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Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea and Medieval Ruler Martyrs: To Persevere in Love »Until the End«¹

*Jovan Vladimir iz Duklje in srednjeveški vladarski
mučenci: biti stanoviten v ljubezni »do konca«*

Abstract: Prince Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea (Duklja, present-day Montenegro), who lived at the beginning of the 11th century, is regarded as the earliest known Slavic saint from the Western Balkans. His moral example and hagiographical narrative should be placed within the context of a wider phenomenon of ruler martyrs murdered out of political self-interest by Christians themselves which was common in the newly Christianized lands on the eastern and northern periphery of Europe between the 10th and 12th centuries. Such saintly personalities include, but are not limited to, Boris and Gleb of Rus' (on the eastern periphery) and Magnus Erlendsson of the Orkney Islands (on the northern periphery). The case of Jovan Vladimir's perseverance in love »until the end« concerns his innocent death ordered by his cousin Ivan Vladislav, tsar of Bulgaria. The life and martyrdom of Jovan Vladimir, depicted in the thirty-sixth chapter within the Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea, is based on the New Testament motif of the Good Shepherd serving as an example of a virtuous ruler who, through following Christ, lays down his life for his people.

Key Words: Jovan Vladimir, Dioclea, ruler martyrs, perseverance, Good Shepherd, medieval literature

Izvleček: *Knez Jovan Vladimir iz Duklje (današnje Črne gore), ki je živel na začetku 11. stoletja, velja za najzgodnejšega znanega slovanskega svetnika na ozemlju zahodnega Balkana. Njegov moralni zgled in njemu posvečeno hagiografsko pripoved je ustrezno umestiti v kontekst širšega pojava vladarskih mučencev, ki so jih zaradi političnih interesov umorili kristjani sami in ki je bil razširjen v novo pokristjanjenih deželah na severnem in vzhodnem obrobju Evrope v obdobju med 10. in 12. stoletjem. Tovrstne svetniške osebnosti se med drugim odražajo v primeru Borisa in Gleba iz Kijevske Rusije (na vzhodnem*

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obrobju) ter Magnusa Erlendssona z Orkneyjskih otokov (na severnem obrobju). Primer stanovitnosti Jovana Vladimirja v ljubezni »do konca« zadeva njegovo nedolžno smrt, ki jo je naročil njegov bratranec in bolgarski car Ivan Vladislav. Življenje in mučeništvo Jovana Vladimirja, kakor ga prikazuje šestintrideseto poglavje Kronike duhovnika iz Duklje, temelji na novozaveznem motivu Dobrega pastirja, s čimer kaže na zgled krepostnega vladarja, ki skozi posnemanje Kristusa daruje življenje za svoje ljudstvo.

Ključne besede: *Jovan Vladimir, Duklja, vladarski mučenci, stanovitnost, Dobri pastir, srednjeveška literatura*

Introduction

Prince Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea (Duklja, present-day Montenegro), who lived at the beginning of the 11th century in a bordering polity between the Byzantine and Latin cultural spheres, is regarded as the earliest known Slavic saint from the Western Balkans. The main starting point of this article is that his moral example and hagiographical narrative on his martyrdom should be placed within the context of a wider phenomenon of ruler martyrs murdered out of political self-interest by Christians themselves. This phenomenon was common in the newly Christianized lands on the northern and eastern periphery of Europe between the tenth and twelfth centuries, regardless of the rising cultural and doctrinal differences between the Western (Catholic) and Eastern (Orthodox) Christianity. Here, the notion of periphery is understood in two complementary terms: both geographically and culturally, emphasizing the late official adoption of Christianity as opposed to the lands of the Mediterranean basin and Central Europe. In the face of mortal danger, these saints did not resort to revenge or fratricide as a means of struggle for power, but rather voluntarily persevered in high Christian (moral) ideals, stemming from the imperative of love towards God and one's neighbor, by accepting their death for the benefit of peace in their homelands and thus accentuating the relative value of political power.

