

Pilgrimage Tours and Pilgrimages in Greece and Albania

Promotion and utilisation
of cultural heritage





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Preface for the PROSFORA project



Cooperation between neighboring countries leads to better mutual understanding and the creation of conditions that contribute to cultural, intellectual and economic cooperation and progress between them. Cross-border cooperation between Greece and Albania has another special feature, as the existence of the Greek minority in Albania constitutes a strong link of communication and mutual understanding between the two countries.

Another element of particular importance and significance has to do with the object that defines such cooperation. In this particular case, the main objective of the Research Programme is to highlight important Pilgrimage sites and routes located in the cross-border area of the two countries, which are of great historical and religious interest. Consequently, through the presentation and promotion of the places of worship, we aim to develop religious tourism in the abovementioned area. The recognition and promotion of the historical and cultural continuity that characterizes these places of worship is a key element in this endeavor. At the same time, we seek to strengthen and improve all the conditions that will contribute to the organized economic development of the selected intervention areas.

Of course, these interventions are carried out while making use of the possibilities offered by Information and Communication Technologies.

The intervention area of the Programme includes, for the Greek side, the Metropolis of Ioannina and for the Albanian side the administrative boundaries of the Municipality of Gjirokastrë, the Metropolis of Gjirokastrë and the Metropolis of Korçë.

In order to digitize and make relevant information available online, the religious monuments in the intervention areas, which are identified by their great historical and cultural value and importance, were recorded, evaluated and scientifically documented. This was achieved through a specially designed online information site (portal). In addition to the predefined routes, which are of special thematic interest, we have also created alternative tourist routes, for which the visitor is informed, depending on his geographical location, and has the possibility to visit neighboring monuments.

We have established three Information and Promotion Centres for Cultural and Religious Heritage in Ioannina, Gjirokastrë and Korçë. These Centres provide information and material on the most important religious monuments of the region, on the proposed Pilgrimage routes, as well as on the tourist businesses of the region. The quality label awarded to all tourist businesses that meet the specific quality criteria is a reference point for all tourists participating in the Pilgrimage Routes.

We have also undertaken a number of complementary actions that are key to further strengthening and maximizing the results of the overall intervention, while research to evaluate the results of the project and ensure its sustainability are key priorities. The Multilingual (Greek, Albanian,

English) Cultural and Tourism Web Portal, as well as the special mobile application, provide the visitor with access to specially prepared material for obtaining information of religious, historical and architectural importance. The operation of three equipped cross-border Information and Promotion Centres for Cultural and Religious Heritage in Ioannina, Gjirokastër and Korçë will play a key role in promoting and highlighting the overall intervention. The actions that refer to the projection and promotion of the project and its results evolve in the same context, with the creation and distribution of material, but above all, with the publication of the present volume in Greek, Albanian and English. Apart from the general promotion of the project and its overall evaluation, the main concern is to ensure the sustainability of the specific intervention.

The University of Ioannina, as coordinator of the project, as well as all the partners, the Region of Epirus with the personal interest of the Regional Governor of Epirus, Mr. Alexandros Kachrimanis, the Metropolis of Ioannina with the constant care and paternal care of His Eminence, Metropolitan of Ioannina, Mr. Maximou. The constant interest and unparalleled love of His Eminence, Metropolitan Demetrios of Gjirokastër, the affection and appreciation of His Eminence, Metropolitan Ioannis of Korçë, all contributed decisively to the successful outcome of a common effort, the importance and significance of which was duly appreciated by all participants. I will take this opportunity to personally thank each of the participants in this interesting and fascinating journey of religious and spiritual uplift, knowledge and culture. At this point, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Deputy Scientific Manager of the Project, Professor Anastasios Embalotis, for his substantial contribution to the implementation of the Project and the excellent climate of cooperation and collaboration that we have created.

We all worked on this Project in a spirit of reciprocity and solidarity. Because of the pandemic, we had to implement the Programme at a particularly difficult time. Nevertheless, we believed in the great importance of the Programme and in the high objectives we set ourselves. I am confident that we have achieved an excellent result, which ought to be continued and have a future. My personal gratitude to all those involved in the implementation of the Programme is boundless, enduring and invaluable.

The Scientific Manager of the Project
George D. Kapsalis

Professor, former Rector of the University of Ioannina

Greeting for the PROSFORA project



At a time when new development «paths» are needed to emerge from the general economic crisis, the Epirus Region seeks to make the most of the resources management of the European Territorial Cooperation programs INTERREG. In this context is also included its participation in the PROSFORA project, which through the promotion and exposure of selected religious monuments, aims to stimulate the local economy and the extroversion of religious tourism.

The important publication «Pilgrimage Tours and Pilgrimages in Greece and Albania» serves this purpose, which presents the most important pilgrimages and pilgrimage tours in the cross-border area of the Region of Epirus and Albania.

It is about monuments and routes, which are points of reference for the whole Orthodox Christian World. These are monuments with everlasting life, having their own architecture and history each, creations of masters of art with unique hagiographies. Monasteries - symbols of transcendence of the earth, others «hung» on steep cliffs above gorges, but built on ancient temples and shrines. Almost all of them have unique fortress architecture, reminiscent of castles, shelters of isolation, survival and defense.

In katholikons, libraries and museums they keep frescoes, portable icons, manuscripts, books and relics of incalculable historical and cultural value. The version you are holding in your hands was created through the European project PROSFORA. It is addressed to those who wish to know the unique pilgrimage routes on the border line Epirus-Albania. It is a first acquaintance, so that then they can visit the monuments up close, to live moments of peace, to learn their history, to admire their architecture.

For the Region of Epirus, the development of religious - pilgrimage tourism, is one of the main priorities and the implementation of the PROSFORA project undoubtedly contributes to this.

The Governor of the Region of Epirus
Alexandros Kachrimanis



Foreword by His Eminence the Metropolitan of Ioannina Mr. Maximos

Each and every collaboration with professionals from various fields presents an opportunity to expand our knowledges and skillset. Scientists, Professionals in Innovation and Technology even other Archpriests lift off any so believed narrow confines of our jurisdiction. Those synergies result to tangible outcomes with many benefits in the society leaving a significant imprint in our environment.

An opportunity of that level was the participation of Ioannina's Holy Metropolis in partnership, with the Holy Metropolis of Korytsa, Argyrokastro from Albania, the Region of Epirus and the Municipality of Argyrokastro, the University of Ioannina as the main coordinator of the project. Through this demanding project, many skills, specialized knowledges, labor and devotion have been applied and combined with new technologies and tools. Highly educated, well-trained professionals have contributed with their knowledge and experience to enhance and pay homage to the Monuments located in the area of Ioannina and Epirus, but also across the border, in Neighboring country of Albania.

The contribution of the former Rector, Professor Mr. George Kapsalis, from the University of Ioannina was significant. He and his associates handled all information unbiased, directed the participants and finally processed and presented the outcome of this project to representing all parties. Among with the people of the competent Authorities of the Region of Epirus, the Municipality of Argyrokastro, the Holy Metropolis of Korytsa and Argyrokastro, we tried to present, all associated routes with the Holy Pilgrimages of the above areas, but also highlight the historical course, the action, the life, the cultural and spiritual imprint of so many people and so many generations who lived, wandered, loved, left and maybe rediscovered this place, worked, created, offered, served in this place.

The study connected a variety of scientists and professionals, historians, archaeologists and theologists. Photographers and video makers though offered their special contribution applying new technology and navigating all paths. This creative material was also audio-visually recorded to maintain an opportunity to everyone who has the interest to learn and discover more. The new technology and use of innovation inaugurated the new era of science.

Through this process we become in a way the communion of those people who created these pilgrimages, of the love of those who offered every way for their function, maintenance and beautification. We become shareholders of the architectural ideas, the temple construction techniques, the wonderful sacred arts and the creators who offered them to us in their time to enjoy them over time. All these elements become in some way part of the worship and praise of God, as, secretly and openly together, they reveal the experiential relationship with the Divine, the faith, but also its relationship with life, persons, things and the environment, as this faith has shaped and continues to shape it in an interactive path of centuries.

We are particularly pleased that the program is open-border, helps to understand the importance of our neighbors, the similarities we hold, the common heritage and responsibility to preserve it, along with the relationship of respect, support and future. Online users and news-readers can finally access all associate information, but also, plan pilgrimages on both sides of the border, taking advantage of the proximity of our areas.

The Holy Metropolis of Ioannina is happy to participate in this project and of course this feeling is multiplied by the possibility of cooperation with the Most Reverend Metropolitans of Argyrokastro and Korytsa, whose presence and orthodox knowledge is impressive in every field of spiritual, pastoral and cultural action and offering. At the same time, the Metropolis utilizes a new space, in Patriarch Bartholomew Square, the new multipurpose hall opposite the Church of Agios Paisios, which will henceforth function as a space for information and presentation of this program with modern electronic means, which already have been placed, and are constantly fed with the audiovisual material provided and continuously created. The innovation of technology will present existing material, as well as material that the Holy Metropolis will continue to create in the future for its monuments and sacred objects in its area of jurisdiction.

We owe warm thanks and congratulations to all the collaborators who contributed to this project. We thank the institutional partners of the project, such as the Holy Metropolis and the Most Respected Metropolitans of Argyrikastro and Korytsa, the Region of Epirus and the Regional Governor Mr. Kachrimanis with his associates, the Municipality of Argyrokastro and of course the former University Professor Pedagogical, Dr. Mr. Georgios Kapsalis, the soul of the program, together with his honorable collaborators. We gratefully thank our Clergy, Elder Fr. Grigorios Manopoulos and Deacon Fr. Bissarion Vakaros, the Archaeologist Mrs. Eleni Michou, our clergymen and lay associates, who contributed to all the implementation processes of the project and of course the managers and staff of the companies, who as contractors implemented the individual deliverables of the project at various levels of work, from research to publishing, translation, advertising, management, but also the creation of programs, electronic media installations, etc. With the certainty that this project will really help make our area better known and help strengthen our bonds with all participants, we hope that it goes well, it will function properly, on both sides, in Greece and Albania, it will strengthen our transnational and ecclesiastical relations and it will launch new collaborations for the good of the countries and our people.

