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## THE NARTHEX IN RAVANICA AND ROMYLOS THE BLESSED

*Abstract:* The article is devoted to analysis of written sources and physical traces of cult of St Romylos. It attempts to establish initial phases of its rise and development, related to arcosolium above his tomb in the narthex of the monastery Ravanica, and the programmatic ties of the narthex wall paintings to the cult and the arcosolium.

*Key words:* cult, hagiography, hermits, narthex, arcosolium, Ravanica, Romylos

1. Huge monuments such as Ravanica (Central Serbia) often abound with issues due to insufficient research, unfinished excavations, and poor documentation. The dating of this fortified complex, put by even more recent studies in a simplistic way,<sup>1</sup> has been addressed anew with a notice there is a long way to go to grasp it fully.<sup>2</sup> This essay deals only with the narthex and cult of St Romylos, the late 14<sup>th</sup> C. hermit buried in there,<sup>3</sup> as a next step in reconsidering the site according to the project started three years ago.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. S. Ćurčić, *Architecture in the Balkans from Diocletian to Süleyman the Magnificent*, New Haven – London 2010, 632–634, 674–680, 788; K. Βαφειάδης, *Υστερη Βυζαντινή Ζωγραφική. Χώρος και μορφή στην τέχνη της Κωνσταντινουπόλεως 1150–1450*, Αθήνα 2015, 274, 278, 286, n. 36; J. Bogdanović, Lj. Milanović, M. Mihaljević, *Art and Architecture in the Balkans and the Lower Danube Regions*, The Routledge Handbook of Byzantine Visual Culture in the Danube Regions 1300–1600, ed. M. A. Rossi, A. I. Sullivan, New York 2024, 49.

<sup>2</sup> B. Cvetković, *Revisiting Chronology Issues in Ravanica*, Niš & Byzantium XXI (2023) 283–302.

<sup>3</sup> For basic information on Romylos and his cult cf. Л. Павловић, *Култови лица код Срба и Македонаца. Историјско-етнографска расправа*, Смедерево 1965, 195–196; I. Dujčev, *Romano (Romilo, Romolo) anacoreta in Bulgaria, santo*, Bibliotheca Sanctorum XI, Roma 1969, 312–316; J. Амфилохије, *Синаити и њихов значај у Србији у XIV и XV веку*, Манастир Раваница. Споменица о шестој стогодишњици, Београд 1981, 116–118; A-M. Talbot, *Romylos*, The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium 3, ed. A. Kazhdan, New York – Oxford 1991, 1812; Кл. Иванова, *Ромил Видински*, Старобългарска литература. Енциклопедичен речник. Второ допълнено издание, ред. Д. Петканова, Велико Търново 2003, 435.

<sup>4</sup> *Monastery Ravanica: archaeology, fortifications, church, wall paintings*, the proj-



Fig. 1 Ravanica, nave and narthex (present state)

Сл. 1 Раваница, црква и припрата (данас)

Since praxes of scholars to evade systematic perusal of data for monuments under research inevitably lead to perpetual shortcomings, no phases in establishing the cult of Romylos have been detected so far and there were no attempts to scrutinize sanctification process including issues of the first and second tomb, transfer of relics, or form of coffins and reliquaries.<sup>5</sup> Two set of questions, therefore, require answers here: 1) initial phases of the Romylos' cult and arcosolium over his tomb at the south wall of the narthex, and 2) programmatic ties of the narthex wall paintings to the arcosolium, as previously set in the introductory article of the project.<sup>6</sup>

The adventurous life of Romylos and interdependence between the Greek,<sup>7</sup> and Slavic versions of his vita,<sup>8</sup> are better known today thanks to novel research by Antonio Rigo and

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. A.-M. Talbot, *The Relics of New Saints. Deposition, Translation, and Veneration in Middle and Late Byzantium*, Saints and Sacred Matter. The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond, ed. C. Hahn, H. A. Klein, Washington D.C. 2015, 215–230.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 293.

<sup>7</sup> I. Dujčev, *Un fragment grec de la Vie de St. Romile*, Byzantinoslavica VII (1937/8) 124–127; id., *Un manuscrit grec de la Vie de St. Romile*, Studia historico-philologica serdicensia II (1940) 88–92; F. Halkin, *Un ermite des Balkans au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. La vie grecque inédite de saint Romylos*, Byzantion 31 (1961) 111–145; id., *Un ermite des Balkans au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. La vie grecque de saint Romylos, mort à Rabenitza (Ravanica) peu après 1381*, Recherches et documents d'hagiographie byzantine. Subsidia hagiographica 51, Paris 1971, 226–228 (= Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines, Beograd 1964, 463–465); J. Сп. Поповић, *Житије новојављеног преподобног оца нашег Ромила Раваничког*, Житија светих за јануар, Ваљево 1972, 501–517; M. Bartusis, Kh. Ben Nasser, A. E. Laiou, *Days and deeds of a hesychast saint: A Translation of the Greek Life of Saint Romylos*, Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines 9:1 (1982) 24–47. Cf. Βίος καὶ πολιτεία καὶ μερική θαυμάτων διήγησις τοῦ νεοφαναοῦς ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ῥωμόλου, Αθήνα 1999.

<sup>8</sup> П. А. Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие преподобнаго Ромила. По рукописи XVI в. Императорской Публичной Библиотеки съ приложениемъ службы преподобному Ромилу по рукописи XVII в. Белградской Народной Библиотеки*, Санктпетербургъ 1900; P. Devos, *La version slave de la Vie de S. Romylos*, Byzantion 31 (1961) 149–187.

Marco Scarpa,<sup>9</sup> though this precious text is given due attention by other authors too.<sup>10</sup> A range of matters analyzed by Rigo and Scarpa cover itinerary of Romylos and his disciples, chronology of his life, analyses of texts of vita, *akolouthia*, with manuscript tradition of these works and identity of their authors.

Despite set within late medieval stratum of eremitic monasticism Romylos is only briefly mentioned by some scholars,<sup>11</sup> while others devote full attention to his vita as the exemplary, primary source from medieval hermits' life.<sup>12</sup> However, the issues pertaining to his cult and arcosolium are unresolved although texts of his vita and *akolouthia* inform that Romylos, after years of wandering between Bulgaria, Athos and Albania, decided to go to Serbia where he made



Fig. 2 Ravanica, reconstructed south juncture of the nave and narthex

Сл. 2 Раваница, реконструисани јужни спој цркве и припрате

<sup>9</sup> A. Rigo, M. Scarpa, *La Vita di Romylos da Vidin asceta nei Balcani (1310 ca. – 1376/1380)*, Subsidia hagiographica 99, Bruxelles 2022. For some earlier articles see B. Сл. Киселковъ, *Св. Ромил Видински*, Духовна Култура 40-41 (1929) 157–175, 250–260; К. Иванова, *Пространо житие на Ромил Видински от Григорий Доброписец*, Стара българска литература IV. Житиенписни творби, София 1986, 656–658; B. Bojović, *Eschatologie et histoire. Caractérolgie de l'hagiographie*, Les vies des saints à Byzance. Genre littéraire ou biographie historique?, ed. P. Odorico, P. Agapitos, Paris 2004, 252–253.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. H. Гавазова, *Книгата “Лествица” – метатекст в “Житие на св. Ромил Видински” от монах Григорий Доброписец*, Балканите – език, история, култура 3 (2013) 391–408; М. Младенов, *Щрих към историята на монашеския център Парория, България, българите и Европа – мит, история, съвремие* 11/1 (2017) 94–99; A. Lampadari, *Linguistic Trends in Late Byzantine Hagiographies. The Lives of Maximos Kausokalybites (BHG 1236z and 1237) and Romylos (BHG 2384)*, The 24<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies 2/2, ed. L. Farina, E. Despotakis, Venezia 2022, 153.

<sup>11</sup> J. Калић, *Срби у позном средњем веку*, Београд 1994, 100; A. Strezova, *Hesychasm and Art: the Appearance of New Iconographic Trends in Byzantine and Slavic Lands in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Canberra 2014, 35.

<sup>12</sup> As was done in Д. Поповић, *Монах-пустињак, Приватни живот у српским земљама средњег века*, ур. С. Марјановић-Душанић, Д. Поповић, Београд 2004, 552–585.



