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Prof. Milovan Vidaković, PhD

President of the National Organization of Engineers and Technicians for Directing Fire Risks - DITUR

FIRE AT HILANDAR MONASTERY

The Article describes the formation and development of the Hilandar Monastery in view of the arrival of Serbs on the Balkans, including the historical role of the Nemanjić dynasty. Special attention is dedicated to 2004 fire at the Hilandar Monastery; moreover, the author gives instructions for the protection against similar situations in future.

The Hilandar Monastery is still exposed to the same peril. Therefore, it is necessary to create conditions for the supply of sufficient water amount. The water tank must have a required water quantity and pressure capacity. Also, it is necessary to install fire sections, in order to restrict the fire to a smaller area. Each restructured building should, by its height, represent a separate fire section. The crossings between the fire sections have to be secured by fire doors. Finally, the monks in the monasteries need to be prepared and/or trained to act in case of a re-occurrence of fire. It is also important to provide for firefighting suits and breathing apparatus.

Key words: *Hilandar, fire, prevention*

Historical Data on Hilandar Monastery Formation

Hilandar is a Serbian monastery established in the 12th century on the Chalkidhiki peninsula in Greece. The monastery is located on Athos, one of the Chalkidhiki's three fingers. Since the 33rd year after Christ, when the Mother of God landed on Athos during a strong sea storm, it has been called the Holy Mountain. By tradition, while landing, the Mother of God knocked down the Statue of Apollo, located on the mountain and dominating the peninsula (2.011 m). At that moment, the Mother of God proclaimed that she was the last woman to have stepped on the Holy Land, and no other woman should ever step on it again.

Before these occurrences, the peasants, the Greeks and Romans, inhabited the peninsula in turn, leaving trails of their existence throughout this tame area. The Holy Mountain was granted independence under the Treaty of London (1913); this was confirmed under the Lozana Contract (1926).

There is some information, today, on how the Monastery Hilandar, the second biggest Monastery on the Holy Land, was formed. Studying, above all, the history of the Serbs, the nation of whose historical heritage the Monastery and approximately 10,000 ha of the surrounding land (which is one fifth of the entire peninsula) form part, we can get a picture on how such a Monastery could have been created outside the boundaries of Serbia.

Hilandar, as a Serbian Monastery, was founded by the Nemanjić Dynasty, ruling from 1171 to 1371. An issue is whether the Nemanjić dynasty should be considered the first Serbian dynasty or, as some historical data suggest, the fifty third.

The historical data on the Serbs inhabiting the Balkans date back to the period of 2,000 years B.C. In that period, the Balkan Peninsula was not called the Balkans, but Helm, after the Hemus Mountain. It is interesting that the peninsula has been called Helm for many centuries, until the Congress of Berlin in 1878, when the name Balkans was adopted, after a Turkish coin word. The name Balkans, again, was given after the Balkan Mountains, which used to be called the Hemus before the Turks appeared.

On the basis of scanty documents, many of our historians have opened a new page of history, placing the ancient Serbs within completely different borders and historical moments. If we accept the evidence of already forgotten and, very often, intentionally disregarded history of the Serbs as Indo-European nation, we come to some discoveries which lead back to the Nemanjić dynasty and formation of the Hilandar Monastery.

According to such data, the settling of Serbs in Europe, 2,000 years B.C, brought the so called Dacian Serbs to the Helm peninsula, where they still live. In that period, some Serbian tribes used to cross big distances; today, therefore, the Serbs can be found even as far as Sicily, France and Zorba, in Germany.

In the documents of the period 240 to 230 year B.C, during the reign of the king Argon (Sargon or Serbon), the Serbs were referred to as Serbs, Illyrians, Sorbs or Veneti. The state under the reign of the Serbian king Argon was called *Zonara* and was represented as a „Serbian empire“. From 229 until 168 B.C, the Romans started conquering the Adriatic Serbia. The full control of the Romans over the Serbs was established nine years A.D. In the Roman documents, the Serbs of that period were referred to as the Illyrians or Venets; those titles were of the Greek origin.

