

BULGARIA

Heritage in Danger

The task of presenting specific Bulgarian monuments at risk seems to be very easy and at the same time it is very difficult. The reason for this ostensible contradiction lies in the simple fact that the Bulgarian cultural heritage in general is in a situation of mortal danger.

Realising that this conclusion may sound quite pathetic, we will try to present the impartial facts on which it is based:

1. The present Law for the Monuments of Culture and Museums, which should guarantee the preservation of the Bulgarian cultural heritage and regulate this activity, was adopted in 1969. In the last 18 years it has become overgrown with a number of amendments, which unfortunately cannot compensate for the lack of a general and modern policy of conservation in this conglomeration of decrees, most often dictated by the constantly changing conditions. This law is really unable to reconcile the system for preservation with the new social and economic conditions.
2. The various laws, related to heritage and its preservation, are not only lacking in harmony between one another, but in various items provide contradictory decrees. In a rather critical way this discrepancy is revealed in the Law for the Development of the Territory, where a number of decrees prevent the adequate and consecutive implementation of activities for the preservation of monuments.
3. The funds, provided by the State budget for the preservation of cultural monuments for the whole country, are absolutely insufficient. These funds are mainly used for urgent measures on the most endangered monuments of the highest categories. Considering there are about 40,000 monuments in total these funds are by no means sufficient to take care of all of them. Obviously, in this situation it is impossible to adequately implement any state strategy in the field of the preservation of cultural heritage – maybe this is the reason for the lack of any strategy.
4. At the same time there is a lack of mechanisms to attract and encourage other sources for funding and there is no incentive for sponsorship. There are also hardly any financial stimuli for the preservation of historic buildings: the responsibility to provide funds for their restoration is left entirely to the owners. Unfortunately there is a tendency for the opposite to occur: most owners intentionally expose these monuments to destruction aiming at excluding the monuments from the register, thus getting away from their commitments to the monuments as well as from the restrictions related to their preservation.
5. The responsibility and legal acts in the field of preservation are concentrated mainly in the National Institute for Monuments of Culture, a body of the Ministry of Culture. It's enough to point out that the staff of this institute numbers only about 60 people, who have practically no physical ability to exercise control over the state of monuments and interventions on them. This lack of control is obvious, especially in a situation where as a result of the process of restitution a number of buildings were returned to their previous owners or their inheritors. In most cases the actions taken for the "utilisation" of these buildings contradict the requirements for their preservation as cultural assets.
6. In most cases, when specific building initiatives also affect monuments of culture, the need of the latter to be preserved and adequately exhibited is considered an obstacle to the erection of a new building. The economic interests of the investors, short-

sightedly evaluated by them, usually outweigh the social interests for the preservation of cultural heritage. Unfortunately, we have to point out that the efficiency of this economic pressure arouses suspicions of corruption.

7. And maybe one of the greatest dangers to heritage is the lack of will and determination among the representatives of the executive to use their legal powers for the enforcement of the Law, which though being rather out-of-date and quite imperfect, still provides some protection for our heritage – because of the inaction of the authorities (no matter if there is interest or not) in a number of cases.
8. These are only the most important components of the risk situation of the Bulgarian cultural heritage. Alongside (and in many cases even provoked by them) a number of other factors are also active: a lack of constant care and good maintenance, so important for the protection of monuments, as a result of which a number of monuments are in a process of fast or slow self-destruction, and a great part of those restored in the past are in a rather bad state at present; a lack of security at the archaeological sites, as a result of which they have often become victims of treasure-hunting and vandalism; illegal traffic of cultural assets, etc. Special attention should be drawn to the problem related to the capacity of the people working both in the administrative as well as in the professional spheres of preservation activities. There is also a lack of well trained decision-makers at the local level as well as a lack of licence regime for the professionals with the right to intervene in monuments, which in some cases can be very harmful to the fate of the monuments.

Below, we will point out only six examples of the impact that the above-mentioned risk factors have on Bulgarian heritage. The selected monuments differ both in their typological and historical background, as well as in the category determining their value. The first five have in common that they are all in an extremely endangered state and urgent intervention for their preservation is absolutely necessary, while the sixth monument is a curious case, where a newly built substitute of a destroyed monument remains in its place in the monument register.

Novae archaeological reserve near the town of Svishtov

The main risk influences on this monument are:

- Lack of funds for conservation and maintenance;
- Aggression caused by natural agents – erosion, geological instability of the ground, unfavourable climate with great temperature fluctuations, intensive invasion of vegetation; and
- Vandalism and treasure hunting due to the remoteness of the site from the town and the lack of security.

