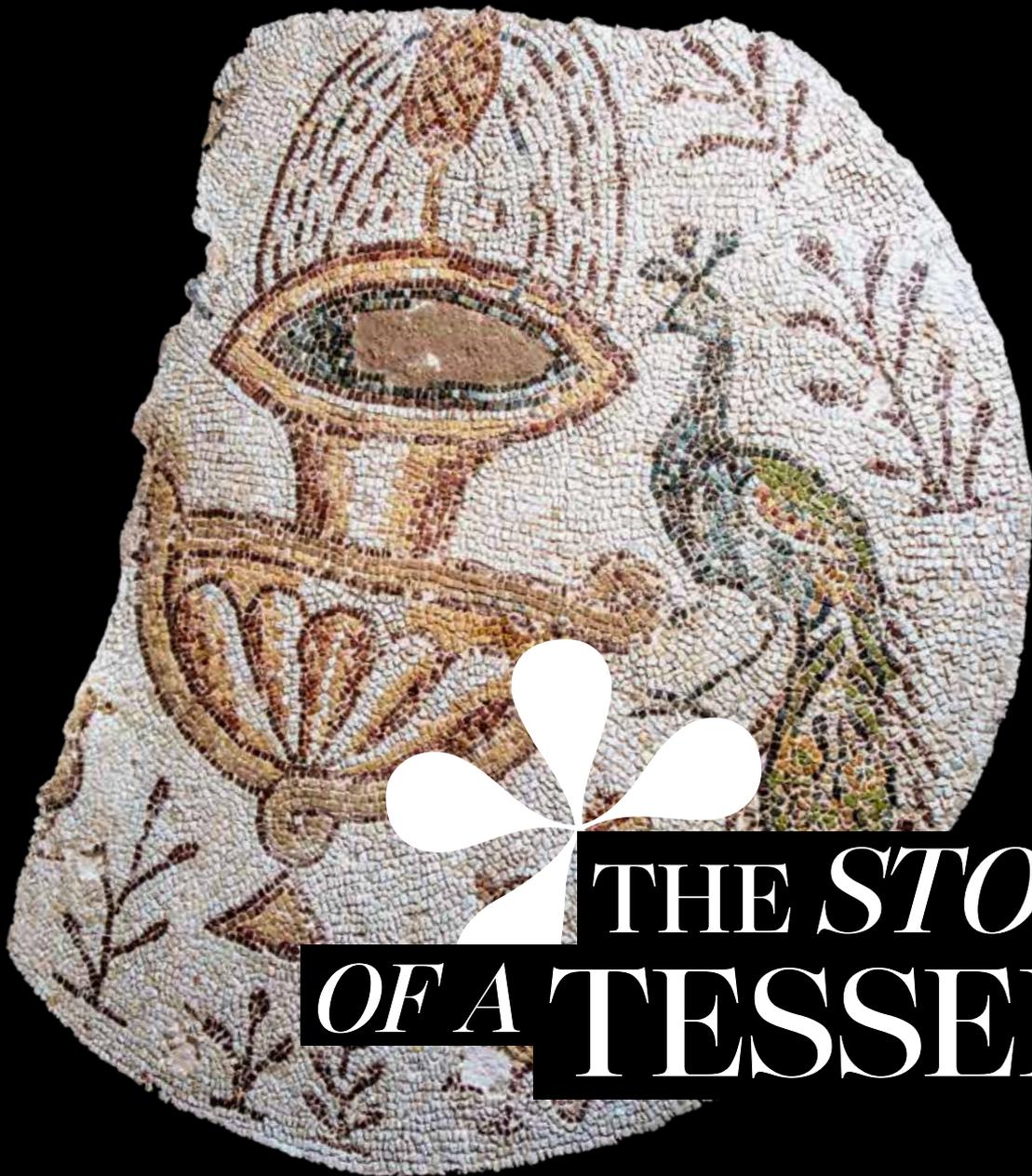


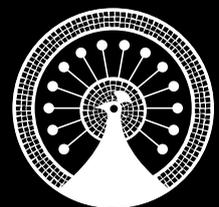
TESSERA*

COLLECTOR'S ISSUE



THE *STORY* OF A TESSERA

TESSERA (*plural tesserae*)
IS A SMALL INDIVIDUAL PIECE OF STONE,
MARBLE, GLASS, OR TILE,
USUALLY FORMED IN THE SHAPE OF A CUBE,
USED IN CREATING A MOSAIC.



