

The Medieval Slavonic Reception of Maximus the Confessor's Circle – Center – Radii Analogy¹

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Abstract: The paper contends that certain circle diagrams discovered in 14th-century Slavonic medieval manuscripts of Dorotheus of Gaza's Instructions, crafted during the Palamite controversy, are influenced by the concepts of Maximus the Confessor. The paper offers an in-depth analysis of select Slavonic diagrams originating from Serbian monasteries in the final decades of the 14th century. It begins by examining simple diagrams wherein the circle's center represents God, and the radii represent created beings moving towards God, then progresses to investigate more intricate diagrams. These complex diagrams include circle or square shaped center, outer circumference, concentric rings, multicolored radii and twisted cruciform bands. It is further argued that these new diagrammatic elements are employed to visualize complex ideas such as the Holy Trinity as differentiations in unity, the ontological limit of creation set by divine providence, the triadic structure of logoi of beings and the double movement of procession and reversion.

Keywords: Maximus the Confessor; Dorotheus of Gaza; Slavonic manuscripts; circle diagram; Dorotheus' circle.

^{ES} La Recepción Medieval Eslava de la Analogía del Círculo – Centro – Radios de Máximo el Confesor

Resumen: El artículo sostiene que algunos diagramas circulares encontrados en manuscritos medievales eslavos del siglo XIV de las Instrucciones de Doroteo de Gaza producidos durante la controversia palamita están inspirados en las ideas de Máximo el Confesor. El artículo proporciona un análisis profundo de algunos de los diagramas eslavos producidos en los monasterios serbios en las últimas décadas del siglo XIV. Se parte del análisis de diagramas simples en los que se identifica el centro del círculo con Dios, y los radios con seres creados que avanzan hacia Dios y se avanza investigando diagramas más complejos. Estos diagramas complejos incluyen un centro en forma de círculo o cuadrado, circunferencia exterior, anillos concéntricos, radios multicolores y bandas cruciformes retorcidas. Se argumenta además que estos nuevos elementos esquemáticos se emplean para visualizar ideas complejas como la Santísima Trinidad como diferenciaciones en la unidad, el límite ontológico de la creación establecido por la divina providencia, la estructura triádica de los logoi de los seres y el doble movimiento de procesión y reversión.

Palabras clave: Máximo el Confesor; Doroteo de Gaza; manuscritos eslavos; diagrama circular; círculo de Doroteo.

Summary: 1. Maximus the Confessor in the Medieval Balkans and the Development of Circle Diagrams. 2. Maximus' Scholia on the Corpus Dioysiacum and Elder Isaija's Diagrams. 3. Center: God. 4. Circumference: The limits of creation. 5. Radii: Individual Existences. 6. The Middle Points on the Radii or the Concentric Circles: The Individual Orientation. 7. Conclusion. 8. Bibliography

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More than a decade ago, I crafted several diagrams specifically for a conference presentation. These diagrams were aimed at elucidating how Maximus the Confessor utilized the analogy of the radii of a circle converging in a center to depict God's relationship with created beings. Shortly after this exposition, I came across numerous of Greek and Slavonic manuscripts originating from the Balkans and Russia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, all featuring circle diagrams.² These diagrams were intended to visually represent the metaphor of the circle, center, and radii as employed by authors like Dionysius the Areopagite, Dorotheus of Gaza, and Maximus the Confessor. With the resurgence of interest in Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor during the Palamite controversy, their works were extensively copied. Passages that reference the circle-center-radii metaphor were often accompanied by various types of circle diagrams. As Dorotheus' *Instructions* were mandatory reading in monastic communities and widely reproduced, they contain the largest variety of circle diagrams among monastic literature. What surprised me was the variation in the diagrams accompanying the passages that referred to the circle metaphor in Dionysius, Dorotheus, and Maximus. These diagrams differed in both type and complexity. It became clear that these diagrams extended beyond the text they accompanied, aiming to convey a very complex message. An illustrative example of this perspective can be found in Dorotheus' *Instruction 6*, also titled "On Refusal to Judge Our Neighbor." Here, the author equates God with the center of the circle and monks with the radii. He asserts that monks resemble the radii: the nearer they are to the center or God, the nearer they draw to one another. Likewise, the closer they are to each other, the nearer they approach the center, which is God.³ Despite the simplicity of the message, some of the circle diagrams accompanying the text are highly intricate.

The current paper seeks to analyze several circle diagrams primarily from medieval Slavonic translations of Dorotheus of Gaza, juxtaposed with the backdrop of Maximus the Confessor's thought. Initially, I will outline the rationale for incorporating Maximus the Confessor's theology into the interpretation of circle diagrams found in works other than those of Maximus himself. Subsequently, I will examine into the earliest Slavonic translations of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* and the *Scholia of Maximus the Confessor*, both of which feature several circle diagrams. Finally, I will analyze various components of the circle diagrams, including the center, circumference, radii and concentric rings and offer the most plausible interpretations for their meanings.

1. Maximus the Confessor in the Medieval Balkans and the Development of Circle Diagrams

Throughout his writings, Maximus the Confessor employed various metaphors in order to make his

Christological and cosmological ideas more accessible to the commissioners and recipients of his works. For instance, when referring to the union between created reality and God, Maximus used the metaphor of iron and fire or that of air and light.⁴ He also utilized the metaphor of seal and stamp,⁵ and of the circle's center and radii when describing the relationship between God and created beings or among the created beings. Many of these metaphors were not original but were inherited from earlier philosophical tradition. The metaphors of air illuminated by light and of iron penetrated by fire were employed by Stoics in order to explain the union of two or more fully mixed substances that retain their respective properties.⁶ The metaphors of the seal and stamp and of the circle's center and radii have Neoplatonic origins and were used to describe the relationship between the One and its subsequent emanations.

The circle metaphor has a long history predating Maximus. Although the circle model is often attributed to the Christian authors such as Dionysius the Areopagite and Dorotheus of Gaza, its origins can be traced back to the Alexander of Aphrodisias,⁷ Plotinus,⁸ and Proclus.⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar identified Proclus as a potential source of the circle metaphor in Dionysius the Areopagite,¹⁰ while John Dillon and Sarah Klitenic Wear noted parallels between Plotinus' and Dionysius' use of the circle metaphor, though without claiming a decisive influence of the former on the latter.¹¹

The direct influence of Dionysius on Maximus' usage of the circle metaphor has already been demonstrated.¹² However, Neoplatonic authors should not be excluded as possible, albeit indirect, sources of Maximus' circle metaphor. Polycarp Sherwood has pointed out that the circle image in Maximus is a Proclean figure,¹³ and

⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigorum Liber 7*, (PG 91:1076A).

⁵ Max., *Ambig. 7*, (PG 91:1076C)

⁶ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Mixtione*, in *Alexander of Aphrodisias on Stoic Physics: A Study of the De Mixtione with Preliminary Essays, With Preliminary Essays, Text, Translation and Commentary*, ed. Robert D. Todd (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 220.

⁷ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima*, in *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter commentaria scripta minora*, ed. I. Bruns, (Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca suppl. 2.1, Berlin: Reimer, 1887), 60,8-13.

⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads* 3,8,8; 4,2,1; 6,8,18, in Plotinus, *Enneads I-VII*, ed. A. H. Armstrong, (Loeb Classical Library 440-446, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979-1988), here vol. LCL 442: 388; LCL 443:20; 446: 284-286.

