

BYZANZ
UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.
Studia
Byzantino-Occidentalia



BYZANZ UND DAS ABENDLAND VII.
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Srđan Pirivatrić

The *translatio* of the Relics of St John of Rila from Sofia to Esztergom and back

Some Observations on the Historical Context of a *furtum sacrum*

From late Antiquity, the veneration of saints and relics was an important element in the structure of Christian societies as a whole.¹ In the history of saintly cults, the dislocation of the saint's relics and other physical objects associated with the saint's cult constitutes an important phenomenon which can be divided roughly into two types. The first of these would be the ceremonious *translatio* of relics, an event which usually occurred under conditions of relative political stability and which frequently had its roots in the sphere of political theology and the sacralisation of secular authority. Modern historians, having in their scope the Christian tradition of Latin cultural areal in the Middle Ages, have reconstructed *translationes* of relics as in most cases very precisely organized rituals, comprising several important phases: the departure of the relics (*profectio*), their arrival at the determined final destination (*adventus*), reception (*occursus*) and transfer (*susceptio*), and, as the last phase, the deposition of the relics in their final resting place (*ingressus*).² The second category was

¹ We refer only to the classic studies of BROWN, P., *The Cult of the Saints. Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago 1981; BROWN, P., *The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity*. In: BROWN, P., *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley 1982, 103–152; for more recent studies see BAGNOLI, M. et al. (eds.), *Treasures of Heaven. Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*. London 2010; KRUEGER, D., *The Religion of Relics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium*. In: *ibid.* 5–18; KLANICZAY, G., *Using Saints. Intercession, Healing, Sanctity*. In: ARNOLD, J. H. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*. Oxford 2014, 217–237; HAHN, C. – KLEIN, H. A. (eds.), *Saints and Sacred Matter. The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and beyond*. Washington 2015.

² According to the reconstruction of HEINZELMANN, M., *Translationberichte und andere Quellen des Reliquienkultes*. Turnhout 1979, 66; see also KRITZINGER, P., *The Cult of Saints and Religious Processions in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. In: SARRIS, P. – DAL SANTO, M. – BOOTH, PH. (eds.), *An Age of Saints? Power, Conflict and Dissent in Early Medieval Christianity*. Leiden 2011, 36–48.

a very important medieval phenomenon of the theft of relics (*furta sacra*), which sometimes occurred against a background of major events such as military campaigns, i.e. a context of radical destabilization of local conditions.³ Of course, a violent *furtum*, rather than a *profectio*, could be merely the beginning of a solemn translation of relics, ending in a triumphal *adventus*. It is the intention here, through such a general overview of the phenomenon of the physical dislocation of saintly relics, to put forward some observations on the historical context of two of the many dislocations of the body of Saint John of Rila.

There has been much debate in modern historiography about the first ceremonious *translatio* of the saint's uncorrupted body from the mountain of Rila to the city of Sofia (Byzantine Serdica, Bulgarian Sredets). The two oldest traditions on this point are contained in the so-called Folk Anonymous Life, which is thought to have arisen in the twelfth century but certainly before 1183, and in the Life of St John of Rila by Georges Scylitzes, written in Greek, it is believed between 1163 and 1183, either in Sofia or in Constantinople, and surviving only in a Bulgarian translation.⁴ The conclusion of some authors that the relics were moved on the order of the Bulgarian Tsar Peter (927–969) is now being supported through the interpretation of cases of the joint mention of Tsar Peter and Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (944–959) in certain texts preserved in the Bulgarian Church tradition and popular culture. It may be assumed that this first *translatio* of the coffin containing the saintly body of John of Rila was made before 959.⁵ Another, this time local *translatio*

³ GEARY, P., *Furta sacra. Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*. Princeton 1978, 1990².

⁴ The editions used are: Жития на Св. Иван Рилски с уводни бележки от проф. Йордан Иванов. (Годишник на Софийския университетъ, Историко-Филологически Факултетъ 32, 13) София 1936, 28–51 (= *Жития*); the translations into Bulgarian: *Стара българска литература, т. 4. Житиенписни творби*, ed. Иванова, К. София 1986 (= СБЛ 4) 123–130; *Завет на Св. Иван Рилски. Из архивното наследство на Иван Дуйчев*, ed. Велинова, В. София 2000, 96–114. There are several recent works on the Scylitzes' life: Γόνης, Δ., Γεώργιος Σκυλίτζης βίоγραφос τοῦ ὁσίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Ῥιλιώτη. *Επιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν* 42 (2007) 333–355; Добрев, И., *Свети Иван Рилски*. Linz 2007, 21–38; for some important relevant details see: BUCOSI, A., New Historical Evidence for the Dating of the Sacred Arsenal by Andronikos Kamateros. *Revue des études byzantines* 67 (2009) 111–130; BUCOSI, A., George Scylitzes' Dedicatory Verses for the Sacred Arsenal by Andronikos Kamateros and the Codex Marcianus Graecus 524. *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 59 (2009) 37–50.

