

BULGARIA – HERITAGE @ RISK!

The risks, which the cultural heritage in Bulgaria is exposed to, could be classified into two main categories: direct – physical, and indirect – socio-economic.

In order to adequately evaluate the actual situation of risk for Bulgarian cultural heritage, it is of primary importance to be clear that the main threat to cultural heritage conservation could be considered the dramatic lack of necessary funds for the elimination of direct, physical risks and the overall concern for the cultural heritage places.

In the context of the political and economic instability of the region and the painful inner structural changes, providing the transition to a free-market economy, acute social problems arise, which have a definite priority in the formation of the state and local budgets. At the same time, effective legislative mechanisms and stimuli are still lacking, as well as tradition and experience in the community itself – for the mobilisation of out-of-budget funds to finance activities in the field of culture in general and in cultural heritage in particular.

It is easy to explain that in this situation, the limited funds available are by no means sufficient even to carry out of the most urgent measures for cultural heritage conservation. First, these measures should be reduced to making an inventory of the most endangered cultural monuments of high value at a national scale; the identification of the physical risks for their safety and finally, the undertaking of emergency measures for the elimination of the most destructive factors. The available funds are unfortunately far beyond those necessary for such a minimal program, because of which at present even that program proves to be impossible to implement.

The fulfilment of the first two tasks – the making of an inventory of the most endangered heritage places of culture and the identification of the threats for their conservation – requires radical improvement of the National Archive for Monuments of Culture. The existing documentation for a number of monuments is incomplete and insufficient; the materials (texts, photos, drawings) are still kept mainly on paper, which definitely slows down and hinders their investigation and completion, and funds and personnel are lacking for the updating, permanent maintenance and technological updating of the documentation.

Due to this, it is impossible at present to create a full and detailed picture of the condition of the cultural heritage places in Bulgaria, outlining where from the entire massif the most endangered heritage places are to be found. (It has to be pointed out that at least at present this does not cause any difficulties by the annual distribution of the budget funds for conservation, as the information available is absolutely sufficient for the selection of the few monuments, where these funds are directed). It is however obvious that in the future substantial funding would need to be provided for the implementation of a permanent and overall monitoring on cultural heritage, for the completion and maintenance of the documentation in the National Archive and its technological updating – a task of fundamental importance both for the total activity related to the conservation of cultural heritage, as well as for an effective approach towards the problem of eliminating threats endangering heritage places.

As far as physical factors with a direct, destructive effect

over heritage are concerned, they do not extend the limits of a universal, still conventional systematisation of the risks:

1. The imminent fragility and lack of durability of the material fabric of most heritage places.
2. The increased seismic activity and geo-dynamic processes, causing heavy twisting and destruction.
3. A higher humidity from direct access of moisture, infiltration and condensation.
4. A higher content of harmful chemical agents in the atmosphere in some industrial regions.
5. The combined action on the monuments of multiple risks, heritage places created and existing in the open or discovered by archaeological excavation, without providing any protection for their conservation.
6. Human destructive activity – as a result of historic cataclysms, building activities, incompetent conservation work, bad maintenance, vandalism (this factor has more historic dimensions, while today it is mainly brought about by bad maintenance – in most cases due to lack of funds and more rarely – to indifference).

The above brief presentation of the problems for Bulgarian heritage at risk aims at explaining the following main characteristics of the list of case studies of the most endangered heritage places outlined below:

- The list has no pretension at all to be full and complete, it should be considered just as a beginning and first stage of a large-scale and profound inventory of the endangered monuments of Bulgaria.
- The high cultural and historic value of heritage places, included in the list – two of the monuments being included in the World Heritage List, most of the rest are declared as monuments of national significance, according to the Law for the Monuments of Culture and Museums.
- The endangered physical condition and the real threat for loosing the authentic fabric, in case no urgent measures are undertaken to save the heritage places.
- Those various enlisted monuments belonging to different epochs (from Antiquity to Renaissance), cultures (Thracian, Christian, Islamic), functional types (churches, monasteries, tombs, residential buildings etc), creative genres (architectural, artistic, constructive etc).
- For each one of the cultural heritage places included in the case studies below, the main risk factors are being pointed out (numbered from 1 to 6 in accordance to the above classification of risks).

