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Late Medieval Monastery Kitchens Forms and Location*

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In the monasteries of medieval Serbia there are not many material remains which offer a sound basis for reconstructing the appearance of monastery kitchens. In the course of their existence, some monastery complexes were subjected to reconstruction while others still need all encompassing archeological investigation. Still, taking into consideration all available data, we are able to determine the basic features regarding the location, contents and shape of monastery kitchens, all the more so because the existing structures from the XVI and XVII century indicate that the medieval tradition of construction and furnishing of these edifices survived for a long time.

In monastery complexes dating from the XII and XIII century the location of the kitchen has been determined with certainty in the case of Djurdjevi Stupovi, Sopoćani and the monastery of Gradac. In Djurdjevi Stupovi nothing is known of the fittings¹, while in both latter cases we find open fireplaces with overhanging chimney constructions. In Sopoćani this construction could have been light construction² and in the kitchen of Gradac monastery four piers could have served as a substructure for a vaulted construction ending in a chimney³. Since no remains of baking ovens have been found, then lack of any remains may indicate that, in the

earliest period, they were not built at all but that bread was baked in earthenware on open fireplaces.

The remains of monastery kitchens and bakeries dating from the XIV and XV century in the monasteries of the Holy Archangels, Nova Pavlica, Pavlovci and Kastaljan offer more information on the possible features of a monastery kitchen. However, the kitchen or rather the kitchen complex of Sopoćani, continually under construction and modification from the time the monastery was founded until the end of the XVI century⁴, is certainly the most instructive example of the different fittings and contents a monastery kitchen and its surroundings could have.

The kitchen of Sopoćani monastery is located in the immediate midst of the refectory. It is a part of a larger architectural complex which includes the refectory and a building made of four large auxiliary spaces at the western end of the complex (Fig. 1.). The organic connection between the refectory and the kitchen was the reason for its functional continuity throughout the entire period of the monastery's existence, even in times when life was dwindling and subsequent being revived in the monastery.

* A abridged version of this text, under the title "Notes on the Features of the Late Monastery Kitchen", was presented on The International Conference "Secular Medieval Architecture in the Balkans and its Preservation" held in Thessaloniki in November 1997. The accompanying drawings are the work of architects Jelena Bogdanović, Katarina Mrkonjić, Tanja Damjanović and Marina Mihaljević.

¹ J. Нешковић, *Бурђеви Ступови у Старом Расу*, Краљево 1984, 192-194.

² О. Кандић, Истраживања архитектуре и конзерваторски радови у манастиру Сопоћани, *Саопштења XVI*, Београд 1984, 19-20. A reconstruction of the possible original appearance of this fireplace according to O. Kandić has been published in С. Поповић, *Крст у кругу, Архитектура манастира у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1994, 277-278, сл. 102.2.

³ А. Јуришић, *Градац, резултати археолошких радова*, Београд 1989, 12-16.

⁴ On the dating of the edifices from the monastery complex cf. О. Кандић, *op. cit.*, 16-28.

