

The Christianization of the Balkan Lands in Late Antiquity

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The lands of South-Eastern Europe played a very important role in the process of Christianization in the Late Antiquity, firstly as the land passage, along with the Mediterranean, connecting East and West of the Late Roman Empire, and secondly as the hinterland of the new capital Constantinople. The Balkan lands witnessed both the missionary activity of St. Paul and his companions during the very early decades of Christianity and also the harsh imperial reaction against the Christians at the time of the Tetrarchs. Later, after the 4th century, those lands witnessed important events, like the Serdica Council, for shaping the new imperial Christianity, and also an active building activity, demonstrated by the many late antique ecclesiastical buildings still standing or uncovered by archeologists in our days.

We already know a lot, yet not enough, about the Christianization of the Balkans from the 4th to the 6th centuries. The place of Thracians in it should be reexamined again as well as the personality and the role of Nicetas of Remesiana. His activity should be evaluated in the context of the time and the realities, not in an anachronistic and propaganda manner. His presumable authorship of one of the Latin symbols of the age is to be reexamined, too. Aside to him, the partly forgotten Latin Christianity in the Balkans included the so called “Scythian monks”, who played an important role in the development of the Chalcedonian Christian theology, being also a vivid link between the Church sees of Rome and Constantinople.

The third main scope, along with the general Christianization and the peculiar role of the Latin fathers for the spread of Christianity among the Balkan peoples, should be focused on the role and place of the Thracians (and not only) in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Thus, we reach the most debated question, still out of any resolution, concerning the existence of the “Bessic” liturgical language, its essence, the scripture used, and its implications.