

= Jovan Vladimir =

Jovan Vladimir or John Vladimir ( Serbian Cyrillic : ????? ????????? ; c . 990 ? 22 May 1016 ) was the ruler of Duklja , the most powerful Serbian principality of the time , from around 1000 to 1016 . He ruled during the protracted war between the Byzantine Empire and the First Bulgarian Empire . Vladimir was acknowledged as a pious , just , and peaceful ruler . He is recognized as a martyr and saint , with his feast day being celebrated on 22 May .

Jovan Vladimir had a close relationship with Byzantium but this did not save Duklja from the expansionist Tsar Samuel of Bulgaria , who conquered the principality in around 1010 and took Vladimir prisoner . A medieval chronicle asserts that Samuel 's daughter , Theodora Kosara , fell in love with Vladimir and begged her father for his hand . The tsar allowed the marriage and returned Duklja to Vladimir , who ruled as his vassal . Vladimir took no part in his father @-@ in @-@ law 's war efforts . The warfare culminated with Tsar Samuel 's defeat by the Byzantines in 1014 and death soon after . In 1016 , Vladimir fell victim to a plot by Ivan Vladislav , the last ruler of the First Bulgarian Empire . He was beheaded in front of a church in Prespa , the empire 's capital , and was buried there . He was soon recognized as a martyr and saint . His widow , Kosara , reburied him in the Pre?ista Krajinska Church , near his court in southeastern Duklja . In 1381 , his remains were preserved in the Church of St Jovan Vladimir near Elbasan , and since 1995 they have been kept in the Orthodox cathedral of Tirana , Albania . The saint 's remains are considered Christian relics , and attract many believers , especially on his feast day , when the relics are taken to the church near Elbasan for a celebration .

The cross Vladimir held when he was beheaded is also regarded as a relic . Traditionally under the care of the Androvi? family from the village of Velji Mikuli?i in southeastern Montenegro , the cross is only shown to believers on the Feast of Pentecost , when it is carried in a procession to the summit of Mount Rumija . Jovan Vladimir is regarded as the first Serbian saint and the patron saint of the town of Bar in Montenegro . His earliest , lost hagiography was probably written sometime between 1075 and 1089 ; a shortened version , written in Latin , is preserved in the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja . His hagiographies in Greek and Church Slavonic were first published , respectively , in 1690 and 1802 . The saint is classically depicted in icons as a monarch wearing a crown and regal clothes , with a cross in his right hand and his own head in his left hand . He is fabled to have carried his severed head to his place of burial .

= = Life = =

Duklja was an early medieval Serbian principality whose borders coincided for the most part with those of present @-@ day Montenegro . The state rose greatly in power after the disintegration of Serbia that followed the death of its ruler , Prince ?aslav , around 943 . Though the extent of ?aslav 's Serbia is uncertain , it is known that it included at least Ra?ka ( now part of Central Serbia ) and Bosnia . Ra?ka had subsequently come under Duklja 's political dominance , along with the neighboring Serbian principalities of Travunia and Zachlumia ( in present @-@ day Herzegovina and south Dalmatia ) . The Byzantines often referred to Duklja as Serbia .

Around 1000 , Vladimir , still a boy , succeeded his father Petrislav as the ruler of Duklja . Petrislav is regarded as the earliest ruler of Duklja whose existence can be confirmed by primary sources , which also indicate that he was in close relations with Byzantium . The principality consisted of two provinces : Zenta in the south and Podgoria in the north . A local tradition has it that Vladimir 's court was situated on the hillock called Kralji? , at the village of Ko?tanjica near Lake Skadar , in the Krajina region of southeastern Montenegro . Near Kralji? lie the ruins of the Pre?ista Krajinska Church ( dedicated to Theotokos ) , which already existed in Vladimir 's time . According to Daniele Farlati , an 18th @-@ century ecclesiastical historian , the court and residence of Serbian rulers once stood in Krajina .

Vladimir 's reign is recounted in Chapter 36 of the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja , completed between 1299 and 1301 ; Chapters 34 and 35 deal with his father and uncles . These three chapters of the chronicle are most likely based on a lost biography of Vladimir written in Duklja sometime

between 1075 and 1089 . Both the chronicle and the 11th @-@ century Byzantine historian John Skylitzes described Vladimir as a wise , pious , just , and peaceful ruler .

