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## A SEA OF MIRACLES: REFLECTIONS ON NARRATIVE SPACE IN MEDIEVAL SERBIAN HAGIOGRAPHY

The broad purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how scholarly readings of medieval hagiography might benefit from a theoretical-methodological shift towards space as the principal focal point of analysis. More specifically, it aims to put forward a new, spatial interpretation of two well-known miracle episodes from the *Lives* of St Sava of Serbia, both of which are said to have transpired on the high seas.

*Keywords:* St Sava of Serbia, Domentian, Theodosius, maritime miracles, narrative spatiality, medieval Serbian literature, Holy Land pilgrimage

Since the 1980s, space has gradually become an important category of analysis in many a research field across the contemporary humanities spectrum, not least in one as interdisciplinary as medieval studies. This conceptual shift – a veritable *spatial turn*, as it is commonly referred to – has introduced new ways of exploring different aspects of the pre-modern past by “thinking spatially”, i.e., by focusing one’s interpretive lens upon the spatial dimension inherent to social, cultural, and other relevant phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Owing to these theoretical developments, the student of medieval literature has gained a potent critical instrumentarium: if modest at first, the interest in *narrative space* to which it gave rise has by now asserted its place as a legitimate

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<sup>1</sup> For a useful discussion on the *spatial turn* with an up-to-date bibliography, see *Bachmann-Medick*, *Cultural Turns*, 211–243. A medievalist perspective on space in this context is offered by *Cassidy-Welch*, *Space and Place*, 1–8; *Cohen*, *Madeline*, *Iogna-Prat*, Introduction, 1–13. It ought to be pointed out that Serbian historiography has not been unreceptive to these approaches; recent works inspired by the *spatial turn* include *Bojanin*, *Sacred and profane topography*, 1013–1024; *Mrgić*, *Landscapes and settlements*, 68–87; *Marjanović-Dušanić*, *Zamišljeni i stvarni prostori*, 179–197.

line of inquiry among medievalists and yielded more than a few noteworthy pieces of scholarship.<sup>2</sup> Aside from those resulting from research undertaken by specialists in the European Middle Ages,<sup>3</sup> there has been in recent years a growing number of pertinent works authored by Byzantinists;<sup>4</sup> even so, much remains to be done in this respect with both Latin/vernacular and Greek sources.<sup>5</sup> As one might expect, this holds even more true for Serbian literature: granted that some contributions to the discussion on narrative spatiality in the surviving writings of Serbian provenance – notably, saints' *lives* – have certainly been made,<sup>6</sup> a comprehensive treatment of the matter set against a solid theoretical-methodological backdrop is still very much a *desideratum*.

Needless to say, the present article cannot possibly hope to fill this gap. Rather, its aim is to demonstrate how medieval strategies of narrating space may be dealt with by drawing upon concepts borrowed from narratology, literary studies, and philosophy of space/place. In terms of genre, the following consideration – much like previous scholarship on the topic – is limited to hagiography, specifically to the two *Vitae* of St Sava of Serbia, penned by the Athonite monastics Domentian and Theodosius in the mid- and late thirteenth century, respectively.<sup>7</sup> In addition, given that an all-encompassing analysis of space in these voluminous works would take us well beyond the scope of a single essay, it appears necessary to concentrate on one distinctive feature of the problem at hand; in other words, on a particular type of space. With this in mind, I have decided to look at how Domentian and Theodosius narrate the sea – especially the open sea –, deliberately cast in both of their compositions as the stage of some of Sava's most memorable miracles. Indeed, it is precisely the fact that the sea is envisaged as a privileged space of miracle-working that will prove fundamental for my inquiry.

This article comprises five short sections. Section One lays the ground for discussion by addressing medieval conceptions of the sea, pursuant to the observation that it is “our own sense or understanding of spaces and places from which we create

<sup>2</sup> As an introduction to the theoretical problems of narrative space, see *Ryan*, *Space*, 420–433; *de Jong*, *Narratology and Classics*, 105–131; *Parker*, *Conceptions of Place*, 74–101 (with further references).

<sup>3</sup> The following is but a selection intended to provide a relevant sample rather than a comprehensive overview of the publications devoted to medieval narrative spatiality over the last two decades: *Lees*, *Overing* (edd.), *Place to Believe in*, esp. Pt 2; *Störmer-Caysa*, *Grundstrukturen*; *Howes* (ed.), *Place, Space, and Landscape*; *Suarez-Nani*, *Rohde* (edd.), *Représentations et conceptions*.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., *Veikou*, *Space in Texts*, 143–175; *Mantova*, *Space Representation*, 157–165; *Veikou*, *Nilsson*, *Byzantine Ports and Harbours*, 265–277.

<sup>5</sup> A highly instructive article by Eva von Contzen has made clear that future advances in the field will greatly depend on whether or not scholars of medieval literature make the effort to formulate a narrative theory that would better suit their own source material: *von Contzen*, *Why We Need a Medieval Narratology*, 1–21.

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, *Polovina*, *Topos putovanja*, esp. Ch. 4 on St Sava's peregrinations; *Špadijer*, *Symbolism of Space*, 300–308; *Savić*, “Izmišljanje” *Vavilona*, 291–312; *Marjanović-Dušanić*, *Zamišljeni i stvarni prostori*, esp. 183–188.

<sup>7</sup> Editions: Domentijan, *Žitije*, 2–433 (with a parallel translation into modern Serbian); Teodosije, *Život*, 1–219. On the authors and their works: *Špadijer*, *Svetogorska baština*, 43–48, 51–72 (with bibliography).

narratives about them, or project narratives *onto* them”<sup>8</sup> In Section Two, I outline a theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms of fashioning spatial constructs through narration. To be more exact, I propose to establish a connection between the process of structuring space and the dynamic of miracle narratives in the two *Vitae*. In this vein, Sections Three and Four are each dedicated to a well-known miracle reportedly performed by Sava on the high seas: during his second voyage towards the Holy Land he calmed a violent storm,<sup>9</sup> whereas on his way back he uncannily incited the sea to deliver a fish that he consumed and was thereupon cured of a life-threatening illness.<sup>10</sup> Finally, to better contextualise these reflections, in Section Five I tackle two meaningful questions which I posed to myself at an early juncture in the course of this research: why does Sava perform maritime miracles on his second pilgrimage and not at an earlier time; and why is his miracle-working confined to the two sea journeys – to and from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean – rather than to any dry-land location he visits or any region he traverses, be it Palestine, Egypt, or Sinai. Taken together, these assorted insights regarding the narrative space of the hagiographies of St Sava will allow for conclusions of a more general order.

*Imagining the sea: maritime symbolism in the Middle Ages*

In medieval times, the idea of the sea was an ambiguous one. In spite of being a vital part of many people’s daily lives – in terms of sustenance, communication, and commerce –, the vast watery expanse was charged with symbolic meaning entrenched in what seems to be an innate sense of unease with which man, an earthbound creature, has presumably conceived of it from time immemorial. As remarked by Sebastian Sobeki, it is the “essential dissimilarity in kind to land” that has given rise to an ambivalent sea imagery: unlike firm ground, stable and susceptible to exploration and manipulation of all kinds, it is a realm of perpetual movement, of transience rather than permanence – “elusive myth” as opposed to “tangible substance”.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, he argues, “[a]we, fear and admiration for the sea are merely permutations of human responses to the sea’s greatness and grandeur, simultaneously conveying its categorical alterity and the resulting incapability of human societies to control it”.<sup>12</sup> Impervious to full comprehension – much less dominion –, the sea has become in the Judaeo-Christian tradition a space of otherness, a boundary of the unknown (or, indeed, the unknowable), “a wilderness par excellence”.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Parker, *Conceptions of Place*, 74 (original emphasis).

<sup>9</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350–352; Teodosije, *Život*, 182–186.

<sup>10</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 398–400; Teodosije, *Život*, 195–198.

<sup>11</sup> Sobeki, *Sea and Medieval English Literature*, 5, 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7; see also Mollat du Jourdin, *Europe et la mer*, 268: “Bravant le temps et l’espace, la mer oppose sa pérennité et son immensité aux générations éphémères d’humains fixés sur un sol déterminé. La mer défie la constance continentale par l’irrégularité de son humeur”.

<sup>13</sup> della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred*, 233.

Little wonder, then, that it was imagined by a number of early Christian authors – some of them pre-eminent patristic figures – as the abode of the devil and his minions,<sup>14</sup> responsible for the “expectedly unexpected” occurrences which constitute the very stuff of medieval seafaring stories, namely, shipwreck, detrimental weather, and pirate attacks.<sup>15</sup> Ostensibly, these fed into a deeply rooted fear of perishing in the waves, a sentiment aptly epitomised in the phrase “briny grave” (*vodoslan'ny grobъ*), by which Sava's *Vitae* connote the sea.<sup>16</sup> However, this distinctly negative image was also mobilised for purposes beyond detailing actual journeys from one shore to another. In effect, by using a fairly standard repertoire of nautical metaphors, medieval writers invoked the vision of the treacherous sea to describe the myriad woes and pitfalls of the world.<sup>17</sup> Fraught with peril of temptation, the course of one's life was conceptualised as a dangerous sea voyage that might just prove fortuitous given the right guidance: we need look no further than the writings of our hagiographers to find expressions such as “those struggling on the high seas” (i.e., men and women in some sort of crisis), hoping for a pious “helmsman” (in this case, Sava) to lead them to the “harbour” of salvation (Christ).<sup>18</sup>

Although the notion of the sea as the seat of infernal cohorts was fervently subscribed to, *inter alii*, by Augustine of Hippo and Gregory the Great, it would be quite wrong to assume that such a clear-cut view was universally accepted among learned Christians of Late Antiquity. As early as the fourth century, theologians in the East – “perhaps remembering their Plato”, as one scholar has pointed out – began to employ maritime symbolism to articulate “the immense and unbounded character of the divine nature”.<sup>19</sup> Owing to the prominence of the Greek Fathers, this line of thought had found its way into the medieval Slavic milieu at a rather early date. To wit, already in the ninth-century *Vita Constantini-Cyrilli* we read an apology for the Christian God uttered by the saint before Arab savants gathered at the caliph's court:

<sup>14</sup> *Rahner*, *Simboli della Chiesa*, 469 sq.

<sup>15</sup> *Mullett*, *In peril on the sea*, 259; *Dennis*, *Perils of the Deep*, 87.

