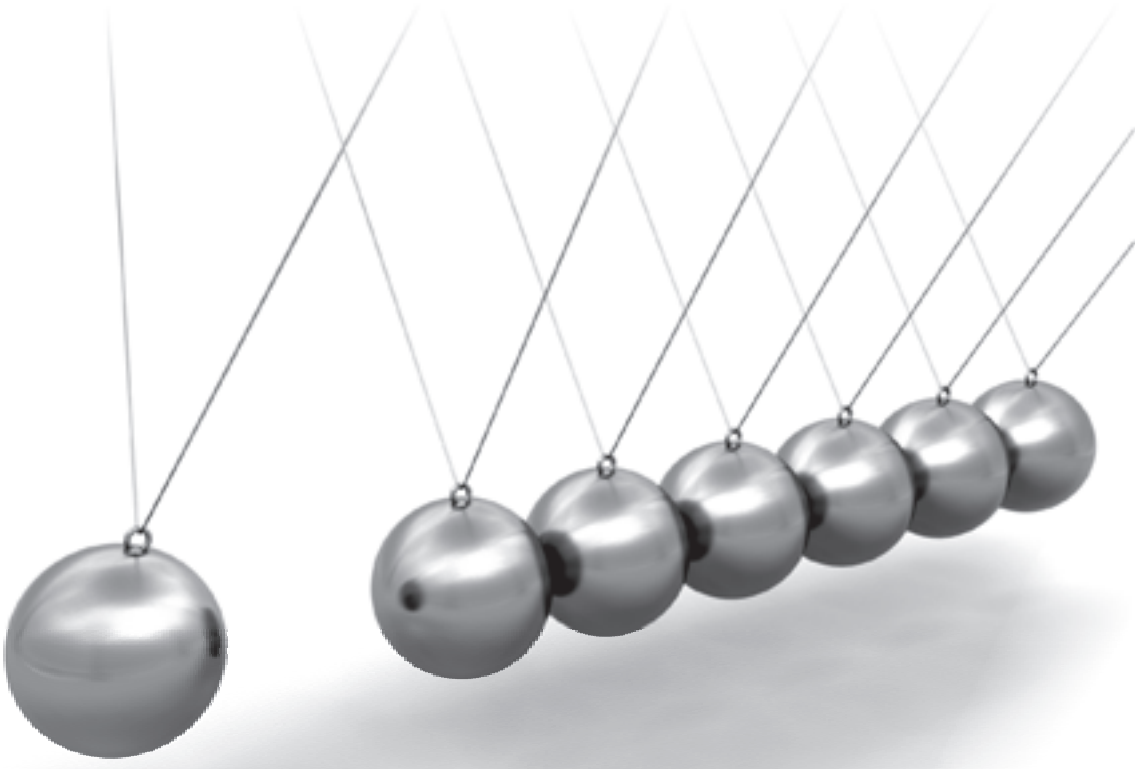
HUMANS AND SOCIETY IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Death, Illness, Body and Soul in Written and Visual Culture in Byzantium and Late Medieval Balkans

Edited by Vlada Stanković



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UNDERSTANDING DEATH AND AFTERLIFE, BYZANTIUM AND SERBIA

Vlada Stanković*

INTRODUCTION TO THE VOLUME

DEATH IN BYZANTIUM. REFLECTING ON THE BYZANTINE CONCEPT OF DEATH AND ITS PLACE IN THE MENTALITY AND IDENTITY OF THE BYZANTINES**

Abstract: The Byzantines, although always ready to engage in disputes over both existential and somewhat petty issues, have rarely openly spoken about the more serious, darker sides of human existence. Death was one of those topics whose simple naming was considered unlucky throughout the Byzantine millennium, but completely in accordance with the Byzantines' pragmatic and realistic attitude toward life, death as a phenomenon was understood as maybe unpleasant but rather natural part of human life. In the mixture of deep Christian hope of eternal salvation of the soul, learned examples from the ancient, pre-Christian works, and the facts of life from their immediate surroundings, the Byzantines have tried to avoid the direct discussions, even thoughts about death, confronting the inevitability of the end of the earthly life with the awareness that they did whatever they could as an individual in this world and can therefore expect a fair judgment in the next.

Keywords: Death, Byzantium, mentality, identity, Christianity, afterlife, individualism

Certain vital elements of Byzantine civilization, as the longest lasting European state, have, for various reasons, remained far from the eyes of

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its scholars, at times raising more attention and interest among the non-academic amateurs, interested precisely in the very essence of the Byzantine being and, by their nature, far less observant of the exigencies of contemporary science. The term Byzantine civilization is itself laden with the problem which also characterizes its constituent parts: how do we define, understand, interpret or represent the *civilization* of a state which lasted for over a thousand years? And is it possible to find enough common traits shared by a fourth-century Roman, one from the time of the founding of the new capital on the Bosporus, and a *Roman* from the tenth, eleventh or fifteenth century, to justify their study at the same time or their casting into the same scholarly frame?

Just like the essence of the civilization we call Byzantine, the answers to the above-stated and other questions are likewise ambivalent, insufficiently defined, at times contradictory, often comprising of opposite views and opinions. The study of phenomena of one such long lasting state infers the danger of losing sight of the specificities of given periods, centuries or decades, of blurring the contours of historical perspective which can thus become practically indistinct, thus causing the phenomena characterizing certain aspects of Byzantine civilization to be slightly or fully dislocated from their historical context. The lack or insufficiency of available historical sources, a permanent problematic issue in medieval studies, is painfully specific in the case of Byzantium: political – and even more sadly – social and intellectual history of the only literary society of medieval Europe, at least until the very end of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the West, is necessarily reconstructed and analyzed based on a small portion of its literary tradition, part of which had already perished after the Latin, Crusader destruction of the Empire in 1204, while the Ottoman conquest of the Empire in the fifteenth century left the *written memory* of the Byzantines more than decimated. Sources from different, incomparable eras are, thus, too often and insufficiently critically employed as indicators of certain views or traits of the Byzantines, although the data contained therein, other than a mere lexical or topic similarity, have nothing in common, nothing that would justify their use and comparison in such a manner.

Additional trouble to the scholars of *civilization* of the Byzantine Empire is brought on by a well-known characteristic of the Byzantines, one which Paul Lemerle, one of the leading Byzantine scholars of the twentieth century, had so astutely and precisely called a *Byzantine trap*: the Byzantine ideal was for things to remain unchanged so that the es-

tablished world order would be preserved, at least ideologically and in theory, if not in the realities of their fast-changing world (Lemerle, 1977, p. 251). The learned Byzantine authors projected that specific attitude – which could be defined as illusionistic – onto the manner in which they describe contemporary events, always seeking in them the reflections of previous historical circumstances and phenomena. At a certain level, the Byzantines refused to admit to changes even when they had become a regular fixture of their reality, holding on for very long to the ideal and illusion of immutability, even if only in the stratum of wording and phrasing, thus managing to convince many subsequent inquirers – who were fully unaware of having fallen into the Byzantine trap – of the uniformity, immutability, and lackluster qualities of Byzantine reality and Byzantine life.

The astute among the researchers of Byzantine history have long since realized that the truth is precisely the opposite of all those intended notions, and that the Byzantine civilization was all about change and turbulence, resembling the steady flow of an immense river, in constant motion and reshaping both itself and its surroundings, yet always preserving the same basic elements from the beginning to the very end. Over the past decades, scholars of Byzantium have adopted this view as topical. Still, no matter how often it has been restated, it has not yet essentially and fully been incorporated into the scientific foundations of studying Byzantine society. Therefore, it appears that the best way to overcome a certain superficiality in the academic approach is to adopt a double, parallel standpoint in the study of Byzantine life and civilization, and, thus, also of the primary topic of this historical reflection, the problem of *death in Byzantium*:

- on the one hand, one must observe the broader social framework of the emergence of given phenomena, in an attempt to grasp the viewpoints and circumstance of the lives of the Byzantines of a certain epoch, in order to establish their place and significance in the process of creating a Byzantine identity and the characteristic features of a Byzantine worldview.
- the other part of such a complex methodological approach is related to specific and concrete focus on a given set of historical facts and their alignment and contextualization within a certain and well defined historical framework as well as a detailed and multilateral analysis of all source, which is the sole precondition for their correct interpretation and evaluation.

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Byzantine attitudes toward death were just as changeable as were the social conditions in which *the Byzantine* lived, from the first, Constantinian epoch to the time of division of Empire and the separation of the East into a specific, different state, up until its final fall and the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453. If one can speak at all of such a subject as an ordinary, common Byzantine, harmoniously connected to both his social as well as geographical setting, a review of Byzantine attitudes towards death could, albeit somewhat schematically, be demonstrated through a set of examples from different epochs, the choice of which is largely conditioned by the most important contemporaneous events and sources preserved from those times, while taking into consideration at the same time the broader spectrum of social values and stances of certain epochs.[1]

The Byzantine of the early period

From the time when Constantine built and consecrated the New Rome on the Bosporus in 330 up until the great Arab invasions of the seventh century, a Byzantine man was a man constantly imbued with a plethora of the most variegated influences, yet, and in practically every aspect – apart from Christianity, a part of the world of antiquity. The heterogeneous nature of this early Byzantine period was obvious in every segment of life, from the vast geographic expanse of the Empire to the multitude of religious traditions that were the heirloom of its different parts. The broad space stretching from north Africa over the Levant and Asia Minor to Crimea and further westward over the Balkans was inevitably the cause of great variety which manifested itself in a number of specific, local spiritual micro-evolutions which were of general, all-Byzantine relevance in just a few, most impactful cases. An entirely specific trait of this period is provided by the fact that the Empire had one single political, imperial capital – Constantinople – but also a number of centers of religious and ecclesiastic life, from Alexandria in Egypt, through different cities in the Levant,

1 Owing to the complexity of the problems presented her, and issues pertaining to the amount and the quality of the available sources and the thorny task of their analysis, the phenomena of death in Byzantium and the Byzantine world, and the Byzantine perceptions and ideas of death are still poorly researched in scholarship. The main study on Byzantine attitudes on the otherworldly still remains Beck, 1979; with the data accumulated in Κουκουλές, 1951 (pp. 148–317), offering a solid basis for further research. Worth noting are also contributions by Радић (2000, pp. 153–180), Dennis (2001), while the recently published Chitwood (2021), only touches this complex set of topics.

and the Holy City of Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria, which occupied the most prominent position in the fourth century, as the center which was to tie together the pagan past with the ever more dominant Christian faith, by setting the new – medieval, i.e. Byzantine foundations of the new faith based on the teachings of three students of pagan antiquity, the three great Cappadocian fathers of the church, Basil the Great, Gregory of Naziansus and Gregory of Nyssa.

In assessing Byzantium as a phenomenon, three elements come undeniably to the fore as essential traits of its civilization, as indispensable in perceiving Byzantine culture and Byzantine *being*: Christian faith, the wholeness of the Roman identity, not only of the empire's state and legal system, and ancient Greek, i.e. Hellenistic cultural heritage. It is precisely through the intertwining and correspondence of these three elements that its parts, different in both the sense of territory and religious practice, were able to unite and come full circle in the creation of the wealth of medieval Byzantium. It was precisely this unity which made Byzantium stand out from the other states of its time. Each of the three elements of Byzantine culture played a significant role in shaping the ways in which the Byzantines regarded and pondered death. All three elements reflected on the rituals and practices surrounding death, as well as on the understandings of the Byzantines of life and the human condition and fate in general.

The Christian faith, deeply ingrained in the foundation of the Byzantine being, brought about a complete novelty in the Byzantine perception of life and death, breathing into the depressive world of Late Antiquity some highly desired hope and a spirit of optimism through the promise of a blissful everlasting life which was to replace the fleeting, ever more burdensome and pointless earthly existence. The *good news* of the new, young faith for the people of the late antiquity were contained primarily in the proclaimed victory over death which marked the end of finality of life, thus offering a new foundation to human life and its goal. The sermons of the apostle Paul, which forever remained the model of religious rhetoric in the Byzantine world, were imbued with two *crucial*, intertwined ideas that became the basis of the Christian faith in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire: love and death. In the philosophy and theology of the apostle Paul the death is conquered, actually replaces by the new Christian *love* (ἀγάπη), which, unlike erotic love, is free from passion.[2] The victory over

2 Especially evident in Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Byzantine studies are still lagging far behind the studies of the Late Antiquity in the western parts of the previously united Roman empire, half-a-century after Peter Brown had revolutionized this field. A recent Peter Brown's master-piece (2012) on the social, financial, and political aspects of the making of Christianity in the West demonstrates how much work is still needed in Byzantine studies, regarding approach, methodology and understanding of the Byzantine empire and the broader Byzantine world.

death which fueled the Christian faith, its strength and ascendency over all other rival religions, was attested by the willing sacrifice of Christ, motivated by the God's love of humankind. Fear of death, and the unknown in general, was annulled by a strong testimony of Divine love as a model to be emulated in the quest after eternal bliss, in an argumentation based on a cry for a moral and honest life, in response and reaction to the state of affairs and the spirit of the times as well as to the vast number and intermingling of all other and different religious practices and teachings. Although apparently contradictory to the above, it was precisely Christianity's insistence on the afterlife, on the promise of its certainty, even if only for the chosen (i.e. the Christians), that spoke of the obsession with death that haunted people in Late Antiquity, forcing them to seek an egress from the limits and finality of this life in a plethora of different religions many of which had originated in the East, which had always been more inclined towards mysticism. The presence of death in the thoughts and fears of the people of the Late Antiquity was obvious, too, in the obsession of the rulers, that is in their need to secure *immortality*, which found its Byzantine expression in the case of Constantine whose Christianization of the Empire earned him the highest place among the Christian saints, the blessed and the immortal, and a rank equal to the apostles.

That initial, optimistic venture of the young Christian faith was, nonetheless, just one of the segments of the entirety of new morality brought about and preached by Christianity. The other half of Christian concepts of death, which arose in Early Byzantine times in the days when Christianity was still not the exclusive, the only permitted religion, constituted of the teachings of one of the great Cappadocian church fathers of the fourth century, Basil the Great. This theologian, educated like his contemporaries in pagan schools by the great philosopher Libanius, introduced moral restrictions and a rigor to Christian teaching on salvation and death which had, opposite to the Levantine optimism of salvation and everlasting life proclaimed by the apostle Paul, formed the strict and rigid sternness of the Cappadocian province, thus conditioning the expected eternal bliss by an *absolute* lack of sin and immaculate conduct which saw even the smallest of sins and disregard of God's commandments as equal to the mortal sins for which there was no remedy and forgiveness. The views of Basil the Great brought about a painful awakening from the somewhat idyllic Early Christian concepts, heralding and symbolizing in the very person of this great father of the church, man of letters and theologian, a shift from the urban – learned – to a gradually dominating provincial culture of austerity and relentlessness over the spirit of tolerance and diversity. In comparison with the urban centers, the provinces of the times, from the point of view of the Christians and especially from the point of view of

church hierarchy, donned the image of purity and idyllic innocence and became the refuge of all seeking salvation from sinfulness of *civilization*, epitomized by the, in Byzantium, still highly populated cities. A trend of contempt for, and retreat from civilization which can be identified in the works of the three Cappadocian church fathers, was reflected in the gradual, yet steady and quick growth of monastic communities which rose out of the deserts of Egypt and the Sinai, to the organization of which Basil the Great had considerably contributed by the monastic rules he authored. A polarization between the city and the province, between the laymen–including the priests–, and the monks, which lasted practically throughout the history of Byzantium, found an important expression in the spiritual idealism of the fourth century, primarily that of Basil the Great and later also of the somewhat younger John Chrysostomos. The ultimate expression and final evolution of this trend is to be found in the centuries to come in the appearance (and "institution") of *holy fools* in Christ whose aberrant behavior and the celebration of whose cults reflected a resistance and a withdrawal from civilization.

The measure of outreach of the teachings of Basil the Great and their impact on the Byzantines of his age cannot be fully assessed. His reputation and influence in the generations to come became so huge that his message spread far outside the borders of Cappadocia and Asia Minor, especially in the Byzantine church, but in the West, as well, which conveyed them further on. His message introduced a certain disquieting thought into the souls of the faithful in those days, those which had been left practically without any hope in ultimate salvation: how was one to live in a world full of sin, and yet to gain salvation, when even the least transgression of church commandments brought on eternal punishment? How was it possible to live and not to sin, and what, then, was the meaning of life? Escaping the world and a life in monasticism was the only answer that Basil the Great could offer, but it was neither enough, nor feasible, for all those who feared death and were concerned with the fate of their souls after death. Basil's teaching exerted an undeniable influence on a considerable growth of monasticism in the subsequent centuries. As opposed to Basil, adherents of ways of the desert were ever less well educated and observed the learned ways of antiquity as a form of afterlife of paganism. This growth of the power and scope of monastic life was to reach its zenith in the period right before the outbreak of the contest over the veneration of icons at the beginning of the eight century, deepening at the same time the rift between the strict ascetics and the persistent laymen, who were disdainful of the simplicity, and its ideal among the monks, and who upheld their view that illiteracy and poverty were no warrants of salvation.

The rigorous stance of the great Cappadocian church father pointed out the more profound concepts of relations between good and evil, virtue and vice and concepts of faith in general in Asia Minor and on the territory which lay to the east of that region. The dualism of good versus evil, transferred to the irreconcilable opposition between the spiritual and the material, remained for centuries at the core of the faith of people in the eastern provinces. In their fight for the purity of faith, the way they saw it, and despite all attempts of the central administration to force them into orthodoxy, they were steadfast in denying any form of material manifestation of religious feelings, thus also in rejecting the church and its terrestrial organization.

The interaction of ancient religions and "young" Christianity in the first centuries after the founding of the new capital in the East implied also a co-existence of different concepts and customs, a great diversity of languages and cultural traditions the centers of which remained in the ancient cities, distributed quite evenly throughout the entire vast territory of the Empire. The adoption and integration on the part of Christianity of the teachings of antiquity and Hellenism left an ever decreasing space for the expression of the world-views, philosophical contemplations on death and the fate of humankind, or the point of human life in general of all adherents of polytheism. Their philosophy was reduced to reflections of already articulated ideas, in particular those which, like the Hellenistic variations of stoicism and epicureanism, had at their core – just like Christianity – the relationship between life and death. It was precisely the novelty of the Christian faith – its revolutionary qualities – which brought about its ultimate victory over the other religions of salvation. It is, therefore, not surprising that it found its most steadfast anchor precisely in the *new* regions of the Byzantine Empire, the capital itself and the provinces which had, as is the case of Cappadocia in the center of Asia Minor, never been the home of ancient centers of learning in antiquity in which the pre-Christian traditions remained far too resilient to allow the new faith (too simple at that, from the point of view of ancient philosophy) to be fully espoused. The strength of local traditions, i.e. of the local schools, is most clearly discerned in the case of Antioch and Alexandria, the two ancient rivals in philosophy who had only Christianized their philosophical disputes and yet remained loyal to the teachings of their predecessors and the traditions of their own schools, producing, through their differences, the greatest disputes within the arms of the Christian church of the fourth and fifth centuries.

Regardless of the fact that it could not, in all truthfulness, fall back on an apostolic tradition which had been the heirloom of eastern patriarchal sees as well as Rome, Constantinople had already by the end of the fourth

century become the undoubted and actual leader of the *Christian* world. Following the Arab conquests in the East and the loss of vast territories, in the seventh century, it remained as the sole and lone spiritual center of the Byzantine world. In itself, this did not in any way imply that the other regions of the still quite spacious Empire had lost all influence on the spiritual life of the Byzantines and thus, also, on their concepts and assessment of death. What it did mean is that the political and cultural power of attraction of the capital thwarted the development of any powerful rival urban center. The differences had now for centuries been manifesting in somewhat diverse ways: facing Constantinople as the political, cultural and educational center with a number of schools in which classical learning upheld the central position, stood the provinces – above all those in the East, Asia Minor with its many local peculiarities – with their specific traditions, world-views, manners of weaving familial networks and waging wars over issues of supremacy in their own milieus which were often actually feats of resistance aimed against an utter, unifying dominance of the capital.

The centripetal power of Constantinople was immense and it manifested itself in both the presence of the Emperor in his city and a number of legends which further solidified the reputation of the capital. The imperial mausoleum, the church of the Holy Apostles, built by the founder of the City, Constantine the Great, represented a particular testimony, filled with deep symbolic meaning, of the particular nature of Christian emperors and their place among the immortal and in the ranks of the apostles. Constantine had envisaged his final resting place in precisely such a manner: deposited in a monumental porphyry sarcophagus, the emperor's body was laid to rest in his mausoleum in the church of the Holy Apostles surrounded by twelve empty sarcophagi which symbolized the tombs of the twelve apostles and attested, indisputably, the *equal-to-apostles* (ἰσαπόστολος) nature of the emperor, his equality with the apostles. Following the model set by Constantine, Byzantine emperors chose his mausoleum in the Holy Apostles as the resting place of their own sarcophagi to the very last possible availability of physical space. Even after the mausoleum had been filled, individual emperors, in their desire to point out their legitimacy and justify their possession of the imperial crown (like Basil I, 867–886), reopened Constantine's mausoleum, thus emphasizing their ideological links with the first Christian emperor and emulation of his virtues.

As opposed to the emperors, the citizens of Constantinople were buried – *interred* – in the ground outside the city walls, as was the custom earlier in Rome, until the fifth century and the raising of the Theodosian walls whereby the territory of the capital was practically doubled in size and some of the cemeteries remained in their original locations, between the old Constantinian and the new Theodosian city walls. As a reflection of the actual

relations in society, in the Early Byzantine period the business of burials (at least in the well documented case of the capital of the empire) was in the hands of the state and its all-powerful, centralized bureaucracy. Employees of that apparatus were in charge of ordinary state funerals of the citizens who were not wealthy enough to build tombs for themselves and their progeny – which remained a privilege of the most powerful members of the imperial family and the closest circle around the emperor himself. Through its bureaucratic apparatus, the state controlled the burials up until the power of its mechanism dwindled in the seventh and eight centuries, in times of crisis which witnessed the final shift from a Roman establishment, epitomized also by the use of Latin in state administration, towards a medieval empire. The final abandonment of the pan-Roman idea of empire following Justinian's unsuccessful attempt at it restoration in the sixth century, implied a change of direction towards the east and the eastern part of the state's own tradition and heritage. From that point on, till the final loss of Asia Minor in the fourteenth century, influences from the eastern part of "true" Byzantium always remained strong and would, sooner or later, take over both the capital and the European part of the Empire. Most often, mystical teachings had their bases in the east, sharing a common source with the development and spread of monasticism which was quite widespread in Asia Minor already at the time of the outbreak of the contest over the issue of veneration of icons in the early eighth century.

The rise of influence of the Christian church in the centuries of the onset of the Byzantine medieval period, was also epitomized by the fact that the business of burials and pertaining posthumous rites had changed hands from state administration to that of the church and its hierarchy. Although Byzantium had never become anything similar to a clerical state, maintaining at all times its dominantly secular character, the transition from the Early Byzantine to the Middle Byzantine Empire above all over the course of the greater part of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century – at a time when the swift Arab conquests shook the Byzantine image of the world and order and brought on an inevitable turning towards faith (and superstitions), mystical and eschatological teachings – was marked by a considerable growth of the power of the church. The Iconoclast controversy, which is essentially a response of imperial authority to a rise of the influence of the church and faith in general that brought on a decrease or fragmentation of imperial power, set up a balance between the two poles of authority for a long time to come with one looking towards the other by the very nature of their existence, with a clear factual, although not always explicit, supremacy of secular power.

In the Christianized Empire, the threat of death – implying a death without honor that left no doubt as to whether the soul of the deceased would end up in hell – became a strong instrument of propaganda in

the battle for the souls of the different fractions and currents within the church. At a time when hagiographical texts with their instructive exempla from the lives of the saints had not yet gained the significance they would attain from the eighth century on, and a time when most of the saints still came from the era of great persecution prior to the establishment of Constantine's Christian empire, the example and symbolism of the terrible death of the arch-heretic Arius was a best possible demonstration of instrumentalization of death. In the story of the death of Arius, light was cast more on the physical, visible horrors rather than on metaphysical problems, like the fate of the soul and its journey after death, which were also tormenting the young Christian faith, resulting, among other things, in the creation of the cult of the Virgin as a mediatrix between mortals and Christ. The death of Arius was *disgraceful* as was his entire heretical influence: walking down the center of Constantinople, with an intention to justify his teachings before the emperor Constantine himself, Arius felt a strong pain in his stomach and went into a nearby public bath house on the forum of Constantine. Instead of expected relief, Arius was terrified to see his entire bowels come out of his body whereupon he soon met a horrible death while watching his own intestines and internal organs. This legendary narrative, penned down by Sokrates from Constantinople who continued Eusebius's Church History at the beginning of the fifth century, is nevertheless a very early represantation of an exemplary, *ideal* death of a sinner and a heretic. Arius's death fed for a millennium, in a somewhat morbid way, the imagination of the Byzantines who were particularly inclined towards similar extreme, or borderline cases of social conduct. Arius's legendary death took place in the center of Constantinople itself, on its main street and a in a place which was well known to every inhabitant of the capital, thus only gaining in significance, especially in view of the fact that the public bath in question stood on that very location until the fall of Byzantine Constantinople, only to be replace by a hammam in Ottoman Istanbul.

The Byzantine of the Middle Byzantine period, seventh – twelfth centuries

In the legend recounting the death of Arius, as is also the case with other, somewhat fairytale examples, we notice the specific traits of a Byzantine view of death that will remain deeply ingrained in the Byzantine mentality and even outlive the fall of the Empire, thus remaining a characteristic cultural heritage of the entire historical Byzantine space: one's fear of death was overcome by a somewhat artificial and exaggerated, yet seeming openness and public acceptance of finality of human life. Instead

of an honest – truthful above all to oneself – confrontation with death, as with any other *life* problem for that matter, the Byzantine was more inclined towards superficial mockery of problems and of those who could not find their way out of them, siding publicly with the views of the majority, while keeping his own fears and misgivings locked deep inside, feeling, perhaps, that by showing them in public he would be branded as a weakling, a looser, or an opponent of general notions, which often had a political aspect to it, too – leading towards social isolation – and would, thus, become increasingly dangerous.

Threats of a terrible death from the Early Byzantine period, like that of Arius, was replaced during the course of, and following the end of the Iconoclast controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries by positive examples of those fallen for the true faith: Iconoclasm gave to the church and to monasticism (the two were never synonymous in Byzantium) a new force by marking a *new great era of holiness and martyrdom*, the greatest after the great persecutions of the pagan emperors of the third century. New martyrs, persecuted and martyred for the true faith, brought new hope to the somewhat skeptical Christians that holiness – that is the salvation which it symbolized – was possible and attainable even in contemporary (*modern*) times, and, moreover, not only for the strictest of the *anachoretes*, as proclaimed by Basil the Great, but to many, or even to all who kept the true faith in their hearts.

During the seventh and the eight century, the two so-called dark centuries of Byzantine history, Byzantium became a veritable medieval state. On the one hand, it was reduced by Arab invasions and the loss of its last strongholds in the west, except for those in the south of Italy and on Sicily, to its Balkan lands and a part of Asia Minor. On the other, this resulted in an increased internal cohesion of the state whereby the centralism of Constantinople became irrefutable and the dominance of the Greek language complete. Another mode of transition of the late Roman into a "true" Byzantine state, is detected in the decline of cities and the growth in impact of the provinces: although Byzantium, mostly on account of Constantinople, as well as Thessaloniki and numerous cities of Asia Minor, never turned into a rural society, the province with its ideals, concepts and actual differences from the cities takes special place in the spiritual history of Byzantium, as the fundamental counterpoint to the capital and the cities, once there were no longer any rival urban centers within Byzantine borders.

In the Middle Byzantine period (and in particular from the eighth to the eleventh century) the province bore a double significance by manifesting both a conscious resistance to Constantinople and its political and spiritual supremacy, as well as a social evolution, given the fact that the main instigators of changes, the bearers of new societal values and the

new elite in the true sense of the word, came from the great, wealthy eastern families who, in those days, took turns at establishing their dominance over the entire Empire. From the time of the large scale Iconoclast clash in the eighth century, Constantinople was often seen as the source of evil and heresy, because it was from the capital that the emperors moved and led their great battle against those who venerated icons and later against monasticism, too. Even more, Constantinople became the new center of martyrdom for the true faith, because the capital witnessed the martyrdom of the leaders in the choirs of the new saints: Stephen the Younger in the eighth and Michael the Synkellos in the ninth century. The death of Stephen the Younger was particularly important and influential in the subsequent decades: he was stoned in the center of Constantinople by order of the emperor himself – the iconoclast Constantine V, but even more importantly, firstly by a personal choice of the new saint himself. Stephen refused to relinquish his own convictions and *chose death*, fully aware that by so doing he would succeed in being victorious over the emperor.

This sort of *willing death* became the key concept of the fight against imperial willfulness and heresy, the foundation of an ideological supremacy of orthodox iconophiles, as well as of all those who, for any given reason, stood up to imperial power and the almighty state bureaucracy. Once fear of death had been overcome – with the new saints demonstrating by virtue of their own example that death was triumphant for it was a gateway to eternal bliss – the fear of earthly punishment had also vanished for it, too, produced, in a manner of speaking, confirmation of the righteousness of one's convictions. In Byzantium, the eighth and ninth centuries represented a time of *new power of death*, an era which saw a reassessment of the concept of death and its formulation on new grounds, not as much in a philosophical-theological sense but rather in a political context. This dimension of death, its political significance, was particularly impactful in the course of evolution of Byzantine concepts of death, i.e. in the significant place which death – the phenomenon of death – gained in the everyday life of the Byzantines, and in the ever important political standoffs. Different groups within the society were intent on winning over, i.e. gaining the power of death for themselves and their members, as a major political weapon of the times: from the persecuted spiritual fathers and monks of the Iconoclast era, who flaunted the death of their leaders as the main cause of their triumph over the imperial heresy, as well as the justification of their subsequent social dominance, to the general feeling in ninth century Byzantium that a just, martyr death was the warrant of victory which, undeniably under Arab influence, grew, by the middle of the tenth century into a call for holy martyrdom for the emperor and the idea of *holy warriors* who had fallen in battle against the infidel.

Just a single conceptual step separated the willing death for the true faith of the period of internal Byzantine strife over the veneration of icons from the idea that all warriors who died of infidel hands – meaning the Arabs – should be proclaimed as saints in the late tenth century. A sort of *idealization of death*, which became widespread and even popular in Byzantine society during the Iconoclast era, overcoming the strictly monastic circles in which contemplation of one's own death was part of the daily routine, gained its ultimate expression precisely in the tenth century ideas related to the east, that is to waging war against the Arabs. The idea of emperor Leo VI (r. 886–912) from the *Taktika,* a military handbook which he compiled, was that soldiers should sacrifice themselves for the emperor. Still, he made a distinct difference between wars waged against *the infidel* Arabs in the east and those against enemies of the *same faith*, such as the Bulgarians in the west, in the European part of the empire. In the clashes with the Bulgarians, the emperor especially advised reticence in spilling of Christian blood, whereas he encouraged those fighting the Arabs even to the point of willing sacrifice for the good of the emperor. Still, this did not imply a special status of the death of the fallen warriors. It was only during the reign of the emperor Nikephoros Phokas (r. 963–969), a representative of the most powerful family from Asia Minor whose members had for generations already held the highest positions in the Byzantine army, that the tendency of distinction of the military from other ranks of Byzantine society came to full form, with a particular emphasis on the significance of the death of warriors. The idea and the proposal Nikephoros Phokas came with, was unique in all of Byzantine history: he ordered that the church of Constantinople proclaim as saints all soldiers who fell in the war against infidels, thus also confirming the intertwining of Arab and Byzantine culture on the eastern frontier which resulted in the rise of a specific frontier mentality in the east part of Byzantium in the ninth and tenth centuries. The intention of emperor Nikephoros Phokas to create a choir of new holy warriors did not find approval with the high-ranking ecclesiastics of the Byzantine church, which considered this as its own and exclusive right and most powerful weapon in their relations with the secular power. This desire for warrior saints was chronologically one of the last results of the new concept and appraisal of death and holiness after Iconoclasm and it underlined the force of division within the Byzantine society, i.e. a complete dominance of the elite from Asia Minor and of its concepts which would go as far as to even secure holiness for its members, a status which had, since the era of Iconoclasm, been "reserved" solely for the patriarchs of Constantinople, by virtue of their office, and to certain highly positioned church officials.

