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Recent Academic Research on Esotericism in the Balkans

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Abstract

In this paper I offer a concise analysis of contemporary scholarship on esotericism in the countries of former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. After a brief historical contextualization, I examine the development and principal features of this scholarship over the last three decades. My main argument is that, due to various historical reasons, there is a stark discrepancy between the abundant presence of esoteric ideas and practices in these countries and the extent of specialized scholarship dealing with them. I also suggest that there is an uneven development of esotericism studies across the region, but that these studies are gradually finding their place in South Slavic academia.

Keywords

esotericism studies – former Yugoslavia – Bulgaria – academia

This overview is concerned with scholarly production on esotericism in the countries of former Yugoslavia and, to a limited extent, Bulgaria. Due to the sheer scope of the intended examination, my presentation will inevitably remain fragmentary. Nevertheless, since *Slavica non leguntur*, it might prove useful to the English-speaking reader with limited or no access to the scholarly publications written in the languages of the region.

It is safe to say that until recently esotericism in the countries of former Yugoslavia rested almost entirely in the hands of its practitioners. The instances of serious and clearly articulated academic approaches to the field are still rare compared to the overall scholarly production in the humanities. However, it

looks like the academic study of esotericism is finally taking hold at least in some parts of South Slavic academia.

The scarcity of academic research in the field of esotericism stands in stark contrast to the abundant presence of various forms of esotericism in the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual life of former Yugoslavia and its successor states, dating back at least to the early nineteenth century—the time well before the creation of the unitary state. Moreover, some esoteric currents of thought undoubtedly reach even deeper into the past, albeit in isolated corners of the South Slavic cultural space.

For historical reasons, the emergence of interest in esotericism—implying here its “Western” forms of appearance—varied greatly both chronologically and regionally. Since a major part of the Balkans had been under the rule (and on the fringes) of the Ottoman Empire for centuries, it remained isolated from the wider currents of European cultural history such as Renaissance humanism or the Enlightenment. As a result, some of those forms of Western esotericism that were more or less common in Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary—especially those dating back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, such as alchemy and ritual magic—had remained virtually unknown in most of the Slavic Balkans. The exceptions are some regions of present-day Croatia and Slovenia (primarily Dalmatia and Istria), which were exposed to the cultural and political influences of Italy and Central and Western Europe. Notable examples in this regard are the Croatian Neoplatonists Frane Petrić (Franciscus Patricius, 1529–1596) and Pavao Skalić (Paulus Scalichius, 1534–1575), who were strongly influenced by the *Corpus Hermeticum*, as well as the alchemist Matija Alberti Matulić from Split (1561–1623).¹

By the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century, with the growing influence of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, a plethora of esoteric ideas and teachings started to penetrate more deeply into the Balkan Peninsula. In this context, the example of Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851), a Prince-Bishop of Montenegro, philosopher, and poet, stands out as remarkable in his time. In his philosophical-theological poem *Luča mikrokozma* [*The ray of the Microcosm*], Njegoš, an active leader of the Eastern Orthodox Church, openly promulgated heterodox and esoteric ideas such as the preexistence of the soul, the gnostic duality of the world, the body as *carcer animi*, mystical magnetism etc. The Montenegrin philosopher-ruler was only one among the early local intellectuals increasingly influenced by Christian theosophy, Freemasonry, Martinism

1 Banić-Pajnić, *Smisao i značenje Hermesove objave* [‘The sense and meaning of Hermes’ revelation’], 115–156.

and other esoteric currents of the time, and through them by much older concepts originating from gnosticism, Manicheism, and possibly even Kabbalah.²

At the turn of the twentieth century these influences were already deeply rooted in some parts of the South Slavic intelligentsia and literary circles, adding to the picture the growing appeal of Blavatskian Theosophy and Steiner's Anthroposophy, with various forms of Asian mysticism looming large in the background. Many esoteric currents appeared in the form of Pan-Slavic doctrines, as exemplified by the work of Dimitrije Mitrinović (1887–1953) in Serbia and Petăr Dănov (1864–1944) in Bulgaria, tightly linked to the question of national identities in a region troubled by its late entrance into modernity. In the period between the two world wars esoteric activities in Yugoslavia steadily developed in multiple ways, attracting even some prominent members of the scholarly community, such as the renowned classicist Miloš N. Đurić or philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević.³

