

## The First Coronation Churches of Medieval Serbia

**Abstract:** The medieval ceremony of coronation as a rule took place in the most important church of a realm. The sites of the coronation of Serbian rulers before the establishment of the Žiĉa monastery church as the coronation church of Serbian kings in the first half of the thirteenth century have not been reliably identified so far. Based on the surviving medieval sources and the archaeological record, this paper provides background information about the titles of Serbian rulers prior to the creation of the Nemanjić state, and proposes that Stefan, son of the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty, was crowned king (1217) in the church of St Peter in Ras.

**Keywords:** Serbia, *corona regni*, Stefan the First-Crowned, Sava of Serbia, Žiĉa monastery

Coronation sites of medieval monarchs hold an important place in the “cultural geography” of European nations. They are a major subject of every history because the rite of coronation sums up previous history and, as a rule, announces the one that lies ahead. The rite encompasses the totality of the circumstances of a given community, political as well as religious, at that particular moment. In the context of such interrelatedness of phenomena, the *coronation site* carries multiple meanings. There is, of course, nothing random about it in a society based on the Christian view of the world and the monarch’s supreme authority. As was frequently emphasized in the middle ages, it is only the holy act of coronation that confers legitimacy on the authority of God’s chosen monarch. Coronation was the decisive moment both in an elective and in a hereditary monarchy. Since the phenomenon was European-wide, this research is necessarily comparative.

Serbian history, as other histories in Europe, remembers various coronations, those performed in normal situations as well as under forced circumstances (wars, dynastic conflicts, the ruler’s illness etc.). The coronations were performed in episcopal churches, in monastery churches, in the seat of government or at the court. Our search for the coronation sites of the first Serbian monarchs will begin with the text of the Žiĉa foundation charter, and it will return to the monastery of Žiĉa in the end, and for good reason, of course.

The so-called *second Žiĉa charter*, the text of which survives on the south wall of the passage through the monastery’s gate tower, contains the long-published and much-discussed order of Stefan the First-Crowned that it is in that

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church, the church of Christ the Saviour, that “all the future kings of this state, and archbishops, and bishops, and abbots be ordained”.<sup>1</sup> This important charter makes no mention of Stefan’s own coronation in that church. It expressly states that the future kings “of this state” should be crowned there.

Owing to D. Sindik’s invaluable work, we know now that the date of the so-called first *Žiča charter*, whose text is inscribed on the north wall of the gate passage, is 1219/20, while the second *Žiča charter*, which contains the above-mentioned coronation clause, has been dated to “about 1224”.<sup>2</sup> What led to this revision of the previously accepted chronology of the issuance of the *Žiča charters* apart from the analysis of their surviving texts was the piece of information about the political marriage concluded between Radoslav, son of Stefan the First-Crowned, to whom the second *Žiča charter* refers as his father’s co-ruler, and Anna, daughter of the influential ruler of Epiros, Theodore I Angelos.<sup>3</sup> This marriage took place in late 1219 or early 1220.<sup>4</sup>

Both *Žiča charters* are in fact excerpts transcribed from the original charters in the early fourteenth century. Significant events that took place at the time of their issuance were clarified by B. Ferjančić and placed in the overall context of Serbo-Byzantine relations in the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

Consequently, the facts are as follows:

- 1) About 1224 (1224–1227) Stefan the First-Crowned ordered that the future Serbian kings be crowned at *Žiča*;
- 2) Stefan the First-Crowned, in the foundation charters for the monastery of *Žiča*, did not mention his own coronation in the monastery church.

In other words, we do not know where the coronation of Stefan the First-Crowned in 1217 took place.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that one should not try to understand what the coronation clause in the *Žiča charter* meant compared to the previous customs. Did Stefan the First-Crowned change something with it, and

<sup>1</sup> F. Miklosich, *Monumenta serbica spectantia historiam Serbiae Bosnae Ragusii* (Vienna 1858), 13; St. Novaković, *Zakonski spomenici srpskih država srednjega veka* (Belgrade 1912), 572.

