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Summary

The Competition for Souls: Sava of Serbia and Consumer Choice in Religion in the Thirteenth Century Balkans

The word *αἵρεσις*, heresy means choice and in a world where religious belief was taken for granted the history of Catharism in Europe can be explained through believers exercising many of the criteria they were later to adapt to choosing secular consumer goods. Believers in the west in the C12 and early C13 had a choice of religions. Catharism became popular in France and Italy on the basis of the virtuous lifestyle of its protagonists, its relative cheapness compared with Catholicism and the simplicity of its theology of individual salvation. Its decline was as much to do with Catholicism being 're-packaged' by groups such as the Franciscans, lay guilds and the Beguines as by any persecution.*

A similar analysis of heresy in eastern Europe would be valuable, despite the relative scarcity of sources. There is some evidence that opposition to the Bogomils focused on the capacity of the Orthodox Church to bring material well being to believers and to provide contact with a world of affluence the lay individual could mostly only dream of. Hugh Eteriano's *Contra Patarenos* gives numerous examples of earthly prosperity springing from making the right spiritual choices and both he and later writers against the Bogomils such as Patriarch Germanus II emphasised the physical value and beauty of objects used in

Orthodox worship, as opposed to the austerity of Bogomil sermons delivered in private houses.

Outside Constantinople the Orthodox Church of the thirteenth century faced the threat of heresy from both Catholic and Bogomil missionaries without the resources available within the capital, and unable to deploy coercion as in the West. Archbishop Sava of Serbia therefore used a variety of methods to maintain the allegiance of the population to Orthodoxy. At the assembly at Žiča in 1221 he outlined gentle courses of repentance for both groups and used his links with his brother, king Stephen Prvovenčani to promise gifts to returning noble heretics. Sava also emphasised the Orthodox Church's capacity to enrich the life of the laity, sending out 'exarchs' or trained priests to preach in Slavonic and encourage the sacrament of marriage, thus targeting families and future mothers. On an inevitably limited scale Sava was also able to stress the sensuous experience of Orthodox worship. His programme of church building included vivid programmes of wall painting to impress the laity. These occasionally conveyed a materialist message, such as the picture of Christ distributing bread from a basket labelled 'Provider'. In short, Sava combined the responses to heresy of east and west. He deployed the appeal to sensuous experience and material well being of Orthodoxy he had seen in Constantinople and Nicaea, but also emphasised lifestyle, vernacular preaching and facilitating lay access to the sacraments which had been articulated in 1215 at the Fourth

Lateran Council. Insofar as neither Bogomilism or Catholicism regained their potency as threats in the region the strategy seems to have been successful.

* Outlined in Andrew P. Roach, *The Devil's World: heresy and society, 1100-1300*, (Harlow, 2005).

APR

24 September 2007

Two small corrections to art.

p.1 Greek word should read *αίρεσις*

p. 11 Delete 'forty years later'. Insert 'in the 1220s or 1230s'.

The Competition for Souls: Sava of Serbia and Consumer Choice in Religion in the Thirteenth Century Balkans¹

The word 'heresy' *αἵρεσις* means 'choice' and one way of looking at medieval religious movements is to consider what choices were available to lay men and women of the period. In this paper I want to review briefly what I mean with reference to the Cathar heresy in the west and to look at what choices were available to the laity in the Balkans in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. Finally, I will examine how Sava of Serbia, one of the most successful spiritual figures of the period, hoped to win people for his particular brand of spirituality and away from that offered by his Catholic and Bogomil rivals.

1. Religious choice in the west

The chronology of western Catharism is generally agreed by historians. Although there may have been earlier outbreaks of religious dissent the organised popular movement known to historians as the Cathars first emerged in Germany in the 1140s, and by then may well have also been established in what were to be their historic strongholds of southern France and North Italy. The movement seems to have originated with the Bogomils of the Byzantine empire and had been brought west either by missionaries from the area or returning westerners.² Systematic persecution came in the thirteenth century with the

¹ This paper is based on a talk given to the Institute of National History, Skopje, Macedonia. My thanks to Prof. Dr. Teodor Chepreganov, Director for his invitation and Dr. Maja Angelovska-Panova for suggesting the subject and her many kindnesses to me during my stay in Macedonia.

² Recent literature on the Cathars and their origins includes M. Barber, *The Cathars; dualist heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*, (Harlow, 2000); M. Zerner (ed.) *L'histoire du*

Albigensian Crusade in southern France between 1209 and 1229 and the advent of inquisitions in northern Europe and southern France from the early 1230s. However, many Catholic churchmen were convinced that more constructive methods had to be used to recapture the hearts of the laity. The result was the rise of new semi-monastic orders such as the Dominican and Franciscan friars and the legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. Both the new orders and the Council shared a preoccupation with preaching, regulating the lifestyle of priests and others representing the Church, while enabling carefully limited participation by the laity, through confession, taking communion and the encouragement of so-called 'tertiary orders' which were lay men or women living under a rule. The combination of discipline and pastoral care of the laity eventually seems to have overcome the Cathar challenge and the last known *perfectus* was burnt in 1321. It is debateable to what extent Catholic success was due to persuasion or persecution, but it is worth noting that by 1300 expressions of spirituality such as Beguines, mysticism and the many lay guilds under the supervision of the friars makes the Cathar route to paradise by receiving the *consolamentum* ceremony from a Good Man or Good Christian, look mechanical and old-fashioned.

Catharisme en discussion. Le "concile" de Saint-Félix (1167), (Nice, 2001); the 3rd edition of M. Lambert, *Medieval Heresy* (Oxford, 2002); C.Taylor, *Heresy in medieval France: dualism in Aquitaine and the Agenais, 1000-1249*, (Woodbridge, 2005); M. Frassetto (ed.), *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: essays on the work of R.I.Moore* (Leiden 2006) and see nn.3 and 6.

