

Izvirni znanstveni članek/Article (1.01)

*Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly* 80 (2020) 3, 669—683

Besedilo prejeto/Received:05/2020; sprejeto/Accepted:05/2020

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DOI: 10.34291/BV2020/03/Malmenvall

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## **Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea: Ruler Martyrdom and its Reception in Serbian Historiography<sup>1</sup>**

*Jovan Vladimir iz Duklje: vladarsko mučeništvo in njegov odmev v srbskem zgodovinopisju*

*Abstract:* According to the Serbian historical consciousness, Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea (Duklja, present-day Montenegro), who lived at the beginning of the eleventh century, is regarded as the first Serbian as well as first Slavic saint of the Western Balkans. He was, however, in the subsequent medieval and modern Serbian historiography, discussed as a minor historical figure or precursor of the saints from the royal Nemanjić dynasty. On the other hand, Jovan Vladimir should be understood as a part of a wider phenomenon of ruler martyrs, murdered out of political self-interest by Christians themselves, which was common in the newly Christianized lands on the northern and eastern periphery of medieval Europe. The aim of this study is to show that Jovan Vladimir, accentuating the insufficiency of the secular paradigm in (post)modern historiography, was not only a political leader, but should also be perceived as a saintly personality in accordance with the original textual material dependent on the Christian interpretative framework.

*Key words:* Jovan Vladimir, Dioclea (Duklja), ruler martyrs, medieval literature, Serbian historiography

*Povzetek:* V skladu s srbsko zgodovinsko zavestjo velja Jovan Vladimir iz Duklje (današnje Črne Gore), ki je živel na začetku 11. stoletja, za prvega srbskega in tudi prvega slovanskega svetnika na zahodnem Balkanu. Kljub temu je bil v kasnejšem srednjeveškem in modernem srbskem zgodovinopisju obravnavan kot manj pomembna zgodovinska osebnost oziroma kot predhodnik svetnikov iz kraljevske rodbine Nemanjićev. Po drugi strani moramo Jovana Vladimirja razumeti kot del širšega pojava vladarskih mučencev, ki so jih zaradi političnih interesov umorili kristjani sami in ki je bil razširjen v novo pokristjanjenih deželah na severnem in vzhodnem obrobju srednjeveške Evrope. Cilj te študije je

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of the postdoctoral basic research project Z6-1883 „Ruler Saints (Martyrs) on the Periphery of Medieval Europe: Kievan Rus', Norway, Dioclea“ carried out at the Faculty of Law and Business Studies (Ljubljana) and financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

pokazati, da Jovan Vladimir, izpostavljajoč nezadostnost sekularne paradigme v (post)modernem zgodovinoписju, ni bil zgolj politični voditelj, temveč ga je treba dojemati tudi kot svetniško osebnost, o čemer pričuje prvotno tekstualno gradivo, ki ga opredeljuje krščanski interpretativni okvir.

*Ključne besede:* Jovan Vladimir, Duklja, vladarski mučenci, srednjeveška literatura, srbsko zgodovinoписje

## 1. Introduction

Between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the northern and eastern periphery of Europe was composed of polities which had recently adopted Christianity. Here, regardless of the rising cultural and doctrinal differences between the Western (Catholic) and Eastern (Eastern Orthodox) Christianity, a special common type of veneration of the saints emerged – ruler martyrs or ‚passion-bearers‘ (*страстотрпыцы*) in Church Slavic terminology. This type of sainthood refers to saints characterized by a martyr’s death caused out of political self-interest by Christians themselves, not by members of other religions as a result of hatred against the Christian faith as such. The following ruler martyrs can be regarded as representative examples of this phenomenon: princes Boris and Gleb (died in 1015) of Kievan Rus’, prince Jovan Vladimir (died in 1016) from Dioclea (Duklja), and jarl (earl) Magnus Erlendsson (died between 1115 and 1117) of the Orkney Isles, then part of the Norwegian kingdom.<sup>2</sup> In the face of mortal danger, these saints did not resort to revenge or fratricide as a means of struggle for power; on the contrary, they accepted their deaths for the benefit of peace in their homelands. This phenomenon also served to build the self-esteem of the ecclesiastical and secular elites of the newly Christianized polities: through the emergence of the local saints, they regarded their homelands as equally included in the world of Christian culture and being part of the biblically inspired vision of history as ‚salvation history‘.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the fact that Jovan Vladimir, according to the Serbian historical consciousness, is regarded as the first Serbian as well as first Slavic saint of the Western Balkans, the objective of this article is twofold: firstly, to provide a contextualized and transdisciplinary (historical, theological, literary) study dedicated to Jovan Vladimir’s martyrdom within the hagiographical character of the original textual material; secondly, to present the reception of his cult in subsequent medieval and modern Serbian historiography, particularly in those sub-structures dealing

<sup>2</sup> More on the phenomenon of medieval ruler martyrs: Malmenvall 2019a.

