SERBIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND ARTS
INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES

LV 2024

BALCANICA

ANNUAL OF THE INSTITUTE FOR BALKAN STUDIES
UDC 930.85(4-12)
BELGRADE 2024
ISSN 0350-7653
eISSN 2406-0801

https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC2455099P
UDC 316.74:2
21-18
Original scholarly work
http://www.balcanica.rs

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The Landscape of the Monastic Endeavour: The Choices of St Sava of Serbia

Abstract: This paper approaches the question of the selection of site intended for monastic ascetic pursuits taking the example of St Sava of Serbia. Sava's choices were based on his masterful knowledge of Byzantine eremitic tradition and his own substantial monastic experience. This is evidenced by the *hesychasteria* he founded: he gave physical form to the concept of *locus amoenus* in the Karyes *kellion* of the monastery of Hilandar, while the concept of *locus horridus* was embodied in the cave hermitages of the monasteries of Studenica and Mileševa. The methodological framework of this research is informed by current landscape studies.

Keywords: St Sava of Serbia, Karyes *kellion*, Studenica hermitage, hermitages of Mileševa, monastic *desert*, landscape studies.

In modern scholarly discourse the *landscape* functions as a complex and polyvalent concept open to diverse approaches and interpretations. Most of the more recent and quite extensive work on the subject – particularly rich in substance since the 1980s – is predicated on the premise that the phenomena designated as "natural landscape" and "cultural landscape" are inseparable, i.e. on the view that landscape is both the "object" and "mode of perception". The fact that what we call *nature* is not only physical reality but also a particular *idea* points to a complex interplay between landscape and man, i.e. between the "object" and its perception and interpretation. It is understandable then that more recent approaches in *landscape studies* are focused particularly on various practices associated with nature which, shaping and transforming both nature and man through dynamic processes, result in an organic interweave of the material and spiritual worlds.[1]

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[1] D. Cosgrove, "Landscape and the European Sense of Sight – Eying Nature". In *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*, eds. K. Anderson et al. (London: Sage, 2003), 249–268; for an exhaustive historical overview of the research and relevant results, see *Chris-*

A specific and quite telling medieval understanding of space saw God, man and nature as intrinsically interconnected. Even early Christian exegetes were proponents of a theology of nature that rested on the belief that the landscapes that make up earth are parts of a single whole – the cosmos, God's perfect creation. To the Byzantines, natural features such as oceans and rivers, mountains and deserts, wild and tame places were not mere geographical concepts but parts of a complex topographic system of symbols and a reflection of heavenly reality. These *topoi*/symbols, as rightly emphasized in Veronica della Dora's exceptional study, operate in complementary pairs – wild and domesticated nature, for example – and in order for them to be understood properly they have to be looked at in their totality.[2] In other words, the landscapes of this world are filled with meaning, and their sacred prototypes are to be found in the Bible, patristic and ascetic literature, hagiography. The preeminent of them were the places endowed with particular qualities, those that possessed a "spiritual magnetism", an immanent miraculous power.[3] Such, above all, were spaces associated with the events and protagonists of Sacred History and the feats of renowned saints. In medieval belief, firmly rooted in the theological postulates and popular piety alike, these sacred places could be renewed and "reconstructed" time and again – all across the Christian world and in very different geographical settings – without losing their spiritual essence. What they had in common were charismatic properties, i.e. a symbolic and associative similarity to the traditional *topoi* of Christian sacred topography such as the illustrious deserts and theophanic mountains, the pillar-like dwellings of stylites and the mystical caves of radical ascetics.[4] This delineates the conceptual framework for interpreting the phenomenon of monastic *deserts* as the landscapes of the ascetic endeavour and the supreme Christian accomplishment.

St Sava of Serbia's conception of the *desert* and its landscape – which is the main topic of this paper – may be pieced together relatively well not only

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tian Pilgrimage, Landscape and Heritage. Journeying to the Sacred, eds. A. Maddrell et al. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 6–7; V. della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred in Byzantium* (Cambridge: University Press, 2016).

[2] della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 26–28 and passim.

[3] J. Preston, "Spiritual Magnetism: an Organising Principle for the Study of Pilgrimage". In *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. A. Moranis (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992), 31–46; M. Winkelmann and J. Dubisch, "Introduction: the Anthropology of Pilgrimage". In *Pilgrimage and Healing*, eds. M. Winkelmann and J. Dubisch, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), ix–xxxvi; A. Lidov, ed. *Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacral Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia* (Moscow: Indrik, 2006).

[4] della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 118–120; examples from Byzantine and Serbian hagiographic heritages have been analysed by I. Špadijer, "The Symbolism of Space in Medieval Hagiography", *Cyrilo-Methodian Studies* 21 (2012), 300–308.

from the surviving written and material sources but also owing to the very stimulating scholarly work which has contributed greatly, especially in recent times, to understanding this important concept of medieval asceticism. In brief, the *desert* is a distinctive kind of space, remote from the world, where the hermit, struggling to transcend the natural limitations of the human body and renounce all earthly values, passes through the stages of ascetic progress towards attaining true virtue, i.e. man's original godlikeness. The *desert* no doubt is an ambivalent concept. It can be, literally and symbolically, a *locus amoenus*, an idyllic landscape comparable to a lush garden as a metaphor for the otherworldly heavenly abode. It seems, however, that it figures more frequently as a *locus terribilis* – a harsh and virtually inaccessible landscape, perilous and menacing, inhabited by wild beasts and haunted by demonic creatures. It is a telling fact – confirmed by the examples from the Bible and patristic and monastic literature – that God reveals himself to his chosen ones at dramatic and charismatic places such as deserts, mountains and caves. The *desert*, whatever its physical form, was a monastic battleground, a space that made the ascetics face major existential challenges. In dealing with them, the hermits followed the highest role models – the biblical desert dwellers, such as the prophet Elijah, St John the Forerunner and Christ himself, and their illustrious continuators, the desert fathers, with St Anthony the Great as their founding figure.[5]

The relationship to the monastic landscape in the medieval Serbian lands may be reconstructed in two ways: based on the written sources and on the natural settings of churches, monasteries or eremitic dwellings. The chronological framework for the topic of this paper is the reign of the first Nemanjić rulers, i.e. the formative, creative period of the late twelfth and early decades of the thirteenth century when the foundations of the Serbian state and church were laid and the principles underpinning these institutions formulated. Needless to say, the pivotal role in that remarkable undertaking was played by St Sava of Serbia,

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[5] A selection of literature: A. Guillaumont, "La conception du désert chez les moines d'Egypte", *Aux origines du monachisme chrétien* (Paris: Abbaye de Bellefontaine, Spiritualité Orientale 30, 1979), 67–87; J. E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society and Desert. Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1999); A-M. Talbot, "Les saintes montagnes à Byzance". In *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident, études comparées*, ed. M. Kaplan, (Paris: Byzantina Sorbonensia 18, 2001), 263–318; D. Ø. Endsjø, *Primordial Landscapes, Incorruptible Bodies. Desert Asceticism and the Christian Appropriation of Greek Ideas on Geography, Bodies and Immortality* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); D. Popović, "The Deserts and Holy Mountains of Medieval Serbia: written sources, spatial patterns, architectural designs". In *Heilige Berge und Wüsten, Byzanz und seine Umfeld*, ed. P. Soustal, (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 53–69; D. Popović, "Desert as Heavenly Jerusalem: the Imagery of a Sacred Space in the Making". In *New Jerusalems. Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces*, ed. A. Lidov, (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), 151–175; della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*.

a prince and a monk, the first head of the autocephalous Serbian Church and chief creator of the dynastic ideology of the first Nemanjić rulers.

