

A FEW NOTES ON THE ORIGINS OF THE BOSNIAN CHURCH AND ITS CONNECTION TO HERESY

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Abstract: DRUGA, Marek. *A Few Notes on the Origins of the Bosnian Church and its Connection to Heresy*. This study aims to address the much-debated and still unresolved questions regarding the formation of the Bosnian Church and its relationship to heresy. The primary focus is on the extent to which the Bosnian Church can be understood as heretical in the 12th and 13th centuries. Dalmatian sources from the 14th century refer to the Bosnian church (*Bosanska Crkva*) as the Patarenes. In this context, 'Patarenes' is an established term reflecting the perspective of the Western Christian (Roman) Church, which viewed the Bosnian Church as schismatic or heretical. However, while at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, contemporary sources describe the Patarenes as heretics who settled on the territory of Bosnia after being expelled from Trogir and Split. This paper re-examines historical reports on the Patarenes and explores the question of a direct affinity and continuity between the Patarenes and the Bosnian Church in the 13th century. A broader corpus of sources has been considered, including the narrative value of various accounts concerning the Bosnian Church and heresy, particularly those from Western European authors and documents issued by the Papal Curia. The focus here is on the supposed relationship of the Bosnian Ban, Kulin, and the Bosnian royal court to heresy, further on the reports of contacts between Bosnian heretics and heretics in Dalmatia and northern Italy in the 12th-13th century and finally, on the question of the contact points of the beliefs of these heretics. The thesis argues that Western sources depict Bosnian heretics as part of a unique church environment within a superficially Christianized Bosnian society. The findings of the study challenge the perception of a direct identification or close connection between the Bosnian clergy, the ruler's court, and the Patarenes in Bosnia. However, the paper also questions the existence of a strict dichotomy between the Patarenes in Bosnia as dualists and the Bosnian Church. The final conclusion supports the idea that Bosnian Christianity in this period exhibited significantly greater variability and heterogeneity of Bosnian Christianity than has been assumed in the majority of earlier studies.

Keywords: *Bosnia, Heresy, Papacy, Dualism, Patarenes*

Introduction: On the Question of Religious Conditions in Bosnia until the End of the 12th Century

Very little is known about the cultural and ecclesiastical development in Bosnia up to the end of the 12th century.¹ Important points in the cultural history of early medieval Bosnia² include the gradual dominance of Slavic ethnic groups and the influence of the Byzantine Empire. From the 10th century onward, Bosnia came under the Byzantine rule at least three times: at the beginning

¹ The study was conducted as part of the project VEGA 2/0095/25: *Nová monarchia. Spoločnosť v neskorom stredoveku. (New Monarchy. Society in the Late Middle Ages)*, carried out at the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

² More recent on the territorial definition of medieval Bosnia in summary Ternovác 2017, 251-252.

of the 10th century, during the reign of Basil II in 1014 – 1025, and under Manuel Komnenos in 1165 – 1180. Between the 10th and 12th centuries, Croatia also sought to assert control over Bosnia. Notably, Croatian King Michael II Krešimir in 949 – 969³ and Bulgarian Tsar Samuel (after 980) made significant attempts to extend their influence (for details, see Ćirković 1964, 29-35; Ternovác 2019, 86-88). However, it was only after the conquest of Croatia by the Hungarian King Ladislaus I (1077 – 1095) in 1091 that Western Christian ecclesiastical influences became more pronounced in Bosnia. Hungary and Bosnia established a vassal relationship that persisted during the reigns of both the Hungarian and Bosnian king (*rex Ramae*) Béla II (1131 – 1141) and his son Ladislaus, the nominal prince of Bosnia, (for details, see Pauler 1899, 245-246, 478-479; cf. Gebé 1908, 18-23). This vassal relationship was undoubtedly understood by the papal curia as the duty of the Hungarian king to defend the Catholic faith in Bosnia, as previously evidenced by the concrete actions of the papal curia during the pontificate of Innocent III (in detail Ćirković 1964, 67-68).

While this provides only a brief overview of key developments in early medieval Bosnia, it already highlights the complex and fluctuating conditions in which ecclesiastical structures may have emerged and evolved. Further examination of religious influences in Bosnia and their presumed origins will be noted, leading to the central question: Can Bosnian heresy – or the Patarenes – be considered a widespread phenomenon that permeated a significant portion of Bosnian society, including the court and church, at the turn of the 12th – 13th centuries?⁴

Political Context: The Origins of Papal Policy in Bosnia and the Background of Reports on Bosnian Heresy at the Turn of the 12th – 13th Centuries

The first surviving references to heresy in Bosnia date back to 1199 – 1200. These are widely known facts, so it is sufficient to briefly mention them here. In a letter from 1199, King of Zeta (Duklja) Vukan Nemanjić wrote to Pope Innocent III, describing Bosnia as a territory under the Hungarian king where heresy had taken root, and to which Bosnian Ban Kulin, his family and ten thousand supporters had succumbed.⁵ Innocent III reacted to the situation in Bosnia with a letter to King of Hungary Emeric (1196 – 1204) on 11 October 1200, in which he mentioned the expulsion of

³ Croatia has long been a country on the borders of the Roman Church's interests, challenged by local Church-Slavic traditions, Orthodox influences, and the establishment of the autonomous Bishopric of Nin in the 9th century, which was placed under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchs of Aquileia.

