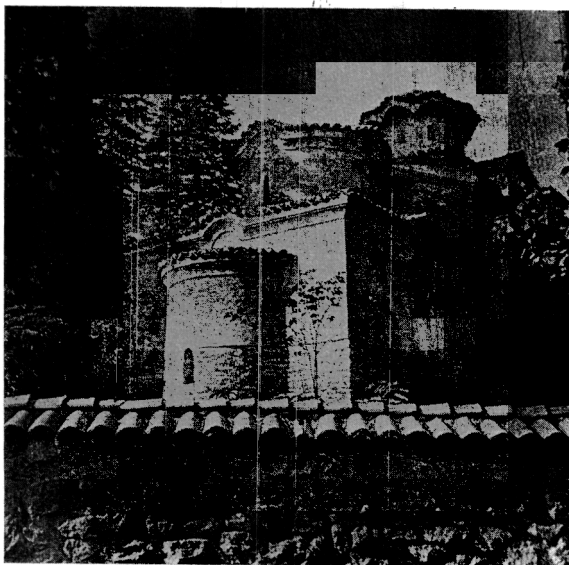


THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE BOYANA CHURCH

A village once and a neighbourhood of Sofia today, Boyana lies on the northern slopes of Mt. Vitosha, some 10 km away from the city centre. During the Middle Ages there was a fortress on what is Boyana today, which was part of Sofia's defence system consisting of about thirty fortified settlements. Thanks to this felicitous strategic position the Boyana fortress played more than once an important role in the defence of Sofia and its environs. A small Christian temple known as the Boyana Church has survived. It is one of the most remarkable monuments in Bulgaria from that period¹. Its frescoes of 1259, impressive for their serene purity and harmonious balance of forms², rank among the best specimens of Byzantine mediaeval art and make the Boyana Church Bulgaria's most precious contribution to mediaeval painting*. In 1979 it was recorded on the list of world cultural heritage. The church frescoes have been an object of studies,

1. North-east view of the Boyana Church now



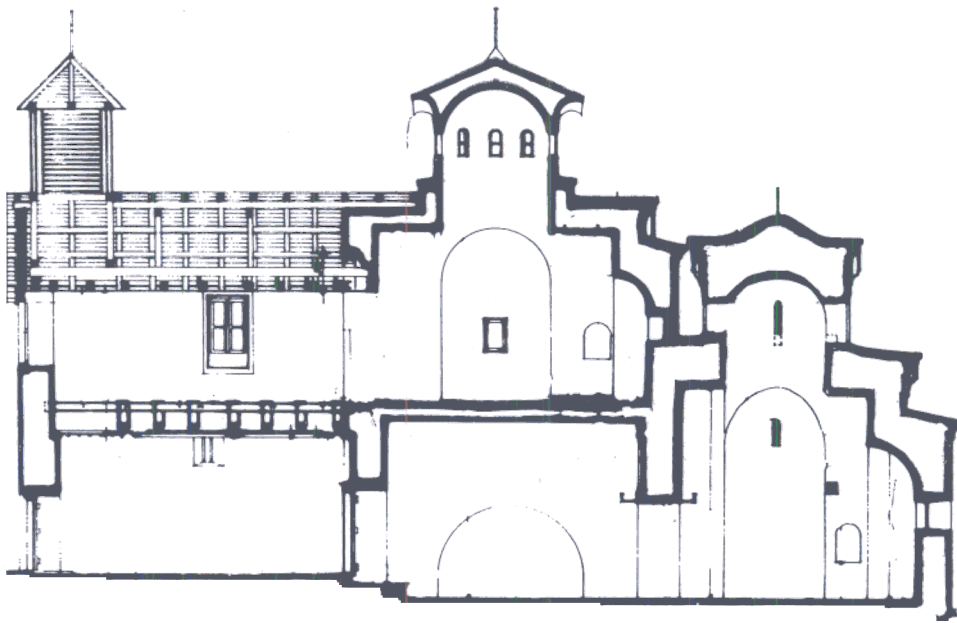
*At its Third session in Luxor, (October 1979) the UNESCO World Heritage Committee proved the frescoes of Boyana church as monuments of international importance

publications and conservations since 1912 but the question of the architecture has always been pushed aside. That is why even today the edifice has not taken its due place in the chronology of Bulgarian mediaeval architecture. The frescoes were believed to belong to the church and efforts were not made nor attention paid to all aspects of the monument in order to reveal its typological features and to record preserved architectural forms and details characteristic of the time of its building.

