

Serbian Orthodox monastery of the Birth of St John the Predecessor, Gomirje

Country or territory:
Republic of CROATIA

Name of organization
compiling the information:
Ministry of Culture,
Conservation Department in Rijeka

Contact name:
Hrvoje Giacconi

Email address:
rikonzervator@ri.tel.hr



<u>Name and address of building or site:</u>	SERBIAN ORTHODOX MONASTERY OF THE BIRTH OF ST JOHN THE PREDECESSOR IN GOMIRJE
<u>Inventory reference number:</u>	723
<u>Building(s) type:</u>	Sacral ensemble
<u>Main date(s):</u>	1602
<u>Current use(s):</u>	Monastery

Significance:

The monastery church is oriented and located in the courtyard of the two storey lodging houses with a "U" shaped ground plan open to the South toward the river basin of the Dobra so that the mutual relationship of the construction directions are mildly slanting. Today the complex is enclosed with a wall of façade brick and originally had a paling fence. The church and monastery were built from stone with arches, while the floors and roofing were made from wood. The roof covering is from sheet metal and grooved brick, originally shingle. Until 1879 an adapted Frankopan tower with a square ground plan and an elaborately structured façade in the historicist form and with the same function and which crumbled from age stood in the place of the present day bell tower, To the North, at the edge of the wood a group of stone and wooden outbuildings stood, including barns, hay-lofts storehouses and workshops and a walled-in monastery graveyard within which was the first church of which there is no trace today. The monastery owns quite a lot of land, including woods, meadows, hayfields, plough-fields and on the northern side of the lodging house a large orchard. The present day church was consecrated in 1730. The monastery burned down in 1789 and again in 1812 and was renovated in 1842-46 and again in 1889. The complex was also damaged and burned in the First and Second world wars, repaired rather unprofessionally during the 50s of the XX century. The church is a typical Orthodox place of worship with an altar, iconostasis, a dome standing on four square columns and a tower at the entrance like those built in the baroque period throughout Lika, Kordun and Banija. The interior was decorated with two layers of sign-paintings of which the baroque style one was preserved as the lower layer in the sanctuary and the upper one in the entire church which has two historicist phases. Because of the threat during World War II the baroque iconostasis with large-sized icons on canvas was dismantled and stored in Karlovac and Zagreb.

Categories of Significance:

The monument is of national interest since it housed the main painting school, which supplied the surrounding Orthodox monasteries with iconostases in the manner of the Russian school. The monks were also engaged in bookbinding.

Categories of ownership or interest:

The complex is in the ownership of the Serbian Orthodox church. After World War II it became a nunnery while in its previous history monks inhabited the monastery. It is unique as the only historic monastery in the Primorsko-goranska County and the most westward monastery of the Serbian Orthodox church in Europe. On the territory of the national state the monastery has a great parochial significance for the most populous, Serbian ethnic community, and has carried out its function continuously since the 17th century. The Serbian community that has settled in this region bought the estate from the Frankopan princes. The monastery is particularly significant in the revolutionary year of 1848, when viceroy Jelačić recruited his army under its wing and prior Stavrofor of that time was a member of the Croatian Parliament and gave his priory for humanitarian purposes. The monastery played an important humanitarian role at that time, sheltering refugees and storing humanitarian aid.

Documentation and bibliographic references:

An architectural survey of the church and partial photo-documentation exist. The inventory is limited to the dismantled iconostasis and objects removed in 1941 that were to be displayed in the Museums of Serbs in Croatia in Zagreb.

Bibliography: M.Grbić, the Karlovac bishopship II, Karlovac 1891.; I. Bach, A Contribution to the History of Serbian Painting in Croatia, HZ, 1949.; D.Medaković, The Gomirje Monastery, Academic papers by Students of the Faculty of Philosophy, Belgrade, 1949.

Condition:

Its condition can be assessed as being between poor and moderate given that the church has been repaired without renovation of the interior, while the lodgings house has roof-covering problems including sporadic leakage and damage from humidity. In addition the entire outer woodwork is in very poor condition.

The complex was damaged in World War II and was not adequately repaired after that. Renovation and reversal into its original form are feasible. In the Homeland war it was not damaged because in that part of Gorski kotar there were no war operations. The monastery played an important role in humanitarian activities at that time, sheltering refugees and storing humanitarian aid.

Risk:

The complex is at risk due to the scarce and helpless monastery community, particularly from the economic point of view. The basis of its management, namely, economy is farming activities for which there is insufficient working force either within or outside the monastery.

Condition risk:

The beginning of renovation is underway. The end user and user have been defined. The lodging house and economic estate as well as the church surroundings, i.e., monastery courtyard have not been renovated. The lodging house is only partly being maintained, namely, only in the part used by the small monastery community with a few accompanying premises for guests and the administration activities.

Technical assessment and costings:

The monastery has been renovated continually since 1999. The church roof has been repaired and the metal sheet roof covering replaced on the bell tower and church dome. The static consolidation of the apse was undertaken and the church facades and tower forms reconstructed. In addition, new drainage and rainwater canalisation systems have also been installed. A water supply system was brought to the complex and the semi-interred concrete cistern removed and a new one constructed. All the windows on the church and those that were in total disrepair in the hallway of the first floor of the lodging house have been replaced. A detailed plan for renovating the interior has been drawn up. An architectural survey of the lodging house is planned in 2004 as well as further projects of renovation and continued replacement of the woodwork. Its expanded use is also planned, for a children's summer colony and open public library for the surrounding area. All the rooms that are not used have to be adapted, the roofing and covering of the lodging house reconstructed and the ground floor renovated as the most neglected and humidity-threatened part of the complex. All the outbuildings also have to be renovated, primarily their roofs and wooden parts of superstructure on the stone foundations. Overall costs of renovation are estimated at 800,000 EURO.

Ownership:

The monastery is in the private ownership of the Serbian Orthodox Church

Occupation:

The complex is partly used.

Management:

The management of the monastery is the responsibility of the owners who are also its users.

Summary:

The most westward monastery of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Europe, located in Gorski kotar in the Primorsko-goranska County is a significant parochial centre of the Serbian ethnic community whose most important feast is the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The monastery is a venue of possible multi-ethnic and multi-confessional gatherings and a future venue of summer and winter children's colonies and public library for the Gorimje area. Its construction status is between poor and moderate given the threat of humidity to the lodging house, leakage and deterioration of the outer construction materials as well as sporadic damages and inadequate previous renovation works. The monument is severely threatened by the slight economic potential of the monastery community.

Sign and date:

Dolores Čikić, dipl.pov.umj., Hrvoje Giaconi, dipl.ing.arh.
10 March 2004.