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St. Jerome and His Work in Serbian Theological-Historical Literature in the Second Half of the 20th and Early 21st Century

Sv. Hieronim in njegovo delo v srbski teološko-zgodovinski literaturi v drugi polovici 20. in v začetku 21. stoletja

Abstract: The study is a review of investigations of Serbian historians and theologians about St. Jerome and aims to show interest in exploring the life and works of Jerome of Stridon in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. The study aims to show what researchers in Serbia have written about Jerome of Stridon, or how many were interested to interpret his life and works. The leading hypothesis of this study is whether St. Jerome is, in the writings of Serbian theologians and historians, isolated from the historical context in which he lived and worked. A special part of the study is devoted to translations of Jerome's writings in Serbian language, in order to show whether these translations evolve independently and from the original, or the writings are translated from some other early translations into world languages. The conclusion of the work is to be linked to the reception of the life and work of St. Jerome in Serbian theological science in the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

Key Words: St. Jerome, *De viris illustribus*, Patrology, Biblical studies, Exegesis, translations

Izveček: Študija je pregled raziskav srbskih zgodovinarjev in teologov o sv. Hieronimu in želi pokazati zanimanje za raziskovanje življenja in del Hieronuma iz Stridona v drugi polovici 20. in na začetku 21. stoletja. Študija naj bi pokazala, kaj so raziskovalci v Srbiji pisali o Hieronimu Stridonskem oziroma koliko se jih je posvečalo razlagi njegovega življenja in dela. Glavna hipoteza študije je, ali je sveti Hieronim v spisih srbskih teologov in zgodovinarjev izoliran od zgodovinskega konteksta, v katerem je živel in deloval. Poseben del študije bo namenjen prevodom Hieronimovih spisov v srbski jezik, da bi ugotovili, ali se ti prevodi razvijajo neodvisno in iz izvornika ali pa je besedilo prevedeno iz katerega drugega zgodnjega prevoda v svetovne jezike. Zaključek dela je treba povezati s sprejemanjem življenja in dela svetega Hieronima v srbski teološki znanosti v drugi polovici 20. in na začetku 21. stoletja.

Ključne besede: sveti Hieronim, *De viris illustribus*, patrologija, svetopisemske študije, eksegeza, prevodi

Introduction

St. Jerome, as a Church scholar, has steadily drawn increasing interest among Serbian historians and theologians over the last half century or so, especially in the fields of patrological and Biblical scholarship. In addition to several analyses dealing with his life, much effort has been invested in translating Jerome's *On Illustrious Men* (*De Viris Illustribus*), along with several other, mostly exegetic writings or parts of it.

It is interesting to explore the reasons why *On Illustrious Men* attracted the attention of Serbian theologians. What do we know about this work? In his Letter 47, 3 to Desiderius, Jerome says that he has written a book on illustrious men from the Apostles to his own time, after the examples of Tranquillus (Suetonius) and Apollonius the Greek (an Augustan era Alexandrian sophist), emphasizing that he put himself down on the last page. According to Sanders (1903, 42), through this work Jerome proved himself to be a pioneer in theological literature. On the other hand, Sidorov's view was that, in the broadest and most fundamental context, Jerome borrowed much from Eusebius of Caesarea, not always with adequate reference and with a fair number of mistakes, although these tended to decline substantially when he wrote of 4th century Church fathers and authors, where he was quite independent (Сидоров 1996). According to Bishop Atanasije (Jevtić), who as a Serbian patristics professor specialized in Jerome, despite the above-mentioned, quite evident mistakes, Jerome's patrological tractate is highly, perhaps decisively significant, holding a prominent place in the history of Christian literature, with its multitude of valuable testimonies. Indeed, the importance of this work is testified by the fact that, almost a millennium later, it served as a model for a number of similar works by medieval authors. According to Bishop Atanasije, one of Jerome's first successors was Gennadius of Marseilles (5th century) who wrote a total of 91 chapters about ecclesiastical writers from the end of the 4th to the last quarter of the 5th century. Traditionally, his work has been treated as a continuation of St. Jerome's work, its second part. It was followed by Isidore of Seville's identically named work (Атанасије 2019, 7). Bishop Atanasije's teaching regarding St. Jerome has guided the work of younger generations of theologians and Church historians in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, resulting in, among other things, several translations of *On Illustrious Men* into Serbian. The aim



of the study is to introduce Serbian historians and theologians that are interested in St. Jerome life and works, from the second half of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, to the wider scientific public.

