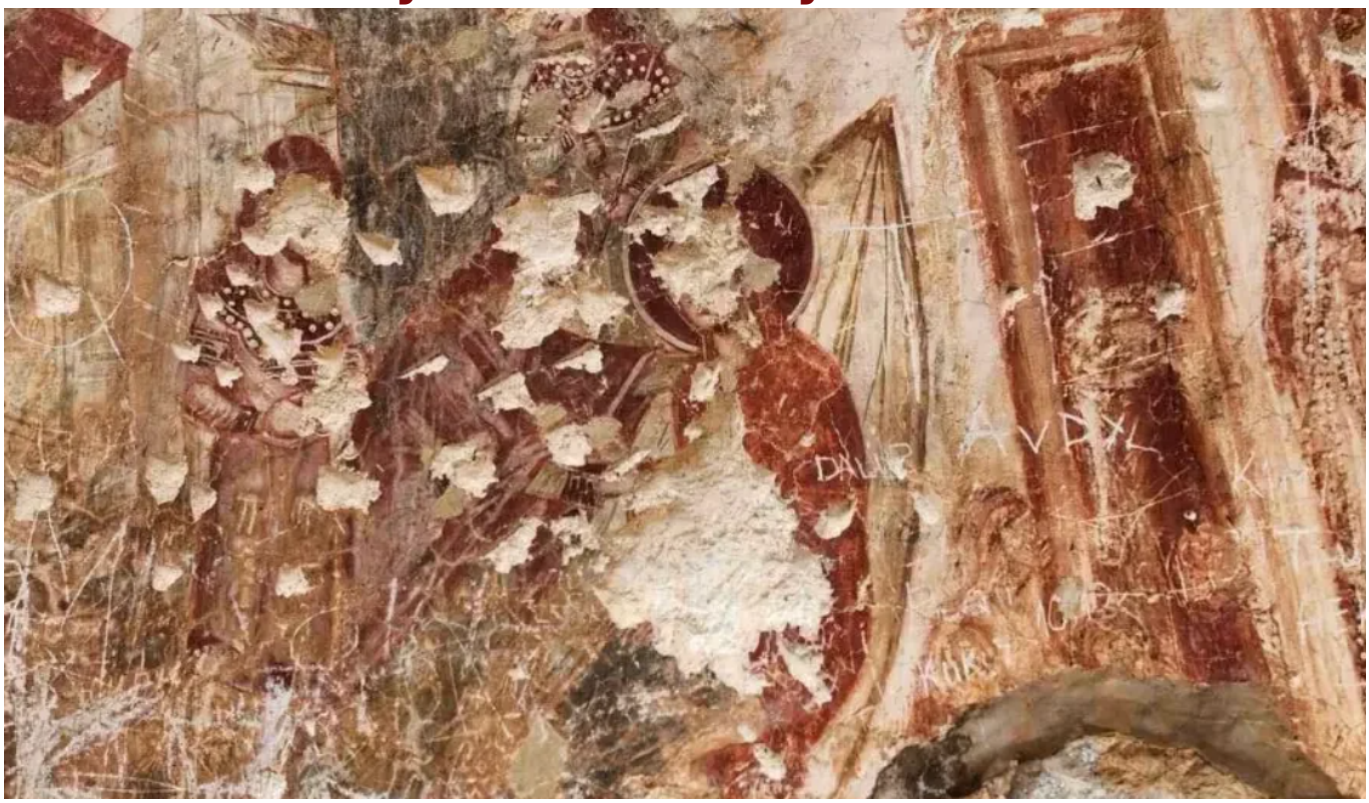
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# Serbian Orthodox Church condemns desecration of 13th-century Orthodox holy site in Kosovo



The Raška and Prizren Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church has issued a strong protest over the severe damage and desecration of the Hermitage of Saint Peter of Koriša, a 13th-century Serbian Orthodox holy site near Prizren, Kosovo.

According to the diocese, unauthorized construction work was recently carried out in the area, including the breaking of a wide access path and paving up to the cave of the saint, seriously compromising the site's archaeological and historical integrity. The very foundations of this medieval monastic complex have been undermined, raising concerns that even minor tremors or heavy rainfall could lead to landslides and the collapse of the hermitage.

