

Image of Illyricum in Jerome's writings

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Abstract

The paper endeavours to present and explore the evidence about Illyricum from Jerome's selected works. The focus is primarily on his numerous letters, but his *Chronicle* and two other works (*On Illustrious Men*, *Life of Hilarion*) are taken into consideration as well. The purpose of this study which has a preliminary character is twofold: to scrutinize the types of information related to Illyricum in which Jerome is particularly interested, and to conduct a textual analysis of the evidence so as to provide insights into the contexts in which Illyricum is mentioned. The overarching aim is to examine the image of Illyricum Jerome creates and to try and discern his perceived intentions in constructing the image as it is presented, however fragmentary it may be.

Key words: Jerome, Illyricum, Late Antiquity, textual analysis, literary deconstruction

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Introductory remarks

Eusebius Hieronymus, or simply Jerome, is a well-known and well-studied Late Antiquity personality.¹ The scholarly literature on Jerome and his writings is abundant, and there is no need to revisit it here, even though this paper certainly benefits from and draws upon a variety of studies.² This being said, Jerome's writings offer a plethora of research possibilities, especially those involving novel interpretations and new approaches borrowed and adapted from various disciplines.³ In this sense, the present study is to be understood as a small contribution to the *studia Hieronymiana*, in which by using the basic ideas of deconstructive literary analysis an attempt is made to elucidate the manner in which Jerome constructs the image of Illyricum and to examine the function that such an image may have had in his texts.⁴ Therefore, the purpose of the study is not to inquire into the veracity of what is stated, or to try and discern facts from fiction so as to provide firm points for a historical reconstruction, but to see how Jerome uses his own experience and knowledge of events to evoke certain imagery related to Illyricum, thus creating layers of meaning and perception.

First, Jerome's works are sifted through for information related to Illyricum, with a view to define the various types of information and detect what interests Jerome most about Illyricum. The aim is also to see if it is possible to discern Jerome's definition of Illyricum. Secondly, an examination is conducted to discover the image of Illyricum that Jerome's creates and to identify his narrative strategies concerning Illyricum, that is, to determine the place accorded to Illyricum

- 1 The paper is based on the author's presentation at the International Symposium on the 1600th Anniversary of Jerome's Death, *Hieronymus noster*, held in Ljubljana on 23–26 October 2019, and is dedicated to Prof. Rajko Bratož, who himself found in Jerome a worthwhile research topic.
- 2 For recent bibliographies, especially with regard to Jerome's epistolary writing and his scholarly output, cf. Conring, *Hieronymus als Briefschreiber*, 255ff; Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 233ff; Fürst, *Hieronymus*, 363ff; van 't Westeinde, *Roman Nobilitas in Jerome's Letters*, 249ff; Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, 273ff; Williams, *The Monk and the Book*, 305ff. For earlier bibliographies, cf. studies in Duval, ed., *Jérôme, entre l'Occident et l'Orient*, especially Banniard, "Jérôme et l'élegancia d'après le De Optimo genere interpretandi," 305–322, and Fontaine, "L'esthétique littéraire de la prose de Jérôme jusqu'à son second départ en Orient," 323–342, as well as Bartelink, *Hieronymus*, 123ff, and Polański, "Jerome as a Translator of Hebrew Poetry. Part I," 155–170; idem, "Jerome as a Translator of Hebrew Poetry. Part II," 173–187.
- 3 Cf. for example SanPietro, "The Making of a Christian Intellectual Tradition in Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus*," 231–259, who has applied network analysis to explore Jerome's *On Distinguished Men*.
- 4 On the concept of deconstruction, cf. Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism*, 649–666; Thomson, "Deconstruction," 298–318. The deconstruction is here understood as a means to detect and decipher various, even contradictory meanings of a literary text.

in Jerome's narratives. Finally, an additional question is concerned with Jerome's sources of information related to contemporary events in Illyricum. The underlying hypothesis is that Jerome may have felt strong ties to his Illyrian *patria* (to be sure, with not always positive sentiments), even though he had left the region very early on never to visit it again. A notion about Jerome's special connection to Illyricum echoes in his purported statement, which is taken as a token of his Illyrian sensibilities, but which he surely never uttered and is much more instructive about how he was viewed and has since been perceived by posterity: *Parce mihi, domine, quia Dalmata sum*. A few cautionary remarks are also in order. Since this is a preliminary study it does not aim for comprehensiveness or conclusiveness, even though it rests on the assumption that further examples of Jerome's information related to Illyricum might deepen the findings or make them more nuanced, but would not alter them substantially.⁵ Furthermore, it has to be borne in mind that such pieces of information function within specific narrative contexts and plucking them out from their textual surroundings, without taking into account their place within the whole of the narrative, might blur their intended meaning(s) and message(s). Additionally, the danger looms large that such an examination might become a mere catalogue of what Jerome could have mentioned but failed to do so, and be turned into a speculation about the reasons for his omissions.

A note on the select sources

As noted above, for the purpose of this study the focus is on Jerome's letters. They are clearly set in the Late Antique epistolographic tradition, but function as a multilayered works of literature imbued with various rhetorical devices and are essentially propagandistic in nature.⁶ The collection of Jerome's per-

5 For instance, in his *Commentary on Isaiah* Jerome mentions a drink, a beer of sorts, which, in the provinces of Dalmatia and Pannonia, is commonly called *sabaium* in native and barbarian tongue, *vulgo in Dalmatiae Pannoniaeque provinciis, gentili barbaroque sermone appellatur sabaium* (*Hieronymi Commentarii in Esaiam* 7.19.5/11 [ed. Adriaen, 280]). Cf. also Dzino, "Sabaiarius: Beer, wine and Ammianus Marcellinus," 58–59. Moreover, in his *Commentary on Hosea* Jerome lists administrative districts of different ranks indiscriminately, and combines this with a geographical view that is clearly reminiscent of his perception of the broader region of Illyricum as exemplified in two of his letters (*Ep.* 60.16.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 570]; *Ep.* 123.16.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 93], cf. *infra*): *Hoc qui non credit accidisse populo Israel, cernat Illyricum, cernat Thracias, Macedoniam atque Pannonias, omnemque terram, quae a Propontide et Bosphoro usque ad Alpes Iulias tenditur* (*Hieronymi Commentarii in Osee prophetam* 1.4.3 [ed. Adriaen, 39]).

