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HOLY RULERS AND THE INTEGRATION OF THE MEDIEVAL SERBIAN SPACE

This paper proposes a new line of analysis of the rich body of medieval Serbian royal hagiography. It suggests that this hagiographical tradition is not so much a strategy of rationalizing the Serbian past, particularly the history of the Nemanjić dynasty (in power from the third quarter of the twelfth century to the third quarter of the fourteenth), and the creation of a primarily intellectual ideological framework for the sake of the dynasty's legitimacy, as it is the textual reflection of the real practice of royal power in the medieval heartland of Serbia. The sanctification of the lineage, the commemoration of the royal dead, and the foundation of numerous pious institutions in the mountainous region immediately to the north and west of the old Christian center of Ras (present-day Novi Pazar) in fact constructed the space of Nemanjić Serbia, and provided it with a nucleus where the overlapping of their private patrimony and the public authority they held did not allow competition. This nucleus would remain the backbone of the dynasty well after the expansion of the kingdom towards the plains of the northeast, the Adriatic coast to the west and the Byzantine and Bulgarian dominions to the south and southeast. Piety and property were intrinsically associated and offered the basis for power.

The *vita* (*life*) that the Archbishop of Peč Danilo II (d. 1337) wrote to commemorate Stefan Dragutin, in the habit Teoktist—king of Serbia between 1276 and 1282, and then ruler of Srem, under the suzerainty of the Hungarian crown—explained how Dragutin, in his own lifetime, prohibited his own exhumation and the writing down of possible miracles connected to his relics.

“And they fulfilled all funeral rites, Danilo wrote, carrying the body of this blessed man away from Srem to the east. And when they reached Ras and the [monastery] of St George [Đurđevi stupovi], they ... placed the blessed Teoktist, once a powerful and autocratic king of Serbia, in his grave where he has lain up to this very day. For during his lifetime he had ordered, under terrible oaths, that even if *through God's grace there might come up visions, one should never exhume his body* (italics mine, BT). And so was it because God glorifies those who glorify Him.”¹

1 Daničić (1866), 52: “i v'sa s'tvor'she nad'grob'naja pënjaja, v'z'm'she tělo sego blaženaago ot srēm'skyje zemlje, i nesušte idu k' v'stoku. i doš'd'siim' im' v' Ras' k' cr'k'vi svetaago mučenika

The opening of a dead person's grave after miraculous signs, and the discovery that his or her body has been preserved incorrupt, have been considered by most pre-Reformation Christian churches the best proof that the person is a saint, a holy vessel of God's grace. The initial discovery, the *inventio*—typically prompted by a miraculous vision or dream sent to one or more people—is followed by the solemn *elevatio* of the saint's relics from the place of his or her initial burial and the *translatio* to a more appropriate location. Within the area of the South Slavs, a very representative case of post-mortem glory of a saint is that of Paraskevi-Petka of Epivatton, whose voluntary poverty, eremitic life and mystical experiences would have remained unnoticed if not for the coincidental death of an unknown sailor centuries later near her forgotten grave. It was the unearthing of her preserved relics that testified to her holiness, and much of her original Greek *life* discussed nothing but the story of her *elevatio*. Petka's later hagiographical tradition would be complemented on several occasions with further accounts of her continuing *translationes* and of the miracles performed by her relics, continuing as late as the mid-twentieth century.² In cases where the person is reburied in the same institution, the *translatio* usually consists of moving the remains from a more peripheral place—outside the church or somewhere in the narthex—closer to, or even under the altar. Danilo recounts a similar case of exhumation with Dragutin's mother Helen of Anjou, whose body was moved from the narthex of the church in her pious foundation at Gradac to the right side of the altar, just in front of the icon of Christ Pantocrator.³ On many other occasions the *translatio* grew into a major procession taking the saint to a completely different shrine, a different city or even a different country. Such processions offered exceptional opportunities for expressing both social cohesion and the special favor the one responsible for the transfer of the relics enjoyed: this might be the expression of imperial supremacy⁴ or, as seen in cases regarding the use of relics in the Latin West during the Central Middle Ages, a powerful incentive for reconciliation and dispute settlement.⁵ The centrality of relics in the conceptualization of hierarchy and the organization of social and spatial networks led, among other things, to recurrent acts of "sacred theft" (*furta sacra*), perhaps most famously the transfer of the Lycian St Nicholas of Myra's to Bari, in Apulia.⁶ The foundational character of the move of relics—one

hristova georgija v' svoi jemu monastir', i tu v'sa obič'naja s'tvor'se, i tako grobu prědaše sego blaženaago Teok'tista monaha, nekogda byvšaago kralja Stefana krěp'kaago i samodr'žavnaago, i tu ubo ležit' i do sego d'ne. Zapověda že v' žitii svojem' i s' kletvoju straš'noju izrek' glagolje: ašte javit' se kotoraja blagodět' božija o sem', da ne javet' tēla jeho ot' pr'st'nyje zemlje, tako bo i byst'. bog' bo proslavljaajet' slavešteje jeho." All translations from Church Slavic are mine. See German translation in Hafner (1976), 97.

2 Paraskevi-Petka's earliest *life*, in Greek, is BHG 1420z, in Halkin (1957). Church Slavic translation of the Greek: in Mircheva (2006), 350–63. For later original hagiographical accounts see: Ivanova (2008), 246–9. Patriarch Evtimii of Turnovo's account of the *translatio* from Epivatton to Turnovo: in Kalužniacki (1901), 69–72; Gregory Tsamblak's account of *translatio* to Serbia, in *ibidem*, 432–6. On Paraskevi's modern miracles, see Guran (1998), 195–8.

