



*Stefan Nemanja,
fresco in Studenica*

As Barbarossa was not ready to accept his plan, the grand župan was left to his own resources. In late 1190, the new Byzantine emperor Isaac Angelos II gathered a strong army and inflicted a defeat on Nemanja's troops. Nevertheless, Nemanja managed to preserve the majority of his lands.

Eventually, the Byzantine emperor recognised Serbia's borders and endorsed Stefan Nemanja as the country's rightful grand župan. Amicable relations between Serbia and Byzantium were further strengthened by a dynastic marriage – Nemanja's second-born son Stefan married Byzantine princess Eudocia and obtained the title of sebastokrator, the third in rank after emperor and despot.

Aware of the importance of changes in organisation of the country, Nemanja wrote in the Hilandar Charter (1198) the following: "The merciful God made the Greeks emperors and the Hungarians kings, and He made me grand župan. By His infinite mercy and benevolence, God gave our great grandfathers and our grandfathers to rule these Serbian lands".

As grand župan, Stefan Nemanja was deeply devoted to Orthodox Christianity, but he also showed great tolerance to numerous Catholics who lived in maritime Serbian towns. Furthermore, he eradicated the Bogomil heresy in the country and created the conditions for religious homogenisation of the Serbian people.



*The oldest Serbian
coat-of-arms;
double-headed eagle
of the Nemanjić
dynasty*



Monastery Studenica

The “great lavra” Studenica was established in 1196 by Stefan Nemanja, the founder of the Nemanjić dynasty. The largest and richest of Serbian monasteries, Studenica enshrines priceless 13th and 14th Byzantine painting, a valuable treasury, and has a distinctive architectural concept.

Besides Saint Simeon (Stefan Nemanja), four more saints – holy members of the Nemanjić dynasty are buried in Studenica. Originally designed to serve as a mausoleum of the Nemanjić rulers, Studenica enjoyed generous support of almost all Serbian medieval kings.

The Virgin’s Church is the biggest and most important building of the monastery complex. Its architecture does not stem from one source only. The plan, space and structure are Byzantine, whilst the conception of outer shapes and architectural details are of Roman origin. Such masterful blending of eastern and western influences endows Studenica with originality and freshness unknown at the time.

The monastery’s oldest frescoes are considered the culmination of 13th century Byzantine painting. St Sava devised the program of compositions on Studenica’s walls, aiding talented painters from Constantinople to realise their full artistic potential and mastery.

In 1986, owing to its artistic and cultural value, Studenica was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