Case Study 1 – Thracian Tomb in the “Shishmanets” Sepulchral Tumulus

The Thracian tomb discovered in the Shishmanets sepulchral tumulus during the archaeological excavations in August 1996 is located about 0.5 km to the south west of the centre of the town of Shipka, Kazanlak District, in the central part of Bulgaria. It is a monumental tomb under a sepulchral hill landfill, built of blocks of porphyroid granite of unstable structure which

are fastened with lead clamps, the tomb consisting of dromos, antechamber and tomb chamber. The tomb dates back to the 4th century BC. It is placed under interim protection as a Monument of Culture of the category of monuments “of national importance”, the procedure for finally declaring it under protection is about to be performed.

Severe damage can be observed. The problems are mainly of structural character – the stone blocks of the dome of the antechamber are fractured, cracks are observed also in the eastern part of the dome, about 30% of the lime mortar coat has been preserved, it is in a weakened condition due to the penetration of atmospheric humidity and the deposition of salts.

The site requires consolidation measures – urgent stabilisation, insulation of the tomb against the penetrating moisture and preservation of the coating – a total restoration and the tomb’s presentation to the public.

The risk factor is 5.

Case Study 2 – Thracian tomb discovered in “The small naked tumulus”

The tomb is a part of the Necropolis, situated 0.5 km to the south west of the centre of the town of Shipka, Kazanlak District, in the central part of Bulgaria. It is an imposing tomb discovered in July 1996 during the archaeological excavations of one of the sepulchral hill landfills of the Necropolis. The tomb is built of blocks of porphyroid granite of unstable structure. It consists of a square tomb chamber, covered by a parabolic vault, antechamber and a large dromos. It is plastered by a fine white mortar. The tomb dates back to the 4th century BC.

Placed under interim protection as a Monument of Culture of the category of monuments “of national importance”; the procedure for finally declaring it under protection is about to be performed.

Severe damage can be observed – on the eastern and western walls of the chamber there are visible cracks running from the vault to the floor, part of the plaster is detached in the upper part of the vault and in the antechamber and part of it has already fallen down, the pavement is damaged, and the walls of the dromos are ruined.

It needs consolidation measures – urgent stabilisation and total restoration work and the tomb’s presentation to the public – strengthening and conservation of the plasters, reconstruction of the dromos.

The risk factor is 5.

Case Study 3 – Madara Horseman (*Madarski Konnik*)

The madara horseman is a stone relief with adjacent chronological inscriptions, cut on the vertical steep slope of the plateau in the vicinity of Kaspichan town, North East Bulgaria. It was created at the beginning of the 8th century. The Madara Horseman was declared a cultural monument of national importance and in 1979 was included in the List of World Heritage (No 43).

Until now it has been continuously damaged by the action of the surrounding environment. Severe damage is visible. Partially damaged due to the continuous process of natural destruction, it requires measures for consolidation of the rock massif into which the relief has been cut, as well as consolidation of the relief itself and the surrounding inscriptions. A major problem to be solved is to find out the best possible technical solution providing maximum protection of the relief from the direct influence of these destructive agents.

The risk factors are 2, 3, 4, 5.

Case Study 4 – The Rock Chapels at Ivanovo Village, “The Church” and “The Ruined Church” sites

The set of Rock Chapels is located on the rocky slopes on both sides of the Roussenski Lom river bank, near Ivanovo village, in the vicinity of Rousse in North East Bulgaria. The complex includes monasteries, churches, chapels and monks’ cells, situated in spaces carved out from natural caves in karst rock massifs. Especially significant are the wall paintings which have been preserved to a different extent in five of the churches. The ensemble dates back to the Middle Ages, to the 13th to 14th centuries, as a result of the then widespread hermit religious movement. The Rock Chapels near Ivanovo were declared a cultural monument of national importance and in 1979 were included in the List of World Heritage under No 45.

