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‘When the living envied the dead’: Church Slavonic Paratexts and the Apocalyptic Framework of Monk Isaija’s Colophon (1371)

1 Introduction

With the Ottoman Empire on the verge of collapse in the first decades of the twentieth century, several historians in the service of the splintered nations that formed the Balkans took great interest in archiving the writings handed down by their forebears, the South Slavic subjects of the Sultan. Apart from historiographical genres (chronicles and annals), an interest developed in collecting other writings that provide information about the history of the South Slavs, such as hagiographies, princely biographies and polemical treatises.¹ Since this is a relatively sparse corpus of texts, nationalist scholarship also obsessively mined Church Slavonic manuscript colophons and marginalia for scraps of historical information. The first enthusiasts, such as the writer and national revolutionary Evtim Sprostranov (1868–1931), scanned the repositories of various churches and monasteries, copying marginal notes from manuscripts and compiling them into published compendia.² They believed that by protecting and copying these fragments – rare textual accounts of the South Slavs under Ottoman rule – they were pre-

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1 After the fall of the Serbian and Bulgarian Empires in the second half of the fourteenth century, South Slavic production of historical literature was fostered by the descendants of Branković dynasty up until the early sixteenth century (Guran 2012: 328). Modern editions and translations of these medieval and early modern South Slavic writings rich in historical thought are to be found in Petre Guran’s overview of South Slavic historiography (Guran 2012: 336–339).

2 Sprostranov published catalogues of manuscripts which included copies of the paratextual material; see Sprostranov 1900 and Sprostranov 1902. Other scholars only published the paratexts, however.

serving ‘бита’ (‘the core’) of the ‘българе’ (‘Bulgarians’) (Ivanov 1908: III), an idea that has been transmitted largely unchallenged.³

In the Balkans, the heritage of Church Slavonic marginal notes made in liturgical manuscripts and early printed books presents an intriguing case. While great importance is bestowed upon the marginal notes, their relationship to the primary text has been largely sidelined. This is a trend which has continued up to the present day. Marginal inscriptions made in manuscripts and early printed books are considered valuable as they ‘садрже трагови интимног живота’ (‘contain traces of the private life’) of the South Slavs, which is not the case for the rest of Church Slavonic literary production. More importantly, inscriptions purportedly hold information about the history of the ‘свакидашњице’ (‘daily life’) of the South Slavs during Ottoman rule (Radojičić 1962: 102).

Although modern compilations of Church Slavonic marginal notes are numerous, studies on the paratextual traditions have been restricted to typological exercises.⁴ The paucity of scholarship can be explained by the widely held view in the Balkans that these accounts represent outlying authentic voices from ‘below’. These voices are taken as true reports about ‘разни настани од економската, политичката, воената и воопшто од социјалната сфера’ (‘various events from the economic, political, military and social spheres’) (Velev 1996: 364).⁵ This assumption of transparency has removed the need for a critical

3 Even in the preface of a recent collection of colophons and scribal marginalia, Bozhidar Raïkov writes that these inscriptions are ‘важен източник’ (‘an important source’) as they contain ‘душевността и бита на българина’ (‘the spirituality and the core of the Bulgarians’) (Raïkov 2003: 11).

4 The most exhaustive and commonly used compendia were compiled by Stojanović 1902–1926, Ivanov 1970, Nachev and Fermandzhiev 1984, Pavić 1986, Pop-Atanasov 1996, Hristova, Karadzhova and Uzunova 2003.

5 Regional scholars have long been interested in finding out as much as possible about ‘the ordinary people’. As a result, marginalia have been identified – sometimes too literally – with the narratives of the marginal classes. As Milorad Panić-Surep writes in the conclusion of his compilation of marginalia, ‘Историје владара имамо. И летописе догађаја, и монографије великих људи, и студије знаменитих покрета. А да ли се може рећи да имамо и историју народа, оног његовог дела што га сапињавају мали свакидашни људи — орачи и чобани, зидари, занатлије, горосече, кириције, најамни работници, немоћни старци и недоучена младеж. Такву у нас, а и другде на на страни, ја не видим’ (‘We have [written] the history of our rulers and records of events and monographs of great men and studies of important movements. But could we say that we have written the history of our people, the part of our nation which consists of small and ordinary people – ploughmen, shepherds, bricklayers, merchants, lumberjacks, carriers, hired labour, old people and unread youth? That kind of history I cannot see being written here and in general.’) (Panić-Surep 1960: 235).

investigation into these sources and their generic history. The compendia are usually presented in the form of lists in which marginal inscriptions are copied in chronological order, while the source texts are merely indexed. This separation is justified by the fact that many marginal inscriptions in Church Slavonic manuscripts do not comment upon the subject matter of the source text which they border, but digress onto other topics such as scribal complaints dealing with the hard labour of writing, the occurrence of celestial events and natural disasters in the region, the rivalries within the Church and the high price of food and drink.

The compilations of Church Slavonic paratexts only select inscriptions which can be comprehended without the source text and omit those which are meaningless unless the source text is available, such as commentaries, glosses and editorial notes. The subject of most marginal writing was seen as separate from the content of the main text, and the editors of compendia did not pay attention to the historical clues that were lost in compilation.⁶ While it is true that some of these fragments may have talked about contemporary events, of life outside the texts they accompanied, they very much addressed the communal life to which the liturgical writings belonged. Manuscript production was an important activity for monasteries and the remarks written in the margins by bookbinders, scribes and illuminators are fundamentally connected to the material and social history of the actual manuscript. Since manuscripts were ritual objects in the monasteries and churches where they were used, the extent to which the marginal notes were involved in monastic life would be lost to us if the history of the period were to be attested mainly through compendia.

This article aims to serve as a corrective to the limits of regional and nationalist historical bias by demonstrating one of the ways in which this vast corpus of paratexts can be coherently conceived of as a writing tradition that evolved over the centuries to have its own repetitions, patterns, functions and meanings rather than serving as plain and authentic testimonials of daily life and suffering.⁷ To tackle the entire Church Slavonic paratextual corpus is beyond the scope of this article and would have to be a part of a much larger project. In order to provide

⁶ The editors of these compendia, for example, do not discuss whether the paratexts are authentic or not; whether these paratexts were original or copied along the main text in later editions of a manuscript.

⁷ A different approach of studying paratexts would be to relate them to the primary text of the manuscript. A good example of such scholarship is Veselin Panaïotov's article 'Belezhkata v Suprasûlskiĭ sbornik' (2002). Panaïotov convincingly argues that the author of marginalia who signed himself as Retko carefully chose the location of his inscription. By reading the sections of the primary text next to which the marginal note was written, Panaïotov demonstrates that Retko was a follower of the Christian dualist sect known as Bogomilism.

both a general view of the paratextual traditions of the South Slavs (and their historiographical reception) and a more detailed close reading of particular paratexts, this paper is divided into three sections: i) a brief overview of the features and templates that constitute South Slavic paratexts and the genre of the colophon in particular, ii) the significance of marginalia and colophons dealing with historical themes and the limits of regionalist and nationalist historiography in the study of these inscriptions and finally iii) the demonstration of an alternative method of reading historical paratexts through a close reading of Isaija's colophon added to the Slavonic *Corpus Dionysiacum* from 1371.⁸

In the third and final part of the paper, I suggest that Isaija's colophon borrows from an apocalyptic writing tradition written in the context of the collapse of empire.⁹ I will also speculate on Isaija's use of apocalyptic time as signalling a historiographical mode through which South Slavic scribes could make sense of important political events. By linking the paratextual corpus to the apocalyptic traditions of the South Slavs we can not only draw attention to the multi-faceted historical evidence contained within the under-explored genre of the colophon but also contemplate ways in which Church Slavonic manuscripts were located in time and space.

2 A brief overview of Church Slavonic marginalia and colophons

Church Slavonic manuscripts produced in the orthodox area of south-eastern Europe are replete with various kinds of marginal inscriptions. From their pervasive

⁸ In 1371 Isaija translated the *Corpus Dionysiacum* from Byzantine Greek along with the commentaries attributed to Maximus Confessor. The *Corpus Dionysiacum*, also known as *Corpus Areopagiticum*, is a set of theological and philosophical writings by an anonymous Christian Neoplatonist from the late fifth or early sixth century CE (the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as part of the Neoplatonist tradition have been explored thoroughly by Wear and Dillon 2007). The anonymous writer has come to be known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, portraying himself in the corpus as St Dionysius the Areopagite in order to acquire unquestionable authority. The Slavonic *Corpus Dionysiacum* includes four treatises (*On the Divine Names*, *Mystical Theology*, *On the Celestial Hierarchy* and *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*) and ten letters addressed to different clergymen (Afonasin, 2008: 102–105).

