

The South Slavic Parish in Light of Stephen Gerlach's Travel Diary

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I. Basic Concepts

One of the key questions faced when researching the South Slavic parish towards the end of the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the Early Modern Period (1300–1600) is the issue of transmission of the official Church teachings into the local, lay environment. The parish is recognized as the basic unit of church organization within which the entire social and religious life of the individual played itself out: “one belonged to one’s parish from birth to death and even beyond. The infant received baptism here, thereby becoming a social-moral creature.”² During this period, the largest number of parishes in Europe were found in rural areas, while the peasantry represented by far the largest social group.³ Territorially, in an ideal state, the boundaries of a parish overlapped with the boundaries of a village,⁴ representing the basic meeting point of different types of knowledge: general and international, rooted in the century-long written tradition of the educated Church elite, on the one hand, and local knowledge, beliefs, and skills of the parishioners gained through direct experience which was transferred

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² A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture: Problems of Belief and Perception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 78.

³ “On the Continent... 80 to 90 per cent lived in the country and for the most part worked on the land,” E. Le Roy Ladurie, “Peasants,” in *The New Cambridge Modern History. Vol. 13: Companion volume*, ed. Peter Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979), 115.

⁴ B. Kuripešić, *Itinerarium der Gesandtschaft König Ferdinand I. von Ungarn nach Konstantinopel 1530. Faksimiledruck nach der Ausgabe von 1531*, herausgegeben, mit einem Nachwort sowie einer Namenskonkordanz versehen von S. M. Džaja und J. Džambo (Bochum 1983), 44 gave a generalised presentation of the societal picture in Serbia (in the region of Kosovo and Metohija) in 1530, noting that “almost in every village there is a church and priest, who performs services at a designated time according to the rules of St Paul.”

orally, on the other. The said meeting could not play itself out through learned theological debates or lectures, but could instead be recognised in the external forms of piety and basic forms of Church life which were part of the everyday routine of the faithful. The basic question then becomes the following: what could have been the fund of adopted knowledge ensuing from this communication? Were certain ideas and concepts accepted in a more or less “pure form”? Which elements of Church teachings became an inseparable part of the religious and societal life of individuals we collectively refer to as “the people”? Certain answers can be reached only if we search for them in concepts such as popular culture, popular religion, and mediaeval folklore.

As Jean-Claude Schmitt argues, these concepts should not be understood as being mutually different or separate, as in this historical period culture was not separated from religion, nor should popular religion be seen as separate from folklore, which, in turn, is wrongly seen as fossilised “pagan heritage.”⁵ Rather, in order for these concepts and societal relations they describe to be represented more clearly, research into popular culture distinguishes between concepts such as “high” and “low” tradition, written and oral, “learned” and “unlearned” (from the viewpoint of official education) or clerical and lay culture, ruling and subordinate social classes, or the official and unofficial.⁶ Communication between the parish and Church authorities (the bishopric, metropolis, or

⁵ J.-C. Schmitt, “Religion, Folklore, and Society in the Medieval West,” in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, eds. Lester K. Little, Barbara H. Rosenwein (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 384–386. For similar views, see N. Z. Davis, “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures,” in *Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. Steven Ozment (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 321–342. Views that suggest that popular culture is static or unchangeable have been rejected not only by historians, but also folklorists, anthropologists and ethnologists, C. Lindahl, J. McNamara and J. Lindow, “Preface,” in *Medieval Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs, I–II*, ed. Carl Lindahl et al. (Santa Barbara–Denver–Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2000), xxiv–xxv. Folklore is seen as the unofficial culture of all societal groups, not just as the culture of the poor, cf. C. Lindahl, “Folklore,” in *Medieval Folklore: An Encyclopedia of Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs, I–II*, ed. Carl Lindahl, et al. (Santa Barbara–Denver–Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 333–342.

⁶ P. Burke, “Popular Culture,” in *Encyclopedia of European Social History from 1350 to 2000*, vol. V, ed. in chief P. N. Stearns (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001), 5–6 on the stated dichotomy and usability of *the binary model* for researching societal relations which enables consideration of levels of cultural distance and changes on the chronological plane.

patriarchate) can also be successfully described using the dichotomy of “centre” and “periphery.”⁷ These dichotomies should not be understood in their ultimate form, nor in the traditional understanding that cultural models are determined by social class.⁸ Instead, we are referring to methods that enable us to understand both interactions and states between these said poles.⁹ Societal interaction is not unidirectional on the societal scale,¹⁰ and research into popular culture can be represented through several concepts such as hegemony (subordinated classes view society through the eyes of their masters), resistance (different forms), acculturation, and appropriation (active reinterpretation of “offered” messages and meanings).¹¹

The transmission of knowledge and official teachings of the Church in the late medieval and early modern parish should not be seen or understood through the process of Christianising the masses or the final phase of the Christianisation of Europe that, according to Jean Delumeau, began when the Reformation and Counter-Reformation came onto the historical stage.¹² Our research will not achieve its goal if we rely on the terminology of the educated mediaeval Church elite which viewed popular beliefs and customs primarily within the framework of

⁷ W. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) distinguishes “two levels” of Catholicism in Spain in the 16th century. Alongside the universal Church, the sacraments, the Roman Liturgy and calendar are popular holy places, relics, local patron saints, holy days, which had a significance for the local community, independently of its social dividedness; cf. N. Z. Davis, “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures,” 322, 324; P. Burke, “Popular Culture,” 7.

⁸ Members of the educated elite of early modern Europe were “bilingual” and as such “bicultural,” as Peter Burke referred to them, as they were able to take part equally in both traditions, “high” and “low,” P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: New York University Press, 1978), 28.

⁹ P. Burke, “Popular Culture,” 5–6.

¹⁰ J.-C. Schmitt, “Religion, Folklore, and Society,” 382–383; P. Burke, “Popular culture between History and Anthropology,” *Ethnologia Europaea* 14 (1984): 6–7.

¹¹ P. Burke, “Popular Culture,” 4–5, 6 takes the concept of hegemony from the Italian Marxist A. Gramsci, while the strategy of appropriation is taken from the French sociologist M. de Certeau.

¹² J. Delumeau, *Katolicizam između Lutera i Voltera* [Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire] (Sremski Karlovci–Novi Sad, 1993), 5, 6 challenged the generalised and idealised picture of the Christian Middle Ages. His thesis sparked a fruitful discussion on the character of popular religion and folklore, in which the views of Delumeau lost a lot of their significance, cf. J.-C. Schmitt, “Religion, Folklore, and Society,” 379, *passim*; N. Z. Davis, “From ‘Popular Religion’ to Religious Cultures,” 321, 324.

something undesirable and worthy of contempt, accompanied with accusations of superstition and paganism.¹³

II. Sources and Their Methodological Analysis

The vast majority of the inhabitants of Europe were illiterate; hence Gurevich dedicated his book on the mediaeval world to the culture of the “silent majority.”¹⁴ Our understandings of popular beliefs, attitudes, meanings, artefacts and performances¹⁵ are mostly indirect, via those who had mastered the written word. Hence, as Peter Burke has observed, we can view the popular culture of the past times only “through two pairs of alien eyes our own and those of the authors of the documents, who mediate between us and the people we are trying to reach.”¹⁶ When it comes to sources, the first group of them is made up of – to borrow another of Burke’s metaphors – the “hostile eyes” of those who were prone to changing popular culture with the aim of aligning it with the views of the learned elite.¹⁷ The second important group of sources is made up of the observations of foreigners, passing visitors, most often represented in the form of travel writing or diary notes. Their importance lies in the fact that they have preserved direct testimonies regarding particular customs, performances and societal phenomena which, to the local literate elite, were ordinary, treated as given and thus not seen as worthy of mentioning.¹⁸ Yet regardless of the extent to which the passing visitor might have been a good observer and drawn by a particular phenomenon, he could not offer the relevant views of an “insider” who was native to the culture which he was describing. As an “outsider,” the traveller was unlikely to be able to capture the sentiments, “local allusions” and – at first sight – hidden meanings of social phenomena which he was encountering.¹⁹

¹³ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 207–243 (Chapter: “The Triumph of Lent: The Reform of Popular Culture”).

