

Original Scientific Paper

YΔK: 322(497.11)"11/14"

322(439)"11/14"

27-36(497.11)"11/14"

27-36(439)"11/14"

DOI: 10.5937/zrffp55-56001

THE FIRST SAINTS OF HUNGARY AND NEMANJIĆ SERBIA: THE MODEL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

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Received: January 13, 2025

Accepted: March 10, 2025

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Keywords:

Holy Trinity;
royal sanctity;
saintly dynasty;
Middle Ages;
Árpád;
Nemanjić.

Abstract. This paper examines the possibility that the first “national” saints in Nemanjić Serbia and medieval Hungary were conceived in triads, resembling the image of the Holy Trinity or the triune God. During the Middle Ages, for peoples without direct representatives in Christian history, “national” saints—whether individuals or groups—were shaped according to selected models, often drawn from early Christian times and biblical history. Archetypal images from the Christian tradition show that their selection always carried political significance, reflecting an ongoing tension between the past and the present. It is important to explore the potential political message behind the proposed model of the Holy Trinity. This exploration should take into account the political and historical context during the establishment of the earliest saintly and dynastic cults in early Christian Hungary under the Árpád dynasty, as well as in Serbia during the era of the first Nemanjićs. Since both states, after their foundation, were confronted with the challenge of establishing and consolidating stable royal, dynastic, and ecclesiastical authority, along with the need to unify it, the question arises if the saintly triads of the Nemanjićs and the Árpáds, crafted in the image of the Holy Trinity, could have served as a fitting framework for developing political, dynastic, and ecclesiastical rhetoric aimed at conveying the notion of their unity and legitimacy, based on their divine selection and ordination status. Ultimately, one must consider how closely related these two proposed models were and whether, and to what extent, the older Hungarian model may have influenced the Serbian model, which is over a century newer.

² The paper resulted from the project 1554 Assessing Neoplatonism in the Religious Tradition of the 14th- and 15th-Century Balkans (ANEB), part of the IDENTITIES (ИДЕНТИТЕТИ) program by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

Introduction

In the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages, establishing a legitimate position in the international community required possessing an independent state, an autocephalous church, and “one’s participation in holiness”—a genuine contribution to the spiritual heritage of the Christian world at that time (Чанак-Медић et al., 2014, p. 13; Поповић, 2016, p. 119). The possession of “their” national saints was particularly important for those peoples that lacked representation in the events of Holy History and direct contact with the consecrated soil of the Holy Land. A unique group of national saints consist of holy kings who stand as God’s chosen leaders for new and destined peoples (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 10). In addition to the phenomenon of holy kings, the idea of holy dynasties emerged in various countries across Europe.³ The idea underlying the concept of a holy dynasty was that the founder’s holiness could be transmitted to the entire ruling family. This is how the phenomenon of holy dynasties arose: the belief that certain virtues (*idoneitas*) and miraculous properties were inherited within the framework of *regal semen*. Based on related beliefs, a strong bond formed between the holy dynasty and the chosen people, which is especially well known in Serbia and partially in the neighboring country of Hungary (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 38).

National saints, whether individuals or groups, were shaped according to selected models, often drawn from early Christian times and biblical history. Archetypal images from the Christian tradition reveal that their selection was always politically significant, reflecting an ongoing tension between the past and the present. Instead of analyzing individual models of holy rulers, which has already been extensively discussed in scientific literature, this text focuses on the possibility of a model of the Holy Trinity.⁴ We explore its origins and symbolic

³ The popularity and prestige of holy dynasties in Europe began to rise in the 11th century (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 21).

⁴ See Marjanović-Dušanić (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, pp. 17–84) for a detailed review of the older literature on the “models” or “typology” of holy rulers.

significance in the formation of national pantheons and holy lineages, focusing on the Nemanjić dynasty in Serbia and the Árpád dynasty in Hungary, as well as the potential influence of the older Hungarian model on the more recent Serbian one.

