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REFLECTION OF DAILY LIFE IN MEDIEVAL INSCRIPTIONS AND NOTES FROM SERBIA AND BOSNIA (12TH–16TH CENTURIES)

Aleksandar Krstić

Keywords: Medieval Serbia, Medieval Bosnia, inscriptions, marginalia, daily life.

Abstract

Inscriptions on buildings, wall paintings and tombstones, as well as marginal notes of copyists and readers of books are important sources for the study of daily life in Serbia and Bosnia in the Middle Ages. They contain information about the erection and painting of churches and monasteries, their founders, builders and painters, and sometimes about the reasons and circumstances in which these buildings were created. The tombstone inscriptions can offer basic information about deceased persons and their lives and often depict the beliefs, ethics and culture of the nobility. Records of copyists, translators and manuscript illuminators reveal both religious motives that led them to accept this endeavor, as well as various difficulties they faced in their work (from inadequate sources, poor quality writing material, to the difficult conditions in which they copied, translated and decorated books – cold, hunger, lack of sleep, sight problems, social disturbances and wars). Similar marginalia about the difficulties they encountered in everyday life, about illness, death or fear of the Turks were often left by the readers of these books, and empty pages or margins in the books were sometimes used to list someone's income and expenses, draft private contracts or record global and local news.

Researchers of the medieval past of Serbia and Bosnia face great challenges due to the relatively small number of preserved historical sources. This refers both to documents issued by the rulers' chancelleries and, to an even greater extent, to those arising from private law relations, as well as to other types of written sources, such as letters, and various narrative texts. The lack of sources is to some extent supplemented by archival material from the cities on the Adriatic coast, primarily Dubrovnik and Kotor, which refers to the relations of the rulers of Serbia and Bosnia with these communes and the business activities of their citizens in the medieval Serbian and Bosnian states.¹ It is understood that the image thus obtained is necessarily one-sided and distorted. The lack of sources makes it very difficult to research numerous topics that fall into the area of daily life in those territories. Therefore inscriptions on buildings, wall paintings and tombstones, as well as annotations

of copyists and readers of books are important sources for the study of daily life in Serbia and Bosnia in the Middle Ages. Most of these texts are in Old Church Slavonic or vernacular, written in Cyrillic alphabet. The systematic collection and publication of these two different types of sources started at the beginning of the 20th century and continues to this day.²

² Ljubomir Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi* (hereafter: *Zapisi i natpisi*), vol. I–VI, Beograd: Srpska kraljevska akademija [hereafter: SKA] (1902–1926), reprinted: 1982–1988; Svetozar Matić, *Opis rukopisa Narodne biblioteke*, Beograd (1952); Marko Vego, *Zbornik srednjovekovnih natpisa Bosne i Hercegovine*, vol. I–IV, Sarajevo (1962–1970); Gordana Tomović, *Morfologija ćirilčkih natpisa na Balkanu*, Beograd (1974); Rade Mihaljčić – Ludwig Steindorff, *Namentragende Steininschriften in Jugoslawien vom Ende des 7. bis zur Mitte des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden (1982), reprinted as Rade Mihaljčić, *Imena na kamenu. Ranosrednjovekovni natpisi na teritoriji Jugoslavije*, in *idem, Izvorna vrednost stare srpske građe*, Beograd (2001), 106–326; Vojislav Đurić-Anna Tsifou-Athanasios Furlas-Ludwig Steindorff, *Namentragende Inschriften auf Fresken und Mosaiken auf Balkanhalbinsel vom 7. bis zum 13. Jahrhunderts* (Wiesbaden – Stuttgart (1986); Milan Ivanović, *Ćirilski epigrafski spomenici iz Srbije, Crne Gore i Makedonije (odlivi)*, Beograd (1984); Ljubica Štavljanin-Đorđević, Miroslava Grozdanović-Pajić, Lucija Cernić, *Opis ćirilskih rukopisa Narodne biblioteke Srbije*, vol. I, Beograd (1986); Petar Momirović, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi iz Vojvodine*, vol.

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¹ Đorđe Bubalo, *Pisana reč u srpskom srednjem veku. Značaj i upotreba pisanih dokumenata u srednjovekovnom srpskom društvu*, Beograd (2009), 27–66; *idem, Pragmatic Literacy in Medieval Serbia*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 29, Turnhout (2014), 45–86.

The inscriptions contain information about the erection and painting of churches and monasteries, their founders, builders and painters, and sometimes about the reasons and circumstances in which these buildings were created.³ Among the numerous inscriptions on churches and monasteries erected by Serbian rulers of the Nemanjić dynasty from the 12th to the second half of the 14th centuries, which commemorate their piety and royal power,⁴ those on the church of the Most Holy Mother of God (Bogorodica Ljeviška) in the city of Prizren in Kosovo and Metohija are in particular relevant for our topic. King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282–1321) rebuilt this church, the cathedral of the bishops of Prizren, about which he left a very nice inscription on the apse of the church, carved in bricks in 1307.⁵ The second royal inscription on this church, made in fresco technique above the entrance to the outer narthex, is especially interesting, and from it we learn that alms were given to the poor and powerless. The king prescribed that on certain days, both during winter and summer, four buckets of flour should be distributed per

I–V, Novi Sad (1993–2001); Brankica Čigoja, *Najstariji srpski ćirilski natpisi (grafija, ortografija i jezik)*, Beograd (1994); Božidar Šekularac, *Tragovi prošlosti Crne Gore. Srednjovjekovni zapisi i natpisi u Crnoj Gori (kraj VIII – početak XVI vijeka)*, Cetinje (1994); Vladimir Ćorović, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, ed. Rade Mihaljčić, Beograd (1997); Šefik Bešliagić, *Ćirilčki epigrafski spomenici srednjovjekovne Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo (2015); Gojko Subotić-Bojan Miljković-Irena Špadijer-Ida Tot, *Natpisi istorijske sadržine u zidnom slikarstvu*, vol. I (XII–XIII vek), Beograd (2015); a new specialized journal has recently started to be published in Belgrade – *Natpisi i zapisi*, vol. 1–7 (2015–2021). Of the Bulgarian editions of inscriptions and marginalia relevant to our topic, it should be mentioned: Ćordan Ivanov, *Bŭlgarski starini iz Makedonija*, Sofia (1970) (reprint of the 1931 edition); Ventseslav Nachev – Nikola Fermandzhiev, *Pisahme da se znae: Pripiski i letopisi*, Sofia (1984); Boriana Hristova – Darinka Karadzova – Elena Uzunova, *Belezhki na Bŭlgarskite knizhovnitsi X–XVII vek*, vol. I: X–XV vek, Sofia (2013).

³ Rade Mihaljčić, *Izvorna vrednost zapisa i natpisa*, in idem, *Izvorna vrednost stare srpske građe*, Sabrana dela, vol. V, Beograd (2001), 98–102; idem, *Natpisi*. Sima Ćirković – Rade Mihaljčić (eds.), *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, Beograd (1999), 436–438; Đorđe Trifunović, *Azbučnik srpskih srednjovekovnih književnih pojmova*, Beograd (1990²), 198–191, where previous literature about these sources is also listed.

⁴ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 37, 43, 46–47, 50–51, 54; Subotić et al., *Natpisi istorijske sadržine*, 36–37, 57, 94–95.