⁹ *De decem dubitationibus circa Providentiam* 5,24-35 and 5,30-35. in Proclus Diadochus, *Tria opuscula*, ed. H. Boese (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960). See very instructive paper: Johnae than Greig, "The Circle-radii Analogy in Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius, and Its Legacy", *SocArXivPapers* (2017): <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/9bfra>

¹⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie: das Weltbild Maximus des Bekenners* (Einsiedeln: Johannes-Verlag, 1961), 583-594.

¹¹ Sarah Klitenic Wear and John Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 18.

¹² Torstein Tollefsen, *Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68; Vladimir Cvetković, "Predeterminations and Providence in Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor", *Dionysius the Areopagite between Orthodoxy and Heresy*, ed. Filip Ivanović (Newcastle: Cambridge scholars publishing 2011), 138-141. Emma Brown Dewhurst, *Relation in the Ethics of St Maximus' Logoi: A Contribution Towards the Study of Ethics and the Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* [research master dissertation], (Edinburg: University of Edinburg), 2013, 16-18.

¹³ Polycarp Sherwood, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Herder

² Branislav Cvetković, "O marginalnom 'ukrasu' dečanskih rukopisa Ave Doroteja" in *ani u svetlu arheografskih istraživanja*, ed. T. Subotin Golubović (Beograd: Narodna biblioteka Srbije), 81-104. [in Serbian]

³ Dorotheus, *Instruction 6*,78. in Dorothee de Gaza, *Oeuvres spirituelles*, eds. J. de Préville & L. Regnault (Sources chrétiennes 92, Paris 1963).

Pascal Mueller-Jourdan has provided further evidence supporting this claim.¹⁴

Maximus heavily relies on Dionysius in his use of the circle metaphor. There are three passages in Maximus where the circle model is mentioned. The first passage is particularly relevant for investigating the problem of the one and many in the context of procession and conversion. It is taken from *Ambiguum 7*:

Κατὰ μὲν τὴν ἀγαθοπρεπιῆ εἰς τὰ ὄντα τοῦ ἐνὸς ποιητικὴν τε καὶ συνεκτικὴν πρόοδον πολλοὶ ὁ εἷς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν εἰς τὸν ἕνα τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιστρεπτικὴν τε καὶ χειραγωγικὴν ἀναφορὰν τε καὶ πρόνοιαν, ὡσπερ εἰς ἀρχὴν παντοκρατορικὴν ἢ κέντρον τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ εὐθειῶν τὰς ἀρχὰς προειληφός καὶ ὡς πάντων συναγωγός, εἷς οἱ πολλοί.¹⁵

According to the creative and sustaining procession of the One to individual beings, which is befitting of divine goodness, the One is many. According to the reverteive, inductive, and providential return of the many to the One – as if to an all-powerful point of origin, or to the center of a circle precontaining the beginnings of the radii originating from it – insofar as the One gathers everything together, the many are One.¹⁶

Maximus connects here the circle model with the double movement of procession and conversion, although in his thought these Neoplatonic terms underwent transformation in both form and meaning in order to serve Christian metaphysics.¹⁷ He claims that the one Logos is many *logoi* on the basis of the creative and sustaining procession (ποιητικὴ καὶ συνεκτικὴ πρόοδος), while many *logoi* are the Logos due to the convertive and inductive return and providence (ἐπιστρεπτικὴ καὶ χειραγωγικὴ ἀναφορὰ τε καὶ πρόνοια).

The following passage where Maximus mentions the circle model comes from the *Capita theologica et oeconomica*:

Ὅσπερ ἐν τῷ κέντρῳ τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ κατ' εὐθεῖαν ἐκτεταμένων γραμμῶν ἀδιαίρετος θεωρεῖται παντελῶς ἡ θέσις· οὕτως ὁ ἀξιωθεὶς ἐν τῷ Θεῷ γενέσθαι, πάντα εἴσεται τοὺς ἐν αὐτῷ τῶν γεγονότων προὔφεστῶτας λόγους, καθ' ἀπλήν τινα ἀδιαίρετον γνῶσιν.¹⁸

As in the center of a circle we see the indivisible point of origin for the straight lines that go out from it, so the one who is worthy to be found in

God comes to know in him all the preexistent ideas of the things that have come to be, in a simple and indivisible act of knowing.¹⁹

The third and final passage where Maximus uses the circle model derives from his *Mystagogia*:

..., ὁ πάντα κατὰ μίαν ἀπλήν τῆς ἀγαθότητος ἀπειρόσοφον δύναμιν αὐτῷ περικλείων, ὡσπερ κέντρον εὐθειῶν τινῶν ἐξημμένων αὐτοῦ, κατὰ μίαν ἀπλήν καὶ ἐνιαίαν αἰτίαν καὶ δύναμιν τὰς ἀρχὰς τῶν ὄντων τοῖς πέρασιν οὐκ ἔων συναφίστασθαι, κύκλῳ περιγράφων αὐτῶν τὰς ἐκτάσεις καὶ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἄγων τοὺς τῶν ὄντων καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ γενομένων διορισμούς.²⁰

It is he who encloses in himself all beings by the unique, simple, and infinitely wise power of his goodness. As a center of straight lines that radiate from him he does not allow by his unique, simple, and single cause and power that the principles of beings become disjoint at the periphery but rather he circumscribes their extension in a circle and brings back to himself the distinctive elements of being which he himself brought into existence.²¹

It is not difficult to find a correspondence between Maximus' *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2, 4 and *Ambiguum 7* (1081C) and Dionysius the Areopagite *On Divine Names* 2,5. Furthermore, the fact that Maximus himself makes direct references to Dionysius by name in passages preceding the *Ambiguum 7* circle and radii metaphor suggests Maximus' reliance on Dionysius.²²

The revival of the interest in Maximus' work is directly connected with the Hesychast monastic movement, which aimed at defending the possibility of human beings to experience the divine light of the Godhead in this life. The early phase of the Hesychast controversy (1337-1349) was characterized by the debate between Gregory Palamas and Barlaam over the proper interpretation of Dionysius the Areopagite, and especially over his notion of divine "unknowing".²³ Contrary to Barlaam, Palamas was inclined to interpret Dionysius' concept as direct experience of God in this life. This focus on Dionysius' ideas sparked the wider monastic community's interest in his works, and in 1371 the Serbian Athonite monk, the Elder Isaija produced the Slavonic translation of *Corpus Dionysiacum*, complemented by Maximus' *scholia*. The earliest manuscript of the text, considered also as the autograph by some scholars, is preserved as a part of A.F. Gilferding's collection in the State Public Library of St Petersburg.²⁴

Interest in Maximus arose significantly during the latter phase of the Hesychast controversy in the sixth and

1955), 172.

¹⁴ Pascal Mueller-Jourdan, "The Metaphysical Position of the Divine as 'Desirable' in Proclus' Platonic Theology and Maximus Confessor's Thought", in *St Maximus the Confessor - The Architecture of Cosmos*, eds. Antoine Lévy, Pauli Annala, Olli Hallamaa, and Tuomo Lankila (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 2016), 139-150.

¹⁵ Max., *Ambig. 7*, (PG 91:1081C). Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers. The Ambigua*, ed. and trans. Maximus Constas (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), vol. 1, 101.