The Metropolitan of Ioannina
Maximos





Foreword by His Eminence the Metropolitan of Gjirokastrë Mr. Dimitrios

Clear testimonies are already recorded from the Homeric epics about the inner need of man to visit various monuments, mainly of religious reference, for mental and physical rest. But also in the Bible we see the Jews, but also our Savior and His disciples, visiting the religious center of the Jewish religion, the Solomon's Temple, to pay homage and worship to God.

This blessed custom was also maintained in later years, where places sanctified by the martyrdom blood of confessors of the Christian faith, or the ascetic struggles of persons who opened the way to virtue were sanctified, gaining new dynamic and functional use, while at the same time being a destination for those who wanted to experience a certain mental uplift.

These various monuments are not just about the religious need of the people. There are also cultural architectures that reflect the progress and culture of a nation, a state, a historical era... These monuments are not simply the cultural jewel of the area to which they belong, but are also eloquent depictions of its culture. They are not dead stones, subject to the relentless decay of time; they are living reference points, part of an uninterrupted history that traces and records its course through the interactions and commands of the historical events that marked the specific space and place. Such a religious, spiritual, cultural, instructional, educational and social contribution is made by the Monasteries and Churches of the Holy Metropolis of Gjirokastrë.

Scattered throughout the length and breadth that borders our Metropolis, watchful spiritual guards stand and through their eloquent and at the same time deafening silence they proclaim the wealth of the Christian womb, in which they were formed and born.

These religious rites are primarily Holy Places. They are scenes of worship and praise of our Triune God... They are vital places of solace, mental uplift and resurrection of the man who is in transition and in redemption and as such we must see them and approach them. For this reason, one of the primary concerns of His Beatitude the Archbishop Anastasi of Tirana, Durrësi and All Albania, Mr. Anastasiou, was their restoration and religious functionality. He knew very well that in this way, too, the flame of the faith of the people could be rekindled, which, due to the long period of atheism, had begun to spark and slowly turn to ashes... And his effort, by the grace of God, bore fruit and now we enjoy its pleasant spiritual fruits and besides us, all those who will want to visit them on a pilgrimage.

The Holy Metropolis of Gjirokastrë, with the wishes and blessings of His Beatitude Archbishop Mr. Anastasios, with great interest, respect and love, responded to the invitation of the University of Ioannina, to implement the «PROSFORA» Program in order to highlight the monuments of religious and cultural heritage that adorn and charge the region and each of us.

From this position I express my warmest thanks to our Lord Pantepoptes for the rich blessings he has given to the historic Metropolis of Gjirokastër, to His Beatitude Archbishop Mr. Anastasios, who tirelessly and sacrificially fights for the restoration, salvation and promotion of religious monuments and through them of Orthodoxy, but also the civilization, progress and spiritual rebirth of the people. Thanks also to Prof. Georgios D. Kapsalis and all his collaborators, who worked hard for the successful publication of this project. Their altruism, knowledge, research interest and in general their sacrifice led to this elegant volume that we enjoy today.

Thank God for everything!

With honor and appreciation
The Metropolitan of Gjirokastër
Dimitrios





Foreword by his Eminence The Metropolitan of Korçë Mr. Ioannis

Christianity in Albania has been widespread since the first century AD and has created a long and rich tradition, leaving an indelible mark on the cultural and spiritual development of our nation. Various monuments of ecclesiastical architecture, dating from the early Christian period to the 19th century, monumental paintings, moving icons, mosaics, purple manuscripts, decorated with magnificent miniatures, works of metalworking, woodcarving and embroidery form a valuable testimony to the vitality, the cultural flourishing and the history of orthodox communities over the centuries. The Orthodox heritage, with its comprehensive nature, has formed a traditional religious culture, defined by local specificities and local characteristics, but it also emits universal dimensions.

The existence of so many churches, monasteries and sanctuaries contributed to the creation and development of the pilgrimage, a tradition that is found in our country since the early Christian period. The Monastery of the Forty Saint Martyrs (Manastiri i 40 Shenjtorëve) in Sarandë, built in the second half of the 5th century, certainly holds a special place and functioned as an important center for many pilgrims of the time.

Although in the past pilgrimage was not always safe for every traveler's life, today it has turned into a means of entertainment and relaxation, a source of knowledge and spiritual upliftment. The phenomenon of pilgrimage has a multifaceted nature, as, on the one hand, it combines theological, anthropological, philosophical and psychological aspects and, on the other hand, it has economic, social and political dimensions.

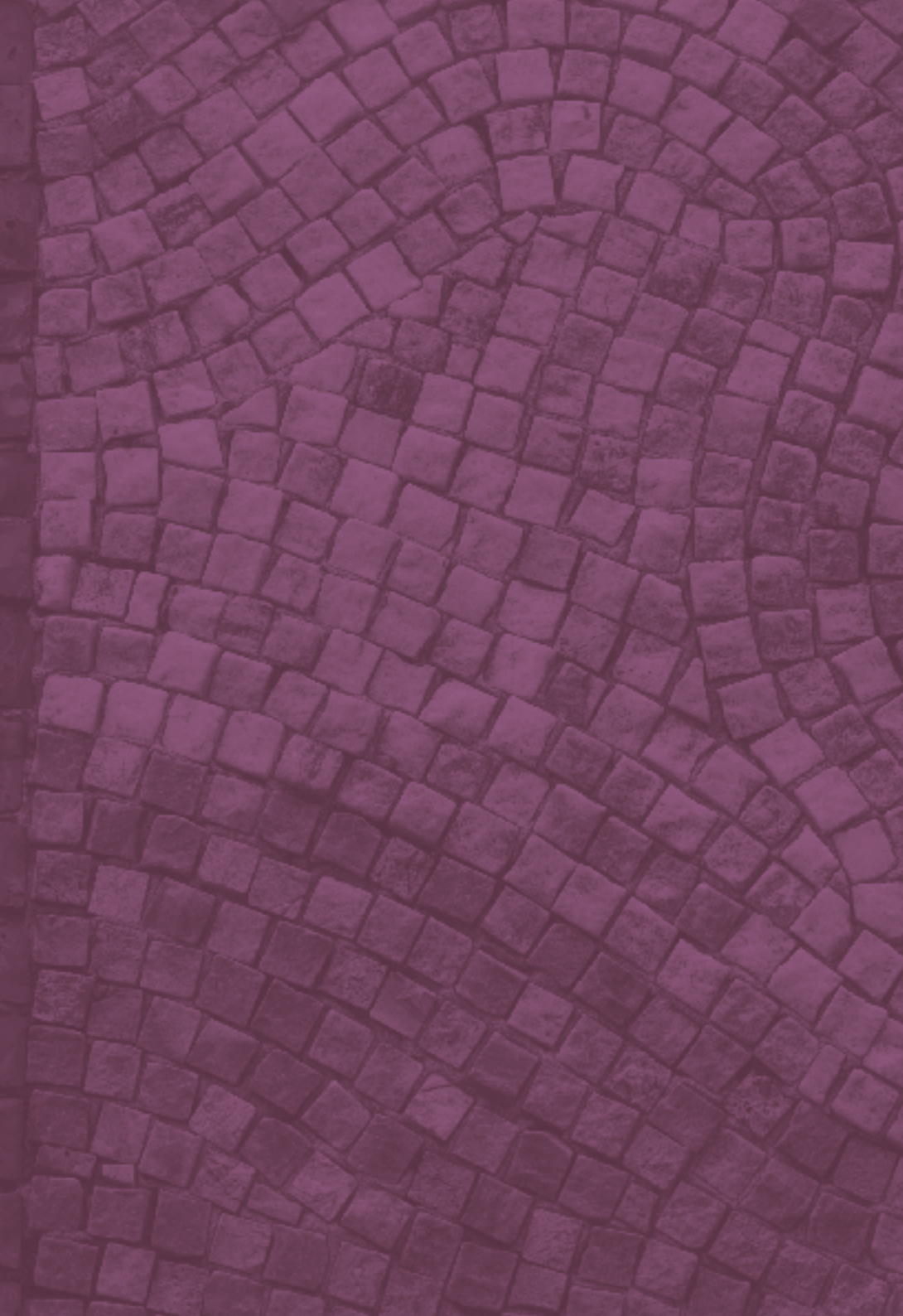
The Orthodox Church invites every Christian to visit the holy places, where the power and love of God were revealed, through miracles. These places of worship, which have supported people in all their trials over the centuries, continue to offer the pilgrim spiritual upliftment through prayer and worship. At the same time, the connection with the culture and art of the time makes these destinations especially attractive for the Christians, the academic visitors, the travelers and the researchers of history and culture, the art and nature lovers, the people who seek the authentic emotional experience in a vibrant and active community.

The Holy Metropolis of Korçë, aware of its historical responsibility for the protection and preservation of ecclesiastical monuments and places of worship in its area, was an active member of the Prosfora project «Pilgrimage tours and pilgrimages to Greece and Albania», developing quality collaborations with the participating partners: the University of Ioannina (Head of the project), the Region of Epirus, the Holy Metropolis of Ioannina, the Holy Metropolis of Gjirokastra and the Municipality of Gjirokastra. The fruit of this collaboration is the current edition. Many thanks and congratulations to the collaborating partners for the perfect and constructive cooperation we had, during the implementation of the project, and to all those who contributed to the realization of this special edition.

On the one hand, we believe that by creating alternative pilgrimage tours in our area, the project implementation will have a positive impact on the protection, promotion and development of intellectual and cultural heritage, and, on the other hand, will contribute to the economic prosperity of local communities. At the same time, the geographical scope of the project, in the cross-border areas of our neighboring countries, will irrigate the deep roots of faith and worship that exist in both Greece and Albania. In addition, it will strengthen the perceptions and both the spiritual and religious relations that have been developed between the two countries over the centuries and which remain to this day.

