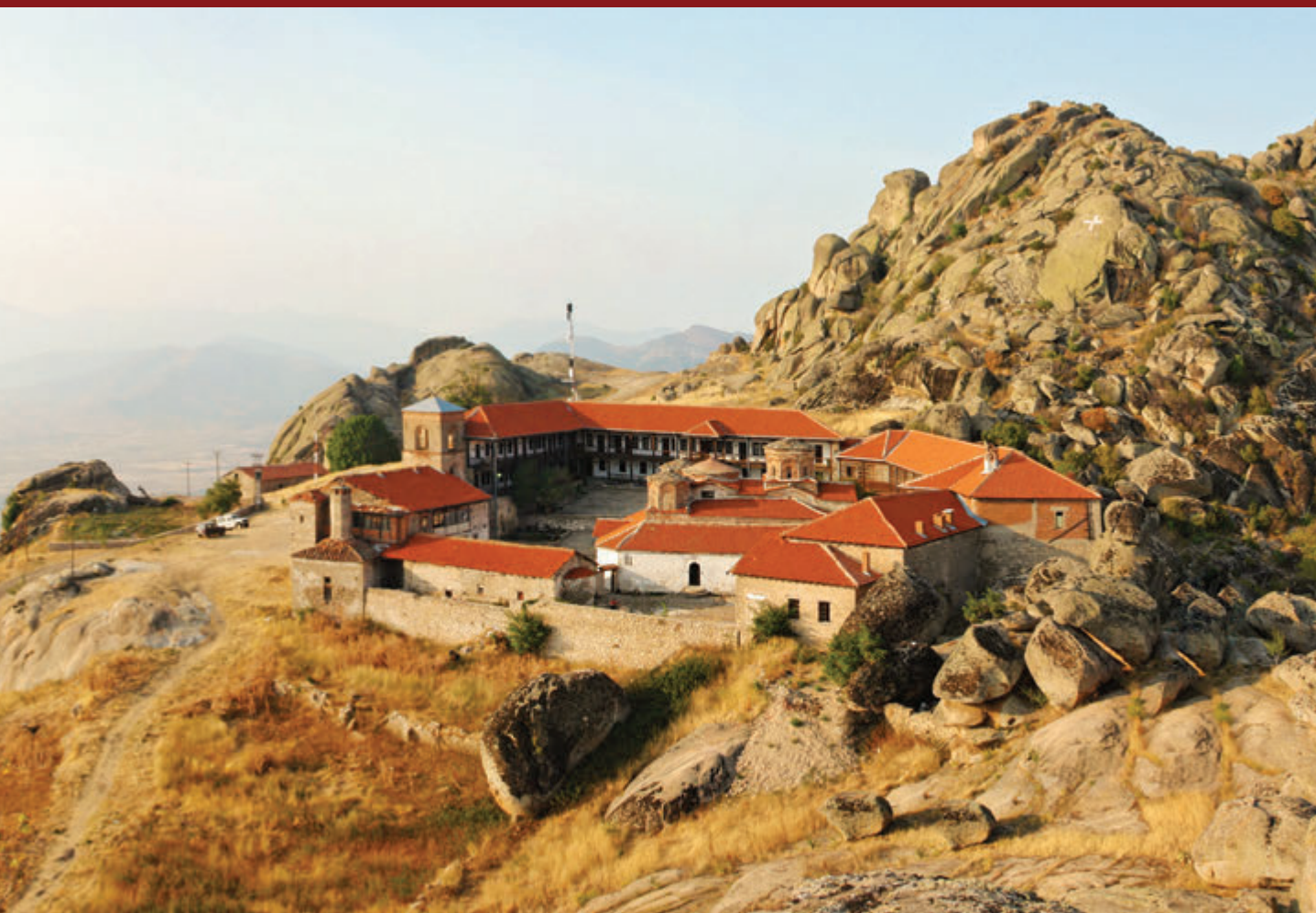




The most significant values
of the cultural and natural heritage

THE MONASTERY OF TRESKAVEC



Aleksandar Vasileski

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FOREWORD

MACEDONIAN CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Over the past 4.5 million years since the creation of Earth, the ancestor of the modern man, “the wise man - Homo sapiens”, appearing on the African continent 150,000 years before this day, quickly settled throughout the territories of the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

His cultural evolution is recorded in the Republic of Macedonia, as well.

While travelling through the prehistoric era of the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, as well as the historical epochs of the Antiquity and the Middle Ages, man created civilizations on the soil of the Republic of Macedonia by introducing and using the natural resources. He established the magnificent kingdoms of the Agrianians, Paeonia, Pelagonia, Lyncestis, Macedonia, and the principalities of Deuriopus, Dessaretia and the Penestae.

The Roman Empire, Byzantine, the medieval states - all left a powerful civilizational imprint.

The belief in the natural phenomena, followed by the belief in the many gods, to finally worship our only God - all left indelible cultural traces.

All this enormous cultural and natural heritage of the Republic of Macedonia was subject of the capital project of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, “Publications of the most significant values of the cultural and natural heritage,” carried out by the Cultural Heritage Protection Office.

130 monographs featuring the Archaeological Heritage, Sacral heritage, the Treasures of the churches and monasteries in Macedonia and the Natural heritage were created.