3 Daničić (1866), 100.

4 Guran (2001).

5 Koziol (1992b), 239–59.

6 Geary (1978).

that was connected to the erection or renovation of new churches, that is to someone's public display of piety and generosity—became the central event in the commemoration of the saints and frequently introduced and sanctioned alternative feast days. A good example from the eleventh century is that of the Kievan sibling princes Boris and Gleb, who fell victim, according to the hagiographical tradition, to their impious brother Sviatopolk. They were martyred on different dates and their common commemoration, first on July 24 and then on May 2, was associated either with the *translatio* of their relics by their brother Iaroslav to the church of St Basil the Great in the Vyshgorod neighborhood of Kiev, or with the renovation of the church and the relics' placement near the altar, in 1069, by all three sons of Iaroslav. This second feast sanctioned the reconciliation of the Iaroslavichi—an event of significance for Rus history since it offered a model for settling a family feud such as those the following generations would often witness.⁷

The *translationes* and reburials of the relics of local saints were a recurrent phenomenon in the practices of medieval Christianity, observable in all churches. The interest of Danilo in the posthumous fate of Serbian kings and queens who were venerated by their direct family and more distant descendants, as well as by the ecclesiastical foundations, is natural. The question is why he would write about something that did not happen—the miracles over Dragutin's grave—and why he would dedicate a *vita* to someone who was not truly revealed as saint. Indeed, Danilo believed that Dragutin had been a "pious vessel of divine grace" (*blagoč'stivy i s'sud' bogu potrebn'*).⁸ He was not alone in believing this, since much later, towards the end of the sixteenth century, Dragutin's body was in fact exhumed. The relics' fate is unclear considering contradictory monastic claims for keeping hold of them; yet his right hand allegedly reposes today at the Dečani monastery, which may be explained with mid-nineteenth century rumors that a rich family in Novi Pazar, next to the monastery where Dragutin was initially buried, had broken the body into pieces for the sake of profit.⁹ Not only that, but Dragutin enjoyed his own modest liturgical commemoration dependent, in its content, on Danilo's work. Dragutin is mentioned several times in the *akolouthia* of his brother Milutin, in the oldest extant manuscript from the late sixteenth-early seventeenth century (now in Sofia, National Library "Kiril i Metodii" [NBKM] MS 544), and appears in the later versions of the *Srbljak*: the collection of liturgical texts dedicated to Serbian kings and archbishops that became central to the liturgical calendar of the Serbian church from the eighteenth century on.¹⁰ Starting with the *Srbljak* and looking back in time, modern scholars have taken for granted the holiness of Dragutin and have asked themselves a question contrary to the one stated above: not why Danilo told the story of something that did not actually happen, but why he was silent about the expected miracles. The all-to-easy answer to this question

7 On the cult of Sts Boris and Gleb see Lenhoff (1989).

8 Daničić (1866), 23.

9 Pavlović (1965), 89, pl. 17.

10 Pavlović (1965), 90. Critical edition of the *Srbljak* in Trifunović and Bogdanović (1970).

is that downplaying Dragutin's holiness would eliminate his heirs from possible struggles over the dynastic heritage of the Nemanjići. Dragutin continued to be a factor in Serbian politics even after abdicating in favor of his younger brother Stefan Uroš II Milutin (r. 1282–1321). It is quite possible that he saw this abdication as temporary, so he proved to be a restless and rather self-dependent vassal of the Hungarian crown, regularly intervened in Serbian politics, had a number of pious donations co-signed with Milutin, yet did not refrain from direct military confrontation with him. After Dragutin's death, his son Vladislav (d. 1325) voiced his claims for the Serbian throne as well.¹¹ If we accept that for the Serbian élite of the early fourteenth century, holiness and legitimacy went hand in hand and the practice of commemorating holy rulers was tightly connected to the legitimacy of the medieval Serbian monarchy, then the hagiographer's supposedly dismissive attitude regarding Dragutin does make sense: his claims went against the dynastic succession of Milutin's heirs and his holy memory had to be obliterated for their sake. The question, however, is why in such a case Danilo, or anyone, would write a *life* of Dragutin in the first place and not just omit him from the history of the Nemanjići altogether.

Serbian royal hagiography has been the object of extensive scholarship for a number of reasons. It is a unique phenomenon for the sheer number of venerated royalties reaching from the late twelfth through the early sixteenth century. The sanctification of individual Christian monarchs was a recurrent phenomenon in European history, associated with distinctive patterns of legitimation of dynasties, consolidation between secular and ecclesiastical authority, and providing spatial, ritualistic and discursive frameworks for political compromise.¹² We may seek concrete models for the Serbian tradition of the time of the Nemanjići, the dynasty founded by the most venerated of all Serbian royal saints, Stefan Nemanja, in the Hungarian precedents of kings Stephen/István I (r. 997–1038) and Ladislav/László I (r. 1077–96), although the development of royal cults may have been, as conjectured by one of the students of Serbian royal hagiography, S. Hafner, a reaction to the eleventh-century cult of John Vladimir of Zeta-Dioclea, the biggest regional rival.¹³ Yet the Serbian case developed characteristics that have no parallels in other parts of Christendom, since the majority of Serbian princes and kings of the period were venerated to one degree or another. First among them was the great župan Stefan Nemanja (in the habit Simeon, d. 1199), who broke free from the suzerainty of Byzantine emperors; last came Jovan Branković (d. 1502), despot of Srem under Hungarian suzerainty.

The presence of those royal saints in the liturgical calendar, Serbian iconography and Church Slavic hagiography varies considerably. The Eastern Orthodox Church substantiated sainthood through inclusion in the liturgical calendar following three

11 On the complex relations between Dragutin and Milutin: Dinić (1955).

12 Three major studies on royal hagiography in Western and Central Europe: Folz (1984), Le Goff (1996) and Klaniczay (2002).

