

BULGARIA

The Bulgarian national committee of ICOMOS has presented an analysis of the causes for deterioration and the list of most endangered monuments in the years 2000 and 2001.

Threats

At the present time the risks to which cultural heritage in Bulgaria is exposed can still be classified into two main categories: socio-economic and physical.

In the context of the political and economic instability of the region and the long-lasting transition of the country to a free-market economy, acute social problems still exist, a situation that allows an extremely insufficient budget for about 40,000 immovable monuments of culture. At the same time effective legislative mechanisms are still lacking (although a new law is to be accepted in a few months).

The main threat to the preservation of cultural heritage during the last decade is the dramatic lack of necessary funds for the elimination of physical risks and for maintaining an enormous and various heritage, as well as for the compilation of a database and network of bodies concerned with threatened heritage. As a reaction to this unacceptable situation, there is a positive social mobilisation to seek additional funds to finance activities in the field of cultural heritage preservation. International and domestic donations, and participation in European projects and the such are already fact, although they are neither frequent nor sufficient enough to respond adequately to needs, even when the most endangered and valuable monuments are concerned.

Unfortunately there is not a complete or updated inventory of the most endangered cultural monuments of high value, nor is there identification of the physical risks and proposed emergency measures for the elimination of the most destructive factors.

Due to the above, it is impossible to create a comprehensive picture of the present state of cultural monuments in Bulgaria, but some general trends can be highlighted with respect to different types of monuments.

According to the Law for Monuments of Culture and Museums, there are various types of monuments of culture:

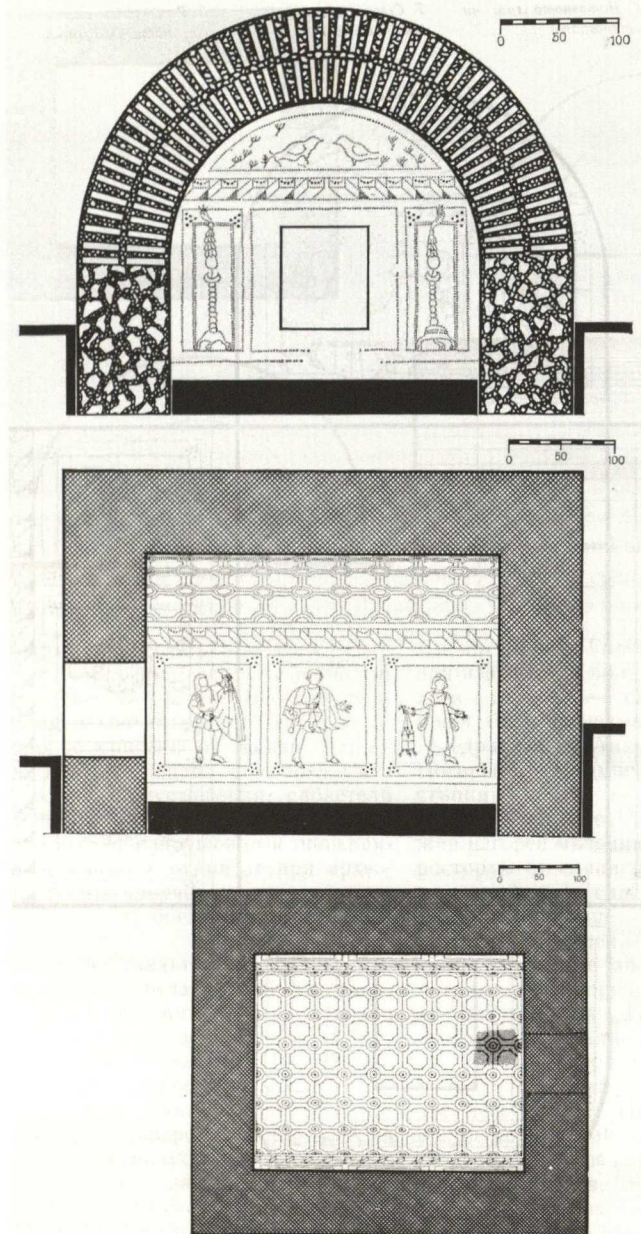
Towns and villages, neighbourhoods, streets

Usually the historic cores are located in the very centre of the cities and there is financial pressure to change the size, height and appearance of the monuments. Although such amendments are not allowed, some negative examples exist, which change the authentic image and atmosphere of the sites. Still the principles of integrated conservation are not implemented in the country, and there is no consequent connection between town planning, archaeological excavations and conservation. When villages are concerned, the problems are mainly due to neglect and lack of maintenance.

