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## THE ORIENTATION OF THE MOST FAMOUS MEDIEVAL CHURCHES ON THE TERRITORY OF THE AUTONOMOUS PROVINCE OF KOSOVO-METOHИЈА (REPUBLIC OF SERBIA)

The article presents the astronomical view of the orientation of seven famous medieval churches on the territory of autonomous province of Kosovo-Metohija. Those Serbian orthodox churches were described by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Republic of Serbia as “the immobile goods of exceptional importance” (Fig. 1, Tab. 1). Four churches are listed in UNESCO’s *List of World Heritage*, under the mutual (and inappropriate) title *Medieval Monuments in Kosovo*. They are all – except Studenica Hvosnanska – foundations of the most powerful medieval Serbian rulers, and they are all – except The Holy Virgin of Ljevisa – the main monastery churches, catholicons.

All churches were orientated by the church rule: their main axes lie in the eastern sector of the horizon (horizon sector bounded by the points of the solstice sunrises) (tab. 2). That is why they are not only the masterpieces of European architecture but also the monumental landmarks.

The axes of the catholicons of Studenica Hvosnanska (Fig. 2.1), St. Archangel (Fig. 5.3) and Gračanica Monastery (Fig. 5.1) deviate notably from the point of the East. First two deviations are probably the consequence of the land relief. The orientation of Gračanica Monastery catholicon can be linked with the Sun geometry (the axis is directed to point when the Sun rises around St. George’s Day (Fig. 7).

The axes of the other churches deviate from the point of the East within the boundaries of  $\pm 5,5^\circ$  (Tab. 2). It can be tolerated because of the methods and the tools used by medieval architects, and all tasks they had to fulfill. From the astronomical point of view The Holy Virgin of Ljevisa (Fig. 4.3) and the catholicon of the Banjska Monastery (Fig. 4.4) are orientated most accurately.

We know who was the main architect of The Holy Virgin of Ljevisa – Nicholas from Epirus. But we also know that he did not orientated the church, because it was built on the foundation of the older Byzantine church. Other churches also “inherited” the orientation, all except Christ Pantocrator Church (Fig. 5.2) which was built and orientated by the Franciscan friar Vita from Kotor.

During the organized violence in March 2004 Serbian orthodox churches on the territory of autonomous province of Kosovo-Metohija were destroyed, burned and desecrated (Fig. 2), including The Holy Virgin of Ljevisa from the UNESCO’s *List of World Heritage*. Because of that, all Serbian monuments from that list were also added on the UNESCO’s *List of World Heritage in Danger*. That is why it is important to write about them continuously.