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**ATHOS – JERUSALEM – SINAI:  
PEREGRINATIONS AND IDENTITIES  
IN THE *LIVES* OF ST SAVA OF SERBIA**

*Aleksandar Z. Savić*

By 1234, Sava, the founder and first Archbishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church, appears to have been already quite a seasoned traveller. For roughly three and a half decades, he had been continuously on the move: not only did his ecclesiastical and political duties take him across the Nemanjić realm and those adjoining it (where he tended to some rather delicate diplomatic missions), but they also motivated several journeys towards the focal points of spiritual and temporal authority in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as Mount Athos, Constantinople, Nicaea, and indeed Jerusalem and the Holy Places in its orbit.<sup>1</sup> However, the most ambitious voyage of Sava's life was yet to be undertaken. He was set on visiting the Holy Land once more, only this time including Egypt and Sinai; a full-fledged pilgrimage which few contemporaries could even comprehend, much less afford. Having foreseen that he would not return alive (he died in Bulgaria in January 1236, on his way back), the elderly Saint relieved himself of the pastoral office, saw to the naming of a worthy successor, and – much to the chagrin of his nephew the king and his courtiers – set off for one last peregrination through Biblical landscapes. In Sava's *Vita prima*, composed around 1250 by the hieromonk Domentian of Hilandar,<sup>2</sup> his departure is recounted and reflected upon at some length:

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<sup>1</sup> The scholarship dedicated to St Sava has yielded a formidable number of works to which one could hardly do justice within the confines of a single footnote (a relevant sample of this profuse bibliography is to be found in a recent book by B. Szepliński, *Trzy oblicza Sawy Nemanjicia. Postać historyczna – autokreacja – postać literacka (Three Faces of Sava Nemanjić. Historical Figure, Self-Creation and Literary Character)*, Łódź, 2016, p. 288-313. The most comprehensive biographical essay on Sava from which the English reader might profit is still that of D. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, Oxford, 1988, p. 115-172. For Sava's travels, consult B. Miljković, *Žitija svetoga Save kao izvori za istoriju srednjovekovne umetnosti (Les vies de saint Sava comme les sources pour l'histoire de l'art médiéval)*, Belgrade, 2008; M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje svetoga Save u Palestinu i njegov značaj za srpsku srednjovekovnu umetnost (The First Voyage of St Sava to Palestine and Its Importance for Serbian Medieval Art)*, Belgrade, 2009; N. Polovina, *Topos putovanja u srpskim biografijama XIII veka. Domentijan i Teodosije (The Topos of Travel in 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Serbian Biographies. Domentian and Theodosius)*, Novi Sad, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije svetoga Save (Life of Saint Sava)*, introduction, translation, and commentary by Lj. Juhas-Georgievska, ed. by T. Jovanović, Belgrade, 2001. For a basic overview of

Having divested himself of this living and things earthly with a right mind and an honest hope, keeping the first and the second of God's Commandments [...], he placed Christ whom he so desired above his own life and this decaying world that withers away swiftly. Once and again (*prežde že i paky*) he had torn himself free from mundane sorrows, flying high as a soaring eagle. Yet now for the third time (*treticeju*), he flew not as an eagle; instead, just as Elijah the Flame-Wielder, he was taken up into Heaven in a whirlwind. [...] And lo, for the third time (*treticeju*) he pulled apart the deceitful shackles of this world, discarded his yoke, and left following in the footsteps of the One who had said: "Where I am, there shall also My servant be."<sup>3</sup>

Considering the above paragraph, one should recall Michael Uebel's valuable insight on the "imbrication of travel and identity in the Middle Ages". Identity, Uebel argues, is not to be conceived of as "something discoverable or given, inherent in place or lineage, but as something accumulated and nomadic, expressive of a trajectory as unfolded through space and over time".<sup>4</sup> In Sava's case, this trajectory of (trans)formation is conceptualised in terms of gradual progress along a vertical axis: his rising high above the fleeting *mundus* – for which he is likened to a lofty eagle – was the first step towards celestial dwellings waiting to receive him as they had once received the Old Testament prophet.<sup>5</sup> It is spiritual advancement, therefore, that mirrors his physical displacement and in fact imbues it with meaning; conversely, spatial-temporal practices with which one usually identifies the notion of travel provide structure to the process of the narrative construction of the Saint's identity. Although both Sava's *Vitae* – the other one also penned by a Hilandarian, Theodosius, who

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Domentian's writings, see most recently I. Špadijer, *Svetogorska baština. Manastir Hilandar i stara srpska književnost (Athonite Heritage. Hilandar Monastery and Old Serbian Literature)*, Belgrade, 2014, p. 43-48.

<sup>3</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 342-344; cf. *John* 12: 26. In this article, if not noted otherwise, the author relies on his own translations when passages from the Serbian sources are concerned. Biblical quotations are given according to the King James Version: H. Marks (ed.), *The English Bible. King James Version*, vol. 1. *The Old Testament*, New York – London, 2012; G. Hammond and A. Busch (eds.), *The English Bible. King James Version*, vol. 2. *The New Testament and the Apocrypha*, New York – London, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> M. Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation. On the Uses of Alterity in the Middle Ages*, New York – Basingstoke, 2005, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, trans. by G. L. Campbell, London et al., 1985, p. 74. The eagle metaphor in medieval Serbian literature is discussed by Đ. Trifunović, "Pripovedanje i simboli srednjovekovne naše umetničke proze" ("Narration and Symbolism of Our Medieval Artistic Prose"), in id. (ed.), *Stara književnost*, Belgrade, 1965, p. 166-168. Apart from Elijah, Sava is compared with a number of Scriptural personages in Domentian's opus: Lj. Juhas-Georgievska, "Književno delo jeromonaha Domentijana" ("The Literary Work of Hieromonk Domentian"), in Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. LXIV-LXV.

flourished at the turn of the 14<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup> – quite often refer to his wayfaring in a very generalised fashion,<sup>7</sup> the quoted excerpt indicates that some of its aspects do stand out. That *three* particular journeys hold a place of special import and thus merit careful attention is asserted with some insistency; but which three would these be (or, rather, which *two*, besides the one Sava ventured on towards the end of his life)? In other words, what does Domentian have in mind when he says “*prězde že i paky*”? Another passage from the *Vita* sheds light on the problem at hand:

With great love for God and by many a laudable feat did he make his fatherland one with the Holy Mount [Athos]; by his hand, deserts became cities and his children known to the dwellers of the Holy Mount. And now as before, by treading for them a most splendid path to Jerusalem, he toiled constantly to prepare all for life in the heavenly abodes [...].<sup>8</sup>

These lines disclose at least two critical points. First, we learn that the other two voyages which Domentian treats as crucial stages of the hero's course to inner perfection refer to his early migration to Mount Athos (where he took monastic vows and established the Serbian Monastery of Hilandar) and to his first pilgrimage to the Holy Land.<sup>9</sup> Apparently, in each of the three instances, Sava's itinerary revolved around a central hearth of Eastern Christianity: Athos, Jerusalem, and, finally, Sinai. The purpose of the present article will be to examine the devices and strategies used by the hagiographic discourse to shape Sava's saintly portrait, drawing on his purported visits to the Holy Places.<sup>10</sup>

There is, nevertheless, another critical remark to be made regarding the last quoted piece. Namely, even if there should be no doubt about the transformative character of Sava's travels *vis-à-vis* his own identity, he is

<sup>6</sup> Teodosije, *Život svetoga Save (Life of Saint Sava)*, ed. by Đ. Trifunović, Belgrade, 1973. See an aperçu of Theodosius' works (as his biography is almost completely obscure) in I. Špadijer, *Svetogorska baština...*, p. 51-72, with earlier references.

<sup>7</sup> This is achieved by such sweeping phrases as “he [i.e., Sava] traversed all Easts and Wests, South and North”, Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 366, 378, 390 (the seemingly awkward plural, itself a borrowing from the Greek, is by no means lacking in literary and ideological implications: see R. Marinković, “Zapadi i istoci Rastka Nemanjića – po Domentijanu” (“The Wests and Easts of Rastko Nemanjić According to Domentian”), in ead., *Svetorodna gospoda srpska. Istraživanja srpske književnosti srednjeg veka*, Belgrade, 2007<sup>2</sup>, p. 216-217).

<sup>8</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 346 (quoted after A. Z. Savić, “A Most Splendid Path to Jerusalem: Remembering the Holy Land in Medieval Serbian Hagiography (Thirteenth to Fourteenth Centuries)”, in *Memory and Identity in the Medieval and Early Modern World*, Peter Lang (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> As noted by earlier scholars: R. Marinković, “Komentari” (“Commentary”), in ead. (ed.), Domentijan, *Život Svetoga Save i Život Svetoga Simeona*, Belgrade, 1988, p. 366, n. 12; Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 492, n. 6; N. Polovina, *Topos putovanja...*, p. 187-188.

<sup>10</sup> A wealth of comparative material for the study of the interrelation between mobility and identity in saints' *Lives* is presented in É. Malamut, *Sur la route des saints byzantins*, Paris, 1993.

obviously not the only one who could be said to have benefited therefrom: it is the “fatherland” (*otčebstvo*) and the people – “his children” (*čeda svoja*) – that he ushered into the universal Orthodox community by opening the way to its most revered *loca sancta*. In this sense, the Archbishop’s status seems to be inextricably tied to that of his congregation, which makes the question of identity somewhat more complicated; indeed, it turns it into a question of plural *identities*, Sava’s, but also his compatriots’. He is a holy man in search of personal religious fulfilment on the one hand, and a prelate responsible for the souls of the faithful on the other. This ambiguity lies at the very foundation of a working hypothesis: that the Saint’s peregrinations make for a privileged discursive position from which the relevant hagiographic texts tackle his multifaceted identity, simultaneously projecting it onto an emergent programmatic definition of the Serbian collective.

### 1. Mount Athos

When he first retreated from the world, Rastko Nemanjić (as Sava was called prior to becoming a monk) was still a youth. Benjamin of the Serbian ruling family, he proved very early to be an exceptional individual; dedicated to a humble and pious life, he never acquired a taste for the leisurely activities for which his highborn peers typically had a strong penchant. In that vein, it might have come as some surprise to the Grand Župan Stefan Nemanja and his wife Anna that their son, now aged seventeen, should ask for permission to go on a hunting expedition. They were unaware, of course, that it would be a mere cover for the lad’s escape to Mount Athos. Once they finally realised what had transpired, it was much too late to undo his decision to renounce secular power and follow the monastic path.<sup>11</sup> A central aspect of the story developed along these lines by Domentian and Theodosius is that they depict Rastko’s transition as an act of withdrawal into “the desert”: our sources intimate that “from a tender age he cherished the eremitic life (*poustin’noe žitie*)” owing to tales he heard “of the Holy Mount Athos and its anchorites, and other desert places (*o pročiuh městěh poustynnyh*)”.<sup>12</sup> A poignant and ambivalent concept, the desert loomed large over the religious imagination of medieval Christians.<sup>13</sup> It

<sup>11</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 8-14; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 5-10.