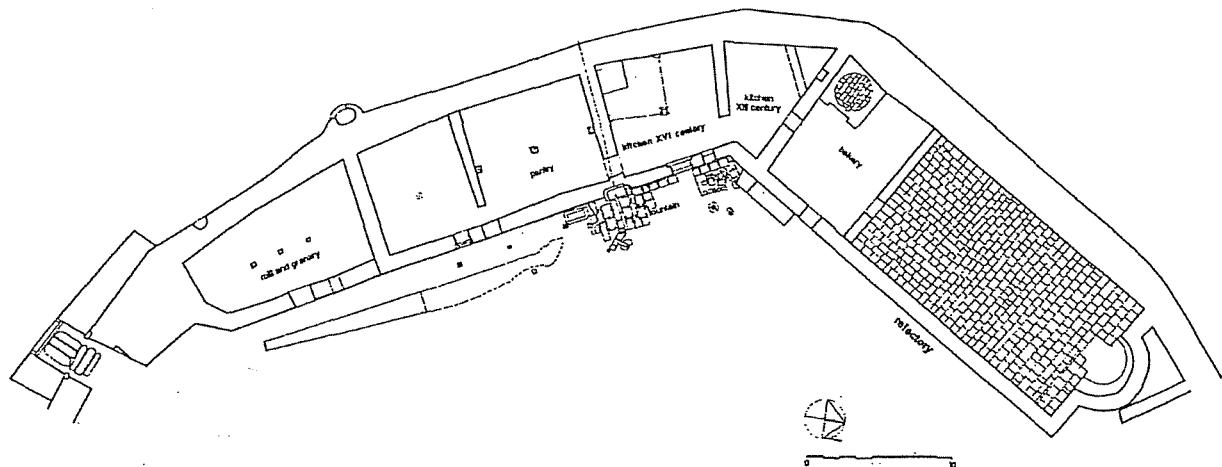


Fig. 1. – Sopoćani monastery – Ground plan of the kitchen with the refectory (after O. Kandić)

Next to the refectory we find a room with a triangular open fireplace which has been identified as the space of the original monastery kitchen from the XIII century. At one point, probably around the end of XIV century, the space of the refectory was reduced and one part of it turned into a bakery. In one corner of this room we find the construction of an oven platform with a circular stone paved surface on top of it which once held the oven calotte, 2.40 m in diameter (Fig. 2.)⁵. The size of the oven certainly shows the size of the monastic brotherhood in those days.

The room which was used as a kitchen during the later Middle Ages is located within the edifice at the western end of the complex, right next to the original kitchen. This is a space of rectangular ground plan which served as an entrance to the entire building (Fig. 3.). In its south-western corner, a construction has been found, leaning against the wall, which probably served as a basis for a bench or a shelf. On the other side of the room, in its south-western corner, there is a square platform, 60 cm high, built of stone. A reddish – brown stain of circular shape made by burning was visible in the central part of its upper surface. Considering the fact that remains of a domical baking stove have been discovered right next to the refectory, this structure was probably used

as an open fireplace raised, for convenience sake, on a constructed platform. A column with a matching capital and base and several blocks of stone with typical saw-tooth joints which once made up two segmental arches were found in the center of this room⁶. Obviously, these arches once spanned this space, transversely in relation to the western and the southern wall of the room, while resting on the column with its matching capital in the center and on stone consoles built into the walls. The discovered stone blocks indicate that a vaulted construction with a chimney on top of it must have existed above the arches. The arches were secured with iron pins without which such a risky construction could not have survived (Fig. 4.).

The entrance space of this room was paved with stone while the rest of the kitchen had an earthen floor. The kitchen lead to two other rooms used probably for storing food and kitchenware.

Apart from the bakery, the kitchen and the storage room, a room serving as a mill was also identified within this complex. Several hand operated grinders of different sizes have been discovered in a

⁵ I am very grateful to arch. O.Kandić, M. A. for the access to data related to archaeological explorations of Sopoćani in the period between 1976 and 1984 (headed by A. Jurišić, archaeologist), who offered me the sketches from her unpublished field documentation.

⁶ Segmental arches with saw-tooth joints are an architectural detail of Islamic origin. They can be seen on several Islamic buildings in the environs of Novi Pazar as well as on the portals of small scale churches dating from the close of the XVI century (cf. Р. Станић, Прилог проучавању градитељског и сликарског наслеђа XVII века на подручју између Новог Пазара и Сјенице, *Новопазарски зборник I*, Нови Пазар 1977, 169-188; Д. Тодоровић, Црква Св. Богородице у Ковачеву, *Саопштења XX-XXI*, Београд 1989, 215-223).