⁵ Чешмеджиев, Д., За времето на пренасянето на мощите на св. Йоан Рилски от Рила в Средец. *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 6 (2015) 79–87; Пириватрић, С., Први преноси моштију светог Ивана Рилског. Неколико запажања о историјском контексту догађаја. In: Куюмджијева,

from the Episcopal Church in Sofia to the Church of St Luke was connected with the Byzantine Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071) and his efforts to consolidate the Church organization by strengthening the cults of local saints, including John of Rila, Prohor of Pčinja, and perhaps that of St Paraskeva – Petka as well. The joint celebration of the two saints, John and Prohor, on the same day 19th October may have been connected to such efforts. The reference to the defeat of heretical teachings in the partially reconstructed Church service to St John of Rila, written in Sofia, is connected to the saint's function as a defender of Orthodoxy against heretics, particularly at the time of the revolt of the Paulicians in 1073 or 1078.⁶ Another local *translatio* of the coffin with the body of Saint John of Rila occurred within the city of Sofia in the period shortly after 1150.⁷

The Vita of St John of Rila by Scylitzes mentions several miracles made by the saint in Sofia, including the miraculous healing of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) through the oil from the candle at the saint's grave. The healing happened in an occasion when the Emperor was staying there. Moreover, Scylitzes reported that he, as the local representative of the Emperor, had himself been cured a year earlier in the same manner and the Emperor had already heard from him about his own miraculous cure.⁸ First we should make few observations on the chronology of events. It is not possible to determine exactly when these miraculous healings happened. During many of his campaigns related to Hungarian affairs Manuel Komnenos often stayed in Sofia – in 1153, 1162, than hypothetically in 1163 and 1164, again in 1165, 1166, 1167 and in 1172 (perhaps with an extension to early 1173).⁹ It was most probably in a year before 1166 when Emperor Manuel met Scylitzes in the

C. (ed.), *Рилският манастир – история, памет, духовност, Доклади от Международна научна конференция, 28 септември – 1 октомври 2017 г. Рилски манастир. София 2018*, 18–30.

⁶ Пиривагрић (n. 5) 25–28; cf. Γόνης (n. 4) 334, 339–342; Добрев (n. 4) 364–380.

⁷ Γόνης (n. 4) 347–349; Добрев (n. 4) 375–376; see also GJUZELEV, V., *L'empereur byzantin Manuel Ier Comnène à la lumière de quelques nouvelles sources et opinions*. In: Νικολάου, Κ. – Τοικνάκης, Κ. (ed.), *Βυζάντιο και Βούλγαροι (1018-1185)*. Αθήνα 2008, 141–151, 145. p. 20; Божилов, И., *История на средновековна България. Том II, Християнска България. София 2017*, 231.

⁸ Жития (n. 4) 50.

⁹ *Ioannis Cinnami epitome*, rec. A. MEINEKE. Bonnae 1836, 202 (1162), 212 (1163), 216 (1164), 240 (1165), 261 (1166), 265 (1167), 286 (1172); *Nicetae Choniatae historiae*, ed. J.-L. VAN DIETEN. Berolini – Nea Eboraci 1975, 31 (1153). The hypothesis on the emperor's stay in Sofia in 1163 and 1164 is based on his usual itinerary during his campaigns to Hungary.

city and was miraculously healed by St John of Rila. Namely, in 1166 Scylitzes was in Constantinople, where he took part at an important synod, holding the high title of protokouropalates. Therefore it does not seem very probable that Scylitzes could have been the governor of Sofia in 1172, although in the modern literature one can often find that opinion. Since Scylitzes was the author of the dedicatory verses for the Sacred Arsenal of Andronikos Kamateros, written ca. 1172 in Constantinople, it seems that his meeting with Emperor Manuel in Sofia should be dated to an earlier year, between 1162 and 1165.¹⁰ In that case his role in the healing of the Emperor and his subsequent high positions in Constantinople were obviously connected. Whenever it actually happened, the healing of the Emperor was significant as a pre-history to the next *translatio* of the Saint's relics. The earliest Hungarian tradition on that event ascribes it to an anonymous Hungarian king, who can with certainty be identified as Bela III (1172–1196).¹¹