The Boyana Church is a collective name because as a matter of fact it consists of two connected mediaeval churches and an adjoining annexe built during the Late Revival period. Its present-day appearance reflects these three main stages as a result of which the monument has become what we see.

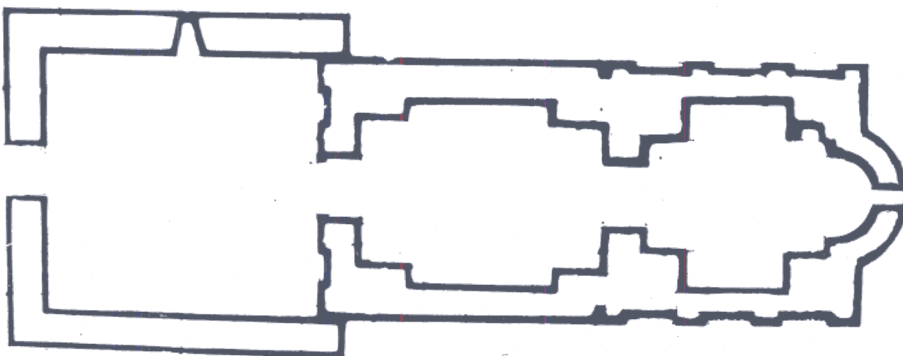
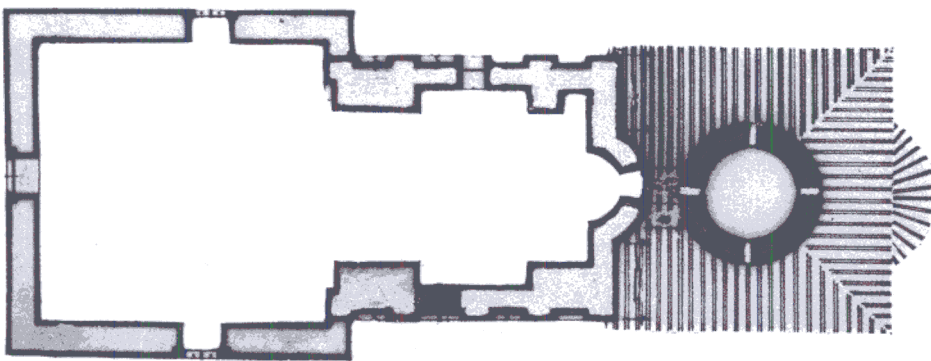
The first stage has given us the St. Nicolas Church (conventionally called the East Church), built probably in the late 10th century. It is almost a cube with a cross inscribed in the plan and a solid dome with a cylindrical drum (or tambour). Analogical examples are provided by contemporary Preslav — e. g. the church with an inscribed cross in the Delidoushka locality³. The south and north façades have three blind arches each with higher middle arches and over them the cornice makes yoke-like curves which repeat themselves over the drum's windows. It is not clear what the west façade was like. Supposedly, there was an anta and a gable⁴. We expect that water isolation work on the church floor will give new information about the west façade. Until then the question will not be solved.

The second stage is the adjoining two-storey church St. Panteleimon the Martyr built to the west. It was erected in the middle of the 13th century on the order of Sebastocrator Kaloyan, hence known as Kaloyan's Church. The first storey is an oblong construction capped with a cylindrical dome and serving as a narthex to the East Church. It is suggested that it was destined to be a burial chamber for Sebastocrator Kaloyan and his wife Dessislava. This assertion is motivated by the two bays in the north and south inner walls but the dimensions of the bays — 3 meters long and 45 cm deep into the wall — and the fact that the frescoes continue into