What strikes the eye is the resilience and appeal of esoteric doctrines in the time of communist Yugoslavia (1945–1991) with the Marxian dialectic materialism as its official ideology. Although confined to individuals and minority groups, esotericism blossomed in arts and literature, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. This period was also marked by the significant rise of organized occult groups and practices developed by enthusiasts like Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski or an adept known by the name Master Leo. A stunning testimony to that rise was the fact that by the end of the 1980s the Yugoslav branch of the *Ordo Templi Orientis* was the most populous in Europe, second in size only to the community in the USA.⁴ On a parallel track, the dissemination and popularization of esoteric ideas mostly came in the form of literary translations, which gained the attention of wider audiences and occasionally even mixed with the genre of popular science.

With the fall of the communist regime and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the successor states gradually entered the process of globalization, marked, *inter alia*, by religious pluralism and the vast range of subcultures, including those of esoteric and occult provenance.

In view of all this, it is somewhat surprising that the fully articulated scholarly reflection on these cultural phenomena started to emerge only in the first decade of the twenty-first century. There are, however, important precursors to

2 Radulović, *Podzemni tok* ['The Undercurrent'], 65–112.

3 Radulović, *Podzemni tok 2* ['The Undercurrent 2'], 35–63.

4 Djurdjević, 'Hidden Wisdom in the Ill-Ordered House', 92.

be mentioned. Throughout the twentieth century, many topics that are nowadays commonly subsumed under the blanket term of esotericism were tackled within the framework of various humanistic disciplines: ethnology, folklore studies, religious studies, art history, literary studies etc. Njegoš with his puzzling *Ray of the Microcosm* is a case in point. Anica Savić-Rebac (1892–1953), a renowned Serbian classicist, undertook a daunting task of translating Njegoš's long and complex poem into German in order to present it to Hans Leisegang and Gershom Scholem and hear their opinion on the possible gnostic and Kabbalistic elements in the poem.⁵ Roughly in the same period, ethnologists and folklore scholars such as Jovan Erdeljanović, Tihomir Đorđević and Veselin Čajkanović laid the foundations of the scholarly studies of the traditional folk magic with its practices and beliefs (e. g. the belief in vampires and witches).⁶ The later decades of the twentieth century revealed an increasing interest of literary scholars in various occult and esoteric motifs appearing in the works of Yugoslav writers—however, always as an integral part of broader literary analyses.

An important precursor of the contemporary regional scholarship on esotericism is the work of Erna Banić-Pajnić, a Croatian scholar of Renaissance humanism (Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb), who was, to my knowledge, the first in Yugoslav academia to deal with the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In her well-known study *Smisao i značenje Hermesove objave* [‘The sense and meaning of Hermes' revelation', 1989], based on her doctoral dissertation, Banić-Pajnić analyzed the influence of Hermetism on the Croatian Renaissance philosophers (Nikola Gučetić, Frane Petrić, Pavao Skalić and others), arguing that it was particularly strong in Petrić. In her later work she also examined Marsilio Ficino's influence on Frane Petrić, especially concerning Ficino's theory of love.⁷ In 2011 Banić-Pajnić edited a Croatian translation of Petrić's Latin translation of *The Chaldean Oracles*, furnishing it with her comments.⁸ In her decades-long study of Petrić, Banić-Pajnić has demonstrated that his *pia philosophia* was deeply rooted in some of the most prominent currents of Western esotericism.

5 One of the most important results of her research was the essay titled ‘Njegoš, Kabala i Filon’ [‘Njegoš, the Kabbalah and Philo’], first published in 1952.

6 A good example is Đorđević's work ‘Vampir u verovanju naših naroda’ [‘The vampire in the beliefs of our nations’, 1953]—‘nations’ here pertaining to the constituent nations of the communist Yugoslavia.

7 ‘Marsilio Ficino and Franciscus Patricius on Love’, an unpublished public lecture, Olomouc, 2014.

