

**ACTA
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SLOVENIAE**

8

**RAJKO BRATOŽ
KRŠČANSTVO V OGLEJU IN NA
VZHODNEM VPLIVNEM
OBMOČJU OGLEJSKE CERKVE
OD ZAČETKOV DO NASTOPA
VERSKE SVOBODE**

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SUMMARY

Christianity in Aquileia and the Eastern Influential Area of the Aquileian Church from Its Beginnings to the Introduction of Religious Freedom.

As to the pre-Constantine era, it is owing to the unfavourable structure of the sources referring to the period that it has been made quite difficult to study the history of Christianity in Aquileia and even more so in the eastern influential area of the Aquileian Church. The almost sole source pertaining to contemporaneity itself can be considered the theological essays of the martyr Bishop Victorinus of Poetovio, which all by themselves give but very little direct evidence to the historian; yet they represent the only authentic expression of the Christian culture existing in Poetovio in about 300. A few other sources date back to late antiquity, to the 4th, the 5th and the 6th cent. (here we should mention first *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, the document of primary importance, and then also several notes scattered in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, as well as archaeological records originating during late antiquity and throwing light upon the development of Christianity in the pre-Constantine period). The third and by far the most extensive group of sources consists of martyrs' legends dating back to the early and the high Middle Ages (and a few also to the late Middle Ages or even to modern times) and of their echoes in martyrologies (in historical martyrologies, *Martyrologium Romanum*, *Synaxarium of the Church of Constantinople* and in other eastern calendars) and chronicles (primarily in those from Aquileia, Grado and Venice) as well as in modern historiography from Humanism onwards. This last group of sources is rather problematic; it can offer us but very few reliable data, for it contains the "sources" that were not created till after about five to thirteen hundred years had passed since the times they tried to give an account of. Even though the sources in question are not dependable, they deserve our careful consideration because it is through them that we get acquainted with the medieval conceptions and notions of the beginnings of Christianity, and above all because the majority of these legends hide in themselves the core that is trustworthy, yet most difficult to define. Owing to the fact that this third group of information is clearly predominant, the scope of the study of the early Christian period much too often

narrows and limits itself to simply describing either the history of individual personalities or even just the genesis of certain "sources". Therefore the picture of the development of Christianity in the pre-Constantine period remains very fragmentary indeed, and all the attempts at drawing synthetic conclusions have one weak point in common: they are all based, to a larger or smaller extent, on hypothetical presuppositions.

As the earliest reliable reports on the presence of the Christians in the vicinity of the discussed territory, referring to the period from the end of the 1st cent. to the end of the 2nd cent. (Titus' mission in Dalmatia, the so-called "*miraculum pluuium*" during Marcus Aurelius' war against the Quadi in 172, and Ireneus' report on the churches in Germania), are rather sparing of evidence, and since the interpretations of some material records from this period (Christian tombs and Christian tombstones from the end of the 1st cent. and from the 2nd cent. found in Emona) are unconvincing, it is legendary tradition and chiefly the legend of St. Hermagoras that can be considered the best authority for the study of the beginnings of Christianity in Aquileia and the Aquileian influential area. This legend is believed to bear witness to the formation of the Aquileian Christian community and the beginning of the mission outside Aquileia already in the age of Nero. The legend, handed down in two versions differing slightly in their form as well as contents, ranks in itself among the most complicated creations of early medieval hagiographic literature; it was written down in the 9th cent. (the earliest manuscript dates from the 11th cent.), whereas regarding the conceptual aspect and the contents its origin can be traced back to late antiquity. It must have existed, together with all its basic characteristics (especially the introductory legend of St. Mark), in the times of the Istrian schism, when it served to back up the ecclesiopolitical aspirations of the Aquileian Church; however, it may have existed already in the second half of the 5th cent., when Aquileia had to reconsolidate her position after the affirmation of the neighbouring ecclesiopolitical centres (Milano, Ravenna) and after some really bad catastrophes (the Huns' conquest of the city in 452, the loss of large parts of the metropolitan territory in north and east). It is the answer to the question whether the historical existence of Hermagoras' personality can be proved or not that defines the value and influence that the legend exerts upon our knowledge of the beginnings of Christianity in Aquileia. As to this question, there are two viewpoints in historiography. According to the first one, which is advocated mostly by Italian historiography, the personality in question is claimed to be the first Aquileian bishop, whose identity can also be proved by the old catalogues of Aquileian bishops and especially by the note made in the Hieronymian martyrology. This bishop cannot be placed in the age of Nero, but (in accordance with majority opinion) somewhere in the first half of the 3rd cent. According to the second viewpoint, which has become valued in this century (the thesis has been put forward by S. Ritig and later on further