<sup>12</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 12; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 6; D. Popović, “Pustinožiteljstvo svetog Save Srpskog” (“Heremitism of St Sava of Serbia”), in M. Detelić (ed.), *Kult svetih na Balkanu*, vol. II (= *Liceum* 7), Kragujevac, 2002, p. 64-65.

<sup>13</sup> The standard work on the early Christian idea of the desert is still A. Guillaumont, “La conception du désert chez les moines d’Égypte”, *Revue de l’histoire des religions*, 188, 1975, 1, p. 3-21. Among the notable works focusing on its medieval European iterations are J. Le Goff, “Le désert-forêt dans l’Occident médiéval”, in id., *L’imaginaire médiéval. Essais*, Paris, 1985,

evoked spaces of contention and trial, physical as well as mental. At once terrible and serene, barren and filled with presence both demonic and divine, it became something of a familiar setting for advanced ascetic practices embedded into a range of specific natural surroundings, be they wastelands of sand and rock, remote islands, forests, or, in our case, (holy) mountains.<sup>14</sup> These uncanny locales were to be found all across the oikumene, but they functioned in much the same way: as places which break the body but strengthen the spirit, a sort of arduous preparation for the much-desired encounter with God.

Needless to say, such experiences changed people. Attracting men and women who set aside their property, social roles, families – their selfhood, even, the desert forged novel identities with which recent scholarship has tried to get to grips by describing them as complex, hybrid, liminal, *entre-deux*, etc.<sup>15</sup> Through an intricate game of mutual mimicry, emptied selves and desolate landscapes generated creative potential which gave a strong impetus to medieval literature, most of all to hagiography; indeed, the very notion of sanctity as promoted in the early Christian centuries came to be heavily imbued with the idea(l)s of detachment, anti-structure, and wildness. As Peter Brown put it in a seminal essay, “the holy man drew his powers from outside the human race: by going to live in the desert, in close identification with an animal kingdom that stood, in the imagination of contemporaries, for the opposite pole of all human society”<sup>16</sup>.

So, how do these general reflections bear upon Sava’s example? The two accounts of his early days on Mount Athos presented by the *Vitae* highlight the (overly) zealous fashion in which he embraced monastic ways. The arduous toils that he endured – from constant prayer and manual labour to fasting and exposure to the elements – made him appear as a “ruthless and wrathful enemy of his own body” which he continually “tortured”, “mortified”, and

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p. 59-75, and several contributions to the volume J. Dijkstra and M. van Dijk (eds.), *The Encroaching Desert. Egyptian Hagiography and the Medieval West*, Leiden – Boston, 2006. For the Byzantine angle, see V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, Cambridge, 2016, p. 118-144.

<sup>14</sup> In medieval Serbian sources, D. Popović holds, the terms *poustynja* (“desert”) and *gora* (“mountain”) are interchangeably employed “in reference to the space intended for higher forms of monastic life”: “The Deserts and Holy Mountains of Medieval Serbia. Written Sources, Spatial Patterns, Architectural Designs”, in P. Soustal (ed.), *Heilige Berge und Wüsten. Byzanz und sein Umfeld (Referate auf dem 21. Internationalen Kongress für Byzantinistik, London, 21.–26. August 2006)*, Wien, 2009, p. 61. Cf., however, I. Špadijer, “The Symbolism of Space in Medieval Hagiography”, *Kirilo-Methodievski studii*, 21, 2012, p. 304-305. Holy mountains are discussed in more detail in Section 3 of this study, see *infra*.

<sup>15</sup> M. Uebel, *Ecstatic Transformation...*, p. 71; P. A. Mena, *Place and Identity in the Lives of Anthony, Paul, and Mary of Egypt. Desert as Borderland*, Cham, 2019, p. 20-21.

<sup>16</sup> P. Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity”, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, 61, 1971, p. 92.

“crucified”.<sup>17</sup> Of course, as one might imagine, corporeal exertion went hand in hand with spiritual growth. In this regard, we ought to take notice of what Domentian and Theodosius stress at the very beginning of their respective narratives: that divine grace had been upon the hero ever since his conception. Born to aged parents of outstanding piety – much like Isaac or John the Baptist – the “prodigious child” (*čjudьbnь ... otrōkь*) was at once recognised as a sign of the Almighty’s sway over the laws of nature.<sup>18</sup> To be sure, this was merely the first such manifestation of God’s omnipotence in Sava’s *Lives*. Its channelling through the Saint into the world around him – the very stuff of hagiography – is an issue to which both Domentian and Theodosius devoted considerable attention: the result is a catalogue of miracles matched neither qualitatively nor quantitatively in all later Serbian literature, notwithstanding certain discrepancies between the two versions, which may be accounted for by the presumed purpose and context of the composition of each work.<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of wonder-working, Sava’s initial sojourn on Mount Athos was clearly a kind of turning point. Indeed, it was not long after his arrival that, according to the *Vita prima*, “God wrought this first miracle (*se prvnoe čjudo*) on him”: namely, by God’s will he evaded the men sent by his father to fetch him and was thus able to take his vows.<sup>20</sup> Shortly afterwards, two more miraculous events came to pass, following a like pattern: as he was on his way to deliver “warm loaves” to anchorites observing Lent, he was intercepted by a party of brigands; yet another time, while sailing along the Athos coast *en route* to the Great Lavra, a similar group took him prisoner. It goes without saying that both attempts to thwart his pious goal were foiled by intervention from on high.<sup>21</sup>

Although these early miracles are arguably much less spectacular than later ones, they do suggest that the gift with which Rastko/Sava had been brought into the world acquired a new dimension upon his flight to “the desert”. In order to understand this development against a broader background, it is helpful to recall Claudia Rapp’s acclaimed analysis of episcopal authority in

<sup>17</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 22; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 25-26; D. Popović, “Pustinožiteljstvo...”, p. 65-68.

<sup>18</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 2-4; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> D. Popović, “Čudotvorenja svetog Save Srpskog” (“The Miracle-Working of St Sava of Serbia”), in ead., *Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult svetih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Belgrade, 2006, p. 97-118 (originally published in D. Ajdačić [ed.], *Čudo u slovenskim kulturama*, Novi Sad, 2000, p. 138-156). For a recent comparative discussion of the two miracle narratives in the wider context of medieval Serbian hagiography, see S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *L’écriture et la sainteté dans la Serbie médiévale. Études d’hagiographie*, Turnhout, 2017, p. 141-175 (also p. 245-248, for a summary of Sava’s *Vitae* and an overview of his *miracula*).

<sup>20</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 14-18.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32-38; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 28-32.

Late Antiquity.<sup>22</sup> The two sides of Sava’s saintly persona that we have just outlined would correspond to what Rapp calls spiritual authority and ascetic authority. The former, she writes, “indicates that its bearer has received the *pneuma*, the Spirit from God”, meaning that it “has its source outside the individual”. Furthermore, spiritual authority is personal – “given directly to a specific individual, without personal participation or preparation by its recipient” – and self-sufficient, in that “it can exist in the individual independent of its recognition by others”.<sup>23</sup> The latter, however, “has its source in the personal efforts of the individual”. It is gained “by subduing the body and by practicing virtuous behaviour”, which makes it essentially self-centred – the goal is to attain “a certain ideal of personal perfection” – and generally accessible, meaning that “anyone who chooses to do so can engage in the requisite practices”.<sup>24</sup> What is of particular interest about these concepts is that they constitute a feedback loop of sorts: “[t]he personal practice of asceticism”, it is argued, “prepares the individual for the receipt of the gifts of the spirit, and thus of spiritual authority”; but in turn, “asceticism is a gauge of the presence of spiritual authority”, as without God’s aid it is all but impossible to withstand the hardships of anchoritic life.<sup>25</sup> As it seems, this principle applies very well to our case. Blessed from birth, Rastko was incited by the Holy Spirit to relinquish the world and to seek the desert; once he became a monk and embraced the ascetic routine, his spiritual power thrived and repeatedly manifested itself through miraculous occurrences. In other words, long before he became a church leader, Sava exhibited signs of a twofold authority that developed over time and thoroughly informed his nascent saintly identity. There is, however, another aspect to it, which now must be addressed.

Claudia Rapp’s design is a tripartite one. Apart from the spiritual and the ascetic, she describes a third type of authority, termed “pragmatic”: it “arises from the actions of the individual, but in distinction from ascetic authority, these actions are directed not toward the shaping of the self, but to the benefit of others”; given its inherently public character, pragmatic authority largely depends on “the individual’s wherewithal”, i.e., on one’s social standing and influence, as well as on material means.<sup>26</sup> Here we have one last vital feature of Sava’s hagiographic portrait. Even though he “despised this transient life and glory and all earthly delights”,<sup>27</sup> his break with home was nowhere as radical as the consumer of anchoritic “classics” might suppose. Domentijan emphasises the

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<sup>22</sup> C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity. The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16 (elaborated in detail in Ch. 3, p. 56 *sq.*).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17 (and Ch. 4, p. 100 *sq.*).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17-18, 101.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17 (and Ch. 2, p. 23 *sq.*).

<sup>27</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 22.



Saint's lasting ties with his "fatherland" by drawing a suggestive parallel between him and John the Baptist, the first *erēmopolitēs*:

For he [John], in the words of Luke the Evangelist, 'was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel'. However, the cherisher of love and lover of mercy – Christ – chose himself this one [Sava] whilst he was still in his mother's womb, and led him to His Holy Mount where he lingered till he was called upon to enlighten his fatherland (*na prosveštenie oṭbčystva svoego*).<sup>28</sup>

This passage underscores a central point. Sava's ascetic experience was not meant to merely enhance his *don de l'esprit* in terms of personal inner progression, but to prepare him to take the helm of the Serbian Church in order to mediate to his *patria* the bounty which the Lord had bestowed on him. In this respect, the Saint falls right in line with many a champion of late ancient and Byzantine Christianity whose time in "the desert" preceded a distinguished ecclesiastical career. These monk-bishops, as Andrea Sterk calls them, exemplify an ideal different from the one embodied by life-long anchorites. Instead of eschewing the world forever, they withdrew from it temporarily to achieve a degree of monastic virtue before assuming control of church affairs.<sup>29</sup> Owing to the prestige of Basil the Great, to whom it essentially harks back, such a conception of the episcopate gradually became the norm in the Orthodox world, adapting as necessary to meet the needs of particular cultural environments. To illustrate this phenomenon from a medieval non-Greek perspective, Sterk briefly looks at none other than Sava of Serbia. Unlike the typical monk-bishop of Late Antiquity who renounced the worldly upon obtaining a solid classical training, thus discarding the prospect of "lofty intellectual achievements", Sava rejected the might and wealth inherent to his princely status; nevertheless, she contends that quite a few features of the original model found their way into the work of Domentian and Theodosius.<sup>30</sup> What is of particular interest now is the so-called "mixed life" which Sterk defines as a "balance between the contemplative life of the philosopher or monk and the active vocation of civic or ecclesiastical service".<sup>31</sup> Indeed, it would be misleading to think of these two conditions as strictly demarcated phases of one's personal and professional course; rather, the ascetic and the pastoral are as a rule thoroughly intertwined and constituent of a complex dialectic of identity construction. Consider Sava's case. During his tenure as abbot of his father's

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12; cf. *Luke* 1: 80. On this Biblical typology, see Lj. Juhas-Georgievska, "Književno delo...", p. LXV-LXXI.