Archaeological sites

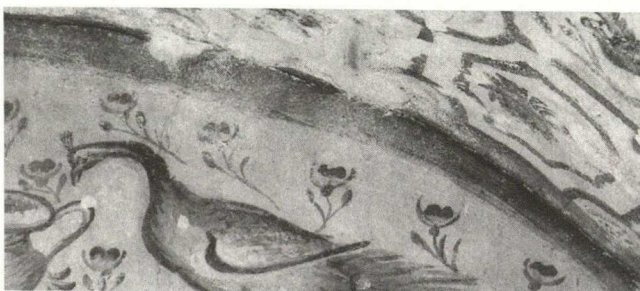
The major threat in this field are criminal archaeological excavations. According to the legislation, all archaeological sites are State property. When such illicit activity occurs, archaeological items of inestimable value are lost, and the State has to immediately allocate funds for security, consolidation and emergency conservation of the rest of the site. This decreases the budget for conservation of all monuments in need, which sharpens the problems of heritage preservation (Case Study A).

NAME OF THE MONUMENT	DATING	CATEGORY (importance)	STATE
I. Listed in 2000			
1 Thracian Tomb in the 'Shishmanets' Sepulchral Tumulus	4th c. BC	national	Not improved
2 Thracian tomb discovered in 'The Small naked tumulus'	4th c. BC	national	Not improved
3 Madara Horseman (Madarski Konnik)	8th c.	world heritage	Not improved
4 The Rock Chapels at Ivanovo village: 'The Church' and 'The Ruined Church'	8th-9th c.	world heritage	Not improved
5 St. Dimitar Church in Boboshevo	15th c.	national	Under restoration
6 St. Dimitar Church in the Podgumerski Monastery	15th-17th c.	national	Not improved
7 Holy Transfiguration of God Church in the Preobrazhenski Monastery	19th c.	national	Not improved
8 Bridge over the Yantra River	19th c.	national	Partially improved
9 St. Spass Church in Dolni Lozen village	17th, 19th c.	national	Not improved
10 Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad	17th c.	national	Not improved
11 Klianti's House in Plovdiv	19th c.	national	Not improved
12 The House of Bayatova, Plovdiv	19th c.	national	Not improved
13 The House of Ilarion Dragostinov, Veliko Tarnovo	17th c.	national	Not improved
14 The Stambolov's Inn, Veliko Tarnovo	19th c.	national	Not improved
II. Added in 2001			
15 Thracian Cemetery near the Village of Alexandrovo	4th c. BC	national	Not improved
16 The Ancient Mediaeval Fortress of Perpericon	8th c.	national	Not improved
17 The Fetih Mehmed Mosque in Kiustendil	15th c.	national	Not improved
18 The Synagogue in Vidin	19th c.	national	Not improved



Case study A: Plan and cross-sections of the Ancient tomb in Silistra

Case study A: Ancient tomb in Silistra – wall paintings in the interior



Religious buildings and sites

According to the Orthodox tradition, almost all church interiors are covered by wall paintings. The Bulgarian heritage is losing priceless murals due to lack of maintenance of the buildings and conservation of the murals on time (Case studies B, C, D and E).

Memorials

Objects with artistic or scientific significance

Archival documents or objects containing information about past cultures

Contemporary works of art after being accepted in museums

The last three suffer the same phenomena – lack of money, insufficient care and no updating of collections and documentation.

It is obvious that in future a substantial source of finance would prove necessary to implement a permanent and overall monitoring of the monuments, which would be an effective approach towards the elimination of threats endangering the monuments. A wider view on the cultural policy of the country in regards to endangered heritage suggests the following conclusions:

- Being a country in transition, legislation should be transformed from being restrictive to one that is stimulating, which will help establish means of preventative conservation – a tool for avoiding the onset of an extreme state of deterioration.
- Proper management requires decentralisation and thus, without denying the prior role of the State, local initiatives should be activated for efficient control and safeguarding of monuments.
- NGOs should take a more important role as a mediator between the diverse social groups on one side and between the national and international institutions on another. They are partners in the intrinsic aims of saving the cultural property and the identity of the nation.

The *physical factors* that negatively impact the monuments can be summarised as follows:

- immanent fragility and lack of durability of the material substance of most of the monuments;
- increased seismic activity and geo-dynamic processes, causing heavy deformations and destruction;
- higher humidity by direct access, infiltration and condensation;
- higher content of harmful chemical agents in the atmosphere in some industrial regions;
- combined action on the monuments of multi-factor risks;
- monuments created and existing in the open air or discovered by archaeological excavations, without any protection or conservation.

A brief review of the monuments listed in the 2000 and 2001/2002 *Heritage at Risk* reports highlights all the above-mentioned problems. In fact their state is deteriorating more and more (with the exception of St. Dimitar Church in Boboshevo, due to a donation from A.G. Leventis and the WMF).

Case Studies

A: Ancient Tomb in Silistra

This late ancient tomb (4th century BC) is under legislative protection as a 'monument of national importance'.

