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The IHS Monogram (Trigram) in the Light of the Interpretation of Some Archaeological Finds

Summary

The reason for writing this paper were the findings of the IHS monogram (trigram) in archaeological contexts, which was used continuously in burials during the post-medieval period, discovered during archaeological excavations of medieval necropolises in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia. While the area of the Republic of Croatia was dominantly Catholic in the period, the area of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina was uniquely Christian during the late medieval period, but had three Christian denominations present (Catholics, Orthodox, and followers of the Bosnian Church), which in the early post-medieval period, due to stronger influences from the West and the East, gradually merged into two Christian denominations (Catholic and Orthodox). Additionally, there are sometimes doubts about the use of certain archeologically detected church-monastery complexes. In the absence of written sources, such doubts are sometimes difficult to resolve because we do not usually have a sufficient fund of distinguishing archaeological elements for such an analysis. Therefore, the appearance of the IHS symbol in a specific, developed form (“Bernardine” and “Jesuit”) on more luxurious rings and on architecture is perhaps one of the indicative elements that could help clarify some of the doubts. With this aim, and based on the study of available relevant literature, the paper attempts to draw certain conclusions about the development of this intriguing symbol, which, as we will see, has been present to a large extent on various archaeological objects, among other things, for centuries.

Keywords: monogram of Jesus; IHS monogram; Christogram; Christian archaeology; Bernardine of Siena; late medieval archaeology; post-medieval archaeology.