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THE DEATH OF SERBIAN RULERS IN SERBIAN ICONOGRAPHY

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The work's aim is to explain the phenomenon of the model of Serbian sanctity, with particular emphasis on its influence on art. Based on the analysis of sources, the author tries to show how they influenced the way of illustrating rulers from the Nemanjić dynasty. Furthermore, analyses some iconographical elements of the Dormition and presents their impact on medieval art in the description of women's images of the Nemanjić family.

Keywords: Serbia, sanctity, holy ruler, the Dormition, icon, monastery, wall painting, Nemanjić dynasty.

КОНЧИНА СЕРБСКИХ ПРАВИТЕЛЕЙ В СЕРБСКОЙ ИКОНОГРАФИИ

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Целью работы является объяснение феномена модели сербской святости с особым акцентом её влияния на искусство. На основе анализа источников автор пытается показать, как они повлияли на способ иллюстрации образов правителей из династии Неманичей. Кроме того, анализируется иконография Успения и представлено её влияние на средневековое искусство при описании женских образов дома Неманичей.

Ключевые слова: Сербия, святость, святой правитель, Успение, икона, монастырь, настенная живопись, династия Неманичей.

*For the Byzantine, as for all people of the Middle Ages,
the supernatural world existed in a real sense [3, s. 151].*

The Empire of New Rome captures well the Byzantine way of thinking. The supernatural world was for the inhabitants of Byzantium a more perfect and timeless reality, against which earthly existence was only a short-lived prelude [3, s. 151].

This specific way of thinking penetrated all spheres of life. It also had, what I will try to indicate, a significant impact on art. The main aim of my article is to explain the phenomenon, which created the model of Serbian holiness, with particular emphasis on their impact on art. I will consider them, by using the example of the three types of characters: the martyr king, the monk king and the female ruler. It will indicate how the iconographic type of performances of members of Nemanjić family changed over the years.

Serbian beliefs about holiness are among the most characteristic and coherent phenomenon of this spiritual culture. They constitute a weave of universal Christian values and ideological content proper to the Serbian tradition [2, s. 100]. In the literature, it is emphasized that the cult of rulers doesn't exist in medieval Bosnia, Bulgaria and Croatia. It is a phenomenon unique for Serbia and inseparable from the case of Nemanjić dynasty, which was prevailing there between the 13th and 15th centuries. The dynasty was founded by Stefan Nemanja (reign 1166-1196). Since the coronation of his son Stefan II Nemanjić, the dynasty rulers exercised the title of the king of Serbia. His second son, Saint Sava, archbishop and creator of the autocephaly of the Serbian Church after canonization became the patron of dynasty and state phenomenon [7, p. 1451]. The myth created by the particularly distinctive triad of rulers: Jovan Vladimir – Stefan Dečanski – Lazar Hrebeljanović is a permanent bond of Serbian statehood. All of them were martyred. The lives of holy rulers present explanations and analyses of specific historical events – from fratricidal deprivation of the throne to the Turkish invasions. The martyrdom of Serbian dying ends with Lazar's death (1389). Symbolically, however, it marked the beginning of a five-century tragic chapter in Serbian history, a period of Turkish rule during which the Serbian martyrdom expanded to include new victims, like the Christian patriots. The idea of martyrdom will serve in particular the Church and Serbia, but the Serbian martyr will cross the national qualities and become a Slav martyr [2, s. 84]. Thus, a concept of Balkan warrior for faith and freedom who goes beyond the geographical boundaries would be created.

One of many important factors, which determined the model of Serbian sanctity, was the geographical location, associated with this influence of the Byzantine culture. The introduction of Christianity also played a huge role. It is claimed that Slavs didn't have a well-organized forms of pagan worship, which is why they generally treated Christianity not as new principle of social, family and spiritual life, but as a set of elements non-antagonistically added to the native culture, which later on led to the symbiosis of pagan and Christian motifs [4, s. 14]. Balkans due to their geographical localization and lack of coherent and well-defined belief system seem to be vulnerable to various types of influence. This is especially visible in the Old Serbian literature. Being in the sphere of influence of Byzantine culture, took from it the basic literary worldview. Undoubtedly, an important model for Old Serbian hagiographies were the Western and Eastern life stories which were based on the model of ancient biographies, Greeks and Romans. References to literature and ancient history should have been well known to the recipients. This proves vividly that the myths concerning the ancient heroes remained alive and sound in the ancient Serbian culture.

