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THE PARALEL UNIVERSES OF MACEDONIAN CULTURAL MULTIVERSE

In physics' string theory, the multiverse is a notion in which our universe is not the only one; on the contrary, many universes exist parallel to each other. These distinct universes within the multiverse theory are called parallel universes¹. In other words - a variety of different theories lend themselves to a multiverse viewpoint. On a more general level, this could be summarized in one of the brilliant quotations by late professor Stephen Hawking, who used to say: *There is no unique picture of reality*². What he meant by this sentence is that reality is subjective – which points to the subjective character of experience. On the other hand, we all know that the world is an objective reality and exists independently of us. That would imply that the phrase is also ultimately about the practical human value of the objective reality. In other words, the objective reality, although independent of our existence, is valuable insofar as it can also fit into our subjective perception of reality³.

Similarly to physics but on a much greater scale, in modern humanities there are theories that contradict each other with a wide scope of arguments and debate in the pursuit of substantial evidence. History, archaeology and art history are among the disciplines with a variety of such academic contradictions related to some major issues, the resolution of which could bring a different perspective even in our daily lives. Those „parallel universes“ of scholarly investigation are not only open and on-going, but expanding and ever-growing, as well. They too, as the universe we live in, have a great impact on our professional perspectives, academic attitudes and research directions in any way possible. In that regard, this paper will be but an attempt to broaden our horizons of an unbiased

¹ E. Laszlo, *The Connectivity Hypothesis: Foundations of an Integral Science of Quantum, Cosmos, Life and Consciousness*, New York 2003, 108. Also see: B. Carr, *Universe or Multiverse*, Cambridge 2007; G. Ellis, W. Stoeger, *Multiverses and physical cosmology*, Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society 347/3, Oxford 2004.

² A quote which originated from the theory of quantum physics brilliantly elaborated in S. Hawking and L. Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*, New York 2010.

³ S. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time. From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, New York 1988, 62-66.

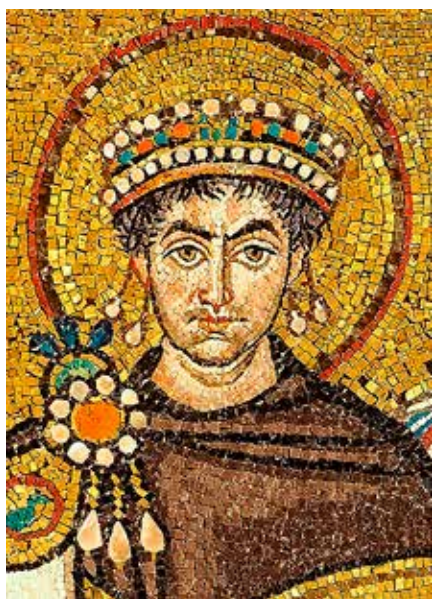


Fig. 1 Emperor Justinian's portrait in San Vitale, Ravenna

Сл. 1 Портрет цара Јустинијана у Сан Витале у Равени

scholarly thought related to some of the pending issues in archaeology, history and art history, the dimensions of which had raised enough attention within the mentioned disciplines.

The first and most probably the striking hot spot in modern archaeology - where is, where could be and where on the geographic map of Early Christianity should we look for the archbishopric see of Justiniana Prima, and also wheater the birthplace of Emperor Justinian I and the town of Justiniana Prima are one and the same place. The second issue, as much as significant as the already mentioned one, refers to history and its impact on medieval state of affairs, modern archaeological debates, even on our contemporary political conciousnes and is related to the question - whose Emperor was and what origin can be ascribed to the great autocrat of the 11th century West Balkans' area – Tzar Samuel. Last, but not least, art history investigates the complex and

often ambiguous sphere - whether political circumstances were or could have been decisive in someone's conception of artistic expression, as it is in the case of the khtetorial arrangement in the church of Saint Nicholas in Psača. In chronological order, we start with the simingly solved, yet still completely unresolved issue of the location of Justiniana Prima.

