

= The Proclamation of Dušan 's Law Codex =

The Proclamation of Dušan 's Law Codex (Serbian : Proglašenje Dušanovog zakonika) is the name given to each of seven versions of a composition painted by Paja Jovanović which depict Dušan the Mighty introducing Serbia 's earliest surviving law codex to his subjects in Skopje in 1349 . The Royal Serbian Government commissioned the first version for 30 000 dinars in 1899 , intending for it to be displayed at the following year 's Exposition Universelle (world 's fair) in Paris .

When originally commissioned , the painting was intended to depict Dušan 's 1346 coronation as Emperor of Serbia . After consulting with the politician and historian Stojan Novaković , Jovanović decided against painting a scene from Dušan 's coronation , and opted to depict the proclamation of his law codex instead . Thus , the painting has often erroneously been described as depicting the coronation . Jovanović paid a great deal of attention to historical detail in preparation for the work , visiting several medieval Serbian Orthodox monasteries in Kosovo and Macedonia , studying medieval costumes and weaponry and consulting experts on the period .

The first version was finished in time for the world 's fair , where it received widespread critical acclaim and was awarded a gold medal by the fair 's artistic committee . In the opinion of one art historian , the artistic committee 's decision affirmed that the painting was on par with the works of the world 's greatest visual artists . A number of historians and critics consider The Proclamation of Dušan 's Law Codex to be one of Jovanović 's finest works , and Jovanović himself felt the painting was his " most beautiful composition " .

= = Dušan 's Code = =

Stefan Dušan was one of Serbia 's most powerful rulers . In the mid 14th century , he oversaw the establishment of a large Serbian state that stretched from the Danube to the Greek mainland . As a result of his achievements , in Serbian historiography he is referred to as Dušan the Mighty or Dušan the Lawgiver . The first suffix is in recognition of his expansion of Serbia 's territory and the second in recognition of the law codex he introduced during his reign , commonly called Dušan 's Code . In 1343 , as King of Serbs , Albanians and the Coast , Dušan added " King of the Romans " to his title . In late 1345 , he began referring to himself as the Emperor (tsar) of Serbia . On Easter Day , 16 April 1346 , Dušan convoked an assembly in Skopje , attended by the Serbian Archbishop Joanikije II , the Archbishop of Ochrid Nikolaj I , the Bulgarian Patriarch Simeon and various religious leaders from Mount Athos . The assembly then ceremonially performed the raising of the autocephalous Serbian Archbishopric to the status of Patriarchate . From then on , the Archbishop was titled the Serbian Patriarch , with his seat in Monastery of Peć . Dušan was subsequently crowned Emperor of Serbia by the new Patriarch , Joanikije .

Dušan had ambitions of conquering all the Byzantine lands , including Constantinople , and proclaiming himself Byzantine Emperor . In order to achieve this goal , he knew that he needed to secure the loyalty of his Greek subjects . Thus , Dušan decreed that lands inhabited by Greeks were to have Greek governors and follow traditional Byzantine laws as opposed to Serbian customary law . This had the effect of reducing tensions between Serbs and Greeks and made it easier for the Serbs to occupy Greek lands without any considerable threat of revolt . In 1349 , Dušan issued a national legal code from his capital , Skopje , one that applied only to the northern half of the empire where Serbs predominated . Dušan 's Code is Serbia 's earliest surviving legal code ; it was influenced heavily by Byzantine law . It was also one of the most advanced legal texts of its time , and the first wide ranging set of laws promulgated by the South Slavs . Because it only covers specific crimes , it was likely part of a three part legal document that also included an abridgement of Matthew Blastares ' Syntagma and the Law of Justinian . The third part , Dušan 's Code itself , was thus probably intended to supplement the first two texts by touching upon issues not covered in them rather than serve as a stand alone legal system .