Vladimir 's reign coincided with a protracted war between the Byzantine Emperor Basil II ( r . 976 ? 1025 ) and the ruler of the First Bulgarian Empire , Tsar Samuel ( r . 980 ? 1014 ) . Basil II might have sought the support of other Balkan rulers for his fight against Samuel , and he intensified diplomatic contacts with Duklja for this purpose . A Serbian diplomatic mission , most likely sent from Duklja , arrived in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 992 and was recorded in a charter of the Great Lavra Monastery , written in 993 .

In 1004 or 1005 , Emperor Basil recovered from Samuel the city of Dyrrhachium , the major stronghold on the Adriatic coast , south of Duklja . Since 1005 , Basil had also controlled the coastal lands north and south of that city , parts of the Byzantine Theme of Dyrrhachium . Byzantium thus established a territorial contact with Prince Vladimir 's Duklja , which was in turn connected to the Byzantine Theme of Dalmatia , consisting of Adriatic towns northwest of Duklja . The Republic of Venice , an ally of Byzantium , militarily intervened in Dalmatia in 1000 to protect the towns from attacks by Croats and Narentines . Venetian rule over Dalmatia on behalf of Basil was confirmed by the emperor in 1004 or 1005 . Svetoslav Suronja , a Venetian ally , was crowned Croatian king . Venice , the Dalmatian towns , Croatia , and Vladimir 's Duklja , were thus aligned in a compact pro @-@ Byzantine bloc connected to Byzantium via Dyrrhachium .

The close relations with Byzantium , however , did not help Prince Vladimir . Samuel attacked Duklja in 1009 or 1010 , as part of his campaign aimed at breaking up that pro @-@ Byzantine bloc , which could have threatened him . Vladimir retreated with his army and many of his people to his fortress on a hill named Oblik , close to the southeastern tip of Lake Skadar . According to the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja , he performed a miracle there : the hill was infested with venomous snakes , but when he offered up a prayer to the Lord , their bites became harmless .

Part of Samuel 's army lay siege to the hill , and the remainder attacked the nearby coastal town of Ulcinj , which was part of the fortification system of the Theme of Dyrrhachium . Vladimir eventually surrendered , a decision the chronicle attributed to his wish to deliver his people from famine and the sword . He was sent to a prison in Samuel 's capital of Prespa , located in western Macedonia . Having failed to conquer Ulcinj , which received men and supplies by sea from Dalmatian towns , the tsar directed his forces towards Dalmatia . There , he burned the towns of Kotor and Dubrovnik , and ravaged the region as far northwest as Zadar . He then returned to Bulgaria via Bosnia and Ra?ka . A consequence of this campaign was the Bulgarian occupation of Duklja , Travunia , Zachlunia , Bosnia , and Ra?ka . Venetian , and indirectly Byzantine power in Dalmatia was weakened . Samuel had succeeded in breaking up the pro @-@ Byzantine bloc .

The chronicle states that while Vladimir languished in the Prespa prison , praying day and night , an angel of the Lord appeared to him and foretold that he would shortly be freed , but that he would die a martyr 's death . His fate in captivity was described in a romantic story involving him and Theodora Kosara , Tsar Samuel 's daughter . This is the chronicle 's description of how they met :

It came to pass that Samuel 's daughter , Cossara , was animated and inspired by a beatific soul . She approached her father and begged that she might go down with her maids and wash the head and feet of the chained captives . Her father granted her wish , so she descended and carried out her good work . Noticing Vladimir among the prisoners , she was struck by his handsome appearance , his humility , gentleness and modesty , and the fact that he was full of wisdom and knowledge of the Lord . She stopped to talk to him , and to her his speech seemed sweeter than honey and the honeycomb .

Kosara then begged her father for Vladimir 's hand , and the tsar granted her request . He restored his new son @-@ in @-@ law to the throne of Duklja . In reality , the marriage was probably a result of Samuel 's political assessment : he may have decided that Vladimir would be a more loyal vassal if he was married to his daughter . Resolving thus the question of Duklja , Samuel could concentrate more troops in Macedonia and Thessaly , the main site of his conflict with Byzantium . The chronicle claims that the tsar also gave Vladimir the whole territory of Dyrrachium . The prince could in fact have been given a northern part of that territory , which was partially under Samuel 's rule . A brief note on Vladimir by John Skylitzes may indicate that the prince also received some territory in

Ra?ka . His paternal uncle Dragimir , ruler of Travunia and Zachlumia , who had retreated before Samuel 's army , was given back his lands to rule , also as the tsar 's vassal .

