







## Matka – Small Mount

### Preface

Matka, known as „Small Mount Athos“, was created and kept by God, in a prayerful intercession of the Virgin Mary, where hermits, monks, martyrs, and saints lived. Where the spirit and breath of the past harmoniously welcomes you into the present. It is a place where devotion, fidelity, and sacrifice for the Love of God, stole the humble souls of the monks who lived here. So today, it wakes in us a yearning for Gods beauty of the Orthodox faith they had witnessed, and the cultural wealth that was left behind.

To each of the pilgrims, from the bottom of our hearts we wish; May the visit of this sacred place bring you and everyone close to you, the blessings only God can give.



Sunset, church of Holy Nedela, Old Matka (Stara Matka)  
View from the window of the church of Holy Nedela





## Introduction



The river Treska starts its 138 km long route through the mountainous regions of Kichevija and Poreche, and arrives at the canyon of Matka, one of the most magnificent areas in Macedonia. The sides of the gorge are sheer cliffs rising hundreds of feet. Upon these hard to reach, rocky heights, are hidden away, by God's blessing, ancient Christian churches, small medieval churches and monasteries, hermit skits, and caves. Above them, families of eagles calmly soar, though their numbers have dwindled since World War I.

In ancient times, the canyon of Matka was a "portal" through which people could quickly pass over to the plane of Pelagonija or Kichevijata, or to Ohrid and Struga. Down by the river, was the main travel route on which caravans passed. Old churches, and the remains of early Christian churches, ancient and medieval houses, and villages can be found here.

The antique stages in these areas can be grouped into three major periods: Antiquity, Middle and Late-Middle-Ages period. The first period of the 1st - 6th century AD, represents a time of notable population, villages, fortresses and also sacred places. In the second period there were fewer settlements, but thanks to the busy road, there were still powerful fortresses in the area, and under the protection offered by the canyon of Matka, several rural churches and monastic complexes were created.

By the third period the region was under Turkish rule, and, due to attacks from the Arbanash (local population (mercenaries) who converted to Islam) the caravan route and the area, became unsafe, causing the people to abandon their villages. Now, only the village of Selishte remains. Today, the monastic population still exists in the monasteries and hermitage cells, though there are some small interruptions, and conditions are difficult. The residents of Matka tell of violence, mainly burglaries and destruction, but they also tell of the slain monk (martyr) who was found leaning on a tree next to the monastery of St. Andrew.

These monasteries, according to their purpose, position and age, are the oldest preserved buildings in the vicinity of Skopje. Their very location, in the almost inaccessible gorge of the river Treska, shows that a true ascetic life was led here. The residents enjoyed a spiritual and literary cooperation, and were often visited by prominent church elders.

It is for this reason that Matka is often compared to Mount Athos and is called Little Mount Athos. Anyone who has lived on Mount Athos, and even those who have only visited, would express during their stay at the monasteries of Matka, that the rocky landscape, with the crosses on each peak, the smell in the air, and the peace that one can feel, reminds them of it. We would also like to point to the connection of the Virgin Mary with these two areas.

We express our gratitude to Professor Victor Lilchich, whose book "Matka through the centuries" is the basis of this little book. Our interest, however, will be only in the remains of early Christian churches, medieval churches and monasteries, and by looking through the prism of Christianity we will follow its continuity in Matka, from the first century to today.





## Early-christianity

Christianity in Macedonia, with the blessing of God, was brought by the apostle Paul, who arrived and preached in Philippi in 49AD. The spread of Christianity in this area is nicely described by Alexander Menj in this excerpt from his book "History of Religions":

„Macedonia is very different from the dry countries of Hellas or Judea with their bare areas. The wide highway (Ignatius military-postal route that connected the Black to the Adriatic Sea) led the missionaries through oak and pine woods, through streams and meadows, and above all that, among grey fog, was the mountain peak Pandeja on which the first snow drifts could be seen. In the surrounding areas shepherds and farmers lived, known for their durability, humble character and healthy mind.

...after a few hours they went down the valley and entered in Philippi. Paul did not think to abandon the former tactic: first to go to the Jews, but found that there was not even a dozen men who were necessary to establish a synagogue, and there was only a small group of people who confesed Judaism and who were preparing for prayer outside the walls next to the creek. Here, under the open sky, among willows and rocks, next to the quiet glittering water, echoed the words of the Gospel, the first that were heard by the people of Eastern Europe.

First who was baptized in the name of Jesus was Lydia. St.. Luke, who accompanied the apostle Paul writes: „The Lord opened her heart.“ Among the local residents, Paul finally could have a rest: he felt like home. The situation in Philippi was very suitable. For several months, Paul created a strong municipality and chose its guardians: bishops and deacons.

The apostle remained for 3 years in Macedonia traveling and preaching. After his departure the care of churches continued by writing epistles to them. Again he returned to Philippi in the summer of 57AD, where he travelled and preached throughout Macedonia even in the neighbouring Illyrian lands (modern Albania). “

It's hard to determine exactly when the Christian faith first reached Skopje and the canyon Matka, but the position of the city of Skupi on the road passing through Philippi, and the 4th century Christian basilicas speak of the existence of the early Christian church. At this time, Macedonia was part of Byzantium.







The first major persecutions throughout the empire occurred in 304AD by the Emperor Diocletian, who was dethroned in 305AD. At this time, after suffering, and then deliverance from prison, the Antioch Bishop Erasmus was active, and stayed in several places throughout Macedonia. According to our data, Saint Erasmus stayed for some time at Lychnidos, or more precisely in its surroundings, where he converted a vast number of people to the Christian faith.

After Diocletian, it was Constantine's ascention as the head of the Roman state, which marked a turning point for Christianity, and the persecutions ceased. In 313AD in Milan, he and his co-ruler Licinij signed an "edict" formally acknowledging Christianity as a religion. In 323AD Constantine became the sole ruler of the kingdom, after which he consistently pursued a pro-christian policy, including founding the new capital of Byzantium, Constantinople.

Emperor Theodosius, in 381AD, gave Christianity the status of state religion. The Macedonian churches were under supervision of the the apostolic seat in Rome. Skupi, judging by the remains of the Basilica, experienced resurgence in the early 4th century. In the early 5th century a new Christian basilica was built, and restored after the attacks of the Huns.

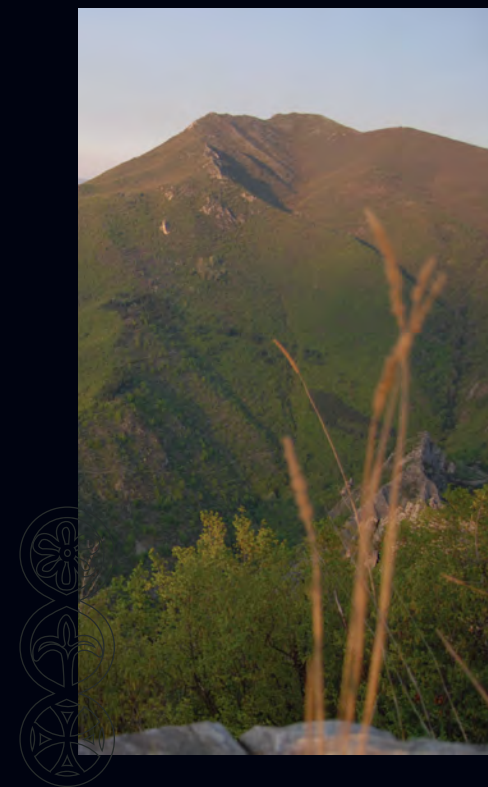
In 412AD, the Pope Vicentius founded the episcopal headquarters in Solun with the supervision of the whole eastern Illyric, with Rufus as the first bishop. In 421AD the Emperor Theodosius II, upheld a law under which the bishop of Constantinople became judge of all ecclesiastical disputes in Illyric. Although these decisions were occasionally changed in 529AD, the law was ratified by the Emperor Justinian. On April 14, 535AD Justinian established the archdiocese Justiniana Prima, as an autocephalous church with a very broad territorial subordination, covering the territory of Moesia and Dacia. The events that followed are undocumented due to the great advance invasion, of the Slavs and Avars, which caused the decline of church life in Macedonia until the late 6th and early 7th century. The activities of the Archdiocese Justiniana Prima can be traced from 680AD to 681AD, since when there is no data available.

This is a summary of the conditions under which the church in Macedonia, and therefore Matka, survived in the early Christian period.

Tranquillity, Markov City, Matka  
Entry to Markov City from the trail (through Machin Dol) above the monastery of St. Andrew (Andrej)







During the Roman period, the region of Matka fell within the province of Upper Moesia, whose administrative centre, it seems, was the ancient city Skupi (near the village Zlokukani). In the regions of Skopje, usually near the city Skupi, retired soldiers would receive land and build their own dwellings. According to the archaeological excavations, the graves of those buried here were often marked by memorial gravestones in the form of steli.

Alongside the river, as well as higher in the mountains, the natives of Matka built modest homes. Probably the most representative residential complex of the Early Roman period was in the Lower Canyon area, where today lies a great number of weekend (holiday) settlement houses. During the construction of a house in September 1963, an early Roman necropolis was discovered. The remains and traces of the south-western outskirts of the settlement even today can be seen north of the school, toward the bottom of the hill.

**View of the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin, from Markov City**  
**View of the monastery of St. Nicholas –Shishevski, from the fortress Markov City**





Nearby, on a plateau by the river Treska, about 800 metres from the centre of the village of Dolna Matka, is a monastery with a church dedicated to the **Assumption of the Virgin**. On the north facade of the church, is a built-in grave stone that bears the inscription: "Here lies the liberated Katinija Katyn Festa, who lived 29 (or 40) years. Mark Katinij Crispus, a liberated slave and a husband of the respected took care to make (the monument)". They were freed slaves of Katinij and during the 2nd century they settled in this place. The interior of the church bears some built-in stone elements from the Early Roman period, such as:

1. Part of the architrave (upper beam) of white marble, walled in the northern facade. Its lower (sometimes a ceiling) side can be seen, decorated with leaves and transverse balteus (lat. belt)
2. Corinthian capital, walled right of the architrave.

In the 6th century, an early Christian basilica was erected within a framework, probably under the foundations or near the present church. Without detailed excavation, its exact position is difficult to detect, but its existence is evidenced by the stone remains from it embedded in the outer walls of the monastery church.

1. Two Meno's (double window pillars of marble) from the early Christian basilica in the walled dome tambour
2. Fully preserved pillar of travertine, walled in the south wall, with the length of 185.5 metres.
3. Two parts of one altar pillar, decorated with kantharos (chalice) with a wine which forms six circular areas in which we can see four Christian crosses, trefoil tree and a six-leaf rosette.
4. Part of the altar pillar with a decoration of pleated rhombuses.
5. Small altar four-leafed capital walled of the northern facade, below.

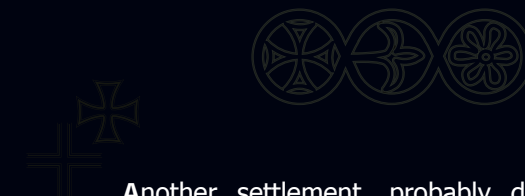
All of the listed stone elements originate from an early Christian basilica.

The assumption that many residents of Lower Matka received Christianity very early is bold, but not without basis. By the 4th century, when the construction of the first Christian basilica (in Byzantium) was initiated, the Christians would gather into structures that represented assemblies and temples. After the construction of the basilica they had already participated in worship services in the early Christian church.

**Built-in elements of an early Christian temple, on the south wall of the church Assumption of the Virgin, Matka**  
Early-Christian crosses, part of the altar column from the 6th century, built-into the west wall, to the left of the entrance of the church







Another settlement, probably dating from the first centuries AD until the Late Antiquity, existed about 700 metres to the south-east under Petrov stone. At this site are found traces of houses and a necropolis. Today, as in the past, a path leads along the valley, following the dry Lower Kovachica spring, connecting to the trail to St. Spas and Markov city.

Petrov Stone, or St. Spas is a 615 metre high hill, that rises about 400 metres above the left bank of the River Treska. The summit is a flattened plateau, with steep slopes on the north, east, and south, linked only on the west, through the wide saddle, to the mountains.

In the middle of the plateau are two buildings. The northern building, erected on the highest position, is the small, single-nave church of **St. Spas**, a Medieval church dating perhaps from the late 14th century, and restored around 1968.

The southern building is the **Holy Trinity** or **Archangel Michael** church. Dating from the time of the Byzantine rule, it was constructed in the 12th or 13th century. More architectural parts, derived from the Early Roman, and late antique period according to their typological characteristics, are scattered about the area or embedded in the churches. They belonged to two cult buildings, a temple and basilica.





Impost of a pilaster wall, with ornamented frontal side: two acanthus leaves, late 5th century, from the basilica under the church of St. Spas

Interesting for us, is the major outline of the old building under the church of St. Spas, which probably hides an early Christian basilica (late 5th century, by Dr. Ivan Mikulcic). A broad, apse oriented east can clearly be recognised. This is the first known location of an early Christian church in the region of Matka. It has yet to be excavated. (According to prof.V.Lilchik it is perhaps good that this is the case, as the resources to properly protect the site during excavation are lacking).

The early Christian church was built of stone and lime mortar, with large building bricks to be found in the ruins. The roof is standard for the time, made from broad late antique teguli (roof tiles) of the Corinthian type. The Early Christian elements are:

1. Three bases for columns (pillars), with characteristic simplified late molding
2. Parts of tree trunks for columns (pillars) of travertine
3. Double window pillar- Meno
4. Impost for Meno (double window pillar) of travertine, half of it is preserved, with a decorative representation of a Christian cross with expanded ends
5. Impost (small portion in the form of a lined pyramid) for a wall pilaster, with adorned front side with: two broad acanthus leaves
6. Part of the parapet slab of white marble
7. Impost for capitals or maybe a column for the arcade in the basilica made of travertine with a hole for metal coupling on the lower side.
8. Part of the parapet slab with a cross of white marble

Nearly all of the stone elements are made of travertine stone, found in abundance in the area of Ramnishte, north of Matka.

There are remains of an early Christian basilica in the village Shishevo. On the hill south-east above the village, is the old **church** dedicated to **St. Athanasius** (formerly dedicated to St. Nicholas), constructed in the 14th century, and in which were built-in multiple architectural elements. According to the style, form, and age of workmanship, there are two different groups of stone elements, that belonged to a temple of the first centuries after Christ, and some elements of an early Christian basilica. The elements of the basilica are:

1. Part of travertine column
2. Two double window pillars - window meno of marble
3. Part of the impost for meno, decorated with a cross with expanded ends
4. Part of a small architrave. probably an altar screen from the basilica, on which there are three decorative elements: four-leaf rosette, three-leaf palm and a latin cross.
5. Part of a parapet slab, made of white marble on which is visible the center of eight-footed Christian cross with expanded ends and rosettes with spirally twisted leaves.





The basilica was established during the period of late antiquity, on a broad plateau high above the right bank of the river Treska, where today sits the monastery of **St. Nicholas-Shishevski**. Although the basilica hasn't been explored in detail, on the ground are visible the different overlapping roof tiles-tegulae of ancient buildings.

In Roman times, a powerful fortress called Markov City was built upon a dominant and narrow rock on the vertical ridge called „Andrews Cliffs“, which descend to the river. The site is barely accessible, and almost invisible from a distance. To access some parts of the old fort even today, is quite a feat of mountaineering. Because of the dense vegetation, Markov city is also very difficult to locate, even when approached closely, and without knowledge of the terrain, it is difficult to identify its parts.

The late-antique castle (fortress) consisted of a large acropolis of about 0.25 hectares (0.6 acres), and a large west front area 0.50 hectares (about 1.2 acres). Archaeological research conducted in the acropolis has located abundant parts and fragments of late antique building ceramics from the framework of the 5th - 6th century:

1. Bricks
2. Semi-brick
3. Roofing tiles-tegulae of the Corinthian type, with sharp edges.

Most of them were used in the building of the medieval church **St.Nedela** in the fortress, but they are visible as surface finds.

The fortress was supplied with water from the spring of Upper Kovachica, about 500 meters west, and on a higher position. Water from this source was captured and carried to the fortress within ceramic water pipes - tubule, almost under the very fortress.