And yet, the initiatives that can be attributed reliably to St Sava are preceded by the sacral monuments dating from the reign of his father, grand *župan* Stefan Nemanja (named Simeon in monkhood), which compellingly testify to the well-considered and purposeful attitude to space as an important factor in the dynastic policy of religious patronage. A remarkable example is the sacral complex at the heart of Stari (Old) Ras in the Raška and Deževa river valleys consisting of the ancient cathedral church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul and, above it, on the top of the conical hill that dominates the landscape, the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi – the votive and triumphal monument of the founder of the dynasty.[6] Not far from it, an eremitic cave community came to be nestled, probably also in the reign of Stefan Nemanja, in the cliffs beneath the fortress of Ras, organically blending into the craggy landscape.[7] Its particular relevance to us lies in the fact that it shows, along with some other examples, that not only the anchoritic form of monasticism but also the physical structures specific to it and always inseparable from their natural setting had a long tradition in the Balkans.[8]

The selection of site for setting up a monastic community was very important in the middle ages and depended on many factors. As observed in scholarship long ago, material and spiritual realties, geography and symbolism, the imaginary and the economic, the social and the ideological were interwoven in that process.[9] Examination of the textual material, among which monastic *typika* and hagiographies are especially relevant, has shown that appropriate natural conditions were a very important consideration – seclusion from the world, healthy climate, fertile land, clean water, even the beauty of the landscape. On the other hand, the anchorites intent on pursuing radical asceticism purposely chose isolated and inhospitable environments that would put their dedication

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[6] D. Vojvodić and M. Marković, *Đurđevi Stupovi u Rasu* (Belgrade: Platoneum, 2023); M. Marković and D. Vojvodić, *Crkva Svetih apostola Petra i Pavla u Rasu* (Novi Sad: Platoneum, 2021).

[7] D. Popović and M. Popović, "The Cave Lavra of the Archangel Michael in Ras", *Starinar* XLIX/1998 (1999), 103–130; M. Popović, Tvrđava Ras (Belgrade: Arheološki institut, 1999), 278–288.

[8] An especially important example is the hermitage of St Peter of Koriša near Prizren, see D. Popović, "The Cult of St Peter of Koriša – Stages of Development, Patterns", *Balcanica* XXVIII (1997), 177; D. Popović, B. Todić and D. Vojvodić, *Dečanska pustinja. Skitovi i kelije manastira Dečana* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU; Međuodeljenski odbor SANU za proučavanje Kosova i Metohije, 2011), 177; I. Špadijer, *Sveti Petar Koriški u staroj srpskoj književnosti* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2014), 133–153.

[9] J. Le Goff, "Le désert-forêt dans l'Occident médiéval", *L'imaginaire médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 59–75.

and the strength of their faith to a test.[10] In any case, looking for and finding the "right" site required "conquering" a space. By the founding of a monastery or an eremitic community – which was frequently guided by divine signs or took place after a triumph over demonic forces – the wild nature was transformed and sacralised and, depending on the type and needs of the monastic community, cultivated.[11] In keeping with the belief in an essential synergy between God, man and nature, the monks would have had an active relationship to the natural environment, ever striving to infuse it with the spiritual and shape it over and over again. They thus transformed the wilderness into a sacred place, constructing their community's distinctive religious and cultural identity along the way.[12]

Sava of Serbia purposely uses the *topos* of reshaping waste land and wilderness into a sacred place in the *Life of St Simeon* when referring to the construction of Studenica, his father's foundation and the dynastic funerary church. At the very beginning of the *Life*, he states: "This holy monastery of ours was, as you know, a place like a waste hunting ground of beasts. When he, our lord and autokrator Stefan Nemanja, who reigned over the Serbian land, came here to hunt and when he was hunting here, it pleased him to build here, at this waste place, this monastery for the peace and propagation of the monkhood."[13] Sava noticeably lays a particular emphasis on the statement, by repeating it twice, that the monastery of Studenica was built at a *waste place* "found" in the course of hunting. He skilfully uses the "waste hunting ground" *topos* as a descriptor of the found wild expanse predestined for the monastic endeavour. Likewise, Basil the Great, for example, states in his correspondence that the "paradisiacal" place in the mountains of the Pontus he chose for his anchoritic dwelling had previously

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[10] A-M. Talbot, "Founders' choices: monastery site selection". In *Founders and Refounders of Byzantine Monasteries*, ed. M. Mullet (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, Institute of Byzantine Studies, 2007), 43–52; A-M. Talbot, "Byzantine Monastic Horticulture: the Textual Evidence". In *Byzantine Garden Culture*, eds. A. Littlewood, H. Maguire and J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2002), 37–41; D. Popović in Popović, Todić and Vojvodić, *Dečanska pustinja*, 203–207.

[11] M. Kaplan, "Le choix du lieu saint d'après certaines sources hagiographiques byzantines". In *Le sacré et son inscription dans l'espace à Byzance et en Occident. Etudes comparées*, ed. M. Kaplan, (Paris: Byzantina Sorbonensia 18, 2001), 183–198; for examples from the Serbian milieu see S. Marjanović-Dušanić, "Zamišljeni i stvarni prostori srpskog srednjeg veka: skica za istraživanje rituala". In *Svet srednjovekovnih utvrđenja, gradova i manastira. Omaž Marku Popoviću*, eds. V. Ivanišević, V. Bikić and I. Bugarski, (Belgrade: Arheološki institut, Grad Beograd – Omladinsko pozorište Dadov, 2021), 179–197.

[12] E. F. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape. Environment and Monastic Identity in the Medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 22–27, 173–211; della Dora in *Christian Pilgrimage, Landscape and Heritage*, 45–51.

