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The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition
A Fourteenth-century Serbian Version of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*

Abstract: Early translations of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* into Old Church Slavonic appear in several versions incorporated into miscellanies of the *zbornik* (collection) type. These texts belong to various genres of religious prose and are usually assembled in apocryphal collections about journeys to the other world. The earliest known Serbian version of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* is the fourteenth-century manuscript dated to about 1380 (MS 29). The present paper gives an analysis of this narrative.

Keywords: apocalyptic literature, visions, "journeys of the soul" genre

The study of medieval apocalyptic and visionary literature has a long and well-developed tradition. Whether looked at in the context of the relationship between learned and popular cultures, which has been attracting scholarly attention[1] ever since the surge of anthropological studies in the 1970s, or as part of literary traditions,[2] the genre of stories of the travellers to the other world has been analyzed in medieval studies in an attempt to decipher the cultural milieus in which they originated and for which they were intended. The literary genre itself had long been known to the medieval public in East and West alike, given that one of the earliest accounts of a visionary experience dates from the seventh century.[3] The attempts to de-

[1] J.-C. Schmitt, "Les traditions folkloriques dans la culture médiévale. Quelques réflexions de méthode", *Archives des Sciences sociales de religions* 52/1 (1981), 5–20.

[2] M. Aubrun, "Caractère et portée religieuse et sociale des 'visions' en occident du VIe au XIe siècle", *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 23 (1980), 109–130; J. Baun, *Tales from another Byzantium. Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge 2007); A. Timotin, *Visions, prophéties et pouvoir à Byzance. Étude sur l'hagiographie méso-byzantine (IXe-XIe siècles)* (Paris 2010); cf. Lj. Maksimović, Το τέλος του Μεσαίωνα στα Βαλκάνια ως ιδεολογική αντιμετώπιση της καταστροφής· η περίπτωση των Σέρβων, in *The Balkans and the East Mediterranean (12–17 s.)* (Athens 1998), 141–149.

[3] According to some analyses, the *Visio Baronti* is an early forerunner of the new literary genre, starting in the late sixth and early seventh centuries in the West: Y. Hen, "The structure and aims of the *Visio Baronti*", *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s. 47 (October 1996), 477–497. For the text of the *Visio Baronti*, see *Visio Baronti monachi Longoretensis*, in W. Levison, ed., *MGH SRM* V (Hanover 1910), 368–394. See also C. Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà d'après la littérature latine (V^e–XIIIe siècle)*, Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome 189 (Rome 1994), 139–186. The genre itself draws its origin

lineate a typology of medieval visionary literature offer various examples of the *tour of heaven and hell* model which influenced nearly all types of other-world visions, apocalyptic included. Also, a feature common to almost the entire production is its close association with monastic circles, regardless of the rusticity (*sermo humilis*), appealing to a broad audience and "popular culture" in general, or the sophistication of its language. Modern scholars have stressed the importance of a proper understanding of the wider biblical context of moral apocalypses. Based on the already developed Christian tradition, especially the one related to the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic narratives written between the second century BC and the third century AD, these texts mainly belong to the genre of Old and New Testament apocrypha.[4] That is why some of their late medieval copies occur in the *florilegia* assembling different apocrypha, nearly all inspired by eschatological prophecy.

The source analyzed in this paper, the narrative known as the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, belongs to the "journeys of the soul" genre. Composed in Greek for a broad audience around the turn of the tenth century, it relates a visionary journey to the other world. In a broader sense, the text belongs to the corpus of Byzantine apocalyptic tradition (*BHG* 1868–1870b). The distinctive feature of this compilation, based on Old Testament apocrypha such as the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, the *Book of Enoch*, and on the New Testament *Apocalypse of Paul*, the *Letter that Fell from the Sky*, the *Didaskalia of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and *Theotokos*, resides above all in the fact that it is an extraordinary apocryphal narrative of a nun chosen to be lifted into heaven and taken on a tour. Concerned with the moral behaviour and eschatology of the individual soul, the narratives of this group were meant to provide immediate moral guidance; as "normative fictions", such stories, intended to uphold moral norms, coincided with the flourishing of fantastic fictional hagiography marking the tenth-century hagiographic revival under the Macedonian dynasty and represented by the hagiographies of holy men, notably Basil the Younger and Andrew the Fool.

