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RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION IN MITROVA REKA AND NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE BOUNDARIES OF THE BANJSKA MONASTERY ESTATE IN RAŠ*

Abstract: During archaeological monitoring of conservation and restoration works carried out in 2022 on the Church of St. Demetrius with its old cemetery in Mitrova Reka, a cultural monument dated to the 16th century, walls from an earlier construction phase and part of a medieval necropolis were uncovered. In order to address structural damage to the walls and foundations on the northern and northeastern sides of the church, rescue archaeological excavations were also conducted in the same year. The current situation suggests that the existing church was built upon the remains of a medieval church. The previous architectural and burial findings in Mitrova Reka provide new insights into the spatial boundaries and territorial extent of the surrounding estates of the Banjska Monastery, recorded in the Svetostefan Charter of King Milutin from the second decade of the 14th century. The confirmation of earlier archaeological layers raises questions about the spatial contextualization of the church within its surrounding landscape, significantly impacting the perception of its cultural and historical value. Furthermore, it complicates the continuation of conservation and restoration works aimed at its preservation and presentation.

Keywords: Medieval Raška, Svetostefan Charter, church, burial, grave slab.

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1. Introduction

Since the reign of Grand Župan Stefan Nemanja (1169–1196), Deževa (locally known as Deževa) has been an important area where settlements and hillforts connected to the fortified capital town of Ras developed. Numerous churches are recorded in King Milutin's (r. 1282–1321) charter to the Banjska Monastery,¹ attesting to the significance of the Deževa Valley in the social, political, and cultural life of medieval Serbia. Important historical decisions were made here, such as the change of rulers of the Serbian Kingdom at the Deževa Assembly in 1282, as described by Archbishop Danilo II (c. 1270–19 December 1337).² The subsequent period, which marked a time of economic and cultural prosperity for the state, lasted until 1455, when the Ottomans, after a months-long siege, captured Novo Brdo and subsequently the entire Branković territory and the Ibar Valley.³ With the later stabilization of political conditions, the population of the Deževa villages, during the 16th and 17th centuries, restored the destroyed churches and erected new ones.⁴ During this period, numerous church buildings were constructed, sharing similar spatial concepts, building techniques, and architectural decorations, such as the Church of Saint Nicholas at Štitari, Saint Marina at Doinovići, Saint Lazarus at Živalić, Saint Nicholas at Kuzmičevo, and the Church of the Holy Virgin at Kovačevo.⁵

During this building phase, on the left bank of the Deževa River, in the area of the village of Aluloviće, on an elevation by the road leading from the village of Deževa to Mount Golija, the Church of Saint Demetrius was erected⁶ (Fig. 1). The structure features a single-nave layout, constructed from dressed trachyte and sandstone blocks, with the incorporation of marble spolia, and is covered by a barrel vault. The interior is organized into a nave, with an inner and outer narthex, the outer one potentially representing an addition or reconstruction, most likely from the 19th century. The altar apse is semicircular on the inside and polygonal on the outside. The western portal features a richly profiled frame surmounted by a niche, flanked by seven-pointed stars enclosed in circles. Within the niche is a dedicatory inscription carved on a plaque of white Studenica marble, topped by a Saracenic arch.⁷ Above the niche, a secondary medieval tombstone (slab insert) of white marble, in the shape of a trapezoid, with a Maltese cross and a sculpted depiction of the deceased's head,⁸ was built in, originating from an older

¹ Editions of the Svetostefan (Banjska) Charter, see Jagić 1890: 1-47; Kovačević 1890: 1–11; Novaković 1912: 622–631; Mošin, Ćirković, Sindik Vol. I, No. 125, 2011: 455-469; Trifunović 2011, Vol. 1, 19-83.

² *Danilo II et al.*, 1866: 25–27.

³ Mišić 2014: 53–54.

⁴ Stanić 1969: 224.

⁵ Šuput 1991: 81, 109, 282 with earlier literature; Premović-Aleksić 2014: 57, 66 with earlier literature.

⁶ By Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia No. 633-6501/2019 of June 27, 2019 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 47/2019 of June 28, 2019), the complex was designated an immovable cultural property—cultural monument.

⁷ There is a clear resemblance in the design of the roof cornice and entrance portal to that of the Church of Saint Marina in Doinoviće; similar masonry techniques and entrance portal treatments can also be observed in the churches of Saint Nicholas in Kuzmičevo and the Holy Virgin in Kovačevo, as well as in the form and appearance of the polygonal apse of the Church of St. Nicholas in Štitari, see fn 5.

⁸ For similar examples of medieval tombstones, see Stanić, Vukadin 1969: 150–151, fig. 6; Milutinović 2019: 55–56, fig. 9.

necropolis. Precise data regarding the construction date of the church is not available. Based on stylistic characteristics, it is presumed to have been built in the second half of the 16th century, i.e., after the restoration of the Peć Patriarchate in 1557.⁹ An inscription on the western façade above the entrance to the church reveals that it was restored by the local inhabitants in 1853, during the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid I (1823–1861) and the episcopate of Parthenios (1849–1854), the last from among the Phanariots to serve as Metropolitan of Raška and Prizren.



