

Gracanica Monastery

Gracanica Monastery was built by St. King Milutin in 1310 and is dedicated to the Dormition of the Theotokos. It is situated in the village of Gracanica, 5 km. from Pristina, the administrative centre of Kosovo and Metohija region. The period of 14th and 15th centuries was the time of greatest spiritual glory of the monastery, which was inhabited by hundreds of monks who had developed very intensive spiritual and artistic activities. In the second quarter of the 16th century it was the seat of the local Novo Brdo Metropolitan who brought the first printing press to the monastery. Later, due to great pressure from the Turkish occupiers, the monastery was deserted and the church served as a parish church. After the Second World War it was renewed by nuns and has been serving as a convent since. Today there are 24 sisters in the monastery who are active in icon painting, agriculture, sewing and other monastic obedience. The monastery is an important meeting place of Christian students of Pristina University who regularly take part in the services and organise various missionary activities.

The Patriarchate of Pec

The monastery complex of the *Pec Patriarchate* consists of four churches and a spacious narthex, built in the period of 13th and 14th centuries was for hundreds of years the centre of the *Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate*. *The Patriarchate of Pec* shows the influence of two schools: the 13th century, Raska school (*the Church of Holy Apostles*) and the Kosovo and Metohija school (*the Church of St. Demetrius and the Holy Virgin*). It is located in the picturesque Rugova gorge near the Bistrica River. Until the 18th century the monastery was a thriving monastic community with hundreds of learned monks. As a result of severe Turkish repression Patriarch Arsenios III left Pec with several thousand Christian families and immigrated to southern Hungary at the end of 17th century. Despite pressure from the local Moslem population the monastery has been preserved until today. After the Second World War the *Patriarchate of Pec* was converted into a convent. Although this monastery jurisdictionally does not belong to the

Diocese of Raska and Prizren it is nevertheless closely tied to the monasteries of the Diocese. After the union of the *Serbian Orthodox Church, Demetrius*, the first Patriarch of restored Serbian Patriarchate, was inaugurated in 1924. All the appointed Serbian Patriarchs have been inaugurated in this monastery ever since. *The Patriarchate of Pec* is the residence of the Serbian Patriarch.

Visoki Decani Monastery

Visoki Decani Monastery was built between 1327 and 1335 by St. King Stephen of Decani and is dedicated to the Ascension of the Lord. The monastery is settled in the picturesque valley of the Bistrica River surrounded by the mountains and forests of the Prokletije mountain range. *Decani* represents a combination of multi-nave basilica with a dome in the Romanesque and partially the Gothic style since the master builder was Roman Catholic monk Vita from Kotor. It is the largest and best-preserved monastery from the Middle Ages in Serbia. During its turbulent history the Monastery was an important spiritual centre with developed artistic and intellectual activities. Although the monastery buildings suffered damage from the Turkish occupation, the church has been completely preserved with beautiful 14th century fresco paintings. Today a young brotherhood of 20 brethren lives in the monastery and they are trying to make the Old Glory of the monastery live again. The brotherhood has developed various activities: wood carving, icon painting, book publishing and is also active in missionary work. The beautiful monastic services are served according to the typicon of Mount Athos and are attracting numerous pilgrims who regularly come to the monastery for confession and spiritual refreshment.



photo exhibition

“FRESCOES FROM MONASTERIES OF KOSOVO AND METOHIJA”

From September 4th 2001

Serbian Heritage Museum
6770 Tecumseh Road East
Windsor, Ontario
Tel: 944-4884

MONASTERIES AND FRESCOES OF KOSOVO AND METOHIIJA

Kosovo and Metohija are like a cathedral shrine to the Serbian people. Archaeological finds verify the uninterrupted presence of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija since the early Byzantine period, that is the 6th century. The most cultured of all Serbian lands achieved its peak during the 13th and 14th century, and also enjoyed some days of glory in the 15th century. A testimony to this are beautiful shrines - Serbia prayers in stone: monasteries *Visoki Decani* (1327-1335), *The Patriarchate of Pec* (1230-1330), *Holy Virgin of Ljevisa* (1219), *Gracanica* (1313-1321), as well as the remarkable ruins of St. Peter of Korisa, Hvosan Studenica and a score of noblemen's endowments from the 13th and 14th century. These are not the only valuables. There were hundreds of smaller churches, monastic sanctuaries, hermitages, hillforts in the fields next to river springs or roads.

Churches of the Kosovo and Metohija architectural group have characteristic ground planing the form of an "inscribed cross", roofed with a dome. The walls were usually built with alternative rows of dressed stone and bricks.

Frescoes

Serbia monumental wall painting from the pre Nemanjic days, developed at the end of the 12th century, has been preserved, among other places, on the walls of a cave parecclesion (chapel) of *Peter of Korisa* near Prizren. The 13th century master wall painters produced mature works. Having created a new style they also introduced certain innovations: the blue colour was replaced with golden, still figures were painted in thick brush strokes, the rich colouring was effectively pronounced with the playful use of light and shadows. The beginning of the 14th century the themes used in painting expanded and apart from the Gospel scenes these included apocryphal stories, the Last Judgement, the Calendar.

The treasures of *Decani*, *Gracanica* and the *Patriarchate of Pec* contain over 300 hand-written and printed books spanning the period between the 12th and the 18th century. There are also 109 icons and over 100 liturgical utensils made of metal and textile. There was a printing shop at *Gracanica Monastery* in the 15th

century. The *Gracanica Octoechos* was printed there at the beginning of 1539.

Cultural and artistic treasures of Kosovo and Metohia ranks among the greatest achievements of Christian civilisation. Hierarchs, monarch, monks and clergy together with people built and decorated churches, monasteries and cave hermitages. Many of such pearls of the medieval architecture stood the test of time and have been preserved until the present day.

The KFOR peace forces entered Kosovo and Metohija on June 13th 1999 with a goal to guarantee peace and security to the entire population of the province. Since their arrival, however, more than 100 Serb Orthodox shrines, churches and monasteries were completely razed to the ground, damaged or desecrated by Albanian extremists. Regrettably, instead of being recognised as world heritage they are, nowadays, being subjected of destruction.

The Church of the Holy Virgin of Ljevisa in Prizren

From Byzantine times, the church organization retained an episcopate in Prizren and the *Cathedral in Ljevisa*, a present-day densely populated town traversed by the Bistrica River. The old centre was renovated at the time, but only for the needs of the new eparchial administration. Its appearance was radically altered only later, at the outset of the 14th century. It is difficult to ascertain the date when the basilica was erected despite many analogous examples in the architecture of the Eastern Christian world, because it belonged to a type of much earlier Byzantine traditional structures such as prevailed even after the re-establishment of the Emperor's authority in these regions. In the 11th century the church was, without a doubt, the seat of the Prizren bishops as cited in a document of Basil II's, in which he confirms the rights and defines the extent of the Ohrid Diocese. There are no indications that after 1219 the Cathedral, as part of the Serbian Archbishopric, altered its appearance in any essential way. *The Church of the Virgin of Ljevisa*, on the other hand, was soon afterwards enhanced with new wall-paintings, but the remaining fragments exposed when restoration work removed the outer layers, revealed only a small part of the once elaborate frescoes.



Organisation of exhibition

The Embassy of the FR of Yugoslavia
The Ottawa Serbian Heritage Society

Sources

Web page of Serbian Patriarchate:
<http://decani.yunet.com/kosovo.html>
<http://decani.yunet.com/epatrijarsija.html>

"Crusified Kosovo", publication of Raska and Prizren Orthodox Eparchy

"The Monasteries of Kosovo and Metohija", by Slobodan Mileusnic

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