From Markov City down to the river, is a steep, but passable gully called **Machin dol**. Since late antiquity, and perhaps earlier, a road used to run through the gully which was used to get down to the river in emergencies. About half an hour's uphill walk from the church of St. Andrew, can be found the remains of a late antique building that is still unexplored. One branch of this trail passes through the rocks to the north along the bottom dam towards Petrov Kamen. Professor Lilčić writes: „the name Machin Dol indicates (according to the residents of Matka) that someone was tortured here, but we do not know whether it was meant to commemorate an intentional torture or should be implied the self-sacrifice of the medieval monks/hermits.“







## Medieval monasteries and churches

The remains of most of the monastic skits, or more precisely, the modest dwellings of the lonely monks of the Middle Ages, are still visible along the steep "Machin Dol" all the way to the monastery of St. Andrew. There is a photograph of one of these hermits taken by R.Ljubinkovich in 1940, on which is written, „The hermitage of Father Gelasij near the monastery of St. Andrew.“ He also states that „On the left and right bank of the river Treska, accessible only by water are small cave churches, some of which are submerged in water during the filling of the artificial lake. There were no frescoes in these churches“. I. Jastrebov, in 1884, noted that over the monastery of St. Andrew there is „...a very steep, trough of rubble, on which once upon a time people walked on this windy path, enclosed on both sides by walls, whose traces are even today visible. Among them, here and there, can be seen big stairs, leading from the top of the mountain to the fortress, which is now in ruins and is called Markov City. Also, this city had a separate church. The city was very strong, as evidenced by the walls which were three cubits thick. “

The medieval fortress of Markov City was smaller, but the remains of it are more obvious. The main part was built upon the late antique acropolis. This fortress has the shape of an irregular triangle with a size around 63 x 56.5 x 48 metres. In the central part, rises a small rocky plateau about 20 x 17 metres in size. This was added on the north and east side to create the required horizontal surface for establishing a medieval residential facility. The south side the terrain is raised by about a metre resulting in a relatively flat area, upon which was built the church **St. Nedela**. To the south of the acropolis, the terrain rises in a steep vertical. In 1912 by P. Popovic was written: „The saddle of rocky reef, when one goes from Matka to the Monastery of St. Andrew, the church lies on a dreadful place, on a vertical almost horizontal field around! It's small, and there is a dome. It was built of crushed stone and brick, mainly dinged but without regularity. There is carved stone (close to the windows). The arches over the windows are made of brick, and the ceiling of limestone. The arches with a size of 30 cm. are solid and have bricks between the limestone. The layers of mortar are the same as the bricks, 3cm. Something that's original is that the pendants are derived as a joint (Lat. Shav) ... The characteristic alignment of the pendants are: a layer of stones, and over it a chain of bricks. The columns of the dome are set as the sides of the world(North, South, East, West).“

Entry to the castle from the path that passes near the church of St. Spas, Old Matka (Stara Matka),







The church of St. Nedela is a small nave church with a dome. The apse is semicircular on the inside and three-sided on the outside. North and south of it, are two small semicircular niches. Above, they are covered with small semi-calottes. The dome and the drum have not survived until today, but the both eastern pendentives are visible and are supported on pilasters. The dome was supported by the crossed arches, of which, only the east one remains.

In 1933, Sandre Trajcevski from Matka, discovered the bronze cross from the dome of St. Nedela in one of the small caves above the spring tap of Lower Kovachica. He then passed it to the hieromonk Teofil from the Matka Monastery. In 1941 it was in the collection of the Church museum of the Skopje metropolis, and exhibited at the church of St. Mina, with a description that is from the 14th century.

To clarify, it is assumed that the church was build in mid 14th century.

The fortress, it's present name - Markov Grad (Markov City) was named for Marko, who ascended to the throne after the death of his father King Vukašin Mrnjavčević, in the battle with the Turks at the Maritsa river in 1371.

Life in Markov Grad, as it can be seen, likely continued in a reduced scale after the arrival of the Turks, during the 15th and 16th century. On almost all sites of the fortress can be found traces of fire.

Church of Holy Nedela, within the fortress Markov City



Jordan Hadzi Konstantinov - Dzinot (1856) said: „....on the wall of the fortress of Marko,there were iron doors until 1790. Finally one cruel Muhamedinian, Abanas, ripped the particularly striking gates, he took them to his home, where he called the blacksmiths who made a pair of plows and axes. After a while, his family disappeared and today it's desolate. „

There is a legend associated with this site, regarding a girl called Boyana: "She was a beautiful mistress of Markov Grad. Her estate is where the village Bojane is today. Some Turk fell in love with her. When she refused him, he decided to take her by force. With his army he attacked Boyana in her hometown. She courageously opposed the from the walls and by pushing a rock over the walls, killed 70 Turks. When she realised there was no escape, she jumped off the cliff into the river Treska. The Turks then destroyed the city."

These walls are adorned by the flower "phoenix" (Ramonda Natalia), which survived the ice age, and is an endemism, growing only here, and in the vicinity of Nis. It was discovered accidentally, when a scientist by accident spilled water on a sample that was preserved for 6 months - it came alive and began to flourish. It looks like the African violets, but the flower is of the type ramonda and the ones next to the church of St. Nedela is formed by 3 leaves.

The remains of a stone wall on the church premises





About 20 minutes walk from the fortress, on a wide gentle slope about 100 meters west of Petrov Kamen, was the original village Matka, which is said to have been destroyed at the same time as the fortress. Some of its inhabitants were killed, but most of them relocated, with the majority of them founding Gorna Matka. In this village, except the aforementioned two medieval churches on the site of Petrov Kamen, there was a small church with a hermitage cell on the **St. Petka**. There is also a necropolis north of which, at Ramnishte today there a number of old houses. This sheds light on the church life of the former inhabitants of the village.

The Church of **St. Archangel Michael (Holy Trinity)** according to its characteristics is older than the neighbouring church of St Spas. Around 1968 the residents of Matka started to restore the small church of St Spas. Moreover, they began to extract building material (broken pieces of carved stones and other construction elements) from a large heap of debris that was located about fifty meters south. In a short time they had excavated the ruins of an old church building beneath the debris, all the way to its stone plate floor. The remains of the walls were about one meter high. The day when this was done, was the day when the Holy Trinity is commemorated, and they attributed that name to the church that was discovered.

The excavated church was built of broken stones joined with mortar, and using some stone parts of an early-Roman temple, but the parts of the early Christian basilica are much more visible. The spatial elevation consists of a wide room with a semicircular altar apse to the east and to the west a wide vestibule with two parallel wall pilasters in the middle. In the centre of the nave, was unearthed a massive travertine tombstone on which was engraved an epitaph in an old Slavic language in which is mentioned „the Gods servant Niko (Ia)”. The final passage in the inscription is a curse to the ones who would take something from the church, Holy Archangel (Michael). This late medieval grave stela was certainly a memorial mark over some of the graves in the area of Solishte, south by the church and it reveals to us who it was originally dedicated to.

The preserved remains that determine the origin of this church are quite modest. The spatial elevation confirms that we are talking about a medieval church. The outside apse is semicircular, indicating an earlier time than the 14th century when the apses were always three-sided or polygonal. The church was covered with distinctive, Byzantine „komnenovski” tiles. Beside this, on the area south of the church, were found several Byzantine copper coins dating from the 12 or 13th century.

Stone throne, in the church of St. Archangel Michael (Holy Trinity), Old Matka (Stara Matka)



Without detailed archaeological excavations, we can't accurately determine the time of the demolition of this medieval village church of The Holy Trinity (Archangel). Probably the church had services during the 14th century, and maybe even after, during the early Turkish rule. It was during this difficult period of Turkish rule that the villagers of Stara Matka, built the much smaller church St. Spas, north of the old church, on top of the older, early Christian basilica.

Describing the ruins of the church of **St. Spas** in 1912, P.Popovikj says: „This church (today) is neglected, but was complete until 3-4 years ago, when some arnauts (Macedonians who have accepted the Islamic faith), who occupied the land around the church, demolished it, so now the only remains of this church is part of the south wall. Around the church yard there are piles of broken and carved stones and bricks, parts of the carved stone garlands, and other processed stones (from the doors, windows). There are trunks of larger columns, though we can not determine where they were used. The dimensions of this church are small, 4-5 meters in width and up to 10 meters in length. Due to the extent of the ruins, we could not perform the correct measurements. Probably the church didn't have a dome because it doesn't have lezeni (a type of pillars merged with the wall).”

It's a bit confusing that the same author calls this church St. George. But, many years before him, in 1856, J.H.Konstantinov - Dzinot, mentions the name of St. Spas, which probably refers specifically to this church. M.Ljubinkovikj in 1951 says: „West of the church extends the cemetery, and above it in the shape of a horseshoe towards the church (is spread) the village. Around the church ruins there are remains of scattered building material; stone, bricks, tiles, roof tiles, and carved stone pieces of carved columns and carved wreath. This fine building material probably didn't belong to the 17th century village church, but to an older building that was located on the same site. The church walls are preserved with an average height of one meter. The design of the church is that of a plain rectangular building, with a elevated apse, three-sided externally and semicircular internally. It was built with crushed stone.”



Church of St. Spas, Old Matka (Stara Matka)





From the rocky gorge, today enclosed by a high concrete dam, built in 1938, the river Treska flows towards north for one mile through a very narrow gorge, and then the field expands. Here, around the 14th century, on a broad flattened terrace on the left bank, upon the site of an ancient sanctuary, was erected the **Monastery of Matka**, with a church dedicated to the **Assumption of the Virgin**. The exact time of the church's construction, is not known, nor the first founder. However, several researchers assume that the church was built around 1337 by Boyko, son of the unknown lady Danica, on the basis of the afore-mentioned inscription in the church of St. Nicholas in Ljuboten which states that in this period Boyko was the master of Matka:

"This divine temple of the Holy Father Nicholas was built through the struggle and effort of Mrs Danica, in the days of Stefan, King Dusan, and was guarding the elder son Boyko and the (City) Matk(a) and the other son (the city) Zvecan on Sitnica in the year 1337th "

The roof and frescoes of the original church suffered, probably during the hectic events of establishing the Turkish rule in Macedonia. In the nave of the church, above the west entrance, an inscription is preserved from 1497 and it mentions the name of the founder Milica who repaired the roof of the church, painted the frescoes, and finished the vestibule.

According this article, it is clear that the original construction of the church is from the 14th century, while the roof and frescoes are from the late 15th century.

The additions built by Milica in 1497 are not preserved and it is unknown when they were demolished. Today, over the door of the church, are still visible the remains of the frescoes which were then inside the vestibule.

In the search for the exact time of the construction of the original church, we must not ignore the headstone of the Christian Marija, discovered in the church, on the floor before the altar. On the headstone it is written:

„Why wonder, oh people who see me in this grave? Know that, also, you will be too, but, the memories with you are dear, remember me also the servant of God, Marija, but called Velislava. Presented to God on September 28, 1372."

According to this article, we can only assume that in 1372 when Marija was buried, construction of the church was already completed.



View from the loggia (balcony), of the church at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin Matka





The design of the church is that of a narrow, indented cross with a dome, supported by a four-wall square base. The dome rests on octagonal drum, carried by massive pilasters, in which are set four small, highly placed windows, and four blind niches. The apse of the church is semicircular, and from the outside is three-sided. The facade of the building is decorated with alternating rows of stone and brick, giving the church a pleasing appearance. This style of decoration is typical of noble sacral architecture from the 14th century, though the basic architectural concept of the church does not stray from the Byzantine architecture of the period.

During the 19th century, repairs were carried out to the arch of the church, and the monastery quarters were constructed. There is a record from a room of the monastery quarters:

“At that time was a monk Aksentij 1851 September day 10, to be known that Elijah Stanoev made a room for health and salvation, Amen”

Jordan Hadzi Konstantinov - Dzinot, accurately describes the location of the monastery in an article for a newspaper in 1856, and he refers to the church as Mother of God the Three hand (possibly according to the icon which can be found in the monastery today). Also in an older record from 1854, it's written that the monastery can barely be maintained by a monk called Auxentius. This is how the monk himself refers to this church in an article in one Pentecostos from July 16, 1846, which is currently kept in Sofia.

The monastery Matka (womb), according V.Lilchikj, A.Nikolovski, D.Kjornakov, and K.Balabanov, got it's name because it was a mother church for the other churches, monasteries and monastic skits in the region of the strait of the river. This is confirmed by all the records associated with the life in the monastery.

This is the only monastery which was always easily accessible, but it's also the only one who survived with almost uninterrupted monastic life.

Interestingly, while the choice of such inaccessible terrain highlights specific difficulties for constructing churches, it also provides the wonderful conditions for the establishment of monasteries and the practice of the monastic life. There are conditions that allow hesychasm and unceasing practice of the Jesus prayer. Medieval monasteries for instance, were almost always constructed in high, hard to access places.





The church of **St Andrej (St Andrew)** was built on a very hard to access and safe place; a flat area, on the left bank, about 20 metres above the riverbed, and 250 metres south-east from the entrance of the rocky terrain of Matka. Today, it can be easily reached along a path, dug in the rocks, along the shore of the artificial lake Matka.

In 1884, I. Jastrebov assumed that: „In the olden days the people used to climb to this monastery in woven baskets like they do, for an example, in the monastery of Meteora (In Tesalia). Beneath the monastery, on the bank of the river Treska, even today can be found iron links/rings to which the row-boats were moored, but through them, in woven baskets, or with some other devices the people used to climb up. Today, no one can climb to this place, but instead they need to travel on foot for a short while and then, with great effort, climb in order to reach the heights above the monastery, and then descend to the monastery itself.”

This combination of isolated position and inaccessibility of the terrain, allowed this church to be one of the best preserved in this area, with regard to both the physical structure, and especially the fresco paintings.

From the inscription on the entry doorway we know that a founder of this church was Andreyash, the second son of the king Volkashin. The inscription also tells us that the monastery church was finished in 1388/89. At the very end of the text about the sponsor, mention is made of the monk Kalast Kiril as the restorer, and as such, it is a proof of the existence of an older church, on whose foundations this church was built. His name is mentioned again in the inscription above the niche in the vestry, where it is written that from the beginning he was working together with his brother-monks, suggesting that he was the abbot. He died after the frescoes in the church were finished.

Something unique about this church, is one more important text of Hrisovul, a type of a written decision from the ruler. The parchment - document that speaks about the rights and the property of the monastery, no longer exists. The same is written on a long painted ribbon that starts from the altar apse, right above the niche in the vestry, than it continues through the south concha, the west wall, the north the concha and it finishes in the altar apse again. Because of the damaged sections, the written painted ribbons today are saved only in fragments. This text, inside of the church is 1766cm long. The painted ribbon separates the scenes of the frescoes, one from another, in its equality in color, as a decoration. This text, written in this manner continues on the outside facade of the church, but today only small fragments are visible (fragments of horizontal painted ribbons).



A trail under mountain rocks, monastery of St. Andrew (Andrej), Matka  
View of the monastery of St. Andrew, over the lake, from the trail to St. Nicholas-Shishevski



The content of the text, on the inside of the church, has been passed on to us, thanks to the academic Vladimir Moshin:

"By the will of the father and with the help of the only begotten son and the assistance of the Holy Spirit this Holy Temple of the Holy first called Apostle Andrew, was created and it was painted. With the effort and the struggle of the servant of God, Krilevik Andrejash contributed to the building of this holy church together with Hrisovolt ... and his Metoh (land belonging to the villages or monasteries) from the both sides of Orashje and Lovishta and Kachepuri with it's metoh ... the village Krushopeci...the village Momkovo and Gorica with their metoh. The village Ivane and Lozno with their metoh. The village Dlbouchica and Uzdolie with their metoh, the village Lukovica and Krushica with their metoh...villages...their hunting grounds and mountain."

This Decree-inscription is the second known in Macedonia. The first one comes from the monastery of St Nichola in the village Manastir, and dates from before 1300 A.D.

The architectural form of the church of St Andrew is a combination of a triconchal (comprised of three conches) plan and a free standing cross highly elevated above the dome. The facade of the church is richly decorated with niches, especially the dome and the altar apse, which is monomorphic (semicircular) on the outside but three-sided on the inside. The tradition of building a triconchal churches in Macedonia goes all the way to the beginning of medieval art and architecture, and is associated with St. Kliment and St. Naum. However, triconchal plan, which requires proportionally flat conch is most prevalent in Egypt where most of the churches were built this way. Later, these type of plans were copied in Constantinople. As a first impulse of this type of plan in Macedonia, we can point to the church dedicated to Holy Virgin, Eleusa in the village Veljusa from 11-12 century. However, the emergence of the triconchal scheme in St. Andrew is a fruit of the influence of the well developed triconchal churches on Mount Athos, whose influence is noted throughout the Balkans in the second half of the 14 century.

The church of St Andrew is distinctive by its east apse which is smaller than the north and south and does not descend to the mass of the wall, as is the case with the northern and southern apse. In addition, the outside deviation of the outer walls does not match the inside. Some of the features, such as the dome, are copied from Marko's monastery.

**The artificial lake Matka, near the monastery of St. Andrew (Andrej)**  
Monastery of St. Andrew (Andrej) church and monastic quarters, currently a hotel and restaurant.







After this church was completed, the construction activity in the region of Skopje dwindled to almost zero.

In the mid 16th century, a vestibule is added to the west side of the church, and is finished on the inside with a semi-dome. In the long, partially preserved inscription on the east wall in the vestibule, is inscribed the year 1559/60 when the frescoes were done.

Jordan Hadzi- Konstantinov - Dzinot, in 1886 remarked that: „In front of the church, stands a bell tower in ruins, but the rest of it is still standing at 5 cubits high“. In addition, Jasgrebov in 1884 says: „The church is very beautiful and in a healthy condition, considering that for 30 years, not a single Christian soul has lived here. Only the bell tower has fallen in the neglected well. In length is 30 cubits. In the church, everything is in it's place: still complete are the chairs and all the saints, which are many in numbers, kept and untouched by unlawful hand“.

In the church museum in Skopje it is mentioned a „...wrought iron cross from the dome of the church St Andrew on the river Treska 14 century - height 0.55 metres, width 0.27 metres“

Ramonda Natalija, the flower “phoenix” which survived the ice age, endemism, growing only here, and in the vicinity of Nis  
**The artificial lake Matka, near the monastery of St. Andrew (Andrej)**







Opposite St Andrew, the rocks penetrate deeper into the lake forming two small coves, of which the first one gives access to the path that leads towards the church St Nikola - Shishevski. If the rocks are passed by a boat, the shoreline of the small cove will be discovered. From here, after a 20 minute trek along a marked, but ill-used and hard to traverse path, the monastery with a church dedicated to **St John the Chrysostom** can be reached. The church itself is in ruins. One wall of the church is the rock itself, that still bears the remains of the frescoes, and just a small part of the frieze can be recognised. Judging by the position of the frescoes, the church was raised on a plateau, which today is completely deformed and overgrown with trees (mainly fig trees) and other vegetation. A part of a stone wall with a beam is still preserved, starting from the rock on one side, it extends along the rock itself (it's glued to it) but on the other, on a 90 degree angle from the rock. The wall goes down about 2 metres below the level of the church and in a short distance from the frescoes on the rock, which once it might've been glued to the very wall of the very church. The research for this location is not known to us. Often it was considered as the unknown place of the monastery. Yet from the elaboration on the Codex of the monastery Matka, as well as the entries from the book about the Shishevski monastery, published by Lj. Stanojevik in 1923, M. Selishcev argues that the village Kozarevo in which is located the monastery St John the Chrysostom, is positioned in the area of Nir, above the river Treska, not faar from the Shishevo Monastery.

