



The Esoteric Background of Yugoslav Messianism¹

Nemanja RADULOVIĆ

NEMANJA RADULOVIĆ  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6572-0787>

BELGRADE UNIVERSITY, Faculty of Philology

E-MAIL: nem_radulovic@yahoo.com

Abstract

Panhumanism was an intellectual movement in interwar Serbian culture that encompassed the idea of Yugoslav messianism. After research based on the archive material of the New Atlantis, we show that the circle of panhumanists from what was essentially the Serbian branch of network of esotericist Dimitrije Mitirnović. Apart from the work on spreading the ideas of Mitirnović, this circle was devoted to occult practices, also under the leadership of a teacher from London.

KEYWORDS: *panhumanism, messianism, occultism, Mitirnović, Yugoslavia*

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: *panhumanizm, mesjanizm, okultyzm, Mitirnović, Jugosławia*

¹ The paper is based on the article “Beogradski krug Mitirnovićevih sledbenika u svetlu arhivske građe” (Nicholai studies 2.1 (2023)), but reworked for this occasion.

Panhumanism

In early 1920s, a movement appeared among Serbian intellectuals for which different names are used both by its ideologist and critics: 'neomessianism' (Stojanović Zorovavelj 1922), 'new humanism' (Vujić, Slankamenac 1923), 'neohumanism' (Gligorić 2013, originally 1931), 'Slavic-Indian panhumanism' (Đurić 1922a), but the most influential was 'panhumanism'. One of its key element was a kind of Yugoslav messianism. This had to be understood in the context of 1918: the creation of new South Slavic state and of Czechoslovakia, and the restoration of Poland, which seemed to be the beginning of a new age, of liberty and of Slavdom.² At the same time, this was a transformation of Yugoslav ideology from the pre-1914 period that had influenced the young generation towards the idea of world mission.

The main tenets of panhumanism were:³ Europe is in spiritual crisis, as the Great War, the result of Western materialism, proved. Regeneration could come from the spiritual East. 'We' (Slavs generally or South Slavs specifically), being a bridge between the East (primarily India) and the West or a synthesis of both, which could bring renewal (Christian or syncretic). The Slavic mission was believed to be universal, since the synthesis would transform not only an exhausted Europe but also the entire world, and all nations would unite (like the South Slavic nations already do) in a new humanity, through the impetus given by the Slavs. A period of brotherhood and peace among nations would start, while nationalisms and imperialisms would disappear. The new epoch would be marked by the emergence of *panhuman* (*svečovek*), which would unite all cultures and all religions, as well as everything existing in the universe. And even more could follow for some authors: expansion to other planets, and into 'inter cosmic beings', the emergence of a cosmic telepathic consciousness and of new religions (Đurić 1922b).

The movement (which overlaps largely with current of the so-called *cosmism* of Serbian avant-garde poetry and with shift from academic philosophy toward irrationalism), has been researched as part of different fields, by historians and students of literature, philosophy and theology and described as 'Slavic-Oriental mysticism' (Vučković 1979, 282), a part of 'interwar modernism' or 'new mysticism' (Radulović 1989, 141-143), 'anthropological literary

² No wonder that in interwar Yugoslav culture, we find strong Slavophile tones in culture and politics. For the confluence of esotericism and politics following the example of Yugoslav and Czech Freemasonry, involving Alfons Mucha see: Radulović 2020, 201.

³ Primary sources are numerous, specially when it comes to journal articles, hence the bibliography in this paper gives only those directly quoted.



criticism' (Palavestra 2008, 304), 'right-wing transformation of expressionism' (Vučković 2011, 268–281), 'anti-European discourse', (Prpa 2018, 321–354), 'anti-Westernism' (Buchenau 2011), 'irrationalism' and *Lebensphilosophie* (Stojković 1970; Žunjić 2014), and 'counter-enlightenment' (Dimitrijević 2015). Critics reproached panhumanists from different angles: leftist or pro-Western. Official Communist philosophy after 1945 condemned it as the racist and reactionary philosophy of the old regime, backed up by 'white Russian' and 'Hindu colonial mysticism' (Nedeljković 1948).