<sup>29</sup> A. Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church. The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, MA – London, 2004, *passim*; see also C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops...*, p. 123-125.

<sup>30</sup> A. Sterk, *Renouncing the World...*, p. 229-236.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

pious foundation at Studenica, and later as Archbishop, he often reminisced about “the desert” of his youth. Yet these retreats to Mount Athos were not only virtual: in fact, he used every opportunity to actually withdraw there for however long matters of state and church allowed.<sup>32</sup> This permanent longing for *askēsis* was held in check by one thing only, the well-being of his people. As Sava himself is reported to have uttered at an assembly of Serbian nobles and clergy: “It was ye, my fellow countrymen, for whom I abandoned my holy and sweet desert (*svetouju i sladkouju mně poustynju*) [...]. For the sake of your souls, so to speak, I despised mine own”.<sup>33</sup> Tensions such as those between seclusion and public agency, self-gratification and common good, bodily torment and spiritual sacrifice (*pro ovibus*), feed the dynamic of the Saint’s *Vitae* and provide an ideological backdrop to his travels, which, as we are about to demonstrate, bring to the fore all three facets of his authority – spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, before we proceed, one other remark should be made about the above juxtaposition of John the Baptist and Sava. By contrasting the two, Domentijan implicitly draws an additional analogy, that between Israel of old and the Saint’s “fatherland”; drawing on *Luke* 1: 14–17, where the former is designated as “a people prepared for the Lord”, the hagiographer states that by virtue of Sava’s ministry the Serbs became precisely that: *gospodevi bogou ljudie s̄vr̄šeni*.<sup>35</sup> As one might expect, this is but an inkling of a highly powerful concept that spans the better part of medieval Serbian literature; a concept, to quote Mary Garrison, “so familiar as to seem to need no introduction, so ubiquitous as to have been part of the group identity of almost every European Christian nation at one time or another”.<sup>36</sup> What is in question

<sup>32</sup> Truth be told, on one famous occasion he decided to remain on Mount Athos and act by proxy, even in spite of great need: Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 186-194; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 117-125. Cf. D. Popović, “Čudotvorenja...”, p. 109-110.

<sup>33</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 142.

<sup>34</sup> An alternative conception of Sava’s authority has been proposed by S. Marjanović-Dušanić, “Harizma i autoritet: Skica za hagiografski portret svetog Save” (“Charisma and Authority: Toward a Hagiographic Portrait of St Sava”), in *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 52, 2015, p. 277-289. Building on the Weberian definition of charisma, the author discusses a bipartite model encompassing a “charismatic” and an “institutional” aspect.

<sup>35</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup> M. Garrison, “Divine Election for Nations – a Difficult Rhetoric for Medieval Scholars?”, in L. B. Mortensen (ed.), *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000-1300)*, Copenhagen, 2006, p. 275. There are many fine books and articles which interpret the various “national” discourses of election in the Middle Ages, from the British Isles to the eastern reaches of the Christian world; suffice it to mention a new book discussing the case of 7<sup>th</sup>- to 13<sup>th</sup>-century Byzantium: Sh. Eshel, *The Concept of the Elect Nation in Byzantium*, Leiden – Boston, 2018 (see the *Bibliography* for more references). M. Blagojević was the first to mine representative pieces of medieval Serbian literature in search of evidence that the idea of election had taken root in the Nemanjić state: “Srbi – izabrani narod. O nacionalnim i državnim interesima u delima Domentijana” (“The Serbs – a Chosen People. On National and State Interests in the Works of Domentijan”), in id., *Nemanjići i Lazarevići i srpska srednjovekovna državnost*,

is, obviously, the theme of chosenness, grounded in the Scripturally-inspired notion of the covenantal relationship between God and an elect community.<sup>37</sup> Now, although the basic assumption itself is straightforward enough, given the spectrum of purposes for which the “chosen people” paradigm is known to have been mobilised in various historical contexts, each iteration of the idea clearly warrants scholarly attention in its own right.<sup>38</sup> In 13<sup>th</sup>-century Serbia, the imagery of popular election reflected a triumphalist political setting: for not only was Sava ordained Archbishop of an autocephalous Serbian Church in 1218 or 1219, but a year or so before, in 1217, his brother Stefan became the first Nemanjić sovereign to bear the title of king (hence his sobriquet “the First-Crowned”).<sup>39</sup> Being the source of secular as well as ecclesiastical power, the royal house was enveloped by an aura of holiness and proclaimed a new *stirps beata* sprouting from the “good root”, as Stefan Nemanja – Sava and Stefan’s father – was fittingly envisaged.<sup>40</sup>

However, the reigning family was more than a focus of sanctity; it was also a conduit: in this early phase of the Serbian election myth, the community was perceived as partaking of the special status granted to Nemanja and his heirs. This phenomenon was described by Anthony D. Smith in a well-known essay in which he tackled myths of chosenness as devices for sustaining ethnic collectives. In some instances, such myths are “attached to the ruling house and dynasty, from which the community tends to take its main symbols and culture, and to which it is always associated”; in short, the imperial-dynastic pattern, as he refers to it, presupposes the “conjunction of dynasty, land and people”.<sup>41</sup> Judging by the sources presently under scrutiny in tandem with other relevant

Belgrade, 2004, p. 115-132 (originally published in *Istorijski glasnik*, 1–2, 1994, p. 15-28). To the best of my knowledge, a systematic overview of the development of this concept has not as yet been attempted in Serbia, but its far-reaching implications have been considered in relation to a variety of other phenomena, most recently and competently by S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *L’écriture et la sainteté... passim*.

<sup>37</sup> Much has been written by scholars from across the humanities about the concept of chosenness in Christianity, but also in other religious systems. See, for instance, J. B. Wells, *God’s Holy People. A Theme in Biblical Theology*, Sheffield, 2000, and A. D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples. Sacred Sources of National Identity*, Oxford, 2003.

<sup>38</sup> M. Garrison, “Divine Election...”, p. 299.

<sup>39</sup> The recent anniversary of these momentous events of Serbian history was marked by a number of conferences and symposia. Among the resulting publications, one stands out as particularly noteworthy: Lj. Maksimović and S. Pirivatrić (eds.), *Kraljevstvo i arhiepiskopija u srpskim i pomorskim zemljama Nemanjića (The Kingdom and the Archbishopric of the Serbian and Maritime Lands of the Nemanjić Dynasty)*, Belgrade, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Vladarska ideologija Nemanjića. Diplomatička studija (L’idéologie monarchique de la dynastie des Némanides. Étude diplomatique)*, Belgrade, 1997, p. 100-117; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *L’écriture et la sainteté...*, p. 62 sq.

<sup>41</sup> A. D. Smith, “Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic Groups Survive”, in id., *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford, 1999, p. 136 (originally published in *Ethnic and Racial Studies Review*, 15, 1992, 3, p. 436-456).

pieces of historical evidence, Sava indeed regulated the intricate relations comprising this conceptual triangle; but other than him, the central figure of the political-theological scheme which permeated the ideological bedrock of Nemanjić rule was the holy forefather himself. Dubbed a “second Jacob” and “new Israel”, Nemanja was to “rejuvenate his children through the Holy Spirit” so that they might be called God’s elect (*iz’brannye božie*).<sup>42</sup> Yet, first he needed to join his son on Mount Athos.

Although it appears that the Grand Župan had initially disapproved of the young prince’s decision to relinquish the court in favour of the monastery, he ended up doing precisely the same. Upon receiving a rather lengthy epistle in which Sava urged him to forgo mundane affairs and come to Mount Athos, Nemanja ceded the throne to Stefan, took monastic vows and withdrew to Studenica, his most prestigious religious establishment; the year was 1196. It was not long after all this took place that the monk Simeon (as he was hence known) set out to the Holy Mount with a mighty entourage and a considerable portion of his erstwhile wealth, which allowed him to make lavish donations to houses across Athos as he traversed the peninsula alongside his youngest offspring.<sup>43</sup> Whether or not one may see fit to take our hagiographers at their word as they report on the extent of Sava and Simeon’s munificence is of little import at this juncture. What matters is rather the underlying impression that father and son took significant pains to substantiate their standing within the Athonite milieu, a necessary first step towards the foundation of a new monastic colony meant to provide refuge to their compatriots. This was beyond doubt the foremost objective of the entire enterprise. Owing to Sava’s diplomatic prowess (and Stefan’s financial support), by mid-1198 they were granted imperial permission to restore a derelict monastery to this very purpose: Hilandar has been the mainstay of Serbian presence on Athos ever since.<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, Domentian and Theodosius cast this chain of events in a miraculous context. The latter cleverly exploits the “new Israel” paradigm: just as God had multiplied Jacob and spread his kin across all Egypt after he had joined Joseph in the wilderness, so was he to multiply Simeon and populate the desert with his own children, though not those of the flesh but those of the spirit.<sup>45</sup> It was thus divine will that Serbian monks be settled amongst other Athonites, as was disclosed to

<sup>42</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 62.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40-82; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 33-48.

<sup>44</sup> More on the historical circumstances of the establishment of Hilandar: D. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits...*, p. 126-130; M. Živojinović, “Kitorska delatnost svetoga Save” (“Activité de saint Sava comme fondateur d’églises”), in V. Đurić (ed.), *Međunarodni naučni skup Sava Nemanjić – sveti Sava. Istorija i predanje*, Belgrade, 1979, p. 16-18; I. Komatina, *Crkva i država u srpskim zemljama od XI do XIII veka (Church and State in the Serbian Lands from the XI<sup>th</sup> to the XIII<sup>th</sup> Century)*, Belgrade, 2016, p. 189-191. A comprehensive read on the monastery and its history, available in English: G. Subotić (ed.), *Hilandar Monastery*, Belgrade, 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 48.