The Model of the Holy Trinity: The Serbian Case

It seems that the concept of the holy Nemanjić dynasty was established from the very foundation of the dynasty, with the first Serbian archbishop and founder of the autocephalous church, Sava I, often rightly mentioned as its creator and originator (Поповић, 2016, p. 119; Чанак-Медић et al., 2014, p. 13). The fundamental pattern of a national saint, which would leave a lasting mark on the Serbian ruling ideology, was undoubtedly established by the creation of the cult of Saint Simeon Nemanja, the founder of the dynasty (Поповић, 2006, pp. 41–73; Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, pp. 100–119). The cult of Simeon Nemanja was gradually and meticulously established by his son Sava, in cooperation with another of Nemanja's sons—Stefan, the first-crowned king of the Nemanjić dynasty (Поповић, 2016, p. 119). Sava and Stefan carefully designed the cult, considering



Figure 1. The cycle culminates with the scene of the Translation of the Body of Simeon Nemanja from Chilandar to Studenica, south chapel of Radoslav's exonarthex, Studenica. Photo by Nikola Piperski

all essential theological, liturgical, and material aspects. At the heart of the cult of St. Simeon lies the powerful concept of the ruler–monk–saint (Поповић, 2016, p. 119). This idea represents the ideal integration of leadership, spirituality, and sanctity, making it a compelling and inspiring foundation for the cult (Поповић, 2006; Поповић, 2016, pp. 119–120; Talbot, 2015, pp. 215–230). The processes involved in establishing the cult were heavily influenced by the mechanisms and methods used in the Byzantine Empire. Specifically, the literary templates for the actions and events implemented were inspired by Byzantine cult practices (Eastmond, 2003, pp. 707–749; Поповић, 2016, pp. 119–120).

The establishment of the cult can be traced through several carefully planned stages: the ruler's premortal monasticism, his death surrounded by a miraculous aura, the elevation, translation, and deposition of the body accompanied by miracles, and finally, the creation of celebratory compositions intended for worship (Поповић, 2006, pp. 41–73, with a detailed review of the older literature and sources). After abdicating the throne, Nemanja retired to Mount Athos, where he became a monk and eventually passed away. His relics were later elevated (*elevatio*), transferred to Serbia (*translatio*), and interred (*depositio*) at Studenica, where they were venerated for bringing peace and performing miracles. The transfer of Simeon's relics to Studenica (Fig. 1) formed a prototype for all later mausoleums of the Nemanjićs.⁵ Over time, celebratory texts were progressively developed for the cult, eventually culminating in two *Lives and Services*.⁶

By building the cult of his father, Sava created a model of the ruler's sanctity, which, as it appears, he intended to apply to his brother Stefan, the first king of the dynasty. As Danica Popović notes, the available data, mainly found in biographical literature, suggests that the canonization of the first-crowned king of the dynasty was part of a broader initiative spearheaded by Saint Sava. This initiative aimed to establish a holy dynasty (Поповић, 2013). According to Theodosius of Chilandar, after Stefan the First-Crowned died, he was temporarily resurrected through a miracle by St. Sava. It was crucial to extend King Stefan's life so that he could become a monk before his death, just like his father. "At that moment, while those present expressed 'horror and admiration,' Sava made Stefan a monk, who

⁵ This site features a prominent grave, paintings that emphasize soteriology and dynastic themes, and a specially designed reliquary program. Together, these elements convey the essential messages of the Nemanjić ruling ideology (Поповић, 1992; Поповић, 2006; Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, pp. 100–119).

⁶ The idea of the ruler as God's chosen one, an invincible warrior, and an embodiment of justice, wisdom, and mercy was taken from Byzantine imperial encomiums. On the other hand, Simeon's monastic image was built around the traditional topos of Byzantine hagiography, chosen to highlight those ascetic virtues that qualified him for sainthood. As pointed by Danica Popović, the content of the cult is rounded off by Simeon's epithets as miracle worker, myrrh-bearer, and "fatherland lover," taken directly from the *Miracula of Saint Demetrius of Thessalonica*, which also served as a model for compiling a "catalog of miracles" in building the ruler's charisma (Поповић, 2016, p. 120).