<sup>2</sup> D. Sindik, “Jedna ili dve žičke povelje?”, *Istorijski časopis* 14–15 (1965), 314–315; D. Sindik, “O savladarstvu kralja Stefana Radoslava”, *Istorijski časopis* 35 (1988), 23–29; D. Sindik, “Značaj žičkih hrisovulja za istoriju srpskog naroda”, *Povelja, n.s.*, XXV-2 (1995), 64–68.

<sup>3</sup> S. Kisas, “O vremenu sklapanja braka Stefana Radoslava sa Anom Komninom”, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 18 (1978), 131–139; B. Ferjančić, “Srbija i vizantijski svet u prvoj polovini XIII veka 1204–1261”, *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 27–28 (1989), 124–125.

<sup>4</sup> Sindik, “O savladarstvu”, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ferjančić, “Srbija i vizantijski svet”, 123–137.

<sup>6</sup> S. Ćirković, *Srbi u srednjem veku* (Belgrade 1995), 56. English edition: S. M. Ćirković, *The Serbs, The Peoples of Europe series* (Wiley & Sons, 2004), 38.

if he did – why? Stefan Nemanjić, in a letter to pope Honorius III of March 1220, referred to himself as “crowned king” (*rex coronatus*).<sup>7</sup>

It is known that the Nemanjić state was created by the unification of two core lands: one was Zeta/Duklja (Dioclea, Dioclia), and the other was centred on the city of Ras. The rulers of Zeta bore the title of king in the second half of the eleventh century. In a letter of pope Gregory VII of 1077, the ruler of Zeta Mihailo (Michael) was referred to as “king of the Slavs” (*rex Sclavorum*).<sup>8</sup> His son Bodin bore the same title, and so did his successors. A papal document of 1089 mentions the “regnum Diocliae”.<sup>9</sup>

The middle of the eleventh century was a time of major ecclesiastical reforms in the West. The Cluniac reform influenced the papacy too, especially from the time of pope Leo IX (1048–1054), cardinal Humbert and pope Gregory VII Hildebrand. The long conflict between the papacy and the Holy Roman (German) Empire over investiture basically was a conflict between church and state over fundamental theoretical as well as practical questions concerning their relationship: the relationship between temporal and spiritual authority in the Christian community of nations. The doctrine of papal theocracy which was gradually developed had considerable political implications in medieval Europe. It gave rise to the belief that it was the pope’s right and duty to confer power upon secular rulers, to grant crowns and thrones but also to declare the throne vacant if he deemed it necessary, and to be the judge of rulers. These topics, however important, fall outside the scope of our subject, and so do the shifts in the meaning of the noun “rex” (king) in European society: in the evolution of society and of the idea of monarchy, there was a long way to go from tribal chiefs who bore the title of *rex* to Christian rulers. I am mentioning this because the first Serbian crowns came from the European West. They were the product of the West-European, not of the Serbian evolution of the concept of kingship.

If we narrow our subject down to the possible oldest coronation sites, our attention will necessarily first turn to Zeta. There was “from the beginning a large kingdom” there, the monk Domentijan says explicitly in the thirteenth century.<sup>10</sup> It is the tradition of that kingdom that Stefan Nemanjić invokes when

<sup>7</sup> F. Rački, “Pismo prvovenčanoga kralja srpskoga Stjepana papi Honoriju III 1220. godine”, *Starine JAZU* (1876), 53–55.

<sup>8</sup> K. Jireček, *Istorija Srba*, vol. I (Belgrade: Naučna knjiga, 1952), 122; S. Ćirković in *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. I (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1981), 189–191.

<sup>9</sup> L. Thallóczy, C. Jireček and E. Sufflay, eds., *Acta et diplomata res Albaniae mediae aetatis illustrantia*, vol. I: *Annos 344–1343 tabulamque geographicam continens* (Vienna 1913), 21; Jireček, *Istorija*, vol. I, 122.

<sup>10</sup> Domentijan, *Život Sv. Simeuna i Sv. Save*, ed. Dj. Daničić (Belgrade 1865); Jireček, *Istorija*, vol. I, 122.

he requests a royal crown from the Roman pope at the time Byzantium was under Latin rule.

