MILAN MILOVANOVIĆ
Požarevac, Serbia
mimidusanovac@gmail.com

DEJAN RADISAVLJEVIĆ
Belgrade, Serbia
dejanradisavljevicanthro@gmail.com

OLIVERA FILIPOVIĆ
Heritage Museum of Homolje in Žagubica
Žagubica, Serbia
filipovicolivera.84@gmail.com

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ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE GRADAC NEAR KREPOLJIN IN HOMOLJE

ABSTRACT

The results of recent investigations of the Gradac archaeological site near Krepoljin in Homolje are presented in this paper. Gradac is a fortified settlement built on the rocky cliff above the Mlava river, at the exit from the Ribarska gorge. Within the defended areal, there are the remains of at least three profane structures and a church settled at the projected north-east part of the mount. Based on accidental findings it could be said that the Gradac site was inhabited during prehistory, Late Antiquity, and the Middle Ages. A field visit for the purpose of revision was performed in 2019 by the authors of this paper, whose results are presented in the following text.

KEYWORDS: FORTIFICATION, CHURCH, GRADAC, ACCIDENTAL FINDINGS, RIBARSKA GORGE, DATING, KREPOLJIN.

FOREWORD

Knowledge about fortified settlements on the territory of Homolje is basically scarce. Archaeological examinations performed up to the present are generally trench excavations and shorter field surveys. Based on trench excavations whose results are not yet fully published, it might be said that the certain sites in which remains of the fortifications can be identified today were inhabited during the Late Antiquity or Early Byzantine period. Such sites are Zad in Ribar and Pčelinji krš in Laznica (Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 103: Мишић и Селаковић 2017: 19; Миловановић 2017: 30-31, 35; Миловановић и Филиповић 2018: 2, n. 3; Миловановић 2018; Миловановић in print). During shorter field surveys of the other fortified settlements in Homolje, archaeological findings on the surface of the terrain were gathered, indicating settlement during the 4th-6th centuries. In that context, the following registered sites might be distinguished: Grac – Gornjak spring and Velika pećina in the Gornjak gorge, Šetaće in Osanica, Pregrada – Podkrš in Žagubica, and Potaj Čuka near Žagubica on the way to Bor (Јацановић 2013: 13-14; Миловановић и Филиповић 2018; Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 102; Milovanović 2019; Миловановић in print). However, the archaeological data, obtained by a field survey of the aforementioned sites are insufficient for final conclusions. For the time being, we do not have firm evidence about settlements on these archaeological sites during the Middle Ages epoch, even though such a possibility should not be ruled out. The only

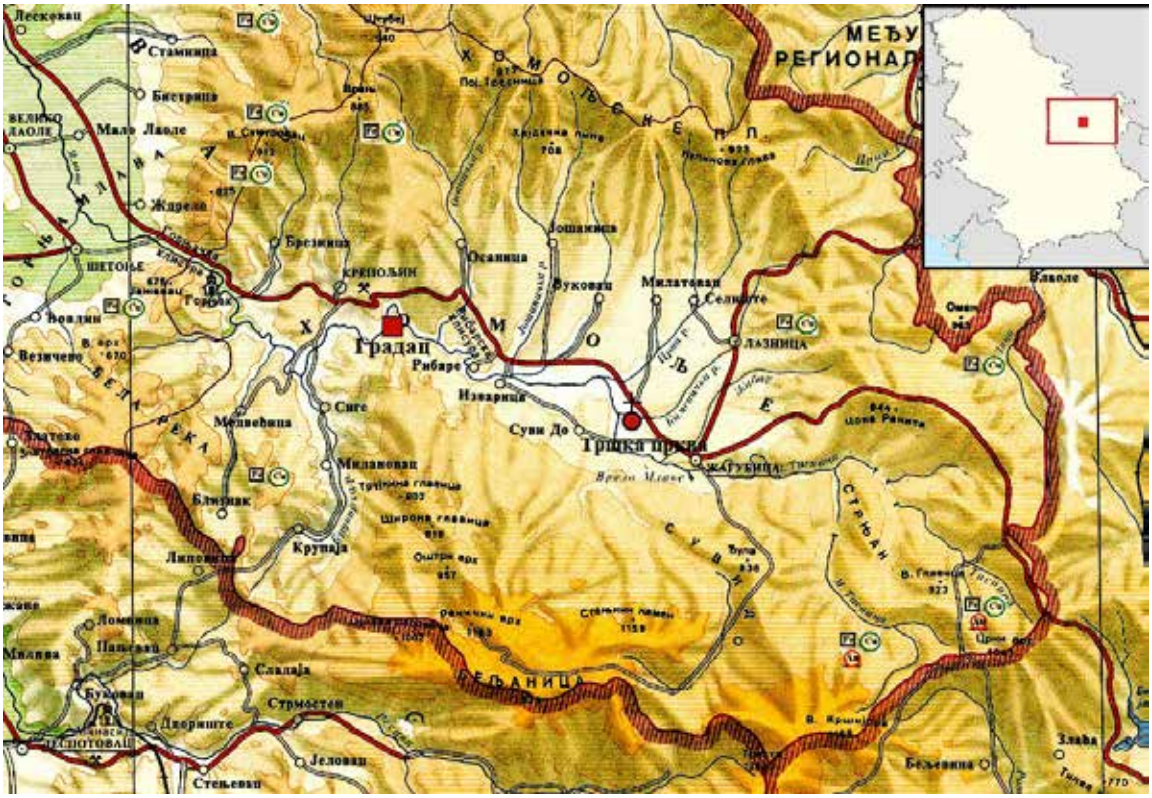


Fig. 1. Geographic location of the Gradac (Градац) archaeological site near Krepoljin in Homolje.

fortress mentioned in written sources of that period is Ždrelo in the Gornjak gorge (Даничић 1866: 115; Вушковић 2010: 107-108).[1]

When it comes to the study of sacral structures within the given territory, the situation is somewhat different. Until now, systemic archaeological excavations have been performed in the corpus of churches in the Gornjak gorge (Metropolinate, Church of Immaculate Mother of God and the Annunciation, as well as in the Trška church near Žagubica). These structures were built in the late Middle Ages (Мадас и Гајић 1983; Цуњак 2000; Чанак-Медић 2006). The test excavations in front of the Šupljaja church in Ribar, the results of which were also not published in full, should be also mentioned (Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 103), as well as the rescue conservation works in the Gornjak monastery (Цуњак 2000: 32-48; 67-68).

The Gradac site near Krepoljin belongs to the class of fortified settlements in Homolje (Fig.1). The visible remains of the well-preserved defence wall were constructed on the high rocky cliff, i.e., a strategically, skilfully selected position. Within the defended areal, the walls of the profane structures and the church can be recognized. We obtained the first data about the walls at the site near Krepoljin from Professor Jovan Dragašević in the mid-1870s (Драгашевић 1874: 60-61, 63; Драгашевић 1875: 80-81). Trench archaeological excavations were carried out in 1992 when the team of the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments from Smederevo and the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments from Belgrade explored the church on the north-eastern cliff of the site (Цуњак и Миљковић 1993; Радовановић 1997: 241). After this research, inhabitation of Gradac during the Middle Ages was assumed, with a note that the possibility of the use of this

1 The individual, accidental, chronologically sensitive finds, which are found in the wider areal of the fortified complex Ždrelo should be also mentioned. This is archaeological material roughly dated to the Late Antiquity period (Миловановић 2016: 213; Јацановић 2013: 13-14).

Fig. 2. Position of the Gradac archaeological site near Krepoljin at the exit from Ribarska gorge (snapshot: Google Earth, September 2019).

area during earlier epochs should not be ruled out (Цуњак и Миљковић 1993; Јацановић 2013: 13-14; Мишић и Селаковић 2017: 18; Пуповац 2017: 48).

In September 2019, the terrain at the Gradac site was visited for the purpose of revision, with the primary goal of determining the degree of the fortification preservation, to which little attention had been paid until then.[2] During this visit, the profane structures and the church were investigated to the extent that was possible. According to former research, it might be said that Gradac near Krepoljin is, for the time being, the only altitudinal site in eastern Serbia on whose peak the remains of the sacral structure have been recorded. According to the masonry technique, the church most probably belongs to the corpus of the Late Middle Ages sacral structures. So far on the surface of the terrain, a certain repertoire of archaeological finds has been found, bearing testifying that the mount in the Mlava gorge near Krepoljin had also been inhabited in earlier periods.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES AND SITE POSITION

The Gradac site is located at just over an hour's walk to the east of Krepoljin, in the southern part of Braničevo district. The remains of the walls are visible today on the high cliff at the exit from the Ribarska gorge, above the left bank of the Mlava river. On the opposite side of the river there are rocky slopes with the name Čovečji pad (Figs. 2, 3). In this part of the Homolje microregion, the Ribarska gorge separates the Krepoljin and Žagubica basins, and their surroundings are abundant with sedimentary rocks, among which limestone, marl, and Permian red sandstone stand out, while of metamorphic rocks, slate is present (Петковић 1935: 81-83; Лазић 1948:32; Драгашевић 1876: 326).

