

même succès à Zagreb, Banja Luka, Sarajevo, Tirana, Podgorica, Sofia et Athènes? C'est moins sur. Cet exposé de « l'Histoire du peuple serbe » risque de heurter des voisins dont l'Histoire fut différente, voire hostile. Et quelle sera leur attitude lors-

que la Serbie sera candidate à l'Europe? C'est un problème auquel il faut réfléchir. Car par son ampleur et son importance, ce livre est un événement marquant de l'histoire contemporaine des Serbes.

BRANISLAV TODIĆ & MILKA ČANAK-MEDIĆ, *MANASTIR DEČANI* [MONASTERY OF DEČANI]. BELGRADE: MUSEUM AT PRIŠTINA, CENTRE FOR PROTECTION OF HERITAGE OF KOSOVO AND METOCHIA–MNEMOSYNE, SERBIAN ORTHODOX MONASTERY OF DEČANI, 2005. Pp. 535. ILLS. 432. PHOTO BRANISLAV STRUGAR.

Reviewed by Danica Popović

A little over a year after the monastery of Dečani had, quite belatedly, been added to the Unesco World Heritage list, a seminal monograph devoted to this Serbian holy shrine and magnificent work of medieval architecture and wall painting, by Branko Todić and Milka Čanak-Medić, was published. The book appeared in one of the most difficult periods in the monastery's 750-year-long history, the latest stage of which, much too often filled with dramatic events, has been befittingly termed the "Dečani Question" (D. T. Bataković, Belgrade, 1989; 2nd ed. 2007). In that way a bizarre continuity has been confirmed, and the fact has not passed unnoticed by the authors. Namely, through force of circumstance all the three scholarly monographs on Dečani conceived or published over the past century are associated with war times: the first, unrealized, was prepared during the Balkan Wars and WWI, while the second, penned by Vladimir R. Petković and Djurdje Bošković (*Manastir Dečani*, Belgrade 1941), was published in the early days of WWII. The latest was being written and prepared for publication against the background of the 1999 aggression of NATO powers and the 2004 outburst of Albanian violence against the Kosovo Serbs. As a result of these events, Dečani has become isolated from its mother country, in a hostile environment, and thus virtually inaccessible

to the faithful, to visitors and researchers. Telling in that sense is the fact that the publisher, the Priština Museum, functions as an institution in exile, struggling in gruelling conditions to preserve the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metochia.

It seems difficult to think of a sharper contrast than that between the sad developments marking our times and those when Dečani was built. The first half of the 14th century was a flourishing time for the Serbian state to which the Nemanjić, "offspring from a holy root", ensured the aura of holiness. It was a time of all manner of accomplishments: military victories, territorial and economic expansion, remarkable upsurges of thought and spirit, outstanding literary and artistic achievements. Seen in that light, the foundation of king Stefan Uroš III (1322–31) is a true representative of its epoch. Following the tradition of Nemanjić *ktetorship* established by Studenica, Dečani not only encompassed all the previous achievements – the organization of monastic life, the cult of the holy founder, architecture, wall painting – but even surpassed them in format, richness and monumentality. Incalculable in itself, the value of Dečani becomes even greater considering the destruction suffered by its equally magnificent predecessors and successors such as king Milutin's Banjska and king Dušan's

Holy Archangels near Prizren. The endowment of king Stefan of Dečani assembled all the best, the most cherished and the most beautiful the Nemanjić had to offer to the Saviour for the salvation of the soul and eternal remembrance, but also for the glory of dynasty and “fatherland”. Construction of Dečani was one of those truly outstanding undertakings through which the Serbs, led by their elite, were seeking to achieve the status of a New Israel, ensuring their legitimate and deserved place in the existing order of nations.

Writing a monograph on a historic and artistic monument of that rank must be an ultimate professional challenge. The book by B. Todić and M. Čanak-Medić faces the challenge in an apt manner. Their study itself is an outstanding piece of work or, more precisely, it is the first modern synthetic study on the monastery’s history, art and treasures. It is written by experienced researchers and experts in not only medieval Serbian but also Byzantine art and architecture. As they themselves stress, they found support in the long and fruitful history of previous research, which has offered some valuable results in more recent times. Essential among them are *Dečanska riznica* by Mirjana Šakota [*The Treasury of Dečani*, Belgrade, 1984], *Dečani i vizantijska umetnost [Dečani and Byzantine art]* by V. J. Djurić (ed.) Belgrade, 1989] and an extensive collection of works by the late Gordana Babić and her students *Zidno slikarstvo manastira Dečana. Gradja i studije [The Wall-painting of Dečani. Documents and Studies]*, ed. V. J. Djurić, Belgrade, 1995]. On the other hand, central to the conception and contents of the book was fieldwork research carried out by the authors themselves. M. Čanak-Medić had for almost a decade directed architectural investigation and restoration of the monastic complex and its church, while B. Todić had for many years studied its frescoes and other antiq-

uities. Finally, as it is always the case with masterpieces, every generation of scholars is left enough room for fresh perspectives and interpretations.

