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# SERBIAN MONK GERASIM ZELIĆ ON THE LATE 18TH CENTURY ISTANBUL

18 YY. SONLARINDA İSTANBUL'DA BİR SIRP KEŞİŞ: GERASIM ZELIĆ

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## ABSTRACT

Serbian monk Gerasim Zelić spent several months in Istanbul in 1784/85. He described his stay in the capital of the Ottoman Empire in his autobiography published in 1823. Zelić had used his time in the city to meet all of the most important members of the Orthodox clergy. In the book he also presented his impressions about the life in the Ottoman capital. Especially interesting is his description of the plague outbreak in 1785.

**Keywords:** Gerasim Zelić, Istanbul, Ottoman Empire, Orthodox Church, The Patriarchate of Constantinople

## ÖZET

Sırp keşiş Gerasim Zelić 1784/85'te İstanbul'da on ay kaldı ve 1823'te yayınlanan otobiyografisinde ziyareti anlattı. İstanbul'da Zelić en önemli Ortodoks din adamlarıyla tanıştı. Gerasim Zelić kitabında Osmanlı başkentinde yaşam hakkında yazdı. 1785 yılında veba salgının tasviri özellikle ilginçtir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Gerasim Zelić, İstanbul, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Ortodoks Kilisesi, İstanbul Patrikliği

Throughout the centuries the splendor and diversity of the Ottoman capital attracted the interest of many travelers. Their accounts about the city give interesting information about the life of Istanbul's inhabitants, the look of its buildings and the functioning of the government. One of such accounts can be found in the autobiography of a Serbian monk, Gerasim Zelić, who visited the city at the end of the eighteenth century.

Before we examine Gerasim Zelić's experiences in Istanbul and his view of the Ottoman capital city, some information about a quite unusual life of this Orthodox monk should be presented. Gerasim Zelić was born in 1752 in a small village Žegar in the Venetian ruled Dalmatia (today Croatia). He became monk in 1774 in one of the Orthodox monasteries in Dalmatia, the Krupa monastery. Nevertheless, quiet monastic life was not compatible with Zelić's temperament and ambitions. His life was marked by a series of confrontations with other monks, clerics and members of the Church hierarchy. Zelić set to himself goal

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to become the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Dalmatia. He undertook many travels during his lifetime, which were often instigated by the quarrels with the other monks in the monastery. Four years after entering the monastery, Zelić was already on his way to Sremski Karlovci, the seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Habsburg Monarchy. That was only the beginning of his travels during which he visited the most important cities of the Russian Empire (St Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev), many regions of the Habsburg Monarchy and even reached the capital of the Napoleon's Empire, Paris. In 1792 he was accorded the title of the Vicar-General of Dalmatia. He continued to play an influential role among the Orthodox clergy in Dalmatia till 1820, when the Austrian government confined him in Vienna because of his conflict with the Dalmatian Episcopo. Gerasim Zelić never returned to his monastery and died in Buda in 1828.<sup>1</sup> In 1823 he published his autobiography under the title *The Life*, wishing to explain his actions and to present for one more time evidence against his adversaries.

His many travels eventually brought Gerasim Zelić to the capital of the Ottoman Empire. He visited Istanbul when he was returning from a visit to the Russian Empire and he spent there several months, from April till July 1784 and from February till July 1785. The period between his two stays in Istanbul Zelić spent on Mount Athos.

According to his own account, Zelić decided to visit Istanbul while he was in Russia. He received a counsel from a Russian cleric, that if he wanted to travel around the Russian Empire collecting alms for his monastery, he should first receive the honorary monastic title of archimandrite, because „in Russia there are so many foreign archimandrites from Jerusalem, from Holy Mount Athos and from many other lands“.<sup>2</sup> This council greatly affected Zelić's plans and marked his stay in the Ottoman capital. In his autobiography it can be clearly perceived that most of the activities that Zelić undertook in Istanbul were aimed at achieving the goal of receiving the title of archimandrite. Thus in the narration the greatest attention was given to the accounts about Zelić's

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<sup>1</sup> The information about the life and the work of Gerasim Zelić was given in the prologue of the critical issue of the autobiography: Jovan Radulović, “‘Žitije’ Gerasima Zelića”, in: *Gerasim Zelić, Žitije, [The Life]*, Beograd 1988, 477–487.

