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FROM MARGINS TO NATION: CHURCH SLAVONIC MARGINAL INSCRIPTIONS AND THEIR VALUE AS HISTORICAL SOURCES FOR MACEDONIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Abstract

The Church Slavonic notes inscribed in the margins of religious manuscripts during the Ottoman period often have been celebrated by Macedonian literary critics and some historians for the evidence they offer about the 'suffering' of the subject population under the Turkish 'yoke'. As it will be demonstrated here, the truth value of these accounts cannot be taken for granted. This paper is divided into three sections. First, I will provide an overview of the views on the Ottoman rule in Macedonian historiography, moving towards an analysis of the role Church Slavonic marginal notes have played in the construction of the historical myth about the Turkish 'yoke'. In the last part, the paper aims to suggest possible approaches to the study of the large paratextual historiographical corpus.

Keywords: Ottoman Macedonia, Church Slavonic colophons and marginalia, Church Slavonic manuscripts, Macedonian historiography.

I. Introduction

Within the large corpus of Church Slavonic marginalia and colophons – notes or marks providing us with information about the production, purchases, bindings or uses of the manuscripts – we sometimes find references to important Ottoman conquests and battles, births or deaths of Sultans and remarks about their rule in Europe. These intriguing writings have already attracted attention among Macedonian historians and literary critics. Previous scholarship mainly has focused on the clues these notes can offer with regards to manuscripts' history, or to the question of the veridicality of these accounts.[1] There are two streams of opinion regarding the truth-value of Church Slavonic paratextual writings. The marginal notes either have been celebrated as truthful accounts accurately describing the suffering of the Macedonian people under 'Turkish yoke' or they have been dismissed as literary exaggerations, bearing little relationship to historical reality.

This paper aims to a) discuss the reception of the Church Slavonic inscriptions dealing with Ottoman power in the Republic of Macedonia and b) provide a framework to enable a move beyond the sterile true/false dichotomy. Framing my paper in these terms, I will begin by providing a general introduction to the 'Turkish yoke' trope present in the academic discourse in Macedonia, after which I will present the main views among Macedonian historians regarding the Ottoman period. The paper then focuses specifically on the truth-value attached to Church Slavonic marginalia and colophons and argues that these marginal inscriptions have played an important role in the construction of the historical myth about the 'Turkish yoke'. In the final section, by giving a few examples, I will suggest alternative frameworks for studying the marginal notes containing references to historical events from the Ottoman period.

II. The Perceptions of the Ottoman Period in Macedonian Historiography

Not so long ago, in November 2012, the then Macedonian minister of Information Technology Ivo Ivanovski, said that he would initiate anti-Turkish-soap-opera measures in the country. "We appreciate the Turkish video production houses" he said, but "we should stimulate our domestic TV production. We had enough, *five hundred years of Turkish yoke*."[2] The minister's statement embittered the Turkish community in the country and was seen as putting into danger the extensive bilateral trade relations between Turkey and the Republic of Macedonia. Ivanovski responded by denying any intention to offend, saying he "was just using historical facts".[3] The minister's statement is a good example of making use of the 'Turkish yoke' trope for political and nationalist purposes. The trope – or the narrative that the Macedonian nation defended itself after a long suffering under foreign domination – is a central political myth for national self-determination in the region and has held an important place in the popular and official historical memory. Apart from being a vital facet of contemporary political discourse, the 'yoke' is one of the key areas of exploration in the folk and cultural scene, constituting the themes of many folk singers, visual artists, poets, novelists and filmmakers.

In the collective memory 'Turkish yoke' stands for the endless exploitation of the subjugated native populace by the Ottoman administration. The main features of this trope include the forced conversion of Slavs into Islam; of young boys removed from their homes and recruited into the special army of janissaries; of beautiful Macedonian women engaged to harems; and of churches destroyed and converted into mosques. These specific strands are used to bolster the larger conclusion that the Ottomans halted the cultural and political development of the Macedonians, causing the region to regress by centuries.

Similarly, much of the Macedonian historiography perceives the Ottoman rule as a period of darkness and suffering in which national and religious independence vanished, with the aristocracy in ruins, the peasantry enslaved as bonded labour, and the youth conscripted to the ruling military forces as 'blood tax'. The negative stereotype of the 'Turk' was and still remains a very important rhetorical tool in the country for the process of nation-building and statecraft, employed mostly in the form of a symbolic distinction between 'us' (the nation) and 'them' (the usurpers and enemies of the nation). From the period when Macedonian historiography began to professionalise itself – in the first decades after the Second World War – until the present day, it has projected the heroism of the nation who managed to liberate itself from several oppressive foreign rulers, including the Ottomans. There is little doubt that the Macedonian professional historians played an important role in adapting, embellishing and distributing stereotypes about the 'Turks'. In fact, in the Republic of Macedonia the derogatory term *ropstvo* (yoke, slavery) was replaced with *vladeenje* (rule) in history textbooks compulsory for primary and secondary education very recently.[4] Having this in mind, it is not very difficult to imagine that the nationalist-oriented minister Ivanovski would be confident that he was only listing historical 'facts'.

A good example of early anti-Ottoman historiography is the work of Ljuben Lape, regarded as a pioneer in the historical establishment as he was the first to compile a corpus of texts that would eventually form the basis for the history of the Macedonian nation. Lape's corpus of historical accounts published in 1959 was initially used as material for classroom instruction before the first history textbooks specially produced for schools appeared. The contents of this compilation include a translation of an Ottoman document detailing a code of conduct to be followed by the Ottoman administration when it recruits a new contingent of children for the legions of the janissaries. Lape annotates this document by declaring that "the most difficult tax that our people had to pay was the taking away of their children, their conversion to Islam and their recruitment as janissaries. This tax was taken every fifth year".[5] Lape's attribution of oppressive measures carried out by the Ottoman administration contrasts starkly with the procedures the actual document describes. The code of conduct in question states the need to take good care of the children they recruited "as has always been the case". In the same document, there is an instance dated 1573, in which a high ranking officer of the empire requested the judges (*kadi*) to ensure that the child-recruits "will get enough food"; that "violence over the *reaya* [the lowest, tax paying class] is unacceptable during the process" of recruitment; that the officials should not forcefully take from the *reaya* food and clothes for the prospective janissaries; and that there should not be any looting in the areas where the *reaya* lived because it is the judges who would be held responsible for not protecting the *reaya*. While this latter instance is far more ambiguous regarding the history of the janissaries, it only begs more questions of Lape's univocal stance. That the high ranking officer intervened on behalf of the janissaries via the judiciary does not entirely absolve the Ottoman administration of crimes committed in their pursuit of the *devşirme*. Rather, it points towards a history of violence and dispossession which required urgent corrective action. At the same time, it also demonstrates that the *devşirme* was not an explicit policy of systematic abuse as Lape and other nationalist historians portray it as being.

Nevertheless, it is Lape's interpretation that holds sway up to the present day. In the history textbook for the second year of high schools still in use, the authors – without revealing the sources from which they develop their claims – write that the Macedonians were conscious of their national identity and had resisted the Ottoman rule in many ways. What they "most resisted was the so-called 'blood tax'; the peasants protected their children by hiding them, or by tattooing crosses on their foreheads, or by marrying them early. Sometimes they handicapped their children by mangling their limbs in order not to be separated from them".[6] The specific body of evidence used by the authors remains to be known. The authors fail to include perspectives which tell a different tale of how the *devşirme* was not always seen by the *reaya* in a negative light as it provided means of advancement for this lowest class, whose social mobility was otherwise very restricted.[7]

In another extract from the same textbook, the authors argue that Macedonians developed many ways of expressing their discontent at being subjected to foreign Muslim rulers. One such example, the authors say, is the 1564 Mariovo-Prilep rebellion. It is unilaterally interpreted as an armed conflict against the 'Turks'.[8] But these rebellions could be categorised under a class of struggles which were a response to feudal excesses and were not restricted only to the Balkan regions of the Ottoman Empire. Suraiya Faroqui writes of Turkish peasants from Anatolia who were also in similar conflict with their landlords (*timar* holders or *sipahis*) as they "were expected to treat the *timar* holder as their master". According to Faroqui, the reasons for these insurrections were various: The peasants were forbidden "to collect the corn from the fields until they (the *sipahis*) themselves had taken their share".[9] This often meant that the produce would rot. Other oppressive measures included the peasant requiring a *timar* holder's consent if they were about to leave the village and seek work in a city. The reasons for rebellion, whether caused by ethnic tensions or feudal relations, are crucial; they could strip away the identitarian hostility which characterises the "Turkish yoke" narrative – and the violence it engenders – in the Balkans.

Although dominant, the nationalist narrative regarding the Ottoman rule has been challenged since the 1970s. One of the first Balkan historians to use Ottoman archival materials, Aleksandar Stojanovski prefaces his book *Makedonija vo turskoto srednovekovie* ("Macedonia during the Turkish Medieval Period") with a frontal attack against mainstream historiography, declaring that "five centuries of Turkish rule, of the Balkan territories and its peoples, are no longer the dark period. "This darkness has been mitigated somewhat by the endless reserves of newly discovered primary sources in the archives of Istanbul".[10] In an article dealing with the impact of the Ottoman rule on the Balkans in the period between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Stojanovski argues that "with the end of the medieval states and establishment of Ottoman rule [...], drastic shifts in terms of socio-economic relations did not occur".[11] This view went against the prevailing idea that the Ottomans introduced a specific type of feudalism which disrupted the progress that the region had previously achieved. Views such as these have posed credible challenges to the predominant representation in nationalist historiography of the Ottomans as being the root cause of economic hardship and decline in the region.

It is possible to see why the early stages of nationalist historiography would have been compelled to perpetuate anti-Ottoman stereotypes in their eagerness to participate in the project of national integration. It is strange, however, that this paradigm should continue with full force even once the initial motives have expired. This continuity persists, as Dragi Ǵorgiev and Irena Stefoska have explained, because the organisation and goals of the "two institutions [the Department of History within the University of Ss Cyril and Methodius and the Institute of National History] which are the most influential in constructing historical discourse in Macedonia" have not changed considerably, and neither has their "epistemological and methodological conception in studying and interpreting the past, which only reinforces the continuity of the previous system".[12] The first generation of historians were closely affiliated with the socialist political establishment, but the outlook of the institutions has not changed even after Macedonia gained independence. Historical research and education are "strictly centralized and represent a monopoly of the state and its institutions" and the main goal of the institutions involved in historical research and education remains "to study the history of the Macedonian nation".[13]

The historiographical tradition in Macedonia is informed by an understanding that revisions of historical writing are initiated 'from above'. Examples of academic historians being subversive to the politically predominant views and crafting narratives without much institutional patronage are rare. The independence of the Macedonian state saw major re-evaluations of the past, causing a shift of focus on the object of historiography from Macedonian role in the Second World War to older figures and events from the medieval and pre-medieval times. Ulf Brunnbauer in his analysis of Macedonian historiography reveals that the new volume of *Istorija na makedonskiot narod* ("History of the Macedonian People"), published in 2000, "dedicated over 200 pages to the Ancient Macedonians", significantly higher than the first edition's allocation in 1969 of a mere twenty pages to that period.[14] Brunnbauer argues that the new "myths of origin and continuity" were primarily constructed by professional historians whose main task has been to trace the foundations of the nation to a period that precedes the founding of the state in the early twentieth century. He says, "the discourse on the ancient Macedonians was intended to substantiate the Macedonians' claim to a long national pedigree and also to a homeland".[15] The role of the Orthodox Church during Ottoman rule is another area that has witnessed re-evaluation. Risto Dinev and other authors of a 1970 history textbook downplayed the 'national' role played by the Orthodox Church during the Ottoman rule, writing with a palpably negative slant against the Church given the anti-Church policies of Socialist Yugoslavia. The textbook states: "During the Ottoman Rule the Ohrid Archbishopric kept its autonomy with Archbishop as leader. The majority of the archbishops were corrupted and greedy, and there were some who were even fighting against the Turks. Such is the case of Valaam, who got killed by the Turks in Veles."[16] In diametric opposition, a contemporary history textbook unquestionably praises the Church, especially at the cost of the Ottomans and the Greek phanariots, stating that "the Orthodox Church was the guardian of the Macedonian nation during the period of conversion. The churches were spaces where Slavonic culture and literacy were spread".[17]

The anti-Ottoman stereotypes shift in new ways to reflect the identitarian appeal for votes made by the dominant political parties. Dragi Ǵorgiev, an historian of the Ottoman Empire, has explored the negative attitudes in Macedonia towards the Ottoman rule, focusing particularly on the Ottoman religious monuments that were vandalized during the armed conflict in 2001 between the ethnic Albanian insurgents and Macedonian security forces. One of the main reasons for these attitudes, he argues, is the *Albanizacija* ("Albanization") of the mosques. The majority of Ottoman Turks left Macedonia during the Balkan Wars and the Second World War, which allowed the Albanians to occupy that vacuum by becoming the largest Muslim minority in the country. They also formed the highest ranks of the *Islamska Verska Zaednica* (Islamic Religious Community), the supreme Islamic authority in the republic. As a result, Albanian has gradually been introduced as the official language of worship. This perceived infiltration by the Albanians has led to regarding these religious spaces as symbols of Albanian separatism. Ǵorgiev concludes that "the old Ottoman objects are no longer perceived as Ottoman heritage or cultural monuments, but as religious institutions where, among other Muslim devotees, the most radical Albanians go".[18]

Apart from ethnic and religious prejudice, Aleksandar Stojanovski adds, historians in former Yugoslavia have overlooked the scale, the diversity and the complexity of the Ottoman Empire and should have assessed the issue of progress – or regression – on a regional and chronological basis.[19] Although the situation might have been different for other Balkan territories, there is evidence that what we today call the Republic of Macedonia did not enjoy any marked economic development until the end of the fourteenth century. As Stojanovski tells us of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Macedonia reached the same level of development as other regions in the Ottoman Empire and "without any doubts we can conclude that the cities in that period very highly developed".[20] Due to prejudice, historians have very rarely explored the earliest centuries of Ottoman rule, but have tended to focus almost exclusively on the national resurgence and the uprisings against the Ottomans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although there is consensus amongst historians that the last centuries of the Empire had been painful and chaotic for both the Ottomans and their subjects, "in historical thinking all the centuries of the Turkish period had been as gloomy as the last one".[21] Indeed, only a small proportion of Macedonian historiography deals with the period from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. The expanse of such stereotyping is important to observe as it does not just afflict historiography but also insidiously spreads into the dominant historical understanding manifested in public and popular discourse, be it school textbooks, folklore or television.

III. Marginalia as a historical source

In the period of decline and dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, professional and amateur historians from a few splintered nations in the European Southeast became interested in archiving the writing left behind by their ancestors, the South Slavic subjects of the Sultan. They were particularly enthusiastic about collecting and publishing marginal inscriptions from Church Slavonic manuscripts, hoping that by doing so they will offer a glimpse into the history of their nation. In the Balkans, in general, marginal inscriptions left behind in manuscripts and early printed books have been considered valuable, particularly by literary historians, as they "contain traces of the private life" of the South Slavs, which according to them, cannot be said for the rest of the Church Slavonic literary production. More importantly, these notes are believed to contain information about the history of the daily life of the South Slavs during Ottoman rule.[22] The compilers of Church Slavonic marginalia claimed that by protecting and copying these fragments – rare historical accounts of the South Slavs under Ottoman rule – they were preserving "the core" of the "population", an idea that has been transmitted largely unchallenged.[23]

In the case of the Republic of Macedonia, however, interest in archiving paratextual writings began to grow during the period of socialist Yugoslavia. Similar to their Bulgarian and Serbian colleagues, the Macedonian editors of compendia highlighted the importance of marginalia as a source for writing nation's history.[24] For instance, Atanas Pop-Gorgiev in the preface of his compendia *Stari Zapisi* ('Old Notes') published in 1996, wrote that the marginal inscriptions are

> important sources for the study of the political, cultural and economic history of our nation' adding that they are particularly important for historians as they 'mention names of important historical figures: tsars, feudal lords, archbishops, metropolitans and other church authorities, and as such they are authentic sources and can serve [the historians].[25]

Obviously, some Macedonian historians did follow this line of thinking and moreover, they sought to corroborate evidence of the 'yoke' in the marginal notes inscribed in Church Slavonic religious manuscripts. For instance, in the two versions of the most extensive study of the history of Macedonians mentioned earlier, marginal inscriptions are used as primary sources. This is evident from the fact that collections of marginalia are listed as cited references in the bibliography. However, it is important to note that we find no reflection on the use of these accounts; neither do the authors tell us which of their arguments have been based on evidence found in marginalia.

While some historians seem to have taken these records for granted, others were either reluctant to use them or when they did, the veridicality of marginalia was questioned. A good example for this is Aleksandar Stojanovski's commentary on the historical sources depicting the notorious Battle of Maritsa in 1371. One of the most important accounts for this event – in fact, the only known record created just a few months after the battle took place – is a preface to the *Corpus Dionysiacum Slavicum* written by the Athonite monk Isaija. In this account, Isaija depicts the battle – the biggest military success of the Ottomans in Europe before the fall of Constantinople – as a catastrophic event to occur while he was working on his manuscript. The event is not merely mentioned; Isaija provides a long depiction of it spanning around seventy lines. Several scholars from Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria have celebrated the truth-value of Isaija's preface "distinguished by its historical accuracy and credibility" in which there is a prevailing "feeling of dread from the future occupier' and hopelessness coming from the anticipation of future tragic events".[26] In response to the widely accepted notion among scholars that Isaija's preface is a reliable, eye-witness account, Stojanovski argues that the preface "is rich in hyperboles" and as such should be taken as a literary exaggeration. Comparing Isaija's preface with more recent sources, Stojanovski goes on to claim that Isaija "certainly exaggerated" by giving the number of 60,000 soldiers for the South Slav armies. Rather, Stojanovski holds, "in the campaign against the Ottomans around 20,000 soldiers took part". [27]

Stojanovski was not alone in his efforts to 'measure' the truth-value of important South Slavic paratexts. In former Yugoslavia, a few scholars have questioned the accuracy of some paratexts. Nenad Janković, for instance, holds the accounts of celestial phenomena to be 'unreliable' in that they often have 'wrong dates'.[28] Additionally, Đorđe Trifunović demonstrated that there is only one inscription contemporary to the Battle of Kosovo (1389), whereas the other paratexts valued by scholars, are based on folklore motifs and were written much after the depicted battle.[29] In the light of this debate we should understand the paper by the literary scholar Vangelija Despodova – *Zapisi za sostojbata vo Makedonija vo rakopisite od poslednite decenii na XVII vek* ('Marginal inscriptions on the circumstances in Macedonia on manuscripts from the last decades of the 17th century') – delivered during a conference predominantly attended by historians working with Ottoman archival documents. The marginal notes containing information about historical events, Despodova claims, are very important historical documents "which inform us about various historical events, about the political and economic position and the suffering of our people'. She goes on to say that the authors of these notes also 'expressed their opinion about particular historical events, which can be taken as the opinion of the entire Macedonian nation [at that time]".[30]

But what were the debates on truthfulness in writing when the accounts themselves were composed? Although the word of God was considered eternal, and hence fidelity of transmission was considered to be a virtue, the marginal inscriptions suggest that the scribes recognized the fundamental instability of writing. Not only do they present us with an elaboration of the theme of instability of writing, they acknowledge the general problem of textual instability as a fatal fall, brought upon humanity by the sin of Adam. If the scribes themselves are mindful of not ascribing absolute values of truth to their accounts and constantly foreground in their apologies their errors in writing, it is no small irony that a number of scholars take them to be either 'true' or 'false'. In fact, this dichotomy is particularly sterile for pre-modern pieces of historiography. As Thomas C. Ferguson tells us in the preface to his book, *The Past as a Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography*:

> church histories written in the fourth and fifth century need to be liberated from modern standards of historiography. History, for the ancients, was not the objective recounting of events (for that matter, neither is any telling of history). To fault church historians for 'errors' in their chronologies, or to

> accuse of them of being biased or one-sided seemed to me to be introducing a category or standard which would have been hopelessly foreign to a pre-Enlightenment world view.[31]

The same attitude should apply to the ways in which dates and events are regarded in South Slavic events. The questions posed to these chronologies and histories should not so much be whether dates are right or wrong but rather what such inconsistencies can tell us about the imagination of time for the clergy who produced these historical writings.

IV. The study of Church Slavonic marginalia and colophons

Although modern compilations of South Slavic paratexts are numerous, studies on these texts have been restricted to typological exercises.[32] As early as 1909, after the three volumes of Stojanović's compendia were published, Jovan Tomić complained that there had not been a study on these fragments despite the fact that the annotations were sources that were "enthusiastically employed".[33] The paucity of such scholarship can be explained by the subscription to a widely held view in the region that Church Slavonic paratextual writings represent outlying authentic "voices from below". These voices are "informing us about various events from the economic, political, military and social spheres" and are taken as transparent in their meaning.[34]

It is in these fragments that Blaže Koneski, the linguist who codified the standard Macedonian language, saw the beginnings of the use of vernacular language in written literature.[35] Scholars like Vladimir Mošin, Mihajlo Georgievski and Ǵorgi Pop-Atanasov, on the other hand, were interested in marginal notes for the clues they held of a manuscript's provenance. As Pop-Atanasov wrote in the preface to his collection of marginal inscriptions, "in these fragments we find important information regarding the history of the manuscript book, often there is precise information about the author or scribe, about the time and the historical circumstances in which the book was written, where it was written, who commissioned it, where did it travel after it had been written".[36]

This assumption of transparency has removed the need for a critical investigation of 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 only indexed.

In South Eastern Europe, the heritage of Church Slavonic marginalia and colophons left behind in liturgical and canonical manuscripts and early printed books presents an intriguing case where the marginal notes are bestowed with principal importance whereas their relation to the primary text and the larger tradition to which they belonged has been largely sidelined.

This separation has been considered permissible since a large selection of marginal inscriptions in Church Slavonic manuscripts are not marginalia per se. They do not comment upon the subject matter of the source text which they border; rather, they digress into other topics such as the difficulties of the scribes, political rivalry within the church, the natural disasters that destroy their dwellings, and the high prices of food and drink. The modern compilations of the manuscripts select only those inscriptions that can be comprehended without necessarily referring to the source text, and omit those that are meaningless without it, such as commentaries, glosses and editorial notes. In the overviews to these compendia, one often comes across the category *zapisi* (inscriptions). The category of *zapisi* includes paratexts, colophons, annotations about historical events, annotations by bookbinders, readers or pilgrims. But interestingly, the annotations which refer to the main text and cannot be understood without the main text are often exempted from catalogues.[37] The act of removing the fragment from its material context leaves this paratextual corpus disembodied, severely limiting the potential for historical investigation. Paradoxically, the acts of compilation and preservation themselves have become a reason for the paucity of analysis on the subject.[38]

Studying marginal notes without examining their source-text seems next to impossible because paratexts are physically tied to the text they comment upon. Nevertheless, there is another, more recent strand of scholarship, which has been drawing on the notion that commentaries are after all original texts and should not be seen as “secondary”. According to this view, the ways and circumstances in which commentaries were produced, used, received, and circulated across textual communities remain to be explored.