Nikephoros Phokas voiced his laymen views, which could even be said to be verging on the anti-ecclesiastic stance of the Asia Minor province which developed a specific autarchic sensibility, clearly and perhaps slightly carelessly, with a pronounced anti-Constantinopolitan feeling. The collective mentality of the Byzantine east, a space deeply imbued with the ideals of waging war against the Arabs, and firstly the most prominent elements of that mentality (love, war, death), were best manifested in the great Byzantine epic of a frontier hero, Digenes Akrites, which was formulated in the oral tradition at precisely that time. The double origins of the legendary hero of the wars against the Arabs is quite typical – both Arab and Byzantine – as is also his fervent love of the daughter of the commander of the Byzantine province and, perhaps above all, his disdain of death and the lack of any mention of the church which, in the eyes of those from the east, obviously had nothing to do with death or human life in general.

That, too, was yet another peculiarity of the Byzantine idea of death: regardless of the extent to which death was integrated into Christian views of life and human fate, the church, epitomized by its hierarchy – in the lives of ordinary mortals – never played the decisive role, neither in the Byzantine stance towards death nor in the hour of death of the Byzantines. The legendary hero of the eastern frontier, Digenes Akrites, could not be a character more contrary to the actual emperors of Constantinople, but he did share with them one very private, almost intimate view of death in which a secular understanding of the human end takes precedence over the ecclesiastical philosophy of death and the accompanying church rites. For the emperors, as well as for the rest of the Byzantines, death was a clear termination of earthly existence, with uncertain prospects for a future life. In the learned tenth century poems which accompanied the deaths of emperors Leo VI and his son Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos, the finality of death and the utter emptiness that comes with it make up for the most prominent motifs, along with characteristic lamentations of the deceased emperors themselves over the cessation of earthly life and their separation from their beloved families (Ševčenko, 1969/1970). The political background of imperial death is gleaned quite clearly in these works, but the lack of any mention of the church or funerary rites is also quite significant. In any case, imperial funerals were, above all, ceremonies in the function of political ideology of the Empire in which the role of the church was used – as was also the case with other imperial ceremonies, like coronation – for the purpose of glorification of imperial power. The role of the church was *simply* intermediary, and the church of Constantinople never achieved the sort of spiritual dominance over laymen

which was typical of the spiritual hierarchy of Rome. Byzantine hierarchs themselves were well aware of that fact and openly envious of the pope on account of his absolute power in and outside the church.

Like the common Byzantines, the emperors, too, would start to ponder their own deaths only in its close proximity, occupying themselves mostly with the issue of their final resting places and their political legacies. In the wake of the great conscious martyrdom for the true faith during the Iconoclastic crisis and the subsequent *proto pro-patriotic* wars with the Arabs, Byzantium was exempt from great waves of death: from the mid-eighth to the middle of the fourteenth century the empire was not threatened by mass epidemics, and above all by the by large-scale and sudden incursions on its territory, like the raids of Thessaloniki in 904 and 1185. Death was inevitable, but its inevitability did not make it any more present in the thoughts, contemplations and everyday talk of the Byzantines, in the capital and the cities, as well as in the province, where the influence of ecclesiastical views on death, somewhat threatening, was even weaker. The Byzantines were quite attached to their own material surroundings and much more pragmatic in their attitude towards life than was the norm in the Middle Ages as well as the later periods in the history of western Europe. Byzantine testaments and their overall stance towards their own legacies have still not been studied in an adequate manner, just as the *memory* of the Byzantines constitutes an utterly unexplored field of the spiritual history of this complex empire, although, over the centuries, certain features of the Byzantine mentality and identity do appear in these types of documents, too. In them we find that which Hans Georg-Beck, following in the steps of John Locke, called an *acceptance in principle* of Christian views and rituals, of somewhat rigid ways of professing the true faith which were a staple of all documents of this sort. For the most part, however, one finds that these documents are of an entirely practical nature, including precisely defined personal petitions regarding both the issue of inheritance as well as memory and memorial services. A number of legal contests regarding the question of property, which are so typical for many a Byzantine document, bear in themselves a testimony of a greater inclination of the Byzantines to the earthly rather than the otherworldly existence. Memory of the deceased never stopped the heirs from disputing his or her last will, from fighting for their own interests and wrangling stubbornly over testament details.

Therefore, it was not unusual for important questions and even decisions regarding the future emperor to be resolve at death bed, as was the case with Alexios Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), who, in his final hour, had to once again confirm his decades-long decision that his heir was and re-

mained since his crowning as a five-year-old boy, his oldest son, John. A quarter of a century later, John Komnenos (r. 1118–1143), had to do the same with the question of his own heir. In the descriptions of the deaths of these two Komnenian emperors, the realistic takes precedence over the ideal, and the secular entirely over the spiritual. In the case of Alexios Komnenos, those gathered around his bed are dedicated to easing his last moments while his wife, the empress Eirene Doukaina, and daughter, Anna Komnene, are trying to persuade him to change his decision and to designate Nikephoros Bryennios, Anna Komnene's husband, as Alexios's heir (*Annae Comnenae Alexias*, 2001, pp. 493–505).They are just the closest of kin watching over the dying emperor, and the long-since crowned John only comes to the imperial palace immediately after Alexios's last breath, in order to secure his absolute power. Two and a half decades later, the same John Komnenos found himself at his own death bed, far from the capital, at the easternmost edge of Asia Minor. Mortally wounded, the emperor was forced to convene some sort of a war council in order to designate, at least by oral testament, his heir. Once more, there is no mention either of the emperor's reflections of his life or possible repentance (that motif was reserved only for the emperors who transgressed church canons of church hierarchy, like Leo VI from the early tenth century), nor of the role of the church, priest, last communion, remission of sins... John II Komnenos passes away and the battle over the imperial crown forces his son Manuel, as well as his adversaries, to hasten to the capital in order to secure actual power.

The measure to which the twelfth century became distant from the tenth century idea of *holy warriors*, those who fell in the war against the Arabs, is best manifested in examples of deaths from the Komnenian age. All three emperors from this dynasty were great and tireless warriors but the social norms had changed in the meantime and death became solely a part of one's private life. There is one regular feature of Byzantine instrumentalization of death: in times of internal strife, whether religious or social, death was used for the purpose of overcoming the adversaries and it crossed over into the private, intimate sphere of life even of the most prominent personages only from the end of the eleventh century when the Komnenian dynasty established a complete dominance of its family and family ideology. It is, therefore, not unusual that we lack the exact dates of death for a considerable number of representatives of the ruling elite precisely from the Komnenian age (end of eleventh – end of twelfth century), although most took all the steps to secure for themselves their own, *private* place of eternal rest. In a similar manner, John Kynamos, emperor Manuel Komnenos's historian and secretary, whose historical writings are

mostly devoted to the wars waged by this emperor, assigns such little importance to death as both an event and a phenomenon that it shows already in his limited and consciously indirect vocabulary of death: in most cases Kynamos relies on descriptive phrases (such as *ends one's life*, *having used his time*, *disappeared from life*). In just one place in his history he uses the term *having passed*, thus managing to avoid the words death (θάνατος) and dying no matter how often he wrote about death and dying in his work (*Ioannis Cinnami Epitome*, 1836, pp. 14, 16, 134, 202, 208, 237, 286, 297; *having passed – teteleutekotes*, p. 203).

The Komnenian era saw a great transformation of Byzantine society and social structures, brought on by a novel, absolute primacy and significance of family and the fact that, beginning with the first decades of the twelfth century, Byzantine aristocracy became an entirely closed elite of family ties, thus wiping out the great vertical mobility of earlier times which stood as one of the pillars of Byzantine society and state ideology. From the twelfth century and the Komnenian era on, it became practically impossible to make considerable changes in one's social status and especially to join the ruling families who were interrelated with the imperial family (Станковић, 2006). This sort of family or *clan* system of power, brought on an opposite view of death set within the same framework and extent of the family, regardless of individual identity or position in social hierarchy.

In Byzantium, an inclination towards increasing privacy in matters of death and burial became clearly present already in the tenth century and manifested itself in the eleventh century in a growing number of private foundations of funerary character. This was both a reflection of the rise of individuality – and a tendency to display it – and of a fully developed feeling of family unity. At the same time, in confirmation of the phenomenon of withdrawal of death to the personal, private sphere, at this time the business of burial in Constantinople passes into the hands of the church. After Iconoclasm, the Byzantine church had taken over from state bureaucracy and into its own custody the care after the *future life* of the faithful. The state played still a significant role in organizing, even controlling the private societies of laymen (something like "fraternities") who were occupied with the business of burial of their members. This tendency resulted also in a growing number, especially from the eleventh century on, of literary compositions preoccupied with the theme of lamentation of someone's death which were often too abstract and closer to the ancient, i.e. Hellenistic rules of the genre than the actual circumstances of their own day and age. Nonetheless, numerous texts of this kind, *orations of consolation*, *funerary orations and songs*, *monodia* (speeches) *on the occasion*

of someone's death and others (numbered in Sideras, 1994), speak quite clearly of a consistency in the Byzantine treatment of death in which basic human feelings of the end and of finality take indisputable precedence over Christian eschatology and theology. The *finality* of life and coming to terms with this fact supersedes feelings of dread over eternal punishment or hope in eternal bliss, and the loneliness of the solitary individual in the face of all-powerful destiny or God's will becomes omnipresent and insurmountable.

The fleetingness of earthly life appears as a sad reality for the Byzantines, but it did not inspire expressions of heightened religiosity, or even excessive superstition, especially when it came to putting one's own destiny in the hands of the Christian church and its earthly hierarchy. Byzantines were far more terrified by the spectacle of death, the decomposition of the body and even disease which represented death before death, than by threats of eternal damnation. To the very end of the Empire, they held onto a realistic and pragmatic stance towards church and God. As opposed to the West, Byzantium knew nothing of the full dominance of the church over secular institutions and secular life. Just as the Byzantine state was fully secular, and this in particular because of the connections of the *secular*, imperial power with God, so, too, the Byzantine was fully aware of the role of the church in earthly existence but also of the limits of its power. Just as so many emperors trusted more in astrologers than in their own judgment in matters of life and death, so, too, the Byzantine church always remained somewhat feeble when it faced the problem of human disappearance from this world, offering *just* hope and never certainty when it came to the question of salvation and bliss.

The Byzantine of the late empire, thirteenth – fifteenth centuries

In the late Middle Ages, when western Christianity started to discover its own fear of death, and the church became the only way of salvation from temporary and sinful earthly life, the Byzantines, having survived western, Latin occupation, tackled the question of survival as such in the face of a new and unstoppable wave of invaders, the Ottoman Turks. Byzantine concepts of the world and terrestrial order were already shaken with the fall of Constantinople into the hands of the Crusaders in 1204, an event which marked the downfall not only of the concept of eternity of empire but also of the illusion of Christian unity and mercy. Long before the western *autumn of the Middle Ages*, and in particular the time around

the middle of the fourteenth century, which, as described so brilliantly by Johan Huizinga more than a century ago, witnessed the rise of a specific macabristic sensibility, it was the reality of life which placed death at the center of existence of the Byzantines. Still, these actual circumstances and imminent death, brought on a growth in melancholy sentiments among the Byzantines, changing the very essence of their being and mentality, as well as a partial increase in the power of the church rather than a growing fear of death or obsessive preoccupation with one's own end.

The overpowering traditions of a long lasting, centralized state, supported by a definitive influence of the heritage of classical antiquity and Hellenism which was disseminated through the system of secular education, retained their dominance until the end of the Byzantine Empire and stopped certain elements of popular culture, beliefs and customs, from taking over as the ruling societal and cultural models. Even from the perspective of our highly limited insight into Byzantine popular beliefs, we notice common, essentially even identical elements they shared with those of the learned Byzantine elite. There was little difference between the various social groups in their concepts of death, in particular among those of a common epoch, greatly underpinned by Byzantine concepts of personality, i.e. individualism, according to which every individual was equal before God. The recognition of each individual as a *free* person, just as equal before God and his Last Judgment as he was before the emperor and earthly power in matters of legal rights, kept the Byzantines from creating closed, hierarchically structured groups and the resulting feudal system of the West which, in turn, responded to such social inequality by giving rise to the late medieval idea of equality in death, a concept which, in that form, remained completely alien, since it was self-obvious, to the Byzantines. *Dance macabre* which symbolized both the obsession with death in the West, as well as a tendency to break down the unbridgeable social differences, was completely contrary to the Byzantine mentality, and in particular so on account of its collectivism, which the Byzantines opposed so strongly, while the *memento mori* cry, which accompanied this state of the spirit in the West, remained limited to the monastic circles in the East, mostly related to the rise of mysticism within the Byzantine church during the final centuries of the empire.

The power of the emperor over the church and its leader, in indication of a minute yet clear supremacy of the secular over the spiritual in the lives of the Byzantines, was also obvious in the ceremonial imperial funeral, as well as in attempts, firstly on the part of the patriarchs of Constantinople, to attain greater influence for reasons of their position in the hour of death or immediately after the death of the emperors. Like

everyone else, the emperors were also at their most vulnerable at their death beds and several examples can give us a clearer idea of the various aspects of imperial death. Byzantine thought was deeply marked by the idea of emulation of earlier, good examples, and emulation, in its multitude of guises, was always seen as laudable, regardless of whether it was related to specific living conditions or expressions of erudition in the form of education and employ of older authors. The example of the christening of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, on his deathbed was a *topos* in Byzantine reflections on death, and a number of emperors made crucial decisions on their own death beds, decisions they had been purposefully reserving for their very last moments.

In the early tenth century, emperor Leo VI's decision to enter into matrimony for the fourth time became the cause of major conflict and dissent in the Byzantine church. The emperor deposed his friend and, up to that moment, faithful ally, patriarch Nicholas Mystikos. Just a few years later, the unhappy emperor found himself on his deathbed, tormented as much by his conscience over the breach of church canons and laws as by his concern over the fate and inheritance of his son Constantine. The dying emperor then decided on a somewhat ceremonial act of repentance, having invited the exiled patriarch to take back his see as the patriarch of the Constantinopolitan church in return for a public remission of the emperor's sins, thus securing his own peace of mind as well as political stability in the empire. Although the timing of the controversial repentance of emperor Leo VI was undeniably late and, thus, could not erase the outcomes of his politics, it did serve as a strong motif for Nicholas Mystikos to point out the emperor's solemn act of repentance as the foundation of Leo VI's political legacy and legitimacy of his own position, balancing out his own and the interests of the empire and endangered dynasty in the tumultuous days before the coming of age of Leo's son (Станковић, 2003).

More than a century and a half later, in 1180, emperor Manuel Komenos, a great warrior and for decades the utterly dominant personage of the Byzantine empire, lay on his deathbed burdened by problems regarding the inheritance of his throne similar to those which had troubled Leo VI. Over the course of his long reign, Manuel Komenonos constructed an image of himself as a reflection of absolute imperial virtues, having possibly gone furthest of all the Byzantine emperors in the process of deification of the emperor as the earthly image of Christ himself. The emperor's political ideology and concept of the position of the *basileus* in the world were most manifest in the manner in which the emperor envisaged and prepared his own tomb in the mausoleum of the monastery of Christ Pantokrator in Constantinople, founded by his father, emperor

John Komnenos. Manuel Komnenos chose for his grave the central part of this mausoleum of the Komnenian dynasty, having taken special care regarding its detached placement at a distance from other sarcophagi and additionally emphasized by the Stone of Unction which was placed right next to the emperor's sarcophagus. The symbolism Manuel had in mind was all too obvious and thus in no need of further explanation but the course of events shortly after the emperor's death demonstrated the impossibility of "victory" over destiny and the complete triumph of life over death. In his final decrees, Manuel had himself pointed out the insecurity not only of his rule, but even more of the inheritance of his eleven-year-old son Alexios – in the emperor's legacy there is not even an insinuation of concern over the fate of his own soul, or Christian repentance and usual topics of official hagiography. Quite the contrary, it is replete with pragmatic, *realpolitik* striving to preserve within the extent of his immediate family the power that he had been building for decades. However, just as Manuel, who trusted more in astrologers than in clerics, took the monastic wows at his deathbed, unwillingly and somewhat comically, so, too, his political testament became invalid only two years later. His cousin and long term rival Andronikos took over Constantinople. He sealed his final victory over Manuel and confirmed it right by the emperor's grave, in the mausoleum of Christ Pantokrator, where he addressed the deceased directly and arrogantly, in words full of revenge as well as of an awareness of the finality of death and the triumph of life over death, of this world over the other, of reality over conviction, something he was soon to learn first-hand as he was tortured and tormented in the streets of the capital by the citizens of Constantinople who revolted against his rule (*Nicetae Choniatae Historia*, 1975, pp. 256–257; Станковић, 2008).

Michael VIII Palaiologos (r. 1259–1282), the conqueror of Constantinople from the Latins and the restorer of Byzantium, was the last Byzantine emperor with real plans of restoration of the historical power of the empire. At the same time, however, ecclesiastical circles strongly disapproved of him, firstly because of the murder that brought him to power and then, also, because of the union with the pope and the church of Rome. His death, with all the accompanying details, represents a valuable testimony of the Byzantine appreciation of life and death, of a heightened religious sentiment among the Byzantines of the thirteenth and the subsequent centuries when they faced both the Turkish threat and the unconditional request for submission to Rome, as well as of the private and political side of death and dying in Byzantium. Georgios Pachymeres, the learned historian of Michael VIII Palaiologos's time, speaks in detail of the emperor's death and the circumstances that surrounded it, beginning with

the story of the emperor's illness (*Georges Pachymérès Relations historiques*, 1984, pp. 661–667). Although he was quite ill, the emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos had no intention of desisting from his campaign with the Tatars against the Serbs, which bought on fierce reproach on the part of his resolute wife, empress Theodora, who scolded him in the following words: 'What's wrong with you, to disregard your body, not even thinking on your own life?'. The concerns of the empress Theodora and others from the circle around Michael VIII soon proved to be legitimate. Having arrived to the Thracian village of Allagi (meaning *change*, *exchange*, in Greek, and thus symbolically implying the emperor's death, his *exchange* of this life for the next), the emperor fell ill and his son, Andronikos secretly summoned a priest to administer the last rights. Suddenly coming to his senses and seeing the priest by his side, Michael VIII exclaimed in wonder: 'What is going on?'. In an equal measure, this referred both to his refusal to believe that his end was near as well as to his admonition of his son for wanting him to pass away before long. Despite the emperor's lust for life, he soon died and Andronikos ordered his father's body secretly transported to the nearby village and quickly buried, fully aware of the fact that in, ecclesiastical circles, Michael VIII was considered a heretic, if not the Antichrist. Andronikos II put his own political interest ahead of imperial ceremony which granted the ruler a solemn funeral in the capital. Only later did Andronikos translate the body of Michael VIII to Selymbria on the shore of the Sea of Marmara, at a time when he had annulled the results of his father's decades long policy of negotiating and realizing the union with Rome, and a time when this translation no longer had any political repercussions.

Still, the church of Constantinople never forgot what the emperor did and refused to list the name of Michael VIII Palaiologos among the *blessed emperors*, thus restricting prayers for the salvation of the deceased emperor's soul that is intercession for his soul before God. This persistent and unusually anti-political stand of the church, along with the measures of Michael's heir, Andronikos II, indicate a separation of the church from imperial power in matters of spiritual life and the beginning of its true domination in this sphere of existence, to be continued also after the final fall of the empire.

The last century of Byzantine history was marked by an intensifying spirituality, by a quest for a way out of a constrained reality without a foreseeable resolution through an ever-increasing retreat into mysticism and spiritual austerity on the one hand or, on the other, through a return to the roots of antiquity and – as it appeared to many – a relinquishing of insufficiently powerful Christianity. Both currents speak of an awareness

among the Byzantines of the omnipotence of destiny and of the impossibility of changing the future, as well as of their coming to terms with these facts. By the end of the fourteenth century the melancholy sentiments that had for centuries been weighing down the Byzantines who had for generations, practically since the first fall of Constantinople in 1204, been witnesses to the fleetingness of life regardless of the tenacity to hold on to it, grew into a helpless acceptance of fate, into a general *expectation of the end* (Радошевић, 2006, pp. 59–65). Reveries of establishing isolated, autarchic tiny states grounded in ancient cults of the Olympian gods – best expressed in the works of the great scholar from the Byzantine Peloponnesus, Georgios Gemistos called Plethon – only confirmed the absence of a true solution for the imminent fall of the empire into the hands of the all-powerful Ottomans. Even before the silent acceptance of the unavoidability of the Ottoman prevalence became a fact of life for the Byzantines, in the middle and the second half of the fourteenth century the attempts to find a solution to the worldly, oftentimes political troubles, led some Byzantines to embrace not only the mystical theosophy of Hesychasm, but its political aspects as well, which underscored the uniqueness of the Orthodoxy and the breadth of the chasm with the West, in spiritual, and in political questions. On the opposite end of this movement within firstly Byzantine monastic community, and then within the political elite and the wider circles of Byzantine society, which gradually created a tightly connected, above-national network of clerics and laymen who influenced the policy making in the Orthodox Balkans until the Ottoman conquest, and even beyond it, stood a group of intellectuals who saw in the western advancements in sciences and theology the only way forward. One of them was Demetrios Kydones, among whose many writings, a treatise on death, usually titled in scholarship *On Despising Death*, deserves a special mentioning in the context of this study. Written in all likelihood before the decisive lost of the Christians at Marica in September of 1371, this treatise is Kydones's philosophical plea to his contemporary, mainly to his learned colleagues, not to fear death, with the help of intertwined ancient and Christian arguments and examples (*Demetri Cydonii De contemnenda morte oratio,* 1901; Ryder, 2010). The very need to compose such a treatise demonstrates the sense of insecurity in the second half of the fourteenth century in Byzantium and in the Balkans, and the omnipresence of threats and death in the wake of the Black Death and in the turbulent political times that foreshadowed the end of the Christian empire in the East. The popularity of this treatise in the decades and even centuries that followed – it was even printed already in 1553 – corroborates the sense of melancholy and gloom, which only increased with the fall of the empire in 1453.

As always in their millennium long history, at the hour of the fall of Constantinople the Byzantines held on to their typical duality in thought and action: on one side of Byzantine mentality and personality stood the ideal of immutability, attested from generation to generation by the same examples from antiquity, the same education, cultural models and paradigms, as well as by the same vocabulary that were the warrant of uninterrupted continuity. On the other side, and just as importantly, stood the ability of the Byzantines to adapt to different circumstances and predicaments of life which were inescapable and common just as the need to overcome them and to carry on with life was nothing unusual for them. Therefore, after the fall of Constantinople Byzantine scholars had to turn to life, i.e. to the new ruler of the empire, Mehmed the Conqueror. No matter how difficult it was to accept the reality of an irretrievable loss of the Christian empire, everyday *life* still forced the Byzantines to accept the new reality and thus to normalize it, making it less difficult and painful. In the historical work of the learned Critobulus from the island of Imbros, who was well aware of the significance of the change that had taken place with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 because he began writing his history only several weeks after that event, we find not only that sultan Mehmed – bearing the Byzantine imperial title of *basileus* – is the main protagonist to whom the author dedicated his work, but also that the onetime Byzantine world has completely vanished from his sight (and his discourse), and that the new reality has become the absolute normality, precisely because it was truly *real*.

Perhaps even more striking is Critobulus's view of death which is practically omnipresent in the time between 1453 and 1467, the period his history refers to. Inspired by his education which implied that certain facts and circumstances can remain unsaid in historical writings, but never conjured, Critobulus notes very meticulously the sultan's orders of execution of enemies and captives, refraining, and understandably so in view of the recipient of his work, from any comment. A somewhat terrifying threat of death immanent to those years becomes even more haunting with Critobulus's disinterest: like some sort of an ominous epilogue, at the end of his narration on any given event Critobulus always gives a brief mention that the sultan had his defeated enemies *killed*, desisting from the euphemism that were so typical of the Byzantine tradition of describing death. In just one passage in his work, towards its very end, Critobulus devotes his full attention to death, in his description of the plague of 1467 in Constantinople, with a full display of his knowledge of ancient formulae and by taking over entire sentences from Thucydides and Thucydides's Byzantine heir, Procopius. Critobulus's description that 'the undertakers

could not manage to bury all the dead; that the infected were dying locked in their homes en masse, remaining unburied for days; and that those who buried the dead one day were buried themselves the next day' (*Critobuli Imbriotae Historiae*, 1983, p. 205), may therefore lose in merit as a testimony of an eyewitness, but does definitely confirm a continuity in Byzantine assessments of death, of an awareness of the fleeting nature of life and of a focus on the actual circumstances that accompany death rather than on metaphysical dread and pondering the afterlife or the eternal punishments which await the mortals on the other side of life.

In search of the mentality of the Byzantines

Following this brief overview of Byzantine stands on death, should one draw any conclusions regarding the place of death in the Byzantine reality and of its impact on the identity and mentality of the Byzantines, two specific phenomena would draw particular attention and, at the same time, indicate the directions of further research:

a) The Byzantines rarely spoke publicly about death, suppressing the issue deep within themselves and introverting all general human problems, which is evident clearly enough already from their unwillingness to call *death* by its name, resorting rather to descriptive or indirect phrases, just as the Greeks had, since antiquity, called the unlucky left side *lucky* or the perilous Black Sea that was so hard to sail *Good-sailing*. In the society in which they lived, naming certain unpleasant things was just as precarious as their very essence, just like open verbal criticism of the emperor was as potent as any deed aimed against the ruler, because it stated someone's actual points which could, logically, breed notorious acts. The Byzantines transferred the external, social limits of behavior and opinion, designated mostly by the centralized and powerful state, onto the private sphere of life, trying to find a balance between the accepted and the permitted, on the one side, and the desired and personal, individual sentiment on the other. Like the political pressure of the state, the emperor, ideology, the state taxes and tax-collectors, and, to a lesser measure, of the church, there was a similar social pressure in the Byzantine world which drew the clear limits of acceptable notions and behavior, with repercussions for all who transgressed them, thus forcing the Byzantines to oblige in principle the common norms and rules of society while leaving

them with the freedom to mould their own intimate world according to their free will.

The occasions on which death was discussed were tied exclusively to burial and accompanying rituals, in spite of the diversity of literary genres which shared the same purpose with the epitaph or its relative, the consolation speech. By conscious or semi-conscious intentions of the Byzantines, death was a phenomenon which was isolated from *life*, one of the things that were inevitable but that could be kept at a distance by keeping quiet or by ignoring the subject. The Byzantines created a taboo of death, and thus tried to chase away their fears of its certainty, like they did with death's twin, the passionate *eros*, and the defense from its unquestionably fatal agency which they found in making it, too, into a taboo.

b) The existence of the individual rapport between the Byzantines and death, i.e. a direct connection between an individual and his fate, which remained untouched by the external, unifying and partly collectivistic nature of the centralized state and pertaining ideology. In Byzantine concepts and even fears of death, the church played a far lesser role from what could have been expected in a medieval society. A certain high level of self-awareness, which enabled the Byzantines to maintain direct rapport with God – especially from the beginning of the eleventh century and the personal-mystical theology of St. Simeon the New Theologian – just like each and every Roman could (at least in theory) petition the emperor himself, thwarted the formation of an exclusive intercessory role of the church in the relationship between man and God, one that implied such power in the West. Being well aware of the terrestrial aspect of Christ's church, the Byzantine could not believe blindly in its divine almighty potency, nor relegate his own life fully into its hands. With a dominant secular power always at its side, with its profuse and omnipresent bureaucratic apparatus, the Byzantine church could not have the political and spiritual control over its faithful, nor maintain its absolute authority over them, like the western church, as is quite clear from the phenomenon of selling indulgences and guaranteeing a way to heaven. To the Byzantines this was not only unacceptable, it was also somewhat banal. The Byzantine died alone, whether an emperor, a monk, a clerk, a warrior, a scholar or a peasant, with a conviction that he had the right to expect a just judgment in the other world and with hope that gracious God will show understanding and mercy for his human weaknesses.

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Влада Станковић*

СМРТ У ВИЗАНТИЈИ. ВИЗАНТИЈСКИ СТАВОВИ О СМРТИ И ЗНАЧАЈ СМРТИ У МЕНТАЛИТЕТУ И ИДЕНТИТЕТУ ВИЗАНТИНАЦА

Апстракт: Византинци, премда увек вољни да се укључе у расправе око егзистенцијалних па и донекле ситничавих питања, прилично ретко су отворено говорили о озбиљнијим, суморнијим странама људског постојања. Смрт је била једна о таквих тема чије је и само именивање сматрано злосрећним током византијског миленијума, али, сасвим у склади са прагматичним и трезвеним односом Византинаца према животу, смрт као феномен, мада непријатна, схватана је природним делом људског живота. У мешавини дубоке хришћанске наде у вечно спасење душе, учених примера античких, предхришћанских дела и искуствене спознаје живота из непосредног окружења, Византинци су покушавали да избегну директне дискусије о смрти, чак и размишљања о њој, сучељавајући неумитни крај овоземаљског живота свести да су учинили све на овом свету што је било у њиховој моћи као појединаца и да, стога, могу очекивати правичан суд на следећем.

Кључне речи: смрт, Византија, менталитет, идентитет, хришћанство, живот након смрти, индивидуализам

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ON DEATH AND DYING IN MEDIEVAL SERBIA. WRITTEN SOURCES AND VISUAL CULTURE

Abstract: Textual and visual evidence is plentiful for the study of issues related to death and dying in medieval Serbia. Being a part of the Christian Orthodox Byzantine *oikoumene*, all rites and rituals pertaining to death, dying, burial and remembrance in medieval Serbia must firstly and necessarily, although not exclusively nor too insistently, be regarded within that context. The particularities and specificities brought on, on the one hand, by the multicultural and multiconfessional affiliation of the population which made up the society of medieval Serbia, and, on the other, by the enduring remnants of Slavic pagan funerary practices and beliefs particularly among the majority rural Orthodox population should always be kept in mind. This text offers an overview and insight into the sophisticated rhetoric of death and dying in both the written sources and visual material related to funeral art in medieval Serbia that should be the subject of further research.

Keywords: death, dying, medieval Serbia, texts, visual culture

A number of preserved written sources from the corpus of texts of various genres produced over centuries in the Serbian cultural milieu and in Old Church Slavonic of the Serbian redaction offer testimony of the final hours and funerals of historical figures who played decisive roles in the life and politics of medieval Serbia from the 12th to the 15th century, from the time of first Nemanides to the end of the Middle Ages and the fall of Serbian lands under Ottoman rule. Together with the visual material, a significant number of preserved mausolea of rulers, members of the ruling dynasties, dignitaries of the state and church prelates and the per-

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taining monuments marking their graves, as well as a vast count of tombstones, arcosolea and other forms of funerary monuments of both high ranking noblemen and simple peasants, along with funerary portraits and inscriptions on walls and gravestones, textual and visual evidence is quite plentiful for the study of issues related to death and dying in medieval Serbia (Ердељан, 2004). Over the past several decades, beginning with the the project supervised in the 1980's by professor Jovanka Maksimović and realized at the Institute for Art History of the Department of Art History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, funerary monuments of various types, belonging to kings and emperors, patriarchs and bishops, as well as to the ordinary man of the lower ranks of medieval society have been the most thoroughly studied and extensively published aspect of all things sepulchral in medieval Serbian culture (Поповић, 1992; Ердељан, 1996; Поповић, 2019). Still, much remains to be studied and considered regarding the sophisticated rhetoric of death and dying in both the written sources and visual material related to funeral art in medieval Serbia.

To be well prepared for death and dying is the prime goal and task of all good Christians. In the life of *homo medievalis* the moment of burial represents the end of earthly, corporeal and corruptible existence but even more so the inception of a path leading towards life everlasting, the eschaton. It is the first, preparatory step on the journey towards a new, eternal life in Christ resurrected which is the hope of every Christian throughout his life on earth, the apogee of salvation for which he is diligently preparing throughout his lifetime, through life in the Church and partaking in its sacraments, from birth to the final eucharist and anointment (Constas, 2010; Marinis, 2017). As part of those preparations and hopes in the life of the world to come, it was customary in the Middle Ages for all those who had even the least possibility to prepare their places of eternal rest in their lifetime. The place and manner of burial, as well as all pertaining aspects of material and visual culture, i.e. type and visual identity of funerary monument, were determined by the social status of the deceased and was prescribed, in effect, by the society and community to which he belonged. Still, regardless of rank and wealth, before the body of the deceased would be able to reach his "true fatherland", as Domentijan referred to the grave in his Life of St. Sava the Serbian (Доментијан, 1988, p. 224), there were steps to be taken and rites to undergo that would grant the dying a "good death" and a safe passage of return into the bosom of Abraham.