<sup>16</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 346; Teodosije, *Život*, 185. Some Byzantine material illustrative of this medieval fear of the sea is discussed in *Radić*, *Strah*, 257–283. For the West, see *Delumeau*, *Peur en Occident*, 49 sq.; *Deluz*, *Pèlerins et voyageurs*, 278–281.

<sup>17</sup> *Efthymiadis*, *Sea as Topos*, 112; *Rahner*, *Simboli della Chiesa*, 506–508.

<sup>18</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 12: “Thou [God] are guide to those who sin and harbour to those struggling on the high seas (*vlažuštiim' se pristanište*)”; *ibid.*, 268: “using God's word as angle [...] he [Sava] caught this king [Stephen of Hungary] and took him as would an agile helmsman those who struggle on the high seas (*jako hitrъ krъmnikъ vlažuštiim' se*), and delivered him to the true harbour (*къ istinnomou pristaništou*)”. Sava is also the helmsman of the Church; *ibid.*, 322. On the other hand, cf. *ibid.*, 324, as well as Teodosije, *Život*, 65, 66, where Sava himself is said to be a harbour to those in need; what is more, Theodosius uses the very same term (*pristanište*) to designate the Monastery of Hilandar as a place of deliverance; *ibid.*, 49. For medieval nautical metaphors more generally, see *Curtius*, *European Literature*, 128–130; *Veikou*, *Nilsson*, *Byzantine Ports and Harbours*, 270–272.

<sup>19</sup> *McGinn*, *Ocean and Desert*, 158–159; see also *della Dora*, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred*, 237–244.

Our God is like unto the depths of the sea. [...] [M]any venture into those depths. With His aid, the strong of mind swim over and return, having received the copious gift of insight. The weak, however, attempt to get across as if on board rotting ships: some drown and others struggle for breath as they float lethargically amongst the waves.<sup>20</sup>

*Gloubina* (“depth”) is thus an attribute of the sea which, imponderable as it is, perfectly suits the ineffable mystery of God. Interestingly, a version of Constantine’s *Life* preserved in a miscellany of South Slavic provenance compiled in 1469 does not feature this particular term but a different one, namely, *poučina* (“the open sea” possibly being its closest English equivalent).<sup>21</sup> These two dimensions – depth and vastness – appear to fittingly encapsulate the sea’s supposed infinitude. Moreover, both are evoked by Domentian and Theodosius in reference to the divine: the former, e.g., recounts his hero’s appeal to the “immeasurable sea of Thy [God’s] mercy” (*кѡ безмѣр’нѣи poučině milosr̄dīa tvoego*) while the latter has the Russian monk, who was to lead young Rastko (Sava) to Mount Athos, say that the prince’s soul had immersed itself into the “depths of God’s love” (*въ gl̄bīnou božie ljubve*).<sup>22</sup>

Just as maritime imagery was a highly convenient means by which to figuratively denote God’s affectionate relation to mankind, so was the actual watery wilderness a space where his benevolent agency in the world of creation found remarkably strong expression. Not unlike the monastic desert, the sea was a setting in which divine presence was likely to be experienced, provided that one was first able to triumph over the forces of evil which as a rule lie in wait in desolate places, be they wastelands or great expanses of water; in that sense, the sea’s diabolic occupants mentioned earlier constitute but one of its facets, however compelling.<sup>23</sup> Even though it could never be conquered in the same way as solid ground – i.e., permanently inhabited –, the sea nevertheless represented a potential site of spiritual *agōn*, which is precisely why many a holy person came to demonstrate their miracle-working powers in such surroundings: seafaring narratives are by and large meant either to reveal a thaumaturge, or else to expand the “portfolio” of one who has already manifested their power.<sup>24</sup> In other words, a miracle signalled the en-

<sup>20</sup> MMFH II, 53–54: “богъ нашъ jako gloubina estъ morskaa. [...] мнози въ gloubinou tou съhоdѣтъ, i silnii оумомъ помошtiju ego bogatstvo razoumnoe priemljuste, preplavajutъ i въzvraštajutse, a slabii, jako въ съgnilѣhъ korablehъ pokoušajutъsja prepyti, ovi istarajutъ, a drouzii s troudomъ edva otdyhajutъ, nemoštnoju lēnostiju vlajuštese” (here and henceforth, translations from the sources are my own; for scriptural citations, I refer to the KJV). This simile has been interpreted by *Vavřínek*, *Byzantine Polemic*, 540 as a likely borrowing from Gregory of Nazianzus.

<sup>21</sup> Kliment Ohridski et al., *Ćirilo i Metodije*, 225, n. 47, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 178; Teodosije, *Život*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> The symbolic correlation between desert and sea (*heremum in oceano*) was perhaps most clearly articulated in the Irish tradition of *peregrinatio pro amore Dei*: *Sobecki*, *Sea and Medieval English Literature*, 41, 49–50; *della Dora*, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred*, 236.

<sup>24</sup> *Efthymiadis*, *Sea as Topos*, 111–116; *Mullett*, *In peril on the sea*, 264–267. For some examples from Latin hagiography, see *Micheau*, *Itinéraires maritimes et continentaux*, 82–83, 85–86.

counter between the earthly and the heavenly, and the sea – being at once demonic and theophanic – provided just the right kind of spatial framework for it.

*Towards a theory: the sea as narrative space(-time)*

It might be freely deduced from what has been said so far that mental pictures of the sea in medieval contexts very much relied on preconceived ideas and rhetorical convention. Widely exploited by literati of the period, a range of *topoi* harking back to Christian antiquity yielded a convenient point of departure for fashioning maritime spaces on the textual plane: as the next section and the one after it will show, some of those time-honoured commonplace notions about the sea had clearly set the tone for narrating Sava's voyages to the Holy Land and back. Yet now we ought to take up a different matter: how does this generic image – a conceptual substratum comprising the sea's physical traits (depth, vastness, liquidity) but also metaphysical associations (ambivalent as they are) – evolve into a coherent literary seascape?

As regards the material under scrutiny, a reasonable assumption would be that it takes an event, that is movement and action performed by characters (notably the saintly protagonist), to configure a particular narrative space. Truth be told, the space of the *Vitae* is highly narrativised, meaning that there are no elaborate descriptions of the locations where events come to pass; rather, the reader or listener is left to piece together the spatial information they collect whilst the narration unfolds.<sup>25</sup> In that sense, it can be maintained that space takes shape and, as it were, expands at a pace dictated by the event itself; however, in order to avoid making any hasty judgement as to the inherent primacy of time over space – a position which has been something of a mainstream in narrative theory for quite some time<sup>26</sup> – we should take care not to lose sight of the fact that it is conventional understanding of different spaces that determines which sort(s) of event might conceivably transpire there at all. As Franco Moretti has remarked, “each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story”.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, if we endorse the view that “*what* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens”,<sup>28</sup> we might readily suggest that a general idea about a space constitutes a scope of possibility which normally informs the act of narrating an event from the very start; yet as the event transpires, this purely symbolic space feeds into a customised narrative construct whose nature is more expressly *spatio-temporal*. Consequently, it may be claimed that culturally conditioned conceptions of space give impetus to narrative – in other words, that space is a generative force of storytelling –, but that literary spatiality only comes to be fully realised when imbued with temporality.

<sup>25</sup> On description and narration as (at times overlapping) modalities of representing space in literature: *de Jong*, *Narratology and Classics*, 113–114; *Ryan*, *Space*, 426; *Parker*, *Conceptions of Place*, 90.

<sup>26</sup> *Stanford Friedman*, *Spatial Poetics*, 192–194.

<sup>27</sup> *Moretti*, *Atlas*, 70.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* (original emphasis).

Attempts to theorise this “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” in literature go back to the opus of Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly to his 1937 essay in which he introduced the concept of *chronotope*. “In the literary artistic chronotope”, he contends, “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole”.<sup>29</sup> Time thus “thickens, takes on flesh” and “becomes artistically visible”, whereas space “becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history”.<sup>30</sup> Now albeit Bakhtin’s work has gained great currency in the second half of the twentieth century, it has been recently noted, and correctly so, that his “sense of the mutually constitutive and interactive nature of space and time in narrative has largely dropped out of narrative poetics”,<sup>31</sup> which has brought about a systemic marginalisation of *topos* in favour of *chronos* in the study of narrative. Bent on countering this tendency by drawing on the theoretical impulse of the *spatial turn*, Susan Stanford Friedman has pointed out that “we need a *topochronic* narrative poetics, one that foregrounds *topos* in an effort to restore an interactive analysis of time with space in narrative discourse”.<sup>32</sup> Appreciative of the merits of such an endeavour, I opt to employ in what follows the term *topochrone* or *space-time*.

Building upon the insights of Bakhtinian theory, I propose to put forward a hypothesis, namely, that miracles in Sava’s *Lives* constitute a topochrone of their own. It is my assertion that these occurrences – all of which essentially boil down to manifestations of divine presence, of the *numen*, in the physical universe<sup>33</sup> – encourage the mutual saturation of space and time in a way which is very much typical of hagiography. (Lest we forget, Bakhtin originally conceived of the chronotope as genre-specific and, indeed, genre-defining.<sup>34</sup>) If we characterise the miracle as an “eventful intervention of the supernatural interpreted as coming from God or at least with God’s consent”,<sup>35</sup> it is clear that we cannot treat it just as any other event taking place in a certain space over a period of time. For as soon as the barrier between the material world and the transcendent collapses, space and time gain a new, expanded meaning. It is common knowledge that medieval miracle stories were penned in adherence to precedent: if a miracle was to convey a message to an audience, it needed to evoke familiar deeds of Jesus Christ and the saints of old.<sup>36</sup> In a sense, therefore, the miracle disrupts the temporal ordering of the narrative by incorporating it into the *historia sacra*, and the event itself – though having a beginning and end – becomes a timeless testament of the dealings of providence.

<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin, *Forms of Time*, 84. For a useful and relatively recent appraisal of the concept, see *Be-mong*, Borghart, *Bakhtin’s Theory of the Literary Chronotope*, 3–16.

<sup>30</sup> Bakhtin, *Forms of Time*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> Stanford Friedman, *Spatial Poetics*, 194.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* (original emphasis).

<sup>33</sup> Dierkens, *Réflexions sur le miracle*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin, *Forms of Time*, 84–85.

<sup>35</sup> Rūth, *Representing Wonder*, 98.

<sup>36</sup> Ward, *Miracles*, 167–170; Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 5–6.



