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Translations of Saints' Relics in the Late Medieval Central Balkans

Abstract: The paper discusses the character of the translations of saints' relics in the late medieval central Balkans, as they increasingly gained prominence as an encouragement to the veneration of saints. The fact that translations grew much more frequent provides the opportunity to analyse the motivations behind this practice, the ways in which relics were acquired, the types of translation processions and their symbolic significance. The relic translations in the central Balkans in the period under study fitted the Christian translation pattern in every respect and stood halfway between history and cult and, frequently, between politics and cult.

Keywords: translations of saints' relics, Late Middle Ages, central Balkans, St Petka, Empress Theophano, Constantine the Great, St Luke the Evangelist, John of Rila, King Stefan Uroš II Milutin

The saints were venerated in a variety of ways: by liturgical commemoration, by painting their holy images, offering personal prayers, making pilgrimages to and translating their relics. Since miracles as a rule involved contact with or proximity to the saints' relics or substances associated with them,¹ the centre of every cult was the shrine in which they were kept.² The emphasis on the saints' bodily remains provides an explanation for the importance of their translations – every relocation of relics meant the relocation of the centre of the cult.

Translations could have a variety of causes. The first, and most important, translation took place in the earliest phase of the formation of a saintly cult,

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¹ A.-M. Talbot, "Pilgrimage to Healing Shrines: The Evidence of Miracle Accounts", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002), 159–161; M. Kaplan, "Le miracle est-il nécessaire au saint byzantin?", *Pouvoirs, Église et sainteté. Essais sur la société byzantine* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011), 100–101. By touching a relic, the faithful came into contact with the holy, with divine power, and believed that some of the holiness was transferred to them. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Sveto i propadljivo. Telo u srpskoj hagiografskoj književnosti* (Belgrade: Clio and Institute for Balkan Studies, 2017), 207–228.

² P. J. Geary, "The Saint and the Shrine: The Pilgrim's Goal in the Middle Ages", *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 170–171.

usually as a result of the first miracles occurring at the saint's tomb.³ The body of the saint was usually moved from the grave into a church and laid in front of the altar. In the Eastern Orthodox Churches, that act may be considered to be official recognition of sanctity.⁴ There usually followed the writing of an office and a hagiography (either synaxarial or extensive).⁵

All further translations were undertaken in response to a community's need to secure the saint's protection. These further translations are the focus of my analysis. They involved the transfer either of the whole body or of its parts.⁶ Apart from the fundamental need for the presence of a heavenly protector, the relocation of the saint's relics could be motivated by four more factors.

The need for the saint's presence could be made more urgent by particular historical circumstances. Sometimes a new political community wanted to invoke God's patronage. Or a community in crisis – such as natural disasters or wars – wanted to secure additional help. Sometimes a community wanted to obtain the relics that it saw as being particularly important to it.

The reason for the translation of a saint's relics could also be the decline of his/her cult. A cult could begin to decline because the church in which the relics were enshrined had suffered damage or destruction, or because the surrounding area had become depopulated. A cult could also begin to decline because the saint was not a miracle-worker⁷ or because the faith in the power of his/her miracles waned. A cult could also be overshadowed by the veneration of another saint. But a cult declining in one environment could flourish again in another.

³ Miracles were the most important, if not indispensable, proof of sanctity. Persons do not become saints because they perform miracles, but become able to perform miracles, in their lifetime or after death, because they have attained divine grace and sanctity through their efforts, see Kaplan, "Le miracle est-il nécessaire au saint byzantin?"

⁴ Until the thirteenth century the translation of a saint's relics was equivalent to canonization in the Roman Catholic Church as well. After that the canonization process came under papal control, see A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵ The office is a combination of different poetic forms read on the saint's feast day. The synaxarial vita is in fact a short hagiography read as part of the office. It could be followed by an extensive hagiography whose place in the liturgy, as that of many other texts, is not clear.

⁶ This did by no means undermine the power of God that revealed itself through the relics, see E. D. Hunt, "The Traffic in Relics. Some Late Roman Evidence", in *The Byzantine Saint*, ed. Sergei Hackel (London: Fellowship of St. Alban & St. Sergius, 1981), 175–179; A. Angenendt, *Heilige und Reliquien. Die Geschichte ihres Kultes vom frühen Christentum bis zu Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997), 152–155. On the dismemberment of saints' bodies, see also Marjanović-Dušanić, *Sveto i propadljivo*, 81, 207–209.

⁷ A saint's cult did not necessarily develop as a result of his or her miracles but, at some point, they could come to be expected of him or her.

An important mechanism of the transfer of sacred objects was also relic policy/diplomacy. The Byzantine emperor and the pope led the way in relic diplomacy: gifts of relics were used as a sign of superiority over the recipients since they could hardly be repaid.⁸ Despite the symbolism underlying such a way of obtaining a relic, the recipients acquired spiritual and political authority in their communities.

Finally, relics could be moved because of wars. The invaders tended to seize the valuables they found, including saints' relics.⁹ Or the community threatened with raids or invasion could choose to move their holy possessions to a safe place. Sometimes the relocation was only temporary, but it could also mean the beginning of a new phase of the cult.

Every translation involved a few stages: the *profectio*, or the departure of the relics; their journey; the *adventus* (one or more), or the arrival at a particular boundary; and the *occursus*, or the reception of the relics.¹⁰ Relics, as any other goods, could be acquired by purchase, gift or even theft.¹¹ Although particular ways of acquisition usually went with particular circumstances – in relic diplomacy they were usually received as a gift, and in the case of a strong need for the presence of a saint, they were usually purchased or stolen – there were no rules. Sometimes a purchase was disguised as a counter-gift.¹² An awareness of the value of relics was there even if the parties involved were of different religions.¹³

After the translation, the saint had to be presented to the new community as its intercessor and patron. This could be done by means of translation

⁸ The attitudes towards relics and the ways in which they reached the West from Byzantium have been discussed by H. A. Klein, "Eastern Objects and Western Desires: Relics and Reliquaries between Byzantium and the West", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004), 283–314. On the patron–client relationship established by that act and the pope's role in that practice, see Geary, "Sacred Commodities. The Circulation of Medieval Relics", *Living with the Dead*, 208–210.

