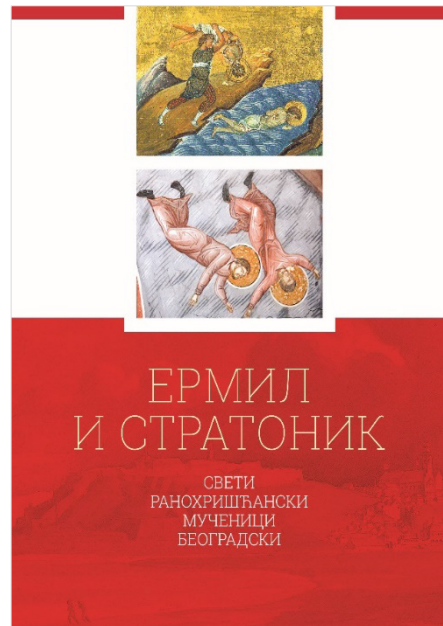


## Book Review:

***Ermil i Stratonik. Sveti ranohrišćanski mučenici beogradski (Ермил и Стратоник. Свети ранохришћански мученици београдски)*, ed. Dubravka Preradović (Дубравка Прерадовић), Balkanološki Institut Srpske akademije nauka i umetnosti, Belgrade, 2022, 216 p. /in Serbian with summaries in English/ ISBN 978-86-7179-117-5**

This year, the Institute for Balkan Studies of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts published a collection of papers about “Hermýlos and Stratonikos. Early Christian martyrs of Belgrade”, edited by Ph.D. Dubravka Preradović, research associate of the institute.

Deacon Hermýlos and his jailer Stratonikos are authentic martyrs of the early Christian Singidunum. They received the wreath of martyrdom at the beginning of the 4th century, during the reign of Emperor Licinius, probably in 315, by being thrown into the Danube together. After three days, their holy relics emerged from the river and were buried in a tomb cut into a rock, eighteen miles downstream from the city. Their martyrdom soon became the focus of their cult. Due to the threat of its destruction by the Huns, in the middle of the next century, the relics of the martyrs were transferred to Constantinople, which decisively influenced the further shaping of their cult.



Conceived as a monographic study, the collection of papers consists of six articles, which are divided into three chapters. They are preceded by a foreword (p. 11–14) by Ph.D Danica Popović, retired Principal Research Fellow of the Balkan Institute, and *Editor's Foreword* (p. 17–23), where the reasons and immediate motivation for writing this book are presented. At that point, scattered in the works of domestic and foreign researchers, focused on certain aspects related to the history and hagiography of these martyrs, a brief overview of previous research on Saints Hermylos and Stratonikos is given. Regarding the identification of the original tomb of the holy martyrs, there have been various assumptions. These circumstances called for the need for a synthetic approach to the topic. A contemporary effort to renew the cult of the two Belgrade martyrs within the Serbian Orthodox Church can also be noticed, a fact that has certainly led to the decision to dedicate one of the chapels in St. Sava's temple in Belgrade to Hermylos and Stratonikos, the oldest saints of the city.<sup>1</sup> The awakening of the cult of the long-celebrated martyrs additionally motivated the need to review and systematize the knowledge gained so far about them in one comprehensive publication, thus achieving a unique scientific and ecclesiastical contribution. Therefore, the historical knowledge and various aspects of the cult of the early Christian Belgrade martyrs were collected in a comprehensive, thematically divided, scientifically based, and methodologically flawless way.

The first chapter, which is dedicated to the place and time of Hermylos and Stratonikos suffering, contains the text **"The Christianization of Late Antique Singidunum: from a Roman Castrum to an Early Byzantine Bishopric"** (p. 27–61) prof. Ph.D. Olga Shepehar. The reader is presented with an image of ancient Singidunum's later history, the religions practiced in it, as well as the beginnings of Christianity in the city. In addition to the Singidunum's bishops, who were involved in the dogmatic disputes of the time, the local martyrs were important figures in the city's early church history. The presence of Christianity in the area of today's Belgrade from the 4th to the 6th century is also evident in certain (mostly portable) archeological findings.

