

**FROM MOUNT ATHOS STORIES:  
AN UNUSUAL “UNION” BETWEEN HILANDAR AND  
ST PANTELEIMON IN THE 16<sup>TH</sup> AND 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

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**Abstract.** *In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries St Panteleimon (Rossikon) was a very poor monastery, frequently deep in debt. That is why its administration turned to Hilandar, a much wealthier and, moreover, Slavic monastery for help. Their motive were the long-standing friendly relations between the two communities. It has long been known that in the course of those two centuries Hilandar and St Panteleimon formed some kind of association, while remaining independent. The lack of sources makes it very difficult to pin down the nature of that relationship. In 1550 the hegumen of Hilandar, Prohor, defined it as “union” without any further clarification. This paper presents and examines the information that can be gleaned from Ottoman documents. Rossikon and its monks, or some toponyms associated with Russian presence on Mount Athos, are mentioned in no more than fifteen odd Ottoman documents.*

**Key words:** *Mount Athos, Hilandar, St Panteleimon, 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ottoman Empire.*

Dedicated to the memory of late Mr Boško Djeniĉ,  
who organized the modern archive of the  
Hilandar Monastery and kindly opened its doors to me.

Friendly relations between Hilandar and Rossikon, established as early as the times of Sava of Serbia, were furthered over the centuries, assuming some quite distinctive forms in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The monks of St Panteleimon no doubt played an important intermediary

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role in presenting Hilandar to the Russian princes, boyars and high clergy. It was the elders of the Russian monastery that brought the first financial aid from Prince Vasili III sometime around 1508 or a few years earlier. The aid was not intended for Hilandar only, but was part of general alms for all Athonite monasteries (Petković 1995, 143–170; Fotić 2000, 207–220; Tchentsova 2012, 181–191).<sup>2</sup>

An important episode in the brotherly relationship between the two monasteries was certainly Despotesse Angelina's appeal to the Grand Prince Vasili III to assume patronage over Rossikon. The *gramota* presented to the Prince in 1509 emphasized that "our monasteries have their *ktetors*, some, the Iberian [Georgian] tsar, others the Wallachian voyvode", and that St Panteleimon deserved Vasili III's more substantial support. Vasili III granted her request and made a generous donation to the monastery (Boškov M. 2014, 41–43; Kashtanov 2004, 8–40; Fotić 2000, 207).

Although the first Slavic monastery on Mount Athos was founded by the Russians, and although St Panteleimon enjoyed some degree of protection of the increasingly powerful Tsardom of Russia, it had never risen to any substantial influence on Mount Athos (Krsmanović 2011, 145–166; Krsmanović 2013, 51–75). It seems that in the difficult times of Ottoman rule, fraught with severe crises, the Russian rulers did not think of using their wealth to make Rossikon a leading Athonite monastery. The most important place among the Slavic monasteries on the Virgin's peninsula was always reserved for the Serbian monastery of Hilandar. From the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century even the Russian rulers themselves, when periodically setting down the amount of financial aid and gifts for some of the Athonite monasteries, invariably and unambiguously gave precedence to Serbian Hilandar over their own Rossikon. The reason undoubtedly was the high regard and prestige Hilandar enjoyed not only on Mount Athos but also in the Balkan hinterland and across the Orthodox world. By supporting Hilandar financially the Russian rulers indirectly supported Rossikon, given that the two monasteries, although independent from one another, formed some sort of association at some periods in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The nature of that association is very difficult to define.

Rossikon was a very poor monastery and frequently deep in debt. That was the reason why its administration turned to Hilandar, also a Slavic but much more powerful monastery, for help. In choosing to do so, they no doubt counted on their long-established relations and the Slavic language, but what must have also played a role was their profound distrust of the Greek monasteries. The Greeks' hostile attitude towards the Slav monasteries was frequently emphasized in their requests for aid addressed to Russian tsars (Fotić 2000, 104–106).

Besides, the question of how many of the monks of St Panteleimon were of Russian origin is still open. The monastery was home to monks coming from all Slavic peoples and, as it seems, mostly to Serbs, as it was in previous centuries (Lemerle, Dagrón and Čirković 1982, 1–20). The anonymous author of a note made in a manuscript dating from 1535 recorded that none of the monks he found at the table in Rossikon on the feast day of the beheading of St John the Forerunner was of Russian origin; all were "Serbs and Greeks" (Fotić 2000, 103).