It is clear that Bela also stayed in Sofia on a number of occasions while he was still a Hungarian prince and certainly had numerous opportunities to pay his respects to the relics of St John of Rila and to hear of their miraculous properties. As we know, in 1163 the Hungarian prince had accepted the Orthodox confession in Constantinople, receiving the name Alexios and becoming affianced to the emperor's daughter Maria, taking the title, specially created for him, of Despot. Bela was even, for a time, recognized as heir apparent to the Byzantine throne and only much later, in 1172, became proclaimed and the next year crowned king of Hungary.¹² It is only natural to assume that

¹⁰ For the arguments towards the earlier period, between 1163 and 1165, see Добрев (n. 4) 21–38, with partially inaccurate chronology of several Manuel's stays in Sofia; for the dating of the Sacred Arsenal in ca. 1172 and the establishing of the terminus post quem for the Scylitzes' dedicatory verses (post March 24, 1171) see: BUCCOSI (n. 4) 120. sq, 130, 41; the extensive argument for 1172 see is elaborated by Γόνης (n. 4).

¹¹ For the list of the relevant sources see Γόνης (n. 4) 351–351, n. 81. The key element for the identification of the anonymous Hungarian king is the reference to the Byzantine emperor Andronikos I (1182–1185) as his contemporary. To the list of the sources should be added another one, see *infra* n. 22.

¹² *Ioannis Cinnami epitome* (n. 9) 214–215; see МАКК, F., *The Arpads and the Comneni. Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the 12th Century*. Budapest 1989, 86; MAGDALINO, P., *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180)*. Cambridge 1993, 79; STEPHENSON, P., *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204*. Cambridge 2000, 251–257; SIMPSON, A., *Byzantium and Hungary in the Late Twelfth Century and on the Eve of the Fourth Crusade: Personal Ties and Spheres of Influence*. In: CHRYSISS, N. – KOLIA-DEMITZAKI, A. – PAPAGEORGIOU, A. (eds.), *Byzantium and the West: Perception and Reality*. London – New York 2019, 192–205, 192–193.

he stayed in Sofia in 1163 on his way to Constantinople. We have also good reason to believe that Bela stayed in Sofia in 1165 with Manuel Komnenos on his way to and from the military campaign in Sirmium.¹³ Similarly Bela must have passed through Sofia during the campaign of 1166, though it is not certain that he was in the city at the same time as the Byzantine emperor. However, Manuel Komnenos and Bela surely were together in Sofia in 1172. When news arrived in Constantinople of the revolt of the Serbs, who had risen in the context of the war between Byzantium and Venice in 1172, as well as news of the turmoil in Hungary following the death of Stephan III in March of the same year, the Emperor set out for Sofia.¹⁴ It is clear that his stay in the city could not have been short since it was from there that he coordinated the establishment of his protégée Bela in power as a king of Hungary, which must have taken few months. Judging by the accounts of contemporaries, it was in Sofia that the Emperor received the embassy from Hungary which wished Bela to inherit his brother's crown. The Emperor proclaimed Bela king and sent him to Hungary together with his wife and some notable followers. Only after he received the news that his protégée had been accepted as the new ruler, though he was not actually crowned until the January of the following year 1173, did Manuel Komnenos depart for Serbia, take the Grand Župan Stefan Nemanja (1166–1196) prisoner, and return in triumph to Constantinople.¹⁵ The Emperor's activities, set out here in brief, took place in the spring of 1172 or in the summer of that year at the latest.¹⁶

Taking into account the fact that Manuel Komnenos and Bela were or could have been together in Sofia at the same time most probably in more the one occasion, we may assume that the latter, as a person close to the former, must

¹³ *Ioannis Cinnami epitome* (n. 9) 246; see МАКК (n. 12) 92.

¹⁴ *Ioannis Cinnami epitome* (n. 9) 286–288.

¹⁵ *Ioannis Cinnami epitome* (n. 9) 287; for dating of this episode to 1172 and not 1173 see Калић, Ј., Јован Кинам. In: Острогорски, Г. – Баришић, Ф. (eds.), *Византијски извори за историју народа Југославије*. IV. Београд 1971, 102. n. 299; for the installation of Bela III see МАКК (n. 12) 105–111.

¹⁶ It is often believed that it was in the course of this, certainly lengthy stay at Sofia that the episode of miraculous healing through the relics of St John of Rila recorded by Scylitzes may have taken place. The healing of the Emperor is very frequently dated in 1173: Златарски, В., Георги Скилица и написаното от него житие на Иван Рилски. *Известия на историческо дружество* 23 (1938) 49–58, 51; Дуйчев, И., *Рилският светец*. София 1947, 55; GJUZELEV (n. 7) 147; see also the extensive arguments in favor of 1173 made by Γώνης (n. 4) 349–351. Arguments in favor of the earlier chronology, before 1166, were presented recently by Добрев (n. 4) 21–38.

have been familiar with the fact that the Emperor was miraculously healed by St John of Rila. In that sense their relatively long common sojourn in Sofia in 1172 must have been very important. Even if the healing happened earlier, which seems probable, we may hypothesize that in that year the Emperor at least did not miss the occasion to pay a respect to his healer during his relatively long sojourn at the city. This was probably just one more opportunity for Bela to witness the veneration of Saint John of Rila, due to his healing power.¹⁷ However, the information he got in one or another way about the miracles of Saint John of Rila was particularly important in the light of what occurred some years later.

