



May 23, Anno Domini 6942 (1435)

Monastery of the Annunciation
“In war, the first casualty is truth”, a Greek philosopher once said a thousand years ago. Alas! So much truth in his words and truth carries its weight for the vanquishers as well as for the vanquished. But both change it to suit their purpose. The vanquishers embellish it adding parts that did not happen, while the vanquished cut it to lessen their defeat and blame it on someone else.

That is why I, humble before God, monk Gabriel, at the end of my life’s journey have decided to preserve the truth as it is, for our posterity, so that they may know what preceded the bloody events of June 15 Anno Domini 6897. As now, evil tongues and curs are vouching that Ottoman Turks conquered Serbia because prince Lazarus lost the battle and that even his son-in-law Vuk Brankovich betrayed him. Neither is true, but it is in human nature to easily forget and still easier to blame other for your troubles.

That is why I, humble before God, monk Gabriel, in my 89th year of life agreed to gather all my writings into three books. It is only due to the wisdom and farsightedness of the fortune-teller Dragushla and upon her persuasion, that I wrote all the stories and events that preceded the battle of Kosovo, as they happened and whose witness and participant I was. As God has given me the

wondrous gift of drawing, with which during my life I decorated numerous ecclesiastic books, I have used it to embellish my writings as well.

And as in my old age, my hands do not serve me well any more, I had to bring young monk Jacob to write in my stead. I will talk into his quill, as I can not repeat myself and my memory is slowly deserting me. I am grateful to abbot of Gornyak who sent you to me. So Jacob, write everything, skip nothing and do not shorten.

Write Jacob, because I have to explain some events and individuals of whom I could write no more, because of lack of scrolls and time. This now comes as an introduction into my writings of 46 years ago, when I could not foretell the importance of the events that were to happen, of humans and creatures on that road that led to bloodshed and heroism of such magnitude which Serbian land had never seen before.

As you know, I do not sleep at night and last evening I took a goose quill into my hand trying to compose the foreword for these books, but my fingers could not hold the light quill, and it kept sliding as if it was playing with them and making fun of me. I throw it away angrily, desperate that I cannot hold any longer something so light. But something in me will not give me peace, so I took a roll from under my straw mattress in which I keep my sling and short sword. I took the sword into my hand, and it fitted me perfectly and the fingers felt as if the strength is returning to them. I squeezed the hilt and the fingers did not rebel, nor did the muscle tire. I brandished it once, twice and the sharp blade cuts through the air with a whiz, and the blood rushed to my head, and again I felt the power and will as I wished to jump on my horse again and cut down a few more Ghouls. Alas! Wishes and old age do not go together, and soon I realized that I would not be able to mount a horse, let alone cut a Ghoul. To this day I do not understand if there is any similarity between my gift of drawing books and my art of

handling weapons. Such different skills done by the same hand. While it creates beauty with a quill, so it defiles it with a weapon. But how I loved holding the hilt of my sword in my hand!

But let us return to our business, Jacob, as we have to explain to people who I am and how come I've found myself shoulder to shoulder with many known and unknown heroes, whose names and deeds I want to save from oblivion and preserve their honor pure. How is it that a priest has come to use weapons, when he should be fighting with the honorable cross and God's word. And how will people believe that I have ridden with Prince Lazarus, King Marko, Vuk Brankovich, Milosh Obilich and not think that I am telling falsehoods when I say that I have talked to Elves, gods and daemons and that I have had duels with Ghouls and Todoraks? But fate wanted my life to take another course, different to that of most people and find the truth on that path about the world and history. Few people know this truth and while some are proud to know it, others hide it, because the truth does not suit everybody, as it is always painful to some.

I, humble before God, Monk Gabriel, was born, they say, at Easter Anno Domini 6854 when our great King Stefan Dushan Nemanich was crowned in Skopje. Of unknown mother and father, I was adopted by the graciousness of the brothers in Banyska, who gave me the name of Gabriel. I was named thus, because the blind old man Joseph who used to beg in front of the church, supposedly saw an angel come down from heaven and drop me in front of the church, which of course was nonsense. Nevertheless, the brothers hurriedly gave me the name Gabriel, after the same named heavenly angel. Happily considering it a good omen, the brothers believed that when I grew up I would make their monastery proud. But, they were wrong. I did not prosper in the Church, I studied writing and reading like everybody else, and I particularly loved Greek and Roman philosophers and historians. I became a

monk, which I am to this day, but in spite of my modesty I must say that few people can commend themselves as God's Warriors. Although, the crusaders passed this way on their route to the Holy Land and the war to liberate Christ's grave, many of them took arms less for God and more for their own sakes. They were not true God's Warriors. Even fewer priests could commend themselves as God's Warriors who wore arms and were knights of the Order of the Dragon, whose duty was the defense of the holy cross from the creatures.

And I, humble before God, Monk Gabriel, was both a priest and a knight of the Order of the Dragon. On my waist I carried the sling Viper, Vritra in Elfish, forked as a serpent's tongue and a short sword Wolfclaw, Vilty in Elfish, forged in the times before the great Flood when humans and creatures waged endless wars.

There is so much to say and write, but so little time. Last night god Svetovid came into my dream and told me that he is coming for my soul on St. Vid's day, as I promised him. How do you speak of something that lasts since time began, and which has been hidden by men for thousand years? It is hard to tell a story a thousand years old, when even a thousand sheets of paper would not be enough, let alone describe it in a thousand words. Shall I start from the beginning? No, because there would be no end. That is why it is better for me to start from the very end, from June 15th 6896, exactly one year before the battle at Gazimestan. You say this is a coincidence, Jacob? No it is not, I have stopped believing in coincidences long ago. Everything happens for a reason. All coincidences are signs besides the road, as the man gets wiser, the more he recognizes them and the easier his journey through life is. There is never enough wisdom and man acquires it drop by drop and always after difficult temptations. That is why Prince Lazarus, King Marko and I met on that June 15th to exchange our thoughts and to ponder on the right course of action. Events were unraveling fast, like a bobbin of wool

which falls out of your hand and unwinds too quickly for you to stop it. That is how the bobbin of fate unrolled and found us three Dragon Knights in Devil's hamlet, where we came for council from the fortune-teller Dragushla...