On this basis, two primary aims of this article emerge: to provide a historical, theological, and literary sketch of Jovan Vladimir's martyrdom in terms of a unique historical individual who consciously decided to imitate Christ; and to present the prince's life and death against the background of comparable ruler martyrs of the time, such as Boris and Gleb of Kievan Rus', living on the eastern periphery of Europe who died in 1015, and Magnus Erlendsson of the Orkney Islands, then part of Norway, living on the



northern periphery who died in 1115/1117. For this purpose, a semiotic culturological method is applied. It is based on a deep analysis of the narratives of the original sources. The same methodology was applied by the author of this study in several of his previous works (Malmenvall 2019b; 2019d) dealing with the construction of historical consciousness among the medieval Slavs belonging to the Eastern Orthodox ecclesiastical sphere in the period directly after their official adoption of Christianity.

1 Textual material and previous research

The most informative and literary elaborated source on Jovan Vladimir's martyrdom is the hagiographical interpolation in the thirty-sixth chapter of the Latin historiographical text *Gesta regum Sclavorum*, more commonly known as the *Chronicle of the Priest of Dioclea* (Serb. *Лемонуча пона Дукљанина*).² The textual core of the chapter was perhaps created as an independent hagiography already in first decades following the prince's death. Furthermore, the mentioned chronicle is generally regarded as the earliest known medieval narrative source from the Western Balkans, most probably redacted in the second half of the 12th or at the beginning of the 13th century. (Živković 2009b, 25–26; 57–68; 340–372) Its hagiographic interpolation on the martyred prince, though, is characterized by rich theological imagery, drawing particularly from the New Testament motif of the Good Shepherd that serves as an example of a virtuous ruler who, through following Christ, lays down his life for his people. Despite the presence of a factual background intertwined with legendary elements, which is characteristic for the *Chronicle* in its entirety, most scholars agree that the thirty-sixth chapter represents the most reliable part of this source. (Đekić 2017, 34; Ćirković 1981, 169)

The phenomenon of ruler martyrs on the eastern and northern periphery of medieval Europe has thus far never been presented in a unified historical-theological comparative study forming a coherent synthesis. This phenomenon has been only partly and fragmentarily addressed within various monographs and articles, mostly in the field of cultural history.

2 It should be made clear, though, that in the *Chronicle* this prince of Dioclea is named Vladimir only.



Nevertheless, the subject of the ruler martyrs on the periphery of medieval Europe has thus far been concisely explored by Norman W. Ingham (1934–2015) (1984), an American cultural and literary historian, and Simon Malmenvall (2019a; 2019b; 2019d, 203–243), a Slovene historian and theologian. It was also addressed, as a comparative sketch on the medieval Slavic ruler martyrs, by Konstantin Aleksandrovich Kostromin (2018), a Russian ecclesiastical historian. In relation to previous research, the fundamental originality of these (relatively new) studies lies in their transnational and transconfessional approach.

On the other hand, the study of Jovan Vladimir has usually been a part of a wider context of research and discussion concerning the *Chronicle*. Among most notable works the three that deserve special attention are those by Ferdo Šišić (1869–1940) (1928), a Croatian historian who prepared the first modern critical edition of this source, a narratological study on the same source by Nikola Banašević (1895–1992) (1971), a Serbian literary historian, and the latest critical edition by Tibor Živković (1966–2013) (2009a; 2009b), a Serbian historian. A systematic contemporary study of the sources concerning the martyrdom of Jovan Vladimir, including the edition of less-known early modern Greek and Slavic liturgical texts, was conducted by Veneta Savova (2018), a Bulgarian historian and philologist. The only thorough biographical and cultural study on Jovan Vladimir so far was published by the contemporary Serbian historian Đorđe Đekić, who examines the prince of Dioclea both as a historical figure and as a saint (2017, 16–19). In the English-speaking world, the most comprehensive study of Jovan Vladimir's sainthood was carried out by the already mentioned Norman W. Ingham (Ingham 1987; Ingham 1990).