developed by R. Egger), it is the Singidunum lector Hermogenes (mentioned in the sources originating in the Aquileian area at the end of the 4th cent. or the beginning of the 5th cent., and in the Hieronymian martyrology, speaking of him as of an Aquileian martyr), whose relics were brought to Aquileia at the beginning of the 5th cent., that should be believed to hide behind the name of Hermagoras. There are a number of external circumstances that speak in favour of the traditional viewpoint and confirm the historical core of the legend. The assimilation of the name Hermogenes to Hermagoras is rather unlikely. Besides, it is also hard to believe that the Aquileian Church should have used a foreign martyr while creating a legend of its own beginnings; and the thesis is most strongly disputed by the fact that the cults of St. Hermagoras and St. Hermogenes, together with the supposed possession of their relics, existed side by side in the Aquileian region throughout the Middle Ages. The fact that the cult of the Singidunum martyr Hermogenes was kept alive in Aquileia apart from the cult of St. Hermagoras indicates that there were originally two different saintly personages, whom only later on modern science tried to fuse into one personality. The great ecclesiopolitical significance of the Aquileian legend is proved by the legend of the Aquileian virgins, which is of slightly later origin, yet it shows the same, now even more clearly profiled ecclesiopolitical tendencies created in the times of the Istrian schism. It is in both legends that the historical background is formed by the existence of Bishop Hermagoras in Aquileia and the beginning of an organized Christian community in the city under this bishop, and perhaps also by the beginning of the mission from Aquileia. It is quite impossible to date these events with any reliability; they may be placed somewhere in the second half of the 2nd cent. or, with still greater probability, the first half of the 3rd cent. This Christian community was organized on the basis of the influence coming from Rome, which can be concluded from the legend as well as from "Liber pontificalis" and its mention of the foundation of dioceses "per diversa loca" of Italy, and with much less reliability, from the tradition of the Aquileian pope Pius I (the middle of the 2nd cent.). On the other hand a number of reports show strong eastern, mostly Jewish Christian, and predominantly Alexandrian elements of early Aquileian Christianity (their quite early worship of the Virgin Mary, the observance of Saturday, certain eastern elements of the Aquileian liturgy). It is as a synthesis of Roman and eastern Christianity that the Aquileian Church is shown in the light of two sources which are of vital importance to the knowledge of early Aquileian Christianity: firstly, the Aquileian creed, which developed from the Roman one (it had developed independently since about the first half of the 3rd cent.) and secondly, the mosaics in the Theodorian Basilica (about 320). The Aquileian creed and the mosaics of the Theodorian Basilica are the only sources that give us a more complete picture of the essential traits of early Aquileian Christianity. As to the origin and the early formation

of the Aquileian Christian community, these two sources show that there was at work an entire conglomeration of influences that were interwoven to such a degree that it is hard to arrange them in chronological order. Thus we can but suppose the influence of the Jewish-Christianly coloured Christian community from Alexandria to have prevailed (simultaneous influences from Syria being also strong) in the earliest period (the 2nd cent.), and the influence of the western churches, mainly those of Africa and Rome, to have become increasingly predominant since at least the middle of the 3rd cent. Western influences finally prevailed at the end of that period.