THE BISHOP'S BASILICA
OF PHILIPPOLIS



www.plovdivmosaics.org

HOW DOES A 1,600-YEAR-OLD PEACOCK MOBILIZE HUNDREDS OF BULGARIANS AND INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS TO VOLUNTEER UNTOLD HOURS OF THEIR FREE TIME? WHAT IS IT ABOUT THIS BIRD THAT COMPELS PEOPLE TO WRITE STORIES ABOUT A RICH CHAPTER OF BULGARIA'S HISTORY? WHY DID THIS PEACOCK INSPIRE A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN AMERICA AND BULGARIA? AND HOW DID I END UP DIGGING IN A PILE OF DIRT IN PLOVDIV? THE ANSWERS ARE PART OF A SEVEN-YEAR JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY RESULTING IN THE COMPLETED BISHOP'S BASILICA OF PHILIPPOPOLIS.



NANCY SCHILLER
PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICA FOR BULGARIA FOUNDATION

TESSERA BY TESSERA. HAND IN HAND.

My first visit to the Basilica site was in 2015. I had been told of the wonderful mosaics that lay hidden under layers of overgrown weeds and a protective cover of sand but could not yet imagine the richness of the ancient treasures. That is, until mosaic restorer Elena Kantareva brought out a shovel and broom to reveal a colorful mosaic of small tiles—tesserae—depicting a bird. In that moment, I became an enthusiastic supporter of the project and a frequent volunteer.

The America for Bulgaria Foundation's earlier collaboration with Plovdiv Municipality on the 5th-century Small Basilica nearby gave both partners the confidence that, together, we could successfully manage this effort as well.

It is probably a good thing that, at the time, we didn't realize the number of surprises history would give us. None was greater than learning there wasn't just one layer of 5th-century mosaics, but another, underneath, dating from the 4th century and extending further than originally thought.

The first two years involved digging. A lot of digging. Hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life volunteered thousands of hours to remove kilos by the hundreds of soil, trash, and weeds. The thrill of discovery was balm to the blisters and sore backs. Without these volunteers, we might still be digging.

At the same time, architects, designers, and builders gathered with archaeologists, historians, and restorers to plan how to best present the layers of mosaics. It was essential to have a thoughtful approach to exhibiting the more than 2,000 square meters of mosaics, respecting the past while presenting the antiquities in a contemporary way to engage all ages and levels of interest.



So how do you tell the Basilica's story?

ABF invited New York-based SKOLNICK Architecture + Design Partnership to help design the visitor experience. The Basilica's history covers more than 17 centuries, and it was important to creatively explain the multiple uses of the site in an understandable way for multiple audiences.

Virtual Reality lets visitors experience what a citizen of ancient Plovdiv might have seen upon entering the Basilica. Reader rails, illustrations, and timelines help explain the spiral of history. To keep things exciting, visitors can picture themselves with several of the bird mosaics that spring to life through Augmented Reality or can enjoy audio tours that work with a mobile phone.

Experts from Muzeiko, the Sofia-based children's STEM museum, worked with the SKOLNICK team to conceptualize the Discovery Zone, where children can imagine themselves as archaeologists, restorers, or anthropologists through interactive games and puzzles.

The contribution of EVN Bulgaria resulted in a colorful outdoor playground for kids and families to enjoy. There are even solar chargers in the canopies, so guests won't run out of power while taking photos of their children at play.

The Basilica united the talents of hundreds of people working for more than 50 companies—48 based in Bulgaria. Individuals and businesses provided support to the Basilica by adopting one of the more than 100 birds for community events or by donating equipment and supplies.

Without the collaborative partnership of Plovdiv Municipality, beginning with then-mayor Ivan Totev and continuing with Mayor Zdravko Dimitrov, the tesserae might still be hidden under centuries of dirt. They and their teams never wavered in their commitment to showcase Bulgaria's unique history. The cooperation of the Ministry of Culture made the project possible from the early stages to completion. The United States Embassy under the leadership of Ambassador Herro Mustafa and previous ambassador Eric Rubin were also steadfast in their support. I also extend my gratitude to the America for Bulgaria Foundation's Board of Directors. Since approving this project in 2014, the directors remained committed and enthusiastic champions of the Basilica.