¹⁶ Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 102.

¹⁷ Vladimir Cvetkovic, "The Transformation of Neoplatonic Philosophical Notions of Procession (*proodos*) and Conversion (*epistrophe*) in the Thought of St Maximus the Confessor", in *The Ways of Byzantine Philosophy*, ed. Mikonja Knežević (Alhambra, CA: Sebastian Press, 2015), 195-210.

¹⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Capita theologica et oeconomica* 2.4, (PG 90:1128A).

¹⁹ Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, ed. and transl. George C. Berthold (London: SPCK, 1985), 148.

²⁰ Max., *Mystagogia* 1.4, in Maximus Confessoris, *Mystagogia*, ed. Christian Boudignon (Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca, 69; Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 13, 186-193.

²¹ Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 187.

²² Max., *Ambig. 7* (PG 91: 1080B).

²³ Kallistos Ware, "The Hesychasts: Gregory of Sinai, Gregory Palamas, Nicolas Cabasilas," in *The Study of Spirituality*, eds. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright & Edward Yarnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 249.

²⁴ Djordje Trifunović, *Pisac i prevodilac inok Isaija*, (Kruševac: Bagdala, 1980), 34 [in Serbian].

seventh decades of the fourteenth century within the Athonite communities. This period saw disagreements between Theophanes of Nicaea and the followers of Akyndinos over the interpretation of Maximus' symbolism of light.²⁵ Maximus' writings were read and copied not only in connection with the Hesychast controversy but also in relation to the anti-Latin polemics over the *filioque* that recurred in the writings of Theophanes and other Greek writers of this period.

Several of Maximus' polemical texts that appeared in Slavonic translation between 1360 and 1385 have been preserved in multiple volumes: volume no. 75 from the Dečani Monastery, no. 90 from the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, and nos. 455 and 459 from Chilandar Monastery.²⁶ All these volumes contain excerpts from Maximus' polemical texts, entitled *Exposition of True Faith*, or simply *On Faith*, *Various Capita*, and *On the Two Perfect Natures of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.

Maximus' works, which gained popularity in Slavonic monastic circles during the Middle Ages, were widely copied in ascetic collections. Many of these collections included translations of Dorotheus of Gaza's *Instructions* accompanied by circle diagrams, indicating a connection between Maximus' ideas and Dorotheus' circles.

The majority of Slavonic manuscripts containing intricate diagrams illustrating Dorotheus' *Instruction 6* were created during the final decades of the fourteenth century, coinciding with the peak of interest in Maximus' work. During roughly the same period, from 1355 to 1390, translations of Maximus' works appeared in several codices: nos. 455, 456, 459, 470, and 476 from Chilandar; nos. 76, 81, and 82 from Dečani; and nos. 85 and 87 from the monastery of the Patriarchate of Peć. Moreover, the translations of Maximus and Dorotheus were often bound in the same manuscript. This is particularly evident in the following Chilandar manuscripts: no. 455, which contains Dorotheus' *Instructions* and a compilation from Maximus' works entitled *Exposition of Faith*, and no. 459, which also contains Dorotheus' *Instructions* and a compilation of different chapters from various *Capita* of Maximus. Dorotheus' *Instructions* and Maximus' *Capita de caritate* appear in Chilandar's manuscript no. 456, and in manuscript no. 85 from the Patriarchate of Peć, entitled *Sermons of Venerable Dorotheus and Other Texts*. During the late fourteenth century, a significant number of manuscripts originating from these same locations feature the works of both Maximus and Dorotheus, along with circle diagrams. This indicates the scribes' awareness of the utilization of the circle and radii metaphor by both authors.

As mentioned earlier, there exists a notable disparity between the straightforward message of Dorotheus' *Instruction 6* and the complexity of the accompanying

diagrams. Despite several attempts to establish a connection between Dorotheus' text and these intricate diagrams,²⁷ contemporary scholarship has not made significant progress. We know that Dorotheus of Gaza's *Instructions* were integral to compulsory monastic literature during the fourteenth century in the Slavonic tradition.²⁸ These texts were copied in over sixty manuscripts from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century,²⁹ far more frequently than the writings of both Dionysius and Maximus. Numerous Slavonic manuscripts of Dorotheus' *Instructions* lack any circle diagrams, while others feature diagrams ranging from simple to highly complex.

It is conceivable that the creators of the intricate circle diagrams in Dorotheus' *Instructions* aimed to convey their theological understanding of other authors who explored the circle and radii metaphor, such as Dionysius and Maximus. A compelling example supporting this claim is the Greek manuscript of Dorotheus of Gaza's *Instructions* from the 16th-century manuscript No. 329, housed in the collection of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos. The circle diagram accompanying Dorotheus' *Instruction 6* is labeled with the text: "a philosophical example of the Holy Fathers." In her commentary on this diagram, Linda Safran suggests that the use of the generic term "Holy Fathers" instead of the specific name of the text's author, Dorotheus of Gaza, might indicate that the Iviron monk did not know who was meant.³⁰ However, it is more likely that the Iviron monk was well aware that the circle analogy was not exclusive to Dorotheus of Gaza but was employed by a broad range of holy fathers, including Clement of Alexandria, Symeon the New Theologian, as well as Dionysius and Maximus. Considering all these facts, one could argue that the scribes from Mount Athos and the medieval Balkans, cognizant of the theological implications of Dionysius' and Maximus' circle and radii metaphor, sought to convey their theological understanding through Dorotheus' circle, which was one of the most frequently copied diagrams in the late Middle Ages.

The functionality and instructional value of the complex diagrams accompanying Dorotheus circle are multifaceted. First, they served as visual aids for expressing intricate theological and philosophical ideas, such as the nature of God, the relationship between God and creation, the relationship between the One and the many, and the process of procession and return. These diagrams also had mnemonic and didactic functions,³¹ helping readers grasp difficult

²⁵ Andrew Louth, "Light, Vision, and Religious Experience in Byzantium", in *The Presence of Light. Divine Radiance and Religious Experience*, ed. Matthew T. Kapstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2004): 94-100; Andrew Louth, "Eucharist and Hesychasm, with Special Reference to Theophanes III, Metropolitan of Nicaea", in *The Eucharist in Theology and Philosophy. Issues of Doctrinal History in East and West from Patristic Age to the Reformation*, eds. István Perczel, Réka Forrai & György Geréby (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2005), 199-208: 203-204.

²⁶ Dragiša Bojović, "St Maximus Confessor in Serbian Medieval Spirituality", *Crkvene studije* 13 (2016), 407-414.

²⁷ Danica Popović, "Dečanska pustinja u okvirima vizantijskog i srpskog eremitskog monaštva", in *Dečanska pustinja. Skitovi i kelije manastira Dečana*, eds. D. Popović, B. Todić, D. Vojvodić, (Beograd: Balkanološki institut SANU 2011), 197-198; Cvetković, "O marginalnom 'ukrasu' dečanskih rukopisa Ave Doroteja", 91.

²⁸ Popović, "Dečanska pustinja", 197-198.

²⁹ Cf. Искра Христова, "Славянските преводи на монашеските поучения на Авва Доротеј", *Palaeobulgari-ca* 25/2 (2001): 36-53.

³⁰ Linda Safran, "Byzantine Diagrams", in *The Diagram as Paradigm: Cross-Cultural Approaches*, edited by Jeffrey F. Hamburger, David J. Roxburgh and Linda Safran (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection 2022), 22-23.