[13] *Sveti Sava, Sabrani spisi*, ed. D. Bogdanović, (Belgrade: Prosveta and Srpska književna zadruga, 1986), 97.

been only visited by hunters.[14] The meaning is similar of the claim in the *typikon* of the Constantinopolitan monastery of Kosmosoteria that it was built on a site that was "wild in every respect", inhabited only by snakes and scorpions.[15] The expulsion of wild beasts from the newly-conquered territory had a great symbolic value because it implied the control the monks had established over nature. At play here are deep associative connections underlying the medieval perception of nature and of its layered meaning. These associations were a vital driving force and spiritual reference point in "discovering" and establishing important sacred places, such as Studenica undoubtedly was. Sava does not describe the monastery's natural setting in any detail, but the exceptional qualities of the surrounding landscape are still recognizable.

The account of Stefan the First-Crowned in his *Life of St Simeon* conveys much the same meaning. Namely, he says that Sava found "a waste place in the middle of Mount Athos" and urged his father, Simeon (Nemanja), to "make every haste" to build there – on the site of the abandoned monastery of the Presentation of the Virgin – Hilandar.[16] So, both of the abovementioned monastic communities, royal foundations of the first order, came into existence through the transformation of waste land. Both bore a strong mark of identity, as compellingly evidenced by written sources: Studenica was the funerary church and dynastic foothold of the House of Nemanjić, a metaphor for the Heavenly Jerusalem and the tabernacle of the Serbian people, and, as such, the sacred point of the highest order on native soil, in the Serbian land.[17] Hilandar, on the other hand, was the Serbian foothold on the sanctified soil of Mount Athos, which earned it the epithet of the New Sion of the Serbian fatherland.[18] Not at all by accident, both monasteries operated as hubs and founts of not only liturgical and cultural life but also of the dynastic ideology of the House of Nemanjić. There is no doubt that their construction required enormous effort to overpower and

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[14] After H. Maguire, "Paradise Withdrawn". In *Byzantine Garden Culture*, 33; see also della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 171.

[15] *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents. A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments*, eds. J. Thomas and A. Constantinides Hero, vol. 2 (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 798.

[16] Stefan Prvovenčani, *Sabrani spisi*, ed. Ljiljana Juhas-Georgijevska, (Belgrade: Prosveta and Srpska književna zadruga, 1988), 79, 80; M. Živojinović, *Istorija Hilandara*, vol. I: *Od osnivanja manastira 1198. do 1335. godine* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1998), 57–65.

[17] D. Popović, *Pod okriljem svetosti. Kult srpskih vladara i relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji* (Belgrade: Balkanološki institut SANU, 2006), 71–73 ("O nastanku kulta svetog Simeona").

[18] Lj. Maksimović, "Hilandar i srpska vladarska ideologija". In *Osam vekova Hilandara*, ed. V. Korać, (Belgrade: SANU, 2000), 9–16; S. Marjanović-Dušanić, "Hilandar kao Novi Sion Nemanjinog otačastva". In *Osam vekova Hilandara*, 17–24.

domesticate the wilderness of the sites. This kind of endeavour, physical and spiritual, is vividly and exhaustively described in the *typikon* of the oldest and most distinguished Athonite cenobium, the Lavra monastery.[19] Enormous effort was also put in rebuilding the monastery of Hilandar, as may be seen clearly from the somewhat later texts penned by Domentijan and Teodosije.[20] The aim of such an endeavour, seen many times in the history of medieval monasticism, was to create, in the chosen environment, on the site of the conquered wilderness, the dedicated ones' own microcosm and abode – in a word, a monastic paradise in miniature as a "reconstruction" of the archetypal one epitomized by the Garden of Eden.[21]

That Sava had a crucial role in instituting and organizing monastic life in medieval Serbia is a generally accepted and well-argued view. He drew on the Athonite model, which encompassed diverse forms of monasticism, from the basic, cenobitic, one through transitional to the *kelliotic* or eremitic way of life.[22] His relationship to the natural environment found full expression at his founding of the Karyes *kellion*, for which he wrote a separate *typikon*.[23] As an Athonite learner in his youth and, much later, on his pilgrimages to the most renowned monastic communities of the East in his capacity as head of the Serbian Church, Sava had the opportunity to gain a keen understanding both of the meaning and purpose of monastic *deserts*, and of their natural settings.[24] No wonder, then, that the Serbian *hesychasteria* he founded reveal his great erudition and finely-honed appreciation of the features and symbolic meanings of different landscapes.

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[19] *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 1, 251–253.

[20] Domentijan, *Život Svetoga Save i Život Svetoga Simeuna*, ed. R. Marinković, (Belgrade: Prosveta and Srpska književna zadruga, 1988), 91–93; Teodosije, *Žitija*, ed. D. Bogdanović, (Belgrade: Prosveta and Srpska književna zadruga, 1988), 138–139 (which claims, among other things, that Sava mustered "a multitude of workers because he wanted to accomplish much in little time").

[21] Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape*, 22–27, 173–211; della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 170–172.

[22] D. Papahrisantu, *Atonsko monaštvo, počeci i organizacija* (Belgrade: Društvo prijatelja Svete Gore Atonske, 2003), 49–91 and passim; D. Popović in *Dečanska pustinja*, eds. Popović, Todić and Vojvodić, 178–185 (with bibliography).

[23] *Sveti Sava, Sabrani spisi*, 41–86; L. Mirković, "Skitski ustavi sv. Save", *Brastvo* 28 (1934), 52–68; I. Špadijer, *Svetogorska baština* (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2014), 18–21 (with complete bibliography); M. Živojinović, *Svetogorske kelije i pirgovi u srednjem veku* (Belgrade: Vizantološki institut SANU, 1972), 91–102.

[24] D. Popović, "Pustinožiteljstvo svetog Save Srpskog". In *Kult svetih na Balkanu II*, ed. M. Detelić, (Kragujevac: Liceum 7, 2002), 61–85; see also M. Marković, *Prvo putovanje svetog Save u Palestinu i njegov značaj za srpsku srednjovekovnu umetnost* (Belgrade: Vizantološki institut SANU, 2009).