⁵ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 44–45; Aleksandra Davidov Temerinski, *Church of the Holy Virgin Ljeviška in Prizren*, Belgrade (2017), 11–13, 21–39. Slobodan Ćurčić, “Renewed from the Very Foundations”: The Question of the Genesis of the Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren. Judson Emerick-Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis (eds.), *Archaeology in Architecture: Studies in Honor of Cecil L. Striker*, Mainz am Rhein (2005), 23–35.

month, two of wheat and two of mixed cereals. The buckets of flour should be of the same measure as those given to the protomasters Nikola and Astrapa, while the church was being built and decorated with frescoes. In addition to the flour, wine was also distributed to the poor and powerless in front of the church – one tub every month, the same amount as previously given to the mentioned protomasters, while one bucket of salt was distributed every two months.⁶

In addition to the rulers, the nobility and church dignitaries also erected their endowments in the Nemanjićs' state. The inscription on the tomb of Bishop Joanikije (c. 1346–1355) in the church of St. Athanasius above the village of Lešak in the area of Polog near Tetovo (North Macedonia) says that the deceased, who had previously been a hieromonk named Antonije, came to the place, cut and planted out the thicket and levelled the hills and began to build the church in the time of King Milutin (1282–1321). The inscription then talks about the proclamation of the Serbian Empire and Patriarchate (1345/1346) and how Antonije was appointed the first bishop of Polog, when his name was changed to Joanikije.⁷ Preserved inscriptions on the endowments of the nobility of this period, carved in stone or written on frescoes, in addition to dedications to patron saints, mostly contain the titles and names of the founders and members of their families, mentions of the ruler and the date of construction or painting of the church.⁸ Rarely,

⁶ Draga Panić-Gordana Babić, *Bogorodica Ljeviška*, Beograd-Priština (1988²), 22–27; Branislav Živković, *Bogorodica Ljeviška. Crteži fresaka*, Beograd (1991); Davidov Temerinski, *Church of the Holy Virgin Ljeviška*, 13–14, 70, 74–77. Painter Michael Astrapas from Thessaloniki was the famous artist of Milutin's time, who decorated with frescoes several churches for this Serbian ruler, known for his numerous pious foundations. See Branislav Todić, *Srpsko slikarstvo u doba kralja Milutina*, Beograd (1998), 228–262; idem, Astrapa Mihailo. *Srpski biografski rečnik* (hereafter: *SBR*), vol. I, ed. Čedomir Popov, Novi Sad (2004), 291, were the previous literature on this artist is listed. Less is known about protomaster Nikola, who was the architect of the Bogorodica Ljeviška, cf. Branislav Todić, Činjenice i pretpostavke o protomajstoru Georgiju iz Dečana. *Saopštenja* 48 (2016), 120–121; Branka Gugolj, Nikola, graditelj. *SBR*, vol. VII (2018), 346. The church of Bogorodica Ljeviška was burned and its fresco paintings were heavily damaged during the anti-Serbian riots on March 17, 2004, Davidov Temerinski, *op. cit.*, 16–17.

⁷ Radoslav Grujić, Pološko-tetovska eparhija i manastir Lešak. *Glasnik Skopskog naučnog društva* 12 (1933), 60–62; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 65–66; Marija Janković, *Episkopije i mitropolije srpske crkve u srednjem veku*, Beograd (1985), 71, 61; Sava Vuković, *Srpski jerarsi od devetog do dvadesetog veka*, Beograd-Podgorica-Kragujevac (1996), 232.

⁸ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 48, 55, 63; Ivan Đorđević, *Zidno*

the inscriptions also mention the areas that the *ktetors* governed⁹ or the possessions that they donated to their endowment.¹⁰ As a testimony of the piety of the *ktetors*, some inscriptions also contain their prayers addressed to God, the Mother of God or to the holy patrons of the temple. Although very valuable, sometimes the only sources about the personalities of the founders and their families, these inscriptions do not contain much information concerning the sphere of daily life. For the sake of illustration, we will mention the founder's inscription of nobleman Dragoslav Tutić in the small church of St. Nicholas in Prizren from 1332. We learn from it that Dragoslav, who became a monk under the name Nikola, built a church together with his wife Bela because they had no descendants. He donated to the church the land he had in Prizren, a house, a vineyard and two black mulberry trees that were located near this temple.¹¹

In Bosnia, at the time of Ban Kulin (1180–1204), judge Gradeša built the church of St. George near present-day town of Zenica, about which we are informed by an inscription on a stone pillar. One can read that Gradeša was buried in his endowment, and that his wife expressed a desire to be laid beside him. The monument was erected by a certain Draže Ohmućanin, and the inscription was compiled by a priest whose name, due to the damaged inscription, can be transcribed differently.¹²

slikarstvo srpske vlastele u doba Nemanjića, Beograd (1994), 131–132, 135, 136, 138, 140–141, 143, 145, 148, 150, 163, 164, 167–168, 177, 178, 188.

⁹ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 56, 62.

¹⁰ Two inscriptions on the stone lintels above the western and southern entrances to the church of the Lesnovo monastery in north-eastern Macedonia lists the possessions which Grand Duke Jovan Oliver donated to his endowment with their precisely stated boundaries (1341). Although partially damaged, the inscriptions are significant because the founding charter has not been preserved. In the church itself, on the fresco next to the founder's portrait of Despot Jovan Oliver, there is a somewhat later inscription, which testifies to his progress in the state hierarchy – Gordana Tomović, *Povelja manastira Lesnova. Istorijski časopis* 24 (1977), 83–101; Smiljka Gabelić, *Manastir Lesnovo: istorija i slikarstvo*, Beograd (1998), 27–38, 112–118, 167–172; Đorđević, *Zidno slikarstvo*, 153–157, 272; Branislav Todić, *Natpis uz Jovana Olivera u naosu Lesnova. Prilog hronologiji lesnovskih fresaka, Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* (hereafter: ZRVI) 38 (1999–2000), 373–384; Đorđe Bubalo, *Jovan Oliver, SBR*, vol. IV (2009), 437–438.

¹¹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 27–28, nr. 60; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 52–53; Janko Radovanović, *Tutićeva crkva Sv. Nikole u Prizrenu*, in *idem, Ikonografska istraživanja srpskog slikarstva XIII i XIV veka*, Beograd (1988), 111–115; Đorđević, *Zidno slikarstvo*, 134. This church was also burned and heavily damaged in March 2004.

¹² Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. IV, 66–67; Tomović, *Morfologija*,

Tombstones with inscriptions, and sometimes with relief depictions are also very important for the study of everyday life in the Middle Ages. They sometimes contain basic information about deceased persons from higher social strata and their lives, and often depict the beliefs, ethics and culture of the nobility. This is largely true for a specific type of tombstones, often called “stećci”, characteristic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also of Croatia, Montenegro and western Serbia.¹³ Sometimes the tombstone inscriptions are the only testimonies we have about buried persons.

For example, the inscription carved on a tombstone near Trebinje during the first decades of the 15th century reads: “Here lies Župan Medulin. I never had much, and I lacked nothing, but I was giving.”¹⁴ On the tombstone of Bogdan Hateljević in Dabro Polje in Herzegovina, erected between 1398 and 1404, one can read that he was a “servant”, i.e. a familiar of Voivode Radič (Sanković) and that he was “born in a good hour in Dabar; he did the right things in the company and died faithfully serving his master.” The tombstone was erected by his sons.¹⁵ There are interesting inscriptions on two stećak tombstones in the necropolis in Lađevine near Rogatica in Bosnia. In the first of them, Vlatko Vladević, who died between 1399 and 1407, and who was in the service of one of the most powerful Bosnian magnates of that time, Knez Pavle Radenović, speaks in the first person how (during his life) he did not beg any man, and he visited many countries, and died at home. He left no son or brother. Vlatko's familiar Voivode Mitoš, who served his master “with God's help and by the grace of Knez Pavle”, “cut a stone” above his tomb.¹⁶ This commemorative inscrip-

35–36; Čigoja, *Najstariji natpisi*, 22–24; Mihaljčić, *Imena na kamenu*, 267–271; Bešlagić, *Ćirilčki epigrafski spomenici*, 98–106.