The status of space in this regard may be even more complex. Theoretically, a miracle can happen anywhere: there is no place beyond the Almighty's reach. Still, I believe that it would be misleading to think that the locations at which Sava encounters the divine were chosen incidentally. God acts through the hero in consecrated spaces, to the benefit of individuals (healing miracles) or the community (the myrrh-exuding of St Symeon's relics); he tests him in the "desert" (i.e., on Mt Athos) and on the high seas; and comes to his aid as he confronts the adversaries of his *patria* in neighbouring realms (the rebellious magnate Strez and King Stephen of Hungary).<sup>37</sup> Common to most if not all of these different settings is that they recall the contexts of analogous exemplary feats performed by revered ancients: whether explicitly or otherwise, Domentian and Theodosius conflate the spatial frameworks of Sava's miracles with those recorded in Scripture and earlier hagiography, even if at first sight they appear to be impervious to comparison. For instance, they project onto the *katholikon* of Studenica the vision of the desert across which Moses had led the Hebrews, thus suggesting that the miraculous myrrh-flowing of St Symeon, whose remains were enshrined in the church, has much the same salvific effect as the drawing of water from the rock in Exodus 17.<sup>38</sup> Since spaces, even if essentially unlike (nature vs edifice, interior vs exterior), could be brought together by means of association so as to get a point across, it is understandable that those identical in substance – e.g., watery expanses – were "particularly liable to be textually transposed onto one another."<sup>39</sup> Whatever the case, it is my impression that spatial interweaving of this kind is a significant aspect of the miracle topochrone, which consolidates space and time in a fashion that firmly asserts God's continuous, diachronic involvement on earth.

Another important observation which needs to be made at this juncture concerns the issue of how miracles exploit the material environment in which they occur. As noted above, the holy man does not work miracles at random sites. On the contrary, Domentian and Theodosius choose spaces that facilitate actions stressing the vital features of Sava's saintly persona: spiritual guide, ascete, champion of the fatherland. And yet, the spatial component of miracle narratives cannot simply be about *location*; it is also – and very much so – about the *direction* space sets for the story in terms of the element(s) it contains or is comprised of. That literary space is never merely a scene or background is practically an axiom of post-*spatial turn* narratology;<sup>40</sup> what is more, in hagiography in particular, space has the potential to actively respond to divine intervention and determine how it can eventually play out. In certain instances, we may even go so far as to claim that the unfolding of a

<sup>37</sup> On Sava's miracle-working, consult Popović, Čudotvorenja, 97–118, here esp. 103–111; see also Marjanović-Dušanić, Écriture et la sainteté, 245–248, for a brief summary of the saint's most prominent miracles.

<sup>38</sup> Domentijan, Žitije, 154; Teodosije, Život, 88. On the Biblical references employed in the relevant passages, see Marinković, Komentari, 344; Bogdanović, Biblijski citati, 301.

<sup>39</sup> della Dora, Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred, 234.

<sup>40</sup> de Jong, Narratology and Classics, 122–123.



miraculous event relies on a dynamic interplay of numinous agency and physical surroundings, the latter being a medium through which the transcendent takes form and makes itself known to humans, temporarily putting a hold on that which they perceive as the laws of nature and instilling awe – and, frankly, pure horror – into their hearts and minds.<sup>41</sup> We shall see in the following sections that the sea, owing to its liquid state, was a most propitious space for exploring the limits of the possible (that is, for suspension thereof).<sup>42</sup>

Up to this point I have endeavoured to theorise the eventful imbrication of space and time resulting from miraculous activity by drawing upon insights offered by narratology and literary studies. Moving on, I should like to shift the disciplinary focus a bit and introduce what I believe to be a noteworthy concept formulated by the philosopher Edward Casey, whose research has greatly contributed to the scholarly discussion on the phenomenon of place. Casey declares that “space and time come together in place”; in his opinion, place provides the “common matrix” in which these two dimensions are “coordinated and co-specified”.<sup>43</sup> Yet what is crucial about the view advocated by this scholar is that place cannot be understood merely as a physical thing; rather, it is a *spatio-temporal event*, whereby time and space are articulated and experienced.<sup>44</sup> In this sense, place is always unique and changeable: “a given place takes on the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen*”.<sup>45</sup> Casey brings this last point home by concluding, seemingly *en passant*, that “it is because they happen that they lend themselves so well to narration, whether as history or story”.<sup>46</sup> (Depending on one’s perspective, miracle accounts might well be seen as either.)

Picking up this line of argumentation, I would assert that there is a very fine line between recounting Sava’s miracles and the places where these came to pass. In point of fact, it might just be that a clear distinction cannot be made at all: as a divine intervention unfolds, so does the spatio-temporal event of place. However, this does not simply refer to the fact that God is able to manipulate the tangible world as he pleases in order to alert humans to his presence; for as stated earlier, place is never entirely physical: it is also social, emotional, spiritual, etc.<sup>47</sup> Miracles tend to challenge, renegotiate or establish all sorts of relationships constitutive of place. Sava’s

<sup>41</sup> On miracles and the natural order, see *Basinger*, What is a miracle?, 23–30; *Larmer*, Meanings of miracle, 36–42; *Rüth*, Representing Wonder, 92–94.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Pomeroy Shores*, Nautical Narratives, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Casey*, How to Get from Space to Place, 36.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–38. Doreen Massey is yet another academic who has influentially theorised place as event, *Massey*, For Space, 130. On these and other trends in scholarly thinking on place, see *Cresswell*, Place.

<sup>45</sup> *Casey*, How to Get from Space to Place, 27 (original emphasis).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

*Lives* demonstrate how they can forge or strengthen communities, turn the hearts of the godless, or restore order where needed: all of these transformative effects leave a thorough imprint on place, which turns, e.g., from one of enmity and fear to one of affection and grace; from one of chaos to one of balance; from one of suffering to one of bliss. To put this differently, place is imbued with layers of meaning (some of which are indicative of the higher truths and principles hagiography is meant to convey), and it is precisely its eventfulness – mirrored by that of miracle – that I shall here treat as the principal mechanism of mediating those various facets.

Bearing in mind this general principle, I find it appropriate to dedicate a few additional lines more specifically to the ship at sea, which represents a very special kind of place: was it not Michel Foucault who wrote in his much debated essay on *heterotopia* that “the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea”?<sup>48</sup> Set in stark contrast to the immenseness of its surroundings, the marine vessel – a sort of drifting microcosm – is both a means and a place of transgression, for it was aboard it that humans became capable of converting a border into a threshold, a *limes* into a *limen*.<sup>49</sup> The potentiality intrinsic by definition to liminal situations can perhaps account for the fact that medieval hagiographers often cast the ship as a place of trial and spiritual gratification, indeed of personal as well as collective transition.<sup>50</sup> The “in-betweenness” of seafaring (designating not one’s position between two shores, but rather the state of hovering between life and death, fully at the mercy of a higher power) is a vital aspect of Sava’s maritime adventures. Moreover, I would argue that the *Vitae* construct the ship as a place by incorporating into its fabric the full range of non-physical factors mentioned above – i.e., the dispositions of its occupants and the relations among them –, none of which in the end remains untouched by the transformative force of divine intervention.

One last question that ought to be raised before this theoretical deliberation is brought to an end concerns the two case studies I announced in the introductory remarks. Namely, the miracles which will be addressed in what follows – the calming of the storm and receipt of the God-sent fish – are not the only ones that may be characterised as maritime. As a matter of fact, these two episodes are preceded by one which took place shortly after Sava and his party had set sail from an undisclosed location on the eastern Adriatic littoral.<sup>51</sup> According to Domentian, word that the saint’s ship was bound for the port of Brindisi had caught the ear of a group of pirates, who apparently went out of their way to arrange an ambush for the pious

<sup>48</sup> Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Tally, Foreword, xi–xiii. Liminal spaces/places are further discussed by Downey, Kinane, Parker, Introduction, 1–16. On seafaring as an act of transgression, see Sobecki, *Sea and Medieval English Literature*, 27–29; Blumenberg, *Shipwreck*, 7–10.

<sup>50</sup> *Pomeroy Shores*, Nautical Narratives, 2.

<sup>51</sup> A fourteenth-century source of Serbian provenance suggests that it might have been Budva: Marković, *Prvo putovanje*, 20–23; Miljković, *Serbia and the Holy Land*, 162 and n. 15.

traveller. Yet as Sava approached, they were suddenly stricken with blindness, which allowed the saint to move past them into the harbour unharmed.<sup>52</sup> (Theodosius tells much the same story, only in his version the villains became miraculously enveloped in thick fog.<sup>53</sup>) This, however, is not the sole encounter with pirates about which we read in Sava's *Vitae*. Once, during his early Athonite years, he and a few of his brethren from Vatopedi set off towards the Great Lavra by boat, only to be seized by a band of outlaws on the way. One of Sava's companions managed to escape, though, and having reached the Lavra, he informed the hegoumen of the incident. The latter then sent a God-inspired monk to invite the captors to the monastery, hopeful that an offer of hospitality would appease them; what ensued was a clever diversion orchestrated by the said monk, which gave Sava the opportunity to jump off the pirates' vessel and flee to safety.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that the present article imposes a selection on the catalogue of Sava's sea-related miracles calls for a clarification. Why not take into consideration one of the events which have just been summarised, or indeed both? Albeit we shall see further ahead that the miracles I have chosen to discuss – for the sake of convenience, they will henceforth be referred to as *the miracle of the storm* and *the miracle of the fish* – may constitute a more coherent whole than first meets the eye, the original decision to bring them to the fore has to do with the way in which these two accounts thematise the sea, i.e., with their outright dependence on the marine spatial framework. This, in my opinion, is not at all the case with the two episodes featuring the pirates, for they seem to be essentially contingent upon a dry-land setting: not only does Sava find refuge in Brindisi, but it is “in the palace of that city” that he ultimately receives and blesses his repentant foes,<sup>55</sup> as for the Lavra scene, it exploits the narrative potential of the sea to an even lesser extent and could easily be retold as unfolding entirely on solid ground. On both occasions, Theodosius notes, the pirates were lying in wait in bays,<sup>56</sup> that is to say along the coastlines of Apulia and Athos, respectively. Quite the contrary holds true for the miracle of the storm and that of the fish, which transpired on the high seas. To my mind, this makes all the difference: it is precisely because there could be no recourse to shore that the open sea was so dreaded, that it “endured as the container of dramatic *topoi*”, to borrow Veronica della Dora's phrasing.<sup>57</sup> Taking place in a setting defined by nothing but an infinite horizon and the briny deep, both miracles, as I hope to demonstrate, are recounted in a manner that emphasises the centrality of space, and a distinctly maritime space at that.