Figure 1. The Church of Saint Demetrius and the old cemetery at Mitrova Reka (photo: D. Andelković)

A graveyard developed around the church, serving as a burial site for the population of the surrounding villages until the early 20th century (Fig. 2). These grave markers were carved in the shape of large stone crosses, a form well known from the necropolis at the Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Novi Pazar. The existence of an earlier burial layer was indicated by larger slabs with beveled edges, which were incorporated as spolia into the base of the bell tower.¹⁰

⁹ Premović-Aleksić 2014: 97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; *Ead.* 2015: 162.

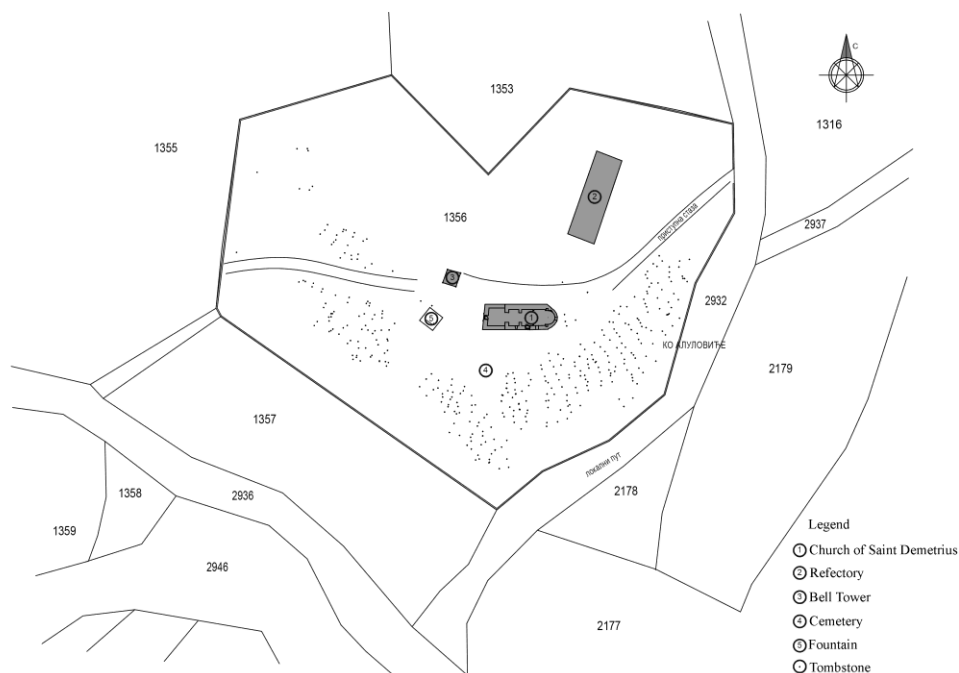


Figure 2. Site plan of the cultural monument Church of Saint Demetrius with the old cemetery in Mitrova Reka (drawing by M. Slavković)

2. Conservation Treatment of the Church of Saint Demetrius

Conservation and restoration works on this cultural heritage site have never been systematically carried out, which is why the territorially competent Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Kraljevo proposed in 2018 the repair of all structural damages to the church, as outlined in the Project for the Conservation and Restoration of the Church of Saint Demetrius with the Old Cemetery in Mitrova Reka, Municipality of Novi Pazar.¹¹ The works included the restoration of the foundations on the northern side of the church, due to subsidence of the ground and shallow foundations, as well as partial restoration of the large cracks in the lower zone of the northern wall, which indicated weak load-bearing capacity and a potential risk of the building's collapse. The Project also included the repair and replacement of the tiled roof covering. Following the restoration of the church, the team planned activities on the monuments of the younger necropolis.

The Project was phased and financed by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Serbia, with conservation and restoration works commencing in 2021. During the second phase, in 2022, the restoration of the foundations on the northern side of the building was carried out. As the required activities were contingent on necessary earthworks,

¹¹ Documentation of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Kraljevo, 2018.

archaeological monitoring was conducted. During the excavation of the trench on the northern side of the building and the raising of the existing sidewalk, two grave markers were discovered *in situ* beneath the foundations of the church (Fig. 3), confirming the hypothesis of an earlier burial layer. The conservation works were temporarily halted to allow for archaeological research,¹² aimed at protecting the material remains and documenting new data on this immovable cultural heritage site.