Residual wall, monastery of St. John Chrysostom, Matka  
Frescoes on the rock, which was once the north wall of the church of St. John Chrysostom







The monastery was a metoh that belonged to the monastery St George Skoropomoshnik - Gorg in Skopje. This was three times confirmed, firstly by the Byzantine Tsar Roman IV Diogen (1067 -1071), then, by the king Constantine Tix Asen (1258-1277) and finally by king Milutin in the charter of 1300. Section 25 of this charter states:

“...and my kingdom submit the village Kozarevo, formerly supplied by the Tscar Diogenes, and in it, the monastery St John Chrysostom, and with Barovo and with Vinsko and with all three villages and with Zlatouschani, with the vineyards. With the land, with the windmills, with hunting grounds of fish and animals, with the zabeli (small forest), with the mountain and with all the rights to these villages, to the monastery St George Skoropomoshnik -Gorg”.

This monastery, whose assets included the hard to access, steep eastern slope of the gorge where the monastery St John Chrysostom was located, and which bordered with the property of the St Andrew. According to the Virginian decree (charter) of king Constantine Tix Arsen, which today is kept at the Hilandar monastery on mount Athos is „ built by the Holy Tsar Roman on the height of Virgino, opposite Skopje, above Serava (which back then flowed next to the Skopje Fortress)”. Here was, according to the list of property (villages, churches, and monasteries) that belonged to Skopje, Veles, Prilep, and Poloshko, a very important monastery, which is thought to have been destroyed for the first time during the Ottoman empire.

In the monastery of St John Chrysostom, the tradition was kept, before the reservoir was built, that the locals to get together on the day of St George. The commemoration of this saint, of this monastery, who's metoh (land) was the whole Kozarevo, has left in oblivion the memory of St John the Chrysostom, to whom this church was dedicated and probably this is the reason why the later pilgrims named this church St George.

he charter testifies that the monastery St John Chrysostom existed since the 11th century.

The calm around the very church is complemented by the small spring of holy water that pours from a small gap in the very rock with the frescoes and another, laterally attached to it, and we could say it's on the exact corner the church once was.

About 40 minutes walk from the monastery, there is another spring in Kozarevo, Kopishte. V. Liljik writes about one miracle that happened here. As the story goes, Milosh Moloshevski said that “ in the period between the two world wars from this spring a child that could not hear nor speak was healed.”

**A natural spring in the corner between the north and east wall (of rock) of the Church of St. John Chrysostom**





**The Monastery St Nicola - Shishevski** in literature is referenced as the monastery St Nicola of Nir, probably because of the former medieval village Nir, which was established on the mild slope in front of the monastery. Today this place is covered with dense forest, but the monastery can be approached on the right of the valley. In the forest there is a spring with a tap.

On a dominant rock, about 500 metres above sea level or 200 metres high, opposite the church of St Andrew there is a small, flat plateau, where sits the small church of St Nicola in Nir, and the monastery can be reached via a route that leads through a picturesque landscape around the lake.

The church is actually a combination of two churches. The original one, built on the east side is a one-nave church, the roof of which is gabled on the outside and vaulted on the inside.

On the west side was added a more complex church with features typical of 14th century architecture. The design includes a nave building, whose upper section is shaped like a compact indented cross with a monumental dome over an octagon drum.

It's obvious that the western tract is more representative. It's walls are adorned with decorative pilasters - lezeni where the upper part is crowned with blind impost segments on top of which, also, there are decorative arcs made with alternately placed stone blocks and bricks. The surface of the lunettes are decorated with one type of reticulatum (brick work) in a combination of brick and stone rectangles.

The drum and the dome are almost identical to those of the church of the Assumption of the the Holy Mother of God. On the corners, there are half shaped collonettes that end as half capitals, and the tops are crowned with archivolts. At the top there is a stone wreath just below the ceramic tiled roof.

The inner walls of the church are covered with frescoes in three layers. The oldest layer is preserved only in very small fragments and it's style cannot be determined, but they possibly derive from the 12th - 13th century, which is likely when the older structure was built, while the newer west side is considered to be built in the 14th century. The second fresco-painted layer is considered to be dated from the second half of the 14th century and it covers the walls of the whole church.



Monastery of St. Nicholas - Shishevski, Matka  
Small gate, Monastery of St. Nicholas - Shishevski





## Frescoes



The Christian temples from the medieval period are worthy indicators of the Macedonian medieval church history and art, and of the Macedonian spiritual and artistic heritage. They can be compared with nothing else that has been created by man, as they go beyond everything in every respect, because they symbolize the Heavenly Kingdom here on earth. This is exactly why the builders and the Iconographers avoided signing their names, because they knew that this was the work of God, a gift from God, or, through their hands, Gods own creation.

The frescoes in the church **St Nedela** are the oldest known, and only partially preserved. The images themselves can barely be discerned, as they were created in a A secco technique, which means painting on previously prepared dry wall. Inside the church, there are some humble remains of fresco decoration with a few saints in the altar section, while the south wall bears the figure of Saint Nedela. The green shade on the face and the clear trappings on the burgundy robe, belong to the style that was used in the 14th century (1450 - 1460). Part of the order of the frescoes is known, but we have no more detailed information about the characteristic of the frescoes.

- On the north wall - The lower zone of the central area, bears a fresco of an unknown saint, while further up can be seen the composition of the Crucifixion of Christ. On the right are presented St. John and Longin. On the left are Bogorodica (mother Mary) with one of the myrrh bearing women and the body of Christ, and in the background are the badly faded remains of some kind of painted architecture. On the south pilaster is St Simeon the Stylite and above him a portrait of an unknown saint.

- In the altar region - On the southern area, in the first zone there is the image of an unknown bishop. In the niche of the diaconicon only remnants of the curtains remain. On the northern altar area, from the east, in the upper zone there is another portrait of an unknown bishop. On the north-east pilaster is St Daniel the Stylite, and above him is another portrait, this time of an unknown Archbishop.

- In the middle of the south wall - From the east side there is a whole figure of St Nedela, the patron of the church. Her long dress is decorated with ornamental rhombuses and leaves. She wears a pearl necklace, her head is covered with a veil, and she has two strands of curly hair on the sides. In the zone above St Nedela, can be seen traces of the composition of the Betrayal of Judah.

Frescoes, on the south wall, of the church of St. Nedela, Markov City  
Frescoes, on the north wall, of the church of St. Nedela, Markov City





Later frescoes from the ones in the church of St Nedela are the barely preserved second layer of frescoes in the church of **St Nikola**. The inside walls of the church of **St Nikola** are covered with frescoes in three layers. The oldest layer is preserved in only small fragments, and though the styles can't be determined, they may date from the 12th to 13th century. These fragments were painted over with artwork from the 14th century. Analysis of these frescoes points to the second half of the 14th century (1370's). These are the work of the art studios in Ohrid, Zrze, Sushica on Markov river, and in St Nikola in Nir, that were most active in the second half of this century. It is exactly that Iconography guild, whose work on the frescoes at the monastery Zrze (in 1368-69) was observed by the brothers Pribil and Priezd, who eagerly learned the craft, raised it to higher level, and they created a true work of art just like the Bishop Jovan (John) and the Hieromonk Makarij (Macarius).

The frescos in St Nikola in Nir that were painted by the members of this guild of frescoe-painters, are not well preserved. Few saints have been presented on the north and south wall in the altar apse, as are the portraits of St Tscar Konstantin and his mother St Elena on the east section of the south wall.

In 1630, a new layer of frescoes was created on top of the frescoes from the 14th century. This is written on the founder's inscription under the lunette together with the presentation of the patron of the church, St Nikola.

Today we can follow him in 4 painting zones in the following order:

Zone 1 - Saints in height (full length) with a wavy painted ribbon above their heads;

Zone 2 - Scenes of the life of St Nikola, starting from the east, from the Birth and the Dream of Tscar Konstantin;

Zone 3 - The miracles of Jesus Chris, three scenes of the Old Testament and the Holy Trinity;

Zone 4 - Scenes of Jesus Christ's last days and his suffering.

The specifics of the frescoes are their narrative, with a tendency for decoration and even over doing the motives. A highlight, is the fresco of the Mother of God with Jesus in the semi-collonette of the altar apse, the fresco of Christ Almighty with the symbols of the evangelists in the apex of the dome, and one rare fresco, the reply of Jesus Christ to the desire of Zacchaeus climbing on a fig tree.



Frescoes, in the altar area, of the church of St. Nicholas, in the Shishevo (Shishevski) monastery, Matka





The frescos in the monastery of **St Andrew**, are the work of the Metropolitan Jovan Zograf (fresco-painter) and his disciple, monk Grigorij. This we learn from the inscription in the niche above the anaphora (prothesis). Let's review the theory about the origin of the main fresco-painter of the monastery church of St Andrej (St Andrew).

The two brothers Pribil and Priezd originated from the medieval fortress "Kale", high above the village Zrze in the Prilep area. It was in this area, their grandfather, the monk German, built a small, nave church, probably on the foundations of an earlier early-Christian church. This happened in the middle of the 14th century when the ruler was Tscar Dushan. When the vestibule of this church was added in 1369, the son of German, Hajko (with the monastic name Chariton), was already deceased. Some art historians believe that around 1370, these two brothers were dressed in a monastic riza (they were tonsured), and had received the monastic names Jovan and Makarij. By this time, they had successfully studied the fresco painting craft, and held high and notable positions in the cultural and the church-administrative life in the state of King Marko. Jovan became a bishop, or supreme ecclesiastical head in Prilep, and died after the death of King Marko, while his brother Makarij traveled to Serbia.

Holy Martyr Demetrius (Dimitrij), fresco, of the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)



Raised in the same spirit of monastic devotion cherished by his ancestors, Jovan acquired the high church-hierarchical rank of a bishop, and at the same time he became a fresco painter with especially strong authorial expression. Created at the top of his career, the fresco-ensemble in the church of St Andrew, is a work of outstanding esthetic quality and refined maturity of the painting process. The work in the church of St Andrew displays the maturity of the craftsmen in addressing the complex attitudes and movement in the composition, which in a way separates them from their predecessors, and places them among the finest master-painters of medieval fresco-painting in Macedonia. Confirmation for this appraisal is his fresco work, the icon of Jesus Christ the Savior and life giver created in 1393/94 for the iconostasis in the monastery of the Holy Transfiguration - Zrze. The work of the fresco-painter, monk Grigorij is threaded seamlessly with the work of bishop Jovan in this monument. In places, the two threads become one, and in places the thread of Grigorij's work stands on its own. Bishop Jovan in the late 14th century brings, or more precisely revives, that all-Christian Byzantine painting style that for a long time was dictated from Constantinople, Solun, and Mistra. But even in his private art workshops, his work ranks among the highest achievements in Byzantine art.

Holy Martyr George (Georgij), fresco, of the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)





The fresco-painting in this monastery church is something of a novelty in medieval wall painting. The frescoes are distinguished by their style and artistic qualities, as well as the iconographic peculiarity, which separates them from those paintings in other churches erected in Macedonia at that time. The faces and figures of the saints are illustrated realistically, with a life force. Characteristic is the tendency to paint in perspective by placing the figures in the same space, as a composition. Due to the relatively small size of the church structure, the iconographic repertoire is reduced to basic thematic sections, and consists of two Christological cycles followed by the usual iconographic content in the dome and the altar.

Monumental, sculpted figures of saints with faces painted in deep sensuality, accented volume, and living gestures of persons engaged in energetic activities, demonstrate the incredible artistic mastery of the fresco-painter Jovan (John). His remarkable skill in drawing, and keen sense of the noble value of colour, has captured, and skillfully executed, architectural panoramas in the compositions, with deep, clean blues, and warm sumptuous colours. Although these compositions contain fresco-decorations typical of the traditional iconographic canons, they display a marvellous freshness in terms of the fine artistic detail. The logic and excellence of the arrangement of the presented figures, are perhaps the most important features of John's painting that can be seen in the church of St. Andrew. But the strength of the images of the saints, the colours that glow, and the blue coloured harmonies, represent the most striking dimension to the painting of the church. Fostered by the creative energies of the medieval masters, the fresco-artist John's magnificent ensemble in the church of St. Andrew, represents the last creative peak of the Macedonian medieval period, woven from the threads of the tradition and imbued in the craftsmanship of a remarkable talent.

The frescoes in the church are divided in three painting zones.

In the nave of the church, in the lower zone of the west wall, south of the door depicts St. Archangel Michael, and its counterpart, north of the door, depicts the St. Archangel Gabriel. On the south wall, on the aisle are presented the holy warriors Demetrius and George. On the southern conch (where the psalteria is) west of the window, are presented the Holy Apostles Luke and Mark. East of the same window are presented St Paul and St John the Theologian. In the nave of the same zone, the northern wall depicts the holy warriors Theodore Stratilat and Theodore Tyron. The northern conch bears an image of the patron saint of the church, St. Apostle Andrew the First-Called, and next to him is presented St. Matthew. East of the window, where the chanters would be, is painted St. Peter, and next to him is the fresco of the Holy Virgin the advocate.



Virgin – The Guide (Patevoditelka), of the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)  
Holy Apostle Peter, of the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)





Over the first zone, on all the walls of the church, extends a frieze of portraits of saints from the waist up. There are a total of sixty. In the second zone, above the sixty portraits of saints, is presented the cycle of Christ's pain and suffering. The cycle begins in the altar area, starting with the Last Supper scene in its southern part, then, proceeding to the west, the presentations develop in the following order: Washing the feet, the Agony in the Garden, in the conch, and the Kiss of Judas. The north wall cycle continues with the Mockery of Christ, the Ascending of Jesus Christ on the cross, and Descending of the cross in the northern conch. The cycle ends back in the altar area, with scenes of the Burial of Christ.

The scenes from the cycle of the big holidays cover the ceiling and the semi calottes where the choir stood. Of these, on the southern side, is preserved the Nativity of Christ, the Meeting and the Baptism of Christ. Unfortunately, they are faded to such extent that, they are almost unrecognisable. On the north side, is preserved only the Descent into Hades.

On the drum of the dome, are placed frescos of the prophets in a full body length, on the pandentives are represented the four Evangelists in the moment of writing the Gospel texts. Each is marked with a special symbol.

The scene the Assumption of the Virgin can be found in its usual place, on the west wall, in the nave of the entrance, above the door.

The first zone, of the altar space, presents the scene of the Liturgical Service of the holy hierarchs. Above this composition are the portraits of eight saints presented from the waist up.

It is particularly important to highlight the presence of St Clement of Ohrid in this group of bishops and his highlighted position in the altar of the church. Here, the image of St. Clement is not typologically specific, but he is the closest to the features of the Ohrid saint. He is painted with a long white beard and very short white hair, evenly distributed on the forehead. His name is written in Greek, as are all the saint names in the church, but with an unusual form of the name. In the semi calotte of the central apse is presented the Madonna with Christ. Over the northern niche is represented St. Archangel Gabriel while over the southern niche is represented the Virgin Mary. Together, they are presenting the scene of the Annunciation. The northern niche depicts the frescoes of St Stefan, and on the southern is St Evplos.

Among the oldest preserved objects in the group, are the royal doors of the iconostas of the church of St. Andrew, whose main decoration represents the figures of St Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, from the Annunciation scene, executed in low relief, along the length of the door wings. They are now housed in a museum in Belgrade.

"The Holy Spirit", a detail of the fresco of the "Divine Liturgy", in the altar area of the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)  
Holy Apostle John the Theologian, fresco, of the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)







The frescoes in the **monastery Matka** belong to Ohrid painting school of the late 15th century. Here, for the first time were found frescoes from that school, adapted in the space of a compact type cruciform. The dark burgundy colour dominates the atmosphere, broken with the light chromium oxide green, ocher (pale yellow), olive green and grey. The painting program was passed on to us completely, by m-r Jehona Spahiu, who each year holds a lecture to her students in the church. We are very grateful for her generosity and knowledge.

**The Dome program** - The presentation of Jesus Christ - Pantocrator, which today is completely destroyed, was probably located in the crown of the dome. Around that presentation is the scene of the Divine / Heavenly Liturgy, and on the drum, between the windows, are screens depicting prophets, two by two, for a total of eight. The four pendentives each depict one evangelist, the sections between the pandantifite bear painted angels, and on the east side is the Holy Scarf (Ubrus). In the crown of the eastern arch (above the altar space) is the Ascension of Christ, while on the west ceiling is the Prepared throne / Hetimasija.

**The Altar area** - In crown of the conch, is depicted the Virgin with the Infant Christ, presented in a floral cup, beneath which, is the Communion of the Apostles. In the first zone is a Liturgical service of the bishops and Christ-the Lamb (sacrifice) with St Basil the Great and St John Chrysostom. In the narrow painted ribbons, on the left and right of the conch is painted the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin of the Annunciation. Under their performances are shown the holy stylites St Simeon and St Daniel. In the niche of the anaphora, is shown St. Archdeacon Stephen, and in the deaconicon area is shown St Roman Melod. In the niche on the south wall depicts St. Cyril the Philosopher, and on the opposite (north) wall is shown his disciple, St Clement of Ohrid. Beneath the from-the-waist-up representation of St. Clement, is presented the vision of Saint Peter of Alexandria.