then died in his arms...” (Теодосије Хиландарац, 1970, pp. 220–222). Stefan the First-Crowned was initially buried at Studenica, beside his father, but in the spring of 1229, his relics were transferred to Žiča.⁷ Danica Popović suggests that Sava’s decision to move Stefan’s body shortly after his initial burial, and for no apparent reason, was part of a new and significant agenda. This action should be understood in the context that Žiča was intended to serve as both a cathedral and a coronation church, as explicitly stated in the monastery’s founding charter (Поповић, 2013, p. 579; Чанак-Медић et al., 2014, pp. 13–21; about the charter: Суботић, 2007, pp. 51–59). There is no doubt that it was Sava’s idea that “all future kings of this state” should be crowned over the relics of their first, holy predecessor, thereby adopting a practice common amongst Europe’s medieval monarchies (Поповић, 2013, p. 579; Чанак-Медић et al., 2014, pp. 13–21). Stefan’s “intact” and miraculous remains were placed alongside Christianity’s holiest relics—those of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and other prominent figures of Holy History, all of which, thanks to Sava of Serbia, were kept at Žiča.⁸ Thus, the relics of the first-crowned king were placed in an environment that, by the standards of the time, emulated Jerusalem and Constantinople—a symbolic piece of the Holy Land transplanted and reconstructed on Serbian soil. By placing such an important national shrine next to the greatest Christian relics, the message was conveyed that the Serbs had become part of sacred history, a legitimate “chosen people” (Поповић, 2006, pp. 207–232; Поповић, 2013, p. 579; Поповић, 2013, pp. 157–170).

We believe that the available evidence suggests that Sava’s goal was not only to canonize his father, the founder of the dynasty, and his brother, its first king, but also to initiate the process of his own canonization as the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its first archbishop, a process that was completed after his death. This can be seen as part of Sava’s broader strategy to establish the sacred legitimacy of the state, the dynasty, and the church (Поповић, 2013; Чанак-Медић et al., 2014, pp. 13–21). The cult of St. Sava began to take shape shortly after his death. A central figure in the development of the cult of the first Serbian archbishop was Arsenius I (1233–1263), Sava’s devoted disciple and successor (Маринковић, 1988, p. 231; Теодосије Хиландарац, 1970, pp. 250, 258; Поповић, 2006, pp. 82–90). Throughout his life, Sava prepared Arsenius as his successor, indicating that he also guided him in this regard. Sava was the only Serbian saint known to have performed miracles during his lifetime, suggesting

⁷ The biographers of Stefan the First-Crowned offer differing dates for the transfer of his relics to Žiča—Domentian places it before Sava’s trip to Palestine, while Theodosius dates it after his return. In this instance, as in many others, the earlier biographer’s account is considered more credible. For the chronology of the translation of Stefan’s relics, see Marković (Марковић, 2009, pp. 14–15) and Поповић (Поповић, 2013, p. 577).

⁸ This aspect was not fully realized, but the focus of the cult was on the incorruptible relics. The cult of Stefan the First-Crowned was not fully established until the seventeenth century, when Patriarch Paisios wrote a *vita* and a service (Поповић, 2013, p. 273).

that he was already regarded as a “holy man” before his formal canonization. This could imply that Sava played a significant role in shaping his own path to sainthood (Поповић, 2006, p. 989).⁹ Additionally, Sava’s choice of Sava the Sanctified (Sava the Anointed) as his spiritual role model suggests that he sought recognition as holy himself. Sava the Anointed was regarded as a “holy man” during his lifetime, and like many early ascetics, he had the ability to perform miracles (Поповић, 2006, p. 99).¹⁰ He was believed to be a chosen vessel through which God’s power and grace operated, enabling him to perform extraordinary miracles that surpassed the abilities of ordinary people (Brown, 1971, pp. 80–101; Galatariotou, 1991, pp. 1–10; Angenendt, 1997, pp. 9–10; Поповић, 2006, p. 98). Sava the Anointed was regarded as a high spiritual authority, endowed with miraculous powers that protected individuals and the community (Поповић, 2006, p. 99).

If we accept the assumption that Saint Sava sought to establish a cult for his father, Stefan Nemanjić—the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty—his brother, its first-crowned king, and himself as the first archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church, we can hypothetically consider them the first triad of dynastic saints, as well as the first saints of the new Serbian state and the Serbian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, it can be suggested that this triad, which we might call *the Holy Trinity of the Nemanjić dynasty*—comprising a ruling father, a ruling son (king), and the spiritual leader of the Serbian Church—was inspired by the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. At its very core, this idea likely originated from the well-known Neoplatonic concept that earthly reality reflects the otherworldly, with the hierarchy on Earth mirroring that in Heaven. As Woodfin notes, “(t)he idea that earthly reality is a reflection of heavenly reality was part of the Neoplatonic ideas that Byzantium inherited from late antiquity” (2012, p. 303). The strongest ideological foundation for pairing an earthly order with its heavenly counterpart can be traced back to Dionysius’ *The Celestial Hierarchy* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, written in the 6th century.¹¹

According to this philosophical teaching, an earthly ruler is a direct representative of God on Earth. However, the Christian doctrine concerning God’s nature defines one God existing in three coequal, coeternal, and consubstantial

⁹ That he was regarded as a “holy man”, even during his life, is indicated by his *Vitas*, though these were written posthumously. His biographer, Theodosius of Chilandar, explicitly states that he performed miracles in their presence while still alive (Теодосије Хиландарац, 1970, pp. 368–369).

¹⁰ The miracles St. Sava the Anointed performed during his life are described in detail in his biography by Cyril of Scythopolis (Patrich, 1995).

¹¹ *Corpus Dionysicum Areopagiticum* stems from Neoplatonic philosophical writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, an Athenian convert under Paul, the “first intellectual” Apostle, who himself was primarily concerned with debatable questions about what it means to be Christian (Acts 17:16–34) (Roerem, 1993, pp. 3–6; Roerem & Lamoreaux, 1998, pp. 1–22; Perl, 2008, pp. 1–4; Rosemary, 2016, pp. 1–41).

divine persons (Daley, 2009, pp. 323–350; Ramelli, 2012, pp. 302–350). God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons (*hypostases*) sharing one essence/substance/nature (*homoousion*) (Daley, 2009, pp. 323–350; Ramelli, 2012, pp. 302–350).

If we accept that the *l of the Nemanjićs* was conceived in the image of the Holy Trinity, Nemanja, Stefan the First-Crowned, and Sava formed an indivisible unity, just as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit do. The political message conveyed was that the authority of all future kings of the Nemanjić dynasty was both legitimate and divinely ordained. This underscored that Serbia was a Christian country where the unity of secular and spiritual authority was upheld, reinforced by the fact that both were embodied within the same family. In other words, the message was that the State, the Church, and the Dynasty represented three aspects of an indivisible whole.

There are indications that Sava's concept of the *Holy Trinity* was present during the reign of King Uroš I (1241/2–1276), the third son of Stefan the First-Crowned. Under King Uroš I, the concept of a holy lineage emerged prominently, reflecting a significant European-wide trend of the time (Поповић, 2016, p. 122). This shift is directly connected to the rise of dynastic cults at European courts during the 13th and 14th centuries, a phenomenon known as *beata stirps*, which was particularly popular in Hungary and Central Europe (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 41; see also Klaniczay, 2000; Le Goff, 1996). During this time, the cult of Saint Simeon received a new impetus, as evidenced by *The Life of St. Simeon*, compiled by Domentian in 1264 at the behest of King Uroš I. Domentian is recognized as the first to articulate the concept of the “holy two,” referring to Saints Simeon and Sava as protectors of the state and its people. He described them as “two bright stars... who wish to illuminate their fatherland with various miracles.” (Маринковић, 1988, p. 313; Поповић, 2016, p. 122). However, it seems that the king took no action to establish the cult of his father, the third person of Sava's supposed *Holy Trinity*. Nonetheless, Uroš I did transfer the relics of his father, the first-crowned king of the Nemanjić dynasty, to the Sopoćani Monastery, an endowment he dedicated to the Holy Trinity, which later became his mausoleum (Fig. 2).

Although Saint Sava's supposed concept of the first *Serbian Holy Trinity* was seemingly not fully realized, it does not mean it was abandoned or forgotten. According to the Neoplatonic idea that the earthly hierarchy reflects the heavenly order, any current ruler is regarded as a representative of Christ on Earth. In this framework, the third figure of the Holy Trinity is always associated with the reigning king, who stands as Christ's representative on Earth. The earthly representatives of God the Father and the Holy Spirit remain unchanged: Stefan Nemanja, as the founder of the dynasty, and Saint Sava, as the founder of the Serbian Church. Indirect evidence supporting this can be found in Theodosius of Chilandar's account of the life of Saint Sava, where he describes the death of Stefan the First-Crowned: Sava approached his brother, extended his holy right