Sava through a mysterious mouthpiece. Domentian relates that one day, as the Saint was minding his business, a God-fearing stranger approached him, having the following to say:

God has not sent thee to the Holy Mount so that merely thou and thy father might find deliverance.<sup>46</sup> For it was said unto the Prophet: ‘Be thou not the only one who knows Me, but get thee up to Mount Zion; lift thy voice like a trumpet, bringing good tidings to Jerusalem, so that all may know Me’. As for thee, falter not, but raise a monastery on the Holy Mount, to be a real haven for thy fatherland, in order that those who come after ye [...] may themselves be saved.<sup>47</sup>

Theodosius, for his part, takes the “national” character of the future monastery even further:

For with God, all is now possible to ye. Rulers in your own land, kin to those who hold the imperial sceptre, should you deign to request anything – your petition shall not be in vain. Make haste, then, and ask for a place or a desolate monastery; and having restored it, endow for your fatherland a monastery bearing the Serbian name (*svoemu otcьstvu outvrьdite srьbьskyi monastyрь zvati se*), so that those amongst your folk who love God and flee the worldly life might reach a harbour of salvation after ye [...].<sup>48</sup>

It is clear that in both *Vitae* Hilandar is conceived of as the redeeming pivot of Sava and Simeon’s people. In that sense, that Domentian drew upon the potent symbolism of Zion is neither incidental nor, in effect, unprecedented in 13<sup>th</sup>-century Serbian literature. It was some fifty years prior that Stefan – who was not just the first Nemanjić king, but also one of the earliest known Serbian men of letters – made use of this imagery to a double purpose: to legitimise the dynasty’s hold on power by identifying its originator with Biblical patriarchs such as Jacob or David (whose fortress atop Zion came to be emblematically represented by Hilandar in the discourse of Serbian writers); but also to relay the point that, under divinely sanctioned leadership, “children of the fatherland” were well set on the path of collective deliverance.<sup>49</sup> Domentian and Theodosius picked up and elaborated both themes in a way which promotes Sava as the ultimate executor of the providential design. His was the guiding hand that led

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<sup>46</sup> One of the surviving manuscripts has “... but so that thou may tread a proper path for the children of thy fatherland” after this, see R. Marinković, “Komentari”..., p. 337, n. 8.

<sup>47</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije*..., p. 86; cf. *Isa.* 40: 9.

<sup>48</sup> Teodosije, *Život*..., p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> S. Marjanović-Dušanić, “Hilandar kao Novi Sion Nemanjinog otačastva” (“The Zion Symbolics of the Monastery of Hilandar”), in V. Korać (ed.), *Međunarodni naučni skup Osam vekova Hilandara. Istorija, duhovni život, književnost, umetnost i arhitektura*, Belgrade, 2000, p. 18-20.

Nemanja and subsequently the entire nation to become a “new Israel”; in other words, he facilitated the transmission of holiness from the revered founder of the state to the community, a process deeply rooted in the Athonite experience.

Simeon lived long enough to witness the foundation of Hilandar, but passed away shortly after (1199). Apart from serving as his initial resting place, the monastery was also the stage of his first myrrh-exuding miracle, an unmistakable sign of God’s special favour.<sup>50</sup> The wonder-working relics remained at Hilandar until early 1207 when Sava brought them to Serbia and had them interred at Studenica. Two episodes regarding the repatriation of Simeon’s mortal remains ought to be looked at presently, one being that of the *translatio* itself. According to the wordplay introduced above, Sava’s *Lives* describe the event as prefigured by the carrying of Jacob’s body from Egypt back to the land of Canaan for burial,<sup>51</sup> hence rounding off a typology which gave tone to the chapters relating the saintly duo’s commendable exploits on Mount Athos. Once Simeon was entombed anew, Sava started praying with great fervour to God that his father’s relics would once more miraculously flow with myrrh as they had at Hilandar. On the anniversary of the holy man’s death (presumably the following year), Sava’s wish was fulfilled: while he was officiating the liturgy, *myron* began to pour from the grave. This scene was embedded into the framework of salvation history employing another familiar Old Testament parallelism: the precious liquid by which Simeon’s “dry bones” were replenished is likened to water that was made to flow in the desert to quench the thirst of the wandering Hebrews upon their flight from Egypt.<sup>52</sup> In the eyes of our hagiographers and their audience, the myrrh secreted by the relics was just as life-preserving; it was a pure materialisation of grace which all of “his [i.e., Simeon’s] children and his people, the new Israel” were invited to share in. It is thus within the span of several pages in the modern editions that the *Vitae* relay a powerful message, namely, that the dynastic patriarch as well as his “flock” became the embodiment of the ambiguous *novus Israël* model.<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, in each case Sava had a part to play, and a decisive one at that. To Simeon’s Jacob he acted as Joseph; on this second occasion, though, he implicitly assumed an even more meaningful role, one with which Domentian would gradually and thoroughly imbue his hero’s personality through the course of the narrative: the

<sup>50</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 128-140; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 68-75. Most recently on Simeon’s miracle-working: D. Popović, “Čuda svetog Simeona” (“The Miracles of St Symeon of Serbia”), in ead., *Riznica spasenja. Kult relikvija i srpskih svetih u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji*, Belgrade – Novi Sad, 2018, p. 229-248 (originally published in M. Radujko [ed.], *Stefan Nemanja – prepodobni Simeon Mirotočivi. Zbornik radova*, Belgrade, 2016, p. 497-507).

<sup>51</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 152; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 83-84.

<sup>52</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 154; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 88.

<sup>53</sup> M. Blagojević, “Srbi – izabrani narod...”, p. 120-122; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *L’écriture et la sainteté...*, p. 88-89 and *passim*.

detailed comparison that he draws between Sava and Moses is, however, a topic to which we shall return later.

To summarise this section, let us briefly highlight the most important conclusions. Sava's initial migration to Mount Athos had set in motion a process of identity formation on two parallel but mutually interdependent tracks. On the one hand, the practice of *askēsis* honed his spiritual gift and prepared him to take the reins of ecclesiastical government in the Nemanjić realm. By the time he set out for Serbia in the early 1200s, he had already been ordained archimandrite, a distinguished title connoting both monastic leadership and priestly office; the episcopate was only a step away.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, by advancing in virtue Sava paved the way to spiritual fulfilment for the entire Serbian society, the *plebs perfecta*: "And he trod for them a great and wide path to the Holy Mount, and there he raised cities grand and solid and endowed them fully, and passed all this on to the children of his fatherland to linger therein and do God's work so that having endured truly unto the end they emerge as a people prepared for Lord God".<sup>55</sup> That Domentian is very much prone to foreshadowing is revealed already in the following sentence: "And he likewise trod a path to Jerusalem and Sinai and to every place where God's name is named".<sup>56</sup> Hinting at this point (Ch. 2) at the travels which lay in store for Sava in the relatively distant future (detailed in Ch. 22 and 26-30) suggests that they do in fact represent later instances of the very same life-long itinerary whose unfolding mirrors the internal dynamic of the process(es) investigated in this study. In order to pursue this dynamic further, we now turn to Sava's pilgrimage to the Holy City.

## 2. Jerusalem

Some time while he was still a young Athonite monastic submitting himself to an arduous ascetic routine in imitation of Christ, Sava beseeched God to grant him the following wish:

Guide my feet into Thy way of peace, and as I hasten East to Thy Holy City of Jerusalem grant me the privilege to prostrate myself before Thy life-giving sepulchre and to behold with the eyes of my soul and heart where Thy pristine body lay, and where stood Thy pristine feet and Thy life-giving cross [...], and having seen all Thy sufferings, to inscribe them onto the tablets of mine heart

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<sup>54</sup> On Sava's ordination, which might have taken place in 1203/1204 in Thessaloniki, see I. Komatina, *Crkva i država...*, p. 258-259.

<sup>55</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

and return West, armed with audacity towards Thee (*съ дръзновеніемъ твоимъ*), so that by the power of Thy Holy Spirit I might enlighten Thy people [...].<sup>57</sup> Albeit it took some three decades, everything which the Saint had hoped for (that is what he had foreseen, as he evidently had the gift) came true. In 1229, the year of his first *peregrinatio* to Jerusalem,<sup>58</sup> Sava was in his fifties and had an outstanding political and pastoral career behind him. Since returning to Serbia with Simeon's miraculous relics and taking charge of Studenica, he had handled several important diplomatic assignments, provided a legal framework for the Nemanjić state (by having the *Nomocanon* translated), set up the ecclesiastical organisation of the newly established Serbian Archbishopric, and enforced Orthodoxy throughout the land; finally, slightly prior to his departure for Palestine he oversaw the transition of power to Radoslav, the eldest son of the late King Stefan.<sup>59</sup> Upon the latter's passing, Sava's role at court clearly became even more prominent: to be sure, Domentian need not be overly exaggerating when he comments that henceforth "all the weight of his fatherland rested on him alone".<sup>60</sup> In light of this remark, the hero's perennial desire to emulate Christ appears to be but one reason for his setting out towards the Holy Land. As a matter of fact, I am about to suggest that it was a double purpose – *pro anima* and *pro patria* – that motivated Sava's voyage to Jerusalem, entirely in line with the prophetically intoned prayer cited just above.

First of all, however, a glance at his pilgrimage route is in order. Domentian describes the voyage in great detail: once he arrived in Jerusalem and venerated the Holy Sepulchre, Sava visited several famous sanctuaries both within the city itself and in its relative vicinity.<sup>61</sup> His itinerary encompassed sites that commemorated crucial events of Christ's life (notably Bethlehem, Zion, the Mount of Olives, Bethany, and the Jordan, in that precise sequence), including those related to the Virgin and John the Baptist. Moreover, it is noteworthy that throughout Domentian's report Jerusalem functions as a kind of "base" to which Sava recurrently comes back in the intervals between visiting holy places; its centrality is thus asserted in terms of symbolic pre-eminence, but also of narrative structure. Of course, in this context, the label "holy place" does not

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-24.

<sup>58</sup> For a convincing chronology of Sava's first pilgrimage, see M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje...*, p. 13-19.

<sup>59</sup> Sava's activities during this period are relevantly discussed by I. Komatina, *Crkva i država...*, p. 259-295.

