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RE-RAISED INTO THE LIGHT: TRACES OF THE NEOPLATONIC LADDER OF BEING IN BALKAN MEDICAL PRAXIS DURING THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURIES*

Abstract: *This study draws upon historical texts to examine the raw materials (materia medica) used in traditional medicines across European, Mediterranean, and Balkan therapeutics during the 14th and 15th centuries. By analyzing these sources, the research highlights new approaches to compiling and interpreting remedies, emphasizing the enduring influence of philosophical ideas on the formation of encoded systems in pre-scientific disciplines, including medicine. The study focuses particularly on simplices, which are here interpreted a posteriori as representations of the purest raw materials essential for the preparation of remedia. These remedies can be understood as direct manifestations of the prototypical concept encoded in Neoplatonism as the scala naturae, guiding the soul toward the supreme being.*

Keywords: *Neoplatonism in the 14th and 15th Balkans, Neoplatonic concepts of artis medicinae Balcanicae.*

Introduction

This study focuses on the pharmacognostic monographs and pharmacopeiac units preserved in two of the most significant late Medieval and early Renaissance Serbian manuscripts. These texts, as reflections of pre-scientific medical and speculative philosophical doctrines, aim to guide the transmutation of Matter by providing the “climbing ladder path tools” necessary to break the chains of bondage and ascend to the Divine. In the language of Neoplatonic medicinal alchemy, they articulate the quest for a universal cure or elixir of life, a substance capable of healing all diseases and granting access to the essential nature of God—that is, immortality—a pursuit that has fascinated humanity for centuries.

Among the key sources are the Hilandar Medical Codex, preserved at Hilandar on Mount Athos, compiled most likely in the 15th or early 16th century within the monastery’s scriptorium, though some of its translated sources may trace back to earlier centers of learning.¹ This codex represents the most complete example of a wide-ranging collection of medical manuscripts, primarily rooted in the Salerno-Montpellier medical tradition, written in the vernacular and reflecting a vast reference corpus. The second crucial manuscript is the Hodoch Code, dating from the late 14th or early 15th century, which similarly preserves a collection of

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¹ Cf. Vacić 2025 for a more recent perspective.

Serbian medieval medical knowledge. Complementing these are comparative materials derived from the Medieval Semitic *materiae medicae*, a corpus that influenced the composition of specific remedies and contributed to the emergence of concepts such as the quintessence and the ascension on the *scala naturae*, as reflected in contemporary European writings and preserved, for instance, in the Cairo Genizah medical corpus.²

The study adopts an interdisciplinary perspective, exploring the interplay between linguistic and cultural phenomena. Attention is given to the symbolic and meta-linguistic dimensions of terms such as the elixir, Serbian еликсир,³ derived from Arabic *äl-iksir* and ultimately from the Greek *ksērós*, originally denoting “dry” in reference to wood and later to powdered substances.⁴ In this context, the study engages with Saussurean notions of the signifier and signified⁵ while drawing on cultural anthropology to examine natural philosophical ideas as socially constructed phenomena. This approach investigates how cultural practices, norms, and institutions shape language and, conversely, how linguistic frameworks reinforce or challenge philosophical and social concepts. Historical and evolutionary contexts are considered to illuminate the deeper roots and transmission of these ideas.

Tracing the origins of European medicinal doctrine reveals that the art of healing in the pre-modern period was inseparable from spiritual concerns and divine involvement. Ancient healing centers, most famously the temple of Asclepius in Epidaurus, combined practical medicine with ritualized spiritual guidance. Asclepius, instructed by Apollo and the centaur Chiron in the use of medicinal herbs, oversaw treatments that began with interpreting patients’ dreams, believed to carry messages from the gods. Priests then prescribed therapies, selected medicinal substances, and performed rituals to invoke divine assistance.⁶ Such knowledge, passed down through generations, forms the foundation of classical works like Dioscorides’ *De materia medica*, which documents over a thousand medicinal substances of plant, animal, and mineral origin.⁷

For centuries, this knowledge informed monastic medicine, which emerged in the early Christian period as monks cared for the sick and cultivated medicinal herbs in monastic gardens. Christianity further shaped healthcare and spiritual healing through the ministry of Jesus Christ, whose practices provided a model for caring for the sick that had both religious and societal significance.⁸

The Hodoch Code

Within the Balkans, the Hodoch Code and the Hilandar Medical Codex preserve the earliest evidence of medicinal plant use, revealing the practices of Serbian and South-Slavic medicine during the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. The Hodoch Code, in particular, consists primarily of translated Latin reference texts from the Scuola Medica Salernitana, illustrating the transmission and adaptation of Mediterranean medical knowledge into the local context.