⁹ Isaija's commentary on political events occurs in the context of the fall of the Serbian principality of Serres in 1371, which led the descendants of these local governors to accept Ottoman suzerainty.

presence in the relatively small corpus of manuscripts that has survived to this day, it can be concluded that writing marginal notes was an integral part of manuscript production and reception.¹⁰ One way to categorise this large body of diverse notes is to divide it into: a) notes that were written by the scribe when the manuscript was produced, and b) inscriptions added later by a different hand.

Some Church Slavonic manuscripts contain scribal colophons – a formulaic inscription which is usually located at the end of the principal text and provides information about the production of the manuscript. We know that colophons in Church Slavonic manuscript culture were important in that they were often considered an inextricable part of the text and were copied alongside it (Petrova-Taneva 2001: 126–7). They were thus deemed significant enough to endure and circulate across different versions. Church Slavonic colophons are largely stereotyped inscriptions in which the scribe provides information about the time, place and circumstances in which the manuscript was produced and the purpose of writing. It is difficult to say whether colophon writing began with the first manuscripts; the corpus that has remained from the Old Church Slavonic period (c. 850–1100 CE) is too small to even hazard a guess. However, in later manuscripts from this period we do find transcriptions of the original colophon supplemented by a note from the later copyist, which may suggest that the practice of colophon writing among the South Slavs began very early.¹¹

Church Slavonic colophons are generally placed after the principal text. In some manuscripts, there is no spatial marker to help us distinguish between the former and the latter due to the fact that the colophons are incorporated into the page layout designated for the main text. In some monastic centres, scribes wrote their colophons in a formal register of Church Slavonic rendered in semi-uncial script. Since the principal text was also written in the same language and script, we can infer that these were instances in which colophons occupied an official position similar to the main text. In a copy of the *Четвероевангелие* ('Four Gospels') from 1562, the famous calligrapher and illuminator Ioan of Kratovo (1526–1583) added a colophon which not only uses the formal semi-uncial script, but

10 The compendia mentioned earlier can give us a good idea of exactly how widespread paratextual practices were. In the largest collection of extant Church Slavonic paratexts to date, the Serbian scholar Ljubomir Stojanović published around 20,000 marginal inscriptions from the manuscript collections to which he had access. See Stojanović 1902-1926.

11 The so-called *Izbornik* of 1076 is one such manuscript where we find two colophons. The first one is copied from the original manuscript and the second is composed by the later copyist (Petrova-Taneva 2001: 127).

features initials which are carefully illuminated in gold ink like those in the primary text (Figs. 1a and 1b).¹²

Fig. 1a: The first page of St. Matthew's Gospel (fol. 10a). The famous calligrapher and illuminator Ioan of Kratovo used black ink for the main text and gold for the decorations. The text is written in elegant semi-uncial script. In Sofia, the Church-Historical and Archival Institute, shelfmark: ms. 34.

¹² I have not seen the actual ms. 34. I am very grateful to Ilija Veleв for providing me with a copy of a digitised version which he edited. Also, I would like to sincerely thank him for giving us permission to reproduce the images of ms. 34.

Fig. 1b: Ioan of Kratovo's colophon is also written in semi-uncial script (fol. 335b). The initials are illuminated in gold ink and black is used for the rest of the colophon, just like the primary text. In Sofia, The Church-Historical and Archival Institute, shelfmark: ms. 34.

However, there are other instances where scribes segregated the principal text of the manuscript from the colophon by varying the script, the style and the ink colour. *Jepej* ('priest') Ioan who copied *Четвероевангелие* ('Four Gospels') in 1658, used calligraphic semi-uncial script, dark brown ink and a thicker brush for the main text (Fig. 2a). For the colophon (Fig. 2b), on the other hand, he used a cursive script known as *brzopis* ('quick writing'), a thinner brush and light-brown ink.¹³

¹³ The St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library (Sofia) provides access to fully digitised manuscripts held at the library, with descriptions of their contents. I used digitised copies of three

Fig. 2a: The final lines of the ‘Four Gospels’ by priest Ioan written in calligraphic semi-uncial script (fol. 257a). *Четвероевангелие* (‘Four Gospels’) by priest Ioan, copied in 1658. In Sofia, St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, shelfmark: ms. 76.

Fig. 2b: The colophon written by the same scribe in a cursive script known as *brzopis* (fol. 257a). *Четвероевангелие* (‘Four Gospels’) by priest Ioan, copied in 1658. In Sofia, St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, shelfmark: ms. 76.

Another interesting example is a colophon from a manuscript containing a copy of the 1640 *Часослов и дамаскин на Даниил и Никита Етрополски* (‘Horologion and Damaskin of Daniil and Nikita of Etropole’). In this case, black ink and an elegant semi-uncial script are used for the main text of the manuscript, the spacing between the lines is consistent and the writing ends with a decorative tailpiece (Fig. 3a). An elaborate curlicue is then added to separate the main text from the colophon (Fig. 3b). The latter appears to be written carelessly in cursive script with the final lines not following the alignment. The scribe used different ink (brown) and a thinner brush to make this distinction (Fig. 3c).

manuscripts: ms. 76, ms. 1388 and ms. 17. I would like to thank Elisaveta Musakova for the kind permission to reproduce images of these manuscripts.

Fig. 3a: The final lines of the primary text are written in a semi-uncial script with a decorative tailpiece (fol. 203a). *Часослов и дамаскин на Даниил и Никита Етрополски* ('Horologion and Damaskin of Daniil and Nikita of Etropole') copied in 1640. In Sofia, St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, shelfmark: ms. 1388.

Fig. 3b: The colophon written in a cursive script (*brzopis*) is separated from the primary text with a curlicue (fol. 203a). *Часослов и дамаскин на Даниил и Никита Етрополски* ('Horologion and Damaskin of Daniil and Nikita of Etropole'), copied in 1640. In Sofia, St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, shelfmark: ms. 1388.

Fig. 3c: The final lines of the colophon are not following the alignment (fol. 203a). *Часослов и дамаскин на Даниил и Никита Етрополски* ('Horologion and Damaskin of Daniil and Nikita of Etropole'), copied in 1640. In Sofia, St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, shelfmark: ms. 1388.

The most typical characteristic of Church Slavonic colophons is the templates which their authors borrowed from the Byzantine scribal tradition. The beginning of the colophon usually constitutes a short prayer which can be a variation of 'СЛАВА СЪВЕРШИТЕЛЮ БОГЪ В ВЕКЪ АМИНЬ' ('To our God, the Creator, be the glory forever, Amen'). This is followed by stating the title of the work and honouring the commissioner of the manuscript. The scribe usually describes the qualities of the donor in glowing terms, adding a request that they be commemorated for their deed. The scribe then provides details about where the manuscript was copied. As a rule, he states the name of the monastery, sometimes with additional information regarding the *hegumen*¹⁴ who governed the religious institution, the town or village where the monastery was located and the larger ecclesiastical polity to which it belonged. Frequently, the author of the colophon would state the reasons for the production of the manuscript, revealing whether the work was copied on his own initiative or at the request of a higher-ranking member of clergy. Some colophon authors revealed their names and ecclesiastical titles, often supplicating themselves by referring to their sinful hand and life and then requesting the reader's forgiveness for their imperfect writing. To avoid being cursed by their readers, scribes would justify the imperfections in their manuscripts by describing the unfavourable circumstances in which they had to write them. In some colophons, scribes wrote curses in the hope that their manuscripts would be protected from being pawned, stolen or sold. Towards the end of the colophon, the scribe normally provided the date of completing the manuscript, using Slavonic letters to express the numbers and stating the year and indiction according to the Byzantine calendar. While these are details that may be encountered in Church Slavonic colophons, it is important to note that they need not contain all of the above features. However, it can be taken as a matter of fact that most colophons contain *explicit* information about the provenance of manuscripts.¹⁵

14 The *hegumen* (or *igumen* in Macedonian and Bulgarian) is the head of an Orthodox monastery, a title similar to the office of abbot in Western monastic orders.

15 Given that not every Church Slavonic manuscript contains a colophon, paleographers and codicologists rely on other features such as medium, language, script or techniques of decoration and production, in order to determine the provenance of manuscripts. But even when manuscripts do contain colophons, their provenance is not easily determined: some colophons provide vague and erroneous information. In addition to this, some manuscripts contain a colophon from the protograph, although they themselves are later copies. As Maya Petrova-Taneva tells us, the provenance of a codex known as the Ghent manuscript of the *Bdinski zbornik* was previously determined by the details stated in the colophon, according to which the manuscript was commissioned by 'Tsaritsa Anna' in 1369, in the city of Bdin [Vidin]. However, by examining the paper watermarks and the orthography of the manuscript, Petrova-Taneva demonstrates that

Apart from colophons, scribes could also add marginalia. Some scribal marginalia are lively interjections where the author of the manuscript complains about the scarcity of writing materials or the difficult and laborious task of writing. A scribe with the signature 'Radul' made this inscription in a sixteenth-century manuscript known as *Апостолски Деяния и Евангелия* ('Acts of the Apostles and Gospels'):¹⁶

Пиян писах.
Ох, що ми се досади!
Помени, боже, раба своего Радула.