Macedonia - the high forest land in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula, as the name suggests, furrowed by the deep valleys of the Vardar tributaries and the river Drim, adorned with the blue - green waters of Lake Ohrid, Prespa and Dojran, with the proud giants Kozuv, Shar Mountain, Korab and Jablanica, Selecka Mountain and other mountain ranges, today lights 130 torches of its own, as well as the world's, cultural and natural heritage; a legacy to preserve, use wisely and pass on to future generations of the Macedonian road to eternity.

Prof. Viktor Lilchikj Adams, Ph.D.

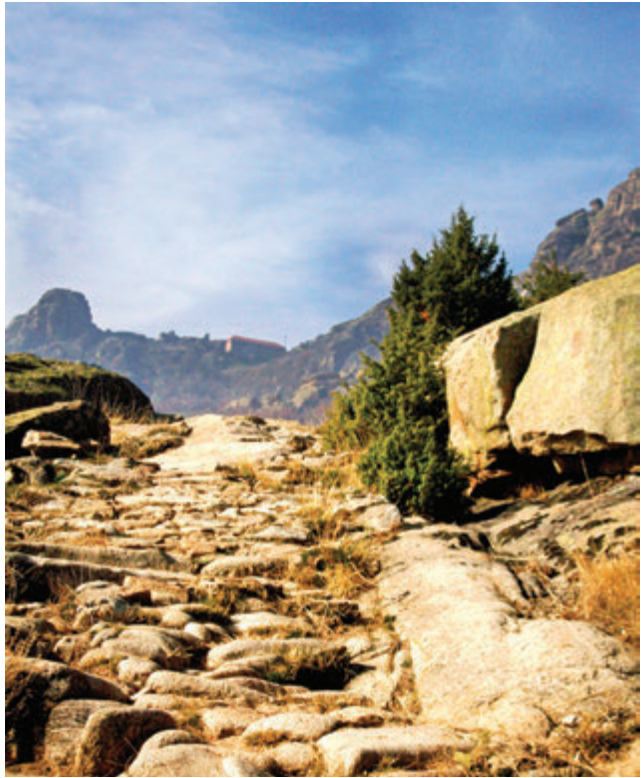
THE MONASTERY OF TRESKAVEC WITH THE CHURCH DORMITION OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

The Treskavec Monastery is nestled in the massive rocks of Zlatovrv, melted in the mysterious landscape that is irresistibly reminiscent of scenes from Byzantine icons and frescoes. Though located only a few kilometres north of Prilep, it seems ages away from the present, sunk in the depth of mythical times. Here, every surrounding rock, every stone and every brick in the monastery church is a subject in the fairy tales retold for centuries. These stories, some beautiful and some frightening, as the area that surrounds Treskavec, tell of emperors and kings, of weddings and slayings, of miracles and beasts, of the hundreds of monks and of the golden apple by which Zlatovrv was named. In the legends, the memory of the times when Treskavec was a powerful monastic centre with the rank of Mount Sinai and Mount Athos still lives, visited and gifted by the Byzantine emperors, Bulgarian tsars and Serbian kings. The reliability of the stories and the glory of the monastery are confirmed by the numerous additions to the katholikon, the large refectory and the dining room that fed the numerous monastic fraternity, by the nobility charters that the monastery was gifted, as well as by the hundreds of books written in the monastery scriptorium. Today, the impressive monastery library is dispersed in the collections of libraries and museums in the Balkans and around the world, whereas the refectory and the dining room are empty. The monastery has been the home of only one monk in the past ten years, who represents a small spark of hope for the revival of the glorious fraternity of Treskavec.



Monastery Treskavec and Zlatovrv, view from the south

Following the monasteries of Mount Sinai and Mount Athos and due to the rigid beauty of the landscape, the holiness of the space surpassed the monastery walls and was transferred over the entire mountain, becoming a place for spiritual elevation and redemption for the monastic fraternity widely known for its exemplary spiritual life, as well as for the hermits who settled in the surrounding wilderness. Since the very beginning the monastery started to grow into a glorious pilgrimage centre. The journey through the sacred mountain represents a sacred act for the pilgrims headed to the monastery. The ancient road leads through the granite rocks imprinted under the footsteps of the countless pilgrims. The icons of the roadside rocks and the nearby fountains were intended



The road to Treskavec



The western entrance to the monastery

for the spiritual and physical support of the passenger to his final destination. The long road evokes a cathartic feeling within the passenger on arrival at the final destination, whereas the inaccessibility grants the monastery tranquillity and timelessness. For centuries, each year on August 28, during the celebrations of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, crowds of people walk this road to celebrate the monastery's celebration day. They briefly disrupt the silence in which the monastery continues its centuries-long existence.

History, founders and donors

At what point in time did man find his place in the heights of Zlatovrv for the first time? Science has yet to find an answer. Perhaps he chose this place initially as the habitat of his gods, and in his desire to be closer to them, he settled here. As witnesses of the first inhabitants on this area stands the remains of the ancient walls that surrounded the plateau where the monastery and the great necropolis were founded. This necropolis has been the place of burials for over eight centuries, from the 4th century BC to the 4th century AD. By contemplating the epigraphic monuments built in the monastery church, which were gathered in the courtyard of the monastery, we discover the name of the settlement Kolobaisa – the cult centre of Apollo and Artemis.

