BETWEEN DESTINY AND REALITY: PROPHETIC AND MESSIANIC IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN SERBIAN LITERATURE DURING THE OTTOMAN PERIOD

This paper deals with prophetic and messianic ideological constructions found in Serbian literature of the Ottoman period. Prophetic accounts developed in two connected directions among the Serbs in this period. On the one hand, old Byzantine-Slavonic prophetic narratives (for example the Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius, the apocryphal Visions of Daniel, the Oracles of Leo the Wise) were copied and actualized according to the politico-historical context. On the other, new anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic prophetic accounts were created. Serbian and South-Slavonic prophetic notions were mostly concentrated on the impending doom of the Ottoman Empire and the legendary emperor of the “last times”, who was supposed to vanquish the Ottomans. Moreover, the Serbs tried to understand the new historical context of the Ottoman period and perceive it through the theological prism. Therefore they started creating a suitable messianic perspective of their destiny with the help of old, well-known ideas from the Nemanjić period (for example the idea of “new Israel”). Both prophetic and messianic ideological constructions seemed to be consoling ideas, which were created to highlight the memory of the magnificent past in the dramatic period of the Ottoman conquest and domination.

Keywords: prophetic ideas, messianic ideas, Serbian literature, Byzantine-Slavonic apocalyptic tradition, the Ottoman period

During the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans in the second half of the 14th century and the subsequent Ottoman dominance, the Christian Serbs tried to understand the emergence of the new order and the interference of the destabilizing factors. It was important to connect it to the history of salvation and God’s plans for humanity according to the medieval model of the world and a strictly theological view on reality (Serbian literature had a medieval character until the 18th century). Therefore, the (Serbian)
symbolic universe, which provides legitimation of the institutional structure and integrates diverse areas of significance, had to be modified and adapted to this new reality.\(^1\) Contact with other symbolic universes became a threat and there was a need to maintain and defend one’s own symbolic universe. Undoubtedly, contact with the oriental, nomadic Ottoman culture necessitated the creation of new ideological constructions by modifying well-known elements comprehensible through the prism of theological references.\(^2\) Ottoman victories needed to be transformed into Christian triumph and moral superiority, because what seemed most important was not temporality, but rather eternity, which was at hand owing to the martyrdom of the Christian Serbs. They tried to comprehend their mission and destiny in the new politico-confessional system *pax Ottomana* and the new enforced cultural context.

These ideological constructions, which were an immanent part of the Serbian symbolic universe, can be divided into two parts. Firstly, they were created to conceptualize the new destructive element in the form of the Ottoman conquest and Ottoman dominance in the Balkans. Secondly, they were constituted to present a suitable perspective for the enslaved Serbian community. In both cases there was a need to find a fitting analogy (usually biblical), decode its significance and indicate its role in their salvation. As in the first case, the Ottoman presence was inserted into a prophetic formula, formed with well-known prophetic *topoi*, imagery and symbols derived in turn from Byzantine-Slavonic prophetic accounts. The Ottoman conquests were connected with the apocalyptic *topos* of the coming of the Ishmaelites from the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara*. This *topos* became especially alluring in the 15\(^{th}\) century, since it corresponded to the idea of the end of the world in the year 7000 “from the creation of the world” (=1491/1492 AD), according to the Byzantine calendar. Pseudo-Methodius prophesied that the Ishmaelites would come and plunder the Christian lands at the end of the seventh millennium (τοῦ γάρ παλαι ἀμαλληλοῦ ὡ πολέμου καὶ τρικαὶ).\(^3\) Thus the Ottoman conquests were perceived as a foreshadowing of the “last days”. The *topos* of the coming of the Ishmaelites helped them understand these turbulent historical events, which were a catalyst of eschatological moods. The old Byzantine-Slavonic prophecies (for example, the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius*, the apocryphal *Visions of Daniel*) usually interpreted Ishmaelite conquests as a result of Christian sins, which was a typical medieval cliché connoting the need for repentance and moral recovery. Serbian and South Slavonic prophetic literature developed in two connected directions from the second half of the 15\(^{th}\) century onwards. On the one hand, old Byzantine-Slavonic prophecies were copied (for instance, Pseudo-Methodius’ work, the apocryphal *Visions of Daniel*, the prophecies of Leo the Wise, the so-called *chresmoi*). On the other hand, new prophecies