The Scuola Medica Salernitana stands as one of the most remarkable intellectual institutions of the Middle Ages, often regarded as the first true medical school in Europe. Its influence on the development of medical knowledge and education was profound, and its unique

² Cf. The Cairo Genizah.

³ V. HJP, s.v.

⁴ V. Fordyce.

⁵ Cf. *de Saussure* 1959.

⁶ Cf. Storl 2017.

⁷ Cf. Dioscuridis.

⁸ V. Porterfield 2005, 42-65.

synthesis of diverse cultural and scientific traditions made it a truly progressive center of learning. Drawing inspiration from the works of Hippocrates and Galen, the school's curriculum was equally shaped by the medical heritage of the Arabic world, whose texts reached Western Europe through Spain and Sicily.⁹ Many of these works were translated into Latin by scholars associated with monastic centers such as the Library of Montecassino, which played a crucial role in transmitting and preserving medical wisdom during the Islamic Golden Age.

At Salerno, teaching was conducted in Latin and combined rigorous theoretical study with practical experience. Students learned anatomy through dissection, explored the preparation and properties of medicinal substances, and studied pharmacology as both an empirical and philosophical pursuit. The Salernitan School also absorbed influences from Byzantine and Jewish medical traditions, creating an environment that fostered dialogue among different intellectual worlds. This convergence of ideas made Salerno a true melting pot of ancient and medieval medicine.

What distinguished the *Scuola Medica Salernitana* from other centers of learning was its empirical spirit. It emphasized observation, experience, and experimentation as the foundation of medical knowledge, gradually moving away from the unquestioned authority of Galenic tradition. The Salernitan physicians sought to test, verify, and adapt inherited knowledge to the lived realities of illness and healing. Preventive medicine occupied a central role in their teaching, reflecting the conviction that health depended not only on the treatment of disease but also on the preservation of balance and harmony within the human body and its natural environment.

The school's intellectual legacy was secured through a series of influential texts that circulated widely across Europe. Works such as the *Practica brevis* and *Circa instans* of the twelfth century became foundational manuals for later medieval universities, while the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum*—a compendium of medical and ethical precepts in verse—was translated into multiple languages and remained popular well into the Renaissance. As one of the first institutions to establish a formal curriculum and confer degrees, the *Scuola Medica Salernitana* is often seen as a precursor to the modern university. Its integration of Greek, Roman, Arabic, and Jewish traditions not only shaped the evolution of medieval medicine but also laid the groundwork for the empirical and interdisciplinary approaches that would define scientific inquiry in subsequent centuries.¹⁰

Turning to the *Hodoch Code*, it is as if the very essence of this Salernitan legacy has been distilled into the Serbian medieval context. The ancient scripts within are a testament to the enduring human quest for enlightenment and healing, even amid the uncertainties and darkness of history. The codex opens a gateway to a world in which the great thinkers of the past grappled with the mysteries of the human body and the ailments that plagued it, seeking solace in the healing virtues of herbs and in the harmonies of the cosmos. Immersing oneself in its intricate diagrams and meticulous notes evokes a profound kinship with the medieval scribes and physicians whose devotion to knowledge and compassion for the suffering continue to resonate through the centuries.

The *Hodoch Code* is not merely a relic but a living testament to the enduring spirit of inquiry and the boundless capacity of the human intellect. It encompasses chapters on physiology and gynecology, as well as astrological writings used for disease prognosis based on calendars, thunderstorms, and festivals—illustrating the deep interweaving of medical practice with cosmological and religious belief. Its pharmacotherapeutic sections provide precise instructions for the preparation of medicinal potions and ointments, primarily derived from plants but at times

⁹ Cf. Snowden 2011.

