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Virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum: Martin of Braga as a Source for the History of the Slavs in Pannonia in the 6th Century

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Abstract

The paper examines the dedicatory poem *In basilica*, attributed to Martin of Braga († 579), analysing its role as a historical source for early Slavic history. Since the poem contains a catalogue of peoples in which Slavs are mentioned among various *gentes*, *In basilica* is often cited as evidence of Slavic presence in Pannonia and/or Central Europe in the early 6th century, an argument also espoused by Jaroslav Šašel. The paper therefore re-evaluates Martin's poem *In basilica*, while seeking to contextualize his knowledge of the Slavs. It concludes that the catalogue of peoples in the poem primarily serves a rhetorical function, severely limiting its significance for early Slavic history.
Keywords: Slavs; Pannonia; 6th century; Gallaecia

Izvleček

***Virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum:* Martin iz Brage kot vir za zgodovino Slovanov v Panoniji v 6. stoletju**

Prispevek obravnava posvetilno pesem *In basilica*, pripisano Martinu iz Brage († 579), in analizira njen pomen zgodovinskega vira za zgodnjo zgodovino Slovanov. Ker pesem vsebuje katalog ljudstev, v katerem so med različnimi skupnostmi omenjeni tudi Slovani, se *In basilica* pogosto navaja kot dokaz za prisotnost Slovanov v Panoniji in/ali srednji Evropi v zgodnjem 6. stoletju, na kar je opozoril tudi Jaroslav Šašel. Prispevek zato preizprašuje to Martinovo pesem in skuša kontekstualizirati njegovo poznavanje Slovanov. Avtor ugotavlja, da ima katalog ljudstev v pesmi predvsem retorično funkcijo, kar močno omejuje njeno sporočilnost za zgodnjo zgodovino Slovanov.
Ključne besede: Slovani; Panonija; 6. stoletje; Galicija

Without a doubt, for any modern researcher of the Late Antique and Early Medieval history of the Eastern Alpine region, it is impossible to overlook the work of Jaroslav Šašel, whose versatile oeuvre has made a significant contribution to today's understanding of ancient history.[1] His broad erudition and systematic mastery of nearly the entire span of antiquity enabled him to explore diverse topics and raise research questions that, in many ways, remain relevant to this day. The Pannonian Martin of Braga and the poem attributed to him, *In basilica*, in which Šašel saw the potential for shedding further light on the ethno-political situation in the early 6th century eastern Alpine area, were no exception.[2]

According to Šašel, Martin of Braga was born between 510 and 520 in southern Pannonia and left the region around 536 when the Gepids took possession of Sirmium (modern Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia). He then embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land before settling in Gallaecia around 550, where he played a key role in converting the Arian Suebi to Catholicism. Initially the Bishop of Dumium and later the Metropolitan of Bracara Augusta (both in modern Braga, Portugal), he remained influential in the ecclesiastical politics of the Gallaecian Suebi until his death in 579. Martin is also said to have been the author of the poem *In basilica*, which served as a dedicatory inscription for the newly built basilica in Dumium. Interestingly, the poem contains a list of various peoples who are said to have converted to Christianity under the influence of St Martin of Tours († 397). In this catalogue of peoples, which also includes a mention of the Slavs, Šašel identified the ethnic configuration of early 6th-century Pannonia, leading him to propose his influential hypothesis that Martin relied on memories of his youth in Pannonia when listing the ethnonyms in the poem. According to Šašel, the Slavs must therefore have already been present in Pannonia in the first quarter of the 6th century.

Šašel's assessment of *In basilica*, which soon solidified into an academic axiom, is even more relevant today, as the last few decades have seen a significant increase in arguments, particularly in archaeological circles, favouring the presence of Slavs in Central Europe and/or the Western Balkans even before the arrival of the Avars in Pannonia (567/568). In this (predominantly archaeological) academic discourse, Martin of Braga is frequently regarded as a convenient and independent written source that complements the ambiguous reports of Procopius of Caesarea, while at

[1] Abbreviations of Latin authors follow van Leijenhorst, Krömer 1990, whereas abbreviations of Greek authors are based on Trapp 2018, with minor adaptations for clarity and alignment with current scholarly usage (since Trapp cites references by volume of the edition, Procopius's works are here cited with indication of the specific title; Malal. refers specifically to Thurn's edition; Greg. Tur. *Hist*. reflects Gregory of Tours's original title *Decem libri historiarum*, following modern historiographical convention).

[2] Šašel 1976; Šašel 1978. Notably, the first surprisingly critical analysis of *In basilica* in the Slovene language was already presented in the late 19th century by J. Smrekar (Smrekar 1890; subsequently acknowledged by Šašel 1977). The source, however, only gained wider recognition in European historiography through Łowmiański 1963, 313–314, a work which Šašel was undoubtedly familiar with. The potential of the source had also been addressed independently of Łowmiański by Stauber 1956/1957, 236–237; Fritze 1964, 318–319.

the same time corroborating recent archaeological discoveries that scholars firmly, albeit speculatively, associate with the Slavs.[3] But is this really the case? Without going into more recent archaeological interpretations, which deserve a separate discussion in the future, this contribution will instead focus on evaluating Martin's poem independently of other sources and critically examining it within its own historical context. On this basis, the contribution will seek to once again question the poem *In basilica* and assess its significance for the history of the Slavs in the first half of the 6th century, a reflection that has been, among others, inspired by the recent thought-provoking interpretations of F. Curta, who argued not only that Martin most likely did not originate from Pannonia, but also questioned his authorship of poem altogether. According to Curta, the poem *In basilica* was instead written by an unknown Frankish author in the 9th century, and therefore it should not be interpreted as a reliable source for the early history of the Slavs.[4]

Martin of Braga

But before analysing *In basilica*, it is worth briefly addressing the biography of the Apostle of the Suebi. Indeed, a modern scholar attempting to reconstruct Martin's biographical profile before the mid-6th century will quickly come up against significant obstacles, since the fragmentary and often contradictory testimony of the written sources makes it practically impossible to draw reliable conclusions about his birthplace, education and theological development. His motives for coming to Gallaecia and the route he took westwards also remain unclear. The only thing that is certain is