Before persecution became a major factor, the religious culture of areas where the Cathars were strong was surprisingly open.³ Debates were held in southern France between Cathars and Dominicans and even between Cathars and the equally outcast followers of Valdes of Lyon. No accounts of debates have come down to us from Italy, but the layman, Salvo Burci's reply to the Cathar book, *Stella* suggests that both books were targeted at educated lay people.⁴

The subject matter of these debates often centred on who was better equipped to deliver salvation to lay men and women. On one notable occasion in 1208, the Cathar supporter Austorgue de la Mothe advised her two little girls that the 'good Christians' (Cathars) could save souls better than the Church of Rome, the bishop of Cahors and the canons of Montauban. It is interesting how she envisages her choice. She is certainly aware of the universal corporation of the Church of Rome, but she quickly breaks this down into more local representatives, the bishop at Cahors and the local canons in the nearby town of Montauban.⁵ The Cathars had an apparent advantage because the *consolamentum* was a simple ceremony usually performed on a believer's deathbed, it offered a guarantee of salvation. However, the validity of the rite depended on the *perfectus* or 'good man' who performed it being in a state of grace. This reflected the laity's wider preoccupation with the lifestyle of those whose responsibility it was to save souls. A Cathar supporter from

³ For much of what follows in this first section, see my *The Devil's World: Heresy and Society, 1100-1300* (Harlow, 2005) esp. ch.5, 'Competing for Souls'.

⁴ Salvo Burci, *Liber Supra Stella*, a cura di C. Bruschi, (Rome, 2002), pp. XIV-XVI, XXII-XXIV.

⁵ Fonds Doat, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (258 vols.) vol. 22:9-10. Hereafter 'Doat'.

Castelnaudary lay dying far away in Narbonne, so his companion summoned two local Cathar good men to perform the *consolamentum* , but because the man could not be sure of the purity of life of these Cathars whom he did not know he instead asked to be committed into the hands of the Cistercian monks of Boulbonne abbey close to where he was born.⁶ The laity had high ideals for their holy men and women; broadly speaking they should be chaste, live modestly and perhaps most importantly of all, as the last story shows, be present when needed in times of extremity.

More difficult to assess is how the laity experienced and participated in religion. People regularly made choices as to what forms of religion to patronise, both heretical and orthodox. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that many participants ignored such labels. Historians grasp the consequence of such choices through bequests in wills, can gauge broad measures of popularity through records of community foundations or extensions to churches, but have limited evidence of how choices were conducted on a week by week or daily basis. Yet we know that such choices were made. From the friars' deliberate confrontations with heretical groups or the complaints of secular clergy against the incursions of the friars' own preaching we know that there was intense competition between spiritual individuals and institutions.

Some factors affecting the laity's decision can be traced. There were Cathar schools in the castle of Gattedo near Milan and daughters of local nobility were

⁶ M.Pegg, *The Corruption of Angels*, (Princeton, 2001), p.112.

educated in communities of Cathar women in southern France. Reaching further into secular life the Cathar stronghold of Montségur had banking facilities.⁷ There were also religious experiences to be chosen. In the decades around 1200 we can see characteristics which successful religious movements shared. Both Cathars and friars had a local presence in lay communities and they preached regularly, often with the dramatic quality of a Francis of Assisi or Anthony of Padua. The expanding western economy of the twelfth century allowed an increasing proportion of the population to choose these novel services based on how useful they thought they were, such as university lecturers, or how they made them feel, such as *jongleurs* and troubadours. It could even be argued that in an age before mass production they had more experience of such choice of intangible 'products' rather than material goods. The Cathars supplied these needs not only through their preaching, but through a system of social support which included regular visits by *perfecti*, distribution of bread blessed by them and even Cathar cemeteries.⁸ In return the 'good men' received the guides, food hospitality and money essential to keep the network in place.⁹ The money was usually in the form of bequests given in return for the *consolamentum* and part of the role of the 'good men' was to collect this from the dead person's relatives or friends.¹⁰

⁷ Gattedo, T. Ripoll, *Bullarium Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, vol. 1 (Rome 1729), p.254. Education of girls, Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus de Principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. H. Scheeben in *Monumenta Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 16 (Rome, 1935), no. 27. Montségur, A. P. Roach, 'The Cathar economy', *Reading Medieval Studies*, 12 (1986), pp. 51-71.

⁸ Cemeteries: Guillaume de Puylaurens, *Chronique*, ed. J. Duvernoy, (Paris, 1976) p.30. Bread: Barber, *Cathars*, p.79, Pegg, *Corruption*, pp.116-17.

⁹ Doat 21:189r, 202r, 220r; 22:14v, 55v.

A story recounted by Peter of les Vaux-de-Cernay against the Cathars inadvertently reveals their advantage over Catholic clergy. A man who had bequeathed 300 *solidi* to the heretics in return for the *consolamentum* on his deathbed asked his son to pass the sum over to them. When the 'good men' turned up the son asked after his father. Having been reassured that he had already joined the heavenly spirits the son refused to hand over the money declaring that his father had now no need of alms and that he knew the *perfecti* would be too kind to recall him from glory. Although in this case something had clearly gone wrong, the attraction of no expensive prayers for the dead and characters they could trust was obvious. This was an important reason why so many turned to the heretics.¹¹

A further aspect of how the religious laity might have viewed their own religious experiences can be derived from the work of Colin Campbell, the British literary scholar. He credits the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century with a recognition of the individual, by means of which the pre-modern 'iron cage' of providing necessities was transformed into the romantic castle of desires.¹² The implication is that 'the romantic consumer' 'enjoys' emotion, not suppressing feelings, but appreciating them for their own sake. This key ingredient in Campbell's recipe, the 'thrill' of emotion for its own sake was available long

¹⁰ Doat 21:293v.

¹¹ *Petri Vallium Sarnaii monachi Hystoria albigensis*, eds. P. Guébin and E. Lyon, 3 vols. (Paris, 1926-39) trans. as *The History of The Albigensian Crusade* by W.A. and M.D. Sibly (Woodbridge, 1998), pp.13-14.

