

Blagovest Zlatanov  
NEXUS associate fellow 2001 – 2002

## **THE 'HOLY' TERRITORIES OF THE EUROPEAN SOUTH-EAST: THE KOSOVO CASE**

### **1. Introduction**

It has already become a truism among some cultural historians that the crucial and foundational identificational symbols and narratives of the South-East Slavic nations – the Serbian and Bulgarian<sup>1</sup> nations, for example – function as recent-time, compensating imaginary constructs. Yet, they have been conceived in the last two centuries and are still postulated as ancient “natural” attributes of the “real” ethnic past, which could be or should be used as an ultimate ground of personal and group self-identification.

Such is the case with some recent historical studies, centered on the foundational ethyological myth of the Serbian nation – the myth of the Kosovo plain (Kosovo polje) - which dare to oppose the predominant Serbian historical narratives.<sup>2</sup>

I would not claim that some new or intentionally concealed data-discoveries prove that the existing Serbian story about Kosovo is not “scientifically true”. In fact, in the last 20 years, when the “Kosovo problem” has turned out to be again a focal point of Balkan and European historical development, there have been no new findings concerning it. Moreover, different researchers are digging into roughly the same compendium of textual and ethnographic sources while building their conclusions. Apparently, the reasons for the completely contradictory resulting statements about and assessments of the historical role of Kosovo could be sought anywhere but in the so-called “sources” and “proofs”. In this sense, I would not share the opinion that at the onset of the 21st century we are still able to believe in and disclose some solid and autonomous “reality” lying beyond the “Kosovo myth”, whereby we could defend our stories and self-projections as reasonable and well-grounded.

The main objective of my paper is rather different. I am not going to discuss the relation between the “Kosovo myth” and “historical reality”, or the discrepancy between the fictionality of the former and the truthfulness of the latter. I am not going to demystify the deceptiveness of the national phantasm “Kosovo”, and thus argue for the impeccability of some reality over there. In the last years so many people have indulged in confronting the shameful and anachronicity of the “Kosovo myth” that it seems as if the contemporary world is saturated by the self-evidence and predominance of advanced and civilized rationality, which brings us to the invincible principles of happiness and justice. On the contrary, I believe in the mytho-genesis of most of the contemporary political and historical establishment. Yet, it is not my goal to prove this here.

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<sup>1</sup> See Zlatanov, B. Nation and Literature in the Cross Point of “Balkan”. In: The Bulgarian Canon. Eds. Pentchev, B. and A. Kiossev, Sofia, 1997

<sup>2</sup> Batakovic, D. The Kosovo Chronicles, Belgrade, 1992

What I am rather interested in are such simple questions as how people are attached to space, what is their relation to the territory, what it is that they call “Kosovo” for example, why they are so eager to envisage some strip of land as their own “possession”, “homeland”, “source of identification” and so on. Common sense compels us to believe that territories are somehow immovable, while people are moving creatures. Nevertheless, spaces travel in the memory of people through some other spaces or through historical time. I am interested in how it is possible for immovable spaces to become an obsession of the movable man. When space starts moving, it causes earthquakes. When space starts traveling within people, it causes neurosis. I am interested in this neurosis of space, which human beings try to nurse back to health through the therapy of instrumental adaptation, social accommodation and imaginative investment. Kosovo is one of the Balkan neuroses. Kosovo travels in the memory of some people, and all over history, producing the so-called “Kosovo myth”. As I said, I am not so naïve and bloodthirsty as to attempt to cure this neurosis by means of some “reality”. I am not a politician to think that the only way to handle one’s neurosis is to kill the patient. Freud believed in curing neurosis by opening the patient’s self-reflexivity to the reality of her/his psychic life. I will humbly suggest that what Freud did was to replace the patient’s neurotic phantasmal narratives with no less phantasmal, but more credible stories. What I am doing now and what I am going to do in the next few pages is just put forward another narrative of what I call “the holy territory of Kosovo” and suggest how it has been mapped.

## **2. Sacred Space as a Type of Imagined Space: Mircha Eliade’s Theory of the Sanctification of Space**

One of the premises of this paper is the quality, attributed to the religious experience in Mircha Eliade’s book *The Sacred and the Profane*.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.1. The Heterogeneity of Sacred Space**

A religious person experiences space as heterogeneous; it is marked by slits and dispersals. There are some parts of this space that are radically distinct from the rest of the parts. This spacial heterogeneity produces an opposition between sacred space, which is the only real dimension, and the remaining profane space. Drawing a seemingly horizontal “sacred-profane” opposition, we are at the same time approaching the act of construing an “immovable point”, the central axis of every future direction. When the sacred appears through hierophany, we witness not only a splitting of spacial homogeneity, but also a manifestation of absolute reality. Horizontal space is split, producing in this way heterogeneity, in which the appearance of the absolute takes place. And vice versa, due to the manifestation of reality there are structural changes in spacial homogeneity, producing a sacred location.

### **2.2. The Point of Orientation**

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<sup>3</sup> Eliade, M. *The Sacred and the Profane*, 1968

The dispersal of homogeneity and the manifestation of the absolute as a dialectical procedures provide a point of orientation for the religious person. The existential experience is possible only through an initial orientation. The latter is based on the presence of a fixed point.

I can experience something only because I can relate it to a point that we both stem from. That point provides us with our existential foundation, and we are mutually connected just through it. In other words, in order to live in a world, one has to found it, but nothing can be born out of chaos and its homogeneity and relativity. The discovery of this fixed point is equivalent to the Genesis of the World. When these two spaces – the sacred and the profane – are constituted, we are able to draw a borderline between them, where the religious community exercises rituals of transition.

### **2.3. The Transition from Heaven to Earth; Hierophany and Theophany**

A gate, an entrance, or some type of opening usually signifies this border. Through it Gods descend to Earth and people ascend to Heaven. Every holy space involves hierophany, a rush of the sacred into the homogeneity of our world. As a consequence, part of this world is separated and turned into something radically different. Sometimes man doesn't need theophany or hierophany at all; it suffices to discern a sign, which can identify the sacredness of a place. The sign possesses a paradoxical structure. Something that does not belong to this world has appeared in an unchallengeable way. But if no sign manifests itself, its disclosure is provoked. The figure of *evocatio* is well known from rhetoric, but it could be transposed to the whole area of sacredness. Whatever the case – sign or *evocatio* – it is a question of looking for powers and figures, which can provide a point of orientation in a homogeneous and relative space. Yet, it shouldn't be admitted even for a second that seeking an *axis mundi*, man is construing a holy space of her or his own device. In fact, the ritual of constituting a sacred space becomes real as long as it mimetically repeats the action of God.

### **2.4. The Sacred and the Alien: Cosmos and Chaos**

Our world, the territory of our settlement, stays in contradistinction to the surrounding space, which is alien and amorphous. The opposition between cosmos and chaos, typical of traditional societies, suggests different exemplifications. At this point, I just want to highlight one of them. In almost all confessions the figure of the stranger is representative of Chaos, sometimes interpreted as demon or ghost. A territory is Cosmos inasmuch as it is consecrated in advance, being chosen by God as appropriate for His appearance. Under this logic of the sacred, *our* and *sacred* are interchangeable, and this admits of the juxtaposition being reaffirmed in everyday and religious practices.

### **2.5. Genesis and its Repetition through Settlement**

For the religious person, the conversion of a land into our possession isn't an earthly and human act. It is a pure repetition of the primordial act: the transformation of Chaos into Cosmos, which is actually the act of Genesis. That is why the appropriation and agglomeration of a piece of land means, in the strict sense of the word, its consecration.

But it means, above all, a ritualistic repetition of Genesis.<sup>4</sup> To settle a territory means to establish a world.

The reason why the correlation between *our, sacred* and *Genesis* is so important, lies in the necessity to open a passage to the transcendent, which could save you from living in Chaos. Sacred space is an opening to the transcendent, where we are provided with the legitimacy of our existence. Around this opening traditional communities extend their World (i.e. *Our World*). Hence the opening proves an *axis mundi*, the ultimate condition for human existence.<sup>5</sup> The people of traditional societies can live just in a space, opened “upwards”, where communication with the transcendent world is guaranteed by ritual.

We are able now to understand why there is a connection between the occupation of a land and Genesis. Here I must add that Genesis is the paragon of every creative human act. Genesis is the archetype of every creation, but as we are going to see, some creative acts are ritually closer to that paragon.

If it is true that *Our World* is a Cosmos, every external attack threatens to turn it into chaos. Since *Our World* is created after the model of God’s Genesis, every invader is declared no less than God’s enemy. The enemies are relegated to the forces of Chaos. The victory of God over the forces of Chaos is recurring with every victory of our community over the intruders.<sup>6</sup>

## **2.6. The Temple**

The ontological difference, which is more and more inserted between the Cosmos and its consecrated image, gives birth to another idea: the sacredness of the Temple is guarded against every earthy touch, since its design is a creation of God, and therefore it exists in Heaven. The transcendental designs of the Temples are endowed with spiritual, ineffable, heavenly existence. The Church edifices are designed as imitations of Heavenly Jerusalem. On the other hand, they reproduce Paradise and Heavenly World.

On the basis of this theoretisation, Eliade draws several conclusions, which could be summarized in the following way. Where the sacred appears in space, Reality is revealed, and the World comes into existence. The storming of the Sacred projects not only a fixed point at the centre of a profane space – *axis mundi* into Chaos – but it also causes a separation of the level that makes possible an ontological transition from one type of living to another. It is this intrusion into the homogeneity of profane space that creates *the Centre*, through which it is possible to communicate with *Transcendence*, since *the Centre* makes orientation possible. The World can be conceived as World, as Cosmos, in the frame of its appearance as Sacred World. Every world is “cosmosized” by people through a ritual reiteration of the initial Genesis. Hence the religious person could live only in a sacred space, for it is this space that belongs to Being, it and only it exists really. The religious person is striving for Being; he incorporates the necessity to give expression to an insatiable ontological thirst. The unfamiliar space, which spreads

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis requires an abundance of reality. In other words, it requires a rush of the sacred into the World.

<sup>5</sup> For Orthodox Christians, the place of opening to the transcendent is the peak of the cosmic mountain – Golgotha. Hence the holy cities and the temples (Orthodox cathedrals and churches) are copies of *axis mundi*.

<sup>6</sup> The unity of cosmos, house, human body. Hence the deep meaning of ‘truncation of roof’. Lazar’s decapitation.

beyond his world, is not sacrosanct; it is amorphous surface, where all enemies dwell. This ontological yearning can find many expressions, but the primordial one is the need to inhabit the closest space to God, the very Centre of World, which could include cities, temples, and other sacrosanct locations. So the existential decision to inhabit a space is at the same time a religious choice to create and cosmosize a world, which is a replica of initial Genesis.

### **3. Sacred Space in Christianity**

The Christianity of the New Testament solves the tension within the Old Testament concerning the sacred by a simple yet sweeping move: it gets rid of the difference between holy and profane - not by turning everything into profane or secular but by expanding the territory of the sacred.