13 Hafner (1964), 21.

steps: elevation and translation of their incorrupt relics, composition of a *vita*, and composition of a liturgy (*akolouthia*) for the saint's feast. Among the Serbian royal saints, only four enjoyed such canonization soon after their death, after a reasonable cushion of three to seven years necessary to prove the incorruptibility of the saint's relics: Stefan Nemanja; his younger son Rastko, in the habit Sabas/Sava, first archbishop of Serbia (d. 1236); Nemanja's great-grandson Stefan Uroš III Milutin (d. 1321);¹⁴ and Lazar Hrebeljanović, who fell in battle against the Ottomans in 1389. These four became the focus of cults related to the locations of their relics: the monasteries at Studenica, Mileševa, Banjska and Ravanica. Yet numerous other members of the royal and princely dynasties were associated with acts or texts typically reserved for saints. Several Serbian rulers had their biographies composed according to some of the principles of hagiography—including a *prologue* justifying the creation of the text and associating it with a celebration of the memory of the deceased, and a *doxology* lauding his or her holy acts and qualities.

The first to produce such hagiographical biographies of royalties was the already mentioned Archbishop Danilo II, who dedicated such accounts to Stefan Dragutin and to Dragutin and Milutin's mother Helen of Anjou (d. 1314).¹⁵ Helen and Dragutin enjoyed other honors which, at least in appearance, associated them with sainthood. Both spent their last years away from the world, both died in monasteries at the peripheries of the kingdom, and both had their bodies taken to another monastery, founded through their own support in the historical core of Serbia. Helen appears next to her canonized son Milutin in the iconography of the Gračanica monastery, yet is omitted from the names of Serbian royalties added in the 1380s to the margins of the earlier *Typikon of Roman* regulating the liturgical calendar of the Chilandar monastery on Mount Athos. Dragutin is present in the *typikon*, in his capacity as donor (*ktitor*), and appears on the donor portrait of his foundation at Arilje.¹⁶ Just like all members of the Nemanjić family, he is depicted with a halo—a tradition not attested before 1282, which evolves in the iconographic model of the *svetorodna loza* ("vineyard bearing holy fruit"), apparently introduced by the same Danilo II and observable in at least four thirteenth-century churches in Kosovo and northern Macedonia (Peć, Gračanica, Visoki Dečani and Matejča). Various members of the royal family had their haloed portraits painted along the branches of a vine rooted in the founder Stefan Nemanja, in imagery similar to the Tree of Jesse.¹⁷ The entire dynasty of Nemanja had borrowed from the founder's holiness as depicted in the *svetorodna loza* and exemplified in the later re-working of Danilo's biographies of Helen, Dragutin and Milutin, in what is known today the *Lives of Serbian Kings and Archbishops* (a title invented by its editor Daničić). Through short notices the continuators of Danilo's work included the remaining members

14 On the cult of Milutin in Ottoman times: Džurova and Velinova (2004).

15 Part of the *Lives of the Serbian Kings and Archbishops*, see n. 18 below. The *editio princeps* by Daničić (1866) is still the only one available. German translation in: Hafner (1976), modern Serbian translation in: Danilo Drugi (1988). On Danilo see Thomson (1993).

16 Ognjević (2000).

17 On the evolution of the dynasty's genealogical trees see: Vojvodić (2007).

of the family in the quasi-hagiographical narrative.¹⁸ The persistence of the iconographic model has its textual parallel in the established tradition of royal hagiography, the best examples of which are the exquisite *vitae*, in a truly Metaphrastic style, of Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (d. 1331) by Gregory Tsamblak (d. 1419), and of Stefan Lazarević (d. 1427) by Constantine Kostenečki (d. after 1431).¹⁹

This continuity and the accumulation of both texts and works of art testifying to the veneration of the Serbian royal saints have reasonably stimulated modern scholars to organize their analytical and synthetic work along broad chronological frames, placing the historical-hagiographical production of Danilo within a tradition beginning with the more clearly hagiographical antecedents of the thirteenth-century *lives* of Stefan Nemanja, Sava and Nemanja's other son and political heir, Stefan the First-Crowned (r. 1196–1228); this continued well into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with the hagiographical, liturgical and artistic works dedicated to the royal saints of late medieval Serbia. S. Hafner wrote of “dynastic historiography,” placing the emphasis on the unique generic qualities of this particular kind of literary production, which merely borrowed the discursive features of hagiography in order to achieve functional ideological goals.²⁰ F. Kämpfer introduced excessively subtle distinctions between “dynastic autobiography,” “ktitor (donor) biography” and “dynastic historiography,” which create the misleading impression of a precise generic taxonomy, but do throw light on the various values of the royal hagiographical discourse.²¹ Most comprehensively, B. Bojović produced a magisterial study of the entire royal hagiographical tradition as a steady process, reaching from the late twelfth into the early sixteenth century, of appropriation by the royal and imperial institutions of medieval Serbia of the theoretical bases of Byzantine state and church ideology associated with the more practical dimensions of Central European royal sainthood: The two connected in a stable model of dynastic legitimation based on dynastic charisma and on that particular philosophy of canon law that evoked the principle of “symphony” between secular and ecclesiastical authority.²² All these approaches treat the literary production of medieval Serbia as a problem interesting and valid in itself, associated with the vague concept of ideology but quite dissociated from the real-time practice of power, the construction and integration of space, the accumulation and transmission of property and other social aspects of earthly and spiritual authority in the Middle Ages. The value of Serbian royal hagiography has been disconnected from the social meaning of the dead rulers' liturgical commemoration and restricted to the problem of constructing historical memory and forging ethnic identity, in the spirit of the nationalist-era political awakenings. Although such perspectives are sound and justified, they do little to help us understand the true mechanisms of power and the place of monastic institutions within them. Regardless of the inherent qualities of the literary

18 Thomson (1993), 126–7, argues convincingly that the *Lives* originally had a different format.

19 Davidov et alii (1983), Kuev (1983).

20 Hafner (1964).

21 Kämpfer (1969), cited in Stankova (2007), 130.

22 Bojović (1995), 9.

works by Danilo and his continuators and followers, they are being understood as just an intellectual rationalization of earlier dynastic history, perhaps too abstract to be of practical use.