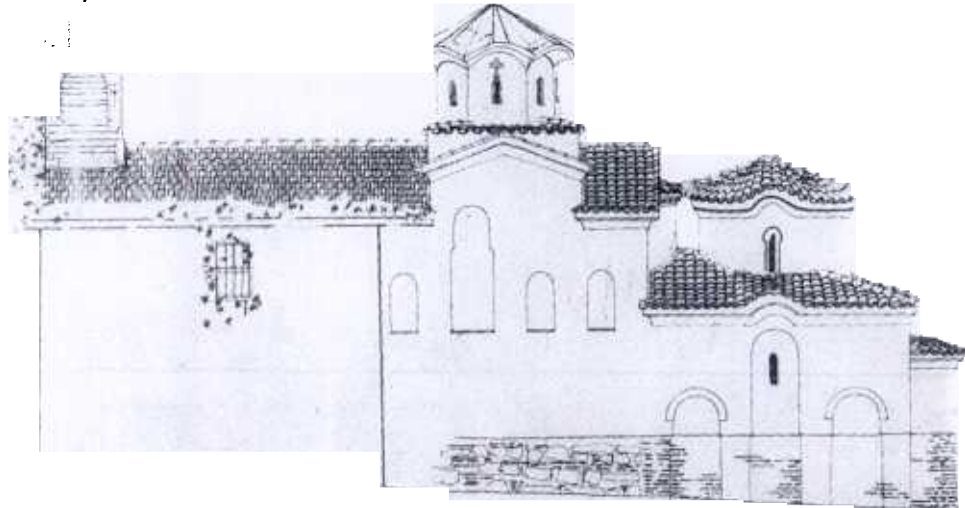


01

section



3. Present-day position:

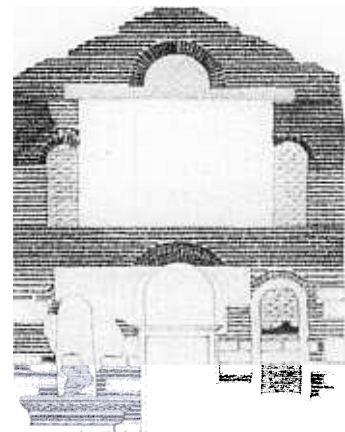


- south façade taken by G. Stc

them down to the floor, make the supposition dubious¹. Moreover, no traces of burials have been discovered there.

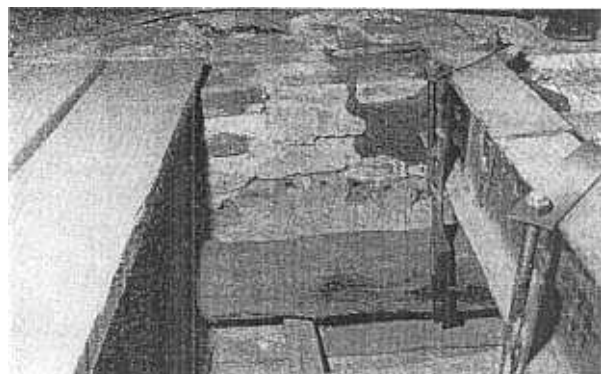
The church St. Panteleimon the Martyr is on the second storey. It has uniform façade and a cross inscribed in the plan. The building is presumed to have been finished in 1259. The donor's inscription on the ground floor fixed the time of the frescoes — 1259 and the same date is accepted for St. Panteleimon, too. The south, west and north façades had four blind bays. The two storeys of Kaloyan's Church differ in structure: the first storey is a mixture of blocks and stones (the latter prevail) and were taken from earlier buildings to be used again); the second storey is pure brickwork. The plan of the second storey was chosen probably by analogy with the East Church although during the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (13th-14th century) other churches were built along a similar plan: St. Nicholas church in Sapareva Banya, St. Todor in Boboshevo, etc.³ The storeyed Kaloyan's Church was the ruler's family chapel and the entrance was at the south façade of the church. It is supposed that in critical circumstances the chapel was a fort¹. The two storeys of Kaloyan's Church were painted simultaneously and with them the East Church was painted once again.