\(^1\) Berger, Luckmann, Społeczne tworzenie rzeczywistości, 151.
\(^2\) Ibid., 159.
\(^3\) Apokrifičeskie teksty, 15.
were created. However, contrary to appearances, only a few anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic prophecies have survived. First of all, the old prophetic material was modified with the help of glosses, compilations, and interpolations and was adapted to the new context. Prophetic material was copied and grouped into larger compendiums, into manuscripts with mixed contents, *miscellanea*. Therefore, there was continuity in the Byzantine-Slavonic prophetic tradition (the process of circulating prophetic literature in the South Slavonic cultural area continued to the second half of the 19th century, until the Ottoman-Russian war 1877–1878). The 15th-century Serbian version of Leo the Wise’s prophecy (attributed to the Serbian Despot Stefan Lazarević in 17th- and 18th-century manuscripts) provides an example of the modification of old prophetic material. The prophecy was supplemented with marginal glosses in one manuscript from the Hopovo manuscript (18th century). They explained the meaning of some enigmatic symbols seen through the anti-Ottoman prism. For instance, the mysterious woman and the horse symbol were linked to the Ottomans. Moreover, the symbol of the hawk evoked Muscovy, which was perceived as the future savior and liberator of the conquered Orthodox Slavs in the Balkans: виде (х) бабу где преско трапо – added in the margin: баба турино, море трапо; и охладит се велики ждребацо – added: турино; и по томь приде птица истерени – added: истерени московъ. Furthermore, an old South Slavonic account (Слово и´маилтýнехϊ в/../послýднĄ (х) всºк½ ска´анéе и […]), from an eclectic 17th-century manuscript (the National Library in Sofia, № 1051) provides another example of the reinterpretation of old prophetic material, based mainly on Pseudo-Methodius’ work. The first part of the narrative presents the coming of the Ishmaelites at the end of the seventh millennium, while the second part describes the coming of the Antichrist. Referring to the fall of Gallipoli in 1354 and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (a fact which might suggest that the prophecy came into being in the second half of the 15th century), the anonymous author highlighted the barbarian and savage character of the Ishmaelites (the Ottomans), who were connected both literally (Pseudo-Methodius claimed that they would come from the Yetrib desert) and figuratively with a desert, symbolizing godlessness (п№стинώ нари·етό бε´όбж (с)тво). After the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, some traditional eschatological ideas were connected not only with the apocalyptic coming of the Ishmaelites, but generally from the 16th century onwards with the Ottoman Empire. The transfer of some conceptions was facilitated by the fact that the Ottoman Empire had replaced Byzantium, which had been the focus of interest of many old prophecies. In general, Serbian and South Slavonic prophecies from that period were concentrated mainly on

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4 Tapkova-Zaimova, Miltenova, Historical and Apocalyptic Literature, 547–564.
5 Ibid., 49.
6 Ibid., 550.
7 Daničić, Proroštvo despota Stefana Lazarevića, 84.
8 Miltenova, Novootkrito bālgarsko istoriko-apokaliptično sǎčinenie, 112–129.
the impending doom of the Ottoman Empire and on one of the most popular topos of Byzantine-Slavonic apocalyptic writing: the figure of the “last emperor” (identified with various historical personages), who was supposed to conquer the Ishmaelites (the Ottoman Turks). Moreover, the theory of a succession of world empires was also connected with anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic prophetic constructions. According to the theory of succession (in Byzantine comments on the Book of Daniel or the Book of Revelation), Byzantium (the Eastern Roman Empire) had previously been perceived as the last monarchy or the messianic kingdom functioning beyond Daniel’s pattern of four empires. However, after the fall of the Byzantine capital (1453), it became necessary to modify this theory and incorporate the Ottoman Empire into it. In general, the Orthodox Christians associated this theory with the negative role of the Ottoman Empire or the positive role of Russia, which began to appear as a future liberator in their collective consciousness. However, in that case, the theory of succession could not be employed with the help of the traditional conception of translatio, because there was no place for a fifth monarchy in Daniel’s pattern. Therefore, the Ottoman Empire had to be identified with the Antichrist’s kingdom, a fact which gave rise to a more general eschatological thesis in the post-Byzantine period. It was believed that the fall of Constantinople had not heralded the end of the world but the beginning of the Antichrist’s rule, which was supposed to be followed by the triumph of Orthodoxy.9 Furthermore, there were attempts to answer the question of what the Ottoman Empire was, its role in human history and which prophecies referred to it. It was thought that the answers to the “Ottoman questions” were encoded in Byzantine-Slavonic prophetic literature (the Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius, apocryphal Visions of Daniel and especially the Ora-