¹³ Unfortunately, out of about 70,000 preserved *stećci* tombstones, only 386 have inscriptions, Šefik Bešlagić, *Stećci. Katalosko topografski pregled*, Sarajevo (1971); *idem, Stećci – kultura i umjetnost*, Sarajevo (1982); *idem, Leksikon stećaka*, Sarajevo (2004); Jelena Erdeljan, *Stećci – pogled na ikonografiju narodne pogrebne umetnosti na Balkanu. Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti* 32–33 (2003), 107–119.

¹⁴ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. II, 59, nr. 115; vol. IV, 170.

¹⁵ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. II, 40–41; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 91–92; Jovanka Mijušković, *Humaska vlasteoska porodica Sankovići. Istorijski časopis* 11 (1960) [1961], 40, reprinted in Jovanka Kalić, *Evropa i Srbi: srednji vek*, Beograd (2006), 272; Siniša Mišić, *Humaska zemlja u srednjem veku*, Beograd (1996), 35, 118, Đuro Tošić, *Srednjovjekovna humska župa Dabar*, Beograd (2005), 22, 36, 84–86.

¹⁶ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. IV, 32–33; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 97–98; Mihailo Dinić, *Dukin prevodilac o boju na Kosovu*.

tion, carved on three sides of the stone block, can only be read in a mirror. It is assumed that the illiterate stonemason received the text of the inscription written in ink that passed on the other side of the paper, so he mistakenly copied the letters on the reverse side. It is quite probable that the person who ordered the inscription, Voivode Miotoš, was not literate either.¹⁷ He was buried with his son Stepan “at the feet” of his master Vlatko Vladević, as it is said in the inscription on the tombstone of Miotoš, where the narration is also in the first person. Miotoš ends his inscription with a short review of himself, which reads: “Much has been done on earth by my hand, and I did not (suffer) from any (hand). And no one has been dead; I didn’t want to kill anyone”.¹⁸

The tombstone of Knez Pokrajac Oliverović, who was in the service of another great Bosnian magnate from the first third of the 15th century, Duke Sandalj Hranić Kosača (1392–1435), gives a picture of a proud nobleman. The deceased says: “Brethren and noblemen, I, Pokrajac, servant to my master, have fulfilled my commitment. With God’s help, I was able to entertain my master and my friend. In doing this good, death reached me and saddened my home.”¹⁹ While Pokrajac Oliverović died a natural death between 1422 and 1435, another familiar of Duke Sandalj Hranić, Radonja Ratković, died under the Ključ fortress for his master, as the inscription on his tombstone in Ključ near Gacko in Herzegovina informs us. Duke Sandalj captured that area in 1404, but it is not known when and in which circumstances Radonja

Ratković died.²⁰ On the tombstone inscription by the village of Kopošić near Sarajevo we read that Batić, who was the Bosnian *knez* “by the grace of God and the glorious King Tvrtko (II)”, lies at that place on his land. The following words about Batić’s illness and death suggest that the compilers of the inscription were aware of certain symbolism in the topography of the last days of the deceased’s life: “I fell ill in Visoko and the (death) day came to me in Duboko.” Namely, Visoko (literally “high place”) was a fortified medieval town in central Bosnia with a royal residence, and Duboko (“deep place”) was probably the eponymous stretch of land northeast of Kopošić. The tombstone was erected by his wife Lady Vukava, who “faithfully served me alive and subserved me dead.” Knez Batić Mirković died between 1420 and 1428.²¹

In addition to the inscriptions on the tombstones of men, several inscriptions on the graves of women of higher social strata from the territory of medieval Serbia and Bosnia have also been preserved. In accordance with the understanding of the traditional role of a woman in a patriarchal society, they primarily emphasize the family relationships of the deceased and have very few information about her life. For example, the tombstone inscription from the narthex of the monastery of Visoki Dečani reads that Marina Vitoslava, who died on April 1, 1374, was the daughter of Uglješa Nenadić, the niece of Despot Oliver and the wife of Branko Pećpal.²² Nun Polihranja, whose laic name was Lady Radača, was buried in the necropolis of the village of Veličani in Herzegovina between 1383 and 1391. The inscription on her tombstone reads that she was the wife of Župan Nenac Čihorić, the sister-in-law of Župan Vratko,

ZRVI 8 (1964), 57–59; Nada Miletić, Neke karakteristike stećaka Zemlje Pavlovića. Milan Vasić (ed.), *Zemlja Pavlovića: srednji vijek i period turske vladavine*, Banja Luka – Srpsko Sarajevo (2003), 466; Esad Kurtović, Historijska kontekstualizacija stećaka. *Godišnjak BZK Preporod* 15 (2015), 448–449. On Knez Pavle Radenović and his territory, see Jovan Radonić, O knezu Pavlu Radenoviću. Priložak istoriji Bosne krajem XIV i početkom XV veka, *Letopis Matice srpske* 211 (1902), 39–63, and the articles of Sima Ćirković, Miloš Blagojević, Peter Rokai, Dragi Maliković, Marica Malović Đukić, Đuro Tošić and other authors in the mentioned volume *Zemlja Pavlovića*.

¹⁷ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 97; Daniel Bunčić, Linksläufige kyrillische Schrift bei den Bogumilen? Anna-Maria Meyer – Ljiljana Reinkowski (eds.), *Im Rhythmus der Linguistik. Festschrift für Sebastian Kempgen zum 65. Geburtstag*, Bamberg (2017), 116–124, 128–129.

¹⁸ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. IV, 30–31; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 98–99.

¹⁹ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. II, 60–61; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 102; E. Kurtović, Inscription on the Stećak of Prince Pokrajac Oliverović from Vrhpolje. The Issue of setting the Date of Origin, *Baština* 1 (2005), Sarajevo (2007), 371–381.

²⁰ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. III, 32–33; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 96; Kalić, *Evropa i Srbi*, 282; Esad Kurtović, *Veliki vojvoda bosanski Sandalj Hranić Kosača*, Sarajevo (2009), 127–128, 130–131, 134–135, 456.

²¹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 74, nr. 231; Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. IV, 56–57; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 103; Srđan Rudić, *Bosanska vlastela u XV veku. Prosopografska studija*, Beograd-Banja Luka (2021), 116–118, where the previous literature about Knez Batić and his tombstone is also listed.

²² Another member of the Pećpal family, Đurađ Ostouša who became the monk named Jefrem, was also buried in the narthex of the Dečani monastery in 1377, Tomović, *Morfologija*, 80–81; Danica Popović, Srednjovekovni nadgrobni spomenici u Dečanima. Vojislav J. Đurić (ed.), *Dečani i vizantijska umetnost sredinom XIV veka*, Beograd (1989), 232–234; Dragan Vojvodić, Portreti vladara, crkvenih dostojanstvenika i plemića u naosu i priprati. Vojislav J. Đurić (ed.), *Zidno slikarstvo manastira Dečana: građa i studije*, Beograd (1995), 282–284; Đorđević, *Zidno slikarstvo*, 151–152; Todić, Činjenice i pretpostavke, 131.