⁹ The most striking example were the transfers of relics from Constantinople after 1204. For the sources and literature on the relics taken to the West, see D. Popović, "Sacrae reliquiae Spasove crkve u Žiči", *Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji* (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2006), 211, n. 18.

¹⁰ The *occursus* also involved the *susceptio*, or the handover of relics, and the *ingressus*, or the deposition of relics in the church. M. Heinzelmann, *Translationsberichte und Andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 72–75.

¹¹ Geary, "Sacred Commodities", 208–213.

¹² The trade in relics, in the guise of gift-giving, became widespread after the fall of Constantinople in 1204, and saw a revival in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Klein, "Eastern Objects and Western Desires", 306–312.

¹³ This was the case in the exchange of relics between the Muslim and Christian worlds, A. Cutler, "Gifts and Gift Exchange as Aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and Related Economies", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001), 252.

accounts (*translatio*), which were either incorporated into the hagiography or written as separate texts. This hagiographical subgenre usually had three parts.¹⁴ The first one was a narrative of the origin and acquisition of the relics, the central and most important part described the ceremony of translation, and was followed by an account of the miracles announcing the saint's wish to remain in that particular place. These texts participated in the reconstruction of the relic's value and marked the church as a notable sacred place.¹⁵ Also, the already existing office for the saint was usually supplemented with verses supplicating the saint to intercede for the new community. If the saint was a particularly important one, then the anniversary of the translation became a new feast day.

Not that such adaptations were always made. If they were, it usually meant that ecclesiastical and/or secular authorities were involved in the act of translation. Consequently, translations, both physical and literary, tend to reveal connections between churches, monasteries, individuals, patrons, states... They tend to reflect historical and, frequently, political realities.

Political changes that took place in the central Balkans between the Battle of Maritsa in 1371 and the fall of Vidin in 1396¹⁶ – the Serbian territorial lords of the Mrnjavčević, Dragaš, Lazarević, Balšić and Branković families, and the Bulgarian empires lost independence, and later on some disappeared from the map – led to a changed attitude towards the saints. The fact that relic translations became more frequent was a sign of the stronger need for the presence of a holy patron. The Serbian Prince, then Despot, Stefan Lazarević (prince 1389–1402, despot 1402–27) and his successor, Despot Djuradj Branković (1427–56) had relics translated from different parts of the Balkans.

In the late 1390s the remains of the Balkan hermitess Petka (Paraskevi) and the Byzantine Empress Theophano were translated to the Principality of Serbia. Both cults were Byzantine in origin: Petka was an anchoritess who lived in the second half of the tenth century, and Empress Theophano was the first wife of Leo VI the Wise (866–912) and she died in 895/6.¹⁷ Petka's cult began to spread from Kallikrateia, where her relics were translated after their ritual

¹⁴ Heinzlmann, *Translationsberichte*, 56–57; P. J. Geary, *Furta Sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 12–13.

¹⁵ Heinzlmann, *Translationsberichte*, 63–66; Geary, "Sacred Commodities", 213–214.

¹⁶ For an overview of developments in those decades, see S. Ćirković *The Serbs* (Malden; Oxford; Carlton: Blackwell Pub., 2004), 77–87.

¹⁷ On the two cults before the translations to the Serbian Principality/Despotate, see D. Popović, "Relikvije svete Petke: *Gloria Bulgariae – Gloria Serviae*", *Pod okriljem svetosti*, 271–286; M. Petrova-Taneva, "Pomoshnitsa na tsarete": *sveta imperatritsa Teofana v uiozhnoslavi-anskata traditsiia* (Sofia: Boian Penev Pub., 2018), 31–61, with earlier literature.

discovery (*inventio*). The Constantinopolitan cult of Empress Theophano at first was politicized and linked to the Macedonian dynasty, but it later spread due to her miracles.

Both cults marked the religious life of Tŭrnovo, the capital of the Bulgarian Empire. St Petka's relics were translated from Kallikrateia to Tŭrnovo after 1230, under Emperor Ivan Asen II of Bulgaria (1218–41).¹⁸ They sacralised the capital, the centre of political and spiritual power of the restored Bulgarian Empire.¹⁹ The translation of a part of Empress Theophano's relics from Constantinople, which probably took place in the mid-fourteenth century, under Emperor Ivan Alexander (1331–71), had the same purpose, and the extensive version of her hagiography was translated from Greek.²⁰ In the last decades of the fourteenth century the Bulgarian Patriarch Euthymius (1375–93) promoted both cults: he wrote an extensive *vita* and office for St Petka, and an office, and probably a *paraklesis*, for Empress Theophano.²¹

An account of the translation of the hermitess Petka to the Serbian Principality can be found in the Oration on the Translation written by Euthymius's disciple Gregory Camblak/Tsamblak and envisaged as an appendix to the saint's extensive hagiography.²² The Oration contains a history of Petka's relics from their arrival in Tŭrnovo to their adventus in the Serbian Principality. The author describes the fall of Tŭrnovo (1393), the request of the Emperor of Vidin to the

¹⁸ The relics were translated after Ivan Asen II's victory over the ruler of Epirus Theodore Komnenos Doukas at the Battle of Klokotnitsa in 1230, which made Bulgaria the leading power in the Balkans.

¹⁹ Constantinople was sanctified by enshrining saints' relics in city churches as guarantees of protection and stability, which earned it the epithet of "New Jerusalem". Tŭrnovo was sanctified by the relics of John of Rila, Tsar Kaloian, St Philotea, Gabriel of Lesnovo etc. On the sacralization of the capital cities, from Constantinople to Tŭrnovo, see J. Erdeljan, *Chosen Places. Constructing New Jerusalems in Slavia Orthodoxa* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017).

