

**FOR THE SALVATION OF ONE'S SOUL:
PIETY, STATUS AND MEMORY
IN THE DALMATIAN DUCHY (C. 812–850)**

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The ideal of performed aristocratic piety in Early Medieval Dalmatia was a result of rapidly changing political and social circumstances which occurred in the first half of the ninth century.¹ From the late eighth century onwards, the Dalmatian duchy found itself under the influence of the Carolingian Empire: a new imperial power that was pervasively and persistently trying to push its interests eastward.² Local Slav elites of the Dalmatian hinterland at the time, not unlike the Slavic peoples of Central Europe, shared many common goals with the Carolingian dynasts and their Friulian subordinates that proved fundamental for securing their mutual cooperation and benefit.³ Charlemagne's wars with the Avars and

¹ This article is based on Marino Kumir "Memory and Authority in the Ninth-Century Dalmatian Duchy," MA thesis (Central European University, 2016).

² For some general overviews of this topic, see Neven Budak, "Identities in Early Medieval Dalmatia (7th–11th c.)," in *Franks, Northmen and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov, Patrick J. Geary and Przemyslaw Urbanczyk (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 223–241; and "Croats between Franks and Byzantium," *Hortus artium medievalium* 3 (1997): 15–22; Mladen Ančić, "From Carolingian Official to Croatian Ruler: The Croats and the Carolingian Empire in the First Half of the Ninth Century," *Hortus artium medievalium* 3 (1997): 7–13; and "U osvjet novog doba: Karolinško carstvo i njegov jugoistočni obod" [At the dawn of a new era: The Carolingian Empire and its southeastern edge], in *Hrvati i Karolinzi*, ed. Ante Milošević (Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2000), 70–103; and "Lombard and Frankish Influences in the Formation of the Croatian Dukedom," in *L'Adriatico dalla tarda antichità all'età carolingia*, ed. Gian Pietro Brogiolo and Paolo Delogu (Florence: All'Insegna del Giglio, 2005), 213–228; Danijel Dzino, *Becoming Slav, Becoming Croat: Identity Transformations in Post-Roman and Early Medieval Dalmatia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Ante Milošević, "Karolinški utjecaji u kneževini Hrvatskoj u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza" [Carolingian influences in the Duchy of Croatia in the light of archaeological finds], in *Hrvati i Karolinzi*, ed. Ante Milošević (Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2000), 106–139; Nikola Jakšić, "Klesarstvo u službi evangelizacije" [Stonemasonry in the service of evangelization], in *Hrvati i Karolinzi*, ed. Ante Milošević (Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2000), 204–213.

³ Following the fall of the Avars, various Slavic groups filled in the power vacuum. And although they usually did so with the help and support of the Franks, gradually they started to distance themselves from the grip of the empire. Particularly illuminating are the Frankish-Moravian relations during the ninth century, especially the disputes over the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Salzburg. For some general overviews on

struggles with the Byzantines in the Adriatic basin meant that the various Slavic peoples and groups of the region found themselves aligned with the Frankish cause. For the Slavs in the hinterland of Dalmatia the most obvious targets were the Byzantine-held cities scattered along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea and their vast agricultural territories. The warfare between them that ensued early in the ninth century was ended in 812 by a peace treaty that preserved the dichotomy of Dalmatia.⁴ The coastal cities were left to the Byzantines, but they suffered territorial losses to the benefit of the Slavs of the hinterland. Slavs not only profited from new land acquisitions, but their support of the Carolingians resulted in the establishment of social and cultural connections between the elites of the Slavic hinterland and the Carolingian territories in Northern Italy. The elites of the continental parts of Dalmatia were quick to adopt Carolingian models of governance, piety, and expressions of social status that thoroughly changed their society.⁵ The empire provided the slowly homogenizing periphery with the framework it needed for establishing a full Christian *regnum*, a process which was underway throughout much of the ninth century and perhaps beyond that.⁶ Despite these extensive contacts, however, the duchy was, for the most part, left on its own. This positioned it somewhere in-between: it was neither inside the framework of the empire nor completely outside of it.

these issues, see Charles Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians and Magyars: The Struggle for the Middle Danube, 788–907* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Herbert Schutz, *The Carolingians in Central Europe, Their History, Arts, and Architecture: A Cultural History of Central Europe, 750-900* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 62, 122-123; Maddalena Betti, *The Making of Christian Moravia (858-882): Papal Power and Political Reality* (Leiden: Brill, 2014);

⁴ The main source for the treaty between Byzantium and Carolingian Empire are the Frankish Royal Annals. *Annales Regni Francorum*, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz and Friedrich Kurze, Monumenta Germaniae Historica [MGH] Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum 6 (Hannover: Hahn, 1895), 136.