[3] Archaeology: e.g. Zeman 1966, 165–166; Váňa 1970, 60; Szydłowski 1980, 235; Klanica, Tržeštik 1991, 18–19; Fusek 1994, 118–119, 308; Chropovský 2000, 58–59; Fusek 2004, 163–164; Fusek, Zábojník 2005, 551; Godłowski 2005, 115, 141; Fusek 2008, 646; Fusek 2015, 153–154; Kazanskij 2023, 85–86. See also Kara 2022, 89. Historiography: besides Łowmiański, especially Avenarius 1986, 22; Avenarius 1992, 10–11; Třeštík 1996, 258–259; Třeštík 1997, 28–30; Lotter 2003, 139 (n. 513); Bystrický 2008, 147–148; Mesiarkin 2017, 69 (n. 51); Budak 2018, 75; Mesiarkin 2019, 36 (n. 3). A more problematic approach is taken by Gračanin 2008, 23; Gračanin 2011, 128–129; Gračanin, Škrgulja 2016, 18–19, 22–23. One of the few who did not rely on Martin of Braga as a source for Slavic history under the influence of Łowmiański or Šašel is Waldmüller 1976, 316–317, relying on Fritze 1964. In Slovenian scholarship, the credibility of the source is widely accepted from Šašel onwards: Pleterski 1990, 49; Bratož 2002, 89–90; Bratož 2003, 479; Bratož 2006, 278–279; Bratož 2011, 602; Pleterski 2015, 242–244; Knific, Nabergoj 2017, 59; Pavlovič 2017, 383, 386; Pavlovič 2020, 187; Pavlovič, Vojaković, Toškan 2021, 176, 177; Bratož 2021, 305, 550–551, 667, 672–673; Pavlovič 2022, 128–129; Pleterski 2024, 116–117. However, cf. Štih 2018, 468. Scepticism regarding the relevance of the poem for Slavic history was expressed by Ivanov 1989; Ivanov 1991; Curta 2001, 46; Curta 2008, 663–665; Curta 2019, 42–43 (n. 9); Curta 2021, 56–58; Curta 2022; Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63). Cf. also Pohl 2018, 152. It is worth noting that many of the modern authors listed here place Martin's Slavs in very different geographical contexts, ranging from Central Europe to the Western Balkans.

[4] Curta 2021, 56–58; Curta 2022.

that Martin arrived in Gallaecia around the middle of the 6th century, where he then played a leading role in the reform and reorganisation of the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of the Suebi.[5]

Today, there is a broad scholarly consensus that Martin was born between 510 and 520,[6] most likely in Pannonia, a claim based primarily on the testimony of Venantius Fortunatus, Gregory of Tours, and the epitaph that Martin is said to have written for himself.[7] Although I still consider Martin's Pannonian origins very likely despite recent criticisms, it is true that these claims are not as definitive as they once seemed.[8] Venantius Fortunatus's statement that Martin "came, as they say, from Roman Pannonia" is particularly ambiguous. The phrase *ut perhibent* clearly indicates that Fortunatus was not fully convinced of Martin's Pannonian origin, contrary to the firm assertions found in modern historiography.[9] Gregory of Tours, who mentions Martin of Braga in *De virtutibus sancti Martini* and later in *Decem libri historiarum*, also gives contradictory information.[10] Likewise, Martin's epitaph, long regarded as a self-declaration of his origins, has also been met with scepticism in recent decades, as P. F. Alberto's important study subjected it to rigorous philological criticism. Alberto

[5] The main edition of Martin's works was published by Barlow 1950. For more on Martin of Braga and his life, see Caspari 1883, i–xxi; Manitius 1911, 109–111; Barlow 1950, 1–10; Schäferdiek 1967, 120–124; Ivanov 1989; Ivanov 1991; Violante Branco 1999; Fontaine 2005, 405–408; Dietz 2005, 162–167; Andrés Sanz 2010; Ferreiro 2012. Cf. also the discussion in Curta 2022. For the Suebi and their kingdom in Gallaecia, see especially Díaz 2011.

[6] Caspari 1883, ii.

[7] Ven. Fort. *carm*. 5, 1–2; Greg. Tur. *Hist*. 5, 37; Mart. Brac. *epitaph*. 1.

[8] The discussion of Martin's origins (especially in the light of F. Curta's recent interpretations), his time spent in the East, the possible route he took westwards, and his possible motives for coming to Gallaecia is left out here due to space constraints and will be discussed elsewhere.

[9] Ven. Fort. *carm*. 5, 2, 21 (*Pannoniae, ut perhibent, veniens e parte Quiritis*). Curta interpreted the phrase *ut perhibent* ("as they say") in connection with Martin's Pannonian origin as Fortunatus's attempt at poetic embellishment and an allusion to the Pannonian origin of Martin of Tours: "Pannonia, in other words, is mentioned here in reference to Martin of Tours, and not to Martin of Braga", Curta 2021, 57 (citation); Curta 2022, 122–123, following Espírito Santo 2007, 268, who also suggested that *ut perhibent* in the account of Venantius Fortunatus should be understood "*em sentido poético*". López Pereira 2014, 550–556, is also very sceptical. See also Violante Branco 1999, 80 (n. 66). It should be stressed that the phrase *ut perhibent* refers primarily to hearsay or a secondary, probably oral, source that Fortunatus simply did not have the opportunity to independently verify. This, of course, does not *a priori* invalidate his testimony, though Curta is certainly correct in observing that Fortunatus's statements should be approached with extreme caution, as the author was clearly attempting to draw as many parallels as possible between his honouree, Martin of Braga, and the patron saint of Gaul, Martin of Tours. To what extent Fortunatus allowed poetic stylisation to influence his information is practically impossible to determine.

[10] In *De virtutibus sancti Martini*, we only learn that Martin came from a "distant region" (*de regione longinqua*), which was also his "homeland" (*patria*), Greg. Tur. *Mart*. 1, 11. Only later, in the *Decem libri historiarum*, do we learn that Martin came from Pannonia (*Pannoniae ortus fuit*), Greg. Tur. *Hist.* 5, 37, a detail that Gregory seems to have learned later. Cf. Ivanov 1989, 11; Curta 2022, 127–128.

highlighted significant differences in versification technique between the epitaph and other poems attributed to Martin, such as *In basilica* and *In refectorio*, as well as discrepancies when compared with other epitaphs from 6th- and 7th-century Hispania. Although *Epitaphium eiusdem* clearly refers to Martin of Braga and can be used as an independent source for his biography, Alberto's conclusion that the poem was probably written by another author is both convincing and highly probable, thereby calling for caution when using it.[11] Uncertainty thus burdens the question of Martin's origins. Recent critiques have indeed presented compelling arguments for scepticism regarding the Pannonian hypothesis, particularly highlighting contradictions and the poetic nature of the sources. However, while these arguments are thought-provoking, they remain speculative in many respects. Thus, despite the inherent limitations of the written sources, the Pannonian hypothesis still appears to me the most convincing one, though it is unlikely ever to be definitively proven or refuted. Given the complexity of the evidence, caution is certainly warranted.

Be that as it may, it is generally agreed that Martin left Pannonia around 535/536, when the Gepids, taking advantage of the political instability in the Balkans caused by the start of Justinian's Gothic War, seized the city of Sirmium and the surrounding region.[12] However, the written sources provide no firm chronological anchor to determine exactly when Martin could have left Pannonia for the Holy Land, nor how long he might have remained there.[13] All that is certain is that Martin arrived in Gallaecia around 550. The sources, with the exception of Gregory of Tours, who mentions that Martin received some form of education in the East, do not provide specific details about his time there.[14]

When and why Martin decided to head west, which route he took and what motivated his decision remain open questions. In fact, it is unclear whether he intended to travel to Gallaecia from the outset or whether he made this decision later. In my view, the latter is more plausible, as Martin almost certainly spent some time in Gaul, as evidenced by his later close links with the region (and his knowledge of Sidonius Apollinaris, to which I will return later). These ties would have been difficult to establish after his arrival in Gallaecia, suggesting that Gaul may have been his first destination before eventually moving on to the Kingdom of the Suebi. Tours, a major pilgrimage centre and the site of his patron and idol, St Martin of Tours, would certainly be an ideal destination for the continuation of Martin's journey.[15]

Nevertheless, what we can say with certainty is that Martin eventually arrived in

[11] Alberto 1994, 218–219, 222–223. See also Violante Branco 1999, 80 (n. 66); López Pereira 2014, 550–551; Curta 2021, 57; Curta 2022, 129. On Martin's style cf. Alberto 1991, and in the context of the poem *In refectorio* especially Lobato 2012/2013.