The curious episode with Dragutin prohibiting himself to perform posthumous miracles, however, hints at a direction of analysis that this paper traces in a rough way, in the hope of producing more conclusive results in the future. The archbishop had to account for the missing miracles, because his readers would expect the body of a Serbian king to be treated as a holy relic: we are offered a glimpse of an existing practice in early fourteenth-century Serbia, tightly connected to the hagiographical tradition, yet preceding it. Much before Danilo II and his disciples wrote the *vitae* of dead kings and queens, bishops and hegoumens in the territorial core of Nemanjić, Serbia had adopted the custom of exhuming royal bodies and venerating them as true relics of holy men. This form of familial piety helped the accumulation of property around the monastic foundations of dead benefactors whose very bodies warranted continuity, reconciliation and mutual benefits for a dynasty that observed no clear inheritance rules, considered no viable options of dividing the patrimony over the long term, and consequently suffered from recurrent outbursts of internecine violence. There are three directions of analysis of this practice. One seeks to highlight the deliberately blurred distinctions between sanctity and power. Secular power and spiritual authority did not simply coexist in harmony, as Bojović argues; they overlapped and in fact produced a common mental space with virtually the same governing centers. The second line of research is more typically anthropological and studies the place of the royal dead in the economy of conflict and reconciliation. Finally, it will be suggested – though this third direction needs much more extensive research and collection of data – that the mental space created through the veneration of the royal dead helped construct and integrate a material space that provided the backbone of the Nemanjići polity.

The first direction of analysis is to distinguish between real life practice and hagiographical representation. Danilo's literary work represents a synthesis so successful that later authors—Danilo's anonymous continuator, Gregory Tsamblak, Constantine the Philosopher—produced similar royal quasi-hagiographies. This success consists in bringing together the hagiographical discourse and the discourse of power proper: the *arengae* and *narrationes* of royal acts, primarily foundation, donation and confirmation charters of religious establishments.²³ Since a pious foundation is a God-pleasing act – the rationale behind the donation, expressed in terms of veneration for the saints and of the self-assuredness of a righteous man – the vocabulary of the *arenga* and of the *vita* naturally coincide. In the inevitably redundant turns of Christian rhetoric, the ability of the pious ruler to please God cannot but be a gift by God and is thus part of the economy of grace. Stefan Nemanja-Simeon, in the preamble of his 1189 foundation charter for the Chilandar

23 The two main studies of the *arengae*, in the Latin and Greek cases respectively, are Fichtenau (1957) and Hunger (1964).

monastery on Mount Athos, testifies to the Divine Wisdom that first showed him the way to the statesman's success (*utvr'dih'... svoeju mudrostiju, danov' mi ot' boga*) and then opened to him the salutary way from power (*vladič'st'vo*) to the angelic image (*angel'skii obraz*); his retirement out of the world is thus the final testimony to his righteous rule.²⁴ Nemanja's *narratio* possibly followed the model of John Komnenos' (r. 1118–43) foundational act for the monastery of Christ Pantokrator,²⁵ yet this does not take anything from the properly Serbian documentary tradition of later generations, with kings garnishing their donations with extensive historical discourses and explicitly reconstructing their own provenance from Nemanja through his son and grandson, as for instance in Milutin's second charter in favor of Chilandar.²⁶ Divine wisdom, historical events and genealogical links built the discursive frames that gave the act of donation its meaning. The first original texts in Serbian hagiography, those dedicated to the memory of Nemanja-Simeon, sprang out of the preamble of the *Chilandar typikon*—the comprehensive text regulating the hierarchy, discipline and everyday practice of the monastic institution—written down by Nemanja's son and spiritual heir Sava, and of the donation charter in favor of Chilandar by Sava's brother, Stefan the First-Crowned.²⁷ The oldest *vita* of Nemanja, by Sava, was in fact incorporated in the *typikon* for his other major coenobitic foundation—Studenica, in the Serbian heartland.²⁸

In Danilo's text, the imaginary dialogues kings or queens lead with God, which turn their every act into a painful experience of the divine, smoothly connect to the serene soliloquies of generous rulers offering gold and jewels to the churches: there is no easy distinction, in the text, between spiritual experience and foundational act. A point at which the hagiographical discourse and the diplomatic evidence touch is the construction of the Chrousarii tower on Mount Athos by Stefan Uroš II Milutin. Several preserved *chrysobulla* deal with the donation, some of them cited for their highly elevated language comparing the donor to a dove who wants its song to be heard all around.²⁹ In his hagiographical account, Danilo noted: "And around this holy place (Chilandar) he erected a wall with a great tower on account of the hanging threat from the godless corsairs,"³⁰ which largely corresponded to Milutin's own wording: "and when they [the Chilandar monks] mentioned their misfortunes happening on the seaside on account of the godless corsairs, so bad I cannot find words to describe them, I did not ignore their pleas but erected a tower for their refuge and comfort."³¹ Without quoting them word for word, Danilo explicitly re-

24 Number 9 in Miklosich (1858), 4–5. The more recent critical edition in Ćorović (1928), 1–4, has remained inaccessible.