I wrote this drunk.
Oh, how bored I got!
Remember, God, your servant Radul (Nachev and Fermandzhiev 1984: 22).

Some margins were used to thank people who contributed to the production of the manuscript. The notes include the names of those who provided implements or even the nourishment necessary for writing. For instance, the copyist of one *Минея* ('Menaion')¹⁷ from the fifteenth-century wishes that God bless 'Калиноу' ('Kalina'), who provided the clergy with 'овощіи вся блага...ни оупокори виномъ' ('sweet fruits... and kept us calm with wine') (Stojanović 1902: 73).

Notes written by later hands can be just as intriguing as those written by the original scribe. Some of them give us an insight into the ways in which Church

this codex could not be the protograph, but an early-fifteenth century copy of a manuscript commissioned by "Tsaritsa Anna" (Empress Anna of Wallachia, the wife of the Bulgarian Emperor Ivan Stratsimir). Petrova-Taneva goes on to say that the scribe probably had no intention to deceive the reader and seems to have followed the South Slavic practice of adding a second colophon along with the one found in the protograph which states 'the name and the rank of the later copyist, or the time and place where the transcript was written' (Petrova-Taneva 2001: 126). Only the last word of the second colophon remains, suggesting that it might have been purposely destroyed more recently so that the manuscript could gain better value on auctions as 'a fourteenth-century original coming from the library of a Bulgarian tsaritsa' (Petrova-Taneva 2001: 127).

16 Given that Church Slavonic manuscripts are scattered in various libraries and archives around the world, I used examples from library catalogues and compilations of marginalia in order to provide the reader with a general overview of Church Slavonic paratextual traditions. I have also relied on these publications for other information about the manuscripts, such as titles and dating.

17 *Menaion* is a liturgical book used by the Eastern Orthodox Church and contains the propers for feasts that take place on fixed dates in the calendar year (that is, offices which do not depend on the movable date of Easter).

Slavonic canonical texts were read through the centuries. These include indicators created by readers to select significant passages for reading aloud in the liturgy, commentaries discussing the content of the work, glosses which translate or clarify words employed in the primary text and annotations suggesting revisions of the work. Other subsequent notes deal with the story of the manuscript as a material object. These marginalia provide us with evidence of the purchase, sale and ownership of manuscripts. They also hold information about manuscripts being rebound into finer covers and valuable manuscripts being pawned as collateral during times of financial hardship, only to be returned to a place of worship by wealthy patrons decades or centuries later.¹⁸ Some manuscripts contain records of donors and donations made to churches and monasteries, and others contain notes left by believers who visited the churches and monasteries. They would usually write a short prayer, recording their name and the date of their stay. Similar notes were scribbled by pilgrims who mentioned the places to which they travelled. We thus learn the names of specific people linked to the various sites of religious exchange that were prevalent among the South Slavs. For instance, a note by Mihail of Kratovo, a seventeenth-century metropolitan bishop, tells us that he read a fifteenth-century copy of *Цветен Триод* ('Pentecostarion')¹⁹ when he visited the monasteries on Mount Athos. This note is an exception in the extent to which it is a personal account where he tells the reader that the monastery cell he rented cost fifty *groschens* and adds 'Престојував во ќелијата една година. А отсега натаму не знам дали ќе престојувам или нема да престојувам. Бог знае. Како што Господ сака, така нека биде'. ('[I] spent the summer in this cell and from now on I don't know whether I will be here or I will not be. For now, as God wills it to be, let it be') (Pop-Atanasov 1996: 73).

18 The 1562 *Четвороевангелие* ('Four Gospels') by Ioan of Kratovo is one such instance where the turbulent history of the manuscript can be reconstructed through marginal inscriptions (Velez 2012b: 61-65).

19 *Pentecostarion*, also known as *Festal Triodion*, is a liturgical book used in the Eastern Orthodox Church during the fifty-day Paschal season, which covers the period from Pascha (Easter) to the Feast of All Saints (the Sunday following Pentecost).

3 The incidence and reception of historical themes in Church Slavonic paratexts

Some of the most interesting types of Church Slavonic paratexts are the large number that do not directly pertain to the manuscript as a material or textual object, but instead engage with historical themes that were central to the political and ecclesiastical culture to which the manuscripts belonged. These extant paratextual writings date the reigns and eventual deaths of patriarchs and rulers, the demolition of monasteries and churches, celestial events, bad weather conditions and catastrophic events such as wars, famine, natural disasters, outbreaks of plague and the rise in food prices. One such instance of a note with historical content is to be found in an *Осмогласник* ('Octoechos')²⁰ from the monastery of St Panteleimon in Skopje. The marginal inscription in this liturgical manuscript tells us that 'Во 1535 година беа разрушени црквите во Скопје' ('In the year 1535, the churches in Skopje were demolished') (Pop-Atanasov 1996: 29). In an interesting example of a celestial record, three accounts written in three different locations record the same event of volcanic ash falling from the sky. In one of these manuscripts, a volume from 1547 which contains John Chrysostom's homilies, we find a single inscription on the last blank leaf: 'Да се знаетъ кога падна пепелъ по въсен земи, беше снег се не видеше ꙗко пепелъ и бе земя помрачена ꙗкоже изгорена. Бѣше то въ лето .ѣ. р. м. мѣсеца декемврія .ѣ. днь.' ('Let it be known when dust fell to the whole earth, the snow could not be seen from the dust and the earth went dark as if burnt. This was in the year 7140, month of December, 7th day.' (Mrgić 2004: 229).²¹ In an example of a celestial record found in a *Псалтир* ('psalter') from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, the chronicler mentions two

²⁰ *Octoechos* ('The Book of Eight Tones') is a liturgical book used in the Eastern Orthodox Church which includes services with specific hymns in eight tones that are chanted from the end of the Pentecostarion season to the first day of the Great Fast (the 40-day fasting season before Orthodox Easter).

²¹ According to Byzantine reckoning, history begins with the year of the Creation of the World, which was calculated to be 5,509 years before the Incarnation. The creational year for the Byzantines and South Slavs lasted from 1 September 5509 BCE to 31 August 5508 BCE. The corresponding year according the Gregorian calendar can therefore be determined by subtracting 5,509 for the period between September and December, or 5,508 for January to August. The year 7140 in the Byzantine calendar thus corresponds to the year 1631 as mentioned in non-Slavic sources about the event. There is only a discrepancy of ten days between all three accounts, which can be explained by the Gregorian reform of 1582 when Pope Gregory XIII dropped ten days from October (Mrgić 2004: 229).

events which occurred in the same year, namely a solar eclipse and an outbreak of plague: 'Во 7208 [година], а од Рождество Христово 1700. Во таа година имаше затемнување на сонцето, а во истата година имаше голема чума во Македонија и голем помор. Никаде не остана здрав град, ниту здраво село.' ('In [the year] 7208, 1700 [years] after the birth of Christ. In this year, the sun got dark and there was a plague in Macedonia that caused great mortality. There was not a healthy city or [healthy] village anywhere') (Pop-Atanasov 1996: 85).

As we can see from the above instances, several of these inscriptions were appealing to the historians of the Balkan nation states as they offered specific stories of the past which were described using powerful imagery. This has led scholars from the region to celebrate these textual fragments as a distinctive literature which is authentic, personal, self-representational and unmediated, as opposed to the canonical writings which the fragments surround. Marginal notes have been understood by scholars such as Ivan Dučev (1998) to 'reveal more honestly and truthfully the reality than the works of the official literature'.²² In one of the few attempts to counter this dominant stream of opinion, the Serbian scholar Rade Mihaljčić argues for the derivative nature of these accounts. He cautions against trusting the credibility of this type of narrative form and questions the value of the accounts as 'аутобиографских извора' ('autobiographical sources') since the majority of the writings are 'подложни монашкој фразеологији' ('subject to monastic phraseology') where 'са готовим клишеима, неретко започиње и завршава се запис' ('with ready-made clichés the notes begin and continue in this manner until the end') (Mihaljčić and Ćirković 1999: 218). This perspective abandons the initial impulse to believe the purported particularity of the 'I' or the first person voice in the margins, and aims to account for the formulaic repetition of phrases and themes that is apparent when the fragments are compared alongside each other.

In Bulgaria, faith in the 'truth status' of Church Slavonic paratexts was challenged after investigation into cases of forgery. In 1984, the historian Ilifā Todorov ascertained that the chronicle written by Metodi Draginov in a seventeenth-century prayer book – the source crucial for attesting that the Bulgarian population had been forced into converting to Islam during the Ottoman rule – was actually a late nineteenth-century literary mystification. It was established that the language had been modernised and that the compiler had based his account on another nineteenth-century chronicle (Todorov 1984: 68–77).²³

²² Cited by Nikolova-Houston (Nikolova-Houston 2008: 5).