Being a part of the Christian Orthodox Byzantine *oikoumene*, as well as heir and part-taker in the Orthodox Byzantine theology and liturgical practice, all rites and rituals pertaining to death, dying, burial and remembrance in medieval Serbia must firstly and necessarily, although not exclu-

sively nor too insistently, be regarded within that context. The particularities and specificities brought on, on the one hand, by the multiculural and multiconfessional affiliation of the population which made up the society of medieval Serbia – above all a strong Catholic presence especially in the coastal Adriatic area in cities such as Kotor and Bar (Живковић, 2020), as well as in the inland cities such as Novo Brdo or Belgrade (Поповић, 2019), and, on the other, by the enduring remnants of Slavic pagan funerary practices and beliefs particularly among the majority rural Orthodox population (Ердељан, 1996), should always be kept in mind.

The Saxon church of Santa Maria in Novo Brdo (Novomonte), a flourishing Serbian medieval town founded at the beginning of the 14th century in the days of king Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321) that was a paramountly important center of mining, trade and culture in late medieval times (Поповић & Симић, 2020) stands out as a well studied case in point regarding visual culture as testimony of non-Orthodox Christian customs related to death and dying in medieval Serbia. The rapid development of the city was undoubtedly accompanied by an active religious life, first of the Saxon or Sassi miners, followed by numerous merchants from Adriatic towns, primarily those from the "King's City" of Kotor, and subsequently also from Dubrovnik. Santa Maria in Novomonte was built in the last decade of the reign of King Stefan Uroš II. Together with the remains of a three nave basilica in Stari trg i.e. medieval Trepča, Santa Maria in Novomonte thus offers insight into the life of Catholic communities in mining centers in medieval Serbia such as Brskovo, Srebrenica or Rudnik (Поповић, 2019).

The remains of the Saxon church in Novo Brdo offer a rare, practically unique example of an urban Catholic church in the continental parts of medieval Serbian lands which makes them all the more important in the study of this part of the population of medieval Serbia. Santa Maria in Novomonte, the Saxon church of Novo Brdo, is also of prime importance for the study of burial customs and funerary visual and material culture of the Catholic population of inland cities and towns of medieval Serbian lands as it had served as the resting place of Saxon miners and merchants from Dubrovnik, Kotor, Venice, Hungary and other Catholic communities within and outside medieval Serbia who traded and dealt in the rich and valuable mining resources and other goods exported from the Balkans to other parts of Europe and the Mediterranean world. Their tombstones, as well as several finely constructed underground funerary vaults, cover the floor of Santa Maria in Novomonte and span the entire period in which the church functioned, from the first decades of the 14th to the end 17th century. Together with the grave finds, they provide excellent and so far

best studied material related to the issue of death and dying of the Catholic inhabitants of urban centers of medieval Serbia and the Ottoman Balkans prior to the Great Austro-Turkish War (Поповић, 2019).

The aspects of material and visual culture, type of burial and form of graves and grave goods and their pertaining funerary markers, slabs and a single *stećak* like monument, in Santa Maria in Novomonte show little or no difference at all when compared to coeval burials and funerary monuments of the Orthodox population of medieval Serbia. Indeed, in their own way they testify of the common origins of Orthodox and Catholic beliefs and practices associated with death, burial, and remembrance in the late medieval and early modern period, dating back to the dawn of Christianity and the period of Late Antiquity, which were only set on divergent theological and eschatological paths with the formulation of the doctrine of purgatory in the Western church that was formally declared at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 and its rejection in the Orthodox *oikoumene*. Unlike the dogmatic approach of the Roman Church, Orthodox theologians were content with a fluid, even nebulous, understanding of the transition between this life and the next: despite the obvious importance of these themes, the nature of the human and its fate after death were never authoritatively defined or formalized by an ecumenical council, nor were they the subjects *per se* of systematic theological inquiry (Chitwood, 2021, p. 199). Thus, throughout the Byzantine world one finds an assortment of eschatologies strewn somewhat carelessly about. As Vasileios Marinis rightfully noted: "From the outset it should be said that, for all their reputed and professed preoccupation with the afterlife, the Byzantines never produced a systematic theology on the postmortem fate of the soul. Or, rather, they did so only in the fifteenth century, under duress at the Council of Ferrara– Florence, whose goal was the union of the Byzantine and Latin Churches (Marinis, 2017, p. 2).

Being a part of the Orthodox Byzantine world, Serbian medieval attitudes towards death, dying and *memoria* were certainly theologically and liturgically grounded in the centuries-long Christian Orthodox tradition of the Byzantine church. Byzantine *typika* of the Komnenian era, such as, firstly, the Typikon of the Pantokrator monastery in Constantinople from 1136 as the dynastic mausoleum (Pantokrator, 2000), as well as the Typikon of the monastery of the Virgin Kosmosoteira at Pherrai from 1152, the burial church of sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos (Kosmosoteira, 2000), offer elaborate descriptions of funerary provisions and *memoriae*. Apart from those of the ktetors and imperial family members, Byzantine typika of the Komnenian era also offer regulations for the burial of the monks (e.g., Kosmosoteira) outside the monastic enclosure perimeter but within the broader sacred space, of the monastic foundation. Moreover, the extraordinarily elaborate commemorative practices and descriptions

of tombs that are related in the *typika* of the Georgian general Gregory Pakourianos in the 11th century for Bačkovo in Bulgaria and of Emperor John II Komnenos (r. 1118–1143) for the monastery of Christ Pantokrator in Constantinople can be compared with the archaeological evidence at both sites (and indeed the former is still a functioning monastery) (Pakourianos, 2000; Chitwood, 2021, p. 203). They offer direct and invaluable insight into attitudes towards death, dying and remembrance in the Middle Byzantine period and thus provide us with the prerequisite historical and theological background significant for understanding the first preserved Serbian medieval written sources, monastic *typika* and hagiographies, related to the subject and produced at that time and as an expression of belonging integrally to the world of the Empire of the Romans in the era of the Komnenoi (Stanković, 2016).

Being integrally a part of the Byzantine monastic tradition and its constitutional regulation, *typika* of the first Nemanide foundations from the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century, composed by Sava the Serbian and following the Constantinopolitan Evergetis model, offer similar provisions regarding death, burial and memory of their royal Nemanide ktetors and can be regarded as the first written sources relevant for the study and understanding of death and dying in medieval Serbia (Свети Сава, 2005). Moreover, they are related to the churches dedicated to the feasts of the Introduction of the Virgin to the Temple at Chilandar (Свети Сава, 2005, pp. 99–151) and the Dormition of the Virgin at Studenica (Свети Сава, 2005, pp. 153–161), the first and the final resting place of Symeon Nemanja, the founder of the holy Nemanide family (Fig. 1). Nemanja's death and burial in Chilandar on Mt. Athos in 1199, and

Fig. 1: Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Studenica

the transfer of his body to Studenica in 1207, are the pivotal points in the process of construction of his saintly identity and the sanctified legitimacy of the state his children and their descendents inherited (Erdeljan, 2013). The passages in his first *vitae* texts composed by his sons, Rastko-Sava (Свети Сава, 1986) and Stefan (Стефан Првовенчани, 1988), which recount those milestones in the life and cult of the first Serbian saint also provide insight into hagiography as the genre of medieval text crucial for understanding the most significant aspects of death and dying in the official, high culture of medieval Serbia and its elites.

A feature that at once grounds the Serbian tradition within the bosom of Byzantine Orthodoxy, hagiographies of Serbian rulers are at the same time a feature of royal saintly cults and a medium of textual communication that stand outside the Byzantine way. While extolling their virtues as champions of Orthodoxy and New Constantines (Марјановић–Душанић, 1997), hagiographies of Serbian rulers, starting with the paradigm model of Stefan Nemanja, the monk Symeon, are in themselves a feature of the Serbian medieval tradition that angles it closer to Western or, more specifically, Central European medieval Hungarian concepts of holy rulers and blessed princesses. Saint Stephen, the first fully Chistian king of Hungary, and his son, Saint Emerik, were canonized in 1083. The cult of King Stephen I was initially organized for political reasons, and this laid the basis for his continued importance as a reference point. His hagiography also reflected political trends and the positioning of the Arpadian state among the major political powers of the era, firstly the Papacy and the Empire, through heavenly intervention and the intercession of the Virgin Mary (Klaniczay, 2002, pp. 114–153; Berend et al., 2013, pp. 369–374).

In hagiographies of Serbian rulers we find *ars moriendi* references as well as descriptions and testimonies of dying a "good death" that are not to be found in accounts of deaths of emperors of Byzantium. That accounts of deaths of Serbian rulers are by definition different from those of Byzantine emperors is quite logical and in keeping with the ideas of hierarchy and status of the Serbian rulers within the universal family of nations that is precisely defined in the introduction to the Chilandar charter issued by Stefan Nemanja – "God made the Romans emperors, the Hungarians kings and the Serbs princes" (Хрисовуља монаха Симеона, p. 67). Firstly, as we learn from Serbian royal hagiographies as the key and crucially important written sources, one faces and recognizes the inevitable proximity of death and the hour of departure from this world. Having sensed that the hour of death was upon him, Symeon Nemanja addressed his son Sava and the monks of Chilandar: "Here, the hour of my leave is near, the Lord is already dismissing me in peace, according to His word, so that it may be fulfilled: You are dust and to dust thou shall return" (*King James Bible*,

2017, Genesis 3: 19). (Свети Сава, 1986, pp. 95–119, in particular p. 113). This is especially underlined in vitae texts of those members of the ruling house of Nemanjić whose cults are prepared carefully and already during their lifetime.

The entire process of separation of the soul from the body of the dying is described in detail. The apogee, the culmination of that process is the moment of revelation and heavenly vision when the soul is still in the earthly body yet already at the gates of heaven. The death scene of St. Symeon Nemanja, as rendered in the vita text composed by his son Sava and as part of the typikon of the monastery of the Virgin Evergetis in Studenica, is the first and paradigmatic example (Свети Сава, 1986, pp. 95–119, in particular p. 113). Given the identity of the author and the political circumstances of its creation, it is so deeply imbued with theological and political testimony, a true and irrefutable testament of the dying Symeon Nemanja as it is at once produced in the presence of earthly witnesses as before the face of God and his holy mother, the Virgin Mary.

The first *vitae* of Symeon Nemanja, composed at the very beginning of the thirteenth century by his sons, Sava the Serbian (Свети Сава, 1986, pp. 95–119, in particular p. 113) and Stefan the First Crowned (Стефан Првовенчани, 1988, pp. 61–101, in particular p. 83), as well that written in 1263/64 upon commission of Serbian king Uroš I, grandson of Nemanja, by Domentijan (Доментијан, 1988, pp. 236–325, in particular p. 294), Chilandar monk and pupil of St. Sava, relate the same story which took place at Nemanja's deathbed. Feeling that the hour is upon him ("the hour of my leave is near"), Nemanja asks his son Sava to bring forth to him the icon of the Virgin so that he could fulfill his wows of committing his spirit into her hands ("Bring to me, child, the mother of my Lord Jesus Christ, so that I can, as I promised, commit into her hands my spirit.") while lying on the ground on a simple straw mat, his head resting on a stone, in utter monastic humility. Teodosije does not relate the act of bringing the icon forth before Nemanja but speaks rather of the emotional and spiritual effect of his contact with this holy icon. He speaks of the fact that in the hour of his death Nemanja's face was "bright and he looked with joy at the most pure eikon of His most pure Mother" (Теодосије, pp. 99–261, in particular p. 144).

Historiography has identified this icon of the Mother of God with Christ into whose hands Symeon Nemanja committed his spirit as the mosaic icon of the Virgin Hodegetria with Christ child, a supreme work of Komnenian icon painting in the luxury medium of gold mosaic, produced at the very end of the twelfth century, around 1198, most probably in Constantinople or Thessaloniki. It was highly revered as patron

and protectress of Chilandar, the katholikon of which was dedicated to the Virgin and the feast of the Introduction of the Virgin to the Temple. As such she was given a highly prominent place within the hierotopical ensemble of the church and kept in the altar or by the iconostasis of the monastery katholikon (Erdeljan & Brajović, 2015).

The act of most intense, spiritual communication with the holy at the hour of death, by physical or visual touch with icons, often of the Virgin Mary, pressing them against the body or holding them before the face of the dying, was part of the *ars moriendi* of monks in the Byzantine world, as attested in visual culture in representations of dying monks. Such a relation between a departing soul and the icon is rendered in Chilandar itself, in the thirteenth century fresco cycle of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete found in the chapel of St. George located on the storey of the Chilandar pyrgos of the same dedication where a dying monk is shown underneath an icon of the Virgin to whom he directs his final thoughts and prayers (Тодић, 1997; Тодић, 1998). Whatsmore, at the time of death of Symeon Nemanja, and in the Komnenian world in general of which Serbia of Nemanja's day was an integral part, close, personal and emotional, sensory experience of the holy was a hallmark of piety and of both state and private devotion and cult. Most telling in that respect is the development of the cult and ritual of veneration of the palladium of capital and Empire, the holy miracle-working icon of the Virgin Hodegetria in Constantinople under the Komnenoi (Станковић, 2006, pp. 270–288; Lidov, 2004; Erdeljan, 2017, pp. 118–133). As stipulated by the typikon of the monastery of Christ Pantokrator, the dynastic mausoleum of the Komnenoi, "the holy icon of my most pure Lady and Mother of God Hodegetria", should be taken into the monastery on the days of the commemorations of the ktetors and be set in the church of Saint Michael near their tombs (Pantokrator, 2000, p. 756).

Visions and revelations of the heavenly realm at the moment of death of significant historical figures were experienced not only on the part of the dying but of the entire population – thus offering practically palpable proof of the connection between this world and the awaited eschatological future as well as of the chosen, New Israel, status of the departed shepherd of the chosen people and the land placed by Divine Providence under his care. Such was the apocalyptic vision in the skies over Belgrade in the hour of death of despot Stefan Lazarević in 1427. The sky above his capital, that he had so carefully constructed as the Serbian New Jerusalem and New Constantinople, was filled with lightning, thunder and storm clouds which shrouded the city. His learned hagiographer, Konstantin of Konstantin of Kostenec or Konstantin the Philosopher describes that from the iconostasis of the the iconostasis of the metropolitan church of Belgrade altar icons

rose up and formed the act of Deisis in the air as a final, irrefutable proof of the status of the despot's capital as a God-protected and God-chosen city (Erdeljan, 2017, p. 189; Константин Филозоф, 1989, p. 128).

Death itself was a public event in the Middle Ages, a ceremony presided over by the dying. One of the most detailed descriptions of such a public death is found in the vita of Queen Jelena Anžujska, wife of Stefan I Uroš, composed by archbishop Danilo II. The public, anticipated, and highly structured act of death and dying of a royal is also a highly political act. Even more so than that of Symeon Nemanja, the death scene of queen Jelena Anžujska, as renedered by her hagiographer, Danilo II, is a masterpiece of medieval literature and a bravado of political astuteness as much on the part of the departing queen as on the part of her trusted and devoted, learned hierarch friend. The scene takes place in Brnjaci, Jelena's residence and entails all the desired elements of a „good death ". First it is announced and proclaimed by the dying queen whereupon she calls for the gathering and attendance of representatives of the church and state elite. Hearing of their arrival, the dying queen utters from her death-bed prayer and words of humble gratitude for the joy of being able to rejoice in the name of the Lord for the last time in their life and through their prayers and the hymns they sang. Danilo II goes on to describe the moment of Jelena's passing, moving on to the translatio of her body to the already prepared mausoleum church of the Virgin in Gradac (Fig. 2) and the funeral itself, crowned by the encomium proclaimed by her grieving

Fig. 2: Church of the Annunciation of the Virgin in Gradac

son and king, Stefan Uroš II Milutin (Данило Други, 1988, pp. 79–107; Ердељан, 2004, pp. 425–426). In this vita text, Danilo draws, quite purposefully, both direct analogies between the death scene of Jelena and scenes of Serbian state assemblies, with the words sabor and sinklit used to denote the participants, the form and even more importantly the purpose of the large scale public gathering at the event of the passing of the Serbian queen (Ђурић, 1991, p. 190) while also, and at the same time, comparing it explicitly with the scene of the death of the Virgin (Данило Други, 1988, p. 99). This written testimony of the death of queen Jelena is multiply significant and signifying, as both her political testament and as an expression of her personal piety and devotedness to keeping the True Faith as an Orthodox queen of Catholic provenance (Erdeljan, 2016).

Present even before the hour of her passing, Jelena's presentiment of the heavenly abode prepared for her soul in its true fatherland, the Heavenly Jerusalem, is beautifully rendered in her hagiography in a poetic masterpiece of Serbian medieval literature penned by the learned archbishop Danilo II in the text of her *vita* (Данило Други, 1988, p. 86). Upon taking the monastic wow in the church of St. Nicholas in Skadar, the ailing queen Jelena, now nun Jelena, addresses her soul in pious introspection, in sweet solace and joy of expectation of meeting the Bridegroom from the Parable of the ten virgins (*King James Bible*, 2017, Matthew 25:1–4): "Oh expiated soul, sin-loving soul, here is the end of thy life in this century and to the other world you shall go, and among other people. For here you leave behind the short-lived beauty, where you had waited to be nourished in centuries, living sweetly. For here the heralds have come and said: They are calling you, rise and do not be late."

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Јелена Ердељан*

О СМРТИ И УМИРАЊУ У СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНОЈ СРБИЈИ. ПИСАНИ ИЗВОРИ И ВИЗУЕЛНА КУЛТУРА

Апстракт: Српски средњовековни писани извори и визуелна култура нуде изванредну грађу за познавање и разумевање свих аспеката смрти и умирања у средњовековној Србији. Будући део и баштиник византијске православне богослужбене традиције и вербо-визуелне културе, и овај део српске средњовековне културе треба свакако разматрати у том контексту. Мора се, међутим, узети у обзир и неправославно, католичко, становништво – нарочито у градовима на приморју али и у централним областима српске средњовековне државе, као и стара предхришћанска пракса и веровања која у свом христијанизованом виду живе у православној популацији, нарочито у руралним областима. Софистицирану реторику смрти и умирања у средњовековној Србији која је предмет овог текста свакако у будућности треба даље проучавати и то управо кроз међусобну повезаност вербалног, литерарног, и слике, визуелног.

Кључне речи: смрт, умирање, средњовековна Србија, писани извори, визуелна култура

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TWO COLLECTIONS OF PARAKLESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR TIME OF CREATION (First Half – Middle of the 15th Century)

Abstract: Two collections of paraklesis were produced in Serbian scriptoria during the first half of the 15th century. The paraklesis is a short service that is not tied to a certain date but is used at times of need when an individual or a society is praying for help from the divine forces. This text analyses two manuscripts from the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church; the first belongs to the collection of Radoslav Grujić (3-I-3) and was created in the first years of the 15th century. The second manuscript belongs to the basic collection of manuscripts of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church (no. 34), and is dated to the middle of the same century, produced in Smederevo. This text considers the reasons for the formation of two such collections and their purpose and function.

Key words: Paraklesis, collection, 15th century, Jefimija, Radič, Županjevac, Stefan Domestik, Smederevo

The second half of the 14th century witnessed a change in the general situation in the Balkans. The breakup of the Serbian state that took place after the death of emperor Stefan Uroš V (d. 1371), the last ruler of the Nemanide dynasty, was the turning point that impacted not only the political scene in Serbian lands, but resulted also in a changed experience in all walks of life. Moreover, that same year saw the first large scale clash between the Serbs and their new enemy – the Turks who appeared in the Balkans. These crucial events proved that a time of unrest had begun, a time of uncertainty and fear before the coming changes which were

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bringing along unforeseeable perils. The year 7000 (1492) was approaching and, according to an apocryphal prophecy of Solomon, the end of the world was expected. Fear of the unknown *other century* that was to follow this dramatic event left deep imprints on the perceptions of the educated people of the era. Changes in the political and social life also influenced the spiritiual life of the Serbian people. However paradoxical it may seem, in the last three decades of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century Serbian literary production did not stagnate nor disappear, quite the contrary, this was a time of production of works of the highest artistic merit.

The chronological framework defined by the title of this text witnessed the production of two collections of paraklesis that are a reflection of the time of their creation and the inner spiritual life of the educated men. However, before we procede with the presentation of the two mentioned collections, we need to say a few words about the *paraklesis* as a specific form of hymnographic compilation. Over the last couple of years, researchers have focused their attention on a subject that had previously been poorly investigated – namely on the *paraklesis* as a specific type of service of limited function, as well as on the collections containing them. (Убипарип & Трийић, 2010; Убипарип & Трийић, 2015; Суботин–Голубовић, 2018.) The paraklesis is a particular type of service dedicated to a saint which, as opposed to services found in the menaion, is not tied to a particular date but is sung when the need arises (Трифуновић, 1990[2], pp. 155–156). It is already the Slavic name, *moleban*, that reflects precisely the Greek term associated with this sort of service – παράκλησις. In the Serbian medieval written sources we come across both names – *moleban* and *paraklesis*. The paraklesis is a prayer addressing a selected saint who is believed to have the power to answer the prayers of the petitioner. This service can be sung either in or outside the church, at any given time of the day and throughout the year, depending on the circumstances and when the need arises. The *moleban* belongs firstly to the domain of private devotion and by its intercession the petitioner can seek protection in times of natural disasters, earthquakes, hunger, external enemy attacks or civil strife – in times of such terrifying events which are beyond the control of any individual. The only thing to be done is for that individual to address the higher powers in hope of receiving shelter from the coming peril. Parekleses are composed in honor of those saints who are believed to be able to offer help and protection in times of the above mentioned unfortuitous events. The origins of this service are not entirely clear. The first to draw scholarly attention to their specific use was our colleague from Bulgaria, Stefan Kožuharov, who associated their appearence in the Slavic world with the literary circle of patriarch Euthymios of Trnovo and

his followers, and proposed hesychasm as the crucial force behind their spiritual orientation (Кожухаров, 1974). He managed to identify two Bulgarian parakleses devoted to the venerable Paraskeve, one the work of monk Makarios and the other of an anonymous hymnographer (Кожухаров, 1974, p. 293). Philoteos Kokkinos, patriarch of Constantinople (1353–1354/5 and 1364–1376), reformer of liturgical practice and prolific author, composed a number of canons which included a petitioning tone typical of parekleses. The hymnographic works of Philoteos which include a tone of personal prayer could have served as a model for later authors of Slavonic parakleses. Slavonic translations of hymnographic compositions of the Constantinopolitan patriarch Philoteos Kokkinos appeared quite early on, at practically the same time. There is ground to assume that these translations were produced in Chilandar itself. In the Chilandar manuscript № 342 (1364/1374) we find *Supplicatory Canon to Jesus Christ and the Mother of God* (against drought), while manuscript № 378 (older part of a manuscript from the first quarter of the 14th century) from the same collection – *Supplicatory Canon to Jesus Christ* and two prayers (1. against drought, strong winds and barbarian attacs; 2. in the case of a terrible and sudden death) (Богдановић, 1978, pp. 139–140, 149; Суботин–Голубовић, 2004, pp. 247–272.). Elements of petitioning address are to be found in the earliest works of the Serbian hymnographer, Teodosije; Đorđe Sp. Radojičić already noted them in the *Joint Canon to Sts. Simeon and Sava* (of the fourth mode) (Радојичић, 1956, pp. 137–155.). That indicates that the apperance of parakleses as we know them from written sources of the 14th – 15th centuries had their predecessors in some sort of preparatory period that saw the composition of texts which heralded the creation and the line of development of this type of short services that were independent of the general liturgical calendar.

The structure of the *paraklesis* is stable; it opens with Psalm 142 followed by a troparion and a litany. The canon is the central part of the service and a kondakion and an oikos are then added after the sixth ode. After the canon there are three sticheira, and the entire service ends with a sticherion of *слава и нињa (δόξα καί νύν)* . The parakleses that are a part of the two collections we are discussing in this text include full evangelical readings (and not just the indications) which thus provide them with a completeness and a certain self-sustainability. The anonymous authors of the parakleses were obviously well informed of the cults of the saints, their *vitae* and their miracles. Existing texts taken from certain hymnographic collections, mostly menaia and oktoechos (for parakleses dedicated to the Virgin) are inserted into these services. Naturally, this does not preclude the possibility that in certain cases and for special purposes entirely new and original texts are composed for parakleses dedicated to a given saint.

Although a series of different parakleses are to be found mostly in euchologia,[1] psalters with commentaries and horologia, two collections with a larger number of parakleses dedicated to different types of saints were put together in the first half of the 15th century. Both manuscripts are kept today at the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade.The older manuscript belongs to the collection of Radoslav Grujić and carries the signature 3-I-3; judging by the watermarks on the paper, it was copied around 1395/1405. The history of this book is interesting. According to an inscription, it was aquired by the monk Samuilo in region of Sirinić near Prizren and brought to the monastery of Devič (Пузовић, 2015, p. 107). After 1936, the manuscript was moved from the monastery to Belgrade by Radoslav Grujić for the purpose of its study. During World War II the book was in Belgrade and after the war, as part of the group of manuscripts collected by Grujić, it became a part of the collection of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, there is no inscription to indicate the place of production of this manuscript but its contents could, in our opinion, be useful in the process of determining the place of its making. Relying on the method of attribution, Lucija Cernić has identified its scribe as Radič who was undoubtedly employed at the Lazarević court office. So far, we know that Radič was the scribe who wrote the charter issued on August 1st, 1398 by princess Milica (the nun Eugenia) to the monastery of Chilandar (kept today at the Laura of St. Athanasios on Athos), as well as two books – the already menitoned collection of parakleses and a Pentecostarion from 1408. The Pentecostarion was written for despot Stefan Lazarević[2] (Цернић, 1981, p. 358.). Radič's activity as a scribe is tied to Županjevac in the region of Levač where, at precisely the time of his activities there, princess Milica and her court had resided. Archaeological excavations carried out in the village of Županjevac have uncovered the ruins of a medieval fortification and a monastery[3] (Рашковић & Грковић, 2014, p. 329).

In view of these facts, we believe that the creation of the collection of Parakleses from the Grujić collection should be associated with the princess Milica, Jefimija and their close circle of which scribe Radič was a

1 Thus in Chilandar manuscript no. 378, an euchologion from the 15th century, there are parakleses dedicated to St. Nicholas, the holy prophet Elijah, megalomartyr George, Christ, the asomatoi (Богдановић, 1978, p. 149).

2 The manuscript is kept in the Russian National Library in Saint Petersburg (F I 583).

3 It is assummed that princess Milica resided in Županjevac during the course of construction of her endowment – the monastery of Ljubostinja, which is also located in the region of Levač. The same region is also the site of the monastery of Kalenić, raised by protovestiarios Bogdan. This speaks of the high level of involvement of the nobility close to the ruling house of Lazarević in the area in question.

member. Indicative in this vein are the very contents of the manuscript in question. The first of a series of its parakleses is dedicated to the venerable Sava and Symeon, and Teodosije's *Joint Canon to Sts. Simeon and Sava* (of the fourth mode) was used in the process of its making (Мошин, 1962, p. 220; Убипарип & Тријић, 2010, pp. 49–50). A brief instruction regarding the occasions of its singing is inserted into the paraklesis text: (p. 6) аште ли хоштеши пѣти параклис(ь) градоу . рекше с(ве)тон wбитѣли . вь нєиже живеши . wт напасти приключьши се ен . (p. 6a) еште молиw се и w єже сьхранити се с(ве)тон wбители сеи, и всакомоу градоу и странѣ . wт гл(а)да, гоубителъства . троуса . потопа, wгня . еще молиw' се и w єже сьхранити се с(ве)тон wбители сеи, и всакомоу градоу и странѣ . ѿ гл(а)да, гоубител'ства . троуса . потопа, wгня мьча . и нашьствиа иноплеменъникъ . и межджоусобные рати . и w еже м(и)л(о)стивоу . и кроткоу, и тихоу . и бл(а)гопрѣмѣн'ноу быти . бл(а)гомоу и члов(ѣ)колюбцоу б(ог)оу w грѣсѣхъ нашихъ . ѿвратити ѿ нас(ь) належещаго праведнаго его прѣщенїа . и помиловати нас(ь) (...).[4]

The following paraklesis is dedicated to the holy megalomartyr Georgios. There we find the full text of Psalm 50; canon of the second mode (б(о)ж(ь)ствною вѣрою и любовию призивающе те) is taken from the minaion service for April 23rd (May 6th). The paraklesis of Saint Demetrios includes a canon of the fourth mode (inc. б(о)ж(ь)ствныимь моучениа вѣн'цеи(ь)), the lection from Luke follows the sixth ode. The same *katabasis* is repeated in each ode of the canon (Ѕп(а)си ѿ бѣдь рабы своє страстотрьп'че . іако вьси сь б(о-го)иь к' тебѣ прибегаемь іако къ топлоиѕ ѕастоупникоу и скороиоу помощ'никоу.).

A special place among those parakleses is assigned to that dedicated to the Forty Holy Martyr of Sebastea. The reasons behind the composition of a paraklesis dedicated to these saints should perhaps be sought in the lines of Jefimija's *Encomium of Holy Prince Lazar* (Грковић, 1993, p. 93). Addressing Lazar, Jefimija beseeches him to pray to God for his people together with the assembly of holy martyrs:

> Gather the assembly of your responedents in dialogue,
> the holy martyrs,
> and with them all pray to God,
> who has exalted you in celebration:
> inform Georgios, move Demetrios,
> convince the Theodores, take Merkurios and Prokopios,
> and leave not behind the forty martyrs of Sebastea,
> and in their martyrdom (in Asia Minor)
> your beloved children are at war,
> prince Stefan and Vuk (...).[5]

4 We pointed out the cases of attack of external enemies and civil strife because they were aspects of everyday life at that time.

5 Larrington, 1995, p. 251.

Regardless of the fact that Jefimija's text belongs to the genre of *encomium* by nature and literary characteristics, the choice of saints Lazar addresses is indicative – they all belong to the category of holy warriors and it is quite clear that Jefimija chose them not only to underline Lazar's warrior image, but also to show that he is addressing those among the saints who belong to the same rank as he does. At the same time this is an allusion to all those warriors who died alongside Lazar, thus pointing out the fact that they had all died as martyrs of the True Faith, just as all the listed holy warriors had died for their faith in the first centuries of Christianity, suffering cruel persecution. The mention of Lazar's sons, Stefan and Vuk, who at that time, in 1402, were in Asia Minor and their association with Roman soldiers who were martyred for their faith in times of persecution of Christians in the days of emperor Licinius, alludes to the predicament of Lazar's sons who were forced to make war on the side of an infidel ruler. It is thus fully understandable why the collection of parakleses include one dedicated to the holy martyrs of Sebastea. It is a reflection of the actual historical circumstances and its composition was by no means an act of chance but a result of deep contemplation. Although there can be no outright claims, it does appear that the author of this paraklesis followed the line of Jefimija's thinking and this would possibly make it yet another argument in favor of the idea that the entire collection was conceptualized among members of princess Milica's circle and with the assistance of her close associate and cousin Jefimija.

The next paraklesis is dedicated to Saint Nicholas based on canon of the second mode which is sung on Thursdays (from the Octoechos) (inc. вьсегда б(о)ж(ь)ствномоу прѣстолоу прѣдстоіе николаіе ...).[6] In hagiographic sources and hymnographic material Saint Nicholas appears as a universal protector and aide in any trouble which makes him a fit companion of those who offer selfless help to the afflicted and the grieving (Anrich, 1913; Суботин–Голубовић, 2013; Атанасова, 2015.). The choice of canon for this paraklesis is also understandable – canons from the Octoechos are paraclytic in nature and thus better suited for the paraklesis than canons from menaion services to Saint Nicholas.

As somewhat of a surprise, next we find a paraklesis to the venerable fathers Onouphrios and Peter the Athonite, celebrated in menaia on June 12th.[7] Although they are two different saints, in this paraklesis they are

6 In medieval times there were several versions of the oktoichos. In one of them, present in the Serbian manuscript tradition, Thursday was a day dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Myra: Йовчева, 2007, 51.

