EXPERTS’ REPORTS ON SITES VISITED

Byzantine/Orthodox architectural monuments

1. Major sites of universal significance:
   - Patriarchate of Peć/Pejë
   - Monastery of Dečani/Dečan
   - Gračanica Monastery
   - Church of Bogorodica (Mother of God) Ljeviska, Prizren
   - Monastery of the Holy Archangels, Prizren
   - Banjska Monastery, Banjska-Zvečan

2. Sites of regional significance:
   - Church of the Virgin, Mušutište, Suhareke/Suva Reka
   - Monastery of the Holy Healers, Zočište-Rahovec/Oharovac
   - Monastery of St. Uroš, Sarenik/Gornje Nerodimlje-Sajkovac
   - Church of St. George and Cemetery, Reçan, Suhareke/Suva Reka
   - Church of St. Nicholas, Kijevo – Klinë/Klina
   - Monastery and Church of the Presentation, Dolac – Klinë/Klina
   - Budisavci Monastery, Budisavci – Klinë/Klina
   - Cathedral Church of St. George, Prizren
   - Cemetery Church of St. Nicholas, Djurakovac – Istog/Istok
   - St. Peter’s Basilica Stari Trg – Kosovska Mitrovica
Patriarchate of Peć/Pejë

Description

The monastery at Peć, one of the oldest functioning Serbian monasteries, is also the nominal seat of the Serbian Orthodox patriarchs. Situated in a picturesque gorge of the river Bistrica, the monastery is also related to the main road that runs through the Rugova gorge, linking the region with Montenegro. In medieval times, this was one of the main routes linking the interior part of the Balkans with the Adriatic littoral. Because of such a location, the monastery was also vulnerable and was therefore protected by a fort built on the slopes of the hill directly overlooking the monastery on the north side. The origins of the large church complex (37m long) go back to a Byzantine building of an unknown date (11th century?), whose western half was substantially incorporated into the church of the Holy Apostles, possibly begun by St. Sava, the first Serbian Archbishop. The church of the Holy Apostles was a single-aisled barrel-vaulted building featuring a low transept, and an eastern end consisting of a large central apse, flanked by two small apsed chapels. A dome rose over the ‘crossing’. The eastern part of the church, including the dome, the transept wings and the sanctuary has preserved extremely fine frescoes from the first half of the thirteenth century. The fresco programme is somewhat unusual. In its emphasis of certain subjects – the Deesis alluding to the Last Judgment- in the main apse, the funerary nature of the church was stressed. The inclusion of the Ascension fresco in the main dome reflected a link to the church of Sion in the Holy Land, in conscious imitation of this sacred shrine on the part of St. Sava, who had made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land twice during his lifetime. The western half of the church underwent extensive modifications in the fourteenth century, along with major additions made to the church of the Holy Apostles made at that time. First, the church of St. Demetrius was added on the north side by Archbishop Nikodim, in 1321-4. This was followed in ca. 1330 by the addition of the Church of the Virgin on the south side by Archbishop Danilo II, Archbishop Danilo was also responsible for the addition of the very large (once open) exonarthex with a tall belfry in front of it, and a chapel of St. Nicholas, flanking the southeast corner of the Church of the Virgin. All churches are lavishly decorated with contemporary frescoes, painted by the finest artists of their time.
The walled-in complex of the Patriarchate encloses many other buildings belonging to different historical periods. Remains of various medieval buildings, including a royal palace, have been archaeologically retrieved. During the first century of its existence the complex served as the seat of Serbian Archbishops. In 1346, it became the seat of the Serbian Patriarchate. Damaged during the first Ottoman raids as early as 1381, the functioning of the Patriarchate was seriously impaired. The complex was not definitively abandoned until the final Ottoman conquest of the area in 1455. At that point, the monastery ceased to function and remained in a semi-ruinous state until 1557, when the institution of the Serbian Patriarchate was restored under Suleyman I. At that time an extensive restoration and modification of church buildings was carried out, as well as the corresponding re-painting of the restored portions of the interiors of the church buildings.

With its numerous preserved tombs and shrines, its remarkable treasury of manuscripts, icons, and liturgical objects, the Patriarchate of Peć is one of the richest repositories of Serbian history and the holiest locus of the Serbian people.

Present condition

The complex of the Patriarchate at Peć survived the difficult period of the military conflict in 1999 without serious damage. Under round-the-clock protection of the KFOR troops, the monastery is a functioning enclave. Some limited restoration work has taken place on frescoes under the auspices of Italian institutions. Remaining gauze glued to some frescoes in restorations begun before 1999 points to extensive problems in need of urgent attention.

Recommended measures

There is an urgent need for a comprehensive study of the architecture and the frescoes from the point of view of their conservation needs. A resulting project should clearly articulate the priorities and recommend appropriate steps that need to be taken.