Throughout the ages the complex suffered continuous damaging under the destructive effect of the environment. Severe damage can be observed at present. The wall paintings are partially damaged by the destructive effect of the environment and human vandalism, and partial destruction of the rock massif.

“The Church” site (14th century) needs measures to consolidate the rock massif within which the Church is situated, as well as emergency measures to prevent the most aggressive harmful impacts.

“The Ruined Church” site (13th century) requires measures to consolidate the rock massif within which the Ruined Church is situated and the total conservation and restoration of the wall paintings.

The risk factors are 1, 2, 3.

Case Study 5 – St Dimitar Church in Boboshevo

The St Dimitar church in Boboshevo Monastery is an extremely precious representative of medieval architecture. It possesses the highest value, “monument of national importance”, according to the Bulgarian listing criteria. The building carries enormous potential for cultural and social influence. The Church is located in an area highly concentrated with Monuments of Culture, forming a specific historical and artistic landscape.

The church was constructed in the 15th century. It has one nave, one round apse, and is covered by a semi-spheric vault.

The wall paintings entirely cover both the walls and the ceiling, as well as the western façade. They are dated to 1488 and have extremely high value, which goes beyond the national cultural boundaries and provokes the interest of many Balkan investigators, tourists and pilgrims.

Today, the physical state of the monument is desperately poor, which is why for a long period of time the spiritual and cultural values have been inaccessible to pilgrims and tourists. Although some attempts at consolidation were made about 50 years ago, when a late and inauthentic narthex and façades were added, the building is listed by the Bulgarian Ministry of Culture as a threatened heritage place.

The risk factors are 1, 3, 6.

Case Study 6 – St Dimitar Church in the Podgumerski Monastery

Saint Dimitar Church is located in the Podgumerski Monastery, close to the village of Podgumer, within the region of Sofia District. The wall paintings of the church are of extremely high value, and because of them, it was declared an artistic cultural monument of national importance. The church was erected in the 16th to 17th centuries and later reconstructed in the 17th to 19th centuries.

The main damage occurred in the 20th century, after World War II. Severe damage can be observed at present. The church is partially demolished and there is an imminent danger of demolition. It requires total restoration of the built structure and the immovable decoration of the monument, including the wall paintings, as well as urban planning for the surroundings. Strengthening and reintegration of the destroyed parts of walls are the most urgent measures that must be undertaken as soon as possible.

The risk factors are 1, 6.

Case Study 7 – Church of the Holy Transfiguration of God in the Preobrazhenski Monastery

The Preobrazhenski Monastery is located close to the town of Veliko Tarnovo, in the central part of North Bulgaria. The erection of the church dates back to 1834. The Monastery presents an extremely valuable architectural and artistic ensemble of exceptional cultural and historic value, because of which it has been declared a cultural monument of national importance.

Severe damage is currently obvious. Over the years the church has been partially destroyed, as a result of landslides above the Monastery in the 1970s and of the caving in of the cliff in the terrain below the monastery in 1992.

It requires urgent stabilisation, starting with the strengthening of the terrain. Partial reconstruction of the destroyed elements has also to be carried out as soon as possible. The next step should be the total reconstruction of the church, of the built structure as well as reconstruction both of the immovable deco-

ration of the monument, the wall paintings, and of the movable decoration, the iconostasis, and icons, etc.

The risk factors are 1, 2.

Case Study 8 – Bridge over the Yantra River

The bridge is situated over the Yantra river, on the road from Pleven via Byala to Rousse, 1 km far from Byala town, Rousse region, in North East Bulgaria. The bridge is an engineering device of exclusive structural properties and was declared a cultural monument of national importance.

