

Negotiating National Prospects by Capturing the Medieval Past: Byzantium in Serbian Architectural History at the Turn of the 20th Century

»It is a daughter of Byzantium«, proclaimed Mihailo Valtrović, a founding father of Serbian archaeology and architectural history, on the occasion of the opening the annual »exhibition of architectural, sculptural and pictorial documents« in Belgrade taken from a study trip to Serbia proper in 1874¹. This widespread notion of a Serbo-Byzantine cultural kinship, which was also attributed to Valtrović's collaborator Dragutin S. Milutinović², revealed what would become a central question of Serbian architectural historiography in decades to come: the affinity, even identity, of Serbian and Byzantine architecture. Born on a tidal wave of the nation's permanent obsession with Byzantium, this metaphor of the closest of family relationships became a model of interpretation that dominated Serbian history in the late nineteenth and early 20th century – not only in art and architectural, but also in cultural and political history. Apart from providing vivid and tangible evidence of the cultural and political ties of medieval Serbia with the Byzantine Empire, Valtrović's argument went, Serbian medieval architecture was also a sublime emanation of the »national spirit«³ closely related to that of Byzantium. And it was by these and similar accounts of ancient buildings scattered throughout the country – neglected and falling to ruin during the centuries spent under the »Turkish yoke« – that architecture became fundamental to the historical imagination (fig. 1). Since Valtrović and Milutinović's times, these dilapidated and vulnerable monuments supposedly »reflected the innermost as well as the external life of Serbian people«⁴ and were deeply entrenched into Byzantine tradition.

Several years later, Valtrović used the same expression to describe a historical process that had left a deep mark on Serbian national identity: »Serbian art is a daughter of Byzantium; all the monuments yet discovered mainly resemble those of the late Byzantine period«⁵. Indeed, the premise of Serbo-Byzantine cultural kinship was characteristic not only of Valtrović's and Milutinović's writings, in which expressions

like »Byzantium's daughter« for Serbia as well as Byzantium as a »Serbia's mother«⁶ abound, but paved a way for the entire interpretive tradition which reached its apex the inter-war period. The words of Milan Kašanin, one of the most respected art historians of his time, are just one example. Kašanin thought that »perhaps no country but ours was in such close and living communication with Byzantium. While not disregarding the influence of the West and Orient«, he argued, »one can comfortably conclude that the Byzantine Empire was a country from which we inherited a major part of our cultural heritage«⁷.

Even a superficial examination of the architecture of medieval Serbia leaves no doubt that it was closely connected with a tradition usually described as Byzantine (fig. 2). To question the premise of the close Serbo-Byzantine cultural relationship and the logic of its employment in historiography seems utterly redundant. It is still believed that it was the apparent Serbo-Byzantine cultural kinship that »naturally« spurred interest in Byzantine art history⁸. »Serbian medieval heritage«, a recent account reads, »originated in the Byzantine cultural sphere and consequently influenced its reception«⁹. This and similar statements assume that the interest in studying relationships between Serbian and Byzantine architecture was formed and developed as a necessary consequence of historical realities. Irrespective of the fact that causal relationships between certain historical phenomena (such as architecture) and the historiographical construction of the past are complex, the fact is that Serbo-Byzantine cultural kinship in the formative period of Serbian architectural history became a central topic of historical interest. It was consequently converted into an unquestionable question of »national« architecture that still preoccupies Serbian historians. But was the historical »influence« of Byzantium on Serbian »national« architecture the only reason for such an unyielding insistence on Byzantium's central position in the national narrative?

1 Valtrović, Govor 14. aprila 1874. 342.

2 Damljanović, Valtrović i Milutinović 14.

3 Valtrović, Govor 14. aprila 1874. 342. – Milutinović, Govor Dragutina Milutinovića 195-196. – Milutinović/Valtrović, Izvešće Odseku umetničkom 408.

4 Valtrović, Stare srpske crkvene građevine 24.

5 Valtrović, Studenica 122.

6 For the metaphor of Byzantium as a Serbian mother see an unpublished paper by Valtrović kept in the Archives of Serbia: MPs, f. IV, p. 9/1880. See: Roter-Blagojević, Značaj 34.