The *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, relating the adventures of a fictitious character, is far more ambitious than merely being a hagiographical account intended to support an already existing and quite popular cult.[5] As a classical medieval vision of the other world, it has distinctive moral and

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from the biblical and patristic traditions, especially from the other-world visions described in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great.

[4] On related issues, see Jacques Le Goff, "Aspects savants et populaires des voyages dans l'Au-delà au Moyen Age", *L'imaginaire médiéval* (Paris 1985), 103–119.

[5] E. Patlagean, "Byzance et son autre monde: observations sur quelques récits", in *Faire croire: modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle*, Collection de l'Ecole française de Rome 51 (Rome 1981), 201–221, was the first to

canonical value, including the standard elements of conventional apocalyptic *topoi*. The same goes for the political and historical frame of the narrative, i.e. prophetic visions of an eschatological nature, typical of the genre. According to most scholars, the visionary in the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, quite contrary to that of the *Theotokos*, is a fictional, typological character known by the name of Anastasia. If, however, the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* was a literary echo of the already popular cult of Saint Anastasia, it remains insufficiently clear which saint is referred to as a "black-habited nun Anastasia". There were at least four saints named Anastasia, two of them Roman martyrs from the 250s, one martyr from Sirmium (late third or early fourth century), and a patrician from the Justinianic era.[6] If it was a real rather than fictional heroine, it perhaps most likely was Anastasia Pharmakolytria, a widow from Sirmium famed for her skill to cure from poison, martyred between 290 and 304 along with her fellow martyrs — the priest Chrysogonus and three (or four) virgins. It was her who appeared to St Andrew the Fool in a vision, and her recognizable iconography with a medicinal vial in hand was widespread across the Byzantine world. In the fifth century, under the emperor Leo I, her relics were translated from Sirmium to Constantinople and enshrined in the Anastasis church next to the forum of Constantine, and in the sixth century some of her relics were transferred to Rome. Her cult became increasingly popular in the tenth century, when a new hagiographic version of her martyrdom (*passio*) was penned by Theodore Krithinos, the *oikonomos* of the Great Church.[7] It is interesting that all surviving versions of *Anastasia* attach great importance to the church of St Anastasia in Constantinople, which is depicted as a place of great spiritual power, especially when it comes to healing those afflicted by demons, sorcerers and mental illness in general.[8] The surge of the popularity of Pharmakolytria's cult coincided with the emergence of our text. Perhaps the effort to spread the cult among different social strata and thus ensure its wider popularity may account for the emergence of a "popular" read which, apart from touching upon universal Christian themes typical of the genre, additionally insisted on social aspects, sin, atonement and injustice, with the sting of criticism being directed at elite sinners. An especially interesting fact is that the social aspect of the narrative is emphasized in the Slavonic translations

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draw the attention of a broader scholarly public to the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*; Baun, *Tales*, 22–27, offers a very informative discussion on the subject.

[6] Baun, *Tales*, 117.

[7] Theodore found the text of the Latin version of Anastasia's *passio* while on an embassy to the Pope in Rome in 824. For more detail, see Baun, *Tales*, 118 (with bibliography).

[8] Baun, *Tales*, 115.

done in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, which was the period of the expansion of Pharmakolytria's cult in the peripheral regions of the Empire. It is my contention, however, that whatever scholarly speculations may be as to which particular Anastasia this one was, the analysis of the fictionality or historicity of the main character ought to take into account the symbolism of the etymology of the name Anastasia — resurrection, and bring it into relation with the main feature of the genre — the journey of the soul. In that sense, the fact that the expansion of Anastasia Pharmakolytria's cult gained momentum in the tenth century does not seem decisive for attributing the text to her. What seems more important is to focus on the narrative content itself.

A hagiographical prologue and a biblical conclusion provide the frame for a peculiar narrative. The supplication for blessing is followed by the story about the pious life and deeds, the death and resurrection of a nun called Anastasia. The introductory lines of *Anastasia* suggest that it was initially intended for monastic circles, by a writer addressing the monastic community. The element that draws attention is the appeal to "Christian people", regardless of social status and wealth, to proceed to confession as instructed by the moral of the popular story they are about to hear. Gregorios, the spiritual father of her monastery, invites the heroine to relate her tale of the other world, where her guide was the archangel Michael. The fact that, during the journey of her soul, she saw the emperors John I Tzimiskes and his victim, Nikephoros II Phokas, among "elite sinners", provides the clue to the date of the tale, which cannot be earlier than the late tenth century.