#### **3.1. The Expansion of Sacredness: From Temple to Community**

The sanction for such a far-reaching move is to be found within the Old Testament itself. Christianity views itself as the religion of the community of the new era: the eschatological-time rather than the old-time religion.

In Isa. 19.24 the old difference between the holy people in its consecrated land and all other profane peoples is perceived as due for eradication at the eschatological time: 'In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance'.

In Zechariah (14.20-21) holiness proliferates out of the temple to the realm of the profane: 'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, Holy unto the Lord; and the pots in the Lord's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy unto the Lord of hosts'.

Jerusalem continues to be the axis of the world- as if the old mythological idiom still had some validity- the axis to which all the peoples of the earth should come to revere.

The spreading of blessedness to every pot in Jerusalem and Judah makes possible the sacrifice of the whole of humankind to happen in Jerusalem without chaos. But once piety has commenced infecting horses and kitchen utensils, it is hard for it to bring itself to a halt; for the law has been established that it is piety and not its opposite that is infectious.

The New Testament does not unambiguously make use of these sections, but it definitely goes the same way. The vocabulary of the sacred place, the shrine, becomes applicable to the community, its locality being as omnipresent as the Christian Diaspora. It is the Christian community that is the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells (1 Cor. 3.16); 'we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them' (2 Cor. 6.16); 'ye are fellow-citizens with the saints . . . growing into a holy temple in the Lord' (Eph. 2.19, 21). The crucial appearance of consecrated space, the temple, has been transposed into a diffused community.

The vocabulary of godliness is cautiously applied to spaces in the New Testament; there are only six passages where we read of the holy city (Mt. 4.5; 27.53; Rev. 11.2), the holy place (Mt. 24.15; Acts 6.13) or the holy mount (2 Pet. 1.18)

It seems that the holiness of space was losing its significance, under the auspices of a new type of locus for the sacred. Moreover, the prophecies of the demolition of Jerusalem (in Mt. 24) operate as a prophetic critique of holy space. Even more significantly, any sacred place predestined for annihilation has already been actually desacralized.

We can observe the same with persons. In Old Testament religion the sanctity of the priests was of a distinctive excellence vis à vis the religiousness of the people, just as in the spatial area there was a progression of holiness from profane (non-holy) to holy, most holy, and holiest. In Christianity it is the total community that is sacred: the 'saints' at Corinth (1 Cor. 1.2) are the entire church, and not some spiritual leaders or persons appointed to 'holy orders'. The field of the holy has not been eliminated, but expanded. It is piety that is infectious.

### **3.2. “Christ-centricity”: the Aporias of God’s Revelation**

Nevertheless, the elimination of the grouping *holy/profane place* does not imply that all becomes an indiscriminated totality, a homogeneous chaos without orientation, as Eliade has described the secular view of space.

Karl Barth elucidates this in his own characteristic manner:

“John 4 does not mean that the divine presence in the world had suddenly become that of a mere undifferentiated ubiquity, and not of definite and distinct places. The opposite of Jerusalem and Gerazim . . . of Rome, Wittenberg, Geneva and Canterbury is not the universe at large, which is the superficial interpretation of Liberalism, but Jesus.”<sup>7</sup>

We can hardly accept Barth's extreme Christ-centricity, but the sign of God, which invents sacred places in their essence, is continuing to be experienced in specific places at particular moments in time.

Yet, these places are God-possessed places, points of divine revelation, momentary axes mundi, world-centres, navels of the earth, which then disappear gradually into the trivial – they remain, however, reminiscent recollections, signals of transcendence. They are mundane places, but as any everyday place may be, they have been visited.

Similarly to Jerusalem and Rome, all the so-called sacred places of Christianity can also be viewed for what they are: places where the presence of God is not tolerated, and therefore at the edge of the world.

Jerusalem, the blessed city, can also be 'the great city which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord was crucified' (Rev. 11.8).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, p. 479

<sup>8</sup> For the exposition on the holy places in the Old and New Testament I am deeply indebted to Clines, D. “Sacred Space, Holy Places and Suchlike”. In: *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967-1998*, Volume 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998, pp. 542-54

<sup>9</sup> To this problem see also: Waldemar Janzen, 'Geography of Faith: A Christian Perspective on the Meaning of Places', SR 3 (1973), pp. 166-82 (176). Wesley J. Fuerst, 'Space and Place in the Old Testament', Dialog 19 (1980), pp. 193-98; Irving Friedman, 'The Sacred Space of Judaism', Parabola 3 (1978), pp. 20-23; Iris V. Culley, 'Geography and Theology in a Biblical Approach to Religious Education', Lexington Theological Quarterly 15 (1980), pp. 65-81; Jonathan Z. Smith, 'Earth and Gods', JR 49 (1969), pp. 103-27; Hans-J. Klimkeit, 'Spatial Orientation in Mythical Thinking as Exemplified in Ancient Egypt: Considerations toward a Geography of Religions', HR 14 (1975), pp. 266-81; and Robert L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space: Four Biblical Studies* (American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion, 23; Chico, CA; Scholars Press, 1981).

## 4. Textual Sources

I will reflect on at least five textual groups, giving rise to the symbolic imagination, which imbues the Kosovo territory with holiness in Serbian cultural and political history.

### 4.1. Serbian Orthodox Writings<sup>10</sup>

### 4.2. Western Group<sup>11 12</sup>

### 4.3. Serbian Oral Narratives<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In a roughly chronological order the early Serbian sources on Kosovo include

- a. *Prolosko zitiije kneza Lazara* (Anonymous) (1390-1393), in Dj. Radojicid, "Pohvala knezu Lazaru sa stihovima," *Istorijski casopis*, V (1955): 251-53.
- b. *Slovo o knezu Lazaru* (Patriarch Danilo III) (1392-1393), in V. Corovic, "Siluan i Danilo II, srpski pisci XIV-XV veka," *Glas srpske kraljevske akademije*, CXXXVI (1929):83-103.
- c. *Zitiije kneza Lazara* (Anonymous) (1392-1398), in S. Novakovic, "Nesto o knezu Lazaru," *Glasnik srpskog uffenog druftva*, XXI (1867) 159-64.
- d. *Slovo o knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1392-1398), in A. Vukomanovic, "O knezu Lazaru," *Glasnik drustva srbske slovesnosti XI* (1859) 108-18.
- e. *Pohvala knezu Lazaru* (Jefimija) (1402), in L. Mirkovic, "Monahinja Jefimija," *Hrigcanski zivot*, I (9-10) (1922): 539-40.
- f. *Sluzba knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1402-1404), in *Srbijak*, II (Belgrade, 1970), pp. 143-99.
- g. *Pohvalno slovo knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1403-1404), in Dj. Danidid, "Pohvala knezu Lazaru," *Glasnik drustva srbske slovesnosti XIII* (1861):358-68.
- h. *Natpis na mramornom stubu na Kosovu* (Anonymous or Stefan Lazarevic) (1403-1404), in Dj. Sp. Radojicid, "Svetovna pohvala knezu Lazaru i kosovskom junacima," *Juffnoslovenski filolog*, XX (1953-1954) 140-41.
- i. *Vrse mislni knezu Lazaru* (Andonius Raphael of Lepanto) (1420), in L. j. Stojanovic, "Stars srpski hrivolul ji, akti, biograf i je, letopisi, tipici, pomenici, zapisi, i drugs," *Spomenik*, III (1890), pp. 81-88. Corrections made by V.V. Kachanovskii, *Istoriia Serbii s' poloviny XIV do kontsa XV v.* (Kiev, 1899), pp. 349-59.

<sup>11</sup> In my view, the so-called Turkish sources, giving information about the Kosovo Battle, such as the documents, from the end of the 14th and the 15th centuries and later, have strongly influenced the western sources. I am going to give arguments and examples, supporting this hypothesis. See especially: Olesnicki, A. "Turski izvori o Kosovskom boju," *Glasnik skopskog naucnog drustva*, XIV (1934), 6062

<sup>12</sup> See M. Braun, "Kosovo: Die Schlacht auf dem Amselfelde in geschichtlicher and epischer Oberlieferung," *Slavisch-Baltische Quellen and Forschungen*, VIII (Leipzig, 1937)  
V. V. Makusev, "Prilozi k srpsko j istori j XI V i XV veka," *Glasnik srpskog ucenog drustva*, XXXII (1871) 176.

S. Ljubic, *Monumenta spectantia historiam slavorum meridionaliurn*, Vol. IV: Listine o odnogajih izmedju juffnoga Slavenstva i mletadke republike (Zagreb, 1874), pp. 269-70.

R.J. Leonertz, *Demetrius Cydones Correspondance*, II (Citta del Vaticano, 1960), no. 396, pp. 350-51; no. 398, pp. 352-53. See the discussion by S. Cirkovic, "Dmitrije Kidon o kosovskom boju," *Zbornik radova vizantoloskog institute*, XIII (1971) 213-19.

*Songe du vieil Pelerin*, text found in Fonds Francais, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, N. 22.542. And *Epistre lamentable et consolatoire*, text found in *Chroniques de Froissart*, edited by Kervyn de Lettenhove, XVI (Brussels, 1872), p. 510. Mezieres' sources are discussed by M. Dinid, "Dva savremenika o boju na Kosovu," *Glas srpske kraljevske akademije*, CLXXXII (1940) 133-48.

*Cronica Volgare di Anonimo Fiorentino dall' anno 1385 al 1409*, Vol. XVII, Fasc. 152 of *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, edited by L.A. Muratori (Citta di Castello, 1917), pp. 77-79.

## **5. Serbian Orthodox Writings**

Miodrag Popovic, whom I consider to be one of the best experts on this topic, suggests, and I would agree with him at this point, that initially the Kosovo myth,<sup>14</sup> circulating in Serbian communities, comes out of two sources.

In the period immediately after the Battle the elements of this myth exist in a rudimentary state. They are scattered in different discourses, being still remote from the cohesiveness and density of a mythological construction.

Evidently, we are not able to reconstruct the textual body of the first source: the folk, mainly rural, tradition. It includes the oral narratives about the struggle on the Kosovo Plain, which came to circulate among the Serbian population right after the battle. Yet, from the very beginning we have to keep in mind that it is the oral tradition that provides the environment, for the myth of Kosovo to go through a process of germination, growth and subsequent preservation. Moreover, we must be aware that the so-called Kosovo epic cycle, as well as the other discourses on the Battle don't just come on the scene out of the blue. They draw upon some dispositions, models, and themes, already existing in Serbian oral and written discourses. Some of them I am going to discuss further down.

The second early foundation of the myth encompasses many, mostly short, liturgical texts, written by the Serbian Orthodox clergy in the first decades after the Battle and stipulated for religious service. At the outset I will consider this corpus of texts, trying to extract those elements of the myth that they bring into existence.