²⁰ Between the 1340s and '90s Nicholas the Deacon composed the Extensive Life of Empress Theophano, a reworked and stylistically modernized version of her earlier hagiography. On Nicholas's Extensive Life and his translations, see Petrova-Taneva, "Pomoshnitsa na tsarete", 89–175.

²¹ For the works of Patriarch Euthymius, see *Werke des Patriarchen von Bulgarien Euthymius (1375–1393). Nach den besten Handschriften*, ed. von E. Kažužniacki (Vienna: C. Gerold, 1901). *Paraklesis* was a special type of service usually held once a week in times of trouble, which, in this case, was the Ottoman threat. On the *Paraklesis* to Empress Theophano, see S. Kozhukharov, "Patriarkh Evtimii. Paraklis za tsaritsa Teofana", *Problemi na starobŭlgarskata poeziiia* (Sofia: Boian Penev Pub., 2004), 140–145.

²² On Camblak/Tsamblak and his work, see *Istoriia na bŭlgarskata srednovekovna literatura*, ed. A. Miltenova (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2008), 544–546 (M. Ōvcheva), 588–597 (A. Angush-eva). His account of the translation: G. Camblak, "Slovo o prenosu moštiju Svete Petke", in *Primeri iz stare srpske knjiŭevnosti. Od Grigorija Dijaka do Gavriila Stefanovića Venclovića*, ed. Dj. Trifunović (Belgrade: Slovo ljubve, 1975), 90–93.

Ottoman Sultan Bayezid I (1389–1402) to be given the saint's relics, their translation to Vidin, the Battle of Nicopolis, and the fall and sack of Vidin (1396).

Camblak then proceeds to describe the arrival of some members of the Lazarević family at the sultan's court. Without stating the exact reason for their visit, he simply says that they went to "be seen by the emperor". The reason for the visit could therefore have been a vassal's regular re-affirmation of fidelity to the overlord. Camblak describes their request for the saint's relics, the sultan's decision to give them the "dry bones", the wrapping of the relics in golden robes²³ and translation. There follows a praise to the saint and to the Serbian lands.

The Oration does not fully fit the *translatio* genre, but rather it depicts the circumstances in which Petka became the patron saint of the Serbian lands. The translation to Vidin is not described, and the translation to Serbia is said to have been performed with "many honours" and that the Lazarevićs rejoiced at having obtained such a treasure. There is no reference to concrete miracles, but they are foreshadowed: it is said that now the saint protects against the impending attacks.

Camblak's narrative about the journey of St Petka's relics in fact describes the political realities of that time. It depicts the fall of two Bulgarian capitals and the status of the Lazarević family in relation to the Ottoman ruler. In both cases, the relics were acquired in the same way: by requesting them earnestly from the sultan himself. Also, the absence of a translation account may mean that the relics were carried to their new destination in humble processions. Perhaps that is why miracles were missing.

It is generally accepted that the Lazarevićs acquired the relics at the time of the rebellion of two of their magnates in 1398.²⁴ It was then that, accused of allying with Hungary, Prince Stefan Lazarević of Serbia was compelled to appear before the sultan to justify himself, without knowing how his visit would end. These events are described in Constantine the Philosopher's Extensive Life of Despot Stefan.²⁵ His account of this visit, however, significantly differs from

²³ This act should be interpreted in the context of the need to clad the saint's relics in sumptuous textiles because they had been stolen, but also in the context of the ritual reclothing of relics. On the reclothing of relics, see D. Popović, "God dwelt even in spiritual wise' – Relics and Their Reliquaries in Medieval Serbia", in *Sacral Art of the Serbian Lands in the Middle Ages*, vol. II: *Byzantine Heritage and Serbian Art* (Belgrade: Serbian National Committee of Byzantine Studies; Službeni glasnik; Institute for Byzantine Studies SASA 2016), 142.

²⁴ The rebellion was raised by Nikola Zojić and Novak Belockrkvić; D. Popović, "Relikvije svete Petke", 287–288; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, "Dinastija i svetost u doba porodice Lazarević: stari uzori i novi modeli", *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 43 (2006), 90.

²⁵ V. Jagić, "Konstantin Filosof i njegov Život Stefana Lazarevića despota srpskoga, po dva-ma srpsko-slovenskim rukopisima", *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 42 (1875), 266–269.

the tranquil visit to the sultan as described by Camblak.²⁶ It seems therefore that the obtainment of Petka's remains and Prince Stefan's reconciliation with the sultan should not be attributed to the same occasion. The translation certainly took place after the fall of Vidin in 1396 and before 1402, when Bayezid was captured at the Battle of Angora.

The relics were probably laid to rest in Lazarica, Prince Stefan's court church in Kruševac, his capital at the time.²⁷ This seems to be supported by the fact that Petka was seen as a heavenly protectress of the ruling family and the capital city, Tŕrnovo. When the capital city of the Serbian Despotate was moved from Kruševac to Belgrade in 1403/4, Petka's relics were moved with it.²⁸ This second translation is not mentioned in the Oration.

The importance attached to the presence of St Petka's relics in the Serbian capitals is evidenced by the reworked titles of her hagiography which emphasize her role as the patron saint of both the Serbian and Bulgarian lands.²⁹ Also, Gregory Camblak's verses exalting St Petka as protectress of the "Serbian city" were added to the office used in the liturgy of the Serbian Church from the mid-thirteenth century.³⁰

Researchers have assumed that a part of the relics of Empress Theophano was translated to Serbia at the same time – in 1398.³¹ This hypothesis cannot be substantiated from the known sources. Prince Stefan probably obtained it from Bayezid – the conqueror of Tŕrnovo – but we do not know exactly when.