Fig. 3 Ravanica (narthex), shrine of Romylos, Raising of Lazarus, Baptism

Сл. 3 Раваница, (припрата), Ромилов гроб, Лазарев васкрс, Крштење

a *dwelling* near monastery Ravanica,<sup>13</sup> while short *vita* in the *akolouthia* says he built himself a *hut* in the vicinity of Ravanica.<sup>14</sup> Notwithstanding these data, there is a blurred image of his whereabouts as scholars state that he either moved to the monastery Ravanica proper,<sup>15</sup> “where he died after 1381”,<sup>16</sup> or used a nearby cave,<sup>17</sup> or “spent his last days in the remote hesychasterion” of Ravanica.<sup>18</sup>

This cave near Ravanica, known only by tradition as of Romylos, perished before it could be studied.<sup>19</sup> Since the *vita* of Romylos states he often sought for solitude,<sup>20</sup> he

obviously proceeded his eremitic ways near Ravanica too living in a *koliba*,<sup>21</sup> though one should keep in mind mention of a *hut* was often *topos* in hagiogra-

<sup>13</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 132–133, 182.

<sup>14</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 50; Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Dujčev, *Romano*, 315; Д. Богдановић, *Историја старе српске књижевности*, Београд 1980, 202; Амфилохије, *Синаити*, 116; Калић, *Срби*, 36; С. Pavlikianov, *The Athonite Period In The Life Of Romylos Of Vidin*, Βυζαντινά Σύμμεκτα 15 (2002) 247, 248; Поповић, *Монах-пустиняк*, 575; Е. Николај, *Пролог*, Линц 2001, 36.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. I. Dujčev, *Rapports littéraires entre les Byzantins, les Bulgares et les Serbes aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Моравска школа и њено доба, ур. В. Ј. Ђурић, Београд 1972, 90; Амфилохије, *Синаити*, 117; S. Popović, *The Last Hesychast Safe Havens in Late Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Monasteries in the Northern Balkans*, ЗРВИ XLVIII (2011) 218.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Popović, *The Last Hesychast Safe Havens*, 219, 247.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Popović, *The Last Hesychast Safe Havens*, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Павловић, *Култови лица*, 196; Т. А. Стародубцев, *Српско зидно сликарство у земљама Лазаревића и Бранковића. Књига I*, Београд 2016, 71 (н. 465), 94, 142–143.

<sup>20</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 13–44.

<sup>21</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 50; Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 44, 67.



phies.<sup>22</sup> That scholars failed to systematically research sites surrounding Ravanica (except for the nearest damp and walled off cave used for monks' blacksmith workshop),<sup>23</sup> is echoed on the Romylos' itinerary map from the book by Rigo and Scarpa since it includes wrong data in locating Ravanica along the river West Morava while it actually sits 80 km to the East, across the Great Morava.<sup>24</sup>

The chronological span of dates for both birth and death of Romylos, as proposed by Rigo and Scarpa, rests on their argument to set the latter to 1380, locked to the alleged year of erection of Ravanica.<sup>25</sup> However, the process of building the cells, fortifications, and church with additionally erected narthex took time that exceeds dates from transcripts of two charters issued upon founding the monastery.<sup>26</sup> Setting aside well known sequence of frescoing the church by three different groups of painters,<sup>27</sup> one must keep in mind the walls with seven towers in Ravanica not only took longer period to erect but had at least two main phases.<sup>28</sup> One also should note the analogies in contemporary forts or fortified monasteries infer longer duration to build or multiple phases: according to an inscription, once above the gate of small castle Koprijan (South Serbia) it took



Fig. 4 Ravanica (narthex), St Sabas, south niche  
Сл. 4 Раваница, (припрата), Св. Сава, јужна ниша

<sup>22</sup> Д. Поповић, *Пустинје и свете горе средњовековне Србије – писани извори, просторни обрасци, градитељска решења*, ЗРВИ XLIV/1 (2007) 271. In Крепићевач the arcosolium with fresco of dying elder Joseph features as his dwelling a hut made of wooden planks, cf. Б. Кнежевић, *Сликаство манастира Крепићевца*, На трговима Војислава Ј. Ђурића, ур. Д. Медаковић, Ц. Грозданов, Београд 2011, 308, сл. 12. For forms of eremitic dwellings, including adapted caves, see Д. Поповић, Б. Тодић, Д. Војводић, *Дечанска пустинја. Скитови и келије манастира Дечана*, Београд 2011, 163–221.

<sup>23</sup> D. Madas, *Lazaret, manastir Ravanica i ravanička pećina – srednjovekovno manastirsko utvrđenje i kovačnica*, Arheološki pregled 12 (1970) 184–185.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 3, Tav. II.

<sup>25</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 285–287, 290–292.

<sup>27</sup> Т. Стародубцев, *Сликари задужбина Лазаревића*, ЗРВИ XLIII (2006) 350–355.

<sup>28</sup> Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 292 (with bibliography).

even ten years to build although it has five towers, comprising smaller area than Ravanica;<sup>29</sup> the Golubac castle had four phases of walls with towers;<sup>30</sup> and the fortified monastery Resava had two basic building phases of walled perimeter and in some parts height of walls with battlements had to be subsequently increased.<sup>31</sup>

One must not relate year of the Romylos' death to erection date of the monastery Ravanica because he did not live in its precincts, nor did he belong to the fraternity upon his arrival to its environs, as stated by both *vita* and *akolouthia*. What these sources only state is he died near Ravanica and, apparently, after it was founded. The exact date cannot be established without new sources, which is why scholars opt between 1375 and 1385.<sup>32</sup>

2. Physical traces of his cult are lacking except for the tomb that is equipped with a frescoed arcosolium.<sup>33</sup> The space housing this tomb is engulfed by the south wall of the narthex, rebuilt after the original one was demolished during the Austro-Ottoman war of 1690s: this refurbishment, using remnants of the old walls as well as parts of the original sculpture, took place in 1721, resulting in a different building with thick walls (fig. 1).<sup>34</sup> Since the medieval period the narthex has been frescoed at least twice with traces of three palpable mortar layers on the north wall,<sup>35</sup> but due to the prevailing reductionism, spatial and iconographic settings of this shrine have hitherto not attracted much attention.

The issue when the original narthex, conceived as light structure with the series of double openings,<sup>36</sup> was added to the nave, sometimes was answered in connection to the cult since it was hypothesized erection was intentionally planned for burial of Romylos.<sup>37</sup> But perusal of the very building and written

<sup>29</sup> For the photograph of the slab, cf. М. А. Марковић, *Натпис из града Копријуна*, Старијар XII (1937) 98–99, сл. 1. For the calque of the slab, cf. Г. Томовић, *Морфологија ћириличких натписа на Балкану*, Београд 1974, 78–79, бр. 65, сл. 65. For the mould copy, cf. Б. Поповић, *Галерија фресака у Београду*, Београд 2022, 317, бр. 92.

<sup>30</sup> Г. Симић, *Голубачки град*, Старијар XXXIII–XXXIV (1984) 71–84; Н. Катанић, *Фазе изградње Голубачког града*, Саопштења XIX (1987) 181–196; G. Simić, *The Medieval Fortress of Golubac*, Belgrade 2012, 51–57, fig. 28.

<sup>31</sup> G. Simić, S. Vukadinović, *Fortification of the Resava Monastery. From the Vision to the Creation*, Belgrade 2018, 220–236 et passim.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 4–9.

<sup>33</sup> That the arcosolium of Romylos is only briefly mentioned in scholarship see Б. Кнежевић, *Аркосолији у Хиландару и у српским средњовековним манастирима*, Осам векова Хиландара. Историја, духовни живот, књижевност, уметност и архитектура, ур. В. Кораћ, Београд 2000, 608.

<sup>34</sup> Б. Вуловић, *Раваница. Њено место и њена улога у сакралној архитектури Поморавља*, Саопштења VII (1966) 41, 153–156, сл. 10. For the monk Stefan, renovator of the demolished narthex cf. М. Ђоровић-Љубинковић, *Даскал јеромонах Стефан Раваничанин*, Рад војвођанских музеја 5 (1956) 73–79; ead., *Даскал Стефан. Поводом шесте стогодишњице оснивања Раванице*, Манастир Раваница. Споменица о шестој стогодишњици, Београд 1981, 156–176.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 290–292.