Where could the kings of Zeta have been crowned, if they were crowned at all? Some scholars have suggested that the ruler of Zeta Mihailo, who bore the Byzantine title of *protospatharos*, in fact “took” the title of king.<sup>11</sup> The text variously known as the *Chronicle of a Priest of Dioclea*, *Bar Genealogy* or *Regnum Sclavorum* contains a passage which should be taken into account here regardless of all the historical untrustworthiness of this piece of writing. As is well known, the text abounds in ambiguities – there are a number of persons and lines of rulers which find no corroboration whatsoever elsewhere, made-up events which frequently merge into unbelievable, and inextricable, tangles or even contradict reliably established facts. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars managed to clarify only some of the problems involved, but most of the major questions concerning the identity of the author, the time the text was written and even its genre (chronicle, genealogy, literary fiction), remain open ever since the time of K. Jireček.<sup>12</sup> Despite this unenviable state of affairs, the view has become largely accepted that the information it provides for a historical geography of the described areas are useable, albeit with much caution, as remarked by E. Dümmler,<sup>13</sup> or, as St. Novaković put it: “its geographical narrative is always consistent and faithful, and many details it speaks about provide actual proof of its trustworthiness even by today’s standards [1880].”<sup>14</sup> Many historians expressed their opinions on the text.<sup>15</sup> F. Šišić believed it to be an “important and reliable source for eleventh- and twelfth-century geography, ergo for objective facts”.<sup>16</sup>

The author places his narrative and his heroes in some historical space, to be sure, but different centuries are all muddled up. The problem that needs to be solved in every single case is: to which period should a particular church, fortress

<sup>11</sup> Jireček, *Istorija*, vol. I, 135.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 130–131.

<sup>13</sup> E. Dümmler, “Über die älteste Geschichte der Slaven in Dalmatien”, *Sitzungsberichte der Phil.-hist. Cl. XX* (1856), 353; St. Novaković, “Srpske oblasti X i XII veka”, *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 48 (1880), 2; before him, H. L. Krause, *Res Sclavorum in imperiorum occidentalis et orientalis confinio habitantium saeculo IX*, Pars I (Berlin 1854).

<sup>14</sup> Novaković, “Srpske oblasti”, 2; St. Novaković, *Prvi osnovi slovenske književnosti medju balkanskim Slovenima* (Belgrade 1893).

<sup>15</sup> Jireček, *Istorija*, vol. I, 131; N. Radojčić, “F. Šišić, *Letopis popa Dukljanina*, prikaz”, *Slavia* 8 (1929), 168–178; N. Radojčić, *O najtamnijem odeljku Barskog rodoslova* (Cetinje 1951); M. Medini, *Starine dubrovačke* (Dubrovnik 1935), 29–64; V. Mošin, ed., *Ljetopis popa Dukljanina* (Zagreb 1950); S. Mijušković, ed., *Ljetopis popa Dukljanina* (Titograd 1967), 115; N. Banašević, *Letopis popa Dukljanina* (Belgrade 1971); J. Lésny, ed., *Historia Królewstwa Słowian, czyli, Latopis Popa Duklanina* (Warsaw 1988), and others.

<sup>16</sup> F. Šišić, ed., *Letopis popa Dukljanina* (Belgrade and Zagreb 1928), 179.

or settlement he makes mention of be dated? This goes particularly for highly-variable names (churches, settlements and the like), and less for more permanent toponyms (rivers, mountains etc.). The phenomenon was European-wide. Many nations have their own texts of the kind. At any rate, methods have been honed of battling one's ways through the fictitious in medieval narratives in order to reach, if possible, the real.

