

**THE STANDING STONES OF MEDIEVAL BOSNIA:
HERESY, DUALISM AND SYMBOLS IN PRE-OTTOMAN BALKANS**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to interpret the enigmatic imagery of the *stećak*, the roughly 60,000 monumental, monolithic standing stones found on the territories of modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbouring regions. Around 30% of the stones are adorned with low reliefs depicting a variety of symbols such as crosses, crescents, rings and rosettes, as well as more complex figural compositions involving *orantes*, circle dances and stag hunts. The rare and terse inscriptions found on the stones allow us to date their production between the 13th and 15th centuries and to link their creation to the medieval Bosnian state and its indigenous religious organization known as the Bosnian Church.

My thesis is that the Bosnian Church adhered to what is known as a moderately dualistic theology. In order to justify this interpretation, I firstly analyze the terms ‘heresy’ and ‘dualism’ in their historical context(s). Secondly, I provide a re-reading of the primary documents linked to the Bosnian Church, arguing that it was related to other medieval dualist movements such as the Paulicians of eastern Anatolia, the Bogomils of Bulgaria and the Patarens/Cathars of Western Europe. Finally, I interpret the *stećak* imagery in accordance with this view, demonstrating that it can be understood as a symbolic language with several layers of meaning.

The dissertation encompasses historical, theological, iconographic and anthropological questions, shedding new light on the nature of medieval heresy/dualist Christianity, the history of medieval Bosnia, and the symbolism of a neglected aspect of European material culture.

Dedicated to my father.

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PREFACE

The aim of this dissertation is to interpret the enigmatic imagery of the *stećak*, the roughly 65,000 monumental, monolithic tombstones found on the territories of modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbouring regions in Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. The *stećak* are scattered around the local countryside in *necropoli* counting tens and occasionally up to several hundred stones. They come in several basic, precisely cut shapes: slabs, rectangular or house-shaped blocks, crosses and pillars, measuring roughly 1.5 - 2 meters in width, length and height and weighing up to several tonnes. The rare and terse inscriptions found on about 200 stones (written in medieval demotic Slavonic using a local variant of the Cyrillic script) allow us to date their production between the 13th and 15th centuries and to link their creation to the medieval Bosnian state and its indigenous religious organization known as the Bosnian Church.

Around 30% of the *stećak* stones are adorned with low reliefs depicting a variety of symbols such as crosses, crescents, rings and rosettes, as well as more complex figural compositions containing *oranti*, circle dances and stag hunts. Previous *stećak* scholarship has interpreted this imagery in two basic, mutually opposed ways: either as primarily naturalistic representations of secular activities of medieval Bosnian society, enriched by a combination of Christian and pagan symbols, or as a symbolic language linked to the mythological worldview of Bosnian Christians. My basic proposition is that the *meaning* of the imagery is not a fixed and static property mysteriously attached to the *stećak* stones, but rather a dynamic construct emerging from an interaction between the object's material properties and the observer's hermeneutic framework. In this way, the previously opposed interpretations of *stećak* imagery can be conceived of as complimentary: an image can simultaneously represent a quotidian activity, call to mind a socio-political metaphor, and evoke a complex religio-symbolic concept. My aim is to uncover some of these 'meanings' that were ascribed to *stećak* imagery by its contemporary observers.

As there is not a single extant document testifying to medieval Bosnians' attitudes to the *stećak* stones and their imagery, they have to be derived from the wider cultural and religious contexts

in which the stones were created. In this respect, the most important question concerns the highly complex and heavily disputed nature of the medieval Bosnian Church. While numerous documents written by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox observers and polemicists describe the Bosnian Christians as heretics, dualists, Manichaeans or Patarens, local sources provide very little direct evidence to confirm these allegations. Recent local and international scholarship has thus come to the conclusion that the external allegations were largely based on misunderstandings and malicious political agendas. According to this view, the Bosnian Church was a schismatic, but essentially Catholic church with a low level of theological sophistication.

I suggest that this conclusion is mistaken, proposing that the Bosnian Church adhered to what is known as a moderately dualistic theology, as argued by the majority of older local and particularly international scholarship on this topic. In order to justify this re-interpretation, I carry out three historiographic and interpretative “interventions”: an overview and several closer analyses of the most important sources relating to the medieval Bosnian Church (Chapter 4), a close reading of the glosses found in several biblical manuscripts written by Bosnian Christians (Chapter 5), and a critique of the seminal book *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation* written by the historian John Fine, the most important proponent of the “orthodox” interpretation of the medieval Bosnian Church (Chapter 6). My conclusion is that, despite certain specificities, the Bosnian Church can indeed be considered as a member of a series of medieval “neo-Manichaean” movements encompassing Paulicians of eastern Anatolia, Bulgarian and Byzantine Bogomils, as well as Patarens and Cathars of northern Italy and the Languedoc. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that due to the scarcity and ambiguity of primary sources, this conclusion cannot be taken as completely certain, and suggest that during its several centuries of existence, the Bosnian Church may have gradually moved towards a nominally more “orthodox” theology.

In order to provide a more precise analysis of the Bosnian Church, however, I have first carried out a detailed historical and discursive deconstruction of the terms “heresy” and “dualism” that were frequently used by both medieval observers and contemporary analysts when describing it (Chapters 2 and 3). My research has shown that despite their ubiquity in discussions of the

Bosnian Church, as well as other “neo-Manichaeism” movements, these terms are frequently misunderstood or misrepresented, thus resulting in a significant degree of impoverishment of scholarly debates. My analysis of “heresy” and “dualism” aims to show that these categories encompass a broad set of phenomena that cannot be reduced to theological “errors,” or, more precisely, differences from the orthodox church(es). Indeed, they cannot be reduced to merely “religious” phenomena, but should rather be seen as complex socio-cultural movements with a significant degree of dynamism and variability. Thus, in legal terms, “heresy” is made up of three distinct elements, *heterodoxy* or distinct belief, *heteropraxy* or distinct custom, and a *will* or conscious rejection of officially defined orthodox and/or orthopraxy. Besides the ascription of a more active role in the creation of the material world to the devil, or a deity that is distinct from God, “dualism” is also defined by its adherence to a series of customs and norms that can be traced back to the earliest forms of Christianity, such as the initiatory ceremony known as spiritual baptism, ascetic moral standards and a gnostic conception of the role of esoteric knowledge.

Equipped with an enriched image of the socio-religious framework in which they were created, I turn towards the question of the appropriate hermeneutic framework in which the *stećak* stones were seen by their contemporaries (Chapter 7). A basic overview of the motifs engraved on the stones indicates that they cannot be understood within what I term the “propagandistic” role officially assigned to religious art by the orthodox churches: as a “Bible for the illiterate,” an aid to memory and arouser of emotions. Among the motifs, there are no depictions of saints or biblical events familiar from other Christian contexts; on the contrary, it is clear that, if they did carry metaphorical or symbolic levels of meaning, these could only be perceived by those familiar with a specific interpretative key. Thus I propose that the appropriate hermeneutic framework for interpreting *stećak* imagery is a “mystical” understanding of art as a conduit to higher, esoteric knowledge ultimately derived from neo-Platonic philosophy. Combining this theory with Erwin Panofsky’s conception of iconology and Clifford Geertz’s and Victor Turner’s understanding of cultures, I propose a general theory of three levels of meaning as a basic interpretative framework for *stećak* imagery.

In the final three chapters, I turn my attention towards a concrete analysis of the *stećak* stones and their imagery. Firstly, I briefly discuss the inscriptions carved on the stones, the wider framework of monolithic tombstone construction, and some of the most significant insights of the anthropology of death. Subsequently, I look at the more general characteristics of the *stećak* stones and the questions they raise: their basic function and form, their relationship towards the question of orthopraxy and the formal characteristics of their imagery (Chapter 8). This chapter is followed by an excursus dealing with medieval Armenian art, which shows some striking parallels with the art of the *stećak*, thus providing an additional piece of evidence for the disputed links between Armenian Paulicians, Bulgarian Bogomils and Bosnian Christians. More importantly, medieval Armenian art demonstrates that the technique in which the *stećak* reliefs are carved (which I term the “flat relief”) represents a deliberate restriction to two-dimensionality linked to a traditional Christian opposition to sculpture in the round, rather than just a primitive version of Romansque sculpture, as argued by the majority of older *stećak* scholars.

Finally, I provide individual treatments of the most important motifs found on the *stećak* stones: the cross, the *orant*, the hand, the circle dance, the stag hunt, the anthropomorphic niche, the spiral, the ring and the crescent (Chapters 9 and 10). I derive the meanings of these motifs using three different methods: firstly, I look at the formal characteristics of their representations, variations, and relationship with other motifs on the *stećak* stones; secondly, I analyze the motifs’ meanings in other historic and cultural contexts with possible links to medieval Bosnia; and, thirdly, I explore the motifs’ possible roles within the wider context of orthodox as well as ‘dualist’ Christian teachings. In this way, I reach several general conclusions. The variability in the way in which individual symbols and motifs are depicted, as well as their frequent combination and “hybridization” - i.e. a combination of two or more symbols into an original whole - indicates that their primary purpose was the communication of conceptual content, rather than an accurate reproduction of an original archetype. In terms of their iconographic precedents, the *stećak* imagery displays a surprising amount of parallels with the arts of the

early Christians and the early medieval Caucasus, rather than, as might be expected, its parallels in the contemporary Catholic West and Orthodox East. Finally, the “theological” analysis of the imagery indicates that it can best be understood within the framework of the “dualist” theology of the Bosnian Church, although their heterodox content is to be found in their interpretations, rather than the symbols and motifs as such.

Overall, the dissertation encompasses historiographic, theological, iconographic and anthropological questions, shedding new light on the nature of medieval heresy/dualist Christianity, the history of medieval Bosnia, and the symbolism of a neglected aspect of European material culture. In addition, it aims to contribute to the developing discourse around the modern-day state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its multiplicity of religious, ethnic and national identities. Although this question is not explicitly covered, the assumption underlying my approach is that its shared medieval cultural heritage belongs to all of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s citizens and can thus contribute to overcoming its contemporary political fragmentation.

CHAPTER 1
MEDIEVAL TOMBSTONES, HERESY AND THE BOSNIAN CHURCH:
AN INTRODUCTION

*This stone
Of Varda
Whose was it?
Whose is it now?
Whose will it be?¹*

“Stećak” (pronounced steh-tchak, meaning “standing stone”) is the term most frequently used to designate a type, or, more precisely, several distinct, but closely interrelated types of monumental, monolithic tombstones found on the territories of modern-day Bosnia and Herzegovina and its neighbouring regions in Croatia (mostly in the region of Dalmatia), western Serbia and Montenegro. The roughly 70,000 surviving *stećak*² appear in several basic forms: horizontal slabs, pillars, blocks, sarcophagus-shaped monoliths and monumental crosses (Figure 1).³

The *stećak* are most commonly found in necropoli made of tens, and occasionally up to several hundred stones. Around 30% of them are decorated with engravings and flat reliefs⁴ of low technical sophistication, but striking primordial beauty, ranging from single symbols such as crosses, crescents and rosettes to relatively rich compositions displaying jousting, hunting scenes

¹ Inscription on a medieval Bosnian monolithic chair (Vego 1962, 41). All translations mine, transcriptions of originals provided in Appendix.

² In Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian, the plural of ‘stećak’ is ‘stećci’. For the sake of legibility, however, I will use the singular throughout.

³ To this may be added several examples of chairs hewn in living rock, such as the one on which the words with which this chapter began were carved.

⁴ I use the term ‘flat relief’ in order to distinguish the engravings from the more plastic low reliefs familiar from Romanesque art. See Chapter 8 for more detailed discussion.

and circle dances. It is this imagery engraved on the *stećak* stones that forms the primary “text” or object of investigation of the following study.

The timeframe in which their production began and ended, their geographical extent, as well as the content of their inscriptions - all point towards the late medieval Bosnian state as the primary geo-historical context in which the *stećak* stones and their imagery are to be interpreted. While a few examples of the *stećak* have been dated to the 13th century, the overwhelming majority of the firmly dated stones were erected in the 14th, 15th and early 16th centuries.⁵ The borders of the Bosnian kingdom in the late 14th century, at the time of its greatest extent, almost perfectly align with the boundaries of the territories in which the *stećak* stones can be found, thus strongly suggesting a close connection between the state’s political formation and the emergence of this original sepulchral culture.

Despite this striking parallel, however, there are some factors that do not allow us to reduce the relationship of the *stećak* stones and the medieval Bosnian state to one of simple causality. The oldest dated *stećak* appear in the regions of Travunija and Hum (modern-day Herzegovina) prior to their incorporation into the Bosnian state; it is in those same regions, rather than the central core of the Bosnian state, that the majority of the most richly decorated *stećak* stones are to be found. Furthermore, a considerable number of *stećak* can also be found on territories that were never, or only very briefly governed by the Bosnian state.

The establishment of a general framework for the study of the *stećak* imagery is further complicated by the highly complex religious make-up of the medieval Bosnian state. While medieval Bosnia’s neighbouring states, Croatia and Serbia, to both of which Bosnia’s ethnic, cultural and political history is inextricably tied, were relatively firmly incorporated into Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy respectively, in the medieval period Bosnia produced its own, distinct branch of Christianity known as the Bosnian Church.

⁵ However, in the absence of large-scale systematic archeological excavations, the dating can only remain provisional, based as it is on nothing more than the rare inscriptions found on roughly 200 of the stones.

The existence of an autochthonous religious organization initially appears as a convincing explanation for the emergence of a distinct culture of death in medieval Bosnia. However, this hypothesis is faced by two major challenges. Firstly, the precise nature of the religious teaching of the Bosnian Church remains heavily disputed among religious historians: while numerous Western European (i.e. Roman Catholic) sources, as well as some documents written by Serbian Orthodox Christians, consistently describe the Bosnian Christians as *heretics*, *dualists*, *Manichaeans* or *Patarens*, there is nothing in the surviving documents written by Bosnian Christians themselves explicitly confirming these allegations. Some sources strongly suggest that Bosnian Christians did not share some of the beliefs usually ascribed to medieval dualist heretics. Secondly, despite the existence of the Bosnian Church, throughout the medieval period, and particularly from the 14th century onwards, when the majority of the *stećak* were erected, there were significant numbers of Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians in Bosnia. In a few cases, the inscriptions on the *stećak* indicate that the buried person was an Eastern Orthodox Christian or Roman Catholic.

The controversial and heavily disputed problematics of the *stećak* stones' contextual framework has ultimately led to the tripartite organization of this book. The first part provides a historical-discursive deconstruction of the terms “heresy” and “dualism”, the second part deals with the problematics of the Bosnian Church, and the final part offers a sort of “thick description” of the most important images/symbols found on the *stećak* stones.

The basic theoretical principle informing this study entails seeing the *stećak* imagery as a constitutive and organic element of the wider culture that produced it, rather than reducing it to the restrictive categories of “art” or “tombstone design”. This principle has necessitated a closer analysis of the nature of the Bosnian Church as the most characteristic phenomenon of Bosnia's medieval culture. Challenging the currently prevalent historiographic view according to which the Bosnian Church was a merely schismatic, rather than heterodox or “heretical” religious organization, I analyze the striking and profound parallels between the Bosnian Church and other

medieval dualist movements such as the Bogomils of Bulgaria and Cathars/Patarens of Western Europe. My basic argument is that their connections should primarily be sought in continuities in the domain of *praxis* (i.e. in *heteropraxy*) rather than dogmatics, as usually assumed in scholarly debates.

This conclusion is partly born out of the insights derived from a closer analysis of the concept of “heresy” in the Christian world. Starting from the earliest followers of Jesus, I trace the gradual development of this concept from its original meaning of “choice” to the medieval “whatever the papacy did not approve of”, showing “heresies” to be a much more complex and diverse historical phenomenon than the dogmatic deviation from orthodoxy it is often reduced to. I analyze “heresies” as socio-cultural and political as well as religious movements, defined primarily by their opposition and resistance to an absolutist theological system. As such, “heresy” is transformed into an innovative and dynamic analytic category that cannot be reduced to either abstract dogmatic principles or “discursive constructions” of ancient and medieval heresiologists. It thus also becomes a useful conceptual framework for the study of *stećak* imagery, even if they were, at least partially, erected by Eastern Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics, as well as by adherents of the Bosnian Church.

The analysis of the *stećak* and their imagery carried out in the final three chapters is based on three methodological principles. Firstly, I argue that “meaning” is not a fixed property, but rather a dynamic construct emerging from an interaction between the observed material and the observer. Thus a symbol or composition is inherently unlikely to have only one static meaning. Secondly, in the absence of texts directly illustrating the hermeneutical principles used by medieval Bosnians, the latter must be sought in the wider Christian tradition(s) to which the country’s culture belonged. I propose that the most appropriate hermeneutical framework for reading *stećak* imagery is not a simplistic naturalism or dogmatic didacticism, but rather a neo-Platonic conception of art as a means of communicating esoteric knowledge. Finally, the meaning of individual motifs is sought through a comparative perspective on the one hand, and a careful analysis of the roles the motifs play in different *stećak* compositions on the other. In this

way, I reach the conclusion that the *stećak* iconography as a whole can best be understood within the framework of the theology espoused by the Bosnian Church.

1.1 Theory and methodology

Heresy and dualism

The most important contextual question faced by the analyst of *stećak* imagery concerns the nature of the Bosnian Church as the dominant religious organization of the medieval Bosnian state. In order to be able to answer this question, however, it is necessary to understand the meaning(s) of the terms “heresy” and “dualism” that were frequently used by Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian observers when describing it. The complexity of these terms has necessitated an engagement with their discursive history spanning the first two chapters of this study.

My primary methodological principle in relation to the term “heresy” is an insistence on seeing it as a *dialectical term*. Thus its evolution in the Romano-Byzantine Christian world is analyzed in relation to three distinct, but interrelated historical and/or discursive processes: the rise of the Catholic Church⁶ as a hierarchical institution, the development of the concept of orthodoxy resulting from (or, indeed, *resulting in*) the establishment of the Ecumenical Councils, and the adoption of a (ecclesiastical and secular) legal framework ensuring its imposition. In this way, “heresy” is shown to be a complex phenomenon consisting of three conceptually distinct elements: *heteropraxy*, i.e. a deviation from the customs of the imperial Roman church (and later the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches), *heterodoxy*, i.e. a dogmatic deviation from the orthodoxy defined by the Ecumenical Councils, and finally a *will*, i.e. a conscious and legally binding rejection of orthodoxy and/or orthopraxy.

⁶ The term “Catholic Church” is used to refer to the Roman-Byzantine Church prior to its schism in the 11th century. For the subsequent period, I use the terms Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church.

Most importantly, my analysis shows the evolving and dynamic nature of these contextual frameworks themselves: the growing bureaucratization of the Church leading to the papal absolutism of the late Middle Ages, the gradual narrowing down of the theological diversity of early Christianity and the eventual dogmatic innovations of the medieval Roman Catholic Church, and the ever-widening set of anti-heretical legal measures culminating in the Inquisition and crusades of the 13th century and beyond. I also analyzed the evolving and dynamic nature of “heretical” movements themselves: what started with a minor disagreement in the domain of orthodoxy or orthopraxy could eventually develop into a conscious and active rejection of the Catholic Church in its totality. Thus, my argument is that the question whether a religious movement was heretical or not cannot receive a simple answer, but must always include a critical engagement with the sense in which the concept of “heresy” is used.

“Dualism” is an equally complex and problematic term, having at least two different basic meanings. Conceptually, it refers to an article of faith according to which the creation and/or governance of the universe is the result of two, rather than only one (divine) agent.⁷ Historically, it denotes a series of (possibly pseudo-)Christian movements (“heresies”) believed to have adhered to that particular article of faith and traditionally conceived of as being mutually connected. The basic problem of the scholarly usage of this term in the latter sense is that it elevates an article of faith whose ultimate role in these movements’ belief systems is unclear at best to their fundamental and defining characteristic, thus potentially misconstruing their nature.⁸ While retaining the term “dualism” in a classificatory sense, I aim to challenge this customary simplification of a complex religious tradition.

⁷ In a practical sense, however, it is difficult to distinguish “dualism” from “monist” Christianity due to the prominent role of Satan in the material world in the latter.

⁸ The situation can be compared to the unjustified and antiquated use of the term “Mohammedanism” for Islam. None of these movements used the term “dualism” to refer to themselves. Nevertheless, in accordance with its prevalence in scholarly literature, I continue to use the term “dualism” for classificatory purposes.

The methodology of my analysis of dualism and dualist movements is two-fold. Firstly, I aim to go beyond the mere enumeration of articles of faith encountered in heresiological⁹ literature and attempt to deduce the nature of these belief systems based on the totality of the available evidence. My conclusion is that dualism has frequently been unjustly and superficially portrayed as an essentially pessimistic and world-denying religious movement, whose brutal destruction is ultimately justified as a victory of “Western civilization” over alien and retrograde tendencies. Furthermore, I view dualistic beliefs as organic elements of the societies in which they flourished, rather than merely abstract theological principles with no relation to their quotidian lives. In this respect, it is important to note that dualistic movements were regularly associated with political, anti-imperial or anti-papal sentiments. Thus I postulate the essentially political nature of these movements, linking their dualism to an opposition to what they considered the illegitimate and excessive involvement of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches in secular affairs, rather than an outright rejection of the material world *per se*.

An additional conceptual and methodological problem that links “heresy” and “dualism” is the question of the mutual connections and continuities between the different movements that were ascribed these labels. Too frequently, this question is approached as a purely empirical issue, a matter of simply comparing and contrasting the available sources describing the different movements. However, the problem of continuities is conceptual and discursive as much as it is empirical. The model of continuity that is usually uncritically taken for granted is that of the orthodox churches, with their claim to dogmatic continuity stretching back to apostolic times. Measured against this yardstick, the claim to continuity among the diverse heretical and dualist churches appears questionable, lacking sources that would firmly prove their mutual connections. Furthermore, it is evident that there were in part significant dogmatic differences between individual movements described as dualist and particularly those labelled as “heresies”.

⁹ The term “heresiology” refers to a variety of antique and medieval theological writings dealing with the topic of heresy.

However, it must be remembered that throughout the period under consideration, these movements were subject to brutal repressions, including the destruction of not only their property but even their bones, so that a lack of relevant sources should not be surprising. While this argument may be described as moral or political, a more important one is methodological: despite its centrality, there is no inherent reason why the issue of dogma should be seen as the sole criterium of continuity between different religious movements. Continuity is not a question of an either/or response, but rather a matter of a meticulous analysis of the complex relationship between change and identity. Thus the continuities between distinct religious movements can be of different types, involving, besides dogma, matters of ethnicity, culture, language and orthopraxy. Furthermore, continuities may be sought in what these movements rejected or fought against, rather than in what they actually preached. Thus, my understanding of the concept of continuity is dynamic, being used in a relative rather than absolute sense.

The Bosnian Church

To an even greater extent than the general problems of “heresy” and “dualism”, the scholarly discussion of the Bosnian Church has been dominated by a rigid binary logic, according to which it was either a full-blown “dualist heresy” or an essentially orthodox organization with minor and ultimately insignificant deviations relating to its structure and level of theological sophistication. While, for a long time after the publication of the Croatian historian Franjo Rački’s seminal work *Bogomili i Patareni* (‘The Bogomils and Patarens’) in 1868, the “heretical” paradigm dominated local and international scholarship, something of a consensus has emerged in the last 40 years or so around the “orthodox” view.¹⁰

However, the problem of both of these approaches is that they work with an excessively rigid and inaccurate understanding of the terms heresy and dualism. If we apply the criteria of heresy

¹⁰ As an indication of the international consensus on the issue we may take the Oxford historian Noel Malcolm’s 1994 *Bosnia: A short history*, which devoted a chapter to the Bosnian Church. Malcolm argues that “the theory which has been most widely accepted for over a century, Rački’s identification of the Bosnian Church as Bogomil, turns out to consist mainly of wishful thinking” (29).

as it was defined by the Catholic Church in the period under consideration, there is no question about the Bosnian Church's heresy: technically speaking, the fact that the Bosnian Church was considered heretical by representatives of the Catholic Church, which is proven by a series of papal letters and heresiological documents, already means that it really was heretical. The question is thus not whether the Bosnian Church was heretical or not, but rather whether it really was "guilty" of the charges of *heterodoxy* and *heteropraxy* raised in the heresiological documents, i.e. whether those charges were justified.

Considering that in the period between the 13th and 15th centuries, when the Bosnian Church was either completely isolated or clearly distinct from the Catholic Church, the latter adopted a whole series of innovations in the domains of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, we may further be certain that the former was indeed to some extent heterodox and heteropractic. The actual "problem" of the Bosnian Church thus becomes even more narrowly defined, essentially revolving around the question whether it held on to any kind of dualistic beliefs. This question is indeed highly complex and, in my opinion, in the absence of new sources, ultimately unresolvable.

My treatment of the problematics of the Bosnian Church is based on a re-reading of the most important primary sources while avoiding the kind of binary logic referred to above. The most contested set of documents relating to the Bosnian Church is a series of diverse heresiological writings spanning more than 200 years, which clearly identify the Bosnian Church as "heretical" and most frequently as "Pataren", and which include detailed lists of its alleged beliefs and customs. Scholars have generally treated these writings in one of two ways: either as transparent expressions of the Bosnian Christians' real beliefs, or as complete fabrications by uninformed and malicious Western inquisitors or clerics.

The Western malice theory emphasizes a different set of sources, a series of biblical manuscripts written by Bosnian Christians themselves, that seem to contain nothing explicitly heterodox or dualist. Furthermore, some of their characteristics appear to contradict what some

heresiologists ascribed to the Bosnian Church. Most notably, the manuscripts contain images of crosses and even a representation of the crucified Christ, both symbols that dualists allegedly rejected. Based on this contradiction, as well as a general mistrust of the reliability of medieval heresiologists, scholars who support an “orthodox” interpretation of the Bosnian Church argue that heresiological documents should simply be ignored.

However, while there may be reason to question the reliability of heresiological documents, their outright rejection seems hasty. Just as we cannot simply and uncritically assume that the documents accurately reflect the Bosnian Christians’ true beliefs and customs, we cannot deduce their complete irrelevance thanks only to some perceived inaccuracies. Surprisingly, however, this is what most scholars of the Bosnian Church have done in the past. A notable exception was the Croatian historian Dominik Mandić, who wrote that “It is a scientifically unjustified and inaccurate principle, that in order to learn about the Bosnian Church, the only relevant source should be its own writings (...) A good judge, to establish innocence or guilt, does not question and take into account only what the accused has to say about himself, but also questions external sources, i.e. that what reliable witnesses say about him” (20).¹¹

If heresiological documents are indeed ignored, it is virtually impossible to prove the actual beliefs of Bosnian Christians. As I show in my analysis of historical heretical movements, heterodoxy was usually to be found in different interpretations of religious writings, rather than their actual modification, so that the codices of the Bosnian Christians, despite their apparent “orthodoxy”, cannot be taken as firm evidence of either view of their faith’s nature. The only element of these writings that could be taken as an indication of the Bosnian Christians’ interpretative practices is a series of glosses found in only two manuscripts, commenting on passages of the New Testament. As I show in my analysis, these glosses display certain similarities with the interpretative practices of Bulgarian Bogomils and Languedoc Cathars, indicating a moderately dualist theology.

¹¹ Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of non-English scholarship are mine.

Ultimately, however, I do not think that these glosses can be used as firm evidence of the Bosnian Christians' beliefs. If there were any dualist beliefs in medieval Bosnia, they were most probably largely restricted to the Bosnian Church's spiritual elites. Furthermore, these beliefs did not constitute a foundational metaphysical principle, but played a very specific role in a wider system of beliefs that will be explored in more detail. What existed among wider layers of society was probably a hybrid set of beliefs, some derived from orthodox Christianity, others absorbed from dualistic movements, and finally some stemming from the not-so-recent pre-Christian past. For the purposes of my argument, however, it is important that an influence of or a connection with other dualist movements can be assumed, and that at least some of the heresiological claims about the Bosnian Church may be considered accurate. In my analysis of *stećak* imagery, I do not encounter motifs that can be read as illustrations of allegedly foundational heretical beliefs such as dualism. What I do encounter, however, are images that can be provided with credible interpretations by referring to other beliefs and customs usually ascribed to dualist movements.

The stećak imagery

Due to its centrality in this study, the methodology of my analysis of *stećak* imagery is treated in a separate chapter, while here I will only provide a brief summary. Discussing the attested reception practices of early and medieval Christians based on their own writings, I propose that the most productive interpretative framework for the study of *stećak* iconography is a theory of three levels of artistic meaning or sense. Deriving from Alexandrian traditions of scriptural interpretation, this theory is attested in the writings of St. Augustine and repeated, in similar forms, by Charlemagne's court theologian Alcuin in the 8th and the French cleric Richard of St. Victor in the 12th century, attesting to its enduring presence within Christian imagination. Its roots reach back to neo-Platonic mystical conceptions of visual art as a conduit to higher, spiritual realities, rather than mimetic representations of the material world. In its Christian guise, the theory merges the mimetic and mystical conception, adding a third, allegorical one, which can all be found simultaneously in one and the same work of art. Thus the *meaning* or

sense of the observed imagery can vary depending on the intellectual and spiritual level of the observer.

The adoption of this theoretical framework leads to a significant breakthrough in the study of *stećak* imagery, as it enables us to see its different interpretations proposed by scholars in the past as potentially complimentary rather than necessarily contradictory. In other words, it implies that each *stećak* composition could simultaneously carry a set of different senses, such as being a mimetic representation as well as a political allegory and a spiritual symbol. At the same time, the adoption of this theory also challenges the more widely-spread Christian conceptualization of art (particularly in Catholic Western Europe) which sees it in basically propagandistic terms, as scripture for the illiterate, arouser of emotions and aid to memory.

The primary reason for my general neglect of the didactic or propagandistic conception of art is the fact that even a basic overview of *stećak* imagery demonstrates that it cannot be read as a simplistic illustration of dogmatic teachings, either of the orthodox or heterodox kind. Thus there are no depictions of Christ, the Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary or any biblical events.¹² Furthermore, there are no images that could be read as illustrations of dualist metaphysical themes, such as, for example, a cosmic battle between the principles of good and evil, or the fall of angels into the material world. On the other hand, on a more conjectural note, I argue that, in accordance with the writings of the neo-Platonic philosopher Plotinus, the “flat” style of the *stećak* carvings should be linked to a mystical conception of art rather than the lack of technical skills among their creators.¹³

So what kind of hermeneutical tradition or principle should be used to interpret the *stećak* imagery? Should it be read in accordance with the Christianity espoused by the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic or Bosnian Church? This question probably represents the most

¹² With possible single exceptions that will be treated in the chapters dealing with the *stećak* imagery.

¹³ Note that the decipherment of the motifs' sense would have required a familiarity with a hermeneutical tradition usually known only by the initiated.

heavily disputed aspect of *stećak* scholarship. When we inquire about the religious identity of the *stećak* stones and their imagery, we may in fact be asking (at least) three different questions:

- (i) what was the religious identity of the people buried underneath the *stećak* stones?
- (ii) in what religious context did the sepulchral custom of erecting *stećak* stones develop?
- (iii) what is the *meaning* or *sense* of the *stećak* stones, and particularly their iconography?

There may be more than one answer to each of them. For example, the first *stećak* might have been erected by Orthodox Christians, with the custom eventually taken over by Bosnian Christians, only for Catholics to finally to ascribe a particular meaning to its iconography. Alternatively, the custom of erecting *stećak* stones might have emerged in a religiously pluralistic context, been shared among adherents of all three branches of Christianity, and ascribed meanings depending on the world-views of observers. The three questions can also be associated with different scholarly disciplines, (i) being primarily a task for the archeologist, (ii) an issue to be resolved by historians and (iii) a problem faced by the art historian or student of visual culture. It is primarily to question (iii) that I turn my attention in this study.

The methodology guiding my response to this question is primarily anthropological rather than art-historical. It inquires into the meanings ascribed to the *stećak* imagery by its medieval observers, rather than assuming that meaning is constant. I analyze the most frequent symbols on the *stećak* stones in accordance with the threefold conceptualization of art set out above, starting with the most basic, mimetic sense and gradually moving to the allegorical and mystical levels. Rather than deciding *a priori* the appropriate religious context or hermeneutical strategy, I analyze each symbol in the context of orthodox as well as heterodox Christianity. As a guideline, I apply a comparative perspective with a series of Christian and non-Christian contexts. My conclusion is that, taken as a whole, the imagery of the *stećak* stones can be provided with a more profound interpretation when viewed in the context of dualistic, Bosnian Christianity, although it does not mean that the *stećak* culture can be ascribed to the Bosnian Church in its totality.

1.2. Literature

Heresy and dualism

The literature consulted for my discussion of the problems of “heresy” and “dualism” can be roughly divided into three sections: one dealing with its conceptual aspects, the second a series of primary sources that have defined the two terms in the medieval period, and finally a deliberately wide and diverse selection of secondary literature concerned with different contextual frameworks that have played a role in the two terms’ evolution.

My own understanding of the concept of “heresy” largely follows that of the anthropologist Talal Asad as presented in his article ‘Medieval Heresy: An Anthropological View’. I particularly value Asad’s refusal to reduce “heresy” either to its theological aspects or to a mere epiphenomenon of social processes. Instead, he insists on seeing “heretics” as conscious, active and constructive agents of change in a society dominated by religion. This understanding fosters a successful synthesis of two significant approaches to “heresy” that have traditionally been mutually opposed (or at least isolated), a Marxist one represented by the likes of the East German historian Martin Erbstösser and a philosophical/religious one reflected in the works of Hans Jonas or Yuri Stoyanov. The latter two exemplify a relatively recent tradition which has overcome the sectarian, ecclesiastical approach to the problem of “heresy” which dominated scholarship for several centuries, and can still be found among authors such as Vladimir Lossky, who are explicitly associated with a branch of orthodox Christianity.

Jonas’s and Stoyanov’s works have also methodologically shaped my approach to the problem of “dualism”. Jonas’s magisterial treatment of Gnosticism shows how philosophical acumen can overcome the limitations of heresiological discourse and make an alien religious movement understandable to an outsider. Stoyanov’s meticulous exploration of the dualistic motif in a variety of religious movements, on the other hand, demonstrates the values of a

comparative approach, despite his own acknowledgement that a direct connection between these movements cannot be proven. Jonas and Stoyanov show that continuities between different religious movements should be sought not only in the transmission of identical dogmatic teachings, but also in their understanding of the relationship between dogma and what they perceived to be the essence of their religiosity. A similar approach is adopted in Michael Tardieu's monograph on Manichaeism, Mansour Shaki's article on Mazdakism, as well as certain observations by Columba Stewart on Messalianism, Adolf von Harnack on Marcionism, or Nina Garsoian on Paulicianism.

The most significant set of primary sources used in this part of the study is contained in two extensive collections of translations of original texts dealing with heresy in Byzantium and medieval Europe compiled, respectively, by Bernard and Janet Hamilton and Walter Wakefield and Austin Evans. While I lack the expertise to question the accuracy of their translations or deal with the complex question of the reliability of these documents, a careful analysis of these primary sources can reveal aspects of the way in which "heretics" were perceived by their contemporaries that have been ignored or neglected by other analysts. Thus I use recurring statements about the dualists' alleged worship of the devil or demons to propose a different understanding of the meaning of their "dualism". Another aspect of heresiological discourse I discuss is the almost universal assumption that all dualist heresies are connected and ultimately derived from Manichaeism. Furthermore, I refer to the canonical New Testament in order to demonstrate the scriptural foundations of some opinions allegedly voiced by these "heretics".

Other primary sources I use are the writings of early Christian heresiologists such as Hippolytus of Rome, Irenaeus of Lyons or St. Augustine, and legal resolutions of the Roman and Byzantine Empire, the papacy, and medieval Western European states. I aim to show the discursive continuities and ruptures in a line of development of anti-heretical writing and legislature starting with the earliest (ecclesiastical) Christian theologians and culminating in the papal decrees and inquisitorial registers of the late Middle Ages. I pay particular attention to the discursive construction of heresy as the Other of socially dominant ideological values such as

regularity, sanity, health and cleanliness. When it comes to law, I focus on two critical periods: the adoption of laws leading to the Theodosian Code in the 4th century, and the series of resolutions adopted by the “lawyer popes” in the second half of the 12th and the 13th centuries. Thus I propose that, besides the theological, the legal discourse represents the most significant framework for the study of heresy.

The first group of the secondary literature I use is a combination of classical and more recent writings on the problems of heresy as well as the general development of the Christian world, particularly during the Middle Ages. They include Obolensky’s classical books on the Bogomils and the Byzantine Commonwealth, Malcolm Lambert’s monograph on the Cathars, and Milan Loos’s and Steven Runciman’s synoptic studies of medieval dualism. For my overview of early Christianity, I rely primarily on the accounts of Henry Chadwick, Leo D. Davis and Stuart G. Hall. More specific aspects of this period are covered by, among others, the works of W.H.C. Frend on Monophysitism, Robert Murray on the traditions of Syriac Christianity, the previously mentioned study of Messalianism by Columba Stewart, Williams Tabbernee’s analysis of Montanism and Samuel Hugh Moffett’s history of Christianity in Asia. Finally, the problem of heresy and the general socio-religious history of medieval Europe is treated in works of Michael Barber, Robert Bartlett, Gordon Leff, Jacques Le Goff, Edward Peters, and R.W. Southern.

A second group of secondary literature I use refuses to accept the traditionally “balanced” approach to the problems of “heresy” and “dualism”. On the one hand, a group of authors challenges the traditional understanding of dualist heresies by arguing that their dualism is essentially a heresiological discursive construction. The most distinguished representative of this strategy in the case of Western Cathars is R.I. Moore, but a similar methodological tactic is applied by Nina Garsoian in relation to the Armenian Paulicians, and John Fine in his treatment of the Bosnian Church and Bulgarian Bogomils. On the other hand, a different strategy, reaching back to the works of Walter Bauer, and currently represented particularly by Charles Freeman, is skeptical of the entire “orthodox” tradition and its pretensions to representing truth and objectivity. This strategy is combined with an emphasis on the fundamentally heterodox nature

of the early Christian world. I adopt certain features of the latter strategic approach towards the religious history of Christian world and combine them with a generally critical view of the “anti-dualist” methodology.

The Bosnian Church

The literature dealing with the Bosnian Church is marked by two endemic characteristics. Firstly, mostly due to its marginal geo-political position on the threshold between the Byzantine and Catholic spheres of influence, it has not been extensively treated in international literature on heresy. Secondly, while the local (Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian) literature on the Bosnian Church is extensive and diverse, it is also frequently laden with explicit and implicit political assumptions and undertones. Thus, my conclusions are primarily based on a re-reading of primary sources, along with some recent secondary sources written by local scholars.

The relative anonymity of the Bosnian Church in international scholarship is demonstrated by its absence from the two collections of primary sources dealing with heresy in Byzantium/the medieval West. Furthermore, both Milan Loos and Steven Runciman scant the Bosnian Church in their studies of medieval dualism.¹⁴ A notable exception is John V.A. Fine’s *The Bosnian Church - A New Interpretation*, originally published in 1975, which has swayed the international consensus towards a rejection of the Bosnian Church’s alleged heterodoxy. As Fine’s book still remains the international reference work on this topic, I have carried out a detailed analysis of his main arguments and methodology, arguing that they contain a series of serious flaws and should therefore be revised.

¹⁴ Thus Runciman writes (with a clear hint at ethnic prejudice) that “Bosnian Bogomilstvo seems to have developed no esoteric thought nor tradition that could survive its loss of material power. It remained a superficial thing, a national dress that could easily be taken off and forgotten. And so it perished, its sacred legends fading, as elsewhere among the Slavs, into a set of improbable popular fairy-stories” (115), while Loos argues that “thus we see that not even in Bosnia did the dualist doctrine of the ‘Patarene’ church leave its mark on the development of the nation’s culture” (309).

The flaws I identify in Fine's approach are his simplistic understanding of the phenomenon of dualist heresies, his excessive reliance on outdated ethnological models, and his conjectural rejection of the relevance of heresiological sources. Fine essentially begins his study with a model of dualism as an abstract, esoteric religious movement unlikely to be accepted in what he considered a static peasant society such as medieval Bosnia. Incomprehensibly, considering his otherwise meticulous approach, he does not even draw the crucial distinction between absolute and moderate dualism. Furthermore, he seems unaware that dualist movements were characterized by a strict division in the status and level of obligations between an inner core of "true Christians" and a wider circle of their supporters. Finally, having reached the wrong conclusions, he goes to great lengths to prove the inaccuracy and irrelevance of all heresiological documents mentioning the Bosnian Church.

The political controversy of the Bosnian Church is essentially caused by the specific and conflict-ridden evolution of 19th century Bosnia and Herzegovina's religious groups - the Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians - into the modern "nations" or "ethnicities" of Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. This process has been accompanied by the development of competing national historiographies which project their origins into the early medieval period when the first Slavic tribes migrated to the Balkans. Thus, the first interpretative conflict concerns the question of the medieval Bosnians' ethnicity, regardless of their religious adherence. The second, more significant conflict is related to the nature of the Bosnian Church, with (nationalist) Serbian and Croatian authors generally emphasizing its proximity to either the Orthodox or the Catholic Churches (and, by extension, to Serbia or Croatia), and nationalist Bosniak authors exaggerating its heterodoxy and alleged proximity to Islam.¹⁵

Nevertheless, during the (socialist) Yugoslav period (1945 - 1991), a general consensus emerged among the leading local scholars regarding the heterodoxy of the Bosnian Church, including authors such as Sima Ćirković (considered as one of the greatest Serbian medievalists), Jaroslav Šidak (Croatian professor of history at the University of Zagreb), Dragutin Kniewald

¹⁵ This complex question is treated extensively by Bašić, 202 - 254.

(Croatian professor of theology at the University of Zagreb) and Aleksandar Solovjev (Russian legal expert and historian who taught at the University of Sarajevo). Dominik Mandić went a step further and produced a book that may be regarded as the most significant Bogomil interpretation of the Bosnian Church, although it is laden with conjectures. The most useful local study is a recent (2005) study of the Bosnian Church in the 15th century by the Bosnian historian Pejo Ćošković, which focusses on its organizational aspects and secular functions on the basis of local documents.

Two other significant more recent secondary sources I use are an article on the glosses of the Vrutok gospel by the Bosnian Slavacist Lejla Nakaš and an unpublished doctoral dissertation on the miniatures of the Hval gospel by the Bosnian historian of art Ema Mazrak. In her article, Nakaš presents a series of previously unknown glosses found in the medieval Bosnian codex known as the Vrutok gospel. Using these glosses along with the previously published ones found in the Srećković gospel, I reconstruct fragments of the hermeneutical methods and beliefs of the Bosnian Christians. Mazrak provides a very detailed analysis of the miniature painting of the most famous medieval Bosnian manuscript, the Hval gospel. Her identification and interpretation of the miniatures showing Moses and the crucified Christ present a challenge to the heresiological claims that Bosnian Christians did not believe that Christ had a real body and that they rejected the Old Testament.

Finally, the most important collection of primary sources relating to the Bosnian Church can be found in a recent collection by the Croatian historian Franjo Šanjek. Šanjek's own interpretations of the documents shows that the frequently made argument that medieval heresiologists were uninformed about or unaware of the real situation in medieval Bosnia is implausible. I provide a detailed analysis of the documents, showing that they present a relatively uniform image of the Bosnian Church as a moderately dualist Christian movement, as other sources also suggest. I also provide a close reading of two other documents that have played a significant role in discussions about the Bosnian Church, the Bilino Polje Abjuration and the

Testament of Gost Radin. In these readings, I make use of a collection of papers from a recent (2005) conference on the Bosnian Church.

Stećak imagery

My most important primary source for the *stećak* imagery is an extensive collection of drawings made in the 1960s by the American art historian Marian Wenzel. While I have personally visited and photographed numerous *stećak* sites, due to the low visibility of the motifs Wenzel's drawings represent the most valuable resource for their analysis. Additional sources I use are drawings by the Swiss art historian and artists Rudolf Kutzli, as well as the photographs and drawings of individual sites and/or micro-locations contained in a series of publications by the authors Šefik Bešliagić, Marko Vego, Alojz Benac and Dimitrije Sergejevski made in the 1960s. Generally, all of these older images are precious due to the poor and deteriorating state of the overwhelming majority of the *stećak* stones, so that many of its carvings are hardly visible today and will probably completely vanish in the near future.

As far as secondary literature is concerned, I have mainly made use of Aleksandar Solovjev, Rudolf Kutzli and Georg Wild, authors who have primarily interpreted the imagery as heterodox/dualist. The primary reason for my reliance on these authors is that the "orthodox" authors have simply not succeeded in providing a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon of the *stećak* and its imagery as a whole. What they have rather relied on is a combination of naive realistic interpretations, suggestions of unclear "pagan survivals" and theories of imitations of Western European models that ultimately lead to more questions than answers. The authors of the latter group, however, must be credited with carrying out the pioneering site registration and iconography classification that facilitates further analysis. The "heterodox" authors, on the other hand, while certainly not correct in every detail, have looked beyond individual motifs in isolation and tried to interpret *stećak* imagery as a distinct and self-contained iconography.

My analysis of concrete *stećak* motifs is comparative and wide-ranging. I visited Armenia to photograph numerous famous and obscure medieval tombstones for comparative purposes. I also consulted books on the art of Armenia by Jean Michel Thierry, Georgia by Rusudan Mepisashvili and Vakhtang Tsintsadze, and Dagestan by Ariel Golan. Other medieval Christian contexts are covered by works of Françoise Henry (Ireland), F. Bernard (Spain), Pierre Du Bourguet (Egypt), Georg Gerster (Ethiopia), Oksana Minaeva (Bulgaria) and Arthur Voyce (Russia). Several authors dealing with the arts of early Christianity have also been consulted (André Grabar, John Lowden, Thomas F. Matthews, James Stevenson).

Methodologically, I have adopted (and adapted) a broadly iconographic approach. This has led to an engagement with the writings of Erwin Panofsky as well as the philosopher Ernst Cassirer who had a profound influence on his work. Furthermore, I have aimed to address some of the fundamental problems faced by the iconographic method raised in the influential collection *Iconography at the Crossroads*, primarily related to the question how images produce meaning (as opposed to just what they mean). A related, but distinct tradition is constituted by authors such as Hans Belting and Ias Elsner writing about what may broadly be described as the problematics of visual culture, paying more attention to the question of reception practices rather than the traditionally conceived static “meanings” of works of art. It is particularly Elsner’s attention to the ideological aspects of formal features of works of art that has influenced my own understanding of *stećak* imagery.

The question of reception practices in medieval Bosnia necessarily leads to a consideration of theological issues. The legitimacy and purpose of visual art has been a problem of primary importance in the history of Christianity so that its understanding in medieval Bosnia cannot be simply taken for granted. I carry out a critical analysis of reception theory and practices in the Christian world relying on, among others, the works of Paul Corby Finney on early Christians, Cyril Mango’s collection of sources on art in the Byzantine world, Leslie Brubaker’s monumental study of iconoclasm, and Madeline Harrison Caviness’s work on art and medieval Western audiences. As noted above, I conclude that the appropriate hermeneutical strategy to be

adopted for medieval Bosnian art is not, as usually assumed, what I call the propagandistic understanding proposed by medieval Catholic theologians such as Bonaventura or St. Aquinas, but rather an older, “mystical” tradition based on Alexandrian methods of scriptural exegesis and attested among authors as diverse as St. Augustine, Alcuin of York and Richard of St. Victor.

The theory of “mystical” seeing ultimately serves to relate theological concerns to anthropological and iconological ones, leading to an interdisciplinary understanding of the problems of “art” and “symbolism”. Following the work of the anthropologists Clifford Geertz and particularly Victor Turner, who have demonstrated the complex and multilayered nature of cultures in even the most “primitive” societies, I propose that symbols, as suggested by Panofsky’s original iconology, should be read on three different levels. Unlike Panofsky’s conception, where the application of this methodology is assumed to provide access to an objective meaning of art, I propose that the three levels of meaning reflect the existence of different reception practices among the original observers. Such reception practices are further attested by anthropologists of death, whose accounts have been derived from the valuable collections of Richard Huntington/Peter Metcalf and Maurice Bloch/Jonathan Perry. Thus the *stećak* imagery is ultimately analyzed in relation to the totality of discourses discussed in this study, including the problems of heresy and dualism, the history of medieval Bosnia and the Bosnian Church, and the theological conception of mystical seeing.

1.3. Conclusion: The Wider Significance

At the end of this introduction to the problematics of *stećak* imagery and its contextual framework, let me briefly address the wider significance of my treatment of this topic.

Most importantly, the *stećak* and its bas-reliefs represent an original and fascinating artistic phenomenon that has not even nearly received the (particularly international) scholarly attention it deserves. If one is prepared to abandon the Eurocentric, Renaissance-based standards of artistic

beauty, the *stećak* reveal a unique aesthetic that succeeds in creating a harmony between the sheer grandiosity of the monolithic monuments and the subtlety of the often barely visible symbols and compositions engraved on their surfaces. Their magnificence can only be partially captured by drawings or photography, however, revealing itself in the relationship they establish with the surrounding natural environment that can be experienced by visiting the original sites. In a period when Western European customs dictated a fashion of burials inside churches, the creators of the *stećak* stones persistently built their gravestones in natural environments, and we should assume that they had a strong reason for it. Through my work, I hope to be able to contribute to raising awareness about this neglected aspect of European (and global) cultural heritage.

Furthermore, as noted above, despite the recent nomination of 22 *stećak* sites for the status of UNESCO World Heritage, the roughly 70,000 surviving stones remain highly endangered monuments, subject to weathering, vandalistic attacks and damage and displacement caused by construction works. While the adequate protection of all *stećak* stones will probably remain an excessively ambitious goal, their renewed registration and digitalization would represent a significant step towards their further analysis and understanding. Most importantly, it would demonstrate the association between individual motifs and *stećak* shapes and particular regions, something that has only received little attention by scholars. Additionally, a systematic archeological excavation of a wide sample of *stećak* sites (rather than only a few isolated necropoli as carried out in the past) would provide a more satisfactory chronology of the appearance and development of the *stećak* culture. While I may not be able to directly contribute to these efforts through this work, raising awareness about the problem can hopefully also represent the beginning of a future solution.

The lack of adequate care and protection points towards a problem that can unfortunately not be completely avoided in a scholarly engagement with the *stećak* stones, and that is the continuing socio-political volatility of Bosnia and Herzegovina (and the surrounding countries in which *stećak* stones can also be found). As briefly discussed above, Bosnia and Herzegovina

remains deeply divided between its three dominant ethno-national groups: the Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Orthodox Christians (Serbs) and Catholics (Croats). As the *stećak* culture predates the emergence of these three ethnic groups (despite primordialist claims to the contrary), it plays an ambivalent role in their national(ist) historiographies, being either ignored as an anomaly or claimed as exclusive national property.¹⁶ In my opinion, however, the *stećak* culture can play a very significant symbolic role in any future effort to create a shared identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹⁷

An additional level of significance is created by the possibility that, as argued in this study, the art of the *stećak* may represent the only known remnant of “dualist Christian” or “neo-Manichaean” material culture, a culture that, it must be remembered, was brutally repressed for most of the entire millennium during which it existed. Paulicians of eastern Anatolia, Bulgarian Bogomils, Italian Patarens and Cathars of Languedoc either did not produce any material culture of significance, or its traces have been largely destroyed, hidden and forgotten during the centuries after their disappearance. Thus the *stećak* stones can be considered as a unique and significant source for the questions left open by the few written sources discussing these movements, most notably those regarding the nature of their religious beliefs (as opposed to dogma). It is clear, however, that this thesis must be treated with care, as the dualist Christians cannot be regarded as a homogenous group, but rather a series of homologous movements that were perhaps never directly related.

While connections between the different dualist movements cannot be proven using written sources, the visual material should be analyzed independently, rather than approached with an opinion formed *a priori*. The analysis of *stećak* imagery may demonstrate or at least indicate the

¹⁶ Ironically, however, the latter option generally does not lead to the adoption of adequate preservation and protection measures. A prime example is the only *stećak* stone believed to show a saint (St. Christopher), and thus often used as a significant argument in favour of the “orthodox” interpretation of the imagery. The *stećak*, which can be seen in a perfect state on around 50 year old photographs, is now located in the backyard of a brick factory and has been broken in half.

¹⁷ This question is dealt with in detail by Amila Buturović in her book *Stone speaker: Medieval Tombs, Landscape, and Bosnian Identity in the Poetry of Mak Dizdar*.

existence of artistic and cultural connections between the geo-cultural areas in which dualist Christian movements emerged. As I argue, in some of its features the *stećak* does indeed show striking parallels with medieval Armenian and central Asian art, as well as, to a lesser extent, the arts of the Languedoc and Italy. In this way, the *stećak* becomes interesting in a time when academic thinking is preoccupied with reconsidering the relationship between the “West” and the “Orient” and its own role in the construction of these binary terms. The *stećak*, as well as the idea of a pre-Renaissance transmission and influence of Eastern dualistic thought on western Europe generally does not fit into a traditional image of “Western culture” triumphantly emerging during the Renaissance by rediscovering its ancient roots.

Finally, my analysis of *stećak* imagery has necessitated a confrontation with the limitations of traditional art-historical methodology. While purely formal and aesthetic concerns may have some value in themselves, my desire to understand the art of the *stećak* led to an engagement with diverse disciplines such as historiography, theology and anthropology. In the process, I have tried to develop an interdisciplinary methodology that would unite all these disciplines within a field that may broadly be classified as iconography or iconology. This theoretical framework has enabled me to carry out a rich and multi-layered analysis of the *stećak* imagery that may not always identify its “true meaning,” but can at least provide a few of the possible ways it was experienced by its original observers. Thus I would hope that the significance of my work can go beyond its immediate subject matter and provide a contribution to the dynamic and still evolving academic field of visual culture studies.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPT OF HERESY

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Matthew 13:3-9¹⁸

The term heresy originates in the religiously and culturally pluralistic world of the ancient Mediterranean. The ancient Greek word αἵρεσις (‘haireisis’) can be translated as ‘difference,’ ‘choice’ or ‘opinion’. Prior to its evolution into a more technical term associated particularly with the world of Christianity, it signified a preference for one of the numerous competing religious and philosophical schools operating within and beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. From the very beginning, heresy was thus associated with a personally selected opinion, a consciously chosen distinction between individuals or groups.

In the New Testament, the word appears in a somewhat evolved shape, denoting a party or sect.¹⁹ However, contrary to its subsequent development in the Christian context, in the Pauline epistles heresy is still seen as something natural, or at least unavoidable: “No doubt there have to be differences (‘heresies’) among you to show which of you have God’s approval” (1 Cor 11:19). It is only gradually that the term will acquire the additional dimension of an explicitly false opinion, as, for example, in this definition by the 13th century English cleric Robert Grosseteste:

¹⁸ All biblical quotes are taken from the New International Version.

¹⁹ As, for example, in Acts 5:17: “Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party (‘heresy’) of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.”

“an opinion chosen by human perception, contrary to Holy Scripture, publicly avowed and obstinately defended“ (Moore 2012, 9). In addition, with the transformation of Christianity from a periodically persecuted minority religious movement to the official ideology of the Roman Empire that began in the early 4th century, heresy gradually became jurisdictionally criminalized and eventually equated with the the crime of *lèse-majesté*, the violation of a reigning sovereign, and thus formally punishable by death. Over time, the nature of heresy became ever-more precisely defined, so that, by the 13th century, it becomes necessary to equate it with “whatever the papacy explicitly or implicitly condemned” (Lambert 8). The task of this chapter is to trace the stages that defined this development and thus discursively deconstruct the term ‘heresy.’

There are two dominant approaches to the study of heresy. The first one is based upon a more or less uncritical reliance on heresiological writings composed by representatives of orthodox churches. These writings tend to reduce the different heresies they encountered to a few basic types and stress their continuity across time - arguing, for example, for an unbroken link between the first Manichaeans in the 3rd century Middle East and the last known dualists in the late medieval Balkans. The other, more recent approach is a product of a more critical historiographic methodology, generally distrusting heresiological sources and stressing the differences and discontinuities between individual heretical movements.

Needless to say, both of these approaches are tied to particular ideological implications, regardless of whether these are intentional or not. The first, ‘heresiological’ approach implies the existence of one or several ‘eternal’ ideological enemies of the orthodox church(es), enemies that can then, depending on personal preferences, be either vilified or celebrated. The ‘critical’ approach, on the other hand, tends to emphasize the sociological factors leading to the repeated emergence of heresies across time and space, ultimately implying that it is only the orthodox churches that form a continuous historical link between the worlds of the ancient Mediterranean

and medieval Europe.²⁰ As my approach is informed by a general skepticism towards the idea of a completely ‘objective’ historiography, I will express my sympathies towards the possibility that, despite all efforts by the imperial and religious authorities to the contrary, certain underground, alternative cultural and ideological currents have succeeded in surviving and affecting the history of medieval Europe.²¹ However, rather than arguing for a perfect homogeneity of different heretical movements, I will focus on discerning single characteristic features that act as historical threads connecting various heresies into a heterogenous, yet ultimately connected current.

The question of (dis)continuity of heretical movements, however, is not the central problem of this study. Aiming more towards a terminological genealogy than a historiographic account of the development of ‘heresy’ in the Christian world, I will identify some of the key moments in the evolution of this concept, starting from the earliest Christians and ending with the High Middle Ages as the period in which the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and heretical movements reached a climax. Taking a clue from the biblical parable with which this chapter began, I will view the growth and proliferation of Christianity - in all its different shapes - in more organic than mechanical terms, replacing the usual stress on causalities and abstract dogmatic principles with a focus on family resemblances and multi-dimensional conceptualizations of religious phenomena.

Most importantly, I will challenge the still wide-spread idea of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ as two static, eternally opposed, and hermetically sealed categories and adopt a more nuanced approach which recognizes that both are the result of a complex dialectical process within which legalistic

²⁰ This approach also tends to deny agency to adherents of heretical movements. Identifying two types of what I have termed the ‘critical’ approach, Caterina Bruschi writes: “Both approaches overlook these groups’ will to challenge, reject or change authority. And they treat beliefs and believers as merely instrumental and incidental to those entities to which they do attribute agency, and therefore schemes, projects and policies: feudal lords, Italian communes with their complex political life, religious orders with their influential ‘production of ideas’, and the papacy as the ultimate and prime mover of all Christendom” (105).

²¹ An additional factor for my sympathies is the possibility of a significant, but widely neglected current of cultural impact of the “East” upon Western Europe.

classifications of the orthodox churches and imperial authorities play as significant a role as the actual beliefs and customs of those groups or individuals accused of heresy. In order to reach a more profound understanding of the concept of 'heresy', it is thus important to pay attention to the development of its terminological 'other', the notion of orthodoxy. Furthermore, what needs to be kept in mind is that, viewed diachronically, the notions of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' often overlap, meaning that their precise distinction depends on the angle from which they are observed as much as their objective characteristics.

2.1. Early Christian heresies: Gnosticism, Montanism and Donatism

Most contemporary scholars of Christianity would agree with the once revolutionary thesis of the German theologian Walter Bauer that 'heresies' - in the sense of 'opinions' or 'parties' - represent the earliest form of Christianity, out of which the institutional, dogmatic orthodox Church developed only gradually. Discussing the earliest phase of its development, Bauer writes that "at that time there probably was no version of Christianity worthy of note that did not have at its disposal at least one written Gospel, in which Jesus appears as the bearer and guarantor of that particular view, and (if only with a silent gesture) repulses those who think differently" (203). The contradictions inherent in the nascent religious movement are reflected in the canonical New Testament itself: its different conceptions of the nature and teachings of Jesus Christ, the tension between the models of a Judaic, institutional religion embodied by Peter and a universal, spiritual message represented by Paul, and the question of the legitimacy of continuing revelation posed by the canonization of John's Apocalypse.

The inconsistencies are further exacerbated once the apocryphal writings of the Early Christians are accepted as equally (un)reliable testimonies of Jesus's mission. Edward Peters thus writes that "it was loyalty rather than a well-defined body of specific beliefs that marked out the early Christians' attitudes to each other and to the person and teaching of Jesus" (17). Accordingly, the development of orthodoxy should be conceived of as a narrowing down of this original theological diversity, rather than the preservation of one primeval form of Christianity. In the

following section, a closer look will be taken at three of the most significant of these early 'rejected' elements of Christianity that led to the creation of independent movements which were eventually declared 'heretical': Gnosticism, Montanism and Donatism.

Gnosticism

Among the myriad of movements that found their place in the works of the earliest heresiologists, it is the label of gnosticism that takes up a particularly distinguished position. In one of the very first works dealing with the problem of heresy, Irinaeus's 2nd century *Against Heresies*, an entire chapter "treats of the exposure and refutation of knowledge (gnosis) falsely so called" (Preface). While gnosticism is still often defined primarily by its allegedly un-Christian metaphysics, a more fundamental characteristic that distinguishes it from what would eventually become orthodox Christianity is an insistence on a specific understanding of the role of knowledge - which is the meaning of the Greek work *gnosis* - that is sharply contrasted with mere belief or *pistis*. Within this conception, gnosis is understood as a particular form of knowledge whose adoption leads to an internal transformation of the human being, and is thus distinguished from the term *theoria*, which represents a merely 'optical' memorization of a series of propositions (Jonas 37). *Gnosis* was usually regarded as a secret revelation available only to the select few, thus leading to a general characterization of gnosticism as an intellectual and elitist form of religiosity.

The essence of the conflict between the orthodox Church and gnosticism was the question whether gnosis is sufficient or, indeed, necessary for the salvation of the human being. An affirmative answer to this question implies a radical devaluation of the Church and its sacraments as necessary elements of mediation between the human and the divine. As Bauer writes: "apparently those in question have boasted that with their new and perfect knowledge of the true God [...] they themselves are the true bearers of the spirit and promise eternal life only to their followers" (92). The Dutch historian of religion Theodor van Baaren lists a series of characteristics that were generally encountered among movements labeled as 'gnostic'; they

include a rejection of the Old Testament, a belief in a transcendent God, an anti-cosmic attitude, a view of the world as a mixture of spiritual and material elements, the existence of three distinct classes of human beings, a metaphysical dualism and a docetist Christology. Although most scholars now reject a direct link between Gnosticism and the medieval dualist movements that will be discussed in the following chapter, virtually all of these teachings will be encountered among the latter, thus justifying the frequently used label of ‘neo-Gnosticism’ in a typological, if not historiographic sense.

Despite the eventual condemnation of gnosticism as heretical, the relationship between gnosis and orthodoxy is ambivalent: the term is used in an affirmative sense by some of the most significant early Christian thinkers, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Evagrius Ponticus. As Stuart G. Hall writes, Clement taught that “the goal of philosophy, as of the gospel, is knowledge, gnosis, and the one who reaches it is the true Gnostic (...) Lower forms of virtue, like refraining from evil, or doing good through fear of God or in hope of an earthly or heavenly reward, fall short of knowledge. The Gnostic loves the knowledge of God for its own sake” (98). Gnosis is a concept that finds its supporters even among recent distinguished representatives of the Eastern Orthodox Church, such as Vladimir Lossky, who writes that “gnosis, the highest stage of awareness of the divine, is an experience of uncreated light, the experience itself being light: ‘in Thy light, we shall see light’” (218).

The problematics of gnosticism thus already incorporate two of the most significant questions that, as will be shown, accompany the study of medieval heresies: it is impossible to sharply distinguish gnosticism from ‘orthodoxy,’ and there is insufficient evidence for the connections between the different movements to which this label was assigned. Regarding the latter, it is important to keep in mind the distinction between *gnosis* as a philosophical or theological concept, and gnosticism as a series of more or less closely related historical phenomena. In the previously mentioned article, van Baaren writes that “it is not possible to isolate one or a few

elements as constituting the essentials of gnosticism. Gnosticism as such is an organic historic complex that cannot be satisfactorily analyzed simply by resolving it into its elements” (175).²²

Certain scholars go a step further and reject the label of gnosticism altogether, arguing that it was ultimately a heresiological construct that grouped together essentially unrelated movements. Thus Freeman, seeing “gnosticism” as an attempt to make sense of the Christian message through Hellenic philosophical concepts, writes that “a preferable approach is to see Christian theology in this era as an interplay between Gentile newcomers, many of them well educated in Greek philosophy, and more traditional Christians“ (152). Nevertheless, the general rejection of the idea of ‘gnosis’ by the orthodox Church - whether it corresponded to real movements or not - ultimately moved Christianity in the direction of a greater stress on the role of faith or belief than knowledge.

Montanism

A second significant early Christian movement that received the label of ‘heresy,’ and thereby also influenced the concept of ‘orthodoxy,’ was Montanism, the New Prophecy or Cataphrygianism.²³ The essence of this movement, which emerged in the second half of the second century in the Anatolian region of Phrygia, was constituted by the claim that a group of charismatic preachers - the founder Montanus and his two followers Priscilla and Maximilia - stood in a special relationship with the Holy Spirit, enabling them to transmit divine messages

²² Due to its relevance to the entire approach to religious history adopted in this book, the passage will be quoted here in full: “The method of addition and subtraction does not work in the history of religions. A religion cannot be compared to a collection of coins to which one can add a few, or from which one can take some without causing some essential change. A religion, like a molecule, has a structure in which every element has only one possible place; add one, subtract one, or, even only change the place of some of the elements, and the result can be a decided and essential transformation. Gnosticism is what it is, because of the manner in which a considerable number of elements form together an organic whole, and because of the way in which every one of these elements functions in the whole complex. As such gnosticism is a unique historic phenomenon and can only be described as such” (175).

²³ The custom of naming heretical movements after their creator (Montanus), teaching (the New Prophecy) or region of origin (Phrygia) will remain common throughout the period under consideration.

expressed through ecstatic prophecies. Although the Montanists did not explicitly preach heterodox dogmatic teachings, the main reason for their conflict with the wider Christian community was their insistence on exceptionally strict ethical standards: “They believed that in these ways the Paraclete [...] had now come to bring in a stricter discipline than that allowed by Jesus, this was their chief unorthodoxy“ (Hall 40).

The Montanists’ beliefs were partly based on scriptural passages such as John 14:26: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” The Montanists were not primarily blamed for their beliefs as such, but rather because of the alleged illegitimacy of their prophets. The belief in ecstatic prophecies facilitated by the Holy Spirit had been a constituent part of early Christianity, and the confirmation of their legitimacy can be found in the New Testament itself.²⁴ While the Montanists claimed that they had received their prophetic gifts through a line of succession ultimately going back to the apostles, the representatives of orthodoxy were basing their attacks on denying this link, which in itself was still considered legitimate (Tabbernee 37). With the canonization of the New Testament, the final formulation of Christian dogma, and the ossification of the Church hierarchy, however, this aspect of early Christianity became more neglected and eventually completely disappeared from official orthodoxy. However, the phenomenon of charismatic religious leaders could not be completely destroyed, so that over time such personalities founded a series of more or less durable movements of which many were declared heretical and eventually destroyed, while others succeeded in finding their place within the framework of the institutional church.

Discussing the reasons for the emergence of Montanism, Hall writes that “it may reflect resentment about the compromises of city churches growing more worldly, or with the intellectual presumptions of church teachers like the gnostic leaders and Justin, we do not know.“

²⁴ “Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (Acts 2:2-4).

(47) Commenting on the penetration of Christianity among the upper classes of Alexandria in the same period, Chadwick observes a similar phenomenon, noting that “the choice for the convert seemed too often to be between clever, eloquently defended heresy on the one side and a dim, obscurantist orthodoxy on the other“ (95). This situation may indeed explain why Montanism succeeded in spreading not only in its home province of Phrygia, but across the entire Roman Empire.²⁵

Thus Montanism should primarily be seen as a reform movement, which only became ‘heretical’ after it was condemned by representatives of the Catholic Church. Its central element was a kind of moral, non-intellectual religious perfectionism. The Montanists drew a sharp distinction between *spiritales*, the ‘spiritual’ people who were committed to their ethical standards, and *psychici*, ‘carnal’ people who did not live up to their moral rigour. Unlike the gnostics, however, among the Montanist this distinction does not seem to have been linked to any notion of secret knowledge. The rejection of Montanism thus represented a crucial step in the transformation of Christianity from a ‘living,’ still malleable faith to an institutional religion defined by the centrality of the concept of ‘orthodoxy’.

Donatism

Donatism developed in the early fourth century in Northern Africa, at that time part of the Roman Empire. It is named after its first leader, the bishop Donatus Magnus. The roots of Donatism reach back to the persecutions of Christians carried out by the Roman Emperor Diocletian at the beginning of the fourth century. At that time, under threat of death, Christians

²⁵ The probably most influential supporter of Montanism was the Carthaginian Tertullian, the first significant Latin Christian theologian. Tertullian is best known for his insistence on a strict separation of philosophy and Christianity, poignantly expressed in his famous dictum “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem, or the Academy with the Church?”. He was thus, on the one hand, strongly opposed to the excessive intellectualization of Christianity that was the norm among movements which were - rightly or wrongly - labelled as Gnostic. On the other hand, Tertullian’s strict ethical standards ultimately also led him to a rejection of the orthodox church: “For a considerable time his advocacy of Montanism was conducted from within the Catholic Church, but as it became clear that the Church was not going to grant recognition to the New Prophecy, Tertullian passed outside the Church, condemning it as unspiritual, institutionalized and compromised by worldliness” (Chadwick 92).

were requested to carry out traditional sacrifices to Roman gods (a custom that was strictly forbidden by their religion), while priests were forced to hand over their religious books and lists of church members. Many complied to these demands and were subsequently termed *traditores*, “those who handed over.”

After the end of persecutions (officially, with the issuing of the Milan edict of 313), many *traditores* were allowed to return to their clerical functions, which led to the opposition of many Christians who would eventually gather around the movement of Donatism. What started as a problem of church discipline and administration, eventually turned into a dogmatic question of the rights of priests guilty of grave sins to continue distributing sacraments and carrying out other church services. The final orthodox theological response to this question was provided by Augustine (precisely during his conflict with the Donatists), who established the principle that the morality of the priest has no impact upon the validity of sacraments, thus declaring the Donatists heretical.

The case of Donatism (as well as, to a certain extent, Montanism) thus shows a very significant characteristic of the concept of heresy: ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ are not two eternal, clearly distinguished categories, but often merely represent two opposed responses to a newly emerged religious dilemma. The history of Donatism also demonstrates the way in which a putatively non-essential question can lead to a lasting schism, and even a conversion to a different religion. Frend notes that the conflict “was also a regional schism, the outcome of a rivalry between the clergy of the province of Numidia and those in the capital, Carthage” (69). Despite imperial persecution, the Donatists survived until the 7th century, when many of them converted to Islam after the Arab conquest of the region.

Besides providing the orthodox stance on the legitimacy of sinning priests, in the course of the conflict between the orthodox church and the Donatists, Augustine also developed a theological justification for their persecution. Augustine’s argument was based on an ingenious interpretation of the Parable of the Great Banquet, reported in Luke 14:16-23 (Hall 209). In the parable, after a

man had prepared a great banquet, the invitees refused to come, providing different excuses. Eventually, the host tells his servant to “go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full” (Luke 14:23). In Augustine’s interpretation, the meaning of the parable is that in the case of people who refuse to join the church (in this instance, the Donatists), the church should have the right to force them to do so. Commenting on this argument, Hall notes that “whatever accounted for it in Augustine’s lifetime, it had the unfortunate effect of giving theological authority for all kinds of vicious repression in the Middle Ages and the 16th century, and to some extent since“ (209). Freeman has an even more damning verdict of Augustine’s overall impact on the development of Christianity and Western civilization in general: “Augustine's lasting contribution to political thought lies in his justification of authoritarian regimes that see virtue in order per se, rather than in any abstract ideal such as justice or the defence of human rights, or even in the teachings of Jesus themselves“ (AD 381 171).²⁶ If, as I argued earlier, the rejection of Montanism represented a transformation of a living faith into a dogmatic religion, the denial of the Donatists marked the victory of the idea of the church as an institution rather than an assembly of individuals striving for moral perfection in this world.

From schism to heresy

Despite their initial success, none of these movements that were declared heretical by the early church - Gnosticism, Montanism and Donatism - survived longer than a few centuries, eventually dying out by the time of the early Middle Ages.²⁷ Their long-term significance lies primarily in the permanent imprint they left on the concepts of heresy and orthodoxy.

²⁶ In that respect, the rejection of another “heresy” had a significant impact on the development of Augustine’s thought. Pelagianism was named after its founder Pelagius, who argued that it was possible to achieve moral perfection through free will alone. Augustine, however, argued that the will is inherently corrupt as a result of original sin, and that therefore divine grace is necessary for a virtuous life. It is possible to see how Augustine’s way of thinking shown here, denigrating the ultimate significance of the individual will in favour of divine grace, also led to his rejection of the relevance of the priest’s morality in favour of the function of the church.

²⁷ With the exception of Gnosticism, which still survives in the ethno-religious group of the Mandaeans indigenous to modern-day Iraq.

Remarkably, in neither one of these movements was the primary reason for the conflict with the orthodox church of a dogmatic nature.²⁸ Their differences with the orthodox church were more subtle and it would be very difficult or impossible to identify them by restricting ourselves to reading their theological writings. Hence, besides having been briefly discussed in order to point out certain conceptions that could lead to a schism from the orthodox church - different understandings of the role of knowledge, prophecy and morality -, these movements, taken as a whole, demonstrate the fact that heresy as a socio-religious phenomenon is much wider than merely dogmatic heterodoxy to which it is sometimes reduced.

They also demonstrate the fact that schisms caused by different reasons have the tendency to mutate into true heresies, as it is stressed by the heresiologists of early Christianity, Jerome and Augustine: “schism without heresy is not possible in the long term, because (...) with time every sect calls itself a church and invents a heresy, in order to dogmatically justify its separation” (Hagender 53). This assessment, written from the perspective of the orthodox church, could also be reversed in order to reach a first preliminary conclusion: *schism without heresy is not possible in the long term, because with time, the church invents (a new) orthodoxy, in order to dogmatically justify its condemnation of schismatics.*

2.2 Heresy as a legal term

The heresies discussed in the previous section emerged in a period when Christianity still was an occasionally persecuted minority movement in the Roman Empire and thus without any support of the imperial government. Already at this stage, however, certain developments in the structure of the church led to a first significant shift in the evolution of the meaning of the term ‘heresy’ from the more neutral associations of a choice or party towards its later implications of an explicitly ‘false’ opinion. Even prior to its elevation to the status of the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity had taken the first steps in its development from a loosely aligned

²⁸ Although there were Gnostic movements with heterodox teachings.

movement of local congregations with significant mutual differences to a hierarchically organized institutional religion.

In order to fully understand the subsequent evolution of the term ‘heresy’ in all its complexity, however, it is necessary to take into account the legal dimensions it eventually acquired. The most significant development in this respect was the elevation of Christianity to the status of the official imperial cult, initiated by the emperor Constantine I (ruled 306 - 337) and completed by Theodosius I (ruled 379 - 395). It is only from this period onwards that ‘heresy’ truly starts to develop the familiar conceptual contours of a religious movement that is, in one way or another, considered not only ‘false’ but also criminal. A second critical period in the evolution of the term occurred in the 12th and 13th centuries in Western Europe. During this time, the Roman Catholic church underwent a new phase of institutional development and adopted a whole series of resolutions that defined ‘heresy’ with much greater precision, and thus fundamentally changed its nature.

Towards a hierarchical institution

Broadly speaking, it was in the course of the third and fourth centuries that Christianity underwent a series of developments which transformed it from a diverse and loosely associated movement to an institutionalized and hierarchical religion. During the first two centuries, Christianity was led and propagated by two different types of figures with a high degree of independence: bishops responsible for local congregations and itinerant apostles or prophets (Chadwick 46/47).²⁹ Around the year 200, the bishops had jurisdiction over loosely allied house churches: “the church was not so tightly defined as to exclude those of other congregations, and perhaps even the clerical status of their leaders could be acknowledged” (Hall 82). This structure

²⁹ Describing the role of the latter, the 4th century church historian Eusebius wrote „Staying only to lay the foundations of the faith in one foreign place or another, appoint others as pastors, and entrust to them the leading of these newly brought in, the preachers set off again for other lands and peoples with the grace and cooperation of God, for even at that late date many miraculous powers of the divine spirit worked through them, so that at the first hearing whole crowds in a body embraced with a whole-hearted eagerness the worship of the universal creator“ (Eusebius 148).

changed in the first half of the 3rd century, when pope Fabian divided churches into congregations, thereby marking an end to house churches (Hall 83), and the Carthaginian bishop Cyprian defined the church by the mutual recognition of bishops, held together through an imperial-style bureaucracy (Hall 89). Eventually, the church would become a strictly hierarchical organization, headed by five patriarchs (of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem), and followed by metropolitans, archbishops and bishops, while itinerant prophets were stripped of their function and influence.

This evolution represented a remarkable shift in the nature of Christianity, as an older generation of influential Christian thinkers had not paid much attention to the significance of the church hierarchy:

Clement hardly mentions bishops and presbyters anywhere [...] For him the catholic and apostolic faith was what his excellent teachers got from their apostolic predecessors. Orthodox Christianity operates like a Greek philosophical school [...] The truly spiritual person, the 'gnostic' who lives according to the Gospel is the true presbyter and deacon, though he lacks ecclesiastical office (Hall 97).

The evolution of Christianity's organizational structure went hand in hand with some fundamental changes in its rituals, most notably the transformation of the custom of "breaking the bread", which was essentially a shared meal, into the formalized ceremony of the Eucharist (Chadwick 263), a ritual in which priests officially act as the intermediaries between God and humanity. Summarizing developments in the late 4th century, Chadwick thus writes: "ceremonial began to become quite elaborate. Greek clergy began to wear ornate clothes, and the ritual acquired a high dramatic splendour. At the same time the pressure of the multitude joining the church, and perhaps also the struggle against Arianism, led to a marked insistence on holy awe and on the transcendent wonder of the eucharistic action" (266). The newly developed institutional and hierarchical church was thus much better equipped to define and persecute what it regarded as a false or misguided belief.

The criminalization of heresy

Heresy first ceased being a purely theological or ecclesiastical term and gained a new, legalistic dimension in the Thessaloniki edict adopted in the year 380. This definition was subsequently integrated into the Theodosian Code, the foundation of the entire Byzantine law. In Book XVI, 326, article I,2, the definition of the orthodox faith is followed by this statement:

We command that those persons who follow this rule shall embrace the name of Catholic Christians. The rest, however, whom We adjudge demented and insane, shall sustain the infamy of heretical dogmas, their meeting places shall not receive the name of churches, and they shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and secondly by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with the divine judgment.

The wording of this law demonstrates several key characteristics of the legalistic understanding of heresy that will remain relevant for the entire period of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (and beyond). Firstly, even though orthodox Christianity was previously defined as the faith followed by pope Damasus and the Alexandrian bishop Peter, the final authority in its formulation remains with the Emperor. Furthermore, in the case of punishment of heretics, the imperial will is fully equated with the divine. It is also clear that heresy has formally been declared a criminal act and thus liable to punishment.³⁰ The final evidence of the totalitarian way of thinking that produced this law is the additional disqualification of heretics as ‘demented’ and ‘insane’. Those who did not agree with the imperial interpretation of Christianity thus received a

³⁰ This aspect was developed further in the law of Arcadius, Honorius and Theodosius II, 22. II, from 407, when heresy was formally declared a public crime.

three-fold sentence: a terrestrial punishment, the threat of divine vengeance, and finally a denial of their sanity.

The inclusion of the concept of heresy into the domain of imperial law had a consequence that will remain relevant for the entire period of the Middle Ages: an inextricable intertwining of theology and politics. Orthodox Christianity virtually became a synonym for imperial ideology, so that an opposition to the principle of Roman, i.e. Byzantine imperialism could easily be construed as a heresy. Similarly to the previously discussed problem of schism, it can be said that any systematic political opposition to the concept of the one universal Roman Empire inevitably implied certain theological disagreements.

A second crucial phase in the development of heresy as a legal term occurred in the period of the growth and development of the Roman Catholic Church after the final schism from the Byzantine, Eastern Orthodox Church in the mid-11th century. Although the principle of the papal primacy in the Christian world had been theoretically developed during the pontificates of Damasus I (366.-384.) and Innocent I (402.-417.), its negation was formally declared a heresy during the papacy's struggle against the autonomy of the Ambrosian church of Milan in the 11th century (Hagender 66). By the mid-13th century, the concept of heresy was significantly expanded and formalized in the writings of canonical lawyers.³¹

In an article written in this period, around the year 1242, Geoffrey of Trani precisely distinguished six different types of heresy: the spreading and following of false beliefs; an interpretation of the Bible that is not in accordance with the Roman Church; the separation from the sacraments and the church community through excommunication; simony; publicly expressed doubt in religion and the slightest disagreement with orthodox teaching; the denial of the papal jurisdictional primacy (Hagender 45-47). A particularly significant element of this legalistic understanding of heresy is its final element, the “denial of the papal jurisdictional

³¹ A poignant symptom of the increasingly legalistic character of Christianity in this period is the fact that between 1150 and 1303, all popes were trained lawyers (Southern 215).

primacy.” Its inclusion represents the final step in the transformation of the Roman Catholic Church from a religious into a legal-political institution, particularly if we take into account the status of the papacy as the only serious political counterweight of the Holy Roman Empire in this period. The penultimate point, particularly its second part, “the slightest disagreement with orthodox teaching,” reveals another significant characteristic of the church in this period, namely its desire to fully homogenize Roman Catholic Christianity. In a practical sense, this element meant that the term “heresy” became highly suitable for political abuse, because every individual in any religious system can presumably be found guilty of some kind of “slight disagreement with orthodox teaching.”³²

Besides this formal definition of the nature of heresy, the period witnessed the adoption of a whole set of laws that determined the way in which the ecclesiastical and secular authorities were supposed to treat persons suspected or accused of heresy. Some of these laws also determined the nature of “orthodoxy” in greater detail, leaving those outside of the bounds of these definitions susceptible to accusations of heresy.

According to Edward Peters, during the 12th, and partly the beginning of the 13th century, debates between heretics and orthodox Christians, often public ones, were customary in Western Europe (166). One of the first significant steps taken to change this situation was the Third Lateran Council in 1179, when it was decreed that heretics, as well as those who defend and support them, were automatically excommunicated (Peters 168). With the papal decree *Ad Abolendam* from 1184, the legal equivalence between heresy and support of heresy was underlined, and public preaching without the permission of the Roman Church was declared heretical (this decree was later included in the resolutions of the Fourth Lateran Council). The next step was taken with the decree *Vergentis in senium* adopted by Pope Innocent III in 1199, when heresy was formally declared legally equivalent to *lèse-majesté*, the act of an insult of or treason against

³² In reference to the discussion of the dualist movements and the Bosnian Church in the following chapters, it is worth noting the second element of heresy, “an interpretation of the Bible that is not in accordance with the Roman Church.” It points to the fact that there were certain traditions of specific interpretations of biblical passages, meaning that an analysis of heresy must not be limited to a mere comparison of texts that were in use among different religious communities.

the sovereign, which made it formally punishable by death (Peters 195). With the decree *Cum ex officii nostrii* from 1207, it was additionally decided that in the case of a proven heretic, “all his goods also shall be sold ... The house, however, in which a heretic has been received shall be altogether destroyed, nor shall anyone presume to rebuild it; but let that which was a den of iniquity become a receptacle of filth.”³³ In the Fourth Lateran Council from 1215, the doctrine of transubstantiation was confirmed as the only correct interpretation of the sacraments, and the obligation to confess sins to a priest was formally introduced for the first time. At the Council of Toulouse in 1229, the possession of translations of the New Testament in the vernacular languages was forbidden (Peters 195), while at the Tarragon Council of 1242, the refusal of the oath and the opposition to the death sentence were declared heretical (Peters 199). In 1322, struggling with the radical wing of the Franciscans known as the Fraticelli, Pope John XXII declared the idea of apostolic poverty heretical (Barber 148).