The Metropolitan of Korçë
+ Joani







Monuments of the region of Ioannina



Holy Monastery of Saint Nicholas Filanthropinon, Ioannina Island

The Monastery of St. Nicholas Filanthropinon or Spanos, is a landmark monument thanks to its imposing mural ensemble and is located on a hill, near the southwestern shore of the settlement of the Island of Ioannina. It is an institution of the Byzantine Constantinople family of Filanthropinon, who settled in Ioannina after the Fall of Constantinople by the Crusaders, in 1204. In 1291/2, Michael Philanthropinos founded or radically renovated the monastery, which was already established on the Island during the 13th-14th century. The monastery flourished in the 16th century when, on the initiative of Abbots Neophytos and mainly Ioasaf Filanthropinon, it was refurbished, expanded and frescoes were made in the katholikon. In the following centuries, the monastery continued to have a special spiritual radiance in the area. Throughout its operation, it maintained a direct relationship with the city of Ioannina, receiving at times rich donations from expatriates of Ioannina, such as Zotos and Apostolos Tsigaras, merchants based in Venice. Later it was also connected with the Spanos family and that's the reason why it is often called the monastery of Saint Nicholas of «Spanos».





Only few remains from the Byzantine phase of the complex are visible today. Originally, the katholikon, the oldest building of the complex, was an aisleless timber-roofed church, with a semicircular arch to the east. It consists of the nave with the Sanctuary and the narthex, surrounded by three unequal exonarthexes. Its current form is the result of extensive interventions, made on the initiative of Ioasaf Filanthropinon in two successive phases, in 1542, with the replacement of the timber roof with an elongated semi-cylindrical arch and in 1560, when its original shell is surrounded on three sides, north, south and west, by vaulted exonarthexes.







The katholikon received an internally extensive mural with brilliantly painted decoration by hundreds of representations and figures of saints and was executed in three different periods. In the first period around 1531/2, before it was even remodeled, were painted the frescoes that adorn the lower part of the walls of the nave. During the second period, in 1542, the new dome of the temple and the narthex (liti) were painted on the wall, with the influence of the great painter Frangos Catelanos from Thebes or even his presence. Finally, during the third period, in 1560, the three exonarthexes of the katholikon were frescoed by the painters and brothers, Georgios and Frangos Kontari of Thebes. The set of mentioned frescoes is one of the leading works of the so-called «School of Northwestern Greece» and a reference point for the study of this painting movement, but also a pattern, pictorial index for many later artists.

The frescoes of the Monastery form one of the best works of the so-called "School of Northwestern Greece"

The iconographic system of the church includes in parts the story of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the martyrdom of the Saints, the life of St. Nicholas organized in circles and other representations according to the Menologium, Old Testament stories, epiphanies and visions, thanksgiving and symbolic performances, the Coming Judgment, the saints of the Church in hierarchical order and the wise men of antiquity in Greece.

The frescoes of the Monastery of Philanthropinon with their unattainable iconographic wealth and originality in structure are, perhaps, the most ambitious temple painting decoration handed out to us from the art of the 16th century, being a rare and unsurpassed monument of treasured knowledge of the time.





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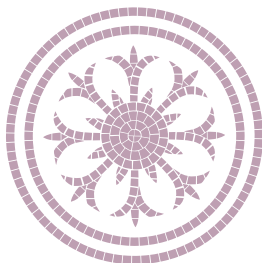
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Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior, Klimatia

The Church of the Transfiguration of the Savior is located northwest in a short distance from the settlement of Klimatia and is surrounded by a low surrounding wall. The austerity of the monument on the outside is directly opposed to the painted decoration on the inside. This makes it one of the most remarkable post-Byzantine painting ensembles of Epirus. The founding inscription states that the church was built from scratch and was painted in 1568; however, from census data of the settlement, it is known that it already existed in 1564. The year 1568 refers to its fresco by the Theban painter Frango Kontari and possibly to the renovation of the building, while the abbot Metrophanes had the initiative to erect it.





The church is small, single-naved, barrel-vaulted, with a semi-hexagonal arch and a later unadorned narthex to the west, but it is unknown when it was added. Today, the entrance to the temple is from the west side of the narthex, but also from the west wall of the nave. To the northwest of the church is located the newest bell tower, while to the southwest there are ruins of buildings, under which stands a large underground vaulted area of unknown use, but according to tradition, it was used as a Secret School (krifo scholio).

The temple is painted in the nave and the Sanctuary with well-preserved frescoes, where themes from the Eucharistic, Christological and Mother of God (Theometorical) cycle are illuminated. The Ascension and the Divine Liturgy stand out in the Sanctuary, while in the nave, in the center of the arch, the Pantocrator, around which the iconographic program is organized. On the west wall stands out the multi-faceted representation of the Crucifixion and on the north wall the extremely rare and interesting theme of "Άρατε Πύλας" (Open the Gates), popular in the laboratory of the Kontarides. The iconographic program and the method used in the themes of the temple reveal affinity and multifaceted relations with those of the churches of Saint Demetrius Klimatias and the Monastery of Eleousa on the Island, following the general principles of the art movement of the School of NW Greece as far as the organization is concerned, by reference to the Monastery of Saint Nicholas Fllanthropinon. There are also influences on individual iconographic details from Western painting, modern and earlier painting of Italy, Central Europe and the early Renaissance.





The frescoes are characterized by a strong narrative mood, a documentary presentation of the events, full of drama and intensity in the scenes and presentation of human figures, usually with harmonious proportions.

Today's wooden iconostasis and the icons that adorn it come from modern era. The original iconostasis is not preserved, but the three despotic icons of Christ Pantocrator, Virgin Hodegetria and of the Transfiguration of the Savior are preserved in good condition, the style of which shows that the first two were painted by the same painter, while the third was painted by another artist. The deacons' doors with the representation of the Annunciation are also preserved, as well as the belt of the apostles, which consists of the central image of Deesis and the two single sections with the full-length figures of the Apostles, works which should all be attributed to the painters of a local laboratory in the second half of the 16th century.



The church is fully decorated throughout the main temple and the sanctuary with well preserved frescoes, with subjects from the thanksgiving, Christological and theomitary cycles.



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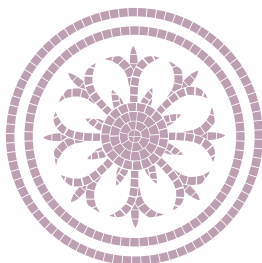
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Church of the Birth of the Virgin - Tsouka, Elliniko



The Holy Monastery of Tsouka, dedicated to the Birth of the Virgin, is built at an altitude of 760 m. on the homonymous hill, near the community of Elliniko of the Municipality of North Tzoumerka. It was named «Tsouka» due to the top of the forested hill of the same name, in Aromanian language (Vlach) «Tsuka Analta», which means «high peak». The hill, while it is easily accessible from Elliniko, it is completely vertical at its eastern side, forming the steep bank of Arachthos straits on the right. As a result the monastery, which is located right on the edge of the cliff, dominates the area and is visible from everywhere, ensuring a wonderful view to Arachthos straits and the opposite villages of Peristeri and Tzoumerka.





According to tradition, an icon of the Virgin Mary was found on Tsouka Hill, for the honor of which the inhabitants of Elliniko built a chapel on the hill of Saint Marina, above the village. However, the icon of the Virgin Mary was leaving every night for the hill of Tsouka, thus indicating in which area she wanted her church to be built. Again according to tradition, the monastery was founded in 1190 by the emperor Isaac II Angelus (1185-1195) and experienced great prosperity during the time of the Despotate of Epirus. It was destroyed in 1736 and renovated in 1779, while it also became a religious and national center, since both in the national Greek War of Independence of 1821, and in all national struggles, it was used as a refuge of the Greek revolutionaries. The monastery acquired a large fortune and maintained the school of the village of Elliniko. It also had a great reputation, thanks to its water, which was considered as hot springs and was sought after throughout Epirus. Its festival on September 8 was really famous and gathered a lot of people, but also gathered the sick, who wanted to be healed. However, after the beginning of the 19th century, its mismanagement led to its decline. It remained abandoned for many years, but was restored in the late 1990s, when its cells and ancillary facilities were restored.





The monastery has a fortress character and is surrounded by a high wall, the entrance of which is decorated with stone carvings. In addition to the katholikon, it includes a number of other buildings, such as cells, a cistern and a bell tower. The two-storey cells are located on the southwest and north side and most of them are buildings of the 18th and 19th century. The cistern with its canopy is located on the southwest side of the katholikon and the stone-built bell tower dates back to 1866, according to the inscription on it. On the south side of the monastery, near the east entrance, there is the chapel of Virgin Mary, which suffered significant damage from fire.





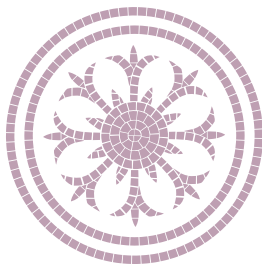
The monastery has a fortress-like character and is surrounded by a high wall. Its entrance is decorated with stone carvings.

The katholikon, built of white hewn stones, is located in the center of the complex and probably dates to the end of the 17th century. The temple is single-aisled, cross-in-square-tetraconch and at its entrance a portico with two columns is formed. On its inside, it is painted and there is an inscription on the lintel, which today is indistinguishable. It states that it was painted at the expense of the owner Alexios Papaioannou and that its remarkable wood-carved iconostasis was gilded with the exquisite floral decoration at the expense of the monastery, during the abbacy of Gavriil, by the painter Athanasius from Kapesovo, son of the also well-known painter Ioannis, on October 3, 1779. The monastery today is for men and celebrates on September 8 with a glorious festival, which gathers a large number of pilgrims.