As far as landscapes are concerned, it should be noted that Sava followed both models of the monastic *desert* when founding *hesychasteria* – the *locus amoenus* and the *locus terribilis*.[25] What the two had in common was withdrawal from the world into untouched nature which appeared to be meant for ascetic pursuits. The former model – the monastic paradise and Edenic garden – was embodied in the Karyes *kellion*, a hermitage of the monastery of Hilandar, whose first dweller was Sava himself.[26] As for the natural setting of the Karyes *kellion*, its conception is illustrated well by Sava's biographers. According to Domentijan, Sava discovered "a place extraordinarily bright and admirable, adorned with all manner of beauties in the likeness of paradise, in the middle of Karyes, where the holy monks live in the sketic way in every silence."[27] Teodosije's account is not much different. Sava, he says, "found an extraordinary place in the place called Karyes, adorned with good waters and fruit-bearing trees"; having purchased that piece of land from the protos, he had a *kellion* built and a small church dedicated to his patron saint, St Sabas the Sanctified, and dwelt there alone "in silence, psalm-chanting and prayer".[28]

These descriptions clearly show that the conception of the Karyes *kellion* echoed the models of natural environment established in Byzantine literature and art as early as the post-iconoclastic period: the idea of *hesychasterion* as an earthly paradise – a place secluded from the world, nested in a bucolic natural setting, flowery and fragrant, abounding in clean water, singing birds; briefly, a markedly beautiful landscape. It is at the same time a spiritual paradise, the place of the monastic endeavour reserved for the few dedicated monks.[29] The latter approach can be read from one of the main provisions of the *typikon* of Karyes, the one in which Sava prescribes that the *kellion* be the "dwelling for two or three [monks]", and those who are "worthy of the spiritual rule".[30]

The conception of the Karyes *kellion* included a garden or a vineyard. Namely, the reference to wine and fruit in its *typikon*[31] has led researchers to

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[25] I discussed this topic in more detail in a separate paper: D. Popović, "Monastic wilderness as a cultural construct. Case study: the cave hermitages of the monastery of Mileševa". In *Wilderness Revisited: its Essence, Perception, Description and Image in Byzantium and Beyond*, Studies in Historical Geography and Cultural Heritage (in press).

[26] Živojinović, *Svetogorske kelije i pirgovi*, 91–102; M. Kovačević, *Sveta Carska Lavra Hilandar na Svetoj Gori. Arhitekrura i druga dobra* (Belgrade – Hilandar: Zadužbina Svetog manastira Hilandara, 2015) 556–566 (with earlier literature).

[27] Domentijan, *Život Svetoga Save i Život Svetoga Simeuna*, 96.

[28] Teodosije, *Žitija*, 146.

[29] Maguire, "Paradise Withdrawn", 23–35; H. Maguire, *Nectar and Illusion. Nature in Byzantine Art and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[30] *Sveti Sava*, *Sabrani spisi*, 37–38.

[31] *Ibid.*, 37.

assume that a vineyard and a fruit orchard were planted around it. This is corroborated by written sources which show that Sava successively purchased land in the environs of the *kellion* with a view to planting a vineyard. It is worthy of note that some of that land had been left unploughed and was overgrown with trees, which would have required its cultivation or, in other words, the transformation of the found wild nature.[32] Sava was an heir to an ancient tradition in that respect too. St Anthony the Great, the illustrious founder of anchoritic, *kelliotic* monasticism, is known to have planted a vegetable garden next to his hermitage in the "inner desert".[33] Such gardens were also tended by anchorites in the Judean Desert – St Sabas the Sanctified among them – as claimed by textual sources and confirmed by archaeology.[34] As documented credibly in scholarship, small gardens around anchoritic *kellia* were common in the Byzantine world too.[35]

The described conception of the Karyes *kellion* had a broader context of meaning as well. It is readable from the perception of Mount Athos as a monastic paradise held by Sava of Serbia and his brother Stefan, the future first crowned Serbian king. Sava presented it in his *Life of St Simeon* penned about 1207, and Stefan in the proem of his *Hilandar Charter*, traditionally dated to 1199–1202 and relatively recently re-dated to 1207–1208.[36] Since the two descriptions of Mount Athos as a paradisiacal meadow have been quoted and discussed more than once – and recently received an exhaustive and informative study by Irena Špadijer[37] – I shall only focus on the points of interest to our topic.

In Sava's *Life of St Simeon* Mount Athos is described as the "holy meadow" at which Simeon (Nemanja) came at his son's invitation: "And [Simeon] arrived

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[32] *Natpisi manastira Hilandara*, vol. I: *XIV—XVII vek*, eds. G. Subotić, B. Miljković and N. Dudić, (Belgrade: Hilandarski odbor SANU and Vizantološki odbor SANU, 2019), 121–122 (B. Miljković, who offers detailed commentaries on the statements made in the written sources).

[33] Athanase d'Alexandrie, *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 271–273.

[34] Cyril of Scythopolis, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, eds. R. M. Price and J. Binns, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 20, 96, 118, 126; Y. Hirschfeld, *The Judean Desert Monasteries in the Byzantine Period* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 200–204.

[35] Talbot, "Byzantine Monastic Horticulture", 41–48 (with sources).

[36] Đ. Bubalo, "Kada je veliki župan Stefan Nemanjić izdao povelju manastiru Hilandaru?", *Stari srpski arhiv* 9 (2010), 233–241.

[37] I. Špadijer, "Alegorija raja kod svetog Save i Stefana Prvovenčanog". In *PERIVOLOS, Zbornik u čast Mirjane Živojinović*, eds. B. Miljković and D. Dželebdžić, (Belgrade: Vizantološki institut SANU and Zadužbina Svetog manastira Hilandara 2015), 113–126 (with special reference to the artistic and textual models used by Sava of Serbia and Stefan the First-Crowned, and to the chronological relationship of their compositions).

at the meadow of peace, amongst beautifully tall and fruit-bearing trees in which sweet birds are singing, where he, listening, lived a peaceful and tranquil life, and anchored well in the true faith and shining bright, stood like a beautiful tree in a good harbour, to wit at Mount Athos…"[38] The allegory of the paradisiacal "holy meadow" becomes more detailed in Stefan's donation charter for Hilandar – in the poetic image regarded, and with good reason, as one of the most beautiful in medieval literature, and not only Serbian.[39] Stefan describes his father's vision of paradise as follows: "He [Simeon] was elevated by thought and desired: as if he were standing at an elevated place, in springtime, on a merry day, i.e. sunny, and he saw from afar a smooth meadow, beautiful in appearance, lovely in creation. In the middle of it a beautiful tree stood, with a round crown full of leaves, graced with flowers and heavy with fruit, sending forth a sweet scent. And in the middle of the tree a sweet-voiced bird settled, modest when sitting, soft-toned when singing, joyous when chirping, clear when whispering, one of the wise loving birds, his sweet boy […] called Sava the monk.[40]

The allegory of Mount Athos as a paradisiacal meadow that Sava and Stefan used drawing on the selected Byzantine literary models reveals its full, soteriological significance. It is clear from Stefan's words that Simeon abandoned the world to earn "the meadow described afore" and "attain salvation there". Telling and full of meaning is also his likening of the Athonite monks, pillars of the true faith, to the branches of the paradisiacal tree: "and [Simeon] heard that the life in that meadow is peaceful and tranquil, and that orthodoxy has taken good roots and is shining bright, like a tree that stands beautifully, and its branches are the sanctified and God-fearing and Christ-loving monks…"[41] The same message is conveyed by Sava's description of the Athonite monks as "nice-smelling flowers blooming in that holy desert".[42] This is not merely a beautiful poetic image; it is also the theologically meaningful idea of flowers as a metaphor for piety, virtue and ascetic values. Hence the link between fragrance, floral symbolism and monastic pursuits is an important *topos* in Christian literature.[43] It underlies the interpretation of the monastic *desert* as the anchoritic paradise where a multitude of flowers bloom – the monks and their virtues. This only seeming paradox

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[38] *Sveti Sava, Sabrani spisi*, 108–109.

