

## CANONS REGULAR OF HEBRON IN MEDIEVAL SRIJEM<sup>1</sup>

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The region of Srijem (Srem), situated at the confluence of the Danube and Sava rivers, owes its name to the Late Antique city of Sirmium. Presently, it is divided between Croatia and Yugoslavia. During the centuries around the turn of the millennium, it was annexed to and detached from various political entities at least nine times: after the destruction of Avars by the end of the eighth century, it probably passed under Frankish domination for a few decades; then it was occupied by the Bulgarians for a century; the newly arrived Hungarians ruled it during the central decades of the tenth century; tsar Samuel returned it to the Bulgarians, who in 1018 surrendered it to the Byzantines; half a century later, the Hungarians recaptured it, but in the second half of the twelfth century, emperor Manuel Comnenos (1143-1180) attached it for the last time to Byzantium. After his death, the Hungarians took hold of it for the rest of the medieval period.

The sources for the history of the canons regular in Srijem are very slim: two letters of pope Innocent III from the first year of his pontificate, 1198.<sup>2</sup> However, the picture emerging from these letters is quite complex. Both writings were addressed to Saul of Hédervára, archbishop of Kalocsa (1191-1202), whose jurisdiction by that time included Srijem.<sup>3</sup> When we arrange all the information chronologically, the story goes as follows.

Around the mid-twelfth century, Beloš, ban (viceroy) of Croatia—a high officer of the king of Hungary—founded in Srijem, on the Danube's right bank, a Benedictine monastery dedicated to St. Stephen the Protomartyr.<sup>4</sup> The monastery and the settlement which developed around it became known as *Monasterium Bani* (Hungarian: Bánmonostora, today Banoštor). This was the first religious house to be founded in Srijem, as the pope put it, *post multa tempora*. However, some thirty years later, under

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<sup>2</sup> Gy. Fejér, *Codex diplomaticus Hungariae ecclesiasticus ac civilis*, vol. 2. (Budae, 1829) 336-338 = P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus - series latina*, vol. 214. (Paris, 1855) col. 234-235 (doc. 281), and 460-461 (doc. 499) = T. Smičiklas, *Codex diplomaticus regni Croatiae, Dalmatiae et Slavoniae*, vol. 2. (Zagreb: JAZU, 1904) 303. (doc. 285). Cf. A. Pothast, *Regesta pontificum Romanorum*, vol. 1. (Berlini, 1874) 30. (no. 311), and 47 (no. 496).

<sup>3</sup> A. Aldásy, "Kalocsa-Bács, Archdiocese of," In *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*. vol. 8. (New York, 1910) 594-595.

<sup>4</sup> M. Pavić, "Redovništvo i samostani srednjega vieka u području (današnje) biskupije bosanskohercegovačke," [The Medieval Monasticism and Monasteries in the Area of Present-day Bishopric of Bosnian-Srijem] In *Glasnik biskupije bosanske i sriemske* 31/5 (1903) 35.

archbishop Andrew (1176-1179), the monastery sunk into what the letters call *dissolutio*, which prompted the archbishop to replace the Benedictines with another community. He assigned the *Monasterium Bani* to the canons called *canonici sancti Abrahae de valle Ebron*. These canons survived in the monastery until the year in which the two letters of Innocent III were dispatched (1198). They turned out to be unable to manage the estates of the monastery, and eventually only three of them remained there. In the time between the two papal letters, archbishop Saul banished them as well. The pope then decided to open the monastery to the "canons regular who serve God according to the rule of St. Augustine." There is no later confirmation that the Augustinian canons actually occupied the monastery. An indirect confirmation that they did may be the fact that in 1229, when pope Gregory IX restored the bishopric of Sirmium, its see was placed at the *Monasterium Bani*.<sup>5</sup>

The main puzzle in this story are, of course, "the canons of St. Abraham from the valley of Hebron," who lived in the *Monasterium Bani* for approximately two decades. They must be linked with the canonical community which established itself in Hebron, in the Frankish Kingdom of Jerusalem. The history of the Crusade-period Hebron includes some picturesque details. In 1119, the alleged relics of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were discovered there. This rewarding *inventio* significantly boosted the attractiveness of Hebron as a pilgrimage site. In 1168, Hebron became a bishopric and its priory of regular canons was promoted into a cathedral chapter. Unfortunately, in 1187, Saladin conquered Hebron, and it was never restored to Christian control.<sup>6</sup>

The comparison of the two chronologies suggests that the canons of Hebron founded their daughter-house in Srijem some ten years after the foundation of the Hebron bishopric and ten years before the fall of Hebron to the Muslims. What is curious here is not the foundation itself, but the fact that it appears to be unique. Unlike the canons regular of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, who generated numerous monasteries and congregations all over Europe, the canons of Hebron seem to have

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<sup>5</sup> S. Bäuerlin, "Djakovo," In *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques* [henceforth *DHGE*], vol. 5. (Paris, 1960) col. 528.