³¹ Safran, "Byzantine Diagrams", 14.

concepts by presenting them in a more accessible, visual form.

The simpler diagrams accompanying Dorotheus' *Instruction* 6 have a mnemonic function. They reinforce the message that closeness to God implies closeness to other human beings, and vice versa, by associating God with the center of the circle and human beings with the radii. Thus, Dorotheus' circle serves as a mnemonic device, reminding monks that love for God also implies love for fellow human beings.

Furthermore, the circle diagrams are powerful didactic and educational tools. They pertain to Euclidean geometry, one of the subjects in the Byzantine quadrivium,³² making them relevant for educational purposes. Lastly, for most Greek and Slavonic scribes of the 14th century, these diagrams served not only to transmit knowledge from classical, Neoplatonic, and Christian traditions but also to convey their stance in the Hesychast debate.

2. Maximus' Scholia on the *Corpus Dioysiacum* and Elder Isaija's Diagrams

The circle metaphor is mentioned twice in Dionysius' *Divine Names* (*DN* 2.5 and *DN* 5.6) and in the Slavonic translation of Elder Isaija from 1371, only *DN* 2,5 was illustrated by two circles diagram (Fig. 1).³³

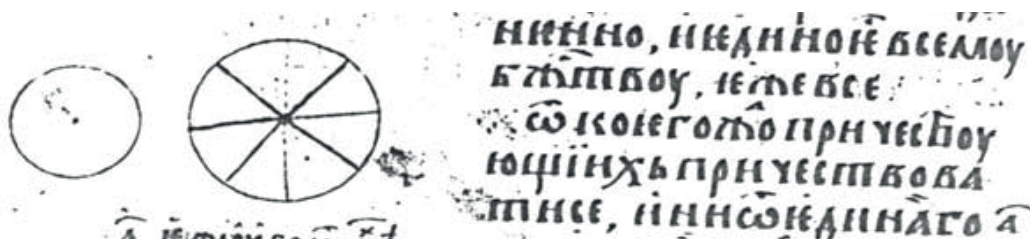


Fig. 1. Gilferding RNL no. 46, list. 91b

As the examination of this diagram is covered elsewhere,³⁴ let us shift our attention to the Scholia to *Celestial Hierarchy* attributed to Maximus the Confessor, which includes the circle diagram. In *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.4, Dionysius reaffirms that the seraphim, the highest rank of heavenly beings, orbit around God while maintaining a state of motionlessness within the "most exalted ever-moving stability" (ἀκίνητον ἴδρουσιν).³⁵

In the scholion to *Celestial Hierarchy* 7.4, attributed potentially to either John of Skythopolis or Maximus the Confessor,³⁶ a parallel is made between God and the center of the circle. The commentator asserts that the minds both remain stationary and, simultaneously, move in a circular motion.³⁷ The movement of the minds is directed both inward, toward themselves, and outward, toward God. If the tendency toward self-focus remains steady, then the minds are more disposed to remain in stillness rather than in motion. Conversely, the inclination toward God entails a circular motion. Here, the commentator establishes an analogy between God and the center of a circle. The minds move along the circumference, thus participating in a kind of circular dance around its center, which serves as their origin.³⁸

In the Slavonic autograph of Elder Isaija, there exists a diagram illustrating a circle, consisting of both the center and the circumference (Fig. 2).³⁹ Upon closer inspection of the diagram, another point on the circumference becomes apparent, positioned directly above the center. This point could symbolically represent the mind encircling the center. The depiction of the mind as a point also serves to illustrate its inherent stability. Therefore, as the Greek commentator suggests, the minds remain steadfast in their self-directed inclination while simultaneously moving in a circular motion in their orientation towards God.

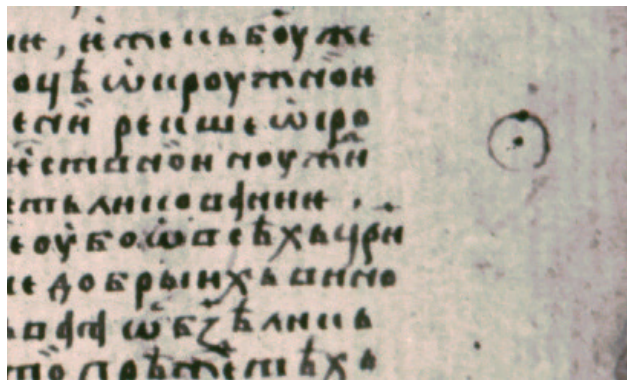


Fig 2. Gilferding RNL no. 46, 311

³² Fabio Acerbi, "Logistic, Arithmetic, Harmonic Theory, Geometry, Metrology, Optics and Mechanics," in *Companion to Byzantine Science*, edited by Stavros Lazaris (Leiden: Brill 2020), 143-149.

³³ Both Djordje Trifunović and Gelian M. Prokhorov suggest that the translator or the scribe has followed the structure of the Greek original. Cf. Trifunovic, *Pisac i prevodilac inok Isaija*, 56-57, and Г. М. Прохоров, "Литературно-общественное движение в византийско-славянском мире в XIV в.," *Чтения по древнерусской литературе* (Ереван, 1980), 108-124. [in Russian]

³⁴ Vladimir Cvetković, "Novoplatonizam u vizantijskoj i ranoj srpskoj filozofiji: dijagram kruga i poluprečnika" [Neoplatonism in Byzantine and Early Serbian Philosophy: The Circle and Radii Diagram], *Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta* 60 (2023), 599-632; *Ibid.*, "Circle and Sphere Metaphors for God's Nature and Providence in Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and Dionysius' *On Divine Names*, in: *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy: A Critical Guide*, ed. Michael O'Wiitalla (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 186-219.

³⁵ Dionysius the Areopagite, *De Coelesti Hierarchy* (=CH) 7.4, PG 3, 212A. See also Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *De Coelesti Hierarchy*, *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchy*, *De Mystica*

Theologia, Epistulae, eds. Günter Heil und Adolf M. Ritter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 31.

³⁶ Beata Regina Suchla, "Die sogenannten Maximus-Scholien des Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum," (*Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, Göttingen; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 31-66.

³⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Scholia in De Coelesti Hierarchy*, PG 4, 73A. See also the Slavonic translation of Elder Isaija in: *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)*, hgg. Sabine Fahl und Dieter Fahl (Freiburg i. Br.: Weiher; St. Petersburg: Russische Nationalbibliothek, 2010), band 1, 31.

³⁸ Max., *Scholia in CH*, PG 4, 73D.

³⁹ *Das Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites*, 31.

It is important to emphasize that the movement described for celestial powers or minds is, in reality, the movement of beings residing in the closest proximity to God and completely infused with divine light or divine energies. The movement of beings along the radii or line segments from the circumference toward the center pertains to those beings, whether angelic or human, who need to embark on a journey back to God and subsequently continue moving around Him.

For the remainder of this paper, I will shift my focus to each component of the circle diagram and examine how depictions of the center, circumference, radii, concentric circles, and intermediary points in various circles of Dorotheus may correspond to certain ideas put forth by Maximus.