The architectural design of the tomb is a typical one-chamber



space, rectangular in plan and covered by a semi-spherical vault. It is 3.3 metres long and 2.6 metres wide, the stone walls are 60 centimetres thick, and the vault is constructed out of bricks. Bricks also cover the floor. Inside the chamber, the walls and the vault are covered by valuable, high quality wall paintings. The techniques used for producing the murals are *al fresco* and the retouch is *secco*.

The wall murals are divided into rectangular sectors where various images are depicted. The boundary between the walls and the ceiling is painted by trimmer joists – illustrating the Hellenic tradition for space effects. The ceiling is divided into cassettes. Wall paintings including scenes with peacocks cover the lunettes.

The problems are in the field of construction stabilisation and conservation of the murals. Due to capillary moisture they suffer from fungus, salts and erosion of the paint. The eastern lunette is severely damaged. The monuments require consolidation measures: urgent construction support; insulation of the tomb against the penetrating humidity and preservation of the coating; total restoration work and exposure of the tomb.

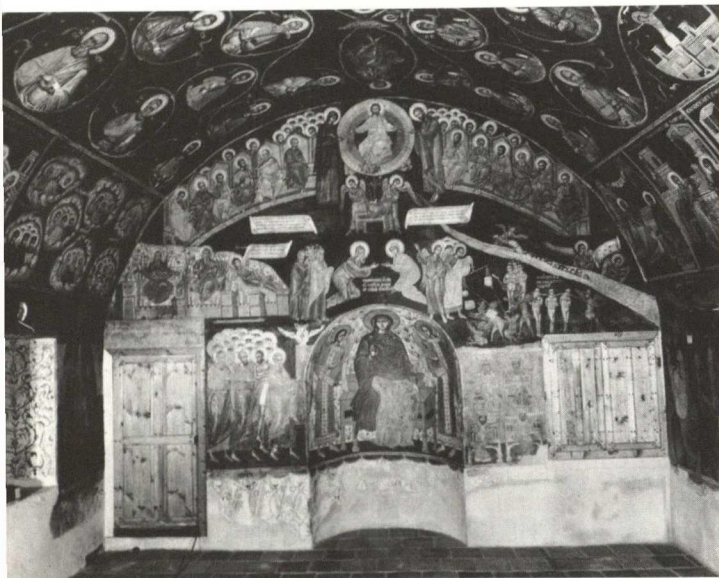
B: Bachkovo Monastery – the Mediaeval Refectory and Main Church

The Bachkovo Monastery was erected in the magnificent locality of the Rodopa mountains (29 kilometres south of Plovdiv). Its history is one of extreme turbulence. Founded by the Georgian Grigory Bakuriani in 1083, the monastery complex was exposed to local, Byzantine and Georgian artistic influences. In 1344, King Alexander established his rule over the Rodopa mountains, populated the monastery with Bulgarian monks and generously donated funds to its upkeep.

Case study B: Bachkovo Monastery, the main Church of the Assumption



Case study B: Bachkovo Monastery, wall paintings in the Large Refectory



Case study B: Bachkovo Monastery, wall paintings in the Large Refectory

The ossuary is the only preserved building from the time the complex was founded. It was recently restored by the A.F. Leventis foundation, and possesses outstanding universal architectural and artistic value.

The large refectory was built in 1601, and is a verification of the high cultural level of the monastic brotherhood. The space is vaulted and murals cover all the walls, the apse and the ceiling. The unknown painter depicted images and events from the Old Testament, even breaking some artistic rules. The murals of the refectory display the upright figures of the ancient philosophers Aristoteles, Diogenes, David Sophocles and Anixemens. The wall paintings are a masterpiece and their composition is a remarkable phenomenon.

The main church of the Assumption was constructed in 1604. It is the only monumental (12 x 22 metre), cruciform, three apse, cultic building in Bulgaria that dates to earlier than the National Revival period. Both the main space and the narthex are entirely painted.

In the middle of the 19th century, a new courtyard with church and dwelling wings were added to the south. Today Backovo Monastery forms one of the richest galleries of history and art, as it has always been a significant spiritual and literary centre.

The large reflection and the main church of the monastery were restored in the 1970s. Unfortunately the priceless wall paintings are in a desperate condition due to roof leakage. Emergency measures are necessary in terms of new roofing and proper isolation from the infiltrating moisture, as well as new conservation of the murals.

C: Church 'St. Nickola' in Soslavtzi Monastery

The site is located not far from Sofia – in the southern slopes of the Balkan mountains. The monastery was probably erected before the 14th century, but was ruined during the Turkish domination. The present monastery church was constructed at the beginning of the 17th century. Its plan (7 x 16 metres) marks the tradition of one-apse churches with one nave and a large exonartex. During the 18th century the church was redecorated by high quality murals – vivid, colourful, true masterpieces of the Bulgarian art at that time.