<sup>60</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 276.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280-302. Theodosius' version is much more succinct: Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 166-169. A scrupulous analysis of this stage of the itinerary, destination by destination: M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje...*, p. 28-70; for a summary overview in English, see B. Miljković, "Serbia and the Holy Land from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century", in E. Hadjistryphonos (ed.), *Routes of Faith in the Medieval Mediterranean. History, Monuments, People, Pilgrimage Perspectives*, Thessaloniki, 2008, p. 160-161.



apply only to those localities considered outstanding by virtue of purported links to Scriptural history. As in any medieval account of Orthodox pilgrimage, in Sava's *Vitae* visits to the renowned monasteries of the Judaeen Desert are just as integral an element of the Holy Land experience.<sup>62</sup> Although he supposedly stopped by a few religious houses in the area, he spent most of the time in the Great Lavra founded by his patron and namesake, St Sabas the Sanctified (his stay there and its implications will be appropriately discussed in the ensuing pages). From there, he returned to Jerusalem and before long ventured to Galilee; he saw Nazareth and Mount Tabor, and finally gained Acre, whence he set sail westwards. Following a sojourn in Nicaea and on Athos he reached Serbia, thus bringing his first pilgrimage to an end.<sup>63</sup>

That Domentian chose to introduce Sava's longing to set foot in Jerusalem at such an early stage is not in the least unusual; after all, someone who spent their days figuratively crucifying their body ought to have felt the appeal of Holy Land travel as a compelling expression of Christo-mimetic piety.<sup>64</sup> Apart from that, what I trust the text is trying to achieve here is a sense of continuity between the Saint's first stay on Athos and his later wanderings, i.e., between one "desert" and another. Apparently, what starts as a pilgrimage report with a subtle eremitic undertone – implied in Sava's excursions to places reminiscent of Christ and his Forerunner, especially that of the former's temptation in the wilderness<sup>65</sup> – shifts into an outright description of "desert wayfaring" (*ō poustyn'nomъ prohoždenii*), which the hero, looking back at his formative years, very much yearned for; indeed, it was only after he had traversed "all the deserts of Bethlehem and of the Jordan, and all Palestine" that he was ready to return home.<sup>66</sup> In the meantime, as he roamed the barren

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<sup>62</sup> As argued by A. Jotischky, "History and Memory as Factors in Greek Orthodox Pilgrimage to the Holy Land Under Crusader Rule", in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *The Holy Land, Holy Lands, and Christian History*, Woodbridge, 2000, p. 115: "The history of monasticism in Palestine was an extension of the biblical narrative of salvation, and by visiting the monasteries the pilgrim was commemorating the lives of the monks as though they were part of that same narrative".

<sup>63</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 302-314; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 169-174; M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje...*, p. 70-93.

<sup>64</sup> On the phenomenon of *imitatio Christi* in the Middle Ages, see G. Constable, "The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ", in id., *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 143-248. Much scholarly work has been done on the late ancient/medieval understanding and experience of pilgrimage. Some of the standard references are E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312-460*, Oxford, 1982; R. Ousterhout (ed.), *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, Urbana – Chicago, 1990; G. Frank, *The Memory of the Eyes. Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, Los Angeles – London, 2000; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred. The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, 2005.

<sup>65</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 288-294; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 167-168.

<sup>66</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 296, 300; cf. Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 169-170. See also D. Popović, "Pustinožiteljstvo...", p. 72.

Judaeen landscape, Sava indulged in his youthful habit of visiting monasteries and holy men scattered across the desert: this time, as I have already mentioned, his principal goal was the Lavra of St Sabas.<sup>67</sup> Given the high regard in which Sava held the great Saint (a fact corroborated by sources other than the two *Lives*),<sup>68</sup> the chance to behold his tomb and his hermitage – “in which he led a life of fasting, pain, and suffering”<sup>69</sup> – must have provided considerable personal satisfaction. And yet, as it seems, there was another vital aspect to this visit. Namely, Domentian intimates that, having donated much gold to the monastery, Sava became a member of its brotherhood, which may well be interpreted as a token of respect and appreciation for the distinguished guest from afar.<sup>70</sup> However, recent scholarship has offered a further explanation that renders this act a central occurrence of Sava’s first trip to the Holy Land.

Over the course of his pilgrimage, so says the *Vita prima*, Sava lodged at the Jerusalem *metochion* of the Great Lavra, which is presumably why he so often went back to the city. It was also there that the Saint made the acquaintance of the Lavra’s abbot Nicholas, in whose company he travelled to the revered desert monastery. Once they returned to Jerusalem, again according to Domentian, Sava was granted the Church of St John the Theologian upon Mount Zion – identified by Miodrag Marković as the erstwhile northern chapel of the Crusader basilica destroyed in 1219-1220<sup>71</sup> – to be the nucleus of a newly established Serbian monastery.<sup>72</sup> By all appearances, the building had been in possession of the brethren of St Sabas and was made available to the Serbian Archbishop only after he joined their ranks. Technically, therefore, Sava’s endowment in Jerusalem still belonged to the Lavra (it was inhabited by Sabaites when he came back to the Holy Land in 1234), but its function must have been to accommodate subsequent pilgrims from Serbia – and conceivably other Orthodox lands – and facilitate their way to the Holy Places; to much the same end Sava might have “redeemed” from Latin hands the Church of St George in Acre, as the *Lives* claim, but the dearth of historical evidence leaves open many questions regarding this enterprise.<sup>73</sup> In any event, political developments in

<sup>67</sup> Principal, but not the only one. Domentian claims that afterwards Sava visited “all the monasteries lengthwise towards the Sea of Sodom” and on his way back made a stop at the Lavra of St Euthymius: Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 296-300. Theodosius mentions more individual stations: Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 168-169; cf. M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje...*, p. 54-57, for an appraisal.

<sup>68</sup> V. J. Đurić, “Uzori svetoga Save” (“The Role Models of St Sava”), *Letopis Matice srpske*, 455, 1995, no. 3, p. 495-498; S. Popović, “Sabaite Influences on the Church of Medieval Serbia”, in J. Patrich (ed.), *The Sabaite Heritage in the Orthodox Church from the Fifth Century to the Present*, Leuven, 2001, p. 385-407.

<sup>69</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 168.

<sup>70</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 296.

<sup>71</sup> M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje...*, p. 66-70.

<sup>72</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 298-300. Theodosius imparts nothing of the sort at this point.

<sup>73</sup> M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje...*, p. 76-78.

Palestine after his death suggest that the Zion foundation was given far too little time to fulfil its intended purpose, as it was probably razed in the sack of Jerusalem in 1244.

Besides the obvious practical benefits, the foundation of the Monastery of St John the Theologian had tremendous ideological potential. It was the *pièce de résistance* of Sava's ktetorial project in Palestine, which bore a number of similarities to his and his father's activity on Mount Athos that had preceded the restoration of Hilandar. Crisscrossing the Holy Land, he allegedly made generous donations to the sanctuaries that he visited, and hence earned the right to inscribe into their memorial books the names of his parents, his brother, and himself, that they be mentioned during the liturgy.<sup>74</sup> Doubtless, this sort of memorialisation within houses of worship spread across a region hallowed by the feet of Christ himself must have had a strong dynastic connotation: even though Sava was ostensibly the first Nemanjić to actually tour the *Terra Sancta*, this allowed other towering figures of the family – its originator and its first king – to posthumously partake in its blessings.<sup>75</sup> However, these blessings were by no means restricted to the dynasty. The “most splendid path to Jerusalem” – a phrase we remember from the introductory remarks – stands for the prospect of communal salvation which gained momentum owing to Sava's protagonism: having reached the earthly Jerusalem, he opened the way towards its heavenly counterpart, for himself and his compatriots alike.<sup>76</sup> The dichotomy earthly/heavenly is fully reflected in Domentian's conceptualisation of the Monastery of St John, which aptly epitomised the Saint's redeeming mission. A particularly illuminating passage from Ch. 27, dedicated to Sava's arrival in Jerusalem in 1234, reads as follows:

The holy one understood the veritable blessedness of the wondrous Prophet: “Those who have a seed in Zion and kinsmen in Jerusalem” (*imějuštii semě vь siōně. i bližnjee svoe vь erosalimě*). [...] Upon it (i.e., Zion) he placed his spiritual dwelling: the monastery of the great Apostle John the Theologian – our Lord's beloved friend –, a divine seed (*semě božie*) sown by the Lord himself to the flourishing of true faith. And thence he inherited the earthly Jerusalem, wishing to abide with the Lord in the Jerusalem on high [...].<sup>77</sup>

The “divine seed” metaphor is a meaningful one. Its inspiration comes from LXX *Isa.* 31: 9 – τὰδε λέγει Κύριος, μακάριος ὁς ἔχει ἐν Σιών σπέρμα, καὶ

<sup>74</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 286, 288, 294, 298. This privilege was reserved for the founder (*ktētōr*) or someone whose benefaction in some way equalled the very act of foundation, meaning that they contributed enough money to restore or secure the normal functioning of a church/monastery; see M. Živojinović, “Ktitorska delatnost...”, p. 15, 23-24.

<sup>75</sup> A. Z. Savić, “‘A Most Splendid Path to Jerusalem’...”.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *L'écriture et la sainteté...*, p. 80-82.

<sup>77</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 360.

οικείους ἐν Ἱερουσαλήμ<sup>78</sup> – which Domentian carefully quotes slightly earlier (Ch. 26) in relation to Sava’s departure towards the Holy Land: *glagoljetъ gospodъ. blaženъ iměe vъ siōně sěme. i domašnjee vъ ierōsalimě*.<sup>79</sup> Albeit this is clearly a more accurate rendition, it is only in the context of the above excerpt that the hagiographer’s point is definitely brought home: the Zion endowment was to be a beacon of Orthodoxy shining bright at the end of the path which Sava had trod for the “children of the fatherland”. Furthermore, what the *Vita* seems to imply is that Jerusalem – in which God “gathereth together the outcasts of Israel”<sup>80</sup> – is indeed the place where the Serbs rightfully belong; that they should have *oikeioi* (translatable as “kinsmen” or “household friends”)<sup>81</sup>, there is merely befitting of a “perfect people” who “inherited” the terrestrial city as well as its celestial, eschatological correlate by virtue of the providentially motivated undertaking of their saintly champion.<sup>82</sup>

We have seen so far that Sava’s pilgrimage of 1229 may be considered a continuation of his early Athonite years in at least two important ways. Much like his escape to the Holy Mount several decades before, this was essentially a response to the “call of the desert”, a wilful detachment from society which enhanced what we have called – following Claudia Rapp – ascetic authority. A second similarity, curious if not counterintuitive at first, is that these *fugae mundi* had a distinctive “altruistic” aspect, brought about by the interests of state and dynasty which Sava actively furthered for the better part of his life. The monastic colonies whose foundations he laid on Mount Athos and in Jerusalem constitute the most conspicuous result of his travels to the East, but not the only one. For instance, the relevance of the sacred relics, manuscripts, and liturgical paraphernalia he carried back to Serbia from the Holy Land is such that we would do well not to underestimate it;<sup>83</sup> yet, aside from precious objects, it was the knowledge, experience, and contacts amassed on his journeys that substantially informed his long-term political and ecclesiastical strategies. In the

<sup>78</sup> In L. C. L. Brenton’s translation, the line reads: “Thus saith the Lord, Blessed is he that has a seed in Sion, and household friends in Jerusalem”, *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament. With an English Translation and Various Readings and Critical Notes*, London, 1879, p. 866. See, on the other hand, A. Pietersma and B. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included under That Title*, New York – Oxford, 2007, p. 848: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Happy is the one who has a seed in Sion and kinsmen in Jerusalem’”.

