CHURCH OF SAINT THEODORE,
BOBOSHEVO, PROVINCE OF KYUSTENDIL
A survey and project for conservation and restoration

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Abstract: *The proposal for a complex approach was described in the report in 2016 regarding the surveying and development of a project for reinforcement, conservation, and restoration of the architectural and artistic values of the mediaeval church of St. Theodore – a typical representative of the archetype dating from the period of the second flowering of Byzantine architecture (867-1204 CE). The characteristics are described, and it is noted from the ruins that have remained up to this day that the church is a cross-in-square domed building of the square dome type with freely extending cross arms. The frescoed decoration has been preserved in fragments in two painted layers dating from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The technical condition is marked, and it is noted that the stability of the constructional and artistic structures is compromised, despite the partial reinforcement works carried out over the last sixty years. On the basis of these findings, a multidisciplinary set of problems has been set out relating to the preservation of this value. The methodological grounds and arguments for the proposed solution are summarised and comprise several major areas. In relation to the architectural appearance, it is noted that a significant part of the superstructure has been preserved, which gives sufficient grounds for the analysis, and motivates the restoration of the tectonic and decorative structure according to authentic information. This permits the structural reinforcement of the building to be integrated into a restored architectural appearance whilst preserving the authentic architectural impact. Regarding the preservation of the artistic values, an integrated programme of conservation and restoration interventions is proposed. The aspects relating to the elements of the environment and the cultural landscape have been clarified, and the authors consider that the restoration of the church will also restore the structural and spiritual significance of the church as part of a series of religious sites in the area of the Struma River.The proposal for a complex approach was described in the report in 2016 regarding the surveying and development of a project for reinforcement, conservation, and restoration of the architectural and artistic values of the mediaeval church of St. Theodore – a typical representative of the archetype dating from the period of the second flowering of Byzantine architecture (867-1204 CE). The characteristics are described, and it is noted from the ruins that have remained up to this day that the church is a cross-in-square domed building of the square dome type with freely extending cross arms. The frescoed decoration has been preserved in fragments in two painted layers dating from the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. The technical condition is marked, and it is noted that the stability of the constructional and artistic structures is compromised, despite the partial reinforcement works carried out over the last sixty years. On the basis*

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of these findings, a multidisciplinary set of problems has been set out relating to the preservation of this value. The methodological grounds and arguments for the proposed solution are summarised and comprise several major areas. In relation to the architectural appearance, it is noted that a significant part of the superstructure has been preserved, which gives sufficient grounds for the analysis, and motivates the restoration of the tectonic and decorative structure according to authentic information. This permits the structural reinforcement of the building to be integrated into a restored architectural appearance whilst preserving the authentic architectural impact. Regarding the preservation of the artistic values, an integrated programme of conservation and restoration interventions is proposed. The aspects relating to the elements of the environment and the cultural landscape have been clarified, and the authors consider that the restoration of the church will also restore the structural and spiritual significance of the church as part of a series of religious sites in the area of the Struma River.

1. Architectural survey – archetype

The Church of Saint Theodore is located 2 km north of the town of Boboshevo. The archetype and some particularities in the construction technology (which will be described later) provide the grounds for the authors to presume that the church was built during the period of the second flowering of Byzantine architecture (867-1204 CE) – more precisely, during the eleventh century. A particular characteristic of Byzantine architecture is the decorative richness and sculptural expressiveness in a unified architectural design that combines and is subservient to an organic link between arches, vaults, and domes. The so-called tectonics (the harmonious unification of structural form, function and systematics with artistic and aesthetic symbolism and significance) of the buildings is additionally accented by the decorative impact of the materials used in the different elements, so that in this way an integrated whole is achieved in the artistic impact (fig. 1).