Violation of Protected Status

The Hermitage of Saint Peter of Koriša is one of 50 Specially Protected Zones under Kosovo's Law on Special Protective Zones. However, despite this legal protection,

the site has been repeatedly targeted since the 1999 conflict, including:

Grave desecration of Saint Peter,
Defacement of medieval frescoes with graffiti,
Erection of an Albanian flag over the hermitage, which still remains visible.
The Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) has long called for the protection of this sacred site, warning of its systematic destruction.

Vandalism of Sacred Frescoes

The desecration of the hermitage's frescoes serves as a blatant example of cultural and religious vandalism. The diocese stressed that these acts deeply offend Orthodox believers and expose Kosovo's failure to uphold its obligations to preserve medieval Serbian Orthodox heritage. The inaction of local authorities and their lack of cooperation with the Serbian Orthodox Church and international representatives highlight the growing threat to Christian cultural monuments in the region.



Heritage Under Threat

The deliberate destruction and appropriation of Serbian religious heritage in Kosovo contradict historical records and legal protections, the diocese emphasized. Many Serbian Orthodox monasteries and churches in the region have suffered relentless attacks and devastation, especially in areas where no Serbian clergy or communities remain to safeguard them.

The Law on Special Protective Zones explicitly mandates the protection of Serbian Orthodox monasteries, churches, and historical and cultural sites of significance to

the Kosovo Serb community. The Hermitage of Saint Peter of Koriša is specifically listed in Article 7 of this law, with designated protective boundaries.

Additionally, Article 3(b-c) of the law stipulates that its goal is to:

Preserve the historical, cultural, and architectural integrity of protected sites,
Prevent unauthorized developments that threaten their integrity,
Ensure that any modifications within protected zones require prior approval from the Serbian Orthodox Church.
Despite these legal safeguards, the municipality of Prizren (through its Directorate for Economic Development and Tourism) illegally carried out the recent construction without consulting or obtaining approval from the Serbian Orthodox Church. The diocese has condemned this action as a serious legal violation that endangers a historically significant religious site.

Unlawful Construction and Neglect

The illegal work at the site was reportedly conducted by EUROVIA, a local Kosovo Albanian company. The lack of heritage experts, reckless use of heavy machinery, and uncoordinated road construction have further jeopardized the structural integrity of the hermitage.



Historical and Cultural Significance

Beyond legal violations, the diocese underscored the deep moral and historical importance of the Hermitage of Saint Peter of Koriša. Dating back to the 13th century, this sacred site holds immense spiritual and cultural value.

The hermitage is mentioned in medieval Serbian texts, including the hagiography

of Saint Peter of Koriša, written by monk Theodosius of Hilandar in the 13th century. It was once a metochion of the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos and is referenced in numerous medieval charters.

Serbian Emperor Stefan Dušan visited the site and donated generously to it in the 14th century.

It housed a valuable manuscript library and served as a monastic center for centuries.

Given its spiritual and cultural heritage, the desecration of the largest monastic cave complex in the region deeply distresses Serbian Orthodox believers and endangers a crucial part of Christian history.



Call for Immediate Action

The Raška and Prizren Diocese has called upon international organizations, including the EU, EULEX, OSCE, and KFOR, as well as relevant Kosovo authorities, to take immediate action to:

Halt all illegal activities at the site,
Hold those responsible accountable,
Implement measures to protect the hermitage,
Repair the existing damage in full coordination with the Serbian Orthodox Church.
The diocese also announced plans to formally notify UNESCO and other international cultural heritage organisations in Europe, the U.S., and worldwide to raise awareness of the ongoing destruction of Serbian Christian heritage in Kosovo.

Pattern of Violations

Unfortunately, this incident is not an isolated case. Kosovo municipal authorities have repeatedly carried out unauthorised construction within protected Serbian Orthodox heritage sites, without prior consultation with the Church or international bodies. Recent examples include:

Illegal work near the Church of the Holy Virgin of Hvosno,
Planned road construction near Dolac Monastery,
Ongoing disregard for protective legal frameworks.
Final Warning: Stop the Destruction

The Raška and Prizren Diocese has demanded the immediate cessation of all illegal construction and strict compliance with the Law on Special Protective Zones. The diocese warns that continued disregard for legal protections could lead to irreversible damage to Serbian Orthodox religious and cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija.

“This systematic destruction of medieval Christian sanctuaries is unacceptable,” the diocese stated. “We call for urgent intervention to prevent further devastation and ensure the preservation of centuries-old Serbian Orthodox heritage in Kosovo.”

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