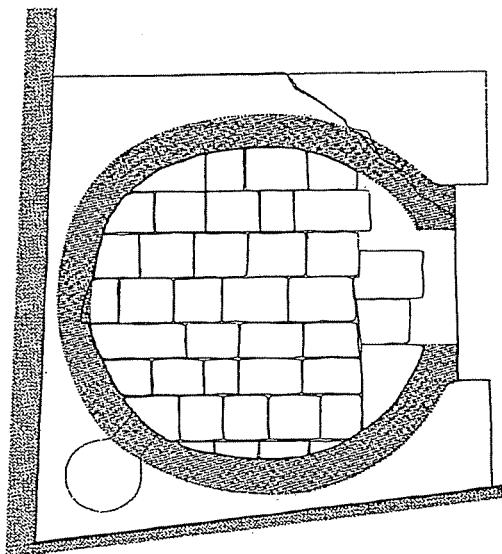


Fig. 2. – Sopoćani monastery
– Reconstruction of the baking oven

room with its own entrance located in the same row with the kitchen and the storage room.

A fountain was located right in front of the kitchen, in the monastery courtyard, as attested by the preserved stone basin with a water drain canal. A part of a lead pipe supplying this fountain with water has been discovered in the southern wall of this room, at the spot where it meets the enclosing monastery wall. Beyond this enclosing wall, along the course of this pipeline, we have even come across an expansion vessel used for regulating the water flow.

A row of stone bases which used to hold the wooden columns of a portico have been discovered in front of the western edifice. A constructed bench with finely cut sandstone seats once stood on either side of the entrance to this building, one on the side of the fountain and another on the side of the refectory. A part of the portico pavement in front of this bench has also been preserved. The remains of



Fig. 3. – Sopoćani monastery – XVI century kitchen (photograph O. Kandić)

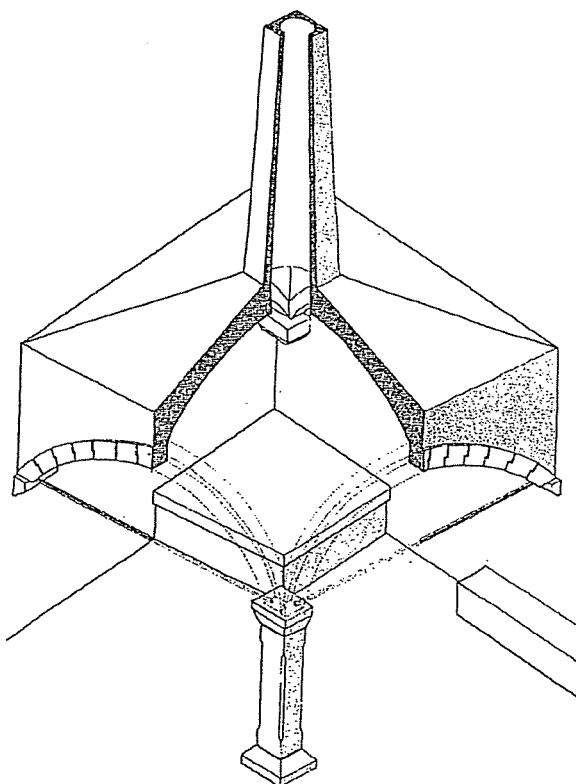


Fig. 4. – Sopoćani monastery
– Reconstruction of the XVI century kitchen

a staircase construction raised along the refectory wall indicate that the kitchen had an upper storey which was most probably used for residential purposes of the monks.

Although it dates from somewhat later times, from the XVI century, this kitchen offers the greatest number of clues for an attempt to reconstruct the appearance of later medieval kitchens. The disposition of fireplaces and distribution of substructure elements carrying overhanging constructions from the preserved kitchens of Pavlovac and Kastaljan, dating from the XV century, and even the later, XVI century, bakery from the monastery of Crna Reka, indicate that the features of the kitchen in Sopoćani were direct copies of medieval models.