Another important factor which contributed to the creation of Serbian model of holiness was, present in Byzantium and developed in following centuries also in Russia, sacralisation of rulers. From the beginning Christianity faced the existence of empire and emperor. When Christianity became the official religion of the empire the pagan *pontifex maximus* became a Christian ruler, which meant giving up many of his prerogatives. In fact, little of them remained – the holy title and certain liturgical functions [9, s. 6]. One of the most characteristic traits of Byzantine system was the overwhelming power of central authority. It had no effective constrains, except for those which arose from divine law [3, s. 33]. The idea of parallelism of the monarch and God was adopted from Byzantium to Serbia. However, this idea itself didn't mean the sacramental sacrifice. Sacralisation doesn't presuppose the ruler's likeness to God but the recognition that the monarch is endowed with special charisma, unique grace due to which he begins to be treated as supernatural being [9, s. 14]. The future development of this thought depended on the political situation. As so, in Russia,

after the fall of Constantinople it changed into the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome.

Moreover, the creativity of hagiographers also played an important role. The greatest initiator of the cults of Serbian rulers was the Serbian archbishop Danilo II. He lived in the years 1270-1337. He established, inter alia, the cult of Helen of Anjou (about 1236-1314) and Milutin (1253-1321). However, he did not develop the cult of Dragutin and Stefan Dečanski.

The above observations are one of the premises testifying to the multitude and diversity of reasons for the creation of a special culture around the Nemanjić dynasty in Serbia. Another is revealed by the careful analysis of aspects related to death narratives and the deaths of Serbian rulers.

King-martyrs

The figure that opens the Serbian martyrism and at the same time sets the Christian direction for Serbian state is Jovan Vladimir, murdered in 1015 by his brother in law Jovan Vladislav. His sacrifice became the founding act of the future Nemanjić state. What is more, his example of life led to creation of specific model of ruler-martyrs. In the literature rulers are often presented on the basis of dichotomy comparisons [5, s. 119]. Their holiness is manifested, among others, in superhuman possibilities. Epithets and glorifying descriptions also appear many times as so as references to the world of nature. All those aspects point towards special exaltation of the holy rulers in literature, but on the other hand indicate the repetitiveness and schematic of the descriptions.

In the Middle Ages, descriptions of “good” and “bad” death functioned in parallel. Good is usually prepared, affecting the whole community and mourned. Evil one is fast and sudden, leaving no room for rituals and thoughts.

The type of martyr ruler is depicted on the hagiographic icon presenting the holy king Stefan Dečanski dated 1577, and originating from the Tsar's Lavra in Dečani. The icon consists of the main image and surrounding it from three sides, 17 smaller scenes. The ruler was presented in full form, on the throne, with his feet resting on a footrest. His robe is richly decorated. He holds a cross in his right hand,

underlining his martyrdom and a scroll in his left. Soldiers were shown on both sides of the ruler. They were presented with spears in their hands. This is a reference to the battle with the Bulgarians from 1330, shown in the lower register of the icon. The Saint is depicted in a closed crown and with a nimbus. His face, with long dark hair and beard, expresses seriousness and focus. Above the figure of the ruler, respectively, on both sides of the main performance, Christ Emanuel and two angels were depicted. Imaginations in glues show successively scenes from the life of Saint Stefan Dečanski. Particularly important for the course of my argument is the scene in the lower right corner, showing the death of the king and the dream scene, in which the figure of Saint Nicholas appears. Of the scenes on the left and right of the throne king, three relate to the apparitions of St. Nicholas. All of them were placed in the left register.

For better understanding of the presence of this Orthodox Saint in art, it is necessary to include the history of Stefan Dečanski's life. Stefan Uroš III Dečanski reigned in the years 1321-1331. He was the son of Saint. King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282-1321), grandson of Stefan Uroš I (1243-1276) and great-grandson of St. Stefan (1196-1228), the first crowned (and doubly) Serbian king, brother of St. Sava, the first Serbian archbishop and organizer of the autocephalous Serbian Church. The hagiography of the Slavonic Church cultivates three life stories of St. Stefan Dečanski [6, s. 147]. The first of them was written by a student of archbishop Danilo, the next by Grzegorz Cambłak, while the third, short, is associated with Cambłak's life. The cult of Stefan Dečanski arose after his death and was created, as were mentioned, in connection with the life written by Cambłak. Only in it was described the death of the ruler and meeting with Saint Nicholas. Stefan Dečanski due to a conflict with his father, Stefan Milutin, as a punishment, was sent to Constantinople, to the court of Simonida, wife of Milutin. He was blinded along the way. In the hagiographic piece St. Nicolas appears to the dreaming Stefan three times. The first vision took place shortly after loss of the sight. St. Nicolas asked Stefan not to worry because soon he will be able to see again [6, s. 148].