2 Jovan Vladimir and the sacrificial motive of the Good Shepherd

Vladimir (died in 1016), baptized as Jovan (John), was the prince of Dioclea (Duklja), the South Slavic polity in present-day Montenegro and northwestern Albania (Ingham 1990, 877; Boškovski 2017, 255). During the military conflicts between the Byzantine emperor, Basil II (976–1025), and the Bulgarian tsar, Samuel (997–1014), he was a loyal vassal of Byzantium (Živković 2009a, 124; 126; 128; Pirivatrić 1997, 101). When Samuel attacked the territory of Dioclea, Jovan Vladimir, having started an armed resistance



against the Bulgarian tsar, was betrayed by one of his military-administrative officials (župan) and immediately sent into captivity to Samuel's capital city of Prespa in Macedonia (Živković 2009a, 126). He was soon liberated owing to the pleas of Samuel's daughter, Kosara, who fell in love with him. She was overwhelmed by his beauty, piety and virtue, and threatened to kill herself if her father would not liberate the man and let her marry him. Samuel granted Kosara's wish, made Jovan Vladimir his son-in-law and sent him back to Dioclea as a new Bulgarian vassal prince. On this basis, it seems that Samuel's goal was not to completely subdue Dioclea – he re-instated its previous ruler to govern over the territory which had given Bulgaria access to the Adriatic Sea. (Živković 2009a, 128; 130; 2002, 428–429)

Shortly after the death of Samuel in 1014, his nephew, Ivan Vladislav, usurped the throne by killing his cousin, Gavril Radomir, Samuel's son and rightful successor. The new tsar called Jovan Vladimir to Prespa and swore an oath on the cross that he would not do any harm to him – as guarantees he sent to Dioclea two bishops and a hermit. (Živković 2009, 130; 132) Jovan Vladimir's wife, Kosara, tried to convince her husband not to travel; however, he put trust in the tsar's oath and left Dioclea. On his way to Prespa, Jovan Vladimir was ambushed by Ivan Vladislav's soldiers, but was allegedly saved by the angels who guarded him (132; 134). When Jovan Vladimir safely arrived in the Bulgarian capital and was praying in one of the city's churches, Ivan Vladislav sent his assassins to the church to kill the prince. Having discovered the real intentions of the Bulgarian tsar, Jovan Vladimir reprimanded the bishops and the hermit for taking part in this treacherous act. He then took confession and Holy Communion and went out; as soon as he stepped outside the church, he was assassinated. (134; 136) Not long after this event, Ivan Vladislav was himself treacherously assassinated by one of his soldiers during the siege of Dyrrachion as a result of a Byzantine plot – just before his death he allegedly saw an angel with a face resembling that of Jovan Vladimir, whom he recognized as the one executing the punishment for his past crime (136; 138).³

3 The events described above occurred between the years 1014 (Ivan Vladislav's usurpation) and 1018 (Ivan Vladislav's death and final defeat of Bulgaria against Byzantium) (Simeonova 2017, 161–162.168).



The thirty-sixth chapter of the *Chronicle* provides a biography of a ruler martyr combining biblical reminiscences with the specific sociocultural circumstances of Jovan Vladimir's life and death, thus proving that his entire personality reflected God's commandments revealed in the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, Jovan Vladimir's life and death are fundamentally understood not in terms of a political struggle, but in terms of perseverance in love »until the end«, resulting in the willing self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. (Ingam 1990, 890–891; Čekova 2016, 61–62) This notion is centered around the motif of the Good Shepherd (Živković 2009a, 126) from the Gospel of John (10,11), serving as an example of a virtuous ruler who, through following Christ, lays down his life for his people. In this context, the next two passages of the *Chronicle* seem to be crucial, the first related to the events preceding Jovan Vladimir's imprisonment by Samuel, while the second concerning his violent death:

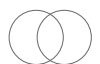
However, a *župan* [/i*upanus*] of that same place, like the traitor Judas, sent a message to the emperor, stating: »Master, if it pleases your eminence, I will deliver the king to you;« to which the emperor replied: »If you manage to do this, know that I will make you rich and powerful.« The king [/i>prince Vladimir] then gathered all the men who were with him, and spoke to them thus: »Dearest brethren, it seems fitting to me that I fulfil the adage of the evangelist, which states: The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. (John 10,11; 15,13) Therefore, brothers, it is better that I devote my being to all of you and deliver my body voluntarily for butchery or slaughter, and thereby deliver you from famine or the sword.« (126)

Next the king prayed and made his confession, received the body and blood of Christ. [...] Immediately before the doors of the church he was struck down by the soldiers; he was beheaded on May 22. [...] Henceforth the Lord revealed the merits of the blessed martyr Vladimir, since on entering the church and praying at his tomb people with many afflictions were cured, and by night all could see a divine light as if many candles were burning there. (134; 136)



The above passages invoke the Christ's parable about his authority (»godliness«), but also his own sacrificial love towards mankind resulting in giving »his life for his sheep«. Unlike the other princes or rulers described in the rest of the *Chronicle*, Jovan Vladimir is not distinguished by his war efforts and political success, but by Christian virtue (Kostić Tmušić 2016, 130; Krstić 2016, 113–114). The murdered prince of Dioclea is thus a virtuous secular ruler and a prime example of Christian self-sacrifice at the same time, because he uses his position as a leader and, consequently, his political authority for the kenotic imitation of Christ (Ingam 1990, 891–893). The reminiscence of the Good Shepherd as a leader and voluntary victim at the same time is theologically closely related to another passage from the same Gospel of John (15,13) emphasizing the supreme form of love of Christ towards men and of men among themselves which consists in »laying down one's life for one's friends«.

The image of the Good Shepherd can also be interpreted by considering Jovan Vladimir's role as a secular ruler trusting in divine providence and as a selfless protector of his people. That is to say, the prince as a Good Shepherd saves his »sheep« from senseless death in battle against a stronger enemy – by giving himself to Samuel, he succeeds in sparing the lives of Dioclea's innocent men. In this context, some biblical parallels should be emphasized: for example, according to the Book of Genesis (15), God himself reveals his own role as a protector (»I am your shield«) when he promises to give Abraham and his descendants many blessings; similarly, when the Hebrew people flee from Egypt, God »opens« them the Red Sea in order to save them from the pursuing pharaoh's army (Exod 14,15–31); furthermore, also in the New Testament, God reveals himself as the protector of apostles Peter, who miraculously manages to escape from prison (Acts 12,3–10), and Paul, who describes the Lord as his protector against pagans (2 Tim 4,17). On this basis, it becomes clear that God himself through salvation history acts as a protector of men and even entire peoples who show trust in him. Consequently, in the context of medieval Dioclea, the role of Jovan Vladimir, being a political ruler, becomes a reflection of God himself: just as God protects pious and innocent Hebrews in the Old Testament and faithful Christians in the New Testament from various threats, so Jovan Vladimir protects his own people against earthly perils.



The author of the *Chronicle* skillfully uses biblical reminiscences and Christian symbols to connect various episodes of the prince's life and confirm his sainthood. For example, the prince's captivity in Prespa under Samuel is a typology which culminates in his assassination at the same place under Samuel's nephew Ivan Vladislav. Similarly, Jovan Vladimir's first coming to Prespa (suffering in captivity) is a prefiguration of the second one (death), while both of them are fulfilled by the prince's spiritual victory, the final »homecoming«, when he is buried at his court in Krajina, where he is eventually, after the death of Kosara, united with his wife for »all eternity«. Following the same typological pattern, Ivan Vladislav's meal, during which he orders the assassination of the prince, comes to fulfillment at the time of Ivan Vladislav's dinner outside the walls of Dyrrachion, where he, as a perpetrator of a crime against the innocent, is struck by an angel in the image of his victim. Furthermore, Mount Oblik, where Jovan Vladimir chooses to surrender to Samuel and thus spare the lives of his people, can be compared to the Mount of Olives, where Christ's agony takes place and where he chooses to sacrifice himself for mankind (Matt 26,36-46; Luke 22,39-46). Consequently, Prespa eventually becomes Jovan Vladimir's Calvary, a place of his innocent death comparable to the place of Christ's crucifixion (Matt 27,32-56; John 19,16-37).