<sup>2</sup> Gerasim Zelić, op.cit., 68. Many of the orthodox monasteries had to rely on the financial donations received from the coreligionists. They sent their monks sometimes to very distant lands in order to collect alms. The monks from the most prominent monasteries had a developed tradition of sending these traveling monks, who didn't collect alms only from the ordinary people, but also received gifts from rulers. As the wealthiest and most influential orthodox state, the Russian Empire was visited by many traveling monks. A. Fotić, “Athonite Travelling Monks and the Ottoman Authorities (16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)”, in: E. Causevic, N. Moacanin, V. Kursar (Eds.), *Perspectives on Ottoman Studies. Papers from the 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium of the International Committee of Pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Studies (CIEPO)*, Belin 2010, 157–158.

meetings with the prominent figures among the Orthodox clergy. Nevertheless, Zelić included in his work lengthy descriptions of the most important monuments and buildings, as well as anecdotes that reflect some aspects of the way of life in the Ottoman capital.

Upon his arrival to Istanbul, Zelić must have chosen as his primary goal to arrange encounter with the highest authority in the Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarch. In the time of Zelić's visit the jurisdiction of the Patriarch in Constantinople included all of the Ottoman Balkan provinces, as Serbian Patriarchate of Peć and the autonomous episcopate of Ohrid were abolished in 1766/67. Zelić's perspective is thus that of a monk from a faraway province, who is visiting for the first time the seat of the head of the Orthodox Church hierarchy. His descriptions are quite vivid and one can reconstruct how the formal audience at the Patriarchal court looked like.

The seat of the Patriarchate Zelić described as "one small monastery and simple church, which is quite long and wide, and near Fener". The Patriarch had a guard of "forty Turks", whose existence Zelić interprets more as a protection from the ill will of the Turks or as a prevention of the Patriarch's flight than as an honor.<sup>3</sup> Zelić himself was stopped at the gates of the Patriarchate by two Turkish guards, who called for the Patriarch's archdeacon to receive the visitor and bring him before the Patriarch. The receiving room is described as spacious and covered by "the most beautiful carpets made in Egypt". There were twelve people in the room, as Zelić remarks, "six with beards and six laymen".<sup>4</sup> The presence of laymen is not surprising as it was an established trend during the 17<sup>th</sup> and especially 18<sup>th</sup> century for the members of the influential Phanariot families to occupy the important official positions at the Patriarchal court.<sup>5</sup> Everybody was sitting with their legs crossed and all had long tobacco pipes. The Patriarch was surrounded by five metropolitans. If Zelić's identification of the present clerics is correct, the number could be indicative, because from the middle of the eighteenth century the most important role in the election of the Patriarch and generally in the Church administration was played by five metropolitans, those of Heracleia, Kyzikos, Nicomedia, Nicae and Chalcedon.<sup>6</sup> After he bowed and kissed the Patriarch's hand, Zelić gave to him golden praying beads as a gift, but he got an impression that the Patriarch was not

<sup>3</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 74.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity. A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence*, Cambridge 1968, 175–176.

<sup>6</sup> Pinelopi Stathi, "Provincial Bishops of the Orthodox Church as Members of the Ottoman Elite (Eighteenth–Nineteenth Century)", in: Antonis Anastasopoulos, *Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire, Halcyon Days in Crete V. A Symposium Held in Rethymno 10–12 January 2003*, Rethymno 2005, 78.

content with the gift. As soon as he had taken the seat, archdeacon brought him a cup of coffee “without sugar” and a smoking pipe. Gerasim Zelić was not used to smoking, but he felt obliged to smoke in order not to offend the present notables.<sup>7</sup>

The whole reception was similar to those made at the courts of Ottoman officials, which is not surprising. The Orthodox clergy adapted to the models existing in the Ottoman society and they used the same or similar ways to present their status as those used by Ottoman dignitaries. This was not typical only for the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which had, thanks to its position, the closest connection with the Ottoman government and court. The metropolitans and bishops in the provinces strived to imitate on a smaller scale the habits and the organization of the Patriarchal court.<sup>8</sup> Being a foreigner, Zelić’s attention was easily drawn to the details, such as the way of sitting or the things served to the guest, which could be overlooked by a person accustomed to that manner of communication and formal reception.

During this first reception, Zelić exchanged only a few words with the Patriarch through an Albanian interpreter, which was recommended to Zelić at the Venetian embassy. The scarcity of the said words notwithstanding, the conversation gives interesting information not only about the manners of the Patriarchal court, but also about Zelić’s opinion about the Church and its policies. He was asked in Turkish where he came from and after responding that he was from Dalmatia, the Patriarch only wished to know how many monasteries and churches there were in that land. Thereafter, Zelić spent half an hour listening to the Patriarch’s conversation with the metropolitans and the present Greek notables, which, as a matter of fact, he did not understand, as they talked “in Turkish and Greek”.

