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# Contemporary Apocryphal Stories Based on the Life of Prepodobna Stoyna – a Bulgarian Prophetess, Healer, Non-Canonical Saint

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**ABSTRACT:** Prepodobna Stoyna was a Bulgarian prophetess who developed the gifts of preaching and healing after she became blind at the age of 7. At the beginning of the 20th century, Prepodobna Stoyna appeared in the church of Saint George in the village Zlatolist in Southwest Bulgaria, where she subsequently resided for at least twenty years and led the life of a hermit until her death in 1933, at the age of fifty. Stoyna lived in the balcony area inside the church and there, in the room that is preserved and visited until this day, she received pilgrims. According to oral stories and her written *vita*, she was endowed with the gifts of clairvoyance and healing, as well as levitation, and more. The faithful call her “the sister of St. George” and believe that thanks to her close connection with the saint, she fulfils requests from their prayers even after her death. The Orthodox Church warns against idolatry and heresy associated with this cult, but, at the same time, this has no effect on the thousands of people visiting this place and treating Prepodobna Stoyna as a saint. In my paper, I point out the cultural mechanisms in the creation of oral stories based on her life, which have similar structural elements to the apocrypha and fulfil similar aims.

**KEYWORDS:** contemporary apocrypha, cult of prophetesses in Bulgaria, Prepodobna Stoyna, changes in religiosity, religious and cultural heroines

Prepodobna<sup>1</sup> Stoyna was a Bulgarian prophetess who developed the gifts of preaching and healing after she became blind at the age of 7. At the beginning of the 20th century, Prepodobna Stoyna appeared in the church of Saint George in the village Zlatolist in Southwest Bulgaria, where she subsequently resided for at least twenty years and led the life of a hermit, until her death in 1933, at the age of fifty. Stoyna lived in the balcony area inside the church and there, in a room that remains preserved and visited until this day, she received pilgrims. According to oral stories and her written *vita* (Fig. 1), she was endowed with the gifts of clairvoyance and healing, as well as levitation, and more (Petrichka n.d.). The devotion to her was preserved in the course of decades. Thanks to fieldwork observations of Bulgarian scholars, Valentina Izmirlieva and Petko Ivanov (Ivanov, Izmirlieva 2003; Izmirlieva, Ivanov 1990; Izmirlieva, Ivanov 1991a; Izmirlieva, Ivanov 1991b; Izmirlieva, Ivanov 2000), at the end of the 1980s, there is preserved testimony as to how the cult developed<sup>2</sup>. The faithful nowadays call Stoyna “the sister of St. George” and believe that thanks to her close connection with the saint, she fulfils their prayers even after her death. The Orthodox Church warns against idolatry and heresy associated with this cult (Arhimandrit Parteniy 2003: 76–80), but, at the same time, this has no effect on the thousands of people visiting this place and treating Prepodobna Stoyna as a saint. In my paper, I point out the cultural mechanisms in the creation of oral stories based on her life, which have similar structural elements to the apocrypha and fulfil similar aims.

### The Notion of Apocrypha

In my article, I treat the notion of apocrypha not in the traditional sense of them as writings that are associated with biblical texts but are not included in the canonical scriptures. Quoting Magdalena Zowczak, “I see the apocryphal as a kind of glocalization: an expression of group or individual identity against the dominant canon of religious culture” (Zowczak 2007: 107–120). In contemporary interpretations apocryphal works, characterised by the trans-genre, trans-generic and multi-formal nature of the form of expression, may contain elements of history, hagiography, legends, folklore, fairy tales and theology (Szajnert 2021: 9). This vagueness of the formal criteria in definition allows me to consider apocrypha, rather, as a “cultural phenomenon” and it serves to redirect my attention to identifying the reasons for their creation and the general features concerning the content as such. These may include, for example, the explanation of the Scripture, supplementing stories from the lives of

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1 “Prepodobna” in literal translation from Bulgarian language means “reverend”, “venerable”, but it describes “saint of a lower rung”, who in their earthly life gave themselves to a monastic, ascetic life. In the case of Stoyna, this title is not officially accepted by the Orthodox Church, but it is how people refer to her in their worship, and it is how her legacy has spread.