The reception of South Slavic marginal notes left in Orthodox manuscripts and early printed books is all the more intriguing in the context of such a debate. Though these paratexts have mostly been examined separately from their respective main texts, this is not because of an interest in the rich history of their tradition or circulation. Also, the narrative strategies and subject matter of marginal notes written in Church

Slavonic vastly differ from the majority of inscriptions that are the subject of the academic discussions on commentaries. While these fragments may have talked about life outside the texts they accompanied, they were very much a part of the communal life to which these canonical writings belonged. Manuscript production was an important activity for monasteries and the remarks left by bookbinders, scribes, and illuminators in the margins are fundamentally connected to the material history of the actual manuscript. Since the manuscripts were ritual objects in the monasteries and churches where they were used, the extent to which the marginal notes were involved in the monastic life would be lost to us if the history of the period were to be attested mainly through compendia. This vast corpus of paratextual inscriptions has not been coherently conceived of as a writing tradition that evolved over the centuries to have its own patterns, functions and meanings. It should be stressed that these patterns and meanings were borrowed from the dominant writing traditions of the South Slavs which were in turn modelled heavily on Byzantine writing traditions. A project that tracks the lineage of South Slavic paratexts is necessary not just to interrogate the authenticity of these records and the claims of historical veridicality that have been forced on them, but also to recover the various roles these enigmatic fragments played in the historical imagination of the South Slavs.

Another way of approaching the historiographical paratextual corpus of the South Slavs would be by exploring the local historical and cultural context which has created this production. As I have argued elsewhere, the South Slavic clergymen held various viewpoints regarding the legitimacy of the Ottoman rule.[39] Some writers denied any legitimacy to the sultans, often interpreting their military victories in apocalyptic terms.[40] Others acknowledged the Ottoman rule, but this acceptance was born out of mere fatalism: according to this view, there was no doubt that the Ottoman rule was 'tyrannical'; however, it was divinely ordained punishment for Christian sin. In contrast to the aforementioned ideological responses, there were writers who tacitly or explicitly endorsed the sultan's reign. The multifaceted factors at play in these accounts make it crucial for historians to see them as discursive practices. One way of exploring discourses of legitimacy crafted by the South Slavs, is by situating these accounts within the historical context in which they were composed. The political relations between the Ottoman state and the Orthodox Churches were often fundamental to the ways in which South Slavic writers represented Ottoman power in their texts.

NOTES

1 When I use terms such as “Macedonia” and “Macedonian scholarship”, I refer to one of the successor states of the Former SFR Yugoslavia, which was admitted to the UN in 1993 under the provisional name ‘The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’ after its constitutional name was disputed by neighboring Greece.

2 Emphasis is mine. “Ivanovski: Kje mora da se namalat turskite serii!”, *YouTube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47AaZyF_S0s> [accessed 30 November 2012].

3 “Reakcije na izjavu makedonskog ministra o ‘ropstvu pod Turcima’”, *TRT Bosanski*, <http://www.trt.net.tr/bosanski//news/detail/region/2/reakcije-na-izjavu-makedonskog-ministra-o-ropstvu-pod-turcima/10572> [accessed 20 November 2012].

4 Macedonian historians eliminated from use the derogatory term ‘yoke’ in history textbooks in 2003. See Tufan 2008, p. 791.

5 In Lape 1959, p. 181.

6 In Adžievski 2002, p. 63.

7 See Fleischer 2014, p. 19.

8 In Adžievski 2002, p. 66.

9 In Faroqhi 2005, pp. 54-55.

10 In Stojanovski 1989, p. 5.

11 In Stojanovski 1989, p. 64.

12 In Stefoska – Ǵorgiev 2008, p. 803.

13 *Ibidem*, p. 803.

