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Towards New Models for the Improvement of Knowledge, Protection and Promotion of the Cultural Heritage of Studenica Monastery

ABSTRACT

Studenica Monastery, as a part of the heritage of humanity and a cultural monument on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1986, has been part of the biosphere reserve "Golija – Studenica" MAB/UNESCO since 2001. In accordance with Articles 5 and 27 of the Convention for the Protection Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the Administration of the Monastery implemented several significant projects. The first in the series was the "Digital Studenica" project, realized in 2018 with the LiveView studio from Belgrade. The goals of this project were the presentation and mapping of the architecture of the Studenica Monastery through a digital interactive interpretation of the Church of the Virgin and the Church of Saints Joachim and Anna (i.e. King's Church), drawings from the 12th century, 3D virtual models and augmented reality, interactive permanent exhibitions and a catalog. During 2021–2022, Studenica Monastery, in cooperation with the competent institutions of the Republic of Serbia, the experts of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church, associate architect, conservers-restorers and other consultants, successfully implemented two phases of the project "Arrangement of the treasury depot of the Studenica Monastery". In accordance with modern museological standards, the Studenica Monastery's treasury depot was established, where valuable treasury items are stored properly and in compliance with technical protection measures. As part of the project, a digital database of all exhibits was created, with an electronic record of each piece, the most important literature references, data on conservation and exhibition. With their interdisciplinarity in the era of contemporary digital culture, these projects make an essential contribution to the preservation, protection and popularization of the cultural heritage of the Studenica Monastery.

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Rapid social and economic changes imply new challenges in the protection of cultural heritage. The improvement of knowledge, along with continuous maintenance, contributes to the preservation of the unique and irreplaceable properties that the Studenica Monastery has as part of the cultural heritage of humanity.

The Studenica Monastery is a cultural monument of outstanding importance and since 1986 it has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.[1] Furthermore, Studenica is part of the biosphere reserve "Golija – Studenica", the first established biosphere reserve in Serbia inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2001 (fig. 1).[2] The protection of the biosphere reserve "Golija – Studenica" was implemented as part of the UNESCO program of the international initiative "Man and the Biosphere",[3] whose goal is the international protection of areas of exceptional natural and cultural value. In this way, not only the cultural heritage of the Studenica Monastery is protected, but also the precious natural heritage.

In the last five years, the administration of the Studenica Monastery has implemented several significant projects that are directly related to Article 5 and Article 27 of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.[4] Article 5 of the Convention obliges "the most active popularization of cultural and natural heritage" in order to guarantee effective protection and preservation. In one of the paragraphs of this article (paragraph "d"), it is referred to the undertaking of "appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage". Article 27 of the Convention mandates that "The States Parties to this Convention shall endeavor by all appropriate means, and in particular by educational and information programmes, to strengthen appreciation and respect by their peoples of the cultural and natural heritage", and obligates to take measures to implement the Convention.

DIGITAL STUDENICA

With the transition from the analog to the digital era, the use of visual media in the presentation of cultural heritage, including virtual and augmented reality, has become a means of reaching a wide range of readers and viewers.[5] Cyberspace is currently the

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1   Studenica, Unesco World Heritage List https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/389/ (accessed April 2023).

2   Golija-Studenica Biosphere Reserve, Serbia, https://en.unesco.org/biosphere/eu-na/golija-studenica (accessed April 2023).

3   Unesco – Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB) https://www.unccd.int/resources/knowledge-sharing-system/unesco-man-and-biosphere-programme-mab (accessed April 2023).

4   Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Paris 1972 in English: https://www.kultura.gov.rs/extfile/sr/5171/11.%20Konvecija%20o%20zastiti%20svetske%20kulturne%20i%20prirodne%20bastine%20(%20Pariz,%201972).pdf (accessed April 2023).

