

= Church of St Demetrius , Patalenitsa =

The Church of St Demetrius (Bulgarian : ?????? ? ?????? ??????? ? , tsarkva ? Sveti Dimitar ?) is a medieval Eastern Orthodox church in southwestern Bulgaria . It lies in the village of Patalenitsa , administratively part of Pazardzhik Municipality within Pazardzhik Province . The church was built in the 11th ? 14th century , with a possible dating to 1091 based on a stone plate inscription , the present location or even existence of which is unclear . Its frescoes , discovered in 1961 and restored in the 1970s , are a work of the 12th ? 13th century .

Built in the vicinity of an older church , the Church of St Demetrius is a crossed @-@ dome stone building . According to several legends , the church was dug into the ground as the Ottomans conquered Bulgaria , so that it may be protected from desecration . It was only unearthed in the middle of the 19th century , when it was dedicated to Saint Demetrius . It was proclaimed a monument of culture of national importance in 1956 .

= = History and dating = =

According to Bulgarian National Revival enlightener Stefan Zahariev from Pazardzhik , St Demetrius was not the first church in this location . In his description of the Pazardzhik district (kaza) published in 1870 , he writes that a previously existing church in roughly the same place was dedicated to Saint Pantaleon and had given its name to the village of Patalenitsa . The Church of St Pantaleon was , according to Zahariev , previously an Ancient Greek sanctuary of Asclepius . He writes that a column from this church with an inscription dedicated to Asclepius was preserved in the newer village church .

The time of the present church 's construction cannot be exactly defined . Scholars such as Atanas Bozhkov are of the opinion that the Church of St Demetrius was built in the early 12th century , while Krastyo Miyatev and Neli Chaneva ? Veleva date it to the late 12th or early 13th century . One author has placed its construction in the late 13th or early 14th century and others include the 11th century among the possibilities .

Some publications refer to a marble plate found in the church and bearing a Medieval Greek inscription with the following text : " [by] Gregory Kourkouas , pro [tospatharios] and duke of Ph [ilippopolis] , indiction 14 , year 6599 (= 1090 / 1091) " . The plate is preserved in the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia (inv. n . 253) . Nevertheless , in the late 19th century the church was known as the Holy Kutruleshtitsa (?????? ????????????? , Sveta Kutruleshtitsa) to the locals , which may indicate a connection to the name of Gregory Kourkouas from the plate .

Another legend tells of the digging of the church into the ground after the Ottoman conquest of Bulgaria (14th ? 15th centuries) , so that the Ottomans would not desecrate it . According to that story , the church was buried and forgotten about by the villagers until the mid @-@ 19th century , when a local coincidentally rediscovered it while tying his donkey to a nearby cherry tree . A different version places the cherry tree on top of the hill under which the church stood . Reportedly , that cherry tree was struck by a thunderbolt , which enabled the villagers to reach the buried gate through the now @-@ hollow trunk . The church was reconsecrated soon thereafter and dedicated to the 4th @-@ century military saint Demetrius of Thessaloniki .

The church was listed among the architectural monuments of culture of national importance in 1956 , and the subsequent discovery of its early murals led to its inclusion on the list of artistic monuments of culture in 1971 .

= = Architecture and decoration = =

The Church of St Demetrius in Patalenitsa was built of stone , though the dome and side bays also exhibit brickwork . The church is 9 @. @ 20 metres (30 @. @ 2 ft) long and 7 @. @ 60 m (24 @. @ 9 ft) wide , and is among the relatively few medieval churches of the crossed @-@ dome type still standing in Bulgaria . It has an octagonal dome and a five @-@ sided apse . The south facade features three bays with narrow windows attached . The church 's floor was originally covered with

marble , though the marble was removed in one of the possibly three rounds of reconstruction that the church underwent . For example , the present narthex was not added until the final reconstruction some time in the 19th century .

Medieval frescoes used to cover the entirety of the church 's interior , though only some 70 fragments survive until today . Until 1961 , the existence of a medieval mural layer was unknown because the walls were covered with oil paint in the 1910s . The medieval frescoes were uncovered and restored between 1970 and 1975 by a team under Dragomir Peshev . The dating of the frescoes is as controversial as that of the church itself . Bozhkov places the painting of the murals in the 12th century , while scholars Bistra Nikolova and V. Mavrodinova believe they were created in the 13th century . According to Nikolova , the mural inscriptions in Medieval Greek (as opposed to Middle Bulgarian) are evidence that the frescoes were painted during the Byzantine rule of Bulgaria (1018 ? 1185) . At the time , the region of Patalenitsa would have belonged to the Byzantine bishopric centred at Philippopolis (modern Plovdiv) .

Among the biblical scenes painted inside the Church of St Demetrius are the Ascension of Jesus , which adorns the altar vault , as well as the Resurrection of Lazarus and the Transfiguration of Jesus , which decorate the vault left of the apse . Images of a number of saints have also been preserved , including these of the patron saint Demetrius , Saint George riding a white horse , Saint Achillius of Larissa and Saint Nicholas .