¹² C. Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford, 1987), pp.74-5.

before then in the west and may be explained by the innovative 're-packaging' of Catholicism in the thirteenth century through innovations such as candle lit processions, preaching, liturgical drama and staged events such as Francis of Assisi's re-creation of Christ's Nativity at Greccio at the Christmas of 1223.¹³

Campbell is suspicious of such manifestations of popular feeling and dismisses them as mere communal rituals kept firmly in the hands of the priesthood, but this is to underestimate the influence of lay guilds, tertiary orders and pious individuals who often hired priests to carry out what they wanted. Even participants in the thirteenth century flagellant movements met, regularly indulged in their masochistic rites and then returned in many cases to wives and families.¹⁴ The tide of religious sentiment had become more subjective so that the Cathars may have looked rather old-fashioned by the middle of the thirteenth century. The persecution of the inquisitors put paid to the organisation, but the movement was already in decline, along with the idea of saving souls by proxy which was the essence of the relationship of the *perfecti* with their supporters.

2. Religious choice in the east

Given this analysis of the decline of heresy in the west to look at the Orthodox world and see if the same pattern can be discerned. Was the Bogomil model of saving souls by proxy superceded by one which offered the laity more

¹³ Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, Opusculum Primum, ch.XXX, pp. 359-63 in *Fontes Franciscani*, eds. E. Menestò and S. Brufani (Assisi, 1995).

¹⁴ G.Dickson, 'Revivalism as a medieval religious genre', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000), pp. 482-5, 494-5.

participation in their own salvation and subsequently made the heretics old fashioned as spiritual tastes changed? An initial difficulty is that the chronology of the Bogomils is far less certain than the Cathars. The first appearances in the Balkans are reported in mid tenth century and the movement is still alive and well in fifteenth century Bosnia on the eve of Turkish invasion. Yet there is enough evidence to pick out the period between 1150 and 1250 as almost as important for the Bogomils as for their heretical counterparts in the west. The era marks their most successful missionary work through *papa* Nicetas in France and Italy, the propagation of Bogomil written works in the east and west and the emergence of at least five distinct strands of the Bogomil tradition in the churches of Drugunthia, Bulgaria, Dalmatia, Philadelphia and the separate dualist churches for Latins and Greeks in Constantinople.¹⁵

The most noticeable difference in the sources between east and west is the attention paid to doctrine in accounts of Bogomilism. Given that the Orthodox culture in which the Bogomils moved was very concerned with doctrinal issues it is no surprise that Orthodox writers should emphasise this aspect of heretical activity and it is quite possible that this was also important to the Bogomils who came to rely on their intellectual firepower to define themselves in the same way that the Italian Cathars also became deeply concerned with the philosophical implications of dualism. As in Italy, to a relatively well informed lay audience the

¹⁵ The most detailed recent account in English of the development of the Bogomil movement is Bernard Hamilton's Introduction to Hugh Eteriano, *Contra Patarenos*, eds. J. Hamilton, S. Hamilton and B. Hamilton, (Leiden, 2004), pp.1-102.

dualists may have actually gained popularity from their propensity for doctrinal debate both among themselves and with the established Church.

Evidence from eastern Europe does suggest that there were debates similar to those in the west. The Life of Saint Hilarion of Moglena, between Thessalonika and Ohrid, composed in the fourteenth century, but referring back to the holy man's distinguished career between 1134 and 1164 recalls how fond the 'Manichaeans' heretics were of 'disputing and wrangling with him'. This was evidently in public, because they were a response to Hilarion's sermons.¹⁶

The *Treatise on Demons* now attributed to Nicholas of Methone who thrived in the mid twelfth century, tells us much about demons, but little about the supposedly dualist adherents who worshipped them. Nicholas seems to have been on some kind of mission to Thessaly to take on the heretics. Amid implausible stories of sexual orgies and infanticide, he lets slip that they met in the evenings in a pre-arranged house.¹⁷ The evening meetings in people's homes resembles the practice of the early Christians and as the Dominicans were to find a few years later in their development of the Compline service, such a time was particularly suitable for those who had been out at work.¹⁸

¹⁶ J. Hamilton and B. Hamilton eds., *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c.650-c.1405* (Manchester, 1998), pp.225-6.

¹⁷ Ibid. pp.227-34. Formerly attributed to Michael Psellus. See P. Gautier, 'Le De Demonibus du Pseudo-Psellos', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 38 (1980), pp.105-94.

¹⁸ C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: the impact of the early mendicant movement on western society*, (Harlow, 1994), pp.81-2.

More evidence of Bogomil attention to pastoral care comes from Hugh Eteriano's *Contra Patarenos*. This is a curious text, only recently edited and raising many questions. Hugh, a Pisan who had been recruited by the Byzantine emperor, Manuel Comnenus, wrote in Latin against a group of heretics found around the Hellespont and indeed the entire world. While there seems no need to doubt the editors' assessment that what Hugh termed 'Patarenos' are what modern historians would call 'Bogomils' in the east or 'Cathars' in the west, the text is very curious in that it makes no reference to dualist beliefs.¹⁹ One possible solution is that Hugh did not know his opponents were dualists, but this seems unlikely given that he had been in Constantinople for some time, was very aware of religious issues and could evidently read Greek. There is, in fact, a hint of dualism in Hugh's report that the heretics rejected the Old Testament and another possibility is that Hugh, whether he knew the exact nature of his opponents or not was more concerned with fighting them in practical terms rather than looking into the theological implications.²⁰ The heretics he described rejected marriage like the Cathars, attacked icons like the Bogomils and despised the Eucharist, as both groups did.²¹ When he considered the success of the heretics he stressed their contempt for priests and their preaching in secret.²² The latter would be understandable in Constantinople which had undergone convulsions of anti-Bogomil paranoia just a generation earlier, but in

¹⁹ It is possible that Hugh's heretics are members of 'the church of the Latins of Constantinople', as described by Rainerius Saccone a century later. A.Dondaine ed., *Liber de Duobus Principiis*, (Rome, 1939), p.70.

²⁰ Eteriano, *Contra Patarenos*, pp.163-4. Hugh also addresses a heretic as 'Manicheus' (p.173)

²¹ Ibid. pp. 165-6, 170, 166-8 respectively.