= = The painting = =

= = = Preparation and composition = = =

In the late 1890s , Serbia was invited to participate at the 1900 Exposition Universelle (world 's fair) in Paris . In 1897 , the Royal Serbian Government created a special committee to select which Serbs would go to France as representatives of their country ; the committee was chaired by the politician Svetozar Gvozdi? . It was decided that Serbia 's contribution to the fair would predominantly consist of art , most of which was to be displayed at the Serbian Pavilion , a building in the Serbo @-@ Byzantine style designed by the architect Milan Kapetanovi? . Other Serbian works were to be displayed at the Grand Palais . The rules of the fair 's art exhibit held that each canvas had to measure 390 by 589 centimetres (154 by 232 in) and contain over seventy figures in various , often complex , positions .

In Serbia , the period between 1889 and 1914 was marked by a spate of patriotic literature , theatre and visual art . Serbian artists competed with one another over who would produce the best depictions of Serbia 's medieval history , and the best Serbian national romantic art was made during this time . One of the most prominent Serb artists of the day was the realist Paja Jovanovi? , who was known for his sprawling historical works . In 1899 , the special committee hired him to compose a scene depicting Du?an 's coronation to be displayed in Paris . In return for his services , he received an honorarium of 30 @,@ 000 dinars . The government felt it was essential that Jovanovi? 's work and those of other Serbian artists be well received . Given decades of political instability in the Balkans , the authorities sought to promote a positive image of their country abroad , especially by familiarizing Western Europeans with Serbian art . Hence , Jovanovi? was painting for a dual audience , both domestic and foreign . His foremost goal was to emphasize the legitimacy of Serbia 's contemporary territorial claims before the Great Powers , especially with regard to Kosovo , Macedonia and the Sand?ak (then divided between the Ottoman Empire and Austria @-@ Hungary) , and counter any negative views of the Serbian state . For his domestic audience , Jovanovi? 's goal was to remind his countrymen of Serbia 's rich history and encourage patriotic sentiments . After consulting with the politician and historian Stojan Novakovi? , Jovanovi? decided against painting a scene from Du?an 's coronation , and opted to depict the proclamation of Du?an 's Code instead . As a result , the painting is sometimes mistakenly referred to as The Coronation of Tsar Du?an (Serbian : Krunisanje Cara Du?ana) .

Jovanovi? began working on the painting in 1900 . In keeping with his usual approach , he spent a significant amount of time researching Du?an 's life . He read medieval accounts of the proclamation , consulted experts on that historical period , and examined medieval paintings and illuminated manuscripts for insight into the architecture and weaponry of 14th @-@ century Serbia . Jovanovi? also visited the monasteries of Gra?anica and Lesnovo , the Field of Kosovo , and the cities of Prizren and Skopje . Since the church where the proclamation took place had long since been destroyed , he was forced to find an alternative , ultimately deciding to model it after the Visoki De?ani monastery given the similarities in their design . By his own admission , the hardest task Jovanovi? faced was achieving authenticity with regard to clothing , weaponry and medieval heraldry . He found the medieval clothing particularly difficult to reproduce because Serbs did not have their own national costume at the time . Instead , medieval Serbs , especially royalty and the nobility , wore clothing that was greatly influenced by neighbouring cultures , particularly the Byzantines . Jovanovi? styled the clothes seen in the painting on frescoes from the medieval monasteries he visited , sketched them , and then requested that the head costume designer of the Vienna State Opera recreate them based on those sketches . Upon receiving the costumes , Jovanovi? placed them in his studio and used them as models for the painting . Du?an 's German mercenaries , who are shown lining the church doors church as he exits , wear Venetian body armour . Jovanovi? based this detail on a medieval correspondence that Novakovi? had discovered in the Venetian archives where Du?an is recorded having ordered 300 units of plate armour from Venice . Knights ' swords and other weaponry were based on depictions from medieval frescoes . The heraldry depicted on the shields and the insignia of the various figures is based on examples

from a medieval book titled *Armaila Illyricorum* . Jovanović had found the book in a Viennese library . It had been removed from Herzegovina 's *Žitomisli* monastery several decades prior and brought to the Austro-Hungarian capital . The Proclamation of Dušan 's Law Codex was painted outdoors , en plein air .