1 St. Jerome and his work in Serbian theological-historical literature

At the beginning, we have to emphasize that there were two independent groups of researchers in Serbia in the period that we are interested in: historians, who worked at Faculty of Philosophy (Department of History), University of Belgrade; and theologians, who worked at Faculty of Serbian Orthodox Church (Faculty was outside the University of Belgrade from 1952 to 2004). They worked independently and were influenced by different schools.

Firstly, historians were interested in St. Jerome's life at the beginning of 21st century. Miroslava Mirković, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy, produced the first serious work dealing with Jerome's life and works. Her book *Life and Correspondence of Saint Jerome* (2000) is divided into two parts: the first¹ – pages from 11 to 97 – is devoted to Jerome's life, while the second – pages from 201 to 413 – comprises translations of 26 of his letters and 7 letters written to him. However, the book has been deemed unreliable in both the historical-biographical and the translational sense. The author provides a good account of the general history of the 4th century, but is chaotic in her approach to Church history, and uncritical in her reference to certain unreliable historians. The spelling of Greek words is wrong, and it is also evident that the author is insufficiently versed in Biblical and theological terminology. The inadequacy of her translation is especially evident on the example of Letters 15 and 16 to Pope Damasus I, which, as Bishop Atanasije concedes in his critique (2019, 177), are difficult enough as it is, both in terms of content and language.

1 That part of the book is also the author's doctoral dissertation mentored by professor Johannes Straub and also influenced by his work *Heidnische Geschichtsapologetik in der christlichen Spätantike – Untersuchungen über Zeit und Tendenz der Historia Augusta*, Bonn 1963; and later influenced by C. Krumeich and his study *Hieronymus und die christlichen feminae clarissimae*, Bonn, 1993.



In his work *Narrative Sources for the History of Europe* (Наративни извори за историју Европе), Miloš Antonović, Professor of General History at the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, writes about Jerome's life on the basis of general historical data from Miroslava Mirković's work, among other things placing Stridon near Aquileia and criticizing Jerome for his exaggerations when describing the fall of Rome. According to M. Antonović, Jerome was a product of his own life's circumstances, and his most important work, which launched him into prominence, was the *Continuation of the Chronicon of Eusebius*, which brought the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius of Caesarea back from oblivion. Jerome translated Eusebius' history into Latin and then went on to cover the period up to the year 378. In Professor Antonović's estimation, *On Illustrious Men* was Jerome's second most important work.

After historians, we have to look into Serbian theologians that were interested in St. Jerome. Dragomir Marić was the first theologian in Serbia in the second half of the 20th century who wrote about Jerome, in his foreword to the *Rules of Pachomius the Great* (published in 1957). He was followed by Dimitrije Bogdanović, who in several texts published in the *Herald* (Весник) magazine of Serbian Orthodox Church – no. 22 (1970), 23 (1971) and 24 (1972) – as well as in the patrological handbook *Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church* (Свети оци и учитељи цркве, 149–153 – published in 1989), offered concise patrological materials on the life of St. Jerome, drawing mainly from Western Christian historians. After that, Bishop Atanasije (Rakita) made a short patrological discourse about St. Jerome in 1998, named Блажени Јероним Стридонски (340/350–420), and published it in the journal Свети кнез Лазар 3: 39–43.

After these works, no one dealt with St. Jerome and his works for almost a decade. Then, Slobodan Prodić translated *On Illustrious Men* into Serbian from a Russian older translation in 2007 (republished 2012), while Radovan Pilipović translated it from the original Latin, first publishing it in the theological scholarly periodical *Theological Views* (Теолошки погледи) in 2011, and then as a complete translation as part of a book issued in 2017 within the *Christian Sources Library* (Библиотека Хришћански извори), vol. 3, published by the Christian Cultural Center (Хришћански културни центар). Accompanying the translation was the study *St. Jerome of Stridon and the Historical Context of the Work On Illustrious Men*,



in which special attention was devoted to a critical analysis of the historical moment in which the work came about. The translator, in the study before published translation, dealt with the circumstances in the Church both in East and West in the time of St. Jerome.