25 Hafner (1964), 65.

26 Number 74 in Miklosich (1858), 77–82, here 78.

27 Hafner (1964), 54–75, Birnbaum (1974), Angold (1993), Bojović (1995), 180, Stankova (2007), 92–102.

28 Text in Sindik (1992), 152–90.

29 On the style of writing, see: Mošin (1938), Trifunović (1961).

30 Daničić (1866), 132: "okolo že města togo svetaago s'zda grad' s' velikoju tvr'dynjeju za naležešteje radi napasti bez'bož'n'yih' hur'sarii.:

31 No. 63 in Miklosich (1858), 65: "i v'spomenuše mi bědy svoje na mori slučajušteje se im' ot' bezbožnyh' hursar', ihže ne možem ispovědēti... I ne přějuh' ih, n'... s'zdah' im' pir'g'... oněm'

ferred to documents he probably knew through personal experience; he had stood at the very top of Serbian clergy for decades, had moved from one episcopal see to another and in fact had requested donation charters from the Serbian kings like the one in favor of the monastery of Sts Peter and Paul, on the Lim river, in Hum, by the same Stefan Milutin.³² Such documents did not just provide backdrop details to the biographies of the holy king; in fact, they substantiated his holiness.³³

Such observations on the closeness of the hagiographical text and the charters' *arengae* are not conclusive, since the language of diplomatics is in its very essence lofty. Byzantine emperors used this language for centuries and yet did not claim to be saints. Something similar to the overlapping of various levels of discourse is observable, however, in the visual language of iconography, and it is no longer typically Byzantine. The Nemanjići gradually entered the very works of art in the temples they were constructing for their spiritual benefit. They had done so by the last quarter of the thirteenth century, much before Danilo began his hagiographical corpus. Once again the example was set by Stefan Nemanja, who, to use Lewis Carroll's fancy metaphor, successfully passed through the looking-glass exemplified by the frescoes of his own funerary chapel at his *zadužbina* of Studenica. In the lower register of the murals, Nemanja-Symeon is depicted as the *ktitor*, next to his son Stefan the First-Crowned and his grandson Stefan Radoslav, who was the real sponsor of the chapel's decoration in 1233–4. In the middle register, however, Nemanja is already present in his capacity as a holy man, depicted in scenes reproducing his *vita*: his departure from Serbia, arrival at Mount Athos, death, and finally, his posthumous translation to Studenica.³⁴ The scenes were a conscious effort to integrate the liturgical commemoration of the dead man with the existing iconographical canon for other major feasts of the calendar, yet not at the expense of the living memory of him, which at the time of the erection must have been fresh. Most striking in this respect are the tonsured heads of some of the clergy receiving the relics of St Simeon at Studenica: a presumably true reenactment of the real event from 1208 in a growing kingdom, large segments of the population of which were Catholic.³⁵ The iconographical cycle of Nemanja's *vita* reflected the spread of his liturgical commemoration and was further reproduced at two of the other major *zadužbine* of the dynasty—Sopoćani and Gradac. It was followed by a similar representation of the *vita* of Sava, perhaps initially in his burial place at Mileševa, destroyed completely in the sixteenth century, and next in the preserved frescoes at the monastery of Gradac. However, while Sava enjoyed his own liturgical commemoration on January 14,³⁶ it is curious that other members of the family made similar attempts to pass through the looking-glass, without any support in the liturgical calendar. Nemanja's Venetian daughter-in-law Anna Dandolo (d.

na pokoište i na utěhu."

32 Novaković (1912), 597.

33 Thomson (1993), 111–4.

34 Winfield (1958), 251–4.

35 Đurić (1965), 80–90.

36 Ivanova (2008), 435–9.

1264) was portrayed at the Sopoćani monastery on her death-bed in clear parallels to the accepted representation of the Dormition of Theotokos.

It was not only the persons of the Nemanjići that were the object of visual representation on the walls of the churches; historical events were depicted as well. The last quarter of the thirteenth century witnessed a new theme develop in the religious art of the country: pictorial representations of major political/canonical councils. Important transitions during the two centuries of Nemanjići rule over the Serbian lands and their neighbors took place with the sanction of councils that included both the clergy and the nobility. Perhaps most intriguing are the four depicted scenes at the church of Đurđevi stupovi, in the very chapel where Dragutin was buried. His own image stood on the northern side of the vaulted ceiling, with the same royal insignia as his younger brother Milutin. The image apparently reproduced the council of Deževu in 1282 when Dragutin abdicated. The other three scenes on the vaults reconstructed similar acts of transition of power—Nemanja bestowing the kingdom on Stefan Nemanjić, the enthronement of Stefan Uroš I and his removal from power by Dragutin in 1276.³⁷ The act of transition, together with material support for pious institutions—Đurđevi stupovi, although originally built by Stefan Nemanja, was renovated and decorated by Stefan Dragutin—were embedded in the visual canon next to the iconography of the feasts of the temporal or secular calendar. The implicitly historicist approach to events was one more expression of the blurred lines between historical acts and the holy tradition: anything that happens is ultimately good because it is part of the Divine Plan; thus Stefan Uroš I could sit next to himself, the first image representing his coming to power and the second his ejection from the throne. Power and sanctity were indistinguishable.

The clearest imitations of practices related to the veneration of saints, however, were the funeral processions of dead Serbian princes and kings to their pious foundations along the river Ibar, in the core area of the Nemanjići patrimony. Stefan Uroš I spent his last days as a monk in Hum (modern Herzegovina), but had his body carried and inhumed at Sopoćani, in 1277.³⁸ His widow, Helen of Anjou, was a nun at St Nicholas near Scutari but was buried in Gradac in 1314, after a long procession recounted by Danilo writing in the first person: “singing divine psalms in her praise... and carrying the body of the blessed lady, with great glory we came to her glorious monastery Gradac.”³⁹ A few years later, Dragutin had his dead body carried all the way from his royal residence in Debrce, in the region of Srem, to the Đurđevi stupovi monastery in Ras. These processions had once again been anticipated much earlier with the transfer of the relics of Stefan Nemanja from Chilandari to Studenica, and of Sava from Trnovo to Mileševa. Ras, Gradac and Studenica are situated along a north-south axis within thirty-five kilometers of each other as the bird flies. Mileševa and Sopoćani, within several miles from each other, are at

37 Đurić (1967), 131–7.