[12] Argued particularly by Šašel 1976, 154 (535); Šašel 1978, 253 (536); Šašel 1979, 135 (c. 536).

[13] Cf. Bratož 2002, 89, who places Martin's presumed missionary activity in Pannonia only after 536. Martin probably travelled to the East via Constantinople, Šašel 1979, 135.

[14] Greg. Tur. *Hist*. 5, 37.

[15] Cf. Greg. Tur. *Mart*. 2, 53. That Martin travelled west through Gaul is also assumed by, for example, Dietz 2005, 166; Ferreiro 2020, 258; see also Lobato 2012/2013, 83. Cf. López Pereira 2014, 554.

Gallaecia. His motives for coming to the Iberian Peninsula, however, have been widely debated.[16] Whatever brought him there, the political dimension of his later activities in Gallaecia is unmistakable. This is evidenced by his rapid rise within the church hierarchy and the unconventional consecration of Martin's monastery in Dumium as an episcopal see in 556, making him both abbot and bishop, which was undoubtedly intended to integrate Martin as quickly and effectively as possible into the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Kingdom of the Suebi – a strategy that ultimately proved successful, given Martin's achievements in reforming the church in Gallaecia and his lasting influence, both during his lifetime and after his death in 579.[17]

In basilica as a Historical Source

However, Martin's activities on the Iberian Peninsula were not limited to ecclesiastical politics. He is also associated with several literary works, with particular attention here given to the poem *In basilica*, which reads as follows:[18]

Post evangelicum bisseni dogma senatus,
Quod regnum Christi toto iam personat orbe,
Postque sacrum Pauli stilum, quo curia mundi
Victa suos tandem stupuit siluisse sophistas,
Arctous, Martine, tibi in extrema recessus
Panditur inque via fidei patet invia tellus.
Virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum
Excitat affectum Christi Germania frigens,
Flagrat, et accenso Divini Spiritus igne
Solvit ab infenso obstrictas Aquilone pruinas.

[16] The epitaph attributes Martin's arrival in Gallaecia to divine intervention (*divinus nutibus actus*), Mart. Brac. *epitaph*. 2. Similarly, Greg. Tur. *Mart*. 1, 11 (*commonitus a Deo*). Cf. Šašel 1976, 152, and especially Šašel 1978, 249–251, who linked Martin's arrival on the Iberian Peninsula with the military and religious plans of Emperor Justinian in Hispania. Cf. Ferreiro 1980, 248–250; Ivanov 1989, 5, 10–11. Caspari 1883, iv–v, suggested that Martin's decision to travel to Gallaecia may have simply been encouraged by Gallaecian pilgrims present in the Holy Land at the time. Similarly, Barlow 1950, 2. Cf. also Ferreiro 1980, 247.

[17] See the discussion in Díaz 2023, 302–305. That Martin enjoyed royal support very early on can also be inferred from his work *De trina mersione*, likely composed between 556 and 561. It contains an interesting reference to a Suebic delegation that had recently returned from Constantinople (Mart. Brac. *trin. mers*. 3, 31–33), which intriguingly points not only to the Suebic diplomatic connection at the time, but also to Martin's early access to such guarded information at the Suebic court in Braga, Mülke 2020, 341 (n. 25).

[18] Mart. Brac. *in bas*. For (partial) translations, see Šašel 1976, 151 (Slovene); Ivanov 1989, 6; Ivanov 1991, 358 (Russian); Curta 2021, 56; Curta 2022, 118 (English). See also Caspari 1883, li, for a summary of the poem's content in German.

Immanes variasque pio sub foedere Christi
Adsciscis gentes. Alamannus, Saxo, Toringus
Pannonius, Rugus, Sclavus, Nara, Sarmata, Datus,
Ostrogothus, Francus, Burgundio, Dacus, Alanus,
Te duce, nosse Deum gaudent. Tua signa Suevus
Admirans didicit fidei quo tramite pergat,
Devotusque tuis meritis haec atria claro
Culmine sustollens, Christi venerabile templum
Constituit, quo clara vigens, Martine, tuorum
Gratia signorum votis te adesse fatetur
Electum, propriumque tenet te Gallia gaudens
Pastorem, teneat Gallicia tota patronum.

A stylistically refined poem, written in dactylic hexameters and structured as a dialogue between the author and Martin of Tours, as indicated by the vocative form *Martine*, begins by portraying Martin of Tours as a successor to the apostolic tradition and praising him as a pioneer who supposedly spread the teachings of Christ to the northern regions of Europe. This is followed by a list of peoples who, thanks to Martin's miracles and renown, were converted to Christianity. The list programmatically concludes with the Suebi, who, in admiration of his miracles, dedicated a church in his honour. The poem concludes with an exclamation expressing the wish that Martin of Tours, the shepherd of Gaul, should also be regarded as the patron saint of Gallaecia.

According to the traditional interpretation, the poem is a *titulus* for the church of St Martin of Tours, most likely the basilica in Dumium, which was consecrated in 558,[19] and is generally identified with the *versiculi* that Gregory of Tours attributes to Martin of Braga.[20] However, this interpretation has recently been challenged by F. Curta, who has rightly pointed out that both *In basilica* and *In refectorio* draw heavily on the poetry of Sidonius Apollinaris (5th century). Since Sidonius's works were virtually unknown on the Iberian Peninsula in the 6th and 7th centuries, this casts doubt on Martin's authorship of these poems. Based on comparisons with other early medieval Latin catalogues of peoples that use the singular form of the noun *Sclavus*, Curta proposed that *In basilica* was not written by Martin of Braga in the 6th century, but rather by an unknown author from Carolingian Francia in the 9th century.[21]

Indeed, Curta has raised several valuable points, among them the fact that *In basilica* is preserved in three manuscripts dating to the 9th or 10th century, with two of these originating from southern France.[22] However, while his interpretation is cer-

[19] Barlow 1950, 276.

[20] Greg. Tur. *Hist*. 5, 37. See also n. 36, below.

[21] Curta 2021, 56–58; Curta 2022.