cles of Leo the Wise – chresmoi), which enjoyed a new wave of popularity in the 16th and 17th centuries, not only in the Ottoman-dominated East, but also in the West, where the Ottoman threat was causing serious concern.10 Hopes for the forthcoming demise of the Ottoman Empire and numerous wars (Ottoman-Venetian, Ottoman-Austrian, Ottoman-Polish, Ottoman-Russian) prompted intense interest in old prophecies, whose popularity increased especially after the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. These prophecies started to be reworked, grouped into cycles (especially the illustrated series) in the Venetian-Cretan milieu and circulated in the Mediterranean thanks to Venetian diplomats and merchants (for instance, collections by Francesco Barozzi from 1571 [Oxford, Barocc. gr. 170], George Klontzas from 1590 [Marc. Cl. VII cod. 22] or the Book of Oracles – Chrismologion by the Metropolitan of Gaza Paisius Ligarides from 1656, dedicated to Tsar Alexis. The Book of Oracles was translated into Russian and modified by the Moldavian writer and diplomat Nicolas Milescu Spătarul in 1672). New interpretations of old biblical and Byzantine prophecies were focused mainly on the idea of the end of the Ottoman Empire and the legend of the future liberation of the Orthodox Christians by the “fair-haired” people (the old Byzantine topos of the

9 Lozanova, Apocalyptic Ideas after the Fall of the Byzantine Empire, 307.
10 Setton, Western Hostility to Islam, 18–46; Deny, Pseudo-prophéties concernant les Turcs au XVIe siècle, 207–216.
“fair-haired” people had originally referred to the Latin crusaders in the 13th century, but in the second half of the 15th century it was identified with the Russians).

An illustrated manuscript of the Leonine Oracles was probably in the possession of Mileševa Serbian monks, who called it “Saint Sava’s prophecies”, as mentioned by the Habsburg emissary Cornelius Duplicius de Scheppere, who visited the monastery on 11th–12th of August 1533. These prophecies could have been brought to the Mileševa monastery (where Saint Sava’s relics were located), perhaps by Venetian diplomats or merchants (in general, Venice became an important center of Serbian Cyrillic printing from the end of the 15th century). Scheppere reported about the mysterious symbols and miniatures in the prophecies, including a fox, eagle, crowned lion, knights, and a ship bearing an emperor. In addition, there was a city with seven towers and an iron gate, which, according to Scheppere, the Serbs and Bulgarians identified as Tsarigrad (Constantinople), the city doomed to fall during its greatest flourishing.11 “Saint Sava’s prophecies” seemed to be an adaptation of the Leonine Oracles, which were also equipped with various enigmatic illustrations. According to the Oracles (and some apocryphal Visions of Daniel, the Life of Andrew the Fool as well), the fall of Constantinople was traditionally perceived as a foreshadowing of the end of the world. Since its fall in 1453 before the expected end of the world in the year 7000 “from Adam” (=1491/1492 AD) had passed without any catastrophe, there was a necessity to modify traditional eschatological ideas according to the new politico-historical situation. Thus “Saint Sava’s prophecies” could have spelt doom for the Ottoman Empire after the predicted fall of its new capital (i.e. the conquered Constantinople).