5   J. P. Bowen, T. Giannini, *From Analogue to Digital in Literature and Art*, in *Conference Electronic Visualisation and the Arts*, London 2016, 1–4 DOI: 10.14236/ewic/EVA2016.1 (accessed April 2023); H. T. Chong et al., *Comprehensive systematic review on virtual reality for cultural heritage practices: coherent taxonomy and motivations*, Multimedia Systems 28 (4) (2021) 1–16. DOI: 10.1007/s00530-021-00869-4 (accessed April 2023).
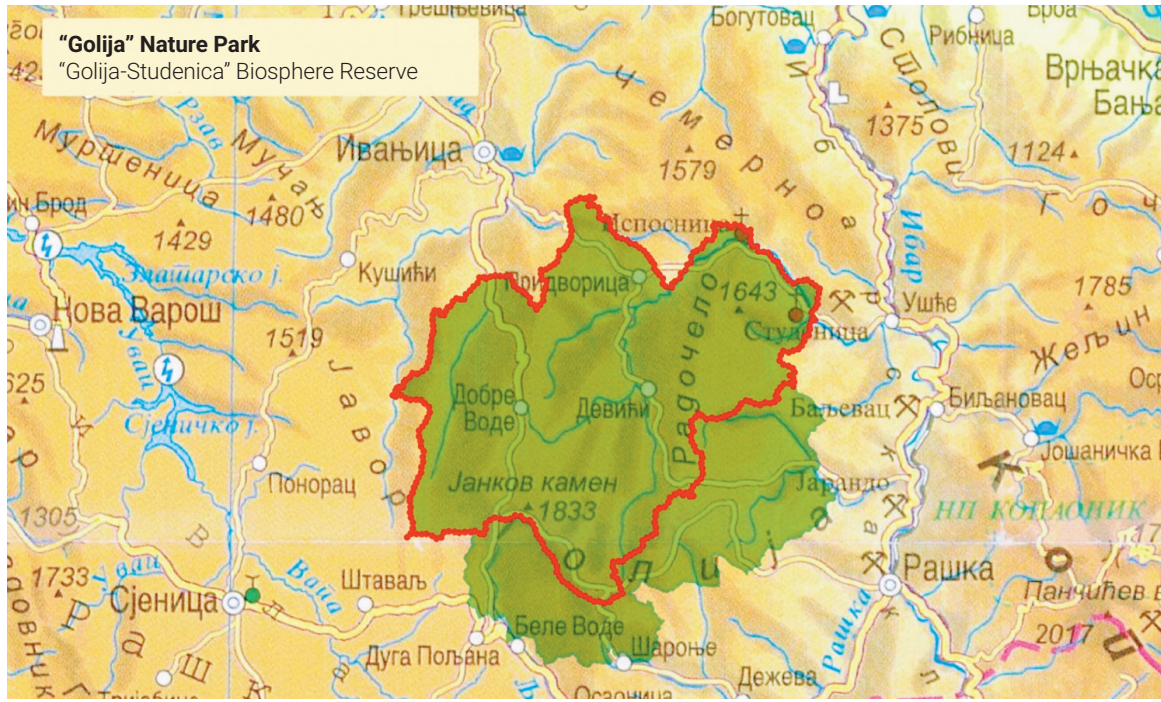
Fig. 1

Golija-Studenica
Biosphere
Reserve, map

Fig. 2

Permanent
exhibition
"Digital
Studenica" in
the refectory of
Saint Sava

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largest information resource in the world.[6] One of the priorities of the digital agenda for Serbia is the application of information technologies for the creation of strategic resources of modern society, which are primarily knowledge and information. Digitization, which basically represents the process of creating digital copies using adequate software, also includes multimedia presentation of digitized heritage as one of the modern ways of protecting tangible and intangible cultural heritage.[7]

Virtual and augmented reality settings are constantly evolving and have great potential when used to encourage visitors to view key topos of spiritual and cultural heritage in an innovative way that connects art, science and technology.[8] In the era of "computer" culture and artificial intelligence, the blurred boundaries between the real and the virtual are constantly being tested.[9]