[22] It is worth noting, however, that the manuscripts containing *In basilica* are all written in Visigothic script (Barlow 1950, 277–279). While two of these manuscripts (Barlow's P and A) originate from southern France, the third (Barlow's E) is of Iberian origin. Furthermore, the folios of

tainly possible within the framework of Carolingian literary culture, the content of the poem itself argues more convincingly for a 6th-century Gallaecian origin. First, the Suebi are clearly portrayed as active historical agents, as evidenced by the second part of the poem: they marvel at Martin's miracles, build a church in his honour, and actively engage in religious devotion. In fact, the entire catalogue of peoples appears to have been included primarily to highlight the Suebi by positioning them at the end.[23] This portrayal differs from how later Frankish sources reference the Gallaecian Suebi, who typically appear as a phenomenon of the past. Given that their kingdom was destroyed by the Visigoths in 585 and their identity slowly faded, it is difficult to understand why a 9th-century Frankish author would write about them in such a present and active role. The poem also states that the Suebi dedicated a church to St Martin of Tours,[24] with particular emphasis on the author's formulation that the Suebi built "these halls" (*haec atria*).[25] The use of the demonstrative pronoun *hic* clearly implies geographical proximity and suggests the author's eyewitness perspective. Furthermore, the use of present participles (*admirans*, *sustollens*, *vigens*) reinforces the impression that these events were contemporary to the author. Additionally, the poem's connection to the historical context of the Gallaecian Suebi in the 6th century is suggested by its allusion to several miracles (*signa*) performed by St Martin, possibly referencing the miraculous healing of King Hararic's son from leprosy through Martin's relics, as reported by Gregory of Tours.[26] Taken together, these elements strongly support the possibility that the poem was composed in the 6th century by someone living within the Kingdom of the Suebi in Gallaecia.[27]

Martin's authorship of the poem is therefore, in my view, entirely plausible. However, as has long been recognized, the author of the poem clearly relied heavily on the works of the Gallic writer Sidonius Apollinaris (5th century).[28] This reliance is particularly evident in the list of ethnonyms in the poem, where 12 of the 15 ethnic names mentioned can be found in Sidonius's works, many of them in identical form (e.g. *Burgundio*, *Sarmata*, *Toringus*).[29] In fact, the only original names in Martin's poem seem to be *Sclavus*,

manuscript A that contain Martin's poems were likely written by Spanish scribes (Barlow 1950, 278). Therefore, despite two manuscripts originating in southern France, one could still argue for a strong Iberian connection in the transmission of the poems.

[23] Ivanov 1989, 7.

[24] Cf. also Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11; 4, 7.

[25] Mart. Brac. *in bas.* 17.

[26] Greg. Tur. *Mart.* 1, 11. It is no coincidence that Gregory of Tours mentions Martin of Braga for the first time within this narrative.

[27] That is, unless the poem was a bookish pastiche by an unknown later author, as Curta suggests, in which case the poem's temporal and geographical presence, on which I build here, could also be explained as a chronotope, a literary construct rather than a reflection of historical reality. I owe this observation to F. Curta. While I find this unlikely, it is not impossible, given the intellectual ambitions and creative literary endeavours of writers during the Carolingian Renaissance.

[28] This was already noted, among others, by Manitius 1911, 110. See also Barlow 1950, 276.

[29] Mart. Brac. *in bas.* 12–15; Sidon. *carm.* 5, 474–477 (*Suebus*, *Pannonius*, *Dacus*, *Halanus*,

Datus and *Nara*. Even more extensive borrowing from Sidonius can be seen in the poem *In refectorio*, also attributed to Martin, where seven out of 10 lines are almost verbatim copies of one of Sidonius's poems.[30] Whoever composed these verses was undoubtedly an admirer of Sidonius Apollinaris. However, as has been pointed out several times, the works of Sidonius were virtually unknown in contemporary Hispania, and local writers – apart from Martin – almost never referred to him. This has led to scepticism about Martin's authorship of these poems.[31] Therefore, if Martin of Braga, who worked in Gallaecia, was indeed the author, the question arises: how did he gain access to Sidonius's works? While it is true that Sidonius's poetry was virtually unknown in 6th-century Gallaecia, this does not apply to Gaul, where his works were well known. Both Venantius Fortunatus, an acquaintance of Martin, and Gregory of Tours drew upon Sidonius.[32] As discussed above, we have very little information about Martin of Braga's life before his arrival in Gallaecia, leaving room for several possibilities. Given that Martin maintained connections with Gaul and almost certainly spent some time there – if he was not originally from there, as some have suggested – his familiarity with Sidonius's poetry is entirely conceivable.[33] He might have visited Tours, the city of his spiritual patron, where Sidonius's works were indeed known at least from the second half of the 6th century, as evidenced by Gregory of Tours.[34] In this context, it is worth noting that Sidonius himself composed an *epigramma* in honour of St Martin for the basilica in Tours – a work

Rugus, *Burgundio*, *Ostrogothus*, *Sarmata*); 7, 321–325 (*Rugum*, *Burgundio*, *Toringus*, *Francus*); 7, 389–390 (*Alamanne*, *Saxonis*). He may also have been familiar with Dracontius (5th century), Drac. *Romul*. 5, 34–35 (*Suevus*, *Sarmata*, *Gothus*, *Alamannus*, *Francus*, *Alanus*).

[30] Mart. Brac. *refect*.; Sidon. *carm*. 17. For a philological analysis of *In refectorio*, see Lobato 2012/2013.

[31] Curta 2022, 136–137. See also Alberto 1994, 220; López Pereira 2014, 556. For the manuscript tradition of Sidonius's works, see Dolveck 2020.

[32] Mathisen 2020, 633–635; Lobato 2020, 665–666. See also Furbetta 2013, 41–65.

[33] Lobato 2012/2013, 87.

[34] See the literature cited in n. 15. Cf. also Mathisen 2020, 633–635. It is worth pointing out that we lack concrete evidence for the presence of Sidonius's works in Tours before Gregory of Tours became bishop in 573, which would be nearly two decades after the hypothesized visit of the city by Martin. Moreover, Gregory, who clearly used Sidonius's letters, was apparently a native of Clermont (*lumen ab Arvernis veniens feliciter arvis*, Ven. Fort. *carm*. 8, 15, 3), where Sidonius had served as bishop after 469, and it is entirely possible that Gregory encountered his works there rather than in Tours. True, later manuscript evidence suggests that the region of Aquitaine played a role in the transmission of Sidonius's texts (Dolveck 2020), though this tells us little about the situation in the mid-6th century. Nevertheless, Sidonius's works appear to have circulated fairly widely in Gaul. This is suggested not only by Venantius Fortunatus, who clearly drew on Sidonius, but also, for instance, by Gregory of Tours (Greg. Tur. *Hist*. 6, 7), who reports that in the 580s Bishop Ferreolus of Uzès, in southern Gaul, composed *libros aliquos epistularum, quasi Sidonium secutus*. Therefore, while direct evidence of access to Sidonius in Tours prior to Gregory's time is lacking, the broader picture of transmission makes such a possibility entirely plausible – especially given that Sidonius's poems and letters, which were self-published, were already actively circulating in his own time (Mathisen 2020, 631).

that may well have inspired the future Apostle of the Suebi, had he encountered it.[35] It is therefore not far-fetched to conjecture that Martin might have gained access to Sidonius's works somewhere in Gaul, most likely in Tours.