St. Clement the Archbishop of Ohrid, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin  
 St. Cyril the Philosopher, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin.  
 Holy prophets Habakkuk and Elijah, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin







**The St Clement character** - Is portrayed as a bishop with a polistavrion (liturgical vestment cloak) and omophorion (a vestment worn around the neck, representing the lost sheep that is found by the Good Shepherd) with crosses. He is presented as having a high forehead, a small rounded fringe, protruding cheeks, and a long, thick, greying beard. In his left hand he is holding a closed Gospel, while giving a blessing with his right hand. His teacher St. Cyril the Philosopher, is depicted wearing a cap decorated with crosses. The painter of the portrait of St Clement of Ohrid certainly belonged to the painting studio that used to work at the archiepiscopal town, and knew the basic features of his physiognomy. This again speaks to the fact that the stylistic features used by the artisans in the frescoes in Matka, only confirm their origin from the city Ohrid. The portrait of St Clement of Ohrid is one of the rare presentations saved in the area of the city Skopje, together with those at the church St. Andrew and Markov monastery, which increases its importance. St Clement of Ohrid portrait is ever present in the other churches in Macedonia. It is also in the churches of St. Sophia, Kaneo, Perivlepta, etc.

**The great holiday scenes** - They begin with the Annunciation (on the east wall), and are then presented in the highest (third) zone on the south wall, in the following order from east to west: The birth of Christ, the Meeting, the Baptism, the resurrection of Lazarus and the entry into Jerusalem / Palm Sunday. The Transfiguration of Christ is shown on the west wall, next to the Dormition of the Virgin. On the north wall, the scenes of the great holidays continue in order, from west to east: the Crucifixion, The myrrh bearing woman at the tomb of Christ, the Descent into Hell, and at the end of the wall surface is the lower part of the Ascension, where are presented the figures of the Virgin Mary and the apostles. In the last scene, above the face of Mother Mary, the following words are written: „Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? This Jesus, which was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven.“ Then the Descent of the Holy Spirit follows, a composition completely artistically degraded by placing it in the narrow area of the triumphal arch. The cycle of the Great holidays ends with the fresco scene of the Assumption of the Virgin, which according to the canons, is always represented on the western wall.

**Christ's pain and suffering** - The scenes from this cycle are in the second zone, under the fresco scenes of the Great holidays. The cycle of the suffering, as a rule begins with the Last Supper, which, because of its liturgical basis, that Christ himself established the Eucharist (Holy Communion), is usually painted in the altar area. But in this church, this cycle begins with the washing of the feet, which according to the testimony of John the Evangelist, precedes the Last Supper. This is then followed by the scene of the Last Supper in the nave. In the inner (east) side of the pilaster, there are two scenes, one above the other, connected with Judas: the Agreement with Jewish elders and taking the silver. Moving to southern wall, we find the Capture / imprisonment of Christ, where is presented Christ's conversation with the soldiers (which is according to the Gospel of John, and a true rarity), and the scene of the trial in Annas and Caiaphas. On the west wall is the trial by Pontius Pilate and the washing of his hands. The cycle of suffering continues on the north wall with the following scenes: Peter's triple denial, the Mockery of Christ and the Crucifixion. On the eastern side on the pilaster there are two scenes, again one above the other, and again associated with Judas: The Return of silver and the Hanging of Judas. The cycle then continues with the scenes of the Deposition from the Cross, the Lamentation and placing Christ in the tomb.





Between the second and the first zone is the frieze / strip, with **the presentation of saints from-the-waist-up**. In this zone, on the south wall, from east to west are presented: St Stephen the New with the icon of the Virgin Mary with Christ in her hands, St Cosmas and St Damian, St. Panteleimon, the Holy martyrs Mina, Victor and Vicentius, then St Tryphon and St Vlasij.

From-the-waist-up portraits of the bishops are positioned in the western part of the church in a large format; in the northern niche is St. Nicholas and on the southern, St Athanasius of Alexandria. In the lowest parts of the leaning arches, are shown smaller portraits (from-the-waist-up) of the Virgin and Christ. On the north side they are blessing St Nicholas, while on the south side, St Sava (1169-1236) and Simeon Nemanja are placed protectively over the founders, which undoubtedly reveal the protective role that these saints had in the eyes of believers. The choice of St Nicholas and St Athanasius, according to Gojko Subotic can be connected to the founders from the inscription above the door: „By the will of the Father, the help of the Son and the interaction of the Holy Spirit (in) this world and the divine temple of the Holy Lady Virgin Mary Prisnodeva, came Milica, and she found the church exposed, and covered the church, and organised the fresco-painting, repaired the vestibule and bought a vineyard. Remember them oh Lord, your servants Toshinko and his son Nicholas and the reigning bishop Athanasius in the year 1497”.

The Holy Angel of God, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin

On the western wall are St Peter Korishki, a hermit of the 13th century, St Christopher, St Zosima giving a holy communion to St Mary of Egypt (from 453 to 530 AD. - the only woman to whom is devoted one week of the Great Lent; she's an example of repentance), and St Julita. On the north wall are: St Kirik, St Nedela, three holy Jewish boys Mishael, Azariah, and Hananiah, St Jacob the Persian, and St Anthony the Great (the father of monasticism).

**First zone saints** - On the south wall, next to the ikonstasot is presented the Virgin Eleusa / the Merciful, the patron of the church, seated on a throne with the infant Christ in her hands (though His figure is damaged), while towards them approaches Archangel Gabriel with instruments of torture. She's signed as Eleusa (the merciful). The following frescoes then follow: St Mark Tracheski (270-400) - a hermit, on the front of the pilaster are illustrated St Demetrius, St Onuphrius Great - a hermit, and the angel of God, dressed in monastic schema, as it gives a written constitution and rules of the ascetic monastic life of St Pachomius (272-346). On the west wall, south of the door, are painted the frescoes of the donors Nikola and Milica.

The fact that Toshinko wasn't painted besides his wife and son can be explained only by the possibility that at the time he was probably already deceased. The remarks next to their faces are written in a form of a short prayer, in a way to express a different attitude towards the restoration of the temple. Next to Milica is written: „Receive, O Lord the pleading of your servant Milice”, and next to Nikola only: „Commemorate O Lord, your servant Nikoly”

Lord Jesus Christ, the holy Ubrus, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin







The figures of saints continue with the holy Constantine and Elena, north of the door. The north wall shows St Marina killing the demon, St Athanasius of Athos - the founder of the first Lavra (diocese) on Mount Athos in the year 960, and the hermit St Paul of Thebes. The front of the pilaster shows St George, then, St Barbara, St Paraskevi (Petka), and the Deisis where Christ is represented as King of kings.

**The western facade** - The fresco presented in the tympanum over the entrance, is the image of Mother Mary with Jesus in her lap, and the neighboring areas are surrounded by the images of prophets. Along the highest part of the south side can be read the name of Gideon. It seems that Mother Mary had the epithet Troeruchica (Three-hand). „If it's confirmed that the Mother Mary, truly presents the mentioned iconographic type - otherwise very rare - it is unusual for upon the wall next to the iconostasis to be painted Mother Mary signed as Eleusa/(the merciful), and above the entrance Troeruchica (Three-hand)". (Gojko Subotic).

In the top section, left and right of the window are two scenes from the life of Mother Mary: the Nativity and the Presentation in the Temple. On the shallow pilasters is shown the Annunciation, of which today only the figure of the Virgin on the south side remains. Below are some faded figures, probably holy warriors. On the left and right of the door are shown the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, while above the door are the both hands of God, one of them offering a scroll, and the other a Gospel, towards the apostles.

The frescoes in the church of the monastery Matka, as an artistic whole, belong to the Ohrid School of Fine Art in the 60's of the 15th century. Related traits - from pure technical solutions, to the iconographic schemes, to the certain stylistic qualities - establish a visible link with the old center. The existing differences, however, between Matka and the classical monuments of the Ohrid region, despite the the time difference they were painted in, are not irrelevant and the fact that the frescoes in the church of Mother Mary are located in an area of a completely different kind. In the art tradition from Ohrid (both architectural and fresco-art), we are not familiar with any compact cruciform church-type, that in the 15th century was fresco-painted, and whose plan would serve as a parallel to Matka. The protruding surfaces of the interior, relatively small and complicated, created entirely different conditions for fresco-painting, and even influenced the choice of compositions and their placement.

The choice of the individual characters and the entire cycles, reliably indicate their origin from Ohrid's art tradition. Even when they are completely formal, some individual features clearly speak of the work of particular centers: the images of saints presented in from-the-waist-up portraits, positioned in a row, in circular and rectangular fields, can be encountered regularly in the churches of Ohrid and its surroundings.

More than anything, the typological and stylistic peculiarities of the frescoes of Matka indicate to their origin from Ohrid, especially one rare detail in the style of painting, taken from the creative wealth of the older work from Ohrid. On most of the saints, the shadows on their faces (or the shadows themselves) are coloured red, and the highlighted parts are shaded green.

Gojko Subotic in his work says: „The presence of many monks and hermits, if compared to other information, confirms that even since then this temple belonged to the monastery. The village churches, even when they had a wider range of characters, in principle, did not contain a great number of monks-hermits.”

The meaning of the frescoes in Matka is precisely in the choice of the presented saints. There, are frescoed all the pioneers of monastic life\*1, and also the founders of the first monasteries in the region.





## Spiritual life



The most valuable asset of a country is its people. Every man and his soul that God created to be eternal, and the spirit of life he breathed into them, are priceless.

The value of the human life, even more, was given from the Lord Himself. Sent by the Father, he was incarnated in His Son, Jesus Christ, and he died on the Cross "for us to live." And he sent the Holy Spirit, the Lord, to be with us until the end of the ages.

Our Lord, the Holy Trinity, was revealed to the people. He first loved us. We saw the righteousness of God, and he showed us how to live. And how did he do it? By example, and by words, and support in the Holy Spirit. For our Lord Jesus Christ showed us and said: „I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Our life is in Christ. This is its only sense - „Truly, truly I say: who believes in me has an eternal life" (John 6, 47).

The real wealth of Matka are its inhabitants - monks, hermits, and unknown prayermen who pray for us before God.

It is a small, but sacred mountain.

Unfortunately, living in hesychasm (hesychia \*2), away from the eyes of the world, closer to God, these residents of Matka left no information about their life in Christ.

The cave churches, the remnants of the hermit cells, and the monasteries, all bear silent witness to their lives in Matka. Only some monks whose names appear in the commemorations, and abbots, who signed receipts, unintentionally left evidence of themselves. Of all the hermits, from the whole sequence of hermit cells between the church of St. Andrew to St Nedela, only the name of Father Gelasij is known, written under a photograph from his cell. Moreover, of all these people, these monks of Matka, only one grave is known, that of monk Seraphim. He died either during, or soon after, the Second World War, brought down by a contagious disease that kept his resting place untouched.

Their names are important to God. Their life is the life of the early Christians and the monks throughout the centuries until today. About this life, Christ Himself taught, and it was preached by the first apostles, who taught about the hesychastic tradition. This Tradition stays unchanged. Each of the holy Fathers, wrote about it according to their style of expression, but all of them lived this way.

By writing about it, we write about the life of the monks of Matka. By writing about it, we only publish what the Holy Fathers wrote and the holy Councils have confirmed - this is a true confession of faith.







The monastic, ascetic-hesychastic, theological Tradition (Teaching) through the centuries has dealt with various theological challenges, but its thorough inspiration and its ultimate goal remained the same. Man, created in the image of God, as a person, as a Theocentric and Christological being, normally and naturally can live, primarily, in a free and loving communion with God and the God-man Jesus Christ. The God-man Christ, according to the Scripture and the holy Fathers, is the alpha and omega, He is the beginning, middle and end, or the purpose of man. Christ, as the reason and purpose, is the essence of human life, a route to the human salvation and its real achievement.

This godfocus does not alienate man from himself and from the environment, and does not deny the man his independence, or his achievement as a person. On the contrary, only the God-man Christ and the communion with Him in the grace of the Holy Spirit, makes man, man. Only the gracious community with Christ provides a true relationship of man with God, with himself, with his neighbors, and all creation. This is a description of man's natural life.

The whole tradition (teaching) of the Church and the Lord Himself, with the God-man Jesus Christ as a Head, and the Church as His Body (as a graceful union of all the saints in the Holy Spirit); the Holy Sacraments, and above all, the Holy Eucharist as a holy all-mystery, also, the holy virtues of the Church; the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament as a book of the church community; the holy Ecumenical councils; the sacred Canons and the works of the Holy Fathers; the sacred temples, as well as the frescoes and icons they contain etc - all of that means the Incarnation of the Son of God, and the consequences of that Incarnation, and it is given to us only with, and only for, one single reason: to spiritually and gracefully grow in the God-man Christ, to develop our personal relationship and personal community with Him, and to transform in free and loving people, reaching the height and age of the growth of Christ, while working to fulfill an ontological community among us in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - "As Thou, Father, in Me and I in thee, so they can be one in Us "(John 17, 21).

This specific way of life and struggle, this science and art of spiritual living, the aim of which is the human healing and perfection as a person, or deification, has been most faithfully perserved and passed on (both the theoretical and the practical) through history, in the Orthodox Church, primarily (almost exclusively) in her monasteries and monastic communities.

And, this religious teaching is transmitted personally, from person to person, from teacher to student, from spiritual father to spiritual child. Elder Sophronius says: „The spiritual fatherhood, as a gift of the Holy Spirit is a living heart of the Orthodox Church. It is a golden chain of the Tradition, which reminds us that Christianity is not religion from a book, but revelation of the mystery of the personality."

The Holy Fathers, monks, often emphasize the fact that the entire spiritual life of man takes place in perfect order and harmony. For them, the spiritual life is not something accidental, or chaotic; something that might happen either way, for in the spiritual life exists one recognizable, and perfect order, which can't be even slightly overlooked.





**The spiritual life** is the unspoken joy, a wager for the fulfilling of all our longing for love, freedom, personal relationships, knowledge and eternity. The spiritual life is the last hope, comfort and cure for the modern man - lost, empty, exhausted and frightened by repeated failures, the passions of sin, from sickness, from the demon that follows him all the way to his eventual death. Any accident results from unspiritual or misguided spiritual life. We all have the need of a spiritual life, i.e., spiritual asceticism and spiritual leadership.

To begin our spiritual life, we need to acknowledge that we are sick, to become aware that we have fallen and missed our target. Only the ones who discover they are sinful, will recognise how far from God they are, they can become frightened, they can feel a need, or a loving yearning for or towards God, and then take a step toward their own transformation.

To set a good start in the process of transformation or healing, the ascetic needs to learn how to be a proper ascetic in the spiritual life. The Holy Fathers say that the struggle should take place in cognition, that is, the spiritual development and transformation to be done knowingly. Repentance in cognition, obedience in cognition, prayer in cognition. To know what we strive towards, we should know where we are, and in which direction we move in every moment. This is possible only if we follow and rely on the counsel of our spiritual father.

**A spiritual father** is the bearer and witness to the power of the Holy Spirit. His mind is enlightened, his word carries power, and his presence is a testimony of Christ, which gently and irresistibly attracts. The word of the spiritual father touches the depths of the heart of his spiritual child and transforms it from inside. He brings the light of faith, brings love, and strength for the struggle, instills hope in the spiritual welfare and life itself. Spiritually, in his heart, he gives birth to and raises him, through a mutual personal relationship, a new, in Christ, man. The relationship spiritual father - spiritual child is a Holy Mystery of mutual perception and growing in Christ.





According to the Holy Fathers, there are three levels (stages) in the spiritual development of a person, which they name as, a purification of the heart from passions, the enlightenment of the mind, and the deification of the human person. Each stage of the spiritual development corresponds to a method of prayer: the first stage, verbal or mental prayer, the second stage, noetic prayer, and the third stage, the unceasing noetic prayer. At each of the stages appears appropriate grace, which they call: purification, illumination, and deification.

Consequently, each of these three stages take place in a specific, but different for each level, spiritual relationship of the spiritual child to the spiritual father. This relationship is dynamic: moving from one quality to another, changing and transforming. The relationship between the spiritual father and his spiritual child is one of the key elements in the spirituality of the Orthodox Tradition.

According to the Mount Athos monastic tradition, the relationship with the spiritual father, monk, should be wholehearted, in absolute obedience, particularly at the beginning when the spiritual child is at the first level; the degree of purification. The main illness of man lies in his mind, or more precisely, in his vanity, pride, and high opinion of himself. This is why, an essential requirement that is set to the one who comes to the monastery, is the practice of humility: to freely and willingly put their mind in obedience to another. To subdue their mind under the mind of their spiritual father.

**The prayer**, as a sacred virtue, especially the noetic prayer, has a special place in the building of the personal relationship with God, so that without it, this relationship could not be imagined. The prayer, in the simplest terms, is a dialogue that leads man into communion and unity with God.

God gave us the commandment to love God with all our heart, with our mind, with our soul. Is it possible to love Him without a prayer? The one who you love, you think about him, you talk about him, you want to be with him.\*1

The more man strives to be with God through such prayer struggle, the more God bestows this prayer dialogue onto him, so it becomes better, and more permanent. We know of several levels of quality in prayer and they are accurately recorded and passed on by the Fathers. What God ultimately gives the ascetic as a prayer - a very rare gift - is the unceasing noetic prayer, which despite the fact the ascetic is speaking, reading, thinking, eating, working, or sleeping, the prayer in his heart flows constantly.

Each ascetic, in his personal transformation in the Church, through the noetic prayer, experiences it in an assembly, as a struggle with all the saints and as the beginning of the transformation of the other people and the whole world. Every monk who says the **Jesus prayer** knows that it is prayer for the salvation of all people. Only in this spirit, can God receive this prayer. The teaching of the Jesus prayer only can be personally experienced, perceived and checked.







