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EDITION HUMANS AND SOCIETY IN TIMES OF CRISIS
(Death, Illness, Body and Soul in Written and Visual Culture in Byzantium and Late Medieval Balkans)

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On the occasion of the health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade initiated the scientific research project “*Man and Society in Times of Crisis*” which aimed to study aspects of social, medical and historical changes during human existence. Grouped according to departments of the Faculty of Philosophy, some of the collections of papers dedicated to this topic are multidisciplinary, such as “*Death, Illness, Body and Soul in Written and Visual Culture in Byzantium and Late Medieval Balkans*” which connects researchers dealing with history and art history. Editorship of the Head of the Department of Byzantine History and the Director of the Centre for Cypriot Studies, Professor Vlada Stanković, whose experience and wide knowledge of the history and culture of the Byzantine and Balkan world is well known, along with highly regarded scientific names of other researchers in the world of Byzantology, certainly contributed to the collection having a distinct scientific value.

The mentioned collection, as the editor himself states, studies the ways in which the members of the Byzantine Commonwealth understood diseases and death, as well as relations between the soul and the body. In the introductory paper, “*Introduction to the Volume Death in Byzantium. Reflecting on the Byzantine Concept of Death and Its Place in the Mentality and Identity of the Byzantines*” Professor Vlada Stanković points to the problem of death in Byzantium as well as its place in the identity concep-

tions of the Orthodox Roman Empire. The author points out the chronic lack of historical sources, which disappeared after the two falls of the Roman capital in 1204 and 1453. In addition to the above, the work is imbued with the idea of permanent Byzantine observation of life through the prism of Orthodoxy, which is embodied in the victory over death, which annulled the fear by God's love. The Orthodox view of death was a signpost for the emperors of the medieval Romans, who, in order to strengthen the legitimacy of their successors, were most often buried in Constantine's endowment, the Church of the Holy Apostles. As a counterweight to the Orthodox segment of Byzantine thinking about death, the author opposes the warrior model at the time of the fight with the Arabs. In those centuries, an infamous and dishonourable death led to hell, but soldiers who fell in battles with Muslims became holy warriors in the eyes of the church. The author states that the absence of spiritual descriptions during the death of the emperors from the Komnenos dynasty testifies in a special way to the militant structure of the Eastern Roman Empire. At that very moment, the deathbed was intended to determine the successor of the ruling emperor. After the collapse in 1204, the fear of the Ottoman danger was noticeable, so the writers, like people themselves, were turned to the mysticism and faith of their ancestors. In the last century of the Empire on the Bosphorus, the search for the meaning of life is characteristic, the author observes.

"On Death and Dying in Medieval Serbia. Written Sources and Visual Culture" is the title of the second paper in the collection. Its author Jelena Erdeljan is a professor of Byzantine and Medieval art at the Department of Art History and director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish Art and Culture. This work is very important for understanding all aspects of the Serbian medieval view of dying and eternal rest through the prism of both narrative sources and visual culture. The author makes a special review regarding the Catholic population in the coastal centres of the Serbian medieval state, which together with the Orthodox population from the hinterland makes the picture of death and dying in Serbia much more complex. Also, the work of Jelena Erdeljan is enriched with illustrations of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin at Studenica as well as the Church of the Annunciation of the Virgin in Gradac.

Tatjana Subotin - Golubović is the author of the third paper in the collection entitled *"Two Collections of Paraklesis in the Context of Their Time of Creation (First Half - Middle of the 15th Century)"*. The author is a professor of Old Slavonic Language and Medieval Slavic Literature. The study of two collections of paraklesis that were created in the middle of the last century of the Middle Ages is of great importance, since the very definition of a paraklesis implies a church service (prayer) of an indefinite date. According to Tatjana Subotin-Golubović, the unnamed author of the mentioned church services leaves the impression of a very learned clergyman. The great scientific significance of the study of the first paraklesis is reflected in the fact that it was copied at the court of Princess Milica, between 1395 and 1405, in the turbulent times of the Serbian medieval state, by the scribe Radič, in whose creation the wife of the despot Jovan Uglješa - Jefimija - also participated. The second paraklesis, which is half a century away from the first one, was copied in the capital of George Branković around the

time of his death and considering the names of the saints mentioned in the text, there is a possibility that the despot himself blessed its creation.

The first paper in the second part of the collection, "*Part Two: Death, Illness, Body and Soul: Testimonies*", is the study of professor Vlada Stanković entitled "*There is no Living Man Who Will Not See Death. A Case Study on Byzantine Thoughts About Life, Death, and Afterlife: Testaments of Symbatios Pakourianos and His Widow, the Nun Maria*". As an expert for the period of the Komnenos dynasty, the author presents a case study of the Byzantines' perceptions of death and transience, only ten years after saving the Roman state from collapse. In addition to the above, Vlada Stanković cites the pattern of Symbatios Pakourianos from the end of the 11th century, pointing to the strength of the Komnenos clan, which was already on stable foundations. Through such examples, it is possible to obscure the image of the Byzantine elite in the 11th and later centuries, which the author does in his paper.