Estimated costs

The Coordination Center estimates that €320,000 would cover the most urgent protection and restoration measures.
Patriarchate of Peć (2003)
Monastery of Dečani/Dečan

Description

Situated in a picturesque, wooded valley, the Monastery of Dečani was the foundation of the Serbian King Stefan Uroš III Dečanski (1321-31) and was finished by his son, Stefan Dušan. The main building of the monastery, its great church dedicated to the Saviour, was built between 1327 and 1335, while its frescoes took another two decades to finish. The building of the church was entrusted to a Franciscan Friar by the name of Vita (Vitus) from Kotor, whose name is recorded on an inscription on the south portal of the church. The architecture of the church betrays the western origins of its master builder. A Romanesque church with a few Gothic details, the building reveals similarities with architecture of the Adriatic littoral. Only the position of the main dome elevated on a tall drum suggests links with the contemporary Byzantine tradition. The church was constructed as the mausoleum of King Stefan Dečanski, who died before the building of the church was completed. The church is faced externally with exquisitely executed alternating bands of ashlar made of different types of marble – one yellowish and the other purplish in color. The exterior is richly decorated with sculpture, while its interior is clad with Byzantine frescoes. Several hundreds of compositions, organized in a number of different cycles bedeck the walls and the vaults of the church interior. The church still has most of its original marble furniture (altar tables, iconostasis screens, two royal sarcophagi, the royal throne, etc.) in situ, a unique occurrence among Balkan churches of this period. The church survived the hostilities of 1999 unharmed, though the monastery was threatened by hostile neighbours until its security was put into the hands of KFOR troops that guard the complex around the clock. The monastery complex is surrounded by a tall wall with a massive barrel-vaulted gate above which once rose a large monastic tower. Other monastic buildings, including a refectory, kitchen, dormitories, as well as utilitarian buildings are organized peripherally against the outer wall of the monastery.

Because of its extraordinary qualities, the monastery church of Dečani has been nominated for the World Heritage list under the auspices of UNESCO. The nomination procedure was completed in 1994, and the final decision is expected to be taken by the World Heritage Committee in 2004.

Present condition

The monastery and the church survived the 1999 armed hostilities virtually unscathed. The church, whose preservation before 1999 had been the subject of considerable attention over the years, generally speaking, is in a relatively good state. Various small problems must be attended to, but these fall in the category of regular maintenance. Restoration of some of the stone sculptural pieces is warranted. It is in the realm of frescoes that extensive work needs to be done. A building that is deserving of immediate attention is an early 19th –century konak (dormitory building), currently in a very run-down state.


Recommended measures

The monastery has a lively community of monks, 35 in all, whose presence accounts for the monastery’s orderly appearance. The living quarters of the monks especially the mentioned konak, however, are not in good shape, so that their restoration and reconstruction constitute a major desideratum. Considering the unique nature of this monastery complex, these interventions must be considered high priorities. The European Agency for Reconstruction is apparently prepared to finance the reconstruction of the konak.

Estimated costs

The figure of € 525,500, provided by the Co-ordination Center, seems realistic for the most immediate needs of this extraordinary monument.
Gračanica Monastery

Description

Present-day Gračanica Monastery is surrounded by a village of the same name. The main church of the medieval monastery is its only remaining original part. Built during the second decade of the 14th century by the Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282-1321), it is one of the best buildings associated with his patronage and one of the very finest examples of late Byzantine architecture anywhere. The church, built over the remains of two older structures, was constructed as the seat of the 14th century Bishop of Lipljan. It consists of two parts – the impressive five-domed structure, and a somewhat younger (but also 14th century) exonarthex. Originally open and marked by a tall belfry, the exonarthex was damaged in an early (1383) Ottoman raid in the area. A remodelling that followed was but one of the known historical interventions on this part of the building that has as a result substantially changed its original appearance. Fortunately, the main part of the church preserves its original form entirely intact. The original fresco decoration in the interior of the church survives almost in its entirety. The frescoes were painted by the best Byzantine artists of the time. Among the innumerable scenes, are also the invaluable historical portraits of King Milutin with the painted model of the church in his hands and his wife Queen Simonis, daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Andronikos II (1282-1328). A particularly important document – a painted faithful copy of the monastic charter – is preserved on the west wall of the south chapel flanking the sanctuary of the church.

Present condition

The church survived the armed conflict in 1999 without any visible damage. At the time concern was expressed because of nearby major explosions that were feared to have possibly affected the building fabric and the adherence of frescoes to the walls. Personal random inspection suggests that some separation of frescoes from the walls does exist.

Recommended measures

Structural integrity of the building must be carefully examined, as well as the condition of exterior wall surfaces. Although seemingly intact, as seen from the ground level, a thorough, reliable examination cannot be done without the use of scaffolding. The interior of the church with its complex layout of frescoes also must be subjected to an exacting process of verification of the degree of the separation, and the degree of potential damage that may have already been caused by growth of fungi within the resulting cavities. Following such an examination, methods for reattaching the separated frescoes should be determined and the procedure carried out. Delays in this regard could cause irreparable damage to priceless frescoes.
Estimated costs

€ 460,000 for two parallel projects:
- an engineering study of the structural integrity of the building and possible interventions based on the results of such a study; and
- a study of the state of preservation of all frescoes and possible measures that may be required on the basis of that study.

Church of Gračanica Monastery (2003)
Church of Bogorodica (Mother of God) Ljeviska, Prizren

Description

The church of Bogorodica Ljeviska is one of the most important churches to have survived in the entire region, and one of the finest examples of Late Byzantine architecture anywhere. Commissioned by the Serbian King Milutin, the church was built in 1306-7, and subsequently painted. The five-domed church was incorporated into the remains of a three-aisled eleventh-century Byzantine basilica, itself partially remodelled in the thirteenth century. Starting in 1019, under the Byzantine rule, the church was the cathedral of Prizren, the function it retained during its thirteenth as well as the fourteenth-century Serbian remodelling. As such it is the only surviving Serbian medieval urban cathedral church. Its history is well documented by several inscriptions of extraordinary importance preserved on its walls. The main ones, executed in brick, are on the east façade of the church, integrated into the decorative articulation of that part of the building, clearly intended to be visible, and accessible in medieval times. Although the physical environment of the church was changed in the subsequent centuries, small-scale private buildings surrounded the structure until recently. The church was converted into a mosque only sometime between 1737 and 1756. Architectural interventions undertaken at that time (addition of a minaret on top of the belfry and internal removal of one of the piers for the purpose of accommodation of the mihrab) were reversed after the building was re-converted into a church in 1912. The church is renowned for its architecture (the builders in this case came from Epiros) and its frescoes. The names of the ‘masters’ responsible for its construction and decoration are recorded in a unique legal document in fresco technique preserved on one of the arches in the ground floor of the exonarthex. The church is also notable for the survival of its original belfry, one of the rare examples of this architectural feature to have survived within an urban environment throughout the Ottoman era.