In any case, although everything concerning Martin's whereabouts prior to his arrival in Gallaecia – and his possible exposure to Sidonius's poetry – must remain strictly hypothetical, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and the references to the famous Gallic poet in *In basilica* (and in *In refectorio*) do not necessarily exclude Martin's authorship. On the contrary, given Gregory of Tours's explicit testimony, that verses written for the basilica of St Martin, most likely located in Dumium,[36] were composed by Martin of Braga – a valuable contemporary witness to his poetic activity – it remains very likely that the poem in question is indeed *In basilica*, as has long been argued, and that Martin was indeed its author.

Be that as it may, it is worth stressing that the question of the authorship of *In basilica* is of secondary relevance in this context, as its primary significance lies not in who wrote it, but in the implications often ascribed to it for early Slavic history, given the mention of the Slavs in its catalogue of peoples. But do these implications hold up under scrutiny? The following section will therefore focus specifically on the nature of *In basilica*, which is a *sine qua non* for any further discussion of its usefulness as a historical source.

The primary purpose of *In basilica* was undoubtedly to glorify Martin of Tours, and it was his miracles and fame that were said to have inspired the *immanes variasque gentes*, including the Slavs, to accept the teachings of Christ under his "guidance" (*te duce*). Some have misinterpreted this phrase to mean that Martin of Tours, who lived in the four century, personally preached among these peoples.[37] Others have seen in the catalogue of peoples a reference to the communities among whom Martin of Braga himself, under the spiritual guidance of Martin of Tours, is said to have carried out missionary work in Pannonia in the second quarter of the 6th century.[38] In reality, the poem merely seeks to convince the reader that all these peoples accepted Christianity through the influence of St Martin (*virtutum signis meritorum et laude tuorum*).[39] In other words, it

[35] Sidon. *epist*. 4, 18, 4–5. See also Ven. Fort. *carm*. 10, 6.

[36] These *versiculi* were apparently located *super ostium* […] *a parte meridiana in basilica Sancti Martini*, Greg. Tur. *Hist*. 5, 37. Many earlier scholars believed that the basilica in question was located in Tours (e.g. Stauber 1956/1957, 237). However, the possibility that Gregory was referring to a basilica in Braga was already suggested by Caspari 1883, li, and especially by Barlow 1950, 276; see also Ivanov 1991, 357. For a more sceptical view of this identification, see Curta 2022, 128 (and n. 65), 138.

[37] Chropovský 2000, 58–59.

[38] Especially Bratož 2002, 89; Bratož 2003, 479; Bratož 2006, 279; Bratož 2011, 602; Bratož 2021, 305, 550–551, 667, 672–673, who interprets the references in *In basilica* as evidence for the beginning of the Christianisation of the Slavs in Pannonia before the mid-6th century. This view is accepted by Lotter 2003, 139 (n. 513); Rübekeil, Scharf, Castritius 2005, 210; Budak 2018, 75. Cf. Štih 2018, 468.

[39] Mart. Brac. *in bas*. 7.

is a purely hagiographic narrative, in which the conversion of the peoples is attributed to the posthumous activity of the saint himself. The author was most likely referring to the already mentioned story of the miraculous healing of King Hararic's son from leprosy by the relics of St Martin, which, according to Gregory of Tours, ultimately led to the conversion of the Suebi to Catholicism.[40] The verses, with their hagiographical tone, therefore suggest that the relics and posthumous miracles of St Martin were still believed to inspire peoples to embrace Christianity in the author's time,[41] with particular reference to the Suebi's acceptance of the "true faith". As such, the poem does not serve as evidence of Christianisation in Pannonia in the 6th century, and certainly does not refer to the youthful missionary efforts of Martin of Braga, whose activities are entirely absent from text. Alongside the Suebi, the *spiritus agens* here is Martin of Tours.

Considering the scepticism mentioned above, it is worth devoting some attention to *In basilica*'s famous catalogue of peoples, which has traditionally attracted the most interest, especially since Šašel's influential hypothesis that Martin of Braga relied on memories from his youth in Pannonia when compiling the catalogue. Šašel considered the ethnonyms, which he also linked to the *antiqui barbari* mentioned by Cassiodorus,[42] to be an excellent source for the ethnography of early 6th-century Pannonia. But is this really the case?

In basilica lists the following peoples: *Alamannus*, *Saxo*, *Toringus*, *Pannonius*, *Rugus*, *Sclavus*, *Nara*, *Sarmata*, *Datus*, *Ostrogothus*, *Francus*, *Burgundio*, *Dacus*, *Alanus* and, of course, *Suevus*, who are also directly addressed in the text and are not strictly speaking part of the catalogue of peoples.[43] Apart from the fact that *In basilica* geographically locates all these peoples in "cold Germania" (*Germania frigens*) and the north in general, it is immediately noticeable that the catalogue includes communities that had little or no longer had any connection with Pannonia in the first half of the 6th century, such as the Saxons, Thuringians, Rugii, Burgundians and Alans. The mentions of the other groups are also anything but unambiguous. The Franks did not expand to the borders of Pannonia until the second quarter of the 6th century, as evidenced by a letter from the Frankish King Theudebert I to Justinian around 545.[44] The Sarmatians, after being defeated by the young Theoderic in 471 and losing Singidunum, are rarely mentioned,[45] and when they do appear, it is mainly as an ethnographic category in classicizing Greek and Roman sources. The same ethnographic context almost certainly applies to the Pannonians and Dacians, who are otherwise referred to as "peoples" (ἔθνη) by Procopius, describing them as subjects of the Os-

[40] Greg. Tur. *Mart*. 1, 11.

[41] Cf. Fritze 1964, 318–319; Waldmüller 1976, 316; Ivanov 1989, 6–7; Ivanov 1991, 357; Curta 2001, 46.

[42] Cassiod. *var*. 5, 14. Šašel 1976, 155; Šašel 1979. See also the contribution by H. Gračanin, in this volume.

[43] Mart. Brac. *in bas*. 12–15.

[44] *Epist. Austras.* 20, 2.

[45] Iord. *Get*. 282.

trogoths before the outbreak of the Gothic War (535).[46] The mention of the Slavs is also ambiguous, as their presence in the Eastern Alpine region only becomes tangible towards the end of the 6th century.[47] The only groups in the catalogue that could plausibly be linked to contemporary Pannonia are the Ostrogoths, and, with some reservations, the Alamanni[48] and Suebi[49] – although it is evident that the author of *In basilica* had exclusively the Gallaecian Suebi in mind. In this context, it is also striking that the catalogue omits the main political actors of the Middle Danube region in the first half of the 6th century, the Gepids, the Lombards and the Heruli, whom Martin, if he was indeed the author, would certainly have known about and mentioned if he had intended to provide precise ethnographic information. The poem therefore does not reflect the ethnographic conditions of Pannonia in the first half of the 6th century.[50]

Šašel's suggestion that Martin based his list of ethnonyms on memories of his youth in Pannonia therefore appears less plausible. Instead, the author evidently made use of a written source, namely the aforementioned poems of Sidonius Apollinaris, particularly his two panegyrics addressed to the Western Roman emperors Avitus and Majorian. As previously noted, *In basilica* contains only three genuinely original ethnonyms: *Sclavus*, *Datus* and *Nara*, the latter two likely being distorted forms of *Danus* and perhaps *Neurus*.[51]

According to many modern scholars, however, this does not necessarily invalidate

[46] Procop. *Bell*. 5, 15, 27. Cf. Mart. Brac. *epitaph*. 1 (*Pannoniis genitus*).

