

**REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**



**INSTITUTE FOR THE PROTECTION  
OF CULTURAL MONUMENTS**

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION  
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 2023.**

**REPORT ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF  
MEDIEVAL MONUMENTS IN KOSOVO (SERBIA) – ADDITIONAL  
INFORMATION**

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## **Introduction**

The property “Dečani Monastery” (C724) was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in 2004. In 2006, at the 30<sup>th</sup> session, the World Heritage Committee decided that the site of the Dečani Monastery would be extended by adding three sites, 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 the same session placed on the **List of World Heritage in Danger (Decision 30 COM 8B.54)** due to the threats to the site detected as follows:

- Lack of legal status of the property;
- Lack of legislative protection of buffer zones;
- Lack of implementation of the Management Plan and 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.

The Committee requested that the State Party (Serbia) works 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.

## **Description, Condition, and the Significance**

Four components of the property “Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)” reflect the high points of the Byzantine-Romanesque and Serbian medieval ecclesiastical architecture and art, with its distinct style of wall painting, developed in the wider region of the Balkans between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Dečani Monastery was built in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> 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 a series of wall paintings. All the churches display an extensive series of wall paintings, but the 13<sup>th</sup>-century frescoes of the Church of Holy Apostles are painted in a unique, monumental style.

Early 14<sup>th</sup>-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 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). Reflecting the spirit of the Byzantine tradition slightly modified by western influence, the main church of Theotokos with the plan, spatial arrangement, decorative wall treatment, and wall paintings together represent the highest artistic achievement of so-called the Palaiologian Renaissance style. That also made it an emblematic structure for Serbian Orthodox ecclesiastical architecture of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Systematic research, conservation, and restoration works have been carried out on all four components of the property since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The property *Medieval monuments in Kosovo* (Serbia) is administered by the Serbian Orthodox Church. The Republic of Serbia, through its institutions, the Ministry of Culture and the Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, in cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church, is implementing a management plan pertaining to research, conservation and other works aimed at protection of the outstanding universal value of the property, carried out by experts from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia pursuant to an adopted annual program.

On January 5, 2022, the new Law on Cultural Heritage („Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia“ No. 129/2021) entered into force. According to this Law cultural heritage of the Republic of Serbia inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, including the cultural heritage on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija (article 40) enjoys a special approach to preservation, protection, and care.

Plans and Programmes for the Management, Research, Protection, and Presentation of all components of the property, which are attached to the nomination dossier, are updated with the annual programme of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia, supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia.

The four components continued to face serious security issues during 2022, despite the fact that the components of the property are still secured by the KFOR and the local police (the protection was established in 1999). The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic created a

new challenge for the female and male clergy living there, enhancing the monuments' overall vulnerability.

In the reporting year, ethnically motivated incidents in Kosovo and Metohija have continued. Out of a total of 150 registered ethnically motivated incidents, five (5) relate directly or indirectly to Serbian medieval monuments that are inscribed on the UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger: on May 30, 2022, a marker with the location of Visoki Dečani monastery was again removed from the " Google Maps" service; On August 2, in the settlement of Kišnica, near Gračanica, where a bilingual monastery sign was placed, the name in Serbian was crossed out in black; On September 22, young men of Albanian nationality hung the flag of so-called Kosovo on a bus that was transporting Serbian pilgrims to Peć; On December 25, the authorities in Priština forbade Patriarch of Serbian Orthodox Church Porfirije to visit the Patriarchate of Peć on Christmas Eve; On December 26, Patriarch Porfirije, who was supposed to stay in the Patriarchate of Peć before Christmas, was returned from the Merdare administrative crossing, which caused condemnation and reactions from the international community.