These legal resolutions demonstrate the way in which the concept of heresy was constantly expanded and defined in greater detail in the course of the late 12th and 13th centuries. Othmar Hagender notes that “this thought process occurred parallel to the building up of the inquisition and the introduction of the death sentence for heretics, as well as torture as part of the inquisition process,”

Another dimension to the meaning of the term ‘heresy’ was provided by the promulgation of secular laws that supplemented the ecclesiastical ones. In the *Liber Augustalis* adopted by the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II in 1231, the following legislation referred to heretics: “they are serpents who seem to creep in secretly and, under the sweetness of honey, spew out poison. We draw the sword of righteous vengeance against them, and we pursue them more urgently [...] committed to the judgement of the flames, they should be burned alive in the sight of the people“ (Peters 208). Similarly, the *Schwabenspiegel* of 1235 contained the following section entitled

³³ The long-term significance of this measure can be deduced from this comment by Le Roy Ladurie: “This basic cell was none other than the peasant family, embodied in the permanence of a house and in the daily life of a group co-resident under the same roof. In local language this entity was called an ostal; and in the Latin of the Inquisition files it was called a hospicium or, more often, a domus. It should be noted that the words, ostal, domus and hospicium all and inextricably mean both family and house” (24).

Concerning Heretics: “They shall be burned at the stake... In case a feudal prince does not bring heretics to judgement, but protects them, the ecclesiastical court shall excommunicate him“ (Peters 209).

Thus it can be seen how in this period the ecclesiastical and secular legal regulations functioned in conjunction: while the church was responsible for identifying and convicting heretics, it was the task of the secular rulers to formally carry out the punishment, which usually meant burning the convicts at the pyre. Due to the necessity of this kind of cooperation between the ecclesiastical and secular authorities in the combat of heresy, a lack of their mutual trust and support has often been cited as one of the crucial factors that enabled the spread of heresies in certain European regions (Southern 20). As will be seen in the following chapters, this condition was fulfilled in virtually all the areas in which the so-called dualist medieval heresies were able to gain a foot-hold: for various reasons, ecclesiastical authorities in Bulgaria, Bosnia, Italy and the Languedoc did not enjoy the full support of the local secular rulers.

Finally, it should be noted that, despite enduring stereotypes of the “Dark Ages”, during this period Western Europe was undergoing a significant phase of economic development, leading to a conspicuous expansion of wealth among the political and religious elites. As Bartlett writes, “we can postulate long-term growth comparable with that of the early modern period, with its rapid urbanization and emigration“ (110/111). Even more significantly, socio-economic processes such as urbanization, the development of trade and the spread of literacy led to the development of new forms of life that could not be moulded into traditional ideological assumptions, most notably the classical division of society into workers, warriors and priests with firmly established corresponding rules of behaviour (Peters 59). The actualization of the phenomenon of heresy in this period can therefore not be viewed as a merely theological problem.

At the same time, the opposite extreme must be avoided, according to which “heresies” and their systematic persecution are but an epiphenomenon of essentially economic or political processes.

The social anthropologist Talal Asad stresses that heretics “did not seek a fitting cosmology for a new society already in being - as though religious ideology were a dress for a naked social structure. They sought, with varying degrees of success, to create new forms of social life” (356). Heresy and its persecution thus must be seen as part of a complex social process that involved an inextricable combination of theological, ideological and political dimensions. The draconian legal measures adopted against heretics demonstrate the extent to which the ecclesiastical and secular authorities considered themselves endangered by this socio-religious phenomenon.

2.3 The Ecumenical Councils

In addition to the significance of the legal resolutions discussed in the previous section, the most fundamental factor that led to the emergence of the specific role and function of heresy in the context of imperial Roman/Byzantine Christianity was the institution of the Ecumenical Councils.³⁴ As their name suggests - the Greek word *οικουμένη* means ‘the inhabited world’ - Ecumenical Councils were envisaged as representative of and binding for the entire (Christian) world. Although the early church had already held synods that dealt with matters of importance for the whole of Christianity - the validity of baptism by heretics in Carthage (256 - 7), the teachings of Paul of Samosata in Antioch (264-8) and ecclesiastical discipline in Elvira (306) (Davis 23) - it was only with the imperial political and legal backing of the orthodox church discussed in the previous section that decrees of the Ecumenical Councils received the status of the very foundations of the Christian religion.

In this section, I will discuss some key elements of the first four ecumenical councils, or, more precisely, the most significant ‘heresies’ they condemned: Arianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism. My concern here is not with a systematic exposition of the highly complex historical process that led to the emergence of what is known as Chalcedonian orthodoxy,³⁵ but

³⁴ For a general overview of the history and theology of the Ecumenical Councils, see Davis.

³⁵ Named after the Fourth Ecumenical Council held in the town of Chalcedon in the year 451.

rather with demonstrating the multidimensional nature of these ‘heresies’ and their struggle with the imperial church. Although the debates that led to the final resolutions of the councils were centred around the nature of Jesus Christ and his relationship towards God the Father on the one hand, and the material world on the other, the underlying issues that led to the conflicts were much wider, including different political and cultural traditions. As will be shown, in the course of the process of assigning the labels of ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘heresy’ to the various theological positions that were circulating during this period, the categories were not simply applied according to previously established rules, but they underwent a significant conceptual modification themselves.

Following the first four ecumenical councils, a complex definition of orthodox belief regarding the nature of Jesus Christ was developed, remaining valid for the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and (most) Protestant Churches up to this day:

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the Godbearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us (Bettenson 73).

Despite the claim that the Christology expounded in this credal statement was taught by “Lord Jesus Christ himself”, it was in fact the result of a long process of conflict and negotiation between the most diverse set of opinions and their representatives.³⁶ While virtually all Christians agreed on the centrality of the concept of the Trinity - i.e. the fundamental role of God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit - for their religion, the precise relationship between them was a matter of frequently acrimonious disputes. One extreme of this debate was taken up by the position known as modalism (or Sabellianism, after the name of the most prominent proponent of this position, the third-century priest Sabellius), according to which the trinity is ultimately dissolved in the unity of the Godhead, whereby its separate elements are merely different ‘modes’ of this ultimate unity: “Sabellius also used the analogy of the one sun which can be distinguished into form, light and warmth, so in the one God, form is the Father, light the Word, warmth the Holy Spirit“ (Davis 42). On the other side of the spectrum, according to the position known as adoptionism, associated with Theodotus the Cobbler, Jesus Christ is seen as a human being who only acquires the status of Son of God after his ‘adoption’ by God. Both modalism and adoptionism ultimately remained marginal Christological views, however, with a whole row of alternatives taking up a position in the spectre of possibilities between them.

Arianism or subordinationism

The most influential among these positions was Arianism, named after Arius, an Alexandrian priest active in the second half of the third century. Although none of Arius’s original writings survive, his name is associated with the scripturally based³⁷ Christological idea of subordinationism, or the notion that God the Father is in some way greater than Jesus Christ. More specifically, Arianism is generally identified with the claim that “there was a time when the

³⁶ Authors committed to an ecclesiastical view of church history would argue along the line of Davis that “what the Council of Nicaea did in its credal statement was simply to attend to what the Scripture asserts as true about the Word of God, reduce that multitude of the statements to the one judgement which is the foundation of all the rest and appeal to the intellects of Christians for their assent to this judgement as the foundation of further religious belief and experience“ (71).

³⁷ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. (John 14:28)

Son was not,” implying an ontological priority of God the Father, although it appears that this idea was ascribed to Arius by his enemies (Hall 124). What Arius himself actually taught is that “what subsists before the Son and the creation is only the timeless God, whose will produces the Son, and with him all time and creation” (Hall 125).

The First Council of Nicaea, convened in the year 325 by the Emperor Constantine, declared Arianism heretical and upheld the *homoousian* doctrine, asserting that God the Father and Jesus the Son are “of one substance.” Davis points out that the term *homoousios* was highly problematic, having no foundation in Scripture, possibly implying the previously condemned position of Sabellianism, and finally having Gnostic origins, being associated particularly with the views of Paul of Samosata (61). According to Davis, the main reason *homoousios* was eventually accepted was due to the pressure of the Emperor Constantine himself,³⁸ thus essentially contradicting a strong Early Christian tradition: as Freeman argues, “subordinationism was the dominant and virtually unchallenged theology of the early church” (260).

The extent to which the homoousian creed remained a controversial issue is shown by the subsequent developments in the Roman Empire: only 10 years after the Council of Nicaea, its resolutions were reversed at the First Synod of Tyre, and the following two Roman Emperors, Constantinus II and Valens, supported the subordinationist position. During this time, the missionary Ulfilas spread Arian Christianity among the Goths, who were not fully converted to orthodox Christianity until the 6th century. It was only at the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381 that the homoousian creed was finally adopted as the official position of the orthodox Church.

³⁸ An indirect confirmation of the extent to which Constantine consciously influenced the nature of Christianity is the fact that he referred to himself as the thirteenth apostle and was laid to rest in the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople, where it was envisaged that the remains of all the apostles would eventually be gathered (Hall 139).

Despite the centrality of the theological dimension of subordinationism, however, it is important to keep in mind Hall's remark that "the dispute about Arius led to divisions between churchmen over many other issues, both ecclesiastical (such as the alleged episcopal tyranny of Athanasius) and theological (such as whether the Son is like the Father or unlike him), and much of this is called the 'Arian controversy' even though Arius had nothing directly to do with the issues" (122). But what factor can ultimately be said to have caused the adoption of the homoousian rather than the subordinationist position? For theologians committed to one of the dominant forms of Christianity, i.e. the Chalcedonian creed, it is a simple question of truth prevailing over mistakes or misunderstanding. Thus, for example, the Orthodox Christian bishop Timothy Ware writes: "[Arius's] motive, no doubt, was to protect the uniqueness and the transcendence of God, but the effect of his teaching, in making Christ less than God, was to render impossible our human deification. Only if Christ is truly God, the council answered, can He unite us to God, for none but God Himself can open to humans the way of union" (22). But it is clear that the reasoning involved here is somewhat tautological or at least arbitrary, for, logically speaking, there is nothing preventing a subordinationist Christ from being the agent of human deification.

A different response is provided by Davis, who argues that Arianism was a more 'imperial' form of Christianity than the homoousian creed. According to him, "the Arians, denying the consubstantiality of the son, were more inclined to emphasize the fact that while Christ is head of man, God is head of Christ and that thus the God-enthroned ruler is superior to the bishops instituted by Christ" (Davis 73). However, it is possible to argue the exact opposite: the elevation of Jesus Christ to the status of a divine figure also implied a glossing over his scriptural status as a rebel against the Roman Empire (Freeman 252). Furthermore, the fully divine status of Jesus allowed for a continuation of the older pagan tradition of the Emperor as a semi-divine figure. In any case, it was the homoousian creed that eventually did become the Roman imperial religion, while the banner of Arianism was carried by the various Gothic tribes that represented the most serious threat to the Roman imperial ideology for several centuries.

Nestorianism and Monophysitism

Nestorianism³⁹ and Monophysitism⁴⁰ can be seen as two diametrically opposed responses to a crucial question left open by the adoption of the homoousian creed: if Jesus is “one in essence” with God, in what way is he then also human? Expressed in a somewhat simplified form, monophysites claim that the divine and human natures are united in Christ, while Nestorians argue that the two natures remain separated. More precisely, the difference between the two positions can be reduced to a single word, the monophysites holding that Christ was created “out of two natures”, while Nestorians state that he was made “in two natures”. Ultimately, both positions were condemned at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, where a kind of compromise solution was adopted, according to which Christ is *one person in two natures*.

Representatives of orthodox Christianity argue that the reason for this choice was the fact that *only* the Chalcedonian position can ensure human salvation. Thus, Lossky writes that „the fullness of our union, our deification, which becomes impossible if one separates the two natures of Christ, as Nestorius did, or if one only ascribes to Him one divine nature, like the Monophysites“ (154). However, even Lossky is prepared to admit that, to some extent, the Chalcedonian position requires the abandonment of logic: „We must live the dogma expressing a revealed truth, which appears to us as an unfathomable mystery, in such a fashion that instead of assimilating the mystery to our mode of understanding we should, on the contrary, look for a profound change, an inner transformation of spirit, enabling us to experience it mystically“ (8). Although such a mode of reasoning is inherent to religious discourse - one may argue that it

³⁹ Nestorianism is named after Nestor, the Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431. The still existing Church of the East has traditionally been labelled ‘Nestorian’, though this label is rejected by modern scholars.

⁴⁰ The Oriental Orthodox Churches (currently Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Syrian and Armenian) are traditionally described as monophysite, although they reject this term, preferring the label ‘miaphysite’.

represents an echo of the previously discussed Gnostic view of knowledge as transformative - the Chalcedonian position ultimately left the orthodox church permanently vulnerable to criticism based on simple logical thought. Supported by the authority of the Ecumenical Councils, it eventually became an unsurmountable stumbling block for the religious and political unity of the Roman/Byzantine Empire. In 486, the Persian Church officially endorsed Nestorianism, thus inevitably leading to a degree of association between this christological position and potential disloyalty to the Byzantine Empire (Davis 167). Furthermore, Moffitt lists Syrian (Monophysite) discontent with the Byzantine authorities as one of the significant factors for the eventual establishment of Arab rule in this region in the 7th century (341).

Once again, it is important to consider the wider significance of this highly abstract Christological dispute. Frend succinctly summarizes its underlying soteriological implications: whereas the monophysite, “out of two natures” Christology implied that “the mystery of salvation was contained in the union of the divine and human in one being”, the Nestorian, “in two natures” position sees “Christ as atoning for the sins of mankind by his sacrifice on the cross and, by the example of his life, death and resurrection, leading man on the communion with God” (5). Thus the two approaches, despite sharing a putatively similar goal (the union, i.e. communion of man and God) and agreeing on the centrality of Jesus Christ, nevertheless represent two different theological conceptions, one stressing the deification of matter/flesh and the other focussing on the cosmic drama of God raising man up towards the divine through his own sacrifice.

This distinction goes beyond dogmatic and soteriological disputes, however, and is ultimately rooted in the different theological and exegetical traditions of the two patriarchal cities of Alexandria and Antioch: “Just as all philosophers are said to be basically Aristotelian or Platonist, so, roughly speaking, all theologians are in Christology either Antiochene, beginning with the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels and attempting to explain how this man is also God, or Alexandrian, beginning with the Word of John’s Prologue and attempting to understand the implications of the Logos taking flesh” (Frend 142). The Antiochian tradition, exemplified most

notably by Theodore of Mopsuestia, favoured a literal, historical interpretation of the Bible (Frend 127), thus putting more emphasis on the human nature of Jesus and lending itself more to the Nestorian position.

On the other hand, the Alexandrian tradition, heavily influenced by Origen, approached Scripture allegorically and symbolically: as Chadwick writes, “Origen concludes that the prime purpose of scripture is to convey spiritual truth, and that the narrative of historical events is secondary to this” (107). Within this theoretical framework, the human aspects of Jesus contained in the Bible are interpreted in an allegorical/symbolical sense,⁴¹ thus allowing for the adoption of the monophysite interpretation. This conflict demonstrates the fundamental significance of different interpretations of scripture for the emergence of ‘heresies’. As Hall notes, among early Christians the ability to correctly interpret scripture was seen as a divine gift: “to see Christ in the Scriptures is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit, when someone turns to the Lord the Spirit removes the 'veil' which prevents the Jews from understanding Moses correctly” (29).

Thus the entire situation can partly be interpreted as a cultural and political conflict between the two intellectually most significant cities of early Christianity, Antioch and Alexandria. The dispute was in fact initiated with the elevation of Nestorius, an Antiochean monk, to the position of the bishop of Constantinople in the year 428. Nestorius, who saw himself as a defender of orthodoxy in the face of Arian opposition (Hall 212), started a campaign against the recently adopted title “Theotokos” - “the God-bearer” - for the Virgin Mary, arguing, in Antiochean fashion, that Mary was bearing not God, but Jesus, who is both God and man. Nestor was opposed by the Alexandrian patriarch Cyril, who developed a theology that would eventually be claimed by both the Monophysite and Chalcedonian camps, ultimately succeeding in having Nestorius deposed and declared heretical.

The final condemnation of both the Monophysite and Nestorian positions, and the adoption of the Chalcedonian compromise solution went hand in hand with the elevation of the imperial

⁴¹ Cyril taught that the human pronouncements of Jesus were merely ‘pretence’ (Hall 218).

capital to the status of the “New Rome”. The newly established city of Constantinople had been assigned this status at the Council of Constantinople in 381, thus overriding the previous seniority of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The Council of Chalcedon reaffirmed these rights, thus giving the capital a religious status second only to Rome. As a consequence, as Frend argues, both monophysitism and Nestorianism eventually acquired a political, anti-imperial element.

On the one hand, „monophysitism was to preserve the spark of independence, and in the mid sixth century John Philoponus argued in the Monophysite interest that the king was not the image of God, and that government rested on the free will of the governed“ (Frend 59). Conversely, “if an openly ‘Nestorian’ definition of faith had ever been proposed, it is more doubtful whether the loyalty of the episcopate to the throne would have survived. Christ 'divided' could also have introduced schism into the concept of imperial monarchy“ (Frend 60). While these claims may be open to discussion, it is certain that after all attempts at reconciliation had failed,⁴² the adherence to monophysitism by Armenians, Syrians and Copts became inextricably intertwined with their political opposition to Byzantine rule. Ostrogorsky thus writes that “monophysitism served as an outlet for the political separatist tendencies of Egypt and Syria; it was the rallying cry of the Copts and Syrians in their opposition to Byzantine rule” (65).

In conjunction with the binding nature of the Ecumenical Councils, the Christological disputes thus led to a significant evolution in the nature of ‘heresy’. While they started off as attempts to impose a universal uniformity on theological questions on which there was no previous agreement, they eventually led to a permanent schism between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian (Monophysite and Nestorian) churches whose borders would eventually be drawn along ethnic or proto-national lines. As some of the non-Chalcedonian churches - the Armenian, Syrian and Coptic - would continue an uneasy coexistence with the orthodox Church within the bounds of the Byzantine Empire for several centuries, they could not simply be treated

⁴² Most notably with the doctrine of monothelitism, according to which Christ has two natures, but one will. This doctrine was declared heretical at the Third Council of Constantinople in 681.

under the same legal conditions as the previously discussed smaller heretical movements of the first centuries of Christianity. Obolensky mentions cases in which Armenian Monophysites could even act as missionaries of Christian/Byzantine civilization to the Huns of central Asia in the 6th century, or, in a later periods, the Slavs of Eastern Europe (1971, 62).

However, as Frend notes, an eventual reconciliation of the different Christian denominations under one Emperor became a practical impossibility: “the fact of the matter was that the empire had been forced into the position of permanent opposition towards the Monophysites. There was no place for two organized churches. Its political philosophy could never have envisaged the emperor being head of two separate and rival groups of Christians.” (323) Thus it is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between the relationship of the orthodox churches and ‘heretical’ movements on the theoretical and practical levels. While movements such as Arianism, Monophysitism and Nestorianism may have been considered ‘heretical’ in terms of their theology, secular authorities associated with orthodox movements did not necessarily apply heresy laws when dealing with them, and occasionally drew no differences between them and adherents of the orthodox church.

2.4 Conclusion: Heresy - a complex socio-cultural phenomenon

The analysis of the concept of heresy in the Christian world carried out in this chapter shows that the term covers a range of complex socio-cultural phenomena that cannot be reduced to its theological dimension. Despite claims to the contrary by ancient and contemporary representatives of orthodox Christianity, in theological terms many of the earliest Christian groups do not appear to have shared much more than a general conception of Jesus Christ as the messenger of God, focussing more on the ethical principles of his teachings. Besides conflicts associated with a gradual homogenization of basic beliefs, some of the earliest disputes among factions of Christianity concerned more practical matters, such as the significance of belief on the hand and the role of secret knowledge on the other, the legitimacy of continuing revelation

and the associated possibility of an evolution of the most basic Christian beliefs, and the moral standards that were expected of priests and regular believers.

The possibility of enforcing the opinions of the majority, or the most powerful minority, on the rest of the Christian world, and thus isolating and condemning what was considered 'heretical,' became more realistic with the emergence of a more hierarchical ecclesiastical organization around the beginning of the third century. The most momentous event in the development of the concept of heresy occurred once the Roman/Byzantine Empire adopted Christianity as its official religion, and thereby transformed 'heresy' from a theological and ecclesiastical into a legal term. Besides directly influencing the way heretics were to be treated, it also led to the development of the Ecclesiastical Councils as specific institutions charged with defining the foundations Christian orthodoxy. The legalization of Christianity reached a climax in the Middle Ages, when the Roman Catholic Church created a significantly more specific understanding of orthodoxy and thereby also expanded the meaning of 'heresy'.

In attempting to account for the reasons for the emergence of various heretical movements, a whole range of factors has been considered, such as clashing cultural and linguistic traditions, political conflicts between the patriarchal cities of early Christianity, and pressures carried out by the imperial authorities in Constantinople. A recurring factor is the role of Christianity in the system of the imperial government, or, in other words, the ideological aspect of orthodox Christianity. Risking an over-simplification of a highly complex question, it is possible to argue with Chadwick that "Christianity achieved its success in the empire in part because it answered best to the empire's need for a universal religion with which it could identify itself" (72).

What is more certain, however, is that once the Empire had adopted Christianity as its official religion, it was gradually moulded so as to better fit its ruling ideology. On the one hand, this is most evident in the evolution of Christianity's organizational structure, which eventually started closely resembling the system of the imperial bureaucracy. On the other hand, the theology eventually adopted as the foundation of the Christian faith through the Chalcedonian creed had

as much to do with conflicts between Antioch and Alexandria and the elevation of Constantinople to the status of the “New Rome” as it had with purely religious concerns.

Although such opinions have been voiced by scholars, it is difficult to argue that Chalcedonian orthodoxy was in some ways inherently more conducive to an imperialistic ideology than other currents of Christianity such as Arianism, Nestorianism or Monophysitism. The most that can be said with certainty is that the extremely complex Chalcedonian Christology would have been incomprehensible to the majority of believers, and thus more appropriate for a religious organization which laid more stress on faith than on knowledge or understanding. The adoption of this type of theology went hand in hand with a greater stress on the role of the church as an authoritarian institution, as exemplified by Augustine’s attitudes towards Donatism.

In many cases, heretical movements have tended to be associated with cultural and political aspects, eventually becoming closely linked with struggles against the supremacy of the Roman/ Byzantine Empire or, in medieval Western Europe, the papacy. The question of their mutual causality, i.e. the problem whether political or cultural factors have caused religious disputes or vice versa, has to be approached on two different levels. On one level, the response will be different for each individual heresy: while some forms of gnosticism with anti-cosmic attitudes seem to be inherently predisposed to an opposition to the imperial, or, for that matter, any secular government, Donatism appears to be rooted in a purely religious, or, more precisely, ethical issue, only gradually acquiring political dimensions. On another level, it is also a problem of meta-historiographic principles, i.e. the response depends, to some extent, on the enquirer’s attitude to the question whether ideas cause material historical developments or vice versa. As the aim of this chapter is to point out and discuss certain aspects of the phenomenon of heresy in the Christian world, rather than offer an essentialist response to the question of their ‘nature’, I will merely establish the fact of the correlation of theological, political and cultural factors in the emergence and development of ‘heresies’ in the Christian world.

In most cases, 'heresies' were not the result of the introduction of novelties or conscious attempts to modify or challenge existing religious customs, but different responses to aspects of the Christian religion that had not been fully defined. The status of a 'heresy' was usually the result of new ecclesiastical legislation that provided a more narrow definition of orthodoxy and thus excluded certain movements or religious customs from their fold. 'Heresies' in the Christian world can thus primarily be seen as a result of the institutional and legalistic character of the orthodox church, which resulted in the enforced exclusion of certain socio-political movements usually labeled on the basis of their perceived theological specificities.

CHAPTER 3

THE DUALIST TRADITION

All things are double one against another: and he hath made nothing imperfect.

Ecclesiasticus 42:24

Among the myriad of religious movements that were classified as heresies by representatives of the orthodox church(es) in the early Christian, late antique and medieval periods, there was one particular article of faith that caused more concern, and indeed outrage, than anything else. In its most general form, it was the belief that the creation and governance of the universe is, in one way or another, the result of the actions of not one, but two distinct gods or principles. This belief, or more precisely set of beliefs associated with this position, is generally referred to as *dualism*.

At the very outset, it is important to stress that the term *dualism* covers a range of related, but different metaphysical ideas and modes of thinking. Yuri Stoyanov, taking over the threefold classification of dualist beliefs devised by the Italian scholar Ugo Bianchi, divides them into the categories absolute/moderate (monarchic),⁴³ dialectical/eschatological⁴⁴ and cosmic/anti-cosmic.⁴⁵ The sources of dualism are manifold and its elements can be found in the majority of ancient religions (Egyptian, Indian, Zoroastrian, Orphic) as well as in the mythologies of numerous peoples around the world.

⁴³ Absolute dualists believe in two co-eternal principles, while moderate/monarchic dualists believe in one principle along with an ultimately subordinate second divine power.

⁴⁴ For dialectical dualists, there is an eternal interaction of the two principles, while eschatological dualists believe in an ultimate resolution of the dualism in the future.

⁴⁵ For cosmic dualists, the material world is either good/positive or a mixture of good and evil, while anti-cosmic dualists see the material world as the creation of an evil god/principle.

After the early Christian period, during which dualistic beliefs were generally associated with various gnostic groups, heresiologists and other commentators of the Middle Ages almost universally applied the label of *Manichaeism* to movements which they perceived as holding dualistic beliefs. While most scholars now reject the possibility that there was a direct link between ancient Manichaeism and the three major medieval Christian movements that were regarded as dualist - Paulicianism, Bogomilism and Patarenism/Catharism -, the question of the mutual influences and connections between the three latter is more complex and controversial. In this chapter, I will analyze the central features of these three movements as they were reported by their contemporaries, ultimately arguing for the possibility of an unbroken connection between them. The continuity is based on the central initiatory ceremony known as spiritual baptism, despite evident variations in their metaphysical teachings.

There are two specific methodological problems that are encountered when studying the religious movements of Paulicianism, Bogomilism and Catharism. The first one has already been alluded to and concerns the question of their origins. On the one hand, we have the writings of numerous medieval chroniclers suggesting an unproblematic line of succession starting with ancient Middle Eastern Manichaeism, continuing through early medieval eastern Anatolian Paulicianism on to Balkan Bogomilism emerging around the turn of the millennium, and ending in the Catharism/Patarenism of Western Europe of the 12th and 13th centuries. On the other hand, what we know about the intellectual habits of medieval clerics suggests that they relied on ancient authorities more than empirical evidence, meaning that in many instances, they may have simply classified the religious movements they encountered according to taxonomies drawn up in antiquity. In other words, they may have simply ascribed the beliefs of ancient heresies to the movements they encountered in their own days. As will be seen, this problem has even led some scholars to a complete denial of the existence of true heterodoxy within these movements.

A distinct, but closely related problem is the question whether, even if the existence of heterodoxy is accepted, these movements truly were each other's successors, or, on the contrary, they emerged independently and only subsequently established mutual connections. These

problems, caused primarily by the unreliable nature of the primary sources, are further exacerbated by the fact that medieval dualist movements span several geo-political spaces and historical periods, including not only the Byzantine Empire and medieval Western Europe, but also their margins such as the Caucasus and the Balkans. As such, the dualist movements also establish a connection between traditionally distinct fields of academic specializations, leading to a situation in which more scholarly attention has been paid to their local variations than to the things they have in common. While I am not in a position to remove the justified doubts of numerous specialists who have studied these movements in greater detail, I will focus on evaluating the possibilities for their mutual connections more than the aspects in which they appear distinct.

As the focus of this chapter is the religious teaching of the dualist movements, I will only provide brief accounts of their historical development, to the extent that it can assist in understanding their beliefs. My primary purpose will be to look into the information regarding their most characteristic beliefs as they were described in primary sources, while pointing out and attempting to account for the differences and contradictions found among them. What I am particularly interested in is to go beyond the mere enumeration of individual beliefs as they were listed by contemporary chroniclers and heresiologists and attempt to reconstruct the mode of thinking that produced a ‘dualism’ that is often hastily dismissed as a ‘sick’ and essentially pessimistic world-view.

Furthermore, to the extent that it is possible, I will take into account the socio-economic conditions in which dualist movements emerged. Writing about Catharism, the Marxist historian Martin Erstbösser argued that “it is clear that all attacks on feudalism expressed in general terms also had to be primarily attacks on the church, all revolutionary, social and political doctrines also and primarily had to be theological heresies. In order to even be able to discuss existing social relationships, it was necessary to remove their aura of sanctity” (7). While I do not adopt

an a priori assumption that the fundamental nature of heresies is socio-economic, I will reflect on the way in which these religious movements represented attempts to create a different society.⁴⁶

3.1 Paulicianism

Compared to the early Christian and Christological heresies discussed in the previous chapter, Paulicianism represents a typologically new and distinct socio-religious phenomenon: rather than attempting to reform some aspect of the existing Church and its theology, from their earliest appearance the Paulicians conceived of themselves as a distinct religious community, simultaneously insisting on the fact that they represent the true tradition of Christianity. Although some Armenian sources mention an undefined heresy that could be a predecessor of Paulicianism as early as the fifth century (Runciman 32), its appearance and development is usually linked to the seventh century and the area of eastern Anatolia, populated by numerous ethnic Armenians, many of whom had fled the recent Arabic-Islamic invasions of the Caucasus.⁴⁷

The Paulicians played their most distinguished historical role in the ninth century, when, allied with Muslim armies, they established their capital in the fortified town of Tephrike in eastern Anatolia (modern-day Turkish Divrigi) and carried out numerous raids of Byzantine territories. Their military threat subsided after they were forced to surrender their capital following a devastating earthquake in the year 878 (Hamilton 22). However, that was not to be the end of their influence on the development of Christianity: in the year 975, the Byzantine Emperor John I Tzimiskes relocated numerous Paulicians to the western borders of the Empire, mainly to the area around the city of Philippopolis (modern-day Plovdiv in Bulgaria), where they seem to have carried out a significant impact upon the emergence of Bogomilism. Even today,

⁴⁶ In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that, as pointed out by Claire Taylor, dualism (and heresy in general) has to be understood on three different levels: the socio-economic conditions in which it emerged, its critique of the beliefs and customs of the orthodox churches, and finally the set of esoteric beliefs that was only revealed to the initiated (Taylor 100).

⁴⁷ For a succinct history of the Paulicians, see Hamilton, 5-25.

several villages in northern Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria are populated by descendants of Paulicians (who now speak a Bulgarian dialect), locally known as *Palčani*.

The beliefs of the Paulicians: a matter of dispute

There is no consensus on the precise nature of the Paulicians' religious teachings. According to the most important contemporary source, Peter of Sicily's *History of the Paulicians*, as well as the opinions of the majority of scholars on this topic (Obolensky, Loos, Runciman, Hamilton), the Paulicians were *dualists*, meaning that "they confess two principles, an evil one and a good one; one who is the maker of this world and has power over it, the other has power over the world to come" (Peter of Sicily § 36, Hamilton 72). They rejected numerous fundamental elements of orthodox Christianity, such as the veneration of the cross (§ 27), the Virgin Mary (§ 39) and the sacraments (§ 40) and referred to themselves simply as "Christians," naming orthodox Christians "Romans" (§ 37).⁴⁸

Based on a careful reading of neglected Armenian sources, however, Nina Garsoian rejects the dualist interpretation of the Paulicians' beliefs. According to her, they were in fact followers of an older Syrian type of Christianity with an adoptionist Christology. The essential teaching of this stream of Christianity is that Jesus was a human being who was "adopted" by God at baptism. A significant consequence of this interpretation is the potential availability of the status of a Son of God to any man or woman. This status is in fact achieved through baptism, which is why the Paulicians were opposed to the custom of child baptism (Garsoian 161).⁴⁹ However, it should be noted that the writings of Magistros and other authors Garsoian uses to derive the Paulicians' attitude towards baptism were written relatively late, in the 11th century. As there is no earlier mentioning of baptism among Paulicians, Hamilton simply concludes that "there is no

⁴⁸ The situation is reminiscent of 4th century Edessa, when the orthodox deacon Ephrem the Syrian wrote: "(The heretics) again call us 'Palutians' and this we quite decisively reject and disown. Cursed be those who let themselves be called by the mere name of Palut instead of by the name Christ!" (Bauer 21).

⁴⁹ When the Armenian scholar Grigor Magistros inquired about the reason for this opposition, he received the following answer: "You do not know the mystery of baptism, we are in no hurry to be baptized, for baptism is death" (Garsoian 160).

indication in any of our sources that the Paulicians in Peter of Sicily's day had any initiation ceremony" (10).

If Garsoian's views on the baptism customs of Paulicians are accepted despite the reservations of Hamilton and other scholars, they provide a ready explanation for their refusal to venerate sacred objects such as crosses and icons. The only carriers of divinity in this world are the baptized, i.e. the sons of God, a belief that has led to disputes with representatives of orthodox Christianity. The Armenian priest Xosrev Anjevaci thus wrote: "They pray wherever they find it convenient, and, what is worse, they worship not God but a man created in his image, since for prayer they gather in the houses of the elders of the village in order to pray not to God but to them as though they were putting them above God; and scorning the houses of God, they prefer to pray in their houses" (Garsoian 162).

Once again, there is a conflict between the later sources used by Garsoian and the earlier ones gathered by Hamilton. For example, Peter the Higoumenos writes that "they call their own priests *synekdemoi* and notaries; they are not distinguished from the others by dress or diet or the rest of their manner of life" (Hamilton 95). A possible explanation of this discrepancy in the sources is provided by Garsoian. According to her, there were in fact two different groups of Paulicians, an Armenian and a Byzantine one: "These shared a number of beliefs and practices, but one of them held a dualistic and docetic doctrine while the other apparently accepted the unity of God, but denied the divinity of Christ" (180). Although this hypothesis must remain a matter of conjecture, the model of (dis)continuity of religious movements across time and space it provides must be kept in mind when discussing medieval heterodox movements. While numerous historiographic works on this topic are dominated by as simple binary opposition between perfect continuity and complete independence, Garsoian's model suggests that real continuity may have existed between movements with significant mutual theological differences, even as profound ones as their basic Christology.

Dualism: A Manichaean legacy?

Despite their own claims to the contrary, virtually every source on the Paulicians insists on their continuity or equality with Manichaeans. For example, Peter of Sicily warns: “Let no one think that there are two different heresies, one taught by Sergius, the other by Mani, they are one and the same” (§ 170, Hamilton 88). According to him, the Paulicians’ Manichaeism is derived from Callinice, the mother of the movement’s founders John and Paul (Peter of Sicily §85, Hamilton 75), after whom they became known as Paulicians.⁵⁰ Peter of Sicily’s narrative notes that at a later point the Paulician reformer Constantine rejected Manichaean books and preserved only the Christian gospels with a Manichaean interpretation: “

He took the origin of every blasphemy from the Manichaean books already mentioned, and was able through the co-operation of the devil to twist the thoughts of the Gospel and the Apostle to his own opinion in his interpretation. He rejected the books of the Manichaeans... especially since he saw that many had died by the sword because of them (Peter of Sicily §97, Hamilton 77).

Once again, we are faced by the possibility of an atypical continuity that transcends labels and even basic metaphysical teachings.

Hamilton dismisses this possibility, however, claiming that “although the Manichaeans had been dualist, they had not been Christian” (1), suggesting Zoroastrianism as a possible source for the Paulicians’ dualism instead. He also notes that “the dualism of Constantine was different from that of the Zoroastrians, for whereas they believed that the material world was the creation of the Good God, Constantine considered it the work of the evil principle” (8). However, this brings

⁵⁰ Hamilton argues that “this story carries little conviction. Callinice is not historically credible, for although women could become Manichaean elect, that involved a life of continence and they never held any position of authority in the hierarchy. Callinice, the Manichaean mother and organizer, is therefore literally unbelievable” (7). However, it is possible that Callinice became a Manichaean elect only after giving birth to two sons. Also, she did not have to hold a position of authority in order to act as a missionary. Thus Hamiltons’ view that the story is literally unbelievable must be rejected.

Constantine's beliefs closer to Manichaeism and thus undermines Hamilton's argument. It is known that Mani called himself 'the apostle of Jesus Christ'.⁵¹ His 'dualism' was much more complex than what could be inferred from the usage of the adjective 'Manichaean' in the contemporary English language for an excessively strict drawing of borders between good and evil (or another duality). The essence of the Manichaean world-view is in fact quite opposed to such 'Manichaeism'; according to it, fragments of divine light are contained, or trapped inside matter, including the human being. Historical Manichaeism would be more accurately described as *dialectical*⁵² than dualistic, for it paid more attention to the dynamic interrelationship between the forces of darkness and light than to their separation at the mythological end of time.⁵³ Thus there is no decisive argument against the possibility that, at least in the metaphysical sense, Paulicianism really did represent a modified version of Manichaeism.⁵⁴

However, numerous sources suggest that Paulicians were prepared to anathematize Mani. One possible explanation for this incongruity is the oft-repeated claim that the Paulicians were prepared, and even encouraged to conceal their true beliefs behind a facade of orthodoxy:

They lie and say what they are told to or what is suggested, and in their own eyes they are innocent. This is the tradition Manes gave them, saying, 'I am not heartless like Christ, who said, "Whoever denies me before men, I too will deny him"'. I say, "If a man denies me before men and by the lie ensures his own safety, I accept with

⁵¹ "By adopting the title 'Paraclete', Mani indicated that he would follow in the footsteps of Jesus. As is stated by the former Manichaean Augustine: "That is why in his letters he [Mani] calls himself the apostle of Jesus Christ, because Jesus Christ had promised that He would send him [the Paraclete] and had sent the Holy Spirit in him". Yet the Manichaeans went even further by not only identifying Mani with the biblical Paraclete, but in the end considering him to be the new Christ"(van Oort 5).

⁵² My use of the term *dialectical* here does not correspond to Stoyanov's classification mentioned earlier. As the Manichaeans taught that at the end of time, light and darkness will be separated, it would have to be categorized as an *eschatological* rather than *dialectical* dualism. However, I use the term *dialectical* here to stress that on a quotidian level, the Manichaeans were more concerned with the interaction between light and darkness.

⁵³ My views of Manichaeism are derived from Tardieu.

⁵⁴ An indication that the 'dualism' of the Paulicians is more complex than the simple good God/evil God dichotomy is given in a 10th century abjuration formula for Paulician converts to Orthodoxy: "Anathema to those who (...) instead of God, the creator of everything, worship him who is called 'the Lord of this world'" (Hamilton 106/7).

pleasure the statement and the lie as if he were not denying me, without holding him guilty” (Peter the Higoumenos § 18-19, Hamilton 95).

Obolensky suggests that the Paulicians’ most fundamental esoteric beliefs were hidden not only from persecuting authorities, but even from all uninitiated followers of their faith (44). This suggestion is corroborated by Peter of Sicily, who writes: “For until the heretics have led wretches to complete destruction, they do not reveal to them their great mystery, which is the denial of God” (§ 151, Hamilton 80). Also, in §33, he notes that “this is what they are most concerned about, that their rites and heresies should not be shared with their nearest neighbours, far less with those who are strangers to them, but only with those few whom they perceive to be more perfect in impiety” (Hamilton 71). If that is the case, in order to understand the Paulicians’ most fundamental religious ideas, we must try to go beyond the simple statement of the belief in two principles that was available to an outsider like Peter of Sicily, and attempt to discern the underlying significance of this metaphysical article of faith.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Another possible source of Paulician dualism, suggested by Milan Loos, is Marcionism. This early Christian religious movement - according to Harnack, the greatest threat to orthodox Christianity in the second half of the second century - was based on a consequent insistence on the contrast between the Old Testament, evil “God of justice”, and the New Testament, good “God of mercy” whose messenger was Jesus Christ, while Paul was his most significant apostle. Judging by the way it was represented by its enemies (no original writings of Marcion survive), Marcionism appears as the most significant anti-cosmic form of Christian dualism, because it does not allow any role of the good God in the creation and sustenance of the material world. Describing the Marcionite view of the cosmos, Harnack wrote: “The world became a prison, a hell, something without meaning, an idle fantasy, indeed a Nothing. All these judgements are basically identical: the world had lost its right to be, so that the palpable fact of its existence evoked every conceivable form of hostile judgement and condemnation” (The Gospel of the Alien God 2). However, he also emphasizes that Marcion’s most influential disciples, such as Luke and Apelles, attempted to reduce Marcion’s strict dualism, approaching some form of monarchism or gnosticism. What is of even more significance is the status that these metaphysical teachings enjoyed according to Harnack: “Apelles wills, indeed he demands, that each one remain with his own subjective metaphysical belief, because for redemption and salvation only the hope in the crucified one comes into consideration” (117). Precisely for this reason, the alleged ‘dualism’ of a religious movement such as Paulicianism does not necessarily represent its most essential feature. The nature of Marcionism, as espoused by Apelles, offers a different model of a religious community, which is not primarily defined by metaphysical dogmas, but by a simple faith in the redemptory power of Jesus Christ and a specific relationship between religious leaders and other followers of that movement.

The social aspects of Paulicianism

The historical sources offer hardly any information on the Paulicians' social structure. One exception is a story recounting their successful avoidance of a hostile Arabic border patrol, achieved by claiming that they are searching for new grazing farmlands, strongly suggesting that many of them were transhumant herdsmen (Hamilton 18). Another piece of information refers to the existence of *Astatoi*, a dedicated military wing of the Paulicians, whose name may be derived from St Paul's description of the apostles as *astatoumen*, 'we who wander without a home' (Hamilton 20). Finally, several sources testify that after the death of their leader (*didascalos*) Sergius in the year 834-35, the Paulicians adopted a more 'democratic' structure of leadership consisting of six *synekdemoi*.

While it is difficult to derive any definite conclusion about the Paulicians' social structure from these fragments of information, the story of their struggles and survival in a hostile environment suggests that they did not merely temporarily disagree with Byzantine imperial policy, but had a fundamentally different view of the way in which their society should be structured. In any case, any form of 'dualism', i.e. emphasis on the role of an evil deity in the creation of the universe, is difficult to reconcile with the idea of a single Emperor as a direct executor of divine will.

If they truly did constitute a part of the Paulician's belief system, the 'dualist' tendencies were probably more emphasized in periods when they were persecuted by the imperial government. The story of the Byzantine government's treatment of the Paulicians is complex. During the rule of the Emperor Constantine IV (668-85), their leader Constantine was stoned to death (Peter of Sicily §103, Hamilton 78) and many of his followers were executed. In the following period, many more Paulicians were burnt alive. However, during the time of the iconoclast Emperor Leo III, the Byzantine authorities started tolerating the Paulicians, allegedly due to a cunning use of allegory by the *didascalos* Timotheus, which enabled him to persuade the Patriarch of Constantinople of their orthodoxy (Peter of Sicily §115 - 119, Hamilton 80/1). The death

sentence for the Paulicians was reinstated by the Emperor Leo V (813-20), after which they soon established their rival state with the capital Tephrike. Following the defeat of Tephrike, the Paulicians were sporadically persecuted, but most of the time acted as military allies of Byzantium in the Balkan borderlands to which they were transplanted. Thus the Paulicians evolved from a militant socio-religious movement that was willing to serve under Islamic powers to fight the Byzantine government to a minority religious movement whose followers eventually faded into insignificance in a political sense.

According to Erstbösser, it is precisely the kind of animosity and struggle against the imperial church which characterized the early Paulicians that should be understood as the essence of heresy,⁵⁶ and not “an all-encompassing set of teachings that more or less approaches a closed system and that fully exists only in single tracts or historiographical texts, and very rarely among the heretics themselves” (96). Hence, on one level, the dualist heresies can be understood as universal socio-cultural phenomena (or at least as phenomena that transcend customary borders of cultures and civilizations) of struggle against totalitarian theocratic systems that can contain dogmatic, ritual and political elements. The continuity of heretical movements can thus primarily be sought in what they fight against, rather than in a perfect correspondence of dogmatic teachings.

Perhaps the strongest arguments for a continuity between Paulicianism and later heretical movements in Bulgaria is provided by Peter of Sicily himself. The only surviving manuscript of his narrative is addressed to the archbishop of Bulgaria and clearly states that the Paulicians were planning to proselytize among the recently converted Bulgars:

Again, I had heard these blasphemers babbling that they intended to send some of their number to the country of Bulgaria to detach some from the orthodox faith and to bring them over to their own foul heresy. They were emboldened by the fact that

⁵⁶ With this conception of heresy, it is also possible to understand the suggestion of Mansour Shaki, according to which the Mazdakists, members of a persecuted Persian, Zoroastrian religious movement whose principle was the teaching of the social and economic equality of all people, could carry out a significant influence on the appearance of Paulicianism in Armenia.

the divine preaching had just begun, and thought that they would be able easily to sow their own tares in the pure and guileless wheat. These unholy people often do this, and eagerly accept many blows and dangers in order to share their personal plague with those they meet (Peter of Sicily §5, Hamilton 67).

3.2 Bogomilism

Judging on the basis of available sources, Bogomilism did not emerge as a fully formulated religious teaching with a firmly determined organizational structure, but evolved in accordance with the conditions in which it was spreading. Its development as a distinct religious movement can be subdivided into several phases: its first appearance as a “new heresy” during the rule of the Bulgarian Emperor Peter I in the mid-10th century, its spread into Constantinople and almost the entire Byzantine Empire after the fall of Bulgaria under Byzantine governance in 1018, the phase of its persecution and systematic destruction during the rule of the Emperor Alexis I Comnenus (1056.-1118.), culminating in the public burning of the Bogomil leader Basil the Doctor in the Constantinople hippodrome in 1118, and its subsequent after-life in the Balkans and beyond.

If this gradual nature of Bogomilism’s development is taken into account, it is much more apparent why the entire subsequent Western European dualist movement can be treated as one of its branches. The writings of Western European heresiologists contain several claims that all Pataren and Cathar churches emerged under the influence of the Byzantine-Bulgarian Bogomils. I will argue that the essence of this influence should primarily be sought in the continuity of the transfer of the initiatory ceremony known as spiritual baptism, rather than in the metaphysical postulates or organizational structure of these heretical churches.

A significant part of the Bogomils’ most characteristic beliefs are mentioned in the earliest document that attests their existence, Theophylact Lecapenus’s letter to the Bulgarian Tsar Peter, written in the mid-10th century. They include the belief in two principles, the devil as the

governor of the world, the rejection of the Old Testament, marriage and the Eucharist, docetism, and the equation of the Virgin Mary with the divine Jerusalem (Hamilton 98 - 102). While there is no mention of the Bogomils' organizational structure, Lescapenus uses the opportunity to anathematize not only the familiar names of Paulician leaders such as Paul and John, the sons of Callinice, but also Manes, Terebinthus and Scythianus the Egyptian (the latter two were believed to have been Mani's dualist predecessors), "the originator of these blasphemies," thus suggesting an unbroken link between the Bogomils, Paulicians, Manichaeans and early Christian Gnostics.

The *Discourse of the Priest Cosmas Against Bogomils*, written in the last quarter of the 10th century, is the first source to mention the name of the priest Bogomil, providing additional information on their beliefs. Thus we hear about their animosity towards the cross, refusal to venerate icons, allegorical interpretation of the Bible, rejection of the orthodox liturgy, animosity towards John the Baptist, willingness to feign orthodoxy for fear of persecution, refusal to eat meat and drink wine, rejection of orthodox baptism, particularly in the case of children, and the custom to confess sins to each other rather than priests (Hamilton 114 - 134). A strong indication that Cosmas was faced by an early form of Bogomilism is his claim that they refuse physical labour: "some of them go about in idleness and are unwilling to employ their hands with any task; they go from house to house and eat the goods of others, those of the men they deceived" (Hamilton 132). It is only with the arrest and trial of the Bogomil leader Basil towards the end of the 11th century, recounted by Anna Comnena and Euthymius Zigabenus, that a detailed description of the ceremony of spiritual baptism and the Bogomils' organizational structure appears for the first time.

A Messalian influence?

In Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*, written at the beginning of the 12th century, Bogomilism is described in the following way:

Two most evil and worthless doctrines combined, which had been known in earlier times, the impiety... of the Manichaeans, which we call the heresy of the Paulicians, and the loathsomeness of the Massalians. That was the Bogomils' doctrine, a combination of the Manichaeans and the Massalians. It appears that it existed even before my father's time, but unrecognized; the sect of the Bogomils is very skilful at counterfeiting virtue. (Hamilton 175)

Although Anna Comnena's words cannot be simply taken at face value, her description of Bogomilism is confirmed by other contemporary sources. Euthymius Zigabenus wrote that Bogomilism is "a part of the Messalian heresy, and for the most part shares their doctrines, but with some additional points which increase the pollution" (Hamilton 181).

The Messalians, Euchites or Enthusiasts were a religious movement that appeared for the first time at the end of the fourth century in Syria. It was declared heretical at the Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431. The Messalians' essential characteristic was their insistence on the possibility of a direct, sensual experience of divinity through asceticism and certain physical, often eccentric practices and dances, coupled with a neglect of work duties and church sacraments. Murray writes that

Messalianism was probably no sect but a 'movement', characteristic of Syrian asceticism, which (like Montanism before it and numerous medieval movements after it) laid too much stress on experience of the Spirit for the liking of ecclesiastics in the institutional Church; its judges pronounced it guilty of heresy and tried to see to it that history would preserve only their account of it (36).⁵⁷

One of the earliest chroniclers of Messalianism, the fourth-century bishop Epiphanius of Salamis, wrote that they have "neither beginning nor end, neither head nor root, but are completely unstable and anarchical and deceived, utterly without the support of name or law or ordinance or legislation" (Stewart 19/20). It is just this kind of instability and lack of dogmatism that could have led Anna Comnena and Euthymius Zigabenus to a comparison of the Bogomils and Messalians. The Bogomils' further history (as well as the history of their descendants, the

⁵⁷ The distinction drawn here between a sect and a movement in reference can also act as a useful model when trying to conceptualize the nature of Paulicianism, Bogomilism and Catharism.

Cathars and Patarens) will show numerous variations and developments in metaphysical teachings, primarily in regard to the precise relationship between God and the devil, i.e. good and evil. That did not, however, prevent them from claiming that they are the true carriers of the Holy Spirit. This fact represents another argument against seeking (dis)continuity of Bogomil/neo-Manichaean movements in the details of their dogma. The essence of this movement, it seems, is contained more in the status enjoyed by dogmatic teachings on the one hand, and the persons who called themselves the true Christians on the other, which strongly differed from the institutional, hierarchical and dogmatically ossified Orthodox and Catholic churches. Obolensky has something similar in mind when he writes that “contradictions and inconsistencies in questions of doctrine are not surprising in the case of a movement which primarily emphasized not dogma, but the promotion of moral purity and evangelical life” (132).

One of the central claims of the Messalians was that every human being is inhabited by a demon linked to his or her physical instincts which can be expunged only through their prayers and rituals (Stewart 59). A similar claim is found in an anonymous 13th century description of the beliefs of Italian Cathars: “they say that sin is a substance in itself, and a spirit which suggests wicked work to men” (Wakefield 355). Precisely this mode of thinking, which stresses the materiality of evil, could have led to accusations of dogmatic ‘dualism’ by representatives of orthodox Christianity, whose official opinion was that ‘evil’ is not substantial, but only represents a lack of ‘goodness’.⁵⁸ The Messalians believed that after the liberation from the internal demon, a ‘mystical wedding’ with the ‘heavenly bridesmaid’ of the Holy Spirit occurs, after which the person has the right to call him- or herself ‘Christian’.

⁵⁸ One of the most influential orthodox definitions of the nature of evil was given by Augustine, a former Manichaean, who wrote the following in regard to his own ‘heretical’ past: “I believed that evil, too, was some similar kind of substance, a shapeless, hideous mass, which might be solid, in case the Manichaeans called it earth, or fire and rarefied like air. This they imagine as a kind of evil mind filtering through the substance they call wrath” (104) and “I did not know that evil is nothing but the removal of good until finally no good remains” (62). Augustine also gives an insight into the moral and psychological significance of this metaphysical belief: “I still thought that it is not we who sin but some other nature that sins within us. It flattered my pride to think that I incurred no guilt and, when I did wrong, not to confess it [...] I preferred to excuse myself and blame this unknown thing which was in me but was not part of me” (163).

The Bogomils: Carriers of the Holy Spirit

If a continuity with Messalianism is accepted, the crucial element of Bogomilism should be sought in their claim that true Christians are carriers of the Holy Spirit, which is transferred in the ceremony of spiritual baptism. The essence of this ceremony is described in the canonical New Testament :

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 8:14-17)

Although this ceremony has in a sense been preserved in orthodox churches in the shape of chrism, for the Bogomils its significance was raised to the foundational ritual of Christianity as they understood it. Judging by this scriptural passage, it is clear that the function of *laying on of hands* was the transference of the Holy Spirit, which cannot be achieved with the act of baptism in water (“in the name of Jesus Christ”).⁵⁹ As numerous sources confirm, the Bogomils rejected the significance of baptism in water and the Eucharist, so that spiritual baptism was their only ‘sacrament’ and basic ‘connecting tissue’ of their church.

However, spiritual baptism was not just a ceremonial act, but implied very specific rights and obligations, which can be related to the previously discussed early Christian heresies: *gnosis*, or a secret teaching for the interpretation of scripture (in his *Dogmatic Panoply*, Euthymius Zigabenus lists more than 20 specific examples of the way in which Bogomils interpreted biblical passages); the obligations of moral perfection (as the Donatists insisted) and the status of

⁵⁹ In this context it is worth noting the intriguing biblical note that “in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples.” (John 4:2).

carriers of the Holy Spirit (Eutyymius Zigabenus wrote that “they say that those of their faith, in whom dwells what they think of as the Holy Spirit, are all, and are all called Mother of God”, §22, Hamilton 192).

It is clear that the status of a Christian conceived in this way was suitable only for a very small minority. In that sense, Bogomilism can also be viewed as a successor to some of the most radical forms of early Christianity, such as the Syrian ‘sons and daughters of the covenant’ (Murray 14). Other streams of Christianity, particularly the Gnostic ones, also strictly divided human beings into three classes: the pneumatics (those possessing spirit), the psychics (those possessing souls) and the hylics (those completely bounded to the material world) (Stoyanov 80). While there is no historiographic evidence that these teachings were transferred from these early Christian movements to the Bogomils in a direct line of succession, in a typological sense their doctrine appears as a kind of synthesis of various strands of the earliest ‘heresies’ suppressed by the orthodox Church.

From dualism to apocatastasis

Similarly to the Paulicians, there are strong indications that the Bogomils’ alleged *dualism* was of a Manichaean, or, as I argued earlier, *dialectical* kind. According to Euthymius Zigabenus, during his interrogation by the Emperor Alexius Comnenus, the Bogomil leader Basil the Doctor claimed that “they ought to honour the demons who inhabit the temples made with hands, worshipping them so that they might not be angered and destroy those who did not do so, as they have great and irresistible power to harm” (Hamilton 191). This mode of thinking reaches a certain culmination in the Bogomils’ alleged interpretation of Jesus’s dictum “Love your enemy” (Matthew 5:44):

They say that the devil is the enemy of man, and by a crazy interpretation, that we ought to be kindly to him and pay court to him with genuflection, as we showed earlier, so that he should not trip up and overthrow those who do not believe and

hand them over to the judge, that is, God, to endure the sentence of condemnation on the day of judgement (Hamilton 199).

This claim of Euthymius Zigabenus could of course be dismissed as mere slander intended to make the Bogomils' beliefs appear more scandalous to the orthodox. Another possibility is to see it as a reflection of a world-view that is more complex and sophisticated than the label of *dualism* usually implies. Although it seems clear that the Bogomils considered material creation as *evil*, this does not mean that they pessimistically rejected any kind of involvement in it. On the contrary, the Bogomils' aim appears to have been to harness or reduce the influence of what they considered to be the evil forces surrounding the human being in this life. Thus their religious attitude cannot be simple reduced to stereotypes of pessimism and withdrawal from the world.

An additional indication of the Bogomils' attitude towards the question of good and evil is provided in an anonymous anti-Bogomil treatise which may have been written by Nicholas of Methone: "some of them give veneration to both the sons, and say that... they should both be worshipped because they come from one father and will be reconciled in the future" (Hamilton 227). Thus the fundamental teaching of Bogomilism, or, by extension, movements which are usually referred to as 'dualism', is not necessarily the rejection of the material world, but rather the overcoming of the duality between the spiritual and material spheres of existence, a restitution of the original, non-dualistic state. Theologically, this position can be described as the belief in universal salvation or *apocatastasis*,⁶⁰ standing in contrast to the orthodox Christian position according to which sinners will receive eternal punishment.

Bogomilism: a revolutionary movement

The historical sources reveal some more precise information about the social aspects of Bogomilism. In one of the earliest sources on the history of Bogomilism, the presbyter Cosma's

⁶⁰ This theological position was held by Origen and his followers, most notably Evagrius Ponticus. Along with other Origenists, Evagrius was formally anathematized at the Second Council of Constantinople ((Harmless and Fitzgerald 501)

late 10th century *Discourse against Bogomils*, it is noted that “they teach their followers not to obey their masters; they scorn the rich, they hate the Tsars, they ridicule their superiors, they reproach the boyars, they believe that God looks in horror on those who labour for the Tsar, and advise every serf not to work for their master” (Hamilton 132). These and similar characterizations of Bogomilism have led some historians, like Dimtar Angelov, to see it primarily as an ideological enemy of the ‘two-headed Eagle’ of the imperial-ecclesiastic government: “By relying on their dualist beliefs, the heretics are trying to undermine one of the central theses of the orthodox Church and that is the thesis that the king and figures of power were put in their position by God” (149).

Nevertheless, even if at the beginning Bogomilism really did represent a movement of resistance of a disowned Bulgarian peasantry against the ruling structures of the Bulgarian and Byzantine Empires, it would be wrong to limit it to this dimension and view it as a kind of anarchistic movement opposed to any form of political government.⁶¹ In accordance with Talal Asad’s conception of heresy as an attempt to create a new society, their teaching should be seen in the context of the prevailing political and economic conditions of the time. As Bogomilism emerged during the initial development of feudalism in Bulgaria, a significant role should be assigned to their rejection of the oath in accordance with the biblical *Sermon on the Mount* spoken by Jesus.⁶² Particularly in Western Europe, the ritual oath of loyalty was the legal foundation upon which the feudal system was built. Dismayed at this Bogomil principle, Hugh

⁶¹ Obolensky writes that “the fact that the Bogomils of Constantinople in the 11th and 12th centuries did not oppose the Byzantine government shows that Bogomilism was primarily a set of religious and ethical teachings and that its political, anti-Byzantine aspect was of secondary significance and almost accidental” (177). However, it could also be argued that an open opposition to the Byzantine government in Constantinople was simply too dangerous. A more solid indication that the Bogomils were not opposed to the imperial government as such is their alleged support of the iconoclast Emperors: “And they banish all the pious emperors from the fold of Christians, and they say that only the Iconoclasts are orthodox and faithful, especially Copronymus.” (Euthymius Zigabenus *Against the Bogomils*, §11 Hamilton 188).

⁶² But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:34-37)

Eteriano wrote: “Without oaths, the world could not and cannot remain firmly based” (Hamilton 238).

Although some of their contemporaries drew parallels between Bogomilism and Paulicianism, the fact that the majority of sources make a clear distinction between them shows that they certainly should be viewed as two distinct movements. In a letter entirely devoted to the dangers posed by Bogomilism, Euthymius of Periblepton comments on the links between Paulicians and Bogomils in the following way: “Their teaching is very like that of these blasphemers, but their [the Paulicians’] heresy is obvious and cannot harm anyone except those who hold it as an inherited tradition; no one is grieved or upset on their account” (Hamilton 158). While Paulicianism, it would seem, remained largely limited to ethnic Armenians, from the very beginning Bogomilism appeared suitable for trans-ethnic and trans-linguistic dispersions, spreading from the Slavic areas under Bulgarian governance first towards Byzantium, and later towards Germany, France and Italy.

Another significant distinction is the much greater role of asceticism and monasticism found in Bogomilism, even though it seems likely that this monasticism was *Messalian*, i.e. it was regulated and institutionalized to a much smaller extent than the Orthodox and Catholic orders. Most probably, the Bogomils did not carry out their greatest influence upon the wider population through their secret esoteric teachings, whose knowledge was limited to those who received spiritual baptism, but through a consequent materialistic critique of the customs of the orthodox church:

The heretics claim, for example, that baptism is just normal water and oil, and the Eucharist only normal bread and wine. Furthermore they claim that the relics of the saints are simply bones of dead people, like the bones of dead animals, and furthermore they claim that churches are normal buildings, and the miracles that Jesus performed according to the Gospel, only ‘stories’ (fables and fairy-tales). (Angelov 151)

This fact can also help us to understand how Bogomilism - an apparently very abstract, speculative religious doctrine - succeeded in spreading and growing roots among an illiterate Slavic peasantry, as well as among diverse layers of the Western European population, from the urban poor to distinguished members of the Occitan aristocracy.

3.3 Catharism and Paterenism

While the Cathars and Patarens (as the Western European dualists were predominantly referred to in southern France and Italy respectively) were traditionally seen, in accordance with contemporary heresiological writings, as more or less direct descendants of Balkan and Byzantine Bogomils (and ultimately either the Manichaeans or Gnostics), in more recent scholarship there is a tendency to downplay or completely deny the significance of this trans-European religious connection. The emphasis is put onto socio-economic factors accounting for the emergence of heretical movements in this period instead.

A distinct, but closely related issue is the question of the precise dividing line between the Cathars/Patarens on the one hand and a variety of different, occasionally strictly local and short-lived religious movements that were declared heretical in this period on the other. While the first religious group in Western Europe that can certainly be identified as ‘Cathar’ does not appear before the mid-12th century, several movements recorded since the turn of the millennium seem to betray distinctly ‘dualist’ influences and were labelled as ‘Manichaeans’ by contemporary chroniclers and heresiologists. In any case, it was the emergence of a powerful Cathar church organization in the course of the 12th century in the Languedoc region that caused the most concern to the papacy, ultimately leading to the Albigensian crusade in the early 13th century and the subsequent development of the Inquisition, which eventually succeeded in eradicating the last traces of this movement.

The Cathars/Patarens and medieval heresy

More than six centuries after the hitherto last recorded execution of a heretic in Western Europe (Priscillian in the year 385), reports of outbreaks of heresy begin to proliferate around the turn of the millennium. In one of the earliest references to heresy from this period, in the year 1018 the monk Ademar of Chabannes wrote of the appearance of 'Manichaeans' in Aquitaine, ascribing them a set of beliefs that may well be derived from the Bogomils, such as the denial of the cross, baptism and "every sound doctrine", abstention from food and a monkish appearance (Wakefield 74). In other reported cases, however, it seems clear that, despite certain similarities, those accused of heresy certainly were not Bogomils/Cathars, such as, for example, Vilgard of Ravenna, a devout student of ancient Roman literature who "made the assertion that the words of the poets deserved belief in all instances" (Wakefield 73), or Eudo of Brittany who, in the mid-12th century, "thought that he was the ruler and judge of the quick and the dead" (Wakefield 143).

The distinction between so-called neo-Manichaean and other heresies becomes more pronounced after the documented emergence of other, more or less well-organized and widespread movements such as the Speronists, Waldensians or Arnoldists, leading Wakefield to the conclusion that "this two-fold classification - dualists with ancient Eastern antecedents, and reformers arising within the Western Church - has some validity, but it is oversimplified" (6). R.I. Moore goes a step further, claiming that, at least in the period up to the mid-12th century, "what the heresies of the West had in common - and it is very little - was disobedience to the church, and the readiness to interpret the scriptures in their own way, the conclusions which they reached were too various to reflex the dissemination of any external influence" (2005, 42).

Even though the distinction mentioned by Wakefield may indeed be oversimplified as a general taxonomy of heresy in the medieval West, it nevertheless appears worth retaining and building upon. In the earliest undisputed reference to a Cathar group in Western Europe (1143-1144), Eberwin of Steinfeld clearly distinguishes between them and a different heretical

movement, identifying the central features that will keep reappearing in virtually all medieval references to the Cathars: the claim that only they constitute the true Church, the imitation of the apostolic life/stress on poverty, the existence of a bishop and his assistant, strict dietary prescriptions, consecration of food and drink, baptism in fire/imposition of hands, the distinction between 'elect' members and auditors, rejection of orthodox sacraments, and finally the claim of the existence of co-religionists "in Greece and certain other lands" (Wakefield 128 - 132).

It is remarkable that there is no reference here to the belief in two gods, warning us against the uncritical usage of the term 'dualist' in the description of this and related movements. Furthermore, an earlier reference to a group that may well have been Cathar clearly demonstrates why we must remain very skeptical towards the existence of any kind of conscious connection between medieval Western heretics and ancient Manichaeans, despite the wide-spread usage of this term. After carefully describing the beliefs of a group near the town of Soissons around the year 1114, the monk Guibert of Nogent writes: "If you will reread the various accounts of heresies by Augustine, you will find that this resembles none more than that of the Manichaeans." (Wakefield 103). The alleged 'Manichaeism' of the medieval 'neo-Manichees' may thus be a product of the heresiologists' classificatory efforts more than the alleged heretics' actual beliefs. Once again, Moore draws the most radical conclusion, claiming that "the medieval heretic was a reality; the medieval Manichee was a myth" (2005, 85).

A branch of Bogomilism?

While it seems beyond doubt that none of the medieval Western heretics considered themselves as 'Manichaeans,' there are strong arguments for the supposition that the Cathars/Patarens were derived from, or at least in close and continuous communication with Balkan and Byzantine Bogomils. One of the major sources for the history of Cathars, an account of their origin written by the Dominican inquisitor Anselm of Alessandria around 1266, notes that the first bishops of the Cathar churches were set up in the Balkan/Byzantine provinces of Drugunthia, Bulgaria and Philadelphia, from where they first spread to the Byzantine capital of

Constantinople. From Constantinople, the heresy traveled further to Sclavonia/Bosnia and, via French crusaders, to France and Italy (Wakefield 168). The limitations of Anselm's knowledge about Catharism are evident, however, as he claims that the founder of the heresy was "an individual named Mani [who] taught in the regions of Drugunthia, Bulgaria, and Philadelphia" (Wakefield 168).

Nevertheless, a kind of communion between Eastern/Bogomil and Western/Cathar churches is strongly suggested by other available evidence. In his *Summa*, the former heretic-turned-inquisitor Rainer Sacconi provides a list of 16 Cathar Churches, including among them "the church of Sclavonia, the church of the Latins of Constantinople, the church of Philadelphia in Romania, the church of Bulgaria, the church of Drugunthia" (Wakefield 336). In the aforementioned account, Anselm of Alessandria writes of the Italian Cathar Mark's attempt to travel to Bulgaria to obtain episcopal ordination from the bishop of Bulgaria (Wakefield 169). Furthermore, a decisive influence of Bogomils upon the Cathars is suggested by the Council of Saint-Felix, at which the missionary Papa Nicetas from Constantinople consecrated the bishops of the Cathar churches of Southern France, established the principles of their territorial organization, and significantly modified their official theology (Hamilton 250-252). Finally, two apocryphal writings of Bogomil origins, *The Vision of Isaiah* and *The Secret Supper* are known to have been used by Western Cathars (Wakefield 448).

Due to a lack of sufficient evidence, a critical historiography will have to concur with Wakefield that "for none of the sects that have been discussed is an uninterrupted line of succession demonstrable from concrete historical evidence [...] similar characteristics may suggest, but cannot prove, direct historical relationship when there are gaps of one or more centuries between the sects which are compared" (17). While this conclusion can be seen as a result of a consistent and rigorous application of historiographic methodology, something more seems to be at play when historians attempt to account for the ultimate 'cause' for the emergence of Catharism in the medieval West. After briefly analyzing the different arguments speaking in favour of and against the links between Bogomils and Cathars, Wakefield concludes: "ideas

carried westward from the Balkans by missionaries, merchants, or crusaders returning home gave definition and formal structure to some of the already existing dissenting groups and produced the Catharist heresy, strongly influenced but not created by the importations from the East” (19).

But does this somewhat pedantic distinction between ‘strong influence’ and ‘creation’ not represent an unnecessary, or at the very least ultimately unresolvable terminological nitpicking? A possible reason for the wide-spread reluctance of historians to accept the eastern origin of Catharism is indicated more clearly in R.I.Moore’s remark that

[I]n exploring the appearance of unorthodox beliefs and practices [...] we must approach it not in the spirit of alienists (whether charitable or severe) patiently accounting for irrational deviations from normality, but as historians observing the emergence of a natural, and even an essential ingredient of human development, at least as we have known it in Europe (2005, 3).

But does the transcontinental or trans-regional exchange of religious or cultural ideas necessarily represent an ‘irrational deviation from normality’? Is such an exchange not rather precisely ‘an essential ingredient of human development’, particularly ‘as we have known it in Europe’?

It seems that the stress on the ‘domestic’ factors accounting for the emergence of heresy in Western Europe is a justified reaction to an older generation of scholars who put an excessive stress on the allegedly ‘alien’ and ‘exotic’ nature of Catharism. However, the ‘domestic’ approach runs the risk of neglecting the crucial role played by the Balkan/Byzantine Bogomils in the emergence of Catharism as well as perpetuating a mental border between ‘East’ and ‘West’ that may be more closely related to contemporary perceptions and limits of academic specializations than the realities of late medieval Europe.

The dogmatic malleability of Catharism/Patarenism

A fundamental feature of the Cathar/Pataren movement that is not always sufficiently stressed is their dogmatic malleability. Writing about the disputes between individual branches of the Cathar movement in Italy, Milan Loos wrote:

the emergence there of new and bold variations was only one aspect of the constant fluctuation to which these doctrines were subject, based as they were on free speculation on the text of the Scriptures. As early as the tenth century, Cosmas the Presbyter had commented appositely on this changeable nature, and since that early period it should be borne in mind as a permanent element of the dualist teaching (250).

While the ultimate reason for the emergence of different teachings were probably more profound than ‘free speculation’, another observation by Loos should be kept in mind: “Indeed as we have seen in Byzantium, the sect did not change the wording of Biblical texts [...] Over every sentence in the scriptures, however, there hung a secret meaning with which the sect invested it” (264).

The Cathar tendency towards dogmatic innovation is commented upon in an anonymous contemporary description of the Albigenses, written in the early 13th century: “[A]mong themselves they adopt various heresies and each one strives with all his might to find something novel and unheard of. He will be accounted the wisest who can invent the greatest novelty” (Wakefield 234). While there clearly is an element of slander in this comment, there is no reason to dismiss it out of hand. It may rather be an indication of a different conception of religion or religiosity, where dogmatic teachings do not take up a role which is as central as it is in the case of the Catholic Church (as previously discussed in relation to the Bogomils). Judging by the available evidence, however, it must be noted that this malleability does not refer to all, but only a part of the Cathars’ metaphysical teachings.

The most precise account of the differences between individual Italian Cathar churches is provided in the *Summa* of Rainerius Sacconi, who states that they are divided into three major ‘sects’: the Albanenses, the Concorezzenses and Bagnolenses, adding that “other Cathars,

whether in Tuscany or in the March [of Treviso] or in Provence, do not differ in beliefs from the Cathars just named or from some part of them” (Wakefield 330). Sacconi first lists the beliefs that all Cathars hold in common: the devil created the material world, church sacraments are worthless, carnal matrimony is a mortal sin, there is no resurrection of the body, eating meat, eggs or cheese is a mortal sin, taking an oath is not permissible, neither is the punishment of criminals by secular authorities, child baptism is worthless. There are also no essential differences among the Cathar branches in the rituals such as the imposition of the hands, breaking of bread, and confession of sins, or the nature and functions of their offices.

While all Cathars agree that the devil created the material world, however, the probably crucial difference between the Albanenses on the one hand, and the Bagnolenses and Concorezzenses on the other, is the question of the precise relationship between God and the devil. While the former believe that “there are from eternity two principles, to wit, of good and evil” (Wakefield 338), the latter hold that there is one principle, God, who created the four elements from nothing, whereas “the devil, with God’s permission, made all visible things, or this world” (Wakefield 343), thus creating the distinction between what is generally referred to as absolute and moderate dualism. Other points of disagreement include the general conception of the nature of the Trinity, the humanity of Jesus Christ, the precise attitude towards the Old Testament, and the existence of purgatory and hell. What is more important than the differences in belief, however, is the general mutual recognition of the individual Cathar churches, as noted by Sacconi: “Also, all the churches of the Cathars recognize each other, although they may have differing and contrary opinions, except the Albanenses and the Concorezzenses, who censure each other” (Wakefield 345).

The history of the Cathars and their eventual annihilation in Western Europe is a complex and well documented story, which will only be touched upon here. Long before the legal measures for the combat of heresy discussed in the previous chapter were adopted - as early as 1022 in Orleans - convicted heretics were burned alive, along with the exhumed remains of their former co-religionists (Wakefield 81), a practice that would become habitual over the following

period. Moore has noted the discursive parallels that were consistently drawn between heresy and leprosy by contemporary chroniclers: “in the 12th century the language of leprosy and its symptoms were applied to heresy with great regularity... the *tabes* were leprous sores, and when they became putrid, according to the prevailing diagnosis, death was inevitable” (2005, 247). Besides leprosy, heresy was also identified with cancer, which “is classified by Isidore under the heading *de morbis qui in superficie videntur*, and was so called, he says, from its resemblance to the scaly skin of the crab, it is a wound for which medicine knows no cure except the amputation of the infected member; if it were allowed to live and spread it would bring certain death (Heresy as Disease 3). Thus, virtually from its earliest appearance, heresy was identified as a kind of collective disease, which needed to be literally annihilated, including the burning of any remains.

The eventual proclamation of the Albigensian crusade in 1209 and the establishment of the Inquisition in 1232 that would actively combat Catharism in the Languedoc region for a period of 100 years should be seen as the culmination of this virtually universal thought pattern among Catholic observers. The only traces of empathy for the victims of this brutal repression can occasionally be identified in the respect felt for the Cathars’ widely acknowledged bravery when faced by the pyre. In Eberwin’s appeal to Bernard of Clairvaux, one can almost sense the author’s doubts about his own position: “What is more marvellous, they met and bore the agony of the fire not only with patience but even with joy. At this point, Holy Father, were I with you, I should like you to explain whence comes to those limbs of the devil constancy such as is scarcely to be found even in men most devoted to the faith of Christ” (Wakefield 129).

Catharism/Patarenism: An ‘alien’ movement?

Although modern historiography has succeeded in providing a more objective image of the Cathars than their contemporaries did, a tendency to view them as something essentially alien nevertheless remains. For the purpose of illustrating this claim, we may leave aside those instances in which they are vilified as ‘enemies of the true faith’, or romantically celebrated as the only representatives of a true spirituality, and focus upon attempts to critically assess their

role in the history of medieval Europe. A typical example of what may be described as a charitable yet ultimately critical judgement of the Cathars was given by Steven Runciman in his classic work *The Medieval Manichee*: “It was not an ignoble religion. It taught the value of the fundamental virtues; it faced with courage the anxious question of evil. But it was a religion of pessimism. It held out no hope for individual men and their salvation. Mankind should die out, that the imprisoned fragments of Godhead should return to their home.” (Runciman 179) It is not clear why Runciman argued that Catharism held out no hope for salvation, as, in fact, it offered a very clear (though, admittedly, very strenuous) path towards the liberation of the ‘inner man’, namely the following of the rules proscribed for what they considered to be true Christians. Furthermore, the liberation of the fragments of light imprisoned in matter was seen as the ultimate destiny of the universe rather than mankind alone.

In a somewhat similar vein, Wakefield writes that

in fully developed Catharist dogma there are elements strange to the main currents of Western religious development, because the influence of Bogomilist cosmology in the mid-twelfth century led the Cathars beyond the essentially Christian asceticism of the earlier period to a total rejection of this world. And to reject the world entirely was to abandon the hope of transforming human life in this world, which is the basis of Christian evangelism (50).

Wakefield’s final point, i.e. the claim that the Cathars abandoned the hope of transforming human life in this world, can only be the result of an assumption of the way in which their metaphysical dogmas were applied to the everyday world. Just as in the previously discussed case of the Paulicians, however, all the evidence points towards the fact that the Cathars were in fact deeply involved in the quotidian existence of their believers. Unlike their pre-mendicant orthodox/Catholic brethren, the Cathars did not withdraw to isolated monasteries to create imitations of the celestial world, but lived among people in towns and villages.

What is more problematic, however, is Wakefield’s claim that Catharist beliefs were ‘strange to the main currents of Western religious developments’, while, presumably, implying that other

contemporary developments such as the crusades and the inquisition were in some ways more 'Western'. In fact, if there is any use in continuing to work with the problematic concept of 'Western' culture that stretches back to antiquity, it would be more precise to state that the conflict between Catharism and orthodox Christianity presented a kind of crossroads of this culture, and the direction that was eventually taken was determined through a brutal campaign of destruction led by the Catholic Church. Among the values known to have been promoted by the Cathars, it is particularly their rejection of any kind of violence against animals and human beings, including criminals, that most stood at odds with the prevailing values of their (and, indeed, our own) times. Considering the development of Europe following their destruction, including the witch-hunts, the wars between Catholics and Protestants and the beginnings of colonization, we can only speculate what the history of the 'West' may have looked like if some the Cathars' ideas had been permitted to become more wide-spread and dominant.

3.4 Conclusion: Dualism - movement of the Holy Spirit

The most important conclusion that emerges from this analysis of the major medieval 'dualist' Christian movements - Paulicianism, Bogomilism and Catharism/Patarenism - is that the label of dualism covers a heterogenous set of beliefs and can ultimately be highly misleading. Using the previously mentioned classification by Stoyanov, the major distinction among the medieval movements is the one between absolute and moderate dualism, attested among Byzantine Bogomils as well as Italian Cathars. Meanwhile, as has been shown, for the Armenian branch of Paulicianism it seems impossible to prove any kind of dualist beliefs.

More fundamentally, however, the problem with the label dualism is that it assigns a central role to a metaphysical belief whose function in the overall religious system of these movements is unclear at best. On the one hand, it appears that this article of faith may have been available only to an inner circle of the initiated, and thus should not be construed as the fundamental feature of the movements as a whole. On the other hand, there are strong indications that this

metaphysical dualism may only have been a means to a more profound teaching of a moral and psychological nature. Primarily, this would include the view that ‘evil’ is something material and substantial that needs to be ‘ejected’ from the human being, as the Messalians taught.

Furthermore, as some of the scattered bits of information mentioned here indicate, instead of simply withdrawing from a material world which is considered evil, the aim of at least some ‘dualists’ may have been to overcome or balance the contradictions between spirit and matter they perceived as inherent to human existence. At least in the case of the Bogomils and Cathars, there are numerous instances in which they are reported to have claimed that the true Christians are already in heaven.⁶³ Thus their reported metaphysical teachings should not necessarily be seen as ‘beliefs’ with a function analogous to those held by the orthodox churches, but rather as instances of transformative knowledge in the gnostic sense, enabling the ‘knower’ to perceive and partake in a different reality, which may be the ultimate aim of ‘dualist’ religious teaching.

Despite the evident variations in their metaphysical teachings, I have nevertheless argued for the possibility of continuity between Paulicianism, Bogomilism and Catharism. This continuity is evident, first of all, in the way representatives of these movements criticized the orthodox churches. The previously discussed targets of their criticisms generally lend credence to their oft-quoted claims that they represent an early form of Christianity fighting against what they perceived to be the later corruptions of the original apostolic teachings carried out by the imperial church. However, particularly the more extensively documented appearance of non-dualist heretical movements in the medieval West, most notably the Waldensians, demonstrate that similar opinions about the orthodox churches may also emerge independently, primarily as a result of wider access to scripture and generally more dynamic social conditions.

The one element of dualist movements that is not attested outside of their boundaries, however, is the initiatory ritual known as spiritual baptism. While it must remain a matter of

⁶³ For example, in his *Summa against the Cathars*, Moneta of Cremona mentions “their congregation, which they call the kingdom of heaven.” (Hamilton 325).

conjecture that a ritual of this kind was also present among the Paulicians, there is strong evidence that in all three movements, baptism, along with its associated obligations, represented the most fundamental and indeed defining element of their entire religion. What made its function so specific to these movements is that it explicitly transformed its recipients into carriers of the Holy Spirit, and thus ultimately into mediators between the mundane and the divine or the material and the spiritual, a role that is reserved for Jesus Christ or the institution of the church as a whole in orthodox forms of Christianity. The significance of this concept is so profound that the so-called dualist movements would perhaps be more precisely named “movements of the Holy Spirit” or “movements of spiritual baptism”. This categorization would most likely be a more accurate reflection of the priorities of these movements’ adherents themselves. More importantly, however, it would reflect a more up-to-date understanding of religions as amalgamations of rituals of forms of life that unite ‘theory’ and ‘praxis’, rather than mere sets of metaphysical dogmas.

A final issue to be discussed is particularly relevant for the following chapter and its discussion about the Bosnian Church. The question concerns the possibility of drawing a precise line of division between ‘dualism’ and orthodoxy. In terms of metaphysical beliefs, the area that usually receives the most scholarly attention, the border is not clear as might be thought at first. While absolute dualism is indeed very far removed from orthodox Christianity, certain forms of monarchic dualism ascribe so little independent power to the devil-demiurge that their position becomes almost indistinguishable from orthodoxy. As far as true Christians as understood by dualist movements are concerned, i.e. those who have received spiritual baptism, there is sufficient evidence to show that the line can be drawn very clearly, i.e. that no compromise was conceivable between them and the orthodox churches, for which they had nothing but contempt.

However, the situation is somewhat complicated by the already discussed and extensively documented willingness of the adherents of dualist movements - including the Paulicians - to conceal their true beliefs behind a facade of adherence to orthodox customs, i.e. the existence of a ‘crypto-dualism’ whose extent can only be guessed at. A particularly striking instance of the

extent to which ‘dualism’ could spread within the nominally most orthodox circles is the report of an infiltration of Bogomils among the monasteries of the Holy Mountain in the 13th century. The question becomes more complex once we take into account the situation among the so-called *credentes*, i.e. the dualist ‘believers’ who had not received spiritual baptism. Writing about Cathar *credentes* in the village of Montailhou, Le Roy Laudurie wrote: “By a kind of dual belief which was not then regarded as shocking, they even shower a special Catholic piety to some particular saint, Beatrice offering coloured candles at the altar of the Virgin and Pierre Maury donating fleeces to the altar of Saint Anthony.” (265) Instead of a response, this chapter will thus end on the note that the researcher of dualist heresies must be more flexible with the analytical categories with which (s)he approaches the available evidence than has often been the norm among scholars in the past. Instead of viewing ‘dualism’ as a homogenous and inflexible set of teachings, sect or even a separate religion, it should rather be thought of along the lines of a movement with identifiable tendencies of thought and behaviour, but no strictly definable delimitations or borders.

CHAPTER 4 THE BOSNIAN CHURCH

Our faith was in communion with Rome until pope Sylvester, who was our teacher, but he fell away and healed Constantine with a dead camel.

‘Dispute between Roman Catholic and Bosnian Pataren’ (Šanjek 175).