In connection with the above, in 2018, the Studenica Monastery implemented the "Digital Studenica" project with LiveView Studio from Belgrade.[10] This project provides basic information about the history, architecture, painting, sculpture, founders of Studenica and its spiritual and cultural heritage in a modern way. The project resulted in the printing of an interactive monograph[11] and the realization of a permanent exhibit that includes interactive 3D virtual models and two augmented reality cabins (fig. 2).[12] Moreover, the project "Digital Studenica" was part of the exhibition "Spiritual and cultural heritage of Studenica Monastery – Antiquity, Constancy, Contemporaneity" (13 December 2019 – 31 March 2020), authored by academician Miodrag Marković, which marked 800 years of autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church.[13]

The inclusion of digital content in established exhibition settings, and this type of presentation in general, represents a challenge to traditional curatorial practice in the sphere of interpretation of heritage of a sacred character. There is no doubt, however,

6   J. Matijašević-Obradović, J. Dragojlović, Digitalna agenda za Srbiju – prioriteti strateških dokumenata i značaj za oblast kulture, in Pravni aspekti digitalizacije kulturne baštine, edited by D. Prlja, Belgrade 2017, 195 and further.

7   Matijašević-Obradović, Dragojlović, op. cit. 196.

8   Bowen, Giannini, op. cit., 3; J. Xiong et al., Augmented reality and virtual reality displays: emerging technologies and future perspectives, Light: Science & Applications 10: 216 (2021) 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41377-021-00658-8 (accessed April 2023).

9   J. P Bowen et al., Computational Culture and A.I.: Challenging human identity and curatorial practice, in Conference Electronic Visualisation and the Arts, London 2020, 1–7. DOI: 10.14236/ewic/EVA2020.1 (accessed April 2023).

10   Digital Studenica https://liveviewstudio.com/work/digital_studenica/ (accessed April 2023).

11   M. Matić, Дигитална Студеница = Digital Studenica = Цифровая Студениц = Digitale Studenica, Studenica 2018; M. Matić, Studenica digitale = Digital Studenica = 数码_斯图德尼查修道院 = デジタル_ストゥデニツァ, Studenica 2018.

12   https://www.rts.rs/lat/magazin/kultura/kultura/3594390/digitalna-studenica-sveti-sava-prica-o-manastiru.html   https://www.rts.rs/lat/magazin/kultura/kultura/3833638/kako-izgleda-kad-studenica-postane-digitalna.html (accessed April 2023).