In that regard, who ever finds substantial evidence or compelling archaeological proof for the exact location of the archbishopric, will be the King of the century. However, that achievement seems less and less expectable. Although the majority of scholars (including the authors of this paper) have no doubt that the site of Caričin Grad is the most appropriate candidate for the „archbishopric title“ of Justiniana Prima⁴, some authorities suggest otherwise; Macedonian archaeologists persistently sustain the idea of the villages of Taor and Bader in the vicinity of Skopje being the most appropriate site for Emperor Justinian's grand enterprse⁵, while Serbian professors once in a while come up with some

⁴ В. Петковић, М. Јевтић, *Јустинијана Прима*, Преглед црквене епархије Нишке XVII, 11-12, Ниш 1936, 391-396; А. Grabar, *Les monuments de Tsaritchin Grad et Justiniana Prima*, Cahiers Archéologiques III, Paris 1948, 49-63; Ђ. Мано-Зиси, *Justiniana Prima, Царичин Град, Лебане, античка архитектура*, Археолошки преглед 6, Београд 1964, 72-73; Б. Баван и В. Иванишевић, *Justiniana Prima – Царичин Град*, Лесковац 2006, 17-46.

⁵ А. J. Evans, *Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum Part IV, Scupi, Scopia and the Birthplace of Justinian*, Archaeology, Vol 49/ 1, London 1885, 235-248; Т. Томоски, Таорско



Fig. 2 Map of Balkans' provinces in 5th Century AD

Сл. 2 Мапа Балканских провинција у 5 веку

sparkling new ideas, such is Kale Zlata near Prokuplje⁶ and some even less probable*. As much as this debate is inspiring and motivating, one can get easily confused when trying to establish a common denominator of all existing theories, since they all rely on different arguments. For example, Caričin Grad is the most abundant in archaeological evidence, Taor and Bader refer to Taurisium and Bederiana mentioned by Procopius, Kale Zlata is rich in 6th century archaeological material and so on and so forth. Still, no groundbreaking discovery has been made to solidly confirm any of the mentioned theories. Therefore, in pursuit of a theoretical explanation, we have to launch our inquiry from an appropriate starting point.

Namely, Procopius of Caesarea in his panegyric named *De Aedificiis*, says: „Among the Dardanians of Europe who live beyond the boundaries of the Epidamnians, close to the fortress which is called Bederiana, there was a hamlet named Taurisium, whence sprang the Emperor Justinian (Fig. 1), the founder of the civilised world. He therefore built a wall of small compass about this place in the form of a square, placing a tower on each corner, and caused it to be called, as it actually is, Tetrapyrgia. And close by this place he built a

градиште, Taurisium – Bederiana – Iustiniana Prima, Жива Антика XVII, Скопје 1967, 233-235; И. Микулчиќ, Уште еднаш за Таурисион и Бедериана, Годишен зборник на Филозофскиот факултет 3/29, Скопје 1977, 94-106; А. Шукарова, Јустинијана Прима, Скопје 1994, 93-116; К. Ристов, Градиште Таор, прелиминарен извештај од истражувањата во 2000-2004 година, *Macedonia Acta Archaeologica* 17, Скопје 2006, 215-230.

⁶ М. Милинковиќ, *О потреби научног проучавања локалитета Злата – Кале, Ниш и Византија. Пети научни скуп (Ниш, 3-5. Јун 2006)*, Зборник радова V, Ниш 2007, 191-202.

*Connecting the term of Iustiniana Prima and the official title of the Ohrid Archbishopric in the course of the high middle ages, some Macedonian scholars have suggested Ohrid as the seat of the newly founded Justinian's establishment.



Fig. 3 The archaeological site of Taor near Skopje

Сл. 3 Археолошко налазиште Таор код Скопља

very notable city which he named Justiniana Prima⁷. Hence, the word hamlet, used by Procopius, is convincing enough to testify to the unprivileged origin of Justinian. This is confirmed by the same author in another of his works, the *Historia Arcana*, where he says: „When Lion was holding the imperial power in Byzantium, three young farmers, Illyrians by race, Zimarchus, Dityvistus and Justinus from Vederiana, men who at home had to struggle incessantly against conditions of poverty, in an effort to better their condition, set out to join the army⁸, referring, of course, to future Emperor Justin, the uncle of Justinian.

If we turn our attention to the idea of the renowned Oxford scholar Arthur Evans that the villages of Taor and Bader in the vicinity of Skopje could be the ancient Tauresium and Bederiana mentioned by Procopius⁹, we have a quality starting point for further examination of the case. In that regard, the archaeological findings at the site confirm the 6th century chronological layer with artifacts belonging to architectural production, pottery, coinage etc., all encompassed by a modest typological range, which would, eventually suggests a small settlement of an unprivileged social position¹⁰. However, the findings there do not correspond to the passage found in Procopius' work, saying: „And many other enterprises were carried out by the founder of this city – works of great size and

⁷ Procopius, *De aedificiis domini nostri Justiniani*, *Corpus scriptorium historiae Byzantinae*, Pars II, PROCOPPIUS, vol. III, Ed. Academiae litterarum regiae Borussiae MDCCCXXXVII, 64.