⁴ The complex and ambiguous terminology regarding church structures in Bosnia is concisely summarized by Fine (2007, 17-18). For the purposes of this study, which focuses primarily on the 13th century, the term "church in Bosnia" refers to the representatives of the Bosnian clergy, falling under the – often only theoretical – jurisdiction of the archbishops of Ragusa, and after 1232, under the diocesan jurisdiction of the Catholic Bosnian bishops and archbishops of Kalocsa. The use of the term "Bosnian Patarenes" is even more problematic, as it is an unsystematic designation applied by the representatives of the Catholic Church to heretics in Bosnia. In the context of the 12th and 13th centuries, "Patarenes" refers to members of a dualist sect in Bosnia whose beliefs appear to have been similar to those of the French and Italian Cathars or the Balkan Bogomils. Finally, a distinction is made between the ecclesiastical structures in Bosnia during the 13th century: those that were schismatic in rejecting papal authority and jurisdiction in Bosnia, and the Catholic Church in Bosnia by the term "Bosnian Church" (*Crkva bosanska*).

⁵ „*Demum vero paternitatem vestram nolumus latere, quia heresis non modica in terra regis Ungarie, videlicet Bossina, pullulare videtur in tantum, quod peccatis exigentibus ipse Bacilinus (ban Culinus, see Kukuljević Sakcinski II 1876, 216, no. 283) cum uxore sua et cum sorore sua, que fuit defuncti Miroslavi Kmenti, et cum pluribus consanguineis suis seductus plus quam decem milia christianorum in eandem heresim introduxit.*” Smičiklas II 1904, 334, no. 310.

the Patarenes from Split and Trogir by the archbishop of Split, Bernard. The pope further wrote of their acceptance, protection and support by Kulin, who calls them Christians and favours them over Catholics.⁶ In another charter from 21 November 1202, Innocent III entrusted the Cistercian and papal legate John of Casamari with the investigation of ecclesiastical conditions in Bosnia (Smičiklas III 1905, 14-15, no. 11). In the spring of 1203, in the Bosnian area of Bilino Polje, later in Buda, representatives of the Bosnian Church (seven priors) promised not to support heretics and to follow the decrees of the Roman Church (Smičiklas III 1905, 24-25, no. 19). Finally, the letter of the legate John of Casamari addressed to Innocent III in the year 1203 stresses the need for a more efficient administration of the Bosnian episcopate by dividing it into three or four bishoprics and proposes to install a Latin bishop to the vacant episcopal seat in Bosnia (Smičiklas III 1905, 36, no. 32).

The aforementioned information has already been analysed in several studies (f. e. Ćirković 1964, 49-51; Basler 1973, 13-22; Fine 2007, 114-121; cf. conclusion of Czarnecki 2022, 24-25; more works mentioned later in the text), therefore it is practical to only bring to the fore the less reflected question of the credibility of these reports. The first point of contention appears to be the testimony of Vukan Nemanjić. King of Zeta writes about the serious sins and heresy of Kulin, his wife and sister, but from the position of a ruler who was involved in local power relations. In the late 12th century, the ecclesiastical policy of the Nemanjićs, including Vukan, was accompanied by theocratic attempts to gain absolute control over the ecclesiastical institutions in the country. Support for the Orthodox Church had long been dominant in Raška, Zachlunia and Bosnia, i.e. in ecclesiastically and dynastically linked regions, while in Zeta and in the territory of the archbishopric of Bar, ties to the Roman Church prevailed.⁷ These tendencies were intensified by Vukan's efforts to gain support for his own power ambitions from the papal curia and King Emeric. A letter by Vukan to Innocent III from 1199 should probably be seen in this political context. In the struggle for the grand duke's seat in Serbia, which took place in 1199–1202, Vukan presented himself as the defender of orthodox Christianity. Also for this reason, the King of Zeta could portray Kulin and his family, which had at least a theoretical claim to rule in Zachlunia,⁸ as active supporters of the heretics. Vukan's reports could also have been an attempt to initiate papal pressure on Emeric's military intervention in Bosnia. The split between the Hungarian ruler and the Bosnian ban did not occur, but the Pope did call on Emeric for intervention in Bosnia in 1202.⁹

Under these circumstances, reports of Kulin's support of the Patarenes in Bosnia, or even of the Bosnian ban's family's affiliation with the heretics, can hardly be accepted as credible. Vukan's claims are not based on autopsies, and their objectivity is in question due to the political setting. On the contrary, the idea of their tendentiousness is supported by other indications which

⁶ „Accepimus autem, quod cum nuper venerabilis frater noster Spalatensis archiepiscopus Patarenos non paucos de Spalatensi et Traguriensi civitatibus effugasset, nobilis vir Culinus banus Bossinus iniquitati eorum non solum tutum latibulum, sed et presidium contulit manifestum, et perversitati eorundem terram suam et se ipsum exponens ipsos pro catholicis, immo ultra catholicos honoravit, vocans eos autonomas(t) ice christianos.“ Smičiklas II 1904, 351, no. 324.

⁷ On ecclesiastical relations in Bosnia, Serbia and neighbouring regions, see Fine 2007, 102-111.

⁸ After 1202, Petar and Andrija, sons of Miroslav Zavidović of Zachlunia and sister of Ban Kulin, ruled for several years in parts of Miroslav's hereditary domain.

⁹ Especially in the passage: „Si qua vero inveneritis inter eos que sapiant hereticam pravitatem et sane adversentur doctrine, ad viam veritatis secundum fidei regulam reducat. Quod si forsitan monitis et mandatis vestris noluerint acquiescere, vos in eos appellatione remota secundum constitutionem quam edidimus, adversus hereticos procedatis, attentius provisuri, ut deum habentes pre oculis mandatum nostrum cum omni puritate ac sollicitudine studeatis implere. Nos enim sententiam quam canonice protuleritis, ratam habebimus et faciemus, auctore deo inviolabiliter observari.“ Smičiklas III 1905, 15, no. 11.

appear in the papal correspondence. The popes had already made contact with the ban in the 1180s. At the time, Byzantine supremacy in Bosnia and Serbia was collapsing and, as a result, the papal curia attempted to extend its influence beyond the territory of the archdiocese of Bar. In 1180, the papal legate in Dalmatia, Theobald, sent a letter to Culin (*Nobili et potenti viro Culin Bano Bosniae*) requesting two servants, precious furs and a message for the pope (Fejér VII/5 1841, 123). Bosnia's mediated contacts with the papal curia continued during the pontificate of Celestine III (1191 – 1198), and the curia's relationship with the ban slipped into confrontation only around 1200.