2 In the 21st century, anthropological research on the cult of Prepodobna Stoyna was published in a book dedicated to the phenomenon of the cult of prophetesses and clairvoyants in the Balkans (Valtchinova 2006; see also Michalska 2020, 2021, 2023).

the saints described (e.g. Jesus Christ, Our Lady, St. Joseph, the apostles and, in my case, Prepodobna Stoyna), questions of theological nature concerning the life of the soul after death, etc. Another feature of the apocrypha is their variability – words are rearranged in successive versions, certain parts are removed, people and places are added, names are changed – while the essential core of the story is preserved. Apocryphal storytelling lacks the logic of characters, situations, action and historical truth, there is often no cause-and-effect sequence (as in a fairy tale, it is not said when exactly something happens, how long it lasts or under what historical conditions it occurs), and the events are concentrated around a single character or arranged chronologically according to an invented timeline. Functioning well in the first centuries of Christianity, at some point apocrypha began to be treated as works of fantasy and sensation, and became marginalised to tales published in folk books and calendars sold at church indulgences (Starowieyski 2003: 35). The same is true of the oral stories circulated about Stoyna's life – her *vita* is fragmented and used in any number of ways according to current needs and purposes; it is also disseminated through various channels of communication. The preceding process of writing her *vita* may also have consisted of collecting selected oral stories from her life in order to fit into the model of creating a "saint's *vita*" and, at the same time, to fulfil specific objectives in consolidating her image in the collective imagination as a person deserving special respect. This shows the mechanism of the "recycling of codes" and the evolution of cultural processes that take place within the local cult in question. At the same time, we can observe how, in these processes, the transfer of information is strengthened or weakened in contemporary conditions, depending on the choice of distribution channel.

The contemporary apocryphal stories I am analysing fall into what is known as "secondary orality" (Ong 1992: 183), supposedly superstructured on "primary orality", based on the word as sound (the spoken word). Through the use of new tools, such as writing, printing and electronics, it takes on new forms, but remains essentially the same. Still, the structure of the texts is subordinated to the mythologised sense conveyed in them to satisfy ontological curiosity. In this way, "the world as a mystical unity can be fully grasped in a cognitive, intellectual and emotional act at the same time" (Bartmiński 1995: 12). The world created by the apocrypha is also a mythical world: the characters are endowed with extraordinary qualities, their stories are unusual, provoking moral conclusions, ordering the world. They personalise the values and symbols experienced most deeply by a given group, and contemporary media support this process of mythicising reality by, as it were, recycling cultural codes (to use Wojciech Burszta's term). Joanna Tokarska-Bakir points to a constant feature of myth, namely, its multiple repetitions, which is also characteristic of apocrypha. This is because, as in myths, a word repeated after someone and repeated many subsequent times leads to the "clarification of essence". In this way, through the sense of co-creation of a myth, one can feel its power of influence, the communal dimension of its symbolism, while, at the same time, being its con-

sumer (Tokarska-Bakir 2000: 392). Małgorzata Jankowska, on the other hand, when analysing apocryphal literature in the context of contemporary culture, states: “contemporary apocrypha can make use of religious symbolism to present completely irreligious (and sometimes anti-religious) content” (Jankowska 2019: 43). It is, therefore, worth looking at how the story of the life and miracles performed by the non-canonical saint and prophetess Stoyna culturally influences the creation of new narratives and what purposes they fulfil.

