

## **Appropriation of Constantinopolitan Identity in the Late Middle Ages, the Case of Trnovo and Belgrade**

(Abstract)

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It is well known, and practically a *topos* in its own right, that the capital of the Byzantine Empire in the eyes of *homo medievalis*, both East and West, figured as a center of universal significance and *umbilicus mundi*. Throughout history a number of other points of the Christian *oikoumene* formed their own identity through emulation of the metropolis or through appropriation of elements of Constantinopolitan identity. Because the idea of God-chosen and God-protected city, or new Jerusalem, achieved through the mediation of its supernatural defenders and the presence of warrants of Divine blessing and salvation in the form of relics and miracle working icons lies at the very core of this identity, its emulation or appropriation is achieved first and foremost through translation of cults and pertaining rites of veneration, regularly accompanied also by trademark elements of visual culture, as markers of cultural identity. Another question is the meaning of appropriation in a given historical context. Considering its root in the language of colonialism, appropriation as a form of intercultural exchange also carries implicit limitations. However, in the later Middle Ages, and especially following the events of 1204 and the dissolution of the, so to say, old world order, it is precisely the reinvestment (and reinterpreting) of elements of the original, in this case Constantinopolitan identity, that gives increment of value and particular sense of purpose to Arta, Nicea and Trebizond or Paris and Venice, to name just some of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon.

Long present in a number of forms in the Balkans, although with changing fate and degree of success, in the period between the end of the XII and the first decades of the XV century, appropriation of Constantinopolitan identity takes on quite a specific purpose and form of realization in Trnovo and Belgrade, capitals of Bulgaria and Serbia. In both cases, naturally, Constantinopolitan elements lie at the foundation of their transformation into state centers endowed with sacral protection and their likening to Jerusalem as the utmost paradigm of sacred space. Programs of both state centers can be contextualized within the framework of the general eschatologically colored intellectual and spiritual climate of the times. There are also well known and documented direct historical connections between them, namely translation of cults from Trnovo to Belgrade and continuation of the encomiastic rhetoric developed within the Trnovo literary school in the Serbian milieu in the days of despot Stefan Lazarević. Still, as a result of historical circumstances and specific spiritual and intellectual inclination of despot Stefan Lazarević, Belgrade, as the capital of his state, seems to go a step further in direct emulation of Constantinople not only in the ways of celebrating the cult of the Virgin but also in appropriation of Constantinopolitan imperial cults demonstrated through the presence of imperial relics of the highest rank, namely those of the first Christian emperor, Constantine the Great, and the holy empress Theophano.