⁵ Cf. Ančić, “Lombard and Frankish Influences,” 216–225; Vedrana Delonga, “Pismenost karolinškog doba i njeni hrvatski odjeci: latinska epigrafička baština u hrvatskim krajevima” [Literacy in the Carolingian period and its Croatian echoes: The inheritance of Latin epigraphy in the regions of Croatia], in *Hrvati i Karolinzi*, ed. Ante Milošević, (Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2000), 238–249; Marino Kumir, “Od Justinijanovih kastrona do Borninih kaštela: Transformacija Dalmacije u kontaktu s Carstvom” [From Justinian’s kastron to Borna’s castella: The transformation of Dalmatia through contact with the empire], MA thesis (University of Split, 2014), 59–71.

⁶ Here I refer to the theoretical framework addressed in Evangelos Chrysos, “The Empire, the *gentes* and the *regna*,” in *Regna and Gentes: The Relationship Between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. Hans-Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut and Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13.

There is no evidence to suggest that the elites of the duchy ever used formulaic expressions of Christian piety before the Treaty of Aachen in 812.⁷ But while the available written evidence comes primarily from the dedicatory inscriptions put up in privately established churches in the post-Aachen period, there is evidence of continuity for some of the Late Antique churches scattered along *Via magna* – the road which cut through Northern Dalmatia, connecting its hinterland to the coastal towns of Nin and Zadar.

Thus, the aristocratic expression of piety that appears in the written and material evidence of the period display the full scope of this hybridity; its origin is undoubtedly external, but its application is a compromise between the imported models of Western expressions of piety and the local situation that kept certain, currently not fully understood, ties with Late Antique Christianity that certainly thrived in Dalmatia in the fifth and sixth centuries.⁸

Thus, in order to investigate what constituted the ideal of aristocratic piety in ninth-century Dalmatia, I identify three ways through which this was expressed: the (re)establishment of private churches, “Christianized” burials inside churches, and written memorials of pious acts. Moreover, since the expression of aristocratic piety always appears in a context that carries meaning in itself, I analyze the role that piety played for aristocratic society and how it was related to concepts such as social status and the memory of the community.

An Example to Follow: The Ducal Dynasty and the First Churches

Epigraphic evidence found at numerous ninth-century sites throughout Dalmatia confirms the importance that the foundation of new churches had for elite identity.⁹ Such efforts of financing and building provided the elite with previously unavailable opportunities to showcase their status within the hierarchically organized society, made possible through the adoption and performance of Christian ideals of piety and religiosity.

⁷ Vedrana Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments of Early Medieval Croatia* (Monumenta mediaevi Croatiae 1) (Split: *Muzej Hrvatskih Arheoloških Spomenika* [MHAS], 1996), 279–208; and, “Pismenost karolinškog doba,” 237–247.

⁸ Nikola Jakšić, “Il ruolo delle antiche chiese rurali nella formazione del ducato croato medievale,” *Hortus artium medievalium* 14 (2008), 103–112; Delonga, “Pismenost karolinškog doba,” 238–240.

⁹ The corpus of early medieval inscriptions found on the territory of the Dalmatian/Croatian dukedom/kingdom up to the year 1996 has been collected and published in Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*.

The identification of ninth-century stone-carving workshops which were active at ecclesiastical sites in the hinterland of Dalmatia has provided us with data necessary to develop a more precise dating framework. Among these workshops, the stone carving workshop of the Master of Koljani Panel, first identified by art historian Nikola Jakšić in the 1980s, has subsequently been shown to be the earliest among the workshops associated with the duchy of the hinterland. Currently, the activity of this particular workshop has been confirmed at five different sites: Bijaći-Stombrata, Biskupija-Crkvina, Koljane Gornje-Crkvina, Galovac-Crkvina, and Ropotine-Rižinice, all of which share some striking parallels – beyond the actual stone carvings – that link them together.¹⁰ For example, six Carolingian-type swords have been discovered, three each at Biskupija and Koljane Gornje, which account for as many as one third of all the currently known eighth-ninth century swords found within the presumed borders of the Dalmatian duchy.¹¹ At this stage of research, the evidence suggests that the phase of eighth-ninth century burials with swords in Dalmatia occurred before the establishment of newly built ninth-century churches. This would imply a linear development in the aristocratic culture of the period, as the two trends should be seen as different stages of the same process. Even though more data is needed to prove or disprove such a hypothesis, the sheer number of swords found at Biskupija and Koljane clearly marks their importance.