⁸ Prokopios, *The Secret History with related texts*, Edited and translated by A. Kaldellis, Indianapolis 2010, 5.

⁹ A. J. Evans, *Antiquarian Researches in Illyricum* Part IV, Scupi, Scopia and the Birthplace of Justinian, 235-248.

¹⁰ K. Ristov, *Gradishte Taor: Late Antique Settlement and Fortress*, *Folia Archaeologica Balkanica* III, Skopje 2015, 361-387.

worthy of especial note. For to enumerate the churches is not easy, and it is impossible to tell in words of the lodgings for magistrates, the great stoats, the fine market places, the fountains, the streets, the baths, the stops. In brief, the city is both great and populous and blessed in every way – a city worthy to be the metropolis of the whole region¹¹. Hence, the description of the city by Procopius can not be associated with the archaeological site of Bader in any possible way, regardless of how hard Macedonian archaeologists tend to do so. Yet, the catch of the two toponyms Taor and Bader related etimologically to Tauresium and Bederiana still holds water¹².

Namely, let us imagine the historical constellation in which Procopius has created his literary work, particularly the one entitled *De Aedificiis*. From the surviving sources¹³, we all know that he was born in today's region of Gaza, ancient Roman province of Palaestina Prima, attended law school and became a barrister in Beirut and thus attained the position of legal adviser to Belisarius, Justinian's chief military commander. As his formal companion, Procopius followed Belisarius in North Africa and Italy before returning to Constantinople in ca. 545, where he turned his attention to transforming his knowledge and experience into literary production. In other words, Procopius has never visited the Balkans in any of his professional traveling campaigns, neither the prefecture of Ilyricum or the province of Dardania, where he locates the newly founded archbishopric of Justiniana Prima. This would mean that he himself did not have personal or sufficient knowledge of the territory (i.e. the precise geographic coordinates) where the city has been established. No greater expectations to find a more precise signpost to the location of Justiniana Prima can we find in *The Novela XI*¹⁴, as well, where Emperor Justinian lists the provinces under the authority of the new archbishopric see,

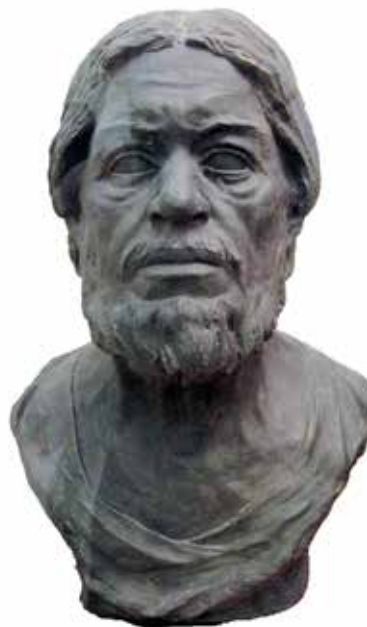


Fig. 4 Forensic reconstruction of Tzar Samuel's image

Сл. 4 Форензичка реконструкција лика цара Самуила

¹¹ Procopius, *De aedificiis domini nostri Justiniani*, 64.

¹² И. Микулчиќ, *Старо Скопје со околните тврдини*, Скопје 1982, 106.

¹³ J. Evans, *Procopius*, New York 1972, 7; A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, London 1985, 7; J. Moorhead, *Procopius*, in: *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historic Writing*, vol. II, Chicago 1999, 962.

¹⁴ *Corpus iuris civilis, Novellae Constitutiones, Novella XI*, Berolini MXXII, 5-6.



Fig. 5 Basilica of St. Achilleos at Prespa

Сл. 5 Базилика Св. Ахилија на Преспи

Dacia Mediterranea being the first among the listed seven. Hence, it seems that Procopius and Justinian tend to have different geographical spectrum related to the location of Justiniana Prima¹⁵ (Fig. 2).