Sluga Dabiživ and Tepčija Stipko, the daughter of Župan Milten Draživojević and the sister of Kaznac Sanko. The tombstone was erected by her son Dabiživ and his men in the time of Bosnian King Tvrtko I.²³

Some tombstones inscriptions record sudden deaths by accident. The inscription on the grave of Nikola, the son of previously mentioned Vratko Čihorić near the church of St. Nicholas in Kuršumlija in Serbia, says that the deceased drowned in the Nišava River on July 5, 1349.²⁴ The inscription has a wider significance, because it is one of the few preserved sources that directly or indirectly testify that the city of Niš and its surroundings were under the rule of Emperor Stefan Dušan.²⁵ A tombstone inscription on a stone cross in Đedići near Trebinje in Herzegovina from the 15th century testifies of a somewhat bizarre situation – the unfortunate deceased Radoje Mrkšić stopped to pray to God, but died of a thunderbolt.²⁶ The tombstone inscriptions, especially in medieval Bosnia, often contain variations of the *topos* “I was like you, and you will be like me” which was widely spread in the Middle Ages in its Latin and other forms (like *Sic come tu se, ego fui; Sicut ego sum, tu devi essere*, etc.).²⁷

²³ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. II, 48–49; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 85–86; Bešlagić, *Ćirilčki epigrafski spomenici*, 122–130; Constantin Jireček, *Die Edelleute von Hum auf der Inschrift in Veličani. Wissenschaftliche Mittheilungen aus Bosnien und Herzegovina*, vol. III, Wien (1895), 474–480; Kalić, *Evropa i Srbi*, 248–266, 287; Arandel Smiljanić, *Pismo Dabiživa Čihorića Dubrovčanima [1384]. Građa o prošlosti Bosne 2* (2009), 48–51; Azra Begović, *Kult posmrtnih memorija: epitafi na stećcima. Pro tempore. Časopis studenata povijesti (Zagreb)* 13 (2018), 52–53; Rudić, *Bosanska vlastela*, 120–121. About the titles and offices of župan (the representative of local government), *sluga* (the cupbearer), *tepčija* (in charge of royal estates) and *kaznac* (in charge of collecting royal revenues), see Miloš Blagojević, *Državna uprava u srpskim srednjovekovnim zemljama*, Beograd (1997), 17–55; *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, 197–198, 268, 674–675, 728.

²⁴ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 62–63. Župan Vratko Čihorić belonged to the noble family which had possessions in Popovo polje in Herzegovina. He and his brothers were in the service of Stefan Dušan and his son Emperor Uroš, Siniša Mišić, Vratko Čihorić/Drugović, župan. *SBR*, vol. II (2006), 320. See the previous note.

²⁵ Jovanka Kalić, Niš u srednjem veku. *Istorijski časopis* 31 (1984), 29, reprinted in: eadem, *Evropa i Srbi*, 396–397. The Bulgarian historiography mainly considers that the entire Nišava valley remained under Bulgarian rule during that period, cf. Ivan Božilov – Vasil Gjuzelev, *Istoriia na sred-novekovna Bălgariia VII–XIV vek*, *Istoriia na Bălgariia v tri toma*, vol. I, Sofia (1999), 586, 614.

²⁶ Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. II, 60–61, nr. 118; Mihaljčić, *Izvorna vrednost*, 102.

²⁷ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 46, 48, nr. 141, 151,

A unique memorial in Serbia from the first half of the 15th century should also be mentioned. At the place where Despot Stefan Lazarević died suddenly of a heart attack or a stroke during a hunt, on July 19, 1427, his nobleman Đurađ Zubrović erected a monument. This stone obelisk located near the church in the village of Markovac south of Belgrade has a total of five inscriptions. In the main inscription, the late Despot Stefan with an extensive title and in the first person, solemnly and piously, briefly talks about his thirty-eight-year reign, and then about his death: “Thus came the order from everybody’s Emperor and God and the angel sent to me said: ‘Go’ and so my soul departed my poor body.” Unlike this inscription of a restrained and dignified tone, on the sides of the monument Đurađ Zubrović and priest Vukša, who participated in compiling or carving of the inscription, strongly and directly express grief for their master: “God blessed Lord Stefan, good Lord and very good and dear and sweet Lord Despot, poor is the one who saw him dead at this site!”²⁸

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Colophons of copyists, translators and illuminators of manuscripts reveal strong religious motives that led them to accept such an endeavor. It is often pointed out that it is a spiritually useful and God-pleasing task for writers, transcribers or translators, as well as for readers, who will ensure the salvation by transcribing and reading the Bible, liturgical books and other Christian literature.²⁹ Usually, the names of the purchasers of these books, whether ecclesiastical or secular, are mentioned in these annotations.³⁰ Monastically modest, the scribes did not leave much information about themselves and their origins. For example, monk Simeon finished his transcription of

vol. IV, 16, nr. 6073; Vego, *Zbornik*, vol. I, 12–13, 48–49; vol. II, 32–33; vol. III, 18–19, 22–23; vol. IV, 10–11, 38–39, 68–69, 96–97; Tomović, *Morfologija*, 79, 95; Čigoja, *Najstariji srpski ćirilski natpisi*, 109–111; Vladimir Ćorović, Utjecaj i odnošaj između starih grčkih i srpskih zapisa i natpisa. *Glas SKA LXXXIV–50* (1910), 51–52; idem, *Uzajamne veze i uticaji kod starih slovenskih zapisa. Glas SKA CLXXVI–90* (1938), 168–169; Mihaljčić, *Izvorna vrednost*, 104.

²⁸ Tomović, *Morfologija*, 105–108; Biljana Mišić, *Spomenik na mestu smrti despota Stefana Lazarevića. Monument at the place of death of Despot Stefan Lazarević*, Beograd (2008), 1–9; Miodrag Al. Purković, *Knez i despot Stefan Lazarević*, Beograd (1978), 134; Jovanka Kalić, *Srbi u poznom srednjem veku*, Beograd (2001), 114.

²⁹ Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 29–34; Trifunović, *Azbučnik*, 81–82; Mihaljčić, *Izvorna vrednost*, 92–93.

³⁰ Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 6–9.

the Evangelary in 1202, when Vukan Nemanjić temporarily took over the Serbian throne from his brother Great Župan Stefan. In his record on the last 189 sheet of the manuscript, Simeon erased the part of original text, certainly dedicated to the former ruler, whose name was replaced with Vukan's name in two other places in the note. As a result, the modified text glorifies the new Great župan and his nobility.³¹ In the first part of the colophon, in addition to several biblical quotations, Simeon also said something about himself. Thus, we learn that this old man at one time left his feeble mother, brothers and sisters and other relatives and came to the monastery, which is why he was exposed to criticism, slander and condemnation.³² In the end, he withdrew from the monastery and, as a hermit in a cave near the town of Ras (nowadays Novi Pazar), he copied and illuminated the so-called "Vukan's Gospel", one of the oldest and the most valuable preserved Serbian Cyrillic manuscripts.³³

The scribes often pray for their loved ones and for the purchasers of the manuscripts.³⁴ For example, in a book written in Skopje in 1313, at a time when the military detachments of King Milutin as Byzantine allies successfully fought against the Turks, the copyist says: "May God mention my parents who raised me and my teacher, and God forgive priest Grd, this book was written for him. Forgive God and me, the sinful priest Nikola".³⁵

³¹ Đorđe Trifunović, *Zapis starca Simeona u Vukanovom jevandlju. Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 67 (2001), 71–76, 79–80 (reprinted in idem, *Sa svetogorskih izvora* Beograd [2004], 65–87); Ivana Komatina, *Crkva i država u srpskim zemljama od XI do XIII veka*, Beograd (2016), 251–252; cf. Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić, *Zapis starca Simeona na „Vukanovom“ jevandlju. Starinar* 43–44 (1992–1993), 201–210. On the conflict between Vukan and Stefan Nemanjić, see also *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. I, ed. Sima Ćirković, Beograd (1981), 266–270; Đorđe Bubalo, *Srpska zemlja i pomorska u doba vladavine Nemanjića*, vol. I, Beograd (2016), 84–86.

³² Trifunović, *Zapis starca Simeona*, 77–78, 82–84; Vladimir Aleksić, Taking care of parents in medieval Serbian countries. *Crkvene studije* 9 (2012), 284–285.

³³ The photo-type edition of the manuscript, which is kept in the Russian National Library in Sankt Petersburg, Josip Vrana, *Vukanovo jevandlje*, Beograd (1967). The manuscript is now digitalized and available at <https://nlr.ru/manuscripts/RA1527/elektronnyiy-katalog?prm=B6787682-05A5-4EFE-A251-2FBBFF954930>. There were several scribes who wrote the first, smaller part (sheets 1–29) of this manuscript before Simeon, cf. Vrana, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 12–22; Mitar Pešikan, *Koliko je pisara pisalo Vukanovo jevandlje? Južnoslovenski filolog* 35 (1979), 147–149.