In the next centuries the church was a desolate spot. The third stage began in the second half of the 19th century when like many other abandoned temples it came back to life. During the Ottoman occupation churches were the only social places



4. Investigation of Kaloyan's Church west façade;

5. Ceramic decoration on Kaloyan's Church west façade hidden in the floor construction of the later annexe



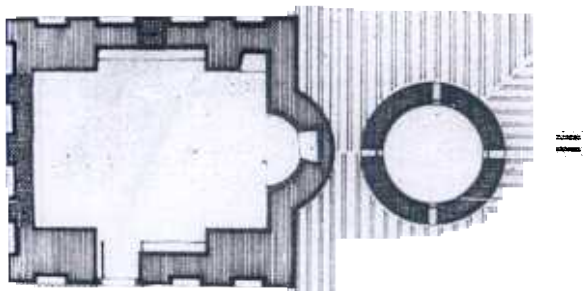
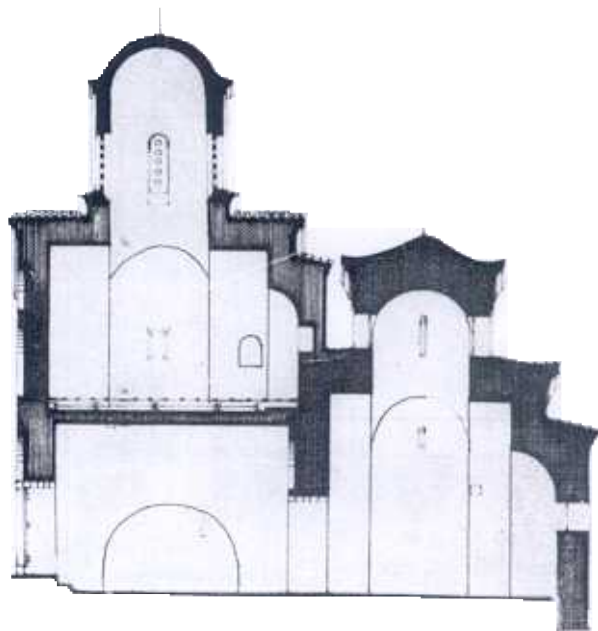
where Bulgarians could meet and feel their national identity. For the Boyana Church it was from 1845 onwards because in that year the Russian traveller V. Grigorovich visited Boyana and was perhaps the last explorer to see the Boyana Church without the Late Revival annexe.

The annexe also had two storeys adjoined to the west façade of Kaloyan's Church. The first storey was a narthex and wooden stairs led to the second storey. An opening on the west façade of Kaloyan's Church led from the annexe to the church. It is curious that Kaloyan's storeyed church was used for Mass instead of the East Church although the other way around would have been logical as the two churches are almost identically spacious. Perhaps the legend that Sebastocrator and his wife Dessislava were buried in the ground floor of Kaloyan's Church played some role.

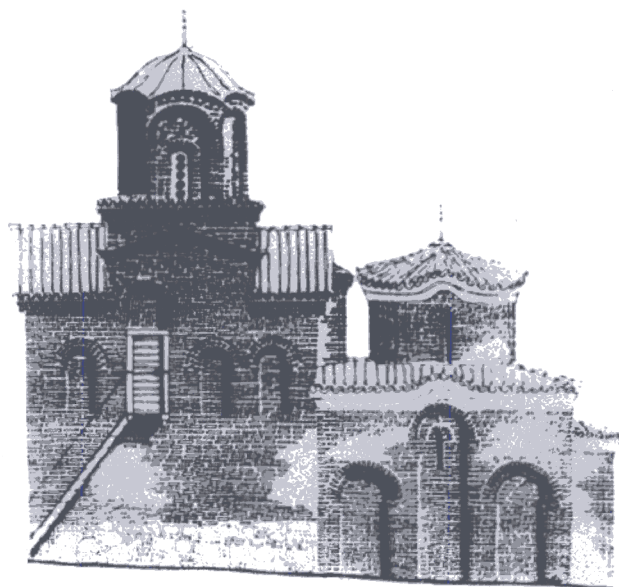
Until recently research on the architecture of the Boyana Church consisted only of fragmentary probing. In 1978-1979 when the roofs of the mediaeval churches were repaired and the outer plaster was removed it became possible to thoroughly study this extremely valuable architectural monument. The results were very interesting and allow a faithful reproduction of the church.