The Bosnian Church is first mentioned under that name in a local charter issued in the year 1329 (Ćošković 27). In numerous sources written by Catholic observers of the 14th and 15th centuries, its adherents were described as infidels, heretics, Cathars, Manichaeans and, most commonly, Patarens (Ćošković 75). As early as the 13th century, however, several Western European heresiological writings mentioned the existence of a dualist church that is referred to as Slavonic or Dalmatian, terms that largely correspond with territories that would eventually form part of the Bosnian state. Furthermore, in a 1203 document known as the Bilino Polje Abjuration, the heads of an unidentified Christian “fraternity” on the territory of Bosnia signed a declaration of faith before the papal legate John Cassamaris, renouncing a series of heterodox customs and beliefs and promising not to remain followers of “heretical depravity”. Thus, based on heresiological documents alone, the term “Bosnian Church” can be extended to this period and its appearance postulated sometime in the 12th century.

This date roughly corresponds with the emergence of Bosnia as a banate under the formal suzerainty of the Hungarian kingdom, and thus its final separation from the Byzantine sphere of influence, under which it had been for significant periods from its first mentioning in the 10th century until the 1180s. Until the mid-13th century, Bosnia had a resident Catholic bishop associated first with the Dubrovnik and, after 1192, the Split archbishopric. However, in 1247 the seat of the bishopric was moved to Djakovo, a town located outside of Bosnian territory, where it would remain for the rest of the Middle Ages (Šidak 15). A more significant Catholic presence was re-established in the country in the mid-14th century with the arrival of a Franciscan mission, leading to a gradual and continuous strengthening of Catholicism. In the early 14th century, the

territory of Hum (largely corresponding to modern-day Herzegovina) was incorporated into the Bosnian kingdom, adding a strong and permanent Eastern Orthodox Christian presence to the complex religious make-up the medieval Bosnian state. By the mid-15th century, the Catholic Bosnian king Stephen Thomas had started persecuting adherents of the Bosnian Church, initiating its collapse and disappearance that would be completed with the conquest of Bosnia by the Ottoman Empire in 1463.

Although a significant number of external sources are very clear in their assessment of the Bosnian Church as heretical/dualist, the scholarship on this question is deeply divided. To list only some of the more prominent interpretations, the theology of the Bosnian Church has been characterized as Bogomil, Orthodox Christian, schismatic Catholic, quasi-Arian, Manichaeic and Humiliatist. While the majority of the foundational works on medieval heresy - such as those by Milan Loos, Steven Runciman, Yuri Stoyanov and Bernard and Janet Hamilton - include the Bosnian Church in the 'dualist' category, John V. Fine, the most influential historian of the medieval Balkans writing in English, is strongly opposed to this view, arguing that "there were certainly dualists in Bosnia, but their movement, probably very small in size, was distinct from the Bosnian church" (286). As I argue in Chapter 6, although Fine's book represents the probably most systematic and detailed available treatment of the history of medieval Bosnia and its religion, his hypothesis contains a row of serious flaws and his conclusions should thus be revised.

The primary reason for the existence of such radically divergent assessments of the Bosnian Church's theology is the extreme paucity of sources written by its adherents. Essentially, they consist of a series of biblical manuscripts written in medieval Bosnian/Slavonic that do not reveal any obvious deviations from orthodoxy. However, as noted in previous chapters, numerous, if not most heretical movements in ancient and medieval Christianity were based on different interpretations of canonical texts, rather than their outright modification. A strong argument in favour of the existence of heterodox, and more specifically Bogomil/Cathar interpretations of the Bible in the case of the Bosnian Church is provided in the glosses found in

two of their manuscripts. Supported by a close reading of the glosses in chapter 5, I will develop an interpretation of the Bosnian Church's theology that will bring it in line with the moderate dualism it was ascribed in Western heresiological sources.

As I demonstrated in the previous two chapters, however, theological questions represent only one aspect of the broader phenomenon of heresy. This is equally true for the narrower category of 'dualism'. Hence an analysis of the Bosnian Church must also include the question of its wider socio-political significance. Unfortunately, due to the virtually complete absence of documents describing the quotidian existence of adherents of the Bosnian Church and their relationship with the wider community, this issue can only be discussed by assuming parallels with similar movements elsewhere, such as the Cathars of the Languedoc about whom a lot more is known due to the availability of extensive Inquisition records (or, depending on one's opinion of the Bosnian Church, other Catholic or Orthodox Christian societies of medieval Europe).⁶⁴

4.1 The structure of the Bosnian Church

While the theology of the Bosnian Church must, to some extent, remain a matter of guesswork and conjecture, its internal structure and organization is more amply documented, most notably in sources found in the archives of Dubrovnik, the city-state with which Bosnia kept close economic and political ties throughout the period of the Middle Ages. The Bosnian

⁶⁴ A typical example of the extent to which the assessment of the Bosnian Church and its place in society must remain a matter of conjecture is the situation during the second half of the 13th century, a period from which virtually no documents survive. During the first half of the 13th century, the Hungarian kingdom had carried out a crusade against Bosnia, with one source mentioning that "many of those who did not want to convert were burnt on the pyre by officials of the vice-regent Koloman" (Šanjek 135). As this is the only source that mentions the burning of heretics in this period, its extent can only be guessed at. However, in a crusade that was led against the Cathars of the Languedoc only a few years earlier, the number of pyre victims is known to have ran into the thousands. A second example of the typical ambiguity of some of the most important documents discussing the religious situation in medieval Bosnia is Mauro Orbini's note that in 1459, the Bosnian king Stjepan Tomaš forced 2,000 Bosnian Christians to convert to Catholicism, expelling to Herzegovina another 40 - or, alternatively, 40 thousand - who refused to convert (Malcolm 41). Needless to say, our assessment of this document, i.e. our response to the question whether in 1459 there were 2,040 or 42,000 Bosnian Christians, will lead to a radically different assessment of the overall religious situation in medieval Bosnia. This and similar problems should act as a warning to scholars of medieval Bosnia who often display an unwarranted certainty in the conclusions they reach, rather than admitting their inevitably hypothetical nature.

historian Pejo Ćošković, who has recently written an extensive monograph devoted to that topic (on which the following summary is largely based) notes that “now we can say with full certainty that the *krstjani*⁶⁵ had a completely built up church organization with a hierarchy which in its nomenclature does not have a full analogy in the set-up of the large dualistic churches of that time” (Ćošković 10). This conclusion was reached in reaction to an older generation of scholars, such as Aleksandar Solovjev and Dominik Mandić, who attempted to derive insights about the organizational structure of the Bosnian Church by simply drawing parallels with Western Cathars and Patarens, without finding support for their claims in domestic sources. At the same time, we should note Ćošković’s opinion that, despite organizational differences, “fundamentally, the Bosnian heresy unquestionably belonged to the dualistic movement of the time, which was distributed in a very wide area from Asia Minor to the south of France” (88).

The most basic characteristic of Bosnian Christianity, encountered as early as the 1203 Bilino Polje Abjuration (to be further discussed below) is the consistent separation of its adherents into two classes, a clerical/spiritual elite and a larger group of lay supporters, with only the former being referred to as ‘Christians’, i.e. *krstjani*.⁶⁶ Although there is no direct confirmation of these terms in domestic sources, most scholars agree that the distinction corresponds to the division of Western Cathars and Patarens into a class of *perfecti* or *electi* and their lay supporters usually known under the name *credentes* (Ćošković 223). The existence of two classes of adherents within the Bosnian Church can also be linked to the presumed monastic origins of this ecclesiastic institution. Ćošković notes that the Bosnian Church originally appears within the framework of the Catholic bishopric with a Slavic service known under the name *ecclesiae*

⁶⁵ The term ‘krstjani’, meaning simply ‘Christians’, is the name that the followers of the Bosnian Church used to refer themselves in the available documents.

⁶⁶ As an illustrative example, Ćošković quotes a 1423 letter written by representatives of Dubrovnik reporting about a visit by a Bosnian delegation consisting of the two *krstjani* Vlatko Tumarlić and Radin Butković and the dukes Budislav and Vukašin, in which they are referred to as “duobos paterenis et duobos laicis” (two Patarens and two laypersons).

bosnensis,⁶⁷ stressing, however, that “between the Catholic bishopric with a Slavonic liturgy and the dualistic Bosnian church there is no continuity in teaching, but only in an organizational sense” (Ćošković 246).

A smaller number of the *krstjani* made up the Bosnian Church hierarchy, known under the name of *strojnici* (plural of *strojnik*), a term Ćošković equates with the Greek *oikonomos* or Latin *administratores*. The *strojnici* were further subdivided into two different groups, known as *starci* (plural of *starac*) and *gosti* (plural of *gost*). The title of *starac* (literally ‘old man’) has been linked to the ancient Christian rank of *presbyter*, the *ancianus* found among the Cathars and the equivalent name found in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, but Ćošković argues that its roots should be primarily sought in extended family communities where it denoted “one of the more respected members who had helped in the administration of domestic affairs through his great life experience” (276). The only certainty we have about the title *gost* (literally ‘guest’) is that its bearer took up a higher position in the hierarchy of the Bosnian Church (Ćošković 313) than the *starac*. Although there are some documents suggesting that the *gosti* occasionally served as heads of monastic communities of the Bosnian Christians known as *hiža*, the role of this title cannot be reduced to this function, since there are other instances in which a *starac* could be found in the same role. Finally, on top of the hierarchy of the Bosnian Church, we find the title *djed* (‘grandfather’), often also referred to as *bishop*. Once again, our knowledge of his precise role and function within the church is very limited. In the Synodikon of the Bulgarian Tsar Boril from 1211, there is a mention of a ‘dedec’ at the head of the Bogomil community, thus allowing for the hypothesis that the title is ultimately of Bogomil origin (Ćošković 390).

⁶⁷ However, Alić notes that this oft-repeated claim is based on only two documents of questionable relevance: a bull of pope Alexander II from 18th March 1067, mentioning a Bosnian bishopric and a bull of pope Clement III from 8th January 1089, confirming the existence of a Bosnian bishopric. Regarding the former, Alić states that “in a detailed analysis of this document Milan Syfflay has proven that this bull is a much later forgery and therefore without any scientific value” (154). While he recognizes the authenticity of the latter document, Alić argues that it is an expression of the pretensions of Bodin, the king of Zeta, rather than the actual state of affairs, and thus cannot be used to conclusively prove the existence of a functioning Bosnian bishopric (155/6).

4.2 The socio-political role of the Bosnian Church

As far as the socio-political role of the Bosnian Church is concerned, the sources only allow us to reach some relatively firm conclusions about its relationship with the local nobility.⁶⁸ Two 15th century documents written by *djeds*, i.e. bishops of the Bosnian Church, illustrate the institution's political role: a letter authored by *djed* Radomer addressed to the duke of Dubrovnik (Šanjek 106/107) and a charter written by *djed* Mirohna in 1427 (Šanjek 108/109). In the first document, *djed* Radomer writes: "we have sent our *strojniks* and *krstjani* via the duke Paul so that he can take possession of his property again, because we have persuaded the Lord king to return to him what belongs to him, because it was taken from him without guilt. Therefore we dutifully thank you for your kindness and for keeping him with you honourably, and we say for you that you have been our allies and ask you to send two of your minor nobles (*vlastelinčić*) with the duke Paul to the king, so that you can sign an agreement and make peace with him, as it would please us if you would stay with us in peace" (Šanjek 107).⁶⁹ This letter indicates the extensive political and diplomatic role enjoyed by the *djed* of the Bosnian Church: he acts as an intermediary between the Bosnian king, a major Bosnian feudal lord and the government of the city of Dubrovnik, possessing the power to influence the king's decision to reconcile with the feudal lord and return the properties that had been taken from him. Furthermore, in his communication with Dubrovnik the *djed* acts as the representative of the Bosnian king, asking

⁶⁸ "Its strength originated from the role it played in the inconstant political conditions and relations with the nobility it had gradually created since the period when its class rights had begun to be formed. What relationships it succeeded in building up with its believers, remains completely unknown, because the appearance of the members of the Bosnian church outside of its public and political framework cannot be assessed" (Ćošković 438). This state of affairs does not, however, necessarily mean that the Bosnian Church was an elitist organization without a significant relationship with the local population, as claimed by John Fine: "Thus we must conclude that even though the Bosnian Church tried to serve as a Church, it failed realistically to face the situation in which it found itself and by failing to reorganize itself into a preaching order, it was never able to make itself into a real Church or to establish firm ties between itself and the peasantry" (Fine 232).

⁶⁹ Translation mine. The original of this and other documents can be found in the Appendix.

Dubrovnik to send representatives to sign a peace agreement with him, thus further demonstrating his high degree of independence of any one side's specific interests.⁷⁰

In the second document,⁷¹ *djed* Mirohna writes that “the lord king Tvrtko has sent to me Ivan Mrnavić called Turka to swear loyal service to him and his successors, that his faith will be the faith of Ivan and his properties, and that it would be guaranteed by letters confirmed by the stamp of royal authority, and that the Bosnian Church and the good Bosnians⁷² will not be examined on this, until something may happen against the faith of the lord king Tvrtko and the (Bosnian) Church” (Šanjek 108/109). In this document, we can see the *djed* more closely aligned with royal interests, acting as the author and guarantor of a contract between an unknown nobleman (the insertion of the name of Ivan Mrnavić is considered a forgery, see footnote above) and the king.

Among the documents illustrating the close proximity of the Bosnian Church and the state's political authorities, mention must be also made of two donations to the *knez* Vukoslav Hrvatinić written in 1326/1329 by the ban Stjepan II Kotromanić. The first one starts with the words “I St.

⁷⁰ The cordial relationships between members of the Bosnian Church and Catholic Dubrovnik have occasionally been used to argue that the former could under no circumstances have been 'heretical'. However, Čošković notes that “it is necessary to point out that in their documents, except during wartime situations, there is no trace of religious intolerance and animosity towards the Bosnian Church and its *krstjani*, whom the Dubrovnik Catholics considered heretical, but it did not prevent them to express friendship, respect and religious tolerance towards them in the interest of conducting trade” (Čošković 27).

⁷¹ In an article entitled ‘O autentičnosti i značenju jedne improve bosanskog “djeda”’, (‘On the authenticity and significance of a document by a Bosnian “djed”’), J. Šidak defended the previously disputed authenticity of this document (except for the name of the personality Ivan Mrnavić), and used it as evidence against the claim that the significance of the Bosnian Church in the Bosnian kingdom had started declining at the very beginning of the 15th century. He concludes: “Hence, there is no foundation for the claim that the respect and influence of the ‘Bosnian Church’ was declining in the 1420s and 1430s. Some change occurs in this respect in the 1440s, but very gradually, while a decisive turn occurs only in the sixth decade, just before the fall of the Bosnian state.” (Šidak 273).

⁷² It is not clear why Šanjek translates the expression ‘ab Ecclesia et bonus Bosnensibus’ (Šanjek 108) as ‘the Bosnian Church and its properties’ (Šanjek 109, translation mine). In fact, the term ‘good Bosnians’ (*dobri Bošnjani*) regularly appears as a designation of members of the Bosnian Church and can be linked to the Cathar term *boni homines*. Šanjek’s (deliberate or accidental) mistake may be linked to his occasionally expressed desire to ascribe the entire Bosnian medieval history a Croatian ethnic character. For example, commenting on the apocrypha *The Beginning of the World*, he argues that it should be viewed “in the context of the folk beliefs of the Croatian *ethnium* in the Middle Ages” (Šanjek 349).

Gregory called ban Stjepan ... by the grace of God the lord of all Bosnian lands” while the second one finishes with a statement testifying that it was written “before the great *djed* Radoslav and before the great *gost* Radoslav and before the *starac* Radomir and Žunbor and Vlčko and before the entire church and before Bosnia... in Moištra... in the house of the great *gost* in Radoslala.”⁷³ The historian Dubravko Lovrenović notes that “the monastery (*hiža*) in Moštre, where the charter was signed, was located about 6 km from Visoko, i.e. it was very close to the centre of the state. This fact shows that the church enjoyed the ban’s support. His relationship with the church (and its leadership) was so close that he visited its monastery and allowed its hierarchy to participate in state affairs” (Lovrenović 198).⁷⁴

Thus, prior to looking at the sources speaking of the Bosnian Church’s theology, it can be established that it was an independent ecclesiastical institution with a hierarchy unlike those found in the orthodox or dualist churches of this period. Furthermore, it can be assumed that it grew out of a nominally Catholic monastic institution that used the Slavic language, although this does not mean that it also inherited its theology. Due to a lack of relevant sources, there is virtually no information on the relationship between the Bosnian Church’s spiritual elite known as the *krstjani* and its lay adherents or supporters. Conversely, there is a relative abundance of sources attesting to the close relationship between the Bosnian Church and the state’s nobility, clearly showing its involvement in regional political, diplomatic and economic affairs (at least from the 14th century onwards). This state of affairs in itself sufficiently demonstrates that the

⁷³ Quoted in Lovrenović 197/198.

⁷⁴ While this conclusion is certainly justified, Lovrenović’s further inferences are more speculative: “The church has been handed back its state-making role, St. Gregory has ‘descended’ to Earth and ‘incarnated’ in the governing figure of the Bosnian ban and taken his seat on the throne *by the grace of God*. All of this shows - as there was no other church organization (and especially no bishopric) in the area of central Bosnia at the time - that the Bosnian church headed by the *great djed Radoslav* appears as the sacralizer of the ban honour” (Lovrenović 198). Lovrenović’s entire argument is based on the assumption that the Bosnian Church was what he calls an *acephalous*, schismatic, rather than heretical church. In this respect, he largely relies on Fine (whose arguments will be discussed in detail below), quoting him to support his claim that “unlike the Bogomils, the Bosnian Church accepted an omnipotent God, the Trinity, church buildings, the cross, the cult of saints, religious art, and at least part of the Old Testament” (224). Thus he derives ultimately unreliable conclusions about the Bosnian Church by assuming parallels with Catholic states, arguing, for example that “almost as a rule, in medieval Europe the Church is the keeper of the ruler’s insignia and there is no reason that it was not the case in Bosnia, particularly considering that it had developed the French church-political model to an enviable degree” (Lovrenović 219).

Bosnian Church cannot be subsumed under the stereotypes of dualist movements opposed to any kind of involvement in the material world.⁷⁵ While in its general form these preliminary conclusions about the Bosnian Church are largely a matter of consensus among scholars dealing with this topic, virtually all other questions remain subject of occasionally acrimonious dispute.

4.3 The heresiological picture

The heresiological picture of the Bosnian Church can be derived (directly or indirectly) from a diverse set of documents spanning the period from the second half of the 12th to the second half of the 15th century: the ‘Acts of the Cathar Council’ held in 1167 in St-Felix-de-Caraman, an anonymous text on the Cathar heresy in Lombardy (1210-1214), Moneta Cremona’s ‘Tractate against Cathars and Waldenses’ (1241), Rainerius Sacconi’s ‘Summa against the Cathars and Leonists’ (1250), Paul the Dalmatian’s ‘Discussion between a Roman Catholic and Bosnian Pataren’ (around 1250), Anselm of Alexandria’s ‘Tractate on Heretics’ (1260-1270), an anonymous ‘List of errors held by the Patarens of Bosnia’ (14th century), Jacob de Marchia’s ‘Dialogue against the Bosnian Manicheans’ (1435/38) and Joannes Torquemada’s ‘Explanation of the religious truths of the Roman Catholic church to inform the Manicheans of the Bosnian kingdom’ (1461).⁷⁶ While the image of the Bosnian Church that emerges from this diverse set of documents is not uniform, it can nevertheless be said that they provide a relatively consistent image of a moderately dualist or monarchical heterodox Christian movement, which considers itself the only true successor of Christ and the apostles and condemns the Catholic church and many of its customs in occasionally radical terms.

⁷⁵ Using a Marxist historiographic methodology, A. Solovjev argued that the Bosnian Church evolved from an apostolic movement defending the rights of the common people to an ultimately conservative institution serving the interests of the feudal nobility: “But by becoming a national movement, which defended Bosnia from the attacks of foreigners, Bogomilism quickly lost its progressive character in accordance with the dialectics of historical evolution. Sometimes rationalistic in its criticism of the official church and its dogma, Bogomilism was nevertheless a child of the Middle Ages, creating a new mysticism and embracing the metaphysics of dualism and docetism [...] By entering a compromise with the aristocracy, supporting its demands and limiting itself to mysticism, the Bosnian Bogomilism condemned itself to destruction along with the feudal state to which it had tied itself.” (Solovjev 1948, 46)

⁷⁶ For the original texts of these documents as well as a discussion of their authenticity, origins, and dating, see Šanjek.

The earliest documents that confirm, or at least strongly indicate the existence of a dualist church on the territory that would eventually become part of the Bosnian kingdom are writings primarily concerned with Western European Cathars and Patarens. The Acts of the Cathar Council held in 1167 in St-Felix-de-Caraman mention the existence of a Dalmatian church among the five Bogomil churches of the East (Šanjek 68/69). The anonymous text on the Cathar heresy in Lombardy notes that a congregation from Mantua sent its bishop Caloianes “to Sclavonia after his consecration” (Wakefield and Evans 163), while Nicola, chosen by a congregation at Vicenza, was “sent to Sclavonia to be consecrated” and “was received as their bishop on his return” (Wakefield and Evans 163). In the same text we are told about the division of Cathars into an absolute and a moderate wing, with Caloianes belonging to the latter.

The moderate dualists’ defining belief was that there is “one only good God, almighty, without beginning, who created angels and the four elements” (Wakefield and Evans 165). Lucifer, who was originally good, was seduced by an evil spirit and “returned to heaven and there seduced others” (Wakefield and Evans 165), after which he and the evil spirit “wished to separate the elements, but could not. Thereupon, they begged from God a good angel as assistant, and thus with God’s acquiescence, with the aid of this good angel, and by his strength and wisdom, they separated the elements” (Wakefield and Evans 165). Furthermore, they assert that Lucifer is the God of Genesis and that he created Adam’s body, forcing the good angel into it. In reference to the prophets of the Old Testament, they believed that “if sometimes these prophets foretold something about Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, they prophesied all unknowingly, as if forced thereto” (Wakefield and Evans 166).

Significantly, the text describes a theodicy that is very different from the belief in an eternal battle between good and evil often summarily ascribed to all ‘dualists’:

They avow that Almighty God did all these things, not through himself, but through the devil as His minister. In this way, they say, with reference to what the devil performed by the wisdom and power accorded to him in creation by God, he caused all these things, with the purpose of ruling over them without limit, with

God's permission. God permitted it for another purpose, that He might draw out of this world through penance the fruit of those destined to be saved. (Wakefield and Evans 166).

Finally, we are told that the "Sclavini" also

believe that in the time of grace the Son of God (who is Jesus Christ), John the Evangelist, and Mary were three angels appearing in the flesh. They say that Christ did not really put on flesh, nor did He eat or drink, nor was he crucified, dead, or buried; that everything He did as man was only semblance, not actuality, and but seemed to be real (Wakefield and Evans 167).

In the 'Tractate against Cathars and Waldenses', Moneta Cremona also draws a clear distinction between absolute and moderate dualists, largely agreeing with the anonymous tract, but also providing several additional details of their beliefs. Repeating the story of creation we encountered in the anonymous tract, Moneta notes that "therefore, God gave material beginning to these forms; for this reason they also say that God is the Creator of all things which are visible. They do not, however, except in an obscure way, call Him the maker of these things" (Wakefield and Evans 317). Furthermore, Moneta explains why God allowed Satan temporary governance of the world. Interpreting the parable of the unmerciful servant found in Matthew 18:23-35, they hold that it was Satan who told God: "If you have patience with me, if you will permit me to do so, I will make so many men that you will be able to restore from among them the full number of your angels which I stole from you" (Wakefield and Evans 319). Moneta also tells us about the moderate dualists' interpretation of Adam's sin: "Satan shut another angel into the body of a woman made from Adam's side while he slept. With her Adam sinned. Adam's sin, they declare, was fornication, for they say that the serpent came to the woman and corrupted her with his tail; and from that coition Cain was born" (Wakefield and Evans 321). Finally, we are also told about their conception of baptism, "which they believe to be nothing other than the imposition of hands" (Wakefield and Evans 322), as well as their denial of "all the sacraments of the Church, the resurrection of the flesh, and the exercise of temporal authority" and their belief that "an oath is forbidden under any circumstances" (Wakefield and Evans 323).

Rainerius Sacconi's *Summa* completes the image of the moderate dualists, adding their belief that "to eat meat, eggs, or cheese, even in pressing need, is a mortal sin; this for the reason they are begotten by coition" (Wakefield and Evans 330). Sacconi also provides us with a description of the custom of breaking the bread, which replaces the orthodox Eucharist, and public confession, noting that usury is not considered a sin (Wakefield and Evans 332). Finally, commenting specifically on the beliefs of the Cathars of Concorezzo, who believe in one principle, Sacconi notes that "they all reject Moses, and many of them are doubtful about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the other patriarchs, and also especially the prophets. And many of them only recently came to believe correctly about the Blessed John the Baptist, whom they all formerly condemned" (Wakefield and Evans 344).

While it does not mention Bosnian or any other non-Italian Cathars, the document known as the 'Tenets of the Italian Cathars' is of particular interest because it offers a very precise comparison between three different groups of Cathars: the Albanenses, the Bagnolenses and the Concorezzenses. According to this list, it is only the Concorezzenses that can be classified as moderate dualists, as they do not believe in the existence of two principles (Wakefield and Evans 358). The rest of the list demonstrates the extent to which the beliefs of moderate dualists could approach those of orthodox Christians. Thus, unlike the other two groups, the Concorezzenses believed that the good God created corporeal bodies (but also that he is not the creator of all things), that all things are subject to one God only, that Christ was a true man, the son of Mary and took flesh from her, that he suffered and died (but, significantly, that he did not ascend in the flesh), that he is equal to the Father and that purgatory and hell do exist (Wakefield and Evans 358-360).

Anselm of Alexandria's text provides additional information on the Cathars of Concorezzo, reporting about a schism that emerged within their group. While the nature of the schism is interesting in itself, it also provides a model of a dogmatic evolution within a Cathar movement which, as will be shown, may also have occurred within the Bosnian Church. Thus, the matters

upon which the “ancients” and the “moderns” of the church of Concorezzo disagreed, included the belief that “Christ truly ate material food, that He actually died, or truly rose again,” that “the same spirit was in John the Baptist as had been in Elijah and that this was an evil spirit, a devil” and “that Christ was not God, one with the father” (Wakefield and Evans 362).

Nevertheless, both groups agreed on an ambivalent attitude towards Old Testament prophets, believing that they “spoke sometimes by their own inspiration, sometimes when inspired by the Holy Spirit, and sometimes when inspired by an evil spirit. All say that these sixteen prophets were good men but that whensoever they spoke by the evil spirit the devil always provided them with that which they should say” (Wakefield and Evans 363). Finally, as Anselm’s text is taken from an Inquisitor’s notebook, it provides important information about the extent to which the Cathars were able to hide their beliefs behind nominally orthodox statements:

one may demand of all Concorezzenses whether God made the body of Adam and whether He formed Eve from a rib, or if He himself shaped your hand or your body in reality and by direct act, without an intermediary. Should the reply be in the affirmative, one asks whether God the Father did this by His own fiat or whether the devil ever received from God any power or ministry by which he could do this, and so on. The Cathar will not be able to hid his error (Wakefield and Evans 364).

4.4 The Bosnian Patarens

Although there is no certainty about the date of composition or author of the ‘Discussion between a Roman Catholic and Bosnian Pataren,’ Šanjek persuasively argues that it was written in the 1230s by the Dominican inquisitor Paul the Dalmatian (160-65), noting that “its author is very familiar with the social and religious conditions of the time in Bosnia” (162). The text contains 31 chapters devoted to individual articles of faith held by the Bosnian Patarens: the rejection of baptism in water in favour of spiritual baptism; the conviction that they are the true followers of St Peter, while the Catholic Church lost its legitimacy with pope Sylvester; the conviction that true Christians are subject to persecution; the rejection of marriage in favour of the mystical union of Christ and the church; the rejection of the consumption of meat; the

rejection of the Eucharist; the conviction that the devil created everything that is subject to decay, while God created only eternal things; that souls are fallen angels who will return to heaven; an opposition to material churches; rejection of child baptism; opposition to the veneration of the cross; rejection of excommunication; rejection of the oath; rejection of the Old Testament and prophets; condemnation of John the Baptist; rejection of belief in bodily resurrection; condemnation of charity; rejection of the equality of God and Christ; opposition to the belief that the Old Testament God is the father of Christ and that he is the son of the Virgin Mary; the belief that Mary was an angel; rejection of the belief that Christ had a physical body, that he ate, that he was a real man, that he suffered, died and resurrected; rejection of belief that man can sin anytime; and rejection of confession of sins and penance (Šanjek 166-233).

A few clarifications are required in order to avoid some unjustified conclusions that could be derived from this list. Firstly, the form of dualism to be found among these allegations is clearly of the moderate kind, as God is held to have created invisible things, which presumably also includes the elements as well as, possibly, their separation. Secondly, the rejection of material churches may not be as clear as it seems at first, as we are only told of the Patarens' opposition to the belief that God dwells in material churches⁷⁷ and their conviction that "the church or crosses or images should not be venerated, like you do" (Šanjek 211), to which the Catholic replies: "I ask you and tell me why you venerate a mortal and corruptible man, for whom you say that he was created by the devil?" (Šanjek 211). The Patarens' conviction is therefore more likely to be based on the belief that the Holy Spirit dwells in true Christians rather than material objects, and not in an opposition to the existence of material structures as such. The same principle of interpretation should be applied to the Patarens' attitude towards the cross, as the text only states that they are opposed to its veneration, rather than its usage as such. In most of the other items, we are provided only with the Catholic response (not the Pataren position itself), so that its claims should be handled with care.

⁷⁷ "Heretic: In Acts 7:47-49, it is told: *Solomon built him a temple. But the all-mighty does not dwell in man-made things, as the prophet says* (Is 66:1): *The sky is my throne*. So also in chapter 17:24-25: *He does not dwell in man-made temples: and he is not served by human hands* etc. Is it, therefore, not the same with material churches?" (Šanjek 209-11).

The other three heresiological documents directly discussing the beliefs of Bosnian Christians are simple lists of their alleged errors, thus providing a more limited insight into their actual convictions. Generally, they confirm the items found in Paul the Dalmatian's text, only occasionally providing some diverging or more detailed information. The 'List of errors held and believed by the Bosnian Patarens' corroborates the assumption that the Bosnian Church adhered to a moderate dualist theology, noting that "they believe that there are two gods and that the higher God created everything spiritual and invisible and the lower, i.e. Lucifer everything corporeal and visible" (Šanjek 283). Perhaps the most important piece of information found in this list is that the 'Patarens' accept the Psalter, although they reject the rest of the Old Testament, consider that all the Old Testament fathers, patriarchs and prophets are condemned, and also condemn John the Baptist (Šanjek 283). Furthermore, we are told about their belief "that the Roman church is idolatrous and that all those who belong to its faith bow to idols" (Šanjek 283) and their condemnation of "material churches, images and saint figures, particularly the holy cross" (Šanjek 285).

Finally, it is important to note that "they say about themselves that they are the church of Christ and successors of the apostles, having among them one who says for himself that he is the vicar of Christ and successor of St. Peter" (Šanjek 283) and that "they promise salvation to all those who believe them and accept their laying on of hands, which they call baptism. And they require to be venerated like gods, calling themselves holy and without sins" (Šanjek 285). In all three documents, we find a reiteration of the Bosnian Christians' rejection of purgatory, along with the implication that it is this world that serves as a purification for the demons that once fell from heaven who "after carrying out penance in one or more coming bodies, will once again return to heaven" (Šanjek 285). The rejection of marriage and parallel belief that the biblical forbidden tree of life was in fact a woman is also reiterated, as well as the general opposition to excommunication and temporal punishment. Although such an attitude is implied in all the heresiological documents on the Bosnian Church, Torquemada's list directly confirms the existence of a Donatist opinion to sinning priests, listing as one of the items of belief he expects

to be accepted that “the power of baptism does not depend on the merits of the baptizer” (Šanjek 297).

The image of the Bosnian Church that emerges from heresiological writings is made up of elements that can be divided into three interrelated, but distinct groups: rejections of orthodox (particularly Catholic) Christian customs, existence of customs more or less typical of all Cathar movements (these two groups fall under the category of ‘heteropraxy’), and a set of heterodox beliefs contradicting the dogmas of the Catholic (and all other Chalcedonian) churches. The rejected customs of the orthodox churches include all the sacraments (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, extreme unction, matrimony and holy orders), the veneration of icons, material churches and the cross, excommunication and oath-taking. The customs specific to the Bosnian Church (and other Cathar movements) include spiritual baptism, refusal to eat meat and other products of animal origin and the veneration of full members of the church by other believers. Finally, the heterodox elements include a rejection of (most of) the Old Testament, a belief that Satan/Lucifer created the material world (though with some kind of participation or approval of God), the belief that souls are fallen demons carrying out penance in material bodies before returning to heaven, an interpretation of the original sin as fornication, a specific understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ (he was neither fully human nor, in some cases, equal to God), the rejection of the idea of resurrection of physical bodies, and a rigid understanding of sins (all sins are mortal) and the way in which they can be forgiven (i.e. only through re-baptism). Although it is not directly confirmed in the case of the Bosnian Christians, it is also important to note that certain beliefs of other Cathar groups were more open to modification than others, most notably the attitudes towards the Old Testament and John the Baptist.

4.4 The Bosnian Church in local documents

The image of the Bosnian Church derived from heresiological sources is challenged, or at least complicated by a closer analysis of a series of local sources: the Bilino Polje abjuration, the Testament of *gost* Radin, and the set of around 15 incomplete Gospels known to have been

written and illustrated by Bosnian Christians themselves. In the following section, a closer analysis of these documents will be carried out, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the Bosnian Church.

The Bilino Polje Abjuration

In the Bilino Polje abjuration of 1203, the representatives of the Bosnian Christians swear to the following items of faith or behaviour:

(i) We will not follow heretical depravity.

(ii) We renounce the schism, for which we are accused, and promise to remain faithful to the orders and instructions of the Holy Church.

(iii) In all the places, in which brothers live together, we will have churches in which we will meet as brothers to publicly sing night, morning and day hours.

(iv) In all our churches we will have altars and crosses, books, from the New, as well as the Old Testament, and read them as the Roman Church does.

(v) In all our places we will have priests, who, at least on Sundays and holidays, in accordance with church regulations, will read Mass, take confessions and assign penance.

(vi) Next to our houses of prayer we will have graveyards, where brothers and foreigners, if they happen to die there, will be buried.

(vi) At least seven times a year we will receive the Body of Christ from the hands of priests.

(vii) We will hold all fasts as instructed by the Church and preserve what our ancestors have wisely decreed.

(viii) The women, who will belong to our society, will be separated from the men in the dormitories and refectories, and none of the brothers will talk to them alone, lest sinister suspicions might appear.

(ix) We will celebrate saints' holidays determined by the Holy Fathers and will not accept anyone who is a known Manichean or other heretic to live with us.

(x) And just like we are separated from other laypeople through our lives and behaviour, we will also differ in our clothing, which will be closed, not dyed, measured to the ankles.

(xi) From now on we will not call ourselves Christians (*krstjani*), like before, but brothers, so that we do not incur injustice to other Christians by ascribing that name to ourselves.

(xii) When our Magister dies, from now on forever, the priors with a council of Brothers, fearing God, will choose an elder who will be confirmed by a Roman

pontiff. And if the Roman church will want to add or modify anything, we will faithfully accept and adhere (Šanjek 81/82).

In one of the most influential interpretations of this document, the Croatian historian and theologian Dragutin Kniewald suggested that through a simple inversion of all the listed items, we can deduce the actual beliefs and practices of Bosnian Christians (Kniewald 17). While there is no direct accusation of heresy among the items - point (x) implying a clear distinction between 'Manicheans' and Bosnian Christians -, a number of them strongly suggest practices usually associated with dualist movements: the lack of church buildings, altars, crosses, priests, celebration of Mass, taking of confessions, giving of penance, graveyards, the Eucharist and the celebration of saints' holidays. Other items, such as the failure to separate men and women and clothing practices may be explained as simple local anomalies. Item (xi), the exclusive ascription of the name of 'Christians', is a custom amply documented among members of the Bosnian Church in the 14th century, thus strongly suggesting the continuity of these Christians and the later Bosnian Church, even if it is not directly confirmed in this (or, indeed, any other) document.

In order to lend further support to his interpretation of this document, Kniewald argues that its introductory statement, "in the name of the eternal God, the creator of everything and redeemer of humankind," can be treated in a similar way, so that its inversion results in the actual belief of Bosnian Christians, according to which not God, but the devil is the creator of the material world. While Kniewald's suggestion is a possible, but hardly fully convincing interpretation, a stronger argument for the heterodoxy of the Bosnian Christians is provided in John Casamare's letter to pope Innocent III following the abjuration, in which he notes that he was "discussing the actions of some Patarens in Bosnia" (Šanjek 85). The only other possible interpretation is that Casamare is talking about a group which is distinct from the Bosnian Christians. This is the line of argumentation adopted by Šanjek, who further argues that "as this is an official act, composed in accordance with customary official and legal formulas, the content of the Bilino Polje abjuration does not reproduce the true image of the teaching and organization of the Christian communities" (79). In a letter written to the Hungarian king Emerich in 1200, however, pope Innocent III wrote that Kulin Ban had accepted and supported Patarens banished

from Dalmatia, “honouring them as Catholics and even more than that, giving them the word Christian as a personal name” (Šanjek 73), thus clearly showing that the ‘Patarens’ are the same group as the Christians who signed the abjuration.

The Croatian legal historian Luja Margetić provides an ingenious interpretation of this document, avoiding the extremes of seeing it either as completely irrelevant to, or as a direct inversion of the Bosnian Christians’ beliefs. He notes that, in comparison to similar documents signed by other movements suspected of heresy in this period, the dogmatic content of the *Abjuration* is very unusual (Margetić 39), being limited to an affirmation of a belief in an “eternal God, the creator of everything and redeemer of humankind”. Thus, for example, the profession of faith signed by Waldes of Lyons in 1180 contains numerous additional articles of faith, such as the confession of belief that “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons, one God, the whole Trinity of Godhead coessential, consubstantial, coeternal, and co-omnipotent”, “that each Person of the Trinity is fully God, all three persons one God”, that “the one God to whom we testify is creator, maker, governor, and, in due time and place, disposer of all things visible and invisible, all things of the heavens, in the air, and in the waters, and upon the earth” (Wakefield and Evans 206). These notable lacunae strongly suggest that the *Abjuration* is neither a formulaic renunciation, nor a simple inversion of dualistic beliefs, because in neither of these cases would there be reason to leave out the additional dogmatic formulations. What Margetić suggests instead is that the *Abjuration* is a formula of compromise, i.e. a kind of dogmatic minimum on which the Catholic and Bosnian Churches could agree.⁷⁸

In a complex, but ultimately conjectural argument, Margetić aims to show that the Bosnian Christians held to a quasi-Arian Christology, allowing them to concur with the dogmatic

⁷⁸ Alić provides an explanation of the political circumstances leading to the adoption of this ‘compromise’ solution. The illegitimate conquest of the Dalmatian city of Zara by the armies of the Fourth Crusade in 1203 led to a European-wide split between the Emperor Phillip the German and his allies on the one hand and the Holy See and its allies, most notably Hungary, on the other: “As the papal legate, John de Casamaris had to take all of this into account and resolve the conflict with Kulin and the Bosnian Christians in such a way as not to create new enemies of the Holy See in the immediate vicinity of the crusaders, not to alienate Hungary and Dubrovnik, and to win Kulin over with very mild conditions and without any threat.” (Alić 64).

statement contained in the Abjuration, as it avoids the question of the precise relationship between God and Jesus Christ. However, moderate dualism could also be reconciled with a belief in God as the “creator of everything”. Thus, in his description of the beliefs of the Cathars of Concorezzo, Rainerius Sacconi writes that “they confess that God created the angels and the four elements from nothing; but they err in believing that the devil, with God’s permission, made all visible things, or this world” (Wakefield and Evans 343). Unlike Waldes, the Bosnian Christians only agreed that God *created* everything, but not necessarily that he also *made* it.

The *Abjuration* can thus not be used as a transparent expression of the beliefs of Bosnian Christians in this period. What seems beyond doubt is that, from the point of view of the Catholic Church, they were guilty of heteropraxy and possibly heterodoxy whose precise nature and extent must remain a matter of conjecture. Furthermore, it can be established that representatives of the Catholic Church referred to Bosnian Christians as Patarens, and that a continuity can be assumed between them and the later Bosnian Church. Viewed in the context of other documents preceding and following the *Abjuration* - most notably the Hungarian-led crusade against Bosnia some 30 years later - there is a high likelihood that dualist heretics were present in Bosnia, being either part of or in close contact with those referred to as *krstjani*, the Bosnian Christians. Thus the possibility that the Bosnian Church only gradually developed from a position of an unknown heterodoxy to a full-fledged moderate dualism should also be taken into account.

The Testament of gost Radin

The second source that complicates the relatively clear heresiological image of the Bosnian Church is the Testament of *gost* Radin, a high dignitary and successful diplomat who built his career on the eve of the ultimate disappearance of the medieval Bosnian state, dying in 1467, four years after the kingdom’s conquest by Ottoman armies.⁷⁹ The Testament contains several provisions and formulations which would normally not be associated with any kind of ‘dualistic’

⁷⁹ For a brief introduction to Radin’s life and career, see Šanjek 359-360 (in Croatian).

beliefs, leading some scholars to use it as a crucial piece of evidence against the heretical interpretation of the Bosnian Church:

- Radin asks for six hundred golden ducats to be given for “divine service”, “for my soul” “reasonably and in the right manner”.
- He further adds that three hundred ducats should be given to his nephew *gost* Radin Seoničanin, “so that he can distribute them with right soul and to those baptized in the proper way, those who are of the true apostolic faith, true *krstjan* serfs and true female *krstjan* serfs, so that on every holiday and holy Sunday and Holy Friday, prostrating on their knees on the ground, they could say the divine prayer of God, so that our Lord God could release us from our sins and pardon us on the Last Judgement for ever and ever.”
- Other donations to the poor should be given “on holidays, on Holy Sunday, Holy Friday, and on Holy Annunciation and on Holy Easter of the Lord and on the Day of St. George, my Christened name, and on the Day of the Holy Ascension of the Lord, and on the Day of St. Peter and the Day of St. Paul, and on the Day of St. Stephen the Protomartyr, and on the Day of the Archangel Michael, and the Day of St. Mary the Virgin, and on All Saints’ Day.”
- He warns his nephew *gost* Radin Seoničanin to keep the terms of the will, “lest he wants to share the guilt of those disobedient to God and if he wants his soul to be peaceful and content before the exalted Lord God and before the indivisible Trinity.”
- Radin also wants “for my soul, the soul of *gost* Radin, candles to be burnt in divine temples on those holidays mentioned previously, every holy Sunday and Holy Friday” .
- He also leaves 140 ducats “for the temple and grave, where my bones will be deposited” (Šanjek 363 - 367).

This list appears to confirm that Radin, a high dignitary of the Bosnian Church, believes in the value of charity, prayers after death, divine services, saints days, the Last Judgement, an indivisible Trinity and the burning of candles in divine temples on holidays. There are, however, certain elements of the Testament that urge us to reconsider the precise meaning and significance

of these putatively orthodox statements. Most notably, they include several rather vaguely formulated references to the specificity of Radin's beliefs and customs: the 600 ducats are to be distributed "reasonably and in the right manner," 300 ducats are to be given to "those baptized in the proper way, those who are of true apostolic faith," the money is to be received by *gost* Radin "for his belief he believes in and the fast that he is fasting." The nature of these expressions suggests that, similarly to the previously discussed *Abjuration*, Radin's Testament should be read as a diplomatic/legal document formulated in such a way that both sides could agree to its terms, rather than as a transparent expression of Radin's beliefs. As the Testament is being deposited in Catholic Dubrovnik, its provisions should be read as negotiated compromises between Catholic orthodoxy and Radin's undefined, but clearly distinct beliefs and customs, which include specific conceptions of baptism, fasts and the conviction that Radin's own church is apostolic.

In the following chapter, a more detailed analysis of some of the provisions contained in Radin's Testament will be carried out in relation to John Fine's attempt to use them to prove the unreliability of inquisitional documents referring to Bosnia. While I disagree with Fine's argument that the Testament, in conjunction with other sources, shows that the Bosnian Church was never truly dualistic - the evidence to the contrary is simply too persuasive - it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in its final period, it underwent a development that brought it closer to orthodox belief and custom than it had originally been.⁸⁰ Although it does not necessarily show that the Bosnian Church shared the cult of saints as practiced by the orthodox churches, Radin's will leaves little doubt as to his respect for the celebration of saints days, including the provision that prayers for his soul should be carried out on those days. Furthermore, it seems beyond doubt that Radin believes in the value of charity, a custom rejected by numerous dualist movements according to heresiological writings. Finally, the probably most surprising element of Radin's will is the provision for candles to be lit for his soul in divine temples on every Sunday and

⁸⁰ In an influential analysis of this document, A. Solovjev wrote: "as far as the testament of *gost* Radin is concerned, its significance is not so much dogmatic as it is sociological. The economic rise and moral fall of *gost* Radin illustrates the decay and fall of the "Bosnian Church". The once revolutionary, Pataren teaching that inspired large masses of the working people in the XII century gradually mutated into its negation in accordance with the dialectics of historical development" (Solovjev 1947, 318).

Friday, suggesting a surprising degree of respect for the Catholic Church by the high dignitary of the Bosnian Church.

The possible evolution in the beliefs and practices of the Bosnian Church in its final period can be linked to the growth of wealth among its most prominent members. As the historian Ćiro Truhelka wrote, “the so-called apostolic poverty, that had allegedly been an ideal among the Patarens, was just a phrase, because *gost* Radin, who, due to his high position, must be a model, died as a rich man and left, as it is visible from his Testament, altogether 5460 ducats of money. What that quantity means, can be understood only by those who knows the value of gold in the XV century and can classify him as one of the richest men in Bosnia of his time”(56). Furthermore, it should be remembered that, as previously noted, the Venetian Republic had issued a permission to Radin and “fifty to sixty persons from his institution and following” to settle on its territory. Thus the Bosnian Church in its final phase, as represented by *gost* Radin, can be compared to the Paulicians who had, several hundred years earlier, evolved from a militant anti-Byzantine movement to a small and ultimately insignificant sect that did not pose any real danger and could thus be tolerated by its orthodox environment.

The Codices of the Bosnian Christians

The virtually only primary source for the study of the Bosnian Christians’ beliefs is the set of religious codices written by their adherents themselves. In total, they include around 15 mostly incomplete gospels⁸¹ written in the 14th and 15th centuries which have, for the most part, been preserved in (Serbian) Orthodox Christian churches and monasteries (Kuna 85).⁸² The Bosnian scholar Herta Kuna suggests that originally, the number of Bosnian Christian gospels must have

⁸¹ On the other hand, only one Catholic and one Orthodox Christian manuscript has been preserved from medieval Bosnia.

⁸² “The greatest number of religious codices has been preserved in Serbian Orthodox monastery, primarily because they belonged to one of the South Slavic recensions of Old Slavic, to which Serbian religious, liturgical and non-liturgical books also belonged, so that, in the lack of religious writings in the Ottoman period, with some adjustments it was possible to use these writings for liturgical needs in church services.” (Kuna 83, translation mine).

been much higher.⁸³ While there have been several attempts to derive ‘heretical’ meanings from some of the words and expressions found in the Bosnian Christians manuscripts, recent research has shown that these efforts were misguided or conjectural at best.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the manuscripts do display several specific characteristics that may allow us to draw certain conclusion about the Bosnian Church. Firstly, they are all written in what Kuna describes as a Bosnian recension of the Serbo-Croatian language,⁸⁵ using the script known as Bosnian Cyrillic.⁸⁶ Secondly, with only two exceptions, they do not contain any parts of the Old Testament, being limited for the most part to the gospels and the Apocalypse, with the occasional inclusion of parts of the Acts of the Apostles and some apocryphal writings. The two exceptions are the codices known as the Venice Miscellany (*Mletački zbornik*), containing the Decalogue, and the Hval Miscellany (*Hvalov zbornik*), containing the Decalogue, the Psalms of David and nine biblical songs. Finally, except for one, the dimensions of none of the Bosnian manuscripts exceed 20 x 15 cm, “indirectly confirming the fact that the Bosnian religious books were not situated in churches, because that would allow for a larger format, but that they represented the movable property of their owners” (Kuna 70).⁸⁷

The first notable characteristic of the Bosnian codices is the inclusion of parts of the Old Testament in two of its manuscripts, thus directly contradicting heresiological claims about its categorical rejection and condemnation by the Patarens of Bosnia. However, as previously noted,

⁸³ “Just the fact that almost all codices found in the territory of Yugoslavia were adjusted for liturgical use allows us to presume that the codices that could not be used in the Orthodox Church were subject to quick decay, and perhaps deliberate destruction” (Kuna 84).

⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion, see Bašić 209-214, concluding: “The key to understanding the teachings of the Bosnian Church is hidden not in its vocabulary, but rather in the interpretation of some critical verses of the New Testament” (Bašić 213/214).

⁸⁵ This fact alone would qualify the Bosnian Church as ‘heretical’ from the Catholic point of view.

⁸⁶ Except for two early manuscripts written in Glagolitic.

⁸⁷ Mazrak further argues that “based on the preserved codices written for the needs of the Bosnian Church, it can be judged that they were not read to ‘great masses,’ as was the custom among the Catholic and Orthodox Christians, but in the more humble interiors of the hižas (houses) which could only accommodate a small number of believers” (309, translation mine).

at least one heresiological source - the 14th century anonymous ‘List of errors held by the Patarens of Bosnia’ - explicitly states that the Psalter, i.e. the Psalms of David, is excepted from this condemnation. Furthermore, although there is no such information regarding the Bosnian Church, heresiological writings on other Cathar movements suggest that their attitude towards the Old Testament would be more accurately described as ambivalent rather than completely negative. Thus, in Sacconi’s previously quoted description of the moderate dualists of Concorezzo, he writes that “many of them are doubtful about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Wakefield and Evans 344), suggesting that at least some of them accepted them as legitimate prophets. A similarly ambivalent attitude may have led to the inclusion of the Decalogue and biblical songs in the Bosnian Christian manuscripts.

A second characteristic of the codices that has occasionally been used to argue for their orthodox nature is the existence of rich illuminations, particularly in the Venice and Hval Miscellanies. Returning to the heresiological literature about the Bosnian Church, however, it must be pointed out that there are no claims that its adherents were categorically opposed to religious art, but only to the practice of *veneration* of icons. Thus, the existence of illuminated manuscripts speaks neither in favour nor against the heterodox nature of the Bosnian Church. There are, in fact, strong indications that both the Bulgarian Bogomils and Western Cathars accepted religious art. Talking about Bogomils, Euthymius of Periblepton notes that “there was an apparent monk and priest of this most evil cult... This man founded a church, adorned and beautified it with paintings inside and out” (Hamilton 148). The Hamiltons also point out the 1308 testimony of Pierre de Luzenac to the Inquisition of Carcassonne, mentioning the existence of illuminated Cathar manuscripts (Hamilton 148).

A more complex problem is raised by the *nature* of the illuminations found in the Bosnian codices. Based on her detailed study of medieval Bosnian illumination, Mazrak identifies a

general tendency towards the portrayal of the heavenly, divine and symbolic,⁸⁸ adding that “there are no depictions of male and female saints common in manuscripts of the Orthodox and Catholic churches” (312). Of particular importance is the fact that the Venice and Hval Miscellanies both contain portraits of Moses. In the header of the Decalogue in the Venice Miscellany, there is a depiction of God the Father pointing towards Jesus (they are situated in two rhomboids), with Moses below looking towards God (Mazrak 96). Concluding her analysis of this image, Mazrak argues that “representing Moses and God in the burning bush, as well as the eschatological image of the Son in glory sitting on God’s right-hand side, through a method of reduction the artist has in fact connected the Old and the New Testament in a single visual depiction” (Mazrak 98). In Hval’s Gospel, next to the *Song of Moses* we can find a “non-standard and rather unusual” (Mazrak 268) image of Moses, Mazrak arguing that it depicts the moment in which “Moses has just received the tables of the Law on Mount Sinai, which is confirmed by his position in the upper part of the miniature, his kneeling position and scroll in his hand” (Mazrak 268).

Another image in the Hval Gospel with theological significance is the portrayal of St. John the Baptist next to St. Matthew. The only element of this image that possibly points towards a specific treatment of this figure by Bosnian Christians is the fact that, unlike the apostles, the name of John the Baptist is written out without the attribute of sainthood (“John the Baptist”) (Mazrak 187). The Hval Gospel also contains a series of images which would perhaps not be expected from adherents of a docetist theology (which was imputed to the Bosnian Church by heresiological sources), such as the Crucifixion and the Mother of God and Child, though it is possible that the images were simply interpreted in a different way. In her final reflection on the teachings of the Bosnian Church, Mazrak notes: “their interpretation of the Holy Scripture differed significantly from those of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. In the end, whether

⁸⁸ “What can be identified at first sight is a tendency towards stressing the heavenly, divine and symbolic through: symbols of the evangelists (*Nikola, Kopitar; Daničić Gospels, Hval and Venice Miscellanies*), the content of headers and initials related to the *Apocalypse* (*Nikola Gospel, Venice and Radovan Miscellany*), the representation of Christ in the schemas of the Ascension and Christ in Glory (*Venice Miscellany*), while there is one isolated example of Christ’s work on Earth as he is blessing the apostles (*Hval Miscellany*) (Mazrak 311).

they were ‘true Christians’ or not depends from the angle they are looked at, i.e. from what that term means” (Mazrak 315).⁸⁹

4.5 The Bosnian Church: an equation with multiple solutions

Ultimately, it must be acknowledged that there is a certain discrepancy between the picture of the Bosnian Church derived from heresiological sources on the one hand and the one resulting from an analysis of domestic documents on the other. While the heresiological sources are relatively consistent in their ascription of a moderately dualist/monarchical theology and a series of familiar Bogomil/Cathar customs to the Bosnian Church, documents such as the Bilino Polje Abjuration, the Testament of *gost* Radin and the codices of the Bosnian Christians compel us to modify this picture to a certain extent. In that respect, it is possible to adopt three different methodological strategies.

The first one would be to completely deny the relevance of heresiological sources and focus on deriving a picture of the Bosnian Church from domestic sources alone. This is the strategy adopted by John Fine and will be discussed in the Chapter 6. The second one, on the contrary, would entail insisting on the accuracy of heresiological descriptions of the Bosnian Church, seeking to discredit the relevance of domestic sources by stressing the documented willingness of Bogomils and Cathars to hide their true beliefs behind a facade of orthodoxy. The problem with this strategy is that it inevitably leads to an inflexibly dogmatic position and does not allow for any modification of its preconceived assumptions. Finally, it is possible to acknowledge that the problem of the Bosnian Church is, to borrow a mathematical term, an equation with multiple solutions. Rather than approaching it with a preconceived categorical contrast between ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘dualism’, it appears more productive to recognize that the line between these categories is not as clear as it appears at first, with the available evidence indicating that the

⁸⁹ Mazrak also argues that “based on the analysis of the illumination, it is not possible to find a single trace of dualism among the Bosnian Christians” (Mazrak 314). However, this opinion seems to be a consequence of an excessively restrictive understanding of the term ‘dualism’ as a belief in two principles.

Bosnian Church was firmly situated in the unfamiliar space in which they overlap. In the following chapter, an attempt will be made to further define this uncharted territory.

CHAPTER 5

THE GLOSSES OF THE BOSNIAN CHRISTIANS

The man is the prince of this world, the manager - the elder of his church, the debtors - those who constantly absolve the sins of men and so lose human souls.

Gloss in Vrutok Gospel (Nakaš 2012, 197).

On a basic level, the surviving codices of the Bosnian Church do not reveal any obvious deviation from orthodoxy. However, one conspicuous element pointing towards the existence of a very specific exegetical tradition among its adherents is the series of glosses added to certain New Testament passages in two medieval Bosnian codices: the Srećković and the Vrutok Gospel. The glosses on the former were published in a transcription in 1902 (Speranski, the original manuscript is now lost), while those on the latter have only been fully discovered and published in 2008 by the Bosnian scholar Lejla Nakaš. To this may be added several shorter, but indicative glosses in Hval's Miscellany.

For the majority of heterodox movements since the very beginnings of Christianity, the issue of contention with the orthodox churches was not so much the biblical text itself as the method of its interpretation. In the case of Bulgarian Bogomils, this is directly confirmed by Zigabenus, who, discussing certain beliefs he considered heretical, "took the Gospel book of the man who taught this in my hands and searched carefully [...] the four evangelists were just like our genuine ones" (Hamilton and Hamilton 192). Zigabenus also lists more than 20 examples of the way in which Bogomils interpreted certain passages from Mathew's Gospel, thus providing a very valuable insight into their exegetical practices. Additional information on the Bogomil methods of interpretation can be found in the *Sermon Against the Heretics* by Cosmas the Priests, while Western heresiologists such as Salvo Burci and Moneta of Cremona provide such information for the Cathars and Patarens. While the glosses in the Bosnian manuscripts do not precisely match the interpretations found among the Bogomils, Cathars and Patarens, they

nevertheless clearly indicate several characteristic articles of belief and modes of thinking, suggesting a close proximity to the beliefs of other dualist movements.

5.1 The Basic Message: An Animosity Towards Material Wealth

The basic structure of the glosses is that of an allegorical interpretation of certain biblical passages. As Nakaš notes, “there is no need to look far for the model for these glosses” (2014, 708), citing the Gospel of Matthew: “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable” (Mt 13:34). Thus the biblical text itself encourages efforts to go beyond its obvious references and search for an underlying sense. One of the most basic ways in which this was done in the case of the Bosnian manuscripts is demonstrated in the gloss added to Luke 10:13 in the Srećković gospel, stating: “Chorazin and Bethsaida, (are two) towns and places that do not yield to Christ and Tyre and Sidon do yield” (an identical gloss can be found in the Vrutok gospel) (Šanjek 335/Nakaš 2014, 707). The main purpose of this gloss is a transference of a historical narrative into a universal message valid beyond its immediate textual reference.

In order to fully comprehend its significance, however, it is necessary to take into account the context in which Jesus’s words are spoken - his sending out of seventy-two apostles to preach in different towns before his own arrival. The gloss implies that the words do not refer to the particular towns of Chorazin and Bethsaida, but to any place in which his apostles are not welcomed. The passage finishes with Jesus telling the apostles that “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16). In its overall purpose, the gloss can be seen as an affirmation of the authority of Christ’s apostles, a legacy claimed by the followers of the Bosnian Church.

An additional dimension of the glosses’ basic function can be derived from the one added to John 9:6-7: “The mud is the mercy of God... where man is required to clean himself” (Šanjek 337). The biblical passage itself, dealing as it does with the healing of the eyes, is highly

suggestive. Interpreted allegorically,⁹⁰ it implies that through his healing, it is Jesus who enables the Christian to 'see', i.e. appropriately understand the words of scripture. The gloss further suggests that appropriate understanding does not require a miraculous intervention by Jesus, but a 'cleansing' of the believer enabling him or her to receive the mercy of God. It is thus only those who are sufficiently purified - which may imply the 'true' Christians with their strictly ascetic lifestyles - who can really understand the underlying meaning of the Bible.

In the New Testament, the inability to comprehend its underlying message is directly associated with the figure of the 'god of this age': "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:3-4). This figure, usually referred to as the 'god of this world' or 'lord of our time', takes up a prominent position in several of the glosses in the Bosnian manuscripts. Most transparently, he is encountered in the gloss commenting on Luke 16:19-31, noting that "the rich man refers to the sons of this world and the lord of the time, and the poor Lazarus, the people of God, and Abraham is the divine Father" (An almost identical gloss can be found in the Vrutok manuscript, with the addition of the phrase 'Where the life of ease is, there is the lord of the world') (Šanjek 337/Nakaš 2014 707). The gloss establishes a stark contrast between this-worldly poverty, proximity to God and a heavenly afterlife on the one hand, and affluence, Hades and the lord of the world/lord of the time on the other, demonstrating the Bosnian Church's (at least theoretical) animosity towards material wealth.⁹¹ The lord of this world appears once again in the gloss

⁹⁰ According to Cosmas, the Bogomils interpreted all the miracles performed by Jesus allegorically: "Because they call the devil the creator, they do not admit that Christ performed any miracles. Although they hear the evangelists proclaim out loud the Lord's miracles, they 'twist them to their own destruction' (2 Peter 2.16), saying: 'Christ did not restore any blind person's sight, he cured not cripple, he did not raise the dead; these are only parables. The evangelists present sins which were cured as if they were diseases.'" (Hamilton and Hamilton 130) A similar attitude among the Cathars is reported by Moneta of Cremona: "Therefore, they give a spiritual interpretation to the gift of sight to the blind and the raising of Lazarus, spiritually also were the sick healed" (311).

⁹¹ A similar attitude is suggested in a commentary on Apocalypse 12:12 in Hval's Gospel ("Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.", simply rephrasing the biblical words: "Woe to the earth and the sea because wrongdoing rules in them!").

commenting on Luke 16:1-11, stating that “that man is called the lord of this world, and the manager is the head of his church, and the debtor is the law expert who forgives sins to people every day and thereby wastes human souls” (Šanjek 337). Clearly, the lord of this world is once again associated primarily with material wealth.⁹² Furthermore, the gloss demonstrates the Bosnian Christians’ belief that the lord of this world possesses his own church, whose ‘law experts’ forgive sins and thereby waste human souls. I have previously discussed heresiological claims that Bosnian Christians, and members of other ‘dualist’ movements, refused the right of priests to forgive sins, suggesting that this claim refers to priests of the Catholic churches. While the previously mentioned stress on poverty can still be reconciled within orthodox Christianity, the claim that either the Catholic or Orthodox churches are associated with the lord of this world establishes the heretical character of the glosses.⁹³

⁹² According to Zigabenus, the Bulgarian Bogomils interpreted this parable slightly differently: “Satan is the steward, second to the Father, having the same form and dress as He does, and he sits at His right hand on a throne, and deserves honour next after His [...] As confirmation of this nonsense, they quote the parable in St Luke’s gospel of the unjust steward who reduced the liability of the debtors. They say that he is Satanael, and that this parable is written about him.” (Hamilton and Hamilton 183). Writing about the Bogomil view of Satan, Cosmas also notes that “because of their great ignorance, some call him a fallen angel, others call him the ‘steward of iniquity’” (Hamilton and Hamilton 126). According to Moneta of Cremona, the Cathars held a similar view: “They also believe that the devil, who is called Satan, being envious of the All Highest, warily ascended into the heavens of the holy God and there by his deceitful discourse led astray the souls just referred to, and drew them to this earth and murky clime; and they believe him to be the unjust steward spoken of by the Lord in Luke 16:8, ‘The Lord commended the unjust steward.’” (Wakefield and Evans 309).

⁹³ The biblical passage presents some interpretative difficulties in itself. By saying “use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves...”, Jesus appears to be endorsing the manager’s behaviour, who did precisely that. However, it can hardly be said that the manager was acting honestly and trustworthily, two traits commended in the following two sentences. In any case, it is important to note the ultimate conclusion Jesus reaches in this passage: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Luke 16:13). It seems that the gloss stresses this point further, interpreting the passage as an allegory of the relationship between Satan/‘the lord of this world’, the pope/‘head of his church’ and his priests/debtors. The gloss provides a justification for the rich man’s ultimate commendation of the manager, as shrewdness is a quality valued by the lord of this world. It is, however, less clear why the debtors are identified with priests/law experts who forgive sins, as this role seems to correspond more precisely to the role of the manager. Despite this unclarity, the main point of the gloss is a firm association of money, the lord of this world, the Catholic/Orthodox church and the custom of forgiving sins rejected by ‘dualist’ churches.

5.2 The law and the ‘law experts’

Besides material wealth, it is particularly the ‘law experts’ that are condemned in the glosses. Commenting on Luke 8:43-45, one gloss states “there is a woman ill from bleeding, the people of God whom Christ healed from their sins; and the doctors are the law experts, the twelve years are the twelve apostles who are always warning of sins, as Christ said in the Gospel: If Christ had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; and the apostles (said): (and if) the sin increases, (there would not) be any blessing” (An almost identical gloss can be found in the Vrutok Gospel) (Šanjek 335/Nakaš 2014, 706). The biblical passage states that the woman had “spent all she had on doctors,” suggesting further that the law experts may be priests of the Catholic Church, charging for the forgiveness of sins in the form of indulgences.

As a whole, the gloss is a complex allegory incorporating a reference to another biblical passage, John 15:22: “If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.” These words are spoken by Jesus to his disciples in the context of his teaching that they will be persecuted like himself, because they “do not belong to the world” (John 15:19). Thus the gloss establishes a contrast between the true followers of Christ who are inevitably subject to persecution, and the law experts/Catholic priests receiving payment for their misguided services.⁹⁴ The Vrutok gospel gloss commenting on Matthew 9:9 strikes a similar tone, making a more explicit reference to Orthodox Christian patriarchs: “The tax collector’s booth - the place of the Patriarch, where the patriarchs are bribed with gold.” (Nakaš 2012, 193). It suggests the corruption of the institution of the Patriarch and, by extension, the entire Eastern Orthodox church he governs.

A second gloss, however, suggests that ‘the law’ cannot be understood in the same way as the ‘law experts’. Commenting on Luke 10:30-35, it states “that man is a prisoner, and Jerusalem the

⁹⁴ A similar point may be suggested by the gloss found in Hval’s Gospel commenting on John 7:7 (Jesus stating that “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil”): “about the ways of this world”.

abode of the just, and Jericho (means) this world, and the wounds (are) sins; and the priest is Moses, and the Levite is John the Baptist, and the Samaritan is Jesus, and oil and wine God's mercy,⁹⁵ and the donkey is the law, and the inn is the Church, and the innkeeper is Peter, and the two denarii is the only⁹⁶ faith" (In the Vrutok Gospel, an almost identical gloss can be found, with the modification that the two denarii are described as 'work and faith')⁹⁷ (Šanjek 335/ Nakaš 2012, 188). Focussing only on the role of 'the law', it can be seen that it is identified with the donkey bringing the man to the inn, i.e. the church, thus assigning it an ultimately positive role. How is this incongruity between 'the law' and 'the law experts' to be understood? A possible explanation is that 'the law' refers to the Old Testament, while the 'law experts' are those who earn money as its representatives, i.e. the priests of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. According to the gloss, the positive role of the law consists in its function of leading the man towards his ultimate destination in Peter's church.⁹⁸ The gloss interprets the biblical parable as an allegory of man's path from his original innocence (Jerusalem, the abode of the

⁹⁵ M.N. Speranski, the original publisher of the glosses, argued that they are based on older models, such as the Orthodox Christian "Questions and Answers" in a 13th century Berlin Codex. However, as Solovjev points out, the Orthodox Codex interprets the oil and wine as the body and blood of Christ (i.e. the Eucharist), while in the Bosnian manuscript it has been replaced with 'God's mercy', indicating the Bosnian Christians' rejection of the custom of the Eucharist (Solovjev 23).

⁹⁶ Šanjek here uses the alternative reading "Juda's faith". However, in a recent extensive discussion of this question, the German scholar Christoph Koch shows that "only" is the more likely reading (Koch 116).

⁹⁷ This expression is reminiscent of James 2:18: "But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds." According to Moneta of Cremona, the Cathars used this passage to criticize the Catholic Church's permissive attitude towards sinning priests (Wakefield and Evans 324).

⁹⁸ Ćirković offers a similar argument: "It is worth pointing out that the role of the 'law' in the interpretation provided by this gloss is not entirely negative. Just like in the Bogomil interpretation the star that led the wise men to Christ was explained as *Moses's law*, so here the *law* is materialized in the donkey carrying the wounded man from the place of his accident to the refuge in the church" (Ćirković 214, translation mine).

just), through his ‘imprisonment’ by sins,⁹⁹ towards the material world (Jericho - this world), and his redemption achieved through the intervention of Jesus - the Samaritan, i.e. God’s mercy (oil and wine).¹⁰⁰ A possibly positive attitude towards Old Testament prophets is also found in the gloss commenting on Luke 13:27-30: “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all spiritual prophets are men of God, and the sons of the kingdom are rebels led by Satan into their hiding places” (Šanjek 335). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are thus equated with the ‘men of God’ and clearly contrasted with the Satanic ‘sons of the kingdom’.

It is, however, also possible to interpret the last gloss differently: rather than equating the Old Testament prophets with the men of God, it may actually imply that their names act as mere allegories, thus allowing for the gloss’s reconciliation with a general animosity towards the Old Testament reported in heresiological writings. This attitude seems to be confirmed in another gloss from the Vrutok gospel, commenting on Mathew 8:28-33: “the demons are satanic spirits, while the swine - all who do not believe in Christ; so is the sea. The herders - Peter and Paul and Mary, from whom seven demons left, all who have abandoned the Old Testament. The town - Christ and the New Testament - as it says in the Apocalypse - and Jerusalem saw how he came down from the heavens from God.” (Nakaš 2012, 133). Here, the abandonment of the Old Testament and the adoption of Christ and the New Testament is equated with the herdsmen’s loss of their demon-infested herd of non-believers and enthusiastic embrace of their apostolic

⁹⁹ Solovjev argues that the term ‘prisoner’ suggests the Manichaean teaching that souls are fallen angels imprisoned in material bodies (Solovjev 1948, 23). This interpretation may be supported by a gloss in Hval’s Gospel, simply reproducing John 3:13 (“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven”, but, significantly, leaving out the last part - “the Son of Man”). Mazrak argues that “Hval the Christian is simply pointing out parts of the texts that he considers important, stressing them, and in this case they refer to Jesus”. However, while the words clearly refer to Jesus in the biblical texts, Hval leaving out the reference to Jesus seems to suggest that he considers the words to have a wider reference (thus reproducing the basic function of allegories). In this case, the gloss may suggest that only the souls that have already come from heaven may reenter it, thus contradicting the orthodox teaching that all souls are newly created. In the previously discussed *Debate between a Roman Catholic and a Bosnian Pataren*, the ‘heretic’ uses this reference to prove his belief that souls are fallen angels, to which the Catholic replies: “Christ did not say that about those angels, but about himself, adding: *the Son of Man*” (Šanjek 209).

¹⁰⁰ According to Bonacursus, the Cathars used this parable to illustrate their teaching of human beings as souls trapped in material bodies: “They state also that the same devil made Adam from dust of the earth and with very great force imprisoned in him a certain angel of light, of whom they think it was said in the Gospel, ‘A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho’ and so on.” (Wakefield and Evans 171).

mission. The contrast between the old and the new is underlined with an implicit reference to Revelation 21:1-2.¹⁰¹ The same attitude is displayed in the gloss on Luke 10:30-35 quoted above, where Moses is equated with the priest who simply passes by the man attacked by robbers. Despite the previously discussed indications to the contrary, it can therefore be concluded that the overall attitude expressed in the glosses towards the Old Testament is one of rejection. Furthermore, they suggest that in the cases in which Old Testament prophets are portrayed in a positive light, they may be taken as allegories of the true ‘men of God’.

5.3 An allegorical understanding of baptism and the Eucharist

Another characteristic attitude encountered in the gloss on Luke 10:30-35 is a condemnation of John the Baptist, who is identified with the Levite who, like the priest/Moses, simply passed by the wounded man lying on the street. Furthermore, in both the Srećković and the Vrutok manuscript, he is given the derogatory attribute of John ‘the water-carrier’.¹⁰² This attribute directly refers to the most likely reason for his rejection by adherents of the Bosnian Church: the fact that he is the originator of the custom of baptism in water, which was generally rejected by all dualist movements. In the gloss commenting on John 6:6-13, we can find an indication for a rejection of another orthodox sacrament, the communion with bread and wine: “The five breads are the four evangelists and the only faith, and the barley is the reproof of the tongue” (Šanjek 337).

The Vrutok Gospel has a variation on this gloss: “Jesus - eighth, 4 evangelists - both faith and works, 12 apostles-barley, the people’s reproof” (Nakaš 2012, 198) The significance of this gloss must be sought in the remainder of this biblical passage. Following the performance of this miracle, Jesus repeatedly notes that his followers should not be looking for edible bread, but for

¹⁰¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

¹⁰² In his translation of the gloss into contemporary Croatian, Šanjek has translated the attribute “water-carrier” into “baptist”, thus significantly modifying its meaning.

‘bread from heaven’: “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you” (John 6:27), “For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). Eventually, he explains that it is he who is this bread: “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35) and that eating his flesh and blood is the way to eternal life: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day” (John 6:54). As this biblical passage represents one of the basic scriptural foundations for the sacrament of the Eucharist, the gloss can be understood as an indirect equation of the flesh and blood of Jesus with the four evangelists, i.e. with the words of scripture that are to be ‘eaten’ in order to gain eternal life.¹⁰³ Hence the glosses provide a strong argument in favour of the heresiological claim that the Bosnian Christians rejected the sacraments of baptism in water and the Eucharist, providing another significant indication for their ultimately heretical character.¹⁰⁴

5.4 A dialectical dualism

¹⁰³ In Hval’s Gospel, John 6:33 is commented through a simple gloss stating “about the true bread,” suggesting the particular significance of this passage.

¹⁰⁴ Cosmas writes that the Bulgarian Bogomils held the same belief, basing it on a specific interpretation of Matthew 26:26-8: “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”. “Tell us, who have shown you that these words do not apply to this consecrated bread and cup, as you heretics claim in your madness? In your deceits you tell that they refer to the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, not to holy communion; by ‘body’, you understand the four gospels and by ‘blood’, the Acts of the Apostles.” (Hamilton and Hamilton 120). The same belief was identified among the Paulicians by Peter of Sicily: “Third, they refuse to accept the divine and awe-inspiring mystery of the body and blood of the Lord. Not only that but they think they can persuade others about this, saying that it was not bread and wine that the Lord gave to his disciples at the supper, but that symbolically he gave them his words as bread and wine.” (Hamilton and Hamilton 72/73) The rejection of the Eucharist among the Cathars is also amply demonstrated, for example in ‘A Description of Cathars and Waldenses’ by Peter of Vaux-de-Cernay: “They held as naught the sacraments of the church to the point of teaching publicly that the water of holy baptism differs not at all from water of a river; that the consecrated bread of the most holy body of Christ is no different from ordinary bread; instilling into the ears of simple folk the blasphemy that the body of Christ, even were it as great as the Alps, would long since have been completely consumed by communicants who partook of it” (Wakefield and Evans 238/9).

While it is thus virtually certain that the glosses as a whole are ‘heretical’ in terms of rejecting key beliefs and customs of orthodox churches, they also provide a more precise insight into the nature of the Bosnian Church’s most fundamental ontological opinions. Only one gloss, commenting on John 5:2-15, could possibly be read in the sense of a classical ‘dualism’ between the soul and the body: “the Sheep Gate pool means the world, where the soul is bathing in the flesh” (Šanjek 337), though the interpretation is not fully conclusive, as the relationship between the pool-the world and the soul is not transparent in the passage.¹⁰⁵ Another gloss, however, commenting on Luke 15:11-32, strongly suggests that the Bosnian Church subscribed to what I have previously described a dialectical rather than a dualistic belief: “That man is the invisible Father, and the son means the angels deceived by Satan; and the older son the angels serving the Father, and the fattened calf means Christ.” (Šanjek 337). Clearly, the world-view reflected in the gloss is far removed from the idea of an eternal battle between two principles of good and evil.¹⁰⁶ Instead of punishing him, God the Father rejoices at the return of the younger son, i.e. the angels deceived by Satan, and even kills (sacrifices) the fattened calf-Jesus in order to celebrate it. On the other hand, the older son - the angels serving the Father, displays an element of dissatisfaction with the Father’s decision, demonstrating a degree of moral imperfection. In the end, the Father explains that the return of the ‘dead’ and the ‘lost’ is the greatest reason for celebration.

¹⁰⁵ A much clearer commitment to a dualistic worldview is found among the Cathars: according to Alan of Lille, they interpret Matthew 6:24, as “No man can serve two masters,” that is “God and mammon.” (Wakefield and Evans 216).

¹⁰⁶ According to Cosmas, Bulgarian Bogomils had a different interpretation of this passage: “When they hear the Lord in the gospel tell the parable of the two sons, they make Christ the elder son and the younger son, who has deceived his father, the devil. They themselves have given him the name Mammon; they call him the creator and architect of things terrestrial.” (Hamilton and Hamilton 128). This and similar differences between the interpretations of the Bulgarian and Bosnian dualists led the Serbian historian Sima Ćirković to conclude that “[the writer of the glosses] was primarily concerned with the problems of the soul, salvation and sin. For him, the cosmogonical problematic is of secondary importance” (221, translation mine). As we cannot be certain whether the glosses are a reflection of the priorities of the writer or the Bosnian Church as a whole, he concludes: “an uncertainty in this important question prevents us from potentially opposing the moral-theological oriented dualism of the Bosnian Christians to the mythologically oriented dualism of the early Bogomisl and forces us to restrain ourselves from attractive general hypotheses” (Ćirković 221, translation mine). The publication of the Vrutok manuscript gospels, which were not available to Ćirković, has added weight to the hypothesis that the glosses reflect the teachings of the Bosnian Church as a whole, rather than the opinions of an individual author.

Instead of the destruction of ‘evil’, the ultimate goal of Christianity as understood by the Bosnian Church seems to be the reconciliation of the ‘two brothers’, i.e. the fallen angels’ recognition of their mistake as well as their acceptance, rather than punishment, by the obedient angels. ‘Dualism’ is thus not the ultimate metaphysical structure of the universe, but a temporary division that needs to be overcome through a reconciliation in the higher principle of the father.¹⁰⁷ This impression is supported further in the gloss commenting on John 11:1-7: “Bethany is between Jerusalem and Bethphage. And Bethany is this world, where many Lazaruses flee to Christ. And Mary—the people of God, and Martha—the sons of this world” (Nakaš 2012, 192). As the biblical passage states that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”, the gloss implies that Jesus loved both the people of God and the sons of this world. The ultimate sense of this attitude is to be found in the overriding soteriological significance of the ‘Lazaruses’, the sick men who will eventually flee to Christ.¹⁰⁸

5.5 Parallels with Bogomilism

Comparing these glosses with the Bogomil interpretations of biblical passages mentioned by Zigabenus, it is possible to identify several striking parallels. There is only one instance of Zigabenus’s Bogomils and Bosnian Christians commenting on the same passage: Mathew 8:28-33. While the Bosnian Christians had identified the demons with ‘satanic spirits’, according

¹⁰⁷ Among the 50 articles of belief that three Bosnian Christians had to accept before the papal legate John Torquemada in 1461, points number five and six are, respectively: “Human souls are not demons fallen from the sky, locked in physical bodies” and “Demons can never convert or be saved through penance” (Šanjek 295, translation mine). Thus it would be more accurate to describe the orthodox view of the universe as ‘dualistic’, since the demons will never be able to return to the divine unity.

¹⁰⁸ Dragojlović argues that the world-view reflected in the glosses is “not the dualist teaching of the eastern Manicheans or western Cathars, but that of the mystics of the Eastern Church, whose essence is represented by the belief that due to their ‘transgression,’ human souls have been locked up in a ‘dirty body’ which is the ‘mean enemy of the soul’ in which it is ‘polluted like in mud’” (Dragojlović 140,1). While this interpretation represents an intriguing direction for a more nuanced understanding of the form of ‘dualism’ practiced by the Bosnian Church, in light of the other glosses it is difficult to completely deny the relevance of Bogomil/Cathar teachings. For example, Dragojlović does not provide any comment on the symbolical interpretation of John 6:11-13, which seems to constitute a rejection of the orthodox form of Communion (see above). Furthermore, quoting the gloss on Matthew 9:9 (discussed above), he simply notes that church officials are “bribed with silver and gold”, leaving out the fact that it explicitly mentions ‘patriarchs’ (Dragojlović 135).

to the Bogomils “the two men affected by demons who came out of the tombs are the order of monks and the order of clerics” (Hamilton 202). This attitude is explained by the fact that “they always live in sanctuaries made with hands, and these are tombs enriched with the bones of the dead” (Hamilton 202). If the order of clerics can, as previously suggested, be identified with the ‘law experts’ of the Bosnian glosses, we can establish the animosity towards them as one of the attitudes shared by the two religious movements. Notably, however, there is no explicit or implicit indication of the Bosnian Christians’ animosity towards monks, which may be related to their ultimately monastic origins.

Some of the other Bogomil interpretations may be used to explain the Bosnian Christians’ negative attitude towards the ‘law experts’: in the comments on Matthew 8:19-20, Zigabenus reports the Bogomils’ attitude that “they say that by ‘scribe’ is meant anyone who is learned, and they advise one another not to accept anyone educated among their pupils, in imitation, as they say, of Christ, who did not accept the scribe” (Hamilton 202). As the comment on Matthew 5:20 clarifies, the Bogomils valued righteousness over education, telling Zigabenus that “their righteousness exceeds ours because they teach what is truer and share a lifestyle which is more austere and pure, abstaining from meat and cheese and marriage and everything like that” (Hamilton 198). While the Bosnian Christians’ animosity seems to be limited to the ‘law experts’, i.e. the order of clerics, according to Zigabenus the Bogomils were opposed to all the orthodox Christians. Thus, in the interpretation of Matthew 3:7, the Orthodox are identified with Nazareth, while the Bogomils are equated with Capernaum: “They say that Christ has left our assembly and now lives with them” (Hamilton 197). Furthermore, in their commentary on Matthew 3:7, the Bogomils claim that “those who believe as [the orthodox] do are the Pharisees and Sadducees who come to the baptism of John” (Hamilton 196).

The status of John the Baptist is another issue on which the attitudes of the Bosnian Christians and Bogomils can be compared: while the former, as previously shown, display a derogatory, but ultimately inconclusive attitude towards him, Zigabenus provides us with a much more precise opinion of the latter - “they say that the Forerunner is in the middle between the

Old Law and the New, and has a share in both the earlier and the later” (Hamilton 196). The Bogomils were, however, as clear in their opposition to the Old Testament as the Bosnian Christians: according to their interpretation of Matthew 5:34-36, “the eyes are the two laws, that of Moses and that of the Gospel. Christ came to give a law instead of a law, the gospel law for the law of Moses, a way for a way, the narrow for the broad” (Hamilton 199). Equally, we can identify a clear parallel in the prominence of the role of Satan/the prince of the world. Unlike the Bosnian Christians (where the issue is not clear), however, the Bogomils clearly believed that Satan is not only the ruler, but the actual creator of the world: in the interpretation of Matthew 4:8-9,

they say that the high mountain is the second heaven, and that Christ was taken up there by the devil and saw all the kingdoms of the cosmos. They say that the devil would not have gone up to it if he had not recognized it was his own making. And he would not have said he would hand over all the kingdoms if sovereignty over them had not belonged to him because they originated from him (Hamilton 197),

and, further, in relation to Matthew 5:34-36, “they say that the great king is the devil, because he is cosmocrator” (Hamilton 199).

Nevertheless, even in the case of the Bogomils, who seem to have ascribed a more powerful role to Satan than the Bosnian Christians, there is an indication that their ultimate attitude towards the world was also of a dialectical rather than dualist kind: commenting on Matthew 5:44, “they say that the devil is the enemy of man, and by a crazy interpretation, that we ought to be kindly to him and pay court to him with genuflection” (Hamilton 199). Finally, the Bogomils also claimed their apostolic legacy, along with a pride in their austere lifestyles:

They claim that Christ said all the Beatitudes about those of their faith, the Bogomils, for they are like this, poor in spirit and mourners, and hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. They are called the salt of the earth and the light of the cosmos and all the other things which Christ said of the apostles (Hamilton 198).