It is also important to note that until 1203, the papal curia had only mediated reports on the ecclesiastical situation in Bosnia. Thus, the popes relied only on the information they received from their allies in the region, including the report from Vukan Nemanjić. The uncertainty of the popes on the situation in Bosnia is indicated by references to the Bosnian Patarenes (Smičiklas II, 351, no. 324), but elsewhere to the Cathars (*qui de dampnata Catharorum heresi sunt vehementer suspecti*; Smičiklas III 1905, 14, no. 11) or heretics without further identification. Then it was appeals to King Emeric to investigate reports of the Bosnian Ban's support of heresy and finally, the sending of a legate to the territory of Bosnia. Only the charters of 1203 are based on the direct experience of John of Casamari, which is evident – in comparison with the references from 1199 to 1202 – from the more specific content of these charters when referring to the Bosnian Church (Smičiklas III 1905, 36, no. 32; Smičiklas III 1905, 36-37, no. 33; Šanjek 2003, 84-85, no. 6).

The limited but valuable information from the papal documents suggests a pragmatically motivated alignment by Kulin with the papal curia, the Great Prince (*Veliki Župan*) of Zachumlja Miroslav Zavidović and the Hungarian royal court.¹⁰ At present, we can no longer determine with certainty the relationship of the papal-oriented ban, his family and the court to the Patarenes coming to Bosnia from Dalmatia. The possibility of Kulin's eventual succumbing to heresy, however, calls into question the impracticality of such a connection and the dangers it would inevitably entail for the ban. The suspicion of supporting heretics had already led to an investigation of ecclesiastical conditions in Bosnia by the papal legate John of Casamari, and to an oath-taking act of 1203, in which leading representatives of the Bosnian Church pledged obedience to the Roman Curia.¹¹

The Oath of Bilino Polje: Motives and Actors

The text of an often-quoted oath from Bilino Polje is interesting here, especially the document's testimonial value in relation to the activities of the papal legate John of Casamari in Bosnia and to the actors of the oath themselves – apparently leading representatives of the Bosnian church.¹² In the Bilino Polje charter, these *priores* or *fratres* pledge – on behalf of Bosnian Christians (*Christiani*) – obedience to the decrees of the popes and declare that they will not follow the heresy.

¹⁰ On the ecclesiastical policy of Ban Kulin in contemporary and later sources in more detail see Fine 2007, 109-111; Ćirković 1964, 45-49.

¹¹ The context of Innocent III's letter of 1202 also shows that the presence of the legate in Bosnia and the investigation of his own relationship to the Christian Church was requested by Kulin himself. Upon the arrival of John of Casamari, the Bosnian ban distanced himself from the heretics in Bosnia, taking a solemn vow of obedience to the Roman Church. At the same time, he sent his son and other messengers with the legate to Hungary, so that the oath might also be sworn to before the Hungarian king and prelates.

¹² The oath was issued in Bosnia in the presence of Ban Kulin, Archdeacon of Ragusa and Legate John of Casamari, then renewed in Hungary on the Csepel-Sziget before Hungarian King Emeric, Archbishop of Kalocsa John and Bishop of Pécs Kalán.

Next in the charter is a detailed description of the individual articles of the oath. Bosnian delegates renounce the schism of which they have been accused and accept the Roman Church as the mother of the entire ecclesial community.¹³ In places of common gatherings of the brothers, they undertake to establish oratories for prayers, sung according to the schedule of the canonical hours. Churches are to have altars and crucifixes and, according to the custom of the Roman Church, the books of the New and Old Testaments are to be read in them during Mass. Priests will be ordained for various places and will celebrate Mass, hear confessions and grant absolutions on Sundays and feast days. In the future, graveyards are to be established at churches.¹⁴

Other regulations concern the cult, organisation and external markings of Bosnian church representatives. The Bosnian delegates undertake to celebrate the Eucharist seven times a year – Christmas, Easter, the Pentecost, the feasts of the Apostles Peter and Paul, the Nativity and Assumption of the Virgin Mary, and All Saints Day. The fasts instituted by the Roman Church must be followed, and previous fasting customs have to be observed as well (*que maiores nostri provide preceperunt custodiemus*). Particular emphasis is placed on the separation of male and female bedrooms and dining rooms, and it is also forbidden for a man and a woman to be in a room together in such a way as to arouse suspicion. In the future, married men or married women are not to be admitted to convents unless they enter the church together.¹⁵ The feasts of all the saints, whose veneration is ordered by papal decrees, are to be celebrated in the Church. It is forbidden to provide hospitality or shelter to “Manichaeans” or any heretics.¹⁶ The priestly (monastic) status is to be distinguished from the laity in manner of life and dress – habits and vestments are not to be coloured and are to cover the whole figure to the ankles. Members of the Bosnian church will also not call each other “Christians” – so as not to affect other Christians – but brothers. The last decree concerns the election of the superior (*praelatus*); after the death of the “magister”, the new “prelate” is elected as a consensus between the leading representatives of the Church (*priores*) and the convent, but with full respect for possible reservations and a final decision of the pope.¹⁷

Articles concerning the future faith and cult of the Bosnian priores or fratres of Bilino Polje are fundamentally different from later reports of Bosnian heresy. Therefore, some historians doubt that heretics appeared in Bilino Polje at all and see them rather as representatives of an independent

¹³ „In primis abrenuntiamus scismati, quo ducimur infamati, et Romanam ecclesiam matrem nostram caput totius ecclesiastice unitatis recognoscimus.“ Smičiklas III 1905, 24, no. 19.

