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# **Cultures of Economy in South-Eastern Europe**

**Spotlights and Perspectives**

**[transcript]**

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# Contents

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## **Cultures of Economy**

Theoretical Perspectives

*Jurij Murašov, Davor Beganović, Andrea Lešić*..... 7

## **An Economic Survey of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia**

*Jelena Rafailović*..... 35

## **Imagining the *zadruga***

*Zadruga* as a Political Inspiration to the Left and the Right  
in Serbia, 1870-1945

*Dubravka Stojanović*..... 57

## **What Were the Outcomes of the Self-Managed Economy in Socialist Yugoslavia?**

*Aleksandar Jakir, Anita Lunić*..... 79

## **Work as a Cure**

*Reana Senjković*..... 97

## **Economy and the Cult of Relics**

The Miracle-Working Icon of the Virgin and Financing  
the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery

*Ivana Ženarju*..... 111

## **Artists and Merchants**

Art "Patronage" in Carniola at the Beginning  
of the Twentieth Century

*Renata Komić Marn*..... 123

## **Architecture and its Value(s)**

The National and University Library in Ljubljana  
*Tina Potočnik* ..... 135

## **Fortunes and Misfortunes of Usury**

Andrić's *Woman of Sarajevo*  
against Balzac's *Eugenia Grandet*  
*Ivana Perica* ..... 143

## **The Socialist Robber-Baron as a Superfluous Man**

Derviš Sušić's Novel *I, Danilo*  
*Andrea Lešić* ..... 169

## **Narration as Misunderstanding**

The Economy in Borislav Pekić's  
*The Pilgrimage of Arsenije Njegovan*  
*Davor Beganović*..... 193

## **The End of the Socialist (An-)Economy, Money, and the Beginning of Literary Narration**

On Miljenko Jergović's *Buick Rivera* (2002)  
*Jurij Murašov* ..... 207

## **Beyond Economy**

Social Misery and Masochism in Post-Communist  
Serbian Society (Nikola Ležaić's Film *Tilva Roš*)  
*Tanja Zimmermann* ..... 229

## **Economy on Stage**

Theatrodicy and Revolution  
*Miranda Jakiša* ..... 247

**Contributors** ..... 265

## Economy and the Cult of Relics

### The Miracle-Working Icon of the Virgin and Financing the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery

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Ivana Ženarju

The Patriarchate of Peć monastery was established by Archbishop Arsenije in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. He was buried in this monastery, as was his successor Archbishop Sava II, brother of King Uros I and other Serbian archbishops and patriarchs. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it was the seat of the Serbian Archbishopric, and the seat of Patriarchate between 1557 and 1766, when it was merged to form the Patriarchate of Constantinople. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the monastery of Peć was part of the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, one of many in the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

As a complex structure, the monastery consists of three separate churches with a common western part and a chapel on the south side. Archbishop Arsenije built the Church of the St Apostles that is now in the centre. On the north side, Archbishop Nikodim constructed a church dedicated to St Demetrios between 1316 and 1326. A few years later, Archbishop Danil II erected a church dedicated to the Virgin on the south side of the St Apostles Church, a narthex for three churches, and a chapel of St Nicholas, on the south side of the southern church.

The focal points of the piety in the Patriarchate of Peć in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the grave of Archbishop Arsenije, and the miracle-working icon of the Virgin, believed to have been painted by St Luke the Evangelist and brought to the monastery by the first Serbian archbishop, St Sava, from Jerusalem or Mount Athos as a major relic. The icon from the monastery of Peć shows the Virgin holding the Child in her right hand. She is flanked by 12 small images of the apostles, six of them on each side. Also, the icon has a rich silver votive frame. The icon had its own liturgical service called *Служба сретeњу чудотворне иконе пресвете Богородице зване Пећске* (*The Service of Presentation of the Miracle-Working Icon of Peć*), written by the priest Nikodim Dimitrijevic Svetogorac and published in 1812 thanks to a donation by one of the faithful from Prizren (Anonymous 1902: 325). The Akathistos was published later in 1894 due to the Serbian metropolitan Michael.