8 *Franciscus Patricius: Zoroaster et eius CCCXX Oracula chaldaica* [‘Frane Petrić: Zoroaster and his 320 Chaldean Oracles’], 2011. This is a trilingual edition, consisting of the Greek original, Petrić's Latin translation, and the Croatian translation of Petrić.

For more than a decade, Nemanja Radulović, a scholar of Serbian folk literature and folklore (Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade), has been actively engaged both in Serbian and international scholarship with his research on esotericism. He was the first to fully introduce the conceptual framework of the academic studies of esotericism in Serbia. In his groundbreaking work, a collection of essays titled *Podzemni tok. Ezoterično i okultno u srpskoj književnosti* [‘The Undercurrent. The esoteric and the occult in Serbian literature’] from 2009, Radulović examines the presence of various esoteric ideas and doctrines in Serbian literature from the late-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. From Atanasije Stojković, the author of the first Serbian novel in the genre of the initiatic story (*Kandor ili otkrovenie Egipetskih tain* [‘Kandor, or a Revelation of Egyptian Mysteries’, 1800]), through Njegoš and his *Ray of Microcosm*, to Dimitrije Mitrović with his concept of “panhumanity”, Radulović analyzes the complex threads of spiritualism, Anthroposophy, Theosophy, Kabbalah, Martinism, Mesmerism, Freemasonry and other esoteric traditions that permeated parts of Serbian literature. Of no less importance is Radulović’s introductory text, in which he gives a detailed account of the historical development of the academic studies of esotericism, with names such as Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Arthur Versluis, Kocku von Stuckrad or Massimo Introvigne appearing in Serbian scholarly discourse probably for the first time.

Roughly a decade later, in 2020, Radulović published a voluminous study entitled *Podzemni tok 2* [‘The undercurrent 2’]. Thematically, it marks a continuation of the previous work, dealing with esotericism in Serbian literature from the 1950s to 2000. However, it is more developed both in terms of methodology and theory: it is an integral, comprehensive history of the subject based on the impressively rich source material and the most relevant scholarship in the areas of literary studies and esotericism studies alike. By scrutinizing the works of some of the most prominent Serbian authors such as Danilo Kiš and Milorad Pavić, Radulović convincingly argues that, from the 1960s onward, various esoteric currents entered Serbian literature even more forcefully than in the preceding century and a half. In addition to literary fiction, he examines the work of some artistic groups of the time (such as *Mediala*), which also acted as disseminators of esoteric ideas in the society.

In 2016 Radulović organized the second biannual CEENASWE conference at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade; in 2018 he edited a volume of proceedings from the conference, entitled *Esotericism, Literature and Culture in Central and Eastern Europe* and consisting of twenty papers. He was also the co-editor (with Karolina Maria Hess) of the proceedings from the first CEENASWE conference held in Budapest in 2014 [*Studies on Western Esotericism in Central*

and Eastern Europe, 2019].⁹ Apart from these major contributions, Radulović published a number of papers covering a variety of esoteric topics linked to the local and regional milieu, such as Slavic neopaganism, neo-Bogomilism, folk magic, Freemasonry, Theosophy, etc.¹⁰ An active member of ESSWE and CEENASWE, Radulović remains one of the pivotal figures in the academic studies of esotericism in East-Central Europe.

Another important researcher of esotericism with links to the regional context is Gordan Djurdjevic, an independent scholar formerly affiliated with the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University, who moved to Canada and specialized in religious and Asian studies. All his works are written in English and internationally accessible. Djurdjevic's main area of academic interest is Indian spirituality (yoga and tantra) and its influence on Western esotericism, to which he dedicated two monographs: *Masters of Magical Powers: The Nāth Yogis in the Light of Esoteric Notions* (2008) and *India and the Occult: The Influence of South Asian Spirituality on Modern Western Occultism* (2014). In 2019 Djurdjevic co-translated a group of late-medieval texts written in Old Hindi and traditionally attributed to Gorakhnāth, one of the founders of the Order of Nāth Yogis, and he equipped the translation with an introductory text and notes (*Sayings of Gorakhnāth*). He has also authored a number of papers on topics related to Western esotericism vis-à-vis Indian esoteric traditions, including several works on Aleister Crowley and Kenneth Grant.¹¹