The four preserved Greek versions of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* are rather late, copied or compiled between the mid-fourteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries.[9] All are incorporated into *florilegia* composed of different kinds of popular religious prose texts — apocryphal, ascetic, biblical, hagiographical, magical, legendary, devotional and homiletic. It seems that *Anastasia* mostly circulated within the Byzantine Empire and in its immediate cultural orbit, namely in south Italy, and among South Slavs, in Bulgaria and Serbia. Early translations of the *Anastasia* narrative into Old Church Slavonic appear in several versions, incorporated into miscellanies

[9] For a very detailed overview of the editions of the text see Baun, *Tales*, 61, Table 2.2: Oxford Bodleian Selden Supra, 1340, unpublished (BHG 1870b); Paris Bibliothèque Nationale Graecus 1631, 15th century (ed. Radermacher 1893; ed. Homburg 1903); Palermo Biblioteca Nationale, Panormitanus III.B.25 (ed. Homburg 1903); Milan Ambrosianus A 56 sup.1542 (ed. Homburg 1903).

of the *zbornik* (collection) type.[10] These texts, titled *slovo* (*logos*), belong to various genres of religious prose and are usually assembled in apocryphal collections about journeys to the other world. Apart from the *Slovo* on Anastasia *Chernorizitsya*, the collections as a rule contain the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which is considered to have been the main source for *Anastasia*, *Theotokos* and a number of other apocrypha whose subject is the future of the world. The Slavonic manuscripts have preserved an earlier version of the Greek original; although copied later than the Greek manuscripts, they actually reveal an earlier stage in the existence of *Anastasia*.[11] One of them, now in the National Library in Sofia,[12] is a sixteenth-century copy of the original translation made sometime between the twelfth and fourteenth century. The now lost Serbian manuscript, believed to be the earliest Serbian version of the translation, was a similar but independent translation from the same Greek original.[13] The Serbian translations titled *Slovo Svete Anastasije* were, as a visionary apocalyptic text, incorporated into four manuscripts, the seventeenth, eighteenth (1750 and 1752) and early nineteenth century versions (1812) of the text.[14] As mentioned before, all these versions are now lost, and we know of them only from Speranski's edition of 1931. Speranski published the version kept in Sofia and recorded all differences between it and the now gone versions of the manuscript from Belgrade. Also, Speranski's edition of the Slavonic *Anastasia Apocalypse* registers a number of correspondences between *Anastasia* and the *Life of Basil the Younger*.[15] Taken as a whole, the manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, both Greek and Slavonic, preserve different versions of the text, each representing a distinct textual tradition. As for

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[10] For the published Slavonic versions of *Anastasia* see M. N. Speranski, "Malo izvestnoe vizantiiskoe 'videnie' i ego slavianskie teksty", *Byzantinoslavica* 3 (1931), 110–133. Speranski's text was reprinted in D. Petkanova's anthology of medieval Bulgarian apocrypha, *Stara būlgarska literatura*, vol. 1, *Apokrifi* (Sofia 1981). Speranski was aware of four Slavonic versions of *Anastasia:* one which is still kept in the National Library in Sofia, and three which used to be in the National Library in Belgrade. In April 1941, however, Belgrade was heavily bombed and the Library was hit and burnt down, and with it, all three manuscripts published by Speranski. However, he was not aware of two other and considerably earlier Serbian translations of *Anastasia* and neither is J. Baun, whose analysis is based solely on the text published by Speranski.

[11] Baun, *Tales*, 67.

[12] Sofia (National Library) Narodnata Biblioteka MS 629, 16th century, ed. Speranski (1931).

[13] Belgrade (National Library) Narodna Biblioteka MS 738, 17th century, ed. Speranski (1931).

[14] See note 17 herein. Cf. Speranski, "Malo izvestnoe", 125.

[15] Speranski, "Malo izvestnoe", 121–123.

the Serbian manuscripts, they belong to a different cultural and textual setting, maintaining complex interrelations with the contemporary literary and cultural tradition.

