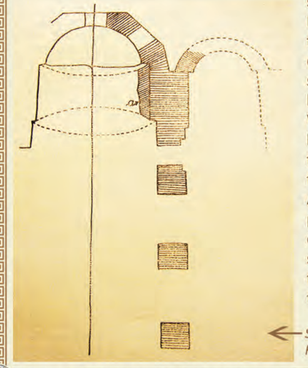
St. Clement of Ohrid – Bishop of Devol

Upper Macedonia become a province of Bulgaria in 860 when the young Khan Boris pushed his frontier right to the mountains of Albania during the reign of the Bysantine Empress Regent Theodora. However, in 864 the Byzantines made an armed intervention in Bulgaria and took Boris completely by surprise while preparing his own campaign against Moravia. Boris was obligated to receive baptism at the hands of Bysantine priests and his country was placed under jurisdiction of the Patriarch Photius. Clement, an exiled disciples of Cyril and Methodius in Moravia, was sent by Boris-Michael as a missionary to Macedonia in 886. The population of Macedonia was predominately Slavonic; the region had only recently been incorporated into the Bulgarian empire.

An experienced pupil of Cyril and Methodius, who was in addition a Macedonian by birth, could be expected to minister effectively to the spiritual needs of the people of this province and to hasten their cultural assimilation into Boris's kingdom. Boris, we are told, "detached Cutmitchevitza from Kotokios", i.e. the former diocess of Praevalis, and appointed Dometas governor and Clement "teacher", didaskalos, of this territory. Clement was given three residences in the Devol district, probably the villages of Radolišta, Oktisi and Vraništa where remains of churches with floor mosaics are descovered from the time of Justinian I. Clement held his post as didaskalos for seven years, until he was appointed bishop in 893. It is fully possible to assume that Clement was entrusted to

The Holy Mother of God Church at Vraništa, located on the site of Gorna Crkov



supervise the construction of the church at Devol, which was one of the most difficult tasks and obligation in his life. The episcope of Devol at Vraništa was the most splendid of the seven katholika that Boris build. The construction of the church at Vraništa must also have been a huge burden even for the local population, with forced labor to carve stone and carry it far from the mountain at the village Višni. According to D. Koco who carried out a preliminary surveys and excavations in the early 50-ties, the church at Vraništa is stated to be an oriental basilica with three-nave and one two-sided roof, dating from a period before the 10th century.

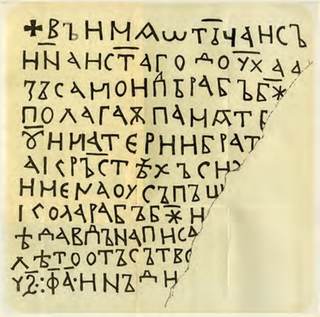
Schematic sketch of foundation of the church The Holy Mother of God at Vraništa, according D. Koco

Tsar Samuel

Tsar Samuel's church

The Holy Mother of God church at Vraništa, located at the site known as Gorna Crkov, is also known by the locals as "Tsar's church". It is believed that both David and Samuel were crowned there, and obviously all Samuels's children's got married in the episcopal church of Devol, that was the most splending of the seven katholika that Boris had build. Comes Nikola, the father of David, Moses, Aron and Samuel undeniably was the ruler of the whole Slavonic Macedonia as province in the empire of Bulgaria. We assume that Nikola had entrusted his sons to rule their parts of the territory that he reigned over, as it was tradition among the Slavic tribal organizations. Anna Commnena says that Samuel, in the beginning was called Mokro in a degrading manner, and we may assume that he ruled over the reputable province Praevalis, i.e. Drimkol, the very important segment of Egnatia road. It was no coincidence that Samuel was married with Agatha, the daughter of Chrysilios, proteuon of Dyrrachium. After the death of tsar Peter of Bulgaria in 969 and the later invasion of the country by the Bysantines, the Comitopuli brothers David, Moses, Aron and Samuel revolted and started a liberation war by taking control over all of Peter's former Empire.

The Bulgarian Patriach, called Gabriel or Germanus gradually fled to Sofia, Vodena, Moglena and finally Prespa. After the invasion of Larissa in 985, Samuel transferred the citiy's holiest relics, the bones of its bishop, St. Achillius, to decorate and sanctify his new capital at Prespa. In the meantime, before its completion, the splendid episcopal church at Devol was still in use for ceremonial purposes where Samuel's daughter Miroslava got married with the Ashot, the captive prince of Taron in 997, under subsequent conduct of the patriarch Philip.