Present condition

The present condition of this very important monument will be presented in three distinct categories:

Environment: Since 1999, the neighbourhood surrounding the church appears to have undergone uncontrolled growth with the building of several structures three or four-stories high that have destroyed the sense of medieval ambience that was maintained by an urban plan for Prizren in force prior to 1999. The immediate environs of the church have been severely vandalized. The house, formerly occupied by a full-time custodian, has been substantially destroyed and remains as a ruin used for the dumping of garbage. The structure, as well as to the garden surrounding the church is protected by barbed wire installed by KFOR units responsible for the protection of the monument. On account of these conditions, it was not possible to walk around the building and inspect its facades on the north, south, and – especially – the east side. Our knowledge of the state of preservation of the building, therefore, is incomplete. The partially open exonarthex has had its arched openings, once an integral feature of its urban setting, boarded up rendering its interior relatively dark. Around the exterior of the building lies accumulated debris, underscoring the state of a totally abandoned, unwanted building. Earlier reports that the garden around the church contained mines were neither denied nor confirmed.
Exterior: The visible parts of the building exterior appear to be in relatively good condition, though a close inspection was not possible. Such an examination of the building exterior is especially warranted because the church is noted for its rich decorative vocabulary of the so-called ceramoplastic elements (hollow cross-shaped tubes, specially cut tiles for making patterned bands, as well as lengthy inscriptions). The present condition of none of these features could be ascertained.

Interior: Frescoes discovered in the church, cleaned and subjected to extensive conservation after 1950, appear to have survived unharmed, though their actual state of preservation could not be closely inspected. The presence of scaffolds used by conservators just before 1999, indicate that some urgent interventions were underway at that time, but these have not been resumed since the end of the hostilities. The building suffers from humidity-related problems (common in many older buildings of this type) whose effects here, on account of the total lack of maintenance, could prove detrimental to the preservation of frescoes.

Recommended measures

On account of its extreme importance, as well as risks to which it has been exposed (attempts at physical destruction; historiographical falsifications, etc.), the church of Bogorodica Ljeviska is in particular need of attention. A detailed project based on careful examination of the present state of the building and its environs must be made. This must take into account environmental, architectural and painting conservation needs on a continuous basis. As the building is not being used regularly, its function must be defined differently, and its integral importance in the life and history of the city must be adequately clarified. The building should function as a museum in its own right. In terms of its urban setting and its historical meaning, the solution could be modelled after the famous Kariye Camii in Istanbul, a Byzantine church of approximately the same age, now functioning as a museum. A re-establishment of the function of a regular custodian is of essence. This may not be feasible under the present, still restless conditions. Given this, it is important to stress that the church of Bogorodica Ljeviska must have military protection that will ensure its safety until ‘normal’ conditions for its existence will have been fully re-established. In contemplating the future manner of building maintenance and function, much thought must be given to upgrading the activities in the neighbourhood of the church. Various cultural activities (e.g. a gallery, or a cultural centre) would significantly change the manner in which the church itself is being perceived. In our view, this project could and should be meaningfully integrated into the larger project aiming at the study and preservation of the urban core of Prizren. An international competition for such an undertaking seems a suitable high-profiled manner for attracting good ideas and potentially the kind of funding that would be needed for such a comprehensive project.

Estimated costs

An initial investment of €350,000 can support the making of the project, as well as its partial implementation, by bringing the building and its immediate environs (caretaker’s house and the garden) into a respectable, potentially functional state. The project must include a study of environmental issues, of the urban structure, as well as of the social character of the neighbourhood as well as a study of conservation needs of the architecture and of the frescoes. Only on the basis of such investigations, a comprehensive recommendation for the solution to various more specific problems can be meaningfully made.
Church of Bogorodica Ljeviska, Prizren
Monastery of the Holy Archangels, Prizren

Description

Situated within the picturesque gorge of the river Bistrica along the road that connects Prizren and Tetovo the monastery was founded by the Serbian King and later Emperor Stefan Dušan ca. 1343. The construction of buildings, built over the remains of an older (possibly Early Christian) complex of unknown function, was probably finished by 1349, and certainly by 1353. The complex was envisioned to one of the most important monastic establishments within the Serbian state. Accordingly, it was granted extensive privileges and possessions, as spelt out in an imperial charter. The prosperity of the monastery was apparently short-lived. It probably suffered serious damage during the Ottoman conquest of Prizren in 1455. Subsequently abandoned completely, the site was used as a quarry of fine building material at the orders of Sinan Pasha for the construction of his mosque in Prizren (built in 1615). The yellowish and purplish carefully cut ashlars with which the mosque was faced may well have been pilfered from the ruined remains of the two churches in the Monastery of the Archangels, along with several column capitals and specially cut elements that came from the dome drums. The monastery was strategically laid out at a point where the river Bistrica makes a sharp bend and bellow a steep rocky formation that provided a suitable location for the construction of a protective fort whose function was to protect the monastery. Laid out on a triangular plan, the monastery had two freestanding churches - the main church of the Holy Archangels and a smaller one dedicated to St. Nicholas. The church of the Archangels was planned as the mausoleum church of Emperor Dušan, whose remains were buried there after his death in 1355. The church, a five domed building, was decorated with frescoes and had splendid inlay marble floors. Externally faced with finely cut ashlars, and featuring elaborate stone carved decoration, the church must have been the work of builders from the Adriatic littoral. In addition to the two churches, the monastery had a large cruciform refectory, as well as other monastic buildings, including a hospital, monastic cells, a hospice for the visitors, etc. The complex was preserved in ruins, whose careful excavation and clearing, conducted in the late 1950s, yielded invaluable results for the understanding of the appearance of the two churches, as well as the monastic complex as a whole. A section of the excavated monastic building has been reconstructed and is being used by a small brotherhood of Serbian Orthodox monks who currently live in the complex.