### Stoyna's *Vita*

In my paper, I use the word “apocryphal” in its contemporary sense – to denote a work of “doubtful authenticity” / any text or story considered to be of dubious veracity or authority, although it may contain some moral truth. In this broader metaphorical sense, the word suggests a claim that is in the nature of folklore, factoid or urban legend. An important point of reference for the creation of many new stories about the life of the heroine of my article, Prepodobna Stoyna, is her *vita* (Fig. 1). In 1985, Zoya Velikova – the granddaughter of Stoyna's sister – wrote down Stoyna's life, and since then the cult began to spread not only orally, but also in a written and, then, printed form. The record of Stoyna's life is supposed to be one of the proofs of her holiness and one of the elements in the quest for her canonisation. In its structure, we find all the similarities to the typical lives of saints: already at birth, Stoyna shows a “divine sign”: a white oleander suddenly blooms in front of her eyes, signalling the birth of someone special. At the age of seven, she loses her sight “struck by the light of St George”, although most likely factual explanation is a severe bout of smallpox. At the same time, she receives the gift of “inner vision”. She is able to foresee all sorts of life circumstances and has visions of the world. As a 16-year-old, she is haunted in a dream by St. George, who announces that he is her brother, and, as a result of his suggestion, Stoyna is led to build a small Orthodox church in the courtyard of her apartment house. When she is forced into exile as a result of the shift of national borders in the early 20th century, she settles in the village of Dolna Sushitsa (the former name of Zlatolist) and decides to live in St George's church. The numerous miracles she performs and her gift of clairvoyance result in the spread of a cult of Stoyna as a prophetess and a healer, respected not only by the local population, but also by visiting pilgrims, who are sometimes treated as “sinister” religious dissenters. Stoyna leads the ascetic life of an eremite, dresses like a nun, eats modestly, only selected produce. She offers the gifts received from the faithful away to the poor. She takes care to pass on the truths of the faith to the local people. The most unusual and mystical states she experiences seem to be the liminal states of “temporary death”. During those, she would stay locked in her room for several days, separating herself from the “world of the living”. She explains that at those times she is with the saints in the hereafter (the life beyond). She, therefore, leaves the realm of the profane to go to the realm of the sacred and, in this way, she becomes a heroine connecting these two worlds. Another of



Fig. 1. Stoyna's *vita* published in booklet form. Photo: Aleksandra F. Michalska, 2023



Fig. 2. Church souvenirs related to the cult of Prepodobna Stoyna, Zlatolist. Photo: Aleksandra F. Michalska, 2023



her observed and recorded skills is the alleged ability of levitation while praying. In her biography, apart from stories of the daily consultations and advice she gives to the faithful, a large part is devoted to events during a period of intense civil unrest, during which Stoyna was able to defend the village and the people from invaders and, as a result, protect them from danger. Miracles also occur after her death, at her grave (Izmirlieva, Ivanov 1990: 80–94).

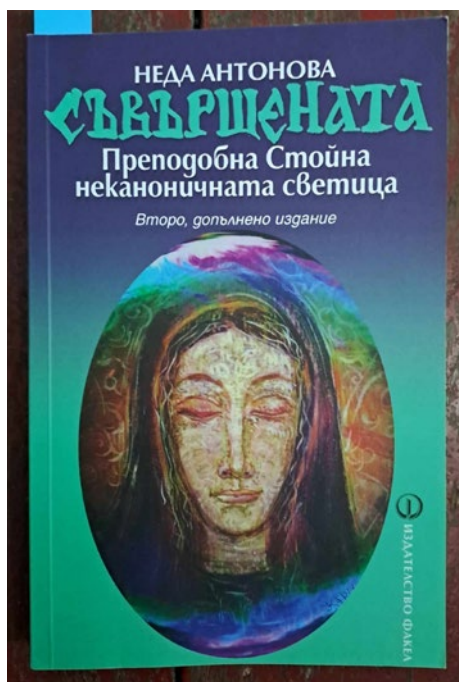
In the personal model of Stoyna, one can see a pattern of constructing not only a saint, but also a mythical heroine, equipped with extraordinary qualities that cause her to be treated by a given social group as someone special: someone who can shape the reality in which she functions and exert a positive influence on it, ordering the meaning of existence. The mythicisation of the protagonist is thus a component of the apocryphal story, whose primary purpose is to explain the world and stabilise social anxieties by living out experiences within the predictable organisation of the mythic world (as pointed out by Leszek Kołakowski in his description of the legitimacy of the permanent rooting of myth in culture) (Kołakowski 2003: 14). Janina Hajduk-Nijakowska, citing Ivan Čolović, draws attention to the phenomenon of the vulgarisation of national heroes in the process of their popularisation and folklorisation through contemporary forms of communication (Hajduk-Nijakowska 2011: 229–230). In the case of Stoyna Dimitrova, in my view, the opposite mechanism occurs due to her popularised image in the media and the multiplication of “apocryphal stories” based on her life: namely, she becomes one of the established national heroes who are “messengers of God and protect the Bulgarian people”. In this way, the mythicisation of the heroine is intertwined with her sacralisation.