Both Speranski and Jane Baun are unaware of two earlier Serbian translations of *Anastasia*, which obviously served as a model for the later translations that they analyze.[16] These two are later copies of entire collections with either the unchanged or very similar selection of texts. That this is so may be easily seen from the descriptions of the now-lost *florilegia*.[17] This contribution will analyze the earliest surviving translation, the one in the collection of apocrypha created about 1380, now kept in the Monastery of Savina (MS 29).[18] The other one, created in the fifteenth century, has been preserved in the A. I. Khludov Collection, now kept in the State Historical Museum in Moscow (Hludov, no. 241).[19]

As things stand now, the earliest known Serbian copy of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* is the fourteenth-century manuscript in a Serbian recension (MS 29). Even this one contains a number of misinterpretations of the original text, all of them apparently due to the translator's linguistic inadequacies. Also, this version differs from the Greek original in a number of ways, namely in its emphasis on the descriptions of other-world torments and its urgent call to repentance. The Slavonic versions of *Anas-*

[16] The list of the manuscripts is available in T. Jovanović, "L'étude des apocryphes dans la tradition manuscrite serbe médiévale", *Etudes balkaniques. Cahiers Pierre Belon* 4 (1997), 127. Cf. T. Jovanović , *Apokrifi novozavetni* (Belgrade 2005), 456–475, where he brings the translation of *Anastasia* according to the manuscript from the Khludov Collection as published by A. Miltenova, with commentaries (pp. 472–475) concerning the differences between this version and MS 29 (see also his commentary on pp. 543–544). Comparison of the differences between the two manuscripts suggests the same prototype, i.e. that the Khludov one might have been a transcription of the 1380 manuscript.

[17] They are also published by Lj. Stojanović, in *Rukopisi i stare štampane knjige*, vol. IV of the Catalogue of the National Library of Serbia in Belgrade, compiled by Lj. Stojanović (Belgrade 1903; phototypic ed., vol. 3, Belgrade 1982): cf. therein the descriptions for manuscripts no. 470 (p. 308), 17th century; no. 503 (p. 369), *ca* 1750; no. 505 (p. 447), 1812; and no. 506 (p. 558), 1752. All these manuscripts are of a Serbian recension and belong to similarly compiled collections. In all of them the text of *Anastasia* is preceded by the *Story of Heaven and Earth*. A translation of 1784 has also survived, and is kept in the University Library in Zagreb (no. 3380).

[18] MS 29, 185a – 196b (with the concluding part omitted); cf. the inventory of the manuscripts in the possession of the Monastery of Savina made by D. Bogdanović and published in D. Medaković, *Manastir Savina. Velika crkva, riznica, rukopisi* (Belgrade 1978), 95, with the description of the manuscript.

[19] Hludov, no. 241, 1361 – 153b, after the edition by A. Miltenova, "Neizvesten prevod na vizantiiskoto videnie na Anastasiya chernorizitsa v starobūlgarskata literature", in *Medievistika i kulturna antropologiya* (Sofia: Mnemozina 1998), 237–257.

tasia generally omit the pseudo-hagiographical prologue and begin with a brief account of (A)Nastasia and her mission, to proceed directly to the description of the punishment of elite sinners. The conclusion of the Slavonic translations contain some interesting departures from the original, similar in tone to the famous *Letter that Fell from the Sky*, the text considered to be an integral part of the original, tenth-century *Apocalypse of Anastasia*.[20]

Considering the abovementioned departures from the original, or the additions to the Slavonic versions, it appears that the Slavonic versions of the narrative, shorter than the Greek original, tended to offer instant and explicit moral lessons to the audience, visible even in its title (*poučenie*). Very close to the broad and developed tradition of homiletic and moralizing prose popular among Slavs, the earliest known Serbian translation elaborates the imagined dialogue between the emperors (Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes). The motif of the "good emperor" and the moralizing point of the passage, especially the emphasis laid on the imagined virtues of Nikephoros Phokas, whose cult had a well-established and widely popular tradition among the Serbs, deserve further analysis.

The key role in the devotional practices observed in the Serbian lands, which, as we have seen, outlived the medieval period and continued into the one in which the first known Serbian translation originated, was played by the cult of the sainted rulers of the Nemanjić dynasty. The traditions of vital relevance to understanding how the cult of the holy rulers was contrived and instituted were formed under the powerful influence of Byzantine models, at first in the eleventh century, which is approximately the time when the original Greek *Anastasia Apocalypse* was written. As shown by the well-studied Byzantine examples, it was then that a link between the cult of saints and power became obvious, and publicly proclaimed in contemporary hagiography.[21] We can observe holy men's increasing repute and importance, their way up on the social ladder, the influence they began to exert in the field of active politics.[22] Holy men acted as spiritual fathers of the leading figures of the secular hierarchy, and their prophetic visions and advice had an effect on the actions of the political elite. The popularity

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[20] Baun, *Tales*, 70.