<sup>3</sup> The concept of salvation history traces its origins back to the biblical exegesis and theology of history in the late antiquity patristic period. According to this notion, history is a stage of ‚encounters‘ between God and man. On this basis, salvation history becomes a mechanism of spiritual interpretation of the secular events, personalities, and processes for which empirical evidence exists. (Malmenvall 2018, 89–90)

with cultural and ecclesiastical matters. The aim of this study is to show that Jovan Vladimir, accentuating the insufficiency of the secular paradigm in (post)modern historiography, was not only a political figure, but should also be perceived as a saintly personality in accordance with the textual material dependent on the Christian interpretative framework. For this purpose, a semiotic culturological method is applied. It is based on a deep analysis of the narratives of the original sources. The same methodology was applied by one of the authors of this study in several of his previous works (Malmenvall 2019b; 2019c) dealing with the construction of historical consciousness among the medieval Slavs belonging to the Eastern Orthodox ecclesiastical sphere in the period directly after their official adoption of Christianity.

## 2. Sources and state of research

The story of prince Jovan Vladimir can be found in four main narrative sources. The first is a brief report on Jovan Vladimir's death included in the Byzantine imperial chronicle titled *Short History* (Σύνοψις ιστοριῶν, *Synopsis historiarum*), written by John Skylitzes (1040s–1090s) (Wortley 2010). The second one is an extensive interpolation on Jovan Vladimir's life and death representing the thirty-sixth chapter of the medieval Latin historiographical text *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, more commonly known as the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea* (Serb. *Летопис попа Дукљанина*)<sup>4</sup> and generally regarded as the earliest known medieval narrative source from the Western Balkans,<sup>5</sup> most probably written in the second half of the twelfth or at the beginning of the thirteenth century (Živković 2009, 2:25–26; 2:57–68; 2:340–372). The third source is an extensive report on Jovan Vladimir's life and death included in the adapted Italian version of the *Chronicle* titled *The Realm of the Slavs* (*Il regno degli Slavi*) written by Mauro Orbini (1563–1613), a Benedictine monk from Ragusa (Dubrovnik), and published in Pesaro in 1601. The fourth source is an anonymous Greek hagiography with liturgical hymns or *akolouthia* (ἀκολουθία) dedicated to Jovan Vladimir and published in Venice in 1690. (Živković 2009, 2:25–26; 2:28; 2:262–263; Ingam 1990, 876–879; Simeonova 2017, 162–163) Among these texts, due to its early composition, consistent narrative, and conceptual elaborateness (Ingam 1990, 876–879), the thirty-sixth chapter of the *Chronicle* is the one that we shed further light on.

The study of Jovan Vladimir has usually been a part of a wider context of research and discussion concerning the *Chronicle*. Among the earlier works the two that deserve special attention are those by Ferdo Šišić (1869–1940) (1928), a Croatian historian, and Vladimir Alekseevich Moshin (1894–1987) (1950), a Russian historian. Among later works the Latin-Polish critical edition of the *Chronicle* redacted by Jan Lesny (1947–1994) (1988) and a narratological study on the same

<sup>4</sup> It should be made clear, though, that in the *Chronicle* this prince of Dioclea is named Vladimir only.

<sup>5</sup> The English text of the *Chronicle* follows the translation made by the authors of this study.

source by Nikola Banašević (1895–1992) (1971), a Serbian literary historian, can be mentioned. The latest critical edition of this source was prepared by Tibor Živković (1966–2013) (2009a; 2009b), a Serbian historian.

In modern era, the story of Jovan Vladimir, in this case mostly based on the narrative of Mauro Orbini, was already present within the seminal work of Jovan Raić (1726–1801) (1794, 232–239), archimandrite of the Monastery of Kovilj in the region of Vojvodina. Consequently, one of the four main sources on the holy prince became an integral part of the beginnings of the Serbian critical historiography from the Enlightenment period. In Serbia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, three relevant popular scientific monographs were written: the first by Dimitrije Ruvarac (1842–1931) (1892), a cultural historian; the second by Stojan Novaković (1842–1915) (1893), a literary historian; and the third by Čedomir Marjanović (1872–1944) (1925; 2003), an ecclesiastical historian. Among these three historians, Marjanović provides the most systematic contextualization of the narratives on Jovan Vladimir and his cult within the process of the Christianization of the South Slavs from the aspect of twofold cultural influence in the (early) medieval Western Balkans – Latin (Catholic) and Byzantine (Eastern Orthodox). Furthermore, Marjanović regards Jovan Vladimir both as an important historical figure and a saintly personality (2003, 7–35) who was somewhat ‘forgotten’ due to the subsequent crucial political and cultural role played by the Nemanjić dynasty (5–6).