Investigation of the East Church shows that originally it had no plaster at all. All statements that there was stonework above the unplastered brick plinth, that the façades were initially plastered and that the cornices are original¹ turned out to be wrong. The entire East Church is made of brick, both the plinth and above it. There are two concentric brick rows above the blind arches with a wide band of white joining. It is an early ornamental form on the façades to which later decorative ceramics were added. The plastering of the façade starts at quite an accidental point and any attempt to find proportions between plastered and unplastered parts will lead to nothing, if of course, the façades are not idealised and the displacement of the ground around the monument is ignored. There is no stone masonry in the East Church except for a later patch deep in the west blind arch of the north façade. The patches acquired while Kaloyan's Church was under construction are clearly visible on the façades. The cornices belong to the Late Revival annexe. Sections with original joining on the drum of the dome have been discovered.

The most significant result of research on Kaloyan's Church was the discovery of original ceramic decoration on the south, west and north façades. That there was decorative ceramic was a fact known before¹ but now we saw that the decoration was ap-



6. Presentation draft — option one:
top — longitudinal section; middle —
plan of the storey; bottom — plan of the ground floor



7. Presentation draft — option one: left — west façade; right — south façade

plied to all façades and was not an isolated phenomenon. The south façade entrance to the storeyed church was discovered. It was probably blocked up during the Revival and the frescoes are in good condition. The west façade was most revealing. Hidden by the Late Revival annexe it contains much significant information about the original architecture. There is ceramic decoration over the two blind arches flanking the entrance and at the patron's bay above the entrance. There were four blind arches once, as high as the second floor, the way it is on the north and south façades. The ar-

ches were also crowned with a decorative ceramic belt of which only a small part is preserved.

An important step was made with the discovery that Kaloyan's Church once had no plaster. It is proved by the decorative façade forms and by the fact that in the Late Revival annexe attic the brickwork of the west façade of Kaloyan's Church is without plaster and preserved original uniform joining. The best preserved ceramic layer is in the patron's bay over the entrance and between the ground floor's ceiling and floor. The cornices are identical with those of the East Church, i. e. made

8. Original joining on the East Church dome



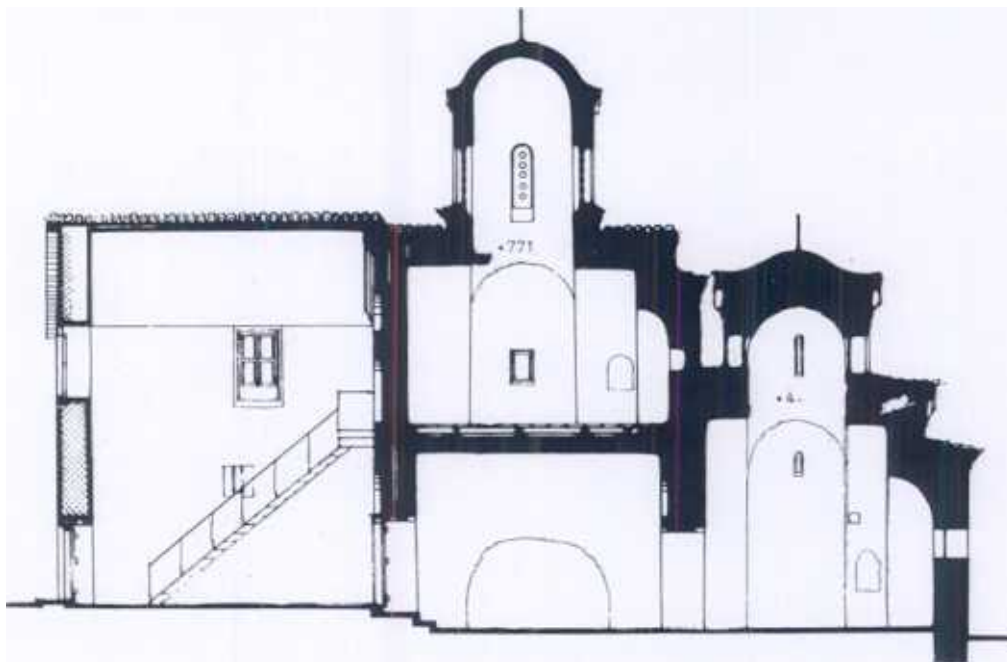
9. Original ceramic decoration on Kaloyan's Church