6 For extensive monographic treatments of Jerome's epistolography, cf. Conring, *Hieronymus als Briefschreiber*, and Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*. The standard edition is *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi*

sonal correspondence contains altogether 123 surviving, genuine letters. The second work that is scrutinized here is Jerome's *Chronicle*, a Latin translation and continuation of the second part of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chronicle*, the so-called *Chronological Canons* (in Latin, *Chronici canones*).⁷ Eusebius's original *Chronicle* reached to AD 325, and Jerome brought it up to his own time, introducing the genre of universal Christian chronicle into the West. Jerome ends his narrative on a low note with an event that he obviously saw as a watershed: the Roman defeat against the Goths at Adrianople in Thrace in AD 378 and the death of Emperor Valens.⁸ Jerome's next work used here is his biographical collection of 135 writers, *On Illustrious Men*, which is fashioned after earlier such works primarily in the Roman historiographical tradition, but with a view to showing the non-Christian public that Christian literary production can match the non-Christian one.⁹ At the same time, it is not by

opera. Epistularum partes I-III, ed. Isidor Hilberg, *Corpus Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 54–56 (Vienna–Leipzig: F. Tempsky, G. Freytag, 1910–1918; repr. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), which contains 121 letters. The two other letters that have been identified as of Hieronymian authorship: the *Epistle to Praesidius* (= *Ep. 18**) (*Epistula ad Praesidium*, ed. Germain Morin, in "Pour l'authenticité de la lettre de s. Jérôme à Présidius," *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes* 3 [1913]: 54–58), and the *Epistle to Aurelius* (= *Ep. 27**) (*Epistula ad Aurelium*, ed. Johannes Divjak, in *Augustinus, Epistolae ex duobus codicibus nuper in lucem prolatae*, *Corpus Scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 88 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1981], 130–133).

- 7 On Jerome's *Chronicle*, cf. Muhlberger, *The Fifth Century Chroniclers*, 19–23; Burgess, "Jerome's *Chronici canones*, *Quellenforschung*, and Fourth-Century Historiography," 83–104; idem, *Studies in Eusebian and Post-Eusebian Chronography*, 90–98; idem, "Jerome Explained," 1–32; Zecchini, *Latin Historiography*, 317–318 (with Burgess, "Review of Gabriele Marasco."); Jeanjean and Lançon, *Saint Jérôme, chronique* (with Burgess, "Review of Benoît Jeanjean, Bertrand Lançon."). The standard edition is *Eusebius Caesariensis, Werke. Band 7: Die Chronik des Hieronymus / Hieronymi Chronicon*, ed. Rudolf Helm, *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte* 47 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956).
- 8 In one of his letters, in which he construes what may be termed as his vision of contemporary history of the Roman Empire in the second half of the 4th century, Jerome also refers to this event (cf. *Ep.* 60.15.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 569]).
- 9 In the Preface to *On Illustrious Men* Jerome professes to have fashioned his work after several authors, both Roman and Greek (cf. SanPietro, "The Making of a Christian Intellectual Tradition in Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus*," 233–235), even though, in one of his letters (*Ep.* 47.3.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 346]), he singles out Suetonius and Apollonius (probably the 1st-century BC Stoic philosopher Apollonius of Tyre). On the work itself, especially Jerome's historiographic method, cf. Ceresa-Gastaldo, "La tecnica biografica del *De viris illustribus* di Girolamo," 221–236 (= "The Biographical Method of Jerome's *De viris illustribus*," 55–68); Pricoco, "Motivi polemici e prospettive classicistiche," 69–99; Opelt, "Hieronymus' Leistung als Literaturhistoriker," 52–75; with Nautin, "La Liste des oeuvres de Jérôme," 319–334; Starowiejski, "Les 'De viris illustribus' comme source," 127–138; Whiting, "Jerome's *De viris illustribus* and New Genres," 41–51; SanPietro, "The Making of a Christian Intellectual Tradition in Jerome's

chance that Jerome stops with himself and that his own entry is among the longest in the catalogue, since he wanted to be recognized and remembered as one of the greatest patristic writers. The last of Jerome's works taken into consideration here is his *Life of Hilarion*, dedicated to St. Hilarion of Gaza.¹⁰

The selection of sources is deliberate. Jerome's letters provide ample material that can be explored in a variety of ways. Since the letters have been extensively used to map out the chronology and details of Jerome's life, it is only natural to assume that they might also supply evidence for an insight into how Jerome perceived his old home country. Jerome's *Chronicle*, as a historiographic work, may be telling of his particular interest in the history of Illyricum, while his *On Illustrious Men* is taken here into account primarily because of Jerome's entry on himself. Finally, the *Life of Hilarion* is considered relevant for this study because of the episode about the saint's time in Dalmatia.¹¹

Information on Illyricum

Letters

In Jerome's letters Illyricum is explicitly mentioned three times, cursorily in relation to St. Paul, as a place where the apostle was active (*Ep.* 59.5.4 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 546]; *Ep.* 65.12.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 630]; *Ep.* 71.1.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 1]). In geographical terms, Illyricum is twice hinted at but not specifically referred to as an area stretching from Constantinople to the Julian Alps (*Ep.* 60.16.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 570]), i.e. between the Black Sea and the Julian Alps in the middle of the Roman Empire (*in mediis Romani imperii*) (*Ep.* 123.16.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 93]). Jerome also mentions various provinces included in that area, with some hints at his being aware of administrative

De Viris Illustribus," 231–259. The standard edition, with an Italian translation, is *Gerolamo, Gli Uomini Illustri / De viris illustribus*, ed. Aldo Ceresa-Gastaldo (Florence: Nardini-Centro internazionale del libro, 1988).