A systematic contemporary research study of the sources concerning the martyrdom of Jovan Vladimir, including the edition of less-known early modern Greek and Slavic liturgical texts, was conducted by Veneta Savova (2018), a Bulgarian historian and philologist. The only thorough biographical and cultural study on Jovan Vladimir so far was published by the contemporary Serbian historian Đorđe Đekić, who examines the prince of Dioclea both as a historical figure and as a saint, seriously taking into consideration, among other aspects, the theological reasoning behind Jovan Vladimir’s cult and the sociopolitical implications of his legacy (2017, 16–19). In the English-speaking world, the most comprehensive study of Jovan Vladimir’s sainthood was carried out by Norman W. Ingham (Ingham 1987; Ingham 1990), an American cultural and literary historian. The Jovan Vladimir theme is also included in some general studies dealing with the medieval South Slavic history and culture, where at least Stanislaus Hafner (1916–2006) (1964), a Slovene-Austrian cultural and literary historian, deserves special mention.

However, it is interesting that the hagiographical narration(s) and historical circumstances concerning Jovan Vladimir were not specifically, but rather generally and sporadically, covered even in the Serbian ecclesiastical historical literature of the late nineteenth and the most of the twentieth century, including the textbooks for history taught in the Eastern Orthodox theological seminaries, the comprehensive synthesis of Serbian ecclesiastical history written by Nikanor Ružičić (1843–1916) (1893, 177–179; 189; 202; 264–265; 301), and the referential three-volume work composed by Đoko Sljepčević (1907–1993); his first volume is dedicated to the history of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Western Balkans

until the end of the eighteenth century (1962). In this context, two exceptions should be noted: a textbook (1929) and a monograph on Jovan Vladimir intended for a wider audience (1925) written by the already mentioned Serbian ecclesiastical historian Čedomir Marjanović. (Radoman 2018) On the other hand, the early medieval period of the South Slavic (Serbian) ecclesiastical and cultural history before the rise of the Nemanjić dynasty at the beginning of the thirteenth century was clearly present in concluding (magistral and doctoral) works among priests and monks from Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina studying at the theological academies in the Russian Empire<sup>6</sup> during the turn of the twentieth century, such as Živojin Jovičić, Marko Knežević Lipovac, Mihailo Jovanović, Sve-tozar Niketić, Jovan Nikolić, Marko Pejić, and Nikodim Petrović (Puzović 2017, 507; 511; 523–524; 526–527; 531; 533).

### 3. Martyrdom of Jovan Vladimir

The thirty-sixth chapter of the *Chronicle* is different from the rest of this source by virtue of its hagiographical aspect and structure, which have long been recognized. It glorifies prince Jovan Vladimir as an exemplary ruler imitating Christ, without giving special attention to the historical facts placed within a coherent chronology. (Trajković-Filipović 2013, 260; 264; Mitić 2016, 137) This chapter begins the story about Jovan Vladimir by mentioning the military campaign of the Bulgarian tsar, Samuel, against Dioclea and Dalmatia. Subsequently, when the Bulgarian tsar (*imperator*) arrived with his army, Vladimir was encircled on Mount Oblik and saw that he could not engage him in battle. Samuel sent messengers to Vladimir to encourage him and his soldiers to descend from the mountain, but the prince declined.

»However, a *župan* [/i>upanus] of that same place, like the traitor Judas, sent a message to the emperor, stating: »Master, if it pleases your eminence, I will deliver the king to you;« to which the emperor replied: »If you manage to do this, know that I will make you rich and powerful.« The king [/prince Vladimir] then gathered all the men who were with him, and spoke to them thus: »Dearest brethren, it seems fitting to me that I fulfil the adage of the evangelist, which states: The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. (John 10,11; 15,13) Therefore, brothers, it is better that I devote my being to all of you and deliver my body voluntarily for butchery or slaughter, and thereby deliver you from famine or the sword.« (Živković 2009, 1:126)

Not long after this, Samuel's daughter Kosara, »inspired by the Holy Spirit«, asked her father if she might go to the prison with her maids and wash the heads

<sup>6</sup> It is worth mentioning that the first companion to the history of the Serbian Orthodox Church was written by a Russian, Yevgeny Golubinsky (1834–1912), professor of the Moscow Spiritual Academy, who dedicated one of its paragraphs to Jovan Vladimir (1871, 427).

and feet of the chained captives – Samuel agreed. Noticing Vladimir among the prisoners, she was, as the author of the *Chronicle* reports, struck by his »handsome appearance, humility, and wisdom«. She was intent upon securing his release from bondage and asked her father to let her marry Vladimir, adding that she would »rather die than accept another man«. Samuel granted Kosara her request and gave Vladimir both the land of his patrimony (Dioclea) and the »whole territory of Dyrrachion« (present-day Dürres/Drač in northern Albania). Afterwards, Vladimir lived with Kosara »in all sanctity and chastity, worshipping God and serving him night and day«, and he ruled his people in »a just manner« (Živković 2009, 1:128; 1:130).