Thereafter , as recorded in the chronicle , " Vladimir lived with his wife Cossara in all sanctity and chastity , worshipping God and serving him night and day , and he ruled the people entrusted to him in a Godfearing and just manner . " There are no indications that Vladimir took any part in his father @-@ in @-@ law 's war efforts . The warfare culminated in Samuel 's disastrous defeat by the Byzantines in 1014 , and on 6 October that same year , the tsar died of a heart attack . He was succeeded by his son , Gavril Radomir , whose reign was short : his cousin Ivan Vladislav killed him in 1015 and ruled in his stead . Vladislav sent messengers to Vladimir demanding his attendance at the court in Prespa , but Kosara advised him not to go and went there herself instead . Vladislav received her with honor and urged Vladimir to come as well , sending him a golden cross as a token of safe conduct . The chronicle relates the prince 's reply :

We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ , who died for us , was suspended not on a golden cross , but on a wooden one . Therefore , if both your faith and your words are true , send me a wooden cross in the hands of religious men , then in accordance with the belief and conviction of the Lord Jesus Christ , I will have faith in the life @-@ giving cross and holy wood . I will come .

Two bishops and a hermit came to Vladimir , gave him a wooden cross , and confirmed that the tsar had made a pledge of faith on it . Vladimir kissed the cross and clutched it to his chest , collected a few followers , and set off for Prespa . As he arrived , on 22 May 1016 , he went into a church to pray . When he exited the church , he was struck down by Vladislav 's soldiers and beheaded . According to Skylitzes , Vladimir believed Vladislav 's pledge , told to him by the Bulgarian archbishop David . He then allowed himself to fall into Vladislav 's hands , and was executed . The motivation behind the murder is unclear . Since Samuel 's defeat in 1014 , the Bulgarians had been losing battle after battle , and Vladislav probably suspected or was informed that Vladimir planned to restore Duklja 's alliance with Byzantium . This alliance would be particularly disturbing for Tsar Vladislav because of the proximity of Duklja to Dyrrhachium , which was a target of the tsar 's war efforts .

In early 1018 Vladislav led an unsuccessful attack against Dyrrhachium , outside whose walls he found his death . The chronicle asserts that Vladimir appeared before Vladislav when he dined in his camp outside Dyrrhachium , and slew him while he cried for help . In the same year , the Byzantine army ? led by the victorious Emperor Basil ? terminated the First Bulgarian Empire . As Vladimir and Kosara had no children , his successor was his uncle Dragimir , ruler of Travunia and Zachlumia . Accompanied by soldiers , he set off for Duklja to establish himself as its ruler , probably in the first half of 1018 . When he came to Kotor , the town 's inhabitants ambushed and killed him after inviting him to a banquet , and his soldiers returned to Travunia . Duklja was not mentioned again in the sources until the 1030s . Some scholars believe that it was placed under direct Byzantine rule around 1018 , while others believe it remained a Byzantine vassal state under an unknown native ruler .

= = Cult = =

Jovan Vladimir was buried in Prespa , in the same church in front of which he was martyred . His relics soon became famous as miraculously healing , attracting many people to his tomb . Shortly after his death he was recognized as a martyr and saint , being commemorated on 22 May , his feast day . At that time , saints were recognized without any formal rite of canonization . Vladimir was the first ruler of a Serbian state who was elevated to sainthood . The rulers from the Nemanji? dynasty , who reigned over the Serbian state which grew around Ra?ka , would almost all be canonized ? starting with Nemanja , the saintly founder of the dynasty .

Several years after his burial , Kosara transported the remains to Duklja . She interred him in the Pre?ista Krajinska Church , near his court , in the region of Skadarska Krajina . The relics drew many devotees to the church , which became a center of pilgrimage . Kosara did not remarry ; at her request , she was interred in Pre?ista Krajinska , at the feet of her husband . In around 1215 ? when Krajina was under the rule of Serbian Grand Prince Stefan Nemanji? ? the relics were presumably

removed from this church and transported to Dyrrhachium by the troops of Michael I , the despot of Epirus . At that time Despot Michael had briefly captured from Serbia the city of Skadar , which is only about 20 km ( 12 mi ) east of the church . Jovan Vladimir was mentioned as the patron saint of Dyrrhachium in a Greek liturgical text .

