



Danica Popović, *Riznica spasenja. Kult relikvija i srpskih svetih u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*

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Sanctity – a very multi-layered notion and one of the key phenomena of medieval culture – is the subject of Danica Popović's book *The treasury of salvation. The cult of relics and Serbian saints in Medieval Serbia*. The author approaches this wide topic through an analysis of reliquary practice and ideology in medieval Serbia, as well as through her comprehensive exploration of the cults of Serbian saints. This wide research concept allows the assessment of various and differentiated aspects of the phenomena of sanctity. The book explores the general importance of relics and national cults for the sacral establishment of the state – their historical, social and ideological dimension, while also drawing attention to the cultic aspect and diachronically tracing the shifts in certain cults and reliquary programs. In addition, it also points out the artistic means and ideational solutions that were used to establish these programs and cults, and assesses them in the context of contemporaneous European and especially Byzantine cultural trends.

These topics are elaborated to varying extents in specific postulates and expounded in fourteen studies that more or less complement each other and make up the mosaic structure of the book. The studies are the result of the author's years-long research and interest in the said topics and were written over the course of the last ten years or so. They are thematically grouped into two sections: "Relics and reliquaries" (eight studies) and "The cults of Serbian saints" (six studies), with the first section focusing on relics venerated across all Christendom (in the Serbian context) and the second discussing specifically Serbian cults. Most of these studies had been previously published in various journals and edited volumes, but collected here they contribute to a more comprehensive survey of the complex problem discussed in the book. In fact, they are highly complementary with the studies published in the author's work *Under the auspices of sanctity* and, taken together, bear evidence to Danica Popović's great research endeavor and contribution to our knowledge of the sanctity phenomenon in medieval Serbia.

Compared to her last, the new book shows a mild topical shift. Unlike her first, this work focuses on relics and expands the topic of Serbian cults from the sanctity of rulers to other types of holiness (that of anchorites and archpriests). The individual topics (particularly those pertaining to relics) seem to have been treated slightly more narrowly than those discussed in the book *Under the auspices of sanctity*, and therefore represent a kind of confirmation and supplement of the author's original views and

conclusions. Her methodological starting points remain more or less the same. Danica Popović innovatively combines the main principles of the Belgrade school of historiography with the current trends in international medieval studies while not neglecting traditional approaches to the study of medieval art, history and culture. The author strives to base her conclusions primarily on sources and evidence, thereby avoiding the potential danger of the methodology overshadowing her research topic or simplifying its perception.

The culturological approach lies at the root of Danica Popović's research perspective, but it is combined with some principles of analytic historiography, history of mentalities and the iconological approach. In her effort to perceive the full complexity of the problem at hand, the author always takes into account the context and therefore veers into the fields of history and medieval poetics. To a slightly lesser extent the phenomena of relics and Serbian saints are discussed through the prism of political and church history. The experience of new historicism is also interwoven through the book and so the author approaches her topics with an awareness of the historicity of text and textuality of history and explores the relationship between text and context, while trying to determine the dominant cultural models of the period and its possible receptions among contemporaries.

The multi-layered topics are considered primarily in their relation to ruler ideology, the creation of the sanctity of the Serbian medieval state, i.e. the formation of its sacral topography. The multi-directional relationships between hagiography, celebratory texts and sepulchral and funerary art with reliquary programs and the cultic veneration of Serbian saints are explored in this light. The author takes into account the ideational basis of reliquary programs and cults as well as their material aspect. When it comes to the topics of the cults of Serbian saints, this aspect is exhausted in the analysis of the material preconditions for myrrh-exuding and funerary cultic ensembles; it is more developed, however, in her analysis of relics and reliquaries. The analysis of ornate reliquaries and their shapes, materials and esthetic achievements represents a major contribution to the history of medieval applied arts and indirectly to our knowledge of medieval goldsmithing. The studies that deal with the problem of relics also tackle the questions of their authenticity, typology, visual rhetoric of inscriptions and epigraphs, while also expounding the history of some types of reliquaries such as *crux gemmata* and *crux gemina*, panel-icons etc. Thus, in the studies comprising the first part of the book the author strives to assess the material features of relics and reliquaries, present their history and complex paths of transfer, reconstruct the appearance of lost reliquaries and outline their ideational, theological, state-building and cultural meaning.

In the second part of the book relics are considered only en passant as the material aspects of the cults of Serbian saints, while the cults themselves are analyzed primarily through the phenomena of wonderworking, the saint-bearing dynasty, and heavenly intercession on behalf of the collective. This part discusses questions pertaining to the canonization of saints, explores the links between specific cults and the general political and cultural trends

of the time, and determines the methods for the formation of the pantheon of Serbian saints, while indirectly highlighting the vitality of these cults, with the time span of some studies reaching all the way to the nineteenth century. However, in both parts of the book the author focuses on the Nemanjić period, particularly the time of St. Sava and the reign of King Milutin, which is hardly surprising in light of the fact that the former of these periods is associated with the establishment of the kingdom and archbishopric, while the latter represents an age of state and church consolidation and of major syntheses in Serbian culture.