These examples testify to the fact that in Jovan Vladimir's virtues and martyrdom, the life and death of Jesus Christ is re-realized and spiritually confirmed, though under different socio-cultural circumstances. On this basis, the entire story about Jovan Vladimir, as narrated in the *Chronicle*, can be understood in terms of the theologically rich Eucharistic image of the »Good Shepherd« whose blood is »poured out for many« (Matt 26,28; Luke 22,20). Finally, the last act of Jovan Vladimir before his voluntary death is the reception of the Holy Communion (»body and blood of our Lord«) (Živković 2009a, 134). In doing so, he identifies with Christ's death, as explained in the words of Apostle Paul: »For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.« (1 Cor 11,26)



3 Ruler martyrs on the periphery of medieval Europe

Based on the political, literary and theological dimensions of Jovan Vladimir's sainthood explained in the previous chapters, it can be emphasized that the prince of Dioclea complements the typological model of a ruler who becomes a saint because of his pious and virtuous life and sacrifice for a greater cause in imitating Christ that was especially popular from the 10th to the early 12th century in newly Christianized lands on the eastern and northern periphery of Europe, such as Scandinavia and Rus'. In the Byzantine Empire of the time, this phenomenon was unknown; such saints also cannot be found in the South European Latin hagiographies and liturgical texts. Ruler martyrs from peripheral lands formed a new tradition: their role was to legitimize the existence of their newly Christianized peoples and to position them within a general Christian narrative. (Marjanović 2003, 88–89; Trajković-Filipović 2013, 266–267; Geary 2006, 323–328; Malmenvall 2019b, 51–52) Despite significant dissimilarities to the «classical» martyrs from the first centuries of Christianity, Jovan Vladimir, Boris and Gleb, and Magnus Erlendsson were assimilated into a well-known phenomenon of martyrdom, the earliest widespread form of sainthood in the Mediterranean world. Original or translated entries in liturgical texts and hagiographic compilations appropriated from the Byzantine or Latin tradition served as a basis to inspire the development of the native forms of sainthood. (White 2010, 95–96; 101–102; 105; Hafner 1964, 15–17; Dubois 2008, 12–13; Malmenvall 2019b, 51) In their writings about the new native saints, the ecclesiastical writers of Dioclea, Rus' and Norway found inspiration in the cult of martyrs, also innocent victims of violence, even if under very different sociocultural circumstances.⁴ Although new lives of martyrs were no longer being produced in contemporary Byzantium or Latin Europe, this type of sainthood proved to be a fruitful model in the polities on the eastern and northern periphery of Europe. (White 2010, 105; Hafner 1964, 16–17; Malmenvall 2019b, 51–52)

4 It should be noted that Christian sanctity, unlike the sacrality of pagan rule, was not an assumed attribute of the Christian ruler. A Christian prince or king had to earn his sanctity; while secular leadership was given to a prince or king by God, and while he was the «Lord's anointed» and God's representative on earth, he was not a being equipped with inborn moral or supernatural qualities. (Graus 1965, 389–391)