Figure 2. St. Simeon Nemanja, Simon (Stefan the First-Crowned (Prvovenčani)), King Uroš I, Church of the Holy Trinity, Sopoćani Monastery, nave, south wall, 1272–1276. Source: public domain

hand towards his heart, and, in the name of the Holy Trinity, he drew the image of a cross on his bare body. Immediately, he felt movement in his hands and warmth spreading through his chest. As he prayed fervently, his prayers were answered (Теодосије Хиландарац, 1970, pp. 220–222). As mentioned earlier, Sava made Stefan a monk, and Stefan died in his arms. Sava then buried him and enthroned Stefan's eldest son, Radoslav, as king (Теодосије Хиландарац, 1970, pp. 220–222). It is also worth noting that during Uroš I's reign, beginning in 1263, his brother Predislav served as Archbishop Sava II of Serbia (1263–1271). This further reinforced the connection between secular and ecclesiastical power within the same family.

In later times, the emphasis on the holy origin of the current ruler was expressed by referring to the progenitor of the dynasty, as well as to the “holy two,” Simeon and Sava (Fig. 3)—a concept that became especially prominent in King Milutin's ruling ideology (Тодић, 1998, pp. 39–52; Марјановић-Душанић, 1997, pp. 130–134; Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, pp. 155–158; Adashinskaya, 2010, pp. 77–92). It is somewhat surprising that the first-crowned king is omitted when discussing the tradition and legitimacy of the God-given right to the royal title. While this is an important topic, a more in-depth discussion falls outside the scope of this paper.



Figure 3. St. Sava and St. Simeon, Church of Saints Joachim and Anna, Studenica Monastery, c. 1314. Source: public domain

The Model of the Holy Trinity: The Hungarian Case

It appears that a strong parallel can be drawn to a concept that originated over a century earlier in neighboring Hungary. By the end of the 11th century, emerging patterns of royal sanctity became evident during the reign of King Ladislas I (1077–1095) (Рокаи et al., 2002, p. 37; Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 55). In 1083, the first saints of Hungary were proclaimed (Рокаи et al., 2002, p. 37). In the northern part of the country, two hermit monks, renowned ascetics widely venerated since the beginning of the century, were canonized. More importantly, this was followed by the canonization of Hungary's first king, Stephen I, his son Emmerich, and Gerard, the bishop of Csanád. The central event of the 1083 ceremonies was undoubtedly the *elevatio* of King Stephen's remains, which took place on the anniversary of his death, on August 15.¹² On that occasion, a council was convened near the king's grave in Székesfehérvár. Prior to opening the grave, three days of fasting were declared, and the reigning king was compelled to release

¹² August 15 marks the celebration of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. King Stephen, who had no heir, dedicated Hungary to Mary, the Mother of God. As a result, she is also known as the *Patrona Hungariae* (Protector of Hungary). In later depictions, she is shown wearing the Hungarian crown (Рокаи et al., 2002, pp. 30–31; for more about the canonization of St. Stephen, see Klaniczay, 2000, pp. 114–154).

his dynastic rival, Salomon, from the prison tower in Visegrád. Over the next five days, Stephen's relics performed numerous healing miracles, and on August 20, the blessed relics were placed in a silver coffin.¹³

In the autumn, a new council was convened, during which the canonization of Stephen's son Emmerich (Imre) was proclaimed (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 56). St. Stephen had several sons from his marriage to Gisela, but only one of them, Emmerich, survived to adulthood (Рокаи et al., 2002, p. 30). Stephen even arranged a marriage for Emmerich, but the couple were childless. In 1030, Emmerich was killed by a wild boar while hunting. Because he died childless, a legend arose that he had abstained from marriage. That is why, when he was declared a saint, Emmerich became the patron saint of bachelors (Рокаи et al., 2002, p. 30). He could be claimed to have been *as pure as the Lamb of God*. Stephen raised Emmerich with great care, appointing Gerard, a well-educated Venetian Benedictine, to advise his son and designated successor as the Holy Spirit, *guiding him on the path he should follow and revealing the truth* (Luke 12:12; Corinthians 2:6–10). Gerard had great merits in the Christianization of Hungary; the Pope had sent him from Italy to the court of Saint Stephen to help organize the early Hungarian Church. He died during the pagan rebellion of 1046, when he was thrown from a rock in Buda. First, the elevation of Bishop Gerard was performed at his grave in Csanád, where, in the presence of King Ladislas I, the solemn act of his inclusion in the order of saints took place.