The archaeological site Novae is one of 44 cultural monuments in Bulgaria with the status of Reserve (this status is determined by a government decision for group monuments of the highest category, i.e. of national importance, to which the highest degree of protection should be provided).

As a result of archaeological research carried out by Bulgarian and Polish teams in the course of several decades, Novae is at pres-



Novae archaeological reserve

ent one of the best investigated Roman camps in Bulgaria. The site is especially representative of the fortified military settlements built on the periphery of the Roman Empire, and some of the findings there are unique evidence of the material and spiritual culture of the period.

Novae was founded in the 1st century AD as a fortified Roman camp on the Danube limes – one of the important points of the fortification system along the Danube river which continued to exist also during the Byzantine Empire. A number of extremely valuable remains and evidences of the town's almost 600 years of existence have been preserved (the last written documents date back to the 17th century).

Founded as a Roman military camp, around the 4th century AD Novae gradually became a town-fortress with mixed military and civil population. New residential buildings were built as well as handicraft workshops and churches. During that period the town became an important military, urban and religious centre.

Remarkable are the remains of the fortification system of the camp and the town, as well as a number of public, residential and religious buildings from the Roman and early Byzantine periods.

Extremely valuable is also the collection of the found artefacts: one of the rare sculpture portraits of Emperor Karakala, bronze statues, inscriptions, coins, glass and ceramic vessels, clay lamps, medical instruments (in the military hospital), wall paintings, etc.

The risk factors mentioned above are a serious threat to the site and question not only its adequate presentation, but also its physical survival.

The church of St. Todor near the town of Boboshevo

The main risk influences on this monument are:

- Lack of funds for conservation and maintenance;
- Active destructive processes, which have led to the critical physical state of the monument and to risking its very existence; and
- Vandalism, a result of the remoteness of the site from the town and the lack of security.

The church of St. Todor is situated in the vicinity of the town of Boboshevo (in southwest Bulgaria), in a natural environment with exceptional and authentic beauty. Through this typical cultural landscape passes a historical pilgrim's way leading to Mount Athos. The church is one of the few preserved religious monuments from the period of the first Bulgarian State. Built at the beginning of the 11th century it is a representative of one of the rarest types of Eastern church architecture, some very few representatives of which have been preserved. Its typical characteristic is the so-called "expressed cross", which is the central element of the plan and space composition of the building and stands out distinctively both in the interior and the exterior of the church. The arms of the cross are covered by semi-cylindrical vaults, while in the centre of the cross rises a high semi-cylindrical drum with four windows, where the dome was set (semi-destroyed today). The walls of the church are stone masonry, while the vaults above the arms and the drum below the dome are brick masonry; the building structure of the drum has a decorative effect: large joints of white lime mortar lie between the red brick belts. These characteristics prove that the building reproduces a very old early Christian type of church architecture. The interior was painted in the 14th century covering older wall paintings. The iconography of the scenes reveals features common with the Cappadocian art tradition, quite different from the Byzantine style of painting dominant at that time. Due to the exceptional characteristics of its architecture and paintings, the church of St. Todor is an extremely valuable typological cultural monument of national importance.

The building and the wall paintings of the church of St. Todor have suffered heavy damages caused by natural destructive processes throughout its long life, by seismic influences, and unfortunately also by acts of vandalism. The church has a partially destroyed structure; the wall paintings are in a rather bad state. In the last century a temporary wooden protective cover was built above to protect the church from further destruction. Unfortunately, the cover itself is now also in a rather bad condition.



Wall paintings in the church of St Todor near Boboshevo



Wall painting in the apse of the monastery church of St Archangel Mihail in Dolna Beshoviza

The monastery of St. Archangel Mihail in the village of Dolna Beshoviza

The main risk influences on this monument are:

- Lack of funds for conservation and maintenance;
- Active destructive processes which have led to a critical physical state of the monument and risk for its very existence; and
- Vandalism and treasure hunting, due to the neglected state of the monument and the lack of security.

The monastery of St. Archangel Mihail in Dolna Beshoviza is located in the municipality of Roman (in West Bulgaria). According to existing records, the monastery church was built in the 14th century, afterwards it was destroyed and rebuilt, repaired and new buildings were added. In the apse of the church well preserved wall paintings exist, revealing some unique characteristics: the images of the Roman popes Sylvester and Adrian, the first paintings of the brothers Cyril and Methodius in the space of the altar, resemblance of the image of the Virgin Mary to the one from the Monastery of Bachkovo. The investigations, the collected historical data and photo research of the icon painting of the church prove the high historical, art and architectural value of the monument, which is of national importance.