My initial excitement of digging in the dirt never diminished. Working on the Basilica has been a thrill of a lifetime for me and the team at the America for Bulgaria Foundation. We are privileged and humbled to have played a part.

I hope you will soon visit and experience a similar thrill seeing Bulgaria's history come to life.

**AMERICA FOR
BULGARIA
FOUNDATION**

Nancy Schiller
PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICA FOR BULGARIA FOUNDATION

American optimism meets Bulgarian potential

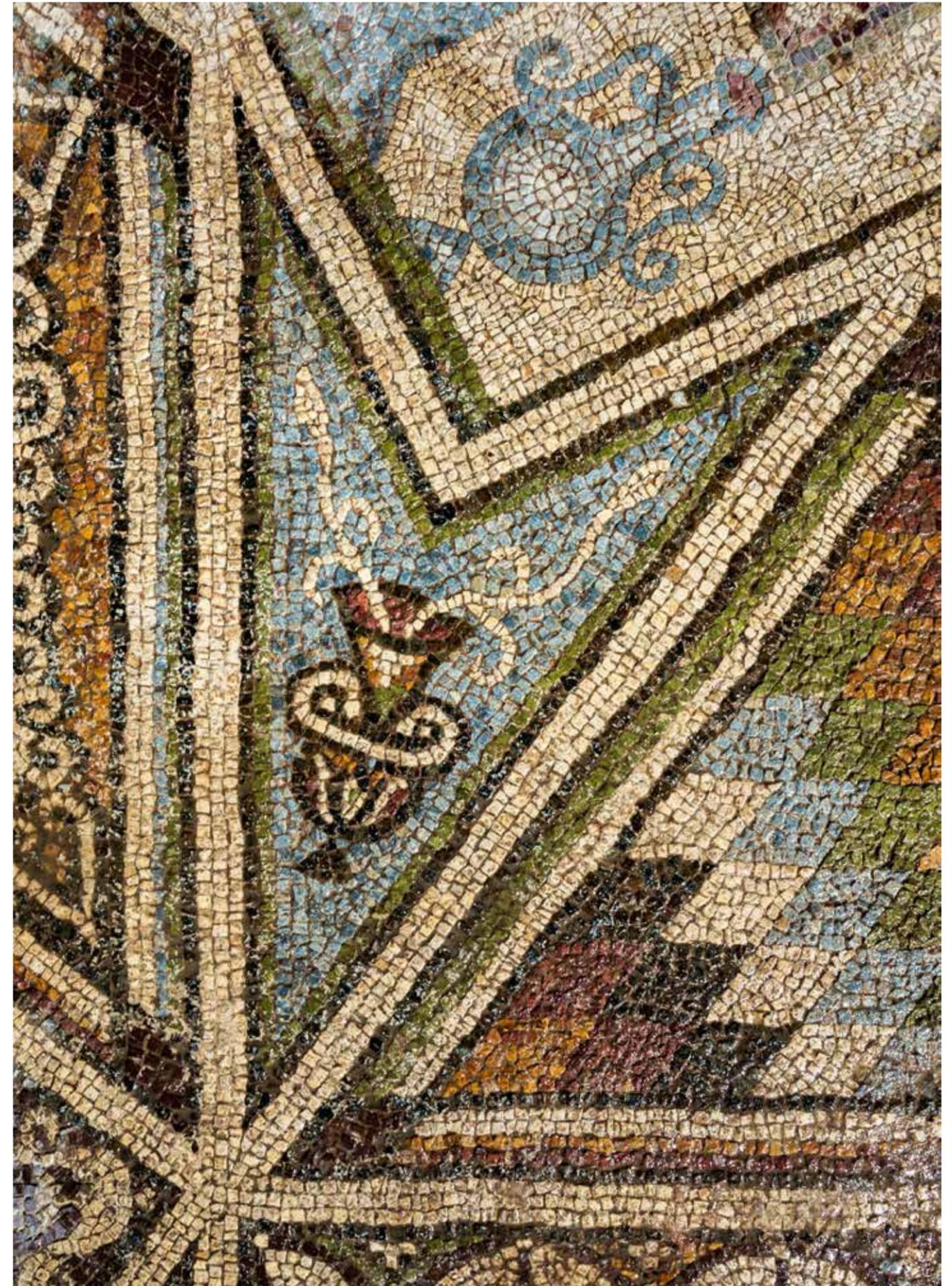


BUILDING OF THE YEAR AWARD

The Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis won the Building of the Year 2020 award in the category of "Projects Related to Urban Development and Culture."