Prophecies about the impending doom of the Ottoman Empire intensified among the Serbs especially in the second half of the 17th century and in the 18th century, when the Ottoman-Austrian wars stirred hopes for the liberation of the Balkans. The Metropolitan of Karlovci, Pavle Nenadović, informed the Austrian authorities about supposed signs derived from various prophecies, which predicted the Ottoman demise.12 In the late 17th century, Atanasije Daskal Srbin wrote an original account about Monk Ananije of Ravanica, who was asked by an Ottoman nobleman about the fate of the Ottoman Empire. The monk answered that it would be destroyed and extirpated according to “Christian books”. Moreover, according to the Ottoman nobleman’s words, the Prophet Muhammad on his death-bed suggested that the whole Turkish nation would vanish a thousand and ninety years (according to the Muslim era Anno Hegirae) after his death.13 In another passage written by Atanasije Daskal Srbin, who described the plundering of the Serbian lands, there is information about a sign in heaven, i.e. a comet in 7191 (=1682/83 AD), which, according to an “ancient philosopher”, foretold the “change of the Empire”, i.e. the end of the Ottoman

12 Ćorović, Eine Prophezeiung über den Untergang des türkischen Reiches aus dem XVIII Jahrhundert, 312 f.
13 Radojičić, Razvojni luk stare srpske književnosti, 284.
Empire. In the 18th-century *Codex of Metropolitan Mihailo* (a version of a Serbian chronograph), in the *Tale of the capture of Tsargrad by godless Ishmaelites*, there is a passage about a mysterious holy fire on Christ’s grave in Jerusalem and an unusual request-prayer, which refers to the idea of unity of the conquered Christian kingdoms and enslaved Orthodox Christians (слава и царствия много: греческое и болгарское и сербское и арбанашское и болешкое), who addressed their imploring prayer to the Lord, begging Him to start a “scintilla of godliness”, which was to reduce the empire of the Ishmaelites to ashes in order to re-enthrone Orthodox rulers:

и ё съго имали надежда ли православни, ико подополкъль наказали нашего саргришения, нака вакъ были Господъ погрусткъниво некъ благочастия ико на непол на тъмъ благочастения властъ такожъ вело и поплатъ измалимъ благочастения царствиа, такоже тмъни и просъясть съть благочастия. И наки вазтакъть благочастия царя православния.15

As mentioned above, the second most popular anti-Ottoman and anti-Islamic group of prophetic constructions was focused on the “last emperor”, who was supposed to conquer the Ishamelites (as stated in the *Revelation of Pseudo-Methodius of Patara*). The references to this figure can be found in a South Slavonic prophecy dating from the Ottoman period (found in a manuscript with miscellaneous contents, now housed at the Library of the Romanian Academy of Science in Bucharest, № 494). The author of the prophecy, which was legendary and epistolary in character, mentioned the conquests of the Ishmaelites (яли и коги въ скъпъмъ искърът благосъстия), but at the same time offered some hope for the future liberation of the Orthodox Christians. They would be liberated, according to him, by a mythical nobleman (роди са въ словене, рикъ ила [..] и въ гръцкъ дуиствохът и въ скъпъмъ гръкъкъ), resembling the character of the “last emperor”, who had been born among the Greeks, acted among the Bulgarians and resided among the Serbs. The prophecy employed the idea of unity of Orthodox Christians, united with respect to their tragic fate (i.e. Ottoman rule) and the character of the “last emperor”, the supposed future liberator of all enslaved Christians. The attributes of this mythical liberator and savior were transferred to other historical personages, who were supposed to initiate the “golden age”, i.e. the future revival of Orthodoxy. At the end of the 16th century, the Serbs awaited the great return of Saint Sava (“Saint Sava’s prophecies” mentioned previously could have been connected with this), a fact which contributed to the creation of a liberation movement in the circle of Patriarch Jovan Kantul and to the outbreak of the uprising