St. Theodore's Church is a typical representative of the archetype of this period and comprises a cross-domed building in its cross-in-square form with freely extending arms of the cross (fig. 2). This type dates from the ninth century and was widely used in the construction of small churches, as in the case of the site being researched here. The length is 7.40 m, and the width is 6.30 m. The dome has collapsed, but it rested on a cylindrical drum with four windows along the directions of the arms of the cross. The church is built of stone, while the dome and vaults are made of brick. In the dome, the brick construction was carried out using the technique of "concealed" or "sunken" brick, where the bricks are plastered in alternating rows. This creates a decorative system with a ratio of brick to grout of 1:2. The stone construction is mixed with brick fragments with an even grout (the surface of the façade is flush with the plasterwork that covers the concave parts of the stone, while the convex parts are left visible) (fig. 3). The clearly defined openings along the facades and the drum are particularly characteristic, being formed with brick or stone framework and with facing bricks in their depths. The generally accepted intended use of these openings is to support the construction scaffolding where, in their standard formation, they are closed off with bricks or stones as part of the general decorative scheme, remaining concealed and difficult to discover. In the case of St. Theodore's, they have been left open and are clearly formed with stones or bricks. And so, in their tectonic sense, they have acquired an independent significance and have become a part of the overall architecture. In the opinion of the authors, apart from their intended use related to the construction process, these openings were also intended for airing out the masonry structures during use of the church. The characteristic of the construction work using not well-shaped stones supplemented by brick fragments, non-homogenous sealing and a dense grout provides the prerequisites for penetration and retention of highly capillary

damp in the walls. That is why these openings could have helped to ventilate the building and quickly remove the damp (fig. 4).

2. Condition and authenticity

The church has reached the present day in ruins.

No systematic care has been taken of it. In 1962, a wooden protective cover was built over it, which was renovated in 2012-2013 with a metal framework and plank sheath. Over the nearly ten centuries of its existence, the church has undergone a series of repairs and attempts to shore it up, including using earthworks, additional sealing of the tops of the walls, patching, reinforcement of the frescoes, laying of cement foundations for coverings, etc. All these constructional interventions have wiped out the original substance of the church and the immediate surrounding area.

We garnered information regarding the preserved original structures of this cultural monument from preserved archival photographs from the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (fig. 5). As regards the interventions carried out and the preserved parts of the building, as well as the availability of authentic data, we made our judgements from the survey carried out on-site regarding:

- Materials and substances that have been preserved: the main structure (load-bearing side walls of the vaults, part of the vaults, pendentives, drum of the dome) and fragments (arches above the windows of the drum, the bays of the vault of the bema (sanctuary), the original floor level, partial remains of the walls and figuring of the facades, the openings for scaffolding and ventilation;
- Traditional techniques: the general principles of the tectonics in Byzantine architecture and the synthesis of the sculptural and decorative systems, and the connection between the dome and the vaulting via a drum set on pendentives have been established; the appearance of the vault structure in the facades; the characteristics of the "sunken" or "concealed" brickwork, plastered and forming a wide grout; mixed walling made of stone and bricks;
- Symbolic/metaphorical sources of information: a conformity with the characteristics of Byzantine churches of the same type and historical period was discovered together with the proportional relationships (2:3 ratio of width to height of the interior space, and 1:1 ration of width to height in the exterior measurements of the church); analogous details (cornices, shaping of the windows); the type of roofing elements and other details (fig. 6 and fig. 7);

Technical condition: the stability of the building is generally ruined as a result of serious destruction and compromised or weakened connections between the load-bearing elements; the stability of the structures themselves is in a critical state due to ruin and weakening of the strength of the mortar; the grouting of the facades has lost its structure everywhere; poorly implemented patching and reinforcement with unsuitable sealings; erratic earthworks (fig. 8).