THE COMPANIES

More than 50 companies worked tirelessly on the Bishop's Basilica so that it can tell its story in the most enticing and accessible way to visitors of all ages and levels of interest.



**UNESCO
WORLD HERITAGE
SITE LIST
CANDIDATE**

The Bishop's Basilica and the Roman mosaic heritage of Philippopolis are on the UNESCO tentative list of significant cultural and natural sites and pursuing inclusion on the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites.

ABOUT THE VISITOR CENTER

The Visitor Center of the Basilica is a modern space for visits, studies, and events. Over 2,000 square meters of ancient mosaics on two levels, interactive exhibitions, a virtual reconstruction of the interior of the church, and a fascinatingly retold millennial history await visitors to the Basilica. The vision for this cultural center is to become an attractive place for people of all ages, Plovdiv residents, and guests of the city from Bulgaria and the world. At the heart of it all, of course, are the mosaics. Modern technologies will further enrich the visitor experience. The interactive children's corner and the outdoor playground, "the classroom," the mosaic restoration studio, the space for events, provide an opportunity for more rich and diverse cultural content—exhibitions, concerts, performances, children's programs, scientific conferences.



Assistant Professor Elena Kantareva-Decheva is the deputy director of the Ancient Plovdiv Institute. She is a painter-restorer and lecturer at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv. Since 2015, she has headed the team that restored the mosaics of the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis.



RESTORER WORDS AND DEEDS

FIRST ENCOUNTER. I first came across the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis back in 1988, when, as a student majoring in restoration at the National Academy of Arts, I chose a piece of mosaic for my dissertation. A year later, after graduating, I started working as a restorer at the mosaic studio of the then National Institute of Cultural Monuments in Plovdiv. The Institute's main fieldwork was at the Great Basilica, as it was then known. At that time, only the southern half of the Basilica had been discovered, and only the mosaics from the nave were covered with a temporary protective building. Unfortunately, during the years of post-communist transition, all activities for the restoration and preservation of the Basilica were suspended, and it sank into ruin and oblivion. I became involved in the project for the construction of a protective covering, restoration, and exhibition of the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis in 2015. This project was initiated and funded by the America for Bulgaria Foundation after we successfully completed the restoration and exhibition of the mosaics from the Small Basilica in Plovdiv, whose restoration I supervised from 2011 to 2013.

MEANING. The Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis is a monument of extremely high historical, artistic, and scientific value. The building is impressive in its scale, architectural solutions, and decoration and ranks among the most representative early Christian sites. It is a carrier of invaluable information about the history of early Christianity and the formation and development of church art in the Balkans and Europe. The floors of the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis are covered with multicolored mosaics with an area exceeding 2,000 square meters. The stratigraphic study during conservation revealed the presence of three floors—one mortar and two mosaic layers, laid on top of one other. They are multicolored and differ in scale, composition, and decoration. They are dated to the 4th–6th century.



MEMORABLE EVENT. During our work on the site, the restoration team went through many trials and challenges, both personal and professional. We realized that working on a site of this scale happens once in a lifetime. We had many difficult moments, but also many exciting and satisfying experiences.

I will never forget the white dove that landed and walked on the mosaic shortly before we found the inscription with the bishop's name on the lower mosaic floor. I will always remember the hot summer of 2017: the mosaics from the Basilica were fully uncovered, we worked on their restoration in situ, and the people who passed by from the north and could freely observe our work greeted us with applause.

RESTORER. The work of the mosaics restorer can be compared to that of the medical doctor, the difference being that our patients are inanimate. It is constructive and brings cultural and artistic treasures back to life so that we can pass them on to future generations. Unfortunately, this profession is not very popular and is often underestimated. I love my job. It brings me great pleasure to restore something that has been forgotten, threatened with destruction, or badly damaged and to give it back to people as a reminder of their history.

WORDS AND DEEDS. The words I associate with working on the Basilica are: challenge, teamwork, scientific research, difficult decision-making, satisfaction, cause.