The movement can be added to the map of European 1920s cultural criticism and messianism, which can yield new insights in comparative research, especially if its esoteric aspect is included. For example, for Fernando Pessoa, just like for Dostoevsky, being Portuguese meant being universalist and synthetic (Pessoa 2011, 260, 286–287) – and Pessoa was the inheritor of Sebastianism, merged with modern occultism. Even Guénon (1921, 342) ended his first book expecting Latin messianism.

However, esoteric sources of panhumanism have been neglected. The same applies to the political attempts of these authors, who are usually regarded as cultural ideologists. In this paper, we will endeavour to cast more light on this, using previously unused archive sources.

Sources, history, protagonists

Different influences converge in panhumanism. The very concept of the panhuman stems from Dostoevsky's 1880 speech on Pushkin, where it was described as trait of Russian character to take the form of every nation, which found great resonance among Russian authors, like V. Solovyov. Serbian panhumanists elevated Dostoevsky to the rank of a prophet (for details: Babović 1961, 260–284); however they changed the concept in two aspects, extending the panhuman concept to Yugoslavs and Slavs generally⁴ and adding a new element to panhumanism: the Orient. Their panhuman was shaped by Vedantic monism, as a source which obviously inspired the idea of a cosmic unity. Besides the Upanishads and Tagore's *Sadhana*, another important influence was Tagore's famous 1917 booklet *Nationalism*, where the poet called for universal human history – 'opening of one's heart to the soul of universe'. While *Nationalism* was met with rejection in China, Japan and Poland, as book that can weaken national strength (Bharucha 2006, 84–85; Pobožniak 2018, 351), among Belgrade panhumanists its universalist message was felt

⁴ They also didn't share Dostoevsky's political conservatism, having more sympathies for Masaryk.



as a stimulus for national messianism. No wonder they saw Tagore and Gandhi as messianic figures of global importance. A third source was Russian religious philosophy, *Lebensphilosophie*, Bergson, and William James. This included an interest in parapsychology (to use modern term). Topics like telepathy or experimental research of spiritualism are also present in their articles, albeit it is the least researched part of the corpus.

By 1917–1918, Serbian intellectuals scattered around Europe expressed messianic ideas.⁵ *Krfski zabavnik*, an appendix of official newspapers of the exiled Serbian government in Greece, edited by literary critic Branko Lazarević, published articles about the mission of Slavs, coming from India, to herald a future era of universal man and of the synthesis of God and human. Translations from Tagore, Vedas, Upanishads and Shankara accompanied this.

The peak of panhumanism appeared in 1920s. The very term spread through Serbian culture beyond the original panhumanist authors, taking different meanings: from avant-garde poets who used the term panhuman as an expression of primitivist originality to Orthodox theologians who fit it into theological categories as synonym for Christ; from right-leaning Yugoslav nationalists, to those who identify this mission with Soviet Russia. While ‘panhuman’ became a topos enjoying popularity in different milieus, it came from an original kernel, a group of closely knit intellectuals, whom we should call ‘panhumanists’ strictly speaking. Here we need short portrait of this core group.

One of them was Bishop Nicholas Velimirović (1881–1956), whose 1919 book *The Words About the Panhuman* was a kind of manifesto. He was leader of the reformist and ecumenical movement in the Serbian Orthodox Church, politically active during WWI in Britain and USA lobbying for Serbian war aims on behalf of the government. In his early works, he professed a kind of cosmic monism and religious universalism resembling Vedanta. Although he was an Orthodox cleric, his idea of Slavic messianism was supra religious. In articles published during the war, he announced a future Slavic time as a period of universal peace, when nationalisms will be eliminated from the world. Between 1918 and 1919, he published a couple of articles in A. R. Orage’s *New Age*; we single out *Indian Panhumanism* where he says:

Why dare we Christians not call Krishna *our* prophet, and even our great prophet? Was Elijah the Prophet more spiritual being than divine Krishna? Or does