¹⁴ A. Gurevich, *Srednevekovyi mir: kul'tura bezmolstvuiushchego bol'shinstva* [The Medieval World: The Culture of the Silent Majority] (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1990).

¹⁵ P. Burke, “Popular culture between History and Anthropology,” 5.

¹⁶ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 68.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 207–243; cf. P. Burke, “Popular Culture,” 4.

¹⁸ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 66 argues that “much of we know about the great carnivals in Rome and Venice between 1500 and 1800 comes from the descriptions left by foreign visitors...”

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 66.

Travel accounts from South-Eastern Europe in the sixteenth century had significant value as a historical source for research into the first centuries of Ottoman rule. They contain much important information that pertains to historical geography, communications, economy and offer certain insights into demographic, ethnic and religious conditions.²⁰ A far smaller number contain a far greater wealth of other information which makes them important sources for researching popular culture. Indeed, not just of their own time period, but also of an earlier historical epoch of the Late Middle Ages. In this regard, one of the most important sources is the travel diary of Stephan Gerlach from the sixteenth century.²¹ The information which it contains increases even more in

²⁰ The significance of travel-inspired writings and diaries as a source for the history of South-Eastern Europe was observed a long time ago in the works of Čedomir Mijatović, Konstantin Jireček, Petar Matković, see next footnote. The researches of O. Zirojević, "Carigradski drum od Beograda do Sofije (1459–1683)" ["The Constantinople Road from Beograd to Sofia (1459–1683)"], *Zbornik Istorijeskog muzeja Srbije* 7 (1970): 3–197, and *Carigradski drum od Beograda do Budima u XVI i XVII veku* [The Constantinople Road from Beograd to Buda in the 16th and 17th centuries] (Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1976) distinguish themselves from a methodological point of view, as the information from foreign travel writings is systematically compared to information from Ottoman documents, *defters* above all else.

²¹ *Stephan Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch...*, Franckfurth am Mayn 1674. Gerlach's diary waited a whole century to be published. This occurred thanks to the efforts of his grandson, Samuel Gerlach, as is clear from the Baroque and long title of his book. A smaller part of it was translated into Bulgarian, S. Gerlach, *Dnevnik na edno pütuvane do Osmanskata porta v Carigrad* [A Diary of a Journey to the Ottoman porte in Constantinople], podbor, prevod, uvod i komentar Mariya Kiselinceva; predgovor i redaktsiya Bistra A. Tsvetkova (Sofia, 1976), while a translation into Turkish was published more than a decade ago, Stephan Gerlach, *Türkiye Günliği [Turkish Diary]*, 2 vols., ed. K. Beydilli; trans. by T. Noyan (Istanbul, 2006). The information contained in Gerlach's diary gained the interest of researchers as early as the second half of the 19th century who were interested in the communication route from Buda to Constantinople, Č. Mijatović, "Pre trista godina. Prilog izučavanju izvora za istoriju našeg naroda u XVI veku" ["300 Years Ago. A Contribution to the Study of Sources for the History of Our People in the 16th Century"], *Glasnik SUD* 36 (1872): 203–215; K. Jireček, "Stari püsheshstviya po Bülgariya ot 15–18 stoletie" ["Ancient Journeys in Bulgaria from the 15th to the 18th Centuries"], *Periodichesko spisanie na Bülgarskoto knižborno družhestvo* 6 (1883): 1–44; 7 (1884): 96–127; P. Matković, "Putovanja po Balkanskom poluotoku XVI vijeka: Putopisi Stj. Gerlacha i Sal. Schweigera" ["Travels Across the Balkan Peninsula in the 16th Century: Travel accounts of Stj. Gerlach and Sal. Schweiger"], *Rad JAZU* 116 (1893): 1–65; Y. Nikolov, "Bülgariya i bülgarite v sachineniyata na Stefan Gerlach i Martin Kruzius" ["Bulgaria and the Bulgarians in the Works of Stephan Gerlach and Martin Crusius"], *Godishnik na Sofijskiya universitet–Istoricheski fakultet* 67 (1973–1974): 58–74. The

significance when compared to those from completely different sources, such as the Slavic penitentials intended for the pastoral practice of the Church. These are ecclesiastical legal sources arising from the desire of the ecclesiastical elite to modify the views and attitudes of the mainly illiterate believers for the sake of “correcting the human roughness” as is noted in one of them.²² These types of literary works are characterised by the simple language of rules and instructions, while their compilatory and often apocryphal mark can be seen in the free combination of genres (legal texts and apocryphal literature) and texts of a canonical and non-canonical origin, which brings them closer to the manner of communication in the environment for which they were intended – the parish.²³ Simplification and adjustment of the text points to the overlapping reach of different influences and reveals, as Gurevich notes, the specific nature of the “zone of contact” between the learned and folk culture viewed through the “dialogue-conflict” relationship.²⁴ In this regard, the penitential books belong to the type of mediaeval literature that is counted among the “mediators” between oral, lay culture and

itinerary of Gerlach’s travels and stay in the Ottoman Empire were presented summarily, in the form of a list, by S. Yerasimos, *Les voyageurs dans l’empire Ottoman (XIV^e – XVI^e siècles)* (Ankara, 1991), 302–305. For the prosopographical research and the review of the content of the diary, see R. C. Müller, *Prosopographie der Reisenden und Migranten ins Osmanischen Reich (1396–1611)*, vol. III (Leipzig: Eudora-Verlag, 2006), 46–123. Recently, Gerlach’s diary data were used in research on the Istanbul Jews, Y. Ben-Nach, G. Saban, “Three German Travellers on Istanbul Jews,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 12 (2013): 35–51.

²² V. Jagić, “Sitna gradja za crkveno pravo” [“Smaller Collections of Ecclesiastical Law”], *Starine JAZU* 6 (1874): 147. On the Latin penitential literature, see A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 78–103. Following Gurevich, I pointed out the similar societal significance of South Slavic penitentials, S. Bojanin, *Zabave i svetkovine u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji (od kraja XII do kraja XV veka)* [Entertainment and festivities in medieval Serbia (from the end of the 12th to the end of the 15th century)] (Beograd: Istorijski institut–Službeni glasnik, 2005), 25–29, passim; S. Bojanin, “Parohijska zajednica u ogledalu srpskih penitencijalnih zbornika” [“Parochial Community in the Mirror of Serbian Penitential Compilations”], in *Srednjovekovno pravo u Srba u ogledalu istorijskih izvora* [Medieval Law in Serbian Lands in the Mirror of Historical Sources], ed. S. Ćirković, and K. Čavoški (Beograd: SANU, 2009), 261–283.