From the beginning of 2023 until January 8, three ethnically motivated incidents were recorded. (Source: Office for Kosovo and Metohija of the Government of the Republic of Serbia <https://www.kim.gov.rs/incidenti-kim.php>)

In 2022, the Dečani Monastery is still on the list of the 7 most endangered cultural properties in Europe. Parts of the announcement of the Europa Nostra organization after the mission in Kosovo and Metohija in July 2022: The key issue discussed with various interlocutors was the [\*\*inclusion of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Serbian Orthodox Monastery of Visoki Dečani on the 2021 List of 7 Most Endangered sites in Europe\*\*](#) and the options to improve the situation. One year after the publication of this List, the main reasons for the inclusion of this World Heritage Site in Danger also on Europa Nostra's List of 7 Most Endangered have remained valid. Firstly, no final solution has yet been agreed upon by all parties concerning the consequences caused by the plans to increase traffic within and around the Special Protective Zone of the Dečani Monastery, nor regarding other announced interventions, such as the riverside project, that could negatively affect the natural environment of the Monastery which is to be considered as an integral part of its outstanding heritage value.

The seriousness of the situation is also demonstrated by the fact that in April 2021, the expert organization "Europa Nostra" (European Voice of Civil Society committed to Cultural

Heritage) included the Decani Monastery on the List of “7 Most Endangered Heritage Sites in Europe”.

## The Dečani Monastery



Photo 1: The Dečani Monastery. Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPCM)

The property of the monastery Dečani is exposed to systematic desecration and destruction, as well as illegal confiscation, despite the existing legal framework and Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council. The monastic community of Dečani Monastery is unable to enjoy the ownership over 24 hectares of monastery property due to a failure to honor even the ruling of the highest legal authority of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government on the territory of Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija of May 20, 2016, annulling the decision of the Special Chamber of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of June 15, 2015.

Since 2014, the Dečani Monastery component has been endangered by the plans of the Dečani Municipality to build a road Dečani-Plav (Montenegro). Its route is planned through the buffer zone of the Dečani Monastery and immediately next to the core protection zone. The works performed in 2020 were suspended only after the reaction of the international community. The terrain has still not been restored to its original state, which confirms that the planning of the road building is still not abandoned. (Photos 2, 3, and 4 ) Owing to the pressure from the

international community the construction of the main road in the protected zone of the Decani monastery, which could seriously endanger it, was ended.



Photos 2 and 3: State of the road Dečani – Plav through the Dečani monastery buffer zone, July 2022.  
Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPCM)



Photo 4: The spring at the foot of the monastery complex was turned into a public bath. Photo by IPCM



Photos 5 and 6: The access road to the monastery is fenced by the barricades set up by KFOR, July 2022.  
Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPCM)



The access road to the monastery is fenced by the barricades set up by KFOR (Photos 5 and 6). For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by KFOR on a daily basis. Due to constantly being under threat, KFOR forces are still deployed at four points in the vicinity of the monastery, including also regular KFOR patrols and helicopter surveillance.

In 2022, conservation and restoration works were carried out on the wall paintings on an area of 36 m<sup>2</sup> in the altar of Dečani church.

The works included the extraction of salt from the endangered wall paintings (Photos 7–11). The most intensive efflorescence is in the zone between 5 m and 9.5 m, from the floor of the church. Salt deposits are manifested as powdery or cobweb deposits, petrified parts, or whitish skim.



Photos 7 and 8: The organization of the work site, the north wall, and the apse of the proscomidia



Photo 9: The archbishops, V zone, the north wall of the proscomidia, the previous state



Photo 10: The archbishops, V zone, the north wall of the proscomidia, state after the works



Photo 11: The apsis and the east wall of the proscomidia, state after the works

## **The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery**

In the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, from August to October 2022, roof reparation, on the church of St. Apostle, was carried out (Photos 12 and 13). The lead cladding was damaged enabling humidity to enter through the cracks thus endangering the wall paintings in the church. The cladding was replaced with lead plates over the nave of the church and the associated bays on the south side towards the church of St. Mother of God, and a new horizontal gutter was made.

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



Photos 12 and 13: Roof repairs on the church of St. Apostle in the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery; Photos by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments

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

No conservation works were carried out in the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren in 2022. (Photos 14 and 15).

In the buffer zone of the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren, changes were observed in the immediate vicinity of the property. There is a busy road next to the church, and the allotments in the immediate vicinity are privately owned. The private building, whose construction was recorded in May 2021, was built up to the roof and the street facade is not finished (Photo 16).

Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia provided detailed additional information to the World Heritage Committee Advisory Body about the proposal of a new iconostasis in the church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviška, based on the preliminary ICOMOS technical review.