Prespa as seat of the church and the state ceased to be used shortly after Samuel's death and the murder of Gavril Radomir and Vladimir of Dioclea, performed by Jovan Vladislav in 1016. Consequently, Jovan Vladimir Jovan made Ohrid his capital and appointed Jovan as the new Patriarch. In 1018 the Samuel's State was definitely in the hands of the Bysantine, when then the Patriarch Jovan was only degraded to Achbishop.

In old age, Clement, exhausted, tried to resign his bishopric. King Symeon hoewever, who admired him greatly, would not hear of it.

He died in his monastery in Ohrid, aged almost eighty, on 27 July 916

Republic of Macedonia

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St. Clement of Ohrid - bishop of DEVOL

Diabolis - Deabolis
Селасфоро
Дъволь
Мокро

Враништа - Врањишта
Црква
Света Богородица
Вранишка

Vraništa

Vraništa is a lowland village located on the plains next to the river Black Drim on its left side. It is located about 5 km north of Struga on the main road to Debar. In the vicinity there are several villages on the slope of the mountain Jablanica such as Vevčani, Oktisi, Belica, Višni and Radolišta where remains of churches with floor mosaics have been found from the time of Justinian I. Likewise in the village of Vraništa is said that several medieval churches existed of which Sveta Bogorodica Prečista, The Holy Mother of God, is the oldest and unique. Remains of this church are to be found on the site called Gorna Crkov, in the middle of the local cemetery, surrounded by graves. Only a small part of the old basilica is preserved in a shape of a small, rebuilt church. Preliminary study and limited excavations done by D Koco in the 1950 showed that the church was of oriental type with three-nave and dating from a period before the 10th century. Taking into account the church's unique design and its location at Vraništa on a segment of the very important road of Via Egnatia at that time, we realize that the medieval town Devol, Diabolis existed here, where St. Clement of Ohrid served as bishop. We know that Clement was sent to Macedonia in 889 by Khan Boris with the purpose to missionize the province where he was given three residences in the Devol district, a church at Radolišta, Oktisi and Vraništa.