If Theophano's relics were obtained from Bayezid, then they were in Kruševac before 1403/4. After that they were transferred to Belgrade together with the relics of the hermitess Petka. Theophano's veneration in the reign of

²⁶ Also, Camblak claims that the sultan was visited by the prince's younger brother, Vuk, in company with Milica (their mother), Jefimija/Euphemia (wife of the late Serbian King Vukašin Mrnjavčević who had become a nun) and Stefan, whereas Constantine the Philosopher mentions the visit of Princess Milica and Euphemia, claiming that Stefan went only later, and that he went alone.

²⁷ Popović, "Relikvije svete Petke", 289.

²⁸ The presence of the relics in Belgrade is evidenced by a 1509 letter of the Metropolitan of Belgrade Theophan, which states that the relics of hermitess Petka and Empress Theophano are kept in the metropolitan church of the Dormition of the Virgin, see S. Dimitrijević, "Dokumenti koji se tiču odnosa između srpske crkve i Rusije u XVI veku", *Spomenik Srpske kraljevske akademije* 39 (1903), 17.

²⁹ Patriarch Euthymius, "Leben der hl. Petka", *Werke des Patriarchen von Bulgarien Euthymius*, 59, 74.

³⁰ Dj. Trifunović, "Camblakove stihire prenosu moštiju svete Petke", in *Zbornik Vladimira Mošina*, eds. D. Bogdanović, B. Jovanović-Stipčević and Dj. Trifunović (Belgrade: Savez bibliotečkih radnika Srbije, 1977), 199–204. It is likely that the old Office for St Petka was also used for a paraklesis.

³¹ See n. 25 above.

Stefan Lazarević is evidenced by a new translation of her Extensive Life included in a manuscript dating from 1425–35.³² Even more than this new translation, it is three reworked versions of Patriarch Euthymius's Office for St Theophano making mention of Despot Stefan that confirm that her remains were transferred in his reign.³³ These rewritten versions show that her cult retained its earlier political importance, as was usual in the case of sainted empresses.³⁴

Among the cults promoted by saints' translations was the cult of Emperor Constantine the Great. The presence of Constantine's right arm in Serbia is known from its reliquary inscribed with Old Slavic verses from the Office for Emperor Constantine and Empress Helena for 21 May.³⁵ There are three hypotheses about how and when this relic came to Serbia.³⁶ The most plausible seems to be the one that Prince Stefan received it as a gift during his visit to Constantinople in 1402, after the Battle of Angora, when the title of despot(es) was conferred on him by John VII Palaiologos (emperor 1390, regent 1399–1403). It is also possible that he was given the relic during his second visit to Constantinople in 1410, when his title of despot was confirmed by Emperor Manuel II (1391–1425).³⁷

³² See the edition of the translation of the Extensive Life in Petrova-Taneva, "Pomoshnitsa na tsarete", 228–293.

³³ Two reworked versions of the Office have been published: K. Ivanova, "Sürbska redaktsiia na sluzhbata za imperatritsa Teofana", *Arheografski prilozhi* 10–11 (1988–1989), 83–106; T. Subotin-Golubović, "Beogradski prepis Jevtimijeve službe carici Teofano", in *Slovensko srednjovekovno nasledje. Zbornik posvećen profesoru Djordju Trifunoviću* (Belgrade: Čigoja, 2001), 617–635.

³⁴ N. Delierneux, "The Literary Portrait of Byzantine Female Saint", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 2: *Genres and Contexts*, ed. S. Efthymiadis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 376–378.

³⁵ E. A. Morshakova, "33. Kovcheg dlia desnitsy sviatogo tsaria Konstantina", in *Khristianskie relikvii v moskovskom Kremlje*, ed. A. Lidov (Moscow: Radunitsa, 2000), 126–128. Cf. the Office, T. Subotin-Golubović, "Praznovanje sv. Konstantina i Jelene u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji", *Arheografski prilozhi* 35 (2013), 31, 38. The arm and Belgrade's other relics (of Sts Petka and Theophano) were taken to Istanbul, probably after the Ottoman conquest of Belgrade in 1521. In 1588 Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah II presented it as a gift to the Russian Emperor Feodor I. It is now kept in Moscow.

³⁶ One links it to the reconciliation between the Serbian and Byzantine churches in 1375, one to the marriage between Jelena, daughter of Konstantin Dejanović (Dragaš) and the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos, and one to Stefan Lazarević's visit to Constantinople in 1402, on which occasion the title of despot(es) was conferred upon him. A. A. Turilov, "Serbskii kovcheg-relikvarii sv. tsaria Konstantina iz Blagoveshtenskogo sobora Moskovskogo Kremliia: datirovka i gipotezy o proishozhdenii", *Crkvene studije* 10 (2013), 125–133.

³⁷ After all, on his travels to the West, Emperor Manuel used relics in his attempt to obtain support from western rulers.

In both cases the acquisition of the right arm was part of the Byzantine emperor's relic policy, and in both cases the circumstances probably prevented their solemn translation. In 1402 Despot Stefan was returning from the battlefield using a coastal route, through Zeta, and in 1410 he sailed home across the Black Sea and along the Danube.³⁸ If it came in 1402, it probably was first enshrined in Kruševac. If it came in 1410, then its destination probably was Belgrade.

It seems that it was the acquisition of Constantine's arm that inspired genealogies to depict the emperor as an ancestor of the Serbian rulers.³⁹ According to them, Despot Stefan was a descendant of Constantine's sister, Constantia. Also, in the *Extensive Life of Despot Stefan*, which contains such a genealogy, Constantine is Stefan's prefiguration. Constantine is depicted as the builder of the "imperial and seven-hill city". Belgrade is likened to Constantinople and Despot Stefan to the "equal-to-the-apostles" emperor. This reveals the paramount importance attached to Constantine the Great as an ancestral figure.

