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## **The Birth of a National Saint: The cult of Saint Jerome in the Eastern Adriatic Coast in the Late Middle Ages**

The veneration of Saint Jerome, a church father and a saint of knowledge, started to grow in Western Christianity during the Late Middle Ages, emerging from major Italian cities. Its peak was in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when diverse artistic productions are found throughout, aside from the Apennine peninsula, and testify to the popularity of the saint. Simultaneously, the veneration of the saint grew in the Eastern Adriatic Coast. Although it was supported by the direct influence of Italian ideas, there the cult had another component. Jerome was praised for his local origins and the alleged invention of Glagolitic letters, which resulted in his veneration as a national hero and eventually a national saint. The new role adjoined to Jerome was expressed in literary works, liturgical books, personal veneration, and numerous artworks representing different iconographic types of the Saint.

Despite the importance of Jerome's role and image in the Croatian history, there hasn't been an interdisciplinary approach, so far, which would resolve the complex question of the formation of the cult in the Eastern Adriatic, primarily Dalmatia. This research observes the artistic production through main traditions of veneration (the local Glagolitic tradition, the imported humanist veneration, and the veneration among the Franciscans in Dalmatia, whose province he was a patron of).

The main goal of the thesis is to contextualize the artistic production by examining the iconography of representations, identifying the commissioners and mapping out the network of main individual promoters, pointing out the literary and artistic models of certain representations in order to underline the specific characteristics of the cult in Dalmatia. Additionally, it questions the production of the specific representation of "Dalmatian" Jerome within the political context of the 15<sup>th</sup> century in mind – the establishment of Venetian government and the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans.

The development of the visual manifestations of the cult is directly connected with the implementation of the Renaissance in Dalmatia. Here I will focus on the core part of my research – the renaissance reliefs representing the saint. The centerpiece is a monumental

relief executed in the baptistery of the Cathedral of Saint Lawrence in Trogir, by Andrea Alessi (1425-1505) in 1469. The specific iconographic type merges several of the most popular representations of Jerome at the time, showing the hermit saint sitting and reading in a cave, surrounded by wild beasts. The previous research did not cover the analysis of the possible artistic models and the mode by which they were transferred and adapted in Trogir. The research connects the representation with the contemporary ones executed in the circle of Andrea Mantegna and Bellini workshop, pointing out the differences implemented by the local master which resulted in the specific iconography. Following this, the relationship “center-periphery” in the context of the Republic of Venice will be questioned.

Moreover, this research questions the role of the artists as transporters of certain artistic motives by their personal connections. In this case, the emphasis is put on the role of Niccolò Fiorentino (? -1506), a student of Donatello and the bearer of the Croatian Renaissance, in the transformation and adaptation of painterly models into the sculptural medium. The observation of the intellectual circle in Trogir at the time identified the local humanists as the possible ideologists of the certain symbolic elements in the representation, which can be read as the direct citation of Jerome’s written works.

The popularity and importance of this representation are demonstrated in the 13 preserved reliefs of smaller dimensions, modeled upon this one and executed by Andrea Alessi, Niccolò Fiorentino, and their workshops, and dispersed along the Dalmatian coastline. The large number of it and their geographical dispersion raises the question of their function and influence on similar representations in the following century.

The research fills the gap in the international literature concerning Saint Jerome, where Croatian written and visual examples of the cult were absolutely omitted. Moreover, it gives a new perspective on the mobility of the artists and the migration of the artistic motives and iconographic types amongst the two shores of the Adriatic Sea.