14 Antologija stare srpske književnosti (XI–XVIII veka), 289.
15 Srećković, Zbornik mitropolita Mihaila, 21.
16 Alexander, Medieval Legend of the Last Roman Emperor, 1–15.
17 Miltenova, Neizvestno istoriko-apokaliptično sâčinenie za turskoto našestvie v prepis ot XVI vek, 578.
18 Ibid.
19 Stojanović, Balkanski svetovi, 204 f.; Idem, Strukturne osnove milenarizma kod Južnih Slovena u XVII i XVIII veku, 21–34.
in Banat in 1594, in which the cult of the first Serbian archbishop played a crucial role. Before that, the attributes of the legendary liberator were transferred (1526/1527) to the mysterious character of Jovan Nenad (in some old prophecies the “last emperor” was called Michael or Jovan), described as a “black man” and a tsar, who was sent by God to destroy Islam and the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the old man Stanj from the Montenegriran Vasojević tribe also mentioned a certain “black liberator” (“Јавиће се један црни човјек”) in his prophecy dating from the late 17th century or the early 18th century. The mythical liberator, called the “car u opancima” (plural: opanci – traditional peasant Serbian shoes), had Messianic-Christological attributes in the prophecy, because he was supposed to return, conquer the Ottoman Turks (“Турци ће се све више и више губити с лица земље”), liberate the Christian Serbs and initiate the “golden age” (“Они које ослободе, живеће лијепо”; moreover, he claimed: “Благо Србима који то дочекају!”). Generally, the topos of the “last emperor” was modified and transformed into a folk myth about a folk liberator and conqueror of the Ottomans, a fact which can be observed in some narratives dedicated to Prince Marko, one of the most popular characters of South Slavonic folklore. According to some legends, Marko did not die, but hid in a cave or on an island, waiting for the right moment to come back to life, conquer the Ottomans and initiate the “golden age”.

The character of the “last emperor”, the supposed liberator and conqueror of the Ishmaelites, can be seen as a specific link between the prophetic and messianic levels of the ideological constructions arising among the Serbs during Ottoman rule, who awaited the impending Turkish doom, the triumph of Orthodoxy and the advent of the “golden period”. The symbolic justification of the Ottoman conquests and the Ottoman dominance seemed equally important as the theological conceptualization of the new politico-historical and religious situation and the new circumstances of the conquered Serbian community. The Serbs tried to create messianic constructions with the help of well-known, old narrative patterns from the Nemanjić period (late 12th century – first half of the 14th century). These constructions were designed as consolatory conceptions, employed to recall the memory of the glorious past in dramatic times. One of the most characteristic ideological constructions in the Nemanjić politico-theological program was the idea of “new Israel” emerging from “replacement theology” (supersessionism), which connoted the notion of the superiority of the Christian Church over the Old Testament “chosen peoples” (it was believed that Christ replaced the Mosaic covenant). Originally, it functioned as a specific topos in early Christian and Byzantine literature, where it denoted the Christian community. The concept of “new Israel” expressed the universal aspirations of the Church and the Byzantine Empire. However, the Serbs adopted this idea to glorify themselves and therefore universal elements were replaced with more specific ones. The idea of the

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21 Čajkanović, O srpskom vrhovnom bogu, 116.
22 Ibid., 117; Stojanović, Balkanski svetovi, 205.
Serbian “new Israel” had to be modified and adjusted to this new tragic reality. The situation of the conquered Serbian community and Ottoman dominance started to be perceived as an exemplification of Old Testament punishment and New Testament sacrifice. As mentioned above, the Ottoman conquest and subsequent rule was interpreted as divine punishment for sinful Christians (грýх± рад нашéих и бе´акоûи), who did not obey God’s law, like the “chosen people” of the Old Testament. Thus it was believed that the sinful Christian Serbs needed to suffer in order to earn salvation and enter the Heavenly Kingdom (“It is through many persecutions that we must enter the Kingdom of God”; Acts 14:22). The period of the Ottoman conquests and rule was often inserted not only into eschatological (и́вв и крýп есм врýмена и кº кованп;24 понеëе врýмена и крýп есм врýмена и кº кованп), but also into martyrological (крýп и приспен и крýп и приспен), semantic formulas. Thus, on the one hand, the notion of “new Israel” was introduced into a martyrological dimension and the Serbs started to function as a nation of martyrs exemplifying Christ’s Evangelical sacrifice and martyrdom, providing the basis for messianic ideological constructions. On the other hand, the suffering of the Serbs (“new Israel”) became a typological repetition of the fate of Israel in the Old Testament. “New Israel” was no longer employed in reference to the dynastic doctrine and legitimization of power (as was the case during the Nemanjić period), but started to function as a designatum for the “new chosen” community, sacrificed and sacralized for its martyrdom and suffering. The Ottoman Turks were perceived not only as the Ishmaelites or the Hagarites, but also as the enemies of Old Testament Israel and appropriate patterns had to be derived from biblical accounts. For instance, Old Serbian authors referred to the Ottomans as the “new Assyrians” or the Persians. Moreover, the Ottoman oppression was presented with the help of an analogy as the repetition of the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt (Exodus 1:22) in an Old Serbian marginal note from 1651:

Напаче же г’да велика и насиле належаше нашим землам, мног минит се не г’ше многа ограбниюща тога за христýанскомение некима дрýвным в Егпете при Фараwне г’да велики грады тсрдные Пи¬а и Рамасанд Іона.31

There is also an interesting annotation from 1566, in which the author compared the reign of Sultan Selim II and his persecutions of the Christians to the rule of Herod the Great and the Massacre of the Innocents (Matthew 2: 16–18):

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23 Stari srpski zapis i natpisi, knj. 1, 112, nr 355.
24 Ibid., 69, nr 218.
25 Ibid., 159, nr 493.
26 Ibid., 170, nr 533
27 Ibid., 183, nr 580.
28 Ibid., 240, nr 811.
29 Trifunović, Ogledi i prevodi XIV–XVII vek, 42.
30 Stari srpski zapis i natpisi, knj. 1, 207, nr 664.
31 Ibid., 368, nr 1466.
Benedikt Kuripešić, a 16th-century Habsburg diplomat of Slovenian origin, described his journey to Constantinople through the Balkan lands and referred to the Ottoman rule as Babylonian Captivity (2 Kings 25:1–21). In a prayer he asked God to save these poor souls from Babylonian Captivity and eternal slavery. Such comparisons may have been heard by Kuripešić from the conquered Serbs.

Generally, the idea of “new Israel” was able to infiltrate through cultural diachrony, since it consisted of universal and historical elements. Therefore, it started to function irrespective of its original (dynastic) context, although it acquired new meanings in Old Serbian literature during the Ottoman conquest and Ottoman dominance. The crucial change in the semantics of the idea of “new Israel” can be found in the Kosovo cycle (the end of the 14th century – the beginning of the 15th century), in the accounts dedicated to Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović’s martyrdom (he was beheaded during the Battle of Kosovo in 1389). For instance, the anonymous author of Slovo about Saint Prince Lazar claimed that the Serbs became “new Israel” owing to Lazar’s martyrdom symbolized by his relics which were translated from the Church of Ascension in Priština to the Ravanica Monastery in 1392. Moreover, the idea can be found in the 15th-century Life of Despot Stefan Lazarević written by Constantine of Costenec (the Philosopher), who glorified the Serbs as “new Israel” and the “most pious people”, whose life was like “God’s church” owing to Despot Stefan, who was compared to Old Testament characters such as David, Solomon, and Joshua. Moreover, the new capital of the Serbian despotate – Belgrade – was referred to as “new Jerusalem”, a fact which was of particular importance owing to the anticipated end of time in the year 7000 “from Adam” and the Ishmaelites’ conquest. The idea of the “holy city” was incorporated into a hierotopic project initiated by the Despot in order to organize a sacred space in Belgrade, where in the face of the apocalyptic atmosphere the relics of popular Christian saints were gathered to protect Serbia and its capital from the Ishmaelites. That project was continued by the successor of Stefan Lazarević, Despot Đurađ Branković, in another capital of the Serbian despotate, Smederevo, to which Saint Luke’s relics were translated in 1453, a fact which was described in a few accounts. The idea of “new Israel” was used by the anonymous author in the Service for the Translation of Saint Luke’s relics, where it was linked to the concept of a new

32 Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi, knj. 2, 66, nr 6328.
33 Kuripešić Benedikt, Putopis kroz Bosnu, Srbiju, Bugarsku i Rumeliju 1530, 37, 22.
34 Stara srpska književnost, 71.
35 Konstantin Filozof, Povest o slovima (Skazanije o pismeneh). Žitije despota Stefana Lazarevića, 125 f.
36 Ibid., 79.
37 Ibid., 101 f.
holy covenant between God and the new “chosen people” (the Serbs). This covenant resulted from the belief in the patronage of the Saint over the state, the city and the ruler. According to the Service, the Serbs (‘new Israel’) were joined in God’s plan of salvation by way of Luke’s relics coming to Smederevo.  