Only after leaving the Patriarchal court, Gerasim Zelić asked his interpreter what the Patriarch and the others commented about him and learned that the Patriarch said that “the Christians in Dalmatia were not Orthodox Christians”. This was a great disappointment for Zelić and he thought of two possible reasons for such a remark. The first was the fact that there was not an

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<sup>7</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 75; Aleksandar Fotić, “(Ne)sporno uživanje: Pojava kafe i duvana”, [The (Un)disputable Enjoyment: The Appearance of Coffee and Tobacco], in: Aleksandar Fotić (ed.), *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama u osvit modernog doba*, [Private Life in Serbian Lands at the Dawn of Modern Age], Beograd 2005, 290–291.

<sup>8</sup> Nenad Makuljević, “Vizuelna kultura i privatni identitet pravoslavnih hrišćana u 18. veku” [The Visual Culture and the Private Identity of the Orthodox Christians in the 18th Century], in: Aleksandar Fotić (ed.), *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama u osvit modernog doba*, [Private Life in Serbian Lands at the Dawn of Modern Age], Beograd 2005, 106–107.

Orthodox Dalmatian episcopo at that time. Zelić's stressing of that fact is in accordance with his ambition to become the head of the Orthodox Church in Dalmatia. The second possible reason that Zelić proposed, was that the Dalmatian Orthodox Christians had never paid taxes to the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In connection with that he made a remark about heavy burdens that Christian clergy in the Ottoman Empire requested from their coreligionists, as he was informed "by Serbs and Greeks that he met in Istanbul and on the Mount Athos".<sup>9</sup> Zelić's disappointment is understandable, because the importance of common Orthodox religious identity was still great at the end of the eighteenth century, and it can be seen in Zelić's work that he strived to stress the belonging of his countrymen to the Orthodoxy.<sup>10</sup> Although Zelić dedicated relatively a lot of space to the explanation of this misunderstanding, he never mentioned how it was solved. He visited the Patriarch more than once, and from the text it is evident that later he was received as a coreligionist.

Gerasim Zelić continued to visit the highest Orthodox clergy throughout his sojourn in Istanbul. His accounts attest to the presence of the great number of the highest Orthodox clergymen in the Ottoman capital. Allegedly, the arch-bishop of Sinai Cyril asked Zelić to join the monastery of St Catherine, promising him that he will receive the charts given by Russian Emperors to the said monastery and with which he would be able to travel to Russia and collect alms. This proposition, nevertheless, was refused by Zelić. Beside the high clergy, Zelić remarks that he also met many monks in Istanbul, "because one can rarely find a secular priest there, but only monks from Mount Athos and other lands, and they are parochial priests in Constantinopolitan churches".<sup>11</sup>

During his second stay in Istanbul, Gerasim Zelić continued to develop and expand his connections with the highest Church prelates. He worked as chaplain for the Orthodox Christians employed at the Venetian embassy and also served in the chapel of the Russian embassy and in the Greek St Nicholas Church in "Baluk-Pazar"(Balıkpazarı). Choosing these posts, Zelić had in mind his primary goal – the receiving of the title of the archimandrite. He hoped that these services would earn him a recommendation from the Venetian

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<sup>9</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "Orthodox Culture and Collective Identity in the Ottoman Balkans during the Eighteenth Century", in: Kate Fleet (ed.), *The Ottoman Empire in the Eighteenth Century, Oriente Moderno*, n.s. XVIII (LXXIX), 1 (1999), 135–136.

<sup>11</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 87.

ambassador.<sup>12</sup> And just before leaving the city in July 1785, Zelić succeeded to be promoted to archimandrite by the Patriarch of Jerusalem Abraham.<sup>13</sup>

Along with the accounts about the people he met in Istanbul, Gerasim Zelić wrote about his impressions of the city. As was already said, he was a foreigner in the Ottoman Empire, but his descriptions of the city and its inhabitants are those of somebody who was not completely unfamiliar with the way of life of the subjects of the Sultan. Although Zelić's attention was mostly given to his Orthodox coreligionists, he did not exclude the Muslims from his accounts.