10. Presentation draft,
option two:



south façade



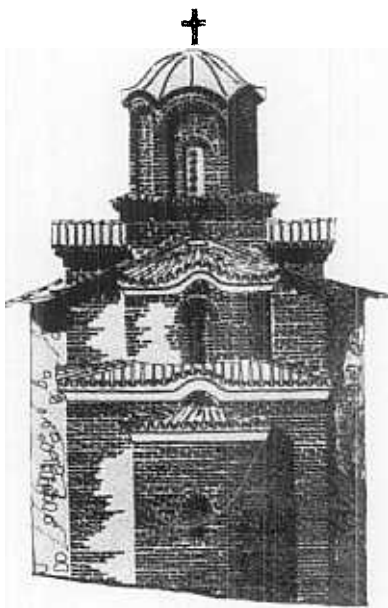
longitudinal section

together with the Late Revival annexe except for the apse cornice of the storeyed Kaloyan's Church where an original fragment is preserved — of the dogtooth type.

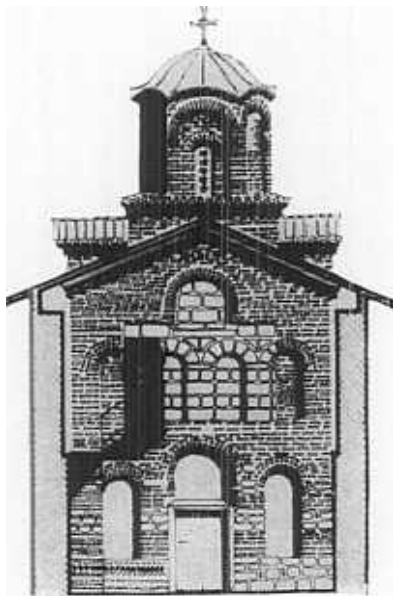
The storeyed church is crowned by a lath-and-plaster tent-like dome built during the Revival to replace the once existing solid one destroyed probably in the series of earth-quakes in the first half of the 19th century.

The present-day appearance of the so-called Late

Revival annexe is the result of multiple reconstructions. At first the annexe was used as narthex to the church and the entrance was a small opening on the west façade of Kaloyan's Church. The annexe floor level was about 50 cm lower than that of the storeyed church. On the west façade of the annexe there was a small oriel which underlined the entrance axis of the church and enriched the otherwise poor west façade. A clapper was hung in this oriel. Later, probably after the Liberation, the space of



east façade



cross-section
with a view to
Kaloyan's Church

the storeyed church became insufficient to hold the congregation; that is why a rather large opening was made in the west façade of Kaloyan's Church which was incorporated to the annexe storey to the church and the ground floor came to function as narthex. A complex system of trimmer joists was applied to make the levels equal whereupon the floor construction of the annexe became 70 cm. That the reconstruction took place after the Liberation is evident from the steel profiles used

to reinforce the opening broken on the second floor and from the factory-made nails on the ceilings, materials imported in Bulgaria for the first time after 1880. The dating of the frescoes — 1882 — speaks also of considerable reconstruction of the antechurch existing before. The annexe underwent the last significant reconstruction in 1913 when the oriel was removed, the windows were enlarged and a belfry was erected over the roof. Nine centuries after the first building work and after this reconstruction the Boyana Church became what we see today.

ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION, RESTORATION AND PRESENTATION

Architectural conservation, restoration and presentation was preceded by research which clarified to a great extent the monument's authentic appearance. It pertains most to the two mediaeval churches which contain real artworks.

The basic principle of conservation was to conserve all preserved elements reflected on the building's appearance and allow restoration on insignificant sectors only avoiding hypothetical elements. We think we should clear off some later layers of no aesthetic worth because the Venice Charter allows that when the removal would uncover remains of undeniable aesthetic value.

We worked out two options for conservation, restoration and presentation both with the aim of maximum exposition of the mediaeval churches. The first option suggests to get rid of the Late Revival annexe which lacks aesthetic worth and to create conditions to reveal the dynamically balanced total volume of the mediaeval churches. This option enables us to give prominence to the west façade of Kaloyan's Church which has an expressly monumental character. The second option keeps the Late Revival annexe but removes its inter-storey construction. The purpose behind it is to fully present the west façade of Kaloyan's Church. The preservation of the Late Revival annexe in this case favours the formation of a cushion volume which will facilitate air conditioning of the mediaeval churches.