With the triumph of Christianity over other religions in the Roman Empire, at the sites of the pagan temples arose Christian churches, as was the case with Treskavec. Sections of the parapet slabs built in the façade of the medieval church that were once part of the altar mock wall of the basilica, indicate that on this place was built an Early Christian basilica. Due to the turbulent historical events from the end of 6th century, the settlement was, most likely, abandoned, and the basilica, left by itself, collapsed under the weight of time. Though the building no longer existed, the memory of the holiness of this place did not cease to exist. The darkness of the past concealed the information of when this place was revived upon the arrival of the monastic fraternity, as well as when the nucleus of the church was built, but unquestionably, life in the monastery was inseparably linked to the state of the Ohrid Archbishopric, as well as the development of the city



Fragment of an Early Christian stone plastic, western façade



Portrait of Andronikos II and Mihailo IX, western entrance to the monastery

of Prilep. According to the fragmented data that survived the turbulent times, we learn that at the end of the 13th century Treskavec was already an important spiritual centre. Throughout the turbulent 13th century, the years and decades changed along with the rulers and countries that ruled Prilep, but the city managed to rise as one of the most important economic and cultural centres in the region of Central Macedonia. It flourished in the period when the new Byzantine-Serbian border was established, when the powerful walls of the Prilep fortress became the first defence of the Byzantine Empire, and the city fair became a trade chain connecting the two countries. In the period when Prilep was essential to the kingdom, over the main entrance to the Treskavec monastery were painted the portraits of the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II and his son and co-ruler Mihajlo IX. The entire scene was completely repainted in the late 19th century, but the faithful adherence to the Byzantine iconographic matrices and the authentic intitulations of the rulers, who can be noticed at the places where the bottom layer was exposed, indicate that the painter who repainted the fresco completely copied the older scene from the period between 1299 and 1316. In the lunette over the entrance were painted two rulers in most solemn attire as they receive the royal crown at the hands of the Mother of God. The master who restored the painting in the 19th century did not possess the skill or training of his medieval predecessor but still managed to keep the triumphant tone of the older painting that was aimed at reflecting the divine origin of the power of the Byzantine emperors. A special place for the portraits of rulers was probably acquired due to the donations and the support they provided for the monastery.

With royal support, the glory of the monastery crossed over the borders of the kingdom and the diocese of the Ohrid Archbishopric. At a time when the Byzantine rulers were immortalized as patrons of Treskavec, Milutin, the king of the neighbouring Serbian state, generously bestowed the monastery. With the gift giving act of the Serbian ruler began a tradition of respect and support of Serbian rulers and noblemen toward this important spiritual centre of the Archbishopric. With the powerful attack of King Stefan Dusan over the Macedonian territories under the rule of Byzantium in 1334, Prilep was included as part of his state. Soon after, a royal palace was built in the city and in order to express his gratitude for God's support in the battles, the Serbian ruler issued the first royal decree by which the monastery was endowed with spacious lands and many villages. Therefore, numerous churches and monasteries became estates of Treskavec. As the military successes of the king accumulated, the monastery was endowed with greater estates and with increasingly favourable economic benefits that were enrolled in two golden- sealed charters. In the period when Stefan Dusan still held the royal title, his portrait was painted on the eastern wall of the outer porch, next to the western entrance to the monastery, which dates the painting in this part of the church from 1334, when he conquered Prilep, to 1343, when Dusan was proclaimed king. Unfortunately, the fate of the fresco that portrayed the Byzantine rulers befell the portrait of Dusan, as well. In other words, during the adjustments and the sectioning in this part of the church in the 19th century, the portrait of Dusan was covered with mortar and the image of Stefan Nemanja was painted over it. From the former triumphant composition, one can now only see the inscription which states his royal title and the angelic representation that places a crown of the type kalimavkion on the head of the ruler. Answers to the questions whether the King received any other insignia as a symbol of military victories and royal dignity, or held a model of the church as the donor of some of the extensions, and finally, whether Dusan is the donor of this art, or it is an honourable portrait of the sovereign of the Serbian state, remain trapped under the additionally built walls and layers of mortar and paint that covered the western wall of the exonarthex.

The noblemen of the king's retinue followed the example of their ruler. Hence, as a donor of one of the extensions of the Treskavec katholikon emerges Gradislav, a close friend of the king who held the title tepcija - manager of the king's fiefs and one of the most powerful noblemen in the kingdom. In addition to the land and other generous gifts that he donated to the monastery, he also built a chapel with his own funds, of which today is only preserved the western wall that portrays the donor and his wife.