The concept of “new Israel” was employed in Old Serbian accounts during Ottoman domination and gained an increasingly martyrlogical character. It appeared, for instance, in the 17th-century letter to the Russian tsars written by Patriarch Arsenije III Crnojević. This is a request to the Orthodox rulers, in which the patriarch asked for help and support, and described the terrible situation of the Serbs under Ottoman rule. In this letter, the notion of “new Israel” was used with a specific meaning linked to the concept of martyrdom, implying a parallel between the suffering of the Serbs and the Old Testament Jews. In general, the idea of “new Israel” became an immanent feature of Serbian cultural imagery, protecting Serbian ethnic and religious identity under the Ottomans. Serbian culture, with its defensive and insular character, seemed to be a relatively constant and stable system during the Ottoman period, due to the references to its past and tradition, which could be continually updated and reconstructed despite changes and cultural or religious threats (posed by Islam and Catholicism). References to the past, the reign of the “holy dynasty” (i.e. the Nemanjić dynasty), and to its symbols and ideas, were used as tools for the reconstruction of their broken cultural continuity. Moreover, they helped to raise the messianic hopes of the Serbs for a better future.

To sum up, prophetic and messianic ideological constructions among the Serbs during the times of Ottoman conquest and dominance incorporated the medieval understanding of destiny, determined by the strictly theological model of the world and comprehended through the prism of Providence. In general, prophetic and messianic notions were characteristic of oppressed, conquered and enslaved communities during periods of destabilization, persecutions, wars, etc. According to the medieval perception of reality, destiny was perceived as something that could not be changed or avoided; it was strictly dependent on God’s will and God’s plan for the world and humanity. However, the conception of destiny took on its modern meaning during the Enlightenment and the increase in historical awareness in the 18th and the 19th centuries, meant that reality started to lose its eschatological and theological aspects among the Orthodox Slavs. Modern Balkan communities (nations) started to believe that their destiny was dependent on their own will, that they could change and shape it; hence, the Ottoman dominance was no longer perceived as God’s punishment or as a sign of the end of the world, but rather as a threat to national awakening and an obstacle for cultural development.

40 Trifunović, Ogledi i prevodi XIV–XVII vek, 125.
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ИЗМЕЂУ СУДБИНЕ И СТВАРНОСТИ.
ПРОРОЧКЕ И МЕСИЈАНСКЕ ИДЕОЛОШКЕ КОНСТРУКЦИЈЕ У СРПСКОЈ КЊИЖЕВНОСТИ У ОСМАНСКОМ ПЕРИОДУ

Чланак представља пророчке и месијанске идеолошке конструкције у српској књижевности у османском периоду. У овом периоду пророчтва су се развијала код Срба у два повезана смера. Са једне стране, стара византијско-словенска пророштва (на пример Откривење Псеудо-Методија Патарског, апокрифна Данилова виђења, пророштва Лава Мудрог) била су копирана и актуализована према политичко-историјском контексту. Са друге стране, настајала су нова антиосманска и антиисламска пророштва. Српске и јужнословенске пророчке идеје концентрисале су се углавном на будући пад Османског царства и лик легендарног цара „последњих времена” који победи Турке. Осим тога, Срби су покушавали да дају теологијски смисао новој ситуацији у којој се нашли, и почили да стварају одговарајућу месијанску перспективу своје судбине уз помоћ давних, познатих идеја из периода Немањића (на пример идеја „новог Израиља”). И пророчке и месијанске идеолошке конструкције биле су утешне идеје, стваране да би се дозвала памет величанствене прошлости у драматичном периоду османског освајања и владавине.