The first Serbian state is recorded to have been established in 461, under the reign of Markelin the Emperor, by overthrowing the authority of Rome; the first Serbian dynasty on the Helm peninsula (the Balkans) was under the emperors of Svevladović dynasty from 490 to 641. According to some historians, the capital of the Svevladović dynasty was the town of Skadar. It is interesting to mention that the first emperor of the Svevladović dynasty descended from the Lusatian Sorbs and/or the Zorbs (as they are nowadays called in Germany). This was, somehow, natural, since the Hungarians did not yet appear; thus, the Serbs of the Helm peninsula were directly linked to the Serbs of the Central Europe.

As the Serbs had already received Christianity and were not easy to conquer, Justinian, the Byzantine emperor, wishing to conquer the Serbs, founded the Peć Archiepiscopcy, in the year 549. The basic idea was, through the Archiepiscopcy and the town of Peć (which now belongs to the territory of Kosovo), to keep the Serbs under control of the Eastern Empire.

In 575, the Serbian emperor Vladan (568–590) moved the capital from Skadar to Solin. In that period, the emperor Vladan received Bulgarians into the Serbian State, at their request.

Six hundred years A.D, the Helm was colonized by the Avars who, in 639, destroyed the capital of Solin. In 641, Svetimir, the Serbian duke, banished the Avars from Serbia and crowned himself in Skadar. According to the historical data, the Serbian dynasty Svetimirović was established in 711; it was continued by Budimir, the son of Svetimir. After the Svetimirović dynasty, Serbia was governed by the long-lived Oštriović dynasty, from 794 to 865. At one moment,

the dynasty of Oštriović was extinguished, only to be re-established again in 926 and last to 1171.

In 858, an important event occurred for the Serbs and their literacy. Two Serbs of Salonika, Cyril and Methodius, were called by Rastislav, the prince of Moravia (modern Czech and Slovakia), to bring people to literacy by a new script. On their way back to Salonika, they stayed in Serbia, where the people accepted the new script (today called the Cyrillic, after Cyril). Until that moment, the Serbs had been using the Vinca script (named after the culture which originated at a place in the vicinity of Belgrade).

After the Oštriović dynasty, the Nemanjić dynasty came to the scene; they founded the Hilandar Monastery on the Holy Mountain. Under the rule of the Nemanjić dynasty, Serbia became a strong and wealthy country on the Helm. The father, Nemanja, had three sons: Vukan, Stevan and Rastko.

In that period, the East-West chism occurred, which affected Serbia as well. The country was in between the conflicting parties, which caused strange alterations in the acceptance of the East or Western Churches. Thus, the youngest son, Rastko, ran to the Holy Mountain, which was under the influence of the East Church; there, he entered a monastic order, under the name of Sava. His brothers, Stevan and Vukan, on the other hand, stayed to reign over Serbia and Bosnia, relying upon the Western Church and the Pope. Moreover, the eldest brother Stevan was crowned Serbian king and inaugurated under the Pope's blessing. A few years later, *Stefan Prvovenčani* received another crown from the East Church, by help of his brother – the monk Sava.

At the end of the 12th century, on the Holy Mountain, the youngest son greeted his father who, in his declining years and before death, entered the monastic order under the name of *Simeon Mirotočivi*. The two of them lived in a Greek monastery, Vatoped. As the Nemanjić dynasty was wealthy, they arranged with the Monks of the Vatoped to take over that old and (for as much as 80 years) abandoned monastery and restore it into a Serbian Hilandar Monastery. Owing to their work and dedication, and, above all, land purchasing, the area of the Hilandar Monastery is today estimated at 10,000 hectares, which forms one fifth of the territory of the Holy Land. The Hilandar Monastery includes the Monastery of St. Basil, originating from the 9th century, located three kilometres away from Hilandar, at the mere seashore.

The name of Hilandar has a few roots; most probably, it meant the area with a church, owned by a trader named Georgie Hilandarius. The first built parts

of the Monastery, under the trader Hilandarius, date back to the 9th century.

Upon taking over the Monastery, Sava and Simeon made great efforts to restore it as a centre of Serbian spirituality. As a result, the Hilandar Monastery is nowadays known as an empire without a crown, state without an army, country without women, wealth without money, wisdom without school, kitchen without meat, prayer without stopping and death without remorse; an everlasting link with the Heavens and a tireless song of praise to the Christ.