Discussing the situation on Mount Athos with the Russian metropolitan in 1550, Pajsije, hegumen of Hilandar, defined the relationship between the two brotherly

<sup>2</sup> From the quite ample literature on Hilandar's ties with Russia, I only refer to the most recent.

monasteries as a "union" or "alliance" (*savez*). He did not make it clear, however, when the "union" had arisen or what it meant in practice. As far as it is known, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Rossikon was a completely independent monastery with its own hegumen and administration. It is quite possible that the "union" concerned joint defense against Greek pretensions and, what is more important, support in the management of the monastery's economy. This may be suggested by the fact that the estates of Hilandar and Rossikon were recorded together in an excerpt from an Ottoman imperial survey register dating back to 1560 (Fotić 2000, 103; Dimitrijević 1903, 21–25; HMAT, 6/7).

A possible interpretation of a firman of the Sultan Bayezid II issued in May 1502, the content of which is not entirely clear, may be that the Ottoman authorities made no distinction between the two Slavic monasteries when it came to naming one of them. Vančo Boškov offered a translation of the document and, according to his interpretation, the monks of the Russian monastery and the inhabitants of Komitissa made encroachments on Hilandar's estate in Komitissa, in the immediate hinterland of Mount Athos, disturbing the monks of Hilandar in their possession of the estate. However, the document may be interpreted differently. It is clearly stated in the petition of the firman that the monks of Hilandar invoked earlier Ottoman documents which established their right of possession over the estate in Komitissa and determined its boundary. In the part of the firman which may be called the exposition it is said, however, that "the monks of the Russian monastery and the inhabitants of Komitissa are currently in dispute". The Sultan ordered the *kadı* of Sidrekapsi not to permit the encroachment of the already determined boundary. Boškov understood the exposition as being part of the request made by the monks of Hilandar, as quoting their own words, which is one of the ways in which that part of the document can be translated. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind the quite strict form of imperial orders and the whole procedure followed by the imperial chancery. It is quite possible that the part of the exposition was in fact put together in the chancery and that a scribe, either because he knew that the monastery in question was Slavic or for some other reason, wrote "the infidels of the Russian monastery" instead of "the infidels of the monastery of Hilandar" (HMAT, 12/37/35, 6/15; Boškov V. 1982, 149; Boškov V. 1983, 204, 211; Fotić 2000, 286).<sup>3</sup> That this interpretation is also plausible – similar errors were not rarely made by the Ottoman chancery (because they did not affect the order itself in any essential way) – is shown by the fact that the Hilandar monks complained about their possession of pastures being disturbed, while the Russian monastery quite certainly had no real property within the boundary of Komitissa except a fishing ground, which by no means posed any harm to Hilandar in this particular case. If this interpretation is correct, it may also suggest some form of association between the two monasteries, and as early as the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The "union" almost certainly lasted until the enforcement was completed of one of the harshest measures that the Ottoman authorities imposed on the Christian churches and monasteries in the Balkans. In 1568/9 all real property of the monasteries, all of their *metochia* in the hinterland of Mount Athos were confiscated and then sold back to their former owners with the right of pre-emption. The price of 14,000 gold coins for the estates in the hinterland of Mount Athos, in the *kazas* of Thessaloniki, Sidrekapsi, Serres, Zihna, Drama, Karaferye and Pravishte was set for all Athonite monasteries treated as a

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<sup>3</sup> I have expressed doubts about the meaning of the firman in the book, but did not delve much further into the issue (Fotić 2000, 286).

single community, and that of 130,000 *akçes* for the estates in the *sancak* of Gallipoli (Thasos and Limnos above all). To be able to pay the enormous amount of 14,000 gold coins, the Athonite monasteries had to take out loans, and they took them from Jewish moneylenders of Sidrekapsi and Thessaloniki at high, and often illegal, interest rates. Having huge debts, Rossikon had to pledge its *metochia* and *crkvena hazna* (monastic treasury). Rossikon was not the only monastery which had to fight a long struggle to overcome the financial crisis and get back some of its properties. That was the beginning of a severe crisis for all monasteries, and it took even the largest of them decades to overcome it. Judging by the activities of the monastic administration, which are reflected in many Ottoman documents, even the Serbian imperial lavra struggled for nearly two decades to consolidate its financial situation (Fotić 1997, 143–162; Fotić 2000, 49–52; Alexander (Alexandropoulos) 1997, 149–200; Dimitrijević 1922, 23–24, 27).