One of Djurdjevic's works is particularly important for the regional context: in *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, a collection of essays he co-edited with Henrik Bogdan (2013), Djurdjevic provided, as he put it, 'a short survey of occultism in former Yugoslavia' (the essay titled 'Hidden Wisdom in the Ill-Ordered House'). It turns out, however, that this short survey was the first, much needed academic overview of the occult doctrines and activities in Yugoslavia in the period after World War II. Having provided a general context, Djurdjevic focuses on three main topics: the activities of the artistic group *Mediala*, the activities and books of Živorad Mihajlović Slavinski (perhaps the most well-known Yugoslav occultist), and the emergence of Crowley's Thelemic doctrines and the OTO in Yugoslavia, with special regard to the work the Slovenian author Janez Trobentar, who translated Crowley and devotedly wrote on Thelema. The

9 See also the previous paper in this volume by György E. Szőnyi.

10 The scope of Radulović's interests can be gauged by the topical diversity of his papers, such as 'Slavia Esoterica Between East and West' (2015); 'Contemporary Magic Healing in Serbia and New Age' (2019); 'Esoteric Current in Serbian and Yugoslav Interwar Freemasonry' (2021), etc.

11 See, for instance, his paper 'Wishing You a Speedy Termination of Existence' (2019).

main conclusions of Djurdjević's survey closely match those from Radulović's book *The Undercurrent 2*, namely that former Yugoslavia was the seat of vigorous esoteric communities and enthusiastic individuals, pointing to the fact that, despite political circumstances, esotericism was not marginal to, but an integral part of modern culture.

As mentioned above, apart from the ideas and doctrines coming from the West, there is yet another branch of esotericism studies, that which is based on folk traditions, beliefs, and practices of the region. Even though this area is commonly approached through the mainstream disciplines of ethnology, anthropology, and folklore studies, a growing number of scholars conduct their research within the conceptual framework of the academic studies of esotericism.¹² In fact, in many cases these two branches cannot be clearly separated. As Djurdjević points out in his survey on occultism in Yugoslavia, by the end of the twentieth century many native esoteric notions were built into 'a diverse amalgam ... produced by the intersection of various European and global streams of influence that created a superstructure over the already present foundation consisting of the traditional forms of folk-magic'.¹³

One part of this "superstructure" gave rise to the studies of native "shamanism"—those forms of traditional belief and practice that bear some resemblance to the widespread popular perception of shamanism. For instance, in 2004 a conference entitled *Shamanism: A Theoretical Construction or a Living Tradition* was held in Motovun, Croatia. Papers discussing this circle of topics were also presented at another conference in Croatia (*The State and Tendencies of Mythological Studies Today*, Zagreb 2007), followed by a volume of proceedings.¹⁴ A good example is the paper entitled 'Zoopsihonavigacija kao poveznica vješticiarstva i šamanizma' ['Witches' Zoopsychnavigation as a link between witchcraft and shamanism'] by Suzana Marjanić (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb).¹⁵ Dealing in her studies primarily with the imagology of witchcraft, Marjanić discusses (much in the vein of Mircea Eliade) witches' "zoopsychnavigation" in the world of Croatian legends as a possible aspect of shamanic techniques of ecstasy. Another section of the volume is dedicated to Wicca, featuring a paper written by Sonja Miličević 'Wicca. Stara ili nova religija?' ['Wicca. An old or a new religion?'], an overview of the historical

12 Instances of these more traditional scholarly approaches are numerous and, due to the limited space available, cannot be included in this review.

13 *Occultism in a Global Perspective*, 79.

14 *Mitski zbornik* ['A mythical collection'], 2010.

15 *Mitski zbornik*, 127–150. It is an abridged version of her essay published in *Studia ethnologica Croatica*, 17, 2005: 111–169.

development of Wicca. It is significant that Miličević's paper is based on her BA thesis defended at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Philosophy (University of Zagreb), indicating a growing readiness of mainstream academia to accept topics of this kind.