[39] S. Radojčić, "Hilandarska povelja Stefana Prvovenčanog i motiv raja u srpskom monumentalnom slikarstvu", *Uzori i dela starih srpskih umetnika* (Belgrade: Srpska književna zadruga, 1975), 195–210; Špadijer, "Alegorija raja", 114, 125.

[40] Stefan Prvovenčani, *Sabrani spisi*, 56.

[41] *Ibid*., 57.

[42] *Sveti Sava, Sabrani spisi*, 111.

[43] D. Popović, "Cvetna simbolika i kult relikvija u srednjovekovnoj Srbiji", *Zograf* 32/2008 (2009), 69–81 (with sources and literature).

is expressed by the syntagm *desertum floridus*.[44] It reveals an essential goal of the hermits – to "reconstruct" the Garden of Eden in their own living environment and thus anticipate the future abodes of the Heavenly Jerusalem.[45]

Scholars have already put forward the view that Sava's and Stefan's penchant for the motif of paradisiacal meadow, embodied in the monastic setting of Mount Athos, may be accounted for by the brothers' similar artistic taste or common literary source of inspiration. It has also been observed that the *topos* of paradisiacal meadow used by Sava was based on his own experience,[46] a fact that is certainly worthy of being emphasized. It was in the early, formative period of his life that Sava experienced the monastic *desert* and its landscape – "beautiful in appearance, lovely in creation" – as an idyllic backdrop for a "tranquil life". If we are to believe his biographers, the impression that the Athonite practice of eremitism made on him was so strong that it set off a profound inner transformation. No wonder, then, that he retained all his life an especial, emotionally charged relationship to Mount Athos in general, and to the Karyes *kellion* in particular. Under the pressure of duties and worries, he often remembered the days spent in that "divine paradise", yearning to return to his *locus amoenus*.[47]

Sava's immediate and deeply felt experience of the *desert* – and not only at Athos but also at the dwellings of illustrious ascetics of Egypt, Judea and Sinai – included awareness of its other side known as the *locus terribilis* or *locus horridus*. The latter conception, the opposite of the paradisiacal bucolic one embodied in the Karyes *kellion*, was given physical form in the hermitage of the monastery of Studenica he founded in his homeland – of which more will be said later. At any rate, Sava's choices of locations for anchoritic dwellings testify to his familiarity with the tradition of *kelliotic* cave monasticism, including the aspect concerning the symbolic properties of its natural setting.

As far as the landscape is concerned, undoubtedly the central phenomenon and distinctive feature of medieval ascetic monasticism was holy mountains – iconic, theophanic spaces of the first order. They evoked biblical mountains – such as Sinai, Tabor, the Mount of Olives, Golgotha – the sites of the key events of Sacred History as well as the mountains regarded as *loci memoriae* associated

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[44] G. J. M. Beterling, "Les Oxymores desertum civitas et desertum floribus", *Studia monastica* 15 (1977), 7–15; S. Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting salvation. Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 56–200.

[45] R. L. Wilken, "Loving Jerusalem Below: the Monks of Palestine". In *Jerusalem, its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. L. I. Levine, (New York: Continuum, 1999), 240–250; D. Popović, "Desert as Heavenly Jerusalem: the imagery of a sacred space in the making". In *New Jerusalems. Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces*, ed. A. Lidov, (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), 151–175.

[46] Špadijer, "Alegorija raja", 125.

[47] D. Popović, "Pustinožiteljstvo svetog Save", 70–71 (with sources).

with the life and deeds of distinguished ascetics. In the Byzantine mind, they were metaphors for spiritual ascent and the ladder leading to heaven.[48] As many concepts of Eastern Christian asceticism, holy mountains were an ambivalent category when it comes to landscape. They could be a space transformed into a paradisiacal garden through the transformation of wilderness. Documented well in Byzantine writers, this idea – which found a supreme expression in Psellos' description of the Bithynian holy mountain as "a second paradise and a second heaven"[49] – is clearly recognizable, we have seen, in the perception of the Holy Mountain of Athos held by Sava of Serbia and Stefan the First-Crowned.

And yet, holy mountains and monastic *deserts* – although frequently understood as complementary, even interchangeable concepts – as a rule belonged to the *locus horridus* category: a dramatically beautiful but remote, barely accessible and dangerous environment which made the ascetic face the hardest trials. The anchorites leaning towards radical asceticism purposefully settled in such inhospitable and perilous environments. There is textual evidence for many such examples among the old desert fathers. Elias the Hermit, a dweller of the illustrious Egyptian Thebaid, was famed for having spent seventy years in the "horrible desert", without ever descending to the inhabited area. His cave hermitage, high in the rocks, could be reached by a narrow, barely noticeable path along the cliff.[50] The tradition of the desert fathers had its continuators. For example, the hermitage of the distinguished Lazaros of Galesion in an inaccessible mountainous landscape was so difficult to reach that the visitors had to resort to a special technology to cut a path in the rock; a man was reportedly killed while trying to climb to his *kellion* using a rope.[51] Telling in that sense is the Athonite monk John's description of his habitat as "cruel and cheerless" and, therefore, suited to the purpose.[52] In the Serbian milieu, an especially prominent example is the hermit Peter whose vita was penned by Teodosije (Theodosius) of Hilandar. Peter found his *kellion* sometime in the late twelfth century in the inaccessible mountainous area of Koriša which he, characteristically, calls a "holy mountain". A century later, Teodosije used select *topoi* of ascetic literature to describe the hermit's endeavour: "He climbed a tall rock gripping it with his fingers. And

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[48] Talbot, "Les saintes montagnes à Byzance", 263–318; della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 147–175; A. Lidov, ed., *The Hierotopy of Holy Mountains in Christian Culture* (Moscow: Indrik, 2019); for examples from the Serbian milieu see D. Popović, "The Deserts and Holy Mountains of Medieval Serbia", 53–69.

[49] After Talbot, "Les saintes montagnes à Byzance", 275.

[50] *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto (The Lives of the Desert Fathers)*, ed. N. Russel, (London: Mowbray, 1981), 69.