Soon, however, Samuel died, and his son Radomir came to power. He waged numerous campaigns against Byzantium. Therefore, fearing the loss of his territories, Byzantine emperor, Basil II (976–1025), secretly sent ambassadors to Vladislav, Radomir's cousin, and bribed him to usurp the Bulgarian throne by killing Radomir. (Živković 2009, 1:123; 1:134; Bošković 2017, 262) Once Vladislav had usurped the throne, he sent envoys to Vladimir, demanding his attendance at the court in Prespa.

Meanwhile, Vladislav had given orders for ambushes to be set along the route so that, as Vladimir passed by, Vladislav's soldiers would kill him. However, God sent his angels to guard Vladimir. Thus, as the king passed through the ambushes, the soldiers realized that these were the Lord's angels and all of them fled. Vladislav noticed that Vladimir had arrived to Prespa and flew into a towering rage. He had been sure that Vladimir would be murdered on the way, so that he should not appear to be implicated in the prince's death. Therefore, when he saw that his plan had been exposed, Vladislav, during his meal (*prantium*), sent swordsmen to decapitate Vladimir. While the prince prayed, the soldiers surrounded him. (Živković 2009, 1:132; 1:134)

»Next the king prayed and made his confession, received the body and blood of Christ. /... / Immediately before the doors of the church he was struck down by the soldiers; he was beheaded on May 22. /... / Henceforth the Lord revealed the merits of the blessed martyr Vladimir, since on entering the church and praying at his tomb people with many afflictions were cured, and by night all could see a divine light as if many candles were burning there.« (134; 136)

When Vladislav saw that miracles were performed at the site of Vladimir's murder, he repented and, out of fear of God's punishment, eventually allowed his cousin Kosara to take and bury the prince's body. She took his body and transported it to Krajina,<sup>7</sup> where Vladimir had had his court, and interred him in the church of Saint Mary.<sup>8</sup> Kosara lived a »pious and holy life«, and after her death

<sup>7</sup> A geographical area on the southwestern banks of Lake Skadar in present-day southeastern Montenegro (Ingam 1990, 878; Ruvarac 1892, 48; Đekić 2017, 89).

<sup>8</sup> The author of the *Chronicle* reports that »each year on his feast day many people congregate in that church, and by his merit and intercession many benefices are granted to those who pray with a virtuous heart, right until the present day« (Živković 2009, 1:136).

was entombed in the same church at the feet of her husband. (136) The most probable reason why Vladislav was able to spare the life of Kosara lies in the fact that she did not represent a threat to his rule – she was a childless widow (Mitić 2016, 138). The translation of Jovan Vladimir's remains to Krajina could, by analogy to the widespread practices in the entire medieval Christian world, mean the act or at least one of the acts leading to the prince's canonization. This was perhaps the main reason why Vladislav initially hesitated to allow Jovan Vladimir's reburial in Krajina: he was afraid that Vladimir's fame of holiness could harm his own reputation and, consequently, political position. (Đekić 2017, 83–84; Pavlović 1965, 279)

When Vladimir's body was being transported from Prespa to Krajina, Vladislav marched out to occupy Dioclea and the city of Dyrrachion, which emperor Basil had promised him in return for the murder he had perpetrated. While he was encamped before Dyrrachion, during his dinner, an angel in the image of Vladimir as an armed soldier appeared before him. He was shaken with fear and began to call for his guards to protect him against the vengeful Vladimir. Immediately he was struck by the angel. (Živković 2009, 1:136; 1:138)

#### 4. Theological and literary basis of Jovan Vladimir's martyrdom

The author of the thirty-sixth chapter of the *Chronicle* managed to compose a coherent biography (*martyrium*) of a ruler martyr combining biblical reminiscences and their interpretations in line with the specific sociocultural circumstances of Jovan Vladimir's life and death, proving that his entire personality reflected God's commandments revealed in the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, Jovan Vladimir's life and death are fundamentally understood not in terms of a political struggle, but in terms of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. This, in turn, serves as confirmation that 'divine providence' continues through (salvation) history by the willing cooperation of virtuous and pious men living in various temporal and geographical circumstances. (Ingam 1990, 890–891; Čekova 2016, 61–62; Kostić Tmušić 2016, 129; Krstić 2016, 113)