Namely, the kitchen of Pavlovci monastery has a fireplace located by one of the walls of this room⁷. Two columns standing at the corners of this fireplace

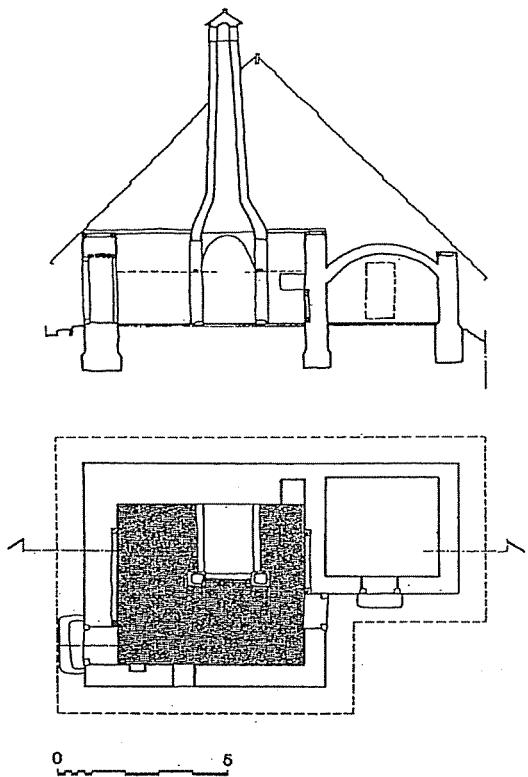


Fig. 5. – Pavlovac monastery
– Reconstruction of the XV century kitchen (after S. Popović)

once carried a domical construction which ended in a chimney (Fig. 5.). The kitchen of Kastaljan monastery is very similar. It has a fireplace in one of its corners and it is also possible that the construction of the chimney rested on one column and several consoles in the walls, as in Sopoćani (Fig. 6.)⁸. No traces of rooms specially designated for bread baking have been found in either monastery. This could mean that in smaller monastic communities bread was baked in earthenware, in the fireplace.

It is important to note that the preserved kitchens dating from the end of the XIV and the XV century have vaulted spaces directly above their fireplaces' ovens but that, contrary to those of Greek and Athonite monasteries which had kitchens of square plans, covered by domes ending in chimneys,

⁷ С. Можиловић, Средњовековни манастир у Павловцима на Космају, просторно-архитектонска студија, *Саопштења XIII*, Београд 1981, 140-141, 143.

⁸ Г. Марјановић-Вујовић, Манастирски комплекс Касталјан, *Старинар XXX*, Београд 1980, 85, says that parts of the chimney construction have not been found. For conclusions on the possible construction cf. С. Поповић, *Крст у кругу, Архитектура манастира у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1994, 279, 281.

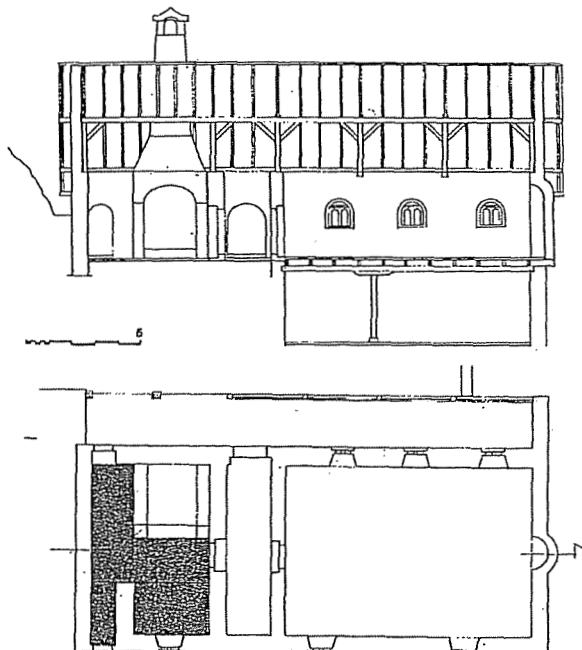


Fig. 6. – Kastiljan monastery – Reconstruction of the XV century kitchen (after S. Popović)

they are not entirely vaulted themselves. Kitchens of that type (*μαγειρείτον*, madupnica) have appeared in Serbia only from the XVIII century on⁹.