[51] *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion. An Eleventh-Century Pillar Saint*, ed. R. P. H. Greenfield, (Washington, D. C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 89, 91.

[52] *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 4, 1391.

having laboriously climbed it, like a pillar, he found high up on this rock a cave, as if prepared by God, and, having thanked God greatly, rejoiced at it."[53]

The "cave prepared by God" and the pillar-like rock reminiscent of the dwellings of ancient stylites, whom Peter's *Life* expectedly mentions, point to a fundamental aspect of the eremitic habitats: their rocky and speluncar character. In Christian tradition, natural features such as caves, cliffs and rocks were believed to be God's miraculous "creations" or "not made by human hands". They evoked the creation of the world and were considered to be privileged places for mystical encounters with the divine. They were also the site of the hermit's struggle with demonic forces.[54] That idea underlay so-called *rock-cut architecture*, the practice of building eremitic cells, *parekklesia* and churches, sometimes even entire complexes, in and against caves and cliff faces. This type of architecture, occurring in the parts of the Eastern Christian world where the topography permitted, exemplified the harmony established between natural, "divine" creations and architecture, a work of human hands.[55]

Caves held a special place among those stony "not-made-by-hands" features. They have always been seen as a liminal zone, an "anti-space" as it were, a place of darkness, silence and apophatic mysticism. The cave is almost like the ascetic's grave in which he, in the spirit of the *Ladder*, dwells in the "daily remembrance of death, mortifying the body and ascending in virtue."[56] That place signified in the most literal sense the hermit's abandonment of the world and programmatic narrowing of perception aimed at ridding himself of all superfluous contents.[57] By way of illustration, let me offer a telling example. Elpidius, a radical ascetic, dwelled in the desert in the environs of Jericho. A tall mountain rose in front of his cave, barring his view: for the twenty-five years he spent there he could see neither the sun after six in the morning nor the stars in the

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[53] Teodosije, *Žitija*, 271; D. Popović, "The Cult of St Peter of Koriša", 210–235, 186–188.

[54] della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 147–196.

[55] D. Popović in Popović, Todić, and Vojvodić, *Dečanska pustinja*, 205–207 (with examples from the Eastern Christian world and relevant literature).

[56] Sveti Jovan Lestvičnik, *Lestvica*, ed. D. Bogdanović, (Belgrade: Sveti arhijerejski sinod SPC, 1965), 68–71.

[57] J. Danièlou, "Le Symbole de la caverne chez Grégoire de Nysse". In *Mullus: Festschrift Theodor Klauser, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum 1*, eds. A. von Stuiber and A. Hermann, (Münster: Aschendorf, 1964), 43–51; S. Ćurčić, "Cave and Church. An Eastern Christian Hierotopical Synthesis". In *Hierotopy, The Creation of Sacral Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. A. Lidov, (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), 216–236; A-M. Talbot, "Caves, demons and holy man". In *Le saint, le moine et le paysan. Mélanges d'histoire byzantine offerts à Michel Kaplan*, eds. O. Delouis, S. Métivier and P. Pages, (Paris: Byzantina Sorbonensia, 2016), 707–718.

night sky.[58] Apart from offering an abundance of colourful information about the eremitic way of life, vivid stories about the cave dwellers, such as the one about Elpidius, reveal its higher, ethical and spiritual purpose.[59] Finally, the *kelliote*'s dwelling in a cave involved the struggle with demons, embodiments of sins and destructive passions. In the subsequent centuries, the arduous battle to overpower those forces of evil, as a rule accompanied by miraculous signs, and the transformation of the cave into a sacred place became a major *topos* of ascetic and hagiographic literature.[60]

In any case, caves were an important element of the already mentioned topographic system which made it possible for the original meaning of hallowed models – the Old and New Testament caves, as well as those that kept the memory of the famous desert fathers – to be recreated, across the Christian world, in one's own time and place. How great their symbolic power was may be seen from the fact that Eastern Christian exegesis developed a distinctive discourse known as "speluncar theology".[61]

Bearing in mind all these general principles regarding the monastic landscape as the ascetic *locus horridus*, let us return to Sava of Serbia. During his stay at Mount Athos, Sava had the opportunity to acquaint himself with both types of monastic landscape – besides the "Edenic" one, he gained an insight into the "cruellest life" of the ascetics residing on the almost inaccessible slopes of Athos. It is worthy of note that in the Byzantine mind this mountain had special charisma and its summit, likened to Tabor, the mount of Transfiguration, was regarded as the place of divine revelation.[62] The features of this landscape, which has changed little since Sava's times, and Teodosije of Hilandar's well-known description help us form a convincing picture of what young Sava experienced during his visits to the most radical Athonite hermits. According to Teodosije, they dwelled "in high mountains together with deer", had the "sky for a church" and "cramped huts adorned with grass." They resided "in rock clefts and land caves and on sea rocks like birds". The recluses lived in union with nature and

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[58] Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, ed. R. T. Meyer, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1965), 131.

[59] Of numerous examples, I offer here a selection of classical compositions: *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, 56, 61, 69, 70, 91, 92, 99 and passim; Palladius, *The Lausiac History*, 32, 57, 82, 92, 130, 138; Cyril of Scythopolis, *The Lives of the Monks of Palestine*, 11, 12, 58, 103, 108, 110, 117 and passim.

[60] R. P. H. Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988); T. Pratsch, *Der hagiographische Topos. Griechische Heiligenviten in mittelbyzantinische Zeit* (Berlin: Millenium-Studien, 2005), 160–169; Endsjø, *Primordial Landscapes*, 49–58; Talbot, "Caves, demons and holy man", 707–718.

[61] della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 176–196.

[62] *Ibid*., 166–170.

were exposed to all of its blessings and whims: "Taught by the hum of trees and the chirp of birds […] nourished by clean and fragrant air", but also "lashed by rain and winds, scorched by sun and heat, chilled by frost and cold". They lived on "the fruits of trees and the herbs of the undergrowth", and drank "the sweet thirst-quenching water running from the mountain stone."[63] Teodosije does not fail to mention Sava's fascination with this "tranquil anchoritic life" and profound understanding of the purpose of anchoritism in the Orthodox monastic system.

