

## ***The Monastery of the Holy Archangels, Prizren***

Territory:  
KOSOVO/UNMIK

Name of organisation  
compiling the information:  
Republic institute for Protection of  
Monuments,  
“Mnemosine” – Centre for Protection of  
Natural and  
Cultural Heritage.



Contact name:

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Name and address of building(s) or site: THE MONASTERY OF THE HOLY  
ARCHANGELS, Prizren,  
District of Prizren, Diocese of Raska  
and Prizren

Inventory reference number(s): SK 1366

Building type(s): Historical monument, Orthodox Church

Main date(s): 1343-1352

Current use(s): in service (until 17 March 2004)

Significance:

### *Position*

The Monastery of Holy Archangels is situated in the gorge of the river Bistrica, 3km from Prizren, by the road connecting Prizren and Tetovo, which in the Middle Ages provided communication between Prizren and Sredacka and Sirinicka zupa. It was founded on a plateau upon the left bank of the river, at the foot of the hill on which the mediaeval fortress Visegrad was built.

### *History*

The monastery was built upon remains of an earlier sacral object, in the period between 1343 and 1352. It is the endowment of king Dušan (Emperor from 1346). The text of the foundation charter, granted by the donor between 1348 and 1353, was preserved in a copy contemporary to the charter. The emperor provided his endowment with a very high rank in the Serbian church hierarchy, as well as with large estates including meadows, vineyards and woods, with 93 villages, with peasants and artisans, with a mine and many other privileges. Exact construction dates are not known. It is believed that the preliminary arrangements were made as early as 1343, during king Dušan's visit to Prizren. The construction of the monastery might have been completed by 1349, when, according to the sources, lead for the roof was obtained. The works in the church, however, were finished as late as 1352. The construction of the monastery was supervised by Hegumen Jakov, who subsequently became the metropolitan of Ser. Five masons appointed by the king, originating from the estates given

to the monastery, were permanently engaged on the monastery's construction. Due to these facts the building of such a big monastery complex, consisting of two churches and large convents, was completed in quite a short time.

Fortified and well protected, the Monastery of the Holy Archangels hosted the refugees from Prizren in 1372, but it could not protect its estates. Many of them seem to have been lost as early as the second decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The life and activity within its walls lasted only one century.

After the sack of Prizren in 1455, the Turks must have captured and demolished the monastery. The unfavourable circumstances during following years resulted in clumsy repairs of the katholikon, and the unskilfully built narthex of the church of St Nicholas. An inscription from 1519, about selling a book that once belonged to the monastery, suggests that the monastery might have already been deserted at that time. There is no doubt that in 1542 nobody lived in the monastery, since certain laymen inscribed their names on the walls of the main church at that time. The katholikon and convents were pulled down between 1542 and 1615.

In 1615, by order of Sinan-pasha, the material of which the church had been built was used for the construction of his endowment, Sinan-pasha's mosque erected in Prizren. The remains of the churches and convents were subsequently covered with a deposit carried by water from the slopes of the hill. No traces of the monastery could be seen, and only the tradition that people from the nearby villages gathered twice a year on the feasts of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, saved it from sinking into complete oblivion. Those gatherings evoked the memory of the fairs that used to be organised in the monastery's immediate surroundings. Three centuries had passed before the archaeological excavations were begun in 1927.

**Monastery complex.** The monastery has an irregular triangle in its plan, defined by a fortified enclosing wall, and dictated by the shape of the plateau and the river band. Having in mind the information from the sources that the perimeter wall used to house a guard, one comes to the conclusion that the wall enclosure must have been finished in a battlement hiding a wall walk. The dormitory, monastery library, infirmary and convents were built against the perimeter wall. The enceinte was occupied by the main church, i.e. the Emperor's mausoleum, dedicated to the Holy Archangels, a little church dedicated to St Nicholas, and the refectory, built as a free-standing object. The katholikon dedicated to the Holy Archangels, Michael and Gabriel, dominated the monastery complex. The complex made of costly materials, lavishly ornate with sculptures and reliefs, excited the admiration of mediaeval chroniclers. One of them wrote: by its beauty and adornment it surpassed the church of Decani. The church had a tripartite sanctuary to the east and a narthex to the west. It was designed on a cross-in-square scheme. The remains of two domes - one bigger in diameter than the other - indicates that the church must have had five domes, and that its oblong corner bays were similar to those in Gračanica - with domes positioned in their corners.

The narthex was designed as an open portico with three apertures on its front, and one on the north and south wall, respectively. The shape and size of the pilasters supporting transverse arches indicates that all of the three bays of the narthex must have been vaulted: those on the flanks surmounted by groin vaults, the central one domed. The facades of the church were made of reddish and white marble ashlar. They must have been decorated with several blind arches and divided into several zones by horizontal cornices. The windows and portals must have had lavish sculptural decoration featuring Romanesque and Gothic reliefs. The mausoleum of Emperor Dušan showed a symbiosis of the Byzantine concept of church's interior and Western treatment of the facades, already seen on the mausoleums of the members of Nemanjić dynasty. The church was equipped with marble liturgical furnishings. In addition to that, it was famous for its mosaic floor, comprised by a medieval chronicler among masterpieces of Serbian art.

Facades of the church dedicated to St Nicholas were decorated in the same manner as those of the katholikon. It was designed as single-naved, domed church, with an eastern apse, and an open portico, narthex, to the west. The narthex might have also been domed. The refectory was a monumental, free-standing, cross-shaped object. One of its shorter arms was finished in an apse.

#### *Research and conservation work*

The research of the monastery began with the study of the sources, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The excavation of the remains and subsequent investigation of the site was begun as late as 1927. That campaign was restricted to the excavation of the remains of the two churches. The other objects belonging to the monastery complex were excavated in the 1970s.. The remains of the monastery underwent conservation treatment on the same occasion. The site was then used as a pasture-ground for cattle. The idea of revitalising the monastery by rebuilding conventual buildings and re-establishing the brotherhood appeared as a solution to this problem. It was realised in the 1990s.

The investigation of the remains of the monastery went along with archaeological excavations. A concise report about campaign of 1927 was written by its supervisor, Radoslav Grujić, PhD. A more comprehensive study about the monastery was written by Professor Slobodan Nenadović, as a result of the investigation and restoration campaign taken up in the 1970s. In his monograph about the monastery of Holy Archangels Nenadović presented the complete corpus of historical data related to Emperor Dušan's endowment. He paid special attention to the analysis of the remains of the churches and stone fragments, in order to make ideal reconstructions of their original appearance. It was a special contribution to the idea of beauty and splendour of the Emperor's mausoleum.

#### Categories of Significance:

Of outstanding national importance.

#### Categories of ownership or interest:

Historical and religious monument of particular national importance. Historical research of the remains was particularly important from the scientific point of view. Also extremely important rehabilitation and restoration were, after nearly 60 years of renovation, particularly important for Serbian Orthodox Church and local Orthodox settlement.

#### Documentation and bibliographic references:

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#### Condition:

*(in accordance with documentation available after the devastation of 17 March 2004)*

Roof more than 30% damage, with significant damage to walls, but can be repaired.

#### Risk:

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#### Condition risk:

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; no solution agreed

#### Technical assessment and costings:

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Ownership:

Serbian Orthodox Church

Occupation:

The Monastery was active until 17 March 2004 when it was evacuated and demolished.

Management:

Serbian Orthodox Church, Diocese of Raska and Prizren.

Summary:

High Priority - a major historical and religious monument and Orthodox Church in Prizren. Badly damaged in the violence of March 17<sup>th</sup>.

Sign and date.

May 2004