

## = Church of St Peter , Berende =

The Church of St Peter ( Bulgarian : ?????? ? ?????? ?????? ? , tsarkva ? Sveti Petar ? ) or Church of Saints Peter and Paul is a small medieval Bulgarian Orthodox church located in the village of Berende in Dragoman Municipality , Sofia Province , in westernmost Bulgaria . Most likely constructed and decorated in the 14th century , the Church of St Peter features simple stone architecture but contains a number of remarkable interior frescoes .

Though located next to the village 's graveyard and often interpreted as a cemetery church , the Church of St Peter may have been in some way related to the Bulgarian royal court , as a now @-@ lost portrait with a caption most likely referencing Bulgarian tsar Ivan Alexander was once visible on one of its exterior walls .

## = = History = =

The original researchers of the Church of St Peter , Karel ?korpil and Yordan Ivanov , ascribed it to the 13th century owing to a now @-@ lost exterior mural of a person on the west wall of the church , described by one source as an image of a Bulgarian tsar . The image bears the following caption in Middle Bulgarian : ? Ivan Asen , in Christ our God faithful tsar and autocrat [ of all ] Bulga [ rians and Greeks ] ? . ?korpil and Ivanov identified the person mentioned in the inscription as Tsar Ivan Asen II of Bulgaria ( r . 1218 ? 1241 ) . Beginning in the 1920s and the publications of André Grabar , however , the church and its art have been usually dated to the 14th century based on stylistic and architectural similarities to other works of that period . The formula of the exterior inscription is also considered to be similar to the inscriptions of Tsar Ivan Alexander ( r . 1331 ? 1371 ) , who is known to have used the name Ivan Asen on several other occasions .

Due to its location , the Church of St Peter is often described as a cemetery church . However , scholar Bistra Nikolova considers it improbable that an ordinary village cemetery church would have an inscription by a Bulgarian tsar . In her opinion , it is more likely that the church was constructed by a noble person related to the court of the Second Bulgarian Empire .

The Church of St Peter has been protected as a national antiquity since 1927 . In 1966 , it was listed as an artistic monument of culture of national importance . However , as of 2011 , the frescoes have never during the church 's existence undergone restoration or conservation and remain threatened . In the lowest parts , up to 0 @.@ 5 m ( 1 @.@ 6 ft ) from the floor , the murals have been entirely erased by moisture . Moisture and the resulting salts have also damaged other decorated sections of the walls .

## = = Location and architecture = =

The Church of St Peter is 800 metres ( 2 @,@ 600 feet ) west of the village of Berende , near the banks of the Nishava River . Today , it lies within the old village graveyard . Not far from the church on the way linking it to the village is Mosta ( ?????? , ? The Bridge ? ) , a natural bridge rock formation .

The church is a small and simple rectangular single @-@ nave building constructed out of crushed stone ; the walls range in thickness from 85 to 90 cm ( 33 to 35 in ) . It is accessible via an entrance on its west wall . The wooden door is 2 m ( 6 @.@ 6 ft ) high and is topped by a shallow semicircular niche . Apart from that niche , the only other decorative feature of its architecture are the narrow windows placed on the apse and the south wall . The apse is semicircular and attached to the church 's east side . The church features a semicircular vault and its gabled roof is made of stone slates . In terms of length and width , the church measures 5 @.@ 50 m × 4 @.@ 50 m ( 18 @.@ 0 ft × 14 @.@ 8 ft ) .

## = = Interior and decoration = =

The interior of the church houses an original wooden iconostasis in front of the altar . Carved in the

second half of the 14th century , the iconostasis has a basic shape . It is constructed of thick beams and wooden boards , on which traces of painting are visible , and has three openings .

The entirety of the church 's interior is covered with 14th @-@ century frescoes , which are described as ? particularly remarkable ? in a UNESCO publication . Among the notable mural portraits is that of church patron Saint Peter , whose larger @-@ than @-@ life image adorns the wall next to the iconostasis . Other frescoes include that of Jesus Christ painted to the right of the apse and that of Saint Alexius next to the entrance . The middle reaches of the walls feature images from the Holy Week , with frescoes depicting events from other major holidays above them . The conch of the apse boasts an image of the Mother of God ; portraits of various saints and scenes from the Ascension of Jesus and the Annunciation complete the decoration of the apse .

Next to the apse is a mural of Saint Cyril of Alexandria , captioned as ? Saint Cyril the Philosopher ? , the 9th @-@ century missionary to the Slavs . Although the position and iconography of the portrait clearly identify it as an image of Cyril of Alexandria , the caption hints that the local population confused the two saints and Cyril the Philosopher was still well @-@ remembered at the time . Other images painted in the church include these of the Dormition of the Mother of God ( above the entrance ) , the Transfiguration of Jesus ( under the vault ) , John Damascene , Cosmas of Maiuma , Archangel Michael ( south of the entrance ) , Saint Constantine and Saint Helena ( right of the entrance ) .