The relics of the anchoritess Petka and Empress Theophano, possibly also of Constantine the Great, participated in the sacralization of Kruševac and Belgrade, and, consequently, of the whole state.⁴⁰ The motive behind their translations was the Serbian ruler's wish to have his state protected by the saints. Their acquisition was made possible by historical circumstances – the fall of Tŭrnovo and Vidin, and Stefan's visits to the sultan's court and Constantinople. Although only the translation of St Petka is testified to by a separate text, they all seem to have been acquired as gifts as part of the relic diplomacy of the Ottoman sultan and the Byzantine emperor. It is unlikely that the translations were ceremonial, but that did not affect the importance attached to the presence of the relics in the political centre of the Serbian state: they emphasized the ruler's connection with God, which was the basis of his political authority and spiritual prestige, and were a guarantee of victory in battle and an element of court ceremonial.⁴¹

The next known translation took place in the early 1450s under Despot Djurdj Branković. Seeking to fortify the new capital of the Serbian Despotate,

³⁸ On the situation in 1402 and 1410, see M. Purković, *Knez i despot Stefan Lazarević* (Belgrade: Sveti arhijerejski sinod Srpske pravoslavne crkve, 1978), 56–63, 91–94; *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. 2: *Doba borbi za očuvanje i obnovu države: 1371–1537* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1982), 64–68, 81–84.

³⁹ On imaginative memory and (secular) genealogies, the role of Constantine the Great in them and in the *Extensive Life of Despot Stefan*, see M. Vasiljević, "Imagining the Ruler's Genealogy in Medieval Serbia," *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 55 (2017), 79–86.

⁴⁰ An *acheiropoietos* icon of the Virgin was there for a few centuries. On the icon, see M. Tatić-Djurić, "Ikona Bogorodice Beogradske," *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 25 (1978), 147–161.

⁴¹ S. Mergiali-Sahas, "Byzantine Emperors and Holy Relics. Use, and Misuse, of Sanctity and Authority," *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik* 51 (2001), 41–60.

Smederevo, he had the relics of St Luke the Evangelist translated to the city, where they arrived on 12 January 1453.

In Eastern Orthodox tradition, Luke was venerated as a physician, a companion of the apostle Paul, the painter of the famous Constantinopolitan icon of the Virgin Hodegetria, the author of a Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles.⁴² The travels made by his relics reflect the history of the Byzantine Empire. In 357 – a period of collecting the most highly revered Christian relics in Constantinople – they were translated from Thebes in Boeotia to the Constantinopolitan church of the Holy Apostles. After the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204, a crusader knight set off for home taking the saint's relics with him. According to a Serbian manuscript, the knight's ship was wrecked off the island of Lefkada and he was compelled to sell them to a local lord.

Two writings on the translation of St Luke's relics have survived. One is the Story of the Translation read on 12 January, the newly-established feast of the translation.⁴³ The other is the manuscript, now kept in the National Library in Paris, which contains six prose texts devoted to the apostle Luke, of which three are devoted to the translations of his relics (the third describes their arrival in Smederevo).⁴⁴ This manuscript may in fact be said to be devoted to the history of Luke's relics. The use of the vernacular seems to suggest that the texts were not intended for liturgical use.⁴⁵

Both writings are exemplary representatives of the *translatio* genre: both present the relics to the reader, both describe their acquisition, and in both their translation is the central event accompanied by miracles. They differ in that the Story interprets the events as part of Sacred History, whereas the Third Translation was intended for the contemporary reader and therefore is more informative.⁴⁶

⁴² V. Milanović, "Kult i ikonografija Svetog Luke u pravoslavlju do sredine XV veka", in *Crkva svetog Luke kroz vjekove: zbornik radova. Naučni skup povodom 800-godišnjice Crkve Svetog Luke u Kotoru, Kotor 20–22. oktobar 1995*, ed. V. Korać (Kotor: Srpska pravoslavna crkvena opština, 1997), 75–81.

⁴³ This text is published by T. Subotin-Golubović, "Sveti apostol Luka – poslednji zaštitnik srpske Despotovine", in *Čudo u slovenskim kulturama*, ed. D. Ajdačić (Belgrade: Naučno društvo za slovenske umetnosti i kulture; Novi Sad: Apis, 2000), 167–178.

⁴⁴ Its call number is: Slave 46. The texts were published by I. Pavlović, "O Sv. Luci i prenašanju njegovog tela. Rukopis druge polovine XV veka", *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 51 (1882), 70–100.

⁴⁵ L. Pavlović, *Prozni i pesnički spisi nastali u Smederevu 1453–1456. godine* (Smederevo: Muzej, 1983), 35.

⁴⁶ Also, the two writers accord different roles in the concluding rites to members of the ruling family. Both texts have been analysed in detail by D. Popović, "Mošti svetog Luke – srpska epizoda", *Pod okriljem svetosti*, 295–317.

According to both, Despot Djuradj learnt about the relics while being in Bosnia. In fact, they were miraculously discovered: an "old man" (according to the Story, the apostle himself, according to the Third Translation, an angel) told the despot about the evangelist's remains being kept in Rogoi and advised him to beseech Sultan Mehmed II (1444–46, 1451–81) for them. Then the authors describe the request to the sultan for permission to translate the relics and the sending of gifts. The Story claims that the city officials refused to hand over the relics despite the sultan's order, and took them to the city tower instead. Serbs managed to enter the tower surreptitiously and escape with St Luke's relics.

There follows a brief description of the translation and miracles. Despot Djuradj and his heir, Lazar, set out to meet the relics, followed by the rest of the ruling family. They were accompanied by nobles, church dignitaries and a crowd of people. The translation ended with a vigil in the church of the despot's castle, the processions carrying the relics through the city and around its walls (to render them unassailable) and into the church of the Annunciation, the cathedral of the Metropolitan of Smederevo. During these processions, members of the ruling family, including the despot's daughter Mara, who had returned from the harem of Sultan Murad II (1421–44, 1446–51), offered gifts to the relics.⁴⁷

Then the Story describes the miracles with which the saint showed that he took the new community under his protection. This is the first medieval Serbian cultic text where we find the motif of disbelief in miracles: at first when the relics began to grow, and then when they began to give off various fragrances, when those in attendance suspected that in fact aromatics had been placed in the reliquary. Finally, the text ends with a description of pilgrimages to Smederevo, the holy place visited not only by Orthodox but also by other Christians: Hungarians, Germans and Italians.