It was Bela III himself who, referred to as the anonymous King of Hungary, during an incursion into Byzantine territory as far as Sofia, decided to take the coffin containing the body of St John to Hungary. Without any doubt, Bela III was fully aware of the Saint's reputation. The short Vita of St John of Rila in the Sofia Prologue clearly states that the King of Hungary had previously heard about his miracles.¹⁸ As we have seen, there were many occasions for Bela not only to hear of the cult of John of Rila but to have formed a particular attachment to it. The above-mentioned short account of the saint's life bears witness to that very fact – it is clear that the theft of the relics had a special motivation and was not simply a random act of looting.

Historians date the campaign of Bela III against Sofia and the theft of the relics of Saint John of Rila to 1183.¹⁹ However, the chronology can be rendered somewhat more precisely due to the fact that there was a Byzantine garrison in Niš until at least the November of that year, before the commander of the city, Andronikos Lapardas, decided to abandon the position. Lapardas did this because he had received the news of the usurpation of Andronikos Komnenos and the murder of Alexios II Komnenos on 15th September that year, and since the withdrawal took place in agreement with the commander of Braničevo, Alexios Vranas, all of this must have required several weeks at the least to bring about. Vranas also withdrew from his position in Braničevo, and in

¹⁷ The healing powers of the saints were especially appreciated; see a general overview of КЛАНЦЗАУ (n. 1) 217–237.

¹⁸ *Жития* 53.

¹⁹ Златарски, В., *История на българската държава през средните векове. II*. София 1934 (= София 1994) 423–424, 465; Дуйчев (n. 16) 226–227; Макк (n. 12) 117; Γόνυς (n. 4) 351–352 n. 81; Добрев (n. 4) 10 et passim; Божилов (n. 7) 231; Данчева-Василева, А., *История на средновековна София IV–XIV век*. София 2017, 156.

the spring of 1184 took part in the siege of Lopadion in Asia Minor.²⁰ Clearly a force as large as that commanded by Bela III, which included the troops of Serbian Grand Župan Stefan Nemanja, could not have reached Sofia before taking Niš. Therefore the capture of Sofia and the theft of the relics could not have happened until the very end of 1183 at the earliest. The incursion was a raiding operation and was not intended as a permanent occupation of Braničevo, Niš and Sofia.²¹

The relics of St John of Rila remained only a few years in Hungary but the stay is recorded in some important details in a Canon of St John of Rila written several years after their next *translatio*, namely after the return of the relics from Esztergom back to Sofia.²² The Canon is devoted in the main to the miracles for which the saint was famed in Hungary. The text of the Canon draws in certain places from the Vita of St John by Scylitzes and it is also believed that the record of the theft of the relics, their stay in Hungary and return to Sofia contained in the Sofia Prologue Vitae of the saint are based in fact on the Canon.²³ The Canon attributes the theft of the relics to the Hungarian king while the Vitae mention only the Hungarian army. The earlier tradition recorded in the Canon of St John of Rila, like the later version given in the Life of St John of Rila by Patriarch Euthymios in 14th century, connects the *translatio*

²⁰ *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (n. 9) 277–279; cf. МАКК (n. 12) 118; CHEYNET, J.-CL., *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963-1210)*. Paris 1990, 116.

²¹ The participation of Stefan Nemanja in the campaign is corroborated only by the Serbian Vita of Saint Symeon (Stefan Nemanja), written by his second son Stefan (later the First-Crowned), see Стефан Првовенчани, *Сабрана дела, Житије светог Симеона*, изд. Т. Јовановић, предговор, превод и коментари Љ. Јухас-Георгиевска. Београд 1999, 14–107, 38–39. For the character and the context of the incursion of Bela and Stefan Nemanja see SIMPSON (n. 12) 193–195.