North of the Ribarska gorge spread the southern slopes of Homolje mountains, where the Ve-

2 The Gradac site visit was conducted as a part of regular annual activities of the Heritage Museum of Homolje in Žagubica.

Fig. 3. Location of the Gradac archaeological site near Krepoljin on a topographic map (according to: the map of Yugoslav People's Army 1:50 000, Žagubica 1, sheet number 482/1, Edition of the Military Geographical Institute 1970).

liki Sumorovac (912 m) and Vranj (885 m) peaks stand out. Apart from the wooded areas, this part of Homolje, especially in the area between the Osanica and Mlava rivers, is abundant with arable surfaces that encompass smaller hill glades and plains in the valleys of the aforementioned rivers. One tools hoard from Vranj roughly dated to the Late Iron Age period, testifies that this area has been suitable for agriculture and forestry since ancient times (Тапавички-Илић 2011: 7-8). South of the Gradac site a mountain forested area spreads, in which Kozarski vrh (654 m) and Trujkina glavica (802 m) heights dominate. Somewhat further from these peaks, the wreath of the Beljanica mountain (1.339 m) stretches out.

West of the Gradac site, at a distance of 9 km, the Gornjak mountains spread (825 m). Between these mountains and the site, there is the smaller Krepoljin basin, in which arable areas as well as a smaller number of village houses, are situated (Marković 1988: 76, 122). There is a path through the basin, which bifurcates at Krepoljin. One arm stretches towards the east, i.e., towards Žagubica basin, while the other leads to the Gradac site. During the field survey of the Gornjak and Ribarska gorges in 1992, the assumption was presented that during ancient times the road passed through this part of Homolje leading to Gamzi-

Fig. 4. Professor Jovan Dragašević (1836-1915) (photo courtesy of Bora Dragašević, March 2018).

grad (*Felix Romuliana*) (Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 103). In that case, the Upper Moesian Roman route, which led from Viminacium (*Viminacium*) to Naissus (*Naissus*) (Vasić i Milošević 2000, 139; Јиречек 1959: 113), most probably divided at Iovis Pago (*Iovis Pago*) and through the Gornjačka gorge, and near Gradac it went toward the interior of the coastal Dacia province (*Dacia Ripensis*). It is possible that this Roman road had been also used during the Middle Ages, as is the case with the road which led through the valley of the Great Morava (Шкриванић 1974: 117-118; Ћирковић 1994: 466; Благојевић 1987: 108; Узелац 2015: 19).

HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH

The fortification near Krepoljin was mentioned for the first time in the literature by the Professor of military geography Jovan Dragašević in 1874 (Fig. 4). During his career, he performed geographical examinations of Homolje on several occasions and left data in his records about some of the fortified settlements. Describing the

Fig. 5. Sketch of the cliff with the structure drawn in on the left bank of the Mlava river at the exit from Ribarska gorge (according to: Драгашевић 1876: 328).

river Mlava flow in Ribarska gorge, he notes that above the spring that meanders there are city ruins: "The ridge on which the city was built is hardly several meters (2-5-7) wide on the top and from there a high cliff breaks into the Mlava river" (Драгашевић 1874: 60-61, 63, 79; Драгашевић 1875: 80-81; Драгашевић 1876: 303). It is interesting that Dragašević called the site by the name Kudelin (Драгашевић 1874: 79; Драгашевић 1875: 80), even though the toponym Gradac was used by the locals during the second half of the 19th century (Валтровић 1890: 89-90). A similar situation occurs with the nearby Zad site in Ribar, called Drman by Dragašević (Драгашевић 1875: 80; Драгашевић 1876: 341; Ђорђевић 1910: 231-232). In the historical sources, the half-brothers Drman and Kudelin of Kumane and Bulgarian origin, are mentioned as independent masters, who established themselves in Ždrelo during the second half of the 13th century (Даничић 1866: 115; Узелац 2015: 111, 118-120; Вушковић 2010: 107-108). It is very likely that during his research Dragašević, heard a legend from the locals about the presence of the aforementioned noblemen in this part of Homolje, and on that basis we may assume that one of the pioneers of Serbian archaeology wanted to identify the meritorious masters for construction of the ancient towns on the Gradac site near Krepoljin and Zad in Ribar.[3]

However, it is highly likely that Dragašević had not climb at the top of the site, since he did not provide a fortification ground plan. In order to compare, he made sketches and precisely located the defence walls constructed in the more accessible Zad hill in Ribar. Also, in his notes he did not mention the remains of the church at the top of the Gradac site, but paid more attention to the hydrological features of the Mlava river and surrounding relief, which were particularly interesting to him as a geographer (Fig. 5). At the very left bank of the river on the south-eastern slopes of the site, he drew the construction of the longitudinal base, which is semi-circular on the eastern side (Драгашевић 1876: 327-328). At first glance, it seems that these are today's remains of the church at the top of Gradac. However, there is also a possibility that during his visit to this part of the Ribarska gorge, Dragašević noticed a rural building that was used by the villagers.[4]

3 If this assumption is correct, this would not be the only legend about Drman and Kudelin in Homolje. A saga telling of their presence in Ždrelo in the Gornjačka gorge was written in the middle of the 19th century, Влаић 1850: 32-34; Медовић 1852: 193-194. Legends about them may be also heard today from the locals of some villages in Homolje, see https://www.ebranicevo.com/homoljska-legenda-o-drmanu-i-kudelinu-foto-, (Accessed on: 25/9/2019). However. the toponyms "Drman" and "Kudelin" are not known to today's villagers of Krepoljin and Ribar, Миловановић 2016: 121. Also, other travel writers and researchers have not recorded these names (except for Kanitz who rewrote notes from Dragašević).

4 During his visit of Homolje, Dragašević discovered the remains of churches on several sites, but he didn't draw a plan for any of them. In his drawings we can see that on several occasions (e.g., in the yard of the Gornjak

Fig. 6. Professor Mihailo Valtrović (1839-1915) (according to: Милинковић 1984: 15).

Felix Kanitz took over the data from Dragašević, using the same name for the site near Krepoljin. It is necessary to note that the Austro-Hungarian travel writer and researcher was the first to assume settlement of this fortification during the Roman period (Каниц 1985: 248, 266-267, 272; Јововић и Шуљагић 2016: 270-271). After Kanitz, the remains of the old towns in the gorge of the Mlava river were mentioned by Vladimir Karić in the book *Србија. Опис земље, народа и државе (Serbia. Description of the Country, People and State),* but to a smaller extent (Карић 1997: 847-849). The site was first mentioned under the name Gradac by Professor Mihailo Valtrović in 1890 (Fig. 6). This was a paper in the journal *Starinar* about prehistoric bronze objects, in which Valtrović, among other things, published the axes accidentally found in Mlava below the site (Валтровић 1890: 89-90). These are, at the same time, also the first published finds from the territory of Homolje (Миловановић, in print).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Gradac was mentioned by Professor Tihomir Đorđević, specifying the Roman coins originating from this site (Ђорђевић 1910: 232-233). Further interest in the site near Krepoljin occurred at the beginning of April, 1947. At that time the representative of the Ministry of Education of Serbia headed by Vladimir Rabotin conducted visits to the archaeological sites and ethnological research done in Homolje. The team also consisted of Đorđe Orlov and Brana Stojanović (Миловановић, in print).

In the 1950s, the archaeological site near Krepoljin, in the vicinity of the exit from the Ribarska gorge, was visited by Nikola Krstić, at that time an associate of the Požarevac Museum and a teacher in Petrovac na Mlavi. N. Krstić characterized the site as a powerful fortification, and on the edge of the rock he noticed the remains of the church with a preserved altar (Јацановић и Живковић 2000: 129; Dragojević 1983: 55). In the subsequent period, the fortification was mentioned by Dimitrije Madas and Aleksandar Gajić, in 1983. In their article, in which medieval tombstones were elaborated on, as well as the graves in the complex of Ždrelo, the "Krepoljin town" protecting the entrance from the east side of Gornjak gorge was mentioned (Мадас и Гајић 1983: 222).