Present condition

The monastery was visited late in the afternoon, as darkness was descending. Our ability to inspect the condition of the remaining walls, therefore, was somewhat hampered. Only general impressions of the monastery enclosure and the new monastic building could be gained. The monastery appears to be well maintained.

Recommended measures

An accurate assessment of preservation needs and other related interventions would require another visit under more favorable conditions. Undoubtedly, a complex of this size and character (mostly an open-air archaeological site) require conservation maintenance on a perpetual basis. Owing to the fact that no such maintenance has been possible during at least the last five years, it stands to reason that a thorough professional examination of the condition of the building remains
is in order. Likewise, it stands to reason that some urgent conservation measures will be required after years of neglect.

Estimated costs

€ 150,000 for the preparation of a comprehensive project that would provide the basis for appropriate management of future conservation needs.

Monastery of the Holy Archangels, Prizren
Banjska Monastery, Banjska-Zvecan

Description

Banjska Monastery is situated in a hilly area of the Ibar River valley to the north of Kosovska Mitrovica. Adjacent to the village by the same name, Banjska Monastery is in ruinous state, though its partially restored church continues to function. In its present form, the Monastery of Banjska was the foundation of the Serbian King Stefan Uroš II Milutin (1282-1321), who richly endowed it as the place of his eventual burial. Built between 1312 and 1316, the church of St. Stephen, indeed, became the royal mausoleum after the king’s death in 1321. Other royal burials took place in the church subsequently. On account of its location close to a major communication route along the Ibar River valley, the monastery suffered considerably in its subsequent history. The first major damage is recorded in 1389, immediately after the Battle of Kosovo. The remains of King Milutin, by then already sainted, were carried by the monks to the safety of the town of Trepca /Stari Trg, where they remained until 1455. After the final conquest of these territories by the Ottomans, the casket with the remains of King Milutin was taken to Sofia, where it still reposes in the church of Sv. Nedelja. The monastery itself apparently continued to live during the second half of the fifteenth century, but it suffered further damage during the early 16th century when it was completely abandoned. During the subsequent decades the Ottomans converted the church and part of the monastery into a fortress, adapting only part of the church for use as a mosque. On account of its strategic military function, the remains of the monastery endured further destruction during the Austrian-Turkish war of 1689. Badly damaged and definitively abandoned, the remains of the monastery were eventually claimed by nature, its church occasionally pilfered of some of its fine building material.

Systematic, albeit slow-paced excavations of this extraordinary monument were started only in the 1970s. These have brought to light the remains of most of the monastic complex, including a large tower, a splendidly decorated refectory, service buildings and monastic dormitories. The church of St. Stephen is undoubtedly the largest (36m long) and the most impressive remnant of the medieval monastery. The church, as is known from the written sources, was expressly built as a ‘copy’ of the Monastery church of Studenica, the foundation of King Milutin’s great-grandfather, Stefan Nemanja, also the founder of the Nemanjić Dynasty that ruled Serbia for two centuries (from the 1170s to 1371). The church was built by craftsmen from the Adriatic littoral, while its roofs were covered by lead sheets by artisans from Dubrovnik. Its exterior articulation included a unique pattern created by stone facing made of blocks of three different colors, as well as exquisite sculptural decoration that has survived only in fragments. The church was restored in 1938-40 by Djurdje Bošković, whose goal was to protect the remaining portions of the church without resorting to a speculative reconstruction. This pioneering approach to restoration of a medieval building is still a subject of considerable debate among experts.

Present condition

The excavations conducted over the past quarter of the century have brought to light most of the monastery complex. They have not been completed, nor have any steps at presenting all of the finds in a suitable manner been resolved. The monastery complex at the moment gives the impression of a construction site that must be considered merely a temporary state of affairs.
**Recommended measures**

The excavated remains of the monastery, as well as the church are in need of conservation. A comprehensive project of the entire monastery complex and its immediate environs needs to be made. The project must involve a detailed study of architecture, architectural sculpture and related conservation needs.

**Estimated costs**

The figure of €440,000 provided by the Coordination Center seems suitable for the initial phase of the most immediate conservation enterprises. A more detailed assessment of conservation needs and their cost would have to be based on a more detailed study of the monument.