The central literary and theological motif in the *Chronicle's* report on Jovan Vladimir's life and death is the biblical reminiscence taken from the Gospel of John (10,11) about the 'Good Shepherd' (Živković 2009, 1:126). This invokes the Christ's parable about his authority ('godliness'), but also his own sacrificial love towards mankind resulting in giving »his life for his sheep«. Unlike the other princes or rulers described in the rest of the *Chronicle*, Jovan Vladimir is not distinguished by his war efforts and political success, but by Christian virtue (Kostić Tmušić 2016, 130; Krstić 2016, 113–114). The murdered prince of Dioclea is thus a *rex iustus* and *pastor bonus* at the same time. Jovan Vladimir uses his position as a leader and, consequently, his political authority, for the kenotic imitation of Christ. (Ingam 1990, 891–893)

The author of the *Chronicle* skillfully uses biblical reminiscences and Christian symbols to connect various episodes of the prince's life and confirm his sainthood. The thirty-sixth chapter of the text can be divided into five main sub-chapters or episodes: 1) Samuel's siege of Mount Oblik, the betrayal of Jovan Vladimir, and his exile; 2) his captivity in Prespa and marriage with Kosara; 3) Ivan Vladislav's call for Vladimir to come to Prespa; 4) the assassination of Jovan Vladimir and translation of his relics; 5) the death of Ivan Vladislav. The first episode concerns the betrayal of Jovan Vladimir by his *župan*, thirsty for riches and power, which is directly compared by the author of the *Chronicle* to Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus Christ, causing his death in exchange for »thirty silver coins« (Živković 2009, 1:126; Ruvarac 1892, 48–49; Matt 26,14-16.21-25; 27,3-10; John 12,4-6; 13,21-30; 18,2-5). It is a symbolical prelude or a typology of the future events which unfold in the third and eventually culminate in the fourth and fifth episodes. For example, the prince's captivity in Prespa under Samuel is a typology which culminates in his assassination at the same place under Samuel's nephew Ivan Vladislav. Similarly, Jovan Vladimir's first coming to Prespa (suffering in captivity) is a prefiguration of the second one (death), while both of them are fulfilled by the prince's spiritual victory, the final 'homecoming', when he is buried at his court in Krajina, where he is eventually, after the death of Kosara, united with his wife for 'all eternity'. Following the same typological pattern, Ivan Vladislav's meal, during which he orders the assassination of the prince, comes to fulfillment at the time of Ivan Vladislav's dinner outside the walls of Dyrrachion, where he, as a perpetrator of a crime against the innocent, is struck by an angel in the image of his victim. Furthermore, Mount Oblik, where Jovan Vladimir chooses to surrender to Samuel and thus spare the lives of his people, can be compared to the Mount of Olives, where Christ's agony takes place and where he chooses to sacrifice himself for mankind (Matt 26,36-46; Luke 22,39-46). Consequently, Prespa eventually becomes Jovan Vladimir's Calvary, a place of his innocent death comparable to the place of Christ's crucifixion (Matt 27,32-56; John 19,16-37).

In Jovan Vladimir's virtues and martyrdom, the life and death of Jesus Christ is re-realized and spiritually confirmed, though under different socio-cultural circumstances. On this basis, the entire story about Jovan Vladimir, as presented in the *Chronicle*, can be understood in terms of the theologically rich Eucharistic image of the 'Good Shepherd' whose blood is »poured out for many« (Matt 26,28; Luke 22,20). Finally, the last act of Jovan Vladimir before his voluntary death is the reception of the Holy Communion (»body and blood of our Lord«) (Živković 2009, 1:134). In doing so, he identifies with Christ's death, as explained in the words of Apostle Paul: »For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.« (1 Cor 11,26)

The phenomenon of medieval ruler martyrs can be additionally explained using the theory of 'mimetic violence' by René Girard (1987, 235–245). According to him, archaic cultures originated in the so-called mimetic desire, which encouraged the imitator to surpass one's own model and, when necessary, use various forms of violence. This mimetic desire, on the one hand, (re)created human cul-



ture, while, on the other, it paved the way towards its destruction. When the violence resulting from the mimetic desire reached its critical point, the 'scapegoat mechanism' was activated time and again in order to restore original peace – it pointed out a particular innocent victim, often perceived as a rival brother (Abel and Cain, Romulus and Remus, etc.), who was sacrificed for the renewal of a particular community. Therefore, archaic cultures were internally divided between progress and destruction, order and chaos, virtue and deception. This pattern of cyclical violence was, argues Girard, defeated through the person of Jesus Christ who subverted the scapegoat mechanism by voluntarily sacrificing his own life for the salvation of every person 'once and for all'. In this respect, an irreconcilable duality emerges between the archaic mythical world and the Gospel, violent sacrifice of someone's life for the alleged benefit of the community and voluntary sacrifice out of love for every irreplaceable human life. (Petkovšek 2018, 37–40) The ambivalent archaic culture finds the other both attractive (worthy of imitation) and dangerous (adequate for sacrifice), while the Christian mindset presupposes love towards every person and without deception acknowledges the innocence of the victim. In this context, Jovan Vladimir can be seen as an innocent victim following the example of Christ by voluntarily sacrificing himself to save the lives of others. In this way, he succeeded in (symbolically) breaking the previous cycle of violence and, consequently, rejecting the recent pagan past rooted in the notion of mimetic violence.