The first test excavations at the Gradac site were performed in 1992 by Mlađan Cunjak and Milorad Miljković.[5] At that time the church was investigated, in which two graves were found. In the report there is a brief description of the defence walls, and unauthorized excavations were also evidenced in the field (Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 103; Цуњак и Миљковић 1993: 67-68; Радовановић 1997: 241). By the end of the 20th century, the site had also been visited by experts from the Požarevac museum as part of the

monastery and its surroundings) he located the buildings that functioned at that time. That was most certainly the case with the structure (whose purpose is still unknown) along the very left bank of the Mlava river below the south-eastern slopes of the Gradac site near Krepoljin.

5 This refers to the research conducted by the Regional Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments from Smederevo and the Republic Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments from Belgrade, Цуњак, Миљковић 1993; Радовановић 1997: 241, n. 90.

Fig. 7. Ribarska gorge, view from the Gradac site (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 8. Krepoljin basin, view from the Gradac site (photo: M. Milovanović).

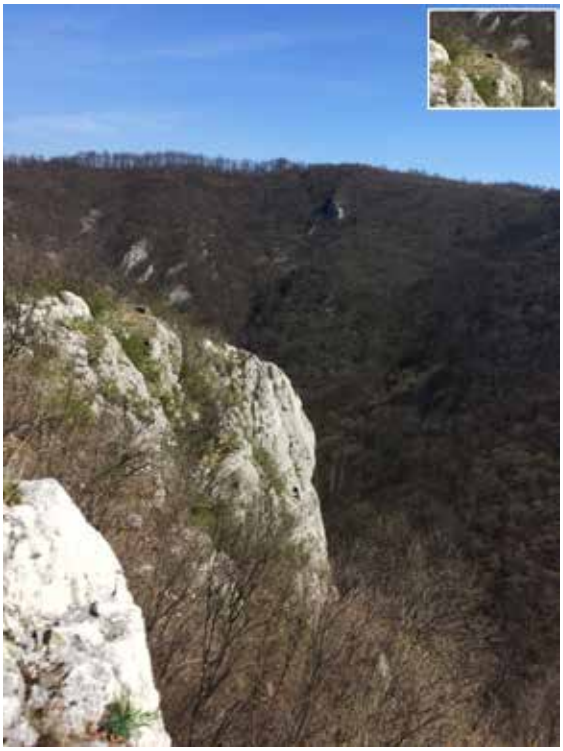


Fig. 9. View towards north-eastern, protruding side of the Gradac site near Krepoljin and remains of the church (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 10. The Gradac archaeological site near Krepoljin, northeast side (photo: M. Milovanović).

Old Cultures of Homolje project, and finds from prehistory were collected. The complete report of these explorations has not been published yet (Манојловић 2001a: 329-330; Манојловић 2001b: 332; Миловановић 2016: 40, n. 157; Milovanović 2019: 59, ref. 6).

A field visit of Gradac was conducted by the authors of this paper in September 2019 for the purpose of revision, primarily in order to obtain data on the micro-location and level of preservation of the architecture. Initially, the locals were surveyed, and then the terrain was examined. From archaeological finds on the surface of the site, pottery sherds and part of a millstone were found. It is interesting to note that at that time anthropological and archaeo-zoological material was collected. In addition, the locals provided objects for inspection, found (according to their words) at the beginning of the 1960s at the top of Gradac.[6]

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE SITE

The Gradac fortification was built in the middle of a limestone cliff, which is situated at the very exit from the Ribarska gorge (Fig. 7), immediately along the eastern rim of the Krepoljin basin (Fig. 8). The base of the cliff is shaped like an irregular four-shaped star, whose surface is mostly covered with woods. The edge of the protruding arms consists of inaccessible cliffs and steep slopes, under which the Mlava flows, creating large bends. The altitude of the site is approximately 330 m.

In the middle of the cliff, there is a longitudinal rocky plateau, on which walls were constructed adapted to the terrain configuration. The base of the plateau, with an irregular oval shape, stretches from the southwest towards the northeast. On the northeast side, the plateau is projected and in

6 Archaeological, anthropological, and archaeozoological finds collected in the field were submitted to the Heritage Museum of Homolje in Žagubica.

Fig. 11. Wall – walking path (?) on the southern side of the site (photo: M. Milovanović).

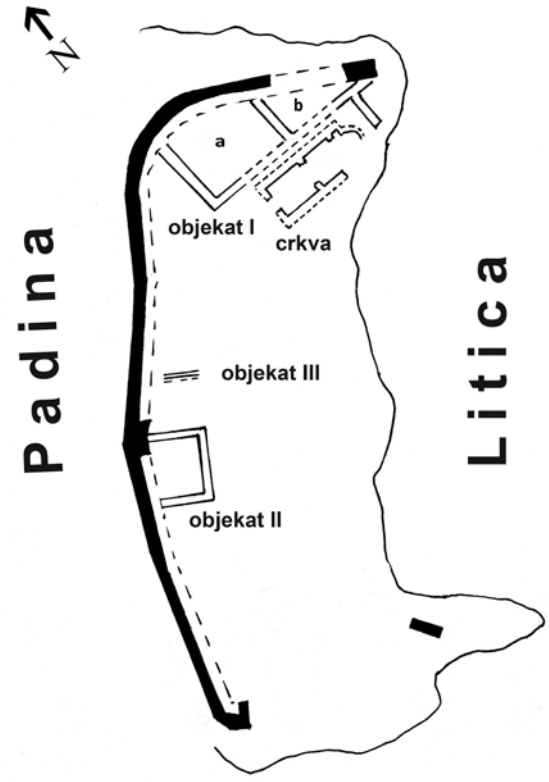


Fig. 12. Sketch of the Gradac fortification near Krepoljin (drawing: M. Milovanović).

that part are remains of the church (Fig. 9). Below there are vertical cliffs that descend to the left bank of the river (Fig. 10). The view from this point is towards the very heart of the Ribarska gorge and the Beljanica mountain peaks.

Access to the site is possible from the southern side, by a narrow path, next to a rocky cliff, which in this part of the terrain is located at a slightly higher altitude than the fortification. The cliff is here elongated and cut. A wall was built at the place where the cut is recognizable (Fig. 11); its purpose at this moment can be only assumed. In fact, from the top of the smaller plateau of the southern cliff there is a view toward the Krepoljin basin, from which the former inhabitants of the fortification were able to detect an enemy break-

Fig. 13. Preserved remains of the rampart on northwest side of the fortification (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 14. Devastated rampart on the northern side of the fortification (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 15. Interior of room a of Structure I (photo: M. Milovanović).

through from this direction. The wall is oriented approximately along the north – south axis. It is made of crushed limestone, of small and medium size, bonded by whitish lime mortar. Its dimensions are approximately 2.70 x 1.40 x 1.30 m.[7] It can be anticipated with necessary caution that the wall was built in the function of a "walking path", so as to more easily reach the protruding position in order to observe the surroundings. In this part of the site, there is also a cut in the rock, which can be assumed, with reservation, to be a trench. Further below the cliff there is a small passable slope covered with forest, and towards the southwest, as the terrain gradually descends, there is a meadow through which the agricultural road passes. From this place there is a view of Vukan and Ježevac, which means that the areal of the settlement had visual contact with the fortifications of the Gornjak gorge. From the meadow, the road heads towards Mlava, from where it leads over today's bridge to Krepoljin.

Within the defended areal, at least two structures were registered, with the working titles Structure I and Structure II (Fig. 12). The route of the rampart spreads from the southwest towards the northeast, following the rim of the western slope. Its length can be followed to a distance of over 40 m (Figs. 13, 14). The highest preserved height of the rampart is 4.20 m, while the width is 2.70 m at the place where Structure II is situated. The defence wall has been devastated in several places by illegal searchers. Damage to the outer face on the north and western part of the route is particularly noticeable. The building technique of the defence wall involved use of crushed and cut limestone of small and medium size with whitish mortar used as a binder. On the west terrace, where the rampart suffered the damage, negatives

7 Because of vegetation which surrounded the wall, it was not possible to take absolute dimensions during the visit.

Fig. 16. Outer front of the northern wall of Structure II (photo: M. Milovanović).

of the former well fence can be observed.