Owing to insufficient sources, it is even harder to study the beginnings of Christianity in the eastern influential area of the Aquileian Church than in Aquileia herself. It is most surprising to observe that the Hieronymian martyrology from the middle of the 5th cent., created within the Aquileian region and maybe even in the near vicinity of Istria, mentions not even one martyr of undoubtedly Istrian origin, nor does it quote any martyr belonging to the present-day Slovene territory. On the other hand the wealth of medieval Istrian hagiography, and above all that of Tergeste, is quite astonishing. Of five Tergeste legends (the legends of Primus and Marcus, Lazarus, Apollinarius, Euphemia and Thecla, Sergius and Bacchus) it can be said that their historical cores are very narrow indeed and hard to define. According to the present knowledge of sources, these legends do not describe Tergeste martyrs, but use names of other martyrs, whose lives and deaths are set in Tergeste. These legends did not spring simultaneously; their historical background, the cults of relics in the broader northern Adriatic region, and in some cases problematic reports in the Hieronymian martyrology can be traced back to late antiquity and the Byzantine period. The earliest of these legends were created somewhere in the 7th or the 8th cent. (the Tergeste virgins, the military martyrs), whereas the others did not appear before the Caroline age or even still later. These legends relate to us practically no objective facts about Christianity in Istria before the 5th or the 6th cent., and are thus of no use as sources for the study of the beginnings of Christianity in the 2nd and the 3rd cent.; neither can be used for that purpose the legend of St. Maximus of Emona, which was created as an adaptation of the original reports on the martyrdom of Maximus in Ephesos in 250. Both versions, the Istrian and even more so the Carniolan one, can be considered fakes; the former appeared in the late Middle Ages, whereas the latter, the Carniolan one, was created still later, in the 17th cent. The attempt at connecting this martyr with the first known bishop of Emona from the last quarter of the 4th cent. cannot undergo criticism.

With the above mentioned legends, we have exhausted the "sources" for the study of propagation of the Christian faith into the eastern influential area of the Aquileian Church. As reliable material proofs of the existence of Christianity before the end of the 3rd cent. can be found neither

in Aquileia nor in Istria nor Noricum, it is but general conditions, namely the deep social changes occurring in the Roman Empire in the 2nd and the 3rd cent., that we can take into consideration while reconstructing the process of Christianization. Such conditions are as follows:

a) the changes of the ethnic structure and together with it, to some extent, also of the social, economic and religious structures of the population in cities, resulting from the increasing percentage of the Greek-Oriental population, which amounted to about 10 to 20 per cent at the end of the period. The greater part of this population came from the Syrian-Palestine region, the Jews constituting an important part among them.

b) the greater intensity of the army life (the presence of the Pannonian legions in the east, and of the eastern ones in the Danubian area, intensive relations between the army and the city population during the civil wars in the 3rd cent.).

c) the propagation of various eastern religions, especially Mithraism, which were precursors and contemporaries (yet not rivals) of Christianity.

Since the discussed territory lay at the juncture of different missionary roads, there can be distinguished only few common traits, characteristic of the entire region. This area was not spared the dogmatic disputes and heretical movements pestering the early church in the 2nd and the 3rd cent. Regarding its culture, Christianity here can be still considered Greek-Oriental, for we cannot yet speak of the specific Aquileian Christian culture (unlike the Christian cultures of Asia Minor, Syria, and Africa, for example). As dioceses based on the territorial principle had not developed yet, no ecclesiopolitical affiliation to a certain centre could come into question, and even less so the hierarchy of such centres. We can discuss only influential areas, which were not homogeneous and sometimes formed without respect to Roman government.

It is no less than five legends originating in the territory in question that mention Emperor Numerianus (283—284) as a persecutor of Christians. These are the legends of the Aquileian martyrs Hilarius and Tatianus, Servulus from Tergeste, Germanus from Pola, Pelagius from Emona, and Maximilianus from Celeia. Since Numerianus' persecutions of Christians in this area are quite out of the question, we must take into account all the sources (from the whole empire) that make mention of Numerianus as a persecutor while searching for answers to the questions raised by these legends.

The reports on the instances of martyrdom in Numerianus' times refer territorially to three areas: the East (8 instances), Rome (6), and the Aquileian-Istrian and southern Noricum area (5). The fact that Numerianus appears as a persecutor in sources that seem to have no mutual relation can be explained by various influences:

In the East, the idea was based on the belief in the martyr's death of the Antiochian bishop Babylas (in fact a Martyr "sub Decio") in the time

of Numerianus. This conception appears to have developed because Numerianus was mistaken for Emperor Valerianus (similar names, and also similar fates in later tradition).

