

# Digitization of Cultural Heritage of Toplica Region in Serbia

Ž. Mijajlović<sup>1</sup>, M. Milovanović<sup>2</sup>, A.Valjarević<sup>3</sup>,

D. Radovanović<sup>4</sup>, A. Simonović<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Matematički fakultet, Beograd, [zarkom@mi.sanu.ac.rs](mailto:zarkom@mi.sanu.ac.rs), <sup>2</sup>Matematički institut SANU, Beograd, [Milosm@mi.sanu.ac.rs](mailto:Milosm@mi.sanu.ac.rs), <sup>3</sup>Prirodno-matematički fakultet, Priština, [Valjarkosmos@yahoo.com](mailto:Valjarkosmos@yahoo.com), <sup>4</sup>Prirodno-matematički fakultet, Priština, [Y8rd@yahoo.com](mailto:Y8rd@yahoo.com), <sup>5</sup>Prokuplje, [simabalonce@beotel.net](mailto:simabalonce@beotel.net)

## Abstract

In this paper we describe the project *Archeological and sacral objects of Toplica region*, a part of the general project *Application of information technologies in the digitization of scientific and cultural heritage*. The aim of the project is to collect data in digital form on archeological sites and sacral objects situated in this region. The data will include main information about this objects and sites, GIS data with accessing roads and photos. Up to now several expeditions were organized in this region to support these goals and more than fifty objects and sites of about one hundred are explored. The project is partly financed by the Serbian Ministry of Science.



The project *Archeological and sacral objects of Toplica region* started in autumn 2002. We decided to begin this project because there are many archeological and historical sites, some of them old more than 7000 years. There are also many sacral objects: orthodox churches, monasteries and old pre-Christian sanctuaries, mostly from the Roman period (I-V century) and remains from the Ottoman period (XV-XIX century).

However, the most important archeological sites are from the Middle Age. The reason is that Toplica was one of the main regions of the new formed Serbian Kingdom in the XII century. For example, the first Capitol of the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja who founded the medieval Serbian state, was Kuršmlija, the second biggest town in Toplica. There are also the first foundations of the Nemanja Dynasty, the

monastery of Saint Nicholas and the Monastery of Saint Mother of Christ near Kuršumlija, both built around 1160.

Many of these objects are ruins or very rusty and they are often at difficult places to come. So we come to the aims of the project:

- **Determine precise locations** (geographical coordinates) having 10 meters precision using GPS (General Position System) technology.
- **Note approaching paths** to these objects.
- **Collect the main data** and describe the main features of these objects in the digital form.
- **Present collected data on the Internet** to the general public:

[eCatalog of cultural monuments in Serbia](#) (project of the Mathematical Institute in Belgrade and Zoran Ognjanović)

For this reason, several expeditions were organized there since 2002 and more than fifty archeological and sacral places are processed from about of one hundred in the whole region.



**Geographical position of Toplica region.** Toplica valley is located in the south part of Serbia. On the South, Toplica borders with the Serbian province Kosovo and Metohia. It is situated between the mountains that border the valley. Through the valley passes the river having the same name *Toplica* and the Toplica valley lies in the middle of the basin of the river Toplica.

**People in Toplica.** Even in the ancient times Toplica (meaning warm water) was inhabited and many tribes and people were living or spent some time there: Avars, Celts, Dardans, Roman people, Byzantines, Turks and of course Slavic people. The oldest culture found there is named *Starčevačka* and is dating 5000 years B.C. Toplica obtained its name in the 7th century, when the Slavic people began to settle the Balkans Peninsula. Through Toplica passed many important roads, for example the medieval caravans from Dubrovnik to the East were passing through this area. Many archeological sites show that the Toplica has rather important historical and cultural heritage.

## List of most important medieval archeological objects in Toplica region:

**Saint Procopius church in the town of Prokuplje:** One of the oldest churches in Serbia, built in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Nearby, there is a small church, also called the Latin Church since it was used for the religious service by the members of Dubrovnic colony (XVI-XVII century).

Known for its monasteries and churches is the town of Kursumlija, the first capital of the Nemanjic dynasty in the Middle Age. There are **St Nicolas` monastery** and **Virgin Mary monastery**, the first Nemanjic foundation and the Holy Trinity Church (beginning of XX c.).