As far as fireplaces and ovens are concerned, it is possible to discern several different types, beginning with the simple open fireplaces, through fireplaces raised on platforms to closed domical baking ovens with or without constructed platforms. Very often open fireplaces have small niches for storing the already prepared meals or cooking at lower temperatures. No auxiliary elements for kitchenware handling have been preserved.

⁹ The best known examples of that type of kitchens are those from monasteries of Crna Reka (cf. M. Вуловић, Манастир Св. Арханђела у Црној Речи, *Зборник за ликовне уметности 4*, Нови Сад 1968, 252, 257, сл. 12), Treskavac (cf. Р. Финдрик, Где се налазила стара манастирска трпезарија у Пећкој Патријаршији, *Саопштења XXII-XXIII*, Београд 1990-1991, 144-145) and the Holy Trinity at Pljevlja. In the XVIII century a part of the refectory in the monastery of Dečani was transformed into a kitchen (cf. С. Ненадовић, Трпезарија протомајстора Ђорђа у Дечанима, *Старине Косова и Метохије I*, Приштина 1961, 294-295, 296-297, 299, 304). Judging by the preserved drawings, the old dormitory in the Patriarchate of Peć also had a kitchen of this sort (cf. Б. Вуловић, Стари конак у комплексу зграда манастира Пећке Патријаршије, *Зборник заштите споменика културе II*, Београд 1951, 119-124).

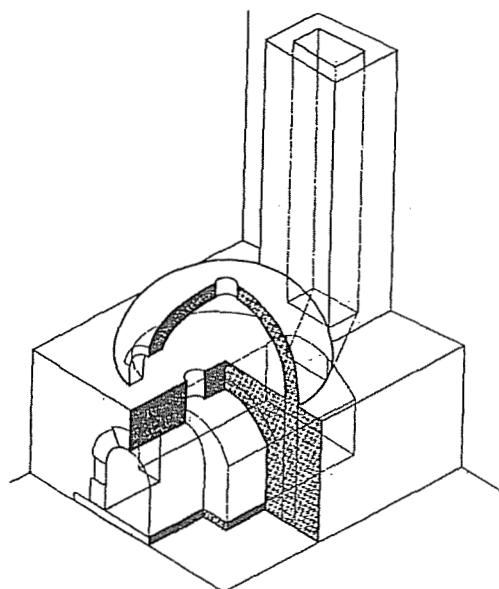


Fig. 7. – Nova Pavlica monastery – Reconstruction of the baking oven

The common type of baking oven has a circular base covered with a calotte. At times, the firewood opening is located at ground level but more often the entire calotte is raised from the ground on a constructed platform which facilitates the act of inserting and taking out bread. Ovens such as these were heated to a maximum and then the embers were scraped aside and loaves of bread to be baked placed inside that same chamber. The domical shape of the oven secured a balanced distribution of heat in its inner chamber. The remains of such ovens discovered in the monastery of the Holy Archangels date from the XIV century¹⁰. Both ovens found in this kitchen have a circular base covered with a calotte. One of them has a closed bottom section which actually makes it a raised baking oven. A similar oven dating from the XVI century is still in use in the monastery of Crna Reka¹¹. As in Sopoćani, the area of the bakery is covered with a calotte resting on segmental arches with metal pins. The calotte extends into a tall chimney channel.

However, in the monastery of Nova Pavlica there are remains of a bakery in which the fireplace is separated from the oven¹². The fireplace was cov-

¹⁰ С. Ненадовић, Душанова задужбина манастир Светих Арханђела код Призрена, *Споменик СХII*, ОДН 18, Београд 1967, 18-19.