14 In Brunnbauer 2005, p. 276.

15 In Brunnbauer 2004, p. 181.

16 Dinev et al. 1970, p. 228.

17 In Adžievski – Ačkovska – Ǵorǵiev 2002, p. 74.

18 In Ǵorgiev 2011, p. 197.

19 In Stojanovski 1989, p. 70.

20 *Ibidem*, p. 70.

21 In Kiel 1985, p. 44.

22 In Radojičić 1962, p. 102.

23 In Ivanov 1931, p. III.

24 The question of disputed boundaries of the geographical area of Macedonia is also reflected in the compendia. The Serbian and Bulgarian editions of marginalia collections include inscriptions composed on the territory of Macedonia. Macedonian scholars interpreted this as another example of nationalist ‘appropriation’ and published their own compendia largely relying on the notes published previously by their Serbian and Bulgarian colleagues.

25 In Pop-Atanasov 1996, pp. 5-7. Although I am using Macedonia as a case study, it is important to note that in the other counties from Southeastern Europe we find similar opinions on this matter. See, for instance, Sima Ćirković's preface to *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, where he says: 'Every scholar who had to deal with any larger thematic of Serbian history or Serbian culture had to rely on this unique compendium…Without exaggerating it could be said that the corpus of inscriptions is one of the pillars on which the development of historiography in our time is based. To its importance contributed the fact that in our country a few sources have survived so every, even the smallest text, should be appreciated' (in Ćirković 1982, pp. 3-4).

26 In Petkanova 1992, p. 196.

27 In Stojanovski 1989, p. 15.

28 In Janković 1989, pp. 36-37.

29 In Trifunović 1989, p. 9.

30 In Despodova 1997, pp. 212-213.

31 In Ferguson 2005, p. viii.

32 In Macedonia itself, we find several such compilations: Ugrinovska-Skalovska 1975; Popovski 1985; Pop-Atanasov 1996; Velev 2001. In Bulgaria the earliest and most influential such works were by Iordan Ivanov (Ivanov 1906 and 1931) and Nikola Fermandžiev and Venceslav Nachev (Fermandžiev – Nachev 1984). In Serbia, the Academy of Sciences and Arts published six volumes of paratextual material of old manuscripts and notes left behind in churches (see Stojanović 1902-1926).

33 In Tomić 1909, p. 49.

34 In Velev 1996, p. 364.

35 See B. Koneski and O. Jašar-Nasteva, Makedonski tekstovi X-XX vek (Skopje, 1966), p. 45.

36 In Pop-Atanasov 1996, p. 5.

37 This is rarely the case with Western European catalogues of manuscripts. H.J. Jackson in his book *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* tells us about the difficulty he had with his research on marginal notes, given that the annotations are not systematically included in catalogues. Catalogues normally "record the presence of marginalia only when they are authorial or associated with a famous name" says Jackson (Jackson 2001, p. 9).

38 On the other hand, the only reason that we know about some authors and manuscripts and events is because these scholars were so obsessed to transcribe so many of them. Many of the marginalia have been preserved until today because Ljubomir Stojanović transcribed them in his six volume book published in the period. The National Library of Serbia was destroyed with the German bombing of Belgrade, on the 6th of April 1941. A remarkable collection of around 300.000 books was destroyed, including around 825 Church Slavonic manuscripts.

39 See Nikolovska 2016, "Tsar or Son of Perdition", pp. 75-86.

40 This view is best exemplified in Isaija's preface mentioned earlier. Isaija's preface borrows from an apocalyptic writing tradition written in the context of the collapse of empire. By placing the military success of the Ottomans within an apocalyptic framework, Isaija interprets the battle of Maritsa as a historical inevitability born of divine will. The preface is therefore not to be interpreted as a fragment that was produced in order to document the battle and its aftermath for the future generations; in fact, it hardly provides any relevant information about the historical event itself. Rather, it is an account which can tell us about how one powerful clergyman sought to accept, respond to and fashion the political circumstances that surrounded him. See Nikolovska 2016, "When the living envied the dead", pp. 204-217.

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