The building of the Monastery was carried on by the Serbian reign Milutin, in 1303. On the foundations of the old church, he built a new, bigger church- *The Ascension of the Holy Mother of God* and a dining hall. The dining hall gained its modern look only many years after, in 1621.

The construction was continued by tsar Lazar. Since the Church turned out to be small for such a big number of monks and visitors, the narthex and/or the second nave was built in 1380.

The years and centuries passed. The Monastery grew bigger and turned into a fortress with the towers. This was necessary, since groups of pirates ravaged the Mediterranean in those times, whereas the rich monasteries, such as Hilandar, owned huge and considerable treasuries. The Monastery's biggest wealth includes the old library with a huge fund of books, icons and sculptures of all dynasties of Serbian history on Helm. Until today, that wealth has attracted the robbers.

The Hilandar Monastery is not only a symbol of Serbian sovereignty, but also a document of Serbian nation inhabiting the Helm peninsula and Europe through centuries.

Perhaps, at this moment, we have come to the reason of fire occurring at the Hilandar Monastery in 2004.

Effects of Fire at Hilandar Monastery

Fire at Hilandar Monastery broke out during the night. The construction of the buildings, erected in the 9th century, with the addings built throughout the following centuries, was suitable for the fast spreading of fire, without any obstacles between the buildings in a range. The roof construction was built of the stone panels; however, below them, there were old girders carrying the roof and the floor. The fire spread from the roof downward. Spreading of the fire

downward, to the floors, was caused by the collapsing burning girders. Later during the night, the biggest part of the Monastery complex was burning. At the end, the fire stopped at the wall of the Guard Tower, built by the St. Sava. The tower raised high above other buildings in the range; the fire, therefore, could not reach the roof and spread. In other terms, the tower was the ideal fire wall, where the fire stopped.

On the other side of the monastery buildings circle, there was the old dining hall, much lower than the tower. As the fire broke out in the vicinity of the hall, at a high monastery building, while spreading downstairs, it reached the lowest temperature, which heated the walls of the dining hall and destroyed the old frescos; however, it was not enough to allow the fire to spread onto the dining hall itself.

The buildings caught up by fire suffered huge damages; as the stone structure itself remained, there was a danger of collapsing. Fast supported by a metal construction, a part of the facade was saved from collapsing, whereas another part collapsed. Steel pillars for supporting the facade were donated by Greece.

The intervention of firefighters was weak and insufficient for the fire of such dimensions. The fire engine of the Holy Mountain arrived at the fire location after a few hours (since there are no actual roads on the peninsula). Moreover, the Hilandar Monastery has, for centuries, supplied itself with water from wells, which have no capacity for any serious firefighting.

The cause of fire has, until nowadays, remained a theme for discussion. Its bursting was investigated by the teams of the Greek crime-investigating police, without a complete answer as to the cause of fire. For now, there are two versions: according to the first, the chimney of the furnace of old 9th century building, which was stoked that night, cracked and the heat spread onto the old wooden buildings. However, the workers who cleared up the ashes claimed that the girders surrounding the chimney were unharmed.

According to other, unofficial but often quoted versions, the fire broke out that night at two locations, at least. One of these versions was supplied by a German website dedicated to the Hilandar Monastery; according to them, it was arson. This has been supported by the fact that on Kosovo, almost simultaneously (within two or three days), dozens of Christian churches and monasteries, dating back to the 12th and 13th centuries, was set on fire. The coincidence of these events, occurring in one month, is very strange, indeed.

Types of Fire Protection of Hilandar Monastery

In October 2010, I was called by the Council of Hilandar to come to the Holy Mountain and help at installing the fire protection while reconstructing the old, burned down monastery buildings. While preparing for the journey, I called Mr Michael Schnell from Cologne, employed with the German Insurance Association and the member of the Confederation of Fire Protection Association (CFPA) Europe, and a well-known photographer Prof. Manfred Zimmermann.

