

“Hilandar Slavic Manuscript 280:
Josephus’ *History of the Jewish Wars* and the
Tale of Constantinople”

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Abstract

The presentation discusses the first South Slavic copy of a prominent work by Josephus Flavius, *The History of the Jewish War*. In order to understand hieromonk Grigorije’s roles as scribe and “translator” of HM.SMS.280 and as the monastery’s representative, as well as Hilandar Monastery’s interaction with the Muscovite court, it is important to understand Hilandar’s crucial need for Russian support—especially (but not only) financial—at this time in its history. This also serves as another illustration of the new and expanding role of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church at this time.

This paper offers possible motives for the initiative to copy this work by a Serbian scribe, based on the promotion of the prominent idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, during the period of the late 16th century. The presence of the text of the *Fall of Constantinople*, within the same manuscript as that of *the History of the Jewish War*, strongly suggests a close relationship between the fall of Jerusalem and Constantinople.

The manuscript of Josephus Flavius’ *The History of the Jewish War* was copied in 1585 by hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije and was written in the Serbian recension of Church Slavonic; folia 73v-126v have different handwriting, which strongly suggests that there was one other scribe besides Grigorije Vasilije who worked on this manuscript. The handwriting suggest that this second scribe could be hieromonk Dionisie, who also was a scribe in Karyes on Mount Athos at the time.

The “Russian” manuscript is the “parent” of the “Serbian” and was used as the source of what the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije calls his “translation” into the Serbian recension (see Bogdanović 1978:124, where this is explicitly stated: “Српски препис са руског извода XVI века сачуваног у Хил. 281” [“A Serbian Copy from a Russian Source of the 16th century preserved in Hilandar 281”]).¹

¹The main text of HM.SMS.281, Josephus’ *The History of the Jewish War*, represents a later copy in a manuscript tradition that dates to the 11th-12th centuries, a time during which the prototype and first original Rus’ian (i.e., East Slavic) manuscript of Josephus was translated from Greek. This translation was

It is also important to note that HM.SMS.280 is the earliest extant Serbian copy of *The History of the Jewish War*. The Serbian manuscript also includes a second historical text, *The Tale of the Capture of Constantinople (Povest o Tsarigradu)* (ibid.).

The Serbian manuscript consists of 279 leaves written in a Cyrillic semi-uncial according to the standards of Resavian orthography (Bogdanović 1978: 124-125; Matejić and Thomas 1992: 442-443). Resavian orthography succeeded the Rascian, seen in older Serbian Church Slavonic manuscripts, which dated from the time of Saint Sava (1175-1236).

The original manuscript is located in the manuscript library of Hilandar Monastery, on Mount Athos, Greece. A microfilm of the manuscript forms part of the Hilandar Monastery Slavic manuscript collection housed at the Hilandar Research Library, a special collection of the Ohio State University Libraries. It was microfilmed in 1971 by the Hilandar Research Project of The Ohio State University (Joković 2007: 23-57).

In order to understand hieromonk Grigorije's role as the scribe and "translator" of HM.SMS.280, as a representative, and Hilandar Monastery's interaction with the Muscovite court, it is important to understand Hilandar's crucial need for Russian support—especially (but not only) financial support— at this time in its history. This also serves as another illustration of the new and expanding role of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church at this time.

To date, no one has written specifically about this extraordinary monk. His name is known to us from the colophon from the Serbian manuscript HM.SMS.280. Originally as a monk called Grigorije, he took the name Vasilije when he was tonsured into the Great Schema in the Tower (*pirg*) of Saint Sava in 1585 (Fotić 2000: 419-421).

Not only was the hieromonk a noteworthy scribe, he also served as abbot of Hilandar Monastery in 1583, multiple times between 1588 and 1591, and continually from 1591–1597/8 (Fotić 2000: 137). However, because of his frequent travels, he had to leave the abbot's duty to another hieromonk by the name of Arsenije. The Hilandar records indicate that Grigorije Vasilije served as an abbot five times between 1588 and 1591. This is understandable considering the need of the abbot to travel, since the best were chosen to represent the monastery abroad (ibid.: 231).

first made in the Rus'ian recension, probably in the southeastern region of Rus'. The author of the translation was well versed in ecclesiastical texts (Leeming 2003: 76).

