



**REPUBLIQUE DE SERBIE**  
*Délégation permanente  
auprès de l'UNESCO*

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**  
*Permanent Delegation to  
UNESCO*

Paris, 31 January 2019

Ref. 92-2/2019

Dear Ms. Rössler,

I have the honor to transmit, enclosed herewith, the Report by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia on the State of Conservation for Serbian cultural heritage "Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)", inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in Danger.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Danijela Čubrilo  
*Čubrilo Danijela*  
Chargée d'Affaires *a.i.*

Ms. Mechtild Rössler  
Director  
World Heritage Centre  
UNESCO  
Paris

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**



**INSTITUTE FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS**

**REPORT**  
**ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF**  
**MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN KOSOVO (SERBIA)**  
**INSCRIBED ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST IN DANGER**

**MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN KOSOVO, Serbia (C 724)**

**The Dečani Monastery**

**The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery**

**The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša**

**The Gračanica Monastery**

Belgrade, January 2019.

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## INTRODUCTION

The property “**Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)**“ (C724) was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in 2004.

In 2006, at 30<sup>th</sup> session of The World Heritage Committee decided that the site of the Dečani Monastery will be extended by adding three groups of churches, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, Gračanica Monastery and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviša (*Decision 30 COM 8B.53*).

The property “Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)”, mainly dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, was at same session placed on the **List of World Heritage in Danger** in 2006 due to difficulties in its management and conservation stemming from the region's political instability (*Decision 30 COM 8B.54*). The Committee requested that the State Party (Serbia) work with UNESCO programmes, with the United Nations Mission to Kosovo (UNMIK) and with the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština in caring for the site.

According to the *Decision 30 COM 8B.54* (2006) the following threats to the Site were detected:

- Lack of legal status of the property;
- Lack of legislative protection of buffer zones;
- Lack of implementation of the Management Plan and of active management;
- Difficulties to monitor the property due to political instability, post-conflict situation (visits under the Kosovo Stabilization Force / United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (KFOR / UNMIK) escort and lack of guards and security);
- Unsatisfactory state of conservation and maintenance of the property.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

The Dečani Monastery, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, Gračanica Monastery and the Church of the Virgin of Ljeviša reflect the high points of the Byzantine-Romanesque and Serbian medieval ecclesiastical culture, with its distinct style of wall painting, which developed in the wider region of the Balkans between the 13th and 17th centuries.

The Dečani Monastery was built in the mid-14th century for the Serbian king Stefan Dečanski and is also his mausoleum. The church represents the last important phase of Byzantine-Romanesque architecture in the Balkan region. Built in marble, it is the largest of all medieval Balkan churches, and is exceptionally rich in well preserved Byzantine painting and Romanesque sculpture.

The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery is a group of four domed churches featuring series of wall paintings. All the churches display an extensive series of wall paintings but the 13th-century frescoes of the Church of Holy Apostles are painted in a unique, monumental style.

Early 14th-century frescoes in the church of the Holy Virgin of Ljevisa represent the appearance of the new so-called Palaiologian Renaissance style, combining the influences of the eastern Orthodox Byzantine and the Western Romanesque traditions. The style played a decisive role in subsequent Balkan art.

Gračanica Monastery was one of the last monumental endowments of Serbian King Milutin (1282-1321). The main church of Theotokos with the plan, spatial arrangement, decorative wall treatment and wall paintings together have made it an emblematic structure for Balkan architecture of the 14th century reflecting the spirit of the Byzantine tradition but slight modified by western influence.

## **The Dečani Monastery**

In the Dečani Monastery no new conservation works were carried out in 2018. During the year, constant monitoring was conducted for buildings in the monastery, wall painting in the main church and mobile church mobiliary, as well as other movable artistic material which is kept in the monastery.

In addition to constant threats and limited freedom of movement of the monastery fraternity, the Dečani Monastery was additionally endangered by the beginning of the construction of the main road Dečani-Plav (Montenegro) in the protected (buffer) zone of the monastery. Namely, on May 25<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština appointed the panel and opened the construction site in the monastery-protected zone (Fig. 1, 2), and heavy construction machinery started earthworks at a distance of less than 400 meters from the monastery's port (Figure 2). The route of the started road was to pass near by the monastery itself. The road through protected area of the Dečani Monastery, violated the decision of the mixed Commission for Protected Zones (consisting of representatives of the EU Office in Priština, the OSCE Mission, the Ministers of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština responsible for Culture and Information and the Bishop of Raška-Prizren and Kosovo-Metohija of Serbian Orthodox Church), for whose recommendation the construction of the bypass road around the monastery protected zone was started. It is not clear why, in the meantime, the construction of the bypass was abandoned, even though works were officially opened on 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština, in the presence of the mayors of Dečani and Plav.

On the occasion of the beginning of the construction of the road through the protected monastery zone, on June 6<sup>th</sup> 2018, the Minister of Culture and Information in the Government of the Republic of Serbia, Vladan Vukosavljević, sent a letter to the Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay, warning that a considerable damage that would be done to the cultural and natural property, if the works were to continue. On July 20<sup>th</sup> 2018, Assistant Director General of UNESCO E. Otone Ramirez responded on behalf of the UNESCO Director-General, conveying the assurances that Unesco noticed our concern and that the World Heritage Center carefully monitored the situation in coordination with the Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Venice and in cooperation with UNMIK, while ICOMOS was provided with the received information for its technical review.

After the reaction of international institutions and representatives in Kosovo and Metohija, the monastery fraternity, the Serbian Orthodox Church and state authorities and institutions of the Republic of Serbia, as well as 13 non-governmental organizations from the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, the works were suspended, but the terrain was not restored to its original state. Particularly worrying is the fact that the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština have not yet disclosed whether they had given up on the construction of the main road through the protected buffer zone of the Decani Monastery.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by KFOR forces on a daily basis.





1. Table of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština responsible for the infrastructure that marks the works in the buffer zone of Dečani Monastery



2. Earthworks on road construction through a buffer zone in the immediate vicinity of the Dečani Monastery



## The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery

In the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, no new conservation works were carried out in 2018. Constant monitoring was conducted for the state of wall painting, monastery objects and movable artistic material which is kept in the monastery. Monitoring will continue in the future. Particular attention was paid to moisture monitoring in one part of the roof structure above the church of Saint Apostles, which was registered in 2017. More intensive observation measures were continued to allow appropriate conservation or restoration measures to be taken at the lead roof in the future. In the Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, projects have been prepared to replace the roof cover of the Church of the Holy Apostles and to remove the atmospheric waters around the church. Please note that moisture has not caused damages to wall painting on the vault's surfaces of the church.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on daily basis.



3. Southeastern look of the churches of the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery



## The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren

No new conservation works were carried out in the church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren in 2018. According to a survey from July 2017, the experts of Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments started the production of project documentation for the necessary conservation interventions in the future, since the conditions in the church are not satisfactory, that there is capillary moisture in the walls that threatens wall painting, as well as that the atmospheric water drainage system does not function in full scope. Also, it is necessary to eliminate the rest visible damage of wall paintings in the church, which resulted from the systematic destruction of Serbian cultural properties that lasted for days throughout the Province of Kosovo and Metohija in March 2004, when the church was burned.

The church is not open to visitors on a daily basis, because the freedom of movement of the non-Albanian population is still very limited and unsafe. For this reason, there is neither regular worship nor gathering during church festivities and Sunday services.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on daily basis.



4. Southern look of the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren,

## The Gračanica Monastery

In the Gračanica Monastery, conservation works on wall painting were performed in 2018, as a continuation of the works that began in 2015. The conservation works were carried out in the period from June to October in the altar area and six columns in the nave of the temple, on a total surface of about 160 square meters. The processed parts of an extremely valuable 14<sup>th</sup>-century painting were endangered by moisture and intense deposition of soot and atmospheric dust over the past decades. Such deposits changed the basic values of painting. Based on the performed physical-chemical research, salt characterization and determination of the properties of dark sediments, the methodology of their removal and further conservation of the paintings has been determined. These extremely exposed units - since they are very close to observers - are now cleaned, preserved and presented appropriately. The bright colors, as well as the clearly legible details of the iconographic content, contribute both to the ceremonial appearance of the space and to the dignity of the preserved fresco ensemble. All performed works and the use of adequate material, in the appropriate inner church environment, should ensure the longevity of the conserved areas of wall painting. (Fig. 5, 6).

The works were performed by the Serbian Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and financed by the Ministry of Justice in the Government the Republic of Serbia and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on daily basis.



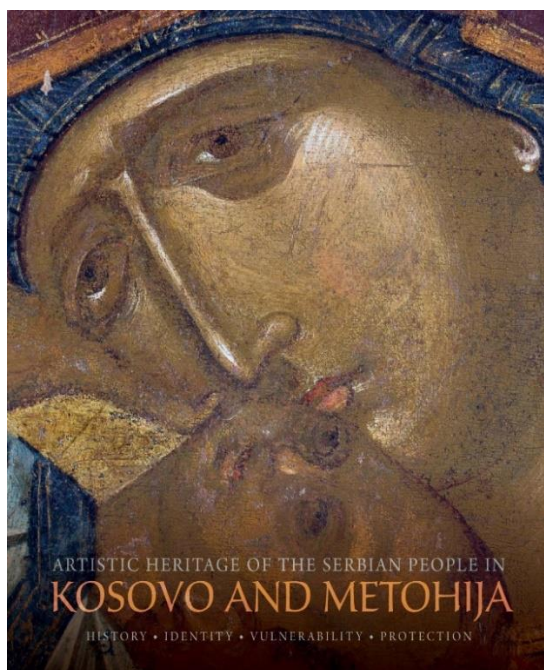




5-6. Oltar apse, before and after conservation work

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Except for the attempt to build a road through the protected area (buffer zone) of the Dečani Monastery, there is no new damage to the properties and their integrity in the reporting period has been maintained. However, the general state of the Serbian churches and monasteries in the province of Kosovo and Metohija is far from good. Although they belong to monuments of great importance for the Serbian people, because they are strongly associated with its identity and history, these holy places are inaccessible to the great majority of believers as there is still no secured freedom of movement for the Serbs and other minority populations. In such an atmosphere, the local authorities impose numerous administrative and technical barriers for priestly and monastic communities (such as restrictions on water and electricity, lack of maintenance of infrastructure facilities, etc.), which makes their survival on these properties - living testimonies of the world's spiritual heritage – rather difficult. There is also a noticeable lack of effort of local authorities concerning heritage education and awareness raising about the importance and values of these properties, which has a negative impact on the attitude of the local non-Serb population, especially younger generations, towards these monuments and their users. Unfortunately, this is also supported by the public presentations of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština (as already mentioned in the previous report), which almost systematically conceal and counterfeit the identity of Serbian art monuments in Kosovo and Metohija. For this reason, we draw the attention to the newest edition of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts – *Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija (History, Identity, Vulnerability, Protection)*, which consists of collection of scientific works published in 2018. Their authors are eminent experts in the fields of history, art history, archeology, ethnology and other humanistic sciences, who exposed the fate and duration of the artistic heritage of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija, from different aspects, from the 13th century to the present.



7. Cover page of publication *Artistic Heritage of the Serbian People in Kosovo and Metohija (History, Identity, Vulnerability, Protection)*.