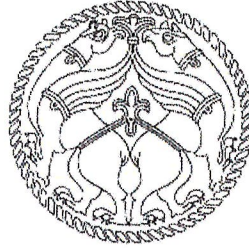


REPUBLIC OF SERBIA



РЕПУБЛИЧКИ ЗАВОД
ЗА ЗАШТИТУ СПОМЕНИКА КУЛТУРЕ
Бр. 21-63/2023-2
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БЕОГРАД

**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 2024

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Introduction

The property “Dečani Monastery” (C724) was inscribed on the List of World Heritage in 2004. In 2006, at the 30th 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)**”, predominantly dating from the 13th and 14th 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 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 broader Balkans region 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 Balkans region. Built in marble, it is the largest of all medieval Balkan churches and 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 13th-century frescoes of the Church of Holy Apostles were painted in a unique, monumental style.

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

The Gračanica Monastery was among the last monumental endowments of the Serbian King Milutin (1282–1321). Reflecting the spirit of the Byzantine tradition that was slightly modified by the western influence, the main church of Theotokos with the plan, spatial arrangement, decorative wall treatment, and wall paintings taken together represent the highest artistic achievement of so-called the Palaiologan Renaissance style. That also made it an emblematic structure for Serbian Orthodox ecclesiastical architecture of the 14th 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 the experts from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia in accordance with the adopted annual program.

Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee

The condition of preservation of the components of the Dečani Monastery, the Patriarchate of Peć and of the Gračanica Monastery did not register any changes. The attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value are preserved.

The Dečani Monastery: the church has the most impressive series of the 14th century Byzantine mural paintings, the largest existing ensemble in the Byzantine world. It is an outstanding achievement of Romanesque sculpture. The latest conservation works on the frescoes were carried out in 2022. The regular monitoring of the condition of preservation of the mural painting was conducted in 2023. Based on the smaller-scale research examination, the project was prepared for resumption of the restoration works in Parenthesis. An inspection of the condition of architectural sculptural elements was carried out and it was established that the condition was stable and that there had been no changes thereto.

The cathedral church of the Gračanica Monastery: the interior walls of the main church are completely covered with extraordinary fresco paintings. The conservation and restoration works on the wall paintings that were carried out over a period of several years were completed in 2018. In 2021, the publication on completed works entitled *Gračanica, Chronicle of the Painting and Conservation Works 2010–2018* was published. The exhibition entitled *Gračanica, the splendor of art in the era of King Milutin*, that was organized in Belgrade from December 2022 to January 2023 was accompanied by a bilingual catalogue, published in Serbian and English. The team of experts conducted a regular examination of the condition of wall paintings and determined that the condition was unchanged. It was established that architectural elements of the Church were in a stable condition.

The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery Church contains an impressive series of mural paintings in an almost complete form. These paintings demonstrate the heights achieved by the Balkan mural painting in the first half of the 14th century. An inspection of its condition was conducted in 2023, and it was established that the repair works on the roof on a part of the Church, which were carried out in 2021 and 2022, had considerably contributed to protection and preservation of architecture and mural paintings.

The preservation level of the component of the Church of Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren is in danger due to an increasingly unstable political and security situation, and despite the provided funds and other resources none of the planned works on the Church of Holy Virgin

of Ljeviša component in Prizren were carried out in 2022 and in 2023. In 2023, extensive works were planned:

- to repair the Church façade, to strip the existing plaster and to provide new decorative plaster;
- to repair and to clean the stone floor in the Church; to replace the deteriorated steel window frames in the Church;
- to close the arched openings in the exonarthex; to relocate the candle votive stand from the Church narthex;
- to thoroughly clean and wash the Church façade and to repair the stone portal on the west entrance to the Church;
- to repair and properly arrange the stone sidewalk and flagstones surrounding the Church; to provide the rain drainage;
- to construct the drainage wells; to repair the fence wall that runs around the Church.
- to provide a connection to the electrical grid according to the electrical installation design;
- to install the distribution boards inclusive of the equipment for protection of installations and users;
- to sit the installations for general purpose convenience outlets and sockets;
- to provide installations and equipment for general lighting in the Church;
- to provide the lightning conduct system installations for protection from lightning.