²² The Canon to St John of Rila was discovered in a manuscript known as the Trnovo Service to St John of Rila, Иванова-Константинова, Кл., *Неизвестни служби на Иван Рилски и Михаил Воин. Известия на Института за български език* 22 (1973) 127–158, 134–140 (= *Канон*); for a translation into modern Bulgarian see Божилов, И. – Кожухаров, Ст., *Българската литература и книжнина през XIII век*. София 1987, 78–84. Cl. Ivanova concludes that the Canon was composed in Sofia, directly after the return of the saint's relics from Hungary in 1186/7 and that it was entered into the order of service for 19th October; p. 128–134. On the other hand, St. Kožuharov connects the date exclusively with the later translation of the relics from Sofia to Trnovo where, in his opinion, both the Service and the Canon to St John of Rila were written, see Кожухаров, Ст., *Служба за Успението на Иван Рилски. Новооткрита най-ранна редакция от XIII век*. In: *Изследвания върху историята и диалектите на българския език. Сборник в памет на чл.-кор. Кирил Мирчев*. София 1979, 217–224, 217–220.

²³ Иванова-Константинова (n. 22) 132–133.

of the relics to the time of the rule of Emperor Andronikos I (1182–1185).²⁴ Also of interest is the mention of Emperor Andronikos as persecutor of the Greeks, which is the earliest occasion in the Slavic sources where we detect a tone similar to that encountered in Western Latin sources where his rule is characterised as tyrannical, both in the sense of cruelty and illegality.²⁵ It should be added that we encounter a similar characterization of Andronikos in the Serbian Vita of St Symeon written in 1216.²⁶ Although it falls into the category of *furta sacra*, the removal of the relics of St John of Rila to Hungary ended as a ceremonious *translatio*. In this regard both the Canon and the Prologue Vita are unequivocal, which is a further indicator that Bela III took the relics of St John to Esztergom with forethought.

The arrival (*adventus*) of the relics in Hungary was managed with great ceremony as is clear from the brief description of their welcome (*occursus*) written in the Canon. The Land of Hungary, a metonymy for the *mixtum populus*, “overflowed with the joy of God” which is a recognizable topos of the ceremonial triumphal arrival (*adventus*), though the text does not say where the event took place. The coffin with the uncorrupted body of the Saint was housed (*ingressus*) at the seat of the Archbishop of Esztergom.

This was, without doubt, an important moment in the delicate relationship between King Bela and the Archbishopric of Esztergom. It is known that Archbishop Lucas of Esztergom was an opponent of the Byzantine candidates to the throne of Hungary, first Ladislaus II (1162–1163) and then Stephan IV (1163–1165), and then Bela III himself. The archbishops of Esztergom traditionally held the right to crown the kings of Hungary. However, due to the opposition of the Archbishop of Esztergom, Bela III was crowned by the Archbishop of Kalocsa in Székesfehérvár, acting on authorization of Pope Alexander III, on 13 January 1173. The formal reason for the opposition of the Archbishop was that he suspected the King of a case of simony, while modern historians add that he also feared the threat of schism, the increasing influence of the Greek (i.e. schismatic) Church and the danger that Roman Catholic Church would eventually decline in Hungary.²⁷ To this we should add that at a point during the Byzantine-Hungarian wars 1162–1167 Emperor Manuel I Komnenos was considered overlord of the archiepiscopate i.e. the Church in

²⁴ *Canon* (n. 22) 136; *Жития* (n. 4) 70.

²⁵ NEOCLEOUS, S., Tyrannus Graecorum: The Image and Legend of Andronikos I Komnenos in Latin Historiography. *Medioevo Greco* 12 (2012) 195–284.

²⁶ *Житије светог Симеона* 38–39.

²⁷ МАКК (n. 12) 108–111.

Hungary.²⁸ Whatever the ecclesiastical conception laid behind this, in practice it was nothing more than a pretension of the Imperial government. Be that as it may, this could certainly have strengthened Archbishop Lucas's reserve. Bela III himself did not question the right of the archbishop of Esztergom to crown Hungarian kings and, moreover, considered his own coronation by the Archbishop of Kalocsa an exception. Later on their relations improved so that Bela III and Archbishop Lucas reconciled. The next Archbishop Nicholas in 1182 crowned the King's oldest son Emeric.²⁹ In the search for the King's motives for this holy theft and for the reposition of the relics specifically in Esztergom cathedral we must first consider the miraculous quality of the saint's relics, which Bela III clearly wished to locate within his own kingdom. This must have been motivated by his personal piety, but we should also take into account other motives connected to the special status of the Archbishops of Esztergom in the kingdom of Hungary who, practically if not yet formally, had the authority of primate.³⁰ Bela may have desired the presence of the saintly miracle worker to enhance the factual primatial authority of the See of Esztergom, considering the role it was to have in the coronation rites of the kings of Hungary. The reposition of the relics of St John of Rila in the Archbishopric of Esztergom was a further example of what we might term the 'Byzantinism' of the Hungarian King. One may hypothesize if Bela believed that he owed his rise to power in its final phase – from the point, in 1172, at which Manuel Komnenos proclaimed him king in Sofia, all the way to his coronation in Székesfehérvár in 1173 – to the intercessionary prayers of St John of Rila. Nonetheless, we should stress that the tradition of St John's patronage over the Bulgarian Empire and the translation of his relics from Rila to Sofia at the time of Emperor Peter, was certainly not cultivated during the time when the city was controlled by Byzantium. In light of this, it is hard to believe that the king's motives for the theft and translation of the relics had their roots in some older tradition of political theology and the saint's patronage of earthly authority. On the other hand, in the king's relation towards the saint, one more general moment is recognized and that is the topos of the relationship between the