13   Spiritual and cultural heritage of the Monastery of Studenica: past, perseverance, contemporaneity, SASA Gallery of Visual Arts and Music (December 13, 2019 – March 31, 2020), authored by Miodrag Marković, academician of the Serbian Academy Of Sciences And Arts https://dais.sanu.ac.rs/123456789/9280; https://www.sanu.ac.rs/duhovno-i-kulturno-nasledje-manastira-studenice-drevnost-postojanost-savremenost/; https://galerijeimuzeji.rs/en/cultural-heritage-of-studenica-monastery/ (accessed April 2023).
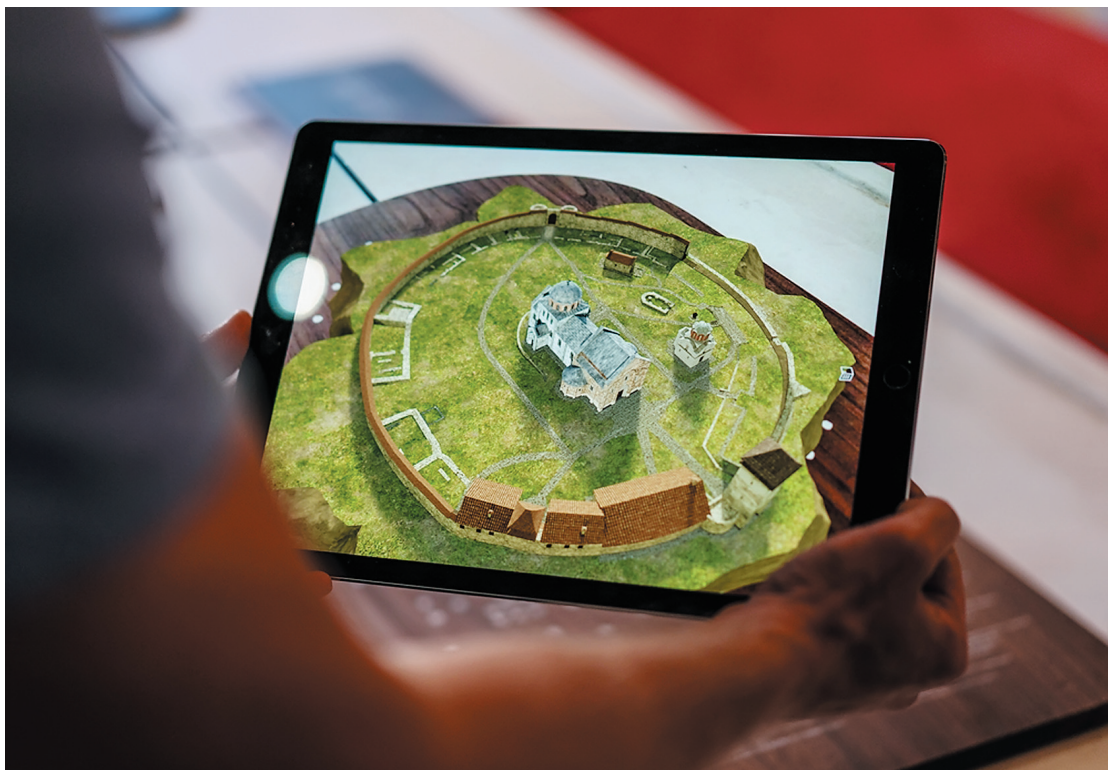
Fig. 3

Digital 3D model
of the Studenica
Monastery complex

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Fig. 4

Digital 3D model
of the Church
of the Virgin Mary
in Studenica

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that in this way a much larger circle of interested audience is reached, both virtual visitors and those who, after learning the basic information about a certain locality, decide to visit it. During the corona virus epidemic and in the post-covid period, the existence of virtual collections of cultural heritage has proven to be a valuable resource.[14] Digital projects that contained elements of virtual and augmented reality in that period of challenges and limitations of travelling were often the only available cultural content. Stories about art and the identity of cultural heritage were transmitted in that period mostly through digital projects available with one click. [15]

The interactive monograph – catalog "Digital Studenica" is also used today as a manual for educational purposes in the teaching of history, art history, fine arts, foreign languages, religious studies, tourism, etc., which has become desirable in the context of implementing educational programs for young people in the digital era, and increasingly, a necessary standard.[16]

One of the goals of the "Digital Studenica" project was the mapping and presentation of the architecture of the Studenica Monastery. This was done through a digital interactive presentation of the complex itself (fig. 3), as well as the Church of the Virgin and the King separately (fig. 4). During the implementation of the "Digital Studenica" project, a special challenge was the reconstruction and 3D animation of both architectural buildings and very significant architectural drawings on the facade of the Church of the Virgin from the late 12th century. These are drawings of the archivolts of the western, southern and northern portals, which are engraved on the southern and northern facades and on the western wall of the northern vestibule of the Church of the Virgin of the Studenica Monastery.[17] Drawings of the archivolt portal at the entrance to the nave and the blind arch at the base of the dome were selected for the digital reconstruction.[18] They are engraved on the southern facade of the church (fig. 5). These technical drawings, according to the architect Milka Čanak Medić, are extremely significant because they testify that the painter of the Church of the Virgin Mary had a high education and that he used a complex design process, since everything was conceived according to the principle of quadrature. The drawings were made before the architectural plastic was done. Their position, as Čanak Medić concludes, "suggests that the walls of the church were largely built, and that the most important stone carved decorations were not finished at that time."[19] Bearing in mind the fact that time has largely erased these drawings, their reconstruction in the Digital

14   L. J. Xiao et al., *The potential of virtualtourism in the recovery of tourism industry during the COVID-19 pandemic*, CurrentIssues in Tourism, 25(3) (2022) 441–457. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1959526 (accessed April 2023).

