier authorities that discussed this matter made starting positions in insufficiently clear information from chapter 33 of the *DAI*, where amongst other things is stated that whole territory of the Zahumlje (or Hum) got name after the mountain Hum (*Chlumos*). There are many toponyms named Hum in Hercegovina, three of them close to Mostar – Hum near Blagaj, near

Rotimlja and near Mostar⁴¹. The steep hill Hum raising above modern urban area of Mostar on right bank of the Neretva is the highest of these three and the most dominant in the landscape. This makes it the most likely candidate to be *Chlumos* from the *DAI* regardless of the fact that no monumental medieval fortifications were located there as far as present knowledge goes (fig. 8). The settlement from this period could have been placed in the plains below the hill. Good support to such argument are surviving names of Mostar suburbs placed in upper flow of the Radobolja river – Predhum, Podhum i Zahum. It is possible to assume that early medieval Zahum was placed in the area between Zdinj and river Radobolja, some 4 km NW from the centre of modern Mostar. This was strategically well suited position with sufficient economic potential and archaeological finds from different periods, especially from Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages. Following such a line of thought, it is also possible to argue that name of the river Radobolja in early medieval period was Zahuma (*Zachluma*) – mentioned in chapter 33 of the *DAI* together with rivers Neretva (*Orontios*) and Buna (*Bona*) (fig. 9). In that case, the name of the river would describe its position, because it is placed 'behind Hum' (*za Humom*), when observed from the the Byzantine outposts on eastern Adriatic.

³⁸ There are similar examples elsewhere, e.g. Knin and Lab are names for two medieval forts positioned next to each other on the same hill, at the place of present Knin fortress, Jakšić 1982, 43-52.

³⁹ Anđelić P., 1999a, 238.

⁴⁰ Jireček 1959, 236.

⁴¹ Anđelić P., 1999a, 239-240.