### Contemporary Apocryphal Stories and Their Dissemination

With the development of mass media, television, social media and YouTube began to play an important role in the dispersal of the cult of Stoyna. She is also the heroine of fictional literature: the novel *Свършената. Преподобна Стойна, неканоничната светица* (The Perfect One. Prepodobna Stoyna, A Non-Canonical Saint) by Neda Antonova was published in 2017 (Fig. 4). The introduction from the publisher states that “Prepodobna Stoyna is an emissary of God – [sent] to save the faith. She is of a higher spirit and Bulgaria is her mission” (Antonova 2017: 4). In addition, the place where she lived and served people is “sacred and the most magical in Bulgaria” (Antonova 2017: 4). In 2022, a monodrama based on the book, directed by Christo Stoychev, starring Desislava Mikhailova was staged at one of the renowned Sofia theatres, the Salza i smiah. In 2016, Plamen Kapitanski, Neda Antonova and Rumen Leonidov published *Албум поема за Преподобна Стойна* (The Album-Poem about Prepodobna Stoyna), and in 2014 a book with Stoyna’s healing recipes was published: *Преподобна Стойна. Рецепти на една светица* (Prepodobna Stoyna. Recipes of a Saint). In 2020, Rumen Leonidov, a journalist and author of poetry dedicated to Prepodobna Stoyna, published a book collecting testimonies of miracles occurring due to prayers to the non-canonical saint: *Чудесата на Стойна*



**Fig. 3.** Literature related to the figure of Stoyana. Photo: Aleksandra F. Michalska, 2023



**Fig. 4.** A fiction book based on Prepodobna Stoyana's life. Photo: Aleksandra F. Michalska, 2023

*Преподобна* (Miracles of Prepodobna Stoyana) (Leonidov 2020) (Fig. 3). Leonidov is also the author of a popular Facebook page with 67,000 followers called *Преподобна Стойна* (Prepodobna Stoyana n.d.), where believers, among others, can share experiences after their visit to the Orthodox church in Zlatolist. The pilgrims' entries are dominated by comments dedicated to the power of Prepodobna Stoyana and the miracles experienced, especially those connected with the fulfilment of maternal plans. In most entries, Stoyana Dimitrova is referred to as a saint, the protectress of the Bulgarian people, and the faithful address her with respect and reverence appropriate to this status. Attention is drawn to her spiritual purity and ascetic lifestyle. The authors of the blog collect requests and petitions to Stoyana several times a year and bring them to the church on the 22nd of December – the anniversary of her death, or on occasion of other major holidays celebrated in the church. In this way, they thank her for her help in fulfilling them. The printouts of requests are placed on a marble slab with an engraved two-headed eagle on the church floor or on the bed in Stoyana's room (Fig. 6).

Through numerous video recordings of pilgrims' visits, posted on online platforms, and through discussion forums, this figure of the non-canonical saint also found its way into pop culture. One of the best-known Bulgarian influencers (with more than one million subscribers) of the popular YouTube



Fig. 5. The cover of the magazine *Списание Осем* (Magazine Eight), No. 2015/8, with an image of the Prepodobna Stoina.