<sup>36</sup> Вуловић, *Раваница*, 68, 157–167, сл. 17, Т. XXII–XXV.

<sup>37</sup> С. Мандић, *Стари раванички нартекс*, Манастир Раваница. Споменица о

Fig. 5 Ravanica  
(narthex), Death of  
Romylos

Сл. 5 Раваница,  
(припрага),  
Ромилово успење



sources cannot sustain such a claim. Partial reconstruction in 1973, based on systematic research of walls and fragments of sculptures from the old narthex,<sup>38</sup> realized on the south façade (fig. 2),<sup>39</sup> renders grounds to surmise the present arcosolium could not belong to the original structure. Had such a plan existed, the arcosolium could not have been part of the massive wall, as it is now, since there the old narthex had an open bifora instead, with slender axial column, also discernible on the donor fresco.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, if the Romylos' tomb had been marked with a construction of the sort, it might have been similar to the Chilandari arcosolia, formed either in between interior elements, attached to walls, or even placed upon a dado.<sup>41</sup> One must conclude the arcosolium was not simultaneous with the narthex and that rebuilders had reconstructed this shrine as all the other walls of the ruined building.

The arcosolium, recently embellished with costly marbles and a wooden arch (fig. 3), was never subject to probes or excavations,<sup>42</sup> and this is unlikely to take place in the near future. Since Stefan, the renovator and monk of Ravanica, took the refuge with other brethren to Sirmia from the Ottomans due to the war

шестој стогодишњици, Београд 1981, 33–38.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Вуловић, *Раваница*, 67–90 Т. XXIV–XXX; В. Божиновић, *Анализа камене пластике раваничке цркве и могућности њене конзервације и презентације*, Модерна конзервација 10 (2022) 145–170.

<sup>39</sup> Д. Радуловић, *Један занимљив покушај рестаурације Лазареве приправе у манастиру Раваница*, Гласник ДКС 13 (1989) 78–81.

<sup>40</sup> Вуловић, *Раваница*, Т. XII.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Д. Поповић, *Сахране и гробови у средњем веку*, Манастир Хиландар, пр. Г. Суботић, Београд 1998, 205–214; Кнежевић, *Аркусолији*, 596–601, сл. 1–4.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. М. Popović, *Les Funérailles du Ktitor: Aspect Archéologique*, 21<sup>st</sup> International Congress of Byzantine Studies. Volume 1, Plenary Papers, ed. E. Jeffreys, London 2006, 99–130; id., *Археолошка сведочанства о ктиторским сахранама у средњем веку*, Новопазарски зборник 30 (2007) 15–47.

of 1690s,<sup>43</sup> he must have known and recalled the exact spot of the Romylos' burial place. Upon his return to the monastery in 1717, he had easily retraced it incorporating it into the wall. That the present arcosolium overtops the original Romylos' grave is obvious from the stone slab placed in the recess realized by cutting off parts of the low sitting bench, only visible residue of its previous furniture circumscribing the narthex interior; also, the recess is another firm proof that the Romylos' tomb postdates erection of the narthex. Its present form, being part of rebuilt wall, resembles the arcosolium in Krepičevac constructed in the south wall of the nave, close to the altar,<sup>44</sup> as well as the indented south wall of the west bay in the Chilandari nave which commemorates original place of the Nemanja's tomb.<sup>45</sup>

These insights are corroborated by analyses of Rigo and Scarpa of the Romylos' *vita*, *akolouthia*, and *encomium*.<sup>46</sup> Not only that these two scholars convincingly refuted identification of the *vita*'s author with a Serb monk Grigorije, showing that Gregorios the Calligrapher as author was not only Greek but the one from the circle of Gregory of Sinai and of Romylos himself, they also established that along the *vita*, the *akolouthia* also was written in Greek and that its extant Slavic version is only translation of its Greek original, now apparently lost. Moreover, they found out that the *encomium* fragment, as preserved in the Vatican Library manuscript Urb. gr. 134, fol. 158v, was authored, as *akolouthia*, by the scribe Ioasaph in the monastery Prodromos Petra in Constantinople, and was perhaps commissioned by despot Stefan Lazarević through his close ties either with the Byzantine imperial court or his own wife.<sup>47</sup>

What the findings display is that the hagiographical texts for Romylos were being produced during several years, with the *encomium* belonging to the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> C., matching both the rise and gradual development of his cult. Close reading of the *vita* and *akolouthia* clearly reveal their authors used known terminology that provides data for understanding initial phases during the sanctification process of Romylos, in accord with high standards of the genre.<sup>48</sup> Description of his death is given as the Romylos' ascension to eternal, heavenly abodes, with transmission of his blessed soul into the hands of God. This sentence is followed by naming his resting place as tomb, *τάφος* in the Greek *vita*,<sup>49</sup> *гробъ* in the Slavic,<sup>50</sup> which exudes sweet fragrance as a sign for the Romylos' emerging sainthood. The next step in establishing cult is provided

<sup>43</sup> For his likeness at the west door to the narthex see М. Тимотијевић, *Портрети архијереја у новијој српској уметности*, Западно-европски барок и византијски свет, ур. Д. Медаковић, Београд 1991, 152, сл. 1.

<sup>44</sup> Кнежевић, *Сликаство манастира Крепичевца*, 308, црт. 2, сл. 12–13.

<sup>45</sup> Д. Војводић, *Хиландарски гроб Светог Симеона Српског и његов сликани програм*, X3 11 (2004) 27–58; J. Bogdanović, *The Original Tomb of St. Simeon and its Significance for the Architectural History of Hilandar Monastery*, X3 12 (2008) 35–53.

<sup>46</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 55–70.

<sup>47</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 70.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. H. Delehay, *The Legends of the Saints. An Introduction to Hagiography*, transl. V. M. Crawford, New York – Bombay – Calcutta 1907.

<sup>49</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 132 (24.7).

<sup>50</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 182 (24.8).





Fig. 6 Ravanica (narthex), St Gerasimos and the Lion

Сл. 6 Раваница, (припрага), Св. Герасим и лав



Fig. 7 Ravanica (narthex), Prophet Zephaniah

Сл. 7 Раваница, (припрага), пророк Софонија

by enumerating various healings the tomb performed before the numerous witnesses, present at the grave.<sup>51</sup> The final stage in promoting Romylos as the saint was exposed in the last chapter of the vita where he is praised with saintly epithets, while his mortal remains are named *relics*, *λείψανον* in the Greek vita,<sup>52</sup> and *honourable body*, *чѣстное тѣло* in the Slavic.<sup>53</sup> The change in usage of terminology in the vita, from *tomb* to *relics*, obviously alludes to transfer of the Romylos' body from his first to the second tomb. That this inevitably took place is confirmed by the statement describing his final resting place as *coffin*, *λάρνακα*, in the Greek version,<sup>54</sup> or *your Divine coffin*, *б(о)ж(ь)ствныѣ ти рацѣ* in the Slavic.<sup>55</sup> The Slavic word *raka* is actually derived as metathesis from the Latin *arca* which signifies box, coffin, tombstone, i.e. sarcophagus. Accordingly, in the *akolouthia* text the Romylos' coffin is described as the

<sup>51</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 132 (24.11-16), 182 (24.12-18).

<sup>52</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 134 (25.7).

<sup>53</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 183 (25.7).

<sup>54</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 134 (25.8).

