

The archaeological site of Heraclea Linkestis

Country or territory:

"THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA"

Name of organisation

compiling the information:

Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments, Natural Rarities, Museum and Gallery, Bitola /

Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments of the Rep. of Macedonia, Skopje

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Name and address of building(s) or site:

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF HERACLEA LINKESTIS, Bitola

Inventory reference number(s):

r.b.1040 (27.07.1950)/ m.b. 4-802-990/023RND

Building type(s):

Archaeological site

Main date(s):

4th century BC – 6th century AD

Current use(s):

Cultural tourism, education, research studies

Significance:

Heraclea Linkestis is a cultural heritage site of international significance. It is located south of Bitola, 15 km from the border with Greece. The history of this site became a subject of great interest at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, not only in Macedonia, but also within the scope of the broader international archaeological research.

Fortunate historic circumstances and geographical aspects contributed to Heraclea's prosperity in the ancient world. The *terminus ante quem* of the city's foundation is provided by Demosten, who refers to Heraclea in the context of the first Philippic war (349 BC).

Situated in a fertile valley, the city was mentioned on all known itinerary maps of its time as a station on the *Via Egnatia* – the famous regional road of the classical epoch. In the first centuries of our era, Heraclea became a Roman colony, event confirmed by the inscription from the beginning of the 3rd century AD, displaying a well-known name of a Roman dynasty – Septimia Aurelia Heraclea. For many centuries, it remained within the borders of the Roman Empire and developed into an urban centre of considerable importance, it is still witnessed, by monuments such as the entrance gate to the Court House, the Thermal Baths and the Theatre.

However, the apex in the prosperity of Heraclea corresponds to the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, when this city became the seat of a Bishopric. Bishops from Heraclea have been mentioned as participants in Ecumenical Councils from the 4th to the 6th century. Many buildings, amongst which, the Great Basilica, the Small Basilica and the Episcopal residence, date from this period. The floors of each of these buildings are paved with spectacular mosaics, discovered between 1960 and 1974, and are considered amongst the most impressive and remarkable remains from the Early Christian period anywhere. The mosaic floors of 16 rooms (an area of 1,300m²), executed according to various techniques, represent a unique pictorial testimony of their time and an exceptional illustration of the passage between paganism and Christianity. One of the most significant buildings is the city's fountain, whose inauguration is set by an inscription to 10 September 562 AD, celebrating 35 years of rule of the Emperor Justinian I.

Just as many other cities of the Classical period, Heraclea declined at the end of the 6th century AD. According to historic sources, between the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th century, Slavic tribes settled in this region, as attested by numerous remains.

Categories of significance:

Of international importance

This city was marked on all known maps of ancient time as an important city-station on one of the main Roman roads in the Balkans, the *Via Egnatia*, which connected the Adriatic and the Aegean Sea. The remains of floor mosaics from the Early Christian period are among the best examples found anywhere.

Categories of ownership or interest:

This site, a high achievement of two powerful civilizations – the Roman Empire and the Early Byzantine Empire – is of interest to all the nationalities living on this territory.

Documentation and bibliographic references:

Documentation

- Complete technical and photographic documentation for the Roman theatre only
- Technical and photographic documentation of various separate parts of the floor mosaics
- Incomplete documentation of the City Wall
- Selected photographic and technical documentation of the researches carried out on the Theatre Square and of the project entitled Redefining the Character of Particular Architectural Components of the Buildings of Heraclea
- The documentation of the excavations, carried out in 1959 – 1974 (presently available only in Belgrade)

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Condition:

The Theatre Square sector: the excavated walls of the buildings in this sector are in very bad condition. No conservation interventions have ever been undertaken.

The Great Basilica: very bad condition. On the southern wall of the Baptistery the falling of stones is imminent, which might entail the complete failure of the building's structure. The southern wall of the southern annex of the Basilica is in similar condition. The mosaics of the narthex, the *naos* (northern and southern aisle), those in the Baptistery and in the northern and southern annexes of the Basilica, need special and urgent conservation treatment.

The southern part of the Early Byzantine City Wall is in very bad condition. There are serious damages resulting in structure failure. The towers are almost completely destroyed.

The Small Basilica: poor condition. The structure of the eastern part of the building (the apse) is in danger. The mosaic floor of the external narthex needs urgent intervention.

The *Thermae* are in fair condition. Their structure suffers from a slow deteriorating process (partial damages on the walls are visible), but the stability of the building is not in danger yet. The building can be consolidated with minor repairs and maintenance works.

The Court House Portal: the stability of the structure is not in danger; Fair condition: minor repairs are sufficient for the partial damages of the walls.

Episcopal Residence: the structure of the building is in good condition but minor repairs still have to be undertaken. The floor mosaics in the refectory and in the three chambers of the residence are in fair condition.

The City Fountain: good condition of the structure, but the building needs minor repairs and proper maintenance.

The Theatre: the structure of the building is in good condition.

Risk:

Bitola and its surroundings are an area of extreme climate conditions: very hot summers and continental cold winters. Some of the above-mentioned damages result from the specific climate conditions. This explains why the buildings and the floor mosaics need to be under special conservation treatment, using adequate materials, techniques and with an appropriate presentation system.

Condition Risk:

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration of the walls (the southern wall of the Baptistery in the Great basilica); rapid deterioration of the towers of the Early Byzantine City Wall.

Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration of the newly discovered walls in the sector of the Theatre Square.

Slow decay of the mosaics; there is an agreed solution/project but lack of funding for its implementation.

Technical assessment and costings:

2000 Conservation of the floor mosaics (498 m²) of the Great Basilica, with financial support from the PHARE Program (10,100 EUR)

2001 Conservation activities for the floor mosaics (281 m²) of the Episcopal Basilica are underway, with the financial support of the Ministry of Culture (2,500 EUR)

Ownership:

The archaeological site of Heraclea Linkestis is State property.

Occupation:

The conservation and presentation solutions for the excavated buildings of this site are temporary and unsatisfactory. All the monuments are open to the public, i.e. accessible throughout the year. The Theatre is used as a stage for many performances during the summer, except the floors paved with mosaics, which are not used. The only mosaics presented to the public are those of the narthex of the Great Basilica and in the external narthex of the Small Basilica.

Management:

The organisation responsible for this site is the Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Monuments, Natural Rarities, Museum and Gallery, Bitola. The Institute will be responsible for the administration of funds and the supervision of the works, should they become available.

Summary:

Because of the international significance of the archaeological site of Heraclea, and of the poor or bad condition of many of its components, the potential priority level for intervention is *high*. Considering the assessment of separate buildings, the priority of interventions would be as following:

1. The floor mosaics
2. The structure of the southern part of the City Wall
3. The structure of the buildings in the sector of the Theatre Square

4. The structure of the southern wall of the Great Basilica
5. The structure of the eastern wall (apsidal wall) of the Small Basilica.

Sign. and date:

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Bitola and Skopje, 6.12.2003