Gerasim Zelić approached Istanbul from the North and his first impressions were connected with Büyükdere, "where all of the foreign ambassadors and consuls in Istanbul have their villas and gardens".<sup>14</sup> Another Serbian visitor of Istanbul, Dositej Obradović,<sup>15</sup> had to wait for 20 days at the Dardanelles because of the unfavorable winds and used this time to visit the gardens and villas of rich city inhabitants on both sides of the strait, which made more than positive impression upon him with "the great number of nightingales, which sang to us tirelessly".<sup>16</sup> Although, the two Serbian travelers did not have much intercourse with the Ottoman officials they could have a glimpse of the luxurious life in the pleasure gardens and seaside villas.<sup>17</sup>

Upon arriving in Istanbul and seeing, as he wrote, the "indescribable greatness of the city", Zelić acknowledged that his emotions are ambiguous. On the one side, he was happy because he was finally in the city that he had wanted to visit since his childhood, but, on the other side, he felt sadness because "the place of such beauty lies in the hands of the barbarians". Although he brands the

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–87.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–96.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Dositej Obradović (c. 1740–1811) was born in a small town Ciacova in Banat, then part of the Habsburg Empire. He received religious education and became a monk. Nevertheless after a short period spent in the monastery, Obradović decided to leave it and to start travelling and expanding his education. On one of his many travels he visited Istanbul in 1781. He studied philosophy in Halle and Leipzig. Dositej Obradović became one of the most important proponents of the Enlightenment movement among the Serbs in Habsburg monarchy, developing through years anti-clerical and secular viewpoints. He supported the Serbian uprising in 1804, and in 1808 he became the Minister of Education in the government formed in Serbia. In the same year he established the Great School, which was the beginning of the higher education in Serbia. His most famous work is the autobiography published in two parts, in 1783 and 1788. Milorad Pavić, "Serbian literature of the Pre-Romanticism", in: *History of the Serbian People*, IV, 2, Belgrade 1986, 238–241.

<sup>16</sup> [Dositej Obradović], *Život i priključenija Dimitrija Obradoviča narečenog u kaluderstvu Dositeja njim istim spisat i sazdat*, [The Life and Adventures of Dimitrije Obradović, as a monk named Dositej, written and published by himself], in: *Sabrana dela Dositeja Obradoviča [The Collected Works of Dositej Obradović]*, vol. 1, Beograd 2007, 130.

<sup>17</sup> Ebru Boyar, Kate Fleet, *A Social History of Ottoman Istanbul*, Cambridge 2010, 230–231.

rulers of Istanbul as barbarians, Zelić did not show interest only for the Christian heritage of the city and recognized the Muslim aspects of the city's architecture and culture. He described the city's outline as defined by the great number of minarets and informed his readers that from these minarets *hocas* call the Muslims to prayer "three times a day".<sup>18</sup> He understood that Aya Sofya was Sultan's mosque and that he prayed there every Friday. Zelić went to see this famous temple several times; he tried to measure its width and he talked with the locals about its history and current appearance. He commented that the interior walls of the church were originally covered with mosaics, but that "they were painted over by the Turks".<sup>19</sup> Zelić mentioned in his description of mosques that there is a great mosque in the place of the Monastery of Stoudion (near Yeđi Kule fortress), "where now the dervishes (Turkish monks) live and where the Turkish money is minted". The narrow streets of Istanbul reminded him of those in Venice, but still he did not refrain himself from making a comment that they were very dirty, „because the Turkish police does not take care of the hygiene as the police in other European cities do“.<sup>20</sup>

One anecdote can be of interest, although some of its aspects are almost certainly fictitious. When describing the important monuments of the city, Zelić wrote of his visit to the square near Aya Sofya. He did not mention that the square had been hippodrome, but he had described the columns that always were its most prominent feature. The Obelisk of Theodosius was especially interesting for the Serbian monk and he gave a rather strange description of the monument. This description gives a reason to suspect the truthfulness of the whole story. Somehow he interpreted the hieroglyphs inscribed on the obelisk and the representations on its basis as pictures representing "all the miracles from the creation of the world, the birth of Jesus Christ and his passion, the resurrection and the ascension to the Holy Spirit..." Zelić decided to try to use his sparse knowledge of Greek in order to read the Greek inscription on the marble pedestal of the obelisk in order to find out which emperor had erected the monument. One day he came to the column and started to write down the Greek inscription. Soon a great number of people, as he wrote, gathered around him and they started to inquire about his intentions. They even brought one Greek to interpret. When Zelić told the crowd that he couldn't read the lower part of the inscription because it was buried, one Turk started to remove the earth with his sword. After he had finished, Zelić still could not find the date and, because he started to fear that the crowd would attack him, he made up that

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<sup>18</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 73.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.



the column was erected by Emperor Justinian. After that, the gathered people dispersed and he decided to go right away to the Patriarchate and ask there if they can translate the inscription.