The wide field of research is also characterized by the extensive and diverse evidence it rests upon. As already noted, it comprises relics and reliquaries, hagiographic literature and, to a slightly lesser extent, liturgical services, epistles, diplomatic material, funerary sculpture, ruler portraits and prints. Depending on their accessibility and state of preservation, relics are discussed either through direct insight or through photographs and testimonies in written sources, with the products of other arts used as analogies to confirm proposed conclusions or offer insight into the operational context of relics.

The author's knowledge of the mechanisms of cults of Serbian saints and their formation largely stems from her careful reading of hagiographic literature, which Danica Popović seems to approach as ideologized texts and the dominant, official discourse of the medieval elite. Of course, the proposed conclusions and hypotheses are corroborated by referencing similar phenomena in the Byzantine world and analyzing other sources and materials.

Some of the studies in the *The treasury of salvation* have rather wide bases. Systematic and synthetic, they provide a reliable framework for understanding more differentiated topics treated in other studies in the book and their more multi-faceted assessment. For example, the role and importance of relics for the medieval Serbian state and spirituality is systematically explained in the study "God dwelt even in their bodies in spiritual wise – relics and reliquaries in medieval Serbia", while the diachronic survey of the cults of Serbian saints ("A national 'pantheon'. Sainly cults at the foundations of medieval Serbian statehood and churchhood") explains the developmental arch of the idea of sanctity in ruler ideology from Stefan Nemanja to the fall of the Despotate. The final study "The shrines and saints of Kosovo and Metohija in the cultic memory and national consciousness of the Serbs" collates all topics discussed in the book, analyzing the relevance of the medieval cults and monasteries of Kosovo and Metohija in popular piety and Serbian collective consciousness from their inception to the end of the nineteenth century.

The book explains many aspects of reliquary practice in the medieval Christian civilization (prophylactic, liturgical, political, military), focusing on the Serbian variant of this practice. Although it strives to present the universally Christian relics that were used to build the sanctity of the Nemanjić realm and cover the entire medieval period of the Serbian state, most attention is given to the relics of the True Cross and the reliquary program of St. Sava. In some cases the author focuses on analyzing the peculiarities of national relics i.e. the *leipsana* of Serbian saints, highlighting the roles of myrrh-exuding graves and coffin-reliquaries as cultic places.

As many as four studies are dedicated to the relics of the True Cross. One of them offers a synthetic overview ("Relics of the True Cross in medieval Serbia") and as such provides a framework for the analysis of specific relics and reliquaries. After an overview of the history of this relic in the Christian world, its place in Byzantine ideology and the main types of reliquaries (*crux gemina*), the author presents an in-depth analysis of the main functions and contexts in which this relic was used in the Nemanjić and post-Nemanjić period of the Serbian state. In addition, she highlights the vitality of this relic in popular devotional practice and collective consciousness.

Three studies discuss specific reliquaries of the True Cross: the stauotheke of Pienza ("A stauotheke of Serbian provenance in Pienza"); that of the church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Ras ("The stauotheke of the church of Sts Peter and Paul in Ras"); and two lost stauothekai of King Uroš and Queen Helen ("On two lost medieval Serbian reliquaries. Stauothekai of King Stefan Uroš I and Queen Helen"). In these studies the material aspect of reliquary practice comes to the fore, as well as the analysis of reliquaries as works of *ars sacra*. Well-rooted in sound methodology, the analysis of the characteristics of these reliquaries (all of them belong to the *crux gemina* type), accompanied by their detailed descriptions, is placed in a wider ideational, cultic and cultural context, with their ornamentation used as a starting point for a discussion of the complex symbolism of gold and precious gemstones in the medieval perception of the world. Their morphological and stylistic characteristics, the development of epigraphy, and goldsmithing and filigree techniques used in their production, along with written sources and analogies with other reliquaries, provide evidence for the author to propose a dating and attribution for these stauothekai.

The Serbian medieval state and church owned a number of relics universally venerated in all Christendom, including the relic of John the Baptist's right arm now kept in Siena, which is discussed in a more extensive study ("The Siena relic of John the Baptist's right arm"). It considers the Siena relic in the context of St. Sava's programmatic activity and the establishment of the Žiča treasury (which is also the case with the Pienza stauotheke), while elucidating the link between this relic and the hagiographic image of St. Sava. The author also analyzes the roles played by this relic in state ceremonies and church rites and offers a multi-faceted description of the relic itself and its original reliquary.