¹⁰ Cf. SMS.

supplemented by animal substances, prayers, or magical inscriptions. In its synthesis of empirical knowledge, spiritual devotion, and cosmic symbolism, the *Hodoch Code* stands as a luminous example of how the Salemitan tradition was reinterpreted and transformed within the Serbian cultural and intellectual milieu of the late Middle Ages.¹¹

However, any investigation of health and religiousness inevitably leads to an inquiry into the ways in which the human body itself was understood. Human beings are embodied beings, constantly negotiating their physical existence while striving toward their spiritual fulfillment.¹² To understand medieval healing, one must therefore turn to the philosophical foundations that shaped both the perception of the body and the practice of *ars medicinae*—the art of medicine—that flourished during the Late Middle Ages and early Renaissance of the fifteenth century. This period, spanning the territories of the former Western Roman Empire and its Byzantine, or Eastern Roman, counterpart, which represented the Hellenized continuation of the ancient Roman world, offers a rich comparative context for examining the interaction between Western and Oriental traditions.

The topic is inherently multifaceted, engaging with metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, the philosophy of science, and the philosophy of language. The concept of the body in these traditions is far from monolithic; it is a construct shaped by cultural, historical, and anthropological factors. The body may be viewed as a biological organism, a physical and perceptual entity, a vessel of experience, a medium of social communication, or even as a site of identity and spiritual transformation. Within both Western and Byzantine thought, the human body is ultimately interpreted in relation to the soul's destiny. Health, in this context, is not merely a physiological condition but a spiritual state—an instrument for achieving inner harmony and approaching divine perfection.

The interplay between empirical observation and divine intervention shaped medical practices throughout the medieval world, giving rise to a unique synthesis of science, philosophy, and religion. Healing was not seen as a purely technical endeavor but as a sacred art that mirrored the cosmic order. A comparative study of these conceptions reveals how different cultural contexts expressed the same fundamental human aspiration: to understand and master the physical self as part of the journey toward spiritual enlightenment.

The cross-cultural exchanges of the period further enriched these traditions. The Crusades and the flourishing of the Islamic Golden Age created new channels of communication through which medical and philosophical ideas moved between East and West. The Semitic world, particularly through Arabic and Jewish scholarship, preserved and expanded upon the Greco-Roman medical corpus, integrating it with its own intellectual and spiritual frameworks. Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*, for instance, exerted a profound influence on both Western and Eastern Christian medical traditions, shaping conceptions of anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology for centuries. Likewise, Jewish scholars such as Maimonides served as vital intermediaries between the Islamic and Christian worlds, translating, interpreting, and transmitting medical knowledge across linguistic and religious boundaries.

The integration of Greco-Roman, Islamic, and Jewish medical thought created an intellectual landscape of remarkable diversity and depth.¹³ In this confluence of traditions, healing became both an act of knowledge and of faith—a manifestation of humanity's enduring desire to reconcile the corporeal and the divine.

If we turn to the Neoplatonic context, the relationship between spiritual healing in Oriental traditions, the rise of astrological medicine, and the evolution of alchemy acquires

¹¹ Cf. Karić 1990.

¹² Cf. Fields 2001.

¹³ Cf. Michaelides 2014.

particular significance. Religious therapeutics in Eastern traditions refers to the use of spiritual and ritual practices to restore harmony and promote healing. In Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional Chinese medicine, one encounters numerous examples of this deep intertwining of the spiritual and the corporeal: meditation and yoga as paths toward internal balance, acupuncture as a means of aligning vital energies, and the use of herbs and sacred rituals imbued with symbolic and cosmic meaning. These practices reflect a holistic vision of the human being—an understanding that health arises from the unity of body, soul, and cosmos.

Within the Neoplatonic worldview, this same principle of correspondence between the material and the spiritual found expression in the development of alchemy and astrological medicine. Alchemy, both a practical and a philosophical art, sought not only to transmute base metals into gold but to purify and perfect the human soul through the transformation of matter. Rooted in the belief that material and spiritual realities are reflections of one another, alchemy became a path toward enlightenment—an ascent from the sensible world toward the divine. Its practitioners, the medieval forerunners of modern chemists, engaged in empirical experimentation while interpreting their results within a framework of metaphysical symbolism. The quest for the Philosopher's Stone, the Elixir of Life, and the secret of eternal youth thus mirrored the soul's own striving for immortality and divine union.