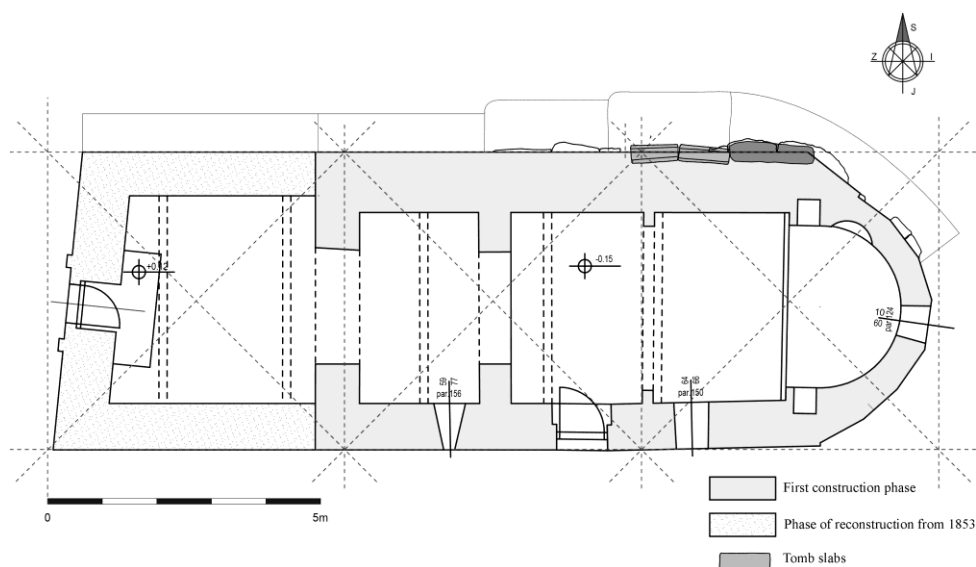


Figure 3. The plan of the existing church with the position of medieval tombstones (drawing by M. Slavković)

3. Methodological Challenges and Research Findings

The documentation of the Institute in Kraljevo records several previous conservation and restoration interventions on the structure, which, as a rule, did not include archaeological research. Unfortunately, all previous works were solely focused on restoring the disturbed structural integrity of the building, involving earthworks without the application of archaeological methodology, resulting in the irreversible loss of valuable data about earlier layers.

Given the specificity of the discovery of grave slabs beneath the foundation zone of the 16th-century church (Fig. 3), at a depth of approximately 0.6 m from the level of the contemporary courtyard, it was not possible to carry out excavation within the standard principles of archaeological methodology. Since the associated graves were clearly located

¹² The protective archaeological research was conducted by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Kraljevo, under the leadership of Marija D. Marić, Ph.D., with a team consisting of the co-authors of this text.

beneath the later construction, it was necessary to statically secure the structure to prevent the collapse of the wall and ensure the safety of the researchers during the excavation. Due to the inability to establish absolute reference points because of the inaccessibility of the findings, the measurements were documented in relative heights in relation to known architectural elements of the church. The research encompassed the area around the two-part marble grave slab (Fig. 3), while the remaining earthworks in the trench along the northern wall and apse were archaeologically monitored due to the potential for new archaeological finds. The upper layers were devastated by previous conservation works related to the installation of the earlier sidewalk, and it was only by lowering the excavation that the intact layers were reached.

Beneath the foundation level of the 16th-century church, on the northern and eastern sides, walls of an earlier structure, somewhat narrower in size, were discovered (Fig. 4). Its longitudinal wall is set back approximately 0.35 m in relation to the northern façade line of the later church. The newly discovered structure was built using a completely different technique, with smaller dressed and broken stone, and bonded with lime mortar (Fig. 5). It has a semicircular apse, which on the northern side ends with a straight section and joins the longitudinal wall at a right angle (Fig. 6), clearly indicating that this is the wall of an older church.

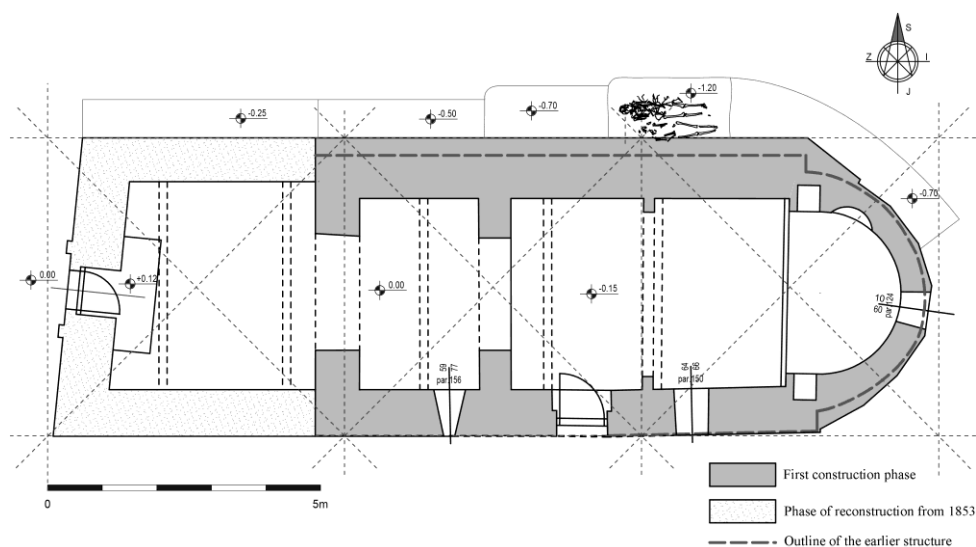


Figure 4. Plan of the existing and older church with uncovered graves (drawing by M. Slavković)



Figure 5. Detail of the exterior face of the northern wall of the older church beneath the foundation level (photo by M. Slavković)

Further excavation on the northern side, along the wall of the younger church, toward the east, revealed another grave marker (Fig. 3). It is a massive dressed sandstone slab measuring 1.60 x 0.40 m, with an average thickness of 0.25 m, featuring a stylized anthropomorphic depiction on its upper surface (Fig. 7). The archaeological excavation beneath the grave slab, where a grave was expected, was not carried out due to the potential risk of seriously compromising the structure's stability. The other previously mentioned grave marker is in the form of a two-part, smoothly dressed marble slab with an elongated rectangular shape and slanted sides, measuring 1.80 x 0.32 m and approximately 0.10 m in thickness. It is decorated with six shallowly carved circles divided into seven segments (Fig. 8). Due to the location designated for the underpinning of the church's foundation at that spot, the slab was removed. After the temporary static reinforcement of the northern wall, the excavation of burial units beneath and alongside the slab in the trench was carried out. Two graves were found beneath the slab. At a relative depth of 0.7 m from the surface level, a partially preserved juvenile skeleton was uncovered (Grave 2). Due to the significantly deteriorated condition, it was almost impossible to clean and lift the bones, so the find was not subject to bioarchaeological processing. Beneath this skeleton, at a relative depth of 1.05 m, the skeleton of an adult individual was found (Grave 3), which, together with the aforementioned slab, forms a burial unit. Due to the composition and hardness of the soil,

it was challenging to define the burial features clearly. Directly adjacent to these two graves, on their northern side, a third grave was discovered with the skeletal remains of an adult individual (Grave 1), at a relative depth of 0.9 m. The skeletons of two adult individuals were found in an anatomical position, buried in an east-west orientation, with their heads to the west (Fig. 4). The hands of the deceased were crossed over the chest.



Figure 6. Detail of the exterior face of the apse wing wall of the older church beneath the foundation level (photo by V. Milutinović)

The movable archaeological material found during the excavation is scarce. In the upper, disturbed layer, beneath the sidewalk, a forged iron nail, 7.5 cm in length, was discovered. In addition, a fragment of the rim of a ceramic vessel, intensely black, made from clay with silica inclusions, was found. The lack of decoration makes it impossible to date with certainty, although the texture suggests it is medieval pottery. In the layer above the two-part grave slab, but beneath the foundations of the younger church, eight fragments from the same pot were found, with thinner walls and a dark grey color. The fragments are missing the diagnostic parts of the vessel, so based on their texture, this ceramic material can be roughly dated to the late medieval or post-medieval period. No other finds were encountered.



Figure 7. Massive grave slab with an anthropomorphic depiction *in situ* (photo V. Milutinović)

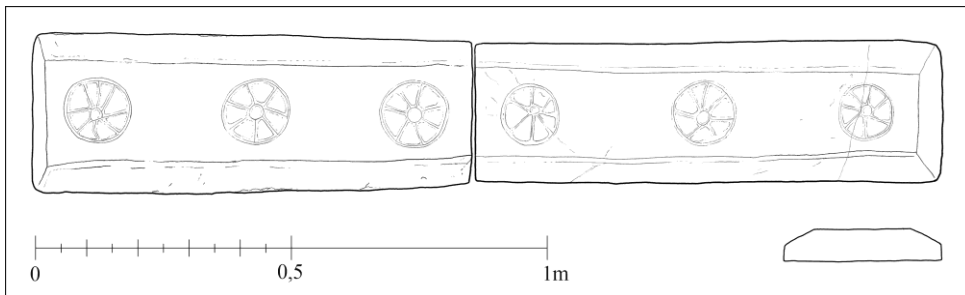


Figure 8. Marble grave slab with a solar circle motif (drawing A. Matović)

4. Analysis of the Research Results

Although the scope of the protective archaeological investigations was limited, being dictated by the requirements of architectural conservation, restoration, and stabilization works on the later church, they yielded significant chronological data and raised numerous questions that form the basis for further research into this sacral

complex. The analysis of the previously described excavation results established that the later Church of Saint Demetrius from the 16th century represents a reconstruction of an earlier structure from the medieval period (Fig. 4). From the latter, only segments of the outer faces of the north and south walls, together with part of the apse, were uncovered. Adjacent to the older structure, a necropolis developed, as evidenced by two grave markers and the skeletal remains of the deceased (Figs. 3 and 4). The first sandstone grave marker, bearing a stylized anthropomorphic representation on its upper surface (Fig. 7), is a type of rustic monument which, during the medieval period, constituted the most common form of sepulchral marker on Serbian necropolises.¹³ The second grave marker belongs to the type of two-part marble slabs with slanted sides, decorated with six stylized solar circles (Fig. 8). The irregularity in the appearance of the motif is discernible, particularly in the carving of the solar rays, which may also be attributed to the stonemason's lack of skill. Such ornamentation generally symbolizes rebirth, in which death is not perceived as an end.¹⁴ Based on an analogy with a grave slab from Studenica, this find from Mitrova Reka is broadly dated to the period from the late 13th to the mid-15th century.¹⁵ The medieval burial layer around the Church of Saint Demetrius is also evidenced by a second, amorphous grave marker found at the same level beneath the foundations of the later church (Figs. 3 and 7).

A basic bioanthropological analysis¹⁶ of the skeletons revealed that Grave 3, located beneath the two-part slab, contained the remains of an adult female individual,¹⁷ while Grave 1, situated adjacent to it and buried somewhat more shallowly, held the remains of an adult male individual over 35 years of age (Fig. 4). No pathological conditions or injuries were observed on the recovered skeletal remains, indicating a relatively good health status at the time of death. In the grave of the female individual, a subsequent burial of a child was carried out, which may suggest a familial relationship between the interred. The graves contained no grave goods, making it impossible to discuss a more detailed chronology of burials within the examined sample of the necropolis.

5. Discussion

Knowledge about the stratigraphic layers from the period of construction of the medieval church in Mitrova Reka is based exclusively on archaeological investigations of limited scope. Given the importance of the Deževa Valley in the Middle Ages¹⁸ and the results of the rescue excavations, it is necessary to consider the possibilities for its historical contextualization.

¹³ Popović 2015: 383 with earlier literature.

¹⁴ Dudić 1995: 101.

¹⁵ Popović *op. cit.*, 383–384, 392, T3/4.

¹⁶ The basic bioanthropological analysis of the skeletal remains was carried out by Tamara Pavlović, M.A., a bioanthropologist and researcher at the Laboratory of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade.

¹⁷ Precise age determination was not possible due to the absence of the pubic bone, but the morphology of the pelvic bones indicates female sex characteristics.

¹⁸ Kalić, Popović 1982.

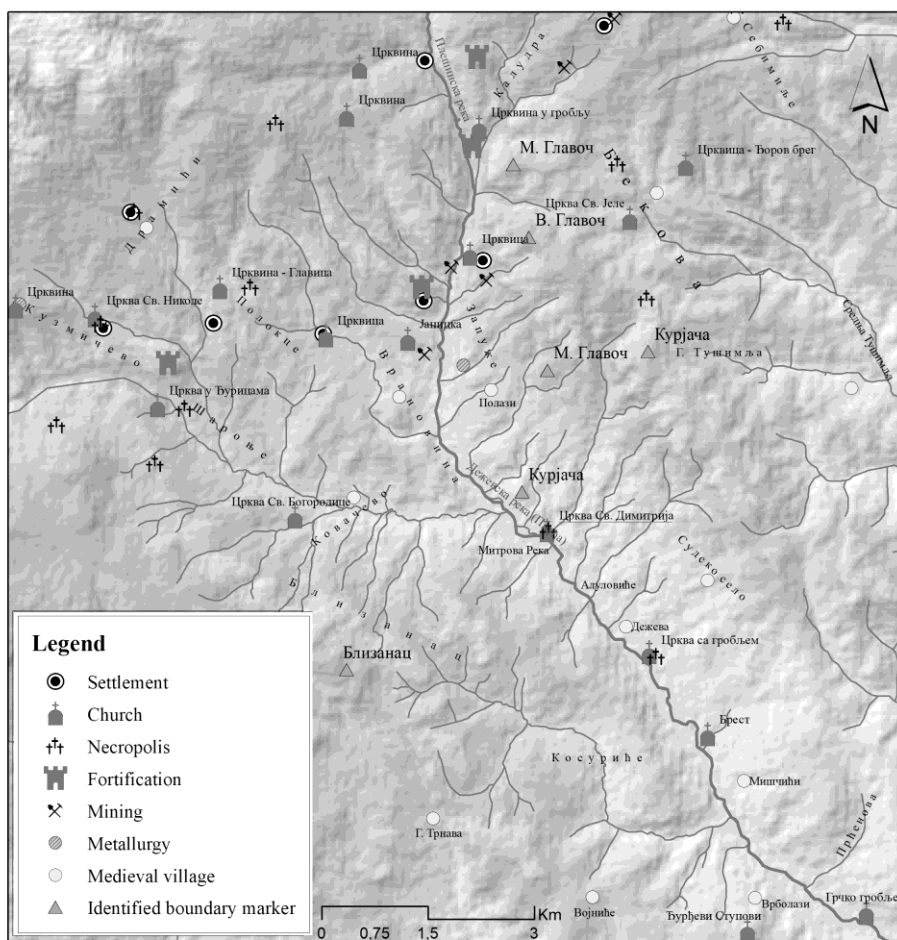


Figure 9. Medieval topography of the Deževa Valley (prepared by M. Marić)

The Deževa River flows through the Deževa area, known in the Middle Ages as Pnuća¹⁹ (Fig. 9). This older name has survived only as a toponym at its confluence with the Raška River. In the second charter of King Stefan the First-Crowned and his son Radoslav to the Žiča Monastery, issued in 1220,²⁰ the *župa* of Pnuća²¹ is mentioned as a territorial and administrative unit. Thus, in written sources, the *župa* of Ras and the *župa* of Pnuća are attested, their

¹⁹ Kalić 1977: 58.

²⁰ The inscription is located on the south wall of the passage beneath the bell tower of the Church of the Holy Savior in the Žiča Monastery. The chrysobull is dated approximately to the time of King Stefan Radoslav's wedding; see Mošin, Ćirković, Sindik, vol. I, No. 15: 93–94. For the possibility of dating the transcription of charter excerpts on the church walls, see also Milutinović & Marić 2017: 97–99.

²¹ Mošin, Ćirković, Sindik, *op. cit.*, No. 15: 94.

territories being unambiguously associated with the valley of the Deževa River. At this point, we return to the question of the spatial and administrative relationship between these two župas until the end of the 13th century,²² when the name of the Župa of Pnuća disappeared in the regional sense and its territory came under the jurisdiction of Ras. In this context, it is necessary to consider once again King Milutin's Svetostefanska chrysobull (issued between 1314 and 1316),²³ which, on the occasion of the founding of Banjska Monastery, also defined the scope of its endowments. In addition to numerous villages throughout the Serbian lands, the chrysobull also mentions several settlements "in Ras" that were granted to Banjska Monastery: Deževo, Suti, Bekova, Tušimlja, Polazi, Hropalica, Dramići, Pavlje Selo, Kovači, Ivanovo, and the village of Dobroslav Stepković,²⁴ accompanied by detailed descriptions of their boundaries and hamlets. As early as 1977, J. Kalić observed that earlier researchers had not sufficiently identified the toponyms mentioned in this written document, and it seems that the situation remains much the same today. Such research into micro-toponymy would greatly illuminate life in the Ras area during the 14th and 15th centuries,²⁵ that is, the period up to the founding of Novi Pazar (in the second half of the 15th century) and the establishment of Ottoman rule in this area, which would remain in place until 1912.²⁶

The present-day name *Mitrova Reka* or *Dmitrova Reka* undoubtedly derives from the Church of Saint Demetrius, which is now known to have been built in the medieval period. P. Ž. Petrović considered that the existing Church of Saint Demetrius in Dmitrova Reka, as well as its predecessor, could not be identified with the church that King Milutin granted to the Banjska Monastery in 1316.²⁷ He identified this 14th-century church (allegedly located in Gornja Bekova²⁸ according to his interpretation of the Svetostefan chrysobull) as being situated at the site of Crkvina within the area of the present-day village of Donja Bekova. This argument is based on the location and name of the spring Dmitrova voda near Crkvina, which, in his view, confirm that the 14th-century Church of Saint Demetrius once stood at that site. Immediately after the destruction of that church, a new one was erected in a more accessible location, dedicated to the same saint, in commemoration of the old church.²⁹ At the site where, in Petrović's opinion, the original Church of Saint Demetrius once stood, a church dedicated to Saint Jela³⁰ was later built (Fig. 9), at a time when the memory of the original patron saint had faded among the local population.³¹

The previously mentioned information recorded by Petrović is based on a hypothesis

²² Kalić, *loc. cit.*

²³ Bogdanović 2011: 117.

²⁴ Tomović 2011: 226–230, Katić, Vojvodić 2020: 130–132.

²⁵ Kalić, *loc. cit.*

²⁶ Zirojević 1977: 111–112.

²⁷ Petrović 1984: 161.

²⁸ In the Svetostefan chrysobull, when the village of Bekova is mentioned, it is never specified whether it refers to Gornja or Donja Bekova (Mošin, Ćirković, Sindik, op. cit., No. 125: 460). The division of the village into two parts was, in fact, the result of the population's obligations either to the Banjska Monastery or to the Church of Saint Demetrius.

²⁹ Petrović is probably referring to the Church of Saint Demetrius in Mitrova Reka.

³⁰ In folk tradition, "Saint Jela" is a shortened form of Saint Helena, most commonly identified with Empress Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine the Great, whose cult was widespread in the medieval Serbian lands.

³¹ Petrović, *loc. cit.*

put forward by Petković as early as 1950, regarding the small church (*Crkvica*) above Debeličko Hill in Bekova, which he identified as the Church of Saint Demetrius with its estate, later incorporated by King Milutin into the Banjska Monastery estate (*banjsko vlastelinstvo*).³² This view has persisted to the present day in works that, in any respect, address the territorial organization of the villages of the Župa of Ras.³³ The precise spatial pinpointing of the church is an important argument in delineating village or estate boundaries, a matter that will not be discussed here in detail. However, it is necessary to reconsider the possibility of identifying the Church of Saint Demetrius in Mitrova Reka with the donation to Banjska Monastery, mentioned in the above-referenced chrysobull.

Today, the Church of Saint Demetrius in Mitrova Reka is located within the cadastral territory of the village of Aluloviće (Fig. 9). Petrović states that this is an old village which, at the end of the 17th century, was settled by Muslims who lived there until 1878, after which local Christians moved in.³⁴ On the other hand, speaking of the village of Bekova in spatial terms, he notes that it is situated in Gornja Deževa, with hamlets that formed in the shaded headwaters of two streams. The village is territorially divided into three parts: Gornja Bekova (below the hills of Katina and Šanac), Srednja Bekova (Staro Selo), and Donja Bekova, with houses situated lower on the hill of Glavoč. He also remarks on the abundance of springs in the area, identifying Dmitrov izvor, among others, as being situated within the present-day Srednja Bekova. Continuing his description of the village, he further notes that the foundations of the wooden church dedicated to Saint Jela, burned by the Turks in 1876, along with the necropolis on the slope, are situated “below Streovac Hill, in Donja Bekova.” He further cites the Svetostefan chrysobull, which mentions the place Kurjača on the boundaries of Bekova, locating it within Aluloviće, together with Glavoč Hill, the site of a former Turkish border fortification (*merćez*).³⁵ From this anthropogeographical study provided by Petrović (2010), different spatial arrangements can be observed compared to those he presented in 1984. The clearest example is the designation of Dmitrov izvor as a reference toponym, taken as evidence for identifying the patron saint of the nearby Crkvina. At the time of the issuing of the Svetostefan chrysobull, Aluloviće did not exist as a village; rather, the area belonged either to Deževa or to Bekova. During the High Middle Ages, when this document was written, both villages belonged to the Župa of Ras. According to the Svetostefan chrysobull, the same oronym Kurjača is listed as a boundary marker of an estate comprising the villages of Deževo, Suti, and Bekovo, as well as a boundary marker of the estate of the Church of Saint Demetrius, which likewise included the village of Bekovo together with the villages of Polazi and Hropalica.³⁶ In this area, there are two elevations named Kurjača, both located within the territory of the village of Aluloviće (Fig. 9). Kurjača Mountain lies on the boundary of the present-day cadastral municipalities of Aluloviće, Gornja Tušimlja, and Bekova (elevation 982 m),³⁷ while a lower hill of the same name is situated in the center of Aluloviće, above the

³² Petković 1950: 18.

³³ See Dudić, *op. cit.*, 33, Premović-Aleksić 2014: 82–83 and others.

³⁴ Petrović 2010: 103.

³⁵ Petrović, *op. cit.*, 105.

³⁶ Mošin, Ćirković, Sindik *op. cit.*, No. 125: 461.

³⁷ Loma (2013: 126), under the entry *Kurjača*, in the list of toponyms from the Banjska chrysobull, identifies the mentioned boundary marker Kurjača with Kurjača Mountain (elevation 982 m), as had earlier been

Deževa River, approximately 400 m northwest of the Church of Saint Demetrius (elevation 695.2 m). Kurjača Hill³⁸ can be identified with the boundary marker Kurjač rt,³⁹ which marks the end of the Church of Saint Demetrius' estate boundary. If the territory of Aluloviće, and thus Mitrova Reka, did fall under Bekova, it becomes important to reopen the question of which Church of Saint Demetrius, together with its estate, is referred to in the Svetostefan chrysobull. In support of the importance of considering which church is mentioned in the chrysobull, we should also take into account the preservation of the patron's name, Saint Demetrius, in both cases. In the case of the Crkvica site in Bekova, where the local community gathers today on Saint Jela's feast day,⁴⁰ the supposed earlier foundations have been attributed to Saint Demetrius as patron on the basis of the nearby Dmitrov izvor.⁴¹ However, this spring need not necessarily be linked to a church or its dedication; it could, for example, refer to a certain Dmitar, a former landowner, or something similar. In the oral tradition, there is also a preserved legend about the "flight" of this church,⁴² a common motif in stories related to the renewal of places of worship during the Ottoman period.⁴³ However, such traditions do not constitute reliable evidence of their earlier dedication, nor do they confirm a connection between the two churches. Conversely, the inscription recording the church's restoration makes it clear that the dedication of the Church of Saint Demetrius in Mitrova Reka is beyond doubt.

Finally, in order to address the issue of identifying the church mentioned in the Svetostefan chrysobull, it is necessary to analyze the preserved architecture of both churches together with their associated cemeteries and the contextual evidence provided by the movable archaeological finds. The Church of Saint Jela in Bekova has been preserved in a ruined state, with the lower courses of its walls constructed from reused older tombstones.⁴⁴ Although no archaeological excavations have been carried out, the form of its ground plan, with a polygonal apse matching the width of the nave, directly suggests it can be dated to the period of Ottoman rule. Protective archaeological investigations in Mitrova Reka have confirmed the existence of the only medieval church so far discovered within the territory of the villages of Aluloviće and Bekova.

6. Conclusion

Archaeological investigations of the sacred complex, which comprises the Church of Saint Demetrius and the adjoining cemetery established in the late 19th century, have yielded new and significant data, offering valuable insights into the historical and cultural

proposed by Škrivanić (1956: 185–187) and Tomović (2011: 227).

³⁸ Loma, *op. cit.*, pp. 125–126, under the entry *Kurjač rt*, also included this toponym in the list but marked it as unidentified, referring to the discussion in Škrivanić, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

³⁹ In the Svetostefan chrysobull, the toponym *Kurjač rt* refers to an elevated ridge or slope used as a natural boundary marker.

⁴⁰ Premović-Aleksić 2014: 83.

⁴¹ Petrović, *loc. cit.*

⁴² Premović-Aleksić, *loc. cit.*

⁴³ The legend of the "flight" of churches arose as a result of the practice of building new churches from the material of abandoned church sites, in order to avoid administrative obstacles and high construction taxes across the Ottoman Empire, *Ead.* 2015: 18–19.

⁴⁴ *Ead.* 2014: 82.

context of the medieval period in this area. Although the trial excavations were constrained and defined by the scope of the conservation and restoration works, the results have once again brought into focus the spatial location of the Banjska estate of the Church of Saint Demetrius at Bekovi and its associated villages.

This research demonstrates that the Church of Saint Demetrius in Mitrova Reka was reconstructed upon the foundations of an earlier medieval church, emphasizing the continuity of sacred space. Alongside the earlier sacred structure, a necropolis developed, active during the 14th and 15th centuries, which currently provides limited yet significant information concerning the sex and age of the deceased, burial practices, and grave slabs. The newly uncovered stratigraphy of the Church of Saint Demetrius in Mitrova Reka, together with the proposed identification of Rt Kurjač in its immediate surroundings, has enabled its spatial correlation with the church of the same name and the estate mentioned in the Svetostefan Charter. Accordingly, this research provides arguments for the reinterpretation of the territorial extents of villages and estates, as well as for a more precise delineation of their boundaries. Further research attention should be directed toward the relationship between this church and the toponyms recorded in the charter, bearing in mind that specific names appear at multiple locations within the study area, and that place-names have changed over time. For the time being, the question of the location of other churches in this part of the medieval Župa of Ras, as well as the relationship between the toponyms that define medieval estates, remains open.

Finally, the issue of conserving immovable remains at Mitrova Reka must not be overlooked. The newly uncovered immovable remains not only require particular attention in their future protection but also call for a change in the approach to the preservation and presentation of this monument. Archaeological investigations, conducted across all phases of protection, enable the recognition of the multi-layered nature of heritage and support the revalorization of its values. In this way, the historical narrative is continuously enriched, serving as a resource for public education and the preservation of cultural identity.

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**ЗАШТИТНА АРХЕОЛОШКА ИСТРАЖИВАЊА
У МИТРОВОЈ РЕЦИ И НОВИ УВИДИ У ПОСЕДЕ
СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНЕ ЖУПЕ РАС**

Резиме

Црква Св. Димитрија са старим гробљем у Митровој Реци, споменик културе из 16. века, налази се у атару данашњег села Алуловиће у области Дежеве код Новог Пазара. Археолошким праћењем конзерваторско-рестаураторских радова на цркви 2022. године, откривени су сегменти зидова старије средњовековне цркве и део истовремене некрополе. Тада су спроведена прва археолошка ископавања у циљу истраживања, документовања и заштите старије фазе локалитета, након чега је настављено са радовима на статичкој и конструктивној санацији млађе цркве. Резултати ових истраживања донели су нове податке о габаритима и техници градње старије цркве око које се развила некропола током 14. и 15. века. Датовање старије фазе локалитета извршено је на основу стилске анализе два надгробника која су откривена уз темеље старије цркве. Први споменик припада типу рустичних притесаних плоча од пешчара са стилизованом антропоморфном представом, које представљају најбројније сепулкрално обележје српских средњовековних некропола у области старог Раса. Други надгробник је у облику дводелне мермерне, равно клесане плоче издужене правоугаоне форме са косо засеченим странама и украсом у виду шест плитко урезаних кружница подељених на седам сегмената. Он је широко датован у период 13. до 15. века на основу директне аналогije из Манастира Студеница. Ископавањем гробне целине испод дводелне мермерне плоче откривена су два скелета на различитим дубинама. Скелет на вишој коти припадао је детету (Гроб 2), док је испод њега лежао скелет одрасле мушке индивидуе (Гроб 3). Северно од овог гроба откривен је и укуп са скелетним остацима старије женске особе (Гроб 1). Скелети две одрасле индивидуе су пронађени у анатомском положају, оријентисани су у правцу запад-исток, са главом на западу. Руке покојника биле су прекрштене на грудима. Грбови нису

садржали инвентар ни прилоге, тако да није могуће расправљати о детаљнијој хронологији сахрањивања на истраженом узорку некрополе.

Анализом претходно описаних резултата ископавања утврђено је да млађа црква Св. Димитрија из 16. века, представља обнову старије грађевине из периода средњег века. Имајући у виду ову чињеницу, као и сачувану дипломатичку грађу за предметни простор у позном средњем веку, у раду је још једном размотрена историјска контекстуализација откривене старије цркве. У Светостефанској (Бањској) хрисовуљи краља Милутина, побројани су земљишни поседи Манастира Бањска у жупи Рас, који обухватају више насеља са детаљним описима међа, међу којима је и посед цркве Св. Димитрија у Бекову са припадајућим селима. Старији истраживачи су поменути цркву препознали на простору данашњег села Бекова, према делимичној убикацији међника средњовековних села и једног савременог микропонима, који их је семантички упућивао на име патрона цркве. Нови увид у стратиграфију Цркве Св. Димитрија у Митровој Реци, уз први пут овде предложену убикацију међника Курјач Рт у непосредном окружењу, омогућио је њену просторну идентификацију са истоименом црквом и поседом који се помиње у Светостефанској хрисовуљи. Самим тим, ово истраживање дало је аргументе за реинтерпретацију територијалних обухвата села и поседа и прецизнију диспозицију њихових граница.

Кључне речи: Рашка област, средњи век, Светостефанска хрисовуља, црква, сахрањивање, надгробна плоча.