Severe damage is obvious at present – throughout the years the church has been seriously affected, as a result of slides of the terrain. Part of the murals in the naos were covered by whitewash, and the iconostasis was stolen. The church requires urgent consolidation measures, starting with strengthening and stabilisation of the terrain. Partial reconstruction of the destroyed parts must also be carried out as soon as possible. The next step should be restoration of both the immovable decoration of the monument – the wall paintings – and of the moveable decoration – for example, iconostasis and icons. The site is of national importance.

D: Church 'St. Georgi' in Arbanasi

The church was created in the 17th century; it has one apse, one nave and a chapel inside. The main damage was caused in the 20th century: the murals were partially destroyed as a result of inappropriate intervention; parts of the mural paintings have been conserved, others have been taken down, but are being kept under poor conditions. The longer they stay stored (treated with glue for their removal) and poorly packed, the possibility of their proper conservation and display diminishes.

It requires urgent measures for the consolidation of the construction and complete restoration of the immovable decoration –

Case study C: Church 'St. Nickola' in Soslavtzi Monastery, wall paintings





Case study E: Church St. Arhangel and Michail in Bilintzi monastery, wall paintings in the interior

the wall paintings, the wooden and metal decoration components – and of the moveable decoration – iconostasis, icons, wooden thrones, church plates. It is also a monument of national importance.

E: Church 'St. Arhangel and Michail' in Bilintzi Monastery

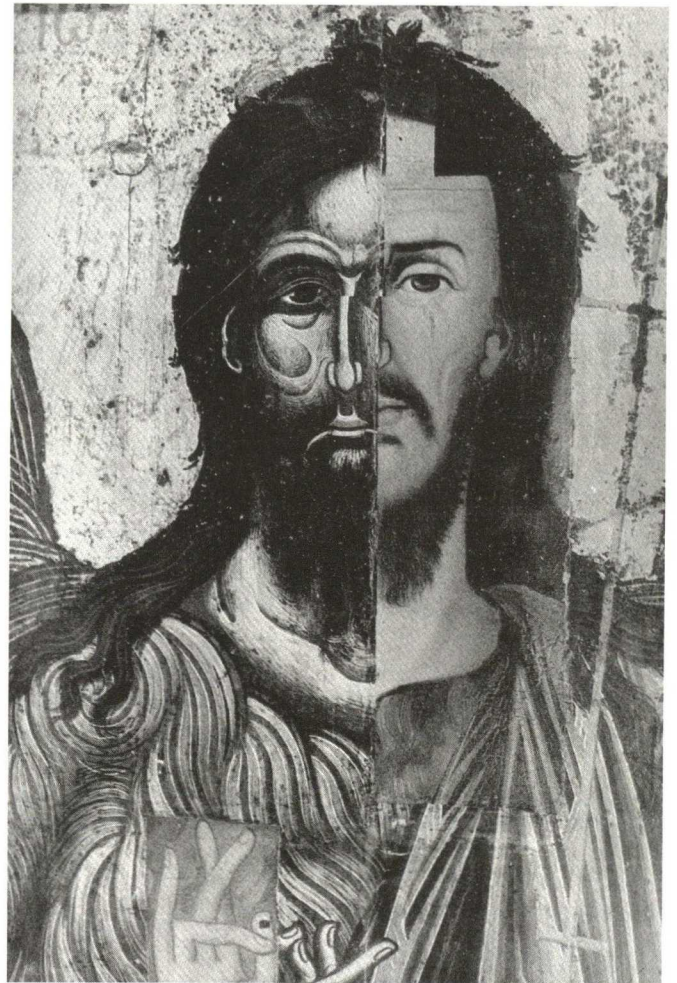
The available historical documents first mention Bilintzi Monastery in 1586. The monastery is located about 50 kilometres west of Sofia. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was an enlightening centre with an attached monastery school. Even during that time the monastery established relationships with several other monasteries in Monte Athos and Russia.

The church is a small (7 x 16 metre) one-apse building; it has one nave, and the narthex was added later. It was renewed in 1855.

The murals inside the naos and the narthex are precious and of national importance. They are dated from the 17th century, with a rather advanced style, free of the strict rules that existed in the field at that time – the colours are bright, and the murals are enriched with architectural details and scenes from country life. Although the wall paintings are dedicated to the cult and some of the images are slightly primitive, they impress a buoyancy and festive mood.

All of the decorative system in Bilintzi Monastery marks an important stage in the development of the Bulgarian figurative arts.

Throughout the ages, the ensemble has suffered continuous damage under the destructive effect of the environment, and the mural paintings are falling down. The monument needs urgent measures to halt the destructive processes: consolidation of the terrain around the church, structural reinforcement, consolidation of the erected structure, roofing and window replacement, and restoration of all moveable and immoveable features.



Case study D: Church 'St. Georgi' in Arbanasi, two layers of mediaeval icon