The 12-volume edition *The Holy Fathers Translated into Serbian* (Свети оци у преводу на српски језик) also includes St. Jerome's *On Illustrious Men* (Volume 6), a new and a Latin-to-Serbian translation presented as a parallel text with critical commentary ably and accurately performed by Dušica Petrović. This is preceded by an introduction by Radomir Popović, professor of Church History at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology, University of Belgrade, entitled *Eusebius Jerome – Brief Biography and Theology* (Кратак животопис и богословље Јевсевија Јеронима), in which he deals with the theological-historical context of both Jerome's life and the origins of the work itself. Popović points out that the Church Fathers referred to Jerome as Dalmatian, and that his place of birth was either Bosansko Grahovo or Bosanska Kostajnica (present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina). Popović draws on 19th and 20th century Russian patrologists – Smirnov, Popov, Lomparev and Disperov – for the remainder of Jerome's biographical data. He also gives an account of Jerome's participation in the Origenist Controversies as well as of the condemnation of some of Origen's views, while criticizing Jerome for arguing that everyone would be saved except for the devil. There is also an analysis of Jerome's transmission of eastern monastic experience to the West, and of his activity in suppressing anti-monastic tendencies in the West propagated by certain individuals. Another aspect of Jerome's theological activity lay in his battle against Pelagius and Pelagianism, as well as in his stance regarding grace. At the end of the study, Popović provides an overview of Jerome's historical works, including *On Illustrious Men*, with a special emphasis on his lives of saints, which were based on his own monastic experience while living in the East.

After all mentioned Serbian theologians, we have to say that Bishop Atanasije Jevtić influenced R. Popović and after that he, as the professor of *Church History*, influenced S. Prodić, R. Pilipović and D. Petrović to work on St. Jerome's *On Illustrious Men*. It remains unclear why they only translated one book.



As a professor of Patrology in the last decades of 20th century in Belgrade, Bishop Atanasije emphasized that St. Jerome is known as a Church historian. One of his earliest historical works was his *Chronicle* (or *Chronicon* or *Temporum liber*), composed c. 380 in Constantinople; this is a translation into Latin of the chronological tables which compose the second part of the *Chronicon* of Eusebius, with a supplement covering the period from 325 to 379. Despite numerous errors taken over from Eusebius, and some of his own, Bishop Atanasije said that Jerome produced a valuable work, if only for the impulse which it gave to later chroniclers such as Prosper, Cassiodorus, and Victor to continue his work.

Of considerable importance for Bishop Atanasije as a patrologist is the *De viris illustribus*, which was written at Bethlehem in 392, the title and arrangement of which are borrowed from Suetonius. It contains short biographical and literary notes on 135 Christian authors, from Saint Peter down to Jerome himself. For the first seventy-eight authors, Eusebius (*Historia ecclesiastica*) is the main source; in the second section, beginning with Arnobius and Lactantius, he includes a good deal of independent information, especially as to western writers (Atanasije 2019, 71). That was the greatest influence on Serbian students of theology in last decades of 20th century in Belgrade.

In his lectures, Bishop Atanasije emphasized Jerome's hagiographical works as very important: *the Vita Pauli monachi*, written during his first sojourn at Antioch (c. 376), the material of which is derived from Egyptian monastic tradition (Atanasije 2019, 107); the *Vita Pauli primi eremitaе*, a biography of Saint Paul of Thebes; the *Vita Malchi monachi captivi* (c. 391), probably based on an earlier work, although it purports to be derived from the oral communications of the aged ascetic Malchus of Syria originally made to him in the desert of Chalcis (Atanasije 2019, 138); the *Vita Hilarionis*, of the same date, containing more trustworthy historical matter than the other two, and based partly on the biography of Epiphanius and partly on oral tradition (Atanasije 2019, 116). Bishop Atanasije had collected and re-analyzed all the lectures about St. Jerome and his works before he published them with the translation of several works of St. Jerome.

In the fourth volume (2019) of his massive *Patrology*, Atanasije Jevtić, bishop and a former Professor of Patrology at the Faculty of Orthodox



Theology in Belgrade, begins his analysis of Latin Church Fathers with St. Jerome and a comprehensive account of his life and theology (Атанасије 2019, 7-70), mainly on the basis of his writings and correspondence, as well as research by Cavallera, Fokin, Bolotov, Labuort and Fray. This is followed by Atanasije's translation of *On Illustrious Men* into Serbian from the original Latin; and also, translation of *Life of St. Paul the First Hermit* (from Latin – *Vita Pauli primi eremitaе*, according to *Patrologiae latinae cursus completus*, PL, 23); *Life of St. Hilarion* (from Latin – *Vita Hilarionis*, according to *Patrologiae latinae cursus completus*, PL, 23); *Life of Malchus, the Captive Monk* (from Latin – *Vita Malchi monachi captivi*); St. Jerome's introduction to his Latin translation of the *Rules of Pachomius* (from Latin, according to *Patrologiae latinae cursus completus*, PL, 23); Epistle to Paulinus on the study of the Holy Scripture (from Latin, according to Sancti Hieronymi, *Lettres III*, ed. J. Labourt /Атанасије 2019, 148/); and the *Letter on Paula's Pilgrimage from Latin* (Атанасије 2019, 161). Atanasije in his *Patrology*, vol. 4, also provides translations of Letter 15 (376) and Letter 16 (377 or 378) to Pope Damasus (Атанасије 2019, 169, 173), improving upon Miroslava Mirković's previously mentioned effort. Finally, Bishop Atanasije provides a comprehensive bibliography on Jerome, however without mentioning any translations into Serbian, despite the existence of the several mentioned earlier in this paper, giving the impression that he does not take them very seriously.