3. Theoretical grounds for the methodological approach

- In relation to the church:

The accepted methodological approach is regulated in the Cultural Heritage Act as "reconstruction in authentic sources of information" (§ 4, p. 15 Supplemental provisions of the CHA), namely: "complete or partial rebuilding on the basis of graphic, textual, photographic documentation and other sources that provide information about the form and design, the materials and the substance, the use and function, tradition and techniques, location and situation, spirit and mood/feel and other internal and external factors". The proposal is in accordance with the directives of the Venice Charter (1964-1965), more precisely: "[the] aim [of restoration] is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents", and is in complete synchronicity with the philosophy and definitions of the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), namely: "Depending on the nature of the cultural heritage, its cultural context, and its evolution through time, authenticity judgements may be linked to the worth of a great variety of sources of information. Aspects of the sources may include form and design, materials and substance, use and function, traditions and techniques, location and setting, and spirit and feeling, and other internal and external factors. The use of these sources permits elaboration of the specific artistic, historic, social, and scientific dimensions of the cultural heritage being examined". This document defines sources of information as "all material, written, oral and figurative sources which make it possible to know the nature, specifications, meaning and history of the cultural heritage."

- In relation to the surrounding space:

The principle of "integrated conservation" is accepted, which "includes various measures aimed at enshrining cultural heritage as part of a corresponding environment created by Man and Nature, where the usage and adaptation of the heritage sites are for the needs of society (§ 4, p. 10 Supplemental provisions of the CHA). This regulation is in the context of the doctrine of sustainable development within the spirit of the following documents: European Charter of the Architectural Heritage; The Declaration of Amsterdam; Congress on the European Architectural Heritage; Resolution 76 (28) of the Committee of Ministers; the Grenada Convention; Guiding principles for development of legislation and management systems for cultural heritage; Leading principles for sustainable territorial development of the European continent, 2000, Recommendation (2000) 1 of the Committee of Ministers.

4.Proposal for interventions to the cultural monument

- In relation to the church (fig. 9 and fig. 10)

Based on the cited theoretical, methodological and legal regulations, the proposed project plans for partial reconstruction and restoration according to authentic information. The proposal is predicated on respect for the preserved original substance and type of material (Venice Charter). It envisages preserving all the elements corresponding to the criteria for authenticity as set forth in national legislation and international documents. It is proposed that the obviously inconsistent interventions be removed. Restoration of the architectural look of the façade design and the impact of the interior is based on the preserved original elements and symbolic/metaphorical sources of information (pursuant to the Nara Document on Authenticity). The planned actions are directed towards:

- Restoring the lost tectonic link between the architecture of the exterior and the interior, and the general tectonic structure of the church (vaults and load-bearing walls) by correcting them in relation to the organic

connectivity of the elements in the Byzantine tectonic system and its decorative impact;

- Restoring the unity and connectivity of the structure of the building by building up the wells with mixed masonry (stone and bricks) and vaults with bricks, and so returning the original scale of the walling with bricks corresponding to authentic Byzantine sizes: 34.5x34.5x4.5 cm;
- Restoring the authentic chromatic-decorative impact of the facades on the basis of research into the composition of the original mortar and the formation of the facades of the lower register typical of the church (mixed masonry) with the flush grout and the profile and structure of the grouting at the enveloped brickwork of the drum;
- Restoring the authentic structure of the windows;
- Restoring the authentic look of the roof covering with single-curve rooftiles;
- Restoring the entrance opening on the west façade with the original stone architrave demolished in front of the entrance to the church;
- Restoring the stone courtyard surrounding the church.

- In relation to socialisation:

The project envisages optimal socio-cultural realisation through revival of the pilgrimage functions, the liturgical functions of the church for major Christian holidays, exposition of the artistic, architectural, and archaeological treasures, and providing opportunities for including the church within the system of cultural tourism.

- Within the surrounding space:

The solution for civil works in the surrounding space is directed towards reviving the significance of the church for the region and the country. The church is a part of a series of religious sites in the Struma River valley. In this context, the project envisages reestablishment of its structural and spiritual meaning. Using a new, compositional solution, the aim is to maximise its appearance and functionality within the context of the natural surroundings – the hillside and the river. It is planned that the property be landscaped and a new vertical plan offering the opportunity to exhibit any archaeological structures found in the future. In this regard, all the civil works must be carried out under the supervision of an archaeologist.

- Structural policy and integrated conservation

The project includes various measures aimed at showing off the qualities of the cultural monument, the archaeological remains, and the importance of the surrounding space. The functionality of the church and the area around it provide an opportunity for organically connecting the cultural monuments with their religious purpose, which is aimed at opening up the social and cultural potential of the tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage as sustainable elements for regional development.