Rossikon was not closed prior to 1571. In March that year, the archimandrite of Hilandar, Prohor, succeeded in obtaining a new charter from Tsar Ivan the Terrible. Hilandar was granted 500 roubles, and St Panteleimon only 350 roubles (Fotić 2000, 210–211). At some point after that date, the monks of St Panteleimon locked their monastery up and dispersed into the surrounding *kellia*. In order to prevent their church treasury from being seized by the unforgiving moneylenders, the Russian monks entrusted all their valuables, church vessels and vestments to the monks of Hilandar for safekeeping. It is known that in 1582 Ivan Meshenin, a confidant of the Russian Tsar's, did not disburse the aid of 500 roubles intended for Rossikon because the monastery had been deserted (Fotić 2000, 211).

In 1578, whether prompted by the crisis or not, two monks of the Russian monastery, Yānīk and Dīkiyo (*dikej = dikaios/righteous?*) (other suggestions in reading the name are also plausible), are known to have sold their *kellion* at Karyes to a monk Damyānō for 3,825 *akçes*, but we do not know whether the latter was one of the Hilandar brotherhood. The sale was confirmed by the *kadı* of Sidrekapsi. The *kellion* was in the immediate vicinity of the *kellia* and estates of Hilandar at Karyes. The *Hilandarski potok* (Hilandar Brook) was referred to as forming a section of its boundary. It seems that the *kellion* later came into possession of the Protaton, and sold it to the "Russians" (*ton Roson*) in 1661. However, the Russians apparently were unable to raise 117.5 grosses and the same year the Great Synod sold it to Hilandar for 70.5 grosses on account of debt (HMAT, 1/64a, only mentioned in: Fotić 2000, 273–274; Dželebdžić 2015, 527–540; Anastasiades 2002, 39–40, 42–45).

In 1583, when the situation had already become relatively stable, the Great Synod of Mount Athos headed by the *protos* addressed a request to the Russian Tsar to re-establish the monastery. However, this apparently did not take place until nearly a decade later, in 1592. It appears that the Tsar was not convinced that the then serving hegumen of St Panteleimon was capable of restoring the Russian monastery back to life. In case of his failure, the Tsar asked the *protos* to entrust the undertaking to Grigorije, Hilandar's distinguished and experienced archimandrite and several times its hegumen (Fotić 2000, 210–211; Petković 1995, 148–149; Dimitrijević 1922, 21; Dimitrijević 1903, 27–32). There are no known documents which would confirm the role of the monks of Hilandar in the re-establishment of Rossikon or suggest the date of its re-establishment.

It is certain that Rossikon operated independently in 1601. A *hüccet* of the *naib* of Sidrekapsi of May 1601 makes mention of a representative of the Russian monastery, Papa Matthew (*Rūs manāstırı rāhiblerinden Pāpā Mātiyō /Mānītō*, in the document). His name was among those of another sixteen representatives all of smaller monasteries who

filed a suit against three large monasteries, the Great Lavra, Hilandar and Dionysiou, because they had for years evaded paying the usual annual sums to the Holy Community intended for the payment of the basic Athonite tax to the Ottomans. The plaintiffs stated that the members of the Athonite community had been paying their dues in accordance with a "time-honoured custom". The monasteries had been divided into three groups: the most powerful, the medium and the poor, and the amount of their respective payment to the Holy Community had been set accordingly. The dispute arose because the representatives of the three monasteries, obviously the wealthiest at the time, argued that all monasteries should participate equally in the obligation to the Holy Community regardless of their financial standing. Since the Great Synod of Mount Athos held at Karyes was unable to reach an agreement on the issue, the representatives of the sixteen aggrieved monasteries turned to the Ottoman court, which ruled in favour of the observance of "time-honoured customs". The *kadi*'s ruling protected the rights of the poorer monasteries against the willful behaviour of the wealthiest (HMAT, 2/112; Fotić 2000, 73–75).

This was just one episode in the disputes over the payment of shared dues. What is interesting in this particular case, apart from the fact that the monastery of Vatopediou, although rich, supported the plaintiffs and that Koutloumousiou stayed out of the dispute, is that Rossikon and Hilandar, its protector as of yesterday, found themselves on opposite sides in the dispute. Perhaps Rossikon was among the plaintiffs only formally, since it was one of the poorest monasteries and it would not have made any sense for it to contest the suit.