7 Onouphrios lived in ascesis in the desert of Upper Egypt in the 5th century. Peter the Athonite was a professional soldier. He was taken captive by the Arabs and spent a long time in captivity in the city of Amara on the Euphrates. Having regained his freedom, he reached Athos where he lived as a hermit. He died there in 734.

celebrated in a joint i.e. combined canon of the fourth mode. The odes of the canon that served for the making of this paraklesis are made up of troparia taken from the separate canons to Onouphrios and Peter. This approach lies at the basis of the composition of the combined canon which, by typological standards, was present already in the archaic Serbian menaia of the 13th century. At the time of creation of the paraklesis dedicated to the two hermits, the above mentioned compositional approach had long been abandoned. However, the author was obviously well informed of the archaic tradition and used it as a model to accomodate his needs. Thus, for example, the first ode comprises of two troparia dedicated to Onouphrios and one to Peter;[8] the fourth ode – two troparia for Onouphrios and one for Peter; the fifth – one troparion for Onouphrios and two for Peter, etc. Although the lives of the two saints developed along somewhat different paths, both ended their lives as hermits. In this case also Peter was chosen very knowingly – as a soldier who retreated from this world after many challenging temptations. In this case, Peter and Onouphrios are representatives of the ranks of the holy anachoretes. The composition of this paraklesis could have been shaped under the influence of someone who had a deep spiritual and personal connection with Athos. Once again, we have Jefimija in mind, whose father and infant son were buried in Chilandar (Трифуновић 1983; Шпадијер 2014, pp. 119–124).

The paraklesis dedicated to the venerable Mary of Egypt is the greatest surprise of the collection.[9] It is, at least at this moments, the only known paraklesis dedicated to this saint to be found in the Serbian literary tradition. The paraklesis is based on the canon of the fourth mode from the menaion service. Should we adhere to the assumption that the creation of the entire manuscript is related to the circle of people close to princess Milica, it is highly possible that Mary of Egypt, a harlot who became a recluse, was selected by the patron(s) of this collection of parakleses (Milica and/or Jefimija) who probably believed that women who bore such a great sacrifice in their day should also find some sort of mention. It may sound unusual, but Mary of Egypt was a model of a woman who rose to saintliness by the sheer strength of her ascesis (Шпадијер, 1992, p. 177). According to tradition, a great number of noble women whose husbands had died alongside Lazar also took their monastic wows in Županjevac, together with Milica, and thus forged a sisterhood of a kind, the members of which were united in the tragedy that befell them.

The paraklesis dedicated to the holy hieromartyr Eleutherios (celebrated on December 15th) is based on the canon of the first mode from

8 The manuscript is damaged and is missing a leaf in this spot, the canon continues only with the fourth ode.

9 Mary of Egypt is celebrated on April 1st.

the menaion sevice. The choice of Eleutherios also carries a strong message of martyrdom for the faith. Eleutherios was born in Rome and display such an intensity in prophessing the faith that he was ordained as bishop of Illyricum with a see in Valona at a tender age of twenty. He was martyred around the year 120 AD in Rome, in the days of emperor Hadrian.

The contents of this collection of parakleses is rounded off with *Supplicatory Canon to emperor and despot* and the acronym indicates the name of its author – Jefrem.[10] Jefrem's canon was reworked so that a number of troparia speak of the despot – instead of the emperor. Vladimir Mošin was the first to identify the text and he pointed out that it was a later adaptation of Jefrem's composition (Мошин, 1962, pp. 219–234.). Biljana Jovanović-Stipčević is of the opinion that it was Radič himself who adapted Jefrem's canon (Јовановић–Стипчевић, 1980, p. 24.). We should point out that *Supplicatory paraklesis to despot Stefan* is the only text in this collection which includes two canons – Jefrem's and the canon of the Virgin from the Octoechos (eighth mode). Whatsmore, it is the only one dedicated to a living man and ruler – despot Stefan. This detail goes to underline our opinion that the entire manuscript was conceptualized among members of the circle around princess Milica, and probably with her own personal contribution. Previous research has already, somewhat shily, stated that despot Stefan could have been the patron of this collection (Убипарип & Трijић, 2015, p. 85). However, it appears to us that it is precisely the presence of Jefrem's adapted canon that stands in opposition to such an assumption – the despot would hardly have personally required that the canon be adapted and then added to the manuscript.

The other, younger collection of parakleses was copied in 1456 and is kept today in the basic collection of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, catalogued under the no. 34. It was already Dimitrije Bogdanović who noted that this manuscript, along with manuscript no. 50 from the same collection, comprises a single codicological unit (Богдановић, 1982, p. 91). Insight into the structures of the two manuscripts shows that this is a *Psalter with commentaries*; the collection of parakleses is actually part of the second half of the manuscript (Убипарип & Трijић, 2015, p. 71). We also know the name of the scribe – Stefan Domestik.[11] It was he who, most probably, conceptualized this collection of parakleses. Before it reached the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, this manuscript was kept in the monastery of Krušedol and had, most probably, once been a part of

10 The monk Jefrem composed the *Канон за цара* in the days of emperor Uroš V (r. 1355–1371).

11 The attribute Domestik by the name of the scribe proves that he was a member of the higher clergy and the chaplain of the church of the Annunciation in Smedrevo, the see of the metropolitan. Apart from being educated in music, Stefan was also a good and experienced scribe, as attested by the manuscripts he copied (Цернић, 1968, pp. 61–83.).

the library of Serbian despots, transferred after the fall of Smederevo to their newly founded monastery.[12]

Following the death of despot Stefan and the returning of his capital, Belgrade, to the Hungarians in 1427, it was necessary to secure a new center for the Serbian state. The construction of Smederevo, the capital of the Despotate, began in 1428 at the place where the River Jezava flows into the Danube. The opening words of the study on Smederevo written by the archaeologist Marko Popović render a precise image of the epoch: „This renowned fortification represented the last and the best example of Serbian military architecture. It was constructed in a desperate, but unsuccessful, attempt to preserve the state in the face of Turkish invasion" (Поповић, 2013, p. 5). The Turks managed to take the city already in 1439 because it was still not prepared to defend itself. In accordance with the peace treaty of 1444, they returned it to despot Đurađ. The Turks attacked again in 1454 but the city managed to defend itslef. Finally, on June 20th, 1459, Smederevo surrendered to the Turks. In the first thirty years of its existence, the city survived a number of dramatic moments, and uncertainty and fear marked the everyday life of its inhabitants. One event left a particular imprint on the life of Smederevo in the final years prior to its fall. Following a series of difficulties that had befallen the city, despot Đurađ managed to find a way to secure a new holy protector for his capital. He succeeded in acquiring the relics of the holy apostle Luke and paid an exhorbitant sum of 30,000 ducats for them.

Luke's relics were expected to provide protection and deliverance in the face of imminent danger and their translation was seen as a ray of hope that miracles were indeed possible. A new feast was established in honor of this event – January 12th was celebrated as the day of the translation of the relics of St. Luke to Smederevo and their deposition in the church of the Annunciation, the see of the metropolitan. The confirmed date of the translation, January 12th, 1453, indicates the *terminus ante quem* for the construction and consecration of the church. An entire corpus of prose and hymnographic texts has been created in honor of this event. The *adventus* of the relics to Smederevo is described in two prose texts[13] (Ruvarac, 1868, pp. 178–186; Павловић, 1882, pp. 70–100; Суботин–Голубовић, 2000, pp. 167–178). A special service was composed in honor of the new-

12 The old signature of this manuscript was Krušedol Ђ V 1 (Петковић, 1914, p. 48.). Krušedol monastery was founded by bishop Maksim Branković between 1509 and 1516. He was the grandson of despot Đurađ Branković. He was christened Đorđe and was born in 1461. After the Ottoman conquest of Belgrade the see of the metropolitan of Belgrade was moved to Krušedol and bishop Maksim was at its head.

13 Ruvarac published the text which is found in manuscript no. 165 of the Patriarchal Library. Pavlović published a somewhat different version found in slave 46 of the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

ly established feast of the translation of the relics of the apostle Luke to Smederevo, as well as two parakleses[14] (Суботин–Голубовић, 1998, pp. 133–157; Суботин-Голубовић, 2011, pp. 99–116). The acquisition of such a powerful protector certainly contributed to a certain sense of secury but it did not quiet down the omnipresent dread of the inhabitants of Smederevo. In view of the more recent approaches to the study of the effect of the presence of holy relics on the status of a given church or the broader community, we could consider the possibility that the intended purpose of the translation of such highly revered relics was to transform the newly founded city into a new sacred space that would grant protection to all who resided in it. Alexei Lidov has discussed this phenomenon and his words could also apply to this Serbian case in point: „It has been understood that the most significant aspect of relics and miraculous icons was the role they played in the creation of particular sacred spaces. In many cases relics and venerable icons were established as a core, a kind of pivot in the forming of a concrete spatial environment." (Lidov, 2007, pp. 135–136.)

Judging by the water marks, the Smederevo collection of parakleses was created around the year 1456, three years after the adventus of the relics of St. Luke to the city and three years before its final fall into Turkish hands. It opens with the Akathistos to the Holy Virgin (Friday vespers of the fifth week of Lent), and continues with a series of parakleses dedicated to Christ, the asomatoi powers, John the Forerunner, holy apostles Peter and Paul, prophet Elijah, protomartyr Stephen, megalomartyr Georgios, megalomartyr Demetrios, John Chrysostomos, Saint Nicholas, Saints Symeon and Sava, Saint Ephraim the Syriac. The final paraklesis of the collection is dedicated to the apostle Luke, an original composition of an anonymous Serbian hymnographe with a canon of the eighth mode. The first and last compositions of this collection of parakleses are key to understanding the nature of this manuscript. The Virgin was the protectress of Constantinople. The Akathistos hymn, sung in her honor in the fifth week of Lent, is ascribed to patriarch Sergios and related to a hisorical event. In 626 the Avars laid siege to Constantinople and then suddenly gave up on this undertaking. This miraculous event is explained as a result of the intervention of the Virgin who protected her city. The collection ends with a *Paraklesis to the apostle Luke* who became the protector of the newly founded city of Smederevo. We are inclined to interpret this as an indication that Luke had the power to protect his city in the same manner, just as the Virgin Mary had done with Constantinople almost 800 years earlier. The creation of this paraklesis goes to show that the Despotate was living the final days of its existence in full awareness of its imminent fate. The

14 The service was part of manuscript no. 165 of the Patriarchal Library in Belgrade. The paraklesis is part of the collection of paraklesis, manuscript no. 34 of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

dark and gloomy tones of the canon of this paraklesis best confirm this assumption. We cite here only a couple of examples in order to corroborate this idea. The fundamental themes of the canon are illnesses (spiritual and corporeal) that have befallen men, fear of sins committed and repentence. We must also keep in mind the fact that St. Luke was a man of medicine, a doctor. Thus, *слава (δόξα)* in the first ode of the canon includes the following lines: (...) "therefore, I address the casket of your relics, oh apostle, help me – your servant who is on the path to be destroyed". The first troparion of the third ode of the canon: "The darkness of my life makes dark my unhappy soul, and the night of my actions makes my heart dark" (...). The second troparion of the fourth ode: "Heal the boils on my soul, oh apostle, and the bitter wounds of my body make whole" (...). Слава (δόξα) in the ninth ode: "Raise the horn of those from our state who pray with faith, and destroy the barbarian attacks, Lord, and save this invincible city and your people, us who have our own apostle who prays for us." Examples such as these go to illustrate the actual state of despondence and hopelessness in the city and among the people close to despot Đurađ.

The choice of saints with parakleses devoted to them and presented in this collection is partly identical with that found in the first collection discussed in this text. Christ, Saint Nicholas, megalomartyrs Georgios and Demetrios appear in both manuscripts. However, just as there were certain surprising contents in the first collection, so, too, there are some surprising elements in the one produced in Smederevo. First – a paraklesis to John Chrysostomos who is considered to be a poet of repentence. The other unexpected saint is Ephraim the Syriac. Dragiša Bojović has alredy considered the significance of Ephraim's literary opus in the context of repentence and the approaching end of days. In his works, Ephraim the Syriac speaks of reprentance, the Last Judgement, the soul, death and the transience of life (Бојовић, 2004). Serbian manuscripts with a number of Ephraim's texts speak in favor of his popularity in monastic circles. It is, thus, not surprising that the author of this collection included a paraklesis dedicated to this saint. It was, perhaps, the deep piety of despot Đurađ that influenced the inclusion of John Chrysostomos and Ephraim the Syriac in the Smederevo collection.

In our opinion, the reasons behind the making of the collections of parakleses discussed above, as well as their functional value, indicate that they were a product of the time of their creation and a unique phenomenon, having firstly in mind their contents and use. It is obvious that both collections were put together to answer the needs of a close circle of people and it is, therefore, not surprising that there aren't any other manuscripts of the same specific contents. Both were conceptualized in court circles, one of princess Milica and the other of despot Đurađ Branković. After the final fall of the Despotate and the loss of state independence, there was simply no need for them any more.

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Татјана Суботин-Голубовић*

ДВА ЗБОРНИКА ПАРАКЛИСА У КОНТЕКСТУ ВРЕМЕНА СВОГА НАСТАНКА (ПРВА ПОЛОВИНА - СРЕДИНА 15 ВЕКА)

Апстракт: Током прве половине века настала су два зборника параклиса. Параклис је кратка служба која се не везује за одређени датум, већ се служи према потреби, у време када појединац или заједница траже помоћ и заштиту од вишњих сила. У раду су анализирана два рукописа из Музеја СПЦ; први припада Грујићевој збирци (З-I-3) и настао је у првим годинама XV столећа. Други рукопис припада основној збирци рукописа Музеја СПЦ (бр. 34), датиран је у средину истога столећа, а преписан је у Смедереву. Анализа садржаја ових зборника показала је да представљају одраз свог времена и пружају слику унутрашњег духовног живота образованог човека. Рукопис из Грујићеве збирке преписан је, судећи по воденим знацима хартије, око 1395/1405. године. Овај зборник параклиса састављен је несумњиво при двору кнегиње Милице у Жупањевцу, чему у прилог говори чињеница да га је исписао Радич, писар дворске канцеларије. У одабиру светих којима су састављени параклиси овог зборника учествовала је Јефимија, за шта су у раду понуђени докази. Други, млађи зборник параклиса преписан је 1456. године у Смедереву, последњој српској престоници. Рукопис је настао за потребе Благовештењске цркве при којој се тада налазило седиште митрополије. На исписивању, а чини се и састављању овог зборника параклиса, радио је познати писар тога времена Стефан Доместик. Узимајући у обзир избор светаца којима су параклиси ушли у састав овог рукописа, претпостављамо да је одређену улогу приликом његовог настанка имао деспот Ђурађ Бранковић. Настанак ова два рукописа представља јединствену појаву у српској средини прве половине XV века, везану за највише кругове друштвене и политичке кругове свога времена.

Кључне речи: Параклис, зборник, XV век, Јефимија, Радич, Жупањевац, Стефан Доместик, Смедерево

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PART TWO
DEATH, ILLNESS, BODY AND SOUL: TESTIMONIES

Vlada Stanković*

"THERE IS NO LIVING MAN WHO WILL NOT SEE DEATH". A CASE STUDY ON BYZANTINE THOUGHTS ABOUT LIFE, DEATH, AND AFTERLIFE: TESTAMENTS OF SYMBATIOS PAKOURIANOS AND HIS WIDOW, THE NUN MARIA

Abstract: Only a decade into the reign of the emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118), a strong documentary evidence confirms the radical restructuring of the Byzantine elite, and the redistribution of the empire's wealth, especially the land estates, among the relatives and supporters of the new emperor. The testaments of Symbatios Pakourianos from 1090 and his widow, the nun Maria from 1098, together with a few related acts, form a unique dossier which offers an insight into the life and career, management of the wealth, thoughts on life, death and afterlife, and the connections within the new Komnenian elite.

Keywords: Byzantium, death, testament, Symbatios Pakourianos, Byzantine elite, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos

The first decade of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos brought about significant, often fundamental changes to Byzantine political and economic system, radically rearranging the Byzantine elite, its structure and functioning. After a series of civil wars in the second half of the eleventh century, with their last and the most vicious phase commencing after great Byzantine defeats in the east and in the west in 1071, the success of

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the rebellion of the Komnenian brothers depended in great measure on the strength of the coalition of the powerful personalities, and influential families they established. The faithfulness of the allies that supported Alexios and Isaac Komnenoi and helped the former to ascend to the imperial throne in April of 1081, was secured in the first place by the future emperor's promises of rewards, and then by realization of those promises by the newly crowned emperor Alexios. Aside of his closest family, his mother Anna Dalasene and older brother Isaac, who formed a kind of triumvirate with the new emperor for almost first two decades of his rule, and the powerful clan of the Doukas family, Alexios relied on his family's clients,[1] and a circle of experienced, influential military commanders, with whom he had crossed paths over a decade he spent on various commanding positions, waging wars on many a rebel for previous emperors.

One prominent member of this circle was Gregory Pakourianos, the grand *domestikos* of the occident, the holder of the, at the time, highest military office, which reflected his military prowess in the 1070s. As a grand *domestikos* of the occident, Gregory Pakourianos had assumed the command of all the Byzantine troops in Europe, the Byzantine's west, becoming in reality commander of the entire Byzantine army. Of Georgian origin, Gregory Pakourianos rose to the highest levels of Byzantine elite. Well-connected in the capital Constantinople, with a wide net of his own relatives, allies and clients and immensely well off, he founded the famous monastery of the Virgin Mary in Petritzios, better known as the Bačkovo monastery, only two years after Alexios Komnenos was crowned as emperor (Lemerle, 1977, pp. 113–191).

Symbatios Pakourianos, possibly a relative of Gregory, but undoubtedly member of the same contingent of influential Georgian émigrés to the empire who gained prominence in the seemingly incessant internal fightings within Byzantine elite at the time, was another important ally of the new emperor. The testaments of Symbatios Pakourianos, and his widow, the nun Maria, offer a unique insight into the worldview, attitudes on life and death, and reflections on the constant political instability of the late eleventh-century Byzantium (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, pp. 150–156; and no. 47, pp. 170–183, respectively). Preserved in the archive of the Georgian Athonite monastery of Iviron, the testaments of Symbatios Pakourianos and his widow, together with another brief document of the latter, newly widowed nun Maria by which she accepts to be executor of her late husband's testament (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 46, pp. 167–169), form a dossier of the life achievements, political importance and accumu-

1 One of the most significant client of the Komnenoi, and Alexios personally, was Leon Kephalas (see *Actes d'e Lavra I*, 1970, no. 65, pp. 334–341; Станковић, 2006, pp. 48–51). Among Alexios Komnenos' personal clients, the Turkic renegade Tatikios was without a doubt one of the most faithful and most picturesque (Станковић, 2006, pp. 53–54).

lated goods of Symbatios Pakouranios, as well as of their personal destiny, their thoughts and contemplations on life, family, and afterlife.

Belonging to the lower echelons of the emperor's closest circle of allies, Symbatios Pakourianos and his wife Kalé (Καλή – *Good*), who took the name Maria as a nun, exemplify the swift change in the Byzantine elite which came about with the ascendance of Alexios Komnenos and his relatives, evidenced in the redistribution of landed properties, mostly in the capital's European hinterland, in the regions of Thrace, Macedonia, and in somewhat less documented degree in Thessaly, over which the emperor exercised direct control in the first years of his reign. Bearing the title of *kouropalates*, Symbatios belonged to that important, and relatively numerous stratum of mid-level allies of the new imperial family, one member of which was his half brother Sergios, honored with a only slightly lesser dignity of *magistros* (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, nos. 43, 44, 47).[2] The fortunate circumstance that both Symbatios and his widow's testaments are preserved in the archive of the Iviron monastery, provide a unique opportunity to glimpse into, and analyze their and their relatives' careers and destinies, their worldview and their position in the new political order established with the ascendance of the Komnenoi and the crowning of Alexios Komnenos. Without these documents, it should be noted, both Symbatios and his wife Kalé/the nun Maria, but also the relatives mentioned in their testaments, would forever be buried under the layers of history of eleventh-century Byzantium, since they are not mentioned in any other historical source that has reached us.

* * *

Symbatios Pakourianos composed and signed his testament on 23 January 1090, less than nine years after the great change took place in the empire, with the victory in the latest civil war of the Komnenoi and their allies, and the crowning of Alexios Komnenos. Symbatios married Kalé, the daughter of a *kouropalates* Basilakios,[3] who remains also otherwise

2 After the newly created imperial title of *sebastokrator*, which emperor Alexios devised specifically for his older brother Isaac, the titles of *kouropalates* and *magistros*, once among the highest titles in Byzantine hierarchy, represented in the first decade of Alexios I Komnenos's rule still high dignities, positioned, however, a significant step below the emperor's direct relatives, for whom the titles of *protosebastos* and *sebastos* were reserved (see the place of these titles in the previous centuries, Oikonomidès, 1972, pp. 47, 137, 245, 263).

3 Kalé's father *kouropalates* Basilakios was already deceased in January 1090, while her mother, *kouropalatisa* Zoe, was still in laity in 1090, while Kalé names her as the nun Xene (Ξένη), adding her last name Diabatene in her own testament (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 4–5, p. 154; and *Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 47, l. 2, p. 178).

unidentifiable, possibly stemming from, or connected to the prominent Byzantine family of Basilakios, whose members were very active politically and intellectually in the late eleventh and the first half of the twelfth century (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, pp. 152, 173–174). Bearing in mind the functioning of Byzantine political system at the time, and the position of Symbatios and his bride's family, it is almost certain that their marriage was if not brokered than sanctioned by the emperor Alexios Komnenos, since we find Symbatios and his relatives as emperor's servants and allies in the theme Macedonia, which Alexios I tried to resurrect administratively, already in 1086. The couple was still young around the year 1090, as they both emphasize in their testaments, but for one reason or the other they did not, and probably could not have children, which additionally pushed them to organize their properties and belongings, and to donate a large portion of them to the Georgian monastery of Iviron, in which Symbatios asked to be buried (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 14–15, p. 155). Throughout the text of their testaments, there is a noticeable feeling of melancholy due to the fact they could not have children, aggravated in the testament of Symbatios' widow, the nun Maria, by a sudden death of her husband in the spring of his youth, which left her 'without protection and without consolation' (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 47, ll. 5–6, p. 178).

Even though they both pass tacitly over the immediate reasons for Symbatios' decision to compose a testament, and over the exact cause of his untimely death, it is sufficiently clear from the introductory part of Symbatios' testament that he was well aware at the time he dictated his last will that the end of his life is nearing fast. A somewhat hurried style of the entire document, precise but laconic enumeration of Symbatios' orders and wishes, betray both the mindset and the physical condition of someone who held no false hopes of living much longer, despite the obligatory emphasis of the author that he is of sound mind and in good health, necessary for his testament to be legally accepted and his provisions not challenged (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 2–3, p. 154). Of greater significance, and pointing to the evident unavoidability of approaching death, is the choice of the introductory quotation from the Scriptures. Symbatios underscores that the main thing he had learned from the Holy Books, but also from his own experience in the world, is that "there is no living man who will not see death", paraphrasing the Psalms (Ps. 88:49), and continuing that he wished to prepare for the *dreadful mystery of death*, not wanting to be surprised like many with its sudden arrival (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 1–4, p. 154). Quoting, or rather paraphrasing the Psalms is a very common feature in Byzantine literature in general, but the choice of quotation reveals in a subtle manner the real circumstances surrounding

Symbatios Pakourianos in January of 1090, evident, as noted already, in a hurried and somewhat expedient style of the text of his document. The paraphrase from Psalms itself betrays the same expediency: "There is no living man who will not see death" is slightly, but significantly changed original phrase, which acquires in the testament of Symbatios a determination not present in the original "Who is that man who will live and not see death".[4]

The same determination is present throughout Symbatios' testament: his death seems imminent, and there is not a slightest doubt that he dictates his will conscious that soon all his deliberations, wishes and orders will be acted upon. Not dwelling excessively on the questions of life and death, Symbatios presented a list of his properties and tried to efficiently put all things in order before his departure from this world. In a passion-free way, Symbatios devotes the majority of his will to his wife Kalé, enumerating firstly the goods she had brought to their marriage as a dowry, of which he was – following the well-established Byzantine legal practice – only a custodian, and which will return to her full ownership after his death, proceeding with other properties which he acquired from the emperor Alexios Komnenos for his faithful service, the most important of which are the land property called Soudaga in the theme of Macedonia, and the village Radolibos with the surrounding land, both of which were to become the property of his wife Kalé (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 4–8, p. 154).

Apart from his half-brother Sergios and his brother-in-law Niketas who were to receive a landed property, in the first case, and objects and a *himation* gifted by the emperor himself, in the second, and gifts in money to other associates, Symbatios took special care to reward and free from service his faithful clients and servants (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 12–13, p. 155). All his provisions were to lead to his final and greatest wish to be buried in the Athonite monastery of Iviron, empowering his wife Kalé to arrange all the necessities and solve all the issues that may arise in the process of the fulfillment of this order of his (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, ll. 14–16, p. 155). It was the one provision which Kalé/the nun Maria fulfilled completely in accordance with her late husband's testament, and together with gifting the estate of Radolibos to the monastery of Iviron, forever bonded Symbatios Pakourianos and herself with the Georgian Athonite monastery (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 47, ll. 12–179, 20, p. 178).[5]

4 *Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 44, l. 2, p. 154: 'οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος ὃς ζήσεται καὶ οὐκ ὄψεται θάνατον'; Ps. 88:49: 'τὶς ἔστιν ἄνθρωπος, ὃς ζήσεται καὶ οὐκ ὄψεται θάνατον'.

5 On Radolibos see Lefort, 1981, pp. 269–313.

When compared to the last will of her late husband Symbatios Pakourianos, the testament of the nun Maria composed and signed on 4 November 1098, impresses on the reader a sense of greater tranquility, and the text itself reveals itself as a systematic document prepared in an unhurried way. The nun Maria's testament also conveys a finality of her existence in this world, once her husband died and she remained alone and childless, some time after Symbatios' death becaming a nun, which in itself was a first step in her detachment from the earthly things and a confirmation of her aspiration for the heavenly (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 47, ll. 1–2, p. 178). A deep sense of melancholy underscores her account of a brief marriage and her husband's sudden death, but she reserves especially personal lament for the fact that they did not have children: 'which is painful for everyone, but how much more for a woman' (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 47, ll. 5–6, p. 178). Evidently still of relatively young age, Kalé, now the nun Maria, searched for solace in detailing all her possessions and prescribing a beneficiary for each and every estate, property, holy icon and other objects, freeing herself from all the material things. Unlike her husband's quotation from Psalms, the introductory segments of the nun Maria's testament repeat somewhat blandly commonplaces with a ring of Scriptures' wisdom regarding the unavoidability of death and the need for all the people, and especially for those in monastic habit, to prepare themselves for death.

The individualistic and, in a way, pragmatic attitude of the Byzantines toward death,[6] is apparent in both Symbatios Pakourianos' and his widow, the nun Maria's testaments: saddened by the unfairness of life circumstances, and in particular by the lack of children, they were nevertheless proud of their ancestry and their life achievements, even if the life of Symbatios was cut short in his prime, influencing the destiny of his wife, too. Similarly to the general tendencies in Byzantine society, Symbatios and Kalé/the nun Maria did not dwell more than it was absolutely necessary on death, the shortness and unfairness of this life and this world's burdens, briefly stating almost obligatory notions of the inevitability of death and hope for eternal salvation of their souls, devoting much more time and care to arrange the things on this earth and leave them in order so that they could move peacefully to the other world, and – in the case of the nun Maria – taking special pride in the fact that she faithfully and to the last detail fulfilled the last will of her late husband Symbatios Pakourianos (*Actes d' Iviron II*, 1990, no. 47, ll. 6–13, p. 178).

6 See Introduction to this volume.

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Влада Станковић*

"НЕМА ЖИВОГ ЧОВЕКА КОЈИ НЕЋЕ ВИДЕТИ СМРТ". СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА О ВИЗАНТИЈСКОМ СХВАТАЊУ ЖИВОТА, СМРТИ И ОНОСТРАНОГ ЖИВОТА: ТЕСТАМЕНТИ СИМВАТИЈА ПАКУРИЈАНА И ЊЕГОВЕ УДОВИЦЕ МОНАХИЊЕ МАРИЈЕ

Апстракт: Само деценију по доласку на власт цара Алексија I Комнина (1081–1118), писана сведочанства недвосмислено потврђују радикално реструктурирање византијске елите и редистрибуцију богатства царства, посебно земљишних поседа, међу сродницима и присталицама новог цара. Тестаменти Симватија Пакуријана из 1090. и његове удовице, монахиње Марије, из 1098. године, заједно са неколицином релевантних аката из јединственог досијеа, нуде увид у живот и каријеру, управљање богатством, размишљања о животу, смрти и оном свету, као и везе унутар нове комнинске елите.

Кључне речи: Византија, смрт, тестамент, Симватије Пакуријан, византијска елита, цар Алексије I Комнин

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ILLNESS – GOD'S *OIKONOMIA* AS DISPLAYED IN FOUR HOMILIES OF GREGORY PALAMAS AND THE HYMNOGRAPHIC TRIPTYCH BY PATRIARCH PHILOTHEOS KOKKINOS

Abstract: In this paper we aim to analyze several notions and representations of illnesses based on scriptural stories of Christ's miraculous healings of the sick and their appropriation and utilization in a specific method of homiletic technique by Gregory Palamas displayed in his Homilies Nos. 29, 30, 61 and 63. We will show that Palamas both utilizes from the rich scriptural heritage of the notions of illness, both from the Old and the New Testament models, and applies them as a specific theological and therapeutically notion of illness as God's *oikonomia* of healing and saving both the spirit and the body of the faithful. Similar ideas are developed in a specific Hymnographic Triptych composed by the patriarch of Constantinople, Philotheos Kokkinos, which has a strong autobiographical notion and expresses the same belief that illness may be God's *oikonomia* put forth in order to heal the sickness of the soul and body of the sinner.

Key words: *oikonomia*, illness, hesychasm, Gregory Palamas, Philotheos Kokkinos, Homilies, Hymn.

Τὸ μὲν τῇ ἑατοῦ φύσει κακόν, ὅ ἐστιν ἡ ἁμαρτία, ἐξ ἡμῶν ἔχει τὴν ἀρχήν, τὸ δὲ πρὸς τὴν ἡμετέραν αἴσθησιν, ὅ ἐστι τὸ ὀδυνηρὸν καὶ ἐπίπονον, γένοιτ' ἄν καὶ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ καθάπερ ἰατροῦ δι' αὐτοῦ ἐπέχοντος καὶ ἰωμένου τὸ ἀληθῶς κακόν, ἰασίμων μὲν ὄντων τῶν ἡμαρτηκότων τὰς πολυτρόπους ἐπιμελείας προσάγοντος...[1]

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1 Χρήστου, 1986, p. 586. (Palamas, Homily No. 63). "Evil by its nature, that is sin, has its origin from us, on the other hand, it may be that the evil which proceeds from our senses, these are misfortunes and illnesses, are directed by God as physician, who stops and cures true evil, taking care that the sinful be truly healed." Palamas makes a clear distinction between *evil* in its essential notion, and the *evil* which proceeds as a result of the fallen human nature and might be emanated by various misfortunes and illnesses, while both are governed by God as *oikonomos*.

When one reads the *Scriptures* (Old and New Testament) it becomes obvious that man is a central figure of all events described and mentioned. God created the world and everything in it in seven days, according to Genesis (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 1: 1–31). In the end of this process of creation of the material world, God created man, but not as the last and least of his creation. Rather, man was the most valuable of all of his creations to whom he entrusted power over everything material (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 2: 1–25). In the "end times", according to Apostle Paul: "... when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."(*King James Bible*, 2017, Galatians 4: 4–5). These words illustrate both the introductory idea of man as a central figure in the *Scriptures*, and add another significant Christian thought, a central motif of entire Christian doctrine – God became man, in order for man to become "god" by grace.[2] In other words, here we deal with the Christian doctrine of *Oikonomia*, according to which God leads his creation, in the first place man, towards salvation. This salvation includes both spirit and body, which shall both integrally be transformed in the incorruptible body in eternal Kingdom of God. Such notion has its strong emphasis in the New Testament story about the Good Samaritan (*King James Bible*, 2017, Luke 10: 30–38) a personification of Christ who expresses care towards a man half-dead left alongside the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, where in an allegorical meaning the entire image of the *Church* is emphasized as caring for the sick and in need, or, in other words, as a hospital where Christ as a doctor heals the sick, St. John Chrysostom being the most prominent interpreter of the allegory (Влахос, 2007, pp. 21–22). On the other hand, the Hesychastic movement of the Late Byzantine period, with its main protagonists, Gregory Palamas, among others, professed that *heavenly* reality of communion with God's energies, could be reached even in temporal life (Острогорски, 1970, pp. 203–223).