Structure I and Structure II are made using the same building technique as the fortification's rampart. The remains of Structure I are located on the northeast part of the site, near the church. The construction includes at least two rooms, marked as "a" and "b". Room "a" has a rectangular shape and a length of 6.40 m (Fig. 15). Its width together with the rampart is 7.20 m. The walls are preserved at a height of up to 0.85 m, while their thickness is 1.05 m. Room "b", judging by the current state on the field, was triangular. It was not possible to measure its dimensions because of the dense vegetation and steep terrain. The southern wall of Structure I, as well as the eastern and western wall of room "a", are connected to the inner face of the rampart. The aforementioned southern wall is parallel to the northern wall of the church and at that part their total width is 2.90 m. If we take into consideration, as will be seen later in this text, the current thickness of the southern church wall of 1.20 m, then between the southern wall of Structure I and the sacral building, free space might be expected at a width of 0.65 m, but some future archaeological excavation will provide a final conclusion. At the eastern end of the structure, a smaller wall was constructed towards the south, parallel to the church apse.

Structure II is situated in the western part of the site. Its inner dimensions are 4.30 x 5.10 m. The maximum preserved height, measured at the northern wall, is approximately 1 m (Fig. 16). The walls' width is 0,90 m. The northern and southern wall of Structure 2 are connected to the inner face of the rampart. Approximately in the middle part of the defended areal there is one more wall that might represent a third profane structure. Judging by the terrain configuration, it is most likely to be the outer face. Its length is 4.60 m, and preserved height is 0.35 m. It can be assumed that the wall was connected to the inner rampart face as in the above-mentioned structures.

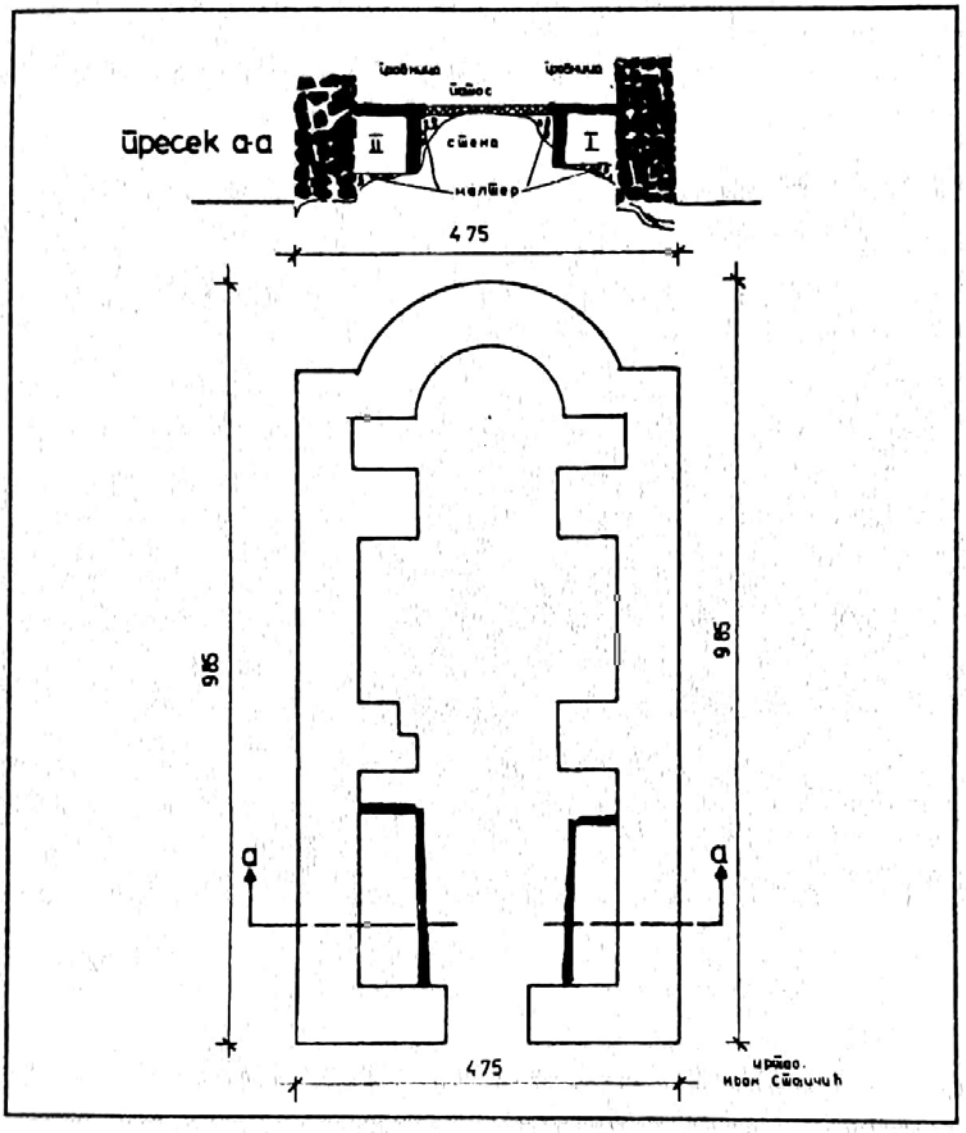


Fig. 17. Church ground plan on the Gradac site near Krepoljin according to M. Cunjak and M. Miljković (according to: Цуњак и Миљковић 1993: 68, Fig. 1).

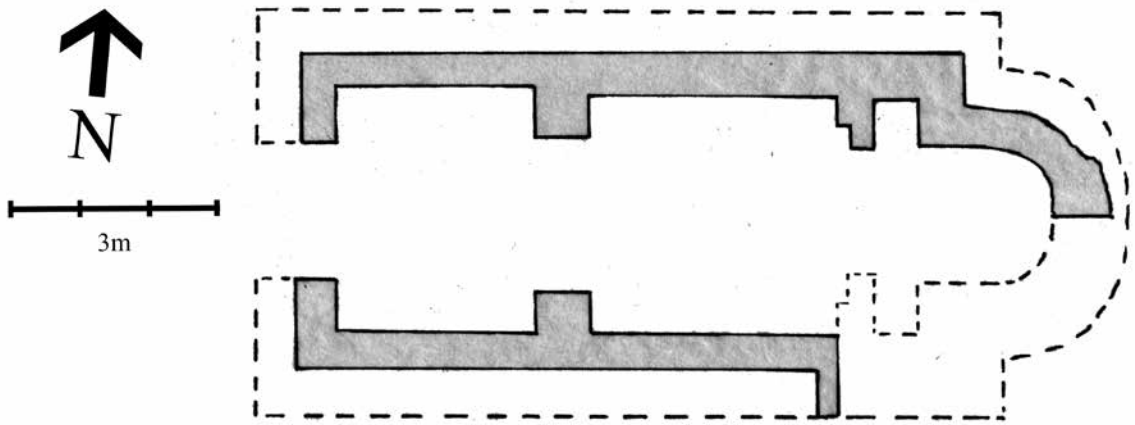


Fig. 18. Church ground plan on the Gradac site near Krepoljin (current condition) (drawing: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 19. Inner face of the apse (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 20. Damage of the apse outer face (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 21. Church northern wall – view of masonry technique (photo: M. Milovanović).

THE CHURCH

A distinctive feature at the Gradac site is represented by the remains of the church, which are situated at the projected northeast part of the rocky plateau, i.e., along the southern wall of Structure I. It is a structure whose walls are for the most part above ground level. Thus, it was possible to establish its main characteristics in the field and therefore, more attention will be paid to it in this paper. The results obtained during the 1992 exploration should first be briefly reviewed. The church base is single-naved, oriented along the east-west axis with a deviation of 6°, towards north. On the east side there is an apse, semi-circular from the inner and outer sides. The interior of the church is divided by pilasters into three bays (Fig. 17). In the western bay, there is one tomb each along the north and south walls. M. Cunjak and M. Miljković, the heads of research, point out that the foundations of the temple were made of crushed stone in lime mortar, and the walls were made of hewn stone blocks of tufa. Fragments of frescoes were evidenced in a niche (Proscomidion?) which was part of the north wall in front of the apse. The external dimensions of the building are 9.85 x 4.75 m. In the report the preserved height of the walls is emphasized (about 0.50 m) as well as the width (0.80 m) (Цуњак и Миљковић 1993; Цуњак и Миљковић 1992: 102).

During the terrain visit in 2019, new and somewhat different data regarding the Gradac church were obtained, after an examination of the current situation. First of all, it should be noted that no protective measures were noticed on the walls, which could protect the building from further deterioration and destruction. According to new measurement, the inner length of the church is 10.52 m. The width of the middle bay is 3.40 m, while the width of the western is 3.61 m. The southern part of the apse as well as the eastern part of the southern wall are completely devastat-

Fig. 22. Church southern wall (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 23. Church southern wall – devastation (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 24. Entrance on the church western wall by the north and southern tomb within western bay (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 25. Preserved floor in the north part of the altar apse (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 26. Southern tomb, current condition (photo: M. Milovanović).