Historically, alchemy's origins can be traced to the syncretic milieu of Hellenistic Egypt and the Middle East, where Greek philosophical concepts merged with Egyptian, Persian, and Semitic traditions. From there, it spread to Greece and Rome, and later to the intellectual centers of medieval Europe. Influenced by the Hermetic tradition, alchemy taught that the material and spiritual realms are inseparably linked and that mastery of nature's hidden laws could reveal the divine order within creation. When viewed through this lens, the parallels between Oriental spiritual healing, astrological medicine, and alchemical transformation become clear: all rest on the conviction that harmony between the microcosm and the macrocosm—between the human and the divine—forms the true basis of health and wisdom.

The emergence of astrological medicine and alchemy can be understood within the broader framework of religious therapeutics, both representing distinct yet complementary efforts to comprehend and engage with the fundamental principles of existence in the pursuit of healing and transformation. In Oriental traditions, this endeavor often takes the form of balancing the body's energies, aligning them with the rhythms of the cosmos, and striving toward enlightenment or spiritual realization. Similarly, in the Neoplatonic tradition, alchemy sought to discern the hidden unity underlying all things and to apply this knowledge to the transmutation of Matter. The quest for the Stone of Knowledge thus becomes a philosophical and spiritual journey—an attempt to grasp the divine essence from which all creation emanates.

The threefold aims of alchemy—discovering the Stone of Knowledge, attaining the medium of Eternal Youth and Health, and achieving the transmutation of metals—reflect a holistic understanding of nature and its processes. These aspirations were not limited to material transformation or worldly gain; they represented the alchemist's inner striving for spiritual purification and divine insight. The belief that all matter is composed of the same primordial substance, differing only in its degree of refinement, resonates deeply with certain spiritual doctrines that teach the unity of all beings and the presence of a shared divine spark within them.

Within the Neoplatonic framework, alchemy served as both a metaphysical and a scientific endeavor. It emphasized the interconnectedness of the cosmos, the divine, and the human, affirming that transformation in the material realm mirrors transformation of the soul. During the medieval and early Renaissance periods, such inquiry blurred the modern boundaries between philosophy, medicine, and chemistry. The pursuit of knowledge in any of these domains was animated by a single aspiration—to understand the divine order of the universe and to participate in its harmonizing processes.

The evolution of astrological medicine and alchemy during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, particularly in the Mediterranean and Balkan regions, can thus be viewed as part of a larger continuum of religious therapeutics and Neoplatonic thought. These disciplines sought to harness the forces of the spiritual and the celestial to bring about both physical and metaphysical transformation. They embody the intertwined nature of scientific exploration, philosophical reflection, and spiritual practice that defined the intellectual landscape of the period—a vision of healing in which knowledge of the cosmos was inseparable from knowledge of the self.¹⁴

From Simplex to Complex: The Liberation of Matter from Admixture

The preceding discussion provides the framework within which the emergence of astrological medicine and alchemy must be examined *in concreto*, whether they belong to the same system or not. These disciplines became the subject of intense speculation among Neoplatonists, particularly during the pre-Paracelsian and post-Paracelsian periods, as they represent a fully encoded system of medieval and early Renaissance forerunners of chemistry. Both were deeply concerned with the transmutation of matter and with the magical processes of transformation and re-creation—what Mircea Eliade described as participation in the circle of eternal rebirth.

Etymologically, the word alchemy derives from a Semitic root meaning the secret of the primordial or First Matter. For medieval alchemists, all elements were manifestations of a single fundamental substance existing at different levels of purification. In this sense, alchemy referred to processes operating within the physical realm. However, when viewed from the perspective of the transmutation of the individual human soul, the terminology of alchemy encompasses two broad semantic fields defined by phenomena or entities belonging either to darkness or to light within the *scala naturae*—a metaphysical instrument enabling both ascent and descent along the cosmic hierarchy.