³⁴ Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 34, 36–37.

³⁵ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 19, nr. 43.

The transcribers and translators often referred to the various difficulties they faced in their work. They complained about inadequate sources from which they copied and translated texts, corrupted by constant copying or by insufficient knowledge of the original language, most often Greek. Thus, for example, a priest named Panareg in a record from 1424 says that he copied a book from a Serbian source, but when he compared it with the original text in Greek, he saw that the translation was not good. He began to erase one part and write another in an effort to modify the Serbian text according to the Greek original. Panareg put a lot of effort, but in the end he was not satisfied with the result, because "no one can turn the Sun into the Moon, nor the Moon into the Sun".³⁶ Jakov and Joanikije, the monks of the Serbian monastery in Jerusalem, had numerous problems translating a liturgical book from Bulgarian into Serbian in 1374.³⁷ Therefore, as well as due to the manner of showing Christian modesty and unworthiness, the scribes often end their colophons with words addressed to future readers: "correct and bless and do not curse,³⁸ and God will do the same to you, because this was not written by the Holy Spirit, but by a sinful and unworthy hand", and similar, asking the reader to pray for the copyist and the salvation of his soul. Such and similar messages and petitions are found in numerous Greek, Slavic and Romanian texts.³⁹

The problems the scribes faced were the poor quality of writing material, but also the difficult conditions in which they transcribed, translated and decorated books. A scribe in the late 13th or early 14th century complained: "How sad I am, an evil pen, and bad parchment!"⁴⁰ At about the same

³⁶ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 75, nr. 235.

³⁷ Like many other scribes, they cursed anyone who dared to alienate the manuscript from the Jerusalem monastery of the Holy Archangels or to cut or tear the sheet with their record, Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 41; Vidosava Nedomački, *Manastir arhandela Mihaila i Gavrila u Jeruslimu – zadužbina kralja Milutina. Zbornik Matice srpske za likovne umetnosti* 16 (1980), 45–46.

³⁸ Cf. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* 12:14.

³⁹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 6, 15, 19, 21, 24, 31, 37, 41, *passim*; vol. II, 404, *passim*; vol. III, 141, *passim*; vol. IV, 14, *passim*; vol. VI, 95, nr. 10027; Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 16–29, 45–47; idem, *Uzajamne veze*, 130–145; Trifunović, *Azbučnik*, 81–82; Mihaljičić, *Izborna vrednost*, 93; Kristina Nikolovska, "When the living envied the dead": Church Slavonic Paratexts and the Apocalyptic Framework of Monk Isaija's Colophon (1371). Giovanni Ciotti – Hang Lin (eds.), *Tracing Manuscripts in Time and Space through Paratexts*, Berlin – Boston (2016), 189, 194–195.

⁴⁰ Đorđe Sp. Radojičić, *Razvojni luk stare srpske književnosti. Tekstovi i komentari*, Novi Sad (1962), 90.

time, the scribe named Bogoje complains that his parchment absorbs too much ink and dries out due to the wind, which is why it was hard to write.⁴¹ In addition to the difficulty and extensiveness of the work they accepted, the scribes had problems with cold, lack of food and sleep and bad eyesight. A certain Ravul, who transcribed the Gospel on parchment in Sirinička župa near Prizren, on the slopes of Šara mountain at the time of King Vukašin Mrnjavčević (1365–1371), left several short notes on different pages in that manuscript. In two places, he noticed that he fell asleep, in the third he complained of a headache; in the fourth he was very sad, because they did not even have millet, let alone wheat.⁴² Hieromonk Mihailo, who also transcribed books during King Vukašin's rule in the area of Polog in western Macedonia, notices: "I wrote again in winter, and in summer every work is better".⁴³ Another scribe complains that he wrote in the dusk, why he was dissatisfied with the sheet on which he left his note.⁴⁴ Somewhat later, at the time of Prince Lazar, priest Nikola apologized to the readers for possible mistakes in copying, because he wrote very indisposed, sitting in the dungeon in the Koznik fortress, hungry and thirsty and in the cold. At the end of his colophon, priest Nikola prayed to God for the Orthodox rulers and Prince Lazar, "to subdue all foreign nations to him". It seems that this record was made on the eve of the decisive battle of Prince Lazar with the Ottomans in Kosovo in 1389.⁴⁵

Sometimes the scribes and decorators of the manuscripts were dissatisfied with the inadequate treatment of the books' purchasers. Thus, scribe Gligorije, who decorated the gospel for Prince Miroslav of Hum, the brother of Serbian Great Župan Stefan Nemanja in the late 12th century, left two marginal annotations on the last pages of

⁴¹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. II, 404, nr. 4175.

⁴² Although it is not known what year he wrote, his notes show that it was in the spring (May) and summer. On July 22, Ravul recorded that the king arrested certain Taban and took away his sheep, wherefore he wrote to a *lagator* (military commander) in Sirinić. The next day, Ravul noticed that a person named Kovelica died – Đorđe Sp. Radojičić, Beleški na „grešniot“ Ravul od vremeto na kral Volkašin (1365–1371). *Glasnik na Institutot za nacionalna istorija*, 10 (1966), 165–170; idem, *Književna zbivanja i stvaranja kod Srba u srednjem veku i u tursko doba*, Novi Sad (1967), 142–144; Bubalo, *Pisana reč u srpskom srednjem veku*, 220–221, 233; idem, *Pragmatic Literacy*, 292–293. Cf. Srđan Rajković, *Lagator. Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, 359–360.

⁴³ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. IV, 14, nr. 6054.

⁴⁴ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. VI, 2, nr. 9334.

⁴⁵ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. II, 410, nr. 4226; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 126; Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 55.

this oldest and most valuable Serbian manuscript. From these notes, it can be seen that the illuminator was not satisfied with his position with Prince Miroslav, whom he blamed for not taking care of him, and he prayed to God to be at the mercy of his master.⁴⁶ An anonymous scribe from Bosnia left a message in a Gospel manuscript around 1375: "The most venerable Ratko, let me have lunch, I am hungry, poor me". Ratko was probably a dignitary of the heterodox Bosnian church, who ordered the manuscript.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the copyists, translators and illuminators often expressed their gratitude to those who helped them in their work in some way, and made the hard days and nights of copying and decorating books easier for them. Around 1300, a scribe records in the Evangelary manuscript: "May God forgive master Rade because he made me boards for books, and Dragan's mother because she spun my strings for books, and the priest's wife Uteha, because she washed my clothes, and the whole Christian world. May God forgive those who taught me."⁴⁸ In 1350, another scribe invoked God's blessing on several people from his environment, among them the blacksmith Rajko, who forged an awl for sewing books and a "haraksalo", a tool used to trace the lines of a manuscript.⁴⁹

In another manuscript, transcribed in the area of Poreč in western Macedonia during the rule of King Marko Kraljević (1371–1395), there are several interesting marginalia. In one, the transcriber named Dobre, states that he wrote the book during a marriage affair of King Marko,⁵⁰ and asks

⁴⁶ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 3, nr. 4–6; *Miroslavljevo jevanđelje: fototipsko izdanje*, Beograd (1998), 358–360. The digitalized version of Miroslav's Gospel is available at https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwld.wdl_02363/?st=gallery. Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 152; Jovanka Maksimović, *Srpske srednjovekovne minijature*, Beograd (1983), 17–23, 87–88; Dušan Mrdenović – Veljko Topalović – Vera Radosavljević, *Miroslavljevo jevanđelje: istorijat i komentari*, Beograd (2002), 7–10; Đorđe Trifunović, Grigorije Dijak. *SBR*, vol. II (2006), 810.