²² Ibid. pp.158, 156-7,

fact probably means no more than that these heretics too preferred to preach in people's houses.²³

Supporting evidence that these are indeed Bogomils comes from Patriarch Germanus II who, writing in the 1220's or 1230's against heretics in Constantinople from his exile in Nicaea records their opposition to marriage, icons and the image of the Cross as well as attributing a creative force to the Devil. This could be taken as conclusive that the two writers were describing the same phenomenon were it not that Germanus ignores the heretics' refusal to take oaths, which so concerned Hugh. However, it may be that this merely reflects how much more important oath taking was in western society than in Constantinople.²⁴

Both writers are making a response to a threat and consciously shape their material to demonstrate the role the laity can play in defeating heresy. Hugh uses a series of vivid stories in which ordinary people bring about divine intervention and in particular make choices. In the section defending the miraculous nature of the Eucharist, the consequences of making the wrong choice are emphasised. Taking a story from the fifth century Greek writer, Sozomen, Hugh tells of what happens when a woman tries to substitute a host

²³ J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, pp.40-1, 212-25 (sources)

²⁴ Germanus II, *Orationes in Patrologia Graeca* (hereafter *PG*) vol. 140, cols. 663-6, trans. J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, 268-9; *PG*, vol.140, cols. 627-30, trans. J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, pp. 269-71. Writing at the beginning of the twelfth century Euthymius Zigabenus had referred to it as a Bogomil characteristic. *PG* 130, col.1323, trans. J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, p. 196.

consecrated by the heretic, Macedonius, for the one consecrated by the bishop. At once it turns to stone in her mouth and the terrified woman, weeping, begs forgiveness. The obvious inference is that in this case it was not necessarily the right choice. More dramatic still is the tale of the Jewish glassmaker who sends his son to the Great Church of Hagia Sophia to be educated, and then is angry when the boy casually eats some consecrated bread left over from the Eucharist. With cold deliberation the father bundles his little son into the glass furnace, only for him to be saved by the Virgin clothed in purple. The real choice here is made by the mother who, after pulling her son from the furnace goes to the patriarch and begs to convert. The father is put to death by the emperor. As an afterthought Hugh adds that the mother becomes a nun and the son, a reader in the Great Church, so their material well being was assured.²⁵

In the section on images, the woman who was cured by touching the hem of Christ's garment in the Bible, according to Hugh then created a statue in bronze of the event at the foot of which grew a healing herb. In another tale, Abgar, the prince of Edessa secured the Mandylion, the cloth used to wipe the sweat from the face of Christ just before the Passion, to cure his leprosy. Restored to health, he destroyed a statue of a pagan god at the entrance to the city and placed the 'reverend image of the saviour' in its place which took over as miraculous protector of the city and displayed an ability to spontaneously reproduce itself on other surfaces.²⁶

²⁵ Eteriano, *Contra Patarenos*, pp.168-9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* pp.170-2.

Both writers emphasise the material worth of spiritual objects and by doing so they attempt to articulate the aspirations of the laity. Hugh refutes the criticism of the Patarene over idol worship

The company of Christians do not adore icons because they have colour and rich materials, nor do they do this in idolatry because they [the icons] do not hear nor see, nor speak nor smell. We show them reverence and honour not in the way the Israelites worshipped the calf, but in what they have to signify through the figure painted.²⁷

This is unconvincing as Hugh has little interest in what the images signify and tells the miracle stories related above which treat the paintings as precious supernatural objects. Germanus in his sermon on images which he particularly aimed at women, took a similar tone when considering how images were made:

When did you ever see anyone from our churches going to the kiln for plaster or to the quarry where there are heaps of stones, or to the shops which sell pigments and honour and venerate them?..... We pay honour not simply to the material, but to the form which appears on the material.²⁸

Both writers, while insisting that the precious materials were not what was being venerated, were reminding their audiences that stone churches laden with icons made from precious materials offered a sensual as much as spiritual experience.

Books are discussed in the same terms. In the very next sentence after his discussion of images, Hugh Eteriano adds;

In this sense we honour and venerate the chalice, the altar and

²⁷ Ibid., p.170., trans. p.187.

²⁸ PG, 140, col.663, trans. J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, p.268.

the books of the gospels not because they have goat or sheepskins marked with ink, but because they extend to our mind at length the words and thoughts which Christ delivered.²⁹

Germanus takes a similar tone, but uses subtler reasoning. In his dialogue on the role of icons with an imaginary heretic he first elicits an admission that it is right to honour the book which contains Christ's words:

Tell me now, is not this book [the Gospels] made of boards, of parchment and of cords which join the parchments, of ink and often of colours as well? So then, when you venerate and kiss the book of the Gospels, do you venerate and kiss the boards and the ink and the parchment, or the words of Christ which are written in the book?³⁰

This careful delineation of the care and materials which go to make books and images was part of both authors' strategy to take on the Bogomils by emphasising to their relatively prosperous audiences the pleasure of orthodoxy and the proximity to beautiful objects. As Germanus goes on to say 'Christ's form is also fashioned, by the splendour of the picture and its clarity, and shines out brightly in it.'³¹

3. Saint Sava and choosing Orthodoxy

Far away from the sophistication of Constantinople, Sava, who became archbishop of the newly autocephalous church of Serbia in 1219, faced similar problems of competition but had far fewer resources. However, just like Hugh and later Germanus, he identified assets which could be used to gain people's

²⁹ Eteriano, *Contra Patarenos*, p. 170, trans. p.187.

³⁰ PG, 140, cols.663-6, trans. J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, pp.268-9.

religious allegiance. Sava's real problem was the number of unfamiliar aspects with which he was confronted. The territory he had grown up in as prince Rastko between Ras and Niš was remote, mountainous and rural. However, thanks to the efforts of his father, Stefan Nemanja (1168-96) and his brother, Stefan Prvovenčani, the first-crowned, the Serbian kingdom now included the coastal towns of Zeta as well as former Byzantine towns to the south-east. Their acquisition had stimulated the economy to the point where Serbian rulers could afford to mint their own silver *hyperpera*.³² All these changes, however had been dwarfed by the fall of Constantinople in 1204. By 1219 it was still not obvious how the political situation might resolve itself. As Demetrios Chomatenos, archbishop of Ohrid asked rhetorically, 'Where is the Empire now?'³³ Byzantine regimes lived on at Nicaea and Epirus while Latin rulers were ensconced in Constantinople and Thessalonika. Meanwhile a growing threat to Serbia came from the other great Balkan kingdom of Bulgaria to the east.³⁴

It has long ago been noticed that the Serbian royal family seemed to have worked as a 'family firm' and in particular Sava and king Stefan worked hard to keep on good terms with most of their neighbours and the aspirant transcendent

³¹ PG, 140, col. 666.