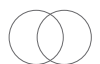


Jovan Vladimir's martyrdom can be compared to the life and death of Boris and Gleb who were sons of a Kievan prince, Vladimir Sviatoslavich (980–1015), also known as the »baptizer« of the East Slavs due to the adoption of Christianity from the Byzantine Empire as the state religion of Rus' in 988 or 989. (Malmenvall 2015, 184–190) Shortly before Vladimir's death in 1015, his son Yaroslav Vladimirovich, at the time prince of Novgorod and later of Kiev (1019–1054), started a rebellion against his father and stopped paying him tribute. Soon, however, the news reached Novgorod that Vladimir had died. Yaroslav persuaded the Novgorodians to join him in the struggle for the Kievan throne in order to stop the rampage of Vladimir's eldest son, Sviatopolk, who in the meantime had taken the Kievan throne and had his younger brothers Boris and Gleb killed. Although Sviatopolk was the eldest living son of Vladimir Sviatoslavich and might at first glance be perceived as a rightful successor, Sviatopolk's taking of the throne was accompanied by deliberate violence – he treacherously killed off his non-resistant brothers to ensure his position. In 1019 Sviatopolk was finally defeated by Yaroslav in the Battle of the Alta River east of Kiev. (Malmenvall 2015, 191–192; Senyk 1993, 225–228) Among the local Rus' saints, the cult of Boris and Gleb was the oldest and most widespread. The first phase of the canonization of the princely brothers was concluded by the confirmation of Georgi, the Kievan metropolitan, in 1072. It is the year 1115, however, that can be regarded as the final phase of the canonization because their relics, reposed in the town of Vyshgorod north of Kiev, were translated to a new church, dedicated to the princely brothers and built on the same site. (Hollingsworth 1992, XXVI–XVII; Malmenvall 2019c, 89) The narration on Boris and Gleb concerns the conduct of the nominally Christian princely dynasty of the Rurikids which ought to serve as an example of concord and virtuous life (Malmenvall 2019c, 90–91). Furthermore, it serves as a testimony about the profound reflection on the position of Kievan Rus' within the community of Christian polities. The parallels with biblical events and personalities testify about the desire of the East Slavic writers of the time to find through them a confirmation that »Divine providence« has been reflected in the recent history of Kievan Rus' as well. The martyrdom of Boris and Gleb is thus seen as a historically and geographically specific re-realization of the Old Testament story of Abel, embodied in the innocent brothers Boris and Gleb, and Cain, embodied in the murderous brother Sviatopolk. This way, Kievan Rus', despite its relatively late adoption of Christianity, was portrayed as included in the



global process of salvation history and as a full-fledged part of the Christian community. Hence emphasizing the fact of the principle of love towards one's enemies made it into the acts of the representatives of the East Slavic secular authorities, the bearers of the political ideal in the Christian society, which eventually served the confirmation of the legitimacy of the Rurik dynasty. (91–92)

In the context of ruler martyrs, similar to the case of Jovan Vladimir and Boris and Gleb, the death and canonization of Magnus Erlendsson, the jarl (earl) of the Orkney Islands within the Norwegian kingdom (Ingham 1984, 33), is worth special mention. Jarl Magnus of Orkney was assassinated between 1115 and 1117 at the behest of his cousin Haakon, who had rival claims to rule the Orkney Isles and for a time contrived to coexist by dividing the realm with Magnus. However, members of the Haakon's clan incited him to kill his cousin. Consequently, he lured Magnus to a peace meeting on the island of Egilsay, where his men lay in ambush. Haakon carried out his intention with treachery and oaths of friendship. When the conspiracy had been revealed, the earl decided against violent resistance to spare the lives of his men. He went to the church and, after the mass, voluntarily surrendered to the murderers. The cousin then ordered Magnus's cook to behead his master. Soon after Magnus's death, miracles supposedly began occurring. In 1135, the local residents demanded the disinterment of his relics, but were opposed by both jarl Paul, Haakon's son, and bishop Vilhjalmr (William). Because of his disbelief, the bishop then temporarily lost his sight and, under the strong impression of such a »divine sign«, he finally ordered Magnus's tomb to be opened. Magnus was canonized the same year. (Ingham 1973, 7–9; Malmenvall 2019b, 53) Two years later (1137) jarl Rognvald Kali Kolsson, later called Rognvald the Crusader (1136–1158), Magnus's nephew known as Saint Rognvald after his canonization in the late 12th century, laid the foundations for the cathedral dedicated to Saint Magnus in Kirkwall, the new political and ecclesiastical centre of the Orkney Isles (Antonsson 2007, 69; Ingham 1973, 7–9). Magnus's cult quickly spread through Scandinavia and found especially many followers in Iceland (Beuermann 2011, 145–146). The internal political plot led by a close relative, his use of deceit to trap the earl in a place away from home where he would be at a disadvantage, the earl's non-resistance on principle, the last-hour praying and attendance at mass, the final encirclement and slaughter of the victim – all this recalls vividly