*Walls of Banjska Monastery, Banjska-Zvecan (2003)*
Banjska Monastery, Banjska-Zvecan (2003)
Church of the Virgin, Mušutište, Suhareke/Suva Reka

Description

The church of the Virgin was the oldest preserved medieval private foundation built by a Serbian nobleman. The occasion of its construction was proudly recorded in a lengthy inscription carved on a stone lintel above the church portal. The inscription gave the name of the donor, one Jovan Dragoslav, along with his wife Jelena, son Stanisa, and daughter Ana, as well as the date of construction, 1315. In all likelihood built on the donor’s private estate, the church eventually became a village church surviving as such the various calamities and damage throughout its long history. The church was a subject of a careful conservation campaign carried out by the Institute of Preservation of Cultural Monuments in Prizren, in 1996-7. The conservation effort resulted in the removal of the newer exterior plaster that brought to light details of the building’s fine construction. Built on a cross-in-square plan, the building belonged to a group of at least eight related churches in the central Balkans, all linked on technical grounds with building workshops of Thessaloniki. Externally the building was characterized by walls featuring two building techniques, both typical of fourteenth-century construction associated with the region of Byzantine Macedonia. Especially interesting was its dome elevated on a tall eight-sided drum, each of its eight faces perforated by a slender window. This dome, built entirely of brick, was a hallmark product of Thessalonikan building workshops. Sharing identical characteristics with several other churches in present-day Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia, the dome of Mušutište was a precious piece of physical evidence enabling the study of building practice and the movement of builders in the central Balkans during the first half of the fourteenth century. The church had excellent fourteenth-century frescoes in its interior, the study of which had been carried out only in part. Serving the local Serbian population, the church was surrounded by a walled enclosure and had several other structures (a priest’s house, a free standing belfry and utility structures), all of them of a more recent date, as well as a grove of beautiful pine trees.

Present condition

The lone belfry standing on the site today is the only survivor of the systematic destruction of the church and its accompanying buildings in June-July 1999. The demolition of the church accomplished by a dynamite explosion was followed by the systematic cutting down of all pine trees. Their removal from the site was evidently carried out for the purposes of selling the material. An earlier report that the trees were cut down and placed over the remains of the church and burnt could not be confirmed. All of the buildings in the complex were destroyed and pilfered of all parts that had potential re-use. The partially damaged belfry is the sole survivor of this tragedy. The only part of the church that remains standing is the south half of its semi-cylindrical apse. The surviving heap of ruins does not appear to have been seriously tempered with, numerous fragments of the main building features (parts of window frames, part of the wall drum, pieces of the building stone eaves, etc.) easily recognizable among them. Remains of the fresco decoration in the remaining part of the apse are also clearly visible.
Recommended measures

Securing the entire site is an urgent matter. The masonry enclosure wall needs to be repaired, and possibly heightened, and a secure door installed to prevent further petty incursions. This must be followed by supervised (to include experts on Byzantine architecture and art) cleaning of the church remains and a careful study of all building fragments preserved in the debris. These must be carefully recorded (measuring and photographing). They must be kept in a designated safe place, possibly within the enclosed compound. Particular attention must be paid to fresco fragments and to the stone lintel bearing the founder’s inscription. These must be removed from the site and stored in a more suitable manner. The cleared remains of the church should eventually become the subject of a study with the aim of procuring information about the burials of the donor and the members of his immediate family. The surrounding buildings need to be repaired as to render them usable. Replanting of the grounds with new pine trees would be a final formal gesture toward returning the sense of dignity to this important historical site.

Estimated costs

€ 300,000 are required to cover the cost of a project proposal, supervised clean-up, professional recording of the remains, and the limited construction enterprises as outlined.
Church of the Virgin, Mušutište (2003)
Monastery of the Holy Healers, Zočište-Rahovec/Oharovac

Description

Situated on a high plateau, the small monastery overlooks the valley with the village below. The small single-aisled vaulted church may have had its origins in the 14th century and underwent subsequent repairs and alterations. The monastery buildings that surrounded the church were of a more recent date. The monastery was renowned for its school, founded in 1871, and for its collection of icons, books and liturgical vessels.

Present condition

In June 1999, the entire monastery was gutted and partially destroyed. The church itself was blown up with dynamite. Large trees that stood in the monastery yard were cut down. The site presents a depressing general image of destruction and total abandonment. The visit to the site was cut short by the appearance of a rowdy group of young people from the village in the valley below the monastery. Therefore, it was not possible to do anything more than to take a casual general glance at the site.

Recommended measures

Despite the mission’s inability to explore the site more thoroughly, some general recommendations are in order. As the monastery of Zočište appears to have been the victim of the same wanton destruction as the churches at Recan and Mušutište, the same initial methods of intervention should be applied here as well. The site should be made secure by strengthening the existing monastery wall, installing a gate and ensuring that it cannot be entered casually by anyone. The interior of the complex must be cleaned under professional (including an expert on Byzantine architecture and art) supervision. Any remains of fresco fragments, icons, or any other objects of relevance must be carefully recorded and appropriately stored. The remains of the church building must be laid bare and eventually subjected to further study and, possibly, archaeological excavations. The monastic buildings that survive in part should be restored, and their occupancy should be made possible. Local authorities need to work on restoring confidence among local population assuring them that the presence of this complex in their midst constitutes part of their heritage and not a perceived symbol of external threat. Nurturing a respect for the remains associated with ‘others’ is an absolute priority here as well as elsewhere in Kosovo. While this is not part of ‘building heritage preservation’ technically speaking, it is a sine qua non condition for any success to be made along these lines.

Estimated costs

€ 150,000 are required for the preparation of a project proposal, supervised clean-up, professional recording of the remains, and the limited construction enterprises as outlined above.
Monastery of St. Uroš, Sarenik/Gornje Nerodimlje-Sajkovac

Description

Situated in a picturesque river gorge, the isolated monastery of St. Uroš has long been a subject of many legends. According to one, its church was built by Empress Jelena, widow of Emperor Dušan, over the tomb of their deceased son Emperor Stefan Uroš (d. 1371). The 14th-century church was abandoned in the 16th century. Its renewal by the end of that century was marked by the making a new reliquary casket for the remains of (by then sainted) Uroš. The relics were removed in 1705, when a new period of abandonment of the monastery begun. The church was described as a ruin in 1858. A rebuilding was undertaken at the end of the 19th century, but the work was finished only up to the level of the vaults. The rebuilt church was a single aisled building subdivided internally into three bays by engaged pilasters and built entirely of stone. It was covered by a concrete roof during the last decade or two.