The bridge was built in 1867 by the order of the Rousse vali Midhad Pasha by Master Nikola Fichev (Usta Kolyu Ficheto), a self-educated builder who constructed a number of buildings, churches and bridges. At the time it was built it was as long as 275 m, with 14 domes with middle clear openings of 12 m, 13 pillars with water-cuts and alleviating niches, and 2 abutments. It is constructed of cut stone of local limestone and lime mortar.

Severe damage has occurred over the years. In 1897, there was a flood and eight domes in the middle part of the bridge (about 130 m in length) were destroyed. In 1922-23, the bridge was reconstructed with steel concrete pillars and domes, but its original design was changed, and the new part is of low aesthetic value). A new bridge was built and the track of main road was moved aside and the old bridge was closed to cars and is only used by pedestrians.

The preserved original parts are severely damaged, namely the eastern section, 78 m in length, and the western part, 64 m in length, and the stone coating and the sculpted decoration of the existing original parts of the bridge are severely eroded.

It requires urgent measures for consolidation of the construction. The project designed anticipates stabilisation and hydro-insulation protection of the original parts, as well as partial reconstruction, with that part of the bridge which was reconstructed in 1922-23 (about 130 m in length) to be dismantled and reconstructed again following the original pattern of the monument. The next stage should be the complete restoration work on the frontage and the sculptural elements, the sculpted stone of its original parts.

The risk factors are 1, 2, 5.

Case Study 9 – St Spass Church in Dolni Lozen Village, Sofia region

Saint Spass church is located in the Dolni Lozen Monastery, within the boundaries of the Sofia District, 17 km from the centre of the capital city and 3 km from the village of Dolni Lozen. Due to the extremely high value of the wall paintings of the church, it was declared an artistic cultural monument of national importance.

The Church was erected in 1671 according to the earliest written records about the church. It was re-built in 1821 and in 1857 three new cupolas were built and the church was completely painted with murals and frescoes. In the 17th and

18th centuries the church was burnt down several times. The main damage was caused in the 20th century, being partially destroyed and about 1/3 of the mural paintings lost as a result of inappropriate technical intervention. Parts of the mural paintings have been covered, others have been taken down, and are being kept under poor conditions.

The Church requires urgent measures for the consolidation of the slope along the whole southern wall of the church which is slipping and from which moisture is penetrating into the church. It needs the consolidation of the construction, partial reconstruction of the floor levels and the antechamber, the building of a partial or complete temporary cover over the church in order to enable the conservation activities on the monument, complete restoration of the immovable decoration, the wall paintings and the wooden and metal decoration components, and of the movable decoration, the iconostasis, wooden thrones, and church plate.

The risk factors are 1, 3, 6.

Case Study 10 – Ibrahim Pasha Mosque in Razgrad

The active Ibrahim Pasha Mosque is situated on the central city square in Razgrad, North East Bulgaria. It is one of the most impressive “Friday” mosques in Bulgaria, with an imposing cross-dome building with 4 towers and a high minaret. The Mosque was declared a cultural monument of national importance. Its erection dates back to 1616. A number of reconstructions were later carried out during the period from 1828 till 1979.

In 1970, during the preservation and restoration work carried out the antechamber was destroyed because of its critical technical condition and it has not yet been recovered. Severe damage is currently obvious. It needs urgent consolidation measures, both partial reconstruction and total restoration, including stabilisation, and painting and restoration of the immovable decoration of the monument.

The risk factors are 1, 6.

Case Study 11 – Klianti’s house

Klianti’s house is one of the oldest houses (1816) of the rich merchants in the Reserve of “Ancient Plovdiv” and one of the most valuable from an architectural and artistic point of view. It has been declared a cultural monument of national importance.

