

= Church of Christ Pantocrator , Nesebar =

The Church of Christ Pantocrator (Bulgarian : ?????? ? ?????? ?????????? ? , tsarkva ? Hristos Pantokrator ? or ?????? ? ?????? ?????????? ? , tsarkva ? Hristos Vsedarzhatel ? , Byzantine Greek : ????? ?????? ?????????????) is a medieval Eastern Orthodox church in the eastern Bulgarian town of Nesebar (medieval Mesembria) , on the Black Sea coast of Burgas Province . Part of the Ancient Nesebar UNESCO World Heritage Site , the Church of Christ Pantocrator was constructed in the 13th ? 14th century and is best known for its lavish exterior decoration . The church , today an art gallery , survives largely intact and is among Bulgaria 's best preserved churches of the Middle Ages .

= = History = =

The Church of Christ Pantocrator is usually dated to the late 13th or early 14th century . University of Pennsylvania scholar Robert G. Ousterhout places its construction in the mid @-@ 14th century . Rough Guides author Jonathan Bousfield attributes its building to the rule of Tsar Ivan Alexander of Bulgaria (r . 1331 ? 1371) , though during this time control of Nesebar changed many times between the Second Bulgarian Empire and Byzantium . The church is dedicated to Christ Pantocrator , a name of God which hails him as the " Ruler of All " in Greek .

The church is located on Mesembria Street , near the entrance to Nesebar 's old town . Nowadays , it houses an art gallery which exhibits works by Bulgarian artists . As it belongs to the old town of Nesebar , the Church of Christ Pantocrator forms part of the Ancient City of Nesebar UNESCO World Heritage Site and the 100 Tourist Sites of Bulgaria . Since 1927 , it has been under state protection as a " national antiquity " , and it was listed among Bulgaria 's monuments of culture of national importance in 1964 .

= = Architecture = =

The church is designed in late Byzantine cross @-@ in @-@ square style . It was constructed from stones and brickwork , a construction technique known as opus mixtum , and measures 16 by 6 @.@ 90 metres (52 @.@ 5 ft × 22 @.@ 6 ft) , 16 by 6 @.@ 70 metres (52 @.@ 5 ft × 22 @.@ 0 ft) , or 14 @.@ 20 by 4 @.@ 80 metres (46 @.@ 6 ft × 15 @.@ 7 ft) , depending on the source . The walls of the church are 0 @.@ 80 metres (2 @.@ 6 ft) thick . The colour of the bricks gives the church a ruddy appearance .

The church features a narthex and a cella (or " naos ") with an essentially rectangular elongated plan . The narthex is small , but has a medieval tomb underneath it . There are four entrances to the church : two accessing the cella from the south and west , and another two for the narthex from the west and north . The apse of the church has three small parts which overlap each other to form a single , larger unit . The prothesis and diaconicon of the church are located by the apse .

The dome , octagonal in shape , stands prominently on top of the centre of the cella . It was supported by four now @-@ destroyed columns which were located directly beneath it . The integrated bell tower has been built on top of the narthex , as was customary in contemporary Byzantine church architecture , and extends from the rectangular main structure . The bell tower was originally rectangular , though it is now partially ruined . It was reached from the south by means of a stone staircase .

= = Decoration = =

The best @-@ known feature of the Church of Christ Pantocrator is the rich and colourful decoration of its exterior walls . The most lavishly decorated part of the church is the east side with the apse , and as a whole all sides of the church exhibit different ornamentation . Interchanging strips of three or four rows of bricks and carved stones , which create an optical pattern , are the most basic type of decoration used . Rows of blind arches , four @-@ leaved floral motifs , triangular

ornaments , circular turquoise ceramics and brick swastika friezes run along the east wall . Ousterhout likens the appearance of the church 's superimposed arcades to an aqueduct ; an earlier example of that configuration can be observed in the Cappadocian church of Çanlı Kilise near Aksaray , Turkey . The inclusion of swastikas in the decoration is considered unusual and curious to tourists . It is explained by the medieval use of the swastika as a symbol of the Sun .

The decoration of the elongated north and south walls includes brick blind arches in the bottom part and a large arch for each wall adjacent to the dome with a columned window in the middle . There are windows above the lower arches of the north and south facade . The dome , which also exhibits a large number of ornamental details and ceramics , features eight windows , one for each of its sides . The medieval frescoes which were painted on the interior walls of the church have been only fragmentarily preserved .