²⁸ BROWNING, R., A New Source in Byzantine-Hungarian Relations in the Twelfth Century. *Balkan Studies* 2/2 (1961) 173–214, 203; cf. MAKK (n. 12) 101; STEPHENSON (n. 12) 259; SIMPSON (n. 12) 198.

²⁹ MAKK (n. 12) 114.

³⁰ LADOS, T., The Origins of the Primatial Authority of the Archbishops of Esztergom in Hungary (Eleventh–Fourteenth Centuries). *Medieval Studies* 22 (2018) 136–152, 139–140.

ruler and the ascetic, the hermit i. e. the holy man in general.³¹ These are the characters of the extreme, completely opposite social positions – the ruler, who is at the top of the social ladder due to the exceptionality of his position, and the holy man, ascetic and hermit, who voluntarily excommunicated himself from the society. This topos was also developed in the so-called Folk life of St John of Rila, for which it can only be presumed that it was written before the translation of his relics in Esztergom, in several episodes about the relationship between Bulgarian Tsar Peter and the hermits from Rila and their alleged meeting.³² But even here there is no firm basis for conclusion about the possible influence of this tradition on the king's motives for the translation of the relics. They were for the most part rooted in the conceptions of time, in the special relationship of the ruling authorities towards the holy people.

The Canon makes no mention of the presence of the Archbishop on the occasion of the reposition of the Saint's uncorrupted body in the cathedral. The last mention of Archbishop Nicholas occurs at the end of 1183.³³ This was in fact close to the time of the translation of the relics of St John of Rila, which happened at the end of 1183 or the beginning of 1184, but it is not clear if Nicholas was even alive at that time, so it is hard to conclude anything about his stance, whether favorable or unfavorable, towards the reposition of St John's relics in the cathedral church, and the introduction of the Saint's cult into Hungary. With caution we might assume that, as a person close to the king, he was aware of his admiration of St John of Rila and his intention to transplant both the Saint's relics and his cult into the Kingdom. Also hypothetically, if after Nicholas's death the see was vacant, it is possible that the ceremonial deposition of the relics in the cathedral occurred at that very time. However, the Canon mentions that, after the deposition of the relics in the cathedral – though it is not clear how long after – the unnamed Archbishop of Esztergom challenged the status of St John of Rila there. This is the oldest known version of the events, and it lies at the foundation of a number of later narratives. It is not possible to determine whether the unnamed Archbishop was Nicholas, or his successor at the head of the Archbishopric of Esztergom, Job, an important figure in this period of Hungarian history. He is first mentioned in this position in

³¹ Cf. the well-known example of the encounter of St Prohor Pčinjski and General Romanos Diogenes, the future Emperor Romanos IV, see: POPOVIĆ, D., Paying Devotion to the Holy Hermit: The Shrine of St Prochorus of Pčinja. In: HADJITRYPHONOS, EU. (ed.), *Routes of Faith in the Medieval Mediterranean*. Thessalonike 2008, 215–225, 217 sq.

³² *Жития* (n. 4) 28–37.

³³ ZSOLDOS, A., *Magyarország világi archontológiája, 1000–1301*. Budapest 2011. 80.

1185, but we do not know when exactly his investiture took place – if it happened already at the end of 1183, or in the course of the following year, 1184, or maybe the next one, 1185?³⁴ The formal reason which the Archbishop gave for refusing to honour the saint was that his name was not in the “old books” i.e. in the current Calendarium of the Roman Catholic Church.³⁵ The oldest tradition about the residence of the relics in Hungary is unanimous on the Saint’s miracle with the Archbishop of Esztergom. For his unbelief in the saint the Archbishop was struck deaf, and when he repented the saint cured him.³⁶ This can also be understood as a topos, the cause-and-effect relationship of unbelief, punishment, repentance, and healing.

