

Vladan Trijić

National Library of Serbia, Belgrade

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SERBIA

AS A CUSTODIAN OF WRITTEN CULTURAL HERITAGE IN AND OUT

Since the 9th century and the activities of the Thessaloniki brothers Cyril and Methodius, "the apostles of the Slavs", manuscripts have survived for the whole millennium as evidence of the idea of literacy and its main form of expression among Orthodox Slavs. Glagolitic and Cyrillic manuscripts are layered sources for cultural and general history. Technological progress in this regard didn't make substantial changes. Over the century and a half as long as printing lasted in the Serbian version of Old Church Slavonic (1494-1638), roots and role models, as well as textual sources of printed books were determined by the manuscript tradition. The new book form represented more of a supplement to the old one than its replacement and that is the context in which modern scholars consider them.

The National Library of Serbia was founded on this legacy. Established in 1832, from the beginning it possessed a small library collection of old books that was growing as Serbia was liberating itself from the power of the Ottomans in the 19th century. Moreover, some of its best-known directors of that era were at the same time the most significant scholars of medieval books. However, the library collection that was being accumulated over a long period of time was destroyed, at first partially in the First World War, and then completely in the Second World War, during the German bombing of Belgrade in 1941. In the raid around 1,300 manuscripts, early printed books and charters were completely destroyed, including one Gutenberg Bible on vellum. However, in the same year of 1941 the formation of new collections started and today they contain 320 manuscript codices and fragments and 101 books of early, mostly Serbian printing. These and other special collections of the National Library of Serbia (including nearly 15,000 old and rare books) have mostly been processed, digitized and made available to users, and there are continuous efforts to protect them through preventive and curative conservation.

These collections are the basis on which the National Library of Serbia builds its identity and its participation in international projects, primarily those related to digitization and electronic processing of library collections and the creation of a treasury of national and European culture. Some of these projects have been completed - for example, in recent years, CENDARI and COST Action 1005, as well as The European Library. On the other hand, NLS remains a member of several international enterprises such as LIBER and Europeana, within which it has the role of a national aggregator. Furthermore, Serbia is one of the founders of the consortium DARIAH-ERIC with the National Library of Serbia as its national representative. In short, NLS continually examines and develops ways to promote its legacy.

However, the National Library of Serbia is not only taking care of its collections but also has a master role in the system of public libraries of Serbia. Thus, its laboratory makes one of two accredited laboratories in Serbia for conservation of old and rare library materials, within the regular working flow. In terms of research, the Serbian legislation states that one of the tasks of NLS is to provide "the archeographic description of Cyrillic manuscripts in the country and Serbian manuscripts abroad." To this end, in 1961 the Archeographic Department (separated from Special Collections Department) was founded as a hybrid scientific unit with the character of an institute.

The main job of the Department is to provide a multidisciplinary description of each of the surviving monuments of ancient literacy, to provide summaries of all of its elements as a set of indications for further scientific studies, its placement in an appropriate cultural context and the inclusion of the cultural heritage of its country and (or) its people. Therefore, as one of the basic characteristics of the approach cherished in the Archeographic Department is emphasizing the cultural, historical, and monumental character of the manuscripts, namely, equal consideration of all the elements of each book whose content, language or decoration receive equal attention when processed – in the extent it is required by the source material.

The work of the Archeographic Department was soon enriched by the creation of collections of materials. Apart from originals belonging NLS, it has also come into possession of a considerably large number of books through copies; from the beginning, in fact, the Central Photo-Collection of the South Slavonic manuscripts and early printed books in the country and abroad was formed, so as to record their condition and to meet the research needs. In this way, through microfilms, photographs and digital images, researchers have access to 5,378

books from local and foreign collections. In addition to this, files have been created of excerpted materials. For example, the filigranological collection contains more than 34,000 copies of watermarks.

Some of the most extensive collections of old books in Serbia that the National Library of Serbia indirectly take care of can be found in monasteries such as Dečani, or in the institutions of culture, such as the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Patriarchate Library and the University Library in Belgrade. However, its professional care also includes collections in foreign countries, for example, in Szentendre in Hungary or in monasteries of Serbian Orthodox Church outside of Serbia. Large dispersion of the Serbian people entails a great dispersion of the nation's cultural heritage. Numerous books have been damaged or taken to distant places in wars, migrations and natural disasters, including the wars in former Yugoslavia in the late 20th century.

All these collections share a common profile: they mostly contain Cyrillic, mainly Serbian manuscripts while the number of manuscripts in other languages and scripts, including Greek is relatively small. For example, in NLS there are only two manuscripts in Greek, one of which is palimpsest. As far as I know, it is similar to collections of other institutions: in Dečani there is a Greek *Psalter* from 15th century along with two younger manuscripts, in the Museum of Applied arts in Belgrade, a *Parousia* from the same time, otherwise there are mainly theological or cantor collections from 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, in small numbers. There are no Greek incunabula in the National Library of Serbia, and of the books from 16th and 17th Century the ones that stand out are French bilingual issues such as *Church History* from 1544, *Peri ton offikialon* of George Kodinos from 1588 and Hesiod's works from 1627.