¹⁴ „... in omnibus locis nostris, ubi fratrum conventus commoratur, oratoria habebimus, in quibus fratres de nocte ad matutinas et diebus ad horas cantandas publice simul conveniemus. In omnibus autem ecclesiis habebimus altaria et cruces, libros vero tam novi quam veteris testamenti, sicut facit ecclesia romana, legemus. Per singula loca nostra habebimus sacerdotes, qui dominicis et festivis diebus ad minus missas secundum ordinem ecclesiasticum debeant celebrare, confessiones audire et penitentias tribuere. Cemeteria habebimus iuxta oratoria, in quibus fratres sepeliantur et adventantes, si casu ibi obierint.“ Smičiklas III 1905, 24–25, no. 19.

¹⁵ „Femine vero que de nostra erunt religione, a viris separate erunt tam in dormitoriis quam refectoriis et nullus fratrum solus cum sola confabulabitur, unde possit sinistra suspicio suboriri. Neque de cetero recipiemus aliquem vel aliquam coniugatam, nisi mutuo consensu, continentia promissa, ambo pariter convertantur.“ Smičiklas III 1905, 25, no. 19.

¹⁶ „Festivitates autem sanctorum a sanctis patribus ordinatas celebrabimus, et nullum deinceps ex certa scientia manicheum vel alium hereticum“ Smičiklas III 1905, 25, no. 19.

¹⁷ „Nos autem de cetero non Christianos, sicut hactenus, sed fratres nos nominabimus, ne singularitate nominis aliis Christianis iniuria inferatur. Mortuo vero magistro, de hinc usque in perpetuum priores cum consilio fratrum deum timentium eligent prelatum a romano tantum pontifice confirmandum, et si quid aliud ecclesia romana addere vel minuere voluerit, cum devotione recipiemus et observabimus.“ Smičiklas III 1905, 25, no. 19.

Orthodox church (in the broader context of the overall view of the Bosnian Church cf. Šidak 1955, 11-40), schismatics or inconsistent Christians (more recent, e.g. Lorenz 2015, 37-40; Ternovác 2019, 92-94; in a rigorous argumentation questioning the involvement of Bosnian heretics in Bilino Polje especially Fine 2007, 116-121). The present study will return to this question; at this point it is sufficient to outline the probable background of the origin of the charter from Bilino Polje and its diction.

The text of the oath of Bilino Polje had clearly been written as a result of the papal legate's investigation and personal experience of the ecclesiastical situation in Bosnia. This is an important finding that shows the exceptionality of the preserved testimony; the charter is not a schematized and general record, typical of most contemporary documents of the papal office, but a response to the actual conditions and state of the church in Bosnia. In the charter we find allusions to the monastic character of ecclesiastical communities or brotherhoods, apparently originating in the influence of eastern monasticism yet mediated by the neighbouring Balkan regions.¹⁸ However, the language of the charter also seems to reflect a lack of knowledge of the cult of the Roman Church, the superficiality of local Christianity, the absence of clergy or the legate's experience with the religious fallacies. The oath from Bilino Polje can thus be seen as the first clue indicating the existence of a specific ecclesiastical environment or religious syncretism of Eastern Christian, Patarene and Bogomil elements or beliefs in Bosnia.

In identifying heretical fallacies typical for dualistic doctrines, it is useful to further consider other reports on the beliefs and organization of Slavonic, Dalmatian or Italian heretics in the 12th – 13th century, as well as statements on the contacts and links of these heretics to other areas.

Slavonia, Bosnia and the Cathars in Lombardy: On the Question of their Contacts in the 13th Century

The question of the genesis of Bosnian heresy and the origin of the Bosnian Patarenes is not answered unequivocally, even in contemporary historiography.¹⁹ The problem here is the dearth of sources, their late origins and the contradictory and inaccurate nature of the extant data. The crucial question remains, therefore, of what is the narrative value and credibility of the reports on the Bosnian Church and its contacts with communities of heretics in other lands. The following text will briefly introduce these reports, then analyse and outline possible solutions.

A corpus of important information about the Cathar communities in Lombardy has been preserved from the 13th century. A large number of studies have dealt with these sources in detail, though mostly in the context of the genesis of the Italian Cathars. These are substantial reports on the Lombard heresy, but it should be stressed that several accounts on the Cathars have inestimable value in relation to the links between heretics in Lombardy and the Balkan region.

As part of a detailed description of the disputes and schism among the Italian Cathars, *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia* (1190 – 1215) mentions Caloian and Nicholas, who were elected bishops

¹⁸ See other links to Fine's conclusions.