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Church of St. George, Negades



The church of Saint George is located in the central square of Negades and is one of the last and most important wall ensembles of Epirus during the 18th century. Negades, a village in central Zagori, flourished in the 18th century, thanks to the wealth caused by the migration of many inhabitants to the Balkans and their involvement in trade.

The temple is a large three-aisled timber-roofed basilica, with narthex, with an attic above the narthex, a space intended to be a gynaeconite, and a peristyle, initially on the north and south sides, while in the middle of the 20th century its western part was added. It is a triune temple, with the northern and southern aisles dedicated to the Holy Trinity and Saint Demetrius, respectively, while it replaced the older homonymous parish church, which was probably founded in the early 18th century. In a short distance from the temple, to the northeast, is located the imposing hexagonal bell tower, with arched openings in its upper part. The construction of the temple began on May 2, 1792, while the mural was completed on October 10, 1795, with the owner and sponsor being the merchant Hatzimanthos Ginou.



The frescoes are the work of the painters Ioannis and the son of Anastasios Anagnostis from Kapesovo, who come from a family with a painting tradition. Ioannis is the most important painter from Kapesovo and the culmination of his art is reflected in this monument in its mature phase, while Anastasios, already working nine years in his father's workshop, is a capable painter. In the large church of Saint George the painters were given the opportunity to develop very rich topics.



Worth mentioning are the representations of the twenty-four Houses of the Standing Hymn, the circle of the seven Ecumenical Councils, but also the two sages of antiquity, Plutarch and Aristotle.



The temple is painted with representations arranged in zones, defined by red stripes. There are themes from the Christological and the Theometorical (of the Mother of God) circle, thanksgiving themes and representations of a liturgical character, while in the lower part of the walls there are full-length saints. Worth mentioning are the representations of the twenty-four oikoi of the Akathist Hymn in equal panels, the cycle of the seven Ecumenical Councils, but also the two sages of antiquity, Plutarch and Aristotle, in the garb of Western scholars. The predominant color is red, alternating with dark green, yellow, blue and grayish white. The use of colors in some cases emphasizes the symmetry of the composition.





The two painters, Ioannis and Anastasios, are extremely eclectic in their iconographic choices. Their patterns are found mainly in the works of the Linotopite painters of the 17th century, in the rich theme of the great monuments of the 16th century in northwestern Greece, such as the Monastery Philanthropinon and the church of the Transfiguration of Klimatia, while assimilating organic elements of Western art enriched with secular elements, usually iconographic details, in line with Western Baroque trends, a new aesthetics, which merchants transported to the economic centers of Ottoman and European society of the 18th century. The two painters are based on the fixed values of tradition, but at the same time, they understand the pulse of their time, while the selective choice of their models reflects the spiritual, theological and social quests of the time and the relations of the ktitors with Western European culture.



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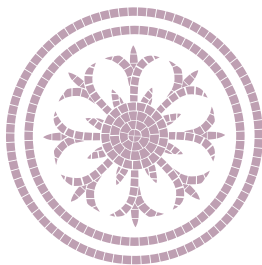
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Church of St. Nicholas of the Market, Ioannina



The church of Saint Nicholas of the Market is located in Ioannina, on today's Hatzikonsta Street, in the historic center of the city. It seems that it already existed from the beginning of the 17th century, according to a reference in a document from July 1628, as well as from a reference in the Menaion of July of the church of Saint Nicholas Kopanon, where it is mentioned that on February 19, 1630 his son Recep Aga destroyed Saint Nicholas of the Market. Until December 2, 1647, the temple has not been rebuilt, while it is mentioned again in March 1749, without, however, making known the exact year of its erection. The only clear fact is that the temple was rebuilt between the years 1647-1749. It was destroyed again during the bloody clashes between Ali Pasha and Hurshid Pasha and the destruction of Ioannina in 1822 by the Sultan's troops. Its second reconstruction, due to its current form, began in 1837, with the sponsorship of the Zosimadon brothers and G. Hatzikonstas, founder and of the adjacent hospital, who completed the church in 1842. However, little is known about the history of the temple after its completion.





Saint Nicholas of the Market is a large timber-roofed, three-aisled basilica with a seven-sided arch to the east. Two colonnades, with five built columns each, separate the aisles and support the raised roof. It is surrounded on the west and north by a picturesque loggia, supported by square pillars, which has a second floor in its entirety, open to the inside of the church and form its galleries, which have separate access from built external stairs to the north and south. The chapel of Saint Eleftherius has been formed at the end of the northern gallery. Above the entrance of the precinct, which opens to the south, raises the two-storey bell tower.





On the sides, in a zone, there are individual representations, which do not compose a single iconographic set, but fragmentary depictions of religious themes, as requested by individual donors.



The church has limited frescoes on the inside, like some other modern temples of the city. The most important parts of the temple in terms of theological message are selected for the illustration, such as the apses of the Sanctuary and the dome (tholos) in the middle of the ceiling, with the Pantocrator in place of the dome, surrounded by angels and prophets. In the parts of the walls between the windows there are full-length saints. On the fronts of the sides, in a zone, there are individual representations, which do not constitute a single iconographic set, but fragmentary depictions of religious themes, wishes of individual donors. The whole iconographic approach of the church reflects the slow but gradual influence of western art, with strong Baroque elements, but also of the Nazarene painters in the formation of religious painting in an urban center, such as Ioannina, during this period.



The temple houses icons and objects of Russian origin, many of which are donated by Hatzikonsta, such as the despotic icons, strongly influenced by the style of Nazarene painters, which he donated to the temple in 1841. The transfer to the temple of portable works of Russian laboratories of the time is closely connected with the personality of its sponsors, who were active members of the Greek-Russian community of the 19th century.



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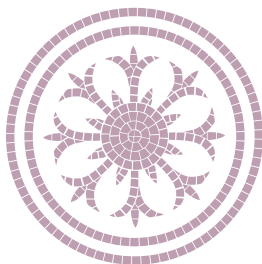
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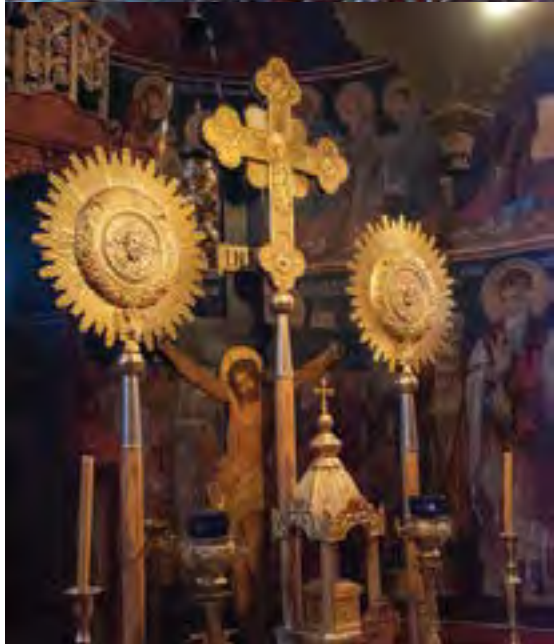


The background of the entire page is a teal-colored mosaic. The mosaic is composed of small, irregular, square-shaped tiles that are arranged in a pattern that resembles a dome or a vaulted ceiling, with the tiles curving upwards towards the top of the frame. The tiles have a slightly textured, stone-like appearance.

Monuments of the Region of Gjirokastrë



Metropolitan Church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour, Gjirokaštër



The church of the Transfiguration of the Saviour of Gjirokaštër, located in the center of the historical quarter of the Old Bazaar, was part of a more complex architectural system, which developed as a continuation of the eastern side of the Castle. It was a hilltop fortress dominating the western part of the Drinos valley, architectural parts of which date back to before the 12th century. Narrow roads, "cobble streets", give access to the site, one of them descending almost vertically from the Castle and the other starting from the central square.



Visible until today, the ruins of the wider building complex, to which the temple belonged, give us a picture of the original layout and function. The complex of buildings reveals the concentration of a multifaceted activity, which probably covered the wider administrative, educational, etc. needs, not only of the headquarters of the Metropolis, but also the needs of the entire local community. Thus, the remains of a large stone water tank of impressive size is another piece of evidence in favor of the above. In addition, written texts, both ecclesiastical and secular, contain numerous references to the importance and the intense spiritual, educational and social life of the village. These include the surviving Codes of Dryinopolis and Gjirokastër and the reports of famous travelers, such as that of the French journalist René Pyot, who was hosted in the church during the Balkan Wars.



Particularly important for the further documentation of the church, but also for general historical research, are the inscriptions that exist both inside the temple and on inscribed plaques on the outer walls. According to a wall inscription on the inner side of the western wall, we are informed of the year of the construction of the church, which is 1776, on the initiative of Dositheos, the then Bishop of Dryinopolis and Gjirokastër, a reference that makes the building almost contemporary with another church of the city, the church of the Taxiarchs



The building complex testifies to the concentration of a multifaceted activity, which is likely to have covered the wider administrative, educational, etc. needs, not only of the seat of the Diocese, but also the needs of the entire local community.

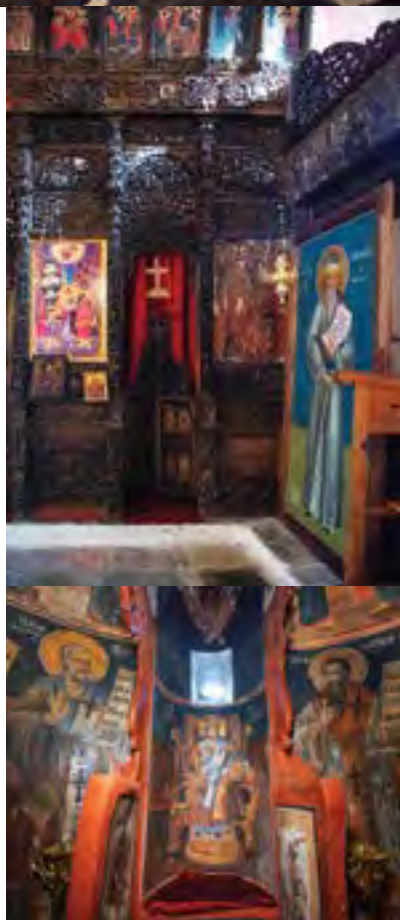






The existence of a place of worship at this particular spot, however, does not begin in the 18th century. During work on the courtyard, graves were found, which, together with the written historical sources, indicate the previous presence of a chapel in the area, which was also dedicated to the Saviour. Moreover, it should be noted at this point that there used to be a bell tower, which, however, was demolished in the late 60's - early 70's due to the special political conditions that prevailed in the country during these decades. After the political change in the 1990s, private initiatives were taken to restore the bell tower, according to photographs that had survived, but this attempt was not particularly successful, neither in terms of the materials, nor in terms of the technique used.