<sup>79</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 344. This line, specific to the Greek version of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) has eluded identification in modern editions and translations of Domentian’s work for quite some time now: S. Stanojević and D. Glumac (eds.), *Sv. pismo u našim starim spomenicima (The Holy Scripture in Our Literary Texts of Old)*, Belgrade, 1932, p. 192 (no. 582); R. Marinković, “Komentari”..., p. 366 (n. 14), 367 (n. 9); Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 492 (n. 7), 494 (n. 6).

<sup>80</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 358; cf. *Ps.* 147: 2.

<sup>81</sup> See *supra*, n. 78. Cf. G. W. H. Lampe (ed.), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, 1961, p. 937.

<sup>82</sup> A. Z. Savić, “‘A Most Splendent Path to Jerusalem’...”.

<sup>83</sup> D. Popović, “*Eulogiae Terrae Sanctae* of St Sava of Serbia”, *Balkanica*, 45, 2014, p. 59-60.

hagiographies, notably the *Vita prima*, these strategies are exemplified by two key episodes, both steeped in salvation rhetoric: the renewal of Hilandar and the establishment of St John's. Synonymous with collective deliverance, the "most splendid path to Jerusalem" Sava trod for his countrymen revolved around the "conquest" of Zion, which started when its symbolic replica was erected on Mount Athos and ended with the foundation of a "spiritual dwelling" on the Jerusalem hill itself. This process – roughly spanning thirty years – is, I believe, a most eloquent expression of the holy man's pragmatic authority generated by his overall management of the secular and religious affairs of the realm.

To conclude the second part of the present study, it is now necessary to discuss the ramifications of Sava's pilgrimage with regard to the remaining element of Rapp's triad, namely, spiritual authority. To that end, let us return for a moment to the quotation which opened the current section. What Sava desired and prayed for was the opportunity to visit the Holy Sepulchre, Golgotha, and other *loca sancta*, so that he might observe them with the "eyes of [his] soul and heart" (*očima ... doušev'nyma i srědъčьnyma*).<sup>84</sup> By immersing himself thus – i.e., spiritually and emotionally – into the passion narrative, the pilgrim would virtually relive or, better still, re-enact the events memorialised by specific holy places, thereby collapsing the boundary between his own time and that of Christ.<sup>85</sup> Resulting from this sort of devotional practice is a growing sense of immediacy in Sava's encounter with God, to which the two *Lives* often draw attention. Domentian gives a fine example as he recounts how Sava venerated the Sepulchre when he first arrived in Jerusalem: fallen prostrate before the tomb, he wept and kissed it, "fondly caressing and beholding his cherisher [Christ], as if he were there (*slad'cě ōhoupae. jako tou soušta samogo vide ljubitelja svoego*)".<sup>86</sup> However, Sava's pilgrimage did not merely begin with an intense religious experience; it drew to a close with one as well. As already mentioned, on his way out of the Holy Land, the Saint stopped by Nazareth and paid a visit to Mount Tabor. There, Domentian contends:

[...] He saw the most splendid transfiguration of his cherisher Christ, along with the God-seer Moses and Elijah the Flame-Wielder and with his three

<sup>84</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 22.

<sup>85</sup> In the words of F. Heim, "L'expérience mystique des pèlerins occidentaux en Terre Sainte aux alentours de 400", *Ktèma*, 10, 1985, p. 198: "La confrontation avec les sites sacrés conduit donc le pèlerin à prendre conscience de la dimension historique de sa foi; mais au-delà, elle le projette littéralement dans le passé, en lui faisant revivre les événements bibliques. Il devient, pour ainsi dire, lui-même témoin des faits, le voyage dans l'espace se transformant en un voyage dans le temps [...]".

<sup>86</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 282; A. Z. Savić, "'A Most Splendid Path to Jerusalem' ...".

beloved disciples [...], and having revelled in heavenly glory and having shared in the splendent majesty of his cherisher, he returned once again to Nazareth.<sup>87</sup>

Whether or not we subscribe to the view that the Tabor scene represents a central point of the entire *Life*,<sup>88</sup> there is no doubt about its pertinence to the investigation at hand. With each step in the course of his pilgrimage, Sava grew in virtue and augmented his spiritual capital, hence rendering the relationship with God – founded, as suggested above, on *dr̆znovenie* (Slav. for *parrhēsia*)<sup>89</sup> – even more intimate. What he was privileged to witness and partake of, his mind bathed in the uncreated light, was the unmediated revelation of Christ’s divine nature: a major advancement on the mystical journey to complete union with his “cherisher”. It was indeed a fitting conclusion to one pious endeavour, but also a subtle anticipation of the next; as a matter of fact, to fully appreciate the implications of Sava’s Tabor experience we ought to step back and consider it in the broader perspective. To achieve this, we must follow Sava to Mount Sinai.

### 3. Mount Sinai

To the medieval mind, holy mountains were exceptional places indeed. Simultaneously “physical and imaginative”, they were daunting pathways of rock leading to the transcendental plane of theophany: as Veronica della Dora points out, “in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the seductive, ambivalent half-seen mountain is a metaphor for speaking to God”.<sup>90</sup> Because of the often

<sup>87</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 304-306. Theodosius’ account is markedly less dramatic: Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 169.

<sup>88</sup> M. M. Lazić, *Estetika Domentijanovih žitija (The Aesthetics of Domentian’s Hagiographical Works)*, Podgorica, 1997, p. 109.

<sup>89</sup> On Sava’s *dr̆znovenie*, see D. Popović, “Čudotvorenja...”, p. 98-99; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, “Harizma i autoritet...”, p. 283.

<sup>90</sup> V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred...*, p. 147-175, here at p. 149. Relevant works on the subject also include P. Soustal (ed.), *Heilige Berge und Wüsten...* (see *supra*, n. 14) and A.-M. Talbot, “Les saintes montagnes à Byzance”, in M. Kaplan (ed.), *Le sacré et son inscription à Byzance et en Occident. Études comparées*, Paris, 2001, p. 263-318. Holy mountains figure prominently in Serbian/South Slavic sources, literary and visual alike: D. Popović, “The Deserts and Holy Mountains...”, p. 53-62; N. Gagova and I. Špadijer, “Dve varijante anahoretskog tipa u južnoslovenskoj hagiografiji (Teodosijevo Žitije svetog Petra Koriškog i Jevtimijevo Žitije svetog Jovana Rilskog)” (“Two Versions of the Anchoritic Type in the Southslavic Hagiography [Teodosije’s *Life of St Petar of Koriša* and Eythimios’ *Life of St John of Rila*]”), in Z. Vitić, T. Jovanović, and I. Špadijer (eds.), *Slovensko srednjovekovno nasleđe*, Belgrade, 2001, p. 159-175; S. Smolčić-Makuljević, “The Holy Mountain in Byzantine visual culture of Medieval Balkans. Sinai – Athos – Treskavac”, in *Heilige Landschaften – Heilige Berge. Akten des 8. Internationalen Barocksommerkurses der Stiftung Bibliothek Werner Oechslin*, Einsiedeln – Zürich, 2014, p. 242-261.

inaccessible terrain and dire living conditions, mountainous regions were “deserts” of choice for many an aspiring anchorite interpreting the harshness and verticality of their surroundings through the lens of monastic teachings on spiritual ascent. In Byzantine hagiography, examples of saints inhabiting such localities are numerous; some of these *Vitae* are even structured as narratives of migration from one *hagion oros* to another, the movement being a vital catalyst of their protagonists’ sanctity.<sup>91</sup> To a certain extent, at least, this principle seems to hold true in Sava’s case as well. Holy mountains were evidently integral to the spatial framework of the travels under scrutiny here, but rather than being isolated events, sojourns on hallowed peaks – from Athos to Sinai – appear to form a continuum overarching his decades-long voyage to deification. Notwithstanding the long interval between Sava’s withdrawal to Mount Athos at seventeen and his peregrination to Sinai at about sixty, Domentijan leaves little margin for doubt as to the interrelation of these two stages: “At last, the sprout of the Holy Mount grown by God was on his way to Mount Sinai”.<sup>92</sup> Even if our source were not quite as explicit, it would be difficult to ignore the implied parallelism between the juvenile prince and the elderly hierarch, each renouncing his title in order to pursue a pious endeavour from which both he and his countrymen stood to benefit. Motivated by the “enlightenment” of his *patria*, the hero’s escape from court had initiated a process that needed to be brought to a close before a second similarly profound separation from “the world” was possible. According to Theodosius, it was only “after he saw the Serbian land of his fatherland in splendour, adorned with a King [Radoslav’s younger brother Vladislav] and an Archbishop, and also with sanctified bishops and abbots, monks, governors, and generals [...], and all the salutary laws and *typika* of Orthodox Christonymous peoples” that he was ready for his last great journey.<sup>93</sup>

Even though it is safe to argue that Sinai was the real focal point of Sava’s pilgrimage of 1234–1235, his itinerary encompassed a range of other destinations in the Holy Land and well beyond.<sup>94</sup> Following a particularly frightening experience at sea, the Saint arrived in Jerusalem, where this time he ought to have felt very much *chez soi*: upon entering the city he went straight “to his own monastery” (*въ свои си монастырь*, i.e., St John the Theologian) to rest

<sup>91</sup> V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred...*, p. 162: “[...] Byzantine holy mountains also signposted the lives of saints, in the same way that New Testament peaks did in the life of Christ. Along with the Holy Land and other notable holy places such as Rome or Patmos, many of these peaks came to represent ‘stations’ in the life of ascetics aspiring to a perfect life in Christ”. A recent study on the imbrication of space, movement, and holiness in Byzantine hagiography is M. Veikou, “Space in Texts and Space as Text: A New Approach to Byzantine Spatial Notions”, *Scandinavian Journal of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 2, 2016, p. 143-175.

<sup>92</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 378.

<sup>93</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 179.

