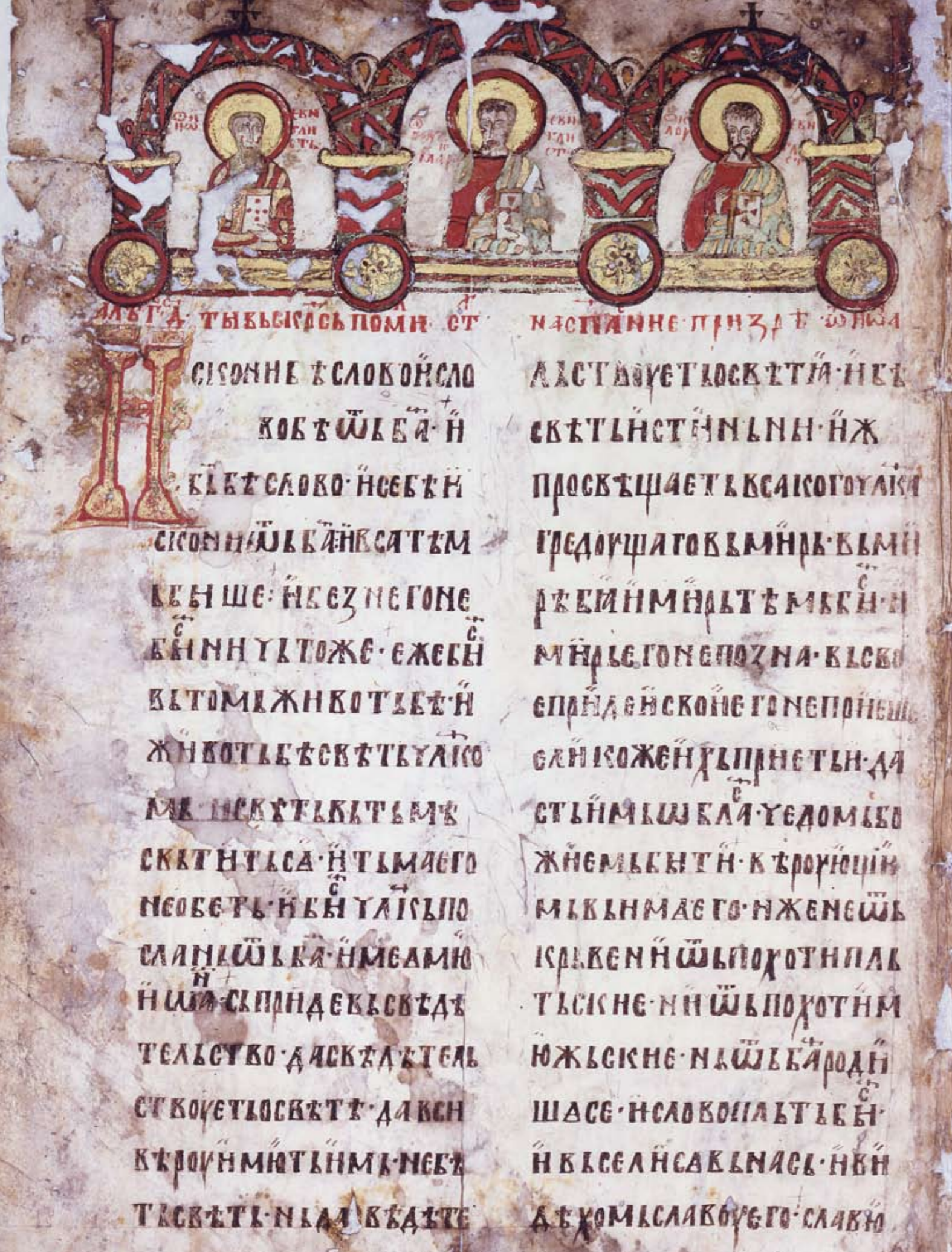


# Museum Collections

The Mediaeval Department



## The Mediaeval Department



IT WAS ORIGINALLY PLANNED that copies of frescoes from mediaeval churches be displayed together with the artefacts from the historical art collection on the ground floor of the Prince Paul Museum, next to the prehistoric archaeological collections.<sup>1</sup> It was also planned that the mediaeval collection composed in such way, should be exhibited in seven rooms (as indicated on the preserved plan). Two rooms were then allotted to old Christian and Byzantine art, two were earmarked for the copies of Serbian frescoes and Serbian numismatic items and the three remaining rooms were to show mediaeval art.<sup>2</sup> The Museum already had a number of copies of frescoes but there were also over two hundred copies executed by a team of Russian copyists. These were done as patterns for the mosaics in the Karadorđević mausoleum at Oplenac.<sup>3</sup> The fact that these were copies was not a problem – as the Museum director once observed: ... *when it comes to mediaeval art the role of copies is not an insignificant one and there are museums such as Trocadéro in Paris which partly consist of models, copies or casts, even photographs. The value and attractiveness of the original is in a way compensated by the opportunity to make direct comparisons between works from different epochs.*<sup>4</sup>