¹⁰ This workshop was first defined by Nikola Jakšić, “Majstor koljanskog pluteja” [The Master of the Koljani Panel], in *Cetinska Krajina od prehistorije do dolaska Turaka*, ed. Božidar Čečuk, Ivan Marović and Željko Rapanić, Izdanja HAD-a, vol. 8 (Split: Hrvatsko arheološko društvo [HAD], 1984), 243–252. For the historicity of research see Ivan Josipović, “Predromanički reljefi na teritoriju Sklavinije Hrvatske između Zrmanje i Krke do kraja 9. stoljeća” [Pre-Romanesque reliefs in the territory of Slavonia Croatia between Zrmanja and Krka before the end of the ninth century], PhD dissertation (University of Zagreb, 2013), 57–64. Some of the most important discussions on this topic are Ante Jurčević, “Usporedba skulpture i arhitekture s lokaliteta Crkvina u Gornjim Koljanima i Crkvina u Biskupiji kod Knina” [Comparison of sculpture and architecture from the sites of Crkvina in Gornji Koljani and Crkvina in Biskupija near Knin], *Starobrvatska prosvjeta*, ser. 3, vol. 36 (2009): 55–84; Ivan Josipović, “Majstor koljanskog pluteja’ u stilskom razvrstavanju predromaničke skulpture iz Galovca kod Zadra” [The Master of the Koljani Panel in the stylistic categorization of the Pre-Romanesque sculpture from Galovac near Zadar], *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 34 (2010): 7–18; and “Predromanički reljefi,” 79–83; Nikola Jakšić and Ivan Josipović, “Majstor koljanskog pluteja u kontekstu predromaničkih reljefa s lokaliteta Stombrata u Bijaćima” [Master of the Koljane Chancel Panel in the context of Pre-Romanesque reliefs from the Stombrata archaeological site in Bijaći], *Starobrvatska prosvjeta* ser. 3, no. 42 (2015): 145–164.

¹¹ Goran Bilogrivić, “Karoliniški mačevi tipa K” [Type K Carolingian swords], *Opuscula archaeologica* 33 (2009 [2010]): 145–146; Goran Bilogrivić, “Carolingian Swords from Croatia: New Thoughts on an Old Topic,” *Studia Universitatis Cibiniensis: Series Historica* 10 (2013): 77–78; Kumir, “Memory and Authority,” 39–41 and 47–51.

Moreover, Galovac-Crkvina and Biskupija are the only two sites in Dalmatia where burials in sarcophagi were discovered in the walls of ninth-century churches.¹² Both the sarcophagus from the northern room of the narthex at Biskupija and the other discovered in the sacristy at Galovac were carved out of classical architraves. In connection with the attested presence of the Master of Koljani Panel workshop at both sites this suggests a chronological correlation between them and it shows that the two dignitaries buried in them shared access to the same luxury objects.¹³ Since the burial in the sarcophagus at Biskupija is thought to be the burial of a duke, this poses questions as to whether Galovac, too, was somehow connected to the local ducal dynasty.¹⁴

¹² Janko Belošević, “Dva kamena sarkofaga s Crkvine u Galovcu kod Zadra” [Two stone sarcophagi from Crkvina in Galovac near Zadar], *Arheološki radovi i rasprave* 12 (1996): 127–141; Maja Petrinec and Ante Jurčević, “Crkvina-Biskupija: Insights into the Chronology of the Site from the Late 8th to the 15th Century,” in *Swords, Crowns, Censers and Books: Francia Media: Cradles of European Culture*, ed. Marina Vicelja Matijašić (Rijeka: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Rijeka, 2015), 347–350.

¹³ Nikola Jakšić, “Vladarska zadužbina sv. Bartula u srednjovjekovnom selu Tršci” [The ruler’s endowment of St. Bartholomew in the medieval village Tršci], *Radovi Zavoda za povijesne znanosti HAZU u Zadru* 42 (2000): 45–46; Josipović, “Predromanički reljefi,” 76–77. Future research of Rupotine-Rižinice, where a fragment of a ninth-century ciborium was discovered in secondary use under the base of the sarcophagus with a burial from the later Middle Ages, might eventually yield similar results.