Other explored archeological and sacral places and objects in Toplica region:

1. Church of St' Ilias, village Dragusa (N43°16.3918' E021°22.4296' )
2. Fort in Pridvorica, Kurvin grad (N43°21.8684' E021°19.0052' )
3. Monastery of Ajdanovac (N43°20.8692' E021°22.8898')
4. Church of St Prokopije (N43°13.8241' E021°34.9800')
5. Latin Church, Prokuplje (N43°13.8607' E021°34.9647')
6. Latin Church, village Glasinac (N43°12.1813' E021°42.0564')
7. Roman thermal springs (N43°13.8099' E021°34.9899')
8. Church St Mina (N43°10.2868' E020°58.6012')
9. Church St Nikola (N43°08.3933' E021°16.6102')
10. Log-cabin church of Saint Lazar (N43°08.7300' E021°15.7957')























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ЦРКВА  
Св ЦАРА ЛАЗАРА









Fragment of wood with inscriptions in an ancient script. The text is arranged in a grid-like pattern. The top row of characters reads: T T T B I G E T A B X I I N S G R E A D T Q S I N A N A T R K S P I S V S. Below this, there are two rows of faint, less legible characters. On the right side of the fragment, the word 'ГОПОНКА' is written in Cyrillic. Below that, 'ГВАРКАНДРЕ' is visible. Further down, there are several more characters, including 'E', 'S', and 'HT'.



## The monastery of Saint Nicholas



The Monastery of Saint Nicholas is built between 1152. and 1168. together with the nearby Monastery of Virgin Mary. These monasteries are the first endowments of Stefan Nemanja. It is located on a plateau near Kursumlija and is oriented to mouth of the river Banjska enjoying in Toplica.

Nemanja's coming to power and upbuilding of the monastery are nearly correlated. According to his biography, building of this

monastery made conflict between Nemanja and his three brothers. In this conflict Nemanja wan and he became the great prefect and absolute ruler of Serbia in 1166. Adjacent to monastery, Nemanja built his palace and Kuršumlija became the seat of his perfection. In that way, this town became the first capital of Nemanja Dinasty.

After the Great Migration of Serbs in 1690, the monastery is deserted. That was the beginning of ruination of the church and the whole complex. The restoration of the monastery church began immediately after the Second World War. It is interrupted a few times and is ended in 2003.

The Monastery architecture is under the influence of two styles. Primarily, Byzantine influence is observable. For example, there is similarity with the Church of Saint Sophia, Constantinople churches and Vlachern gate. Also, there are some Romanic elements. Porch with two turrets looks similar like St. Triphon Cathedral in Kotor. This monastery represents beginning of the Rascian style in Serbian Middle Age architecture.



## The monastery of Virgin Mary



The Monastery of Virgin Mary is one of the first endowments of Stefan Nemanja. Nemanja built this monastery after meeting in Nis with Byzantine emperor Manoylo Komnine about 1159, according to evidence of his son Stefan the First Crowned. Stefan says that it is founded like nunnery that was ruled by her Nemanja's wife Ana, called Saint Anastasia.

Monastery church is built on the place of early-byzantine church from sixth century. This church is single among all Middle Age buildings, not only Serbian but Armenian, Coptic and Macedonian too. It is set on the front of Rascian style period and it gravitates there just temporally, but architecturally it stands separately at all like a special and enigmatic type of building. Some authors have founded similarity with the old models of Persian and Egyptian sacral architecture.

After the Great Migration of Serbs in 1690, the monastery deserted. Today, we can see just ruins that are rests of external walls and parts of wall iconostasis. Frescos are destroyed completely. About their existence and wealth is written by Felix Kaniz in the book “Serbia – country and population”.

## The church of Saint Minasis



The Church of Saint Minasis in XV century by duke Mrksa, one of the most important laird of Serbia for that time. It is situated in village Štava on a plateau of the mount Kopaonik. Above church portal there is a note that the church is built and painted during the rule of patriarch Pajsije (1614-1647) and metropolitan Silvester which means that the church was completely destroyed before XVII century.



*Frescos in the Church of Saint Minasis.  
Beside window slot there are figures of St. Vasilis  
the Great and St. John Chrisostome*

**The architecture** is very simple. It is one part building with roof that is made of stone plates. The church is almost without windows. Narrow slots like loopholes indicate that the church could be used for defense. Frescoes are done in byzantine style with constant colors. Compositions are painted by solid move and emphasized by drawing with dark blue background.

## Log-cabin church of Saint Lazar



Log-cabin church of Saint Lazar is situated 2.5 km far from Prolom Banja beside Prolom River at the right side of it. It is built on the old fundamentals from XIV century. Near the church, nowadays, there are from XIV and XVI century.

Origin of this church is related with departing of Serbian army on the battle on Kosovo and their eucharis on this place. After the battle, people built church on this place.

It is not known how long had been lasting that first log-cabin church on this place but it is sure that it couldn't be for longer than two centuries. Nowadays church is built after immigration of Serbs from the Mount Golija on this location. It is square in basis with four part roof. It is covered with tile with a wooden cross on the top.