This short introductory overview of Christian doctrine and the place and role of God and man in the *Scriptures* was a central motif of the entire Byzantine Christian tradition as developed and professed by the Church fathers of the Byzantine epoch (Magdalino & Nelson, 2010, pp. 1–38). Our aim in this paper is to analyze a specific theological and literary motif of man in relation to illness and collective misfortunes caused by epidemics of various diseases during the Late Middle Ages in Byzantium, as

2 Fundamental truth of the Hesychastic *Triadology* "which represents the basis of the entire theological argument of St. Gregory", according to metropolitan Amphilochios, "is that the Holy Trinity manifests itself within the teoanthropological *oikonomia* of Christ – *All things are delivered unto me of my Father* (*King James Bible*, 2017, Matthew 11: 27)" Cf. Радовић, 2012, p. 112 et passim.

presented in several orations and prayer collections delivered by Gregory Palamas and Philotheos Kokkinos – high hierarchs of the Church of Constantinople in the mid-fourteenth century.

Why Palamas and Kokkinos? Both were first-class representatives of the Hesychastic theology of the Byzantine church, shaping their arguments in multitude of political, ecclesiastical and spiritual confrontations during the first half of the 14th century. Both were contemporaries of the Black Death plague, an epidemic which swept through the Byzantine world and the Balkans in 1346 and in following years, leaving grave and harsh consequences in the population, affecting human society in a variety of aspects, economic, demographic, political, while it obviously gave a response in Byzantine theological and homiletic literature. (Bartsocas, 1966; Scarborough & Kazhdan, 1991, p. 1681; Cohn, 2008).

Hesychasm – a mystic and spiritual movement which emerged in Byzantium in the end of the 13th century, first in isolated "islands" all around the Byzantine and Christian world of the Eastern Mediterranean (Marjanović, 2020), professed not only spiritual *divinization* of a person, but a complex anthropological system of man's opening toward God's divine energies in total. These divine energies pervaded the physical and physiological aspects of man. In a world where Biblical notions of disease, illness, epidemic and plagues were well known, and often utilized in moral and theological concepts of exegesis, insight in theological and didactic exploitation of such *Scriptural* examples might provide us with a specific understanding of the notions which forthcoming misfortunes and illness provoked in the spiritual and theological thought of these leaders of the Hesychastic movement, and likewise, with the perception how they utilized such thinking in order to convey to their public and flock the evangelical message of faith and eternal salvation. It appears that the main argument in that sense was that God had used misfortunes and illness as instruments in a therapeutical manner in order to heal the soul and then eventually the body of a sinner and thus, in such emanation of his *oikonomia*, to lead his people towards eternal salvation. Thus the title of this paper, "Illness – God's *oikonomia*".

Many examples of collective and individual illnesses recorded in the Old and New Testament, often can be traced in orations and written theological compositions of the two Hesychastic prelates. Most notable examples of illness and disease, and even epidemics in Christian oratory and theological treatises derive from the Old and New Testament.

If we briefly examine some of the most notable examples of collective or individual illnesses witnessed in the *Scriptures,* we will see that they always bear a sense of therapeutic notion and purpose directed towards the

salvation of man or entire society – foremost of the *elect nation* – the Hebrews, thus manifesting God's *oikonomia* in preparation for the fulfillment of the Incarnation of Christ – Son of God, through whom full accomplishment of the Old Testament prophesies and the complete *oikonomia* shall be realized. When in Exodus (*King James Bible*, 2017, Exodus 9–12) we read of the most famous example of misfortunes and epidemics befalling an entire nation or society, such as the Egyptian state in the time of Moses, we can distinguish a clear purpose of such misfortunes and plagues – liberation of the *elect nation* from the enemies of God (*King James Bible*, 2017, Exodus 9: 1–35).

On a personal, individual level, probably most famous scene is from the Book of Job, while Christian context of this Old Testament narrative is given in James "As you know, we count as blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."[3] (*King James Bible,* 2017, James 5:11).

While the Exodus scene and the tale about Job's perseverance in grave illness carries a clear notion of God's attempt to promote true faith and religion with personal virtue, another example, that of Gehazi, the servant of Prophet Elisha, who was chastised by God for his avarice and leprosy was sent upon him by the blessing of Prophet Elisha to mark his sin, carries a different context in the spiritual message of the *Scripture* – that of condemnation of personal sin.[4] And exactly as we shall show further, according to Gregory Palamas, all these motifs of the Old Testament models

3 ἰδοὺ μακαρίζομεν τοὺς ὑπομείναντας τὴν ὑπομονὴν Ἰὼβ ἠκούσατε, καὶ τὸ τέλος κυρίου εἴδετε, ὅτι πολύσπλαγχνος ἐστιν ὁ κύριος καὶ οἰκτίρμων.

4 2. Kings 5: 20–27: Καὶ εἶπεν Γιεζι τὸ παιδάριον Ελισαιε Ἰδοὺ ἐφείσατο ὁ κύριός μου τοῦ Ναιμαν τοῦ Σύρου τούτου τοῦ μὴ λαβεῖν ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἃ ἐνήνοχεν· ζῇ κύριος ὅτι εἰ μὴ δραμοῦμαι ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ καὶ λήμψομαι παρ' αὐτοῦ τι. καὶ ἐδίωξε Γιεζι ὀπίσω τοῦ Ναιμαν, καὶ εἶδεν αὐτὸν Ναιμαν τρέχοντα ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἅρματος εἰς ἀπαντὴν αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἶπεν Εἰρήνη· ὁ κύριός μου ἀπέστειλέν με λέγων Ἰδοὺ νῦν ἦλθον πρός με δύο παιδάρια ἐξ ὄρους Εφραιμ ἀπὸ τῶν υἱῶν τῶν προφητῶν· δὸς δὴ αὐτοῖς τάλαντον ἀργυρίου καὶ δύο ἀλλασσομένας στολάς. καὶ εἶπεν Ναιμαν Λαβὲ διτάλαντον ἀργυρίου· καὶ ἔλαβεν ἐν δυσὶ θυλάκοις καὶ δύο ἀλλασσομένας στολὰς καὶ ἔδωκεν ἐπὶ δύο παιδάρια αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἦραν ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ σκοτεινόν, καὶ ἔλαβεν ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν καὶ παρέθετο ἐν οἴκῳ καὶ ἐξαπέστειλεν τοὺς ἄνδρας. καὶ αὐτὸς εἰσῆλθεν καὶ παρειστήκει πρὸς τὸν κύριον αὐτοῦ. καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ελισαιε Πόθεν, Γιεζι; καὶ εἶπεν Γιεζι Οὐ πεπόρευται ὁ δοῦλός σου ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα. καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτὸν Ελισαιε Οὐχὶ ἡ καρδία μου ἐπορεύθη μετὰ σοῦ, ὅτε ἐπέστρεψεν ὁ ἀνὴρ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἅρματος εἰς συναντήν σοι; καὶ νῦν ἔλαβες τὸ ἀργύριον καὶ νῦν ἔλαβες τὰ ἱμάτια καὶ λήμψῃ ἐν αὐτῷ κήπους καὶ ἐλαιῶνας καὶ ἀμπελῶνας καὶ πρόβατα καὶ βόας καὶ παῖδας καὶ παιδίσκας· καὶ ἡ λέπρα Ναιμαν κολληθήσεται ἐν σοὶ καὶ ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ προσώπου αὐτοῦ λελεπρωμένος ὡσεὶ χιών.

were rather symbols and forms of spiritual notions displayed in the New Testament.[5]

In the works of Gregory Palamas and Philotheos Kokkinos, both ideas, however, rooted in New Testament models, which were appropriated from the Old Testament, play a certain role in their own notion of illness and the place various diseases and misfortunes caused by epidemics had in explication of the idea of God's *oikonomia*.

In this sense, Gregory Palamas's Homily No. 63 about those who lament due to misfortunes that befall them, begins with the introductory note that *misfortunes and illness* befall men not due to their fallible human nature, but many times these conditions arise due to God's *oikonomia* in order to cure the soul of a sinner.[6] Gregory Palamas here develops a complex theory of illness and misfortunes, in which both elements are mutually interconnected and he explicates his point exactly on the basis of several Old Testament quotations, according to which both man, through his bodily illness and the created nature and environment, suffer due to men's sinful actions. Palamas writes: "Since we all are of such disposition, and since we need (a useful instruction and advice), we shall speak to you now through God's word in a oration in order to understand that sin is the source of (ecumenical evil)..."[7] Palamas then proceeds to quote verses from Exodus of which we quote here the shorter but the more significant one for our topic: "If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you."[8]

We cannot deduce when exactly was this speech delivered by Gregory Palamas. There are almost no references about any specific historical event of his time which might guide us towards a precise conclusion. However, carefully reading the text of the sermon, several interesting references might shed light as to when and in connection to what event such

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5 Such is the introduction to his Homily No. 61.

6 See footnote 2.

7 Χρήστου, 1986, p. 588. (Palamas, homily No. 63): Ἐπεὶ τοίνυν τοιαῦτοι πάντες ἐσμὲν καὶ κοινωφελοῦς δεόμεθα τῆς εἰσηγήσεως καὶ συμβουλῆς, ἀπὸ τῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ λόγων νῦν μάλιστα πρὸς ὑμᾶς ποιησόμεθα τοὺς λόγους˙ ὡς ἂν ἐπιγνόντες τῆς **παγκοσμίου τῶν κακῶν** ἐπιφορᾶς αἴτιον τὴν ἁμαρτίαν οὖσαν, ἀφῶμεν τὴν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν φιλαμαρτήμονα γνώμην καὶ μεταποιήσωμεν πρὸς πᾶν ὅ, τι θεάρεστον ἡμᾶς αὐτούς, καὶ οὕτω, δι' ἔργων ἀρετῆς ἐξιλεωσάμενοι καὶ θεραπεύσαντες τὸ θεῖον, εἰς ἔλεον τὴν καθ' ἡμῶν τοῦ Κυρίου τρέψωμεν ὀργήν.

8 Exodus 15: 26: Ἐὰν ἀκοῇ ἀκούσῃς τῆς φωνῆς κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου καὶ τὰ ἀρεστὰ ἐναντίον αὐτοῦ ποιήσῃς καὶ ἐνωτίσῃ ταῖς ἐντολαῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ φυλάξῃς πάντα τὰ δικαιώματα αὐτοῦ, πᾶσαν νόσον, ἣν ἐπήγαγον τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις, οὐκ ἐπάξω ἐπὶ σέ· ἐγὼ γάρ εἰμι κύριος ὁ ἰώμενός σε.

oration might have been delivered. At one place, in the beginning Palamas, as we have mentioned, declares that *sin is the source of pan-cosmic evil* while God can be turned toward mercy through virtuous life without sin. It is plausible that Palamas delivered the oration in regard to some misfortune which befell the Byzantines of his time, taking it as a motif and cause for his theme. He indeed uses a vivid term *pan-cosmic evil*, in order to describe its violence and character. Certainly, the metaphor might carry a notion of completely spiritual meaning, but we might ask whether Palamas maybe refers to the epidemic of Black Death which swept through Byzantium in 1346/1347? If this might be the case, then his homily might have been delivered in Thessaloniki as soon as he was admitted to the metropolitan see in 1350 and became archbishop of the city, sometime after the epidemic or even at the time of its duration at some other place.

Homily No. 63 delivered by Palamas introduces a clear system of a typical hesychastic anthropology according to which sin is the main obstacle for salvation, due to which God releases misfortunes and illness as a consequence of man's transgression. Repentance and life according to God's commandments restores the required mode of relation between man and God. In a characteristic Hesychastic analogy and argumentation Gregory Palamas expresses this belief: "...He is the judge of one's wishes and thoughts of the heart and knows the spirit which is in us, since he made it as inherent to himself, to be similar to some spiritual moon and a lower light, capable to shape in itself a spiritual spark of godly and most sublime light."[9]

In Homily No. 39, pronounced following a prayer during a "deadly and unheard-of calamity" which ravaged at that time,[10] Palamas follows the same pattern of mutual relation between sin, epidemics and man's illness and God's dispensation of those who repent. In this homily Palamas makes an effective comparison: "Due to these (sins) we are punished and yet will be chastised. We seek to be delivered from the misfortune, but the guilt due to which we are reprimanded we multiply. Do you wish to know how a grave evil avarice is? This you can see by the plague from which we now suffer." He then makes a comparison with physical illness: "Blood is one among corporal elements and when it disproportionately increases, it brings death to those dying. And as gathering of surplus in the body brings death, that's how avarice devastates the soul, expelling the grace of God which is divine life."[11]

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9 Χρήστου, 1986, p. 598. (Palamas, homily No. 63): κριτὴς γάρ ἐστιν ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας, καὶ τὸν νοῦν οἶδε ἐν ἡμῖν, κτίσας οἰκειότατων ἑαυτῷ, οἷόν τινα νοητὴν σελήνην καὶ φῶς ἔσχατον, δεκτικὴν τῆς νοερᾶς ἀκτῖνος τοῦ θείου καὶ ἀνωτάτου φωτός.

10 Χρήστου, 1985, p. 490. (Palamas, Homily No. 39). Again without historical references to a specific event.

11 Χρήστου, 1985, pp. 500,502 (Palamas, Homily No. 39): Διὰ ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα παιδευόμεθα, καὶ ἔτι παιδευθησόμεθα. Τὴν μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἐπηρειῶν λύσιν ποθοῦμέν τε

In several of his homilies Palamas builds his argument on the Gospel stories of Christ's healing miracles. These are Homilies No. 29, No. 30, No. 61. In Homily No. 29 he approaches the topic of man's eternal salvation through the exegesis of the Gospel story of the paraplegic described in Matthew (*King James Bible*, 2017, Matthew 9: 1–2): "Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his town" (εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν πόλιν). Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Palamas builds his argument on this verse in order to point out the idea of the healing of the soul. He interprets the story of the healing of the paraplegic in an allegorical manner. "His town" is referring to the town of Capernaum, but Palamas transforms it in his interpretation to a Heavenly Realm of Christ which is his true "town".[12] He further uses allegory in reference to the healing of the paralyzed man. The paralyzed man is rather a symbol of many gentiles who through receiving the Apostolic homily about the true God, become Christians and thus become *healed* from their spiritual and bodily paralysis, entering into full communion with the true God through fait and virtuous life.[13]

Homily No. 30 opens with Palamas differentiating bodily and spiritual blindness, again choosing to narrate about spiritual aspects of certain aberrations through allegory about bodily illness described in the Gospels, which then in his argument becomes a main topic. In fact, Palamas stresses that the very incarnation of Christ stands in relation with the physical healing of the sinners – that the incarnated God healed the blind, both in spirit and body: "Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μετὰ σώματος, ὃ

καὶ ζητοῦμεν, τοῖς δὲ πταίσμασι δι' ἃ παιδευόμεθα καὶ προστίθεμεν. Βούλεσθε μαθεῖν ὅσον ἡ πλεονεξία κακόν; Ἀπὸ τῆς πληγῆς, ἧς ἀρτίως πάσχομεν, τοῦτο γνώσεσθαι· πλεονεκτῆσαν γὰρ ἓν τῶν ἐν τοῖς σώμασι στοιχείων, τὸ αἷμα, καθώς ὁρᾶτε, τὸν θάνατον ἐπιφέρει τοῖς ἀποθνήσκουσιν. Ὡς οὖν ἐν σώματι πλεονεξία διαφθείρει τὸ σῶμα, οὕτως ἡ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ τὴν ψυχὴν διαφθείρει καὶ θανατοῖ, τὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ χάριν ζωὴν οὖσαν θειοτέραν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ἐκδιώξασα.

12 Χρήστου, 1985, pp. 228, 230 (Palamas, Homily No. 29): ὅτι ὁ κοινὸς ἁπάντων Σωτὴρ ἐνδυσάμενος τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν διεπέρασε τὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς τοῦ βίου τούτου θάλλασαν καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν πόλιν, τὴν ὑπερουράνιον ἐκείνην ἕδραν καὶ δίαιταν, τῆν ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος καὶ ἀξιώματος, ἔιτε ἐν τῷ νῦν αἰῶνι, ἔιτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι γινωσκομένῳ· ἐκεινος γὰρ ὄντως ἴδιός ἐστιν αὐτοῦ ὁ τόπος, ὃς καὶ μόνῳ τούτῳ βάτος.

13 Χρήστου, 1985, p. 230 (Palamas, Homily No. 29): Ὅτε οὖν ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν ἄνω πόλιν καὶ ἐισῆλθεν είς τἄ ὄντως ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξίᾳ τοῦ Πατρὸς [...] ἵνα κατὰ τὸν ἀπόστολον εἴπω [...] τότε τοὺς ἐξ ἐθνῶν παραδεξαμένους τὸ κήρυγμα τῆς ἀληθείας [...] ἔτι δὲ κειμένους ὡς ἐπὶ κλίνης τῆς ἡδυπαθείας καὶ παρειμένους ὄντας καὶ παραλύτους, τῷ μήπω λαβεῖν τῶν κατὰ ψυχήν νοσημάτων τὴν ἴασιν, ταὐτὸ δ' εἰπεῖν τῶν οἰκείων ἁμαρτημάτων τὴν ἄφεσιν, κἀντεῦθεν ἀκίνητον ἔχοντας καὶ τὸ σῶμα πρὸς τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ ἐργασίαν...

παρ᾽ ἡμῶν ὑπὲρ ἡμὼν ἀνέλαβε, συναναστρεφόμενος τοῖς ἐπὶ γῆς, πολλοὺς καὶ κατὰ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ ψυχὴν ἐθεράπευσε τυφλούς.[14] Thus, it results that the very incarnation was an *oikonomia* utilized by God in order to help the man-kind. This therapeutic working of the Son of God, according to Palamas, has a two-fold objective, to reach the human soul but through healing of the body from various illnesses. On the other hand, in context of his rhetorical method, and theological argumentation, he utilizes the scriptural evidence to approach his public with a clear message of converting *historical* events to allegorical interpretations burdened with spiritual instruction which transcends daily *historical* events which in his homilies remain only as a positive argument of his primarily theological exposition. This is evident in the following passage based on New Testament models:

Lord himself commands (or rather encourages, recommends: παραγγέλει) us to seek spiritual (treasures): "Labor' he says 'not for the food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life." (*King James Bible*, 2017, John 6: 27). He professes to give us bodily treasures (τὰ σωματικά) if we ask what is beneficial for spiritual treasure (τὰ ψυχωφελῆ), "ask, for the Kingdom of God, and everything will be delivered to you" (*King James Bible*, 2017, Luke 12: 31). In this way he acts towards the blind. Reclining the heavens and by his philanthropy descending to earth to open the eyes of our soul through evangelical preaching, he presented us with spiritual sight and added healing of the blind eyes of the body.[15]

And finally, as we have mentioned in the beginning, in Homily No. 61. on the New Testament story of the miraculous healing of ten lepers, Palamas directly explains his allegorical method. All elements of the *old law* were symbols, forms and shadows. This law considered leper sinful, and abominable, thus alluding to the uncleanness of those who sin before God. Consequently, for Palamas, lepers are rather symbols of sinners with the sick soul. But when God had become man, through his great mercy towards man-kind, he healed spiritual illnesses and erased the sins of the world, and cured the diseases which the Old Testament called unclean.

14 Χρήστου, 1985, p. 250 (Palamas, Homily No. 30).

15 Χρήστου, 1985, p. 256 (Palamas, Homily No. 30). Ὥσπερ δὲ αὐτὸς ὁ Κύριος ἡμῖν παραγγέλλει τὰ πνευματικὰ ζητεῖν «ἐργάζεσθε», λέγων, «μὴ τὴν βρῶσιν τὴν ἀπολλυμένην, ἀλλὰ τὴν βρῶσιν τὴν μένουσαν εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον», ἐπαγγέλλεται δὲ προσθήσειν ἡμῖν καὶ τὰ σωματικά, ἔιπερ ἡμεῖς τὰ ψυχωφελῆ ζῆτουμεν, «ζητεῖτε», λέγων, «τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ταῦτα πάντα προστεθήσεται ὑμῖν», οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ποιεῖ· κλίνας γὰρ οὐρανοὺς καὶ καταβὰς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς διὰ φιλανθρωπίαν, ὡς ἂν διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελικοῦ κηρύγματος τοὺς τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς διανοίξῃ ὀφθαλμοὺς καὶ χαρίσηται ἡμῖν τὴν κατὰ νοῦν ἀνάβλεψιν, προσετίθει καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶς μὴ βλεπόντων ὀφθαλμῶν τὴν ἴασιν. Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ πολὺ τὸ κατάλληλον ἐν ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς ἀναβλέψεσι, τῇ τε κατὰ σῶμα λέγω καὶ τῇ κατὰ ψυχήν.

Thus, those who recognize these diseases as symbols of true impurity and sinfulness will by regarding these symbols recognize in Christ the one who is capable to cure and absolve the sins of the world.[16] Thus, it appears that God's *oikonomia*, his incarnation, was intended to cure both spiritual and bodily illness of men, which had entered the world through sin. Such is Gregory Palamas's notion of illnesses in several of his homilies.

Now we shall turn towards the liturgical poetry of Philotheos Kokkinos and his representation of illness of the soul and body in his hymnographic triptych offered to the Theotokos.[17] It is impossible to date the text itself. The title of the second poem refers to Philotheos Kokkinos as patriarch: ποιήματα δὲ τοῦ κυροῦ Φιλοθέου πατριάρχου, which would mean that the work was written some time during Philotheos' two patriarchal offices (1353–1354, and 1364 –1376) The three parts of the triptych have the form of an *acrostic* (ἀκροστιχίς), the first part of the triptych has a form of an alphabetical acrostic from α to ω, and presents a prayer of a man to the Theotokos, second part has a form of a reversed alphabetical acrostic from ω to α and is a dialogue between the Theotokos and her Son, while the third part is an acrostic providing us with the name Φιλοθέου and is a reply of the Theotokos to the man offering his prayers. The entire composition is based on the idea of the author's personal sinfulness portrayed in vivid representations. The role of the Theotokos is illustrated as a supplicant before her Son and God for the man offering his repentance. The entire work is composed of sixty troparions divided in three parts, with twenty-five troparia in the first and second acrostic, and ten in the third. We are quoting the text according to the edition of the two extant Greek manuscripts from the Russian State Historical Museum, both from the 14th century (ГИМ, Синод, гр. 431 (349); ГИМ, Синод, гр. 429 cf. Прохоров, 2008, p. 156).

The first troparion of the first acrostic opens with a notion of the painful heart of the petitioner: Hear now o Virgin my voice coming from a painful heart. Receive the words of this repentance, and accept, o Mother

16 Χρήστου, 1986, pp. 538, 540. (Palamas, Homily No. 61). Τὰ τοῦ παλαιοῦ νόμου πάντα συμβολικὰ ἦν καὶ τυπικὰ καὶ σκιώδη· διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τὴν λέπραν ὁ νόμος οὗτος ἐφάμαρτον καὶ μιαρὰν καὶ ἀποτροπαίαν ἡγεῖτο [...] Ὀφθεὶς οὖν ὁ Κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὡς ἄνθρωπος δι᾽ἄφατον εὐσπλαγχνίας πέλαγος, ἵνα τὰς ψυχικὰς ἡμῶν ἐξιάσηται νόσους καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἄρῃ τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ τὰς νόσους ταύτας, ἃς ἀκαθαρσίας ὁ νόμος ὠνόμαζεν, ἐθεράπευεν· ἵνα εἰ μέν τις ἀκαθαρσίαν ὄντως εἶναι κὰι ἁμαρτίαν ἐκεῖνα νομίσει, Θεὸν ὁμολογήσῃ τὸν ἐκ τούτων τοῦς ἀνθρώπους λυτρούμενον, ἐι δὲ σύμβολα τῆς ὄντως ἀκαθαρσίας καὶ ἁμαρτίας ἐκεῖνα καλῶς νομίσει, ἐκ τῶν περὶ τὰ σύμβολα ταῦτα τελουμένων παρὰ Χριστοῦ συνήσῃ τοῦτον αὐτὸν ὄντα τὸν καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου συγχωρῆσαι καὶ καθᾶραι δυνάμενον.

17 For the patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos's liturgical poetry in general, cf. Прохоров, 1973.

of God, one who resorts to you.[18] The author refers to himself as a δοῦλος throughout the entire work. He proceeds to narrate that multitude of his sins has made him incapable, or rather, left him without boldness to pray directly to Christ.[19] He proceeds to develop this idea through a multitude of pious motifs, such as the one when he explicates that he turned his wishes towards the deeds of darkness, but through the Theotokos a great sun shone forth to him.[20] He clearly differentiates between one spiritual and multitude of bodily laws, as the law of Christ's Gospel, and the multitudinous laws of various sins embodied in the *bodily law*.[21]

All explicit references, eight in number, about both spiritual and bodily illness and consequent miraculous healing, with strong notions of personal experience, Philotheos places in the second acrostic of his hymnographic triptych which is in the form of a conversation between the Theotokos as his intercessor and her Son and God. It appears that a certain illness of internal organs fell upon Philotheos Kokkinos at some time, due to which he was forced to abstain from his ascetic feats. The term νόσος τῶν σπλάγχνων, indicating, as we have said illness of internal organs, including heart, might carry a specific notion of spiritual or affectionate degradation of the author, since the heart might be affected by a specific spiritual illness, from which then sin emanates rather than virtue and deeds of orthodox worship. Exactly in such affectionate manner, Apostle Paul utilizes the same term, in order to promote his loving affection towards the Christians of Greek Thracian city of Philippi (*King James Bible*, 2017, Philippians 8: 1): "For God is my witness, how I long after all of you in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus."[22] Philotheos might allude to a specific spiritual illness of his own in which his internal organ, foremost, the heart, which was the spiritual center of man's being, by the teaching of the hesychasts, has lost its positive affectionate state and rather let negative, sinful affection to master his heart. Nevertheless, we must leave space for the assumption that the author described and utilized his specific bod-

18 Прохоров, 2008, p. 157: Ἄκουσον, Παρθένε, νῦν τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς προιοῦσης ἐκ καρδίας ὀδυνηράς. Ἀνάσχου τῶν λόγων τῆς μετανοίας ταύτης, καὶ δέξαι, Θεωτόκε, τὸν προσφυγόντα σοι.

19 Прохоров, 2008, p. 157: Δέσποινα, τὸ πλῆθος μου τῶν κακῶν ἐστόρησε νῦν με παρρησίας τῆς πρὸς Χριστόν. Δέσποινά μου, δέξαι τὰς ἐμὰς δεήσεις, καὶ πρέσβις καὶ μεσίτις γενοῦ τῷ δούλῳ σου.

20 Прохоров, 2008, p. 157: Ἡμέρας υἱόν με καὶ τοῦ φωτός εἰργάσατο, Κόρη· ἀνατείλας μοι δια σοῦ ἥλιος ὁ μέγας· ἐγὼ δὲ σκότους ἔργα ποθήσας κινδυνεύω. Δέσποινα, σῶσόν με.

21 Прохоров, 2008, p. 158: Νόμους ἀθετήσα πνευματικούς, νόμοις ὑπέταγην ἀναξίους τοῖς σαρκικοῖς.

22 Phillipians 8: 1: μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ θεός, ὡς ἐπιποθῶ πάντας ὑμᾶς **ἐν σπλάγχνοις** Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. See footnote 4 for a simmilar utilization of the term.

ily condition affected by an unnamed illness, to appropriate the motif and transform it into a spiritual context.

For the sake of clarity we shall quote the eight troparions which enfold in the second acrostic in a successive manner:

> **Theotokos**: He was, as you know, a moderate supporter of the poor, and a lover of ascetism. However, a sickness of internal organs set it aside.
>
> **Lord**: He endeavored properly in everything (only) in words, for some time he engaged in deeds, but he never accomplished nothing to its end. That is why now he seems barren of all (these).
>
> **Theotokos**: Sickness, my Son, is truly a great hindrance in practicing virtue, a hindrance in the battle with passions and demons. You know that he is an implacable combatant against these.
>
> **Lord**: Nor demons, nor people, neither do illnesses overpower the soul. Truly what overpowers is the weakness of senses, the inner betrayal, offspring of pleasure.
>
> **Theotokos**: Foundation of virtue, I know, is the labour of fasting, wakefulness and prayer. These are death of shameful passions. You who cure sickness, how shall he utilize these?
>
> **Lord**: Fasting, Mother, the weight of vigilance, labour and remaining ascetism are like nail and cross for the passions – one illness makes good.
>
> **Theotokos**: He wishes to live in virtue, but the illness cuts his zeal. I reckon he will live in accordance with divine life, being healed from this illness.
>
> **Lord**: I released this illness and various trials upon him, o Mother. I drag him by these always towards myself, and he, remaining without senses, carries himself away.[23]

23 Прохоров, 2008, pp. 160–161: **Θεοτόκος**· Μέτριος ὑπῆρξε κοινωνικὸς ἀκτήμων ὡς οἶσθα καὶ ἀσκήσεως ἐραστής. Μεγίστη δὲ νόσος τῶν σπλάγχνων αὐτὸν ἀφείλατο.

Δεσπότης· Λόγοις ἐσπουδάκει πάντα καλῶς, ἀπτόμενος δέπου καὶ τῶν ἔργων κατακαιρούς, λαμπρὸν οὐδὲν ὅλως εἰς τέλος κατωρθώκει. Διὸ καὶ γυμνὸς πάντων ὁρᾶται σήμερον.

Θεοτόκος· Κώλυμα καὶ νόσος ὡς ἀληθῶς μέγιστον, Υἱέ μου, πρὸς τὴν πράξιν τῆς ἀρετῆς. Κώλυμα πρὸς μάχην παθῶν τε καὶ δαιμόνων. Τὸν πόλεμον γινώσκεις τοῦτον τὸν ἄσπονδον.

Δεσπότης· Ἰσχύουσι δαίμονες οὐδαμῶς, οὐκ ἄνθρωποι, Μήτερ, οὐ δὲ νόσος κατὰ ψυχῆς. Ἰσχύει δὲ λύσις τῶν ἀισθήσεων ὄντως, τῶν ἔνδον προδοσία ἡδονῆς ἔκγονα.

Θεοτόκος· Θεμέλιον οἶδα τῆς ἀρετῆς, νηστείας τὸν πόνον, ἀγρυπνίας καὶ προσευχῆς. Θάνατος σχεδὸν γὰρ παθῶν αἰσχίστων ταῦτα. Ὁ νόσον θεραπεύων πῶς αὐτοῖς χρήσεται;

Δεσπότης· Ἡ νηστεία, Μήτερ, καὶ οἱ βαρεῖς ἀγρυπνίας, πόνοι καὶ ἡ ἄσκεσις ἡ λοιπὴ ἦλος εἰσὶν ὥσπερ καὶ σταυρὸς ἐμπαθείας, ἅπερ ἡ νόσος μόνη καλῶς ἐργάζεται.

Θεοτόκος· Ζῆν σπουδαίως οὗτος ἐπιθυμεῖ, ἡ δὲ νόσος αὕτη δικόπτει τὰ τῆς σπουδῆς. Ζήσειν αὐτον, Λόγε, θείαν ζωὴν εἰκάζω, εἴγε τῆς νόσου ταύτης ἀπαλλαγήσεται.

Δεσπότης· Ἐγὼ καὶ τὴν νόσον καὶ πειρασμοὺς ἀλλοίους, ὦ, Μήτερ, συνεχώρησα ἐπ᾽ αὐτῷ. Ἐγὼ τούτοις ἕλκω πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν διόλου. Αὐτὸς ἀναισθητῶν δὲ πόρρω που φόρειται.

This dialogue of the Theotokos as intercessor for the patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos with her Son and God Jesus Christ ends with God giving health to the patriarch and author of this triptych. We might assume that the Hymn composed by Philotheos provides us with some autobiographical data. First, we know that the patriarch was at some point ill and received health through healing in a miraculous manner. He obviously ascribed his healing to the intercession of the Mother of God. We cannot assume with certainty whether Philotheos Kokkinos described a specific bodily illness, or rather alluded to his personal spiritual weakness. However, he minutely developed and described the nature of spiritual and bodily decay due to sin and absence of zealous fulfillment of God's commandments. As Gregory Palamas in several of his Homilies, the patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos developed the same theological argument, that various illnesses may be understood both as a result of personal sin or immoral behavior, and likewise as God's *oikonomia*, that is, a specific therapeutic approach to healing of the entire person, of both his body and spirit.