Therefore, one should dare to explicate a new idea which would open an alternative path in the quest for solution in the case of Justiniana Prima. Namely, we can not ignore the very precisely mentioned toponyms by Procopius: „close to the fortress which is called Bederiana, there was a hamlet named Taurisium, whence sprang the Emperor Justinian“¹⁶. If we accept the idea that the modern names of Taor and Bader could be associated with the ancient toponyms of Tauresium and Bederiana¹⁷, we could be solving at least one issue, that Emperor Justinian could have been born at that location, where a modest archaeological

¹⁵ Although neither of the two documents point specifically to the geographic location of the new Archbishopric, Procopius “tend” to situate Justiniana Prima in the province of Dardania (“among the Dardanians of Europe”, cf. Procopius, *De aedificiis domini nostri Justiniani*, 64), while the Emperor points to the province which is geographically situated to the north-east of Dardania (“intending that the temporal head of the first Justinian shall be not only a metropolitan, but also an archbishop; and that his jurisdiction shall include other provinces, that is to say Dacia upon the Mediterranean, As well as Dacia Ripense, Second Mysia, Dardania, the province of Praevalitana, Second Macedonia....”, cf. *Corpus iuris civilis, Novellae Constitutiones, Novella XI, 5.*)

¹⁶ Procopius, *De aedificiis domini nostri Justiniani*, 64.

¹⁷ И. Микулчиќ, *Старо Скопје со околните тврдини*, 106.



Fig. 6 Panorama of Samuel's Fortress in Ohrid (photo by NI Institute for Protection of Monuments of Culture and Museum – Ohrid)

Сл. 6 Панорама Самуилове тврђаве у Охриду (фотос Националне установе Завод и Музеј у Охриду)

horizon from the first half of the 6th century has been confirmed by continuous terrain explorations¹⁸ (Fig. 3). However, Justiniana Prima can not be looked for at that site since it is not, as Procopius says: „a city worthy to be the metropolis of the whole region“¹⁹. In that regard, could it be that Procopius, who has never ever visited the Balkans²⁰, had no accurate knowledge on the distances between geographical points in the prefecture of Illyricum, thus situated the newly established city: „close by the place“²¹ where the Emperor was born. Could we suppose that, living in Constantinople where he has settled after traveling so many miles in so many different territories, Procopius has lost his sense for „closeness“ and „remoteness“ and accordingly has loosely described the 100 miles distance between present-day sites of Taor and Caričin Grad as „close“? If so, than the new archbishopric, established as ecclesiastic buffer between the eastern and western church influences²², would have been positioned on equal distance between the two major neighbouring bishoprics – Naissus and Scupi, instead of being located near modern Skopje as a substitute to the demolished episcopal see of Scupi – as Macedonian historians and archaeologists

¹⁸ K. Ristov, *Gradishte Taor: Late Antique Settlement and Fortress*, 364-377.

¹⁹ Procopius, *De aedificiis domini nostri Justiniani*, 64.

²⁰ Neither of the aforementioned authors who have managed to gather some data on the life of Procopius mentions his presence in the Balkan area in any occasion, cf. J. Evans, *Procopius*, 7; A. Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, 7; J. Moorhead, *Procopius*, in: *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historic Writing*, 962.

²¹ Procopius, *De aedificiis domini nostri Justiniani*, 64.

²² R. Bratož, *Zgodnjekršćanska cerkev v Makedoniji i njen odnos do Rima*, *Zgodovinski časopis* 44, Ljubljana 1990, 54.



Fig. 7 Bone bust, (D. Mitrevski, Skopje Fortress, 2015)

Сл. 7 Попреје у кости (из књиге Д. Митревског, Скопско Кале, 2015)

would like to point out²³. Of course, there is always another catch – in this case – John of Antioch, who, in one of his works, says: „Justin from the fortress of Bederiana, which is close to Naissus, the one in Illyricum“²⁴, referring to Emperor Justin, which can also be acknowledged as a relative fact given by the historian John from the 7th century, for whom the Balkan distances could have also been small in comparison to the dimensions of the Empire²⁵.

In the area of archaeology, we will turn our attention to the “pending” issue of Emperor Samuel and his historical contribution to the notion of his reigning title. In that regard, one of the “loudest”, if not the most vociferous promoters of the Byzantine imperial *agitprop*, Skylitzes, though unintentionally, marked the rise of centuries’ popular medieval enigma to follow, the medieval marvel from Macedonia - tsar Samuel (Fig. 4). And even though the *Synopsis Historion* has been scientifically denoted as somewhat exaggerated and at points quite epic narrative, especially in the fantastical set piece

image of the Bulgaroktonos – the Bulgar-Slayer, this written catharsis can be justified by the frustrations piled in the Byzantine-Bulgarian battling, as well as by the need of an esteem idol in the preoccupations of the political context of Skylitzes’ time²⁶. Thus, this historical masterpiece presents the chapter of two *titans*, Basil II - the apogee of the restored Byzantine power, culmination of military apex and the longest reigning Eastern Roman Emperor, and Samuel the Kometopoulos - an ultimate equilibrium to all said before, “invincible in power and unsurpassed in strength” as the *Life of St. Nikon* describes it²⁷ and a *raison d’être* for the glorious image of Basil II we know today.