### **5.1. King Lazar's Martyrdom as Epiphany of God's Transcendence**

Popovic points out that perhaps the first element of the myth, developed in liturgical literature, is connected with the cult of King Lazar. The cult's practices commence with the transfer of the King's remains from Pristina to the monastery of Ravanica (built under the auspices of Lazar) in 1391, although the glory of the King starts spreading soon after his death in the battlefield. Serbia's clergy have no hesitation in interpreting the deeds and death of Lazar. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, King Lazar is a Christian martyr. How could we grasp the emergence of this image?

Although there are earlier texts about King Lazar and the Kosovo Battle, the most influential work, leading to the canonization of Lazar as martyr,<sup>15</sup> is "Slovo o knezu

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<sup>13</sup> The so-called "viteski pesma". See: Matic, Svetozar. *Poreklo kosovskih pesama kratkoga stiha I Odbrana teze o kosovskim pesmama*. Novi Sad, 1964, pp. 95-151

<sup>14</sup> Popovic prefers to speak about the "Kosovo legend". I don't know whether in the western vocabulary there exists a distinction between 'legend' and 'myth'. In Slavic ethnology and literary criticism there is a clear-cut distinction between these terms. Generally speaking, they share many common features and they refer to transcendent events and their causes. Still, whereas the myth handles a religious and non-human transcendent reality (the structure of being and gods' acts), the legend is organized around earthly events, non-subsumable to an earthly logic, and a human protagonist with extra-human abilities. Strictly speaking, I have to use 'legend' rather than 'myth', but for reasons I will explain later, I prefer to use 'myth' for the Kosovo case.

<sup>15</sup> At this stage I have to highlight a fact, already discussed by researchers. There is a very strong martyr tradition, dedicated to Sultan Murad in the Turkish sources, which is in an intriguing way parallel to King Lazar's martyr tradition. See about Murad's martyrdom the following examples from medieval Turkish chronicles. To my regret, I have at my disposal only the German translation of these texts that I want to cite

Lazaru”, written by Patriarch Danilo III Banjski between 1392 and 1393, i.e. 3 years after the Battle. In a paragraph of the document Lazar is dubbed straightforwardly “the new martyr”:

And the victorious and godly zealot, the new martyr,  
Prince Lazar, was brought down with a sword and met his blessed end.<sup>16</sup>

It is a bit unusual to refer to the martyr as ‘new’, since the eagerness to achieve this status takes in most cases a long time. I have to acknowledge that there are many types of martyrdom, but all of them share the requirement that the hardship be highly intensified, almost unbearable. Sometimes it is so, because of the long period of the martyr’s unequivocal devotedness to God.

Evidently, Lazar reaches the status of martyr very rapidly, with one stroke. The sentence cited above provides all the arguments needed to explain the promptness of Lazar’s inauguration into this religious rank. The very death of Lazar is sound and sufficient evidence of his martyr’s nature. “Slovo...” turns Lazars death into a martyr’s end through a number of rhetorical oppositions, emblematic for this genre of Orthodox religious literature. At first, Lazar turns to God, praying for His support in view of the impending clash with the huge Turkish army. But coming back to his warriors, Lazar finds them desperate and deeply sad: the first sign that God’s will leads in a direction, opposite to Lazar’s prayer. The reason for this switch from prayer to the following development isn’t textually represented in Danilo’s “Slovo...”, but this lacuna makes us more attentive to the next paragraph. Immediately recognizing the warriors’ mood as a sign of God’s decision, Lazar anticipates the coming disaster and changes his rhetoric in accordance with it:

Vi, o drugovi i braco, velmoze I blagorodni,  
Vojnici, vojvode, veliki I mali,  
Sami ste znali I videli,  
Kolika nam je dobra Bog u zivotu ovom darivao<sup>17</sup>

Quite significantly, Lazar addresses his noblemen and warriors in the past tense, urging them to look back to their previous life and recognize the abundance of God’s compassion and love. Prayer is oriented mainly to the future, calling upon God to support him in what is to come. The future is mysterious and unfamiliar; it brings human beings

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here. It would be inadequate to provide my English translation of the German version, written by Maximilian Braun:

1. "Iskender-Näme" written by Ahmedî, and issuing from 1402-1410 in Adrianopol.:

War ein siegreicher Glaubenskämpfer und wurde auch fraglos zum Märtyrer für den Glauben!

2. Chronicle of Urug. From the mid-15. century, written in Adrianopol:

“Gazi Mürad Chan wurde an jener Stelle Märtyrer für den Glauben. Da sprachen sie: "Möge Gottes allumfassende Barmherzigkeit mit ihm sein! Wir haben leichtsinnig gehandelt."

<sup>16</sup> *Slovo o knezu Lazaru* (Patriarch Danilo III) (1392-1393), in V. Corovic, "Siluan i Danilo II, srpski pisci XIV-XV veka," *Glas srpske kraljevske akademije*, CXXXVI (1929):83-103.

<sup>17</sup> “O comrades and brothers, lords and nobles,

soldiers and vojvodas - great and small.

You have witnessed for yourselves

that great goodness God has given us in this life

into a chaotic field of vagueness and lack of orientation. That is why we address Godq hoping that His omnipotence will be with us in this path. Prayer is an attempt to project through the imagination our wish for order into the unpredictability of the future. Now, Lazar urges his people to see God's presence in their past, where God has revealed himself in the prosperity and happiness of the community. That is why this profound revelation of God is to be the point of orientation for their future decisions. Confronted with death, they have nothing but this point. The ultimate thing they have to do is to turn to God and die for Him:

No ako mac, ako rane, ako I tma smrti dogodi se nama  
Slatko za Hrista I blagocasce otacastva da podnesemo.<sup>18</sup>

Since God is the ultimate destination of every Being, death, the withdrawal of Order, is a way to give your life, sanctified by God's presence, back to Him. So we are predestined to give our life back to the One who has bestowed it on us. We tare supposed to respond to God's benevolence with additional effort. The bigger the benevolence, the more intensive our sacrificial gratitude;

Bolje je nama u podvigu smrti,  
Hego li sa stidom zivot,  
Bolje je nama u boju od maca smrt podneti,

...

Mnogo pozivesmo za svet,  
The most expressive evidence for our eagerness to reply to God's revelation in front of us is make effort to be like him;  
Postarrajmo se, dakle, da uskoro  
Pdvig stradalacki primimo.

Not surprisingly, at this stage the crucial images of *Eternal Life* and *the Book of Life* appear, because it is through the eagerness to follow God' steps that we could be accepted by Him, since He determines for Eternal Life and He writes the Book of Life:

Da bi smo pozivali vecno na nebesima,  
Imenujmo sebe vojnicima Hristovim,  
Stradalcima za blagocasce,  
Kako bismo se upisali u knjige zivotne."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> But if the sword, if wounds, or if the darkness of death comes to us, we accept it sweetly for Christ and for the godliness of our homeland.

<sup>19</sup> "It is better to die in battle  
than to live in shame.

Better it is for us to accept death from the sword in battle  
than to yield our shoulders to the enemy.  
We have lived a long time for the world;  
in the end we seek to accept the *martyr's struggle*  
and to live forever in heaven.

We call ourselves Christian soldiers, *martyrs for godliness* to be

Before moving on to the conclusions of this section of my paper I would like to cite briefly and systematically just some of the numerous examples, where the martyrdom of Lazar and his warriors is the central topic, aiming to provide arguments that this religious construct is of crucial importance for interpreting the holiness of Kosovo in Serbian national memory:<sup>20</sup>

*Prolosko zitije kneza Lazara (1390-1393)*<sup>21</sup>

Jer tada i blagočastivog i hristoljubivog kneza Lazara sujemudreni oni (koji lažno mudruju), i množastvo blagorodnih vojnika njegovih, u Hristovom ispovedanju, koje se usprotivilo vere radi hrišćanske, Hristu predstaviše. **Mučeničkim vencem**, koji se blistao svetlije od sjaja sunčanog.<sup>22</sup>

*Zitije kneza Lazara (1392-1398)*<sup>23</sup>

**O new martyr**, Prince Lazar. You were educated from your youth in all of this earth's beauty. And the strong hand of the Lord designates you powerful and marvelous among his earthly lords. You ruled the land of your **fathers and found pleasure in all that was good.**

**Pohvala knezu Lazaru (Jefimija) (1402):**<sup>24</sup>

У красотама овога света васпитао си се од младости своје,  
о **нови мучениче кнеже Лазаре**,  
и крепка рука господња међу свом земаљском господом  
крепког и славног показа те.»

*Natpis na mramornom stubu na Kosovu (Anonymous or Stefan Lazarevic) (1403-1404):*<sup>25</sup>

«да у Христу добро скончају  
и приме **мучења венац**  
и вишће славе учесницибуду .  
О чудеса Божијих судбина,  
ухваћен би храбри страдалац  
безаконим агаренским рукама

---

recorded in the book of life.”

Translation: Thomas Emmert

<sup>20</sup> Where they exist, I cite the English translations of the documents.

<sup>21</sup> *Prolosko zitije kneza Lazara* (Anonymous) (1390-1393), in Dj. Radojicid, “Pohvala knezu Lazaru sa stihovima,” *Istorijski casopis*, V (1955): 251-53.

<sup>22</sup> For then the pious, Christ-loving Lazar and a multitude of his noble soldiers, opposed as they were because of their Christian faith, were sent to Christ by those false thinkers. And the ruler [Christ] decorated them all with the martyr's wreath which shone more brightly than all the radiance of the sun.

<sup>23</sup> *Zitije kneza Lazara* (Anonymous) (1392-1398), in S. Novakovic, "Nesto o knezu Lazaru," *Glasnik srpskog uffenog druftva*, XXI (1867) 159-64.

<sup>24</sup> *Pohvala knezu Lazaru (Jefimija) (1402)*, in L. Mirkovic, "Monahinja Jefimija," *Hrigcanski zivot*, I (9-10) (1922): 539-40.

<sup>25</sup> *Natpis na mramornom stubu na Kosovu* (Anonymous or Stefan Lazarevic) (1403-1404), in Dj. Sp. Radojicid, "Svetovna pohvala knezu Lazaru i kosovskom junacima," *Juffnoslovenski filolog*, XX (1953-1954) 140-41

и крај страдању добрд сам прима  
и мученик Христов постаје  
велики кнез Лазар.”  
*Sluzba knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1402-1404):<sup>26</sup>,

«Не сачека смрти природне  
на како жељаше добио јеси,  
свекрасно твоје живљење *мучењем* улепшао јеси  
и прешао јеси у вечне обитељи,  
где гледаш лепоту неизрециву”  
*Pohvalno slovo knezu Lazaru* (1403-1404):<sup>27</sup>

You are the good shepherd who offered his soul for us. How shall we praise you? With which language is it worthy to celebrate you? Oh praiseworthy *martyr*, Lazar, come unseen to us and stand in our midst. Show us the songs of praise so that we will not be like sheep who have no shepherd. You are our shepherd; you cared for your flock which Christ the Lord gave you. Do not surrender us to a shepherd whom we do not know. Do not scatter your flock which you gathered and for whose sake you shed your holy blood.