## 5. Influence of Jovan Vladimir's cult

In 1215, after the defeat of the Serbian prince (later king) Stefan Nemanjić (1196–1228) against the warlords of Epirus led by Despot Michael I (1204–circa 1215), the relics of Jovan Vladimir, seen as war booty, were translated from the church of Saint Mary in Krajina at the Skadar Lake to Dyrrachion. They were soon placed in the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, later named Monastery of Saint Jovan Vladimir, near Elbasan in present-day eastern Albania. Following its destruction in an earthquake, the monastery was renovated in 1381 by the Albanian count Karlo Topia (1368–1382) and dedicated to Jovan Vladimir – as the inscriptions above the main entrance of the monastery's church in Greek, Latin, and Church Slavic testify. (Polyvjannyj and Turilov 2010, 736–737; Novaković 1893, 225–227; Marjanović 1925, 39–40; 78–79; Hafner 1964, 42; Jovović 2017, 203) The earliest known written testimony about a liturgical commemoration of Jovan Vladimir on May 22 is found in the Church Slavic collection of daily readings (*aparakos*) from the *Acts of Apostles*, most probably a Serb copy of a Bulgarian original made at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century (Polyvjannyj and Turilov 2010, 736–737; Čekova 2017, 55).

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the cult of Jovan Vladimir was revived in the context of the administrative, literary and spiritual renewal of the Eastern Orthodox archdiocese of Ohrid (Achrida) under the guidance of Archbishop

Joasaph II (1719–1745), as Elbasan, the main center of Jovan Vladimir's veneration, belonged to the jurisdiction of Ohrid. (Novaković 1893, 239–243) During this period, ecclesiastical dignitaries and educated monks of the Ohrid archdiocese promoted the editing and printing of those hagiographies with a ‚patriotic‘ connotation in order to advance their clear anti-Ottoman intention. In this context, various cults of the Slavic saints living on or connected with the territory of the Western Balkans were revived: Cyrill and Methodius, Naum, Kliment, Jovan Vladimir, Sava, etc. These cults served to encourage the local Christians in preserving their faith amidst the present Islamization, on the one hand, and increasing military success of the Catholic Habsburg Empire against the Ottomans on the Balkan battleground, on the other. (Marjanović 2003, 62–64)

In the nineteenth century – starting from 1802 with the Church Slavic translation of the Greek *akolouthia* published in 1690, both of them printed in Venice – the cult of Jovan Vladimir gained popularity within the context of emerging South Slavic ethnic nationalism, particularly in the field of literary studies and ethnography. Jovan Vladimir was viewed as a Serb national saint by the Serbs, as a Bulgarian by the Bulgarians and as the heavenly protector of the Petrović dynasty of Montenegro. (Polyvjannyj and Turilov 2010, 737; Jovović 2017, 204–205; Đekić 2017, 19) Additionally, the image of Jovan Vladimir was indirectly involved in the context of the continuous acclamation of the ‚heroic‘ principality (later kingdom) of Montenegro; various authors writing for the Serbian patriotic press of Hungary (the region of Vojvodina) from the mid-nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century regarded Montenegro and its ‚glorious‘ past, particularly its resistance against the Ottoman Empire, as the symbol of the Serbian military and freedom values. (Vasin 2018) In the 1920s, after the unification of the Serbian ethnic territories under the re-established Patriarchate of Peć (Serbian Orthodox Church) within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia), Jovan Vladimir became the symbol of Serbian and Yugoslav cultural unity, particularly in the light of the connectedness of the peripheral lands, such as Montenegro and Macedonia, with central Serbia. In this context, a representative example can be recognized in the joint state-ecclesiastical solemn gathering in Ohrid in 1926 at the 910th anniversary of Jovan Vladimir's death. (Pilipović 2018, 285–286)