In its early stages, alchemy employed planetary and astronomical symbols as chemical representations, further illustrating the intimate relationship between cosmic order and material transformation. Within this framework, the present study examines the pharmacotherapeutic content of the *Hodoch Code* collection, in which numerous remedies—primarily of plant, mineral, and animal origin—are described in ways that appear unusual to the modern reader. Their application often presupposes knowledge of corresponding astrological texts and is accompanied by prayers, charms, and the use of amulets, revealing a profound intertwining of medical, magical, and spiritual dimensions.

For instance, against fevers, the text recommends the application of Epiphany water accompanied by a prayer to Christ; similarly, to treat rabies, it prescribes *prospora* inscribed with a magical formula as a remedy.¹⁵

The *Hilandar Medical Code* represents a monumental compilation of European scientific medical writings dating from the twelfth to the fifteenth century. This collection, preserved on Mount Athos, is written in the vernacular—closely resembling the Balkanized dialects of the Serbian language, such as the Prizren–Timok speech—which provides valuable clues concerning the region of its origin. Although the original text has been lost, this does not diminish its importance as a key historical document offering unique insights into medieval Serbian medical knowledge and practice.

¹⁴ V. Rinotas 2015,79-98.

¹⁵ Cf. Катѣћ 1990 et v. also the literature cited therein.

The manuscript synthesizes materials drawn from several major European medical authorities of the period. Its comprehensiveness suggests a deliberate attempt to systematize and consolidate the prevailing medical understanding of its age. The codex likely encompasses a wide range of subjects, including anatomy, physiology, diagnosis, and therapeutic methods. Of particular significance is its emphasis on pharmacology, which reveals the central role of medicinal substances and their therapeutic applications in medieval Serbian medicine. The pharmacological sections highlight the predominance of plant-based remedies, reflecting a pronounced reliance on phytotherapy—the use of plants and their derivatives for treating illness and maintaining health.

This preference for botanical over mineral or animal ingredients can be attributed to several factors, including accessibility, safety, and long-standing empirical efficacy. Plants were readily available and generally less toxic, which made them especially suitable for widespread medical use. Such reliance on herbal medicine corresponds to the broader historical framework of medieval medical theory, grounded in the teachings of Hippocrates and Galen, who emphasized natural remedies and the balance of the four humors as the foundation of health.

The influence of the medical traditions of Salerno and Montpellier on Serbian medieval medicine is particularly noteworthy. These renowned centers of learning synthesized Greek, Roman, Arabic, and Western European medical thought into a unified and pragmatic system of practice. Their empirical orientation and extensive use of medicinal plants are clearly reflected in the pharmacological content of the *Hilandar Medical Code*. In particular, the Scuola Medica Salernitana is celebrated for its contributions to herbal medicine, notably through the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum*, a widely circulated text that offered detailed prescriptions for preparing and administering plant-based treatments.

While the influence of Byzantine medicine is less evident in the pharmacological sections, it remains discernible in other domains such as biology and physiology. Byzantine scholars not only preserved but also elaborated upon the works of ancient Greek physicians, thereby ensuring their transmission and adaptation across both Europe and Asia.¹⁶ The *Hilandar Medical Code*, situated at the crossroads of these traditions, thus stands as a testament to the rich intercultural synthesis that shaped the medical landscape of the medieval Balkans.

From *Ars Medicina Naturalis* to Modern Pharmacognosy: Re-Evaluating the Efficacy of Medieval Remedies

The distinction between common plant names and scientific terminology is essential for the accurate identification of species and the standardization of medical preparations. Vernacular names often vary across regions and cultures, which can lead to confusion and potentially compromise treatment efficacy. In contrast, scientific botanical nomenclature provides a universal system for naming and classifying organisms, ensuring precise communication among researchers and practitioners.

The accurate identification of plant species and the reconstruction of historical remedies remain ongoing challenges. Addressing these issues requires interdisciplinary collaboration among historians, pharmacists, botanists, and chemists, who work together to decipher archaic terminology, understand traditional preparation methods, and evaluate the bioactivity of the substances described. Persistent difficulties arise from translation errors, the loss of traditional knowledge, and changes in plant species over time.