The great state of King Dusan was short-lived. Without the powerful personality of King Dusan, the kingdom was torn into several principalities which only formally recognized the government of Dusan's successor - Uros. Of the newly emerged states, the largest in territory and politically the most powerful was the kingdom of Volkasin, with its capital in Prilep. The small and divided states could not resist the imminent danger, so they easily become prey to the Turkish invaders. With the death of King Marko in 1395, Prilep became part of the powerful Ottoman Empire. Once these areas were conquered by the Ottoman sultans, the Treskavec monastery was entitled to the old benefits and was exempted from a number of taxes. In the last quarter of the 15th century, with a special Sultan decree, the monastery became part of the estate of the Pelagonian metropolitan David. With the start of the second half of the 16th century, the internal crises in the Ottoman Empire could



Donor portrait of Vissarion and Ambrose

be felt and the state of the population dramatically deteriorated. In these difficult times, when the Ohrid Archbishopric was exhausted by heavy taxes, the monastery was able to provide some financial stability. In the monastery screed and as patrons of the monastery are indicated most Christian villages in the greater surroundings, the wealthy families Pepikj and Bojkikj - owners of the Kratovo mines, and even the dukes and noblemen from Wallachia and Moldavia. The scriptorium, which commenced its activity in the 14th century, further intensified its work in this period thus assisting the monastery in supplying the nearby churches with literature essential for religious service and constantly enriching the monastery library with new books. The last books written at the hands of the Treskavec monks were dated in the first half of the 18th century, after which the rich spiritual life of the monastery gradually began to extinguish. It seems that the abolition of the Ohrid Archbishopric in 1767 created a crucial impact on the weakening of the monastery as a monastic, spiritual and

cultural centre. The monastic fraternity became insufficient and financially weaker, but did not allow the centuries-long building and painting tradition in the monastery to become extinct. In the third decade of the 19th century, the abbot Vissarion and the monk Ambrose built a covered porch over the katholikon, and their faces were painted in one of the arched niches of the southern external wall of exonarthex. The two old men, dressed in a simple monk's robe, hold the model of the church with the additionally built porch in one hand, and in the other they carry crutches and prayer beads. The only item that determines the higher rank of the abbot Vissarion is the olive-coloured analav (accessory attire). Two decades later, in 1854, at the hand of Dico Zograf (icon and fresco painter) was eternalized the character of the monk Samuil, who was one of the last monks who lived in asceticism in the monastery of Treskavec. In the second half of the 19th century, the responsibility for the monastery was administered by clergymen from the surrounding villages. The absence of the Ohrid Archbishopric created an opportunity for political struggle between the Serbian Patriarchate and the Bulgarian Exarchate for supremacy over the monastery, whereby the monastery itself and its believers suffered the most. But despite the efforts to seize and alienate the monastery, it is still an essential segment of the spiritual life of the Prilep inhabitants who have never forgotten or abandoned it.

The monastery complex

When King Dusan first visited the Treskavec monastery, he was not particularly impressed with either the quantity or the monumentality of the monastery buildings, but rather with the orthodox monastic life, the strict typikon and the hermits who choose the surrounding rocks as their place of existence. With the growth of financial power, spiritual authority and the quantity of the Treskavec fraternity, the old buildings were renovated and new buildings were added in the monastery complex. At the time of the peak of its spiritual glory and feudal power, the monastery was fortified by a system of towers and powerful ramparts that perfectly utilized the strategic position of the place and the inaccessibility of the terrain in order to defend it from the enraged enemy crowds. Due to the numerous natural disasters and the armies that passed through these lands, the towers and ramparts were erased, by reason of which the monastery acquired its present appearance with a courtyard enclosed by monastery objects on three sides, and a refectory and dining room on the southern side. The central position of the monastery circle was held by the katholikon dedicated to the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, which was, and still is, the main axis around which revolves the monastery life. In the nearby granite rocks there is a cave church that used to be a hermitage, where the monks of the monastery, who longed for spiritual enlightenment, were tempted. Those who were a part of the Treskavec life lived by the



Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, view from the north-west



Dining room, stone dining tables

The monastery villas, unfortunately, were burnt in a fire in 2013. They were also burnt previously, in 1867 and 1991.

rules of the monastery typikon and the instructions and tasks assigned to them by the monastery abbot. The unity of the monastic brotherhood was built during the liturgies and wakes which were held in the monastery church, but also during meals in the dining room. The meals were consumed in devout humility, in an atmosphere of religious rite at the stone dining tables, which were unique for this kind in the Republic of Macedonia. From the painted depiction in the dining room, today are preserved the frescoes in the apse that portrayed the Mother of God and Christ accompanied by angelic forces and the in the lower zone. The original fresco in the dining room was created in the 17th century, and in the 19th century the same scenes were repainted over the older paintings. Among the 17th century frescoes is the depiction of the Mother of God with Christ, which is located in the lunette above the western entrance to the dining room.



Mother of God with Christ, lunette over the western entrance to the dining room

The architecture of the katholikon

The Treskavec katholikon dedicated to the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, with its complex conception, serves as a unique example of this type of construction in medieval architecture in Macedonia. The unique architectural structure of the temple did not occur in a single architectural phase, but is the result of numerous additions, demolitions and reconstructions, which attest to the rich and turbulent history of the monastery. In the architectural moulding of the Treskavec church were encountered various tendencies that are excellent representatives of the mainstream of Byzantine architecture in different time periods, and attest to the impact that the major empire centres had on the builders of certain parts of the building. The central part of the present-day church consists of a narrow naos superposed by a dome, whose narthex is integrated in the west side covered with a blind calotte. One can enter the south nave and the north chapel through two wide openings in the narthex, divided by a single pillar down the centre. The southern nave extends along the entire length of the temple, and owing to the rocky terrain, a smaller chapel was built on the north, covered with a semi-cylindrical vault and a three-sided apse on the east side. On the west side of the church dominates a monumental two-dome exonarthex, under whose domes were formed compartments. In the 19th century was built a covered porch of massive granite blocks on the west and the south side, which prevents us from seeing the lavishly decorated façades divided by shallow arched niches set in two zones. In the shallow niches of the lower zone are located fresco icons painted in the second half of the 14th century, and above them extends a string of shallow half-circle niches whose interior is filled with ceramic decoration of various motives - diamonds, crosses, horizontally and vertically positioned bricks and their combinations, which revived the monotonous masonry of the coarsely processed stone blocks and bricks.