¹⁴ New arguments for dating the workshop of Master of Koljani Panel have narrowed down the time frame in which the man buried in the so-called sarcophagus with *hippocampi* was interred. He was, most likely, Borna, Vladislav or Mislav. Cf. Petrinec and Jurčević, “Crkvina-Biskupija,” 353–355; Ante Milošević, “Sarkofag kneza Branimira” [The sarcophagus of Duke Branimir], *Histria Antiqua* 18 (2009): 561–566; Kumir, “Memory and Authority,” 26. Neven Budak interpreted the cult of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle, to whom the church at Galovac was once dedicated (although the earliest evidence for this comes from 1289), as “a royal option in ninth-century Croatia.” Budak claims that the cult came to the hinterland of Dalmatia via the Benedictines sometime after 839, but before 892, arguing that it “came to Croatia and Dalmatia around the middle of the ninth century.” This assumption is now at odds with the recently proposed, more precise dating of the Master of Koljani Panel to the 820s and 830s, the period when the church at Galovac was refurbished (see footnote 11). This would mean that either the church at Galovac was not dedicated to Saint Bartholomew in the ninth century or that the cult predated the Benedictines. Moreover, as there is not enough evidence to date the tenth-century royal monastery of St. Bartholomew at Kapitul to the ninth century, Budak’s proposal needs a reevaluation. (Josipović, “Predromanički reljefi,” 60). Cf. Neven Budak, “Was the Cult of Saint Bartholomew a Royal Option in Early Medieval Croatia?” in *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways: Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed.

The other two sites, Bijaći-Stombrate and Rupotine-Rižinice, were both mentioned in the only two preserved ninth-century charters issued by the local dukes, Trpimir (c. 842–c. 864) and Muncimir (892–c. 910).¹⁵ It is important to stress that these two sites are thus undoubtedly tied to the ducal dynasty. Bijaći, a known ducal possession, appears as the location where both charters were created, while the available archaeological evidence suggests that the Benedictine monastery whose establishment by Duke Trpimir is narrated in his charter was located at Rižinice.¹⁶ Therefore, all of the five sites associated with the workshop called the Master of Koljani Panel are directly or indirectly connected to the ducal dynasty.

Thus, the introduction of church building into the landscape and the aristocratic culture of the duchy seems to have been a consequence of efforts undertaken from the very top of the hierarchy. Since so few sites are associated with this workshop, it seems that its activities were quite confined both temporally and spatially. In other words, the workshop seems to have been active for a short time-span (in the 820s and 830s) and at a small number of sites spread throughout

Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 240–249; Jakšić, “Vladarska zadužbina sv. Bartula,” 43–49.

¹⁵ Critical editions of both charters have been published in *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae, vol. 1*, ed. Marko Kostrenčić, Jakov Stipišić and Miljen Šamšalović (Zagreb: Jugoslavenska akademija znanosti i umjetnosti [JAZU], 1967), 3–8 and 22–25.

¹⁶ The Charter of Duke Muncimir was, in fact, created in front of the church of St. Martha in Bijaći. *Ibid.*, vol.1, 24: *Actum est in Biaci ante fores ecclesiae sanctae Martae martirae*. The earlier charter of Duke Trpimir from the mid-ninth century was also issued at the same site. *Ibid.*, 5: *Actum in loco, qui dicitur Byaci*. For the site Bijaći-Stombrate, see Mladen Ančić, “Od vladarske *curtis* do gradskoga kotara: Bijaći i crkva Sv. Marte od početka 9. do početka 13. stoljeća” [From the regal *curtis* to the town borough: Bijaći and St. Martha from the beginning of the ninth until the beginning of the thirteenth century], *Starohrvatska prosijeta*, ser. 3, no. 26 (1999): 189–236. Much less is known about the monasterial complex at Rižinice, apart from the famous inscription PRO DVCE TREPIME[ro...] ... [prece]S CHR(ist)O SV(b)MIT[tatis...] ... [...hab]ETE COLLA TREME[ntes...]. The inscription is thought to have been put up in memory of Trpimir's establishment of the monastery as narrated in his charter: “That is why I, Trpimir, by divine grace the duke of the Croats, although a sinner, and since I do not know when my last day and hour will come, greatly concerned for the salvation of my soul, I took council with all of my župani and I built a monastery and brought monks in it. Touched by their pleas and wanting that their prayers free me of sin, I started thinking how to acquire some utensils for the church of that monastery. And as there was not enough silver to complete the creation of the liturgical vessels, Peter, the archbishop of the church of Salona and our dear godfather, gave us eleven ounces of silver” (*Codex diplomaticus, vol. 1*, 4–5). However, the site itself has not been sufficiently excavated yet. *Hrvati i Karolinzi: Katalog* [Croats and Carolingians: Catalogue], ed. Ante Milošević (Split, MHAS, 2000), 329–330.

the duchy but connected to the ruling dynasty. This workshop was soon afterwards succeeded by the so-called Workshop from the Time of Duke Trpimir, which is roughly datable to the fourth, fifth, and parts of the sixth decade of the ninth century. The corpus of the latter workshop is larger and it appears at sites that are much more heterogeneous, which suggests that by this time the trend of church building had already spread to a wider circle among the elite.¹⁷