²³ S. Bojanin, “Penitencijalni sastavi u dečanskim trebnicima № 68 i № 69” [The Penitentials of the Dečani Trebniks № 68 and № 69], in *Dečani in the Light of Archeological Research*, ed. T. Subotin-Golubović (Beograd: Narodna biblioteka Srbije, 2012), 163–181.

²⁴ A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 222–223.

learned culture.²⁵ Analysing the concrete information described in the diary of a “foreign observer” within the context of the problems highlighted in the Slavic penitentials allows us to gain a more reliable and, I believe, more complete picture regarding Church life and education in the parish. Applying this method of comparison also allows us to evaluate the data contained in the sources themselves.

III. Stephan Gerlach's Diary

The travel accounts in the diary of Stephan Gerlach (1546–1612), a German Protestant clergyman, later professor from Tübingen and church dean of Tübingen,²⁶ contain all the advantages and disadvantages one might expect from this type of source. The author is a learned German theologian, the young chaplain of the Hapsburg diplomatic mission in Constantinople (1573–1578) who, as a talented observer, noted a wealth of information and observations regarding various topics.²⁷ During his time in Constantinople, which lasted several years, Gerlach found himself in the midst of lively negotiations between the Protestant leaders and humanist scholars from Tübingen on the one hand, and the senior hierarchy of the Greek clergy on the other. The negotiations were intended to secure the mutual understanding and cooperation of the two Churches, but these expectations were not fulfilled.²⁸ It is these circumstances and the general preoccupation of the

²⁵ Ibidem, 25–28; cf. J.-C. Schmitt, “Religion, Folklore, and Society,” 382.

²⁶ Gerlach was born in Knittlingen, in the Duchy of Württemberg, as the son of a quarryman. Upon completion of his studies of theology in Tübingen, he was ordained as a priest and appointed as chaplain to the Habsburg diplomatic mission of David von Ungnad in the Ottoman Empire. Upon his return to Germany, he became a doctor, which enabled him to have a university career as a professor, M. Kriebel, “Stephan Gerlach. Deutscher evangelischer Botschaftsprediger in Konstantinopel 1573–1578,” *Die evangelische Diaspora* 29 (1958): 74–75, 95.

²⁷ Assessments of Gerlach as a sober observer and his diary as an important historical source, were given by the most early researchers such as K. Jireček, “Stari püteshestviya,” 17–19, 96–111; P. Matković, “Putovanja po Balkanskom poluotoku,” 16–17; A. P. Lebedev, *Istoriia greko-vostochnoi cerkvi pod vlastiu turok. Od padeniia Konstantinopolia (v 1453 godu) do nastoiashchago vremeni* [The History of the Greek Eastern Church Under Turkish Rules. From the Fall of Constantinople (in 1453) to the Present] (S.-Peterburg, 19032), 52–54 or more recently, M. Kriebel “Stephan Gerlach,” 79 and Y. Nikolov, “Bülgariya i bülgarite,” 58–59.

²⁸ M. Kriebel “Stephan Gerlach,” 89–95. On the mentioned negotiations, A. P. Lebedev, *Istoriia*, 571–620; E. Benz, *Wittenberg und Byzanz. Zur Begegnung und Auseinandersetzung der*

Protestant intellectuals with the current religious and ecclesiastical questions of the time (included in the Augsburg Confession) that significantly influenced the formation of Gerlach's interests and his selection of the information that he presented in his diary. He presents himself as someone knowledgeable regarding the political and societal circumstances in the Ottoman Empire and an inquisitive investigator of the customs and religion of the Greeks, Turks, Slavs, Armenians and others. Gerlach noted that the Orthodox Christian "Bulgarians, Vlachs, Moldovans, Russians, Muscovites" share with the Greeks a common "religion, faith and Church customs."²⁹ In several places, he describes Church rituals, in particular the Holy Liturgy with a special focus on the Eucharist. He discusses the behaviour of the faithful during the rituals, as well as the various customs relating to annual holidays and the life cycle, the belief in the cult of saints, etc. He gathered the most information on the South Slavs during his return from the mission to Constantinople, during the summer of 1578.³⁰ His span of interest was the areas that lay along the road from Constantinople. The years spent in Constantinople made him relatively well acquainted with local administrative and political circumstances. For example, he wrote that the settlements of Burgas (Bergasch) and Dragoman (Dragomanli) belonged to Mehmed Pasha Sokolović or that the village of Vetren (Vedreno), south-east of Sofia, and the town of Belgrade fell within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Patriarch Gerasim of the Patriarchate of Peć.³¹

Gerlach presented his observations regarding parish life in the places through which he passed systematically, as if observing the forms from the visitation protocols kept in Protestant and Catholic lands. This may be one of the reasons why his diary is richer in description of religious

Reformation und der östlich-orthodoxen Kirche (Marburg, 1949), 94–96, 122; S. Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity. A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 247–255; D. Wendebourg, *Reformation und Orthodoxie: Der ökumenische Briefwechsel zwischen der Leitung der Württembergischen Kirche und Patriarch Jeremias II. von Konstantinopel in den Jahren 1573–1581* (Göttingen, 1986); W. J. Jorgenson, "Eastern Orthodoxy," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation II*, ed. in chief Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15–17 has the most important bibliography in English.

²⁹ "... Religion / Glauben / und Kirchengebräuchen," *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 56.

³⁰ The description of the journey to Constantinople in 1573 is twice shorter than the description of the return in 1578 and contains far less information on local Christian communities.

³¹ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 510, 517, 521, 530.

life and practice compare to other writers of a similar genre.³² The diary contains diverse information regarding the parish, the appearance of churches, cemeteries, basic church inventory (the chalice, an object upon which the author places a particular focus, books and icons), all the way to the societal position of the clergy, its education and familiarity of the laity with the basics of Christian teachings. With the goal of gathering as much information as possible, Gerlach did not limit his contacts with the local population to merely buying food or superficially enquiring about local attractions. He entered into conversations confidently, in the first instance with local parish priests who showed him their churches, but also with ordinary people who showed the good will to answer to his varied questions. The diverse and numerous information from Gerlach's diary on the familiarity of ordinary people with official Christian religion and the state of religious and social life in the South Slav parishes can be categorized into three basic thematic groupings. The first grouping is made up of issues related to the means and channels of communication through which the basic content of the Christian faith was transmitted (the language of the liturgy, familiarity with basic prayers and the cult of icons and relics), the second encompasses customs and forms of behaviour during rituals regardless of whether they belong to the official Church or not, while the third relates to issues of authority i.e. the attitude of the laity towards the parish priest as the official representative of the ecclesiastical authorities.

IV. Verbal Messages: the Language of the Church and the Language of the Parish

One of the basic questions that concerned Stephan Gerlach related to the language of Church rituals. Do the faithful understand the language of the liturgy and the sermon of the priest? Gerlach attended Church services relatively frequently on various occasions during his stay in the Christian areas of the Ottoman Empire and gained the impression that the participation of the "ordinary man" ("der gemeine Mann") in the

³² On the "visitation protocols" see J. Delumeau, *Katolicizam između Lutera i Voltera*, 232–239. A newer analysis of the "visitation protocols" as a source for research into the parish, along with remarks on the methodological limitations of their use, G. Strauss, "Visitation," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation IV*, ed. in chief Hans J. Hillerband (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 238–243.