<sup>52</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 346–350.

<sup>53</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 181–182.

<sup>54</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 36–38; Teodosije, *Život*, 31–32.

<sup>55</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 348.

<sup>56</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 31: “изъ разоуху морьскые разбоинци на нје napadoše”; *ibid.*, 181: “мьгложу бо тьстожу разоуху, въ нѣже светомоу засѣдаоу, ровѣть морскыѣ и невидима того иму и неврѣдима provodi ego”.

<sup>57</sup> *della Dora*, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred*, 233.

*The miracle of the storm, or Taming the sea*

Apart from setting the pirates on the path of redemption, Sava does not seem to have had much business in Brindisi: it was not long before the saint and his entourage embarked on a ship bound for the Crusader port of Acre. After many days of sailing across the “great Syrian sea”, calamity struck. Domentian and Theodosius recount the storm which befell our pilgrims in a way that very much conforms to a familiar narrative pattern studied by Danièle James-Raoul.<sup>58</sup> The sequence, apparently inherited from classical antiquity, as a rule opens with an abrupt change of weather bringing about darkness, adverse wind, daunting waves, and other standard indications of nature’s wrath (lightning, thunder, etc.). Both hagiographers convey this atmosphere, although the author of the *Vita secunda* puts it more vividly:

[...] as they were sailing the open sea, all of a sudden a storm arose from the sky along with opposing winds; there was gloom and great turmoil at sea. The waves were breaking about covering the ship, and the masts were bending and all but broke from the force of the wind.<sup>59</sup>

The cited passage hints at yet another common structural element of these accounts, namely, the damage sustained by the vessel during the storm. However, in Sava’s *Lives* the emphasis is not so much on material losses as on the wretched state of the crew, dismayed by the realisation that the captain had virtually no control over the ship:

And the sailors, who had lost hope of survival, had no more strength in their hands. Fallen into dire straits, they were dying of fear, for all hope of salvation had abandoned them.<sup>60</sup>

At this point, only a divine intervention could reverse their imminent demise: indeed, the next stage of this sort of narration is normally a prayer offered to a higher power. Domentian contends that, at the sight of all the suffering around him, Sava pleaded with God to deliver everyone on board from certain death.<sup>61</sup> Yet again, however, Theodosius’ version is more revealing. Left with no option, the desperate men came to Sava asking him to implore God’s mercy; the saint, for his part, stated that the entire predicament was due to his own sins and urged the others to pray along with him.<sup>62</sup> The ensuing scene is quite compelling: after God commanded him to

<sup>58</sup> James-Raoul, *L’écriture de la tempête*, 217–229, here esp. 218.

<sup>59</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 182–183: “[...] poučinou plovouštimъ, i vъ nezaarou boury sъ nebesе i protivnъmъ vѣtromъ vъstavšimъ, primrakъ i metežъ velii vъ mori bystъ. vъny že okrѣstъ vъlivahou se, jako pokrivatъ se korablju, i jadrъlomъ sviaemomъ i oтъ noužde vѣtrъnie mala ne slamajuštim se”; cf. Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350.

<sup>60</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 183: “[...] korablъnikom že rouky nenadčaniemъ živōta do konca oslabѣvšemъ, i vъsi vъ bѣdѣ souštie strahōmъ skončavahou se, vъsa bo nadežda spasti se imъ oтъ nihъ pogybe [...]”; cf. Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350.

<sup>61</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350.

<sup>62</sup> Sava’s insistence on his own sinfulness being the cause of the storm may perhaps be a distant echo of Jonah 1, though the two stories play out in wholly different ways.

rise and extend his arm towards the raging sea, Sava instructed his disciples to hold him because he was not able to stand in the violent storm unaided. He then told everyone “to cast away fear and exclaim Lord, have mercy” whilst he uttered another prayer to the Almighty; thereupon, fully exposed to the fury of the elements, he made the sign of the cross and ordered the waves and the winds to yield. Just as suddenly as it had begun, the storm was over: the sun was shining bright and the sea was once more at peace.<sup>63</sup> Even in its final segment, this episode remains true to the narrative schema laid out by James-Raoul in that it closes with a collective praise to God, but also to Sava, who is perceived by all as an undisputed agent of providence.<sup>64</sup>

Albeit they might be said to lack novelty with respect to the fabula, I would argue that these two stories, if read carefully, can elucidate some fairly sophisticated mechanisms of constructing hagiographic space-time. What should be clear from the above recapitulation is that we would be doing scant justice to this section of Sava’s *Vitae* if we characterised the miracle of the storm as merely an event which came to pass at sea. Rather, it is an event that musters the full narrative potential of the maritime imaginary, centred upon an interactive relationship between the saintly protagonist and the watery wilderness. The hagiographers have no doubt whatsoever as to the cause and purpose of this ordeal: it was yet another test of the holy man’s faith, which, as Domentian informs us, the devil himself was bent on breaking.<sup>65</sup> Lending itself to being an instrument of diabolical agency, the sea was thus much more than a setting: it was an adversary Sava needed to oppose and defeat if the ship was to remain afloat. That the sea was governed by an unholy entity is suggested by the manner in which the *Vitae* recount the event, specifically by the lexical devices that impart to natural phenomena certain qualities of living beings, seemingly feral ones. In Domentian, Sava faced the wind (*i sta v̄ lice protivou silnomou větrou*), which “fled back” (*poběže v̄spet̄*) as he made the *signum crucis*; eventually both water and air were forced to “obey” (*poslušati*) the saint and “bow to [his] bidding” (*povinovati se. pověleniju*).<sup>66</sup> Theodosius goes a step further: in his report, gesture is coupled with verbal action. Sava ordered the winds and the waves to stop, which they immediately did “by the name of [our] Lord Jesus Christ and his [i.e., Sava’s] mouth” (*imenem̄ gospoda Iisou Hrista i ousty ego*).<sup>67</sup> Everyone who witnessed the miraculous “taming of the sea and winds by the word of the holy one” (*slovom̄ svetago morou i větrom̄ oukroštenie*) was filled with awe and praised God.<sup>68</sup> Whilst Theodosius employed the metaphor of taming to depict the saint’s victory

<sup>63</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 183–185; cf. Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350–352.

<sup>64</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 185; Domentijan, *Žitije*, 352. For the sake of comparison, see the Greek *Life* of St Nicholas of Sion, which offers a more succinct but otherwise very similar account of a storm at sea: Mullett, *In peril on the sea*, 267.

<sup>65</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350; see also Teodosije, *Život*, 183.

<sup>66</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350, 352.

<sup>67</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 185.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

over the elements, for Domentian it was nothing short of an exorcism: no sooner had Sava compelled the waves and wind to halt than “all the demons vanished, unable to stand the symbol of the power of the cross” (*vsī demoni izčeznouše. ne trpěšte znamenīa sily krěstbnyje*).<sup>69</sup>

Needless to say, Sava’s feat evoked similar occurrences attested to in sacred history. The obvious parallel is the calming of the storm recorded by the synoptic Gospels.<sup>70</sup> We are reminded of this episode over the course of Sava’s prayer: emulating the Disciples of Christ, who had once found themselves in much the same situation on the Sea of Galilee, he beseeched their master to deliver him and his companions from the waves.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the very manner of the holy man’s confrontation with the sea is unmistakably Christo-mimetic, since it was Jesus who had originally stayed the furious waters by word alone. This, however, is not the only sanctified example which the *Vitae* draw upon at his juncture. As both writings indicate, long before Sava the command to stretch out his arm in the direction of the sea had been given to a prominent biblical personage: charged with the task of leading the Hebrews out of Egypt, Moses famously parted the Red Sea and allowed his people to escape Pharaoh’s retribution.<sup>72</sup> By means of analogy with the Old Testament Prophet (a matter to which we shall return later) the hagiographic discourse superimposes another biblical sea on the watery expanse Sava traverses on his way to the Holy Land. Apparently, space functions as a central motif around which stories conflate. Rather than being a neutral setting, the sea that Domentian and Theodosius invoke is thoroughly imbued – by virtue of intertextual projections – with memories of events which had transpired on other seas at different points in time, but nevertheless feeding into the universal course of salvation history.

Given the context, it seems perfectly reasonable that Christ’s maritime miracle should be brought to the reader’s mind; after all, it served as model and inspiration for Sava’s own triumph over the briny deep. But what do we make of Moses? For what purpose might this typology have been introduced in the episode under scrutiny? The answer, as I see it, lies in the facets of Sava’s saintly figure which our writers chose to emphasise at that particular point: apart from miracle-working, it is spiritual leadership that the incident at sea firmly underscores.<sup>73</sup> This aspect of the hero’s character is exemplified by the act of prayer outlined earlier, for he was the one with the audacity to speak directly to God on behalf of the unfortunate men, who were but moments away from perishing under the waves. Although it has been pointed out already, I find it appropriate to stress once again that the *Vita secunda* infuses

<sup>69</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 352.

<sup>70</sup> Matt. 8:23–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25.

<sup>71</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 350; Teodosije, *Život*, 184.