⁵ Some researchers distinguish Serbian (before 1918) and Yugoslav messianism (after 1918) (Babović 1961, 262).



the Prophet Jeremiah stand nearer Christ than the prophet Krishna? No. Hardly anyone can find more spirituality on many pages of the Old testament than in the Bhagavad-Gita. (Velimirović 1919, 127)

This short article contains the gist of his panhumanism, that would be developed in *The Words* and numerous other articles, which brought him accusations of heterodoxy. As early as 1922, he distanced himself from panhumanists moving toward conservative positions, although he remained an Indophile throughout his entire life. He believed that Serbs, being a small nation without colonial ambitions, had messianic role of converting India to Christianity without force, and baptized India then would be able to rekindle religious feeling in the whole world, since all religions have their essence in India.

Another was Classical scholar Miloš Đurić (1892–1967), who later would become the most important Serbian translator from Greek. His PhD, however, wasn't on classical themes but on *Lebensphilosophie*.⁶ Djurić coined the term Slavic-Indian panhumanism and propagated the Upanishadic identity of *ātman* and *brahman* as the heart of the Yugoslav mission. Djurić praised both the Indian and Slavic spirit as ecumenical and pacifist (obviously, spiritual ecumenism corresponds to ethical pacifism and ontological monism). He also published an article about Christ as a yogin, re-telling Abhedananda.

There were two theologians and ex-monks who left monastic order, although they remained Christians: Pavle Jevtić (1896–1951) and Dušan Stojanović (1895–1949). Jevtić is the first Serbian Indologist with a PhD (on karma and reincarnation) from SOAS,⁷ and translator of *Bhagavadgītā*. Stojanović received his PhD on Solovyov at Oxford, published books on Bergson and on Russian religious philosophy,⁸ and translated Tagore's *Nationalism*. Their belief in spiritual regeneration was a combination of Christian mysticism (Sophianism in Stojanović) with Indian elements.

In this group, we also find Vladeta Popović (1894–1951), who, with his wife Mary Stansfield Popović (1899–1989), was the founder of English Studies at Belgrade university. While Popović is mostly remembered for his academic work on English literature, in the period we discuss, he not only published a couple of panhumanist articles, but he was personally, as we shall see, involved with the rest of the group.

⁶ Under the supervision of Croat philosopher Albert Bazala, author of the pioneer book of parapsychology in interwar Yugoslavia.

⁷ One committee member for his thesis was John Woodroof.

⁸ Some of them (D.S. Merezhkovsky, N.A. Berdyaev, S.N. Bulgakov, B.P. Visheslavtsev) he met personally.



The person connecting all of them was Dimitrije Mitrinović (1887–1953), a Serbian art and literature critic from Bosnia, who moved to London in 1914 and was to remain there for the rest of his life. While before 1914, Mitrinović belonged to anti-Austrian national-revolutionary youth, in the UK, he became the leader of groups aimed at social reform in a pan-European and global context. At the same time, he was a teacher of an inner circle of disciples working with them with psychological and spiritual exercises. His historiosophy, formed during the war and explained publicly from the early 1920s (when he appeared in Orage's *The New Age*) is an organicist vision of world with elements of Theosophical macrohistory (root races), Steiner's threefold state, Vedanta, and Sophianism, where, at the end of world process, people will gain new level of expanded consciousness realizing their divine nature, when God and Christ in humans will awake. Mitrinović brought his Orientalized variant of Solovyov's panhuman to British public, presenting Slavs as important factor in creating an East-West synthesis. Mitrinović's influence on young people before 1914. is well attested – for example, he brought Upanishadic theme of cosmic unity in Serbian poetry⁹ – but it can also be taken that the panhumanism of 1920s represent the development of his ideas.