Chapter IX of the *Chronicle* contains a reference to a church of St Mary in the city of Dioclea (ecclesia Sanctae Mariae in civitate Dioclitana).<sup>17</sup> In that church king Svetopelek was buried. In that church people “elevated his son Svetolik, who was consecrated and crowned there by the archbishop and bishops. On that day the custom was instituted to elect and enthrone every king of this land in that church.”<sup>18</sup>

F. Šišić, in his time, regarded this passage as being a later gloss put together “sometime in the thirteenth century, probably in the environs of Split.”<sup>19</sup> He pointed to its similarity to the text of Thomas the Archdeacon (of Split) about the coronation of Stefan the First-Crowned, and concluded that the text of the anonymous Dioclean priest was a fabrication created after the establishment of Žiža as the coronation site of Serbian kings.<sup>20</sup>

If we put aside the description of the coronation of the imaginary Dioclean ruler Svetolik, if we disregard even the style of coronation – “more Romanorum regum” – which, such as described, does not correspond to the situation in the Roman Church in the ninth and tenth centuries (contrary to what the Dioclean priest claims, there was no papal vicar and cardinal Honorius at the time, and some other details are also inaccurate), briefly, if we disregard the event and the fictitious time in which it takes place, the question remains: was there a church of St Mary in the city of Dioclea in the middle ages? The same ninth chapter of the *Chronicle*, as is well known, contains many accurate geographical data: cities (Scodra/Shkoder, Antivari/Bar, Ulcinium/Ulcinj, Suacium/Svač, Drivastum/Drivast/Drishti etc.), regions (Serbia, Bosnia, Zachlunia/Zahumlje, Terbunia/Travunija, Rassa/Rascia/Raška etc.), rivers (Drinus/Drina).<sup>21</sup>

First archaeological excavations on the site of the ancient city of Dioclea, in the area bounded by the Morača and Zeta rivers and the Širalija rivulet, were carried out as early as the nineteenth century. They were resumed later, with particular intensity after the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> Two early Christian basilicas

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 308–309.

<sup>18</sup> Mijušković, ed., *Ljetopis*, 202.

<sup>19</sup> Šišić, ed., *Letopis*, 431.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 429–431.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 306–307.

<sup>22</sup> D. Vučković-Todorović and Dj. Stričević, “Duklja près de Titograd”, *Starinar* 7–8 (1956–57), 409–410; V. Korać, “Doclea près de Titograd: cite romaine”, *Starinar* 9–10 (1958–59),

were discovered. One of them, designated as Basilica B, was in the north-eastern part of the city. On its foundations a cruciform church was built.<sup>23</sup> As far as is known, it belongs to the last construction phase in Dioclea.<sup>24</sup> Next to the church was discovered a stone lintel (230cm × 22.5cm) with a votive inscription of the deaconess (*diaconissa*) Ausonia, who had a foundation built with her sons. The inscription is believed to have come from an older structure, presumably from one of the two basilicas.<sup>25</sup> The probable date of the construction of the church, which remains an open issue, is the sixth century.<sup>26</sup> J. Kovačević, who studied the inscription, dated it to the ninth century,<sup>27</sup> and did not rule out the possibility that it had come from the church of St Mary.<sup>28</sup>

What remains as a fact is:

- 1) The Priest of Dioclea refers to the church of St Mary in the city of Dioclea as a coronation site;
- 2) In that city, on the foundations of an early Christian basilica, a cruciform church was built.

That is all that can be said at present.

Another coronation site is the church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Ras (today known as St Peter's near Novi Pazar). I would like to draw attention to two events, both from the life of Stefan Nemanjić, one from 1196, the other from 1217.

Medieval Serbian biographies carefully recorded Stefan Nemanja's decision to step down from the throne and take monastic vows. He decided, as is known, to pass the throne to his second son, Stefan, son-in-law of Byzantine emperor Alexios III Angelos, who at that time already bore the title of *sebastokrator*. Let us first hear the testimony of a participant in the event, Nemanja's son Stefan himself. Nemanja, he writes, summoned his wife, and his sons, and his bishop by the name of Kallinikos – the bishop of Rascia – and his elders, noblemen and warriors, and expressed his will and, "rising up from his throne,

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378–379; for an overview of the archaeological excavations on the site see *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. I (Titograd: Redakcija za istoriju Crne Gore, 1967), 200–201, n. 88 etc.