²³ For more detailed information about the de-authentication of this paratextual account, known as the Metodi Draginov chronicle, see Todorova 2004: 130–136.

Fraudulent pre-modern paratextual writings were discovered to have been produced even before the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth-century Balkans, although the motive for making these forgeries was different. A particularly interesting case is the luxurious, heavily illuminated edition of the *Four Gospels* from the first half of the thirteenth century, known as *Добрейшово евангелие* ('Dobrejšo Gospel'). The notes in the margins of this manuscript include short prayers and various names which have only confused philologists who have tried to place the manuscript in time and space. Given that few names are mentioned in the margins, it remains unclear whether they refer to the scribes, the commissioner or to later owners. Ben'o TSonev, one of the first scholars to discuss the provenance of the manuscript, argues that it was written by one hand only, namely that of priest Dobrejšo (TSonev 1906: 13). However, as Elisaveta Musakova has pointed out, the simple inscription 'Edrene, priest Dobrejšo' (Fig. 4) could not have been written at the same time as the manuscript. According to her, the inscription is an imitation of a medieval signature written in a much later hand using inks which differ from those used for the primary text. Moreover, Musakova notes that the name 'Edrene' (Edirne) is itself an anachronism since the Ottoman name of the city previously known as 'Adrianopol' (Adrianople) among the South Slavic writers could not have been used prior to the Ottoman conquests of Thrace in the 1360s. In addition, the Church Slavonic dialect in which the primary text is written does not coincide with the dialects used around Edirne, but with those used in the territory of present-day northern Macedonia. Musakova suggests that Dobrejšo was not the scribe, but probably a later owner of the manuscript who recorded his location and name or perhaps the name of the medieval scribe (Musakova 2005: 186–195). While the question as to the specific site of production of the manuscript remains unresolved, the discovery that Dobrejšo's signature is an imitation of an older signature suggests that some Church Slavonic paratexts related to the provenance of manuscripts could have been faked in order to resolve the question of the ownership of expensive manuscripts.²⁴

²⁴ Some Byzantine manuscripts were wrongly dated, as scholars relied on the date provided in the colophon. As Ernest C. Colwell has demonstrated, Byzantine scribes often increased the value of their manuscripts by 'antedating' them (Colwell 1969: 141). It is a difficult task to detect a fraudulent date in a colophon due to the scribal practice of imitating older styles of colophons. While such studies have been carried out for the Byzantine tradition of colophon writing, the dating of Church Slavonic colophons has remained largely unchallenged.

Fig. 4: An imitation of a medieval signature written in red ink in the inner margin, fol. 120b. *Добрейшово евангелие* ('The Four Gospels of priest Dobreysho'). In Sofia, St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library, shelfmark: ms. 17.

One of the many reasons why paratextual writings are often considered 'straight-forward and candid' is because of the precise numerical information they sometimes contain. This is particularly true of colophons and historical marginalia, where dates feature prominently. The dating of events in historical marginalia is often preceded by a variation of the formula *Знатисе* (*Znatise*, 'let it be known'), which has been interpreted as indicative of a self-conscious tendency to create chronologically precise testimonials of suffering under Ottoman rule.²⁵

In the former Yugoslavia, too, a few scholars have questioned the accuracy of certain paratexts. Nenad Janković, for instance, holds the accounts of celestial

²⁵ This has been argued by several scholars including Despodova 1997.

phenomena to be 'непоуздани' ('unreliable') in that they often have 'погрешни датуми' ('wrong dates') (Janković 1989: 36–37). Additionally, Đorđe Trifunović demonstrates that there is only one inscription concurrent with the Battle of Kosovo (1389), whereas other paratexts valued by scholars are based on folklore motifs and were written long after the battle they describe (Trifunović 1989: 9). Despite these debates, Church Slavonic paratexts are considered to be reliable and truthful sources. Even a very recent study attests that these fragments are 'straightforward and candid accounts' by 'scribes (who) wrote honestly' (Nikolova-Houston 2008: 326).²⁶ The emphasis in this study is on the status of Church Slavonic paratexts as eyewitness accounts which 'taken together, tell a story of constant turmoil and the struggle for survival of a marginalized people living on the periphery of European and Ottoman Empires' (Nikolova-Houston 2008: 365).²⁷

Even if one were to discount the importance of precise dates in evaluating the historical writings of the Slavs in paratexts, taking these testimonials at face value still leaves us with many problems. A significant gap remains where existing scholarship has failed to explain or even investigate the nature of historical writing that these paratexts might have once constituted. This failure is of pressing importance when it comes to the vast number of extant Church Slavonic inscriptions that deal with historical events, especially those written after the major Ottoman conquests of territories in the Balkan Peninsula. The question of what these notes meant to the community that produced them has never been seriously posed. Instead, a more modern conception of accurate and independent historical narration has been hastily transposed onto them. If this paratextual historiography was intended as an independent testimonial to Ottoman oppression, it would be reasonable to assume that a variety of themes and events would figure in paratextual records, reflecting the complexity of social, political, economic and religious transactions that might have taken place for the South Slavs living under Ottoman rule. Instead, one is struck by the limited scope of the patterns and repetitions that pervade a majority of these inscriptions. For instance, the

26 This is the first study focusing on South Slavic colophons and marginalia to have been written in English.

27 Various South Slavic sources have been used in Balkan historiography to support its claims about the Turkish 'yoke' – a five century period of 'continuous terror' by the Ottoman administration against their South Slavic subjects – including the historical genres of chronicles, hagiographies, and more significantly, marginalia and colophons. A good example of using marginalia and colophons for nationalist readings of Balkan history is Ivan Snegarov's work. According to him, a number of Church Slavonic paratexts offer substantial evidence for Ottoman cruelty (Snegarov 1958: 44).

wide range of diseases which were a constant companion of the early modern South Slavs is not reflected in the marginal annotations of manuscripts from the period. Instead, we read exclusively about outbreaks of plague, often labelled as the 'mop' ('great mortality'). The clergy kept records of this disease and not of 'тpecka' ('fever') epidemics, for example, although the latter was also a serious health problem at the time if we go by the number and variety of extant magical formulae used to dispel the affliction (Katić 1990: 62). Similarly, the clergy regularly reported on the demolition of monasteries and high taxation in the margins of manuscripts, but rarely tackled the Islamisation of the Orthodox population despite the fact that the religious conversion of many South Slavs was a major anxiety for the Orthodox Church from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century (Krstić 2011: 2–3).

How do we meaningfully account for the systematic patterns (and exceptions) that feature in these historical paratexts while at the same time not reading the dates and statements in these paratextual accounts too literally as has been mostly the case until now? The first point of departure would be to inquire into whether the patterns that these historical marginalia and colophons develop have a shared context. In the instances of historical paratexts encapsulated above, there are records of celestial events, bad weather conditions or of catastrophic events such as wars, famine, natural disasters, and outbreaks of plague (as in the case of three scribes in different locations recording volcanic ash falling from the sky, or the link between a solar eclipse and the outbreak of plague). There are also many instances of paratexts that deal with events such as the reigns and eventual deaths of patriarchs and rulers, and the demolition of monasteries and churches. In all of these instances, these records either deal with events which also figure as portents, signs of things to come (a solar eclipse or volcanic ash falling from the sky) or the events that also figure as the outcome of prophecy (the outbreak of plague or the reign and death of a ruler). The various themes that make up historical records in Church Slavonic marginalia and colophons feature prominently in the eschatological and apocalyptic schemes that were central to South Slavic beliefs and attitudes towards time and history. By comparing and relating the paratextual corpus to the apocalyptic literature of the South Slavs we can also account for the exceptions noted above. Events such as outbreaks of 'тpecka' ('fever') and the religious conversion of many South Slavs under Ottoman rule did not feature in the paratextual corpus as they were not present in the apocalyptic texts whose focus on certain kinds of events were central to forming the inventory of themes that would occupy the history writing of the South Slavs.

A very large part of the Church Slavonic paratextual corpus dealing with historical events stretches from the late fourteenth century which coincides with the rise of the Ottomans until the nineteenth century where the Ottoman Empire and manuscript production itself declined in a conclusive manner. As Petre Guran tells us in the context of the connection between the fall of the Bulgarian Empire in the late fourteenth century and the production of historical writings in this period, 'the sense of this historiography is not to record facts, but to discover the metaphysical place of a given community within the larger context of God's creation' (Guran 2012: 333–334). The historiography of the South Slavs in this period, Guran argues, was driven by the 'nostalgia of the Empire' (ibid., 344), with an emphasis on apocalyptic schemata occupying the space previously reserved during the heyday of the empire for eulogies, princely biographies and regnal chronologies. This transformation in the concept and practice of timekeeping was also registered in paratextual writings. The clergy were even more strident in assuming the role of prophecy: to reveal the approaching Apocalypse. The epithet *ЗНАТИЦЕ* ('Let it be known') is therefore not a conscious declaration to record testimonials of suffering under Ottoman rule so that a future readership may one day know about the past. Instead, it is a clairvoyant impulse to interpret contemporary phenomena – mortal or celestial – as the fulfilment of the various phases of an elaborate prophetic scheme that was to culminate in salvation from the rule of the Antichrist.