7 Kašanin, Drugi međunarodni 336-337. – Kašanin, Bela crkva 115.

8 Makuljević, Art History in Serbia 463.

9 Makuljević, Inventing and Changing 508.

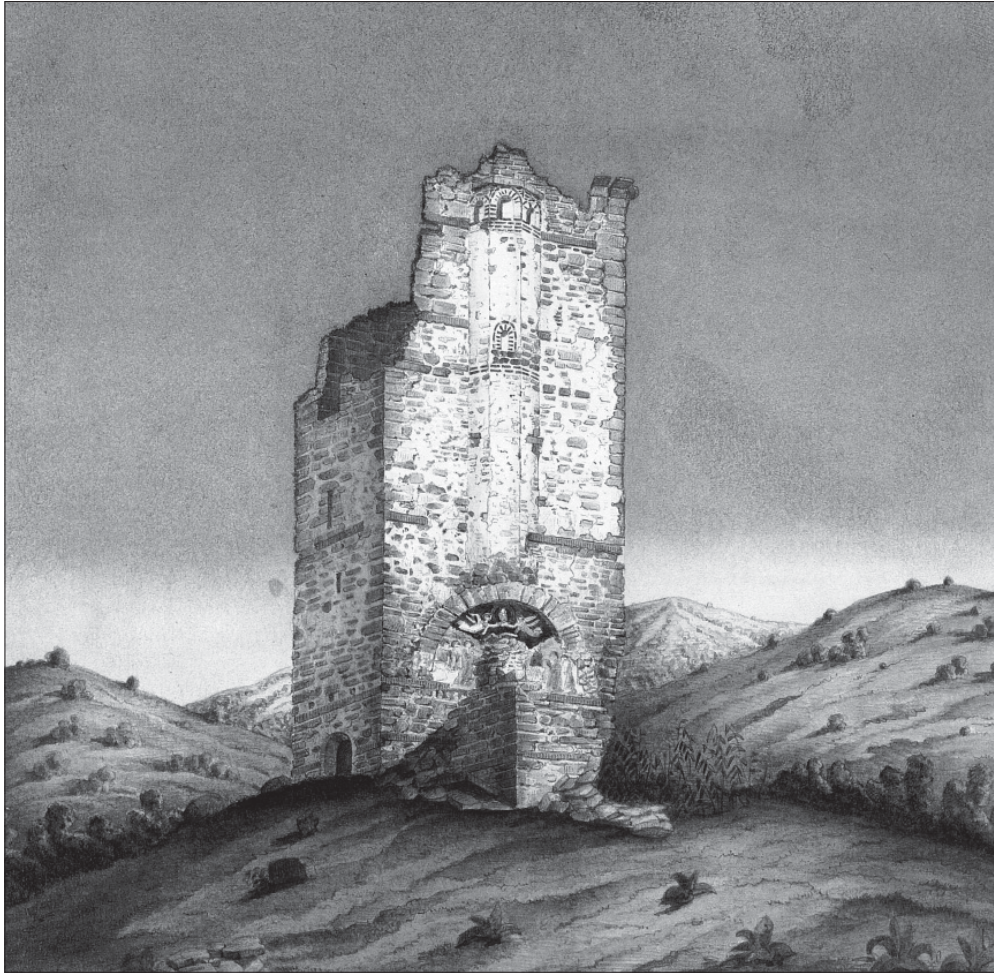


Fig. 1 D. Milutinović, Church of St Nicholas near Lukavica, watercolour, 1878. – (© Historical Museum of Serbia, Inv. no. 3693).



Fig. 2 Church of the Annunciation, Gračanica, 14th c. – (After Umetnički pregled 3/1, 1937, 70).

This paper investigates the problem of how historiographical accounts of Serbo-Byzantine architectural relationships in fin-de-siècle scholarship dealt more with issues of Byzantium as a value-laden construct than with historical realities in medieval Serbia. For between the late nineteenth and the early decades of the 20th century, the attribute »Byzantine« – not only in scholarly discourse but also in wider historical imagination – expanded well beyond its basic sense of referring to the Eastern Roman Empire. Rather, Byzantium was burdened with connotations that defined the qualities of medieval Serbia as those of Byzantium's cultural and political heir.

A principal aim of this paper is to propose that the relationship between Byzantine and Serbian architecture was used as an ideological tool par excellence – i. e. as an integral part of the nation's historicity and modernity, as well as an ideological justification for political formations and frontiers. In the context of Serbian nation-building in the late 19th and early 20th century, which was inextricably linked with the idea of the restoration of medieval »empire«, the image of a past that would justify the country's expansion and its eminent status regarding its neighbours needed a strong historical justification. Just as the attribute »Serbian« was widely used among historians to denote not only the people of medieval Serbia but also a set of cultural values attached to a »Serbian nation«, the term »Byzantine« stood for much more than the Byzantine Empire and its civilization¹⁰. Indeed, Byzantium in Serbian national historiography was not only a historical phenomenon – whose chronological, cultural and even political frontiers and identities are highly problematic, as Averil Cameron demonstrated in her recent study of the »Byzantine problem«¹¹ – but a set of ideological assets characterized by complexity and fluidity¹². And it was this complex image of Byzantium that became useful for crafting an idea of medieval Serbia which would, and should, represent a predecessor of modern Serbia.

To investigate the problem of how architectural historiography interpreted the Serbo-Byzantine relationship, one should go beyond disciplinary frontiers and seek a wider perspective. The work of Stanoje Stanojević, a prominent and prolific Serbian historian of the time, is perhaps the most conspicuous example of this entire tradition of historiography. At the beginning of the first volume of his ambitiously conceived but haltingly executed book »Vizantija i Srbi« (Byzantium and Serbs, 1903), he outlined a framework that characterized both a romantic strain of national historiography and its critical opposite, which he believed himself to represent¹³. »More than any other historical factor«, Stanojević asser-

tively declared, »Byzantium influenced the political and cultural history of the Serbian people and Serbian lands [sic]«. »Moreover«, he added, »despite occasional influences from the West, particularly in material culture, Byzantium and its civilization marked the life of Serbian people, as well as their lands, so strongly that they far surpassed all other historical factors taken together«¹⁴. He then elaborated on the dual role of Byzantium as Serbia's cultural benefactor and principal political adversary.

In this and similar accounts, Byzantium retained an exceptional position in the nation's history. On the one hand, medieval Serbs were portrayed as having the closest of affinities with Byzantine culture, while on the other hand the Byzantine Empire was seen a constant threat not only to Serbian sovereignty over »national« territory, but also to national identity. This ambivalence was framed by historians who expounded on Byzantium's relevance »either as a master or enemy«, as a contemporary historian has put it, stressing that, in one sense or another, it »was always seen as a role model of kinds«¹⁵. Yet this ambivalence stemmed as much from the historiographical reconstruction of the past as from a global, epistemologically unstable and (for that matter) ideologically useful image of the Eastern Roman Empire created by generations of European historians who wrote after Edward Gibbon.