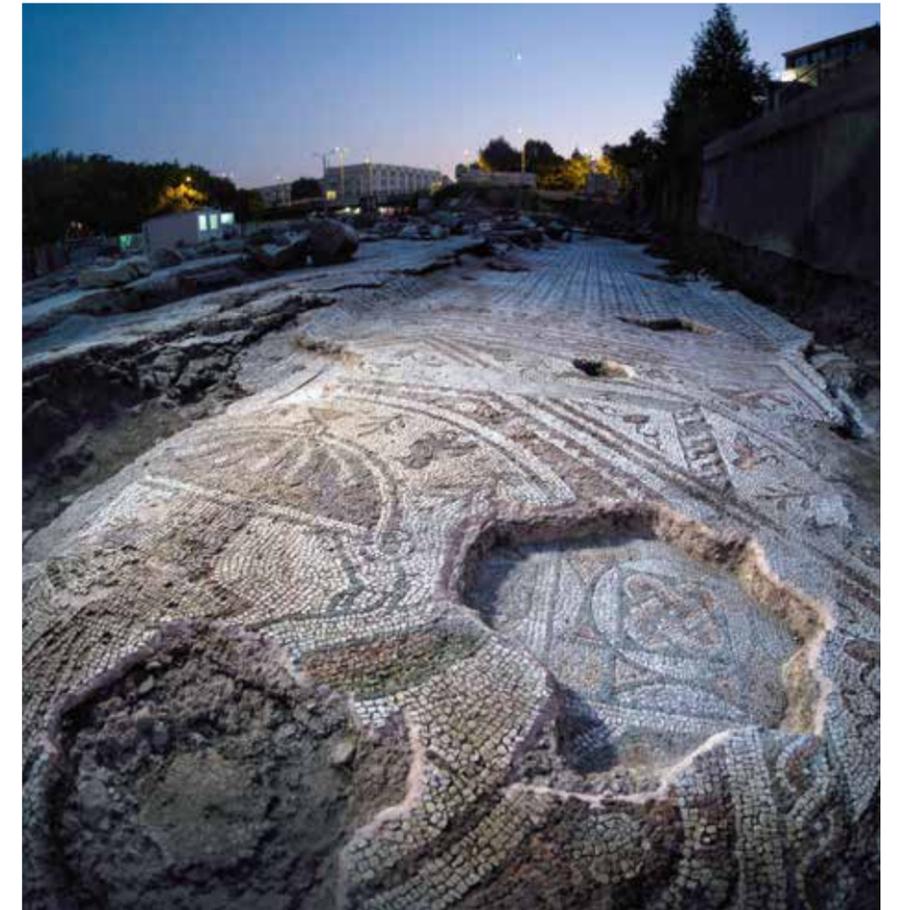


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irst discovered in 1982 during road construction in Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second largest city, the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis was brought back to life thanks to a public-private partnership between the America for Bulgaria Foundation (ABF), Plovdiv Municipality, and Bulgaria's Ministry of Culture. The project for the restoration of the Bishop's Basilica began in 2014.

This is the largest early Christian temple in this country. It was built in the 4th century, shortly after Christianity was legalized in the Roman Empire. The first mosaic layer dates back to this period, with the second layer laid in the 5th–6th century. The Basilica functioned until the end of the 6th century.

BISHOP'S BASILICA COMES BACK TO LIFE



SPRING OF LIFE SCENE

The mosaics have their own singular appearance, combining different influences with local culture, traditions, and resources and enriching our knowledge about the spread and development of mosaic art in Late Antiquity.

TOUR WITH A MESSAGE



The Visitor Center of the restored Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis reveals over 2,000 square meters of Roman mosaics from the 4th–6th century, exhibited on two levels. More than 100 unique medallions with different types

of birds come to life in the mosaics— from dancing guinea fowls to peacocks with outstretched tails, from chattering parrots to a bird that feeds its young. The middle panels of the two side naves contain the Spring of Life scene.