A Dialogue with the Past: The Establishment of Churches

The progressive increase in the number of newly built churches in Dalmatia during the ninth century testifies to the changes that were happening at the higher levels of local society. So while the Master of Koljani Panel worked at only five sites, the two workshops active in the last quarter of the ninth century are associated with over thirty-five localities.¹⁸ These churches were sometimes built at sites that had some kind of sacral continuity, although this was not always the case.¹⁹ One illustrative example is the archaeological site Begovača, situated at the very edge of Biljane Donje in Northern Dalmatia, where a ninth-century church was built on top of an older Late Antique church.²⁰ Since burials from the later Middle

¹⁷ Nikola Jakšić identified the workshop in 1986 and it has been used as a concept ever since. Despite its name, the activity of the workshop is not exclusively tied with the reign of Trpimir, as it has been argued that the same workshop was active also at the time of his predecessor Duke Mislav (Ivan Josipović, “Prijedlog za čitanje imena kneza Mislava na natpisu s Begovače” [A Proposed Reading of Duke Mislav’s Name in the Inscription from Begovača], *Archaeologia Adriatica* 6 (2012): 138–147. Recently, Josipović counted fourteen sites at which fragments carved by this workshop had been found (“Predromanički reljefi,” 106–108).

¹⁸ Josipović, “Predromanički reljefi,” 154–155, 190–191, 198–199.

¹⁹ Cf. Jakšić, “Il ruolo delle antiche chiese,” 103–110; Ante Milošević, “Karolinški utjecaji u kneževini Hrvatskoj u svjetlu arheoloških nalaza” [Carolingian influences in the Duchy of Croatia in the light of archaeological finds], in *Hrvati i Karolinzi*, ed. Ante Milošević (Split: Muzej hrvatskih arheoloških spomenika, 2000), 123–125.

²⁰ The results of the excavations of the cemetery were published by Dušan Jelovina and Dasen Vrsalović, “Srednjovjekovno groblje na ‘Begovači’ u selu Biljanima Donjim kod Zadra” [Medieval cemetery at ‘Begovača’ in the village Biljani Donji near Zadar], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* ser. 3, no. 11 (1981): 55–136. However, the key contribution to the interpretation of the site was provided by Nikola Jakšić, “Crkve na Begovači i problem starohrvatskih nekropola” [The churches at Begovača and the problem of Old Croat cemeteries], *Diadora* 11 (1989): 145–164. His conclusions have since been confirmed by Vedrana Delonga, “Kameni spomenici s ‘Begovače’ u Biljanima Donjim kod Zadra [Stone monuments from ‘Begovača’ in Biljane Donje near Zadar], *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* ser. 3, no. 20 (1992): 96, 100; Josipović, “Prijedlog za čitanje,” 129–148.

Ages destroyed most of the architectural remains of these two churches it is rather difficult to understand what happened to the Late Antique church between the time it was built and the ninth century, when a local dignitary “renovated” it “for the well-being of his soul.”²¹ The inscribed term REN(ovavit) is difficult to decipher; perhaps it was meant to signify that the Late Antique church had been reconstructed or perhaps that a new church was built on top of the older one. This episode provides valuable insight into how imported innovations of the early ninth century – such as establishing privately funded churches and refurbishing their interiors with decorations which often featured inscriptions – recalled the local past, which might or might not have been forgotten.

The revisited past at Begovača was a strictly Christian one, but this was not necessarily the case at some of the other Dalmatian sites. For example, a very different kind of past was invoked by the man who financed the basilica at Biskupija-Crkvina, who, in the third or fourth decade of the ninth century, decided to have a church built on top of a row-grave cemetery that had presumably been in use by his family for at least half a century.²² Shortly after the main building of the basilica at Biskupija was completed the donor himself died and was laid to rest in a sarcophagus carved out of classical spolia that was then interred by the main entrance of the church.²³ Not long after, an antechamber to the basilica was constructed on top of his burial place, which physically and symbolically incorporated the burial into the main body of the church.²⁴ There are no tell-tale signs which might suggest whether the persons buried in the small eighth-ninth century row-grave cemetery were Christian or not, but the donor of the church certainly was, and through his actions he quite literally re-appropriated his own familial past by incorporating the older burials into the newly built sacred site. However, there is another side to this strategy: through his actions the donor also “localized” Christianity to a certain degree by tying it to a physical and tangible location that carried social, political, and perhaps religious connotations which pre-dated the Christian site of worship.

