

# THE SECRET OF THE MAGLIĆ FORTRESS IN THE JORGOVAN VALLEY

*Admiration and curiosity among travelers through the Ibar gorge is caused by the town of Maglič, built on a high bare rocky mound above the Ibar meander, about 20 kilometers upstream from Kraljevo. The magnificent and wild slopes and peaks of the Stolovi mountain tower above it, which are often crowned with clouds, while about 200 meters below its towers in the morning, strands of fog "float" over the Ibar. By some miracle, the clouds and fog do not hide Maglič, so it is always clearly visible, staunch and strong as if it had been carved from the bones of the mountain.*

In the spring, this Nemanjic fortress evokes deep feelings among curious people who cross the suspension bridge over the foaming Ibar, climb the steep path to the fortress and see the incredible image of a broken lilac tree emerging from a barren monolithic black rock, on which the tallest and most powerful tower is built. Blooming bushes are also a kind of hiking trail to the top of Stolovi, whose real name is Kamarište or Ravni sto. This older name is probably preserved from pre-Christian times, as is the name Troglav for the mountain on the other side of the Ibar. At that time, old Slavic deities were feasting on these heights in the popular imagination, and later ancient legends were most often adapted to Saint Sava, as evidenced by a series of toponyms in the Ibar Gorge.



Maglič, who is still a mystery to science, also appears in that story. Namely, the castle whose remains we see today was built by Archbishop Danilo Second, a Serbian nobleman-monk, archbishop, warrior, statesman and writer, powerful and respected at the courts of Nemanjić in the 13th and 14th centuries. Carrying both a sword and a mantle, he was the commander of the defense of

Hilandar and the right hand of King Milutin. However, archeological research has shown that before Danilov there was an older fortification built on this harsh place. According to the remains of ceramics from that older city, similar to those found in the Ras fortress, some scientists assume that Maglič could have built Stefan Prvovenčani, as a protection of the heart of the Serbian state from the penetration of the Huns and Bulgarians from the Pomeranian plain.

Conquering the fortress by assault or siege devices was impossible from the steep slopes under which the Ibar flows and from the deep gorge of the Maglašnica river. To prevent a quick incursion from the only side, which offered an opportunity for such an attack, from the top of Mali sto above Maglič, the rock on which the castle was built was cut by a moat, with smooth edges as if they were made by a single blow of a giant blade. Anyone who steps into that 20-meter-wide and up to ten-meter-deep hole is taken aback by the magnitude of the undertaking, which would be difficult even with today's technology.

The reason for such an effort was probably the fact that Maglič guarded the now-forgotten pedestrian and caravan road, which connected Nemanja's white Studenica, the mother of all Serbian monasteries, with the purple Žiča, which Prvovenčani erected as the seat of an independent national archbishopric. In the event of an attack on it, along that path, which is still used by mountaineers, monks and people, they reached the safe and impregnable city in about three hours' walk.

He was also the guardian of the ancient road that, since prehistoric times, led through the Ibar valley, between ore-rich mountains and connected the Adriatic ports with Pomoravlje and Podunavlje. Such a strategic military role of Maglič explains its eight towers, high thick walls and two deep water cisterns dug into living stone, which enabled the city to withstand a long siege. However, archaeologists are puzzled by the remains of the great palace, the center of the court life of the medieval city, the spacious church dedicated to Saint George and residential buildings for living. At that time, such buildings were suitable for a ruler's castle in the heart of the country, and not for a fortress isolated among the harsh mountain slopes.



## **WILD HORSES, YET SO TAME**

On the flat top of Kamarište, a herd of semi-wild horses welcomes the travelers. They are used to visitors and approach without fear, expecting sugar and apples, which the mountaineers have accustomed them to. The beautiful, strong animals remind us of another legend of this region, that Miloš Obilić was looking for a knight on which he would ride to Kosovo in Stolovi, famous for its steeds. The herdsman Petar, seeing

what kind of hero he was, gave him the legendary tall Ždralin, and his distant descendants run freely around the mountain today. And that herd of horses reinforces the impression that is inevitable from the moment you start climbing the ridges of the mountains above the Ibar - that you are walking through two worlds at the same time, the past and the present.

Scholars find the answer in the writings of Daniel the Second's student and biographer: "In the city of Maglič, the works of his labors were also known there. Because there he built beautiful palaces and other cells, for the residence of those who are there. And there, in the church of St. George, in that city, establish the divine law that the unchangeable is always carried out in it, abundantly placing divine books and all other ecclesiastical needs in it. For such his many exploits and contributions to the homes of God, may the Lord grant him eternal bliss..."

Danilo the Second was like Saint Sava, active in political life as well, acting as a conciliator, first of King Dragutin and King Milutin, then Milutin and Stefan Dečanski.



A nobleman and a warrior, he was Milutin's most trusted associate, and as an educator he left the most important medieval book to the Serbian people. There are few people who left a deep mark on their age like Danilo - says historian Prof. Dr. Vlada Stanković. - As a statesman, he practically had a decisive influence on the appointment of all kings after

Milutin. He left us "The Lives of Serbian Kings and Archbishops", which he wrote with his students, as the most important biographical work on the secular and spiritual Serbian rulers of the Middle Ages. He was also a great builder, who led the work on the royal endowments of Banjka and Visoki Dečani, and he himself built the narthex and the church of Our Lady of the Guide in the Patriarchate of Pec. Despite everything, Danilo the Second is still a mystery to his own people.