⁴⁷ Radoslav Grujić, *Jedno jevanđelje bosanskog tipa XIV–XV veka u južnoj Srbiji. Zbornik lingvističkih i filoloških rasprava u čast Aleksandra Belića*, Beograd (1937), 263–277; Đorđe Trifunović, *Iz tmine pojanje. Stari srpski pesnički zapisi*, Beograd (1962), 76, 205; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 126–127; Dragoljub Dragojlović, *Istorija srpske književnosti u srednjovekovnoj bosanskoj državi*, Novi Sad (1997), 60–61, 100.

⁴⁸ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 16, nr. 35; Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 139.

⁴⁹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 37, nr. 98; Irena Špadijer, Život sa knjigom. Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić – Danica Popović (eds.), *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama srednjeg veka*, Beograd (2004), 449–454.

⁵⁰ According to Dobre, King Marko handed over Teodora,

readers not to curse him for possible errors in the text, which arose either because he talked to someone while writing, or because he got drunk, but to pray for him and his parents.⁵¹ The manuscript was ordered by priest Todor from the village of Kaluđerica, in whose home Dobre probably worked. In two other notes, Dobre prays for Todor and blacksmith Miroslav because they forged scissors for him, so he could make pens.⁵² Another scribe named Torno wrote his note at the moment when a certain Stefan fell asleep. The scribe complains that he suffered a lot, but he prayed to God for some priest Manojlo, who mentioned him in a prayer during the liturgy, as well as for priest Đorđe who brought him strawberries and a certain Vasilj, because he brought him red ink.⁵³ In the 1420s, another copyist of a manuscript book prayed to God for nun Marina, who provided him with clothes, and Kalina and nun Theodosia, who brought him various dishes and fruits, as well as wine, from which “his eyes corrected and his hands strengthened”, because he was very tired writing all day.⁵⁴ At the beginning of the 15th century, a copyist of a manuscript wrote: “May God forgive keyholder David Dandeba, who gave me wine”.⁵⁵ There are several similar examples.⁵⁶

Another very interesting record is that of Teodor the Grammarian, who in 1263, in the colophon to the *Hexameron* book, described his suffering, but also the paternal care and protection provided by

“Grgur’s wife” to his father-in-law Radoslav Hlapen, and took back his first wife Jelena, Hlapen’s daughter. After the Battle of Maritsa (1371), Radoslav Hlapen became one of the most powerful provincial lords who govern the territory in northern Greece. There are different opinions on the identity of mentioned Grgur, cf. Rade Mihaljičić, *Kraj Srpskog carstva*, Beograd (1989), 198; Dušan Mrđenović, Aleksandar Palavestra, Dušan Spasić, *Rodoslovne tablice i grbovi srpskih dinastija i vlastele*, Beograd (1991), 93, 95, 97; Gojko Subotić, Manastir Bogorodice Mesonisiotise. *ZRVI* 26 (1987), 158–159; Marko Šuica, O kesaru Grguru. *ZRVI* 34 (1995), 172; Vladimir Aleksić, *Naslednici Mrnjavčevića i i teritorije pod njihovom vlašću od 1371. do 1395. godine*, unpublished PhD thesis, Belgrade (2012), 211–214; Radivoj Radić, Marko (Kraljević). *SBR*, vol. 6 (2014), 121.

⁵¹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 58–59, nr. 189; Mihaljičić, *Izborna vrednost*, 94–95.

⁵² Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 59, nr. 190, 191.

⁵³ Đorđe Sp. Radojičić, *Savremenici Kraljevića Marka i njihovi zapisi. Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, VI–VII (1959), 36–40.

⁵⁴ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. IV, 24–25, nr. 6114–6117; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 92–93; Nikolovska, “When the living envied the dead”, 195.

⁵⁵ Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 93.

⁵⁶ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. VI, 4, nr. 9349, Matić, *Opis rukopisa Narodne biblioteke*, 21.

hieromonk Domentijan from the Serbian monastery Hilandar on Mount Athos. Domentijan was the disciple of the first Serbian archbishop Saint Sava and he wrote Sava’s hagiography. Namely, Teodor, who was young but skilled at copying books, arrived at Mount Athos, where he began his copying activity under Domentijan’s mentorship. However, Teodor was beardless, and at that time the persecution of beardless monks began on Athos, and they were expelled from this monastic community. Teodor took refuge in Thessaloniki, but Domentijan brought him to Mount Athos again after half a year. However, enemies sued Teodor to the *prothos* and the administration of the Holy Mountain, which is why he and Domentijan were exposed to great inconveniences and condemnations. Although he strongly advocated for his protégé, Domentijan failed to save him from the re-persecution from Athos. However, he placed Teodor on a property of the Hilandar monastery out of Athos, where he successfully completed the transcription of the manuscript in which he left his precious record.⁵⁷

Uncertain and difficult times full of riots and wars brought fear to the copyists, translators and illuminators and disrupted their work. There are a number of records which illustrate their spiritual condition and beliefs at those times, but often also contain important information for supplementing our knowledge about some significant military and political events. The colophon of monk Isaija, who translated the tractate of Pseudo Dionysius the Areopagite, is often considered as an important testimony to the difficult situation in the Balkans immediately after the battle of Maritsa river and the death of King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa Mrnjavčević on September 26, 1371. This learned monk describes in moving words the destruction and plunder of Ottoman detachments, the abduction of slaves and the cruel famine that ensued. Although Isaija largely borrows from Byzantine apocalyptic literature to depict the battle of Maritsa and its aftermath, which certainly limits the value of his record as an accurate historical account, there is no doubt that the dramatic events made a strong impression on him.⁵⁸ The extensive

⁵⁷ The latest edition with facsimiles and the translation into the modern Serbian language – Trifunović, *Sa svetogorskih izvora*, 94–114. See also Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 110–117; Mirjana Živojinović, *Istorija Hilandara I. Od osnivanja manastira 1198. do 1335. godine*, Beograd (1998), 111–112, 120, n. 18; Špadijer, *Život sa knjigom*, 465–466.

⁵⁸ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. III, 41–44, nr. 4944; translation to the modern Serbian language – Đorđe Sp.

colophon of an anonymous monk from the Dalša monastery in the vicinity of Golubac, who came to Serbia from Athos at the invitation of Despot Stefan Lazarević to transcribe books, is also well-known. With the despot's help, he founded a new monastery in the Danube region, but the turning point came after the despot's death, when the Turks captured Golubac, and then the Hungarian king Sigismund tried unsuccessfully to regain this fortress. The Dalša monastery suffered from both the Ottomans and the Hungarians, the fraternity fled, and the newly founded sacral center was destroyed.⁵⁹

There are many other, shorter and literarily not so valuable records that speak of the Ottoman destruction or fear of the Turks from the last decades of the 14th to the end of the 16th centuries and later. Only a few of them will be mentioned here. For instance, in the turbulent period after the Battle of Kosovo (1389), the "sinful" Mihailo was afraid of the Turks, but due to gout he could not escape from the monastery of Bogorodica Hvostanska (Mala Studenica) in northern Kosovo. In another note in the same manuscript he recorded that "his soul suffered from the Turkish beys", which is why he asked for help and protection to the Mother of God.⁶⁰ In 1409 a priest named Pribil, who transcribed a book in the state of Đurađ and Lazar Branković, apologized that "my thoughts bothered me ... because the Turks fought, and the battles were great", noting that the end of the world would come soon.⁶¹

After the establishment of the Ottoman rule,

Radojičić, *Antologija stare srpske književnosti (XI–XVIII veka)*, Beograd (1960), 99–101; *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, Milorad Pavić (ed.), Stara srpska književnost u 24 knjige, Beograd (1986), 70–72; Đorđe Trifunović, *Pisac i prevodilac inok Isaija*, Kruševac (1980), 84–88; 159–160; Mihaljčić, *Kraj Srpskog carstva*, 183–185; Nikolovska, "When the living envied the dead", 204–217.

⁵⁹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 78–84, nr. 250; Radojičić, *Antologija*, 177–182; Špadijer, *Život sa knjigom*, 466–468; Ema Miljković, Aleksandar Krstić, *Branicevo u XV veku: istorijsko-geografska studija*, Požarevac (2007), 205–207; Bubalo, *Pragmatic Literacy*, 303.