In 1368 Dyrrhachium was taken from the Angevins by Karlo Thopia , an Albanian lord . In 1381 he rebuilt , in Byzantine style , a church ruined in an earthquake in the narrow valley of the stream Kusha , a tributary of the Shkumbin River ? near the site of the town of Elbasan in central Albania ( built in the 15th century ) . The church was dedicated to Saint Jovan Vladimir , as the inscription which Thopia placed above its south entrance declared in Greek , Latin , and Serbian . The saint 's relics were kept in a reliquary , a wooden casket , which was enclosed in a shrine , 3 m ( 9 @. @ 8 ft ) in height , within the church .

Serbian scholar Stojan Novakovi? theorized that Vladimir was buried near Elbasan immediately after his death . Novakovi? conjectured that the earthquake which ruined the old church happened during Thopia 's rule , and that Thopia reinstated the relics in the rebuilt church . If Vladimir was previously buried in Duklja , Novakovi? reasoned , he would not be absent , as he was , from Serbian sources written during the reign of the Nemanji? dynasty , who ruled over Duklja ( later named Zeta ) from 1186 to 1371 . Novakovi? did not consider the idea that the relics might have been removed from Duklja to Dyrrhachium in around 1215 . He commented on the chronicle 's account that Kosara transported Vladimir 's body " to a place known as Krajina , where his court was " : While his court was possibly in the region of Krajina before his captivity , after he married Kosara it could have been near Elbasan , in the territory of Dyrrachium he received from Tsar Samuel . He was interred near the latter court , which was replaced in the chronicle with the former .

An Orthodox monastery grew around the church near Elbasan , and became the center of veneration of Saint Jovan Vladimir , which was limited to an area around the monastery . In the latter half of the 15th century , the territory of present @-@ day Albania was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire , in which Islam was the privileged religion . After losing the Battle of Vienna in 1683 , the Ottomans went on the defensive in Europe . In the climate of revival of Christianity in the Ottoman Empire , a hagiography of the saint and a service to him were written in Greek in 1690 at the monastery . It stood under the jurisdiction of the Archbishopric of Ohrid , which became a notable spiritual and artistic force during the leadership of Archbishop Joasaph from 1719 to 1745 . In this period , the veneration of Saint Jovan Vladimir was promoted in southern Albania and western Macedonia , as well as beyond the archbishopric , in Bulgaria and among the Serbs in the Kingdom of Hungary .

The monastery became the see of the newly founded Archbishopric of Dyrrhachium in the second half of the 18th century . In more recent times the monastery fell into disrepair , and in the 1960s it was closed by Albania 's Communist authorities ; in 1967 the reliquary with the saint 's relics was moved to St Mary 's Church in Elbasan . The dilapidated monastery was returned to the Church in the 1990s . The restoration of its church and other buildings was completed in 2005 . Since around 1995 the relics have been kept in the Orthodox cathedral of Tirana , the capital of Albania , and are brought back to the monastery only for the saint 's feast day .

Each year on the Feast of Saint Jovan Vladimir , a great number of devotees come to the monastery , popularly known as Shingjon among Albanians . In the morning , the reliquary is placed at the center of the church under a canopy , before being opened . After the morning liturgy has been celebrated , chanting priests carry the reliquary three times around the church , followed by the devotees , who hold lit candles . The reliquary is then placed in front of the church , to be kissed by the believers . The priests give them pieces of cotton that have been kept inside the reliquary since the previous feast . There are numerous stories about people , both Christians and Muslims , who were healed after they prayed before the saint 's relics .

On the eve of the Feast of Saint Jovan Vladimir , an all @-@ night vigil is celebrated in the churches dedicated to the saint , as is celebrated in other Orthodox churches on the eves of their patron saints ' feasts . The liturgical celebration of Vladimir 's feast day begins on the evening of 21 May , because , in the Orthodox Church , the liturgical day is reckoned from one evening to the next . Despite the name of the service , the all @-@ night vigil is usually not held throughout the entire

night , and may last only for two hours . In the Church of St Jovan Vladimir near Elbasan , it lasts from 9 pm to 3 am . Hymns either to Jovan Vladimir or to another saint whose commemoration falls on 22 May , are chanted , on that liturgical day , at set points during services in all Orthodox churches .