3. Center: God

Despite Dionysius, Dorotheus, and Maximus identifying God with the center of the circle, in the majority of circle diagrams produced from the mid-14th century onwards in Serbian monasteries, God is depicted not as a point-like shape but as a small concentric ring within a wider circle (see Figs. 3, 4, 5).

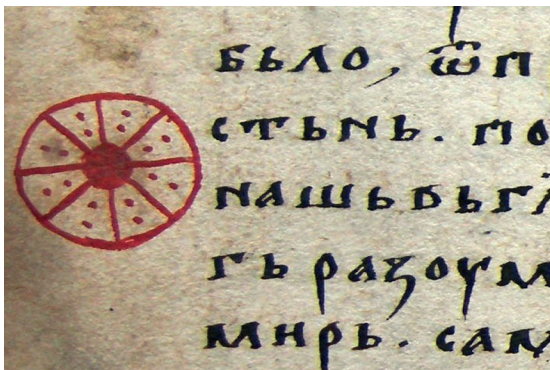


Fig. 3. Gilferding RNL no. 37, list 76b, Serbian redaction, mid 14th century

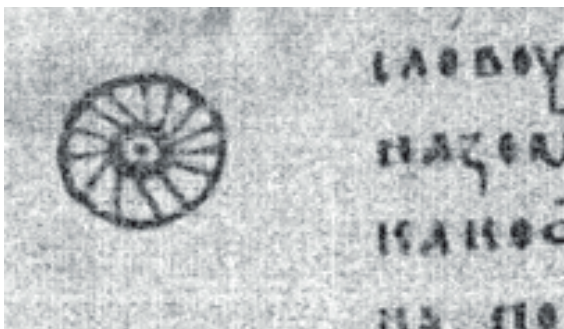


Fig. 4. Dorotheus' *Instruction 6*, Collection of Chilandar Monastery, no. 455, list 165b, 1360-1385

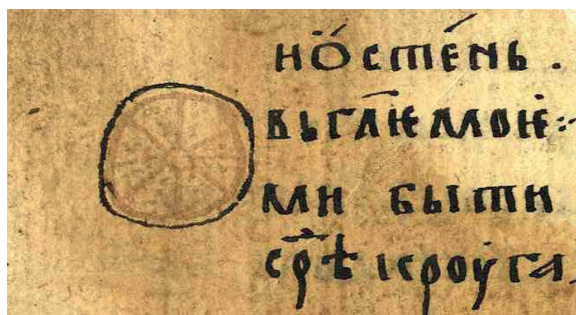


Fig. 5. Dorotheus' *Instruction 6*, Collection of Dečani Monastery, no. 79, list, 80b, the end of 14th century

What would be the main reason for this change? I think that there are at least two reasons for this change, one pertaining to the nature of God, and the other to the future of created beings. The argument that pertains to the nature of God deals with God as Three in One. While one Godhead as undifferentiated unity, in the language of Dionysius, may be depicted as a point, both the divine activities as differentiated unity and the Holy Trinity as unity of differentiations are better expressed as a circle. In the analysis of Elder Isaija's' circle diagram that accompanies *DN 2,5* (fig. 1), it is argued that in left circle the center symbolizes God's indivisible essence, while the circumference points to divine activities.⁴⁰ The right circle, with its radii, illustrates the creative aspect of God, showing differentiation within unity. While both circles aim to depict God's essence and activities, they emphasize different aspects: divine unity and divine creative activities.

Although Maximus does not use the Dionysian language of unities and differentiations, it is evident that he adheres closely to Dionysius' ideas.⁴¹ In Dorotheus' diagrams, the point and circle, which refer to God *ad intra*, are complemented with straight lines or radii and circumference, which represents divine activities *ad extra*. The radii indicate the process of differentiation among created beings, while the circumference represents both the final phase in differentiation of individual beings and the extent of differentiated unity. Both the Holy Trinity and the created world are depicted as circles because the Holy Trinity is unity of divine differentiations that share a common divine nature, while the world is a unity of creaturely differentiations with God as their common origin.

The argument for God as circle-like center that pertains to the future of created beings may be substantiated by Maximus' concept of ever-moving rest (ἀεκίνητος στάσις). While God is symbolically represented in the form of a point and circle, created beings are identified with straight line and circle. Maximus' idea of convertive and inductive return describes the linear movement of rational creatures from circumference along the radii toward the center. When they reach smaller concentric circle, they continue to move along the circumference of the smaller circle, or around God, never ceasing their movement. They no longer advance towards a goal because they have reached God, the ultimate goal of their movement. Instead, their motion becomes an infinite progression along divine infinity, being eternally filled with divine grace. Maximus, referencing Gregory of Nazianzus and Dionysius, underscore human inability to fully comprehend God due to his infinity in *Capita de caritate* I, 100. In the circle diagram from manuscript no. 455, housed in the collection of the Serbian monastery of Chilandar in Mount Athos (Fig. 4), which includes copies of Dorotheus and Maximus'

⁴⁰ Cvetković, „Novoplatonizam u vizantijskoj i ranoj srpskoj filozofiji”, 607-608.

⁴¹ Max., *Myst. 5* (CCSG 69: 27,420ff). Cf. also Vladimir Cvetković, “The Mystery of Christ as Revived Logos Theology” in *St Maximus the Confessor - The Architecture of Cosmos: New Perspectives*, eds. Antoine Lévy, Pauli Annala, Olli Hallamaa, and Tuomo Lankila (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Seura, 2015), 189-198.

writings, the radii are depicted not as perpendicular to the circumference of the smaller circle, but rather as tangents to it.

In my opinion, this diagram transcends a mere representation of Dorotheus' circle, suggesting that while created beings have achieved their ultimate goal, their movement does not cease. Maximus similarly asserts that, after reaching God, the created beings continue to move passively around the unmoved (περὶ μὲν τὸ ἀκίνητον).⁴² This view is consistent with the previously mentioned scholion to Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy*, attributed to Maximus, which describes both angelic beings and human souls as moving in a circular motion around God (see Fig. 2).⁴³ In some manuscripts of Dorotheus' *Instructions*, including later ones such as the 1626 manuscript housed in the Kiev Pechersk Lavra (Fig. 6),⁴⁴ the scribe took an additional step by integrating the linear movement and circular movement into a spiral movement around God.

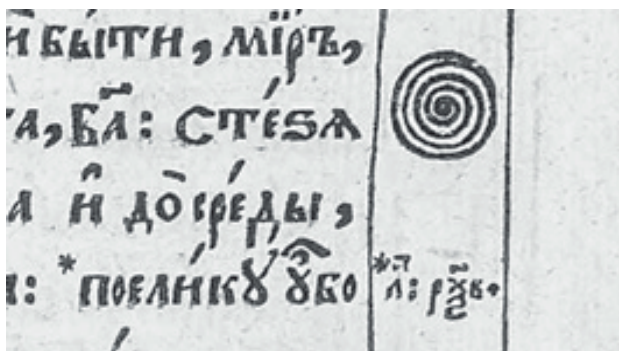


Fig. 6. Dorotheus' circle, Collection of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra, 1626.

Therefore, depicting God as a small concentric circle is justified by the impenetrable nature of divinity and the plurality of Persons in the Holy Trinity. This depiction reflects how created beings are drawn towards God as their origin. While God serves as the goal of the created beings, He does not restrict their movement; rather, as an infinite entity, He allows for an endless movement of creatures around him.