This was a context in which Serbian architectural history operated: »Byzantium« was included in national architecture by virtue of either closeness or difference, identity or opposition. On the one hand, Byzantine-Serbian kinship suggested not only shared cultural values but also an underlying idea of political and cultural succession, which was common among historians who developed a particularly Serbian variant of *translatio imperii*. They constructed an elaborated narrative in which medieval Serbia was to become Byzantium's political and cultural heir¹⁶. The differences between Byzantine and Serbian culture – and, more particularly, between two discrete architectural languages – went hand in hand with the historiographical construction of Serbo-Byzantine political enmities and cultural clashes. Serbian architecture was clearly seen as either a vital offspring or continuation of the Byzantine, which was related to the idea of medieval Serbia as Byzantium's truest successor. Most particularly, the aura that historians created around King Stefan Uroš IV Dušan (1308-1355), who was crowned Emperor of Serbs and Romans in 1346, as well as his »Serbo-Byzantine« state, spurred the idea of *translatio imperii* that would make a deep mark on the mainstream historical imagination of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Serbia. However, this imagination

10 On the historiographical construction of Byzantium see: Reinsch, Hieronymus Wolf 43-53. – Reinsch, The History of Editing 435-444. – Stephenson, The World of Byzantine Studies 429-434.

11 Cameron, Byzantine Matters 60, 112-115. On the problem of establishing timescales and spatial boundaries concerning the history of Byzantium see: Cameron, Byzantine Matters 28-29. – Stephenson, The World of Byzantine Studies 429-434.

12 Ignjatović, U srpsko-vizantijskom 276-297. – Bodin, Whose Byzantium 11-42.

13 Indeed, the same attitudes towards Byzantium distinguished the both traditions of Serbian historiography, see: Ignjatović, Byzantium's Apt Inheritors 57-92.

14 Stanojević, Vizantija i Srbi 1, IV, emphasis added.

15 Maksimović, Carstvo Stefana Dušana 191. Elsewhere he has used the same triad (»master«, »enemy«, »exemplar for imitation«) to picture the relationship between medieval Serbia and Byzantium: Maksimović, Srpska carska titula 133.

16 On the topic see further: Ignjatović, Byzantium's Apt Inheritors 57-92. – On the relevance of the *translatio imperii* model in architectural history see: Ignjatović, U srpsko-vizantijskom kaleidoskopu 492-546.



Fig. 3 Church of St. Stephen (Lazarica), Kruševac, 14th c. – (After Srpski tehnički list 18/50, 1907, 417).

was not only a historical fancy associated with burgeoning nationalism, but also part of a national program that would serve as an ideological basis for Serbian expansionism.

In particular, Serbo-Byzantine cultural kinship influenced the perception of Serbs as an imperial nation that ought to have an absolutely predominant role in the Balkans, in both past and future, and in both political and cultural terms. Historical accounts of Serbo-Byzantine relationships in architecture helped establish a dominant paradigm of the nation, which could be summed up using the dendrological metaphor of a »national sapling« ennobled with a »Byzantine graft«, a common phrase used by Mihailo Valtrović and his fellow Serbian historians educated in the milieu of positivism. And yet simultaneously, stark cultural differences between Byzantium and Serbs, which were developed in architectural historiography and other forms of

historical imagination contemporaneously, reinforced a sense of national authenticity, which was crucial for constructing a genuine Serbian identity and legitimizing the independent nation-state (fig. 3). Importantly, these two perspectives on Serbo-Byzantine relationships – which were based on two stereotyped images of Byzantium, one positive and one negative – were not opposed but indeed complementary.

It is important to consider the outlines of this dual epistemological-ideological paradigm of Serbo-Byzantine kinship and difference in a wider Balkan context. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the historical writing of Greeks, Romanians, Serbs and Bulgarians was permeated by efforts to create medieval national genealogies and the veneration of suitable »national« pasts. In this competing context, Byzantium became a multifaceted semiotic topos appropriated by Balkan

elites in order to support diverse but comparable national imaginations. This happened in the political context of the declining Ottoman Empire, the so-called Eastern Question and the Balkan nations' struggle for political and cultural emancipation. A combination of different models of perceiving Byzantium seeped into the historical imagination and was accorded a special ideological role. More particularly, in the prevailing Orientalist discourse, Byzantium still retained an aura of cultural decadence, though it had also signified cultural sophistication and extraordinary imperial rule¹⁷. For instance, the Greek and Romanian national narrative had a rather complex but integrative stance towards the issue of Byzantine history and culture; the Bulgarian one was predominantly exclusivist, while Serbian historiography combined these two opposite views, representing a special case¹⁸.

Being an ideological tool *par excellence*, Byzantium in the Serbian national narrative was included in mechanisms of dual cultural emancipation, »causing the Byzantine Empire to be simultaneously seen as »national legacy« and expressed in terms of the nation's political adversary and cultural obstacle«¹⁹. The construction of Serbo-Byzantine kinship and the myth of Byzantine-Serbian imperial succession in particular was an ideological weapon brandished at both the still-present remains of Ottoman culture as well as intrusive Western paternalism²⁰. At the turn of the century, what was seen as the Byzantine heritage became an integral part of the national colonization of the past and the creation of an imperial pedigree for the nation²¹. The age of modern empires might have come to an end, but imperial appetites and prospects remained crucial features of nationalism – not only in the predominantly Christian states of the Balkans, but also elsewhere in Europe²².

That architecture, via the discipline of architectural history, became a primary medium for the construction of national narratives in Europe of the 19th century is common knowledge. The architectural remains of ancient times were transformed into national symbols, along with all other aspects of culture – from language and material culture to societal forms and legislature, all contributing to the politically-driven idea of historical continuity²³. Serbian history of architecture and its colonization of the medieval past originated from

this dual process of establishing the discipline and bolstering nationalism. From the sporadic activities of solitary intellectuals in the first half of the 19th century to a systematic and state-sponsored exploration of medieval monuments which reached its peak between 1880s and 1910s, the architecture of medieval Serbia came into the sights of both scholars and political elites, who joined together not only to admire the remnants of the nation's imperial past, but to cultivate the ideological potentials and functions of this recently discovered heritage.