Fig. 6. Printscreen of the post from Facebook; prayers offered to Stoina, 2023, December 12th.

channel “The Clashers” – Slavi Panayotov – advertises Zlatolist as “one of the most mystical places in Bulgaria, with an exceptionally strong energy” (The Clashers 2022) (Fig. 7). Stoina’s gift of levitation is discussed on the TV show by an “expert” – the writer Christo Nanev – who is convinced of her many other supernatural qualities, as well as the fact that she was a “Bogomil”<sup>3</sup> in a previous life (Etv Haskovo 2022). This theory coincides with the one propagated by members of the contemporary New Age religious movements and the White Brotherhood, who try to find a continuation of medieval Bogomil thought in Stoina’s life (see Szwat-Gylybowa 2005; Drzewiecka 2023). That, in turn, brings her closer to the philosophy of the spiritual leader Petar Danov<sup>4</sup>. There is also a book, in free circulation, devoted to Stoina’s life, entitled *Преподобна Стойна – неканонизираната българска светица* (Prepodobna Stoina – a non-canonical Bulgarian saint 2019). It is distributed by esoteric

3 In contemporary esoteric circles in Bulgaria invoking the medieval ideas of the heretical Bogomils movement has become rather popular and “trendy” in the 20th/21st century. For more about Danonism and “White Brotherhood” organization see (Toncheva 2015).

4 Living between 1864 and 1944, he was a spiritual guru and founder of the “Byalo Bratstvo” (White Brotherhood), an organisation still in function, in the spirit of the New Age (see also Szwat-Gylybowa 2005).





**Fig. 7.** A printscreen of the video from YouTube channel “The Clashers” with the claim on Prepodobna Stoyna: “She is 10 times stronger than Vanga”.

bookshops, but it is also available as an electronic copy online, and as an audiobook<sup>5</sup>. The book states that Stoyna foresaw the existence of her “successor”, Vanga<sup>6</sup>, and that Vanga, who often stayed in Stoyna’s room to recharge herself energetically, emphasised that Stoyna’s power was several times stronger than her own – depending on the source of the information: three times, four times or ten times her power. Some accounts also say that Vanga communed with the spirit of Stoyna (Ivanov, Demirev, 2017). Many online sources quote Stoyna’s prophecies, e.g. in the context of Russia’s recent war with Ukraine: “Russia will begin to destroy the world, but in the end, it will be destroyed itself” (Novinite 2022). Prepodobna Stoyna is also the brand name of a mineral water distributed in shops, and the Zlatolist church shop sells devotional items with the image of this non-canonical saint, including small travel icons and magnets (Fig. 2).

5 In 2022, a verdict was announced on plagiarism committed by the publishers of the book *Преподобна Стойна – неканонизираната българска светица* (Prepodobna Stoyna – The Un-canonical Bulgarian saint), attributing authorship to Boyana Palikarova and using extensive excerpts from Neda Antonova’s book in the text *Съвършената. Преподобна Стойна, неканонична светица* (The Perfect One. Prepodobna Stoyna, A Non-Canonical Saint). The book was allegedly based on the author’s notes from the last days of Stoyna’s life, written down before her death in 1933. “It was supposed to have been ‘spiritually transmitted’ to the publishers by the guru Petar Danov himself”.

6 Vanga – Vangelia Gushterova, often known as Baba Vanga (1911–1996), was a world recognized Bulgarian clairvoyant living in the same Southern-West region of Bulgaria where Stoyna used to live. Baba Vanga’s predictions and her life have been subjects of fascination, leading to various studies, documentaries, and books that explore her mystical abilities and the accuracy of her prophecies (see Valtchinova 2006).