Maximus' reference to the circle metaphor in *Ambiguum 7* and in *Chapters on theology and economy 2,4* focus mainly on the center of the circle. In contrast, the reference in *Mystagogia 1.4* addresses both the center and the periphery. In the following subsection I will explore the concept of the limits of creation that Maximus discusses in *Mystagogia 1.4* in relation to circle's circumference.

4. Circumference: The Limits of Creation

In some manuscripts, Dorotheus' circle is circumscribed by another circumference. This is evident in the circle diagram from the Dečani monastery collection dating to the end of the fourteenth century (Fig. 5). A similar approach is seen the circle diagrams in Dorotheus' *Instructions* from the Russian 15th century collections, such as the one from Kirillo-Belozersky monastery (Fig. 7) and another the Trinity Lavra of St.

Sergius (Fig. 8). Gelian Prochorov argues that Greek and Slavonic manuscripts from the Balkan peninsula, particularly from Mount Athos, significantly influenced the development of the Slavonic manuscript tradition in Russia. The techniques found in Russian manuscripts are believed to have been transmitted from the Balkans.⁴⁵

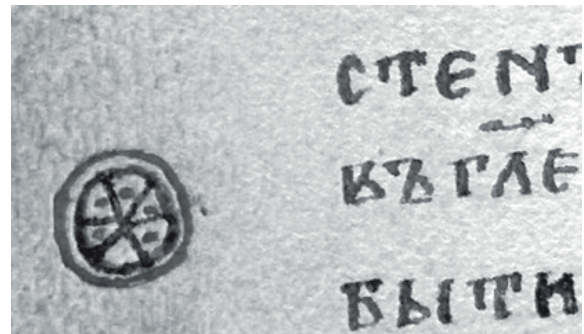


Fig. 7. Dorotheus' circle, Collection of Kirillo-Belozersky monastery, no. 23/1100, list 71, 15th century



Fig. 8. Dorotheus' circle, Collection of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, no. 60, list 79b, 15th century

Since the outer circumference appears frequently, it likely holds significant meaning. One possible interpretation is that it represents the limit of the immanent ontological structure referred by Maximus in his *Mystagogia 1.2-4*. According to Maximus, God "who made and brought into existence all things by his infinite power contains, gathers, and limits them"⁴⁶ and "encloses in himself all beings by the unique, simple, and infinitely wise power of his goodness".⁴⁷ Creatures do "not run the risk of having their being separated from God to dissolve into nonbeing".⁴⁸ The expansion of created beings is limited by divine providence.

⁴² Max., *Ambig.* 41, (PG 91: 1308C). Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 2, 108.

⁴³ Max., *Scholion in CH*, PG 4, 73A.

⁴⁴ Преподобнаго оца нашего авви Доротеја поученија, (Киевския Печерския Лаври, 1626), 161.

⁴⁵ *Corpus des Dionysios Areiopagites in der slavischen Übersetzung von Starec Isaija (14. Jahrhundert)* / hgg. Hermann Goltz und Gelian Michajlovič Prochorov (Freiburg i. Br.: Weiher; St. Petersburg: Russische Nationalbibliothek, 2013), band 5, 90-111.

⁴⁶ Max., *Myst.* 1.2 (CCSG 69: 10-11). Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 186.

⁴⁷ Max., *Myst.* 1.4 (CCSG 69: 13-14); Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 187.

⁴⁸ Max., *Myst.* 1.4 (CCSG 69: 14). Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 187.

If the beings are unlimited in their ends because they eternally move around God, what kind of limit the divine providence impose? To address this question, we must consider what Maximus describes in *Ambiguum* 10.37. Here, he outlines the process of expansion (διαστολή) as a downward movement from the most general *logoi* of being and nature to subsequent *logoi* of most generic genus (γενικώτατον γένος), more generic genera (γενικώτερα γένη), species (εἶδη), and most specific species (εἰδικώτατα εἶδη).⁴⁹ The movement of expansion culminates with the *logoi* of individuals (ἄτομα), who are characterized by common essence and accidents (συμβεβηκότα). In the previously cited passage from *Mystagogia* 1.4, Maximus references the circle model in the context of overcoming divisions. Just before this passage, Maximus quotes Paul's epistle to Galatians (3:28) and Romans (3:11), which state that in Christ there is no distinction between male nor female, Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigner and Scythian, slave and freeman; Christ is all in all.⁵⁰

Torstein Tollefsen has noted that Paul, when emphasizing the absence of differences in Christ, uses the term διαστολή, like in Romans 10:12: "For there is no distinction (οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή) between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all."⁵¹ If Paul's statement is understood in the context of διαστολή, rendered as "expansion", and if the focus shifts from the all-embracing presence of Christ through his *logoi* in creation to individual accidents such sex, ethnic origin, or social status, then a different conclusion emerges. This implies that individuals do not further expand into their attributes, nor should their individuality be solely defined by these attributes. Instead of emphasizing their ethnic, sexual, or social distinctions, human individuals should strive to unite in universal aspects, starting from humanity and sensible nature in general, and culminating in unity with the Logos. This reverse process aligns with the concept of contraction (συστολή), which signifies a movement back to the Logos.

The created order is in a state of perpetual movement, determined by the essence of beings and their specific place in the structured reality. In *Ambiguum* 15 Maximus says that:

“Ακινήτως δὲ κινεῖσθαι τε καὶ φέρεσθαι τὰ ὁρώμενα” εἰρηται τῷ διδασκάλῳ, τῷ μὲν λόγῳ, ὃ γέγονε ταῦτα, κατὰ τε φύσιν καὶ δύναμιν καὶ ἐνέργειαν, τάξιν τε καὶ διαμονὴν ἀμεταστάτως ἔχειν, καὶ μὴ ἐξίστασθαι καθ’ ὅτι οὖν τῆς φυσικῆς ἰδιότητος καὶ μεταβάλλειν εἰς ἄλλο καὶ φύρεσθαι, κινεῖσθαι δὲ πάλιν τῷ κατὰ ῥοὴν καὶ ἀπορροὴν λόγῳ, αὐξήσει τε τῇ περὶ τὸ ποσὸν καὶ μειώσει καὶ τῇ περὶ τὸ ποιὸν ἀλλοιώσει, καὶ κυρίως εἰπέϊν,

τῇ ἐξ ἀλλήλων διαδοχῇ, ὑπεξισταμένων ἀεὶ τοῖς ἐπιγνομένοις τῶν προειληφόντων.⁵²

In saying that “visible things are moved and carried along without motion,” the teacher was referring to the intelligible principle according to which they were created, for they are unchanging in their nature, potential, and activity, as well as in their rank and station in the general order of things, so that they do not in any way go beyond their natural properties or change into other things and become confused with them.⁵³

For Maximus, all beings exhibit stability and immobility according to the *logoi* of their existence, while they appear unstable and in motion due to the *logoi* of “what is contemplated around them”.⁵⁴ This distinction means that the fixedness and limitations of beings are determined by their preexisting *logoi*, while their movement occurs at the level of their accidents, evident in changes in increase and decrease, or in quantity and alternation. The outer limit of every being resides in the individuality of its nature rather than in the particularity of its accidents.

From the above discussion, several conclusions can be drawn. First, created beings are limited by their individual existence. This implies that they are distinct from one another through their modes of individual existence, yet united through their *logoi* of common essence, which were created by God. Therefore, beings represented as radii are separated individually but share God as their common origin, symbolized by the center, and a common mode of individual existence, depicted as the inner circumference.