In Serbian historiography Jovan Vladimir is considered the first Serbian ‚holy king‘, precursor of the holy kings of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Nemanjić dynasty. Jovan Vladimir is also seen as a ruler martyr, later followed by prince Lazar Hrebeljanović (1373–1389), who died fighting the Muslim army led by the Ottoman Sultans Murad I (1362–1389) and Bayezid I (1389–1402) at the Battle of Kosovo Field in 1389. (Trajković-Filipović 2013, 259; 276; Marjanović-Dužanić 2006, 72–79) It is, however, interesting that the cult of Jovan Vladimir, despite the previous popular and ecclesiastical veneration of the prince based on textual evidence, gained its official recognition in the Serbian Orthodox Church only in 1861, when the ruler of Dioclea was canonized by the metropolitan of Belgrade, Mihailo Jovanović (1859–1881, 1889–1898). At that time, his life, adapt-

ed from the Greek *akolouthia* of 1690, was included in the miscellany of individual short hagiographies called *Srbljak* (book of Serbian saints). (Mitić 2016, 140–141; Banašević 1971, 140–141) In the case of prince Lazar, a particularly popular cult of a martyr saint in the following decades and centuries, the ecclesiastical memory draws upon two crucial points: the violent death of the hero murdered after the battle, and the fame of martyrdom acquired by a death suffered in the defense of the homeland against the Islamic invaders. Devotional compositions written for the intended founding of his cult associate his posthumous miracles with instances of healing, and with his role as his successors' intercessor before the heavenly assembly of saints coming to aid in the field of battle. Therefore, in the eleventh century the cult of a royal martyr in Dioclea, later integrated into medieval Serbia, assumes features found in the hagiography of Slavic and other literatures on the northern and eastern periphery of Europe of the time. Sacral kingship requires the ruler's identification with Christ – martyrdom and sacrifice thus bring about the collective salvation of the community over which the martyr ruled. During the late medieval period, under the influence of historical circumstances turning Serbia into a shield against the 'infidels', this ideal undergoes transformation into an elaborate program of the saintly martyr king, whose most important function, other than healing, is to assure his successors' victory in battle. (Marjanović-Dušanić 2006, 76–79)

The 'glory' of Jovan Vladimir was very soon, already in the thirteenth century, overshadowed by the new South Slavic (Serbian) ruling Nemanjić dynasty with its own saintly members, most notably Stefan Nemanja (died 1199) and his son Rastko Nemanja, who became the monk Sava, the first archbishop of Serbia (1208–1236) (Ingam 1990, 877; Bojović 1999, 34–35; 39–40). Nevertheless, the story about Jovan Vladimir, as narrated in the *Chronicle*, could have exerted some literary influence on the *Life of Simeon (Stefan Nemanja) (Житие Симеона)*, the earliest known Church Slavic hagiography written on the territory of present-day Serbia (Marinković 1998, 133–138; Juhas Georgijevska, Mirković and Bašić 1988, 13). This hagiography is dedicated to Stefan Nemanja, the first independent ruler of Serbia from the Nemanjić dynasty, who died as a monk named Simeon. It was written between 1208 and 1216 by his son Stefan Nemanjić or Stefan the First-Crowned (1196–1227),<sup>9</sup> brother of Sava – thus being one of the constitutive texts of the Nemanjić dynasty exerting its spiritual reputation. It was also the only Serbian hagiography in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries written by a layman. The main idea of this hagiography, emphasized already in its introduction (Juhas Georgijevska, Mirković and Bašić 1988, 63–64), is that God's mercy towards mankind is actively present throughout all historical periods, giving every group of people not only their own 'holy men and women', but also 'holy earthly rulers' – in this case Stefan/Simeon to the Serbs. Thus, the story of Simeon is a re-real-

<sup>9</sup> Stefan Nemanjić was a successful ruler: his reign was marked by military victories and territorial expansion, the elevation of Serbia to the rank of kingdom (1217) as well as gaining the status of autocephaly for the Serbian Orthodox Church (archdiocese of Žiča, 1219) from Constantinople (Juhas Georgijevska, Mirković and Bašić 1988, 11; Bojović 1999, 37–38).

ization of God's mercy in specific historical circumstances within a global context of salvation history. (Juhas Georgijevska, Mirković and Bašić 1988, 16–17; Bojović 1999, 65–66)

The most obvious similarities between Simeon and Jovan Vladimir are the following: they were both saints from the ranks of political leaders; they both originated from South Slavic polities in the Western Balkans; they were both taken into captivity by their own relatives and saved from imprisonment by divine intervention; the relics of both saints were eventually transferred from the places of their deaths and acquired miraculous powers; both saints eventually punished their enemies; they were both characterized as ‚Good Shepherds‘ of their people. (Hafner 1964, 44–53; Čekova 2016, 60; Popović 2018, 314–315) In addition, Stefan Nemanja himself originated from Dioclea, he was born in the town of Ribnica in present-day northern Montenegro. During Stefan Nemanja's rule over Rascia (Serbia), the relics of Jovan Vladimir still reposed in Krajina in the territory of former Dioclea, which exactly at that time (end of the twelfth century) became part of Stefan's polity. Drawing from the circumstances mentioned above, it can be assumed that the memory of the martyred prince was still alive among Dioclea's local elite and probably known in the circles around Stefan and, even later, among at least some of his descendants. Furthermore, the example of former Dioclea with its ruler saint and its urban cultural centers along the Adriatic coast, influenced by both Byzantine and Latin culture, could have been adapted as a useful means to construct a new dynastic cult of the Nemanjić dynasty together with their clear Eastern Orthodox („Greek“) orientation from the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards. (Hafner 1964, 42–43; 50–53; 75–76; Đekić 2017, 121; 123–124)