The Red Ruins of a Church: Upcoming conservational interventions at the Church of Saint Theodore near Boboshevo

Iliya Nikolov

The church is located in the centre of the Bishopric of Velbazhd. It belongs to the so-called cross-in-square type of cubic buildings organised around a central space. Two layers of frescoes have been document (in places there are traces of a third). The frescoes are dated within a wide time range in several publications from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. V. Minkov dates them to the 13^{th}-14^{th} century; N. Mavrodinov – 12^{th} century; D. Panayotova – first quarter of the eleventh century. The second layer of frescoes dates to the first half of the fourteenth century.

The first conservation works on the polychromatic decoration and paintings of the church were carried out in the 1970s. the preserved fragments from this stage amount to about 57 square metres. Despite a series of interventions carried out over the years and administrative correspondence in the period 1993-2010, the "temporary wooden sheathing" collapsed onto the church. The frescoes and plaster support subsequently experienced exceptionally aggressive stress. (fig. 8 and fig. 11)

Up to now, the silhouette of the church is as it was described by Konstantin Ireček– as "red ruins of a church". The temporary roof and the emergency work and interventions carried out to date have not solved the structural problems. Serious architectural, conservation and restoration work are planned which must be synchronised with preservation of the interior of the church space up to complete conservation and exposition of the church. The present project deals with the mediaeval Church of St. Theodore in Boboshevo, together with its frescoed decorations. The proposals for conservation work at the church relate to the interior of the church – conservation in situ. The conservational intervention would permit the application of the so-called holistic approach to the original, i.e. use of materials inconservation practice that are close to the authentic technology.

The earliest layer of frescoes is preserved partially but is distinguished by its high artistic and historical value. It includes genre scenes from Bulgarian mediaeval painting such as "The Last Supper", "Pedalavium", "The Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane", "The Betrayal of Christ by Judas" etc. The frescoes comprising the second later are, according to S. Angelov, the work of the Master of the Kastoria school of painting who frescoed the Church of St. Nicholas Magaliouin Kastoria (1504/5), and also those at the Church of the Archangel Michael above the village of Saparevo, District of Dupnitsa.

The upcoming conservations works shall be carried out within those months when the weather conditions are beneficial for such interventions. The conservation-restoration techniques developed are based on a detailed survey of the particularities of the construction and frescoing of the church.

Identification of the microflora will assist in carrying out an appropriate biocide procedure. At the same time as removal of dirt, the frescoed layer needs to be supported – the areas with disintegration and flaking. We propose that the emergency stabilisation of the disintegrating paintings and the eroded plaster support be carried out with acrylic compositions. The deep reinforcement of the sections with peeling and gaps, and also those with a poor binding between the plaster and the painted later, shall be adhered with lime casein tempera. Before being injected with the tempera mixtures, the frescoes will be protected with a protective layer of Japanese paper and tarpaulin.

Buffers comprising sandwiches of textile, Fibran and polyurethane foam will be fitted at the site. They will form a negative surface with the shape and volume of the original structure. Thus protected, the frescoes will be resilient during the restoration of the

architecture, and afterwards, the buffers and the temporary structural supports will be removed.

At the same time as removal of dirt is taking place, reinforcement work will be carried out on the painted layer, the places where disintegration and flaking is evident, and also in those microsections where the bonding with the plaster support is poor. The final exposition of the decorative plaster and the chromatic reintegration shall complete the integrity of the church.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Fig.1.

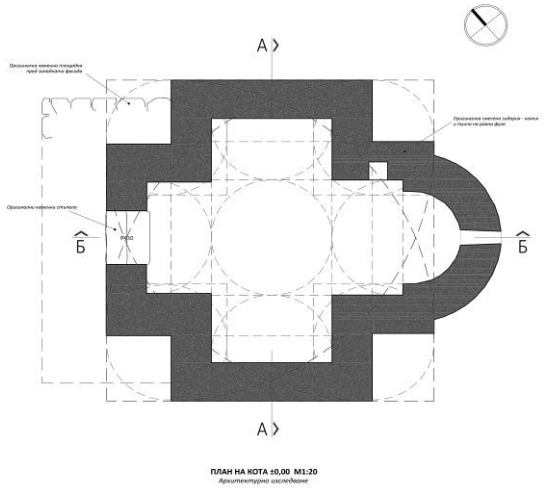

Fig.2: Floor plan at height ±0.00 scale 1:20

Fig.3.