After consideration of the suggested options, appraisal of their positive and negative aspects, bearing in mind the importance of the monument, the necessity to put to maximum use the results obtained by investigation and recognizing that each part of the church has the value of an original and right to existence as representative of the period when it was built, an intermediate solution was reached: the Late Revival annexe is preserved as a volume, for it is the third stage in the history

of the monument, but the intermediate level is almost entirely done away with in order to present the west façade of Kaloyan's Church. Limited sections are left to mark the ceiling and storey levels. The west façade of Kaloyan's Church is restored according to the data provided by research. The south, east and north façades of the mediaeval churches are restored without plaster up to the cornices. Above, because of lack of data, we will keep the appearance assumed after the Revival reconstruction, the tent-like dome of Kaloyan's Church included.

In 1980 the Boyana Church frescoes are being subjected to conservation work and an air conditioning system is installed in a specially designed underground premise north of the church to maintain the temperature and humidity necessary for the

frescoes. A town-planning resolution has been adopted about the surroundings of the church which are regarded as appendix to a first-class monument. The Boyana Church is to have an extra building where the museum exhibition will be arranged. All this gives rise to hopes that in the near future we shall be able to present the Boyana Church as a world cultural monument in a light worth of its significance and qualities.

Vassil KITOV

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RESUME

L'église de Boïana est composée, en fait, de deux églises médiévales et d'un édifice construit au XIXème siècle, durant le Réveil national. A l'est, l'église Saint-Nicolas, du Xème siècle, est la plus ancienne. L'église dite de Kaloïan fut construite autour de 1250. Elle comporte deux niveaux, dont le premier est un passage voûté menant vers Saint-Nicolas. Un artiste inconnu décora, en 1259, les murs de ce passage de peintures qui comptent parmi les chefs-d'oeuvres de l'art médiéval bulgare. Ces peintures ont été classées par l'UNESCO, en 1979, au nombre des monuments culturels d'importance mondiale. Durant la seconde moitié du XIXème siècle, une sorte de porche, à deux niveaux, fut ajouté devant la façade ouest de l'église de Kaloïan.

L'étude approfondie de l'architecture de ces monuments, en 1978 et 1979, a établi que les églises Saint-Nicolas et de Kaloïan n'étaient pas enduites. L'église Saint-Nicolas est entièrement construite en maçonnerie de brique et l'église de Kaloïan est en maçonnerie de pierre et brique pour le premier niveau, de brique pour le second.

Plusieurs possibilités avaient été envisagées pour la restauration de ces monuments. La première était de supprimer le troisième édifice pour mettre en valeur la silhouette de l'église de Kaloïan. La seconde était de conserver le volume de ce porche, mais de suppri-

mer ses niveaux intérieurs. Ces solutions avaient pour objectif essentiel la mise en valeur des églises médiévales. Tous les éléments existants étaient conservés, la restauration ne touchait que quelques points peu importants, en se basant sur des faits établis avec certitude et non sur des hypothèses.

Après étude de ces propositions, une solution intermédiaire a été adoptée. Le bâtiment du XIXème siècle sera conservé, mais ses niveaux intérieurs seront presque supprimés, pour présenter au public la façade ouest de l'église de Kaloïan. Les façades seront conservées sans enduit jusqu'au niveau des corniches et, au-dessus, faute de données, elles conserveront leur aspect, dû aux remaniements intervenus à l'époque du Réveil national.

1. *L'église de Boïana, au jour d'hui — vue du nord-est*
2. *L'église de Boïana. Etat actuel — coupe longitudinale, plan de l'étage et plan du rez-de-chaussée*
3. *Etat actuel — façade sud,*
4. *Etude de la façade ouest,*
5. *Décoration en céramique de la façade ouest (vestiges)*
6. *Projet de présentation, 1ère variante — coupe longitudinale, plan de l'étage et plan du rez-de-chaussée*
7. *Projet de présentation 1ère variante — façade ouest et façade sud*
8. *Jointoyage de la coupole de l'église Est*
9. *Décoration en céramique de la façade sud de l'église de Kaloïan — vestiges*
10. *Projet de présentation, 2ème variante: façade sud, coupe longitudinale, façade est, coupe avec vue vers l'église de Kaloïan*