¹¹ М. Вуловић, *op. cit.*, 256-257, сл. 7, сл. 9.

¹² А. Јуришић, *Нова Павлица, резултати археолошких радова*, Београд 1991, 51.

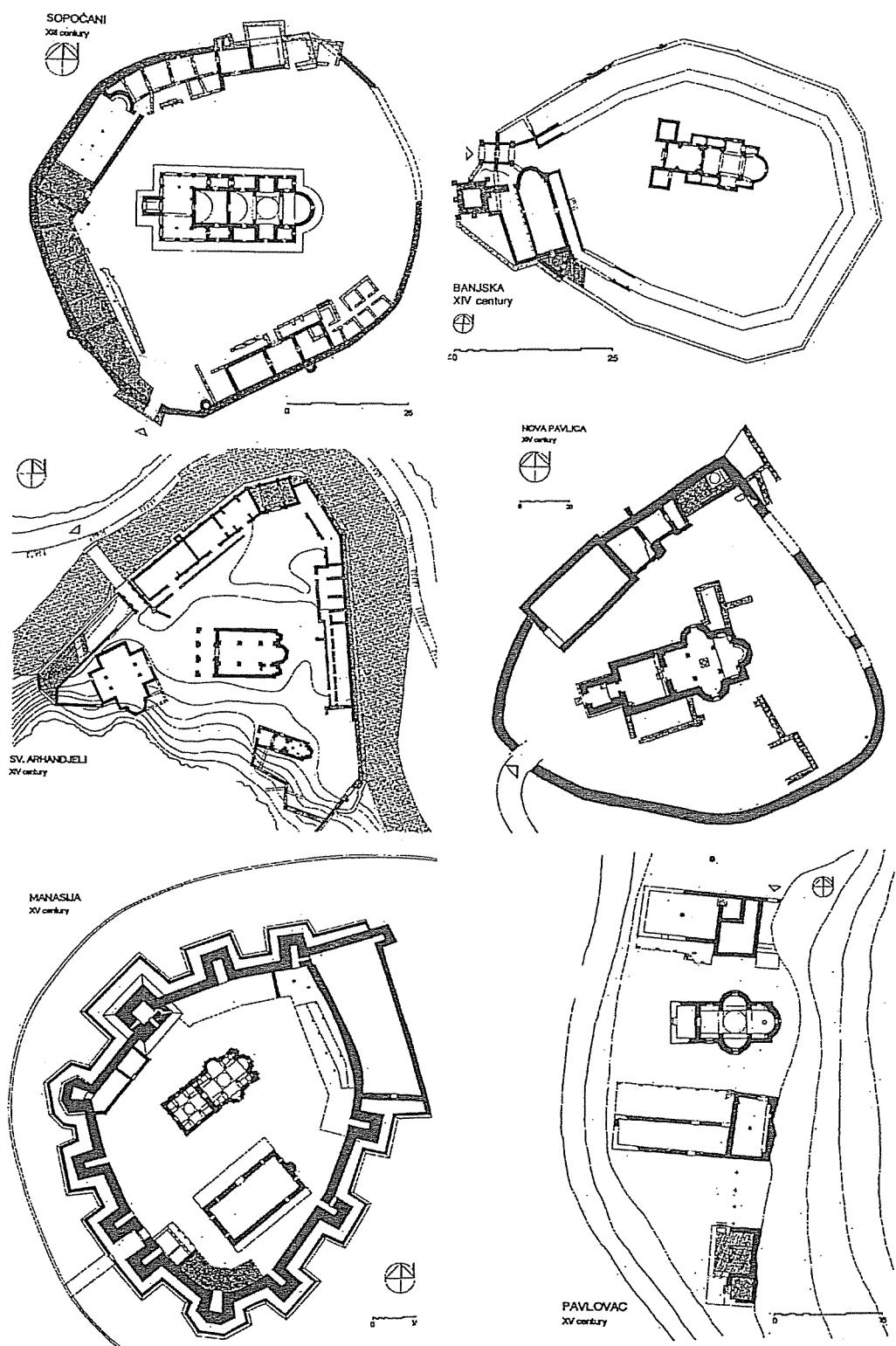


Fig. 8.— Possible locations of the kitchens

ered with a segmental vault made of brick and had an opening lined with stone on its front. The oven also had the form of a calotte and the hot air coming from the fireplace was probably channelled into its inner chamber (Fig.7.). It is also possible that the calotte was very shallow in order to enable better heating. Although ovens of this type are not common in folk architecture, which has produced many traditional oven shapes in direct continuity until this day, one similar example is still used in the monastery of Chilandar. One of the mentioned two ovens from the kitchen of the Holy Archangels monastery did not have raised fireplace chamber and its firewood opening was located at floor level. Since placing bread inside such an oven was very difficult, it could be that this oven was used only for heating while the baking was actually done in an adjoining oven.

The location of the kitchen within the monastery complex in Sopoćani is typical for Serbian monasteries of the XII and XIII century¹³. Some of the monasteries of a later date such as Nova Pavlica (XIV century) and Kastaljan (XV century) show a similar spatial organisation, with the kitchen located inside the same building as the refectory.

However, during the XIV century a change takes place in the disposition of monastery kitchens. They are detached from the encircling walls of the monastery and raised as separate structures. It is possible that the new location of the refectories brought about the formation of economy zones or even courtyards which could house the monastery kitchen, as a separate edifice or within a complex of other rooms used for purposes of economy¹⁴. It is possible to discern the origins of such spaces in the monasteries of Banjska and Dečani, but the kitchens were probably traditionally positioned. In