³² Sava himself draws attention to the expansion and varied character of Serbian territory in his *Life of Simeon* (Stefan Nemanja); facsimile and translation in M. Kantor (ed.), *Medieval Slavic Lives of Saints and Princes*, (Ann Arbor, 1983), p.259. Serbian economy, S. Ćirković, *The Serbs*, (Oxford, 2004), pp.52-3, 55.

³³ D. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, (Oxford, 1988), p.159.

³⁴ This survey of the Balkan political situation is largely drawn from F. Curta, *Southeastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 500-1250*, (Cambridge, 2006); articles by Jacoby, Angold and Ducellier in D. Abulafia (ed.) *New Cambridge Medieval History: vol. V c.1198-c.1300* (Cambridge, 1999) and J. V. A. Fine, *The Late Medieval Balkans*, (Ann Arbor, 1987). Anglophone

powers. Two years after Stefan obtained a crown from Pope Honorius III in 1217, Sava was appointed archbishop by the patriarch of Nicaea. Even so, in the years between his appointment and his death in 1236 Sava was well received in Constantinople, Thessalonika and Trnovo. Only Epirus was outraged by Sava's elevation, not surprisingly since the new archbishopric had been carved out of the archdiocese of Ohrid. Its incumbent, the same Demetrius Chomatenus kept up a steady stream of criticism of the new metropolitan. Sava and his brother may have judged this an acceptable risk for the prestige conferred.

In religious terms also Sava faced a tricky situation. He inherited Catholic populations in the bishoprics he established on the coast at Prevlaka and Ston. He would also have been aware of an upsurge in Catholic missionary activity. As early as 1205 the Cistercians took over the large and prosperous monastery of Chortaitou outside Thessalonika with the obvious aim of turning it into a mother house for new foundations, the Franciscan friars were present in Constantinople by 1220.³⁵ Francis of Assisi himself had preached further up the coast, possibly in Zadar when shipwrecked there in 1212.³⁶ Even without conscious missionary activity there may have been a tendency to turn towards the western version of Christianity increasingly on offer. The considerable number of lists of Latin errors

understanding of the region will doubtless benefit from the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Byzantium*, ed. J. Shepard (Cambridge, 2008).

³⁵ B. Bolton, 'A Mission to the Orthodox? The Cistercians in Romania' in *Studies in Church History 13: The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. D. Baker, (Oxford, 1976), pp.174-6; R.L. Wolff, 'The Latin empire of Constantinople and the Franciscans', *Traditio*, 2, (1944), reprinted in his *Studies in the Latin empire of Constantinople*, (London, 1976), pp. 213-4, C. A. Frazee, 'The Catholic church in Constantinople', *Balkan Studies*, 19 (1978), p.37, P. Lock, *The Franks in the Aegean, 1204-1500* (London, 1995), pp.222, 230.

produced by Byzantine authors (one of which was translated by Hugh Eteriano) has been seen as an attempt to distinguish and stigmatise Latin practices for Orthodox believers who either did not know, or did not care about the doctrinal divisions between the two churches and were happy to attend Latin worship.³⁷

Sava's own feelings towards Catholicism have been much discussed and it is probably not by chance that they are so hard to divine. The references to foreigners causing great turmoil even on the holy mountain, Mount Athos has the air of suppressed outrage about the Latin invasion, but Sava knew that the papacy was taking a keen interest in the region and that his own patrons in Nicaea were far away and relatively powerless.³⁸ Nevertheless, a regime which had carefully husbanded its power through the establishment of royal monasteries may well have been suspicious of the centralised religious orders and hierarchy of the western Church and the newly appointed archbishop rejected Latin ritual and liturgical practice.

Sava was also aware of the presence of Bogomil heretics. The agreement of Bolino-Polje in 1203 to the north of his archbishopric in Bosnia had put further pressure on the Bogomil church of Sclavonia.³⁹ The Bogomils had already been

³⁶ Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, ch.XX, in *Fontes Franciscani*, p.329 and see P. Benvenutus Rode, 'De antiquitate Provinciae Sclavoniae OFM nunc Dalmatiae', *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*, 1 (1908), pp. 505-07.

³⁷ T. M. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: errors of the Latins*, (Urbana, Illinois, 2000), pp.28-30.

³⁸ Sava, *Life of Symeon*, ed. and trans. Kantor, p. 291.

³⁹ This *ordo* had first identified by Nicetas around at the Council of Saint-Félix, around 1170, as of 'Dalmatia', then referred to by Rainerius Saccone as 'Sclavonia' and by Anselm of Alessandria as 'Sclavonia from the area called Bosnia.' Hamilton intro. to Eteriano, *Contra Patarenos*, pp. 63-6.

expelled from Split and Trogir in the late 1190s. Now it appears a number of them had reconciled themselves with the papal authorities in the presence of Ban Kulin, lord of Bosnia and organised communities of men and women promising to shun anyone reliably identified as a Manichaean or any other heretic. The agreement was overseen by the king of Hungary.⁴⁰ Whether these really were former dualists has been much discussed, but what is certain is that those who felt that they could not live under the new regime would probably have fled elsewhere. One possible destination was Bulgaria, but Tsar Boril (1207-1218) took action against them at the Synod of Trnovo in 1211.⁴¹ An alternative escape route was to go south into Serbia.

Another possible source of heretics was the Bogomil church of 'Bulgaria', which may have had its origins in the area around Ohrid where centuries earlier Clement and Naum had started to provide a body of Slavonic theological literature with the result that the region had developed its own religious culture, with some evidence of lingering anti-Byzantine feeling.⁴² Therefore, Bogomil missionaries could well have been active in Sava's archbishopric for some time. Certainly in the last decades of the twelfth century there were several attempts, some successful, by western Cathars to be ordained in the Balkans and texts

⁴⁰ J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, pp. 254-9.