<sup>55</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 183 (25.8).

source of salvation, **его рака источникъ сп(а)сеніа**.<sup>56</sup> The quoted lines from these texts decisively prove the present arcosolium in the narthex reflects the second holy tomb of Romylos, specially constructed as part of the sanctification process. These are precious data since no traces of Romylos' activities in vicinity of Ravanica have been preserved,<sup>57</sup> nor there are other remnants of his cult.<sup>58</sup>

This is probably the context that may explain additional erection of the narthex in Ravanica, which must have occurred 1385–1389.<sup>59</sup> One may suggest various political or ideological motives for its subsequent building, as are commemoration of victories (battle at Dubravica won in 1381),<sup>60</sup> votive prayers for help in emerging disaster (Niš lost to the Ottomans in 1386), growing fear of the Turks,<sup>61</sup> or dynastic jubilees (tenth anniversary of the firstborn son of Knez Lazar, 1377–1387).<sup>62</sup> Despite that precise motives may never be ascertained origin of both the architectural type and decorative system obviously lies with the Byzantine, narrowly Athonite praxes. As recently shown, the exonarthex in Hilandar was not built by Knez Lazar but King Stefan Uroš III, which would later exert strong impact on sacral arts in the Serbian hinterland.<sup>63</sup> Addition of narthexes usually reflected continual family and dynastic ktetorial rights, both with nobility (Dobrun),<sup>64</sup> and royalty (Studenica, Žiča, Gračanica).<sup>65</sup> This provides grounds for reasonable proposition that the Ravanica narthex probably came out from two joint ideas – ktetorship Lazar obtained in Hilandar,<sup>66</sup> and need to establish his own dynasty i.e. to stress his immediate successors, as do-

<sup>56</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 50; Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 68.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Z. Kiknadze, *Tre volti del'ascesi*, Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano. Miscellanea Metreveli, Roma 2000, 29–40.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. E. Bakalova, A. Lazarova, *A locus sanctus in Bulgaria: The Monastery of St John of Rila and its sacred topography*, Routes of Faith in the Medieval Mediterranean. History, Monuments, People, Pilgrimage Perspectives, ed. E. Hadjistryphonos, Thessalonike 2008, 309–327.

<sup>59</sup> Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 297.

<sup>60</sup> М. Шуица, *Немирно доба српског средњег века. Властела српских обласних господара*, Београд 2000, 27, 90, 119.

<sup>61</sup> М. Шуица, *Приповести о српско-турским окршајима и «страх од Турака» 1386. године*, ИЧ LIII (2006) 93–122.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Константин Философ и његов живот Стефана Лазаревића деспота српског*, прир. В. Јагић, Гласник СУД XLII (1875) 262 who presents precious information that the palatine chapel in the capital Kruševac was dedicated to St Stephen, in honour of the homonymous firstborn son of Knez Lazar.

<sup>63</sup> Б. Тодић, *Време изградње католикона и ексонартекса манастира Хиландара*, ХЗ 14 (2017) 147–171.

<sup>64</sup> И. М. Ђорђевић, *Зидно сликарство српске властеле у доба Немањића*, Београд 1994, 143.

<sup>65</sup> Б. Цветковић, *Студенички ексонартекс и краљ Радослав: прилог датовању*, ЗРВИ XXXVII (1998) 75–85; М. Чанак-Медић, Д. Поповић, Д. Војводић, *Манастир Жича*, Београд 2014; А. Димитријевић, *Питање ктиторства првобитне грачаничке спољне приправе*, Niš & Byzantium XX (2022) 339–350.

<sup>66</sup> М. Благојевић, *Кнез Лазар – ктитор Хиландара*, Свети кнез Лазар. Споменица о шестој стогодишњици Косовског боја 1389–1989, Београд 1989, 47–61 (= Немањићи и Лазаревићи и српска средњовековна државност, Београд 2004, 347–353).

nor portraits in Ravanica display only his two minor sons, although Lazar also had five daughters.<sup>67</sup> That dynastic reasons were prevailing as was always the case with royal architecture corroborates the fresco itself since the narthex is intentionally painted above the head of the senior prince.<sup>68</sup>

Knez Lazar must have had close assistants from Athos for such an endeavour, and the sources do point to a number of them, as were the famous monk Isaiah, diplomat and translator,<sup>69</sup> or monk Nicodemus (Grčić), Greek interpreter, who would after his Athonite sojourn found monastic centers in Wallachia.<sup>70</sup> Both of them were members of the team that settled the anathema issues between the court in Constantinople and Serbia.<sup>71</sup>

Complex relationship between the Greek and Slavic versions of the Romylos' vita has been well known fact. While the Greek vita names Ravanica monastery **Ραβενίτζα**,<sup>72</sup> the Slavic corrects it to **Раваньница**.<sup>73</sup> It is noteworthy that the *akolouthia* uses the third variant, **равьница**,<sup>74</sup> close to the one in the passage on the *level place* (a suitable spot for ascetics), from the short vita text of Knez Lazar which explains the monastery name in relation to writings on *level places* by St Athanasius the Great.<sup>75</sup> The proof that these texts belong to hagiography of high style produced by the social elite, for the members of the elite, and about the elite (to paraphrase I. Ševčenko),<sup>76</sup> is usage of terminology. While in the Greek vita *to Serbia* is given in a rather simple way, **εἰς τὴν Σερβίαν**,<sup>77</sup> the Slavic vita uses a syntagma, *to the Serbian land*, **въ Срьб(ь)скѹ землю**.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the *akolouthia* text relies on the geographic anachronisms, well known and much used by Byzantine writers. When mentioning Valona on the Ionian coastline (present day Vlora in Albania) its author si-

<sup>67</sup> Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 297–302, fig. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 297–302, fig. 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ђ. Трифуновић, *Писац и преводилац инок Исаија*, Крушевац 1980.

<sup>70</sup> G. Speake, *A History of the Athonite Commonwealth: The Spiritual and Cultural Diaspora of Mount Athos*, Cambridge 2018, 145–160.

<sup>71</sup> For the sources of these activities, cf. *Acta et diplomata Graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, ed. F. Miclosich, I. Müller, Vindobonae 1860, 553–555, 560–564, No. CCC, CCCVI; *Шест писаца XIV века*, ур. Д. Богдановић, Београд 1986, 96, 167; *Данилови настављачи*, ур. Г. Мак Данијел, Београд 1989, 129–130. For various issues, cf. Ф. Баришић, *О измирењу српске и византијске цркве 1375*, ЗРВИ XXI (1982) 159–182.

<sup>72</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 132 (24.3).

<sup>73</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 182 (24.3).

<sup>74</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 50; Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 67.

<sup>75</sup> M. Belović Hodge, *Ravanica – Prince Lazar's Mausoleum Church: Its Name Reconsidered*, *Byzantinoslavica* 61.1 (2003) 205–228.

<sup>76</sup> I. Ševčenko, *Observations on the Study of Byzantine Hagiography in the Last Half-Century or Two Looks Back and One Look Forward*, Toronto 1995.

<sup>77</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 132 (24.2).

<sup>78</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 182 (24.2). Cf. М. Ивановић, *Границе српске земље од краја XII до средине XV века према наративним изворима*, *Concepts of Nationalism and Patriotism in Serbian Political Discourse: Medieval, Modern, Contemporary*, ed. S. Marjanović-Dušanić, A. Z. Savić, Belgrade 2025, 38–41.



Fig. 8 Ljubostinja (dome), Prophet Zephaniah

Сл. 8 Љубостиња, (купола), пророк Софонија

tuates this town in the region of *ѿлврѣкъ*,<sup>79</sup> i.e. *Illyricum*, one of old Roman, and later Byzantine, provinces in the West Balkans. Likewise, when stating that Romylos goes to Serbia, he uses instead *дѧлматѣю*, i.e. *Dalmatia*,<sup>80</sup> again ancient name of the Roman province in the Central Balkans.

The most conspicuous difference between the two versions of the vita of Romylos is surely the one of dedication of Ravanica as the Greek vita names the *Virgin*,<sup>81</sup> and the Slavic corrects it to *Ascension of the Lord*.<sup>82</sup> This issue raises question why could such an error occur? Possible answer may stem from unusual iconography in lunette above gate to the nave featuring rare image of Orant Virgin with Christ child, on blue background sparkled with stars, and signed as the *Life Giving Source*. The motive for such an image recent research has not clarified,<sup>83</sup> but this fresco might have been seen by someone who interpreted it as the patron icon reaching the author of the Greek vita, despite being false. When this image of the Virgin was depicted cannot be ascertained but it seems its painter did not belong to groups working in the nave or the narthex. It is, though, interesting to note, almost as with ancient errors made in

translations,<sup>84</sup> that dedication error from the Greek vita made its way in recent literature,<sup>85</sup> by being fortuitously taken from a modern translation of the vita,<sup>86</sup> and wrongly referred to as the Slavic vita (while actually the used translation in Serbian was made after the Greek vita).<sup>87</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 49; Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 30, 67.