In addition to the miracle with the Archbishop, the Canon describes further miraculous cures, punishment and subsequent healing of paralytic and the curing of a blind woman. Here the Canon ends and the further fate of the relics is known from the two oldest short Vitae of St John of Rila. As we have seen, the Canon contains only a short description of the ceremonious translation and only of certain phases of it, which is to be expected from a celebratory composition of this kind. If the translation of the holy body of St John of Rila to Esztergom had succeeded in establishing his cult, a particular date would certainly have been fixed upon on which the translation would have been celebrated, and the appropriate celebratory compositions and more detailed vitae would have been written, describing the *translatio* in detail in all its important stages. Perhaps such attempts were indeed made during the approximately three years that the relics remained in Esztergom. However, no trace of Hungarian provenience on the translation of John of Rila’s relics to Esztergom and their short-lived residence there has remained. As far as we can establish, the King was compelled to bow to the opposition of his elites. Perhaps it is justified to suppose that opposition to the establishment of the cult of St John of Rila in Hungary was in part motivated – like the opposition to Bela’s coronation in Esztergom some years before – by fear that the influence of the Eastern Church might increase, this time, through the cult of a saint who was reputed miraculous by the king’s authority.

At the command of Bela III there followed another ceremonious *translatio* of the saint’s relics. Before this the king had the existing casket containing the

³⁴ ZSOLDOS (n. 33) 80; see also BEKE, M., Jób. In: BEKE, M. (ed.), *Esztergomi érsekek 1001–2003*. Budapest 2003, 75–81.

³⁵ МАКК (n. 12) 121. n. 180.

³⁶ In addition to the Canon and the Prologue Vita, it is mentioned in the vita from the so-called Menologion of Dragan, albeit as “the unbelief of a certain Bishop”, see *Жития* (n. 4) 58.

saint's remains decorated with silver and gold, transferred the relics and returned them with great honor to Sofia.³⁷ This cannot have been anything less than a ritual translation of relics and thus we may assume a ceremony of welcome (*occursus*) of the relics which were formally reinstalled (*ingressus*) in the Church of St John.³⁸ The Prologue Vita from Sofia gives the date of 6695 and 5th indices as the elements of absolute chronology, which agrees with a dating of 1186/87.³⁹ It should be observed that, according to this chronological data which seems reliable (the indices respond to the year) the relics were transferred after the rapprochement of the new Emperor Isaac II Angelos (1185–1195) with King Bela III. The backbone of the agreement was the dynastic marriage of king's daughter Margaret to Emperor Isaac, negotiated in late 1185.⁴⁰ At the time of the return of the relics Byzantine power in Sofia had already been re-established, and the border redrawn to return Niš, Belgrade and Braničevo to the Byzantine Emperor.⁴¹ The Canon, let us recall, explains the translation of the relics from Sofia and the invasion of the Hungarian King as the just anger and providence of God in consequence of Andronikos' cruelty to his own people (the Greeks). It appears that this aetiology echoes in the text as a tacit counterpoint to the normal circumstances that had, in the meantime, been re-established; i.e. the just imperial rule of Isaac II, when the relics were restored to the Church of St John in Sofia. The return of the relics itself had to be accompanied by some form of official aetiology so it can be assumed that it was founded on the contrast between Andronikos' tyranny and regular authority of Isaac II, i.e. on the exemplary-consequential connection between the illegal or legal character of the imperial dominion (τυρρανία versus ἔννομος βασιλεία) and the absence or presence of the saintly relics and their blessings.⁴² It is reasonable to suppose that

³⁷ *Жития* (n. 4) 54.

³⁸ *Κανον* 135; *Жития* (n. 4) 49. This doubtless concerns the same stone church mentioned by Scylitzes.

³⁹ *Жития* (n. 4) 54.

⁴⁰ On the marriage agreement see МАКК (n. 12) 119–120; SIMPSON (n. 12) 196.

⁴¹ SIMPSON (n. 12) 195–198. None of the towns mentioned, including Sofia, was returned at this time to the Emperor as a dowry, as is often claimed.

⁴² In the verses written on the occasion of the marriage between Emperor Isaac and the daughter of the Hungarian king, dated to February 1186, Nicetas Chroniates stresses that the groom of the Hungarian princess is the rightful inheritor of the imperial scepter (ὁ σκήπτρον τῶν Ῥωμαϊκῶν ἔννομος κληρονόμος), *Nicetae Choniatae Orationes et Epistolae*, ed. J. A. VAN DIETEN. Berolini – Nea Eboraci 1973. 44–46, 45. In a much later historical account of Isaac's reign Chroniate stresses the will of God as a factor in his election to the imperial throne; see in detail ВЕИHAMMER, A., Comnenian Imperial Succession and the Ritual World of Nicetas

the return of the relics could have been connected to the marriage arrangement between Isaac and Margaret and the fact that her father, Bella, was proclaimed king of Hungary in Sofia, but about this we can only speculate. The return of the relics is certainly beyond the context of later relations between Emperor Isaac and King Bela and Archbishop Job that followed in 1191–1192, which were marked, among other things, with gifts of a sacral character.⁴³