After traveling through Bosnia and Herzegovina and Old Serbia, Aleksandar Giljferding published his travels in 1856, in which he recorded seeing the miracle-working icon of Peć. He wrote that this icon was held in the Church of the Vir-

gin in Peć Monastery and that it was carried into the homes of believers to heal the sick (Гиљфердинг 1859; 1996: 134). In a letter addressed to the metropolitan, Abbot Miron of Peć asked for support for the monastery, describing it as the Monastery of Saint Arsenije and claiming the importance of the saint. He wrote that holy relics of various Serbian clergymen were placed near the miracle-working icon of The Virgin of Peć, which was brought from Jerusalem by Saint Sava (Archives of Serbia, MID-PPO 1906: 932).

*Fig. 1 Miracle-working Icon of Peć.*



Unfortunately, we have no scientific study related to this icon, most probably painted at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> or beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and all we know con-

cerns its wooden Baroque throne that was constructed by the famous Macedonian wood engraver Dimitar Stanišev from Kruševo in 1863 (Ќорнаков 1986: 153). In the lower part of the throne, on its left-hand side, the artist engraved his own portrait. He represented himself while making the throne, beside two figures of the monks who commissioned it, Jerotej and Maxim, all of them flanked by two angels. On the other side of the throne, he engraved portraits of St Arsenije and St Nikodim, saints whose relics are kept in the monastery. This construction has rich wooden decoration in the form of anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and vegetable motifs. There are scenes of The Ascension of Christ and the Birth of the Virgin, figures of angels, evangelists, eagles and lions, and motifs such as acanthus leaves, roses, grapes, etc.

Also, there are some painted parts on this throne, by the painter Kostadin Krstev from Veles (Ќорнаков 1986: 154). Firstly, a Baroque medallion is placed beneath the place where the icon is held. Kostadin Krstev painted on this medallion a composition that conveys a visual understanding of the legend of the icon. He depicted the scene *Presentation of the Miracle-Working Icon*. On the right side, there is St Sava, dressed in episcopal robes, holding the miracle-working icon in his hands, and escorted by two clergymen. St Arsenije is presented in front of St Sava. He is also dressed as bishop and accompanied by his escort. It is clear that Kostadin Krstev painted the moment when, according to the legend, St Sava brought this icon to the monastery. This pictorial construction, probably designed by patrons, was invented in order to assure the faithful of the authenticity of the story in which they believed. Above this medallion, there is a painted rectangular panel with portraits of St Danil and St Sava II, also saints whose relics are in the monastery. Between them, there is a text explaining who commissioned this wooden throne and who made it. Above the miracle-working icon, there is a medallion with the presentation of Christ as the Great Archpriest.

Fig. 2 Presentation of the miracle-working icon.



This icon, as well as the grave of the founder of the monastery, as evidence of God's presence in the community, was a core of the sacred space (Lidov 2009: 9). The relics, which include all items directly related to the figures of the heavenly hierarchy, were the subject of the theological exegesis and liturgical rites, and of a strong expression of devotion (Поповић 2006: 208). They had protective and healing powers and were also considered a palladium of the town (ibid.: 209). Thus the miraculous icon of the Virgin was regarded as the patron of the city of Peć, with healing powers that made it an object of worship, especially in the area of female piety. The Orthodox Christian world is familiar with many miracle-working icons, and the majority of them were of the Mother of God (cf. Lidov 1996: 2000; Shevzov 1999; 2000; 2007). The popularity of these icons derived from the visual image of the depicted saint, as well as from narratives behind the icon. Those narratives pointed to events that led to the icons' special veneration, from their creation to the miracles they performed (Shevzov 2000: 613). Concerning the creation of miracle-working icons, Orthodoxy attributed many of them to St Luke as their painter, even if it was clear that they were post-Byzantine due to the style and iconography, as in the case of the Peć icon (cf. Bacci 2000: 79-89). In that way, miracle-working icons played the role of a mediator of divine energy radiating from the most sacred spaces (Lidov 2004: 291-321).