<sup>80</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 50; Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 132 (24.3-4).

<sup>82</sup> Rigo, Scarpa, *La Vita*, 182 (24.4).

<sup>83</sup> Т. Стародубцев, *Культ Богородице Ζωοδόχος Πηγή и његов одјек у сликарству у доба Палеолога*, Зограф 33 (2006) 102, 110, 112–113, сл. 4, 10.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. F. J. Thomson, *Towards a Typology of Errors in Slavonic Translations*, Christianity among the Slavs. The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius, ed. E. G. Farrugia et al., Roma 1988, 351–380.

<sup>85</sup> Дујчев, *Романо*, 315; С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Владарска идеологија Немањића. Дипломатичка студија*, Београд 1997, 180.

<sup>86</sup> *Житије новојављеног преподобног оца нашег Ромила Раваничког*, 517.

<sup>87</sup> Поповић, *Монах-пустињак*, 561, н. 27. Cf. Амфилохије, *Синаити*, 116, н. 43.

Further confusion entered scholarship by virtue of comparing the cultic texts on Romylos and Knez Lazar. Reflecting on date when could the Greek *vita* be translated, it was Radojičić who proposed it must have been prior the translation of Lazar's body from Priština to Ravanica in the late 1390, as the *vita* does not mention that the relics of Lazar are laid close to Romylos.<sup>88</sup> For unspecified reasons scholars have held it mandatory that the transfer had to be echoed in cultic texts.<sup>89</sup> Such a theory is pointless since it misses to note that none of the texts on Romylos mention Knez Lazar at all, not even in the context of Ravanica as his own foundation, while on the contrary, the *vita* mentions despot John Uglješa in an emphasized manner.

Moreover, this hypothesis has been turned into antithesis by being misquoted in that the *vita* states relics of Romylos rest along relics of Knez Lazar.<sup>90</sup> Since Lazar was not mentioned in Greek or Slavic versions of the Romylos' *vita*, or in the *akolouthia*, it follows that their authors did not find it necessary to make such a connection between the texts since there were not any direct relation between the two cults, as was projected by wishful thinking of scholars. The cult of Romylos was evidently promoted by monastics in Athos, unlike that of Lazar, established and dispersed by the court and clergy.<sup>91</sup>

Sources that first mention parallel existence of the relics of Romylos and Lazar do not date before the 17<sup>th</sup> C. The earliest is the picturesque book of 1673 by Edward Brown (1644–1708), who in 1669 had travelled the Balkans from Vienna to Larissa. He briefly mentions “noted Convent, wherein is kept the body of *Kenez Lazarus*, and the body of St. Romanus”.<sup>92</sup> The other



Fig. 9 Resava (dome) copy, Prophet Zephaniah

Сл. 9 Ресава, (купола) копија,  
пророк Софонија

<sup>88</sup> Ђ. Сп. Радојичић, *Григорије из Горњака*, ИЧ III (1952) 95.

<sup>89</sup> Also, see Павловић, *Култови лица*, 195.

<sup>90</sup> Д. Поповић, *Раванички гроб кнеза Лазара*, Свети кнез Лазар. Споменица о шестој стогодишњици Косовског боја 1389–1989, Београд 1989, 179; ead., *Српски владарски гроб у средњем веку*, Београд 1992, 125.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. F. Kämpfer, *Der Kult des heiligen Serbenfürsten Lasar. Textinterpretation zur Ideologieggeschichte des Spätmittelalters*, Südost Forschungen XXXI (1972) 81–139; P. Михаљчић, *Лазар Хребељновић. Историја, култ, предање*, Београд 1989, 127–174.

<sup>92</sup> E. Brown, *A brief account of some travels in Hungaria, Servia, Bulgaria, Mace-*



is the document of Patriarch Arsenije III on estates of Ravanica, dated to May 25, 1689, which states that along the most healing relics of Lazar there are relics “of the blessed father of ours Romylos, the wonderworker”.<sup>93</sup> However, in view of these late sources which bring together relics of the two, one may suggest that the fresco of the Virgin the *Life Giving Source* must have been depicted above the gate in relation to the sainted bodies kept in Ravanica. The fact the *akolouthia* text renders the holy tomb of Romylos as *source of salvation* makes it possible to posit the fresco and the coffin share direct relationship.

3. This is the point to turn to the fresco ensemble and inspect if the programme was conceived due to the Romylos’ cult or liturgical practices prescribed for narthex.<sup>94</sup> It has been said above the narthex walls are covered with wall paintings which can be dated to at least three distinct chronological phases, as is best discernible in the southeast corner (fig. 4). The high niche on the former west façade preserves in its upper section the late 14<sup>th</sup> C. frescoes attributable to painters who worked in the first zone of the nave and who finalized decorating church and newly erected narthex.<sup>95</sup> Figure of St Sava the Serbian on the left, as well as repainted damaged lower section of adjacent figure of St Gerasimos on the right, date to 1736, after renewal of ruined narthex.<sup>96</sup> Floral decoration in the upper register with some scenes and figures on the vaults and arches date to 1721.<sup>97</sup>

The damaged fresco in the arcosolium obviously can be dated to 1736 layer (fig. 5). An inquiring eye may detect it depicts death of Romylos: his body on

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*donia, Thessaly, Austria, Styria, Carinthia, Carniola, and Friuli, as also some observations on the gold, silver, copper, quick-silver mines, baths, and mineral waters in those parts. With the figures of some habits and remarkable places*, London 1673, 49. Cf. Ст. Новаковић, *Белешке доктора Брауна из српских земаља од године 1669.*, Споменик СКА IX (1891) 41; Вл. Поповић, *Путонис д-р Брауна. Пут од Беча у Аустрији до Ларисе у Тесалији (Наставак)*, Гласник Историског друштва у Новом Саду VII/1-3 (1934) 291.

<sup>93</sup> I. Суботић, *Писмени споменици (I. Писмено Архи-Епископа Пекског Арсенија Чарнојевића, у коме се манастиру Раваницы одъ Кнеза Лазара дарована притяжанія изчисляваю, и сохраняванъ исты препоручуе)*, Сербскій лѣтописъ 80/I (1848), 65; Г. Витковић, *Споменици из Будимског и Пеиштанског архива. Збирка четврта*, Гласник СУД 2-ги одељак. Грађа за новију српску историју. Књига шеста (1875), 186. For some later sources, see В. Р. Петковић, *Манастир Раваница*, Београд 1922, 12–13.

<sup>94</sup> For various functions of a narthex, see N. Stanković, *At the Threshold of the Heavens: the Narthex and Adjacent Spaces in Middle Byzantine Churches of Mount Athos (10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> Centuries) – Architecture, Function, and Meaning*, doctoral dissertation, Princeton University 2017, 183–258.

<sup>95</sup> Cvetković, *Revisiting*, 297, 299, 302. Cf. Стародубцев, *Сликари задужбина Лазаревића*, 355; ead., *Српско зидно сликарство. Књига II*, 47–48.

<sup>96</sup> A complete insight of phases of the wall paintings in the narthex is still to be fully established as some frescoes obviously belong to the 19<sup>th</sup> C.

<sup>97</sup> Л. Шелмић, *Српско зидно сликарство XVIII века*, Нови Сад 1987, 12, 50; Љ. Стошић, *Српска уметност 1690–1740*, Београд 2006, passim. Cf. П. Васић, *Поствизантијско сликарство у Србији у XVIII и XIX веку*, Градска култура на Балкану (XV–XIX век) 1, ур. В. Хан, Београд 1984, 227; Б. Вујовић, *Уметност обновљене Србије (1791–1848)*, Београд 1986, 185–186.

the bier, haloed head, and the figures of possibly three monks around him.<sup>98</sup> Unlike similar scenes above tombs of monks, as with hermit Gabriel in Lesnovo, which in the background displays a church building,<sup>99</sup> elder Joseph in Krepičevac who is shown in front of his hut,<sup>100</sup> or St Euthymios in eponymous paraclesis in Thessaloniki who lies between the desert dunes,<sup>101</sup> here one sees a high wall with bifora and blind arcades, featuring three turrets of unequal height. These architectural elements obviously display the fortified monastery Ravanica implying the Romylos' death took place outside its walls.