Belgrade panhumanists share the core themes with Mitrinović: panhumanity and world unification, the role of the Slavs in an East-West synthesis, pro-Orientalism, cosmism, a human divine nature. Therefore, the idea of a Yugoslav mission can be better understood in the background of Mitrinović's English texts, where the topic is placed in a larger macro-historical picture. Less researched is the mutual theme of expansion of consciousness that dominated Mitrinović's historiosophy (Rigby 1984, 75, 83), and appears in panhumanist articles. While Djurić wrote of telepathy, papers by Jevtić and Popović show belief in higher states of consciousness that existed in ancient India and that can be achieved nowadays, through yoga, understood as development of latent possibilities or, which can come as a surprise, through psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis (encompassing Freud and Adler and Jung)¹⁰ wasn't regarded as the opening of a dark abyss, but as the modern scientific complement to yoga – namely, both can strengthen religion.

⁹ It is important to note that Mitrinović's panhuman vision entirely corresponds to an avant-garde pathos of mankind's brotherhood. It is one of the red threads that connect his early and his later activity and that situate panhumanism more fully into the interwar context (see Milnović 2022).

¹⁰ Mitrinović was the founder of the Adler society in the UK, before Adler withdrew his support when the group turned more toward politics.



Panhumanism as Mitrinović's group

Their involvement with Mitrinović wasn't matter of purely textual influences. They all (except Djurić) were in England either during the war (like Velimirović) or in the 1920s (for studies or diplomacy), where Mitrinović exercised his influence on them. This experience also turned most of them into Anglophiles, in dominantly Francophile Serbian culture, which explains their most unexpected feature – the otherwise unusual combination of respect for British Empire and Slavophilism. It seems that the experience of the multicultural capital of the British Empire (Markovich 2017, 178) – where they met Indian intellectuals for example – was also an impulse for their universalism. A maritime empire seemed to be a blueprint for future world unity, which led them to take a lenient attitude toward British colonialism. Mitrinović developed the idea of British messianism, alongside a Slavic one.

Although the general impression in the interwar period in Serbia was that Mitrinović had withdrawn from national culture, panhumanist activity was largely spreading ideas inspired by him through books, journals and lectures. The group started the journal *Preteča* (The Forerunner) in 1928–1929, but only three issues were published, on great Church holidays, bringing article on panhumanism, the Oriental, Balkan and Slavic mission (including excerpts from Krasinski and Slovacki). Many other authors joined panhumanists' camp, even Yugoslav Anthroposophists.¹¹

It is no exaggeration to describe the core group as Mitrinović's network. The letters from Mitrinović's New Atlantis Foundation archive, kept today in J. B. Priestley Library University of Bradford, shed more light on this.¹² The members of the Belgrade group saw their activity as part of the same movement as Mitrinović's British group of students,¹³ and they were in contact

¹¹ One of the contributors was Ratko Parežanin, another of Young Bosnia generation, who decades later described meeting Mitrinović as "an unforgivable experience". In *Preteča*, he published articles on the Balkan world mission, while in 1934 he (as senior official of Central Presbiro) started the Balkan Institute with the mission of developing Balkan studies. Part of the initial funds was contributed by the king. Although nominally independent and private, the Institute's mission overlapped with the Yugoslav foreign policy of bringing together Balkan nations, and it could better be understood with such possible subtext. Recent research strongly suggests that the Institute was discreetly backed up by the state for its finances (Obradović 2010). Parežanin – sympathetic toward 'new Russia' as 'awakening of cosmic powers' 'from Asia' in *Preteča* – joined the Fascist movement in the 1930s.

¹² Access to materials was kindly helped by Julie Parry (J. B. Priestley Library University of Bradford) and Mike Tyldesley (Mitrinović Foundation). I thank them both. Another part of his legacy is in University Library in Belgrade.