[21] Highly useful for the Byzantine examples is S. Hackel, ed., *The Byzantine Saint*, University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies (Birmingham 1981), and therein esp. E. Patlagean, "Sainteté et Pouvoir", 95–97, and R. Morris, "The Political Saint of the Eleventh Century", 43–50.

[22] On the concept of the holy man, see A. Cameron, "On defining the holy men", in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, eds. J. Howard-Johnson and P. A. Hayward (Oxford 1999), 27–43.

of a monastic vocation in the Eastern Christian world led to the monastic ideal being embraced by representatives of the highest political circles as early as the tenth century, and it even left its mark on the development of the emperor cult.[23]

These models undoubtedly influenced the cult of emperor Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969), increasingly popular in the Slavic world from the thirteenth century.[24] Owing mostly to the widely-read "Eulogy on emperor Nikephoros II Phokas and his spouse Theophano",[25] the emperor became the preferred prototype of the ruler-monk. As a result of the spread and immense popularity of neo-martyr cults among the Serbs in the late middle ages, it clearly had a sequel in post-Byzantine times as well. Contemporary western *lives* of martyr-rulers meeting their end while praying, at the church door, or performing ascetical practices as emperor Phokas did by sleeping on jagged stones, as a rule contrast the hero of the *Life* with his murderer who profits from the crime and takes power. In the eleventh century Phokas receives an office, honouring him as a martyr, ascetic, and bringer of victory. The celebration of the emperor's sanctity is accommodated to the frame of current piety and popularity of the cult of ascetics and martyrs.[26] Subsequent Serbian hagiography and especially the fashioning of the popular ruler-monk pattern undoubtedly drew upon the related literary genre cultivated in the Byzantine cultural orbit. It is no accident that the popularity of the *Eulogy* and *Office* to the emperor, composed at the Great Laura and honouring him as an ascetically inclined ruler close to the Athonite monastic circles, coincides with the growing popularity of royal monkhood which becomes an accepted model in medieval Serbia.[27] During the eleventh century, cults of royal martyrs arise across the Slavic world, receiving a

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[23] P. Magdalino, "The Byzantine holy man in the twelfth century", in Hackel, ed., Byzantine Saint, 51–66.

[24] Patlagean, "Sainteté et Pouvoir", 99.

[25] For a critical edition of the text, see E. Turdeanu, *Le dit de l'empereur Nicéphore II Phocas et de son épouse Théophano* (Thessaloniki 1976).

[26] E. Patlagean, "Le Basileus assasiné et la sainteté imperiale", in *Media in Francia, Recueil de mélanges offert à Karl Ferdinand Werner* (Paris: Institut historique allemand, 1989), 345–359; P. Schreiner, "Aspekte der politischen Heiligenverehrung in Byzanz", in *Politik und Heiligenverehrung im Hochmittelalter*, ed. J. Peterson (Sigmaringen 1994), 365–383.

[27] P. Magdalino, "The emperor and his image", *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge 1993), 413–488. On the use of the said model in medieval Serbia, see S. Marjanović-Dušanić. *Vladarska ideologija Nemanjića* (L'idéologie monarchique de la dynastie des Némanides) (Belgrade 1997), 274–286. Cf. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, "Patterns of Martyrial Sanctity in the Royal Ideology of Medieval Serbia. Continuity and Change", *Balcanica* XXXVII (2006), 71–72.

most enthusiastic response connected with the spread of the martyrial and monastic ideals in Byzantium.[28]