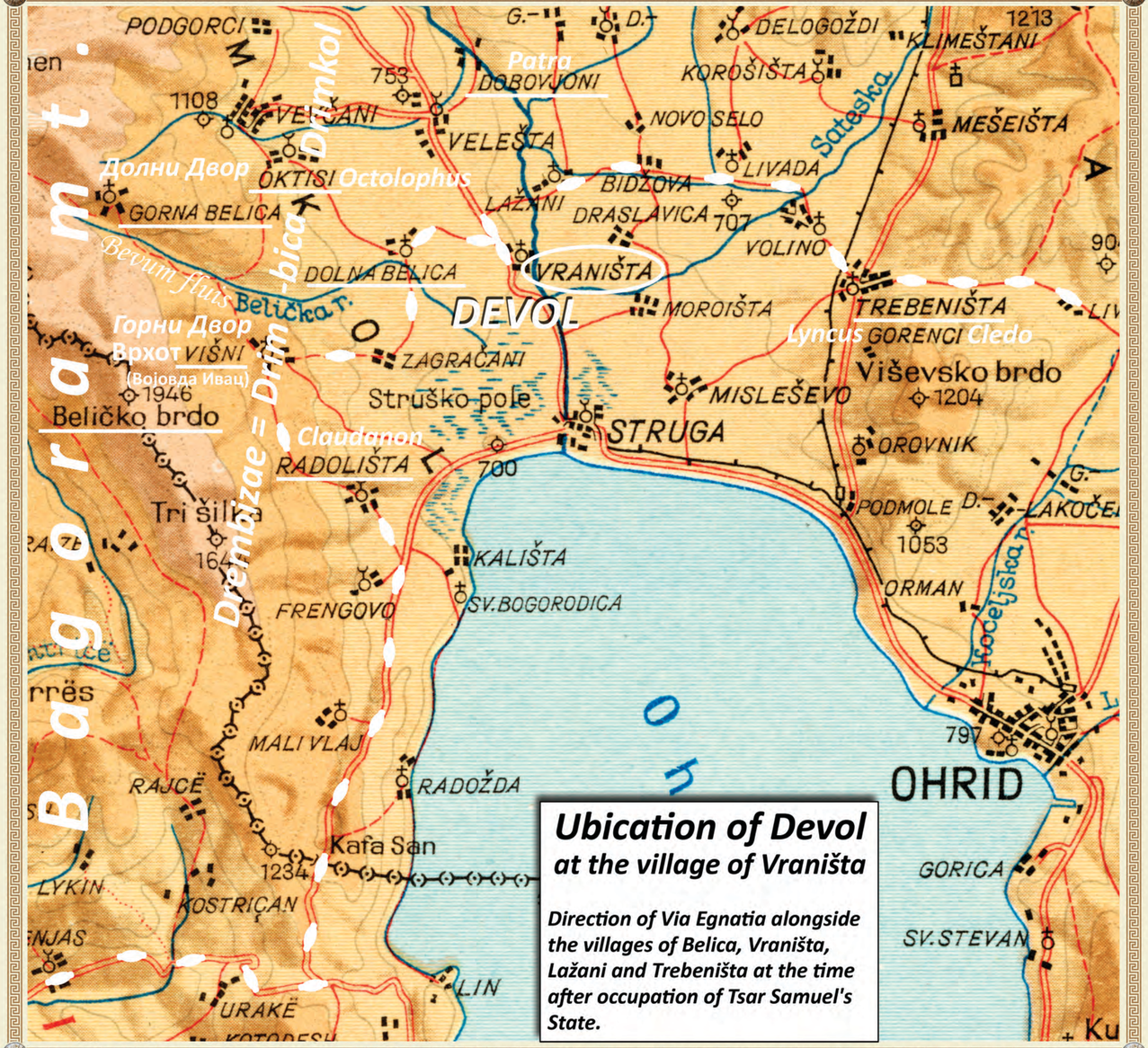
Praevalis, Drembizae and Velizae

Of great value is to bring some clarity to the issue regarding the geography and toponymy of the whole region around Vraništa, the place of the medieval town Devol, where St. Clement of Ohrid served as bishop.

Praevalis was a province created during AD 289-305 under Diocletian's reform with Scodra as its capital. Carolus a Sancto Paulo names two diocesses in Praevalitiana, Scodra, the old metropolis of the province, and Achrida, which was anciently called Praevalis, but afterwards Justinian I honored it with patriarchal dignity.
When Boris sent Clement on mission to Cutmitchevitza we have to understand that he took possession of the former diocess of Praevalis.

Drembizae is apparently misspelling of the word Drim-bizae, or Drimkol. Kol is a Turkish word and means the smallest administrative unit.

Velitzae is actually Belica, a local name for a village, a river and a hilly region nearby Vraništa.



Ubication of Devol
at the village of Vraništa

Direction of Via Egnatia alongside the villages of Belica, Vraništa, Lažani and Trebeništa at the time after occupation of Tsar Samuel's State.

The wedding of Ashot and Samuel's daughter Miroslava

In the village of Vraništa, on the site known as Gorna Crkov, there is a small church called Sveta Bogorodica Prečista, rebuilt on the ruins where the episcopal church in Devol existed. By the villagers the church is also known as "Kralska crkva", i.e. "Tsar church", where Tsar David and Tsar Samuel may have been crowned around 976. We assume that all Samuel's childrens got married there. Theodora-Kosara got married with the captive Jovan Vladimir, the prince of Doclea, after the war on the Adriatic Sea in 989. After the battle of Spercheios in 997, Samuel took Ashot, son of Taronites, out of prison and made him his son-in-law by marrying him to his daughter Miroslava. Katun-Anastasia married Vasul of Hungary while the son of Samuel Gavril Radomir had two wives, of whom the first was the daughter of the Hungarian king and the second the beautiful Irene of Larissa.

The battle disaster at Kleidion in 1014

Byzantine Emperor Basil II continued to invade Samuel's country every year, laying waste everything that came to hand. Knowing that the emperor was always in the habit of coming by way of what is called Kiava Longos and Kleidion, Samuel determined to block this pass and prepared for battle. Then the commander of Philippoupolis joined the emperor and attacked Samuel's troops in their backs by trekking around the very high mountain Belasitza. Completely taken aback by the unexpected nature of this attack, Samuel's soldier fled in panic. Many fell and even more were taken prisoner. They say that the emperor blinded the prisoners, about fifteen thousand in number, with orders that one man for each hundred be left one eye so he could be their guide. When Samuel saw them arriving in such numbers and the state they were in, he suffered a heart attack and died two days later on October 6th 1014.