To overcome these challenges, researchers employ a combination of historical analysis, ethnobotanical fieldwork, and phytochemical investigation. Comparative studies may involve

¹⁶ V. Hunger 1984, 287-320; Temkin 1962, 95-115.

aligning descriptions of plants in medieval manuscripts with extant botanical records or analyzing archaeobotanical remains to identify the species used. In some cases, scholars attempt to recreate the medicinal preparations recorded in the texts and assess their efficacy and safety through *in vitro* or *in vivo* studies.

Overall, previous and ongoing research into these pharmacological manuscripts provides critical insight into the evolution of medical knowledge and the role of phytotherapy in the medieval Serbian context. The integration of diverse medical traditions, particularly those of the Salerno-Montpellier and Byzantine schools, reflects the dynamic intellectual exchange that shaped medical practice during this period. Continued investigation into the identification of plant species and the reconstruction of historical remedies not only deepens our understanding of medieval medicine but also contributes to the potential revival of lost practices, informing the development of modern pharmacology and herbal therapeutics.¹⁷

Crafting the Remedium-Base with Wax and Honey: From Materiality to Spiritual Essence

Despite extensive analyses of the text from intra-, inter-, and multi-/transdisciplinary perspectives,¹⁸ one question has remained largely unaddressed: the near-uniform presence of a pharmaceutical *remedium*-base, that is, the adjuvant substance in which nearly all preparations—irrespective of their Galenic form—were incorporated. These bases consist predominantly of waxes, preferably beeswax, and honey. The present study seeks to provide a reasoned explanation grounded in the central concepts of alchemical doctrines that emerged during the pre-Paracelsian period and were later systematized by Paracelsus himself.

In the absence of modern analytic techniques, the medieval alchemist conceptualized the material world hierarchically, with the One at its apex, transcending all categories and descriptions, as a framework for understanding the healing process. When preparing plant extracts, alchemists employed a specific methodology designed to isolate the active constituents of a plant and then reintegrate them into a therapeutic preparation. This procedure involved “opening” the medicinal plant, “purifying” it through successive stages, and “preparing” it to be “composed” into a remedy.

The preparation of herbal extracts was meticulous. Plants were hand-picked, cleaned, and fermented to preserve volatile components. The extract was subsequently divided into liquid and solid fractions via traditional pressing, followed by air-drying and vacuum distillation. Volatile constituents, essential oils, and alcohol were collected separately from the aqueous phase, which was handled independently. The residual plant matter was combusted to produce gray-black ash, which was reheated to yield a mineral-rich powder. The remaining liquid phase was also incinerated to produce ash resembling the original plant material, which was then combined with distilled water and alcohol, filtered, and cleared of insoluble residues. This method—characterized by separation, purification, and unification—foreshadows the foundational procedures of modern chemistry and biochemistry.¹⁹

Within this context, the role of waxes and honey assumes particular significance. The described procedures effectively replicate natural processes, with bees functioning as inadvertent natural alchemists. Bee products, long recognized for their purity and medicinal efficacy, were central to therapeutic practice, with honey distinguished as the most intricate, pure, and energetically potent substance. The combination of honey and wax, particularly in the formation of a light, virgin comb, can be further elucidated through a linguistic perspective. For example,

¹⁷ Cf. SBM.

¹⁸ For more details on this topic with extensive citation of reference writings, v. Божанин 2017, 277-294.

¹⁹ Cf. ESS.

the Serbian term **мед** shares a root with the Greek **μεθώ** [methó], whose primary sense is “to alter consciousness.” The semantic range of **μεθώ** includes:

(a) To bring someone into a state of intoxication by giving them alcoholic drink:

Δραπέτευσε, αφού πρώτα μέθυσε το φρουρό.

Τον μέθυσε το δυνατό κρασί.

(b) To be in a state of intoxication due to consumption of alcoholic beverages:

Ήπια πολύ κρασί / ούζο και μέθυσε.