The house is a two-storey residential building with an area of 200 m² and entire area of 584 m². In 1928, due to the regulation town plan of architect Shnitter, part of the building was cut. The interior is famous with its rich architectural work with geometrical motives of the ceilings and multi-coloured surfaces, unique landscapes on the walls dating back to 1817, and a richly painted niche “French style”. The walls are decorated with monumental compositions with vegetation ornaments. Part of the original wall paintings and ceilings are preserved *in situ*, others have been taken away and preserved.

The lath-and-plaster construction is in an extremely bad physical state, the entire lath-and-plaster frame is in a deteriorated state, as well as all floor trimmer joists, roof construction, and woodwork, etc.

The risk factors are 1, 6.

Case Study 12 – The House of Alexandra Bayatova

The house of Alexandra Bayatova in the Reserve “Ancient Plovdiv”, built in the 19th century, is a typical representative of one the main typological groups in Bulgarian vernacular architecture – “the Plovdiv House”. It has been declared a cultural monument of national importance.

The house is a two-storey building with a stone basement under part of it. The supporting system consists of solid external stone walls and wooden columns, in the basement and in the ground floor, with supporting walls of wooden frame with a brick filling in the upper floor.

At present the building is in an extremely bad condition. As a result of the sinking of the walls, especially those with the wooden frame, some vertical and slanting cracks in the walls and serious deformation and declinations of the floor and roof constructions can be observed. The timber of all structural elements including the roof construction is in bad condition, the wood being affected by erosion from wood worms, and parts of the wooden frame of the external walls are damaged.

The risk factors are 1, 6.

Case Study 13 – The House of Ilarion Dragostinov

The House of Ilarion Dragostinov is located in the village of Arbanassi, in the region of Veliko Tarnovo. It is a typical example of the rich houses from the region of Arbanassi and was declared a cultural monument of national importance. The house was probably built in the 17th century, later on, during the 18th century, some reconstruction was carried out, an entrance hall being created on the ground floor, while on the upper floor the open gallery (called *chardak*) and the room next to it were enlarged.

The house is a two-storey building, covering an area of 260 m². The ground floor and the whole south façade are stonework, while the remaining three façades of the main floor are made of wood. The representative rooms on the main floor, as well as the open gallery (the *chardak*) have wooden ceilings, and the floor is covered in ceramic tiles in figurative patterns. The ceiling of the north room is plastered and ornamentally decorated.

At present the building is in a very bad situation. In 1977, the house suffered from an earthquake and no measures to rectify the damage and strengthen the building were taken at the proper time. The wooden beams of the floor between the ground floor and the main floor are almost ruined. The filling of the inner walls is removed and the supporting frame in the interior is to-

tally exposed, its elements are seriously damaged by water, penetrating through the damaged roof. The roof construction and the walls are at present supported and strengthened by a metal tube scaffolding. Most of the doors and windows, as well as the ceramic floors are dismantled and preserved, the details and the ornaments of the ceilings being documented.

The risk factors are 1, 6.

Case Study 14 – The Stambolov’s Inn

The inn is located in Veliko Tarnovo, it was built in the 1840s, in the neighbourhood of the most lively market-place of the town during the Renaissance. It is one of three inns preserved nowadays.

The building is a residential building with a predominantly wooden construction, representative of Renaissance vernacular architecture. The authenticity and the participation of the build-

ing in the town planning structure is still preserved. It possesses high individual cultural, historic, architectural and artistic value and is declared a Monument of Culture of local significance.

The building has an “I” – shape composition, situated on steep ground aligned with the street. It consists of a ground floor – shops and two floors – workshops and rooms for rent, facing the main street, and another two floors, facing the East. The main entrance is at a higher level, leading to an inner covered courtyard, where various staircases lead to the upper floors and the open inner courtyard. The ground floor is built of stone, while the upper floors have a lath-and-plaster frame. The inn was built over medieval vaults and reconstructed Renaissance houses, which later at the end of the 19th century were amalgamated into one. The façade was also changed at that time. At present the building is semi-destroyed.

The risk factors are 1, 6.

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