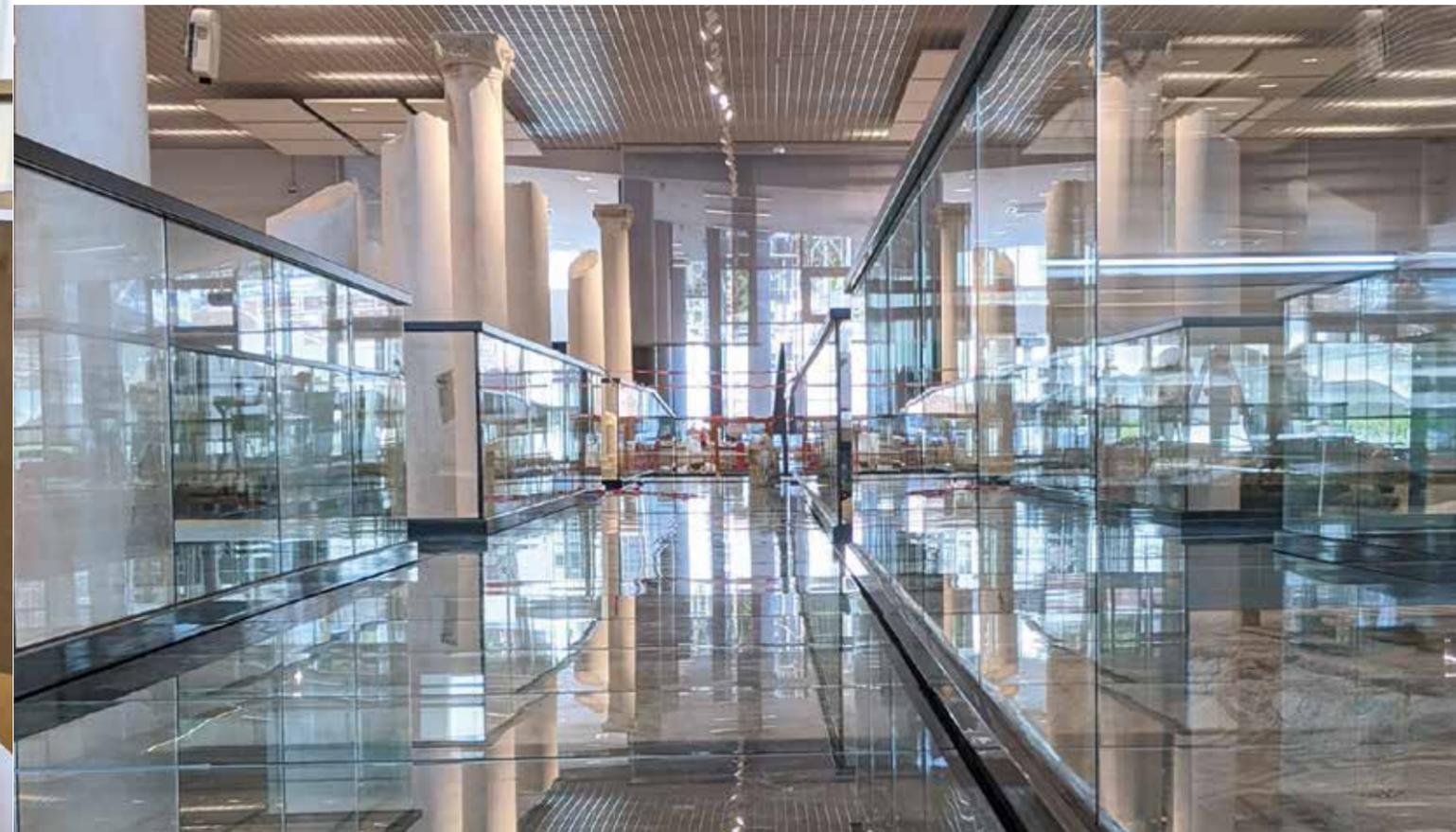




SPIRAL OF TIME

The Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis is an exceptional archaeological site. Its floor mosaics with an area of over 2,000 square meters are the largest preserved mosaic floor of an early Christian basilica from the 4th - 6th century in Europe.

With state-of-the-art equipment, the visitor center built over the mosaics of the Basilica is one of Bulgaria's most contemporary spaces and offers a great opportunity for visitors to get acquainted with the country's rich mosaic heritage.



INTERACTIVE CORNERS



The center includes an interactive children's Discovery Zone to present the Basilica's history in an understandable, engaging manner as well as an outdoor children's playground made possible through a contribution by EVN Bulgaria.



TIME TRAVEL THROUGH HISTORY—TO PRESERVE IT



Virtual Reality (VR) can make you feel connected to a time and place that no longer exist. History in particular might benefit from VR reconstructions, according to Yavor Bonev, founder of Animajor Studios, the company behind the VR reconstruction of the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis, which visitors can experience on site. "VR isn't an end goal in itself, but it helps to capture attention in an innovative way. It also allows people to

develop emotional connections to past events," Yavor says.