Apart from this damaged funeral likeness, no other painted portrait of Romylos is known which is why the tabernacle made for the Ravanica monks bears importance. It was ordered during their refuge in Sirmia in 1705 from the goldsmith Nikola Nedeljković who realized it as a five-domed church with figures and busts of saints in low relief on its sides, including St Romylos signed: **сѣн ромил**.<sup>102</sup>

That the medieval frescoes close to the Romylos' tomb could be related to his cult has already been stressed. St Gerasimos healing the paw of a desert lion (fig. 6), depicted in the lower register of the south niche, is one of themes often encountered as part of the eremitic cycles in medieval art.<sup>103</sup> It was long ago noticed that the Romylos'



Fig. 10 Ravanica (narthex), south niche, St Agapias and disciples

Сл. 10 Раваница, (припрата), Св. Агапија и ученици

<sup>98</sup> For iconography of death scenes of monks, cf. S. Moretti, *La morte del monaco nelle più antiche fonti figurative bizantine: dalle origini al secolo XI*, Hortus Artium Medievalium 23/2 (2017) 556–568.

<sup>99</sup> С. Габелић, *Манастир Лесново. Историја и сликарство*, Београд 1998, 109–112, сл. 42–44.

<sup>100</sup> Кнежевић, *Сликарство*, 308, сл. 12.

<sup>101</sup> S. Tomeković, *Les saints ermites et moines dans la peinture murale byzantine*, Paris 2011, 396, fig. 113.

<sup>102</sup> Л. Мирковић, *Старине фрушкогорских манастира*, Београд 1931, 51–53; С. Мартиновић, *Дарохранилница манастира Врдник*, ЗМСПУ 42 (2015) 49–64.

<sup>103</sup> C. I. Ciobanu, *Quelques notes sur l'iconographie du cycle de la Vita de Saint Gerasime du Jourdain dans la peinture roumaine*, Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture

vita contains direct comparison of Romylos who mourns his deceased fellow monk with the desperate lion at the St Gerasimos' grave.<sup>104</sup> It was concluded that their proximity to the Romylos' tomb reflects the quoted line from the vita.<sup>105</sup> The results of research of cultic topography in the Ravanica narthex reveal more grounds connecting Romylos with Gerasimos as one of the famous desert fathers. These go beyond comparison of the two including network of meanings of the nearby wall paintings, imbued with specific liturgical readings.<sup>106</sup>

What firstly attracts one's attention is the fresco programme above the Romylos' shrine. Directly resting on a semicircle of the arcosolium's frame is *Raising of Lazarus* in a fairly good state but with traces of two layers (fig. 3). Above this is a fresco fragment of *Christ's Baptism* which, due to its technical and stylistic features, may even postdate the former. However, superposition of these scenes most probably springs from well thought out symbolism. Placing a scene in the first zone which would normally be found in one of upper registers of church interior walls, is always sign of its special role. Also, the sheer size of the *Raising of Lazarus* fresco, as well as its structure, display intentional emphasis on this particular theme.<sup>107</sup> Iconography of this scene has rare analogies due to its wide composition with figure of resurrected Lazarus holding central, axial position, since it is usually represented somewhere aside. He stands upright, risen from a large sarcophagus placed centrally in a landscape. In the rear, between two hills, are walls and towers of city Bethania. Blue background displays remnants of white letters of the legend between two parallel lines incised into mortar. Lazarus, clad in a white shroud, has gold halo. On the right damaged side of fresco are figures of a gesturing noseholder turning his body away, a man removing heavy lid of the tomb, and of two more figures barely visible now. On the left side, the nimbed Christ leads group of onlookers, while Mary and Martha kneel in front of him. Since above this fresco there is a *Baptism* of Jesus in Jordan, one is tempted to interpret these superposed scenes as intentional reflection of old customs prescribing that among suitable feasts to perform the baptism rite was Saturday of Lazarus.<sup>108</sup> Origin of such a rite was

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and Art VI/1 (2019) 9–44.

<sup>104</sup> E. Bakalova, *Scenes from the Life of St. Gerasimos of Jordan in Ivanovo (A Pictorial Interpretation of the Idea of Restoring Harmony Between Man and the World of Nature)*, ЗЛУМС 21 (1985) 121. For the quote see Rigo, Scarpa, *Vita*, 44, 45, 48, 98, 142, 165.

<sup>105</sup> М. Беловић, *Раваница. Историја и сликарство*, Београд 1999, 152–157.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. B. Cvetković, *Shrine of Romylos the Blessed in Ravanica: Culminating Focus of His Balkan Paths, Mountains, and Plains*, 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference "Via Egnatia: Peoples and States – Cultural, Political, Regional Identities in the Past and Today". Abstracts of Papers, Tbilisi 2009, 23–25.

<sup>107</sup> For its iconography, cf. G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile aux XIV<sup>e</sup>, XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles, d'après les monuments de Mistra, de la Macédoine et du Mont Athos*, Paris 1916, 232–254.

<sup>108</sup> Л. Мирковић, *Хеортологија*, Београд 1961, 142.



Fig. 11 Gračanica, St Alexandros, St Romylos of Caesarea  
Сл. 11 Грачаница, Св. Александар, Св. Ромил Кесаријски

Typicon of the Great Church in Constantinople.<sup>109</sup> Saturday of Lazarus was celebrated with corridors of imperial palace being decorated with myrtle, laurel or olive branches, including visit by the emperor to the church of St Lazarus.<sup>110</sup>

The analyses of extant fresco programme disclose the both scenes probably repeat iconography above the former tomb of Romylos. The connection is in that the biblical Lazarus is the holy namesake of Knez Lazar, ktetor of Ravanica, and liturgical readings for Saturday of Lazarus are reflected in frescoes in the neighbouring niche. In cultic texts, Knez is often compared to bibli-

<sup>109</sup> А. Дмитриевскій, *Описаніе литургическихъ рукописей I. Типика*, Кіевъ 1895, 126–127.

<sup>110</sup> Pseudo-Kodinos, *The Constantinopolitan Court, Offices and Ceremonies*, ed. R. Macrides, J. Munitiz, D. Angelov, Ashgate 2013, 170–171, 200–201, n. 579.

cal Lazarus, from that he got name after “Lazarus, friend of Jesus”,<sup>111</sup> to that he was called by Jesus to his heavenly empire as was Lazarus from the dead,<sup>112</sup> to Knez being homonymous to Lazarus who spent four days in the tomb.<sup>113</sup> Further, liturgical readings for Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday (Genesis, 49) refer to Jacob blessing his sons, but also to the lion of Judah, so providing additional symbolic meaning of St Gerasimos with the lion (fig. 6), depicted close to both the fresco *Raising of Lazarus* and tomb of Romylos. That these readings had impacted iconography of entire niche (fig. 4), corroborates the figure in its upper part, above St Gerasimos (fig. 7). This, obviously a prophet, is as *Raising of Lazarus* placed not in upper parts of walls, which is why it implies special meaning being positioned near the arcosolium of Romylos. Despite that earlier scholarship could not identify it,<sup>114</sup> due to typology of face and characteristic posture, turned to the right and writing on an unfurled scroll, it most probably represents prophet Zephaniah.<sup>115</sup>

The closest analogies are the figures of this prophet in Ljubostinja (fig. 8),<sup>116</sup> and Resava (fig. 9).<sup>117</sup> Unlike the former, lacking both the legend and text on the scroll, the latter is clearly identified and holds a prophecy from the book of Zephaniah (3, 8), often found with this prophet in medieval art, symbolizing resurrection.<sup>118</sup> Although the text on the scroll in Ravanica is flaked, it is possible to discern letters in the fifth line matching the quotes from that prophecy which shows this prophet is also related to both the arcosolium and the fresco above, since the reading Zephaniah (3, 8-15) is prescribed for the Saturday of Lazarus, and Palm Sunday.<sup>119</sup> These facts lead to two important conclusions. Firstly, medieval frescoes in the niche and from 1736 above arcosolium are clearly connected by the overarching idea as symbols of resurrection and with implications to the relics of both Knez and Romylos through usage of liturgical readings for Saturday of Lazarus and Palm Sunday. Secondly, the frescoes in

<sup>111</sup> *Списи о Косову*, пр. М. Грковић, Београд 1993, 37.