<sup>72</sup> Ex. 14 (cf. *Marinković*, *Komentari*, 366; *Bogdanović*, *Biblijski citati*, 304)

<sup>73</sup> On the various traits of Sava’s “hagiographic portrait”, see *Marjanović-Dušanić*, *Harizma i autoritet*, 277–289.

this scene with an additional layer of meaning by suggesting that the prayer was a concerted undertaking in which everyone else also had a part to play. As reported by Theodosius, Sava told his disciples and the crew precisely what to do: the former flocked around the saint and physically supported him against the storm, and the latter chanted as he pleaded with God for deliverance.<sup>74</sup> The collective nature of the deed is in the end acknowledged by Sava himself, who thus spoke to everyone on board: “For it was your faith in me, a sinner, and my prayers to God that made that for which we pleaded come true.”<sup>75</sup>

A conclusion to be drawn from the discussion so far is that Sava’s ship is a fine example of a place narrated as an event. The predominant feature of this eventfulness, as I have come to understand it, is the spiritual transformation undergone by the sailors while the miracle unfolded. In the opening scene, the sea encroached on those aboard both physically and mentally; although the storm failed to break the masts of the vessel, this is very much the effect it had on the crew’s morale. Enfeebled and deprived of hope, they gave into despair, yet once they bore witness to the miracle, this sentiment turned into something else altogether: in the *Vita prima* they approached Sava giving thanks to God and saying that “from now on, having seen, we believe in God, who works great wonders through his saints.”<sup>76</sup> Making fear give way to faith is the entire point of the Gospel story about the storm at sea, and as such is recast in Sava’s *Lives*. In light of the transition experienced by the mariners, it is interesting to note that at the very end of this segment, in both versions, the saint orders everyone to take food (*vsěmb povelě prieti brašno*).<sup>77</sup> In a classic piece of scholarship that has laid the groundwork for the theoretical articulation of liminality, Arnold van Gennep described the consummation of food as a very important phase of certain rites of passage:<sup>78</sup> it is an act of (re-)incorporation, a symbolic return to life corresponding to an equally symbolic death upon which the transition itself begins.<sup>79</sup> By all appearances, the crew members, who observed the divine intervention, endured a fundamental transformation. It was owing to the holy man, by their own admission, that they “escaped the briny grave” (*vodoslannago groba ... izběgše*) and “gained life in God” (*o božě živōtē ... poloučivše*), a life that henceforth, pursuant to Sava’s command, they were to direct towards Christ (*žítie naše ougodno*

<sup>74</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 184.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 185: “vaša bo eže kь mně grěšnomou věra, moe i kь bogou molitve vьzmogoše prosimoe poloučiti”.

<sup>76</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 352: “i oть sьgy viděhōmь i věrouemь bogou tvoreštomou div’naa čjudesa svetymi svoimi”.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; the same in Teodosije, *Život*, 185. For a possible scriptural parallel, see Acts 27:33–36.

<sup>78</sup> *van Gennep*, *Rites of Passage*, 47 et passim.

<sup>79</sup> The theoretical course set by van Gennep and subsequently elaborated by Victor Turner has been discussed in the context of medieval miracle narratives by *Bailey*, Peter Brown and Victor Turner, 24–30 (here esp. 28–29, where the author discusses a healing miracle in which taking of food also functions as a rite of incorporation).



*tomou vь přědnjaa oupravymь*).<sup>80</sup> In my view, the ramifications of their passage were deeply inscribed into the place they occupied: at first, the ship is narrated as a place of terror and agony, but as the miracle story unravels, it becomes a place of consolation and spiritual instruction. Indeed, that in the end the ship fulfilled its purpose – reaching the port of destination – in fact stands for a higher truth: that it was a vessel whereby Sava, excelling in his pastoral role, delivered the sailors into the embrace of God, the one “true harbour” of all those drifting in the sea of the world.

*The miracle of the fish, or The nourishing sea*

Having begun with a miraculous event, Sava’s extraordinary pilgrimage came to an end with one as well. After reportedly traversing the Holy Land, Egypt, and the Sinai Peninsula, the saint returned to Jerusalem, whence he travelled to Antioch and then moved on into Asia Minor. The road took him and his party through “Armenia and the Turkish lands” – i.e., the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia and the Sultanate of Rūm –,<sup>81</sup> and eventually brought them once more to the coast of the “Syrian sea”, where they embarked upon a ship bound westwards, in the direction of Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> Based on what is known about the medieval practices of seafaring in this part of the Mediterranean, one would imagine that Sava’s ship would have sailed in the comfortable vicinity of the shoreline, keeping the ports on which crews relied for supplies and shelter within reach.<sup>83</sup> Instead, however, the two hagiographers place their protagonist yet again onto the “great open sea” (*poučinou že velikouju plovouštivь*), to which Domentian adds a further ominous note by designating it as “dark” (*posrědě čr̃tmnye poučiny*).<sup>84</sup> But though the setting may be similar to that of the episode considered in the previous section, this time the predicament to be resolved by virtue of divine intervention was caused by a wholly different set of circumstances.

Shortly after they had set sail, Sava fell gravely ill: as we learn, the many hardships of his long voyage were starting to take their toll. Moreover, Theodosius remarks, given that the ship was on the high seas it was beyond possible to call and seek treatment on land.<sup>85</sup> Of course, although Sava’s death presented in itself a most unsettling prospect to his disciples, its implications were no less terrifying: for what was to become of them once their master passed away? They had two scenarios in mind, and neither was particularly reassuring:

<sup>80</sup> Teodosije, Život, 185.

<sup>81</sup> On Sava’s itinerary, see *Miljković*, Serbia and the Holy Land, 162–163; *Savić*, Athos – Jerusalem – Sinai, 44–46.

<sup>82</sup> Whereas Theodosius claims that the ship was headed straight to Constantinople, Domentian says that it was in fact bound for “Anatolia” (*vь anatoliju*), that is the Empire of Nicaea; it was only after Sava had passed “Anatolia” and “Byzantium” (*vizan’tiju*) that he gained Constantinople: Domentijan, Žitije, 398, 400; Teodosije, Život, 195.

<sup>83</sup> *Marković*, Prvo putovanje, 25–27.

<sup>84</sup> Domentijan, Žitije, 398; Teodosije, Život, 195.

<sup>85</sup> Teodosije, Život, 195.

We know, o holy bishop, that God will heed thee, now as ever, even more so because it is for our sake. Pray to Him for thy life until we leave foreign regions and reach known land, or until thou lead us, father, from this sea and deliver us to the faithful. For when thou are no longer with us, these strangers who carry us on their vessel will sell us into slavery, or slaughter us here on the sea for the wealth we carry and hand us over to the briny deep.<sup>86</sup>

Once again, as we can see, the narrative features two collective characters – Sava’s companions and the mariners – but their relationship is utterly different. Whereas the storm was an outer threat which made the two groups band together so as to overcome it, on this other occasion the danger came from within the ship itself: in the event of Sava’s death, the very survival of his followers, left at the mercy of a potentially hostile crew, would have been brought into question. In order to prevent such an outcome, the frightened men urged Sava to take some food, hopeful that it would restore his strength.<sup>87</sup> And yet, the saint would not have just anything: much to their dismay, he replied that he might consume nothing but freshly caught fish. In the *Vita secunda*, the preposterous nature of Sava’s wish is stressed through a dialogue between the disciples and the shipmaster, who practically scolded them for wasting his time with such a foolish request: how was he supposed to provide them with fresh fish in the middle of a restless sea?<sup>88</sup> It was at this moment that a miracle happened. To wit, a wave carrying a large fish arose from the sea; as if by hand, it gently placed the God-sent gift upon the ailing saint, in a way that not a single drop of water landed on him. At once, Sava gave thanks to the Almighty and had the fish prepared and served to all on board. Amazed and remorseful for his conduct, the shipmaster partook of the meal, as did the rest of the crew; Sava, for his part, was instantly cured of his affliction, and soon enough the journey was completed according to plan, without further disturbances of any kind.<sup>89</sup>

This brief summary of Sava’s second maritime miracle indicates several points which I would like to elaborate on in the ensuing pages. What immediately draws attention is that the strategy of representing the sea in this section of the *Vitae* is quite at odds with the one employed in the other miracle account examined in the present

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 195–196: “вѣмы, владыко светыи, какоже и вѣсегда и нынѣ послушати те имать богъ, множае раче насъ ради, нъ мoli се емou о животѣ твоемъ, dondeже есмy вѣ страняхъ тоуждѣихъ до знаемyе землѣ, или ис poučiny sije до вѣрныхъ лjudii насъ izvedeši, отъче. тебѣ бо съ нами не бoudоустou, вѣ работou иноезычники сими vozeštĭimi насъ продани бoudемъ, или вѣсеконьчно носимago ради съ нами богатства вѣ poučiny sei zaklany, глѣбинѣ морсчѣи прѣдами се”. In Domentian’s version, they begged Sava to endure at least while they were at sea, i.e., until they reached a harbour, even though they were very much aware of the fact that, without him to lead them, they could just as well perish at the hands of marauders in unknown regions: Domentijan, *Žitije*, 398.

<sup>87</sup> On the connection between food and healing in the monastic milieu, see *Caseau*, *Nourritures*, 295–296.

<sup>88</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 196.

<sup>89</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400; Teodosije, *Život*, 196–198.

essay. If initially depicted as an instrument in the hands of the devil, the sea is now cast as a divinely inspired medium meant to disclose the fondness God has for the holy man. That the sea was made to serve (*porabotati, posloužiti*) him is asserted by both hagiographers;<sup>90</sup> however, what I believe to be the most salient expression of this idea is to be found in neither of the *Lives*, but in another work penned by our Theodosius, the so-called *Praise to St Symeon and St Sava*.<sup>91</sup> One of its segments provides an overview of Sava's miracles, stressing how "the abyss" attended to him in his hour of need:

And this is a great miracle whereby the saints celebrate God, ineffable in His wonders: that a wave – being water that dissipates by its very nature – should obediently rise like an obliging servant and, as if by hand, deliver the fish as a gift into the hands of the holy one, and then return without even sprinkling the ship.<sup>92</sup>

Not unlike the previous miracle episode, this one very much relies on personification as a means of narrating space.<sup>93</sup> Still, if the sea can be said to manifest certain animate traits in both cases, it is in the latter that it becomes expressly anthropomorphic; for not only does it minister to Sava as would a sentient being, but it actually comes to take human form. Even though it might appear as little more than an oddity, this detail may have a more substantial meaning after all. Passed from one "hand" – that of "the Nourisher" (Christ) himself<sup>94</sup> – to another, the uncanny fish represents the gift of life, to be sure, but it is also a token of theophany: God made himself manifest in order to aid the suffering saint, indeed to serve one who had devoted a lifetime to serving him. Such is the way of a compassionate God; a God whose unconditional love towards mankind is the source of miracles and, at the same time, the greatest miracle of all.<sup>95</sup> In Byzantine theology, by which Domentian and Theodosius rigorously abided, this affection is epitomised in the incarnate Christ, i.e., in the fact that the Almighty assumed flesh and walked amongst humans as one of them. Functioning as an allusion to God's corporeal presence in the world, anthropomorphisation of space signals the immediacy of Sava's contact with the divine, founded on emphatic mutual love that can exist solely between Christ and his elect. In this sense, rather than having the fish jump out of the water on its own or materialise aboard the ship in some other way, the *Vitae* insist that

<sup>90</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400; Teodosije, *Život*, 197.