"*Illness - God's Oikonomia as Displayed in Four Homilies of Gregory Palamas and the Hymnographic Triptych by Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos*" is the work of Dragoljub Marjanović, Associate Professor of Byzantology. As a great specialist in Hesychasm, the author considers the thoughts of two great men, both in the political and spiritual spheres of Byzantine life of the second half of the 14th century, Gregory Palamas and Patriarch Philoteus Kokkinos. Aimed at the representation of illness and healing, the two hesychasts develop a special, unique, and very interesting style. Through their four words, analysed through the pen of Professor Dragoljub Marjanović, these clergymen used biblical motifs. According to the author, the *oikonomia* of God is visible in diseases and salvation from them.

The sixth work in the collection is entitled "*Poems and Votive Gifts of the Nun Jefimija as an Expression of Human Tragedy*" by Ljubica Vinulović - research associate. The daughter of caesar Vojihna and the later wife of the Serbian despot Jovan Uglješa and her poems and votive gifts are the main subject of the study. Through several illustrations showing: The diptych from the Hilandar monastery, the inner panel of the diptych from the Hilandar monastery, the representation of Paradise in the Gračanica monastery, the katepasma from Hilandar Imperial doors, the shroud for the Prince Lazar and the epitaphon from Putna's monastery, the author cites Jefimija's inspiration for the works of Simeon Metaphrastus, Nicholas the Mystic and Simeon the New Theologian. The votive gifts to God, the Mother of God and Prince Lazar, as well as the inspiration to the mentioned clergymen, are connected with mourning for the prematurely deceased son, which has had a significant impact on the development of Serbian medieval art since then.

"*Lessening the Dread of the Hour of Death: Introductory Miniatures in the Two Late Medieval Slavic Psalters*" is the work of Jakov Đorđević, research associate. The author contrasts the miniatures from two psalters: Tomić's and the Serbian Psalter in Munich, thus pointing out obvious differences. Through the illustrations of the two mentioned psalters, it is clear that different scenes actually represent opposite views on death. The miniature on Tomić's psalter describes a peaceful death, while the Serbian psalter conveys a general warning message.

The last work in the collection “Death, Illness, Body and Soul in Written and Visual Culture in Byzantium and Late Medieval Balkans” is a study by Nikola Piper-ski - Research Associate. “*The Origin of the Iconography of the Miraculous Return of Sight to Stefan Dečanski by St. Nicholas of Myra*” deals with a very interesting topic of the return of sight of King Stefan Uroš III of Dečani during his stay in the complex of the monastery of Christ Pantocrator in Constantinople. The motive of a Christian martyr personified in the son of King Milutin, whose culmination can be seen in the blindness after the revolt of 1314, runs through the pen of the king’s biographer Gregory Tsamblak. The abbot of the Visoki Dečani monastery attributed the return of sight to St. Nicholas of Myra, which was later shown on several icons which the author describes through illustrations.

Concluding the final review of the collection with the semantics of death and disease, ie representations of soul and body in the written and visual culture of Byzantium and the late medieval Balkans, it can be unequivocally stated that the quality and diversity of scientific topics achieved the goal set by the editor. With their textual contributions, the authors once again justified and satisfied the recent interest of both general as well as scientific audience for the everyday and detailed social and medical history of the Balkans. Expertly marking and reflecting on the rare but thus immeasurably valuable preserved sources of various provenances on the concern and dedication of medieval man for soul, body and overall health, the collection of research approaches to modern medieval medical studies. It is the study of such topics that can lead to absolute scientific progress in the field of both history and medicine itself since one of the imperatives of historical study is drawing lessons from the past. The common link between all the works of our esteemed professors and colleagues, as in the case of medicine and history, is the man and his everyday life, in this case, embodied through several examples. Whether it is high church personalities and clergy or members of secular classes, the basic idea that can be noticed throughout the entire Collection of Papers is in the very title of one of the papers “*There is no living man who will not see death*”. Through several examples, the authors managed to lead readers to a simple conclusion with different scientific approaches: The salvation of medieval man from disease and death is only possible through God’s love and church communion.

Whether it is about narrative sources or visual culture, the dominant impression is that the collection conveys the intertwining of art history, medicine, and history, creating an image of a medieval man, educated or not, whose everyday life was filled with fighting “elusive and invisible enemies”. Thus, the collection in another series reaches an argumentative parable with the modern world and man. Although the views of death at that time, as well as the means used in the fight against the disease, are completely different from the modern ones, fears and hopes remain common denominators. Sublimation of such conclusions is therefore a strong message of multi-disciplinary study, which is in front of the reader for some new reflections.