Second, this form of individual existence, which limits created beings, is imposed by God. The purpose of this limitation is to guide created beings towards realizing that their ultimate aim is to turn them towards and unite with God. Consequently, the outer circumference drawn by some scribes symbolizes the external limitation of beings. Since the limitation is illustrated as a boundary on radii in the form of circumference, it brings the radii to the focus for further examination.

5. Radii: Individual Existences

Within the framework of Maximus' circle metaphor, the radii represent individual human existences navigating various stages of their spiritual development as they journey towards God as the center. Interpreted through the lens of Maximus' immanent onto-logical structure, as outlined in *Ambiguum* 10.37, and the fixedness described in *Ambiguum* 15, the individuality of each human being is anchored by their unique *logoi* and the unity of their accidents in common substance. While divine creation expands to a certain limit through the creative act, it also returns to God through a movement of contraction. The expansion is directed from the Logos of God toward

⁴⁹ Max., *Ambig.* 10.37 (PG 91:1177C). Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 289. See also Vladimir Cvetković, “All in all’ (1 Cor 15:28): Aspects of the Unity between God and Creation according to St Maximus the Confessor”. *Analogia* 2-1 (2017), 19-20.

⁵⁰ Max., *Myst.* 1.4 (CCSG 69, 13); Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 187.

⁵¹ Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St Maximus the Confessor* [PhD dissertation] (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2000), 100-101.

⁵² Max., *Ambig.* 15 (PG 91:1217A). Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 366.

⁵³ Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 367.

⁵⁴ Max., *Ambig.* 15 (PG 91:1217AB); Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 367.

the circumference, reaching its final limit at the outer circumference. Conversely, the contraction moves from the circumference back toward the center of the circle.

Tollefsen argues that the double movement of procession (πρόοδος) and conversion (ἐπιστροφή) delineates the historical limits of the world, encompassing its historical beginning and end.⁵⁵ Given that the outer circumference represents the ultimate boundary of all creation, it is reasonable to infer that this double movement occurs along the radii. The procession, as a movement of the divine Logos towards the multiple logoi, extends from the center of the circle to the circumference. Conversely, the movement of creatures, in alignment with their logoi toward the Logos, occurs in the opposite direction—from the circumference back to the center of the circle.

The diagrams provide several methods for visualizing these movements. One approach is illustrated by the scribe of the Dorotheus circle in the fifteenth-century collection of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius (Fig. 8). In this diagram, the scribe differentiates between divine and human movement by using red ink for the former and black ink for the latter. By employing red for the outer circumference, the scribe emphasizes the divine origin of the creative and providential acts. The colors of the radii also indicate the direction of movement: movement along the red radii, extending from the center to the circumference, represents the divine act, while movement along the black radii, moving from the circumference toward the center, signifies human movement back to God. The semicircles drawn in the middle of the red radii, resembling arrows pointing towards the circumference, further indicate the direction of the divine movement.

In light of the aforementioned passage from *Ambiguum* 7 (PG 91, 1081C), one can further infer the following: the red radii represent the movement of the one Logos into individual beings, referred to as the creative and sustaining procession (ποιητική καὶ συνεκτική πρόοδος), where the one Logos becomes many *logoi*. Conversely, the black radii symbolize the reverse movement of many *logoi* towards the one Logos, known as the convertive, inductive, and providential return (ἐπιστρεπτική καὶ χειραγωγική ἀναφορά τε καὶ πρόνοια).⁵⁶

A different portrayal of this theme is found in the Dorotheus circle from the Dečani Collection dating from the last decade of the fourteenth century, which depicts the two corresponding movements as twisted cruciform bands (Fig. 9). It is not uncommon to represent the radii of Dorotheus' circle as a cross, as seen in the manuscript from the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius from the fifteenth century (Fig. 10). Regardless of the interpretation of the "cruciformity" in Dorotheus' circle, Maximus' own "cruciform" cosmology is linked to the image of a "cruciform" circle. For instance, the manuscript no. 476 from Chilandar, which contains Maximus' *Capita de caritate*, includes an illustration of a cruciform circle.

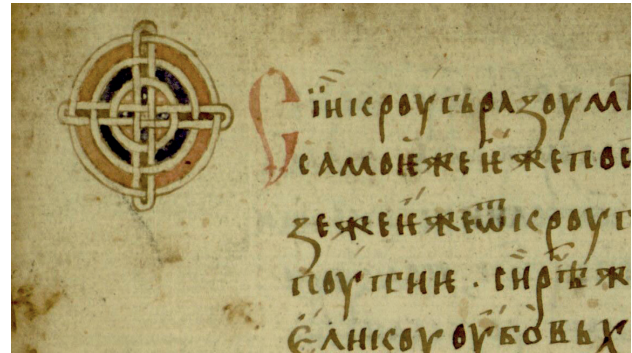


Fig. 9. Dorotheus' circle, the Dečani Collection, no. 78, list 64b, last decade of the 14th century

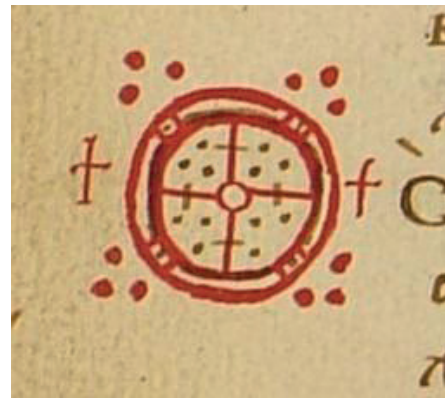


Fig. 10. Dorotheus' circle, Collection of the Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, no. 154, list 114, 15th century.

However, I believe that the form in which the twisted cruciform bands are depicted may have multiple interpretations within the context of Maximus' works. First, while the cross shape is commonly associated with general Christian symbolism, it also takes on a specific significance in Maximus' *Capita theologica et oeconomica* I, 66. In this text, the cross symbol is reinterpreted in a way that reflects Maximus' theological insights and cosmological views.

Καὶ ὁ μὲν γνοὺς σταυροῦ καὶ ταφῆς τὸ μυστήριον, ἔγνω τῶν προειρημένων τοὺς λόγους· ὁ δὲ τῆς ἀναστάσεως μνηθεὶς τὴν ἀπόρρητον δύναμιν, ἔγνω τὸν ἐφ' ᾧ τὰ πάντα προηγουμένως ὁ Θεὸς ὑπεστήσατο σκοπόν.⁵⁷

The one who knows the mystery of the cross and the tomb knows the principles of these creatures. And the one who has been initiated into the ineffable power of the Resurrection knows the purpose for which God originally made all things.⁵⁸

According to Maximus, the mystery of the cross represents the *logoi* of the sensible world, while the mystery of the tomb signifies the *logoi* of the intelligible world. The Resurrection illuminates both the cross and the tomb, symbolizing the ineffable unity of God with creation.⁵⁹ Maximus' analogies suggest

⁵⁵ Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology*, 2008, 78.

⁵⁶ Max, *Ambig. 7* (PG 91:1081C). Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties*, vol. 1, 101.

⁵⁷ Max., *Cap. theol.* I, 66 (PG 90:1108AB).

⁵⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, 140.