²¹ Vedrana Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, 180–183, cat. no. 134. 135, 137, 139: [+] DE DONIS D(e)I E[t...] ... [m]OISCLA[avus] ... [...vn]A CVM CO[nivge...] ... [...pr]O REMED(io) A(n)IME SVE REN(ovavit) HVNC TE[implvm].

²² Milošević, “Karolinški utjecaji,” 123–125. For a comparative situation from Rhineland, see Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 36–38.

²³ Frano Radić, “Grobna raka iz starohrvatske biskupske bazilike s. Marije u Biskupiji kod Knina i u njoj nađeni mrtvački ostanci” [Grave from the Old Croat bishopric basilica of Saint Mary in Biskupija near Knin and the remains of the deceased found within it], *SHP* 2 (1896): 71–73.

²⁴ Petrincec and Jurčević, “Crkvina-Biskupija,” 354.

The basilica at Biskupija predates the ninth-century renovation project of the church at Begovača, although not by much. The fragments of the altar relief from Begovača have been identified as products of the Workshop from the Time of Duke Trpimir.²⁵ Moreover, it has been convincingly argued that one of the preserved inscriptions bears the name of Duke Mislav (c. 829–c. 842), which would position the church at Begovača very close to the horizon of churches built by the efforts of the Master of the Koljani Panel.²⁶ The church at Begovača could then well be one of the first examples of privately funded churches put up by the members of the elite outside of the ducal family.

From the 602 graves discovered at Begovača, only four burials – graves 165, 253, 258, and 263 – contain grave goods that can be reliably dated to the ninth century.²⁷ Graves 253 and 258 are located under the apse of the church, the latter being a double burial, presumably of a married couple. Since the inscription from one of the fragments of the architrave narrates that the church was (re) constructed by the efforts and finances of an anonymous donor and his wife, it might be possible to identify them with the couple buried in the grave 258.²⁸

Thus, unlike the donor from Biskupija-Crkvina who built his ninth-century basilica on top of a small late eighth-early ninth century church that was in continual use by several generations of the donor's family, the anonymous married couple from Begovača wanted a link to a strictly Christian rather than a familial past. Therefore, they used a different approach: relying on the continual Christian sanctity of the site they had chosen as their place of burial. The couple's main concern was the salvation of their own souls and perhaps of their offspring but not necessarily the souls of their ancestors.²⁹ Explicitly, this was conceptualized through an inscription displaying the same idea, which once stretched across the whole architrave of the altar screen and physically and metaphorically tied

²⁵ Josipović, "Prijedlog za čitanje," 136–147.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 141–142.

²⁷ Dušan Jelovina, *Starobrvatske nekropole* [Old Croat cemeteries] (Split: Čakavski sabor, 1976), 17 and 32; Jelovina and Vrsalović, "Srednjovjekovno groblje na Begovači," 62.

²⁸ Josipović, "Prijedlog za čitanje," 144–145. Unfortunately, the part of the architrave bearing the name of the donor had not been found, but a reference to his wife is evident from one of the preserved fragments which reads: CVM CO[nivge...] (Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, 182, cat. no. 137).

²⁹ After all, their inscription verbalizes this concern: [...pr]O REMED(io) A(n)IME SVE REN(ovavit) HVNC TE[implvm...] (Delonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, 183, cat. no. 139).

them together with the very stone fabric of the church they had funded.³⁰ Along with the construction of the church for the well-being of their souls and the inscription commemorating it, their eternal salvation was further insured by the careful choice of the location for their burials. Unsurprisingly, this happened to be at the most holy place inside the church – under the altar itself.

A Name to Remember: Prayer in the Function of Remembrance

The establishment of churches and burials within them were not the only way the elite of the duchy could have expressed their Christian piety. The importance of the ideal of aristocratic piety is verifiable in another source: a Gospel book from Aquileia that was once thought to have contained the autograph of Saint Mark the Evangelist.³¹ The Gospel book, which bears a large number of Slavic, Lombard, and Frankish names, once served as a sort of *Liber vitae* or *Liber memorialis* that was used to commemorate pilgrimages undertaken to a monastery in Aquileia, most likely located in present-day village of San Canzian d'Isonzo, where it was kept.³² An entry in the book would have been followed by giving gifts to the monks in return for the prayers which were expected to be said on behalf of the pilgrims and those dear to them.³³ It was an envisaged exchange of material goods for prayers, exactly like the one in the Charter of Trpimir, where, for example, the duke expected that the monks from the monastery he had established would pray for the salvation of his soul while he procured for them liturgical vessels made out of silver and gave them gifts of land.³⁴

³⁰ For a proposed reconstruction of the original appearance of the altar rail, see Josipović, "Prijedlog za čitanje," 144–145, fig. 7a and 7b.