It is worth noting that a gradual process of institutionalizing architectural history and the rise of interest for the Serbian »national« and »imperial« heritage clearly demonstrate the stages of the development of nationalist movements as outlined in the well-known Miroslav Hroch scheme²⁴. In the first stage of romantic nationalism, a small group of intellectuals showed interest in studying medieval architecture, which they classified according to loosely established categories such as »national« and »Byzantine«. For instance, Vuk Karadžić, Dimitrije Avramović and Janko Šafarik were among these early national activists²⁵. The peak of the second phase was distinguished by Mihailo Valtrović and Dragutin Milutinović's systematization of medieval heritage, which lasted until the beginning of the First World War. In this phase, a number of official institutions were established in order to examine and preserve medieval Serbian architecture, such as »Društvo srpske slovesnosti« (Serbian Learned Society, 1864), »Srpska kraljevska akademija« (Serbian Royal Academy, 1886), »Narodni muzej« (National Museum, 1844) and »Srpsko arheološko društvo« (Serbian Archaeological Society, 1883). As the century progressed, these institutions became crucial agents of Serbian nationalism²⁶. The final stage of development occurred with a broader popularization of Serbian medieval architecture and the proliferation of popular books and visual material on the subject during the 1920s and 1930s²⁷.

Notwithstanding the phases of development of the Serbian nationalist movement, which neatly paralleled the rise of the discipline of architectural history, the relationship between Serbian and Byzantine architecture became a fundamental element of the national narrative. As already noted,

17 Stamatopoulos, *Balkan Historiographies*.

18 Ignjatović, *U srpsko-vizantijskom kaleidoskopu* 343-745. – Babić, *Grci i drugi* 119-137.

19 Ignjatović, *Byzantium's Apt Inheritors* 58.

20 On the importance of the Hapsburg paternalism in the context of constituting national art history in Serbia at the beginning of the 20th century see: Makuljević, *The Political Reception* 3. – Čubrilo, *Istorija umetnosti kod Srba* 703.

21 Dagenais/Greer, *Decolonizing the Middle Ages* 431-448. – Levitt, *The Colonization of the Past* 259-284. – Hodder, *Sustainable Time Travel* 139-147.

22 The opposition between the empire and nation-state has been examined in contemporary literature. Some authors understand that imperialism and nationalism are not necessarily set against each other but are interconnected historical phenomena. Importantly, the modern empires of the late 19th and early 20th century are all distinguished by the rise of nationalism. On the other hand, many European nation-states of the time shared attitudes towards territorial enlargement, cultural, political or territorial expansionism and, above all, aspirations to imperial rule. See: Gerasimov et al., *New Imperial History* 3-23. – Lieven, *Dilemmas of Empire* 163-200. – Kumar, *Empire and English Nationalism* 2. – Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World* 230.

23 The literature on relationships between architectural history and nation-building is large and multifaceted; it includes a number of interpretive perspectives. However, titles concerned with the roles of architecture in the symbolic representation of the state predominate, such as: Vale, *Architecture*. – Artan, *Questions of Ottoman Identity* 85-109. On the role of architecture in the formation and development of nationalism see: Quek, *Nationalism and Architecture* 1-18. – Schwarzer, *The Sources of Architectural Nationalism* 19-38. On the function of architecture in the discourse of Serbian nationalism: Ignjatović, *U srpsko-vizantijskom kaleidoskopu* 40-56. For architecture's role in the construction of the ideology of Yugoslavism see: Ignjatović, *Images of the Nation* 828-858. – Ignjatović, *From Constructed Memory* 624-651. – Ignjatović, *Architecture* 110-126. – Ignjatović, *Jugoslovenstvo u arhitekturi* 17-41.

24 See: Hroch, *Das Europa der Nationen* 45-47. – Hroch, *Social Preconditions* 18-30.

25 On the early agents of Serbian national heritage see more in: Medaković, *Istraživači srpskih starina*. – Makuljević, *Umetnost i nacionalna ideja*.

26 Ignjatović, *Between the Sceptre and the Key* 47-68.

27 Ignjatović, *U srpsko-vizantijskom kaleidoskopu* 28-29.

Serbian medieval heritage was interpreted as simultaneously identical with the Byzantine and distinct from it. Thus, two interconnected paradigms of dealing with medieval heritage can be discerned: Byzantinisation and De-Byzantinisation. These paradigms, however, were only part of a much wider process of interpreting the medieval past in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Serbia and were not limited to architectural matters²⁸. The underlying pattern of these paradigms was to associate Serbs as closely as possible with a Byzantine cultural sphere (which had a range of ideologically convenient connotations, from the inheritance of the classical values of ancient Greece and Rome to the epitome of the original spirit of Christianity), but also to dissociate an authentic Serbian national culture from what was usually seen as the decadent, ossified and uninventive culture of the Byzantines. Byzantium as a symbolic vehicle became instrumental to this dialectic of identity because it carried a range of value-laden meanings developed in both scholarly discourse and the popular historical imagination.

The foundation of these paradigms, fully developed in the second decade of the 20th century by the French scholar Gabriel Millet²⁹, was already laid in nineteenth-century accounts of medieval art and architecture, particularly those by Valtrović and Milutinović. But perhaps the most telling example is a study excursion to Macedonia, still under Ottoman rule, by the Russian archaeologist and art historian Nikodim Kondakov in 1900 and published only nine years later as a book »Makedoniā: Arkheologicheskoe puteshestvie« (Macedonia: An Archaeological Voyage)³⁰. The author's aim was to »determine the historical role of Serbia and Bulgaria in the cultural history of various Macedonian places«³¹. This enterprise, of course, helped justify Serbian and territorial claims over Macedonia and Kosovo. The conclusion of Kondakov's argument was that the »limits of what has been considered Byzantine art should be [...] appreciably reduced«. Starting »from the thirteenth century«, he added, the »extent of a genuine Byzantine art was limited to the Constantinopolitan region, while other regions were distinguished by flourishing not of the Byzantine, but a Greco-Slavic art«. Importantly, this »Greco-Slavic« identity (Kondakov used the term »Byzantine-Slavic« interchangeably) was »unquestionably characterized by Serbian impact«³².