The illustration of this fragment is the second scene from the top in the left register of the icon. It depicts the sleeping King Stefan, resting on a bed and Saint bending over him. In orthodox art, sleep is often imagined by placing the body quite freely and supporting the head with one hand [8, s. 287]. Stefan Dečanski was presented in a similar way. The ruler has a nimbus and a crown on his head. His body is covered with dark fabric. On the icon from Dečani the described scene of the second meeting is shown as the king is sitting on the throne with a cane in his hand and St. Nicholas. Saint extends towards the king a hand on which, according to Cambłak's description, eyeballs can be seen. The third and final meeting takes place before the death of the king. The scene of death on the icon depicts Stefan, with a nimbus and in his robes, lying on a catafalque. He is imagined in the same way as on other images from his life. Among the figures leaning over the king one can recognize St. Nicholas.

It should be noted that the incorporation of the story of Stefan Uroš III into the cycle associated with Saint. St. Nicholas gave the Serbian king gave an opportunity to become a hero in Old Russian literature and art. Similarly to Russia, also in the homeland of this Serbian ruler interest in him clearly increased since the mid-16th century, when in the area of the renovated Serbian Patriarchate based in Peć, there were many performances linking the figure of Stefan with his heavenly protector [6, s. 156]. This performance is also a testimony to the existence and popularity of the holy rulers of the Nemanjić dynasty many years after their reign.

Female ruler

The presence of women's images in both texts and in medieval art is negligible. Until Western ideals of romantic love reached Byzantium, one of the foundations of Byzantine mentality was anti-feminism [3, s. 220]. Searching for the sources of this phenomenon, it was noticed that the Byzantine attitude towards holy women reflects their general attitude towards women – they are torn between the Old Testament, containing a description of God's creation of the world, in it a man and a woman, and the presentation of Eve [3, s. 220]. In the New Testament, a significant part of the characters are men. Women occur rarely, but they play important roles, especially

Virgin Mary, who is the instrument of human salvation, giving birth to Christ [1, p. 10]. The cult of the Mother of God developing and very important for Byzantium is not directly linked to the greater popularity of holy women.

The reasons for the lack of equality between holy women and holy men are still not fully understood by science. They may result from general negative beliefs about the nature of women [1, p. 12]. Old Serbian literature and art are characterized by disproportion in the assessment of women and men. Mary's death was the prototype of a perfect death for a Christian, and perhaps this was the consequence of treating the image of Virgin's death as a model for performances showing the dying of Saints [8, s. 264]. The performance, modelled on the stage of Dormition, is a fresco showing the last moments of Anna Dandolo from the narthex of the monastery in Sopoćiani. The monastery was created to serve as both a cathedral and mausoleum.

The scene takes place on background of the temple. A group of people bends over Anna Dandolo, lying with a headscarf. The ruler is portrayed "as alive", with her hands folded across her chest. Also presented here is the archangel who holds in his hands a small figure wrapped in a shroud. Next to it, Christ is depicted, holding out his hands towards her. It is this fragment of the image that most strongly indicates the alignment of this image from the representations of the Dormition. The main point of the Dormition iconography seems to be the relationship between Mary and Jesus holding the eidolon. Here we see the dead body of the Mother of God and Her living, immortal soul. As a source of such a performance, researchers recall Byzantine iconography, in which death was depicted in various ways. Before reaching Heaven or the Underworld, the soul of the deceased had to undergo a weighing process. This scene was often included in the complex performances of the Last Judgment. The soul takes the form of a small, naked figure standing before the scales of justice – on one side with Archangel Michael, the other with a devil or several demons. The scene from Sopoćiani not only imitates the iconography of the Dormition, but is intended to reflect the meeting of two courts – terrestrial and celestial. The dying queen is accompanied by members of the Serbian royal court on the one hand, and Christ and the Virgin Mary on the other. The Byzantines imagined God and the Kingdom of

Heaven like the court of Constantinople [3, s. 151]. Members of the court, depicted on the right, perform praising gestures with their hands. On the other side of the bed Christ was presented with the Mother of God. The scene in Sopoćiani can be interpreted as mutual intercession and recommending Anna's soul.

Summing up the above performances, it is worth noting that Serbian art, despite being consistent with the artistic tradition of the Eastern Church, did not stick to the tradition or established forms. The discussing works of art are closely related to the Nemanjić dynasty. They are used to create and build worship of these rulers.

Conclusion

The rulers of the Nemanjić dynasty, building churches-mausoleums, created a special "pantheon" of Serbian saints. This phenomenon functioned in parallel with others, such as the sacralisation of power and the development of hagiographic literature, but it had characteristic elements that I tried to highlight in this work. Analysis of the source texts shows the multitude of ways to describe Nemanjić dynasty, and thus their significant role in art and culture. Stories of holy rulers were combined in iconography with biblical and apocryphal figures. A special performance in this context is the Dormition. It was an important role model for depicting the death scenes of the Nemanjić family.

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