While most studies explore the reliquary practice from a perspective not far removed from reliquary diplomacy and in the context of the far-reaching state-building project, the study dedicated to eulogies sent by St. Sava to *hegoumenos* Spiridon from the Holy Land ("Eulogiae Terrae Sanctae of St Sava of Serbia") shows the personal dimension of the first Serbian archbishop's devotion. As peculiar secondary relics, the eulogies are considered in relation to the phenomenon of pilgrimage, while highlighting their primary prophylactic function.

The final study in the part of the book on relics and reliquaries is dedicated to flower symbolism in reliquary practice ("Flower symbolism and the cult of relics in me-

dieval Serbia"). Here the research focus shifts towards national relics and cults. The analysis of floral topics in medieval literature is associated with the theology of relics and sepulchral art. The study diachronically traces the shaping and usage of these topics from the cult of Stefan Nemanja to the cults of the last rulers from the Branković noble family. Although floral metaphors were ideationally and symbolically part of the shaping of various saintly types, the author shows that in their materialized form (funerary sculpture), as an expression of a rounded and well-thought-out program, they are primarily associated with the tombs of church dignitaries.

The second part of the book "The cults of Serbian saints" includes an analysis of the cults of St. Simeon, Stefan the First-Crowned, anchorites and archbishops, as well as synthetic overviews of the formation of the national pantheon and the place and importance of the medieval cults and relics of Kosovo and Metohija in popular devotion and collective memory. The content and function of St. Simeon's cult in its initial stage are explored in two mutually complementary studies ("The miracles of St. Simeon of Serbia" and "The myrrh-exuding tomb of St. Simeon of Serbia at Studenica. A fresh look"). The first focuses on the ideational starting points of the cult, while the second highlights its material foundations. They trace the shaping of Simeon's cult as a saint – myroblete, wonderworker and patron of the fatherland, and explore the links between his cult and state ideology. Simeon's cult is also considered in the context of contemporaneous models of sanctity, with its ties to the cults of St. Demetrius and St. Theodora exhaustively analyzed.

A remarkably inspiring study ("When was King Stefan the First-Crowned included among the saints. A contribution to the study of royal 'canonisation' in medieval Serbia") explores the question of the canonization of the first-crowned king. The author concludes that St. Sava carefully prepared his brother's canonization: the rites of *elevation* and *translatio* were performed; the incorruptibility of his relics and their miraculous revelation were confirmed. However, the final shaping of the cult in celebratory texts was completed later on, owing to the efforts of Patriarch Pajsije. Faced with a lack of reliable sources, the author leaves open the question of the reasons that might have led to this delay, although she does underline the belated creation of national cults in the generation of the sons of Stefan the First-Crowned and the somewhat different basis and objectives of sanctity creation in King Milutin's age.

This period is characterized by overarching projects and the expansion of the national pantheon to include other types of sanctity besides that of a ruler, and so the

author considers the formation of cults of archbishops and anchorites in its context. The works of Teodosije the Hilandarian and Danilo II provide the main source material on which the author bases her exploration of this topic ("Pantheon' of Serbian saints in the age of King Milutin. Cults of archbishops and anchorites"). The formation of cults of archbishops is considered in relation to ecclesiastical history, the teaching of power diarchy and King Milutin's church policy. Danica Popović distinguishes two stages in the preparation of the cultic celebration of archbishops, with the first associated with Teodosije's and the final with Danilo II's work. She illustrates her general considerations using the cults of archbishops Arsenije and Joanikije I as examples. The cult of St. Peter of Koriša provides the main example for her analysis of anchoritic cults. The evolution of this cult is traced through Teodosije's writings, with an exploration of the questions of sacral geography and of similar cultural and ideational trends in the Palaiologan period.

The undeniable scholarly value of the studies contained in this book is enhanced by its methodological apparatus. The author takes care to present her views so as to make them easily readable, verifiable and conducive to academic dialogue. Equipped with an index of the most relevant terms and names, the book also includes an exhaustive bibliography and summaries in English as well as many illustrations selected to encourage a more multifaceted assessment of presented problems. Despite being well-rooted in theory, the book does not suffer from a heavy terminological apparatus which can often obscure the subject of research. Instead, the author's thoughts are presented concisely and in a highly readable style, but not at the cost of scholarly precision. Explaining her methods and referencing other sections in the book, the author emerges as a reliable guide through the discussed problems.

Although the introductory note emphasizes that the author's aim was not to create a synthesis or a coherent unit, the studies contained in the book, particularly in view of Danica Popović's previous research efforts, successfully outline the most important aspects of the sanctity phenomenon and contribute to a more systematic assessment of national saintly cults and the reliquary practice of medieval Serbia. However, the special relevance of this book seems to lie in the questions it poses and the solid foothold it offers to future researchers. Created as the result of in-depth and extensive research, *The treasury of salvation* represents a remarkable contribution to Serbian medieval studies and cultural studies in general.

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