Fig. 27. Church interior at the Gradac site near Krepoljin, view from the western bay (photo: M. Milovanović).

ed, most probably by the work of illegal searchers (Fig. 18). It was not possible to establish the outer dimensions of the building since the walls were covered with earth, debris, and overgrown vegetation, with the exception of the apse.

The preserved apse wall width is 0.73 m. It should be noted that its outer face was not preserved (Fig. 19, 20). The apse foundation was built on uneven rock, using a small piece of limestone with whitish mortar as a binding agent. It is difficult to say how many stone rows were in the foundation zone prior to revisional archaeological excavation. The preserved inner apse height is 0.73 m while the outer height is 0.82 m. The inner face is made of square tufa blocks of whitish-grey colour, and different dimensions. Geological surveys indicate that tufa storage deposits exist in nearby Beljanica, but also in other parts of eastern Serbia (Гавриловић 1993: 6-7). The square stone blocks are noticeable in all inner faces of the walls (the largest piece has dimensions of 38 x 32 x 20 cm) which are also bonded with whitish lime mortar (Fig. 21). Two rows of square stone blocks have been preserved on the north wall and apse, and three rows of square stone blocks on the south wall. For the time being, the question regarding the construction method of the outer face of the church walls remains open.

The southern wall is preserved in a height up to 0.75 m (Fig. 22). On its outer side, a smaller cut limestone can be perceived lying on the rock; thus it was possible to measure the current width of the foundation zone, which is 1.20 m (Fig. 23). The maximum preserved inner height of the north wall is 0.53 m. Within the western wall of the western bay with a height of 0.55 m was an entrance to the church, with a width of 2.14 m (Fig. 24). At its corners, larger square blocks of limestone and tufa were observed.

The church had flooring which is preserved along the northern inner side of the apse (Fig. 25). The preserved length of the flooring is 0.90 m, while its width is 0.33 m. It is made of whitish lime mortar with rows of smaller size crushed limestone below. On the surface of the east bay, a lump of lime mortar is observed which was certainly part of the church flooring.

During the archaeological excavations, M. Cunjak and M. Miljković recorded two tombs inside the western bay, which were cut in the rock. The northern tomb was built next to the northern and western church wall. The lateral sides are made from vertically placed stone plates. The northern tomb is not observable on the terrain since on this part were thrown earth and debris. The heads of research state its length as 2.26 m, while its measured depth is almost 0.60 m. The width of the tomb is 0.69 m on the eastern side, while on the west it is 0.75 m. A similar situation is also apparent with the southern tomb, which is built along the southern and western church wall (Fig. 26, 27). Its length is 2 m, while its measured depth is about 0.57 m. The widths in this case are also not unified. The western side is 0.68 m wide, while the eastern is 0.50 m wide. (Цуњак и Миљковић 1993: 68-69, Сл. 1). Today, the filling of the southern tomb consists of debris and earth. The measured height from the filling to the top of the southern wall is 1.23 m. During clearing for photography, the following osteological material was found: two mandibles (*mandibula*), part of a breastbone (*sternum*), and most probably the shorter bone of the forearm (*radius*).

During investigations at the beginning of the 1990s, scattered human bones were also found. According to the words of the investigators, two adult individuals could be singled out, one of them male and the other female.[8] Traces of green patina were noticed on certain parts of the bones, on the basis of which it was established that there were archaeological findings in the southern tomb, where a female individual was laid. Both tombs had a mortar floor to level the surface of the uneven rock. It was concluded that the tombs were covered with slabs of fine-grained sandstone (Цуњак и Миљковић 1993: 68). Inside the

8 Anthropological analysis on the bones has not been performed to date.

church, scattered massive whole and broken slabs of a dark grey colour can be seen today (Fig. 27). A total of two whole and 13 broken slabs were noticed. The dimensions of the largest plate with vertically carved edges are 1.39 x 0.64 x 0.16 m. Some specimens are ornamented with the technique of carving in the form of oblique borders. The possibility of burial in another part of the nave should not be ruled out, given the large number of gravestones. Inside the nave, a semi-circular processed block was recorded, which was most probably part of the window frame or doorframe of the church.[9]

M. Cunjak and M. Miljković determined the church in the Gradac site to be from the 10th century. Dating was performed according to the findings of a deltoid arrow and "similar single-naved structures which can be found in the wider area of our coast" (Yugoslavia at that time) (Цуњак и Миљковић 1993: 69). Lack of stratigraphic context and chronologically sensitive findings complicate dating of the Gradac sacral building. It is also necessary to emphasize that we do not have all the architectural data. The fact that today's dimensions do not match the measurements from 1992 indicates the need for revisional archaeological excavations. However, if all the data that we have at our disposal are considered, new interpretations can be offered, with additional caution, about the time of construction of the church, despite insufficient research.

The construction of sacral structures in dominant places, such as the case on the Gradac site, was common in the Early Byzantine period (Милинковић 2010: 92). Science has suggested that the cliff near Krepoljin may have been inhabited during this period (cf. Цуњак и Миљковић 1993; Јацановић 2013: 13-14; Мишић и Селаковић 2017: 18; Пуповац 2017: 48). In the area of northern Illyricum, during the aforementioned period, it is noticeable that the number of sacral structures was growing, especially on mountain-fortified settlements and in secluded areas (Милинковић 2015: 33). However, smaller churches whose interior was divided into three bays by pilasters were a rarity during the 6th century. Such a type of sacral building of somewhat larger dimensions, as far as known, has been only explored at the Castellion site in Palestine (Hirschfeld 1992: 114-116, Fig. 52).

Building of sacral structures in hard-to-reach positions is confirmed also during the Middle Ages (Милинковић 2010: 92). Judging by the archaeological excavations so far, smaller single-nave churches with pilasters appeared more intensively during this period of history. The heads of research, as has been already pointed out, dated the church in Gradac in the 10th century, on the basis of an arrow and similar ground plans of contemporary temples occurring in the area of the Adriatic coast. Buildings of that time are classified within Pre-Romanesque church architecture. Research has shown that Pre-Romanesque sacral monuments are characterized by modest dimensions, conditioned by the needs and possibilities of the Slavic environment and Roman centres of that time (Суботић 1963: 12-13). It is difficult to assume that the church in Gradac was built on the model of pre-Romanesque temples. First of all, it should be noted that the masonry technique, which in this case implies square tufa blocks, does not coincide with that of the coastal region during the Pre-Romanesque period. It should also be noted that churches, such as the one in Gradac, appear also outside the pre-Romanesque cultural circle, as is the case with the temple of Agia Kiriaki (*Αγίας Κυριακή*) in the island of Naxos in the Aegean Sea, which was most probably built in the 9th century (Ćurčić 2010: 322/343).

In the following periods we find numerous analogies for smaller number of single-nave types of sacral building whose interior is divided into bays with pilasters. Further in text we will present several examples. According to its basic corpus, the Gradac church has similarities with the church

9 Stone slabs and pieces of architecture evidenced inside the church will be the subject of study of D. Radisavljević in a future paper.

of St. Nicholas (*Αγιος Νικόλαος*) in Kyriakosellia on Crete, determined in the 11th century. The upper structure of the temple is supported by leaning arches in the eastern and western bay, and a transverse vault in the middle, and is entirely supported by pilasters (Корać и Шупут 2010: 208, 206/255-256). The earliest dated sacral building in Serbia with such a base is the Latin Church near Gornji Matejevac in the vicinity of Niš. According to the masonry technique and other architectural elements, it is considered that the church represents a version of Byzantine provincial construction and that it was built in the first half of the 11th century (Ракоција 1990-1991: 22-21). Analogies can be further found in Bulgaria, as is the case for example with the St. Archangels' church of the Bachkovo Monastery (*Бачковский монастъръ*), roughly dated to the 12th – 13th century (Миятев 1969: 121, Рис. 114).

This type of sacral building occurs more often on the territory of Serbia during subsequent centuries. The internal organization of the space of the Gradac church near Krepoljin congruencies congruent with the temples of St. Nicholas in Baljevac and St. Nicholas in Brvenik in the area of Raška. The temple in Baljevac was built of large, rectangular pieces of ashlar stone, arranged in regular rows. The suggested dating for the church is the fourth or fifth decade of the 13th century (Чанак-Медић и Кандић 1995: 213). From their outer side, the walls of the church in Brvenik are built from ashlar blocks of trachyte of unequal dimensions. Within the western and central bays, gravestones were arranged in two rows, under which archaeological excavations revealed graves. The construction of the church is presumed to date to the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century (Чанак-Медић 2006: 235-236).