The presence of Prepodobna Stoyna in pop culture has taken increasingly diverse forms of expression in recent years. It would be premature to refer to her as a pop culture heroine, but as I have shown, there are indications to assume that legends associated with her figure, spread by the mass media, may lead to the use of her image for commercial purposes. Because of this process the concerns regarding reduction, simplification, and schematisation of Stoyna's figure are justified. The creation of "contemporary apocryphal stories" around Stoyna undoubtedly helps in building her image as a cultural heroine, who, as "a messenger of God, is to lead the Bulgarian people in the right direction of faith and is supposed to protect them" (Dineva 2015: 41). In "Magazine 8" (Fig. 5), she is compared to the world's prophets and spiritual guides such as Nostradamus, St. Teresa of Avila, Wolf Messing, Edgar Cayce or Petar Danov (Dineva 2015: 41), and thus regarded as an emissary not only for Bulgaria, but for the world<sup>7</sup>.

As a result of the vividly developing "contemporary apocryphal stories", spread mainly on the Internet, there are many legends about Stoyna's life and the miracles she performed, including her abilities of teleportation, levitation, painting icons despite her blindness, as well as clairvoyance (Siyanie 2015). Both established public figures and ordinary commentators (offline and online) contribute to the dissemination of "apocryphal" information about Prepodobna Stoyna's life. In a Polish book entitled *Balkany Magiczne* (The Magical Balkans) (Mikołajczak 2023: 102–110), published in 2023, the author cites Stoyna's story in one of the chapters, based mainly on internet sources, recalling mythologized stories. For example, it is stated that Stoyna lived in a part of the Zlatolist temple located "next to the apse, almost behind the iconostasis" (Mikołajczak 2023: 102–110), even though it would be physically impossible to live there due to the architectural layout, as well as to the absolute prohibition concerning women behind the iconostasis in Orthodox Church. Stoyna's well-preserved room in the emporium section of the temple never raised any doubts about the space where she lived. Her life was written down not by her niece, but by her sister's granddaughter. The 1986 issue of the journal "Bulgarian folklore" was not devoted to the story of Stoyna, as the author mentions in the text, without citing any details<sup>8</sup>. Hundreds of such distorted stories can be found on the internet and it is not difficult to get lost in them. Oral accounts are intermingled with those written down, but, nevertheless, conveyed on the basis of "Chinese whispers", without going into the logical sequence of events or comparing them with more reliable sources, such as scientific articles summarising the collected testimonies of informants and attempting to deal with information containing facts rather than myths, and if myths, then subjected to professional analysis.

7 According to how "Magazine 8" is described on its website, it "presents popular and in-depth information about science, nature, alternative medicine, ancient history and the unexpected, with an emphasis and priority on discoveries and news from Bulgaria or related to the people of the country" (Dineva 2015).

8 The first article to appear on the Stoyna Dimitrova cult is (Izmirlieva, Ivanov 1990: 75–94).

The most popular channels for disseminating “apocryphal stories” leading to mythologisation and making Stoyna a cultural heroine include the press, fiction literature, the internet: films documenting visits, interviews with residents and people experiencing miracles, influencer programmes on YouTube, Facebook social media profiles, TV. The most widespread contemporary stories are those concerning miracles performed by Stoyna: healing from women’s diseases, helping to conceive a child, healing children, the disabled, the blind. No less popular are those concerning Stoyna herself: the ability to levitate, teleportation, a life of complete asceticism (diet: nuts, citrus fruit, bread, water), liminal states of “temporary death”, clairvoyance. One can also observe the development of stories and legends around the very place of worship of Prepodobna Stoyna – the Orthodox church where the non-canonical saint lived and its “unique mystical energy”. Among these, the most popular are: the marble plate located in the centre of the church over which Stoyna was said to levitate and which marks a high-energy healing point for pilgrims, Stoyna’s tomb, a healing swing hanging on a thousand-year-old plane tree – a high-energy tree, a well and a spring with miraculous water. All these sites are located within the St George’s Orthodox Church and its courtyard, generate new legends, and the faithful visiting them repeat rituals recorded individually and transmitted in online spaces. In addition, information has also spread that Zlatolist forms an “energy triangle” with the neighbouring villages of Melnik and Rozhen, which has an exceptionally good effect on the well-being of visitors (Gergova 2020: 384). It is obvious that the subjectivity of the experiences in the described places does not make it possible for us to formulate assumptions about their truthfulness or untruthfulness.