Present condition

The church was completely blown up in late June 1999. The force of the explosion pushed most of the walls outward, while the reinforced concrete roof collapsed over the heap of the building’s rubble. The only remaining standing part of the building is a section of its northern wall. There appears to have been no effort to clear the site.

Recommended measures

The site needs to be completely enclosed by a suitable high metal fence, to discourage any further desecration or looting. The building debris must be cleared under constant supervision of a experts (including an expert on Byzantine architecture and art) versed in matters of architecture. Any remaining elements of the building, or its religious contents (icons, liturgical vessels, etc.) must be carefully inventoried and preserved. The remaining portions of the building, including the standing portion of its north wall, should be carefully consolidated. Future activities should include archaeological investigation of the remains with the ultimate aim of determining the early history of the building and its alleged links to the burial of Emperor Uroš. The site ought to be treated as a monument of culture or an archaeological site.

Estimated costs

An amount of € 250,000 is required to cover the cost of a project making, the supervised clean-up, professional recording of the remains, and the limited construction enterprises as outlined above.
Church of St. George and Cemetery, Recan, Suhareke/Suva Reka

Description

The small church was built as a private foundation of an unknown Serbian nobleman who was buried in the church in 1370. A partially preserved damaged tomb slab was the only historical record of this foundation. The building was a single-aisled church marked by an internal system of pilasters dividing the interior into three bays. The central one, square in plan, was covered by a dome elevated on a tall drum. The other two were barrel vaults. The lower part of the church was built of a mixture of stone and brick. The same was true of the dome drum where alternating bands of three courses of brick and single courses of stone were preserved in its lowest section. The rest of the church revealed the use of stone as the exclusive building material. This was the result of an extensive mid-19th century reconstruction. The church was decorated with painting that revealed the work of a local school of painters active in the area during the second half of the 14th century. Frescoes were distinguished for the inclusion of an extensive and unusual cycle dedicated to the patron saint, George.

Built as a private foundation in the fourteenth century, the church was evidently situated on a private estate that eventually became part of a village. In this new function, the church also accommodated the needs of the local community – its members were buried in the adjacent cemetery shaded by beautiful large old trees attesting to its age. The cemetery must have reached back in time at least to the period of the church’s extensive restoration in the mid-19th century.

Present condition

The church was completely destroyed in 1999. A particularly disturbing aspect of this destruction is that the rubble appears to have been unprofessionally removed. The possibility that this task may have been undertaken with the aim of retrieving fragments of frescoes is especially alarming. The cemetery around the church has been systematically vandalized. All of the stone tomb markers have been turned over, and a large percentage of them deliberately broken. This was clearly done separately from the blowing up of the church.

Recommended measures

Situated in the middle of a village from where the entire Serbian population has fled, or has been expelled, the church has been subjected to destruction and continuing vandalism. In this case, an immediate enclosing of the site (church with the cemetery) is urgently needed. In addition to preventing further vandalism and looting, the act of physical enclosure of the site, ought to be combined with an educational campaign among the population to begin convincing them that this heritage in their midst presents no threat and needs to be preserved and respected. Parallel to these efforts, a campaign to clear the site under professional supervision (involving an expert on Byzantine architecture and painting) is warranted. Any remains of architecture, frescoes and other church valuables need to be retrieved and carefully recorded. These, as well as the tomb remains of the founder, need to be securely preserved. The number of medieval tombs featuring inscriptions with the name of the deceased that have survived in their original location is quite
limited. The church at Recan, therefore, is of particular importance from that point of view, as well. The site as a whole ought to be treated as a monument of culture or an archaeological site.

Estimated costs

€ 150.000 are required for the preparation of a detailed project proposal (supervised clean-up, professional recording of the remains, and the limited construction enterprises as outlined above).
Church of St. Nicholas, Kijevo – Klinë/Klina

Description

The village church of St. Nicholas was built in the sixteenth century. Its original part was single-aisled, barrel-vaulted space that terminated in a massive round apse on the east side. Shortly after its construction the church acquired a narthex, as a western extension that doubled the size of the original church. The narthex was painted in 1602-3 by a group of unskilled painters, though their frescoes contained interesting iconographic features. A low belfry was the second addition to the building, added sometime after the narthex and directly in front of it. All parts of the church, with the exception of the belfry, were externally plastered and whitewashed. The church stood on a large plot of land. On the opposite side of the village road stood a large village cemetery.

Present condition

After June 1999 the church was destroyed by dynamite, while the cemetery associated with it was desecrated. A large heap of rubble occupies the former site of the church. The only remaining standing portion of the church is its apse. The blast of the explosion sheared it from its foundation as well, but due to its form and its large physical mass it has remained in upright position. The churchyard around the building is full of debris and continues to be used as a dumping ground for garbage by the villagers. Virtually all grave markers in the graveyard have been pushed over, broken or otherwise vandalized.

Recommended measures

The first step must be the fencing in the churchyard and the prevention of its further being misused as the dumping ground. Local authorities must be engaged in the campaign of raising the awareness of the local population. Respect for a departed neighbour’s dead and a clean cemetery and churchyard with the conserved remains of a church in its midst give a more decent impression of a community than the sight of sacrilege and a garbage dump that has been created in their midst. The second step needs to be the professionally supervised (including an expert on Byzantine architecture and art) cleanup of the church debris. All finds (fresco fragments, architectural features, if any, icons, church utensils, etc.) must be carefully recorded and all of the material stored in a safe place. The remains of the church must be carefully conserved. Eventually, in a later phase, these could be subjected to an archaeological investigation of the site. Fencing-in and cleanup of the cemetery must be carried out at the same time. This should be followed by the restoration of the desecrated graves.