The conceived plan was never put into effect and the Mediaeval Department occupied only one room. However, the Museum management, guided by the principle that visitors to every museum should have an opportunity to upgrade their artistic, scientific, social and cultural historic education, took care that *unique national monuments* were exhibited in it. From the founding of the Museum its director endeavoured to gather *the most important and valuable documents of our cultural history* so that they could be exhibited as part of the permanent display. This referred above all to significant mediaeval manuscripts and primarily to the “*Gospel of the glorious Prince Miroslav*” known as the *Miroslav Gospel*.<sup>5</sup> The manuscript was written in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century on commission from prince Miroslav of Hum, brother of Stefan Nemanja. The second item was the *Prizren Manuscript of Emperor Dušan's Code*<sup>6</sup> (from between 1525 and 1530)<sup>7</sup>. The *Miroslav Gospel* is the oldest Cyrillic manuscript in the Serbian transcription of Old Slavic. *Dušan's Code* was the most important Serbian mediaeval legal document and its *Prizren Manuscript* is more complete than the older copies and therefore the most suitable for reconstructions of the original text. This makes this document the

◀ The Miroslav Gospel

The seal of Stefan Nemanja, 12<sup>th</sup> century



Inscription from Temnić, 11<sup>th</sup> century



Golden clasp of the Hum prince Petar, 13<sup>th</sup> century (1222-1228)



best known and respectable of all copies of the *Dušan's Code*.<sup>8</sup> The Museum management also requested that other manuscripts kept in the National Library be loaned for exhibition purposes, for example the *Four-Gospel Book* No. 297 from the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the *Romance of Alexander the Great* from the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

The *Miroslav Gospel* was in ownership of the Royal Court, and kept in the National Bank vaults. Upon the request of HRH Prince Regent a special commission opened the vault and presented the manuscript to the Prince Paul Museum for keeping and exhibiting. The *Miroslav Gospel* was removed to another place for safekeeping at the beginning of the Second World War and returned to the Museum in 1945.

Special brass showcases with shock resistant glass were provided for the *Miroslav Gospel* and the *Prizren Manuscript of Dušan's Code*. The manuscript stands were coated with special dust repellent fabric, also moth and bookworm proof. The exhibits could be aired occasionally and every modern requirement for keeping books was carefully observed. One of the cases contained the *Miroslav Gospel* and the other one *Dušan's Code*, two charters of Despot Đurđe Branković and a cast of Nemanja's seal.<sup>10</sup>

It was intended to display the *Miroslav Gospel* open-paged with leaves occasionally turned over so that interested visitors could view the entire book on several visits.<sup>11</sup> The showcases were specially commissioned and made in order to satisfy all the requirements of contemporary museum standards.<sup>12</sup> The exhibits were displayed chronologically and by the type of material and arranged in such a way to avoid overcrowding so that the visitors' attention was drawn to the specimens and not the series.

As the museum director stated: *The Serbian Mediaeval display is located in the last room on the left: it contains the Miroslav Gospel, the golden clasp of the Hum prince Petar, sculpted remains from the church in Banjska, the golden ring of queen Theodora, a silver plate with the name of Emperor Dušan, polykandelon of king Vukašin and quite a number of other items. Byzantine golden jewellery and enamel pieces are in a separate showcase in the same room.*<sup>13</sup>

The published descriptions given by contemporaries and the preserved lists of exhibits in the permanent display, kept in the archives of the National Museum, provide insight into the arrangement of the exhibited objects but also into the development of the museum collections as well.<sup>14</sup> They show that the permanent display in the Museum was occasionally changed, particularly when new, although not too many, acquisitions were made. In 1937 the mediaeval art display was extended to an additional, though smaller, room. The displayed objects were defined by time of origination, provenance and the kind of material. The following showcases were on permanent display: old Christian and Byzantine treasures, mainly objects from Stobi; jewellery presumed to be old Slavic and old Serbian;