Today, VR technology has become so good, it successfully simulates operating theaters, raging fires, and combat conditions used in the training of surgeons, firefighters, and soldiers and their

potential is only now starting to unfold.

A lot of work needs to happen before you get to the fancy computer graphics and balance-defying experiences,



regardless of the industry. Good VR has to be grounded in research, Yavor says. Before you proceed to create a computer version of a medieval castle, you need to know what a medieval castle looks like, what it is made of, how the materials age, where sentries are located, etc. And the more sophisticated VR products rely on far more than computer graphics: they may make use of human actors, scripts, musical scores to heighten the mood, classical drawing, and some programmer's sleight-of-hand.

"Research is foremost, especially when you are working on a historical subject," says Kalina Atanasova, one of the team members who worked on the VR environments for the Bishop's Basilica. Before delving into the actual animation, Kalina, Yavor, and the rest of the team talked to historians, archaeologists, and mosaic restorers to learn as much as possible about what the Basilica may have looked like. None of the original structure has been preserved to this day except for fragments of columns, capitals, and other architectural elements, so the team based the VR-reconstructed basilica's appearance on other, surviving churches from the period and drawings of ancient basilicas made in later times.

The team also wanted the VR environment of the Bishop's Basilica to convey the spirituality of the place and make people feel the same way a citizen of ancient Plovdiv would have felt upon entering it. The result is staggering: the rich interior inspires awe, and the ubiquitous birds evoke the Garden of Eden. The time inside the Basilica seems to stand still, the air heavy with incense and a hallowed presence... You cannot remain unmoved, no matter what your relationship to faith is.

Undoubtedly, VR is being applied ever more widely. But are we going to do everything in VR in the future?



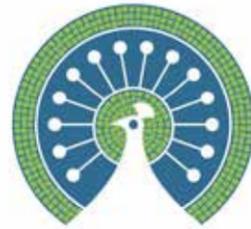
Yavor dismisses the idea. "People are afraid that VR will become more attractive, and people will want to spend all their time there. I think VR is a tool," he says.

VR isn't about escaping reality but about making it better, about allowing you to fully experience something that might otherwise be inaccessible—or in danger of being forgotten.

The VR tour of the Bishop's Basilica is available at the Visitor Center of the Basilica in Plovdiv.



Yavor's own emotional connection to art in all its forms was nurtured from an early age under the influence of an artist father—noted Bulgarian sculptor Theodore Bonev, whose bronze model of ancient Philippopolis can be seen at the Visitor Center of the Bishop's Basilica and whose other work is part of private collections and public spaces all around the world.



**THE BISHOP'S BASILICA
OF PHILIPPOLIS**

2 Knyaginya Maria-Luiza Blvd., PLOVDIV, BULGARIA
www.plovdivmosaics.org

The archaeological study of the Bishop's Basilica of Philippopolis, the restoration and conservation of its mosaics, and the creation of the Visitor Center were supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation, Plovdiv Municipality, and Bulgaria's Culture Ministry. The Bishop's Basilica and the Roman mosaic heritage of Philippopolis are included in UNESCO's tentative list of significant historical and natural sites.



REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
MINISTRY OF CULTURE



MUNICIPALITY OF PLOVDIV



The America for Bulgaria Foundation (ABF) is an independent, nonpartisan, and nonpolitical American foundation working in partnership with Bulgarians to strengthen the country's private sector and related democratic institutions. It builds on the success of the Bulgarian-American Enterprise Fund, an investment fund created in 1991 by the US Congress with support from the US Agency for International Development.

The Foundation seeks to enhance the longstanding legacy of goodwill and friendship between the American and Bulgarian people.

