

**Interpolation as a Form of Protection of Cultural Monuments and the Problem of Restoring the Exonarthex of the Sopoćani Monastery Church**

The insertion of new, modern elements into the structure of a cultural monument is not an unusual procedure in the protection and restoration of old buildings. Such solutions have been used with more or less success in living urban entities, archaeological building remains and individual buildings. The most delicate problem and the most difficult to solve is interpolation in medieval sacral monuments. An example of this is the Sopoćani monastery church in Serbia.

The monastery of Sopoćani was founded in 1265 by the Serbian king Uros I. The wall paintings in its church were painted by the best artists of that period in the area of spreading Byzantine culture. At the end of the same century a spacious, open exonarthex with a belfry in front of it were added to the church. This part was painted a few decades later. During the period of Turkish occupation the temple was damaged and the surrounding monastery buildings destroyed. The monastery of Sopoćani is included in the list of the world's cultural heritage because of its exceptional artistic and architectural value, and especially because of the supreme artistic achievement of the church paintings. While the church and the belfry have mainly kept their original forms, many parts are missing from the exonarthex which lies between them, as well as from the monastery buildings. Up to now, the main part of the church and the belfry have been restored and the remains of the monastery buildings presented as an archaeological site. The problem of protecting the exonarthex is still not completely solved.

All that remains of the exonarthex are the columns, two facade arches and one great central arch, with parts of the vaults. Important painting still exists on the east wall of the belfry and the west wall of the church, which were part of the construction of the exonarthex. As the upper parts and roof of the exonarthex are missing these wall paintings are in danger of being damaged by rain water flowing down the walls.

The construction of the exonarthex of Sopocani was established on the basis of preserved remains, detailed investigations and studies. Undoubtedly it was three aisled. The side aisles, in continuation of the lower aisles of the main part of the church, were formed by columns which were connected by arches and rows of dome vaults. The construction over the central part of the exonarthex was formed by two high arches and a vault, placed transversally to the church and the belfry. Some details indicate that the roofs, one-slope side and double-slope central, also followed the direction of the construction. Data concerning details, such as the cornices, pilasters and windows, are not completely certain.

The partial restoration of the exonarthex is not a matter of controversy. In that way its main forms which are very important when studying the development of building ideas in Serbia, would be preserved and better understood. By building part of the vault, a sort of eave would be formed above the wall paintings which would prevent rain water flowing down the walls. However, this valuable painting would not be completely protected without constructing the entire roof. For this reason the question arises whether the complete restoration of the exonarthex should be carried out in the same material — stone, even where there is insufficient data, thus risking possible mistakes when restoring the original forms or should uncertainty concerning the assumed appearance be marked by the use of different material or even form. In both cases the wall paintings would be protected. In the first solution the aesthetic, visual demands would be satisfied and scientific truth would be of secondary importance. In the second, the aesthetic component, the entirety of the building and the complete experience would be subject to respect for the original. That second variation presents the clearest relationship to the original remains of the monument. They would be preserved, the parts for which there are data (vaults and arches) would be restored in the same material, and those parts for which the data are incomplete would be realised in different, modern material may be even in a form independent of the assumed, which would in both cases clearly indicate their purely protective function.

However, interpolation in a 13th century church would disturb the harmony of material, colour and the whole impression of the building and its environment. It seems that it should be used only when other approaches are not possible.

On these monuments which have been included on the list of the world cultural heritage for their uniqueness and artistic value, drastic experiments with dubious results should not be undertaken. Interpolation could be accepted as a final solution only if its elements were of a montage type so they can be removed without difficulty or damages to the monument, if the principles of restoration were ever changed.

Olivera Kandić,  
Institute for the Protection  
of Cultural Monuments of Serbia,  
11000 Belgrade, Bozidara Adzije 11, Yugoslavia