Saint Jovan Vladimir is the patron saint of the modern @-@ day town of Bar in south Montenegro , built at its present location in 1976 about 4 km ( 2 @.@ 5 mi ) from the site of the old town of Bar , which was destroyed in a war and abandoned in 1878 . A religious procession celebrating the saint passes on his feast day through the town 's streets with church banners and icons . The procession is usually led by the Serbian Orthodox Metropolitan of Montenegro and the Littoral . The bronze sculpture King Jovan Vladimir , 4 m ( 13 ft ) in height , was installed at the central square of Bar in 2001 ; it is a work by sculptor Nenad ?o?ki? . Although Vladimir was only a prince , he is referred to as " king " in the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja . He is called the Holy King in southeastern Montenegro , and hence the hillock thought to be the site of his court is named Kralji? ( kralj means " king " ) .

= = = Cross of Vladimir = = =

A cross , held by tradition to be the one that Jovan Vladimir received from Ivan Vladislav , and had in his hands when he was martyred , is a highly valued relic . It is under the care of the Androvi? family from the village of Velji Mikuli?i near Bar and , according to the Androvi?s , has been for centuries . The cross is made of yew wood plated with silver , with a brass ball attached to its lower arm , into which a stick is inserted when the cross is carried . The cross is 45 cm ( 18 in ) high , 38 cm ( 15 in ) wide , and 2 @.@ 5 cm ( 1 @.@ 0 in ) thick .

According to Russian scholars Ivan Yastrebov and Pavel Rovinski , the cross was originally kept in the Pre?ista Krajinska Church , in which Kosara had interred Vladimir . The peak of Islamization of the Krajina region was reached at the end of 18th century . The church was torn down , though it is uncertain when and by whom , but the cross was preserved by the people of the region . They believed that it could protect against evil and ensure a rich harvest , and kept it as sacred , although they had converted to Islam . The cross was later taken from them by the neighboring clan of Mrkojevi?i . As they too converted to Islam , they entrusted the cross to the Androvi? family ? their Orthodox Christian neighbors . The Mrkojevi?i considered it more appropriate for the cross to be kept in a Christian home , rather than in a Muslim one .

The cross , followed by a religious procession , is carried each year on the Feast of Pentecost from Velji Mikuli?i to the summit of Mount Rumija . The procession is preceded by a midnight liturgy in the village 's Church of St Nicholas . After the liturgy , the ascent begins up a steep path to the 1 @,@ 593 m ( 5 @,@ 226 ft ) summit of Rumija . The cross , carried by a member of the Androvi? family , leads the procession , followed by an Orthodox priest and the other participants . Catholics and Muslims of the region have traditionally participated in the procession . It is carefully observed that no one precedes the cross ; to do so is considered a bad omen . The ascending devotees sing :

In the past , the standard @-@ bearer of the Mrkojevi?i clan , a Muslim , walked next to the cross with a flag in his left and a knife in his right hand , ready to use it if anyone attempted to take the cross . The clan especially feared that the participants from Krajina might try to recover the sacred object . At the end of 19th century the number of Muslims in the procession dropped as their religious and political leaders disapproved of their participation in it . After World War II , Yugoslavia 's socialist government discouraged public religious celebrations , and the procession was not held between 1959 and 1984 .

Tradition has it that a church dedicated to the Holy Trinity stood at the summit until it was razed by the Ottomans ; in another version , the church crumbled after a boy and a girl sinned within . Before 2005 , there was a custom to pick up a stone at a certain distance from the peak and carry it to the supposed site of the church in the belief that when a sufficient quantity of stones were collected , the church would rebuild itself . A new church dedicated to the Holy Trinity was consecrated on the site by the Serbian Orthodox Church on 31 July 2005 .

The procession arrives at the peak before dawn , and at sunrise the morning liturgy begins . After

prayers have been offered , the procession goes back to Velji Mikuli?i , again following the cross . The participants would formerly gather on a flat area 300 m ( 980 ft ) from the peak , where they would spend some five or six hours in a joyous celebration and sports , and have a communal meal . On the way back , some people pick the so @-@ called herb of Rumija ( *Onosma visianii* ) , whose root is reputed for its medicinal properties . The procession ends at the Church of St Nicholas , and folk festivities at Velji Mikuli?i continue into the night . Until the next Feast of Pentecost , the cross is kept at a secret location . It was formerly known only to two oldest male members of the Androvi? family , and since around 2000 the Androvi?s have appointed a committee to keep the cross .

