

SERBIA

Stari Ras and Sopoćani

Brief description

On the outskirts of Stari Ras, the first capital of Serbia, there is an impressive group of medieval monuments consisting of fortresses, churches and monasteries. The monastery at Sopoćani is a reminder of the contacts between Western civilization and the Byzantine world.

1. Introduction

Year(s) of Inscription

1979

Agency responsible for site management

- Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia
Radoslava Grujica 11
11118 Belgrade, Serbia

2. Statement of Significance

Inscription Criteria

C (i), (iii)

Justification provided by the State Party

Stari Ras and Sopoćani merit inclusion to the World Heritage List for the following reasons:

According to available historical sources and material evidence of civilization in this area, it was here that the earliest Serbian state was founded and its independence asserted, after several centuries of war against Byzantium and Bulgaria.

As the seat of Serbian monarchs from the 10th to the 13th centuries, the domain of Stari Ras was the focal point for all the decisive events underlying the birth, development and consolidation of the independent state of Ras. The process of political and national consolidation included the founding of the eparchy of Ras, the seat of the earliest orthodox ecclesiastical body. The development of trade, together with other activities, led to the setting up of the first workshops for minting Serbian coins and, in the neighbouring area, gave a new lease on life to the mining of ores, traces of such activity having survived up to the present day.

The monuments here provide authentic evidence of the earliest original forms of artistic expression in the Serbian culture and represent the finest achievements in artistic and architectural creation

during the period from the 10th to the 14th centuries. Thus, the foundations were laid for the intensive development of trade, arts and crafts and the creation of works that were both noble and precious.

Artistic and architectural creation, planned and executed under the patronage of Serbian monarchs, achieved, over an uninterrupted period of two hundred years, a high degree of originality, while reflecting the main influences of Byzantine art, yet striving constantly for their own mode of expression.

Within the loose pattern of this group of varied monuments, it is those with an historical, cultural or artistic character which command the greatest interest. The fortress of Gradina and the lower town of Trgovište, for example, are of exceptional historical significance.

Having been, as its ruins testify, the earliest military construction in Ras during the medieval period and the seat of Serbian monarchs, Gradina is of considerable significance in the study of the early history of the Serbian state.

St. Peter's church is the oldest Christian building preserved in the Balkans. With its foundations dating back to the 6th century, this church is of exceptional interest for the study of the Middle Ages in this part of the Balkans. The wall paintings that have been preserved, whose execution evolved in time with the various changes in the architecture of the monument, illustrate the developments which took place in pictorial art between the 10th and 14th centuries. This church constitutes an invaluable part of the history of the Serbian people as it was linked with events that were decisive for the future of the Serbs.

The Church of St. George in the monastery at Djurdjevi Stupovi, with its original architectural style and structure, is a religious edifice that is quite unique and represents an exceptionally interesting example of Romanesque and Byzantine architecture, not only in Yugoslavia, but in a wider context. The church is one of the earliest churches built in monumental style in Serbia and reflects an artistic influence of considerable significance in the subsequent development of specifically Serbian medieval architecture. The architectural characteristics of this church were to serve as a basis for the Ras school of art. The frescoes dating back to the 12th century are representative of the Byzantine school of Komnenos and the late 13th-century painting is among the finest in Serbia during that period.

The Sopoćani monastery with its 13th-century mural paintings is the most remarkable of all the buildings from an artistic standpoint. The paintings in the monastery church are among the finest in Byzantine and Serbian art of the period. Executed at the time of the Latin Empire of the East, during a difficult period for Byzantine history and art, the Sopoćani frescoes are evidence of the vitality of the most creative current in Byzantine art which exerted a profound influence on the Balkans, where a new focal point of art and culture was evolving, ready not only to absorb the qualities of Byzantine art but also to incorporate them into its own subsequent individual development. The Sopoćani paintings are works of a most refined quality and purity of style in the Byzantine art of the period. The talented artists of the Byzantine school at Sopoćani, at the beginning of the second half of the 13th century, produced a work which through the simple, serene and perfect harmony of its features, integrated into the established concepts of monumental art, has never been equalled in the realm of medieval art in Eastern Europe.