As mentioned early on in the article, to undertake a comprehensive study of the vast number of historical marginalia and colophons and their relation to the apocalyptic writing traditions of the South Slavs would be much beyond the scope of this paper. One of the difficulties of such a task – when compared to the study of other historical writings in Church Slavonic, such as chronicles and princely *vitae* where we find long and developed narrative sequences – is that the majority of these marginal historical accounts appear too scant for the present-day reader to easily infer their contemporary functions. Often, they can be compared to yearly records in the annals where the date and a brief description of the event are given.²⁸ There are a few exceptions which are unusual in their detail and therefore allow us to explore the discursive milieu of even the shorter and more

²⁸ The historical paratexts share common form and substance with another important historical genre of the South Slavs, the so-called Newer Serbian chronicles (*mladi letopisi*). These chronicles, a type of historiography similar to Western annals, are records of historical events arranged in yearly sequence.

formulaic paratexts. It is the close investigation of one such example, Isaija's colophon to the Slavonic *Corpus Dionysiicum*, that will form the remainder of this article.

4 'The most evil of all evil times': apocalyptic time and space in Isaija's colophon

A large number of Church Slavonic colophons are almost identical to each other, which suggests that scribes sometimes borrowed templates, changing only the details which would necessarily vary, such as the title of the work, the name of the commissioner and the date and place of production. Although the intervention of some scribes amounted to very little, there were others who sought new ways of employing the strict Byzantine generic conventions. A number of colophons begin with long and erudite prayers, for example.²⁹ In some of the more notable colophons, such as the one written by Deacon Dimitar of Kratovo in 1466, we find a lengthy exploration of a contemporary political and religious crisis. Deacon Dimitar of Kratovo, in a Slavonic copy of the *Syntagma* of Matthew Blastares,³⁰ wrote a polemical colophon against the Bogomils – a dualist heresy which threatened the power of the Orthodox Church in the Balkans from the tenth century onwards.³¹ Other scribes expanded into an elaborate panegyric to the patrons, as is the case in a colophon added to a psalter from 1336/7, where the scribe composes an unusually long and ornate passage praising the religious and military virtues of Tsar Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria (reigned 1331–1371) (TSonev 1916: 4–13).

²⁹ One such lengthy prayer is found in the colophon of a manuscript which contains *Апостолски Деяния* ('Acts of the Apostles'), copied in Zograf monastery in the fourteenth century (Nachev and Fermandzhiev 1984: 56).

³⁰ Matthew Blastares was a fourteenth-century Byzantine monk who compiled the *Syntagma Alfabeticum*, a corpus of civil and church laws that he ordered alphabetically. For information about the manuscript tradition of the Slavic *Syntagma*, see Alexandrov 2012.

³¹ A detailed study on the Bogomil movement in the Balkans – its relation with the State and Church, doctrine, practices and history – has been written by Obolensky 1948. The original polemical colophon by Deacon Dimitar is contained in a fragment known as Grigorovich MS 27, kept in the Russian State Library in Moscow (Alexandrov 2012: 193). The entire colophon has been published by Angelov (Angelov 1967: 260–267).

Intriguingly, the assumedly stable templates designated for locating production of the manuscript in time and space were employed creatively to include historical narratives reflecting and responding to political upheavals that were co-terminous with the writing of the manuscript. Where a date and place name would suffice, sentiments regarding larger political upheavals were inscribed, expanding the colophon into a valuable historiographical space over and beyond the prefatory function it served. The scribe of a *Празничен Минеј* ('Festal Men-aion') called Rastko of Meševišta, for instance, tells us that 'оваа книга започна да се пишува кога оеа Турците против Цариград, а се заврши кога го презедоа' ('this work was begun when the Turks attacked Constantinople and was finished when they conquered it') (Pop-Atanasov 1996: 19). This colophon provides details about the chronology of manuscript production and is deliberately framed so that it is consistent with, and therefore participates in, the chronology of a significant event.

It is important to note that there were colophons which included passages addressing historical themes even before the first Ottoman campaigns in the Balkans. In a *prolog*³² copied in Lesnovo by monk Stanislav, for instance, the scribe tells us that he finished his work 'во деновите на превисокиот крал Урош Стефан, кого татко му го ослепи и го испрати кај Грците' ('during the reign of the great King Uroš Stefan, whose father sent him to Greece to have him blinded') (Pop-Atanasov 1996: 11). While in the pre-Ottoman colophons some scribes commented on political events related to the history of the Bulgarian, Serbian and Byzantine empires, a few extant colophons concomitant with the martial campaigns of the Ottomans and their subsequent rule in the Balkans locate the time of the manuscript production within an apocalyptic framework. Apart from Isaija's colophon, which will be discussed in what follows, I would like to list two other less-known colophons which make clear reference to an apocalyptic prophecy. A scribe who signed his name as Pribil tells us that he copied the manuscript in 1409.³³ In his colophon he dates the completion of the manuscript to the year 1409 when, as he tells us, his mind was preoccupied as 'Турци боквахоу, и рат[и] белици бывахоу' ('the Turks were at war, and many wars were [occurring]') (Matić 1952: 140). Pribil ends his account thus: 'а по писанию вѣка сего бызоу ꙗко[у] амын его' ('according to Scripture, the century is now [going to]

³² A *prolog* or *Slavonic synaxarion* is a collection of short lives of the saints.

³³ This miscellany included the *Revelation of St John the Theologian*, Old Testament apocryphal writings and hagiographies. Unfortunately, the manuscript does not exist any more as it was destroyed during the Second World War. However, Pribil's colophon has 'survived', having been published in the library catalogue.

close. Amen') (ibid.: 140). It is apparent that the author was referring to passages in the so-called *Little Apocalypse* here, in which Jesus describes the end of times. Among other signs that are to precede his Second Coming, Christ mentions wars and foretells that 'nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom' (Mark 13: 1–37; Matthew 24: 1–25; Luke 21: 5–38). This account is unusual in that the scribe explicitly associates it with a prophecy found in the Gospels. In a similar fashion, Ioan of Kratovo added an 'apocalyptic' colophon in his 1526 copy of the *Четвороевангелие* ('Four Gospels'). Here, the scribe requests the reader to forgive his '8мѣ слабѣ' ('weak mind') since 'Бѣхѹ врѣмена зла, а смѣръти по мѣста често бивахѹ', а по писанию кончина близѣ' ('the times were evil, there were many deaths in diverse places, and according to Scripture, the end is nigh') (Velev 2012b: 21). Christ prophesied in the *Gospel of Matthew* that apart from wars 'there shall be famines, and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places' (Matthew 24:7). Ioan's colophon is interesting in that it displays a participatory play between text and paratext. Ioan fixes the moment of completing the manuscript in the scheme of its own time as well as within divinely ordained history by linking the divine apocalyptic imagery of the primary text – the Gospels – to contemporary events, which feature paratextually.

One of the earliest examples in Church Slavonic paratextual writings anticipating the Apocalypse is found in monk Isaija's colophon of 1371.³⁴ Isaija was an influential South Slavic monk who spent most of his life in the St Panteleimon monastery on Mount Athos. He provided the Slavic world with the first Slavonic translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* – one of the most significant theological and philosophical works for the Orthodox clergy. In the colophon to this work, Isaija depicts the 1371 battle at Maritsa River near Chernomen (present-day Ormenio, Greece) as the overriding event to occur while he was finishing his translation of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius. The battle is not just mentioned briefly in order to help mark the time, as is the usual convention in this type of colophon

³⁴ Apocalyptic sentiments expressed in paratextual writing could have existed even before the late fourteenth century if we go by the fact that the most influential Byzantine apocalypses were translated into Old Church Slavonic much earlier. However, the extant colophons which make use of apocalyptic imagery are from the period of the incipient stages of the Ottoman invasions into the Balkans. One such instance is an undated inscription made in *Octoechos* and copied during the last decades of the reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria (reigned 1331–1371). An anonymous scribe tells us that he copied the manuscript 'когато господ изпрати измаилтяните по лицето на цялата земя и те тръгнаха, поробиха и опустошиха' ('when God sent the Ishmaelites on the face of the whole Earth and they moved, took captives and desolated') (Nachev and Fermandzhiev 1984: 20).

where the expression of time generally resembles the practice of compiling annals. Rather, Isaija writes a long narrative about the battle itself spanning sixty-eight lines.