Also, the planned works based on the conservation and restoration works' project on mural painting, which was designed based on the previously completed research works, were not realized. The exceptional wall painting dating back from the 14th century is covered with a layer of soot and grime due to the mortar shelling and deliberate setting fire to the church in 2004.

Legal status of the property

The Dečani Monastery, the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery, the Gračanica Monastery and the Church of Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren were proclaimed cultural monuments based on the Law on Cultural Goods of the Republic of Serbia. In addition to that, they were categorized as cultural monuments of exceptional significance for the Republic of Serbia. The legal status of the cultural goods is unchanged, but The Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Priština or PISG do not recognize their established legal status. The competent protection institutions in the Republic of Serbia carry out the protection measures for these properties in cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which is their beneficiary and manager, and through the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, which is an authority of the Government of the Republic of Serbia.

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 that Law, the 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.

The Risks from Urban Planning and Transport Infrastructure

The condition in 2023 is without any changes. From 2014 and 2018 till today, the Dečani Monastery component has been in danger owing to the intention of the Municipality of Dečani to construct an arterial road Dečani – Plav (Montenegro), and the road route has been planned to run through the buffer zone of the Dečani Monastery and immediately along the core protection zone of the property. The works that were carried out in 2020 are suspended only after the reaction of the international community. The terrain has still not been restored to its original state. The access road to the Monastery is restricted by means of the barricades that were placed by the KFOR units that are guarding the Dečani Monastery.

Future for Religious Heritage, the European network for historic places of worship, which is a member of the European Heritage Alliance, nominated the Dečani Monastery to the *7 Most Endangered Programme 2021*. The representatives of the Europa Nostra visited the Dečani Monastery in 2022, and a number of official talks were conducted. In 2023, no new developments have been identified concerning resolving of the issue of endangerment of the Monastery from a continuation of road construction.

The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery is located in a relatively isolated position and is not under the impacts of urban planning construction. The local police provides the physical protection of the property.

The Gračanica Monastery is located in the Gračanica populated area. In 2023, no changes have been observed in construction of buildings on privately owned land parcels in the buffer zone.

The Church of Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren suffers the strongest impact of the urban planning changes in the immediate surroundings of the good. A busy road runs next to the Church, and the privately owned land parcels, on which construction work on residential buildings are carried out, are located in its immediate surroundings. The local police provides the physical protection of the property.

Management of the Property

The property *Medieval Monuments in Kosovo, Serbia* is managed 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, implements the management plan relating to the research, conservation and other works for protection of the exceptional universal value of the property, which are, according to the adopted annual programme, carried out by the experts of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Serbia.

Through the Office for Kosovo and Metohija, the Republic of Serbia provides legal and other types of assistance to the Serbian Orthodox Church in order to protect the Church property in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija.

During the reporting year, 179 ethnically motivated incidents were recorded in Kosovo and Metohija, of which 24 were directed against Serbian cultural heritage (Source: Office for Kosovo and Metohija <https://www.kim.gov.rs/incidenti-kim.php>).

The property of Dečany Monastery is exposed to systematic desecration, as well as illegal confiscation, despite the existing legal framework and Resolution 1244 of UN Security Council. The monastic community of Dečany 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.

Interpretation / communication of World Heritage property

The medieval heritage in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija is subject to numerous research works on the historical, history of art and architectural values. The thematic studies that are in particular carried out within the projects in the academia or in the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts provide for high level of interpretation of origin, history and value of the heritage, in particular for the goods inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is still, in the 21st century, one of the most endangered cultural heritage in Europe. Despite the fact that the heritage has a universal value incessant attacks on Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, attempts to rename and falsify history have become a daily occurrence.

In the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija on social networks and in tourist brochures, false information about the property *Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)* are continuously disseminated.