The Patriarch and the present metropolitans were shocked when they heard how Zelić made the transcription and that the crowd had let him go. Zelić further emphasized the danger of his act by saying that before a few months one Greek had been killed when he stopped by a door in order to read a Greek inscription written over it. Allegedly none of the present clergymen could read the transcription, so a secretary had to be called to make a translation, which, according to Zelić, confirmed that Emperor Justinian erected the monument. Both of these facts – alleged inability of members of the highest clergy to read the inscription and the wrong translation (emperor in question was Theodosius) – give further evidence that Zelić made up at least some aspects of this story.<sup>21</sup> Gerasim Zelić probably wanted to present himself to the readers as a daring and curious person, and the fact that he wrote several decades after the described events might be also responsible for the errors. But still, recurring mention of the curiosity and the surprise of the public concerning the examination of the archeological remains might attest to the fact that such activities were not common in Istanbul.

From Zelić's account it can be partly reconstructed what the experiences of foreign clerics in Istanbul were like. The first thing any man would observe on a foreigner is the attire. Zelić remarked that he wore full attire of his rank: a cross, a cassock (an outer robe with wide sleeves; *rasa*, *mantoros*), a *kamilavka* (a brimless hat with a veil) and a reed cane (*kanadindija*). What made him stress this fact is seen from his observation that, unlike him, neither the Patriarch nor the metropolitans and bishops living in Istanbul wore publicly above mentioned Church robes, but they used instead *džube* (an outer robe worn by Muslim religious figures) and a shawl. He obviously did not discuss that matter with the members of the clergy he met, because he was not sure which was the real reason for that habit ("they cannot or do not want to wear...").<sup>22</sup>

Gerasim Zelić did not mention that he had problems because of his attire. On the contrary, he used it once to evade a possible trouble. Going around the city, Zelić noticed that on many corners there were people who stopped passers-by and asked them to show the tax receipts. Zelić was stopped once by one of those persons, which he described as a tax-collector (*haračlija*). He succeeded

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–93.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

to be promptly left to go after showing a Russian passport, which he received during his travels in Russia and which was not valid any more. According to Zelić's account, after seeing the unusual robe of the Serbian monk and the imperial coat of arms in the document the Turk commented that Zelić must have been "a great Moscowite Priest" (or as Zelić transcribed it: "boyuk papas moskov").<sup>23</sup> This was not unique case of Serbian clerics using Russian passport to intimidate Ottoman officials. Serbian theologian and historian from the Habsburg Monarchy, Jovan Rajić<sup>24</sup> was asked to pay taxes by Ottoman officials who inspected his ship during his short visit to Istanbul in 1758. Rajić and his companion showed them the Russian passports and after that they were released.<sup>25</sup>

Gerasim Zelić was also a witness of the plague outbreak in Istanbul in June 1785. As soon as the plague started the Venetian ambassador and his retinue commenced the preparation for a retreat to Büyükdere. Zelić, on the other hand, decided that it was time to return to his monastery and he remained in the city waiting for a ship. He stayed at the embassy in Galata and in Fener, in the house of some rich Greeks he befriended. The Greeks, for their part, left the city and took refuge in Arnavutköy. He had contacts with several people who had the disease and, although he wrote his book several decades after the events, the distress and urgency that he must have felt can easily be perceived.<sup>26</sup> The already mentioned Serbian theologian, Jovan Rajić, also happened to be in Istanbul during a plague outbreak in 1758. In the short account of his trip from today Romania to the Mount Athos, he wrote that by embarking in Istanbul they passed over from a fear of sea to an even greater fear, that of plague. In order to limit the possibility of infection, Rajić rented a room in Galata, in which he spent six days waiting for a ship to continue his journey.<sup>27</sup> And only a few years before Zelić, Dositej Obradović experienced the same problems. He was so afraid of the disease that he decided to stay for more than half a year in Chios when he heard of the plague in Istanbul. When at last he came to the city in April 1781, there was a new outbreak of plague. Fearing for his life, he decided

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>24</sup> Jovan Rajić (1726–1801) was born in Sremski Karlovci, then in the Habsburg Monarchy. He was one of the most educated Serbian theologians of the time. Nevertheless, his most famous work was not about theology, it is his *History of Various Slavic Peoples, Particularly the Bulgarians, Croats and Serbs*, written from 1757 to 1768, and published in four volumes in 1794–1795. He visited Istanbul in 1758, when he was travelling to the Mount Athos. Milorad Pavić, "Serbian Literature of the Baroque", in: *History of the Serbian People*, IV, 2, Belgrade 1986, 192–193.