¹³ Cf. Dušan Stojanović to Mitrinović 11.1.1926 (NAF 1/7/12/29).



with Mitrinović's London disciples: Valerie Cooper, Lillian Slade and writer and pacifist activist Philip Mairet. Alan Porter, active as lecturer on Adler's psychology in Mitrinović's London circle, travelled to Belgrade to deliver lectures to the Belgrade group.¹⁴ It seems that the main goal was an idealistic regeneration of society, and for that, beside publications, the word should have been spread among associates, but influential people and the media were specifically targeted. Jevtić had the task of meeting figures from public life, like powerful politician Svetozar Pribićević,¹⁵ made plans to acquire diplomatic passport for Mitrinović, and contacted some journalists – noticing that they are not familiar with Theosophy and Buddhism, but 'for the time being' they could serve 'as a medium to reach the real people'.¹⁶ Mitrinović was asked to be president of an organization, aimed at becoming a centre for spiritual and cultural activity, that involved Theosophists and Anthroposophists; the initiative seemed to have attracted the interest of Prince Paul of the Royal House¹⁷ and the Croat politician Pavle Radić.¹⁸

But Mitrinović wasn't only an intellectual teacher. Both in interwar Britain and in Yugoslavia critics described his circles as a kind of cult and him as a guru, false apostle, mystagogue and hypnotist (Van Hengel 2020, 276; Page 2016, 57; Radulović 2023, 84). Literary critic Velibor Gligorić directly attacked the group around *The Forerunner* as cult waiting for Mitrinović to become the messiah. It is worth noting that the word *Preteča* in Serbian is also a term used for John the Baptist (*prodromos*). Was Mitrinović seen as a John Baptist of the coming panhuman? Velimirović in his *Indian Letters*, from period when he distanced from the group, mentions how Mitrinović's Indian disciples revered him as an avatar. Even if this is not correct, it testifies to what image contemporaries had of Mitrinović.

But did the critics exaggerate? Archive material from 1940s and 1950s pertaining to his British circle describe him as a world teacher with a unique doctrine, calling him 'Abraxas' and 'the pneumatic technocrat of the age'. Recent research discovered that one of the exercises he gave to (English) disciples, innocuously called 'fostering independency', actually meant that

¹⁴ Vladeta Popović to Mitrinović 19.12.1926 (NAF 1/7/12/33).

¹⁵ Pavle Jevtić to Mitrinović 25.8. NAF 1/7/11/25; no date NAF 1/7/13/46.

¹⁶ Pavle Jevtić to Mitrinović 28.8.s.a. (NAF 1/7/13/50).

¹⁷ Vladeta Popović to Mitrinović 13.4.1926 (NAF 1/7/11/6).

¹⁸ The owner of the place was Vojislav Kujundžić, a notable Belgrade doctor, pioneer of crematism, freemason and a Teosophist (president of Belgrade lodge *East*). He was in the same Masonic lodge as Miloš Đurić and in the late 1930s he started a kind of movement based, again, on Slavic messianism.



Mitrinović decided which of the students would have sex with whom (Van Hengel 2020, 231), which uncannily makes him appear Osho-like.

Even some published articles reveal such an attitude. Stojanović hails Mitrinović as greater than Dostoevsky and Solovyov, since he made nothing less than a synthesis of Christianity with Oriental religions, and synthesis of theurgy, theosophy and theocracy as well (Stojanović 1927); Jevtić approvingly reports that in the UK Mitrinović is revered as the “new messiah” (Jevtić 1938).

An occult circle

If we again turn to letters from the archive exchanged between Mitrinović and the Belgrade group again, it is confirmed that beyond intellectual public activity there was much more unknown to the public: occult practices. The group used to gather on Saturdays to read *Bhagavadgītā*, Mabel Collins’ *Light on the Path*, Max Heindel’s *Cosmoconception*, and ‘on many an occasion’ something from ‘Guravlev’s yoga’ – which I assume stands mistakenly for Gurdjieff. On Thursdays, some members (plus other visitors from the literary world) gathered to practice exercises from Heindel’s *Cosmoconception*: energetic, morning and evening exercises, and some others called non-identification and detachment (perhaps created by Mitrinović himself). Mitrinović was informed to what extent some of the participants did (or did not) progress in exercises.¹⁹ It seems that there were separate exercise groups for men and women.²⁰

Another part of activity was circulating the reading material. Mitrinović and his London disciples sent to Belgrade Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*, Steiner’s lectures, and ‘Gurdjieff’s system’²¹ (Mairet had to be reminded of sending ‘Gurdjieff’s system’).²² From Belgrade, the current reading was reported (Steiner, Heindel, Ernst Wood).²³ Vladeta Popović reported about his visit to Dornach, where he met notable Anthroposophists Günter Wachsmuth, Emil

¹⁹ Popović to Mitrinović 1.11.1926 (NAF 1/7/12/36); 19.12.1926 (NAF 1/7/12/33). The first letter also references to reading “G.s’ lecture”.