The other sacral buildings on the territory of medieval Serbia are close to the Gradac temple from the 14th century, such as the older phase of the cathedral church in Novo Brdo and the church of St. John in the complex of Studenica. During recent research of the St. Nicholas cathedral in Novo Brdo, it has been established that there is a smaller single-nave cemetery church below it, which is similar in size and shape to the Gradac church. The preserved church walls were made of crushed and cut stone. It is considered to have been constructed in the second quarter of the 14th century (Поповић и Бјелић 2018: 51-52, Fig. 14/a-b). The church of St. John the Forerunner in Studenica is situated within the monastery walls (Радан-Јовин, Јанковић и Темерински 1988: 56-57, 55/22). Its walls were built from tufa ashlar in combination with crushed and cut stone. According to recent studies, the St. John the Forerunner church was built during the third or fourth decade of the 14th century (Поповић 2015: 82, 84, Fig. 34). We also find numerous parallels in later periods. In the valley of the Lim river, as well as in the wider area of Stari Vlah, single-nave church structures have been recorded, whose inner space is divided with pilasters on three bays, and which can be roughly dated to the 16th – 17th century (Пашић 2002: 87-88, Сл. 2).

According to the above-presented examples, it can be concluded that smaller single-nave churches with three bays appear in a wider period of time. Considered as a whole, the church in Gradac is most similar to the Trška church near Žagubica, which is about 9 km away, toward the east. Archaeological and architectural research conducted during the 1980s showed that the original base of the Trška church had a single-nave shape with an apse on the east side. From the inner and outer sides, the apse was constructed in a semi-circular form. The nave was divided into three bays by pilasters, while a narthex was on the west side. The temple foundation was made of smaller crushed stones soaked in lime mortar. Walls made of yellowish brown square tufa blocks also bounded with lime mortar were constructed above (Чанак-Медић 2006: 182-183). The western facade of the older church included highly elaborated sculptures of gryphons and lions, which may have their origin in the Hungarian and Raška construction style. In later periods, the Trška church would

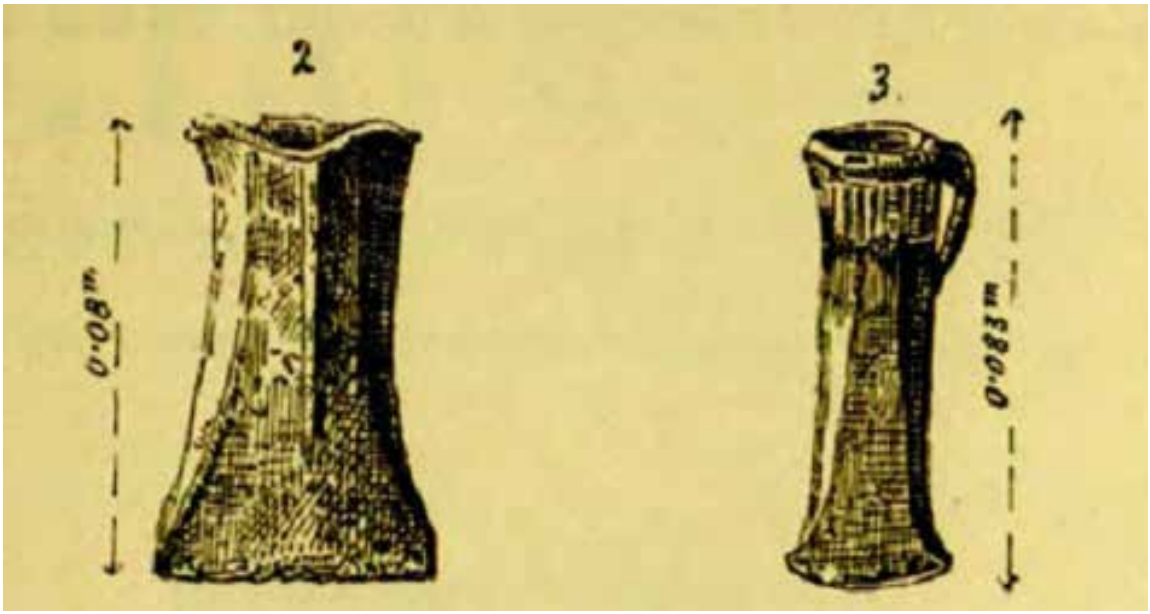


Fig. 28. Bronze axes from Mlava (according to: Валтровић 1890, TAB. IX/2-3).

have a large number of upgrades, which will be not be the subject of research at this moment, because it is beyond the scope of this paper.[10]

During archaeological excavations, graves around and inside the church were found. It was concluded that burials were performed over a long time span. The oldest graves belong to the 14th century, while the youngest are determined to be from the 19th century. In the nave of the Trška church, gravestones were found and the graves below them were investigated. A slab found at the place where ktetors were usually buried, which is the southern wall of the western bay, attracted attention, and below it the skeletons of a woman and a newborn baby were found (Чанак-Медић 2006: 198). A similar situation was also recorded at the previously mentioned temple of St. John the Forerunner in Studenica. There, along the southern wall of the western bay, a ktetor's grave was found, made at the same time as the church was built (Поповић 2018: 82-83).

Based on explorations conducted by Milka Čanak-Medić, it was determined that commencement of construction of the St. Nicholas church near Žagubica can be dated to the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century. It is assumed that the ktetor of the Trška church was King Dragutin or one of his district masters (Чанак-Медић 2006: 178, 189, 198-199, 203, 208). Kings Milutin and Dragutin conquered these areas after defeating their half-brothers Drman and Kudelin in the nearby fortification of Ždrelo in 1284 (Станковић 2012: 85-86) or 1292 (Узелац 2015: 210).

A similar mode of construction to the Gradac church has also been recorded in the single-nave church of Immaculate Mother of God in the Gornjačka gorge. On the western side a narthex was subsequently constructed. According to morphological characteristics of some letters on the gravestone inscriptions, it has been concluded that the ktetor was buried around the middle of the 14th century, and that the church was most probably built during his lifetime. The frescoes discovered on the walls during archaeological excavations are determined to be from the first half of the 14th century (Мадас и Гајић 1983: 226, 228-230). We remind you that fragments of iconography were also discovered on the Gradac church during archaeological research in 1992, but so far, they have not

10 About later phases of construction of the Trška church, see also М. Чанак-Медић, 1997. Ексонартекс цркве Св. Николе у Тргу код Жагубице.

Fig. 29. Polyhedron ornament and spear from the Gradac site near Krepoljin, accidental finds (photo: M. Milovanović).

been the subject of study. According to the aforementioned observations, the sacral structure on Gradac could be preliminarily dated to the period between the construction of the Trška church near Žagubica and the church of the Immaculate Mother of God in Gornjak gorge, i.e., at the end of the 13th or the first half of the 14th century.

Fig. 30. Stone millstone from the Gradac site near Krepoljin, accidental find (photo: M. Milovanović).

FINDS

A smaller number of archaeological finds indicate that the cliff on the left bank of the Mlava river in the Ribarska gorge was inhabited during prehistory. In 1890, two bronze axes that were found, as recorded, in Mlava, below the very churchyard, in the place called Gradac, were presented to the public (Валтровић 1890: 89). According to the submitted drawing (Fig. 28), it can be concluded that the axes belong to a Celta type axes and can be dated to the Late Bronze age (Гарашанин и Гарашанин 1951: 62). These tools have numerous analogies in the archaeological sites of that time all over Europe. The territorially closest parallels are found in the accidentally discovered hoards from the Bronze Age in Suvi Do near Žagubica and in Šetonje near Petrovac na Mlavi (Шљивар 1991: 33-34, T. I/1; Јацановић и Радојчић 2003: 7, 16, 25/1-2).