Church rituals was reduced to the making of the sign of the cross (“Creutz machen”), chanting *Kyrie Eleison* and saying the word *Amen*, and that “he does not know nor understand more than that.”³³ The stated observation can be considered generalised, to some degree oversimplified, which is shown in some of the more detailed descriptions of the liturgy in his diary. The impression which he gained is entirely in line with the fact that he came from a very different milieu of Church rituals and practices in which understanding the words uttered in the ritual is closely tied to understanding the actions of the ritual and active participation in it. Gerlach set out his understanding of the importance of the vernacular in the pastoral work of the Church in one conversation with his friend and protonotarius Joannis Zygomalas, in which they considered the importance of diglossia in the Church life of the Greek community.³⁴

Understanding the language of the liturgy was one of the most important issues during the spread of Protestantism into South-Eastern Europe. Protestant missionaries pointed to the diglossia phenomenon. In the vicinity of Sibiu, for example, liturgical books in use in 1546 were not in the “local” but “foreign,” “Serbian language” (“Die Raczische Sprach”), while the local clergy were much divided over their use.³⁵ For his part, Gerlach was informed regarding similar circumstances in Albania, where the clergy was mostly Greek, from Morea and Ioannina. The local village population (“Land-volck”) did not understand the Church services, hence sermons were occasionally held in the Albanian language.³⁶ A similar situation was prevalent in the Greek Orthodox communities of Asia Minor where the Christians mainly spoke Turkish, while the liturgy in the Greek language was often not understood even

³³ “Mehrers weiß und versteht er nicht,” *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 206; R. C. Müller, *Prosopographie*, 100.

³⁴ In his diary (13 January 1577), Gerlach noted his disagreement with the views of the learned Greek that the sermon should be “in ancient Greek” (“in der alten recht Griechischen”), even if only two persons could understand it, as this was the language of the Bible and other religious literature. He held a view on the importance of the sermon being “in the common language” (“in der gemeinen Sprach”) so that the “people” (“Volck”) could understand it, *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 304.

³⁵ J. Karácsonyi, and F. Kollányi, ed., *Egyháztörténelmi emlékek a magyarországi hitújítás korából IV (1542–1547)* (Budapest, 1909), 522; on the content of this document, see S. Čirković, “Srbi i rani protestantizam” [“The Serbs and Early Protestantism”], *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju* 36 (1987): 16.

³⁶ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 151.

by the priests themselves.³⁷ Especially interesting are Gerlach's observations regarding diglossia in the Slavic churches. In conversation with the peasants of Bulgaria and Serbia, Gerlach observed that certain difficulties existed in understanding the Church Slavonic language of the liturgical books and rituals. In the Bulgarian village of Vetren, Gerlach noted on 20 June 1578 that the "ordinary man" does not fully understand the Divine Service.³⁸ He received a similar response from Christians in Belgrade, around twenty days later, where believers admitted that they did not fully understand the language of the liturgy, but that they did understand most of it.³⁹

The Slavic language of the Church rites was the language of liturgical books and inscriptions on icons and holy objects. Gerlach referred to this language using different names: "Slavic or Illyrian language" ("in Slavonischer oder Illirischer Sprache") but also "Croatian." In the aforementioned village of Vetren the liturgy was served in the "Croatian language" ("Crabatischer Sprache"), while the Slavic inscriptions on the icons were written in "Croatian letters" ("mit Crabatischen Buchstaben").⁴⁰ The diversity in the names of the language and alphabet should not be seen as an indication of Gerlach's lack of knowledge. His system of reference is entirely in line with the different names for the language and alphabet of the South Slavs among German Protestants.⁴¹ Gerlach's "Croatian," meaning Slavic, or rather Cyrillic letters could, in other circumstances, be referred to as "Rascian" ("characteribus ut vocant Racianis"), or "Serbian," as in the aforementioned source on the need to print the Catechism in the "Vlach" language.⁴² The practice of designation the South Slavic languages does not reflect the existence of diglossia in the church life of the South Slavs to which Gerlach pointed.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 372.

³⁸ "Den Gottesdienst... der gemeine Mann nicht alles verstehet," *Ibidem*, 518.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 530. Gerlach reports the direct testimony of contemporaries regarding the existence of diglossia when it comes to performing rites. In Slavistics, diglossia was considered only on the basis of preserved written material. For newer reflections in the context of mediaeval Serbian literature, see J. Grković-Mejdžor, *Spisi iz istorijske lingvistike* [Writings on Historical Linguistics] (Novi Sad, 2007), 443–459.

⁴⁰ *Gerlachs des Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 517, 518, 524.

⁴¹ On the South Slavic language with many names, E. Benz, Wittenberg und Byzanz, 180–183. During that time, there were opinions that Serbian and Croatian are the same language, "lingua Croatica sive Serviana," S. Ćirković, "Srbi i rani protestantizam," 17–18, note 38.

⁴² See above note. треба 35, јер су додали једну напомену на почетку.

It does not clearly differentiate the old and universal written Church Slavonic language of the liturgical books from the contemporary vernaculars and dialect.⁴³

Through conversations with Slavic believers, Gerlach brings direct testimony regarding their knowledge of basic elements of Christian teaching. Most of the faithful in Serbia and Bulgaria did not know a single official Church prayer. A smaller number of them could recite the Pater Noster (“Vater Unser”) or Credo (“Glauben”) “in their language” (“in ihrer Sprache”) but could not name the Ten Commandments (“die 10. Gebotte”).⁴⁴ The Protestant clergyman says nothing about knowledge of the Song of the Most Holy Theotokos (the Ave Maria).⁴⁵ It is from the content of these prayers that the basic knowledge regarding the Christian faith was drawn. Without getting into more detailed intricacies of theology, the faithful knew that there existed one God, that his son was Jesus Christ who suffered for the people and was crucified and resurrected, and that Christians awaited the resurrection of the dead and eternal life.⁴⁶ They openly made clear their poor knowledge of the basic Christian teachings and Church rites to Gerlach. The inhabitants of Vetren, Belgrade or Prhovo in Srem were aware that only a few members of their community knew these prayers. Some of them blamed, as in the case of the village of Klokotnica (Semisze), their parish priest for their lack of knowledge (see below). Despite their limited religious knowledge, all of them considered themselves Christians and kept to the annual cycles of fasting and feasting.⁴⁷ Upon Gerlach’s observation that he could not understand why the majority does not at least know the most

⁴³ In supporting this consideration, there is a case in another source when the syntagma “Cyrillic language” was used to mark the spoken language: “Die cirulisch gantz voll, dieselbig auch sein angeporne sprach ist,” S. Ćirković, “Srbi i rani protestantizam,” 20.

⁴⁴ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 518.

⁴⁵ “Seine Bauren können das Vater Unser und den Glauben / aber die 10. Gebotte nicht / wie auch keiner in der Bulgarey oder Servien,” Ibidem, 532. A similar state prevailed in the lay areas of Roman Catholic Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages. The prayers Pater Noster, Ave Maria, Credo, knowledge of the ten commandments and seven deadly sins, was intended to represent the basic repertoire of knowledge which was not reachable to the vast majority of the faithful, P. J. Geary, “Peasant Religion in Medieval Europe,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 12 (2001): 201–202. The faithful of New Castile in Spain in the 16th century knew only the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria, W. Christian, *Local Religion*, 141–142.

⁴⁶ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 530; R. C. Müller, *Prosopographie*, 121.