the manner of the deaths of the Slavic martyred princes, such as Boris and Gleb and Jovan Vladimir (Ingham 1973, 8; 16). In a re-enactment of Christ's crucifixion and his triumph over the Devil, Magnus's willingness to suffer martyrdom heralds the completion of one step in God's plan: the spread of the religion even to a remote land like the Orkneys. Magnus, however, does not convert his people to Christianity, for they are already Christians in name, but still his martyrdom represents a symbolic inclusion of the earldom into the family of Christian people. Magnus's innocent blood had washed away the violent pagan past, heralding a new era of the Orkney Isles. (Antonsson 2007, 38-40)

4 Ruler martyrs and the process of Christianization

The comparison between ruler martyrs from the mentioned period, such as Boris and Gleb and Magnus Erlendsson on the one hand, and Jovan Vladimir on the other, is a reasonable step towards a deeper understanding of the process of Christianization and medieval political theology. The most general common characteristics of the compared princes are: they all lived in the same historical period; they belonged to the ruling political elites of their respective lands; they were princes of relatively recently Christianized polities; they were murdered by their own relatives as a result of political interests; they all voluntarily accepted their deaths for the sake of peace in their homelands and to save the lives of other people, following the example of Jesus Christ; furthermore, they all eventually became known as saints emphasizing the impact of recently adopted Christian ideals on decisions of social importance in their homelands. (Malmenvall 2019b, 51-55; Živković 2006, 72-73) The categorization of murdered rulers or other members of the ruling dynasty as saints was thus typical of those parts of medieval Europe where the new Christian ideals had only started to gradually shape the social norms. Ruler martyrs were regarded by their contemporaries as promoters of the new ideal of the Christian monarch or member of the ruling elite and symbols of the rejection of the recent pagan past. Their deaths are presented within a framework of confrontation between »exemplary« and »false« Christians, actually still pagans, opposing them. When addressing the subject of ruler martyrs, the writers of medieval European peripheries elevate a particular type of sacrifice, defined by following the example of Christ and breaking the cycle



of violence, which results in the victim gaining entry into the »Kingdom of Heaven«. (Ingham 1984, 33.36–37; Miljutenko 2006, 9.14–15.27–28.31.33–35; Paramonova 2010, 281; Klaniczay 2010, 288–289.302–304; Antonsson 2010, 18)

The discussed phenomenon of ruler martyrdom can be explained in two fundamental ways: not only did it enable newly Christianized ruling dynasties and their homelands to position themselves in the Christian salvation history, but it also positioned them in the symbolic centre of the European culture of the time. Its centrality was ensured through hagiographical narratives of saints, relics, and miracles. This also explains why the first written records produced in the eastern and northern periphery of medieval Europe are all about local saints. Therefore, from this perspective, not only did the earlier periphery become the centre, but the division between the centre and periphery lost its relevance. Wherever God's presence was manifested through a saintly ruler, his people were in the centre of the Christian world. (Trajković-Filipović 2012, 9–10; Klaniczay 2002, 327; Geary 2006, 327) Because those saints »followed Christ«, their sacrifice is presented as a »new covenant« between God and their homeland. In the Old Testament, animal sacrifice was a way of making a covenant; through animal sacrifice, God made a covenant with Abraham; in the later Christian tradition, Christ was compared to a lamb that was to be sacrificed by a divine plan for the sins of mankind. This level of meaning is important for the understanding of the role of ruler martyrs of the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries because their decision to voluntarily sacrifice their lives out of love towards fellow men and their homeland was not only a manifestation of God's presence but also the making of a covenant and creation of a new Christian community. (Trajković-Filipović 2012, 14–15; Sciacca 1990, 254–257)