¹⁹ On the genesis of the term Patarenes, see a brief summary Dujčev 1958, 318-319; more recent cf. Paolini 2013, 117-138. On the relationship between the Bosnian Church and the Bogomils from more recent works at least, see especially: Dragoljović 1987; Šanjek 1999, 285-294 (cf. Šanjek 1972, 131-181); Lambert 1994, 29-50; Fine 2007, 30-37; Culianu 2008, 280-281; Lorenz 2015, 46-48. In the case of the question of links between the so-called Patarenes in Bosnia, Dalmatia or northern Italy and other communities of heretics, it is a fact that a lasting methodological and conceptual issue is the definition of the categories of heretics themselves. On the problems of typology of heretical directions in wider context, see the more recent study by Zbíral 2013, 163-190.

by the Cathars of Mantua and Vicenza, and who received ordination in Slavonia.²⁰ Words on these “rebellious bishops” against the original Bishop Garattus, who received ordination from Bulgaria, also appear elsewhere in the text. In connection with the question of the origins of the Bosnian heresy, the reference to Slavonia is interesting. This medieval term referred – in a broader context – to the area between the Ilova, Sava, Drava and Danube rivers. However, the presence of heretics in Slavonia, headed by a heretic bishop, is mentioned by Anselm of Alessandria in *Tractatus de hereticis* from the 13th century with Bosnia („*Sclauonia, scilicet de terra que dicitur Bosnia*“, Šanjek 2003, 136; cf. Czarnecki 2008, 111-138, mainly 119-121; Czarnecki 2022, 14-16). Anselm writes that heresy spread here through Bosnian merchants after they returned from Constantinople, began to preach and elected a bishop, called the Bishop of Bosnia or Slavonia. *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia* also contains material on the common beliefs and mythological elements of the faith of the Cathars, who recognized Garattus, consecrated in Bulgaria, and Caloian, consecrated in Slavonia (Dondaine 1949, 308), as their bishops.

To the aforementioned sources may be added the records of the Cathar council in Saint-Félix-de-Caraman (now Saint-Félix-Lauragais) in south-western France from 1167 (on them in detail, e.g. Hamilton 1997, 23-53; Zbíral 2006, 19-40; Dalarun 2012, 535-548), in which Pop Niketas mentions the “Cathar” churches in Byzantium, Druguntia, Melnik in Macedonia, Bulgaria and Dalmatia, and the reports of the papal legate in Burgundy, Cardinal Conrad of Urach, in 1223. Conrad writes about a “Cathar” antipope in the territory of the Bulgarians (according to other interpretations, of Bosnia, cf. Culianu 2008, 278; Šanjek 2003, 86-87), in Croatia and Dalmatia, and in regions inhabited by the nation of the Hungarians, who installed Bishop Bartholomew of Carcassonne, plus other bishops in the vicinity of the southern French Agen (Devic – Vaisette III 1737, 332-333; cf. Devic – Vaisette VIII 1879, col. 765-766, no. 225).

Information on the eastern connections of the Italian Cathars can be analysed and interpreted on multiple levels. The first challenge lies in terminological difficulties, particularly with terms such as Cathars, Patarenes, Cathar bishops, and antipope – concepts that older historiography scarcely recognised. Reports from Western Christian authors from 1167 to 1223 mention “Cathar” churches in both the Balkans and Byzantium, and a “Cathar” pope in Bulgaria or Bosnia. From the point of view of contemporary historians, this is a confusing and incorrect designation for Eastern heretics. However, mentions of contemporary informants only show the vagueness, and often also the contextual irrelevance, of the use of the schematized term “Cathars” in the 12th-13th centuries. Cathar groups in Lombardy and elsewhere were internally heterogeneous, rival factions that often rejected the teachings and cult of related heretical communities. From this point of view, the term “Cathars” in the 13th century only simplifies, replaces and deforms the image of the sectarians, whose branches are described in detail and named accurately by the author of *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia*. The above observation is important because such variability and deviations of belief are rarely considered in the case of heretics in Bosnia. However, the term “Bosnian Patarenes” may be as schematizing category as the “Cathars” for the region of Lombardy.

A second important aspect of the data on Bosnian or Slavonian heretics is the question of the reliability of these reports in terms of the authors’ knowledge and intentions. In anti-heretical writings, the imagination and distortion of the image of heretics plays a crucial role (in detail, Zbíral 2013, 215-219; in the broader context of the emergence of anti-heretical literature, f.e. Zbíral 2010, 163-190). However, *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia* cannot be defined as polemical literature; on the contrary, it is a detailed and descriptive work by an informed author – according to some

²⁰ „*Caloianus episcopus unius partis hereticorum, qui habent ordinem suum de Sclavania [...] Nicola de Vicencia, episcopus de Sclavania.*“ Dondaine 1949, 308; Šanjek 2003, 126-128. Cf. Drakopoulos, 2010, 161-163.

historians of the former Cathar – whose ambition is to capture the genesis of the organization of the heretics and the characteristic features of their theological system (in detail, Zbíral 2013, 220-221). It cannot be ruled out that the description of the hierarchy and filiation of the branches of the Cathars may also be based on simplified or misinterpreted data here. However, the core of the treatise – including references to the ordination of “Cathar” bishops in Slavonia, Bulgaria and unlocalized Drugunthia (Dondaine 1949, 306-312; cf. Hamilton 1973, 115-124; Dujčev 1964, 215-221) – is very likely authentic. Also, the reports of Conrad of Urach on the Bulgarian antipope seem to be less credible, but here again, only the cardinal’s ideas of the Cathar organization and hierarchy as the mirror image of the Roman Church can be distorted (cf. data on the organisation and hierarchy of the Italian Cathars in Raynerius Sacconi O. P. *Summa de Catharis et leonistis seu pauperibus de Lugduno*, Šanjek 1974, 47-51). On the other hand, Conrad’s testimony on the continuing contacts between Eastern and Western “Cathars” sounds plausible, and confirms and complements the reports from *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia* and *Summa de Catharis*.²¹

Several credible theories can be deduced from the recurrent reports of contacts between Lombard and Eastern (Balkan) heretics. At the turn of the 12th-13th centuries, in Bulgaria, Slavonia (Croatia or Bosnia) and probably in other areas in the Balkan region, there were seats of heretical bishops as authorities who also had the power to consecrate the leaders of communities in Italy.²² *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia* also suggests that not only the Lombard, but also the eastern “Cathar” churches may have acted as competing fractions. In the treatise, for example, it is said that Pope Nicetas questions the Bulgarian ordination of the Lombard bishop Mark, while Petracius “from overseas” (France) and his companions attack the ordination of Nicetas and his predecessor, the sin-tainted bishop Simon in Drugunthia (Dondaine 1949, 306; cf. Obolensky 1983, 489-500). Although criticism of the lack of spiritual purity of bishops led the rigorous communities of the Lombard Cathars to doubt and schism, according to *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia*, the representatives of the divided factions were still turning to the East in the consecration of bishops. The authority of Eastern bishops to ordain bishops in Lombardy does not appear to have been challenged by the French Cathar bishop, who also mediated disputes among the Lombard groups. A bishop from beyond the Alps – whether from northern France or the Languedoc – advised fellow believers in Italy to nominate a new episcopal candidate, one who was to be consecrated once again in Bulgaria (Dondaine 1949, 308).