The Third Translation mentions the growth of the apostle's body, but makes no mention of the doubts of the "low-spirited". This text is followed by an account of eight miracles, three of which are associated with the translation, and the rest are mostly healings. One of the miracles is negative. Luke caused the ailment of the eye of a priest who doubted the authenticity of the relics, but then he healed it after the priest offered a prayer and placed his eye on the saint's hand.

The two translation accounts show that it was an event of paramount state interest and that it revived the practice of solemn processions. The saint's arrival in Smederevo was an event that symbolized the hierarchy of power and brought together the ruling family, the clergy and the townspeople.⁴⁸ Translation

⁴⁷ On Mara Branković, see M. St. Popović, *Mara Branković. Žena između hrišćanskog i islamskog kulturnog kruga u 15. veku* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2014).

⁴⁸ S. Marjanović-Dušanić, "Se souvenir de Byzance. Les reliques au service de la mémoire en Serbie (XV^e–XIX^e s.)", in *Héritages de Byzance en Europe du Sud-Est à l'époque moderne et contemporaine. Actes du colloque "La présence de Byzance dans l'Europe du Sud-Est aux époques*

accounts were always an element of the ruler's display of power, either through references to his participation in the discovery of the saint's bodily remains or to his meeting the procession carrying the relics, when he as a rule laid down his regalia and proceeded back bareheaded and barefoot, sometimes even as a coffin bearer.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the texts reveal historical realities: the necessity of having the sultan's permission and the purchase of relics. The absence of a description of the journey from Rogoi to Smederevo may suggest that the procession was not solemnly escorted, that it travelled fast because of general insecurity, or that the authors attended only the ceremonies in Smederevo.⁵⁰

Also, the texts provide a testimony to the urban mentality of the time. They recorded doubts about the saint's miracle-working, i.e., about the authenticity of the relics. Perhaps the major cause of such doubts was the very historical moment in which the translation of St Luke's relics took place: the frequent movement of relics meant more opportunities for forgery. And yet, the scene of the events is similar to the one that gave rise to this hagiographic *topos*.⁵¹

Over the next six years the cult of St Luke underwent adaptations to the local environment. As one of the major Christian cults, it had already been present in liturgical practice. Its "Smederevo phase" was marked by the institution of the feast of the translation celebrated on 12 January, for which the Office and the Story of the Translation were written. Also, two parakleses to the saint were written, supplicating for the salvation of Smederevo, the despot and the Serbian people.⁵²

moderne et contemporaine", Athènes, 22-24 septembre 2008, ed. O. Delouis, A. Couderc & P. Guran (Athens: École française d'Athènes, 2013), 104.

⁴⁹ E. Bozócky, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint-Louis* (Paris: Beauchesne, 2006), 224–254.

⁵⁰ As proposed by Pavlović, *Prozni i pesnički spisi*, 44.

⁵¹ The more complex religious landscape of late-antique cities gave rise to the hagiographic *topos* of doubt about miracles in a period when miracles had a very important role in conversion to Christianity. The imagery of doubts and dispelling of doubts later became a hagiographic device intended for those who might be sceptical about the content of hagiographies. In the Serbian case the scene is also the city – the capital city at that – in a society undergoing the laicization of culture which could make it feel closer to the culture of late antiquity. For examples, see A. Kaldellis, "The Hagiography of Doubt and Scepticism", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 2: *Genres and Contexts*, ed. S. Efthymiadis (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 453–477 (with sources and literature).

⁵² All these texts, along with a composition about Luke's life and an encomium on the evangelist were assembled in a manuscript, Anthology, kept in the Patriarchal Library in Belgrade under no. 165. Apart from the Story of the Translation, the following texts have been published: the Paraklesis by T. Subotin-Golubović, "Paraklis Svetom Luki", in *Pad Srpske despotevine 1459. godine. Zbornik radova sa naučnog skupa održanog 12–14. novembra 2009. godine*, ed. M. Spremić (Belgrade: SANU, 2011), 99–116; and the Office for 12 January by T. Subotin-

The ceremony of translation and the earnest attention paid to the cult of St Luke show how important the event was for the Serbian Despotate. Perhaps Despot Djurađ planned for the church of the Annunciation where the saint's relics were enshrined to become a third seat of the Serbian Church.⁵³ The events that followed, however, brought an end to all plans, and St Luke's relics were transferred to Jajce in the Bosnian Kingdom, and then to Venice, which was their last translation.

The translation of the relics of St Luke was motivated by the Serbian despot's wish to fortify his capital, as his predecessor had. He was able to do that after the Ottoman conquest of a part of Epirus in 1449. The sultan gave permission for the translation, but the despot also paid a handsome sum for it. Since the relics were translated from Epirus, and not obtained at the sultan's court, the translation took a slightly different form. Although it may be seen as part of relic policy, it did not have the significance it had in the previous cases. This is why the relics were both discovered miraculously and purchased.⁵⁴ It has been assumed that Mara Branković had some influence in the sultan's decision to grant permission for the translation.⁵⁵ According to the Story of the Translation, the departure of the relics for Serbia eventually was made possible by holy theft,⁵⁶ but the Third Translation makes no mention of such an undertaking, so perhaps it was just a hagiographic *topos*.

The translation in 1469 of a part of the relics of the hermit John of Rila to his own foundation, the Rila Monastery, is the last known translation described in a separate composition. His ascetic pursuits should be dated to the first half of the tenth century.⁵⁷ The growing veneration of the ascetic led to the

Golubović, "Smederevska služba prenosu moštiju svetog apostola Luke", in *Srpska književnost u doba despotovine. Naučni skup Despotovac 22–23. 8. 1997*, ed. R. Marinković, J. Redjep & G. Jovanović (Despotovac: Narodna biblioteka Resavska škola, 1998), 133–157.