[47] It is worth noting that among the peoples mentioned in Procopius's ethnographic digression on the Western Balkans and the Eastern Adriatic before the outbreak of the Gothic War in 535 (Procop. *Bell*. 5, 15, 24–30), the Slavs do not receive a mention. This omission is telling, given that Procopius – evidently familiar with the Slavs, as he also provides the first extant ethnographic profile of them (Procop. *Bell*. 7, 14, 22–30) – clearly had some rather precise data at his disposal, as is evident from his rigorous distinction between the different groups of Suebi, describing those in Pannonia as οὐχ οἱ Φράγγων κατήκοοι, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τούτοις ἕτεροι (Procop. *Bell*. 5, 15, 26). Otherwise, the presence of Slavs in Central Europe before the arrival of the Avars in Pannonia (567/568) has traditionally been argued based on Procopius's references to Slavs in the context of the migration of the Heruli to the island of Thule and in relation to the events surrounding the Lombard pretender Hildegis (Procop. *Bell*. 6, 15, 2; 7, 35, 16–22), which are anything but unproblematic and which I will discuss in detail in my doctoral thesis.

[48] Cassiod. *var*. 3, 50.

[49] Procop. *Bell*. 5, 15, 26; 5, 16, 9.

[50] Ivanov 1989, 7; Avenarius 1992, 10–11. Some have attempted to forcibly "correct" the ethnonyms in the poem and align them with other 6th-century sources, particularly the accounts of Procopius. This is exemplified by D. Třeštík, who interpreted the Rugii as Lombards, the Dacians as Gepids, and the Nari as Noricans (Klanica, Tržeštik 1991, 18–19; Třeštík 1996, 258–259; Třeštík 1997, 30). See also Łowmiański 1963, 314. Cf. Gračanin, Škrgulja 2016, 23.

[51] In one of the manuscripts (Barlow's P), *Danus* appears instead of *Datus*, which was likely the original form. *Danus* is also mentioned by Ven. Fort. *carm*. 9, 1, 73. The argument that Nara most likely refers to the Neuri is supported by the fact that *Neurus* appears in both of Sidonius's catalogues, which the author of *In basilica* evidently drew upon (Sidon. *carm*. 5, 475; 7, 323). Cf. Curta 2021, 58, who concludes that both names are "nothing but 'padding', made-up names invented to complete the syllabic quantity required for a perfect meter".

the ethnographic significance of *In basilica*'s catalogue. It has been argued that Martin of Braga, to whom the poem is traditionally attributed, updated his list to reflect the circumstances of his own time (*Sclavus*, *Datus* and *Nara*), while structuring the enumeration of peoples according to a geographical principle.[52] *Nara* could thus refer to the Noricans, which would imply that the Slavs, mentioned immediately after the Rugii, could be geographically located in the broader Eastern Alpine region. While the catalogue undoubtedly contains new ethnonyms – an issue I will address below – the argument that the list follows a strict geographical principle does not stand up to scrutiny. Although some traces of a geographical logic can be discerned, the author largely jumps back and forth in his enumeration, without following a coherent sequence. The catalogue begins roughly in the Central Alpine region, where the Alamanni are typically located (*Alamannus*), then moves northeast (*Saxo*, *Toringus*), before shifting southeast (*Pannonius*, *Rugus*, *Sarmatus*). If *Datus* refers to the Danes, the direction then turns north again, before moving south once more (*Ostrogothus*), then west (*Francus*, *Burgundio*), and finally back east (*Dacus*, *Alanus*). The ethnonyms, therefore, were not listed according to geographical principles but instead seem to have been arranged to fit the poem's metrical structure.[53] Any attempt to use this sequence as a basis for reliably locating *Sclavus* (or *Nara*) on the map of early 6th-century barbarian Europe is clearly futile – especially given the previously noted fact that many of the peoples mentioned belong more to the ethnographic context of the 5th rather than the 6th century. The poem's metre, rather than historical or ethnographic accuracy, was thus the author's primary concern in composing the catalogue. This is further evident from the poem's attempt to convince the reader that all the peoples listed had supposedly already embraced the teachings of Christ by the 6th century (*nosse Deum gaudent*), something that is, of course, not the case.[54]

The author's excessive reliance on Sidonius Apollinaris therefore clearly excludes the possibility that *In basilica* represents an ethnographic catalogue based on his own first-hand observations, given that, as I argue, he was writing in the 6th century. However, despite this heavy dependence on earlier literary precedents, *In basilica* nevertheless includes *Sclavus*, *Datus*, and *Nara*. How can this combination of old and new, original ethnonyms be explained, and why would the author even use ethnic names that did not necessarily correspond to the ethnic landscape of his own time? In this respect, S. Ivanov's observation is well-founded: just like the lists of peoples in Sidonius Apollinaris, the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* is clearly rhetorical and firmly embedded in the classical literary tradition.[55] As R. Mathisen has convincingly demonstrated, the tendency to create various catalogues of peoples was a pervasive phenomenon in the

[52] For example, Gračanin, Škrgulja 2016, 22–23. Cf. Bystrický 2008, 147–148.

[53] As already pointed out by Váňa 1970, 61. See also Szydłowski 1980, 235; Ivanov 1991, 359 (n. 6); Curta 2008, 664; Curta 2021, 58.

[54] Mart. Brac. *in bas*. 15.

[55] Ivanov 1989, 7; Ivanov 1991, 359 (n. 6). See also, for example, Třeštík 1997, 28; Curta 2001, 46; Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63).

ancient Roman literary tradition. Roman writers, from the Classical period through Late Antiquity, frequently employed this technique to glorify the military achievements of various emperors, often listing long sequences of defeated peoples.[56] Sidonius Apollinaris, whose panegyrics to Avitus and Majorian the author of *In basilica* undoubtedly drew upon, serves as an excellent example of this literary tradition. In his panegyric to Avitus, for instance, the catalogue of peoples clearly served to underscore the terrifying might of the Huns – a rhetorical emphasis that would echo in later representations of imperial triumph over barbarian foes.[57] Such "simple lists", as Mathisen calls them, were therefore common, since no real distinction was made between one people and another, they were merely a sequence of ethnonyms, much like in *In basilica*. And that was precisely the point. In Mathisen's words, "the catalogues achieve(d) their force not from the peoples' individuality but from their multiplicity".[58] Writers sought to incorporate as many ethnonyms into verse as possible, thereby creating a cumulative effect.[59] These catalogues thus had a rhetorical function, with their primary aim being the glorification of Roman emperors' achievements, rather than a rigorous ethnographic examination. In Late Antiquity, the tradition of catalogues was gradually adopted by Christian writers. However, whereas earlier lists of peoples had primarily served to exalt imperial military successes, Christian authors repurposed them into a rhetorical device to glorify the universal expansion of Christianity. This is exactly what the author sought to emphasize in *In basilica*: through the rhetorical enumeration of various peoples – chosen primarily to align with the poem's metrical structure – he sought to underscore the universal spread of the "true faith", which, thanks to the supposed miracles and merits of St Martin of Tours, had reached many peoples, including the Gallaecian Suebi. The function of the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* was therefore entirely rhetorical and should in no way be used as source for the ethnography of Pannonia (or any other region) in the early 6th century.[60]

Sclavus in *In basilica*

Does this make *In basilica* completely useless for early Slavic history? Not entirely. The rhetorical function of the catalogues, however, does not necessarily imply that authors poetically employed only "outdated" collective names that no longer had any

[56] Mathisen 2011, especially 19–27.