The character of medieval »national« architecture itself, as described by historians, was highly instrumental. Kondakov's conclusions, which did not lack a Slavophile pathos and an-

ti-Ottoman sentiment³³, soon penetrated into Serbian history writing. This is best shown by »Prošlost Stare Srbije« (The Past of Old Serbia, 1912), a book written by Jovan Radonić, one of the greatest Serbian historians of the period. He made full use of the accounts by Kondakov and other architectural historians of a peculiarly Serbian variant of the Byzantine to bolster Serbian claims to Macedonia and Kosovo, an acute issue on the eve of the Balkan Wars³⁴.

However, the cultural ambiguity of medieval Serbian architecture remained because the association of Serbs with Byzantium was always retained in the narratives. This, of course, had a long history. Even the mid-19th century interest in the scant remains of the medieval »national« past, scattered across Serbian »national« territories, testifies to the establishment of a regime of closeness and even identity between Serbian and Byzantine architecture. For example, in 1846 Janko Šafarik, one of the early pioneers of Serbian architectural history, described his encounter with medieval monuments as a discovery of »Byzantine-Slavic architecture«³⁵. Yet it was only with Felix Kanitz's »Serbiens byzantinische Monumente« (Serbian Byzantine Monuments, 1862), published simultaneously in German and Serbian, that the understanding of the national heritage as »Byzantine« received a great boost³⁶ (fig. 4), albeit not without dissenting voices. The first among these critics was Milan Milićević, who in 1867 complained that one could not equate Serbian with Byzantine architecture, instead opting for »Serbian monuments in the Byzantine Style«³⁷. He and his supporters, Dragutin Milutinović and Mihailo Valtrović included, thought this was a veritable term to adequately describe the national heritage³⁸.

The close ties of Serbian architecture with Byzantium remained unquestionable, not only to art historians – for instance Vladimir Petković, who determinedly avowed that Serbian medieval architecture was in fact Byzantine³⁹ – but also in the wider historical imagination of fin-de-siècle Serbia. However, there was no consensus among historians as to whether Serbo-Byzantine cultural identity owed its existence to the gravitational »spheres of influence« of the Byzantine Empire, a »circle of a common civilization«, or a »zone of Byzantine Orthodoxy« – i. e. what Dimitri Obolensky would later call the Byzantine Commonwealth⁴⁰; or whether the dual identity of national monuments existed due either to Serbian cultural predilections or political interests.

On the other hand, the perception of national architecture as a culturally distinct phenomenon, spurred by the need for

28 Ignjatović, Byzantium's Apt Inheritors 57-58.

29 Millet, L'art chrétien d'Orient 928-962. – Millet, L'ancien art serbe (La Serbie glorieuse) 26-56. – Millet, L'ancien art serbe: les églises.

30 Kondakov, Makedoniā.

31 Dragutinović, Rezultati ruske naučne 107.

32 Dragutinović, Rezultati ruske naučne 112.

33 Warren, Mikhail Larionov 22.

34 Radonić, Prošlost Stare Srbije 19-21.

35 Šafarik's observation was not only related to the church of Manasija (also called Resava, 1406-1418), but also to a series of other medieval edifices which he had visited in 1846 under the auspices of »Društvo srpske slovesnosti« (Society

of Serbian Letters). See: Šafarik, Izvestije o putovanju po Srbiji. On Šafarik's activities on issues concerning heritage see: Medaković, Prva ispitivanja starina 154-157. – Maksimović, Janko Šafarik 41-54. – Kolarić, Prvi koraci ka zaštiti starina 25-35.

36 Kanitz, Serbiens byzantinische Monumente. – Kanitz, Vizantijski spomenici po Srbiji.

37 Milićević, Manastiri u Srbiji 71. – Milićević, Manastiri u Srbiji (Glasnik) 71.

38 Milutinović/Valtrović, Izveštaj izaslanika Umetničkog odseka 301.

39 Petković, Freske iz unutrašnjeg narteksa 120-143, esp. 123.

40 Obolensky, The Byzantine Commonwealth.

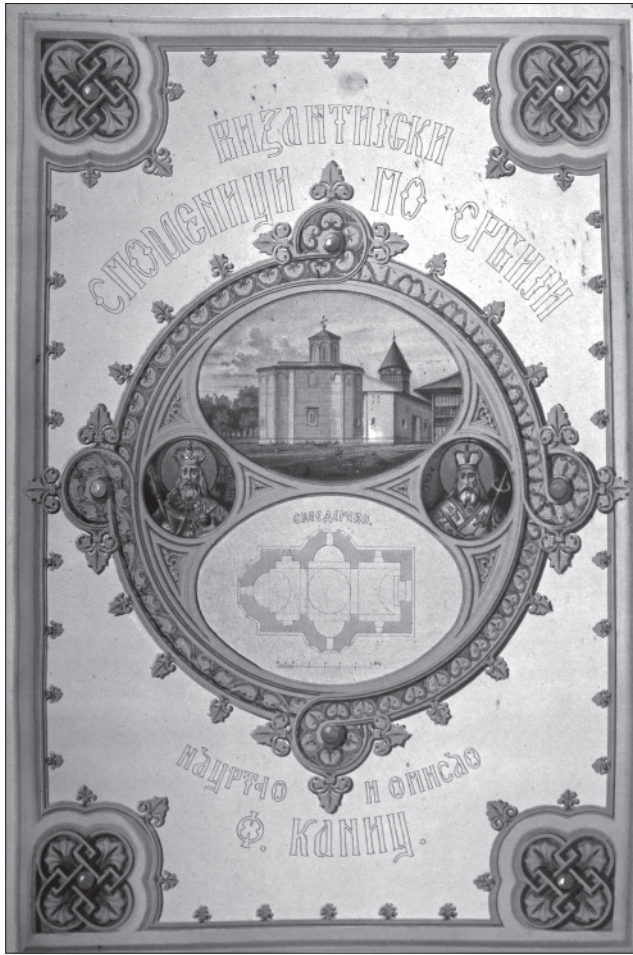


Fig. 4 F. Kanic, Vizantijski spomenici po Srbiji (1862), Book Cover.