= = = Description and history = = =

The painting depicts Dušan exiting a church with his wife , Jelena , and son , Uroš , shortly after announcing that the law codex would be put into force . At their side are Patriarch Joanikije and the magnate Jovan Oliver , as well as many other members of the clergy and nobility . The emperor and his entourage are watched by an admiring crowd of nobles , knights and commoners . The knights lower their swords at Dušan 's feet as a sign of respect and submission . A festive atmosphere pervades the scene . The noble Gojko Mrnjavačević reads the proclamation before the crowd . Palman Bracht , a German mercenary who oversaw Dušan 's personal bodyguard , stands at the far right among a row of other knights , and watches closely as the Emperor steps outside . The art historian Lilien Filipovitch-Hobson writes :

Technically , the artist brought together an accumulation of his considerable study and experience as a painter of history , portrait , and genre scenes . As was typical , his orderly composition and perfect one-point linear perspective , both of which are appropriate to the subject , are informed by the frescoes of the Renaissance . Every figure in the foreground and middle ground directs the eye steadily to the compositional vanishing point , Tsar Dušan . He is the epitome of control , dignity , and majesty . The brilliantly clothed entourage behind him frames his form as do the massive stone walls of the church . They not only lend compositional stability but intimate a durability shared by the God-inspired architecture and Dušan 's reign .

Once complete , the painting was presented to the Royal Serbian Government . As part of his contract , Jovanović granted the government the right to print reproductions of the painting . Jovanović felt the painting was his " most beautiful composition " , but was displeased that he had not been able to complete it the way it was originally envisaged . He had originally intended for the finished work to be painted on woven tapestry . The version that went on display in Paris was an oil on canvas that Jovanović had only meant to use as a model for the tapestry painting . He later recalled that King Alexander had gambled away the money he had promised to provide for the tapestry painting 's completion . Disappointed , Jovanović pledged to repaint it to his own liking , though he did not begin work on a revision until 1925-26 , by which time he was in his sixties . He went on to complete a total of seven different versions of the painting in his lifetime . The first version is in the possession of the National Museum of Serbia , in Belgrade . Another , measuring 190 by 126 centimetres (75 by 50 in) , is on permanent display at the Belgrade City Museum .

= = Critical reception and legacy = =

The Proclamation of Dušan 's Law Codex was well received by the Serbian public , and is said to have exceeded the expectations of all the government ministers . It was also well received in France , where Jovanović was named an Officer of the Académie des Beaux-Arts . The painting was met with critical acclaim at the world 's fair , and the fair 's artistic committee awarded Jovanović a gold medal for his work . By way of this decision , the art historian Jelena Milojković-Djurić asserts , the Paris committee recognized that the painting was on par with those of the world 's best visual artists .

Serbian painter and art critic Nadežda Petrović described Jovanović 's compositions as the " crown of Serbian pictorial art " , and lauded The Proclamation of Dušan 's Law Codex as his best work . Filipovitch-Hobson ranks it among Jovanović 's three best paintings , alongside The Takovo Uprising (1888) and Migration of the Serbs (1896) . " By focusing on the famed reign of Tsar Dušan , " she writes , " Jovanović was making a case for the respect with which Serbia should be regarded . " The painting , she argues , is both a history lesson and a " patriotic declaration " . For Serbian audiences in particular , she continues , it alluded to the greatness of Serbia 's past and

implied that the country 's restoration as a free , modern nation was within reach . In her opinion , it is an inherently optimistic work .

Tim Judah , a journalist specializing in the Balkans , compares Jovanovi? 's contribution to Serbian art to Jacques @-@ Louis David 's contribution to French art , and draws parallels between The Proclamation of Du?an 's Law Codex and The Coronation of Napoleon . Professor David A. Norris , a historian specializing in Serbian culture , describes the knights ' armour as " highly stylized " and opines that , as a direct result , some of the figures resemble Hollywood actors more than medieval knights . " The picture shows excellent conception and solidity in its composition , " art historian Radmila Anti? contends . " The figures are well related , their attitudes conscientiously studied , the costumes represented with the greatest care for detail . "

= = = Endnotes = = =