It is assumed that Danilo wrote the book in his Maglič, but this does not give an answer as to who founded the city. According to one theory, that venture was carried out by Uros the Great, known as Hrapavi, under whom Serbia became a mining superpower, when numerous mines of iron, copper and silver were opened in the mountains around the fortress. A fortress like Maglič was necessary to guard this ore-bearing area with the nearby town of Bogut, Brvenik and several other smaller fortifications.

## MYSTERIOUS MONK DEFENDED BY HILANDAR

The builder and owner of the magnificent Maglič with the church of St. George, the palace and the copying center is Archbishop Danilo Second. Neither his worldly name nor his origins are known, but biographers state that he was very similar to Saint Sava, so just as Prince Rastko was Nemanja's favorite, so too was the nobleman Danilo, the future archbishop, close to the heart of King Milutin, from whose court he fled to the Holy Mountain and became a monk. However, he was not a hermit for long, he immediately took command of the defense of Hilandar, which for the next three years he successfully defended against the sieges of the Catalan Company, the best and cruelest mercenary army in the 13th century. The significance of that battle and victory is enormous, because the Holy Mountain was then the religious, political, diplomatic and intelligence center of the entire Orthodox world, located on neutral territory in the Roman Empire. For the Orthodox, Athos is what the Vatican is for the Catholics, historians say.

Folk legend also connects Uros the Great with the fortress below which the Lilac Valley begins. THE Serbian king, according to tradition, planted them along the cliffs of the Ibarska Gorge to make his bride Jelena of Anjou happy. Botanists say that an autochthonous species of this bushy plant with rich flowers grows in the Lilac Valley, and for mountaineers it is a kind of signpost to the top of the tables. Namely, when you start climbing the steep Gradski slope above Maglič towards Mali stolo, you come to seemingly impassable rocky cascades that look like an impregnable rampart that isolates the fortress. Persistent athletes use their hands and feet to cross them, but those who look for lilacs more carefully will see that they emerge along the edge of the rocks and reveal a barely noticeable path on the steep side of the Maglašnica hill, below which the white river Maglašnica bubbles through a bed of black rocks.



From time to time, this path, which is hidden by tough evergreen trees and bushes through which the purple petals of lilac shyly push their way, breaks out into extensions that rise above the abyss like a terrace and on which traces of ancient stonework and road works can be seen. Curiosity then irresistibly pulls you further, all the way to the pointed peak of Mali sto, through a forest on the trees of which there are hiking markings placed by members of the Gvozdac club in Kraljeva.

When you reach the top, it becomes clear that it is the same ancient path from the Nemanjić era, which flows into the Polish road that descends to Kraljevo and Žiča on

one side, and leads to the magnificent Stolov peak on the other. Every spring, a large number of nature lovers climb that, easier path to the top of Stolovi, because then the mountain turns white again, but not from snow, but from daffodils. The second, steeper and harsher path to the top of the "stone mountain" leads along the ridge opposite Maglič, which emerges from the Maglašnica gorge and continues to wind along the edge of the Ibarska gorge.

Like signposts, this path is also marked by lilac bushes, which persistently follow it. Bare rocky elevations, similar to observation towers, occasionally rise along it. They continue all the way to the ridge of Usovica, which leads to the top of Kamarište at 1,375 meters above sea level and offers a magnificent view of the Kraljevo valley, where Moravian Serbia begins, and the mountains of Stari Ras.



One of the theories is that the king of Serbia, Uroš I, planted the lilacs to show his love for the Catholic Queen Jelena of Anjou, as well as to make this French noblewoman feel at home. In the first half of the 13th century, the medieval fortress Maglič was built in the Lilac Valley.

There is another legend about the origin of lilacs, according to which they were planted by the son of King Uroš and Queen Jelena. King Milutin had already had a couple of marriages behind him and he wanted to make his third wife happy. Since it was the minor daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronikos, Simonides, Milutin did not want her to grow up unhappy, so he decorated the entire valley with a sea of lilacs.

## **JERINA'S TOWN**

There is a legend that Maglič was built by Irina, the wife of the despot Đurađ Branković, who was hated and therefore called the cursed Jerina. The building is still popularly called Jerina's town. Experts, however, reject that legend, because it would mean that it was built at the beginning of the 15th century. By the way, the people gave the name Jerina's town to a large number of old collapsed towns whose origin is unknown, connecting it with the legend of Cursed Jerina and her building of Smederevo, which is deeply rooted in tradition as a symbol of the kuluk. Since ancient times, people have been passing on the legend of Cursed Jerina, the wife of the despot Đurađ Branković. It is said that the city of Maglič was built by Jerina, and that the people hated it and called it this not very flattering name. The fortress is still popularly called Jerina's town.

Even now, this fortress hides many secrets. Historians still cannot determine exactly who enriched the Ibar Valley with the white and blue lilacs that bloom every spring. In 1979, Maglič was declared a cultural monument of exceptional importance. Although today a visit to Maglič and the center of Nemanjuća can be described as a spiritual journey through Serbia, a little adventurous spirit is not out of place.