⁴⁷ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 515.

important Christian prayers, the inhabitants of Belgrade responded that as peasant labourers they did not have time for learning. They spent three to four months in the fields with the oxen or had to carry out work for their Turkish feudal overlords day and night.⁴⁸ The given explanation represents a widespread conviction stated in line with the basic way of life of the vast majority of Europeans in the 16th century, regardless of the country in which they lived or the faith of the master for whom they worked.⁴⁹ This did not mean that they were not familiar with other prayers or formulas close to those from the apocryphal literature of parish priests. Aside from this, the free time of holidays could be spent in entertainment, with dancing and song (see below), which was more appealing than learning the Catechism or reciting of prayers to God.⁵⁰ For the educated Church elite, most probably for the German clergyman as well, knowing the official prayers, along with regular church attendance, confession and communion, were the basic marks of a good Christian.⁵¹ These were the criteria for evaluating the piety of ordinary believers and the pastoral role of local priests.

V. Visual Message: The Power of Image and Relics

The message of the mediaeval Church could most easily be understood in the form of image. In the parish churches of the Orthodox world from Srpski Kovin or Räckeve (Raitzenmarck) and Slankamen (Schlamikanik) in the middle Danube region to the Greek villages in the closer and further environs of Constantinople, Gerlach noted the strong devotion

⁴⁸ Ibidem, 530; R. C. Müller, *Prosopographie*, 120.

⁴⁹ P. J. Geary, "Peasant Religion," 202. Laborious work and lack of free time as excuses for not knowing the most important Christian prayers was a common place in the Early Middle Ages sermons of Caesarius of Arles (died in 542), A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 16.

⁵⁰ Data from the Protestant visitations in the region of Wiesbaden mention a village from which the male and female youth went to Catholic regions in order to avoid Catechism lessons on Sundays, "so as to be free to dance all the day," G. Strauss, "Success and Failure in the German Reformation," *Past and Present* 67 (1975): 57. A call to religious instruction on Sundays and on feast days is contained in the mediaeval Penitential Nomocanon of Pseudo-Zonaras which was included among the Serbian printed Trebniks from the first half of the 16th century, S. Bojanin, "Epitimijni nomokanon Goraždanskog molitvenika (1523) u svetlu štampane i rukopisne knjige" ["The Penitential Nomocanon of the Goražde Prayer Book (1523) in the World of Printed and Manuscript Books"], *Crkvene studije* 15 (2018): 190.

⁵¹ P. J. Geary, "Peasant Religion," 202.

towards icons, which he refers to as “pictures” (“das Bild”). The first encounter with holy “pictures” in the summer of 1573 reminded him of the “papist” decoration of churches.⁵² Aside from being painted on the walls or part of the iconostasis, the “pictures” were exhibited in the central part of the church as well, where the appropriate icon was placed on the analogion for most major holidays.⁵³ Gerlach noted that these icons were kissed by people upon entering the church.⁵⁴ Communication via images and gestures were considered more comprehensible, while cults of the saints were closer to the religious experience of the faithful than other religious knowledge.⁵⁵ In the churches along the road to Constantinople, icons of St. George, St. Nicholas and Elijah’s ascension could be seen most often, leading Gerlach to conclude that these three “pictures” were present in every “Bulgarian church.”⁵⁶ These saints were particularly popular and as a result a significant number of parish churches in Serbia and Bulgaria that the author visited were dedicated to them. Nevertheless, the diary entries do not contain more detailed notes regarding the beliefs of the Slavic parishioners in the cult of the icon and the saints, unlike in other parts of the Ottoman Empire. In the Greek villages around Constantinople money and votive gifts were placed on the icons of saints for securing healing from sickness.⁵⁷ On one occasion, Gerlach witnessed a sick child being brought to the icon of St. Paraskeva in order to secure healing by, as he noted, “two incredibly beautiful (trefflich-schöne) women.”⁵⁸ However, the most sacred object which he saw and described on the road to Constantinople was not an icon, but the relics of the “Bulgarian King” St. Stephen.⁵⁹ They were on display in

⁵² Räckve (Srpski Kovin), 23 June and Slankamen, 29 June 1573, *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 13, 15. For identifying the places, see O. Zirojević, *Carigradski drum od Beograda do Budima*, 89–92, 156–158; S. Yerasimos, *Les voyageurs*, 302.

⁵³ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 341.

⁵⁴ “Wer in die Kirche hinein gehet / der küsset es,” Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Cf. P. J. Geary, “Peasant Religion”, 200–201; A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 39–77; W. Christian, *Local Religion*, 23–69.

⁵⁶ “... die 3. Bilder hab ich noch in allen Bulgarischen Kirchen gefunden,” *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 521.

⁵⁷ Holy Angel, 6 June 1576 and Aghia Paraskevi, 1 May 1577, Ibidem, 206, 341. For identifying the villages, see S. Yerasimos, *Les voyageurs*, 303. Compare the similar practice of votive offerings in New Castile in the 16th century, W. Christian, *Local Religion*, 95–96.

⁵⁸ The village of Aghia Paraskevi, *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 341.

⁵⁹ These were the relics of Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282–1321) from the Nemanjić dynasty which were moved to Sofia, probably in the second half of the 15th

the main Sofia church dedicated to St. Marina. The “chest” (“Truhe“), i.e. reliquary was placed in front of the iconostasis, while the “body” (“Cörper”), i. e. the relics themselves were wrapped in garments, apart from the hands, which were exposed to the direct gaze of the faithful. Several bowls were placed on the chest of the saint in which Gerlach noticed several money donations.⁶⁰

Observations regarding the “modest” level of knowledge of Christian teachings in the parish are stated by Gerlach without any intention of belittling. Nevertheless, on the margins of the diary there have been printed occasional comments with explanations and remarks on the main body of the text. In one of them, the belief in the healing power of saints was labelled as “the superstition and idolatry of the Greeks.”⁶¹ The comment was printed along with the main text which describes the money offerings on the icon of St Athanasius which represents a votive gift of a woman who was cured from the plague.

VI. The Power of Customs: Official and Unofficial Rites of the Parish

Gerlach's diary contains a number of important descriptions of the ritual behaviour of the faithful, either with regard to official Church or unofficial and local customs. The value of his observations is derived from the fact that they are unique and that they come from an individual interested in various ecclesiastical and religious questions in the regions in which he stayed. His descriptions of the liturgy are not limited purely to the acts of the priest and deacon, but also the behaviour of the ordinary faithful. Thanks to such descriptions, certain elements of the local lay practice within the universal rite are preserved. Particularly interesting is Gerlach's description of the celebration of the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul on 29 June 1578 in the village of Klisurica (Ku-

century, K. Jireček, “Stari püteshestviya,” 118. Today, the relics are kept in the cathedral church of St. Sunday in Sofia.

⁶⁰ *Gerlachs des Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 521.

⁶¹ “Aberglaub und Abgötterey der Griechen,” *Ibidem*, 206. The comment corresponds to the views of an educated Protestant who considered healing through prayer, amulets or magical healing as the “superstition” of the mediaeval church, cf. M. Lindemann, “Medicine and healing,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation II*, ed. in chief Hans J. Hillerband (New York–Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 39–41.