⁶⁰ However, in his third note in another part of the manuscript, Mihailo did not forget to pray for a certain judge, who gave him three large glasses of wine – Matić, *Opis rukopisa Narodne biblioteke*, 21; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 126; Jovanka Kalić, „Strah turski“ posle Kosova. *Sveti knez Lazar. Spomenica o šestoj stogodišnjici Kosovskog boja (1389–1989)*, Beograd (1989), 185–186; Marko Šuica, *Osmanlijski jahači apokalipse*. Siniša Mišić – Katarina Mitrović (eds.), *Pošasti na tlu srednjovekovnih srpskih zemalja*, Beograd (2021), 50–51.

⁶¹ Matić, *Opis rukopisa Narodne biblioteke*, 140; Milorad Panić Surep, *Kad su živi zavideli mrtvima*, Beograd (1960), 22; Nikolovska, "When the living envied the dead", 205–206.

colophons often speak of the difficult position of Christians. In 1528, scribe Nikola Kričak wrote that Sultan Suleiman "dispersed many lands in the East, he was even in Buda and plundered those lands, and his soldiers held us and ruled us fiercely."⁶² In 1537, Vasilije, the heguman of the monastery of the Holy Trinity in Vrhobreznica (Pljevlja, Montenegro), wrote with his fraternity that their great misery was from the Turks, "what property we had, they took from us, some came to us, others went away, and they took everything we gained."⁶³ Grammarian Petar, who was born in Kruševac, grew up in Niš, and then moved to the "Zagorje side", i.e. to the Bulgarian town of Loveč, left a moving record of fear for his children in 1545. Namely, Ottoman officials who gathered male Christian children for janissaries (devshirma) came to his place. Although Petar's sons were not yet of the required age, he was overwhelmed by great fear because the "sycophants" who denounced people to the Turks came to him as well.⁶⁴ Many complaints of the Ottoman violence date back to the time of Sultan Selim II (1566–1572), when the monastic property in the Balkans was taken away. The monks who could not buy their monasteries back were forced to leave them.⁶⁵ Records from the end of the 16th century, from the time of the Fifteen Years' War, mention a large number of murders and tortures, mass slavery, plunder, burning of villages and towns, looting and desecration of churches and monasteries, great scarcity and famine.⁶⁶

Scribes often made records about illnesses or death. When scribe Petar, at the order of a priest named Marko, began transcribing the Evangelary in the village of Kožinac in the area of Dubočica, an epidemic of plague broke out (apparently in

⁶² Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 147–148, nr. 462.

⁶³ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 158–159, nr. 492. About the scriptorium in the monastery of the Holy Trinity near Pljevlja, see Anika Skovran, *Osvrt na puteve nastanka i obnove riznice manastira Svete Trojice kod Pljevalja*. *Glasnik Zavičajnog muzeja Pljevlja* 5 (2006), 124–129.

⁶⁴ Beno Tsonev, *Opis na rukopisite i staropechatnite knigi na Narodnata biblioteka v Sofija*, vol. II, Sofia (1923), 26, nr. 489; Panić Surep, *Kad su živi zavideli mrtvima*, 85.

⁶⁵ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 183–184, 206–207, 220–221, nr. 580, 664, 716–718; vol. IV, 68, 73–76, nr. 6337, 6359, 6369, 6371; Radojičić, *Stara srpska književnost*, 248; Aleksandar Fotić, *The Official Explanations for the Confiscation and Sale of Monasteries (Churches) and Their Estates at the Time of Selim II*. *Turcica*, XXVI (1994), 33–54.

⁶⁶ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 251, 257, 259, 262, 266, 272–273; nr. 868, 894, 905, 916, 940, 966, 967, 970; Trifunović, *Azbučnik*, 86–87; Radivoj Radić, *U početku svega je strah*. Aleksandar Fotić (ed.), *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama u osvit modernog doba*, Beograd (2005), 511–512.

1536). The disease “reaped people like wheat.” Peter also received the “seal and gift of the Holy Spirit,” that is, three pimples on the body, and lay sick for a total of 105 days. After he was healed by the grace of God, and with the help of the Holy Mother of God and Saints Nicholas, George and Demetrius, he managed to transcribe the entire manuscript.⁶⁷ It seems that a note from the 16th century speaks about a strong epileptic seizure. Namely, certain painter (*zograf*) Petar collapsed while the anonymous scribe was transcribing the Gospel and his blood stained one sheet of the manuscript. The unfortunate man did not come to his senses for 15 days (“not knowing anything, he fantasized somewhere”), and the scribe noted: “Alas, the evil disease, while it was coming he was like rabid”.⁶⁸ Another copyist of a manuscript from the 16th century left a note that his head hurt a lot due to a toothache, with the remark: “a tooth is a small bone, but a big illness”. He worried about what awaited him, the sinner, in another life, when he was already suffering great torments in this world.⁶⁹ In 1591/1592, monk Timotej from the monastery of Ozren in Bosnia complained that he has been completely deaf for 12 years, and that it was sad to watch those who tried to communicate with him by waving their hands, nodding heads and moving their lips.⁷⁰

Readers also left notes on the books about the difficulties they encountered in daily life. For example, there is a moving note in a manuscript book by a certain Rajčin Sudić, who was imprisoned with his fellow Kijevac around 1360 by *kesar* Vojihna, an aristocrat of Emperor Stefan Dušan and Despot Uglješa who ruled the city of Drama and its wider surroundings in eastern Macedonia. Rajčin cried out that their “souls were distressed to death”, because they were imprisoned in chains in the narrowness and stench of the dungeon for five months without any guilt, praying to God and the Mother of God for deliverance.⁷¹

Some marginalia from the 16th century mention

freezing of vine and fruitful and other plants (1551, 1579), the great famine and high costs of various grains (for instance, 1558, 1571, 1575, 1587).⁷² One note informs us about the death of sheep on Šarplanina and in all mountains in 1540, while other from 1557 reads: “It was a harsh winter, peril to the animals.”⁷³ Wall inscriptions mentioning various life misfortunes and problems have also been preserved. For example, a short inscription scratched in 1492 in the stone of the church of the monastery of Visoki Dečani reads: “There is no bread. Year 7000” (according to the Byzantine calendar).⁷⁴

Astronomical, geological and meteorological phenomena have also left their mark in old Serbian marginalia. For instance, they mentioned the eclipse of the sun on June 17, 1433⁷⁵ and the earthquake that struck Mount Athos on July 23, 1585, causing many human casualties and great devastation.⁷⁶ Priest Teofan recorded serious damage caused by hail on July 18, 1450.⁷⁷ There is also a record of a great storm on Athos on December 17, 1571, which destroyed ships and boats and docks of Athosite monasteries.⁷⁸ A note in a manuscript book informs us that on May 18, 7026 (1518) there was a flood due to the overflow of the river Raška in western Serbia and that this book, as well as others in the church of St. Simeon, stood in water for nine hours.⁷⁹

⁷² Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 179, 187, 215, 221, 227, 236, nr. 561, 594, 698, 717, 718, 745, 789; vol. III, 162, nr. 5625; vol. IV, 74, nr. 6362; Bogumil Hrabak, *Izvoz žitarica iz Osmanlijskog carstva u XIV, XV i XVI stoleću*, Priština (1971), 71, 81; Radić, *U početku svega je strah*, 523.

⁷³ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 164, nr. 499; Sava Petković, *Zbirka rukopisa manastira Kuveždina, Divše, Šišatovca i Grgetega. Spomenik SAN, CI* (1951), 53.

⁷⁴ Panić Surep, *Kad su živi zavideli mrtvima*, 62–63.