We do not have sufficient information which would shed closer light on the relationship between the two monasteries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The administration of Rossikon might have even been in Greek hands at some point. In 1637, Niccolò Rossi, a Jesuit teaching on Mount Athos, claimed that there were much more Greeks in the brotherhood than "Ruthenians", as he called Russians, and "Bulgars", among whom he might have also counted Serbs given that he frequently did not differentiate clearly among monks of Slavic origin (Hofmann 1954, 53).

The Ottoman documents kept in Hilandar refer to the monastery of St Panteleimon in only two ways: as *Rūs manāstiri* and *Urūs manāstiri* ("U" being added here as a prosthetic vowel for easier pronunciation of the first syllable). Some toponyms occurring elsewhere are also modified by the adjective *Rūs*: "Russian *kellion*" (*Rūs keliyesinde...*), mentioned in 1583, perhaps somewhere in the environs of Yovanitza (Mt Athos); "Russian cross" (*Rūs ḥaccina varınca...*), mentioned in 1570 as a section of the boundary of Hilandar's estate at Karyes; "Russian *çiftlik*" (*Rūs çiftliki*), mentioned in 1649 as a landholding of a Muslim in the environs of Ierissos (HMAT 1/48a, 1/64a, 1/80, 2/112, 2/176, 2/181, 6/7, 6/15, 11/1, 11/5a, 12/10/8, 12/37/35).

Monks of the Russian monastery are mentioned a few times as witnesses in different disputes filed by Hilandar, along with monks from other Athonite monasteries, which may have some relevance only because of their names, although we cannot even then be sure about their origin (1561: monk Sava; 1578: Yānīk and Dīkiyo (*dikej = dikaios?*); 1583: Boyil, son of Dimo; 1641: Antim) (HMAT 1/37, 1/64a, 1/80, 2/186, 12/10/8).

On this occasion research concerning the *metochia* and smaller estates of the Russian monastery on Mount Athos and in its hinterland from Kalamaria to Zihna has been left aside. It can certainly be a topic in its own right even though the Russian monastery was not one of those possessing large *metochia* scattered across modern-day northern Greece.

The issue of the “union” between Hilandar and Rossikon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century remains open. Sources will hopefully be found which would shed a clearer light on the relationship between the two monasteries. Rossikon and its monks are referred to in only some fifteen of about five hundred Ottoman documents from the archive of the monastery of Hilandar that cover the period from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. None of those fifteen odd documents is of central importance for the history of Rossikon. Even so, by collating even such less significant pieces of information, we make progress in reconstructing the history of Russian monasticism on Mount Athos and its connections with the Serbian imperial lavra.

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## **IZ ISTORIJE SVETE GORE: NEOBIČAN „SAVEZ“ HILANDARA I SV. PANTELEJMONA U 16. I 17. VEKU**

*Manastir Sv. Pantelejmona na Svetoj Gori (Rusik) bio je veoma siromašan manastir u 16. i 17. veku, često u velikim dugovima. Zbog toga je uprava Rusika potražila pomoć od Hilandara, znatno bogatijeg, a slovenskog manastira. Tome su razlog bile davno uspostavljene prijateljske veze. Odavno je poznato da su Hilandar i Sv. Pantelejmon u nekim razdobljima tokom ova dva veka bili u nekoj vrsti zajedništva, iako su zadržali samostalnost. Karakter te zajednice je zbog nedostatka izvora veoma teško odrediti. Hilandarski iguman Prohor je 1550. godine njihov odnos definisao pojmom „savez“, bez ikakvog daljeg objašnjenja. U ovom članku su predočeni i analizirani podaci iz osmanskih dokumenata koji se čuvaju u arhivu manastira Hilandar. Rusik i njegovi monasi, ili pojedini toponimi vezani za rusko prisustvo na Svetoj Gori, pominju se u svega petnaestak dokumenata. Iako su to podaci od manjeg značaja, oni nam omogućavaju određen napredak u sagledavanju povesti ruskog monaštva na Atonu i njegovih veza sa srpskom carskom lavrom.*

**Ključne reči:** Sveta Gora, Hilandar, Sv. Pantelejmon, 16–17. vek, Osmansko carstvo.