One of more interesting finds from the Gradac site is a small bronze weight of polyhedron shape, with dimensions of 0.9 x 0.8 x 0.8 cm, which is stored in the Heritage Museum of Homolje in Žagubica (Fig. 29/1; T. I/1).[11] On one of the flat surfaces a circular indent can be observed, i.e., an embossed dot, which most probably represents a weight mark. Above, a smaller slanted notch can be identified. It is also noticeable that the polyhe-

11 The object was provided to the museum by the courtesy of Bora Nikolić from Suvi Do, in March, 2018.

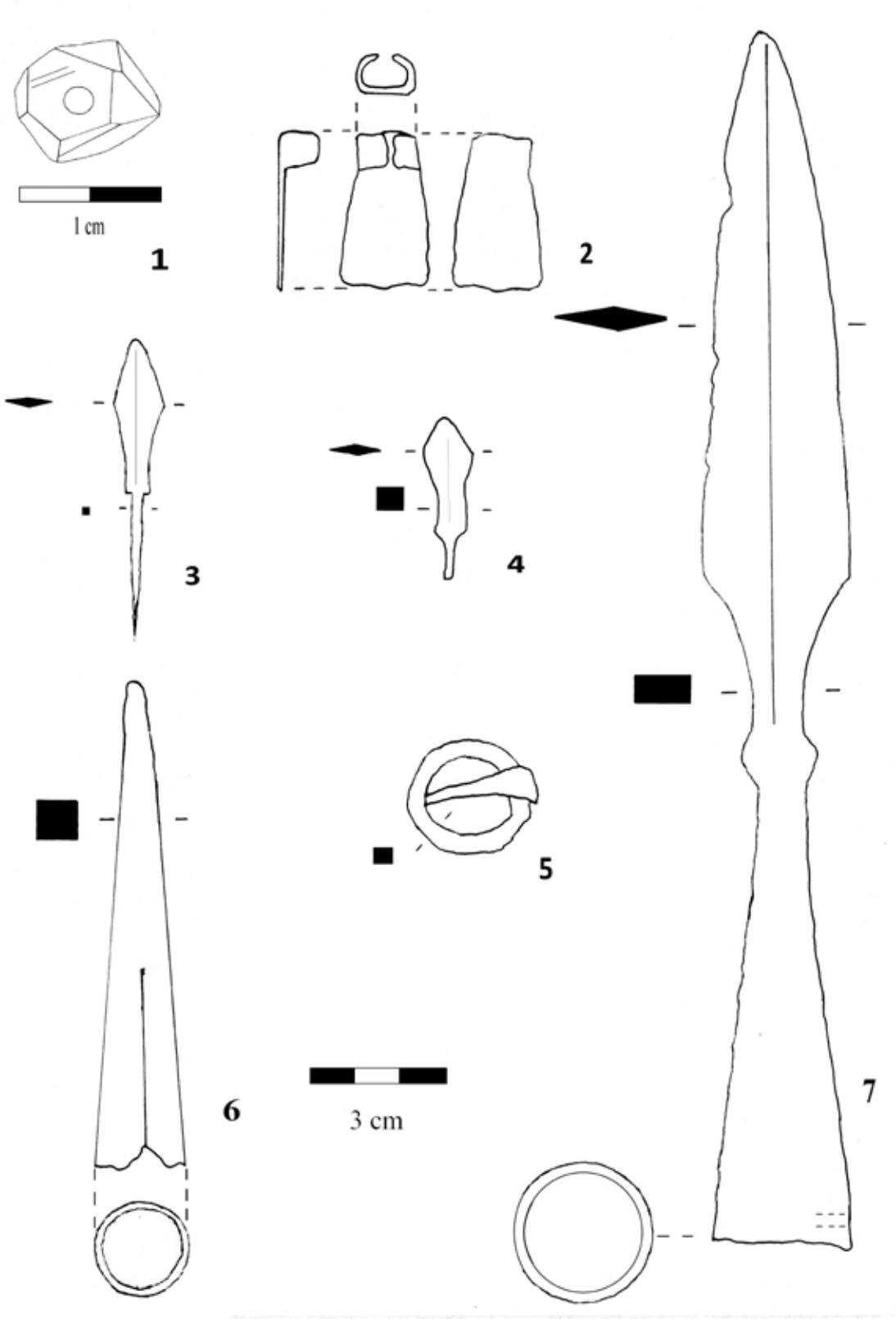
dron "corners" are not equally processed, so their dimensions are different. The weight of this item is 3 g. Several weights of polyhedron shape have been evidenced so far in Serbia. Those are accidental finds, with various weights from several ounces (*unca*), originating from Novi Banovci, Salakovac or unknown sites which are, according to S. Krunić determined to be from the period of the 2nd -3rd century (Крунић 1995: 9-10). However, according to its weight, the example from Gradac is closer to the specimens with the value of one nomisma (4.54 g). It can be assumed that false weights appeared in order to decrease the value of one nomisma. It is believed that false weights were used during the Early Byzantine period in the fortified settlements in Đerdap (Špehar 2010: 80).

During the terrain visit in 2019, a smaller number of archaeological finds were discovered. Those are objects from the excavated earth that occurred during illegal activities at the top of the site. Pottery sherds were the most numerous. Those are the sherds whose chronological span is difficult to determine, due to atypical shapes, except in the case of one fragment. It is a sherd of a pot rim made of clay with grey-brown baking colour and quartz admixture, made on a potter's wheel (T. II/1). The rim is bent, and the mouth is rounded. A pot with such a rim has the closest similarities territorially with the acoustic pottery pots discovered during the exploration of the Trška church near Žagubica. Chronologically these vessels were, according to analogies, determined to date from the end of the 13th to the end of the first quarter of the 14th century (Чанак-Медић 2006: 191, 203).

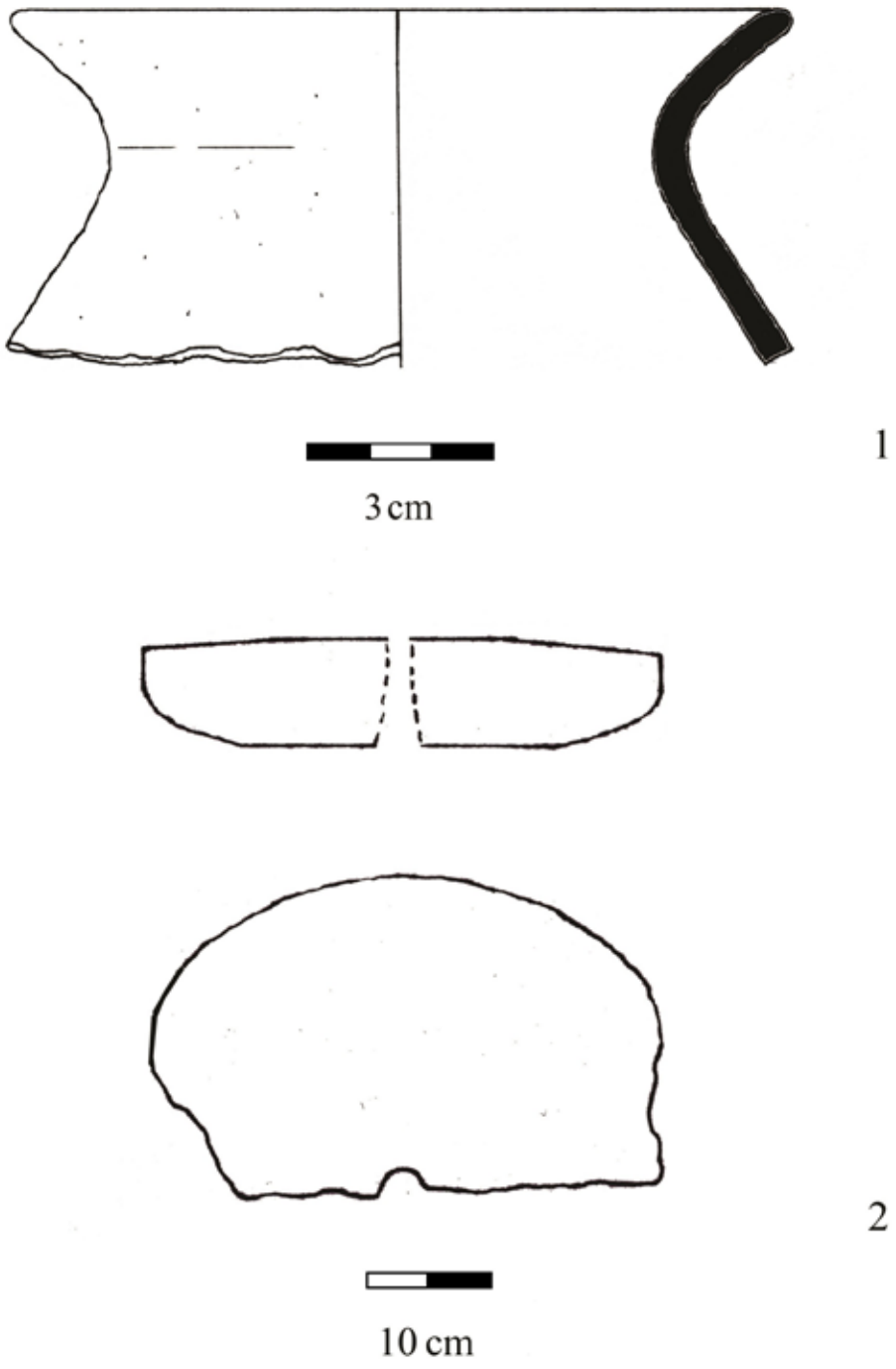
On the surface of the terrain in the vicinity of Structure II, part of a millstone made of grained stone of whitish colour, most probably of some kind of sandstone, was found (Fig. 30; T. II/2). It is the lower half of the millstone, the static part. The upper surface is flat, slightly prominent, while the lower is raised at the ends. In the middle of the millstone, a smaller damaged semicircle is perceived, which was the opening for the axle inserted in the lower static stone and around which the upper one revolved. The opening of the upper part (R=2.5 cm) gradually widens toward the lower one (R=4 cm). Without stratigraphic context, it is difficult to date this millstone from Gradac. Such a shape represents a universal shape of the lower half. Research shows that it was in use from the La Tène period and was one of the most commonly found types in the territory of Serbia, prevalent during the whole Antiquity period (Jovičić 2019: 205-206). This shape also appeared in later times, during the Middle Ages, as evidenced by the specimens discovered during research of the Ras fortification (Popović 1999: 150, 328–329, Sl. 100, kat. br. 251/1).