In addition to writing the manuscript and serving as abbot, the hieromonk Grigorije was well known as the monastery's representative on foreign missions. Hilandar Monastery sent him on several missions to seek support for the monastery. This type of mission was called *pisanije*. It takes its name from the word for letter/correspondence because it entailed the carrying of a letter, written usually by the abbot or abbots, which would accompany a representative of the monastery as he traveled and came in contact with potential benefactors and donors. The reason for this type of frequent travel of the Hilandar monks in the second half of the sixteenth century (after 1569) was undoubtedly the confiscation of the monasteries and monastery land by the Turkish ruler Suleiman II (Fotić 1994:49, 221).

The monks had to travel and ask for help in order to get the monastery out of debt. These monks had the written permission of the Turkish authorities, which allowed them to travel and collect donations. It is interesting to note that these monks, in order to protect themselves, often had to resort to disguises in order to avoid robbery (ibid.: 221, 226, 227).

Hilandar Monastery has preserved five letters addressed to dignitaries that the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije presented on behalf of the monastery.² One of the important journeys that the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije made was to Russia in September of 1582. During this trip, the Hilandar monks stayed in Russia for over a year (Fotić 2000: 419). Eventually, Grigorije Vasilije and his delegation were admitted to the tsar's court on December 6, 1583 (Dimitrijević 1922: 21–25, Fotić 2000: 211). During this visit, Grigorije handed the Hilandar abbot Makarije's letter to the tsar asking for monetary help for the building of a tower. On this occasion, Tsar Ivan the Terrible sent 700 rubles to Hilandar for prayers for the repose of the soul of his son, Ivan. He donated 60 rubles, 40 pieces of beaver's fur (which, at that time, were worth around 20-30 rubles each), and 20 rubles for each monk (ibid.).

During his stay in Russia, the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije most probably lived in the residence in Moscow that Tsar Ivan the Terrible had donated to Hilandar Monastery in 1556. The purpose of this residence was to provide accommodation to visiting Hilandar monks.³

² (1) A petition given to the nobleman Nikita Romanov Jur'ev (the grandfather of the future tsar Mikhail Romanov) in April 1586; (2) A petition given to the nobleman Andrei Iakovlevich (written before 1582); (3) A second petition to the nobleman Andrei Iakovlevich (written before 1582); (4) A petition to the Polish king Stefan Batory (1575-1586); and (5) A petition to Duke Andrei Mihailovich Kurbskii of Smolensk and Jaroslavl' (died in 1583) (Dimitrijević 1922: 22-24). These documents have been published by the Moscow Main Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Relations (ibid.: 23).

³ The generosity of Tsar Ivan the Terrible and his fondness for Hilandar Monastery could be explained by the tsar's awareness of his distant Serbian royal lineage and the desire to strengthen his own position by

In addition to traveling, serving as an abbot, and writing, the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije lived a very strict life. The Karyes cell in which he lived and copied *The History of Jewish War* provides evidence of the rigors of his monastic life and the circumstances in which he lived.

Undoubtedly, the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije was a distinguished monk who represented Hilandar monastery during some very difficult times for the Athonite monastic communities. His copy of *The History of the Jewish War* is indicative both of his talent as a scribe as well as his erudition. Yet, in the colophon, the Grigorije Vasilije calls himself “one of those who are unlearned and simple”: “I translated [the work] using Serbian expressions; but I did not know how to compose the text, nor did I learn the text; I was not educated but [am] as one of the simple [folk] and an ignoramus. Forgive [me] for the Lord's sake.” The reader cannot take the hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije’s words here literally. One must rather consider them, in light of his work and deeds, as a standard humility topos. His written legacy, including MS.SMS280, is the best indication of his true capabilities.

