

= Church of St Nicholas , Sapareva Banya =

The Church of St Nicholas ( Bulgarian : ?????? ? ?????? ?????? ? , tsarkva ? Sveti Nikola ? ) is a small medieval Eastern Orthodox church in the southwestern Bulgarian town of Sapareva Banya , which is part of Kyustendil Province . Originally either the property of a local notable or attached to a larger church , it was constructed anytime from the 11th to the 14th century .

The church was built using red bricks and white mortar . Architecturally , it is of a simple Byzantine cross @-@ in @-@ square design , with a single nave and apse . The frescoes in the interior are only scarcely preserved . It was reconstructed in 1937 after falling into ruin , and it was listed as a monument of culture of national importance in 1968 .

= = History = =

Scholars disagree on the possible period of the church 's construction ; assessments range from the 11th ? 12th , through the 12th ? 13th , to the 13th ? 14th century . In an article in the Bulgarian Church Review magazine from 1898 , the local priest Mihal Popov was cited as saying that a stone from the church altar was unearthed during excavations . The priest believed that the stone , which reportedly had the date 1160 inscribed on it , was sent to the National Archaeological Museum in the capital Sofia .

Due to its diminutive size , the Church of St Nicholas was probably not constructed as an independent church . A legend links the church to the name of an unidentified local feudal lord named Nikola ( Nicholas ) as his final resting place , though archaeologist Nikola Mavrodinov considers it more likely that it was possibly a chapel or a cemetery church attached to a larger place of worship . The larger church was perhaps pulled down during the early Ottoman rule of Bulgaria ( post @-@ 14th century ) . While the Church of St Nicholas was not destroyed , its renovation was prohibited by the Ottomans , thus it gradually fell into ruin .

In his 1931 study , Mavrodinov also writes that at the time , the church lacked a roof . He references a story about a group of Circassians that were settled in Sapareva Banya on the order of the Ottoman authorities after the Crimean War ( 1853 ? 1856 ) . According to that story , the Circassians sought to pull down the church 's roof . However , one of them fell to his death inside the church , so they fled in horror . The church was thoroughly reconstructed in 1937 by a team under architect Rashenov .

= = Architecture = =

The Church of St Nicholas lies in the centre of Sapareva Banya . Its architecture is rather simple , with a single nave , a single apse and no narthex present . The church follows the Byzantine cross @-@ in @-@ square design , with unusually short arms of equal size . The dome has twelve sides and is of no particular height , though it is rather large for the church 's size . The apse is situated on the church 's eastern side ; its shape is semicircular and it features a window . The entrance is located on the west wall .

The church was constructed out of rows of red bricks stuck together with white mortar . According to scholar Bistra Nikolova , its size is 7 @. @ 20 by 5 @. @ 50 metres ( 23 @. @ 6 ft x 18 @. @ 0 ft ) , while another source measures it as 6 @. @ 60 m x 5 @. @ 40 m ( 21 @. @ 7 ft x 17 @. @ 7 ft ) . Either way , it is square in appearance . In height , it probably reached 6 @. @ 60 m ( 21 @. @ 7 ft ) at the dome and 4 @. @ 20 m ( 13 @. @ 8 ft ) at the cornice .

In terms of design and decoration , Mavrodinov likens the church to the Church of St Pantaleon in Gorno Nerezi near Skopje , today in the Republic of Macedonia . It is also compared to the Church of St Theodore in nearby Boboshevo . The Church of St Nicholas features a multitude of two @-@ stepped vaults on its outside walls . The interior was originally entirely covered with frescoes , though only fragments survive . It was enlisted as a monument of culture of national importance in 1968 , with a publication in Bulgaria 's newspaper of record , the State Gazette , issue 77 .