The present state of the monastery is disastrous: its west wing is destroyed, its east wing could fall down any minute; the church has serious cracks and unless the treasure hunting excavations in its foundations stop, the church is under serious threat. Urgent measures have to be taken immediately in order to save the surviving building structure of the monument, and in the next stage to carry out the necessary research and design work for future restoration activities.

The church of St. Petka in the village Chuipetliovo, region of Pernik

The main risk influences on this monument are:

- Lack of funds for conservation and maintenance;
- Destructive process in the wall paintings; and
- Incompetent intervention in the wall paintings.

The church St. Petka in the village Chuipetliovo in the region of Pernik (Sofia bishopric) was built in 1860 (the date 1860 inscribed on its east façade is the only evidence for the construction, as the chronicle book of the temple was lost). The church is dedicated to St. Petka, one of the most honoured saints in Bulgaria and on the Balkan Peninsula.

As an architectural and composition type the monument belongs to the one-aisle churches and bears the typical characteristics of the temple construction in the West Bulgarian lands from the second half of the 19th century. The temple has no narthex; its main body is compact and monumental. Cyclopean blocks as well as processed stones were used for the building structure, altered by bricks. The building structure is massive, with thick walls, which entirely take the load of the massive vault. The walls end with a cornice, turning into convex-concave arcs in the east and west, typical for Bulgarian Revival architecture. Above the vault there is a double-pitched wooden roof with tile cover.

There are three distinctive parts in the spacious interior of the temple: altar, nave and upper level; the nave is divided into five equal parts by four arcs, supporting the vault. The vault has an elliptic outline, in the middle it smoothly turns into a flat ceiling. All surfaces of the interior are entirely covered by wall paintings. The iconographic programme is extremely interesting. No records from the icon painters have been preserved, but there is serious reason to assume that two icon painters worked in the temple at different periods of time. The entire layout of the interior has the same monumental impact as the exterior of the church, which is proof of

the high quality and experience of the painters. The church is a cultural monument “of local importance”.

Some of the wall paintings are destroyed, while the greater part of the rest is in a critical condition – with detachment and a covering thick layer of salts. The priest ordered the re-painting of some of the scenes by a local painter without the approval and consent of the National Institute for Monuments of Culture.

The house of Dimitar Jablanski in Sofia

The main risk influences on this monument are:

- Intentional neglect and lack of maintenance by its owner; and
- Lack of intervention by competent authorities, which should demand from the owner to observe the law and in the case of refusal to use sanctions against him.

The house was built in 1907 by the Austrian architect Grunanger for the rich contractor Jablanski. It is situated in the centre of Sofia, close to the Parliament (18, Tsar Osoboditel boulevard), and belongs to the category of rich family residential buildings typical for Europe at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, which the representatives of the well-to-do-classes built in the most prestigious areas of the big cities.

The building situated in a relatively small garden-yard is a three-storey house, with imposing dimensions, rich architectural and decorative design and monumental impact. Expropriated by the communist government after 1944, for more than 30 years it hosted the Chinese embassy in Sofia. After 1989 it was returned to the inheritors of its last owner.

The building at present is deserted, abandoned and left to destruction. There are indications that the new owner is striving for maximum utilisation of the extremely expensive ground of the building, aiming at impressive profit.

In spite of the numerous public initiatives for the preservation of this emblematic monument, no measures have been taken by the authorised institutions to prevent its intentional destruction.

The house of Dimitar Jablanski in Sofia



Sofia, façade of the house of Nicola Moushanov integrated into new building

The house of Nicola Moushanov

It would be a bit incorrect to say that this monument is at risk, as actually it does not exist anymore – the building was destroyed, in its place a modern six storey apartment hotel was erected. The National Institute for Monuments of Culture reduced the category of the monument, and afterwards it authorised the project for the new hotel with the main motif that the memory of the monument has been preserved there – in the street façade of the hotel a “quotation” (though not literal) of the house façade was incorporated.

This house was of the same type of monument as the Jablanski house – a big and imposing residential building, situated in one of the central streets of Sofia (47, Moskovska street). It was built at the beginning of the 20th century by Nicola Moushanov, prominent Bulgarian politician and Prime Minister during the period 1931-1934.

Special attention should be drawn to the fate of this monument, as it is symptomatic of a kind of “disease” becoming “chronic”. This is the third case in Sofia, where monuments of culture are being destroyed in order to build new hotels on their sites. In all these cases the designs were authorised because the facades of the new buildings quote in some way the disappeared monuments.