Coincidently with the spreading of Phokas' cult, the Greek original of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia* found its readers in Slavic areas. Of course, it was no accident that it was Phokas, "wearing raiment all golden", and his murderer Tzimiskes that Anastasia meets on her journey to the other world. The fact that the *Slovo*, written to elicit widespread response, introduces a very famous ascetic saint such as the late emperor was undoubtedly a deliberate choice. The more so as none of the four surviving Greek texts contains the moralizing passage about good emperors in general and Phokas in particular,[29] with its elaborated dialogue between the victim and his murderer.[30] In his analysis of the text and its dependence upon the *Life of Basil the Younger*, Speranski suggests that the dialogue between Phokas and Tzimiskes was inspired by the words, recounted in *Basil*, which the dying Michael III addressed to his murderer, the usurper Basil I.[31] The question, therefore, is what effect the author sought to achieve. This passage does not rely for its moralizing effect solely on references, not so rare in the literature of the type, to the punishment awaiting the murderers of legitimate rulers. Considering the general popularity of St Nikephoros' cult among the South Slavs, it had yet another goal — to give an additional boost to his cult. At the same time, the attention paid to the already popular saint added to the popularity of the new narrative and gained a broader audience for the moral lessons of the *Slovo*.

There is another point of interest concerning the Slavonic translation. In Anastasia's story about her visionary journey, before the passage about her encounter with St Nikephoros and Tzimiskes, she meets yet another "popular" imperial pair: St Constantine and his mother Helen, "who found the Holy Cross of the Lord". As they were the objects of extraordinary popular devotion in Slavic lands, it is understandable why they found their way into the Serbian and Bulgarian versions of the narrative, even though they did not figure in the Greek version of the text. Commenting on the passage, Jane Baun proposes the explanation that "the special attention given to the archetypal good kings in the Slavonic version may speak to a local, contemporary Slav concern with promoting ideals of Christian kingship."[32] The introduction into the narrative of a second pair of saints, together with

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[28] Patlagean, "Basileus assasiné", 348–349, and 372.

[29] *Nastasya*, lines 22–27 (Speranski, "Malo izvestnoe", 127).

[30] Baun, *Tales*, 222–223.

[31] Speranski, "Malo izvestnoe", 121–123. For further analysis, see Baun, *Tales*, 115.

[32] Baun, *Tales*, 72–73.

the mention of the famous relic of the Passion associated with Helen, highlighted the "martyrial character" of the selected other-world encounters. It suits the intended purpose of the whole text, and reveals a distinctly moralizing effect of the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*. Those who suffered for, or decisively helped the introduction of, Christianity, especially by inventing the relics of the Passion, are celebrated as ideal kings (*tsars*). That the proposed interpretation of the motive for adding this particular selection of "good emperors" to the Slavonic translation is not groundless may be strengthened by another characteristic addition to the text.

The Slavonic translation of the passage containing the description of the punishment zone (*The punishment of sinners*) adds pilgrimage to the list of virtues. This addition certainly reflected the great popularity of pilgrimage among the South Slavs.[33] During the seventeenth century, when the Belgrade manuscript of *Anastasia* was copied, pilgrimage was gaining importance in everyday life.[34] The Greek and Slavonic versions also differ from one another in their depictions of the torments of hell, especially torture, as well as in the increased interest of both the Sofia and the Belgrade manuscripts in sorcery, black magic and arcane knowledge in general.[35] This might be explained by the persistence of pagan beliefs in the popular piety of South Slavs.

What appears to be the most striking difference between the Greek original (in all four surviving versions) and its Slavonic translations is the portrayal and development of the main character. Not only do the Slavonic versions bring a more direct dialogue between the heroine and her guide to the other world, the archangel Michael, but the portrayal of the nun and future saint is livelier and more dynamic, thus evoking for its audience a clearly shaped personality instead of a model, typical of the hagiographical portrayal of saints. This most certainly is the result of the translator's literary gift, but it also raises a very interesting question as to how to define the religious culture and needs of the milieu in which the apocalyptic text circulated. Therefore, in order to be able to define the individual features of

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[33] G. P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington DC 1984), 1–9.

[34] On pilgrimage in the Serbian environment in the 17th and 18th centuries, see M. Pavić, *Barok*, vol. 2 of *Istorija srpske književnosti* (Belgrade 1991), 87–91; B. Unbegaun, *Počeci književnog jezika kod Srba* (Belgrade–Novi Sad 1995), 29–32; N. Radosavljević, "Vera i crkva u svakodnevnom životu u 18. veku", in *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama u osvit modernog doba*, ed. A. Fotić (Belgrade 2005), 90.

[35] Baun, *Tales*, 73.

the text, it must be examined, as we have tried to show, against the political, social and religious background which led to its creation.[36]

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[36] For the methodological premises of the approach, see Hen, "Structure and aims", 478.

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