All these reports indicate that communities of dualistic heretics or Patarenes in Dalmatia or Bosnia were formed in the second half of the 12th century at the latest. Even if not all the reports on Slavonia cited in the study are accurate, they do complement each other and show that there were already important heretical centres in the 12th century that maintained contacts with the Cathar movement in northern Italy. The heretics from Split and Trogir certainly did not settle in Bosnia by chance, nor were they likely the first to introduce dualistic ideas there. It is highly probable that they arrived because an established community of heretics was already present.²³

²¹ However, it cannot be ruled out that the Slavonian and Bulgarian ordination of some of the Italian bishops referred only to origin and tradition, or otherwise, the term “ordination of bishops from Bulgaria or Slavonia” may have been understood to refer to the ordination by local bishops in Italy whose predecessors had received their episcopal dignity directly in Bulgaria or Slavonia. The context of the above-mentioned reports does indeed point to the persistence of direct links, even in the 13th century, but we are still dealing here with authors who described these links as outside observers.

²² It should be borne in mind that the term “bishop” may have a Catholic connotation, and that it does not necessarily correspond to the terminology of the heretics (Patarenes) in Slavonia, Dalmatia or Bosnia.

²³ We have also noted that the rise of heresy and the public activity of heretics under Ban Kulin was not prevented by the archbishops of Ragusa and their Bosnian suffragans, which could only have increased the interest of the exiled heretics in the territory of Bosnia.

Dualism and the Emergence of the Bosnian Church in the First Half of the 13th Century: On Problems of Contemporary Interpretation

On the basis of the letter from Bilino Polje and the letters of John of Casamari, it can be concluded that the official church in Bosna at the beginning of the 13th century cannot be considered heretical (Patarene). At the head of the ecclesiastical structures were Bosnian bishops, who at that time fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the archbishops of Ragusa.²⁴ The oath from Bilino Polje demands that the envoys or leaders of the Bosnian church renounce any association with the Patarenes or “Manichaeans”. However, the charter mainly deals with deviations from Catholic customs – especially fasting traditions, different customs in the establishment of cemeteries, burials and liturgy. The emphasis on the separation of women’s and men’s circles points to rather freely organized religious communities. The efforts of John of Casamari to increase the number of priests, and indeed the entire legate’s activity in Bosnia, can also be seen as an unsuccessful attempt to create a functional ecclesiastical organization.

Further information on the ecclesiastical situation in Bosnia have been preserved only from the 1230s. In 1232, Archbishop Ugrinus of Kalocsa wrote to Pope Gregory IX about reports that the Bosnian bishop supposedly did not know Latin, did not observe Catholic customs, did not celebrate Mass and did not speak out against or even protect heretics (see the charter of Gregorius IX. in Wenzel I 1860, 298-299; Smičklas III 1905, 361-362, no. 315; cf. Fine 2007, 137-138). In 1234 – 1235 and 1238 – 1270, the Dominicans John of Wildeshausen and Ponsa became bishops of Bosnia, and apparently tried to administer his province until the Mongol invasion from Ban Brdo near Sarajevo.²⁵ Reports of the military interventions of the Slavonic Duke Coloman in Bosnia and Gregory IX’s calls for action against heretics show that in the 1230s, missionary and military pressure against heretics intensified there (in a detailed summary Fine 2007, 138-141). The letters of Gregory IX and later reports on the Dominicans’ activities in Bosnia also document missionary failures and the persistence of complicated ecclesiastical conditions.

A significant part of historiography associates the 1230s with a turning point in the ecclesiastical development in Bosnia, i.e. the supposed emergence of the heretical Bosnian Church (Šanjek, Fine, Ćirković, Šidak and others). The growing interest of the popes, especially Gregory IX, as well as the Slavonian Duke, Coloman, and Archbishop Ugrinus of Kalocsa, towards Bosnia led to an increased onslaught of Bosnian “Christians” into Dominican missions and the Inquisition, and in 1235, also into the military intervention of Coloman. An important impulse for the emergence of the heretical Bosnian Church may also have been the support of foreign clergy (Dominicans) in filling the position of Bosnian bishops – from 1234 at the latest, bishops in Bosnia were of German and Hungarian origin. All these aspects were intended to lead (according to Fine 2007, 150, between 1234-1252; cf. Ćirković 1964, 552-554) to the emergence of an organized heretical counter-church in Bosnia, headed by “bishops” (*djed*) and leaders of communities with lower ecclesiastical ranks (*gost*, *starac*).²⁶ According to Fine, this schismatic Bosnian Church had a structure more typical for the monastic communities of Eastern Christianity and operated alongside heretics with dualistic ideas. Ćirković, on the other hand, assumed that religious dualism also asserted itself within the Bosnian Church. Both interpretations are based on the premise that this schismatic or dualistic-heretical Bosnian Church was created on the foundations of the former church structures in Bosnia, whose representatives can also be found in Bilino Polje.