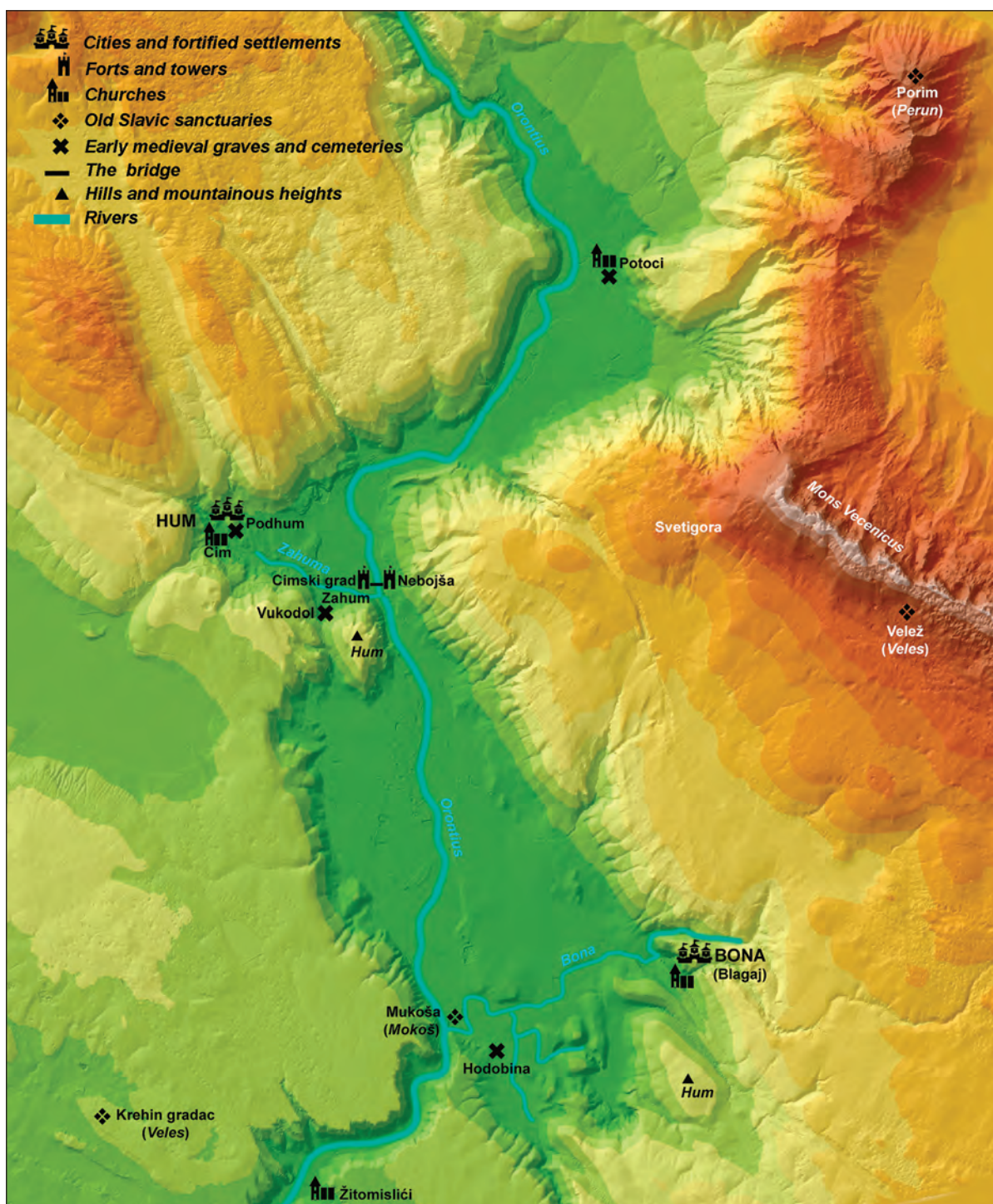


Fig. 9. Archaeological topography of early medieval sites in the region of Mostar.

On this location, in suburb of Cim, was most likely placed centre of early Christian bishopry *Sarsenterum*,⁴² which is indicated by earlier men-

⁴² The location of the *Sarsenterum* bishopry attracted many different discussion that placed it widely in the areas of western Hercegovina and southwestern Bosnia. Today it seems the most convincing the idea of Ivo Bojanovski, who

tioned find of church with interesting architectural

territory of this bishopry identified with the settlement *Sarsiteron* mentioned by the Ravennate Cosmographer in the sixth or seventh century (Bojanovski 1988, 380-382), as well as historical-topographic analysis that locates this bishopry in the area of Mostar (Mandić 2013, 48-51). See extensive discussion of this problem with earlier bibliography and somewhat different conclusions in Puljić / Škegro 2006.



Fig. 10. Church in Cim: 10.1. Orthogonal view (photo: Ž. Peković); 10.2. Fragments of early medieval sculptures (author)

plan, which was luxuriously decorated and had three-apsed sanctuary supplied with holy relics. C. Patsch initially thought that the church originates in Late Antiquity and that it was renovated in early Middle Ages⁴³. Later excavations did not confirm Patsch's assumption about early medieval phase although this assumption cannot be excluded taking into account that several early medieval stone decorations were excavated (fig. 10) together with earlier mentioned fragments of pots from the same period (fig. 5)⁴⁴.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that currently available evidence indicating presence of early Slavic migrants (the Zahumljani) in the area of Mostara remains unclear as we have on disposal only patchwork made by different sources. However, it is still possible to argue that the presence of early medieval Slavic migrants in this area should not be questioned, so that any future research in this field would bring important results. Apart from archaeological excavations, new avenues of research should in particular focus on exploiting and better clarifying information from the DAI confirming settlement of the Slav Litzikes from upper flow of Visla, known

from other early medieval sources, in this area of Hercegovina⁴⁵.