⁵³ The Branković family had in their possession the right arm of St John the Baptist, see D. Popović, "The Siena relic of St John the Baptist's right arm", *Zograf* 41 (2017), 89. It is possible therefore that this relic too was in Smederevo. The Serbian Church had two parallel seats at the time, at Žiča and at Peć, see D. Popović, M. Čanak-Medić & D. Vojvodić, *Manastir Žiča* (Belgrade: Zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 2014), 395–403. On the importance of the church in Smederevo in the Serbian Despotate, see M. Ubiparić and V. Trijić, "Zbornici paraklisa u srpskoslovenskoj tradiciji", *Arheografski prilozi* 37 (2015), 79–80.

⁵⁴ The amount paid for the relics is referred to in other sources, see Popović, "Mošti svetog Luke – srpska epizoda", 300–302.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 301.

⁵⁶ On thefts of relics, see Geary, *Furta Sacra*.

⁵⁷ According to I. Ivanov, *Sv. Ivan Rilski i negoviat monastir* (Sofia: BAN, 1917), 3, John of Rila lived between 876 and 946.

translation of his remains from the Rila Monastery to Sofia.⁵⁸ Their transfer to the Hungarian city of Esztergom took place in 1183, after the Hungarian conquest of Sofia. Four years later the relics were returned to Sofia.⁵⁹ Following his extensive conquests, the Bulgarian Emperor Ivan I Asen (1189–96) had them translated to the capital, Tŭrnovo, in 1195 to sanctify the city and emphasize the claim to continuity of the Bulgarian state. He had a church dedicated to John of Rila built for his relics in Trapezitsa fortress, the first residence of the Asen dynasty, and the feast of the translation was instituted.

The translations of John of Rila reflected the political history of the Balkans. This was why his cult produced several extensive and short vitae, offices and translation accounts. The prose texts were used by the Bulgarian Patriarch Euthymius to compose a new extensive vita.⁶⁰

The next phase of the cult was marked by the saint's translation from Tŭrnovo to the Rila Monastery in 1469. Vladislav the Grammarian wrote the Story of Rila as an appendage to Patriarch Euthymius's Extensive Life of St John. Drawing on these two texts, Dimitrije Kantakuzin, a Serbian writer of Greek origin, composed John's Life and the Office for the new feast of the translation of his relics to the Rila Monastery commemorated on 1 July.⁶¹

In his Story of Rila, Vladislav the Grammarian first describes the restoration of the monastery by three brothers and the second *revelatio* of the saint. The news of the saint's relics came from the presbyter Jakov of Philippopolis, who paid honours to them personally and was given a fragment by the locals.

⁵⁸ This took place either in the late 960s or early 970s, or in the late 1060s or early 1070s. According to the earliest vitae, the translation to Sofia was arranged by the Bulgarian Emperor Peter (927–966), whereas later writings say that it “took place after a long while”. The view that the translation took place as early as the tenth century was held by I. Duichev, *Rilskiiat svetets i negovata obitel* (Sofia: Interpres; Viara i kultura, 1947), 191. The other hypothesis is that it took place in the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071), G. Podskalski, *Srednjovekovna teološka književnost u Bugarskoj i Srbiji (865–1459)* (Belgrade: Pravoslavni bogoslovski fakultet; Institut za teološka istraživanja, 2010), 133.

⁵⁹ The relics were taken as a war trophy after the victory of King Bela III of Hungary (1172–1196) over the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos (1183–1185), following the same pattern as the one practised by the Ottomans. Emperor Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195) married Bela's daughter who brought these territories as her dowry.

⁶⁰ Ā. Ivanov, “Zhitie na sv. Ivan Rilski ot patriarkh Evtimii Tŭrnovski”, *Bŭlgarski starini iz Makedoniiia* (Sofia: BAN, 1970), 369–383.

⁶¹ Analysis will therefore be focused on the Story of Rila, V. Gramatik, “O obnovi Rilskog manastira i o prenosu moštiju svetog Jovana Rilskog”, in *Primeri iz stare srpske književnosti. Od Grigorija Dijaka do Gavriela Stefanovića Venclovića*, ed. Dj. Trifunović (Belgrade: Slovo ljubve, 1975), 126–136. The works of Dimitrije Kantakuzin are published by B. St. Angelov, “Zhitie s malka pokhvala na Ivan Rilski”, in *Dimitŭr Kantakuzin. Sŭbrani sŭchinenia*, eds. B. Angelov et al. (Sofia: BAN, 1989), 21–43; S. Kozhuharov, “Sluzhba na Ivan Rilski”, in *Dimitŭr Kantakuzin*, 44–77.

Vladislav emphasized that the thefts of “holy and venerable objects” and their dispersal prompted the brothers to verify the trustworthiness of the news.

Then he describes the role of Mara Branković, daughter of Despot Djurdadj.⁶² Asked to act as an intermediary, she visited Sultan Mehmed and was given his written order for the translation of the relics. In keeping with an expected *topos*, after their arrival in Trapezitsa, the local people refused to hand them over; they were relinquished only three days later.

It is interesting that Vladislav the Grammarian describes the route of the relics in detail, with a few advents, including those in Nicopolis and Sofia. While in Sofia, they were laid next to the body of the Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282–1321). Of course, the journey was accompanied by many miracles. The abbot of Rila met the procession at some distance from the monastery, assuming the role otherwise played by the ruler in the ceremony. The Story of Rila ends with an account of the night vigil, the institution of the feast of the return of the relics (1 July), and a remark about a *paraklesis* to the saint being sung every Thursday. After these events, the monks wrote an epistle to Mara Branković about their journey, and she responded by donating a new shroud “for the saint’s glory and for her eternal memory”.

The account of the 1469 translation of the relics of John of Rila shares the features of the previously discussed writings. It testifies to contemporary realities in the Ottoman Empire: the deserted city of Tŭrnovo, the fate of an important Christian monastery, the need to re-consecrate a holy place and attract pilgrims. It also testifies to the influence of Mara Branković and to the fact that the sultan’s permission for the translation was needed, as in all previous cases. Finally, Mara Branković’s gift calls to mind her gifts to the relics of St Luke. These writings speak of the religious climate as well. In this case, too, there were doubts about the authenticity of the relics. Also, the character of the translation ceremony remained the same, even if it was no longer of state but of local importance.