⁴¹ *Monumenta Bulgarica*, ed. and trans. T. Butler (Sofia, 1996), pp. 203-15.

⁴² D. Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 109, 151-3; B. Primov, *Les Bougres*, (Sofia, 1970, trans. Paris, 1975), p. 207.

translated from Slavonic such as the *Interrogatio Johannis* found their way to the west.⁴³

Sava therefore had good reason to take action against heresy to save souls and to display the new autocephalous Church's credentials. However, there was a delicate balance to be achieved. To draw attention to the existence of heretics on his territory was to invite external interference. Sava would have perhaps been aware of the Albigensian Crusade launched against Raymond, count of Toulouse in 1209 for not taking action against the Cathars. He would certainly have known about the pressure his brother, Vukan of Zeta had been able to apply on his neighbour, Ban Kulin of Bosnia by alleging to Pope Innocent III that Bosnia had become a refuge for ten thousand heretics. The subsequent agreement of Bolino-Polje was underpinned by the threat of a papally sanctioned invasion from Kulin's distant overlord, the king of Hungary.⁴⁴ By 1221, when Sava was legislating, Innocent III's successor, Honorius III was again urging the king of Hungary to take action and in the 1230s pope Gregory IX was to proclaim anti-heretical crusades against both Bosnia and Bulgaria.⁴⁵ On the other hand firm action against heresy could bring political rewards. Tsar Boril of

⁴³ A. Dondaine, 'La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, I: Le "De Heresi Catharorum in Lombardia"', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 19, (1949), pp. 307-08; A. Dondaine, 'La Hiérarchie cathare en Italie, II: Le "Tractatus de hereticis" d'Anselme d'Alexandrie, O.P. III: Catalogue de la hiérarchie cathare d'Italie', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 20, (1950), p.309. Both reprinted in his *Les hérésies et l'Inquisition XII-XIII siècles*, (Aldershot,1990). B. Hamilton, 'Bogomil influences on Western Heresy', in M.Frassetto (ed.), *Heresy and the Persecuting Society in the Middle Ages: essays on the work of R. I. Moore*, (Leiden, 2006), pp.107-08.

⁴⁴ J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, pp.256-9.

⁴⁵ J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, 265-7.

Bulgaria's *Synodikon* against heresy in 1211 had allowed him to appear in a quasi-imperial light, to assert his authority over his restless kingdom.⁴⁶

Sava's father, Stephen Nemanja had already had one attempt at eliminating the Bogomils. On becoming aware of the prevalence of heretics in his realm Nemanja had summoned a general assembly which inflicted dire punishment on the Bogomils. Their leader had his tongue cut out, his followers were executed or banished and their heretical books burnt. Nemanja's brutality of method in dealing with heresy at least carried an acknowledgement that it was spread by preaching and reading which in turn suggests that it would be difficult to extirpate by a single dramatic act.⁴⁷

At his own assembly or *sabor* at Žiča in 1221 Sava made a change of tactics.⁴⁸

On the second day, after outlining the essentials of the Orthodox faith, he set about persuading heretics back into the Orthodox Church. He emphasised veneration of the cross, icons of Christ and His mother, holy communion in both kinds, churches and the icons of saints. It is perhaps not so surprising that the heretics in the audience were reduced to asking what it was they had to do to repent, but more that they were there in the first place. It suggests that mixed

⁴⁶ To the extent that the threat may have been deliberately exaggerated.

Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, p.100.

⁴⁷ Obolensky, *Bogomils*, p.284 offers no date: Y.Stoyanov, *The Hidden Tradition in Europe*, (London, 1994), pp.148-50 implies that it is soon after the death of Manuel Comnenus in 1180.

⁴⁸ The synod is most fully described in Teodosije's *Life of Saint Sava*. I have consulted the Serbian translation by L. Mirković, *Zitije Svetog Save*. (Belgrade, 1984), pp.145-6. It is paraphrased in N. Velimirovich, *Life of Saint Sava* (orig. 1951, reprinted with new Introduction, New York, 1989), pp.XI, 55-6, 96-7, 99-100. A shorter account is in the *Life* by Domentijan; Serb

audiences attended the performances of charismatic preachers in the same way as they did Dominic or Francis of Assisi in the west.

The next day Sava provided a gentle course of repentance. After preaching about salvation emphasising that faith can only save if united with and expressed in good works, he asked those who wanted to be reconciled to the Church to stay behind after Great Vespers. First, he addressed the Bogomils. They were to condemn their heresy and then prepare for holy baptism. As for the Catholics, there was no question of not recognising their baptism, (as Fourth Lateran council had alleged was customary in the Orthodox Church⁴⁹) nevertheless they had to renounce their heresy and then recite the Creed of the First and Second Ecumenical Councils after which they were anointed with chrism. In other words they were confirmed, like children who were not yet fully part of the Christian community. To show that this was more than a theatrical gesture on his own part, the new archbishop instructed his bishops to employ the same procedure against heretics in their own dioceses.⁵⁰

Returning to the faith would not confer merely spiritual benefits. Using his close relationship with Stephen Prvovenčani Sava offered the many nobles among the

translation, *Zivot Svetog Save i Svetog Simeona* by R. Marinković and L. Mirković, (Belgrade, 1988), p.154.

⁴⁹ C.4 in N. Tanner (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2vols. (London, 1990), 1, pp. 235-6.

⁵⁰ There are echoes of the 'Franciscan question' in the status of the two lives. Domentijan's brief account is usually dated to being within twenty years of Sava's death. Teodosije's longer and more detailed account is placed at the end of the century. M. Loos, *Dualist Heresy in the Middle Ages* (Prague, 1974), pp.231-2, 238 n.22. Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, pp.123-4, 156. G.

heretics 'great gifts' from the king. Those who obeyed him received these gifts while in turn the archbishop accepted the penitents with love. Finally, Sava condemned the Bogomils once more and promised that those who were obstinate in their heresy would be driven from their lands.⁵¹ Whereas in the west Church and State combined to eradicate heresy with violence, Sava promised that, in the first instance at least, repentance would be rewarded. It was an imaginative policy which made use of the Serbian monarchy's growing prosperity. In spiritual terms there are resonances of the generosity showered on the returning prodigal son and yet there is also more than a hint of the 'special offer' to convince local consumers spoilt for religious choice.