<sup>23</sup> *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. I, 269–270, provides plans of Basilica B and the church; photographs of the basilica and the church are available in P. Mijović and M. Kovačević, *Gradovi i utvrđenja u Crnoj Gori* (Ulcinj and Belgrade 1975), figs. 67 and 68.

<sup>24</sup> I. Nikolajević-Stojković, "Dve beleške za istoriju Prevalisa", *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 20 (1981), 9–13.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 11–12.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 9–13; V. Korać, oral communication.

<sup>27</sup> *Istorija Crne Gore*, vol. I, 309, 320, 369, 440.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 440.

passed it to him [Stefan] with a blessing”, and then he spoke to the holy one [bishop of Rascia] with these words: “Proceed and do as I have requested.”<sup>29</sup>

Stefan Nemanja’s youngest son, Sava, describes the rite by which his father personally transferred power to Stefan: Nemanja, the text reads, summoned the nobility (“all of the most distinguished lords, higher as well as lower”), announced them his intention, and “chose his noble and beloved son Stefan Nemanja, son-in-law of the God-crowned *kyr* Alexios, Greek emperor”, and presented him to them with the words: “Have this one instead of me”[...] “It is him that I seat upon the throne in the state”, and he “wreathed [crowned] him himself and blessed him extraordinarily...”<sup>30</sup>

Domentijan reiterates the main facts about the enthronement ceremony. He says that Nemanja chose a son of his as his heir and “created him lord *autokrator* of the whole of his realm and, rising up from the throne, passed it to him with his every blessing”.<sup>31</sup>

Monk Teodosije is even more specific. He tells us that Nemanja, having decided to abdicate, “promptly summoned his son Stefan... The father *autokrator* took him and, with the most reverend bishop Kallinikos and all noblemen, entered the church of the holy and foremost Apostles Peter and Paul. And when the service and prayer were over, the father *autokrator*, with the honourable holy bishop, consecrated Stefan as grand *župan*, as lord and *autokrator* of the whole of the Serbian land, with a cross and by the laying on of hands.”<sup>32</sup>

These sources show that in 1196 the so-called *investiture of a monarch*, to use the term of the European West, was performed in the church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Ras; in Serbian historical literature the term “enthronement” predominates. It is known today that a grand *župan* was also entitled to a “wreath”, the monarch’s wreath. The note of one of the scribes of *Vukan’s Gospel*, abba Symeon, says that a *holy wreath* as a symbol of power over the Serbian lands was handed to the grand *župan* by Christ himself.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “Žitije Simeona Nemanje od Stefana Prvovenčanog”, ed. V. Ćorović, in *Svetosavski zbornik*, vol. 2 (Belgrade 1939), 39–40; Stefan Prvovenčani, *Život Stefana Nemanje*, in *Stare srpske biografije*, ed. and transl. M. Bašić (Belgrade 1924).

<sup>30</sup> V. Ćorović, ed., *Spisi sv. Save* (Belgrade and Sremski Karlovci 1928); transl. in Bašić, *Stare srpske biografije*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Domentijan, *Život sv. Simeuna i sv. Save*, 41–42; Domentijan, *Životi svetoga Save i svetoga Simeona*, transl. L. Mirković (Belgrade 1938), 156.

<sup>32</sup> Teodosije Hilandarac, *Život Svetoga Save*, ed. Dj. Trifunović (Belgrade 1973).

<sup>33</sup> J. Vrana, *Vukanovo jevandjelje* (Belgrade 1967), 2, 485; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Vladarske insignije i državna simbolika u Srbiji od XIII do XV veka* (Belgrade 1994), 124; cf. A. Solovjev, “Pojam države u srednjevekovnoj Srbiji”, *Godišnjica N. Čupića* 42 (1933), 81 = “Corona regni. Die Entwicklung der Idee des Staates in den slawischen Monarchien”, in *Corona regni: Studien über die Krone als Symbol des Staates im späteren Mittelalter*, ed. M. Hellmann (Weimar

Until the establishment of the Serbian autocephalous church in 1219, the church of Sts Peter and Paul in Ras was the ecclesiastical seat of the realm. It was located, in the words of Stefan the First-Crowned himself, in the “throne city”.<sup>34</sup> In the dynastic history of the Nemanjić family this church is also known as the place where Stefan Nemanja “received a second baptism at the hands of the holy man and bishop [of Rascia] in the middle of the Serbian land”, again in the words of Stefan Nemanjić.<sup>35</sup>

There could be no coronation of a Christian monarch without the participation of the Church. The consent of the Church was a prerequisite for coronation: through bishops, acting as intermediaries in the rites of coronation, God’s grace passed on to monarchs. The Church was a direct participant in such events across Europe. Examples abound. The Church carefully kept everything associated with coronation – objects (insignia), written records, or memory. In the Serbian case, nothing of it has survived except memory. A vestige of that memory, at least as far as coronation sites are concerned, was preserved in the Serbian Church: the document put together by two Serbian Orthodox monks, Damian and Paul, and submitted to pope Clement VIII in late 1597. It was a time when hope was harboured that the papacy would be able to support the Serbs’ struggle against the Ottomans. The pope’s reply is dated 10 April 1598.<sup>36</sup> I have been able to consult a copy of the document from the Vatican Archives and its translation into Italian. In its concluding section, which depicts the Serbian lands and people, mineral resources and customs, we can read: “We have documents of ancient lords that kings can be crowned in three places, in St Peter’s or in Žiča or in Peć.”<sup>37</sup>

There are, then, three coronation sites – the church of St Peter is listed first, before Žiča. The text explicitly refers to the coronation of Serbian *kings*, not Serbian *župans*, and the reference is apparently based on *written evidence* (“docu-

1961), 156–197; S. Ćirković, “The Double Wreath: A Contribution to the History of Kingship in Bosnia”, *Balcanica XLV* (2014), 108–109.

<sup>34</sup> Ćorović, “Žitije Simeona Nemanje”, 18–19; transl. in Bašić, *Stare srpske biografije*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> K. Horvat, “Monumenta historica nova historiam Bosniae et provinciarum vicinarum illustrantia”, *Glasnik Zemaljskog muzeja* 21 (Sarajevo 1909), 55–58; the pope’s reply in A. Theiner, ed., *Vetera monumenta Slavorum meridionalium historiam illustrantia*, vol. II (Rome 1875), 90/1; cf. J. Tomić, *Pečki patrijarh Jovan i pokret hrišćana na Balkanskom poluostrvu 1592–1614* (Zemun 1903); J. Kalić, “Stolno mesto”, *Novopazarški zbornik* 12 (1988), 19–21.

<sup>37</sup> Archivum secretum apostol. Vaticanum, Borghese Serie I, 913. The Italian text reads: “Hanno privilegii delli antichi signori che li re se possono incoronar in tre luoghi, nella chiesa de San Pietro, overo in Scica, overo in Pechi” (*ibid.* 485); this piece of information was used by S. Ćirković, “Mileševa i Bosna”, in *Mileševa u istoriji srpskog naroda*, ed. V. Djurić (Belgrade 1987), 139.

ments of ancient lords”). Before March 1220, when Stefan Nemanjić wrote to the pope referring to himself as crowned king (*rex coronatus*), there had been *only one* royal coronation – in 1217. In other words, *the known coronation of Stefan Nemanjić with a crown from Rome took place in the church of St Peter in Ras in 1217.*

On this occasion I have put all other questions aside – the style of coronation or a possible “second” coronation, in Žiča, after 1220 (the fact is, however, that Stefan the First-Crowned makes no mention of it in the Žiča charters).

The search for the site of the coronation of the first Serbian king with a crown granted by the pope in 1217 opens up one more aspect of the problem. Even if the explicit reference of 1597 did not exist, it could be concluded indirectly that the coronation took place in St Peter’s in Ras. This is suggested by comparative research. The Roman Church attached great importance to the rite of coronation. The site of coronation was carefully chosen whenever possible. It carried some meanings by itself. The traditions of the Bishopric of Rascia can be traced back to Roman, pre-Slavic times. A vestige of the belief in the antiquity of the church survives in Serbian chronicles. It was believed that the foundations of Christianity had begun to be laid there early on by a disciple of the apostle Paul, Titus. The historian I. Ruvarac dismissed this belief as “pious tales”.<sup>38</sup> The fact that the piece of information is not true and that it was recorded at a comparatively late date in Serbian history cannot, if we follow Ruvarac’s line of thinking, prevent people from believing in the great antiquity of the church.