The importance of the *History of the Jewish War* for the Orthodox Slavs

The History of the Jewish War has long been considered a very important historical work. It was very popular in Russia up to eighteenth century. For example, the description of the Essenes and their ascetic view of life were seen as paralleled in the Orthodox monastic way of life (Leeming 2003: 98, 101). Even though the historical content of the text does not completely correspond to that of the Gospels,⁴ it was considered by Christians to be an important historical source, written by an intellectual of non-Christian background. Another reason for the popularity of *The History of the Jewish War* was the emergence of the idea of

pointing to his royal ancestors. Sreten Petković attributes the presence of the 1564/65 fresco of Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović (St. Lazar of Kosovo) in the Church of the Archangels within Moscow’s Kremlin to Tsar Ivan’s feeling of connection to his Serbian roots. Additionally, the Church of the Archangel Michael in the Kremlin contains depictions of Saints Sava, Saint Simeon, and the Byzantine emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos (Petković 1987: 576–78). Radojčić points out that Ivan the Terrible was of Serbian descent through his mother Jelena, the granddaughter of Duke Stefan Jakšić, a member of the feudal Jakšić family, which immigrated to Hungary (Radojčić 1965: 285).

⁴For example, Josephus records that Pilate received 30 talents to kill Christ [Srb 54r:12]. According to the Biblical account, it was Judas that received the 30 pieces of silver for promising to betray Christ (Matthew 26:15). In Josephus, it is Pilate who decided to have Christ crucified, whereas in the Gospels he did not make the final decision to deliver Christ to be crucified but left the decision to the will of people, after being accused of treason against Caesar (John 19:12). Josephus’ description of St. John’s life and what he ate in the wilderness also differs slightly from the biblical account [Srb 51v:17].

Moscow as a “Third Rome” or “New Jerusalem” in the sixteenth century. This was an important period of time for Eastern Christians, marked by the Fall of Constantinople and the rise of a centralized Russian state.

In the context of that which closely preceded it, the timing of the Fall of Constantinople was particularly significant to the Russian Church and the newly established state. Prior to the Fall of Constantinople, a council took place in Florence in 1438 where the Patriarch of Constantinople agreed to unite the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. When Constantinople subsequently fell, Russians attributed the Fall to divine retribution: God had prohibited an unsuitable union with the Roman Catholic Church from taking place. While Constantinople, the center of Eastern Christendom, had lost its primacy and fallen under Ottoman rule, Moscow was shortly thereafter (1480) liberated from Mongol rule, which Eastern Christians considered to be a clear sign of God’s intervention and His positive disposition toward Moscow and the Russians. As a result of the fall of the Second Rome (Constantinople), the historical and, especially, the spiritual role and authority of Constantinople were believed to have been transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church and the Muscovite state. Russia had inherited Constantinople’s historical legacy, thereby making it the “Third Rome” or “New Jerusalem” (Leeming 2003: 101).

In his article, “Rediscovered Texts from the *Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh*: Understanding Russia and Russian Orthodoxy in the sixteenth century Moscow as the ‘Third Rome,’” Predrag Matejić provides a valuable explanation of the impact of the Fall of Constantinople on the establishment of the new role of Moscow as “The Third Rome” or “A New Jerusalem.” Matejić particularly concentrates on the portions of the so-called “3rd Pachomian reduction” of the life of Saint Sergius of Radonezh, found in Hilandar Monastery Slavic manuscript 485. He suggests that this specific text is an effective text intended to strengthen the idea of “Moscow the Third Rome.” In it, God, by the means of His saint, Saint Sergius of Radonezh, intercedes in the preservation of the purity of the Russian Church and the eventual transfer of the spiritual authority from Constantinople to the Russian Church (Matejić 2005: 263-264).

In connection with this article, the coexistence of *The History of the Jewish War* and *the Tale of the Fall of Constantinople* in HM.SMS.280, copied mostly by hieromonk Grigorije

Vasilije, is by no means an accident. It is rather an intentional parallel of the events that led to the turning point of the Russian Church and state of this period (Collins 2002).

Based on the above information, and in an analogous manner, it can be concluded that the presence of *The Tale of the Capture of Constantinople* as an accompanying text to *The History of the Jewish War* in the same manuscript is also significant. While there is no proof of this, it is conceivable that Tsar Ivan the Terrible or someone in his court presented the Russian manuscript to hieromonk Grigorije Vasilije, commissioning him to copy the manuscript in order to spread the message of the newly established leadership role of the Russian Church and state. In their cultural worldview, both the First Jerusalem and the Second Jerusalem (or Second Rome), Constantinople, fell as a consequence of apostasy. Instead, Orthodox Russia received the grace from God to preserve and maintain the pure faith (ibid.)

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