The relics were translated for two reasons. The cult of the holy hermit had declined in Tŭrnovo, and therefore stories about the saint began to spread again. The probable reason was the fact that the relics had been kept in Trapezitsa fortress in Tŭrnovo. The political centre was on the other side of the Yantra River, on the Tsarevets hill, from where the Ottomans had taken the relics of the hermitess Petka and Empress Theophano in 1393. At the same time, the restored Rila Monastery sought to obtain its founder’s remains in order to attract monks and pilgrims and thus ensure its future. The text of the *paraklesis* remains unknown, but the fact that it existed indicates the importance of the cult of St John for the local community. It is debatable if this case can be clas-

⁶² On Mara Branković and her role in the translation of the relics in the light of her standing in the Ottoman Empire, see Popović, *Mara Branković*, 232–234.

sified as an example of the sultan's relic policy. The relics were translated by the subjects of his empire so there was no need for a symbolic assertion of his sovereign authority. There is no reference to the means of their acquisition, so they should probably be categorized as a gift.

The Story of Rila claims that the priest Jakov of Philippopolis managed to obtain a part of John of Rila's relics from clerics in Tŭrnovo. This means that not all of the saint's relics ended up in the Rila Monastery. More importantly, this shows that not all transfers of relics were described in separate accounts. Also, we do not know if the sultan gave his permission or it was not even needed in the cases where only fragments of a saint's relics were translated or where translations were not solemn.

Among the translations that were not described in separate accounts are those of King Milutin's relics. The king's body was first transferred from his foundation and mausoleum, the Monastery of Banjska, to Trepča, presumably between 1389 and 1402, when Banjska was damaged in a fire. We learn about that from a much later genealogy that mentions the translation from Trepča to Sofia.⁶³ The threat of plundering was the probable reason for transferring the remains of the Serbian king to the nearby town of Trepča, perhaps in the hope that they would soon be returned to rest in his foundation. After that, probably after the fall of the Serbian Despotate in 1459 but before 1469, they were taken to Sofia.⁶⁴

King Milutin's relics were first deposited in the church of St George, where they were at the time of the translation of John of Rila. In the mid-sixteenth century, when St George's was converted into a mosque, they were moved to the church of the Holy Archangels. Before 1570 they were moved to the church of St Marina the Great-Martyr. And that was not the last translation.⁶⁵ For the liturgical needs of the holy king's cult in Sofia, the Office was reworked to emphasize that the saint protected both the Bulgarian and the Serbian lands.⁶⁶

⁶³ Lj. Stojanović, *Stari srpski rodoslovi i letopisi* (Sremski Karlovci: Srpska manastirska štamparija, 1927), 32.

⁶⁴ I. Gergova, "Kulūt kŭm sv. kralj Milutin 'Sofiiski' v Bŭlgarii", in *Manastir Banjska i doba kralja Milutina. Zbornik sa naučnog skupa održanog od 22. do 24. septembra 2005. godine u Kosovskoj Mitrovici*, ed. D. Bojović (Niš: Centar za crkvene studije; Kosovska Mitrovica: Filozofski fakultet; Manastir Banjska, 2007), 249.

⁶⁵ The sequence of the translations of the holy king's relics follows I. Gergova's article cited in n. 64 above.

⁶⁶ The Office for King Milutin was composed by the Serbian Patriarch Danilo/Daniel in the late fourteenth century. Two surviving copies demonstrate the alterations made to it, see

The undescribed translations show that the Ottoman conquests and their rule in the following centuries prompted the movement of relics in yet another way. Translations could result from the fear of pillage and ravage and the wish to save sacred objects from destruction. Also, a saint's cult could die out (possibly also as a result of the conquest) or a church could be converted into a mosque, which then required that the relics be moved to a different place. These translations were no longer undertaken under the patronage of heads of state or church, but rather by local people and clergy anxious to move the relics in their possession to a safer place. As a result of such circumstances and the absence of political leadership among Orthodox populations, translations became informal and probably hasty events. The actual number of translations and their destinations cannot even be conjectured. But they nonetheless are testaments to their times.

The Ottoman presence in the central Balkans triggered a new movement of saints' relics. Translations were caused by the need to find a safe place for them ahead of the invasion and destruction of cities, churches and monasteries, by the waning of saintly cults in consequence of the changing population structure, by the Ottoman practice of collecting holy objects and using them as part of relic diplomacy, and by the need of the polities that had some degree of autonomy to secure heavenly protection for their community.

All of these reasons led to two types of translations: those that took place under the auspices of major political actors and those that did not. The former were frequently described in separate translation accounts. They usually led to the adjustment of saints' cults to their new environments by reworking or translating the already existing cultic texts, but in none of the cases was the content of the cult changed. Finally, they frequently led to the institution of a new feast day in commemoration of the translation. Such were the translations of the hermitess Petka, Empress Theophano, Emperor Constantine the Great, Luke the Evangelist and John of Rila.

The translations that were not supported by political actors frequently remained unrecorded, and we learn about them virtually in passing in other sources. They usually did not involve transformation of the cult either. Such were the translations of King Milutin, John of Rila and many others.

The described translations also show the extent to which the central Balkans became, on one level, a unified region in the period under study. The growing number of translations from the end of the fourteenth century onwards

T. Jovanović, "Služba svetom kralju Milutinu Danila Banjskog", *Kosovsko-metohijski zbornik* 6 (2015), 98–99, 120, 132.

shows that they retained all features of the translation processions: the reasons for the relocation of relics, the modes of acquisition and the symbolism were the same. These translations, too, were bounded by crucial historical events, shrewd diplomacy, cult practice or the everyday life of the faithful.

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