Transformed into an example, this kind of life has been passed onto us by Elder Ephraim Philotheou in the book „Hesychastic testimonials“, which contains the published teachings of his Elder, Joseph Hesychasts.

He begins, with his meeting with the Elder on Mount Athos:

“That evening, inside the church of the Holy Baptist, carved in a cave, I did prostrations for my obedience. There, inside the weak light, my soul recognized, in her special way, the bright face of my Elder.

I was the youngest in the council, according to my physical and spiritual age. But, Elder Joseph was one of the greatest spiritual guides of our time in Mount Athos. While I remained for twelve years with him, learning at his feet, for as long as he lived after my arrival. God dignified me to serve him until his last breath. He was a worthy man to be served in all manner, because of his many spiritual efforts and holy prayers, that he left for us as a highly valued spiritual heritage. I met him as a real God-fearing man. A remarkable spiritual leader. Skilful in the fight against the passions and demons. It was not possible for a man to come to him, regardless how possessed he was by his passions, not to be healed. It was enough only to fulfill his commandments in obedience.

...His attitude was: „step, and I follow you.“ And the word became a deed.

...the Elder constantly watched over us to live in silence with prayer.

He used to say:

“... the Spiritual state splits into three levels and accordingly to it acts the grace in man. The first is called purification, which cleanses the man, and leads to repentance. Each earnestness, a desire for spiritual life, is due to the purification-grace. Yours is nothing! She mysteriously interacts. This grace, when you go through your ascetic struggle it remains with you for several years. And if the man progresses through the noetic prayer, receives another grace, a very different one. The first, as mentioned, is called feeling-energy deep inside, and it is a purificaing, as the one who prays feels divine movement - energy inside. And the other is called illuminating. Whit it can be gained an enlighment of knowledge, a man is elevated to the contemplation with God; Nor illumination, nor fantasies, nor images, but the clarity of mind, purity of thoughts, to the depth of meaning . For this condition to appear, the one who prays needs to have silence, peace, and a grounded (not in delusion) guide. The third condition is the gift of grace through the Holy Spirit. The perfection of Grace is a great gift.



**To properly confess, we need to realize that - I am guilty of everything.**

Our mind and our heart and our body we defile with our words, deeds or thoughts, so now we lack courage (before God). We don't have a wedding attire. That's why we need to be cleansed. By confessing, crying, mental hurting and the biggest – by praying! For prayer cleans and perfects man! The bridal clothing that we sing about in the Passion Week: "Your wedding chamber my Savior I see decorated, and I have no clothes to enter in it", is the grace of God which is achieved only through pure prayer, accomplished with great struggle, great effort, and deep pain.

...The humility contains simple words that say: "I am a sinner" and the like. Humility is the truth! To ensure that you are nothing! God created the world no-of-thing! So we are that no(of)thing. Your roots, your existence starts from nothing, so your mother is the earth, and your Creator is God. - What do you have, that you have not received? If you've received again, why do you complain as if you haven't received?

A Great gift of God to man is to discern the truth. And that truth, God said, will free you from sin!

**About the obedience (not-identificating with your thoughts, desires and feelings)**

True, great is the secret of obedience. When our sweet Jesus first marked the path and became an example for us, we were bound to support Him. If only I could be, my child, among you. To struggle in my eager and true obedience. Because, I frankly confess, at full strength and full reason, that there is no other path to salvation, which is far from every delusion and every action of the enemy. So he who really wants to be saved, and quickly to find the sweet Jesus, is obliged to obey. He's obliged to watch over his Elder with such love as if he sees Christ.

So, my child, hold tight the weapons which you have received and fight fearlessly, aiming the arrows straight at the enemy. For, by not listening to your Elder, you sadden God. For God to show mercy to you, your agent is your Elder. If however, you grieve your Elder, who will beg God to show mercy on you? Try as much as possible, to lessen the burden on your Elder, so you too have ease, and patience in your troubles. Because through my personal experience, I discovered how much responsibility, weight, and suffering the Elder needs to go through, until he restores the dignity of the soul and to guide it into heaven, especially if the soul has a rigid nature.

For each undertaken soul, the Elder adds another heavy chain around his neck, so he requires a lot of prayers to lessen his weight. He needs to have a lot of love, real love, and the disobedience and the contradiction only increase the links on the chain.

From the lips of the novices needs to come godliness and grace, not vinegar and bitterness, strife and discord. Each rigid word that you will say in a moment of temptation, is driven by the cunning serpent, covering the soul of the Elder as poison, drying it as flowers hit by hail. He's unable even to pray for himself until the pain passes. When the spiritual children are obedient, then the Elder straightens up, he warmly prays, he becomes illumined, he speaks reasonably, he gives you timely advice, he receives added grace and becomes an inexhaustible spring, dispersing the grace received from God, to everyone.

Therefore, my child, if you want to progress quickly and without great effort, learn to give up all of your opinion(thoughts), so it doesn't transform itself into a will. Your ear should be always turned toward the mouth of your Elder, and whatever he says to you, receive it as from God's mouth, and do it without thinking. So you will always have peace!







...Whoever gives orders is responsible, so he is accountable for his orders. You on the other hand, will answer for your disobedience!

It is not obedience only to fulfill this or that commandment, as it is given to you, for within yourself you are contradicting it. Obedience is to subdue your reason, the way of thinking of your soul, in order to get rid of your old "self".

Obedience is to become a slave, in order to become free! Buy your freedom cheap! Release your self from the responsibility and rejoice!

**A continuous ascetical-hesychastic struggle is required.**

What you feel first is the grace of God that when it comes, spiritualizes the man. And everything seems beautiful and good. Then he loves everyone, he has compassion, tears and warmth in his soul. But when the grace pulls away, the body prevails and the spirit falls. You however, even then, do not lose thy zeal, but consistently say the prayer with power, effort, with much pain. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me! And again, and many times over, and consistently. See Christ through your thoughts and say "I thank the good Lord for the good He gave me and the evil I endure. Glory to Thee, my Lord, glory to Thee". And when you endure it, the Grace will come again, and the joy. But the temptation will come again too, and grief, and stress and tension. But, again fight and victory and give thanks! And it will be so, until you slowly get cleansed from the passions and become spiritual, and by maturing to reach dispassion. But fight! Do not look for good things to come on their own. On soft feathers you won't become a monk. The monk should be insulted, mocked, tempted to fall, to rise, to be a man. Not in the arms of his mother. Its unheard of anyone becoming a monk near his mother. As soon as you say "oh", you'll hear "eat, do not get sick". This effort requires deprivation. You won't find any good in a bath, and in good times. It requires much effort and struggle. Requires that day and night you call for Christ. Requires patience in all trials and sorrows. You need to drown the anger and the desire (or your own will).

"Broken and divided is the Lamb of God, which is broken and not disunited,, which is ever eaten and never consumed, but sanctified those that partake thereof. ... with the opulence of the Holy Spirit", Holy Liturgy, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin

"With the fear of God, faith and love, draw near", a call for the Holy Communion, church of the Assumption of the Virgin







... Don't you remember when I used to say to you in the beginning, "what you are saying now, I want you to say it in four years?". Find my first letters and you will see. This is an immutable law of God. After three, four, rarely after five years the grace of God will withdraw, for the one who had it previously to train him, and make him wiser, of course, if he wants.

So do not be pitiful!

The chalise is common. Read about St. Andrew the fool for Christ, to see what he said when Christ checked up on him. This applies to all of us, according to the level of our endurance.

Endure the yoke of thy Christ! Tightly close your mouth and say nothing! Encourage yourself by saying: "Why are you pitiful my soul, and why do you despair? No harm has happened! Christ left only briefly, but would be back! He slowed slightly wanting to teach you humility and patience. The saints have suffered so much, and you're not able to even slightly handle the economy of grace?". Tell this to your soul and do not despair because, to your tempters, your are offering joy, through them seeing you pitiful and depressed. When the grace comes, it will leave and return again, with that you will learn how to fight, but with joy say, "Try me, O Christ, tempt me like silver." Then you will grow deep roots like the trees, which as the wind blows, grow even deeper! God is my witness that in the great trials I found the greatest consolation! So, be encouraged and become stronger in the Lord enduring the ordeals, so that the grace will come again!

"I believe, O Lord, and I confess that Thou art truly the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who camest into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the first. I believe also that this is truly Thine own most pure Body, and that this is truly Thine own most precious Blood" **a prayer before the Holy Communion**  
**Holy Communion, Holy Liturgy, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin**





### **A true monk**

My Elder hadn't studied theology. He always used to give blessings with great depth. In one of his letters, wrote: "A true monk, when in obedience and hesychasm will transform his feelings, will calm his mind and purify his heart, then he will receive the grace and the light of knowledge and he will become light himself, enlighten mind; he becomes a source of theology, so even if three try to write, will not reach the river of grace which surges in wavelike manner, and pours the final peace over the passions in the whole body. The heart lights up with the divine love and calls: Keep, oh my Jesus, the waves of Your grace, because I'm melting like wax. Indeed he melts not being able to handle it. And the mind is captured in ecstasy, and merging can happen. The man transforms and becomes one with God, no longer recognising himself and not separating himself, like hot iron in the fire.

From his words it can be seen that the Divine gleam, that the uncreated light glows over, was not an unknown and inaccessible area, but he could recognise them as the place and manner of the presence of God, as an ineffable mystery, as the brightest light. This is because my Elder knew how to pray. Many times when he would appear after many hours of noetic prayer, his face seemed changed and bright. It was not surprising at all, that the light in which his soul was constantly rinsing, occasionally would light up his body. Indeed, the halo of saints and is nothing but the reflection of the uncreated light of grace, which glows and rises deep within them.

**Holy Communion, Holy Liturgy, in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin  
Sermon, a priest at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin**





In the period from 1946 to 1959, a brotherhood of exceptional monks was created around Elder Joseph the Hesychast. After the death of the Elder, and with his blessing, the brotherhood separated. Each of the brothers went to a separate cell, and over time, each of them created their own fraternity.

The Elder Joseph the Hesychast spoke prophetically of his spiritual sons and brothers: "These monks will restore monasticism on Mount Athos." And so it happened! First was Fr. Ephraim summoned, along with his fraternity, to restore and arrange the monastery Philotheus. Not long afterward, from that fraternity were three more Athos monasteries were restored.

Later, Elder Ephraim, by God's providence travelled to America, where he created seventeen monasteries. After the departure of Elder Ephraim and his fraternity in Philotheus, Elder Haralambos renewd and regulated the monastery Dionysius. Elder Joseph, although the oldest, was the last one to cross with his fraternity in the New skete in Vatopedi, after the call of the Vatopedi brotherhood.

Today these monasteries have numerous monks. The brotherhoods live an intense spiritual life, beautiful worship, frequent all night vigils, unceasing prayer and frequent partaking in the Holy communion.

The Elder Joseph the Hesychast died on the day of the commemoration of the Assumption of the Virgin in 1956. His disciples revived and continued to spread the hesychastic teaching. After his holy prayers, Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us.

The reconstruction and revival of the monastic life today is, as always, based on the renewed practice of the eucharistic and hesychastic life in the parishes, and the monasteries (it is the fruit of repentance of the people).

The Tradition about the Jesus prayer in Macedonia and in Matka is an inseparable part, never ceasing, from the apostolic times until today. And although we know that the flame of the Jesus Prayer constantly burned in the hearts of the prayerful hesychasts, in the heart of the living Tradition of the Holy Fathers, in certain moments it was intensely burning.

We will follow exactly the continuity of the ascetical-hesychastic Tradition in Matka and in Macedonia, through these figures, these lights, that were willing to deny themselves and, sacrifice themselves for God and their fellow men. They testified and preached about Christ in this territory, they were burning in order to glow even today.





The beginning of the above-described monastic life, grounded in prayer, leads us to the Holy Virgin.

In one of his sermons, St. Gregory Palamas says about her, „Investigating about what is needed the most for the prayerman to be in sinaxis with God, through which path does prayer come, the Virgin Mary finds the Holy Hesychasm - 'silence of the mind', away from the world, forgetting everything earthly and craving for divine revelations, a choice of the 'better part'. Reveals that if the mind is not distracted by the earthly things, could be given into better and higher actions, which means to turn to himself: the only action by which he could unite with God.

...Those who also do this, those who, with Holy Hesychasm have purified their hearts and in an ineffable way have approached the One who is above every feeling and thought, and within themselves as in a mirror they can see God. Hesychasm is a quick and direct guide, to successful unifying with God, especially for those who in everything and completely are practicing it. And what can we say about Mother Mary, who from childhood was in hesychia? Supernatural playful hesychasam, from the youngest years, She, precisely because of this - not knowing about man - She got the grace to give birth to the God-man Christ. "

Mother Mary with her example and experience, in itself - gave forever, to the whole venerable monastic habit, an image of a humble and careful life of the inner man, so the monks could, by renounce the world, look up to her, in the zeal of their monastic struggles and the noetic prayer, each according to his powers, but after the prayers of the Holy Virgin, so they can follow Her.

Mother Mary, the fruit of her playful life she showed even at the very Annunciation when She calmly answered St. Archangel Gabriel, after the news that She would conceive and give birth to the Son of the Almighty God: "Let it be according to thy word." Simply obeyed and said it to be God's will.

In a section of her biography, it is said that, wanting to visit the resurrected Lazarus - a Bishop of Cyprus, by God's providence, she arrived on Mount Athos and blessed it.

The Holy Virgin - Greater than the Heavens, fresco, from the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)







Virgin Mary was sailing together with St John the Theologian to Cyprus, to visit Lazarus. When the ship with which she sailed, from the storm was pushed out of the course, to Macedonia, to then, pagan Athos, they were forced to reach the port of Klement, close to today's monastery Iverion, and Mother Mary went ashore. The pilgrims of Apollos, who were there at the time, came out to greet her and Mother Mary, after their plea, began to speak about the Lord Jesus. Moreover, to all of them God opened their hearts, and they immediately wanted to be baptized and to go where she would order them. The Apostles who traveled with Her, christened them, and told them to stay in that place, and She left one of her entourage to confirm them in the faith. Before She left, She blessed them and uttered: „This place shall be my favorite garden which was given to me from my God and Son. May the grace of God, be on it and all who dwell here with piety, and who keep the commandments of my Son and pray to Him. His mercy will be with them till the end of the world. For I will be a proxy for this place, and their warm mediator before the Son and my God.“

From that moment the mountain is dedicated to the Mother of God, as her garden, upon which no other woman is permitted to set foot.

This was her last trip before the Assumption, when after her wish, for the last time she saw and blessed the Apostles which in a miraculous way, God had gathered in the home of St. Apostle John, and among them was St. Apostle Paul.

Detail from the fresco “Assumption of the Virgin”, from the Church of St. Andrew (Andrej)  
St. Apostle John the Theologian, fresco, from the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)





“The youngest of the apostles” - as he calmly called himself, St. Paul, was the first to preach in Macedonia.

His every sermon would end with establishing of a Church, consecration of bishops and priests, with the creation of Christian community. Besides being a preacher, he was a teacher, pastor and father. The Epistles of St. Paul testify to his continual and strong links with the churches he founded. The divisions among the Christians concerned him, so he would advise them and offer guidance, resolve the problematic issues, sometimes even threaten them, warn them, instruct them. The Apostle Paul to full extent exercised, and lived the ideal of being a pastor, that he had formulated: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” His every written word shows how strongly he felt responsibility for all the souls of the Church, each one of them: „...of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” (Gal 4:19)

Father Alexander Schmemmann speaks of him: „All his teachings, words, ultimately, are boiled down to one, primary and tirelessly repeating the claim and call: „In Christ”. In these two words is contained the whole meaning of Christianity, as a sketch of the Christian life. The Faith and the Baptism have united us with Christ and now we live in Him, for Him we live His life.” The full extent of that life is what Paul says, „I no longer live, but Christ (is) who dwells in me.” The Kingdom of God the Apostle reveals it to us in the Epistles, the life of Christ Himself, that has been granted to the people, a Life which brings them together through the Holy Spirit inseparably interconnected in unity and in unity with God. „

The great apostle ended His worship with a testimony, not only of words but of blood. He suffered as a martyr in Rome, just like the Apostle Peter.

What kind of period starts then? After them remain only a few groups of people, scattered around the world, that nobody knows, and, in the beginning, almost nobody notices. Yet not long after, began the persecution of the Church. For as Christ suffered, following his example, so too did thousands of saints, from children to older people. St Apostle Paul addresses the Christians through his epistles „they think of us as cheats, but we are righteous; for strangers, but we are well known; they guard us as we are dying, and here - we live; they punish us, but they can not killed us; nor sadden us, as we are always happy; they consider us as poor, but many we made wealthy; like we have nothing , but everything we have. “



St. Apostle Paul, fresco, from the church of St. Andrew (Andrej)





In this period, the holy martyr and Antioch Bishop Erasmus, spent the last years of his life in a cave near Hermelia. He had the gift of miracles, and preached the gospel in several places throughout Macedonia. In Ohrid he resurrected the son of a man named Anastas and baptized him. He was tortured by the Emperor Maximilian, who was then in Illyria, and was imprisoned. He was freed from the prison by the holy Archangel Michael, as once was done with the Apostle Paul. He travelled to Campania, but again returned to Hermelia. He died in 303 AD. The cave where the church of the holy martyr Erasmus, can still be found not far from Ohrid.

After 10 years of his repose the Christianity becomes a recognised religion and the persecutions stop in the Byzantine kingdom.

