St. Stefan Ottawa Choir - Serbia Trip 2025

During the ten years we performed many concerts but our primary role was to participate in weekly liturgical services at Saint Arch. Stefan Serbian Orthodox Church in Ottawa, Canada.

We dreamed about coming to Serbia to sing in their old medieval churches and monasteries. Our dreams became a reality for us in the summer of 2025, thanks to a few successful concerts and many sponsors from our Serbian parish and community that loved and supported our work.

Day 1: Arrival

Day 2: Belgrade St. Marko church, St. Sava church, Kalemegdan and Skadarlija sightseeing

While most members of our choir arrived a few days prior to the commencement of our tour, some arrived just a day before. We were grateful and very excited to participate in our first liturgy early Saturday morning at St. Marko Church to celebrate the special feastday of St. Peter and Paul.

This church is huge and there were many people. We were unsure if the voices of our 12 singers would be able to sing loud enough to be heard in every corner of the church, however with help from the local church choir, and mostly thanks to our director, we were able to perform all selected liturgy parts with no hiccups . We were later invited to a small reception hosted by the local choir.

Elias was amazing in helping us feel confident and providing hints on how to sing in this huge church, contrary to confined places that we encounter more often

Fun fact: St. Marko church - is a Royal Mausoleum - King Alexander and Queen Draga are buried there.

Kalemegdan fortress- was built in the 3rd century, the name in Turkish language means “ battle field”. It has witnessed 115 battles over the ages.

Skadarlija -the bohemian quarter, is a cobblestoned street with many restaurants, known for music, art and good food.



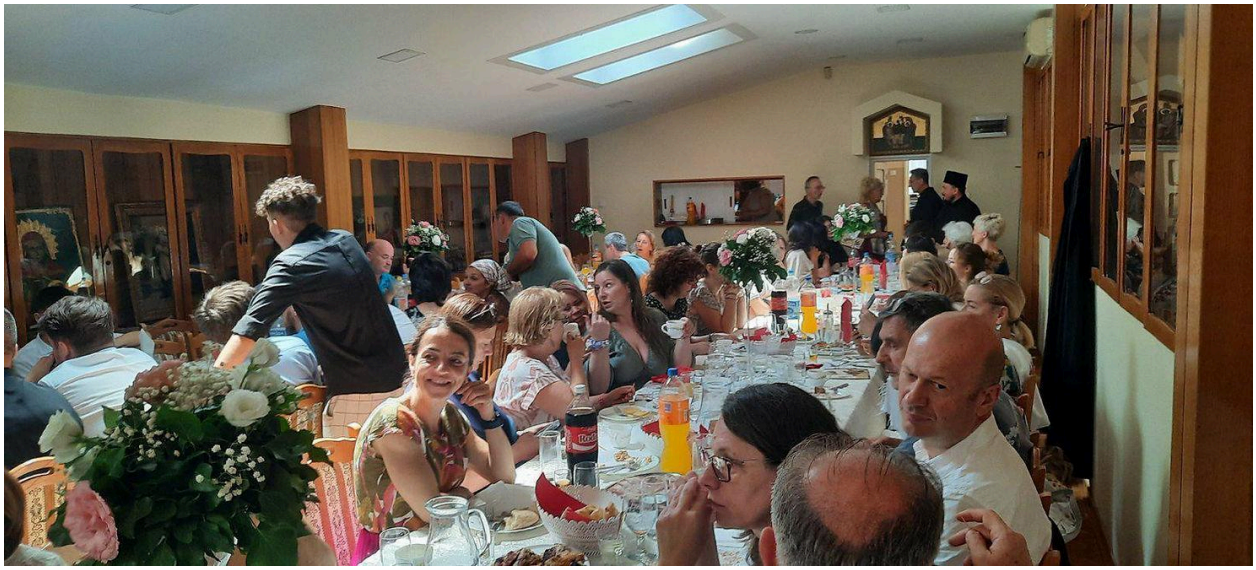


Day 3 morning: Šabac Liturgy July 13th

We had an early start to our next day, hopped on and found seats on our touring bus that would be our home away from home, for a 7 days tour of Western Serbia. Our first stop was Sabac - St. Peter and Paul Church, for Sunday liturgy served by the Bishop. For more information about this church please check

After liturgy we were invited to a feast by our grateful hosts. It was hard to get up after a delicious meal and talking to attentive host- members of this congregation, but we had to continue to Loznica, as our first concert was already scheduled for the same evening.

Fun fact: Šabac- city of the first Serbian uprising in 1806, led by Karadjordje, against the Ottoman (Turkish) rulers. The city lies on the Sava river and has a big fortress that is used for concerts and other fun events.





Day 3 afternoon: Loznica - Concert July 13th

After a short rest at our hotel, we changed into our concert attire, pinned our brooches with Serbian embroidery handmade by our dear friend Dragica Bogdanovic in Ottawa. Upon taking a few photos in front of Saint Prokopije Church in Loznicko Polje, we were ready to enjoy this new, beautiful, acoustic church and warm hosts, by sharing our mutual joy in music. The concert ended with ovations and another great reception. Our hosts insisted on us joining them to sing some traditional Serbian and Russian folk songs. We obliged, of course. That night we witnessed the Perseid meteor shower. What a nice start to our trip! We could not ask for more.

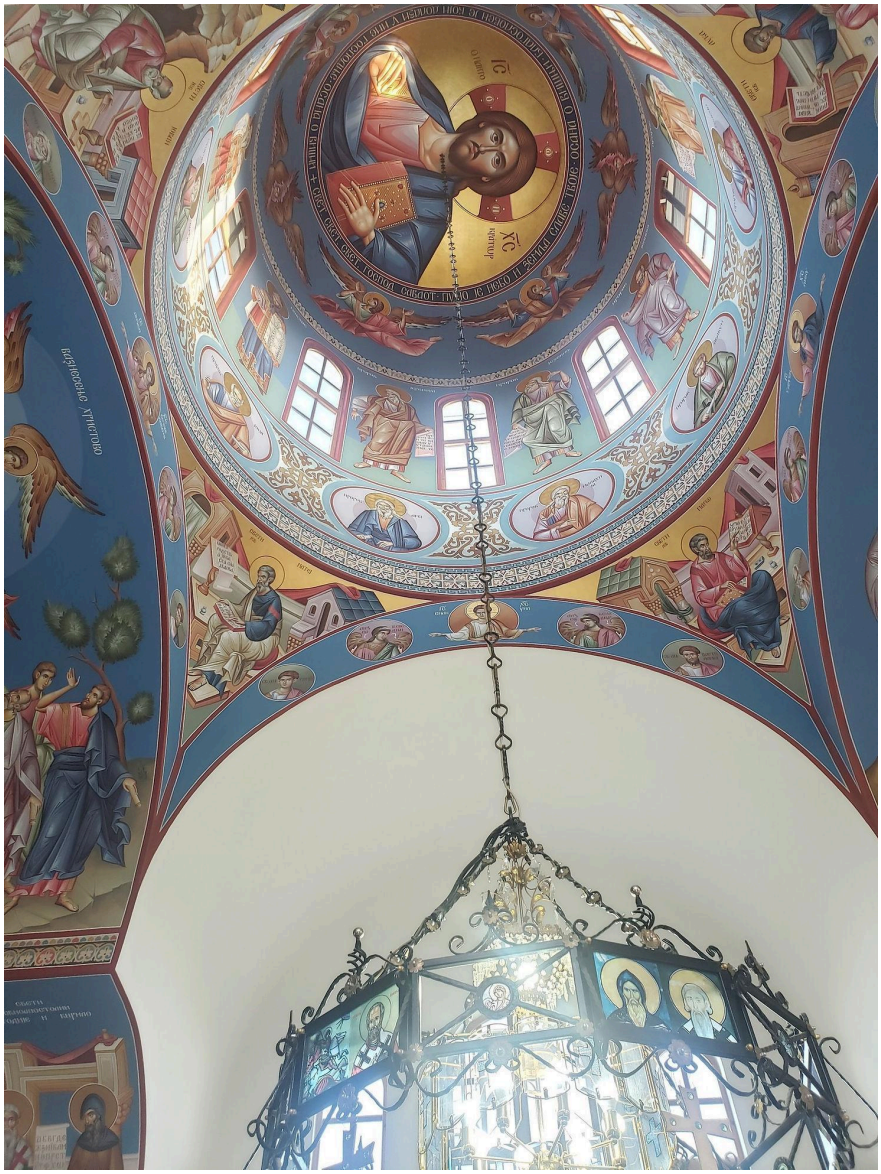
More info at following Instagram page

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Day 4: Loznica, Tršic, Tronoša July 14th

The following morning we visited Trsic village and monastery Tronosa, where the father of Serbian Cyrillic alphabet - Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, grew up and learned his first letters. We sang in the chapel Seven brothers Jugovic, from our hearts, without notes, and loved it so much. As we visited other churches and monasteries we would sing “Svjati Boze” with our choir member Luba as a soloist, over and over again.

That afternoon, we enjoyed a relaxing break for lunch in Loznica by the Drina river, looking out toward Bosnia on the other side. As evening fell, we drove out to the ethno-village of Lelic for our overnight stay, near Valjevo, overlooking Lelic Monastery. We were welcomed by a secluded setting high on a mountaintop with 4-5 traditionally built houses that surrounded a central open dining area with wooden tables and chairs, covered in checkered tablecloths. We were served comforting food: corn bread, kajmak, cold-cuts and drank rakija and wine. All you

could hear was our laughter echoing into the night.

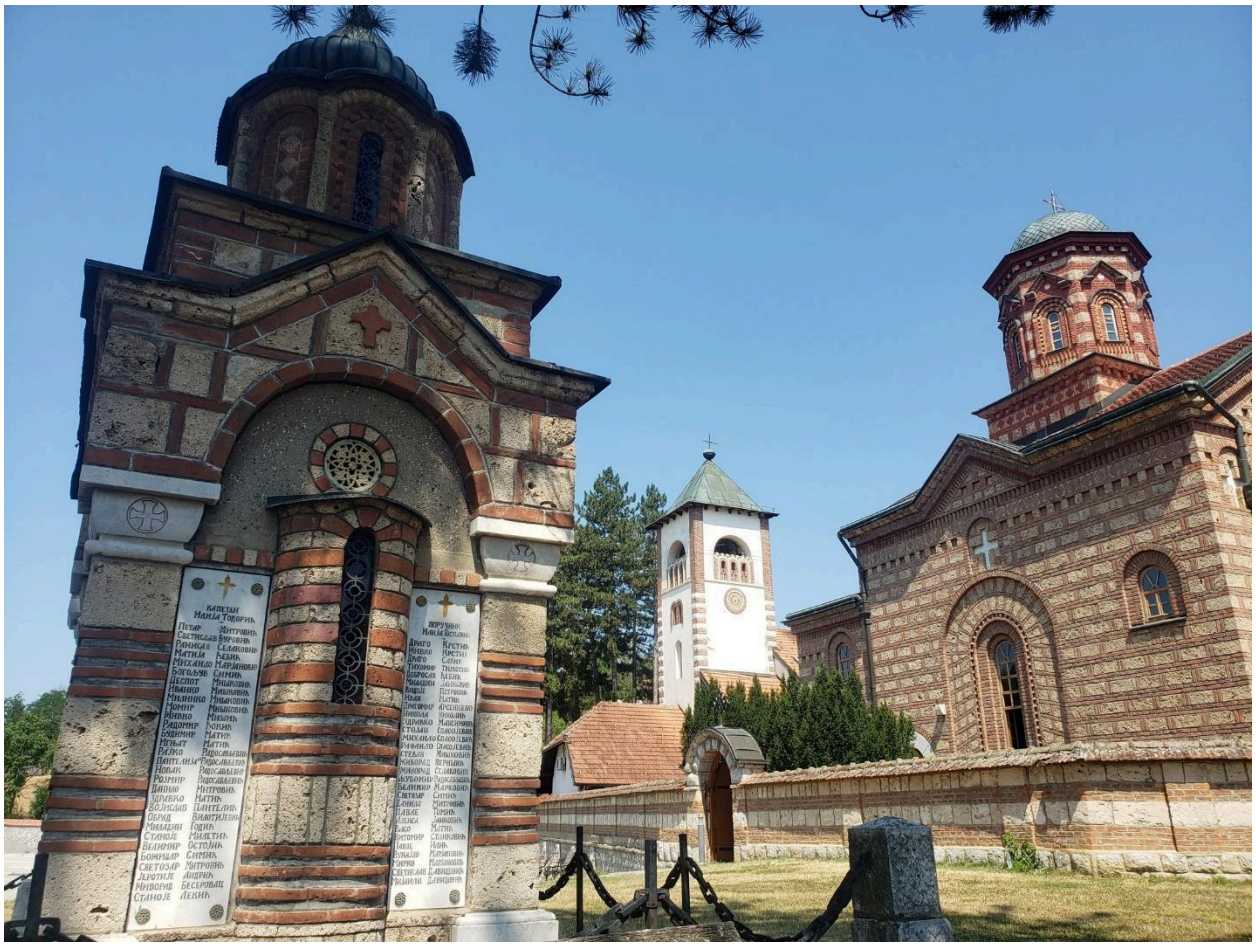
Fun fact: Monastery Tronoša, was founded in 1317 by King Dragutin and his wife Catherine. It's a place where a unique custom of making large "plowmen's candles" takes place on Maundy Thursday (night before Good Friday). Two of these tall wax candles stand on either side of the altar doors in the church and are lit every Sunday for liturgy and during special feast days and can last up to a year. This belongs to part of the National intangible heritage. It is a custom that was initiated in pre-Christian times and lives today. The idea is that people from villages that surrounded the monastery would collect wax and make candles to burn, along with prayer for health, happiness and a good harvest.



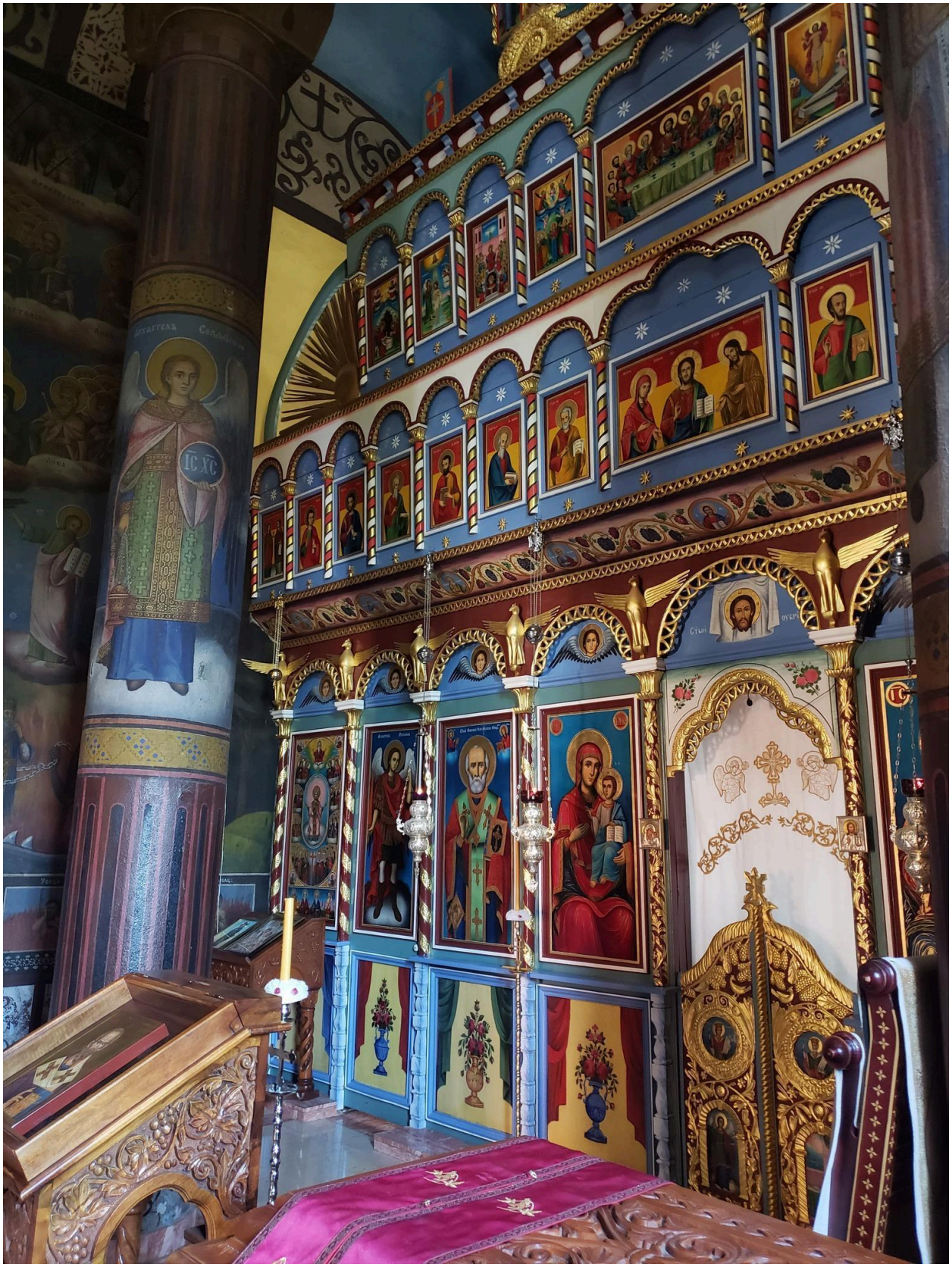
Day 5 Monasteries Lelic and Celije and river Gradac picnic

The following morning, we drove downhill towards Lelic Monastery, erected in 1929 and located in the village with the same name, 11 km outside of Valjevo.The monastery is an endowment of Bishop Nikolaj and his father Dragomir Velimirović.

When the relics of St. Bishop Nikolaj were transferred from America to Lelic monastery, a beautiful iconostasis and frescoes as well as other newly erected religious buildings and a museum were created within and around the monastery grounds, as a necessity to create preconditions for the changing in spiritual regime within the Orthodox Church.



Inside the church the frescoes are well illustrated, due to times when people often were not very literate. The last judgment is one of the larger frescoes, illustrating the path that souls take when heading to the world of spirits. A scene with a snake and all the earthly sins is painted on one of the walls, as well as scenes that illustrate virtues. The remains of Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic are kept inside the Monastery church.


ІС ХС


Блуд.
Зависть.
Сварда.
Неверн.
Любуш.
Идолопоклонник.
Еретик.


ПЕШАЦИ
ГЛИКОСТАЗА
води у Манастир Ћелије
Стрмих степеника има 930
стазу користе млађе особе и деца
СТАНИ - РАЗМИСЛИ - КРЕНИ
2014 ГОСПОДЕ ПОМИЛУЈ! 2014
ЋЕЛИЈЕ

Ćelije Monastery was built in the 1300's as an endowment of Dragutin Nemanjic. Hidden away in a forest, from Turkish invaders, uphill from the river Gradac, it was a center of spirituality in those hard times.

Today it is a female monastery, with 25 nuns led by abbess Glikerija. It is also the place where our famous theologian, Ava Justin Popovic spent most of his life (1947-79) writing, while persecuted by the Communist regime. His grave is behind the small church of St. Arch. Michael on the monastery grounds. His endowment to the Serbian people consists of hundreds of articles and numerous books. This great man was canonized as a saint in 2010.







After our visit to monastery Celije, we spent part of the hot summer afternoon cooling down by the Gradac river. The children happily splashed and played with rocks. Adults swam, or sat at the picnic table in the shade to enjoy a picnic lunch. The walk uphill to the bus was quite steep, but we made it. That evening we drove to the outskirts of Cacak, where our priest and matushka were waiting along with her family to welcome us for dinner, refreshments and a peaceful evening with good friends.

Fun fact: The river Gradac is one of the cleanest rivers in Serbia. It flows through a stunning canyon that has 70 caves in it. Otters, birds and trout are just some of the amazing animals you could see there.



Days 6 and 7: Cacak and monasteries in the Ovcar -Kablar gorge

Bright and early next morning we headed out for the tour of monasteries in the Ovcar-Kablar gorge, located in the vicinity of Cacak. We visited 4 monasteries, the fourth - Nikolje (St. Nicholas) was only reachable by a boat, after a nice tour of the West Morava river. The monasteries are Vavedenje (Presentation of the Blessed Virgin), Preobrazenje (Holy Transfiguration), Blagovestenje (Annunciation) and Jovanje (St. John the Baptist). We sang in every one of those monasteries from our hearts and were invited to next day liturgy in monastery Preobrazenje (Holy Transfiguration) at 7:30 in the morning. In Jovanje (St. John's monastery) we were captivated by the life story of nun Marija and her positivity.

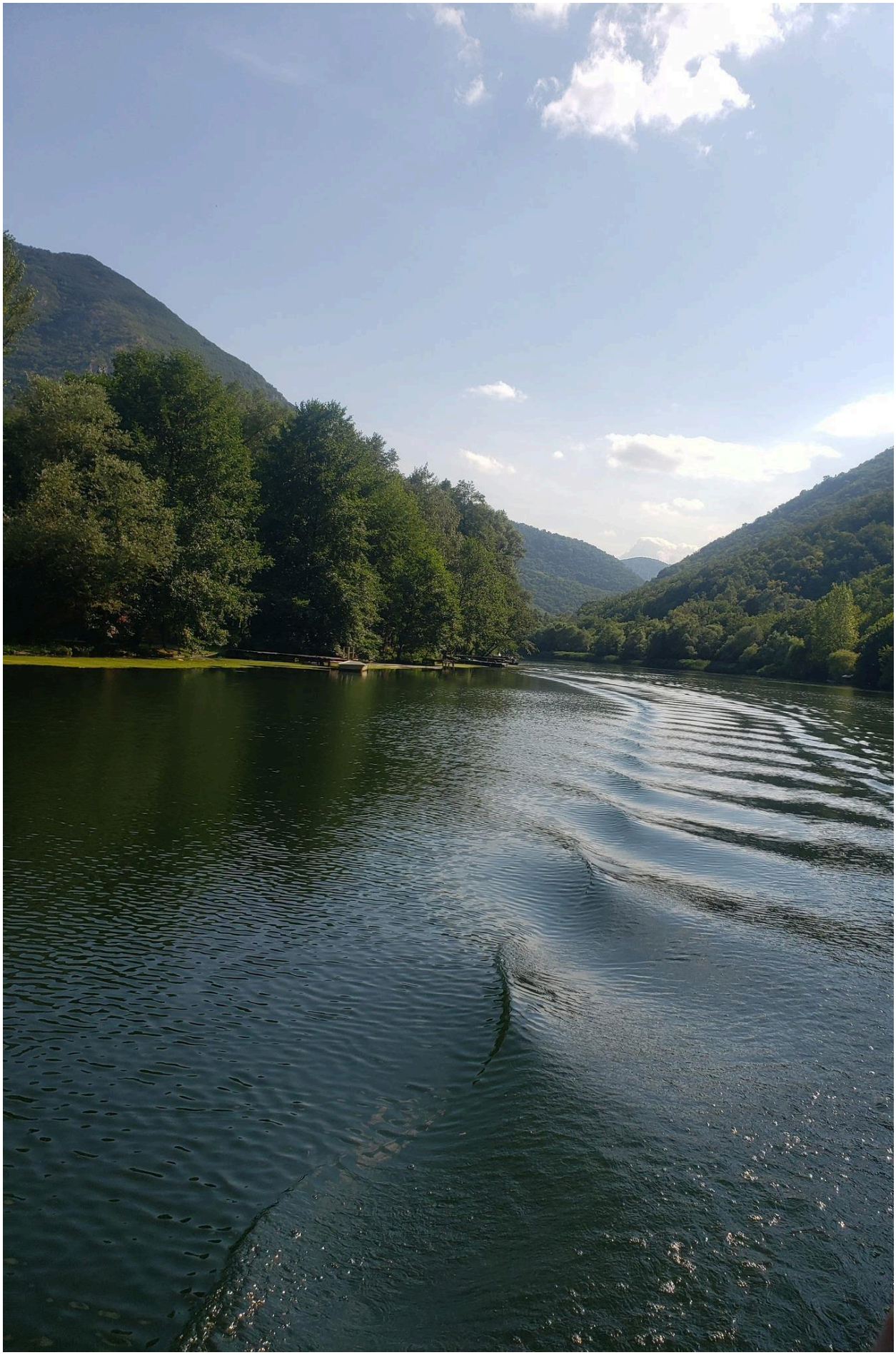
In monastery Preobrazenje on July 17th we served full liturgy. Afterwards we were asked to join the monks for breakfast. Then each of us received a small gift of appreciation. The biggest surprise however, was that the brotherhood decided to gift our director Elias and the choir a special icon of the Holy Theotokos to bring back to our church in Ottawa. We all felt so blessed! It was really a day to remember.

Fun fact: The first monasteries built in this area are related to the years 1307-1309, when Serbian monks fled under the Catalan invasion. At that time, the monasteries on the Holy Mount Athos in Greece were destroyed. Escaped monks founded new ones in this gorge. After the Battle at the Maritsa river in 1389, a new wave of people moved into the gorge. During the Ottoman rule, these monasteries played the role of preserving the spirituality identity of Serbia and Serbs, and refugees often hid in them.









Upon visiting three of the monasteries, a few members of our group went up the St. Sava hermitage. It is quite a steep climb. Visitors are asked to bring a bag of sand or a brick to help with the building of a church on the cliff side. The rest of the group relaxed in the shade by the West Morava river. Later in the afternoon we all gathered for a two hour boat ride on the peaceful meandering river. Shades of green all around. Occasionally we would spot people at their cottages and they would wave at us.

The last monastery we approached from the water side, by docking there. The nuns were thrilled for our visit and even more so to hear us sing. So much joy for all.



Days 7 and 8: Studenica monastery, Gradac, Church of Peter and Paul, Djurdjevi Stupovi

The next leg of our journey was towards Studenica monastery. On the way there we stopped to visit Gradac monastery, built by Saint Helen of Serbia (known also as Helene d' Anjou). She was the queen consort of the Serbian Kingdom, as the spouse of King Stefan Uroš I, who ruled from 1243 to 1276. Her endowment included founding the Gradac Monastery, restoring numerous churches, establishing Serbia's first girls' school, and creating a court library. She was an influential ruler, diplomat, and philanthropist in medieval Serbia.

She brought in elements of Romanesque architecture and blended it with existing Byzantine influences when designing Gradac monastery, allowing more light into the building. The same influence was used later in monastery Sopocani, her husband's endowment.

Fun fact: A fun fact about the Gradac Monastery and the “Valley of Lilacs” is that the valley is said to have been planted with lilacs by King Uroš I (Urosh) to welcome his bride, the French princess Helen of Anjou, and remind her of her homeland, Provence.





In 1986 UNESCO included 12th century Studenica monastery in the list of World Heritage Sites.





We stayed at Studenica monastery guesthouse for two evenings, which gave us some time to enjoy the peaceful surroundings of the monastery. Studenica monastery was founded as an endowment by Stefan Nemanja, the first ruler of the independent medieval Serbian state, as a mausoleum and major religious center in the late 12th century. His son, Saint Sava, became its first abbot and developed Studenica into a crucial spiritual, cultural, and medical hub. The monastery is a significant example of the Raška architectural style, a unique blend of Byzantine and Romanesque elements, and houses important 13th- and 14th-century Byzantine frescoes.

Thanks to Sava's efforts, the best painters of that time were engaged to decorate the walls of the Church of the Holy Virgin with frescoes. They painted using high-priced lapis lazuli and gold. Master painters who made such outstanding works of art in the Studenica Monastery probably came from Constantinople, but the inscriptions on the frescos are written in the old Serbian Cyrillic language. The famous fresco of Studenica is the Crucifixion of Jesus.This impressive wall painting made by a most talented anonymous author is a representation of the lamentable yet sublime redemptive moment when Jesus dies on the Cross, mourned by the angels, while standing at his foot is His Mother, Our Most Holy Lady Virgin, with several women by her side, and His favorite disciple, Saint John the Apostle, and soldier Longinus next to him.

Next to the Crucifixion, painted above the sepulcher of the founder of the Studenica Monastery, is an extraordinarily significant fresco: Saint Simeon Nemanja, holding his memorial church in his hands, is brought by Our Most Holy Lady Virgin before Jesus Christ the Righteous Judge.

We were blessed to sing liturgy at this monastery.

Fun facts: Studenica (Studenitsa) monastery is located in "The Valley of the Kings". Built in the 12th century, Studentica is one of the largest and richest monasteries in Serbia. It contains the remains of several Serbian rulers, including Stefan Nemanja (also known as Saint Simeon) and his wife Anastasia, who were the parents of Saint Sava.

Later that morning we headed to Ras to The Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul commonly known as Peter's Church. This church, the oldest intact church in Serbia and one of the oldest ones in the region, situated on a hill of Ras, the medieval capital of the Serbian Grand Principality (Rascia), in Novi Pazar, Serbia. It is part of the Stari Ras complex, an UNESCO World Heritage Site.[1]

It was founded in the 4th century during Roman rule, while notable additions were made in the 7th and 9th centuries, after which it served as the ecclesiastical seat of the Serbian church, and as the baptismal church and state council site of the Nemanjić dynasty, until the last years of the 12th century. It has a unique storey gallery just beneath the dome, with semicircular openings looking inward towards the center of the church.









Our next stop was the monastery -Djurdjevi Stupovi. It was erected in ca. 1170 as an endowment of Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja, dedicated to Saint George; it is known as the "Pillars of St. George". The monastery is exceptional not only for its position and significance it had according to medieval chronicles and manuscripts, but also for its particular architecture. It was named after the church dedicated to St George and its two former bell towers, two high towers – pillars (old Slavic language- stolp, stub). Namely, according to Stefan the First-Crowned, Nemanja had built this church to commemorate his gratitude to St. George for saving him from dungeons-caves where he was put by his brothers.

Djurdjevi Stupovi - contains the tomb and burial place of King Dragutin. THe church itself does not have many frescoes, as most were destroyed due to weathering. In the times of Turkish invasions, many of the church roofs that were made of lead, were destroyed and used to melt for ammunition, thus leaving monasteries like Gradac, Durdjevi Stupovi and a number of others left to the effects of weather throughout the seasons.



Our last stop that day, was monastery Sopocani, an endowment of King Stefan Uroš I of Serbia, was built from 1259 to 1270, near the source of the Raška River in the region of Ras, the centre of the Serbian medieval state. It is a designated World Heritage Site. The frescoes left us speechless, as well as a very knowledgeable monk Zosima who answered every question we had. Several royal family members were buried here.

The fresco paintings were completed in 1270. The Sopocani frescoes are the most eminent examples of European painting at that time. What the painters of Sopocani attained in linearity and coloring have been surpassed only in the Italian renaissance. This monastery was built during the times when the Serbian dynasty was very wealthy. Gold and silver were mined and exported to Europe. King Stefan Uroš I, brought in skilled fresco-artists from Byzantium to decorate the inside walls of the monastery church. A technique only used here was to place a very thin layer of silver as a background layer against the wall surface and then cover it with an even thinner layer of gold on top. Due to the influence of blending in Romanesque and Byzantine architecture which introduced more light into the open space, by applying these precious metals to the wall surface would have produced a warm reddish glow inside the church, giving an even more ethereal almost three-dimensional feel to some of the painted figures. This is the only cultural monument in Serbia where this technique was used. Unfortunately, during Turkish invasions, a lot of the precious metal layers were scraped off. The church has two side chapels added, one dedicated to the protector of the Nemanjic dynasty - St. Arch. Stefan , and the other to Stefan Mirotocivi - the founder of the dynasty Stefan Nemanja.

Fun fact: “Sopot” in old Slavic language- means (water) spring.







Day 9: Fortress Maglic and monastery Zica, return to Belgrade

Maglič (Serbian Cyrillic: Маглич) Fortress is a 13th-century medieval stronghold in Serbia, built on a hill around which the Ibar river makes a curve. It sits about 100 meters above the Ibar gorge to protect key monasteries and the caravan route to Kosovo, likely by Stefan the First-Crowned or his son Uroš I. It served as a seat for Archbishop Danilo II before being occupied by the Ottomans in the 15th century and was eventually abandoned as a military site. Today, it is a popular tourist destination, known for its dramatic location and historical significance. The kids especially enjoyed the ride on the river barge across the Ibar and were excited to explore a Medieval castle.

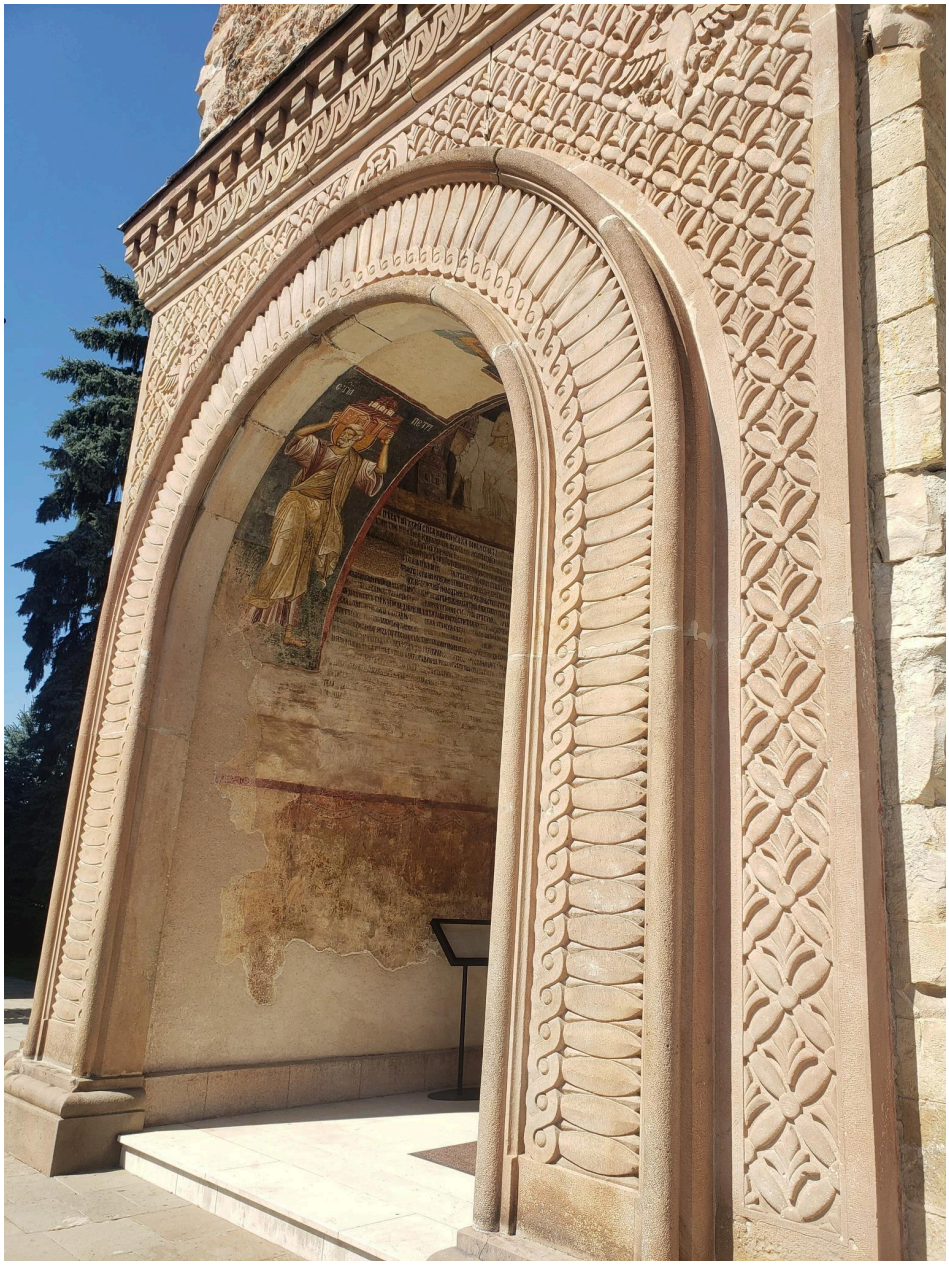
Fun fact: Maglič Fortress, a 13th-century Serbian castle, is known for its strategic location, mysterious origins, and connection to Serbian history. Its name, "Fog castle", reflects the frequent mist that surrounds it. The fortress is linked to the legend of Irene (Yerina) Kantakouzene, the wife of Despot Đurađ Branković, who is said to have played a role in its construction and faced accusations of being evil because she imposed harsh conditions on the local population during its building. She is often called “Cursed or Damned Yerina”.



Žiča Monastery was founded in the early 13th century by King Stefan the First-Crowned and Saint Sava, was a central religious and political site in medieval Serbia. It served as the seat of the first Serbian Archbishop and the traditional coronation church for Serbian monarchs, symbolizing the newly independent Serbian state and church. Built in Rascian architecture with Byzantine and Romanesque influences, the monastery is known for its original frescoes and red walls. Although it was damaged and restored multiple times throughout its history, like during WWII very few paintings survived. However, it remains a significant cultural monument and the largest women's monastery in Serbia today.

Fun fact: Monastery (Zhicha) - Žiča is sometimes called "The monastery of the seven doors" because a new door was opened for each coronation. This monastery was the first Patriarchate of Serbia.

Žiča Monastery is painted red as a symbolic representation of the blood of Christian martyrs. Saint Sava, the first Serbian archbishop, specifically requested that the monastery be covered in plaster and painted red, inspired by the churches of Mount Athos.









Days 10 and 11: Pancevo and Belgrade

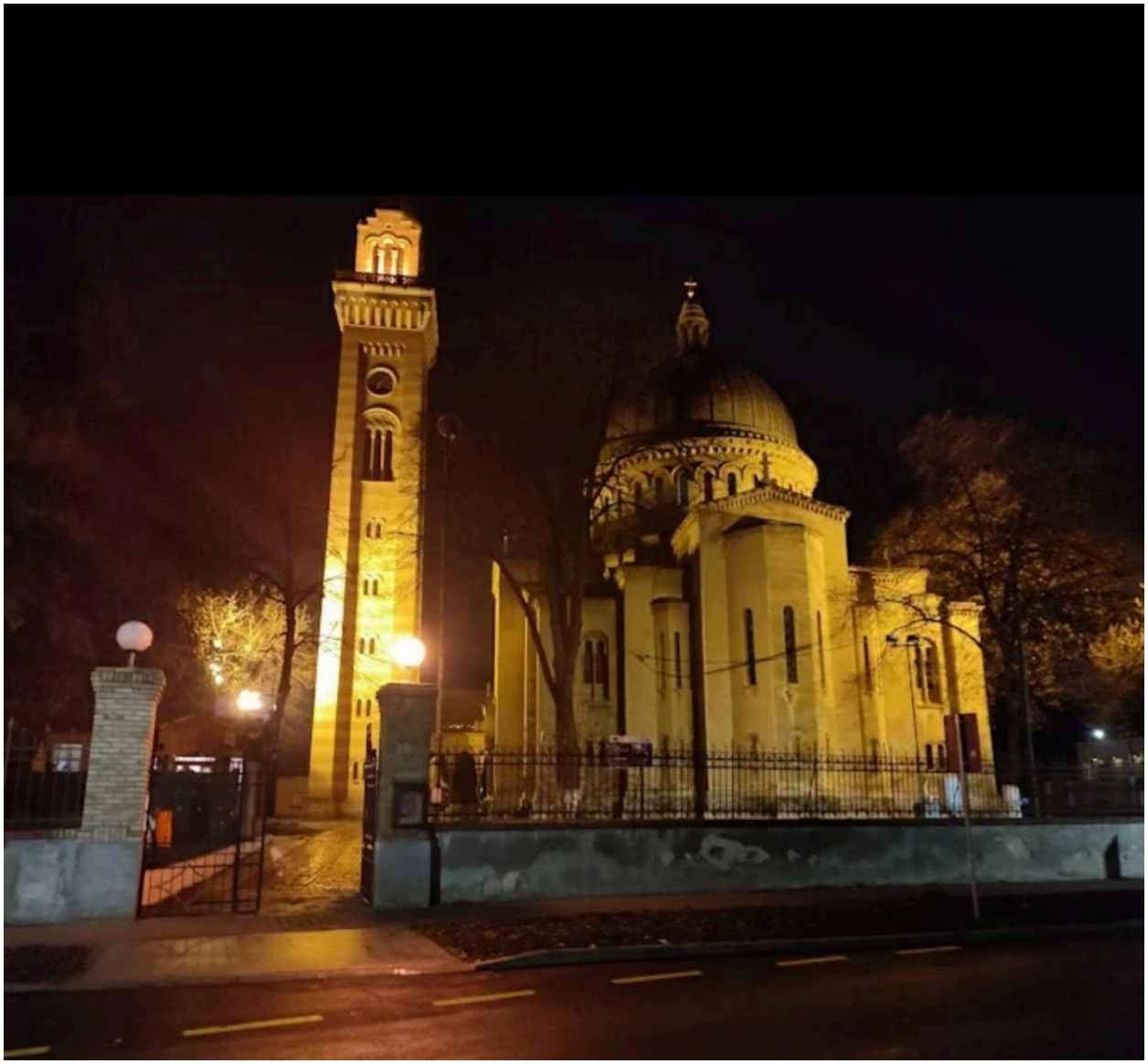
After our return, from the first part of our tour that encompassed the visit to Western Serbia, we returned to Belgrade and Pancevo, which otherwise served as our base. On July 20th we served liturgy in the oldest church in Pancevo, the Church of the Dormition of the Holy Virgin. We were welcomed very warmly, and invited to the lovely Paris hall for drinks and brunch. The Parish hall displayed beautiful oil paintings of prominent citizens of Pancevo that contributed to the town and townspeople through time.

Since Pancevo is a small town, we walked to Jelena's place and were able to relax in her backyard eating fresh figs from the fig tree and dinner.

Later that evening we changed once again into our concert attire and walked to the Church of Holy Transfiguration in Pancevo, where we performed our concert. We were thrilled to have a large crowd come out to listen and watch, and were invited to a lovely reception hosted by the local church choir and Parish, attended by our friends, family and ex-pats from Ottawa,Belgrade and Pancevo.

Fun fact: Pančevo is one of the first cities to have had electricity. Pančevo has a church with two towers. Pančevo has many interesting landmarks: an old Mill, Brewery and Silk worm - factory. The estuary of the Tamiš into the Danube river is marked by two lighthouses. There is also a Bronze age archeological settlement in Starčevo village near Pančevo, on the banks of the river Danube.









Day 10 until late afternoon was used for visiting Kalemegdan fortress in Belgrade, church Ruzica and Saint Petka Samardjiyska as well the biggest and newest church Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade.



Days 10 and 11: Eastern Serbia: Silver lake, Danube cruise, Tumane monastery

Towards late afternoon on Day 10, after some of our choir members had departed, and others had spent some time visiting Belgrade, we got together and were back on the bus heading towards the town of Veliko Gradiste and our accommodations at Srebrno Jezero (Silver lake). This is an emerging lake resort where we stayed for two nights.

The first evening was very relaxing. We swam in the lake and later gathered to have pizza and wine, talk and laugh.

The following morning, we left bright and early for Tumane monastery and the Hermitage of St. Zosimus which is located in a cave, near the monastery, that is embedded in the rock surrounded by an old, thick forest. There are actually two caves, connected by a narrow passage. St. Zosimus lived in one, and prayed in the other. Next to the former monastic cell is a small chapel. Speleothems in the cave are still preserved. There is also a "miraculous" water spring next to the cave, resembling a small cascading waterfall. The last hermit who dwelled in the cave was *synkellos* Pahomije, who died in 1965.[5]

At the monastery we were able to venerate the two tombs of the saints and sing inside the small church for a number of surprised pilgrims.

A fun fact about Tumane Monastery is that it's believed to have been founded by Miloš Obilić, a hero of Serbian epic poems. The legend says after Miloš accidentally wounded a hermit Zosim, who was living in a nearby cave. The hermit, whose name was Zosim, told him "Tu me mani" (“leave me here”) as he was being taken for treatment, which is said to be the origin of the monastery's name. The relics of two saints, Venerable Zosimus Sinait and Venerable Jacob the New, are kept in the monastery's church.


Pozdrav
sa
Srebrnog jezera
SUN
#velikogradiste
@srebrnojezero




AMERICAN
LEGEND





Upon leaving Tumane monastery, we stopped for lunch at a restaurant, and proceeded to drive to Donji Milanovac for our cruise on the Danube river . On our way we passed by Golubac fortress. We were received by our “2 captains” waiting by the river boat.

We spent two wonderful hours learning about nature, the flow of the water and winds along the Danube and its history. We were taken all the way to Kazan - known also as the Iron gates, the most narrow and deep part of the river. We also saw Tabula Traina (a memorial Roman inscription, carved into a rock face overlooking the Iron Gates gorge on the Danube River, in what is now Serbia. It was commissioned by Emperor Trajan in the early 2nd century AD, marking the construction of a Roman road and the related Tabula Traiana, or Trajan's Bridge, over the river, which facilitated his campaigns against the Dacians. The plaque's text details the road's creation through extensive rock excavation. In 1969, the inscription was moved to a higher, safer location to prevent it from being submerged by the rising water levels from the Đerdap I Hydro Power Plant. We sailed by a most beautiful St. Anna -Romanian monastery and saw the sculpted rock with Decebalus’s face - it commemorates the final defeat of Decebalus by Trajan in 105, and the absorption of the Dacian kingdom into the Roman Empire.




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Fun fact: Beaten only by the Volga in Russia, the Danube is the second-largest river in Europe. Its length spans over 2,848 kilometers, with 2,400 kilometers of it being navigable. So, if you really want to, it's possible to travel from the start in Germany's Black Forest, travelling through 10 countries to the Black Sea (almost) completely!

The river is home to a huge collection of waterbirds, fish and plants. The beluga sturgeon is the largest freshwater fish in the Danube, and can live to 100 years. There are salmon, bream and carp as well.

The white tailed eagle, herons, pelican and ducks are common birds to look out for. There are over 5000 animal species and over 2000 plant species that live in and around the Danube river!

Day 12 Manasija monastery, waterfall Lisine, Resava cave and Resava monastery

We were all in awe when we visited Manasija monastery and fortress. We spent so much time inside the church admiring frescoes and then walking the fortress and an amazing guide that shared a lot of interesting information. We also sang and brought some visiting tourists to tears. Time stopped for us.

The Manasija Monastery also known as Resava, is a Serbian Orthodox monastery near Despotovac, Serbia founded by Despot Stefan Lazarević between 1406 and 1418. The church is dedicated to the Holy Trinity. It is one of the most significant monuments of medieval Serbian culture and it belongs to the "Morava school. Monastery founder Despot Stefan Lazarević built Manasija to serve as his mausoleum. The monastery complex consists of:[11]

- The church to the Holy Trinity
- The refectory, placed to the south of the church
- The fortress with 11 towers, the largest of which is the keep, also known as the Despot's Tower (to the north of the church), with living quarters for the monks and other buildings



The fresco "Holy Warriors" (shown below) in the Monastery of Manasija is one of the most striking works of Serbian medieval wall painting. It was painted in the first half of the 15th century, most likely between 1418 and 1421, during the reign of Despot Stefan Lazarević, the founder of the monastery.

They are depicted in lavish Byzantine-style armor, with helmets, spears, shields, and various types of weapons. Despite their warrior appearance, their faces exude a calm and spiritual sublimity, reflecting the combination of physical strength and spiritual strength, that is, Christian chivalry.

The frescoes of Manasija represent the peak of late medieval art in Serbia. They were painted in the Renaissance spirit of the Morava school, characterized by realism, spatial awareness, and individualized portraits. The colors are deep and vivid, and the compositions are powerful and

monumental. The artists were highly skilled, likely painters close to the artistic traditions of Constantinople.

The holy warriors in Manasija carry strong symbolic meaning. They are defenders of the faith and the people, models of Christian heroism and loyalty. In the context of the political and military threat posed by the Ottomans, their presence on the monastery walls serves as a call to both spiritual and physical defense of Christianity.

Manasija Monastery (also known as Resava) was founded in 1407 by the Serbian despot Stefan Visoki Lazerević. It is well fortified, because it was created during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire into the Balkans, when Turkish incursions were frequent. The fortress consists of 11 towers, of which the Despot's tower stands out.

Constantine the Philosopher wrote that the construction lasted more than 10 years. The Ottomans managed to occupy the monastery for the first time in 1438. The army of the Serbian despot Đurđ Branković regained control of the monastery in 1444. After some more small attacks and burnings, the Ottomans finally captured the fortress in 1458. The following year , 1459, Smederevo, the capital of the Serbian despotism, also fell. Most of the more than 20,000 books from the monastery library were lost in the Turkish attacks. Only one third of the frescoes in the monastery have been preserved.

The Resava school existed during the first half of the 15th century and worked within the Manasija monastery. Learned monks, writers, translators, writers, copyists who decorated manuscripts and books gathered in it. One of the main collaborators of the Resava School was Konstantin Filosof. According to the rules of this school, work was carried out in numerous monasteries, and its influence was also felt in Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania and Russia.

Under the influence of Byzantine monastic literature, he tried in the XV. c. the Patriarch of Trnovo, Theodosije, to lift up the very low moral life of the Bulgarians and to create a good order in literary work. Because the Bulgarian translators knew neither Greek nor Slavic well, so in their books there were places without meaning, even with a heretical meaning. This work was developed by his student, Patriarch Yeftimije of Trnovo, who reformed Bulgarian orthography. His helpers and students make up the Trnovo School.

When the Bulgarian Empire fell (1393-6), a large number of Bulgarian monks and writers moved to Serbia, and with them the ideas of the Trnovo School. They were accepted by the enlightened despot Stevan and began with them and other able monks, in his endowment Resava, translation and transcription work. This work was directed by Constantine the Philosopher, one of the most willing Bulgarian refugees of Yeftimi's school. He created the rules of the new Serbian spelling. This is how the famous Resava school was born.

Transcripts and translations of the Resava School are considered exemplary, and they were used to measure the quality of a manuscript in later times (up to the 18th century). According to Resava rules, work was done in Ljubostinja, Hilandar and elsewhere. The influence of the Resava school went deep into Macedonia, Bulgaria and Russia. The main literary work of

Constantine is the Biography of the Reverend Mr. Despot Stefan. It is the most important work of his school, and at the same time one of the best biographies from the Middle Ages.

Manasija became a great spiritual and educational center of Serbia . The "Resava School" has been a symbol of enlightenment for centuries. Learned monks, writers, translators, writers, copyists who decorated manuscripts and books worked there. From there, leafyness spread even to distant Russia and nearby Romania. At that time, he left Serbia for Russia and became Metropolitan Cyprian there.

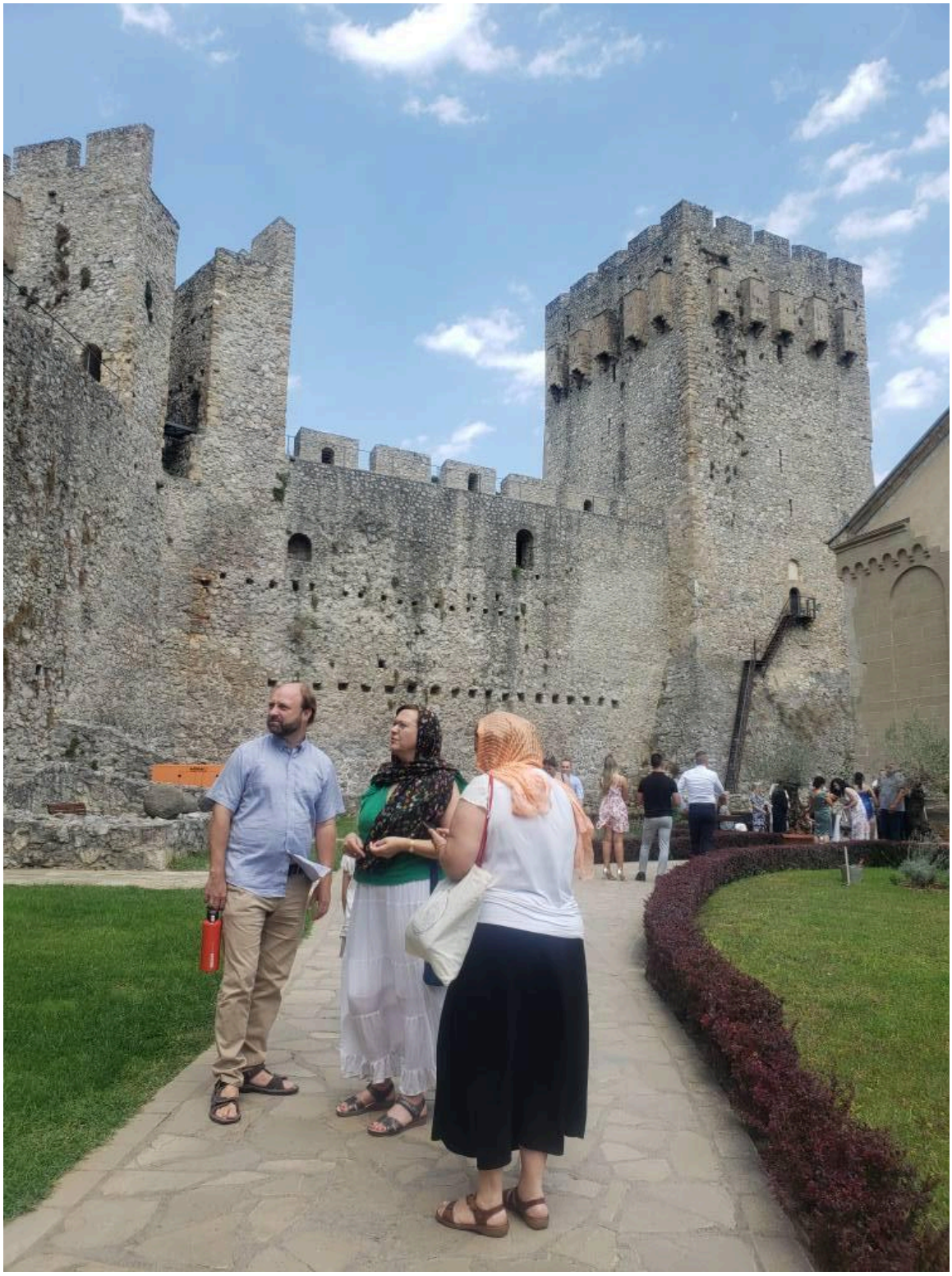
The abbot of the Dečani monastery, Grigorije Camblak (he wrote the Life of the Holy King Stefan of Decani), later became the Metropolitan of Kyiv. The Serbian monk Pachomija, who became famous in Russia as a writer, was also known at that time.

Despot Stefan Lazarević took Belgrade as the capital of Serbia in 1405. In the following period, Belgrade experienced a great rise. The old city walls were re-fortified along with the castles, and the churches and fortresses were rebuilt, which helped the city resist the Ottoman invasions for as long as 70 years. At this time, Belgrade became a refuge for many Balkan peoples who were fleeing from the rule of the Ottomans. It is believed that the number of inhabitants then reached 40,000-50,000.

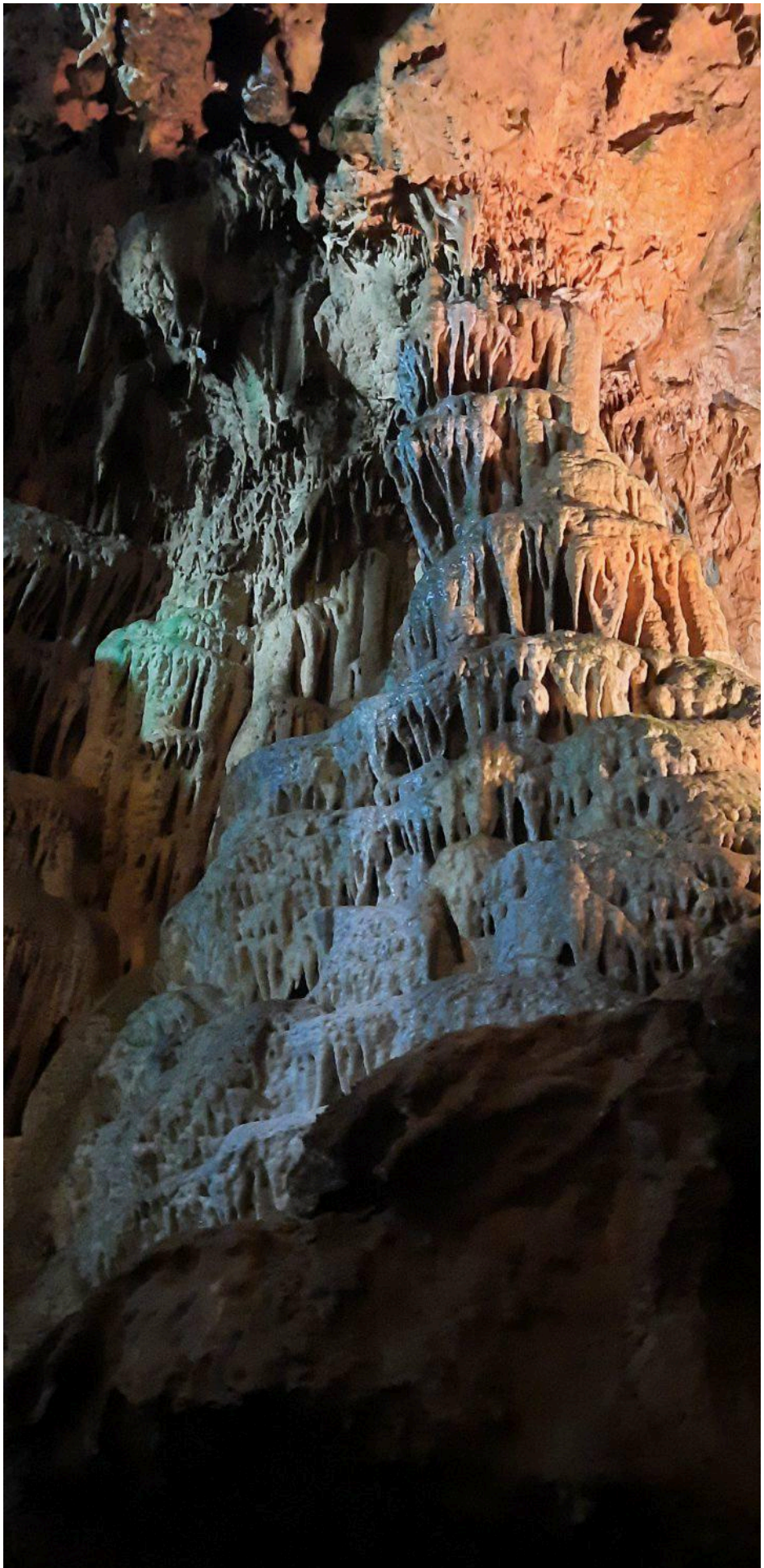
Despot Stefan Lazarević was very educated, he read a lot, and he was also engaged in writing. His work "The Word of Love" is well known. Slovo ljubve, i.e. Word of Love, is a literary work (a poetic epistle, i.e. a kind of prose poem) written in 1404 or 1409 by Despot Stefan Lazarević. In it, he addresses an unnamed close person with whom he has a bad relationship, which he would like to repair, which is why it is considered that the Word of Love was written for his brother Vuk Lazarevic, with whom he was then in open conflict. The writer is very specific in his depictions of nature, which are descriptive and suggestive of the Renaissance.

The original of Despot Stefan's work The Word of Love perished in the Nazi bombing of the National Library in Belgrade on April 6, 1941. On that day, the book collection of 500,000 volumes, 1,424 Cyrillic manuscripts and charters from the 12th to the 17th century, and a cartographic and graphic collection of 1,500 volumes were destroyed.

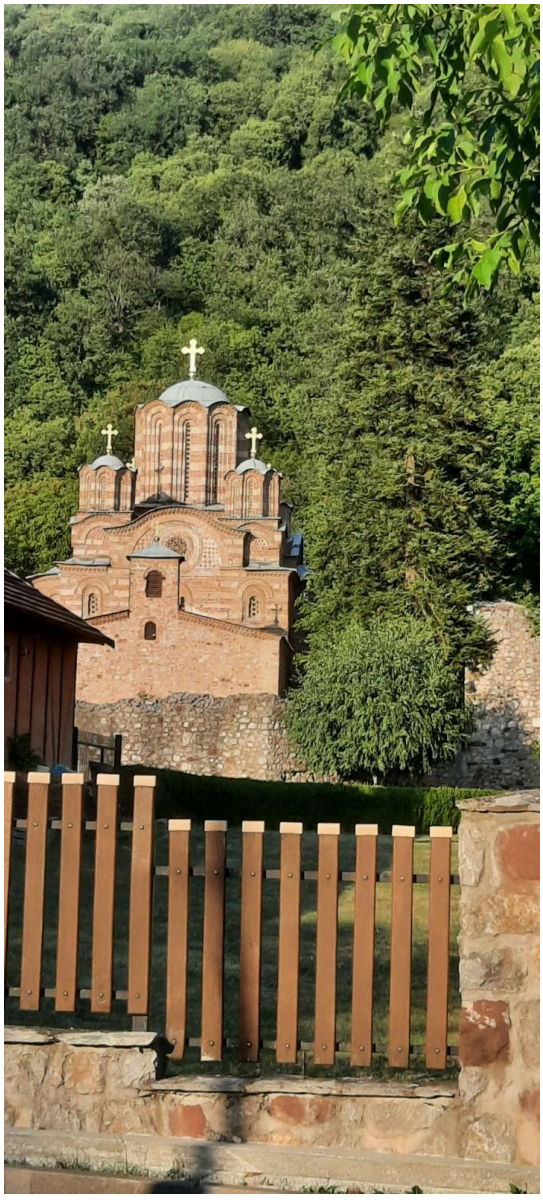












Fun facts about Lisine waterfall (or Veliki Buk - “loud” waterfall) and the springs of Krupaja.

Lisine- is the largest waterfall in Serbia, 25 meters tall, falling into a crystal clear blue pool. Unlike typical springs- Krupaja (Krupaya) emerges from a cave and is situated below ground level. The area is steeped in folklore, with tales of a hidden treasure guarded by a water spirit named Tartor in the "Golden Cave" deep beneath the spring!

The interior of Resava Cave is rich in various cave ornaments. Stalactites, stalagmites, flowstones, corals, and petrified waterfalls make the cave a true natural museum. The most beautiful part of the cave is undoubtedly the Crystal Hall, which takes one’s breath away due to its crystal formations. The lower gallery, 80 m beneath the ground, contains the most beautiful hall in the cave, known as the Concert Hall, which is acoustically significant - this is where we

sang !

Fun fact: The Resava cave is around 80 million years old, it is the largest in eastern Europe. It is 4,5 kilometers long and the temperature inside is always 7 degrees Celsius!



Days 14 and 15: Avala tower and liturgy at Fruska gora monastery Gregeteg






АЛЕКСАНДАР I, КРАЉ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈЕ, НЕЗНАЛОМ ЈУНАКУ

While a group of us were resting in Pancevo/ Belgrade from the intense rhythm of our tour, a few members decided to hike out to Avala mountain.

Avala Mountain is a significant Belgrade landmark, named from the Arabic for "observation point," with a history dating back to ancient settlements and a medieval fortified town. Its iconic structure, the Avala Tower, was built in the 1960s, destroyed in the 1999 NATO bombing, and then rebuilt, reopening in 2010 as the tallest tower in the Balkans. The tower's distinctive tripod design is inspired by a traditional Serbian three-legged stool and symbolizes the country's resilience and modernity. he mountain was likely inhabited by the Vinča culture around 5700 BC, who mined the area for mercury sulfide to create pigments for ceramics. A fortified town was built on Avala by the Serbs, and later extended and reinforced by the Ottomans in the 15th century, before being demolished in 1934.

Fun fact: The tower's design features an equilateral triangle cross-section and stands on three legs, forming a tripod inspired by a traditional Serbian chair, making it unique in the world.

Monastery Grgeteg is located on Fruska Gora. It was established around 1471 by Despot Vuk Branković (Vuk the Fiery Dragon) for his blind father, Grgur, but was heavily damaged during the late 17th century's Great Viennese War.

It was rebuilt in the early 18th century by Bishop Isaiaja Đaković and later in the 19th century a new church and bell tower was added. The monastery is known for its Baroque architecture and, most notably, for housing a copy of the icon of the Holy Theotokos with Three Hands from the Serbian monastery Chilandar on Mount Athos. The church is the resting place for the Brankovic family, who were the founding members.

Fun fact: There are 37 nuns living at the monastery. A unique aspect of their work is beekeeping and production of honey.





In conclusion, this is the most memorable vacation we have ever had. We sang every day, we loved every day we spent together, we met many monks and nuns, we have memories to stay with us for our lifetime.