the monastery of the Holy Archangels the detachment of the kitchen from spaces of other function is quite obvious. Here, the refectory is an entirely independent structure communicating through a door with an economy courtyard west of it. In the monastery of Ravanica the economy area is clearly a separate unit within the complex with an identified metal workshop behind the refectory but is not clear whether or not the kitchen was located within this block in the later phase. The door and the portico of the refectory in the monastery of Manasija indicate that the space designated for preparing food must have had a somewhat more withdrawn location within this complex¹⁵. A similar organisation of space, regardless of existing differences in the urbanism of the settlement, was present also in the XV century monastery of St. Nicholas in Pavlovcı. The kitchen, together with an auxiliary space, is placed within a separate building, located far from the sacral structures of the monastery (Fig. 8).

If we were to recapitulate the available data, we could conclude that a developed monastery kitchen very often included special rooms designated for preparing food and bread baking and that its fittings did not change much throughout the Middle Ages. As far as the location of a kitchen within a late medieval monastery is concerned, there are indications that special economy zones were organised as individual spatial units within monastery complexes. It is certainly tied to a stronger influx of the Byzantine custom of granting great importance to refectories as independent structures in monastic settlements.

Translated by
Jelena ERDELJAN

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¹³ On the spatial organization of Serbian monasteries cf. С. Можиловић, Просторна структура манастира средњовековне Србије, *Саопштења ХИІ*, Београд 1981, 7-45 and С. Поповић, *Крст у кругу, Архитектура манастира у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1994, 71-80.

¹⁴ С. Поповић, *Крст у кругу, Архитектура манастира у средњовековној Србији*, Београд 1994, 33-34, 37, elaborates the location of economy zones within monastery complexes. In this paper, the separation of an economy zone refers to its clear detachment from residential area and places of worship within a monastery.

¹⁵ Д. Тодоровић, Трпезарија манастира Ресаве, *Манастир Ресава, историја и уметност, Дани српскога духовног преображења II*, Деспотовац 1995, 175-176.