*Life of Despot Stefan Lazarevic* Constantine the Philosopher's (c. 1431):<sup>28</sup>

And God allowed this so that this great one [Lazar] and those with him might be wreathed with the crown of *martyrdom*. And what happened after this? He attained the blessed end through decapitation. Before this, however, his dear comrades came forward with many sad entreaties to die before him so that they would not see his death. This battle was in the year 6897 [1389], the month of June, the fifteenth day.

I dare say that there hardly exists a Serbian medieval liturgical text, where this topic, issuing from the writings of Danilo III is not addressed. Martyrdom is a fundamental and universal prism, through which the Battle on the Kosovo Plain is viewed in Serbian Church writings. Since this problematic is discussed at length in many analyses,<sup>29</sup> here I just want to call attention, for the purposes of my text, to the way the topic of martyrdom is shifting its position from Lazar to his warrior noblemen, and last but not least, to his entire people. With respect to the epic songs in the last section of this paper I am going to discuss the relation between Lazar and his people (parallel to the relation between God

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<sup>26</sup> *Sluzba knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1402-1404), in *Srbljak*, II (Belgrade, 1970), pp. 143-99.

g. *Pohvalno slovo knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1403-1404), in Dj. Danidid, "Pohvala knezu Lazaru," *Glasnik drustva srbske slovesnosti XIII* (1861):358-68.

<sup>27</sup> *Pohvalno slovo knezu Lazaru* (Anonymous) (1403-1404), in Dj. Danidid, "Pohvala knezu Lazaru," *Glasnik drustva srbske slovesnosti XIII* (1861):358-68.

<sup>28</sup> *Zitile i zizn' pris' nopom' nimaago, slovustaago, blagoc'stivaago gospodina despota Stefana*. Text is according to a manuscript from the second half of the fifteenth century, published in 1875 by V. Jagid, "Konstantin Filosof i njegov Zivot Stefana Lazarevida despota srpskoga," *Glasnik srpskog udenog drustva*, XLII (1875) 223-328

<sup>29</sup> These works have been analysed as literary and religious works in a study of high scholarly standard by Djordje Trifunovic: *Srpski srednjovekovni spisi o knezu Lazaru i Kosovskom boju* (Krutevac, 1968).

and His people). In the theoretical part, I note that it is characteristic of Christianity that God reveals Himself not in a place, but in the very community. Paradoxically, the community is the place where God appears. In the Serbian case, God appears first in Lazar, and through him in his community. Consequently, a parallelism is built between the space where the Battle took place and the community that fought in this field. God's revelation appears through the martyrdom of Lazar and his community, and this has happened on the Kosovo Plain. Here not the place of God's revelation sanctifies the community living in this space; rather, the community giving evidence of its eagerness to follow God through martyrdom sanctifies the place. This is one of my explanations why Kosovo's territory is not so much an earthly spot, as it is an imaginative projection, moving within the Serbian Volk and causing what I called "the neurosis of space".

Among Orthodox Christians, especially in Bulgaria, there is a widespread misunderstanding, according to which the institution of the Church confers on a person the rank of a martyr, recognizing his or her extraordinary religious eagerness and passion. One could hardly think of anything more misleading.

Martyrdom stems directly from God as a paragon. To safeguard the Church's right to define who fits the prescriptions of martyrdom is to give preference to Church rather than to God and thus to misinterpret the Christian hierarchy. Not surprisingly, the one who chooses martyrdom enters into direct interaction with God (he usually retreats to a secluded place), not striving at all for institutional recognition.

By the very longing for the canonization of King Lazar as a martyr the Serbian clergy recognizes and consecrates his life and death as a symbolic and mimetic repetition of Jesus' deeds.

The structure of earthly martyrdom closely follows and symbolically repeats Jesus Christ's hardship and endurance, which involves making ultimate sacrifices for the faith. The relevancy of Jesus as a paragon hardly needs more elucidation. I just want to underscore the idea that martyrdom as a process incorporates and reifies a transition from an earthly human nature to a godly transcendent eminence. Martyrdom as a process of transition from Earth to Heaven is already subsumed in the essence of Jesus as God-Man. Martyrdom represents a terrestrial temporalization and visualization of God's inaccessible and enigmatic nature. In martyrdom we see not only a repetition of Jesus' last earthly steps, but also a symbolic repetition and commemoration of Jesus' nature. At this point I should refer back to Eliade's theory of the 'sacred'. 'The sacred' is this place, more accurately this 'location', where God reveals himself in an earthly location to his community of followers. In the case of martyrdom, God puts himself into the appearance of a human body, thus consecrating this body. Not surprisingly, the bodily remains of the martyr are so revered in the Slav Orthodox tradition. They do miracles and can cure, just as Jesus did. In an amazing, extraordinary way God has left the traces of his strength in these bones. So we can observe at least two stages of God's appearance – by the transition from Earth to Heaven through the matrix of martyrdom, and by the miraculous transposition of God's strength into the remains of the martyr.

At this point, I will dare draw a preliminary conclusion that the Serbian Medieval clergy turns to King Lazar as 'sacred location' of God's appearance: at first, in the form of eventful sequence, mimetically representing God's path from Earth to Heaven, and later

in the form of ‘holy remains’, imbued with miraculous and curing strength.<sup>30</sup> At this early stage, not the territory, but Lazar as a ‘bodily location’ is a manifestation of holiness.

## **6. Western Sources**

We are enormously in debt to Maximilian Braun, who in 1937 compiled different sources<sup>31</sup> where stimulating information about the early writings on the Battle can be found.

### **6.1. Earthly Victory as Epiphanly of God’s Will**

My interpretation of these texts commences with a writing of Signoria of Florence from 20th October 1389, which is a reply to a message of the Florentine authorities, sent by King Tvrtko of Bosnia. The latter announces, in a way similar to his message to the Trogirans, that the Serbs have allegedly triumphed over the Turks. The response from Florence is known among scholars as the *Florentine Congratulation*.

Let me quote a short passage from this message:

Felices et ter quaterque felices duodecim illa procerum jurata manus...<sup>32</sup>

The message says that the Florentines had learned about the Battle partly from ‘rumors’, partly from ‘written records’. To our regret, we don’t have access to the records that can verify the number of the noblemen. The *Florentine Congratulation* is the first known document where the Biblical number 12 emerges in relation to the Battle.

Prince Lazar is not mentioned in the closest context of this sentence, which allows me to suggest that the *Congratulation* depicts the essential moment of the Battle in terms of the pattern “one leader – Jesus – and twelve noblemen – twelve apostles” where the mimetic figure, which allegorically refers to Jesus, is the assassin of Murad, who isn’t named in person in the text. The later sources suggest that his name is Milos (K)obilic.<sup>33</sup>

It must be clear that I dare refer to this pattern due to its adamant and highlighted presence in the *Congratulation*. To relate everything to the Bible is an over-simplistic approach to medieval writings. Moreover, it is not very rewarding in terms of the attempt to excavate deeper meanings in the present text. Evidently, one adequate and proper interpretation of it demands taking into consideration the peaceful nature of Jesus Christ and the anti-warfare imagery around him and his disciples. I will come later to this

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<sup>30</sup> Eliade insists that ‘the sacred’ represents an appearance not of God himself, but of his energy, his strength.

<sup>31</sup> Braun, M. “Kosovo”. Die Schlacht auf dem Amselfelde in geschichtlicher und epischer Ueberlieferung. Leipzig, 1937

<sup>32</sup> Opt. cit. p. 15. “Fortunate, three – and four times fortunate, this conspired community of twelve Noblemen...”

<sup>33</sup> The absence of King Lazar in the early western sources and the presence of Milos, though not named, has already been noted. Here I propose my interpretation of this strange fact.

conversion of the peaceful Biblical pattern into war-affectionate descriptions in the Kosovo cycle.<sup>34</sup> It has to do, on the one hand, with the transition from Old Testament to New Testament, which I discussed in the theoretical part, and on the other hand, with the allegorical transfer from the Biblical model to the concrete historical events.

If we follow the chronological order, most of the accounts of the Battle, especially in the western sources, provide the image of an alleged victory of the Serbian forces. This confidence has reigned among large communities over a long period of time.

On 23th July, 1389 the Council of Venice issues an instruction related to the worrying, yet not confirmed, information about a war between Sultan Murad and the Serbs. Maximilian Braun<sup>35</sup> supposes that the council has been familiar with more information than the instruction suggests and the precautionary diction of the text is due to the effort, made by the Venetian authorities, to establish a friendly relationship with Murad's successors. The Venetian nobles send special envoys to the Turkish court, providing them with two different letters, each of them designed for each of the potential successors. As to the Battle, the text of the instruction is very circumspect:

..., de quo diverso dicebantur, quibus fides bene preberi non poterat. Sed tamen dominatio nostra audiverat de morte ipsius domini Morati, de qua maximam displicentiam habuerat...<sup>36</sup>

These two meanings are worth highlighting with regard to the quotation. First, the instruction overtly, though very anxiously, refers to the death of Murad. Second, it implies tacitly the loss of the Turkish army, causing alarm among the Venetian authorities. It is hardly surprising that the instruction morbidly expresses grief for the lack of reliable information one month after the Battle itself.

I have to point in advance that the deficiency of information will turn, over time, into confidence that the Serbs were victorious.

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<sup>34</sup> See the song 'Supper in Krushevac', perhaps the most famous text from the so-called "Kosovo Cycle" of epic songs:

On his right he places old Yug Bogdan  
And next to him the nine brave Yugovichi.  
On his left Vuk Brankovich sits down,  
And then the other lords according to their rank.  
Across from Lazarus is Captain Milosh;  
And next to him are these two noble knights:  
The first: Ivan Kosanchich,  
And the second: Lord Milan Toplitsa"

If Lazar, not entering the Battle in this song, and Vuk Brankovic, proclaimed later a traitor, are excluded, there remain the nine Yugovichi, their father Yug Bogdan, Kasancic and Toplitsa. These twelve noblemen strictly correspond to the pattern outlined in *The Congratulation*.

<sup>35</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 10

<sup>36</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 11

I have already mentioned in another aspect the Signoria's replay from 20th October, 1389 to the letter of King Tvrtko of Bosnia.

The first known source, which alleges that the Serbs have won the Battle for sure, is the very letter of King Tvrtko of Bosnia to the Trogir community in Dalmatia. As Braun points out, the letter was written under the immediate impression of the first messages about the Battle. King Tvrtko announces:

Eya tandem inito cum eis bello die 20. mensis Junii proxime praeteriti Dei dextera adjutrice et nobis propitia assistende, obtento penitus cum triumpho campo conflictimus, devibimus, et humi prostravimus interemptos, paucis demum ex ipsis superstitibus remanentibus, Dei laus licet cum aliqua strage nostorum, attamen non multorum.<sup>37</sup>

the *Florentine Letter* is a significant manuscript for our consideration of the battle because it provides definite information about the event for the first time. It correctly identifies Kosovo as the battlefield and 28th June, St. Vitus' Day, as the date of the battle. Most important, however, is its claim that the Ottoman sultan died at the hands of a Christian assassin.<sup>38</sup>

Fortunate, most fortunate are those hands of the twelve loyal lords who, having opened their way with the sword and having penetrated the enemy lines and the circle of chained camels, heroically reached the tent of Amurat himself. Fortunate above all is that one who so forcefully killed such a strong vojvoda by stabbing him with a sword in the throat and belly. And blessed are all those who gave their lives and blood through the glorious manner of martyrdom as victims of the dead leader over his ugly corpse.<sup>39</sup>

The letter is written from a "participant's" point of view: the narrator not merely observes the event, but is an active participant in it. He is in this regard the ultimate proof of the account's truthfulness, proclaiming the victory of the Serbian army. There is not a hint of vacillation as to the total triumph over the infidels. The rhetoric of the text accumulates figures, whose meanings convey the message of the overall and irreversible annihilation of the Turkish forces. Moreover, the losses of Tvrtko's army are neglectfully small, thus reconfirming the success.