The surviving temple is a massive, stone, three-aisled basilica. The different phases of construction, including the original, as well as later additions and restoration interventions, are visible on the exterior masonry, mainly from the south side of the church. Of great interest are also the architectural indications of communication between the temple and houses of the quarter at the western gate, through a staircase leading outside from the women's gallery.





The interior of the church is divided into naves, with a double colonnade on either side of the two long sides of the central nave, with pairs of columns at the west and east ends respectively. Columns and piers end in high and imposing arches, thus bringing the horizontal axis of the church in harmony with the vertical. Heading towards the sanctuary, we notice the addition of various stone decorations on the arches, such as bands, frames, inscribed arches and small reliefs. Similar stone reliefs are also embedded in the south wall, next to the main entrance of the temple.

The sanctuary has been partially hagiographed and the murals that are preserved both in the central arch and in the arches of the Prothesis and the Deacon's Arch have some individual damage. What is particularly interesting is the choice of the faces of the Saints in the iconographic programme, as these are figures not often found in churches in the wider area. According to the surviving inscriptions, the hagiography of this section was painted around 1860, during the archpriesthood of Metropolitan Panteleimon, without, however, mentioning the name of the painter.

The important movable parts that survive inside the church are the iconostasis and the Despotic throne. The wood-carved iconostasis bears complex relief decorations, with interesting themes and motifs. The Despotic Throne is also preserved in a very good condition, with a similar technique and composition.

In 2011, due to extensive problems, the murals were fixed and maintained on the initiative and care of Metropolitan Demetrios of Gjirokastrë. With individual interventions made in the church in recent years, the floor of the women's gallery and the staircase to access it were replaced.

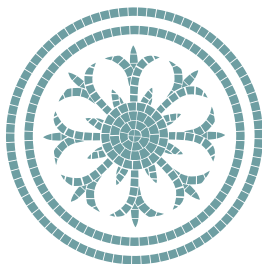
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Holy Church of the Glorious Taxiarchs Bodrista

Bodrista is one of the largest communities, with a strong Greek element, in the Dropull Valley, in close proximity to the historic seat of the Diocese of Dryinopolis. Archaeological findings give evidence for the existence of an organized settlement in this geographical area, already from the Hellenistic period. In late Byzantine and modern times, the connection of these small communities with the large urban centers to the east and west resulted in the economic and social development of the specific regional communities of the Ottoman Empire. Many post-Byzantine churches and monasteries were built in the surrounding area and remain to this day, leaving an imprint of the glory of that period.





In the center of the settlement of Bodrista, within a green fenced area, is the church of the Glorious Taxiarchs. In its northwest corner, as a continuation of the building, there is an attached covered portico, a «hagiati», with an open archway to the west. Looking carefully at the courtyard, one realizes that there was a preexisting set of buildings apart from those that are visible today. One such building was the chapel dedicated to St. Athanasios, which, unfortunately, has been completely destroyed. A few, but imposing, family tombs still remain on the south-western side of the enclosed remaining complex, as a testimony to the former function of the site.

From word of mouth, we know that the temple was built and hagiographed with funds and care of the inhabitants of the local community.





The Holy Church of the Glorious Taxiarchs was founded in 1778-1780 and is included in the list of churches built or reconstructed by Bishop Dositheos. From tradition, we know that the church was built and hagiographed at the expense and care of the inhabitants of the local community. It is a three-aisled basilica with a gable roof covered with the traditional slate slabs for this type of architecture. On the west side of the church, where the original entrance to the church is located, there is a built-in bell tower, which is developed in three levels with double and single arched openings, a typical example of Epirus bell tower architecture. Finally, outside the wall of the courtyard on the west side, a short distance from the church, there is a small shrine commemorating the visit of Saint Kosmas of Aetolia to Bodrista, during one of his tours, most probably in 1777.

Entering the temple from the roofed, northern entrance, we see the interior developed in three naves, with double columns, connected by a system of arches on either side of the central nave. On the roof, small domes and spherical triangles create an interesting complex system, mainly in the central nave, while on the west side and as a later addition is the narthex, which, as it seems, also functioned as a women's gallery with crenellated openings facing the side aisles.

Years of abandonment and shifting of the ground have caused severe damage to the foundation, the walling and the mural decoration of the church. The surviving inscriptions inside, unfortunately, due to their poor condition, cannot give us any information about the church's patrons, donors or hagiographers. The interior surface of the nave, however, preserves much of the original iconographic program. High up we find representations and figures from the New and Old Testaments, while in the lower zones saints are lined up, first in busts within medallions and then lower down full-length. To the east, on the walls of the sanctuary, we find perhaps the best preserved examples of iconographic decoration. In particular, on the right of the sanctuary, in the Prothesis, there are wall notes, in the form of a diptych, of living and deceased inhabitants of Bodrista, from the time when the church was established as the center of the parish.



Despite repeated looting, during which valuable parts of the portable icons and parts of the wooden decoration of the church were removed, part of the iconostasis survives to this day. Later additions help to make up for the lost elements.

The church functioned uninterruptedly from its foundation until 1967, serving the needs of the cemetery, which was located next to it. With the change of the political regime and for almost twenty years, it was converted into a warehouse. Evidence of this event, as written comments by the priest of that time, can be found in the gospel of the church. Since 1990, when we had the political change, extensive and well thought-out maintenance and restoration work on the church has been carried out during the decade 2000-2010, under the care of Archbishop Anastasios.



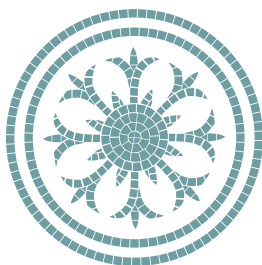
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Holy Church of St. Athanasios Vouliarates

The village of Vouliarates or Vouliarati, which lies at the foot of the eastern side of Mount Koziaka, is one of the most picturesque villages of the valley, which is crossed by the river Drinos. Archaeological findings from the 3rd century BC, such as clay weights and seals, give us evidence of the existence of a settlement and the possible operation of pottery workshops in this area. Following a parallel course with other communities in the prefecture of Gjirokastër, Vouliarates, in the late Byzantine and modern times, developed an intense economic activity, mainly linked to trade. As a result, a significant number of schools and churches were built throughout the surrounding area.



The Holy Church of St. Athanasios at the north-eastern entrance of the village of Vouliarates is part of a cemetery complex, which dates back to the 16th century. A low stone wall delimits the area, within which a Byzantine church used to exist. It is probable that the present building was erected on the foundations of the old church. The ground around the temple is laid out in terraces connected by stone paths. The complex includes, apart from the scattered tombs, a shed gallery, "hagiati", and a traditional, three-level stone bell tower on the right side of the main entrance gate in the courtyard of the church, with double and single arched openings alternating on the second and third levels respectively.



The “hagiati” shed needs maintenance and restoration, as it was abandoned for a long time, but it remains an important building for the operation of the site and the cater of the needs of the believers. It is a simple building, with most of the side open to the east, with six arched openings supported on columns. Its roof follows the type of the roof of the nave and is covered with the traditional slate roof of the area. On rainy days, the believers used and continue to use this space as part of their religious duties, which have to do with a funeral or memorial service.

The most important building of the complex is that of the church, dedicated to the memory of Saint Athanasios, Patriarch of Alexandria, which is located opposite and diagonal to the hagiati, on the north side of the fenced area of the cemetery. The exact date of the original foundation of the church, unfortunately, is not known. It is, however, evident from the form of the building, especially internally, that it has undergone various phases of reconstruction and additions. More specifically, on the eastern side, the coexistence of architectural elements of different eras is evident, with the part of the triple-nave sanctuary being the oldest, with distinctly different masonry. Various dates of interventions and reconstructions are mentioned in written sources and appear in inscriptions, which survive in various parts of the church, as well as in a wooden triptych, which survives with a more specific reference to the year 1574.





The church is a three-aisled basilica with a gable roof and a slightly raised dome, which was added later, probably in the 19th century. Externally, the roofed entrance on the south side of the church is interesting. The space is divided internally into three naves by two pairs of columns, connected by arches. On the roof of the central nave there is a system of small domes, semi cylindrical arches and spherical triangles, with iconographic representations of two different phases of the church, the earliest of which is on the east side, in the space above the sanctuary steps. In the parts of the roof, in the side aisles, there are traces of hagiography, but unfortunately, there is extensive damage that requires, if possible, urgent intervention.





In parts of the roof, at the side aisles we find traces of hagiography, but unfortunately there are significant damages that are in urgent need for restoration



As a later addition, in the western part we find the part of the narthex that also played the role of a women's gallery. The space of the narthex is open and connected to the nave, as a continuation of it, divided into naves with the use, this time, of double columns instead of columns. On the west wall, the opening of the original entrance to this space is visible. Interventions have recently been made to strengthen the load-bearing structure of the building, which include cementing the perimeter walls, as well as the total reconstruction of the stone-tiled roof.



Inside the church, we find the coexistence of parts of different periods, paintings and additions to the iconographic programme. The oldest phase is the one that survives up to this day in the sanctuary, as mentioned above for the architecture of the building. The arches of the sanctuary, as well as those of the prothesis and the diaconate, are inscribed with representations and figures from the Old and New Testaments. The most recent phase of hagiography is that of the early 20th century, parts of which can be seen on the vertical walls outside the sanctuary, on the dome of the central nave and on the pews of the narthex.