Fig.4

Fig.5

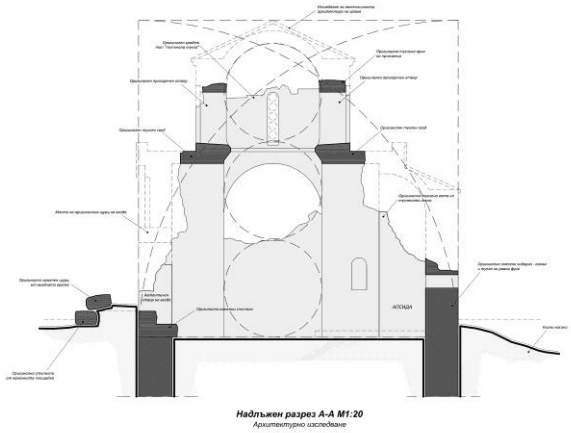

Fig.6: Lengthwise section A-A scale 1:20

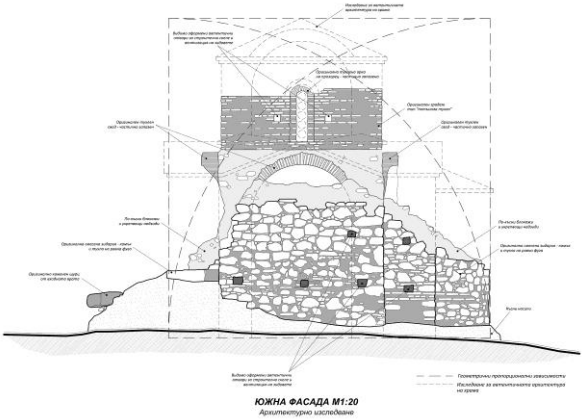

Fig.7: South façade scale 1:20 – architectural investigation

Fig.8.

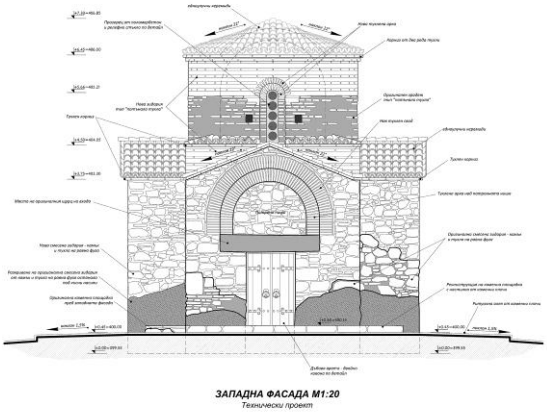

Fig.9: West façade scale 1:20 – technical project

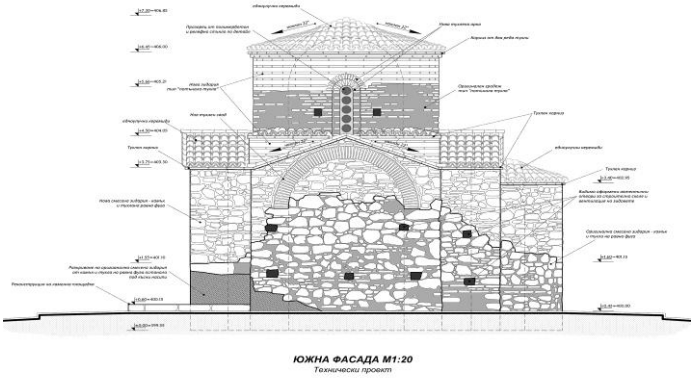

Fig.10: South façade scale 1:20 – technical project.

Fig.11

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