<sup>91</sup> Edition: *Jovanović*, *Pohvala*, 703–778. For some elemental information on this piece, see Špadijer, *Svetogorska baština*, 60–61.

<sup>92</sup> *Jovanović*, *Pohvala*, 731: "i se čjudo veliko, iže svetyje svoje proslavljajuštago, neizrečebnago vь čjudesehь boga. kako vьlna, vodno soušte i razlivajušte se jestьstvo. i jako se něky soumnivyi rabь. smotgьlivo vьzvysivьši se, i jako roukama daronosivo, vь roucě svetago ribou vьdavьši, i ne okropivьši korablь, vьzvьrati se".

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *de Jong*, *Narratology and Classics*, 128.

<sup>94</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400: "jako samoju roukoju togo pitatelja".

<sup>95</sup> *Jevtić*, *Božansko i čudesno*, 333.

God mobilised the sea and revealed himself through it so as to fulfil the wish of his servant, “true and beloved, kind and faithful, bestowing upon him a great honour with much love”.<sup>96</sup>

A second issue raised by the above excerpt concerns the relationship between nature and the miraculous. According to a conventional definition, miracles are events “that would not have occurred in the exact manner in which they did if God had not intentionally brought it about that this would be so”; in other words, “if God had not ... directly imposed the divine will on the natural order”.<sup>97</sup> A miracle, therefore, can only transpire by virtue of a deliberate manipulation of the facts of nature by a higher force. Opposing all expectations and preconceived notions about the material world, such events are meant to signify the extraordinary character of the encounter of the numinous and the earthly.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the miracle of the storm was a fine example of God’s sway over nature: had he not restrained the sea through the actions of the holy man, everyone on board would have certainly been claimed by the deep. In this respect, however, the miracle of the fish leaves an even stronger impression because it apparently challenges a fundamental physical principle. As Theodosius rightly declares, such is the natural disposition of water that it cannot take shape on its own, much less a definite shape resembling, for instance, a human hand. Still, it goes without saying that in hagiography assumptions of this sort become utterly irrelevant *vis-à-vis* the workings of providence: “God”, in the phrasing of Sava’s *Vita secunda*, “overcomes the law of nature as He pleases” (*boga ... poběždajuštago jestvstva oustavb jakože hoštetv*).<sup>99</sup>

In line with this dictum and in spite of its inherent physical traits, the sea lends itself to being the vehicle of divine intervention, and very conveniently so: as remarked in a recent study, Anglo-Latin hagiographers saw in maritime miracles “the opportunity to imagine the infinite power of God in the awesome power of Nature”.<sup>100</sup> In a similar vein, Domentian and Theodosius used the watery expanse to convey a message about Sava’s privileged status before the divine, asserted by a meaningful reversal of the natural order. What rendered the sea a most fortunate choice for this purpose were both its symbolic associations – notably, the conceptual interrelation of God’s endless mystery and the immensity of the sea – and its objective features, i.e., its liquid state, which allowed for a particularly effective (and, as I have suggested in the previous passage, theologically engaging) demonstration of God’s fondness

<sup>96</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 198: “svoemou prisnomou i ljubimomou, blagomou že i věrnomou rabou vь velikoju čьstь mnogoju ljuboviju”.

<sup>97</sup> *Basinger*, What is a miracle?, 21.

<sup>98</sup> *Jevtić*, Božansko i čudesno, 334.

<sup>99</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 4. This is not to say, however, that God breaks or violates the laws of nature; rather, “he changes the material conditions to which the laws of nature apply”: *Larmer*, Meanings of miracle, 38.

<sup>100</sup> *Pomeroy Shores*, Nautical Narratives, 53.

for the saint. Thus, in a figurative as well as in a material sense, space appears to be a veritable driving force behind the hagiographic narrative but also a potent medium for communicating sophisticated ideas about the sanctity of the protagonist.

Building upon the hypothesis that the character of place is essentially determined by the relations among those occupying it, I shall now go on to examine in greater detail the interaction between Sava and his companions on the one hand, and the sailors on the other. Both Domentian and Theodosius stress the alterity of the crew at the very beginning of their respective accounts: it was, as a matter of fact, the principal source of the disciples' predicament, for they feared that nothing good could befall them at the hands of those "strangers".<sup>101</sup> That the mariners harboured certain animosity towards the saint's party might perhaps also be inferred from the unpleasant conversation between Sava's followers and the shipmaster (which, as noted above, is detailed by the *Vita secunda* only). But as one might expect, the divine intervention brought about a radical change of atmosphere on board. Having seen how the waters were compelled to serve Sava, the shipmaster went "with all of his men" (*sv svoimi vsěmi*) to the holy one, asking for forgiveness and blessing; as is quite often the case in Christian literature, the miracle opened their eyes to the fact that Sava was a man of God (*nynja razouměhōmb jako božii ... ty esi*) and that by virtue of his prayers they would arrive safely at their destination.<sup>102</sup> And yet, what is interesting about this particular situation is that the turning of the sailors' hearts went hand in hand with a communal meal. Upon receiving the miraculous fish, Sava ordered that a piece be offered to everyone: even Domentian, whose version of events is rather succinct when compared to Theodosius', imparts as much.<sup>103</sup> It is an aspect of the story which I believe ought to be looked at more closely.

Over the past several decades, an increasing number of theoretical works devoted to the concepts of feasting and commensality<sup>104</sup> has provided medievalists with a set of analytical tools that have shed a fascinating new light on the socio-cultural and religious implications of sharing food.<sup>105</sup> As proposed by Brian Hayden,

<sup>101</sup> The precise term employed in the *Vitae* is *inoezyčbnikъ* (Domentijan, *Žitije*, 398: "da li vь rashyštenii javim' se. inoezyčnykōmъ syimъ"; Teodosije, *Život*, 195: "vь rabotou inoezyčniki simi vožeštiimi našь prodani boudemъ"). According to *Miklosich*, *Lexicon*, 258, it refers to someone speaking a different language, its Greek equivalent being *heteroglōttos* or indeed *barbaros* ("varvaromъ, rekše inojezyčnikomъ"). Cf. *Daničić*, *Rječnik* II, 411.

<sup>102</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 197. On this and other functions of miracle, see *Carleton Paget*, *Miracles*, 135–138.

<sup>103</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 197–198; Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400.

<sup>104</sup> E.g., *Dietler*, *Hayden* (edd.), *Feasts*; *Hayden*, *Power of Feasts*; *Kerner*, *Chou*, *Warmind* (edd.), *Commensality*.

<sup>105</sup> Going back to the magisterial study *Walker Bynum*, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, this tendency in Western medieval studies has yielded much fine scholarship which understandably cannot be properly surveyed here; to give but a few examples: *Effros*, *Creating Community*; *Tomasik*, *Vitulo* (edd.), *At the Table*; *Piera* (ed.), *Forging Communities*. As for Byzantium, among the recent works I would single out *Mayer*, *Trzcionka* (edd.), *Feast, Fast or Famine*, and *Caseau*, *Nouritures*, both of which contain abundant bibliographies. On food and feasting in medieval Serbia, see *Bojanin*, *Zabave i svetkovine*, passim; *id.*, *Srednjovekovna svetkovina*, 246–279; *Popović*, *Marjanović-Dušanić*, *Popović*, *Daily Life*, 135–152, 164–173.

“any sharing of a meal including some special foods (i.e., foods not generally served at daily meals) between two or more people hosted for a special purpose or occasion” may be considered a feast.<sup>106</sup> But despite this rather simple definition, the phenomenon of feasting is laden with various strata of meaning with which Hayden tackled by introducing a dichotomic distinction between the *form* of a feast and its *symbolic content*. The former designates the overall out-of-the-ordinary nature of the event (including but not limited to the behaviour of the participants, the physical setting of the meal and its course, the exceptional character of the food and the non-edible paraphernalia), whereas the latter refers to the symbolic value bestowed upon the meal by those partaking of it.<sup>107</sup> To put this in simpler terms, a feast is largely about what is eaten and the significance ascribed to the act itself.

In light of these insights, let us take another look at Sava's two *Vitae*. First of all, the food miraculously presented to the saint was of a very special sort indeed: it was clear to everyone that the fish, excelling in size and wonder (*prěvelikou i přěčjud'nou ribou*), was nothing less than a gift from God (*nasytiše se oťb božbstv'nago dara*).<sup>108</sup> Secondly, it is important to observe that the men on board shared in the God-sent food only after witnessing an awe-inspiring intervention from on high: forgiven for their insolence, the mariners joined the saint in praising the Almighty, and then ingested some of the miraculous fish.<sup>109</sup> In my view, this underlying ritual(istic) note is crucial because it correlated the act of eating with the sailors' experience of the numinous, which thus became corporeal as well as spiritual. It would seem, therefore, that the repast aboard Sava's ship meets both criteria which, according to Dana Robinson, distinguish a Christian meal, i.e., “one in which God is the source of the food supply and in which the participants recognize and acknowledge the divine gift”.<sup>110</sup> It was a feast, by all appearances, and a Christian feast at that.<sup>111</sup> But what do we make of it in the context of this inquiry? As a rule, feasts function as factors of social cohesion: they bring people together and invigorate the inner bonds of communities.<sup>112</sup> In this case, it brought the tension between the disciples and the

<sup>106</sup> Hayden, *Fantastic Feasts*, 28; Hayden, *Power of Feasts*, 8. Cf. Dietler, *Theorizing the Feast*, 65–69, who attaches greater importance to the public and ritual aspects of feasts.

<sup>107</sup> Hayden, *Fantastic Feasts*, 25; Robinson, *Shenoute's Feast*, 585.

<sup>108</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400. It is worthy of mention that the fish was symbolically charged in Christian contexts even in everyday (that is, non-miraculous) circumstances: *Effros*, *Creating Community*, 3; *Caseau*, *Nouritures*, 93–94.

<sup>109</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 197.

<sup>110</sup> Robinson, *Shenoute's Feast*, 587.

<sup>111</sup> It should be noted that the meal mentioned in Section Three may also be considered a feast. The main argument for such an interpretation is provided by Domentian, who states that everybody on board, having eaten, “regained their strength and rejoiced in spirit and body” (*krěpōstb prijemše. i veselie douhov'no i telēsno*), Domentijan, *Žitije*, 352. According to *Bojanin*, *Zabave i svetkovine*, 61–63, medieval Serbian authors used the phrase *veselie douhov'no i telēsno* to describe the outstanding, festal nature of certain events; by employing it in this particular situation, Sava's hagiographer seems to further emphasise the extraordinary character of the sailors' liminal experience, of which the said meal was a vital part.