Estimated costs

€ 200,000 are required for the preparation of a project, supervised cleanup, professional recording of the remains, the conservation of church remains and restoration of graves.
Monastery and Church of the Presentation, Dolac – Klinë/Klina

Description

Situated on a plateau of a hill, the monastery of Dolac overlooks the river valley of Beli Drim and the village of Dolac. The monastic foundation goes back to the fourteenth century. In 1455 the monastery was recorded as having only three monks, and may have even been temporarily deserted after that. A major renewal occurred at the end of the 16th century, when the complex was walled in, a gate, a tower and a fountain were built. Dormitory buildings for monks were constructed only in the nineteenth century. In the middle of the monastic compound stood a small single-aisled barrel vaulted church dedicated to the Presentation of the Virgin. Several layers of frescoes were preserved on the interior. The oldest may have been from the end of the 14th or the early 15th century, the second from the early 16th century, and the third from 1619-20.

Present condition

The monastery was destroyed in August 1999. The church was completely blown up by dynamite, while the monastic buildings were burnt and pilfered of all usable elements. Nothing of the church remains standing, while shells of other monastic buildings remain standing.

Recommended measures

The enclosing of the monastery would involve repairing of its outer wall and replacing its gates. The interior of the monastery would thereby be made off-limits to casual passers-by and potential troublemakers. The next step should aim at the cleanup of church remains under professional supervision, including that of an expert in Byzantine architecture and art. The task would be particularly demanding because of the three layers of frescoes that existed in the church. All fragments would have to be carefully documented and stored in a safe place. Reconstruction of some of the monastic buildings could serve temporary function of providing a place for the storage and study of the fresco remains. Preservation of the church remains should follow. Eventually, an archaeological excavation of the site could be undertaken with the aim of clarifying the early history of this establishment.

Estimated costs

€ 150,000 are required for the preparation of the project (supervised cleanup, professional recording of the remains, the conservation of church remains and reconstruction of the monastic buildings).
Monastery and Church of the Presentation, Dolac – Klinë/Klina (2003)
Budisavci Monastery, Budisavci – Klinë/Klina

Description

The church of the Transfiguration is the only surviving part of the medieval monastery. Built by an unknown patron, the church probably dates from the reign of the Serbian king Stefan Dečanski. Severely damaged at some point in the late 15th or early 16th century, the church was extensively restored in 1568, under Patriarch Makarije, whose portrait with a model of the church in his hands is preserved in the building. The church underwent further modifications in the 19th century when an earlier (possibly medieval) narthex was heightened to its present level. All of the preserved frescoes on the interior are from the time of the 16th -century restoration. The exterior of the building reveals clearly later interventions characterized by the prevalent use of stone instead of the characteristic mixture of stone and brick. The church is the finest surviving Serbian private religious foundation from the first half of the 14th century.

Present condition

The church has survived the armed conflict in 1999 without any serious damage. Its security, as well as that of the resident nuns is guarded by a KFOR contingent. The building is lacking in regular maintenance. Without such attention various relatively minor problems can result in serious damage over time. Cumulative damage is being caused by humidity owing to the presence of a concrete floor, concrete pavement around the church and cement mortar that was used in the lower parts of exterior walls. Possible roof leakage is also visible on the interior. Frescoes are in need of cleaning and conservation.

Recommended measures

Archaeological and architectural investigation of the church and the monastic complex, begun before 1999, should be continued. Preservation of the church should be carried out on the basis of its examination. Further examination, cleaning and conservation of frescoes should also be undertaken.

Estimated costs

€ 100.000 are required for the restoration of the monastery and the implementation of work described above, as well as a detailed project preparation.
Cathedral Church of St. George, Prizren

Description

The large Serbian-Orthodox cathedral of Prizren was built and decorated between 1856 and 1887. Its construction alongside major Islamic Mosques and a Catholic Cathedral (all within a few blocks of each other) bespeaks an ethnic and religious mix that characterized Prizren on a continuous basis since the Middle Ages. The church is a large building combining features of a basilica with a cross-in-square scheme. The intersection of the nave with a transept is marked by a dome elevated on a tall drum. The western end of the building is accentuated by a belfry that rises on axis above the narthex. The carefully constructed stone building belongs to the period of revived Christian church architecture that became common in the Balkans (Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia) during the waning years of the Ottoman Empire. The interior decoration (paintings and carving of the iconostasis) was the work of artists from Macedonia. The church belongs to a complex that includes a small church also dedicated to St. George (also known as the “Runović Church”). This small picturesque building seems to have at least two building phases (14th and 16th centuries). The church has interesting 16th-century frescoes whose cleaning was begun in 1995, but was left unfinished in 1999. The complex also includes the residential building and offices associated with the seat of the Eparchy of Raska-Prizren.

Present condition

The complex has survived the military conflict in reasonable condition. The few remaining Serbian residents of Prizren continue to maintain the complex with occasional external help (e.g. partial lead re-roofing of the main church in 2002). Small cracks in the walls and various other forms of damage visible on the building fall into the category of regular building maintenance needs that such a large structure requires. On account of continuing ethnic tensions, the complex is under heavy protection by KFOR.

