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Basic Philosophical Texts in Medieval Serbia

Abstract: Medieval Serbian philosophy took shape mostly through the process of translating Byzantine texts and revising the Slavic translations. Apart from the Aristotelian terminological tradition, introduced via the translation of Damascene's *Dialectic*, there also was, under the influence of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and ascetic literature, notably of John Climacus' *Ladder*, another strain of thought originating from Christian Platonism. Damascene's philosophical chapters, or *Dialectic*, translated into medieval Serbian in the third quarter of the fourteenth century, not only shows the high standards of translation technique developed in Serbian monastic scriptoria, but testifies to a highly educated readership interested in such a complex theologico-philosophical text with its nuanced terminology. A new theological debate about the impossibility of knowing God led to Gregory Palamas' complex text, *The Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. Philosophical texts were frequently copied and much worked on in medieval Serbia, but it is difficult to infer about the actual scope of their influence on the formation and articulation of the worldview of medieval society. As a result of their demanding theoretical complexity, the study of philosophy was restricted to quite narrow monastic, court and urban circles. However, the strongest aspect of the influence of Byzantine thought on medieval society was the liturgy as the central social event of the community. It was through the liturgy that the wording of the translated texts influenced the life of medieval Serbian society.

Keywords: medieval Serbian philosophical legacy, Byzantine philosophy, terminology, translation schools, medieval Serbian society, liturgy

Introduction

Any approach to medieval Serbian philosophy needs to take into account its almost complete dependence on Byzantine philosophy.¹ Medieval Serbian philosophy looks up to its Byzantine models and may in fact be described as Byzantine philosophy in the medieval Serbian language. It took shape mostly through the process of translating Byzantine texts and revising the

¹ Until recently it has been widely accepted that the beginnings of Serbian philosophy cannot be traced further back than the late 18th century and the influence of the Enlightenment. As S. Žunjić, "Likovi filozofije u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji" [Aspects of philosophy in medieval Serbia], in *O srpskoj filozofiji* (Belgrade: Plato, 2003), 233, puts it: "The earlier philosophical tradition has been largely neglected not only in overviews of the already well-known high achievements of medieval Serbian art, but also in historical overviews of Serbian philosophy. The belief that philosophy did not emerge in Serbia until the break with the Church-Slavic tradition ("Byzantinism") and the radical turn towards modern Western philosophical literature persists in our culture even today."

Slavic translations. Although the philosophical texts in medieval Serbian were not locally produced nor were they original in the modern-day sense of the word,² they played an exceptionally important role in embracing complex Orthodox theological thought, in mediating the Hellenic philosophical legacy and, particularly, in building a Serbo-Slavic philosophical terminology.³ Owing to that work, which was centred mostly on translation and interpretation — beginning with early translations of excerpts and manuals in the tenth century and being crowned with extensive translation projects in the fourteenth century — the millennial intellectual and spiritual tradition of Byzantium was introduced into Serbia and became an integral part of its culture and philosophy. This process, on the other hand, enabled Serbia to participate actively in the intellectual and cultural life of the Byzantine “commonwealth”.⁴

This paper will take a look at the most important Byzantine texts that were translated into medieval Serbian and thus played a decisive role in forging a language for abstract thinking.⁵

The reception of Byzantine philosophy in Serbia

In medieval Serbia, the adoption of written culture entailed the adoption of Byzantine state ideology and cultural legacy.⁶ Literacy was widespread

² In this connection, the distinctly Byzantine understanding of originality should be borne in mind. Originality as we understand it today was little valued. Byzantine thought sought to conform to the ultimate paradigm in much the same way as the Byzantine visual arts did. The purpose of the icon as well as of the text was a likeness of the prototype.

³ Žunjić, “Likovi filozofije”, 236.

⁴ D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth* (London 1971); G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State* (Rutgers University Press, 1986); Lj. Maksimović, “The Byzantine ‘Commonwealth’: an early attempt at European integration?”, in *The Idea of European Community in History* I, eds. E. Chrysos, P. Kitromilides and C. Svolopoulos (Athens 2003), 99–109; specifically on Byzantine-Serbian relations, see G. Ostrogorsky, “Problèmes des relations byzantino-serbes au XIVe siècle”, in *Main Papers* II, Thirteenth International Congress of Byzantine Studies (Oxford 1966), 41–55; Lj. Maksimović, “Byzantische Herrscherideologie und Regierungsmethoden im Falle Serbien. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis des byzantinischen Commonwealth”, in *ΠΟΛΥΤΙΛΑΕΥΡΟΣ ΝΟΥΣ. Miscellanea für Peter Schreiner zu seinem 60. Geburtstag* (Munich–Leipzig 2000), 174–192.

⁵ The focus of the paper is on Serbia under the Nemanjić dynasty (from the 12th century) and their successors. As far as is known, there was no significant, if any, development of philosophical thought in early medieval pre-Nemanjić Serbian states, including Dioclea (Duklja) and Bosnia.

⁶ S. Averintsev, *Poetika rannevizantijskoj literatury* (Moscow 1977), 35; D. Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti* [History of old Serbian literature] (Belgrade 1991), 35.

in Byzantium and it was appropriated mostly in lower schools attached to monasteries and churches. Higher learning was reserved for the highest social ranks.⁷ How the school and education system in medieval Serbia was organized is unknown. There were no secular universities, and the number of second-level schools is unknown. Even in Byzantium such schools were mostly in Constantinople. What is known, however, is that highest education was acquired mostly in Byzantium or under private tuition provided by foreign teachers, whilst further educational opportunities were provided by monastic centres such as Mount Athos, and there notably the Serbian monastery of Hilandar⁸ with its renowned translation school. Thus, there were in the centres of medieval Serbia sophisticated writers and connoisseurs of many languages trained in the liberal arts (i.e. grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, astronomy, geometry, arithmetic and music), as well as scribes, who, just like those in Byzantium, were trained for secular and ecclesiastical administrative duties as well as for commerce.

In the early medieval period differences among the Slavic languages were relatively insignificant.⁹ In the 860s brothers Cyril (Constantine) and

⁷ On education in Byzantium, see J. M. Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire, 867–1185* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1937); R. Browning, “Byzantinische Schulen und Schulmeister”, *Das Altertum* 9 (1963), as well as his text “The Patriarchal School at Constantinople in the twelfth century”, *Byzantion* 32 (1962), 167–202 and 33 (1963), 11–40; C. N. Constantinides, “Higher Education in Byzantium in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries (1204 – c. 1310)”, *Texts and Studies of the History of Cyprus XI* (Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre, 1982); F. Fuchs, “Die höheren Schulen von Konstantinopel im Mittelalter”, *Byzantinisches Archiv* 8 (Amsterdam 1964); M. Medić-Čanak, “Teorijska sprema i stepen obrazovanja srednjevekovnih graditelja” [Theoretical knowledge and practical skills of medieval builders], *Zbornik zaštite spomenika kulture XVIII* (1967); G. Tsampis, *Byzantine Education: Its Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1965).

⁸ Mount Athos, the holy mountain on the Athos peninsula in northern Greece, is a unique monastic state of Orthodox Christianity. In the 12th century it was the main centre of Eastern monasticism, with monasteries and monks of various nationalities. Besides the most numerous Greek monasteries, there were also Georgian, Russian, Bulgarian and Serbian. In the scriptoria of the main monasteries Byzantine theological and literary works were copied and translated and the translations sent to their native countries. Hilandar, which ranks fourth in the Athonite hierarchy of monasteries, was founded in the late 12th century by Stefan Nemanja, grand *župan* of Serbia, and his son Sava.

⁹ P. Ivić, “Standard language as an instrument of culture and the product of national history”, in *The History of Serbian Culture* (Porthill Publishers, 1995), 41, illustratively put it: “...probably smaller than the differences among modern German dialects in Switzerland.”

Methodius created the first Slavic written language,¹⁰ based on the Slavic speech used around their native town of Thessalonica, in order to be able to translate the most important religious books as a necessary tool in their evangelizing mission to the Slavs. Old Slavic (and Church Slavic) remained for a thousand years comprehensible to the educated reader for whom it was intended, functioning as the lingua franca of the Slavic world.¹¹ Thus the terms characteristic of philosophical thinking were for the first time written down or translated:¹² for example, the Greek term *logos* was translated into Slavic as *slovo*, the ancient philosophical term *arche* was first translated as *iskoni*, but over time the latter gave way to *načelo*, which was more easily combined to form compound words typical of the Greek language. Briefly, the missionary work of Sts Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century laid the groundwork for articulating philosophical thought in Serbia.

Medieval Serbian philosophy was based on patristic literature, such as the writings of Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Gregory Palamas and others. Of the greatest importance for Serbian philosophical terminology was the translation of Theodore of Rhaithu's *Preparation* and John Damascene's *Dialectic*. Theodore of Rhaithu's *Preparation*, a kind of a dictionary containing basic philosophico-theological concepts, was translated with reliance on several Greek texts and included in *Svyatoslav's Miscellanies*.¹³ The *Codex* is encyclopaedic in nature and consists of 383 texts of well-known authors (e.g. Basil the Great, Justin the Philosopher, Athanasius of Alexandria) on a variety of subjects such as astronomy, mathematics, biology, philosophy and theology. Theodore's *Preparation* predates the text of John of Damascus, but its Slavic translation from the Greek original included certain portions of the *Dialectic*. Despite some terminological inconsistencies, the basic philosophical terms are already established in *The Preparation* (*rod, lice, vidb*), but it is the translation of the full text of Damascene's *Dialectic* that played a

¹⁰ According to the 9th-century monk Hraban's (*Chernorizets Hraban*) text *On letters*, prior to the mission of Sts Cyril and Methodius the Slavs had no letters, cf. A. Knežević, *Filozofija i slavenski jezici* [Philosophy and Slavic languages] (Zagreb 1988), 189; for Cyril and Methodius, see A.-E. Tachiaos, *Cyril and Methodius of Thessalonica: The Acculturation of the Slavs* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001).

¹¹ Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, 51.

¹² Some of the terms (e.g. word, spirit, reason) can be traced back to proto-Slavic.

¹³ The *Miscellanies*, the third-oldest dated Slav book (copies of 1073 and 1076) to the *Novgorod Codex* (first quarter of the 11th c.) and the *Ostrimir Gospel* (1056 or 1057), was initially translated from Greek (913—919) for the Bulgarian Emperor Simeon; 150 years later, it was copied for the ruler of Kievan Rus Iziaslav Yaroslavich, whose name was later erased and replaced by that of Svyatoslav Yaroslavich, Prince of Kiev.

crucial role in creating Serbian philosophical terminology. Apart from the Aristotelian terminological tradition, introduced via the translation of the *Dialectic*, there also was — under the influence of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and ascetic literature, notably of John Climacus' *Ladder* — another strain of thought originating from Christian Platonism. Some modern scholars believe that this caused a duality in thought which has marked the entire subsequent history of Serbian philosophy.¹⁴

Corpus Areopagiticum

Distinctiveness of the *Corpus Areopagiticum*¹⁵ mostly resides in its synthesis of Neoplatonism and Cappadocian doctrine. The influence of Plato's school,

¹⁴ M. Djurić and S. Žunjić, "Philosophie in Serbien – Ansätze zur Entwicklungsgeschichte und zum heutigen Stand", in M. Djurić and S. Žunjić, eds., *Die serbische Philosophie Heute* (Munich 1993), 14.

¹⁵ The identity of the author of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* has been a long-standing controversy, but none of the many theories has been proved correct. It remains unknown who hides behind the name of Dionysius the Areopagite, a disciple of the Apostle Paul (Acts 17:34), figuring at the bottom of the text. Although it cannot be said with certainty what led the author to conceal his identity, the work does not derive its renown from the name of its writer, but from its content, which is obvious from the fact that the authority of many other texts claiming to have originated in apostolic times was later rejected. The *Corpus* enjoyed undivided respect and had a strong impact on both Greek and Latin patristic authors. Having been analyzed and interpreted in complex and long-lasting theological disputes, the *Corpus Areopagiticum* became included in the Byzantine higher education curriculum. The *Corpus Areopagiticum* was early transmitted to the West. The large number of translations, copies and commentaries in both East and West led G. Florovsky to conclude that "without taking into account the influence of the *Areopagitica* the whole history of medieval mysticism and philosophy remains misunderstood"; for an English translation, see *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, transl. C. Luibheid, foreword, notes and transl. collab. P. Rorem, preface R. Roques, introd. J. Pelikan, J. Leclercque, K. Froehlich (New York: Paulist Press, 1987); on the *Corpus*, see H. Müller, *Dionysius, Proklos, Plotinus* (Munich 1926); V. Lossky, "La notion des 'analogies' chez le ps.-Denys l'Ar.", *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* V (1930); V. Lossky, "La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Ar.", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* XXVIII (1939); R. Roques, "Symbolisme et théologie négative chez le ps.-Denys", *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 4 (March 1957); I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The pseudo-Dionysius", in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge 1967); P. Rorem and J. C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford University Press, 1998); C. Schäfer, *The Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: an Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise On the Divine Names* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); E. D. Perl, *Theophany. The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

by then a thousand years old, including the influence of Plotinus and Proclus, can be seen particularly well from the use of typically Neoplatonic terms such as *hen* (one), *henas* (unity), *proodos* (emanation, procession), *kal-lon* (beauty), *agathon* (good), *extasis* (a step out, ecstasy). The One emanates into the world of things and thus becomes multiple, while remaining one without dispersing into multiplicity when outpouring its goodness. The One and Hyper-essential, as perfect Good, Beauty and Light, is the cause and the final aim of all things. Evil is the privation of good and does not have a positive existence.¹⁶ On the other hand, the Areopagite's strong link with Cappadocian doctrine (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory the Theologian) is best seen in *The Mystical Theology*, which is the most important Areopagitical text in methodological terms because it describes the apophatic method developed by the Cappadocian Fathers. Unlike the deductive cataphatic method which begins from the whole and gradually deduces particular from general affirmative statements, the apophatic method, which prevailed in later Byzantine thought, uses negative statements in its "ascent" from the particular towards the general. The mystagogic character of the apophatic method stems from its inductive character, as reflected in its demand for using the experience of believing and thinking as reference points in the quest for truth. The mysticism of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* does not imply an emotional isolation in unravelling mysteries, but a binding awareness of the impossibility of ever fully knowing the truth, because the truth resides in the "hyper-essential darkness". Laying an emphasis on "leaplike" ecstasy as the last step in the gradual journey toward the "Hyper-essential" and issuing a warning, similar to that of Plato's in his *Seventh Letter*, to exclude the uninitiated and ill-prepared, who believe they can understand the essence of the "hyper-Divine", *The Mystical Theology* further points to a dialectical relationship between the apophatic and cataphatic methods. While the essence of the Unknowable and Transcendent is impossible to understand or know, it is possible (through its actualizations) to attribute affirmative statements to the Unknowable by generalizing the knowable attributes, because negations (*apophaseis*) are not simply the opposites (*antikeimenai*) of affirmations (*kataphaseis*) since "beyond privation [*steresis*] is He who is beyond any subtraction and placement [*assertion, thesis*]" (Migne PG 3, 1000BC). Differentiation between the two methods originated with Proclus, entered Christianity via the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, and subsequently the apophatic method became predominant in the East, while the cataphatic or positive method, developed as the fundamental method

¹⁶ The understanding of evil as the privation of good is shared by Plato, Neoplatonists, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, the Areopagite, Gregory Palamas (*Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*).