Of the wood-carved decoration of the church, the iconostasis is the oldest one. Inscriptions above the icons of St. Nicholas and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary mention, respectively, the year 1827 and the presence of hagiographers «from Sudan», who were engaged in the gilding of the woodcarving and the preparation of the portable icons.

A short distance from the church is the Military Cemetery of St. Skepi of the Greek Fallen in World War II, as well as a small souvenir of the visit of Saint Kosmas of Aetolia, in a place where a stone inscription has been found referring to the year 1777. Finally, Vouliarates can be the starting point for interesting hiking trails, such as the one to the Holy Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary at the location of Dryanou, between Vouliarates and Zervati



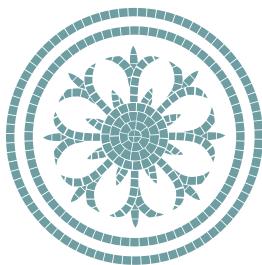
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Holy Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Kosinë

(Byzantine Church of the 12th century A.D.)

Kosinë is a historical community near Premeti, in the upper part of the valley of the Aaos River, a short distance from one of the most important national parks of the country, the “Bredhi i Hotoves-Dangelli.” The village is about thirty-five kilometers from the border crossing of Mertzani, at the end of the plain of Konitsa and at the same distance from the Holy Monastery of Panagia Molyvdoskepastos. In the wider area, there is a confirmed presence of organized settlements from the ancient times, such as Vyllida, Apollonia and Amantia, ancient cities that can be found in the lower part of the Aaos River, descending towards its mouth in the Adriatic.

At the southwestern end of the village of Kosinë, in a prominent position, the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary is located in a fenced, with a low stone wall, hillock. Among the buildings of the monastic complex, only the katholikon survives today, which, with its excellent architecture, gives us a small sample of the great ensemble that existed before. On the basis of historical sources and oral testimonies, we are told that the church played an important role in the spiritual and social life of the wider region. Specifically, for the period following the late Byzantine period, we are informed that in the northwestern corner of the complex from the 19th century onwards there was a Greek school, which operated until the mid-1930s.







The Church of the Assumption is a building of the 12th-13th century, a remnant of a monastic complex, which, as mentioned before, is no longer preserved. It is a cruciform church with a dome, with brick masonry and ceramic decorations, a red multi-level roof and ornate carved decorations on the upper parts of the wall and the dome drum. From an architectural point of view, it presents similarities with the church of the Nativity of the Virgin of Upper Episkopi, in the area of Dropull, but with richer external decoration.



One can access the church through a door on the west side, while two side doors are also present on the sides of the transept, north and south respectively, which are used only for ventilation of the interior. The narthex is developed on the west side. This part of the temple, on the outside, appears as a first transept, parallel to that of the nave. This section is covered by a semi-cylindrical arch, rather than the usual gable roof, an element not often found in similar buildings of the same period and which gives this relatively small building an extremely interesting character. Entering the church, the central space is dominated by the vertical axis of the dome and the light that enters through the four single, arched openings that are located opposite each other in the dome. Originally, the dome was supported by four columns, which were later encased and converted into massive columns. In the same context, and with a view to balancing the loads of the whole system, the wall on the west side of the main space of the church was particularly reinforced and made thicker than usual. On the east side is the niche of the sanctuary, with blind arches on either side, in the place of the deacon's and provost's offices respectively. An interesting peculiarity is also found here in the opening of the window in the central niche. In a double form, it appears internally to have the appearance of a single arched opening, while externally it has the appearance of a double-hung window, with the usual, dividing quoin in the middle. Extensive parts of the murals of various periods have been preserved from the interior decoration. At least two different phases of hagiography are visible. The earliest is the one in the niche of the sanctuary, where the font is traditionally placed, with figures of hierarchs. The dome with the figure of the Almighty, as well as the spherical triangles with the four Evangelists, are of a later period.

During the years of political change and after 1967, although the church was declared a heritage site in 1963, it was abandoned and gradually destroyed. For this reason, during the period 1996-1998, major restoration work was carried out to reverse the deterioration and restore the church. The restoration works on both the interior and exterior of the church were completed in 2018, under the supervision and funding of the Orthodox Church of Albania and with the approval of the Ministry of Culture.

The restoration works on the interior and the exterior of the church were completed in 2018, under the supervision and funding of the Orthodox Church of Albania with the permission of the Ministry of Culture

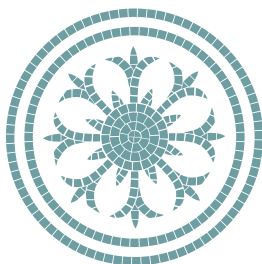


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Holy Church of St. George Dematos

In the area of the Ksamili Peninsula, just opposite the island of Corfu, is the monastery of St. Georgios Dematos. Located just south of the town of Agioi Saranda and in the extension of the settlement of Tsouka towards the Ionian Sea, it was once the only building in the area. However, with the passage of time and urban development over the last three decades, the area has changed significantly in form and character.

The monastic complex is located on the top of a hill. Archaeological findings at this particular geographical point testify to the existence of an ancient wall, probably part of the defense system of the ancient city of Vouthroto, which is located at a relatively short distance and it is not beyond consideration that there was a tower and a small harbor as an extension of the wall to the sea, hence the place name Dema.





References to the church of St. Georgios can be found in historical sources as early as the 17th century. Some of them refer to the generous donations of the church for the implementation of public works, such as the construction of schools. Additionally, from written impressions of travelers, we find information about the state and activity of the church during the period of the Ottoman Empire, as well as the way of communication with the hinterland. A special place among them is occupied by the description of the English archaeologist Nicholas Hammond, who visited the church in 1936 as part of his studies on the antiquities of the region.

The monastic complex is enclosed by a high stone wall, on the perimeter of which there are many openings that served as defensive watchtowers. Within the courtyard, apart from the church, there are other buildings, such as the building of the presbytery in the southeast corner. It is a two-store building, the two levels of which are connected by an external stone staircase on the west side. Directly opposite, on the southwestern side of the enclosure is an elongated two-store building, which forms a corner. A building that served the needs of the monastic community and housed the refectory and the monks' cells, as well as some rooms for the accommodation of pilgrims. In the north-west corner of the katholikon there is an underground water reservoir, into which an original system for collecting rainwater from the roofs of the church ended. There are also visible remains of the foundations of other buildings, both inside and outside the enclosure of the monastery, most interestingly on the south side.

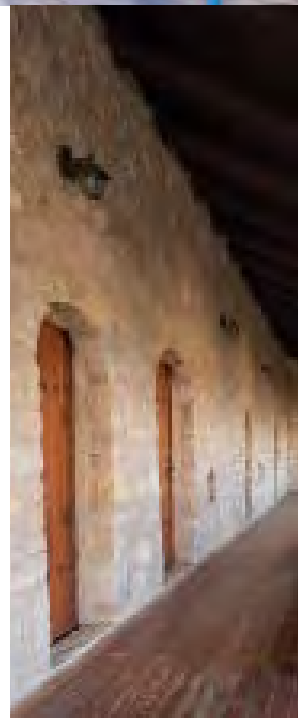
The monastic complex is enclosed by a tall stone wall. At its perimeter we find many openings used as defense observatories.





Undoubtedly, the central building, as is the case in all orthodox monasteries, is the church, or the monastery's katholikon, dedicated to St. George. The church consists of two distinct parts. The nave and the later addition of a spacious narthex, developed on the west side of the building. The vertical walls of the church are constructed entirely of stone and the roof is covered with local slate slabs. The built-in bell tower at the top of the west wall of the narthex is constructed with local limestone, using the same technique as the rest of the building and it constitutes a later addition.

Entering the church, we first encounter the simple and spacious narthex. A relatively narrow, arched opening in the eastern wall leads us to the main temple. The nave is an almost square space with the sanctuary to the east bounded by a built iconostasis, which communicates with the rest of the space through three arched openings. In small recesses in its façade, unfortunately, with extensive damage, there is a composition of a Great Deesis. It is a composition with the twelve apostles, divided into two groups of six, on either side of the central image of Jesus Christ.



The mural decoration, which survives inside the church, has suffered great damage and despite the maintenance work, the faces and the compositions of the scenes remain quite indistinguishable.

In the center of the nave stands the dome, with a very interesting architectural peculiarity. The plan of the dome's drum has the form of a ten-sided convex shape on the outside, while on the inside it develops in three levels. Standing just below the center of the dome's end inside the temple, the visitor can see, looking up, two successive rhombuses formed by the gradual alternation of spherical triangles and small niches. These rhombuses have inwardly convex sides and end with a hollow surface where the image of the Almighty is traditionally placed. In this way, interesting surfaces are created for the accompanying depictions of Old Testament figures, angels, hexaptera, etc. On the last higher level, four narrow, opposite openings help to ventilate the interior of the temple and allow the sun's rays to enter, the light of which creates, in effect, a cross.

The mural decoration, which survives inside the church, has suffered great damage and despite the maintenance work, the faces and the compositions of the scenes remain quite indistinguishable.





During the years of the previous political regime, the church was converted into a base for the Albanian army, which was responsible for guarding the border maritime zone and anti-aircraft defense. Following restoration work carried out by the Albanian Orthodox Church at the beginning of the 21st century, the complex was restored to its former state and is now an important pilgrimage site.



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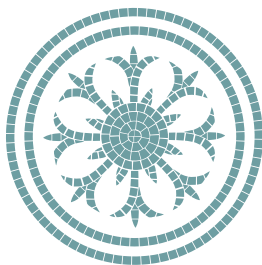
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Monuments of the Region of Korça



Monastery of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Vithkuq



Vithkuq is located twenty kilometers southwest of Korça and south of the neighboring Voskopojë, at an altitude of 1300 m above sea level. It is surrounded by high mountains, which create a very beautiful and picturesque natural landscape.