In Rome such a conception was due to the belief in the close connection between Numerianus and Diocletianus, and the belief in the philochristian policy of Numerianus' brother, Emperor Carinus, which emerged in Rome in the 5th (?) or the 6th cent. during the political struggles between the pagan and the Christian (Anicii) parties. This conception spread from Rome to the Aquileian-Istrian region.

The conception of Numerianus as a persecutor of Christians, which has no historical background, is the result of either a mistake or political interests in the milieus where it was created. It appeared in east and west in the 5th and the 6th cent., and can be traced back somewhere to the second half of the 6th cent. in the sources that can be dated with great reliability. In the Middle Ages, it entered the historical consciousness of the Greek Byzantine and the Latin western worlds as one of historical constructions. As to the number of the instances of martyrdom "sub Numeriano", the reports referring to the East or to Rome give a number that is almost negligibly small in comparison with the otherwise high number of martyrdoms, whereas in the Aquileian area the "sub Numeriano" number represents about one quarter of all known martyrdoms. At the same time, these are the oldest datable instances of martyrdom if Aquileia and Tergeste with their rich hagiographic traditions are not taken into consideration. Therefore their evaluation is of extraordinary importance to the knowledge of the beginnings of Christianity in those regions. Unfortunately, these legends give us but very few historically reliable data, which at the best, in the legend of Hilarius and Tatianus, for example, narrow and limit themselves to the martyr's name (the martyrs' names), the place and the date of the martyrdom and possibly also to his (their) rank in the church community, whereas at least one or even two of the mentioned elements are deleted in all other instances. None of these legends were created on the basis of authentic material from antiquity. While the swerving from the truth is still admissible in some cases (e.g. the legend of Hilarius and Tatianus), it is quite unacceptable in others (e.g. the legend of Maximilianus from Celeia). The legend of Hilarius and Tatianus is the only one to describe events whose historical existence can be proved by sources from antiquity. In all the other cases the historical backgrounds of the described events (a Christian martyr's death with an indication of the place and the date) are probable, yet testified only by half a millennium younger material. In the cases of Servulus, Pelagius and Maximilianus, it is the place of the martyrdom that is considered unreliable, whereas it is the date that cannot be depended upon in the case of Germanus. None of the legendary martyrs can be considered a fictitious personality; moreover, these legends were not

created only on the basis of the local veneration of relics, which can be said of the legend of the Aquileian virgins and the afore-mentioned Tergeste legends. It is only the Tergeste saint Servulus that has, in all probability, origin in a completely different milieu. None of these martyrdoms can be proved to have occurred in the times of Emperors Numerianus and Carinus, in the year 284; nevertheless, it can be concluded on the basis of the example of the Aquileian legend, which in all probability describes the events from before Emperor Diocletianus, and on the basis of the analogies from Rome and the East (it is in three cases that the "sub Numeriano" martyrdoms refer to the time of Emperor Decius) that the martyrs in question belong to the times preceding the great persecution of Christians. Thus the discussed martyrs most probably belong to the second half of the 3rd cent., i.e. the times of the consolidation of Christianity in Aquileia and the emergence of the first Christian communities outside Aquileia, in the Venetian region, Istria, and Noricum. It is martyrs' legends that still represent the only sources for the study of this age; consequently, our knowledge of it is uncertain and burdened to a high degree by hypothetical suppositions.