<sup>94</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 340-402; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 179-199. For a highly instructive commentary of the two accounts, see B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save...*, p. 152-186.

from the hardships of travel.<sup>95</sup> Once the pilgrim gathered his strength, he ventured an excursion to Alexandria, which eventually turned into an impressive tour of the Egyptian wasteland. Instigated by the Holy Spirit, Sava visited venerable hermits abiding in the area of Mareotis and along the fringes of the Libyan Desert, after which he marched all the way to “the Thebaid, Scetis, and the Black Mountain [?]”, desirous of their holy inhabitants’ blessings.<sup>96</sup> Now, regardless of the many problems this sequence of stations presents for the historian,<sup>97</sup> we should notice that the (former) Archbishop’s affinity towards the eremitic condition is a central recurring theme of all his eastern travels. In this sense, his peregrinations may perhaps even be conceptualised as an attempt at retracing the history of monasticism – through space and time – to its very origins; that Sava subsequently also reached the desert dwellings of St Anthony and St Arsenius, as imparted by the *Vita secunda*, is by all appearances an argument in favour of such a view.<sup>98</sup>

In the meantime, however, Sava returned to Jerusalem and prepared for his trek to Sinai. Having crossed the Jordan near Jericho, he moved southwards and gained Al-Karak; the next two stops – namely, “Great Babylon” and “Great Egypt” – presumably refer to his visit to Cairo, which may well be the most controversial part of the entire journey.<sup>99</sup> In any case, it was not long before the holy man was back on the road making his way to Mount Sinai, where he observed the Lenten season of 1235; the sheer number of days Sava spent amongst the brethren of the Monastery of St Catherine speaks to the place of honour this particular site had in his itinerary.<sup>100</sup> As a matter of fact, once he parted from his hosts, the return journey began. After calling at Jerusalem and Antioch he went ahead to Asia Minor, traversing the Armenian Kingdom of Cilicia – “in search of saints’ relics”, Theodosius adds<sup>101</sup> – and the Sultanate of Rūm, before finding a ship bound for Constantinople. Albeit his wish was to sail on to Athos, the Spirit instructed him otherwise: he travelled instead to Tärnovó,

<sup>95</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 354, 358; also Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 186.

<sup>96</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 364-368; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 188-189.

<sup>97</sup> B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save...*, p. 158-165.

<sup>98</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 191-192; cf. D. Popović, “Pustinožiteljstvo...”, p. 72-74.

<sup>99</sup> Viewed from the perspective of a “historical” itinerary, it would have made much more sense if Sava had organised a trip to Cairo while he was in Alexandria, rather than setting out into Egypt twice. Scholarly reconstructions of his route tend to differ somewhat from that which I have outlined following the *Vitae*; consult, e.g., B. Miljković, “Serbia and the Holy Land...”, p. 162-163. For the issue of “Great Babylon” and “Great Egypt”, most recently: A. Z. Savić, “Izmišljanje Vavilona – geografija i hagiografija u bliskoistočnom itineraru svetog Save Srpskog” (“Imagining’ Babylon – Geography and Hagiography in St Sava of Serbia’s Middle Eastern Itinerary”), *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, 52, 2015, p. 291-312.

<sup>100</sup> B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save...*, p. 178.

<sup>101</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 195.



to the court of the Bulgarian Emperor John Asen II, where he expired approximately a week upon arrival.<sup>102</sup>

While each of these instances might be discussed at length and in its own right, in the remainder of the present section we shall focus on the Sinai episode alone. In Sava's day, the Biblical peninsula boasted a centuries-long tradition of attracting pious wayfarers from all across Christendom; dominated by the awe-inspiring foundation of Justinian I, which would come to be identified in the later medieval period with the cult of the Alexandrian martyr Catherine, Sinai's southern region was thought to have been the stage of some of the most memorable events of the Old Testament narrative, notably those related to Moses.<sup>103</sup> The monastery itself was built around the site where the Burning Bush had allegedly grown (hence the dedication to *Theotokos tēs Batou*), that is where God had bid the great Prophet lead the Hebrew people out of captivity. At the very spot of the encounter – enclosed by a chapel adjoining the *katholikon* as its easternmost and holiest segment – Sava officiated the liturgy barefoot, adhering to the local custom going back to *Ex. 3: 5*, paraphrased in both *Vitae*: “put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground”.<sup>104</sup> The epiphanic atmosphere evoked by this famous line is further emphasised by Theodosius, who couples it with another one: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”.<sup>105</sup> Carved into the lintel over the main entrance to the Sinai basilica for visitors to read as they come in, a variation of the words whereby the Lord had made himself known to Moses was meant to “poin[t] proleptically [...] to the vision and the relic to which the pilgrim's passage through the church would lead”,<sup>106</sup> in a similar vein, by bringing to mind what had transpired at the foot of the mountain in the Biblical past, Sava's hagiographers gradually constructed an ambience of divine revelation that would set the tone for the second phase of the pilgrimage: his ascent to the sacred peak.

<sup>102</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 400-408; cf. Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 199-202.

<sup>103</sup> For a useful survey of information on Sinai pilgrimage yielded by a variety of medieval sources, see D. Jacoby, “Christian Pilgrimage to Sinai until the Late Fifteenth Century”, in R. S. Nelson and K. M. Collins (eds.), *Holy Image, Hallowed Ground. Icons from Sinai*, Los Angeles, 2006, p. 79-93. See also A. Drandaki, “Through Pilgrims' Eyes: Mt Sinai in Pilgrim Narratives of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries”, *Deltion tēs Christianikēs Archaiologikēs Hetaireias*, 27, 2006, p. 491-504.

<sup>104</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 372; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 192-193.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Ex. 3: 6*, *3: 15*, and *3: 16*.

<sup>106</sup> S. Coleman and J. Elsner, “The Pilgrim's Progress: Art, Architecture and Ritual Movement at Sinai”, *World Archaeology*, 26, 1994, no. 1, p. 79. The inscription, itself a combination of *Ex. 3: 14* and *3: 15*, reads: “† Καὶ ἐλάλησεν κ(ύριος) πρὸς Μωϋσῆν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ τῶ λέγων· | ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ θ(εὸς) τῶν πατέρων σου, ὁ θ(εὸς) Ἀβραάμ κ(αὶ) ὁ θ(εὸς) Ἰσαάκ | κ(αὶ) ὁ θ(εὸς) Ἰακώβ. | † Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ὢν †” (I. Ševčenko, “The Early Period of the Sinai Monastery in the Light of Its Inscriptions”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 20, 1966, p. 262).

On his way up, Sava stopped by the Church of St Elijah, erected over what was believed to be the grotto in which the latter had sought refuge after smiting the priests of Baal.<sup>107</sup> Though mentioned only in passing,<sup>108</sup> Elijah's name presumably brought to the audience's mind his own theophanic episode; lest we forget, he was the sole Biblical prophet besides Moses to converse with God at Sinai.<sup>109</sup> Neither, however, was allowed to actually see the Lord in all his unobscured glory: Elijah was commanded by "a still small voice" (preceded by much more violent displays of heavenly power), and Moses was merely able to catch a glimpse of God's "back parts"; to prevent him from looking at his face, he placed Moses in a cleft of rock and covered him with his hand while he passed by.<sup>110</sup> Preposterous as it had been for men of the Old Testament, their longing to lay eyes on the Almighty himself was not to remain forever unsatisfied. As Domentian rightly reminds us, the Transfiguration of Jesus on Tabor was not only witnessed by three of his Apostles (Peter, James, and John), but also by "the God-seer Moses and Elijah the Flame-Wielder",<sup>111</sup> who were finally granted an unhindered vision of God. The mystical connection between Sinai and Tabor – the first giving way to the second just as the Old Covenant was superseded by the New – furnished the theological framework of Sinai pilgrimage.<sup>112</sup> A magnificent iconographic rendition of this "hierarchy of theophanies" is to be found in the mosaic programme of the central church of St Catherine's Monastery. On its eastern wall, above the triumphal arch, two facing panels represent Moses' encounters with God: to the spectator's left he is loosening his sandals in front of the Burning Bush, while on the opposite side he receives the Tablets of the Law; albeit horizontally aligned, this diptych is in effect evocative of a vertical advancement, given that the scenes it comprises summon events which had taken place at the mountain's base and its summit, respectively. Translated into spiritual terms, this "upward" progression – which "prefigures the actual movement of the pilgrim from the monastery to the peak of the mountain"<sup>113</sup> – attains its true meaning through a third piece, located

<sup>107</sup> 1 *Kings* 19: 1–9.

<sup>108</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 193. Only one of the surviving manuscripts of Domentian's work records Sava's visit to this locality: see R. Marinković, "Komentari"... , p. 370 (n. 43); B. Miljković, *Žitija svetog Save...*, p. 182 (n. 639).

<sup>109</sup> 1 *Kings* 19:9–18.

<sup>110</sup> *Ex.* 33: 20–23.

<sup>111</sup> See the last quoted excerpt *supra*, in Section 2.

<sup>112</sup> On the Sinai – Tabor relation, see A. Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis. The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography*, Crestwood, NY, 2005, p. 193-208; J. Elsner and G. Wolf, "The Transfigured Mountain: Icons and Transformations of Pilgrimage at the Monastery of St Catherine at Mount Sinai", in Sh. E. J. Gerstel and R. S. Nelson (eds.), *Approaching the Holy Mountain. Art and Liturgy at St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai*, Turnhout, 2010, p. 52-55; V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred...*, p. 149-155.

<sup>113</sup> S. Coleman and J. Elsner, "The Pilgrim's Progress..." , p. 84.

beneath the former pair, in the apse itself. Looming over the nave, the image of the transfigured Christ completes the sequence both visually and conceptually, rendering it “an allegorical simulacrum and paradigm of the viewer’s own spiritual journey”, its ultimate goal being “the full confrontation with God face to face”.<sup>114</sup> Although our hagiographers make no direct reference to this pictorial ensemble, it will shortly become apparent that its message is by no means foreign to the account of the Saint’s pilgrimage.