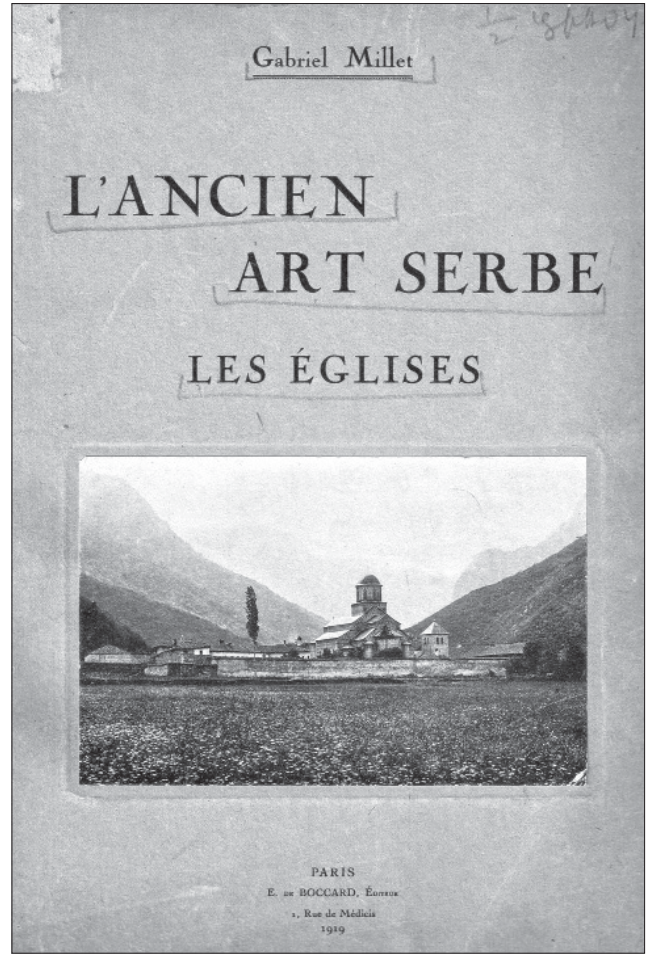


Fig. 5 G. Millet, L'ancien Art Serbe: Les Églises (1919), Book Cover.

cultural authenticity and genuine national identity, led to the dissociation of the two traditions. Milutinović and Valtrović already practiced this strain of interpretation, and over the course of the first decade of the 20th century the de-Byzantinisation paradigm kept pace with Byzantinisation. Around 1900, Božidar Nikolajević, the first Serbian art historian to specialize in Byzantine art, opted for a clear demarcation between Serbian and Byzantine architecture. Almost all authors writing on Serbian medieval architecture in the 1910s, such as Peter Pokrishkin, Louis Bréhier and, most notably, Gabriel Millet would soon follow this trend.

But the origins and development of the de-Byzantinisation paradigm in architectural history only partially resulted from arguments of form, morphology and style. What was needed were distinct features of a »national« architecture that would simultaneously speak of its Byzantine origins and a peculiarly Serbian form of their adoption, sophistication and perfection⁴¹.

41 Ignjatović, Byzantium Evolutionized 254-274.

42 Vasić, Žiča i Lazarica 92.

The peak of de-Byzantinisation was reached when Mилоje Vasić, one of the greatest authorities in the field, published »Žiča i Lazarica: studije iz srpske umetnosti srednjega veka« (Žiča i Lazarica: Studies in Serbian Art of the Middle Ages, 1928), the first synthesis of medieval Serbian architecture after Gabriel Millet that went beyond the hitherto sketchy compendia. Vasić concluded that »one ought not to have any doubts and may dare to say that medieval Serbian architecture is not a coarse reflection of Byzantine architecture, and certainly not its feeble offshoot«⁴².

Nevertheless, despite being a well-studied piece of scholarship, Vasić's book has not challenged prevalent accounts based on the interpretation of medieval Serbian architecture by Millet, finally published in 1919 under the title »L'ancien art serbe: les églises« (fig. 5). The French Byzantologist subdivided the architecture of medieval Serbia into three distinct groups, which he symptomatically called »schools«: the »Raška School«, the »School of Byzantinised Serbia« and the »Morava School«⁴³. Interestingly, three years earlier he

43 Millet, L'ancien art serbe. On Millet's operation see the critical analysis: Ćurčić, Architecture in Byzantium 9-31.

had divided medieval architecture in the Southern Balkans into two particular »schools« – those of Greece and Constantinople⁴⁴. Irrespective of earlier similar attempts to organize Serbian national heritage, either structurally or chronologically, which was performed by Milutinović and Valtrović, Kondakov and Pokriškin, Millet's seminal work was seen as undoubtedly original; it also gave credibility to the already developed nationalistic cult of authenticity which saturated the national narrative.