What impresses you immediately after disembarking the ship at the Holy Mountain, is that you suddenly find yourself in the middle of the 12th century. To tell the truth, the jeeps were waiting to drive us to the Hilandar, but everything else was unreal for the modern times.

At the entry of the Hilandar Monastery, we were awaited for by the father Theodor, who was our host during the entire stay at the Holy Mountain. After getting the information about fire at the Hilandar Monastery, we started to explore the forms of fire protection that could be installed into the restructured parts of the Monastery. It was clear at the first glance, that the Monastery building, originating from 9th to 14th century, had no fire protection at all. To make the situation more difficult, the restructuring procedure had to cover all the construction steps from the mentioned centuries. In other words, the restructured buildings had to appear completely the same as when they were first built. This required that the installed fire protection did not disturb, in any detail, the systems of construction and the appearance of the buildings from the past centuries.

This is why the wooden roof structure was, during the reconstruction, coated with the retarders - in order to increase the fire resistance. Also, it was planned to install the sprinklers into the attic, so as to ensure the extinguishing of any possible fire occurring on the roof structure. Installing sprinklers in the attic was, certainly, a good step, but not sufficient; the entire section, not only some parts, need to be controlled by sprinklers. This means that the entire building must be covered with sprinklers, located in fire sections. For Hilandar, this is an excellent solution, if we have in mind that the system can control fire automatically, without the need for fire brigades and trained staff.

In order to control the fire by sprinklers, the first and basic issue was the water amount and pressure at the location. Until bursting out of the fire, the Hilandar Monastery has been supplied by water from the wells. The only way to

solve this issue was to build a reservoir of sufficient capacity on one of the hills surrounding the Monastery. The reservoir had to supply the amount of water necessary for the fire extinguishing period of at least one hour, at a pressure of seven bars. According to my information, the reservoir was completed in 2012, against many difficulties regarding the issuance of the construction permit.

Another issue was the construction of fire sections for restricting the fire to a smaller area of the restructured buildings. The fire sections were planned in a way that each segment of the restructured building represented, by its height, a separate fire section. The crossings between the sections were secured by fire doors. The floors were not divided into fire sections, since the reconstruction of the old way of building did not allow this. It is assumed that the fire walls were planned to be installed at the roofs, as well, to cut off any possible ways of fire spreading. The choice of material was dedicated special attention; meeting the requirements of the old way of building, as well. For the first time during the reconstruction, the attention was given to fire alarms, obeying the requirement that these installations should not be visible at all (in order not to disrupt the appearance of the building).

The third issue regarded the training of the monks themselves for action in case of fire, since it had turned out that, under the conditions existing on the holy Mountain, they could only rely upon their training in case of the intervention and fire extinguishing. For this reason, they gained the firefighting suits and breathing apparatus.

During this visit, a three-hour lecture was delivered to the reconstruction workers, with the accent on fire during the period of construction.

During the visit to the Hilandar Monastery, prof. Vidakovic and Michael Schnell went to see all the premises which were not endangered by fire, such as the treasury, library, church, wine cellar, the Monastery of Saint Basil and the Dining Hall. The remarks were given by word, while checking particular windows. After returning from the visit, in his Report to the Council of Hilandar Monastery, prof. Vidaković gave the conclusion on the proposals and discovered deficiencies.

While working on fire protection, prof. Manfred Zimmermann made photographs of the Hilandar Monastery. Beautiful photographs of frescoes, churches, buildings and fire shall remain as a document of past period. There was an idea to write a monograph about the Hilandar Monastery in several languages, in order to reveal to the entire world a pearl of the Serbian nation

and its spiritual culture. Unfortunately, in spite of long negotiations with the National Museum on organizing the lectures and exhibiting photographs in the Gallery of Frescoes, the idea has not yet been implemented. The lectures delivered by prof. Vidaković and the exhibition of photographs made by prof. Manfred Zimmermann would, for sure, secure a sufficient number of sponsors for such an important monograph. Unfortunately, due to the crisis, this was postponed for better days. Hopefully, these beautiful photographs will, one day, still be available to the whole world in a monograph about the Hilandar Monastery, which will be issued in several languages.

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*Translated into English by: **Bojana Papović***