Guritzesme) not far from Bela Palanka, between Niš and Pirot.⁶² The village church of St George was too small to receive all the gathered villagers. Inside the church were older men (“etlich alte Männer”), while women (“das Weiber Volck”) stood outside the main door.⁶³ This order reflected the existing social stratification of the holy space of the church, which was present in other parishes too. In his description of the Belgrade church of the Holy Archangels, Gerlach noted, alongside the gender and age differences, those of class as well. In the central part of the church, along the wall, were benches intended for older men, while from the “third part” of the church, or rather the narthex in which stood two marble baptismal fonts, the liturgy was followed by women and “common people” (“der gemeine Pöbel”).⁶⁴

In his descriptions of church services, Gerlach pays significant attention to the rite of the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the acts of the priest in the altar space and the ritual behaviour of the faithful. During the Great Entrance, the faithful would bow to the ground “as if they were not worthy of seeing the sacrament with their own eyes.”⁶⁵ Interested in the question of Eucharist, he describes the act of receiving communion and distributing the antidoron after the end of the liturgy.⁶⁶ Active participation of the laity in certain parts of the liturgy showed that they possessed certain knowledge, at least to the extent that they were familiar with the basic repertoire of prayers (see above). However, the behaviour of individuals during the Divine Service could literally depend on where they stood in the church. During the liturgy on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, the portion of faithful who could not enter the church – i.e. women – showed little interest in the rite. As they stood outside, at a certain distance from the centre of activity, they spent their time in non-religious conversation (“prattle”) as if they were “in any other place.”⁶⁷

⁶² For identifying the place, see O. Zirojević, “Carigradski drum od Beograda do Sofije,” 183. In S. Yerasimos, *Les voyageurs*, 303, 304 the belief is expressed that this is Bela Palanka.

⁶³ *Gerlachs defß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 522.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 529–530.

⁶⁵ “...bückten sich alle zu der Erden nieder / als ob sie nicht würdig wären das Sacrament mit ihren Augen // anzuschauen,” Galata, Constantinople, 26th Septembre 1574, *Ibidem*, 64. Several years later, Gerlach described similar behavior at the liturgy in Klisurica: “daß Volck bückte sich bis gar auff den Boden/und creutzigte sich,” *Ibidem*, 523.

⁶⁶ Description of the distributions of antidoron after the liturgy, *Ibidem*, 64, 523.

⁶⁷ “Sie...haben ein Geschwätz miteinander / wie sonsten auf einem Platz,” *Ibidem*, 522.

In the description of the liturgy in the village of Klisurica some less formal types of behaviour during the communion of the faithful are presented. In the direct meeting with the parishioners, the priest would, despite the delicate part of the rite, stay in short conversation with some of them – even in laughter – receive a small amount of money from another in lieu of some debt and so on. Such behaviour by the priest and villagers who were receiving the holy gifts appeared irritating to Gerlach.⁶⁸ From the point of view of the community, on the contrary, it was not considered unusual or inappropriate. The priest did not live in the same village and the meeting with him was, likely for most, temporally and spatially limited. The Protestant clergyman did not fail to note that children of the age of two to three years old also received communion, particularly as he saw that one of them spat out the holy gifts.⁶⁹ For the participants in the liturgy, this was not an unusual act, but an inevitable part of the practice of delivering communion to small children. In other areas, some children would receive a smack from the priest for such behaviour.⁷⁰ The handling of the Eucharist is an important topic in the penitential texts in which there are warnings regarding irregularities, with the threat of appropriate penances. A member of the faithful was to swallow the communion, the priest had to take care not to spill the contents of the holy cup (along with the wooden or brass chalice, Gerlach often mentions a piece of cloth and several brass spoons), while it was important to ensure that any communion that was spat out was not eaten by a dog. If an unpleasant event did occur, whatever was spilled was to be “buried” in the ground, along the wall of the church or burnt, while reading the 100th psalm.⁷¹ The attitude towards the Eucharist was not just a matter of the rite. The priest was called upon to keep a close eye on the parishioners, as in such situations he could uncover any hidden heretics secretly attempting to spit out the holy gifts.⁷²

After the liturgy, the priest would bless the food brought to the church, the bread, wine and first fruits, and then he would hurriedly set

⁶⁸ “Dabey es doch auch sehr ärgerlich zugegangen,” *Ibidem*, 523.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 523.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 166,

⁷¹ The penitentials dealt with the different issues of the spilled or spat the holy gifts, V. Jagić, “Sitna gradja,” 136, 141, 144, 148–149.

⁷² *Ibidem*, 149.

off for home. The inhabitants of Klisurica would carry on with the celebrations. The blessed food was consumed in the church and around it, for the purpose of which long tables and benches were used, across which Gerlach came relatively often, as he says, in front of the doors of “Greek and Bulgarian churches.”⁷³ The tables were used for organizing feasts on the occasion of the celebration of a saint or the commemoration of a deceased.⁷⁴ A special event at the celebration of the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul were the song and dance of two groups of maidens.⁷⁵ Gerlach had attended similar celebrations before. The inhabitants of Aghia Paraskevi not far from Constantinople had gathered on 26 July 1577 to celebrate the village Feast day. The community was somewhat richer and the women were dressed in “velvet and silk,” carrying gold and silver necklaces. A group of young adult males sat separately gathered. After the liturgy, a feast was organized around and inside the parish church.⁷⁶ On another occasion, the author referred to the organization of a lay celebration during the time of the fasting cycle. The villagers of Klokotnica would gather after the liturgy to praise, in a good mood (“sind guter Dinge”), God, the saints, the Virgin Mary and St Nicholas, the patron of the village church.⁷⁷

In Gerlach’s description of the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, he presents the detailed content of a celebration that mediaeval Church authors would have described as “twofold (suguba) joy and mirth” or “spiritual and carnal celebration.”⁷⁸ The societal importance of the lay celebration is stressed in the penitential texts. In an effort to align the celebrations of the faithful with the official views of the Church, parish priests were banned from organizing feasts with food and drink in front of the church. The obligation of the priest and his parishioners was to

⁷³ “Vor der Thüre hat es wie vor allen andern Griech = und Bulgarischen Kirchen / viel Bänck und lange Taffeln,” *Gerlachs defß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 522.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 206.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 523. Cf. S. Bojanin, *Zabave i svetkovine*, 125, 329.

⁷⁶ *Gerlachs defß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 368.

⁷⁷ Gerlach was in Semisze (Klokotnica) on 16 June 1578, at the time of the fast of SS. Peter and Paul, *Ibidem*, 515.

⁷⁸ S. Bojanin, “Srednjovekovna svetkovina između privatnog i javnog” [“The Medieval Festivity Between the Private and the Public”], in *Privatni život u srpskim zemljama srednjeg veka* [Private Life in the Medieval Serbian Lands], ed. S. Marjanović-Dušanić and D. Popović (Beograd: Clio, 2004), 253–254, 277; S. Bojanin, *Zabave i svetkovine*, 61–62, 70–72.

move the “carnal celebration” from the public holy space of the church yard to the private space of the home.⁷⁹

Another event that drew the attention of the German clergyman was the tragic death of several inhabitants of the village of Grocka (Klein Palanka), not far from Belgrade, on 8 July 1578. During stormy weather the rain caused a landslide in which several houses disappeared, killing members of two families. The husbands and fathers avoided death as they were not in the village during those days. As with every other rite of the life cycle, the funeral was tightly rooted in local practice and interwoven with the official Church rite-at the same time. The deceased were laid on the ground, dressed in clean clothes, while their heads were decorated with wreaths of flowers and scented plants. Mourning women gathered around the deceased, crying and wailing (“beweinten sie / und sungen ihre Klaglieder”), beating their own chests, ripping out their own hair and scratching their own faces, occasionally kissing the deceased on which blood fell from their cheeks. All the members of the community, “women and men, young and old” (“Weiber und Männer / Junge und Alte”), took part in the burial rite, which ensued several hours later, after the graves had been dug. The bodies of the deceased were buried in two separate graves, while a clod of turf was placed under their heads. Instead of a coffin, the bodies were framed and covered with wooden planks. For his part, the priest sprinkled red wine over each of the buried and threw several pieces of earth to each of the four sides of the grave. The priest’s service ensued, after which those gathered dispersed home.⁸⁰

Gerlach ends his description at this point. He does not mention the funeral feast (*daća*) which perhaps did not take place. He wrote of a funeral feast three weeks earlier during his stay in Klokočnica. There, he noted that the funds for its organization were taken from the estate of the deceased, to the value of 5 to 8 thalers, depending on the size of their estate. After weeping for the deceased, a feast would ensue during which a jovial atmosphere could be observed.⁸¹

⁷⁹ On the ecclesiastical and lay concept of celebration see S. Bojanin, “Srednjovekovna svetkovina između privatnog i javnog,” 270–273; S. Bojanin, *Zabave i svetkovine*, 43–98. Similar forms of celebration existed in other parts of Europe as well in the 16th and 17th centuries and both Catholic and Protestant reformers of parish life spoke out against them, P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 207–243.