Miracle-working icon from the monastery of Peć and its cult made a great contribution to the economic prosperity of the monastery through the donations of the faithful. They donated money to the monastery and bestowed votive offerings to the holy image when visiting it as pilgrims. Members of other religions visited this miraculous icon too, seeking salvation and comfort. For example, among Muslims it was known as St Merima (Петровић 1995: 168). Besides those living in the vicinity of the monastery, there were many pilgrims who had to travel long distances to venerate relics in the monastery. The pilgrim of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was usually one who venerated, rather than one who traveled, due to the limited possibilities of traveling through certain parts of the Ottoman Empire (cf. Weyl Carr 2002). Also, the faithful donated money on occasions when the icon visited their homes. The miraculous icon usually left its sumptuous throne in times of great and prolonged droughts and epidemics (Поповић 1995: 168). This is a specific kind of icon veneration which has been called 'pilgrimage in reverse' (Shevzov 1999: 36).

This phenomenon of icon visitations was well known in the Orthodox world. In Russia, it was a widespread practice within a parish, district, diocese, or even between dioceses. Usually, these visitations were initiated upon requests from local communities, since pilgrimage was not possible for many social groups. A large number of Russian communities sponsored annual miracle-working icon visitations to commemorate such events as droughts, epidemics, floods and fires. Icon visitations were organized in the form of processions with a focus on the particular icon that was being carried (Shevzov 1999: 34-36). In Bulgaria, the miracle-working icon of the Virgin from the monastery of Rila was also carried into the homes of the faithful on several occasions. Great credit was attributed to this icon in preventing the spread of the plague in the late 1820s (Куюмджиев 1998: 52).

In the ceremonial processions in which it was carried, the miracle-working icon of the Virgin from the monastery of Peć was accompanied by believers, priests and monks. During Lent and in cases of long droughts and epidemics, the icon was carried into the homes of the faithful (Петровић 1933: 6). The icon entered the home in the evening, in a specially equipped room, with a large table decorated with flowers and vigil lamps. The table was oriented to the east, and surrounded by chairs for many people, friends and neighbors of the hosts. The entrance to the house was decorated too. Once the icon entered the room, an old cross was placed on it so people could venerate both of them. They then placed vigil lamps and candles near to the icon, as well as parts of clothing of their sick relatives, and they stayed all night in the room praying. Since this event was considered a great honor and ceremony, on this occasion housewives would prepare food that was served during the night (ibid.: 6). It is interesting that people used to treat this icon as a living person. They did not speak as if the icon had been brought to their home, but as if she had come alone and spent the night. Gathering around the icon contributed to the good social relations in the community. Also, there was another

social dimension to venerating this icon, due to the belief that the icon punished violations of moral and hygienic rules (ibid.: 6). The icon played its most significant role in the economic life of the monastery in 1907.

Besides being spiritual, educational and cultural centers, Orthodox Christian monasteries functioned as economic entities. This multi-functional monastic role was immanent to every monastery in the vast territory of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the time of Ottoman rule. The economic life of the great monasteries in the Diocese of Raška and Prizren in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was shaped by their financial means and properties, which included metochia, arable land, vineyards, meadows and pasture areas, forests, houses, shops etc. Via the rational management of monastic properties, they were able to generate income for fraternities.

Properties were arable land, pasture areas and real estate. The most profitable monastic asset in the period of Ottoman rule was land. Land could be cultivated by members of a fraternity, or it could earn income in the form of rent. Pasture could also be used for monastic stock or could be rented for a fee. Land was usually exploited by local villagers, who were obliged to pay an annual percentage of their income. There were also many cases when land generated no income. Many monasteries had real estate in the form of houses, schools, shops and taverns, and often had houses on monastic land in other dioceses, which served as resting places for monks traveling in order to collect donations to the monastery. A very important category of monastic property was *metochia*, monastic land that was usually not located in the vicinity of the monastery and that had its own church or monastery (Roudometof/Michael 2010: 61). The monastery could acquire estates in several ways, including purchase from timar owners who sold public land, or purchase with complete ownership. More often, the monastery could earn properties from donations and dedications from the faithful (Roudometof/Michael 2010: 62). Besides managing assets, it could also earn income from regular parish taxes.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, in 1894, the monastery of Peć had three estates in the vicinity of Peć and Gnjilane (Archives of Serbia, MID-PPO 1894: 440; 1904: 150). It had three taverns, six shops and four houses in Peć, as well as vineyards and a large brewery in Orahovac. The monastery earned regular annual income from the collection of regular parish taxes, rent, mills and livestock. Many people gathered twice a year at the monastery, on the day of Assumption of the Virgin and St Peter's day, and they also contributed to the economic well-being of the economy. The monastery also earned donations from believers who venerated to the miraculous icon of the Virgin (Archives of Serbia, MID-PPO 1894: 440).