³¹ C. L. Bethmann, "Die Evangelien Handschrift zu Cividale," in *Neues Archiv*, vol. 2 (Hannover: Hahn, 1876), 112–128; Uwe Ludwig, *Transalpine Beziehungen der Karolingerzeit im Spiegel der Memorialüberlieferung: prosopographische und sozialgeschichtliche Studien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Liber vitae von San Salvatore in Brescia und des Evangeliers von Cividale* (MGH, Studien und Texte, vol. 25) (Hannover: Hahn, 1999).

³² Ludwig, *Transalpine Beziehungen*, 192; Rosamond McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 162–172; Andrea Tilatti, "Un monastero altomedievale a San Canzian d'Isonzo?," in *Studi sancanzianesi in memoria di Mario Mirabella Roberti*, ed. Giuseppe Cuscito (Antichità Altoadriatiche 57) (Trieste, Editreg SRL: 2004), 277–283.

³³ McKitterick, *History and Memory*, 167.

³⁴ *Codex diplomaticus*, vol. 1, 4–5.

Duke Trpimir's name appears as an entry on two separate lists in the manuscript.³⁵ In the first his name is entered together (yet subsequent to) that of Sebedra(g), who held the rank of *hostiarius*, presumably at Trpimir's ducal court.³⁶ Since a portion of the text is unreadable, it is unclear whether Sebedra(g) arrived at the monastery together with the duke or if he had the monks enter Trpimir's name into the book so that they would pray for the well-being of his sovereign's soul as well as his own.³⁷ Whatever the case may be, the purpose would have been the same: the entry would have been both a call for prayers and a call for remembrance.

In the second entry, Duke Trpimir appears second on a list featuring the names of several dignitaries entered in a single column of the manuscript in what appears to be the same hand.³⁸ Again, who actually visited the monastery is not certain, but the fact that the entry was made is important enough. Moreover, the same list also contains the name of Peter, a son of Trpimir (known from another entry in the same manuscript). In this other entry, Peter's name appears together with a certain Presila, who had signed his name on the pages of the codex in his own hand.³⁹ It is possible that this Presila is the same person who appears among

³⁵ Trpimir's name actually appears twice, but the third time it is not a separate entry but an identifier for his son Peter (*Petrus filius domno Tripemero*).

³⁶ It is uncertain whether this Sebedra(g) is the same person who would later on, in the time of Duke Branimir, finance the replacement of the altar screen in a small church at Otres. The inscription reads: + IN N(omine) D(omi)NI TE(m)POR[e] DOMNO [Br] ANNI[mero] DVCI EGO C[ede]DRA[go] [ad ho]NORE(m) BEATI PETRI ET S(an)C(ta)E MARIE S(an)C(t)I GEORGII S(an)C(t)I STEFANI S(an)C(t)I MARTINI S(an)C(t)I GRISOGONI S(an)C(ta)E CRVCIS (DeLonga, *The Latin Epigraphic Monuments*, 228–229, cat. no. 182). Alternatively, Sebedra(g) may be identical to Šibidrago, the *iuppanus* of Klis, who was one of the witnesses listed at the end of the Charter of Duke Muncimir from 892 (*Codex diplomaticus*, vol. 1, 24: *Sibidrago, zuppano Clesae*. Trpimir Vedriš, “Nekoliko opažanja o začetcima štovanja sv. Krševana u Dalmaciji u ranome srednjem vijeku” [Notes on the beginnings of the cult of St. Chrysogonus in Dalmatia in the Early Middle Ages], in *Spalatumque dedit ortum*, ed. Ivan Basić and Marko Rimac (Split: Filozofski fakultet Split, 2014), 217–219).

³⁷ Unless the unreadable line between the two names is somehow deciphered, the problem will remain unsolved.

³⁸ Whether Duke Trpimir ever visited the monastery personally is impossible to tell. His name does not appear first in either list, which might imply that the entries were made on his behalf through the intercession of members of his court, Sebedra(g) and Bribina.

³⁹ Mirjana Matijević Sokol argues that both Peter and Presila could have been literate (“1150. obljetnica darovnice kneza Trpimira” [The 1150th anniversary of the Charter of Duke Trpimir], in *100 godina Arheološkog muzeja Istre u Puli: Nova istraživanja u Hrvatskoj*, ed. Darko Komšo (Izdanja HAD-a, vol. 25) (Zagreb: Hrvatsko arheološko društvo, 2010), 15).

the fifteen witnesses named in the Charter of Duke Trpimir, which would again stress the importance that the display of piety had for the social and political life of the duchy in the first half of the ninth century and beyond.⁴⁰ For both Sebedra(g) and Presila it was important that their personal connections with the duke and his son be memorialized by having their names written down together. Hence, the manuscript should be understood as the medium through which piety could have been expressed, codified, and remembered. Like the establishment of churches, this is not to be understood in simplistic terms. Explicit expressions of Christian piety always came together with an implicit understanding of the intricate network of interactions and social connections shared among the members of the elite society of the Dalmatian duchy. In essence, Sebedra(g) and Presila were doing the same thing that the anonymous donor from Begovača did when he memorialized his pious act of establishing a church by having an inscription put up on the altar rail. The inscription bore not only the memory of his act, but also the memory that he had done it in the time of Duke Mislav.