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Драгољуб Марјановић*

БОЛЕСТ – БОЖИЈА ИКОНОМИЈА У ЧЕТИРИ БЕСЕДЕ ГРИГОРИЈА ПАЛАМЕ И ХИМНОГРАФСКОМ ТРИПТИХУ ПАТРИЈАРХА ФИЛОТЕЈА КОКИНА.

Апстракт: У раду се разматра специфичан погледа средњовековних исихаста Григорија Паламе и Филотеја Кокина на феномен болести и њихове теолошке и духовњачке представе о улози болести у духовном исцељењу и спасењу човека. Оба исихастичка духовника развијају јединствен стил у тумачењу односа Бога и човека, први, у своје четири беседе које смо анализирали, посматра старозаветне и новозаветне моделе болести и исцељења на алегоријски начин, узводећи своје слушаоце ка духовним реалностима, отворено говорећи да су болести Божијим допуштењем послате људима ради њиховог покајања и следствено спасења. У својем химнографском триптиху, збирци тропара – акростиха, патријарх Филотеј Кокин је обрадио сличан феномен али у аутобиографском приступу, захваљујући Богородици за заступништво пред Христом приликом његове болести и потоњег чудесног исцелења које је добио. Оба византијска духовника XIV века пројављују исти став, да су болести заправо својеврсна Божанска икономија којом Бог као *иконом* управља светом и човеком у њему.

Кључне речи: икономија, болест, исихазам, Григорије Палама, Филотеј Кокин, хомилије, химна

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POEMS AND VOTIVE GIFTS OF THE NUN JEFIMIJA AS AN EXPRESSION OF HUMAN TRAGEDY

Abstract: This paper focuses predominantly on poems and votive gifts of the nun Jefimija which are linked to her life. All of her known gifts, such as the diptych from the Hilandar monastery engraved with the poem *Lament for the infant Uglješa*, the icon from Poganovo, the katapetasma for the Imperial doors in the Hilandar monastery, the shroud for the relics of the prince Lazar with an embroidered poem *Praise to Prince Lazar* and the epitaphion from Putna monastery, have been preserved today. Her poems engraved or embroidered on her votive gifts inspired by the works of Symeon Metaphrastes, Symeon the New Theologian and Nicholas Mystikos represent unique expression of the maternal pain and human tragedy which shaped the visual culture and literature of the medieval Serbia. Each of them was also created as Jefimija's votive gift, primarily to the Mother of God, but also to Christ and Prince Lazar who are her intercessors and protectors at the Last Judgment.

Key words: Nun Jefimija, poems**,** the diptych from Hilandar monastery, Hilandar's katapetasma, the shroud for the relics of prince Lazar, the epitaphion from Putna monastery

Basilissa Jelena Mrnjavčević (c. 1349–1405), the nun Jefimija is the most often mentioned in historiography and literature as the first Serbian female poet. It is assumed that she was born in the first half of the 14th century and that she spent the first years of her life, before marrying the despot Uglješa Mrnjavčević (r. 1364/65–1371) at the court of her father, kesar Vojihna (d. b. 1368–1371), in Drama. According to the

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charter of emperor Stefan Dušan (r. 1331–1355), which he issued to Hilandar monastery, Vojihna was *bratučed*, a cousin of the Serbian emperor (Ћирковић & Ферјанчић, 2005, pp. 175–176; Ћирковић, 1995, p. 177). Apparently, their marriage was concluded before 1358, when Uglješa issued a charter to the Kutulumuš monastery on Mount Athos (Ћирковић, 1995, pp. 181–182). By marrying Jelena, a cousin of emperor Stefan Uroš V (r. 1355–1371), Uglješa became a member of a ruling and holy dynasty, which strengthened his position as the regional lord in the Serres area. Jelena and Uglješa lived in Serres after Uglješa took power over this city in 1365 (Ферјанчић, 1994; Острогорски, 1965). The Mount Athos was within its territory. Jelena and Uglješa maintained friendly relations with the monks of Mount Athos. The despot was the ktetor of the parekklesion of Saints Anargyroi within the complex of the Vatoped monastery, which he visited during his stay on the Atos before the Battle of Marica in order to receive a blessing from the monks. It is still an open question whether Jelena together with her husband donated monasteries on Mount Athos. However, it is confirmed that she independently donated a diptych to Hilandar when Uglješa was still alive.

Jelena was very educated and talented, according to the poems she wrote. Some of them were inspired by the works of Symeon Metaphrastes (d. 987), Symeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) and Nicholas Mystikos (d. 925) (Трифуновић, 1992). The inscriptions on the icon from Poganovo[1] (Babić, 1987, pp. 57–65; Pentcheva, 2000, pp. 139–153; Суботић, 1993, pp. 25–40; Vassilaki, 2012, pp. 226–227; Vinulović, 2018, pp. 179–184) of which she is the ktetor and on the epitaphion from Putna monastery, which she embroidered, also indicate that she knew Greek very well. Jelena and Uglješa had a son Uglješa Despotović who died at a very young age (d. b. 1368–1371). He was buried with his grandfather Vojihna in the katholikon of the Hilandar monastery (Поповић, 1998, pp. 211–213). This tragedy that forever marked Jelena's life was reflected in her poems and votive gifts. After the loss of her son, she lost her husband on 26th of September 1371, at the Battle of Černomen in the valley of the Marica River. In addition to marking Jelena's life, this battle opened the way for the Ottoman invasion into the Balkans, which later led to a vassal relationship between the Serbian rulers and the sultan (Максимовић & Ћирковић, 1981, pp. 598–602). After the defeat of the Serbian army and the death of her husband Jelena lost her home. She left Serres probably before it was conquered in November 1371 by the Roman despot and future emperor

1 The older generation of researchers considered that the ktetor of the icon was the Byzantine empress Jelena Dragaš Palaiologina (e. 1392–1424) (see Gerasimov, 1959, pp. 279–288; Grabar, 1959, pp. 289–304; Xyngopoulos, 1962, pp. 341–350).

Manuel II Palaiologos (r. 1391–1425). It is believed that she moved to Thessaloniki, from where she went to the court of Prince Lazar (r. 1373–1389) in Kruševac, where she lived under his protection for several year. However, Prince Lazar and most of the Serbian nobility died in the Battle of Kosovo on 28th June, 1389. Along with princess Milica Hrebeljanović (c. 1335–1405) and numerous women who remained widows, Jelena was left again without protection. After that, Jelena took the monastic vow becoming nun Jefimija, but it is not known exactly in which monastery. It is possible that Jelena and Milica took the monastic vow together in princess Milica's endowment Ljubostinja. It is quite certain that Jelena became a nun before 1398. It is evidenced by the inscription on the Jelena's katapetasma for Hilandar in which she is mentioned as a nun. In the work of the Gregory Tsamblak (d. 1420) *The Homily on the translation of the relics of Saint Paraskeve from Tarnovo to Vidin and Serbia* Jelena is also mentioned as nun Jefimija (Петровић, 1989). This Homily describes Jelena's and Milica's journey to the court of the sultan Bayezid I (r. 1389–1402). They travelled together as nuns Jefimija and Evgenija, to Bayezid's court in 1398 in order to "justify" the actions of Prince Stefan Lazarević (r. 1389–1427), who was accused of treason. On this occasion, they managed to get the relics of St. Petka from Bayezid and transfer them to Serbia (Петровић, 1989; Поповић, 2006, pp. 286–293; Томин, 2007, pp. 30–32, 135–139; Томин, 2011, pp. 20–21). Tsamblak especially praises the wisdom and strength of mind of these two nuns and calls them the virile women.

Jefimija's ktetorship is quite special and differs in several aspects from what is considered to be an established ktetorship. She did not build a single church or monastery, but she donated Hilandar and Ravanica. All the "objects", of which she was the ktetor, are votive gifts in the full sense of the word. As a basillisa, she donated a diptych to the Hilandar. During her sojourn in Thessaloniki, she ordered the icon from Poganovo, while as a nun, she embroidered her votive gifts. What makes Jelena special are her poems that are engraved and embroidered on her votive gifts. All of her known gifts, such as the diptych engraved with the poem *Lament for the infant Uglješa*, the icon from Poganovo, the katapetasma for the Imperial doors in the Hilandar monastery, the shroud for the relics of the prince Lazar with an embroidered poem *Praise to Prince Lazar* and the epitaphion from Putna monastery, have been preserved today. Jefimija's verses are imbued with a deep personal tone that speaks of her unfortunate fate and piety. These votive gifts gain their full meaning exclusively through the joint observation of the text and the image and their mutual relationship, one cannot be understood without the other. Each of them was created as Jelena's votive gift, primarily to the Mother of God, but also to Christ and

Prince Lazar. Through her poetry as well as through embroidery, Jelena is assimilated to the Mother of God, her protector and advocate. Due to her personal fate and the tragedy that connects her with the Mother of God, she symbolically represents the reflection of the Mother of God on earth.

The diptych is the first preserved votive gift of the basillisa Jelena Mrnjavčević. She donated this diptych to the Hilandar monastery after the death of her son Uglješa Despotović (Drpić, 2016, pp. 921–925; Hawkesworth, 2000, pp. 80–81; Томин, 2015a, p. 136; Томин, 2015b, pp. 8–9; Трифуновић, 1992, pp. 17–18, 55–56; Vassilaki, 2012, p. 226). It has been dated between 1368 and 1371. Originally it was consisted of two wooden icons assembled in a diptych that the Metropolitan of Serres, Theodosius, gave to her son Uglješa at his baptism (Hawkesworth, 2000, pp. 80; Кашанин, 1990, p. 307; Vassilaki, 2012, p. 226). After his untimely death, it was covered on the outside with silver plates on which is engraved the poem *Lament for the infant Uglješa*, written by Jelena (Fig. 1). It is unique object, because it is the only preserved example of a poem that speaks of mourning for son and his lamentation in Serbian medieval literature, but also in the literature of the Roman cultural circle (Кашанин, 1990, pp. 307, 311–312; Пилиповић, 2011; Pilipović, 2020, pp. 147–160; Томин, 2015b, pp. 4–5; Трифуновић, 1992, pp. 17–18). This literary genre called *threnos*, mourning for the deceased, has existed since ancient times. The threnos was especially linked to the Mother of God and her lamentation

Fig. 1: The diptych from the Hilandar monastery with engraved poem *Lament for the infant Uglješa*, 1368–1371, Hilandar monastery

of Christ during his Descent from the Cross and entombment (Milliner, 2011; Ševčenko, 2011, pp. 247–262; Tsironis, 2005, pp. 91–102; Tsironis, 2018; Vassilaki & Tsironis, 2011, pp. 453–463). The first service of the Virgin's lament appears in the hymns of the hymnographers Romanos the Melodist (d. c. 556) and Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373). In the Middle Byzantine period, during the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties, a special literary genre, the *kanon threnodes*, was formed in Constantinople, whose authors were Symeon Metaphrastes and the Patriarch of Constantinople Nicholas Mystikos (Ševčenko, 2011, pp. 453–463). It was read in churches on Holy Saturday. It was consisted of the verses of lamentations read at the funeral in the form of *enkomia* inserted into the verses of the funerary psalm 118 (Ševčenko, 2011, pp. 453–463). This service, which also contains the text of the Virgin's lament, connects the burial of the deceased with Christ's entombment, through which the one who is buried is assimilated to Christ, and his grave becomes Christ's grave. Special emphasis in these texts is on the Mother of God's human suffering and mourning for her son. The influences of this literary genre are also reflected in Jelena's poem. We already said that Jelena was a very educated woman. The fact that she was acquainted with the texts of Symeon Metaphrastes and Symeon the New Theologian is also evidenced by her votive poem embroidered on the katapetasma for the Imperial doors that she donated to Hilandar monastery (Drpić, 2016, p. 924; Кашанин, 1990, pp. 308–309; Hawkesworth, 2000, pp. 82–83; Смолчић–Макуљевић, 2000, pp. 693–701; Шпадијер, 2014, pp. 122–132; Трифуновић, 1992, p. 19; Vassilaki, 2012, p. 228). Therefore, it can be assumed that *Lament for the infant Uglješa* was created inspired by the texts of Symenon Metaphrastes and the verses of the service *epitaphios threnos*.[2] Young Uglješa was buried in the Hilandar monastery together with his grandfather, kesar Vojihna, in a place where Jelena could never go. Uglješa's tomb in the form of an arcosolium is located in the nave of the church on the north side, between the north wall and the northwest pilasters (Поповић, 1998, pp. 211–212). As Jelena could not visit her son's grave, this diptych and the poem engraved on it represent a prayer and a votive gift to Christ and the Mother of God, which Jelena addresses through verses.

> Small icons but the great gift,
> which have the most holy image of our Lord
> and of the most pure Mother of God,
> offered they were by the great and holy man

2 This poem is also inspired by epitaphs and verses of the Prologue, but the connection of the Jelena's verses with the services of the Virgin's lamentation is more important for our topic.

to the young youth Uglješa, the Despot's son,
whose untouched youthfulness has been transferred
to the eternal family,
and his body handed over to the grave,
crafted by the ancestors for the sake of the transgression.
Lord Christ,
and thou, o most pure Mother of God,
deign me miserable always to take care of the resolution of my soul,
that I saw in those who bore me
and in the youth born by me,
for whom grief flames unstoppably
in my heart,
conquered by maternal nature. (Pilipović, 2020, p. 174).[3]

The analysis of the verses shows the ambiguity and deep symbolism of Jelena's words (Пилиповић, 2011; Pilipović, 2020, pp. 147–160). As a mother who lost her only child prematurely, she addresses to Christ and the Mother of God and pray them for the salvation of her son's soul. At the same time, Jelena tries to find consolation, particularly in the Mother of God, who survived the same fate as her (Babić, 1987, pp. 61–65; Суботић, 1993, pp. 31–32; Vinulović, 2018, pp. 181–184). Through the text of the poem, which can be interpreted as lamentation Jelena symbolically linked herself to the Mother of God and became her reflection on earth.[4] Through the verses in which she addresses Christ and the Mother of God, Jelena expresses her connection with the Mother of God and also underlines her role as a mother. The last three verses especially emphasise Jelena's connection with the Mother of God and the same tragic fate that they survived and that unites them, and that is the loss of the only son. The final verse "conquered by maternal nature" on a deep and personal level from the heart of the author of this poem speaks of the suffering that Jelena went through after the loss of little Uglješa (Pilipović, 2020, p. 174). These verses speak of motherly feelings and the relationship between mother and son, both Jelena and Uglješa and the Mother of God and Christ. Although Jelena knows that Uglješa's soul was received in the bosom of Abraham "...whose untouched youthfulness has been transferred to the eternal family ..." she cannot mourn the loss of her only child "...in the youth born by me, for whom grief flames unstoppably in my heart, conquered by maternal nature" (Pilipović, 2020, p. 174). These verses speak of

3 The poem was translated into English by Jelena Pilipović

4 For the Marian Studies and the female private piety and ktetorship in the Roman Empire and the Medieval Serbia see: (Cunningham, 2011; Erdeljan, 2017a; Erdeljan, 2017b; Garland, 2002; Hill, 2013; Станковић, 2006; Татић–Ђурић, 2007; Theis L., et al., (2011/2012); Томин, 2007; Томин, 2015a; Vassilaki, 2011; Винуловић, 2020).

her faith in the resurrection and salvation of little Uglješa's soul, but also of her deep maternal mourning for the loss of her son (Кашанин, 1990, pp. 307, 311–312; Pilipović, 2020, pp. 147–160; Трифуновић, 1992, p. 18; Томин, 2015b, pp. 4–5). This attitude towards the death of the only son is described in the services of the Virgin's lamentation. The Mother of God, who from the moment of Christ's first entry into the Temple, the Presentation, was aware of his key role in the history of salvation through his sacrifice, could not help but mourn for him after his death on the cross. These are the key topoi that depict the Mother of God as a human, earthly mother who is suffering for her only child. In this way, by attaching to this literary genre, the lamentation of the Mother of God, Jelena linked herself to the Mother of God and became her reflection on earth. During the 12th century, on the territory of the Roman cultural circle, in the monumental painting of churches, the composition Lamentation of Christ was formed. It occupies a prominent place in the program of churches of this period, such as the church of St. Panteleimon in Nerezi from 1164 and the church of St. George in Kurbinovo from 1191 (Hadermann–Misguich, 1975; Sinkević, 2000). Although there is no such composition in the diptych, the text of the poem symbolically replaces the image of Lamentation, it becomes a mental image that is created in the consciousness of the one who reads this poem in which Jelena is assimilated to the Mother of God and Uglješa with Christ.

The word child (youth) which refers to little Uglješa Despotović is mentioned twice in the poem. The term is related to the 12th chapter of the Revelation, which describes a woman standing on the moon with a crown of twelve stars on her head: "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head" (*King James Bible*, 2017, Revelation 12: 1). She gives birth to a child, an infant, who will atone for all the sins of the human race with his sacrifice and who will be accepted by God to himself and his throne. The child is the personification of the Christ and the woman is the personification of the Mother of God. This chapter speaks of Christ's triumph through his sacrifice, final salvation, and resurrection during the Parousia and the establishment of the Heavenly Jerusalem on earth. The verses of the poem "whose untouched youthfulness has been transferred to the eternal family, and his body handed over to the grave, crafted by the ancestors for the sake of the transgression", speak of Uglješa's premature death which happened precisely because of the ancestral sin which Christ atoned during the Crucifixion (Pilipović, 2020, p. 147). By creating a connection between infant Uglješa and Christ the infant from Revelation, and the prayer that Jelena addresses to Christ and the Mother

Fig. 2: The inner panels of the diptych from the Hilandar monastery with the compositions of the Mother of God with the Christ and the Holy Trinity, 1368–1371, Hilandar monastery

of God, the departure of Uglješa's soul to the dwellings of the righteous of the Heavenly Jerusalem, where Uglješa will wait for the resurrection of the dead at the end of time so that his soul will finally be united with the resurrected body is accomplished. One of the preconditions for his soul to go to heaven immediately after death was baptism. If Uglješa received the diptych at baptism it is very clear why Jelena chose this diptych to engrave the words of her lament and prayer on it. Uglješa's untimely death left Jelena to take care of the salvation of her soul "...deign me miserable always to take care of the resolution of my soul" (Pilipović, 2020, p. 147). This verse testifies to the fact that the author wrote the poem as a prayer and a votive gift addressed to Christ, and above all to the Mother of God, who was her personal protector and advocate at the Last Judgment, as evidenced by Jelena's other votive gifts.

The text of the poem directly communicates with the compositions on the inner panels of the diptych. These are the compositions of the Mother of God with the Christ and the Holy Trinity (Fig. 2). On the left panel of the diptych is the Mother of God on throne with the little Christ in her arms. This can be interpreted as the iconographic type of the Mother of God *sedes sapientiae*, Throne of Wisdom (Татић– Ђурић, 2007; Vassilaki, 2011). It testifies to the incarnation of logos in the womb of the Mother of God, that especially emphasise her maternal role. She is

the one who gave a birth to the saviour of the world and who was given the role of the mother of the Son of God. Christ and the Mother of God are turned towards each other and are presented in one form of silent communication. Their body positions and gestures especially underline the closeness and love between mother and son. This iconographic type of the Mother of God on the throne appears within the composition of the Last Judgment. During the reign of the Serbian king Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321), a very developed scene of the Last Judgment was formed in the wall paintings of Serbian churches in the 14th century. Thus, in the church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Gračanica, the endowment of king Milutin from the first half of the 14th century, a developed representation of Paradise was painted on the southern part of the western wall of the nave as part of the Last Judgment (Тодић, 1988, pp. 159–165). In heaven, next to Abraham, who holds the souls of the righteous in the form of a baby, the Mother of God is represented on the throne (Fig. 3). This image speaks about the Mother of God as the queen of the heaven whose place is next to Christ on his right side in the Heavenly Jerusalem. She is the intercessor of the entire human race during the resurrection of the dead at the end of time that awaits little Uglješa in the bosom of Abraham. The verses of the poem that are engraved on the back of the diptych are addressed to Christ and the Mother of God, who are represented on its inner side.

Fig. 3: The representation of Paradise in the Gračanica monastery, 1321.

On the right wing of the diptych is the Holy Trinity in the form of the Old Testament prefiguration of the Hospitality of Abraham. The choice of this iconography type is very interesting. This scene represents Old Testament theophany, the moment when the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit appeared on earth and revealed it to Abraham and Sarah (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 18: 1–15). Each of them is represented as an individual figure of angel sitting at the table. This representation can be interpreted, of course with a certain amount of precaution, as the Old Testament Annunciation, because during the hospitality of Abraham, the angels announced to Abraham and Sarah the birth of Isaac, the long-desired son (*King James Bible*, 2017, Genesis 10–15). In this way, a parallel can be drawn between Sarah, the Mother of God and Jelena as mothers who found themselves in almost the same situation. The God has told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac in order to test Abraham's faith in him. At the last moment, he sent an angel from the heaven to stop Abraham. Instead of his son, he has sacrificed a ram. In the context of the poem, the child/infant Uglješa could also be assimilated to Isaac, who is a prefiguration of the infant Christ. Jelena, like the Mother of God, lost her infant son, unlike Sarah, over whom God had mercy. On the other hand, this representation can be related to the baptism of Christ. During the baptism of Christ in the Jordan River, John the Baptist addressed Christ with the words "behold, the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world" (*King James Bible*, 2017, John 1:29). The Holy Spirit descended on Christ's head in the form of a dove, while the words of God were heard from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (*King James Bible*, 2017, Matthew 3:17). As little Uglješa received this diptych at his baptism, it is quite clear why this representation of the Holy Trinity, in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are presented as individual persons. The baptism of every believer recreates the baptism of Christ. This act represents the purification from the previous, ancestral sin, as well as the metaphorical death of the believer who, after baptism, is resurrected and born again in Christ. The representations of the Holy Trinity on the diptych symbolise the real presence of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit during Uglješa's baptism, and as if they were performing this rite together with Metropolitan Theodosius. During the baptism the ancestral sin was taken away from little Uglješa. Immediately after his death, his soul went to heaven in Abraham's arms, just as is described in Jelena's lament. Along the edges of the inner wings of the diptych are pearls and precious stones alluding to the walls of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[5] (*King*

5 For the creation of sacred space and construction of Heavenly Jerusalem in visual culture, see: (Erdeljan, 2017b; Kühnel, 1987; Lidov, 2006, pp. 32–58).

James Bible, 2017, Revelation 21: 11–21). All the characters in this diptych as well as the poem are in the metaphysical, timeless, eschatological reality, in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

This diptych that Jelena sent to Hilandar, replaces her real presence next to Uglješa's tomb. This is performed through a poem written in the first person, a prayer that Jelena personally pronounces. The diptych *Lament for the infant Uglješa*, who in the true sense of the word represents the Heavenly Jerusalem through images and poem on it, communicates with the figure of the Mother of God Pelagonitissa in the arcosolium above the Uglješa's tomb. In this composition, the relationship between mother and son is again extremely underlined. Here, too, is a special emphasis on the infant Christ and the Mother of God as a mother who suffers because of the future destiny of her only child. She watches over the little Uglješa and gives him protection instead of Jelena, like a mother watching over her son.

The diptych with the poem *Lament for the infant Uglješa*, the first in a series of Jefimija's votive gifts represents a unique and for now only such example in the visual culture not only of medieval Serbia, but also of the entire visual culture of the Roman cultural circle.. No similar examples from the earlier or later period are known so far. Jefimija's poems, inspired by the texts of Symeon Metaphrastes and Nicholas Mystikos, as well as the hymns of Romanos the Melodist, represent a unique example of motherly mourning and lamentation in the culture of the Middle Ages and in Serbian medieval literature. The verses imbued with a deep personal and emotional tone come from the heart of the author and speak of motherly pain and sorrow due to the premature loss of her only son, but also of hope for salvation and reunion with him in the Heavenly Jerusalem. Through the verses and the image of the Mother of God in the diptych, Jefimija assimilated herself to the Mother of God, she becomes her earthly reflection, while Uglješa is assimilated to the little Christ. This diptych encolpion was created as an expression of Jelena's private piety, a votive gift to the Mother of God who was her protector and to Christ, to whom she prays for the salvation of the soul of little Uglješa Mrnjavčević.

Almost twenty years after she donated the diptych to Hilandar, Jelena as nun Jefimija donated Hilandar a katapetasma for the Imperial doors around 1398/99 (Drpić, 2016, p. 924; Кашанин, 1990, pp. 308–309; Hawkesworth, 2000, pp. 82–83; Смолчић–Макуљевић, 2000, pp. 693–701; Шпадијер, 2014, pp. 122–132; Трифуновић, 1992, p. 19; Vassilaki, 2012, p. 228). It was created by her hands as well as the poem she embroidered on it. The image of Christ as the great archpriest between two

Fig. 4: The katapetasma for the Imperial doors
in the Hilandar monastery, 1398/1399, Hilandar monastery

angels (Fig. 4) is embroidered on the red cloth with gold and silver thread. Christ is flanked by the figures of Saint Basil and St John Chrysostom. The scene represents the service of the liturgy and the Eucharist. Christ is represented here at the same time as the one who offers the sacrifice and the one who is sacrificed. Between Christ, John Chrysostom and Basil the Great, the text of Jefimija's poem known as the *Prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ* is embroidered with gold and silver threads.

> From sullied lips, from an abominable heart, from a tongue impure, from a soul defiled,
>
> accept <this> prayer, O my Christ, and do not turn me away, your servant, nor rebuke me
>
> in your anger, O Lord, at the hour of my departure, nor chastise me in your wrath on the
>
> day of your coming, for before your judgment, O Lord, I am condemned by my conscience;

> not a single hope in salvation is there in me, unless your mercy conquers the multitude of my transgressions. Therefore, I pray to you, O benign Lord, do not turn aside this small
> gift, which I offer to the holy church of your most pure mother and my hope, the Virgin of
> Hilandar,
> for I have adopted the faith of the widow who offered you two copper coins, O Lord. Thus I, too, have offered this, your unworthy servant, O Mistress, Jefimija the nun,
> daughter of my lord, the kaisar Vojihna, who is buried here, once a despot's wife.
> This katapetasma was donated to the church of the most holy Virgin of Hilandar in the
> year 6907 [=1398/99], in the eighth indiction. And if someone were to remove it from the
> church of the most holy Virgin of Hilandar, may he be separated from the consubstantial
> and indivisible Trinity and may the most pure Virgin of Hilandar be his adversary on
> the day of the fearsome judgment. (Drpić, 2016, pp. 922–923).

This prayer also has its role models in the texts of Symeon Metaphrastes and Symeon the New Theologian (Кашанин, 1990, p. 309; Трифуновић, 1992, p. 19). The katapetasma was created as a votive gift for the church in which Jefimija's son Uglješa was buried. Jefimija, just like the Mother of God, embroidered the katapetasma for the temple, and thus became the Mother of God. In this way, Hilandar is identified with the Solomon's Temple. The red colour of the canvas alludes to the blood of Christ, and to the Christ passion. At the time of Christ's death on the cross, the katapetasma that the Mother of God had embroidered was broken into two parts. Here is a special emphasis on Christ's sacrifice that he made for the salvation of the human race. The katapetasma can also symbolise the body which Mother of God has given to Christ Logos during the incarnation. It carries the symbolism of containment that speaks of the history of salvation from incarnation through passion to the Eschaton. With her verses, Jefimija was included in this sublimation of eschatological time.

Through the text of her prayer, Jefimija addresses Christ and begs him to be merciful on the day of her death and at the Last Judgment. In prayer, she also addresses "the most pure Virgin of Hilandar" as her hope, a sure hope, whose intercession will secure her a place in the heavenly dwellings of the righteous (Drpić, 2016, p. 923). This katapetasma

Fig. 5: The shroud for the prince Lazar‘ relics in Ravanica monastery, c. 1402, Ravanica monastery

also replaces her real presence in the temple. Here, too, special emphasis is placed on the Mother of God as a mother who lost her only son, to whom Jefimija is likened and from whom she seeks *kataphyge*, a spiritual refuge.

On the eve of the Battle of Angora in 1402, in which Prince Stefan and Vuk Lazarević, sons of Lazar Hrebeljanović, took part, Jefimija embroidered the famous shroud for the relics of the Serbian Prince Lazar which are housed in the Ravanica monastery (Drpić, 2016, pp. 921–926; Кашанин, 1990, pp. 309–310; Hawkesworth, 2000, pp. 82–84; Шпадијер, 2014, pp. 123–124; Томин, 2015a, p. 136; Vassilaki, 2012, pp. 228–229).

The poem *Praise to Prince Lazar* is embroidered on the shroud which is made of the red canvas as well as the Hilandar katapetasma (Fig.

5). The colour of the shroud was specially and carefully selected to emphasise the martyrdom of the holy prince. The poem is consisted of three key parts (Кашанин, 1990, pp. 309–310; Пилиповић, 2018, pp. 101–114; Трифуновић, 1992, pp. 18–23). The first is a praise to the prince, which describes his fight for fatherland against the "snake and opponent of the holy churches" that he defeated and killed, and because of that he received the wreath of martyrdom from God (Hawkesworth, 2000, p. 83). The second part is a prayer addressed to Lazar, in which Jefimija begs him to gather an army of saints, holy warriors and martyrs who will provide help and sacral protection to his sons Stefan and Vuk in the fight against the Ishmaelites. The third part has a personal tone in which Jefimija speaks about the tragedy she experienced "... And now I beg you doubly: that you should nourish me still and calm the fierce storm in my soul and body. Jefimija offers this from her heart to you, Holy One!" (Hawkesworth, 2000, p. 83).

Jefimija embroidered the shroud for Lazar, who suffered a martyr's death for his people and faith. As a reward for his passion and faith in Christ, he deserved a place in paradise and a wreath of the righteous. Through this shroud Lazarus is assimilated to Christ. The shroud becomes the shroud of Christ and Lazarus' tomb Christ's tomb, which gives an additional sacral dimension to the Ravanica monastery, which in this way becomes the church of Christ's tomb. After the canonization, Lazar became a national saint, but also Jefimija's intercessor at the Last Judgment, to which she prays.

For the tomb of her mother, Jefimija made the epitaphion that is kept today in Romania in the Monastery of the Mother of God in Putna (Кашанин, 1990, pp. 310–311; Мирковић, 1925, pp. 109–120; Половина & Томин, 2014, pp. 95–110; Суботић, 2018, pp. 51–62; Трифуновић, 1992, pp. 31–32; Томин, 2015a, pp. 136–137; Vassilaki, 2012, p. 230). It has been dated to 1405, which indicates that this was very likely the last work of Jefimija (Fig. 6). On the epitaphion is embroidered a representation of the dead Christ surrounded by a choir of angels and two inscriptions in Greek: "Seeing the strange sight, the host of angels uttered an unaccustomed cry of anguish, O Son of God, Word. Remember Lord, the soul of your servant the Kaisarissa of Serbia Euphemia the nun with the daughter of the basiliisa of Serbia the nun Eupraxia." (Kalantzidou, 2016, p. 115)

The first part of the inscription is inspired by the *threnos*, the service of the Virgin's lament, which corresponds to the image of the dead Christ mourned by the angels. This inscription substitutes the image of the Moth-

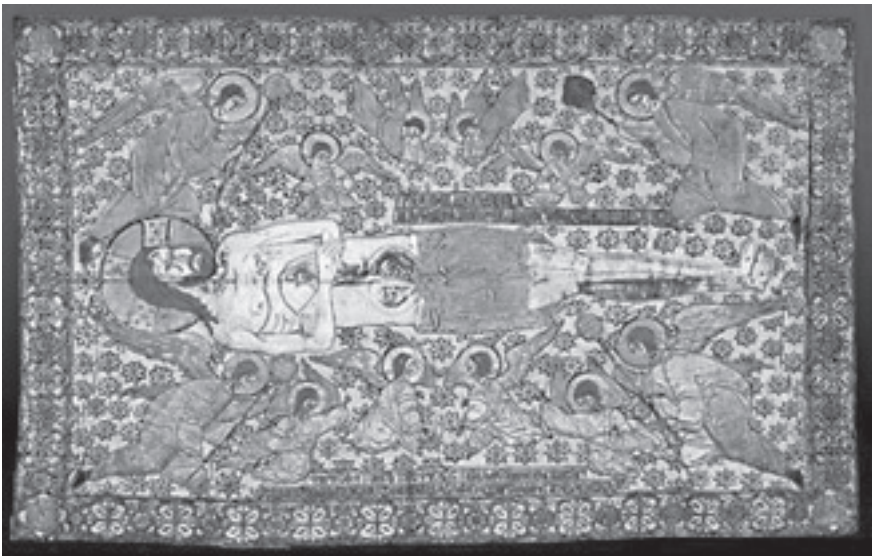

Fig. 5: The epitaphion from Putna monastery, c. 1405, Putna monastery

er of God. The second part of the inscription, which mentions Kaisarissa nun Jefimija, and basillisa nun Jevpraksija, led the researchers to different conclusions regarding the identity of these two women (Половина & Томин, 2014, pp. 95–110; Суботић, 2018, pp. 51–62). We have already stated that Jelena took a monastic vow before 1398/99 as we know from the poem on the Hilandar katapetasma. It is assumed that Jefimija became the great chemist Jevpraksija near the end of her life, which corresponds to the fact that she was last mentioned in the charter of despot Stefan from 1405 under this name (Веселиновић, 2002, pp. 131–141). Jelena's parents passed away before she composed the poem *Lament for the infant Uglješa*. Their death is mentioned in the verses of the poem "...that I saw in those who bore me..." (Pilipović, 2020, p. 147).