Archaeological finds made of iron which are not chronologically sensitive are kept by the locals, and accordingly, they will not be the subject of more detailed analysis in this paper. A small chisel, two arrows, and a buckle belong to that group (T. I/2-5). The exceptions are probably represented by a well-preserved javelin butt and a spear. The javelin butt was used as an offensive weapon from the time of the Roman Republic until Late Antiquity. With regard to typology, findings of this type generally do not differ, so their dating is made according to the context of their finding (Бугарски 2009: 230-231). The specimen from Gradac has in its lower part the opening for insertion, whose arms are connected, while the upper part of the object gradually comes to a spike of a square cross-section (T. I/6). The javelin dimensions are 11 x 2.1 x 0.9 cm (socket diameter R=2 cm).

The spear from the Gradac site is characterized by a deltoid shaped tip with a socket for insertion, and dimensions of 27.1 x 3.3 x 0.6 cm (socket diameter R=3.2 cm). The find is characterised by the reinforcement located between the tip and the socket (Fig. 18/2; T. I/7). Spears with reinforcement were known during the Early Byzantine period, which is evidenced by specimens from *Iustiniana Prima* (Caričin Grad) and some sites from the Migration period in Panonia (Кондић и Поповић 1977, 210-211, TABLE XXVII/95; Dimitrijević, Kovačević i Vinski 1962, Tb. XI/3). However, it



T. I. Accidental finds from the Gradac site near Krepoljin (drawing: M. Milovanović).



T. II. Accidental finds from the Gradac site near Krepoljin (drawing: M. Milovanović).

seems that analogies for this type of spear should be sought in later periods. Judging by its shape, the specimen from Gradac has similarities to the medieval spears from the typology sorted out by Petar Pop-Lazić (Поп-Лазић 1983: 163, 170-171). A similar spear, which has reinforcement on the upper part of the socket, has been discovered on the Šumljak site near the Kalna village in the Knjaževac region and is considered to belong to the period of the 13th-14th century (Lalović 1982: 70, T. I, Fig. 9; Јовановић 1990: 196, T. I/3).

CONCLUSION

It is still early to draw final conclusions about the Gradac archaeological site near Krepoljin, since the defended areal, except for the church, has not been archaeologically excavated to date. The aim of this paper is primarily to provide more detailed information about the present condition of the site to an academic audience in order to provide the basis for future research. The bronze axes found below Gradac testify that the limestone cliff on the exit of Ribarska gorge was originally inhabited during the Bronze Age, most probably at its very end. We emphasize once more that those are the finds published by M. Valtrović in the *Starinar* journal for 1890, and that it was the first time that the site was mentioned under the name Gradac.

The weight in the shape of polyhedron and the javelin butt, discovered by locals, may suggest the inhabitation of Gradac during Antiquity. It is also necessary to emphasise the Roman coins mentioned by T. Đorđević. Finds of this type definitely indicate the presence of a population on the site before the epoch of the Middle Ages. The iron objects also collected by the locals on the surface of the terrain are not chronologically sensitive to such an extent and occur during various periods. The exception is perhaps the spear, which most probably originated in the Middle Ages.

Up to 1992, there were no attempts to explore the site archeologically. The small church situated on the protruding north-east part of the rocky plateau drew the most attention of researchers at that time. The base of the church is single-nave, and the interior is divided by pilasters into three unequal bays. However, other data about the sacral structure, provided by M. Cunjak and M. Miljković, do not match the present state in the field. After a site visit in 2019, it was established that appropriate protection measures had not been performed on the church, and that the apse and the southern wall were devastated to a great extent. The question of relations between Structure I and the church remains open for the time being, until archaeological excavations are carried out.

Single-nave temples whose interiors are divided by pilasters into three bays, occur in different periods of the Middle Ages. The base of the Gradac church has closest similarities territorially with the Trška church near Žagubica, which is considered to have been built at the end of 13th or at the beginning of the 14th century. When it comes to the masonry technique that involves combination of crushed stone and square tufa blocks, parallels may be found with the church of the Immaculate Holy Mother of God in the Gornjačka gorge and St. John the Forerunner in Studenica, built during the first half of the 14th century. Based on the aforementioned observations, it seems that the sacral structure on Gradac should be dated to the period between construction of the Trška church and the temple of Immaculate Holy Mother of God, but final judgement should be provided by revisional archaeological excavations.

In debris of the southern tomb within the western bay, osteological material was found that will definitely be the subject of study by physical anthropologists. During excavation of the northern and southern tomb, scattered skeletal remains were also found, assumed to belong to the ktetors of the church. In the forthcoming period, comparative anthropological analysis on the bones found in 1992 and 2019 should be performed.

During the visit in the field, a rampart with a length of over 40 m and at least three profane

structures were explored to the extent possible. The site is devastated for the most part by the activity of illegal searchers. In the following period, primarily the test excavation of the defended areal should be expected in order to obtain a stratigraphic picture of the site. Before that, it is necessary to perform recording of the present state and additionally to carry out a field survey of the wider Gradac area.

On the surface of the terrain, a smaller number of archaeological finds was discovered. Those are pottery sherds and part of a millstone, which are not chronologically sensitive to a large extent. With necessary caution, a preserved sherd of a pot rim which might be dated according to the analogies to the end of 13th or the first half of the 14th century, may be singled out.

There are few written sources describing events in the Homolje area during the medieval epoch. Areas in the Mlava and Pek valleys belonged to the Nemanjić state during the last quarter of the 13th century (Станковић 2012: 85-86; Узелац 2015: 210; Благојевић 1987: 84). They were within the Braničevo land area which Archbishop Danilo II said was fortified (Даничић 1866: 115). In Serbian historiography, it is believed that the Homolje parish (župa) was there (Мишић 2006: 11), therefore the existence of the fortified seat of the local authority within the aforementioned geographical-administrative area should be expected. In Homolje, at least for the time being, the Gradac site, near Krepoljin, stands out as a possible administrative and military centre. According both to the finds and immovable archaeological material, there are indications that demonstrate that this site was inhabited at the end of the 13th or at the first half of the 14th century. However, whether the fortification was built at that time still remains an open question.

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REZIME
ARHEOLOŠKI LOKALITET GRADAC KOD KREPOLJINA

KLJUČNE REČI: UTVRĐENJE, CRKVA, GRADAC, SLUČAJNI NALAZI, RIBARSKA KLISURA, DATOVANJE, KREPOLJIN.

U radu su predstavljeni rezultati dosadašnjih proučavanja arheološkog lokaliteta Gradac kod Krepoljina u Homolju. Reč je o utvrđenom naselju koje je izgrađeno na stenovitom grebenu, visoko iznad leve obale reke Mlave pri njenom izlasku iz Ribarske klisure. Unutar branjenog areala, nalaze se ostaci najmanje tri profana objekta i crkve koja je smeštena na isturenom severoistočnom delu uzvišenja. Prvo interesovanje za lokalitet javilo se početkom sedemdesetih godina 19. veka, kada je profesor Jovan Dragašević ostavio podatke o razvalinama grada na grebenu iznad Mlave. Pod imenom Gradac nalazište je prvi put spomenuto od strane profesora Mihaila Valtrovića 1890. godine. Tokom narednog stoleća u nekoliko navrata sprovedena su rekognosciranja terena. Godine 1992. vrše se prva arheološka iskopavanja i tom prilikom je istražena crkva. Terenski obilazak u svojstvu revizije obavljen je 2019. godine, čiji su rezultati predstavljeni u ovom radu.

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