Sava's short term generosity to the nobility was combined with a longer term programme to attract and maintain adherents within the wider community. In the first place Sava had already created seven new bishoprics.⁵² In western Serbia and on the coast the new structure ran alongside the Catholic one, both confessions having their own churches and priests. Sava dispossessed the Greek bishops of Prizren and Lipljan and appointed Slavs in their place to the fury of Demetrius Chomatenus, the Greek archbishop of Ohrid. There is an obvious political agenda here reflecting Sava's close relations with his brother, the Serbian king, but no less importantly Serbian prelates would be better able to address their flock in their own language. Demetrius was also interested in

Podskalsky, *Theologische Literatur des Mittelalters in Bulgarien und Serbien, 865-1459*, (Munich, 2000), pp. 376-86.

⁵¹ Teodosije, p.146.

⁵² Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, p.117; Curta, *Southeastern Europe, 500-1250*, p.393.

pastoral care, but he had tended to concentrate on the lands to the south and east of Ohrid. He accused Sava, driven by 'a mad thirst for fame', of leaving the solitary and ascetic life of Mt. Athos and instead becoming involved in worldly affairs, walking in processions and taking part in banquets. But this could be a hostile description of what was expected from a conscientious metropolitan touring his dioceses and mixing with his flock. Demetrius's other charges of Sava's lavishly and diversely dressed bodyguard, his thoroughbred, richly caparisoned horses merely suggest the impressive show of the charismatic archbishop on the move and find no response in other sources.⁵³

Even Sava could not be everywhere at once and so he instructed 'exarchs', trained priests to go into the countryside. Sava emphasised the sacrament of marriage in their mission. Many couples were living together without the Church's blessing, supposedly because of a lack of priests to perform the ceremony. If this was the case, it is peculiar that Sava should choose this sacrament for special attention for if priests were scarce then presumably children were going unbaptised and whole congregations going without communion.⁵⁴ In fact Sava may have had a number of reasons for this action. In east, as in west marriage had made slow progress to becoming a sacrament, having its origins in civil law. Theologically it was seen at best, as a poor second to a life of celibacy and many of the laity simply did not like ecclesiastical authority interfering in what was essentially a business of family alliances and

⁵³ Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, p.158. G. Prinzing (ed.), *Demetrii Chomateni Ponemata Diaphora*, Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae; vol.38, (Berlin, 2002).

property transfers. Hence the issue was taken up by heretics for social as well as theological reasons. Hugh Eteriano's Patarenes condemned it, as did Germanus II's Bogomils, along with a host of western heretics including the Cathars.⁵⁵

Sava instructed his agents not only to seek to marry those who were newly co-habiting, but also those who had lived together for some time and had children. In doing this Sava may have been looking to enforce religious allegiance. The arrival of the exarch separated those who were not married for whatever reason from those who would not get married under any circumstances, perhaps because of their resentment of the Church or their heretical beliefs. It was a neat way of forcing stubborn Bogomils to declare themselves. There are similarities to the arrival of Catholicism's 'trained priests' in the west, the Dominican inquisitors. But whereas the Dominicans, like Sava himself at the *sabor* had looked to reconcile dissidents by an admission of guilt and then public reconciliation, the propagation of the sacrament of matrimony reconciled couples to the Church without necessarily incurring the stigma of being marked out as a penitent heretic.

⁵⁴ Teodosije, p.146; Domentijan, p.154; Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, p.156.

⁵⁵ Eteriano, *Contra Patarenos*, p.165, trans. p.183, Germanus II in J. and B. Hamilton, *Christian Dualist*, p.272. In west see Salvo Burci, *Liber Supra Stella*, a.c.d. Bruschi, pp.8-9, 469. Ermengaud of Béziers in A. Dondaine, 'Durand de Huesca et la polémique anti-cathare', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, 24 (1959), p.268, Raynerius Saccone in A.Dondaine ed., *Liber de Duobus Principiis*, (Rome, 1939), p.64.

Other considerations also demonstrate the shrewdness of Sava's choice. Marriage was the sacrament which initiated a household. There was a good chance that any subsequent children would be baptised into the same religious allegiance; it was a way of influencing future mothers. This was not a definitive move since there is plenty of evidence of medieval individuals mixing and matching all shades of spirituality, but it was a start. It also went to the heart of secular society. By sanctifying marriage with its legalisation of sex, exchanges of property and settling of clan feuds, Sava showed that as Serbian society became more complex there was no aspect of life into which the Church could not intervene. In fact, if the Bogomils shunned marriage as part of their rejection of the material world Sava aimed to show that, on the contrary there was no aspect of that world which could not be legitimated and even revered.

In the longer term Sava made it easier for all the sacraments to be administered. His new bishoprics were accompanied by an extensive programme of church building.⁵⁶ Within those churches there was an emphasis on oral and visual communication with the laity. The number of texts produced in Slavonic increased in Sava's time and modifications in the written language indicate that these gospels and Bibles were designed to be read out in something akin to the local vernacular.⁵⁷ The use of Slavonic, as opposed to Latin or Greek, may well have fostered a sense of allegiance as well as understanding. Within the churches a series of frescoes emphasised pastoral messages. At the Church of

⁵⁶ M. Živojinović, 'Activité de saint Sava comme fondateur d'églises' in *Sava Nemanjić-Saint Sava: Histoire et tradition*, ed. V. Đurić (Beograd, 1979), p.25. Ćirković, *The Serbs*, p.44.

the Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren simple images in cheerful colours illustrated Christ turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Canaa and healing the blind, but just to drive the point home there was an icon on one of the pillars in the nave of the infant Christ distributing bread from a basket, helpfully labelled 'Provider'. While it is true the monastery's charity to the poor made it literally a provider, the scheme is surely emphasising a wider sense of spiritual and material well being. Similarly Sava extended the Church of the Holy Apostles at Peć, which was to become the burial place of later archbishops. However, the monumental painting of the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist interceding with an enthroned Christ in the spherical apse clearly visible above the low altar screen emphatically demonstrated to the laity the best spiritual insurance policy available to them.⁵⁸

The main lines of Sava's activity should now be clear. Further churches were built at the episcopal see at Hvosno and perhaps Pridvorica as well as the new monastery of Mileševa.⁵⁹ Sava was deliberately making the act of going to church an affecting experience. The Serbian church had nothing like the resources which could be deployed by the Catholic Church, let alone the riches of Constantinople. Yet the worshipper entering the church would be bombarded with seductive images and the scent of incense, read to and preached to and

⁵⁷ Ćirković, *The Serbs*, p.44.