²⁰ Jevtić to Mitrinović, no date (1920s) (NAF 1/7/11/20). This is practice he used for his British groups too.

²¹ Stojanović to Mitrinović 11.1.1926 (NAF 1/7/12/29); Stojanović to Mitrinović 24.8. (NAF 1/7/13/51) Jevtić to Mitrinović 16. 3 [1925]. 1/7/13/44. Jevtić to Mitrinović 14.3. [1925] 1/7/13/43.

²² Stojanović to Mitrinović, 3. 9. 1926 (NAF 1/7/12/35).

²³ Vladeta Popović to Mitrinović 10.9.1925 (NAF 1/7/12/26).



Molt and George Kaufmann.²⁴ Jevtić also asked if he should have visited Dornach.²⁵ New members were to be recruited: one letter informed Mitrinović how a lady was loaned Swedenborg, Steiner and Ernst Wood so that in a couple of months she would be ‘ready’ for Saturday meetings.²⁶

Their public activity can be seen as filtering down of the occult activity of the innermost kernel. Such a double way of practice – social and secret – was Mitrinović’s *modus operandi* generally (Rigby 1984: 162).²⁷ Perhaps, the main point connecting their public and their hidden activity is belief in acquiring new, superior level of consciousness. In that sense, it is interesting to notice that in the early 1920s the Gurdjieff system reached Belgrade (via London), which is important for the study of Gurdjieff. One article by Vladeta Popović uses terminology strikingly similar to Gurdjieff’s and Ouspensky’s (Popović 1928), about three types of people according to their development, i.e. contact with different ‘reservoirs of energy’.

The teacher comes back. Political action

1929 was a crucial year for the movement. On January the 6th, King Alexander decided to resolve political conflicts between Serbian and Croat politicians by introducing personal regime. The country changed its name to Yugoslavia, with an officially proclaimed ideology of ‘integral Yugoslavism’, according to which Serbs, Croats and Slovenes are merely three ‘clans’ of one Yugoslav nation. Panhumanists, although essentially democrats, hailed this royal move as fulfilment of their ideas. Mitrinović’s group started the new journal *Društvena obnova* (Social renewal) (1929–1930), owned by Mitrinović’s brother. It is telling that the front page of the first issue has the King’s picture and Mitrinović’s programmatic text *For Yugoslavia*. One article (by Mitrinović’s associate Slovenian ethnologist Niko Županič) in the same issue expresses hope that The King would become ‘Imperator totius Slaviae’! The journal was of a strongly Slavophile tone, with articles on Slavic messianism, but also on Krishnamurti and Gandhi. It also brought parts of *Sidereal Birth* by Mitrinović’s friend, German Jewish mystic Erich Gutkind.

²⁴ Vladeta Popović to Mitrinović 6.10.1925 (NAF 1/7/12/24).

²⁵ Pavle Jevtić to Mitrinović 28. 8. 6.r (NAF 1/7/13/50).

²⁶ Vladeta Popović to Mitrinović 19.12.1926 (NAF 1/7/12/33).

²⁷ Cf. “It seems clear that whatever the proclaimed aim of Mitrinović’s public initiatives, such as the Adler Society and the New Europe Group, one of their prime functions was to create settings within which potential recruits to his inner circle(s) might be identified...” (Rigby 2022: 40).



The journal emphasized the need for ‘new people’ for a ‘new time’, obviously recommending themselves.