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Deacon Hermylos and soldier Stratonikos were the first known, historically credible, Christians in Singidunum, who suffered for their faith in the city itself. It is known from the text of the Martyrdom of Saint Polyon, as well as from Jerome's martyrology, that some little earlier, in 304, the priest Montanus and his wife Maxima belonged to the church community of Singidunum and they died in Sirmium, the seat of the Illyricum prefecture. Some written sources mention Donatus, Fortunatus and Hermogenes as Singidunum's clerics, and Sirmium's martyrs who died during Diocletian's persecution, but the authenticity of the latter can be questioned.

The next chapter is dedicated to the cult and iconography of Hermylos and Stratonikos during the Middle Ages, and it consists of two articles by Dubravka Preradović “The Cult of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Byzantine Capital” (p. 65–89) and “Representations of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Medieval Art of the Eastern Christian World” (p. 91–133). The Belgrade martyrs were especially revered in the Byzantine capital, where their relics were transferred from a tomb near Singidunum. During the 6th century, the two Belgrade Saints’ Martyrdom (Passio) had already been composed – a rare and precious example pre-Metaphrastian hagiography, as well as other hagiographic (praise, synaxars) and hymnographic (canon, troparions) compositions. According to the provisions of the Typikon of the Great Church, their memorial was marked twice a year (January 13 and June 1) at several locations in Constantinople, which have also been discovered. Finally, based on the testimony of the pilgrim Anthony of Novgorod, it is known that around the year 1200 the skulls of the two martyrs were kept in the altar of the church of St. Sophia. The text on their iconography includes representations of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Eastern Christian world during the Middle Ages. Preserved representations of Saints Hermylos and Stratonikos, although modest in number, can be found in both miniature and monumental paintings, as well as on calendar icons. The two saints were depicted, together or individually, as martyrs without distinct saintly attributes. St. Hermylos is rarely portrayed as a deacon. Within the painted calendars and menologia, in addition to their representations as holy martyrs, there is also a depiction of their common suffering by drowning in the Danube.

The collection’s final chapter is comprised of three articles and it’s dedicated to hagiographic and liturgical written sources. In the first, “**The Passio of Hermylos and Stratonikos**” (p. 137 –150) prof. Ph.D Darko Todorović brings a translation of the text of the Passion of Hermylos and Stratonikos into modern Serbian. It is preceded by an extensive introduction and is accompanied by appropriate philological and historical comments. Observations on the literary value of their Martyrdom and its representation in the Byzantine manuscript tradition are presented here. This is analyzed in the following text “**The Memory of Hermylos and Stratonikos in Constantinopolitan Typika**” (p. 153–161). Its author, Lazar Ljubić – based on the analysis of the cathedral and monastic typika that originated in Constantinople or reflect the Constantinopolitan liturgical practice - reconstructs the manner and degree of celebration of the two martyrs. As it spread to the Eastern Christian world through liturgical books, the cult of Hermylos and Stratonikos reached the Slavic world, as Miloš Jovanović writes in his text on **The Prologue Vitae of Hermylos and Stratonikos in the Serbian Manuscript Heritage** (p. 163–181). The prologue has been observed in various editions (Varlaam’s and Lukije’s redaction). Here, texts of

their Prologue Vitae are also critically published. Both synaxars belonging to the editors of Constantine of Mocisia and those with verses at the beginning were taken for analysis.

Elegantly composed in terms of design, this book contains many great illustrations (fifty-two in total), i.e. reproductions of icons, frescoes, manuscripts and archeological artifacts, which are mentioned in the articles (list of illustrations, p. 187-190). A rich list of historical sources and relevant professional literature used in the production of texts points to the level of studiousness of this collection (bibliography, p. 191–216). Additionally, at the end of each text, an extensive summary in English is given.

In conclusion, the book *Hermylos and Stratonikos* is the first book dedicated to two early Christian martyrs, who had died on the territory of what is now the modern-day Serbian capital, Belgrade. The systematization of knowledge about Saints Hermylos and Stratonikos, in addition to undeniable scientific value, also provides a solid basis for further nurturing their respect.

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