⁸⁰ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 528.

⁸¹ “Wann sie den Todten genugsamb beweynet / so verzehren sie dieses Geld und machen sich miteinander wieder frölich,” *Ibidem*, 515.

The tragic event in Grocka was cause for making a fairly detailed account of the funeral customs. Wishing to find out more about the customs which he was unfamiliar with, Gerlach asked the priest regarding the meaning of pouring the wine over the deceased or throwing the lumps to the sides of the grave. The answer that he got was laconic: “that is the custom among us.”⁸² Nor was there explanation in terms of theology, religion or social significance which the author, perhaps, expected from his colleague. For the parish priest and inhabitants of Grocka, the rite was a familiar one and did not require further explanation. Gerlach met with the same response several days later, in Belgrade, although the cause was different. Enjoying the hospitality of Belgrade’s priests, he learned of the widespread practice of widowed priests taking the monastic vows, as well as of the practice of divorcing on the part of priests wishing to withdraw into monastic solitude. Upon his objection that the latter was contrary to Holy Scripture (“wider die Heilige Schifft”), there ensued the – by now familiar to him – laconic answer – “that is the custom among us” – after which all discussion would become superfluous.⁸³

This phrase was intended to express in the most succinct manner possible the significance and importance of the current custom. Detailed and scholarly explanations regarding its origins, meaning, etc., were not necessary for it to be respected. The importance of the rite was rooted in its holiness and belief in its longevity and unchangeability. Objections and reference to authorities originating outside the local community with the goal of the local practice being abandoned did not succeed. The answer given to Gerlach is not just evidence of a well-established practice, but also of a certain strategy of resistance towards views and attitudes that did not originate from a domestic environment. It is within this paradigm that we should examine the extent of the influence of the mediaeval penitentials of parish priests and the ruling hierarchy of the mediaeval Church.

⁸² “Es sey bey ihnen der Brauch also,” Ibidem, 528.

⁸³ “...antworteten sie mir: Es sey bey ihnen der Gebrauch also,” Ibidem, 530. The historiography is familiar only with the first part of Gerlach’s conversation with the priests in which they discuss the taking of monastic vows by a widowed priest, R. Grujić, *Iz naše prošlosti: O drugom braku sveštenstva* [From Our Past: On the Second Marriage of Priest] (Sremski Karlovci, 1909), 3–4.

VII. Parish and Authority: The Flock and Its Priest

The parish priest was the most important mediator in the spread of the views and knowledge of the Church elite in the parish. As noted, this knowledge was not transmitted in the parish in its “learned” form, while the parish priesthood was in many ways a partaker of the culture of its parishioners.⁸⁴ The priest’s knowledge and his views of the world were significantly formed by the cultural forms of the environment in which he grew up and worked. Probably in line with the custom of parish visitations of his time – and being a clergyman himself – Gerlach paid due attention to the societal position of the parish priesthood. He noted that in terms of dress or external appearance the priest was not particularly distinct from other parishioners and that he dressed “as the Bulgarian” or “as any other Serbian peasant.”⁸⁵ In the summer, he could walk barefoot, with shortened trousers, thus dressed holding a funeral service, as in the case of the tragically deceased in Grocka. What did set him apart from his flock in terms of his external appearance was his “priest’s hat” (“Pfaffenhütlein” or “Priester Cäplein”).⁸⁶ It was an important item of clothing, which indicated the social standing of the individual and represented the basic symbol of the priestly occupation.⁸⁷ During the time of Christian and Muslim rulers, the Orthodox clergy of the Slavic Churches did not fully belong to the economically ruling class.⁸⁸ The basic income of the priests were derived from their services around the parish, or rather from offertory or “alms” (“Allmosen“), as Gerlach referred to them, which they received for baptisms, weddings, confessions and funerals.⁸⁹ These were also incomes mentioned in the

⁸⁴ Cf. A. Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*, 10–21, passim; J.-C. Schmitt, “Religion, Folklore, and Society,” 382.

⁸⁵ “Wie ein ander Bulgar” or “wie ein ander Servischer Bauer,” *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 523, 528.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 523, 528.

⁸⁷ The “priest’s cap” as a symbol of the priestly rank is mentioned in Article 31 of Dušan’s Code, M. Burr, “The Code of Stephan Dušan: Tsar and Autocrat of the Serbs and Greeks,” *The Slavonic and East European Review* 28 (1949): 204.

⁸⁸ D. Dinić-Knežević, “Prilog proučavanju sveštenstva u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji” [“A Contribution to the Study of the Priesthood in Medieval Serbia”], *Godišnjak Filozofskog Fakulteta u Novom Sadu* XI/1 (1968): 51–56.

⁸⁹ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 530. The so-called “epitrachelion income” is referred to here, regarding which we know little due to the lack of sources, cf. R. Grujić, *Srednjovekovno srpsko parohijsko sveštenstvo* [The Medieval Serbian Parish Priesthood] (Skopje,

mediaeval penitentials, although not the only ones in the period of Christian rulers.⁹⁰ In the Ottoman Empire, the mentioned income was not enough to support the existence of many priests, hence some of them engaged in additional, artisanal work, as in the case of the Belgrade archpriest Lazar, who was “a dyer” (“Färber”).⁹¹

What set the priest apart from his flock was mastery of the holy sacraments and the written word, from which were derived the priest’s spiritual powers in the social life of the parish.⁹² As literate individuals, in mediaeval Serbia and Bulgaria they were the bearers of basic education and disseminators of written texts through the copying of books necessary for the Church life of the community. Gerlach left testimony of the existence of several educational centres in the regions along the road to Constantinople. In Sofia, the metropolitan’s seat, there was a “Bulgarian school” and alongside it another one for boys.⁹³ The parish priesthood was trained in individual monasteries, where schools were also established. Gerlach mentions them in the monastery of St. Demetrius not far from Bela Palanka and the wider area of Belgrade, in the monastery of St. Nicholas and in Hopovo in Fruška Gora (most probably both refer to the same monastery).⁹⁴

The body of knowledge contained in the penitentials from the Trebnik (prayer book) were mainly intended for the parish priesthood, which was expected to inform the believers regarding various transgressions and different types of sins. In them, the weight of each sin was determined through the length of penance. A particular tool for transmitting such knowledge was confession, which was, according to the penitentials, compulsory twice a year, at the start of the Christmas

1923), 62. In his writings, B. Kuripešić, *Itinerarium*, 44 writes vaguely and idealistically of the parish which supports its priest. Regarding the modest incomes of parish priests under the Ottomans, see M. Mirković, *Pravni položaj i karakter srpske crkve pod turskom vlašću (1459–1766)* [Legal Status and Character of the Serbian Church under Turkish Rule] (Beograd: Zavod za izdavanje udžbenika, 1965), 147–150.