Now it was time for Mitrinović to return. While his disciples prepared the public, Mitrinović established contact with the new government. There is a letter, previously unmentioned in research, Mitrinović sent to general Petar Živković (1879–1947), appointed by the King to be the prime minister (1929–1932) of the new government.²⁸ Živković was Alexander’s confidant, and, as key figure of court camarilla involved in different intrigues very unpopular in public. Mitrinović recommends for political reasons buying British briquettes and a contractor who can secure credit for Yugoslavia in Britain.

I am ensured that in new regime of our state and in government you are presiding at, English see the possibility of investing their money and their products at us [...] so this financial rapprochement with England should be used for our purposes to renew and reinforce our absolutely necessary political ties with this empire.²⁹

He adds that he will inform general more about ‘our work’ in Britain, especially among socialists in government. The contractor he recommended was industrialist Ivo Gabela, who belonged to Mitrinović’s (British) New Europe group. As we see from newspapers, the deal was successful: British coal owners sent briquettes to the Yugoslav railway on a credit basis, and the 100% guarantee for the credit was given by none other than the British government (instead of the usual 70%). While this was published in newspapers as the new government’s political success, Mitrinović’s role remained unknown to public. But on the very same page bringing this news (*Vreme*, 18.7.1930.), there is an article by Gabela, praising both Mitrinović and the King.³⁰ We lack details about the background of this and similar activities of Mitrinović.

In 1930, Mitrinović came back. He was hailed as a pioneer of the Yugoslav idea, giving interviews and public lectures and supporting the new policy. In an article explaining his program, he stated that divine nature is the essence of humanity, and the Yugoslavs, being the new type of humanity, would embody human perfection, with God awakened within them. Mitrinović’s style deserves to be quoted:

²⁸ Mitrinović to Petar Živković 5.12.1929 (NAF 1/7/10/32).

²⁹ Mitrinović’s letter to Petar Živković from 1929.

³⁰ It is also interesting that the report about the deal was written by Čedomilj Mijatović (who, according to Mitrinović’s letter, knew Gabela). Mijatović was writer and Serbia’s former ambassador in UK, who spent the rest of his life in London – but he was also the pioneer and life-long propagator of Spiritism in Serbia.



The sons of Yugoslavia, this empire of ours, are given and commanded a difficult and important function in the kinds (*rod*) of nations, in the Empire of Empires, Panhuman Adam is an empire and glory of all the people, lines, family, dynasties, tribes, nations, all worlds in the kinds of the Earth.

That function is service to Panhuman, leading from Yugoslav to All-Slavic civilization and resolution of the 'ecumenical problem'.

Yugoslavia will be the organ of humanity, which will for the very first time give life to the racial ideal of human perfection in the masses. The average son of Yugoslavia will be, when the building of Yugoslavia is fully completed, the highest type of human fulfilment and simple glory. God will breathe in man by the conscious will of man. (Mitrinović 1990, 207-215)

This has been criticized as racism, especially from the left: but the article is understandable precisely on the esoteric background of ideas like the expansion of consciousness and of merging the heritage of Slavic messianism with esotericism. Finally, Mitrinović met King Alexander. Literary critic and diplomat Branko Lazarević (see supra), who was also a panhumanist,³¹ was close to the King, and he succeeded in making an audience for Mitrinović. According to his testimony, given to literary historian Predrag Palavestra, the King's idea was to start new review that would propagate the new policy and Lazarević recommended Mitrinović as its editor. Thus, Mitrinović would be a spokesperson (or perhaps even a kind of the ideologist) of integral Yugoslavism (Palavestra 2003, 340).³²

Alexander (1888-1934) seemed to be a good receptacle for Mitrinović's ideas. During his schooling in Russia, as a protege of Nicholas II, he encountered mystical circles, (Gligorijević 1996, 28)³³; he was interested in prophets and collected prophecies. He was in contact with Nicholas Roerich, inviting the artist to come to Yugoslavia for a long study stay (this didn't happen but

³¹ Cf. his book *Three Highest Yugoslav Values* (1930) where he proclaimed artist Ivan Meštrović to be the gnostic and panhuman embodiment of Eastern-Western synthesis. Not suprisingly, Mitrinović was the first to provide a historiosophical interpretation of Meštrović's art.