A fine example of examining folk magic and superstitious traditions vis-à-vis new, "imported" modes of esotericism in Serbia (in this case spiritualism) is a monograph published in 2009 by Radmila Radić (Institute for Recent History in Serbia, Belgrade), titled *Narodna verovanja, religija i spiritizam u srpskom društvu 19. i prvoj polovini 20. veka* ['Folk beliefs, religion and spiritualism in Serbian society of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century']. Of particular value is the aspect of her study examining the tense interactions between the Serbian Orthodox Church and spiritualism in the context of the inherited folk ("superstitious") beliefs strengthened by the emergence of spiritualism. The book contains a historical overview of the spiritualist movement in Serbia, with special emphasis on Čedomilj Mijatović and Dragutin Ilić as its prominent members.¹⁶

Returning to the "native" shamanism and neoshamanism as its increasingly popular variant, two more contributions should be mentioned here. Deniver Vukelić (Faculty of Humanities and Social Arts, Zagreb), who published on witch trials and other trials of sorcery in Croatian history, as well as on the role of magical beliefs in the formation of Croatian cultural identity, in 2012 authored an important study of neoshamanism in Croatia titled 'Problemi identifikacije i identiteta u hrvatskih "šamana" s kraja 20. i početka 21. stoljeća' ['The problems of the identification and identity of the Croatian "shamans" at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century']. Vukelić examines the uses of the terms "shamanism" and "shaman" in the context of various esoteric currents in present-day Croatia, touching upon the phenomenon of occulture in the activities of several Croatian artists-shamans. Building on his research, I conducted a close examination of a neoshamanic group in Serbia and had the results published in a paper entitled 'Dr. Wolf and the Ancient Roots: Neoshamanism in Serbia' (2019). The paper is a case study of what Goran Djurdjević terms a "superstructure" consisting of various intertwined local and global layers of esoteric concepts. Much like Vukelić's essay, it points to the complex processes of identity construction in the framework of New Age spirituality in Serbia.

¹⁶ This circle of topics has been thoroughly researched by Nemanja Radulović, too; suffice it to mention his paper 'Okultni svet Dragutina Ilića' ['The occult world of Dragutin Ilić'] published in 2007.

Having mentioned myself, I should add that the main topic of my academic interest is Renaissance esotericism, with special emphasis on Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim and Marsilio Ficino. In addition to having several papers published both in Serbian and English, I authored a monograph on Agrippa in Serbian entitled *Između Hermesa i Hrista. Srednji put Kornelija Agripe* [‘Between Hermes and Christ. The middle way of Cornelius Agrippa’, 2019]. The monograph was based on my doctoral dissertation, defended at Central European University (CEU, Budapest) and supervised by György E. Szőnyi. In 2010 I also had a smaller monograph (published in English) *The Pious Impiety of Agrippa’s Magic: Two Conflicting Notions of Ascension in the Works of Cornelius Agrippa*. The two books deal with different aspects of Agrippa’s thought in the context of medieval and Renaissance heterodoxy, and its Neoplatonic and Hermetic aspects.¹⁷

Speaking of the works supervised by György E. Szőnyi at the Medieval Studies Department of CEU—where he created an informal centre of esotericism studies attracting prospective scholars from the region—I should mention an MA thesis (yet unpublished) by Armin Stefanović.¹⁸ It is a neatly conducted, exciting research on the development of Theosophy in Yugoslavia throughout the twentieth century, taking also into account certain forms of New Age influenced by Theosophy. Among other things, Stefanović notes a curious fact that the Theosophical Society was present only in Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, while for some reason bypassing Bosnia and Herzegovina. As part of his analysis, he also examines the development of the New Age in Slovenia and provides a fascinating case study of Janez Drnovšek, a former prime minister and president of Slovenia who at one point turned to living a lifestyle and writing books closely linked to Theosophy and various New Age concepts.