It is considered that the Christianisation and the emergence of monasticism in Macedonia, as part of the Byzantine state, occurred simultaneously with their spread throughout the Byzantine Empire. Already in the 4th century, the Christianisation in Macedonia was complete, and the emergence of monasticism began in the 5th century. The headquarters of Justiniana Prima, established in the 5th century as an autocephalous church, was near the village Taor, which is thought to be the origin of St. Tsar Justinian.

It can't be confirmed with certainty, when the caves around Matka began to be populated by the first monks and hermits, but due to its inaccessibility, it became their refuge quite early. With its three famous basilicas of this early Christian period, and the remnants of building materials from constructions (one in the area where in the Middle Ages many hermit cells were built), of the late-antique period, Matka, near the headquarters of the Archdiocese, was certainly a Christian center as early as the 4th century.

After the attacks of the Slavs, and their settlement in this region, the continuity of Justiniana Prima can't be followed, but later, its dioceses completely belong to the Ohrid Archdiocese.

Generally, the emergence of the monasticism in Macedonia, (whose part is Matka as well), can be traced from the time of St Cyril and Methodius, and especially their holy disciples, St Clement and Naum, who launched the Christianisation of the Slavs. \*3





St Cyril and Methodius were born in Solun (Thessaloniki). St Methodius, during the time of the iconoclastic heresy, went to the Olympus monastery, where he became a monk and even an abbot. St Cyril was especially gifted (even as a child he loved the written work of St. Gregory the Theologian. He would read them constantly, and knew many of them by heart), and so was sent to the well known school in Carigrad (Constantinople). He became a monk, and then returned. As a monk, he taught philosophy, and he was also a librarian. As an experienced teacher and a Christian he was sent to preach, together with Methodius, to the Khazars and Slavs.

The life of the holy Methodius and Cyril, is best described by St Clement, who compares them to Moses and Aaron:

"And these two, blessed and God-fearing men, didn't show themselves as lesser than them (from Moses and Aaron). Fed with the same Spirit of God from the above, and once they were deemed worthy of a doubled grace, they guided the people from the dark demonic sea, they flooded the pharaoh (the Satan) and destroyed all of his power. Once they were armed with faith and with the power of the Cross, they guided the people not in the desert, but they guided them into the knowledge of God. They did not draw water from a stone like Moses and Aaron, but they quenched the thirst of the thirsty with the faith in the Word of God. They did not draw water of a cold stone, but with the blood and water that flowed from the all-pure ribs of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the faithful they passed the eternal food and endless life of salvation; they fed (the people of God) not with bread of the angels, but for the forgiveness of sins they gave them the very body of our Lord Jesus Christ... they were not preachers of the slaughtered victim, but they became servants and ministers of the bloodless, peaceful spiritual service. After they thoughtfully took their cross upon their shoulders, they went around the whole world... and, like with sunrays, they enlightened the whole world with the Light of the knowledge of God."

St Cyril reposed in Rome on February 14, 869AD, after receiving the great schema. St Methodius, together with his disciples continued to preach to the Slavs, in the Slavic language. Even though he was an archbishop of Pannonia, he spent three years in prison, but after he was released, and until the end of his life, he was forced to defend himself from the constant accusations of the German clergy. He died in the year 885AD.

After the death of St Methodius, his disciples, as well as the fragile Slavic Church, were exposed to persecutions. These new-apostles, many of whom felt the shackles and the iron doors of prisons in Germany, nonetheless continued their mission with the Southern Slavs.







St Clement and St Naum, were sent by the Bulgarian Tsar Michael (in monasticism he was called Boris) to preach in Macedonia. St Clement was tireless in his teachings and his writing, and was appointed as a teacher in the village Kutmichevica, and also received a place to rest in Ohrid. In 893AD. St Clement was ordained in a Clergy and Laity Assembly, as the Dremvic/Great bishop, and in his place (in Kutmichevica) was appointed St Naum. The priests and the other clergy were trained and educated in the Slavic language, and they then introduced and spread the Slavic language in the all worship services. In each parish were working 300 selected disciples (teachers, pastors, clergy), their total number being 3500. In the Ohrid literary center, St Naum worked for seven years. This school had the charter of a university institution with complete rights, and it is considered to be the the first university in Europe. All of this effort has born ample fruit since that time.

In the 900AD, on the shore of the Ohrid Lake, St Naum founded a monastery dedicated to the Holy Archangel Michael and to all holy and heavenly bodiless forces, which was consecrated by Bishop Clement, who, on the opposite shore, founded a monastery dedicated to St Panteleimon. By withdrawing into the monastery, St Naum built the foundation of the monasticism in Macedonia, and around him gathered a multitude of monks from the whole Balkan region. He was a wise teacher, God-fearing leader of the monks, strict ascetic, a miraculous prayer-man and a spiritual father. He performed many miracles during his lifetime and even after his death. From his miraculous relics even today occur numerous miracles, healing of deadly diseases, especially madness and demon possessed people. The blessed Naum died of old age, and gave his soul to God on the 23rd of December, 910AD. Six years later, St Clement also died. In the late 10th century, the Saints Clement and Naum became canonised saints. Besides the translations, there are many preserved works of St. Clement (and several of St Naum), including some of sermons spoken during his liturgies, in which, with simplicity, he speaks of the basic dogmas of faith - the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the Birth, the Resurrection of Christ, the Baptism, the Communion, the Ascension. \*4

With great love, he led His God entrusted flock to Christ. This is a small excerpt from his general teaching for the Holy Week:

"Blessed are the humble in spirit ... Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted ... who does not weep for their sins, they unsuccessfully will cry, inconsolably in eternal torment; ... Blessed are the meek, Blessed are the merciful. ..

Annunciation. Iconography by the sisterhood of Matka

And we, brethren, need to ensure that we are worthy of such bliss, making ourself God's church (temple) of the Holy Spirit, not to be vengeful one to another, blooming in piety; glowing with love for the poor, with brotherly love ornamenting yourself, burning in the spirit, serving God. With purity and fear to approach him, so we are worthy before Him, as He Himself said, 'will dwell in them, and be their God, and they will be my people.' And how will this be? The one in whom God will dwell, through the holy communion with His life-bearing body, is it not purer than gold? Is it not renewed each day with purity, like an eagle, and flies up with the mind? By understanding this, my brothers, lets renew with purity and goodness and our life to be worthy. By our holiness to be called Christians, not only by name. But give in to a spiritual struggle, to compete with one another in virtue, so our Lord can say to us: "Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom, prepared for you since the creation of the world". "

St Clement, who even during his lifetime, was revered as a saint, died on 27th of June, 916AD. His relics were laid in his monastery of St. Panteleimon.

(Today, in the little church in Matka, although a rarity in Skopje, in the altar area, facing each other, we can see St. Cyril the Philosopher and St. Clement.)

Shallow door carving, from the church of the Assumption of the Virgin - Matka







In this period begins the earliest history of the active monastic life in the monasteries on Mount Athos. During this time, monks of Macedonian origin have left their mark. Namely, as reported on the ceiling fresco-painted decree, the monks from Ohrid, the brothers - Moses, Aaron, and Jovan from the Selima family - In the 10th century, constructed the monastery Zograf on Mount Athos.

From the 10th century, the Holy Mountain - Athos became a major centre of Byzantine monasticism, and it remains so until this day. The settlement of Athos with anchorites (hermits), is considered to have started very early, sometime in the 4th century. The founder of the first monastery Lavra in 960, was St. Athanasius of Athos.

Athos got the priority to conserve and to multiply the Eastern spiritual heritage, of the hesychastic Tradition. The task upon itself, during the diminishing and the eventual collapse of the Byzantine Empire, received the Slavic people.

St. Gregory of Sinai (1255-1346) became involved in this purpose, as an executive. In his writings, he covered the entire hesychastic Tradition to that point. Coming from Asia Minor, St Gregory received monastic tonsure at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, where the memory of St. John of the Ladder was still alive. Yet, his "keeping of the mind" and the noetic prayer was not learned at Mt Sinai, but from a monk named Arsenios, in Crete, where he later lived. From Crete, he journeyed to Mount Athos, where he became the spiritual father of the hermitage called Magula, and was surrounded by many disciples. Around the year 1325, the monks who lived outside the protective walls of the great monasteries, became victims of the constant Turkish attacks. Therefore, St Gregory was forced to leave Athos and find refuge in Parorija, in the Thrace mountains near the Byzantium-Bulgarian border, where he continued to teach and spread the doctrine of the Jesus' prayer in the Slavic countries.

Kneading of prosphora, at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin





One of the main reasons why many of the holy disciples of Gregory remain nameless (unknown) in the Church and folk Tradition, is the conscious hiding of their own struggle and origin. By practicing the "wise action", i.e. "the continuous prayerful hesychasm" and the strict restraint, guarding their heartfelt commitment to God, they claimed that their home town is Upper Jerusalem that is above (in heaven), and their brothers and cousins - the celestial armies. As far as their homeland, they considered themselves to be edemit's (residents of the garden of Eden) - paradise people, created in the image and likeness of God. Working along the Aegean, through the Balkans and Romania, all the way to the borders of Moldova and Ukraine, borders which include Matka. Many of them, hermits and Sinai's in the 14th and 15th centuries spiritually prepared the Balkans to bear the Islamic invasion from Asian Minor, and slavery lasting for many centuries.

In the writings and doctrines about the prayer from St Gregory of Sinai and the multitude of his disciples and spiritual successors, we come across chapters in which is united the whole secret of the Divine Name and the spirituality of the noetic prayer with the mystical life in Jesus Christ.



The systematic exposure to the hesychastic teachings of St. Gregory of Sinai, was preparing the grounds for the theological synthesis of another teacher of the Church - St. Gregory Palamas.

About him the very reverend Alexander Schmemmann writes: „St. Gregory Palamas, an Athonite monk and later an archbishop of Solun Thessalonica (1296-1359) is undoubtedly the greatest Byzantine theologian. He essentially, was just guiding it, and with his work he restored the primeval, main line of the orthodox understanding of Christianity. It consisted in understanding that God is indeed present in the world, that we are familiar with him and that we are united not by abstract thinking, nor with "philosophical", but ontological. Here - in the defence of the real union with God - is hidden the meaning of the Palamas teaching about 'God's energies' with which the world is filled, and, thanks to the world (man), not being in communion with God, who is essentially неосознатлив, is united with Him and can be in communion in Him, to carry Him within himself, and indefinitely to grow in his familiarity with Him. In the experience of hesychasm, with the theology of St. Gregory Palamas resurrects the whole Tradition of the Fathers of the Church. In the God-man icon of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Christianity is revealed as a viewing of the deified fullness of man, and through it the „Holy communion with God" of everything in the world. "

After the fall of Constantinople, the hesychastic tradition of the East did not die. Rather, the simplicity and the essence of his teachings admired by the monks and laymen, who during the four century long Ottoman(Muslim) rule, deprived of schools, books, and church organisation, zealously guarded the treasure of the Orthodox spirituality. Thus, Mount Athos remains a major centre of the hesychastic monastic tradition.





Matka, during this period of the activity of the Sinai's disciples, at the time of St Gregory of Sinai and St Gregory Palamas, can be characterised by one word - (re)construction.

Many monasteries, including the monastery Dormition of the Virgin-Matka (1337), St Nicholas-Shishevski (second half of the 14th century), and St Andrew (1388/89) are restored. The Church of St Nedela also dates from this time.

The influence of Mount Athos can be seen in the rebuilding of the monastery churches, all built along the lines of Athos.

At that time, in the monastery of Saint Andrew, lived a monastic brotherhood whose abbot was Kalest Cyril, and the Metropolitan John and his brother monk Macarius also stayed there during the rebuilding. A work of such depth and beauty of the fresco-painted saints, the harmony of the compositions, and the unity of motion and colour, can only have been created by an artist enlightened by God. And this work today, serves as an example for the numerous iconographers and fresco painters, who come from everywhere to view them in the monastery of St. Andrew.

The monastery brotherhood, that lived at St Nicholas-Shishevski, left a book, Minei, dated around the 14th century featuring a record, that testifies of the literary activity of this monastery: „This monastery book from St Nicolas I'm writing it in the village Shishevo“.

To live, on the other hand, in the hermitage cells and caves, is a blessing only for the ascetics who progressed to the level of illumination. There was a wealth of such people in Matka during this period, and since then has remained the toponym for the area Machin Dol; in the account about the name of the monastery Matka - mother (ID monastery) of the hermits and monastic skits; and most importantly, the way of life of these ascetics has given the name Little Holy Mountain (ref. Mt. Athos).

We have placed an emphasis on the reconstruction, because it is significant that it occurred along with the rebuilding of the hesychastic tradition throughout the Balkans, but the monasteries in Matka, together with the life of the monks, are mentioned in earlier centuries.

The monastery of St. John Chrysostom in the village Kozarevo, is the only one mentioned as early as the 11th century. Its earliest reference is in a royal charter, as being part of the metoh (lands) of the great monastery of St George in the Skopje area. This certainly doesn't mean that the other monasteries didn't exist.

St. Nicholas-Shishevski, was built in the 12-13 century, but even there can be found the remnants of materials from an older building.

The monastery of Saint Andrew was reestablished in the late 14th century. In the founder's entry is written that the monk Kalest Cyril, with the brotherhood, was helping since the beginning of the rebuilding of the church (which confirms that it previously existed).





Although from this period, through the centuries that follow, there are more written records, testifying to the life in the monasteries of Matka, but such is not the case with the monastery of St. Andrew.

The only records are from the decree from the rebuilding, which was mentioned earlier, and in a record by Archbishop Paisios of 24th February 1642, who states that, then „in these violent times,” the abbot was Kalest Avenir, in St Jacob.

And exactly there, are the hermit cells, the cave chapels... their residents, the monks-prayermen, who, in this inaccessible, serene area did not require human glory, but instead, sought God, who is the only One who can wed them with unfading glory in His kingdom.

With the construction of the dam, the new monastic quarters (today a hotel), and the path from 1939, the monastery became easily accessible, but with it, it brought unfavourable conditions for the ascetic life, for which the soul of the monk-hermit yearns. Since then is the only photograph of the hermit-cell of the monk Gelasij, which was located near the Church.

During the Second World War, the last monk of the monastery was slain, his body found leaning against a tree near the church. His name is not remembered even by the oldest residents of Matka.

According to records from the church Official paper, in 1928, to the monastery of St. Andrew was sent a monk called Mokij, a Russian from Valaam, who previously was in the Lesok monastery.

These are the only details we have found about the monastic life in this monastery and the hermits around it. This, however, is the first book written about the life of the monks in Matka, and as such, is hopefully, only a starting point for further research.

Obedience in the yard, at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin.



Fitting of the vigil lamps, at the chapel of St. Naum of Ohrid and St. Gregory Palamas, at the monastery of Matka





A characteristic of the monastery of St. Nicholas-Shishevski, is the literary and educational activity, which were continuously nourished by the resident monastic brotherhoods. Of the ten loads of Slavic manuscripts that Jordan Hadzi-Konstantinov - Dzinot, found during his visit in 1854, today none are left. However, some books remain, written in the monastery, and now owned by libraries and other monasteries in Skopje and beyond. The entries in the books that belonged to the monastery, or were written here during the literary work, are almost completely published by Professor Victor Lilčić, who translated them from Church Slavonic to the modern Macedonian language. They are the basis for the description of the life of the monastic brotherhoods, that are shown below.

From the 14th century, the monastery in Shishevo had a well developed literary workshop. Here, were written mainly liturgical books. During this time the monastery church was restored. King Marko, who left a strong imprint on this area, used to aid the brotherhood of the monastery. He is mentioned in a later monument from 1816 (probably written on a base of older transcript) as a "founder of the sacred brotherhood of this Saint Nicholas."

With the fall of King Marko, of Macedonia to the Ottomans, the life of the monks became difficult, but the living hesychastic Tradition among the monks throughout the monasteries and the hesychasts, yielded fruit in the centuries that followed.

The monastery had survived and continued to deal with literary work in the 15th century. One Pentecostarion is saved, that was written here by two monks, the later writer being Eustrati, who wrote his part in 1488, or more precisely, he wrote that the book was then finished. In the 16th century, the Abbot Jacob was particularly active, „during the time of the Metropolitan of Skopje, Simeon (1630) and the patriarch Paisius and bishop Nicanor (1645)". In his time the church was completely re-fresco-painted. In the founders inscription, written under the lunette with the representation of the patron saint of the church St Nicholas, is written: „it was fresco-painted during the time of the hallow Metropolitan of Skopje, Mr. Simeon, and the Abbot Jakob and the hieromonk Jovan, and the founder Mr. Kalogini Kozhuhar, it was started on 15 April and finished on 25 June 1630." At Abbot Jacob's request, a carved wooden cross, for the altar screen was made by the Hieromonk Onuphrius. The Abbot also constantly increased the monastery library, by buying new books.

The monastery was continuously active until the visit of the Patriarch Arsenios of Pekjsk in May 1st, 1733, who, in the records he wrote during his visit, even himself mentions the miseries and terrors, which were very violent, „especially on the pastors of the flock of Jesus and us."







The years that followed left the monastery without monks, and there was no one to look after it. On Matka, quite a few villages and churches were burnt down, and the number of Orthodox residents decreased. In 1801 the monastery was visited by the hieromonk Cyril Pejcinovic, who left his earliest known record on the local Pentecostarion, which was brought to the monastery Matka in the same year.

The monastic life in the monastery in Shishevo was again renewed in July 1816, with the arrival of the hieromonk Samuel, two novices, and the nun Paraskeva. They found the monastery in poor condition. There were only two cells and the church. Even the path to it was completely overgrown and impassable. It was at this time when the monument in Shishevo monastery was written on a triptych made of wooden boards, that we mentioned earlier. The rich monastery library, however, was still there. After the resettlement of the monastery and monastic tonsure of one of the novices, the literary activity was renewed, and, as in the other monasteries, developed enlightenment (educational) work - here were received and educated gifted students (mainly priests or monks).