Ring of Empress Theodora, 14<sup>th</sup> century



Polykandelon of king Vukašin (1365-1371)



Plaques, enamel, Chialndar, 11<sup>th</sup> century

Ciborium from Ulcinj,  
9<sup>th</sup> century



Serbian antiquities; 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century liturgical vessels; a chasuble and epitachelion from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. About seven icons from the post-Byzantine period were mounted on the walls.<sup>15</sup> The display presented also stone plastic remains from Banjska, a mediaeval monastery near Kosovska Mitrovica, two stone reliefs from the church in Orahovac in Kosovo and the arcade of an early mediaeval ciborium from Ulcinj. Since the presentation of mediaeval art was not proportionate to the art from other periods, the Museum management made efforts to enlarge the stocks of this department.

Between 1936 and 1945 inventory entries of the mediaeval and historical collections were not numerous, but the majority of objects were donations, mostly

personal effects of the Karadorđević and Obrenović, and predominantly related to the historical and not to the mediaeval collection.<sup>16</sup>

The museum curators occasionally travelled in order to collect relevant artefacts but there is no reliable information as to what was brought back to the Museum. Five pieces of architectural remains from the Banjska monastery were brought in 1935. The curator of the collection went to Prizren, Đakovica and Orahovac in 1936 *to study and collect ancient art objects*. In 1937 the collection was enriched by the finds excavated during the explorations of Stobi.<sup>17</sup> That same year the arcade of a mediaeval ciborium from Ulcinj was brought to the Museum. There were also two icons from Prespa dated to



Fragment of  
decorative plastic,  
Banjska, fist half of  
14<sup>th</sup> century

seventeenth century, a donation from the Yugoslav embassy in Tirana.

The Prince Paul Museum had a substantial budget for the purchase of mediaeval artefacts. Objects were purchased mainly from well-known antiquarians in Skopje. During his office as director of the Museum of Contemporary Art Milan Kašanin managed to acquire a silver plate with the inscription of Emperor Dušan for 4000 Dinars. The then still existing Museum of History and Art could not afford to buy it<sup>18</sup> but after the merging of the two museums the plate was displayed in the Prince Paul Museum.

The most important acquisition of mediaeval objects d'art for the Prince Paul Museum was an exquisite collection of jewellery from Markova Varoš – seven bracelets, a pair of big earrings and a

Silver plate with an  
inscription of Emperor  
Dušan (1345-1355)





Silver jewellery, Markova varoš,  
first half of 14<sup>th</sup> century



silver reliquary. The collection was purchased in 1938 from Chalekian, a well-known antiquarian from Skopje, and paid 3,500 dinars. In January 1941 fifteen mediaeval rings were purchased from Hannah Sokolovskaya, also an antiquarian from Skopje.<sup>19</sup> Another important purchase was made when the Prince Paul Museum acquired an early Christian chandelier from Markov Grad near Pirot (originally mistakenly described as a piece from Marko's Monastery).<sup>20</sup>