<sup>112</sup> *Списи о Косову*, 121.

<sup>113</sup> *Списи о Косову*, 173.

<sup>114</sup> Б. Живковић, *Раваница. Цртежи фресака*, Београд 1990, 53, бр. IX/2; Беловић, *Раваница. Историја и сликарство*, 155–156, 181, 230, сл. 19; Стародубцев, *Српско зидно сликарство. Књига II*, 38. Cf. Стародубцев, *Сликари задужбина Лазаревића*, 381, сл. 15 with reproduction of the figure that is in legend erroneously identified as St Gerasimos.

<sup>115</sup> Cvetković, *Shrine of Romylos*, 25.

<sup>116</sup> С. Ђурић, *Љубостиња. Црква Успења Богородичиног*, Београд 1985, 73, 76–79, Т. XII, ил. 66.

<sup>117</sup> The fresco copy (inv. no. 436) was made in 1956 by Šime Perić, see Б. Поповић, *Галерија фресака у Београду*, Београд 2022, 259, бр. 54.

<sup>118</sup> Ј. Проловић, *Сликани програм купола и поткуполних простора у цркви манастира Ресаве*, *Зограф* 32 (2008), 141–142, сл. 9; ead, *Resava (Manasija) Geschichte, Architektur und Malerei einer Stiftung des serbischen Despoten Stefan Lazarević*, Wien 2017, 150–166, fig. 46, Т. 23, Abb. 60.

<sup>119</sup> А. Rahlfs, *Die alttestamentlichen Lektionen der griechischen Kirche*, Berlin 1915, 40, 65, 132; А-М. Gravgaard, *Inscriptions of Old Testament Prophecies in Byzantine Churches*, Copenhagen 1979, 87; *Паримејник*, Требиње 2000, 93–94.



the niche, being work of artists who painted the first zone in the nave, date not only after the body of Knez Lazar was translated to Ravanica, but after installment of the original arcosolium of Romylos, i.e. during the early 1390s.

More precise dating of the frescoes in nave and narthex also enables analysis of remaining parts of programme in the northern niche. This group of eight tightly squeezed figures (fig. 10) has been variously identified, as St Seven Sleepers from Ephesos,<sup>120</sup> or St Bademos and his disciples.<sup>121</sup> However, it would be more probable to identify them as St Agapios with seven other saints, martyred by sword on the same day during Diocletian in Palestinian Caesarea, since one of them was named Romylos, as the newly venerated hermit in Ravanica.<sup>122</sup> This homonymous liaison was likely the reason for such a choice, as this group of martyrs from Palesitine had their place in the medieval wall paintings in Serbia. Three out of eight of them are depicted as busts in the south bay of the narthex in Peć, above south gate.<sup>123</sup> Their figures must have existed in the painted calendars in Staro Nagoričino and Dečani but frescoes on the appropriate surfaces have perished.<sup>124</sup> Better preserved are the corresponding frescoes in Gračanica.<sup>125</sup> Along displaying group passion of St Agapios with others, there is also a separately depicted bust of St Romylos; despite being partly damaged, it features the legible caption: **ρωμύλος** (fig. 11).

4. The extant written sources on the hermit Romylos the blessed have provided scholars with data that his cult was the specific phenomenon, limited to Athos and region around Ravanica. However, the interior of the Ravanica narthex, both the arcosolium and the remaining frescoes, disclose important information elucidating initial stages in rise of the cult, as well as its later phases. That Romylos was revered as the leader of the monks residing in hermitages of the Balkans is supported by the primary sources mentioning his activities on Mount Athos. His position is best described by the long inscription from the manuscript of a Miscellany, dated after 1370, now in the National library in Paris (BNF slave 8, fol. 231r), which informs on the group of hermits dwelling at the site known as the *Evil Stone*, Κακή Πλάξ,<sup>126</sup> i.e. Κακή Πλάκα,<sup>127</sup> after

<sup>120</sup> Живковић, *Раваница*, 52, бр. IX/1.

<sup>121</sup> Беловић, *Раваница*, 155–156, 181, 213, 230, сл. 38.

<sup>122</sup> *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. Delehay, Bruxellis 1902, col. 537–538.

<sup>123</sup> В. Ј. Ђурић, С. Ђирковић, В. Кораћ, *Пећка патријаршија*, Београд 1990, 263, сл. 169.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. П. Мијовић, *Менолог. Историјско-уметничка истраживања*, Београд 1973, 277–278, 334, сх. 14, 43; С. Кесић-Ристић, Д. Војводић, *Менолог*, Зидно сликарство манастира Дечана. Грађа и студије, ур. В. Ј. Ђурић, Београд 1995, 401.

<sup>125</sup> Б. Тодић, *Грачаница. Сликаство*, Београд – Приштина 1988, 89, 105, црт. IX.

<sup>126</sup> Pavlikianov, *The Athonite Period*, 251–252.

<sup>127</sup> К. Παυλικιάνωφ, *Σλάβοι μοναχοὶ στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος ἀπὸ τὸν Ι' ὡς τὸν ΙΖ' αἰῶνα. Ἡ ἐμφάνιση Σλάβων μοναχῶν στα Ἑλληνικά Ἀθωνικά καθιδρύματα καὶ οἱ ἀπαρχές της μόνιμης παρουσίας τους στις μονές Ζωγράφου καὶ Παντελεήμονος*, Θεσσαλονίκη 2002, 32–37; id., *The Bulgarians on Mount Athos*, Mount Athos. Microcosm of the Christian East, ed. G. Speake, M. K. Ware, Bern 2012, 65–70.

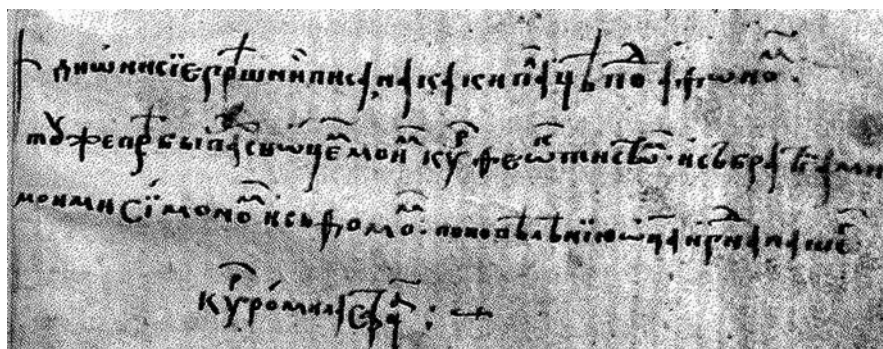


Fig. 12 BNF slave 8, fol. 231r (inscription of Dionysius)

Сл. 12 BNF slave 8, л. 231г (запис Дионисијев)

behest of their father and master, the elder Romylos: † дионисіє грѣшни писа, на какиѣлацѣ под аѡноѡм(ь) :- тѣ же прѣбывах(ь) съ ѡ(ть)цем мѡим(ь) кѣр(ь) ѡѡк(ь)тистѡм(ь) . и съ братїами моими сїмонѡм(ь) и съ ѡмѡм(ь) . по повѣлѣнїю ѡ(ть)ца и г(ѡ)сп(о)д(ин)а нашег(о) кѣр(ь) ромила стар(ь)ца:- (fig. 12).<sup>128</sup> Moreover, a recent discovery of the original composition of Romylos additionally reveals his special place among the hermits of the time. This is the *Skete rule*, a part of the Miscellany in the library of the monastery Chilandar, the headline of which (Chil. 640, fol. 24) presents the name of Romylos as its author: **сѣн старѣць ромиль**.<sup>129</sup> Obviously, his high esteem among the monks of various origin was reason why he got firstly the Greek hagiography.

Dating the Romylos' *akolouthia* to the 15<sup>th</sup> C. corresponds to problems pertaining to hagiographical production for the cult of Holy Knez Lazar as his *akolouthia* was also dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> C. due to mention of a *despot*.<sup>130</sup> However, dating his vita is problematic due to tendency of modern scholars to base it only on mention of Stefan as *knez*,<sup>131</sup> which neglects the fact that this text does not mention his brother Vuk, pointing to a later date.