It is of immeasurable significance in the artistic heritage of Serbian or Yugoslav medieval art as a whole. Without this work, the history of the entire development of Byzantine and European art in the 13th century would be incomplete and Yugoslav art during this period would be deprived of a masterpiece.

The historical, geographical and cultural features of Stari Ras as a whole provide the earliest significant evidence of the birth and development of Serbian writings, culture and civilization. It was here that the first epigraphical works were produced, classified among the oldest Serbian documents of this kind. Original literary works and illuminated ecclesiastical manuscripts from the 12th and 13th centuries have also been discovered here. The ancient Ras region, where the earliest foundations were laid for national development, was of exceptional historical significance for the subsequent political, cultural and artistic unity of the Serbian nation. The monuments of considerable artistic and stylistic value, within this small area, with their individual characteristics giving them significance, even if on a smaller scale, and revealing the passage of time with its various historical developments, make up a specific historical, geographical, cultural and artistic entity which is unique.

This particular group of monuments realistically portrays the earliest centre of civilization in the ancient Serbian state and contributes ample evidence of the birth and development of artistic and cultural activity in medieval Serbia, which,

through its achievements, was to attain the highest standards in the art and culture of the Byzantine empire and the regions of central Europe.

The combination and cross-fertilization of historical, cultural, artistic and natural values and qualities give this group of monuments its particular identity which contributed and continued to contribute to Serbian medieval history. Through absorbing various currents and influences, it has fostered the birth of a specific culture and art whose influence was considerable on the later development not only of Serbian art, but also on the dissemination of concepts of art in the Balkans and throughout this part of Europe. The artistic and architectural features of the cultural monuments of this region became the basis and inspiration for major new creative concepts which had a distinct influence on later artistic works.

The group of monuments at Stari Ras and Sopoćani is of exceptional interest on account of its significance in so many different spheres and its unity of composition; it provides a deeper and wider grasp of the historical, sociological, artistic and cultural aspects of the development of the Serbian nation and its contribution to the culture of Slavonic and other nations during the Middle Ages.

As provided in ICOMOS evaluation

The historical interest of Stari Ras and the Monastery of Sopoćani is not questionable in the world sphere. It seems necessary to better emphasize those edifices and elements in question and their merits.

Committee Decision

The Committee made no statement.

- Statement of Significance does not adequately define the outstanding universal value of the site
- Additional change proposed by State Party: changes to the statement of significance and the official description to reflect the outstanding universal value are requested

Boundaries and Buffer Zone

- Status of boundaries of the site: adequate
- Buffer zone: adequate

Status of Authenticity/Integrity

- World Heritage site values have been maintained

3. Protection

Legislative and Administrative Arrangements

- No special zoning or legislation exists for the site at this time
- The ownership of the lots in the immediate surroundings of the cultural properties frequently changes. Beside that, one of the monuments in the World Heritage site has re-established its original function, so it is not protected as an archaeological site anymore, but it has gained another, traditional form of protection
- The protection arrangements are considered not sufficiently effective

Actions taken/proposed:

- Raising public awareness (to undertaken by Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education over a 2 year period)
- Finalising the General Urban Plan for the city of Novi Pazar and the Spatial Plan of the municipality of Novi Pazar (to be undertaken by the Republic Agency for Spatial Planning over a 2 year period)

4. Management

Use of site/property

- Religious use, visitor attraction (free entrance)

Management /Administrative Body

- Steering group: legally constituted in 1984, however the Board for Stari Ras and Sopocani, founded in 1984, adopted in 1990 a new, 5-year programme (1991-1995) but its realisation was interrupted by the economic crisis and the war in former Yugoslavia. The plan of re-establishing a new Board exists, but in the meantime there is a working group for the monuments of the region, composed of experts with different specialties, from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments
- Site manager on full-time basis: with responsibilities added on to an existing job
- Levels of public authority who are primarily involved with the management of the site: regional
- The current management system is not sufficiently effective

Actions proposed:

- The setting up of a new steering group is planned because more intense cooperation with the local community is needed in order to

improve the management systems. This is foreseen as a six month process

5. Management Plan

- No management plan is being implemented but implementation is planned for 2007
- Responsibility for over-seeing the implementation of the management plan and monitoring its effectiveness: Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia

6. Financial Resources

Financial situation

- Budget sources: no core funding, but government funding comes through the Ministry of Culture. There are also some proceeds from the Serbian Orthodox Church
- Insufficient

7. Staffing Levels

- Number of staff: none

Rate of access to adequate professional staff across the following disciplines:

- Good: conservation
- Average: interpretation
- Bad: promotion, management, education, visitor management

8. Sources of Expertise and Training in Conservation and Management Techniques

- Conservators are educated off-site, in institutes for the protection of cultural monuments and museums
- Management techniques are only now being introduced in educational programmes, through seminars and workshops

9. Visitor Management

- Visitor statistics: not available
- Visitor facilities: museum shop, parking, washroom facilities, some restaurants and cafés nearby
- Visitor needs: more parking facilities, souvenir shops, more interpretive panels

10. Scientific Studies

- Studies relating to the value of the site; archaeological surveys

- The results of studies will be incorporated into the future management plan

11. Education, Information and Awareness Building

- An inadequate number of signs referring to World Heritage site
- World Heritage Convention Emblem used on some publications
- Adequate awareness of World Heritage among visitors only
- Need for raising awareness: on the first place, educational programmes for the local community are necessary, but the raising of public awareness in general is needed as well. The private sector is unaware of the benefits that the WH site offers
- Events: occasional exhibitions
- There is no website for the Stari Ras and Sopoćani as a WH site. The monks from the monasteries of Djurdjevi Stupovi and Sopoćani manage their websites (www.djurdjevistupovi.org.yu and www.sopocani.org.yu)
- Local participation: involved through their representatives in the Board for Stari Ras and Sopoćani which existed from 1984 until 1995

12. Factors affecting the Property (State of Conservation)

Reactive monitoring reports

- N/A

Conservation interventions

- Major conservation interventions were performed in the monastery of Sopoćani (protective construction over the exonarthex in order to preserve the frescoes, conservation of the remains of the monastery buildings archaeologically excavated in the churchyard), on the fortress of Ras and the town of Trgovište (archaeological excavation and conservation of the ruins), in St. Peter's church (archaeological excavation of the churchyard and reconstruction of the main gate), and in the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi (conservation of the remains, reconstruction of some of the monastery buildings necessary for the rehabilitation of the monastic life)
- The greatest threat to the Sopoćani Monastery, the widening of the road that passes by the monastery, is eliminated for the time being
- Present state of conservation: patchy

Threats and Risks to site

- Development pressures, environmental pressures; number of inhabitants
- The major problem is the development of the city of Novi Pazar, which endangers the natural surroundings of the properties and which has negative impact on environment (higher pollution etc.)
- The rehabilitation of the original function in the monastery of Djurdjevi Stupovi, although it has already shown the advantages regarding its sustainable use, also presents a threat for the preservation of the site's authenticity because the property has to be re-adapted to its original function reactivated after several centuries
- Emergency measures planned: More intense participation of the conservators in preparing and realisation of the spatial plans as well as close cooperation with local authorities and the owner of the properties in defining future development programmes

13. Monitoring

- No formal monitoring programme
- The key indicators for monitoring the site have been recognised but a formal monitoring programme does not exist
- The Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia plans to develop the systematic monitoring programme

14. Conclusions and Recommended Actions

- Main benefits of WH status: conservation
- Strengths of management: many conservation activities have been performed at the site, much more than at other cultural properties which do not have WH status
- Weaknesses of management: the traditional management is present at the two properties that are under the supervision of orthodox monastic communities. In the other two properties there is very little management at all, as well as regarding the whole site in general

Future actions:

- In order to obtain the adequate management of the site, it is necessary to create a management plan. This will be the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and it will take place over a period of two years