Further unsettled years followed for Sofia. In 1189 the Crusader army of Frederick Barbarossa found the city deserted, making resupply there impossible.⁴⁴ It is unknown what was done with the relics of St John in these conditions of emergency.⁴⁵ Sofia and its environs were soon retaken by the Byzantines, probably as soon as 1190. Only a few years later, between 1192 and 1194, Sofia came under the control of Tsar Ivan Asen (1190–1196), who together with his brother Peter (1185–1190) in 1185 headed the uprising of the Bulgarians and Vlachs and the restoration of the Bulgarian Empire.⁴⁶

It must have been in these years that the Canon was written. Judging by the sections of the Canon referred to above, which mention the miracles that

Choniatae's *Chronike Diegesis*. In: BEIHAMMER, A. – CONSTANTINOU, S. – PARANI, M. (eds.), *Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean. Comparative Perspectives*. Leiden – Boston 2013, 159–202, 188–198.

⁴³ On gifts in contemporary Byzantine-Hungarian relations; see the discussion in SCHREINER, P., *Diplomatische Geschenke zwischen Byzanz und dem Westen ca. 800-1200: Eine Analyse der Texte mit Quellensammlung*. *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 58 (2004) 251–282; as well as in: PRINZING, G., “The Esztergom Reliquary Revisited”. Wann, weshalb und wem hat Kaiser Isaak II. Angelos die Staurothek als Geschenk übersandt? In: ASUTAY-EFFENBERGER, N. (ed.), *Philopation: Spaziergang im kaiserlichen Garten; Schriften über Byzanz und seine Nachbarn; Festschrift für Arne Effenberger zum 70. Geburtstag*. Regensburg 2013, 247–256.

⁴⁴ CHROUST, A. (ed.), *Ansbert, Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris*. (MGH SSrG 5) Berlin 1928, 1–115, 37; cf. Данчева-Василева (n. 19) 156.

⁴⁵ It should be noted that, although by the summer of 1189 Stefan Nemanja had already taken control of the Byzantine Littoral and the whole region from the east of Niš, all the way to Sofia and even to Stob, there is no evidence that Nemanja ever visited the Rila monastery in the immediate vicinity, nor is the monastery included in the long list of the religious institutions which he endowed during his lifetime. It is not indeed certain if the monastery even existed at the time. Anyway his incursion into the region of the Upper Struma valley, where he kept to the main arteries of communication, was not intended to be a longer-term conquest. It had probably been made in the context of Nemanja's alliance with the Vlach-Bulgarian leaders Peter (1185–1190) and Asen who at that time had revived the Bulgarian Empire, see PIRIVATRIĆ, S., *The Alliance of Stefan Nemanja and his Brothers with Peter and Asen*. *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 8 (2017) 473–481.

⁴⁶ *Nicetae Choniatae historia* (n. 20) 434, 437; cf. Божилов (n. 7) 295; Данчева-Василева (n. 19) 157.

the saint performed “in his own Church”, it seems likely that this text was written in Sofia/Sredets, in the short period after the arrival of the relics there and before their next *translatio*.⁴⁷ The clear reference in the text on the Greeks as “the others” suggests the short chronological frame between the establishing of the Bulgarian realm in the city and the next *translatio* of the relics. According to the Prologue Vita from Sofia, the relics of St John of Rila in 1194/5 (6703) were solemnly transported by Tsar Ivan Asen from Sredets to Turnovo.⁴⁸ There the saint became one of the most important heavenly protectors of the renewed Bulgarian Empire.⁴⁹ All the indications suggest that some years earlier King Bela III had attempted to cast St John of Rila in an important and perhaps similar role in the kingdom of Hungary, but that attempt did not come to fruition.

⁴⁷ Иванова-Константинова (п. 22) 130 sq.

⁴⁸ Жития (п. 4) 54.

⁴⁹ VILJARSKY, I., La translation des reliques à la capitale du second empire bulgare et les idées du pouvoir. In: СТАНТЧЕВ, К. – PARENTI, ST., *Liturgia e agiografia tra Roma e Costantinopoli*. Grottaferrata 2007, 329–338; Добычина, А., Тырново и политика перенесения священных реликвий в период становления Второго Болгарского царства (1185–1204). In: *Великите Асеновци. Сборник с доклади от конференция, посветена на 830 години от въстанието на братята Петър и Асен, началото на Второто българско царство и обявяването на Търново за столица на България и 780 години от легитимното възобновяване на Българската патриаршия*. Велико Търново 2016, 52–59.

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