5.6 Conclusion: A Moderate Dualism

In conclusion, it can be said that the Bosnian Christian glosses reflect a worldview similar to, but not identical with the Bogomil one as portrayed by Zigabenus. Through an allegorical method, the Bosnian glosses point towards certain biblical passages, usually parables told by Jesus, offering unexpected and occasionally enigmatic interpretations that nevertheless appear to reflect a very particular religious viewpoint. For one, it stresses a highly ascetic view of Christianity strongly linked to the apostolic ideal, laying emphasis on the necessity of material poverty and the inevitability of persecutions of true Christians. Furthermore, it presents a very stark view of the prince of this world, a figure associated with material wealth and moral degeneration, who controls his own church, which can most probably be identified with the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The biggest sin committed by these churches seems to be the custom of charging money for an ultimately misguided and unwarranted forgiveness of sins.

Two further worthless customs these churches perform are the sacraments of baptism in water, instituted by the derided John the Baptist rather than Jesus Christ, and the Eucharist, based on a misunderstanding of Jesus's allegorical words about his flesh and blood, which actually refer to the words of the New Testament. The Old Testament, on the other hand, is something to be abandoned, being either fully condemned or viewed as a path towards Christ at best. While some of the Old Testament prophets may truly be valued, they may equally well be understood as mere allegories for the men of God. Despite such strongly expressed animosity towards the material world and its prince, however, the glosses do not allow us to conclude that the ultimate message is one of rejection of the material in favour of the spiritual. On the contrary, the ultimate goal is a reconciliation of the two opposites in the name of a higher principle, the Father, a 'return' of the 'lost son' and recognition of his own mistakes, as well his acceptance rather than punishment by the 'obedient son'.

CHAPTER 6

JOHN FINE'S *THE BOSNIAN CHURCH - A NEW INTERPRETATION*

That both ladies finally became decidedly convinced of what they had first supposed only as a supposition is in no way extraordinary. Our sort - intelligent folk, as we call ourselves - act in almost the same way, and our learned reasoning serves as proof of it. At first the scholar sidles up to it with extraordinary lowliness; he begins timidly, with moderation, starting from the most humble inquiry: "Can it be from there? Was it not from that corner that such and such a country took its name?" or "Does this document not belong to some other, later time?" or "Should we not take this people as in fact meaning that people?" He immediately quotes one or another ancient writer, and as soon as he sees some hint, or something he takes for a hint, he sets off at a trot and plucks up his courage; he converses with ancient writers on familiar terms, he asks them questions and even answers for them himself, forgetting entirely that he started with a timid supposition; it already seems to him that he can see it, that it is clear - and the reasoning concludes with the words: "This is how it was, this is the people that must be meant, this is the point of view to take on the subject!" Then, proclaimed publicly, from the podium, the newly discovered truth goes traveling all over the world, gathering followers and admirers.

Gogol, *Dead Souls*

Near the beginning of his influential book *The Bosnian Church - A New Interpretation*, the historian John Fine proposes a working hypothesis, writing that "the possibility that Bosnia contained both a dualist heresy and a schismatic non-dualist Bosnian Church is seriously examined in this study" (23). After evaluating virtually all the available sources dealing with medieval Bosnia, he concludes with a full affirmation of his hypothesis.

In this chapter, I will argue that Fine's conclusion is undermined by a deep-seated problem in his methodology. While he must be credited with paying sufficient attention to sources that contradict his conclusions, in several critical instances his interpretations are far-fetched and unconvincing, clearly primarily serving the purpose of confirming his previously formed views. In other words, in his overall argumentation Fine proceeds as though he had already made up his mind on the questions he considers, adjusting the evidence to his pre-conceived image.

Most notably, Fine flatly dismisses the relevance of the most important set of documents speaking in favour of the heretical interpretation of the Bosnian Church, arguing for the “irrelevance of the Inquisition documents for the Bosnian church” (65). The foundation of Fine’s overall thesis is created by two deeply problematic arguments. The first one is a static and essentialist view of dualism as a highly abstract doctrine utterly removed from the material and this-worldly needs of its adherents. The second one is an excessively static view of Bosnian medieval society derived from anthropological methods whose relevance is simply assumed as universal.

Combining these two arguments, even prior to examining any sources and evidence, Fine essentially reaches the conclusion that the dualism as he presents it simply could not have been adopted in medieval Bosnia. In the following pages, a closer look will be taken at these arguments, followed by a critique of the way they are used to support Fine’s hypothesis. Ultimately rejecting his conclusions, I will argue that the moderately dualist interpretation of the Bosnian Church presented in the previous two chapters remains the more persuasive hypothesis.

6.1 Fine’s initials arguments

Talking about the overall aims of his book, Fine writes that “for us coming to grips with the way of thinking and how the peasant mind works is far more important than the matter of what ideas or beliefs were held” (42). The problem with this approach is that it draws a somewhat arbitrary and imprecise line between ‘ideas/beliefs’ and ‘the way of thinking’, as though they were completely unrelated. If applied consistently, this approach leads to a reductionist idea of religion as an abstract set of propositions that have no bearing on other aspect of the lives of the people holding them. As it was shown in previous chapters, however, different beliefs about the putatively most abstract metaphysical details can, and usually do have a very close relationship with highly practical matters.

At least implicitly, Fine seems to acknowledge this fact when he writes that

the essence of a dualist world view is that there are two principles - a good principle usually identified with the spirit and considered to be the creator of heaven and the soul, and an evil principle identified with matter and considered to be the creator of this world and the human body. Here on earth is waged one phase of an eternal battle in which human beings, with their good souls and evil bodies, play a role or their roles and at the same time strive to achieve salvation (21).

While the belief in two principles may indeed be characterized as an abstract 'idea', the notion that life on earth represents a part of the cosmic battle between good and evil surely does have an impact on one's 'way of thinking'.

What is more problematic about Fine's argument, however, is the fact that this explanation of the 'essence' of dualism is virtually the only thing that he has to say on the topic. His views, however, do not correspond with the form of dualism as it was found within the Bosnian Church. Most importantly, Fine fails to draw the important distinction between absolute and moderate dualism which is very relevant for an analysis of the Bosnian Church. Furthermore, the idea that life on earth is one phase of an eternal battle between good and evil is much closer to Manichaeism than to medieval dualist movements such as Bogomilism and Catharism. By reducing the highly heterogeneous category of dualism to a simplistic 'essence,' Fine effectively draws a straw-man of an 'abstract other-worldly religion' (i) which, according to him, would be inherently unsuitable to a society like medieval Bosnia.

The second element of Fine's argumentative line is a questionable reliance on anthropological methods: "the use made of anthropology in this study involves putting to the Bosnian sources some of the questions anthropologists put to the societies they study, making use of ethnological data on recent Bosnian peasant society and making use, for comparative purposes, of descriptions of the function and role of religion in various other societies" (310). At the same time, however, Fine criticizes scholars who compare medieval Bosnia to other regions with an attested presence of dualist heretics, arguing that "even if there was dualism in Bosnia, it is necessary to remember that Bosnia was a backward and uneducated country; hence the

practices of any religious confession there would be bound to acquire significant deviations from those of their co-religionists elsewhere” (24). Thus what Fine seems to be saying is that while it is not advisable to compare medieval Bosnia to, for example, the medieval Languedoc, the home of the Cathars, it is perfectly acceptable to draw parallels between medieval and 20th century rural Bosnia.

A rather extreme instance of this argumentative method is Fine’s claim that the marketplaces of medieval Bosnia were unlikely spaces for the exchange of ideas, based on the insights of an anthropological study of contemporary Bosnian markets written in 1965:

William Lockwood has demonstrated that markets are a poor medium for the spread of *ideas*. His field work in Bosnia has shown that the peasants coming to market are primarily concerned with business; they socialize only after business matters are completed and then they socialize in small groups with their own associates (...) In our medieval Bosnian markets, then, it is unlikely that the Bosnian peasant would have spoken with strangers (...) If a foreign missionary approached him, it is unlikely that he would have been receptive to new ideas from him (47).

Needless to say, an observation about a 20th century custom in rural Bosnia cannot simply and uncritically be extended to the Middle Ages. It relies on an outdated, static image of ‘rural societies’ that has been abandoned and severely criticized in more recent anthropological theory. While this may be a particularly striking instance of Fine’s methodology, it poignantly illustrates his tendency to assume that ethnological methods can provide him with insights about Bosnia’s medieval society which are regarded as more profound than the information provided in contemporary sources.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Fine explicitly acknowledges this methodological principle. Writing about medieval observers of Bosnia’s society on whose writings we rely for our information, he writes: “These theologians did not have the anthropological grasp to see that Bosnian beliefs were a haphazard mixture of many different cults, from paganism, Catholicism and heretical ideas, to new beliefs arising from a mixture of the three, and from an unconscious drifting away from the three through ignorance and misunderstanding” (30).

6.2 Fine's treatment of heresiological sources

The most important set of documents Fine chooses to disregard are three 13th century texts written by Italian inquisitors referring to heresy in Bosnia (discussed in Chapter 4): 'The Heresy of the Cathars in Lombardy' (1200 - 1214) (Wakefield and Evans 159), 'The Summa of Rainerius Sacconi' (1250) (Wakefield and Evans 329) and Anselm of Alessandria's 'Inquisitor's Notebook' (1266-1276) (Wakefield and Evans 361). Fine discusses them only briefly and summarily, acknowledging that "all three documents are of unquestionable authenticity" and, further, that "since these Italian Churches were derived from Slavic ones, we can expect that they would have had various beliefs in common" (62/63).¹¹⁰ The latter point, however, is something of an understatement. The first source, 'The Heresy of the Cathars in Lombardy',¹¹¹ describes in detail the development of Catharism in northern Italy in the period between 1150 and 1200. After the appearance of a schism among the Italian Cathars, we are told that

some from Mantua, with their followers, chose as their bishop a man named Caloiannes, who, being sent to Sclavonia after his consecration, filled the episcopate for them. In the same fashion another man, named Nicola, chosen by a congregation at Vicenza and sent to Sclavonia to be consecrated, was received as their bishop on his return. Similarly in Tuscany two bishops were ordained (163).

These churches were not, however, merely derived from 'Sclavonia', but are actually referred to as the 'Sclavini', thus making the likelihood of analogous beliefs very high.

¹¹⁰ Although adding, somewhat incongruously, and without providing additional evidence: "however, a variety of Italian beliefs most probably did come from the Western (French, Lombard) Cathar milieu" (63).

¹¹¹ Wakefield and Evans note that "of the author we know no more than that he was a Lombard, perhaps from Milan, and so well informed about Catharist groups and leaders that he himself may have been a member of the sect at one time" (160).

The text also provides very valuable information about the beliefs of the *Sclavini*, noting that they “preach only one God, almighty, without beginning, who created angels and the four elements” and, further, that “they assert that Lucifer and his accomplices sinned in heaven” (Wakefield and Evans 165), thus allowing us to conclude that they were moderate dualists. Fine claims that “the Inquisition documents do not define the geographical boundaries of Slavonia”. However, Anselm of Alessandria’s text clearly speaks of “certain persons from Sclavonia, that is, from the area called Bosnia” (Wakefield and Evans 168), allowing us to at least make the very informed assumption that these two geographical terms are largely synonymous whenever they are used by Western heresiologists. Thus we have very strong evidence of the existence of a moderate dualist church in Bosnia in the mid-12th century, including a narrative of their origins in Anselm’s text: “certain persons from Sclavonia, that is, from the area called Bosnia, went as merchants to Constantinople. On return to their own land, they preached and, having increased in number, established a bishop who is called the bishop of Sclavonia or Bosnia” (Wakefield and Evans 168).

Fine pays somewhat more attention to three inquisitorial documents mentioning Bosnia from the late 14th century: the testimony of Jacob Bech of Chieri before the Inquisition in Turin in 1387, a list of errors of the Bosnian Patarins, and a dialogue between a Bosnian Patarin and a Roman Catholic (dated to the late 14th century). He acknowledges that

the testimony of Jacob Bech and the two tracts clearly state that the ‘Bosnian Patarins’ were dualists. These Patarins believed in two principles and in docetism; they condemned the Old Testament, church buildings, baptism with water and various other ‘Christian’ practices normally rejected by dualists (63).

Furthermore, he notes that the Inquisition called the Italian members of Jacob’s sect from Chieri ‘Bosnian heretics’. The other two documents, as Fine also acknowledges, contain a theology very similar to Jacob’s testimony.

So how is Fine able to deny the relevance of these documents for the Bosnian Church? Only by construing an elaborate set of arguments that serve to confirm his previously formed idea of its orthodox theology. First, based on nothing but the roughly similar dates in which the three documents were produced, he speculates that the source of the list of errors of the Bosnian Patarens and the dialogue between a Bosnian Patarin and a Roman Catholic was the dualist sect to which Jacob Bech belonged, rather than any actual Bosnians: “From this, it seems that we can use these tracts for little more than to demonstrate that there still existed a dualist current in Bosnia with which Italians had connections” (Fine 64).¹¹² However, the dialogue clearly mentions Bosnia several times, the Catholic accusing the Pataren that “you and your Bosnian hills are the schism” (Šanjek 175), that “you have separated from us and escaped to the hills of Lombardy or Bosnia” (Šanjek 177) and that “all the peoples are not in Bosnia” (Šanjek 181).

Fine then goes on to argue that, even though the majority of Dalmatian and Hungarian sources referred to adherents of the Bosnian Church as Patarins, the Italian sources did not mean the same thing when using this term: “since the tracts describe dualists and since the Italians generally called their dualists ‘Patarins’, it would be quite natural for the authors of the tract to say ‘Bosnian Patarins’ when describing Bosnian dualists” (Fine 64). He then reaches his conclusion: “In fact the Bosnian Church that emerges from our study of all the sources about it is very different from the sect described in the tracts. Thus I conclude that the Bosnian with whom these Italian ‘Bosnian heretics’ had contact were Bosnian dualists who belonged to a movement separated from the Bosnian Church” (Fine 64/65). The problem is, however, that once we exclude inquisition documents, among ‘all the sources’ about the Bosnian Church, there is virtually *not a single one* that speaks directly about its theology. Thus, while I am not arguing

¹¹² Based on his assumption about the primitive nature of Bosnian society, in a footnote Fine questions even this conclusion: “In fact, the whole idea of Italian city dwellers going to rural uneducated Bosnia to learn religious doctrine is very hard to imagine” (321) At a different point, he restates his questionable assumption: “it seems hard to believe that these Italian urbanites had anything to learn about doctrine from a Bosnian” (172).

that the inquisition documents have to be uncritically accepted as true, they should certainly be taken into account when trying to form the final image of the Bosnian Church.¹¹³

Combining a superficial notion of dualism and a pre-conceived image of Bosnia's peasant society, Fine reaches, or rather starts his analysis with the following conclusion:

Yet in an environment like that of Bosnia a consistent and constant abstract theological creed did not and could not exist. All that could exist would be a basic core of beliefs and practices associated with what people thought was Christianity. An illiterate society like Bosnia simply does not look upon its religion theologically (29).

Besides its reliance on questionable conceptions of dualism and medieval Bosnia, Fine's argument is seriously undermined by what is known about the organizational structure of dualist movements. As I have previously shown, one of the most fundamental features of Bogomilism, Catharism and, possibly, Paulicianism was the division of its adherents into two different classes, with a significant contrast in their status, regulations and levels of theological knowledge. The more abstract, esoteric aspects of the religious teaching would only have been known by and adhered to by an inner circle of the initiated. Thus it is perfectly conceivable that even in a society such as rural medieval Bosnia as it is presented by Fine, a type of dualist religious movement could exist.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ At the beginning of the chapter about Catholic Church sources, Fine writes: "Almost all references to Manichaeism or to doctrines or practices that could be called dualist come from these Catholic documents. This fact has led many, who want to argue that the Bosnian Church was not dualist, to claim that since only one category of sources, and these form a foreign land (and an organization clearly hostile to the Bosnian Church), speaks of dualism, we should reject the evidence of these writings" (54). However, it appears that Fine presents us with a somewhat more sophisticated, but ultimately equivalent argument.

¹¹⁴ In fact, one of the few things that are known with relative certainty about the Bosnian Church is that it maintained a division between initiated members who referred to themselves simply as *Christians* and regular believers. This characteristic is encountered as early as the previously mentioned 1203 abjuration of the Bosnian Christians, which contains the following provision: "From now on we will not call ourselves Christians, as before, but brothers, in order to avoid insulting other Christians by ascribing that name to ourselves".

Fine adds another categorical, yet ultimately questionable opinion:

To have acquired a following in Bosnia, dualism would have had to adopt itself considerably, or have given up trying to influence the daily lives of its believers and have been satisfied with simply initiating people on their deathbeds. Even so, it seems difficult to believe that it would have gained much of a following if it offered no benefit for the peasant in this world (32).

However, as noted in previous chapters, besides their esoteric teachings, a crucial aspect of dualist heresies was their rejection of numerous demands made by the orthodox churches. It is primarily in these ‘negative’ teachings of the dualist heresies that a very tangible this-worldly benefit for their adherents could be found.

6.3 The fifty points renounced by thee Bosnian noblemen

A condensed summary of Fine’s arguments against the heretical/dualist nature of the Bosnian Church is provided in his discussion of the most detailed available inquisitional document relating to medieval Bosnia, a list of fifty points renounced by three Bosnian noblemen before Cardinal Torquemada in 1461. The fifty points will be listed here in full:

1. There are two Gods, the one supremely good, the other supremely evil.
2. There are two principles: one spiritual and bodiless, the other corruptible, with a body or visible. The first is the God of light, the second of darkness.
3. Certain angels are evil by nature, and cannot help but sin.
4. Lucifer ascended to heaven, fought with God there and brought down many angels.
5. Souls are demons imprisoned in bodies.
6. Evil angels imprisoned in bodies may return to heaven by baptism and purification and repentance.
7. They damn and reject the Old Testament, saying that it originated with the principle of darkness.
8. They say the Angel who appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai was evil.
9. They do not accept all the New Testament, but only certain parts of it. They do not believe that Christ was born of a Woman and they reject Christ’s genealogy.
10. They condemn the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament.

11. They condemn John the Baptist, saying that there is no devil in hell worse than he.
12. The tree of knowledge of good and evil was a woman. Adam knew her, that is sinned with her and was expelled from paradise.
13. The blessed Mary was not a woman or female creature but an angel.
14. The Son of God did not assume a real body but a fantastic (i.e. apparent) one.
15. Christ did not really suffer, die, descend to hell or ascend to heaven. Everything he did was only seemingly done.
16. Their church is that of God.
17. They are the successors of the apostles; their heresiarch is bishop of the Church and successor of Peter.
18. The Roman Church is condemned and excommunicated.
19. All the popes from Peter to Sylvester were of their faith; and that Sylvester was the first to apostatize from it.
20. They condemn material churches, saying they are synagogues of Satan, and that those who worship in them are idolaters.
21. That the use of images in churches is idolatry (i.e. against worship of images).
22. The sign of the cross is a sign of the devil.
23. They condemn the mass and church singing as being opposed to Christ's Gospel and doctrine.
24. They ridicule and damn the veneration of holy relics.
25. They ridicule and damn the worship of saints in church, saying they are holy and without sin, and that they have the Holy Spirit within them.
27. They damn ecclesiastical sacraments.
28. They renounce baptism with water, saying it's John's baptism, and by it no one can be saved.
29. They maintain Christ's way of baptizing without water, by placing the Gospel on the chest and with the laying on of hands.
30. Through their baptism, anybody may have his sins remitted and become as holy as St Peter.
31. That a boy before the age of discretion cannot be saved.
32. Complete holiness and the power of baptism comes to the baptized only through the merit of the baptizer.
33. As often as the baptizer sins, the souls of those whom he has baptized fall from a state of blessedness in heaven to hell.
34. As often as the baptizer sins, all those baptized by him must be remitted by re-baptism.
35. They condemn the sacrament of confirmation.
36. They deny the sacrament of the eucharist, saying that the body of Christ cannot be made into bread, and if it could, we should not eat it.
37. They condemn the sacrament of repentance; they say sins are remitted by re-baptism.
38. They condemn the sacrament of extreme unction.

39. They condemn the sacrament of ordination (for a priest).
40. Bodily marriage is adultery.
41. All sins are mortal.
42. They deny all authority to the Church, saying no one can be excommunicated.
43. They condemn the eating of meat, saying that whoever eats meat, cheese or milk cannot be saved unless re-baptized.
44. They deny resurrection, saying that no body that dies now will ever be resurrected; it is the spirit that will be resurrected.
45. They deny purgatory, saying that there is no middle road between heaven and hell.
46. They condemn church prayers for the deceased.
47. It is a mortal sin to kill animals or birds, or to break eggs.
48. They condemn capital punishment by secular powers.
49. They condemn all oath-taking.
50. They prohibit all acts of charity and mercy (Fine 280-282).

At the beginning of his discussion, Fine states that “all these points could well concern Western Cathars, which makes it possible that they were drawn from Inquisition records about Cathars” (Fine 282). While the point he makes is certainly justified, it still makes sense to ask why an inquisitor in the year 1461, i.e. more than a century after the last Cathars in Western Europe had disappeared, would make use of these records, unless he was faced by adherents of a movement he considered at least similar. According to Fine, only three or four of these fifty points are relevant for the Bosnian Church, while the rest are contradicted by other, more reliable sources. A careful analysis of his arguments for the alleged contradictions, however, shows that the conclusions he reaches are far from certain and could well be accounted for differently. I will start with the points Fine recognizes as accurate reflections of the teaching of the Bosnian Church, followed firstly by his own, and subsequently by my comments:

“16. Their church is that of God. Every church believes that of itself” (Fine 285). While it is probably true, on a very general level, that every church believes itself to be that of God, the significance of this point is that it, presumably, does not consider the Catholic (or Orthodox) Church to be that of God. Thus it indicates an awareness of a more profound difference between the two churches.

“17. They are the successors of the apostles. Radin’s will refers to krstjani of the apostolic faith” (Fine 285). Similarly to (16), this point indicates that the Bosnian Church presumably did not consider the Catholic Church to be apostolic. This point should be read in conjunction with (19), which Fine does not comment on: “All the popes from Peter to Sylvester were of their faith; and that Sylvester was the first to apostatize from it.” This belief was associated with the *Donation of Constantine*, a forged document according to which the Emperor Constantine had given Pope Sylvester the right to secular rule in the Western Empire (Loos 260). Thus the apostolic succession of the Catholic Church was broken once it became tainted with political power.

“26. The (heretical) leaders allow the people to adore them. The pope in 1373 quoting Franciscans (...) states some group in the vicariate had believers adoring heretics. It is not stated that this refers to the Bosnian Church. We do not know if the adoration was similar to that of the Cathars. The 1373 letter never states that it was believed that the heresiarchs were in possession of the Holy Spirit. We also find a visiting Catholic bishop more or less adored by Bosnians in the 1430s” (Fine 285). While it is true that we do not know if the adoration was similar to that of the Cathars, we may presume that a Franciscan, a member of an order devoted to the combat of heresy, was aware of the meaning of the word “adoration” - a custom characteristic of the Cathars - when he decided to use it in a letter to the pope.

“49. They condemn all oath-taking. It is clear that the ordained Patarins did not swear oaths. However, on occasion they were able to endorse a document or testify in court according to their own customs, whatever that means. Lay members of the Church freely took oaths” (Fine 285/286). Fine seems to acknowledge that Bosnian Christians did indeed condemn oath-taking to its full members, thus recognizing the validity of this point.

Thus, even the four points that Fine accepts as accurate strongly suggest that the Bosnian Church shared some fundamental characteristics with Bogomilism and Catharism: it considered itself the true apostolic faith (in contrast to Catholic and Orthodox Christianity), it maintained a division between two classes of adherents, with one “adoring” the other, and it condemned all oath-taking.

I will now continue with a commentary of Fine's reasons for rejecting the other points in the list:

"1,2. There are two Gods or two principles: Radin's will and the herceg's 1453 treaty both refer to an omnipotent God" (Fine 283). Both of the documents Fine mentions were not of a theological nature and thus cannot be taken as the most reliable statements of religious beliefs. The mentioned treaty was written by a lay member of the Bosnian Church who did not necessarily share its esoteric beliefs. More importantly, as shown previously, the belief in an omnipotent God is perfectly compatible with moderate dualism.

"7,8, 10. They damn the Old Testament, Moses' law, the prophets and patriarchs: Hval's Gospel contains the Ten Commandments, the Psalms and Songs. We also find a favourable reference to the Patriarch Abraham on the gravestone inscription of Gost Mišljen" (Fine 283). The Bosnian Church and some of the other dualist movements used only some parts of the Old Testament, rejecting others. Thus this point may be somewhat exaggerated, but not necessarily false.

"9, 13. They do not accept all the New Testament, they do not believe Christ was born of a woman; Mary was an angel. Hval's Gospel contains the complete New Testament. In 1453 Herceg Stefan swears before Mary, Mother of God" (Fine 283). As he was, at most, a lay believer of the Bosnian Church, Herceg Stefan's behaviour cannot be taken as an accurate reflection of its teaching. The fact that Hval's Gospel contains the complete New Testament does not necessarily mean that its creators and readers believed everything that was written in it. The claim that adherents of the Bosnian church did not accept all the New Testament may mean that they interpreted it allegorically or simply differently than the Catholic Church.¹¹⁵ This is indicated in the second part of point (9) which Fine fails to quote here: "They do not believe that

¹¹⁵ In his discussion of the reliability of Catholic documents, Fine himself makes a similar point: "It should also be mentioned that these sources frequently speak of heretics rejecting certain practices; this need not have meant total rejection, but could just as well have meant rejection of the practice as performed in a Catholic church" (54).

Christ was born of a Woman and they reject Christ's genealogy." From an orthodox point of view, this belief would amount to a rejection of some parts of the New Testament.

"11. They condemn John the Baptist. Hval's Gospel has a complimentary picture of John" (Fine 283). The treatment of John the Baptist by the Bosnian Church has been previously discussed. On the one hand, in contrast to Matthew who is depicted next to him, the inscription above John the Baptist's head does not contain the title "Saint" (although it must be added that he is represented with an aureole, a standard indication of sainthood). On the other hand, in the glosses found in two Bosnian codices John is described as the "water-carrier" (*vodonosac*), a derogatory term alluding to baptism with water, which was rejected by Bogomils and Cathars. Furthermore, in another gloss he is identified with the Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) who "passed by on the other side" when he saw a robbed and beaten man lying on the street.

"20. They condemn material churches. We have presented a number of reasons to suggest that the Bosnian Church did have churches. Here we simply note that in 1472 money was taken, according to terms specified in Radin's will, to build him a sepulchre and chapel" (Fine 283). As Fine notes, there are reasons to suggest that the Bosnian Church did have material churches, but there is no firm evidence. Furthermore, it may be possible that the Bosnian Church condemned material churches in the way they were conceived of by the Catholic and Orthodox Christians.

"22. They condemn the cross. Though it can be argued that the Bosnian Church may have rejected the cross in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, this certainly was not true in the fifteenth century - and the fifty points were compiled in 1461. The djed's letter of 1404 begins with a cross, so do the herceg's 1453 treaty and Radin's will. Radin's will also has a large cross down the margin. The 1453 treaty also has the herceg swearing before the life-giving and venerable cross. This last phrase suggest that he and the died and stroiniks accepted Christ's actual resurrection and also bodily resurrection for mankind. Thus we probably have good reason also to reject point 15 which says that Christ only apparently participated in the events of his passion, and point 44 which says they deny bodily resurrection for mankind. And if Christ's passion becomes real, then we eliminate point 14 which denies Christ has a real body. The herceg's 1454 treaty issued to Dubrovnik, stating 'God sent his only Son to great suffering in

order to deliver His (people) from sins by resurrection' also contradicts points 14, 15 and 44. Though no Patarins witnessed the document, the herceg's adherence to their Church probably is sufficient justification to cite this treaty as evidence for the Bosnian Church's position" (Fine 283). While I agree with Fine that it seems very unlikely that the Bosnian Church fully condemned the cross, the rest of his suggestions is highly speculative. Once again, he uses elements of a secular document signed by a lay member of the Bosnian Church to derive their dogmatic/esoteric teachings, which is not acceptable. In fact, discussing the 1454 treaty, Fine himself notes that "though Radin had been instrumental in bringing about this peace, neither he nor any other Bosnian Church cleric appended his name to the document" (256). This fact strongly suggests that they did not agree with the orthodox Christology presented in it.

"24. They condemn relics of saints. We find Sandalj's Orthodox widow leaving relics to her great-nephew, almost certainly an adherent of the Bosnian Church. We also find Herceg Stefan leaving relics in his will. The herceg also accepted the cult of St Sava" (Fine 283). The fact that an Orthodox Christian woman left relics to her great-nephew, who was most probably a lay member of the Bosnian Church, cannot be used to prove its religious teachings. He may have appreciated the relics for their financial value. Once again, herceg Stefan's behaviour cannot be taken as an accurate reflection of the Bosnian Church's teaching.

"25. They ridicule the worship of saints. The herceg in 1453 swore by all the saints. Radin's will requests prayers for his soul on the Days of St Peter, St Paul, St Stephen, and St George. He even notes that he celebrated St George's Day as his slava" (Fine 283/4). While it certainly appears that Radin was not completely opposed to the remembrance of saints, it does not necessarily mean that he accepted the full idea of their worship as taught by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Fine does not quote the very significant remainder of this point: "...saying they are holy and without sin, and that they have the Holy Spirit within them." Thus the opposition to the worship of saints has to be seen in the light of the Bogomil/Cathar belief that the baptized are their living equals. This is confirmed in point (30): "Through their baptism, anybody may have his sins remitted and become as holy as St Peter."

"41, 46. All sins are mortal; they condemn church prayers for the deceased. Radin requests prayers by both krstjani and Catholics for his soul after his death, and speaks of God forgiving

sins and pardoning us at the Last Judgement. Thus he clearly believed that sins could be remitted after death and that prayers for the dead were of value. Thus by extension we can eliminate point 37 which says sins can only be forgiven through re-baptism” (Fine 284). Radin’s will indeed strongly suggests that he believed in the value of prayers for the dead. However, it does not necessarily imply the elimination of point 37. The belief that sins can only be forgiven through re-baptism should rather be seen in contrast to the orthodox belief that priests have the right to forgive sins. It is compatible with the belief that God can forgive sins after death. Once again, this point has to be seen in conjunction with its first part which Fine does not quote: “they condemn the sacrament of repentance.”

“50. They condemn all charity. Radin’s will leaves money to be distributed not only to the poor and crippled of his own faith, but also to poor and crippled Catholics” (Fine 284). While Radin’s will is clear on this point, it must be remembered that he was an extremely wealthy man for his times and left his will in Catholic Dubrovnik. It does not confirm that the Bosnian Church accepted the obligation of charity as taught by the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

After commenting on these points, Fine writes:

Thus, fifteen of the fifty points can immediately be shown not to pertain to the Bosnian Church in the fifteenth century. And if we make a logical extension to point 22, we add three more to that figure, and by extending points 41 and 46 we add a fourth. Thus it is reasonable to say that nineteen of the fifty points are irrelevant (284).

However, as I have shown, only point 22, the rejection of the cross, can be said to be irrelevant for the Bosnian Church with relative certainty. The beliefs that all sins are mortal (41), the condemnation of church prayers for the deceased (46) and charity (50) are all suggested by only one, very specific document - Radin’s testament. 11 more points - the belief in two Gods/principles (1,2), the damnation of the Old Testament, Moses and the patriarchs (7,8,10), the rejection of the New Testament and orthodox Christology (9, 13), condemnation of John the Baptist (11), material churches (20), ridicule of worship of saints (25) and the belief that sins can only be forgiven through re-baptism (37) - are perhaps imprecise or open to debate, but certainly

cannot be flatly dismissed as irrelevant to the Bosnian Church's beliefs. Fine's reasons for rejecting the relevance of the belief that Jesus did not have a physical body (14), that he did not suffer (15), and that there is no physical resurrection (44) cannot be accepted, as they are based on the behaviour of a single lay member of the Bosnian Church. His reasons for questioning the condemnation of relics of saints (24) is highly circumstantial and thus even less founded.

Commenting on the other points, Fine writes that they "seem somewhat inaccurately expressed, but we cannot be certain":

"18. The Roman Church is condemned and excommunicated. The Bosnian Church clearly had broken away from Rome, and was condemned by Rome. How strongly the Bosnians attacked Rome is unknown. Relations certainly were on the whole friendly between Patarins and Catholic Dubrovnik, and in his will Radin asks for prayers in Catholic churches and leaves money for charity to crippled Catholics. Thus this point seems somewhat overstated" (Fine 284). The fact that the relations between Patarins and Catholic Dubrovnik were on the whole friendly says little about the Catholic Church's attitude towards the Bosnian Church (see chapter 4, footnote 7). While Radin's will demonstrates his personal attitude towards the Catholic Church, or perhaps the attitude of the Bosnian Church at the time it was collapsing, it certainly cannot be generalized.

"21. The use of images in churches is idolatry. This point seems to refer to worship of images. Serbian anathemas state the *krstjani* refuse to bow down to images. The Bosnian Church clearly did not reject religious pictures since its Gospels were illustrated with them. Various lay members of the Bosnian Church also possessed icons. It is possible, though, that the Church, while allowing religious pictures, did prohibit the worship of them" (Fine 284). Fine's final conclusion in this case can be accepted: the existence of Gospel illustrations does not imply an endorsement of the cult of image worship.

"23. They condemn the mass and church singing. Once again, we cannot be sure; we have one ritual (...), which is similar to (but shorter than) a Lyon Cathar ritual. Thus the Bosnian Church may have had its own service that varied from the Roman. Whether this means they

condemned the Roman is unknown, as are their views on church singing. However, we also have two sources suggesting they had a rite similar to the Serbian Orthodox, which would include mass and singing: the Franciscan Symeon in 1322 (...) and a Hungarian writer in 1463 (...). And Radin in his will requests Catholics to light candles for his souls on Sundays and holidays which needless to say are times when mass was being celebrated” (Fine 284). Here we can agree with Fine that “we cannot be sure”.

“28. They renounce baptism with water. In 1404, King Ostoja, almost certainly a member of the Bosnian Church, having conferred with the djed, wrote to Dubrovnik to recall Klešić. He dated the letter as the Day of the Hallowing of the Waters (...). Ostoja also in 1401 had one son baptized, and Dubrovnik’s calling the ceremony a baptism suggests it was an orthodox (i.e. with water) baptismal ceremony (...) Radin’s will refers to baptized (kršteni) krstjani, though we do not know how they were baptized. Though sufficient evidence to prove the point is lacking, the above show the Bosnian Church had some sort of baptismal rite and suggests it was with water” (Fine 284). The argument presented here is highly circumstantial. Religious movements such as the Bosnian Church drew a clear distinction between baptized members and unbaptized supporters and were usually opposed to the custom of child baptism. Writing about the sales of Bosnian slaves in the Dalmatian town of Zadar, Tomislav Zdenko Tensek writes: “The traders from that town would acquire slaves from the market in the Neretva valley, mainly Bosnian *krstjani*, Patarens, often with the explanation that they are still ‘unbaptized’. In order to justify their acquisition of these slaves, the traders would use dubious and hypocritical claims that they want to make them Christian” (Tensek 326). Thus it is unlikely that King Ostoja would have baptized his son in the Bosnian Church.

“39. They condemn the sacrament of ordination. While it is likely that the Patarins had a somewhat different procedure of ordinations from the Catholics, they clearly had some rite of ordination for their clergy. This is seen from Radin’s will which refers to the *krstjani* (i.e. the ordained) who were ‘baptized in the correct way.’ And since the *krstjani* seem to have been a continuation of a Catholic monastic order, it would not be surprising if their ceremony was quite similar to the Catholic” (Fine 285). The claim that the *krstjani* were a continuation of a Catholic monastic in a formal sense does not imply that there was any kind of continuity in their beliefs

and rituals (see Chapter 4). Furthermore the term *krstjani* does not refer to those who were ordained, but rather those who were baptized. There is no evidence that the Bosnian Church had any ritual of ordination, and particularly that it was considered a sacrament in the sense of the Catholic Church.

“40. Bodily marriage is adultery. Though the Bosnians did not look upon marriage as a sacrament, there is no reason to believe they condemned marriage or sex. It seems the *krstjani* were celibate; however, Catholic priests were too. Lay members married” (Fine 285). While there is no independent evidence for this claim in the case of the Bosnian Church, there is no reason why this belief would not have existed in Bosnia. *Encratism*, i.e. belief that a true Christian has to remain celibate, has a long history reaching back to Early Christianity, and is amply documented among the Bogomils and Cathars.

“43. They condemn the eating of meat, cheese and milk. We know that the Bosnian Church clerics kept some sort of fasts since Radin mentions fasting in his will, and speaks of fasters and ‘*mrsni*’ (non-fasting people). However, we do not know whether the ordained Patarins kept fasts all the time, or only long ones during certain periods of the year. We also do not know if they eliminated all the items noted in point 43 from their diet. It is also evident that only the ordained kept the strict fasts; lay members’ diets, as far as we know, were not regularly restricted” (Fine 285). Fine is right that there is no independent evidence for the nature of these fasts. However, if analogies with other dualist movements are taken into account, the fact that special fasts are mentioned suggests that they were of a similar kind.

6.4 The Problems with Fine’s Approach: An Overview

What I have tried to show in this chapter is that there is a fundamental problem in Fine’s central argument against the heterodoxy of the Bosnian Church. In order to clarify my claim, I will set out Fine’s argument as I have understood it in individual propositions:

- (i) ‘dualism’ is an abstract, esoteric religion
- (ii) Medieval Bosnia was an illiterate peasant society

(iii) Modern ethnology shows that abstract, esoteric religions are inherently unsuitable to illiterate peasant societies

(iv) Hence, it is inherently unlikely that ‘dualism’ was the dominant religion in medieval Bosnia.

While this is, in a formal sense, a valid argument, what I have shown is that its premises cannot be accepted as true. Most importantly, Fine presents an essentialized and superficial idea of dualism defined by the metaphysical dogma of the existence of two principles. Furthermore, he disregards what is known about the organizational structure of dualistic movements, leading to the faulty conclusion that movements of this kind cannot exist in illiterate peasant societies. Finally, his reliance on ethnological insights about modern illiterate, peasant societies, to derive insights about medieval Bosnia cannot be accepted. Equipped with this pre-conceived image of medieval Bosnia and its religion, Fine approaches the sources with the intention of making them conform to this image, rather than on their own terms. Although I have not discussed his treatment of every single source, I have tried to demonstrate the nature of his approach on the basis of his analysis of inquisitional documents, the most important set of sources speaking in favour of the dualist interpretation of the Bosnian Church. To summarize my argument, we can say that:

(i) Fine dismisses three 13th century inquisitional documents due to the alleged (but ultimately untrue) imprecision of the term ‘Sclavonia’ and an exaggerated scepticism towards the high likelihood that a group named the ‘Sclavini’ in Italy would share their beliefs with Slavs/Bosnians from whom they derived their religion.

(ii) He further dismisses three 14th century inquisitional document by construing an elaborate hypothesis according to which two documents, although speaking of Bosnians, actually refer to those known as ‘Bosnians’ in Italy and the term Bosnian Patarins, although extensively used in reference to the Bosnian Church, in fact refers to a hypothetical dualist group in Bosnia which is separate from the Bosnian Church.

(iii) Finally, he dismisses a very detailed 15th century inquisitional document undoubtedly referring to Bosnia by demonstrating that the majority of its points are allegedly contradicted by domestic sources. As I have shown, however, although a few points in the document do seem to be contradicted by domestic Bosnian sources, in the majority of cases the verdict can be ambiguous at best. Fine reaches his very critical attitude to the document primarily through an excessive reliance on the reported behaviour of lay members of the Bosnian church.

Thus Fine unjustifiably robs the historian of the possibility of using the most detailed available sources on the theology of the Bosnian Church. While the information provided in the inquisitional documents should not be uncritically accepted as fully accurate, it should nevertheless form an element of our evaluation of the beliefs of medieval Bosnians. If we take into account both domestic and external sources, the possibility that the Bosnian Church was indeed moderately dualist - though not necessarily exactly as it was presented in inquisitional documents - still appears like the more plausible hypothesis.

6.5 The Bosnian Church: A Summary

In the introduction to Chapter 4, I noted that due to the paucity and ambivalence of the available primary sources, any conclusion reached about the Bosnian Church can be considered a more or less likely hypothesis at best, rather than a definitive opinion. While this should be a principle of any critical historiography, it is particularly relevant in the case of an insufficiently documented religious movement accused of heterodoxy in the medieval Balkans.

The issue of *interpretation* is of crucial significance for our understanding of the Bosnian Church. On the one hand, judging by what we know about other heterodox/heretical movements from the very beginnings of Christianity, it is primarily in the way they interpreted scripture rather than in the text itself that the specificities of their religious beliefs are to be found. This fact creates an endemic problem which is only partially offset by the existence of a

series of glosses in Bosnian manuscripts, providing us with a glimpse into the manner of thinking of those for and by whom the texts were originally written.

On the other hand, in order to account for the inconsistencies encountered among the diverse sources testifying to the beliefs held by adherents of the Bosnian Church, we are forced to make assumptions about the relevant context in which they are to be evaluated, thus facing the second level at which the issue of interpretation becomes relevant. Depending on whether one views the Bosnian Church as primarily orthodox/schismatic or heretical/dualist, it is possible to reach conclusions as contrasting as those viewing it as a primarily feudal institution and ‘sacralizer’ of terrestrial power on the one hand or an ascetic movement fighting against the corruption of the material world on the other. While the hypothesis of an evolution in the nature of the Bosnian Church from a revolutionary heterodox movement to a conservative upholder of the existing socio-economic order accounts for some of the inconsistencies encountered in the sources, there is ultimately no independent evidence to confirm such a development.

I have paid particular attention to one of the most influential historiographic assessments of the Bosnian Church - John Fine’s theory of a schismatic monastic institution whose theological deviances can be explained by a combination of pagan survivals and general provincial ignorance. John Fine’s work is a prime example of the excessive certainty in hypothetical assumptions discussed here. Starting off with a possible solution of the enigma of the Bosnian Church - the hypothesis that there was both a heretical dualistic movement and a schismatic yet orthodox ecclesiastical institution -, Fine ends up with a certainty in his conclusion that is not supported by an open-minded interpretation of all the available evidence. The problems with Fine’s approach are most clearly illustrated by his complete dismissal of all heresiological sources based on nothing but an ultimately conjectural argument.

While Fine’s hypothesis acts a useful corrective to older theories of the Bosnian Church that uncritically and excessively relied on heresiological sources, the solution of the problem, as I have argued, should rather be sought in a reassessment of the categories of ‘orthodoxy’ and

‘dualism/heresy’. Most importantly, a closer analysis of heresiological sources discussing the beliefs of Western Cathars and Patarens shows that certain streams of monarchic or moderate dualism could hold basic dogmatic beliefs that made them all but indistinguishable from orthodoxy, particularly if we take into account their willingness and ability to disguise their beliefs behind putatively orthodox statements. More precisely, it has been shown that some of the items of belief that have often been used to prove the Bosnian Church’s alleged orthodoxy - such as the acceptance of (parts of) the Old Testament and John the Baptist, and the belief in an omnipotent God - were in fact perfectly compatible with a moderate dualist theology. Nevertheless, some of the codices of the Bosnian Christians, as well as documents such as the Testament of gost Radin, clearly indicate that the allegations made against it in heresiological sources cannot be taken at face value. Although virtually every document written or signed by adherents of the Bosnian Church points towards certain theological peculiarities, their ultimate nature is not sufficiently documented to warrant a definitive conclusion.

For the purposes of further discussion, the conclusions reached in the last three chapter will be briefly reformulated here, starting with the most certain ones and moving on towards questions that must remain open. The Bosnian Church was an independent religious organization with a hierarchy and organizational structure unlike either the orthodox or other medieval dualist churches. While it is not mentioned as such in any documents prior to the early 14th century, it appears reasonable to assume its continuity with an unidentified Christian “fraternity” that was described as Pataren and forced to renounce a series of heterodox beliefs and customs at the beginning of the 13th century. A series of documents from the 14th and 15th centuries allow us to conclude that for significant periods of time, Bosnian Church officials enjoyed cordial relations with and participated in diplomatic and economic affairs of the Bosnian king and feudal lords and the neighbouring city-state of Dubrovnik, in at least one documented example amassing large personal fortunes in the process. One of the most characteristic features of the Bosnian Church was a consistent division of its adherents into ‘true Christians’ and other lay members, with a strict set of ethical standards applying only to the former.

Some of the more certain beliefs and customs of members of the Bosnian Church include their conviction that they represent the apostolic tradition of Christianity, their refusal to take oaths and the 'adoration' of the 'true Christians' by lay adherents. Furthermore, the surviving codices of the Bosnian Church show that it accepted at least some parts of the Old Testament and its prophets, although a general preference for the New Testament can also be established. The only elements of the codices indicating the existence of heterodox beliefs are the glosses found in three manuscripts, providing interpretations of biblical passages reflecting a theology that can be classified as moderately dualist, ascribed to the Bosnian Church by a set of heresiological writings spanning several centuries. At least in some cases, however, the heresiological sources are contradicted by domestic sources and thus must be treated with caution. Ultimately, the available evidence situates the theology of the Bosnian Church in an elusive space between 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy', allowing for the possibility to argue in favour of either possibility depending on the selection of sources to be emphasized.

CHAPTER 7 ICONOLOGY REVISITED

So I conceive of iconology as an iconography turned interpretative and thus becoming an integral part of the study of art instead of being confined to the role of a preliminary statistical survey. There is, however, admittedly some danger that iconology will behave, not like ethnology as opposed to ethnography, but like astrology as opposed to astrography.

Erwin Panofsky, 'Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art' (32).

These thoughts of Erwin Panofsky, one of the pioneers of modern iconography/iconology, succinctly capture the aims and dilemmas informing the following chapter. Having dealt with the major problems and controversies surrounding the complex religious environment of medieval Bosnia, it is now possible to take the next step towards an assessment of its artistic legacy. This step will entail determining the appropriate theoretical framework in which the visual culture of medieval Bosnia will be interpreted.

In this chapter, I will aim to overcome a traditional form of logocentrism according to which the only task of an iconographic analysis consists in matching imagery to themes or passages whose relevance has previously been determined by historical, theological or literary analysis.¹¹⁶ I will present a theoretical framework in which it becomes possible to use visual data as an independent source of evidence that may enrich, modify or even contradict the conclusions reached through more traditional approaches centred on textual sources. Ideally, this step will result in going beyond Panofsky's desire to make iconology an integral part of the study of art, turning it into a fundamental aspect of the study of culture and history in general.

¹¹⁶ Referring to traditional approaches to early Christian art, Robin Margaret Jensen writes: "art-historical materials were deemed to be supplementary and supportive, rather than autonomous and sometimes divergent sources of data regarding the faith and practices of early Christians. It was as if art contained a canon of static symbols that was a relatively simple tool for expressing basic theological truths as contained in catechism or creed." (28)

At the same time, however, it is crucial to beware of the danger, addressed by Panofsky, that the envisaged form of iconology may turn into a form of astrology, arbitrarily identifying meanings on the basis of nothing more but inspired guesswork. It is precisely this kind of danger that has led to a general abandoning of Panofsky's lofty ambitions for a future iconology in favour of an empirically grounded iconography that may be more than a "preliminary statistical survey," but is ultimately unwilling to search for the elusive "content" of works of art that can provide a glimpse into the "basic attitude of a nation, culture or class" (Panofsky 14). While Panofsky's idealistic metaphysical assumptions undoubtedly require a readjustment, I will argue that his approach to deciphering the meaning of visual imagery may be closer to the minds of (at least some) medieval observers than some of the approaches that dominate more recent developments in iconography.

The attempt to analyze images in accordance with their contemporary rather than modern interpretative criteria is a trend that can be identified within recently developed art historical methodologies such as those of Jaś Elsner.¹¹⁷ A fundamental problem with this approach in the case of medieval art, however, is the fact that, as Jeffrey F. Hamburger notes, "art theory as such did not exist in the Middle Ages. Despite prolonged efforts to match medieval texts with medieval works of art, there remain few points of contact" (11). What does exist as a possible starting point is a series of theological justifications of art rooted in the long-standing dispute over the legitimacy of religious imagery ultimately going back to the period of Byzantine iconomachy.¹¹⁸

Medieval theologians frequently provided three reasons to justify the existence of religious art: their ability to teach 'humble' (i.e. illiterate) people, their emotional effect and their role in aiding

¹¹⁷ Introducing his analysis of the Transfiguration mosaic in St Catherine's monastery on Mt Sinai, Elsner writes: "my aim is to provide an interpretation of the mosaics according to contemporary - that is, sixth-century ideology, rather than one grounded in modern critical categories" (102).

¹¹⁸ Opposing the traditional, ecclesiastical historiographic approach according to which the opposition to icons was just a temporary anomaly, the historian Leslie Brubaker suggests the replacement of the traditional term 'iconoclasm' in favour of the more neutral and historically accurate 'iconomachy', i.e. the conflict over images.

in the process of memorization.¹¹⁹ Clearly, however, this theoretical framework for the analysis of religious art is distinctly didactic and logocentric: the three reasons for the existence of art provided here are based on imperfections of the human mind, justifying its usage only to the extent that it assists in facilitating content that is ultimately of a textual nature. Despite the predominance of this conceptualization of art in the medieval Christian world, I have looked for possible alternatives that may be capable of assigning the visual an epistemologically more prominent function.¹²⁰

In order to identify such a theoretical framework, it is necessary to go back to the period of early Christianity and inquire into the ways in which the early followers of Jesus Christ appropriated the existing imagery of the Greco-Roman world to gradually fashion their own iconography. In one of the earliest surviving Christian reflections on visual culture, around the year 200 Clement of Alexandria provided the following advice on pictorial devices that Christians should chose for the finger ring they wore as a signet: “Our seals should be a dove or a fish or a ship running in a fair wind or a musical lyre such as the one Polycrates used or a ship’s anchor such as the one Seleucus has engraved on his sealstone. And if someone is fishing he will call to mind the apostle [Peter] and the children [baptizands] drawn up out of the water“ (Finney 111).

Commenting on this and similar examples of early Christian attitudes towards visual imagery, Paul Corby Finney concludes that “the creation of early Christian art seems to have taken place

¹¹⁹ As in this example by the 13th century Franciscan Bonaventura: “In fact [images] were introduced for a triple reason, namely, because of the ignorance of humble people, so that they who cannot read the scriptures can read the sacraments of our faith in sculptures and paintings just as one would more manifestly in writings. They are likewise introduced because of the sluggishness of feelings, namely so that men who are not stimulated to devotion by the things that Christ did for us when they hear about them are excited at once when they become aware of the same things in statues and pictures, as if present to the body’s eyes. Our feeling is more excited by things it sees than by things it hears... because of the unreliability of memory, in that things that are only heard fade into oblivion more easily than those that are seen” (Hamburger 15). The same three justifications are given by Aquinas (Freedberg 162).

¹²⁰ In her analysis of early Christian art, Margaret Jensen has a similar aim in mind, writing that “rather than beginning with the presumption that visual art and literary texts represent divergent belief systems, theological sophistication, or the varying taste of different social groups, this study proceeds from the proposition that written documents and art objects emerge from the same or similar communities, and have common purposes or outlooks” (30).

simultaneously and in various places. In every attested example, the scenario involved Christians turning to pagan workshops and exploring their already existing iconographic repertoires” (152). The crucial element that enabled Christians to appropriate pagan imagery was the existence of a specific interpretative tradition that allowed the adopted symbols to be read in a particular way. Unlike the didactic approach, where ideas are translated into images, in this case the process is reversed, with the interpretative process starting with existing images and finishing with their adjustment to religious concepts.

While in the example of Clement’s advice it was a case of a simple mental association connecting an anchor and baptism, similar but more complex processes of deriving profound meanings from religious and secular imagery can be identified within the framework of Christian tradition. Most notably, a tradition going back to Alexandrian methods of interpreting scripture, and extending into the Middle Ages and beyond, conceptually distinguished between three modes of seeing (to which a fourth one is occasionally added): a corporeal, allegorical and symbolic (with the anagogic as a possible fourth). In this chapter, I will argue for the relevance of this threefold approach to religious imagery in an analysis of medieval Christian art, demonstrating its connections with more recent iconographic and ethnological approaches to the study of art and culture in general. In the final part of this chapter, I will provide an overview of the development of the attitudes towards visual arts in the Christian world.

7.1 Realist, allegorical and mystic modes of seeing

The contrast between the didactic and logocentric conceptualization of the function of art and the multidimensional, symbolic interpretation of imagery is rooted in two distinct traditions that precede the emergence of Christianity and can be observed in the pagan Greco-Roman world. In his *Art and the Roman Viewer - The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity*, Jaś Elsner identifies two key texts that demonstrate the differences between what he terms the realist and the mystic modes of viewing: the *Imagines* of the Greek 2nd/3rd century Sophist Philostratus and the *Tabula* of the 5th/4th century BC disciple of Socrates Cebes. Elsner’s central

argument is that, although both modes of viewing art could co-exist in the Greco-Roman world, the adoption of Christianity in the Roman Empire entailed a general shift towards the predominance of the mystical over the realist approach: “in a culture which subjected the artifacts it produced to increasingly complex symbolic, exegetic and religious interpretations, art was expected to stand for symbolic and religious meanings rather than to imitate material things” (19).

Elsner bases his methodology on an argument that can serve as a valuable starting point in the attempt to make iconography more relevant to the study of culture, arguing for the “reflexivity of viewer and object each constructing the other” (21). What this argument implies is that visual culture cannot be simply relegated to the politically and socially rather insignificant domain of ‘art,’ but actually plays a crucial role in the basic ideological function of self-formation. In other words: by learning how to ‘view’ images in accordance with dominant cultural norms, I also learn how to ‘be’ a full member of that culture and thus ultimately contribute to its social reproduction. Conversely, what I see in an image is to a large extent determined by who I am, or, more precisely, by the values and ideologies that constitute the foundation of my ‘self.’ It is thus that Elsner is able to arrive at a conclusion that may appear very radical from a traditional art-historical and iconographic perspective: “*meaning* in the visual arts lies not in specific significations but rather in the types of relationships and assimilative strategies that different kinds of art generate from their viewers in different contexts” (39).

This argument becomes more comprehensible once Elsner’s analysis of the two mentioned texts is taken into account. The starting point of the realist concept of art is the ancient Greek tradition of art as deception, exemplified in Pliny’s famous anecdote about the competition between the painters Parrhesius and Zeuxis in creating the most accurate reproduction of

nature.¹²¹ While it may appear that this illusionistic conception of art is not particularly conducive to ideological appropriation, Philostratus's *Imagines* demonstrates the contrary: as Elsner argues, through the literary technique of *ekphrasis*, "the viewer is encouraged in the illusion that he or she can control the 'other,' the picture, by incorporating it through a narrative contextualization into the world of the viewer's psychological and cultural experience" (22). A crucial role in this process is played by the concept of *phantasia*, a Stoic term denoting a visualization or presentation which "imprinted itself upon and in some sense altered the soul" (Elsner 26) and is thus superior to mimesis.¹²² The task of the *ekphrasis* is precisely the creation of a *phantasia* that will have a more profound impact upon the viewer's mind than the simple observation of a mimetic image: "they were offering more than the mere descriptions of objects; they were educating their audience into truth. Their descriptions were not simply parasitic on pictures, rather, they competed with the pictures" (Elsner 27). *Ekphrasis* thus subtly transforms the act of observing a mimetic image into an ideological inculcation of a society's dominant values.

Using a more explicitly religious conceptual framework, the concept of *phantasia* is closely linked to the notion of *daimones* or daemons, originally denoting neutral spiritual entities and only gradually acquiring the connotation of an evil spirit in the Christian context. Thus, in his criticism of the usage of mimetic art, Tertullian argued that "images functioned as the bodies of *daimones*, so that the relationship between the body and the soul in a living person is paralleled in an ensouled image by the relationship between the material thing and the *daimon*" (Finney 55). Regardless of whether the issue is analyzed within a psychological (*phantasia*) or religious

¹²¹ "The contemporaries and rivals of Zeuxis were Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupompus, and Parrhasius. This last, it is said, entered into a pictorial contest with Zeuxis, who represented some grapes, painted so naturally that the birds flew towards the spot where the picture was exhibited. Parrhasius, on the other hand, exhibited a curtain, drawn with such singular truthfulness, that Zeuxis, elated with the judgment which had been passed upon his work by the birds, haughtily demanded that the curtain should be drawn aside to let the picture be seen. Upon finding his mistake, with a great degree of ingenuous candour he admitted that he had been surpassed, for that whereas he himself had only deceived the birds, Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist" (Pliny the Elder, ch. 36).

¹²² For a detailed analysis of this process, see Elsner's chapter 'The Statue of Augustus from Prima Porta' (162 - 172).

(*daimones*) framework, the conclusion that emerges is that mimetic images are viewed as carriers or conduits of underlying values (or even spiritual entities) that may be utterly unrelated to their putative visual significations,¹²³ but can carry out a profound and often unconscious effect upon the viewer.

The ‘mystical’ mode of viewing is exemplified by Cebes’s *Tabula*, described by Elsner as “a religious-philosophical interpretation of a picture set into a votive tablet in a temple at Kronos” (40). The most striking initial contrast to the mimetic mode is that the rhetorical validation of the presented interpretation is not based primarily on the content of the image itself, but rather on “a detailed hierarchy of authority and oral tradition of secret exegesis” (Elsner 41).¹²⁴ The second contrast to the mimetic mode of viewing can be identified in the relative significance assigned to the image: while the ultimate aim of *ekphrasis* is an incorporation of the image into a pre-established value system, in the case of Cebes “instead of the viewer having control over the ‘other’ - an inert picture - it turns out that the viewer’s own life forever after depends upon this moment of viewing, depends upon a correct understanding of the picture” (42). In other words, instead of reaffirming the authority of the dominant value system, the mystical mode of viewing aims to utterly transform the viewer on the most basic level of his or her inner being.¹²⁵

This mode of viewing can best be understood within the philosophical framework of a (neo-)Platonic metaphysics, according to which ‘true’ reality lies beyond sense perception and can only be perceived by the mind’s inner eye. Thus, paradoxically, at the same time as the epistemological value of the image is raised to the status of a conduit of higher reality, the

¹²³ Discussing the term’s relevance in the Middle Ages, Thomas E.A. Dale writes that “building upon St. Augustine, twelfth-century writers ascribed to *phantasia* the power both to combine phantom images derived from the senses into new hybrids and to make manifest diabolically inspired images of sexual temptation” (71).

¹²⁴ This fact points towards two crucial problems inevitably encountered when trying to reconstruct such ‘mystical’ readings of images, particularly in cases where no detailed written exegetical materials are available: firstly, that the ultimate ‘meaning’ may be very far removed from the content of the image, and, secondly, that the authority of the tradition of exegesis will always remain open to dispute, as it is precisely here that Panofsky’s danger of an ‘astrologization’ of iconology will be encountered most acutely.

¹²⁵ The contrast can be compared the distinction between *gnosis* and *theoria* discussed in Chapter 2.

significance of its actual material content is pushed into the background. The final aim of mystic viewing is to overcome what is perceived as the limitations of material existence: “mystic viewing is predicated upon the assumption that in mystic experience the dualism of subject and object can be transcended into a unity that is neither subject nor object and yet is simultaneously both” (Elsner 90).

In order to gain a more precise understanding of the mystic mode of viewing, it is necessary to take a closer look at the work of the 3rd century neo-Platonist philosopher Plotinus, who has carried out a profound influence upon the nascent metaphysics of early Christianity. The first point to note is that the mystic mode of viewing is not necessarily incompatible with a mimetic conception of art. In the *Enneads*, Plotinus even commends the usage of what could be described as an ‘idol’ in a Christian/monotheistic context, i.e. a statue believed to ‘contain’ divine beings:

I think, therefore, that those ancient sages, who sought to secure the presence of divine beings by the erection of shrines and statues, showed insight into the nature of the All; they perceived that, though this Soul is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, something reproducing it, or representing it, and seeming like a mirror to catch an image of it” (*Ennead IV, 3, 11*, quoted in Grabar 1969, 288).

As Grabar clarifies, “the image is a mirror of the thing represented, which therefore participates in its model in virtue of the Stoic theory of universal sympathy” (1969, 288). However, what is important to note is that despite the ability of mimetic idols to attract the presence of the ‘Soul,’ the latter is ultimately ‘everywhere tractable’. Grabar thus argues that the image

is useful only as an instrument for acquiring knowledge of the *nous* (an imperfect instrument, but serviceable all the same); here indeed is the *raison d’être* of the work of art. What it gives us, what we should look for in it, is a reflection, - weakened but genuine all the same - of the supreme Intelligence, sole reality (288).

Although mimetic art can thus be compatible with a mystic mode of viewing, it is such in spite of, rather than due to its accurate reflection of material reality. Naturally, the adoption of such a conception of art inevitably leads to a decline of emphasis on its mimetic qualities in favour of its ability to reflect what is perceived as higher, immaterial reality. Just like Elsner had pointed out in his discussion of Cebes, in the case of Plotinus the authority of mimetic reflections is replaced by an emphasis on hermeneutic traditions: “for if the purpose of the work of art was the one Plotinus assigned to it (and not a simple joy in the beauty it achieved, an imitation of the outward aspects of material things, or the imparting of moral or intellectual instruction), the beholder could not decipher its message without special training” (Grabar 288).

In the further elaboration of his ideas, Plotinus in fact develops a theory of art that is diametrically opposed to visual mimesis. Building on the idea of the *nous* as a higher reality superior to the realm of the material universe, he links depth, darkness and matter on the one hand and light, mind and single-plan perspective on the other: “The depth (of beings and things) is matter, and that is why matter is dark. The light illuminating it is form; the mind perceives the form and, seeing the form of a being, assumes that the depth of this being is a darkness placed below the light“ (*Ennead II*, 4, 5, quoted in Grabar 1969, 289). Thus the most accurate method of representing higher reality is through images devoid of depth and gradations of light. Besides the training/tradition required to decipher the meaning of such works of art, another significant factor is the internal purification of the observer: “the eye must be adapted and assimilated to what it sees. Never could an eye see the sun unless it had become like the sun, or the soul see the beautiful without itself being beautiful. Therefore let each man who wishes to contemplate God and beauty, begin by becoming godlike and beautiful himself” (*Ennead I*, 6, 9 quoted in Grabar 1969, 289).

Here we can identify a striking parallel to the method required for an appropriate understanding of scripture encountered in the glosses of the medieval Bosnian Christian manuscripts. This hermeneutic principle creates a veritable challenge for the contemporary analyst of ‘mystical’ imagery, running the risk that an excess of meaning will be read into artistic

works that may have been created for more prosaic purposes. This risk can, to some extent, be alleviated by reformulating the question: rather than considering ‘meaning’ as something embodied in the object, it should be viewed as a relational quality emerging in the interaction of object and viewer.¹²⁶ In this way, the basic question of meaning does not necessarily concern the elusive ‘intention’ of the artist, but rather the interaction of the material qualities of the artistic object and the mental framework of the observer. Thus, ‘mystical viewing’ is also aligned with an additional crucial element addressed by Plotinus, the overcoming of the duality of subject and object: “Normal vision presupposes a distance between him who sees and his surroundings. Plotinus bids us negate this and assume that his environment is absorbed in the man, the man in his environment; this is ‘seeing with the mind’” (Grabar 1969, 290).

Reassessing the different ways in which the mimetic and mystical modes of seeing have been analyzed, it can be noticed that three, rather than only two formally distinct conceptualizations of the relationship between images and their meaning were encountered. On the one hand, there is the purely mimetic relationship within which meaning is constituted by the greatest possible resemblance to material reality, as in the case of the story of Parrheisus and Zeuxis. On the other hand, we encounter the mystical viewing of the ‘inner eye’ whereby the material object as well as the viewing subject virtually dissolve into a higher unity on a non-material plane. Between these two levels, however, there is also a third mode of viewing that can be termed allegorical, forming a middle ground that is neither simply mimetic nor fully mystical.

In order to create an adequate *phantasia*, the author of an *ekphrasis* of mimetic images is forced to look beyond the immediate reference of the image and incorporate a secondary, metaphorical level of meaning relating the image with a wider context. Similarly, in order to ‘ascend’ to the fully mystical mode of viewing, the religious-philosophical interpreter must first of all relate what is visible in the image to an intermediate level that is neither mimetic nor fully

¹²⁶ In a chapter about Roman art and architecture, Elsner notes “In effect, we cannot draw a sharp distinction between the architectural and visual world of the Roman educated elite on the one hand and their mental and rhetorical world on the other. Together they make up the *mentalité*, the particularity and identity of Roman civilization” (78).

distinct from what is actually visible. It is in this sense that the development of the Christian tradition of three kinds of vision is to be understood.

In his *Literary Commentary on Genesis*, Augustine associates the three kinds of vision with different senses or faculties of the mind: thus eyes are used to see corporeal objects, the imagination perceives likenesses of objects, while the intellect is where “the soul understands those realities that are neither bodies nor the likenesses of bodies” (Miller 33). Similarly, the 8th century English ecclesiastic Alcuin of York distinguished between corporeal, symbolic and mental ways of seeing, paying particular attention to distinguishing the latter two, noting that “the third is unknown to most because they do not know how to differentiate what is symbolic and what is mental” (Noble 217).¹²⁷ The different modes of seeing are treated more extensively in the 12th century French theologian Richard of St. Victor’s commentaries on the Apocalypse of St. John and linked explicitly to the interpretation of scripture. Thus he distinguished between seeing of the exterior or visible world, which is equated to the historical level of scripture; the outward appearance or physical action with mystical significance corresponding to allegorical interpretation of scripture; seeing with the ‘eyes of the heart’, corresponding to eschatological truths, and finally an entirely spiritual or visionary fourth level, which is the “ascent of the spirit to celestial contemplation without the intermediary of visible forms” (Caviness 21). Most importantly for the further usage of this conceptualization of religious imagery, Caviness concludes that “the modes of seeing elucidated by Richard of St. Victor are in fact seldom isolated in art; the richest works, like the richest passages of scripture, might allow exegesis on all four levels” (21).

7.2 Iconology and the three modes of seeing

¹²⁷ Alcuin continues: “The apostle distinguishes these two with one statement, at that a superbly brief one, when he says “I will pray with my spirit and I will pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit and I will sing with my mind”. He named “Spirit” the hidden meanings that are in the Holy Scriptures and he called “mind” their plain meanings. For he wanted to pray with an understanding of those things which we were talking about. Whence in another place he says “If I have prayed with my tongue, my spirit has prayed but my mind is without fruit”. The tongue means here the dark and mystical meanings which are customarily perceived by the spirit and if we have no understanding of them our minds remain fruitless.” (Noble 217)

Having established the presence and survival of the tradition of three modes of seeing among philosophers and theologians from late antiquity through to the High Middle Ages, an important question emerges concerning its relative significance beyond the narrow circles in which this conceptual framework emerged. On the one hand, the question is whether and how this tradition can be used by the contemporary analysts to reliably derive the secondary and tertiary meanings of religious imagery a medieval viewer may have perceived. My argument is that, in a formal sense, the three modes of seeing closely resemble Erwin Panofsky's three levels of iconological analysis, providing a particularly valuable perspective on his tertiary level of meaning, which he referred to as the "content" of a work of art.

On the other hand, the question also concerns the wider relevance of the framework in its temporal context. Was the search for deeper, secondary and tertiary levels of meaning of art just an intellectual pastime of spiritual elites or did it, on the contrary, have some kind of influence on the wider circles of people who came into contact with religious imagery? While traditional art history and historiography have tended to assume the existence of a more or less impenetrable division between the domains of 'high' and low or popular culture, recent anthropological studies have revealed that the latter category is more complex and intimately connected to the most fundamental levels of a society's system of values. Building on ideas developed in the field of symbolic anthropology, I will argue that the theological conception of the three modes of seeing find their social parallel in Victor Turner's distinction between the individual, the social, and what he terms *communitas* or anti-structure. Thus my final argument is that the threefold conceptual structure of visual culture creates a framework for an interdisciplinary analysis of religious imagery connecting theological, iconographic and anthropological aspects.

According to Panofsky's classical methodological framework of iconology presented in his essay 'History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline', every work of art possesses three distinct levels of meaning, which he terms the primary or natural, the conventional and the intrinsic. The primary level of meaning relates to a mere identification of actual objects that are visible in a

work of art, such as a human being, an animal or plant. The conventional meaning describes those features of a work of art which can be explained by referring to the culturally ascribed significance of certain objects, combinations of objects or ways in which they are positioned, such as a handshake or the halo above a person's head. Finally, the 'intrinsic' meaning refers to deciphering the so-called content of a work of art, defined as "the basic attitude of a nation, a period, a class, a religious or philosophical persuasion – all this unconsciously qualified by one personality, and condensed into one work" (Panofsky 14).

In an interesting parallel to Augustine, Panofsky assigns the decipherment of the different levels of meaning to distinct intellectual faculties: thus the primary meaning requires 'practical experience,' the secondary meaning is derived from a knowledge of literary sources, while the intrinsic meaning is based on something Panofsky terms 'synthetic intuition.' Comparing the theological and iconological threefold division of visual meaning, clear analogies can be established on the level of primary/corporeal and, to a somewhat lesser extent, secondary/symbolic semantic level. In the case of primary/corporeal meaning, in both frameworks it is a question of a simple recognition of objects that can be expected from a person without any kind of specialist knowledge. Although the iconological secondary and the theological symbolic/imaginative meaning are not, strictly speaking, identical, it is nevertheless a case of a different emphasis, rather than a complete conceptual distinction. In both cases what is being spoken about is the establishment of a mental connection between the visible and the invisible on the basis of either formal similarities or relevant conventions. The most intriguing question, however, concerns the possible parallels between the mental mode of viewing and Panofsky's 'content' of a work of art. Is the 20th century humanist's idea of the intrinsic meaning of a work of art in any way related to a 3rd century neo-Platonic notion of mystical viewing?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at the origins of Panofsky's conceptualization of the tertiary level of meaning in general and the idea of synthetic intuition in particular. Comparing iconology to the natural scientific method, Panofsky notes that "the art historian subjects his 'material' to a rational archeological analysis at times as

meticulously exact, comprehensive and involved as any physical or astronomical research. But he constitutes his 'material' by means of an intuitive aesthetic re-creation, including the perception and appraisal of 'quality'" (14/15), adding that

intuitive and aesthetic recreation and archeological research are interconnected so as to form, again, what we have called an 'organic situation' [...] the two processes do not succeed each other, they interpenetrate, not only does the recreative synthesis serve as a basis for archeological investigation, the archeological investigation in turn serves as a basis for the re-creative process; both mutually qualify and rectify one another (16).

Despite Panofsky's efforts to preserve art history's proximity to a scientific, empirical methodology, it is clear that in his view it must contain a significant 'intuitive' element which is synthetic rather than analytic.¹²⁸ Addressing the most fundamental distinction between the natural sciences and the humanities in general, Panofsky notes that "the humanities, on the other hand, are not faced by the task of arresting what otherwise would slip away, but of enlivening what otherwise would remain dead. Instead of dealing with temporal phenomena, and causing time to stop, they penetrate into a region where time has stopped of its own accord, and try to reactivate it" (24). In this attitude, Panofsky reveals the (acknowledged) profound influence of the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer on his thought.¹²⁹ At the same time, he forms the basis for a comparison between his idea of the aim of 'the humanities' and the previously explored notion of mystical viewing. In both cases, the observer sees something *through* rather than *in* the work of art, employing a mental faculty which is considered to be distinct from, and even superior to a mechanistic intellect. Whereas the mystic gains access to what he sees as an atemporal higher

¹²⁸"To grasp these principles we need a mental faculty comparable to that of a diagnostician - a faculty which I cannot describe better than by the rather discredited term 'synthetic intuition,' and which may be better developed in a talented layman than in an erudite scholar" (38).

¹²⁹ In his *The Logic of the Cultural Sciences*, Cassirer writes "what is actually preserved for us of the past are specific historical monuments - "monuments" in words and writing, in image and in bronze. This becomes history for us only once we begin to see in these monuments symbols not only in which we recognize specific forms of life, but by virtue of which we are able to restore them for ourselves" (77) and "the science of culture teaches us to interpret symbols in order to decipher their hidden meaning - in order to make the life from which they originally emerged visible again" (80).

reality, the iconologist is persuaded that he can achieve something that is equally 'mystical': a temporary reanimation of a 'dead' past.

The idea of reanimating a historical period through a synthetic insight into its most profound values finds a parallel in the anthropologist's effort to 'explain' an initially incomprehensible social system. In the introduction to his idea of 'thick description' as the basic ethnographic method, Clifford Geertz uses an example that may well serve as an illustration of the iconographic distinction between the primary and secondary levels of meaning, noting that a wink may be seen as an unintentional movement of the eyelids, a clandestine signal, or an ironic social comment. In Geertz's opinion, the task of ethnography begins and ends with the provision of 'thick descriptions' of cultural phenomena: "doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of "construct a reading of") a manuscript - foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour" (12). His most original contribution to the study of culture consists in his refusal to see it either as a Hegelian essence of history or a Marxist shadow of material conditions, arguing that ideas, concepts, values and expressive forms are "independent but not self-sufficient forces (...) acting and having their impact only within specific social contexts to which they adapt, by which they are stimulated, but upon which they have, to a greater or lesser degree, a determining influence" (361).

While in his analysis of religion and symbolism Geertz generally works with two levels of meaning (e.g. 'the world as lived' and 'the world as imagined,' 112), it is the work of another pioneer of symbolic anthropology, Victor Turner, that allows for parallels to be drawn between social analysis and the theological/iconological threefold conceptualization of visual culture. The basic methodological distinction between the two ethnologists is that whereas Geertz has a fundamentally static view of culture, tending to reduce it to a 'text', Turner pays more attention to its dynamic/processual elements. Thus, thick description is replaced by 'processual symbolic analysis,' defined as an "interpretation of symbols operating as dynamic systems of signifiers (the outwards forms), their meanings, and changing modes of signification, in the context of

temporal sociocultural processes” (Turner 245). Symbols cannot be reduced to their semantic values, but they “are felt to possess ritual efficacy; that is they are believed to be charged with power from unknown sources, and to be capable of acting on persons and groups in such a way as to change them for the better” (Turner 247).

The crucial point to note here is that Turner derives his insights about the nature of symbols from an analysis of what he describes as ‘liminoid phenomena,’ i.e. social processes that escape and even defy the logic of quotidian existence. In Turner’s opinion, however, although they are not governed by a society’s conventional semantic structures, these phenomena are characterized not by chaos, but by something he names *communitas* or anti-structure and defines as “a relational quality of full unmediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations and circumstances.” Despite its spontaneity, however, the logic of *communitas* is transmitted through what Turner calls *root paradigms*, defining them as “consciously recognized (though not consciously grasped) cultural models for behaviour [...] they represent the goals of man as a species, where they prevail over particular interests” (248).

As a typical example of a root paradigm, he refers to the model of the *via crucis* encountered in societies dominated by the Catholic Church. Thus *communitas* or anti-structure may be seen a third level of social reality surpassing individual consciousness and quotidian social structures and values and as such it invites comparison with the previously identified tertiary level of iconological meaning and the theological conception of the mystical mode of viewing. A significant point that enables a reconciliation of the fundamentally elitist nature of mystical viewing and the universal conception of *communitas* is the fact that, as Turner points out, the root paradigms that make up the *communitas* are consciously recognized *though not consciously grasped*. The same duality is in fact contained in Panofsky’s idea of the ‘content’ of a work of art which, according to him, is *unconsciously* condensed into a work of art the by the creator himself. Thus we arrive at the conclusion that beyond the corporeal and allegorical meaning of religious art, beyond the primary and the conventional meaning of a work of art, and beyond the

psychological and the social level of reality, there is a third level that may be directly perceptible only to the select few, but is ultimately unconsciously emulated by the entire community. A conclusion that - admittedly - does not fully succeed in alleviating the concern of a too close proximity to astrology encountered in the introduction of this chapter.

7.3 The evolution of Christian attitudes to visual art

Having discussed the distinct conceptual frameworks for an analysis of imagery in the Christian context, this section will be devoted to their historical evolution, starting from the apparent aniconism of the first Christians and finishing with the the final triumph of the iconodules after the iconoclastic controversy in the Byzantine Empire, which essentially determined the orthodox theology of images still valid today.

Represented schematically, I identify four major phases in the development of the Christian attitude towards religious imagery. In the first phase, starting with the apostolic age and finishing around the year 200, Christians either did not produce any art, or did so to a such a small extent that no traces of it can be identified today. While there can be no complete certainty on this question, the writings of the earliest Christian thinkers seem to confirm that the lack of art in this period is a result of a principled opposition to the visual representation of the material world. The second phase, starting around the year 200 and ending with the Peace of the Church, is characterized by the emergence of Christian art primarily in the funerary context. The art of this period is to a large extent allegorical, illustrating moral qualities expected of a virtuous Christian. The following period, starting with the Peace of the Church in 313 and ending with the outbreak of iconoclasm in the 8th century, witnessed a significant impact of Roman/Byzantine imperial ideology upon Christian art, reflected both in the nature of the dominant subjects and in the gradual shift in the function of art from the commemorative to the liturgical. The final result of this development was the emergence of the belief in the *real presence* of divine/spiritual forces in imagery, eventually leading to the following phase initiated by the outbreak of iconoclasm. This final phase, characterized by the struggle between the iconodule and iconoclast

factions, eventually resulted in the adoption of the theology of images proposed at the 843 Synod of Constantinople, also known as the Feast of Orthodoxy. The iconoclastic controversy left an ambivalent legacy to the Christian world: while the real presence in holy portraits was formally denied, the practices of ordinary believers essentially remained unaffected by this decree.

The apocryphal *Acts of John*, recounting the missionary journeys of John the Evangelist, provide us with the earliest testimony of a Christian attitude towards figurative art. After John's disciple Lycomedes had secretly arranged for a portrait of the apostle to be painted, upon discovering it John responds: "As the Lord Jesus Christ liveth, the portrait is like me: yet not like me, child, but like my fleshly image" (Barnstone and Meyer 28). In order to paint a true image of him, John continues, Lycomedes should use

colours which he giveth thee through me, who painteth all of us for himself, even Jesus, who knoweth the shapes and appearances and postures and dispositions and types of our souls [...]: faith in God, knowledge, godly fear, friendship, communion, meekness, kindness, brotherly love, purity, simplicity, tranquility, fearlessness, grieflessness, sobriety, and the whole band of colours that painteth the likeness of thy soul [...] But this that thou hast now done is childish and imperfect: thou hast drawn a dead likeness of the dead (Acts of John 29).

While the attitude towards art expressed here cannot be taken as representative of early Christianity as a whole - after all, the *Acts of John* are considered a heterodox apocrypha - they nevertheless illustrate a strong tradition that will survive as part of mainstream Christianity at least until the final defeat of iconoclasm in the 9th century. The presented argument is couched in terms of a hierarchical duality of body and soul, which are associated, respectively, with death and life. While a material painting can only represent the physical body which is considered dead, the soul, the truly living part of a human being, can be reproduced using one's interior moral qualities. Thus we implicitly encounter an argument that will be extensively used by later

iconoclasts: the only true image of Christ is the virtuous Christian.¹³⁰ What is important to note in this passage is that John does not condemn religious imagery as idolatrous or wrong per se, but rather dismisses it as ‘childish’ and ‘imperfect’. In this way, the argument allows for the possibility of developing the idea of religious painting as a ‘Bible for the illiterate’ that is encountered in the writings of pope Gregory around the year 600 (Grabar 1968, 93).¹³¹ Going a step further, it can be argued that, in spite of his own intentions, John the Evangelist provides a blueprint for a Christian *ekphrasis*, creating a *phantasia* of a virtuous Christian that could ultimately be based on, rather than contrasted with the material image.

A more explicitly negative attitude towards religious imagery can be found among numerous early Christian thinkers such as Clement, Origen and Eusebius (Brubaker and Haldon 41). This theoretical stance seems to be confirmed by the fact that no examples have been found of Christian art originating prior to roughly the year 200, the approximate date of the oldest Christian catacombs (with the oldest sarcophagi and wall paintings of the house church of Dura Europos following around 30 years later). There is no consensus among scholars about the reasons for the rather sudden emergence of Christian art: while the traditional view assumes an underlying shift in religious attitudes,¹³² more recently Finney has argued that “the reasons for the nonappearance of Christian art before 200 have nothing to do with principled aversion to art,

¹³⁰ A similar argument can be found in a homily by the 4th/5th century bishop of Amasea Asterius: “The more religious among rich men and women, having picked out the story of the Gospels, have handed it over to the weavers - I mean our Christ together with His disciples, and each one of the miracles the way it is related. [...] If they accepted my advice, they would sell those clothes and honor instead the living images of God. Do not depict Christ (for that one act of humility, the incarnation, which he willingly accepted for our sake is sufficient unto Him), but bear in your spirit and carry about with you the incorporeal Logos. Do not display the paralytic on your garments, but seek out him who lies ill in bed...” (Mango 51)

¹³¹ The argument can also be found before Pope Gregory, in the *Miscellaneous Enquiries* written in the 530s by Hypatius of Ephesus: “And as for the inexpressible love of God towards us men, and the holy patterns set by the saints, we ordain that these should be celebrated in sacred writings, since, for our part, we take no pleasure whatever in any sculpture or painting. However, we permit simple folk, inasmuch as they are less perfect, to learn such things in an introductory manner by means of sight, which is appropriate to their natural development, having found on many occasions that even the old and new ordinances of God may be brought down to the level of the weaker for the sake of their spiritual salvation” (Mango 117).

¹³² For example Grabar, who argues that “those first makers of Christian images, who worked at their own risk and to their peril, would never have done so without serious religious reasons, especially since the first generations of Christians had worshipped without a cult of images” (1968, xiv).

with otherworldliness or with antimaterialism. The truth is simple and mundane: Christians lacked land and capital” (108).

Regardless of the ultimate reasons for its emergence,¹³³ it is clear that the first Christian art was *parasitic* (Grabar 1968, xv), i.e. that, as previously noted, it represented an adaptation of existing pagan imagery. While Finney sees the earliest Christian frescoes found in the Callistus catacomb as nothing more than “failed Greco-Roman naturalism” (228), Grabar argues that they should be read as schematic image-signs rather than mimetic representations, noting that “image-signs, as found in the catacombs, fulfill their purpose successfully only in so far as they are clear, but the concept of clarity is a function of the training of the viewer” (10). Thus it is precisely in the earliest art of the catacombs that the previously discussed shift from a mimetic to a mystic mode of viewing can be identified.

Rather than representing symbolic illustrations of the most profound Christian mystical ideas, however, the earliest catacomb frescoes are dominated by images which were meant to be viewed in what was previously identified as an “allegorical” mode of viewing, requiring an engagement of the intellect or the imagination. As argued by Grabar, the primary aim of the image-signs dominating the catacomb imagery was to represent particular ideas associated with a virtuous Christian, such as piety, philanthropy and humanity. In fact, it appears as though the first Christian artists attempted the paradoxical task of physically portraying precisely those immaterial qualities of the soul that make up the living persons identified by John the Evangelist. In that sense, the fact that numerous catacomb frescoes combine Christian (or, more precisely, primarily Old Testament) and putatively pagan imagery becomes more readily comprehensible, not requiring the assumptions of an indistinct religious eclecticism.¹³⁴

¹³³ Hans Belting suggests a possible explanation, arguing that “with the adoption of images, Christendom, one an Oriental church, asserted its claims to universality in the context of Greco-Roman culture” (7).