The history of Vithkuq dates back to the Byzantine years. According to tradition, the construction of the first church, dedicated to Saint Athanasius, dates back to the year 1162. After the establishment of Ottoman rule in southern Albania in the late 15th century, new developments affected Vithkuq. Sultan Bayezid II granted as mulk (= property), to the first equerry and conqueror of Psamathia (Samatya) Ilyaz Mirachor Evel bey, seven villages in the area of Korça, including Vithkuq.

During the 17th-18th century, the settlement reached a high economic and cultural level, following the course of many well-known centers of the time, such as Voskopojë, Nikolicë, Shipskë (Ypischia) etc. According to 19th century historians, Vithkuq flourished in parallel with these centers and its population, during the heyday, was divided into twenty-four neighborhoods, including the districts of Doukas, Mporis, Graikas, Tatats, Kovatsias, Roussas etc.



During the years of the archbishop of Achrid Ioasaph of Voskopojë (1719-1745), high cultural and educational development was marked. Evidences of this development are given by the ornate temples of Vithkuq, which are among the most representative monuments of the ecclesiastical art of the 18th century in the Balkans. The list includes about fourteen temples and monasteries. Among them the Holy Monastery of the Apostles Peter and Paul stands out. The monastery is found on a hilltop on the northeastern side of Vithkuq, next to the ruins of the historic district of Borshi and in the past belonged to the ecclesiastical province of the Metropolis of Kastoria. According to the codex of the Monastery, published by Filaretos Vafides, the monastery was erected gradually in two phases.






The first phase of construction of the monastery started in 1709, after the issue of the firman of the sultan, with the monetary contribution of Athanasios Hatzirimaras from the Borishi district of Vithkuq. The master builder in the construction was Thane Lenas from the same district. The year 1710 was inaugurated by the local metropolitan of Kastoria Dionysios and the bishop of Prespa Joasaf, the later archbishop of Ohrid. The second phase begins in 1759, during the days of the abbot Nikos Tarasios, with the construction of the catholicon, which is dedicated to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. The catholikon, of domed basilica style, was painted in 1763 by the brothers Constantine and Athanasius from Korçë and in 1761 the iconostasis of the church was painted.



The building complex of the Monastery includes the small cemetery church of Saints Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian, which was built in 1736 and painted in 1750 (May 18), also by the brothers Constantine and Athanasius from Korçë



The building complex of the Monastery includes the small cemetery church of Saints Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian, which was built in 1736 and painted in 1750 (May 18), also by the brothers Constantine and Athanasius from Korçë. According to the founding inscription, the church was built under the abbotship of Methodius and with the donation of the presbyter and oikonomos Ioannis from «Aidonochora», the nowadays village Aidonochori which is located near Serres. The expenses of the painting of the church, according to the inscription, were afforded by the archon Syropoulos from Aidonochori and Panagiotis Ntesinas, head of Vithkuq. The fact that two of the donors that supported the construction of the church came from Aidonochori of Serres reveals the commercial transactions of the inhabitants of the wider area of Voskopojë with the area of Serres.



The katholikon of the Apostles Peter and Paul has survived from the monastery complex until today and apart from the wall of the precinct of the Monastery, the church of Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian. The accommodations of the Monastery were destroyed during the Second World War, when in 1943 Vithkuq was set on fire by the Italians who invaded the village. It was then that four of the remaining temples of Vithkuq were burned, the church of Saint Nicholas, Saint Athanasius which was the oldest, Saint Ioannis and Saint Paraskevi.

Among the preserved temples of Vithkuq are included also the church of Panagia of the 2nd half of the 17th century, the church of Saint Menas of the 18th century, the church of Evangelistria of 18th century, the church of Saint George of the 2nd half of the 18th century a period that coincides with the expansion of the settlement of Vithkuq, where each district had acquired its own temple.



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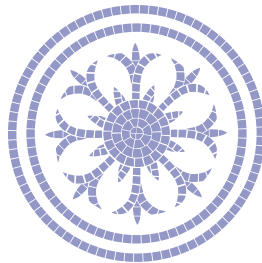
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Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, Boboshticë, Korçe



The village of Boboshticë is located at a distance of about ten kilometers south of Korça. It is known for its natural wealth, historical and cultural treasures, traditional cuisine and agricultural products, as well as for its many and beautiful churches.

On a hilltop, at the southern tip of the main road of the village, is located the Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin. The exact date of construction of the first temple is not preserved, but it is probable that there was a monastery complex with a presence of about a century in this area. A small building, part of the monastic cells, survived from the old monastery, which, during the time of political upheavals, a period of persecution of Christians, was used as a warehouse, as well as the katholikon, a single-aisled basilica, was used as a cattle stable.



We know from sources that in the old temple there were two phases of construction. The older phase included the apse of the Sanctuary and a part of the north wall, about 1.5 meters high. Later, on the existing elements, the perimeter walls were built and a three-pitched roof with a small shed at the western entrance was constructed. The temple did not have particular architectural elements. The construction of the walls of the second phase was poorly done and there were serious damages to the load-bearing elements of the roof, which created a danger for the collapse of the building.

The Church of the Dormition of the Virgin is one of the first places of religious worship that began to operate after the collapse of the communist regime in 1990. For its reopening, in the years 2005 and 2006, the old cells were demolished and a new four-storey building was built for the same use, accommodation and reception areas, a chapel of daily services and a space for mechanical installations.

In 2014, the old church was demolished, but the apse of the Sanctuary was preserved, to be integrated in the new katholikon, in the center of the monastery, with the work to be completed in 2019. The new temple is triconch, domed cruciforme roof, a bell tower attached to the west wall and a perimeter stoa, the north side of which ends in the apse of the old church. The fencing of the courtyard of the Monastery was made of stone and an independent bell tower of twelve meters was placed near the entrance gate of the monastery. The areas, around the perimeter of the complex, belong to the Monastery, and are developed as an external fenced yard around the inner stone.

On the day of the feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary, on the 15th of August, there is a great traditional festival, with the participation of many christians from all over the country.

The Church of the Dormition of the Virgin is one of the first places of religious worship that began to operate after the collapse of the communist regime in 1990



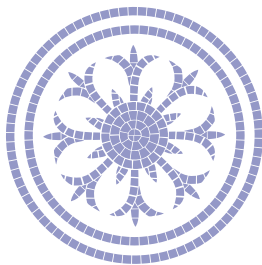
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Cavernous Hermitage of the Birth of the Virgin, Maligrad Island, Lake of Great Prespa

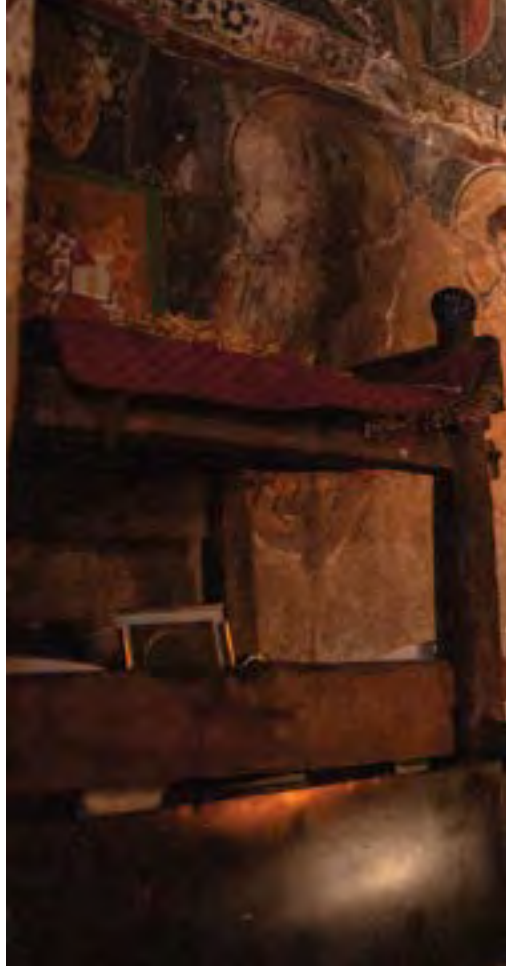


At an altitude of 853 m above sea level, surrounded by the Pyrenees Mountains and the mountains Varnous, and Livaniskos, is located the Prespa Basin, a lake, consisting of two parts, the Great and the Little Prespa, places that communicate with each other, through a narrow channel.

The Prespa Lakes region, which is divided between Albania, Greece and northern Macedonia, is a cross-border protected area, established by a joint Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the three neighboring states in February 2000. The area is a very important natural forest, due to the biodiversity and endemic species that exist in it. At the same time, the area of Prespa is rich in historical monuments.



The interior and exterior decoration of the temple is extremely interesting. From the first phase (1344/5) a small part of the mural decoration is preserved on the east wall of the Sanctuary and in the lower parts of the north and south wall



Along the shores of the lake and the hinterland there are prehistoric and medieval settlements, temples and monasteries, as well as rock caves with Byzantine hermitages and chapels, inside of which there are remarkable frescoes. These hermitages on the shores of Lake Prespa date from the middle of the 13th to the middle of the 16th century, confirming the presence and continuation of Byzantine art and monasticism in the area, even after the fall of Constantinople.

The single-nave church of the Birth of the Virgin is built in a large cave on the rocky and uninhabited island of Maligrad on the lake of Great Prespa, near the village of Pustec. It is a single-aisled basilica, small in size, covered by a semi-cylindrical arch. Based on the surviving founding inscriptions, the temple was originally built and painted in 1344/5 by Boyko and his wife Evdokia, together with their children and is a typical example of the time. We are informed from the sources that the art of the wider area of Prespa was directly dependent on Ohrid, an important ecclesiastical center of the time, and influences from well-known workshops that are active, during the 14th century.