<sup>128</sup> Т. Јовановић, *Инвентар српских ћирилских рукописа Народне библиотеке у Паризу*, Археографски прилози 3 (1981) 306–308, 325, сл. 6.

<sup>129</sup> К. Ivanova, P. Matejić, *An Unknown Work of St Romil of Vidin (Ravanica) (Preliminary Remarks)*, *Palaeobulgarica* 17/4 (1993) 3–15. Cf. В. Бусыгин, *Послание старца кѣр Феоктиста о иноческом келейном правиле*, Труды Отдела древнерусской литературы 68 (2021) 402–444.

<sup>130</sup> Ђ. Трифуновић, *Српски средњовековни списи о кнезу Лазару и Косовском боју*, Крушевац 1968, 199–204. For the text of *akolouthia* cf. Ђ. Трифуновић, И. Шпадијер, *Служба светом кнезу Лазару*, Свети кнез Лазар. Споменица о шестој стогодишњици Косовског боја 1389–1989, Београд 1989, 193–221.

<sup>131</sup> Ст. Новаковић, *Нешто о кнезу Лазару по рукопису XVII. вијека*, Гласник СУД XXI (1867) 160–164; Ђ. Sp. Radojičić, *Antologija stare srpske književnosti (XI–XVIII veka)*, Београд 1960, 117–118; Трифуновић, *Српски*, 96–98; Раваничанин I, *Житије светог кнеза Лазара*, Списи о Косову, пр. М. Грковић, Београд 1993, 122–123.

The Athonite origin and Constantinopolitan background of the Romylos' cult can be understood in context of strong political and spiritual impacts the Balkans and Serbia received at the time, and also due to high status of the Serbian princely house, as reflected in their official commemorations by the Great Lavra *Synodikon*.<sup>132</sup> The texts on Romylos present complex image of his adherence to the multiethnic communities of hermits which differs from nationalist and colonial approaches by some historiographies,<sup>133</sup> although the well known sources reveal that intra-ethnic stratum among citizens of the Late Byzantium had been clearly distinguished by the contemporaries.<sup>134</sup>

The vita of Romylos in both versions may provide grounds to understand why he chose to settle around Ravanica. The Greek variant describes that in search for the next place where to isolate from the world and people seeking his spiritual guidance Romylos wrote to one famous Athonite monk who at the time was in Constantinople. Romylos was advised not to return to Athos but to proceed to Serbia.<sup>135</sup> The Slavic version presents that his decision to move to the Serbian lands was inspired by the vision he had in a dream.<sup>136</sup> There are clues in the vita which may explain what made him choose as his next dwelling environs of Ravanica. During his stay on Athos, in his need to move further into desert he asked his disciples to find suitable spot for ascetic dwelling, a proper *level place* (**τόπος πεδινόν, мѣсто равнo**).<sup>137</sup> Although the request sounds as a practical step, necessary in setting any sort of dwelling, it bears, however, symbolical meaning as it is based on the Gospels lines (Luke 6, 17-19), which tell that Christ, preaching or performing healings, used to stand on a *level place*. This topical quote was used in some other texts of the kind, e.g. the Chilandari charter issued by Stefan the First Crowned,<sup>138</sup> and vita of King Stefan Dečanski.<sup>139</sup> As it also can be found in the short vita of Knez Lazar which explains origin of the name of the monastery Ravanica comparing it to the *level plains* from the

<sup>132</sup> A. Rigo, *Il Synodikon dell'Ortodossia di Lavra (1400 circa)*, REB (2017) 271–275, Tav. 2.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. *Is Byzantine Studies a Colonialist Discipline? Toward a Critical Historiography*, ed. B. Anderson, M. Ivanova, University Park, PA 2023.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Dj. Sp. Radojičić, «Bulgaralbanitoblahos» et «Serbalbanitobulgaroblahos» – deux caractéristiques ethniques du Sud-Est européen du XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Nicodim de Tismana et Grégoire Camblak, *Romanoslavica* 13 (1966) 77–79; E. Stănescu, *Quelques propos sur l'image byzantine de la romanité balkanique*, RESEE XXIV/2 (1986) 133–144.

<sup>135</sup> Halkin, *Un ermite*, 142 (23, 1-15); Rigo, Scarpa, *Vita*, 132 (23.1-13).

<sup>136</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 33; Rigo, Scarpa, *Vita*, 182 (23.1-6).

<sup>137</sup> Сырку, *Монаха Григория житие*, 31; Halkin, *Un ermite*, 142 (21, 9); Pavliki-anov, *The Athonite Period*, 250; Rigo, Scarpa, *Vita*, 128 (21.7), 180 (21.7).

<sup>138</sup> *Примери из старе српске књижевности*, изд. Ђ. Трифуновић, Београд 1975, 11, 13; Стефан Првовенчани, *Сабрани списи*, изд. Љ. Јухас-Георгиевска, Београд 1988, 56, 57; Р. Станкова, *Србската книжнина през XIII в. (контекст и текст)*, София 2007, 95.

<sup>139</sup> *Данилови настављачи*, пр. Г. Мак Данијел, Београд 1989, 57; С. Марјановић-Душанић, *Свети Краљ. Култ Стефана Дечанског*, Београд 2007, 276.

work of St Athanasius the Great,<sup>140</sup> it is possible theological value the site was given by learned monks may have played a part in making him choose it for his next and final dwelling.

Бранислав Ј. Цветковић

(Завичајни музеј Јагодина)

#### РАВАНИЧКА ПРИПРАТА И ПРЕПОДОБНИ РОМИЛ

Чланак је посвећен анализи писаних извора и физичких трагова култа преподобног Ромила Видинског (Раваничког), као једној од етапа пројекта истраживања комплекса манастира Раванице, започетог 2022. године. Испитивање хагиографских извора (грчке и словенске верзије Ромиловог житија, службе и похвале) пружио је податке на основу којих се могу прецизније сагледати сви битни делови у процесу заснивања Ромиловог култног штовања и успоставити везе с аркосолијумом као култном жижом. Подаци из култних списа указују на ступњевитост у развијању култа пошто је могуће уочити стадијуме којима се путем термилолошких нијанси раздваја Ромилов први од другог гроба, што је праћено изменом одговарајућих појмова, сахрањено тело – мошти, тј. гроб – кивот.

Пуна пажња обрађена је Ромиловом зиданом гробу с аркосолијумом и његовом односу са првобитном припратом која је имала широке двоструке отворе. Анализа изворне грађе указује на то да садашњи облик аркосолијума у основи понавља конструкцију подигнуту над Ромиловим другим гробом али тек након што је сазидан првобитни нартекс, на шта указује надгробна плоча уметнута у пресечени ниски банак, једини остатак првобитне структуре старог нартекса који ће крајем 17. века бити тешко оштећен током аустро-турских ратова. Пошто је јеромонах даскал Стефан, вративши се у Раваницу, 1720их обновио нартекс као грађевину масивних зидова, воспоставио је Ромилов гроб тако што је нови аркосолијум уклопио у обновљени јужни зид.

Да конструкција с аркосолијумом изнад Ромиловог гроба следи првобитне замисли могу да посведоче резултати истраживања живописа с краја 14. века у нишама првобитне западне фасаде храма, као и фреске изнад аркосолијума, на познијим слојевима. Хомонимична веза композиције васкрсења четвородневног Лазара с главним ктитором манастира, српским кнезом Лазаром, као и паримије које се читају на Лазареву суботу и на вечерње пред Недељу Цвети, дају основа да се изведе такав закључак. Притом, живопис у нишама припада оном зографу који је украшавао прву зону наоса, што значи да су и наос и припрата били осликани не само након преноса кнежевог тела из Приштине у Раваницу, већ и након конструисања Ромилове гробнице у припрати. У ниши се уз фигуру св. Герасима с лавом, што је мотив који постоји у обе верзије Риомиловог житија, налази у зони изнад и фигура пророка Софоније, који је често приказиван с текстом његовог пророштва са симболиком васкрсења и као део паримија за наведене празнике. Да је иконографски програм и северне нише стајао у вези са штовањем преподобног Ромила показује идентификација фигура са групом палестинских мученика међу којима и свети имењак раваничког пустињака.

<sup>140</sup> *Стиси о Косову*, 129; Беловић, *Раваница*, 22–30; ead., *Ravanica*, 205–228.