<sup>6</sup> P. Riant (ed.), "Canonici Hebronensis tractatus de inventione sanctorum Patriarcharum Abraham, Ysaac et Jacob (27. Jul. 1119)," In *Recueil des historiens de croisades. Historiens occidentaux*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1844-1895) 5: 303-314.; Ch. Kohler (ed.), "Un nouveau récit de l'invention des patriarches Abraham, Isaac et Jacob a Hébron," In *Revue de l'Orient latin* 4 (1896) 496-502.; P. Riant, "Invention de la sépulture des Patriarches Abraham, Isaac et Jacob à Hébron," In *Archives de l'Orient latin* 2 (1884); S. Salaville, "Hebron," In *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* vol. 7. (New York, 1910) 184-185.; B. Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States: The Secular Church* (London: Variorum, 1980) 77, 84-85, 243, 247, 266.; D. Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. A Corpus*. vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 224-239.

stopped after their first attempt in Europe. Why did this first and last attempt (if it is such) take place precisely in Srijem? I cannot answer this question fully. I can only point to facts which might have favored this choice, although they can by no means explain why it was unique.

The region of Srijem was repeatedly crossed by the armies of the first three Crusades (according to the traditional division), and the *Monasterium Bani* was situated next to the continental route leading from Western Europe to the Holy Land. It is significant, according to the pope's letter, that it was more by the decision of the Hungarian king than that of the archbishop of Kalocsa that the Benedictines in the monastery were replaced by the canons of Hebron (*de voluntate regia, bonae memoriae A[ndrea] praedecessore tuo suum in parte praebente consensum*). The king was Béla III (1173-1196), the first Hungarian ruler who participated actively in the Crusaders' undertakings. His wife was a daughter of the princess of Antiochia and the notorious Crusader Renaud of Châtillon.<sup>7</sup> However, if these circumstances help us to explain the presence of the canons of Hebron in Srijem, there are other elements which make this presence less understandable. Thus, to our best knowledge, Srijem was in Byzantine hands from the defeat of the Hungarians in 1167 up to Manuel Comnenos' death (1180) or shortly after that.<sup>8</sup> How then were the Hungarians able to interfere in ecclesiastical matters in Srijem in the second half of the 1170s? This contradiction probably reveals the ambiguous nature of the Byzantine domination of the region. An explanation might again be found in the person of King Béla III. As is well-known, he was educated at the imperial court in Constantinople and it was intended that he should succeed to the Byzantine throne and establish a Hungaro-Byzantine union. When emperor Manuel Comnenos changed his mind after a son was born to him from his second marriage in 1169, Béla had to return to Hungary, where he was crowned in 1173.<sup>9</sup> Although Srijem remained formally under Byzantine control, it is probable that Béla could exercise some power there before Manuel's death.

<sup>7</sup> J. R. Sweeney, "Hungary in the Crusades, 1169-1218," In *International History Review* 3 (1981) 469-477.

<sup>8</sup> T. Wasilewski, "Le thème byzantin de Sirmium-Serbie au XIe et XIIe siècle," In *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta* 8/2 [=Mélanges G. Ostrogorsky 2] (1966) 481-482.; J. Kalić, "Zemun u XII. veku." [Zemun in the Twelfth Century] In *Zbornik radova vizantološkog instituta* 13 (1971) 31-50.; F. Makk, *The Árpáds and the Comneni. Political Relations between Hungary and Byzantium in the Twelfth Century* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989) 99-101.

<sup>9</sup> Gy. Moravcsik, *Byzantium and the Magyars* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970) 90.; Makk, *The Árpáds and the Comneni*. 108-109.

A final comment is needed on the pope's decision to replace the canons of Hebron with the "canons who serve God according to the rule of St. Augustine." This obviously implies that the canons regular of Hebron had not yet adopted Augustine's Rule in shaping their communal life. Although the Rule was, as Clifford Lawrence put it, "one of the great discoveries of the late eleventh century," it was not widely accepted among the canons regular before the end of the twelfth century.<sup>10</sup> The canons of Hebron must have been a "pre-Augustinian" canonical community, which lived according to a version of the old Rule of Aachen (816), probably somewhat tightened in the spirit of the Gregorian reform.

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<sup>10</sup> C. H. Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism. Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*. Second ed. (London-New York: Longman, 1993) 165.; Ch. Dereine, "Chanoines." In *DHGE* vol. 12., col. 375.; M.-Th. Disdier, "Chanoines réguliers dits de l'ordre de Saint Augustin." In *DHGE* vol. 5., col. 601-602., and 608.