In 1847, the Abbot was the hieromonk Benjamin. During this period we see more visits by pilgrims and monks from monasteries across Macedonia. The monastery was small spiritual centre.

After the attacks of the Monastery Matka, the abbot Savatij withdrew to St. Nicholas-Shishevski.

In 1897 the monastic quarters were burnt, and the monastery remained without monks for a short time. The iconostasis, together with the royal gates was transferred to the church of St. Athanasius in the village Shishevo. The last abbot Benjamin, crossed to the monastery in the village Pobožje, in Skopje - Black Forest (Montenegro). According to M.V. Veselinovic, until then „in the monastery always lived 7-8 monks.“

In the years that followed, there was at most, one monk, or a host-keeper of the monastery. After the World War II, the church of St Nicholas-Shishevski became metoh(land) to the Monastery Dormition of the Virgin-Matka. In 1936, the monk Sergius Jokich died there, and was buried at the monastery gate.

The monastery in Shishevo had one monk, who, after the Second World War, cultivated food for the brotherhood of the monastery of Matka as well. The last monk was Seraphim, who was from an Albanian family, Kamberi, in Shishevo. He is still in the living memories of the local residents who helped him with food and clothing. He was always happy and grateful (he used to give thanks for everything).

Obedience in the garden (yard) at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin







Handcraft, painting on ceramics, at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin

In the spirit of the monument in Shishevo monastery, for a prayerful „memory of the before-presented in front of God, spiritual fathers and brothers“, follow the names of those monks that we know of:

Monk - Eustathius

Monk - David  
 Hieromonk - Josif  
 Monk - Jovan  
 Deacon - Grigorij  
 Monk - Ananij  
 Monk - Joachim  
 Hieromonk - David  
 Hieromonk - Gabriel  
 Monk - Stephen  
 Hieromonk - Jeremiah  
 Monk - Sophronij  
 Nun - Theodora  
 Nun - Marija  
 Nun - Evtimia  
 Nun - Athanasia

Hieromonk - Benjamin  
 Hieromonk - Ananij  
 Monk - Theodore  
 Hieromonk - Nicodim  
 Hieromonk - Abbot - Jacob  
 Hieromonk - John  
 Hieromonk - Samuel  
 Nun - Paraskeva  
 Monk Sergei  
 Monk Daniel  
 Hieromonk - Abbot - Benjamin  
 Monk - Dionysij,  
 Hieromonk - Sergej Jokich,  
 Monk – Seraphim ...

Monk Seraphim, the monastery St. Nicholas-Shishevski  
 The monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin, 1926







The only monastery of Matka which has continuous monastic life, with only minor interruptions of a few years (mainly in the 20th century), is the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin-Matka.

Reestablished in 1337 when in Skopje, the monastery of St. George Skoropostizhnik-Gorg is the most powerful monastic centre, after Mount Athos, in Macedonia (Dr. John Belchovski).

Marija, its first known inhabitant, humbly begs for the prayers of visitors: "Why wonder, oh people, who see me in the grave? Know that, also you will be, but the memories with you are dear, mention me as well the servant of God Marija, but called Velislava. Presented in front of God on 28th September, 1372". This stands in a record, in church-slavonic, on the headstone, to the right of the altar.

Selishev, states that also in the church of Mother of God Troeruchica (the three-hand), which back then was located in Skopje, at the entrance there was a tombstone on which was written: „+ was presented (passed away) the servant of God the nun Evgenia, in the summer of 1536." This leads to the opinion that Marija is actually buried before the altar, which can only be confirmed by archaeological research/excavation.

As mentioned, it is considered that even before 1497 when the frescoes were completed and the church restored, the same church was in a monastery, or more precisely it belonged to a monastery where monks lived. This is testified by the selection of frescoes that number all of the founders of monasticism, the Egyptian and Macedonian, as well as the numerous frescoes of hermits: St Anthony the Great, St. Onuphrius the Great, St Mark of Trache, St Paul of Thebes, St. Zosima, St Mary of Egypt, Saint Peter of Korish ...

Natural apple cider vinegar, hand painted glass bottle, from the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin







For the needs of the monks, the founder Milica, gave them a vineyard (the present location of the new cemetery at Dolna (Lower) Matka, near the monastery).

The Bishop of Skopje, Arsenij, during whose time the Church, Assumption of the Virgin was fresco-painted, and according to records in the Codex that was written in the monastery, there was a monk from Skopje. Skopje, was then under the Ottoman rule, and the Skopje Eparchy fell within the Ohrid Archdiocese. The respect toward St Clement and St Cyril the Philosopher, frescoed in the altar sanctuary, indicate that the monks cherished them, then, as well as today. In the monastery, a literary activity was developed in their honour. Owned by the monastery, is a handwritten manuscript, Minei (a biography of the saints commemorated in that month) for April, dating from the 15th or 16th century. It is written on paper, and contains 113 pages. A manuscript of the monastery Matka, was also one Oktoih (a book of liturgical hymns for singing in eight parts), in which there is an inscription from 1687. In the inscription is mentioned that the book, at the time of Bishop Estimij and the spiritual father Antonij, was given as a gift to the monastery of St. Mother Mary, near the river Treska, by the brothers Andrej and Stojan Kovach.

From this monastery came the Codex which is located in the National Library in Sofia. The manuscript for the main part was created in the sixties or the seventies of the 16th century, and in later periods was constantly added to. The Codex contains entries from the 17th and 18th centuries, in which the writing style, language, and content differ from the earlier entries.

True, the Codex carries later dates of entry (1564-1580), but, certainly it is a transcript of an older original which was later added to. Three writers worked on the initial, basic section: Hieromonk Eustrati, monk Nicodem, and Azariah. This, we learn from the records of the manuscript that were left by them, about their work.

The Codex of the Monastery Matka is a small manuscript, containing 49 +1 pages. The first sheet provides an introduction, which is characteristic of most Codices, and in which is stated that the church was built with labor and love. The liturgical vessels are mentioned (gold and silver), the icons (decorated with silver and gold), and the books (with and without metallic bonds). And everything that is stated in the Hrisovul and the Codex of the holy founders (a document, we are not familiar with).

On the inside of the cover, there are a few entries. In one of them is mentioned the Archbishop of Ohrid, Prohor. There is only one Archbishop named Prohor among the Ohrid archbishops, who were on the throne from 1528 to 1550 (seven years before the re-activation of the Peck-Patriarchate, by the decree of Sultan Mehmed Selimovich and subjugation of the Skopje Eparchy within it).

In the dedication section of the Codex, is listed the Reverend Metropolitans - Herman, Matthew, Jovan, and Athanasij „Metropolitan of Skopje.“ Although this is not stated, presumably Athanasij and the others are all Metropolitans of Skopje. The Metropolitan of Skopje, Matthew, is also mentioned in an inscription of a Christening Vessel, in Markov monastery in 1394, who died in 1428.

Besides the Metropolitans, are listed the names of the hieromonks; 11 hieromonks of the monastery Matka, as well as some from Ohrid and Marko monasteries, monks, nuns, priests, and then the names of many believers.





The Codex is actually a dedication (a commemoration list), from where these names are mentioned during church services - for good health of the living, and for a place in the kingdom of heaven for the dead. Before the names the dedication section, is written that it should be read during the liturgical service, every Saturday. This confirms that there were regular worship services in addition to the Sunday services, when by tradition in the monastery of Matka, all the ascetics of the caves and hermits would gather for a Liturgy.

The Liturgies were served even at the request of the faithful, which is carefully written alongside their names in the Codex.

A calendar table was made by Hieromonk Eustrati. On page 45, are drawn two squares, diagonally placed, located in two concentric circles, and in their center a cross is drawn, creating four fields on which is written IS HS - NI KA. In the four fields on the intersection of the two squares are the names of the evangelists, and in one of the twelve remaining fields, clearly can be read the name Paul.

At the end of the Codex, are written selections and parts of the prayers of the Matins service.

The manuscript also contains many entries relating to the gifts and contributions of the pilgrims to the monastery.

The Codex names all the Orthodox inhabitants of the cities: Kicevo, Debar, Ohrid, Kastoria, Veles, Prilep, Janina, and others, as well as the villages throughout the area of Skopje, some of which do not exist today, or they exist, but lack Christian residents. According to records in the Codex, the population of Skopje was divided into nobility and layman. Evliya Chelebija, in the 17th century describes: „the population of Skopje is composed of merchants, farmers, craftsmen and scholars.“ The nobility was mainly of Orthodox Christians, and it's believed that it contributed to the continuity of the life in the monasteries in Skopje, and the surrounding area, even after many centuries under the Ottoman rule. Certainly, the main reason for this is the proper spiritual life of the monks, laid on the foundation of the ascetical-hesychastic Tradition. Hence, the respect of the residents towards the monks, about which D-r J Hadzi-Vasilevich wrote: „The name monk, can hardly be heard in the Skopje area. The people used to call them kalugeri (monks) and they were more appreciated than the clergy. The kalugeri were considered well educated. Confessors were only the kalugeri. They were addressed as 'grandfather' by the people and 'duovniche' (spiritual father), and the priests are referred to as 'Father' or less frequently with "dedo pope"(grandfather, Father). In the monasteries in the 19th century, there were few nuns. "

A process of tailoring and embroidery, in the studio of the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin.







Among the Hieromonks mentioned in the Codex are: Abbot Hieromonk Metrophan, Hieromonk Basil, and Hieromonk Theodore of Marko monastery, then from Krushopek the Hieromonks Nestor, Avramij, Anthony and Ananij, monk Paphnutius of Ohrid, the monk Theodosius from Prizren, from the Shishev Monastery, Hieromonks Nicodem and monk Theodore, Hieromonk Sylvester from the village of Gorno Sonje. The priests that are mentioned are from several villages and towns: Krushopek, Glumovo, Shishevo, Dobridol, Prilep, Grachac, Kuceviste, Orizari, Skopje, Matka, Rakotinci, Bojane, and Zhemirci. Which means, at that period, the monastery was very active as a spiritual centre, with a secure material position which allowed them to accommodate a vast number of clergy and believers, which were investing themselves in it (by personally helping the monastery).

According to the folk tradition present among the local population, in this monastery, probably due to the favorable location, there were many monks and priests. Literary activity was constantly cultivated, and there was a library, whose books were used for the monastery's own needs, but were often borrowed, and taken to the surrounding monasteries, and beyond.

The Codex was written in continuity. One entry in the manuscript testify that it was transferred to Shishevo monastery when the abbot Hieromonk Savatij, of the monastery Assumption of the Virgin - Matka, crossed to St. Nicholas in Shishevo, which before the fire, in 1897 was borrowed by monk Chariton in the Bigorski monastery, and taken later, from there to Sofia.

The monastery was visited by the Patriarch of the Peck Patriarchate Arsenij the IV, in 1716, then Archbishop, who bestowed upon the church a linen antimnoses with green edges.

Epigonation with embroidered icon of the Lord Jesus Christ, from the studio at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin  
 "The Holy Virgin – The Three Hand" (Troeruchica), an icon, at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin







The Pentecostarion that probably in 1801 was brought from the monastery in Shishevo, was labeled by a monk Auxentij in 1846, where he wrote that it originates from Staro Nagorichane, and in 1801 was brought to the monastery in Matka, which he calls Mother Mary Three-hand (probably according the icon of the Mother Mary(Bogorodica) Troeruchica). The same monk was mentioned in the inscription in 1851 in one room of the today's monastic quarters. It is known that in 1830 the abbot of the monastery was Hieromonk Anania, but at the last visit of J.H.K-Dzinot in 1854 there was only monk Auxenti „that barely maintained the monastery.“

In 1857 is mentioned the Hieromonk Arseni, and the last abbot before 1900 is the Hieromonk Savatij. For the period until the First World War there are no records. In in 1912, the Abbot was the Hieromonk Peter Tirev.

From this period, there is almost no documentation about the monks in the monastery, nor in the archives of Skopje and Macedonia, nor in the Skopje Eparchy. The records that we will examine are mostly from notes left on the books in the monastery library, and orally transmitted memories of some of the older residents of Matka.

The library of the monastery Matka, today contains mainly liturgical books, on which are left records, receipts, and official newspapers of the time of the Bishop Barnabas from Skopje.

The Minei, which today are used in worship, it should be noted, have been left in legacy to the library of the monastery by Hieromonk Simon Petkovich who died on 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 1914. His brother, and prior of the monastery, was Hieromonk Teophil.

Some of the entries, directed us to look up the Russian monks who lived here, and who left in legacy the books "The ladder" and "The service of St. Sergej Voronjeshki", which bear the seals of the Athonite Russian Skete of St. Andrew and St. Elias (founded by the Venerable Paisius Velichkovsky), from the monasteries in Hopovo and Kuvezhdin, as well as the Valaam Monastery.

In one record of Tihomir Jančovski, in his book „Monasticism in Macedonia" \*5 describes the conditions in which at the time of the Metropolitan Barnabas (otherwise spiritual child of the venerable Joanikij Rakotinski), about 250 Russian clergy, monks and priests were accepted into the Skopje Eparchy.



Priestly vestments, in Russian style, Diesis, an embroidered icon from the studio at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin





„The monks and nuns from Russia, after World War II, remained in the monasteries in Macedonia, the majority of whom came here as part of the so-called White emigration, i.e. the first waves of refugees that followed the October Revolution. Aside from these few, the Russian monasticism on the territory of the Republic Macedonia in the twentieth century, constituted of two other important groups: the monks from the Valaam Monastery who were expelled for not accepting the new calendar, and the Russian monks from Mount Athos, that in the 20's and 30's of the 20th century left the Holy Mountain and came to Macedonia. Besides the migration of monks (from the Vallam monastery, or from the Holy Mountain or belogardejci - bela garda - white movement) and nuns, it is important to note that a number of Russian laymen decided to enter into a monastery in Macedonia.

In the Macedonian monasteries, between the two world wars, came and stayed, and thus left or remained more than a hundred Russian monks and nuns.

Such is the case with the 35 Valaam's Exiles, Russian monks from the Valaam monastery in Finland, who in 1926, arrived at St. Athanasij in Lesok. After refusing to switch to the new calendar, recently accepted by the autonomous Finnish Church and the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the group-old-style calendar monks were sentenced to exile in September 1926 and after a month's journey arrived in Macedonia. They were accepted by the Skopje metropolitan Barnabas, as expelled for Orthodoxy. The whole Russian brotherhood lived in cenobitic manner at the monastery in the village Lesok for two years and then separated into smaller groups of 2-3 monks and deployed in other monasteries in the Skopje Eparchy.

The migration of the Russian monks from Mount Athos to the Macedonian monasteries took place in several waves, and for various reasons. Among the main reasons were: the hunger and poverty that occurred due to overcrowding of the monastery of St. Panteleimon and the Russian Athonite hermitages in the twenties, the earthquake on Athos in 1932, after which many Russian monks decided to leave, and the decision by the Greek authorities for the Hellenization of Mount Athos. This last one required all Athonite monks, regardless of nationality, to have Greek citizenship, and to acquire it, they had to have lived in Greece for at least ten years. At the time of Bishop Barnabas, almost all the inhabitants of the monasteries in the Skopje eparchy were Russians (from the monasteries of Belograd, Valaam or from the Holy Mountain).“



Before sunrise, at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin  
Priestly vestments, in Byzantine style, an embroidered icon from the studio at the  
monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin





The abbot of Matka Monastery from 1928 to 1933, was the Hieromonk Agej(Haggai). His known brother-monks were the hierodeacon Nil (Neal) and the two monks from Valaam, who moved to the monastery in 1926 from the monastery in the village Lesok. The Hieromonk Agej remained in Macedonia after the Second World War, in the monastery of St. Panteleimon, until his death. A meeting with him was described by the British journalist and author Rebecca West, in her journal "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon" - „... for me he was one of the dearest people I met in Yugoslavia. He is a little creature that knows of no sin. His eyes, whose brilliance emerges under his thick eyebrows, the wrinkles on the face and beard, they are not bright, but they are a real light ... When asked whether he feels lonely, he said: Mostly I'm not, because God is always here. „

From the Russian monks here during the Second World War, the elder was monk Seraphim, about whom, grandfather Blagoja of Matka said he was a very good man who became ill and died here.

According to the meagre details and memories of Milutin, who in the 1950's worked as an electrician at the dam, in the period after the Second World War (in 1948) the elder of the Monastery was Hieromonk Naum, with the brothers-monks Maximilian and Arsenij. Milutin remembers mostly about Maximilian, and says that he was aged around 30-40 years, a very good and intelligent man, and he said: „He was always carrying a book. Those in the monastery were mainly looking after the sick and wounded who were brought here from Aegean Macedonia; above the monastery were the graves of the dead soldiers, separate from those of the monastics which were around the church - it was all grave stones around it; they used to take groceries from the monastery from Shishevo, where, a monk was growing them; and that's how I got to know Maximilian, together we used to go to get the groceries. "

Today, there isn't a single grave or tombstone near the church, which Milutin found incredible. The military graves above the monastery, although completely overgrown, can still be recognised through the densely grown hazel trees.

Records about this brotherhood and a support for the words of Milutin can be found in the account book (income-expenditure) that was used in 1948. Here we found the exact names and ranks of the monks, and the great expenditures for medicine drugs listed on virtually every page.