On entering the period of the persecution of Christians during the times of Emperor Diocletianus and his joint-rulers, we set foot on more or less firm ground concerning the study of Christianity in Aquileia. The persecution of Christians in the north-eastern part of Italy did not last till the so-called edict of Milan, but it continued from the February of 303 to the May of 305, the time of Emperor Maximilianus' abdication. Maxentius tolerated Christianity, which can be proved by the material found in the treated area, viz. by the second currency issue of the Aquileian mint (308), where we sporadically come across Christian signs on the coins found in the 3rd officina; according to the structure of the most representative find of coins of that period, the Centur hoard, the extent of this issue of "Christian" coins was not large, for its number amounted to about 3 per cent of the coins in the 2nd series, and to little less than 1 per cent of the total output of the Aquileian mint during Maxentius' rule; as to the total emission of Maxentius' mints, this currency issue was hardly noticeable. The persecution of Christians does not seem to have been severe in Aquileia. We know of only few victims from Aquileia in that period: five martyrs belonging to Cantius' group (Cantius, Cantianus, Cantianilla, Protus, and Chrysogonus), Felix and Fortunatus, which makes altogether seven martyrs, or eight if we also add Anastasius, who died in Salona. The reports found in the legend and speaking about extraordinary severe persecution and jails full of martyrs and confessors are undoubtedly at least slightly exaggerated. It is not only the small number of martyrs but also the fact that Anastasius, wishing himself a martyr's death, had to go elsewhere to achieve his aim that makes us deny the truth of such statements. All the legends, including that of Anastasius, connect the martyrdom

with Diocletianus' presence, which may be considered reminiscence of the emperor's journey from Rome to the East in the first half of 304. All the martyrdoms that according to the calendar fall somewhere between the end of November and the middle of June (or Anastasius' martyrdom in Salona at the end of August) can be dated to the end of 303 or to 304. Thus all the martyrs with the only exception of Chrysogonus fell victims of Diocletianus' 4th edict (March 304), by which the entire population was ordered to make pagan sacrifices. This is also referred to, in an exaggerated form, by the legend of St. Anastasia and the legend of Felix and Fortunatus. The mode of the Aquileian martyrs' executions does not show any excessive fanaticism of persecutors. The martyrs of Cantius' group were beheaded without any previous torture, whereas Felix and Fortunatus were beheaded after being tortured. It is quite obvious that these different procedures reflect the then penal law and its different treatment of the members of the higher social strata (*honestiores*) on the one hand, and the lower ones (*humiliores*) on the other.

The light thrown by legendary sources upon the life of the Aquileian Christian community in the age of persecution is but poor and uncertain. Not a single source mentions the church organization and its hierarchy, which existed at that time beyond doubt. The church hierarchy appears to have stood the persecution well (Bishop Chrysogonus, probably the second in the succession of the Aquileian bishops bearing this name, was the only one to be put to death); the victims were evidently "chosen" at random from among the lay members of the church community. The example of the Cantii, who owned estates and led a smaller centre of Christian life in the vicinity of the city, and the examples of Felix and Fortunatus, who originated from the neighbourhood of the city, indicate that Christianity had already spread from the city to the country by that time. Three of the martyrs' names are of Greek origin (Chrysogonus, Protus, and Anastasius), whereas the other five names are Latin. Consequently, we can draw a conclusion that Christianity comprised the native Latin population, too, and even its wealthier strata, whose members were also the Cantii.

We know but very little about the ideas and concepts prevailing in the lives of the Aquileian Christians. The Cantii as well as Felix and Fortunatus tried to run away from their persecutors — they are all believed to have fled eastwards or north-eastwards, in the direction of the present-day western Slovene territory; Anastasius, however, wishing to become a martyr, went in "search" of persecutors of his own free will. His deeds reflect the presence of the montanistic ideas as regards his voluntary or intentional self-sacrifice for the religion, the ideas that were present throughout the period of persecution even though they were for the most part not approved of.

It is the cosmopolitan character of the Aquileian bishopric, the ordination of clerics in the area outside the immediate suburbia (the instance of

St. Donatus), and above all the attendance of its bishop at the synod in Arles in 314 (with the most extraordinary representation of Dalmatia) that prove the fact that the Aquileian Christian community achieved considerable prestige in the entire northern Adriatic region already in a period previous to the age of religious tolerance. And it was during this early period that, within its influential area, the Aquileian diocese began to practically develop diocesan authority based on the regional principle.