of Aquinas' philosophy, culminated in rational philosophy and theology in the West.¹⁷ After commenting on the necessity of preparation and cathartic experience for reaching the situation propitious for knowing, the apophatic "ascent" from the last to first negations is compared to the sculptor's taking away the excess of the material to reveal the "hidden features" of a statue. The cause of all sensory is not sensory (*aisthesis*) (it is not a body, nor is it a form, nor appearance) and the cause of all noumenal is not noumenal (*nous*) (it is not a soul, nor mind, nor truth), because above every thesis is: "...the unique cause of all and beyond all subtraction is the pre-eminence of Him who is simply [*haplos*] free from all and transcendent to all [*holon*]" (Migne PG 3, 1048B). This teaching about God's transcendence, characteristic of the Areopagite's apophatic method and of the Cappadocian Fathers (fourth century), is shared by Maximus the Confessor (seventh century), Symeon the New Theologian (tenth century) and Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century), thereby becoming a lasting feature of the Byzantine mode of thought. The claim of Gregory of Nyssa that "if the subject is the essence of God it is time to keep silent, but if the subject is His works then it is time to speak..." is embraced in the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and Palamas' writings, particularly when the emphasis is on the difference between God's essence (*ousia*) and God's actualizations (*energeiai*).

Relying on these basic tenets of Orthodox theology, the fourteenth-century Hesychasts encouraged interest in reading, interpreting and translating the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, which thus became a cornerstone of medieval Serbian philosophy, culture and learning, and directly influenced the society's worldview. The Dionysian corpus was translated into medieval Serbian on Mount Athos about 1371, by monk Isaiah (*Inok* Isaija, also known as Isaiah of Serres, and *starac* or elder Isaiah),¹⁸ and under the influ-

¹⁷That the Byzantines were aware that the apophatic method had been used by Neoplatonists as well can be seen from Barlaam of Calabria's statement that "the Greeks understood that the hyper-essential and nameless God is above knowledge, science and all other achievements" (Migne PG, 151, 1365), a view shared by Gregory Palamas, who says that some classical philosophers accepted the monotheism of a hyper-essential God and apophatic theology. "If you want to find out if the Greeks understood that the hyper-essential and nameless God transcends knowledge, science and all other achievements, read the works of Pythagoras' disciples [...] Philolaus, Charmides and Phyloxenus addressing this subject. You will find there the same expressions that the great Dionysius uses in his *Mystical Theology* ... Plato also understood the transcendence of God" (*Triads* II, 3,67, Migne PG, 151).

¹⁸Monk Isaiah, a Serb born in Kosovo c. 1300, entered the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mt Athos sometime before 1330; in 1349 he was appointed abbot of the Russian monastery of St Panteleimon; in 1353–63, he was in Serbia, actively contributing to relaxing the strained relations between the Serbian Church and the Constantinopoli-

ence of the Hesychast movement whose teaching was largely based on the Areopagitical texts. The Serbian translation of the corpus (*Mystical Theology, Divine Names, Heavenly Hierarchy, Ecclesial Hierarchy* and *Ten Letters*) was accompanied by the *scholia* attributed to Maximus the Confessor¹⁹ and the translator's commentaries. The large number of both Bulgarian and Russian copies testifies that the texts were popular and much read.²⁰ Their influence was particularly furthered by the Hesychasts active on Mount Athos and in the Slavic south, after they emerged victorious in the dispute with the Latinophrones (those reasoning in a Latin way) in 1352, and after the Ottoman conquest of the southern parts of the Balkans caused the migration of monastics towards Serbia.²¹

tan Patriarchate; in 1366, he became advisor to Despot Uglješa, master of the Serres region; he was commissioned by Theodosius, Metropolitan of Serres, to translate the *Corpus Areopagiticum*; in a note about the Battle of the Maritsa (1371), Isaiah says that he began working "in good times" and finished "in the vilest of all evil times", brought about by the Ottoman invasion. For more on Isaiah, see Dj. Trifunović, *Pisac i prevodilac inok Isaija* [The writer and translator monk Isaiah] (Kruševac 1980); V. Mošin, "Zhitie startsa Isaii, igumena russkogo monastiraya na Afone" [The Life of Elder Isaiah, Abbot of the Russian Monastery on Mount Athos], in *Yubileinyi sbornik Russkogo arkeologicheskogo obshchestva v Korolevstve Yugoslavii* 3 (Belgrade 1940), 125-167; B. St. Angelov, *Iz starata balgarska, ruska i srbeska literatura* II (Sofia 1967); see also S. Radojčić, *Uzori i dela starih srpskih umetnika* [Old Serbian artists' models and works] (Belgrade 1975), 260-262.

¹⁹ It is most likely that Maximus (7th century) compiled and systematized all extant "scholia", adding his own commentaries to the collection, which is why it has commonly been attributed to him; for commentaries on the *Corpus Areopagiticum*, see B. R. Suchla, "Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum", *NAWG* (1980), 33-66; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus*.

²⁰ E. Afonasin, "Corpus Dionysiacum Slavicum", *ΣΧΟΛΗ, Ancient Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* II/1 (2008), 111, observes: "The Ottoman occupation and the destruction of many centres of education in the Balkans determined the further destiny of the *Corpus Dionysiacum Slavicum*. Fortunately, the victory in the battle on Kulikovo-Field and the establishment of Metropolitanate in Moscow opened the great possibilities for the development of Christian culture in Russia, and the *CD* found its place in this process. In fact, these writings became very popular in Russia from the time of the Metropolitan Cyprian (d. 1406), who is said to have brought a copy of Isaiah's translation here and possibly was personally acquainted with the translator, Starets Isaiah."

²¹ On Hesychasm, see G. Ostrogorski, "Svetogorski isihasti i njihovi protivnici", *Sabrana dela* V [The hesychasts of Mount Athos and their opponents, *Complete Works* V], 203-223; J. Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Grégoire Palamas* (Paris 1959); J. Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Faith Press, 1974); A.-E. Tachiaos, "Le monachisme serbe de Saint Sava et la tradition hésychaste athonite", *Hilandarski zbornik* 1 (1966), 83-89; for a bibliography on Hesychasm, see *Isikhazm: annotirovan-*

The Divine Ladder

Judged by the number of its copies and translations, *The Divine Ladder* was the most popular text in medieval Serbia.²² It is a strict monastic handbook based on the tenets of some of the systematizers of the erstwhile monastic teachings and the tradition of Sinaitic monasticism. John Climacus built a complex phenomenological system of thirty levels with strict rules for passing from one level to the next.²³ The number thirty symbolizes the thirty years of Christ's life before the revelation of the Gospel, so Climacus invites monks to reach: "...the measure of the stature of Christ", who, "baptized in the thirtieth year of his earthly age, attained the thirtieth step on the spiritual ladder" (Migne PG 88, 1161A). Other numbers also have symbolic and mystical meaning, such as three (the Holy Trinity), four (the number of the Gospels), five (purification of the five basic senses through repentance), eight (eight levels of passion) and so on. *The Ladder* is structured as a coherent system of ascetic ascent on the "ladder of virtue", where each step has its *basis*, *bathmos* and *anabasis*.²⁴

naya bibliographiya, ed. S. S. Khoruzhii (Moscow: Publishing Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, 2004).

²² John of the Ladder or John Climacus (c. 525–608) entered the Sinai monastery at the age of 16; after some time in the monastery and forty years of anchoritic life, he became its abbot, but then withdrew into the desert again, cf. *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité* VIII, s.v. Jean Climaque, Saint, by G. Couilleau (Paris 1972); J. Chryssavgis, *John Climacus: From the Egyptian Desert to the Sinaite Mountain* (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2004); for an English translation, see John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, transl. C. Luibheid and N. Russell, introd. K. Ware (New York: Paulist Press, 1982); on the reception of John Climacus in medieval Serbia, see D. Bogdanović, *Jovan Lestvičnik u vizantijskoj i starijoj srpskoj književnosti* [Jean Climaque dans la littérature byzantine et la littérature serbe ancienne] (Belgrade 1968).

