

Music in Serbian sacred medieval literature

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The wide range of research techniques is necessary when dealing with medieval sacred music preserved in a limited number of scattered sources, as in the case of Serbian culture. Turning to Serbian literary sources, particularly rich in mentions of music, is appropriate to the study of many phenomena relevant to music history. The interdisciplinary approach to music and literature has been attracting musicologists and literary scholars for a long time (Calvin Brown, Stephen Paul Scher, Lawrence Kramer, Eric Prieto, to mention just a few of them); however, in the past this method has not been used systematically in the study of musical culture of medieval Serbia. Any discourse embracing literature and music is encountered with different horizons of expectations. How could (if could at all) the literary sources be used as an evidence of musical realities of the time, especially in the devotional context? Is it possible to read Serbian hagiography (so called *žitija*, lives of the Saints) with the aim of revealing names and usage of hymns, descriptions of liturgical situations where music was present, or concrete historical personalities and their connections to sacred music, for example? I do not necessarily deny such a possibility, but I prefer different ways of understanding the relationship between music and literature. Basic premises run along the lines of what St Gregory of Nyssa (who influenced Serbian medieval culture) designates “meaning hidden <in simple melodies> behind the words”, or what Lawrence Kramer calls “mythical union of a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music”. In other words, this interdisciplinary approach will help in broader theological, philosophical and ethical context of understanding of music, the understanding that would not be apparent from within the narrower perspective of the single discipline.

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