Trpimir's son, Peter, might have had his name entered on the pages of the manuscript on a third occasion that has been, as far as I know, previously unnoticed in scholarship.⁴¹ This time a person called Peter (Petrus) appears together with Mutimira, which seems to be the feminine equivalent of the male name Mutimir. As the entry is located on the same page where the two entries associated with Duke Trpimir and his entourage were entered, it certainly opens up new questions about the genealogy of the ducal dynasty and the importance of *Codex Foroiuliensis* as a source for the Adriatic region in the ninth century.⁴² Finally, Duke Branimir (879–c. 892), who came to rule the realm after murdering Trpimir's son and

⁴⁰ *Codex diplomaticus vol.1*, 6–7; Ferdo Šišić, “Genealoški prilozii o hrvatskoj narodnoj dinastiji” [Genealogical notes on the Croatian ruling dynasty], *Vjesnik Arheološkog muzeja u Zagrebu* 13 (1914): 6. In this document, a person with the title *inppanus* appears second on the list under the name *Pretilia* or *Precilia*. Judging from this coincidence, it appears likely that the orthographical variations refer to the same high dignitary, who was close both to the duke and to his son.

⁴¹ For unknown reasons C. L. Bethmann did not recognize these two names as a single entry (“Die Evangelien Handschrift,” 121), which is why they remained unrecognized in Croatian scholarship (Cf. Franjo Rački, *Documenta historiae Croatiae periodum antiquam illustrantia* (Zagreb, 1877), 382–386; Šišić, “Genealoški prilozii,” 5–7; Ferdo Šišić, *Priručnik izjava hrvatske historije, vol. 1* [Handbook for the sources of Croatian history] (Zagreb, 1914), 125).

⁴² *The Gospel of Cividale*, Cividale del Friuli, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Archivi e Biblioteca, MS 137, fol. 5v. It is clear that the same hand wrote the names Mutimira and Petrus, one on top of the other, in the free space between the two pre-existing columns bearing names of other pilgrims. Even though there is no direct evidence that these two

Byzantine protégée Zdeslav, also found his way to the monastery where the codex was kept, together with his wife Mariosa, which again affirms the importance that performed acts of piety had for the aristocratic culture and society of the Dalmatian duchy.⁴³

Conclusion

The available archaeological and written evidence shows that imported models of Christian piety clearly brought innovations to the ways the local Slav elites expressed themselves and their status. It is now clear that the new trend of establishing churches was introduced from the top, by the ducal dynasty themselves. However, as the case from Biljane Donje-Begovača shows, it did not take long for it to be accepted by the higher strata of society. The display of Christian piety, however, not only included funding new churches, but also the disappearance of swords and other weapons from burials, which from then on became associated with small rural churches. The donors of sites such as Galovac-Crkvina, Biskupija-Crkvina, and Biljane Donje-Begovača might have financed their churches so that they could one day be buried by or in them. The scarce, but revealing, evidence of pilgrimages that the elites of the region undertook to the monastery in Aquileia shows the importance that this “new way” had for society.

The establishment of churches, “Christianized” burials associated with them and the entries to the Gospel of Cividale had strong symbolic significance that went beyond the expression of aristocratic piety. They were, after all, options available primarily to the select few among the elite, both religious and secular, and as such it was a luxury that served a very down-to-earth function. The church as a building was an intervention in the physical space of the everyday life of a rural community which served as a statement of the social status, power, and authority that its donor asserted over the territory. Moreover, in the cases when the donor and his family used these private churches for their own burials, the churches took on the symbolic role of tombstones, reminding the communities of those who had been buried there and of those who had the right and opportunity to be buried there in the future. In this regard, the display of aristocratic piety was never *only* about piety. Rather, it was a consequence of complex social relations, for which access to novelties introduced under the umbrella of Western Christianity became a catalyst for social competition.

people are actually from Trpimir's duchy, the context in which they appear is certainly interesting.

⁴³ Bethmann, “Die Evangelien Handschrift,” 126; Ludwig, *Transalpine Beziehungen*, 271.