In the first half of the colophon, Isaija provides us with his reflections on the ambitious task he had been given of translating the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius from Byzantine Greek into the Slavonic tongue (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 1, lines 1–42).³⁵ After requesting the reader to forgive him for any mistakes he might have made, he tells us that the initiative for translating the work came from Theodosius, the metropolitan bishop of Serres (active in the second half of the fourteenth century), whose religious and moral virtues he celebrates (*ibid.*, lines 43–93). The second half of the colophon tells us that the battle started when Despot Uglješa (r. 1346–1371) raised several regional armies numbering around sixty thousand men 'и поидоша въ македонїи на изгна́нїе туркѣ' ('and they left for Macedonia to chase the Turks away') (*ibid.*, lines 101–108). According to Isaija, Despot Uglješa, his brother King Vukašin (reigned 1365–1371) and other supporters of the attack failed to see that 'гнѣвоу бжїю никтоже мощенъ противѣстѣти' ('nobody can oppose God's wrath') (*ibid.*, lines 109–110) and therefore 'тѣхъ оубо не изгнаша нѣ сами ѿ нихъ оубиени быша. и тамо кости ихъ падоша и непогребении пребыша.' ('they did not chase them [the Turks], rather they were killed by them and their bones fell and remained unburied') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 2, lines 1–4). The colophon then proceeds with a lengthy depiction of the disastrous consequences of the battle (*ibid.*, lines 5–50). Isaija finishes his account by inscribing a cryptogram and dating the completion of the manuscript by year and indiction (*ibid.*, lines 62–73).

The oldest preserved copy of Isaija's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* can be found in the Gilferding collection at the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg. This copy, known as Gilf. 46, is not only the earliest extant Slavonic codex, but is also Isaija's autograph and, according to Prochorov, even features notes made by him during the translation (Prochorov 1980: 183–185).³⁶ Unfortunately, the first eleven folia of the manuscript are missing and we cannot be entirely

³⁵ I have taken the citations of Isaija's colophon from the first full publication of the Slavonic translation of *Corpus Dionysiacum*, edited by Herman Goltz and Gelian Prochorov (2010–2011). Given that the original colophon from 1371 has been lost, the editors published a facsimile and a transcription of the colophon included in a 1541 copy of Isaija's *Corpus Dionysiacum*. This manuscript is held in the National Library of Russia, St Petersburg (Sofijskoe sobranie, Min. Cod. 1318, fol. 74–74v).

³⁶ A great deal has been written about the provenance of Gilf. 46. Recently, Mihail Alekseevich Shibaev has confirmed previous opinion that the information provided by Isaija in the colophon matches with features of the manuscript from which the provenance can be determined. According

sure whether the colophon was part of Isaija's autograph. Nevertheless, we can speculate that this was the case from the copies of the colophon that feature in several later editions of Isaija's translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* (Fig. 5).³⁷

Fig. 5: A fragment of Isaija's colophon included in a manuscript from the first half of the sixteenth century (fol. 8r). In Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, *Schriften mit Scholien des Maximos Homologetes*, shelfmark: Cod. Slav. 14.

to Shibaev, these features confirm that the manuscript was written in the 1370s on Mount Athos (Shibaev 2013: 16–27).

³⁷ Two later editions of *Corpus Dionysiacum* have been used for details about Isaija's colophon. There is a fifteenth-century East Slavic version kept at the Rumyantsev Museum in Moscow (shelfmark MS 93). Aleksandr Khristoforovich Vostokov was the first scholar to publish this version of the colophon (Vostokov 1842: 161–165). In the Balkans, transcriptions of the colophon are to be found in several scholarly editions based on a sixteenth-century South Slavic copy of the *Corpus* which is kept at the Austrian National Library in Vienna (shelfmark Cod. Slav. 14). The first scholar to publish transcriptions of both versions of the colophon was Bonfî Angelov (see Angelov 1967: 148–161). More recently, Trifunović published a translation of the whole colophon into Serbian (see Trifunović 1980: 84–88).

Isaija's account has gained attention in the Balkans since it is the oldest known source depicting the Battle of Maritsa in 1371 – the biggest military success of the Ottomans in Europe before the fall of Constantinople in 1453. It vividly depicts human suffering after the armies of the brothers King Vukašin and Despot Uglješa Mrnjavčević were defeated by the Ottomans. Donka Petkanova celebrates the truthfulness of Isaija's account as a narrative 'отличаващ се с ист[орическа] конкретност и достоверност' ('distinguished by its historical accuracy and credibility') in which there is a prevailing 'чувството на ужас от настъпващия поробител' ('feeling of dread from the future occupier') and 'безнадежни нотки и предусещания за трагични събития' ('hopelessness coming from the anticipation of future tragic events') (Petkanova 1992: 196). Other scholars, however, such as the Georgije Ostrogorski, have a less credulous view of the value of Isaija's account as a historical document. Ostrogorski questions the reliability of the colophon as he perceives it to be similar to more recent historical documents of the battle 'испреплетене легендама и пуне очигледних претеривања' ('mixed with legends and rich in obvious exaggerations') (Ostrogorski 1965: 143). Đorđe Trifunović, a Serbian scholar who published an influential monograph about Isaija's life and work, also argues against the historical objectivity of Isaija's account on the grounds that it is 'надахнуто књижевно виђење српско-турског сукоба и страдања' ('an inspired literary vision of the Serbo-Turkish confrontation and suffering') borrowed from the rhetorical repertoire of the Byzantine writer Philotheos Kokkinos (Trifunović 1980: 6). Although the colophon has attracted wide academic interest, existing scholarship is limited to discussing a) the extent to which Isaija's account matches up with the historical reality and b) the details that the colophon provides regarding the first Slavonic translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, which constituted a literary milestone.³⁸ The colophon has not yet been explored as a source which largely borrows from Byzantine historical apocalypses and, as such, may shed light on the ways in which South Slavic writers responded to religious and political crises in the late fourteenth century.

The colophon begins by marking the time of writing by referring to an apocalyptic chronology where Isaija tells us: 'и къ вечероу сѣничаго днѣ захода сѣдморичнаго рекоу вѣка и мѡеѡ жизни скончанїѡ, слоучисѡ и мнѣ навѣкноути мало

³⁸ Even in the recent monumental edition of Isaija's autograph, the authors focus on the colophon primarily to discuss the provenance of the manuscript. In the fifth volume dedicated to secondary literature on Isaija's work, Denis O. TSypkin and Mihail A. Shibaev only mention that the battle is depicted from an eschatological viewpoint (TSypkin and Shibaev 2013: 59).

гречьскаго языка.' ('on the eve of the solar day, that is to say, [at] the sunset of the seventh age, and towards my life's end, it happened that I also learnt some Greek') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 1, lines 14–18). In this case, 'седморячанаго вѣка' ('seventh age') refers to the seventh millennium, which Pseudo-Methodius, as we will see later, prophesied would be the last one. A few scholars have pointed out that these lines of the colophon refer to the widespread belief in Byzantium that the world would end in the 7,000th Byzantine year, which corresponds to the year 1492 CE (Tapkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 2011: 22).³⁹ In Byzantine chronography, there was a 'correspondence between the seven days' in which God created the world and 'its total existence of 7,000 years' (Tapkova-Zaimova and Miltenova 2011: 21). Isaija tells us towards the end of the colophon that he finished translating the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius in the year 6879, a number close to the notorious end.

Isaija's colophon locates the manuscript in the 'seventh age' and makes stock use of apocalyptic themes to depict the Battle of Maritsa in 1371. The ethnic designator 'Turks' appears just once in his narrative, only to be replaced with 'Ishmaelites', a label pregnant with apocalyptic meaning. The Ishmaelites, mentioned in the *Book of Genesis*, play an important role in extra-biblical literature since their advent was a portent of the imminent End of Days.⁴⁰ Ishmaelite invasions are associated with the End of Days in Byzantine apocalyptic writings such as the 'Visions of Daniel', which borrows largely from the 'Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius', both of which were in circulation among the South Slavs long before Isaija's colophon was written.⁴¹ Although both apocalyptic writings significantly

³⁹ This connection is relegated to a footnote by Đorđe Trifunović (Trifunović 1980: 87) and Sima Ćirković (Ćirković 2006: 28).

⁴⁰ The term 'Ishmaelites' has been associated with various groups of people in different historical and cultural contexts. Before the mid-tenth century BCE, various nomadic tribes that wandered in the area between Palestine and Egypt were believed in biblical literature to be the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar. Centuries later, as I. Eph'al has pointed out, Arabs alone became associated with the biblical Ishmaelites in various Judeo-Christian and Muslim sources (Eph'al 1976: 225). This identification became particularly strong in the period between the sixth and ninth centuries in which Byzantine 'historical' apocalypses were written. These writings depict the Ishmaelites as a cruel invading force that would eventually destroy the Byzantine Empire and bring the world to its end. As Paul J. Alexander puts it, these works are centred around 'the wars against the enemies of the Empire, notably against Persians and Arabs' (Alexander 1968: 998).

⁴¹ The original *Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, hereafter referred to as *Apocalypse*, mistakenly attributed to Methodius of Olympus (bishop and martyr), was composed by an unknown author in the Syriac language in the mid-seventh century (Alexander 1985: 25). It was translated into Greek fairly soon and from Greek into Old Church Slavonic in the late ninth or early tenth

feature the Ishmaelites, I shall focus on the *Apocalypse* since it presents the division of world history into seven millennia.

According to this late seventh-century Syriac composition issued under the patristic authority of the fourth-century Church Father and Saint Methodius of Olympus, history begins with Adam and the biblical establishment of kingdoms and ends with the Antichrist being defeated by Jesus Christ in the last seventh millennium.⁴² The account is divided into two parts: the first deals with imperial histories, the establishment of various biblical lineages, their empires and the wars they conducted with each other, while the second part is prophetic, set in the future and tells us that the Ishmaelites – the 'children of the desert of Yathrib' – would invade the world and bring suffering to the entirety of Christendom. Although depictions of great cruelty and devastation permeate this account, it ends with the faithful Christians moving towards salvation. The victory of the Ishmaelites is seen as a temporary period of suffering, lasting until the Last Emperor arises from dormancy to defeat them and govern Christianity for ten year-weeks. The Last Emperor returns the empire to God only to be usurped by the Antichrist, who will be overcome by the Second Coming of Christ.

The *Apocalypse* has been seen as a response to the seventh-century Arab conquests in the Near East, where higher ecclesiastical circles declared the Arab victories to be temporary divine punishment for humanity's sins (Reinink 1992: 149–187). The prophecy that the Ishmaelites would finally be defeated by the Last Emperor was also used in historical works written in a variety of distant territories and cultures and depicting invasions of various non-Christian tribes and empires. The oldest known Slavic reminiscence of Pseudo-Methodius's prophecy occurs in the earliest extant Rus' chronicle, the *Primary Chronicle*, which is thought to have been written in Kiev circa 1116 (Cross 1929: 329–330). The compiler explicitly mentions Pseudo-Methodius's vision in order to describe the Cuman conquests of South Russia and Wallachia in the eleventh century. Unlike the *Primary Chronicle*, Isaija does not refer to any prophecy in particular. Nevertheless, the imagery

century (Thomson 1985: 144). The oldest Slavonic translation has not been preserved, but the text has been reconstructed from codices from the late thirteenth century (*ibid.*, 144). There is also a second translation – a South Slavic version from the thirteenth or fourteenth century – which survives in copies from the sixteenth century (*ibid.*, 144). The 'Visions of Daniel', according to Alexander, was translated into Slavonic between 827 and 829 in Sicily (Alexander 1985: 64).

⁴² The Syriac original of the *Apocalypse* has been reconstructed and translated into German by Gerrit J. Reinink (1993). For English translations of the *Apocalypse* from Greek, see Alexander (Alexander 1985: 36–51) and Garstad (2012).

and phraseology which Pseudo-Methodius used to describe the tribulations preceding the end of the world are strikingly similar to the ones found in monk Isaija's account. The apocalyptic landscape in both texts is a desolate wasteland devoid of life and abundant with corpses, where Christians lie slaughtered and unburied. In a poignant passage, Pseudo-Methodius describes the consequences of the invasion and the devastation of the landscape where 'many [Christians] will perish and there will be none to bury the bodies' (Garstad 2012: 63) and 'the wild asses and the gazelles of the desert and every kind of beast, both wild and tame, will starve and grow less, and the men will be driven away and the animals will be wasted, and they will cut down all the trees of the forest and the beauty of the mountains will disappear. The cities will be made desolate, and the fields will be impassable because of the diminishment of humanity, and the earth will be stained with blood and will withhold her fruits' (ibid., 47).⁴³

In staking a comparison between the text of the prophecy and the colophon text, it is important to remember that the textual space available for exploring ornate description is very different in each case, with the prophecy text being more extensive than the colophon. Isaija's fragment condenses the defeat by the Ottomans and the description of the ensuing wasteland into a pithy lament: 'кости их падоша и непогребенни пребыша' ('their bones fell and remained unburied') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 2, lines 3–4). The apocalyptic landscape features the Earth 'ѡста земаа всѣх добрыхъ поустъ, и людеи и скотъ и иныхъ плодовъ' ('left without what was good in it – man, beast and fruit' (ibid., lines 31–33). Both accounts use the metaphor of the flight of a flock of birds to capture the rapid advance of the invaders' battalion. Where Pseudo-Methodius describes the incoming ships of the Ishmaelites as 'birds flying over the waters' (Garstad 2012: 15) during the Battle of Maritsa 'по оубиеніи во мѡѣжа сего хѡбраго деспота оуглѣша. просыпашася измалѣтѣ' ('when Despot Uglješa, the courageous man was killed, Ishmaelites spilled out'), the power of the invading forces is likened by Isaija to 'птица по въздоху' ('birds flying in the air') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 2, lines 14–17).

The way in which the time course has been understood is also similar in both works. For Pseudo-Methodius, time spans from Adam until the end of times, that is, from 'paradise' to 'last tribulation' until Christ returns to restore the world's order. Monk Isaija's span of time is much shorter, but he follows a similar logic.

⁴³ There is no English translation of the Slavonic *Apocalypse*. Given that the Greek original used for the Slavonic *Apocalypse* has been translated into English, I have borrowed the quotes from there to simplify citation. Otherwise, I worked with a late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century version of the Slavonic *Apocalypse* reconstructed and published by Istrin 1897.

Instead of writing about universal time, however, he attributes the same path from 'добра оубо времена' ('good times') when 'божественныа оубо цркви и сѣаа гора раѣви подобнѣ цвѣтахоу' ('Churches of God and the Holy Mount befitted paradise') to 'злѣише всѣхъ злыхъ временъ. когда егда ѡгнѣви бѣ христїанѣ западныхъ странъ' ('the most evil of all evil times when God got angered by the Christians of the Western lands') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 1, lines 93–101).

Both accounts also explore the horror of death by siege, and they conclude by allocating more despair for the fate of the survivors who were taken captive. The *Apocalypse* concludes the episode of suffering that precedes the appearance of the Last Emperor: 'And their road will be called a road of anguish, and old men and old women will travel along it, rich and poor, hungry and thirsty, bound captives, and they will think the dead happy' (Garstad 2012: 46–47). Isaija finishes his account of the battle by stating that he finished translating 'тогда оублажахоу живїи преже оумершихъ' ('when the living envied the dead') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 2, lines 43–44). Although the trope concerning the despair of the living people who survive a bloody or famished death can also be found in some eschatological passages of the Bible, such as *Ecclesiastes* 4:2, a comparison between Isaija and Pseudo-Methodius is especially pertinent.

The assumption that Isaija used the account of Pseudo-Methodius to compose his colophon can be based on the case of a Slavonic copy of the *Apocalypse* which, according to Istrin, has been housed in the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos since the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (Istrin 1987: 121). This is a location which Isaija would have frequently traversed and therefore indicates the extent of the access he could have had to this important apocalyptic work. More importantly, Isaija's colophon transforms the episode which Pseudo-Methodius added as a new element of Christian eschatology – the Last Emperor. As stated earlier, according to Pseudo-Methodius, the Last Emperor would come to redeem the Christians from the Ishmaelites. But redemption is preceded by despair; the narrator grieves on account of the fact that people have 'no hope of salvation or redemption out of the hands of the Ishmaelites' (Garstad 2012: 55). Monk Isaija employs this lament to report of the fall of the empire where 'не бо бѣ князя ни вожда ни наставника в людехъ, ни избавляюща ни спасающаго' ('there was no prince, nor an emperor, nor a teacher left among the people; there was no one to redeem them') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 2, lines 34–35). Significantly, Isaija omits the divine resolution that is to be found in the figure of the Last Emperor. This omission is central to understanding how monk Isaija locates the South Slavic community in apocalyptic time and space. One possibility is that Isaija felt that the upheavals brought about by the Ottoman conquests and the consequent

challenges to his own authority and to that of his superiors were far too immediate and tangible to entertain thoughts of salvation.⁴⁴ It is also possible that Isaija used the minor form of the colophon to muse over current circumstances and how the transformations would affect his milieu, and was less interested in discussing the vast timeline of entire generations that is encompassed by an apocalyptic scheme.

But why would Isaija use a text written in the seventh century in order to discuss contemporary political events? As mentioned earlier, the *Apocalypse* has been seen as a response to the seventh-century Arab conquests in the eastern part of the Byzantine Empire, present-day Egypt, Palestine and Syria, in which higher ecclesiastical circles declared the Arab victories to be temporary divine punishment for humanity's sins. Some scholars, such as Paul J. Alexander, M. Kmosko and Bernard McGinn, who have explored the political context in which the *Apocalypse* was written, argue that the anonymous author constructed a powerful imperial myth at a time when the majority of the Syrian population believed the opposite and subsequently welcomed the rise of the Arabs as they sought liberation from the Byzantine 'yoke'. In order to prevent massive popular support for the Arabs, the Syrian writer of the *Apocalypse* is seen by Alexander as having written 'a politico-religious manifesto... preaching that salvation from the Moslem yoke could come from only one source, the most powerful Christian monarch of the time, the *basileus* of Byzantium'.⁴⁵ By incorporating the rapid seventh-century expansion of Muslim power into an apocalyptic scheme of history, Pseudo-Methodius offered a divinely determined explanation of the political and religious crisis in Syria, a model which would be formative for the discursive shape of later political and religious crises in regions that traversed both the Eastern and Western churches. We could say that Isaija's apocalyptic colophon, like the *Apocalypse*, was born amidst serious religious and political crises.⁴⁶ Isaija's anxiety, too, was profoundly immediate due to changes in the geopolitical balance of power in the

⁴⁴ Before the Ottoman conquests, monk Isaija was one of the most powerful religious figures on Mount Athos. Three biographies have been written about him. During the reign of the Serbian emperor Stefan Dušan (1331–1355), Isaija became a *hegumen* of St Panteleimon monastery, receiving generous support from the Emperor. After the Emperor's death, Isaija played an important role in settling the dispute between the Patriarchates of the Serbian Empire and Byzantium. He was also a representative in the Imperial Court, where Despot Uglješa was the supreme judge (Ostrogorski 1965: 113).

⁴⁵ Cited by McGinn (McGinn 1979: 70).

⁴⁶ Much has been written about the political context in the Balkans in the period 1330–1371, but for our analysis it is sufficient to say that monk Isaija writes in a period when the Ottomans defeat the South Slavic rulers and make vassals of most of the remaining provincial governors.

Balkans. As Isaija tells us, the Despot Uglješa and King Vukašin were not the only ones to die. In the colophon we read that 'в то вѣ время и племя сербскихъ господъ седми мноу родъ конецъ пріапъ' ('at that time, I think, God put an end to the Serbian rulers of the seventh generation') (Goltz and Prochorov 2011: 2, lines 40–42). Here, Isaija refers to the death of the last Serbian monarch under the Nemanjić dynasty, the King Stefan Uroš V (Uroš the Weak), who died in December 1371, after which the Serbian Empire dissolved into fragments.

Thus, Isaija's account is 'pessimistic' not because he personally witnessed the battle, as has been suggested by Petkanova, but rather because he borrowed apocalyptic imagery to depict the fall of an empire. Monk Isaija corroborates the purport of his colophon by bringing the Antiochene sophist Libanius into the story. He says that even the most talented orator among the Greeks would not have been able to describe the suffering encountered after the Battle of Maritsa. By likening his task to that of Libanius, we see hints of what Isaija's patron might have demanded and the mode in which his ornate description was received among the political elite. That the colophon was not written as a truthful account can also be understood from the historical moment which coincides with the beginning of Isaija's translation and is described as 'paradise' for the Athonite monks.⁴⁷ We know from a few extant letters written by monks that the monasteries on Mount Athos were not as tranquil as the colophon suggests – they were frequently attacked by Ottoman armies even before the Battle of Maritsa.⁴⁸

By placing the military success of the Ottomans within an eschatological scheme, Isaija interprets the battle as a historical inevitability born of divine will. The colophon is therefore not to be positioned or interpreted as a fragment that documents the battle and its aftermath; in fact, it hardly provides any relevant

⁴⁷ Isaija does not explicitly state when he started translating Dionisysus's writings, but he does tell us that Theodosius, the Metropolitan of Serres, commissioned the production of the manuscript. Given that Theodosius was appointed metropolitan bishop in October 1366, monk Isaija could not have started translating any earlier than this.

⁴⁸ Historians such as Ostrogorski have pointed to letters written by Athonite monks in which they sought financial support from various rulers on the grounds that the monasteries were being demolished by the Ottomans (Ostrogorski 1965: 127). If these letters were not mere rhetorical exercises, could we say that Isaija writes about the financial stability of the monasteries during Despot Uglješa's rule when he tells us that 'the Churches of God and the Holy Mount befitted paradise'? As Ostrogorski tells us, this despot – like his predecessor, Stefan Dušan – invested generously in the Serbian monasteries of Mount Athos in order to have the monks' support for various political questions. After the battle, the financial stability of the clergy was shaken. After the collapse of his principality, it appears that the Athonite monks enjoyed fewer privileges than before.

information about the historical event itself. Instead, it tells us a lot about how one erudite clergyman sought to accept, respond to and fashion the political circumstances that surrounded him. It is important to note that the dark message of the colophon was meant to be passed on to the religious elite. We know this from the cryptogram at the end of the narrative, through which monk Isaija hides his identity. This was a common medieval practice by ‘the monachus ludens’ (‘playing monk’) who ‘does not want his identity to be revealed in the vanity of mundane life’ (Moutafov 2013: 72). Isaija must have been aware of the higher ranks among which the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius would circulate. These complex philosophical works were created for those who had the power to design and implement doctrines, such as the members of the ruling families and the highest reaches of the clergy. Including an apocalyptic colophon in the Slavonic *Corpus Dionysiacum* may have been a strategic decision, with Isaija employing a prophetic mode in order to demonstrate despair to his superiors over the recent incursions by the Ottomans and possibly also to shape the narratives through which this powerful readership could protect their political interests. The use of apocalyptic mythology for such ends was not uncommon – it represents a discursive practice employed in diverse imperial contexts to legitimate war and represent the rival political faction as an evil force. Similarly, powerful vassals used this type of narrative in order to foment social upheaval and opposition to the Emperor (Rubenstein 2011: xi–xiv).

The apocalyptic understanding of time and history, as has been pointed out by Guran, was closely related to imperial ideologies in medieval Bulgaria and Serbia. Isaija, just like his Byzantine counterparts, asserted in his colophon that the empire was God’s chosen realm and its fall was charted as the end of history to eventually culminate in the return of Christ, who would rule and restore glory (James 2010: 7). Isaija follows the model of history which interprets the fall of an empire as a necessary event, since it would release the Antichrist, who would eventually be defeated. The military defeat of one’s own empire according to this chronology could have been seen by Isaija as an inevitable step to overcoming a mighty rival who was, in turn, painted as a tyrant.

Isaija adds to the most common method of dating found in colophons (Byzantine year and indiction) by placing the historical moment in which the manuscript was produced within apocalyptic chronology. Not only does he record the time when the manuscript was created, but he also tells us how time and history could have been understood. The centrality of eschatological schemes permeates his account and it is absolutely critical to factor this into the interpretation of his colophon. His colophon is not a ‘personal’ eyewitness account of the decline of the Serbian Empire and Ottoman military success, but an argumentation used

against a powerful invading force through the employment of apocalyptic imagery. While the imperial greatness of the Nemanjić dynasty vanished with the Ottoman expansion in south-eastern Europe, the story of loss recounted in Isaija's colophon flourished. We know that it has been widely read across the ages since it accompanies many of the one hundred extant manuscripts copied from Isaija's protograph (Afonasin 2008: 112). As in the case of Isaija's colophon, tracking the lineage of South Slavic paratexts – in terms of the writing traditions they borrowed from – would be important not just to investigate the authenticity of the records and the claims of historical veridicity that have been forced upon them, but also to recover the various roles that these textual fragments could have played in the historical imagination of the South Slavs.⁴⁹

Note on the transcription of Slavic names and references

In order to be consistent while transcribing Slavic personal names and references I used the Library of Congress ALA-LC Romanization tables for Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Church Slavonic scripts. It is important to note that one name may be differently transliterated into Latin script depending on whether we use a Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian or Church Slavonic source. In such cases I have had to make a decision and follow it consistently throughout the article. For some Slavic names already transcribed in Latin script, I have had to use different transcriptions. Apart from the alternative transcription provided in the non-Slavic sources (Prochorov), I also used the Library of Congress system whenever I cited from Slavic sources (Prokhorov).

⁴⁹ Ilija Velez (Velez 1996: 367) alluded vaguely to how the South Slavs borrowed paratextual templates from Byzantine writing, especially regarding the format in which information is presented. Vladimir Ćorović wrote a long article about this borrowing (Ćorović 1910: 1–60), but failed to elaborate on the potential significance of the lineage in evaluating South Slavic paratexts as historical records.

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