Money was spent on salaries for the brotherhood, servants and guard, on feeding the fraternity and monastery guests, on maintenance of the church and buildings within the complex of the monastery, and on the lawsuits conducted against some members of the local Albanian communities (Archives of Serbia, MID, Consulate in Priština 1909). Bad management by Abbot Sofronije in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

put the monastery into heavy debt. He sold monastic land in Goraždevac at half price to a Bišara Bey. He also sold three shops, and one of them, in the prominent part of Peć, was bequeathed by the merchant Staniša Đukić. Abbot Sofronije built a two-storey house at the cost of a monastery for a son of a man who managed the church and school community (Archives of Serbia, MID-PPO 1894: 440).

In 1907, during the time of Abbot Miron, the monastery fell into huge debt, which was added to old debt due to his poor management of money and estates. There were problems between the church and school community as well as between the priest and monks. They were negligent in taking care of accounting and book-keeping, and the monastery cash was used for costs of various kinds (Петровић 1995: 166-167).

When Metropolitan Nićifor visited the monastery in 1907 as head of the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, he found that various persons owed a total of 160,000 coins to the monastery. Many of them could not be traced, because some were no longer alive and some were bankrupt. Therefore only 4,000 groš could be raised. At the same time, the monastery owed around 59,000 groš, and all the creditors, including citizens of Peć and surrounding villages, demanded their money back. It was difficult to pay back all the debt, because annual monastic income stood at approximately 60,000 groš at the time (ibid.: 167).

*Fig. 3: The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery (around 1925).*



At that time, the monastery earned income from everyday parish activities to the tune of approximately 16,000 groš. Those activities involved the consecration of

water and oil, baptism, memorial services and funerals, reading prayers for healing and so on. The faithful also used to place money and various contributions next to the miracle-working icon as well as on other icons in monastery churches. In addition, they were obligated to pay parish taxes, and at that time the parish consisted of between 800 and 900 homes. The monastery had annual earnings of over 20,000 groš from land, its most profitable source. Income from letting different facilities, including houses, shops and taverns, amounted to around 8,000 groš. The monastery also owned water mills through which it earned about 3,500 groš, and livestock that could bring in more than 7,000 groš (Archives of Serbia, MID, Consulate in Priština 1909).

Given that at the time of his stay in the monastery there was not enough money to pay off all debts, the Metropolitan had an idea how to collect the amount owed as quickly as possible. He ordered sending the miraculous icon of the Virgin throughout the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, hoping for a high amount of donations. Although this miracle-working icon had left the monastery before, this time its tour was supposed to produce concrete financial benefits for paying monastery debts.

During this "holy expedition" in 1907, the miraculous icon visited the monasteries of Dečani and Gračanica and the towns Đakovica, Prizren, Uroševac, Gnjilane, Priština, Lipljan, Vučitrn, Mitrovica, Novi Pazar, Sjenica, and Nova Varoš. During the transport of the icon, the monastery had two abbots, Joanikije and Maxim, who escorted the icon, and they were greeted very solemnly in each town (Петровић 1995: 168). The icon was exhibited to the faithful in the parish churches, where they could venerate it and donate money. This endeavor proved to be very profitable, the icon raising enough money to cover the monastery's debts.

After being displayed in the monastery of Gračanica, the miracle-working icon visited the town of Lipljan. There the icon was exhibited in the center of the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin. The welcoming committee consisted of a local priest in ceremonial dress, deacons, teachers and the faithful. The icon spent a night in the church and early in the morning the priest went through the parish to collect money. Money was also placed on the icon, as well as offerings in the form of socks, scarves, and fabric, which was later sold (Archives of Serbian Academy of Science and Arts: E-469-II-131; E-469-II-132). Beyond those offerings, people endowed the icon with 1,033 groš.