Setting about the task, the writers of this book were led by the intention to present the monastery of Dečani comprehensively, from its founding till this day. This means that the study encompassed its history, architecture, sculptural decoration and all the antiquities and treasures accumulated over the centuries. The focus of attention, a conceptual pivot of a sort, was the cult of the founder, the holy king Stefan of Dečani.

The very conception of the book rests on certain principles, some of which deserve special emphasis, for example the decision to present the long and often turbulent history of Dečani in its full continuity, that is, from its founding till this day. The results of this demanding approach are vital to a true understanding of Dečani’s purpose and role. Dečani is not just a representative “monument of culture” from a remote past and, as such, primarily an object of technical protection and scholarly attention. Originally intended as a House of God, Dečani has never ceased being a living organism with a liturgical function and social mission. Likewise, it was and still is the scene of significant, often dramatic, historical events. Another aspect, fully consistent with the views of modern scholarship, concerns the structure of the book, most of all the authors’ decision not to “isolate” the monastery’s treasury into a separate chapter. On the contrary, instead of being dislocated into an artificial, “museological” frame, the monastery’s illustrious valuables – icons, books, church vessels and vestments – including the greatest of all, the holy king’s relics, are viewed in a much more realistic and historically more credible context. One need not emphasize that such a manner of viewing past realities is one of the foremost tasks of a

methodologically well-founded historical science.

The important individual contributions making up the book should also be underlined, at least briefly. M. Čanak-Medić is responsible for the chapter on the original monastic compound, the architecture and sculpture of the monastery church. She views the monastic settlement as a spatial and architectural whole suited to the needs of communal life and guided by the idea of a higher order to which the monastic life is to be accommodated. Her presentation of its components, such as the monastery's fortifications, gateway tower and refectory, is documented with exquisite reconstructions. The focus of her attention, and with good reason, is the monastery church. In her recognizable manner, which means with exceptional thoroughness and credibility, with ample technical documentation, she discusses all the elements of the church – its ground-plan and structural system, the space and its decorative treatment, the shaping of its exterior, liturgical organization. Confirming the widespread recognition of Studenica as a prototype for the overall design of Dečani, an expression of commitment to hallowed models and everlasting values, she puts forward a number of fresh observations, especially concerning the origin of the architectural design. She traces it back to the east Mediterranean, most of all to Kotor cathedral, St Tryphon's, and to churches of Dubrovnik, but also farther afield, to the Venetian area, Tuscany and Umbria. Recapitulating the results of previous research, she demonstrates that the sculptural decoration of Dečani, an amazing combination of biblical scenes, real and imaginary plants and animals, and ornaments, is late Romanesque, but at the same time in full conformity with the spiritual ambience of an Orthodox church. So were its messages: all created beings, in their multiplicity and diversity, are a mirror of this world filled with the

struggle between virtue and sin. Similarly to psalms, they glorify God and at the same part partake in the artistic beauty of the church. Owing to M. Čanak-Medić, we now have a much deeper understanding of the roles played by the originator of the building and sculptural programme of Dečani – archbishop Danilo II, and the master builder – Fra Vita, who had the skill and the gift to confer a remarkable and beautiful form onto an exceptionally complex theological content.

B. Todić, in addition to the task of reviving more than seven and a half centuries of the monastery's life, wrote the pages devoted to the church frescoes. The magnitude of the challenge may be surmised from the fact that some ten years of frescoing resulted in about one thousand scenes and individual saintly figures combined into some twenty hagiographic and liturgical cycles. All the paintings were consistently arranged according to a carefully designed programme, which, as the author puts it, was a work of art in itself. While taking into account, scrupulously and deferentially, all the previous results in presenting and interpreting the painting of Dečani, B. Todić has chosen a fresh and different approach. Instead of approaching the frescoes from the angle of iconography and the cycles depicted, he has opted for a solution at once more useful and more sophisticated, closer to the medieval outlook of the world and the true significance of fresco ensembles. He interprets the painting of Dečani as a consistent programme of superior intellectual format which in a theologically well-versed way expounds salvation history in all of its stages: from the image of God, the Pantocrator, the story of creation and the original sin, the announcement of Christ's redemptory work – through his incarnation, miracles, teachings and passion, to the founding, consolidation and expansion of the New Testament church, to the Second Coming of Christ and

the final salvation of humanity. In other words, the painting of Dečani is interpreted as an expression of the notion that a church with its painted decoration is an image of the Kingdom of God and that it depicts it in the same essential way as the liturgy that takes place in it. Within that general order feature the Serbs as members of the community of the elect. The believer who entered the church would meet a series of historical figures – first the *ktetors*, St Stefan of Dečani and his heir, at first king then emperor, Dušan, whose initiatives powerfully influenced some elements of the painted programme. Serbian church leaders found their place among them, including the deserving hegumen of Dečani. The basic message communicated to the faithful was the one about the Nemanjić dynasty's sainted forebears and God-chosenness.