15   J. Bowen et al., *Beyond Human: Arts and identity between reality and virtuality in a post-Covid-19 world*, in *Conference Electronic Visualisation and the Arts*, London 2021, 7–11. DOI: 10.14236/ewic/EVA2021.2 (accessed April 2023).

16   D. Buckingham et al., *Digital generations: Children, young people, and the new media,* London 2013.

17   M. Čanak Medić, Đ. Bošković, *Arhitektura Nemanjinog doba 1, Crkve u Toplici i dolinama Ibra i Morave*, Belgrade 1986, 98–99.

18   M. Matić, *op. cit.* 30.

19   Čanak Medić, Bošković, *op. cit.* 99.

Fig. 5

Digital 3D model of
the drawing of the
archivolts on the
south facade
of the Church of the
Virgin Mary

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Fig. 6

Repository of the
monastery treasury
of the Studenica
Monastery

Fig. 7

Method of storing
treasury items in the
repository

(Studenica Monastery)

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Studenica project is an important contribution to their preservation, since without it, it is quite difficult to imagine what it is actually about.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Government of the Republic of Serbia recognized the "Digital Studenica" project in 2019 as a project with exceptional results in the field of education, awarding the Administration of the Studenica Monastery the St. Sava Award for the improvement of educational practices and the development of scientific and artistic achievements in areas of education.[20]

ARRANGEMENT OF THE TREASURY DEPOT OF STUDENICA MONASTERY

In the course of 2021 and 2022, the Studenica Monastery implemented another project with the funds of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, the sector for movable cultural heritage, and the Ministry of Justice – Directorate for Cooperation with Churches and Religious Communities, and in cooperation with the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church and relevant cultural institutions "Arrangement of the treasury depot of the Studenica Monastery".[21] The project was led by Archimandrite Dr. Tihon Rakićević, abbot of the Studenica Monastery, and the project team consisted of experts from the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church and several collaborators on the project, including an architect, the conservators-restorers from the Museum of Applied Art and the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade and mechanical engineers consultants. In compliance with technical protection measures and recommendations of the National Museum of Serbia, two phases of the project were implemented. The first phase aimed to identify all objects that are part of the treasury inventory of the Studenica Monastery, since only the inventory of the treasury was listed. The space for the treasury depot has been determined and arranged in accordance to its purpose. The complete corpus of objects published in the monograph "Treasury of the Studenica Monastery" by Mirjana Šakota[22] was cataloged, and the existence of another number of very important, so far undescribed and unpublished objects was identified. They are included to the treasury fund under the supervision of experts. The fund of old and rare books of Studenica Monastery was segragated and arranged as a separate entity and its digitization began. A long-term plan for the necessary conservation and restoration works was made, and a ten-year work plan was drawn up for the collection of textiles and embroidery, which is continuously implemented from year to year with the help of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia and the National Museum in Kraljevo. The treasury depot is equipped with certified metal furniture (fig. 6).

The second phase of the project included the acquisition of devices for regulating microclimatic conditions and fire and burglary protection systems. Then, in the prescribed

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20   https://prosveta.gov.rs/vesti/ministar-sarcevic-urucio-svetosavske-nagrade/ (accessed April 2023).

21   https://manastirstudenica.rs/projekti-manastira-studenice-predstavljeni-na-medjunarodnoj-naucnojkonferenciji-na-arhitektonskom-fakultetu-univerziteta-u-beogradu/ (accessed April 2023).

22   M. Šakota, *Studenička riznica*, Studenica 2019.

Fig. 8

Photograph of two candles from the new treasury item collection before conservation

Fig. 9

Photograph of two candles from the new treasury item collection after conservation

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manner, in boxes made of acid-free cardboard, maps, separators and other adequate materials, all the conserved artefacts were placed in the depot area (fig. 7). Within the duration of the project, a digital database of objects in the treasury of the Studenica Monastery was created, with an electronic record of each exhibit, as well as a file records cabinet.

