

Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God

Country or territory:

"THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA"

Name of organisation

compiling the information:

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

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Name and address of building(s) or site:

CHURCH OF THE DORMITION OF THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD, village of Velushina

Inventory reference number(s):

r.b. 08-409/1, 9.10.1996; m.b. 4-802-990/023 RND

Building type (s):

Orthodox Church

Main date(s):

10th-11th / 19th century

Current use(s):

Church with active service

Significance:

The Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God is situated near the village of Velushina, 10 km south of Bitola, near the border with Greece, on the slopes of the Baba Mountain.

Until recently, it was considered that the church was built in the first half of the 19th century, over the remains of an older structure. However, archaeological excavations carried out in 1991 by experts from the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Bitola, found evidence of graves from the 9th and the 11th century.

Recent research on the architecture and the wall paintings demonstrated that this church dates back to the Medieval period, to be more precise the 10th century or the beginning of the 11th century, as confirmed by international experts of Medieval Byzantine art. This chronology is compatible with the stylistic character of a recently found wall painting fragment, discovered under a 19th century paint layer.

The building is a small three-aisled basilica, inspired by early Christian architectural typologies. Studies have proved that the communication from the central aisle to the subsidiary aisles and the narthex was ensured through a triple passage (*tribilon*). This type of passage can be found in the several sacral Byzantine buildings, built in the 9th -11th centuries, such as the monastery of Chora in Constantinople, St. Sophia in Thessalonica and the Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God in Labovo (Albania). This type of "small basilica" is characteristic of the regions of Kastoria and Florina in Greece. Other very similar examples are the Church "Taxiarhi" in Castoria, built in the 9th century, the Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God in Kalambaka, in the region of Thesalia, and the

churches of St. Peter and Paul and the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God in Florina. Near Velushina, a similar church, the Church of St. Peter and Paul, built in the 10th century, is located on the island of St. Ahilios in the Prespa Lake.

The 19th century wall paintings and the icons from the first half of the 19th century are also important in the history of this church. Although they can't be counted among the best artistic creations of this period, the wall paintings, such as the Last Judgment, are a testimony to the influential position of the Orthodox authorities, established in the period of the Ohrid Archiepiscopacy.

Category of significance:

Of special national interest

Further research should confirm its outstanding national importance.

Categories of ownership or interest:

The building is owned by the Macedonian Orthodox Church. The church has particular importance for the Orthodox community.

Documentation and bibliographic references:

Documentation

- Description of the significance of the building, nomination as a Cultural Monument (protected by the Law)
- Documentation on the archaeological excavation of 1991
- Technical documentation of the present condition
- Documentation on the research activities in 2000-2002

Bibliography

No scientific publications. The only article on the recent architectural research was written by the author of this PIL: R. Paligora, The church of the Holy Mother of God in the village of Velushina, Bulletin "Bitola through the centuries", University of St. Clement of Ohrid", 6, Bitola 2003 (in Macedonian).

Condition:

Very bad: structure failure and instability, the roof is seriously damaged.

Fair: necessary conservation measures for the wall paintings from the 19th century and the Medieval fresco paintings.

The building was recently damaged by the "embellishment" of the church with new and completely inappropriate annex buildings on the western side.

Risk:

Further interventions to beautify the church could result in more damage.

Condition Risk:

Immediate risk of rapid deterioration. A detailed proposal for the construction of a temporary roof as a priority measure was prepared but it was not implemented because of insufficient financial support.

Technical assessment and costing:

1991 – Archaeological excavation in the surroundings of the church (5,000 EUR)

2001 – Research on the construction of the building (3,000 EUR)

2002 – Separation of the wall painting layers (2,000 EUR)

2003 – Building material for the roof construction (16,000 EUR)

The Ministry of Culture of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” financed all these activities.

Ownership:

The building is a property of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

Occupation:

Orthodox church with active service.

Management:

The Church Council of Velushina, including the inhabitants and the priest responsible for the church, is the management authority for the Church of the Dormition. Since this monument is a cultural monument protected by Law, the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments, Natural Rarities, Museum and Gallery, Bitola, would be the organisation responsible for management in case funds for the conservation and restoration project were allocated.

Summary:

Considering the historic importance - this church is one of the oldest churches in the Bitola region - the iconography of the 19th century wall painting, and the general poor state of conservation of the monument, the potential priority level for intervention is *high*.

Sign. and date:

Risto Paligora

Bitola, 10.12. 2003