The archaeological investigation of the church of St Peter in Ras showed that it had been built on the site of an earlier, sixth-century, religious building<sup>39</sup> whose remains constitute its core, which is visible in the plan of the church.<sup>40</sup> Besides, an important Christian centre dating from the late Roman period was discovered not far from St Peter’s, in the area of present-day Novopazarska Banja. Archaeological excavations established that a pagan temple had been converted into a church in the fourth century. It was an episcopal seat in the early Byzantine period: a sixth-century basilica with a synthronon was also discovered.<sup>41</sup> This religious centre of a pre-Slavic date had also been abandoned. In the middle ages, St Peter’s was restored.

Consequently, the medieval church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Ras was a continuation of an early Christian centre. For centuries it was the

<sup>38</sup> I. Ruvarac, “Raški episkopi i mitropoliti”, *Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije* 62 (1901), 2.

<sup>39</sup> J. Nešković, “Petrova crkva kod Novog Pazara”, *Zbornik Arhitektonskog fakulteta* 5 (Belgrade 1961), 18–31.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

<sup>41</sup> A. Jovanović in *Politika*, 12 September 1994; A. Jovanović “Arheološka istraživanja u Novopazarskoj Banji”, *Novopazarski zbornik* 19 (1995), 31–67.

seat of the bishops of Rascia, who played an important role in the life of the country both in Byzantine and in Serbian times.<sup>42</sup>

The coronation in 1217 of Stefan Nemanjić in the cathedral church of the bishop of Rascia with the crown granted by pope Honorius III played a role in the creation of the concept of *Regnum Rasciae*, the “kingdom of Rascia” or the “Rascian kingdom”. This was the name for the medieval Serbian state which was in use in all types of sources (narrative, diplomatic, coinage etc.) in the West but never in Byzantium, as correctly established by M. Dinić.<sup>43</sup> In Western sources, for example, even the Serbian despot, Stefan Lazarević, was referred to as “despot of the Kingdom of Rascia”, and so was his successor, despot Djuradj Branković.<sup>44</sup>

This research suggests that Žiča was a turning point. The church of Christ the Saviour, which had no previous Roman-period history,<sup>45</sup> became the seat of the Serbian autocephalous archbishopric (1219) reorganized by Sava of Serbia, and soon (about 1224) also the new, and permanent, coronation site of Serbian kings, if the Žiča charter is read literally. The road led from Ras, from the cathedral church of Rascia, to Žiča via Studenica in many respects. The first Nemanjić rulers were laying the foundations of an independent Serbian state carefully and wisely. Instrumental in the process was no doubt Sava of Serbia.

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<sup>42</sup> H. Gelzer, “Ungedruckte und wenig bekannte Bistümerverzeichnisse der orientalischen Kirche II”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 2 (1893), 44–45; St. Novaković, “Ohridska arhiepiskopija u početku XI veka”, *Glas Srpske kraljevske akademije* 76 (1908), 57–58.

<sup>43</sup> M. Dinić, “O nazivima srednjevekovne srpske države”, *Prilozi za književnost, jezik i folklor* 32/1-2 (1966), 31–32. Cf. J. Kalic “Naziv ‘Raška’ u starijoj srpskoj istoriji”, *Zbornik Filozofskog fakulteta* 14 (Belgrade 1979), 79–92.

<sup>44</sup> L. Thallóczy and A. Áldásy, *Magyarország melléktartományainak oklevéltára* (Budapest 1907); A. Veselinović, *Država srpskih despota* (Belgrade 1995), 72–73.

<sup>45</sup> There are no vestiges of earlier religious buildings on the site.

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