<sup>25</sup> Tomislav Jovanović, "Rajićevo Moreplovianje kao tip putopisa", [Rajić's Voyage by the Sea as a Model of a Travel Book"], in: Marta Frajnd (ed.), *Jovan Rajić. Život i delo, [Jovan Rajić. Life and Work]*, Beograd 1997, 184.

<sup>26</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 98–100.

<sup>27</sup> Tomislav Jovanović, *op.cit.*, 184.

to stay in Pera. Nevertheless, even there Obradović did not feel safe and soon he found a ship to take him to Moldavia.<sup>28</sup>

Unlike Rajić and Obradović, Gerasim Zelić had to spend more time in the city stricken by disease. He dedicated several pages of his book to the plague, describing in detail what he had done during the outbreak. As prevention, every morning he rubbed vinegar in the skin. After that he drank coffee and smoke tobacco, because “smoking is always good against the ill air and plague, as the Greeks told me”.<sup>29</sup> Zelić gave last communion to the diseased and he once even thought that he got the disease. Wishing to make a last confession he went to the evening liturgy at the church. His description of this episode is very interesting, because he claims that he heard bells and thereafter a voice of a man who went through the streets calling people to gather at the church.<sup>30</sup> From Zelić’s account it is not visible whether he was aware that such actions were highly unlikely to happen in the center of the Ottoman capital.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it cannot be determined with certainty if this story is only a product of Zelić’s much later reminiscing of the events or was it really possible that he could have heard the sound of bells in Istanbul.

The account about Istanbul given by Gerasim Zelić has the characteristics of the accounts made by western travelers, but there are also some differences. He was a person with various overlapping identities and also a person who thanks to his own ambitions experienced far more than most of his monastic brothers. He was educated in the monastic school and he became monk and later Church official, but he also traveled across many parts of Europe and was deeply involved in the politics and diplomacy. Zelić’s character and plans also left a mark on the description of his stay in Istanbul. He was more interested in the persons he met – the Church notables and other influential Christians and foreign ambassadors, but still that does not mean that he was closed to experiencing the life of the city and he showed an interest in its history and architecture. Thus it can be concluded that Gerasim Zelić’s work is a valuable addition to the long line of the accounts about the fascinating imperial capital on the Bosphorus.

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<sup>28</sup> Dositej Obradović, *op.cit.*, 128–129.

<sup>29</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> Gerasim Zelić, *op.cit.*, 101–102.

<sup>31</sup> Rossitsa Gradeva, “Ottoman Policy towards Christian Church Buildings“, *Etudes balcaniques*, 4 (1994), 33; Aleksandar Fotić, “Između zakona i njegove primene“, [Between Law and its Application], in: Aleksandar Fotić (ed.), *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama u osvjet modernog doba*, [Private Life in Serbian Lands at the Dawn of Modern Age], Beograd 2005, 37.

## Summary

Gerasim Zelić was born in the small village of Žegar in Venetian ruled Dalmatia in 1752. When he was 17 years old he joined the monastery Krupa, also in Dalmatia. Nevertheless, he did not live a secluded life inside the walls of the monastery. His whole life was marked by many travels that he undertook, both to the Western European countries and to the two great Empires in the east, the Ottoman and the Russian. In order to recount his travels and his strife for ever higher positions in the church hierarchy and for the creation of the Orthodox Episcopal see in Dalmatia, Gerasim Zelić wrote an autobiography.

The aim of this paper is to present and analyze Gerasim Zelić's description of his two visits to Istanbul in 1784/5. During his second stay in the capital of the Ottoman Empire, he worked for 6 months as a chaplain for the Orthodox Christians employed in the Venetian consulate. He had opportunity to meet the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Patriarch of Jerusalem, as well as other members of high Orthodox clergy. Zelić used the months spent in Istanbul to visit many parts of the city and to get acquainted with the way of life of its inhabitants. In his autobiography, Gerasim Zelić also wrote a description of the plague outbreak in Istanbul.

Gerasim Zelić was not a lonely case of a traveler and generally inquisitive person among the Serbian 18<sup>th</sup> century clerics and monks. In the paper his experience is compared with that of several other Serbian travelers who visited Istanbul.

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