⁹⁰ A. Solovjev, “Srpska crkvena pravila iz XIV veka” [Serbian Ecclesiastical Rules from the 14th Century], *Glasnik SND* 14 (1934): 37. Cf. D. Dinić–Knežević, “Prilog proučavanju sveštenstva,” 56–61.

⁹¹ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 530; cf. R. C. Müller, *Prosopographie*, 64, 121.

⁹² Cf. S. Bojanin, “Jezik pretnje u srednjovekovnim pokajničkim knjigama” [“The Language of Threat in the Medieval Penitentials”], in *Theolinguistic Studies of Slavonic Language*, ed. J. Grković–Mejdžor and K. Končarević (Beograd: SANU, 2013), 333–356.

⁹³ *Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 521.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, 524, 530.

and Easter fasts for all those older than 12 years.⁹⁵ The confessor was expected to question the confessant regarding a larger number of sins written down on lists or according to questionnaires that were usually part of the rite of confession. How this worked in practice and the extent to which the priest strictly kept to the instructions regarding confession, we do not reliably know. Certain descriptions of the practice are given by Gerlach who, at the time of the aforementioned Feast of St. Paraskeva in the village of the same name near Constantinople, witnessed the confession of the parishioners. They formed a queue in the church and waited for the priest or monk to hear their confession, each one of them individually before the icon of St. Paraskeva. After confession, a book was placed on their heads from which prayers of absolution were read. At the end of the rite, each person left some money for the priest, between 6 and 20 aspers.⁹⁶ As usual, Gerlach does not fail to notice the gifts to the priests for their services, derived from their power to administer the sacraments. He lists the liturgies (masses), betrothals, weddings funerals, and “other spiritual services.” Holiness and money went hand in hand in the everyday life of the parish, “as with the Papists” (“wie auch bey den Papisten”), notes the Protestant clergyman.⁹⁷

The authority of the priest was not derived merely from his ordination; rather, he had to be accepted by his local community as well. The penitentials contain detailed instructions to priests on how to engage with their flock and how to preserve their authority.⁹⁸ Gerlach recorded the existence of disagreements between the inhabitants of the village of Klokotnica and their priest who ministered to several other villages.⁹⁹ It would seem that the disagreements were significant, as the peasants openly expressed their discontent to a foreigner. They blamed their priest for his poor pastoral work, accusing him of being responsible for their poor knowledge of the Christian faith. Aside from that, he forced them to fast strictly including a complete ban on eating meat. It would seem that the reasons for their dissatisfaction lay elsewhere. The parish priest displayed certain ambitions to interfere with the marriage policies of his parishioners on the authority of his spiritual power. He banned entry into

⁹⁵ A. Solovjev, “Srpska crkvena pravila iz XIV veka,” 36.

⁹⁶ *Gerlachs des Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 368; see above note. Треба 89.

⁹⁷ *Gerlachs des Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 357.

⁹⁸ See above note. Треба 92.

⁹⁹ *Gerlachs des Aeltern Tage-Buch*, 514–515.

second marriage, even when a spouse had died early. Such actions brought about a significant increase in the number of young widows in the village. If someone did dare to enter into a second marriage, the priest had to be informed and the couple married for the second time would have to pay him a significant amount of money. In ordinary circumstances, notes Gerlach, the second marriage tax paid to the priest was twice as much as for the first (24 aspers), while the local spahi also needed to be paid. On the basis of this information, it is clear that the parish priest used his religious and societal position to impose on his parishioners control over their eating habits and, indirectly, over the creation of kinship and societal ties at the local level.

VIII. “That is the Custom among Us”

Gerlach’s travel diary contains information unusually important for studying the popular culture of the South Slavic lands not only in the 16th century but also in the Late Middle Ages. The author describes phenomena that are mediaeval, long present in the parish and particular to its societal and religious function. These phenomena can be considered in the context of relations between the learned and written culture and the local culture of the oral word. In certain mediaeval sources, they are presented typologically or determined by genre, whether in penitential books, certain hagiographies or apocryphal literature, regarding which Aaron Gurevich has written. When it comes to South-Eastern Europe, it is important to stress the continuity of these relations and phenomena in the parish after the Ottoman conquest. In a certain way, this continuity was confirmed ecclesiastically and politically through the renewal of the Patriarchate of Peć in 1557, within whose boundaries lay most of the South Slavic communities along the road to Constantinople through which Stephan Gerlach travelled.

Doubtless, the significance of the diary for this research topic owes most to its author. Unlike his colleagues in Catholic and Protestant Europe who scrutinised the customs of ordinary people, Gerlach can be seen as a “double outsider” in the Slavic (as well as Greek) lands. He is a member of the learned class who visits rural communities while on the other hand, as a Protestant he belongs to different religious and political centres and their customs. Viewing societal phenomena from that fairly distant position, he pointed in a generalised way to a certain unity of customs and beliefs in the Orthodox Greek–Slavic–Romanian world of

South-Eastern and Eastern Europe. Such a view does not necessarily see all the possible diversity of local customs in individual parishes, nor does it more precisely or clearly testify to the dynamics of control over the parishes on the part of Orthodox religious centres in Constantinople or Peć. Thanks to his position of being a foreigner in passing, rather than a domestic reformer of village customs, Gerlach bequeathed to us very interesting information regarding Church and everyday life in the lay environment of the Balkan peninsula. Thanks to his meticulously kept diary, the “silent majority” was in some moments able to “speak up,” briefly but fairly clearly and convincingly.

Diglossia was present in the official and ritual communication of the Church (the liturgy and other Church rites) and the extent to which an individual peasant, herder or artisan – who represented the bulk of the population in the parishes of the Ottoman period – understood official Church rites and prayers was dependent on the individual efforts of a priest (or his bishop). These same groups did not belong to a privileged social class, nor were they such in mediaeval Christian states. In Gerlach's time, it is important to note, local masters – as adherents of the Islamic religion – remained outside the parish structure. However, this did not mean that there was no societal or economic stratification in the South Slavic parish. It was vaguely described by the traveller in the case of the creation of the societal concept of space in the parish church in Belgrade. It is clearly recognizable from his descriptions that a certain consensus existed in the parish regarding deference towards certain customs, either those related to official Church rites or other, unofficial ones. Organization of societal space (the church and the churchyard) and time (feast days), behaviour during the liturgy and after it, devotion to icons and relics, and the belief in saints and their miraculous apotropaic powers, were part of the experience and knowledge of the local community. An important role in creating this knowledge lay with the parish priest who interpreted the basics of Christian teachings. Certain disagreements could arise between him and the flock (Klokotnica) during the unaligned application of general and comprehensive traditions of the Church in the sphere of local knowledge and behaviour. Customs and experiences cultivated in the parish represented the strong identity of the entire community. Hence, it was not necessary to explain them in terms of categories of “high” culture. The smallest attempts at change from “above” could run into corresponding forms of resistance. In

communication with the curious foreigner, there was a type of indeterminate, but unambiguous response which expressed faith in the complete validity of the practice – “antworteten sie mir: ‘Es sey bey ihnen der Gebrauch also,’” i.e. “they answered me: ‘that is the custom among us.’”

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