Earlier mentioned archaeological and historical sources provide grounds to assume that the Slavic Litzikes settled in the areas of Hum and Zahumlje at very end of the eighth/beginning of the ninth century. Their settlement is characterised with well-attested horizon of the finds containing Carolingian or Carolingian-influenced weapons and military equipment⁴⁶. Such an interpretation would imply that social and ethnic changes in this part of the western Balkan peninsula are not so different to contemporary Croatia. The only difference is that the Croats were in a long run successful in maintaining their group name and even imposing it on the existing inhabitants (the descendants of late antique population and the Slavs) between rivers Cetina and Zrmanja⁴⁷. The Litzikes, however, took over existing geographical terminology of earlier shaped and defined Sclavinias (Hum and Zahumlje), located at middle and lower flow of Neretva, that

⁴³ Patsch 1904, 274, fig. 150-151.

⁴⁴ Anđelić T., 1976, 194, sl. 8, T. 6.1, 3, 9.1-5 (fragments of the sculptures) 206-208, T. 17-18 (pottery fragments).

⁴⁵ On Slavic settlement of the western Balkans and development of different Sclavinia as well as on the process of their acculturation with surviving local population in post-Roman Illyricum see Džino 2010, 155-174. On Hum and Zahumlje, Humljani and Zahumljani see more recently Ančić 2011, 217-278.

⁴⁶ Milošević 2001, 97-127; Milošević 2005, 245-270; Milošević 2018, 63-85.

⁴⁷ Ančić 2000, 70-105.

were inhabited by population of similar ethnic composition to the territory between Cetina and Zrmanja⁴⁸. Such an interpretation, explaining origins of these two early medieval duchies, makes clearer their intensive contacts in all important social, economic and political domains, including the renewal of ecclesiastical infrastructure in following centuries.

Rezime

Tragovi ranih Slavena u okolini Mostara

Tijekom proteklih stotinjak godina, u široj okolini Mostara, pronađeno je slučajno ili kao rezultat zaštitnih arheoloških istraživanja više ostataka koje možemo dovesti u užu vezu s ranim Slavenima na tome području. U tome nesumnjivi primat pripada velikom groblju s urnama koje je 1888. godine evidentirano na položaju Žarovište u Bišćem polju južno od Mostara. Prema izvještaju V. Radimskog riječ je o vrlo prostornom groblju koje je djelomično uništeno krčenjem zemljišta, a nekoliko tada prikupljenih keramičkih ulomaka vrlo vjerojatno upućuje na pretpostavku da je ovdje riječ o ranosrednjovjekovnim slavenskim urnama. Veličina toga groblja, koje nikada poslije nije istraživano, vrlo je impresivna i do danas je, ako je Radimský dobro proučio teren, najveće takvo groblje na zapadnom Balkanu. Sličnih ranoslavenskih nalaza pronađeno je i u ruševinama velebne starokršćanske crkve u Cimu zapadno od Mostara. Uz ove arheološke podatke u raspravi se upozorava i na nekoliko sačuvanih toponima kojima je nesumnjivo porijeklo u staroslavenskom *Panteonu* (Porim = Perun, Velež = Veles, Mukoša = Mokoš), a njihov raspored ne terenu upućuje na vjerojatnost da su tadašnji Slaveni u potpunosti sakralizirali novozaposjednuti prostor svojim vrhovnim božanstvima i to shemom tzv. *svetih trokuta* koja je prisutna u gotovo cijelom zapadnoslavenskom svijetu. U manjoj mjeri, prema podacima iz djela *De administrando imperio*, pokušava se reinterpretirati i ranosrednjovjekovna povijesna topografija mostarske okolice.

⁴⁸ The Humljani and Zahumljani in early medieval period, as well as some other Slavic groups in the northwestern Balkans are perceived by *De administrando imperio* as »ethnic« Serbs, which shows perception of the outside sources, rather than their actual ethnic affiliation, see most recently Džino 2021, 178-180.

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