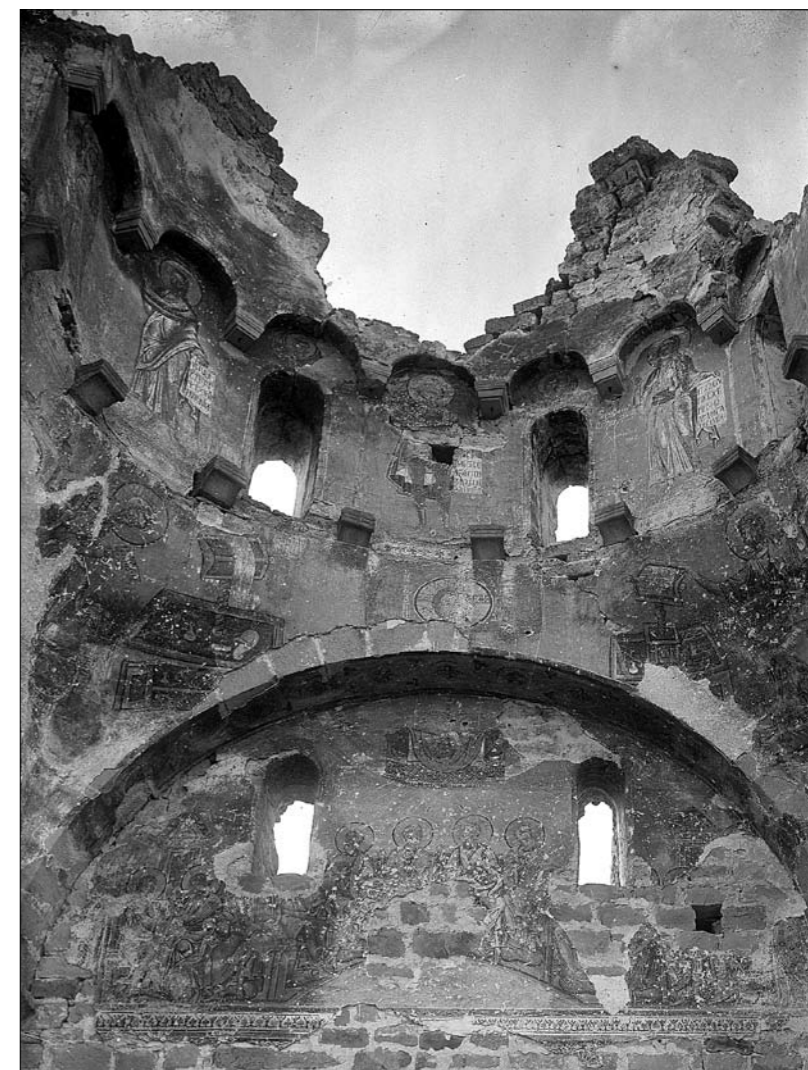
It was not easy to build up the mediaeval collection. In 1939 Milan Kašanin contacted, among others, the bishop of the Ohrid-Bitola diocese. In his letter he pleaded that some of the objects be sent from Ohrid to the Museum for restoration and subsequent display. The artefacts he mentioned were icons from the iconostasis (either covered with boards or painted over), a wooden statue of Saint Clement,<sup>21</sup> several samples of church embroidery, a silver mounted Gospel book and two reliefs, he presumed to be Greek. He also proposed that the icons and other objects remained in the ownership of the church.

This move followed the idea of Prince Paul to organize a special exhibition of Serbian mediaeval art ... *an exhibition of ecclesiastical treasures from all our monasteries and private collections*, as he wrote to Bernard Berenson in 1932.<sup>22</sup> From the same letter it is clear that the Prince believed such an exhibition would be the first step towards the realization of his great desire – the foundation of a Byzantine Museum in Belgrade. The same plans were actively considered in 1935 as well,<sup>23</sup> but the exhibition was never organized. Still, fully aware of the importance and values of Serbian mediaeval art, the Prince never gave up the idea of exhibiting at least some of these *treasures* in Belgrade and that must have been the

reason for Kašanin's appeals that certain endangered objects be transferred from monastery treasuries to the Prince Paul Museum.

Despite all such efforts, the number of objects in the mediaeval collection was never significantly increased.<sup>24</sup>

Durdevi stupovi,  
photographed in 1930s





Epitachelion, end of 14<sup>th</sup>-beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century

The Prince Paul Museum was not involved only in the collecting and presenting of mediaeval objects d'art. Scholarly activities were fostered from the very beginning, but on a much smaller scale than in the preceding period when the curators of the Museum of History and Art (i.e. National Museum) and experts who worked under their supervision were systematically exploring and preserving the mediaeval remains. Nevertheless, in 1935 the Prince Paul Museum management transferred to Belgrade some fragments of the decorative plastic from the Banjska monastery, which lay scattered in courtyards of the Banjska village. The aim was not only to enrich the Museum's stocks but also to register the situation in the field. On that occasion only five fragments were brought to Belgrade for temporary safekeeping – their display in the Museum was a reminder that Banjska should be restored.<sup>25</sup> The excavations of an Avarian necropolis begun that year in Vojka, a settlement in Srem, revealed some valuable discoveries.<sup>26</sup>

The mediaeval, and particularly national art, presented an important segment of each issue of *Umetnički pregled* (*Art Survey*). Apart from Kašanin's contributions there were regular articles by the curators Đorđe Mano-Zisi, Ivan Zdravković and Jozo Petrović, and significant essays on the mediaeval heritage were provided by many distinguished mediaevalists: Svetozar Radojčić, Lazar Mirković, Miodrag Purković, Vladimir Mošin, Georgije Ostrogorski, Aleksandar Deroko, Đurđe Bošković and others. *Umetnički pregled* published popular texts as well on the mediaeval collection in the Prince Paul Museum but also covered less studied fields of national mediaeval heritage such as Kašanin's passages on mediaeval sculpture or civil and military architecture,<sup>27</sup> or the text by Aleksandar Deroko about mediaeval fortresses.