In studying this monumental fresco programme, unique not only in Serbian but also in Byzantine art, B. Todić puts forward many fresh and interesting observations which we believe will inspire an exchange of ideas in the scholarly community. For example, an essential feature of the Dečani painting such as its firm reliance on the text is interpreted differently from his predecessors – not in terms of the illustrative or didactic role of images, which characterized Roman Catholic art, but in terms of its liturgical meaning and its accommodation to different functions of different portions of the church. A convincing example in that sense is his analysis of the scenes from the cycle of the Acts of Apostles. A praiseworthy novelty is also his well-documented observation that in the process of frescoing these different portions certain cycles were disbanded and certain themes brought closer together and merged, assuming specific and additional meanings, which is recognized as yet another peculiarity of the Dečani painted programme.

With iconography at the centre of scholarly attention, the painters of Dečani and their style have been a neglected topic, but owing to B. Todić this lacuna is finally filled up. The work of many fresco painters engaged at Dečani is subjected to meticulous consideration and highly competent evaluation. Unlike earlier wholesale and not exactly flattering evaluations, we now have a coherent analysis, based on ample knowledge and experience, of the styles, preferences and handwritings of the Dečani painters, whose individual contributions are precisely determined for the first time. Therefore, the new and nuanced assessment of the Dečani painting proposed by B. Todić may be said to rest on very reliable foundations. Some of the painters, such as those executing the Ecumenical councils, were not up to their task, some may be considered mediocre, such as the authors of the Creation, of part of the cycle of St Nicholas, Christ's miracles and teachings, and some, such as those who frescoed the sanctuary and side chapels, showed much greater skills. A distinctive personal handwriting characterizes the painters of the Calendar and Acatist, while the painters of the cycle of St Demetrios, lower registers of the Acts of Apostles, Old Testament scenes and especially the Last Judgment are recognized as best. Common to them all was a penchant for the classicist art of the early decades of the 14th century. Finally, one should mention the author's well-substantiated rejection of their western origin and the cautiously assumed Thessalonian background.

A separate and praiseworthy quality of this book is its ample illustrative material conceived as a document running parallel with the text as its functional supplement rather than as a mere "decoration". It includes technical drawings, made according to highest standards and with the aid of state-of-the-art digital technology, such as those showing the arrangement of

frescoes. Supreme quality also characterizes the photographs of a master of the art, Branislav Strugar, which effectively bolster the new assessment of Dečani's artistic achievements. The documentary value of the illustrations is but one of their dimensions. They contribute just as much to the visual identity and beauty of

the book, for the design of which is responsible Mirjana Pištalo-Gligorijević. The book was designed as a luxury item, not only to be read with interest but also leafed with pleasure. Such a work is what the church that had even in medieval times been said to "surpass any thought by beauty" deserves.

NEW JERUSALEMS. THE TRANSLATION OF SACRED SPACES IN CHRISTIAN CULTURE.
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD AT THE NEW JERUSALEM MONASTERY AND THE
TRET'YAKOV GALLERY, MOSCOW, 27 TO 30 JUNE 2006.

Reviewed by Aleksandra Davidov Temerinski

The seventh international conference thematically and methodologically devised and organized by the art historian Alexei Lidov, Director of the Research Centre for Eastern Orthodox Culture, Moscow, was held in June 2006. Alexei Lidov has taken the first steps in this direction in the early 1990s, and his creativity and organizational abilities has led to Moscow becoming a new and important international centre where ideas are exchanged and fresh angles in the study of medieval Eastern Orthodox culture taken. These thematically well-defined conferences have in recent years balanced the number of participants coming from Eastern Europe and Russia and Western Europe and the USA, producing an inspiring atmosphere for exchange of ideas between scholars formed in the two culturally and methodologically different "schools". It should be emphasized that the proceedings not only are published regularly, but quite often complemented by publications such as catalogues of accompanying exhibitions or critical editions of the written sources relevant to the topic of the conference. The Centre's busy publishing activity is best illustrated by the recently published volumes: the first volume from the 2004 conference (*Hierotopy. The Creation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2006), a selection of writ-

ten sources relating to relics, which were the subject of the 2000 conference (*Relics in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2006), the English edition of the first conference, held in 1991 (*Jerusalem in Russian Culture*, eds. A. Batalov and A. Lidov, New York–Athens 2005), as well as the collection of abstracts from this year's conference (*New Jerusalem. The Translation of Sacred Spaces in Christian Culture. Material from the International Symposium*, ed. A. Lidov, Moscow 2006).

The topic of the 2006 conference – New Jerusalem. The Translation of Sacred Spaces in Christian Culture – has been intended to mark the 350 years of the New Jerusalem Monastery (1656) near Moscow, the life's work of Patriarch Nikon (1652–67) begun in the reign of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich Romanov (1645–76) and completed in the early 18th century.

A sacral, intellectual, spatial and visual expression of the Russian revival of the period, the Resurrection Cathedral of the New Jerusalem Monastery fully follows the ground-plan of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, the holiest of all Christian shrines. And this is not all: the layout of the monastery complex reflects the sacral topography of Jerusalem and its surroundings. Effecting an allusion to Heavenly Jerusalem, this complex near Moscow established a parallel to serve