[57] Sidon. *carm*. 7, 319–325; see also Meier 2025, 216. For the peoples listed in Sidonius's panegyric on Majorian, see Steinacher 2017, 102.

[58] Mathisen 2011, 23 (citation).

[59] Mathisen 2011. See also Gračanin, Škrgulja 2016, 22; Curta 2022, 131–134; Liccardo 2024, 34, 241–242.

[60] A similar conclusion was also reached by Ivanov 1989, 12; Curta 2001, 46; Curta 2008, 664–665; Curta 2021, 58; Curta 2022, albeit with varying emphases and interpretive frameworks. See also Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63).

foothold in ethnic reality. It is certainly true that, at the expense of their own observations, authors often preferred to rely on ethnonyms rooted in the ethnographic tradition and the so-called "barbarian canon" (such as Scythians, Germani, and later Huns, for instance), which allowed the writers to demonstrate their encyclopaedic knowledge, but at the same time they often also sought to include at least some peoples relevant to their own time.[61] The inclusion of *Sclavus* in the catalogue could certainly be explained in this way.

Given that the main focus of this paper lies in evaluating the poem's character and content – a prerequisite for any further discussion of its historical value – the question of its authorship has largely remained secondary. However, if we aim to contextualize the term *Sclavus* within the poem, briefly revisiting this issue may still prove useful. While the matter remains open to debate, the traditional view that places *In basilica* in the 6th century and attributes it to Martin of Braga, as argued above, remains the most plausible in my view. This interpretation can be further supported by the Latin form *Sclavus* used in the poem, which reflects a Greek linguistic context – it is a Latin adaptation of the Greek Σκλάβος, itself a Greek rendering of the Slavic self-designation (Slověne) – and, in fact, aligns well with Martin's background, as he had spent time in the Byzantine East.[62]

Moreover, proposing Martin of Braga as the author would indeed fit well within the broader historical framework of the early spread of the Slavic ethnonym. Even beyond the case of *In basilica*, it is evident that virtually all the early references to the Slavs in Western Latin sources at the turn of the 6th to the 7th century are in some way connected to Constantinople. John of Biclaro, Bishop of Girona in Hispania, who mentions them

[61] Heather 1998, 95–96; Mathisen 2011, 23.

[62] Greek-speaking Byzantine observers, who first encountered the Slavs along the Lower Danube frontier in the 6th century, had difficulty pronouncing the consonant cluster σλ- and thus inserted an epenthetic consonant κ or, more rarely, θ. As a result, Greek sources use the forms Σκλάβοι, Σκλαβῆνοι, or Σκλαυηνοί, and more rarely Σθλάβοι, instead of Σλάβοι. This phenomenon has long been recognized, see, for example, Roesler 1873, 89–90 (n. 1); Niederle 1923, 36; Schelesniker 1973, 7; Reisinger, Sowa 1990, 10; Anferťev 1991, 127 (n. 102); Koder 2002, 336; Darden 2004, 139. That *Sclavus*, as mentioned in *In basilica*, reflects a Greek linguistic context has been noted by Klanica, Tržeštik 1991, 18–19; Třeštík 1996, 258; Třeštík 1997, 30; Curta 2001, 46; Curta 2008, 664; Curta 2021, 58; Curta 2022, 136. It may not be coincidental that one of the manuscripts (Barlow's A), in which *In basilica* is preserved, renders *Sclavus* as *sclabus*. Cf. Curta 2021, 58; Curta 2022, 136, who argues that the "generic" use of the Latin singular form *Sclavus*, as found in *In basilica*, is a phenomenon of the 9th century. While *Sclavus* was indeed commonly used in a generic sense in early medieval Western Latin sources (Graus 1980, 29–30), this does not mean that every reference to *Sclavus* had to always be restricted to such a broad semantic scope. The meaning of ethnonyms varied depending on the temporal and geographical contexts of individual authors. Therefore, if *In basilica* was composed in the 6th century and its author encountered the term in Constantinople, as I argue, then the Latin form *Sclavus* would obviously have aligned with late antique/Byzantine semantics and thus referring specifically to the Byzantine enemies north of the Lower Danube. Notably, the singular form of the Slavic ethnonym with this specific meaning appears in late antique Greek sources, as seen in Agathias (Agath. 4, 20, 4: Σκλάβος ἀνήρ).

in his chronicle at the end of the 6th century, had spent time in Constantinople between 566 and 582, where he studied both Latin and Greek.[63] A Byzantine context is also evident in Pope Gregory the Great, whose letters contain the earliest known reference to the Slavs in the northern Adriatic region at the turn of the 6th to the 7th century.[64] On the initiative of Pope Pelagius II, Gregory resided in Constantinople between approximately 579/580 and 586, where he served as papal *apocrisarius*.[65] Incidentally, it is worth noting, with regard to his first mention of the Slavs, that Gregory, who had previously spoken only superficially of "barbarians",[66] explicitly thanked the Byzantine exarch in Italy, Callinicus, for the news of his victory over the Slavs. That reports about the Slavs from the Byzantine East steadily reached as far as the Iberian Peninsula at this time is attested not only by Martin of Braga and John of Biclaro, but also by Isidore of Seville, who, in the first quarter of the 7th century, records that "the Slavs took Greece from the Romans".[67] The Latin ethnonym *Sclavi*/*Sclaveni*, which gradually appears in Western sources from the second half of the 6th century onwards, is therefore of Greek origin and undoubtedly entered the West via Constantinople or through other connections with the Byzantine East.[68] *In basilica* was no exception in this regard.[69] Thus, if we accept the traditional view that Martin of Braga authored the poem, it follows that he almost certainly did not hear of the Slavs during his youth in Pannonia, but instead encountered the term in Constantinople or elsewhere in the East.

But if so, can Martin's acquaintance with the Slavs be specified in greater detail? As mentioned above, before arriving in Gallaecia around 550, Martin had apparently spent time in the Greek East, having presumably travelled there from Pannonia at some point. If this is the case, he would almost certainly have passed through Constantinople, which was an important pilgrimage centre. While we cannot determine with certainty when Martin left Pannonia, it is entirely possible that he travelled east via Constantinople in the 540s. This would place him in the region at the height of Slavic pressure on the Balkans: between 545 and 551/552, the Slavs launched at least six devastating incursions into the Eastern Roman Balkan provinces, causing considerable difficulties for Justinian, whose military forces were already engaged in conflicts with the Ostrogoths and, to some extent, the Persians.[70] Martin could therefore have first

[63] Schreiner 2018, 830–831.