Recommended measures

The building and its contents (a collection of icons and other religious objects), require attention that they deserve. On account of the important integral nature of this complex within the urban tissue of the old city of Prizren, the complex could become part of a more comprehensive conservation enterprise that would also involve Sinan Pasha’s Mosque, the Catholic Cathedral, School and Bishop’s residence. Such a project would carry an important larger message related to the significance of building heritage and its preservation as it relates to the rich and complex history of Prizren itself. The work begun on the small chapel of St. George must be urgently completed. The remaining gauze strips glued to the fresco surfaces as long as four to five years ago can cause damage to frescoes. Applied to the frescoes with their preservation in mind, the task was left unfinished on account of the outbreak of hostilities.
Estimated costs

An amount of €100,000 would probably cover the most immediate needs of this complex. A comprehensive project involving also monuments of the two other faiths (as mentioned above) would require a separate budget estimate.
Cemetery Church of St. Nicholas, Djurakovac – Istog/Istok

Description

Situated on a low picturesque plateau, the cemetery of the village of Djurakovac must have once presented a beautiful sight. Marked by an enormous oak tree, a small chapel of St. Nicholas, and a small residence for the local priest, the cemetery was distinguished by its age, reaching back certainly two hundred years and possibly more. Among its gravestones are many ancient crosses, whose forms and weathered inscriptions reveal late 18th-century/early 19th-century origins. The chapel, square in plan with a low semi-cylindrical apse, was made of irregular small blocks of stone laid with large quantities of mortar. The chapel was barrel-vaulted and externally covered with slate. A carved stone cross stood on the roof ridge close to the west façade of the building. A low, squarrish narthex, abutted the chapel on its west side. In this form, the chapel was the result of a complete reconstruction carried out by the villagers in 1592, presumable over the remains of a church dating from 1362. Made entirely of wood, the narthex was a later addition. The chapel was frescoed in 1592 by a painter Milija, whose signature was preserved on one of his wall paintings. The chapel contained a wooden iconostasis of ca. 1600, decorated by four large icons painted in 1630. There was also a 16th-century manuscript within the chapel.

Present condition

The chapel of St. Nicholas was completely destroyed in July 1999. A heap of ruble reveals many elements of its construction, and also large sections of its frescoes adhering to its wall fragments. The fate of the mentioned icons and the manuscript that must have been buried under its debris is unknown. Many of the grave markers in the cemetery were vandalized. The priest’s residence was destroyed, though not by the use of dynamite. In a rare departure from developments elsewhere, the magnificent old tree has survived despite evident attempt to destroy it also by the use of dynamite.

Recommended measures

The enclosing of the cemetery with the chapel by a stronger metal fence, instead of the inadequate present one, should be the first order of priority. The entire sacred ground should be made off-limits to casual passers-by and potential troublemakers. The next step should aim at the cleanup of church remains under the supervision of professionals, including an expert in Byzantine architecture and art. All architectural features and fresco fragments would have to be carefully documented and stored in a safe place. Reconstruction of the former priest’s residence could temporarily provide a place for the storage and study of the fresco remains. Preservation of the church remains should follow. Eventually an archaeological excavation of the site could be undertaken with the aim of clarifying the early history of the chapel of St. Nicholas.

Estimated costs

€ 150,000 are required for the preparation of the project, supervised cleanup, professional recording of the remains, the conservation of church remains and reconstruction of the monastic buildings as outlined above.
St. Peter’s Basilica Stari Trg – Kosovska Mitrovica

Description

The impressive remains of a large medieval church stand in a wooded area that once belonged to the medieval mining settlement of Stari Trg, near the present day town of Kosovska Mitrovica. The church was apparently built for the community of the Sas (Saxon) miners employed in the nearby mines at an early stage of their exploitation (second decade of the 14th century). The remains of the church include a large fully preserved apse, portions of two smaller lateral apses and the excavated remains of the building’s foundations. From these it is apparent that the building was a three-aisled pier basilica, approximately 21m long. The spacing of piers suggests that the church may have had a dome over the crossing, although aspects of the building elevation can be discussed in hypothetical terms only. The main apse has two tiers of window – a single axial window on the lower level, and three lancet windows on the upper level, just below the apse semi-dome. It also seems that the building was vaulted throughout, but that the nave had no clear-story lighting and that the entire building may have been covered by a single pitched roof. Such a disposition would have made the church akin with Romanesque-Gothic church architecture of the Adriatic Littoral to whose sphere it probably belonged. The church was internally apparently fully covered with frescoes, as attested by the large areas of weathered fresco mortar still adhering to the standing portions of the building. An interesting detail involves a torus-profiled base molding that runs around the building periphery at the very base of its rising walls. As such it marks the transition between somewhat wider stone capping of the foundations and the rising walls themselves. A mixture of brick and stone was used in the construction of rising walls, though they may have been faced with local limestone blocks. The church is of relevance in several ways. It is at once a document of the presence of another ethnic group, of Catholic faith, in the region. At the same time its builders may have been among those builders from the Adriatic Littoral that have been working on other commissions for the Orthodox patrons in the same region (e.g. Banjska Monastery) around the same time.

Present condition

The remains of the church of St. Peter do not appear to have been effected by the recent fighting in the region. Nonetheless, they require immediate attention as their condition suggests advanced stages of deterioration due to years of neglect. The monument sits in swampy terrain. Its walls are saturated with water, and their surfaces in many areas covered with moss.

Recommended measures

A comprehensive examination of the conservation needs could be easily conducted and is urgently needed. Proper drainage of the site requires immediate attention. The remaining apse walls must be consolidated along with the remains of fresco decoration adhering to their surfaces.

Estimated costs

€ 100,000 are required for covering the most urgent conservation needs outlined above.