For the reason of its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on daily basis (the church is still surrounded by a barbed wire fence – Photos 14 and 15).



Photo 14: The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren; Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments



Photo 15: The Entrance in the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren, July 2022; Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments



Photo 16: State of new construction on the plot next to the Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren, July 2022; Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments

## The Gračanica Monastery

No conservation works were carried out in the Gračanica Monastery in 2022.

In 2022, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and the Serbian Academy of Science and Arts prepared Exhibition *Gračanica, the splendor of art in the era of King Milutin* (*Грачаница, сјај уметности у доба краља Милутина*) in Galery of Serbian Academy of Science and Arts in Belgrade (Photo 17). The exhibition opened on December 21, 2022, and is expected to last until the end of February 2023. The exhibition presents historical and artistic values created during the construction and painting of the church, as well as the process of conservation work that was carried out until 2018. The preparation of the exhibition was financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia.

Experts from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments continue their monitoring tasks.

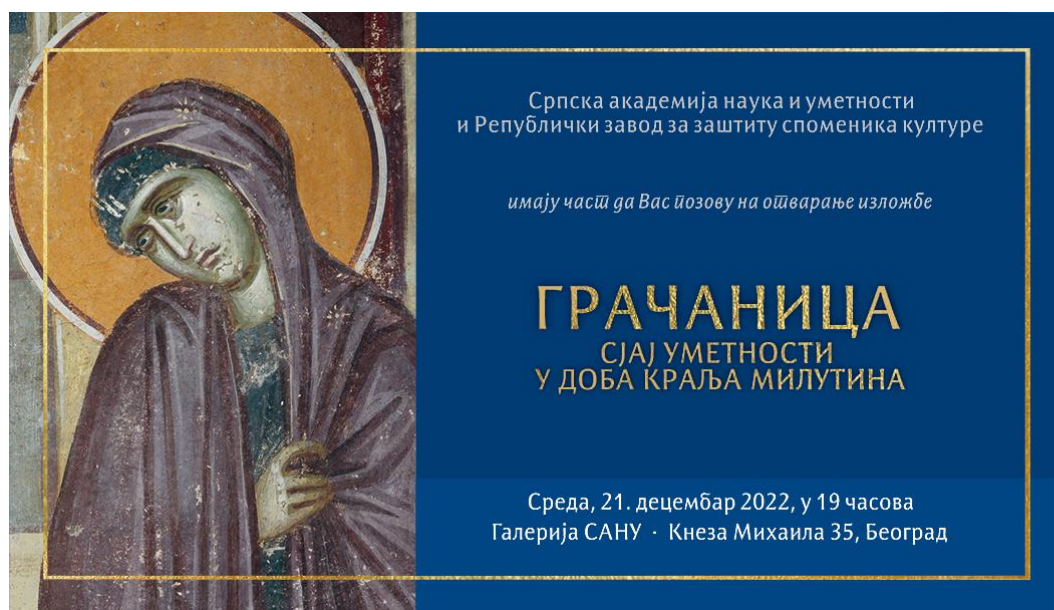


Photo 17: Exhibition Gračanica, the splendor of art in the era of King Milutin, December 2022, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments.

Due to its constant physical endangerment, the property is still secured by the local police forces on daily basis. In 2021 in the Gračanica Monastery, the tricolor of the Serbian Orthodox Church was stolen, and the mast on the monastery gate was broken. Photos of the desecrated church flag were posted on social networks, also depicting a black-clad Albanian holding the flag of “Greater Albania”, stomping on the tricolor. A few hours later, a video appeared on social networks with that same masked Albanian burning the flag.

## **CONCLUSION**

Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is still, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one of the most endangered cultural heritage in Europe. There is a vast number of Serbian churches and monasteries throughout Kosovo and Metohija that were destroyed or severely damaged, thus deteriorating the historical and artistic mark and imprint and unique features of this area, which are an important legacy and part not only of the region but also of Europe and the world. Efforts to create a multi-ethnic and multicultural society in Kosovo and Metohija in the light of global European processes imply, above all, respect for and appreciation of history and its legacy, respect for fundamental human and religious rights, the right to freedom of movement and the right to a life worthy of a human being at the beginning of the third millennium.