Nevertheless, Millet's tripartite model only further reinforced the ideas hitherto present in Serbian scholarship. One of the leading Serbian intellectuals of the interwar period, the literary critic and university professor Pero Slijepčević, praised Millet's views in spite of sharing widespread assumptions that medieval Serbian architecture was somewhat identical with Byzantine. He wrote that »history has only recently come to dismantle the totality of Byzantine art, which has since been taken as a single style«. He praised the differentiation of the entire Byzantine tradition into various »national« idioms, which had already become codified as a scholarly standard *par excellence*⁴⁵.

The idea of establishing different national or sub-national »schools« was only one, albeit the most important, way of nationalizing the Byzantine heritage. Indeed, what went beyond Millet's particular enterprise was the need for a rather ideological carving-up of medieval architecture and its subsequent distribution among different national camps. More particularly, Millet's tripartite division reinforced the three major conceptual models of Serbian national identity, which were not mutually exclusive. First, the »School of Byzantinised Serbia« was generically linked with a dominant view on Serbian national history distinguished by the emphasis on its full Byzantinsation while the »Raška School« insisted on the profound influence of the West. Yet only in combination could these two architectural idioms function as a kind of identity model of cultural mediation that fit into one of the major paradigms of imagining Serbian identity – that of a cultural crossroads, of a nation spanning East and West⁴⁶. Finally, the ideological economy of the »Morava School« – a peculiarly picturesque idiom developed in the late 14th and the beginning of the 15th century – supported a central nation-building myth of cultural authenticity. Despite being Byzantine in spatial concept, the historians argued, churches of the Morava School far surpassed typical Byzantine features in both structural logic and decoration.

Not only academic historians were responsible for transferring these identity models to public discourse. More than anyone, professional architects turned architectural historians

contributed to the popularization of both the Byzantinisation and de-Byzantinisation paradigms. Starting with Andra Stevanović in the late 19th century to Aleksandar Deroko in the 1920s, a number of architects devoted themselves to helping academic literature seep into public awareness. An account by Dragutin Maslač from 1908, in all its naiveté, sums up this phenomenon rather well:

»We, the Serbs, had a period of culture when architecture was purely Serbian; when the people uniquely adapted ideas taken from Byzantium and – while appropriating and remodelling the borrowed motifs with an urge to add novelties and adapt the composition in line with their [national] character – gave a vivid proof of their ability to appreciate the beauty of forms as well as to adjust them to suit their own needs«⁴⁷.

Maslač's narrative was only a reflection of a long-standing tradition present in both para-scholarly literature and academic historiography. By the end of his fruitful career as an archaeologist and architectural historian, Mihailo Valtrović tersely summarized his decades-long explorations of medieval Serbian heritage. Writing about the origins and importance of »Serbian art«, he concluded that medieval national monuments should be regarded not as mere »copies of the Byzantine patterns but as autonomous creations«⁴⁸. To do so was key to understanding not only the still enigmatic national past, but also the importance of that past within the realm of modern national identity and sovereignty.

Before concluding the case of the appropriation of Byzantine architecture for Serbian national narrative, it is useful to put it in a wider historical context. Not only were there other scholars in the Balkans who employed Byzantium, but the Russians too developed an extraordinarily rich use of Byzantium for remodelling national architectural past. In the second half of the 19th century the Russian national-imperial project heavily relied on the symbolic use of the »Byzantine«; while national architectural histories were being written, neo-Byzantine edifices sprung up throughout the country, just like in Serbia, Greece, Romania and Bulgaria⁴⁹. More particularly, the contemporaneous Russian »scenarios of power« – to use Richard Wortman's phrase – and the discourse of the Russian-Byzantine Style in architecture was highly compatible with the corresponding »Serbo-Byzantine« one, in both formal and ideological terms⁵⁰. On the other hand, the Turkish case of an ambivalent perception of the Byzantine heritage indicated the idea of cultural discontinuity with Byzantium; nevertheless, political continuity was not entirely disregarded. In the period of political transition from the late Ottoman and imperial to the Turkish and national – which can be traced back to the mid 19th century – knowledge of Byzantine his-

44 Millet, *L'école grecque*.

45 Slijepčević, *Poklonstva po zadužbinama* 192, emphasis in original.

46 For a more recent account on the subject see: Zimmermann, *Der Balkan zwischen Ost und West*.

47 Maslač, *Skice za zgradu* 98-99.

48 Valtrović, *Umetnost u Srba* 70.

49 See: Ignjatović, *Byzantium Evolutionized* 254-274.

50 On the Russian national narrative and appropriation of the imperial heritage of Byzantium see: Ivanov, *The Second Rome* 55-80. – Wortman, *Scenarios of Power* 9-22. – Maiorova, *The Myth of Spiritual Descent* 155-182. On the »Russian-Byzantine Style« in the 19th century see: Wortman, *Scenarios of Power* 1 381-387. – Salmund/Whittaker, *Fedor Solntsev* 1-16, esp. 6, 11-13. – Wortman, *Solntsev* 17-40. – Wortman, *The »Russian Style«* 101-116.

tory and its significance was also transitional⁵¹. Interestingly, during the reign of the late Ottoman sultans, Byzantium gradually became included in the patriotic Ottoman narrative through the idea of political succession, which, like in the Serbian case, comprised both association with the Byzantine Empire and dissociation from it⁵². But with the rise of Turkish nationalism this ambivalent position towards Byzantium became problematic. The insistence on ethnicity as the foundation stone of Turkish national identity led to the re-evaluation of Byzantium's role in national history and the »elimination of Byzantine influence« ensued, in both late Ottoman and early republican Turkish historiography⁵³.