In the floor and the mortar-covered walls of the Treskavec church are still hidden some of the answers to the mysteries of its emergence, of the donors who built it and those who rebuilt it, of the function of its additions and the date of their existence. Some of these questions will be answered in the future, and the answer to others is forever lost, but we can reconstruct part of the life of this building based on previous knowledge and numerous assumptions. In the first phase of its existence the Treskavec katholikon was conceived as a small single-nave church superposed with a dome that relied on four massive pillars attached to the walls. This building, which was built in the late 12th and early 13th century, is the earliest representation in the sacral architecture on the territory of Macedonia of the type of churches with a narrow inscribed cross in the base. Around the middle of the 13th century a narthex was added on the west side of the temple, which became a single space with the central part of the church after the demolition of the wall that separated it from the nave. With the advent of the Palaiologos dynasty and the reestablishment of the Byzantine Empire, intense construction activities were initiated across the kingdom in the last quarter of the century. In this period, when many older churches in the capital and the provinces acquired new additions, the Treskavec katholikon probably received its external porch, which consisted of two parts that surrounded the central section of the church - on the west and the south side. At this stage, the outer porch was executed as an open porch, which brings it closer to the portico-façade which characterizes the Late Byzantine architecture. The beginnings of the use of the portico-façade in Byzantine architecture can be traced back to the period of the 11th and 12th century, but the greatest expansion of use occurs in the additions to the Constantinople



Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God, the domes of the exonarthex

and Salonika churches at the time of the Palaiologos dynasty. With the construction activities on St. Sophia in the year 1313/14, the Ohrid cathedral also received an exonarthex executed as a portico-façade on the west side. The asymmetrical base of the Treskavec example suggests the following of a Constantinople example, but this concept was favoured probably due to the restrictions that were imposed by the rocky terrain. With subsequent construction activities another dome compartment of the exonarthex and a chapel were added on the north side, whose length is significantly shorter than that of the south nave, but, nevertheless, the symmetry of the building was achieved, and the arched openings on the open porch were probably closed. The two-dome narthex is an innovation of Late Byzantine architecture and it nearly always has a burial function. The burials discovered in the space under the dome of the Treskavec exonarthex and the eschatological motif in the painting, confirm that this part of the church had a burial function. The north chapel was used as a baptistery and one entered it via the exonarthex, whereas the present connection to the interior of the church was achieved considerably later. The construction activities were completed before this entire area was painted, between the year 1334 and 1443.

Another addition which was built in the period around the middle of the 14th century is the construction of the chapel on the east of the south nave. The west wall which depicts the donor of this building holding a model of the chapel was preserved as a remnant of this building until today. The little compact chapel was built with the funds of the nobleman Gradislav, who is mentioned as the monastery donor in the royal decrees of King Dusan.

Unfortunately, with the advent of the Islamic conquerors, the intense architectural activity which began in Treskavec was halted at the time of its greatest material and spiritual power. During the Turkish rule in this region, the construction activities were reduced mainly to the repair of damages or making necessary adjustments. Considerable damage was inflicted on the monastery church on two occasions - in the 15th century, when the upper parts of the naos and a segment of the northern wall collapsed, and in the 16th century, when the altar and other eastern parts of the building were destroyed. In the 19th century the most considerable changes to the interior of the Treskavec church took place. The closed porch was built in the first half of the century. Later, the walls of the narthex to the north chapel and the south nave were removed, which probably took place during the reconstruction of the monastery villas in 1867, and which was intended to create a three-nave layout of the building - a major trend in church architecture of this period. In addition, the exonarthex, which formerly functioned as a single space, was divided by a wall with the south nave, thus forming dome compartments.

The carved gates

In order to enter inside the naos of the Treskavec church, first, one needs to open the double-winged door which divides the exonarthex from the inner porch of the church. Over these doors the master carver perfectly entwined the gently curved lines and vivid harmony of the floral motifs with the sharp edges and strict order of the geometric shapes using his chisel, thus creating a symbolic harmony between natural and human geometry. In-between the dynamic lines that powerfully capture one's attention are placed figures of angels, saints, people and animals - real and fictional. Taking into account the mysterious meaning of the numbers, he placed three representations in each of the seven lines, except the mid row with only two



Carved gates

fields, thus achieving twenty fields on each wing, i.e. forty on the entire gate - a number possessing rich biblical symbolism. The mid row divides the gate into two halves, each wing exhibiting a representation of an instrument player and a snake-resembling creature, whereas the third



Detail of the carved gates

motive represents a human head cast in bronze. The upper part of the gate is decorated with fields ending in a broken arc portraying the Mother of God and John the Baptist, the archangels Gabriel and Michael, apostles, bishops and deacons. In the lower three rows on each side of the gate are placed three square frames, each representing an animal. In the lower areas of the Treskavec gates we can see fictional and real life animals. The fictional are represented by dragons, griffins, centaurs and other chimeric creatures that were the product of medieval fantasy.