¹³⁴ “The Christian images of salvation or deliverance and the pagan images of the labors of Hercules were both meant as demonstrations of a divine power working for men, and it was for this reason that they were used in funerary art.” (Grabar 1968, 15)

A definitive shift in the nature of Christian iconography occurred after the Peace of the Church in 313 and the associated changes in the nature of Christianity described in Chapter 2. Although this thesis has recently been challenged by Thomas F. Matthews, it is in this period that the decisive and permanent influence of Roman imperial imagery on the nature of Christian iconography took place. Most notably, this influence is reflected in the growing presence of “the idea of the Christian Empire as a reflection of the celestial Empire, the earthly monarch who holds his power from the divine monarch, the cosmocrator” (Grabar 1968, 40). Accompanying this shift was a parallel change in the prevailing image of Jesus: “whereas before Jesus had appeared primarily as a teacher or healer, during the 4th century Jesus begun to be represented in a formal pose, standing on a rock from which flow the four rivers of paradise, or seated on a throne, sometimes resting his feet on the marble of the god Caelus” (Jensen 81).

Another notable evolution was the gradual disappearance of the image of the ritual agape meal in favour of depictions of gospel subjects such as the Last Supper or the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes (Grabar 1968, 95). The identified changes were more profound than the mere modification of dominant motifs. What occurred in this period was rather a shift in the prevailing mode of viewing from a primarily allegorical imagery, representing moral qualities to be emulated by the individual believer, to a more didactic visual language expounding religious dogma and simultaneously, on a symbolical level, representing the theocratic political philosophy of the christianized Roman Empire.¹³⁵

By the late 7th century, the political control of imagery had become more explicit: among other resolutions, the Quinisext council held in the years 691/2 decreed that Jesus was to be portrayed only in human form, rather than symbolically as a lamb, as had hitherto been customary (Brubaker and Haldon 692). This iconographic evolution went hand in hand with the gradual disappearance of catacomb frescoes and the migration of Christian art onto the walls of

¹³⁵ Following Elsner, it can be argued that this development represented a legacy of what he calls the imperial cult as religion found in the Roman Empire: “The essential characteristic of the imperial cult as a religion (and indeed of civiv religion generally in antiquity) was its uneasy and ambivalent conflation of the socio-economic world and the Other Wold, by contrast with other religious systems in antiquity which thrived precisely on a radical separation of these worlds” (171).

numerous churches constructed in this period. Thus the entire function of Christian art changed fundamentally, including the response elicited from its viewers:

Rather than emphasizing Christ's earthly ministry, this new iconography represents Christ's divine essence and his work of salvation, and such visual dynamics demanded a visceral response of veneration or worship rather than an intellectual one of analysis or edification. Worshippers gazing at this kind of art while in prayer or participating in the liturgy could believe Christ was in some sense present in or through his image (Jensen 112).

It was precisely this kind of belief in the *real presence* of Christ and other holy figures in their images¹³⁶ - a belief whose emergence preceded the development of its theological justification¹³⁷ - that ultimately led to what is known as the iconoclastic controversy. One of the roots of this belief can be identified in the cult of saints and their relics that had developed from the 4th century onwards (Brubaker and Haldon 34), which extended the presence of the divine in holy men and women to their posthumous material remains. As Belting notes, "the change from funeral portrait to saint's icon, from a memorial image for private use to a cult image for public ritual, took place in the realm of tombs, much as the cult of saints itself grew out of the funeral practices of the previous age" (88). Thus the sanctity initially associated with the bones of the saint was gradually transferred onto his or her portrait depicted on the tomb, in order to, eventually, become completely liberated from the funerary context.

A second root of the idea of real presence in images can be found in the tradition of the *acheiropoieta*, the "icons made without human hands," itself a continuation of the pagan concept of *diipetis*, the "things cast down by Zeus" (Belting 55). The most famous of these *acheiropoieta* in the Christian context was the so-called Mandylion, a portrait of Jesus believed to have been miraculously imprinted on a piece of cloth he had personally sent to king Abgar of Edessa. Thus,

¹³⁶ Grabar argues that the critical phase of transition took place in the second half of the 6th century: "What is new in this period is not the appearance or the increase of Christian portraits, but the development of a religious, rather than purely commemorative, veneration of Christian portraits and perhaps especially of the portrait of Christ." (1968, 86)

¹³⁷ "The doctrine of images is no obvious help, as it was developed "after the fact" by theologians during iconoclasm and not with the intention of guiding the production of actual icons" (Belting 115).

once again, the sanctity of the image was originally derived from direct physical contact with the divinity, only gradually extending to its reproductions based on the original.

A final significant factor contributing to the eventual emergence of an image cult was the *Hodegetria*, an icon depicting the Virgin Mary holding the child Jesus, which was believed to have been painted by the apostle St. Luke. While this tradition did not directly justify the belief in the sanctity of images, it provided the custom of creating icons with an apostolic sanction. It was thus that, towards the end of 7th century, a veritable cult of images developed within the wider framework of the cult of saints.¹³⁸ The Quinisext Council, held in the same period, also provides the earliest official statement about images, arguing that Christ's incarnation requires material images (Brubaker and Haldon 61). In this context, the power of the personages they depicted was transferred onto the images themselves (in a formal sense, the image became equated with its prototype), resulting in the emergence of the custom of *proskynesis*, the act of bowing/prostration before sacred icons.

According to Brubaker and Haldon, the late 7th century rise in the prominence of icons was to a large extent determined by “the spiritual crisis and insecurities brought about by Islamic conquests” (25). On the other hand, the eventual emergence of iconoclasm can be seen as a consequence of that same crisis: “An opposition to icons [...] derived essentially from the same need for purification in the face of catastrophe that the veneration of sacred portraits developed from” (Brubaker and Haldon 787). Thus the crisis was primarily a result of an existential concern for an appropriate relationship between God and the Empire, between the divine and the material, rather than an issue of a narrowly theological relevance. While the beginnings of iconoclasm are associated with the rule of the Emperor Leo III (717 - 741), it was not fully institutionalized until the Council of Hieria held in 754 under his son and successor Constantine V (ruled 741 - 775).

¹³⁸ “Holy portraits do not replace relics and visions: what seems actually to have happened is that, toward the end of the seventh century, holy portraits become an important component of the existing cult of saints; there is not ‘cult of images’ independent of the cult of saints” (Brubaker and Haldon 61).

The central arguments offered in favour of iconoclasm can be derived from surviving fragments of the *Peuseis*, a treatise on the topic of images authored by Constantine himself. The main reason provided was of a Christological nature: if Jesus is both God and man, it stated, then an image cannot accurately represent his dual nature. The second one follows from the first, insisting that only the Eucharist is a true image of Christ (Brubaker and Haldon 180). What is important to note is that the surviving evidence does not suggest that the iconoclastic period witnessed a large-scale destruction of religious icons (this wide-spread idea is a result of subsequent iconophile propaganda) - the most visible changes were rather a discontinuation of the practice of *proskynesis* before sacred icons and a restriction of religious art to not-figurative images, along with the whitewashing of figurative images in churches (Brubaker and Haldon 209). Furthermore, Byzantine iconoclasm differed from the one found in Christian lands under Islamic rule, where the representation of all living beings was banned, to be replaced by abstract geometric designs. The first return of icon worship, formalized with the 7th ecumenical council in Nicaea in 787, did not significantly modify the terms of the debate, essentially providing theological justifications to customs that had already become prevalent prior to the imperial adoption of iconoclastic policies: “The Council had in effect established a formal cult of images for the first time: images were to be accompanied by candles and incense and all Christians were to adore them” (Brubaker and Haldon 275). The idea that icons are carriers of divine presence had thus been provided with a theological and legal justification.¹³⁹

The second outbreak of iconoclasm in the Byzantine world can also be linked to a traumatic military defeat, this time a devastation of the province of Macedonia at the hands of the Bulgars under khan Krum in the year 814. The focus of the theological debate shifted from Christological territory to the domain of a general theory of representation: “The premise underlying both positions was that a ‘true’ image had to share in the essence of the original, from which it is clear

¹³⁹ This insistence on the sanctity of images formalized in the 7th ecumenical council led to the opposition Western theologians at the court of Charlemagne, as can be seen from the following words from the *Libri Carolini*: “We do not speak against images for the memory of past deeds and the beauty of churches, since we know that they were thus made by Moses and Solomon, although as type figures, but we reject their most insolent and more than that most superstitious adoration which we cannot discover to have been instituted by their patriarchs, prophets, apostles, or apostolic men.” (Noble 224).

that the argument had moved away from Christological debate into new territory - a general theory of religious representation that encompassed images of saints alongside the hitherto emphasized portraits of Christ” (Brubaker and Haldon 274). Rather than emphasizing the role of the Eucharist, the 9th century iconoclasts insisted on the previously encountered argument that the true image of Christ or the saints was a virtuous Christian rather than a material image.

According to Brubaker and Haldon, the re-introduction of iconoclasm had more to do with a desire to reproduce the military and political success of the iconoclast Emperors than with purely theological motivations: “The ban on images was not, as far as we can see, revisited for ideological reasons, but in emulation of the strong rulership, long reigns and military success of the early Isaurian emperors, especially Constantine V” (102). The eventual defeat of iconoclasm, formalized at a synod held in 843 under the Empress Theodora, ultimately made a significant concession to the iconoclastic camp: images were formally declared distinct from their prototypes and thus, at least theoretically, stripped of *real presence* (Brubaker 109). However, this formal decree had little impact upon the actual behaviour and attitudes of believers:

The honour that was given to holy portraits was, as the churchmen correctly insisted, directed at the saint portrayed, and the distinction between the image of the saint and the saint him- or herself was thus easily blurred. This was brought out sharply by the contrast between the theology of learned churchmen and the response to images considered appropriate in accounts of people in everyday situations (Brubaker 111).

The result was a contrast between official theology and religious practice that would remain a permanent feature of orthodox Christianity. Although the honour given to icons was theoretically directed at the portrayed saint, in practice they continued to be treated as though they were in fact imbued with real presence.

Attempting to assess the overall, long-term significance of the iconoclastic controversy for the development of Christianity, it is possible to provide two very different responses. On the one hand, Brubaker sees the triumph of iconodules as a kind of ‘democratization’ of Christianity:

through their emphasis on texts and their insistence that only the clergy could mediate between the earthly and the spiritual realm, the iconoclasts restricted access to divine mediation to a limited few. In sharp contrast, by promoting the real presence of holy portraits and the compulsory veneration of them, the pro-image faction in 787 legitimized open access to God for all Orthodox believers (Brubaker 108).

What Brubaker seems to neglect, however, is that what he himself refers to as the 'compulsory' veneration of holy portraits cannot be simply equated with an 'open access to God'. Although the relationship between an individual believer and a holy portrait was not directly 'mediated' by the clergy, it was nevertheless carefully orchestrated and, in the final instance, controlled by the representatives of the church.

Belting provides a very different assessment of the iconodule triumph:

in this way the church gained control of a medium that had once threatened its authority. An activity that had been carried on outside the official church now was incorporated within it, its features controlled by the church. The same state authorities who had banned religious images at the outset of iconoclasm now, jointly with the church or in its name, introduced images firmly into church practices (183).

In contrast to Brubaker, who assumes a too sharp inherent distinction between the alleged restrictions imposed by the iconoclasts and the open access to the divine of the iconodules, however, Belting implies an unproblematic continuity between the two opposed camps, describing them simply as the 'same state authorities'. What actually seems to be the case is that the iconoclasts and the iconodules promoted two different models of the relationship between the earthly and the spiritual realm. While icons did provide a degree of unmediated access to God for the believer, they also calcified the religiosity of the believers and channeled it in a certain direction, restricting the power of individual clergy and monks to provide Christianity with new impulses and directions. Conversely, the incorporation of the image cult into the official church did not necessarily lead to its unproblematic control by authorities, but also implied a dilution of its channels of influence. In short, the iconoclastic controversy represented a complex act of

negotiation between two poles of authority, one laying more emphasis on the living carriers of divinity and the other on material objects imbued with spiritual authority.

7.4 Towards a New Iconology

The aim of this chapter, as stated in the introduction, was to identify a theoretical grounding on the basis of which it would be possible to develop an iconological methodology for a non-logocentric analysis of visual culture in a medieval Christian context. In the first part, I analyzed the notions of the realist and mystical modes of seeing ultimately derived from the pre-Christian Greco-Roman world, arguing that a specifically Christian tradition based on exegetical principles created a framework in which these two modes were united in a higher whole, along with the addition of a third, allegorical interpretative principle. Furthermore, I demonstrated the way in which the three modes of seeing corresponded with Erwin Panofsky's idea of three levels of iconological meaning as well as Victor Turner's conception of three layers of socio-cultural significance of symbolic actions. In this way, I formed the methodological basis for an interdisciplinary analysis of religious imagery in accordance with Jaś Elsner's principle that artistic meaning is to be found in the types of relationships and assimilative strategies generated among its viewers, rather than in its specific significations.

The greatest problem and challenge I identified in this approach was the fact that in all three cases - Alcuin's 'mental' mode of seeing, Panofsky's 'content' of a work of art, and Turner's *communitas* or anti-structure - it is a question of meanings that are, by definition, perceived either unconsciously, or through a 'higher' mental faculty such as synthetic intuition or what was referred to as the 'mind's eye.' As such, this level of meaning will inevitably be notoriously difficult to identify and analyze, any suggestion remaining open to the charge of 'astrologization.' However, despite such objections, any iconological approach that aims to read religious imagery in accordance with the way it was done by contemporary observers cannot afford to ignore the level of meaning that goes beyond the direct reference and the allegorical dimension, regardless of the precise way in which it is conceived.

In the second part of the chapter, I provided a schematic overview of the historical development of the Christian attitude to visual art up to the final defeat of iconoclasm in the 9th century, after which the orthodox stance on this question was permanently defined. What I concluded is that the theology of icons defined on the Seventh Ecumenical Council and the 843 Synod of Constantinople left the orthodox Christian world with an ambivalent legacy: while icons were formally stripped of real presence, they continued to be venerated and thus practically treated as though they truly were material carriers of divinity rather than mere channels through which the depicted holy personages can be perceived. Thus, on the one hand, the way was opened for the development of the threefold justification of art (instruction, memory, emotions) that became the dominant attitude towards religious images in the medieval period. On the other hand, the idea of mystical viewing, ultimately derived from neo-Platonic philosophy, also remained present within Christianity through the practical attitude towards icons.

Although the veneration of icons was historically derived from the cult of relics, thus, by analogy, implying the idea of real presence in images, in a conceptual sense it could only be justified through a neo-Platonic belief in a higher, immaterial reality that can be accessed through icons as privileged sites of access. The formal Christian attitude towards icons was therefore Plotinian, sharing its belief that certain material objects - in this case images reproducing the physical shape of holy figures or saints - can be particularly efficient in ensuring the temporary presence of immaterial entities. However, while in the case of Plotinus the perception of immaterial realities was clearly a matter of the mind or “inner eye,” in the official Christian context this element was neglected and icons virtually became conduits for a direct sensory perception of immaterial entities. Thus, although the Christian theology of icons was not fully ‘idoltrous’ in the sense of a belief in a direct presence of divinity in material objects, it represented a vulgarization of the intellectually elitist Plotinian theory of art.

Besides the didactic threefold justification of art on the one hand and the vulgarized neo-Platonism of icon veneration on the other, however, the tradition of the three (or, alternatively,

four) modes of viewing religious imagery was identified as an alternative current of Christian thought running through the works of theologians from late antiquity through to the Middle Ages. It is precisely this tradition that I consider as the most appropriate theoretical framework for the envisaged non-logocentric iconology of medieval imagery. Besides the previously discussed difficulties associated with the problematic status of the third mode of viewing, a possible objection to the application of this framework is that its familiarity in different geographical and temporal contexts, particularly those with an un- or underdeveloped written culture such as medieval Bosnia, cannot be simply taken for granted.

My response to this justified objection is that the primary task of an iconology conceived in this manner is to derive the *potential* rather than the assumed *actual* meaning(s) of religious (or, for that matter, any other) imagery. Within this framework, meaning is not conceived as a static value attached to a material object (or the mind of its creator), but rather a dynamic construction emerging from the interaction between the object and its viewer. Thus one and the same image may have produced very different meanings depending on the mental and intellectual framework of the person observing it. The task of iconology would consist in identifying these *possible* meanings of images based on what is known or can be reasonably assumed about the environment in which it existed.

Furthermore, this iconology will aim to incorporate Elsner's previously discussed principle of the reflexivity of the image and the viewer: rather than conceiving the viewer as a passive recipient of the image's meaning(s) or, conversely, the image as a passive site of projection for the viewer's values, it sees their relationship as a dynamic interaction that can lead to a significant modification in what is seen, or even in the very basis of the viewer's mental framework. In a word: imagery is seen as an essential aspect of the complex semantic system that makes up a culture, rather than a mere reflection of one of its putatively more fundamental elements.

CHAPTER 8

THE STEĆAK STONES: INTRODUCTION

If any persons after their death shall be found to have been heretics, their bodies shall be dug up, and their bones burnt.

Decree of the Council of Lyons, 1245

8.1 Epitaphs

My analysis of the *stećak* stones will begin with a brief overview of their inscriptions.¹⁴⁰ The first thing to be noted is that, just like the majority of manuscripts from medieval Bosnia, the inscriptions are written in medieval Bosnian/Serbo-Croatian using a variant of the Cyrillic script known as *bosančica*, i.e. “Bosnian Cyrillic,” thus indicating their rootedness in the traditions of Slavic Christianity and literacy of Cyril and Methodius. The same conclusion can be derived from the names occurring in the inscriptions, which are, in the overwhelming majority of cases, of Slavic, rather than Greek or Latin origin.¹⁴¹

The most valuable information provided by the inscriptions is a rough dating of the custom of erecting *stećak* stones. Thus the oldest two inscriptions have been found in the medieval regions of Travunija and Zahumlje (modern-day Herzegovina) and date to the late 12th and early 13th centuries respectively.¹⁴² However, the large majority of the directly and indirectly dated

¹⁴⁰ Inscriptions have been identified on only around 300 of the roughly 70.000 stones. Thus, the insights derived from them can have an indicative value at best, rather than providing any firm conclusions about the nature of the *stećak* culture as a whole.

¹⁴¹ For example, Radivoj, Vigan, Herak, Braje, Ostoja, Mišljen, Radoje, Milutin, Hrelja, Radovan, Radosav, Radič... with only individual occurrences of names such as Juraj (=George) and Mihajlo (=Michael).

¹⁴² These are the tombs of *župan* (a Slavic political and military title roughly corresponding to prince) Grd (died around 1180) from Police near Trebinje and “servant of God Mary, called Divica” (raba božija Marija, a zovom Divica) from 1231, found in Vidoštak near Stolac. In both cases we are dealing with horizontal slabs, a relatively conventional type of tombstone that is not necessarily directly related to the later culture of the *stećak*. Thus I will view them as exceptions and focus my analysis on the *stećak* culture of the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries.

stećak stones were erected in the 14th, 15th and early 16th centuries. The last identified inscription dates to the year 1589 (the tombstone of Dragojlo Novaković, Vego IV 49), though it should be noted that its reference to Jesus and Mary¹⁴³ clearly marks it off as belonging to a different religious and cultural climate than the majority of the older *stećak* stones. The decline of the *stećak* culture can thus be linked to the conquest of the medieval Bosnian kingdom (and the disappearance of the Bosnian Church that accompanied and partially preceded it) by the Ottoman Empire in 1463 (i.e. 1482, when the last stronghold of Herzegovina was defeated).

Some of the inscriptions also provide valuable information about the deceased and the time in which (s)he lived. Thus one of the longest epitaphs reads:¹⁴⁴

In the name of the father and son and holy spirit amen! Here lies Vigan Milošević I served ban Stipan and king Tvrtko and king Dabiša and queen Gruba and king Ostoja. And at that time king Ostoja came and feuded with the duke and with Bosnia Ostoja attacked the Hungarians. At that point my, Vigan's time came to an end on my own land under Kočerin, and I beg you, do not step onto me! For I was as you are, and you will be as I am. (Vego I, 13).

Vigan Milošević's epitaph can serve as the most complete illustration of the culture of *stećak* inscriptions, containing as it does virtually all of its most characteristic semantic elements. It starts with an invocation of the Trinity, clearly establishing its Christian character. After the conventional identification of the deceased starting with "here lies", it switches into a first-person narrative, setting up a somewhat macabre atmosphere of a conversation between the dead and the living. It then continues with a recollection of the events marking Vigan's life, stressing the central value of the service he performed for Bosnian rulers, and allowing us to conclude that he lived between the mid-14th and early 15th century. The epitaph concludes with a frequently

¹⁴³ "Jesus and Mary! O, Dragojlo Novaković lies here!" (Vego IV, 49).

¹⁴⁴ I have deliberately aimed to preserve some of the linguistic peculiarity of the inscription in my translation.

occurring plea or threat not to disturb the deceased's bones¹⁴⁵ and a variation on a conventional reflective formula of mourning familiar from Western European contexts.¹⁴⁶

In some cases, however, we are confronted by individual aphoristic expressions that seem to be specifically composed for the occasion. Thus on the stone of Radoje Mršić we can read a possibly ironic, almost surrealistic reflection on the banality of death: "I stood praying to God and not thinking any evil, and I was killed by lightning" (Vego II, 61). The tombstone of Hrelj Radogostić provides a condensed biography of the deceased person's life: "I visited many countries and I came home. I lived justly and I reposed on my own land" (Vego IV, 206). An anonymous epitaph reflects on the ethical qualities of the deceased: "And many were killed on earth, but I was not killed by one, and my hands did not kill anyone. I did not want to kill" (Vego IV, 31). In one case we are provided with a veritable moral lesson: "And this is written on the cross of Juraj. So that every man knows: Juraj Ivanović how I gained wealth and died because of it" (Vego I, 29).

A second type of the epitaphs, or elements of the epitaphs, refers to persons involved in the production of the *stećak*. Thus some of them are signed by the artists or scribes who created the decorations or inscriptions, while others mention those who presumably financed its construction: "This is the monument of *knez* Radoje, the great *knez* of Bosnia. It was erected by his son *knez* Radič with God's help ..." (Vego IV, 65).

A question of particular interest concerns the religious beliefs or affiliations of the individuals buried underneath the *stećak* stones. In this respect, the epitaphs are not as revealing as one would expect. The religious identity of the buried persons can be established with complete certainty only in a few cases in which an adherence to the Bosnian Church is identified by the

¹⁴⁵ A more explicit formulation is found on the tombstone of *knez* Vlač Bijelić (Vego II, 43): "Man, so you may not be cursed, do not touch into me!"

¹⁴⁶ An equivalent expression is found on the tombstone of Radivoj Draščić (Vego II 33): "you will be as I am and I cannot be as you are". A similar sentiment is expressed on the tombstone of Stipko Radosalić (Vego II 39): "a long time have I reposed and long still I have to repose".

titles *gost*, *strojnik* or *krstjanin* mentioned in the inscriptions. In a few other cases, the epithet “servant of God” suggests that the deceased were adherents of the Orthodox Church, though it should be noted that the occurrence of this phrase is limited to the area of eastern Herzegovina (i.e. the medieval region of Travunija). The only explicit mentioning of Roman Catholicism can be found on a very late, 16th century tombstone that should probably not be qualified as a *stećak*, but rather as a later development characteristic of Catholics in Ottoman Bosnia (the tombstone of Mihovil Grahovčić, Bešlagić 1967, 101). While some scholars have attempted to prove the Roman Catholic and/or Orthodox character of some inscriptions based on the mentioning of certain religious formulas, most notably the Trinity, medieval heresiological literature clearly states that most adherents of dualist movements believed in a conception of the Trinity, though they may have had heterodox interpretations of its nature.

As far as dogmatic or theological peculiarities are concerned, it is worth mentioning two interesting cases. The epitaph of Radoslav Vlahović begins with the unusual invocation “in the name of God and St. John” (Vego II, 16), revealing, perhaps, theological ignorance rather than heterodox beliefs. On the other hand, the inscription may also reflect the particular reverence to John the Evangelist exhibited by adherents of the Bosnian Church, as attested in heresiological sources. A similar question is created by the epitaph on the *stećak* of a dignitary of the Bosnian Church, where we are told that “here lies sir *gost* Mišljen, to whom Abraham as decreed has provided hospitality [...]” (Vego III, 61). If, considering the position of the deceased person, we may assume a certain level of theological sophistication, the reference to Abraham may be read as an implicit rejection of the medieval Roman Catholic invention of the concept of Purgatory.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Binski notes that by the early 13th century, Purgatory became distinguished “from the somewhat less clearly formulated idea prevalent in the early Church that the dead went to what Tertullian called an *interim refrigerium* (‘interim refreshment’), a waiting place typically in Abraham’s Bosom between Heaven and Hell, until the Last Things” (25). However, this interpretation seems to be contradicted by the remaining part of the epitaph: “Good sir, when you step in front of our only lord Jesus Christ, mention us your servants.” Thus, it appears as though the scribe assumed that Mišljen will enter Heaven rather than Purgatory or any kind of related “in-between” space such as the bosom of Abraham.

In any case, in a religious sense the epitaphs on the *stećak* stones seem to lead to more open questions than firm answers. Judging only on the basis of the available written evidence, however, it could be tentatively suggested that the roots of the *stećak* culture developed in an Eastern Orthodox Christian context of eastern Herzegovina, the custom eventually became associated primarily with the Bosnian Church (and the entire medieval Bosnian state), and was perhaps finally adopted by Roman Catholics.¹⁴⁸

1.2 Monolithic tombstones: a comparative view

While the inscriptions of the *stećak* stones do not significantly deviate from what is familiar from the context of late medieval Europe, it is their striking material and aesthetic features that mark them off as a distinct and specific sepulchral phenomenon. Following a venerable art-historical methodology, most scholars have attempted to “explain” the meaning of individual motifs on the *stećak* stones by referring to other cultural contexts in which their occurrence is attested, often prioritizing, almost by default, the artistic creations of Romanesque and Gothic Western Europe as their immediate models.

For the purposes of a general assessment of the *stećak* imagery, we may quote the German scholar Georg Wild:

Within a relatively narrow distribution area, the Bosnian tombstones display representations which, considering their European cultural context, are remarkable in the manner of their execution and partially also their compositions, and thus may claim a certain special position. In the case of images that appear symbolic, an identity with similar images in Western and Eastern Europe is beyond doubt, whereas figural images and compositions, on the contrary, often appear mysterious (Wild 17).

Besides parts of its imagery, it is the very basic conception of the *stećak* stones that does not correspond to anything that can be found in the sepulchral customs of Western Europe of this

¹⁴⁸ However, I would like to stress one more time that this conclusion should be regarded as *preliminary* and has to be evaluated in conjunction with other available evidence.

period: except for the wide-spread form of the horizontal slab, monumental monolithic tombstones are not attested among Catholics of the high and late Middle Ages.¹⁴⁹ The frequently repeated argument that the form of the *stećak* stones is ultimately derived from the sarcophagi of Roman antiquity can be characterized as conjectural at best: one of the key characteristics of the *stećak* is the fact that they are solid pieces of stone placed on top of graves, rather than hollowed out containers holding bones. Furthermore, the carvings on the *stećak* stones are marked by a pronounced flatness or two-dimensionality that clearly distinguishes them from the sculpture of Romanesque and particularly Gothic art.

In a purely formal and material sense, the closest known “relatives” of the *stećak* stones can in fact be found on the eastern borders of Anatolia, on the territories of modern-day Armenia. Besides the relatively well-known memorial stones known as *kchachkar*, a different and much less frequent type of tombstone used in medieval and early modern Armenia is popularly known as *ororots*, meaning “cradle”. The basic shape of the *ororots* stones is almost identical to the chest-shaped *stećak* with a flat roof, while some examples of the *ororots* have round rather than roof-shaped tops as in the case of the *stećak*. In an iconographic sense, the *ororots* are characterized by their secular and naturalistic subject matter, standing in stark contrast to the *khachkar* which is strictly defined by the absolute dominance of the central motif of the cross in numerous variations. Despite a certain similarity in the flatness and general lack of technical sophistication of the carvings, however, it must be pointed out that there are no direct parallels in the iconographies of the *ororots* and the *stećak*. Furthermore, all the dated *ororots* stones were erected in the 16th and 17th centuries, and thus fall into the period after the culture of the *stećak* had essentially disappeared.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ For a somewhat dated, yet still valuable introduction to medieval European tombstone design see Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture*. A more modern approach is provided in Binski.

¹⁵⁰ The inscriptions and dates of the *ororots* were provided in private correspondence by Hamlet L. Petrosyan, Head of Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Yerevan and expert on the subject of medieval Armenian art. The parallels between Armenian and Bosnian medieval art are treated in more detail in the following Excursus.

Taken in its totality, however, medieval Armenian art appears closer to the carvings of the *stećak* than the sculpture of Western Europe. If the attested possibility of a direct communication between the Paulicians of medieval Armenia and the Bogomils of Bulgaria (and thereby ultimately Bosnian Christians) is also taken into account, a strong argument in favour of a comparative analysis of the *stećak* and medieval Armenian art and architecture is created. Such an analysis in fact results in the establishment of an entire series of parallels that can assist in the process of “reading” the iconography of the *stećak* stones. However, an analysis of this kind remains a difficult venture, as, despite their significance, the arts of the medieval Caucasus remain a somewhat exotic subject within art history. This problem is even more pronounced in the case of other cultures whose traditions show certain similarities with the art of the *stećak*.¹⁵¹

In a more general sense, the *stećak* culture can be classified as an element of a whole series of examples of original Christian monolithic tombstone and church designs, including, besides Armenian *khachkars*, catacombs of the early Christians, early medieval Irish crosses and Ethiopian rock-hewn churches whose construction flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries. Besides the general stability and durability of stone as a building material, these material cultural phenomena may be related to what Jacques Le Goff has described as “hylozoistic understandings according to which matter is alive” (180).¹⁵²

Besides the material from which they are constructed, the different examples of Christian monumental rock carvings also display more specific and revealing mutual similarities. Thus some of the most characteristic motifs of the early Christian catacombs, most notably the *orant* figure, can be found reappearing after many centuries on the *stećak* stones. Besides the reappearance of the basic concept of a monumental monolithic cross, *stećak* stones and Irish crosses are also related by the occurrence of certain characteristic iconographical elements, such

¹⁵¹ For example, the folk carvings of Daghestan, the gravestones of the Uyghurs or the symbols of the Mandaeans all display certain analogies with the carvings of the *stećak*.

¹⁵² Le Goff further notes the significance of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel II, where a “rock was cut out, but not by human hands”, which eventually destroys an enormous statue made of gold, silver, iron and clay, representing an eternal heavenly empire that will be established after the destruction of a series of earthly kingdoms.

as the motif of the stag hunt (Henry 92). Ethiopian rock-cut churches provide an interesting example of an architecture that, despite evident technical abilities, rejected sculpture in the round around the same time that the *stećak* stones were being erected in Bosnia.¹⁵³ What is particularly revealing is the fact that in all these cases of appearances of specific monolithic material cultures, they were tied to particular religious/proto-national institutions, i.e. the Irish, Armenian and Ethiopian churches, thus suggesting an analogous connection between the culture of the *stećak* and the Christianity of the Bosnian Church.

1.3 Insights from the anthropology of death

One of the basic, but most important insights provided by the anthropology of death is Maurice Bloch's observation that "the death of the individual is the source of rebirth of the group" (24), following from his general hypothesis according to which

the world religions bury the individual and send him to God and out of the social world. At the same time this expulsion purifies that part of the person which continues on earth and which will be re-used and reincarnated in other members of the corporate group to which the dead belonged (Bloch 20).

This observation, based on a large number of empirical studies from around the world, shows that the modern Western perception of death as a purely medical, despiritualized and individualistic process should not be regarded as normative, but rather as highly exceptional.

Comparing the modern Western perception of death with examples from other cultures, Bloch further notes:

what differentiates our system of thinking from such examples is therefore not the presence of individualism, but the possibility of the occurrence of the idea that we

¹⁵³ Gerster notes that "this almost universal ostracism by the Christian Orient with regard to statues may seem like a heritage of Judaism, whose ban on any 'graven image' has been followed since the Ten Commandments; above all, however, it exhibits the fear, so often expressed by the Fathers of the Church, that simple souls, confronted by these three-dimensional creations, would fall into idolatry" (64).

are nothing but individuals and that, as a result, when the combination of elements which creates the individual breaks up, the constituent elements then have no value in themselves (18).

Applied to the problematics of the *stećak* and its imagery, these insights should warn us against the tendency to reduce its meaning to a representation of the buried individual's achievements in their lifetimes or their hopes and prospects for a heavenly afterlife. On the contrary, the imagery of the *stećak* stones should primarily be seen as a social rather than an individual construction, or, to paraphrase the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's definition of culture, part of the stories that societies tell themselves about themselves. The symbols and compositions are thus only the tip of an iceberg consisting of an ultimately inextricable amalgamation of beliefs, customs and rituals, rather than just visual equivalents of simple statements about the deceased person's life or afterlife.

A second fundamental insight of the anthropology of death is the observation that the death of an individual is almost universally accompanied by an extended *liminal* phase affecting the wider society.¹⁵⁴ If a similar phenomenon can be assumed to have existed in medieval Bosnia,¹⁵⁵ the symbols and compositions on the *stećak* stones should be viewed not only in relation to the lives of the wider society before and after the individual's death, but also in reference to the liminal phase associated with his or her burial. In this phase, ritual acts and behaviours tend to gain additional and distinct levels of meaning and significance. Thus, for example, the funerals of the Nyakysa of eastern Africa are characterized by the performance of traditional war

¹⁵⁴ The concept of *liminality* is derived from the highly influential work on the nature of rites of passage by the ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep. Van Gennep observed that diverse rites of passage around the world are characterized by three stages which he termed pre-liminality, liminality and post-liminality. While the existence of pre-liminality and post-liminality is self-evident, it is the "discovery" of the liminal as a distinct phase with its own rules of behaviour that represents the most significant aspect of Van Gennep's work.

¹⁵⁵ Metcalfe and Huntington note that "even a very brief exploration of the emotions expressed at funerals in different parts of the world will serve to show that we cannot assume that any are universal, nor even that similar reactions correspond to the same underlying sentiments in different cultures" (44). While we cannot assume anything about the *nature* of the funeral customs of medieval Bosnia based on observations of other cultures, the *existence of some kind of funeral customs* in a society which produced such an impressive sepulchral culture seems like an acceptable assumption.

dances.¹⁵⁶ What is particularly interesting is the explanation of this dance provided by its participants:

This war dance is mourning, we are mourning the dead man. We dance because there is a war in our hearts - a passion of grief and fear exasperates us... A kinsman when he dances he assuages his passionate grief; he goes into the house to weep and then he comes out and dances the war dance; his passionate grief is made tolerable in the dance [literally, “he is able to endure it there, in the dance”], it binds his heart and the dance assuages it (Metcalf and Huntington 56).

Thus the meaning of the burial dance is much more complex than what a simple observation would reveal, involving a dynamic interaction between personal emotions and social customs. In a similar way, the symbols and compositions of the *stećak* stones should be seen in relation to complex liminal psycho-social processes, rather than simple “representations” of “folk customs”.¹⁵⁷ The frequently repeated (particularly in older historiographic literature) remark that the society of medieval Bosnia was “primitive” does not allow us to jump to the conclusion that its funerary rituals were any less complex than in putatively “more civilized” societies.

Special care must be taken with the application of anthropological methods, however, since we are dealing with the domain of visual representations rather than human behaviour. Unfortunately, virtually nothing is known about the funerary customs of the people who erected the *stećak* stones. Furthermore, the anthropology of death has not paid nearly as much attention to the field of visual representation as it has to ritual behaviour. This lacuna has been offset to some extent by the emergence of the sub-disciplines of historical anthropology and micro-

¹⁵⁶ “Dancing is led by young men dressed in special costumes of ankle bells and cloth skirts, often holding spears and leaping wildly about. Women do not dance, but some young women move about among the dancing youths, calling the war cry and swinging their hips in a rhythmic fashion [...] The noise and excitement grow and there are no signs of grief” (Metcalf and Huntington 55).

¹⁵⁷ Such “explanations” are often provided of the frequent representations of the circle dance on *stećak* stones. Similarly to explanations of individual motifs by pointing to earlier cultures in which they appeared, however, such views can only be the *beginning* rather than the end of the motifs’ understanding.

history,¹⁵⁸ as well as a more general adoption of anthropological methods in historiography. Thus in his 1989 call for “a new paradigm of medieval religion”, the historian Donald Weinstein wrote that “it will have to be multidimensional and dynamic rather than dualistic and static, pluralistic rather than hierarchical. It will also have to incorporate what medieval people themselves thought about the matter” (Weinstein 90).

Following a similar motivation, I have attempted to overcome the gap between the *stećak* imagery and its medieval observers by analyzing the artistic reception practices of early and medieval Christians. In this way, I hope to be able to postulate at least some of the senses ascribed to this imagery in its original context, recognizing the inevitable limitations and assumptions of this approach. The basic epistemological stance of this study is anthropological (rather than theological, historiographic or art-historical): what I am concerned with primarily is how (some) medieval Bosnians perceived the imagery of the *stećak* stones. The discussion of their origins and religious identity of the buried persons ultimately only serve to answer that primary concern.

8.4 Functions and forms of the *stećak*

The first impression one gains from observing a *stećak* necropolis is one of sheer monumentality: clearly, they were built to last. Furthermore, their most basic function seems clear: to not only mark, but also protect the bones buried underneath. Could this act as a clue revealing something of the nature of the wider culture that produced them?

On the one hand, such extraordinary measures taken to protect bones seems to constitute a strong argument against the dualist interpretation of the *stećak* culture: heresiological sources repeatedly stress these movements’ rejection of the belief in bodily resurrection, thus making the

¹⁵⁸ Incidentally, two of the most famous micro-histories deal with the subject of medieval heresy: Carlo Ginzburg’s *The Cheese and the Worm* and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie’s *Montaillou*.

preservation of bones meaningless from an eschatological perspective.¹⁵⁹ On the other hand, inquisitorial records from the Languedoc indicate that at least some Cathars did carry out burials of some kind, and even had their own cemeteries. When conditions permitted it, however, the bones of posthumously convicted heretics were exhumed and, analogously to the treatment of living heretics, ceremoniously burnt on the pyre (Wakefield 30). While there is no evidence that such policies were ever adopted in medieval Bosnia, an assumption of this kind would provide a convincing (though certainly only partial) explanation for the emergence of a culture of massive monolithic tombstone construction.¹⁶⁰ The previously discussed warnings not to disturb the deceased's bones often found in *stećak* inscriptions, though arguably conventional and formulaic, nevertheless indicate the existence of a genuine concern for the safety of bones in medieval Bosnia.

The majority of *stećak* stones – more precisely, around 70% - do not have any kind of decoration. As with so many other aspects of this artistic phenomenon, the reasons for this fact can only be speculated upon. The simplest and most obvious answer would be that the reasons are of an economic and/or technical kind – the decoration of the stones could probably only be carried out by a few experienced carvers, whose services must have been costly. However, as Solovjev rightly points out, considering the prohibitive costs of producing the more imposing shapes of the *stećak* stones,¹⁶¹ the addition of one simple crescent or other symbol (as can often be found on the stones) would hardly have represented a significant factor (the cost factor could, however, be decisive in the case of the more complex compositions).

¹⁵⁹ “Furthermore they claim that the relics of the saints are simply bones of dead people, like the bones of dead animals...” (Lourdoux and Verhelst 151)

¹⁶⁰ Note that this kind of treatment of local tombs, particularly if they were in some sense venerated, did not necessarily require them to be considered heretical. Discussing the Norman conquest of England in the 11th century, Bartlett notes that “at the abbey of St Albans there was a wholesale destruction of the shrines of pre-conquest saints by the first Norman abbot, who regarded his Anglo-Saxon predecessors as *rudes et idiotas* – ‘uncouth and illiterate’.” (272) The tombs of illustrious Bosnian ancestors may have received a similar treatment at the hands of the invading Hungarians, particularly if their remembrance was associated with anti-Hungarian or generally nativist feelings.

¹⁶¹ For illustrative purposes, it is worth noting that in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, the production of a *stećak*-sized stone would cost between C\$ 5,000 and 10,000.

Solovjev's own suggestion is that the use of decoration was restricted only to those members of medieval Bosnia's religious, political and military elites who had received spiritual baptism (Solovjev 29). In a modified version of this argument, it could be suggested that it was permitted only to the most distinguished members of medieval Bosnia's society. Thus the culture of the *stećak* – considering its costs, an elitist culture in any case – permitted for further posthumous socio-economic stratification.¹⁶² This argument can further be used as a foundation for the frequent claim that certain symbols, such as the sword or the tau-shaped walking stick, should be interpreted as occupational markers.

Using a different argumentative strategy, it can be argued that the significant degree of variation in *stećak* decoration can be explained as a temporal evolution. Thus the Bosnian Church, or medieval Bosnian society in general, may have moved from a strictly iconoclastic attitude in its early phases towards a more lenient attitude towards religious imagery by the second half of the 14th century. Such a development would correspond to the hypothetical gradual narrowing of the dogmatic gap between the Bosnian and the Catholic/Orthodox Churches suggested in chapter 4.¹⁶³

Whatever the reasons for the relative scarcity of decorations may be, its result is the fact that the fundamental aesthetic (and arguably semantic) feature of the majority of *stećak* stones is their shape. Several scholars have provided extensive taxonomies of the variety of shapes in which *stećak* stones can be found, occasionally suggesting their hypothetical gradual evolution (fig. 1).¹⁶⁴ The stones generally consist of either one of, or a combination of two basic monolithic structural elements: a conventional quadrangular horizontal slab and a most frequently regularly

¹⁶² In a rough, but persuasive estimation, Solovjev argues that in the three centuries during which the *stećak* culture flourished, there were around 120.000 members of the feudal classes, knights, religious leaders and rich merchants, which would correspond to the estimate of the original number of *stećak* stones.

¹⁶³ Alternatively, it may be suggested that there were regional differences in the attitude towards religious imagery. This would explain the relatively greater abundance of imagery in the region of Herzegovina.

¹⁶⁴ Škobalj's table is provided only for purposes of illustrating the different shapes of the *stećak*, without endorsing his evolutionary hypothesis.

shaped cuboid (i.e. block), which is either rectangular or in a shape that would geometrically be described as a trapezoidal prism (with its vertical edges subtly radiating up and outwards, thus providing the structure with a sense of lightness). In many cases, the blocks are provided with a “roof” in the form of a triangular prism, thus creating the most characteristic type of the *stećak* in the shape of a house. Three further shapes constituting part of the wider *stećak* culture are the regular and anthropomorphic cross (with a rounded upper arm, thus resembling the *ankh* sign), the rectangular pillar and the anthropomorphic vertical slab, appearing only in a very few cases.

The diversity in the basic conception of the *stećak* stones leads to a significant classificatory problem: essentially, it is impossible to draw a precise line between the *stećak* and other forms of gravestones which have either preceded or succeeded it. I have already mentioned the conventional horizontal slabs found in the region of Travunija (eastern Herzegovina) roughly 150 years before the earliest dated *stećak* stones. While some kind of continuity between the early slabs and later stones seems highly likely due to their appearance on the same necropolises and usage of (Bosnian) Cyrillic script, it is not clear whether they should actually be considered part of the same sepulchral culture.

Similarly, the period of roughly 150 years after the conquest of Bosnia by the Ottoman Empire witnessed the development of a multiplicity of hybrid shapes of gravestones, incorporating elements of the *stećak* as well as the Islamic grave pillar known as *nišan*.¹⁶⁵ Traces of *stećak* culture can also be found on Orthodox and Christian gravestones of Bosnia and Herzegovina for several centuries after the *stećak*'s disappearance. The frequent continuing usage of *stećak* necropolises as Islamic, Orthodox or Catholic cemeteries indicates the gradual evolution rather than sudden destruction of the culture that created it.

8.5 The *stećak* culture and the question of orthopraxy

¹⁶⁵ For a detailed treatment of this phenomenon, see Amila Buturović, *Carved in Stone, Etched in Memory*.

The form of the *stećak* that has attracted most scholarly attention is the house-shaped stone (figure 2). The association of a tombstone and an “eternal home” points not only to the hypothetical link between the *stećak* and the sarcophagi of Roman antiquity (which could be found on the territories of medieval Bosnia, and particularly neighbouring Dalmatia), but more generally to the adoption of an idea that is encountered in numerous ancient, medieval and modern cultures around the world. The association is occasionally reinforced by the decoration of the horizontal sides of the stones with round or pointed arches and, less frequently, their roofs by what appear to be tiles.¹⁶⁶ While arches are found mainly in the southern region of Herzegovina with a Mediterranean climate, in the mountainous regions of central Bosnia some stones are decorated with what may be an imitation of wooden logs, thus presumably reflecting local architecture.¹⁶⁷

Besides houses in general, roofed *stećak* stones may have been meant to evoke associations with churches in particular.¹⁶⁸ In this aspect, the *stećak* culture could be conceptually compared to tombs of medieval Catholic Western Europe, which underwent a gradual evolution from relatively simple sarcophagi and humble slabs in the 11th to elaborate chantry chapels in the 15th century.¹⁶⁹ However, several factors speak against anything but the most superficial analogies between the *stećak* and Western European tombs of this period. Firstly, despite evident

¹⁶⁶ An interesting parallel may be suggested with early medieval monoliths of Ethiopia. Gerster argues that “[t]hese are not merely decorated monoliths but elaborate architectural fantasies which represent what the architects of Aksum would have liked to build, even though they could not achieve it” (53).

¹⁶⁷ The latter kind of *stećak* has led to comparisons with a similar type of medieval Slavic tombstone found near the city of Narva (modern-day Estonia) made of wood, as well as speculations that the *stećak* may have developed from an earlier type of wooden tombstone, although no such monuments were found in Bosnia (Benac 65). This particular argument by Alojz Benac may also serve as an illustration of Yugoslav scholars’ occasional tendency to adopt a somewhat vulgar Marxist approach. After establishing some parallels in the socio-economic conditions of medieval Bosnians and northern European Slavs who produced the Narva tombstones, Benac notes that “this fact nicely shows how similar conditions create the same spiritual manifestations” (65). Further on, he attempts to explain the hypothetical transition from wooden to stone tombs in the following way: “Why just then? My opinion is that it is primarily a consequence of social development. This is the time period in which feudalism becomes more established in Bosnia, and the consequences had to be reflected in all fields” (Benac 71).

¹⁶⁸ Some *stećak* stones bear a striking resemblance to a particular type of small pre-Romanic churches found on the Dalmatian coast, whose style is sometimes described as early Croatian architecture.

¹⁶⁹ Binski notes that even the colleges of the University of Oxford were originally chantries, and thus in a sense the “tombs” of its benefactors.

similarities between some *stećak* stones and church architecture, we cannot conclude that they were actually meant to represent churches: there is not a single *stećak* decorated with a representation of a door or the rounded exterior of an apse. More importantly, the *stećak* culture did not reflect what may be described as the single most important development of Western European tomb construction in the later Middle Ages: its migration into the interior spaces of churches.¹⁷⁰ In fact, the relationship between the *stećak* and church buildings in general is unclear: while on some *stećak* sites there are foundations of buildings that could have been churches, many more do not have any traces or indications of that kind.¹⁷¹

The question of the presence of church buildings on *stećak* sites leads to the wider and more fundamental problem of the orthodoxy, or more precisely orthopraxy of this burial custom. Both Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches required (as they still do) Christians to be buried in consecrated cemeteries, which usually meant the courtyards of churches (though, exceptionally, individual graves could also be consecrated). Furthermore, speaking of Western Europe, Binski notes that “once a body had been buried and had decomposed to the point of defleshing, it was normal to exhume it and to store the bones in a charnel (from the Latin *carnus*, ‘flesh’, ‘carrion’) house [...] the existence of a specific grave was less at issue than burial in consecrated ground” (55).¹⁷² Thus any cemetery without a church appears anomalous (if not outright heterodox) from an orthodox (or orthopractic) perspective.

On the other hand, assuming the correctness of heresiological claims about the Bosnian Church’s general animosity towards the materialization of the sacred (in the form of the Eucharist or

¹⁷⁰ “[The key development in the history of the medieval tomb] was instead the admission of the dead to the interior of churches. The medieval tomb was essentially, if not absolutely, an interior art form, and it was this factor which separated its development from the exterior movement of the old Mediterranean world, and from the ancient mausoleum” (Binski 72).

¹⁷¹ According to heresiological sources, Bosnian Christians rejected church buildings (though the meaning of this claim has been questioned in chapter 6).

¹⁷² This can be at least a partial response to Noel Malcolm’s remark that “to identify all *stećci* as such with Bogomilism means to replace one mystery with another - the mystery of non-existent Catholic or Orthodox gravestones” (30). Additionally, some rich Catholic and Orthodox Christians may have chosen to be buried inside churches (which have been destroyed in the meanwhile), as was the custom in other parts of Europe.

icons), a custom such as the consecration of cemeteries is likely to have been rejected. Hypothetically speaking, Bosnian Christians may have treated the burial of the dead as inconsequential from an eschatological perspective. That, in turn, could have allowed for the survival and adaptation of an originally pre-Christian concern for the preservation of bones on land belonging to the clan (as indicated by inscriptions), which was of primarily social rather than religious significance (making an analytic distinction which was probably not recognized by medieval Bosnians themselves).¹⁷³

Assuming a closer proximity of the Bosnian Church, or the *stećak* culture as a whole, to orthodox Christianity, however, a factor that may have significantly influenced its development was the belief in the sanctity of holy men's (and women's) bones, which can be traced back to the earliest Christians.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, there is evidence suggesting that prior to the development of church buildings, Christians celebrated their services in cemeteries.¹⁷⁵ Eventually, this belief led to the development of the cult of relics on the one hand, and the desire of Christians to be buried as closely as possible to the tombs of saints, reflecting a quasi-magical belief in the "contagiousness" of sanctity. The previously discussed epitaph of *gost* Mišljen ("Good sir, when you step before our only lord Jesus Christ, mention us your servants") - who, in virtue of his position as a Bosnian Church dignitary was considered a *true Christian* and thus equivalent to a saint - indicates that Bosnian Christians (like Catholics and Orthodox Christians) did believe in the saints' power of intercession in their interest. Whether this can be taken as an indication of a belief in the sanctity of saints' bones can only be speculated upon. In any case, as previously noted, the beliefs of Bosnian Christians should not be considered as a hermetically sealed set of

¹⁷³ Thus, my argument is that, while the *stećak* culture cannot be said to have been formally caused by the Bosnian Church, it may have been the predominance of Bosnian Christianity that allowed for the development of this culture in the first place (which, furthermore, does not exclude the possibility of its initial emergence in and/or eventual adoption by Orthodox and Catholic Christians).

¹⁷⁴ Freeman quotes the following words of Eusebius: „The bones of a martyr are more precious than stones of great price, more splendid than gold“ (2011, 214).

¹⁷⁵ Freeman notes that the 3rd century Roman Emperor Valerian “ordered that no Christian services be held and that Christian cemeteries where worship took place be seized“ (2011, 211).

fixed dogmatic principles, but rather as an amalgamation of different and perhaps even mutually contradictory beliefs.¹⁷⁶

A second consequence of the assumption that the bones of at least some men and women buried underneath the *stećak* stones were considered sacred is that the necropolises were not only cemeteries, but actual sites of worship (whose precise nature represents yet another mystery).¹⁷⁷ This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that many - if not most¹⁷⁸ - of the necropolises are situated in proximity to sources, rivers, large rocks, clearings and other naturally distinguished sites (as well as the largely unexplored stone heaps believed to have been erected by the Illyrians, the Balkan's pre-Slavic inhabitants) - thus suggesting their pre-Christian religious significance. This fact provides another argument against the reduction of the meaning of the *stećak* and its iconography to a simple recollection of the lifetime achievements of the persons buried underneath. On the contrary, they should be regarded as objects that marked the continuing presence of the deceased in the lives of the surviving community, facilitated by the performance of rituals on the sites of their burial.

8.4 The imagery of the *stećak* stones: a formal analysis

Prior to an iconographic analysis of individual symbols, a general formal and stylistic analysis of the *stećak* imagery will be carried out here. This analysis will provide a foundation for a basic assumption of my approach, namely the claim that the imagery of the *stećak* stones can be considered as part of a unique iconographic program or, to use a less loaded term, that it is made up of a relatively homogenous repertoire of motifs.

¹⁷⁶ Discussing the burial of Cathars in the Languedoc on the basis of inquisitorial records, Wakefield notes that "despite their disrespect for clerical services, Cathars and their adherents sometimes made use of them" (30).

¹⁷⁷ Talking about the custom of ritual offerings or libations on graves, Marian Wenzel notes: "This latter idea is not alien to the South Slavs, who to this day place food on the grave and hold mass at the graveside. The grave is thus regarded jointly as a table and as an altar", adding that "in Rome, in the early centuries after the birth of Christ, funeral banquets were carried out at the grave. The mourners reclined around a stone table, built over or near the tomb" (129).

¹⁷⁸ In the absence of systematic topographic analyses of *stećak* sites, I rely on personal impressions gained from visits to around 50 sites.

However, the general homogeneity has to be reconciled with another pronounced characteristic of the imagery: a significant degree of regional and even local variation in the nature and diversity of the iconography. Furthermore, the iconography is characterized by an atypical level of variation in the way that individual symbols are depicted and composed, leading to the fact that, despite a limited repertoire of motifs and a large number of stones, there are virtually no two identical *stećak*. While many scholars have simply ignored this fact or chosen to see it as an indication of a lack of the artists' technical and intellectual sophistication, I will argue that the iconographic flexibility is a sign of the mystical rather than mimetic nature of the *stećak* imagery (i.e. that the emphasis of the images is on *what* they represent, rather than on *how* it is represented).¹⁷⁹

Another frequently ignored, but very significant characteristic of *stećak* imagery is the regular metamorphosis of individual motifs: thus orants turn into crosses, fleur-de-lys or architectural niches, crosses become swords, anchors or grape vines, while stag antlers are populated by birds or rosettes, grow out of human heads, or turn into abstract, geometric shapes. The observer's attention is thereby directed from the individual objects or symbols to their mutual relationships and, further (permitting a degree of evaluation), to the underlying energies and forces uniting them into a higher whole.

This characteristic should warn us against the almost universal tendency of *stećak* scholars to prematurely divide the motifs into categories such as, for example, "religious symbols," "depictions of everyday life" and "pure ornament". The imagery rather seems to suggest an intimate connection between different aspects of human existence; a multiplicity of layers of meanings contained even in quotidian objects and activities. Thus the senses of *stećak* imagery cannot be exhausted in a simple dictionary-like listing of individual symbols and their statically

¹⁷⁹ On a more speculative note, assuming a primary association of *stećak* artists with the Bosnian Church, their "artistic freedom" could be linked to the previously discussed dogmatic malleability of dualist movements. As *true Christians*, the artists could have been considered as carriers of the Holy Spirit, who thus had the liberty to produce individual impressions of universal symbols and motifs.

conceived meanings. While part of my analysis will be structured around separate treatments of the most frequent motifs, their final sense will be sought in the role they play in individual compositions on the one hand and the totality of *stećak* art on the other.

To illustrate the full range of the diversity of *stećak* decoration, let us consider some examples that may be taken as markers of its outer limits. On the one hand, there are numerous instances of stones that are merely marked by nothing more but a small carved symbol, most frequently a cross, crescent or simple rosette (with varying numbers of petals). Semantically even simpler (yet arguably indicating the first steps towards composition) are some of the decorations Marian Wenzel describes as “geometric shapes,” such as protruding lines or bars often dividing the stones into two parts.¹⁸⁰ Some of these bars are additionally decorated with parallel or zig-zag lines that may carry a particular meaning,¹⁸¹ but could also be added for purely decorative reasons. Following Škopalj (227), I suggest that these merely marked *stećak* stones should be differentiated from the ones that are fully decorated, although several ambivalent cases can be identified. In the former case, the symbols probably carried simple and precise meanings and were not subject to the type of interpretation I propose for the more complex compositions. I suggest that the marks were primarily either of a prophylactic nature or indicated the beliefs and/or social status of the deceased (figure 3).

A special category of these “marks” is made up of different mysterious symbols of varying complexity reminiscent of prehistoric more than medieval art. Such are, for instance, the relatively numerous single or combined circles with dots marking their centre.¹⁸² Another example is made up of two juxtaposed triangles with three or four circles on their sides, appearing several times in the region around the town of Kalinovik in south-eastern Bosnia

¹⁸⁰ Wenzel suggests that these lines mark a double grave (19), but the validity of this hypothesis can only be established with archeological excavations.

¹⁸¹ In his systematic analysis of prehistoric symbolism, the Israeli scholar Ariel Golan argues that the zig-zag or parallel lines, one of the oldest known ornamental elements, represent rain, one of the most important natural phenomena to early farming communities.

¹⁸² According to Golan, this wide-spread symbol in prehistoric art represents a planted seed.

(figure 4, 19-21). A more complex motif of this type appears in Western Herzegovina, consisting of what looks like two keys combined with additional elements (figure 4, 30, 34, 35). The most frequent and interesting cases of these marks, however, are various kinds of rings, hollows and knobs. Wenzel notes that the local population refers to these hollows, which are only found on the horizontal sides of the stones, as “kamenice,” meaning a well used for cattle, thus suggesting that they were used to collect or hold rain water or another liquid such as oil or wine for ritual purposes. The rings, on the other hand, often have indented edges and appear in combination with raised hands, thus suggesting solar associations. Finally, the knobs, which continued to be used on later Christian and Islamic gravestones, are locally referred to as “apples,” suggesting their connection with the recorded local customs of leaving real apples on graves (Wenzel 133).

On the other end of the spectrum are the less frequent, elaborately and richly carved stones such as a famous example from the necropolis of Donja Zgošća in central Bosnia (now located in the courtyard of the National Museum in Sarajevo). This particular stone has often been described as the “most beautiful *stećak*” (Mazrak 2012, 99), though the main reason for this qualification is presumably its relatively greatest adherence to Eurocentric standards of aesthetic beauty.¹⁸³

From the perspective of the formal characteristics of *stećak* art in its totality, the stone from Donja Zgošća would more accurately be characterized as decadent (figure 5). Almost every inch of its four sides is filled by so many details that, in comparison to other *stećak* stones, its basic aesthetic attitude resembles a *horror vacui*, the ornaments decorating the borders between its registers reach a baroque complexity, the strict symmetry of its elements results in a formal rigidity depriving the stone of the usual sense of vitality, while the repetition of complex rosettes seems like nothing but an exercise in artistic ingenuity devoid of deeper meaning. Furthermore, the depictions of people and animals are characterized by a high degree of realism and rigidity of poses (except, arguably, the hunting scene in the lower register of one side). Finally, according to

¹⁸³ A replica of this *stećak* has recently been erected in front of the parliament building of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo.

a recent article by Ema Mazrak (2012), the damaged frontal side of the stone depicts Jesus as apocalyptic judge, which would make the composition unique in an iconographic sense.¹⁸⁴

Between the extremes of the marked stones on the one hand and the elaborate *stećak* from Donja Zgošća on the other, a series of compositional elements of varying complexity can be identified. I have already mentioned motifs of an architectural type, whose aesthetic and semantic effect emerges in combination with the stone on which it is depicted. Of a similar kind are various types of ornamental frames acting as the stone's sole decorative elements. While it would be possible to argue that they are nothing but compositional devices for images that were never completed, their isolated appearance is too frequent to warrant this conclusion (figure 6).

There is a large variety in the type of ornament used in the creation of such frames. In many cases they are very simple, resembling the lines and bars mentioned above. Others, though more complex, appear equally decorative, possibly representing “degenerations” or echoes of motifs that once carried specific meanings. In some instances, however, a certain conscious symbolism seems undeniable: thus some frames are made up of spirals resembling stylized vine tendrils, others of winding branches carrying trefoil leaves, and finally, in a few cases, of circles inscribed with crosses and rosettes. In a stylistic sense, the usually rustically executed ornaments have a highly decorative effect, providing the heavy stones with a sense of vitality. The aesthetic effect may also have given its medieval observer the feeling that the carvings have in some sense provided the stone with life.

Another formal type of decoration is a depiction of an individual motif, either in isolation or in combination with others. I distinguish this type of motif from a simple mark primarily on the basis of its size, but also, further, its complexity and position on the stone. Thus I would classify a simple, but large and centralized depiction of a crescent and cross on the Radimlja necropolis as an individual (or combined) motif, rather than a mark (figure 7). In this particular case, the

¹⁸⁴ The article also provides one of the most detailed and profound iconographic analyses of an individual *stećak* composition in general.

motif emerges as the primary semantic element, reducing the significance of the stone to the material on which it is depicted.

Furthermore, regardless of its iconographic meaning, which may have been as obvious as that of a simple mark, the creator of this motif invites the viewer to reflect upon its appearance. Possibly, the motif also encourages the (qualified) viewer to go beyond its immediate significance and consider its deeper layers of meaning. These arguments are more persuasive in instances of motifs of a higher complexity than simple marks, such as, to name only a few, elaborate types of crosses, arms and hands, human figures, circle dances, jousts, hunting scenes, different animals and phantasmic creatures. Despite their diversity and heterogeneity, the number of motifs appearing on the stones is fairly limited, constituting, as it were, the basic vocabulary of its iconographic language.

A special type of motif is made up of unique images and compositions that cannot be classified under one of the semantically formulaic and relatively frequently occurring categories mentioned above. Such motifs are, for example, a four-legged winged animal resembling a horse surrounded by a snake from Dugo polje in Blidinje (figure 8), a composition appearing to depict the transportation of a deceased person found on the same location, a procession of four animals that can only be giraffes with birds standing on their backs from Ubosko, or a man holding a cup next to a table and T-shaped stick in Banja Stijena (the complex stone from Donja Zgošća discussed above would also be included in this category). Although relatively rare, such images prove that the creators of *stećak* art did not simply reproduce a fixed set of available motifs, but rather enjoyed a sort of compositional freedom. Their privileged status is further confirmed by the fact that, despite the general scarcity of inscriptions, a number of stones were signed by their creators.

The semantically most complex images are created through a combination of ornamental frames and individual motifs. Besides their decorative effect and possible intrinsic meaning, the frames can also act - to further pursue the linguistic analogy - as the markers of the images' grammatical

structures. On a most basic level, the frame serves as a device through which the motif contained within it is separated from the world surrounding it, an indication that it belongs to a different level of reality. Its frequency shows that the intended audience of *stećak* imagery had moved beyond a hypothetical “primitive” state of mind in which image and reality are not separated. In some cases, additional frames further divide the images into separate parts. For example, a type of *stećak* characteristic of the region of western Herzegovina is a particularly wide and long, but low block, with frames dividing the upper side into four roughly equal triangular or square surfaces decorated with different motifs and symbols (figure 9)¹⁸⁵. More frequently, frames divide images depicted on the sides of the *stećak* into several horizontal strips or registers. In this case, it can be assumed that these registers indicate different levels of reality, in accordance with a wide-spread compositional principle used as far back as ancient Egyptian and Babylonian art (and used extensively in medieval Europe).

In order to approach the full sense of a *stećak* motif, an additional factor that must be taken into account is its relative position.¹⁸⁶ Thus, for example, it has been noticed that the stag hunt motif is usually depicted only on the sides of the stones, with the dynamics of the image following an East-West direction, thereby providing an argument in favour of a solar interpretation of this composition (to be further discussed in Chapter 10). Similarly, the so-called “anthropomorphic niche,” frequently interpreted as a horseshoe arch, can be found depicted on the arms of cross-shaped stones, indicating that its sense cannot be limited to an architectural motif (figure 10). A particular challenge is presented by the variety of combinations of individual motifs in what appears to be compositions. Thus, for example, a *stećak* on the Radimlja necropolis shows two persons with raised hands standing in a fortress located above a depiction of a joust. Does this kind of juxtaposition imply two registers, or, alternatively, a naive attempt at representing perspective? In a second example, a representation of what appears to be St. Christophorus

¹⁸⁵ This type of compositional device may have been influenced by the Romanic/Gothic/Renaissance art of the Dalmatian coast.

¹⁸⁶ While this may appear rather obvious, local *stećak* scholarship is still often caught up in what I would describe as a naive iconographic approach, regarding the meaning of individual motifs as static and fixed.

holding the baby Jesus¹⁸⁷ is found in the middle of a stag hunting scene. Does this composition represent a “primitive,” unreflective amalgamation of unrelated motifs, or an attempt to express a complex theological statement?

A final compositional element of the art of the *stećak* to be considered here are its inscriptions. Unlike their Western European counterparts of this (and earlier) periods, in the large majority of cases the inscriptions are not separated by a frame, but rather seem to be awkwardly “floating” in the empty spaces surrounding the other motifs, rarely respecting any vertical or horizontal, external or internal margins. Furthermore, their technical execution is surprisingly primitive, standing in stark contrast to the rustic, yet skillfully carved ornamental and figurative decorations. In some cases, such as the tombstone of Polihranija in Veličani near Trebinje, the inscription seems at odds with the aesthetic conception of the *stećak*, filling out the spaces between its rounded arches.¹⁸⁸ In Brotnice, on an otherwise particularly skillfully and richly ornamented stone, the letters fill out the spaces between and below a rider’s arms and head (figure 11). This is particularly striking considering the stone’s location, around 30 km from Dubrovnik, at this time the most important city of the Dalmatian coast with a rich medieval and Renaissance cultural tradition. Overall, it must be concluded that the inscriptions appear like a foreign element in the art of the *stećak*, its creators in most cases not succeeding in organically integrating them into the larger aesthetic conception of the stones.

8.4 Conclusion: a semantically complex artistic phenomenon

The first important conclusion emerging from this preliminary analysis is that, due to the predominance of non-decorated stones, a study of its iconography can only have limited value for understanding the *stećak* culture as a whole. While it may be possible that the appearance of decorated stones was simply a question of the availability of technical expertise or changing

¹⁸⁷ If this interpretation is correct, it would represent the only firmly identifiable representation of a saint found on the *stećak*.

¹⁸⁸ Though it must be pointed out that there are several examples of human figures and animals carved within such spaces as well.

aesthetic taste, it may also have been caused by a profound modification of religious attitudes, such as a loosening of iconoclastic principles. In the absence of definitive answers, the phenomenon of the *stećak* appears as mysterious as prehistoric megalithic cultures, reflecting a mode of thinking that may remain incomprehensible to the modern observer. However, a possible logical explanation for the erection of such massive tombstones is a genuine concern for the safety of the bones buried underneath, which may have been caused by the inquisitorial custom of unearthing and burning the remains of those who were posthumously convicted of heresy.

Furthermore, despite some superficial conceptual analogies, it seems clear that the impetus for the emergence and development of the *stećak* culture could not have come from the Catholic Church or the contemporary artistic traditions of Western Europe in general. Most importantly, in a period in which the major development of (elite) sepulchral culture in Western Europe was the migration of tombstones to the interior of churches, the *stećak* continued to be built in natural environments, on sites that possibly had pre-Christian religious significance, frequently far removed from any church. While this does not necessarily mean that *stećak* were not also erected by Catholics, considering the attitudes of the Catholic Church in this period, this could only have been done in spite of clerical attitudes. Regardless of whether the Bosnian Church really was heterodox or heretical, it seems unlikely that in this period the Catholic Church would have willingly adopted a custom that was in any way associated with charges of heresy, as the Bosnian Church certainly was.

As far as *stećak* imagery is concerned, I have argued that it is not only iconographically, but also semantically heterogenous. What it means is that a small cross carved on a stone as a simple marking does not have the same sense as, for example, a large cross in combination with a crescent, surrounded by an ornamental frame. Thus a simplistic classification of motifs into rigidly conceived categories, as proposed by numerous scholars in the past, can be highly misleading. On the one hand, it implies that a motif cannot have a multiplicity of simultaneous meanings. On the other hand, it also leads to the conclusion that, regardless of its size, position

and relationship to other elements of a composition, a motif always has the same, stable and static meaning. What I propose instead is a merely analytic classification of motifs based on their semantic type into the categories simple mark, ornamental frame, individual or combined motif, unique composition and combination of frame and motif.

Besides the type of image within which it appears, the meaning of a motif must additionally be sought in the position it takes up as well as its relationship to other motifs on the stone. Thus, for example, a position in the upper part of a composition and/or stone can generally be assumed to have divine or heavenly associations, particularly in cases in which it is formally situated in a separate register through the usage of ornamental frames. Similarly, any putatively secular motif which is additionally decorated with an abstract symbol should be analyzed from the perspective of its potentially religious associations. The application of this methodology is based on the assumption that those responsible for the conception of the *stećak* compositions were capable of significantly more profound levels of conceptual thought than it has been assumed by other scholars.

EXCURSUS: KHACHKAR, OROROTS AND MEDIEVAL ARMENIAN ART

In chapter 3, I discussed the profound parallels between the religious teachings of Armenian Paulicians and Bulgarian Bogomils, as well as the strong possibility of a direct influence of the former upon the latter after the Byzantine resettlement of Paulician communities to Bulgaria in the 10th century. Intriguingly, the *stećak* culture displays a series of parallels with the arts of medieval Armenia, potentially providing a neglected piece of evidence in favour of the disputed connections between Paulicians and Bogomils (and, further, Bogomils and Bosnian Christians). However, the formulation of a hypothesis of this kind would require a further investigation into the remains of early medieval Bulgarian art that goes beyond the scope of this study.¹⁸⁹

In the following excursus, my aim is to provide a brief formal comparative analysis of the monumental arts of medieval Armenia and Bosnia, which can assist in understanding certain characteristics of the latter. In particular, I will look at three aspects of medieval Armenian art: the style of its sculptural reliefs as seen on the 10th-century Church of the Holy Cross on the island of Aghtamar (on lake Van in south-eastern Turkey), the iconography of the relatively well-known medieval memorial stones known as *khachkar*, and, finally, the general conception of a rare and largely unknown (even in Armenia itself) type of tombstone locally referred to as *ororots* (“cradle”).¹⁹⁰

My first point of reference is the magnificent (and, unfortunately, in Western art history largely neglected) Cathedral of the Holy Cross on the island of Aghtamar (alternatively spelled

¹⁸⁹ It is worth noting the following remark by Steven Runciman: “Bulgarian architecture of the ninth century shows an Iranian influence that was doubtless supplied by Armenian architects. Whether these Armenians came from the Paulician colonies that Constantine V had planted in Thrace or whether they came from Armenia itself we cannot tell; but doubtless some of them were Paulicians” (65).

¹⁹⁰ The Armenian scholar Hamlet Petrosyan insists on the more technical term *rectangular parallelepiped*. In private correspondence, Mr. Petrosyan noted: “At first about the term of ‘ororots’, which means ‘cradle’ in Armenian. It comes from a child's bed with the form of rectangular parallelepiped and with arch form in his upper part. Some later medieval tombstones really have the same form and first Armenian describers of such tombstones had used this term for making understandable his descriptions.”

Aght'amar). The church's most striking aspect are its richly carved exterior walls, a decorative device that is not only unknown in the medieval West as well as Eastern Europe/Byzantium, but is highly untypical for Armenian architecture itself.¹⁹¹ While the iconography of the Church of the Holy Cross represents a fascinating subject in itself,¹⁹² what I want to focus on is the style of its reliefs. Formally, the main group of images (most of which depicts biblical motifs) is situated between two horizontal frames, the lower one consisting of a highly stylized combination of grape clusters and acanthus leaves, and the upper one of a more naturalistic grape vine populated by animals and human beings (figure 1).

Besides their content, the two frames are distinguished by a striking difference in the manner of their execution: whereas the lower one is ornamental and decorative, being largely restricted to two-dimensionality, the vegetation and figures of the upper one are provided with a significant degree of depth and plasticity (additionally, a series of tree-dimensional sculptures of animals adorn the space between the main images and the upper frame). In terms of depth, the central imagery stands somewhere between the two frames, being generally restricted to one plane, but having some allusions of plasticity, particularly in the faces of the figures.

Are these stylistic variations the result of nothing but aesthetic experiments by the creators of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross? Hardly so, considering the complex history of the Christian attitude towards sculpture in the round, as well as the symbolic significance of church architecture, particularly in the East.¹⁹³ Having been completely banned in the East, it is precisely at the time

¹⁹¹ While bas-reliefs on the exterior walls of churches are wide-spread in medieval Armenian architecture, Aghtamar is distinguished by their quantity and extent. A similar style can also be found in neighbouring Georgia, as well as the so-called Vladimir-Suzdal style of medieval Russia. The most significant example is the Cathedral of St. George in the city of Yuryev-Polsky built in the 1230s, a time period in which the Vladimir-Suzdal Principality had strong cultural ties with the Caucasus (Voyce 124). Between 1212 and 1228, Yuri, the Prince of Vladimir-Suzdal, was married to Queen Tamara of Georgia.

¹⁹² For an extensive analysis, see Lynn Jones, *Between Islam and Byzantium: Aght'amar and the visual construction of medieval Armenian rulership*.

¹⁹³ "The history of Eastern Christian church architecture from its beginnings to our own times reveals an unaltered dual concern for providing a place for the assembly of the community members, while simultaneously conveying the symbolic expression of God's invisible and uncontainable realm" (Ćurčić and Hadjistryphonos 9).

of the construction of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross - i.e., the mid-10th century - that the oldest known sculptural representation of the crucifixion, the Gero Cross, appears in the West. It would take another century for the development of the first Romanesque sculpted portals, characterized by a greater depth and plasticity than the bas-reliefs of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross. Using a teleological framework, the subsequent development of sculpture in the West is often described as its gradual “liberation” from the architectural framework. Within this scheme, the bas-reliefs of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross are an example of a time period in which sculpture was still firmly controlled by architecture. Situated in an area with strong iconoclastic traditions, they can be seen as the result of a compromise between the traditional Christian ban of sculpture in the round and the evident desire to create a biblically-inspired monumental figurative art. In order to distinguish it from bas-reliefs with more pronounced depth, I will refer to this style as *flat relief* (although it should not be confused with the so-called *Stiacciato* relief for which this term is occasionally used).

My argument is that the art of the *stećak* should be classified as an example of the flat relief. This is particularly evident in the well-known depiction of a man with a raised right hand from the Radimlja necropolis (figure 2). Even the previously discussed stone form Donja Zgošća, which I have characterized as stylistically decadent, does not deviate from this artistic principle, implying its fundamental significance for the art of the *stećak* as a whole. While it may be argued that this style is a consequence of nothing but the lack of technical sophistication of its creators, the absence of even one significant example in which it has been breached strongly speaks against this possibility, particularly considering the proximity and availability of Dalmatian artists, some of whom must have been familiar with sculptural techniques prevalent in Europe at that time.¹⁹⁴ In the absence of alternative explanations, my suggestion is that the reason for the prevalence of the flat relief was the attested religious conservatism of medieval Bosnian society in general and

¹⁹⁴ It should be kept in mind that many of the *stećak* stones discussed here were created in a time period in which the Renaissance was already flourishing on the not-so-distant Italian peninsula!

the Bosnian Church in particular.¹⁹⁵ While this opposition to sculpture in the round was shared by the Eastern Orthodox Church, its prevalence strongly indicates that the the *stećak* culture was not shaped by the artistic principles of the Catholic Church.

The second element of medieval Armenian art I want to discuss is the *khachkar* (“cross stone”). The *khachkar* is a vertically erected stone slab defined by the centrality of the cross motif, used primarily as a gravestone as well as, less frequently, a memorial of Armenian Christianity. Just like the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, the art of the *khachkar* can be considered as an example of the technique of the flat relief (though it must be noted that, in both cases, the reliefs are of a significantly higher technical quality than those found on the *stećak*).

However, my interest in the *khachkar* is iconographic rather than stylistic. In particular, it is the treatment of the cross on the *khachkar* that invites a comparison with the *stećak*. In only a very few cases (and never in the case of the *stećak*) does the *khachkar* display a representation of the crucifixion.¹⁹⁶ Most frequently, it is adorned with a so-called winged cross, with grape clusters growing out of its arms and its “wings” occasionally transforming into human hands holding additional crosses (figure 3). The remaining spaces on the stones are usually filled with intricate ornaments as well as, sometimes, a further series of smaller crosses. In short, the entire conception of the *khachkar* seems to suggest that the cross is not primarily seen as the tool of Jesus Christ’s execution, but a mystical symbol whose full meaning is only revealed in a process of complex interpretation.

While there are no direct analogies in the iconographies of the *khachkar* and the *stećak* stones, a basis for their comparison is created by the (hypothetical) link between the iconographies and the respective forms of Christianity in which they were created. The Armenian Church belongs to the

¹⁹⁵ Note that I do not argue for a continuity of and direct connection between Armenian and Bosnian flat reliefs, though this possibility should certainly not be excluded. Closer to Bosnia, a similar style can be found in the art of the Lombards, such as the famous 8th century Altar of Ratchis in Cividale. and its echoes on the Dalmatian coast.

¹⁹⁶ This rare type of *khachkar* is in fact referred to by a different name, *armenaprkich*.

non-Chalcedonian branch of Oriental Orthodoxy, adhering to what it refers to as a miaphysite theology (replacing the still wide-spread label of monophysitism, which is regarded as a polemical term), essentially placing a greater weight upon the divinity of Jesus Christ than Chalcedonian orthodoxy permits. The predominance of the symbolic cross over the crucifixion, a motif so emphatically stressing Christ's humanity, can be seen as a reflection of this central tenet of Armenian Christianity. This, in turn, creates a foundation for the attempt to derive the Christology behind *stećak* art attempted in the following chapter.

A second basis for comparison is created by the frequency of the symbol of the rotating wheel on the *khachkar*, generally interpreted as a solar symbol derived from Zoroastrianism, the religion of the Armenians before their adoption of Christianity. While the rotating wheel symbol does occasionally appear on the *stećak* as well, it is rather the concept of a harmonious blending of the cross with a pre-Christian symbol that creates a model that can be useful when attempting to understand the iconography of the *stećak* stones.

However, the most intriguing parallel in the arts of Armenia and Bosnia is found in a type of tombstone known as the *ororots*. In its basic conception, the *ororots* is essentially identical to the *stećak* - a monolithic, regularly shaped block, often equipped with an additional base in the form of a rectangular slab, and occasionally decorated by ornamental, symbolic or figurative carvings. The one significant difference between the two types of tombstones is created by the fact that the majority of the *ororots* have a rounded, rather than roof-shaped top, as in the case of the *stećak* (though I am aware of at least one *ororots* with a roof-shaped top and one *stećak* with a rounded top).

The *ororots* is a rather infrequent type of tombstone: during a relatively systematic exploration of medieval Armenian cemeteries, I have come across around 100 *ororots* stones, as opposed to several thousand *khachkars*. Strictly speaking, the *ororots* cannot be classified as "medieval": the very few epitaphs in Armenian (I have been able to find six in total, with three of them

mentioning a precise date) have been dated to the 16th and 17th centuries.¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, the tradition of *ororots* construction seems to have continued at least until the 19th century, as shown by some examples from the cemetery of Noratus (although the later examples have flat roofs and no carvings, and should thus arguably not be considered part of the same tradition).

In terms of both style and content, the *ororots* represent a striking contrast to the *khachkar*. While many *khachkar* are examples of fascinating technical virtuosity, the bas-reliefs of the *ororots* are much simpler, in most cases remaining on the level of artistic naivety.¹⁹⁸ In comparison to the strict compositional principles of the *khachkar*, the imagery of the *ororots* appears spontaneous and lively. Most importantly, however, the contrast between the two types of monumental tombstones is created by its iconography: while the *khachkar* is defined by the centrality of the cross symbol, with only occasional and marginal inclusions of figurative depictions, the central motif of the *ororots* is the human figure, frequently accompanied by animals and objects, and only occasionally by abstract symbols. In many cases, the depicted figures are engaged in quotidian activities, such as hunting, tilling the land or playing a musical instrument. However, a hasty categorization of *ororots* imagery as “secular” is prevented by the frequent presence of objects with a possibly religious significance, such as a wine-jar and the lavash bread, central elements of the Eucharist, as well as certain mystical symbols, such as the rotating wheel, intertwined snakes, rosettes, or ornamental knots.¹⁹⁹

What is more striking than the contrast between the *ororots* and the *khachkar*, however, is the heterogeneity of the style and content of the former. Based on my own research, I would roughly divide them into three groups. The first one can be found on the cemetery of Noratus, the largest

¹⁹⁷ The translations of the epitaphs were provided in private correspondence by Mr. Petrosyan. The very terse inscriptions simply mention the name of the deceased and occasionally the builder of the stone. In one interesting case from the Noratus cemetery, we are told that “this Holy Cross is an intercession for Giqor”.

¹⁹⁸ The naivety of the *ororots* is of a very different kind from that of the *stećak*, thus showing that analytic limitations of this term. Even naive or primitive art has its stylistic characteristics which have to be taken into account in a complete iconographic analysis.

¹⁹⁹ According to Petrosyan, the imagery of the *ororots* is rooted in pagan beliefs about the afterlife, presenting human life in idealistic circumstances.

surviving *khahchkar* site.²⁰⁰ The *ororots* of Noratus are characterized by their strict adherence to the flat relief, as well as a rich and diverse iconography, containing several depictions of what appear to be scenes of everyday life. It is on this cemetery that the probably most famous *ororots* stone can be found, displaying (according to local guides) a lively wedding celebration (figure 4). The lack of respect for artistic conventions typical of the *ororots* is shown particularly clearly on this stone, which permits the intrusion of elements of the central image into the frame containing an inscription and ornaments.

The second group of the stones can be found scattered around the 14th century Church of the Holy Mother of God in the village of Areni.²⁰¹ The *ororots* of this group are characterized by a much higher level of technical and compositional sophistication, as well as a pronounced plasticity of the represented figures (at least in one example, figure 5). The figures represented on the Areni stones are shown riding horses, holding scrolls, or playing the *oud* (rather than tilling the land as in Noratus), thus indicating their higher social status.²⁰² Finally, the third group of *ororots* can be found in the south of the country, on two separate sites, one in the village of Agitu and another in the monastery of Vorotnavank. The stones on these sites are also marked by technical naivety, though of a different kind than those of Noratus, with a very specific, child-like depiction of human beings. Furthermore, the *ororots* of Vorotnavank are characterized by their combination of secular and sacral motifs, such as the hunt with an ornamental knot symbol or an archer aiming his arrow at a pair of oversized intertwined snakes (figure 6).

Except for the motif of intertwined snakes, there is no direct analogy in the iconographies of the *stećak* and the *ororots*. Despite the essential conceptual identity of the two types of tombstones,

²⁰⁰ After the documented destruction of the Julfa cemetery, now located in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan, by Azerbaijani military forces in the 1990s and 2000s. The cemetery contained close to 10,000 medieval tombstones, most of which were *khachkars*.

²⁰¹ According to local legend, it is in this village that Noah settled with his sons after the flood.

²⁰² This impression is confirmed by an inscription on one of the stones, stating that it is the tomb of *paron* Mehrab, an Armenian title roughly equivalent to baron (Petrosyan, private correspondence, with an indication that the inscription can be found in Corpus of Armenian Inscriptions, vol. 3, Vaiots Dzor /by Sedrak Barkhudaryan, Yerevan, Academy of Sciences of ArmSSR, 1967, p. 32 (in Armenian).

it is thus difficult to argue for their direct connection or mutual influence.²⁰³ It is rather in their differences that the *ororots* reveal important aspects of the *stećak*. Firstly, despite their much greater number and relatively larger area of distribution, the *stećak* are characterized by a significantly higher level of stylistic uniformity. In fact, considering the religious (or rather denominational) plurality of medieval Bosnia and its surrounding regions, as well as the relatively short time period in which it was a unified kingdom, the stylistic (and, to a somewhat lesser extent, iconographic) homogeneity of the *stećak* is very surprising, suggesting the existence of a deeply rooted shared culture that is hardly revealed in the surviving written documents (or “primary historical sources”). Secondly, despite their lack of technical sophistication, the *stećak* reflect a greater adherence to compositional principles than the *ororots*, never permitting anomalies such as the intrusion of the image into its ornamental frame. Finally, although the iconography of the *stećak* includes such putatively secular motifs as the stag hunt, joust and circle dance, the range of such motifs is smaller than that of the *ororots* (particularly considering the much larger number of stones), while the manner of their depiction appears more formulaic. Thus Petrosyan’s warning that despite appearances, the motifs depicted on the *ororots* should not be simply classified as secular seems even more pertinent in the case of the *stećak*.

My brief analysis of medieval Armenian art, a tradition with possible links to Bosnia due to the links between the Paulicians and the Bogomils, has shown that the decorative style found on the 10th century Church of the Holy Cross on the island of Aghtamar should be considered as a distinct kind of bas-relief that I have referred to as flat relief. I suggested that the flat relief does not merely represent an artistic mannerism of Armenian sculptors, but is rather the result of the Christian ban on sculpture in the round, which was gradually forgotten in the Catholic West. Furthermore, I argued that despite its generally lower technical level, the art of the *stećak* should be considered as an example of the flat relief, rather than a primitive version of Romanic or Gothic art. The adoption of, and strict adherence to, the principle of this style in medieval Bosnia

²⁰³ A similar type of tombstone can also be found among the Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region of China, incidentally the only people who had adopted Manichaeism as their official religion in the 10th century. It could be suggested that the three similar type of tombstones share an unknown common origin somewhere in the Caucasus or central Asia.

should not be considered a result of direct or indirect Armenian influence (though this possibility cannot be excluded), but rather as a consequence of the general conservatism of the Bosnian Church (or medieval Bosnian society in general).

Finally, despite the striking resemblance in the basic conception of the *stećak* and the Armenian type of tombstone known as *ororots*, I have not found sufficient evidence to suggest a direct connection between them. On the contrary, it is the differences between the two types of tombstones that have led to a series of significant insights about the art of the *stećak*. These include the surprising level of stylistic homogeneity of the *stećak* reliefs, their relatively strict adherence to compositional principles, and the necessity of paying attention to the religious significance of putatively secular motifs. The conclusion that emerges from a comparison between the *stećak* and its closest known stylistic and conceptual relative is that the former can truly be viewed an authentic creation of medieval Bosnian society. Although it shares some basic conceptual features and iconographical elements with a range of artistic phenomena from different cultures and societies, the *stećak* can indeed be considered as an example of an original creation of Christian material culture.

CHAPTER 9
THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE STEĆAK STONES - PART 1

I extended my hands and approached my Lord, for the expansion of my hands is His sign.

And my extension is the upright cross, that was lifted up on the way of the Righteous One.

And I became useless to those who knew me not, because I shall hide myself from those who possessed me not.

And I will be with those who love me.

Odes of Solomon, 42

The final two chapters of this study will provide a detailed analysis of *stećak* iconography. In this chapter, I will discuss three of the most frequently occurring motifs: the cross, the orant and the hand. My basic methodological framework is constituted by the theory of three levels of meaning developed in chapter 6. This methodology is enriched by an analysis of concrete occurrences of individual motifs, with a particular focus on their relationship towards other motifs and the compositions in which they are found. In this way, I am aiming to strike a balance between seeing individual motifs as relatively stable semantic elements and taking into account their shifting and dynamic meanings in the wider context of *stećak* iconography in its totality. The conclusion I reach is that the imagery as a whole can best be understood in the context of the tenets of moderate dualism ascribed to the Bosnian Church.

The most basic, mimetic level of the imagery's meaning has already been comprehensively analyzed by past scholarship, most notably the study of Marian Wenzel. As previously mentioned, however, I do not accept the attempt to prematurely classify the motifs into semantic categories such as, for example, "religious symbols", "secular compositions" and "pure ornaments", as done by Wenzel and the most other *stećak* scholars. This analytical step can be

highly misleading, as it can blind us to the possibility that a motif carries a whole range of different meanings of various kinds.²⁰⁴

The mimetic references of *stećak* iconography are best understood in the context of the imagery's allegorical meaning. Even if a motif is nothing but the portrayal of actual events, the most interesting question is why it was regularly depicted on *stećak* stones. The explanation of tombstone design (at least at this stage of social and cultural development) cannot be reduced to the personal whims of its creators, but must be sought in the ideological structures of the society that produced it. Most obviously, considering the elitist nature of *stećak* production, one dimension of the imagery's meaning is related to what we may call class values. Thus, the regular depiction of a particular motif on tombstones suggests that it played a significant role in the preservation and reproduction of the prevailing socio-economic structure and hierarchy. Furthermore, the depicted motif may have served as an allegorical representations of other, structurally analogous social relations.

As allegories, the images also reflected the society's religious values. Considering the simple fact that the medium of expression is the decoration of tombstones, as well as the presence of many unequivocally religious symbols, doubtless the imagery as a whole is, to a large extent, religious. However, the virtually complete absence of conventional religious motifs familiar from other Christian contexts, such as biblical events and prominent saints, turns the extraction of the images' religious significance into a particularly challenging task. The situation is further complicated as, most frequently, the precise nature of the appropriate religious interpretative framework is unknown. For this reason, I adopt a specific analytical strategy, reading the motifs in the context of both Eastern Orthodoxy/Catholicism and the Christianity of the Bosnian Church. In this way, I also evaluate the likelihood that a particular *stećak* stone or motif was created in the framework of one or the other branch of Christianity.

²⁰⁴ In the absence of specific hermeneutic texts, the claim that the mimetic level exhausts the meaning of a particular motif is (logically) impossible to disprove. However, its adoption leads to a radical impoverishment of the iconographic discussion and ultimate redundancy of the iconologist, reducing the debate of the *stećak* imagery to stylistic concerns.

When it comes to deciphering the third, symbolic level of the imagery's meaning, we are faced by a fundamental methodological dilemma: if we are to take into account what those who viewed images in a symbolical or "mystical" sense themselves thought about the matter, only those who are sufficiently "purified" and spiritually elevated can perceive this level of meaning. Furthermore, what we are talking about is the perception of "non-corporeal", "mental" or even "celestial" realities, which, granted that we do not dismiss these concepts as obscurantist mystifications, may be impossible to capture in conventional words and grammatical forms.

A possible way to conceptualize mystical or symbolic viewing is provided in Rudolf Steiner's *Outline of Occult Science*.²⁰⁵ Using the example of the rosy cross symbol, Steiner notes:

Now we gaze in spirit on the rose and say to ourselves: 'In the red sap of the rose is the erstwhile green sap of the plant—now changed to crimson—and the red rose follows the same pure, passionless laws of growth as does the green leaf.' Thus the red of the rose may offer us a symbol of a kind of blood which is the expression of cleansed impulses and passions, purged of all lower elements, and resembling in their purity the forces working in the red rose. Let us now try not only to assimilate such thoughts within our reason, but also let them come to life within our feelings. We can experience a blissful sensation when contemplating the purity and passionless nature of the growing plant. We can awaken the feeling within us how certain higher perfections must be paid for through the acquisition of passions and desires. This, then, can change the blissful sensation previously experienced into a serious mood: and then only can it stir within us the feeling of liberating happiness, if we abandon ourselves to the thought of the red blood that can become the carrier of inner pure experiences, like the red sap of the rose. The important point is that we should not look coldly and without feeling upon these thoughts which serve to build up such a symbolical concept (Steiner 1922, 225).

This paragraph represents only a fragment of Steiner's much longer 'initiation' into a 'mystical' viewing of the rosy cross. But it suffices to demonstrate the basic elements of this hermeneutical strategy: a concentration on the transformation of objects and their characteristics,

²⁰⁵ I would like to stress that I do not endorse or imply an acceptance of any aspect of Rudolf Steiner's philosophy, but simply use his conceptualization of symbolic viewing as a suitable illustration.

an emotional experience of abstract insights, an attempt to ‘enliven’ thoughts through the infusion of new emotions, and the derivation of new intellectual insights from such emotional states.

9.1 The Cross

Any discussion of *stećak* iconography must begin with a consideration of the cross: it is not only the most frequent single motif²⁰⁶ appearing on the stones, but also the iconographically most controversial one. The main reason for its prominence in iconographic discussions of the *stećak* is the recurrent heresiological claim that Paulicians, Bogomils, Patarens and Cathars - i.e. adherents of dualist Christian movements - rejected and even *abhorred* the sign of the cross. Thus its frequent presence on the stones has often been cited as proof that either this artistic phenomenon cannot be linked with the Bosnian Church, or that the Bosnian Church was not dualist at all. However, a persuasive “pro-dualist” response to this problem has been proposed by Aleksandar Solovjev in an article entitled “Did the Bogomils respect the cross?”. Due to the significance of this question, I will briefly lay out and elaborate on his argument here.

The argument is based on a careful re-reading of the primary sources dealing with the dualist movements’ attitude towards the cross. Solovjev cites the Paulician leader Gegnesius’s interrogation by the Byzantine patriarch as recounted by Peter the Sicilian: “Then the patriarch said again, ‘Why do you not believe in and honour the precious cross?’ He said, ‘Anathema to him who does not worship and venerate the precious and life-giving cross.’ By ‘cross’, he meant Christ making a cross by holding out his arms” (Hamilton 80). From this, Solovjev concludes that the Paulicians respected the cross as a symbol of Christ, rather than a representation of the tool of his execution. With the aid of their attested willingness to disguise their beliefs behind a facade of orthodox claims, they were thus, in this particular case, able to avoid religious persecution. Presumably in response to this strategy, Byzantine theologians developed the

²⁰⁶ Wenzel mentions 438 cases where the cross constitutes the major element of the decoration, and a further “almost 200” where it forms a minor element (91).

following, very thorough, abjuration formula for Paulicians accused of heresy: “Anathema to him who does not worship with a true heart and mouth the venerable wood of the precious and life-giving cross, on which was nailed our Lord and God, and all the figures of it which are made of any material, for the salvation of our souls and bodies“ (Hamilton 104). Clearly, the main point of contention was the veneration of the actual wood or material from which the cross was made, and not the usage of the cross symbol as such.

While Solovjev’s argument heavily relies on references to Paulicians, whose connection with later European dualists remains hypothetical, his view is consistent with most heresiological claims about the Bogomil, Cathar and Pataren attitude towards the cross. Thus the 14th century Dominican inquisitor Bernard Gui wrote that the Cathars “say that the Cross of Christ deserves no adoration or veneration.” He further explained their logic:

according to them, no one adores or venerates the gallows on which his father or some relative or friend has been hanged. Also, they say that those who adore the Cross should, with equal right, adore all thorns and all lances, for just as in Christ’s passion the Cross was for His body, so were the thorns for His head and the soldier’s lance for His side (Wakefield 384).

Gui’s description thus implies that, just as with the Paulicians, for the Cathars the main concern was the adoration or veneration of the cross as a material object. A similar point is made by Moneta of Cremona in his *Summa Against Cathars*²⁰⁷ and Euthymius Zigabenus in his discourse against the Bogomils.²⁰⁸ In at least two cases, however, a significantly greater degree of animosity towards the cross is ascribed to Bogomils²⁰⁹ and Cathars.²¹⁰ Thus, while the primary

²⁰⁷ “They also attack the use of images in the Church and the adoration of the Cross” (Wakefield 312).

²⁰⁸ “They do not honour the holy cross, because it is the murderer of the Saviour, when they should rather honour it, because it destroys the devil” (Hamilton 189).

²⁰⁹ “They are worse than the demons themselves, for the demons are afraid of the cross of Christ, while the heretics chop up crosses and make tools of them. The demons are afraid of the image of the Lord painted on a wooden panel, but the heretics do not venerate icons, but call them idols” (Cosmas the Priest, Hamilton 117).

²¹⁰ “They say that the Cross is the sign of the beast of which one reads in the Apocalypse and is an abomination in a holy place” (Bonacursus: A Description of the Catharist Heresy, Wakefield 172/3).

sources do not allow for a definitive conclusion on this question, it appears that at least some branches of European dualism were primarily opposed to the veneration/adoration of the material cross as practiced by the orthodox churches, rather than to the symbol as such.

The deeper theological significance of the dispute about the cross is clarified by some of the heresiological writings mentioned above. Thus Solovjev notes that the Byzantine patriarch Photius condemned those who “pretend to respect the cross” (Solovjev 98), simultaneously accusing them of docetism, i.e. the claim that Jesus did not have a real physical body. This association of a non-reverential attitude towards the cross and a docetic Christology is further explained in Peter the Sicilian’s justification of the custom of venerating the cross:

Once the cross had been planted on earth and the bread of life for love of man came down from heaven together with the divinity - not that His body came down from heaven, He took that from earth with the same capacity for feeling as we have - and was raised upon the wood of the cross and watered the earth with the streams of His divine blood, He made it breathe out a sweet smell. Fertilized by the hallowing of His precious blood and water, it blossomed with different sorts of sweet-smelling spiritual flowers, as it still does (Hamilton 70).

The association of the physicality of Jesus Christ’s body and the sanctity of the cross is expressed more emphatically in Zigabenus’s tract against the Bogomils:

They do not honour the holy cross, because it is the murderer of the Saviour, when they should rather honour it, because it destroys the devil. Until that time it was an instrument which brought death, but from then on it became a weapon which brought life, most royal and terrible to its enemies, inasmuch as it was sprinkled with the Lord’s blood and water (Hamilton 189).

Thus the veneration of the cross is intimately linked to Chalcedonian orthodoxy, according to which Jesus Christ was both fully divine and fully human.

The iconography of the cross found on the *stećak* provides a strong argument in favour of its dualist or, more precisely, docetist interpretation. Despite the bewildering variety of crosses

carved on the stones (to be discussed below), there is one highly conspicuous absence - that of the crucifixion. A similar phenomenon had already been observed in my discussion of the Armenian *khachkar* stones, where it was linked to the miaphysite Christology of the Armenian church. But, although the crucifixion does sometimes appear on *khachkars*, it never figures on the *stećak* stones. Judging from the iconography of their tombstones alone, it thus seems likely that the Christians of medieval Bosnia adhered to a heterodox or at least non-conventional Christology.

A peculiar type of motif - a hybrid between a human being with outspread arms and the shape of a cross, frequently described as an *anthropomorphic cross* - further supports the hypothesis of a heterodox Christology. While the *orant* - a human being with bent, uplifted arms - is a relatively frequent motif on the *stećak* stone with a complex symbolism that will be treated in a separate section, here I suggest a possible connection between the anthropomorphic cross and the dualist idea of the cross as a symbol of Jesus with outspread arms. On one stone from Milavići (figure 1), the upright of a large cross is rounded and inscribed with a human face, while the lower splits into two branches suggesting legs. A possible echo of this motif is also found in the type of *stećak* constructed in the shape of cross with a rounded shaft.²¹¹

Thus it would be premature to identify the *stećak's* religious context based on the occurrence of the cross alone. While heresiological writings very often ascribed adherents of dualist movements a general animosity towards the cross, the theory developed by Aleksandar Solovjev shows that this animosity may be restricted to the idea of the cross as an element of Christ's Passion. The plausibility of this interpretation is suggested by the complete absence of the crucifixion on the *stećak* stones, as well as by the occurrence of the peculiar motif of the anthropomorphic cross, possibly a representation of Jesus with spread arms. While a firm conclusion would be premature, a preliminary analysis of the cross motif suggests that it may

²¹¹ However, this shape may also be related to the *ankb*, another relatively frequent motif on the *stećak* with a possibly very different origin.

well have been introduced in the framework of a non-Chalcedonian Christology such as docetism.

To get beyond the simplistic dichotomy orthodox/dualist and attempt to derive a more profound allegorical level of meaning of the cross(es) carved on the *stećak* stones, we must look deeper into the complex history of this symbol in the Christian context. As Martin Werner notes, the cross only became a truly *venerated* symbol after Constantine adopted it as the standard (*labarum*) of the Roman Empire (181). Thus the cross carried both a theological and a political significance. The intertwinement of politics and religion became more pronounced after Constantine's erection of a great jewelled cross on the site of the Crucifixion, following the (legendary) discovery of the remains of the True Cross - i.e. the actual cross on which Jesus had been crucified - by the Emperor's mother Helena. Through the Persian conquests and Roman/Byzantine re-conquests of Jerusalem,²¹² the cross became a potent symbol of the unity of the Christian religion and Roman imperial ideology. In order to emphasize the association between the symbol of the cross and the relic of the true cross, a specific type of cross was developed by the sixth century, with a short upper bar employed to suggest the board above Christ's head at the Crucifixion (Werner 178). This type of cross, known as a Byzantine or Patriarchal cross, is particularly associated with the power of the Byzantine patriarch, who would eventually become the highest authority of Orthodox Christianity.

Besides the dogmatic, ecclesiastical and political ones, however, there was also a mystical level of the cross's meaning: as Werner notes, "in patristic literature and in the liturgy, the True Cross came to be identified with the Tree of Life of Genesis and Apocalypse" (182). The Tree of Life is mentioned In Genesis 2:9, where we are told that it was situated in the centre of Paradise, next to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. According to Werner, Jewish prophets saw the Tree of Life as a symbol of Messianic salvation and as God's wisdom, while the New Testament

²¹² "Jerusalem became the center of a growing Cross cult until, in the early seventh century, the Persians occupied the city, destroyed most of its churches, and carried off the True Cross in its silver casket. The precious relic was recovered by Heraclius in 628 and the Holy Sepulchre complex was rebuilt. But because of a new threat from the Arabs, the primary reliquary of the True Cross was removed to Constantinople shortly before Khalif Omar captured Jerusalem in 638" (Werner 181).

identifies the water of life and the Tree of Life with the sacrificial and redemptive death of Jesus. Furthermore, the Tree of Life is also an ancient and almost universal symbol, representing the foundational structural elements of the universe, connecting the underworld with the heavens and thus binding the world together.

Early Christian theologians also saw the cross as a more abstract symbol that is revealed in many different aspects of the world. Thus in the second century, in his *Apologia*, Justin Martyr wrote:

For consider all the things in the world, whether without this form they could be administered or have any community. For the sea is not traversed except that trophy which is called a sail abide safe in the ship; and the earth is not ploughed without it: diggers and mechanics do not their work, except with tools which have this shape. And the human form differs from that of the irrational animals in nothing else than in its being erect and having the hands extended, and having on the face extending from the forehead what is called the nose, through which there is respiration for the living creature; and this shows no other form than that of the cross (Chapter 55).

It is with Justin's understanding of the cross that we truly reach a tertiary or symbolic level of its meaning: to recognize the cross in a sail, plough or human being with extended arms requires us to go beyond the merely visible and engage our "inner eye," or, to use a less loaded term, our capacity for abstract thought.

Viewed against the background of this enriched iconographic picture, the crosses on the *stećak* stones appear to reflect a predominantly mystical rather than mimetic or allegorical understanding of this symbol. The complete absence of the crucifixion has already been commented on and hypothetically linked with a docetist Christology. The Byzantine or Patriarchal cross, or a variation thereof - which may be linked to an Orthodox Christian influence - appears on altogether 8 stones, 4 of which are located on only one necropolis (Vrlika near Knin in modern-day Croatia). Using standard heraldic terminology, the other crosses can roughly be categorized in several groups: Greek cross, Latin cross, solar cross, cross pattée, cross cercelée, cross moline, anthropomorphic cross, ankh, foliate cross, swastika (figure 2) . It must be pointed

out that these categories are only provisional, as there is significant variation within them, as well as numerous overlapping or hybrid cases. Finally, certain forms of the cross on the stones are so idiosyncratic as to fit none of these categories (figure 3).

The first four listed categories - Greek cross, Latin cross, solar cross and cross pattée - are relatively common in virtually every Christian context. They thus tell us little beyond a generic reference to the Christianity of the deceased and/or the environment in which he or she lived and died. More interestingly, even among these relatively conventional types of crosses, there is very little uniformity in style, position²¹³ or compositional role. Thus the crosses are sometimes simply incised, but more frequently carved in flat relief; they can appear as the sole ornamental elements of a stone, but are often combined with other elements or additional crosses; some crosses take up one entire surface, horizontal or vertical, of a *stećak* stone, while others are simply scattered about.

As noted in my discussion of the compositional principles of *stećak* stones in chapter 8, the simplest crosses may have had an apotropaic function. The larger and more elaborate crosses are sometimes adorned with additional elements that may be purely decorative, but could also have carried meanings: thus one Greek cross is inscribed with a circle in its centre (figure 4), one Latin cross is inscribed with circles in its centre and arms (figure 5), while the spaces between the arms of some crosses are decorated with more or less complex geometric designs (figure 6). The most richly ornamented type is the solar cross, occasionally virtually indistinguishable from rosettes with petals, another very frequent type of *stećak* decoration.

A peculiar subtype of the Greek and Latin crosses frequently appearing on the *stećak* has rings or circles located on the edges of their arms.²¹⁴ The size of these rings ranges from the hardly noticeable (figure 7) to the overwhelmingly large, surpassing even the size of the cross

²¹³ However, Wenzel notes that “when represented on a horizontal surface the cross, virtually without exception, is directed towards the west end” (93).

²¹⁴ Wenzel (92) argues that these crosses are derived from the basic shape of the ankh, but this is not fully convincing since in the case of the ankh, the ring completely replaces the upper arm of the cross.

itself (figure 8). In one case (figure 9) the rings are additionally ornamented so as to appear like flowers, while in another (figure 10) the entire cross is surrounded by an additional striped ring, providing the composition with a degree of dynamism and thus emphasizing the organic, vitalist associations of the circular shape. Allowing for a degree of symbolic speculation, the cross with circular edges may thus be interpreted as an extension of the basic mystical symbolism of the cross, the transformation of death into life. A similar meaning can be derived from the apparent visual connection between several examples of crosses with stepped or oval bases, most probably representing the True Cross in Golgotha, and the previously mentioned crosses with “legs,” approaching an anthropomorphic shape: the death on the cross leads to the birth of a new life. Several examples that appear to be derived from the basic shape of the cross with circular edges have been modified to such an extent that they may well be considered as original artistic creations: such are the stones from Bahori near Gacko (figure 11) and Radmilja near Stolac (figure 12).

It is difficult to ascertain the precise meaning of the two similar types of crosses known as cross *cercelée* and cross *moline*. The latter, generally associated with St. Benedict of Nursia, may indicate the lasting influence of Benedictine monasteries believed to have existed on the territories of the later Bosnian state in the early medieval period. However, such a precise iconographic association is not likely, as there are very few “pure” forms of these crosses, while many others represent derivations with one or more oversized (figure 13), additionally decorated (figure 14) or completely transformed (figure 15) fork tips. Furthermore, these two shapes form the foundation for another frequent iconographic type appearing on the *stećak* stones, the foliate cross. According to Wenzel, this type of cross, appearing mainly in the region around the town of Stolac, “has apparently been adapted from woodworking, and was most likely introduced into the area by the import of Siculo-Arabic ivory caskets” (92). However, even if this speculative origin of the motif is correct, it does not tell us why medieval Bosnians would use it on their gravestones. Perhaps, as with the cross with circular edges discussed above, this motif represents a strong visual expression of a mystical understanding of the cross as a divine, life-giving force that triumphs over death.

The same idea, combined with the association of the cross with the Tree of Life, seems to be expressed on a series of anchored crosses at the necropolis of Radimlja near Stolac (figure 16). The symbols are essentially made up of a combination of anchors whose rings are stylized so as to evoke solar associations, enriched by grape clusters growing out of their forked tips and spirals attached to their lower arms. The anchor is one of the oldest Christian symbols, found in the Roman catacombs as early as the late 2nd or 3rd century (for example in the catacomb of Priscilla). Its usage is often linked to Hebrews 6:19-20: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf.” The grape clusters, another wide-spread and ancient Christian symbol, can also be understood through a biblical reference, John 15:1-4:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

The crosses of Radimlja are thus original symbolic creations whose appearance testifies to a high level of abstract conceptual thought. While the crosses do not clinch a definitive conclusion regarding the denominational context in which they were created, the quoted passage from John’s Gospel contains the word καθαροί (catharoi - “pure, clean, unmixed”), and may thus have held special significance for dualists who sometimes went by the name of *Cathar*.

Finally, there are the most unusual types of crosses found on the *stećak* stones: the ankh, the swastika, and the original creations that cannot be categorized. The ankh, an ancient Egyptian symbol of eternal life, while certainly not unknown in Europe, is primarily associated with Coptic Christianity. It may thus reflect unknown connections between the Bosnian Church and the Christian Orient. The swastika is an ancient symbol of the sun that medieval Bosnians could have inherited from both their Illyrian and Slavic ancestors, and fitted to a Christian framework. Among what I have described as uncategorized shapes, note a cross pattée with three horizontal

bars from Gornji Studenci near Ljubuški (figure 17), a similar, but anthropomorphized shape from the same necropolis (figure 18) and several crosses of various shapes mounted on unusual structures (figure 19). This multiplicity of cross forms and the freedom with which they were treated reveals an attitude analogous to the one found in the words of Justin Martyr quoted above. The primary aim of the carvers of crosses in medieval Bosnia (or those who were responsible for their conception) seems not to have been to call up the historical event of Jesus Christ's execution, but rather to evoke a mystical realization of the universal presence and significance of this symbol in this world.

9.2 The Orant

The *orant* - literally "praying figure" - occurs on approximately 35 *stećak* stones, but if some of the formally more or less closely related motifs are taken into account - such as those Wenzel categorized as "figures holding objects or insignia", "figures with one hand raised", "female figures", "male figures", "figures with weapons", "figures in pairs" and "hands and arms" -, the symbolism of the *orant* can be identified in well over 100 cases. It is thus one of the most prominent *stećak* motifs.

The *orant* is one of the most significant artistic motifs of early Christianity, but has very few parallels in the art of medieval Europe. Save for a few exceptions, the *orant* virtually disappears from (European) Christian art after the fifth century. Its interpretation in medieval Bosnia is additionally complicated by the multi-layered and evolving meaning of this motif within the framework of early Christianity itself. Furthermore, the *orant* plays a prominent role in a variety of pre-Christian artistic traditions, as early as pre-historic petroglyphs.

In the period of Early Christianity, the *orant* motif underwent a significant semantic evolution. As Andre Grabar (following T. Klauser) notes, it initially appeared as a pictorial symbol/ideogram, eventually evolved into the posture in which the dead were portrayed in funerary art, only finally to be reserved for saints, particularly the Virgin Mary. The crux of its

significance is indicated by the name conventionally assigned to this motif (the word *orant* is derived from the Latin *orare*-to pray): it is the posture in which early Christians carried out their prayers. Eric C. Smith lists a series of quotes by early Christian authors that testify to this fact.²¹⁵ The most impressive testimony to the symbolism of this posture is contained in the 27th *Ode of Solomon* , an early Christian collection of hymns:

I extended my hands
And hallowed my Lord
for the expansion of my hands
Is His sign.
And my extension
is the upright cross.

Thus here, among early Christians, the primary sign of Christ is the extension of one's hands in the *orant* posture, rather than a material representation of the cross.²¹⁶ Furthermore, as the last two verses show, the *orant* posture should be seen not as a simple *representation* of Christ on the cross, but rather as a mystical merging of the individual and this symbol.²¹⁷

However, several alternative explanations of the *orant* motif in early Christian art have been proposed.²¹⁸ According to one view, the *orant* represents the soul of the deceased, which, given the fact that the Greek word for the soul - *psyche* - is feminine, would explain the curious fact

²¹⁵ In *De Oratone*, Tertullian writes: "We, however, not only raise, but even expand them; and, taking our model from the Lord's passion, even in prayer we confess to Christ." Eusebius notes: "Yo would have seen a youth not yet twenty standing unchained, his arms spread in the form of a cross and his mind at ease, in leisure prayer to the Deity." (Smith 63).

²¹⁶ As the exchange between the Byzantine patriarch and the Paulician leader Gegnesius quoted in the previous section shows, this idea would eventually become associated with "heretics."

²¹⁷ This conception, incidentally, seems the most logical explanation of the motif of the anthropomorphic cross encountered in the previous section, a motif virtually indistinguishable from some of the more abstract *orant* forms that will be discussed below.

²¹⁸ While traditional iconographic studies, such as those of Andre Grabar, saw catacomb images as nothing but "visual counterparts of prayers said in the Office of the Dead" (Early Christian Art 103), and were thus content with simply establishing a connection between the *orant* figure and the praying posture of early Christians, contemporary art historians have pointed out that there is neither sufficient evidence (Jensen 71) nor any inherent reason for seeing any early Christian art in such a restrictive and derivative manner.

that “it was also often painted as a female or with ambiguous gender, regardless of the gender of the character it was meant to depict” (Smith 62). However, Smith further notes that such an interpretation of the motif “is inconsistent with the earlier use of the orant, its insertion into biblical narratives in place of major characters. In those contexts, the soul or *psyche* is not evoked, nor is anyone ascending to heaven or being resurrected” (63).

Alternatively, as noted in numerous studies of early Christian iconography, the Christian *orant* may be derived from the very similar portrayal of *Pietas*, the personification of one of the major traditional Roman virtues, usually translated as “duty”, “religiosity,” “loyalty” or “devotion.” Smith offers an intriguing version of this interpretation, arguing that the Christian adoption of this symbol enabled them to simultaneously simulate and covertly subvert²¹⁹ Roman ideology: “while it depicted and endorsed piety and Piety, it also functioned as a crypto-cross, conveying the posture and attitude of the crucifixion in a way hidden to all but initiates” (64).²²⁰ Smith’s argument may well be extended to the medieval period: in the case of heretics, the reference to the crucifixion may represent yet another level of outward simulation, while the “hidden transcript” visible only to the initiated would be the teaching of the mystical union between the individual and the cross. Furthermore, this model of subversive adoption may be used to explain a whole range of occurrences of putatively pagan symbols in Christianized environments.

Thus we have encountered what may be considered as three different levels of meaning of the *orant* figure: a representation of prayer, the portrayal of the deceased’s soul and the mystical union of the individual with Christ. These three levels can be interpreted as the basic, allegorical and symbolic meanings of the motif, which can thus potentially be perceived in every occurrence of the *orant* motif. However, the evolution of the *orant* in the period of early Christianity can be

²¹⁹ As Smith terms it, adopting the terminology of the anthropologist James C. Scott, the symbol was both a “public transcript” and a “hidden transcript”.

²²⁰ He continues: “Hiding a depiction of the crucifixion within a depiction of a normative Roman image accomplished the colonizing of a Roman discursive space, and characterized the spaces in which it appeared as spaces of resistances and counterhegemony” (Smith 64).

linked with a clear shift of emphasis in the manner of its visual representation. Its original occurrence as a pictorial symbol is most closely compatible with a symbolic interpretation, as its primary reference seems to be an abstract idea known only to those who can decipher it, rather than a specific person or quality. In its second phase, the emphasis shifts towards the allegorical level, as the primary association of the individualized *orant* as the soul of the deceased. Finally, in its last phase, in which the *orant* posture becomes restricted to the portrayal of saints, its meaning is reduced to the prayer or, by extension, to intercession of the portrayed on behalf of those who are observing the image.

The eventual evolution of the *orant's* symbolism and its relationship with the cross can be observed on the mosaic in the apse of the 6th century Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe near Ravenna, one of the outstanding monuments of early Byzantine architecture and art. The mosaic consists of what may be considered as two separate registers (though formally the image displays a unified scene), the upper one showing a symbolic representation of the Transfiguration (indicated by the presence of Moses and Elijah), and the lower one Saint Apollinaris, his hands upraised in prayer position, surrounded by the twelve apostles. One of the most striking characteristics of the mosaic is its combination of different modes of representation: thus Christ is shown symbolically as a jewelled cross (though a medallion in its centre shows his face), the apostles are represented allegorically in the form of sheep, while the representations of Moses, Elijah and Apollinaris are realistic.

Though they remain clearly linked through the vertical juxtaposition of Christ and Apollinaris, the cross and the *orant* have been assigned iconographically distinct functions, the former one representing Christ's divine nature (as revealed in the Transfiguration), and the latter its emulation in this world carried out by saints, in this case in the form of martyrdom. The idea of a mystical union between the Christian believer and Christ has thus been replaced with a strictly defined hierarchy on whose pinnacle stands Jesus, followed by the apostles and saints. Due to the mosaic's position in the basilica's apse, the hierarchy extends further below, to the bishop standing behind the altar and taking up the equivalent position in the course of the Mass.

Rather than establishing a direct union with Christ by personally taking up the *orant* posture, the individual believer is now faced by a complex metaphysical and ecclesiastical structure standing between him and the divinity.

While the presence of a saint such as Apollinaris in the apse of a church is something of an anomaly, the *orant* posture - and thus the role of an intermediary between Christ and the individual believer - is frequently encountered in Eastern medieval representations of the Virgin Mary, the personification of the Church. A very early example with a strong theological and ecclesiastical message is contained in a large illustration of the Ascension in the Rabbula Gospels, completed in Syria in the year 586. While the realistically depicted resurrected Jesus is floating in the sky surrounded by angels, directly below him the *orant* Mary stands gazing at the viewer, thus strongly suggesting the idea that it is she who has taken over the position of Jesus Christ on earth. Meanwhile, the apostles are crowded around Mary, looking and pointing at the sky in bewilderment, clearly taking up a secondary role in the event. The image is truly remarkable from an iconographic point of view, as the presence of the Virgin Mary during the Ascension (Acts 1:9-11) is entirely unscriptural. Its primary function is thus not to illustrate Scripture, but rather to convey the idea of the significance of the Virgin Mary, the personification of the Church. The same idea can be derived from the relatively frequent presence of the *orant* Mary in the apses of churches, such as, for example, at St Sophia in Kiev built in the 1040s.

A rare appearance of the *orant* in medieval Western Europe is the sarcophagus of Agilbert, a late 7th century bishop of Paris. On one of its sides, there is a carved depiction of what is usually considered as the Last Judgement: a seated figure with an aureole, presumably Jesus, is surrounded by a group of *orant* figures, representing either the souls of the righteous, or, alternatively, the resurrected bodies of the elect (Hubert 74). Hubert notes that, while the composition is unique in medieval Western art, it is highly reminiscent of Coptic stelae of the same period (74), leading him to propose a Coptic artist escaping the Arabic invasions as its potential author (77). Regardless of its ultimate origin, however, the sarcophagus of Agilbert demonstrates the survival of an alternative iconographic tradition of the *orant*, not reserved

exclusively for the depiction of saints and the Virgin Mary, but is rather associated with every true Christian.

A related, but distinct tradition of the *orant* can also be identified in the depictions of a series of Old Testament figures, such as Noah, Jonah, Daniel and the three youths in the fiery furnace. The posture may have a scriptural foundation in the rather curious incident during the battle of the Israelites against the Amalekites recorded in Exodus 17:11 - 12:

As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up - one on one side, one on the other - so that his hands remained steady till sunset.

However, judging from its iconographic occurrences, it seems that the *orant* posture is linked to a more general plea for divine intervention when things go badly. While no particular preference for one Old Testament personality surfaces during the period of catacomb art, Daniel in the lion's den remains relatively popular during the early medieval period and beyond. A prominent example can be seen carved on the walls of the 10th century Armenian church of Aghtamar, with Daniel in the *orant* posture flanked by two symmetrical lions obediently sitting by his feet.

A final twist in the development of the *orant* figure took place in the "popular art" of early medieval Europe: in a series of 7th century belt buckles found in the territories of the Frankish kingdoms, Daniel and the two lions have been transformed into abstracted structural elements. Although one might dismiss such artistic phenomena as "mere ornament," the usage of the *orant* Daniel on a belt buckle points to the strong possibility of the belief in its apotropaic powers. The iconographic *orant* can thus be said to have traversed a full circle, returning to its original role of a pictorial symbol, now imbued with semi-magical powers.

The *orantes* appearing on the *stećak* stones are heterogenous. Among the 35 occurrences identified by Wenzel, at least 14 (figure 20) can be classified as either pure pictorial symbols/ ideograms, or, alternatively, as apotropaic abstracted signs. While the latter seems the more likely explanation of an ornamental carving on the upper surface of a stone in Stupa near Neum (figure 21), a particularly striking symbolic design from Donji Jugovići near Gacko (figure 22) certainly seems to express a complex idea. In any case, as mentioned above, the visual or formal analogy between the cross and the *orant* is expressed to such an extent that it occasionally becomes difficult to determine whether a particular design is meant to represent one or the other motif. Of the remaining, more realistic depictions of the *orant*, only one found in Radimlja near Stolac (figure 23) may be an attempt to portray an actual person, while the others are indistinct male or female figures, with only occasional efforts to represent facial features.

In a few cases (figure 24), the *orant* is depicted with what may be described as a primeval expressive force, reminiscent of prehistoric petroglyphs rather than catacomb frescoes. It may thus indicate the non-Christian origins of this motif.²²¹ On one stone in Priluka near Livno (figure 25), the *orant* may not have any religious significance, as he is shown facing another man pointing a bow and arrow at him (although a line carved in the middle of the composition may indicate that the stone's two sides should be considered as separate images). However, a whole row of *orant* depictions leaves no doubt about the posture's religious meaning. In only one case, a pillar located in Bukovik near Arandelovac in modern-day Serbia (figure 26), the iconography is reminiscent of conventional Christian art: an *orant* is standing underneath a large cross, with additional crosses carved on his chest and the space around his head. Despite the lack of an explicitly religious symbol, one stone from Seline near Imotski (figure 27) certainly seems to depict a scene with spiritual significance: an *orant* is flanked by two large stars, while his raised arms form a parallel with a large zig-zag line above his head. One *stećak* from Gvozno near Kalinovik (figure 28) indicates a funerary function of the *orant* posture: a female figure with raised arms is standing below an equestrian procession apparently carrying the deceased. The

²²¹ An *orant* figure can be seen on a Bulgarian 9th/10th century jug representing the “ascension or drinking of the liquid of immortality” (Minaeva, figure 15).

most striking representation of an *orant* on the *stećak* stones can be found in Bronjice near Cavtat (figure 29): a large *orant* figure wearing an unusually shaped mitre is standing below a horizontally placed crescent, with a prominent rosette taking up the space between them.

Judging from these examples, it is difficult to derive a consistent meaning of the *orant* motif on the *stećak* stones. Rather, they seem to reflect a whole range of meanings encountered in the course of this motif's semantic history. Two of its historical levels of significance can be excluded with certainty: there are neither any representations of Old Testament figures, nor any (identifiable) Christian saints or the Virgin Mary in the *orant* posture. Furthermore, a direct link with the ancient Roman concept of *Pietas* is also highly unlikely. What appears more probable is that, analogously to the development encountered in early Christianity, the *orant* was adopted from previous pagan usage and subsequently christianized. Ultimately, it seems to have been associated with the three levels of meaning familiar from the early Christian context: a posture of prayer, the deceased's soul and the mystical union with Christ. It is particularly the last, symbolic level of the *orant's* meaning that held a particular significance for medieval Bosnians, as shown by the relative frequency and rich development of the ideogram merging the *orant* and the cross.

This conclusion, however, leaves open the question of the source of this early Christian concept in medieval Bosnia. A Western European and Catholic origin can be excluded with relative certainty, as, Daniel in the Lion's Den aside, the *orant* motif had all but vanished there. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, as previously noted, the *orant* is particularly associated with the portrayal of the Virgin Mary, but her complete absence from the *stećak* implies that this potential origin is also highly unlikely. Hence the Bosnian Church seems the most likely source of the *orant* motif, though its connection with early Christianity remains a matter of speculation.

But does the *orant*-cross reflect what we know about the theology of the Bosnian Church? One possible answer, Solovjev's proposal of the Paulician understanding of the cross as Jesus with outspread arms, has already been mentioned in the previous section. Another possibility is to link the *orant*-cross to the dualist idea of the *true Christian* (usually referred to as *electus* in

Western Catharism) as the literal carrier of the Holy Spirit. If so, the complex metaphysical and ecclesiastical hierarchy encountered in the discussion of the Basilica of Sant Apollinare becomes superfluous, to be replaced by the idea that every true Christian is equal to the saints. The presence of this conception in medieval Bosnia would explain the “democratization” of a posture normally reserved exclusively for saints.

Besides adopting the “pure”, individual *orant*, however, the carvers of the *stećak* stones seem to have introduced an original iconographic innovation in the treatment of this motif. In 16 compositions (figure 30) we can see an *orant* figure standing between two facing cavalrymen, most often armed with lances. In some instances, the *orant* figure is holding the two horses by their bridles. In a formally related, unique composition carved on a stone from Prokletnica near Konjic, one of the horses has been replaced by a large dragon with a twisted tail (figure 31).

Despite the formal centrality of the *orant* figure in these compositions, most *stećak* scholars have treated it as an iconographically marginal detail that does not significantly alter the images’ meaning. Thus, for example, Wenzel has classified them under the subcategories “two horsemen” and “two horsemen with figures between them.” In this way, the search for the meaning of the compositions is shifted towards the wider category of “horsemen” which includes other subcategories such as “single horsemen,” “horsemen and standing figures,” “two horsemen.” “two horsemen with deer between them” and “groups of more than two horsemen.” Despite the lack of facial features in these images, their primary meaning is usually considered to be a portrayal of the deceased. In many of the carvings showing a single horseman or a horseman with a second standing person holding the horse’s bridle, this suggestion is indeed plausible. However, certain details in some of these images indicate that the meaning of even these relatively simple compositions should not be reduced to the purely secular. Thus one horseman (figure 32) has an aureole around his head, possibly indicating the portrayal of an unknown saint. Numerous others are surrounded by symbols such as spirals (figure 33), crescents (figure 34), rosettes (figure 35), birds (figure 36) and crosses (figure 37), suggesting a religious dimension.

With images whose central motif is an *orant*, however, an allegorical and possibly symbolic level of meaning is beyond doubt. On the one hand, the iconographic history of this motif, as well as the nature of its occurrences on the *stećak* stones analyzed above, clearly shows that in medieval Bosnia the *orant* posture was imbued with a profound religious significance, being virtually synonymous with the cross. On the other hand, there is simply no plausible explanation for the *orant's* presence in these images if they are considered as nothing but mimetic representations of the deceased.

A possible scriptural basis (or least initial inspiration) for this composition can be found in Psalm 32:9: “Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.” Similarly to the adoption of *Pietas* in the ancient Roman context, the composition of the *orant* holding two horses (as well as the one in which one person is holding a horse) may thus represent a subtle subversion of medieval chivalric values. The latter are strongly expressed by the mounted warrior, a representative of the military elite of medieval society. While the warrior seems in control of the horse and his powerful weapon, it is ultimately the person holding the bridle who is in control of both him and his horse.

In the case of the *orant* standing between two horseman, he may be seen in a more explicit role, actively preventing a confrontation. On an allegorical level, the composition can thus be read as a visual expression of the strong political and diplomatic role the Church(es) played in the preservation of medieval Bosnian society. In contrast to analogous medieval images found in the contexts of both Orthodox Christian and Catholic art, which strongly express submission to a hierarchy at whose pinnacle stand Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, followed by the pope/patriarch and emperor, the *orant* with the horsemen suggests a harmonious unity of equal partners submitting to a higher principle.

Following a similar line of reasoning, symbolic meaning can be derived from this motif. Instead of distinct personalities, the individual figures can be read as representations of particular

ideas or concepts. The basic symbolic message would thus be the notion that the Christian faith is what distinguishes man from the animal, that the belief in the message of Jesus Christ can harness the violent and conflictual nature of human beings. This message is suggested particularly strongly by a stone from Ljubinje, where an *orant* with an aureole around his head is holding two riderless horses.

However, a more profound level of symbolic significance is suggested by the composition from Prokletnica mentioned above (figure 32), where one of the mounted warriors has been replaced by a dragon. Without the *orant* in the middle, the image could be interpreted as a widespread Christian artistic motif, St. George killing the dragon, an allegorical representation of the triumph of good over evil. However, the insertion of the *orant* between the two conflicting sides turns it into a puzzling subversion of this iconographic motif. A possible explanation is that the image represents a symbolic expression of the dualistic theology of the Bosnian Church: the mission of Christianity is not a violent destruction of evil in this world, but rather the achievement of *apocatastasis*, an overcoming of all dualities and restitution of its original state. If this interpretation is correct, the Prokletnica stone represents the most explicit visual expression of the theology of the Bosnian Church.

9.3 The hand

A particularly iconic *stećak* motif is a human figure with an oversized raised hand.²²² It occurs on altogether 10 stones, five of which can be found on a single necropolis, Radimlja near Stolac (figure 38). In eight of those ten cases the figure raises its right hand, though it should be noted that, once again, each one of its occurrences is (at least) slightly different. Two additional iconographic attributes of this figure, both occurring on the same four stones, are a circular, possibly solar shape located just above the space between the figure's thumb and index finger, and a bow and arrow "floating" above its left shoulder. Finally, in two cases the figure is accompanied by a second, much smaller figure on its side, one of them also holding its right hand raised.²²³

In nine of its ten occurrences, the figure constitutes a dominant iconographic element, taking up almost an entire frontal side of a *stećak*, while in only one case it could be considered as a schematic image-sign. In four cases (figure 39), there is a clear attempt to represent facial features, implying that one level of the image's meaning is a mimetic representation of the deceased. In three other cases (figure 40), the head is represented in a specific schematic kind, either in the shape of two concentric circles, or as a circle surrounded by a striped band, possibly representing an aureole.

In order to identify iconographic precedents of this motif, it is necessary to go back to the period of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. On several 4th and 5th century sarcophagi and apse mosaics, we can see a depiction of Christ with a raised right hand, passing a scroll to one of the figures surrounding him with his left. The depicted motif is the *Traditio Legis*, Christ handing over the Law, i.e. the New Testament, to St. Peter. Despite the analogy with Christ's posture,

²²² Although it is rather infrequent, in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina the oversized right hand is the most widely known *stećak* motif.

²²³ This figure is usually interpreted as the representation of a child. Another possibility is that, analogously to early Christians (Jensen 177), the newly baptized were represented as infants. In this case, the composition would have to be ascribed to adherents of the Bosnian Church, who practiced adult baptism.

however, it is not likely that this motif directly influenced the iconography of the *stećak* stones: there is no indication that the latter represents Christ or is in any way associated with the idea of the transmission of law.

A distinct occurrence of this posture can be identified on a mosaic in the 7th century Hagios Demetrios church in Thessaloniki: although he is usually depicted in military garb, here we can see St Demetrios, one of the most important Orthodox Christian military saints, with a raised right hand, surrounded by children. Although this image is formally closer to the *stećak* stones, St. Demetrios raises his hand in a much more subtle and reserved manner, thus lacking the *stećak* motif's expressive gestural power.

The posture of the raised right hand seems to have been particularly important in the arts of the medieval Caucasus. It can be seen on a Georgian flat relief on the 9th century church of Opiza representing either the Old Testament prophet David or the Georgian king David II, who is simultaneously pointing towards a model of the church with his left. On a 10th or 11th century silver-gilt panel from Sagalosheni, Christ is depicted with a raised right hand in the moment of his baptism in the river Jordan.²²⁴ Finally, an almost identical iconographic precedent of the figure with the raised hand can be found on a carving on the 10th century Armenian Church of the Holy Apostles in the city of Kars, where it is used to depict one of the apostles.

While its iconographic precedents cannot reveal this motif's full meaning in the context of *stećak* art, they strongly suggest the existence of a spiritual level of significance. This assumption is further indicated by the visual association between the figure's raised hand and the circular shape which, as shown above, held a particular significance in the art of the *stećak*, being frequently associated with the cross. The purely religious character of the image, however, initially seems to be contradicted by the presence of the bow and arrow, which can be read as the figure's occupational markers, and could thus indicate a warrior's grave. The apparent

²²⁴ Incidentally, on a 1967 monument in the capital Tbilisi, the 5th century Georgian king Vahtang Gorgasali is depicted riding a horse and holding up his right hand.

contradiction can be resolved if the image is read symbolically: as Georg Wild notes, the weapons can be interpreted as a reference to the armour of God mentioned in Ephesians 6:11-17: “Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (...).” Wild further argues that the circular shape represents the “crown of righteousness” mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:8 and frequently depicted in early Christian art as a reward given by Jesus Christ to martyrs and saints (26). However, a simpler, more allegorical reading of the image is also possible: the figure may indeed represent the portrait of a former warrior, who has now lain down his weapon and abandoned his soul to God.

Incidentally, Ephesians 6 represents one of the central scriptural arguments for the dualist teaching according to which the material world is governed by the devil, mentioning as it does both the “powers of this dark world” and the “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Of course, this hypothetical connection between the image of the bow and arrow, a biblical passage, and its interpretation by adherents of dualist movements is not sufficient to establish its definitive meaning, but it shows that an interpretation of this type certainly is possible.²²⁵

In order to gain a more profound understanding of this motif, however, it is necessary to look into the significance of what is arguably its most striking iconographic attribute: the exaggerated

²²⁵ In an important and still widely quoted article entitled “The cultural character of the Radimlja necropolis,” the historian Marko Vego argued that this necropolis was most certainly not created by adherents of what he described as neo-Manichaean movements. His first argument is based on several inscriptions found on the Radimlja necropolis, mentioning members of the feudal family Miloradović. Quoting a document according to which one member of the Miloradović family swore an oath using the Bible, Vego argues that this act proves that no member of the Miloradović family could have been an adherent of a dualist movement (1973, 325). However, as argued in chapter V, the ban on oaths applied only to *true Christians*, and not all supporters of the Bosnian Church. Vego’s main argument, however, is based on canon 12 of the council of Braga held in the year 563, which states “whoever claims that the depiction of the human body is the devil’s act, and that the conception in female bodies is caused by demons and therefor does not believe in bodily resurrection, as taught by Mani and Priscillian - may he be cursed” (1973, 313). Vego concludes: “Hence all characters and portraits on the stećak or stone and other monuments belong to Christians of one or the other rite. Hence the Radmilja human figures on the stećak and crosses can be neither heretical, nor Bogomil or Pataren” (1973, 313). However, Vego’s argument is completely unfounded. Without a critical evaluation, the decrees of the council of Braga cannot be taken as representative of the Manichaean attitude to art, let alone that of the Bogomils, Patarens or adherents of the Bosnian Church.

dimension of the raised hand. This characteristic can also be observed on some of the *orants* analyzed in the previous section, as well as many of its iconographic precedents from the period of early Christian catacomb art (Grabar 1968, 101). Furthermore, the oversized hand can be found on several reliefs of medieval Georgia, such as the 11th century Ascension of Christ from the walls of the Nikortsminda Cathedral (on both Christ and the angels carrying him) and the donor portrait on the 9th century Opiza church discussed above (on Christ, king Ashot II presenting a model of the church, and king David raising his right hand and pointing towards the model with his left). Somewhat less pronounced, this iconographic feature can also be identified on the angels depicted on Lombard reliefs such as the 8th century altar of King Ratchis in Cividale.

The basic guideline for the interpretation of this motif is one of the foundational principles of non-representational or symbolic art: the size of an object or person is primarily a reflection of its significance, rather than physical dimension. In the case of the *stećak* figure with the raised oversized hand, it can be thus be established that its primary purpose is neither the realistic portrayal of the deceased, nor the expression of its relationship with the bow and arrow. Based on its iconographic precedents and the presence of the circular shape next to the figure's hand, it can further be assumed with relative certainty that the gesture indicates a relationship with the sacred. As the precise meaning of this gesture in the context of medieval Bosnia is unknown, however, any further specification of its meaning will inevitably be based on speculation.

Jensen points out that in ancient Roman art, it is the right hand that clasps the hand of God in the ascending emperor image (104). More intriguingly, in his discussion of Manichaeism Stoyanov notes that “the Living Spirit (Mithra) released the Primal Man (Ohrmazd) by grasping his right hand to raise him from the dark bondage and the ritual greeting with the right hand, symbolizing the mystery of salvation from the Darkness, was to become a Manichaean custom” (109). Although it is highly unlikely that this Manichaean custom was interpreted exactly in the same manner in late medieval Bosnia, the gesture may well have carried a similarly profound symbolic significance.

A closely related and more frequent iconographic motif appearing on the *stećak* is the single hand or arm, the latter often depicted bent in the elbow and with spread-out fingers, thus suggesting its function as a metonymy for the image of a human figure with a raised hand. The latter suggestion, as well as the motif's relationship with the orant, is confirmed by a stone from Lovreč near Imotski (figure 42), showing a cross whose right arm has been transformed into a raised human hand. Somewhat surprisingly, a combination of two arms suggesting an *orant* posture appears in only two cases. One of them, carved onto the frontal side of a stone from Varošiste near Rogatica (figure 43), represents a highly original as well as aesthetically successful composition. Three vertical stripes emerge from a base flanked by two large spirals, while two symmetrical arms with spread out hands seem to grow out of the stripes towards the top of the stone. Two peculiar ornaments, locally referred to as “apples”, essentially protruding hemispheres, are carved into the spaces between the two hands' thumbs and index fingers.

The composition is remarkable for several reasons. Firstly, it shows that an ornament which may be considered purely decorative, the three stripes dividing the stone into two halves, can carry a semantic value, as the arms are depicted as literally growing out of them. Secondly, it shows that the “apple” ornament, a frequent *stećak* motif, has a similar meaning as the circular shape considered above, indicating the divine power the open hand communicates with. Finally, the composition represents one of the most outstanding examples of the use of symmetry as a formal principle of *stećak* design.

The single hand or arm is rarely depicted in isolation. It usually appears in combination with other symbols or objects. In only one case, the hand has been transformed into a schematic image-sign, consisting of a semi-circle and four straight lines (figure 44). In most of its other appearances, the realistic hand or arm is depicted in combination with symbols familiar from other *stećak* designs, most frequently the crescent, followed by crosses, rosettes and striped circular shapes, with single examples of combinations with a circle dance (figure 45), a horse (figure 46) and a stag hunt (figure 47). In several instances, the arm or hand emerges either from

a vertical stripe as in the image discussed above (figure 48), a rosette (figure 49) or a spiral (figure 50). While the majority of arms appear to be pointing upwards, several exceptions (figure 51) show that it is not a universal compositional rule. In three cases (figure 52), we can see a hand holding a T-shaped walking stick. A stele-shaped *stećak* from Humsko near Foča (figure 53) depicts a male human figure holding a T-shaped walking stick in one hand and a book in the other, the accompanying inscription identifying him as *gost* Milutin, a dignitary of the Bosnian Church. The stick can thus be identified as a possible attribute of the dignitaries of the Bosnian Church and linked to itinerancy as one of the defining features of members of dualist Christian movements.²²⁶

Besides religious symbols, however, the arm and hand can frequently be seen depicted in combination with, or holding a weapon, most frequently a sword and shield, and occasionally a bow and arrow or lance. In only one instance, the arm holding a sword or, more precisely, a dagger, is shown engaged in combat, about to pierce a dog-like creature (figure 55). In several other cases, however, one or several of the familiar symbols (crescent, cross, rosette) are depicted next to the hand holding a weapon (figure 56).

The significance of this motif must be sought in relation to the very frequent depiction of weapons and shields without any accompanying human figure or arm and hand occurring in well over 200 instances, and thus representing one of the most wide-spread *stećak* motifs. Similarly to the bow and arrow discussed above, the weapons may be symbolically related to the scriptural “armour of God.” However, considering the fact that due to their socio-economic position, a significant part of the *stećak* stones must have been erected by knights (which is further

²²⁶ In this context, three unique designs from the regions around Imotski and Sinj (modern-day Croatia) must be mentioned: the raised hand of a human figure (in one case an aureole) has either been transformed into or is holding a huge ornamented cross (figure 54). Formally, the image is reminiscent of the Lombard Altar Slab of Magister Ursus in San Pietro Ferentillo from the year 740. Iconographically, it indicates a much greater degree of reverence for the cross than other *stećak* designs. Located as they are in the western-most regions of the territory on which the *stećak* can be found (in the immediate hinterland of the Dalmatian coast), the designs may have been created in a Catholic environment, or at least one significantly influenced by Catholicism.

confirmed by some of the inscriptions), the depiction of weapons is most probably related to the lifetime status or occupation or of the deceased.

However, the presence of religious symbols accompanying the depiction of weapons shows that the composition's meaning cannot be reduced to a simple expression of the deceased's social status. The free combination of putatively "religious" and "secular" motifs rather shows that such a categorical division does not reflect the world-view of the persons responsible for the conception of *stećak* ornaments. The battles led under the sign of the crescent, cross or rosette seem to have been considered, or at least projected as, just wars, carried out under the guidance of a divine power. The presence of the arm and hand, whose analogy with the *orant* gesture cannot have escaped the attentive medieval observer, only served to underline this message. Such a conception seems to be confirmed by two similar original compositions on the sides of a stone from Cernica near Gacko (figure 57) and Lokvičići near Imotski (figure 58). On the first one, a human figure is shown with raised arms, holding an oversized sword in one hand and a bird in the other. Below him a strange, possibly phantasmic animal with a dragon-like tail lies inverted, probably indicating its death. Directly above the human figure's head, a large crescent flanked by two rosettes seems to indicate the presence of a divine force. In the second composition, the animal has been replaced by a cross and the bird with a shield, while the crescent is turned downwards and the human figure appears even more like in a position of prayer rather than combat. In both compositions, we can read a symbolic transformation of death (and possibly, in the case of the animal, evil), through human life, up towards heaven. The human figure in the middle is subject to both domains, being complicit with the forces of death in this world, but simultaneously praying for the eternal life of the world to come.

The arm and hand, an apparently simple motif, thus emerges as a multilayered symbol whose semantic complexity can be compared to the cross and the *orant*. On the most basic level, it may represent a metonymic portrayal of the deceased person, holding an object that defines his social status during his lifetime. However, the regular appearance of the arm and hand without any object indicates that this motif carries a meaning in itself, its frequent combination with religious

symbols suggesting a spiritual level of significance. This assumption becomes more clearly pronounced in the relatively rare, but highly expressive motif of the human figure with a raised oversized hand, standing in close proximity to a circular symbol. The truly symbolic level of this motif's significance has only been indicated in this discussion: it only emerges from a reflective meditation upon the significance of the hand for the human being, being simultaneously the means through which he can inflict death and destruction upon other living beings and establish a communication with the divine.

It is difficult to definitively establish the denominational association of the arm and hand. While I have mainly considered its possible meanings within the framework of the theology of the Bosnian Church, there is nothing inherently heterodox contained in this symbol. Two factors, however, speak strongly in favour of the primary association of the arm and hand with the Bosnian Church. Firstly, the gesture of the raised arm and hand has more precedents in early Christianity and the early medieval Caucasus, rather than Byzantium or Catholic Western Europe, suggesting a stream of influence that is not associated with the orthodox churches. Secondly, the cross represents just one of several religious symbols regularly accompanying this symbol (and not the most frequent one), suggesting that it was used in the context of a very specific conception of Christianity.

9.4 Preliminary Conclusions

The analysis of three of the most prominent *stećak* symbols - the cross, the orant, and the hand - allows for some preliminary conclusions. In all three cases, we are dealing with motifs for which precedents can be identified in the history of Christian art. While the cross has continued to play the role of the most significant Christian symbol in the period in which the *stećak* stones were constructed, however, the hand and particularly the orant appear like relics from an otherwise largely forgotten iconographic past. In the astounding diversity of forms in which it appears on the *stećak*, even the cross strongly suggests a surprising connection between the arts

of medieval Bosnia and the Christianity of the catacombs, late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

In geographical terms, the origins of *stećak* iconography seem to lie closer to the frequently ignored artistic traditions of the Christian eastern Mediterranean and Caucasus, rather than, as might be expected, its contemporary counterparts in the Catholic West and Orthodox East. Even in cases in which direct parallels with Western Europe can be identified, it appears more probable that they are based on shared origins in the East rather than a direct mutual influence. Taking into account the fact that there are no significant traditions of early Christian art on the territory of medieval Bosnia and the wider region, the iconographic evidence thus suggests that the primary influence on the emergence of *stećak* art was a missionary activity originating in a movement with strong links to early Christianity.

The most striking characteristic of *stećak* iconography is not the mystery of its origins, but rather the freedom with which the individual motifs and symbols were treated. This characteristic has led many scholars to the mistaken conclusion that the creators of *stećak* reliefs were ignorant rustics who did not understand the true significance of the symbols they were using. However, a closer analysis shows that there certainly is a method in the ‘madness.’ Most obviously, this method is evident in the meticulous avoidance of depictions of the crucifixion, despite the inclusion of an extremely diverse variety of cross forms. Furthermore, despite the occasionally careless distribution of symbols on the stones’ surfaces, suggesting their primarily apotropaic function, the more complex compositions testify to the significant level of conceptual planning that preceded their execution.

Taking these factors into account, it becomes clear that the liberal treatment of motifs was based on a conscious decision adopted by its creators. My suggestion is that the main reason for this decision was the desire to emphasize the symbolic level of the motifs’ meaning. In contrast to both the art of the icon, whose success was measured by its proximity to the prototype, and the art of (post-)Renaissance Europe, which aimed to provide a faithful reproduction of nature, the

art of the *stećak* should thus be evaluated on its own terms, as an attempt to communicate more or less complex symbolic conceptions. These conceptions cannot necessarily be translated into formal theological statements, but should rather be seen as an element of a wider world-view associated with the Christianity of the Bosnian Church.

A closer analysis of the three motifs considered in this chapter shows that they cannot be understood in the framework of the classical linguistic conception sign-signified. In fact, it is impossible to draw a precise dividing line between them: the cross is transformed into an orant, the orant's arms and hands are detached from the body to become independent symbols, while hands grow out of some crosses' arms. The basic motivation behind these metamorphoses seems to be the idea that the three symbols are fundamentally interchangeable, that they ultimately convey the same concept. I have suggested that this concept is the same one that has led to the adoption of the orant as the basic symbol of early Christianity: through this posture, the believer can mystically become one with Christ.

However, this suggestion does not imply that the meaning of the three motifs is exhausted in this mystical conception. Thus the various shapes and transformations of the cross additionally imply a more abstract understanding of this symbol, that does not reduce it to a tool of Christ's execution, but rather points towards its universal presence in the material world. In combination with equestrian knights, the orant is transformed from a purely religious into a political symbol, indicating the wider role of the Church in Bosnia's medieval society. To an even greater extent, the motif of the arm and hand appear detached from a primarily spiritual significance, being frequently combined with a sword as a possible occupational marker of the deceased.

As noted earlier, the different conceptions of the motifs' meanings should be viewed as complimentary rather than contradictory. My discussion of the theory of three levels of artistic meaning showed that the interpretation of a symbol depended on the viewers' own hermeneutic framework, or his or her acquaintance with different levels of esoteric knowledge. Furthermore,

following Smith's theory of the *orant* among early Christians, the symbols can be viewed as covert subversions of the religious values promoted by the orthodox churches.

However, it should be emphasized that there is nothing "heretical" or "dualist" in the symbols discussed here themselves. Rather, what I propose is that their usage is more comprehensible within an interpretative framework associated with the theology of the Bosnian Church. This, in turn, further suggests that their adoption and usage in medieval Bosnia should primarily be linked to the Bosnian Church and its links with an alternative conception of Christianity transmitted through the dualist current.

CHAPTER 10 THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE STEĆAK STONES - PART 2

This cross of Light is sometimes called logos by me for your sakes, sometimes Mind, sometimes Jesus, Sometimes Christ, Sometimes a door, sometimes a way, sometimes bread, sometimes seed, sometimes resurrection, sometimes Son, sometimes Father, sometimes Spirit, sometimes Life, sometimes Truth, Sometimes Pistis (Faith), sometimes Charis (grace); and so is it called for mans sake.

Acts of John

While the previous chapter dealt with three symbols that are relatively familiar in the wider context of Christian art, this is not the case with most of the motifs considered here: the circle dance, the stag hunt, the anthropomorphic niche, the spiral, the ring and the crescent have played a marginal role in Christian iconography at best. The only two exceptions are the fleur-de-lis and the rosette, two prominent elements of medieval Christian art, whose significance in the Bosnian context nevertheless remains difficult to decipher.

Similarly to the cross, the stag hunt motif represents a major moot point in *stećak* scholarship, frequently being used as a major piece of evidence in support of the thesis that the carvings are of a predominantly mimetic and secular nature. In accordance with my methodology, I accept that on the most basic level, the stag hunt motif is indeed a mimetic representation of the activities of the medieval Bosnian aristocracy. However, the very long pre-Christian iconographic history of this motif strongly suggests that its meaning is not exhausted in a naturalistic interpretation. An analysis of this history reveals the multidimensional nature of the stag's symbolism, incorporating a pre-historic, pagan, as well as a specifically Christian layer. An awareness of these levels of the stag's symbolism in medieval Bosnia is strongly suggested by the evidence provided by the iconography found on the *stećak* stones. I propose that the proliferation of this symbol in medieval Bosnia can best be understood in the context of the theology of the Bosnian Church and its possible links with the arts of the Caucasus.

The circle dance is the most original iconographic invention of medieval Bosnian artists, having no direct precedents in the history of Christian art, or indeed any other artistic tradition. My interpretation of this motif is based primarily on the motif's mimetic link with ritual dances performed on grave sites, attested in local and other folkloric traditions around the world, as well as numerous records of the customs of early and medieval Christians. However, this hypothetical connection between the ritual behaviour and funerary artistic motifs of medieval Bosnia does not answer the question of their significance and symbolism. A closer analysis of the iconography of the circle dance on the *stećak* stones reveals that it cannot be ascribed a single and clear meaning. On the one hand, it is linked to the idea of righteous souls dwelling in paradise, as well as the performance of sacred rituals in this world on the other. My suggestion is that the motif's significance is to be sought precisely in the attempt to establish a contact between the dead and living, or, in a more general sense, between the terrestrial and heavenly worlds, thus explaining its frequent depiction on gravestones.

The anthropomorphic niche is an intriguing symbol which is frequently classified under the wider category of 'architectural motifs' and not assigned any particular significance. While its origin undoubtedly lies in the shape of the empty space formed by two columns and an architrave, on the *stećak* stones the anthropomorphic niche undergoes a remarkable transformation, evolving into a symbol in its own right, completely detached from its architectural origin. The indication of the motif's significance provided by the iconographic evidence is given further support by its prominence in as diverse geo-historic contexts as Visigothic Spain, medieval Armenia and early modern Dagestan. While it is difficult to assign a definitive meaning to this motif, I propose several different readings based on its iconographic history as well as its possible relationship to the theology of the Bosnian Church. Regardless of the semantic significance of the anthropomorphic niche, it must be considered as another one of the more original aesthetic elements of *stećak* design.

Judging by the frequency of their depiction and the position they are assigned in *stećak* compositions, the spiral, ring and crescent can be classified as some of its most significant motifs, rivalling even the position of the cross. While all three symbols play a prominent role in a variety of pre-Christian and pre-historic cultures, it is difficult to decipher their precise meaning in the context of Bosnian medieval art. I have limited my attempts at interpretation to some suggestions based on the significance of these symbols in other contexts, as well as some examples of the ways in which they were interpreted by early and medieval Christians. Furthermore, I have attempted to assign them a role in the wider symbolic picture of medieval Bosnian Christianity derived from the interpretation of previous motifs. One element connecting these three symbols is their frequent association with femininity, which may be linked to the complete absence of explicit Marian symbolism on the *stećak* stones. Depending on the interpretative framework we adopt, they could thus be either read as allegorical depictions of the Virgin Mary, or, alternatively, in accordance with dualist theology, the feminine, receptive element in every true Christian.

Finally, in the framework of medieval European art, the fleur-de-lis and the rosette are the most conventional symbols found on the *stećak* stones. Ironically, their omnipresence hinders their understanding on a symbolic level, since they are usually assumed to have a purely decorative and/or heraldic function. However, the metamorphoses that these two symbols undergo on the *stećak* stones suggest that they cannot be reduced to a mere ornament or sign of political belonging. In that respect, the fleur-de-lis can be compared to the spiral, ring and crescent, being frequently associated with the Virgin Mary, yet also having a more profound symbolic significance associated with the presence of divinity in the material world. The rosette is a polyvalent symbol being associated with the sun, stars and flowers, elements of the natural world that are, in turn, frequently seen as reflections of divinity in the material world. Ultimately, both symbols are closely linked to the association of light and divinity, a very prominent idea in dualist as well as orthodox Christianity.

10.1 The Circle Dance

The motif of the circle dance - locally referred to as *kolo*²²⁷ - is depicted on 122 *stećak* stones, with an additional 16 instances of two human figures standing in a similar position (figure 1). Wenzel divides them into the categories *female dancers*, *male dancers* and *male and female dancers*, although no obvious significance seems to be attached to the dancers' gender. There is no regularity in the number of depicted dancers, ranging from two to twelve. In almost all instances, the dancers are holding their arms in an upright position, thus calling to mind their formal analogy with the orant, although there are several exceptions to this compositional rule (figure 2). The dancers are always depicted in a rather schematic fashion, with no attempts to represent their facial features, strongly suggesting that their semantic role is allegorical or symbolic rather than mimetic. In at least four instances (figure 3), the *kolo* dancers have been transformed into abstract image signs, in the former two into anthropomorphic shapes whose heads are replaced by floral motifs, and in the latter two into the motif of the *anthropomorphic niche* that will be treated in a separate section.

The *kolo* depiction is reminiscent of a very popular late medieval and early modern European artistic motif: the *danse macabre* or dance of death. The Bosnian scholar Dubravko Lovrenović suggests that “medieval Bosnia could have become familiar with this theme of Franciscan inspiration primarily through Franciscan influence, while the role of Dubrovnik merchants and German Saxon miners in its transmission should not be excluded either” (74). However, Lovrenović provides no particular evidence for this argument, or the claim that the *danse macabre* is a theme of “Franciscan inspiration.”

²²⁷ Wenzel questions the appropriateness of this term, claiming that “it is not entirely satisfactory, because the figure of on the *stećci* are never represented in a circular formation, but in a row” (Wenzel 1961, 98). However, in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina and the wider region, all dances involving multiple participants holding hands are referred to as *kolo*, thus justifying the continuing usage of this term.

In fact, the parallels between the *kolo* and the *danse macabre* are only partial: there is no trace of the most striking element of the *danse macabre*, the participation of skeletons in the dance, on the *stećak* stones. Furthermore, the earliest known depiction of the *danse macabre*, which could be found in the cemetery of the Parisian Church of the Holy Innocents, dates to the year 1425, while the first example from Bosnia's closer vicinity was painted in the Istrian town of Beram in the year 1471. Assuming that the majority of the decorated *stećak* stones were erected in the 14th and 15th centuries, it seems highly unlikely (if not impossible) that the *kolo* motif was directly influenced by the Western European *danse macabre*.

The link between the *kolo* and the *danse macabre* is rather constituted by their probable shared origin, which is to be found in the ancient and widespread custom of performing dances during funerary rituals. In her monographic treatment of the *danse macabre* motif in Western European art, Elina Gertsman notes that

since its inception, Christianity has embraced the close connections between death and dancing, but these have always been controversial and necessarily dichotomous. For instance, the devout performed dances on martyrs' graves as early as the fourth century. Such dancing was construed as a celebration of death, as opposed to mourning for the departed, since, for the martyrs, the day of their demise marked their rebirth in heaven" (53).²²⁸

Indeed, the depictions of the *kolo* dance on the *stećak* stones seem to call to mind a *celebration of death* rather than the macabre associations of its Western European counterpart. However, Gertsman adds that, notwithstanding their popularity and pious associations, the Church had tried to suppress gravesite dances since at least the fourth century (61), with a "veritable explosion" of such decrees in the Latin West in the course of the 13th and 14th

²²⁸ In a footnote to this remark, Gertsman adds that "Pagan Slavonic dances included wild leaping on the graves to honour the underworld, dances devoid of solemnity or sorrow but rather 'wild and abandoned', with masks and profane gestures; see P. Kemp, *Healing Ritual; Studies in the Technique and Tradition of the Southern Slavs*, London: Faber and Faber, 1935".

centuries.²²⁹ The proliferation of this motif in medieval Bosnia in precisely this period thus strongly suggests that it did not occur under the auspices of the Catholic Church, but rather, once again, through an unclear connection with the traditions of early Christianity.

A rare medieval Western European appearance of an artistic motif that is reminiscent of the *kolo* - although its figures do not hold hands, and would thus be more accurately described as a row of orants - can be found on the tomb of the Venetian Doge Marino Morosini (governed 1249 - 1253). The tomb's frontal side displays a sculpted composition consisting of two registers. The upper one shows Christ in the *traditio legis*, submitting the law to the 12 apostles gathered around him. On the lower register, we can see the Virgin Mary in an *orant* posture, surrounded by five further unidentified *orant* figures.

In her monographic study of the tombs of the doges of Venice, the art historian Debra Pincus offers a primarily political interpretation of this composition, arguing that it represents a strong affirmation of the Venetian political structure of this period, which stressed the values of a unified *civitas* and the corporate diffusion of authority (Pincus 49). Thus, the surprising usage of the early Christian *orant* motif in this context can be linked to the fact that at this time, Constantinople was still under Catholic control after its Venetian-led conquest in the Fourth Crusade, bringing hopes for a newly unified Christian world under Venetian hegemony. Furthermore, Christ's egalitarian transmission of the law in the upper register - standing in contrast to the Roman emphasis on the monarchic primacy of Peter - is emulated here on earth by the orants surrounding Mary, allegorically expressing the Doge's mode of governance. The row of orants, a motif that is formally very similar to the *kolo*, can thus also be read as a wider allegory for the idea of a non-hierarchical social or political structure.

²²⁹ "In 1212 or 1213, the Council of Paris embraced the Archbishop of Paris Eudes of Sully's 1208 prohibition of dancing in the churches, cemeteries, and processions. Linked to the commemoration of death, dancing continued to gain popularity throughout the Latin West, and the thirteenth century saw a veritable explosion of such decrees by a variety of synods and councils held throughout France, Italy, Germany, and Hungary. By the 14th century the practice had spread even further: now not only the simple folk but also the clergy and council members themselves were cautioned against such unlawful practices" (Gertsman 55).

A specific scriptural, though non-canonical inspiration for the circle dance in a Christian context can be found in a hymn contained in the Acts of John, entitled “The Round Dance of the Cross” (Barnstone and Meyer 371 - 375). The hymn is preceded by the remark that “Jesus told us to form a circle and hold each other’s hand, and he himself stood in the middle and said, Respond to me with ‘Amen’”, Barnstone and Meyer noting further that it contains “instructions for liturgical dance to accompany the hymn” (371). The hymn consists of a series of gnomic and paradoxical pronouncement by Jesus, such as “I will be released and I will release”, “I will be wounded and I will wound” and “I will be born and I will bear,” Barnstone and Meyer suggesting that it “illustrates features familiar from gnostic texts; some scholars believe it may constitute a gnostic ritual in song and dance” (371). In the final part of the hymn, Jesus explains the mystical significance of the dance: “If you respond to my dance, see yourself in me as I speak, and if you have seen what I do, keep silent about my mysteries. You who dance, understand what I do, for yours is this human passion I am to suffer” (374). The round dance is thus associated with a “secret knowledge” shared only with the closest circle of initiates. In the Acts of John, “The Round Dance of the Cross” is followed by a section named “Revelation of the Mystery of the Cross,” which can be read as a succinct expression of docetic Christology and a justification of the refusal to venerate the material cross.²³⁰

The brief analysis of the iconographic history of the *kolo* and related motifs has thus revealed three possible levels of its meaning: a mimetic representation of a funerary ritual dance, an

²³⁰ In the very moment of his crucifixion, Jesus appears to John in a cave, showing him “a cross of light firmly fixed” with “the Lord himself above the cross, having no shape but only a kind of voice; yet not that voice that we knew, but one that was sweet and gentle and truly the voice of God”. The voice tells John that “this cross of Light is sometimes called logos by me for your sakes, sometimes Mind, sometimes Jesus, Sometimes Christ, Sometimes a door, sometimes a way, sometimes bread, sometimes seed, sometimes resurrection, sometimes Son, sometimes Father, sometimes Spirit, sometimes Life, sometimes Truth, Sometimes Pistis (Faith), sometimes Charis (grace); and so is it called for mans sake." It continues: “But what it truly is, as known in itself and spoken to us, is this; It is the distinction of all things; and the strong uplifting of what is firmly fixed out of what is unstable, and the harmony of Wisdom, being Wisdom in harmony. But there are places on the right and on the left, Powers, Authorities, Principalities and demons, threatenings,passions,devils,Satan, and the inferior root from which the nature of transient things proceeded. This cross then is that which has united all things by the word and which has separated off what is transitory and inferior, which has also compacted things into one. But this is not that wooden cross which you shall see when you go down from here; nor am I the man who is upon that cross. I whom now you do not see but only hear my voice. I was taken to be what I am not, I who am not what for many others I was; but what they will say of me is mean and unworthy of me. Since then the place of my rest is neither to be seen nor told, much more shall I, the Lord of this place, be neither seen nor told.”

allegorical representation of an egalitarian social system, and a mystical expression of a secret *gnosis* intended for the spiritual elite. The meanings of the *circle dance* on the *stećak* can be further deduced from some of the iconographic attributes occasionally accompanying this motif: thus some dancers are holding trefoil leaves or crosses in their hands, while in several instances the figure leading the *kolo* holds either a sword or a ring. In two cases (figure 4), the *kolo* is led by a person riding a stag. Additionally, an allegorical or symbolic function of the *kolo* is suggested by the fact that it frequently constitutes an element of a composition made up of two or more registers, often taking up the uppermost position.

The majority of *stećak* scholars have attempted to explain the *kolo* motif by linking its depiction to the hypothetical performances of such dances in the course of funerary rituals performed in medieval Bosnia. Thus Bešlagić (1954, 182) quotes a series of former Yugoslav scholars who have written about the widespread custom of performing the *kolo* among Southern Slavs as well as Illyrians. More specifically, Cvjetko Rihtman wrote about the *mourning kolo* (“*žalosno kolo*”) which is performed from left to right (rather than, as customary, right to left), but Bešlagić’s observation that some *kolo* dances on the *stećak* seem to reflect this particular style cannot be considered as a general rule.²³¹

One of the most prominent former Yugoslav *stećak* scholars, Marko Vego, categorically states that the *kolo* “has nothing to do with the 149th psalm of King David, but, if it appears on tombstones, it is taken from everyday life of the people that presumably acquired a funerary significance”(1954, 42).²³² However, Vego’s reasoning relies on an outdated view of “primitive”

²³¹ Wenzel notes that the Vlachs of northern Serbia still perform a *kolo* in which three female dancers carry bunches of flowers, while the *kolo* leader carries a sword, which corresponds to a few exceptional *kolo* depictions on the *stećak*. This particular dance is believed to serve as a soul’s guide to the other world (Wenzel 348).

²³² Vego presumably responds to an unreferenced symbolic interpretation of the *kolo* according to which the motif is linked to the Psalm 149, instructing the faithful: “let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with timbrel and harp”. The psalm is of some interest as it starts with the theme of joyful singing and dancing and continues with with a call for the infliction of punishment upon the enemies of God: “May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetter, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them - this is the glory of all his faithful people.”

peoples that does not take into account the symbolic complexity of ritual behaviour. Furthermore, even if the hypothesis that the *kolo* dances were performed during funerary rituals is accepted, the iconologist is faced with the crucial question why they were, additionally, depicted on tombstones. While the previously considered *stećak* motifs were abstract symbols or depictions of either the deceased and/or religious/spiritual figures, the inclusion of the *kolo* in its repertoire reflects the existence and significance of the wider society or community in which the deceased lived. In this way, the semantic complexity of the *stećak* compositions reaches a new level: whereas the depiction of the deceased may be considered *retrospective*, and that of his or her liberated soul as *prospective* (if the *orant* can be read as such), the *kolo* is primarily a reflection of the present.²³³

The reasons for the depiction of the *kolo* on *stećak* stones becomes clearer once the motif's allegorical level of meaning is taken into account. In his influential anthropological study of burial customs around the world, Maurice Bloch notes that "the death of the individual is the source of rebirth of the group", proposing the hypothesis that "the world religions bury the individual and send him to God and out of the social world. At the same time this expulsion purifies that part of the person which continues on earth and which will be re-used and reincarnated in other members of the corporate group to which the dead belonged" (24). This hypothesis provides a convincing theoretical framework for the comprehension of one level of meaning of the *kolo* motif on the *stećak* stones: through their participation in a ritual dance, the surviving individuals symbolically express, or rather perform the continuing vitality of the wider society. The *kolo* thus literally acts as a thread that binds the dead and the living into a higher unity. The additional depiction of the *kolo* on the tombstone is a reminder that the effects of this ritual are permanent, that the deceased and the living have thus formed a lasting bond.

²³³ In his comprehensive study of death in the Middle Ages, Paul Binski argues that medieval Christian art was primarily prospective, i.e. it was concerned with the deceased's afterlife, whereas it was the renaissance that rediscovered the retrospective approach of antiquity. If this argument is accepted, the claim that *stećak* art is essentially retrospective (i.e. that it is primarily a depiction of the deceased's lifetime achievements) becomes highly unlikely: it would imply that either *stećak* art was in some ways more "progressive" than the Renaissance (using a teleological approach to art history) or, alternatively, that it cannot be considered within the framework of wider European artistic tendencies at all.

A striking characteristic of the *kolo* depictions on the *stećak* stones is the strict formal equality of its participants. This represents an additional stark contrast to the *danse macabre*, which regularly incorporates the hierarchically positioned representatives of all social classes, from the pope or emperor down to the beggar, thus carrying a message of death as a sinister and ruthless force negating all socio-cultural values. The motif of the *kolo* can be read in precisely the opposite manner: here it is the socio-cultural values, embodied in the dance, that succeed in overcoming the forces of death. The only exceptions to this compositional rule are constituted by four cases in which the “leader,” situated on either the left or the right-hand side of the *kolo*, is endowed with additional attributes, holding a sword in two cases (figure 5), and riding a stag in the other two (figure 6). As will be shown in the following section, the stag is very likely to hold a spiritual/religious significance, implying that this type of *kolo* may represent an allegorical expression of the idea that society is led by spiritual guidance. By analogy, the *kolo* leaders holding swords may be seen as representatives of knights or the military in general, though there is nothing except the sword which would identify them as such. As argued earlier, however, the sword can also be read as a symbol of the spiritual battle against demonic forces led by the righteous.²³⁴ Of course, following the model of the Morosini tombstone discussed above, the *kolo* as a whole can be read as an allegory of an egalitarian socio-political structure, but there are no additional elements in the *stećak* compositions themselves that would suggest this particular interpretation.

A different allegorical interpretation of the *kolo* motif is suggested by Georg Wild. He argues that the flowers held by the *kolo* dancers on some stones are “the medieval symbol for the fact that the depicted persons are already deceased and dwelling in heaven” (Wild 117). Indeed, Wild’s hypothesis would provide a convincing explanation for the fact that there are no attempts to provide the *kolo* dancers with facial or any other individualized features: similarly to the *orant*

²³⁴ A “spiritual” or irenic social role of the *kolo*, equivalent to the *orant*, is suggested by a stone from Klobuk (figure 7). Above a *kolo* consisting of eight figures, two mounted warriors seem to be about to confront each other. Two *kolo* dancers (formally, two orants holding each other by one hand) standing between them are preventing the occurrence of a battle.

in the first phase of its semantic development during the period of early Christianity, they can be interpreted as image-signs representing the general concept of righteous souls dwelling in paradise. The function of their depiction on tombstones could thus be seen as an expression of the hope that the deceased will join the heavenly *kolo*. This interpretation of the *kolo* could also explain the frequent depiction of the motif on the uppermost part (figure 8) or formally divided register (figure 9) of a *stećak* stone.

However, the almost equally frequent position of the *kolo* on the bottom part of the stone does not allow us to conclude that it always represents a heavenly dance. One of the most striking *kolo* compositions that can be used to explain this motif's ambivalent semantic role is to be found on the side of a *stećak* from Brotnjice (figure 10). It consists of what can be considered as four separate registers, the upper two being formally divided from the rest of the composition through an engraved line. The lowest register is taken up by a procession of two does led by a stag, above which there is a *kolo* consisting of nine female figures (identified by their long dresses) holding their arms on each others' shoulders. Above the *kolo*, the third register is taken up by another procession, made up of six alternating larger and smaller birds. Finally, on the top part of the composition there is a *kolo* consisting of nine figures, who are holding their hands high up in the air in a position equivalent to the *orant*. Assuming the possibility that the different registers represent separate levels of reality, this composition shows that the *kolo* on the *stećak* could potentially represent both a heavenly and a terrestrial dance. In fact, it is through this ritual act that the living communicate with the righteous souls dwelling in heaven.

It is along these interpretative lines that a symbolic level of meaning of the *kolo* motif can be identified. Writing about a striking composition of a *kolo* below a large spiral (figure 11), Rudolf Kutzli notes:

Rhythm is the secret of life. True rhythm, in harmony with the laws of nature and the cosmos, can become a gate leading to fructifying, vitalizing, spiritualizing influences and to a unison between heavenly and terrestrial forces. In this sense, in the past the dance was not just pleasure and diversion, but a sacral act, a cultic form

[...] The *kolo* as a terrestrial mirror, a terrestrial resonance of divine rhythm appears on a stone from Mostar. In the upper region, an archetypal symbol of coiling and uncoiling spirals; its reflection and echo on the territorial plane is the *kolo* (220).

At first sight, Kutzli's theory may appear rather daring and speculative. However, it succeeds in providing a convincing explanation for the motif of the oversized spiral, as well as a series of similar ornaments, that does not simplistically reduce it to a decorative role. Furthermore, it creates a framework in which the *kolo*'s ambivalent semantic role can be understood: the dance is not simply a bond between the dead and the living, but, more generally, a ritual through which the harmony between divine and terrestrial forces is reestablished.²³⁵ The *kolo* can thus be understood as a foundational element of what I have termed the dialectic dualist theology espoused by the Bosnian Church and reflected in a series of previously discussed *stećak* symbols.

Kutzli's symbolic interpretation of the *kolo* is confirmed by two additional original compositions involving this motif. A stone from Ravno (figure 12) shows a *kolo* made up of three female figures. The figure on the left edge of the *kolo* is holding a horse or a dog, while the one on the right is holding or merely touching a large striped ring. On Kutzli's own drawing of the composition (figure 13), the stripes on the circles are more emphasized, suggesting a circular movement.²³⁶ If, as previously argued, the ring can be considered as a sign of divinity,²³⁷ the composition conveys a very clear message: the *kolo* represents a connection between the animal and the divine.

²³⁵ Writing about the symbolism of the circle dance in ancient Greece, Forstner notes: "According to the Pythagoreans, the stars are the dwelling of the blessed. Thus the soul that wants to be united with the divine here on earth must join in the circle dance of the stars, in order to be, what it once was, and what it will be again" (29).

²³⁶ Kutzli's drawing may be dismissed as a subjective, biased rendering of a motif. However, it must be noted that due to the different angle and intensity of light, many *stećak* compositions can appear very different depending on the time or season in which they are observed.

²³⁷ On two other compositions (figure 14), the person on the left edge of the *kolo* is holding a circular shape that appears more like a physical rather than symbolic ring.

The second composition can be seen on a stone from Blidinje (figure 15): it is not a true *kolo*, but rather a scene of what appear to be two dancers holding each other with one hand (alternatively, one of the ‘dancers’ may be holding his hand on the second one’s head, with the latter standing in an orant position). With his other hand, one of the dancers seems to be holding or reaching towards a circular shape situated above him. Kutzli argues that the scene portrays the *consolamentum*, the fundamental dualist ritual also known as *baptism of fire*. While this hypothesis inevitably remains speculative, the image certainly represents a kind of communication between the dancers and the divine energy embodied by the ring.

10.2 The stag hunt

The motif of the stag hunt can be found on just over 100 *stećak* stones, the majority of them in the central and southern parts of modern day Bosnia and Herzegovina. It can be considered as the most characteristic variant of a wider group of motifs that includes depictions of different animals in general (birds, dogs, fish, snakes and others) and deer in particular on the one hand, and a few cases of hunts on different animals (a bear or a boar) on the other. The stag is usually chased by a bowman on foot, a mounted warrior equipped with a lance or sword, or a combination of the two, frequently accompanied by a dog. Although there are a few exceptions to this rule, the reliefs regularly show one particular moment of the stag hunt, the point at which the hunter is about to pierce or thrust his weapon towards the animal.

In a formal sense, the hunter and the stag take up a nearly equal amount of space, thus directing the viewer’s attention towards their interaction as the focal point of the composition. Commenting on the crucifixion and the tauroctony as the central images of Christianity and Mithraism respectively, Jaś Elsner writes that “the god is transformed from a static cult image to a god performing ritual action (whether as sacrificer or as a victim). It is the action that deifies, the performance is the deity” (217). Thus, if the depiction of the stag hunt on the *stećak* can be ascribed any religious significance, it would seem that we are dealing with an equally ‘dynamic’ conception of divinity.

For the majority of *stećak* scholars, however, the stag hunt does not have any religious significance, representing nothing but the mimetic depiction of the leisurely pursuits of the medieval Bosnian aristocracy. Along with images of the circle dance and jousting, the stag hunt is usually classified into the wider category of ‘secular motifs’ and thus removed from the further discussion of the *stećak*’s religious sense.

However, the iconographic history of the motif of the stag and the stag hunt strongly suggests the existence of an allegorical and symbolic level of significance. The tradition of the stag’s representation reaches back to the very beginnings of artistic creation: it is a frequently occurring motif on petroglyphs around the world whose age is estimated at about 10.000 years or more.²³⁸ Much later, around the year 1000 BC, megalithic monuments known as *deer stones*²³⁹ appear in Mongolia, representing the stag in various shapes, sometimes flying or holding a sun-disc in its antlers, thus strongly suggesting its spiritual significance. Related types of megaliths can be found all over central Asia, and even as far west as the region of Dobruja on the Black Sea coast of modern day Romania and Bulgaria. A more specifically shamanic²⁴⁰ character of the stag is suggested by the Gundestrup cauldron, an Iron Age Celtic silver vessel found in Denmark, showing a seated man with antlers surrounded by different animals (including a stag) looking towards him.²⁴¹ While far from exhaustive, these three examples illustrate the frequent

²³⁸ “Throughout that first millennium B.C. and throughout the nomadic hegemony of Eurasia, however, the art of the Early Nomads was dominated by the image of the deer. Isolated or as a part of a complex zoomorphic references, the image of the deer is the ultimate key to understanding Early Nomadic culture and that of the larger Scytho-Siberian world.” (Jacobs 4)

²³⁹ “In fact, these stylized deer images appear only on the stones associated with Mongolia and the Transbaykal, their anthropomorphic reference, however, is repeated in the deer stones of Tucan and Gorno-Altayskay A.O. and even in the monolithic sculpture associated with Eastern Europe in the late Bronze and early Iron Ages”(Jacobs 142).

²⁴⁰ “What had been the focus of concern and attention by all members of a social group - the process of death and rebirth - seems at some time after the age of the Early Nomads to have become monopolized by a single individual, the shaman, as that figure is defined through modern ethnography” (Jacobs 211).

²⁴¹ In an alternative explanation, the figure represents the god Cernunnos.

appearance of the stag in the arts of very different cultures and time periods, as well its common association with the divine or supernatural.

In his study of prehistoric symbolism, the Israeli scholar Ariel Golam explores a myth common to many Eurasian cultures: a cosmic deer or elk carrying the sun in its antlers is chased by a predator or hunter eventually overtaking and killing it (52). On the most basic level, the story serves as a mythological explanation of the apparent movement of the sun, the deer or elk being killed at sunset and resurrected at sunrise. A distant echo of this myth is found in the story of St. Eustachius, the patron-saint of hunters, who was converted to Christianity in the course of a deer hunt.

An additional element of the myth is constituted by an episode in which the deer steals the sun from the god of the underworld, and thus takes over the role of the “culture hero” who suffers for his good deeds (Golam 58). The stag could thus also serve as an allegorical representation of Christ, the “culture hero” of Christianity. The strong possibility that the stag hunt motif on the *stećak* is associated with a solar myth is indicated by a formal characteristic observed by Wenzel: the majority of the stag hunts are depicted on the side of the stones facing west. When they are depicted on the northern or southern side, the stag is always chased in an east-west direction (Wenzel 398).²⁴²

The stag also plays a significant role in medieval Christian art, where it often appears as an illustration of Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God”, provided with an additional dimension by Jesus’s references to the ‘living water’: “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:13). Two notable examples include the portal carvings of the 7th century

²⁴² Wenzel further notes that the most striking instance of this compositional rule can be seen on a stone from Bekavci near Imotski (figure 16), where the stag hunt is represented on both sides of the stone, the hunt being directed in an east-west direction on both sides (398).

Ateni Sioni Church in Georgia and the 11th century mosaic above the altar of the San Clemente Basilica in Rome.

This level of the stag's symbolism appears to have been familiar in medieval Bosnia, as one *stećak* stone can be read as its direct illustration: on a horizontal slab, an engraved stag is running towards a hollowed out round indentation that can serve as a container for rain water or another liquid (figure 17). Another level of the stag's usual symbolism is provided by various medieval bestiaries which tend to reproduce the remarks made by Isidore in his *Etymologies*: "Deer are the enemy of snakes. When deer are ill or weak they draw snakes out of their holes with the breath of their nostrils and eat them, overcoming their poison and thus renewing themselves" (Book 12, 1:18-22). This characteristic of the deer is also commonly illustrated in Christian art. Despite the frequent appearance of the snake on the *stećak*, however, it is never shown in combination with the stag.²⁴³

Rudolf Kutzli points out two additional characteristics of the stag that may provide a clue to the significance of its depiction on *stećak* stones. Firstly, he notes that each year, the stag sheds his antlers, only to grow a new pair enriched by two additional tines: "what would otherwise calcify is shed and renewed, year by year. In that way it becomes a true symbol for death and rebirth, for the replenishing life force of resurrection" (Kutzli 212). Undoubtedly, this natural phenomenon has contributed to the human fascination with this animal exhibited since prehistoric times. Similarly to the symbolic understanding of the cross as a shape that could be found in all aspects of existence, the stag could thus have gained an additional dimension of significance through its association with the fundamental Christian concept of resurrection. Kutzli's second point is somewhat more speculative: "In its formal shape, the stag antlers could be compared to a seeking organ, a differentiated sensor, tasting a world situated above the one closed into the bones of the skull [...] The antlers turn into a symbol of a higher organ, which is capable of entering into the imaginative world of the supersensory" (212). While there is no way to verify whether the stag's

²⁴³ A possible exception is a stone from Dugo Polje (figure 18), showing a fantastic winged animal surrounded by a snake.

antlers were consciously perceived in this manner, Kutzli's theory provides a convincing reason for the association between the stag and his antlers and the human capacity for communication with the spiritual realm.

On the most basic level, it is clear that the motif on the *stećak* is indeed a mimetic representation of a hunt. This meaning is suggested particularly strongly by those compositions showing a hunt of a different animal, such as a bear or a boar. On three such compositions (figure 19), the hunter has already dealt the deathblow to the animal by stabbing it with a lance. Despite the lack of details, the motif may even depict, or more precisely suggest, the person buried underneath the stone, engaged in one of his favourite lifetime pastimes. The reason for its appearance on a tombstone would thus be a simple desire to remember the person in a particular way.

Following the 'secular' interpretation, the stag hunt can be further read as a marker of class identity, subtly reaffirming the dominant social structure. The 'ritual action' of the stag hunt could thus be seen as socially transformative rather than religious: by carrying it out, the portrayed hunter 'performs' his privileged social status. Thus the sense of the depiction of the stag hunt would not be exhausted in the remembrance of the deceased, but rather in the survival of this custom, along with the corresponding 'corporate group' or culture among the hunter's descendants or corporate group.

But there are several indications suggesting that the meaning of the stag hunt motif should not be reduced to a quasi-naturalistic representation. First of all, the manner in which it is usually depicted appears schematic and formulaic rather than mimetic. While this fact could be caused by nothing more than the artist's low level of technical skill, a more probable explanation is that the purpose of the image is to call to mind an idea rather than to depict an actual event.

Furthermore, if the only purpose of the motif was the glorification of the hunter, one would (at least in some instances) expect a different kind of composition, one putting more emphasis on his power over the stag - for example, the hunter triumphantly dealing the death blow to a stag lying

below his horse's feet. The reduction of the hunt motif to a mimetic level of significance is also contradicted by the frequent depiction of different animals in isolation or in different contexts. Some of them, such as the dog or the horse, may well have a purely mimetic function. Others, however, such as the bird,²⁴⁴ stag or snake, as well as a series of dragons and other fantastic animals, are clearly imbued with symbolic levels of significance.

A series of original compositions may serve to demonstrate this point. A stone from Čerin (figure 20) is decorated with a single *orant* figure with an aureole around its head. Four oversized birds are lined up in a separate horizontal register rising above the orant's hands, looking towards the figure's head. The meaning of this composition could be this: through his ritual gesture, the *orant* has penetrated into a higher dimension, receiving the Holy Spirit symbolized by the birds. The birds' association with the spiritual realm is suggested more strongly on a stone from Ubosko (figure 21): a human figure, possibly representing the deceased's soul, is carried upwards by two birds.

The stag seems to be imbued with an equally significant symbolic function: a cross-shaped stone from Marasovina (figure 22) is decorated by a sole stag in its central part. One striking composition from Blace (figure 23), a man is kneeling next to a tree in a posture of prayer or adoration, facing a stag located high above him, in the very opposite corner of the stone.

Finally, a series of compositions (figure 24) show a pair of intertwined winged snakes or dragons, clearly suggesting an idea or concept rather than an actual animal. The meaning of this motif may be revealed in a unique composition from Glumina (figure 25): the upper arm of a cross has been replaced by two dragon heads facing each other. If the dragons can be considered as symbols of evil, this motif may be another expression of a truly dualist idea: the dualism of the material world is resolved into a higher unity through the "knot" constituted by the cross, the redemptive teaching of Jesus Christ.

²⁴⁴ "Within the shamanic ritual, birds were hardly less significant than deer and trees; the three elements - birds, deer, and trees - are constantly reunited in tale and ritual" (Jacobs 178).

The previously discussed transcultural and specifically Christian significance of the stag enables us to postulate a first possible (religious) allegorical level of the motif's significance: it represents a virtuous Christian soul yearning for proximity to God. Following the logic of this interpretation, the hunters and dogs would stand for the dark forces of this world aiming to divert the righteous soul from its virtuous path. Despite its strong allusions to the evils of this world, this idea could be classified as *Christian* in the broadest sense, not allowing for a closer denominational determination. This interpretation also provides a convincing explanation for the way the hunt is depicted: despite its precarious situation, the stag has not been hurt, thus creating an ultimately optimistic message. The person buried underneath the stone may have led a particularly virtuous life, or, alternatively, the image may be an expression of the desire for a heavenly afterlife, analogous to depictions of the deceased kneeling before the Virgin Mary on Western European tombstones of this period.

Thus, whereas a focus on the hunter as the dominant figure of the composition implies a more secular understanding of the motif, a greater emphasis on the stag leads towards a more religious and specifically Christian interpretation, turning the viewer's attention towards the idea of *victimhood*. The idea that the image may possess several layers of meaning leads to the intriguing possibility that, depending on the way it is observed, both the hunter and the stag may in some way represent the deceased person. Taking this interpretation a step further, the stag hunt can actually be read as an allegorical representation of the internal battle between the body and the soul.

A closer analysis of some of the other appearances of the stag on the *stećak* stones, however, suggests that on one level, its significance may be closer to a more archaic, shamanistic context. In numerous instances, the stag's antlers are decorated by rosettes of various forms, a very frequently occurring symbol on the *stećak* stones that certainly possesses a symbolic, religious meaning. This intuition is given additional weight by the two previously discussed stones (figure 26) showing a circle dance led by a man riding a stag. The identification of the stag with a kind

of spiritual guide is further suggested by a *stećak* stone from Čengiće bara, depicting a man with antlers holding the reins of two mounted men's horses in an apparent gesture of reconciliation (figure 27). This interpretation would also explain the relatively frequent combination of the *kolo* and the stag hunt (figure 28): in these cases, the dance may be led in honour of or by the allegorical guidance of a spiritual leader. Furthermore, this composition can be read in a way analogous to the combination of the *kolo* and the oversized spiral discussed in the previous section: the rhythm of the cosmic stag hunt (i.e. the movement of the sun across the sky) is emulated here on earth through a ritual dance.

If this interpretation is correct, it leads to the conclusion that the stag hunt should be read as a specifically Bosnian Christian, rather than general, non-denominational symbol. In one of the very few indications of the possible relationship between the Bosnian *true Christians* and the wider circle of their adherents, heresiological sources report that they were regarded as carriers of the Holy Spirit and were honoured by a ritual greeting known as *adoratio*. While this argument remains conjectural, it appears more likely that the *true Christians*, conceived as carriers of the Holy Spirit, rather than Orthodox or Catholic priests were pictured as spiritual guides symbolically transformed into stags.

Heresiological sources in fact provide another significant clue for the decipherment of the stag hunt's possible meaning in a Bosnian Christian context. In a document entitled "Discussion between a Roman Catholic and Bosnian Pataren," believed to have been written in the 1230s by the Dominican inquisitor Paul the Dalmatian, we are told of the Bosnian Christians' belief that a mark of the true Christian is that (s)he is subject to persecution in this world. Regardless of whether the Bosnian Christians truly were heterodox or not, we can be certain that they were periodically subject to persecution by domestic or foreign religious and secular authorities. This insight allows for a reconciliation of the 'shamanic' interpretation of the stag with the role it is assigned in the hunt composition: the stag hunt would thus be an allegorical representation of the persecution of Bosnian Christians in general, or the person buried underneath the stone in particular.

Without doubt, an equally complex ‘mystical’ insight can be derived from the stag hunt motif: starting from the emotional state of the hunter, his control of the horse below him on the one hand and his impending attack on the fleeing stag on the other, the transformation of his emotion into the firm grasp of the weapon with which he is about to take a life, on to the innocent stag running for his survival, perhaps causing a feeling of compassion, thus bringing to mind man’s internal conflict between a desire to possess and control and his awareness of the suffering of others... And, further, taking into account the possible association of the pursued stag and a spiritual guide, a contemplation of the image may lead to a reflection upon the fate of the true Christian in this world, the necessity of following the path set by Jesus Christ and facing persecution and martyrdom.

10.3 The Anthropomorphic Niche

The motif of the anthropomorphic niche can be found on roughly 90 *stećak* stones, the majority of them located in the Herzegovina region. It is the most frequent and characteristic of a wider group of motifs that includes those Wenzel classifies as columns (figure 29), pointed arches (figure 30) and rounded arches (figure 31). In Wenzel’s own classification, the anthropomorphic niche is divided into several categories she terms transitional arches “A”, horseshoe arches and transitional arches “B”. However, this classification is a consequence of a strictly teleological view of iconographic development, according to which the origin of this motif is an architectural element, while any kind of deviation from this original shape represents a mere meaningless “degeneration”. Following Kutzli (198), I define every kind of motif constituted by an elongated quadrangular base and a circular ‘head’, strongly resembling the shape of a human figure, as an *anthropomorphic niche*.

It is clear that at least some types of arches carved on the *stećak* stones represent architectural references, presumably linked to the wide-spread conception of the grave as an eternal dwelling of the deceased. This is particularly visible in those cases in which the base or the architrave of

the pillars forming the arches are additionally emphasized (figure 32). In any case, the arches are always hollowed out from the surface of the stone, thus suggesting the notion of empty space and indicating that the motif represents a portal or window. However, the problem with basing the entire interpretation of this motif on the idea of a mimetic reflection of an architectural element is that the inclusion of realistic construction details forms an iconographic exception. Indeed, the motif of the pillar and arch on the *stećak* stones seems to have undergone a process of gradual metamorphosis into an abstract symbol. Thus, in its most non-architectural guises, the anthropomorphic niche is depicted on the vertical as well as horizontal arms of *stećak* stones in the shape of looped crosses and enriched by a horizontal line transforming its ‘neck’ into a cross. The reason for this transformation is certainly not an abstract process of “degeneration,” but a corresponding shift in the underlying understanding of this symbol.

The horseshoe arch, the architectural motif most closely resembling the shape of the anthropomorphic niche, is now associated primarily with Islamic architecture, but its iconographic history reaches back to the period of early Christianity. It plays a prominent role in the architecture of pre-Islamic Spain, where it was presumably imported to from the Visigoths.²⁴⁵ Čurčić analyzes an 11th century Byzantine lamp-basilica containing what he terms keyhole windows, noting that the same type of windows “appear in the architecture and painting of Cappadocia during the very same time period” (Čurčić 32, note 62).

The same shape plays a very prominent role in the sepulchral arts of medieval Armenia, where it is often used in simplified depictions of the deceased on horizontal slabs, indicated by the occasional inclusion of facial features or personal items (figure 33). Most intriguingly, the anthropomorphic niche is found in the gravestone design of medieval and modern Dagestan, forming a central element of a visual culture that has survived the region’s conversion to Islam in the 12th century.²⁴⁶ Particularly the last two examples strongly suggest that the anthropomorphic

²⁴⁵ For example, the 7th century church of San Juan de Banos or the 9th century church of Santa Christina de Lena. For an overview of medieval Spanish architecture, see Bernard.

²⁴⁶ For an overview of the arts of Dagestan, see Debirov.

niche should not be reduced to a mere stylistic peculiarity, but rather considered as a motif with profound allegorical and symbolic levels of significance.

The simplest allegorical interpretation of the anthropomorphic niche would see it as a representation of particular personalities or human beings in general. This interpretation is suggested by a stone from Radimlja (figure 34), where two lines emerging from the sides of two anthropomorphic niches seem to indicate an abstracted representation of two figures holding hands. Furthermore, the ‘heads’ of some niches are additionally emphasized through the usage of simple lines or striped ribbons, possibly indicating an aureole. In a small number of cases (figure 35), the anthropomorphic niche is enriched by a partial ‘reflection’ whose hypothetical head would be located below the ground, thus allowing for a degree of symbolic speculation related to the conception of death as an inverted reflection of life.²⁴⁷

A more profound symbolic level of meaning of the anthropomorphic niche is suggested by the iconographic pre-history of this symbol: according to Golam, “the pole with a wheel or a disk on top is an emblem of the Great Goddess - the major deity in the Neolithic religion” (33). Regardless of whether medieval Bosnians were still aware of this particular association, the anthropomorphic niche really is a literal union of a quadrangular and a circular shape, which has already been encountered in the characteristic symbol of the cross with circular endings. According to Kutzli, this fact could be related to the idea of death as a transformation of the human being from a terrestrial to a spiritual form mentioned in the Pauline epistles.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ It is interesting to note that a similar ‘reflection’, only located so as to take up the space between, rather than directly below the niches, leads to a very different interpretation: in this case, it appears to represent a structural feature of the column base. However, such a ‘degeneration’ of this motif suggests that from the very beginning, the columns and niches were conceived of in an allegorical or symbolic rather than mimetic fashion.

²⁴⁸ I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. (1 Cor 50-54).

Kutzli further proposes a daring symbolic interpretation of this motif:

we assume that through the cultic erection of stones and particularly through the form and hollowing out of the anthropomorphic niche, the ‘dead’ could be truly present in the consciousness of the Bogomils, when they celebrated death rituals before these ‘altars’. The stone would thus, similarly to the much older stones of the Neolithic, be an ‘instrument’ of the earthly human being through which it could establish contact with the spiritual form of the deceased and vice versa: the form of the stone, the hollow shape of the niche in particular, offered the dead as the ‘transformed’ the opportunity to be spiritually ‘present’ (199).

While this interpretation must be considered as highly speculative, it does provide a convincing explanation for an iconographic process that led to the transformation of the empty space marked by the outlines of columns into a semantically charged symbol in its own right.

10.4 The Spiral

The spiral appears on over 200 stones, and can thus be considered as one of the most prominent *stećak* motifs. In the semantically simplest form, the spiral is used as a decorative border (figure 36), implying that its role may be purely ornamental.²⁴⁹ However, more frequently the spiral appears as a major element of *stećak* decoration. Several basic types can be identified: a single spiral ring, usually repeated several times (figure 37), a spiral consisting of two interconnected rings of the same or different sizes (figure 38), an extended spiral consisting of a series of connected rings (figure 39) and the most frequent version consisting of a pair of two symmetrical spirals twisting in opposite directions (figure 40). Additionally, at least two unique variations can be identified: a triple spiral on a stone from the Srebrenica region (figure 41) and a human being whose arms have been replaced by spirals (figure 42). Finally, the spiral constitutes a major element of another complex and relatively frequent symbol: an abstracted plant or cross with clusters of grapes growing out of its branches represented by spirals (figure 43).

²⁴⁹ However, as previously discussed, there are reasons to believe that even when they appear as ornaments, certain motifs may carry specific meanings. Firstly, many bordures enclose an empty space, thus representing the only decorative element of a stone. Secondly, in certain images, such as the *kolo* below an oversized spiral, it is difficult to determine whether a motif represents an ornament or an element of the main composition.

Although it clearly represents an abstracted symbol, the role played by the spiral on some *stećak* compositions suggests its possible mimetic foundation in a naturalistic depiction of vine tendrils. To a careful observer, the tendril certainly represents an intriguing and suggestive element of floral life, providing support to climbing plants by twining around other plants or objects. It is thus a particularly suitable symbol for an allegorical depiction of the idea of faith as a tender, yet crucial element of human existence. This interpretation provides a persuasive explanation for the frequent connection between the spiral and the cluster of grapes on the *stećak* stones.

From a naturalistic point of view, however, this combination of motifs does not make sense, since grapes do not grow out of tendrils. The spiral and the grape are rather to be understood in relation to the parable likening Jesus to a vine analyzed in my discussion of the cross. Nevertheless, the meaning of the spiral on the *stećak* is not fully explained through this scriptural reference. Firstly, it does not justify the degree to which the spiral is emphasized in the complex symbol consisting of the cross and the grape cluster as its putatively most significant elements. Secondly, and more importantly, it does not explain why the spiral is so frequently found as an independent symbol, particularly in the form of the symmetrical pair, which is not reminiscent of tendrils.

The second possible naturalistic base of the spiral is the female uterus. Wenzel notes that in antiquity, Vitruvius established the connection between the spiral and the female form in his discussion of the origins of the Ionic and Corinthian capitals, while the Renaissance anatomist Vesalius used the double spiral to depict the female uterus (180). A systematic archeological association of the *stećak* stones would perhaps reveal a connection between the double spiral and the feminine gender of the deceased.

However, beyond the generic association with femininity, this interpretation does not provide a persuasive explanation for the prominence and frequency of this symbol. What is perhaps more revealing is the fact that, as Wenzel notes, the appearance of the spiral as a major motif has a relatively strict geographical distribution, being largely limited to the contiguous areas of eastern

and central Bosnia and northeastern Herzegovina, with a few examples in the Imotski region in modern-day Croatia. A careful analysis of the double spiral motif shows that in the large majority of cases, the stones on which it is depicted bear no crosses. Indeed, a hypothetical evolution of this symbol can be proposed: beginning with the simplest form showing what appears as two plant shoots (figure 44), the spirals become more convoluted, multiplied and enriched by additional decorative elements (figure 45), eventually gaining a new element in an abstracted flower or fleur-de-lis hovering above or emerging from its centre (figure 46). In the final phase, this central element is transformed a cross, eventually taking over the central role in the type of compositions discussed above, reducing the spiral itself to a marginal position.

The evolution of the spiral on the *stećak* stones suggests a possible response to the question of its two-fold mimetic origin. In both cases - the female uterus and the vine tendrils - the spiral represents an organic element necessary for the creation and development of the ultimate 'fruit' - the grape or the cross, which can both be read as allegories of the idea of Christ as the living God. Considering the complete absence of depictions of the Virgin Mary on *stećak* stones, the spiral may thus be taken as her allegorical depiction, as the Mother of God was formally honoured with the title 'Theotokos' or 'God-bearer' since the Third Ecumenical Council held at Ephesus in the year 431. In the tradition of dualist Christianity, however, the title 'Theotokos' was ascribed not to the Virgin Mary, but to the *true Christians* who were considered as the literal carriers of God in the form of the Holy Spirit. Thus the spiral may be considered as a marker of stones covering the graves of those who had received spiritual baptism, or, more generally, adherents of the Bosnian Church.

Following this line of interpretation, the frequent absence of the cross on stones decorated with spirals may be provided with a different explanation. As discussed in my analysis of this motif, dualist Christian movements were frequently ascribed a negative attitude towards the cross. Although this attitude was clearly not shared by all Bosnian Christians, the region of eastern Bosnia may have been the centre of one of its branches that was opposed to the usage of the cross. The hypothetical gradual adoption of the combination of cross and spiral may thus be

an indication of a temporal or geographic differentiation in the Bosnian Christians' attitude towards this symbol. Furthermore, considering the rich and ancient iconographic pre-history of the spiral, its evolution in the Bosnian context may be another example of the process of outward simulation and covert subversion of a pagan symbol (discussed in reference to the orant) in the course of its gradual adoption into a Christianized environment.²⁵⁰

10.5 The Ring

As a basic geometric shape and archetypal symbol, the ring cannot be ascribed a single and unambiguous meaning. On the *stećak* stones, it appears in three basic shapes: as a plastic circle, a circular indentation, or a protruding knob. Furthermore, it can be identified as an element of a whole row of more complex, previously discussed symbols such as the cross or the anthropomorphic niche. In terms of its compositional role, the ring is also highly versatile, appearing as a basic element of a variety of borders, a part of more complex compositions, or as an independent symbol.

Numerous studies of prehistoric symbolism identify the ring as a symbol of the sun,²⁵¹ which was frequently associated with divinity due to its role of a source of light and heat and thus ultimately of all terrestrial life. It is indeed possible that the creators of the *stećak* stones adopted this symbol from their pagan ancestors or another unknown source, gradually “forgetting” its

²⁵⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius (De div. nom. IV, § 9) and after him Thomas Aquinas (Summa th. 2/2, qu. 180, a. 6) and others see the spiral as an image of contemplation. The former says: “the soul moves in the form of a spiral, as long as it is enlightened with divine insights in accordance with its nature, not only through in a spiritual and unified manner (i.e. not through sudden, direct exposure), but through discursive reasoning, or, as it were, through mixed and changing activity.” This definition is reminiscent of the vertical circular movement of creepers and screws. If, however, the spiral is viewed as a line running towards or away from its centre in one plane, on the hand the contemplation can be viewed as an effort to expel the external from the senses, or to take into consideration the creation as an image of eternal love and beauty in order to reach concentration in God. On the other hand, the opposite path can be considered, whereby forgetting the ego-centre can lead towards the entrance into the width of the infinite sacred. (Forster 63/4).

²⁵¹ In his study of the symbols of the Illyrians, the pre-Slavic inhabitants of the Balkans, Aleksandar Stipčević notes that “the ring is the most common and frequent way of depicting the sun. One of the very rare written testimonies that speak of Illyrian symbolism concerns precisely this solar symbol. It is the well-known observation found in the work of the of the II century Greek rhetorician Maximus of Tyre, who says that the Peonians adore the sun in the shape of a small disk attached to a high pole (16/17).

original significance. According to Solovjev, however, the solar symbolism of the circle was consciously incorporated into the art of the *stećak* in the framework of a “neo-Manichaean” Christianity. He quotes a series of authors describing the central role of the sun in the Manichean and Paulician conceptions of the universe,²⁵² where its function consisted in transporting the souls of the deceased into paradise, thus providing a persuasive explanation for its frequent depiction on tombstones. According to another testimony, the Paulicians claimed that the sun can be equated with Jesus and prayed to the sun, moon and stars (Solovjev 37).

Many *stećak* compositions, particularly those containing the ring in the form of a plastic circle, seem to confirm a cosmological interpretation of this symbol. While in only one example the ring is surrounded by what seems to be a mimetic depiction of rays²⁵³ (figure 47), the parallel stripes frequently adorning the rings strongly suggest a circular movement (figure 48). Furthermore, the ring is often accompanied by depictions of the moon in the shape of a crescent, or a variety of rosettes which may represent stars (figure 49). The more specific association of the sun with Christ is suggested by the relatively frequent combination of the cross and the ring (figure 50), as well as the previously discussed circle within or as part of a cross. Considering the solar associations of the stag, the cosmological and Christological interpretation of the ring is further suggested by a series of compositions in which the stag carries a ring between its antlers (figure 51). Finally, a spiritual function of the ring is implied by its frequent combination with an outspread hand.

A somewhat different or additional level of significance of the ring can be derived from a series of previously mentioned compositions in which a *kolo* leader is holding this shape in his or

²⁵² The 4th century Cypriot episcopes Epiphanius of Salamis wrote that “Mani located three wide lights into the sky: the sun, the moon and the stars. He claims that they pull the souls of the deceased from the earth (...) The sun, that great ship, carries them into eternal life, in the land of the blessed (...)” (Solovjev 33, translation mine). An anathema against Paulicians states that they claim “that human souls are of the same essence (homoousioi) as God, swallowed up by Matter, and that God pulls them up using the sun and the moon, which they call ships” (Solovjev 33).

²⁵³ Although in this particular example the location of this symbol on the bottom of a stone, below a realistic depiction of a human figure, seems to contradict the cosmological interpretation.

her hand (figure 52). On the one hand, it is possible to reconcile this type of composition with the cosmological interpretation by arguing that the ring represents an allegorical depiction of the sun, thus suggesting the idea that the *kolo* leader is in some way communicating with the higher power embodied by the sun. On the other hand, a different interpretation can be proposed: according to Wild, the ring is “the final product of an iconographic process of degeneration transversed by the old Christian symbol of the crown of victory, also referred to as ‘crown of justice’ or ‘corona vitae’” (114). Wild notes that the crown of victory played a particularly significant role in the dualist theology, according to which angels lost their crowns when they were expelled from paradise and trapped in physical bodies due to their rebellion against God. The terrestrial path of the fallen angel/soul is completed with the entrance into the community of true Christians, when it regains its lost crown (Wild 116).

Despite the prominent role of the crown of victory in dualist theology, however, there is nothing in the iconography of the ring on the *stećak* stones suggesting this particular interpretation. The solar association thus remains the most convincing interpretation, although the hypothetical neo-Manichaean implications inevitably remain a matter of speculation. The other two frequent shapes of the ring on the *stećak*, however, cannot be subsumed under the same semantic category. The hollows or indentations appear to be the easier one to explain, at least in a mimetic sense. As Wenzel notes, they only occur on the horizontal sides of the stones, and are referred to as “kamenica” by the local population, a word normally used for cattle wells (129). The idea of a kind of well is strongly suggested by a composition consisting of a stag running towards a circular indentation, implying that the rain or other liquid gathered inside it can be allegorically understood as the scriptural ‘living water.’ As far as the knobs are concerned, the most intriguing indication of its significance is constituted by the fact that the local population refers to it as an “apple” (“jabuka”), leading Wenzel to propose a possible link with the still living tradition of placing apples on graves (133). However, the knob is neither shaped like an apple, nor located only on the horizontal sides of the *stećak*, thus implying that this connection is very distant or partial at best.

Ultimately, it must be noted that all three shapes of the ring frequently appear multiplied, while both the plastic circle and the knob can be found on different positions on the *stećak* stones. The conclusion that must be drawn from this fact is that, regardless of their semantic origins, the different shapes of the circle must have eventually acquired a predominantly apotropaic or even aesthetic function. While the circle and the indentation can be associated with the sun and the idea of living water respectively, no such specific meaning can be assigned to the knob. It is thus highly likely that it represents an element from a pre-Christian past that may have received a new interpretation in the course of the Christianization of the environment in which it was used.²⁵⁴

10.6 The Crescent

The crescent can be found on approximately 200 *stećak* stones. In comparison with its counterpart familiar from Islamic iconography, the crescent appears more naturalistic on medieval Bosnian tombstones, having an elliptical rather than round shape (figure 53). A naturalistic reference of the crescent is suggested by the fact that, save for a few exceptions (figure 54), the motif is never multiplied, but appears only once on a single stone. However, in the majority of cases it is pointing either upwards or downwards, rather than sideways, as would be expected in a mimetic depiction of the waning or waxing moon (though there are numerous exceptions to this general rule). While it is regularly shown in isolation, the crescent is also frequently combined with other motifs such as the ring, cross or hand.

There are few parallels for the crescent in medieval Christian art. The only type of composition in which it appears regularly is the crucifixion, frequently accompanied by a personification of the sun and the moon above the right and left arm of the cross respectively. They were interpreted in different ways: as an illustration of the two-fold nature of Christ, of the two parts of the Bible (Speake 134), or the idea that nature in its entirety was dismayed by the

²⁵⁴ Another hypothesis, suggested by Wenzel (133), is that the knob was adopted from Islamic tombstone design. Remarkably, the knob continued to be used as an element of post-medieval Islamic as well as Catholic and Orthodox Christian tombstone design.

crucifixion of Christ (Forstner 103). However, the crescent on the *stećak* stones does not seem to have any analogies with this particular iconographic type. A more relevant iconographic parallel can be seen on the Russian Cathedral of St. Dmitri in Vladimir built in the late 12th century (discussed previously in reference to its links with the arts of the Caucasus), where the cross on the roof of the church appears to be contained within an upward pointing crescent, similarly to some compositions found on the *stećak*.²⁵⁵

A possible scriptural foundation for the iconographic use of the crescent can be found in Apocalypse 12:1: “A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.” As Speake notes (134), this mysterious figure was frequently interpreted as the Virgin Mary, implying that the crescent may have been used as her allegorical depiction. However, once again there is no iconographic evidence for this particular interpretation of the crescent on the *stećak* stones. Furthermore, as previously discussed, in contrast to medieval Catholic and Orthodox Christian art, there are no indications for a specific reverence for the Virgin Mary in medieval Bosnia.

Another interpretative possibility is provided by the crescent’s pagan significance. Although it does not play an important role in the art of the Illyrians (Stipčević 30), the crescent represents a prominent element of numerous ancient religions which may have influenced Bosnia’s medieval population. As Forstner notes (99), the historic symbolic significance of the moon surpasses even that of the sun, mainly due to the fact that ancient calendars were based on its phases. Furthermore, due to its constant waning and waxing, very early on the moon became associated with the idea of resurrection. Listing a whole series of meanings attached to the moon,

²⁵⁵ “Sometimes a crescent moon is found on the bottom part of crosses on domes. According to the information available to us, this type of cross adorned the domes of several churches of the twelfth century, in particular the Church of the Intercession of the Holy Virgin on the Nerl, the Cathedral of Saint Dimitry in Vladimir, and Assumption Cathedral in Staraya Ladoga. Here, the crescent moon in no way represents a Muslim symbol and does not indicate, as it sometimes suggested, the superiority of Christianity over Islam. The crescent moon was one of the state symbols of Byzantium (it symbolized royal power) and only after the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks did it become a symbol of the Ottoman Empire. The depiction of the crescent moon is found on Old Russian icons, vestments, and book miniatures. Moreover, the cross with the crescent moon brings to mind an anchor (the symbol of salvation, concordant with the symbolism of the Church as a ship), a blossomed cross, a chalice, or a trampled-upon snake” (Alfeyev 57).

Forstner concludes: “The deeper sense of all lunar symbolism consists in the fact that all terrestrial being is subject to constant change, to a rhythmical becoming, but that the polarity between growth and life on the one hand, and withering and death on the other, is replaced by periodical regeneration and finally by eternal life” (101).

Clearly, the association of the moon with regeneration and eternal life made it highly susceptible to a Christian appropriation. As Forstner notes, Origen was the first to provide a specifically Christian interpretation of the moon (in Gen. Homily 7), arguing that “just as there are two great lights in the sky, so also within us, namely Christ and the Church.” (Forstner 101). Thus, just like the sun and moon provide light to the body, Christ and the Church provide it to the soul. Furthermore, the Church receives all its light from Christ and passes it on to its members.

There is, however, a further, mystical level to this analogy: “The closer the Church comes to Christ, the more it becomes one with His destruction, the more its light is reduced, until, having become fully invisible, it goes under in the light of the bridegroom. This is constantly repeated in the terrestrial history of the Ecclesia, particularly during the time of persecutions” (Forstner 101). Within this interpretative framework, the crescent could thus be understood as a symbol of the persecuted church, which would suggest its primary association with the Bosnian Church.

Another level of the moon’s significance can be found in the ancient Greek conception according to which it marks the boundary between terrestrial darkness and the heavenly sphere constituted by fire and light: “From there, immortal souls fell onto the dark world as sparks of fire or divine drops of water, but they constantly yearn for their true homeland” (Forstner 100). In the previous section, I have discussed the way in which this quintessentially Gnostic idea was appropriated and developed in the framework of Manichaeism, where the moon gained the additional function of a ship transporting the souls of the deceased to their heavenly abode. This particular idea could be used to explain the few instances on the *stećak* stones in which the crescent is enriched by two rosettes attached to its ends.

Based on the iconographic evidence alone, however, it is impossible to prove that the crescent was associated with these mystical conceptions in the medieval Bosnian context. It seems beyond doubt, however, that it carried a religious, i.e. spiritual level of significance: this is demonstrated by its frequent combination with other sacred symbols such as the cross, the ring or the rosette, as well as a series of compositions in which an open hand is reaching towards it. However, this does not imply that the mystical interpretation exhausts its meaning. In approximately 100 instances, the crescent appears in the form of a heraldic decoration of a shield. While it is possible to interpret these shields in an allegorical sense, it is more probable that they indicated the graves of warriors who had died in what they considered to be a “holy war,” i.e. a war fought in the defence of their faith.

10.7 The fleur-de-lis

The fleur-de-lis, or, more precisely, lily or iris flower stylized in several different ways, is depicted on just under 80 *stećak* stones (figure 55). They can be roughly classified into three different categories: a more or less conventional, heraldic fleur-de-lis, a more abstracted form with elongated, S-shaped volutes, and finally an anthropomorphized form in which the volutes have been transformed into legs and the flower’s central part into a head. The lily or iris most frequently represents a stone’s central motif and is depicted on its frontal side, although there are a few exceptions in which it is either repeated on its vertical sides (figure 56) or arranged into a row so as to form a kind of bordure (figure 57).

The appearance of the fleur-de-lis on the *stećak* stones is frequently interpreted as a consequence of the adoption of this symbol as an emblem of the royal Bosnian family Kotromanić due to their dynastic links with the House of Anjou. Indeed, the fleur-de-lis can frequently be found on medieval Bosnian coins, stamps, coat-of-arms and other objects. However, as noted above, only a fragment of the stylized lilies found on the *stećak* stones take the form of a truly heraldic fleur-de-lis. Furthermore, there is neither a single depiction of the

actual Bosnian coat-of-arms on the *stećak* stones, nor are any of the numerous depicted shields decorated with a fleur-de-lis. Thus, even if the appearance of the fleur-de-lis on the *stećak* is linked to its heraldic function, its iconographic metamorphosis can only be explained by the existence of additional layers of meaning.

Besides its heraldic function, the fleur-de-lis is often associated with the idea of purity in general, and the Virgin Mary in particular. As in the case of the crescent, however, there is no iconographic or contextual evidence suggesting that the appearance of this symbol on the *stećak* stones should be understood through its Marian association. A somewhat modified ‘orthodox’ interpretation is offered by Wenzel: linking the fleur-de-lis to the iris flower, characterized by its red petals and sabre-like leaves, she argues that it was “identified with the Passion of Christ” and, further, that it symbolized the “pain felt in the heart of the Virgin when she regarded Christ on the Cross” (163). As an iconographic proof of her suggestion, Wenzel refers to the composition showing in figure 58, displaying a cross, a fleur-de-lis and a sword, arguing that it represents this “iconography in its pure form” and “potently suggests the rebirth of the deceased through Christ” (163). While it does represent a plausible reading of this composition, Wenzel’s interpretation does not provide an explanation of the characteristic metamorphosis of the lily or iris on the *stećak*.

According to Forstner, the symbolism of the lily “originates in the sun-lit regions of the Persian royal city Susa” and is based on “the thought of the luminous birth of the human being from the bosom of the earth and darkness” (183). She adds that, besides the Virgin Mary, the lily can also symbolize Jesus, the church, and the virginal state of any soul emerging from its terrestrial roots and shooting forth towards the heavenly realms (Forstner 183). The association of the lily with the idea of virginity suggests that it could have been a particularly suitable symbol for adherents of the Bosnian Church, who laid a strong emphasis on asceticism and moral purity, contrasting their behaviour with the corruption of the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

Furthermore, despite the possibility of an “orthodox” interpretation of this motif, the emphasis on the luminous nature of the human being linked to the lily also makes it into a potentially potent symbol of a dualist Christian theology. An emphasis on this level of the lily’s significance allows for a persuasive explanation of its anthropomorphic form found on the *stećak*: the primary reference of this symbol would thus be the *true Christian*, rather than an abstract idea of royal power.

Two notable non-heraldic iconographic occurrences of the lily or fleur-de-lis in other cultural contexts can provide further clues towards its significance in medieval Bosnia. On Armenian *khachkars*, the edges of the central motif of the cross are frequently shaped in the form of a fleur-de-lis (figure 59). If the *khachkar* cross can be interpreted as a symbol of Christ, with a stronger emphasis on his divine nature in accordance with the miaphysite Christology of the Armenian church, the edges of the cross can be understood as the ends through the divine enters the material world. If a similar meaning can be assumed to be present in the lilies found on the *stećak*, they can be linked to a further theological specificity of the Bosnian Church (and other dualist movements): the *true Christians*, rather than the Virgin Mary, are the true “theotokoi,” the carriers of the divine in the material world. This interpretation could also explain the other prominent medieval occurrence of this symbol: the wrought iron crosses of southern France, which have frequently been linked to the Languedoc Cathars. It is thus possible to assume that the fleur-de-lis had developed a specifically dualist significance.

However, to an even greater extent than other symbols discussed here, it is impossible to prove in what way the fleur-de-lis and lily were interpreted in medieval Bosnia. In his discussion of the usage of this symbol in medieval Bosnia and the Languedoc, Wild argues that during the same period, the fleur-de-lis was specifically associated with the notion of divinely sanctioned terrestrial power and the institution of the Inquisition, both of which were, in their own ways, directly combatting the spread of the dualist movements. He concludes that “if it had indeed been an originally Cathar symbol, it is hardly plausible that the Dominicans and the inquisitorial authorities would have decided to take over the lily cross as a sign of the anti-Cathar and anti-

heretical spiritual institutions” (Wild 99). However, considering that the conflict between the Catholic church and the ‘heretical’ movements was also fought over the issue of who represented the true traditions of Christianity, this kind of appropriation of a traditional symbol was not necessarily so implausible. Thus the interpretation of the lily or fleur-de-lis may have been one of the “sites” over which the battle for Christianity was fought.

10.8 The Rosette

The rosette or, more precisely, a group of motifs consisting of a series of lines or petals radiating outwards from a common centre, can be found on around 100 *stećak* stones. They range from simple, naturalistic flower-like designs to highly abstracted circular shapes filled by intricate geometric patterns. While the rosettes are occasionally simply scattered about on the surface of the stones, more frequently they take up a distinguished position, such as the top of the frontal side of house-shaped stones, or the centre and edges of cross-shaped stones, thus indicating their pronounced semantic significance. Despite the prominence of the rosette in the art of the *stećak*, as well as medieval European art in general, it is rarely discussed in art-historical studies, being frequently reduced to a purely decorative element.

On a mimetic level, the rosette can be linked to at least three different natural objects: the sun, the stars, and flowers. The solar reference of the motif is suggested particularly in those instances in which a single rosette is depicted on the upper-most part of a stone, sometimes additionally separated by a simple line or more complex border. Furthermore, some rosettes seem to represent more elaborate versions of the previously discussed ring motif, and are thus likely to share its solar symbolism. In one instance (figure 60), the rosette takes the characteristic shape of the *arevakhach*, the solar symbol associated particularly with Armenian medieval art. The probably clearest solar reference can be found on a cross-stone from Simiova near Bileća (figure 61), whose upper arm is shaped in the form of an anthropomorphic niche, with the round upper part filled by a smaller circle surrounded by radiating rays. To this example we can add a

cross with a rosette located in its centre (figure 62) and a unique design that may represent the pre-historic solar symbol of the “pole with a wheel” (figure 63).²⁵⁶

However, in numerous instances the rosettes on the stones are multiplied, thus strongly suggesting that they should not always be understood as mimetic or allegorical depictions of the sun. Following the previously discussed solar and lunar symbolism on the *stećak*, some of the rosettes can be seen as representations of stars. On the one hand, their presence could be understood as a consequence of pagan conceptions that were integrated and reinterpreted in a Christianized context. On the other hand, it is also possible to explain the role of stars solely within the framework of Christian thought. Early Christian exegetes interpreted the Old Testament prophecy of the Moabite prophet Baalam - “I see him, but not now, I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob, a sceptre will rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17) - as a reference to Jesus (Forstner 104). More significantly, the Gospel of Matthew recounts how the three wise men from the East were led to the newborn Jesus by a star (Matthew 2:1-8). The first/second-century martyr and bishop of Antioch Ignatius wrote that this star was “brighter than other stars. Its light was indescribable and its novelty caused amazement; all the other stars, however, including the sun and the moon, led a circle dance before this star, and its light shone brighter than any of them” (Ep. ad Eph. 19, quoted in Forstner 105).²⁵⁷

The association of the stars with Jesus, however, does not explain the multiplication of this motif on the *stećak* either. Another possibility is to see them as allegorical representations of the souls of the deceased in accordance with the words of St Paul: “The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:41-42). Significantly, these words are spoken in the course of a discourse which has served as the most explicit scriptural foundation for the

²⁵⁶ According to Golam (33), “the pole with a wheel or a disk on top is an emblem of the Great Goddess - the major deity in the Neolithic religion”. The cross-stones whose upper arm is either rounded or shaped in the form of an anthropomorphic niche may represent a Christianization of this pre-historic symbol.

²⁵⁷ “heller als alle Sterne. Sein Licht war unbeschreiblich und seine Neuheit rief Staunen hervor; alle übrigen Sterne aber, samt der Sonne und dem Mond, führten einen Reigen auf vor diesem Stern, und sein Licht überstrahlte alle” (Forstner 105).

belief that the dead will not be resurrected in their physical bodies, frequently ascribed to adherents of dualist movements: “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44-44). Due to its frequent presence in Orthodox Christian and Catholic art, the rosette can not be read exclusively in this context. However, it is possible that it received this particular interpretation in the framework of the Bosnian Church.

In an introduction to the symbolism of flowers in Christian thought, Forstner notes that they are

the wedding decoration of the awakening nature, the hope for the coming fruit, a remaining piece of the lost paradise and perhaps - as long as man does not abuse it - the creatures that are least affected by the curse of sin. Each one, from the smallest to the greatest, is formed according to geometric measures, and yet there is nothing frozen, nothing stiff about them, only grace and loveliness, fragrance and colourful beauty in endless diversity (180).

Despite the impressionistic nature of this account, it certainly captures something of the universal human fascination with flowers that goes a long way in explaining its prominent role in Christian art in general and *stećak* decoration in particular. Simultaneously, the brevity of a flower’s life would have reminded the observer of the transience of terrestrial existence and the necessity of putting their faith in the eternal word of God.

Finally, it is highly likely that an additional and potentially complex level of symbolism was associated with the number of petals contained in each rosette, as well as the number of rosettes found on individual stones. Mazrak (2012) provides a persuasive reading of the Zgošća *stećak*, linking the row of seven rosettes located above the depicted town to John’s Apocalypse, a second row of 12 rosettes to the twelve jewels out of which the Heavenly Jerusalem is constructed and a third row of 8 rosettes to the idea of resurrection and new creation. Furthermore, she argues that the repetition of the six-petaled rosette may be associated with the usage of this symbol by the royal Bosnian family Kotromanić. As previously argued, however, the Zgošća *stećak* is highly

atypical, having a significantly more elaborate and complex iconography than other stones. While its numerical associations may indeed have been as precise as Mazrak suggests, in many of the other cases the symbolic associations were probably more fluid, depending on the observer's own level of esoteric knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Philosophico-Logicus*

The question with which this study began initially appeared relatively simple: what is the meaning of the imagery of the *stećak*, the standing stones of medieval Bosnia? The answer to this question, however, is far from simple. The primary reason for its complexity lies in the fact that the meaning of this (or, indeed, any other) imagery cannot be reduced to the linguistic model sign-signified. The appropriate model for understanding the tombstone design of medieval Bosnians is rather the dictum proposed by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein - *meaning is use*. In order to decipher the meaning of *stećak* imagery it was thus, first of all, necessary to understand the wider context in which it was originally used and produced. In accordance with this principle, a significant part of this study has dealt with the question of medieval Bosnia's (primarily religious) culture.

The religious culture of medieval Bosnia, however, is a complex enigma in its own right. It revolves around another deceptively simple question: were (some or most) medieval Bosnians adherents of a heretical, moderately dualist Christian movement tied to the indigenous Bosnian Church, as claimed by heresiological sources? Or were these charges, on the contrary, the result of nothing but the political calculations of malicious Western European Catholics? In order to answer this question, I have analyzed the most important primary sources dealing with medieval Bosnia, arguing against the currently prevailing paradigm of the Bosnian Church established by the historian John Fine, according to which it was a schismatic, yet ultimately orthodox institution. My conclusion is that the paucity of sources does not allow for a definitive conclusion, but that the available documents are consistent with the claim that the Bosnian Church adhered to a moderately dualist theology.

The mistaken conclusions of Fine (and others) are, to a large extent, a consequence of a superficial understanding of the terms ‘heresy’ and ‘dualism’. In my analysis of the former, I show that ‘heresy’ is not a purely religious, but rather a complex socio-cultural phenomenon. Conceptually, it is made of up of three interrelated, yet distinct elements: heterodoxy or distinct religious beliefs, heteropraxy or distinct religious customs, and a will or conscious rejection of the Church’s institutional legitimacy. Hence, heresy has to be understood as a dialectical term, whose full meaning emerges in relation to three distinct discourses: the evolution of the Church as a hierarchical institution supported by the Roman imperial government, the development of dogmatic principles backed by the authority of the Ecumenical Councils, and the legal measures adopted by ecclesiastical and secular authorities to combat heresy. Thus I propose a non-essentialist conceptualization of heresy, bringing it closer to its original meaning of ‘choice,’ thereby transforming it into an analytic category that can shed new light on the religious development of medieval Europe.

A closer analysis of the concept of ‘dualism’ reveals that it is an equally complex term. Similarly to ‘heresy,’ it consists of three distinct elements: dualism in a dogmatic sense, i.e. the belief that the world is created and/or governed by two distinct deities (along with a row of other dogmatic specificities); a series of customs that can, for the most part, be traced back to certain branches of early Christians, such as the division of adherents into two classes and the initiatory ceremony known as spiritual baptism; and finally a political opposition to the involvement of the Church in secular affairs, as well as, occasionally, the entire concept of the imperial government as an expression of divine will. In a historical sense, I argue for the possibility of a continuity between the Paulicians of eastern Armenia, Balkan Bogomils and Pataren/Cathars of Western Europe (as well as, ultimately, the Manichaeans of late Antiquity), despite acknowledging the existence of (more or less) clear differences between them. I base my argument on a rejection of the binary opposition between perfect continuity and complete independence, adopting a model of flexible continuity that can be observed on a series of fringe religious movements such as Messalianism.

Against the background of this conceptual analysis, the question of the Bosnian Church's alleged heresy and dualism becomes more clearly delineated. In terms of its *praxis*, it can be said with relative certainty that the Bosnian Church divided its adherents into two classes and had a hierarchy unlike those of either the Catholic or the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Thus it certainly can be considered as *heteropractic*. Furthermore, as even Fine acknowledges, the Bosnian Church was consciously schismatic, and thus fulfilled another criterion for the existence of heresy. While it can thus certainly be considered as heretical from the point of view of the medieval Catholic Church, the question whether the Bosnian Church really was guilty of the charges of dualistic heterodoxy remains pertinent. Based on a close reading of a series of glosses found in two medieval Bosnian manuscripts, I argue that the Bosnian Church did adhere to a moderately dualist theology, as reported in heresiological documents. However, the heterodoxy of the Bosnian Church was not to be found in a modification of scripture, but rather in its distinctive interpretation.

Having established a framework for the study of medieval Bosnia's religious culture, I turned my attention to the imagery of the *stećak* stones. Prior to analyzing their iconography, however, I proposed a general theory of the role of visual culture in medieval Bosnia. The reason for this additional theoretical step is two-fold. Firstly, even a quick glance at the imagery of the *stećak* stones reveals that it cannot be read in the standard framework of either Eastern Orthodox or Catholic medieval art. Most notably, the imagery is characterized by a complete absence of depictions of prominent saints and biblical scenes. Secondly, like all dualist movements, the Bosnian Church was ascribed an iconoclastic attitude, thus making the question of its conception of art particularly challenging. Analyzing the history of Christian attitudes towards the visual arts, I suggest that the most productive framework for understanding *stećak* imagery is a theory of three levels of meaning, ultimately rooted in Alexandrian methods of scriptural interpretation. This framework allows for a reconciliation of two of the most prominent, mutually opposed scholarly approaches to *stećak* art: one stressing its mimetic, naturalistic qualities, and the other emphasizing its symbolic nature. My proposal is that the *stećak* imagery possessed several layers of meaning, some of which were only legible to the initiated.

My general analysis of *stećak* imagery leads to several significant conclusions. I argue that the technique in which the imagery is carved should not be considered as a primitive variation of the Romanesque low relief, but rather as a deliberate restriction to two-dimensionality dictated by an adherence to the early Christian opposition to sculpture in the round. The restriction to this technique, which I term *flat relief*, suggests that the imagery is not (only) a mimetic representation of events and personalities, but rather a symbolic language used to convey specific ideas of an esoteric kind. Furthermore, the *flat relief* indicates the existence of surprising connections between the arts of the *stećak* and those of medieval Armenia and the Christian East in general. In a more general sense, however, I conclude that the *stećak* represents an authentic creation of medieval Bosnians, taking up its place among a series of original Christian artistic expressions in stone.

The imagery used on the *stećak* stones can be roughly divided into three groups. The first one is a series of symbols and motifs familiar from the context of medieval European art, including crosses, rosettes, fleurs-de-lis or jousts. The second group is constituted by motifs that are very rare in medieval Europe, but are familiar from either early Christian or medieval Caucasian art, such as the orant, the swastika, the ankh cross or the anthropomorphic niche. Finally, some symbols and images such as the circle dance, certain idiosyncratic crosses or the anthropomorphic fleur-de-lis are either original creations of medieval Bosnian artists, or are taken over from other, non-Christian contexts. In the case of the former two categories, the occurrences of motifs in other context served as a starting point for the decipherment of their meaning on the *stećak* stones. In this respect, the most striking parallel is constituted by the *orant*, one of the most prominent motifs of both early Christian and the art of the *stećak*.

However, my readings of *stećak* imagery are based primarily on an analysis of their concrete occurrences on the stones. Proceeding in this way, I have reached three important general conclusions. Firstly, I argue that the images can be classified into several distinct semantic types: simple marks, ornaments, motifs and unique compositions. Depending on the nature of the image

in which it occurs, the same symbol can thus have different meanings. Secondly, there are numerous instances of “hybrid” images, whereby two or more symbols are merged to form a new one which cannot be assigned a clear meaning. Finally, a striking characteristic of the *stećak* imagery is the tendency to modify and develop symbols, leading to the fact that, despite a limited repertoire of motifs, there are no two identical *stećak* stones. These three conclusions lead to the important insight that the meanings of the *stećak* imagery cannot be limited to a dictionary of static iconographic definitions. While individual symbols certainly do represent relatively stable concepts, their full meaning can only be derived from their individual occurrences and combinations with other motifs.

Notwithstanding the occurrence of a series of indecipherable symbols, the imagery of the *stećak* stones constitutes a consistent iconographic programme. In terms of their frequency, the most important symbols are the cross, the crescent and the ring. They can be read as both representations of divinity and apotropaic symbols. The cross, furthermore, is understood as a universal symbol connecting disparate elements of the universe into a higher whole, thus reflecting a conception that is closer to the world of the early Christians than that of medieval Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The cross is also reflected in the human being in the *orant* posture, representing the idea of communication between the material and divine worlds. A special significance is attached to the hand, which can be seen as both a metonymy of the *orant*, and a means through which the human being defines its role in the material world. Frequently, the hand is shown holding a weapon, thus acting as an occupational marker of the military caste as well as reflecting the idea of a struggle against the dark forces of the material world.

While on one level it can be read as an expression of the secular values of medieval Bosnian aristocracy, the stag hunt motif also has a symbolic significance. It is tied both to pre-Christian solar conceptions and to the idea of the inevitable persecution of true Christians in this world. The circle dance or *kolo* can also be read on several levels: it reflects the performance of sacred dances attested in early and medieval Christianity, expresses the idea of an egalitarian social structure and indicates the continuing communication between the dead and the living. While it

is difficult to assign a definitive meaning to the anthropomorphic niche, I have suggested that on a basic level it represents a human being, simultaneously reflecting the esoteric conception of his or her transformation into a spiritual form after death. Finally, I argued that a series of prominent *stećak* symbols such as the spiral, the fleur-de-lis and the rosette should be read as expression of the receptive, feminine element reflecting divinity in the material world, thus filling the position taken up by Marian symbolism in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox art.

As I show in my analysis, it is impossible to assign the categories ‘orthodox,’ ‘heretical,’ or ‘dualist’ to the symbols found on the *stećak* stones. Just as in the case of scripture, the possible heterodoxy of symbols is rather to be found in their interpretation. In this respect, perhaps the clearest indication of heterodoxy is to be found in the nature of the crosses found on the *stećak* stones, or, more precisely, the complete absence of the crucifixion. The most convincing explanation for this striking absence is an adherence to a docetic Christology, or, at the very least, a predominantly symbolic interpretation of the cross. Furthermore, the prominence of the *orant*, as well as its frequent ‘hybridization’ with the cross, indicates a belief in the presence of divinity in *true Christians*, one of the fundamental beliefs of dualist movements. An adherence to a dualist type of Christianity is further indicated by several unique compositions, such as, most notably, the ‘reconciliation’ of a mounted warrior and a dragon (Chapter 9, figure 31), and a cross whose vertical arm has been replaced by two intertwined dragons (Chapter 10, figure 25). A proximity of the majority of the other symbols to the Bosnian Church is suggested through a method of elimination, as they are not found in either Catholic or Orthodox Christian art of this period. While my analysis can thus not conclusively prove that the *stećak* stones should primarily be seen as a product of Bosnian Christianity, it has provided a convincing interpretation of their iconography in accordance with a moderately dualist theology.

Naturally, my analysis of *stećak* imagery does not fully reveal its multiple layers of meanings. In the absence of sources attesting to the reception practices of medieval Bosnian observers, they will inevitably remain a matter of further speculation and dispute. More importantly, however, I have argued that a significant element of the imagery’s meaning is symbolic. This level of

meaning has received a deliberately brief and marginal treatment. The reason is that the symbolic meaning can only be perceived by what the philosophers of antiquity and the Middle Ages called the mind's *inner eye*. Avoiding an entanglement in mystical conceptions, it can be suggested that this inner eye can be linked to a level of consciousness that remains beyond the possibility of linguistic communication. Thus, symbolic meaning remains something to be deciphered by each individual him- or herself. Perhaps, it can be found only in the presence of the original carvings, in the vicinity of one of the thousands of *stećak* stones still scattered around the countryside of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTIONS OF MEDIEVAL INSCRIPTIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Chapter 1

The tombstone of Varda

SI KAMI
NЪ VARDA,
ČI LI JE BIO,
ČI LI JE SADE
ČI LI NEĆ[e]
B[i]TI.

(Vego I 41)

Chapter 4

The letter of Radomer, djed of the Bosnian Church (8. 1. 1404.)

“[...] oto poslasmo po vojevodi Pavla i naše strojnike i kr'stjani da pride opet' u svoje, jere na to naidosmo gospodina kralja, da mu opet' njegovo vrati, jere mu je bilo bez' krivine uzeto. Za to smerno zahvaljujemo vašoi ljubve i zahvalismo, što ga ste doslei u sebe počteno pridr'žali, i ošte molimo vašu milost', da ga počteno i otpravite, i ošte pravimo vas' cekja', nam' ste bili opkjenici, eda vam' je takoi videti poslati svoje dva vlasteličikja s vojevodom' Pavlom' do kralja, jeda biste koi sklad, i mir'šnim' učinili, jere bi nam' drago, da biste u miru prebivali.”

(Šanjek 106)

The charter of the Bosnian djed Mirohna (1427.) (translation form Latin)

“Gospodin kralj Tvrtko poslao mi je Ivana Mrnavića zvanog Turka da se njemu i njegovim nasljednicima zakune na vjerno služenje, da njegova vjera bude i vjera Ivana i njegovih posjeda, te da mu to bude ovjerovljeno pismima potvrđenima pečatom kraljevske vlasti, i da se o tome neće ispitivati Crkvu bosansku i posjede, sve dok se ne bi dogodilo nešto protiv vjere G(ospodina) Kralja Tvrtka i Crkve (bosanske).”

(Šanjek 109)

The Abjuration of Bosnian Christians

Bilino polje, 8.4.1203.

The King's Island (Csepel), 30.4.1203.

(Translation from Latin)

U ime vječnoga Boga, stvoritelja svega i otkupitelja ljudskog roda, godine 1203. od njegova utjelovljenja, šeste godine (pontifikata) gospodina pape Inocenta III. Mi, priori, onih ljudi, koji smo se dosad na poseban način nazivali povlasticom kršćanskog imena na području Bosne, izabrani kao predstavnici svih u ime sviju koji pripadaju bratstvu naše zajednice, u prisutnosti gospodina Ivana Casamarisa, kapelana vrhovnoga prvosvećenika i od Rimske crkve u Bosnu zbog toga poslanog, u prisutnosti gospodina bana Kulina, gospodara Bosne, obećajemo pred Bogom i njegovim svetima da ćemo ostati vjerni naredbama i zapovijedima svete Crkve u životu i u vladanju našem kao i da ćemo slušati i živjeti prema njezinim naredbama. Jamčimo u ime sviju koji pripadaju našoj zajednici i iz naših su mjesta, sa svom imovinom i stvarima, da nikad ubuduće nećemo slijediti opačinu krivovjersva. U prvom redu odričemo se raskola, zbog kojeg smo ozloglašeni, i priznajemo Rimsku crkvu, našu majku, glavom svega crkvenog jedinstva. U svim našim mjestima, gdje braća zajedno žive, imat ćemo bogomolje u kojima ćemo se kao braća zajednički sastajati da javno pjevamo noćne, jutarnje i dnevne časove. U svim ćemo crkvama imati oltare i križeve, knjige, kako Novog, tako i Starog zavjeta, čitat ćemo kako to čini Rimski crkva. U svakom našem mjestu imat ćemo svećenike, koji moraju barem u nedjelje i blagdane, prema crkvenim odredbama, čitati mise, slušati ispovijedi i davati pokore. Pokraj bogomolja imat ćemo groblja, u kojim će se pokapati braća i došljaci, ako ondje slučajno umru. Najmanje sedam puta na godinu iz rulu svećenika primat ćemo tijelo Gospodnje, a to znači: na Božić, Uskrs, Duhove, Blagdan apostola Petra i Pavla, Uznesenje Djevice Marije, na njezino rođenje i na spomendan svih svetih, koji se slavi prvoga studenoga. Od Crkve određene postove održavat ćemo i čuvati ono što su naši staro mudro odredili.

Žene, koje budu pripadale našoj družbi, bit će odijeljene od muškaraca i u spavaonicama i u blagavaonicama, a nitko od braće neće sam sa samom razgovarati, ako bi odatle mogla proizaći zla sumnja. Niti ćemo unaprijed primati nekoga ili neku udanu, osim ako se uzajamnim sporazumom, obećavši uzdržljivost, oboje zajednički obrate.

Slavit ćemo svetačke blagdane određene od svetih otaca i nikoga, za kojega bismo sa sigurnošću znali da je manihejac ili neki drugi krivovjerac, nećemo primiti da s nama stanuje. I kako smo odijeljeni od ostalih svjetovnjaka životom i vladanjem, tako ćemo se razlikovati odjećom, koja će biti zatvorena, nebojena (ne šarena), izmjerena do gležnja. Od sada se nećemo nazivati kršćanima, kao do sada, nego braćom, da ne bismo, sebi pripisujući to ime, drugim kršćanima nanosili nepravdu.

Kad umre učitelj, od sada za vazda, priori s vijećem braće, bojeći se Boga, izabrat će starješinu kojega treba potvrditi rimski rimski prvosvećenik. I ako Rimski crkva bude htjela nešto dodati ili ublažiti, vjerno ćemo prihvatiti i održavati.

Da ovo ima snagu zavazda, dokazujemo svojim potpisom. Dano kod rijeke Bosne, na mjestu koje se zove Bilino polje, 8. travnja (1203).

Potpisujemo: Dragič, Ljubin, Dražeta, Pribiš, Ljuben, Radoš, Vladoš, ban Kulin, Marin, arhiđakon dubrovački.

Zatim mi Ljubin i Dražeta po volji sve naše braće u Bosni i samoga bana Kulina, s istim gospodinom Ivanom kapelanom došavši k uzvišenom Emeriku, najkršćanskijem kralju Ugarske, u prisutnosti samoga kralja i časnog Ivana, nadbiskupa kaločkog, i Kalana, biskupa iz Pečuha, i mnogih drugih zakleli smo se u ime svih da ćemo ono što smo ugovorili čuvati, i ako Rimski crkva bude htjela od nas nešto drugo, uvest ćemo po katoličkoj vjeri.

Učinjeno na Kraljevu otoku, 30. travnja (1203).

Šanjek (82-83)

Transliterated text of gost Radin's testament

+ Neka je (u) sviden'je svemog(uće)ga g(ospo)dina b(og)a i u znan'je samovladuštaago i b(la)goljubimmago gospotstva dubrovač'koga, jere jaa, gost' Radin', buduće m(i)los'tiju b(o)žiom' namestan' u svoioi pameti na svako celo i istino ufan'je, da mi je nepotvoreno za mene i kon' mene. Postavih' u kneza Tadioka Maroevičja i u sinovca mu Maroja Naokovičja, kako se i što zdr'ži i uzdr'ži u zapiseh i načinieh', koja pisma jedna esu u notari g(o)spodstva dubrovačkoga a druga pisma esu u mene gosta Radina od' iste ruke kneza Tadioka Maroveičja i pod' njegovu pečat' verovanu, za ti za isti poklad, e k(a)da li (bi) se što zgodilo menie gostu Radinu, smrt li ali koim' drugim' uzrokom', tai pisma ostaju i esu u Ivan Kaboga, koi se zdr'že u imenu u više r(e)čenieh' pismeh' i poveljah', za koi poklad' s'da od'lučih' i razredih' na bol(j)i i na pravii način' nego što se i kako imenuje u prvieh' pismeh'. S'da ovoi poslegne od' prvieh' pis'mo učinismo, da zdr'ži vsa ina i po sem' pismu moem', gosta Radina, da se ima i hoće razrediti i uči(ni)ti za moje r(e)čeno iman'e, koe se nahodi v prveh' više r(e)čenieh' poveljah', da se svakomu momu surodniku, a ili sluzi ali prijateelju na punu i na tvrdu moje razgren'je: Naipr'vo za moju dušu, gosta Radina, šest sat' dukat' zlatieh' da se dadu na božju službu, tai šest sat' dukat' da se imaju podati razložno i načino(m'). Trista dukat' da se imaju i hoće dati u ruke net'ja mi, gosta Radina Seoničanina, da on' toi razdeli s pravom' dušom' i z dobriem' načinom' kršteniem', koi su prave vere apostolske, praviem' kr'st'janom' kmetem' i prevem' kmeticam' krstjanicam', koi da za moju dušu svaki velik' dan' i svetu nedjelju i svetu petku, na zemlju kolena poklečuće gov(o)re svetu molitvu božiju, da bi nas' iz'bavio g(os)pod' bog' od' grehov' našieh' i pomilovao na strašnom' sudištu veku vekoma; a navlašno da se toi deli stariem' kmetem' i kmeticam', takoge tko bi bili ubozi dobri muž'je, od koe' su godie vr'ste, ili krt'jane ili krst'janice, koi greha ne ljube, da im' imaa i hoće delit r(e)čeni neti im Radin', kako koga vidi i znaa od' našega zakona, ili slepa ili hroma ili mlobna ili uboga, kako koga videći, nikomu tri perpere a nikomu četiri a nikomu pet a nikomu šest a nikomu sedam a nikomu osam, takoće i mr'sniem' ljudem', prokaženiem' i slepim' i hromem' i gladniem' i žedniem' i starcem' i staricam': tem' da se imaa i hoće dav(a)ti, kako koga videće, na velike blage dni u svetu nedelju i u svetu petku i navlašno na dan' svetoga rožas'tva Hristova i na sveto blagovešten'je i na sveto vz'kršen'ja gospon'je i na dan' svetoga Goerigja, moga kr'snoga imena, i na dan' svetoga Stepana pr'vomučenika i na dan' svetoga Mihail'ja arhandela, na dan' svete deve Marie, na dan' sveh' svetieh': toi sve više pisano imenovano, kako se i što u sem pismu zdr'ži tei 300 dukat' da ima dati knez' Tadioko Marojevik' i sinovac' mu Maroje Naoković' r(e)čenomu gostu Radinu svrhu njegove vere, koju veruje i posta, koi posti, da ne može ni manje donesti ni učin(i)ti više pismenoga imenovanoga 300 dukat, nego razdeliti pravo i celo i isitino za moju dušu, kako se i što više imenuje, ako neće biti pričešnik' božiem' neposlušnikom' i ako hoće, da mu je mirna i pok(o)ina duša prid' višniem' g(o)spodom' b(o)gom' i pred' svetom' troicom' nerazdelimom', tem' pravo da up(o)koi dušu moju, koliko ushoće g(ospo)d(i)n b(o)g' svemogući.

Takogere po ti način' reč' po reč', slov(o) po slov(o), od' tehie naipre šest sat' dukat' stalju a na ufan'je božie drugu tri sta dukat' u oblast' i razgledbu kneza Andruška Sorkočevića i Tadioka Maroevića, da su oni tomui počelo i svrha, razredit i razdelit rečeno zaduš'je moje gosta Radina, po pravom' pravilu ništetniem' i uboziem', slepiem' i hromiem', sirotam' i udovicam' za to pove i ostavih' u njih' moje rečeno zaduš'je svr'hu vere i duše plem(e)nstva njih', da dele, kako koga vide stara ili uboga ili nevolna čoveka, nikomu 3 dinare a nekome 4 dinare a nekome 5 a nekom' 6 a nekomu 7 a nekomu mimo 8 dinara. K tomu da se imaju sveće žeci za dušu moju, gosta Radina, u hrameh' božieh na onei svete velike dni, koi se više imenuju, svaku svetu nedjelju i svetu petku. Od' veće togai zadušja, koe je od'lučeno na službu božiju i svieh' sveteh', jaa gost Radin, ne znače svr'šen'ja žvotu momu, k'da li, gdje li, u koe li vreme, naredih' i sredih' i raspisah' ostalo pravo iman'je moje, bude zdrav' u pameti moioi, da stoi reč(e)no iman'je moje, sve pod'puno, menie za menie, na moju volju, po svem', u svem' i po sve. A zgodilo li bi se s'mrt' mene, gostu Radinu, ostavljam' i nareguje ostalo moje imanje: naiprvo Vukavi krst'janici bratučedi mi, a kčerši Tvrtkovi 150 dukat', a gostu Radinu netju mi Seočaninu 100 dukat', a drugoi Vukavi kr'stjanici mlaišoi Vuknin(o) 100 dukat'; Stoisavi mlaišoi moioi šest' des't' dukat'; Vukni sestri moioi 360 dukat; a Vučici kčerši moioi 200 dukat; a trem' kr'stjam', koi su za mnom' pošli, naipre da se daa Vukše 60 dukat' a Radoju 50 dukat'; Mil'savi kr'stjanici da se daa 20 dukat' a Radanu kr'stjaninu da se daa 60 dukat'. A od' pročieh naiprie da se daa Pavi nevesti mi s tremi sinmi dve tisuć dukat' a kčerši mi Alinci 100 dukat, a sinovcu mi Vladisavu z duma sinovma tisuću dukat' a nevesti mi K'tavi 100 dukat'. A sulgam' mojem', koi su za monm' pošli, naiprije Vukasu kom(o)rniku 100 dukat', Radosavu i bratu mu Vukiću Radilovićem' 60 dukat', Radovanu Ostoiću 30 dukat', a četirem' Gotianovićem', Radivoju i Mihoju i Radosavu i Obradu, svem' njih' 70 dukat', tako da budu Mihoju tridesti dukat', a oniem sviem' trem' 40 dukat'. Radonji Vukotiću 40 dukat', Vukiću Vukašinoviću 30 dukat', Obradu i Milici, slugam' Paviniem', 10 dukat', a Gjurenju i Ilie 10 dukat' a našemu prijatelju, knezu Tadioku Maroeviću, dvesti dukat' i šubu moju crvenu od' aksamita, podstavljenu ciblini, koju mi je darovao gospodinu kral' Matijaš', a knezu Andrušku 100 dukat', a za hram' i a greb', gde mi kosti budu i legu, 140 dukat'.

A ovoi neka se znaju pokladi, pravi gost' Radin', što je tko u mene postavio, da mu ne izgine ni na manije doge: naiprije bratučeda mi, gosta Radivoja, 270 dukat', toi da mu se daa detetu, a sine Božićka Miloševića.

Serčanice da mu se da 190 dukat', a Vuoku, gostu uskopalskomu, 110 dukat.

A ostalo moje imanj'e, ili je u sudoveh' ili u inom' kovu, toi da razdele četiri sinovca moi Vladisav' i Tvr'tko i Jurai i Radič', a ostalo pokuć'je i iman'je moje toi da je na glave Vukni i Vuč(i)ci i Mihni i Tvrtku i Jurju i Radiču, ili bi konji, ili su svite moje i bisazi, ili koe kodie pr'tište, izam šuba sa zlatom': onai da e Tvr'tko.

Toi se više imenovano na ufan'je božie razdelismo i naredismo, da dobar' način' i razred'bu učine tomui svemu više pisani počteni i više imenovaani vlas'tele knez' An'druško Sorkočević' i knez' Tadioko Maroević' š njim' mojaa dva sinovca Vladisav' i Tvr'tko.

Pisano let' g(o)spodneh' na 1466. leto m(e)seca ženara 5. dan' u Dubrovniku.

(Šanjek 362-364).

Chapter 5

The glosses of the Bosnian Srećković Gospel published by M.N. Speranski (1902)

Matthew 3:29

Vir'no Hristos pripovida: ne će bog' prostiti grišnikom, koi glagolahu duh' nečisti su iei a u nem' že biš duh' oca nabeskoga.

Luke 8:43

Žena kr'votočiva est' ludie boži eže Hristos' očisti od grih'ih'; a vračeve zakonici; dvinadesete liti 12-te apostol' iže vse dni grihe obličajut', iko že i Hristos' reče u evangjeli: ašte ne Hristos' prišal i glagolah' im', grih' ne bi imili, i apostoli reče: ida že, umnoži se grih', prin' bist' blagodati.

Luke 10:13

Harazin' i Vit'saida, grada i mista nepokorliva Hristu, a Tir' i Sidon', pokorliva.

Luke 10:30-35

On' človik' est' plinici, a Erusalim' žilište svetih; a Eriha mir', a jazvi grisi, a erei Moisi, a legvit' Ivan' Vodonos'c, a samarinanin' Isus', a oliii i ivino milost' Božija, a skot' zakon', a gostionica crkva, a gostinik' Petar', i dva pineza vira Idina.

Luke. 11:5-7

Tri hlibi ot'c' i sin' i sveti duh'; a drug' supr'nik' iže hoštet' dušu ego pridati angjelom' neprijaznime.

Luke 13:27-28

Avram', Isak', Jakov' i vsi duhovni proroci ludie boži sut', a sinove carstva otstup'nici eže uvede Sotona u skrovište skudil'n'ja.

Luke 15:11-32

On' človik' est' ot'c' nevidimi; a sin' m'ni angjeli eže shini Sotona; a sin' starji angeli iže vinu ocu služe; a tel'c' upitjanii Hristos'.

Luke 16:1-11

On' človik' s'nove vika idiže, est' prostranoe žitie, to e i gospodin' vika; a ubogi Lazar' ludi boži, Avram ot'c' nebesni.

John 5:2

Ov'ča kupil' se razumiti mir's', indiže se kupul duša na pl'ti.

John 6:11-13

Pet' hlibi sut' četiri evangjelisti i vira Idina; dvanadesete apostol', a eč'men' ukorenje ot' ezik'.

John 9:6

Br'nie milost božii iskupil' mir'sa; idiže potriba iest' očistiti se človiku.

The glosses of the Vrutok Gospels

1. (Luke 8:43-48)

Žena krvvotočiva ľudije B(o)ž(i) ježe H(ri)s(t) očisti ot(ь) grêhъ jihъ, a vračeve zakonici, a 12 lêtê14 12 ap(o)st(o)la jaže po vse d(ь)ni grêhi obličahota, jakože H(ri)s(t) r(e)če: Ako ne bihъ prišъ i glagolalъ jimъ, grêha ne bi imêli.

2. (Matthew 8:5-10)

Карегънаумъ vladanije, a satъnikъ vsi jezici, a otrokъ ľudie B(o)ž(i) koje H(ri)s(t) očisti ot(ь) grêhъ, a krovove zakoni pod ke ne vъnide H(ri)s(t), a vladika knezъ vêka sego, a vojini zakonici, a rabi iže se povinuju vsi.

3. (Matthew 12:1-8)

Sijanije jes(t) s(i)nove, a jadenije propovid. To je i molitva. Farisêije pripirahu Is(us)a jere ňegovi učenicu u subotu učahu, a Is(us) je prêše jere oni ot(ь) Dav(i)da po vse d(ь)ni u cr(ь)kvi skvr(ь)ne subotu krivo propovidajušte.

4. (Matthew 12:14-20)

Pravednikomъ velitъ cêlomudrǔstvovati, a ne sьblazniti. I se jakože tristi vêtarъ ne prêlamajetъ i ogaň uprŕitišti ne ugasajetъ

5. (Matthew 13:33)

Polъ vьtora spuda i talanatъska

6. (Mark 8:30-33)

protivļenije

7. (Luke 9:28-36)

S(i)ň B(o)ž(i) pokaza svojimъ učenicomъ kakovu slavu vênu (=vynu) ima ot(ь) Ot(ь)ca ašte gla(go)aše Mojšijъ (i) Ilija zakoniju16 se javļaje na zakonъ B(o)ž(i) ot(ь) načela do vêku.

8. (Luke 10:13-15)

Horazinъ i Vitъsaidъ gradi i mêsta nepokogļiva H(rist)u, a Turъ i Sidonъ pokorļiva.

9. (Luke 10:30-35)

Онъ чл(о)в(ê)къ jes(тъ) plinica, a Jerus(a)limъ žilište s(ve) tihъ, a Jeriha mirъ sь, a jazvi grêsi, a jerêjъ Mojъsjъ, a levgitъ Ivan Vodonosacъ, a Samarijaninъ Isusъ, a olijъ i vino milostъ B(o)žija, a skotъ zakonъ, a gostinъnica cr(ъ)kvъ, a gostinъnikъ Petarъ, a dva pineza dêla i vira.

10. (Luke 16:4-9)

Онъ чл(о)в(ê)къ jes(тъ) knezъ vêka sego, a konobъ starišina cr(ъ)kve jego, a dl(ъ)žnici iže po vse d(ъ)ni grêhe ot(ъ)puštaju чл(о)в(ê)комъ i tako gube d(u)še чл(о)в(ê)čske.