38 Daničić (1866), 19.

39 Daničić (1866), 90: “pojušte mnogohval’nyje pjesni bož’stv’nyje... i tako nesušte tělo blaženyje, s’ velikolěp’noju slavoju priidohom’ v’ slav’nyi monastir’ jeje Grad’c.”

a distance of sixty to seventy kilometers west of Ras. The interpretation of these reburials over distance is uncertain, and there is good reason to believe it deliberately reflected conflicting views of the afterworld and the place of the dead in the society of the living. Stanislaus Hafner most clearly pointed to the fundamental difference between cult of the saints (*Heiligenverehrung*) and cult of the dead ancestors (*Ahnenverehrung*), which were however consciously mixed (*verschmelzt*) in the case of the Nemanjići.⁴⁰ Perhaps over-critically, Hafner goes as far as treating even the return of Nemanja's remains to Studenica as just a second burial and not a procession of holy relics, on account of missing references to miracles performed by the relics, or even to their supernatural preservation, in the *vita* of St Simeon by Sava.⁴¹ Yet, even if these were simple reburials observing some hypothetical pre-Christian funeral practice among the medieval Serbs, the effect, at least from the point of view of the clergy, was the imitation of *translationes* of relics. Our working conclusion regarding this first line of analysis is that the thirteenth-century Serbian clergy and élite deliberately, and consistently, blurred the distinction between the commemoration of a dead *ktitor* at liturgy and his liturgical commemoration through *akolouthia* and *vita*; between the votive portrait and the icon; between the reburial and the *translatio*. In the third or fourth decade of the fourteenth century, Danilo gave a hagiographical justification of these practices, portraying the otherwise dubious saints Stefan Uroš I, Helen of Anjou and Stefan Dragutin as perfect Christians, ready to renounce earthly power, to recant and to overcome their flesh for the sake of peace. In the particular case of Helen, he did not refrain from adding his own account of her body's proven incorruptability (see n. 3), which plausibly reconstructed an actual ceremony. Yet the visual material from the *zadužbine*, the concurrent pieces of evidence from earlier texts and the incident with Dragutin's prohibited miracles suggest that these mixed ancestral and saints' cults predated Danilo's work by at least two generations and reflected an accepted practice.

This leads us to the second line of analysis: the use of such cults. For one thing, the cult of the ancestors made possible the periodical reconciliation of various Nemanjići after recurrent disputes. The dynasty observed neither the principle of primogeniture, nor that of election, even if clergy and nobility gave their assent to the transfer of power on particular occasions—most famously, the assembly of 1282 at Deževu, when Dragutin abdicated in favor of Milutin. Co-option seems to have been the prevalent custom, yet it was often contested both by those excluded from the inheritance and by the co-opted heirs themselves when too impatient. According to the *vita* of St Simeon by Sava, included in the *typikon* of Studenica, Nemanja's sons Stefan and Vukan sent a joint appeal to their younger brother Sava at Chilandari to bring the holy relics of their father, because "foreign nations were causing trouble in their kingdom (*v" straně toi v"zmetoš se ezyci*)."⁴² In fact, the trouble was between the two of them. Much later, the burial of Helen in Gradac

40 Hafner (1964), 37. On the ancestral cult see: Ćurčić (1973), 191–5.

41 Contrary opinion in Maksimović (1986).

42 Sindik (1992), 186–8.

served to bring about the reconciliation of Milutin and Dragutin. The two had recently fought a war against each other and now, visiting their common mother's tomb, Dragutin could use the opportunity to show up in Milutin's residence of Paun. For two years the two brothers' wives, Simonida and Katalina, jointly visited the church at Gradac, and in Danilo's words "kissed all over Helena's tomb and watered with their warm tears her sarcophagus",⁴³ suggesting that even before the formal *elevatio* Helen had not been buried in the ground but lain in a sarcophagus, probably in the narthex, easily accessible to those who would wish to pay obeisance. The bodies of dead rulers, before or after their elevation, helped construct a holy space where the reconciliation of feuding members of the family received divine sanction and was made public through the ritualized behavior of the participants. We are confronted with a practice similar in its essence to the act of "kissing the cross" (*krestotselovanie*) in the Rus' lands over the twelfth century and later,⁴⁴ and touching on the important, and much debated, problem of to what extent rituals were constitutive acts in western medieval politics of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Koziol), or just the visible, annunciatory part of negotiations that observed unspoken rules (Althoff).⁴⁵

The very act of donation to a monastery played a fundamental function in the cohesive processes within the dynastic group or, conversely, in the process of eliminating particular branches of the bloodline. A famous example of the significance of pious donations for family politics is the early misfortune of Stefan Nemanja, who fell victim to the revenge of his elder brothers Tihomir, Miroslav and Sracimir in the mid-1160s, after founding without their sanction the monasteries of St Nicholas, in present-day Kuršumlja, and of Theotokos, on the bank of the river Toplica nearby. Nemanja was tricked away from his tentative princely domain and kept in prison for more than a year.⁴⁶ The incident was of tremendous significance for the dynastic history of Serbia, since Nemanja both claimed to have rightfully inherited and recuperated, at the expense of his unfaithful brothers, his *dědovina* (from *dědo*, "grandfather"), that is the patrimony associated perhaps with the Great Župan Stefan Uroš I of Raška, r. 1112–45 (not to be confused with the thirteenth-century king of the same name), and placed himself at the head of the dynasty with no reference whatsoever to earlier generations.⁴⁷ The crime of Nemanja, in the eyes of his elder brothers—and probably his main motivation for getting rid of them when he had the opportunity—was that through the pious institutions he was carving out a center of authority to which they had no access, since they were not co-opted as donors.