The master-carver portrayed real life animals that he was familiar with such as a deer, a doe, a rabbit, a cow and a camel. As for the exotic animals that he decided to portray he had most likely heard of, read about or even seen in some manuscripts or wood-carving representation he came across, so he was able to portray realistically an elephant, a rhino and a monkey.

The Treskavec gates are dated in the 16th century and are associated with the workshop which established the basic guidelines for the Macedonian art of carving in



Centaurus, detail of the carved gates

the centuries of Turkish rule. The most prominent works of this workshop are the carved gates of the Slepce and Treskavec monastery, as well as the church mobiliar of the Zrze monastery, providing the reason why this workshop became known as the Slepce-Prilep carving school. The works executed in the spirit of this school can be traced in the period from the 15th to the 17th century, whereas the work of this workshop laid the foundations for the brilliant works of the Mijak carvers from the 19th century.

14th century painting – the exonarthex, the façades and Gradislav's chapel

In the narrow and dark space of the outer porch of the katholikon in the Treskavec monastery, the visitor encounters strict and dignified figures of saints from the lowest zone of the fresco painting. In the upper sections of the walls is painted a gallery of saints who exhibit the same calmness while waiting for the blow of the sword of their executioner, and with dignity bear the pain inflicted by their tormentors and the scattered bodies of those who were executed. Due to the alteration of the space, the addition of walls and stacking of layers of plaster and paint, nowadays we cannot experience this painted art in its full glory. Nevertheless, by means of the visible remains, the painted ensemble created in the period between 1334 and 1343 can be reconstructed. At one



The painting in the south-western exonarthex



Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, menologium



Death of St. Mark and St. Basil Amasia, menologium

point, over the entire surface of the walls and the arches in the southern nave and the two-dome exonarthex, were aligned figures of saints and scenes in a sequence - each denoting a particular day of the year, together forming the menologium (church calendar). The cycle, most likely, began in the southern nave of the exterior porch with the month of September, and ended in the under-dome area northwest of the exonarthex. At the core of the Treskavec portrayal of this cycle two ideas are essentially intertwined - the visual representation of the flowing of the days in a year and the commemoration of the saints' martyrdom, who became the pillar of Christianity with their sacrifice, thus securing their place in heaven. Martyrdom is also celebrated with the iambic distich of Christopher of Mytilene, written in Greek, which features scenes from the Treskavec menologium. The mournful verses, elicited from the metric calendar written by the Mytilene patrician, speak of the glorious death and the heavenly reward of the saints.

In the north-west dome, above the scenes that mark the month of August, for the first time in medieval art is painted a scene, which due to its intricate theological foundation, had been differently interpreted and named in science, but is commonly referred to as the Heavenly Court. The idea for the representation of this theme was accepted and exploited in many temples over the next centuries. Even in the naos of this very church in the 15th century were, once more, painted holy warriors as lords in the first zone. Nevertheless, the composition Heavenly Court from the Treskavec exonarthex continued to exist as the unique example in orthodox art due to its location, spatial conception and complex eschatological content.

The composition Heavenly Court consists of Christ's bust at the top of the dome, which represents the centre of the whole scene. Christ, signed as Βασιλεὺς τῶν Βασιλευόντων - King of Kings, wears a festive crown on the head, kalimavkion, and he is dressed in a dividision and loros, covered in gold thread and precious stones. Around the image of Christ are lined two processions of celestial forces consisting of archangels and angels, cherubs and seraphs, authorities, thrones, dominions and powers. Approaching the processions are led by King David of the Old



Heavenly Mansions, north-western dome



The Mother of God beside the Prepared Throne, Heavenly Mansions, detail

Testament, whose representation is quite demolished, and the Mother of God, dressed in full royal orant, wearing a high open crown, wrapped in purple cloak decorated with crosses embroidered with gold and pearls. In the drum of the dome were painted the figures of eight holy warriors, presented as courtiers with lavish robes, wearing high hats and holding precious rods.

As for the textual model of the artistic shaping of this theme, were used parts of 44 (45) David's psalm, whose motives can be found in the Revelation of the Apostle John, and speak of the Second Coming and the Heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 19.7,8,14,16). The composition Heavenly Court is ideologically linked to the menologium, granting it a complex eschatological dimension that refers to the end of the world and of eternal life, which was linked to the burial function in this part of the church. The artistic expression of the painters who created the painting on the outside porch of the Treskavec katholikon with the meticulous drawing, the classical proportioning of the figures, the thoughtful structuring of the scenes, all follow the best artistic traditions that were established at the beginning of the century faithfully. The warm pastel tones, which are usually characteristic of the saints' attire, are in contrast with the blue and green background. The faithful depiction of the saints' faces was achieved by extensive olive shades and bright accents created by short strokes by means of white colour. Considering the artistic value and deep theological dimension, the painted ensemble on the outside porch of the Treskavec katholikon is linked to major cultural centres of the Byzantine Empire, which were the focal point of art in the 14th century Balkans.