www.us4bg.org



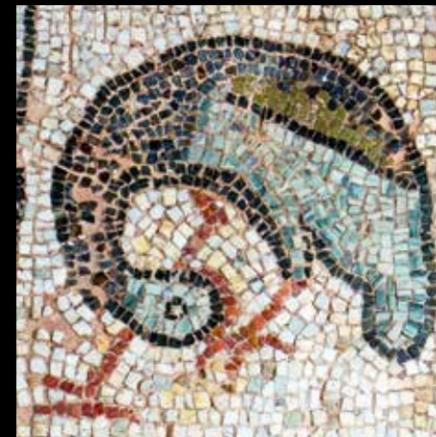
THE-SPRUCED-UP-ONE



EMERALD-TAIL



THE-PROUD-ONE



CHIPPER-BIRD



IMP-FOWL



SWAGGER-FOWL



PURPLE-PLUME



THE BRAVE ONE

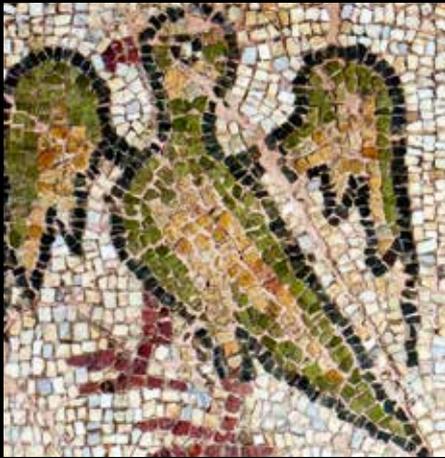


TWISTY-BEAK

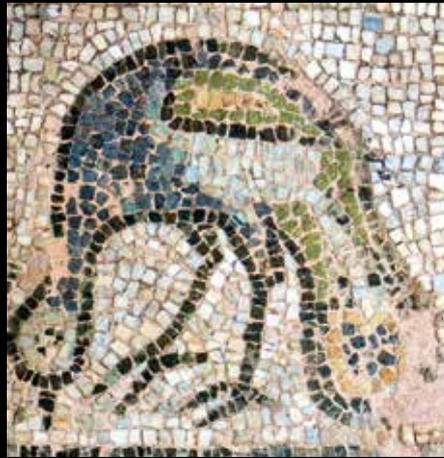
FRIENDS OF THE BASILICA – PLOVDIV ASSOCIATION

The Friends of the Basilica – Plovdiv Association, whose members include active citizens and businesses, as well as foreign donors, contribute by adopting one of the more than 100 mosaic birds.

The funds will help support cultural activities at the Basilica.



FIRST-FLIGHT



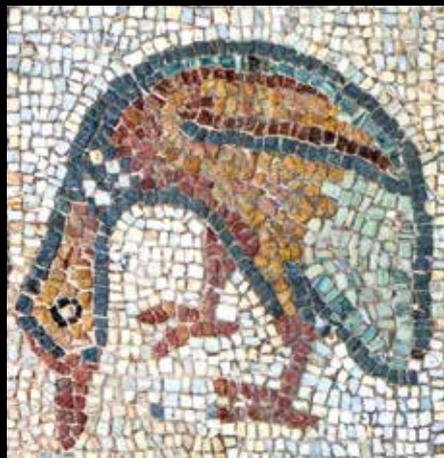
PADDLE-TAIL



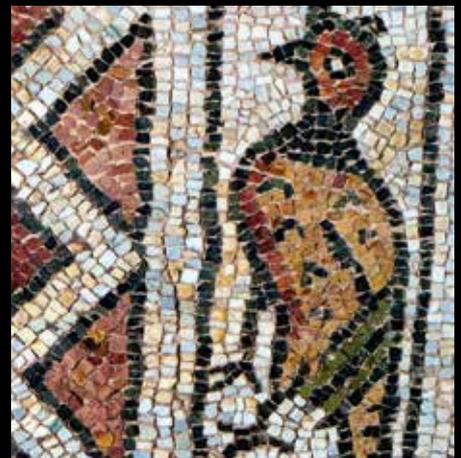
LOVE-BIRDS



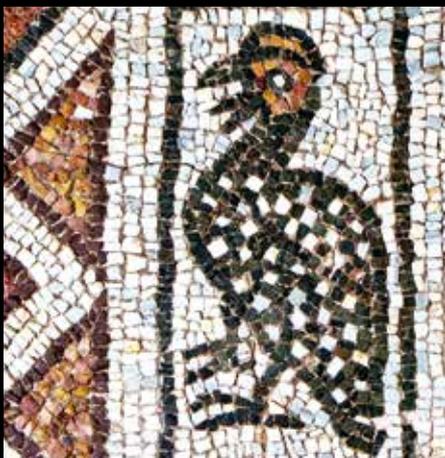
BONNY-BIRD



GOURMAND



FROCK-FEATHER



SONG-BIRD



BIG-BEAKS



DAPPLE-BELLY

TESSERA - THE STORY OF A TESSERA

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