In the cities of Raška and the Lim Valley, the icon was endowed with tens of thousands of coins (Шалипуровић 1972: 183). The highest amount was collected in the town of Nova Varoš, where the faithful donated 61,543 groš, which was enough to pay back the monastery debts. For unknown reasons, this amount never reached the monastery of Peć, but was kept in the church school community in the town (Шалипуровић 1972: 188). The second largest amount was collected in the town of Sjenica, where believers donated 40,000 coins, even though the community of Sjenica was known to be very indigent. Of these, about 6,000 coins were left

in Sjenica for the completion of the school building with the permission of the Metropolitan (Петровић 1995: 154).

The usual annual income from the miraculous icon of the Virgin in the monastery of Peć was between three and four thousand coins. The decision by Metropolitan Nićifor for the icon to tour the Diocese in 1907 resulted in 250,747 coins. There was enough money to pay monastery debts, as well as to finish some necessary construction work that had already been started within the monastery complex. With that money the fraternity also initiated new constructions in the complex, built a tower in a field near the monastery, and helped repair some buildings in the city that had been damaged due to extreme weather conditions (Archives of Serbia, MID, Consulate in Priština 1909).

*Fig. 4: The community awaiting the return of the icon to the monastery, 1907*



It is interesting that during the very same year of this great icon visitation by the Diocese, the Trust of the Holy Virgin was founded at the monastery. The founding of trusts under the church authority was a common practice among the Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire. Church and school communities took care of ecclesiastical properties in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and established church trusts modeled on the trusts of guilds, which were the primary form of monetary mergers of Serbs within Ottoman society (Чемериќић 1937: 697-698; Раќић 1985: 113; Миќић 1988: 314). Those trusts served to lend money with interest, for which there were two active Ottoman banks on the territory of the Diocese of Raška and Prizren, but their credit conditions were not suitable for Serbs (Храбак 1982: 58). Therefore, under the auspices of the church, trusts were founded based on the shareholdership

principle, which attracted a large number of investors as well as large capital (*ibid.*: 68).

After the Balkan wars and the liberation of the territories of Old Serbia from Ottoman rule, church trusts were transformed into banks. For example, the Trust of St Sava Church in Kosovska Mitrovica, founded in 1902, was transformed into the Bank of Kosovo in 1913 (Пантовић 1996: 16). The Trust of St Uroš' Church in the town of Uroševac, which was founded with capital of 3,000 napoleons (324,000 *groš*) in 1907, was turned into the Bank of Uroševac in 1914 (Храбак 1982: 79; Секулић 1991-1992: 69). In 1907, the Trust of the Holy Virgin was established in the monastery of Peć, as mentioned above. The fund sold shares, and it was later advertised in newspapers as a collection of charitable contributions. Joining this fund, the Bank of Montenegro created the Bank of Peć (Храбак 1982: 65, 74).

The dislocation of sacred objects, relics and icons from the sacred to the profane environment was a common practice associated with solving the economic problems of monasteries. Monks often traveled through the places inhabited by Christians, carrying monastic relics, which at the same time could invoke the sanctity of monasteries and appeal to religious feelings of the faithful. In order to gain financial support for their fraternities, they frequently traveled to Russia to visit great monastic centers, the patriarch or even the tsar. On these occasions, they carried icons, often the most precious ones, or even holy relics, which they gave as a gift of gratitude (Петковић 1997: 123). It is well known that monks from Mount Athos used to travel to Russia carrying miracle-working icons aiming to collect money for their monastic communities (*cf. ibid.*: 122-153). During their stay in Russia, two representatives of the monastic brotherhood from the Dečani monastery carried the cross of Tsar Dušan (Ристић 1864: 62). Monks from Dečani used to carry this cross while collecting charity in the Diocese of Raška and Prizren too.

The dislocation of relics, especially those with healing powers, enabled a greater number of believers to directly encounter them, which also meant more gifts of gratitude addressed to the saint and to the monastery as his habitat. As we have seen in the case of the miraculous icon of the Virgin in the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, this kind of extensive use of relics was a way for monasteries to gain economic prosperity.

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