On the whole, it is but little that we know about the Christian communities in Istria in the age of persecution. We know of only three Christian communities, viz. those in the Roman colonies in Tergeste, Parentium and Pola. On the authority of archaeological records (for Parentium and Pola) and hagiographic documents (for Tergeste and Parentium), it can be concluded that these Christian communities were rather small. It is not known when they were formed. The Parentium archaeological documents that prove the existence of organized religious life can be traced back somewhere to the middle of the 3rd cent. This period can be imagined as an age of the formation of Christian communities in other towns, too, viz. in Tergeste, Pola, and in the vicinity of the Istrian territory, in Emona. As to the degree of organization, these Christian communities differed from one another about the year 300. Tergeste apparently had no diocese yet, for there is no mention of the bishop made in any of the Tergeste legends; in the legend of St. Iustus, too, it is the presbyter that plays the role of the highest representative of this community. We know nothing about Pola. The only Christian community that was organized as a diocese was that of Parentium, which was probably one of the reasons why this community suffered most during the time of persecution. The death of Bishop Maurus and the deaths of five other Christians from Parentium (Eleuterius, Iulianus and Demetrius, Proiectus and Acolitus), one of whom was most probably a cleric (a deacon in all probability), represented the highest contribution that an Istrian Christian community had to pay with its people's blood; it was almost as high as the blood-tax paid by Aquileia in the times of Diocletianus' persecution.

As to the large Emona region, there are no reports on the Christians in that period; yet there are some indirect reports from the vicinity of the region (about 270, the birth of St. Donatus into a Christian family in a smaller Istrian place lying on the border with Pannonia and Dalmatia, and about 347 the birth of St. Hieronymus in Strido in already christianized environment) that make us conclude that Christianity began to spread to the country already in that period. Nothing is known about the then church organization, either. The life courses of the two above mentioned saints, whose first important stopping place was Aquileia, show that this whole region was under the influence of the Aquileian Christian community.

It is only partially correct to number Noricum, too, among the parts constituting the then influential area of the Aquileian church. There are no reliable documents referring to that period that would prove the influence or even the missionary-organizational dependance of the Noricum Christian communities upon Aquileia; such dependance, past doubt, did not exist till the last quarter of the 4th cent. Theoretically speaking, the persecutions of Christians in Noricum continued until Galerius' edict in the April of 311; nevertheless, they were most probably abolished already at the time of Licinius' inauguration after the tetrachs' conference in Carnuntum in the November of 308. So the Christian communities of this region can be said to have lived in harder circumstances, which, in addition, lasted for a longer period.

A good document for the study of the course of the persecution of Christians in Noricum is provided by "Passio Floriani", which is undoubtedly the best of all the till now discussed legends. In addition to relating the central Florianus story, based on a record reaching back to antiquity (the times before the Hieronymian martyrology was created), this work gives a fairly convincing account of the circumstances of the persecution of the Christians in Noricum. Those conditions were characterized by the flight of the Christians to the mountains and their hiding in caves, the capture of most believers, who later pined away in prison, and the existence of Christian communities in Cetium and Lauriacum. The fact that Florianus went to meet persecutors, as well as his provocative action most likely reflect montanistic ideas. The social origin of the martyr (a civil servant) indicates that Christianity sporadically comprised even the members of the state apparatus and the holders of the government authority and ideology, i.e. the social class that was, as a whole, the last to adopt the Christian faith.

As to Poetovio, a town lying on the border line between Pannonia and Noricum and possessing the only Christian community that could compete with the one in Aquileia regarding its size and significance, the development of its Christian community can be said to belong to the verge of the Aquileian influential area, where strong influence from Illyricum and Asia Minor could be felt. The development of Christianity in Poetovio is revealed to us through the preserved work of the greatest and at the same time the only relatively tangible personality that lived in this region in the pre-Constantine period, viz. through two preserved essays of the martyr Bishop Victorinus of Poetovio, Treatise upon the Origin of the Universe, and Commentary on Apocalypsis. Since these two works tell us practically nothing about the history of the Poetovio Christian community, they can help us but very little with the attempt at the reconstruction of the spiritual and material lives of the Poetovio Christian community. If we consider the still unsolved and insolvable question to which extent his essays (ideas) may be regarded as representative of the

Christian life in Poetovio (or even in the broader Noricum-Pannonian area), the possibility of acquiring any reliable knowledge of the Christian life on the basis of these two essays seems to be very small indeed.