Guided by those insights and his own vision, Sava brought the model established at Mount Athos – which included the Karyes *kellion* attached to Hilandar as the mother monastery – to the Serbian lands. He gave it physical form in the vicinity of the monastery of Studenica, the sacral and dynastic centre of the first Nemanjić rulers, by having a *hesychasterion* built, which is still extant and known as Sava's Upper Hermitage.[64] Unlike the Karyes *kellion* whose founding and *typikon* are documented in written sources, all evidence for the founding of the Studenica one is lost – probably in many ravages the monastery and its *kellion* suffered over the centuries. Nonetheless, there is good reason for researchers' undivided opinion that the Studenica hermitage was Sava's brainchild. It is corroborated by the general, conceptual reasons, illustrated well by the words of Sava's biographer Domentijan that Sava "brought the Holy Mountain's good example to his fatherland, to cenobiums, monasteries, hesychasteria".[65] Sava's role in the founding of the hermitage is suggested not only by the enduring local tradition but also by somewhat later written sources. Especially important of these is a note made in a manuscript copy of the *Typikon* of Studenica: "This *typikon*, written by the hand of St Sava, was copied in 1619 in the cave hermitage of St Sava."[66]

While the Karyes *kellion*, as we have seen, epitomized a bucolic landscape and heavenly meadows, the Studenica hermitage exemplified the model based on the "sacred triad" – mountain, rock, cave. The "Upper Hermitage" sits about 12 km to the west of the monastery of Studenica, deep in Mt Čemerno. It can be reached from two directions – from the west, from the village of Bažale, and along the path from the "Lower Hermitage", from the village of Savovo,

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[63] Teodosije, *Žitija*, 116–117.

[64] L. Pavlović, "Beleške o manastiru Studenici", *Saopštenja* XIX (1987), 169–171; S. Temerinski, "Gornja isposnica u Savovu kod Studenice". In *Osam vekova Studenice* (Belgrade: Sveti arhijerejski sinod SPC 1986), 257–260; S. Temerinski, "Konzervatorski problemi u Gornjoj isposnici kod Studenice", *Glasnik Društva konzervatora* 14 (1990), 44–52; N. Debljović-Ristić, "Gornja isposnica Svetog Save u Studenici – obnova drvenog pristupnog mosta ka kuli za stanovanje", *Moderna konzervacija* 6 (2018), 95–104.

[65] Domentijan, *Život Svetoga Save i Život Svetoga Simeona*, 124.

[66] Lj. Stojanović, *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, I–VI (Belgrade: SANU, Narodna biblioteka Srbije, Matica srpska, 1982–1988), 293–294.

which means a steep ascent in the last section. Rock-cut paths leading to the cave complex testify to the difficulty of access. At the end of the ascent, from a narrow piece of level land several hundred meters above the Studenica river, a magnificent view breaks upon the visitor – of the whole river gorge and, far in the distance, the slopes of Mt Golija. The Upper Hermitage, a small cave complex, is set up in a spacious funnel-shaped recess in the vertical rock mass. Either approach to it was defended by a wall and gate. The complex consists of several structures whose original medieval layer has been identified under the subsequent additions and more recent reconstructions.[67]

Visually the most imposing is the multi-storeyed residential building known as the "Tower", with its floors organized into several functional wholes. Under it is a two-part chamber, dubbed "Sava's cask" (*Savina kaca*), with a walled water well at one end and a fireplace at the other. The Tower can be accessed by a 20-m-long wooden bridge supported by stone-built pillars. At the other end of the bridge, a natural recess in the rock accommodates a small aisleless church dedicated to St George which shows the same building material and technique as the Tower. The complex includes other elements – such as the cave with the walled-up entrance and a spring inside it above the former gate as well as a lengthy, spacious cave in the immediate vicinity of the Tower.[68]

Viewed as a whole and individually, all the elements described above compellingly show that the architecture of the Upper Hermitage was organically integrated into the landscape. Conservation-restoration and field work revealed a number of important facts and technical details about how the medieval builders adapted the form of buildings to the configuration of the rocks. They cut paths and hewed cave walls, built retaining walls and stone supports, cut holes for wooden beams and grooves of various shapes and purposes. They spanned the chasm by a wooden bridge, and fitted two springs and the fireplace, vital to the survival of the hermits, in the space of the caves. It would not be an overstatement to say that the Upper Hermitage of Studenica is a representative example of "rock architecture" with respect both to architectural form and to the construction method and technique.

The first thing that strikes even the untrained visitor to the Upper Hermitage is its location; in other words, the choice of site that took into account a number of natural-morphological, spatial and microclimatic characteristics.[69] These characteristics, and the perfect harmony between the architecture and the rocky landscape testify to a masterful knowledge of the main elements of

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[67] Temerinski, "Gornja isposnica", 259–260; Temerinski, "Konzervatorski problemi u Gornjoj isposnici", 44–52; Debljović-Ristić, "Gornja isposnica Svetog Save", 99–101.

[68] See n. 64.

[69] Debljović-Ristić, "Gornja isposnica Svetog Save", 97–99.

monastic cave habitats, including those relating to their associative and symbolic meaning, and certainly known perfectly well to Sava of Serbia. It should also be noted that the Studenica hermitage faces the southeast, which means it had excellent sun exposure; hence an unexpectedly diverse plant life on the narrow piece of land around it – including grapevines and cherry and apricot trees.[70] Yet, these "bucolic" details are by no means the distinctive feature of this craggy landscape. The prevailing impression it makes is the dramatic scenery that elicits admiration and delight as much as fear and anxiety in face of the whims of wild nature. Illustrative in that sense is the experience of the visitors caught by a storm and, especially, of the Studenica monks who make an occasional stay at Sava's hermitage. According to them, spending a night there can be quite a trial because of the seclusion of the place, complete darkness and strange, often terrifying sounds.[71] This is a characteristic experience of the ascetics-anchorites who put their spiritual strength and faith to a test in the mystical and dangerous setting of caves and the wilds. That experience, described many times in ascetic literature and known as the *mysterium tremendum*, is the central feature of the type of ascetic habitats that functions and is perceived predominantly as the *locus horridus*.[72]

The origin of yet another cave complex, very similar to the Studenica one in type and purpose, has been attributed to St Sava of Serbia: the hermitages of the monastery of Mileševa (near Prijepolje, south-western Serbia) situated in the gorge of the Mileševka river about two kilometres south of the monastery. Not even in this case is the founding of the *hesychasteria* documented in written sources. But it is linked to Sava directly by local tradition and a note made in 1508 in a manuscript copy of the *Life of Saint Sava* written by Teodosije of Hilandar. The note says that the *Life* was copied by *dijak* Vladislav "in the desert of St Sava".[73] Yet another supporting argument is the fact that Sava had a crucial role in the inception and overall design of the monastery of Mileševa, the foundation and funerary church of his nephew, king Vladislav.[74]

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[70] Personal observations made during field surveys. As for animal life, eagles and falcons are frequently seen flying above the Upper Hermitage, and there are also ravens and swallows.

[71] On this see D. Popović, "Monastic wilderness as a cultural construct" (in press).

[72] della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 196 and passim.

[73] *Stari srpski zapisi i natpisi*, vol. 1, 124.