We have witnessed that the practice of arranging exhibition settings – permanent or occasional – is more widespread, while the arrangement of treasury collection depots, unfortunately, is not given enough attention despite the fact that a well-arranged depot is the heart of every treasury, i.e. of the museum fund, while the permanent exhibition is only an exponent of the highest range of beauty and historical significance of the treasury units. Due to all of the above, the implementation of the Studenica Monastery depot arrangement project is an example of good practice in the protection of movable heritage within extremely valuable units such as treasuries.

The project of arranging the depot of the Studenica treasury made significant progress in the protection of the movable cultural heritage of the Monastery inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Namely, during the work on the depot arrangement project, the inventory of the treasury of the Studenica Monastery was significantly expanded, because a number of items that had never been recorded before were found to be in a very bad condition. For example, after the conservation of three very dirty filigree vigil lamps that were found among old discarded objects, they turned out to be very valuable works of the 19th century applied art. This can best be seen when comparing the photographs of the two vigil lamps before and after conservation (fig. 8, 9). It is clear that these are significant objects, which are the work of a 19th-century master skilled in the filigree technique with thin silver wire, with the use of gilding and semi-precious stones.

Four individual sheets of two manuscript books, Acts of the Holy Apostles and Synaksarion, originally from the church in the village of Trnava near Čačak, were added to the fund of the Studenica treasury, which were threatened with decay (fig. 10). These sheets are now in the collection of manuscript books of the Studenica Monastery, they have been digitized, and a scientific paper dedicated to them is being prepared.

With the introduction of the electronic database in the process of work on the arrangement of the depot, all data on items in the inventory of the treasury of the Studenica Monastery were integrated. The database of the Studenica treasury is searchable by subject name, time of creation, author, information from the description, by keywords or by the condition of the item itself (fig. 11). In the old signature field, the older inventory numbers assigned to the items are stored. Finally, conservation data is recorded in the history of each artefact, and the most important references on each subject are cited. Thus, for example, it is possible to perform a search by name, author, name of the donor or by the literature used, such as the two catalogs of capital exhibitions at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts from 1986 and 2019.[23]