The exact year of Jelena's parents' death is still unknown. Vojihna is buried in Hilandar, but it is not known where Jelena's mother was buried or what her secular name was. In Uglješa's charter for the Kutlumuš monastery from 1357, she is mentioned only as a kesarica without a name (Ћирковић, 1995, 183). What is known is that her monastic name was Jefimija and that she passed away probably in the period before 1368–1371. Jelena probably took the monastic name Jefimija in memory of her mother. The text and image on this shroud correspond to each other as well as to other Jefimija's votive gifts. The text of the *threnos* refers to the image of the dead Christ, but also to Jefimija's mother. The ktetorial inscription

has a votive character, through which Jevpraksija addresses the Lord, and begs him to mention them and provide them with salvation. These verses connect the Hilandar diptych and this epitaphion. For the first time, verses inspired by the Virgin's lament were engraved on the diptych, Jelena's first votive gift, while for the last time they were embroidered on the epitaphion that she embroidered as a shroud for her mother's tomb. In this way, the circle that began with the lamentation of the son and ended with the lamentation of the mother was closed.

Basillisa Jelena Mrnjavčević, as Jevpraksija, is mentioned for the last time in the charter of despot Stefan Lazarevic from 1405. She spent the last years of her life in Ljubostinja together with Milica, nun Jevgenija. She died in 1405, but the exact date of her death is not known, just as it is not known where she was buried. One hypothesis is that she was buried in the narthex of Ljubostinja on the south side, and that her tomb was marked by a sarcophagus with lilies, which is still in the southern part of the narthex (Ђурић, 1985, pp. 57–58; Радичевић & Зечевић, 2014, p. 127). Jefimija, as Milica's close friend and perhaps a relative, could certainly have been buried in Ljubostinja. The dedication of the monastery can also testify to this hypothesis. It is dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God, which indicates the funerary function of the church. This feast also promises salvation through the intercession of the Mother of God, which immediately after the dormition was next to the Christ in Paradise as a representative of the entire human race. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that Jefimija wanted to be buried in this church in which she will wait the resurrection of the dead at the Last Judgment, during which she will be again reunited with her son and husband, under the sacral protection of the Mother of God. All her votive gifts are imbued with her personal tragedy and suffering due to the loss of loved ones. It is the thread that connects all her poems and votive gifts.

The life of this unfortunate basillisa influenced the forming of a visual culture that testifies to human tragedy and maternal pain, which was especially shaped through the verses of a poem written by Jefimija. Jefimija's life and work represents a unique picture of a time and a picture of a human's life in crisis, which is reflected precisely through her poems and votive gifts. It is a spiritual and emotional crisis that is directly connected with the real political situation in which was medieval Serbia at the end of the 14th and during the 15th century.

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ПОЕМЕ И ВОТИВНИ ДАРОВИ МОНАХИЊЕ ЈЕФИМИЈЕ КАО ИЗРАЗ ЉУДСКЕ ТРАГЕДИЈЕ

Апстракт: Већи део овог рада фокусиран је на поеме и заветне дарове монахиње Јефимије, које су нераскидиво повезане са њеним животом. Сачувани су сви њени дарови за које се зна, а то су диптих на којем је урезана поема *Туīа за младенцем*, Погановска икона, катапетазма за Хиландарске двери са стиховима *Мољенија Госпōду Исусу Христ̄у*, плаштаница за мошти кнеза Лазара са поемом *Похвала кнезу Лазару* и плаштаница из Путне. Јефимијине поеме уграviране или извезене на њеним заветним даровима и инспирисане делима Симеона Метафраста, Симеона Новог Богослова и Николе Мистика представљају јединствен израз мајчинског жаловања и људске трагедије која је обликовала визуелну културу и књижевност средњовековне Србије. Сваки од дарова је настао као Јефимијин заветни дар, пре свега Богородици, али и Христу и кнезу Лазару који су њени заступници и заштитници на Страшном суду.

Кључне речи: монахиња Јефимија, поеме, Хиландарски диптих, Хиландарска катапетазма, покров за мошти кнеза Лазара, плаштаница из манастира Путне

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LESSENING THE DREAD OF THE HOUR OF DEATH: INTRODUCTORY MINIATURES IN THE TWO LATE MEDIEVAL SLAVIC PSALTERS

Abstract: The aim of the present paper is to show that the introductory miniatures in the Tomić Psalter and the Serbian Psalter in Munich, being the tools for meditation on human mortality, were devised to lessen the dread of the moment of death while simultaneously conveying the Christian forewarning. It is argued that, though representing the similar scene, the one in the Tomić Psalter was designed as a model of a good death, while the one in the Serbian Psalter was offering the message of hope through the dreadful pictorial narration.

Keywords: moment of death, remembering death, Tomić Psalter, Serbian Psalter in Munich

Depicting the hour of someone's death is always a highly charged image. Regardless of the culture and its conceptualized views on human mortality, the representation of a dying person is inevitably devised to instigate a reaction. Whether the reaction is manifested through certain emotion(s) or involuntary sensation, it is often paired with further reflections. Those reflections are in essence intimate reexaminations of one's belief system, values, hopes, and fears, with the power to reaffirm or challenge cultural norms.

The late medieval Western culture left an abundance of visual testimonies of such ponderings. If we limit ourselves to depictions of the deaths of "ordinary" people, i.e. to exclude divine or deified mortals or

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quintessential sinners, we will be able to discern a particular human need that brought about those images at the time. For example, Gloria K. Fiero noticed that the period after the first four waves of the plague pandemic (1347–1375) saw a great increase in realistic representations of funerals in prayer books for laypeople (the Books of Hours). Observing that illuminations in question were not allegorical, she argued:

> I perceive this unprecedented attention to death, especially as it is represented in those scenes of death ritual that adorn the prayerbooks of the period, as a manifestation of the intense psychological need within European society to restore the religious and social traditions of funeral and burial that were disrupted by the Black Death (Fiero, 1984, p. 271).

Moreover, she remarked:

> Even as they describe a society to which ritual had been restored, the miniatures of funeral and burial in fifteenth-century prayerbooks contributed to a new sense of confidence and security (Fiero, 1984, p. 291).

This means that after the period when people were faced not only with the fear of horrible death but also with the uncertainty of receiving the necessary ritual which secured the desired rite of passage, depictions of a proper burial instilled a sense of order and security.

On the other hand, the late medieval period, even before the first outbreak of the Black Death in Europe (1347), gave birth to macabre imagery which spread over the pages of manuscripts for personal devotion as well. Once again, the pictures of decaying corpses were not devised in order to immerse viewers in the fear of unavoidable human fate, but were imagined as tools for conquering it, ensuring a certain comfort and social stability. The miniatures of the Legend of the Three Living and the Three Dead were frequently painted in private psalters and books of hours to remind owners to pray for the departed members of their families while simultaneously prompting repentance as a means of preparation for the "good death" (Kinch, 2013, pp. 126–144). Even the personal "encounters" with the menacing personification of Death in the guise of a putrefying cadaver were meant to set the stage for practicing the future "confrontation" instead of passive reception of a mere *memento mori* message. The ultimate goal was not to subdue the opponent but to resist its violence. Preserving dignity in the form of acceptance was a feature of the good death as was the timely confession of every sin (Ђорђевић, 2013, pp. 26–33).

Still, it might be that *ars moriendi* manuals offer the most direct access to the late medieval psychological investment in the moment of one's death and the attempt to normalize it. This fifteenth-century guide to the "craft of dying", often incorporating images, is envisioned as a drama at

the deathbed, where angels and demons are contesting over the soul of a dying person. The soon-to-be-dead is subjected to the five temptations which would decide their fate. Therefore, this treatise provided valuable pieces of advice for the last hour of someone's life, together with the appropriate protocols at the deathbed (Gertsman, 2007, pp. 64–65). Thus, by offering a "script" to be performed at the end of one's (physical) life, *ars moriendi* manuals had the power to lessen the anxiety of the dreaded hour of reckoning.

This last example is maybe the best introduction to the topic of the paper at hand: the role of the introductory miniatures of the two fourteenth-century Slavic psalters with representations of the moment of death. Even though both psalters under analysis here, the Serbian Psalter in Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Slav. 4) and the Tomić Psalter (Moscow, GIM, Muz. 2752), belong to the Eastern Christian tradition, the brief overview of the contemporary Western tendencies can set the starting point in trying to understand the human need for such highly charged images where the viewer was invited to reflect on mortality and conceptually comprehend and accept death. Finally, the moment of death in the late Middle Ages can be characterised the same both East and West as – to use the words of Caroline Walker Bynum – "the moment at which not only one's fate but also one's significance was judged" (Bynum, 1998, p. 592).

Visualizing the nature of death

If we try to find an analogy for the Western books of hours in the Byzantine East, psalters might be the most appropriate parallel. Not only did "very few of the medieval psalters now preserved appear to have been read in church" but they also encouraged immediate engagement in personal devotion (Parpulov, 2010, p. 81). Being written in direct speech, the reader was embodying the author's "I" in the psalms, appropriating experiences, needs, fears, and desires delivered throughout the verses. Furthermore, much as the book of hours, psalters often had supplementary devotional texts added to the main corpus and, what is even more telling, were frequently chosen to fit the needs of their owners. Even though a psalter was the absolute cornerstone in the life of a monk, its obvious usefulness granted it popularity among the lay community as well (Parpulov, 2010, p. 80). As a few surviving manuscripts testify by the written instructions, certain psalms were also described as prescriptions for particular unwanted disruptive thoughts or difficult emotional states. Interestingly enough, there is one peculiar example of a psalter with the instructions for intertwining psalms with the practice of divination (Parpulov, 2010, p. 83, 88).

It is not known who the original owners of the two Slavic psalters were (on the two psalters, see Джурова, 1990; Belting, 1978; Радојчић, 1963; Stichel, 1971; Милорадовић, 2017). The Tomić Psalter, which is exhibited today in the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Moscow, GIM, Muz. 2752), is a manuscript of Bulgarian origin, most probably produced in the 1360s (Джурова, 1990). On the other hand, the Serbian Psalter, kept today in the Bavarian State Library in Munich (Cod. Slav. 4) and dated between 1370 and 1395, was created in medieval Serbia and is known to have later arrived at the library of the Serbian Despot Đurađ Branković (Радојчић, 1963). The first miniatures to be encountered in both manuscripts are the full-page illuminations designed to invite their viewers into the meditation on mortality. One twelve-century Byzantine psalter in the Dionysiou Monastery (cod. 6) also has elaborate illuminations devoted to human fate in the afterlife at the beginning of the codex and is established to have belonged to a monk named Sabas (Parpulov, 2010, p. 96). However, if we compare its deathbed scene to those in the Slavic psalters, the apparent difference is that the dying person in the first example is of monastic identity, while the latter depict laymen. Because such images were fashioned as mirrors for their owners, it is logical to suppose that the Serbian Psalter and the Tomić Psalter were ordered by members of the nobility, for it is highly unlikely that someone of lower social status could have afforded such luxurious codices.

They are both opened on the same scene called the Cup of Death (Stichel, 1971, pp. 17–69; Милорадовић, 2017). It is a scene depicting the personification of Death offering a goblet filled with the bitter liquid to a dying person (Fig. 1, 2). The "cup of death" is a motif that can be found in Byzantine sources. In the long recension of the Testament of Abraham, Death calls itself "the bitter cup of death" (*Testament of Abraham* A, 1983, 16:12). Yet the motif is also reminiscent of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane, where he asks if the cup can be taken from him (Krugovoy, 1972, p. 67–68). This New Testament allusion is quite telling for the present discussion because the illuminations bear associations with the last communion received before departure from this world (cf. Ердељан, 2004, p. 426). The "cup of death" is also an important feature in the Life of Saint Basil the Younger. Part of this vita describes a vision of the saint's disciple Gregory who encounters a recently deceased slave woman named Theodora. Theodora narrates to him her terrifying experience of dying, indicating that the bitter drink enabled her soul to leave the body (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 2014, Part II, 8). Thus, the cup of death represents the perfect antipode to the chalice and communion. While the Eucharist provided the bodily union with Christ and gave a hint of the future experience of

Fig. 1: The Cup of Death, the Serbian Psalter in Munich, fol. 1v.

Fig. 2: The Cup of Death, the Tomić Psalter, fol. 3r.

resurrection (Congourdeau, p. 165; Ђорђевић, 2019, pp. 74–83, 118), the deadly chalice was meant to dissolve the psychosomatic marriage of body and soul. Hence, the miniatures of the two Slavic psalters were imbued with the menacing notion of a perverted Eucharist.

Being translated into Old Slavonic, the Life of Saint Basil the Younger is the most useful source for understanding the scenes of the Cup of Death illuminated in the two psalters. It is no wonder that the vita enjoyed popularity in Byzantium taking into account that the story of Gregory's vision virtually represents the Eastern *ars moriendi* manual. Besides the thrilling nature of the narrative, Theodora's recollection is supplied by an abundance of edifying remarks and practical pieces of advice about what a living person should do in order to prepare for the good death. Moreover, the account reveals in great detail the unavoidable events for the soul after it departs from the body. According to the vita, the soul is being led by guardian angels through the aerial tollhouses where demons with prepared records of committed transgressions are waiting ready to contest possession of the soul. This belief in the aerial tollhouses and sinister toll

collectors was never officially recognized by the Orthodox Church, yet it captured the imagination of the churchman and laics alike. Every aerial tollhouse held dominion over a particular sin and the recently deceased person was forced to offer compensation in the form of a good deed performed during their lifetime. Otherwise, the soul would not be permitted to pass further, finishing its journey imprisoned in Hades (see Marinis, 2017, pp.15–46). It is interesting to note that, in the Serbian Psalter, we can clearly distinguish a demon near the deathbed, but there is no trace of the guardian angel. By contrast, one can only discern the heavenly companion in the Tomić Psalter. Still, this is not the only important difference between the two miniatures. The visualization of personified Death is quite different as well.

The personification of Death was very rarely depicted in Byzantine art. In the Life of Saint Basil the Younger, its role is explained as the one who is in charge of separating the soul from the body. In Byzantine imagery, this task is most often assigned to angels, demons, or the personified Hades (see Marinis, 2017, pp. 49–66). In literary works, however, Death as a character can be encountered more often, sometimes going by the name of Charos (influenced by the mythological ferryman who transported souls to Hades; Kyriacou, p. 138; see also Angold, pp. 442–453). Still, the representations of Death in the two psalters are similar only at the most basic level – they are both rendered as dark monochromatic figures and, in addition to the cup, they are both holding a weapon. On the other hand, while the Death in the Tomić Psalter is mirroring the angelic form of the heavenly guardian, the one in the Serbian Psalter has taken shape of the demon standing beside it. Does this mean that the nature of Death differs between the two manuscripts, triggering, in turn, two dissimilar experiences in their viewers?

The answer may lie in the parallel analysis of the illuminations set to introduce Psalm 118 (119). The role of the miniatures paired with psalms was not so much to directly illustrate, but rather to problematize the verses. They were meant to bring about allusions to theological concepts or distinct events of the sacred history, deepening the meaning of the text and inviting the reader to ponder it further (cf. Barber, 2007). Certain images even forged connections to the services in which particular psalms were sung. Being associated with the funeral service, it is not surprising that at the beginning of Psalm 118 we encounter funerary-themed images in the two Slavic psalters (Parpulov, 2017, p. 302; Иванић, 2003). In the Serbian Psalter, one finds a double miniature representing the death of a righteous man and the death of a sinner (Fig. 3). In the upper scene, set amidst a rocky landscape, an angel is peacefully lifting a winged soul from the body of a ragged man. In the lower one, however, the angel is strik-

Fig. 3: Introductory miniature to Psalm 118, the Serbian Psalter in Munich, fol. 153r.

ing the dead body wrapped in a shroud with a spear, implying a violent separation of body and soul. The contrast between the two moments of death is further accentuated by the figures gathered around the deceased. While in the lower scene the deceased is surrounded by a large number of attendants at his deathbed, even including a priest who is blessing the dying, in the upper scene, the lonely pauper is accompanied by King David and King Solomon. The presence of King David is particularly revealing because, according to a story from the *Apophthegmata* (see Stichel, 1971 p. 23; Marinis, 2017, p. 53), on one occasion he was sent by God with his lyre to aid the departure of the soul that was unwilling to abandon its former "housing". In the end, the soul happily left the body. The double miniature also bears an unmistakable resemblance to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The moments of death of the two characters from the parable are juxtaposed in the Dečani Monastery, comparing once again the peaceful departure of the soul to the painful separation by the angelic weapon. This association with the story of the rich man and Lazarus underlines the redundancy of the funeral pomp in the case of unrepented sins. In the Life of Saint Basil the Younger, when describing her passage

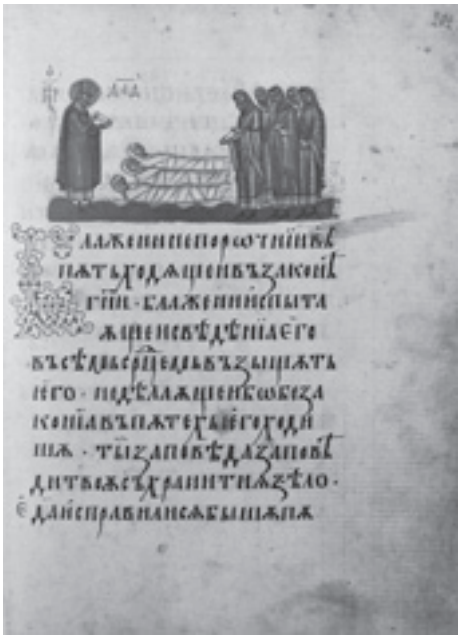

Fig. 4: Introductory miniature to Psalm 118, the Tomić Psalter, fol. 202r.

through certain aerial tollhouses – that of pride and the one of ennui and vainglory – Theodora explains why the demons were not able to charge her with anything. She states: "for how could I, who was a poor slave from infancy, seek to show pride toward anyone?"; "for how and why was I, as a slave, going to be vainglorious?" (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 2014, Part II, 17, 20). Remembering that the Serbian Psalter was originally owned by an aristocrat, the introductory illumination of Psalm 118 must have been especially disturbing, because it emphasized the dangers of the life lived in wealth and power.

In the Tomić Psalter (Fig. 4), on the other hand, we do not encounter a depiction of the moment of death. The miniature at the beginning of Psalm 118 represents three corpses accompanied by the group of laics on the left and King David on the right (Джурова, 1990, 107). King David is not carrying his lyre, but a scroll, just like the first man on the other side of the miniature. It is not unintentional that the deceased are facing the gathered laypersons instead of the celebrated Old Testament figure. It seems that the scene represents prayer (service) for the dead and that the gathered living, gathered as a community, are supposed to mirror King David. Since in medieval images scrolls insinuate the act of speech, it can be presumed that the group of laics is delivering words of Psalm 118 –

King David's verses – for the salvation of their departed loved ones, reminding the reader of the manuscript to do the same.

Therefore, whereas the miniature in the Serbian Psalter is staging a serious warning that emerges from contrasting the first lines of the Psalm ("Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord") to the depiction of the fate of the "defiled", the one in the Tomić Psalter is inviting its viewer to engage in uttering the same words as the bereaved assembly, without any hint of potential rebuke. It becomes quite clear that those two introductory illuminations of Psalm 118 differ from one another in notion as much as the two personifications of Death. Can it be, then, that the choice of the angelic form given to the personification of Death in the Tomić Psalter was driven by the deliberate intent of lessening the horror of its experience – the horror which is also absent from the previously discussed miniature of the same manuscript?

The Testament of Abraham may provide the appropriate answer. Existing in longer and shorter form in Greek, this apocryphal text is also preserved in a short recension in Slavonic. As the final part of the narrative goes, "when the days of Abraham's death drew near", God decided to send Archangel Michael to "adorn Death with great youthful beauty" before sending it to Abraham (*Testament of Abraham* B, 1983, 13:1–3). During the encounter, Death revealed its identity to the Old Testament patriarch saying:

> Do not think, Abraham, that this youthful beauty is mine, or that I come thus to every man. No, but if anyone is righteous as you are, I take crowns thus and go to him. But if he is a sinner, I go in great decay; and from their sin I make a crown for my head, and I trouble them with great fear, so that they may be dismayed (*Testament of Abraham* B, 1983, 13:12–14).

In the Life of Saint Basil the Younger, Theodora also attests to the shapeshifting ability of Death who appears first as a "roaring lion" and then as a "young barbarian" (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 2014, Part II, 8). Nonetheless, her account of the words of the two angels witnessing the divorce of her body and soul is even more important. They said to Death: "Why do you stand there? Loose her bonds and treat her with moderation, for she has no great weight of sins" (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 2014, Part II, 8). Hence, what becomes apparent from both texts is that Death adjusts its approach to dying people in accordance with their virtuous or sinful nature.

Therefore, it is beyond doubt that the angelic appearance of Death in the Tomić Psalter was devised to insinuate positive aftermath in the hereafter of the man on the deathbed and, by the "mirroring effect", of the viewer as well. Contemplating the miniature, the viewer was supposed

Fig. 5: The Naked Bones, the Serbian Psalter in Munich, fol. 2r.

to identify with the dying man and gain a glimpse into the unavoidable future experience. Though represented as a difficult and painful experience indeed, particularly by its allusion to the "perverted Eucharist" whose drink is always bitter, the dread of the hour of death is lessened by hopeful implications. Furthermore, the illumination was not designed as a forewarning, but as the model of the "good death" that should be followed. The depicted man has obviously prepared for his departure and he is granted the tendance of his guardian angel. However, does this mean that the owner of the Serbian Psalter, where we find the personification of Death in demonic guise, was encountering the miniature divorced of any hope, which only amplified the dreaded moment further?

Cry for help

The harsh message about the necessity of repentance and preparation for the good death is undoubtedly embedded in the Serbian Psalter. Even the introductory miniature of Psalm 118 lends itself to this notion. Yet, the initial reflection on human mortality at the begging of this codex does not

end with folio 1v. Unlike the Tomić Psalter, the meditation on death in the Serbian Psalter continues on the following page. On folio 2r, the viewer encounters an illumination that, at first glance, seems to represent two separate scenes (Fig. 5). In the upper part, one sees the famous parable from the Romance of Barlaam and Joasaph, i.e. the story about a man who was chased by a unicorn, while the lower portion, named "the naked bones" by the inscription at the bottom, shows the prophet Isaiah accompanied by a young man before an opened tomb. However, the lack of any drawn border between the two depicted events unifies them as much as the very posture of the prophet who is looking upward, thus implying that the parable should be understood as a vision (Милорадовић, 2017, pp. 266–267).

The concise version of the story about the man and the unicorn is written above the illumination:

> A man chased by a wild beast, called a unicorn, fled to a tree. And forgetting all about the chase of the wild beast and the sudden death and the deep chasm under the tree, he saw amidst that very tree honey drops for his pleasure, namely [the delights of] this vain world (Stichel, 1971, p. 49; Милорадовић, 2017, pp. 262–263).

The tale, as it is interpreted in the romance, is the allegory of human life. The unicorn embodies death that is always pursuing the living in order to seize them; the tree stands in for the duration of human life (in the original story the tree is nibbled by two mice – night and day); and, finally, the drops of honey represent delights of this world whose alluring nature makes people forget about their own salvation (Варлаам и Јоасаф, 2005, pp. 86–87). The moral of the parable is clear, straightforward, and particularly convenient for someone of high social status who can afford earthly pleasures, indicating once again that the Serbian Psalter belonged to a person from the aristocratic milieu. It represents the foreshadowing of the unwanted fate.

However, as has already been noted, the depiction of the man and the unicorn is designed as the vision of the prophet Isaiah. He is witnessing it while in the company of a youth as if to recreate the role of the hermit Barlaam who told the parable to the young prince Joasaph in the romance. It goes without saying that Joasaph was so inspired by the teachings of the recluse that he decided to leave everything behind and become a hermit himself. In this pictorial "rendition" of the story, the depicted young man is gazing at the bones in the open tomb with gestures of deep emotional disturbance. The inscription beside him reads: "The man wonders while looking at the naked bones" (Stichel, 1971, p. 53; Милорадовић, 2017, p. 266). Hence, the vision of the prophet Isaiah is the lesson on the transience of human life that explains the object of wonderment for the "new Joasaph".

Still, while this interpretation of the miniature may seem neat and persuasive, the text on the prophet's scroll challenges it, though it might not appear like that at first. One can still discern the words in his hands: "and I saw naked bones". They are taken from the *idiomela* for funeral services of John of Damascus:

> I recalled the prophet who cried "I am earth and ash" and again I looked into the graves and saw naked bones [.] and I said "for who is king or poor, who is just or sinner?" But, o Lord, give rest to your servant with the righteous, for you are the lover of mankind (Stichel, 1971, pp. 53–54; Милорадовић, 2017, p. 270).

First of all, the cited passage, mentioning "the prophet" and "the naked bones", appears to be a direct inspiration for the lower part of the illumination. The prophet from the hymn is identified as the prophet Isaiah in the miniature. Secondly, even though the notion of the transience of human life imbues most of the paragraph, the last lines indicate that we are dealing with the intercessory prayer for the salvation of the dead. Is this connection to the verses of John of Damascus actually implying a different notion behind this image in the Serbian Psalter? To put it simply – are we dealing with the representation of mere forewarning for the viewer?

Art historians have already noticed that the figure of prophet Isaiah on folio 2r closely resembles the one of the same prophet on folio 195v (Милорадовић, 2017, pp. 270–271). The latter is illuminated next to the Ode of Isaiah (*King James Bible*, 2017, Isaiah 26:9–20). The Odes (or canticles) are the nine poetic excerpts from the Bible that were positioned after the Psalms in the Byzantine Psalters (Parpulov, 2017, p. 300; Walter, 1990). They are fervent expressions of prayer toward God, much as the Psalms, and there are examples of the miniatures attached to them which were supposed to instigate readers' embodiment of the verses by offering suitable performative models (Nelson, 1989, pp. 151–152). However, this is not the case with the depiction of the prophet Isaiah in the Serbian Psalter. He is represented as receiving the cleansing coal by an angelic figure during his vision (*King James Bible*, 2017, Isaiah 6:6–7). While this choice underlines the prophetic character of the Ode (Walter, 1990, p. 51), it also connects the two figures rendered on different pages. The process of reading that illuminated devotional manuscripts in the Middle Ages, particularly the private ones, was marked by contemplation. The text was "studied" and experienced together with the miniatures, but not always limiting the reader/viewer to unearthing the word-image relation. Miniatures could also allude to other images and thus bring additional (sometimes unexpected) meanings and possibilities to the "game" (cf. Đorđević, 2019). If we consider the mnemonic potential of illuminations – the abil-

ity of "tying" a text or part of the text to a particular image in one's mind – the figure of prophet Isaiah in the depiction of the Naked Bones could inspire an association in the reader's mind (the reader who had already read the whole Psalter) with the Ode to which the similar figure of the same prophet is attached. In the Ode of Isaiah, unsurprisingly, one can indeed find verses that can be related to an image of a tomb with "naked bones":

> Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead (*King James Bible*, 2017, Isaiah 26:19).

Therefore, just like the reference to *idiomelon* of John of Damascus, this is another association of the miniature on folio 2r with the text that conveys the message of salvation. This can also explain the choice of the prophet Isaiah to embody "the prophet who cried 'I am earth and ash'" from the hymn because otherwise the connection with the Ode of Isaiah would be lost. However, the inclusion of the notion of the potential salvation of the dead in the miniature of the Naked Bones somewhat undermines the forewarning effect. Hence, one may justifiably question the true purpose of the illumination in the Serbian Psalter.

The references to the two texts may not be the only indications of a hopeful message. Both the Serbian and the Tomić Psalters have additional inscriptions accompanying their deathbed scenes. These words can be found in both manuscripts:

> Mourn and weep for me, oh, friends! For lo, suddenly a brigand appeared invisibly before me [.] tearing out my soul amidst the heart with a terrible weapon [.] and giving me a sip from the cup of deadly bitterness. Woe is me that there is no one to pity me (Џурова, 1990, p. 93; Stichel, 1971, p. 25; Милорадовић, 2017, p. 255).

At the bottom of the page in the Tomić Psalter, one also reads:

> Pause and see, oh, man, your life's end [.] and perceive and comprehend this existence. Weep and see me slain by death [.] for short was our fellowship. The rumble and murmur ceased [.] and the light in my eyes is quenched. And the beauty of my face is withered like a flower. And the grave, that unknown prison, detaches me from friends. Oh, the horror and wonder! Oh, the dreadful mystery! (Џурова, 1990, p. 93; Stichel, 1971, p. 57).

It is interesting to note that both passages are addressed to the onlookers – in the first case, to the gathered friends surrounding the deathbed, but indirectly to the viewer as well, being the one who is also witnessing the Death's approach; in the second paragraph, found only in the Tomić Psalter, the viewer is, however, directly addressed ("Pause and see, oh, man, your life's end"). The second paragraph is actually an invitation

to contemplate one's own mortality through the death of the other. Rainer Stichel pointed out that it is the translation of a Greek poem by Ioannes Kladas, namely an ekphrasis in the form of a grave inscription (Stichel, 1971, pp. 57–59). The main aim behind such funerary inscription was to arouse compassion in the reader (by identifying with the deceased) so that he or she would be moved to intercessory prayer for the dead person (Đorđević, 2018). Furthermore, the words of the Tomić Psalter are imagined as though they are coming from the grave ("that unknown prison"), hence, though there is no pictorial rendering of the "naked bones", the reader is confronted with verbal imagery of human transience in this manuscript as well as in the Serbian Psalter on folio 2r (Stichel, 1971, pp. 57–59). Being similar in character to the distinct type of sepulchral inscriptions, the text also implies the need for intercessory prayer.

On the other hand, the first cited passage, which is found in both psalters in connection to the deathbed scene, resembles in tone the *Kanon eis Psychorragounta* (*Kanon for He Who Is at the Point of Death*), which was read shortly before one's death as part of a service (Marinis, 2017, pp. 107–110). It describes the painful separation of body and soul, as well as the soul's journey to Hades. The text is delivered in direct speech, filled with troublesome expressions of sorrow and terror such as "mourn and weep for me" and "woe is me", but also with cries for help – whether to friends, angels, Christ or, in most cases, the Virgin Mary. The verses of the sixth Ode of the Kanon are dedicated to the request of the dying man for his (unworthy) dead body to be thrown away to dogs:

> What is the benefit to me if my soul is to be dragged into terrible punishments while my body is being read the [funeral] service by you. It is not worthy; rather, drag it out and throw it to the dogs.
>
> Perhaps passing strangers, seeing the bones dragged by dogs, will be moved by compunction and cry: help, mistress [the Virgin Mary], the soul of this wretched body (Marinis, 2017, p. 138, Ode VI, hymns 3–4).

Even though the feeling of despair pervades the text of the *Kanon eis Psychorragounta*, there are also reemerging hints of hope in intercessory prayers. In the case of the sixth Ode, the dying man is obviously insisting for his body to be left unburied as the food for animals in order to enable this horrid spectacle to move the strangers passing by to prayer. Moreover, in the perambulatory that surrounds the chapel of St George in the Chilandar Monastery, where the painted cycle of the Kanon is preserved, these exact verses are illustrated representing the accidental onlookers with gestures of amazement (Marinis, 2017, pp. 115–116; Đorđević, 2018, p. 25), not unlike those performed by the young man in the Serbian Psalter on folio 2r.