Bishop Atanasije draws his biographical data from Cavallera's research (Атанасије 2019, 174), but nevertheless occasionally corrects him. Regarding Jerome's place of birth, Atanasije offers three possibilities: Skradin on the Krka River, near Šibenik (present-day Croatia); the vicinity of present-day Grahovo, on the Una River (today's Bosnia-Herzegovina), on the border between Dalmatia and Pannonia; or a town more to the north, towards Ljubljana (present-day Slovenia), on the Sava River (this one is the least probable, however, because it is not a part of Dalmatia). In addition to providing some details from Jerome's youth, Atanasije mentions Jerome's involvement in the affair of St. John Chrysostom's slander and persecution, but also writes of his ascetic life, filled with travel, in the course of which he wrote letters, visited many places and engaged in various polemics. Atanasije concludes that Jerome did not lead an anachoretic life, nor one of prayerful quietude, but does not dispute his asceticism, despite the fact that, although a priest, he did not serve the Divine Liturgy. Interestingly,



on the subject of the relationship between Jerome and Origen, Atanasije observes that Jerome proudly emphasized that he used Origen's *Hexapla* and *Tetrapla*, but that he ultimately condemned both Origen and his erstwhile friend Rufinus. In a separate section, Atanasije writes of the fallacies Jerome committed in the *Chronicle* and underlines historical inaccuracies and uncertainties. The study concludes with an analysis of Jerome as an interpreter of the Holy Scripture and his translation of the Bible.

Jerome's patristic commentaries align closely with Jewish tradition, and he indulges in allegorical and mystical subtleties after the manner of Philo and the Alexandrian school. But only M. Golubović translated portions of Jerome's *Commentary on Matthew* from Russian into Serbian, and that translation was published in the collection *The Holy Fathers Interpret the Gospel* (Свети Оци тумаче Јеванђеље, 2002).

St. Jerome's epistles, both by the great variety of their subjects and by their qualities of style, form an important portion of his literary legacy. Whether he is discussing problems of theology, comforting the afflicted, or saying pleasant things to his friends, scourging the vices and corruptions of the time and urging against sexual immorality among the clergy, exhorting to the ascetic life, or breaking a lance with his theological opponents, he gives a vivid picture not only of his own mind, but of the age and its peculiar characteristics. Beside early mentioned works of Bishop Atanasije and M. Mirković, M. Šobot's translation of the *Letter to Evangelus* from Latin (*Patrologiae latinae cursus completus*, PL 22, 1192) into Serbian was published in 2010, in *Theological Views* (Теолошки погледи).

Conclusion

It can be said that the interest of Serbian historians and theologians in St. Jerome has gradually grown over the past half century, culminating in the work of Bishop Atanasije Jevtić (2019), which provides the most comprehensive analysis of Jerome's life in the context of the turbulent 4th century. Using mostly Western writers as sources, Atanasije places Jerome's life in a broader theological-historical context, clearly delineating Jerome's views against the background of his involvement in the Origenist Controversies and his role in the relationship between the East and the West in the second



half of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century, as well as examining Jerome's contributions in the fields of Biblical studies, exegesis, patristics and Church history. When it comes to translations of Jerome's works into Serbian, Atanasije's translation of *On Illustrious Men* stands out, due to the original work's importance in Church history and Patrology as well as to the general interest it attracted among the Serbian theological public, mainly due to the influence of Bishop Atanasije himself.

Because of that, the conclusion of the study is that St. Jerome was not isolated from the historical context in which he lived and worked, in the writings of Serbian theologians and historians. Unfortunately, the Serbian theologians did not take into account the broad opus of the works of St. Jerome, but opted for only one work (*On Illustrious Men*) and several excerpts. The question remains why the same work has been translated several times. Bishop Atanasije does not mention previous translations, but he himself certainly influenced all the translators in the beginning of 21st century.

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