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23   *Blago manastira Studenice,* author of the concept of the exhibition and publication V. J. Đurić, Belgrade 1988; *Spiritual and cultural heritage of the Monastery of Studenica: past, perseverance, contemporaneity,* SASA Gallery of Visual Arts and Music (13 December 2019 – 31 March 2020), author of the exhibition and editor of the publication Miodrag Marković.
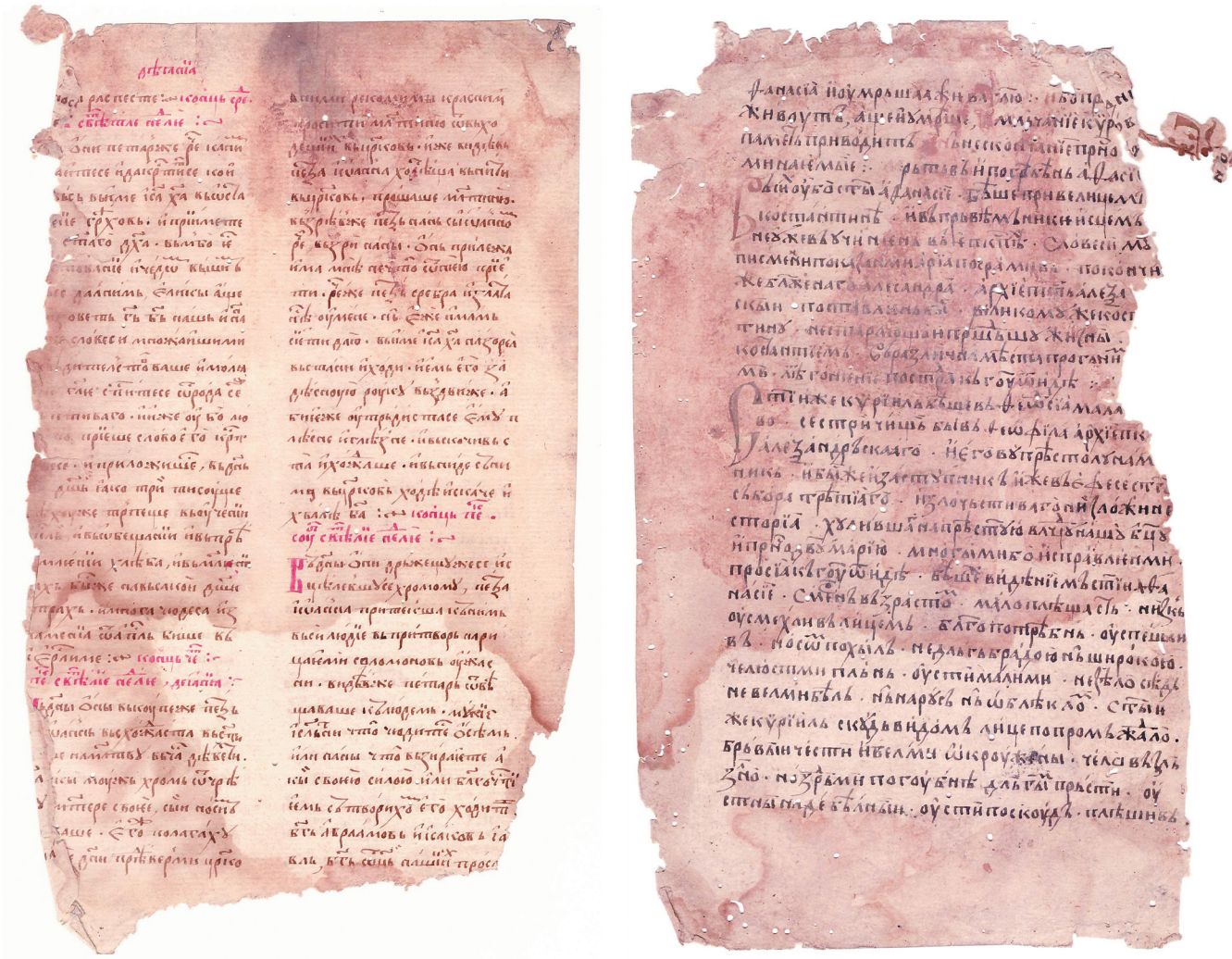
Fig. 10

Fragments of manuscript from the church
in the vilage Trnava near Čačak

(Studenica Monastery)

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Then, there is also data on the conservation of objects, such as objects made of metal, whose conservation was carried out in the Arachne Conservation and Restoration Studio from Belgrade.

In this way, it is possible to easily find some not quite common terms in the database. The place where the item is stored is also specified in the printout from the database. In this manner, the availability of objects and work with them is greatly facilitated.

The creation of a database and file with a record of each treasure item (fig. 12) was a very demanding task that would not have been possible without the help of the administration and employees of the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As far as we know, the project of arranging the depot of the Studenica treasury according to the most modern prescribed standards is the first project of its kind carried out in a monastery of the Serbian Orthodox Church, if we exclude diocesan museums.

THE UNIQUE IDENTITY OF STUDENICA MONASTERY
IN THE MODERN DIGITAL SPACE

The previously mentioned projects are an example of new models of knowledge improvement, protection and promotion of the cultural heritage of the Studenica Monastery, since the valuable Studenica heritage is treated integrally and interdisciplinary with a modern approach.

With the same intention, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, in 2020, the Studenica Monastery realized a permanent online exhibition in English on the Google Arts nad Culture platform, "Studenica Monastery. Made of Marble and Spirit. An exhibition of art and history of the ancient Serbian Lavra".[24] This exhibition was among the first ten exhibitions organized by the Ministry of Culture in Serbia.