The entire system of ceremonies of utmost state importance held in 1083, along with the accompanying celebratory texts, reveals a sophisticated state–church agenda orchestrated by King Ladislas I and his entourage. Just before the official canonization of saints, an anonymous author composed the famous eulogy *Legenda Maior*, which celebrates all local saints as part of an order gathered around the central figure of Stephen.¹⁴ King Ladislas quickly recognized the benefits of promoting the cult of St. Stephen for his rule. Ladislas's position required the confirmation of legitimacy, as—although he had ruled the Hungarian throne since 1077—he was only formally crowned several years later (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 57). That is why the events of 1083 were necessary to consolidate and secure the sacred aura of his rule (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, pp. 57–58). King Ladislas I presented himself as the true heir of Stephen and a righteous ruler–lawgiver,

¹³ In Hungary, the feast of St. Stephen, on August 20, has been celebrated continuously ever since. In the Middle Ages, state councils were held on that day (Рокаи et al., 2002, p. 31).

¹⁴ In addition to “national” saints, the text also mentions the cult of St. Martin, popular in Hungary due to his Pannonian origin, the patron of the first Benedictine monastery founded by Stephen in 1000. The text of the Legend mentions St. Adalbert, the great apostle of Central Europe, the national protector of Bohemia and the Kingdom of Poland, whose cult was a kind of model according to which the canonization of St. Gerard was carried out (Klaniczay, 1986, p. 72; Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 57).



Figure 4. St. Stephen and St. Ladislav, All Saints' Church in Bijacovce, Slovakia, 2nd half of the 14th century. Source: public domain

who completed what Stephen had started.¹⁵ He also portrayed himself as the reincarnation of Stephen's early-deceased son, Emmerich (Fig. 4). The fact that neither Ladislav I nor St. Emmerich had male descendants certainly served to reinforce the association between the two. Emmerich, the untried, virgin prince, meek as the Lamb of God, the true embodiment of Christ on Earth, was the chosen successor of Saint Stephen to lead the Hungarian people and guide them to salvation, just as God the Father had sent Christ to Earth to save all the peoples of the world through sacrifice. However, just as Christ did not become the king of Judea, Emmerich did not become the king of Hungary, a role his father had intended him for, due to his untimely death. What Emmerich couldn't accomplish, Ladislav I was now expected to achieve, guided by the Christian Church, just as Emmerich had been guided by St. Gerard. The connection between Ladislav, his holy ancestors, and St. Gerard as a spiritual leader was crucial, especially as Hungary was still grappling with pagan influences, which played a role in the battles for the throne (Pokan et al., 2002, pp. 34–37). Pagan traditions remained strongly present in Hungary, as evidenced by two rebellions: one that led to the death of

¹⁵ After almost forty years of instability and political turmoil, Ladislav I accomplished what Stephen I had begun, completing the organization of the church, a task traditionally attributed to St. Stephen (Pokan et al., 2002, p. 31; Klaniczay, 2000, pp. 173–194; Veszprémy, 2006, pp. 217–245).

Bishop Gerard and another in 1061. For these reasons, the concept of church, state, and dynasty as an indivisible whole held great importance for King Ladislav. *The Holy Trinity* of Dynasty, Church, and King—embodied by St. Stephen, St. Gerard, and St. Emmerich—became indivisible, much like the Holy Trinity itself. This symbolic expression of political unity, established during St. Stephen's reign, reached its full potential thanks to the efforts of King Ladislav I. An intriguing theological connection arose in relation to the Filioque controversy, which became increasingly prominent in regions under Rome's spiritual authority following the Great Schism of 1054. Augustine's model (Johnson, 2011, pp. 7–25), where the Holy Spirit represents the love between the Father and the Son, aligns well with the role of Bishop Gerard. Meanwhile, the Filioque formulation—asserting that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son—better reflects the dynastic succession of both royal power and sainthood. In contrast, the Serbian model, which likely adapted the Hungarian model, portrays St. Simeon as God the Father, St. Stefan the First-Crowned as the Son, and St. Sava as the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father alone, maintaining the bond of love between them.