New Age in Slovenia was also explored by the anthropologist Barbara Potrata (University of Leeds), who conducted her fieldwork in that country between 1998 and 1999. Potrata attended numerous New Age events and carried out some 70 interviews. The results of the research were presented in her work ‘New Age, Socialism and Other Millenarianisms: Affirming and Struggling with (post)Socialism’ (2004). Apart from Potrata, the new, esoteric forms of religiosity in Slovenia were analyzed by the Slovenian sociologists Sergej Flere and Andrej Kirbiš (University of Maribor) in their paper ‘New Age, Religiosity, and Traditionalism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison’ from 2009. In Serbia,

17 Among my other works on Agrippa and Renaissance esotericism, I can mention my papers ‘Agrippa’s Cosmic Ladder’ (2016) and ‘The Role of Faith in Agrippan Magic’ (2020).

18 *Theosophy and the New Age in Yugoslavia and Its Successor States* (Budapest 2020). See also its mention in Gy. Szőnyi’s paper in this volume.

a similar sociological-anthropological study of the New Age phenomena was conducted by Danijel Sinani, Nina Kulenović and Mladen Stajić (Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade) in their paper ‘Nove i alternativne religije u Srbiji: o proučavanju i proučavanima’ [‘New and alternative religions in Serbia: on the research and those who are researched’, 2012]. As a particularly interesting case I should mention Lidija Radulović’s anthropological study of the Serbian occult scene in the 1990s, *Okultizam ovde i sada. Magija, religija i pomodni kultovi u Beogradu* [‘Occultism here and now: Magic, religion, and trendy cults in Belgrade’] from 2007. In the period between 1993 and 1997, Radulović conducted exciting fieldwork mostly among Belgrade psychics, but also in several occult groups, including Slavinski’s. While all these studies are characterized by a detached, unbiased scholarly approach, viewing the New Age phenomena primarily as results of a complex web of historical, societal, and cultural factors, one occasionally comes across works and approaches of a more conservative attitude, based on explicit value judgements. A good example is the paper ‘New age: izazovi modernog doba’ [‘New Age: the challenges of the modern era’, 2014] by Haris Islamčević (University of Sarajevo/Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo). Islamčević, who wrote his doctoral dissertation on the New Age as part of the broader phenomenon of modern esotericism, views his subject matter in terms of a “crisis” brought about by modernity and the subsequent process of disenchantment.¹⁹ This type of approach, which regards modern esotericism as a consequence of the lost or endangered traditional religious identities, is fairly common among more traditionally oriented scholars in the region, regardless of their ethnicity and religious denomination.

A mention should be made of another growing field in the regional academic studies of esotericism, one that emerged from art history and art studies in general. I already mentioned Radulović’s and Djurdjević’s research on *Mediala* as the most prominent group of esoterically oriented artists in former Yugoslavia (with special emphasis on Miro Glavurčić and Leonid Šejka). Several presently active artists whose works are permeated with esoteric elements were explored by scholars within the theoretical framework of esotericism studies, especially with reference to the concept of occulture. Thus, in her paper ‘Spiritual in Contemporary Art of Southeastern Europe’ from 2019 Nadežda Elezović (Faculty

19 In 2021 Islamović published a book based on his doctoral dissertation: *Fenomen Nove misli: povijest, učenje, praksa, i istraživanje prisutnosti učenja kod bosanskohercegovačkih muslimana (slučaj Sanskoga Mosta)* [‘The phenomenon of New Age: history, teaching, practice, and research on the presence of this teaching among the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina—The case of Sanski Most’]. This book has remained out of my reach during this research.

of Philosophy, Rijeka) examines the works of several artists, including Marina Abramović, Marko Pogačnik and Vladimir Dodig Trokut.²⁰ As the most well-known among ex-Yugoslav artists engaged in esotericism, Marina Abramović and her intriguing performance art were thoroughly analyzed in a doctoral dissertation written by Nikola Pešić, himself an artist. The dissertation (supervised by Nemanja Radulović) was later turned into a book entitled *Okultno u umetnosti Marine Abramović. S kratkim uvodom u jugoslovensku okulturu 1970-ih* [‘The occult in the art of Marina Abramović: With a brief introduction into the Yugoslav occulture of the 1970s’ (2017)]. By analyzing the reception and development of various esoteric ideas in the context of the Yugoslav avant-garde and artistic countercultures, both Elezović and Pešić convincingly argue that esotericism is to be viewed as an integral part of popular culture, strongly influencing the world of art in a variety of ways.

