

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

WORLD HERITAGE LIST

N° 456

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : Early Christian and Byzantine monuments of
Thessalonika

Location : Northern Greece

State Party : Greece

Date : January 15, 1987

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II and IV.

C) JUSTIFICATION

In 1985 Thessalonika celebrated its 23rd century. It was founded in 315 B.C. by Cassander, who named it after his wife Thessaloniké, just a short time after the new cities of Alexander (d. 323 B.C.). Following the Roman conquest of Macedonia, it became one of the Empire's provincial capitals. A cosmopolitan and prosperous seaport, the city grew in commercial and strategic importance during the Roman period and was one of the first bases for the spread of Christianity.

St. Paul first traveled there in 50 A.D. He returned in 56 to visit the church he had founded and for which he exhibited great concern in his Epistles. Imperial splendor and the changing fortunes of the Thessalonian church were inextricably linked during the early centuries of Christianity. It was during the period that the palatial complex of Galerius was being built (298-311) that St. Demetrius was martyred (c.303). Some time later, the rotunda, which Galerius had probably planned as his mausoleum, was taken over by the Christians who converted it to a church dedicated to St. George. North of the Forum, on the ruins of the Thermes where tradition has it that St. Demetrius was imprisoned and tortured, they built the Basilica of St. Demetrius. Rebuilt in 412-413 by the eparch Leontius and enlarged in 629-634 according to a grandiose plan that included five naves, the church, despite having been ravaged by fire in 1917, remains one of the most notable monuments of the Early Christian era.

Other churches of archaeological interest were built during the Byzantine period. These include the Basilica of the Virgin, called "Acheiropoietos" after 448, St. David's (late 5th or early 6th century), and particularly St. Sophia (8th century), which is a harmonious blend of the Greek cross plan and a three-nave basilica plan. After the Latin conquest in 1205 it became the Cathedral of Thessalonika. When the city was returned to Byzantium in 1246, new churches were built, among which were St. Panteleimon, the Holy Apostles, St. Nicholas Orphanos and the present St. Catherine's.

When the Ottomans gained control of the city in 1430, most of the churches, new or old, were converted to mosques, and other Islamic sanctuaries were built (Hamza Bey Cami in 1467-1468, Alaca Imaret in 1484).

Under Ottoman rule (1430-1912), Thessalonika regained the status of major cosmopolitan city it had enjoyed during the Early Christian era. This was particularly due to the arrival in 1492 of 20,000 Jews driven from Spain by the Edict of Alhambra. The multitude of cultural influences is reflected in the city's wealth of monuments, now sadly depleted, which were described by travellers like Robert de Dreux (1665), Evliya Celebi (1668), Paul Lucas (1714), Félix de Beaujour (1797), and Abdul Mecid (1858).

The revised nomination presented by the Greek government covers a series of Early Christian, Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments. This diachronic ensemble illustrates the eminent role played by Thessalonika in the Christian world over more than a millenium. Its inclusion is justified on the basis of criteria I, II and IV.

- Criterion I. The mosaics of the Rotunda, St. Demetrius and St. David's are among the great masterpieces of Early Christian art.

- Criterion II. The influence of the Thessalonian churches on the development of the monumental arts was considerable first in the Byzantine and later the Serbian world, whether in the Early Christian period of the High Middle Ages or the Palaeologan Renaissance.

- Criterion IV. The Christian monuments of Thessalonika are outstanding examples of churches built according to central, basilical and intermediary plans over a period going from the 4th to the 15th century. For this reason they constitute a series which is a typological point of reference.



Church of St. Demetrios : St. Demetrios with the founders
(7th-8th century)