²⁴ In detail recently with references to the literature, Ternovácz 2016, 217-219.

²⁵ On several aspects of Dominican missionary enthusiasm, in the context Bishop John of Wildeshausen’s action, shedding light a recent study Hunčaga 2021; cf. Hunčaga 2023.

²⁶ On the organization and hierarchy of the Bosnian heretics in detail, also Šanjek 1972, 153-159.

At their core, these are argumentatively persuasive theses, though they also have their weaknesses. However, these uncertainties simply show the unstable ground of conclusions, or any attempt to interpret in detail phenomena so poorly reflected in the sources, such as the initial phase of the formation of the organized Bosnian Church. For example, Fine accepts reports from 14th-century sources on the organization and hierarchy of the Bosnian Church (religious communities, ecclesiastical dignities in the succession of *djed*, *gost*, *starac*), and due to missing information from the second half of the 13th century, he suggests the creation of the Bosnian Church before 1252. At the same time, Fine rejects the dualistic elements in the beliefs of Bosnian “Christians”, which means that he places less weight on the narrative value of 14th-15th century sources when assessing the older beliefs of Bosnian heretics in the 13th century.

The dualism of the Bosnian Church is indicated by a Venetian copy of a manuscript from the 14th century (Codices manuscripti Latini Bibliothecae Nanianae, 12-13), as well an excerpt from the work of the Franciscan vicar in Bosnia, Jacob de Marchia, from 1435-38, (*Dialogus contra manichaeos in Bosna*, Šanjek 2003, 286-289) and reports of the Dominican cardinal, Juan de Torquemada, from 1461 (Šanjek 2003, 294-306; cf. edition Lopez Martinez – Proaño Gil 1958, 37-132). These sources contain quite detailed information about the beliefs of the “Christians” in Bosnia, i.e. according to Western authors, also the representatives of the Bosnian Church. Bosnian heretics believe in two gods, in the creation of the material world by Lucifer, in his ascension to the heavens and a battle with the good God, in the removal of the fallen angels from heaven and their imprisonment in human bodies from which they are gradually purified. They further question the human nature of Christ and Mary, the Ascension of the Lord, the activities of John the Baptist, the Old Testament, the prophets and the Laws of Moses as the work of the devil (in detail, f.e. Culianu 2008, 277-281; cf. Thomas 2003, 113-131). Even references to the cult of Bosnian Christians and their relationship to the Roman Church and the sacraments is rather reminiscent of the ideas of dualistic heretics. Bosnian “Christians”, according to the Franciscan and Order’s vicar in Bosnia, Bartholomew of Auvergne (*Dubia ecclesiastica*, 1373-1375), and some later sources from the 15th century, replace baptism by water with baptism by book and question the sacraments, including marriage. Jacob de Marchia attributes the denial of transubstantiation and the spiritual meaning of the Eucharist to them, and the rejection of oaths and Old Testament books (Šanjek 2003, 288).

Several of the references mentioned - particularly the rejection of oaths, the belief in the angelic origin of Mary, the apparent body of Christ or the apparent resurrection, and the damnation of John the Baptist – echo earlier accounts found in the *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia* (*De heresi catharorum* in edition Dondaine 1949, 306-312; Czech translation, Zbíral 2013, 222-246) and in the *Summa de catharis* by Rainer Sacconi from the year 1250 (Šanjek 1974, 30-60; also Dondaine (ed.) 1939, 64-78; Czech translation, Zbíral 2014, 63-86; cf. Fine 2007, 62-69; Lorenz 2015, 31-33). However, variations of the above accusations are also repeated with regard to the French Cathars and Bogomils.

Doubts about the accuracy of some of the information regarding the Bosnian Church and heresy are certainly justified. The findings and reports from Christian authors are clearly schematized in several instances and influenced by broader generalizations about dualistic sects. However, the question arises as to whether this represents an over-simplification of contemporary historians’ understanding of the contrast between the schismatic Bosnian Church and the Patarenes, or whether it mistakenly treats the religious phenomena in Bosnia as two clearly distinguishable categories. The Bosnian envoys in Bilino Polje probably did not believe in religious dualism; otherwise, it is hard to imagine that the legate John of Casamari would not have

included a renunciation of dualistic ideas in the act of an oath.²⁷ The oath, however, emphasizes the severance of previous contacts with the “Manichaeans”. At the same time, the Bosnian envoys define themselves in relation to the surrounding Christians, since, as later Bosnian heretics from 14th century, they regard themselves uniquely as *Krstjani*. Also, the emphasis on future readings not only from the New Testament, but also from the Old is conspicuous here.²⁸ These references indicate the ecclesiastical environment within which a syncretism of religious ideas and traditions of Orthodox communities and dualistic sectarians already existed in the 12th century. Therefore, the Bosnian Church may have consisted of a rather heterogeneous mix of schismatics as well as of Patarene preachers and their followers, even in the 13th century. These groups were already viewed by the Catholic Church as heretics from a dogmatic point of view. In the reports of inquisitors, legates and other Christian authors, the distinction between heretics and schismatics is blurred, but this image of the Bosnian heresy, formed by distant and biased Western literati, was probably more complex in reality, as in the case of the Cathars and other uncoordinated sectarians.²⁹

So it seems that the theory of the formation of an organized Bosnian Church before the middle of the 13th century cannot be regarded as entirely convincing. The process of creating a community of Bosnian “Christians” and the Church may have happened over a longer term, and its origins may go back as far as the 12th century. From the years 1167 and 1223, we have reports about the heretical church and its bishop or anti-pope in Dalmatia, Drugonthia, Bulgaria and Bosnia. At the same time, in Bilino Polje, foremen or representatives (*priores*) of Bosnian “Christians” (*krstjani*) appear. In light of these findings, it can also be concluded that the hierarchical structures of both the schismatic and the Patarene communities were more like a living organism, gradually developing as part of the decades-long process that led to the genesis of the Bosnian Church.