I have already had the opportunity to refer to the *Florentine Congratulation* with regard to the Biblical pattern of the noblemen's description.<sup>40</sup> Evidently, the Florentine leaders take the letter of Tvrtko as a completely reliable source. It is well known from other sources that the Turks used to apply in many of their battles the military tactics of positioning:

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<sup>37</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 9-10: "

<sup>38</sup> Emmert, Th. The Battle...

<sup>39</sup> V. V. Makusev, "Prilozi k srpsko j istori j XI V i XV veka," *Glasnik srpskog učenog društva*, XXXII (1871) 176.

<sup>40</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p.

concatenatosque in circuitu camelos.<sup>41</sup>

I presume that this reply has to be regarded as even more valuable, since it perhaps reiterates some parts of the letter's content. For example, the reply repeats the image of total annihilation of the Turks, described in so elevated a style in Tvrtko's letter:

... et humi prostravimus interemptos, paucis demum ex ipsis superstitionibus remanentibus...<sup>42</sup>

It rhetorically transforms the vocabulary of this passage, preserving its underlying content:

...in campo qui campus Turdorum dicitur, cum infinitis gentium saurum milibus cumque duobus filiis multo cum sanguine cecidisse...<sup>43</sup>

If the phrase "...only a tiny part of these infidels remained living..." is compared to "...in a huge bloodshed found their death..." it is correct to conclude that the latter construction is deduced through a rhetorical figuration from the former and that both of them imply the same thing: the total obliteration of the Turkish units. On the basis of this figurative semblance, I would suggest that the remaining part of *The Congratulation* contains also intertextual references to Tvrtko's letter and so provides additional information about the Battle.

On the other hand, Tvrtko's letter and the reply to it utterly express God's benevolence towards the Serbs, which is the single and ultimate reason for the Serbian victory. The simple prerequisite of the medieval religious universe that everything stems from God, that every earthly event occurs in a way envisioned by God, must be reified in the narrative and argumentative structure. A play of the possible and the actual is acted out, both of them stemming from God and staying under God's surveillance. The religious logic of 'possible-actual' interrelation is anchored in the text.

Between 1403-1406 Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo takes part in a delegation sent by King Heinrich III of Castalia to Timur (maybe Tamerlan). De Clavijo writes a rich and detailed report of his travels, containing among various other messages, stories and rumors, a reference to the Battle on the Kosovo Plain. The reference appears while the author is describing the legendary war between Timur (Tamerlane) and Bajezid. The text, while presenting the genealogy of Bajezid, comes back to his father and the way the son has succeeded him. Due to the conciseness of this passage, De Clavijo has just enough space to mention that Graf Lazar assassinated Murad and in revenge Bajezid killed Lazar.<sup>44</sup> In contradistinction to other statements, this text portrays Lazar himself as violently assassinating the sultan by stabbing his sword into Murad's chest and pressing it to come

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<sup>41</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 15

<sup>42</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 10

<sup>43</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 15

<sup>44</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 12

out of his back. However, the travel book, by not giving details on the Battle, disproves in no way the dominating belief in the West that the victory went to the Serbs.

The persistence of this confidence could be tracked down at least back to 1422 when in all probability a Latin chronicle entitled *Cronica Caroli Sexti* was created by a court historiographer of Karl VI of France. The note on the Battle was inserted not earlier than 1395. It concerns the campaign that led to the Nikopolis catastrophe. Lazar isn't called by name in the text. The author identifies him as the 'King of Hungary'.<sup>45</sup> This chronicle includes perhaps the most detailed account of the Battle on the Kosovo Plain, ever presented in western sources. Its XVII Chapter bears the title "Concerning the victory of the King of Hungary over the Turks" - good indication of the confidence among western powers that the Serbs have won the Battle.

The narrator builds up a consistent account of the logic of events and the rationale of their occurrence, preceded by a narrative frame, which specifies the sources for the story to follow. Like other narratives, mentioned thus far, this one also refers to "circulating rumors" and "reports from reliable persons", and argues for an attentive and considerate selection of information. Evidently, this is a common and widespread procedure in the Middle Ages designed to bolster the reliability of a document.

Right after the initial narrative frame there is a paragraph deserving closer examination. Unwittingly or otherwise, it immerses the Battle on the Kosovo Plain in the intricate course of global European politics, implying an alleged coordination between Christian countries against the Turkish invasion. A remote cause of the Battle on Kosovo plain rests in a French and English intention to eradicate the Turkish presence in Christendom. Given this intent, they reach a peace agreement one year before the Battle. Learning about the threatening contract, Sultan Murad hurries back to his lands to gather new Sarazine forces. With the help of the available forces he couldn't face the overwhelming French and English troops, resolved not simply to expel the Turks from the Christian lands, but to annihilate them altogether. This course of events explains why it turns out that the Serbs have to fight against a Turkish army, strongly outnumbering their own forces. Actually, the Turkish army is designed to clash not with them, but with united French - English troops in a struggle, intended to fix up the political and religious geography of the whole of Europe. The paragraph entails in its rhetorical texture that Murad was fully aware of the importance of the impending collision, since his own counter-intention was neither more nor less than:

in brevi totam christianitatem occupaturum viribus.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the Serbs turn out to be a seemingly incidental participant in a complex geopolitical puzzle, whose arrangement will draw the destiny of Christianity. Determined to demolish all Christians, obviously, the Turks must start with facing the nearest, still non-occupied (in contrast to Wallachians and Bulgarians) Christians - the Orthodox Serbs.

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<sup>45</sup> Braun (opt. cit. p. 16) suggests that this misunderstanding is due to the poor knowledge of Balkan political relations at the time, but other reasons could be involved here, too.

<sup>46</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p. 17: "in a short time to subjugate the entire Christendom."

However, this is merely an ostensible description of the state of events as they occur in the chronicle. In fact, the King of Hungary (Serbia) decides to oppose the Turkish plans, though he is faced with an extreme shortage of time to collect the troops needed. Whether or not he would receive an alleged support from the French and the English, he is ready to bear the burden of entering single-handedly into a clash with the Turks. These two ideas can be deduced from this short paragraph.

First, the Battle on the Kosovo Plain is part of complex European geo-political developments, where the Serbs aren't decisive policy-makers (a wide-range political anti-Turkish campaign is launched by western authorities), but they turn out to be crucial war-campaign strategists. They reject the option of waiting for a future war between Turkish and Anglo-French forces, which is going to sever the knot of Europe's power balance. The King of Hungary begins the struggle immediately, perceiving the destiny of Europe as closely entwined with the fate of his own people. This broad contextualization of the Battle could be easily inferred from the chronicle. It moving evidence of the geo-political scope through which the Battle is viewed from a western perspective.

Second, the image that the Serbs not just fight against Murad, but also in fact prevent the subjugation of the entire Christendom is represented in the text indirectly yet mightily through a kind of syllogistic structure. Murad endeavors to "subjugate in a short time the entire Christendom". Those who fight the Turks are preventing the conquest. The Serbs are the first to defy the overwhelming Turkish forces. Consequently, they defend the whole of Christian Europe.

As I will point out later, this idea is inscribed in the core message of what I call 'a third covenant' with God. If it can be proved that the idea appears for the first time in western sources, it will be all the more crucial to examine how it has migrated to and how it has influenced some Serbian interpretations of the event from 1389. In fact, the Serbs have never succeeded in rescuing Europe, since its destiny in the end didn't depend on their efforts at all. The reduced idea that they have still decisively contributed to the dwindling of Turkish power isn't correct either. The Turks were strong enough to win a sequence of battles against united European forces long after the Battle on the Kosovo Plain.<sup>47</sup> In the end the salvation of Europe had to be reached on another level with another military scope, on a scene with other geo-political dimensions, by other means and over a long period of time.<sup>48</sup>

There are many ways to back up the truthfulness of a given statement. One of them is to develop a narrative account of a chain of events down to the minutest details so as to promote yourself as the most reliable eyewitness authorized to make truthful statements about these events. This is the argumentative strategy applied by the narrator in the chronicle under scrutiny. The story about the Battle is divided into two pieces, one of them referring to an initial temporary defeat of a small Christian detachment, sent on a

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<sup>47</sup> For example, the defeat of the united European forces in Nikopolis and Varna.

<sup>48</sup> It is useful to mention for the foreign readers that exactly the same idea was many times ascribed by Bulgarian historicists to Bulgaria. With our sacrifice (it isn't known how this sacrifice really looks like) we, Bulgarians, have rescued Europe and Christianity.

reconnaissance mission, and the second one presenting the final route of the Turkish forces.

In the first section a flexible opposition is built, allowing an impressive transposition from outer to inner. On the one hand, the military advantages of the Turkish forces give information about the external aspects. The Turks set up an ambush for the intelligence detachment, and surrounding it, attack by surprise, using a large number of warriors. On the other hand, the narrator, possessing an omniscient perspective, tells us about the internal psychological state of the Christian warriors. He penetrates into the 'souls' of the Christians, upset by the unexpected developments, but applying antithesis, he hastens to have us believe that they don't suffer a shortage of 'courage' in any way. Despite the ostensible inequality of powers, the Christians succeed in keeping a parity, though not for a long time. Obviously, the opposition between external power and internal strength is a rather common figurative device, used in the Middle Ages. It couldn't assure us so easily of the reliability of the narrator's voice. Nevertheless, this very consistent logic of transition from the particularities of circumstantial description to conclusions about the psychological state of the Christian warriors is evidence of an intense proximity of the narrator to the situation. Whether this proximity was real or fake, I am not able to prove due to the lack of additional information about the real narrator. Despite that, the way the figure of narrator is constructed in the text, and the rhetorical devices it uses, are designed to convince the reader that the narrator was there – in the battlefield.