### **Apocryphal Stories – Personal Myths**

As Bulgarian anthropologist Vihra Baeva states, “if local stories function as myths of a given community, we can then call personal narratives a kind of ‘personal myths’” (Baeva 2013: 178). This is particularly true of miracle stories, which, through the fact of repetition, cause them to be re-experienced, as it were, as a sacred act. In this way, through “personal myths”, a person organises his or her inner world, discovers his or her identity, but also identifies with a given community, using established cultural codes in the story and thus fulfilling the expectations of the community (Baeva 2013: 179). Importantly, the one to whom the miracle happened feels obliged to share his or her story, and by spreading it, contributes to strengthening faith, so it works to the benefit of the church as a community.

However, in seeking an answer to the question concerning the purpose and reasons for the popularity of “apocryphal stories” about the life of a non-canonical saint and her place of veneration, we can return to the explanation of the origin of the apocrypha at the beginning of the article. Like the apocrypha, these stories have great potential to provide the audience with a colourful, interesting, naïve world – eagerly read and listened to. Based largely

on myths, oral stories, legends, they form the so-called “biografichna povest” (biographical story); “these works differ from medieval lives of saints: there is no obligatory introduction, an argument about the hero’s life and an ending in consecutive order. The rhetoric and the panegyric are kept to a minimum, the narrative prevails, and the narrative is built on the event and the dialogue” (Petkanova 1982: 14). Apocrypha were also used to emphasise patriotic and even messianic sentiments, and served to accentuate moods of pessimism and ontological and moral anxiety. In this context, we are left to ask ourselves whether similar functions are fulfilled by the increasingly circulated “apocryphal stories” about the life of Prepodobna Stoyna, or whether, according to Roland Barthes’ assumptions about myth, by virtue of the fact that they “conceal nothing and reveal nothing, but simply distort” (Barthes 2020: 352), their ultimate aim is “to immobilise the world, so as to suggest and imitate a certain universal economy that has once and for all fixed the hierarchy of property. In this way, every day and every step of the way, man is detained by myths, sent back by them to this immobile prototype [...]” (Barthes 2020: 390). In this sense, in my view, the features of apocrypha, myths and contemporary “apocryphal stories” can intertwine and overlap, and perform similar functions, ordering reality. To quote a Polish apocryphal scholar of the early 20th century: “In the absence, therefore, of uncoverable real facts, [the apocrypha] create imaginary ones and from them, as if from the real, draw conclusions which surpass in fantasticness the fantasticness of the facts themselves. The imagination in the apocrypha seeks to remedy all the omissions and deficiencies in the biographies” (Radliński 1905: 13–14). As a consequence, the stories handed down in successive generations take on the characteristics of the supernatural and the miraculous, in which fiction merges with reality and thus becomes similar to myth or legend. For, to quote Roland Barthes again: “Myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (Barthes 2020: 352). The “apocryphal stories” mentioned above are, therefore, cultural texts that use cultural codes perpetuated in the ever-circulating media of these codes, which change according to social needs and in accordance with the development of the means of their dissemination. Above all, however, what comes to the fore in the popularity of apocryphal stories based on the life of the Prepodobna Stoyna, in my opinion, is their timeless function: encouraging, creating for the faithful a better, ordered world in which all overcome obstacles have a purpose. The story of Stoyna and the belief in the miraculousness of a place where the faithful experience an energetic impact on their well-being fulfils their needs, which are realised within the contemporary transformation of religiosity.

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