Although it is probably inaccurate to refer to the period from the 1230s to the 1250s as the emergence of the Bosnian Church, it should be noted that during these years, favourable conditions may have been established for the further strengthening of the authority and position of its leaders. As several historians have already written, the Catholicising pressure on Bosnia in the 1230s must have caused resistance from the Bosnian clergy.³⁰ The failure of the first phase of the Inquisition and missionary efforts was compounded by the Mongol invasion and the inability to effectively administer the vast, rural and forested regions of Bosnia over the long term. The absence of a physical presence of Bosnian (Catholic) bishops after 1250 may have contributed to the further isolation, separatism, and schismatic character of the Bosnian Church. Meanwhile, dualistic tendencies continued to spread and gain momentum throughout the 13th century.³¹

²⁷ According to the Christian Church, this was one of the most perverse fallacies, since dualism proclaimed the creation of the world by the devil or the invalidity of Christological doctrines.

²⁸ Interesting insights into the relationship of Bosnian heretics to biblical texts have been provided by Šanjek 1972, 168-173; Culianu 2008, 279-282.

²⁹ Thus, the apparent uniformity of the reports on Bosnian heresy may simply be a consequence of their low number and the poor awareness of the critics.

³⁰ As an important contemporary analogy, we may point to the situation in another territory on the periphery of Hungarian influence in Galicia (Halych) in the years 1205-1235, where the Hungarian kings similarly sought to assert their power through Catholicization. After the departure of most of the Hungarian army, the local Catholic elites there were repeatedly attacked and overthrown by the local boyars and their supporters, and this struggle was presented as a fight of Orthodoxy against the Catholic usurpers.

³¹ It should be emphasized that the considerations about the nature of the Bosnian church in this study relate primarily to conditions up to the middle of the 13th century. Numerous studies bring many other conclusions and observations to later periods as well. More recent works are mainly cited by

Conclusion

Several assumptions can be drawn from the 13th-14th century sources on heresy and ecclesiastical structures in Bosnia in the 13th century. The reports of Rayner Sacconi, the anonymous author of *De heresi catharorum in Lombardia*, Conrad of Urach and Anselm of Alessandria on the dualistic heresy in Dalmatia, Slavonia or Bosnia are not nearly as accurate, reliable or detailed as contemporary data on the North Italian Cathars. However, they complement each other and indicate that there were already religious communities in Bosnia in the 12th century, which maintained contacts with related sects of the Cathars in Lombardy. Reports by Christian authors on the episcopal ordinations of "Cathars" in Bulgaria (who were, in fact, Bogomils) and Slavonia suggest that the emergence of Balkan centres of heretics with dualistic ideas preceded the establishment of Cathar branches in Lombardy. Therefore, the arrival of the Patarenes from Dalmatia cannot be seen as the first wave of dualistic heretics migrating into Bosnia.³² The most likely possibility here is the existence of older Bogomil imports, reaching Bosnia mainly from the territory of Bulgaria, Serbia or neighbouring regions throughout the 12th century. Thus, the intensity of heretical influences in Bosnia may have been amplified by occasional movements, such as the case of the Dalmatian Patarenes of 1199, but also by the long-term migration of heretical preachers and their followers from the Balkan regions to the east of Bosnia.

In parallel with radical, dualistic religious communities, ecclesiastical structures were forming in Bosnia whose leaders interacted with papal legates and the Catholic milieu. The oath of Bilino Polje from 1203 already indicates that the Bosnian bans, bishops and clergy tended to cooperate with the Roman Church, Hungarian rulers and the episcopate for pragmatic reasons. From the 1230s onwards, the Curia intensified its efforts to assert direct papal influence in Bosnia through legates, archbishops of Kalocsa, Dominican missions and support for the military campaigns of the Hungarian Kings or Slavonian Duke Koloman. In an environment with strong Orthodox and dualist influences, the Bosnian Dominican bishops also failed to assert their authority. The inherently violent and unsuccessful Catholicizing tendencies of the 1230s may have been an important aspect that deepened the schismatic character of the Bosnian Church.

Older ideas on the dualistic nature of Bosnian "Bogomilism" and the Church are supplemented in more recent historiography by notions about schismatics and dualistic heretics in Bosnia as two distinct religious currents. However, attempting to define the ecclesiastical situation in Bosnia as a simple dichotomy between the Bosnian Church – rejecting papal authority and primacy – and the dualists fails to fully capture the complexity and intricacy of the religious landscape in Bosnia. The Oath of Bilino Polje, records of Bosnian heresy from the 1220s and 1230s, and later reports of the heretical nature of the Bosnian Church from the 14th-15th century point rather to the long-term formation of ecclesiastical communities in Bosnia. The genesis of the Bosnian Church may have been fundamentally influenced by Eastern Christianity, the isolation of the local ecclesiastical environment, the primarily folk (rural) character of Bosnian religion and the coexistence of a schismatic church and a radical dualistic heresy. Although such an assumption may challenge some older ideas about the clearly definable spiritual nature of the Bosnian Church (whether Bogomil/dualistic or schismatic), I find this approach to be much more realistic and closer to the actual ecclesiastical situation in Bosnia during the 13th century.

a comprehensive study by Dautović, 2015, 127-160. Cf. also collection of studies *Fenomen 'krstjani' u srednjovjekovnoj Bosni i Humu*. 2005 (Šanjek, ed.).

³² Apart from the previously mentioned Ćirković, similar thesis appears to follow from conclusions of the study by Czarnecki 2022, 24.

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