= = = Hagiography and iconography = = =

The oldest preserved hagiography of Saint Jovan Vladimir is contained in Chapter 36 of the Chronicle of the Priest of Duklja . This chronicle , written in Latin , was completed between 1299 and 1301 in the town of Bar , then part of the Serbian Kingdom . Its author was Rudger , the Catholic Archbishop of Bar , who was probably of Czech origin . He wrote Chapter 36 as a summary of an older hagiography of Vladimir , written in Duklja most likely sometime between 1075 and 1089 . This is the period when Duklja 's rulers from the Vojislavljevi? dynasty endeavored to obtain the royal insignia from the Pope , and to elevate the Bar Bishopric to an archbishopric . They represented Prince Vladimir as the saintly founder of their dynasty ; they were , according to the chronicle , descendants of his uncle Dragimir . The Vojislavljevi?s succeeded in those endeavors , though Vladimir was not recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church . Despite its hagiographic nature , Chapter 36 contains a lot of reliable historical data . Chapters 34 and 35 , which deal with Vladimir 's father and uncles , are probably based on the prologue of the 11th @-@ century hagiography . Chapters 1 ? 33 of the chronicle are based on oral traditions and its author 's constructions , and are for the most part dismissed by historians .

The hagiography in the chronicle is the source for the " Poem of King Vladimir " composed in the 18th century by a Franciscan monk from Dalmatia , Andrija Ka?i? Mio?i? . The poem is part of Mio?i? 's history of the South Slavs in prose and verse , written in the Croatian vernacular of Dalmatia . This book was first printed in Venice in 1756 and was soon read beyond Dalmatia , including Serbia and Bulgaria ( then under Ottoman rule , as was most of the Balkans ) . The " Poem of King Vladimir " is composed in a manner derived from the style of the South Slavic oral epics . It describes Vladimir 's captivity in Bulgaria , the love between Kosara and him , Tsar Samuel 's blessing of their marriage , and their wedding . It concludes with the newlyweds setting off for Vladimir 's court , which Mio?i? places in the Herzegovinian city of Trebinje .

The Greek akolouthia on Saint Jovan Vladimir , containing his hagiography , prayers to him , and hymns to be chanted in church services on his feast day , was printed in Venice in 1690 . The book was reprinted with small changes in 1774 and 1858 . It was written from oral traditions by the deputy of the Orthodox Archbishop of Ohrid , Cosmas , who resided at the Monastery of St Jovan Vladimir , near Elbasan . Copies of the book were distributed to other Orthodox churches and individuals . The akolouthia was also published in 1741 in Moscopole , an Aromanian center in southeastern Albania , as part of a compilation dedicated to saints popular in that region . A shorter hagiography of the saint , based on his life contained in this akolouthia , was included in the Synaxarium composed by Nicodemus the Hagiorite , printed in Venice ( 1819 ) and Athens ( 1868 ) . Cosmas 's text was the basis for the Church Slavonic akolouthias on the saint , which appeared in Venice ( 1802 ) and Belgrade ( 1861 ) . The latter was printed as part of the third edition of *Srbljak* , a compendium of akolouthias on Serb saints , published by the Serbian Orthodox Church . The saint 's life in English , translated from Church Slavonic , appeared in the book *Lives of the Serbian Saints* , published in London in 1921 by the Anglican Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge .

In Cosmas 's writing , the saint was named " Jovan from Vladimir " ; his father was Nemanja ( historically , Grand Prince of Ra?ka from 1166 to 1196 ) , and his grandfather was Simeon ( Bulgarian Tsar from 893 to 927 ) . He married a daughter of Samuel , the tsar of Bulgaria and Ohrid . He succeeded his father as emperor of Albania , Illyria , and Dalmatia . After Byzantine Emperor Basil defeated Tsar Samuel , Emperor Jovan defeated Basil . He also fought against the Bogomil

and Messalian heretics . From his early youth , Jovan Vladimir longed for the Kingdom of God . After he was married , he prayed day and night , and abstained from intercourse with his wife . She was a heretic like her brother , whom she incited to kill Jovan . When the two brothers @-@ in @-@ law rode together , accompanied by soldiers , the heretic suddenly struck Jovan with a sword at a mountain pass named Derven , but could not cut him . Only when Jovan gave him his own sword was the murderer able to cut off his head . Jovan caught it in the air and rode on to the church he had built near Elbasan . There he put his head down , saying , " Lord Jesus Christ , in your hands I place my spirit , " and died ; it was AD 899 . He was buried in the church , which then became the scene of many miracles . The saint 's beneficent power is described in the hagiography :

According to Vladimir 's life in Church Slavonic , he succeeded his father Petrislav as the ruler of Serbian lands ; he ruled from the town of Alba . He was captured and imprisoned by the Bulgarian ruler Samuel . After marrying Samuel 's daughter Kosara , he returned to his country . Emperor Basil , having overcome Bulgaria , attacked the Serbian lands , but Vladimir repulsed him . Basil advised the new Bulgarian ruler , Vladislav , to kill Vladimir by trickery . Vladislav invited Vladimir to visit him , as if to discuss the needs of their peoples . When Kosara came to him instead , Vladislav received her with apparent kindness ; therefore Vladimir came as well . Vladislav was able to cut off his head only after Vladimir gave him his own sword . The saint then carried his severed head to the church he had built near Alba , and died there ; it was AD 1015 . He was buried in the church . During Vladislav 's siege of Dyrrachium , Vladimir appeared before his murderer when he dined , and slew him while he cried for help . The saint 's relics then gushed myrrh , curing various illnesses . The kontakion which is contained , among other hymns , in the Church Slavonic *akolouthia* published as part of *Srbijak* , praises the saint :

In a Bulgarian liturgical book written in 1211 , Vladimir was included in a list of tsars of the First Bulgarian Empire : " To Boris , . . . Samuel , Gavril Radomir , Vladimir , and Vladislav , ancient Bulgarian tsars , who inherited both the earthly and the heavenly empires , Memory Eternal . " According to the earliest work of Bulgarian historiography composed in 1762 by Paisius of Hilendar , Vladimir , also named Vladislav , was a Bulgarian tsar and saint . His father was Aron , Tsar Samuel 's brother . His wife and her brother murdered him because of his pure life and Orthodox faith . Paisius combined Ivan Vladislav and Jovan Vladimir into one character attributed with Vladislav 's parentage and Vladimir 's sainthood .

An important model for the iconography of Saint Jovan Vladimir is an engraving in the 1690 edition of the Greek *akolouthia* . It is a work by Venetian engraver Isabella Piccini . She depicted the saint with a mustache and short beard , wearing a cloak and a crown inscribed with lilies , holding a cross in his right hand , and his severed head in his left hand . A portable icon in Saint Catherine 's Monastery in the Sinai Peninsula , dated around 1700 , shows the saint mounted on horseback .

An icon of Saints Marina and Jovan Vladimir , dated 1711 , is part of the iconostasis of the Monastery of St Naum near Ohrid in western Macedonia . The icon 's position on the iconostasis indicates that Vladimir was an important figure of local veneration . He was often depicted in the company of Saints Clement and Naum in Macedonian churches . A number of 18th @-@ century painters from central and southern Albania painted the saint in churches of the region , especially in the area of Moscopole . A portable icon of the saint was created in 1739 at the Ardenica Monastery in southwestern Albania . It depicts him seated on a throne , surrounded by twelve panels showing scenes of his life and miracles . Saint Jovan Vladimir is represented on frescos in three monasteries of Mount Athos : Hilandar , Zograf , and Philotheou ; and three Bulgarian monasteries : Rila , Troyan , and Lozen .

Hristofor ?efarovi? , an artist from Macedonia , painted the frescos in the rebuilt church of the Serbian Monastery of Bo?ani , in the Ba?ka region ( then part of the Kingdom of Hungary ) in 1737 . There , he depicted Jovan Vladimir in a row of six Serb saints , wearing a crown and sceptre , clad in a full @-@ length tunic , *loros* ( a type of stole ) , and *chlamys* . In the same row stands another Serb saint from present @-@ day Montenegro , Stefan ?tiljanovi? . ?efarovi? 's frescos in Bo?ani are regarded as the earliest work showing Baroque traits in the Serbian art . ?efarovi? created in 1742 in Vienna a copperplate with scenes of the saint 's life and miracles . Its printed impressions were disseminated to many Orthodox Christian homes in the Balkans . The same author included

him among the rulers and saints whom he illustrated in his *Stemmatographia* .