<sup>112</sup> Hayden, *Fantastic Feasts*, 30; Dietler, *Theorizing the Feast*, 68–69.

crew to an end and assembled them around God's copious bounty. Narrated once again as a place upon which the transformative power of divine intervention is writ large, the ship is at first defined by an atmosphere of enmity and death (which was in store for Sava and his companions alike), but owing to the miracle and the ensuing feast, it eventually turns into a locus of communal rejoicing in the blessings of God.

One final matter which I find necessary to touch upon at the end of this section concerns the scriptural references and allusions whereby our hagiographers attribute a familiar sanctified dimension to their miracle narratives. Although neither Domentian nor Theodosius make explicit mention of Jesus' feats in this context, that a single fish, however large, was more than enough to satiate a number of grown men (apparently there were leftovers) is doubtless evocative of the feeding miracles attested to in the Gospels.<sup>113</sup> A further biblical event which specifically the *Vita prima* brings to the mind of the reader/listener is the feeding of Israel in the desert:

And now came to pass before the holy one that which David, the [fore]father of God, had written about the Israelites, saying: 'What they wished for He provided, and they were not left wanting; they begged for meat and He brought forth to them quails from the sea, and they ate their fill. And as this most sanctified one asked for fish, at that very instant a fish was presented to him by the living Lord God of Israel [...].'<sup>114</sup>

The Old Testament episode to which the *Vita* points here (indirectly, i.e., via the Book of Psalms wherein it is recalled)<sup>115</sup> is in effect the unfortunate sojourn of the Hebrews at what would hence be known as Kibroth Hattaavah, related in Numbers 11; I call it unfortunate because the chosen people paid a terrible price there for their ungratefulness. After consuming *manna* for some time, they began craving meat and complained to Moses about it. God, as we are told, was willing to indulge them, only they failed to foresee that it would be a punishment rather than a reward. He then sent "quails from the sea", upon which the Israelites fervently feasted; however, "while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague."<sup>116</sup> This is a good example of a biblical reference that revolves – rather superficially, I would say – around a minor aspect of an exemplary tale from sacred

<sup>113</sup> That everyone on board ate as much as they could is made plain in both *Lives* – Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400: "i jaše vsi i nasytiše se oť božstv'nago dara"; Teodosije, *Život*, 198: "najadšou že se svetomou i vьsěmь souštiimь vь korabli oť bogoposlaniye oňe rybe". Another miracle similarly redolent of the life of Christ – that is, based on the invention of an oversized fish and its division among those present – is detailed in the Latin *Vita* of St Rusticula (d. 632), see *Effros*, *Creating Community*, 42.

<sup>114</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400: "Съгы же богооѣса даvyда писаніе събусть се прѣдъ сумь svetyмь. еже propisa o israil'těhь. рекъ pohoti имь prinese. i ne lišise se oť pohotei svoihь. oňi mešь prosiše. i krasťeli имь oť mōra izvėde. i nasyti e: – A sy preosveštenny rybě pohotěvь tomь časě rybou emou прѣдъblozii: Živy gospodь bogь israiljevь [...]"

<sup>115</sup> Esp. Ps. 78:27–31 (as noted by *Marinković*, *Komentari*, 374).

<sup>116</sup> Num. 11:33.



history while ignoring its essential meaning.<sup>117</sup> Namely, Domentian saw fit to compare the quails and the fish because in either case the God-sent food came *from the sea*, albeit their respective implications are altogether different. I think it is safe to argue that the logic of this particular allusion to Scripture, focused on the sea, works very much in favour of the premise that space can function as a powerful generative factor of hagiographic narration.

Aside from the story recounted in Numbers, this segment of Sava's *Vitae* hints at another biblical account featuring Moses and the wandering Hebrews, though its identification warrants a more attentive reading. Moments after the fish appeared, the saint gave it to his disciples so that they might prepare "baked and boiled meals" (*pečena i varena predbloženia*); once the feast was over, what remained of the food was saved for the next day (*soušteje ostavše otv njee sobljudošē na outria*).<sup>118</sup> Now consider this in relation to the instructions the Prophet gave to the elders of Israel about what is to be done with the collected *manna* on the eve of the Sabbath:

And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.<sup>119</sup>

The relation between the two nourishments of divine provenance – the heavenly bread of the Old Testament and Sava's fish – is thus rendered obvious; after all, it could hardly be a coincidence that Theodosius chose to describe the taste of the fish with the words "ineffable sweetness" (*otv neiskazannye ... sladosti oudivljaje se*).<sup>120</sup> These discrete insinuations – chosen with utmost care by the hagiographers, surely – all feed into the sophisticated parallel drawn between Sava and Moses throughout his *Lives*, notably that penned by Domentian. Indeed, it is my contention that this typology is the key to a possible understanding of the miracles discussed in the present article within the wider ensemble of the two works. This is an issue to which we must now turn.

#### *Zooming out: miracles in (con)text*

It was announced in the introduction that this last section would be devoted to an effort to provide answers to two questions which had presented themselves practically at the very outset of my inquiry into Sava's maritime miracles. Let us tackle them one at a time. First, why would his wonder-working at sea be confined to the framework of the pilgrimage he undertook in the final years of his life? It is

<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Pomeroy Shores*, Nautical Narratives, 81–82.

<sup>118</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 400.

<sup>119</sup> Ex. 16:23; on the preparation of *manna*-based meals, see also Num. 11:8.

<sup>120</sup> Teodosije, *Život*, 197. According to Ex. 16:31, the taste of *manna* was "like wafers made with honey"; cf. *Caseau*, *Nouritures*, 17. On sweetness as the flavour of the divine, see *Fulton*, "Taste and see", 169–204.

general knowledge that Sava was a very well-travelled man; after all, he visited the Holy Land twice, which naturally leaves one asking what could have made his second voyage to the East and back more propitious for miraculous activity than the first. (As a matter of fact, his initial crossing of the Mediterranean is hardly even brought up in the *Vitae*.<sup>121</sup>)

In my opinion, a solution to the problem at hand might be sought in the overall context of Sava's last great journey. As has been made clear already, it was by no means a "standard" Holy Land pilgrimage (to Jerusalem and the adjacent *loca sancta*) but a comprehensive tour of the foremost sanctuaries of the Orthodox Christian world.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, Domentian's account seems to be fairly straightforward as to the focal point of this impressive itinerary: judging by the way in which he recounts the saint's stay at Sinai, it is clear that this was the ultimate goal of the latter's arduous wayfaring.<sup>123</sup> Chapter 29 of the *Vita prima* represents the pivotal segment of the Sinai episode: it comprises a sequence of short comparisons between Sava and Moses, which on the whole make for a rather lengthy *synkrisis* proclaiming – fully in consonance with the traits of this rhetorical genre – the predominance of Sava, a Christian, over the Old Testament Prophet.<sup>124</sup> It would appear that this elaborate parallel, marvellously articulated by Domentian, is not merely the culmination of the narrative of Sava's second pilgrimage but one of the central sections of the entire *Life*, for it programmatically asserts the hero's role as the leader of a new chosen people.<sup>125</sup>

As I expect to have shown, both miracles examined heretofore bear a conspicuous Mosaic connotation; in view of the ideological ramifications of Sava's sojourn at Sinai, I would further argue that the two miracle narratives were in fact supposed to contribute to the overarching idea that Sava had been a more than worthy successor to the revered biblical exemplar. On that note, one should bear in mind that miracle stories are "textual elements, susceptible of appearing in different textual and pragmatic contexts", meaning that they "cannot be read without explicitly taking their function within a larger textual ensemble into account".<sup>126</sup> In this sense, I am prone to understanding the miracle of the storm and that of the fish, respectively, as the prologue and epilogue of a *tour de force* comparison between Sava and Moses, which is a major element of the former's saintly persona. Granted, this connection is not as easily discernible in the *Vita secunda* as it is in the *Vita prima*; although Theodosius takes the cue from his predecessor in terms of the structure of the

<sup>121</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 280, 306; Teodosije, *Život*, 166, 170.

<sup>122</sup> See n. 81 *supra*.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Teodosije, *Život*, 179.

<sup>124</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*, 376–392. On the genre of *synkrisis* or *comparatio*, see Rapp, *Comparison*, 279.

<sup>125</sup> *Juhas-Georgievska*, *Književno delo*, LXXII–LXXXII; *Polovina*, *Topos putovanja*, 197–201; *Savić*, *Athos – Jerusalem – Sinai*, 48–51.

<sup>126</sup> *Rüth*, *Representing Wonder*, 89–90.

pilgrimage narrative, he markedly tones down the Sava–Moses parallelism (there is nothing even resembling Domentian's *synkrisis* in his writing). Nevertheless, I would maintain that the younger hagiographer was similarly aware of the functional complementarity of the two miracles: the surveys of Sava's wonder-working that he offers in two of his other works might be interpreted in favour of such a claim.<sup>127</sup> So my answer to the question posed above would be that Sava did not perform his maritime miracles earlier – say, over the course of his first pilgrimage – because their full potential could only be achieved in the framework of the saint's trip to Sinai, i.e., in relation to the climax of a gradually constructed analogy with Moses.

However, if this is the case – that is, if the aim of the two episodes was to reinforce the typological connection between Sava and the Hebrew champion of old – one cannot help but ask why both miracles needed to take place at sea. To put this differently, why does the saint never demonstrate his thaumaturgic ability in the Holy Land, or in fact on his way across Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula, areas highly redolent of Moses' life and deeds? Namely, it is fairly obvious why the sea was chosen to be the setting of the initial miracle: the parting of the Red Sea is among the most familiar and frequently evoked events from the Bible, and in this case the correspondence was simply too convenient, as Sava – just like Moses long before him – was crossing a vast watery surface so as to gain the Promised Land. Conversely, the adventures of Israel remembered in the other miracle account had not originally transpired at or even by the sea, but in the desert; why, then, insist upon the maritime context? An explanation I find plausible lies in stylistic symmetry, for which Domentian appears to have had quite a penchant. If Sava's peregrination commenced with a miracle, with a miracle it would end; the spatial constant (both had come to pass on “the Syrian sea”) added to the proportion in that it strengthened the impression of a coherent textual segment, demarcated structurally and symbolically by the hero's passages across the watery expanse.