- 10 On Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*, cf. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, 81–163; Pataki, "Fiscellas iunco texens," 349–357; Nehring, "Jerome's *Vita Hilarionis*," 417–434; Harvey, Jr., "Jerome Dedicates His 'Vita Hilarionis,'" 286–297; Gray, "Erzählperspektive und Wertung in der *Vita Hilarionis* des Hieronymus," 83–104; Konig, "Solitude and biography in Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*," 295–308. The recent critical edition, with a French translation, is *Jérôme, Trois vies de moines (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion)*, eds. Edgardo Martín Morales, Pierre Leclerc, Sources chrétiennes 508 (Paris: Cerf, 2007), 212–298.
- 11 For this episode, cf. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, 142–144; Degórski, "Il soggiorno di sant'Illarione di Gaza in Dalmazia," 101–114.

aspects: Scythia, Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, Dardania, Dacia, Epiruses, Dalmatia, and Pannonias (*Ep.* 60.16.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 570]), with Epirus and Pannonia in plural forms, which may be interpreted as an illustration of his familiarity with the late Roman provincial administrative structure.¹² Of these provinces, excluding Thrace and Scythia which did not belong to Illyricum,¹³ three are additionally referred to: Dalmatia, twice explicitly (*Ep.* 60.10.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 559]; *Ep.* 118.5.6 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 443]); Pannonia, twice through the name of its inhabitants (*Ep.* 68.1.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 675]: *homo Pannonius*; *Ep.* 123.15.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 92]: *hostes Pannonii*), and once obliquely as the native soil (*genitale solum*) and home country (*patria*) of Emperor Valentinian I (*Ep.* 60.15.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 569]).¹⁴

The geographical picture of Illyricum in Jerome's letters is supplemented with additional references to named or unnamed toponyms. Of hydronyms, the river Danube is mentioned only once in relation to the limes (*Ep.* 123.16.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 93]: *fracto Danubii limite*). The Adriatic Sea is touched upon five times, once indirectly as the strait (*fretum*) by which the islands of Dalmatia (*insulae Dalmatiae*), where the presbyter Nepotianus is said to have lived in solitude, are separated from Altinum (a town in the province of Venetia and Histria) (*Ep.* 60.10.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 559]); four times directly: as the surge of the Adriatic Sea (*aestus Adriatici maris*) (*Ep.* 68.1.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 675]), in connection to an island in the Adriatic (*insula Hadriae*), where the monk Sisinnius is said to have found a letter addressed to Jerome from Augustine of Hippo (*Ep.* 105.1.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 243]), as the Adriatic Sea (*Adriaticus pelagus*) which the noble lady Paula had crossed on her journey to Jerusalem as if it were a pond (*stagnum*) (*Ep.* 108.7.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 312]), and as the

12 For remarks about Jerome's faulty knowledge of late Roman provincial organization in present-day southeastern Europe, cf. Bratož, "Girolamo e i suoi rapporti con Aquileia," 12, note 14, who says that Jerome mixes the exact contemporary names of provinces with anachronistic and imprecise ones.

13 Thrace is mentioned two more times, as the area which Jerome himself visited during his wanderings about (*Ep.* 3.3.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 14]), as well as the place where Emperor Valens was defeated by the hands of the Goths and where he perished (*Ep.* 60.15.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 569]).

14 Greece, even though it belonged to the prefecture of Illyricum, is referred to separately in the sense of a geographical-cultural zone (*Ep.* 39.1.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 294]: *Graecia tota*; *Ep.* 52.3.5 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 417]: *sapiens ille Graeciae*; *Ep.* 58.8.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 537]: *docta Graecia*; *Ep.* 58.10.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 539]: *Graeciae flores*; *Ep.* 125.6.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 123]), once even in a plural form (*Ep.* 108.3.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 308]: *per omnes Graecias*). There are two mentions of Achaia as well, but as a region of Greece (*Ep.* 33.5 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 259]; *Ep.* 59.5.4 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 546]). Crete is only referred to in connection to St. Titus (*Ep.* 69.3.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 683]; *Ep.* 146.1.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 309]), once through its inhabitants (*Ep.* 70.2.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 683]: *Cretenses*).

waves of Adria (*Adriae fluctus*) between which and the Cottian Alps the presbyter Vigilantius is said to have found refuge and spoken out against Jerome (*Ep.* 109.2.5 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 354]); as well as an anonymous sea in which the island stands where Jerome's friend Bonosus pursues an eremitic life (*Ep.* 3.4.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 15]: *pelagus*; *Ep.* 3.4.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 15]: *insanum mare*). Of places that are unnamed,¹⁵ there are four references to Jerome's own birthplace: he styles it as his home country of rusticity (*patria rusticitatis vernacula*) where god is one's belly and one lives for the present, and the richer one is the hollier is one held to be (*Ep.* 7.5 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 28]), calls it a place with half-ruined little country houses (*semirutae villulae*) that have escaped the hands of the barbarians and are to be sold along with the ashes of our (i.e. Jerome's and his brother Paulinian's) common ancestors (*Ep.* 66.14.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 665]), and two more times refers to it plainly as *patria* (*Ep.* 6.2.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 25]; *Ep.* 81.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 107]). Once it may be taken that Jerome's birthplace is alluded to in his assertion that a monk cannot be perfect in his home country (*Ep.* 14.7.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 54]). Furthermore, the islands in the Adriatic are both directly mentioned or assumed. Two instances of their direct mention have already been pointed out (*insulae Dalmatiae*: *Ep.* 60.10.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 559]; *insula Hadriae*: *Ep.* 105.1.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 243]). One further example is a reference to the islands of Dalmatia where a wealthy landowner Julian is said to have built monasteries and secured support for a multitude of holy men (*Ep.* 118.5.6 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 443]). An Adriatic island is also suggested by an unnamed island where Jerome's friend Bonosus lives as a hermit, and which is said to cause shipwrecks since it is surrounded by the roaring sea and encircled with precipitous cliffs, and has rough crags, bare rocks and a desolate aspect with no grass or flourishing fields offering shade, while the sea surface resounds when crashing against cliffs of winding rocky heights, but which Jerome compares to a paradise (*Ep.* 3.4.2, 4 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 15, 16]),¹⁶

15 In a letter to the hermit Castricianus Jerome directly mentions a place called Cissa to where Castricianus is said to have managed to arrive in his attempt to visit Jerome before being forced to turn back home (*Ep.* 68.1.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 675]), and which has been identified with either Cissa Pullaria, i.e. the Brioni archipelago, or Cissa Liburnica, i.e. the island of Pag (cf. Ciglencečki and Bobovnik, "Blue Deserts," 450–451, with further literature), but it is more likely that the Thracian Cissa (an alternative name for the Cressa on the coast of Thracian Chersonesus) is meant, since Jerome explicitly says that Castricianus arrived to the Aegean and Ionian seas.