Groups of experts from different fields of interests and citizens are visiting churches and monasteries in an organized manner in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija. Access is provided to the organized groups that have announced their visits in advance to all the components of the property *Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)*.

The availability of information about the exceptional value of the property *Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)* is ensured by means of the digital guides within the digitalization efforts on the tourist offer of Serbia. In 2023, drawing up of the project dealing with placing of the digital info points in the Patriarchate of Peć Monastery was initiated. That is a pilot project that has been planned for all the properties inscribed in the World Heritage List.

The property “Medieval Monuments in Kosovo (Serbia)” – Illustrations



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



Photo 2: The Patriarchate of Peć Monastery. Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments



Photo 3: The Gračanica Monastery. Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments

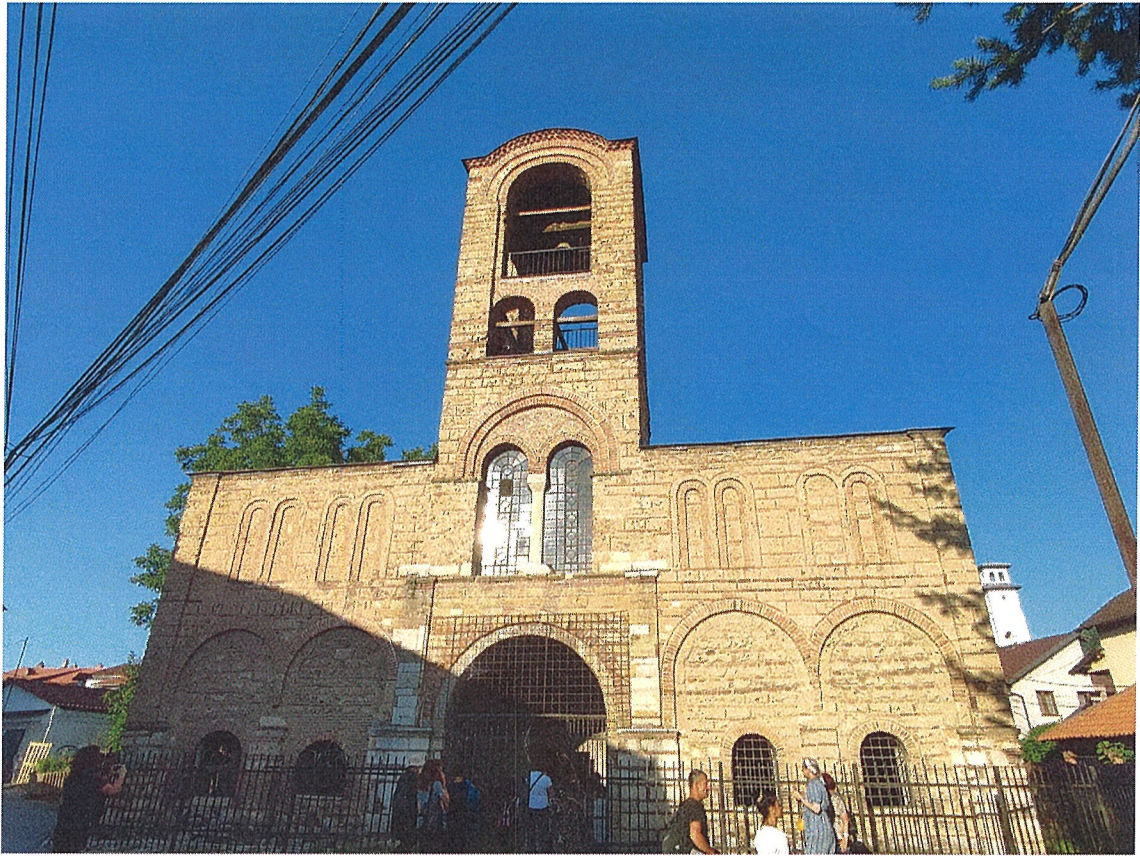


Photo 4: The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljeviša in Prizren. Photo by Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments