

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SPACE FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CHURCH "ST. ANNUNCIATION" IN PRILEP**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, we will deal with the cultural heritage and the possibilities for the development of tourism of a Prilep Orthodox church municipality and its temple, which is an expression of the overall living, creation, suffering and constant spiritual and intellectual struggle for the biological, cultural, spiritual and pastoral survival of Macedonians.

This church largely represents an exhaustive historical, psychological, cultural, social and ecclesiastical-spiritual identity, not only in the municipality of Prilep, but also sheds light on the overall events and developments of the Macedonian Orthodox people and their Holy Church.

Historically, we will take a look at all the more important developments in this church, with a special reference to how clinging to great blackmail, they managed to build their first temple in Prilep, during the Ottoman Empire, when temples were converted into mosques, and the people became Islamized with great propaganda.

We will also highlight the role of pilgrim Hristo Damjanov - Logotet, who represents a unique example of a man who had enormous spiritual and intellectual abilities, i.e. a person who manages to cope in every situation and even turns enemies into friends of the church. Considering that such a perceptive person is born rarely, that is why his work is mentioned.

All this information together with the sacred objects in the interior: the icons, the frescoes and the iconostasis made in a cave, we will try to reflect the value of those works, as the main driver of tourism, and also a cultural heritage with a huge history that will be inherited through the generations and it is of great importance both for Prilepčani and for all Macedonians.

**Keywords:** occasion, woodcarving, spiritual history, historical artefacts, culture

### **INTRODUCTION**

"**St. Annunciation**" better known as the **Old Church** is located in Prilep. The church was built by the famous Prilep masters Costa Lautso and Riste Taslamice in 1838. The church is 32 m long, 26 m wide and 9 m high. In the courtyard of the church is the grave of the Macedonian revolutionary Pere Toshev.

The initiative to build the church was initiated by respectable persons, potters and craftsmen, who wanted to fulfil the centuries-old desire of the people of Prilepčan for a temple of God. Guilds, especially the tobacco guild, played a major role in obtaining a construction document. The role of the then tobacco merchant - Aji Hristo Damjanov - Logotet was crucial.

He dared to present the wishes of his fellow citizens to the Ottoman authorities. He used his acquaintance with Rushid Pasha to introduce the Sultan to the desire of the people of Prilep to have a church, in which they would sing and worship in their native language. He wrote a petition to the Sultan, asking to build a church. He went to Constantinople first for a meeting with Patriarch Gregory, and then with Rushid Pasha he managed to enter the palace of Sultan's chief secretary. They replied that they should wait for several months. The permit for building the church was obtained in 1835.

A certain grandmother Mita from the Mižovtsi family gave her property, because it was the best place to build the church, and all the guilds agreed to give materials to build the temple

of God faster. The well-known masters Kosta Lautsot and Risto Taslamice were hired, and Damjan Jankulov Renzovski and Kitan Petrov are called their architects.

The people of Prilep decided that the church should be dedicated to him on the "Holy Annunciation" holiday because until then no milder and more beautiful news had arrived in the city. The consecration was performed by Metropolitan Gerasim of Pelagonia. All the priests and almost the whole town attended the act. At the head were Aji Pop Konstantin Dinka, the first bishop vicar in Prilep, and priests Hristo Ikonomovski, Angele Smichkovski, Konstantin Pantov and others served together. The church "St. Good news" is still a spiritual centre for believers and a nursery for priests.



### **1. Historical Events in the Early 19th Century**

The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century is a very characteristic period, both for the Macedonian revival movement and for the awakening of the national and religious feelings of the Macedonians. The Macedonian people welcomed the first decades of the 19th century almost as if they had been forgotten by Europe. The difficult economic and social circumstances and interests were the main reason for the small number of Macedonian intelligentsia and bourgeoisie to start with mass contraction and rebirth. This was because the rare Macedonian intelligentsia had to acquire their education and literacy in Greek high schools. After all, this type of school with a Macedonian sign neither could nor was allowed to exist.

The Macedonian people knew the national feeling, for their Macedonian and Slavic origin, exclusively from the monks, who lived in the Slavic monasteries on Mount Athos, but also from the national clergy, who often knew how to oppose all assimilationist propaganda. However, the influence of the high Greek clergy in Macedonia was at a high level, and their assimilationist policy was successful, first of all, for economic reasons. Not only the cities but also the villages throughout Macedonia were exposed to strong pressure from the Greek bishops and their governors. Their abuses of material resources, as well as corruption, which they carried out in all layers of church and social life, had no end.

Although it was constantly eroded by the religious-national propaganda of the neighbouring countries, the Macedonian people, at the beginning of the 19th century, gathered the strength to start an active church and spiritual life. The construction of magnificent churches in the cities during this period was closely related to the appearance of the first church-school municipalities. The modest economic rise of the Macedonian merchants, as well as the relative understanding and permission of the Turkish authorities to build wider and bigger churches of solid material in Macedonia, contributed to the city churches starting to sprout slowly but surely.

Characteristics of this period are the churches in Bansko (1808), Nevrokop (1811), Bitola (1830), Kruševo (1832), Skopje (1835), Struga (1835), Kratovo (1836), Veles (1836), Prilep

(1837). and in many other places. The construction of these churches is due, first of all, to the selfless deceptions of the prominent people from the cities - the brewers and the artisan guild, who were also the main initiators and promoters of these ideas.

It must never be forgotten the fact that all these churches were built with the great help of the entire local population, who, not being able to generously and financially support the constructions, were always willing to make their labour available in the more successful and faster building of churches.



**Figure 2: The church "Annunciation"**

## **2. The Personality of Pilgrim Hristo Damjanov - Logotet and His Merits for the Cultural Heritage of the Church**

Prilep's educational and social activity could only progress through church life's development because the newly emerging Macedonian civil class was increasingly aware of its position and role among its people. That was the reason for that class to be more involved and fit into the more active development of church life.

The butcher-Christian guild was the first to be hit by the Turkish authorities, which limited their rights in trade, so they were forced to open their bazaar in the churchyard. That is why, among the 25 mayors who signed the purchase agreement in 1837, two butchers are also mentioned.

Apart from the Christian butcher's guild, which played an important role in the development of church life, in Prilep in the middle of the 19th century, there were 38 guild associations, which selflessly helped in realizing the idea of developing church life as intensively as possible, but also in organizing the building of a temple monument, which would satisfy the religious needs of Prilepchan. However, one of the first guilds that grew into a trade guild and that played a decisive role in obtaining the permit for the construction of the church is the tobacco guild. They achieved this key role and responsible task through the then tobacco merchant - pilgrim Hristo Damjanov.

Aji Hristo Damjanov is an eminent person, who dared to express the wishes of his fellow citizens and with skill, ability and tact to achieve his goals before the Ottoman authorities. He was born between 1775-1780 in the village of Belovodica, in the Damjanovci family, and was named after his grandfather. His family was one of the wealthiest in his time.

Sometime before 1826, pilgrim Hristo Damjanov came to Prilep and became the bishop of the church "St. Dimitrij" in Varos. In that period, this church was the central city church, although it was located in Varos, and almost all baptisms, weddings and funerals for Orthodox Christians were performed here. Being the epitope of this church represented a great honour and privilege because the epitope was the supervisor of the material and financial operation of the church and the manager of its property.

After that, he received the royal decree for the construction of today's church of the Holy Annunciation. The location was decided after the famous Midzovci family, i.e., grandmother Mita, without any thought donated the place not only for building the church but also donated a wide area around the church for the construction of a courtyard. Here, all the Prilep guilds donated materials to build the church, and people from nearby places such as Selce and Lenište, who at that time did not have their own churches, joined them, so their joy

was indescribable.

### **3. The interior and woodcarving works of art in the church**

In the first half of the 19th century, due to the economic rise of the Macedonian citizenry and the relative permissiveness of the Turkish government to build larger and monumental churches of solid material in Macedonia, architecture and painting came to the fore. In the same period, cooperation is also on the rise, and the interior decorations of the churches are particularly prominent.

This was especially evident after the return of the Debar carvers from Sveta Gora, where coppersmithing was developed to perfection. The most famous cobblers of that time were Petre Filipovski - Garkata from the village of Gari and Makarij Frchkovski from the village of Galicnik, who perfected their craft in the workshops of the Italian-Venetian masters. Apart from having learned the craft, these masters, together with their types, knew well the Old and New Testaments, as well as the church canons and rules that apply to the making of iconostases, pulpits, choirs, bishop's chairs and the like. As masters of their craft, they did not allow any of their works to be created spontaneously, but everything was harmonized, measured and masterfully processed.

Adji Hristo decided on such wonderful masters and entrusted them with the difficult and painstaking work of making the iconostasis. The agreement was concluded between the church municipality, headed by the pilgrim, and the tribe of Petre Filipovski - Garkata and his son-in-law Dimitar Stanishev from the village of Gari, Debarsko.

The difference in the characters of the two masters - leaders of their types - has a great influence on the beauty of the wood carvings in the church. Petar proved to be a man of broad culture, classy and measured. Most likely, the reason for this attitude of his was the fact that he had opportunities to admire the magnificent surroundings of the big cities, to admire the powerful works scattered around the churches and monasteries and to penetrate the boundaries of the transcendental world, which was known to them as the Christians from the East as well as those from the West. That's why his expression was subtle and filled with refinement.

His son-in-law Dimitrij, on the other hand, was more of a man than the environment in which he grew up - an environment with difficult times, habits and affections, with a deep tradition, with feelings expressed in the rhythm of folk music and ornaments. In the series of framed fields of his creation of the iconostasis, a little rhythmicity is felt, similar to the rhythmicity of the Macedonian folk songs and dances, which followed his ancestors and generations. That's why his strength is in the details and the intertwining of plant life. In the processing of certain worlds, he went almost to naturalism. On the other hand, the other woodcarving works (the bishop's chair, the pulpit and the honorary chair of pilgrim Hristo) were not so strictly fixed, and this allowed him more freedom in his work. Most likely, the bishop's chair is the work of Garkata, and the iconostasis is the work of Stanishev.

#### ***Figure 3: Church's Woodcarving Works***

In short, the hard-working Kopanicari of Debar created beautiful monumental works about which both pilgrims Hristo and today's Prilep residents speak with reverence and admiration, and every believer, who stands before the iconostasis with a pure and calm heart, has the feeling that he is standing before eternity and has the opportunity to foretaste the beauty of immortality.



The works that these masters made are still present in the church today and represent a significant historical heritage, as well as the cultural wealth of the Macedonians. This church is also a big driver of tourism for all kinds of people who come from all over to visit this church, to be amazed by the beauty it has to offer, and also to find spiritual peace here.

By presenting these historical facts and data, and capturing the most important elements that the church contains, and there is also a huge part that has not been mentioned, the significance of this church for the historical development of the Macedonian people, as well as for the cultural heritage that the Macedonians they have it throughout the churches.



**Figure 4: The church today**

#### **4. Preparing and serving food in the dining room of the monastery**

Part of this church is the kitchen and dining room, which were built in a new space close to the church. In this facility, dishes are prepared depending on which day the gathering falls on, if it is on Wednesday and Friday then the menu is lean, if it is on other days then fatty food is prepared.

Traditional Macedonian dishes are prepared in the dining room right next to the church, and some of them are the following:

##### **➤ Macedonian Pogacha**

Ingredients:

- 4 eggs,
- 1 cup of sour milk,
- 1/2 cup of oil,
- 2 cups of flour,
- 1 bag of pastry,
- 200-250 g cheese,
- 1/2 teaspoon of salt as needed, and little sesame.



**Figure 5: Macedonian Pogacha**

Eggs are beaten, and then sour milk and oil are added. After mixing well, flour and pastry are added and mixed again. Finally, the crushed cheese is added and sprinkled with sesame seeds. The mixture is placed in a pan and baked at a temperature of 180 - 200 degrees.

➤ **Macedonian Makalo**

Ingredients:

- 6 potatoes,
- 20 embroidered dry peppers,
- 2 cloves of garlic,
- 1 tablespoon of salt,
- 200ml of potato water,
- 50ml oil



**Figure 6: Macedonian Makalo**

Wash the potatoes and peppers well, then put them to boil and soften. The peppers are cut in half lengthwise and the seeds are removed so that only the fleshy part of the pepper remains (you can use a spoon). Put the salt and garlic in a mortar and pound well. Mash the peeled potatoes. Then add the inside of the peppers and the potato water (in which the potatoes and peppers were boiled) and you get a mixture slightly thicker than puree. Heat the oil and steam the potatoes.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century is a very characteristic period, both for the Macedonian revival movement and for the awakening of the national and religious feelings of the Macedonians. This period allows the people to create cultural heritage, create historical wealth for the generations that follow, and to lay the foundations of Macedonia for further tourism and development.

Although the people were enraged by the religious-national propaganda of the neighbouring states, nevertheless, they gathered the strength to start an active church and spiritual life. The construction of magnificent churches in the cities during this period was closely related to the appearance of the first church-school municipalities. The modest economic rise of the Macedonian merchants, as well as the relative understanding and permission of the Turkish authorities to build wider and bigger churches of solid material in Macedonia, contribute to the city churches starting to sprout slowly but surely. The construction of these churches is due, first of all, to the selfless efforts of prominent people from the cities - the butchers and the artisan guild, who were the main initiators and promoters of these ideas.

The Church "Holy Annunciation" possesses a precious treasure of 186 icons, which are registered as monuments of culture. Some of these icons have been transferred to the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments and the Museum in Prilep and they are exhibited in the gallery of icons in the city. Some of those icons were painted by Jovan Atanasov and Adamche Najdov Janov. The church also possesses valuable historical objects, such as, for example, the anti-minus manuscript from 1727, the anti-minus from the Patriarchate of Alexandria from 1730, the Prilep ascetic-instructional collection, the manuscript minuet for the month of September from the 18th century, etc. The church also owns a large number of lithographs, which are recorded and entered in the inventory book of the Institute for the Protection of Culture and the Prilep Museum.

The "Holy Annunciation" church has been a spiritual centre and nursery for the people of Prilep since its construction today. Annually, about 300 new Orthodox Christians are baptized here, about 200 married couples get married, and funerals are performed for about 400 Orthodox Christians.

Today, eight priests and one parish deacon are active here. As a valuable historical monument, according to the proposal of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments,

it has been declared a cultural monument and is a place that is regularly visited by numerous domestic and foreign believers, tourists, researchers, historians and art lovers. With the declaration of a cultural monument, it is possible to prepare appropriate scientific research and protection programs, which would have a national mark. In addition, access to scientific and protective research has been made possible, and thus the opportunity to present and publish to the wider Macedonian and world public.

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