Nemanja himself gave up developing this particular domain of his later on, possibly on account of its vulnerability to outside attacks (at a time of bustling Byzantine, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Cuman and Crusader competition in the area), and concen-

43 Daničić (1866), 98–99: "lobyzavši i, i omočista raku jeje teplyimi sl'zami."

44 Mikhailova, Prestel (2011).

45 Koziol (1992a), Althoff (1997) and idem (2004), 136–59.

46 Fine (1994), 3–4.

47 See again his Chilandar charter from 1198. Miklosich (1858), 4.

trated his donor's efforts on the area around Ras and the Holy Mountain of Athos. His choice to restore the deserted monastery of Chilandar on Athos pursued multiple goals, but for the purposes of this paper most valuable was his success in creating a pious institution with which he could associate his descendants—Sava, Stefan the First-Crowned and Stefan's progeny—while at the same time placing the monastery under the sanction of the Byzantine emperor, and thereby preventing the very possibility that a change in the dynastic line in Serbia could affect this unique Nemanjić patrimony. For a Christian donor, the pious foundation is not a one-time act of inconsequential generosity that would gain him, or her, divine favor once and for all. It is an institution that has to exist in time, over generations, one that has to be materially supported so as to be able to successfully perform its major functions, most valuably, from the donor's perspective, praying for the souls of the dead and their commemoration at liturgy. In the middle and later periods of Byzantine history, the donors could not really own the churches or monasteries they were founding,⁴⁸ but had the most important say regarding the rule to be observed, the monks or nuns to be allowed in the institution, and frequently regarding the observation of feasts. In the words of R. McKitterick, "monastic endowment and donation was a major part of a process of ensuring the maximum amount of intercession for the souls after death."⁴⁹ This cannot actually be an individual act, because the donor donates what by inheritance should go to his or her progeny; thus, the descendants of the patron are implicitly co-opted in the charitable act, which is visually confirmed by the numerous children depicted on *ktitor* portraits in the churches around the Byzantine world. The *typika* of eleventh-century Byzantine monasteries, again following McKitterick's observations, create the clear impression that family solidarity was among the priorities of the donor, yet this solidarity was limited to direct descendants and very close relatives.⁵⁰ In fact, including in, or excluding from, donations particular members of the family—see Nemanja's dispute with his brothers above—was a major stake in medieval politics. This problem has received extensive treatment by western medievalists like Stephen D. White and Dominique Barthélemy, who have argued that much of the violence in early feudal Europe consisted precisely in disputes by later members of donors' families of donations made in the past, or if in the present, made without recourse to their sanction. According to these views, feudal violence was the act of appropriation, re-appropriation, or destruction of donated land, serfs or other property at the expense of either the recipient—a church or monastery—or the donors. The solution of the conflict was reached through the formula of *laudatio parentum*—the agreement of the relatives.⁵¹

Such considerations suggest that a pious donation was not so much an ideological act that had to justify, legitimize and perpetuate the memory of a ruler; instead, it was

48 This was not the case in Late Antiquity, when private property and religious institutions were difficult to separate. See Thomas (1987).

49 McKitterick (1995), 128.

50 Idem, 133.

51 White (1988), Barthélemy (1996).

the very act through which the ruler ruled. Being able to appropriate land, labor and resources and donate them to a church, with the implicit promise of a long-standing, two-way relationship between patron and recipient, was the basis of power in societies where there was no clear understanding of the public good and in which fear of the divine compensated for it. Nemanja deliberately played with the word *dědovina* in referring to the lands around Ras: it is impossible to define clearly whether he meant the landed patrimony of the family or the political authority of the *župan* to collect taxes and fees, extract labor force and circulate gifts. Perhaps it was impossible to distinguish between the two, at least in the particular area that was the heart of his land and where there had existed no visible tradition of written law or functional public justice and administration. It would be unwise to interpret *dědovina* as simply private property based on the observable distinction between *baština* (“patrimony”, from *bašta*, “father”) and *župa* (“country”, administrative unit) in the fourteenth century, when the expanded Serbian kingdom/empire comprised former Byzantine dominions with much older and sophisticated legal and patrimonial traditions.⁵² In the beginning of Nemanja’s long political career, the *dědovina* was a vague concept signifying the rights of members of the family (though it is not very clear which family) to administer a particular area of the Central Balkans; it could be grabbed and lost within days and months. By the end of the century, the *dědovina* reposed upon on the pillar-stones of Nemanja’s several foundations, some of which grew into episcopal sees and were richly endowed with land, villages, serfs, pastures, and so on. The lavishness of the Nemanjići embedded their own dynasty in the landscape of Raška and turned it into their fortress. It was the co-opted heirs of the crown, like Stefan the First-Crowned, that held sway over this core area and exerted their dominion over the peripheries, regardless of the strategic advantages that Zeta or Hum, with their access to the Adriatic Sea and the existing urban networks, offered. Zeta, Hum, the Pomorje, were the areas where the lesser branches of the *svetorodna loza* of the Nemanjići could establish their own *zadužbine* and try to carve out their own smaller patrimonies away from Ras – for instance, the monastery of Morača in the heart of present-day Montenegro, which was the pious foundation of Stefan Vukanović, a grandson of Nemanja forever banned from the dynastic networks in Raška.

The third line of analysis will therefore have to sum up the previous two and deal with the spatial dimensions of the Nemanjići network of pious foundations. Until now, we have seen how the early Nemanjići used their own bodies as carriers of the divine grace and consciously treated their ancestors in ways proper for holy men and women. Instead of relying on the traditional Christian practices of venerating the relics, or images, of saints, they mixed ancestral cults with Christian piety and turned their own graves into places of worship. In this way, the Nemanjići prompted and maintained a trend of vesting property and power in a small number of well-protected and well-supplied monastic institutions that all belonged to the core area of Raška and deliberately avoided the peripheral provinces, regardless of their fre-