16 This description is combined from two passages: *insulam pelago circumsonante navifragam, cui asperae cautes et nuda saxa et solitudo terrori est, quasi quidam novus paradisi colonus insedit ... totam circa insulam fremit insanum mare et sinuosis montibus inlisum scopulis aequor reclamant; nullo terra gramine viret; nullis vernans campua densatur umbraculis; abruptae rupes quasi quandam horrois carcerem claudunt.*

and calls a safe place (*in tuto insulae*) and the Church's bosom (*ecclesiae gremio*) where Bonosus resides following the example of St. John of Patmos (*Ep.* 7.3.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 28]). Regardless of whether or not this description is a figment of Jerome's imagination and a literary invention, or it may be taken at face value as a result of his first-hand knowledge, it is illustrative of the features of the marine climate and island morphology which are applicable to maritime Dalmatia. As another reference to the geographical quality of a certain area may be considered Jerome's remark about a Pannonian Castricianus, whom he calls a land animal (*terrenum animal*) (*Ep.* 68.1.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 675]), which hints at Pannonia as a landlocked region.¹⁷

Jerome also provides glimpses into the contemporary situation in Illyricum in the late 4th century as he saw it. He says that Emperor Valentinian I died leaving his home country unavenged (*inultam*) after his native soil had been ravaged (*vastato*), while his brother Valens was defeated and killed in a battle against Goths in Thracia (*Ep.* 60.15.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 569]). In the same letter that dates from AD 396, Jerome speaks of twenty and more years that have passed with Roman blood being shed every day in the area between Constantinople and the Julian Alps, where various barbarian groups (Goths, Sarmatians, Quadi, Alans, Huns, Vandals, Marcomanni) ravage, pillage and plunder, while God's matrons and virgins of noble descent have been made their sport, bishops have been captured and priests and other clerics killed, churches have been destroyed, altars turned into places for stalling horses and the relics of martyrs dug up, everywhere there is mourning, fear and death, and the barbarians even rule over the whole of Greece (*Ep.* 60.16.2–4 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 570–1]).¹⁸ In another letter that dates from AD 409, Jerome relates about how for thirty years after the Danube limes had been breached the regions in the middle of the Roman Empire, from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, were not under Roman control but became a battleground, where all but few old people were born either in captivity or under the siege and did not long for freedom which they had never known (*Ep.* 123.16.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 93]).¹⁹ Moreover, Jerome mentions the *hostes Pannonii*, the Pannonian

17 In similar vein, Jerome calls Bonosus, who was also very likely from Dalmatia, a son of the Fish and says that he sought water (*Ep.* 7.3.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 28]).

18 It is worth pointing out that Jerome remarks that the east seems to be free from these evils but is panic-stricken through news about them (*Ep.* 60.16.4 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 57]), which alludes to how Jerome himself has learned of such developments.

19 Jerome talks about these events in the past tense, and the use of a temporal adverb *olim* at the beginning of the passage indicates that they are something that lies in the past. He also finds a culprit for such bad condition of the Roman Empire: a semibarbarian traitor (*semibarbarus*

foes, who had joined different barbarian groups (he lists the Quadi, Vandals, Sarmatians, Alans, Gepids, Herulians, Saxons, Burgundians, Alamanni) in laying waste to the entire Gaul between the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Rhine and the Atlantic Ocean (*Ep.* 123.15.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 92]).²⁰

Chronicle

In Jerome's *Chronicle* Illyricum is directly referred twice: Claudius II defeats the Goths who plunder Illyricum and Macedonia (s.a. 270 [ed. Helm, 221–222]); Probus, the prefect of Illyricum, is said to have destroyed with his most unjust tax exactions the provinces that he was ruling (*provincias quas regebat*) even before they were ravaged by barbarians (s.a. 372 [ed. Helm, 246]).²¹ Of the provinces mentioned that belonged to Illyricum, but which are not explicitly referred to as such, are Dacia (s.a. 290 [ed. Helm, 225]: Galerius is native of Dacia in the vicinity of Serdica);²² Moesia (s.a. 254 [ed. Helm, 219]: Aemilianus plans a revolt in Moesia);²³ and Pannonia, in singular form (s.a. 179 [ed. Helm, 208]: Marcus Aurelius Antoninus dies in Pannonia; s.a. 251 [ed. Helm, 218]: Decius is a native of Budalia in Lower Pannonia, *Pannonia Inferior*; s.a. 364 [ed. Helm, 244]: Valentinian I hails from Pannonia), as well as in plural form (s.a. 263 [ed. Helm, 220–221]: the Quadi and Sarmatians conquer Pannonias; s.a. 375 [ed. Helm, 247]: the Sarmatians ravage Pannonias and because of this the same consuls remain in office); whereas the choronym Macedonia seems to have been used more in the sense of a historical region than province (s.a. 263 [ed. Helm, 220]: the Goths plunder Greece, Macedonia, Pontus and Asia; s.a. 270

proditor) by whose crime Rome's enemies were armed against Romans with Roman money (*Ep.* 123.16.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 93]), meaning Flavius Stilicho. Jerome does not specify here the barbarian groups that have caused devastation in Illyricum, but he names them in the letter 60 (cf. *supra*). His two catalogues of barbarians (*Ep.* 60.16.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 570]; *Ep.* 123.15.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. III, 92]) are consistent with other such contemporary catalogues and may be considered to be primarily a literary device. On catalogues of barbarians, cf. Mathisen, "Catalogues of Barbarians in Late Antiquity," 17–32.