³² It is interesting to notice that in the same period of personal regime, Croat poet and critic Milan Marjanović was appointed as chief of Presburo (government's journalist and intelligence agency). Marjanović was Mitrinović's friend from youth, deeply influenced by Vedantic monism, too, and devoted Freemason, and Theosophist, author of esoteric articles and books, translator of Besant; it seems that he was also member of The Order of the Star of the East, and that he visited Krishnamurti (Radulović 2020: 197-199). Some of his texts also combine esotericism and the idea of Yugoslav messianism.

³³ His two aunts were Montenegrin princesses married to the Romanov family; they were interested in occultism, had contact with Maître Philippe and were most probably responsible for introducing Rasputin to court.



Roerich had sent him the picture *The Land of the Slavs* (Radulović 2016)). The international representative of the Bahai movement Martha Root was received at the Belgrade court (Root 1928).³⁴ (There is no proof of Alexander being a freemason, but he and the brotherhood were supportive of each other, which, however, had more to do with the political role of Yugoslav masonry, than with the esotericism).

However, The King's lunch with Mitrinović in Sarajevo, turned out to be a disaster. According to Lazarević, Mitrinović said to the King that the Yugoslav problem was not a national but religious one; the King had the unique opportunity now to unite Orthodox and Catholic Christianity and Islam into a new Yugoslav religion. After the meeting, the King decided not to see Mitrinović any more (Palavestra, 2003, 340). We can put this proposal into Mitrinović's larger framework; he obviously saw integrated Yugoslavia as a springboard for global unification. Mitrinović publicised these ideas publicly in the article "The mission of Sarajevo" (1930) (Mitrinović 1990, 216–218): "The main problem of Yugoslavia in principle and essence is, as the problem of every race and nation generally, religious and mystical problem of self-knowledge in Panhuman...".

Initially met with warmth, Mitrinović left his country under attacks never to come back. Panhumanists realized that the mission had ended as a failure. Mitrinović focused on political activities in UK, and we can mention in passing that his activity in Britain also included an occult side: he organized paramasonic groups with rituals with the same aims as the aims of his public groups. But that is a topic for another paper.

Concluding remarks

Panhumanism and messianism were seen as intertwined, both by the protagonists, opponents and by researchers. Indeed, the idea of a messianic role for the Southern Slavs was a key component of the movement. Such panhumanist messianism proved itself as a fruitful stimulus for interwar Serbian culture, inspiring thinking beyond the original group. Mitrinović, for a long time considered as someone who had severed ties with national culture, appears as a figure that loomed behind, but more important are the panhumanist concepts which gained a life of their own. At the beginning, we located panhumanism in its contemporary context. But it can also be seen in its historical perspective. Cultures of the former 'Byzantine

³⁴ Although she was received by Queen Mary and her mother, Romanian Queen Mary.



commonwealth' entered modernity wrestling with questions of identity (polemics of Russian Slavophiles and Westerners is probably the most famous). The East-West question, that occupied Europe after 1918, took a different shape in interwar Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Russian emigrant culture. It came as new layer on these older debates. Panhumanism tried to answer the question 'who are we' through identification with the East or proposing an utopic, millenarian synthesis of East and West. It differs from similar 19th century ideas by expanding the issue of identity from the Balkans to the global, even cosmic scale. Such a bold vision of the world was accompanied with the idea of self-change, and the emergence of a new type of human. This radical shift in the idea of national mission was in large part due to esoteric sources (mediated by Mitrinović circle).³⁵ The point connecting esoteric sources with national mission was probably the idea of self-change as expressed in ideas of experiments with consciousness. Panhumanists operated on two levels, internal and external: the former, esoteric, was another expression of the later where they were active as cultural ideologists.

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³⁵ For the esoteric versions of Slavic messianism see Radulović 2015.



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