In the initial phase of construction, the temple was a single-nave basilica, with a low two-pitched roof. In 1368/9, during the reign of the Serbian king Vukašin, renovation and painting works of the church were carried out, on the initiative of the ruler of the region, Caesar Novako. During the renovation, the church became taller, its wooden roof was replaced by a semi-cylindrical arch and it was painted inside and out.

The interior and exterior decoration of the temple is extremely interesting. From the first phase (1344/5) a small part of the mural decoration is preserved on the east wall of the Sanctuary and in the lower parts of the north and south wall. These sections stand out for their calligraphic and decorative character, the strict characteristics of the portraits and the colors. The frescoes of the second period (1368/9) extend to the rest of the interior of the church and are arranged in two zones on the east and in three zones on the south, west and north wall. On the west façade is located one of the most beautiful representations of the temple, in which can be seen the ktetor Caesar Novakos with his wife Kali, their daughter Maria and their son Amiralis. An image of the same person can be found in the Byzantine church of Mborje in Korçë, which is dedicated to the Ascension of the Lord.



The frescoes of the second phase are distinguished for the liveliness of the compositions, the movement of the faces, the expressiveness of the portraits and the variety of colors and are considered a typical example of art, during the Palaeologan Renaissance of the 13th-14th century. The scenes of the temple in Maligrand, according to the observations of Professor E. Tsigaridas, belong to the same iconographic tradition with monuments decorated by workshops of Thessaloniki, of the first period of the Palaeologans, with themes and stylistic features adopted by the artists of workshops of Kastoria, during the second half of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century. The workshop that painted the frescoes of the Church of the Birth of the Virgin, in Maligrand, in Great Prespa, seems to be the same as the one he worked on in Mborje (1390), as well as in the church of Saint Athanasius of Myzeqeja, in the city of Kastoria (1383/84).



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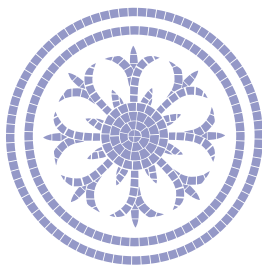
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Church of Saint Nicholas, Voskopojë



Voskopojë is an important historical, cultural and tourist center. It is noted for its architectural monuments, the picturesque landscape and the excellent climate. It is located on a high slope, about 1200 m above sea level and extends between the mountains of Opari and Ostrovicë. From the east side, the hills descend smoothly and form a valley, which is the only natural entrance to Voskopojë. The place is very rich in forests, pastures and water sources.



Known since the 14th century, Voskopojë experienced amazing economic and spiritual prosperity at the beginning of the 18th century. The «New Academy» (1744), its Library and Printing Press, the first in the Balkans, gained a great reputation. This educational institution contributed to the dissemination of education and to the formation of a vibrant intellectual movement. The city was adorned with about twenty-two temples, which were noted for their impressive gilded wood-carved iconostasis, the wood-carved pulpits and despotic thrones, the ornate apartments of the cantors, but also their complex frescoes, elements that gave them unquestionable grandeur and which at the same time reflected the wealth and power of the city.

Until 1670, Voskopojë belonged directly to the Archdiocese of Ohrid, while then it came under the jurisdiction of the Holy Metropolis of Korçë. At the beginning of the 18th century, the city had fourteen districts, covering an area of 1800 acres. The spotlight of the districts was the complexes of religious institutions






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Despite its flourishing, the society of Voskopojë could not react to the successive catastrophes of 1769, 1772 and 1780 and could not, subsequently, reach the level of development it had before them. Hundreds of Voskopojë families were forced to migrate to Korçë, Janina, Delvinaqi, Ambelakia, the Monastery, Ohrid, Budapest, Vienna, Kleisoura and other urban centers.



The church of Saint Nicholas is one of the most brilliant temples in the city. It was erected in 1721 in the Rue district. Architecturally, it is a three-aisled basilica, with internal dimensions of 19.7 x 11 m. It consists of the main church, the narthex and the portico on the south side. The trapezoidal-shaped narthex has a series of columns in the center, which are connected to each other, as well as to the perimeter walls, by a system of bows, forming rectangular compartments housed with semi-cylindrical arches. The portico, which extends across the south side of the main temple, is open with arches on low stone columns, which rest on a low bench. The tower of the belfry rises southeast above the entrance of the courtyard of the temple. In this area before 1916, the year when a large fire broke out, there were other buildings, such as the chapel of Saint Euthymius and cells that probably served the needs of the existed monastery.

The masonry of the temple is elaborate, made of carved stones connected with plaster, forming very thin joints. The levels of the layers of the masonry are emphasized on the east side, where there is apse with blind arches and ends with a mud-brick fishbone-shaped decorative ribbon. In contrast to the masonry of the main church, the masonry of the porch has a rich decoration that is achieved thanks to the combination of bricks and limestone, as well as due to the use of various subjects, cornices and strips.

The portico was painted in 1750 by the brothers Constantine and Athanasius, who due to their profession were called "Painters".





According to the founding inscriptions, the temple was decorated in 1726 by the painter David Selenica, known for his works on Mount Athos, Kastoria, Thessaloniki and elsewhere, with the help of Constantine and Christos. The portico was painted in 1750 by the brothers Constantine and Athanasius, who due to their profession were called «Painters». For more than forty years, the Painter brothers gained a great reputation, which is proved by the fact that they managed to take several orders for the painting of some of the most important monuments of their time.





At the southern entrance of the temple is preserved the image of the founder and owner Hatzigeorgiou of Voskopojë offering the temple to the enthroned Saint Nicholas, with the inscription between them «Ηγάνησα, Κύριε, τὴν εὐπρέπειαν τοῦ Οἴκου Σου καὶ μὴ συναπολέσης μετὰ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν τὴν ψυχὴ μου» («Lord I missed so much living in your temple. Do not testify against my soul to the sinners»). The first phase of the painting of the church took place, during the time when Joasaph, a distinguished and eminent hierarch from Korçë, was the archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Korçë, and the second phase was completed during the reign of Metropolitan Nikiforos of Korçë.

The wood-carved iconostasis of Saint Nicholas of Voskopojë is preserved to this day in the homonymous church of the village of Vlasti, in the prefecture of Kozani. It is rumored that it was transported to the area, after the destruction of the city, in 1769 by the priest Georgios Sinas.



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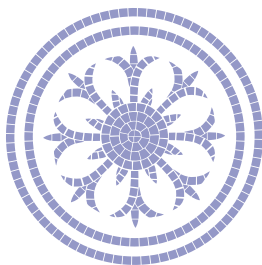
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The New Cathedral of the Resurrection of Christ, Korçë



The town of Korçë is the most densely populated urban center in Southeastern Albania. It is located at the foot of the Morava Mountain at an altitude of about 850 m above sea level and extends to the edge of the valley of the same name, which is one of the richest and most important in present-day southern Albania.

The first historical reports about the settlement of the area of Korçë begin from the Byzantine years. According to written sources, Korçë is mentioned as a city related to the Muzakajt feudal family (13th-15th century), who were based in Berati, in the plain of Myzeqeja. With the Ottoman conquest, the provinces of Korçë, Kolonjë and Përmet became a separate administrative unit with Korçë as its capital. According to the first census of the Ottoman administration of 1431-1432, Korçë appears as a residential castle with twenty-six houses, all Christian, and its own market.



During the period before the 11th century and until 1030, the region of Korçë belonged, ecclesiastically, as it appears from the golden bull of Basil II, to the metropolis of Kastoria, which, in turn, belonged to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Ohrid. The exact date of the establishment of the metropolis of Korçë is not historically confirmed, but we know that the first mention, under the title «Korça and Selasphorus», was made after the year 1557.

The Christian Orthodox element made up 2/3 of the urban population and had organized the Orthodox Community, which had the Demogerontia, which consisted of ten members, based in the Metropolis of the city. The spiritual life was centered on the spiritual institutions of the city, the most important of which was the old metropolitan church of Zoodochos Pigi (Life-giving Spring), which was located within the area of the community schools and the metropolitan building.

During the communist period, the church of Zoodochos Pigi was turned into a museum, as previously its upper part, the dome and the bell towers were demolished. All the icons and ecclesiastical objects that were saved after the demolition of the churches in Southern Albania were collected there. After the collapse of the communist regime, the large ground floor room of the museum was adapted, to function from 1992 as a church again, covering the religious needs of Orthodox Christians.





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Subsequently, at the request of the Orthodox of Korçë, efforts began to find a suitable plot of land for the construction of a new metropolitan church. After many adventures and difficulties, thanks to the dynamic persistence of the orthodox of Korçë, a large plot of land was granted by the state authorities, in the center of the city.

On August 2, 1994, Archbishop Anastasios laid the foundation stone for the construction of the new metropolitan church, dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ. The temple would fill the huge gap created by the demolition of many temples in this city, which stands out for its Orthodox tradition. The plans of the metropolitan church were prepared by the architect Dimitrios Christidis from Thessaloniki, and the construction was carried out with funds provided by Archbishop Anastasios. In those difficult times, Archbishop Anastasios would characteristically state: «When they throw us stones, we use the stones to build.»

The new metropolitan church is cruciform, with four apses, with a dome in the center, with a circular peristyle on three sides and two bell towers. It has a gallery (gynaecoon) in almost all its internal development. The temple is externally lined with stone and decorative ceramic elements. In the catacomb-basement, with an area that reaches 960 sq.m., there is a temple, a baptistery, a meeting room, etc. The temple is adorned with an artistic wood-carved iconostasis. With the contribution of Christians, the frescoes of the temple have almost been completed. This impressive project was inaugurated by Archbishop Anastasios on August 7, 1996, with the participation of the Eminence Metropolitan Mr. Ignatius of Berat, Mr. Ioannis of Korçë and Mr. Theoklitos of Florina.



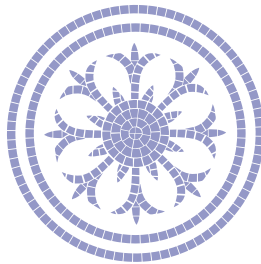
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