The martyrdom of Jovan Vladimir and the phenomenon of medieval ruler martyrs in general can be additionally explained using the theory of »mimetic violence« by René Girard (1987, 235–245). According to him, archaic cultures originated in the so-called mimetic desire, which encouraged the imitator to surpass one's own model and, when necessary, use various forms of violence. When the violence resulting from the mimetic desire reached its critical point, the »scapegoat mechanism« was activated time and again in order to restore original peace – it pointed out



a particular innocent victim, often perceived as a rival brother (Abel and Cain, Romulus and Remus, etc.), who was sacrificed for the renewal of a particular community. This pattern of cyclical violence was, argues Girard, defeated through the person of Jesus Christ who subverted the scapegoat mechanism by voluntarily sacrificing his own life for the salvation of every person »once and for all«. In this respect, an irreconcilable duality emerges between the archaic mythical world and the Gospel, violent sacrifice of someone's life for the alleged benefit of the community and voluntary sacrifice out of love for every irreplaceable human life. (Petkovšek 2018, 37–40) The main difference between mimetic violence and the Christian worldview lies in their relation to the other: the ambivalent archaic culture finds the other both attractive (worthy of imitation) and dangerous (adequate for sacrifice), while the Christian mindset presupposes love towards every person and without deception acknowledges the innocence of the victim. In this context, Jovan Vladimir, as well as other mentioned ruler martyrs of the northern and eastern periphery of medieval Europe, can be seen as innocent victims following the example of Jesus Christ by voluntarily sacrificing themselves to save the lives of others. In this way, they succeeded in (symbolically) breaking the previous cycle of violence and, consequently, rejecting the recent pagan past rooted in the notion of mimetic violence.

Conclusion

Although the existence and subsequent veneration of ruler martyrs was unknown in both the Byzantine and southern European Latin Christian lands, this phenomenon cannot be considered a peculiarity of a particular medieval polity. Despite local differences and specific reasons for specific canonizations, the phenomenon of princely or royal ruler martyrs was in fact common between the 10th and 12th centuries in the countries on the eastern and northern periphery of Europe that had recently adopted Christianity, such as Kievan Rus' with Boris and Gleb, or the Orkney Islands, then part of Norway, with Magnus Erlendsson. In the face of mortal danger, these saints did not resort to revenge or fratricide as a means of struggle for power, but rather voluntarily persevered in high Christian (moral) ideals, stemming from the imperative of love towards God and one's neighbor, by accepting their death for the benefit of peace

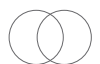


in their homelands and thus accentuating the relative value of political power. In this context, one of the most notable examples of ruler martyr cult among the medieval peripheral polities can be observed in the case of prince Jovan Vladimir of Dioclea, who was murdered by his relative Ivan Vladislav, tsar of Bulgaria. The central literary and theological motif of Jovan Vladimir's life and death is the biblical reminiscence taken from the Gospel of John (10,11) about the »Good Shepherd«. This invokes the Christ's parable about his authority (»godliness«), but also his own sacrificial love towards mankind resulting in giving »his life for his sheep«. On this basis, the entire story about Jovan Vladimir, as presented in the *Chronicle*, shows that Jovan Vladimir uses his position as a leader, his political authority, for the kenotic imitation of Christ.

The phenomenon of ruler martyrs can be explained in two fundamental ways: it enabled newly Christianized ruling dynasties to position themselves in the Christian salvation history and it also positioned their polities in the symbolic centre of the European culture of the time. Its centrality was ensured through hagiographical narratives of saints, relics, and miracles. This also explains why the first written records produced in the eastern and northern periphery of medieval Europe are all about local saints. Therefore, not only did the earlier periphery become the centre, but the division between the centre and periphery lost its relevance. Wherever God's presence was manifested through a saintly ruler, his people were in the centre of the Christian world. This level of meaning is important for the understanding of the role of ruler martyrs between the 10th and 12th centuries: their decision to persevere in love »until the end« was a manifestation of the creation of a new Christian community.

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