In the second piece of the story, the text activates two other rhetorical devices: focalization and inverse parallelism. The focalization serves as a tool for a change of textual perspective from the groups' collision in the first piece to the personal role of the King of Hungary in the ensuing substantial battle in the second one. The king's figure appears two times, at the beginning of the paragraph and at the end of it, forming something like an essential narrative frame, whereby at first the struggle has to be induced, and subsequently presented as brought to a victorious end by the Christians. A decisive intervention of the King at the beginning causes an inversion in the mood of some nobles who are rather inclined to surrender the field and to flee. In the conclusive part of this paragraph the King literally emerges above the foaming waves of his warriors, urging them to fight "ad honorem Ihesu Christi". The narrator consecutively shows the reader two faces of the King's eminence: the eloquence of persuader and the bravery of warrior. There is hardly more proper evidence of the reliability of narration than this comprehensive, multi-perspective look at the King's figure. The reader hears the King's voice and watches his actions. In everything he is outstanding: a skilful speaker, proficient in moving the audience, and a fearless leader able to inspire his army. Once again, the use of rhetorical devices does not discredit the truthfulness of the description; rather, they produce it. Those who apply such devices do not acknowledge a dispossession of raw factual impressions. On the contrary, the devices' presence does testify to the author's proficiency by conveying the intensity of eyewitness experience. The equilibrium of impression and expression verifies the author's skillful presence both in terms of the event as an observer and in language as a persuader.

I have already called attention to the external features of the Turkish army when it ambushes the intelligence detachment. At this point I have to add another aspect of this fight: the Turks are assaulting the detachment incessantly and severely until final demolition. Now, this feature – the type of attack - is transposed in an inverse order to the King's warriors in the second part of the narrative. At this instant it is their turn to assail the Turks ceaselessly and forcefully. By 'inverse parallelism' I mean that there is a coincidence of the type of action, but, in the first case, it is carried out by one of the sides and in the second case by its adversary. Although the Christians continue to be a minority in the substantial battle, they are nonetheless capable of exercising pressure with the same intensity as their enemy, which leads to an intensification of the Christians' eagerness and strength. Through this comparison, the reader is made even more acutely aware why in the end they overwhelm the strongly outnumbering Turkish army. Anyone who is not simply able to report on an event, but meanwhile is capable of carrying out subtle comparisons and differentiations, is a knower of a situation in the purest sense of the word.

That is why the reader can completely rely on the truthfulness and correctness of a conclusive statement, following this narration:

Quo favente, tantem barbari victi sunt...<sup>49</sup>

Naturally, the conclusion does not mean to imply at all second that this victory is a human achievement, since the "Hungarians" are only mediators or transmitters of "heavenly revenge" on "this mad people".

So, we come to the end of the 15th century, one century after the Battle, when another description of the event could be found in western manuscripts. I mean the so-called *Italian Dukas Translation*, which, according to the predominant opinion, should be subsumed under the western sources. The *Chronicle of Dukas*, Greek by origin, and written about the end of the 15th century, has been translated in Italian right after its compilation. Following Krummbacher<sup>50</sup>, Braun puts forward the idea that, although nothing positive is known about the translator, he is maybe a Slav from Dalmatia. We can easily recognize, due to phrases like "our army", a large personal interest of the translator in the destiny of his Serbian compatriots, his good knowledge of Serbian oral legends, as well as the fact that he supplies his text with many Slavic names and expressions. There is another reason to list the translation in the western group. In line with the medieval praxis the translator proves himself too frivolous with respect to the original, incorporating many supplements in the source text. The document is even more valuable, since in this case we are able to compare the original account of the Kosovo Battle in Greek with the translation, influenced by the previous western tradition of covering the event. The contrast is too sharp as a result, which allows us to extract from it some dominating western matrix and its long-lasting dispositions.

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<sup>49</sup> Braun, opt. cit. p.19: "and with His support the Barbarians have been defeated at last..."

<sup>50</sup> Krummbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur*, Muenchen, 1897, S. 302.

Not surprisingly, the *Dukas Chronicle* starts the narration about the struggle with some details on the preparation and organization of armies.<sup>51</sup> We are already acquainted with two of the elements, usually attributed to the Serbian side.

First, King Lazar, considering the disadvantages of his army with respect to their numbers, turns to his Slav neighbours, asking them to send troops in his support. So we are provided with the information that the Serbian army was actually composed of many Slav detachments under the command of different regional Slav rulers. This composite structure of the Serbian army has a great impact on the further narrative development of the *Dukas Chronicle*. At this stage, it is important to indicate that the second most famous participant in the formation of Slav forces, Bosnia's King Tvrtko, is expressly mentioned

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<sup>51</sup> This proves that the *Dukas Chronicle* is strongly influenced by the Turkish documents, written throughout the 15th century. There the preparation and organization of the armies is a central topic. To my regret, I have at my disposal only the German translation of these texts that I want to cite here. It would be strange to provide my English translation of the German version, translated by Maximilian Braun. See:

1. "Iskender-Näme" written by Ahmedi, and issuing from 1402-1410 in Adrianopol:

*"Die Ungläubigen und Christen, soviel es ihrer gibt bis zum Westen hin, Gaben dem Lazar Truppen ohne Zahl,*

*Um gegen Gazi Müräd Krieg zu führen"*

2. Chronicle of Urug. From the mid-15th century, written in Adrianopol:

*"Daraufhin kam es zur Feindschaft zwischen Sultan Gazi Müräd und Lazar. Lazar schickte zum Sultan Müräd einen Gesandten und sprach: "Ich bin fest entschlossen, mit ihm Von Angesicht zu Angesicht zusammenzutreffen und zu kämpfen. Er möge nur kommen" - so sprach er. Als von Lazar diese Nachricht eintraf, sammelte Müräd Chan ebenfalls Leute von allen Seiten, verschickte Befehle nach allen Seiten und begann ein Heer zu sammeln. Es versammelten sich Krieger aus Anatolien und Rumelien. Zuerst waren aus Anatolien zehntausend Mann Fußvolk bereit, aus Rumelien zehntausend Azep. Dann brachte er an die zwanzigtausend Akindzi zusammen. Insgesamt waren fünfzig bis sechzigtausend Krieger versammelt, denen der Sieg den Weg wies, und mit ihnen zog er nach Kosovo. Kurz, an dem genannten Ort war das Zusammentreffen vereinbart.*

*Der Despot Lazar nahm ebenfalls viele Söldner aus Serben, Arnauten, aus Bosnien und Ungarn. Er sammelte auf diese Weise Krieger aus allen Völkern und zog ebenfalls nach Kosovo. Gazi Müräd Chan nahm seine zwei Söhne mit sich: Bajezid Jyldyrym und Ja'küb Celebi, und marschierte ebenfalls auf. Als die Heere herangekommen waren und sich einander gegenüber aufgestellt hatten, stellte Gazi Müräd auf dem rechten Flügel den Bajezid Jyldyrym, auf dem linken den Ja'küb Celebi auf. Diese beiden standen auf den beiden Flügeln, seine Majestät selber stellte sich aber, vom Glück begleitet, im Zentrum auf. Vorn standen die Azep, die Janitscharen und das übrige Fußvolk. Und als sie dem Heer der Ungläubigen entgegentraten, da stellte Lazar ebenfalls seine Truppen in Schlachtordnung auf. Und so griffen sie einander an. Zu der Zeit gab es noch keine Kanonen und Gewehre. Man kämpfte gewöhnlich mit Pfeilen, Lanzen und Schwertern. Sie wurden handgemein und es begann ein großes Kämpfen und Blutvergießen. Da ist viel Volk von den Muslim und von den Ungläubigen gefallen, zahllose fielen durch das Schwert."*

3. Chronicle of Sükrullah Around 1460:

*Nachdem er (man) dies (alles) für (sein) Jenseitsleben vollbracht hatte, brach er wieder nach Rumelien auf und widmete sich dem Kampfe und (zwar) wandte er sich gegen die Lasen (Serben). Der König der Serben hörte dies, sandte Botschaft zu den Ungläubigen des Westens der Erde und verlangte Hilfe.*

*Von den Wallachen, Ungarn, Tschechen, Serben, Arnauten, Ungaren (sic !) und Franken schickte man Truppen. Mehr als hunderttausend Ungläubige versammelten sich und kamen mit allerlei Waffen heran."*

4. Chronicle of .Asykpasazäde, written around 1484:

*"Da nahm Gazi Müräd Chan seine beiden Söhne, den Bäjzld Chan, der den Sandzak Kutahije und Hamldeli befehligte, und den Ja'küb Celebi, der den Karasy-Sandzak unter sich hatte. Gazi Müräd Chan erließ einen Befehl, daß die Begs des ganzen Landes ein gutes Heer versammeln, sich bereit machen und kommen sollten. . . . [Verse ]. Als die Ungläubigen das Heer des Islams erblickten, richteten sie sofort ihre Lanzen dagegen und griffen an."*

in the Chronicle. Given his reputation in the West as one of the most reliable sources of information about the struggle right after its ending<sup>52</sup>, it is easy to explain why he and his nephew, the commander of the Bosnian detachments, Vlatko Vladenic, are introduced by name, though some others are to come into the account later.

Second, the ambiguous relation to Christian religion is by no means dropped out here. On the one hand, the Serbs are predestined to stop the devastating raid of the Turkish forces into the Christian lands. This time the mighty idea that in the struggle with the Turks they save the whole of Christendom is expressed in the following words:

... per defensione dela cara patria, di figlioli, di parenti, dela fede et sacra et sancta legge evangelica sotto l'insegna dela sancta croce.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, a victory could only be dedicated only to God and won in His name:

... per amor de Cristo nostro redemptore...<sup>54</sup>

I have already said that this recurring formula expresses in a slightly modified way the general medieval belief that everything - ups and downs, triumphs and defeats – stems from God's benevolence. As I have already mentioned earlier, and as I must repeat many times later, this 'triple-bind' of medieval religious faith – (1) everything stems from God and (2) therefore we are destined to fight on Earth for Him, (3) but just because everything is in Him beyond human will, He is going to determine whether we win or lose – finds its ultimate foundation in New-Testament Christianity, but rather in Old-Testament Judaism. Over time, the dogmatic contrast between the two Testaments has been softened to the goals of earthly political legitimation.

## **7. Serbian Oral Epic Songs**

From the 18th c. on, from Peter II Petrovic Njegos and Vuk Karajic to some contemporary scholars and writers, a constant claim has been reproduced that on 15th June, 1393 on the Kosovo Plain God made a covenant with the Serbs. But I don't think that all these scholars and writers have ever fully realized how right they are and how wrong they are at the same time. They are right that God granted a covenant to the Serbs in Kosovo, but they are wrong about the number, and what is more, about the content of the covenants.

### **7.1. God's CTovenant as His Ultimate Epiphany**

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<sup>52</sup> See *Tvrko's Letter* discussed above.

<sup>53</sup> "...in defence of our precious homeland, our children, our parents, the faith and the sacred evangelical orders under the auspices of the Holy Cross..."

<sup>54</sup> "... out of love for Jesus, our Savior..."

God's giving His covenant is a founding and fundamental gesture of Biblical ontology. The covenant presents a promise establishing the onto-theological relation between God and man. For this reason, the place, where the covenant is made, implies the ultimate idea of 'holiness'. I will try to prove in the following pages, that some pieces of the textual basis of the Kosovo myth – the so called Kosovo Cycle of epic poems – encodes the idea that God gives the Serbs two covenants, which allegorically simulate the two fundamental acts of covenant-giving in the Bible. This means that God establishes a special relation with the Serbs and this act occurred in Kosovo. The place where such an act might occur is nothing else but the very place of holiness.