Having reached the top, Sava venerated with great fervour the “sacred rock” where God’s “all-powerful right hand” had once rested as he manifested himself to Moses. This is unmistakably the pivotal point of his entire peregrination, which is why it deserves to be examined as closely as possible:

[...] He did not want to part from that rock, for it was as though he saw the One who had bent the heavens and descended, indeed as if His vigorous and omnipotent holy arm were still there [...]. Presenting a blissful heart as an offering, he gazed at the One sitting upon the cherubic throne on high through the eyes of the mind, the heart, and the soul [...]. And the holy God-bearer (*bogonos’cb*) came down from the mountain having become like the great God-seer [Moses], not only bearing God himself within him and on him but also adorned with His favour. And this one [Sava] became a second God-seer (*v’tori bogovid’cb*), and he was deemed worthy to see not only God’s back, but by the favour granted him from above he was deemed worthy to serve the Lord himself through holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of his life.<sup>115</sup>

Nothing short of ecstatic, Sava’s experience was evidently one of profound transformation. The vehicle for expressing this dramatic change, masterfully narrated by Domentian, is the analogy which he progressively draws throughout the *Life* between the hero and Moses. In Section 1, I have briefly discussed an indirect likening strategy whereby the desired effect is achieved by implication: Sava, who made Simeon’s relics flow with myrrh so as to satiate the “new Israel” – spiritual descendants of desert-wandering Hebrews –, was obviously assigned the role of the Biblical prophet. To be sure, though, this is no more than a snippet of a rich repertoire of literary devices feeding into the elaborate Sava – Moses parallel, which grows ever more conspicuous as the story unfolds.<sup>116</sup> Since we presently cannot hope to undertake a comprehensive analysis of this important typology, it will suffice to concentrate on the ultimate phase of its development, coinciding with the Saint’s last voyage to the East.

<sup>114</sup> J. Elsner, “The Viewer and the Vision: The Case of the Sinai Apse”, *Art History*, 17, 1994, 1, p. 88.

<sup>115</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 374-376; partly quoted after A. Sterk, *Renouncing the World...*, p. 236.

<sup>116</sup> Lj. Juhas-Georgievska, “Književno delo...”, p. LXXII-LXXXII.

This phase, as intimated in the above-cited passage, is marked by a significant turn in the relation between Sava and Moses, brought about by the former's Sinai epiphany. Prior to this momentous event, Sava is shown on various occasions modelling his actions after those of Moses, who became a veritable exemplar to the Serbian Archbishop; aside from his ritual movement at Sinai itself – a series of rather explicit mimetic references to the Hebrew leader's life – it would seem that even his journey towards the holy mountain had a strong Mosaic connotation: when a terrible storm threatened to sink the ship on which he and his companions were crossing the Mediterranean on their way to the Holy Land, God instructed Sava to raise his hand and appease the deadly waves, emulating the one who had once parted the Red Sea in much the same manner.<sup>117</sup> This dynamic, however, was altered at the peak of Mount Sinai: through a mystical union with Christ, facilitated by Sava's faculty of inner sight, the *imitator Moysis* well surpassed his role model, as is so often the case with Christian holy men and women following in the footsteps of Old Testament figures.<sup>118</sup> In the *Vita prima*, the fact that Moses was outdone by Sava is further stressed by a rhetorical shift from *exemplum* to *comparatio*.<sup>119</sup> Structured as a sequence of thirty brief comparisons affirming the superiority of the “second God-seer” over his Scriptural forebear, the ensuing chapter dwells on the immediacy of Sava's knowledge of the Divine: “[...] and having served the Lord on that hallowed ground, he celebrated the heavenly Father; he heard not the voice from within the flames [i.e. the Burning Bush], but the Giver of the voice himself, His true body and His pristine blood spilt for the life of the world [...]”.<sup>120</sup>

To equate the ramifications of the “new Moses” paradigm with the above consideration would, of course, be an oversimplification; for apart from speaking to God, the Prophet epitomised a broad spectrum of ideals which made him a favoured *persona imitabilis* in the Middle Ages. As Vincent Déroche has recently shown, Byzantine intellectuals developed a multifaceted image of

<sup>117</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 350-352; Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 182-185; D. Popović, “Čudotvorenja...”, p. 107-108.

<sup>118</sup> S. Marjanović-Dušanić, “Harizma i autoritet...”, p. 286. On the “topos of outdoing” (*Überbietungstopos*), see the still relevant E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by W. R. Trask, Princeton and Oxford, 2013, p. 162-165.

<sup>119</sup> According to C. Rapp, “Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography”, in M. Whitby (ed.), *The Propaganda of Power. The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, Leiden – Boston – Köln, 1998, p. 278-279, the *exemplum* or *paradeigma* “looks to the past in an effort to demonstrate that the subject adheres to and represents a specific tradition”, its purpose being to “emphasiz[e] continuity with the past”, while *comparatio* or *synkrisis* may be defined as a “detailed comparison of one person with another, which may result either in establishing equality between the two, or in asserting the superiority of one over the other”, thus demonstrating that “progress and movement are made manifest in the present”.

<sup>120</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 376-392, esp. 378.

Moses which served to express different sorts of authority, from monastic to imperial.<sup>121</sup> In theological writings – most notably those of the Great Cappadocians – Moses was held in especially high regard as the prototype of the bishop: often transgressing the divide between ecclesiastical and secular, church leaders in the East conveniently looked up to the Hebrew champion who wielded both kinds of power; as a matter of fact, in terms of Claudia Rapp’s trinary scheme, Moses is the perfect embodiment of spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic authority.<sup>122</sup> I believe much the same may be said about Sava in the context of his pilgrimage to Sinai. His theophany, a paramount sign of spiritual authority, cannot be deprived of its ascetic dimension: it was a reward for virtue attained through inner discipline and physical feats. Each Saturday, Theodosius contends, the Saint climbed to the summit, where he prayed and sang hymns throughout the night.<sup>123</sup> These prayers, as one might expect, were repeatedly uttered for the sake of Sava’s “children”:

[...] ever keeping vigil over the flock of his fatherland at the far reaches of the earth, the true shepherd [...] always thought to himself: ‘What and how and for what reason is this passage of mine from the West to the true East, and what is it that I gain thereof? Christ, the omnibenevolent Lord, [who is] the enlightenment of my fatherland and mine own, and the Saviour of my people’.<sup>124</sup>

At all times and wherever his wayfaring took him, the holy man worked in the interest of his compatriots. This principle was the source of his pragmatic authority, whose various facets were skilfully outlined in Domentian’s *comparatio*. Beacon of religious and political guidance, ecclesiastical reformer, lawgiver, diplomat, the bane of heretical teachings and upholder of Orthodoxy, Sava was a most worthy successor to Moses in practically all respects. Likewise, by virtue of his divinely ordained leadership, the Serbs were by no means lagging behind the Hebrews of old: “By the power of God, that great God-seer [Moses] had wrought many a miracle. By that same power, and indeed by the favour bestowed upon him by God, this most sanctified one [Sava] wrought the

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<sup>121</sup> V. Déroche, “Figures de Moïse à Byzance”, in D. Aigle and F. Briquel Chatonnet (eds.), *Figures de Moïse*, Paris, 2015, p. 201-217; see also C. Rapp, “Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses...”, p. 286-297. A similarly wide use of the “new Moses” theme is documented in medieval Serbian sources; charters, for example, reveal that sovereigns were likened to the Old Testament Prophet with the end of representing them as ideal warrior-rulers leading their countrymen into victory: see S. Marjanović-Dušanić, *Vladarska ideologija...*, p. 218-221; Ž. Vujošević, “National Leader, Warrior, Prophet. Moses in Medieval Serbian Charters”, *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde*, 55, 2009, p. 163-174.

<sup>122</sup> C. Rapp, *Holy Bishops...*, p. 125-136; A. Sterk, *Renouncing the World...*, *passim*.

<sup>123</sup> Teodosije, *Život...*, p. 193.

<sup>124</sup> Domentijan, *Žitije...*, p. 392.

very same miracles; inspired by God, this second Israel presented unto the Lord a new people”.<sup>125</sup>

## Conclusions

In the passage from Sava’s *Vita prima* which opened this essay, we read that the hero relinquished all things mundane for the third time “keeping the first and the second of God’s Commandments”. What the hagiographer hints at here are apparently the precepts of Christ attested to in the synoptic Gospels, those on which “hang all the law and the prophets”: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”.<sup>126</sup> The two injunctions seem to encapsulate both major points of our discussion on Sava’s peregrinations: on the one hand, his alienation from the world was prompted by the love of God, whom he had sought from youth in various “deserts” of the East; on the other hand, each and every one of his departures was in fact motivated by the welfare of the nation which he spearheaded for decades in concert with other members of his family. If conflicting at times, these two motives proved to be mutually compatible, for as he trod the arduous path of personal spiritual perfection, he also paved the way of collective deliverance for his countrymen. These intertwined processes were set in motion when the Saint decided to leave home and become a monk on Athos: through extraordinary ascetic practices he augmented his spiritual gift in order that he might “enlighten” the Nemanjić realm. This stage was marked by the foundation of Hilandar, a “true haven” and a “harbour of salvation” of Sava’s *patria*: perceived as a “new Zion”, it functioned as a vantage point for looking further East, towards Jerusalem. Undertaken during the final years of his life, Sava’s pilgrimages to the Holy Land and beyond ought to be appreciated as a continuation of the early Athonite years in spite (or precisely because) of the long hiatus; these two periods in effect signal the beginning and the end of his mission, which was to render the Serbs a “people prepared for the Lord”. The Archbishop’s first sojourn in the Holy City reached its apex with the establishment of the Monastery of St John the Theologian. Conceived of as a “seed” “planted” on Zion, it conveyed a powerful message, namely, that Sava ushered his compatriots into the Orthodox milieu of the most revered hearth of all of Christendom; in much the same way, Hilandar symbolised Serbian presence on Athos, which is precisely what Domentian has in mind when he says that Sava made “his children known to the dwellers of the Holy Mount”.

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 376.

<sup>126</sup> *Matt.* 22: 37–40. Cf. *Mark* 12: 30–31; *Luke* 10: 27.

Needless to say, Jerusalem and the rest of the *loca sancta* of Palestine provided our pious traveller immense spiritual gratification. The same holds true for his second pilgrimage, over the course of which he ventured much farther than the Holy Land, i.e., to Egypt and Sinai. From the perspective of this study at least, his visit to the Biblical peninsula is definitely one of the most significant moments of the entire *Vita*. What culminated with Sava's Sinai theophany was not just a sequence of profound religious experiences that he had undergone on his many journeys; more importantly, this episode brought to completion an intricate parallel with Moses, gradually constructed throughout the narrative and ultimately rounded off with a lengthy *comparatio* which asserted Sava's supremacy over the cherished Scriptural model. A "new Moses", Sava was envisaged as a paragon of virtue and a "second God-seer", but also as the intercessor between the Almighty and a latter-day "chosen people": fusing the notions of monarchy, fatherland, and community, the political-theological principle of divine election supplied the framework for constructing the identities of the "new Israel" and of their sanctified leaders from the house of Nemanjić. Thus, Sava's travels across the Eastern Mediterranean and visits to the Holy Places were physical manifestations of his quest for the "true East", i.e., for the realisation of God's providential plan for him and his "children".\*

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