



EUROPEAN CENTRE

FOR BYZANTINE AND POST-BYZANTINE MONUMENTS

E.K.B.M.M. – P.O. Box 50363 – 54640 – Thessaloniki, GR. (2, Leophoros Stratou str.)

Tel.:0030 2310 889 830 - E-mail: info@ekbmm.gr

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PRESS RELEASE

COMPLETION OF THE SECOND PHASE OF CONSERVATION WORK OF THE FRESCOES IN AGIOS NIKOLAOS IN MESOPOTAMOS, ALBANIA

The second phase of the restoration of the frescoes in the Byzantine church of Agios Nikolaos in Mesopotamos, Albania, was also successfully completed this year, with significant findings. The works were carried out as part of a Memorandum of Cooperation signed in September 2021 by the President of the European Centre for Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Monuments (EKBMM), Professor Emerita of Byzantine Archaeology, Natalia Poulou, and the then Minister of Culture of Albania, Elma Margariti.

Under this Memorandum, the EKBMM undertook the preparation of a conservation study for the frescoes and rest stone decoration, as well as the execution of the project, with funding from the Greek Ministry of Culture. The study, which was prepared on behalf of the EKBMM by the Directorate of Conservation of Ancient and Modern Monuments of the Ministry of Culture of Greece, included all state of the art methods of analysis and documentation of the deterioration and interventions on the frescoes, and was approved in 2024 by the Ministry of Culture of Albania.

Immediately thereafter, the first phase of the conservation work began, carried out by specialized Greek conservators from the EKBMM, from August 27 to September 20, 2024, continuing this year from June 10 to July 8. Investigative cuts were made in the higher parts of the church, above the 8-meter level, extensive interventions were carried out to remove later layers of plaster and lime coatings, as well as work on delimiting, stabilizing, and surface desalination. To the great surprise and joy of all, this year, several previously unknown frescoes were discovered, which had not been identified in the previous research of the monument.

The conservation work is scheduled to continue and be completed by 2026. At every stage of the project's organization and planning, the cooperation between the EKBMM and the Albanian Institute of Monuments was exceptional. The contribution of the municipality of Finiq was also particularly significant, as was the substantial support provided by the Greek Embassy in Tirana and the Greek Consulate General in Gjirokastër.

On the occasion of the completion of the project, a visit was made to the monument on Saturday, July 5, by the Greek Ambassador, Ms. Konstantina Kamitsi, and the Consul General of Greece in Gjirokastër, Mr. Socrates Sourvinos, in the presence of the Mayor of Finiq, Mr. Romaio Tsakoulis, and their collaborators, as well as the Director of the EKBMM, Dr. Flora Karagianni. During the visit, everyone praised the important work being carried out at the monument by the EKBMM's team and expressed gratitude to the Albanian side for their excellent cooperation.

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