In addition, there were thematic issues at the time of big foreign exhibitions with topical contributions, for instance on monumental mediaeval art in France or Italy. Many of the colour reproductions printed in *Umetnički pregled* represented frescoes from Serbian mediaeval monasteries.

Study collections were located in the basement and were at the disposal of specialists. A well equipped photo studio was also located in the basement. The Museum management endeavoured to found a central photo-archive covering all important art monuments in the country.<sup>28</sup> The activities previously performed by the Museum of History and Art were continued, the mediaeval remains were photographed and in 1941 the photo-archives of the Museum had over 10,000 photographic plates. Inventories of the plates with photographs of mediaeval monasteries were kept systematically from the opening of the Prince Paul Museum, and the plates were stored in special cupboards.<sup>29</sup>

Scholarly and documentary materials and a huge number of negatives of mediaeval churches, monasteries and treasuries still make the core of the museum documentation related to mediaeval monuments, together with the material collected under the supervision of Vladimir Petković, the director of the Museum of History and Art. In addition, the texts published in *Umetnički pregled* (*Art Survey*) improve the understanding of mediaeval art and inspire new studies.

The composition of scholarly documentation developed in two directions. On the one hand, photographic campaigns of mediaeval monuments were continued and on the other, special attention was paid to cadastral surveys in the entire territory of Yugoslavia. It was a regular



Bell, first half of 15<sup>th</sup> century



Durđevi stupovi, 12<sup>th</sup> century  
(photograph from 1930s)

practice to ask the cadastres to provide the Museum with copies of the foundations of ancient towns and fortifications.

All photographing was conducted by assistant conservators in the Prince Paul Museum who were occasionally accompanied by the curator in charge of the mediaeval collection. Monuments in the territory of Žiža, Raška-Prizren and Skopje dioceses were thoroughly photographed.<sup>30</sup> These activities were intensified in 1937,<sup>31</sup> and the management asked for a budget increase in the following years. In 1938 about a thousand photographs were brought to the Museum including not only those of Serbian mediaeval monuments<sup>32</sup> but also of the *Dalmatian and old Serbian art of the Adriatic Littoral*, as noted in the report for 1938. Photographs of fresco paintings and of sculptures in the Dečani monastery were taken on several occasions in 1939. The restoration of the monastery church was in progress and the scaffolding facilitated approach to less accessible parts of the church. This was repeated in 1940 and photographs were also taken of the Kalenić, Studenica, Stara Pavlica monasteries and the Peć Patriarchy.

Field research was usually combined with photographing.<sup>33</sup> There are no records to indicate that the Museum was involved in the protection of these sites. It should be noted that the Museum personnel was not as numerous as in the preceding period and the duties of the few curators who remained in the Museum were focused primarily on the management of the collections, consuming all their working hours of the employees. Field work was centred on archaeological explorations and only to a lesser extent on the conservation of mediaeval monuments.<sup>34</sup>