A closer look at the historiographical construction of the relationship between Serbian »national« and Byzantine architecture reveals a complex epistemological-ideological structure of closeness and difference, which can be fully understood only in its political context. Originating in the romantic discourse on history, this relationship became part of the Serbian national narrative, justifying the political processes that accompanied the final stage of Serbian emancipation from the Ottoman Empire (1878) as well as the Kingdom of Serbia's short but turbulent life (1882-1918). Serbo-Byzantine relationships in architecture were only part of a much wider Serbo-Byzantine discourse, which operated across various disciplines, as well as in popular culture, and had many features of the *longue durée*. According to the classical understanding of this concept⁵⁴, the relationship between the »Serbian« and the »Byzantine« cannot be understood with respect to »historical objects« – namely, as something inherent in medieval architecture *per se* – but in a sense closer to Fernand Braudel's original understanding of the *longue durée*. In short, the relationships between Serbian and Byzantine architecture, as the objects of historical inquiry, are not to be comprehended as »things with properties, but as ensembles of changing relations forming configurations that are constantly adapting to one another and throughout the world around them through definite historical processes«⁵⁵.

The question of the Serbo-Byzantine relationship still represents a central issue in the history of Serbian medieval architecture. It seems equally irrelevant now to Serbian architectural historians to unearth the ideological economy of architectural history as it did at the time of the early pioneers of the discipline. Nevertheless, at the heart of the heightened interest in medieval architecture and concern for the relationship between the Byzantine and the Serbian lies a dual problem of objectivity – that of »historical reality« and of its historiographical construction. What architectural historians

understood as the »Byzantine« and »Serbian« in the context of medieval history did not represent a simple product of a methodical inspection of different historical sources; nor was it based on tracking down the »influences« and modifications of Byzantine architecture on »Serbian national territory“«, as late nineteenth and early twentieth historians frequently put it. Rather, both were conscious historical constructs and the relationship between the two categories functioned as a metahistorical framework of interpretation.

Nevertheless, despite increased pressure from both historians and the popular historical imagination to associate Byzantine architecture with Serbian national style, the narratives of the Serbo-Byzantine relationship were not epistemologically monolithic. In fact, they were seen as a complex interplay of identities that were, in spite of their similarities, asymmetrical and differential. The conceptual tension of identity, with the Byzantine being simultaneously attached to Serbian identity and detached from it, had its ideological rationale, clearly seen in the political context of the late 19th and early 20th century, when national elites needed historical justification for both the imperialist project and nation-building strategies.

It is intriguing that the same projection of the concepts such as »nation«, »nation-state« or »national style« onto Serbian medieval past should still preoccupy historiography. Many historians – not unlike historians in other Balkan countries – still distinguish »national history« from »Byzantine influences«, interpreting the sources and understanding historical context just like their predecessors did one hundred years ago⁵⁶. Does this suggest that Byzantium still matters in the Serbian national narrative for the same strategic reasons?

51 See the most recent study on the Ottoman and Turkish early republican perception of Byzantine architecture: Yildiz, *Byzantium Between* 97-118. – Yildiz, *Byzantine Studies* 63-80.

52 On the ideology of Ottomanism see: Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks* 15-19, 30-55. – Vezenkov, *Reconciliation* 47-77. On the architectural and ideological issues of the »Ottoman Revival Style« as an integral part of Ottomanism see: Bozdoğan, *The Legacy of Ottoman Revivalism* 16-55, esp. 22-34.

53 Yildiz, *Byzantium Between* 176.

54 On the employment of the *longue durée* concept in history writing see: Tomich, *The Order of Historical Time* 9-34, esp. 10-15. – Raab, *The Crisis from Within* 57-59. On the nation in the perspective of the *longue durée* see: Armstrong, *Nations* 3-5. – Smith, *Nationalism* 61-62. – Hutchinson, *Globalization* 84-99. – Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism* 143-146.

55 Editorial, *Tentons l'expérience 1319-1320*. Cited after: Tomich, *The Order of Historical Time* 14.

56 Stanković, *The Character and Nature* 76.

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Summary / Zusammenfassung

Negotiating National Prospects by Capturing the Medieval Past: Byzantium in Serbian Architectural History at the Turn of the 20th Century

The truism that the birth of the discipline of architectural history in Serbia was entwined with national emancipation and the construction of an authentic national identity is questioned by the position of the Byzantine cultural heritage in the Serbian architectural past. The germ of »national architecture« – conveniently identified with that of the Middle Ages – was an image of Serbian culture as part of the Byzantine that problematized the very idea of an original, authentic Serbian identity. This paper will explore the question of the Serbian national narrative torn between a need for cultural authenticity and an imperial mission, and focus on the context in which this duality became a recognizable ideological agenda that justified Serbian political projects in an era when the Kingdom of Serbia was on the cusp of national, cultural and territorial expansion.

Aushandeln nationaler Perspektiven, indem man das Mittelalter kapert: Byzanz in der serbischen Architekturgeschichte an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert

Die Binsenweisheit, dass die Geburt der Disziplin Architekturgeschichte in Serbien mit der Nationalen Befreiungsbewegung und der Konstruktion einer authentischen Nationalen Identität verflochten war, wird durch die Stellung des byzantinischen kulturellen Erbes in der serbischen Architektur in Frage gestellt. Das Aufkeimen einer »Nationalarchitektur« – bequemerweise identifiziert mit der des Mittelalters – war eine Vorstellung von serbischer Kultur als Teil der byzantinischen, was die gesamte Idee einer originalen, authentischen serbischen Identität problematisierte. In diesem Beitrag wird die Frage nach dem serbischen nationalen Narrativ erforscht, das zerrissen ist zwischen dem Bedürfnis nach kultureller Authentizität und imperialer Mission, und er konzentriert sich auf den Kontext, in dem diese Dualität eine erkennbare ideologische Agenda wurde, die serbische politische Projekte rechtfertigte in einer Ära, als das Königreich Serbien an der Schwelle zu nationaler, kultureller und territorialer Expansion stand.