- 20 The *hostes Pannonii* may probably be compared to the Bacaudae movement, especially since Jerome defines as their area of activity the provinces of Gaul. For the Bacaudae, cf. Drinkwater, "The Bacaudae of fifth-century Gaul," 208–217; Sánchez León, *Los Bagaudas*, with Drinkwater, "Review of J. C. S. León, *Los Bagaudas*," 287–288; Lambert, "Salvian and the Bacaudae," 255–259.
- 21 The *Chronicle* also mentions the Illyrians: Alexander the Great successfully fights the Illyrians and Thracians (s.a. 335 a.Chr. [ed. Helm, 123]), and the Illyrians and Galatians are declared free by Romans following the demise of Perseus, the king of Macedonians (s.a. 165 a.Chr. [ed. Helm, 140]).
- 22 One other mention of Dacia is related to the Transdanubian province (s.a. 102 [ed. Helm, 194]).
- 23 Aemilianus was a governor of Upper Moesia (*Moesia Superior*), which later become part of the prefecture of Illyricum (cf. Kienast, Eck, and Heil, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, 203).

[ed. Helm, 221–222]). Pannonia and Dalmatia are indicated indirectly through mentions of their inhabitants: Probus allows the Pannonians (and the Gauls) to grow vineyards and gives the hills Alma and Aureus, planted by soldiers' hands, to be cultivated by provincials (s.a. 280 [ed. Helm, 224]); Diocletian is called Dalmatian (*Dalmata*) (s.a. 286 [ed. Helm, 225]).²⁴

Of toponyms, a number of oikonyms are specified: Brigetio (Brigetio) (s.a. 375 [ed. Helm, 247]: the deathplace of Valentinian I); Budalia (s.a. 251 [ed. Helm, 218]: the birthplace of Decius); Carnuntum (s.a. 308 [ed. Helm, 229]: Licinius is made emperor at Carnuntum by Galerius); Cibalae (s.a. 313 [ed. Helm, 230]: the place where the battle against Licinius was fought; s.a. 364 [ed. Helm, 244]: the birthplace of Valentinian I who is called a Cibalensian, *Cibalensis*); Dyrrachium (s.a. 346 [ed. Helm, 244]: destroyed in an earthquake);²⁵ Margum (s.a. 285 [ed. Helm, 225]: Carinus is defeated in a battle at Margum and killed); Mursa (s.a. 350 [ed. Helm, 238]: Vetrano is made emperor at Mursa; s.a. 351 [ed. Helm, 238]: the place of Magnentius's defeat in a battle in which the Roman forces have been ruined); Naissus (s.a. 351 [ed. Helm, 238]: Vetrano is deposed at Naissus by Constantius II); Salonae (s.a. 316 [ed. Helm, 230]: Diocletian dies in a palace not far away from Salonae); Serdica (s.a. 290 [ed. Helm, 225]: Galerius's birthplace is not far away from Serdica); Sirmium (s.a. 271 [ed. Helm, 222]: the deathplace of Claudius II; s.a. 283 [ed. Helm, 224]: Probus is killed at Sirmium in a military mutiny, in a tower called Ferrata; s.a. 371 [ed. Helm, 246]: an unnamed presbyter has been unjustly beheaded at Sirmium because he did not want to betray the former proconsul Octavian²⁶ whom he was hiding); Siscia (s.a. 308 [ed. Helm, 229]: Quirinus,

24 The Pannonians and Dalmatians are also referred to as inhabitants of the respective regions before their transformation into Roman provinces (ss.aa. 10, 6 [ed. Helm, 167–168]): Tiberius celebrates triumphs over the Pannonians; s.a. 4 [ed. Helm, 170]: Asinius Pollio triumphed over the Dalmatians; s.a. 7 [ed. Helm, 170]: Tiberius brings the Dalmatians and Sarmatians back under Roman authority). The *Chronicle* also mentions Dardania but only as the ancient kingdom of the Dardani (*Eusebii praefatio* 9/10F, ss.aa. 1477, 1415, 1365 a.Chr. [ed. Helm, 12, 45b, 48b, 51b]), as well as Achaia (ss.aa. 1746, 1398, 74 a.Chr. [ed. Helm, 32b, 49b, 188]) and Thessaly (ss.aa. 1794, 1578, 1526 a.Chr. [ed. Helm, 30b, 40b, 42b]) but solely as regions/kingdoms of ancient Greece. The choronym Greece (*Graecia*) is consistently used to denote a geographical-cultural zone (7F, 9/10F, 11/12F, 17F, ss.aa. 1471, 913, 568, 377 a.Chr., 49, 105, 263 [ed. Helm, 9, 12, 15, 20b, 46b, 77b, 101b, 119, 181, 194, 220]). Crete and its inhabitants are predominantly mentioned in the contexts of mythological Greece (ss.aa. 1962–1955, 1887, 1564, 1503, 1461, 1447, 1445, 1406, 1319, 1250 a.Chr., 144, 171 [ed. Helm, 22b, 26b, 40b, 44b, 46b, 47b, 49b, 53b, 57b, 202, 206]).

25 Dyrrachium, i.e. Epidamnus is also mentioned once in a pre-Roman context (ss.aa. 627 a.Chr. [ed. Helm, 97b]).

26 On Clodius Octavianus, cf. Jones, Martindale, and Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, 637.

bishop of Siscia, *episcopus Siscianus*, is killed gloriously for Christ); Thessalonica (s.a. 323 ed. Helm, 231]: Licinius is slain at Thessalonica contrary to a solemn pledge). Among other places mentioned are an unnamed river in which Bishop Quirinus of Siscia was thrown (s.a. 308 [ed. Helm, 229]), but it is not indicated if the river was in Pannonia, and two hills, Alma and Aureus (s.a. 280 [ed. Helm, 224]), both of which are seemingly connected to Pannonia, even though it is known from other sources that the *mons Aureus* that is meant here was located in Upper Moesia (*Eutropius, Breviarium ab urbe condita* 17.2 [eds. Bleckmann, Gross, 168]; *Aurelius Victor, Historiae abbreviatae* 37.3 [eds. Groß-Albenhausen, Fuhrmann, 108]).

On Illustrious Men

Jerome's *On Illustrious Men* is practically devoid of references to Illyricum and its provinces, except for one in relation to the author himself: Jerome is called native of the *oppidum* Stridon which is said to have been once the border between Dalmatia and Pannonia and destroyed by Goths (*De viris illustribus* c. 135). Jerome also mentions Achaia (c. 44, 54) and, indirectly through the name of its inhabitants (c. 27, 28) and in adjective form (c. 30), Crete, but neither as provinces.²⁷ There is one mention of Sirmium in connection to Photinus who is said to have been ordained its bishop (c. 107), as well as two mentions of Poetovio in adjective form in relation to Bishop Victorinus (c. 18, 74). The latter deserves some attention in the context of this analysis, since Jerome seems to indicate in his letters that he identified Victorinus as his regional compatriot if that is what lies behind Jerome's labeling of Victorinus as *noster* (*Ep.* 36.16.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 283]).²⁸

Life of Hilarion

More informative is the *Life of Hilarion*, the last of Jerome's works that are scrutinized here, since one of the episodes in the saint's life is set in Dalmatia. Dalmatia is directly named only once (*Vita Hilarionis* 28.2) but is also explicitly referred to as *provincia* (28.3). Of the oikonyms mentioned are Epidaurus (28.2: *Dalmatiae oppidum*; 29.2: *oppidum*; 29.4), along with its region (29.4: *illa regio*) and municipal area (29.7: *omnis civitas*), and its inhabitants (*Epidauritani*) (29.2), as well as Saloniae, which is clearly implied in the text as an important centre (29.7). There are also two references to the Adriatic Sea

27 Greece (*Graecia*) is referred to several times but in usual sense of a geographical-cultural zone (c. 10, 19, 83).

28 Cf. also Bratož, "Girolamo e i suoi rapporti con Aquileia," 10, note 7.

(*Adria*), which both St. Hilarion and later his disciple Hesychius are said to have crossed to arrive at Sicily (25.2; 27.4).

The *Life of Hilarion* also offers what could be termed as ethnographical information, which may be indicative of Jerome's familiarity with local knowledge. He speaks of a big serpent (*draco, serpens*) that is called *boa* in the native tongue (*gentili sermone*) because it is so large that it can swallow oxen, *boves* (28.3),²⁹ and uses the word *lemb* (29.7: *in brevis lembo*) to describe a small vessel in which St. Hilarion sailed off secretly by night from Dalmatia, a type of ship usually connected with the southern Adriatic and the Illyrians.³⁰ Moreover, Jerome seems to preserve another piece of information that might be interpreted as testifying to his tapping into local knowledge, regardless of whether his depiction is primarily a literary device or not: he narrates how the inhabitants of Epidaurus were fearful about their coastal town being destroyed by roaring waves (*frementes fluctus*), heaving masses of water (*undarum moles*) and mountains of swirling billows (*montes gurgitum*), which were caused by an earthquake that is said to have befallen the whole world (*terrae motu totius orbis*) after the death of Emperor Julian II (29.1–2). Various sources attest to an earthquake that hit Palestine and adjacent regions in May 363, which had a strong impact on contemporaries who ascribed both political and religious significance to the seismic event.³¹ In Jerome's story the fear by the local population of the earthquake's devastating consequences provides another opportunity for the saint to prove his miraculous valour and solidify the victory of Christianity over the powers of chaos and destruction by stopping – with the signs of the cross in the sand – the swelling sea that rises to an unbelievable height and threatens the town. It is precisely this achievement of the saint that attracts the attention of the local population, much more than his doing away with the *boas*, which as a snake also symbolizes chaos and the chthonic forces of destruction.³² Indeed, Jerome makes this feat become part of collective memory, a story that is recounted by locals and even reaches Salonae, and which mothers teach their children to hand down to posterity (29.3–7), thus

29 Weingarten, *The Saint's Saint*, 142 believes that the phrase *gentili sermone* denotes the Greek-speaking gentiles but she does not back up her claim.

30 On *lemb*s, cf. Boršić, Džino, and Radić Rossi, *Liburnians and Illyrian Lembs*, 61–138, 173–175, 192–193.

31 On the 363 earthquake, cf. Russell, "The Earthquake of May 19, A. D. 363," 47–64; Levenson, "The Palestinian Earthquake of May 363," 60–83; Ward, "The 363 Earthquake and the End of Public Paganism in the Southern Transjordan," 132–170.

32 For the interpretation of Jerome's story of St. Hilarion's triumph over the *boa* as a victory over the local pagan cult of Cadmus, cf. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints*, 143–144.

cementing the saint's fame. Such an ending is in contrast to Jerome's remark about St. Hilarion's reason for coming to Dalmatia in the first place: the saint wanted to go to certain barbarous nations (*ad barbaras quasdam nationes*) who knew not of his name and reputation (28.1). With this remark Jerome brands the provincials of Dalmatia as barbarians, which may be seen as his criticism of their habits and practices, comparable to what he says about inhabitants of his own home region (*Ep.* 7.5 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 28]).³³

Image of Illyricum

The image of Illyricum that can be deduced based on the information from Jerome's writings analysed here is sketchy, since his treatment of Illyricum is not systematic nor is Illyricum presented as a coherent administrative or geographical entity. Be that as it may, the extracted information provides a sufficient basis for instructive insights into Jerome's mindset with regard to how he depicts as well as perceives Illyricum. To be sure, the image that emerges is not a comprehensive portrayal, that is to say, Jerome's focus is on Dalmatia, whereas other regions are only passingly touched upon. Furthermore, the representation is composite as it is constructed from different textual contexts, but which may be assumed to be connected by Jerome's own perception as an overarching framework.

In Jerome's letters Illyricum is strictly speaking presented only as one of the places where apostles were active, along with India, Rome, Crete and Achaia (cf. *Ep.* 59.5.4 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 546]). Jerome's reference to St. Paul in connection to Illyricum is taken from St. Paul's *Epistle to Romans* (15:19), to which Jerome alludes (*Ep.* 65.12.3 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 630]) as well as explicitly mentions (*Ep.* 71.1.2 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 1]). It remains an open question what St. Paul actually understands by Illyricum, but it is likely that for Jerome it denotes the Illyricum of his own time and age. This Illyricum was a geographically vast region stretching practically from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, to which Jerome only hints, but which is also what other 4th- and 5th-century Latin and Greek writers imply.³⁴ This region is depicted by Jerome as a place of long-standing insecurity and danger caused by the

33 Ciglonečki and Bobovnik, "Blue Deserts," 444 believe that the mention of "barbarous nations" refers to the pagan population of Dalmatia.

34 For the extent of Illyricum as presented in the works of 4th- and 5th-century Latin and Greek writers, cf. Gračanin, "Illyricum of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD in the works of Latin and Greek historians," 289–290.

barbarian destruction and deadly violence visited upon the local population in the late 4th and early 5th centuries.³⁵ It is a grim picture, which when one takes into account the contexts of the relevant letters serves specific purposes: consolatory (*Ep.* 60) and exhorting (*Ep.* 123).³⁶ As another illustration to the point Jerome offers the fate of his own home place Stridon: it was destroyed by Goths (*De viris illustribus* c. 135). Similarly in the *Chronicle* Illyricum and its provinces are shown as an area where civil wars, power struggles and military uprisings as well as fights with barbarians were almost an ordinary thing in the 3rd and 4th centuries, and even those who might have helped mitigate consequences of such devastating events were more keen to contribute to the general misfortune by incurring even more misery, as exemplified by the case of the Illyrian prefect Sextus Petronius Probus (*Chronicon* s.a. 372).³⁷ What, however, can also be surmised from this image of Illyricum is its importance. This is further supported by Jerome's concern to note that the Illyrian provinces were where emperors hailed from as well as died, which may arguably be also interpreted as obliquely indicating a certain amount of Jerome's pride about his home region.

As has been pointed out, Dalmatia is given the most attention, which is to be expected since it was Jerome's home province. The image of Dalmatia that can be derived from what Jerome says is ambivalent. On the one hand, Dalmatia is portrayed as a land with islands that offer ideal conditions for an eremitic life of solitude and where holy men dwell (*Ep.* 3.4.2–4; *Ep.* 7.3.1; *Ep.* 60.10.2; *Ep.* 105.1.2; *Ep.* 118.5.6) as well as a country where saints come to perform their miraculous deeds (*Vita Hilarionis* 28.2–4; 29.1–4). On the other hand, Dalmatia is also depicted as a province exposed to barbarian attacks (*Ep.* 66.14.2; *De viris illustribus* c. 135), a country of uneducated peasants where people are only in pursuit of material gain and earthly pleasures (*Ep.* 7.5), which makes them a barbarous folk who care so little for the spiritual and godly that are ignorant of a saint of world fame (*Vita Hilarionis* 28.1–2) and are menaced by a monstrous creature of apparently demonic nature (*Vita Hilarionis* 28.3).

Pannonia, too, is accorded a prominent place. The image of Illyricum as a region of conflict, barbarian incursions and civil strife as well as a region from where important emperors came is largely based on what is said about

35 Cf. also Bratož, "Girolamo e i suoi rapporti con Aquileia," 26–27.

36 For the classification of the letters, cf. Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 212, 215.

37 On Sextus Petronius Probus and his administration of Illyricum, cf. Seyfarth, "Sextus Petronius Probus," 411–425; McCoy, "Corruption in the Western Empire: the Career of Sextus Petronius Probus," 101–106; Kovács, "Petronius Probus és Illyricum," 140–160.

Pannonia. A particularly bleak picture of Pannonia is painted in Jerome's accounts of contemporary conditions: after the Pannonian provinces are ravaged by barbarians the regular consuls remain in their office (*Chronicon* s.a. 375), which is a comment that creates an additional impression of grave and extraordinary circumstances. Furthermore, Emperor Valentinian I dies before he is able to strike back at the enemy and is soon followed by his brother Valens who perishes while fighting another barbarian group (*Ep.* 60.15.3). This triggers a period of protracted sufferings for the Roman population of the broader region (*Ep.* 60.16.2–4; *Ep.* 123.16.1), even to the point that the Romans of Pannonia seem to have had no choice but become Roman enemies by joining the barbarians in their onslaught against the Roman cities of Gaul, a deplorable development as Jerome explicitly remarks (*Ep.* 123.15.2: *o lugenda res publica*). Such an image is a far cry from the situation a century earlier when the Pannonians are said to have been allowed to grow vineyards (*Chronicon* s.a. 280), which invokes a sense of peace and incipient prosperity.

A note on Jerome's sources of information

When it comes to Jerome's depiction of contemporary events and circumstances in Illyricum and its provinces, as well as offering details on the situation in his own home region it is worthwhile to discuss his sources of information. To be sure, much of what he provides in his narratives might have derived from common knowledge or been a result of a literary convention or even invention. Some material might be based on his acquaintance with local myths or stories, such as the elements of the legend about St. Hilarion combating the giant serpent, which seems to have been connected to the cult of Cadmus.³⁸ Other material might have come from Jerome's personal experience or recollections, such as his comments about the way people of his home region live. The material on contemporary events, which he included in his *Chronicle*, is more or less dependent on various written accounts, especially since much of what Jerome reports can be found in other historical works.