52 Matanov (1997) is an excellent example of scholarship based on such distinctions.

quently better material and demographic resources. In 1220, when Sava returned from Nicaea with the archiepiscopal dignity, his Serbian archbishopric comprised ten eparchies.⁵³ When a little later Stefan the First-Crowned issued his charter for the creation of the archbishopric of Žiča, he listed four “royal” monasteries as dependent directly on the archbishopric. It cannot be coincidental that these comprise Nemanja’s two major foundations—Studenica and Chilandar—plus the future burial places of Helen of Anjou and Dragutin—Gradac and Đurđevi stupovi.⁵⁴ The effort invested in the creation of the monastic regulations of Chilandar and Studenica suggests that the early Nemanjići were seriously interested in creating thriving, well-ordered and controllable institutions, choosing for this purpose the model of an urban monastery in Constantinople, the Theotokos Evergetis, and not the other Athonite monasteries from which Chilandar tangibly differed.⁵⁵ The *typikon* of Studenica, as Miodrag Petrović has analyzed it, had a tremendous effect on the history of the Serbian church, since its eparchies in fact chose to function as monastic communities under the guidance of the abbot of Studenica, observing similar rules and submitting to similar discipline.⁵⁶ This was an original way to bypass the delicate question of the Serbian dioceses and to grant the Serbian archbishop practical independence without any formal attempts at autocephalous status and patriarchal dignity (which would happen only in 1346). But even more, it was an efficient way for the Nemanjići to exert their rights as patrons and benefactors over the ecclesiastical networks in their kingdom and disregard the principles of the church’s public character and autonomous hierarchy; even in the case that the high clergy defended its rights, as with the unsuccessful attempt by Milutin to have Danilo elected and ordained archbishop in 1317, the ruling dynasty were confident that their most valuable *zadužbine* would remain intact and continue to function as the real centers of the networks of piety.

What would explain the Nemanjići preference for the lands of Raška? This may have had to do with security issues, since the area is relatively well protected by mountains. In contrast, the monastery of Žiča, the first archiepiscopal see, which was easily accessible from the north and east, was heavily damaged by Tatars around the year 1290; the devastation was such that the archbishops moved to the much safer area of Peć, which was initially just a dependence, a *metochion*, of Žiča. Yet mountains were never fully reliable. According to Stefan Uroš I’s charter in favor of the monastery of Sts Peter and Paul on the Lim river, deep in the mountains of present-day Montenegro, that foundation too had been severely pillaged by Bulgarians in the mid-thirteenth century.⁵⁷ By some paradox, perhaps because their rights of property over these important *zadužbine* in the Serbian heartland—Studenica, Gradac, Đurđevi stupovi, Sopoćani and Mileševa—were unquestionable, these are among the institutions that have left practically no original archival material. The donations were either never inscribed on paper or were never associated with the

53 Janković (1979).

54 Novaković (1912), 572.

55 Živojnović (1994).

56 Petrović (1986).

57 Novaković (1912), 593–4.

body of documentary material that Chilandar collected over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries through a slow process of laying hold of numerous independent institutions in Macedonia, Old Serbia, and so forth. So we lack the crucial evidence to reconstruct the spatial dimensions of this core network, though we do have sufficient material to make conjectures about some principles.

The only documentary evidence about the landed property of any of these three monasteries comes from the eighteenth-century forged charter of Stefan Nemanja in favor of Studenica, appended to the *typikon*. In the *narratio*, the imaginary Nemanja declares that the location of his pious foundation had been a “deserted place, a hunting-ground for wild beasts.”⁵⁸ This is not necessarily the product of eighteenth-century imagination, since a similar claim appears in the Chilandar *typikon*, stating that the location had been completely devastated by godless outlaws: it is possible that the forger was inspired by an authentic document.⁵⁹ The historical Nemanja was certainly looking for an isolated location convenient for a monastic coenobium, yet the reconstructed text most certainly reflected the belief among Studenica monks that their monastery and its landed estates had been cleared off the forest where no settlements had existed before. Several of the toponyms further down in the same document point to small, isolated villages or hamlets on the slopes along the Studenica and the Ibar. The same possibly applied to the monastery of Gradac, which is at the very foot of the mountain, quite isolated from the river and the roads following it. We may conjecture, therefore, that the main pious foundations of the Nemanjići were concentrated in this particular area because the family claimed strong patrimonial rights that were not contested by anyone, least of all by pre-existing ecclesiastical foundations that could invoke older donations by Byzantine emperors or rich citizens.

The working conclusion would be that the practice of thirteenth-century Serbian kings and queens of turning their main pious foundations into dynastic funerary chambers and of prompting the veneration of their own mortal remains as if they were holy relics is deeply embedded in a strategy – simple enough to have been conceptualized and developed by contemporaries – for the appropriation and integration of space. Developing the cults of the royal saints in these particular institutions would stimulate the further consolidation of property rights within the family and would prompt the confirmation and growth of the foundations’ estates. The cults of the royal ancestors both encouraged new foundations and the augmentation of the family domain, and mobilized later generations to confirm the donations of their predecessors and promote their cults for the sake of the dynasty’s indissoluble patrimony. The project has yet to collect more evidence regarding the real-time process of territorial spread of the Nemanjići’s pious donations, but we can already see the outline of an analysis connecting the dots between the literary and artistic

58 Sindik (1992), 152, or fol. 79r of MS Šafarik 10 IX H in the Prague Narodni museum: “jako věděti vam, jako pustu městu semu byvšu. lovišta živěrem’ věhu.”

59 Miklosich (1858), 3.

production of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and the exercise of power. The advantages of such an approach lie in the possibilities it offers for analyzing medieval politics safely away from the restrictive framework of a nationalist historicist discourse that tends all too easily to equate the ambitions and successes of a tumultuous dynasty with the presumptive priorities of a pre-national ethnic group. Ethnic markers were among the ideological tools used by the Nemanjići, kings and archbishops alike, and there is even less doubt that the historical legacy of the dynasty contributed enormously to the consolidation of Serb ethnicity over time. But it would be much more useful for the proper appreciation of the cultural and social events of the period to interpret the acts of those same kings and archbishops within the context of the problems they faced firsthand: creating and solving conflicts, appropriating territory, acknowledging and abrogating conflicting rights, exploiting resources and, at the very bottom of all these, surviving.

Abbreviations:

BHG = *Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca*, 3 vols., ed. F. Halkin (Brussels, 1957)

ZRVI = *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta*, Belgrade

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