Despite the linguistic similarities, the Bulgarian cultural space has always been somewhat separated from that of Yugoslavia. Therefore, the Bulgarian scholars dealing with esotericism remained less well known in the scholarly communities of former Yugoslavia. A notable exception is Yuri Stoyanov (SOAS University of London), who maintains closer academic ties with scholars from across the South Slavic region. Like Djurdjevic, Stoyanov publishes mainly in English, thus making his works more accessible to an international readership, but he has also published in German, Swedish, Turkish, Farsi and other languages.²¹ The main topics of Stoyanov’s research, common to other Bulgarian scholars too, are Dualist and Gnostic traditions in the East Mediterranean region, with particular emphasis on Bogomilism. His research encompasses a vast historical span ranging from the pre-Christian dualist religions to the status of Freemasonry in eighteenth-century Russia.²² Among a large number of Stoyanov’s works, I should single out his two major monographs, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe: The Secret History of Medieval Christian Heresy* (1995) and *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (2000).

Several other contemporary Bulgarian scholars, or scholars related to Bulgaria, should be mentioned here. Svetoslava Toncheva (Department of Comparative Folklore Studies at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies,

20 As a self-proclaimed shaman, Trokut was also studied by Deniver Vukelić in his paper on neoshamanism in Croatia.

21 In addition, his works have been translated into several regional languages. For instance, his well-known monograph *The Hidden Tradition in Europe* (1994) appeared in Serbian in 2003, and in Croatian in 2020.

22 See, for instance, Stoyanov, ‘Religious Dualism and the Abrahamic Religions’ (2015); Stoyanov, ‘The Adoption of the Swedish Rite in Eighteenth-Century Russia’ (2021).

Sofia) published a book *Iz novata duhovnost na XX vek: antroposofija, bjalo bratstvo, edinno učenje* [‘Out of the New Spirituality of the Twentieth Century: Anthroposophy, the White Brotherhood and the Unified Teaching’, 2015], in which she dealt with Anthroposophy in relation to the White Brotherhood, a movement of esoteric Christianity founded by the spiritual teacher and philosopher Petăr Dănov.²³

In 2005 Grażyna Szwat-Gyłybowa, a Polish Slavist and literary historian, published a book entitled *Haeresis bulgarica w bułgarskiej świadomości kulturowej XIX i XX wieku* [‘*Haeresis Bulgarica* in Bulgarian cultural consciousness in the 19th and 20th centuries’]; five years later the book was translated into Bulgarian (*Haeresis Bulgarica v bŭlgarskoto kulturno sŭznanie na XIX i XX vek*). Szwat-Gyłybowa examined the image of Bogomilism in Bulgarian culture from the time of national awakening, through communism, to postmodernism. Some chapters of the book focus on occultism in the context of the White Brotherhood and the New Age in general. In 2006 Galina Vlčinova, a Bulgarian ethnologist, published a study, *Balkanski jasnovidki i proročici ot XX vek* [‘Balkan clairvoyants and prophetesses in the 20th century’]. Staying out of reach, this, and many other works of the Bulgarian scholars of esotericism still remain *desiderata*, at least in the Serbian academic space.

Concluding this brief survey, I should point out once again that several scholars in the south Slavic academic communities gradually developed their interest in esotericism, surpassing the old positivist prejudices concerning the insufficient “seriousness” of the subject. However, when speaking of ex-Yugoslavia, it appears that this interest is not equally distributed in all parts of the former unitary state: my research suggests that the emerging hubs of esotericism studies are Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, whereas I was not able to trace this sort of academic engagement in the other successor states, which might have to do with a more conservative academic atmosphere in those regional scholarly communities. Certainly, more thorough research would add some fine tuning to the picture.

23 In 2015 the book appeared in English translation with the title *Out of the New Spirituality of the Twentieth Century*.

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