The following year, in 2021, the Administration of Studenica Monastery launched a new website in Serbian and English in the form of a highly aestheticized portal that introduces the visitor to this 12th century monastery inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List – its history, art, news, worship schedule, photo gallery and video content, and selected texts.[25]

The Digital Studenica project, the Google exhibition "Studenica: made of Marble and Spirit" and the new website brought the Studenica Monastery the Southeast Europe Award in Ljubljana on 28 October 2022. [26] They were recognized by the international jury as essential for the creation of a unique identity, innovative design of the highest artistic quality and textual and audio-visual content for visitors in seven foreign languages.

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24   Google exhibition of Studenica Monastery https://artsandculture.google.com/story/QQUBzumTG9oQEQ (accessed April 2023).

25   Website of Studenica Monastery https://manastirstudenica.rs/ (accessed April 2023).

26   https://bigsee.eu/studenica-monastery-made-of-marble-and-spirit-belgrade/ https://manastirstudenica.rs/en/studenica-monastery-project-won-the-southeast-european-award/ (accessed April 2023).

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Fig. 11

View of the
electronic
database

Fig. 12

View of the item
card in the treasury
archive

(Studenica Monastery)

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We believe that all implemented projects, described in this paper, represent an example of the search for new models of knowledge improvement, protection and promotion of the cultural heritage of Studenica Monastery. With their interdisciplinarity in the era of contemporary digital culture, they make an essential contribution to the preservation, protection and popularization of the cultural heritage of Studenica Monastery as part of the heritage of humanity.

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АРХИМАНДРИТ ТИХОН М. РАКИЋЕВИЋ
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КА НОВИМ МОДЕЛИМА УНАПРЕЂЕЊА ЗНАЊА, ЗАШТИТЕ И ПРОМОЦИЈЕ КУЛТУРНЕ БАШТИНЕ МАНАСТИРА СТУДЕНИЦЕ

Манастир Студеница као део баштине човечанства и споменик културе на Листи светске баштине Унеска од 1986. године, део је и резервата биосфере „Голија – Студеница“ MAB/UNESCO од 2001. године. Управа Манастира је у складу са чланом 5 и 27 Конвенције о заштити светске културне и природне баштине спровела неколико значајних пројеката. Први у низу био је пројекат „Дигитална Студеница“, реализован 2018. године са LiveView студијом из Београда. Циљеви овог пројекта били су презентација и мапирање архитектуре манастира Студенице посредством дигиталне интерактивне интерпретације Богородичине и Краљеве цркве, цртежа из 12. века, 3Д виртуелних модела и проширене стварности, интерактивне сталне поставке и каталога. У току 2021-2022. године манастир Студеница је у сарадњи са надлежним институцијама и стручњацима Музеја Српске православне цркве успешно реализовао обе фазе пројекта „Уређење депоа ризнице манастира Студенице“. У складу са савременим музеолошким стандардима оформљен је депо ризнице Манастира Студенице, где су прописно и уз поштовање мера техничке заштите, смештени вредни ризнички предмети. У оквиру пројекта је урађена дигитална база података о свим експонатима, са електронским картоном сваког дела, најважнијом литературом, подацима о конзервацији и излагању.

Манастир је у сарадњи са Министарством културе Републике Србије 2020. године на платформи Google Arts nad Culture реализовао сталну онлајн изложбу на енглеском језику „Studenica Monastery. Made of Marble and Spirit. An exhibition of art and history of the ancient Serbian Lavra“. Ова изложба била је међу првих десет изложби које је Министарство културе остварило у Србији.

Наредне 2021. године, Управа Манастира Студенице је покренула нови веб сајт на српском и енглеском језику у форми високо естетизованог портала који посетиоца упознаје са овим манастиром 12. века века на Листи светске баштине Унеска – његовом историјом, уметношћу, новостима, распоредом богослужења, галеријом фотографија и видео садржаја, и одабраним текстовима.

Својом интердисциплинарношћу у ери савремене дигиталне културе, ови пројекти дају суштински допринос очувању, заштити и популаризацији културне баштине манастира Студенице.