In the following decades, when the monastery was at the peak of its power, the painting and construction activities of the monastery church continued. In the 1350s was built and painted the chapel of the tepcija (nobleman) Gradislav, with only the western wall that depicts the monastery's donor portrait preserved until today. The tepcija, who was one of the most significant political figures of his time, is portrayed offering the model of his chapel to Christ's representation in the lunette over the entrance, while God's hand blesses him from the sky. He is dressed in a burgundy tunic, woven with silver thread that is used in the creation of the decorative motif of a leaf framed in a net of diamonds, wearing a long belt on his waist decorated with golden applications. On Gradislav's wide face with a brown beard, framed by long hair that falls to his shoulders, on his strong neck and the large body, one can see the remains of militant tenacity and physical strength of Dusan's military aristocracy, which, following the years of the great mid-century conquests, assumed the bureaucratic obligations and relaxed in the lethargic comfort of civilian life. Gradislav's wife is painted standing next to him in a prayer position, but the damage of a piece of mortar had destroyed her face, which was later unsuccessfully retouched. She is portrayed dressed in lavish green attire, covered with a purple cloak rimmed with a strip of gold embroidery, and wearing an open crown adorned with pearls. Judging by the artistic features of the preserved paintings, the master who created it worked in the technique characteristic for the second half of the 14th



Donor portrait of the tepcija (nobleman) Gradislav

century on the territory of the Serbian Kingdom. The individualization and psychological emphasis on the character of the founder (donor), as well as the solid and realistically moulded shapes and the striking colours set it apart from the frescoes in the arched niches of the western and southern façade, which were painted shortly after the painting of Gradislav's chapel. The fresco-icons on the west and south façade were created in the seventh decade of the century, and considering their artistic qualities they can be linked to the painting of the church St. Mother of God Zahumska (Sv. Bogorodica Zaumska), which was completed in 1361. The slender figures, bright palette, the warm colours and the refined drawing give this type of painting a lyrical note, which marked the end of one period in the monastery's existence.

Reconstructions – the painting of the nave, the altar and the inner porch



Christ on the throne, southern facade

Due to the Turkish conquest and the collapse of the Christian states in the Balkans, the period of material wealth and feudal domination of the monastery ended. The times when Treskavec was attended and gifted by emperors and kings were gone. Historical conditions changed. The church no longer had the unstinting support of the state and of the church organizations in the Balkans, and the only one that continued to exist in the first centuries of Ottoman rule was the Ohrid Archbishopric. Still, even in the times of absence of wealthy donors and powerful patrons, Treskavec remained financially stable and spiritually authoritative. It continued to be in the mainstream of spiritual and material culture created at the core of the Ohrid Archbishopric and spread west to southern Italy and Russia to the north. The new layers of painting in the monastery church were applied in order to cover the damage to the old paintings and blank walls that were either demolished by the forces of nature or the wrath of people.



Prayer in the Garden of Olives, painting in the naos

The first painting created after the period of stabilization of the Turkish rule in this region was the fresco-icon of the Holy Mother of God with Christ in the lunette over the southern entrance to the exonarthex. The inscription, which surrounds the presentation of the Holy Virgin stroking the infant Christ, stated that the fresco was painted in 1430. Though the fresco is damaged, one can still recognize the precise drawing, the solid composition and the warm palette, which place it among the works associated with the workshop of monk Macarius of Zrze.

In the third quarter of the 15th century the monastery was struck by a natural disaster resulting in the destruction of the upper sections and parts of the walls in the naos and narthex. The frescoes, which were created in the ninth decade of the century, covered the old paintings and the rebuilt walls.

This painting, which is one of the masterpieces of the century, gave new lustre to the church. The inscriptions written on the arcs of the dome were to provide divine protection of the building and keep it from being demolished again. The new painting was executed within the established standards for fresco-decoration of dome churches. On the top of the dome, above the naos, Christ Pantocrator watches, framed in the verses of Psalm 102 - the call of the damned and unfortunate for divine mercy. Around the Pantocrator moves a procession of angelic forces that are part of the heavenly liturgy, and in the drum of the dome are arranged figures of Old Testament prophets. On the pendentives are portrayed four evangelists who, guided by divine inspiration, write the Gospel texts. In the highest zones of the under-dome areas are lined scenes of the Feast cycle, which are accompanied by quotations from prophecies that they heralded, written on the scrolls held by the prophets. The narrative cycle of the is composed of illustrations of the most important evangelical events, complemented by a number of episodes that speak of the high theological education of the patrons of this art. The dogmatic symbolism contained in each of the holiday scenes, complemented with apocryphal templates, is illustrated by numerous exceptional episodes in the Treskavec cycle, of which some are unique by their selection. The overload of symbolism is best observed in the composition supplemented by