However, some of the information that is concerned with the contemporary Illyricum, and especially with Jerome's own home country, must have been acquired by him indirectly, through personal channels, at some later date as he had left Stridon and Dalmatia for good in the early 360s.³⁹ Jerome

38 Cf. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saint*, 143–144.

39 Cf. Rebenich, *Jerome*, 3; with Bratož, "Girolamo e i suoi rapporti con Aquileia," 23–24,

mentions in his letters several people who might have provided him with recent news on the situation in Dalmatia as well as in the broader region. In 370s he was in contact with his maternal aunt Castorina even though his letter to her alludes to a somewhat disturbed relationship (*Ep.* 13 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 42–44]). Around that time Julian, the deacon of Aquileia, informed Jerome about Jerome's sister (*Ep.* 6.2.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 25]). Jerome's brother visited their hometown when he was sent to effect the sale of their estate (*Ep.* 66.14.2; *Ep.* 81.2). Jerome also sent at least one letter to a Dalmatian landowner named Julian (*Ep.* 118). The letter is said to have been dictated hastily (*velociter*) and with it Jerome has broken his long silence towards Julian (*longum ad te silentium rumpo*) (*Ep.* 118.1.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. II, 435]), which is an indication that they weren't much in contact. As is noted in the letter, it was carried by Julian's brother Ausonius who briefly visited Jerome.⁴⁰ Therefore it may be inferred that Jerome could also acquire additional first-hand information on local and provincial as well as regional affairs from the people with whom he corresponded – presumably a conspicuous place among them had the clerics from Aquileia⁴¹ – or who paid him visits in his distant abode.

Concluding remarks

Even though Illyricum and its provinces are accorded only sporadic attention in Jerome's narratives, and thus the image constructed based on available information is fragmentary, it is nevertheless not unfounded to claim that Jerome seems to be both interested in and informed about the general situation in late antique Illyricum. True, he is quite vague about what he understands by Illyricum and never ventures to even hint at its precise administrative extent, although it may be assumed that, same as other 4th- and 5th-century writers, he saw Illyricum as the spacious territory stretching between the Black Sea and the Julian Alps, which he mentions twice in his letters. Once, however, he differentiates in his *Chronicle* between Illyricum and Macedonia in the context of the late 3rd century. That he wasn't utterly indifferent to administrative matters

40 In the letter to Castricianus, Jerome says that he was informed about Castricianus's unfinished journey to visit him by one Heraclius the deacon (*Ep.* 68.1.1 [ed. Hilberg, vol. I, 675]), but Heraclius is likely to have come from Thrace, if the more probable assumption that the Cissa which Castricianus reached was the Thracian Cissa, i.e. Cressa (cf. here note 15) is accepted, and therefore could not have served as Jerome's informant about developments in Dalmatia and western Illyricum.

41 About Jerome's Acquileian circle, cf. Rebenich, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis*, 44–46, 48–49.

is shown, apart from his mention of the Illyrian prefect and his tax management, by his indication that his hometown was once the border between Dalmatia and Pannonia.

What Jerome has to say about Illyricum and its provinces gives an impression of an area frequently plagued by civil wars and barbarian devastations, a region of instability and crisis, especially in the 4th century. This is in a stark contrast with the portrayal of Illyricum in the more distant past, where it is referred to as an area of apostolic missionary activities, as well as from the image that Jerome paints of the insular Dalmatia, which is represented as place of eremitic peace and where the only disturbance is created by the might of the sea and not by clashing armies, barbarian attacks or base human pursuits. In terms of Jerome's narrative strategies, it may perhaps be argued that he gives a special place to Illyricum as a striking, vivid example of all the uncertainties and perils of living in the late Roman Empire as a result of both external and internal threats and hardships, which could serve as a poignant admonishment to change one's ways, abandon worldly pursuits and turn oneself over to God.

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Rezime

Slika Ilirika u Jeronimovim djelima

U radu se nastoje predstaviti i istražiti svjedočanstva o Iliriku iz odabranih Jeronimovih djela. Težište je ponajprije na njegovim brojnim pismima, ali se u obzir uzimaju i njegova *Kronika* te dva druga djela (*O znamenitim muževima*, *Život Hilarionov*). Svrha ove studije preliminarnoga karaktera jest dvojaka: pomno ispitati vrste informacija vezanih uz Ilirik koje Jeronima posebno zanimaju te provesti tekstualnu analizu građe kako bi se dobio uvid u kontekste u kojima se Ilirik spominje. Opći cilj je ispitati sliku Ilirika koju Jeronim stvara i pokušati razlučiti njegove percipirane namjere u konstruiranju slike kakva je predočena, koliko god ona bila fragmentarna.

Iako Iliriku i njegovim provincijama Jeronim u svojim spisma pridaje tek sporadičnu pozornost, pa je slika izgrađena na temelju dostupnih podataka fragmentarna, ipak nije neutemeljeno ustvrditi kako se čini da Jeronima zanima kasnoantički Ilirik i da je upućen u opću situaciju na tom području. Istina, prilično je neodređen u vezi s time što podrazumijeva pod Ilirikom ne odvažujući se niti naznačiti njegov točan upravni opseg, premda se može pretpostaviti da je, kao i drugi pisci iz 4. i 5. stoljeća, Ilirik doživljavao kao prostrano područje između Crnog mora i Julijskih Alpa, koje u svojim pismima dvaput spominje. Jedanput pak u svojoj *Kronici* pravi razliku između Ilirika i Makedonije u kontekstu kraja 3. stoljeća. Da nije bio posve ravnodušan prema administrativnim pitanjima, pokazuje to što je, uz spominjanje iliričkog prefekta i njegove porezne uprave, naznačio da je njegov rodni grad nekoć tvorio granicu između Dalmacije i Panonije.

To što Jeronim kaže o Iliriku i njegovim provincijama stvara dojam da je to bilo područje koje su često pogađali građanski ratovi, barbarske provale i pustošenja, regija prožeta nestabilnošću i krizom, osobito u 4. stoljeću. To je u oštroj suprotnosti s prikazom Ilirika u daljoj prošlosti, kada je on oblast u kojoj misionare apostoli, kao i s Jeronimovom slikom dalmatinskih otoka koji su predočeni kao mjesto pustinjačkoga spokoja, gdje jedini poremećaj stvara snaga mora, a ne sraz vojski, barbarski napadi ili prizemna ljudska htijenja. Možda se može ustvrditi da Jeronim u sklopu svoje narativne strategije Iliriku daje posebno mjesto kao upečatljivom, živopisnom primjeru svih neizvjesnosti i opasnosti života u kasnome Rimskom Carstvu uslijed vanjskih i unutarnjih prijetnji i poteškoća, a s mogućom svrhom da bude oštra opomena kako čovjeku valja promijeniti svoje navade, ostaviti se svjetovnih težnji i predati se Bogu.