[74] M. Čanak-Medić and O. Kandić, *Arhitektura prve polovine XIII veka*, vol. I: *Crkve u Raškoj. Crkva Vaznesenja Hristovog u Mileševi* (Belgrade: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1995), 129–143; O. Kandić, S. Popović and R. Zarić, *Manastir Mileševa* (Belgrade: Republički zavod za zaštitu spomenika kulture, 1995); B. Todić, "Serbian Monumental Art of the 13th Century". In *Sacral Art of the Serbian Lands in the Middle Ages*, eds. D. Vojvodić and D. Popović, (Belgrade: The Serbian National

The hermitages of Mileševa sit in a remarkably picturesque landscape of the almost impassable gorge of the Mileševka river which can still boast rare and even endemic animal and plant species. Their builders used natural rock shelters in the northern vertical cliff beneath the medieval fortress known as Mileševac. The complex consisted of three main units. The so-called "Western Hermitage" served as a dwelling, and so did the "Upper Hermitage", which was set up high in the cliff and probably functioned as a scriptorium as well. The complex known as "Savine vode" (Sava's Waters) was cultic and sacral in character. One of its caves was converted to a chapel, which is still visited by pilgrims. In the cave opposite it is the "holy spring", traditionally believed by the faithful to have healing properties. The remains discovered on the narrow strip of level land within the *Savine vode* area indicate a small, undoubtedly wooden, church. The surviving pieces of church "furniture" – a two-part altar and a seat cut in the rock – are the only of the kind in Serbian "rock architecture". Among the curiosities of the complex is the natural channel connecting the Upper Hermitage and *Savine vode* which ensured the *kelliotes'* safety and relatively easy access to the drinking water from the spring.[75]

Much like the Upper Hermitage of Studenica, the cave complex of Mileševa makes a powerful impression by the dramatic beauty of the landscape which inspires mixed feelings – admiration and fascination on the one hand, and unease and fear over the unknowns such inhospitable and dangerous landscapes might hide.[76] Both complexes may therefore be given the epithet of *locus terribilis* for more than one reason. Also impressive in both cases is the mastery of the repertoire of "rock architecture" shown by the builders. In the Mileševa hermitages it is reflected in many ingenious solutions in rendering the found "God-created", i.e. "not-made-by-hands", rocks and caves suitable for the habitation and activities of the *kelliotes*. Apart from the usual ones – rock-cut paths, steps and handholds, niches and retaining walls – the exploration discovered some quite inventive creations. To be singled out are the already mentioned pieces of church furniture, the interventions in the cave channel and the solutions for bridging vertical distances between the structures at different levels. Some undertakings may be regarded as a true feat, such as the construction of the multi-storeyed Upper Hermitage in a vertical, practically inaccessible rock, and using massive timber elements.[77] All of this suggests not only highly skilled builders, practised

Committee of Byzantine Studies, P.E. Službeni glasnik, Institute for Byzantine Studies SASA, 2016), 219–220 (with bibliography).

[75] D. Popović and M. Popović, "Isposnice manastira Mileševe", *Saopštenja* L (2018), 9–32 (with bibliography).

[76] More on this in D. Popović, "Monastic wilderness as a cultural construct" (in press).

[77] D. Popović and M. Popović, "Isposnice manastira Mileševe", 12–24, 27–28.

in the art of cave architecture, but also a well-versed originator of the idea. It is not difficult to imagine in that role Sava of Serbia, who walked Mount Athos to "deserts and caves" […] visiting all venerable and righteous men in the deserts",[78] and, on his journey through the Judean desert, carefully "studied the cave of the holy father Sabas and all dwelling places in the desert".[79]

The distinguishing features of the ascetic monastic communities initiated and conceived by St Sava of Serbia have been emphasized in scholarship more than once. Their most important common characteristics were a set of particular rules (*typikon*), regulating the *kelliotic* way of life, and the fact that those hermitages were places for the monastic elite and centres of manuscript copying.[80] To be added to these general characteristics is the choice of their natural setting, well-considered and suited to the purpose. In that respect, as we have seen, Sava followed two main and complementary models of the monastic *desert – locus amoenus* and *locus horridus*. As so many of Sava's other works and achievements, these models of anchoritic dwellings became a lasting legacy in the Serbian milieu as regards both the organization of monastic life and the architectural shaping and harmonious integration of the *kellia* into the landscape.[81]

An important aspect of Sava's *hesychasteria* concerns the complex origin of their models and the multiple layers of their meaning. Although patterned on the ancient hallowed models which, with variations, are commonplace in Eastern Christian desert monasticism and "rock architecture", these *hesychasteria* were founded on authentic personal experience – Sava's and his followers' – through personal practice and in one's own milieu; hence their status of special sacred places, *loci memoriae* of a sort bearing a strong mark of identity.[82] It is the landscape endowed with extraordinary natural features that lends a special dimension to such places. Modern scholarly discourse attaches particularly importance to that fact. Researchers in landscape studies emphasize that the landscape is an important visual and environmental setting for spiritual and cultural contents open to a wide range of ideas and messages. What may be taken as a representative example are precisely the anchoritic habitats that combine an iconic picturesque landscape, spiritual contents and cultural heritage, as well

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[78] Domentijan, *Život svetoga Save i Život svetoga Simeona*, 67.

[79] Teodosije, *Žitija*, 225; D. Popović, "Pustinožiteljstvo svetog Save Srpskog", 72–74 (with sources).

[80] D. Bogdanović, "Predgovor". In *Sveti Sava, Sabrani spisi*, 14–16; Popović, Todić and Vojvodić, *Dečanska pustinja*, 202–203; M. Davidović, "Srpski skriptoriji od XII do XVII veka". In *Svet srpske rukopisne knjige* (*XII do XVII vek*), eds. Z. Rakić and I. Špadijer, (Belgrade: SANU, 2016), 49–88.

[81] For more on this see D. Popović in Popović, Todić and Vojvodić, *Dečanska pustinja*, 177–186 (with relevant literature).

[82] della Dora, *Landscape, Nature and the Sacred*, 199.

as the opportunity of being experienced firsthand by the faithful and pilgrims, tourists and researchers.[83] Viewed from that perspective, Sava's hermitages, with their immeasurable historical value, spiritual charisma, creative architectural solutions and, moreover, located in the untouched nature of extraordinary qualities, may with good reason be regarded as a national treasure – a source of collective memory and a link between past and present.

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[83] *Christian Pilgrimage, Landscape and Heritage*, 1–21; very stimulating contributions in the edited volumes: *Heritage, Memory, and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, eds. N. Moore and Y. Whelan (Burlington: Routledge, 2007); *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Heritage and Identity*, eds. B. Graham and P. Howard (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

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ISSN 0350-7653