

= Church of St John the Baptist , Asenovgrad =

The Church of St John the Baptist ( Bulgarian : Църква на Свети Йоан Кръстител , tsarkva ? Sveti Yoan Krastitel ? ) , also known as the Church of St John the Precursor or , locally , Sveti Yani or Sveti Yan , is a small medieval Eastern Orthodox church in the town of Asenovgrad in Plovdiv Province , south central Bulgaria . The church is located on a cliff west of the town and dates to the 12th - 14th centuries . Its exterior is decorated with many blind arches , while its interior features mostly frescoes from the 18th century , with some fragments of 14th - 15th century murals . Its high position and the arrowslits on the north wall made the church suitable as a defensive outpost .

= = Location and history = =

The Church of St John the Baptist , known to the locals as Sveti Yani or Sveti Yan , is located on a high cliff on the western outskirts of Asenovgrad , which belong to the old town . To allow its construction , the terrain around its foundations had to be reinforced . The church lies close to several less ancient chapels , such as Saint Barbara 's , Saint George 's and Chapel of the Entry of the Most Holy Mother of God into the Temple . Nearby are also a 17th - 18th century water fountain and remains of medieval fortifications which date to the 11th - 13th century . Together , these buildings contribute to that part of Asenovgrad 's medieval atmosphere .

The church has not been conclusively dated . Art historian André Grabar placed it in the 14th century , scholar Nikola Mavrodinov dated it to the 13th century , while archaeologist Krastyu Miyatev is of the opinion that both theories are equally likely . Architecture writer Stefan Stamov gives a possible range from the 12th to the 14th century .

The Church of St John the Baptist belonged to the northern fortifications of medieval Asenovgrad ( then known in Greek as Stenimachos ) . It was in continuous operation until the late 18th or early 19th century , when it suffered significant damage , perhaps during Ottoman brigand raids . During the reconstruction works which were carried out soon thereafter , the roof and the upper parts of the church were modified . The interior was also repainted at the time .

The church has been protected as a national antiquity since 1940 ; in 1970 , it was enlisted among Bulgaria 's monuments of culture of national importance . The church was reconstructed in the 2000s by a team under architect Stoycho Maronov . The restoration efforts restored the windows , the interior frescoes and the iconostasis , and took 42 days .

= = Architecture and decoration = =

The Church of St John the Baptist is relatively small , measuring 9 m by 5 m ( 30 ft × 16 ft ) or 8 by 5 m ( 26 ft × 16 ft ) , with a height of around 5 metres ( 16 ft ) . In terms of design , it follows the Byzantine cross in square style . The church lacks a narthex and features a single triangular apse with three small windows in its eastern part . The wall which carries the iconostasis clearly divides the interior into a cella and an altar . The altar includes a prothesis and a diaconicon , which are housed in bays in the east wall .

The church was built out of interchanging rows of stones and brickwork , without any ceramic facing . Blind arches form an important part of the church 's exterior decoration : there are five each on the north and south walls , with an additional three on the west wall . The walls are around 1 metre ( 3 ft ) thick . In its architecture , the church closely resembles other medieval religious buildings in its close surroundings , most notably the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Asen 's Fortress south of Asenovgrad and the ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery . However , the Church of St John the Baptist is unique in that it is the only one of the three to feature arrowslits . Six arrowslits on the north wall enabled the church to be quickly converted into a defensive tower .

Most of the surviving frescoes on the church 's interior walls date from the 18th century . These include images of the Mother of God , Jesus Christ and John the Baptist , all painted as part of the church 's first reconstruction . However , restoration works carried out in the 2000s have uncovered 14th - 15th century murals depicting the meeting of Elizabeth and Mary as well as John the Baptist .