[64] Greg. M. *epist*. 9, 155; 10, 15.

[65] Dal Santo 2013, 59.

[66] For example, Greg. M. *epist*. 1, 26; 1, 43. Interestingly, Gregory makes no mention of the Avars in his letters.

[67] *Sclavi Graeciam Romanis tulerunt*: Isid. *chron*. 414 a (s.a. 5827). It is worth noting, however, that Isidore, like *In basilica* before him, uses the form *Sclavi*, whereas John of Biclaro refers to *Sclavini*, Ioh. Bicl. *chron*. s.a. 576, 581.

[68] Koder 2002, 339; Pohl 2018, 152–153; Mühle 2023, 37.

[69] *Contra* Štih 2018, 468.

[70] Slavic raids: Procop. *Bell*. 7, 13, 24–25 (545); 7, 29, 1–3 (548); 7, 38 (549/550); 7, 40, 1–8 (550); 7, 40, 31–45 (550/551); 8, 25, 1–5 (551); 8, 25, 10 (552).

heard of the Slavs either during his journey along the Danube[71] or, more likely, while staying in Constantinople.[72] By the late 540s, just before Martin's supposed departure westward, the Slavs had become a major political concern due to their bold raids. It is thus hardly coincidental that they first appear in written sources around 551/552, when they are mentioned by Jordanes and Procopius, followed shortly thereafter by Pseudo-Kaisarios.[73] Given the considerable interest the Slavs were generating in the East at the time, it would not be surprising if Martin of Braga had also encountered reports about them there – where, like other contemporaries, they may have made such an impression on him that he later recalled them when composing *In basilica*.

If the above interpretations are correct, then Martin's reference to *Sclavus* in *In basilica*, which is presumed to have been composed around 558, would represent the first mention of the Slavs in the Latin West and the second mention in Latin sources after Jordanes. It is worth noting, however, that while Jordanes, Procopius, and Pseudo-Kaisarios refer exclusively to *Sclaveni*, Martin uses the form *Sclavi*, albeit in the singular. This shorter form does not appear in Greek sources until the 560s, first in John Malalas, and later in Agathias (580s),[74] whereas in Western Latin sources, *Sclavi* in the plural is first attested in the letters of Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the 6th century.[75] According to this interpretation, Martin of Braga would thus be the first known source to use the shorter form for the Slavs, preceding even its attestation in Greek sources.[76] In the end, however, whether Martin became acquainted with the Slavs during his stay in the East, as argued above, or whether he learned of them only later through an unknown Greek source[77] – or even through some combination of both – cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.

Be that as it may, the conclusion should be apparent: despite the fact that *In basilica*'s catalogue of peoples is primarily rhetorical rather than ethnographic in nature, as discussed above, it is clear that even if we accept Martin's authorship in the 6th century and assume he had specific Slavs in mind – thus granting the catalogue a limited ethnographic value – these were certainly not located in Pannonia or Central Europe but rather along the Lower Danube frontier, from where they were raiding the Balkan

[71] This possibility was already considered by Smrekar 1890, 153–154 (n. 10).

[72] Ivanov 1989, 12; Curta 2001, 46; Pohl 2018, 152; Mühle 2023, 47 (n. 63). Cf. however, Curta 2022, 136.

[73] Iord. *Get*. 34–35; Procop. *Bell*. 7, 14, 22–30; PsKais. 109.

[74] Malal. 18, 129; Agath. 4, 20, 4.

[75] Greg. M. *epist*. 9, 155.

[76] Cf. Curta 2008, 664–665. Caution is warranted, however, as it is by no means certain that *In basilica* was composed as early as 558, upon the consecration of the church of St Martin, as is commonly assumed. A later date should not be ruled out, *terminus ante quem* being 579, the year of Martin's death.

[77] Smrekar 1890, 153 (n. 10). Diplomatic contacts between Constantinople and Gallaecia certainly existed (see n. 17, above). Cf. Klanica, Tržeštik 1991, 18–19; Třeštík 1996, 258; Třeštík 1997, 30, who attempted to explain Martin's use of the Latinized Greek form *Sclavus* by suggesting his reliance on an unknown Byzantine source.

provinces of the Empire. This is suggested by the Latinized Greek form *Sclavus*, which Martin most likely encountered in the Byzantine East, and which therefore conformed to contemporary Byzantine semantics. Consequently, *In basilica* cannot be used to localize the Slavs in Pannonia and/or Central Europe in the early 6th century. This does not render *In basilica* insignificant, however. On the contrary, it provides a valuable insight into the spread of the Slavic ethnonym across the Mediterranean in the 6th century.

Conclusion

The poem *In basilica*, traditionally attributed to Martin of Braga, is often cited as evidence for the presence of the Slavs in Pannonia and/or Central Europe before the arrival of the Avars (567/568), not least due to thought-provoking interpretations of Jaroslav Šašel, who suggested that Martin drew upon his youthful memories of Pannonia when composing the catalogue in *In basilica*. However, as this study has demonstrated, despite the ingenuity of Šašel's deduction, his interpretation raises several issues, as the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* was never intended as a historical or ethnographic account. Rather, it primarily served as a rhetorical device, designed to emphasize the universal spread of the "true faith", which, thanks to the supposed miracles and merits of St Martin of Tours, had reached numerous *gentes*, including the Gallaecian Suebi. Given its rhetorical nature, it is hardly surprising that the author borrowed most of the ethnonyms from the panegyrics of Sidonius Apollinaris. The function of the catalogue of peoples in *In basilica* was therefore primarily rhetorical and should in no way be used as an independent source for the ethnography of Pannonia (or any other region) in the early 6th century.

In basilica's *Sclavus* does not fare much better. While different interpretations exist regarding the poem's authorship, the traditional view that situates *In basilica* in the 6th century and attributes it to Martin of Braga remains the most convincing and, indeed, provides a strong contextual basis, as his time in the Byzantine East dovetails nicely with the Latinized Greek form *Sclavus* mentioned in the poem, which reflects a Greek linguistic background. This suggests that Martin likely encountered the ethnonym not in Pannonia, but in the Greek East. In the end, however, regardless of whether we accept or reject Martin's authorship of the poem, the mention of *Sclavus* in *In basilica* holds little historical significance for early Slavic history and can in no way be used as evidence of pre-Avar Slavic presence in Pannonia or Central Europe. Nonetheless, as the potentially first known mention of the Slavs in the Latin West, its primary value lies in the study of the discourse surrounding the spread of the Slavic ethnonym in written sources.

The debate on *In basilica* and Martin of Braga has certainly advanced since Šašel's time. However, one cannot overlook the fact that his interpretations were undoubtedly groundbreaking – and in many ways, they still are – as they continue to inspire reflection even half a century later. From an academic perspective, one could hardly ask for a more enduring contribution, and for that, we can only be grateful to him.

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