⁵⁹ Cvetković, "The Transformation of Neoplatonic Philosophical Notions," 207.

that the unity of the sensible and intelligible realms, as well as the ultimate unity of all creation with the Logos, could not be achieved without Christ's sacrifice, death, and Resurrection. Christ's Resurrection is seen as a foretaste of the final resurrection and the ultimate deification through unity with Him. In the context of the double movement, it can be concluded that, by returning to the Heavenly Father in His humanity, Christ was the first to traverse the path from the circumference to the center of the circle.

Second, in the Dečani circle, the two intertwined cruciform bands that resemble Solomon's knot symbolize the two movements: from the center toward the circumference and back again. These bands are connected by semicircles, which signify not only the final limits of the world but also the transformation of the linear movements into an elliptical movement of creation around God. Unlike the smaller concentric circle that represents the movement of being around God, this elliptical movement encompasses the entirety of creation, extending to its ultimate boundaries. This illustrates that both the sensible and intelligible aspects of creation are included in the divine plan of salvation and are destined for final union with God.

Third, the two twisted cruciform bands form four distinct movements: from the center to the circumference and back. The number four carries special symbolic significance. Dionysius, for instance, argues in *De Divinis Nominibus* 5.2 that there are four divine processions (πρόοδοι) emanating from God: Goodness, Being, Life, and Wisdom.⁶⁰ Building on Dionysius' framework, Maximus places these four processions within an anthropological context. He associates Being and Eternal Being (τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ αἰὲ ὄν), which correspond to Dionysius' concepts of Being and Life, with the essence of humanity, reflecting the divine image in human nature. The other two processions, Well-Being (τὸ εὖ εἶναι) and Wisdom (σοφία), representing the likeness of God, are attributed to human will and determination.⁶¹ This anthropological triad of "Being," "Well-Being," and "Eternal Being," inspired by Dionysian cosmology, will be further analyzed in relation to the middle points of the radii in Fig. 9 and the concentric circles in Fig. 14 in the next subsection.

6. The Middle Points on the Radii or the Concentric Circles: The Individual Orientation

In both the Dečani circle diagram (Fig. 9) and the Trinity Lavra circle diagram (Fig. 8), the radii are either marked with red and black points in the middle or intersected by three concentric circles. Clearly, the middle parts of the radii play a significant role for the scribes, forming a triadic structure along with the points on the circumference and the center. As mentioned earlier, Maximus' well-known triad of cosmic or creaturely movement includes "being," "well-being," and "eternal well-being." Thus, if we identify the center with eternal being and the point on the circumference with being, then the middle point or the

middle concentric circle represents well-being. This triad is derived from the tetrad of divine processions. According to *Capita de Caritate* III, 24-25, God created human beings in His image and likeness, granting being and eternal being to His image, and well-being or goodness and wisdom to His likeness. Being in the image of God corresponds to human actuality, while attaining the likeness to God pertains to human potentiality. Therefore, the process of convertive and inductive return involves acquiring well-being and wisdom, which ultimately leads to the transformation into eternal well-being.

Although the Dečani diagram is more complex than the Trinity Lavra diagram, its meaning can also be explained through the triad of "being," "well-being," and "eternal well-being." The middle points on the radii, or their intersections with concentric circles, refer to different stages in the movements of expansion and contraction, or procession and conversion.

It is plausible that the central square formed by the twisted cruciform bands in Fig. 9 represents God. The three concentric rings, with the outer and inner rings painted in red and the middle one in blue, correspond to this triad. The outer ring signifies the realm of the *logoi* of being, the middle ring represents the realm of the *logoi* of well-being, and the inner ring denotes the realm of eternal being or eternal well-being.

By following its own logos and actualizing God's likeness, each individual human being progresses from the realm of the *logoi* of being into the realm of the *logoi* of well-being. The final concentric ring, which contains the inscribed square, represents the realm of eternal being. Being and eternal being are bestowed upon the human image by God, which is why the outer and inner rings are painted red. The middle ring, referring to the realm of well-being, is achieved through human effort and is depicted in blue.

7. Conclusion

Dionysius the Areopagite, Dorotheus of Gaza, and Maximus the Confessor employed the metaphor of the circle and radii to illustrate the unifying nature of God. However, as Dionysian and Maximinian ideas became contentious during the Palamite controversy in the 14th century, these diagrams also began to reflect the differing views of the opposing camps. The most innovative circle and center diagrams in the Slavonic manuscript tradition of the Balkans appeared in the last three decades of the 14th century, serving as visual representations of Instruction 6 of Dorotheus of Gaza, a widely circulated work in monastic communities.

The simplest circle diagrams found in Slavonic manuscripts, such as those in the translation of the *Corpus Dionysiacum*, depict both the ineffable mystery of the Godhead and the divine creative act. The portrayal of God as a small concentric circle within a larger circle aims to illustrate the indivisibility of the Godhead (represented by a point-like circle) and the unity of the persons of the Holy Trinity (depicted as a circle).

The diagrams found in Slavonic manuscripts that often accompany the *Instructions* of Dorotheus of Gaza are valuable for elucidating certain aspects of

⁶⁰ Dion., *DN* 5.2 (Suchla, 181). Cf. Cvetkovic, "Predeterminations and Providence," 140-141.

⁶¹ Max., *Capita de caritate* 3, 24-5 (PG 90:1024AB).

Dionysian and Maximian teachings. In the simplest diagrams, the lives of created beings are represented as radii extending from the outermost point on the circumference toward the center of the circle, symbolizing God as the ultimate destination of their journey. However, in several Slavonic manuscripts, the diagrams illustrating Dorotheus' *Instruction 6* are so complex that they do not align directly with the basic text.

The historical fact that Dorotheus' circle appears alongside the works of Maximus and Dionysius in some manuscripts, coupled with the shared translation and copying of Dorotheus and Maximus in the same monastic schools, establishes a significant connection between Dorotheus' circle and Maximus' thought. Often, Dorotheus' circle metaphor served as a pretext for scribes to convey a sophisticated theological message through the circle diagram. A discernible pattern emerges in the diagrams from the fourteenth century, where emphasis on the center, circumference, or radii aligns with the different contexts in which the circle metaphor is employed by Dionysius and Maximus.

The center of the circle represents God in general, but its shape—whether point-like or circular—emphasizes different aspects of the divine. A point-like center highlights the singularity of the Godhead, while a circular center underscores the plurality of the Holy Trinity. When considered in the context of creation, a point-like center, which unites all radii as their common terminal point, symbolizes God as the ultimate unity among creatures. Conversely, a circular center reflects the infinite circular movement that creatures will assume after the world's consummation.

The circumference denotes the cosmological and ontological limits of creation imposed by God. Just as the center represents the complete unity of creatures, the points on the circumference symbolize individual existences. The circular shape of the circumference signifies the unity of created differentiations, aligning with how the center represents the Holy Trinity as the unity of divine differentiations. The radii connecting the center with the circumference pertain to both divine differentiations and creaturely unifications.

To convey this dual movement along the radii, scribes employ various methods, including different colors or twisted bands. Additionally, elements such as concentric circles or middle points on radii indicate the stages of being set by God and achieved by created beings. These recurring elements in Slavonic diagrams reflect established interpretations of complex theological and philosophical concepts. They not only aid modern scholars in understanding ancient authors more comprehensively but also bridge gaps between disparate traditions.

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