²³ А. Шукарова, *Јустинијана Прима*, 113-114.

²⁴ Ioannis Antiocheni *Fragmenta ex Historia Chronica* (Ed. V. Roberto), Berlin – New York 2005, 142.

²⁵ It is uncertain where has Procopius written *De Aedificiis*; however, the scholars believe that it was created in Constantinople, cf. G. Downey, *The Composition of Procopius’ De Aedificiis*, *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, vol. 78, Baltimore 1947, 171-183.

²⁶ The reminiscence of the Golden Age of the Empire, personified in the image of Basil II, had its justification in the face of the bureaucratic aristocracy which “disintegrated” the traditional imperial *modus operandi*. For the overall changes in the Byzantine culture see A. Kazhdan, A. Wharton, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, University of California Press, 1985, 69-73.

²⁷ P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*, Cambridge University

Samuel's magnitude at the end of the 10th century is probably best parabled by the Byzantine poet Kyriotes Geometres who epitomized the 989 celestial and earthly phenomena in the verses – “*Above the comet scorched the sky, below the comet[oupulos] burns the West*”²⁸. The Kometopoulos created an empire nearly equal to the Byzantine in matters of political structure²⁹. He was a monarch and warlord who mobilized the Slavic force on the wider Balkan area in his imperialistic ambitions, and a sovereign who laid the basis of Slavic constitutional thought and Orthodoxy in its Balkan form³⁰. However, Samuel's reign remains equivocal and still rises polemics among the scholars. Namely, although there are few hypotheses about his origin, local no doubt in our opinion³¹, he nevertheless remained historically unrestrained to ethnical belongings. In this regard, his actions can be perceived as close, if not identical to the Byzantine ones, since he seems to have “forgotten” the concept of a *nation*. Or did he? Being a highly intelligent, extremely capable and “deadly” ambitious leader, Samuel, aware no doubt that he was not in a position to arrogate an ethnic or territorial label to his dynastic legacy, probably decided to overlook the concept of nation, merging his aspirations into the sole pre-validated un-Byzantine tsardom, the Bulgarian one³². Furthermore, being aware of the ethnical variety of his dominion and cautious to the necessary support from this ethnical mélange, Samuel

Press, 2003, pp. 16-17.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 17.

²⁹ After a certain period of self-styled *tetrarchy* of the four brothers, followed by a co-rule of Samuel and Aaron, Samuel actually took on the Byzantine “tradition” of eliminating the obstacles to power and grew into a sole ruler of the new state. He also engaged into beneficial marital ties in order to strengthen his position, see С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава обим и карактер*, Београд, 1997, 78-79.

³⁰ After John I Tzimiskes dismissed the Bulgarian patriarch in 971 the Patriarch in exile continued his office in the newly formed “independent” territory on the west, see J. V. A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkan – A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, University of Michigan Press, 1991, 196-197; С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава обим и карактер*, Београд, 1997, 75-76.

³¹ There is no evidence that Samuel, or his father for that matter shared *lineage* with the Bulgarian imperial dynasty or that both had any Boyar status. The inscription mentioning the name of Samuel's father, discovered near the village of German, mentions no title beside his name, see С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава – обим и карактер*, Београд, 1997, 59-60, 64-65 (f. 116).

³² For the character of Samuel's state and its close formal resemblance to the Bulgarian one see С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава обим и карактер*, Београд, 1997. However, it is noteworthy to accent that all researches of Samuel's state clearly feel and point that there is something idiosyncratic about this 10th century stately institution and thus it receives different names e.g. “independent empire Western Bulgaria” formed in Macedonia, or a “Macedonian Empire – Western Bulgarian Empire” - a *state* with different geographic determinant. In any case the material culture evidently speaks that up until the 9th century these territories showed no traces of any politically developed institutions, or something which could resemble a state, nonetheless a Byzantine cultural assimilation of any kind. Nominally present-day Macedonia was under the Bulgarian empire, but in fact it probably remained independent and under its own nobility for the entire period. See J. V. A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkan – A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, University of Michigan Press, 1991, 188-189.



Fig. 8 Miniature depicting “The Death of Tsar Samuel”, Illustrated Manuscript of the Slavic Version of the *Chronicle of Constantine Manasses*, Cod. Vat. Slav. II, fol. 184 v., Vatican Library.