It seems that the original model of the *Holy Trinity* was gradually overshadowed in Hungary, with St. Gerard, the spiritual leader, being replaced by St. Ladislav in the new triad of saints. King Ladislav I was canonized in 1192 at the initiative of Hungarian King Béla III (1172–1196). It was only after this canonization that the kings of the Árpád dynasty began to identify themselves as the “kin of the saintly kings” or descendants of the *Holy Árpád Dynasty* (Font, 2016, p. 29).¹⁶ Shortly after his canonization, St. Ladislav, along with St. Stephen, became one of Hungary's most venerated saints. The *Gesta Ungarorum*, written in the late 11th century, highlights Ladislav's popularity and recounts his many legendary exploits: handsome in appearance and very tall, he embodied many of the qualities of a Christian king, for which he was regarded as the perfect knight, the idol of every Hungarian knight. Known for his warrior virtues, Ladislav I was celebrated as a defender of Hungary against the Mongols and Cumans. For this reason, he was considered the protector of Christian Hungary's integrity even during later invasions by the Tatars and Turks (Марјановић-Душанић, 2007, p. 58; Рокаи et al., 2002, p. 38). The canonization of St. Ladislav marked the beginning of a strengthened cult surrounding the three holy kings—*Sancti Reges Hungariae* (Fig. 5) (Năstăsioiu, 2009, pp. 11–31). By the end of the 13th century, this cult had become firmly established, laying a crucial foundation for the concept of *beata*

¹⁶ According to Klaniczay, the political and ideological reasons for the canonization are not easy to pinpoint. He highlights Béla III's dream of leading a crusade, which only his illness prevented, much in the same way as Ladislav I's death prevented him from responding to requests from the Frankish, Lotharingian, and German kings to lead a Christian war. The legend of St. Ladislav, which depicted him as a crusader, was likely written around this time and could have served as a fitting announcement of Béla III's crusade ambitions (Klaniczay, 2000, p. 187).



Figure 5. Sancti Reges Hungariae, All Saints' Church in Krásnohorské Podhradie, Slovakia, late 14th century. Source: public domain

stirps (Năstăsoiu, 2009, pp. 16–22). This idea played a crucial symbolic role in the royal rhetoric of Hungarian kings, remaining influential even after the Árpád dynasty ended and lasting until the collapse of medieval Hungary (Klaniczay, 2000; Năstăsoiu, 2009, pp. 23–29).

Concluding Remarks

Considering the above discussion, we believe that if we accept that the first supposed triad of saints in Nemanjić Serbia and the first supposed triad of saints in medieval Hungary were formed according to the model of the Holy Trinity, i.e., the triune God, we can conclude that the two concepts, despite their differences, fundamentally shared a similar idea and goal. The two models exhibited differences in details. In Nemanjić Serbia, the cult of Saint Simeon Nemanja, the founder of the dynasty, held greater significance than that of King Stefan the First-Crowned. This contrasts with the neighboring country of Hungary, where the first Hungarian king was regarded as the most important figure. In Hungary, the situation was different from Serbia because Árpád, the founder of the dynasty, was not Christian. Moreover, in Sava's original model of the *Holy Trinity*, all three persons were from the same family, which contrasted with the situation

in Hungary. However, the differences in details did not significantly alter the essence of the message conveyed by this idea: this commonality centers on the affirmation of God's predetermined right and the unity of secular political and dynastic power. In both countries, this original concept continued to evolve over time, adapting to the political, dynastic, ecclesiastical, and other needs created by the new circumstances that emerged.

By the time Stefan Nemanja became Veliki Župan (Grand Prince) of the Serbian Grand Principality of Raška, the ancient Árpád dynasty had been governing Hungary for nearly two hundred years. During this period, the first saints of the dynasty had already been recognized, including the first Hungarian king, Stephen I, and his son Emmerich, who were both proclaimed saints in 1083, during the reign of King Ladislas I. However, it was only after 1192 that the kings of the Árpád dynasty started to refer to themselves as “the kin of the saintly kings,” following the canonization of King Ladislas I at the initiative of the reigning Hungarian king, Béla III. This coincided with Stefan Nemanja's rule as Veliki Župan of Raška. Therefore, we believe that Sava Nemanjić, as the creator of the cult of the sacred Nemanjić dynasty, must have looked to his northern neighbor as a model. Traditionally, it is rightly considered that the literary templates and other elements of the cult of the first Nemanjić saints were Byzantine. However, we must acknowledge that the concept of a sacred dynasty never truly took hold in Byzantium, where the cult of the saintly ruler was virtually nonexistent. In Byzantium, the emphasis was firmly on the sacredness of the empire itself rather than on the personality of the reigning emperor (Поповић, 2006, p. 262). The closest instance of what could be considered the establishment of a dynastic cult occurred in Byzantium during the Comnenus dynasty.¹⁷ The Comnenus were closely related by marriage to the Hungarian Árpáds, and during this period, they had particularly intensive relations with Hungary.¹⁸ This is why we believe that the influence of both Byzantium and Hungary on Saint Sava's concept of the sacred dynasty, along with the adoption of models for creating national saints' cults, is quite natural. This perspective is especially relevant considering the political context and the position of the young Nemanjić state, which was situated between these two powerful empires.¹⁹