⁷⁵ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 85, 87, nr. 258, 259, 269; vol. IV, 26, nr. 6127; Nenad Janković, *Astronomija u starim srpskim rukopisima*, Beograd (1989), 138, 147, 193, 199; Radić, *U početku svega je strah*, 527–528.

⁷⁶ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 233–234, nr. 775–776; vol. IV, 83, nr. 6412–6413; Aleksandar Fortić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar u Osmanskom carstvu (XV–XVII vek)*, Beograd (2000), 151. Almost half a century later, three accounts record the volcanic ash falling from the sky as a consequence of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 1631 – Jelena Mrgić, “Pade prah sa nebesa na zemlju”: erupcija Vezuva 1631. godine i balkanske zemlje. *Balkanica* 35 (2004), 223–238.

⁷⁷ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 92, nr. 292; cf. Siniša Mišić, Glad u srednjovekovnim srpskim zemljama. Siniša Mišić – Katarina Mitrović (eds.), *Posasti na tlu srednjovekovnih srpskih zemalja*, Beograd (2021), 11; Radivoj Radić, Jer takva glad bi po svima krajevima (Glad u srpskim zemljama XIII–XV veka), *ibidem*, 35.

⁷⁸ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 216, nr. 699; Fortić, *Sveta Gora i Hilandar*, 151.

⁷⁹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 132, nr. 432.

⁶⁷ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 154, nr. 484; Bogumil Hrabak, Kuga u balkanskim zemljama pod Turcima od 1450. do 1600. *Godine. Istorijski glasnik* 1–2 (1957), 29.

⁶⁸ Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 97.

⁶⁹ Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 97.

⁷⁰ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 243, nr. 822. Cf. different translations into the modern Serbian language Trifunović, *Iz tmine pojanje*, 135; Pavić, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, 181.

⁷¹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 42, nr. 118; Ćorović, *Utjecaj i odnošaj*, 55; Aleksandar Solovjev, *Odabrani spomenici srpskog prava*, Beograd (1926), 166; Sima Ćirković, *Oblast kesara Vojihne. ZRVI* 34 (1995), 183; Trifunović, *Azbučnik*, 87; Mihaljčić, *Izborna vrednost*, 96.

However, not all records arose out of a desire to leave testimonies of the difficulties and problems that affected their authors. Some scribes and translators were not indifferent for the natural beauty in their surroundings. The copyist of a manuscript book in the monastery of the Annunciation in the Gornjačka gorge in Braničevo was writing “during the time of dear spring, while nightingales sing with cuckoos” (undated record from the 16th century). Another record from 1568 is similar – although suffered from the pains in his hands, an anonymous scribe noticed: “while I was writing this, orioles and nightingales and various other birds were singing with cuckoos.”⁸⁰ There are also cheerful and witty notes. A note in a manuscript from 1464 reads: “I wrote this, Priest Ivan, full-fed and drunk on an empty stomach.” The sentence rhymes in the original.⁸¹ Another note, preserved in several versions, speaks of a conflict between a scribe and a fly that drank the ink on the just-written letter. The angry scribe tore off the fly’s wing with his pen, and the sad insect cried.⁸² In the *Vodičnički pomenik*, the 16th century commemorative book of a monastery from Skopska Crna Gora, there is also a witty note left by a scribe, with the use of alliteration: *Stojan pisac, pijan pijanah u pomenik pisa* (“Stojan the scribe, the drunk of drunks wrote in the commemorative book”).⁸³ I will also mention one marginal note, which a reader left with the sermon of Apostle Paul on abstinence: “This speech was spilt by an old man and an old woman.”⁸⁴

Empty pages or margins in manuscripts and old printed books were sometimes used to list revenues and expenditures, draft private contracts⁸⁵ or record global and local news. Such records of priest Nedeljko from the famous mining town of Novo Brdo were made during the third and fourth

decades of the 16th century on the margins of a Greek manuscript. He recorded fights among miners, private contracts, wages paid to workers, income and expenses for clothes and shoes for his wife and children and for groceries, bills for drinks in local pubs, etc.⁸⁶ There are also short messages written on some books, which were sent from one person to another. Those messages concern various problems that arose in daily life, such as a short report sent to priest Bogdan about a finger injury caused to a man in the church in the village of Trstenik in Kosovo around 1433, or an appeal addressed to certain “Muhmul Pasha” for the deferment of payment of some debt (undated, probably from the 15th – 16th centuries). Several requests for sending bread and money to the workers, as well as for steel and nails were written on the margins of a 14th century manuscript and dispatched by the *hutman*⁸⁷ to the representative of the mine holders in some Serbian mine. It seems that these messages also originated from the 15th – 16th centuries.⁸⁸ The reason for writing and sending such messages in books instead of letters was certainly the lack of available paper.

At the end of this brief overview, which only showed to a small extent the richness of these types of source material for the study of daily life in medieval Serbia and Bosnia, I will quote another typical note used by the scribes to mark the completion of their work. Among them was also Jov, the monk of the Serbian monastery Hilandar on Athos, who wrote in 1408: “Just as detainees rejoice to see their homeland and sailors rejoice to see the port, so the one who writes rejoices to see the end of the book.”⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Petković, *Zbirka rukopisa*, 43–44; Trifunović, *Iz tmine pojanje*, 130, 140; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 95.

⁸¹ *Sije pisah az, pop Ivan*. Čte jes sit i napijan, Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. IV, nr. 6162; Trifunović, *Iz tmine pojanje*, 105; Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 152.

⁸² *Zde pokusi perce i upisa slove i priide mušica i popi mi i az se oskrbo zelo i vrgo se percem i odbio krilce. I reče mušica: Jao, jao, ubo mne ljuto žao*, Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. VI, 14, nr. 9417; Trifunović, *Iz tmine pojanje*, 171; Špadijer, *Život sa knjigom*, 456–457. For other versions of this joking note in Serbian and Bulgarian manuscripts from 17th and 18th centuries cf. Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 169.

⁸³ Stojan Novaković, *Srpski pomenici*. *Glasnik Srpskog učenog društva* 42 (1875), 19–20, 26; Trifunović, *Iz tmine pojanje*, 114.

⁸⁴ Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 92.

⁸⁵ Bubalo, *Pisana reč u srpskom srednjem veku*, 156, 181–182; idem, *Pragmatic Literacy*, 204–205, 232–234, note 18, where the sources are listed.

⁸⁶ Aleksandar Solovjev, *Novobrdski zapisi iz početka XVI veka*. *Jugoslavenski istorijski časopis* 3 (1937), 313–319; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 268–273; Đorđe Bubalo, *Pisana reč u svakodnevnom životu*. Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić and Danica Popović (eds.), *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama srednjeg veka*, Beograd (2004), 491–492.

⁸⁷ The overseer of the extraction of ore, from the German Hüttenmann, see Sima Ćirković, *Rudari*, in *Leksikon srpskog srednjeg veka*, 630.

⁸⁸ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. I, 85, nr. 260; Jadranka Prolović, *Hilandarski rukopisi XIII i XIV veka u Beču i manastir Hilandar*. *Hilandarski zbornik* 6 (1986), 183–184; Radojičić, *Razvojni luk*, 136–138; Bubalo, *Pisana reč u svakodnevnom životu*, 489; idem, *Pisana reč u srpskom srednjem veku*, 221–222; idem, *Pragmatic Literacy*, 295–296; Marko Popović – Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić – Danica Popović, *Daily Life in Medieval Serbia*, Beograd (2016), 226.

⁸⁹ Stojanović, *Zapisi i natpisi*, vol. IV, 21–22, nr. 6110. On this *topos* see Robert Zett, „Sicut navigantibus portus” – Ein Abschlusstopos kirchenslavischer Handschriften. *Colloquium Slavicum Basiliense. Gedenkschrift für Hildegard Schroeder*, Bern – Frankfurt am Main (1981), 781–792; Ćorović, *Uzajamne veze*, 164–165; Mihaljčić, *Izvorna vrednost*, 93.