Сл. 8 Илуминација која приказује Смрт цара Самуила, словенска верзија Хронике Константина Манасеа из Ватиканске библиотеке

remained simply indigenous only to his territory. And it is exactly his *territory*, i.e. his *omphalos* of power, Prespa and Ohrid (Fig. 5 and 6) which palpably attest of his individual and peculiar imperial footprint and hegemony.

From the very beginning the scientific scrutiny realized that Samuel's state was not a mere sequel of the Bulgarian empire. It might have followed some of its traditions as identified by the scholars, especially in the elitist Bulgarian imperial legacy³³, but it clearly was something new, a novel political core, a western center of power, far from the Old Bulgarian capitals and close to the trading routes between the Adriatic and Aegean seas. Furthermore, the Slavic hallmark of Samuel's empire has been rightly identified and pointed in each historical analysis of his bequest and one might even say that Samuel can be regarded as the *architect* of the Slavic stately (and in some way ethnical) con-

³³ On this occasion we would like to point that we are not overlooking the fact that Jovan Vladislav decided to call himself Bulgar by origin in the famous inscription from Bitola, but we must also not forget of the elitist aspirations toward what was left in the “full house” of the Byzantine oikumene. С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава обим и карактер*, Београд, 1997, 67.

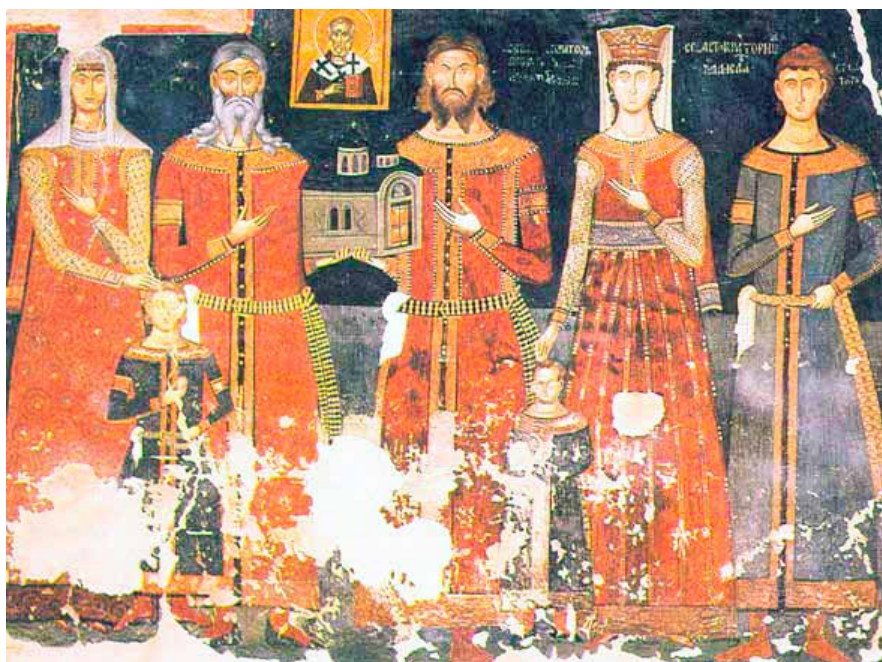


Fig. 9 St. Nicholas at Psača, Commissioners' composition, khetors' family (south wall of the narthex)

Сл. 9 Црква Св. Николе у Псачи, Ктиторска композиција, породица ктитора (јужни зид припрате)

sciousness, substantiating it into a politically-administrative form. One question nevertheless remains open. Namely, thinking back of his persona, fearless and zealous in his warfare against the Byzantine Empire, one logically wonders whether or not Samuel ever thought of gaining recognition of his crown from Constantinople. The scientific intuition has already advanced the possibility of a ten years' treaty between Basil II and Samuel³⁴. In this regard the truce might have also included an endorsement of a kind, a warranty of which is not to be found in the sources, thus leaving the medieval marvel of Samuel open and intriguing for scholarly debate.

In the end of this brief panorama of Samuel the Kometopoulos we would like to point to a recent find from the medieval fortress of Skopsko Kale - a bone bust of a medieval ruler (Fig. 7). Some would say that it might be a *Zatrikion*³⁵ piece. It seems that this exceptional figurine wears a closed imperial crown - *kamelaukion*, with *prependulia* hanging beside the sides of the face, plastically marked with engraved lines. The vigor and individualism of the representation are stunning. This object "portraits" an elderly man, a ruler equal in insignia

³⁴ For a detailed overview of this logical conclusion for the truce 1005-1014, see P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Stayer*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

³⁵ Byzantine chess set piece.