As to his human dimensions, Victorinus rises high above the rest of the ecclesiastical lords of that period within the Aquileian influential area. Being the first Latin interpreter of the Bible, he transferred Greek theological learning to the West (the influences of Origenes, Ireneus and Hippolytus are the most evident) and thus paved the way for the greatest Latin interpreter of the Bible in the early Christian period, his distant fellow-countryman, St. Hieronymus. Among Victorinus' viewpoints, in all probability his own, personal viewpoints, which could not be necessarily connected with the life and the views of the Poetovio Christians, we should emphasize primarily his negative stand against the secular Roman state, in which he perceived a work of Satan (such a view may have been predominant among the Christians in general in the age of persecution), as well as his interest in history, and his anti-Semitic orientation (this, too, may reflect conflictive relations with Jewish diasporas, at that time existing in a number of places of the northern Adriatic and the Danubian areas). Speaking of those spiritual elements of the Christian life which can be in all probability applied to the Poetovio Christian community, we should stress in the first place binitarian conceptions, or better the rather vague conception of the Holy Spirit as the third person constituting the Trinity, and above all the archaic formula of the creed (*regula fidei*); this formula can be considered the prime source of our knowledge of the dogmatic characteristics of Christianity in Poetovio, for Victorinus states it quite clearly that he was obviously taught this formula in the home church community, where he had been baptized. Another, separate question is in what way, through what mediators this formula could influence the Irish apostle St. Patrick. It is especially important to point out the presence of spiritual millenarianism. In his Treatise, Victorinus appears as a follower of the idea of the cosmic week, which he connects with Asian messianic millenarianism in a hardly perceivable manner; in his Commentary, however, he is a moderate (spiritual) millenarian influenced by Asian spiritualism, in which he is related to Methodius from Olympus.

Victorinus' anti-heretic activity is also believed to reflect the then circumstances in Poetovio (and certainly in a broader area, too). Ranking among outstanding fighters against the heresies of his period, Victorinus criticized the aberrations of the Gnostics, Marcionites, and Patripassians. It is above all the latter two heresies that are supposed to have existed in the area in question (the Patripassians were certainly in Aquileia, the Marcionites and Gnostics in Illyricum, and perhaps in Aquileia); yet there is no criticism of the montanistic movement, which was quite powerful in the 3rd cent. Therefore it can be concluded that he was favourably disposed towards the Montanists (who also appreciated millenarian

tenets). This movement, too, can be believed to have been present in the discussed region, which supposition is indicated by "montanistic" actions of some martyrs (Florianus, Anastasius, and maybe also St. Iustus). According to the archaizing traits of Victorinus' theology and his struggle against heresies, the origin of the Christian community in Poetovio can be placed in the age of Severi, at the turn of the 2nd into the 3rd cent. The practical lives of the Christians from Poetovio were characterized by their tendency towards penitence, proneness to asceticism, already fully developed fasting habits, as well as by social and moral differentiation among individual members within a Christian community (rich-poor, simple-well educated, tepid-ardent).

At the threshold of the Constantine era, Christianity was already firmly anchored in Aquileia and the eastern influential area of the Aquileian church. There were a number of Christian communities in towns, and individual Christians or smaller Christian communities could also be sporadically found in the country, in the vicinity of towns as a rule. The spiritual image of Christianity was not uniform; while Aquileia was strongly influenced by Egypt, Rome and Africa, it was the influence of Asia Minor that was more pronounced in the eastern area. The territory discussed here represented a juncture of numerous maritime and continental missionary and influential routes coming from various parts of the then Christian world. In the beginning Christianity in that area was Greek-Oriental in cultural, linguistic and spiritual respects; yet it was already then that it began to acquire more and more western, Latin traits, which became even more predominant in the succeeding period, so that it necessarily became part of Western Christianity on the occasion of the historical, epoch-making division into the Christian West and East, the division that began to show in late antiquity and was performed in the Middle Ages.

(Translated by Aleksandra Pirkmajer)