I want to clarify my version of how the 'holiness' of Kosovo's territory has come into existence, and how it was mapped, by pointing out that all well-known components of the Kosovo myth are not powerful enough to explain its magnitude in Serbian history, or to explain why Kosovo is a 'holy' territory and what is the content of this 'holiness'. We need additional hermeneutical efforts to reveal the miracle of the Battle on the Kosovo Plain.

Let me follow now the three steps I have just mentioned.

In the beginning, I want to focus my attention on three epic poems, which are the initial textual source of the Kosovo myth – *Supper in Krushevats*, *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* and a short fragment which usually opens the publications of the so called Kosovo Cycle.<sup>55</sup> All of them give an account of the events on the day immediately before the Battle on the Kosovo Plain and thus concern the same temporal unit.

*Supper in Krushevats* develops an allegorical account of the supper on the Day of Unleavened Bread when Jesus eats Passover with his disciples. We know this Biblical story from the Gospels of Luke 22: 7-20 and John 13: 2-20. I am not going to run a meticulous textual analysis of the poem. It is obvious that the figure of Tsar Lazarus is an accurate imitation of Jesus Christ. Lazarus' noblemen – Yug Bogdan and his sons Yugovichi, Vuk Brankovic, Milosh Kobilic, Ivan Kosancic, Milan Toplitsa - are portrayed in accordance with the underlying pattern typical of Jesus' disciples. The focal point of the allegory is expressed in the following verses containing the words of Lazarus:

I'll only toast the health of Milosh Obilich.  
Hail, Cousin! friend of mine and traitor!  
First of all my friend- but finally my betrayer.  
Tomorrow you'll betray me on the field of Kosovo.

«We come across a traditional junac supper»,<sup>56</sup> claims Bulgarian folklorist Radost Ivanova. Her interpretation of *Supper in Krushevac* assigns the narrative of heroic dinner entirely to the folk-epic stereotype. In this stereotype, the usual way to trigger the story is to set a character in such circumstances, where he suffers a number of setbacks and is compelled to fight them in order to assert his right cause. Ivanova points out that in

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<sup>55</sup> I am using an English translation of these poems accomplished by John Matthias and Vladeta Vuckovic.

<sup>56</sup> Ivanova, R. *Epos-Obred-Mit*, S., 1995, p. 91

different songs from Serbian folk epics the supper before the Battle situates Milosh Obilic in disadvantageous contexts. In the first case Milosh gets the rare benevolence to take seat at the table among other Serbian noblemen just in front of King Lazar. This is a definite sign that he is recognized as their equal:

u zastavu vojvodu Miloša,  
i do njega dv'je srpske vojvode:  
jedno mi je Kosančić Ivane,  
a drugo je Toplica Milane.<sup>57</sup>

Yet, in the subsequent lines the promotion of Milosh into the circles of nobility is used to sharpen the contrast between his new stance and the accusation of treachery that Lazar brings against him. The welcome into the nobility gives even more emphasis to the alleged betrayal. This is actually a double treachery, immediately exposed by Lazar.<sup>58</sup> This gives rise to the narrative development. Disgraced by King Lazar in front of all Serbian nobility, Milosh reacts to the offence, swearing to kill the Sultan and to prove his loyalty.

In another version Milosh's bringing into disrepute is signaled through the position he has at the table:

...svi se junaci redom poredise,  
Milos, kaze, dole ha dno s ovre...<sup>59</sup>

Lazar puts Milosh at the end of the table and calls him "friend and traitor" in the presence of all nobility:

Zdrav, Milošu, vjero i nevjero!<sup>60</sup>

Lazar shows himself suspicious of Milosh's courage and faithfulness. As in the first variant, the narrative receives momentum through the damage done to Milosh's reputation. The assassination of Murad turns out to be a test of his loyalty.

A combination of religion (Passover), history (Kosovo Battle) and folk mythology in the episode with Milosh makes difficult the disentanglement of the factual and the generic formal imagination.

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<sup>57</sup> Across from Lazarus is Captain Milosh;  
And next to him are these two noble knights:  
The first: Ivan Kosanchich,  
And the second: Milan Toplitsa.

<sup>58</sup> This overlapping of admission to the court and betrayal goes in line with another topic of the Kosovo Cycle: the prophetic signs and dreams about the impending defeat of the Serbian army. Since foretelling based on dreams and tokens has no grounds in terms of reason and experience, it is necessary to find a transitional modus between it and some argumentative explanation. At the same time Lazar is prophesying the defeat and is explaining it through the logic of betrayal.

<sup>59</sup> Srpske narodne umotvorine, p. 234, # 463

<sup>60</sup> Hail, Cousin! friend of mine and traitor!

However, I would like to draw attention not to the topic of betrayal, which implements the fullness of Biblical allegory, but rather to the very toast proposed by Tsar Lazarus to the honor of Milosh Obilic, who is suspected as a new Judas. In fact, the whole poem is dedicated to this toast.

So to your health, dear Milosh, drink it up,  
And keep the golden goblet to remember Lazarus.

I would highlight the phrase “the golden goblet”, for, as I intend to show later, it is a key to the solution of the miraculous puzzle of the Kosovo myth.

I am aware that an interpretation of *Supper in Krushevats* as a poem constructing the ‘holiness’ of Kosovo has been proposed many times. According to this line of thought, the events in the eve of the Battle strongly resemble the Holy Supper on the evening of the Day of Unleavened Bread. They acquire a symbolic significance from the correspondence with the Bible; that is why they are proof that God has intervened in the Kosovo story to consecrate this territory.

I am not so pleased with such an interpretation. It does not explain the relation between Kosovo as a territory and the allegorical correspondence between the events concerning the Battle and the Biblical account of the Supper. Not every place in the Bible is a ‘holy’ place, and the house where the supper in the above-mentioned Gospels took place is not named. It does not explain what is the relation between Kosovo as a territory and the allegorical correspondence between the events concerning the Battle and the Biblical account of the Supper. Not every place in the Bible is a ‘holy’ place and the house where the Supper in the above mentioned Gospels took place is not named ‘holy’.

Turning to the second poem - *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* - we can discern another network of Biblical allusions, which are much more elevated and complicated. The specific gravity of Biblical symbolism in this poem strongly outbalances the references to real events. Except for the figures of Tsar Lazarus, the Patriarch of Serbia, the priesthood and the central topic of the impending battle against the Turks, this poem weaves a tissue of Biblical motives whose deciphering demands intensive hermeneutical work. Let me quote the central passage of the poem:

Lazar! Lazar! Tsar of noble family,  
Which kingdom is it that you long for most?  
Will you choose a heavenly crown today?  
Or will you choose an earthly crown?

According to *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia*, it does not matter which Kingdom Tsar Lazar would choose. Since God is going to support him by all means, he shall be victorious.

If you choose the earth...: your enemy will be destroyed  
But if you choose the skies then build a church

The connoisseurs of the Bible know that the idea/image of the Kingdom of Heaven is of crucial importance for the New Testament. It is discussed at length in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 3-25. Yet, there is a sharp incongruity between the Biblical description/story of the Kingdom of Heaven and the dilemma between the Heavenly Kingdom and the Earthly Kingdom, which is at stake in the poem. Although the Bible opposes earthly to celestial life, it never expresses them in terms of Kingdoms. There is only one Kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew – the Kingdom of Heaven - which is without alternative. We must keep in mind the highly metaphorical status that this Kingdom has in the Bible. It could not be allegorically or literally compared to any political organization we know from human history.

Mt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs."

In relation to this, I would like to mention something very important. The Kingdom of Heaven is promised not to the Kings, but to anyone who would follow God's commandments, especially the poor.

I have already stressed the double structure of the Kosovo myth. The poems, the essential tissue of the Myth, are forced to combine the knowledge of the Battle with the Biblical and ecclesiastical patterns, through which it could be appropriated in the Middle Ages. Evidently, it is hardly possible to disentangle the convoluted texture of these accounts so as to be in a position to distil the 'real' events from the highly prefigured ways of their representation. Seen in a narratological perspective, these are not independent strata. I discern 'story' and 'discourse' in these medieval ecclesiastical writings in order to suggest that, on the one hand, there is a historical event – the Battle of Kosovo, which I choose to name 'political prerequisite' of the poems, and on the other hand, there are a number of accounts of this event, which I call 'narratological prerequisites' of the poems. I have access to the epic poems only through the narratological prerequisites and not through the political ones. It doesn't mean that I discard the importance of the 'pure' event. I am just saying that it is impossible to extract from medieval writings the substance of some 'pure' event as it has exactly occurred. I do not know exactly how the political and the ecclesiastical are intertwined in the Kosovo myth, since I don't possess them in a non-entangled condition, but I know that the entanglement has occurred. For this reason I want to analyse what the entanglement looks like; I wouldn't dare suggest how it was constructed.

In what follows I want to put forth a hypothesis about why the topic of the Earthly Kingdom emerges in *Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia*. Many scholars<sup>61</sup> are confident that the Battle actually was equal. The evidence: the Turks withdrew right after the collision, which means that they did not have forces to take advantage of what might be called 'victory'.

Thus, we come to the omnipotent decision, taken by Lazar, which is introduced by the following argument:

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<sup>61</sup> Let me mention Ranciman and after him Malkolm.

Earthly kingdoms are such passing things -  
A heavenly kingdom, raging in the dark, endures eternally.  
And Lazarus chose heaven, not the earth,

One of the best Serbian researchers of Serbian medieval writings, George Trifunovic, states that the image/idea of the Heavenly Kingdom is carved in the very basis of Serbian spiritual development in the Middle Ages. He interprets this idea as an essential element of God's revelation.

Jesus' speeches on how to approach the Heavenly Kingdom are part of the introduction of the Holy Bible to the Serbian lands. Jesus' message of a sacrificial way to the Heavenly Kingdom reaches its peak through the spiritual deeds of Serbian saints in the death of Prince Lazar.<sup>62</sup>

I cannot agree with Trifunovic since in his comment the image of the Heavenly Kingdom tacitly overlaps with another idea, which, I should acknowledge, is related to it, but has a different semantics. The idea of God's Kingdom, which could not be seen, but rather is in the process of emerging in the human soul – expressed mainly in Luke, 18, 20-21 - should not be mixed with the Heavenly Kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew.

Nevertheless, I agree with Trifunovic that the opposition Heavenly – Earthly Kingdom can be reconstructed on the basis of a number of Serbian medieval manuscripts. Serbian church poetry evolves multifarious topoi that are recognizable as predicates of these Kingdoms.<sup>63</sup> This reconstruction supports the hypothesis of the theological origin of the Kosovo cycle.

In this regard, the relation of pre-battle texts to the writings of Lazar's martyrdom, originating from the years after the Battle, should be envisaged as a crucial part of the analysis of folk songs.