¹⁷ During the reign of the Comnenus dynasty, a significant innovation was the inclusivity of the imperial family. Through intentional policies implemented by its leaders, the dynasty brought together all the most prominent Byzantine families, ensuring that the right to the throne remained exclusively within this familial network (Станковић, 2006, p. 4).

¹⁸ Alexius I decided to externalize the system of control over rival families by applying its principles to foreign policy through the marriage of his heir, John II Komnenos (1118–1143), to the Hungarian princess Piroška-Eirene, the first Western and Catholic princess to wear the Byzantine imperial crown (Stanković, 2015, p. 37).

¹⁹ Stefan Nemanja's perspective on his position in the struggle for Serbian independence from powerful neighbors, such as the Byzantine Empire and the Kingdom of Hungary, is

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best illustrated by the text of his founding charter for the Chilandar Monastery, dated 1198, where he writes: “The merciful God established the Greeks as emperors, and the Hungarians as kings,...and appointed me as the grand Joupán” (Свети Сава, 1986, p. 31).

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Резиме

У овом раду испитује се могућност да су први „национални” свеци у немањићкој Србији и средњовековној Угарској били замишљени у тријадама, на подобије Свете Тројице или тројединог Бога. У средњем веку, за народе без директних представника у хришћанској историји, „национални” свеци – било појединци или групе – били су обликовани према одабраним моделима, најчешће из ранохришћанских времена или библијске историје. Избор модела из хришћанске традиције увек је имао политички значај, одражавајући стални дијалог између прошлости и садашњости. Пошто су се обе државе, након свог оснивања, суочиле са изазовом успостављања и учвршћивања стабилне краљевске, династичке и црквене власти и успостављање њиховог јединства, светачке тријаде Немањића и Арпадовића, саздане по лику Св. Тројице, могле су добро послужити у политичкој, династичкој и црквеној реторици, усмереној на преношење појма њиховог јединства и легитимитета на основу њиховог богом изабраног статуса. Једном речју, прве тријаде светитеља и у Србији и у Угарској, упркос својим специфичним разликама, суштински су иза себе имале сличну идеју: да држава, црква и династија представљају три аспекта једне недељиве целине. У обе земље, овај оригинални концепт наставио је да се развија током времена, док на крају није прерастао у нешто сасвим друго, прилагођавајући се тако политичким, династичким, црквеним и другим потребама које су настајале услед нових историјских околности. У време када је Стефан Немања постао велики жупан Рашке, древна династија Арпадовића владала је Угарском већ скоро две стотине година. Током овог периода, Угарска је већ добила своје прве свеце, међу којима су били и први угарски краљ Стефан I и његов син Емерих, који су проглашени за свеце 1083. године, за време владавине краља Ладислава I. Међутим, тек после 1192. године, након канонизације краља Ладислава I, краљеви из династије Арпадовића почели су себе да називају „потомцима светих краљева”, односно „изданцима светородне лозе”. Било је то баш у време када је Стефан Немања био

на великожупанском трону Рашке. Стога, сматрамо да је утицај угарског модела на формирање идеје о светородној династији Немањића, уз усвајање првих модела за стварање првих светачких култова, био сасвим могућ. Традиционално се с правом сматра да књижевни предлошци и други елементи култова првих Немањића вуку корене из Византије. Међутим, како концепт свете династије никада није заживео у Византији, сматрамо да је сасвим оправдано тражити утицаје и са друге стране, нарочито када се узму у обзир историјске и политичке прилике оног времена, када се Србија Стефана Немање борила за самосталност, укљештена између две велике силе, Византије и Угарске.

Кључне речи: Света Тројица; владарска светост; света династија; средњи век; Арпадовићи; Немањићи.



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