(c) (metaphorical)

(i) To bring someone into an emotional state of intense excitement: *Τον μέθυσε η ομορφιά της. Τον μέθυσαν τα πλούτη / η δόξα.*

(ii) To be in an emotional state of intense euphoria: *~ από χαρά / από ενθουσιασμό / από την επιτυχία.*

The etymology traces **μεθώ** < αρχ. **μεθ(ύω)**, with metaphorical extensions expressed in forms such as **μεταπλ. -ώ** based on verbal roots like *γελασ-* (*γέλασα* – to laugh), *μιλησ-* (*μίλησα* – to speak),²⁰ illustrating how the linguistic heritage encodes transformations of perception and consciousness. This connection suggests a symbolic dimension to the use of honey in alchemical practice, linking the physical and the spiritual in a manner consistent with the broader aims of medieval medicinal alchemy.

Finally, the inquiry undertaken in this research does not conclude with the elucidation of the *remedium-base* paradigm. Having established this framework, the study proceeds to examine additional dimensions of symbolic and ritual practice. This includes linguistic and literary analyses of the symbolic selection of gifts—myrrh, frankincense, and gold—offered to the Son of God and, paradigmatically, to the children of God, demonstrating the continuum between material substances, spiritual transformation, and cosmological symbolism.

Conclusion

Over time, humans have sought to understand and harness the essential elements of nature, a pursuit reflected in both cultural practices and scientific inquiry. This quest, exemplified in the preparation of remedies, alchemical operations, and symbolic use of substances such as wax and honey, has contributed to the development of knowledge that forms part of our shared cultural heritage. Manuscripts like the *Hodoich* and *Hilandar* codes reveal the intricate interplay of practical medicine, philosophical reflection, and symbolic thought in the medieval period.

Interpreting these practices requires balancing admiration for historical ingenuity with awareness that modern perspectives shape our understanding. By situating medieval medicine and alchemy within their own intellectual and cultural contexts, we gain insight into how earlier societies conceptualized health, matter, and the divine. Ultimately, the human drive to observe, purify, and transform both material and spiritual realities reflects a continuity of curiosity and creativity that bridges past and present, illuminating the enduring connection between empirical knowledge and metaphysical inquiry.

²⁰ V. MGL, s.vv.

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Маја Калезић

**ПОНОВО УЗДИГНУТИ У СВЕЛОСТ: ТРАГОВИ НОВОПЛАТОНИСТИЧКЕ
СКАЛЕ БИЋА У БАЛКАНСКОЈ МЕДИЦИНСКОЈ ПРАКСИ
ТОКОМ XIV И XV ВЕКА**

Студија доприноси истраживању историје *materiae medicae* у Европи, Медитерану и на Балкану током касног средњег века и ране ренесансе, анализом референтних и релевантних рукописних терапијских збирки и списа из области *ars medicinae*. Резултати истраживања указују на нове потенцијалне правце у разумевању процеса компоновања лекова, осветљавајући утицај филозофских идеја на формирање кодираних система у преднаучним дисциплинама, попут *ars medicinae*.

Фокус студије су такозвани једноставни лекови (*simplices*), за које смо а posteriori закључили да су сачињени од сировина највишег степена чистоће, неопходних за обликовање „алхемијских“ *remedia*. Ови препарати, скоро имитативним поступком, отварају души пут ка врховном бићу, чиме постају директан одраз кодираних прототипског концепта познатог у неоплатонизму као *scala naturae*. На тај начин, показали смо и како се овај концепт „материјализује и инструментализује“ кроз процес компоновања медикамената који се, кроз примену на „опипљивим“ ентитетима, заједно са њима реализује коначно у сфери трансматеријалног.

Истраживање такође истиче значај основне *remedium*-базе у обликовању лекова, са посебним освртом на восак и мед као кључне компоненте. Језичка и семантичка анализа указује на дубоке симболичке везе између материјалних супстанци и промене свести, при чему српски термин *мед* корени у грчком *μεθώ*, што значи „изменити свест“ или „подлећи стању екстатичног узбуђења“. Тако се показује да избор ових супстанци није само практичан већ и метафизички, у складу са циљевима средњовековне медицине, алхемије и астролошке терапије. Укупно, студија осветљава континуитет људске тежње да спозна, трансформише и интегрише материјално и духовно, повезујући емпиријско знање, филозофску рефлексију и симболичко деловање у оквиру традиције *materiae medicae* и алхемијских пракси на Балкану током средњег века и ране ренесансе.