⁵⁸ G. Subotić, *Art of Kosovo: the sacred land*, (New York, 1998); Ljeviša, pp. 26-7 and plates 29, 30; Peć, pp. 28-9 plates 13-15. This last has been dated to the time of Sava's successor, Arsenije, but the iconography it is agreed probably comes from Sava's reign.

⁵⁹ V. Korać, 'Serbian architecture between Byzantium and the West' in *Serbs in European Civilization*, eds. R. Samardžić and M. Duškov (Beograd, 1993), pp.95-6.

given all the majesty that the Orthodox Church could offer. The obvious intention was to draw believers away from Bogomil and Catholic competitors in the area.

Sava was building on the existing strengths of his family's religious culture and his own earlier career. He had nurtured Nemanjid and Serbian prestige by turning Studenica into a shrine to Stephen Nemanja and by the foundation of the Hilandar monastery on Mount Athos. Undoubtedly Sava had multifarious aims in this period. As pointed out by Anthony Eastmond, the political iconography of the Serbian royal family was easily included in the spiritual messages at important sites like the monastery of Studenica.⁶⁰ In his later career as archbishop he drew once again on these tried and trusted techniques. His bishoprics were all centred on monastic complexes and his pool of talented churchmen to carry out the ambitious programme of pastoral care all had monastic backgrounds. Of course, such monasteries also acted as reservoirs of political power for the fledgling dynasty. However, they represented a substantial burden on the community and for this reason needed to be held in affection. In liturgy, in sermons and in iconography Sava helped them achieve a popularity which was to endure far beyond his own era.

Finally, it is worth speculating on the intellectual origins of Sava's strategy. One strong influence was his namesake Saint Sabas of Jerusalem (439-532) whose life he commemorated in wall paintings in the north chapel at Žiča. He too was a

⁶⁰ A.Eastmond, "Local" saints, art and regional identity in the Orthodox world after the Fourth Crusade', *Speculum*, 78 (2003), p.708.

monk who turned reluctantly to pastoral care, church building and defence against heresy.⁶¹ Another role model was his father: significantly, Sava's *Life of Simeon* does not mention his persecution of Bogomils, but does carry an imprecation to him as a teacher of orthodox Christians of how to keep the faith, a consecrator of churches and builder of monasteries, respecter of priests and monks and listener to holy men.⁶² As for the assembly at Žiča, one obvious parallel is Boril's Synodikon of 1211, but with the significant difference that at Žiča, Sava, the churchman was in charge, in place of the secular power.

The intriguing idea is that some of Sava's ideas may have come from the west where churchmen regularly took charge of such matters. The new archbishop had called an assembly of the most influential prelates and laity, defined the faith and introduced a code of law, the *Nomokanon* to regulate the laity and clergy. Moreover, he had offered a route back to the Church for heretics and schismatics, sent out trained preachers and rearranged diocesan boundaries. Like Innocent III a few years earlier at the Fourth Lateran Council Sava sought to combine discipline and pastoral care to secure the allegiance of the laity. Marriage played an important part in Innocent's policy too and the Council tried to make it both easier and more open by relaxing the prohibitions concerning affinity (c.50) and forbidding secret marriages (c. 51). Innocent clarified the position over payments to priests who conducted the ceremony in canon 66 and banned hearsay evidence in matrimonial cases (c. 52), establishing the principle that, 'it

⁶¹ Eastmond, "'Local' saints', p.711 and see J. Patrich, *Sabas, Leader of Palestinian Monasticism*, (Washington, 1995).

is preferable to allow some unions which are contrary to the laws of man than to contravene the law of God by parting those lawfully joined.⁶³ The council's impact on the archbishop of Serbia may not be as unlikely as it seems at first sight. Sava was a natural authority figure and far too shrewd not to learn from the Latins, whatever his feelings about them. His appreciation of the potential role of the bishop at Žiča was as novel as his development of monasteries in the region was traditional. Like the popes, Sava also strove to introduce an element of direct control through his 'exarchs' who were responsible to him, just as the mendicants owed allegiance to the papacy in the west. Moreover, he had had plenty of chance to discuss papal strategy as he wintered in Latin held Thessalonika in 1219-20.⁶⁴

Conclusion

The last years of the twelfth century and early years of the thirteenth were years of intense interest in religious issues all over Europe and the medieval Balkans were no exception. Indeed the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade may well have exacerbated the religious excitement. What is interesting is that the competition for souls took place in the east without the presence of coercion as a serious option. Instead, the challenge of Bogomil heretics and representatives of western Catholicism seems to have stimulated a renewed interest in the popular appeal of Orthodox religion among the laity, both by writers close to the Byzantine establishment and by provincial leaders such as Sava. The strategy

⁶² Kantor, *Slavic Lives*, p.259.

⁶³ Tanner, *Ecumenical Councils*, 1, pp.257-9, 265.

adopted was a combination of appeal to the senses, Church participation in lay life and, where necessary, frank material rewards to gain adherents. Once defined and differentiated, the Orthodox spiritual experience appears to have been successful against its rivals, so that by the middle of the century there was a decline in Bogomil activity and western hopes of gaining widespread converts to Catholicism were frustrated.⁶⁵

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⁶⁴ Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, p.154.

⁶⁵ My thanks to Dr. Jonathan Shepard for his many helpful suggestions and translation of sources in Serbian.