Crucifixion, painting in the naos



The betrayal of Judas, detail, ainting in the naos



St. Theodore Stratelates, painting in the naos

the resurrected Adam who resurrects washed from his mortal sin by the blood of Christ. The inscription that follows the episode clarifies the role of Christ's sacrifice in the redemption of humanity. The striking cycle of is framed by two medallion friezes, which physically separate it from the Feast cycle and the gallery of standing saints painted in the first zone. The dramatic events of the Passion cycle, painted in the Treskavec katholikon, are filled with deep human pathos and strong emotions. Christ, surrounded by the demonically ugly servants of the high priests, looks away from Judas in the depiction of the Betrayal, gives the spectator a helpless look when brought before the judges, and, frightened, he hesitates when placed on the cross for crucifixion. In the lowest zone of the walls in the naos are painted the elegant figures of the holy warriors, clad in extravagant aristocratic robes, accompanied by the founders of monasticism and holy physicians Cosmas and Damian. On the southern wall of the altar is the image of Mary holding Christ-the child, and next to it is the depiction of St. Nicholas. As their counterpart on the north wall stands the composition of the Deisis with Christ wearing a royal crown and a purple sakos, but the omophorion on his shoulders is a typical attire of the bishops, thus portraying Christ as a secular ruler and spiritual leader. To the extravagant throne where Christ is seated, the Virgin Mary in royal robes approaches on one side, holding an open scroll, and John the Baptist on the other. The fresco- painting that covered the walls of the Treskavec monastery in the church Holy Mother of God in the 1490s is characterised by an exceptional theological basis, shaped by liturgical and apocryphal texts in addition to the biblical. The Byzantine heritage present in this art can be observed in the compositional structure and the use of old iconographic matrices, but the rendering of the saints' faces and attire, the gestures, emotions and the introduction of unusual episodes and elements within the established standards, refer to western influences on the masters. The main protagonists of the evangelical events



An unidentified saint, painting in the naos



St. Nicholas, painting in the altar

are skilfully detached from the other participants and by means of the inclusion of episodes is acquired multiple interpretations of the scene. The theological ideas, which are skilfully woven into the patterning of the frescoes, with regard to their content are related to the most important tenets of orthodoxy, while the realistically treated saints' images, full of life energy and emotions, are at odds with the orthodox dogma and aesthetics. These are not idealized images of saints who are not part of this world, but belong to a different reality. These are people of flesh and blood, full of life forces. Their beauty is a symbol of their kindness and vice versa - Christ's enemies are portrayed having disfigured faces of cruel barbarians and almost animalistic traits. This painting is linked to the painting of a large group of monuments that were created in the last quarter of the 15th century on the territory under the jurisdiction of the Ohrid Archbishopric - Thessaly, Macedonia, Serbia and Bulgaria, which is thought to be the work of the workshop centred in Kostur. In the artistic expression of these masters is recognized the influence of the western art, particularly the Late Gothic art of painting and the art of

the Italian masters from the circle of Giotto.

The painting in the altar of the church was created in 1570, as part of another reconstruction which included the eastern parts of the church, and which was financed by the financial means of Stojan Hranchev and his wife. The spatial organization of the paintings follows the previously established standards for the decoration of the holiest part of the temple. In the conch of the apse is painted the Holy Mother of God Mary with Christ, and under her, in two rows, the apostles of Christ approach the double composition of Christ who conducts communion with bread and wine, while in the lowest zone is the. In the niches of the prothesis and the diaconicon and painted holy deacons we find the martyr Stephen and the proto-psalter Roman. In the upper zones of the altar walls are presented two scenes from Christ's post-resurrection appearances - Christ appears to Mary Magdalene, Doubtful Thomas and another scene that is part of the cycle of Christ's miracles and teachings - Christ teaches in the synagogue.



St. Basil and St. Gregory, central apse, painting in the altar



Angelic forces, painting the altar



Deposition of the Holy Spirit, painting the altar

Although this manner of painting emerged a hundred years after the painting in the nave, in its conception and artistic expression it is more conservative and true to the Byzantine manner of expression. The drawing is lively and almost calligraphic, with a strongly emphasized brown line and the plasticity of the images is achieved with wide brown shadows, whereas the volume of the figures is expressed by means of geometric lines of the drapes. The masters who worked on the altar are inextricably linked to local traditions, and their examples are Byzantine art.

The last major painting endeavour on the walls of the Treskavec church took place in two stages in the middle of the 19th century. In the inscription of the composition Dormition of the Virgin, on the west wall of the inner porch is written that the painting in this part of the narthex was created in 1847 by master Atanas and his son Vangel. Unfortunately, due to the darkened area and the damage to part of the mortar surface, the artistic values of the painting are hardly visible. The illustration of the hymn dedicated to the Mother of God "O tebe raduetsja" ("In Thee Rejoiced all Creation"), placed in the blind calotte which supercedes this part of the church, was painted in 1849 by the fresco painters Michail and Zisi from Krusevo. Around the composition of the Holy Trinity in the top of the dome flow the verses of Damascus which celebrate the Mother of God, and under each of the verses are presented his artistic shapes.



O tebe raduetsja (In Thee Rejoiced all Creation), internal porch



The western gate of the monastery Treskavec

The entire composition echoes the laudable rhythm of the literary work, and by means of the rhythmic arrangement of angelic and saints' choirs, the vivid colouration, the luxurious robes and classic facial images of the participants, the masters managed to present the solemn atmosphere of the lyrical verses by the act of painting. By means of the painting of the Krusevo fresco painters was created the last masterpiece - a work on the walls of the Treskavec katholikon. The painting activities that took place after this monumental work were reduced to retouching and restoring of older frescoes, and repeated the contents of the older type of painting with a weaker visual language.

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