²³ R. Lawrence, "The Three-Fold Structure of the Ladder", *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 32/2 (1988), 101–118.

²⁴ From renunciation, as the first step and the basis of monastic *askesis* (I), derives impartiality (II) through separation from the world and alienation (III) from everything that the soul has thus abandoned. Alienation is followed by obedience (IV), the complete renunciation of self-will, and penitence (V), expressed through remembrance of death (VI), crying (VII) and the absence of anger (VIII), whereby the victory over the eight levels of passion is achieved. As anger generates vengefulness, the next step entails unvengefulness (IX), followed by nonjudgementalness (X), and by silence (XI), as verbosity breeds lies, and thus should be overcome (XII). Verbosity also generates dependency (XIII). Gluttony should be overcome (XIV) because it leads to debauchery (XV), after which greed (XVI) should be overcome and poverty voluntarily accepted (XVII). Insensibility (XVIII) and sleepiness (XIX) should be overcome to achieve bodily and spiritual vigil (XX), and to defeat fearfulness (XXI). Once these passions are overcome, there follow the more sophisticated ones, such as vainglory (XXII) and pride

The basic conceptual pair virtue (*arete*) — passion (*pathos*) is simultaneously present on every step of the *Ladder* because there is an intrinsic interdependence between suppression of passion and advancement in virtue. Rather than discussing sin as an act, John of the Ladder looks at passion as a propensity for making typical mistakes. Passion as illness is a consequence of man's fall, and hence the body, which is neither good nor evil by nature, succumbs to a certain tendency towards evil: "We have turned the positive traits of the soul into passions. ... By nature we have in us anger, but to use it against the serpent, and we have used it against our neighbour. We have in us ardour to work towards good but we work towards evil. It is natural for the soul to long for glory, but for glory in Heaven" (Migne PG, 88, 1068C-D). When defining the passions, John Climacus takes into account the experience of monastic life and the works of the great systematizers of asceticism, such as Evagrius Ponticus,²⁵ according to whom "the natural purpose of anger is to fight against demons", and John Cassian, who sees gluttony and debauchery as "natural" passions, for they are extensions of natural needs. Apart from their natural origin, some responsibility for the passions also falls on the power of habit: [Passion is a] "sin which has over time passionately nestled in the soul, and which has through habit become its natural characteristic, until the soul of its own accord clings to it" (Migne PG, 88, 897A). Passion does not arise all of a sudden, but gradually, through an encounter with a thought; coupling or communication with the thought; assent to pleasure; captivity as the seduction of the heart by the object which injures the soul; and the struggle between the attacker and the attacked, the outcome of which is either victory or defeat (i.e. passion).

Although John of the Ladder expands the list of eight basic passions (gluttony, debauchery, greed, anger, sadness, sloth, vanity and pride),

(XXIII). If pride, the worst passion, is overcome, one can achieve meekness, simplicity and innocence (XXIV), humility (XXV) and discernment (XXVI). After these steps comes *hesychia* (XXVII) which is achieved in prayer (XXVIII). The reception of divine actualizations in hesychast prayer leads to the state of dispassion and perfection (XXIX), which is a prerequisite for the basic triad of virtues: faith, hope and love (XXX), as the aim of the whole ascetic way.

²⁵ Evagrius Ponticus (†399), a friend and disciple of the Cappadocian Fathers and teacher of Macarius the Great is the first serious systematizer of monastic teachings; his teaching was condemned by the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553, for he claimed, following Origen, that the spirit frees itself from matter in prayer in order to reach God; his work, misattributed to St Nilus of Sinai, influenced Eastern monasticism nonetheless. See A. Guillaumont, *Les "Kephalaia Gnostica" d'Evagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'origenisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Paris 1962); J. Bunge, "Origenizmus-Gnostizismus, Zum geistgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrius Pontikos", *Vigiliae Christianae* 40 (1986).

he sees all passions as deriving from two basic ones: gluttony and pride. Combinations of the two basic passions produce all others, which, despite the fact that John of the Ladder does not follow John Cassian's strictly logico-psychological method, have a certain hierarchy and causes.²⁶ Passion as a hereditary propensity for evil can be overcome through dedicated and perseverant practice and through a disciplined advancement in virtue. Opposite to the passions is a life in virtue as a permanent tendency towards good, with the monastic ideal of "godliness" as its final aim. By practice (*askesis*) we acquire certain spiritual characteristics which gradually become a permanent tendency toward good and virtue. The final aim is reached, according to John of the Ladder's aretology, through transformation of suppressed passions ("love is to be suppressed by love"). While discussing love as the place in which the mystery of becoming God-like (*theosis*) is hidden, he does not refrain from terming love not only *agape* but also *eros*. "It is not in the least unseemly to compare longing and fear, ardour and dedication, serving and love of God, with what we can usually see in people. Blessed is therefore the man who loves God like an infatuated lover loves his beloved one" (Migne PG, 88, 1156B-C).

The one who has attained the highest step of virtue experiences the mystical states of joyous crying, ecstasy, illumination, resulting from the "change of mind" (*metanoia*). What these states have in common is the vision of the Divine light (*fos theou*), or Divine actualizations (*energeiai*). This highest spiritual experience is easy to confuse with illusions (Slav. *prelest*), and only the most experienced are able to tell one from another. John of the Ladder therefore advises caution as regards mystical experiences: "With a modest hand push away joy as if you were not worthy of it, so that you would not be deluded into receiving a wolf instead of the shepherd" (Migne PG 88, 813C-D).

The Ladder was very early translated into Slavic (ninth or tenth century). The oldest surviving manuscript is in Russian redaction with traces of a Bulgarian original.²⁷ The influence of this monastic handbook on Serbian culture does not, however, begin with its translation into the medieval Serbian language. It is observable even earlier, in the *typika* for the Serbian monasteries (such as Hilandar and Studenica) written by St Sava of Serbia.²⁸ King Stefan the First-Crowned obviously had in his library a copy of *The Ladder* and referred to it in the *Life of St Simeon* (Nemanja)²⁹ he wrote be-

²⁶ Cf. Lawrence, "Structure of the Ladder".

²⁷ For the surviving copies of the *Ladder*, see Bogdanović, *Jovan Lestvičnik*, 25.

²⁸ For St Sava, see note 28 below.

²⁹ Stefan Nemanja, grand *župan* of Serbia (1166/68–96), the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty which ruled Serbia until 1371. In 1196 he gave up the throne for his second son

fore 1216. A Serbian redaction of the translation was done in Serbia around 1370, but it seems that the transcription differences raised doubts as to the accuracy of some portions of the text. Despot Djuradj Branković³⁰ ordered therefore that a Greek version and other Slavic translations be procured, and so various excerpts were collected in Constantinople and on Mount Athos. Under the guidance of Metropolitan Sabbatius (Savatije), the translation was corrected, the result of which is the *The Ladder of Braničevo*, so called because the work was completed in Braničevo in 1434.³¹

The cause of the great popularity of the *Ladder*, initially intended only for coenobitic monks, resides in the special preference for this strict monastic handbook shown by the ruling house of medieval Serbia. The text provided guidance to the medieval reader as regards the types of sins and virtues, explored under the perfect conditions of complete commitment to acquiring goodness and virtue. As most secular situations could be explained through ascetic phenomenology, the monastic ideal was not limited to the monastery (after the example of St Sava), but was posited as an ideal that everyone should strive for (after the example of St Simeon Nemanja).³²

John of Damascus' Dialectic

John of Damascus was the first to conduct a synthesis of the Eastern Christian tradition and to present it systematically in *The Fountain of Knowledge*, a philosophico-theological encyclopaedia in three books.³³ In its first part

Stefan (grand *župan* 1196–1217; king 1217–28) and withdrew to Hilandar, where he died as monk Simeon in 1199. His youngest son Rastko (c. 1175–1236), in monkhood Sava, the first archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church (1219), is one of the central figures in the history of medieval Serbia. For St Sava, see D. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits* (Oxford 1988), 115–172. The well-known late 12th-century *Miroslav's Gospel* was written and illuminated for Stefan Nemanja's brother Miroslav, who ruled the Hum region of medieval Serbia.

³⁰ Djuradj (George) Branković, Serbian Despot (1427–56), grandson of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović and Milica Nemanjić, succeeded his uncle, Despot Stefan Lazarević, on the throne of Serbia thereby becoming the first ruler of the House of Branković (1427–1502).

³¹ See Bogdanović, *Jovan Lestvičnik*, 175.

³² On the ascetic writings, see B. Milosavljević, "Monaško-asketski spisi u srpskoj srednjovekovnoj filozofiji" [Monastic-ascetic writings in Serbian medieval philosophy], *Srpska filozofija, Gledišta* 1–2 (1999), 78–93.

³³ John of Damascus or John Damascene (c. 676–c. 750) was born in Damascus into a distinguished and influential Christian family which held a high hereditary office under both Byzantine and (after 636) Arab rule, and he obviously inherited his father's office; at some point he resigned and withdrew to the monastery of St. Sabas to devote

commonly known as *Dialectic* he outlines Aristotle's categories, antepredicaments, postpredicaments, and Porphyry's *Introduction* to Aristotle's categories. In the second part (which was not translated into Serbo-Slavic), he gives an account of one hundred heresies, while the third volume, *Dogmatic Chapters*, is devoted to Orthodox dogmatics, or the anthropological, Christological, soteriological and eschatological teachings. In its content and structure *The Fountain of Knowledge* is a combination of a philosophical propedeutics and true philosophy, i.e. Orthodox theology. John of Damascus claims in his introduction that in presenting the "best thought of the Greek wise men" he will accept "all that is in accordance with truth", and reject "all that is wrong and close to quasi-knowledge". When discussing the importance of philosophy, he uses the Aristotelian argument that the one who questions philosophy has already accepted its relevance. Because of its comprehensive, systematic and easy-to-follow presentation, *The Fountain of Knowledge* was often copied and translated in the Byzantine world, either entirely or in part. The *Dogmatic Chapters* were translated into Slavic as early as the late ninth or early tenth century, within the large-scale translation project undertaken under the Bulgarian Emperor Simeon. The leading figure of the project, John Exarch, in fact translated just one part of John Damascene's dogmatics, but it was him who found the first terminological solutions in a Slavic language. Damascene's philosophical chapters, or *Dialectic*, were translated into medieval Serbian in the third quarter of the fourteenth century. This translation, a product of the Hilandar school, does not show only the high standards of translation technique developed in Serbian monastic scriptoria; it also testifies to a highly educated readership interested in such a complex theologico-philosophical text with its nuanced terminology. While Exarch's translations show a certain freedom in terms of adding and omitting portions of the text, the Serbian method is iconographically true to the Greek original not only in lexical but also in syntactic terms. An advantage of such a method is the precision of the translated text,

himself to reflection and asceticism; as a theologian, he took an active part in the fight against Iconoclasm. For an English translation, see F. Hathaway Chase, ed., *Saint John of Damascus. Writings* (Washington 1999); for a German translation, see B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos I* (Berlin 1969); on the *Dialectic*, see G. Richter, *Die Dialektik des Johannes von Damaskos* (Ettel 1964); E. Weiher, *Die Dialektik des Johannes von Damaskos in kirchenslavischer Übersetzung* (Wiesbaden 1969); A. Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford University Press USA, 2005); S. Žunjić, "The definitions of philosophy in the *Dialectica* of John Damascene: their ancient sources and their Byzantine meanings", in *Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, ed. K. Boudouris (Athens 1994), 294–323; for the reception of the *Dialectic* in medieval Serbia, see S. Žunjić, "Damaskinova *Dijalektika* u srpskoj filozofiji" [The *Dialectica* of John Damascene in Serbian philosophy], *Istočnik* 9 (Belgrade 1994), 43–77.

which was checked and rechecked over and over again in order that it might be true to the original. On the other hand, the Serbian translation of the *Dialectic* is often very difficult to understand without the original, and not only to the modern reader, but also to the medieval one. The Greek text of Damascene's "philosophical chapters" survives in two versions, one shorter, *Dialectica brevior* (50 chapters), the other longer, *Dialectica fusior* (68 chapters). It is usually assumed that Damascene himself authored both versions. The fourteenth-century Serbian translation is in fact the shorter version to which some chapters from the longer version are added. The extraordinary importance of this translation for Serbian philosophical culture consists in the creation of appropriate terminology, whereby Serbian philosophical thought became capable of communicating at the highest academic and intellectual level.

The Serbian translator's terms for the basic philosophical disciplines follow closely the etymology of Greek words. The only term that is not translated in accordance with the previous practice of Exarch's school is "philosophy": instead of being translated as *l'ubomudrije* (love of wisdom), it is simply transcribed from Greek. From the literally translated names of philosophical disciplines, only the adjective *bogoslovno* (theological) has survived until this day, while the rest were at some point replaced with Greek words, following the term philosophy (*filosofija*). According to a division of philosophy after the Aristotelian model, philosophy is divided into theoretical (*zritelnoje*) and practical (*delatnoje*) knowledge (*znanije*). The theoretical knowledge is further subdivided into theological (*bogoslovnoje*), physical or natural (*jestbstvnoje*), and mathematical (*učitelnoje*), while the practical knowledge is subdivided into ethical (*običajnoje*), economic (*domostroitelnoje*) and political (*gradnoje*). Although the translator closely followed the rule that a compound word should be translated with a compound word, the term wisdom (*mudrost*) is translated in accordance with the older tradition as *premudrostb*, which has remained in liturgical usage until this day.

The *Dialectic* recounts the contents of Porphyry's *Introduction*, Aristotle's *Categories*, antepredicaments and postpredicaments, and its terminology is therefore based on the terms contained in these logical texts. Basic ontological concepts from Damascene's text are translated quite successfully, and correspond grammatically to the Greek language: Greek *on*, the present participle of the verb "to be" (*einai*) is translated as *sušt* (today commonly *biće*, *bivstvujuce*, *bitujuće*); *ousia*, derived from *ousa*, the feminine participle of the same verb, as *suštbstvo*, earlier also as *suštije* (today *suština*, *bivstvo*); and the infinitive of the verb "to be" (*einai*) as *sušttestvovati* and *bytije* (today usually *bivstvovanje*, *bitak*, *biće*, *bitovanje*). Opposite of *suština* (essence) is *slučajb* (accident; Gr. *symbebekos*).

After the division and several different definitions of philosophy, the considerations of the terms *being*, *essence*, and *accident*, the explanation of logical concepts of division and subdivision, the definition of concept, John of Damascus presents Porphyry's predicables, for the translation of which a high level of proficiency in grammar and logic was required. The term *genos* is translated as *rod*, which remains unchanged until this day, while *eidos*, species, is etymologically correctly translated as *vid*.³⁴

The consideration of the predicables in the *Dialectic* is followed by antepredicaments, which establish relations between things and concepts. In contrast to Aristotle's three relations, the *Dialectic* describes five (synonyms, homonyms, polyonyms, heteronyms, paronyms), and in the way it was done in Plato's Academy and in subsequent Neoplatonic schools. The antepredicaments are followed by Aristotle's ten categories: *suštvstvo* (*ousia*), *količtvstvo* (*poson*), *kv česomu* (*pros ti*), *kačtvstvo* (*poion*), *gde* (*pou*), *kogda* (*pote*), *ležati* (*keisthai*), *imeti* (*ehein*), *tvoriti* (*poiein*), *stradati* (*pashein*). The concluding part of John of Damascus' text deals with postpredicaments, i.e. the different forms of opposition (contradiction, contrariety), types of statements (negation, affirmation) and syllogism. Apart from logical concepts, the *Dialectic* also explains philosophical and theological concepts such as hypostasis (Slav. *svstav*), person (*lice*), etc. It is obvious that the purpose of this work was to introduce the reader to logic and basic philosophical concepts, without which it was impossible to proceed to more advanced philosophical and theological topics.

The most important achievement of the Serbian translation of the *Dialectic* was the creation of philosophical terminology in Serbian. It was not the first medieval translation of a philosophical text, but terminologically it certainly was the most diversified one. John of Damascus' work was much read in both translation and original, copied and worked on many times. Its first three chapters were translated anew in the early fifteenth century. A certain number of Bulgarisms have led to the assumption that this new translation was done by Constantine the Philosopher, the author of the earliest Serbian philological study *Skazanija o Pismenah* (*A Story of the Letters*) and of the *Life of Despot Stefan*.³⁵ It did not introduce any change as regards terminology, and therefore the reason for the undertaking remains obscure. Later translators did not rely on the Hilandar translation, but either "Serbianized" Russian translations (e.g. Gavril Stefanović Venclović in

³⁴ Because *eidos* has the same root as *oida*, a perfect with the meaning of present (I have seen=I know), which is coradical with Slav *vedeti*, *vem*.

³⁵ Constantine the Philosopher, a medieval writer and chronicler who, following the Ottoman conquest of Bulgaria in 1393, found refuge in Serbia, at the court of Stefan Lazarević (Prince 1393–1402, Despot 1402–27).

the first half of the eighteenth century), or translated from Greek or Latin (e.g. Bishop Dionisije Popović, whose translation done in 1827 introduced different terms for several basic concepts). In her translation of Aristotle's logical texts, Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981)³⁶ used by then widely accepted Latin terminology, which soon almost completely replaced medieval Serbian terms (*supstancija*, substance, instead of *suštstvo*; *subjekt*, subject, instead of *podbležešteje*; *definicija*, definition, instead of *ustavb*).

Palamas' Exposition of the Orthodox Faith

The basic tenet of the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and Cappadocian doctrine of the impossibility of knowing God except through His works is rekindled by Gregory Palamas.³⁷ A new debate about this topic, which began in Byzantine academic and monastic circles after the long-lasting disputes about the Hesychast practice of “mental prayer” and the possibility of seeing Divine actualizations (*energeiai*), led to his complex text, *The Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, eventually accepted by the Council of Constantinople in 1351. Characteristic of Palamas' teaching is his theoretical articulation of the traditional monastic notion of “becoming God-like” (divinization) and the vision of the Divine light, which is uncreated but not identical to God's essence. Presenting the distinction between essence (*ousia*) and actualization (*energeia*), Palamas uses the concepts discussed in detail in Aristotle's philosophy, because they make it possible to understand the relationship between that which can, i.e. has potency (Gr. *dynamis*; Sl. *sila*) to, become

³⁶ Aristotel, *Organon*, transl. K. Atanasijević (Belgrade: Kultura, 1965).

³⁷ Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), was son of a courtier of Emperor Andronicus II and he received education at the imperial court; his whole family with servants entered a monastery in 1316; on Mount Athos Palamas studied theology and embraced Hesychast monastic practice, served as abbot of the monastery of Esphigmenou, and was the official representative of the Athonite monastic community in the dispute with Barlaam; although the Council of 1341 accepted Hesychast teaching, Palamas was imprisoned in 1344 because of his alleged involvement in a coup; he was rehabilitated and appointed archbishop of Thessalonica in 1347; the 1351 Council of Constantinople included his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* among the official texts. On Gregory Palamas and Hesychasm, see Ostrogorski, “Svetogorski isihasti”, 203–223; G. Florovsky, “St Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers”, *Sobornost* 4 (1961), 165–176; A. Jević, “Prolegomena za isihastičku gnoseologiju” [A prolegomena to Hesychast gnoseology], and “Živi i istinski Bog Svetog Grigorija Palame” [The living and true God of St Gregory Palamas], in *Filozofija i teologija* (Vrnjačka Banja 1994); Meyendorff, *Introduction à l'étude de Gregoire Palamas*; Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*; S. Yiagazoglou, “The Demonstrative Method in the Theology of St. Gregory Palamas”, *The Fifth International Conference of Greek Philosophy* (Samos–Patmos 1993), 6–8.

something (a form), and that which has become a form, i.e. has been actualized.³⁸ In the context of Hesychast theory, the unknowable Divine essence as the first cause has potency for different knowable actualizations, such as the Incarnation or the uncreated “light of Tabor” seen during the Hesychast prayer.³⁹ Seeing the Divine light does not imply understanding or knowing the unknowable Divine essence, but only its actualizations, knowable because of the potency of the essence to become accessible through actualization (*energeia*), through God’s work (*ergon*).

Barlaam of Calabria’s criticism of Palamas’ teaching calls into question the uncreatedness and eternity of the Divine light, and argues that only the Divine essence is uncreated.⁴⁰ If we accept that the light is uncreated, then the light is the Divine essence itself, which implies that seeing the Divine light is the same as seeing the Divine essence, and that in the final analysis the Hesychast teaching is the same as that of Thomas Aquinas:⁴¹ “Thomas, and everyone who reasons like him, thinks that there is nothing out of reach for the human mind” (*Paris. gr.* 1278, fol. 137). On the other hand, since it is only the Divine essence that is uncreated, then the light seen during prayer cannot be the uncreated “light of Tabor”, which then casts doubt on the Athonite monastic practice. Since both Palamas and

³⁸ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1002b32–1003a5 ff.

³⁹ Hesychasm (from *hesychia*, meaning silence, quietness), an influential monastic movement in the Byzantine world in the 13th and 14th centuries, combined the communal and anchoritic ways of monastic life, and laid emphasis on the constant individual practice of mental prayer, which may or may not involve particular psychosomatic techniques, and on the duty of participating in the liturgical life of society. According to Hesychast teaching, monastic practice enables a spiritual conversion (divinization or “becoming God-like”) through the vision of the Divine light. Hesychasm can be traced back to 5th-century sources and its teaching is based on the experience of Eastern monasticism, particularly the Sinai school (7th century) and the work of Symeon the New Theologian (11th century).

⁴⁰ Barlaam of Calabria, a learned Greek monk from southern Italy, came to Constantinople c. 1330 and joined the University of Constantinople to teach about the *Corpus Areopagiticum*. As a representative of the Byzantine Church he took part in negotiations about union with the Roman Church. He was the opponent of the famous historian Nicephorus Gregoras in a scholarly debate which ended in his defeat (decided by the audience). In this debate, Barlaam argued for the importance of syllogism in understanding theological and philosophical teachings, while Gregoras favoured Plato over Aristotle, and argued against the adequacy of the syllogistic method as an additional logical tool for solving fundamental philosophical problems. According to Gregoras, the syllogistic method could only be overrated by the Latins, unenlightened as to higher spiritual spheres. See Ostrogorski, *Sabrana dela V*, 210–211. For Barlaam’s use of the syllogistic method, see Yiagazoglou, “Demonstrative Method”, 6–8.

⁴¹ See V. Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Faith Press, 1973), 10–11, 16–17.

Barlaam referred to the Areopagite in stressing the impossibility of knowing the Divine essence, their dispute ended up being about the distinction between essence and light (or actualization). Barlaam and his followers denied the possibility of such distinction, claiming that it would endanger Divine unity and simplicity, implying a “second”, “lower” god. Palamas replied by claiming that the multiplicity of God’s manifestations and apparitions (*ekphaseis*) does not affect the unity of God who is above the whole and the part: “Goodness is not one part of God, Wisdom another, Majesty and Providence still another. God is wholly Goodness, wholly Wisdom, wholly Providence and wholly Majesty. He is one, without any division into parts, but, possessing in Himself each of these energies [actualizations]. He reveals Himself wholly in each by His presence and action in a unified, simple and undivided fashion.”⁴² If we do not accept the teaching about Divine essence and Divine actualizations, then there is no link between God and the world, because, Palamas says, such God would be non-actualized (*anenergeton*), and could not be called Creator since that “which has no potency or actualization, does not exist, either generally or particularly”. To deny a distinction between essence and actualization would therefore result in an atheistic position.

The most important terminological distinction for understanding Palamas’ teaching is the conceptual pair *potency–actualization*, because the essence is what has potency for actualization through a particular act. Potency is the capacity for (actualization), because, Palamas makes a further distinction following Gregory Nazianzen, between that which has intention (desire) as permanent potency and particular intentions (desires) by which actualizations take place, or in other words, the potency of birth, and the actualization of birth as act. Through potency the essence sets in motion, and the act itself is motion and, eventually, actualization.⁴³

Palamas’ distinction between essence and actualizations, based on the teachings of the Church Fathers, particularly of the Cappadocians and Maximus the Confessor, has implications for the understanding of the Eucharist as the central theme of Orthodox theology and the basis of the liturgical practice.⁴⁴ Hesychast emphasis on the monastics as a critical force in society and adamant resistance to non-Orthodox political pressures, shaped

⁴² Palamas, *Writings* II (Thessaloniki 1966), 209.

⁴³ Palamas, *Writings* III (Thessaloniki 1966), 384, 5.

⁴⁴ If we reject the distinction between the essence and actualization, even the Eucharist or Holy Communion becomes impossible: “Since man can participate in God and since the superessential essence of God is completely above participation, then there exists something between the essence that cannot be participated and those who participate, to make participation in God possible for them” (*Triads*, III, 2, 24, Migne PG 687).

the Eastern Christian understanding of society, not only because of the political strength of this movement, but also because Hesychasm was the final form of one thousand years of Byzantine thought.

Hesychast teaching was embraced by the Serbian Church as early as the fourteenth century, and Palamas' writings, notably his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, were translated and copied.⁴⁵ Hesychasm left a strong imprint on Serbian medieval literature and art, which is evident already in the works of Domentianus (Domentijan) and Theodosius (Teodosije),⁴⁶ but most prominently in the writings of Daniel (Danilo) of Peć, monk Ephrem (Jefrem), Silouan (Siluan),⁴⁷ and Monk Isaiah. Its prolonged influence on both the state and church hierarchies and amongst the people was largely a result of the activity of the Sinaiti.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Several copies of the Serbo-Slavic translation have survived, such as *Codex of Vladislav Gramatik*, Ms 80 (1469), Archive HAZU, fol. 562–564; Hilandar Ms 469 (end of 15th century), fol. 182–185; Mss 82 and 83 (16th century), Bulgarian Academy of Science, 301–304 and 67–69 respectively, and possibly also some other copies in monasteries, libraries and academies.

⁴⁶ Domentijan (mid-13th c.) and Teodosije (end 13th–first half of 14th c.), both members of the monastic community of Hilandar, writers of hagiographical literature. The former wrote the *lives* of St Sava and St Simeon, the latter the *life* of St Sava, services to St Sava and St Simeon, several eulogies, services and canons. Cf. Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, 157, 169–170.

⁴⁷ Danilo, Archbishop of the Serbian Church (1324–37), founder of several churches, political mediator, writer of several hagiographies of the canonized members of the Nemanjić dynasty (kings Uroš, Milutin and Dragutin, Queen Jelena), and church heads (archbishops Arsenius I, Ioannicius I and Eusthatius I) and two services (to Arsenius I and Eusthatius I), cf. Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, 175–176; monk Ephrem, Serbian patriarch (1375–79 and 1389–91) of Bulgarian origin, writer of the canons (hymns) to Christ, the Virgin and the so-called Canon to the Emperor, cf. Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, 182–183; monk Silouan (second half of 14th–early 15th c.), Athonite Hesychast, writer of the *lives* of St Sava and St Simeon. The so-called Epistles of Silouan (1418) to Athonite monks shed light on the intensive communication between Mount Athos and Serbia, cf. Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, 185–187.

⁴⁸ For the Hesychasts in Serbia, traditionally known as Sinaiti, see A. Radović, “Sinaiti i njihov značaj u životu Srbije XIV i XV veka” [Sinaiti and their importance in the life of Serbia in the 14th and 15th centuries], in *Spomenica o petstogodišnjici manastira Ravanice* (Belgrade 1981); Bogdanović, *Istorija stare srpske književnosti*, 202–205; D. Bogdanović, “Preteče isihazma u srpskim zbornicima XIV veka” [Precursors of Hesychasm in 14th-century Serbian collections], *Cyrrillomethodianum* V (1981); D. Bogdanović, “Neoplatonizam u isihastičkoj književnosti kod Srba” [Neoplatonism in Serbian Hesychast literature], *Pravoslavna misao* 32 (1985).

The influence of Byzantine philosophy on the Serbian medieval state and society

The great translation project and the revisions of translations of both the most important liturgical books (gospel books, epistle lectionaries, psalters) and the texts crucial for the development of Serbian philosophical thought, is closely connected with the liturgical reforms that began in the first half of the fourteenth century. In the Serbian monastic scriptoria such as that at Hilandar, texts were translated from Greek, earlier translations were corrected and improved, and more suitable terminological solutions were usually found. An exceptionally important feature of this project, commenced under King Milutin (r. 1282–1321), was a powerful Hesychast influence. Athonite spirituality influenced both the style and method of codifying sacral texts, and the Serbian translation school, which embraced the strict, “iconographically” correct, approach to translating the most complex Byzantine texts. That the translation effort was part of a comprehensive scholarly and educational reform can also be seen from the selection of texts for translation. At first only informative edifying texts were translated (such as Theodore of Rhaithu’s *Preparation*), but the fourteenth century saw the translation of texts of encyclopaedic character (John of Damascus’ *Fountain of Knowledge*), collected works (*Corpus Areopagiticum*) and texts of current interest such as Palamas’ *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*.

This thought-out approach to the work of translation obviously had a deeper meaning. Namely, according to Byzantine scholarly methodology, whose main characteristic is systematic and consistent thought, in order to understand the “true philosophy” it was necessary to successfully climb several rungs of the ladder of knowledge. For understanding dogmas, which are the final expressions of cataphatic thought, it is first necessary, according to the highest authorities (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John of Damascus etc), to discipline the mind on the Greek texts on logic and philosophy. Given that the basic dogmatic statements remain obscure without background knowledge of complex Platonic and Aristotelian terminology, the fourteenth-century effort to translate the philosophical chapters of Damascene’s *Fountain of Knowledge* is understandable. In addition to the already mentioned characteristics of Byzantine philosophy (systematic thinking, consistency, influence of classical philosophical terminology), being true to the original is yet another of its major features. The originality of the author in the modern sense of the word did not exist in the Byzantine world. Original is only one immutable truth, while individual authors, continuing the work of previous thinkers, are only able to come more or less close to it.

Philosophical texts were frequently copied and much worked on in Serbia, but it is difficult to infer about the actual scope of their influence on the formation and articulation of the worldview of medieval Serbian society. As a result of their demanding theoretical complexity, study of philosophy

was restricted to quite narrow monastic, court and urban circles. However, the strongest aspect of the influence of Byzantine thought on medieval society was the liturgy as the central social event of the community. It was through the liturgy that the wording of the translated texts influenced the life of medieval Serbian society. They were important for understanding the Eucharist itself, as well as for understanding the celestial, ecclesiastical and state hierarchies, which was particularly evident during the Hesychast dispute. In the liturgical texts themselves, mainly of prayerful nature, there are ontological formulations and statements⁴⁹ that are crucial for understanding the liturgy and essential for understanding Byzantine thought.

