Image - Body - Space: Serbian Orthodox Monasteries and the Creation of Patriotic Memory in the 18th Century

Abstract:

The paper deals with the problem of a relation between the sacred spaces and the holy bodies in the context of the Serbian culture of the 18th century. The focus is set on the minority group of the Orthodox Serbs in the Habsburg monarchy and on the analysis of their use of the holy relics in the struggle to preserve religious identity amidst attacks from the Catholic Church. The aim of the research is to explain the political use of Orthodox religious traditions and visual means for the creation and spreading of the new patriotic conscience in the early modern period. Religious patriotism was one of the main forms of patriotic awareness among the Serbs at the time when the old Orthodox dynasties of Nemanjićs and Brankovićs had disappeared, when they had lost their country and found themselves under the Muslim and the Catholic rulers. The relics of the Serbian medieval saints were brought along during the migrations and distributed throughout the monasteries in the archdiocese of Srem. Their presence in the monasteries gave a new quality to the perception of the space. The faithful flocked to pay homage, to express their piety and loyalty, while the church hierarchy worked on shaping the final image of these cults. With time, the services and hymns in honour of these saints were written and published, and they become an integral part of the liturgical and devotional practices among the Serbs. At the same time, the leading Serbian artists published a great number of images of these saints. The aim of this widespread glorification of the saints was to accelerate the development of the patriotic religious consciousness among the Serbs. This will remain a key determinant of identity until the late 18th and early 19th century, when the idea of a nation/national identity started to gain ground.

Keywords: *sacred space, holy relics, orthodox Serbs, religious patriotism, icons, 18th century.*