Fig. 10 St. Nicholas at Psača, Commissioners' composition, ktetors' family (south wall of the narthex)

Сл. 10 Црква Св. Николе у Псаћи, Ктиторска композиција, породица ктитора (јужни зид припрате)

to the Byzantine emperor himself, and it is said that *he* might be Samuel³⁶. The holes in the bone bust were probably incised with some kind of precious stones or gems, thus emphasizing the imperial regalia. In this respect, even the miniature depicting the *Death of Samuel* in the *Manasses Chronicle* (Fig. 8) represents the tsar in *tzangia* - red boots, an imperial prerogative *par excellence*³⁷. And finally, what more could we say of this magnitude of man except that the challenge remains open for those who wish to search for Samuel's intimate national feeling, although it seems reasonable to conclude that he will always be more or less multi-ethnic, depending on the analysis-estimate. And

³⁶ For the medieval events in the Fortress in Skopje see С. Пириватрић, *Самуилова држава обим и карактер*, Београд, 1997, 57; J. V. A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkan – A Critical Survey from the Sixth to the Late Twelfth Century*, University of Michigan Press, 1991, 190; D. Mitrevski, *Skopje Fortress*, Skopje, 2015, 23-27.

³⁷ О. Zorova, "Body" and "Costume" in *Byzantine Imperial Ideology – Social, Aesthetic and Magical Aspects*, in *Традиционална естетска култура – Тело и одевање*, Ниш, Центар за научна истраживања САНУ и Универзитета у Ниш, 2009, 95-112, 108; *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, Tzangion*, ed. by A. Kazhdan and A. Talbot, New York – Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, 2135; Ж. Дагрон, *Цар и првосвештеник – Студија о Византијском „цезаропатизму“*, Београд, CLIO, 2001, 183.



Fig. 11 St. Nicholas at Psača, Commissioners' composition, the Royalty (north wall of the narthex)

Сл. 11 Црква Св. Николе у Псаћи, Ктиторска композиција, представа цара Уроша и краља Вукашина (северни зид припрате)

it seems justified to accept him as such, since he was loyal to himself, to his dominion of power, to his ambition and to his dream to establish an empire west of Byzantium, the reverence of which left deep marks in the memory of many historical figures to follow his aspirations in the medieval Balkan turmoil of events, in their pursuit of legacy for power.



Fig. 12 St. Nicholas at Psača, Commissioners' composition, the Royalty (north wall of the narthex)

Сл. 12 Црква Св. Николе у Псачи, Ктиторска композиција, представа цара Уроша и краља Вукашина (северни зид припрате)

In the universe of art history, the first pending issue that comes to mind is the idea that the khetorial arrangement in the church of Saint Nicholas at Psača should be chronologically re-examined³⁸ (Fig. 9). Namely, due to the limited spatial capacity of the narthex where the commissioners' composition was located, it was divided into two parts, one of which, depicting the donors' family, was represented on the surface of the southern wall (Fig. 10), the other – containing the royalty, was pictured on the opposite, northern wall³⁹ (Fig. 11). According to the joint portraits of Emperor Uroš and King Vukašin, the chronological reference of the khetorial ensemble in the period between the years 1365 and 1371 seems highly plausible⁴⁰. However, some scholars have pro-

³⁸ З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *Историските портрети во Псача и времето на нивното настанување*, Средновековната уметност во Македонија, Скопје 2004, 245-263.

³⁹ И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске властеле у доба Немањића*, Београд 1993, 172-173.

⁴⁰ F. Kämpfer, *Die Stiftungskomposition der Nikolauskirche in Psača – Reichen-theoretische Beschreibung eines politischen Bildes*, Zeitschrift für Balkanologie X, 2, München 1974, 47-56; В. Ј. Ђурић, *Византијске фреске у Југославији*, Београд 1974, 75; И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске властеле у доба Немањића*, р. 172; S. Ко-

blematized this dating saying that the figure of King Vukašin was painted over an older depiction, covered by a new layer of plaster with a sole intention of being a visual replacement of a no longer significant social character, represented within the politically influential commissioners' scene⁴¹. According to the scholars who gave the identity to this idea, the individual that has been so crudely abandoned from the picture is the former Empress Jelena, the wife of late Emperor Dušan and mother of current Emperor Uroš, represented as a nun⁴². In other words, the original characters depicted in the commissioners' composition were Uroš and Jelena pictured around 1358, while in 1365, Vukašin, being enthroned a King, was painted as Jelena's political and visual substitute. In that regard, we have to ask ourselves several questions:

- First of all, how could Jelisaveta the nun be depicted standing on a purple cushion, a piece of formal equipment usually reserved only for the politically active representatives of the state;
- Second of all, what is a nun, no matter how respected and influential, doing in an official khetorial ensemble encompassing the actual ruler of the Empire;
- Third of all, if Vukašin has replaced the older image of Jelena who, in the original picture was standing next to Uroš, how is it possible that his elbow is depicted over the one of Vukašin (Fig. 12);
- Fourth of all, if Vukašin's image is an overpainted picture done approximately a decade later than the original one, why the painterly features, the stylistic approach, as well as the aesthetic features of the two images are, by all means, identical.
- Fifth of all, how could the commissioner who, judging from the historical sources, has been entitled sebastocrator by Emperor Uroš, has the image of his sovereign's mother so crudely eliminated from the picture; and last, but not least
- Was it possible for a noble and honorable donor of a medieval social essence to act according to the principle of daily politics and suck up to the new authorities, as would a contemporary Balkan politician do in order to maintain tiny privileges and/or expendable goods.

Of course, a simple probe on the location of King's Vukašin image would eventually solve the case; how long should we wait for that procedure, is up to the higher authorities. We are patient and eager to see the consequences of some more indepth analysis, therefore and highly expectant, we are going nowhere any time soon; hopefully Emperor Uroš and King Vukašin are going to follow our lead.

runovski, E. Dimitrova, *Macedonia. L'arte medievale dal IX al XV secolo*, Milano 2006, 199; E. Dimitrova, *The Portal to Heaven. Reaching the Gates of Immortality*, Niš & Byzantium fifth symposium, Collection of scientific works V, Niš 2007, 377-378; E. Димитрова, С. Коруновски, С. Грандаковска, *Средновековна Македонија. Култура и уметност*, Македонија. Милениумски културно-историски факти, Скопје 2013, 1754.

⁴¹ З. Расолкоска-Николовска, *Историските портрети во Псача и времето на нивното настанување*, 261-263.

⁴² *Ibidem*, 261.

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ПАРАЛЕЛНИ УНИВЕРЗУМИ МАКЕДОНСКОГ КУЛТУРНОГ МУЛТИВЕРЗУМА

У савременим хуманистичким дисциплинама постоје различите теорије које се међусобно супротстављају јачим или слабијим аргументима, са заједничким циљем – доћи до истине на било који могући начин. То је, међутим, често немогуће због различитих методолошких начина у истраживању проблематичних одредница како у историји, тако и у сродним дисциплинама, као што су археологија и/или историја уметности. Ипак, њихово коначно решење могло би утицати и на шири спектар научних проблема у оквиру модерне хуманистике, тако да смо у овом чланку покушале да укажемо на неке од њих. У домену археологије то је питање о локацији архиепископског центра којег је цар Јустинијан I у првој половини VI основао под именом Јустинијана Прима. У том контексту, узевши у обзир податке из историјских извора (Прокопије из Цезареје), као год и налазе са археолошких истраживања неколико локалитета на подручју Македоније и Србије (Царичин Град, Таор исл.), сматрамо да није неопходно да се место рођења цара Јустинијана поклапа са локацијом негових нових архиепископије, т. ј. да је он можда рођен у данашњем селу Таор у Македонији, а да је основао Јустинијану Прву на позицији савременог археолошког локалитета Царичин Град. У сфери историје контраверзно питање је *непотребно* мистификовање владарске титуле цара Самуила, којег, неки савремени историчари (т.ј. више њих) сматрају бугарским сувереном – синтагма која у оновременим историјским изворима уопште не постоји, те је, према нама, проблематична *in essentia et ratione*. У истраживачком универзуму историје уметности, са друге стране, сматрамо да је непотребно мењати већ успостављене хронолошке референце одређених сликаних ансамбала једино на основу дискутабилних претпоставки, као што је покушај предатовања ктиторске композиције (т.ј. целог сликаног фреско аранжмана) у цркви Светог Николе у Псачи, чији је иконографски и визуелни концепт у контексту историјско-политичких догађаја у време после смрти српског цара Душана сасвим јасан, недвосмислен и наглашено претенциозан. Дискусија у вези Јустинијане Приме и њене још прецизно неутврђене локације, дебата везана уз цара Самуила и његове етно-политички нерешене владарске титуле, као и покушаји да се портрети средњовековних монарха у Псачи виде у другачијем историјском светлу нису једини нерешени проблеми у хуманистичким дисциплинама, али су свакако инспиративни за даља истраживања, разматрања и верификовања.