The salvific properties of the prayers for the dead were debated at length by various Byzantine theologians (see Marinis, 2017, pp. 93–106). Particularly problematic were the dead who died with unrepented sins. Were the intercessory services and prayers effective in those cases? The theological teachings were never officially unified. At the Council of Florence (1438–1439), during the lively dispute on the existence of purgatory between Western and Eastern Churches, Mark Eugenikos (d. 1445) argued for the possibility of salvation for those who died with unrepented sins, but not the mortal ones. They will be cleansed not by the purgatorial fire but through the experience of fear at the moment of death and the temporary imprisonment in Hades (Marinis, 2017, p. 104). Writing one of the treatises on the soul dedicated to the question of purgatory, Eugenikos' disciple Gennadios Scholarios (ca. 1400–1472) stated that church services can indeed accelerate the process of cleansing of the pardonable sins. However, he also mentioned that there are known examples of souls with mortal sins that have been saved from Hades by the intercession of saints (Marinis, 2017, p. 80). On the other hand, in this same period when theologians were struggling to reconcile different teachings and beliefs (mostly stirred by the desire to present purgatorial fire as unnecessary), one peculiar service emerged preserved in a small number of manuscripts – the "Service of the Funeral Unction". Its main purpose was the remission of sins after one's death (Marinis, 2017, pp. 126–130).

Going back to the Serbian Psalter, it can be rightfully argued that the intent behind the miniature of the Naked Bones was primarily not to forewarn its viewer, but to emphasize the salvific power of the intercessory prayers for the dead. The young man is moved by the sight of the opened tomb, and the vision of the prophet Isaiah can be understood as the recounting of the sinful life of the deceased. However, both the prophet's scroll and the gestures of the youth imply the possibility of his salvation. Furthermore, it seems that the second illumination was necessary in order to handle the immersion of the viewer in fear after encountering the dreadful moment of death on folio 1v. The second miniature brought back the sense of control.

Therefore, while the image of the Cup of Death in the Tomić Psalter functioned as the model of the good death, lessening the dread of the hour of reckoning by employing a positive example, the same scene in the Serbian Psalter was purposefully designed as an ominous admonition emphasizing the "moral of the story". Still, even in the Serbian Psalter, the harsh Christian didactic approach had to be reconciled somehow

with the need of regaining the sense of security, instead of immersing the viewer in despair. That way, the moral message is preserved together with the possibility of hope even in the darkest scenario. One may even argue that the instigation of fear and its utilization in fashioning the terrifying deathbed scene was done not only to convey the Christian forewarning but also to lessen the already existing fear. What if a person struggled with the fear of forgetting to confess a certain sin before death? We are actually able to sense this anxiety from theological debates, but also the text of the Life of Saint Basil the Younger. Theodora herself states that she had forgotten some of her sinful deeds before encountering the neatly bureaucratic demonic records (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 2014, Part II, 18). By perceiving the depictions on folios 1v and 2r as a consecutive narrative, the bones in the opened tomb can be identified as those belonging to the dying person from the previous scene – the Cup of Death. Thus, the terrible uncertainty of the moment of death would be alleviated in the viewer through the process of deep contemplation – the intercessory prayers of the young man and the prophet will be able to help the dead. Finally, the Serbian Psalter is not a unique example of a private devotional manuscript with such a daring, thought-out programme (see Ђорђевић, 2013, pp. 33–52). The medieval images for personal meditation on human mortality were generally envisioned as tools for confronting existing fears that surround death. They had a utilitarian purpose above all.

In the end, one additional point should be addressed. Such strong emphasis on the intercessory prayer in the Serbian Psalter and its implied notion in the words of the discussed paragraph below the miniature in the Tomić Psalter direct also to the care for the deceased loved ones. Besides pondering their own future fate, the owners of the two devotional manuscripts must have been reminded to ensure the salvation of those who died before them. Death in the Middle Ages was always a matter of community, and the established bonds did not cease after departing from this world. Even Theodora's account in the Life of Saint Basil the Younger attests to that. Theodora would not have been able to pass certain aerial tollhouses if she had not been supplied with the spiritual gold of her, at that moment, still living spiritual caretaker – Saint Basil (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, Part II, 10). Being recognized as a holy man during his lifetime, not only on earth but in heaven as well, he was also able to provide all his deceased followers with a distinguished heavenly residence long before his own death (*The Life of Saint Basil the Younger*, 2014, Part II, 46).

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УБЛАЖАВАЊЕ УЖАСА САМРТНОГ ЧАСА: УВОДНЕ МИНИЈАТУРЕ ДВА ПОЗНОСРЕДЊОВЕКОВНА СЛОВЕНСКА ПСАЛТИРА

Апстракт: Циљ овог рада је да покаже како су уводне минијатуре у Томићевом псалтиру и Српском псалтиру у Минхену, будући оруђа за медитацију људске пролазности, требало да ублаже ужас тренутка смрти пружајући истовремено и хришћанско упозорење. Упркос томе што приказују сличну сцену, у раду се образлаже да је минијатура из Томићевог псалтира осмишљена као модел добре смрти, док је она из Српског псалтира нудила поруку наде путем застрашујућег ликовног наратива.

Кључне речи: тренутак смрти, сећање на смрт, Томићев псалтир, Српски псалтир у Минхену

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THE ORIGIN OF THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE MIRACULOUS RETURN OF SIGHT TO STEFAN DEČANSKI BY ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA

Abstract: This text deals with the process of forming a joint iconography of St. Stefan Dečanski and St. Nicholas of Myra, on the vita icons of one of these two saints. King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski was canonized for saint in 1339, but the most important moment in the formation of his cult was the creation of the text of his *Life*, written around 1400 by Gregory Tsamblak, at that time abbot of the Dečani monastery. In the text of the *Life*, Tsamblak presented the Holy King Stefan Dečanski as a true Christian martyr, and the key moment of his martyrdom was the moment of his blindness on Ovče Polje. After five years of blindness in exile in Constantinople his sight was miraculously returned to him by St. Nicholas of Myra. Conecting St Stefan and St Nicholas by Gregory Tsamblak, will have a great echo in visual arts from the end of the 16th century. Gregory's *Life* served as a literary basis for the creation of common iconography of these two saints. Scenes in which St. Nicholas addresses Stefan Dečanski and restores his sight first appeared within the vita icons of St. Nicholas, created first in Serbia, and later in Russia, and became the ideological and visual basis of vita icons of St. Stefan Dečanski.

Key words: St. Stefan Dečanski, St. Nicholas of Myra, iconography

Stefan Uroš III (r. 1321–1331), later named Dečanski after his most famous endowment – the Dečani monastery, was born around 1275 (Станковић, 2012, p. 46). He was the eldest child of King Milutin (r. 1282–1321), from the first or second of his four marriages (Станковић,

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2012, p. 46). When Stefan came of age, his father gave him the lend of Zeta, where he settled until such a time as Stefan would be called to succeed his father to the throne. After the fourth marriage of King Milutin with the Byzantine princess Simonida in 1299, the agreed order of succession to the throne was abandoned (Станковић, 2012, p. 111). King Milutin's plans with Simonida's brothers as possible heirs to the Serbian throne led to a misunderstanding between the king and his eldest son Stefan, who rightly expected that the throne would belong to him after his father's death. It is possible that Milutin's turn in the choice of successor, with the possibility that he would be from Constantinople, provoked Stefan's revolt and rebellion against his father in the first half of 1314 (Станковић, 2012, p. 113–132).

Soon, King Milutin came with the army near Skadar, lured his son to negotiations, and then caught him, took him chained to Skopje, where his halls officially blinded him. The purpose of that punishment was to disable Stefan for ruling and prevent him from participating in the fight for power. It seams that Stefan was never totally blinded, and as some think was likely not blinded at all (Fine, 1994, pp. 260,263). After that, king Milutin handed over Stefan with his wife and two children, to the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II, under whose supervision he would remain in Constantinople for seven years. Dečanski wrote a letter to Danilo, Bishop of Hum, asking him to intervene with his father (Fine, 1994, p. 262). Danilo wrote to Archbishop Nikodim of Serbia, who spoke with king Milutin and persuaded him to forgive his son. Stefan's pleas were granted by King Milutin, apparently in 1320, when he allowed him to return from exile in Constantinople. At that time the heir to the throne was considered Stefan's half-brother Konstantin (Максимовић & Ћирковић, 1981, pp. 438–465), king Milutin's son from one of his later marriages – most probably to Ana Terter (Станковић, 2012, p. 132).[1] Shortly after Stefan's return to Serbia,

1 After the death of king Dragutin, king Milutin definitively renounced the Deževo Agreement (Станковић, 2012, p. 58–69), imprisoned Dragutin's son Vladislav, and as Stefan Dečanski repented of his disloyalty, Milutin appointed Konstantin as his successor on the throne. According to the inscription on one altar which King Milutin donated to the church of St. Nicholas in Bari from 1319–20, (now lost, but which is preserved in younger transcripts), King Milutin, apparently already by that time, appointed Konstantin as his successor (Миљковић, 2007, p. 282).The same is testified by the contemporary *Loza Nemanjića* (Nemanjić's Family Tree) from Gračanica, at the top of which, on Milutin's right side, is painted Konstantin, *the son of Stefan the King* (Тодић, 1999, p. 107; Миљковић, 2007, p. 285); Konstantin's character is also presented in the lineage of Nemanjić from the narthex of Pećka patrijaršija (arround 1332) (Ђурић & Ћирковић & Корać, 1990, pp. 138–139); For dating see: (Војводић, 2002, p. 263).

King Milutin died. Stefan then announced to the whole world that his eyesight had been restored, which many did not believe. Konstantin showed the most distrust and started the war against his older brother. In the war for the throne, Konstantin lost his life, and Stefan became a new Serbian king.

Although Stefan was never completely blinded, according to a later tradition, the eyesight of the blinded Stefan was later miraculously restored by St. Nicholas of Myra. It has not been proven whether the notions of the miraculous intervention of St. Nicholas originate from Stefan Dečanski himself or were created after his death in the circles of Dečani monks. This *God's miracle* (without mentioning St. Nicholas) was mentioned as crucial in the events of Stefan's accession to the throne, first by Guillaume Adam, Archbishop of Bar (1322), then by Danilo's student (between 1337–1340).

According to his own words recorded in his charters issued to the monasteries in Vranjina and Orehovo, it is known that King Stefan Dečanski considered St. Nicholas of Myra to be his patron and protector (Miklosich, 1858, p. 112; Мишић, 2002, p. 57).[2] In the founding charter of the Dečani monastery, in which he briefly spoke about his life, and then in the Prizren charter, Stefan Dečanski thanks God for restoring his eyesight and planting him on the throne of his parents; in the second Vranjina charter, he attributes the credit for that to both God and St. Nicholas, and in the third Vranjina charter – which is quite damaged – it seems only to St. Nicholas (Miklosich, 1858, p. 112; Ивић & Грковић, 1976, pp. 73, 74, 304; Шекуларац, 1984, p. 59).

Stefan Dečanski showed special respect for St. Nicholas through the erection, renovation and donation of temples dedicated to him: Even as a governor in Zeta, Stefan donated some villages to the monastery of St. Nicholas on Vranjina island on Skadar Lake, and later as king he renovated the church of the monastery of St. Nicholas in Dabar in 1329, which was severely damaged a little earlier in conflicts with Bosnian heretics. According to the later testimony of Gregory Tsamblak, Dečanski also built a temple dedicated to St. Nicolas not far from the Dečani monastery (Цамблак, 1989, p. 67).[3] Also he donated one luxurious icon of St.

2 Stefan did not dedicate his most important endowment, the Dečani monastery, to Saint Nicholas, but to Pantocrator. His stay in the Constantinople complex of the Pantocrator monastery had an undoubted influence on the dedication of the church of the Dečani (Станковић, 2012, p. 143).

3 From this church, which was really built at the same time as the monastery, and could be dedicated to st. Nicholas, today there are only foundations left (Поповић, 1926/1927, pp. 226–227).

Fig. 1: Icon of St. Nicholas, Basilica di San Nicola in Bari

Nicholas with silver riza (Fig. 1), to the famous Basilica di San Nicola in Bari, that houses the relics of St. Nicholas. On this icon King Stefan Dečanski, and his son, the young king Stefan Dušan were presented kneeling in the praying possition on the both sides of St. Nicholas (Miklosich, 1858, pp. 86–87, 112–114; Новаковић, 1912, pp. 398–402, 581, 598, 638–645, Шекуларац, 1984, pp. 56–67; Томовић, 1974, pp. 50–51; Ђорђевић, 1989, p. 121; Миљковић, 2007; Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 26). Because of its large dimensions (187 x 113 cm) in later times it was believed that it was a true portrait of the saint.[4] In Dečani itself, St. Nicholas was given a very prominent place: one chapel next to the altar was dedicated to him, and he was very frequently depicted on the frescoes, sometimes as

4 On an engraving from 1584 made at the request of the noble Domenico Denesius in Rome, which is kept in the graphic cabinet of the National Library in Paris, Natale Boniface of Šibenik presents a faithful copy of this icon (believed to be a gift from King Milutin) entitled Vera effigies s(ancti) Nicolai Magni Archiepiscopi Myrensis ex eccl(esi)a regni Bariensi in qua requiescit desumpta praecipuisque eius miraculis exornata (Миљковић, 2007, pp. 286–289.

Stefan's undoubted representative and mediator (Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 26).

However, it should be borne in mind that St. Nicholas was also highly respected among the other members of the Nemanjić dynasty: first by Stefan Nemanja, and later Queen Jelena and King Milutin showed special affection to him, and were also doners to Basilica di San Nicola in Bari (Миљковић, 2007). Further, as well as in Dečani, chapels near the altar dedicated to St. Nicholas were erected several times in the last years of the 13th and in the first decades of the 14th century in churches that were erected by the members of Nemanić dynasty (Arilje, church of Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren, Staro Nagoričino and Gračanica) (Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 26).

Whether Dečanski himself claimed that he owed gratitude to St. Nicholas for restoring his eyesight or not, the tradition according to which St. Nicholas appeared in a dream to the blinded Stefan on Ovče Polje, only to miraculously regain his sight on St. Nicholas Day five years later in Constantinople, was first noted around 1400 by Gregory Tsamblak, some 60 years after Stefan Dečanski was proclaimed saint (in 1339).[5] Tsamblak spent several years in Dečani at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, and at one point he was even its abbot (Šufflay, 1911, p. 148; Данило Други, 1988, pp. 128–129; Цамблак, 1989, p. 62). Under the influence of *Gregory's Vita*, the cult of St. Stefan Dečanski will develop on Ovče Polje in Pelagonia (Филиповић, 1937, pp. 2–18; Филиповић, 1986, pp. 303–323; Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 543),[6] but the focus of Stefan's cult, however, was Dečani Monastery.[7] After all, Gregory's life celebrated St. Stefan's monastery in equal measure, as the saint himself. According to Tsamblak, for the construction of Dečani, Stefan Dečanski chose a place filled with the magnificent beauty of nature. That statement was very important because it leads to a logical conclusion, which Tsamblak cared about very much: only one with sharp eyesight could place his future monastery and a final resting place in such beautiful nature, so it is irrefutable proof that Stefan's eyesight was indeed restored and he could rule. Thus, the description of the choice of the place for the construction of the monastery makes convincing the miracle of St. Nicholas of Myra (Петровић, 1989, p. 28).

5 The contemporaries of Stefan Dečanski, Danilo II and his student, said nothing about the miraculous return of sight to Stefan. They only inform us that Dečanski was blinded in Skopje on his father's orders, and that on that occasion his eyesight was only partially damaged (Данило Други, 1988; Мек Данијел, 1989, p. 32).

6 A church was built there in 1847 (Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 37).

7 The cult, especially spread in the Dečani area, among Serbs, Arbanassi of the Roman Catholic and Muslim faiths (Вукановић, 1937, p. 371–389).

When Tsamblak decided to write the *Life* of the founder of the Dečani monastery, King Stefan, had already acquired a holy halo, but there were no real hagiographical nor liturgical writings for him that could be used for church needs. *Life of Stefan Dečanski*, by an anonymous student of Archbishop Danilo was written immediately after the death of Stefan Dečanski, before he was canonized, and were not usable in the church due to its distinctly secular orientation. On the other hand *Gregory's Life,* created to be read in the monastery where the saint's relics rest, has a form of an almost classical hagiography (Петровић, 1989, pp. 23–24).

Tsamblak began his *Life* with the scene of blinding of Dečanski, thus creating the conditions for the creation of the image of the king-martyr, which was his main goal (Петровић, 1989, p. 24).

> On Ovče polje, where the temple of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was, Stefan's eyes were taken out. The blinded Stefan felt terrible pains and strengthened himself only with prayer. Almost dead all night in terrible agony, he fell asleep a little before dawn. And he saw in a dream this: before him stands a beautiful saint in the hierarch's robe, his face shining with a gracious light, and he holds in his right palm both of his outstretched eyes, and says to him, "Hey, do not grieve, Stefan! Here are your eyes in my palm." And as he said that, he showed him both eyes. And Stefan, thinking, asked him, "And who are you, my lord, that you show so much care for me?" And the Appeared answered: "I am Nicholas, Bishop of Myra." Waking up from sleep, the sufferer with a humble heart offered his gratitude to God and His benefactor. And he felt some pain relief (Цамблак, 1989, pp. 52–53).

After five years in captivity in Constantinople, St. Nicholas addressed to Stefan Dečanski for the second time, in a dream:

> Do you remember what I told you before when we last met?" And as if he had fallen to the ground, he (Stefan) said that he knew him and that he was the great Nicholas, without remembering what he had said. And he, the merciful one, said, "I told you not to grieve, because your pupils are in my hand and I showed them to you. "And he declared that he remembered that, and fell at the feet of the saint to beg for mercy. And he who answered said, "What I told you then, I am now sent to fulfill." And when he gave him sight, he lifted him up and made the sign of the cross on his face, touching the tips of his fingers with his eyes, he said: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave sight to the blind man from birth, also gives your eyes the first ray (Цамблак, 1989, p. 58).

Restoring the eyesight by St. Nicholas of Myra manifested God's affection for the suffering prince Stefan. But that wasn't the end of Stefan's sufferings. His son soon died in Constantinople. This increases his suffering even more. However, a pardon from his father soon had arrived and Stefan returned to Serbia. Stefan's arrival was accompanied by tears and remorse from his father, which achieved the rehabilitation of the unjustly

convicted Job. According to Tsamblak neither Stefan nor his father were directly to blame for Stefan's tragedy, but perhaps Stefan's stepmother Simonida (Цамблак, 1989, pp. 50–51). According to medieval understandings, the ruler, as God's chosen one on earth, was at the same time the implementer of God's will on earth. So, king Milutin as God's chosen ruler couldn't be condemned for such a terrible deed. Consistent in such understanding, Tsamblak draws a parallel with Constantine the Great, who, at the urging of his cunning wife, killed his son Priscus (Цамблак, 1989, p. 52). Tsamblak does not mention Stefan's rebellion, so it remains unclear why Stefan was actually blinded (Петровић, 1989, p. 25). On the other hand, Stefan knew that a personal tragedy will befall him. And instead of turning away from his father's wrath or finding justification for himself before him, he consciously accepted the sacrifice, believing that it is a work of God which seeks to examine his righteousness and suffering. It is no coincidence that in Tsamblak's work, Stefan is compared only to the biblical Job, to whom suffering is a companion throughout his whole life (Петровић, 1989, p. 25).

Shortly after Stefan's return, King Milutin died, and Stefan announced to the whole world the miracle that had happened to him, in which many did not believe in. Tsamblak used this event to show how his hero was still exposed to injustice and new sufferings. But, God who had previously shown his affection for Stefan by restoring his sight, helped him even now, when the imminent danger of his brother's rebellion threatened. About the terrible punishment over Konstantin, Tsamblak does not say anything definite. It is only pointed out how Stefan came out of that fight with his brother as a winner (Петровић, 1989, p. 27).

According to Tsamblak, Stephen's acceptance of God's will was perhaps most fully expressed in the events leading up to his death. Stefan does not die suddenly and uninformed. St. Nicholas appeared to him for the third time and told him to prepare for his imminent death. The knowledge of imminent death didn't bring fear into the soul of the Serbian king, but happiness because he will soon appear before God (Петровић, 1989, p. 28).

Tying St. Stefan Dečanski to St. Nicholas was actually just the old custom of tying the newly declared saint (at least at the beginning of establishing their cult) to older and much more famous one, that Tsamblak used. The honor shown to the older saint, in this case St. Nicholas, was passed on to the new one – St. Stefan Dečanski, founder and holy protector of Dečani; their cults were merged, so fast help and consolation that were expected from Stefan, should be expected at the same time from St. Nicholas as well; connecting St. Stefan Dečanski with the cult of St. Nicholas of Myra, opened the doors to St. Stefan Dečanski not only in Serbian lands, but also in other

Fig. 2: St. Nicholas bringing Stefan Dečanski to Christ, Holiday Menologiumof Božidar Vuković, 1536/1538

parts of the Christian world as well. Numerous transcripts of the *Gregory's Vita of St. Stefan Dečanski* were found in Russia (Петровић, 1989, p. 31). Biographical data from *Gregory's Vita* were included in many Russian genealogies and annals (Стојановић, 1927, pp. 38, 49, 79, 192, 289). *Gregory's Vita* was known in Russia also because Tsamblak in 1409 went from Serbia to Kyivan Rus, where he continued his work, and finally became the metropolitan of Kyiv in 1414 (Петровић, 1989, p. 28).

From the beginning of the 15th century Tsamblak's work will become basis for the iconographical solutions of the cycle of Stefan Dečanski (Цамблак, 1989, pp. 52, 53, 58, 59). There was even a presumption that the manuscript of Gregory's (Tsamblak's) *Life of St. Stephen* was decorated with appropriate illustrations, which later served as a template for later artists (Петковић, 1933, pp. 68–72), which, however, turned out to be unlikely. The first known depiction of Stefan Dečanski with St. Nicholas in visual culture (if the founder's portrait of Dečanski on the icon of St. Nicholas from Bari is not taken into account) is a graphic from the Holiday Menologium of Božidar Vuković, printed in Venice 1536–1538. Gregory's (Tsamblak's) service and a short version of the *Life* of the holy king were published in it, and at the beginning of it, there was an

Fig. 3: St. Nicholas Brzopomoćnik, end of the 16th century

illustration of St. Nicholas bringing Stefan Dečanski to Christ (Fig. 2) (Ћоровић–Љубинковић, 1958/1959, pp. 175, 177; Медаковић, 1958, p. 133; Петковић, 1990, pp. 141–147). The credit for the appearance of this woodcut undoubtedly belongs to deacon Mojsije of Dečani, who ordered this book, and whose instructions helped an unknown artist to iconographically portray the figure of St. Stefan and – according to *Gregory's Life* – to tie him to St. Nicholas (Петковић, 1976, p. 133).[8]

Unrelated to this graphic, but with its roots in the same text, in the last decades of the 16th century, a number of visual depictions of Stefan Dečanski appeared and were multiplied on icons in Dečani. Inspired with the picturesque episodes of *Gregory's Life*, scenes of the appearances of St. Nicholas to Stefan were especially gladly taken. On one incompletely preserved icon of *St. Nicholas Brzopomoćnik* (the Ambulance) from the end of the 16th century (Fig. 3), there is preserved the scene with the First Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan Dečanski on Ovče polje, when St. Nicholas promised to restore eyesight to Dečanski (Мирковић, 1963, p.

8 This depiction from the Holiday Menologium will be a template for several paintings by Stefan Dečanski during the 17th and 18th centuries: (Ћоровић–Љубинковић, 1958/1959, p. 133; Петковић, 1990, pp. 155–156; Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 37).

Fig. 4: Vita icon of St. Nicholas,
Dečani, around 1620

46; Ћоровић–Љубинковић, 1958/1959, pp. 176–177; Шакота, 1984, pp. 94, 112). Probably on the opposite side of this icon, originally was depicted the scene of Second Appearance, as it is on the vita icon of St. Nicholas ordered by the abbot Diomidius of Dečani around 1620 (Fig. 4). (Ђурић, 1961, p. 125; Мирковић, 1963, pp. 34–37; Шакота, 1984, pp. 94, 112). At the bottom of this icon, to the right, is painted the First Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan Dečanski, in the same form as it was depicted on the previous icon, while opposite is the Second Appearance, when St. Nicholas brought back eyes to the blind king and restored his sight (Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 39).

Finally, in 1577, Zograf Longin, decided to paint Vita icon of St. Stefan Dečanski at his own expense (Fig. 5) (Петковић, 1933, pp, 60–74; Мирковић, 1963, pp. 17–19; Шакота, 1984, pp. 110–111; Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 40). After mentioning that he finished the icon on August 1, 7085, during the time of the Archbishop of Peć Gerasimus, and the abbot of Dečani Nikifor, Longin wrote his text in honor of St. Ste-

Fig. 5: Zograf Longin,
Vita icon of St. Stefan Dečanski, 1577

fan and, in the end, recorded his name in a secret script (Ђурић, 1985, p. 12). Longin's icon and Akathist service to St. Stefan Dečanski, that he also wrote, were the culmination of the third period of the rise of the cult of Stefan Dečanski, which coincided with the renewal of the Patriarchate of Peć in the second half of the 16th century, when the cult of Stefan Dečanski began to spread in the vast area under the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Peć, and its increasingly frequent appearance in visual culture, on frescoes and icons, and later in graphics.

Longin's icon, perhaps created at the request of the monastery fraternity, was a personal contribution of the painter to St. Stefan Dečanski to help him in the illness that tormented him. The large central panel of the icon depicts the holy king Stefan Uroš III on the throne, between two guardians; from above, from a segment of heaven, surrounded by cherubim, Christ Emmanuel blesses the king, with both hands, and two angels descend towards him with a lor and a crown in their hands. At the bottom of the icon, in full width, is depiction of the Battle of Velbužd, which

Fig. 6: Second Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan Dečanski, Zograf Longin, Vita icon of St. Stefan Dečanski, 1577

is understood as a conflict between a pious ruler, on the one hand, and a king who deviated from God's laws, on the other; in it Dečanski is the first to win by the power of prayer, which is why he is depicted in a prayerful position and with his hands raised, repeating the example of the Old Testament Moses who defeated Amalek with prayer (Павловић, 1965, pp. 106–107; Милошевић, 1970, pp. 215–221). Through sixteen small painted panels arranged on both sides of the icon, is told the story about Dečanski as an exemplary ruler and martyr. The outline of this story are the three Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan. Before St. Nichola's First Appearance on Ovče Polje, there were shown the scene of Simonida's slander of Stefan in front of his father and Stefan's Blindness. Before the Second Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan Dečanski in the monastery of Pantokrator in Constantinople, when the saint restored his eyesight (Fig. 6), there were shown Stefan's execution in captivity, Stefan's participation in the council against Barlaam's heresy and Stefan's persuasion of Emperor Andronicus to expel heretics; after the Miraculous return of sight to Stefan, there were depicted

Fig. 5: Third Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan Dečanski, Zograf Longin, Vita icon of St. Stefan Dečanski, 1577

the scenes of King Milutin's meeting with the abbot of Constantinople, Stefan's meeting with his father, Stefan's coronation, Building of Dečani and Stefan's distribution of alms to the poor. The Third Appearance of St. Nicholas, in which St. Nicholas announced to Stefan that he will soon be dead (Fig. 7), was followed by Stefan's gift of gold to the Dečani monastery and Stefan's death. This series ends with the Funeral of Stefan the martyr, an exemplary Christian ruler and protector of his monastery.[9]

9 Apart from the miracles on the these vita icons, St. Nicholas and St. Stefan Dečanski were united two more times in Dečani. On the back of the richly carved royal doors, two of them are painted in the eight decade of the 16th century (Шакота, 1984, pp. 116– 117), and their characters in this truly exceptional place could be explained by the proximity of the ark with Stefan's relics. Somewhat later, apparently in the 17th century, they were again represented together, on an icon that was repainted in the 19th century (Мирковић, 1963, p. 49; Шакота, 1984, p. 124). Also, in 1576–1577 Hieromonk Georgije Dečanac ordered from the painter Longin three throne icons for the church of St. Nicholas in Velika Hoča, with appropriate scenes in the lowest part of each of them. The event when he restores sight to the holy king was chosen

The *Life of Stefan Dečanski* and liturgical texts of Gregory Tsamblak were undoubtedly of great importance for the establishment and spread of the cult of St. Stefan Dečanski – only from the 15th and 16th centuries a dozen transcripts of the service and twice as many biographies have been preserved, in Dečani itself, in Hilandar, and even in Russia (Павловић, 1965, pp. 101–102). As far as is known, in the visual culture of the common depictions of St. Stefan Dečanski and St. Nicholas, first appeared in the Holiday Menologium of Božidar Vuković 1536–1538. Since than scenes of the Miraculous return of sight to Stefan entered the cycle of St. Nicholas in Serbian and Russian art of the 16th and 17th centuries (Ћоровић–Љубинковић, 1958/1959, pp. 174–178; Петковић, 1965, p. 83; Петковић, 1989, pp. 417–424).[10] As for the iconographic solution of the Life of Stefan Dečanski, within which the most important scenes were three scenes of the Appearance of St. Nicholas to Stefan Dečanski, it was, as it seems, definitely formed only in the work of the painter Longinus, in the second half of the 16th century, since when it has become a standard for Vita Icons of this saint.

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for the one with Saint Nicholas. The choice was not accidental, because with this miracle, St. Nicholas was celebrated as much as the holy founder and protector of the monastery from where the person who ordered the icon originated. Moreover, right next to this scene, the hieromonk Georgije himself was depicted, and on his scroll the lesson was recorded that those who give gifts also receive help from St. Nicholas. The miracle with Stefan Dečanski was the best proof and hope for Georgije that his prayers will be answered (Чанак–Медић & Тодић, 2018, p. 37).

10 In a manuscript from the middle of the 16th century in the Russian State Library in Moscow, in the collection of *Bolshakov* no. 15, as many as 35 miniatures related to St. Stefan Dečanski were painted according to Gregory's *Life*: (Петковић, 1989, pp. 422–424).

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Никола Пиперски*

НАСТАНАК ИКОНОГРАФИЈЕ ЧУДЕСНОГ ВРАЋАЊА ВИДА СТЕФАНУ ДЕЧАНСКОМ

Апстракт: Текст се бави сагледавањем процеса формирања заједничке иконографије светог Стефана Дечанског и светог Николе Мирликијског на житијним иконама посвећеним једном од ова два светитеља. Краљ Стефан Урош III – Дечански проглашен је за светитеља још 1339. године, али најважнији тренутак у формирању његовог култа био је настанак његовог Житија око 1400. године које је написао Григорије Цамблак, у то време игуман манастира Дечани. У тексту Житија, Цамблак је светог краља Стефана Дечанског представио као истинског хришћанског мученика и страдалника, а као кључни тренутак његовог страдалништва истакнут је тренутак него-

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вог губитка вида на Овчем Пољу, који му је, пошто је био праведник, након пет година слепила и заточеништва у Цариграду, на чудесан начин повратио свети Никола Мирликијски. Повезивање светог краља Стефана Дечанског и светог Николе Мирликијског од стране Григорија Цамблака, имаће од краја XVI века великог одјека у ликовним уметностима. Григоријево Житије је послужио као књижевна основа за стварање заједничке иконографије ова два светиње. Сцене у којима се свети Никола обраћа Стефану Дечанском и враћа му вид појавиле су се у оквиру светитељских циклуса на житијним иконама Светог Николе, насталим најпре у Србији, а касније у Русији, и постале идејна и визуелна основа циклуса на житијним икона Светог Стефана Дечанског.

Кључне речи: Стефан Дечански, Свети Никола из Мире, иконографија

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The volume *Death, Illness, Body and Soul in Written and Visual Culture in Byzantium and Late Medieval Balkans* explores the ways in which the Byzantines and the Serbs in the late Middle Ages understood and represented death, illness, the relations between body and soul, and the questions of life and afterlife.

Confronted with a pandemic of the Black Plague from the middle of the fourteenth century and the overwhelming power of the Muslim Ottoman invaders that threatened their existence, men and women of the broader Byzantine world sought solace in their Orthodox Christian faith, in the acceptance of the finite nature of earthly life, and above all in the preparations for the afterlife in hope and expectation of eternal bliss.

The papers in this volume offer original and innovative analyses of the attitudes toward the basic questions of human existence, and bring to life the people of Byzantium and late medieval Balkans through a series of studied examples of deeply personal expressions of their world-view, their faith, hopes and fears.

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