A lithography in the 1858 edition of the Greek *akolouthia* shows the saint wearing a crown with a double lily wreath , his right foot on a sword . He holds a cross , a sceptre , and an olive branch in his right hand , while his crowned severed head is in his left hand . He wears an ermine cloak and a robe with floral designs , adorned with large gems surrounded by pearls . The Greek text beneath the illustration names the saint as Jovan Vladimir , the pious Emperor of all Albania and Bulgaria , the graceful Wonderworker and Great Martyr , and true Myrrh @-@ gusher . In his hagiography included in the *Synaxarium of Nicodemus the Hagiorite* , the saint is referred to as Emperor of the Serbs ( ??? ?????? ????????? ) .

= = = Legends = = =

Several legends about Jovan Vladimir have been recorded in western Macedonia . One has it that , after he was beheaded , he brought his head to the Monastery of St John of Bigor . On a hill above the village of Peso?ani in the Municipality of Debarca , there is a locality called Vladimirovo , at which some ruins can be seen . The locals claimed that Vladimir was born there , and brought his severed head there . The Church of St Athanasius near Peso?ani , now in ruins , is reputed to have been built by Vladimir . People from the region gathered there each year on the eve of his feast day . They lit candles on the remains of the church 's walls , and prayed to the saint . Tradition has it that the Monastery of St Naum had a bell tower named after the saint , in the foundation of which a portion of his relics was placed .

In the western fringe of Macedonia , which is now part of Albania , Jovan Vladimir was remembered as a saintly ruler , cut down by his father @-@ in @-@ law , an emperor , who believed some slander that he was a womanizer . The enraged emperor , accompanied by soldiers , found Vladimir on a mountain pass named Qafë Thanë ( also known as Derven ) , on the road between the Macedonian town of Struga and Elbasan . He struck his son @-@ in @-@ law with a sword , but could not cut him . Only when Vladimir gave him his own sword was the emperor able to cut off his head . Vladimir took his severed head and went toward the site of his future church . There stood an oak , under which he fell after the tree bowed down before him . The saint was interred in the church which was subsequently built at that place and dedicated to him .

According to a legend recorded in the Greek hagiography , Jovan Vladimir built the church near Elbasan . Its location , deep in a dense forest , was chosen by God , and an eagle with a shining cross on its head showed it to Vladimir . After the saint was decapitated , he brought his head to the church , and was buried inside . A group of Franks once stole the casket with his miraculous relics . The casket turned out to be extremely heavy , breaking the backs of hinnies on which the Franks carried it . They eventually put it in the Shkumbin River to take it to the sea , but the river flooded , and the casket ? radiating light ? went back upstream toward the church . The inhabitants of that area took it out of the water and returned it to the church in a festive procession .

A group of thieves stole , on a summer day , horses that belonged to the Monastery of St Jovan Vladimir . When they came to the nearby stream of Kusha to take the horses across , it appeared to them like an enormous river . They moved away from it in fear , but when they looked back from a distance , the stream appeared small . As they approached it again , the Kusha again became huge and impassable . After several such attempts to cross the stream , the thieves realized that this was a miracle of the saint , so they released the monastery 's horses and ran away in horror .

A possible legend of Prince Vladimir was recorded by Branislav Nu?i? in the 19th century in the city of Korçë , southeastern Albania , close to Macedonia . Ruins on top of a hill above Korçë were said to be remains of the court of a Latin ( Catholic ) king , whose kingdom neighbored the state of an Orthodox emperor . The king asked the hand of the emperor 's daughter , who agreed to become his wife only if he built an Orthodox church . He did so , and she married him , but on the first night of marriage she killed him . She then became a nun , and the king 's body was taken somewhere ? he was not buried near his court . Macedonian Slavs inhabiting Saint Achillius Island in the Small Prespa Lake in Greece told of an emperor named Mir?e . He lived on their island , where he was killed by a cousin of his out of jealousy , and his body was taken via Ohrid to Albania .