At the level of historical circumstances, theological ideas, and literary images it can be presumed that the cult of Simeon and, consequently, the beginning of the entire hagiographical tradition dealing with the saints from the Nemanjić dynasty, did not begin as a complete innovation without at least some influence coming from the existing hagiographical patterns. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that the *Life* was influenced by the narrative of Jovan Vladimir – either in the form of oral tradition, or (now lost) written texts similar to the final version found in the *Chronicle*. This presumption is supported not only by the literary parallels, but also by the geographical and chronological closeness of the rule of both saints. However, there is an important difference between Jovan Vladimir and Simeon concerning the way in which they achieved their sainthood: the latter cannot be characterized as a ruler martyr; Simeon was a military-type saint consciously fighting against domestic and foreign enemies. Thus, his sainthood was not achieved through the direct sacrifice of his own life for his people restraining from using violence. Simeon's successful political reign was eventually fulfilled by another kind of renunciation or sacrifice, the choice of the ‚angelic‘ life of a monk fully dedicated to the ‚heavenly‘ realities. In this context, Stefan (Simeon) acted as a ‚Good Shepherd‘ in two mutually interconnected ways, both as a righteous and successful ruler and as a pious monk – in both cases, building a bridge between

the ‚earthly‘ and ‚heavenly‘ realms, he proved his loyalty to his vocation(s) and made the right ‚sacrifices‘ for the benefit of his people.

## 6. Conclusion

Despite local differences, the phenomenon of ruler martyrs was common in the countries on the eastern and northern periphery of Europe that had recently adopted Christianity. In this context, one of the representative ruler martyr cults among the medieval Slavs is the case of prince Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea, who was murdered by his relative Ivan Vladislav, tsar of Bulgaria. The central literary and theological motif of Jovan Vladimir’s life and death is the biblical reminiscence taken from the Gospel of John (10,11) about the ‚Good Shepherd‘. On this basis, the entire story about Jovan Vladimir, as presented in the *Chronicle*, can be understood in terms of the Eucharistic image of the Good Shepherd whose blood is »poured out for many«. Like other ruler martyrs, such as princes Boris and Gleb of Kievan Rus’, Jovan Vladimir uses his position as a political leader for the kenotic imitation of Christ. Even though Jovan Vladimir was the first Slavic ruler saint in the Western Balkans, his martyrdom, contrary to that of Boris and Gleb, who were subsequently venerated as the protectors of their homeland and the Rurik dynasty, did not evolve into a politically significant cult. Nevertheless, the story about Jovan Vladimir could have exerted some literary influence on the *Life of Simeon* (Stefan Nemanja), written by the Serbian king Stefan Nemanjić (Stefan First-Crowned) – the constitutive text of the Nemanjić dynasty exerting its spiritual reputation.

Since Jovan Vladimir was the first Slavic saint from the territory of the Western Balkans in chronological terms, his cult found its reception in the subsequent medieval and modern Serbian historiography. In this context, a general observation, encompassing various historical periods, can be made: Jovan Vladimir was and still is considered the first Serbian ‚holy king‘, precursor of the saints from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries belonging to the royal Nemanjić dynasty, particularly Rastko Nemanja (Sava) and Stefan Nemanja (Simeon), and also of Lazar Hrebeljanović from the fourteenth century, who was a different kind of martyred prince, one who was killed in battle against the Islamic invaders. Upon analyzing modern Serbian historiography, three fundamental characteristics emerge: Jovan Vladimir is widely included in various scholarly and semi-scholarly works; however, his rule is mostly regarded as a minor episode of the medieval ‚pre-history‘ before the emergence of the Nemanjić dynasty; the personality of Jovan Vladimir is, additionally, mostly viewed not in terms of martyrdom, but of a political leader enabling the early spread of Christianity and consolidation of local state formations among the Slavs of the Western Balkans; on this basis, Jovan Vladimir’s sainthood is considered as a part of ‚heroic‘ events and personalities in the initial periods of the Serbian secular(ized) national history. Thus, within the contemporary historiography, a more holistic approach is needed, emphasizing a

contextualized and transdisciplinary research of the biblically inspired meaning of Jovan Vladimir's martyrdom as provided by the hagiographical character of the original textual material. This also enables to accentuate the fact that the studied saint lived in 'pre-national' times and, consequently, can be regarded as a moral example and common element from the spiritual heritage of various contemporary nations living in the Western Balkans.

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