11. (Luke 16:19-23)

Bogati чл(о)в(ê)къ s(i)nove vêka sego. Idêže jes(тъ) prostranoje žitije, to je i g(o)s(podi)нъ vêka. A ubogi Lazarъ ľudie B(o)ž(ij)i, a Avramъ Ot(ъ)сь n(e)b(e)sni, a lono krilo

12. (John 2:3-12)

Zakonъ: Arhitrikl(i)нъ mni se Petrъ, a ženiнъ Is(us)ъ, a voda narodi, a vino milostъ B(o)žija, a sluge ev(a)нд(e)listi stvorъše pravdu.

13. (John 4:16-18)

5 zakonъ

14. (John 6:6-13)

I(su)сь osmo, 4 ev(a)нд(e)listi i vira i dêla, 12 ap(o)s(to)la ječmenъ, ukorenije ot(ъ) jezikъ

15. (John 6:16-21)

Narodъ mlъva gnivъ u jezicihъ

16. (John 9:1-10)

Vъnije milostъ B(o)žija, a kupilъ mirъ sь idiže (=idêže) kupujetъ se d(u)ša na plъti i jestъ potriba očistiti se чл(о)в(ê)ku.

17. (John 11:1-9)

Vitanija jestъ meju Jer(u)s(alimomъ) i Vitъragijeju. I Vitanija jestъ mirъ sь idiže (=idêže) Lazari mnozi biše do H(rist)a, a Marija ľudie B(o)ž(ij)i, a Marъta s(i)nove vêka sego.

18. (John 11:43-48)

Ukorenimъ ubrusomъ

19. (Matthew 8:28-33)

Bisi (=běsi) su d(u)si neprijaznini, a svinije vsi iže ne vĕruju H(rist)a; to je i more. A pasušte Petarъ i Pavalъ i Marija is (=izъ) koje izide 7 bêšъ i vsi iže ostaviše Vetъhi zakonъ. A gradъ H(rist)ъ i Novi zavitъ jakože u (A)pokalipsi r(e)če: i t(ъ) Jer(u)s(a)l(i)მъ vidihъ nizъhodešť s n(e)b(e)se ot(ъ) B(og)a.

20. (Matthew 9:9)

Mĕtъnica mĕsto patrijarъhovo idĕže se pat(r)ijarъhi stave srebromъ i zlatomъ.

(Nakaš 2012, 194-199)

Chapter 8

The tombstone of Vigan Milošević

+VA IME OCA I
SINA I SVET[a]GO
D[u]HA AMINъ. SE
LEŽI VIGANъ
MILOŠEVIĆъ.
SLUŽI BANU S
TIPANU, I KRALJU TV
[rъt]KU, I KRALJU DABI
ŠI, I KRALJU DABI
ŠI, I KRALJICI GRUBI
I KRALJA OSTOJU. I U T
O VRIME DOJDE I
SVADI SE OSTOJA
KRALъ S HERCEGOMъ
I Z BOSN[o]Mъ I NA UGRE
POJE OSTOJA. TO V
RIME MENE VIGNA
DOJDE KONъČINA
I LEGOHъ NA SVO
Mъ PLEMENITOMъ
PODъ KOČERINOMъ,

I MOLJU VASъ, NE NAST
UPAJTE NA ME! JA S[a]Mъ
BILъ KAKO VI JESTE,
VI ĆETE BITI KAKO

JESAMЪ JA.
(Vego I 13)

The tombstone of Radoje Mrkšić

A SI KRЪS
TЪ RЪD
OJA MRЪK
ŠIĆA STA
HЪ BOGA M
OLEĆE I ZLA
NE MISL
EĆE I UBI M
E GROMЪ
(Vego II 61)

The tombstone of knez Vlač Bijelić

+ A SE LEŽI KNEZ VLAĆЪ BIEL
IĆЪ U SVOJOJ CRЪKVI U SVE
TOMЪ LAZARU ČLOVЪČE TAKO DA NIESI
PROKLETЪ NE TIKAJ U ME
(Vego II, 43)

The tombstone of Stipko Radosalić

I SE LEŽI STIPKO RADOSA
LIĆЪ BOŽE DAVNO T SAM
Ъ LEGAO I VELE TI MI E L
EŽATI
(Vego II, 39)

The tombstone of Radosav Vlahović

VA IME
BOGЪ I SVE
TOGЪ IVANA
SE LEŽI RA
DOSAVЪ VA
LAHOVIĆЪ
NEKA SE
ZNA ERE
LEG[o]HЪ

NA SVOI
PLEMEN
ITOI BA
ŠT[i]NI
SE
PISA RA
DIČb RA
DOSALIĆb
A SIEČE A
MILETA
KOVAČb KR
ILICb
(Vego II, 15)

The tombstone of vojvoda Mitoš, Vlađevina, Rogatica

+ Vb IME O[t]CA I S[i]NA
I SVETO[ga]
D[u]HA SE LEŽI VOEVODA
MIOTOŠb [sa] SVOIMb
[s]INOMb STbPKOM
SVOMU
G[ospo]D[i]NU VLATKU VUČEVI
ĆU ON [kod] NOGU
KOI MU POSLUŽI ŽIVU A MRbTVA POBILIŽI BOŽIJ[o]Mb
[p]OMOĆI I KNEZA PAVLA MILOSTIJO
A I SE KOPAITE NA PLEME[ni]TOMb
I PRAVI VOEVODA MIOTOŠb MNOGO OT MOE RU
KE NA ZEMLI BI [ubijeno] A JA NI OT ENE [jedne] I NIK
OG NE BU MRT[a]Vb NE [hte]H GA UBIT

Vego IV, 31

The tombstone of knez Radoje, Toplica, Lepenica

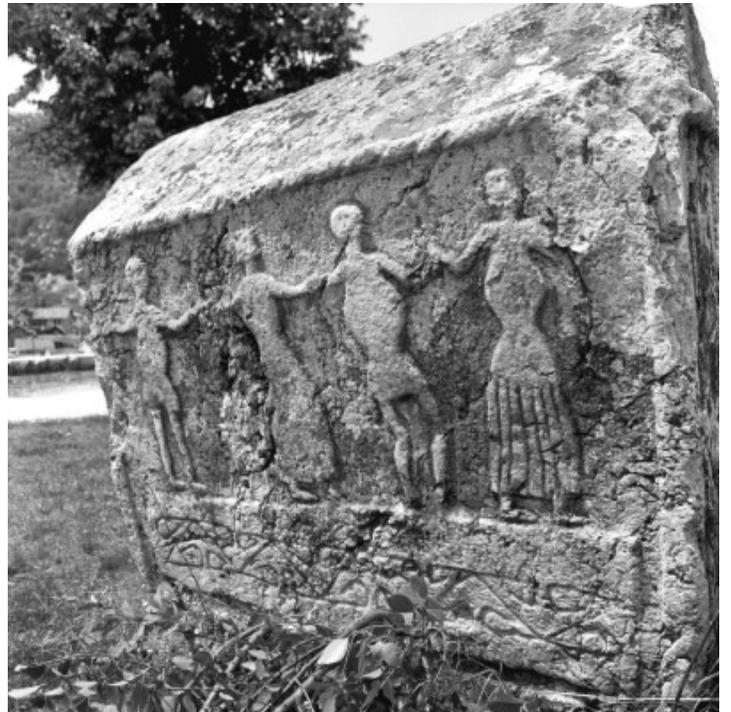
SE ZLAMENIE KNEZA
RADOJA VELIKOGA KNEZA BOSANSKOGA
A POSTAVI E SINb EGOV
b KNEZb RADIČb Z BOŽIJOM POMOĆJU
I SVOJIHb VJARNJAHb A S INOMb NIEDN
OMb INOMb POMOĆIJO NEGO SAMb ONb

Vego IV, 65

ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHAPTER 1
***Stećak* stones. Photographs by Tošo Dabac.**











ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHAPTER 8

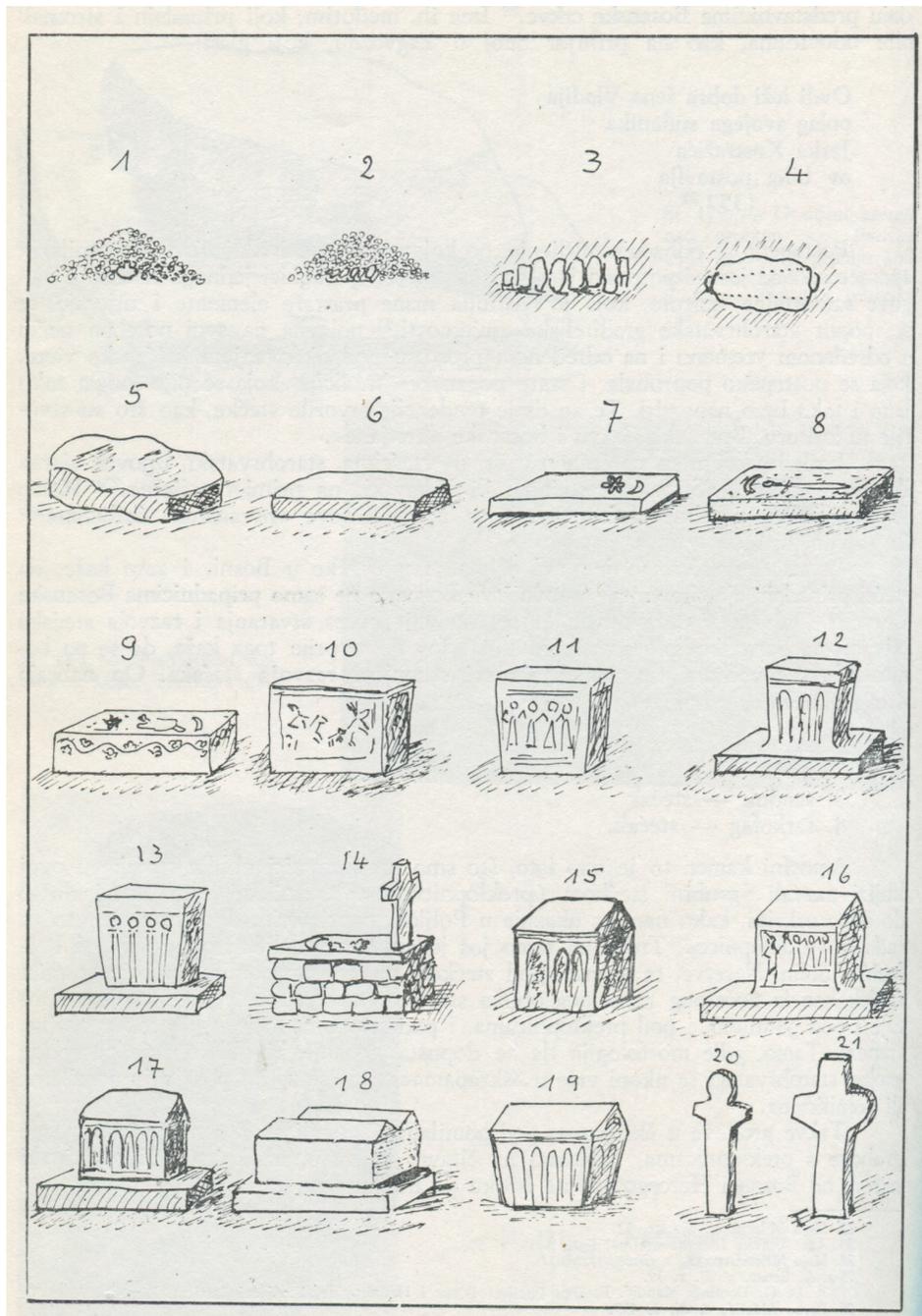


Figure 1: The evolution of the *stećak* according to Škopalj.
Drawing by Ante Škopalj



Figure 2: house-shaped *stećak* (Kupres). Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 3: *stećak* marked with crescent (detail) (Kupres). Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 5: All four sides Donja Zgošća *stećak*. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.

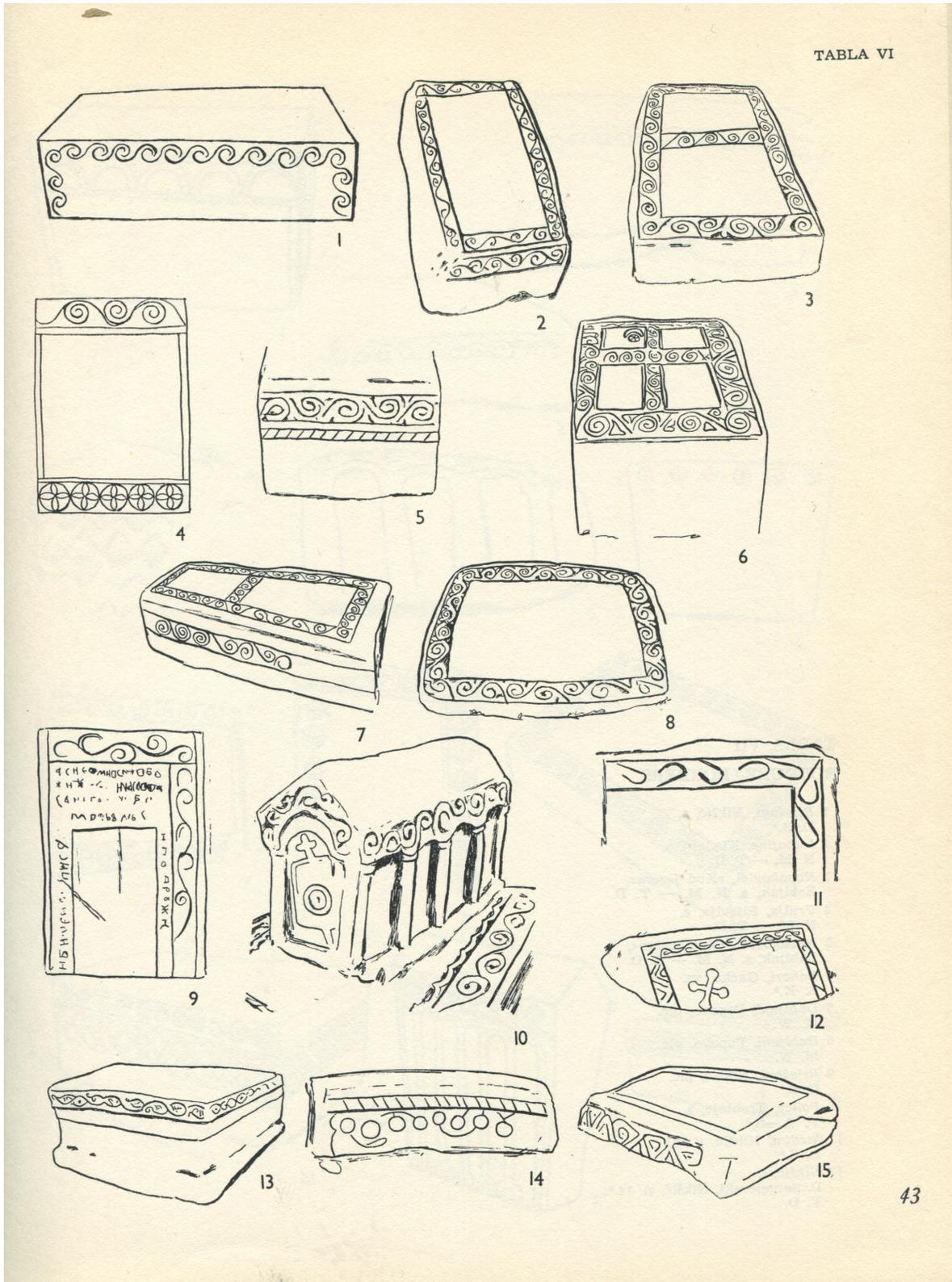


Figure 6: Different types of ornamental frames. Drawings by Marian Wenzel.



Figure 7: Crescent and cross, Radimlja.
Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 8: Fantastic winged animal surrounded by snake
Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 9: Stone divided into four parts.
Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 10: Cross with anthropomorphic niches.
Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF EXCURSUS



Figure 1: Aghtamar Church, Lake Van, Turkey. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 2: Radimlja necropolis. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 3: Winged crosses on *khachkar* stones. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 4: *Ororots* stone, Noratus, Armenia. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 5: *Ororots*, Areni, Armenia. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.



Figure 6: *Ororots*, Vorotnavank, Armenia. Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHAPTER 9
 Drawings by Marian Wenzel



Figure 1: Anthropomorphic cross

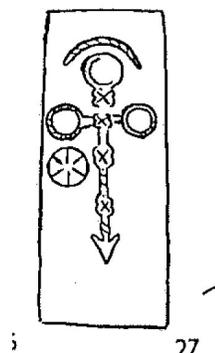
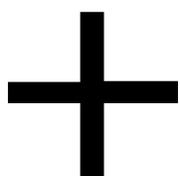


Figure 3: Idiosyncratic cross



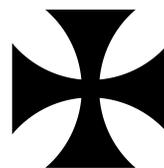
Greek cross



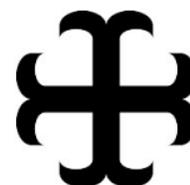
Latin cross



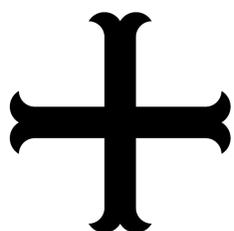
Solar cross



Cross



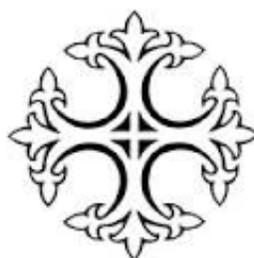
Cross cercelée



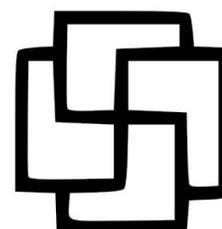
Cross moline



Ankh cross

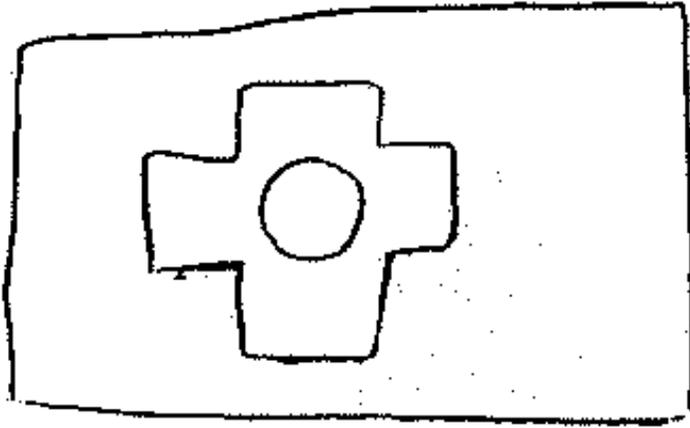


Foliolate cross



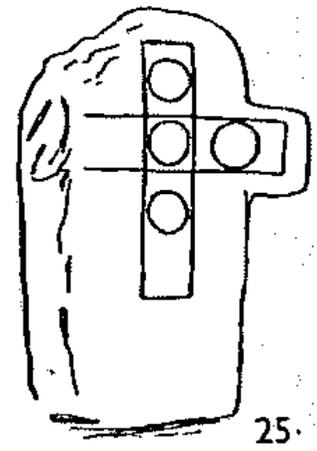
Swastika

Figure 2: Different types of crosses on *stećak* stones (schematic representation)



10

Figure 4: Greek cross with inscribed circle



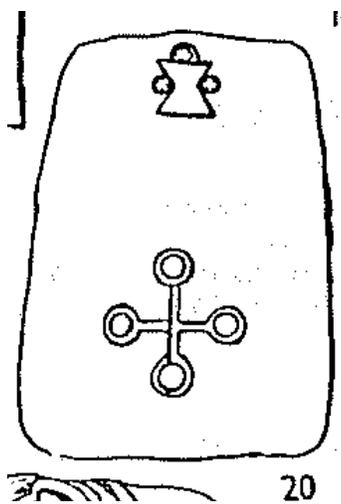
25

Figure 5: Latin cross with inscribed circles



31

Figure 6: Cross with geometric designs



14

20

Figure 7: Cross with circular edges

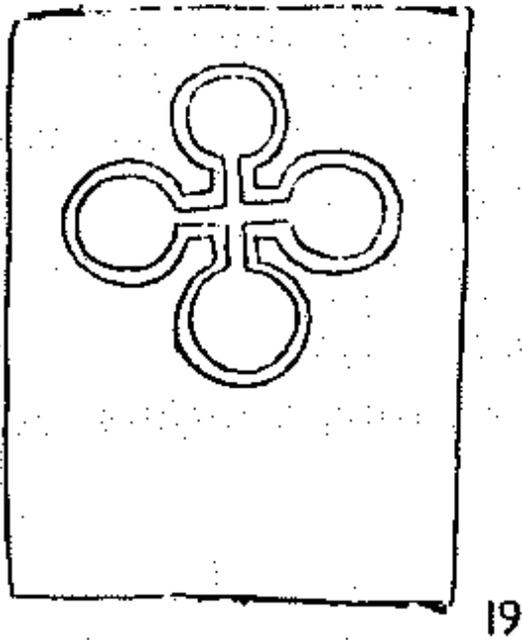


Figure 8: Cross with large circular edges

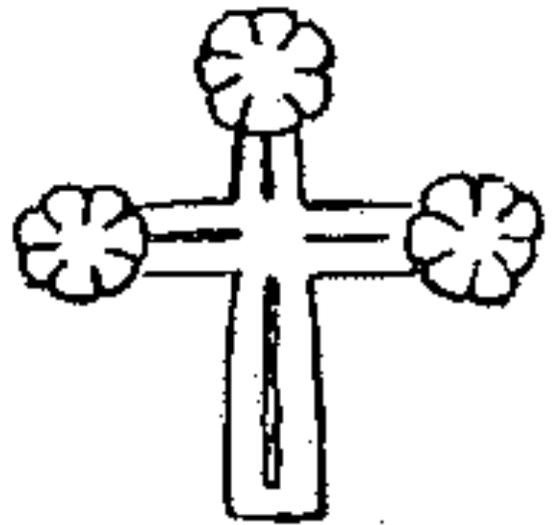


Figure 9: Flower-like rings on cross

6

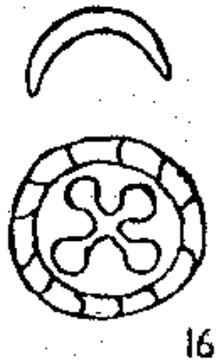


Figure 10: Cross inscribed in striped circle
Wenzel

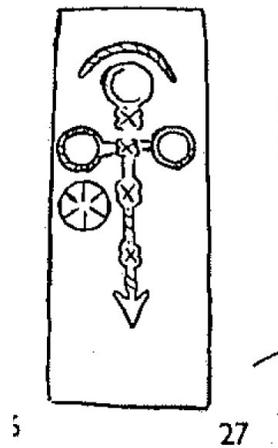
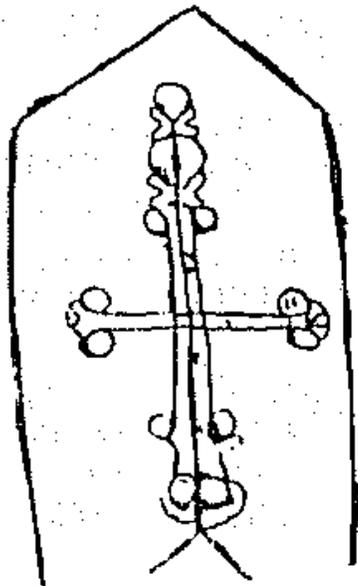


Figure 11: An original cross design



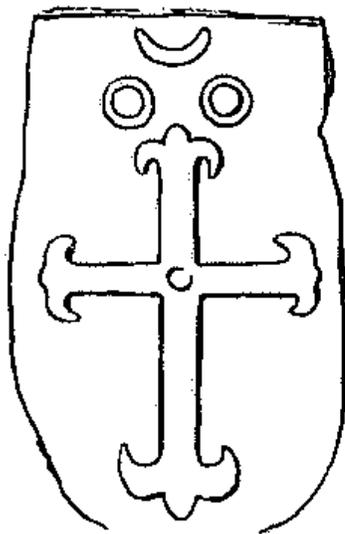
14

Figure 12: Original cross design



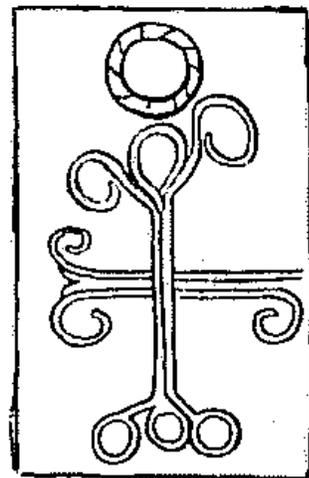
13

Figure 13: Cross moline with oversized fork tip



4

Figure 14: Cross moline with additional decorations



2

Figure 15: Transformed cross moline



Figure 16: Anchored cross.
Photography: Gorčin Dizdar.

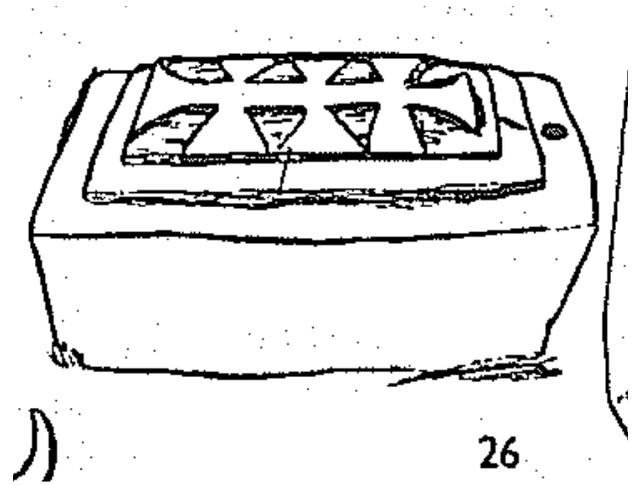


Figure 17: Cross pattée with three horizontal bars

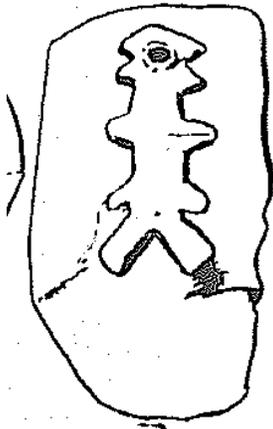


Figure 18: Anthropomorphized cross pattée

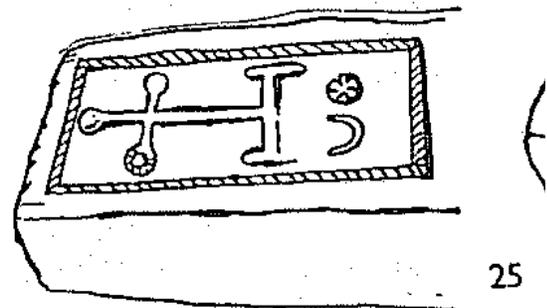


Figure 19: Mounted cross

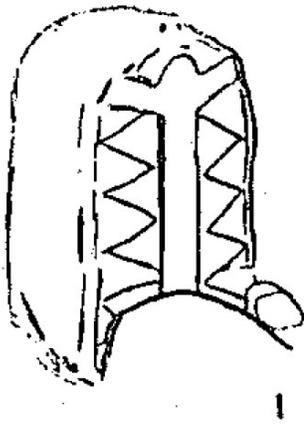


Figure 20: Orant ideogram

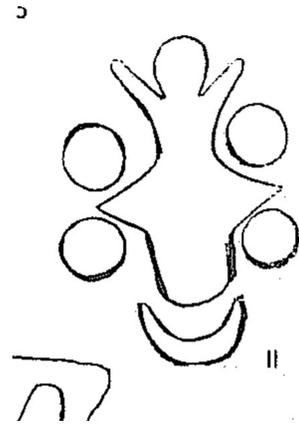


Figure 21: Abstracted orant sign

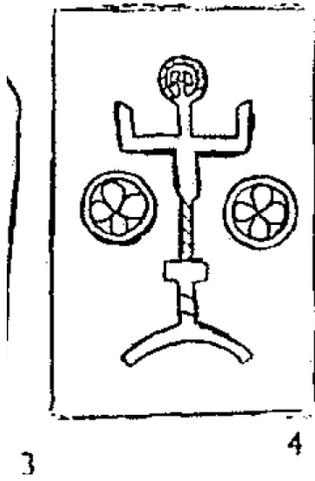


Figure 22: Symbolic orant design

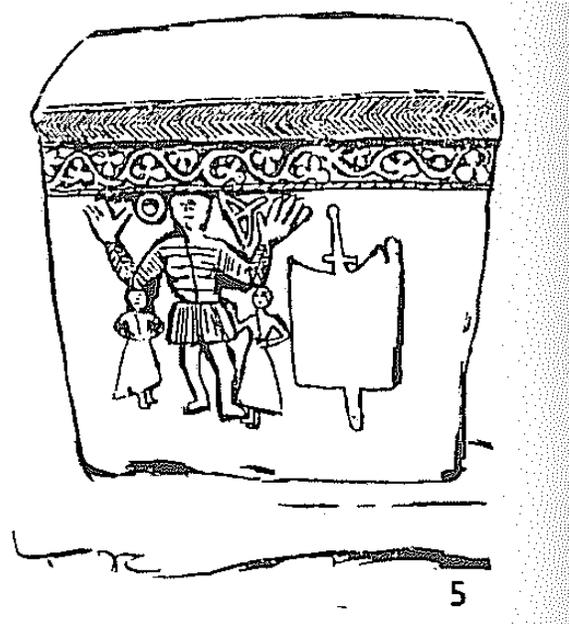


Figure 23: Portrayal of person in orant posture

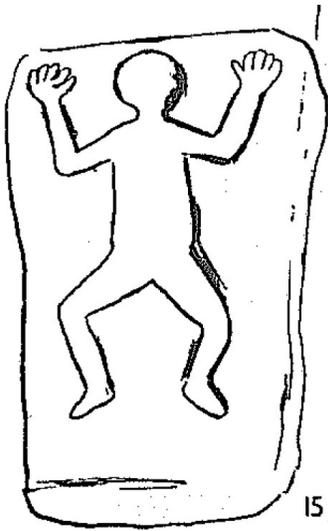


Figure 24: "Primeval" orant

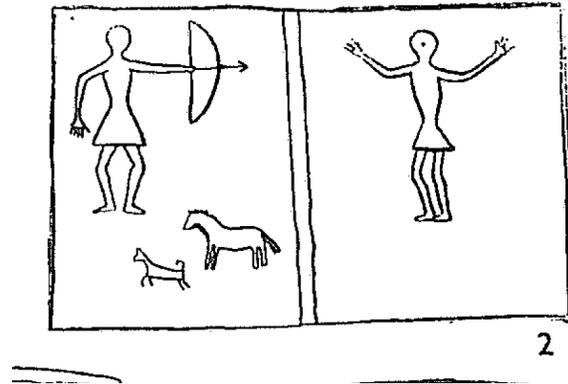


Figure 25: A non-religious orant?

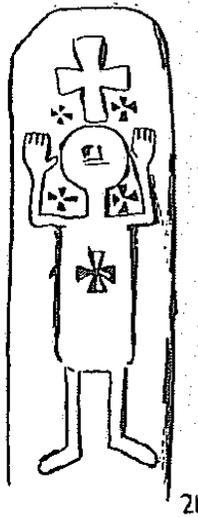


Figure 26: A conventional orant

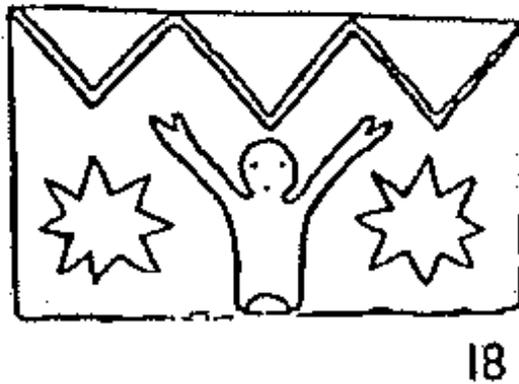
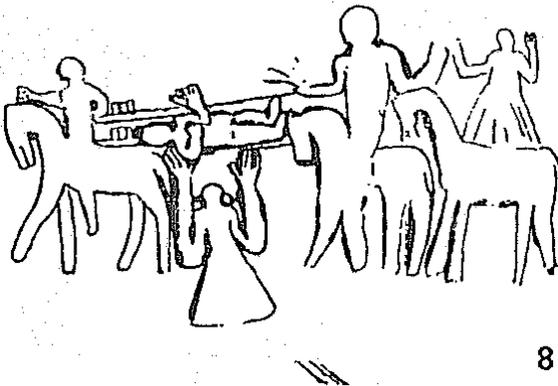
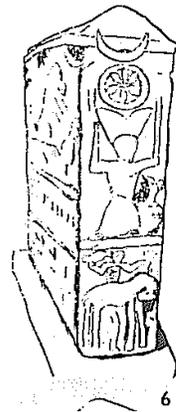


Figure 27: A spiritual orant



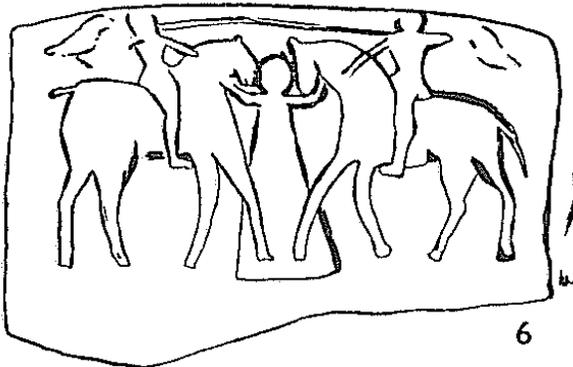
8

Figure 28: Orant in funerary procession



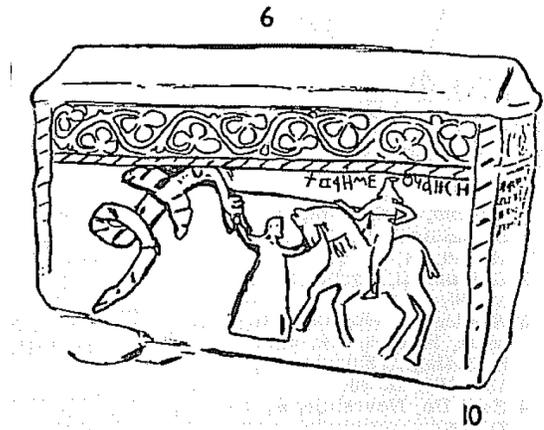
6

Figure 29: Unique composition with orant



6

Figure 30: Orant between two cavalymen



6

10

Figure 31: Orant between horseman and dragon



Figure 32: Horseman with aureole

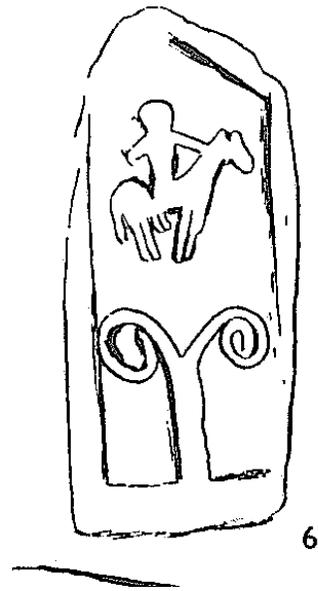


Figure 33: Horseman with spiral



Figure 34: Horseman with crescent

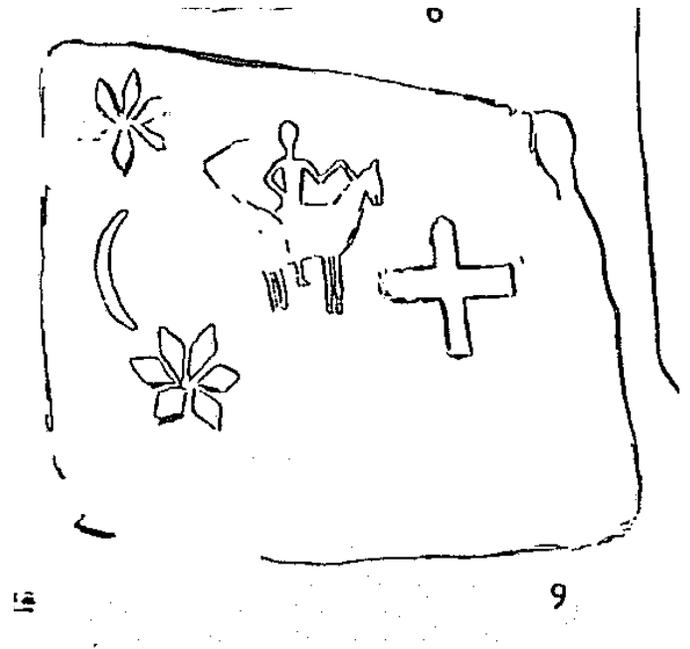


Figure 35: Horseman surrounded by rosettes

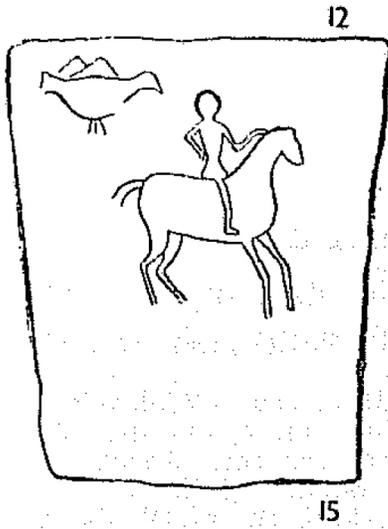


Figure 36: Horseman with bird

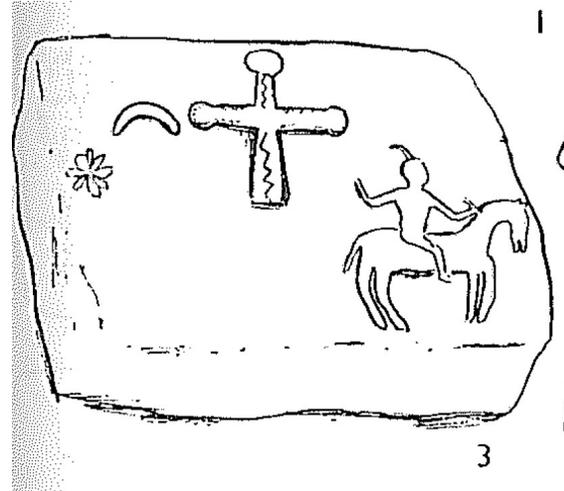


Figure 37: Horseman with cross



Figure 38: Man with raised hand

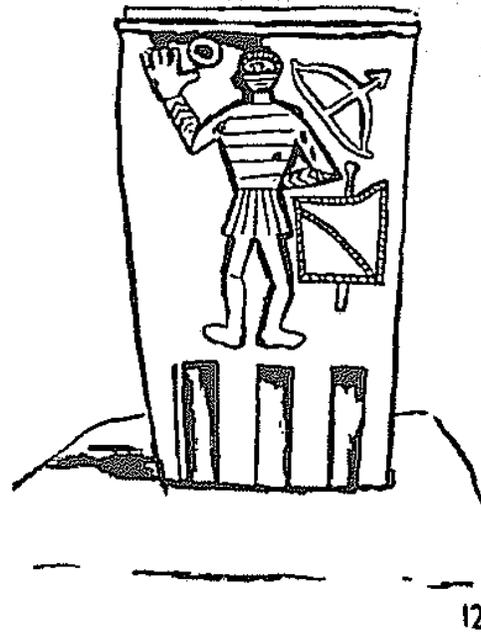


Figure 39: Man with raised hand and facial features



Figure 40: Man with raised hand and schematic face

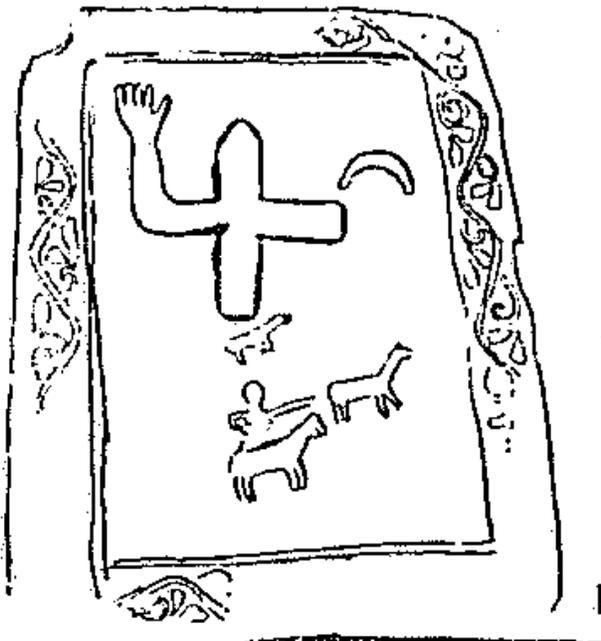


Figure 42: Cross with raised hand

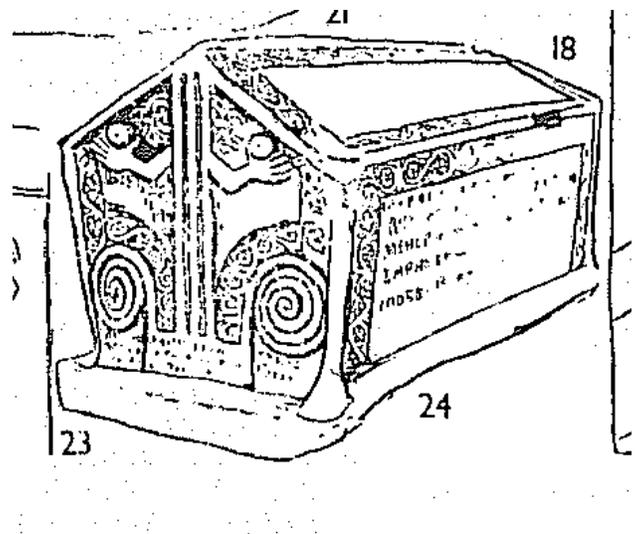


Figure 43: Two raised hands



Figure 44: Schematic hand sign

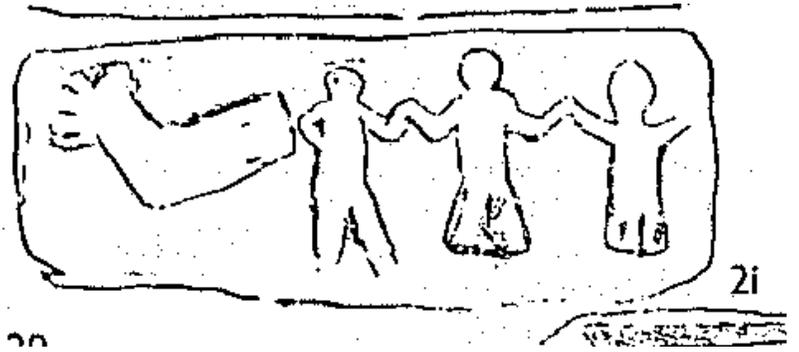


Figure 45: Hand with circle dance

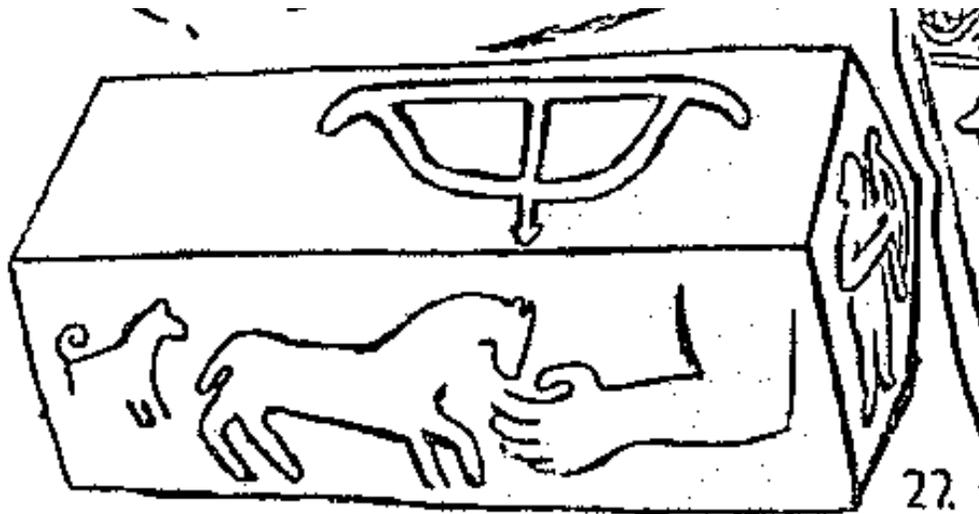


Figure 46: Hand with horse

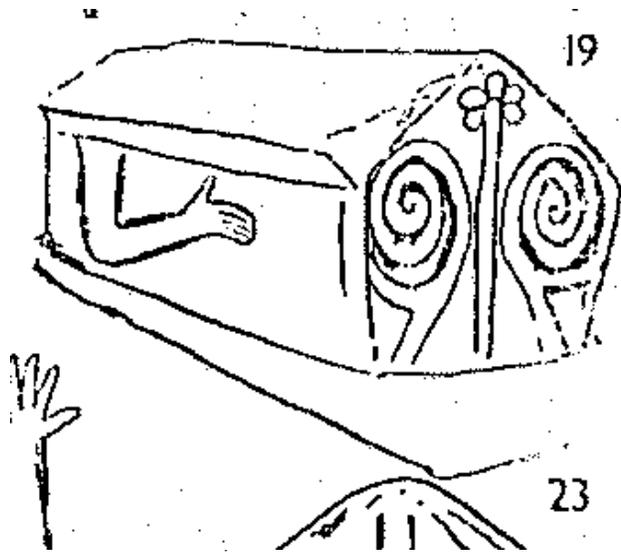


Figure 51: Hand pointing sideways

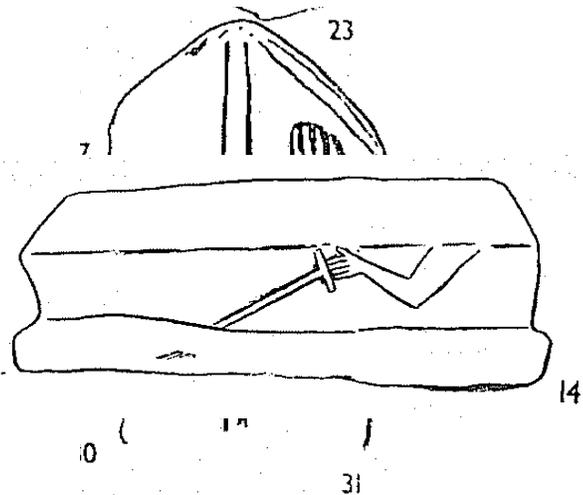


Figure 52: Hand holding walking stick



Figure 53: The *stećak* of gost Milutin

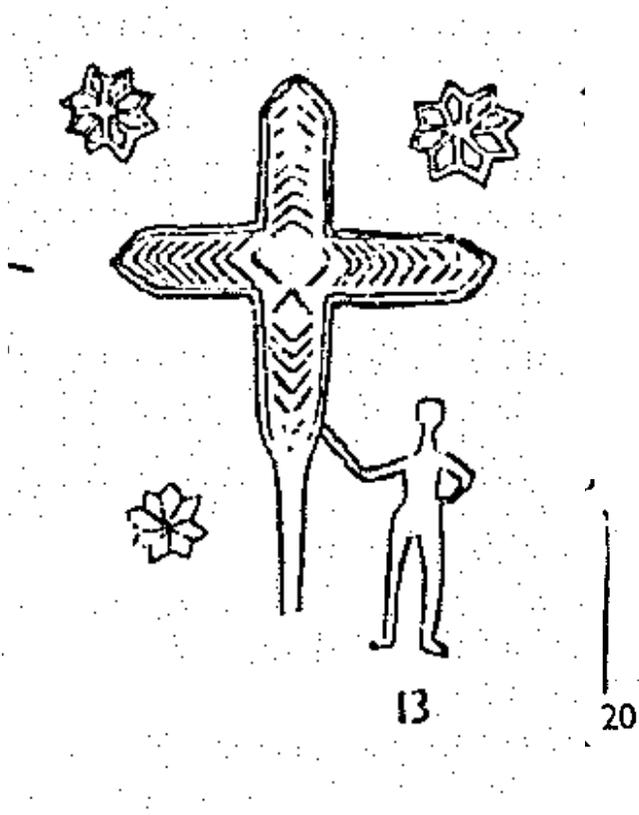


Figure 54: Man holding cross

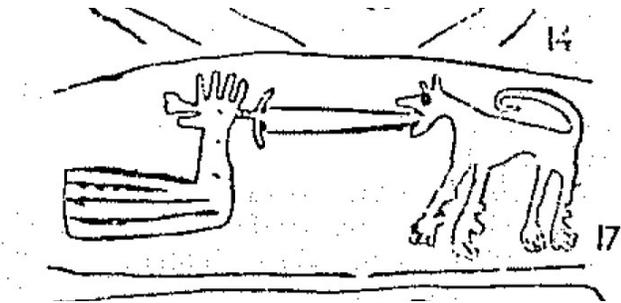


Figure 55: Hand engaged in hunting



Figure 56: Hand with crescent

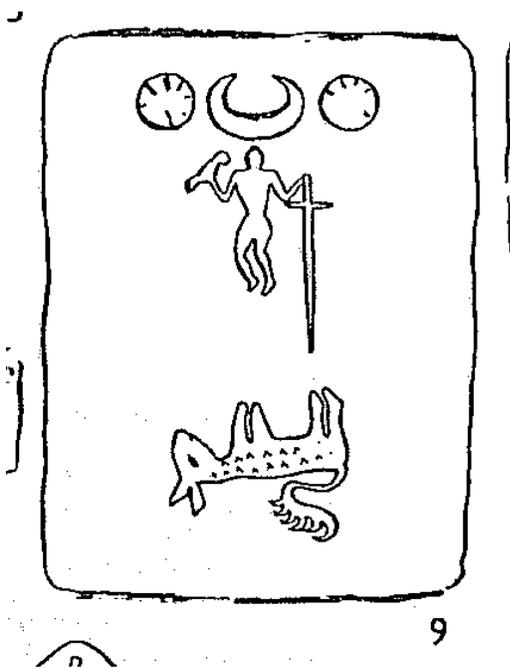


Figure 57: Symbolic composition with sword



Figure 58: Symbolic composition with sword

ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHAPTER 10
 Drawings by Marian Wenzel.

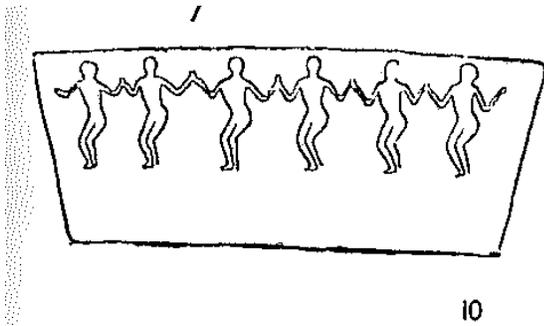


Figure 1: A Circle Dance (*Kolo*)

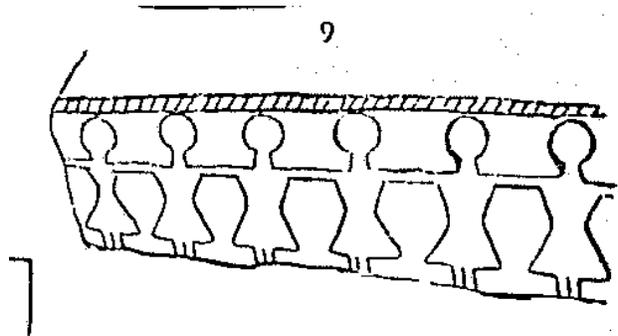


Figure 2: *Kolo* with different arm position

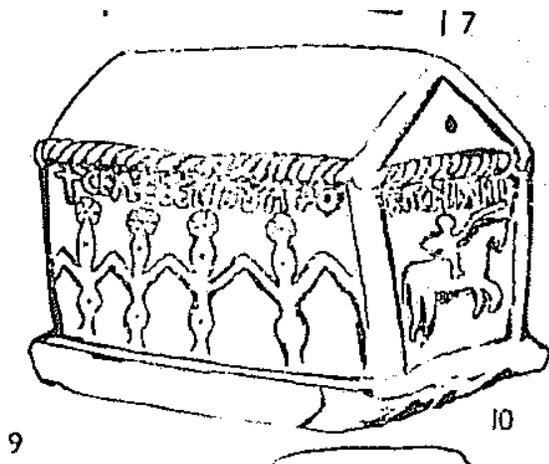


Figure 3: Abstracted *kolo*



Figure 4: *Kolo* led by rider on stag



Figure 5: *Kolo* led by man holding a sword



Figure 6: *Kolo* led by rider on stag

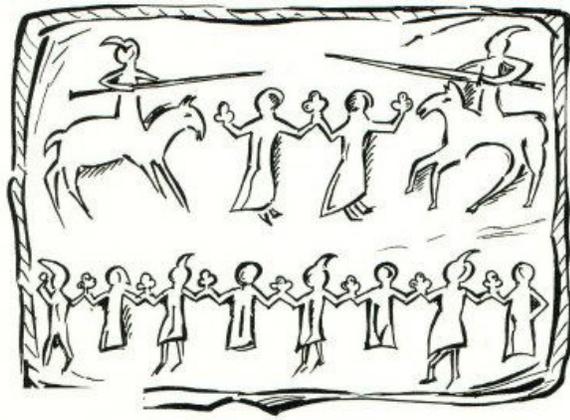


Figure 7: Eirenic *kolo*

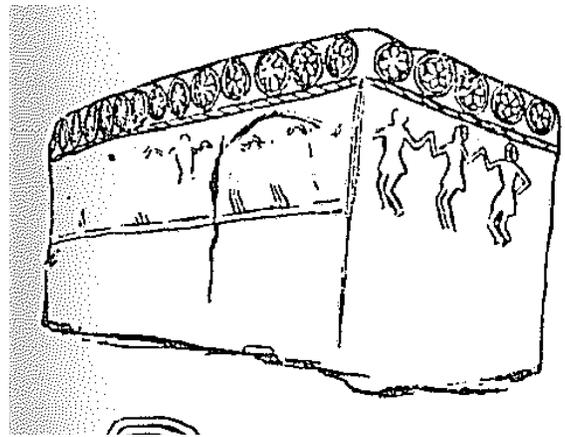
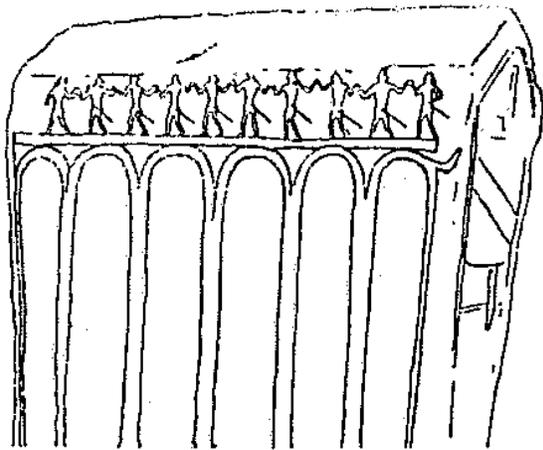


Figure 8: *Kolo* depicted on upper part of the stone



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Figure 9: *Kolo* depicted in upper register

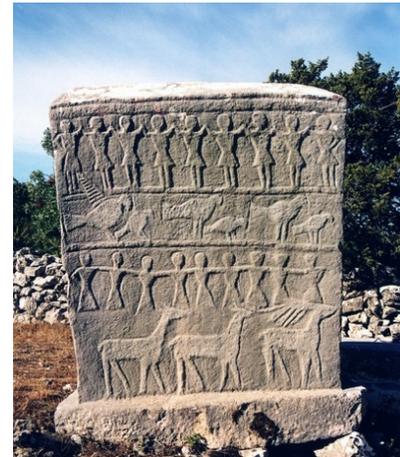
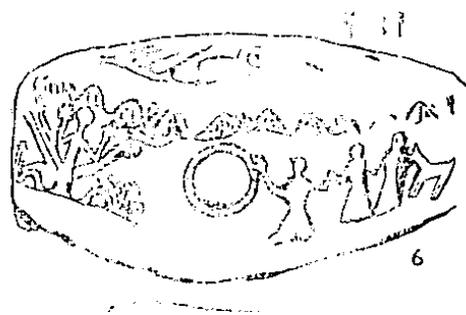


Figure 10: *Kolo* in two registers.
Photography : Gorčin Dizdar



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Figure 11: *Kolo* below spiral



6

Figure 12: *Kolo* between ring and dog



Figure 13: *Kolo* with rotating ring

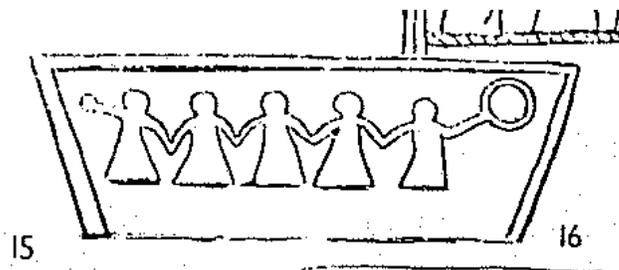


Figure 14: *Kolo* leader holding ring

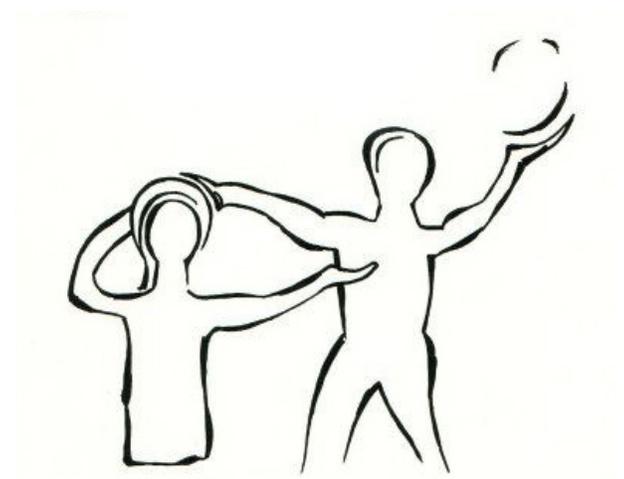


Figure 15: Dance with ring

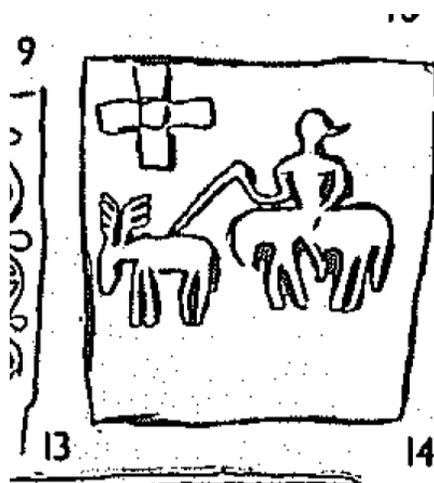


Figure 16: Stag hunt on two sides



Figure 17: Stag and well

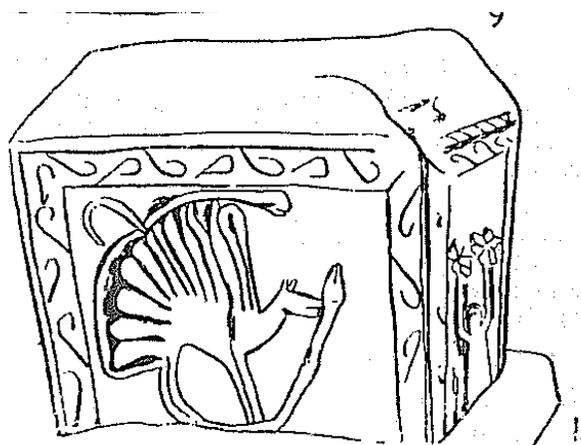


Figure 18: Fantastic winged animal surrounded by snake

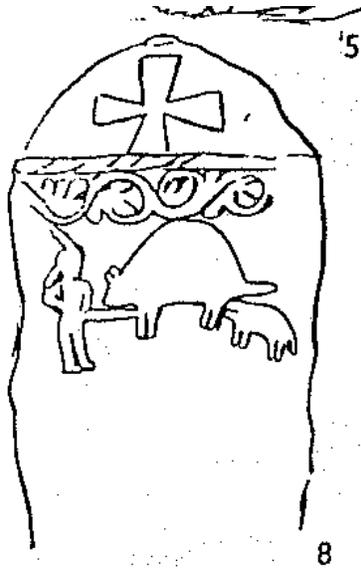


Figure 19: Boar hunt

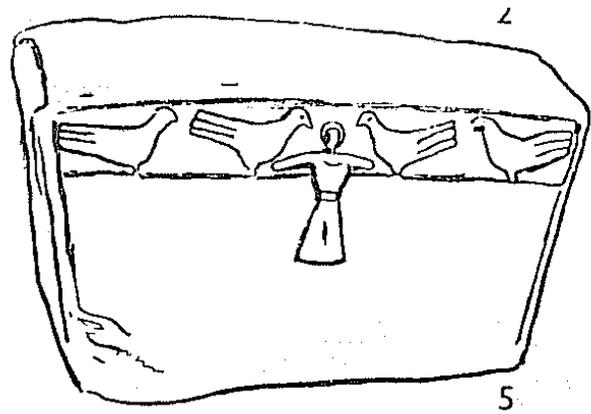


Figure 20: *Orant* surrounded by birds

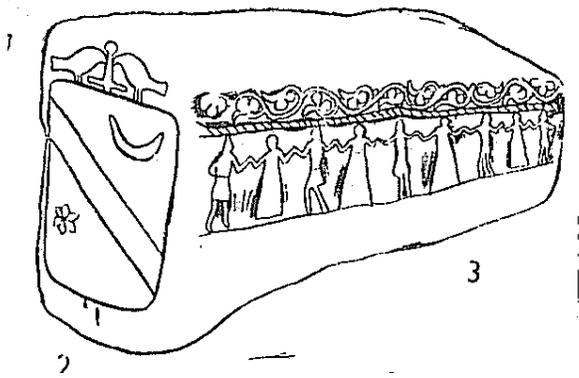


Figure 21: *Orant* surrounded by birds

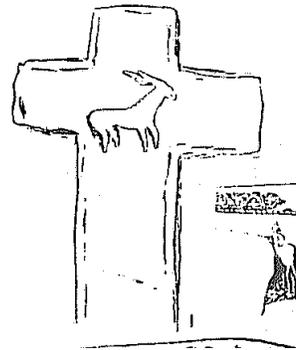


Figure 22: Stag on cross

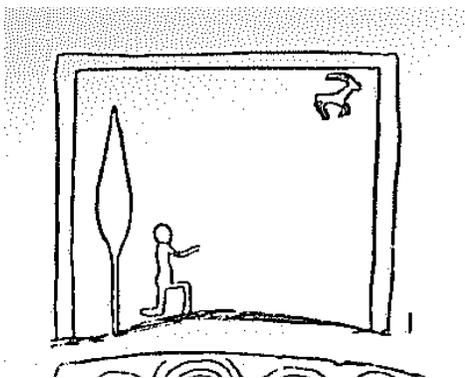


Figure 23: Composition with man and stag

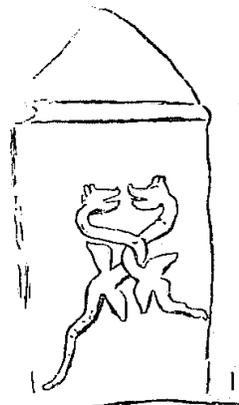


Figure 24: Intertwined dragons

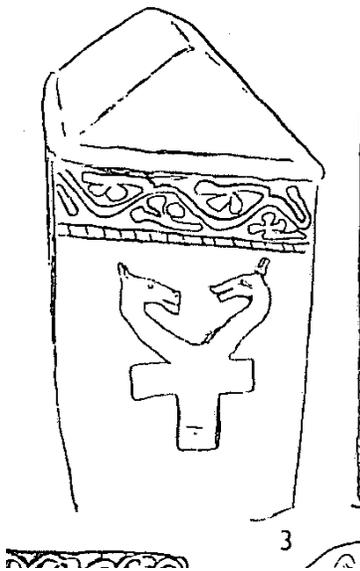


Figure 25: Cross with intertwined dragons



Figure 26: *Kolo* led by stag

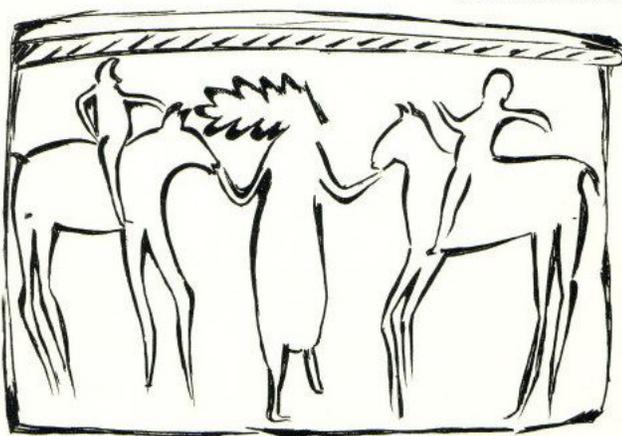


Figure 27: Man with stag antlers in conciliatory gesture

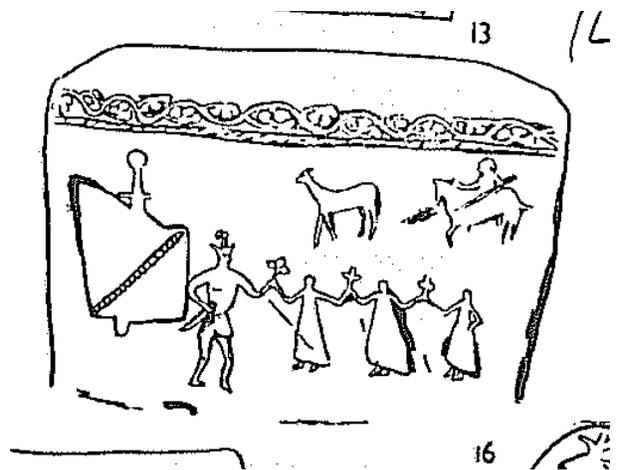


Figure 28: *Kolo* with stag hunt

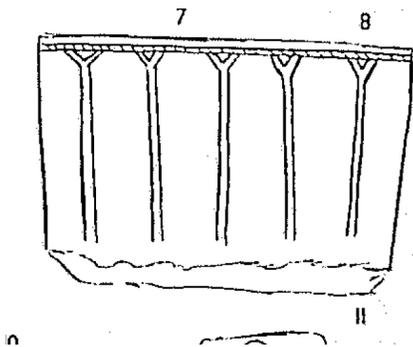


Figure 29: Columns

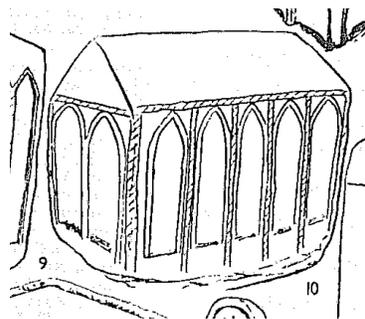


Figure 30: Pointed arches

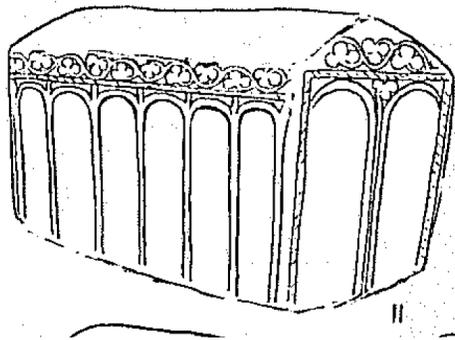


Figure 31: Rounded arches

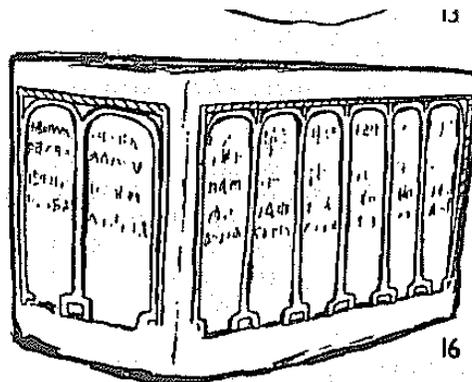


Figure 32: Pillars with base



Figure 33: Armenian anthropomorphic niche. Photograph: Gorçin Dizdar

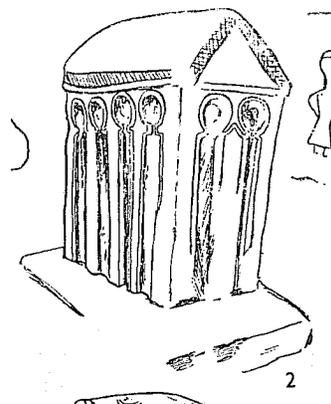


Figure 34: Anthropomorphic niche with

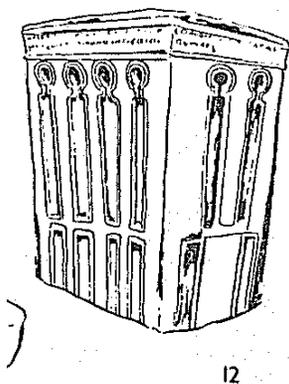


Figure 35: Anthropomorphic niches with reflections

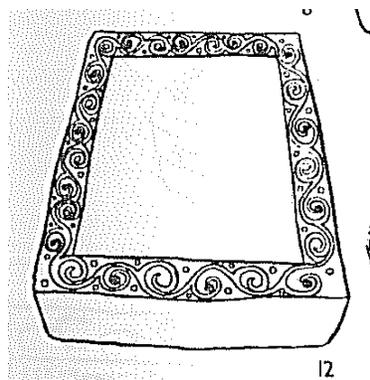


Figure 36: Spiral bordure

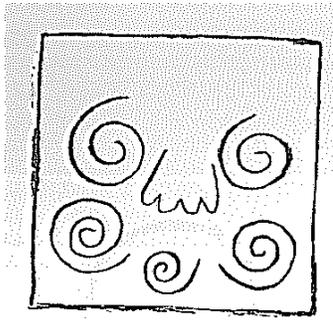


Figure 37: Repeated spirals

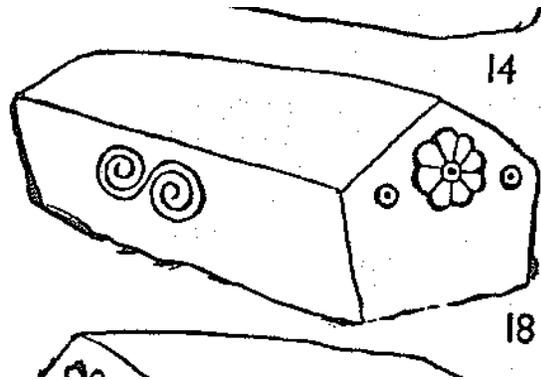


Figure 38: Two interconnected spirals

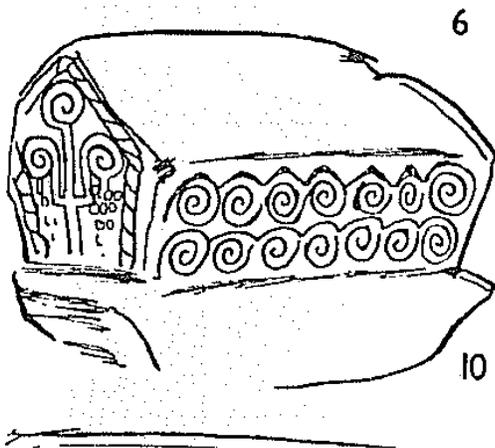


Figure 39: Row of connected spiral rings

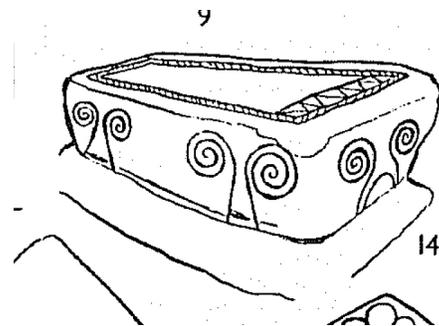


Figure 40: Two spirals twisting in opposite directions

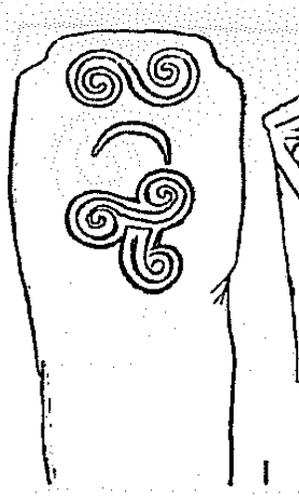


Figure 41: Triple spiral

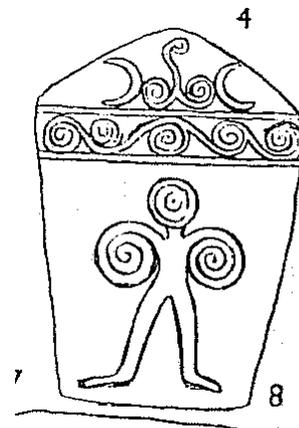


Figure 42: Anthropomorphic triple spiral

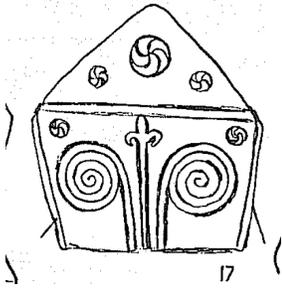


Figure 43: Abstracted plant XLVI 17

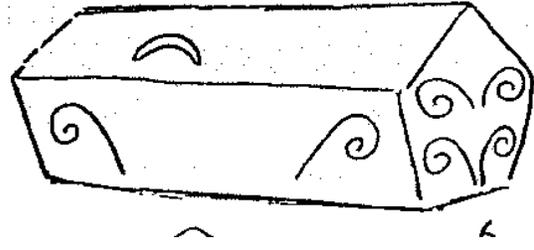


Figure 44: Spirals resembling plant shoots

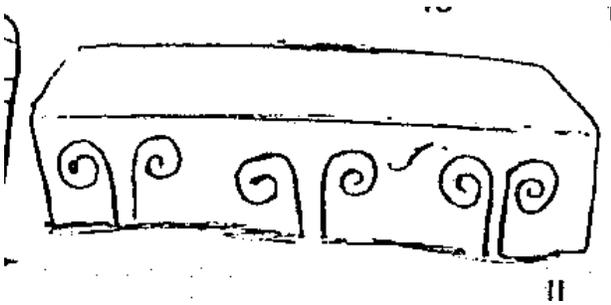


Figure 45: Series of convoluted spirals

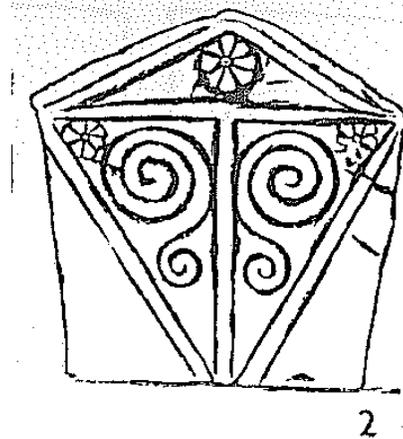


Figure 46: Spirals with abstracted flower

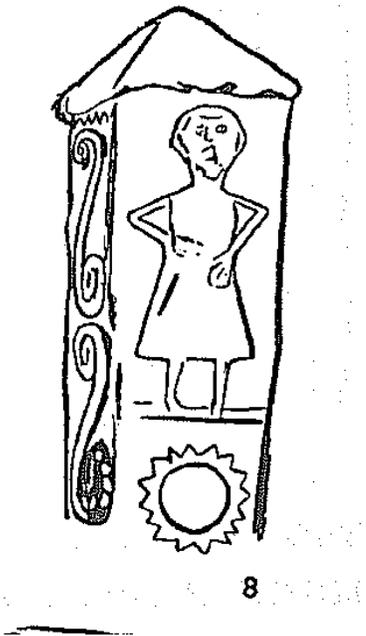


Figure 47: Ring with rays

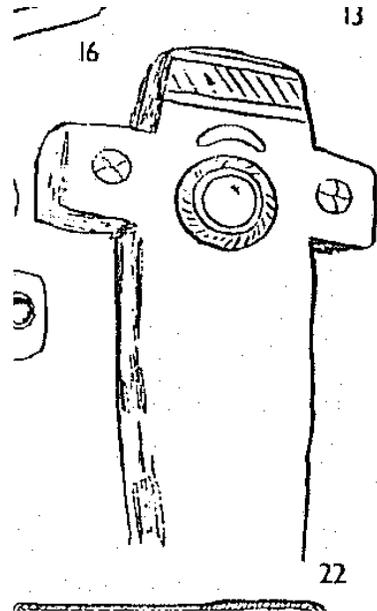


Figure 48: Rotating ring

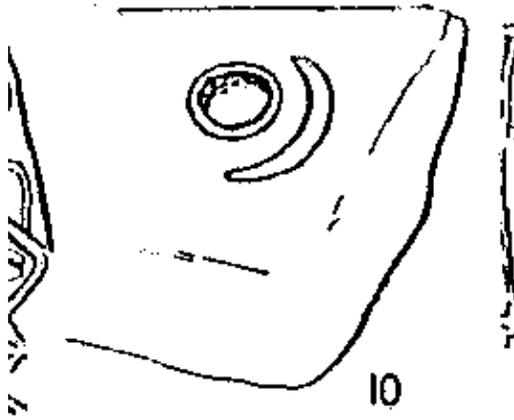


Figure 49: Ring and crescent

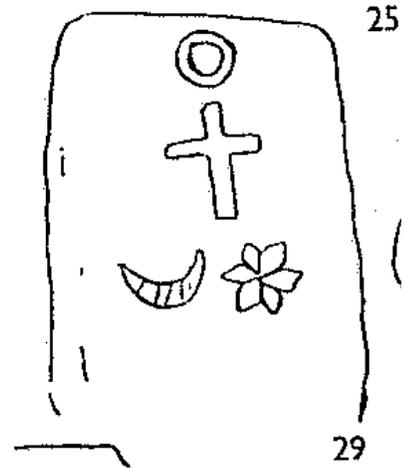


Figure 50: Ring and cross

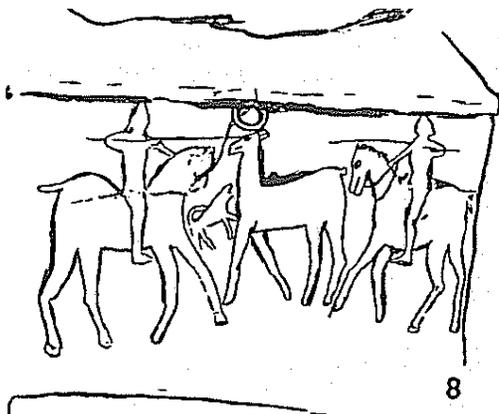


Figure 51: Ring and stag

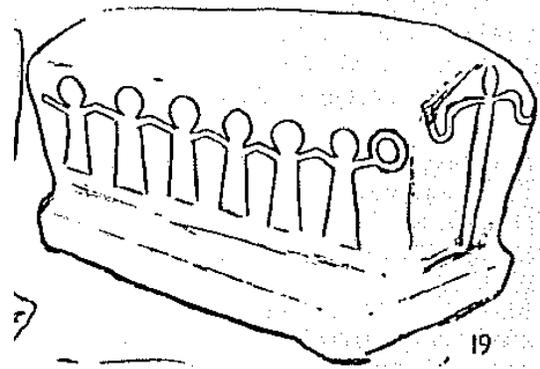


Figure 52: Ring and kolo

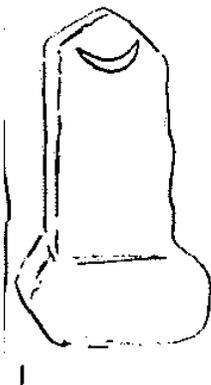


Figure 53: Crescent

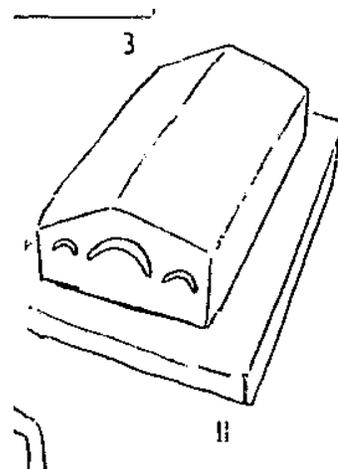


Figure 54: Three crescents

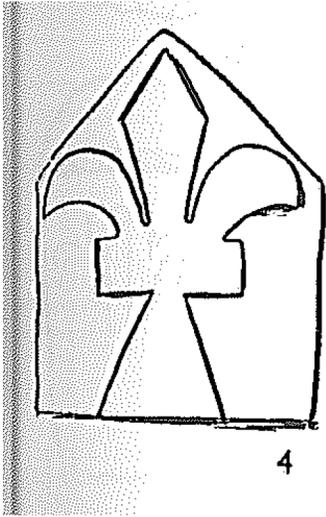


Figure 55: Fleur-de-lis

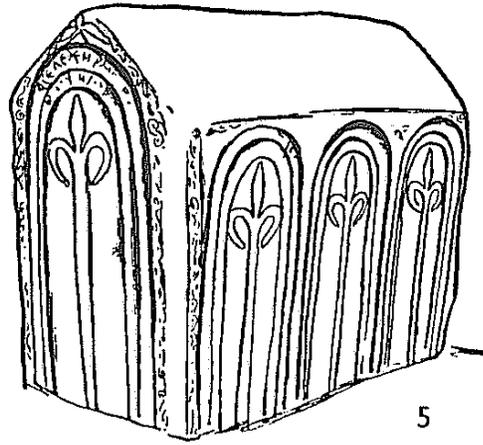


Figure 56: Fleur-de-lis on vertical side

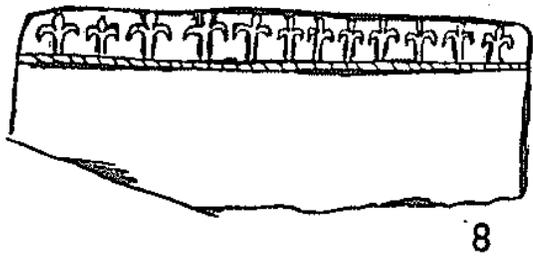


Figure 57: Fleur-de-lis bordure

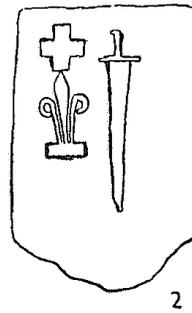


Figure 58: Fleur-de-lis with sword and cross



Figure 59: Khachkar with lilies
Photography: Gorčin Dizdar



Figure 60: Arevakhach



Figure 61: Solar rosette

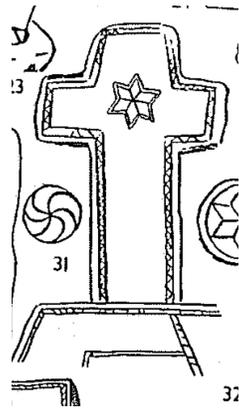


Figure 62: Cross with rosette

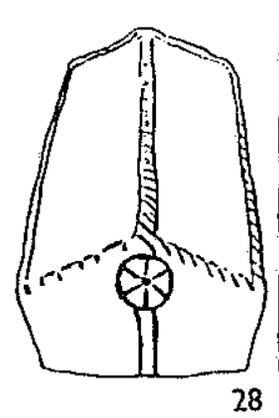


Figure 63: Pole with wheel

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