For how long the fraternity was here, and exactly when the monastery became a convent, is not known. It is only known that in the sixties, the Abbess was a nun called Susanna, and her three fellow nuns were Evgenia (formerly from the Monastery Kuvezhdin), Seraphima, and Ilarija (from Hopovo). Kuvezhdin and Hopovo are two monasteries in the Fruska Forest in Serbia, where several sisterhoods from Russia were received, and whose spiritual father was the last Elder Ambrose from the Optina monastery, in whose honour the Fruska Forest is called "Holy Fruska Forest".



Winter, at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin  
Bishop's vestments, from the studio at the monastery of the Assumption of the Virgin





In this monastery, in their own time, stayed the Velichki Bishop Gabriel Hagiorite and his father, the monk Cyril (1972-74). In their brief stay of 2 years before leaving for Lesnovo monastery, Father Gabriel generally lived and struggled in the caves and mountains of Matka, coming to the monastery only for Sunday worship. His father, who regularly stayed there and maintained the monastery, was counted worthy to see the tears of the miraculous icon of the Mother of God, which is now placed on the left side of the church, which back then was part of the iconostasis. Venerable Gabriel while staying at Matka was a student, "an excellent one", as it's recalled by one of the Faculty of Theology: "He used to come on foot, and except tea, he wanted nothing else. Once he arrived with a blue eye, and I asked him - Father what happened?, and he replied - "Nothing, I looked at the dam, but it seems I'm not allowed to see"."

About him, Tihomir Jančovski writes: „As it often happens, that in times of major crises comes the time of great people, who with their personalities can keep the balance.“ He is a Saint among the Macedonian monks of the restored Macedonian Orthodox Church- of the Ohrid Archdiocese.

A resident monk of this monastery, was the blessed Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia, Mr Mihail (Michael), who is said to have worked here in peace. In his lifetime, was revived the monasticism in Macedonia. Macedonian Monks were summoned, from Mount Athos who initiated the establishment of monastic communities in the monasteries. The ascetic-hesychastic Tradition again is transferred from Mount Athos to Macedonia. Matka once again has its population of monks. In 1998, in the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin - Matka, the monastic life is renewed in the form of a female monastery, whose abbess is the nun Perpetua.

During this period, the monastic journey from a monk to a bishop, in the monastery of Matka, was passed by today's bishop and Metropolitan of the Povardarie, monk Agatangel.

The typikon of the monastery is according to the athonite - ascetical-hesychastic tradition, based on the Jesus prayer: Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me (us).

"The Jesus' prayer, intimate and personal, never separated the individual from the church community, but in a supernatural way was constantly connected with it, because Christ, whom the prayer is looking for in the human heart, the Divine name she calls, can be found inside the heart in such measure, as the man, through the holy baptism and the Eucharist is rooted in the body of the Church" (St. Gregory Palamas).

Again, do not forget, every gift we receive through Her, especially the gift of the mind-hearted prayer (the unceasing Jesus prayer in the heart). Her wonderful Name with love fills our hearts - Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.







Through the prayers of  
the Holy Virgin Mary, remember  
them o Lord:

Metropolitan German,  
Bishop Matej (Matthew),  
Metropolitan Jovan (John)  
Bishop Atanasij (Athanasius),  
Archbishop Prohor  
Archbishop Mihail (Michael)  
Bishop Gavril (Gabriel)

Hieromonk, Evstratij (Eustratius)  
Hieromonk Raphael,  
Hieromonk Seraphim,  
Hieromonk Josif,  
Hieromonk Lazar,  
Hieromonk Sava,  
Hieromonk Orest,  
Hieromonk Gavril,  
Hieromonk David,  
Hieromonk Diodor,  
Hieromonk Arsenij,  
Abbot - Hieromonk Ananij,  
Abbot – Hieromonk Savatij,  
Abbot - Hieromonk Peter,  
Hieromonk Platon,  
Hieromonk Simon,  
Hieromonk-Prior Theophil,  
Abbot - Hieromonk Agej,  
Hieromonk-Prior Theophil Nikolich  
Hieromonk-Prior Seraphim,  
Abbot - Hieromonk Naum,  
Hieromonk Mihail,

Monk Nicodim,  
Monk David,

Monk Macarius,  
Monk Stephen,  
Monk Grigorij (Gregory),  
Monk Theodosij,  
Monk Theophil,  
Monk Chrysostom,  
Monk Azarij (Azariah),  
Monk Auxentij,  
Monk Hilarion ,  
Hierodeacon Nil,  
Monk Maximilian,  
Monk Arsenij,  
Monk Kiril (Cyril),

Nun Rahila  
Nun Elizaveta  
Nun Theodosia  
Nun Anastasia  
Nun Magdalena  
Nun Salomia  
Nun - Abbess Susanna,  
Nun Seraphima,  
Nun Evgenia,  
Nun Ilaria,

Marija called Velislava,

by their holy prayers and the prayers  
of all the unknown inhabitants of this  
monastery, remember us, the current  
sisterhood of the monastery  
Assumption of the Virgin- Matka,  
who live and struggle at the time of the  
Archbishop of Ohrid and Macedonia  
Stephen.

Virgin Mary with Jesus Christ, a  
miraculous icon, at the monastery  
of the Assumption of the Virgin.



## Appendix

1\* The monasticism itself appears in the third to fourth century when Christianity received its status of state religion in Byzantium.

Its first officials are: St Anthony the Great (Anchorite, father of monasticism), St Pachomius the Great (the founder of cenobitic monasticism) and St Athanasius of Alexandria (bishop and theologian). Thanks to them, by the end of the century in which they lived, the Christian monasteries became organised communities of ascetics, and monastrism will be integrated as an important organ in the body of the Church. St Anthony the Great and St Pachomius laid down the foundations of isolated and common (in a community) ascetic life which the Eastern-Christian monks will follow till today, an unbroken continuity of 1700 years.

Under the anchorite or hermit (lone) living, means a situation where the monk anchorite dwells alone in a desert place, away from people, avoiding whatever contact in attempt to reach the Christian perfection. The monk leaves the monastic community to which he belongs, in order to lead an ascetic life in solitude, usually in a natural cave or a hidden cabin. One of the brotherhood from the monastery, or someone they know, occasionally would leave food. In order to lead such life, besides prayers and spirituality, great physical endurance and resourcefulness is required. Examples of such hermits in the early Christian monasticism, aside from St. Anthony the Great (250-335), are St Paul of Thebes (229-342) and St Onuphrius the Great (330-400).

Even during the life of St. Anthony, the pristine anchoritic life was amended by the accession of his students. These people wanted to emulate him and live under his spiritual leadership. It created a form of moderate anchoritic living, i.e., a situation where several monks gathered around an older, experienced spiritual father, who will occasionally advise them and this way they'll perfect their asceticism. Thus, they are placed in a pupil-teacher relationship. They live separately, a significant distance from one another, and they would gather on Sunday for Liturgy. Once they finish the common prayer and eat together, they again go on their way, and live separately for the rest of the week. The Elder accepts his disciples in coexistence after he examines their character and suitability for monastic life. This kind of monasticism in particular was promoted by St Macarius of Egypt (300-391), a disciple of St Anthony, and later will be called Sketian (Eremitic) life. It's named after the Skete desert in Egypt, where at the time of St. Macarius, and later, many monks practiced this way of life.

Cenobitic or community monasticism is a situation where many monks live in a community. All brothers in a Cenobitic monastery "should have one heart, one soul, one thought, one will". Each monk has his own separate room, called a cell, where he sleeps and performs his prayer rule specified by his spiritual father. All the monks of the brotherhood gather for worship services, eat together, and work according to the given obedience. The monks respect the rules, and the typikon of the community. All the property is common, and they all live in obedience to the abbot of the monastery. This lifestyle was founded by St Pachomius, and further developed by the Bishop of Caesarea, St Basil the Great (329-379), who gave it its final form. St. Basil in the Cappadocian monasteries formulated the monastic vows of poverty, obedience and celibacy, and introduced the ritual of becoming a monk - monastic tonsure. He compiled the monastic rules, and adjusted the Pachomius rule to the Cappadocian conditions, and they govern life in the cenobitic monasteries.

2\* Regarding the term „Hesychasm“. „Hesychia“ today, refers to the spiritual and theological movement that began on Mount Athos in the 14th century, the teaching of which is outlined in the theological synthesis of the Orthodox monastic spirituality of St Gregory Palamas, and confirmed by the Church in the councils of 1341, 1347 and in 1351 in Constantinople. But the roots of hesychasm date from the early Christian tradition of the first Church, and as St Gregory Palamas says, the lighthouse of Orthodoxy, even in the Holy of holies, lies in the heart of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary.

Hesychasm, above any other theology and teaching, presents a way of Orthodox spiritual life in the Church, which turns into a prayerful hesychasm, filled with the noetic prayer, through which one seeks and experiences the gracious and personal community with God. The Greek word "hesychia" (<sup>1</sup> σϋχια) means silence, peace. In the spiritual, monastic life and struggle, this word is used to denote the internal prayerful hesychasm of the mind in the heart. It can be said that the hesychasm in the Orthodox Church is a fundamental spiritual asceticism and philosophical-theological method of the Christian vision, experience and knowledge of God, and thus of the man and the world.

3\* The lives of the Saints Cyril and Methodius are well known to all Christians, and the South-Slavic people have a special appreciation for them. The brothers were born in Solun (Thessaloniki) to the family of a prominent military sergeant close to the imperial court. Methodius, the elder brother, served for 10 years in the Slavic garrison, among Macedonian Slavs, where he learned the local dialect. At the pinnacle of the fight against the Iconoclastic heresy, he became a monk and went to the Olympus monastery in Asia Minor.

Constantine, the younger brother, from early youth began to show unusual talent. Even as a child he loved the works of St Gregory the Theologian, he constantly read them and many of them learnt by heart. A gifted student, he studied in the academy at the Byzantine imperial court. There, along with the young prince Michael III, he was taught by the best teachers (including the future patriarch Photius). Even then the question of the logothete (fiscal official) Teoctist: „What is philosophy?“, He replied: „knowledge of God and human things, which teaches us how one can get closer to God and how, through deeds, to become the image and likeness of Him Who created him „.

Noting the brilliant talents of Constantine, the imperial dignitary Theoctistus wanted to marry him to his cousin and to provide a career for him in the court. But Constantine had other plans. He secretly went to a monastery by the sea and became a monk named Cyril, after which he became famous in the history of Christendom. Cyril, with a blessing as a monk, returned to Constantinople and gained a position as a Lecturer in philosophy, and as a librarian in the church of St. Sophia. In 851AD, a Muslim emir addressed the king with a request to send an experienced teacher, a Christian, and Cyril Philosopher was selected.

After returning, Cyril spent several days in the monastery Olympus, where the abbot was his brother Methodius. In 860AD, at the initiative of the Patriarch Ignatius and with the recommendation of the king, the brothers were sent to the Khazars, at their own request. The mission was successful. The brothers not only converted many Khazars to Christianity, but contributed to the return of the captive Greeks to Constantinople.

In 863AD, during the reign of Patriarch Photius, the brothers journeyed to the Slavic countries. Preaching for three years, first in Moravia, and then in Pannonia, the brothers converted the pagans, and grounded them in the faith and morals. They created the Slavic alphabet, with which they became the creators of the Slavic language and literacy. They translated into Slavic, some parts of the Scripture that were used in worship.

In 868. brothers went to Rome. Pope Adrian II supported the missionary activity of the Saints Methodius and Cyril. He legalised the right to serve in a Slavic language, and the Slavic books were blessed. St Cyril, who had a fragile health, fell ill and died in Rome on the 14th February 869AD, after he received a great schema.

St. Methodius was appointed as an archbishop of Pannonia, and spent three years in prison after which he was released, but till the end of his life he was forced to defend himself from the constant accusations of the German clergy. In 883AD he began to translate into the Slavic language the full text of the Holy Scriptures and some separate manuscripts of the Holy Fathers. Thus, in work and struggle, he died in 885AD.



4\* About the Assumption of the Virgin.

"There, a celebration of light, come, beloved, glad to be enjoying this wonderful miracle! Once you reject the life in darkness, to illumine the bodily eyes and with the mind to ascend, in order to see the miraculous Assumption of the Virgin.

But if someone thinks something inappropriate in his mind, by saying: 'Should not taste death the one who gave birth to the lifegiving-God', to such we will respond like this: Because to Adam after his sin, he was told: 'you are made of soil and in the soil you will go' and, as from him we have the beginning of our existence through birth, so we have from him and the death, because our Lord Jesus Christ came to earth and accepted this mortal body, and for us he tasted the physical death, not the divine, because He who is with the Godly is always non suffering and immortal. But, because he was of double nature, God and man, and that's why He tasted death with His human nature, not with the Godly. And he was resurrected as an immortal, and He resurrected with Him, the first-created Adam and the other righteous who died after him. Therefore, the Holy Virgin Mary - Mother of God tasted death in the flesh (physical death) ... so they laid her in the tomb. And hence, on the third day she rose from the tomb, for she had to be called from the tomb, so that the mother to be with Her Son. "

"Rejoice, o un-burning tree, who carried the Divine Incarnation in thy holy womb ... Rejoice, ray of noetic Sun .... radiance of the unsettling Light!...propitiation of all the world ... acceptable incense of intercession..."

5\* The Russian priests and monks in the Kingdom belonged under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (RZPC), which was established in 1921 in Sremski Karlovci, and this city remained the seat of the Outside of Russia Synod until 1945. Along with the Karlovo jurisdiction, many Russian clergy in Macedonia received canonical reception in the three Macedonian dioceses within the United Serbian church. At the outset of the war, the high clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church withdrew from Macedonia. The jurisdiction of RZPC continued throughout the war until 1945, when the headquarters of the outside of Russia synod was moved from Karlovci to New York. The Russian clergy and monastics that were under the jurisdiction of RZPC, and remained in Yugoslavia after the Second World War, requested admission to the local dioceses. The Russian monks and nuns who remained in the monasteries after 1945, have accepted the jurisdiction of the Macedonian church authorities.

After the Bolshevik revolution and the victory of the Red Army over the white, the first refugee wave of about 80,000 Russians, found refuge in the Kingdom of SCS, in whose boundaries then belonged the area of Vardar, Macedonia. From the Government was arranged an assistance, where refugees were housed in dozens of centres, which later were established as the first Russian colonies. There were two such colonies in Macedonia, in Skopje and Bitola. At that time, the new unified Serbian church felt a enormous shortage of clerical staff and monks. The highest dignitaries of the SPC were former students of Russian spiritual academies and as such, were positively inclined to acceptance of the hundreds of Russian priests and monks who had begun to enquire. During the First World War, it is believed that the losses of the Serbian Church were more than a thousand priests and monks, which accounted for one third of the active Serb clergy before the war. In the dioceses on the Macedonian territory, there were two major Russophiles; the bishops Barnabas (Rosikj) and Nikolai (Velimirovic) and their exact dioceses in Macedonia became the nurseries of Russian monasticism throughout the Kingdom.

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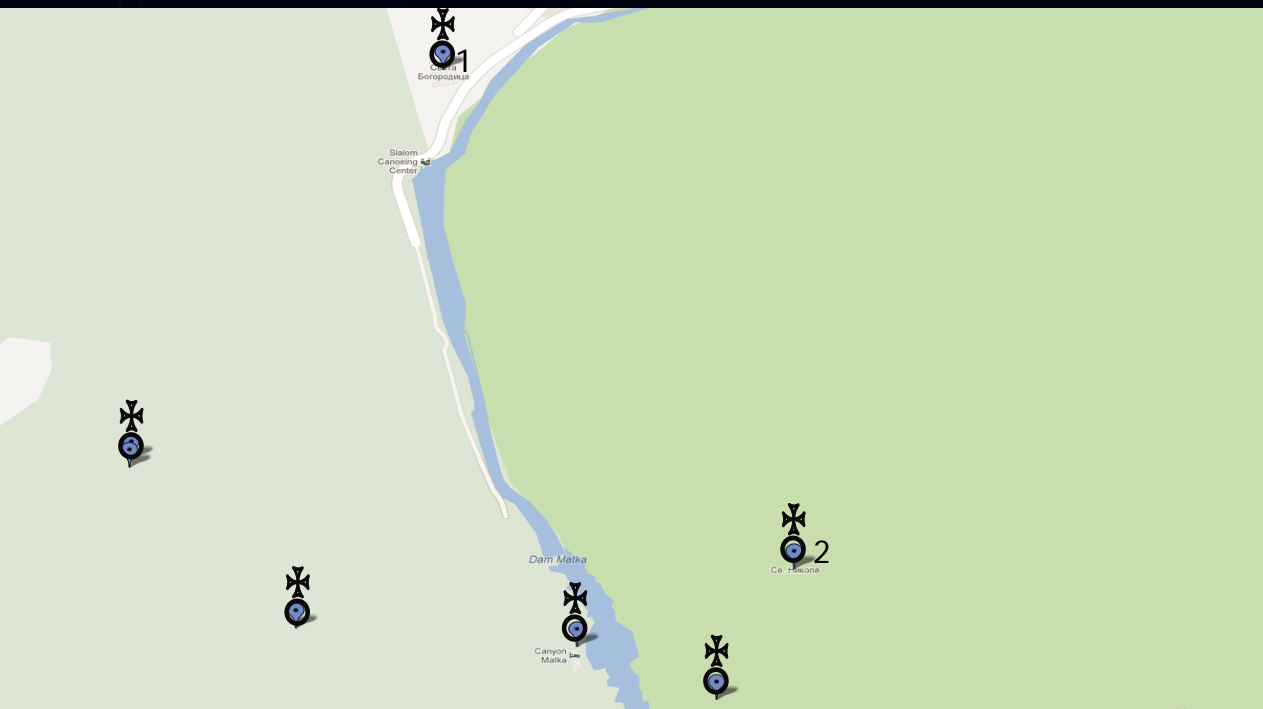
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