Another way of looking at this issue takes us back to Franco Moretti's theory of narrative space, specifically to his claim that “different spaces are not just different landscapes” but rather “different *narrative matrixes*”, which basically means that “[e]ach space determines its own kind of actions, its plot – its genre”.<sup>128</sup> In other words, certain spaces allow for certain stories to be told; yet since conceptions of space

<sup>127</sup> Aside from that contained in the *Praise to St Symeon and St Sava* – which I introduced earlier –, Theodosius provides one other overview of the saint's miracle-working: to wit, in the second canon of his *Service to St Sava*. Neither of the surveys is comprehensive, meaning that each represents a selection of Sava's miracles, presumably made in keeping with the intention and compositional schema of each work. Given that we cannot venture here an in-depth analysis of the two miracle catalogues, suffice it to remark that both feature the miracles of the storm and of the fish and allocate considerable space to each, while Sava's miraculous escape from the ambush set up by pirates off the coast of Brindisi (which, as explained above, immediately preceded the miracle of the storm) is mentioned in neither. See *Jovanović, Pohvala*, 728–732, esp. 730–731; *Srbijak* I, 264–292, esp. 276–278.

<sup>128</sup> *Moretti, Atlas*, 84 (original emphasis).

themselves are mere constructs, in order to understand their stories one ought to take a step back and try to discern what it was that shaped them in the first place. Now how can all this account for the fact that Sava wrought no miracles on firm ground in the course of his pilgrimage? A working hypothesis would be that the literary space of the Holy Land (and of neighbouring regions distinguished by renowned pilgrimage centres) constituted in the *Lives* a particular narrative matrix – presumably informed by the writings on the holy places a contemporary Athonite was likely to come across –,<sup>129</sup> its purpose being to engender detailed accounts of Sava's peregrinations, which were by no means meant to simply provide context for his miraculous activity (as is the case with most of our saint's voyages) but were assigned a distinctive quality in their own right. Unlike the sea, functioning primarily as a *space of miracle-working*, Palestine, Egypt, and Sinai are conceived of as *spaces of pilgrimage*; this is to imply that the sea and land are cast as wholly distinct narrative realms, each with a design and therefore a poetics of its own. Whereas this article has hopefully shed some light on the former, the latter will have to be addressed in a separate study.

#### *Concluding remarks*

To round off the present discussion, a recapitulation of its main points is in order. Quite in opposition to that which has been advocated by traditional narratology, space is indubitably a major aspect of every story because it determines not only *what* can happen, but also *how* it can happen. That literary space cannot be reduced to mere location or static background is implied in the assumption – which has been my theoretical point of departure here – that narrative spatiality may be properly investigated solely in tandem with narrative temporality. In this respect, I have proposed an analytical approach drawing upon some of the ways in which scholars from across the disciplines have interpreted the mutual imbrication of space and time, notably the Bakhtinian *chronotope/topochrome* and Edward Casey's concept of place as event. Coupled with a further interpretive prism specific to the source material under scrutiny – i.e., medieval hagiography – these assorted insights have formed a theoretical platform which I have used to problematise the mechanisms of narrating space(-time) in the two *Lives* of St Sava. As a potential *prolegomenon* to a more exhaustive treatment of the topic, this essay has focused on the saintly hero's maritime adventures, that is, on two of his miracles that reportedly came to pass on the high seas.

One conclusion to be drawn from both case studies is that the sea played a vital part in the process of recounting Sava's miracles: in my view, what made it such a favourable context for wonder-working was, on the one hand, the highly potent if ambivalent symbolism ascribed to it by patristic authorities, and on the other, its physical traits which aptly epitomised the power of nature. In the first case, the watery

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<sup>129</sup> A general idea about this body of writing (whereof doubtless only a sample survives or is as yet known to modern scholarship) may be grasped from *Külzer, Peregrinatio graeca*.

wilderness is cast as an enemy force of demonic inspiration, whereas in the second it is manipulated by God himself to provide nourishment for the holy man. It would be misleading, therefore, to characterise these miracles simply as events that transpired *at sea*; indeed, I am inclined to think that the primary feature of their eventfulness is precisely the interaction between Sava and his surroundings, the latter serving as the medium of the encounter between the earthly and the transcendental. Put differently, the maritime setting is far from just the backdrop which allows the reader or listener to imagine the occurrences in question; it is rather an aspect of the story that actively influences its course, an underlying principle which thoroughly affects the act of narration itself. In this respect, I believe that the locational marker *at sea* should be understood in a wider, more substantial sense: to wit, *of the sea*.

A second issue that has been touched upon throughout the article centres on the ship as a peculiar type of place, ever in motion and closed in by the daunting vastness of the sea. Building on the supposition that place is constituted to a significant extent by its occupants' dispositions but also by the relations among them (which are, needless to say, susceptible to contestation and change), I have looked at the two miracles through the lens of the transformative effect they had on those aboard the vessel. In either case, as we have seen, the dominantly negative connotations which had at first determined the character of place – fear of death and looming hostility – were reversed by virtue of divine intervention, giving way to a state of spiritual fulfilment and unity, most effectively exemplified by the communal meal that ensued on the miraculous appearance of the fish sent from on high. The narrative thus (re)shapes the very fabric of place, which actually proves to be as much an event as the miracle that triggers its fundamental transformation.

One final remark to be made here is of a more general kind: namely, it is evident that the hagiographic discourse uses space in a number of ways to communicate various messages about the holy protagonist. For instance, Sava's Christo-mimetic confrontation with the sea asserted the soteriological meaning of his actions;<sup>130</sup> similarly, the miracle of the fish was meant to suggest that he was cherished by God to a degree that surpasses both human comprehension and the order of nature. Furthermore, space was a consequential factor in constructing the parallel between Sava and Moses, another biblical typology that contributed a crucial dimension to the model of sanctity which the saint came to embody. In other words, this article has hopefully demonstrated that the literary space of the two *Vitae* should be appreciated as a powerful means of expressing complex hagiological notions. Therefore, I am confident that a comprehensive "spatial reading" of these much studied medieval writings can bring about a refreshing and novel perspective on the textual foundations of the cult of St Sava.

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<sup>130</sup> Bogdanović, Teodosije, XXVI.

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### МОРЕ ЧУДА: РАЗМИШЉАЊА О ПРИПОВЕДНОМ ПРОСТОРУ У СРПСКОЈ СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНОЈ ХАГИОГРАФИЈИ

Ослањајући се на теоријско-методолошке тековине тзв. „просторног заокрета“ (*the spatial turn*) у друштвено-хуманистичким наукама, овај рад настоји да укаже на могућност нових читања средњовековне житијне књижевности, која би била заснована на простору као једном од кључних чинилаца хагиографског наратива. Наша је основна претпоставка да простор представља много више од пуких „кулиса“ или оквира догађаја што их предочава приповест. Простор, како се покушава показати, заправо је веома важан аспект наративне структуре, будући да непосредно утиче на природу збивања која наратив у њега смешта. Другим речима, од простора – наиме, од његових физичких карактеристика, али и од симболичког набоја који га одликује – умногост зависи шта се у житију може догодити и на који начин. У том смислу, нема сумње да је традиционално наратолошко становиште о преимућству времена над простором приче неумесно. Ово, ипак, никако не значи да је из разматрања о потоњој категорији могуће изоставити прву; напротив, мишљења смо да исправно разумевање простора изискује да у обзир буде узета и његова спрега с временом приповести, коју је уверљиво образложио још Михаил Бахтин. Повезујући овај правац размишљања са скоријим наратолошким, књижевнотеоријским и филозофским увидима, водећи притом рачуна о специфичности нашег изворног материјала, у раду смо изложили теоријску поставку која омогућава нешто друкчије разумевање изабраних сегмената из двају житија Светог Саве: у питању су његова „морска чуда“ – у науци позната као „чудо с олујом“ и „чудо с рибом“ – која су се збила током последњег светитељевог путовања у Свету земљу.

Оно што повезује наведене епизоде јесте начин на који се простор ставља у службу приповести. Ни у једној море није само окружење у којем се одиграва чудо; напротив, ток чудесног догађаја у бити је условљен просторним контекстом, а своди се на међудејство протагонисте и мора, које у извесном смислу посредује у сусрету између оностраног и оностраног. У првом случају (чудо с олујом), пучина је инструмент у рукама ђавола, с којим се Сава суочава не би ли спасао лађу и све у њој; у другом пак случају (чудо с рибом), море је у функцији испољавања неизмерне Божје љубави према светоме. Оба пута хагиографи вешто експлоатишу амбивалентну хришћанску симболику мора, поигравајући се притом његовим физичким карактеристикама како би указали на изузетност дешавања о којима извештавају и истакли неке значајне одлике Савиног светитељског лика. Оно што следи из ових запажања јесте закључак да пучина у размотреним одељцима двају житија не може бити сведена

на декоративну позадину која помаже читаоцу/слушаоцу да замисли догађај. Како ми то видимо, простор делује као покретачка снага житијног наратива, и као такав представља један од најважнијих његових ослонаца, кроз који је могуће предочити и веома комплексне хагиолошке поруке.

Друго важно питање којем се посвећује пажња у овом раду тиче се Савиног брода, чије смо наративно конструисање покушали објаснити позивајући се на теорију Едварда Кејсија, који место разуме као својеврсну резултанту простора и времена, тј. просторно-временски догађај. Према његовом схватању, за место се не може казати да једноставно *јест*; напротив, оно се *дешава*, што значи да се непрестано мења и реконституише, и то не само у физичком смислу, већ и у културном, емоционалном, духовном итд. С тим у вези, разумљиво је да природа места умногоме зависи од оних који се у њему налазе, те од њихових међусобних односа. У два епизодама из Савиних житија што смо их овде узели у разматрање, брод се наративизује као место које испрва носи негативан предзнак: у првом примеру, доминантан је страх од утапања проузрокован олујом, док се у другом истиче опасност која је претила Савиним пратиоцима од морнара. Ипак, чудесно деловање доводи до корените промене у самом карактеру места: по смирењу олује, брод као место смрти постаје место новог живота у Христу, а након чуда с рибом – место у чије темеље је првобитно био уграђен осећај непријатељства међу људима претвара се у место духовног јединства симболизованог заједничким оброком. Друкчије речено, наше мишљење је да управо кроз догађајност чуда долази до пуног изражаја догађајност места, чија суштинска трансформација чини окосницу његовог приповедања.