Apart from large-scale translation projects, the immediate influence of Hesychasts and direct communication with liturgical texts, medieval Serbian society could encounter philosophical terminology in legal texts and in more popular readings such as collections of maxims of “wise men” and philosophers (*gnomae, melissae*).

Chapter 61 of the Serbian *Nomocanon* (*Krmčija*), a collection of canon and secular law put together by archbishop Sava about 1220, contains a paragraph on some of the most prominent ancient Greek schools of philosophy. This widely known text, which Sava either translated himself or borrowed from some previously translated collections, refers to the teachings of the Pythagoreans, Platonists, Stoics and Epicureans.

The *Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević*, penned by Constantine the Philosopher,⁵⁰ contains sayings attributed to Orpheus, Thucydides, Plato and Aristotle. The Byzantine *melissae* (bees) which were in use in the Serbo-Slavic-speaking areas as early as the twelfth century and continued to be copied until the eighteenth century, contain maxims of “wise Hellenes” (Socrates, Pythagoras, Democritus, Epictetus, Plutarch). Just as widespread in medieval Serbia were also the *gnomae* compiling reflections of classical philosophers and writers on a variety of life’s issues (Euripides, Menander, Democritus, Socrates, Epictetus). Some of these sayings, whose ancient Greek origin sank into oblivion, have survived in Serbian folk wisdom and poetry.

Medieval Serbia’s forgotten philosophical legacy

This particular case of oblivion is closely connected with the history of the Serbian language. Unlike Latin, Church Slavic was not as incomprehensible to the medieval population as it might be assumed from its subsequently

⁴⁹ E.g. the (Nicene) Creed; “It is truly right to bless you”; or statements such as: “Thine own of Thine own we offer You on behalf of all and for all”.

⁵⁰ For Despot Stefan Lazarević and Constantine the Philosopher, see note 34 above.

growing difference from the Serbian, Russian and Bulgarian vernaculars.⁵¹ Apart from the literary language into which philosophical texts were translated, the vernacular was used in writing as well, mostly for laws and royal charters, and there was also a vernacular written literature (chivalrous romance) and history (chronicles).

The Ottoman expansion into the Balkans began in the fourteenth century and eventually all parts of the former medieval Serbian state were conquered. The conquests, however, had no impact on the relationship between the literary language and the vernacular. The diglossia survived. Ottoman rule in fact conserved the state of affairs as it had been in the middle ages.⁵² The texts that were copied or printed in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were in fact earlier Church Slavic translations. With the fall of the medieval state and its secular rulers, the only leaders left, and formally recognized by the Ottomans, were ecclesiastical leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Under Ottoman rule, the liturgy remained the central social event and, due to the distinctive features of Ottoman administration as well as geographical and historical circumstances, Serbian society lived its own and largely independent life.

It was the eighteenth century that brought about some significant changes leading to the eventual suppression of medieval philosophical tradition. In 1783 the central figure of eighteenth-century Serbian literature, Dositej Obradović,⁵³ proposed his language project. Inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, he opted for a pragmatic approach: written language was supposed to be fully comprehensible to the reader. At first some Church Slavic and Russian, mostly abstract, words were spared because they had no vernacular equivalents, but they also were expelled eventually.

With the First Serbian Insurrection in 1804 statehood was restored. As recent research has shown, medieval tradition played a role in creating state institutions and in lawmaking.⁵⁴ During the first half of the nine-

⁵¹ Ivić, "Standard language", 43.

⁵² In many Serbian charters, especially donation charters to monasteries, the opening text expounding the donor's God-pleasing act, is written in Church Slavic. One could speak of and address God only in the hallowed church language, while the profane language was only acceptable for profane themes. In fact the use of both languages in one text shows that they were not seen as two different languages, but as functional varieties of a single language.

⁵³ M. Kostić, *Dositej Obradović u istorijskoj perspektivi* [Dositej Obradović in Historical Perspective] (Belgrade: Srpska akademija nauka, 1952).

⁵⁴ In writing the first laws of restored Serbia, Prota Mateja Nenadović (1777–1854) drew from the *Krmčija of St Sava (Nomocanon)*, a collection of canon and secular law put together by archbishop Sava about 1220. Cf. *The Memoirs of Prota Mateja Nenadović*,

teenth century, however, the increasingly prominent role of Western models resulted in, among other things, an uncritical rejection of earlier traditions. As Serbian society and culture changed, so did its literary language: it was no longer shaped by the Church, and there was a general orientation shift from Russia towards Western Europe.

Once the principles of Vuk Karadžić's language reform prevailed,⁵⁵ Church Slavic became reduced to the language of worship. As a result, the thousand-year-old literary language sank into oblivion and, with it, the entire medieval philosophical legacy.

The Enlightenment belief in the rule of reason, the uncritically accepted Western misunderstanding of the Byzantine world viewing it as utterly mystical and theocratic, and the rejection of the "dark clerical burden of the past", helped the cultural amnesia to spread. Once the wars of liberation and the struggle for the use of the vernacular in public education ended victoriously, the emerging Serbian intelligentsia turned enthusiastically to modern Western Europe and its positivist science. The centuries of Old Slavic literacy sank into oblivion almost overnight. The Byzantine (philosophico-theological) worldview rapidly gave way to the philosophical effort of "celebrating the power of reason, moral autonomy and the benefits of a secular culture".⁵⁶ Attitudes towards this legacy swaying between disparagement and complete lack of interest continued into the twentieth century.⁵⁷

Academic interest did not revive until the last decades of the twentieth century. The interest in medieval theological thinking was encouraged by the School of Orthodox Theology,⁵⁸ while the first impulses to study the medieval beginnings of Serbian philosophy came from Belgrade's School of Philosophy. Apart from new translations and fresh analyses of medieval

ed. and trans. Lovett F. Edwards (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). Cf. also Z. Mirković, *Karadžordjev zakonik* [The Code of Karageorge] (Belgrade 2008), 13.

⁵⁵ Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864), the Serbian philologist who reformed the literary language and orthography by moving it away from Church Slavic and Russian and bringing it closer to the spoken language, more specifically to the Shtokavian dialect of the Serb-inhabited eastern Herzegovina. Cf. Lj. Stojanović, *Život i rad Vuka Stef. Karadžića* (Belgrade: Srpska knjiga, 1924); D. Wilson, *Life and Times of Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, 1787–1864: Literacy, Literature and National Independence in Serbia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

⁵⁶ Žunjić, "Likovi filozofije", 234.

⁵⁷ The first comprehensive overview of the history of Serbian philosophy, made in the late 1960s, finds that "sadly, the middle ages in Serbian culture lasted until the eighteenth century", cf. D. Jeremić, "O filozofiji kod Srba", *Savremenik* 5–12/1967, 1–2/1968, repr. in D. Jeremić, *O filozofiji kod Srba* (Belgrade 1997), 9.

⁵⁸ Reincorporated into the University of Belgrade since 2004.

texts,⁵⁹ there have been more or less successful attempts to take a comprehensive look at medieval philosophical thinking, and studies are underway into the scope and impact of translated philosophical writings and the building of philosophical terminology.

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⁵⁹ For the translations of the *Mystical Theology*, John Climacus' *Ladder*, Palamas' *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* and the first ever translation of Damascene's *Dialectic* into modern Serbian, see B. Milosavljević, ed., *Vizantijska filozofija u srednjevekovnoj Srbiji* (Belgrade 2002). For studies on the medieval Serbian philosophical legacy, see *Istočnik* 9 (Belgrade 1994); *Filozofija i teologija* (Vrnjačka Banja 1994); I. Marić, ed., *Srpska filozofija, Gledišta* 1–2 (1999); Milosavljević, ed., *Vizantijska filozofija*; I. Marić, ed., *O srpskoj filozofiji* (Belgrade: Plato, 2003).