This situation is somewhat odd given the fact that, for the Serbian literacy, the relationship with Greek has always been sacrosanct. As I mentioned at the beginning, Saint Cyril and Methodius enabled the evangelization of the Slavs in their own language, which, for the Europe of 9th century, was revolutionary in the full sense of the word. The literacy of medieval Serbs in general was developing on their variety of common Slavonic language, within the canons of the Byzantine literature. It is also known that texts were translated primarily from Greek. For example, the famous Serbian Church Slavonic translation of the hesychastic controversy from the mid-14th century, saved the first original version of the homely of Gregory Palamas concerning the Holy Spirit as well as one, unrecorded in Greek, apodictic homely of Barlaam of Calabria. A Serbian scribe of the Cyrillic *Tetraevangelion of King Stefan Dušan* from 1348, written in Great Lavra, warned

of the deterioration of the Serbian text of the gospel because of insufficient knowledge of the "force of the Greek language."

Both cited manuscripts originate from the Holy Mountain, which for more than eight centuries has remained the main meeting point of Greek and Serbian culture, with the Hilandar Monastery in leading role. Serbs have always maintained a special bond with Hilandar although the monastery never belonged to the Serbian church and was under Serbian masters for a very short time. The monastery was established in 1198 on the site of the older, desolate monastery by Vatoped monks Simeon, whose name before he took monastic vows was Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the independent Serbian late-medieval state, and his youngest son Sava, who was to become the first archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Church. The founding charter of Emperor Alexios III Angel says that the monastery was dedicated to "those among Serbs who choose monastic life."

Thus, in Serbian rulers ideology of the time, Hilandar had the meaning of the New Zion, while the practical significance of its development was reflected in the confirmation of legitimacy of Serbia within the Byzantine civilization. In the centuries that followed, the Serbian state, embodied first in rulers, and later in rich nobility, took care of Hilandar and Hilandar gave back in writing, translation and reproduction of Christian literature and artistic creativity and in forming bishops, as well as in diplomatic mediation, both within Serbia, and between it and the Byzantine Empire. The monastery has remained an inexhaustible source of cults of Saint Simeon and Saint Sava, who are celebrated individually, as holy patrons, but also through a joint cult of "the sacred two" as intercessors before God for the Serbian rulers, state and nation. The importance of Hilandar did not decrease even during the Serbian rule of the Athos Peninsula (1345-1371), when the Serbian rulers led imperial politics trying to donate all of Athos monasteries and to resolve their mutual disputes and when Serbian monks renovated and inhabited other families, like Saint Panteleimon and Saint Paul. At the same time, the monastery occasionally enjoyed a special favor of some Byzantine emperors like Andronicus II.

The great importance that Hilandar has had since its establishment, has resulted in a continuous effort to make everything created in it or for it and in the glory of God representative. One part of monastic heritage is a collection of manuscripts which the modern public started to learn about from reports of 19th century travellers. The formation of the collections as we know them was started in the late 19th and early 20th century by monk Sava, a native Czech, with the gathering of codices from multiple locations in the monastery and from cells. Sava

also compiled the first catalog of the collection. Today Slavonic manuscript collection has 943 codices or fragments written from the end of 12th to the beginning of 20th century, which makes it by far the richest library of its kind with the Serbs. It is particularly important that more than 4/5 of these units were written in Hilandar or its sketes and cells, where the "hesychastic" way of life facilitated unhindered intellectual work. Apart from Slavonic, there is a valuable Greek manuscript collection of 241 units cataloged by Spiridon Lambros at some extent, which also deserves special attention.

Right here is where the two streams of my today's presentation meet and its conclusion begins. The connection between the National Library of Serbia and Hilandar is not only symbolic and historically predestined by the development of Serbian literacy, but also specific: namely, several manuscripts originating from Hilandar were part of the collection of manuscripts of NLS that was destroyed in 1941. The only code from the collection that was not burnt then was an anthology originating from Hilandar with transcriptions of the lives of Hilandar saint patrons and monastery typicon from 14th century.

So, it's not surprising that within its described cultural tasks, in 1971 the National Library of Serbia started to help Hilandar equip their library premises, and form collections of manuscripts and early printed books, charters and modern publications, and in their conservation and restoration, scientific and professional processing and promotion. This work continued intermittently until 2004 and the great fire that destroyed two-thirds of the monastery and, although a lot has been done, there is still a lot to do.

As a result of decades of work, collections of Cyrillic manuscripts and early Serbian printed books have obtained their printed catalog and paleographic album, some items were published separately and albums of watermarks of Cyrillic manuscripts from 14th to 17th century were also issued. Until the great fire, conservation, restoration and rebinding works were also done. The largest number of manuscripts was microfilmed. The microfilms are kept and used for scientific purposes in the Archeographic Department of the National Library of Serbia. Nowadays the complete documentation is being prepared for each individual item. It is necessary to do thorough codicological research and to write a complete archeographic description.

Considering other collections, a card catalog of old printed books (16th-19th century) has also been made for approximately 2/3 of titles. Electronic bibliographic processing of this collection has been started but not completed in

accordance with international library standards for archivists – ISBD(A). Finally, a library of contemporary books and periodicals has been formed: there are printed catalogs from the last decade of 20th century, as well as an electronic catalog with the basic bibliographic information.

A special segment of work the experts of the National Library of Serbia did in the past was related to imprinting of graphic boards, primarily those from Hilandar and other families from Mount Athos such as Vatoped, Simonopetra and the cell of St. Elijah.

Based on the foregoing, it is clear that the National Library of Serbia does not lack motivation and expertise when it comes to international networking in achieving its mission of protection and description of the corpus of old literacy.