

The Episcopal Basilica and the Baptistery at the archaeological site of Stobi

Country or territory:

"THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA"

Name of organisation

compiling the information:

Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje

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Name and address of building(s) or site:

THE EPISCOPAL BASILICA AND THE BAPTISTERY AT THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF STOBI, near Gradsko

Inventory reference number(s):

Building type(s):

Early Christian church and Baptistery

Main date(s):

4th – 6th AD

Current use(s):

Cultural tourism site presently undergoing excavations and conservation.

Significance:

The Episcopal Basilica is one of the greatest and most elaborate late Classical sacral buildings of the archaeological site of Stobi. It was erected on the eastern part of the main street -Via Sacra. In this location, the remains of two buildings, known as the Old and the New Basilica, built and reconstructed in several phases between the 4th and the 5th century AD, were excavated.

The Old Basilica is probably the oldest Christian church discovered on the territory of the Rep. of Macedonia. The basilica was constructed during the ministry of the bishop Budios, present at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325. The Old Basilica is a three-aisled building. Fresco paintings as well as the geometric and floral pavement mosaics date from the first construction period. The second construction phase, dating back to the first half of the 5th century, corresponds to the ministry of the Bishop Eustathios. The remains of the fresco paintings decorated with the monograms of Christ and the Bishop Eustathios, and the mosaics in the nave, date from the same period.

At the end of the 5th century, the New Basilica, significantly larger, was constructed four meters above the level of the earlier church. Parts of walls adorned with gold mosaics, the remains of a crypt in the apse, and the columns date from the first construction phase. An inscription describing the Bishop Philip as the patron of the church, situated above the entrance of the nave, dates back to the second construction phase, around 530 AD. The New Basilica ceased to function in the second half of the 6th century, after a catastrophic earthquake, which destroyed the city.

A staircase leads from the south door of the narthex of the Episcopal Basilica to the Baptistery. The Baptistery, erected at the same level of the Old Church, was built in the shape of a tetraconch and included a circular pool dating from the period of the early church, at the end of the 4th century. The paved mosaic floors are the most beautiful of the ones found at Stobi. They are decorated with eschatological and eucharistic compositions in which a water-fowl, deer and a peacock drink from a *kantharos*. The walls are covered with three layers of fresco paintings. The most significant are those depicting the life of Christ. On the south of the Baptistery there was a *preaefurnium* for heating water and a basin.

Categories of significance:

Of outstanding national importance

The oldest building, the early Christian Basilica, has a particular significance as a testimony to the earliest history of the Christian civilization on this territory and beyond.

Categories of ownership or interest:

This site is of interest to all the communities living on this territory.

Documentation and bibliographic references:

Documentation

Several types of documents are available: research programmes, conservation projects, excavation reports, photographic and technical documentation on the discovered artefacts, etc.

The manager of the site, Mr. Živojin Vinčić, Ph.D., an archaeologist, prepared a restoration and conservation project which includes all the components of this archaeological complex (architectural monuments, fragments of wall paintings and mosaics, etc.).

Bibliography

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3. E. Kitzinger, *Survey of the Early Christian Town of Stobi*, Dumbarton Oaks Papers 3, Washington 1946, 87-110
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5. J.R. Wiseman and Đ. Mano-Zissi, *Excavations at Stobi, 1971*, AJA 76; 420-422
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7. B. Aleksova, *The early Christian Basilicas at Stobi*, CCAB 33, Ravenna, 1986
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Condition:

The condition of the two excavated basilicas is very bad. Ten years ago, 50 % of the floor mosaics (that is 340m²) were removed from the site, together with the frescoes from the walls of the Old Basilica.

Some of the walls are extremely unstable. Their collapse is prevented by temporary supporting structures. The rich decorative marble remains are not appropriately protected and presented.

Risk:

There is a general risk of collapse due to the high seismicity of the region.

Condition Risk:

Immediate risk of collapse due to the instability of the basilica's wall structure and the temporary roof. There is no new permanent solution/project prepared yet.

Immediate risk: the floor mosaics, fresco paintings and the marble decoration are also endangered, owing to their inadequate protection and exposure to destructive micro-organisms. No permanent solution has been prepared.

Technical assessment and costings:

The temporary roof of the Basilica is composed of two parts. The southern part was constructed in 1978, and the central one over the period of 1983-1985. The project was prepared by the experts of the Institute of Engineering in Skopje. The realisation costs amounted to 60,000 EUR.

A project for the conservation and restoration, of the Episcopal Basilica and the Baptistery (building structure, wall paintings, mosaics) is undertaken by the manager of the site, Mr. Vincic. The preliminary cost estimate amounts to 330,000 EUR.

Ownership:

The site is State property.

A special management department has been established for the archaeological site of Stobi. Its work is supervised by the Institute of Protection of the Cultural Monuments of the Rep. of Macedonia.

Occupation:

Despite the fact that buildings are not entirely presented, they remain a part of the cultural itinerary of the entire site. They are accessible to the public.

Management:

The entire site is under the management of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of the Rep. of Macedonia. The Institute will be responsible for the supervision of the interventions at Stobi in case funds are provided.

Summary:

The sacral complex comprising two basilicas and a baptistery is of outstanding importance, not only at the local level but much farther, especially considering the fact that the Old Basilica is the oldest Christian building on this territory.

Given the fact this site is located in a zone of high seismic activity, considering the instability of the buildings due to incomplete protection measures, we assume that the priority level is *high*.

Sign. and date:

Živojin Vinčić, PhD.
Skopje, 8.12.2003