Therefore, we could conclude that the opposition of the two Kingdoms – the symbolic Kingdom in Heaven and the political Kingdom on earth - is an invention of the poem and one of the forthcoming tasks of this text is to answer the question why such a perspective was chosen.

God promises the earthly kingdom to Lazar under no preliminary conditions. Lazar should not comply with some preliminary standards in order to acquire the worldly kingdom. The only thing Lazar has to do is to make a completely free choice. This is the only condition, which considered logically, means rather the absence of any condition.

In this verse the listeners could observe a radical gesture of God. He has chosen Lazar and the Serbs; therefore on no account will he abandon them. On the contrary, God has predestined the whole, everything, Being, to Lazar.

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<sup>62</sup> Trifunovic, G. Kososvsko stradanje i nebesno carstvo. Prema srpskim srednovekovnim knjizevnim spisima. In : Bozic, I. and Curic, V. Eds. O Knezu Lazaru, Beograd, 1971, p. 255.

<sup>63</sup> Opt. Cit. p. 257.

Choosing eternity, Lazarus declares his longing for God, for Orthodoxy, for the Church, and at the same time rejects any earthly acquisitions. Taken as an ultimate message of the poem, this opposition is certainly not surprising. Still, I am aware that my analysis would be pointless and boring if I stop here. Furthermore, I don't think we can rely on this perfunctory reading of the poem. That is why I will try to assert that *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia*, as well as *The Supper in Krushevats*, has a subdued meaning, which can elucidate our understanding of the holiness of Kosovo.

Before I concentrate on this subdued meaning, I would like to draw attention to a small fragment from the Kosovo epic cycle.

Sultan Murad fell on level Kosovo!

...

Lazar! Tsar! Lord of all the Serbs,  
What has never been can never be:  
One land only but two masters,  
A single people who are doubly taxed

Considering other historical sources, it is strange that the fragment describes Lazar as Tsar of all Serbs. Moreover, all Serbs are one people, inhabiting a limited territory. Once again we can see how the Kosovo cycle flatly contradicts the purport of other historical data. It seems to me, however, that the visionary construction of the topics and events in Kosovo – as they are presented in the epic poems - is much more important to understanding the Kosovo myth than the comparison of different types of texts. Or to recapitulate, the ultimate message of the fragment is expressed in the following words: “Kosovo is the common land of all Serbs, who are a single unified people under the reign of one single ruler – Tsar Lazar.”

I have to acknowledge that in contradistinction to the usual reception of the Kosovo myth I conceive the proposed textual analysis of the Kosovo epic poems only as a prerequisite, as a preliminary phase, towards understanding the previously introduced neurosis of space.

In order to prove my hypothesis, I am going to quote two very significant passages from contemporary Serbian authors, who discuss two periods, distant from each other, in Serbian history, the first one preceding the Kosovo poems and concerning a text written by the Serbian Patriarch Danilo III in 1393; the second one succeeding the poem and focusing on the Serbian revolutions between 1804 - 1878.

The first quotation is from Bishop Anastasije Jevtic:

The ethic of Kosovo as the national covenant of Serbian history was even expressed by Patriarch Danilo III acclaiming Tsar Lazar and the Kosovo martyrs with these words in 1393: “It is better to choose death with honor and sacrifice, than life in shame,” and “let us praise Tsar Lazar as a martyr and saint”, in which his martyrdom was exalted to both a

historic and a meta-historic ideal, soon became the source and inspiration of the well-known Kosovo cycle of epic poetry.<sup>64</sup>

Here is the quotation from Dusan Batakovic:

When the Serbs on other Balkan lands fought to preserve their religious freedoms and national rights, their banners bore as their beacon the Kosovo idea embodied in the Kosovo covenant, which was woven into folk legend and upheld in uprisings against alien domination. The Kosovo covenant - the choice of freedom in the celestial empire instead of humiliation and slavery in the temporal world - although irrational as a collective consciousness, is still the one permanent connective tissue that imbues the Serbs with the feeling of national entity and lends meaning to their join efforts.<sup>65</sup>

In 1393 Serbian Patriarch Danilo III wrote about the Kosovo covenant of the Serbian people. Nowadays, Jevtic and Batakovic maintain that the Kosovo covenant has been preserved in the Kosovo epic cycle and in the 19th c. it became the foundation of Serbian national identity. To describe the content of the Kosovo covenant, Jevtic quotes the words of Danilo III, which form the backbone of the plot of *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* and its pivotal message. Batakovic, who again quotes the poem, confirms the content of the Kosovo covenant.

There is no doubt that there is something mysterious about the Kosovo cycle. These are not merely poems, this is not simply some textual basis of the Kosovo myth - this is a covenant. Yet, the fact that these three poems contain a covenant, which forms the core of the Kosovo myth, is not obvious at all. There are many literary scholars, historians and politicians who are eager to call such a statement 'overinterpretation', 'mysticism' and 'manipulation' of the Kosovo epic poems. They maintain in the media that the Kosovo myth is a groundless, fictional instigator of ugly nationalism.

I would humbly protest to the latter by saying the following: both from a literary and a theological perspective, it is obvious that *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* and *Supper in Krushevat*s contain as an underlying structure the model of the Biblical covenant. So we have to read once again the poems through the Biblical patterns in order to understand their meaning.

Because of the fundamental importance of the two Biblical covenants, their exegesis is the most complex hermeneutical issue in the study of the Holy Bible. For this reason, I intend to use only part of it for the purposes of my analysis. The Biblical covenant is so crucial because it determines the onto-theological relation between God and man. The covenant is in the form of promise or oath, which God extends to man in order to save him, if and only if he follows God's ontological commandments. There are two covenants in the Bible – the old one and the new one, which correspond respectively to the Old and the New Testaments.

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<sup>64</sup>Rev.Bishop Atanasije Jevtic *The Heavenly Kingdom in Serbia's Historic Destiny*: In Dorich, W. Kosovo.

<sup>65</sup> Batakovic, *Kosovo and Methohia, A Historical Survey*; I D. T. Batakovic, *Od srpske revolucije do istočne krize: 1804-1878*, in: *Kosovo i Metohija u srpskoj istoriji*, pp. 172-208.

It seems to me that the most lucid description of the Old Covenant is given in Luke 1: 73-75:

*72 He has dealt mercifully with our fathers and remembered His holy covenant-- 73 the oath that He swore to our father Abraham. He has granted us that, 74 having been rescued from our enemies' clutches, we might serve Him without fear 75 in holiness and righteousness in His presence all our days.*

The first covenant is made between God and Abraham as a father of all Israelis. God promises to rescue them from all their enemies. God reaffirms this oath later by giving it again to the other fathers of Israel, the great prophets. I would like to stress out the time it occurs:

the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not continue in My covenant, I disregarded them, says the Lord.<sup>66</sup>

The reaffirmation appears in the moment of the release from the bondage in Egypt. However, the Jews don't remain in this covenant, committing sins against God. This is the time God decides to give them a new covenant.

8 But finding fault with His people, He says: "Look, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - 10 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the Lord: "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they will be My people."<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 8:8-10:

Hebrews 8:6 describes who will be the main character of this second covenant:

But Jesus has now obtained a superior ministry, and to that degree He is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been legally enacted on better promises.

God gives the New covenant through the mediation of Jesus Christ. How this happens, we can read in Luke 22:20:

In the same way He also took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

If I could roughly summarize, the first covenant of God with Abraham and other leaders of Israel contains the promise to Israelis that they would be rescued from every enemy in all their days if and only if they would obey God's commandments.

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<sup>66</sup> Hebrews 8:9

<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 8:8-10:

God said to Abraham, "As for you, you will keep my covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations."<sup>68</sup>

But they commit sins by disregarding this covenant, after God has brought them out of the bondage in Egypt.

As a consequence, God makes one tremendous and ultimate gesture. He decides to rescue all people irrevocably, even against their will. God gives a new covenant, in which Jesus sheds his blood as redemption for all human sins. There is something very important about the transition from the first to the second covenant. God makes the first covenant with one people – Israel - and its leaders – Abraham and the prophets; the second one is made with all peoples through the mediation of Jesus. God will save all Christians as a gesture of an ultimate redemption. In the first covenant Israelis are God's people, because God promises to save them from all enemies and from any bondage. In the second covenant, God makes all Christians His people through the sacrifice of Jesus, which is redemption for all human sins.

Keeping in mind the Biblical structure of the covenant, we can see that there are layers of profound meanings encoded in the three poems. If we look carefully into *Supper in Krushevats* we can detect a third allegorical message. The Supper of Lazarus with his nobles does not simply imitate the supper of Jesus with His disciples. Another necessary hermeneutical reading of the poem might be suggested here. Not surprisingly, it is dedicated to the toast with the nobles. The cup of wine is the symbol of the New Covenant. The golden goblet of Milosh Obilic corresponds to this cup:

And keep the golden goblet to remember Lazarus.

The remembrance of the cup is a remembrance of the covenant.

In the same way He also took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."<sup>69</sup>

Repeating the gesture of Jesus, Tsar Lazar makes a new symbolic covenant, pledging to shed his blood, hence to rescue all Christians.

While *Supper in Krushevats* structurally refers to Christ's covenant with Christians, *The Fragment of the Kosovo Battle* and *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* draw upon the Biblical model of the Old Covenant between God and the Israelis.

The fragment of the Kosovo cycle depicts Tsar Lazar as Lord of Serbs, who are one people. He is father of the Serbs, just as Abraham and the prophets are fathers of Israel. In *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* we see two crucial elements of the Old Covenant. First of all, this is a covenant between God and a leader- Tsar Lazar - the king of all generations of Serbs. Second, Tsar Lazar fulfills his part of the oath willfully, because he has the right to choose between two Kingdoms. I would like to point out here that God will support Lazar, no matter what his choice is. This is the third evidence that

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<sup>68</sup> Ge 17:9

<sup>69</sup> 1Co 11:25

the Serbs are presented as the people of God. If Lazar chooses the earthly kingdom, God will support him, and his enemies will be destroyed. Otherwise, Lazar will again succeed, this time in Heaven. I have mentioned that the message of *The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia* is a combination of motives both from the Old and the New Testament. One part of the Old Covenant is God's support for Israel in all its days, but the idea that these days will be distributed between earth and Heaven is absent in the Old Testament. It appears in the New Testament. So the poem interweaves motives from both Testaments in order to assert the willfully made choice of Lazar. On the one hand, it states that God will bring the earthly victory to His people – the Serbs. This might be seen as part of the imaginary warfare of the Old Testament and the Old Covenant. On the other hand, God will allow the Serbs in the Kingdom of Heaven and they will be saved forever. God promises them both the victory and the Kingdom of Heaven. This is a double covenant. On the one hand, the Serbs are the people of God. On the other hand, they are the true Christians. Tsar Lazar is both the Leader of God's people and the Savior of all Christians. After Abraham and the prophets, after Jesus, Lazar is depicted in the Kosovo cycle as the new father and the new mediator, whom God has chosen to make a new, maybe third, covenant with His people.