- 1 \* If not otherwise specified, the major source of information for this text is the Archive of the National Museum in Belgrade – ANM.
- 1935, report of the Commission in charge of the Organisation of the Prince Paul Museum AHM, document without number.
- 2 1935, AJ Fund of the Ministry of Building Engineering of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Collection of Plans of the Architecture Department of the Ministry of Building Engineering 62-656.
- 3 Kašanin 1931: 256; Preradović-Petrović 2004: 558, notes 4,5,6,7,8.
- 4 Antić-Komnenović 1997: 74.
- 5 It is actually an *evangelistary*, i.e. the complete *aproxos* when the text contains *lectiones* from all the four gospels, arranged in the order of reading during service at the time of annual liturgical cycles.
- 6 The manuscript written on in-18° paper has 165 sheets. Text of the Code beginnings on the second page of the sheet 131 and ends on the second page of the sheet 156 where it discontinues in the article 186 since the end of the manuscript had been lost. In addition to the *Code of Dušan* the manuscript contains the *Shortened Syntagma* of Matthew Blastares, *Rules by Saint John the Faster* and the *Code of Justinian*.
- 7 Radojčić 1960: note 34.
- 8 When the manuscript was given to the Prince Paul Museum for keeping, the opinion was that the *Prizren Manuscript* had been one the oldest manuscripts of Dušan's legislative documents, next to the *Struga Manuscript* dated into 1373/1374 and as such it was published several times. Радојчић 1953: 13; Радојчић 1960: 18-19.
- 9 1935, 14<sup>th</sup> May. ANM, No. 287. This manuscript was published by S. Novaković in *Glasnik srpskog učenog društva*, vol. IX for 1878. (Story about Alexander the Great in Serbian Literature). Regrettably, the loan of the *Four-Gospel Book manuscript* No. 297 and of the *Romance of Alexander the Great* had not been realized and the two manuscripts were lost when a bomb hit the National Library on 6 April 1941.
- 10 Petrović 1935: 244.
- 11 Politika, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1935: 7.
- 12 Kašanin 1936: 422-423.
- 13 Kašanin 1936: 428.
- 14 Mano-Zisi 1936: 235; Jevremović 1937: 8-14.
- 15 *Adoration of the Magi*, 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> centuries; *Saint George*, silver icon, 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> centuries; *The Raising of Lazarus*, 16<sup>th</sup> century; *Baptism*, 16<sup>th</sup> century; *Triptych*, 17<sup>th</sup> century; *Saint John the Baptist*, 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries and *Pieta* from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
- 16 Gilt silver vessel with coins of king Dragutin, emperor Dušan, king Vukašin (41 pieces punched to be used in a string) and Venetian coins (U. 1937a: 62; Petrović 1940: 108-109)
- 17 U. 1937:29
- 18 Petković 1935: 250.
- 19 Ten silver and five copper rings.
- 20 Marjanović-Vujović 1973: 13-24.
- 21 Kašanin 1937.
- 22 Letter of Prince Paul to Bernard Berenson on 13 February 1932. I would like to express my gratitude to Princess Elisabeth (*Jelisaveta*) Karadordević who let me see copies of the letters from her private archives.
- 23 Letter of Prince Paul to Bernard Berenson on 8 September 1935 (Lake of Bohinj): *If possible I'll try to organize next spring an exhibition of ecclesiastical art in B[elgrade] and collect all the treasures of the land. It won't be easy as churches and monasteries are jealous owners.*
- 24 Total number of inventory entries was 120 but it should be remembered that the same inventory book contained both the objects from the Middle Ages and the Historical Collections which were prevailing, e.g. thirty objects for everyday use mainly by members of Obrenović dynasty donated to the Museum by Mrs. Konstantinović from Trieste in 1938 (Historical Inventory, from number 1647 to 1674; almost all objects were given to the Historical Museum on 19 November 1953).
- 25 ANM, 663, 5 November 1935; ANM, 679, 11 November 1935. The transferred fragments had not been entered into the Inventory Book. Reconstruction of the Saint Stephan's Church in Banjska monastery was carried out in 1938/1939. Many of the discovered fragments were inbuilt in the temple's walls. Fragments transferred to the Prince Paul Museum have never been returned to the site. They are still in the National Museum in Belgrade.
- 26 Mano-Zisi 1937: 265
- 27 Contents of *Umetnički pregled* volumes are given in the paper of Aleksandra Petrović *List of all publications of the Prince Paul Museum (Popis izdanja Muzeja kneza Pavla)*.
- 28 Kašanin 1936: 429.
- 29 Kašanin 1936: 429.
- 30 Photographs were taken of Studenica, Sopoćani, Peć Patriarchate, Dečani, Gračanica, Psača, Lesnovo and Marko's Monastery.
- 31 Photographs were taken of the Peć Patriarchy, Morača, Sopoćani, Gračanica, Dečani, Gradac, Peter's Church, Đurđevi Stupovi, Voljavča, demolished churches in Brodarevo, Studenica, Arilje, Mileševa and Dobrun, Davidovica, Hisardžik, Jezevica near Čačak.
- 32 Photographs were taken of Gračanica, Peć Patriarchate, Staro Nagoričino, Mateič, Ravanica, Nerezi, Žiča, Dečani.
- 33 In 1936 Đ. Mano-Zisi accompanied the Viennese professor, Dr. Wilhelm Suida, who was researching Serbian mediaeval painting (1936, 26 May. ANM, No. 420).
- 34 It should be noted though that the Museum made an appeal to the Ministry of the Interior that private persons should be strictly forbidden to explore and excavate antiquities without control of official and professional persons. 1935, 10 June. ANM, No. 281.



